



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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17 July – 7 August 1999
Issue #245
Summer Issue

"The Rabbi" takes a summer break!

The next issue of ASK THE RABBI

will be posted the week of Parshat Shoftim, read on 14 August 1999, 2 Elul 5759

SABBATH POLICE

John Padavic, Memphis TN <padavic7@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Last weekend after the shootings in Chicago, it was reported that the Jewish victims would not talk to the police until after the Sabbath. Since the shooter was still at large, and other people were in danger, does Jewish law forbid Jews from talking to the police on the Sabbath?

Dear John Padavic,

Let me tell you a story: A man walks up to a newsstand and asks for a newspaper. "Two dollars, please," says the storekeeper.

"Two dollars! It's only a dollar and a half. It says so right here," he says, pointing to the words "Price: \$1.50" on top of the front page in bold print.

"You believe everything you read in the paper?" says the storekeeper.

The media reports are simply false. I know some of the Jewish people involved in Chicago, and they did cooperate with the police fully on Shabbat (Sabbath). This is in accordance with the principle that human life overrides the Shabbat.

I personally spoke to Dr. Benzion Allswang, an orthodox Jew from Chicago, who was there at the shootings. Dr. Allswang was walking to synagogue when the killer pulled up in his car. A loud noise came from the car. Since it was the 4th of July weekend, Dr. Allswang thought it was some sort of prankster throwing a firecracker. The car pulled closer and fired another three shots. Allswang felt some wind, but that was all. The shooter drove off and Allswang flagged down a policeman.

Not until 11:30 that night, Friday night, did Allswang notice the hole in his shirt in the vicinity of the abdomen. Two minutes later the police arrived to further investigate the incident and he told them the whole story again. The police asked to see his jacket. Lo and behold! There were three bullet holes in his jacket! Only then did he realized the extent of the miracle. "I

recited the special *hagomel* (thanks-giving) blessing the next day with more thankfulness and concentration than I'd ever prayed before!" Allswang said.

HELPING IN KOSOVO

Damien Urban <Damien.Urban@med.monash.edu.au> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am very interested in the following topic and was hoping you could help me understand and direct me to sources. It has basically been a thought I have had since the Kosovo crisis. The question is, how much *tzedaka* (charity) or help should we as Jews give to this crisis? Should Israel as a country send help? Thank you very much.

Dear Damien Urban,

Jews are obligated to help others in need, even if they are not Jews, and even if they are pagans. As Maimonides writes "Our Sages commanded us, even regarding the pagans, to visit their sick, to bury their dead as we bury the Jewish dead, and to sustain their poor amongst the Jewish poor."

Additionally, we are obligated to sanctify G-d's name in the world. So, we clearly have an obligation to help. It's hard to measure exactly how much is enough.

The State of Israel has indeed offered refuge to hundreds of Kosovars, most of them Moslems, who live on *kibbutzim* and are extremely well treated. The Israeli army sent over mobile hospitals, physicians and combat medics to care for refugees.

Sources:

- Maimonides, *Hilchot Melachim* 10:12
- Maimonides, *Sefer Hamitzvot* 9

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.

General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman
Production Design: Eli Ballon

Ask The Rabbi • World Wide Web: Our address is <http://www.ohr.org.il>
is available from • E-Mail via InterNet. To subscribe, send the message "sub ask (your full name)" to listproc@vjlists.com
several sources:

522 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel
38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA
613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada

972-2-581-0315
1-212-213-3100
1-905-886-5730

fax: 972-2-581-2890
fax: 1-212-213-8717
fax: 1-905-886-6065

info@ohr.org.il
RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Aol.com
Somayach@MSN.com

PREYING PLANTS

Name@Withheld wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Are there any grounds to suggest that a carnivorous plant (e.g., Venus Flytrap, etc.) would be treif (not kosher), assuming it was edible? Please give sources. Many thanks.

Dear Name@Withheld,

Being "carnivorous" wouldn't make a plant not kosher. The Torah tell us that *all* plant life is given to man to eat (Genesis 1:29), and we don't find any source which restricts any particular plant species.

Your question is based on the idea that kosher species are those which are not carnivorous and do not prey on other animals. However, this is not always true. Although there are no kosher carnivorous animals, and preying on other living things is an indication that a bird is non-kosher, this is not the case with fish, for example. Many kosher fish eat other fish or insects. So, too, it is not a restriction on plants.

STANDING UP FOR DOWNS

Chana B. Keil <andrea_keil@juno.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I have heard that it was the habit of a great rabbi to stand in the presence of a person with Down syndrome. Can you please tell me who that was and why?

Dear Chana B. Keil,

I've heard that the famous "Chazon Ish," Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz, stood up for people with Down syndrome and the like. If this is true, I understand it as follows:

Each person is given faculties. These faculties allow him to reach his potential. The greater gifts and faculties a person is given, the more he is obligated to achieve. A person is created far away from a goal but given the tools to get there.

A person born with very limited faculties obviously has a much smaller goal to achieve. So, in essence, the person of limited capabilities is created closer to his state of personal perfection.

Such a person may even be a reincarnation of a great *tzaddik* or *tzaddeket* (righteous person) who achieved near perfection the first time around, but needs to come back to this world just to "tie up some loose ends." Such a person is worthy of respect.

PURE CONFUSION

Zahava <zehava3@airmail.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Did G-d ever reveal why a person was declared "unclean" if he touched a dead body?

Dear Zahava,

In Hebrew, the word impurity (*tumah*) is related to the word confusion (*timtum*). Any time a human experiences spiritual confusion whose origin is in the physical world there is *tumah*. For example, contact with the dead gives the maximum degree of *tumah* because it is the ultimate illusion. One sees a dead corpse, no soul, no immortality, no spiritual essence, just flesh. A person's soul feels wounded and confused, because it knows that the essence of the human is eternal, infinite and spiritual. Sleep also imparts a very minimum degree of *tumah* because during sleep the physical instinct takes over from the spiritual free will.

Sources:

- Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Commentary on Leviticus 12 and Numbers 19

Yiddle Riddle

Since the next ASK THE RABBI will not be published until Parshat Shoftim,
this week's YIDDLE RIDDLE includes the answer. Have a great summer!

Two baby boys were born within a week of each other. 13 years later the older boy isn't considered an adult to be counted in a minyan (quorum of ten) until a few weeks after the younger one. How can this be?

Answer: In a Jewish leap year, there are two months of Adar. The 1st baby was born on 27th of Adar I (in a leap year), and the second baby was born on the 2nd of Adar II. The year of their bar mitzvah, however, is not a leap year, so the younger boy is considered a bar mitzvah (adult) on the 2nd of Adar while the older boy must wait 3 weeks or so until the 27th of Adar.

Riddle and answer thanks to:

Dani Wassner <dani@moit.gov.il>

State of Israel Ministry of Industry and Trade, Jerusalem

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Re: Favorite Jewish Wine (Ohrnet Pinchas):

Regarding the meaning of wine and its use in most Jewish occasions, the Maharal offers a fascinating answer: While all physical objects lose vitality as time passes, spiritual concepts gain vitality. This is due to their origin in an *Olam B'li Sof* — a world without end. Wine, points out the Maharal, is the only *physical* object that shares this property of improving with time, making wine a bridge between the physical and spiritual.

Saf Stern, Great Neck, New York <saf.stern@us.socgen.com>

The French Connection:

Starting a few weeks ago, we, a large congregation of Paris (Ohaley Yaakov, we have about 400 people, four services for Shabbat morning, Beit Midrash, Kollel, College

for Women, etc.) have begun publishing a weekly Torah newsletter. We use past Ohr Somayach's "YIDDLE RIDDLES" and PARSHA Q&A's, giving credit to Ohr Somayach International. We translate it in French. It's a great success, a real "Marbitz Torah" — Torah dissemination. *Chazak Ve'ematz!*

Shlomo Ouaknine, Paris <salomon.ouaknine@etam.fr>

Ohrnet for All:

Thank you for sending me the weekly OHRNET. I am currently printing about 30 copies a week to hand out in my Yeshiva and everyone really enjoys it. It's great!

Mendel Scherer, Yeshiva Shaare Chaim, Jerusalem <ysc2@inter.net.il>

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