



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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OHR SOMAYACH אוהר שומאך
TANENBAUM COLLEGE

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Issue #233

Parshat Tazria - Metzora!

ANOREXIA

Name@Withheld wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Our daughter is ill with a form of anorexia. She is at Stanford Hospital for the second time and we are doing everything we can to help her. Do you have any suggestions, Jewish prayers, something that may give us some inspiration and hope to help her get well? She is a beautiful girl of 14 with her whole life ahead of her. We are also in family therapy to assist the problem. Do you have any suggestions?

Dear Name@Withheld,

Firstly, may Hashem grant your daughter a complete and speedy recovery. Tradition teaches that reciting the entire Book of Psalms in one sitting and offering a personal prayer afterwards can have a tremendous effect. You can even say everything in English. I heard in the name of the great kabbalist Rabbi Yisrael Abuchatzera (known as the "Baba Sali") that reciting the entire Book of Psalms once a month is of great benefit. Giving charity is also a powerful merit.

PORKY CHEWS HIS CUD

Barak from Philadelphia, PA <bakbak101@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

If science could genetically alter an animal that chews its cud but does not have split hooves — a camel for instance — to give birth to camels which do have split hooves, would it then be kosher?

Dear Barak,

Great question! The Mishna actually discusses such a case. The Mishna says, "If a non-kosher animal gives birth to an apparently kosher animal, the offspring is not kosher...because whatever comes from a non-kosher animal

is also non-kosher." So even if a camel were born with split hooves, it wouldn't be kosher.

On the other hand, if we could genetically engineer a kosher animal, such as a cow, to give birth to a type of camel or pig, then theoretically such a camel or pig would be kosher, as the Mishna says, "If a kosher animal gives birth to a non-kosher animal, the offspring is kosher...because whatever comes from a kosher animal is kosher."

So, the moral of the story is: If your cow has a camel, don't have a cow.

Sources:

- Tractate Bechorot 5b
- Rambam Hilchot Ma'achalot Assurot 1:4
- Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 79,2

MISHNA, TALMUD AND KABBALAH

Willem-Jan from Utrecht, Netherlands
<wdewit@freemail.nl> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Where does the Mishna find its origin?

Kara from Sweet Treatz, PA <sugar_04@hotmail.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am working on a project involving the Talmud. I found your website by a search engine. I especially liked the content of the site and was wondering if you could answer some questions that involve the writing of the Talmud. Who were the original writers of the Talmud? When and where was it written? Why was it written?

If you have E-Mail and a question, you can submit it to Ask The Rabbi for possible inclusion in a future edition. Just write your question using your E-Mail program, set the subject to "Ask The Rabbi" and send it to info@ohr.org.il. Or use our form at <http://www.ohr.org.il/ask/page/ask.htm>. We can't include all questions submitted, but we do try to respond to everyone.

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Ben Schneider < ben.schneider@gte.net > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

What is the relationship between the Torah, the Talmud, and the Kabbalah?

Dear Willem-Jan, Kara, and Ben Schneider,

The Torah is the Five books of Moses.

When G-d taught Moshe the Torah at Mount Sinai, He didn't just give Moshe a written text (that wouldn't take 40 days!). Rather, G-d explained what everything meant. These explanations are what we call "the Oral Torah" or "the Mishna."

The Jewish people preserved the Mishna as an unwritten teaching for about 1,400 years. After the destruction of the Second Temple, the leading Sage Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi realized a long exile was about to begin, and that if the Mishna wasn't written down it would become lost. He thus took the unprecedented step of writing it down.

Not long after this, the leading Sages in Babylon again saw a decline in scholarship, so they wrote a more comprehensive explanation of the Mishna, called the Talmud.

Kabbalah is also part of the Oral law. It is the traditional mystical understanding of the Torah. Kabbalah stresses the reasons and understanding of the commandments, and the cause of events described in the Torah. Kabbalah includes the understanding of the spiritual spheres in creation, and the rules and ways by which G-d administers the existence of the universe.

TWO FOR TREE

John Rosen from Lenexa, Kansas
< jrosen@qlx.quintiles.com > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

My 5 year old son named Ilan asked: "If an 'ilan' means specifically a fruit tree (as opposed to the generic "eitz" which refers to any type of tree, as two Israelis explained this distinction to him), why do we say 'borei p'ri ha-eitz' instead of 'borei p'ri ha-ilan?'"

" Thank you — this question has stumped a number of people.

Dear John Rosen and Ilan,

"Eitz" is the Torah's term for "tree", whether a fruit tree or not. The format of the blessings were chosen by our Sages to correspond to the terminology used by the Torah.

"Ilan" is the term for "tree" in common speech, but it never appears in the Torah. "Ilan" is actually an Aramaic word.

Sources:

- Deut. 20:19, 20
- Responsa Batzel HaChochma

MR. GOOD-MAN

Marie Dupont < mariedupont@excite.com > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Thank you for your page. It is the most informative and enjoyable page on the web. I was wondering what Judaism say about man being born evil. Thank you for your answer. Regards.

Dear Marie Dupont,

No, man is not "born evil."

The Torah says that "the inclination in man's heart is evil from his youth." (*Genesis 8:21*) The Talmud explains "youth" here to mean from the time of birth. However, this evil inclination is external; it is not intrinsic to a person's pure soul. Our pure soul is given to us even earlier, at the time of conception.

So, Judaism sees man as basically good, created in G-d's image, but with temptation towards evil. While the evil inclination is strong, Judaism believes that a person can choose to overcome it. This is the concept of free choice, which is basically the purpose of our existence: To choose good over evil.

Sources:

- Yerushalmi Berachot 3:5
- Bereishet Rabba 34

Yiddle Riddle

What name is mentioned three times in the Torah, once as a non-Jew, once as a convert, and once as a Jew?

Submitted by Yitzy Kimmel < yitzy@sprynet.com > from Brooklyn, NY

Answer next week....

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

*Comments, quibbles, and reactions
concerning previous "Ask-the-Rabbi" features*

Re: The More I Study:

In your "Public Domain," a reader wrote: "Many 'chance' happenings are not chance, but are guided from Above; many such 'coincidences' occur in my own life, and they seem to increase the more I study, the more observant I become."

Champion golfer Arnold Palmer once mentioned something similar. After sinking a very long putt, his opponent congratulated him on his "luck." Palmer paused, replaced his club, and replied: "Yes, and you know what? The more I practice, the luckier I get!"

Lee Budgie Barnett < budgie@compuserve.com >

Re: "Grab a Megilla" by Rabbi Chaim Salenger (Ohrnet Purim):

I read "Grab a Megilla" and enjoyed singing it very, very much. I would like to know if you have a nice poem that I could use for my bar-mitzvah. Today I had my first lesson in "*laining*" Parshas Noach. I learn in the Yesode-Torah school in Antwerp. I wish you good luck and *hatzlacha rabba* in the future.

*Michael Marelus (12.5 years old), Antwerp Belgium
< bt110634@turboline.be >*

Re: College Advice (Ohrnet Vayakhel-Pekudei):

Regarding the university student feeling lax in his observance: I went to Northwestern. Although it has a large Jewish population, it has a very small Orthodox population and I felt isolated. I found that going to stay with Orthodox families in West Rogers Park on Shabbos was enough to keep me connected. I thought this experience might be helpful to the university student.

Larry Weinberg < larryw@bu.edu > Boston, MA

Re: Thanks for "Ask the Rabbi":

Just want to let you know how much joy I get from reading "Ask the Rabbi." I wait for it, impatiently I must admit, every week. It always brings a smile of recognition or from learning a new idea. Toda raba for doing it. I truly think it's a *kiddush Hashem*.

Natalie Cohen, Tamiment, PA

I have saved all the "Ask the Rabbi" e-mails that deal with kashrut. They are such a great source!

Paula and Daniel Silberman < PandD@lanminds.com >

Re: Final "fe" and Scarlet (Ohrnet Vayakhel- Pekudei):

My best wishes and blessings for your good work. *Yishar kochachem*.

Regarding your Yiddle Riddle in "Vayakhel Pekudei," there is an additional source about the absence of the final "fe" from *Birkat Hamazon*. This source predates the Tashbetz Koton and contains additional information. It is the Roke'ach in siman 337, who writes that the "*Yotzeir Or*" prayer and the "*Shmoneh Esrei*" don't contain any final "fe" either!

Also, in "Sherlox" of that issue, you translate "*tola'as shani*" as scarlet silk. To translate it as silk is quite tenuous. The Ibn Ezra and Abarbanel do so, but I believe that the bulk of classical Biblical and Talmudic commentators render it, like *t'cheiles* and *argaman*, as died wool. Keep up the truly wonderful work.

David Solomon < dsolomon@actcom.co.il >

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