



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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LOOKING DOWN OUR NOSES AT MOSES

David Levine <dlevine@inter.net.il> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

G-d willing, I hope to buy my son his bar-mitzvah teffilin. The price for a "good" pair is \$500-\$800. I noticed that one can get numerous stringencies and "hidurim" in the teffilin, with each extra "hidur" adding to the price. I hope to get him the best, but I was wondering if in the past they kept all these stringencies? It seems that some "extras" are only available today with our technology and manufacturing methods, and that it wasn't possible to produce this quality of teffilin in the past. If so, then do we have to be more machmir (strict) than Moshe Rabeinu?

Dear David Levine,

I once heard a story about a renowned Rabbi. One year in preparation for Succot, he bought three *etrogim*, even though the mitzvah requires only one. He did this in order to fulfill all of the different opinions regarding exactly what constitutes a valid *etrog*. Seeing this, his wife commented, "My father didn't have three *etrogim*." Answered the Rabbi, "Your father also didn't own three suits. If I can afford three suits, I can also afford three *etrogim*."

This doesn't put us on a higher spiritual level; previous generations did the best that they could with their available resources, and we do the best that we can with ours. The point is not to compare yourself with others, but to do your best with whatever G-d has given you.

INTERFERENCE

Name@Withheld wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

A person who is dear to me says he became an atheist. He still loves Jewish humor, a good Jewish joke, but refuses to come to a synagogue — even to meet his old friends there! My question is: May I pray that Hashem turn his heart to Judaism? Maybe, if he is nudged a little, he will make the rest of the road on his own feet. But isn't Hashem expecting that a person turn to Him of his own volition? He gave us freedom of will so that we could discern good from evil and make the right choice, and my concern is that I may be asking for something self-contradictory. Is it ethical to pray that another person become more Torah observant?

Dear Name@Withheld,

I'm touched by your question. From a logical point of view, your question is very sound. Doesn't G-d want us to observe the Torah through our own free choice?

Clearly, it is a mitzvah to pray that our fellow Jews should return to the Torah path, just as we pray for ourselves in the daily prayers, "Return us, our Father, to your Torah."

But does it make sense to pray for someone to become Torah observant? Doesn't this contradict free will? Not really. You see, every person, Torah observant or not, has free choice. So, when you pray for someone to become Torah observant, you are praying that his free choice be changed from one level to another.

For example, right now let's say that his free choice level is "Should I eat one ham sandwich today or two?" We pray that he become a Torah observant Jew, and then his choices will be on a higher level: "Should I study Talmud for one hour today or two?" We pray that his free choice level be elevated to that of a Torah Jew.

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Ask The Rabbi is written by Rabbi Moshe Lazerus, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Reuven Subar, Rabbi Avrohom

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Another answer to this question is that we pray that G-d put the person in a situation where it will be easier for him to choose to keep the Torah. For example, let's say a person doesn't keep the Torah because he never had a good Torah education. Through your prayers, G-d can open an opportunity for him to learn about Judaism; for example, he "bumps into" an observant Jew who invites him for Shabbat.

Sources:

- Responsa Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim 4:40:13
- Avotot Ahavah, by Rabbi Mordechai Becher and Rabbi Moshe Newman

IT AIN'T KOSHER!

Mark Spice, Sheffield, UK < mark.spice@uk.hboc.com > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I know kosher means foods etc. that are allowed. But what is the term for foods, etc., that are not kosher?

Dear Mark Spice,

In common jargon, non-kosher food is called "treif."

Actually, the Torah doesn't use the word kosher to refer to kosher food! Regarding animals, the Torah speaks about the animals that are *tahor* (pure or kosher) and *tamei* (impure or non-kosher). Otherwise, we refer to non-kosher food as "*asur*," which means "forbidden."

Regarding mitzvah-objects — like a Torah scroll or a *succah* — we refer to them as either "kosher" (valid) or "*pasul*" (invalid).

BETH JACOB

Moshe Lowenberg < Cars118@aol.com > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Why are Orthodox girls' schools throughout the United States called "Beis Yaakov?" What was the relationship between Yaakov and girls' education? Thank you for your attention to this. We were not able to come up with an answer in our study group.

Dear Moshe Lowenberg,

Before giving us the Torah, G-d said to Moses: "Thus shall you say to the *Beis Yaakov*, and tell the *B'nei Yisrael*." Our Sages explain that *Beis Yaakov* refers to the women, while *B'nei Yisrael* refers to the men.

Hence, women's Torah institutions — whose aim is to transmit the teachings of Sinai — are fittingly called *Beis Yaakov* in honor of the very first link in that chain of transmission, the women who stood at Mount Sinai.

Sources:

- Shmot 19:3 and Rashi

SWEET LAND OF LACTOSE BEE

Miriam from Montreal, Canada < docusys@colba.net > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I have known for some time that in the phrase "erezt zavav chalav u'dvash — a land flowing with milk and honey" the "dvash" refers to date honey (not bee honey). What is the chalav? Certainly it was not cow's milk. Was it goat's milk or could it be some other type of milk? Does this have some inference that honey and milk should be our main food sources?

Dear Miriam,

The milk referred to is cow's or goat's milk. The honey is fruit honey, such as from figs or dates.

This doesn't mean that milk and honey should be our main food sources, but rather that the Land of Israel is overflowing with everything good.

The Talmud relates that our Sages saw goats eating from fig trees. The figs were so luscious that they were dripping with juice; the goats' udders were so full that milk flowed out. These two liquids mingled into a sweet stream, and the land was literally "flowing with milk and honey."

Ramban notes that regions with good air, good pasture and good water, such as mountainous regions, produce the healthiest animals which give the best milk (witness Swiss cheese and Swiss chocolate). But these types of climates don't usually produce top quality fruits (ever heard of Swiss plums?). The Torah stresses that the Land of Israel has both.

"Milk and honey" also allude to mother's milk and bee honey. These are the only two kosher substances which are derived from a non-kosher source (bees and people are not kosher). The implication is that the Land of Israel has the spiritual energy to purify even the impure.

Sources

- Ketubot 111b, Megilla 6a
- Ramban, Shmot 3:8

Yiddle Riddle

Last week we asked:

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

Answer:

Re'uel. The first Re'uel mentioned is one of Esav's sons, who was not Jewish (*Bereishet* 36:4). The second refers to Yisro, a convert to Judaism (*Shemot* 2:18, see *Rashi* 4:18). The third Re'uel is the father of the *nasi* (prince) Elyasaf, prince of the Tribe of Gad. His name is spelled three times as De'uel, and once as Re'uel (*Bamidbar* 2:14).

Riddle courtesy of Yitzy Kimmel from Brooklyn, NY <yitzy@sprynet.com>

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Re: To Pay the Truth:

A while ago, I asked you whether I have to tell my supplier that they delivered more expensive goods than they had invoiced. Reluctantly, I followed your advice to tell them their mistake and pay the extra money. It was the best thing I could have done! My relationship with them has improved immensely, they are much more willing to deliver to me and treat me much better. I followed the halachic advice, and thank G-d I have already seen the benefits, and G-d willing I will continue to see more.

Name@Withheld

Re: "Give and Take"(Ohrnet Teruma):

You wrote about a body without limbs as a metaphor for Torah without *mitzvos*. Regarding the body itself you wrote: "Without limbs there can be no body."

May I presume to heighten your sensitivity regarding handicaps that are of a purely physical nature? It is truly unfortunate when a person becomes a double or even a quadruple amputee. However, I learned as a volunteer at a long-term care hospital-home that such a handicapped person

appears to have a "bigger" personality. (Dare I say "soul"?) Oft times more prominent than the personality in normally equipped four-limbed persons. The personality truly seems to shine forth perhaps in a "kind of proportion" to the amount of physical body that is missing. I still remember the vibrant sense of humor that shone from the "bodies" of these injured, limbless soldiers. They taught me an unforgettable lesson about just how big a soul can seem to be. How often do we see in our lifetimes that when old age and illness strips us of our physical capabilities, Hashem grants us the gift of heightened spirituality?

Finally, let us look to the story of Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, Germany about one thousand years ago: He composed *Unetaneh Tokef* in his last days of life, after having been brutally mutilated by the Christian bishop for refusing to convert to Christianity. Rabbi Amnon's soul did not lack power; on the contrary, it spilled forth soul-powers that prompt us to greater spirituality to this very day when we recite *Unetaneh Tokef* on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

• Chani Kreisel, Jerusalem

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