



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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ARE THERE FLYING RABBIS OR ARE THERE FLYING NONE?

c.e.k. from Los Angeles, CA <kill@worldnet.att.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi:

Thanks again for your very informative and enjoyable service. I promise you I'm serious about this question, I'm not joking or trying to make fun. I have recently been exposed, through a student film, to a reference about "flying rabbis." Apparently, throughout history this is a well-documented phenomenon. Apparently, the last one died within the past 100 years or so. Could you recommend some easily available (in the US) books on the subject? If this film was merely generating a fictional hoax, I apologize. If not, I eagerly await your scholarship on the matter. Shalom.

Dear c.e.k.,

Jewish tradition does relate incidents of people, both righteous and wicked, who were able to fly. The righteous people did so using holy methods, while the wicked ones resorted to the occult to do so.

There are stories of a particular Rabbi who lived in Egypt early this century who they claim was able to fly. His name was Rabbi Abuchatzaira. His descendants live in Israel and are a famous family of Kabbalists. There is also a story about the Baal Shem Tov and one of his disciples flying across a river. As with many of these kinds of stories, if you believe all of them you are too gullible, but if you don't believe any you are too cynical.

We are cautioned against telling too many "miracle stories." A person is considered righteous or wicked based on his deeds alone, and so the ability to do miracles doesn't really prove anything.

Regarding Judaism and the occult, I suggest the book *Faith and Folly* by Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Hillel.

Sources:

- Yalkut Shimoni Shemos 14:235
- Targum Yonatan Bamidbar 31:8

HERE'S SNEEZIN' ATCHOO!

Alan Mangurten from Morton Grove, Illinois
<manguala@concentric.net> wrote:

Are there Jewish roots to the custom of saying "G-d bless you" when someone sneezes, or does this really have other origins? Todah Rabbah!

Dear Alan Mangurten,

There is an ancient Jewish custom that when someone sneezes we say "asuta" which is Aramaic for "may you be healed." The sneezer then says "blessed are you" and then says "for your salvation, G-d, I wait."

This custom was written down during the Mishnaic period (c. 100 CE), but it dates back to the time of Jacob. Before Jacob's time, it was extremely common for perfectly healthy people to die suddenly, with no forewarning. Rather, a person would walk down the street, suddenly sneeze and die. Jacob prayed that Hashem should give people some warning of their impending death, so they would have time to consider their ways and repent of any bad deeds.

Source:

- Code of Jewish Law, Orach Chaim
- 230, Mishnah Berurah 7 (ad loc.)

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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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HONG KONG HANUKAH

Ido from Hong Kong, China <idok@asiaonline.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

My name is Ido and I have a question. Before that I would like to speak about myself: I am nine years old, I live in Hong Kong (China) speak Hebrew, I go to a Jewish school called Carmel School and I am sure you heard of my Jewish studies teacher, Rabbi Avtzon (one of the most popular guys in Asia). Here's the question: What does Maimonides tell us about the importance of Chanukah?

Dear Ido,

Maimonides (Rambam — Rabbi Moses ben Maimon) relates that the Greeks tried to destroy Judaism. They didn't let us study the Torah or observe the commandments. Finally, Hashem had mercy on us and we defeated them.

Then Maimonides writes about the miracle of one day's oil which burned for eight days. Because of this, our Sages established Chanuka as a time of joy and praise to Hashem. We light candles to remind ourselves of the miracle of the oil. This teaches us that although the military victory was a miracle, the spiritual victory was the essence of Chanuka.

Sources:

- Rambam, Hilchot Chanukah 3

Yiddle Riddle

Last week we asked: "Who was the first person to die after the Great Flood (*mabul*)?"

Answer: Haran

On the verse "Haran died in the presence of his father," the Zohar states that Haran was the first person to die in his father's lifetime. The Vilna Gaon explains that this refers to those who died *after* the Flood, because before the flood we do find those who died in their fathers' lifetimes — Hevel and Chanoch, for example. Now here's the rub: A simple calculation shows that Noach outlived Haran! So if Noach was still alive when Haran died and no person had yet died in their father's lifetime, then no one could have died period! For if Noach was alive, his children must have been alive. And their children must have been alive. Continue the logic through the generations and you'll realize nobody died!

Eli & Zahava Gross <ezgross@netvision.net.il>

Sources:

- Zohar Lech Lecha 1:77b
- Kol Eliyahu

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Re: Kashrut certification of restaurants open on Shabbat (Ohrnet Parshat Vayishlach):

At least three kashrut boards in the US will give certification to businesses open on Shabbos if those businesses are owned and operated by non-Jews. The Chicago Rabbinical Council certifies a particular Dunkin Donuts store, and I believe there is also a certified Dunkin Donuts in the Five Towns area of Long Island. (This is a wonderful thing the night after Pesach....) Also, I am acquainted with a (non-Jewish owned) wholesale bagel factory (under the Kof-K) that has a retail window open on Shabbos.

Joel Ehrlich, Albert Einstein College of Medicine
<ehrllich@aecom.yu.edu>

Re: How did fish survive the scalding Flood waters? (Ohrnet Parshat Vayishlach):

Another explanation is the waters in Eretz Yisrael were not destructive, not hot. As for the fish, either the waters below land level were cooler or the fish congregated in Eretz Yisrael. (Rabbi Levi in Shir Hashirim Rabba 1:66 and 4:2, Rabbeinu Bachai Bereishit 8:11)

Rabbi Yitzchok D. Frankel, Cedarhurst, NY
<Ydfrankel@aol.com>

Re: Saying the silent prayer out loud for visually impaired congregants (Ohrnet Parshat Vayeitzei)

Your answer did not take into account evening services or a place where there is no minyan, which are the interesting cases, in my humble opinion.

Ben Michelson <ben@valor.com>

The Rabbi responds: In those cases, one would be allowed to recite the prayers out loud for the sake of the visually impaired people.



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