



THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE INK OF ETERNITY

“Hashem said to Moshe: Carve for yourself two stone Tablets like the first ones...” (34:1)

Would you rather be the Holy Ark in which the Torah is kept, or the ink with which the Torah is written?

After the Jewish People heard the Ten Commandments at Sinai, Moshe ascended the mountain to receive the rest of the Torah from Hashem. He came down on the 17th of Tammuz.

The two Tablets of stone that Moshe brought down with him contained not just the Ten Commandments but the whole Torah. Everything. The Talmud, the Aggada, etc. Everything necessary to carry out The Maker’s instructions were embodied in the first Tablets. Not only the commandment to wear *tefillin*, but also what *tefillin* were and how to make them. All the minutiae of Shabbos. Everything later given to Moshe as the Oral Torah was written on those first two Tablets.

When Moshe came down from the mountain and saw the people cavorting in front of a golden calf, the words that were written on the Tablets flew back up to Heaven. The Tablets then became heavy. Moshe could no longer hold them and they smashed to the ground.

The Tablets became heavy because the words that flew away were the words of the Oral Torah. What was left was a “heavy” Torah. A Torah that had a commandment to wear *tefillin* without any precise instructions as to what *tefillin* were or how to fulfill the mitzva. A Torah that was “heavy” because it left so much unexplained. All the minutiae took wing and flew back to whence they came.

G-d forgave the Jewish People for their infidelity with the golden calf. On Yom Kippur, Moshe brought down a second set of Tablets. These Tablets were both less and more than the original Tablets. They were less in that the original Tablets were the work of G-d Himself, whereas the second Tablets were hewn by Moshe. However these second Tablets gave the Jewish people a new elevated status.

The entire Torah had been con-

“...even if all the mitzvos that should lighten his home are like darkened windows — but if he still keeps Shabbos then there is yet a sign that Jewish life is smoldering within.”

tained in the first Tablets; thus, the Jewish People and the Torah had been two separate entities. Israel was the creation charged to keep and guard the Torah. They were like the ark in which the Sefer Torah is kept.

However, the second Tablets did not contain the entire Torah. On the second Tablets Hashem only inscribed the written Torah. The detailed instructions of the Oral Torah were given to Moshe as a verbal tradition to be passed down from teacher to pupil throughout the ages.

Unlike the first Torah written just on the Tablets, *part of the Torah was now to be written in the hearts and minds of the Jewish People themselves.*

When the Jewish People received

the second Tablets, we ceased being just the container of the Torah. We became part of the Torah. We became the very parchment of the Torah itself. The ink of eternity, the Torah’s Holy words, the instruction book of Maker, written in the mind of the Jewish People, passed from “rebbe to talmid” in an unbroken chain.

SIGN OF THE TIMES

“It (Shabbos) is an everlasting sign between me and the Children of Israel.” (31:17)

A shoemaker’s shop — the door is barred, all the windows are shuttered; not a crack of light can be seen from within. One would think the shoemaker has moved out of town. Only the sign above the door — “Shoemaker” — gives any clue that the shoemaker is still in business.

Similarly with the Jew: However far he wanders from the faith of his fathers, and even if all the mitzvos that should lighten his home are like darkened windows — but if he still keeps Shabbos then there is yet a sign that Jewish life is smoldering within; that the light of Yiddishkeit has not gone out completely.

But when that sign — “Shabbos” — comes down, it is as though the Shoemaker has left town for good.

A VALID VISA

“Hew for yourself two Tablets of stone.” (34:1)

Once, there was a traveler who wanted to visit an exotic and remote country on the roof of the world. This country had the reputation of being almost impossible for tourists to enter. So, when our traveler was granted his tourist visa, it came

continued on page three

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Moshe conducts a census by counting each silver half-shekel donated by all men, age twenty and over. Moshe is commanded to make a copper laver for the *Mishkan*. The women donate the necessary metal. The formula of the anointing oil is specified, and Hashem instructs Moshe to use this oil only for dedicating the *Mishkan*, its vessels, and Aharon and his sons. Hashem selects Betzalel and Oholiav to be the master craftsmen for the *Mishkan* and its vessels. The Jewish People are commanded to keep the Sabbath as an eternal sign that Hashem made the world. Moshe receives the two Tablets of Testimony on which are written the ten commandments. The mixed multitude who left Egypt with the Jewish People panic when Moshe's descent seems delayed, and force Aharon to make a golden calf for them to worship. Aharon stalls and tries to delay them. Hashem tells Moshe to return to the people immediately,

threatening to destroy everyone and build a new nation from Moshe. When Moshe sees the orgy of idol-worship he smashes the tablets, and destroys the golden calf. The sons of Levi volunteer to punish the transgressors, executing 3,000 men. Moshe ascends the mountain to pray for forgiveness for the people, and Hashem accepts his prayer. Moshe sets up the *Mishkan*, and Hashem's cloud of glory returns. Moshe asks Hashem to show him the rules by which he conducts the world, but is granted only a small portion of this request. Hashem tells Moshe to hew new tablets, and reveals to him the text of the prayer that will invoke his mercy. Idol worship, intermarriage, and the combination of milk and meat are prohibited. The laws of Pesach, the first-born, the first-fruits, Shabbos, Shavuos and Succos are taught. When Moshe descends with the second set of tablets, his face is luminous as a result of contact with the Divine.

HAFTORAH: MELACHIM I 18:1-39

Just before the *shofar* sounds on Yom Kippur, bringing to a close 25 hours of prayer and fasting, we repeat the closing words from this week's Haftorah seven times: "*Hashem; He is the G-d.*"

Eliyahu HaNavi had challenged the idolatrous prophets of the *Ba'al* to a public demonstration to see who was really G-d and who was a fraud. When a miracle happened and the

Jewish people saw the truth, they shouted in unison "*Hashem; He is the G-d.*"

In the same way that this week's *Parsha* describes the Jewish People wavering on the brink of idol worship, so too the Haftorah tells of one of the worst kings to rule Israel — *Achav*, whose wife, *Izavel*, worshipped idols, murdered righteous prophets and filled the palace with idols.

In spite of the danger to his life, *Eliyahu* successfully challenged *Achav* and *Izavel*. The culmination of his victory was on Mount Carmel, where it became clear to all the Jewish People who was G-d.

golden calf, *Yehoshua* tried to comfort Moshe by saying "*The sound of battle is in the camp.*" He meant that not all the Jews were infected by idol worship; there is still a battle between the worshippers of the golden calf and those faithful to Hashem.

Moshe replied to him that it was "*not a sound shouting strength nor a sound shouting weakness,*" meaning: "I don't hear an ounce of resolve in either the worshippers of the calf nor in those loyal to Hashem."

Even those *not* worshipping the calf were taking the stance of tolerance, of neutrality. They were "open to both opinions." That was "*the sound shouting weakness.*" Just a voice, nothing more; the voice of appeasement, devoid of action and expectation of improving the situation.

In the fight against idol-worship, whatever that idol may be, only the "*sound shouting strength*" must be heard, because then it is impossible to dance between two opinions.

• D'var Hamelacha



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THE VOICE OF APPEASEMENT

"How long will you dance between two opinions? If Hashem is the G-d, follow Him! And if the Ba'al, follow it." (18:21)

When Moshe *Rabbeinu* was descending from Mount Sinai with the Tablets and the Jewish People were busy with the

לע"ן
ר' אברהם יצחק בן ר' יעקב ז"ל
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

to him as something of a surprise. However, in spite of this, he was convinced that he would be stopped at the border and refused entry to his destination.

He had set his heart on the trip, so he enlisted the services of a “special agent,” a certain Mr. Shaker, who had contacts in high places in the government of the country. Shaker was able to magically open “locked doors.” All of this came at a price. Quite a tidy sum was deposited in a numbered bank account. And then the word came. All clear. He would be met at the airport by an official who would usher him through the customs and immigration formalities. He needed to bring nothing with him. Not even his visa. He would be recognized immediately and whisked through the airport in a flash.

On arrival, our traveler bounded off the plane and presented himself at the immigration desk. “Visa please!” asked a uniformed official. “I’m sorry?” said the traveler. “I said: Visa Please!” repeated the official, somewhat irritated. “But, don’t you recognize me?”

“If you gave me your visa, maybe I’d be able to recognize you, said the official, sarcastically.

“But Mr. Shaker said...”

“Look” said the official, “I’ve no idea who this Mr. Shaker is, but all you need to enter the country is a valid visa. Without that, there’s nothing I can do.”

Why was it that the first Tablets of the covenant were hewn by Hashem himself, whereas the second Tablets were hewn by Moshe?

The sin of the golden calf was not

real idol worship, but it was based on a mistake: That, because Hashem himself had made the first Tablets, it was impossible to fathom their depths without the assistance of lofty spiritual powers. For this reason the people fashioned the likeness of an ox to worship, for the ox is one of the mystical creatures surrounding the heavenly throne. By worshipping a calf, they thought, the mystical powers of the ox would help them transcend the boundaries of human reach and be close to Hashem and to understand His Torah.

While Moshe was still with them, they relied on Moshe to bring them close to Hashem and did not seek other means. However, when they thought Moshe was dead, they turned to other ways of elevating themselves.

The truth is that every Jew has his own passport to spirituality. It’s called the Torah. It contains all the visas we need to reach out of this world. We need no special agents or intermediaries. With our own human abilities we can achieve the sublime.

It was for this reason that Hashem commanded Moshe to hew the second Tablets: To demonstrate that human hands were involved in their making; that through our own efforts, we can earn the help of Hashem to understand all of the words of the Holy Torah and to climb to great heights. For that reason the Torah is called *Toras Moshe* — the Torah of Moshe. It’s possible to gain entry to its most esoteric and remote regions via the visa of human effort alone.

THE GOLD STANDARD

“Aaron said to them: Remove the golden earrings that are in the ears of your wives, sons, and daughters, and bring them to me.” (32:2)

Aharon’s part in the incident of the golden calf is difficult to understand. It cannot be that he deliberately incited the people to make an idol to worship. Rather, his intention was the reverse.

A person’s will is represented by the heart. And the heart is expressed through the “pocket.” By gathering gold from all the Jews and making it into a single unit, Aharon was trying to create a tangible symbol of the unity of the will of Jewish People. The gold would be cast into the fire and the fire would remove the impurities of the latent tendency to idol worship.

What would be left would be pure and united, a symbol of the unity of the Jewish People and Hashem.

However, the “mixed multitude” who came up from Egypt with the Jewish People, and whose intentions were truly idolatrous, introduced the powers of spiritual impurity into the gold. The Jews were then drawn after this, and what resulted was the golden calf.

Sources:

The Ink Of Eternity - Beis Halevi, Drasha 18
Sign Of The Times - Chafetz Chaim
A Valid Visa - Rabbi Moshe Feinstein
The Gold Standard - Rabbi Shmuel M’Sokhachov

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

REMEMBERING THE LAND

Purim is not celebrated on the same day everywhere. In walled cities, we are told in Megillat Esther, the celebration is on the 15th day of Adar, while in cities without walls it is on the 14th.

The reason for this is that in the unwalled cities, the Jews overcame their enemies on the 13th of Adar and celebrated on the 14th, while in the walled capital of Shushan the battle still raged on the 14th and the Jews there could not celebrate their victory until the 15th. Therefore, all walled cities celebrate Purim on the 15th because of their similarity to Shushan.

The designation “walled city” does not depend on a city’s present situation, but rather on whether it had a wall at the time Joshua led the Jewish nation in the conquest of *Eretz Yisrael*. But why is Joshua’s time the criterion for the designation “walled city?” Wouldn’t it have been more logical to make this determination based on the time of the Purim miracle?

The answer is found in the Jerusalem Talmud where Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi declares that this was done in order to accord honor to *Eretz Yisrael* which lay desolate at the time the Persian miracle.

Rabbi Nissan ben Reuven (*Ran*) explains this as follows: At the time of the Purim miracle there were hardly any cities in *Eretz Yisrael* with their walls still intact. Had the determination of “walled city”

been made according to the situation at that time, almost all cities in *Eretz Yisrael* would have the status of unwalled cities. To avoid this disgrace, it was decided to base the status “walled city” on the situation of the city at the time of Joshua. This made many more cities in *Eretz Yisrael* eligible for this distinction.

Rabbi Yosef Karo (*Beis Yosef*) has a different approach. Our Sages wanted some memory of *Eretz Yisrael* in the celebration of this miracle which took place in a foreign land. In the spirit of “*zecher lemikdash*” — those laws and customs we follow to recall the *Beis Hamikdash* — the Sages linked the determination of “walled city” to *Eretz Yisrael* so that the Jews living abroad would not forget their holy land.

WEEKLY DAF

SHABBOS 100 - 106

WRITE OR WRONG?

Although Torah law forbids writing on Shabbos only in durable script, the Sages prohibited even such non-durable forms of writing as dipping a finger in juice and writing letters on the table, or etching letters into dust, sand or ashes. This extends even to drawing letters on a frosted window pane, but does not include drawing imaginary letters with your finger in the air or on a dry sheet of paper.

What about etching letters into a congealed layer of fat?

There is no doubt that this is forbidden since it is no less an act of writing than the aforementioned examples prohibited by rabbinic law. The question is whether such writing is forbidden even by Torah law.

There is no explicit mention of such writing on congealed fat in our *gemara*, and one of the great halachic authorities indeed concluded that it is forbidden only by rabbinic law. But if one turns to the very last pages of a standard *gemara* and consults the *Tosefta* (a body of law citing the rulings of the Tannaic Sages not included in the *Mishna* and similar in many ways to the *Beraisa* — both of which are frequently quoted in the *gemara* for supporting or challenging the view of an Amoraic Sage) he will note that in Chapter 12, *Tosefta* 6 it is stated clearly that writing upon congealed fat is a violation of Torah law.

The logic behind the view that the ban on such writing is only of rabbinic origin is that it lacks durability since it will disappear once the fat is melted. The *Tosefta*'s approach, as it was understood by leading commentaries cited by *Mishna Berurah* (240:20), is that since such writing will last as long as no action is taken to dissolve it we must consider such writing as durable and therefore prohibited by Torah law.

• *Shabbos 104b*

LONG DAYS AND LONG YEARS

When one Jew wishes another long life he traditionally blesses him that "Hashem should lengthen his days and years." The reason for this apparent redundancy can be appreciated from a closer look at what the *gemara* tells us about the importance of properly eulogizing a deceased Torah scholar.

One who is lax in eulogizing such a scholar, says Rabbi Chiya bar Abba in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, will not live long. This is a punishment of measure for measure. Since he was so indifferent to the tragedy of a scholar's life being cut short, there will be an indifference in Heaven regarding his own life.

A challenge is presented to Rabbi Yochanan's statement by the very same Rabbi Chiya who quoted it. The elders who survived Yeshoshua were so guilty of not properly eulogizing him that a volcano threatened to erupt and kill them (*Yehoshua* 24:30). Yet it is concerning these very same elders that we are told (*Shoftim* 2:7) "they lived long lives after the passing of Yehoshua."

"Babylonian that you are," Rabbi Yochanan rebuked this disciple who had left his land to learn Torah under Rabbi Yochanan in *Eretz Yisrael*, "they did indeed enjoy long days but they did not merit long years." Rashi explains that "long days" refers to the quality of life, while "long years" refers to the quantity. Although their other merits gained for them an enjoyment of their years, the number of those years was lessened by their failure to adequately eulogize a Torah scholar like Yehoshua.

So when we wish someone "long days and long years" we are blessing him with both quality and quantity of life.

• *Shabbos 105b*

BONUS QUESTION?

Rashi never "just" comments; something in the text always impels him to do so. Rashi answers unspoken questions arising from a thoughtful reading of the Torah text. Anyone who wants a true understanding of Rashi's classic Torah commentary must always ask: "What's Bothering Rashi?"

"And you speak to the Children of Israel saying: Keep My Sabbaths, for it is a sign between Me and you for your generations, to know that I am Hashem Who sanctifies you."(Exodus 31:13) Rashi comments on the words **"For it is a sign."** It is a great sign between us that I have chosen you, in that I let you inherit the day on which I rested as your day of rest. Rashi changes the meaning of the verse. The simple meaning is that Shabbos

is the sign, but Rashi doesn't say this. He says the sign is "that I have chosen you." Why? **What's bothering Rashi?**

BONUS ANSWER!

Reading the verse carefully (as Rashi did) you will notice that the word "Sabbaths" is plural while the verse says "it is a sign" in the singular. So the apparently reasonable meaning is not grammatically correct. Therefore Rashi says "it" refers to the sign (not to Shabbos), meaning: The fact that G-d chose us to give us His day of rest as ours is a great sign of the special relationship between us. This is truly an original interpretation.

• Based on Dr. Avigdor Bonchek's new book "What's Bothering Rashi?" Feldheim Publishers

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. How many “geira” are there in a shekel?
2. What was the minimum age of military service in the Jewish army?
3. What were the three different types of *terumah* donated?
4. The Jews were counted after *Yom Kippur* and again after *Pesach*. Both times they numbered the same amount. How can this be? Didn't some 19 year olds turn 20 during that six month period?
5. How many ingredients comprise the incense of the *Mishkan*?
6. According to Rashi, why are sailors called “*malachim*”?
7. What is the difference between *chochma* (wisdom), *bina* (understanding), and *da'as* (knowledge)?
8. Shabbos is a “sign.” What does it signify?
9. When did the Jewish People begin to give contributions for the building of the *Mishkan*?
10. How many books are there in Tanach?
11. From where did the men take the earrings that they donated to make the calf?
12. Why did Aharon build the altar for the golden calf by himself?
13. Why did Moshe break the Tablets?
14. How can two brothers belong to two different tribes?
15. Why did Moshe ask that his name be erased from the Torah?
16. How has the sin of the golden calf affected the Jewish People throughout history?
17. In verse 33:2, Hashem says that the inhabitants of *Eretz Canaan* would be driven out of the Land. In that verse, only six of the seven Canaanite nations are mentioned. What happened to the seventh?
18. How did Hashem show that He forgave the Jewish People?
19. How did Moshe become wealthy?
20. How do the light rays shining from Moshe's face show us the powerful effect of sin?

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

“**And they shall give... (30:12)**” The word *V'nasnu* — “and they shall give” — is a palindrome. It is spelled the same backwards as forwards. This hints that giving charity is a two-way street. When a person gives charity he should realize that he or his offspring might one day need to be on the receiving end of charity. And then his good deed will come back to assist him.

• Vilna Gaon

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 30:13 - Twenty.
2. 30:14 - Twenty.
3. 30:15 - For the *Adanim* (sockets), for the purchase of communal sacrifices, and for the building of the *Mishkan*.
4. 30:16 - Their ages were calculated based on Rosh Hashana, not based on their individual birthdays.
5. 30:34 - Eleven ingredients were used making the incense.
6. 30:35 - Because they stir (*malach*) the water with their oars.
7. 31:3 - *Chochma* is knowledge acquired from others. *Bina* is the deduction of new knowledge from what one has already learned. *Da'as* is holy inspiration.
8. 31:13 - It is a sign between Hashem and the Jewish People that He has chosen them and a sign to the nations of the world that He has sanctified the Jewish People.
9. 31:18 - The 11th of Tishrei.
10. 31:18 - 24.
11. 32:2,3 - From their ears.
12. 32:5 - He hoped that by building it by himself it would take longer and in the interim Moshe would return.
13. 32:19 - Moshe reasoned: If the Torah forbids those who have estranged themselves from the Torah to partake in even a single commandment (*Pesach* sacrifice), surely the *entire* Torah cannot be given to a whole nation who has estranged itself from Hashem!
14. 32:27 - Half-brothers, sharing the same mother.
15. 32:32 - So people shouldn't say “Moshe was unworthy to plead for mercy on behalf of the Jewish people.”
16. 32:34 - Whenever Hashem punishes the Jewish People, part of that punishment comes as payment for the sin of the golden calf.
17. 33:2 - The seventh nation, the *Girgashites*, voluntarily emigrated.
18. 33:14 - He agreed to let His *Shechina* dwell among them.
19. 34:1 - Moshe carved the Tablets out of precious stone. Hashem commanded Moshe to keep the leftover fragments.
20. 34:35 - Before the sin of the golden calf, the people would not have been afraid to look at the light rays, but after the sin they were afraid.

ASK the RABBI

LETTER IMPERFECT

Leon Sossen from Melbourne, Australia
<leonsoss@iaccess.com.au> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

In Megillat Esther, the word v'sasson (and joy) in the sentence "The Jews had light and happiness and joy and honor" is spelled "vav sin sin nun." Every other time I have seen the word sasson it is spelled "sin sin vav nun." In the Megillah, the letter vav is missing! All editions of the Megillat Esther leave it out! Now this sentence is also part of the Havdalah prayer. The ArtScroll Siddur unlike any other siddur that I have ever seen also omits the vav in the same sentence. I wonder if you could comment on this? I have a particular interest in the Hebrew/Yiddish spelling of this word...

Dear Leon Sossen,

In many places the Torah omits "silent" letters. This is called *ketiv chaser*, incomplete spelling. It doesn't change the sound or meaning of the word.

Some words are normally spelled this way. The name *Yaakov* for example is almost always spelled without a vav.

When letters are left out of a word, it hints to some lack in the concept being projected. In the verse you asked about, the *sasson* (joy) may lack some element. Our Sages identify the "joy" in this verse as the joy of performing the *mitzvah* of circumcision. A possible explanation of the missing letter is that it refers to the pain of circumcision which detracts from the joy of the occasion.

Sources:

- Talmud Megillah 16b

HIGH, HOW ARE YOU?

Ron Shaul from Tofino, British Columbia <mama@island.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Do you know anything about the reference in Exodus 30:23 to one of the ingredients of the anointing oil. The English is translated as Sweet

Calamus. However there seems to be a controversy as to its real name. In Hebrew it is *Q'ana bos*. Which sounds a lot like Cannabis or marijuana. My Hebrew dictionary defines *Q'ana bos* as hemp. Please let me know if you find anything as it would certainly create quite a stir if it could be proven that Moishe was pouring marijuana oil over the heads of Aaron & the High priests.

Dear Ron Shaul,

See Aryeh Kaplan's translation of the Chumash called "The Living Torah." The Septuagint, Nachmanides, Saadya Gaon and Ibn Janach all identify it as sweet calamus, *Acorus calamus*. Maimonides identifies it as the Indian plant *Cympopogon martini* (which also sounds intoxicating). Others do indeed identify it as the hemp plant, or marijuana, although this is a minority opinion.

Even if it was hemp, it was mixed with many other ingredients, mostly oil, and therefore not potent enough to "get high."

WHO IS AMALEK?

Fabian <perkal@adinet.com.uy> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
Who is Amalek?

Dear Fabian,

Amalek was the illegitimate son of Elifaz, and the grandson of Esav. (Amalek's mother was the illegitimate daughter of Amalek's father).

The progeny of Amalek are the archetypal enemy of the Jewish People. Their very existence is diametrically opposed to the Torah. The Sages describe the people of Amalek as being the essence of all the evil in the world.

Today, we don't know who is descended from Amalek. Around the year 600 BCE, the Assyrian conqueror Sancheriv exiled most of the world's inhabitants from their homelands and scattered them around the world. Since then, the true national identity of any people (except for the Jews) has become obscure.

The concept of "Amalek" goes a long

way in helping us understand the baffling phenomenon of *anti-Semitism*. Anti-Semitism has no sociological parallel. Even the word is unique: "Anti-Semitism" is the only English word describing hate towards a distinct group of people. There's no English word for French-hatred, Irish-hatred, or German hatred, even though England fought bitter wars against all these nations.

We are the only people in the world towards whom there exists a unique, distinct hatred. This bears out the Torah's prediction that until the Mashiach's days, there will exist a nation, Amalek, with an unexplainable, inborn hatred towards us.

FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, AND OTHER DRINKS

In honor of Purim, here's a bunch of questions about kosher alcohol.
L'Chaim!

Jeff Sokolow

<sokoloj@towers.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

In your view, would a hechsher (kashrut certification) be required for sake (Japanese rice wine)? It is my understanding that sake is distilled from fermented rice in much the same way vodka is distilled from potatoes. I would assume the answer is therefore no, unless some non-kosher ingredient were to be added in the distilling process. Thank you and best wishes.

RGalert <rgalert@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Is Tequila Kosher? How can I get a list of kosher alcoholic beverages?

Aharon Goldman from Jerusalem
<goldman@schttools.co.il> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Is there any way to get information on kashruth of various alcoholic drinks? In particular I'm interested in Southern Comfort, Khalua, Drambuie, Cointreau.

ASK the RABBI

Richard Eden

<richard.eden@tao.j-sainsbury.co.uk>
wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
What is it that makes wine kosher?
Do similar rules apply to other alcoholic beverages? Are beer and spirits either kosher or non-kosher?

Dear Jeff Sokolow, Rgalert, Aharon Goldman and Richard Eden,

The London Beth Din publishes a list of kosher foods, including liqueurs and alcoholic drinks. I checked the list and found the following:

The only sake they list as kosher is *Hatsukuru sake*. They certify the following types of Tequila Souza as kosher: Conmenerativa, Gold, Hornitos, Silver and Tres Generacione. According to their list, Cointreau is kosher only if produced in France. Southern Comfort is kosher only if produced in Ireland. All Drambuie and Khalua are kosher.

Wine has a uniquely strict status due to its use in religious ceremonies. All wines without kashrut certification are non-kosher.

Regarding kosher beer, the following is adapted from an article written by Rabbi Tzvi Rosen for *Kashrus Kurrents*:

Most U.S., Norwegian, English and German beers are acceptable. Stouts, flavored beers and "Barley wine" require certification, as do European, Asian, and other beers about which there is insufficient information regarding their contents.

Beer is normally made from all kosher ingredients: Water, barley, yeast, and hops. Isinglass finning (made from ground tropical fish), gelatin, and other ingredients are sometimes added to remove dark particles from the beer. Caramel color is sometimes added for coloring. In all, United States law allows over fifty-nine chemicals or additives to be used in beer.

Gelatin and isinglass clarifiers are

not used in domestic beer in the United States. Isinglass finnings have been used as a beer clarifier in the UK for centuries. Over two hundred years ago the great Halachic authority Rabbi Yechezkel Landau in his work Nodah B'Yehudah permitted isinglass clarifier (Yorah Deah, Siman 26). A clarifier only filters unwanted particles and is not present in the final beverage.

Fruit flavorings and spices are used to make flavored beers. By U.S. law, these beers must be labeled "Flavored Beer." Flavored beer definitely requires kosher certification.

"Barley wine" is a specialty beer which definitely needs kosher certification, because it is sometimes fermented with non-kosher wine or champagne yeast.

Obviously, the kashrut status of a product changes with changes in production methods or kashrut supervision.

Jeff Sokolow <sokoloj@towers.com>
responds:

I appreciate your taking the time to check. One question: Does the fact that this one brand of sake is the only one the London Beth Din lists mean the other brands are not kosher, or just that this is the only one they have checked out? In broader terms, is there a reason why it would be necessary to investigate or certify the production of sake when there is apparently no need to do the same for whiskey or vodka?

Dear Jeff Sokolow,

I don't know the London Beth Din's criteria. They do, in fact also list vodkas and whiskeys. On the surface, there seems no reason to suspect sake of being non-kosher, but food technology has become complicated. I suggest you write to the OU <kosherq@ou.org>. They are the largest kashrut organization in the world. They also have a web site listing kosher products.

A PACKAGE DEAL

M.B. Epstein

<epsteinmb@worldnet.att.net>
wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
What should a *mishloach manot* package include, and why?

Dear M.B. Epstein,

It's a mitzvah to send portions of food, *mishloach manot*, to one another on Purim. Minimally, send one person two portions of different types of food, like meat and cake or cake and wine. The food should be ready to eat so it can be served at the festive Purim meal.

Sending presents engenders friendship and love for one another, and shows our joy for our miraculous rescue from the evil Haman.

JEWISH HUMOR LISTS

Rachel <orbart@tezcat.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
Do you know Jewish humor email lists? Looking. Shalom

Dear Rachel:

Ohr Somayach has a few pieces of Jewish humor:

- Top Ten Lists
<http://www.ohr.org.il/judaism/humor/top10/topten.htm>
- Chopped Liver cartoons:
<http://www.ohr.org.il/judaism/cartoons/cartoons.htm>
- Yossi & Co. Comic strip:
<http://www.ohr.org.il/yossi>

In the meantime, here's one:

An Israeli official, desperate to buy a new fighter jet costing \$50 million, comes up with an idea. He will seek out one thousand donors and ask them for \$50,000 a piece. His friend, listening to him pitch this idea, says "But the jet will never get off the ground!"

"Why not?"

"Do have any idea how much a thousand plaques weigh?"

Or L'Golem

Give us two years and we'll make you a *mentefi*!

a subtraction of Ohr Somayach Tanenbaum Institutions

OF GENOCIDE?

WHICH SIDE

Purim is a time of physical celebration. It is a mitzvah to enjoy a festive meal, to send gifts of food to friends and contributions to the needy — and even to imbibe spirits more than one is accustomed to doing.

Chanukah, by contrast, is a time of spiritual celebration. We light candles and add *Hallel* to our prayers. But there is no obligation to have a festive meal — *latkes* and doughnuts are only a popular custom.

Why this difference between Purim and Chanukah?

One suggested approach is that Jews have been historically threatened by two forms of genocide — physical and spiritual. Purim recalls the threat of Haman’s “final solution to the Jewish problem.” Haman was determined to annihilate every Jew, “young and old, children and women in one day.” He would not have abandoned his plan even if the Jews had all abandoned their faith in Hashem. Since it was the physical body of the Jewish People which was saved from destruction, it is incumbent on the survivors and their heirs throughout the generations to celebrate with their bodies by eating, drinking and sharing such indulgence with others.

Chanukah celebrates heavenly rescue from a threat of spiritual genocide. The Hellenist Greeks were interested in forcing assimilation upon the Jewish People, not physically destroying them. Since the threat was a spiritual one, the celebration of our deliverance is a spiritual one of lights and prayers of praise.

This very neat explanation is challenged by one of the great Halachic commentaries in the following manner:

The Torah forbids the males of the Ammonite and Moabite nations from ever marrying a woman from a Jewish mother, even if they convert to Judaism. Our Sages explain that the Torah distances these nations from our midst because of their great crime in tempting our ancestors to sin through sexual promiscuity and idol worship on their way out of Egypt. The Edomites, on the other hand, are distanced from marrying into our people after conversion for only two generations, despite the fact that they waged war against us and tried to destroy us. The conclusion, say our Sages, is that one who seeks to persuade a person to sin commits a greater crime than one who tries to kill him. Why? Because one who kills him takes him away only from this world, while one who causes him to sin brings upon him Divine retribution which removes him from this

world and from the World to Come.

Therefore, spiritual genocide is equivalent, if not worse than, physical genocide. Why then should we not physically celebrate our Chanukah deliverance from the physical-spiritual genocide which threatened us?

A fascinating response to this challenge is provided by another great Halachic authority:

When is causing a Jew to sin equivalent to physical genocide because he loses both worlds? Only when the Jew is *enticed* to sin as he was by the daughters of Moab who exploited sexual attraction to lead Jews to idol worship. That is why the Moabites were distanced from our people in an even more severe manner than were the Edomites who only tried to perpetrate physical genocide.

The Hellenists, on the other hand, attempted to *coerce* Jews into committing sins. Submission to such pressure can certainly not be viewed as inviting Divine retribution which is expressed in physical and spiritual genocide. But continued violation of religious practice is certain to undermine the spiritual health of a people, and deliverance from such pressure is a cause for celebrating a rescue from spiritual genocide in a purely spiritual way.

Which side of genocide does our own generation face? The threat of physical genocide which reared its ugly head in the Holocaust still echoes in the Arab call to Jihad against the Jewish State. But this danger is nowhere near as tangible as that of the spiritual genocide which is decimating our ranks in the form of widespread assimilation and intermarriage.

This is not the spiritual genocide of Hellenist, Crusader or Inquisitors. Nowhere are Jews being forced to choose between the cross and the stake, the crescent and the sword. Our problem is that of the Moabite kind, submission to passion for pleasure exacerbated by the powerful forces of social conformity, the age-old desire to be a nation like all nations. This is a situation of “do-it-yourself genocide” where more than six million are trying to achieve a final solution of vanishing into the family of nations, rather than serve as a model for them.

On Purim, when we joyfully celebrate our miraculous escape from one side of genocide we must resolve to strengthen our Jewish identity through Jewish education in order to save our people from the other side of genocide.

“NOWHERE ARE JEWS BEING FORCED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THE CROSS AND THE STAKE, THE CRESCENT AND THE SWORD.”

Sources:

- *Levushai Malchus*
- *Turei Zahav*
- *Eliyahu Rabba*

MEGILAH A&Q

We give you the answers! You give us the questions!

READ THIS: You have to ask questions from Megillas Esther which aptly fit the following answers.
(For example, if we tell you the answer is "127," you must tell us that the question is "How many countries did Achashverosh rule over?" Got it? Good.)

- | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Woe! | 6. Vashti Dishes | 11. Lots of Luck |
| 2. 180 degrees | 7. Shushan Buoy | 12. History is Boring |
| 3. Arzei Habira | 8. Quiche | 13. Dangling Modifiers |
| 4. Remove both of his shins | 9. Esther | 14. Doll Phone |
| 5. "Here's mud in your eye!" | 10. Dodo | 15. Hummin' |
| | | 16. Because |

QUESTIONS?

- How do Yemenite Jews pronounce the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet (which happens to be the first letter in the Megillah)?
- What would you get if every single day of Achashverosh's feast you graduated college? (1:4)
- From where did they get the cedar trees (*arzei*) to build Shushan Habira?
- How could you make Achashverosh be called Achavayro?
- Which "toast" did the Medians say to one another before drinking which eventually became the source for the name of their country "Mud-Eye"? (1:3)
- What did the Persian queen serve at her party? What didn't she do after the party?
- What Persian flotation device causes lots of confusion when you ask someone at the airport where you can find one?
- What egg-based luncheon pie sounds like Mordechai's great-grandfather?
- Who's the only person in the Megillah with an English name?
- What word defines Esther's father's relationship to Mordechai? (2:7)
- What objects did Haman use to determine a date for his plan?
- When he couldn't sleep, why did Achashverosh ask for the Book of Remembrances?
- What kind of adjectives best describe Haman and sons?
- What toy did Haman buy to go with his second son's Barbie collection? (9:7)
- What joyous vocal expression is appropriate when our idolatrous enemies hang?
- Why aren't there 20 questions this week?

ChoppedLiver®

Created by Rabbi Mordechai Becher
Illustrated by Osher Werner



Megillah reading at Los Alamos Nuclear Test Site.

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ECHOES ECHOES ECHOES
TAPE TAPE TAPE LIBRARY LIBRARY LIBRARY
PRESENTS
Wayward Voice™
The New CD From Hymie Dillinger
AVAILABLE IN VINYL AND STAINLESS STEEL WHEREVER GOOD JEWISH PASTRAMI IS SOLD

THE WILLING SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

Once heard an interview with a leading British stage actor. He found life rather frightening. When you got up in the morning, he said, you never quite knew what was going to happen to you. However, in every day, there were two and a half hours when everything was totally reliable, two and a half hours when nothing would change, when all would be completely as he expected it to be.

When he walked out onto the stage, he entered a world where everything was comfortably and exactly the same as it was the previous night. That's what he loved about acting. He would say "Good morning, Mr. Jones!" And the other actor would reply "And a Good Morning to you, Mr. Baker!" Night after night it would be the same. In the midst of a world over which one had no control, in which anything could happen, there were two and a half hours where everything was reassuringly unchanged and unchanging.

On Purim, we also dress up in fantasy costume and put on plays. But what is the connection between Purim and drama?

Samuel Taylor Coleridge called drama "*that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.*" When we sit in a theater, we willingly suspend our disbelief. We know that everything that is happening on the stage isn't real, but the playwright, the actors and the audience all enter into a conspiracy "*of poetic faith*" in an attempt to bring to life a quasi-reality that will transcend and communicate some perception about life in this world.

Unlike other religions, there are no leaps of faith in Judaism. Maybe a couple of steps at the end of a long well-lit boulevard, but no leaps into the dark. Judaism is not so much about belief as the "willing suspension of *disbelief.*"

This world is a cosmic drama littered with tell-tale clues. The Protagonist, however, is hidden. Judaism is not so much a matter of

belief; rather it is taking positive action to remove those forces that bring to disbelief. It's not difficult for a Jew to believe. We are all natural believers. We come from a long line of believers, all the way back to Avraham.

Every Jew has the indelible spiritual heritage of standing at Sinai and hearing the Ten Commandments. A Jew is a believer. All we need to do is to *suspend* our disbelief, the disbelief that comes from having bought into the Hollywood ethic, from living in a spiritual twilight zone — Tinsel Town for the soul.

"THE WORLD IS NO MORE THAN
A GREASE-PAINT FACADE
AND YOU HAVE TO LOOK
BEYOND. EVEN THOUGH
LIFE LOOKS CHAOTIC AND
FRIGHTENING, IT REALLY
IS A DIVINE DRAMA."

This world is a stage set. It is no more than an impressive plywood facade propped up from behind. G-d is hidden in this world. He is hidden behind the stage set. The world is specifically designed to be something which conceals G-d. The Hebrew word for world is *olam*. *Olam* has the same root as the word *ne'elam* which means "hidden" or "vanished."

In other words, this world's name is "*Concealment.*" Hashem has, so to speak, "vanished" from the play of life. He is hidden. He has retreated behind the curtains, behind the backdrop of the "natural" world. He has created a stage, an existence whose very name means *concealment*. But He is not difficult to find. There are telltale clues that He is alive and well (the survival of the Jewish People is a giveaway in

itself). You don't have to be Sherlock Holmes to track Him down.

We are the audience in this cosmic mystery. We are invited to suspend our disbelief, to remove the mask from this world and to reveal The Divine Playwright. And the more we choose to see G-d's hand in our lives, the more clear His hand will be. This is the purpose of Man in the world. To reveal and proclaim the existence of the Divine Playwright.

On Purim, we read the Scroll of Esther, the *Megillat Esther*. *Megillat Esther* has the connotation "*lagalot et hahester* — to reveal that which is hidden." The nature of a scroll is to reveal, bit by bit, as you unwind it. However, the name of the *Megilla* is strange. What does it reveal? There is nothing in the *Megilla* which seems in the slightest bit removed from the natural world. There are no open miracles. There is no prophecy of things to come. The narrative seems to proceed in an entirely natural fashion.

And yet, after we finish reading the *Megilla*, when we look back at the plotline, we can see a progression of events which give the lie to its being merely a random sequence. We are invited to "suspend our disbelief" — to view those events as a most tightly woven drama in which not a single plot-twist is gratuitous.

The *Megilla* reveals that nothing in this world (whose very name is *Concealment*) is coincidental.

Maybe that's one of the reasons that we perform plays on Purim. We are saying that the world is no more than a grease-paint facade and that you have to look beyond. Even though life looks chaotic and frightening, it really is a Divine Drama.

That famous English actor retreated to the stage to find his security. To the Jew, nothing is random, nothing is frightening, except the awe of the Master Himself. A Jew sees every event as a development of the Divine Drama. Nothing is left to chance. No event is random.

Win a FREE* Hawaiian Vacation! Be the first person to properly punctuate the following sentence!

The Talmudic statement that "A person is obliged to get intoxicated on Purim until he can't discern between Blessed is Mordechai and Cursed is Haman" which has challenged the commentaries as to how to justify this directive to become inebriated almost to the dangerously deranged state reached by Lot that famous fugitive from the ancient city of Sodom in light of the rational sane lucid intelligent and open-eye manner in which a Jew is at every other time of the year required to conduct himself and which is not mentioned in Maimonides' magnum opus Mishneh Torah but rather a seemingly similar statement that one should "drink until drunk and then sleep amidst drunkenness" explored at first by the famous

later-day authority Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein in the Aruch Hashulchan as a possible explanation of the Talmud's dictum to so numb the mind as to blur the obvious demarcation separating the diametrically opposed characters of Haman and Mordechai which may indeed be said to be achieved through drink-induced sleep and is codified according to Rabbi Moshe Isserles in the Shulchan Aruch as a bonifide fulfillment thereof but upon a precise examination of the Talmud's phraseology implying that only if directly through the drink itself one come to the requisite dull-headedness has one fulfilled one's duty Rabbi Epstein demonstrates to be offered not as an explanation of but rather in rejection of and in opposition to the Talmudic one has spawned a variety of defini-

tions as to the exact level of befuddlement sufficient for its realization including but not limited to the inability to recite the entire lyrics of a song well-known in Talmudic times in which the aforementioned Biblical personalities' epithets feature prominently the resultant confusion arising from the attempt to calculate numerically the correct *gematria* value corresponding to the letters of these two arch-foes' appellations and respective blessed or cursed designations which when sober are equal to exactly the same as one another or being incapable of deciding whether or not Haman's demise was of greater benefit to the Jewish People than Mordechai's aggrandizement or the other way around.

• Based on Aruch Hashulchan 495

*All competition entries must be submitted in seventy languages, each inscribed upon a separate gold ingot (double spaced) with the plume of a Tibetan Dodo Bird, and hand delivered to the Ohr Somayach fund-raiser in the Mir (Space Station, that is).

THE FAR SIDE OF THE STORY

Giving People the Benefit of the Doubt

Judging favorably means finding excuses for questionable behavior. When we find ourselves suspecting others, we must ask ourselves: Are there any redeeming factors? Did I miss something? Did I jump to the wrong conclusion? For instance, take the case of...

THE SABBATH STROLL

Moe and Lenny are strolling home from shul one Saturday morning. Suddenly a cab speeds past, and their friend, Irving, is running frantically behind it, flailing his arms wildly.

"Well," said Lenny, "I never imagined our good friend Irving was a Sabbath violator! Look at him running for that taxi."

"Wait a minute," Moe replied. "Didn't you read that book I lent you, *The Other Side of the Story*, about the command to judge other people favorably? I'll bet we can think of hundreds of excuses for Irving's behavior."

"Yeah, like what?"

"Maybe he's sick and needs to go to the hospital."

"Come on! He was running 60 miles an hour after that cab — he's healthier than Arnold Schwarzenweis."

"Well, maybe his wife's having a baby."

"She had one last week."

"Well, maybe he needs to visit her in the hospital."

"She's home."

"Well, maybe he's running to the hospital to get a doctor."

"He is a doctor."

"Well, maybe he need supplies from the hospital."

"The hospital is a three minute walk in the opposite direction."

"Well, maybe he forgot that it's Shabbos!"

"Of course he knows it's Shabbos. Didn't you see his tie. It was his paisley beige 100% silk Giovanni tie from Italy. He never wears it during the week."

"Wow, you're a really observant Jew! I didn't even notice he was wearing a tie."

"How could you not notice? Didn't you see how it was caught on the back fender of the taxi?"

Miss Understanding

Richard Fader from Ft. Lee, NJ
<Motzeishabbos@nite.live.com.ic> wrote:

Dear Jack,
With all due respect, I have a complaint: Often as one of your sources you mention the "Bad Baloney and Talmud." What is this "Bad Baloney and Talmud?" Whatever it is, how you can expect to be taken seriously when citing such a source? Are you referring to the rock group "Bad Baloney" (which happens to be an excellent band) or to actual decayed cold cuts (if so, your spel cheker is broken). How can "Jack's the Rabbi" refer to something even Oscar Meyer would turn up his nose at? Your very reputation is at stake (no pun intended)! If you're smart you'll take my advice and never again refer to this so called "Bad Baloney and Talmud."

Dear Richard Fader,
Thanks for your comments. Actually, we refer only to the "Babylonian Talmud" — the Oral Law as compiled in Babylon in the 5th century CE. We never refer to the source you mentioned.

Richard Fader from Ft. Lee, NJ responds:
Never mind.

Bittle Riddle

When are your Shabbat Candles like a United States President?

• riddle submitted by Binyamin Franklin
<continental.congress@timberteeth.gov>

Answer: When they're A'blinkin'!

TM
Yossi & Co.



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