



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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MEZUZAH NEEDLEPOINT

Gloria Weber from Sherman Oaks, CA <gloweb@usa.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am making a needlepoint cover case for a mezuzah and there are two inserts available. One is hand-written, the other one is reproduced. Is there a religious difference, or just a price difference?

Dear Gloria Weber,

The "insert" is the actual *mezuzah* and it must be handwritten.

The laws of *mezuzah* are precise and complex. For example, the *mezuzah* must be written by a knowledgeable, qualified Jewish scribe; it must be written with special ink upon animal parchment set aside expressly for this purpose. Only certain erasures are allowed.

All these conditions and more make a valid *mezuzah* considerably more expensive than an invalid one. This plus rampant ignorance has opened the *mezuzah* market to a flood of bogus *mezuzahs*. A recent study found upwards of 90 percent of all *mezuzahs* were invalid. Any "Judaica" dealer who sells photocopied "mezuzahs" is either totally ignorant about *mezuzahs* or is simply dishonest. Either way, any *mezuzah* he sells, even a handwritten one, is certainly not going to be valid. The only way to get a valid *mezuzah* is to buy it from a qualified, knowledgeable, G-d fearing scribe or retailer.

Locust Focus

Impoverished <fowl@gte.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

With the 17-year locusts in the news, a question has popped up, the answer to which has always eluded me. I've always heard and read in the Bible that locusts are "clean." But it's never been explained HOW TO EAT A LIVE LOCUST! Are the legs, head, and/or wings removed first, or is nothing wasted? And as for the "pickled locust," is there a recipe? Signed: Impoverished.

Dear Impoverished,

I hope you're not so impoverished that you have no bread and you need to eat locusts!

Although some types of locusts are kosher, we no longer eat them because we have lost the tradition for how to distinguish which ones are kosher and which ones aren't. Yemenite Jews do still have this tradition, and therefore they can eat them. They don't eat them live, however, as this would transgress "don't be disgusting," just as we don't eat live fish.

Source:

- Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 13:1
- Leviticus 11:43

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.

Ask The Rabbi is written by Rabbi Moshe Lazerus, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Reuven Subar, Rabbi Avrohom Lefkowitz, Rabbi Mordechai Becher and other Rabbis at Ohr Somayach Institutions / Tanenbaum College, Jerusalem, Israel.

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THE HOUSE THAT RUTH BUILT

Anonymous from Singapore <romans5@singnet.com.sg> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I'm involved in a musical production called "Fiddler on the Roof" by Singapore Lyric Theatre. I require the information below in order to portray accurately Jewish customs and traditions: 1) During a wedding, is there a special container that is used to contain the Holy water? 2) During the Sabbath Friday night, what do the Jews normally eat? Will there be Holy Communion? 3) When will the head of the household pronounce blessings over his children? For blessings on daughters, does the father bless them to be like Rachael and Leah or Ruth and Esther? Thank you very much for your answers!

Dear Anonymous,

There are no "holy water" or "communion" rituals in Judaism. Traditional Sabbath foods are braided bread, wine, fish and meat and potato kugel (pudding).

Before the Friday night meal, the father blesses his daughters to be like Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah. The "Fiddler" lyrics "May you be like Ruth and like Esther" are one of that show's many inaccuracies.

DOG GONE

Alan Novak from Raleigh, NC <zayden@intrex.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am a volunteer at the North Carolina State Veterinarian school. One of the vets is also a minister, who is with people when they have to put an animal to sleep. She asked me if there is a specific prayer for Jewish people when their animal has to be put to sleep. Please advise if there is something in the Torah or elsewhere in the Bible. Thank you for taking the time to answer this question. After we had to put our Labrador to sleep, who we had for over 13 years, we went to shul (synagogue) on Shabbos and said kaddish for a special member of our family.

Dear Alan Novak,

Although it can be traumatic putting a pet to sleep, there is no special prayer that one recites, and saying "kaddish" for a dog

would not be appropriate. But a person can always pray to G-d for any of his needs, and in any language.

FAVORITE JEWISH WINE

Baruch Greenbaum from Brooklyn, NY <farblungrd@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Why does wine have such a significant role in Judaism?

Dear Baruch Greenbaum,

To answer your question, I have to tell you a joke:

A leader of a house of worship was giving a fiery sermon: "If I had all the beer in the world," he said, "I'd take it and throw it in the river; and if I had all the wine in the world, I'd take it and throw it in the river! And if I had all the whiskey in the world, I'd take it and throw it into the river." He sat down. The choir leader then stood and said with a grin, "All please rise for the singing of Hymn #258: 'We Shall Gather at the River.'"

The above story illustrates two ways to look at wine: The sermonizer believes that wine is intrinsically evil and must be totally avoided, while the choir leader implies that hedonistic immersion in wine is not so bad. The Jewish view is far from both of these views. We believe that the enjoyment of wine, like other physical pleasures, can and should be used in the service of G-d.

Wine is mentioned in Psalms as something that "gladdens the heart of man," and hence it is used to gladden and inspire us at various times — like *kiddush* on Shabbat (sanctification of Shabbat), at a circumcision and a wedding.

Wine symbolizes a completed and perfected human life. It starts off as an inferior product (grape juice = childhood, immaturity) but must go through fermentation (struggle = challenge of evil) and only then does it become the superior product, wine. We drink it on occasions where we have passed a certain fermentation process (marriage) or at times, like Shabbat, which represent the final product of human life, the World to Come.

Sources:

- Psalms 104
- Sefer Hachinuch 31

Yiddle Riddle

Last week we asked: Who didn't eat or drink for upwards of 60 years?

Answer: Choni Ham'agel. The Talmud recounts the events whereby Choni Ham'agel slept for seventy years. Hence, he neither ate nor drank during that time.

Tractate Ta'anit 23a

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Re: Too Far Side (Parshat Shlach):

To the question: "Are comic strips and cartoons depicting G-d as a human (such as The Far Side) against Rambam's Third Principle of Faith?" You answered "Yes." But when a humorous strip like the "Far Side" draws G-d, I don't think he means to say that this is really what G-d looks like. Nor do I think he expects people to think that this is his message. For example, once he drew a cartoon captioned "Inside the Sun" that showed a man inside a shed with a giant switch on the wall labeled "Rise" & "Set." I doubt if he meant to claim that this is really what the inside of the sun looks like.

Haim [Howard] Roman <roman@avoda.jct.ac.il>

giant serpents or reptiles [which then G-d, according to the *Midrashim*, caused to go extinct. - Ed.] This may be a reference to dinosaurs. Thank you for your wonderful service!

A. Avruch <aandpsgang@juno.com>

Great and awesome is your reply about "Jurassic Judaism." It requires courage and open-mindedness, but alas it is necessary to tell the world that the secrets of "*ma'aseh Bereisheet*" are multiple, and that the account of Creation, although meaningful literally (whatever "literally" means) is not a child-like narrative without depth, G-d forbid. *Hatzlacha!*

Arie Folger, Yeshiva University <afolger@ymail.yu.edu>

Ohrnet responds:

Our intention was that the concept of G-d's having a physical form contradicts our belief. Depicting "G-d" in a cartoon is at best highly irreverent.

Re: Jurassic Judaism (Ohrnet Beha'alotcha):

While the existence of dinosaurs does not in any way affect our belief in G-d, I once heard an interesting concept that is overlooked by many people: The Torah (*Bereisheet* 1:21) states that G-d created the "*taninim hagedolim*" —

Re: Heal and Soul:

I think "Ask the Rabbi" is a mitzvah (can I say that?) in itself. I hope all the scholars are aware of the peace and comfort your honest answers give to people. Not to sound cheesy — but what I study is how to heal the physical, while what you study is more meaningful — how to heal the soul and allow it to grow to its full potential.

Med_Student@Anonymous.edu

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