



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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4 December 1999

Issue #257

Parshat Vayeshev

WHAT THE ELEPHANTS?

Ceil Carey <jscarey718@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I work in the youth services department of a library and in a child's book we see an elephant used as a symbol of Chanukah but no explanation. Could you explain the symbolism of an elephant in the celebration of Chanukah? Thank you so much.

Dear Ceil Carey,

According to the Book of Maccabees, the ancient Greek armies came against Israel with fearsome armored elephants. It is known from other historical sources as well that the Greeks used elephants in warfare. They were the ancient tanks!

WHO COMMANDED IT?

Avner Stein from Tampa, Florida <AvnerStein@juno.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

-d sanctified us with his

ones that originate in the Torah. Yet the first blessing for lighting the chanukia also contains this phrase even

exception?

Dear Avner Stein,

Lighting Chanukah candles is not one of the 613 *mitzvot* of the Torah. Rather, it is a Rabbinic mitzvah that was enacted by the Sages of the Sanhedrin (Supreme Torah Court) during the

Second Temple period. Yet, the blessing we say when we light the Chanukah candles

means that Hashem commanded us to light them! How can we say that G-d commanded us to perform a Rabbinic mitzvah? The answer is this: One of the 613 *mitzvot* in the Torah is the commandment to obey the Sanhedrin (**Deuteronomy 17:11**), and since the Sages enacted the lighting of Chanukah candles, therefore lighting the candles indeed becomes like a commandment from the Torah.

We say a similar blessing for other Rabbinic commandments as well, such as lighting Shabbat candles Friday afternoon and reading the Scroll of Esther on Purim. Both of these are not commanded in the Torah; yet in the blessing we say that G-d commanded these things, because G-d commands us to listen to the Sages who instituted them.

I HAD A LITTLE DREIDLE

Caren from Indianapolis, Indiana <clf@iquest.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

How does the dreidle (four-sided spinning top) fit in with the story of Chanukah? My theory is that since Jews were not allow to congregate, but they were allowed to play Greek games, they pretended to play this game while they planned their next move. Am I even close?

Dear Caren,

Close but no dreidle! The ancient Greeks forbade studying the Torah, so the people would gather together in secret. If the Greeks interrupted them, they would pull out the dreidels and pretend that they had gathered to gamble.

The Secret of

the Dreidel

<http://www.ohrnet.org/special/chanukah/chan95.htm>

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 and send it to info@ohr.org.

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CHANU-KAH

Alan Litchman from Brooklyn, New York
<alitchman@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Do the words Chanukah and Chinuch (education) have the same root? If so, what is the connection?

Dear Alan Litchman,

Yes, these words are connected. Chanukah means **Chanukat**

-inauguration of the altar by the Maccabees after its defilement.

Chinuch is an expression indicating the beginning of something. Thus, it means inauguration, but it also means education, which begins and initiates a person in the way that it **Chanoch**

Chanukah when read as two words (**chanu kaf-hey**)

Maccabees were victorious in battle and rested from their enemies on the 25th of Kislev.

Sources:

Rashi, Tractate Shavuot 15a

EXERCISE

Jechezkel Frank from Holland <jbfrank@xs4all.nl> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Did our Sages exercise at all? How could the Maccabeans be so strong and know about warfare without practicing and working out? Of course this was one of the miracles which happened on Chanukah, but is there more we can say about this? Are there any sources about rabbis who knew how to sport or exercise? Or sources about the importance of exercising?

Dear Jechezkel Frank,

In the Chanukah prayers, we say that G-

people who did not go to war were priests, and the Maccabees were all priests.

following in the ways of G-d, as it is impossible to understand and to perceive the knowledge of the Creator when one is sick; therefore people must distance themselves from things that are destructive to the body, and conduct themselves in ways that

Maimonides highly recommends exercise as part of his overall prescription for health. He even ranks it higher than

regularity, sickness will not come upon him, and his strength

Sources:

Maimonides, Hilchot Deot 4:1, 2, 15

Yiddle Riddle

Last week we asked:

Answer:

13. Joshua was commanded to encircle the city once a day for 6 days, and on the seventh day to encircle it 7 times.

(Joshua 6:3,4)

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles, and reactions
-the-

Re: Gather Round the Chanukah Fire:

Last year an Ohrnet reader asked about the validity of a menorah, the arms of which are arranged in

opinion, recorded in the classic rabbinic literature, which maintains that the Menorah in the Tabernacle in the desert (and in the Temple in Jerusalem) was in just

This opinion is found in Midrash ha-Gadol, as well

Yoseph Kapach in his edi
Commentary on the Mishnah, Tractate Menachot 3:7 n.
57* (p. 78).

Rashi Simon, KESHER, London, England rsimon@keshet.org.uk

Re: Unkosher Kritters (Ohrnet Vayishlach):
Regarding the question posed regarding the scuba

pictures of lobsters on it, I would like to add that there exists in fact a custom of not wearing clothing with non

kosher animals drawn in it. Some people are strict about this especially in regard to children's clothes, because they believe the first images a child has are very important in his

don't let them wear or be surrounded by objects with non kosher animals engraved in them.

Daniel Faintuch, Sao Paulo, Brazil <danielfaintuch@hotmail.com>

Re: Talking Turkey (Ohrnet Vayetzet):

Two comments regarding Thanksgiving: Us non-Americans will never understand how religious Jews in the U.S. celebrate

I have heard that the custom of eating turkey on Thanksgiving is a Jewish one. The Hebrew word for **Hodu** -d? By

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