



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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DIVINE TEST

Yonatan Amit from Kohav-Yair, Israel
< Yoniamit@netvision.net.il > wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
Can G-d make me pass the bagrut [matriculation] exams? Please respond as soon as possible. Thanks in advance.*

Dear Yonatan Amit,

Yes, G-d can do anything.

But G-d doesn't "like" doing miracles very often. G-d made natural laws and wants us to follow these laws. The word "ha-olam" (the world) is related to the word "he'elem" (concealment). G-d made the world as a place in which to "hide," and it is our job to find G-d. Open miracles take away our free will to do this, because they make G-d's existence too obvious.

So, if someone wants G-d to do a miracle, he has to pray for G-d to do a hidden miracle. In your case, for example, you need to study very hard, study for as much time as you have, and pray for G-d's help. Then, if G-d does perform a miracle, no one will know! You yourself may not even realize it!

So, study hard, pray hard, and let me know what happens.

A GRAIN OF SALT

Sandra Block from Scottsdale, AZ
< rancher@phnx.uswest.net > wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
I would like to know: Why do we put salt on bread? Is it on all types of bread or just challah? Do we say the hamotzi blessing before eating all types of bread or only over challah? Thank you!*

Nancy Gomes from Toronto, Ont. < nancy@sierra-inc.com > wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
Every Kabbalat Shabbat (Friday night) after hamotzi, we put salt on our challa and still don't know how this tradition came to be?*

Roi Levine Garshoni < RoiGar@aol.com > wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
Shalom. The Torah speaks of salt on the sacrifices. My grandfather, may he rest in peace, would always put salt on the bread in the prayer of hamotzi. What significance is salt to a Jew? Is this the reason Lot's wife was turned to salt? Toda Raba*

Dear Sandra Block, Nancy Gomes and Roi Levine Garshoni,

There are two reasons for dipping bread in salt after saying the blessing on the bread. One is that people sometimes put salt on their bread to give it flavor. This is a matter of taste, not Jewish law. So, if you are going to dip your bread in salt throughout the meal, you should certainly dip the first piece in salt. This is a way of honoring the blessing, by making sure that the piece of bread you eat after saying the blessing is delicious. This follows the Torah idea that physical pleasure can be used as a vehicle in the service of Hashem.

Another reason we dip our bread in salt is that when we had the Temple and brought offerings on the altar, salt accompanied every offering. The significance of salt is that it completes other foods and enhances their taste. Also, it preserves things which would otherwise spoil. For these two reasons, the Torah tells us to salt our offerings: To offer a completed offering, and to symbolize that our offerings help preserve our relationship with Hashem.

We no longer have the altar to atone for us. Now, our table is our "altar," because we share our food with the needy, and this atones for us. Since our table is like the altar, we try to keep salt on the table all the time. And we dip our bread in salt the entire week, not only Friday night.

Lot's wife turned into salt because she was stingy towards the needy. Lot himself was a generous person, always inviting guests. His wife resented guests and discouraged them. One trick of hers was not to provide salt, a small thing which makes a big difference to guests. Therefore, she was punished by means of salt, measure for measure.

And to answer Sandra's last question, we say hamotzi on all types of bread, not only on challah.

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 program, set the subject to "Ask The Rabbi" and send it to info@ohr.org.il. Or use our form at <http://www.ohr.org.il/ask/page/ask.htm>. We can't include all questions submitted, but we do try to respond to everyone.

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

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PASSING PASSING

Judith Finkelstein from Northridge, CA
<jfinkels@lausd.k12.ca.us> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
I attended a Jewish funeral today, and the rabbi had each person shovel 3 shovels-full of dirt into the grave. The tradition included his instructions to specifically put the shovel back in the dirt when finished and let the next person proceed. Is there a certain significance in "putting the shovel back into the dirt" instead of passing it directly to the next person in line (the next person to shovel dirt)?*

Dear Judith Finkelstein,

There are two reasons for the custom not to pass the spade from one to the other. The first is that on the day that a person is buried, it is not considered correct behavior for a person to pass something to another. One of the messages to the participants at a funeral is to understand that on the day of death we are all equal. This idea is amplified by placing the spade into the earth and not passing it straight to the next person, as it denotes a certain dominance over the person who is receiving the spade. The second reason is that the time of the burial is a time of great anguish and to pass the spade from one to the other would be symbolic of passing the anguish.

Sources:

- Ta'amei Haminhagim 489:1025

FOLK MUSIC

Chana Rudnick from Chattanooga, TN
<kgrudnick@juno.com> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
I play folk instruments and have been thinking of trying to get a job playing for people. My main thought is to see if any hospitals could use me. When I visited my mother in the hospital and played for her, the nursing staff thought that would be something that many other patients might enjoy. I also thought it might go over well with children. Is it permissible to play music between Pesach and Shavuot if you are hired to do so?*

Dear Chana Rudnick,

The period from Pesach until Shavuot is a somewhat sad period due to historical tragedies which occurred during this time. I asked your question to Rabbi Yisrael Pesach Feinhandler, shlita. He said yes, you may play music between Pesach and Shavuot under these circumstances because you are doing so for work, not for your own personal enjoyment. May you continue to bring joy and gladness to the hearts of many.

Yiddle Riddle

Last week we asked: Women customarily light two Shabbos candles every Friday afternoon before sunset. The Mishnah Berurah (263:7) says that if a woman forgets to light Shabbos candles, she has to light an extra Shabbos candle for the rest of her life. So, if she forgot to light candles the first week, she would have to light three candles the next week. If she forgot the next week as well, then she would need to light four candles the third week. If this continues over a period of 10 weeks, what is the total number of candles she will have used during this 10 week period?

- Riddle submitted by Lev Seltzer <levs@virtual.co.il>

Answer: None.

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Re: "The Worst Seder in History" (Ohr Somayach Internet Archives: <http://www.ohr.org.il/Pesach>):

Beautiful story about the "Worst Seder." Brought tears to my eyes.

Tsivya <tsivya@usa.net>

Re: Medicine on Shabbat, and Pigeons as Hepatitis Treatment (Ohrnet Tazria-Metzora):

It is absolutely necessary to continue taking antibiotics throughout the Shabbat, even if you feel fine. There is a small but very real danger that interrupting the regimen (usually 10 days) will lead to the development of drug resistant bacteria. What is less clear (to me) is the rule regarding pills for control of blood pressure which should be taken every day but present no obvious danger due to skipping a dose. Regarding hepatitis, I can hardly accept that pigeons work; but my daughter from Bnei Brak assures me that they do

*Edward Simon <esimon@bilbo.bio.purdue.edu>
Professor of Biology (Microbiology) Purdue University*

Re: Daf Yomi Origins (Ohrnet Vayakhel):

Please print the following about Rabbi Moshe Menachem Mendel Spivak creating the Daf Yomi?

Rav Eliezer Katzman wrote in the Jewish Observer (October 1997) an article entitled "An unsung hero — Rabbi Moshe Menachem Mendel Spivak — The Martyred Originator of the Daf Yomi Concept, who Steered the Folio-a-day Plan From a Dream to Reality."

Rabbi Katzman wrote: "Everyone knows that Rabbi Meir Shapiro proposed the Daf Yomi idea at the first Knessia Gedolah in Vienna in 1924, but few are aware that the idea was actually proposed in an Agudath Israel Publication in December 1920. One of the first issues of Dagleinu (vol. 1 #7) contained his proposal to organize a world-wide "Chevra Shas" involving business men, laborers and workers alike to study a blatt Gemora together... His appeal fell on deaf ears... Rabbi Spivak did not give up and approached Rabbi Meir Shapiro to broach the subject... When Rabbi Shapiro finally presented the Daf Yomi proposal in the electrified atmosphere of the Knessia Gedolah... In the excitement of the moment, he neglected to mention Rabbi Spivak's name as the originator of the idea. Rabbi Shapiro later wrote to Rabbi Spivak apologizing for the fact that he did not give him due recognition."

Marc I Spivak <spivakm@juno.com>

Re: Yizkor on Yom Tov (Ohrnet Shemini/Pesach):

In your recent article pertaining to yizkor you attempt to explain why we recite it on Yom Tov. I wish to bring to your attention that the reciting of yizkor on Yom Tov is questionable, in spite of the common practice to do so. The Machzor Vitri (I:312 pp. 344-5, I:353 p. 392) states emphatically that yizkor should only be said on Yom Kippur and not on Yom Tov. The reason being that since Yom Tov is a day of simchah one should not arouse feelings of grief.

Chaim Ozer Chait <ybte@netvision.net.il>

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