



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

This Issue Contains:

1. A Jewish Environment
2. Fins on the Scale
3. Tending the Bar Mitzvah
4. The Rabbi's Car
5. Public Domain
6. Yiddle Riddle



8 November 1997

Issue #166

Parashat Lech Lecha

Bill Clark <whcii@msn.com> wrote:

I have a question for the Rabbi!

I have been writing a column on energy conservation for a local Jewish magazine, The Jewish Outlook, in Austin Texas. I have been proud to cite many Biblical and Rabbinic references to encourage people to "repair the world" and to practice energy conservation.

Then I read about an organization in Israel that makes gadgets that let people follow the Sabbath rules, but still live in the modern world. One is a light that stays on all the time, but has a cover that can be taken off when light is needed. Mostly they get around the injunction against using an electrical switch that way — by keeping things on all the time. Wasting energy, in other words.

Which is more important — to conserve energy and help renew the world in a sincere effort — or to adhere to the Sabbath in an almost comical circumvention of the rules? I think it is clearly the former.

Dear Bill Clark,

The gadget you mention is used mainly in hospitals. When the light is covered, the patient can sleep, and it can be uncovered whenever the patient needs care. At home most people use timers, programmed before Shabbat to turn lights off and on. These timers save energy.

But I'm in the dark about something: What is it about this gadget that "comically circumvents the rules?" Is blocking the light a "circumvention of the rules?" If so, we shouldn't shut our bedroom door Friday night if it blocks the hall light. We shouldn't shut our eyes, because then our eyelids block the light! We should stay awake the whole night staring straight into the light!

But to answer the question "which is more important, observing the Torah or conserving energy" — observing the Torah is more important. G-d, as Creator, owns the world and has the right to direct the use of its resources.

Remember the movie "Bambi vs. Godzilla?" (It was a very short film.) Your portrayal of "Environment vs. Shabbat" reminds me of it: Shabbat, the giant monster, "squishes" the tender Environment with one stomp of its foot. The End.

But imagine — what would happen if everyone in the world kept Shabbat? Imagine one day a week when no cars, planes or boats guzzled gas, no factories coughed out polluted stench, no TVs, stereos, or computers leached electricity?

Just imagine the health benefits if everyone *rested* once a week! And how many road deaths (the majority of which occur on weekends) would be avoided. Most of all, imagine the positive environmental impact if we all took one day a week to recognize the beauty of G-d's world. If one day in seven were spent thinking: "This is G-d's world, not mine!"

No, I don't think Shabbat observance is going to eat a hole in the ozone layer. It might even mend one.

Miles Levin from Pittsburgh, PA <mbi@andrew.cmu.edu> wrote:

For fish to be Kosher, the Torah says they need to have fins and scales. I've learned that there aren't any fish or any sea animals which have scales and yet no fins. So why is the qualifier "fins" necessary?

Dear Miles Levin,

Your question is asked by the Talmud some 1500 years ago. (It's fascinating that our Sages knew this fact.)

Simply to identify kosher fish, it would have been enough for the Torah to simply write "scales," since every fish with scales also has fins. However when looking at these specifications as the *reason* for the fish being kosher, both are essential. Let me explain:

An elementary understanding behind all the laws of *kashrut* is the concept that the soul is influenced by whatever the body eats. The Talmud states that the kosher birds are the ones that are non-aggressive, so that we shouldn't absorb bad character traits by eating them. This can also explain the requirement for kosher animals having split hooves which are used for fleeing, as opposed to claws used for attacking. Chewing the cud is the compensation to allow these species to flee when necessary but still be able to maintain an appropriate intake of food in harsh environments. In a short stay upon a fertile feeding ground they are able to accumulate enough fodder to survive, and they can flee at the appearance of an attacker and digest their food later.

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 ohr@virtual.co.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 Lefkowitz, Rabbi Mordechai Becher and other Rabbis at Ohr Somayach Institutions / Tanenbaum College, Jerusalem, Israel.

General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman

Production Design: Lev Seltzer

Ask The Rabbi is available from several sources:

- World Wide Web: Our address is <http://www.ohr.org.il>
- Fax and Mail in Israel and US-MAIL in America. Send us a note requesting a subscription in Israel, or call 800-431-2272 in the US for details.
- E-Mail via InterNet. To subscribe, send the message "sub ask (your full name)" to listproc@virtual.co.il

22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel

38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA

613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada

972-2-581-0315

1-212-213-3100

1-905-886-5730

fax: 972-2-581-2890

fax: 1-212-213-8717

fax: 1-905-886-6065

ohr@virtual.co.il

RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@aol.com

Somayach@MSN.com

The same applies to fish: the fins aid retreat while the scales act as a protective covering. Together, they are specifications which classify them as the hunted and not as the hunters.

Sources:

- Chullin 59a, 66b
- Niddah 51b
- Gaon of Vilna on "Sabei Devei Atuna"
- Ramban Leviticus 11:13

Judith Subar < ABubbe@aol.com > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Something bothered me recently when I attended an Orthodox Bar Mitzvah week-end. The Orthodox caterers were serving food during Shabbat. They seemed to be working very hard on the Shabbat. What is the halacha for preparing, serving, and cleaning up during Shabbat? Thank you!

Dear Judith Subar,

On Shabbat, 39 categories of creative activities are forbidden by the Torah. These include such things as cooking, writing and building a fire. Other prohibitions were added by our Sages to safeguard the sanctity and spirit of Shabbat.

As long as the caterer avoids any of these forbidden activities, he is allowed to 'work' on Shabbat. For example, all food must be cooked in advance and kept warm on a stove that was lit before Shabbat. He doesn't violate the spirit of Shabbat either, because his efforts are Shabbat related.

Another issue is the Rabbinic prohibition against earning wages on Shabbat. The Sages forbade earning wages for a Shabbat activity, even if the activity itself is permitted. They limited this prohibition, however, only to payment designated *specifically* for work done on Shabbat. But if the pay is part of a "package deal" which includes work done during the week, such as setting up before Shabbat, then even the Shabbat wages are permitted.

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch 306:4
- Mishna Berurah 306:16
- Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata 28:59

(Name withheld) wrote,

Dear Rabbi,

What do you think of a Rabbi, with a large number of survivors in his congregation, that buys a Mercedes Benz automobile?

Alex < kornale@charlie.iit.edu > Glenview, Illinois wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

What is the halachic standing on buying German cars. I have tested BMW and Mercedes, both are \$40,000 cars and I want to buy one. But then I was told that there is a halachic issue with buying those cars, because they are German.

Dear Alex and (Name Withheld),

Many people refrain from buying German products as a way of showing their moral outrage at the behavior of the German people during the Holocaust. Strictly speaking, however, there's no halachic basis for not buying German products.

But a person should always consider how his actions will affect others. For example, a friend of mine would never buy a German car because his mother, a Holocaust survivor, would be deeply hurt and offended.

As for the Rabbi who bought the Mercedes, we can't judge a person without knowing all the circumstances, motives and pressures that the person experiences. Judaism tells us that "You shall not hate your fellow man in your heart," rather you should tell the other person what's bothering you about his behavior. I suggest that you speak directly to the rabbi in a respectful manner and clarify the issue with him.

New Feature !

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

I would just like to add that the custom to pick up the Bride and Groom on chairs began in the late 1930's here in NY. My father and his friends made a wedding for one of the poorer boys in the yeshiva. It turned out to be one of the most beautiful and lively weddings that they ever attended. In the heat of the dancing, some of the boys lifted the groom and started dancing with him. Later the ladies did the same with the bride. The rest as they say is history.

David Rockove < drockove@juno.com >

I once heard another reason for the braids of the Challahs. Each challah has three braids, times four (twice Lechem Mishna) gives us 12. There were 12 Lechem Haponim on the Shulchan in the Mikdash.

*Rabbi Asher Schechter from Fair Lawn, NJ
< comp-acct.fiduciary.software@worldnet.att.net >*

We usually put a small 3 braid on top of a larger 3 braid and bake them together, or we make a six-braided challa. When we use two loaves made in this way we actually have 12, representing the lechem hapanim.

Nancy Wells from Dallas, Texas < nwells@objs.com >

Yiddle Riddle

Last week we asked: Of which two people in the Torah can it be said that their names spelled backwards are words used by the Torah to describe them?

Answer: Noach and Er, son of Judah. Concerning Noach the verse says "Noach found favor (*chein*) in Hashem's eyes." In Hebrew, *Chein* is *Noach* spelled backwards. Concerning Er the verse says "And Er, Judah's firstborn, was evil (*rah*) in Hashem's eyes. In Hebrew, *Rah* is *Er* spelled backwards.

- Bereishit 6:8, 38:7