



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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Parshas Bechukosai

THREADS ARE RED

Moshe from Silver Spring, MD <hdi@radix.net> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
I have seen some people wearing red threads or strings around their wrist and even necks. Is there any source for this, or is it "superstition?" Thanks..*

Aytan Ben-Pelech from Australia <gcn@wantree.com.au> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
Recently I was in Jerusalem and when I visited the Kotel I was approached by a woman who tied a red string around my hand and said a blessing. I have asked numerous people for an explanation and I have received just as many different answers. Perhaps you can help.*

Name@Withheld wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
Could you please explain to me the history of the red bendel. I received one recently from a friend that had traveled to the Wall. What does it mean when the bendel falls off your wrist?*

Dear Moshe, Aytan Ben-Pelech and Name@Withheld,

One of the items necessary for the building of the Holy Sanctuary was red thread. The dye for the red thread came from a type of worm. Rabbi S. R. Hirsch points out that the worm was the lowliest form of life, and yet it was intrinsic to the building of the Sanctuary.

The red string is thought by some to ward off the "evil eye." Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler explains the "evil eye" as follows: If a person is blessed with good fortune and he becomes haughty as a result, this might arouse jealousy in others. In this sense, his good fortune is negative. This calls his good fortune into question and may cause him to be re-judged in Heaven.

The red thread, reminiscent of the lowly worm, can be seen as protection against this. Each time a person looks at the string he is reminded that a person is really as lowly as a worm. This humility is the ultimate weapon against the "evil eye."

Having said that, many great Rabbis frown upon it.

What does it mean when it falls off the wrist? It is an extremely significant sign: It signifies that it was not tied on properly.

Sources:

- Michtav M'Eliyahu V.4 pp. 5-6

DIABETES ON YOM KIPPUR

Mom@ <Address_Withheld> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
My 15 year old daughter was just diagnosed with diabetes. One of her first thoughts was, "Now I won't be able to fast on Yom Kippur." I assured her she would find other ways of fulfilling that spiritual purpose. I would appreciate suggestions for her. Thank you.*

Dear Mom,

Even though some people with diabetes don't fast on Yom Kippur some do. Before Yom Kippur you and your daughter should consult with a competent doctor and with an Orthodox Rabbi.

The Rambam writes that the major purpose of fasting is repentance, returning to a more spiritual life. Not being able to fast, however, does not preclude the possibility of repentance. According to the Rambam, repentance involves three stages: Regret, verbal admission of the sin in prayer, and commitment not to repeat the sin in future.

Just as it is a mitzvah for a healthy person to fast, it is a mitzvah for your daughter to preserve her health.

Sources:

- Mishneh Torah Hilchot Ta'anit 5:1

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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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OLIVE BRANCH OF PEACE

Barry Pogrund from Cape Town, South Africa
< bgw@iafrica.com > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

We often talk about the dove and the olive branch as symbols of peace. Is there any Talmudic source for such a notion, and if not from where do we arrive at the contention that the dove and the olive branch are symbols of peace? Many thanks for your wonderful and elucidating series.

Dear Barry Pogrund,

There's no reference in the Talmud identifying the dove or olive branch as symbols of peace.

However, Noah's flood is compared to a "war" between G-d and Mankind. This idea is seen in the symbol of the rainbow. After the flood, G-d showed Noah a rainbow as a sign that there would never again be a world-wide flood. The rainbow looks like an archer's bow pointing up towards heaven. The Ramban explains that the "upside-down bow" symbolizes that G-d will no longer "shoot arrows" at the earth in the form of a flood, just as a warrior turns his bow towards himself as a gesture of peace.

In this sense, the dove returning to the ark could be seen as peace symbols, indicating that the "war" between G-d and Man had ended.

By the way, the "olive branch" is a misconception. The dove returned to Noah with an olive leaf in its mouth, not a branch.

Sources:

- Ramban, Genesis 9:12

SABBATH IN THE SUN

Asher Breatross < ash@interlog.com > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Is it permissible to spread sun screen lotion on oneself and on a child on Shabbat? Take care and have a nice day.

Dear Asher Breatross,

Memare'ach — smoothing — is prohibited on Shabbat. This applies only to creams or lotions which have the consistency of thick oil. If your lotion has this consistency, then it's forbidden to use it on Shabbat. But if your lotion is very "liquidy" then it is permitted. (Since it's not clear exactly what the proper consistency is, one should only use a very liquid lotion.)

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch 314:11

Yiddle Riddle

When is the only time one would say "Av Harachamim" two days in a row? (Av Harachamim is the prayer which, according to the Askenazic custom, is generally said on Shabbat before musaf).

Riddle submitted by Dr. Joel Luber, Bayit Vegan, Jerusalem

Answer next week...

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Re: Intermarriage (Ohrnet Emor):

After reading your article on intermarriage, I thought it was excellent! This, in my opinion, should be circulated throughout the Jewish community.

Sandra Block, Scottsdale, Arizona
< rancher@phnx.uswest.net >

Elimelech Meisels, Jerusalem < tamike@netvision.net.il >

You answer that Shemini B'Shemini refers to reading Parshat Shemini on the 8th day of Pesach. Couldn't it refer to the first reading, the afternoon of the 8th of Nissan, Shabbat HaGadol in such a year?

Lawrence Myers, London < lawrence@lawrm.globalnet.co.uk >

Re: Psalms Author? (Ohrnet Tazria/Metzora):

I very much enjoyed the Parasha Insights for Tazria/Metzora. But I was unhappy with the reply about how King David could write "Shir Hama'alot" recited before Birkat Hamazon. Firstly, Chazal say there were 10 authors of the Book of Psalms so it did not have to be King David.

The suggestion that King David wrote Psalms 126, 137 with prophetic insight raises difficulties. The prophets of Tanach who foresee the possible destruction of the Temple always qualify their prophecy with the clause "If the children of Israel do not mend their ways." In the time of King David, the situation was much more open, and to suggest that Israel would go astray would conflict with their free will.

There is, however, a really simple solution, suggested by the late Rabbi Samuel Mirsky, zatzal. In Shir HaShirim Rabbah on the verse "kemigdal David," the 10 authors listed include Ezra. If we assume Ezra is the author, we have no problem.

Professor Cyril Domb, Jerusalem, via E-mail

Ohrnet Responds:

Interesting answer. However, it is implied by Rashi and explicit in Tosefot (Bava Batra 14) that King David wrote all 15 of the Shir Hama'alot.

Re: Yiddle Riddle explaining "Shemini B'Shemini Shemini Shemini" (Ohrnet Acharei Mos/Kedoshim):

"Shemini B'Shemini" refers to the 1/8 of an 1/8 of ga'avah — pride — that a talmid chacham may have (Sotah 5a). "Shemini Shemini" refers to the events in Parshas Shemini, wherein Aharon felt unworthy to bring the chatas offering. Moshe told Aharon that he was indeed worthy, and that Hashem had chosen Aharon specifically. In the eighth verse, we are told that Aharon heeded Moshe and brought the offering. This illustrates the pride required of a talmid chacham; he must appreciate his own merit and not think himself unworthy of proper avodas Hashem (see Maharsha). Hence, "Shemini B'Shemini," an 1/8 of an 1/8, "Shemini Shemini," in the eighth verse of Parshas Shemini.

Re: Who first studied Chumash with Rashi (Ohrnet Vayikra):

The reason Rashi needed to write his commentary which concentrates on peshat (basic meaning), and such a work was not needed before him, is that these things were already known but were in danger of being forgotten. That's why there is a Talmud and much of Jewish literature. So, the Torah was always studied with the commentary of Rashi, only not in his name.

With bracha from Liverpool (home of the Beatles, B"H)

Ben Granat < ben_granat_at_wmc__brli@wmcmail.wmc.ac.uk >

Rashi's father wasn't the first person to learn Chumash with "Ra"shi" — he was the first person to learn Chumash with "Shi."

Raphael Harris < atwood@netvision.net.il >

Re: Rain on Parade (Ohrnet Acharei Mos/Kedoshim):

I hate to rain on your Parade, but I'm afraid the Parsha Insight Rain On My Parade was a distortion of the Chizkuni whom you cite as a source. You write that one who doesn't lend his possessions is "terminally mean," thus the Torah doesn't bother to address him. This is not so. There are many reasonable explanations for not lending an object which preclude the designation "mean." And who said the Torah doesn't talk to evil people?

What the Chizkuni says is that the first person was not commanded to lend, and refused only because of stinginess, not because of hatred. (Stinginess may not be so nice, but it is not forbidden.) The second person, however, is not stingy, and would lend his object, but his hatred prevents him from doing so. This is evil, for we are allowing hatred to overcome our love. The Torah thus commands us to lend the object, and have our love overcome our hatred. Thus we spread love in ourselves and the world.

Name@Withheld

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