Selling Futures
Eli Silberstein <rebeli@juno.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Recently, I became aware of a situation involving two elementary school aged children (each about 10 years old), in which one of them signed over to the other, in a written contract, his eternal reward. Is such a contract deemed valid, or is it nullified considering the young age of the participants?

Dear Eli Silberstein,

If it came down to actually judging this case, it would need to come before a “dayan” (Torah judge) in the presence of the two boys, or their representatives. I will merely offer some ideas to be used as a general guideline; and my answer is not to be thought of as a definitive ruling.

A cursory glance at the Shulchan Aruch implies very strongly that this contract is null and void due to the fact that the parties are minors. There are a few other reasons as well which would say that this contract is void.

However, I would advise you to try to have these boys annul the contract, regardless of its validity. The action of the seller, even though he is young, shows a lack of seriousness regarding his eternal reward; this attitude may become ingrained unless some action is taken now. This is an opportunity to correct him and explain to him that eternal reward is not something that is for sale.

Additionally, if he continues with the idea that the other person will take his eternal reward, then it won’t faze him to commit sins or to abstain from doing mitzvot, as he thinks the other person will get his eternal reward.

Barak & Mubarak
Al Pachman <iluvjudi@mindspring.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

It is interesting that the head of the Egyptian state is named Mubarak and the head of the Jewish state is named Barak. Is it “all in the family” in the Middle East?

Dear Al Pachman,

Many names sound similar even though the people aren’t related. (For example, you’re not related to Al Pacino or to Pac Man, are you?)

“Mubarak” is Arabic for “blessed” (like the Hebrew “mevurach”). “Barak” is Hebrew for “lightning.”

But I think your observation is astute. It’s interesting to note that Israel’s chief justice is also named Barak. Note that when George Washington was president of the United States, England’s king was also George. And Israel recently had two prime ministers one after the other, both named Yitzchak: Yitzchak Shamir and Yitzchak Rabin. And today in the US, both the president and defense secretary are named William. Perhaps people with certain names are just destined to rule at certain times!

The Big Lie
Michael Green <stisrael@barak-online.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Can G-d lie? If so, then everything the Torah says maybe is a lie [50% chance it is]. Also maybe Hashem does not care if we do His commandments, and that what He tells us to do is a lie [and He is being cynical]. Please explain. Thank you!

Dear Michael Green,

No, G-d can’t lie or be cynical. G-d is All-Merciful and Benevolent, and no form of imperfection or cynicism can be attributed to Him.
There is an example in the Torah where G-d told Avraham information which wasn’t “the whole truth.” When 90-year old Sarah heard she was going to have a child, she expresses her surprise by saying “After withering, will I become young again? And my husband (Avraham) is old!” When G-d told Avraham what Sarah had said, G-d altered the information somewhat. Instead of saying “my husband is old” G-d told Avraham that Sarah said “I am old.”

But even here, G-d didn’t lie, but rather paraphrased the first part of Sarah’s statement in which she describes herself as old, and omitted the second part where she calls Avraham old. This was done for the sake of the greater goal of peace between husband and wife.

Source:
- Bava Metzia 87a
- Bereishet 18,12-13

Fingers Crossed
Sherry from Baltimore wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I’ve heard that it’s forbidden to cross the fingers of the right hand with the fingers of the left hand. This sounds a bit baffling. And I see Orthodox Jews who do this and wonder if they are ignorant of a prohibition or perhaps just not always aware of the state of their fingers. Thank you for this wonderful service.

Dear Sherry,

Crossing the fingers isn’t really a prohibition, but it is mentioned in traditional sources as something to avoid. Here is the explanation of one commentary: “The right side represents Divine mercy whereas the left represents Divine strict judgment, and it is inappropriate for a person to do something that signifies a mixing of these distinct attributes of G-d. It is even a dangerous thing to do, and therefore one should be careful to avoid this practice.” This is a deep kabbalistic concept that we cannot truly understand.

I asked a renowned Jerusalem rabbi who said that if you aren’t generally concerned about intertwining your fingers then there’s no need to be concerned about this. Only if one is generally careful not to cross fingers because of it being wrong or even dangerous does one need to be always careful not to do so.

Sources:
- Shmirat Haguf V’Hanefesh 78:1

Yiddle Riddle

Last week we asked:

Where in davening (liturgy) do you say 24 words in a row that end with the letter “chaf?”

Answer:

In Kiddush Levana — Sanctifying the New Moon — we say the verse: “Baruch Yotzraych, Baruch Osaych, Baruch Kohnaych, Baruch Bohraych” four times.

Riddle and answer submitted by Shlomo Zev Friedman <geno@netvision.net.il>

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles, and reactions concerning previous “Ask-the-Rabbi” features

Re: What Levi’im Never See (Ohrnet Ki Teitze):

In a recent Yiddle Riddle, you asked “What is it that a levi never sees in his entire adult life,” and answered “if there is no levi present, a kohen is called to the Torah instead of a levi. A levi never sees this.”

There would appear to be a number of exceptions to this; here’s one: We do not call up the Chasan Torah or Chasan Bereishis (the ones honored with ending and beginning the year’s Torah reading) more than once on Simchas Torah. Therefore, if the Chasan Torah is a levi, even if he is the only levi present, he is not called up for the second aliya (reading) of Vezot HaBeracha; rather, the kohen called for the first aliya remains there in place of a levi for the second aliya as well. The levi is not even required to leave the synagogue for that second aliya. (Ta’amei Haminhagim 831, in footnote citing...
A levi could see this if it’s a fast day and he is not fasting. In such a case, he would not be called up to the Torah.

Zvi Freund <milonf@villagenet.com>

A levi could also have seen it if G-d forbid, he was sitting shiva (in mourning) and no other levi was present.

Lawrence Myers <lawrm@globalnet.co.uk>