



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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I AM WHAT I AM

Joseph Slotkowski <22slotkowski@cua.edu> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Why does G-d call Himself, "I am who I am?" I know that's a horribly complex question, but I am a horribly complex person.

Dear Joseph Slotkowski,

Rashi explains this name to mean "I am and I will be — I am their rescue now and will be in the future." Others explain this name to mean that G-d's true existence can't be comprehended by human logic. G-d is above time, as He created time. Therefore, He always was, He is now, and He always will be in the future, and all this He is in the present. The word "ehyeh" (I will be), spelled *alef*, *heh*, *yud* and *heh*, hints at this idea, as all the numbers mount towards 10: The numerical value of *alef* is one, symbolizing the past, *heh* is five, symbolizing the middle or present, *yud* is 10, symbolizing the end or the future, and the last *heh* five comes to say that all this is in the present.

Sources:

- Exodus 3:14
- Rashi Ibid.

MEMORY CANDLE

Kim Hornbeck from Belpre, Ohio
<hornbecks@speednet1.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

This is the first time I'm lighting a yahrtzeit (anniversary of passing) candle for my late father, and I don't know what prayer to say. Thank you for your help.

Dear Kim Hornbeck,

There is no specific prayer to recite on lighting the *yahrzeit* candle. I think that it is fitting to stop for a few moments to remember the deceased and to spend some time in introspection. The *yahrzeit* candle is lit at sundown on the eve of the anniversary of the passing and the candle should remain alight for twenty-four hours. It is a beautiful custom to light a candle on the *yahrzeit*, as the flame of a candle is compared to a soul. Just as a flame is never still, so too does the soul continuously strive to "reach up" to G-d.

COVER-UP

Gabor Borbely from Las Vegas, Nevada <borbely@lj.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Can you please tell me shortly about the *minhag* (custom) of covering our heads. I mean rulings, sources, etc?

Tamar Tessler from Johannesburg SA
<tamtov@hotmail.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Where in any *sefer* (book) are there *halachot* (laws) about *kippot/yarmulkes*? How do we know which size is considered kosher? Material? Are there any *halachot* regarding the positioning of the *yarmulke* on the head? I know this could be a touchy question (political correctness!) Thank you for answering.

Dear Gabor Borbely and Tamar Tessler,

The Talmud says "cover [the child's] head so that he will have the fear of heaven." The Talmud also associates a covered head with humility.

In "Guide for the Perplexed," Maimonides states that the early Sages were repelled by a bare head. The custom to wear a head covering is legislated in *Shulchan Aruch*.

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The color and material depend on custom. Some prefer multi-colored versions, some prefer black. The Chatam Sofer in his responsa says *kippot* may be crocheted or woven even if hair sticks through. Regarding size, there are differing views. Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, *shlita*, requires that the *kippa* be big enough to be seen from all sides, but other authorities, including Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, *zatzal*, disagree and say that there is no size specification. I am not familiar with any source regarding where exactly to position the *kippa*.

Which reminds me of a story: Once on a very windy day, a rabbi was walking along, when a strong gust of wind blew his hat off his head. The rabbi ran after his hat, but the wind was too strong and it kept blowing his hat further and further away. A non-Jewish young man, seeing what had happened ran after the hat, caught it and gave it back to the rabbi. The rabbi was so grateful that he gave the young man twenty dollars and blessed him.

The young man was so excited that he decided to go the race track and with the rabbi's blessing fresh in his mind decided to check the program and place the entire twenty dollars on a horse. After the races he went home and recounted his very exciting day to his father. "I arrived at the fifth race and looked at the program. I saw this horse named 'Top Hat' was running. The odds on this horse were 100 to 1 but since I received the rabbi's blessing I bet the entire twenty dollars on 'Top Hat' and guess what? He won! In the next race, there was a horse named 'Stetson' at 30 to 1 so I bet the entire amount of my winnings on him, and guess what ... I won again!"

"So did you bring the money home?" asked his father.

"No," said the son, "I lost it all on the next race. There was a horse named 'Chateau' that was a heavy favorite so I bet everything on him, and since that meant 'hat' in French I figured he was a sure thing."

"You fool!" said the father. "Hat in French is 'chapeau' not 'chateau!' But who won the race?"

"A real long shot," said the son. "A Japanese horse named *Yamaka*..."

Sources:

- Tractate Shabbat 196b
- Tractate Kiddushin 31a
- Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 2:6

DAVID'S MOTHER

Marilyn Rubin from Scottsdale, AZ & Jerusalem < l_rubin@netvision.net.il > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I would like to know the name of King David's mother. Where is this written in the Torah? I believe that his father's name was Jesse (Yishai).

Dear Marilyn Rubin,

David's mother's was Nitzevet daughter of Adael. This is not written in the Torah, but rather is recorded in the Talmud, Tractate Bava Batra 91a. The Talmud there also gives the name of Avraham's mother, and of Haman's mother!

MORE THAN SKIN DEEP

Email@Withheld from South Africa wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

There is a saying that we must not "judge a book by its cover," meaning that we must look beyond the physical appearance. This is shown to us by the mitzvah of "dan lechaf zechus" (judging favorably) and in Ohr Somayach's regular feature "The Other Side of the Story." However, I believe that this is not entirely true because otherwise what is the purpose of the physical world? I believe we must consider our outside performance. If we must not judge a book by its cover then G-d could have made us all angels. Many times in the Torah the beauty is mentioned. For example a person could say "I am not going to keep the laws of tznius (modesty in dress and deportment) because people must look beyond the outside." I do not mean to say that our inside is not important but what is the importance of the physical appearance and where do we draw the line?

Dear Email@Withheld,

Proverbs (31:30) states "False is grace and vain is beauty, a G-d fearing woman, she should be praised." The Gaon of Vilna explains this verse as saying that beauty is vain only when it is not accompanied by fear of G-d. But if beauty is accompanied by fear of G-d, then it is indeed something to be valued and praised.

Yiddle Riddle

Which verse in the Torah has all the letters of the *Aleph-Beis*? Answer next week...

Submitted by Yair Guttman < YDgutt@aol.com >

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Re: Red Thread (Ohrnet Bechukosai):

Regarding the Ask the Rabbi in which a subscriber asked about the source of wearing red thread to ward off the evil eye: Your answer was somewhat complicated and involved a red worm, and that by looking at the string one is reminded that he is as lowly as a red worm. I think the following is a much simpler and more satisfactory answer: There is a verse in the last chapter of the Book of Proverbs, which is King Solomon's famous tribute to womanhood: "Lo tirah l'vaitah mishaleg" — Why is the woman of valor not afraid that the snowstorm will harm her family? "Ki chol baitah lavush shanim" — Because her entire household is clad in red!

Arthur Elfenbein, Woodmere, NY

Re: Reunion:

I merely wish to express my utmost gratitude to you for the part you played in a long awaited reunion on my part. In a recent "Ask the Rabbi" I noticed a name and email that seemed like it might be that of a friend from Israel whom I had not had contact with in two years. I've been trying to find this person, but even enlisting the help of my brother and friends in Yerushalayim proved fruitless. When I saw the email in your issue, I was skeptical, as my friend had not really been a computer person. I took the leap and sent a short note, and sure enough he and his wife had gotten a computer recently and had been subscribing to Ohr Somayach's internet lists. This was an amazing and pleasant surprise to both of us and with the help of Hashem we will now be able to renew our friendship.

Dovid Gelerinter, Chicago, IL <dgelerin@mcs.kent.edu>

Re: Chanuka Wishes (Ohrnet Miketz):

I found the Chanuka edition most enlightening! I was quite surprised to see the greeting "Chag Urim Somayach — Happy Festival of Lights" as Chanuka is a moed and not a chag, being that melacha (work) is permitted (see Sefer Chanuka: Halachot 1:5, Rabbi Tzvi Cohen).

Regarding "Simcha's Torah Stories" — what a wonderful message of mesirus nefesh (self sacrifice) for adults as well!

Avraham Zuroff, Kiryat Sefer, Israel

Re: Very Phunny! (Ohrnet Miketz):

Loved Rabbi Orlofsky's Chanuka article. I am on the floor as I type! Don't eat too many latkes.

Bob Davidson, San Diego <bobwar@san.rr.com>

Rabbi Orlofsky's Chanukah message left me with a smile on my lips and in my heart! Keep up the great work you are doing!

Judith Amrani, Houston, Texas <AMRIJ@gardere.com>

I forwarded your special Chanuka article by Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky to a friend. The following is her response:

Hi Reuven,

I was just thinking of you, and lo and behold, a missive from you this morning. All I can say is: Kol Hakavod!! It comes at a time when I am seeing so many of my friends' children and my children's friends intermarrying; three in the coming months. I know it might seem foolish, but each time I feel as if it is a personal loss and it really hurts. They seem to know all of the "thou shalt nots" of Judaism, but none of the beauty and truth. Anyway, this is not a new story and you are as aware of it as we are. I just wanted to let you know that I am going to forward that Ohr Somayach article to all those on my e-mail list. Maybe the message will get through to at least one person. B. and I send you and your family our warmest wishes for the holiday. May the lights of the Chanuka candles bring joy to all, happiness and pride in who and what we are. Best Always, M.E.

Reuven <millerr@mail.biu.ac.il>

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