



# Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

## This Issue Contains:

1. Hard Work on Shabbat
2. Sister Marry
3. Charming Amulets
4. Retiring Women
5. Death Penalty - a Capital Idea?
6. Yiddle Riddle
7. Public Domain



## HARD WORK ON SHABBAT

Email@Withheld wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Our family has a kid-related problem every Shabbat. It starts out great with family activities together and with my husband and I taking turns with the kids, aged 9 and 3. But I suffer from a painful chronic illness that requires rest. By about 2 o'clock on Saturday afternoon I am exhausted and need about 3 to 4 hours sleep. My husband finds it difficult to keep the kids occupied for this amount of time with acceptable Shabbat activities such as books, blocks, and playing in the yard or going for walks. At most, this amuses the kids for an hour or two. There are no other Shabbat observant families nearby and we cannot afford a baby-sitter. Do you have any ideas to help us with shalom bayit (household tranquillity) under these circumstances? My husband suggested that we turn on a small TV in an out-of-the-way spot before Shabbat and that we let the kids watch without changing the channel during the time that is difficult for him. But somehow this doesn't strike me as kosher.

Dear Email@Withheld,

I sympathize with you in what sounds like a difficult situation. And I agree that letting your children watch TV on Shabbat is "not kosher," as you wrote. The analogy may sound harsh but if your children were a little hungry you wouldn't feed them non-kosher food. Shabbat is soul "food" and shouldn't be tainted, even if your kids are a little bored.

But what to do? As a parent, my experience is that children don't need to be entertained every moment of the day. Perhaps your husband is spending too much energy in trying to keep your children entertained. I think they would entertain themselves if he also had a rest. I realize that your children's ages are too disparate to allow them to really play

together, but, nevertheless, children have a tremendous talent to adapt themselves to different situations.

Try to think creative solutions. Offer your nine-year old a special prize or privilege for "baby-sitting" the three-year old for an hour or so. Keep favorite toys and books separate and make them available on Shabbat afternoon when you want to nap.

May Hashem grant you a complete recovery, and may your children be a source of constant joy to you and to all the Jewish People.

## SISTER MARRY

Email@Withheld wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Is it halachically permissible for a man to marry the daughter of his mother's husband from a previous marriage?

Dear Email@Withheld,

Marriage between a step-brother and a step-sister is permitted, and such is accepted practice. The Chafetz Chaim, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, married his mother's husband's daughter. I personally know a couple like this who have been happily wed for the past 30 years.

According to *Tzava'at Rabbi Yehudah Hechasisd* step-siblings should not marry. However, this ruling seems not to have been accepted even by those who generally adhere to the other rulings of *Tzava'at Rabbi Yehudah Hechasisd*.

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch Even Haezer 15:11
- Sefer Shmirat Haguf v'Hanefesh 178

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 Lauffer, 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: **Eli Ballon**

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

☎ 972-2-581-0315

☎ 972-2-581-2890

✉ info@ohr.org.il

☎ 38 East 29th Street 8<sup>th</sup> floor, New York, NY 10016, USA

☎ 1-212-213-3100

☎ 1-212-213-8717

✉ RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Aol.com

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

☎ 1-905-886-5730

☎ 1-905-886-6065

✉ Somayach@MSN.com

## CHARMING AMULETS

Helen Block <hblock@fm.ucsf.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

*I am intrigued by the age-old use of kemiot (amulets), particularly ones with the human hand. Apparently the Persian Jews especially used to employ quite a variety of kemiot for protection in marriage, childbirth etc. What is the halachic and rabbinical positions on these?*

Dear Helen Block,

Amulets or *kemiot* are mentioned in the Talmud in many places and are not forbidden as superstitious. The amulets mentioned in the Talmud were parchments with prayers in them written by pious scholars, and they are like continuous prayers. An amulet which is just a symbol or hand, while not forbidden, does not have the same impact. Nevertheless they can serve to remind a person of Divine Protection and Providence (the 'Hand of G-d') and to focus on G-d. As Maimonides states in the Guide for the Perplexed, "The degree of Divine Providence is directly proportional to the degree of attachment of the person to the Divine."

It's said that the towering sage Rabbi Akiva Eiger once wrote a very effective amulet. Curious about what mystical letter permutations or Kabbalistic incantations lay within, someone opened the scroll. What did he find? A single paragraph of *Tosefos's* logical, straightforward commentary to the Talmud! The amulet was "powered" simply by the merit of Rabbi Eiger's sincere Torah study.

## RETIRING WOMEN

R. Berzack <robert.berzack@pixie.co.za> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

*I'd like to know the details of the commandment of the bedtime shema regarding women's obligation. I've heard that you are not allowed to talk after you have said it, is this true? And what about reading a book afterwards?*

Dear R. Berzack,

Women should recite *shema* and the *hamapil* blessing immediately before retiring at night. Married women customarily say the blessing with their hair covered.

One shouldn't interrupt between the *hamapil* blessing and sleeping. Therefore, one should not eat, drink, or talk after saying *hamapil*. Some even have the custom to omit *hampil* altogether, or they say it but omit G-d's Name and the phrase "King of the universe," out of concern that they will converse afterwards.

If one says the bedtime *shema* and then has difficulty sleeping, he should keep repeating the first paragraph of the *shema* or other supplicatory verses until sleep overtakes him. Thinking Torah thoughts is also permitted, so reading a *sefer*, a book of Torah thoughts, is okay.

Rav Yehuda Segal, the late Rosh Yeshiva in Manchester, used to actually fall asleep while reciting the bedtime *shema*, and he would wake from time to time and carry on exactly from the place he left off!

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch 239:1
- Mishna Berura, *ibid.* 4,7
- Halichos Bas Yisrael 2:40, Rabbi Y.Y. Fuchs

## DEATH PENALTY - A CAPITAL IDEA?

Saul "The Maven" Caplan <Maven@donet.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

*In the Reform High Holiday services we repeat several times that it is not the death of sinners that G-d wants, but that they should turn away from their unholy ways (this may be part of the Orthodox and/or Conservative services, too). Is there any scriptural basis for that statement, or is it just part of the prayer writers' rhetoric? If there is scriptural basis, it seems to me that it would be a good rebuttal to those who claim that capital punishment is Biblically mandated.*

Dear Saul "The Maven" Caplan,

The phrase you mentioned is from a verse in Yechezkel (*Ezekiel 33:11*). In context, this passage doesn't contradict the Biblical death penalty but rather supports it.

Here's the context: In the previous verses (7-10) G-d tells the Prophet Yechezkel to warn the wicked people to repent or die; if Yechezkel fails to warn them then he will be blamed for their death, but if he does warn them, then their death will be their fault. Why? Because "I don't desire the death of the wicked person; but rather that he return from his ways and live." That is, the death penalty is not that G-d wants *revenge*, but rather it is a warning to repent before it's too late. (This shows the danger of taking an isolated verse without studying the context.)

The Biblical death penalty is mentioned explicitly several times throughout the Torah, however it was very rarely performed (less than once every 70 years).

Sources:

- Tractate Makkot 7a

# Yiddle Riddle

**Last week we asked:** Twin brothers are born from the same mother on the very same morning. Both are perfectly healthy. Yet, the proper day for one's *brit mila* is 8 days later, while the proper day for the other one's *brit mila* is not until the 9th day. Why?

**Answer:** The babies are born Shabbat morning. The first one is a normal birth, and the second one is born by cesarean section.

*Brit mila* on the eight day from birth supersedes Shabbat. However, this is only true of a natural birth. *Brit mila* after a cesarean section does not supersede Shabbat. Hence, the first baby has his *brit* eight days later, on Shabbat, while the second one must wait till the ninth day from birth, Sunday.

Source:

- Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 266:10

## THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

**Re: Internet New Under the Sun? (Ohrnet Lech Lecha):**

In a recent Ask the Rabbi, a reader, Gaon <gaon@earthlink.net> wrote:

"What on earth was the wisest of the wise thinking when he said, 'There's nothing new under the sun?' I wonder if King Solomon would have said the same thing if he had had Internet access."

The Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin) was once asked this question: How could Koheles write that there's nothing new under the sun, when we have such new creations as the phonograph, electricity, and the telescope?

The Netziv answered that their potential existed ever since the time of Creation, but were only revealed in modern times. So, you see, even Gaon's question isn't new! The Netziv also goes on to give Torah Sources for the use of a telescope (Tractate Eruvin 43b), a lightning rod (Tosefta Shabbos 7:10), and a phonograph (Mechilta Parshas Yisro 18:19). Rabbi David Koppelman writes this story about the Netziv in his excellent book, Glimpses of Greatness.

*An Ohrnet Reader <lightsd@mail.internet-zahav.net>*

**Re: Sherlock:**

Please publish a Sherlock book.

*Dede Toledano-Efromson <dedeef@internet-zahav.net>*

**Re: Vegetarians (Ohrnet Noach):**

You wrote that before Noach everyone was vegetarian, yet in Gemara Sanhedrin 59b it says that Adam ate meat. Also, the Tosefos on 56b clearly points out that people were allowed to eat an animal that dies of its own accord. Were people really vegetarians before Noach?

*Ken Siegel, Lannet, Israel <ksiegel@lannet.com>*

**Ohrnet responds:**

The Talmud implies that Adam ate heavenly meat roasted for him by the angels in the Garden of Eden, whereas our article was post-Eden. Regarding animals that died on their own, while they may not have been strictly forbidden, being that the ancients understood the spiritual cleanliness and uncleanness imparted by food, we assume that at least the righteous people (everybody who's anybody) avoided such meat.

Take part in

# THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

Send your comments to: [info@ohr.org.il](mailto:info@ohr.org.il)

You can submit your questions to

## Ask The Rabbi

with your web browser from the page:

# [www.AskTheRabbi.org](http://www.AskTheRabbi.org)

Or if you want to use e-mail, address it to: [info@ohr.org.il](mailto:info@ohr.org.il)