



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

This Issue Contains:

1. Philosopher's Stone
2. Gotta Light?
3. Tadoo You
4. Fore are the Mothers
5. Eulogy of a Farmer
6. Please Pass the Plastic
7. Yiddle Riddle
8. Public Domain



2 May 1998
Issue #190
Parshas
Acharei Mos/Kedoshim

PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

Name@Withheld wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am a firm believer in Judaism, the Torah and of course in G-d. But the other day someone asked me a question that I had trouble answering. Can G-d make a rock so heavy that He Himself cannot lift?

Badbones <lordevil@hotmail.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Can G-d create a rock he cannot lift? I know this is an "apikoris" [heretical] question but please answer!

Dear Name@Withheld & Badbones,

My 5 year old son asked me a similar question: "Daddy," he said with a devilish grin, "can G-d make this fork to be that it never was?"

The answer to his question, and to yours, is: No. G-d can't do something that is a contradiction.

G-d can't divide 5 evenly by 2, can't win at chess if He starts with only a king, and can't spell "table" correctly using only 4 letters.

The reason G-d "can't" do these things, is because we have not specified a thing to do; we have contradicted ourselves in the description. "A rock too heavy for the Almighty" is a self-contradiction, because the Almighty is...All Mighty! Therefore, by definition, such a rock can't exist. So your question boils down to: "Can G-d create something which cannot exist?" Of course not; that's a self contradiction. G-d's "inability" to do such a thing does not indicate a lack in G-d; rather, it indicates our failure to define what it is we are asking.

- Thanks to Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb

GOTTA LIGHT?

Bud <buddli@niven.imsweb.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Can a widower light candles Friday nights?

Dear Bud,

A man without a wife — whether he is single, widowed, or simply if his wife is away — should light candles Friday afternoon before sunset.

If his name is Bud, it would be called a Bud Light!

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 263:2

TATTOO YOU

Joshua from Passaic, NJ <josh6086@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I know it is forbidden for a Jew to get a tattoo. My question to you is this: Is getting the name of Hashem as a tattoo even worse; will I be "hexing" myself by getting it? The 4 letters won't be together; the "yud" and "hey" would be on one side of a heart with a crack down the middle and the "vav" and "hey" would be on the other side.

Dear Joshua,

You've answered your own question. Getting a tattoo is explicitly prohibited in the Torah. Getting a tattoo with the four letters that spell G-d's Name is a double disgrace, because you're doing the prohibition with the letters of the Name of G-d who commanded you not to get a tattoo. Whether the letters are in pairs or all together, it is nonetheless the Name of G-d.

Sources:

- Leviticus 19:28

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FORE ARE THE MOTHERS

Name@Withheld wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

A co-worker asked me the following question and I didn't have an answer: What is the significance of the name Rivka (Rebecca)? I pointed out that in the Bible only names that are given or changed are explained. Such that the names Moshe (Moses) and Israel (Jacob) are explained, but Abram and others are not.

Rob Brickner from Brooklyn, NY <robraham@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

What do the foremothers' names mean? Why are the forefathers' names explained right in the Chumash and the foremothers' names are not described in detail? Rivka — I have no idea what that name means. The others I have a one or two word translation. But is there a tradition as to what each of the mothers' names stood for?

Dear Name@Withheld and Rob Brickner,

True, the Torah usually explains a name only at the time of birth or when the name is being changed. But Sarai is changed to Sarah and Hoshea is changed to Yehoshua (Joshua), yet the Torah doesn't explicitly explain these names. Yitzchak's naming is narrated in the Torah but his name is not explained. The same is true of Judah's sons. Moses' son's name, Eliezer, is explained in the Torah *not* at the time of his naming.

True, the Written Torah doesn't explain every name, even the names of some of our greatest people. However, the Oral Torah explains these names.

Sarah comes from the word *sar* meaning "noble" and "ruler." Rivka means a young calf, which is a symbol of innocence. Rachel means a sheep, also associated with innocence. Leah mean tiredness; Leah cried to G-d so much that her eyes looked tired.

Sources:

- Genesis 17:15, 38:3-5
- Exodus 18:4
- Numbers 13:16,
- Tractate Eiruvin 17b
- Sefer Halikutim 17:4

EULOGY OF A FARMER

<TheBergs@delanet.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

My uncle was a farmer. He dedicated his whole life to making things grow. I need to say something

about this in his eulogy. Is there something you can recommend from the Torah, Talmud, or a nice Midrash? I need this soon. Today.

Dear <TheBergs@delanet.com> ,

The Talmud sees a farmer as the model man of faith. The farmer, who depends directly on rain, sunshine and climate, must be a person of faith. He has faith in the Creator every time he plants a seed. He believes that G-d will bless his efforts, and all his efforts are based on that faith.

Sources:

- Talmud Tractate Shabbat 31a

PLEASE PASS THE PLASTIC

Itamar from Thornhill, Ont. <itamar@kosher.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Are the following items *muktzeh* [forbidden to move on Shabbat]? Passport? Driver's license? Credit card? Birth certificate? I figured a credit card might not be *muktzeh*, because you are not actually carrying money. Thanks a lot.

Dear Itamar,

Muktzeh refers to different types of items which are forbidden to be moved on Shabbat, or which can only be moved under limited circumstances.

A credit card is like money in this regard. It has no use on Shabbat and is therefore *muktzeh*. Important papers, too, are reserved for safekeeping by their owners and therefore they are *muktzeh*.

Sources:

- Magen Avraham 307:20, Mishnah Berurah (ad loc.) 56

Yiddle Riddle

Last week we asked: What is the explanation of the following? "*Shmini B'Shmini Shmini Shmini.*"

Answer: Outside of the Land of Israel, when *Parshat Shmini* is read *B'Shmini*, i.e., on the eighth day of Passover at *mincha* time (due to the eighth day of Passover occurring on Shabbat), then *Parshat Shmini* is read *Shmini*, i.e., eight times altogether.

The eight times are: 1) *Mincha* time on Shabbat before Passover 2) Monday before Passover 3) Thursday before Passover 4) First day of Passover (which is also Shabbat) at *mincha* time 5) Eighth day of Passover (which is also Shabbat) at *mincha* time 6) Monday after Passover 7) Thursday after Passover 8) Morning of Shabbat *Parshat Shmini*.

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Continuing the Tradition

I was just reading about the yeshivot of Pumbedisa and Sura. Seems like your responsa are the continuation of a long tradition, albeit in a somewhat different medium.

Haiim <chevy1@idt.net> Brooklyn, NY

Re: Source for saying: "May you live to be 120" (Ohrnet Terumah):

A lawyer, Lawrence Glick, told me that the source for the blessing "may you live to be 120" is a verse in Bereishis. He's referring to where, according to Rashi, the Torah says the flood will be in 120 more years, i.e., that mankind will exist for only 120 more years until the flood. But according to other commentaries, the verse means that that human lifespans will begin to decrease until they will be limited to approximately 120.

*Rabbi Yehuda Albin <orsomayach@aol.com>
Director of Ohr Somayach Chicago*

Re: Moshe's Punishment for Not Admitting his "Hebrew" Origins (Love of the Land: Ohrnet Vayakhel/Pekudei):

You quoted the midrash to the effect that Moshe was punished for the following reason: "When the daughters of Yisro told their father that "an Egyptian man rescued us" (Shemos 2:19), Moshe made no

effort to correct the false impression of his being Egyptian and to stress his Hebrew origins." Therefore, Moshe was unable to enter the land of Israel.

I heard the following from my father z"l, an Ostrovtser Chasid: The Ostrovtser Rov asked in relation to this midrash: "Surely Moshe did no more than tell the truth, for he was indeed born in Egypt?" He answered that we see from the midrash that where a Jew is born is an "accident" of birth — it doesn't make him an Englishman or American or whatever. Every Jew belongs to Eretz Yisrael.

*Perets Mett from London, England
<p.mett@open.ac.uk>*

Re: What's Bothering Rashi?:

I enjoy your feature "What's Bothering Rashi?" A large portion of the commentary of the Sifsei Chachamim is dedicated to just this question. I find it unfortunate that this is not a focal point when teaching Chumash and Rashi in the cheder/Beis Yaakov school systems. It adds a new dimension to both Chumash and Rashi, and it teaches children analytic reasoning (i.e., how to think). Keep up the good work.

*Yehuda Zimmerman, Ashdod
<zimmery@mail.biu.ac.il>*

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