



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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OHR SOMAYACH אוהר שומאך
TANENBAUM COLLEGE

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Issue #196

Parshas Beha'aloscha

ALMOST TRUE

Carson Hughes <carsonmh@telapex.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Is a "white lie" a sin? This question was raised in our Sunday School class by a 7th grade student.

Dear Carson Hughes,

A "white lie" — a falsehood which does not cause any harm — is not as serious as cheating or being dishonest in business, but it is still prohibited. Rabbi Yona Girundi in his classic "The Gates of Repentance" enumerates nine different levels of falsifying, beginning with dishonesty in crime and monetary matters and ending with a few types of "white lie." I very highly recommend the study of this passage.

In limited cases, lying is permitted; for instance where it will bring peace between people. Moshe's brother Aharon is praised for the way he made peace between quarreling parties: Aharon would approach one of the people and say "The other person sent me to tell you that he apologizes and is truly sorry for the way he acted towards you." Then he would go to the other person and say the same thing. The next time the two people met on the street, they would ask each other for forgiveness.

Even when it is permitted to lie, one should avoid it if possible, as illustrated by the following incident in the Talmud. The wife of the great Talmudic sage Rav always did the opposite of what he requested. If Rav asked for lentils she made beans, if he asked for beans she made lentils. When Rav's son, Chiya, grew up, he tried to correct the situation. Chiya told his mother the opposite of what his father wanted, thereby tricking her into making the correct food. Rav, realizing what Chiya had done, chastised him by quoting the verse: "They have taught their tongues to speak falsehood." Rav meant that a person should avoid lying even where it is permitted, lest he become accustomed to lying and lose his integrity.

Sources:

- The Gates of Repentance (c. 1100 CE), Gate 3 notes 178-186
- Tractate Yevamot 63a, 65b
- Yirmiyahu 9
- Tractate Kalla Rabbati 3:5

NO SOAP

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

Dear Rabbi,

I was wondering if there is any mention in the Torah or Talmud about "cleansers" that may have been used in cleaning "holy" garments such as those that may have been worn by Aharon or the kohanim? These garments had to be "clean and pure" when worn in the Temple.

Someone once mentioned that the word "fuller" comes up in the Torah. I was a bit skeptical of that remark! I can't help but think of the Fuller Brush Co. Are you aware of any mention anywhere of what they used in those days? It's probably a very strange question, but I have a curiosity about it. Rav Todot.

Dear Sandra Block,

Maimonides writes: "It is a commandment that the priestly clothing be new, beautiful, and long like the clothing of dignitaries. If they are soiled or ripped, the service carried out in them is invalid. A priestly garment which is stained should neither be whitened nor cleaned; rather it is to be used for the wicks (of the menorah), and new clothing is worn."

The source for the above is the Talmud which says that one may clean the priestly garment only if the stain will come out with water alone. One may not clean a priestly garment if it requires *netter* or *ohel* to clean it. This is because "There is no poverty in a place of riches."

Neter was a type of white earth called in Old French *nitra*, which in English is called saltpeter. *Ohel* was derived from the root of an herb by that name.

The Talmud list other types of cleansers used in those days. Some seem to have been quite caustic and effective. They used plant roots, sulfur, and even urine and dog manure to clean garments.

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A "fuller" or "foller" was a type of coin, and is mentioned in the Jerusalem Talmud. Despite rumors, neither "Amway" nor "Tupperware" appear anywhere in the Talmud.

Sources:

- Maimonides Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Klei Hamikdash 8:4,5
- Zevachim, 88a, 89a
- Rashi Tractate Shabbos 15, 50b & 89b Hametargem
- Tractate Shabbat 89b, 90a
- Talmud Yerushalmi Peah 1:1

JEWES & JUBILEE

Larry Heiberger from St. Louis, MO <L6462@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

When is the 50th year (Jubilee Year) to commence, and is it celebrated the same way as it was in the Biblical days?

J. Woody from Paterson, NJ <TwoWoodys@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Please tell me (so far as can be known) when the true Jewish Year of Jubilee is, according to our present calendar. Some say 2000, but I think that it might have been picked for it's attractiveness.

Tore Lende from Norway <tolende@online.no> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Do the Jews in Israel — or any Jews — keep the Jubilee year (Leviticus 25) by not sowing or reaping, etc.? If not, why not? Sincerely, a friend of the Jews.

Dear Larry, J. Woody and Tore,

The Torah commands us to allow the land of Israel to lie fallow every seventh year. This is known as the *shemita* year. After seven *shemita* years is the fiftieth "jubilee" year, in Hebrew called *yovel*. The Torah commands that the land lie fallow during *yovel* as well.

Today, we are not required by the Torah to observe *yovel*. The Torah says that *yovel* only applies when the Jewish people dwell in the Land of Israel according to their tribes. Ever since the tribes of Reuven,

Gad and half of Menashe were exiled (c. 600 B.C.E.), *yovel* has no longer been applicable. Therefore, even Torah observant Jews do not observe *yovel*.

When is the next Yovel? Maimonides, based on historical calculations, writes: "According to this calculation, this year — which is the 1107th year from the destruction of the Temple...and the year 4936 from Creation — is the the 21st year in the Yovel cycle." Since today is 5758 from Creation, the next *yovel* would be seven years from now. But the Rambam himself writes that his calculations are not conclusive.

Sources:

- Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Shemita Veyovel, 10:4,8

THE NATURE OF THE EVIL NATURE

Arie Benzaken from France <benzaken@planetepc.fr> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

First of all, thanks a lot for all the previous answers you made, which really helped and guided me! Second of all, thanks for your time and for the forthcoming answers! I'd like to know how come that Moshe in Shmot argued so many times (revealing his doubt concerning what Hashem was telling him) with Hashem, when Hashem asked him to go and tell the Jewish People that they will soon be delivered from slavery! He already was a great tzaddik and should have an entire faith and trust in what Hashem was saying! I'm not judging, I just didn't get all the thing that is written in my book: "Le Midrash Raconte" (The Midrash Says).

Also, I've heard from two different Rabbis two different versions of the notion of the yetzer hara (evil inclination) and yetzer hatov (good inclination). One told me that at the time of creation, G-d in His infinite kindness created Adam without the yetzer hara, and by eating the forbidden fruit Adam absorbed the notion of Good and Bad! The other Rabbi told me that in the Mishna it is said that at the time of Creation of Adam, G-d created him with Good and Bad in him!? Toda Raba.

Dear Arie Benzaken,

Whenever Moshe seems to question Hashem's behavior, he is not questioning the justice or the reality of what Hashem is saying. Rather, Moshe is questioning whether the Jewish People and the other nations of the world are on the spiritual level that they can understand why Hashem wishes to act in the way that He wants to.

Regarding good and evil: Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler teaches that Adam was created with a *yetzer hara*.

However, it was not the same kind of *yetzer hara* that we would recognize today. Adam's *yetzer hara* was purely spiritual in nature and its drive was to convince Adam that he needed to become a partner with Hashem rather than be a "passenger," allowing Hashem to do everything for him. It was only after Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge and internalized the sin that the *yetzer hara* "evolved" into something that was physical in nature.

Yiddle Riddle

Last week we asked:

Two exactly identical people in the exact same place on the exact same day do the exact same act with the exact same intentions. However, the first one is fulfilling a *mitzvah d'oraita*, a Torah commandment, and the second one is transgressing an *issur d'oraita*, a Torah prohibition.

(Note: The people are exactly identical. The answer is *not*: "One's a *kohen* — or member of any special group — and one isn't," or "One's life is in danger and one's isn't." In other words, the riddle could equally be asked about the same person acting twice.)

Hint #1: The first person says a blessing before his action. Hint #2: The order of their actions is important.

Answer:

The first person ritually slaughters a female animal. The second one ritually slaughters the offspring of that animal. The first one has done a *mitzvah*, and the second one has done a sin, as the Torah says, "A cow or sheep, it and its child you shall not slaughter on the same day." (*Leviticus 22:28*)

Riddle submitted by Rabbi Yaakov Bradpiece

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Re: Blood Pressure & Shabbat (Ohrnet Behar):

I was very concerned about the possible dangers to your readers of a certain comment in a recent Public Domain, in which a reader commented: "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." Unfortunately, skipping a dose of medication for high blood pressure can be very dangerous for two reasons. First, medicine for high blood pressure is also used for coronary artery disease, e.g., to prevent heart attacks. It may not be obvious to patients that a medicine is being used for more than one purpose. Second, skipping a dose of medicine for high

blood pressure can lead to "rebound hypertension" where a patient's blood pressure can rise to a dangerously high level. Thus, I would strongly recommend that a patient never skip a dose of medication without consulting with their physician. It could be life-threatening.

Mark Taragin, M.D., M.P.H.

<MarkTaragin@compuserve.com>

Re: "Pi" in the Sky (Ohrnet Bechukosai):

Regarding Solomon's circular pool, described in the verse as having a ratio of 3:1 as a signal for us to employ this ratio in regard to all halachic matters: I heard in the name of the Vilna Gaon that this too is hinted at in the verse. In the verse, the word *kav* (circumference) is written *kuf vav heh*. These letters have a total numerical value of 111. The *kri*, the way the word is pronounced, however, is *kuf vav* which equals 106. Divide 111 by

106, multiply your answer by the ratio of 3 and you get ...
pi!

Gershon < gershon.dubin@juno.com >

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