



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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Parshat Lech Lecha

WHERE HAVE ALL THE YEARS GONE?

Baruch Roi Garcia from San Antonio, Texas
<roigar@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Now that it is the new year a friend of mine from Israel says that we are not really at 5759, but that we lost some 240 years during captivity, according to his Rabbi in Netanya. True or not so true?

Dear Baruch Roi Garcia:

There is a discrepancy of about 165 years between Greek historians and Jewish historians.

The Greeks maintain that Jewish historians omitted a number of Persian kings from the historical accounting, and that the combined reigns of these kings add up to about 165 years. We, on the other hand, maintain that the people the Greeks mistakenly count as kings were actually only dukes or princes who ruled concurrently. The fact they were known as kings and not as "king of kings" is evidence of this.

We, the Jews, lived in Babylon and Persia for over 1000 years; whereas the Greeks sent scribes to gather their historical information. I believe, therefore, that our history is accurate and that the Greek account is mistaken. We had first-hand knowledge of Persia and are therefore more reliable.

Speaking of what year it is, we thank David Olesker <olesker@IsraelMail.com> for forwarding the following:

Last year, in my computer class, a student asked me before Rosh Hashanah what year we were entering. I said 5758. He paused for a moment and said, "Well, I guess you guys solved the Year 2000 problem!"

WHAT'S NEW!

Gaon <Gaon@earthlink.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

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 Internet access.

Dear Gaon,

In the *Book of Koheles* King Solomon wrote: "There is absolutely nothing new under the sun." He meant that in the physical world nothing is created new. There is no creation *ex nihilo*, only the transfer of energy and reassembling of different parts into different structures. All of "modern technology" has existed since ancient times, in potential. When G-d created the physical universe, telephones, fax machines and "Internet access" came into existence, in their component parts. It was only up to us to figure out how to put them together.

Only in the spiritual world — "above the sun" — is there renewal. Through the power of free will a person can create a spiritual reality that was not preordained and is not just a continuation of a process already started. Repentance, choosing against one's conditioning, acts of altruism — these are all acts of creation. This is what King Solomon meant when he said "nothing new under the sun."

REENACTMENT OF SINAI

Hillary Zana <ai181@lafn.org> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I have read and heard that the Torah Service is actually a reenactment of the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai, with the bima representing Har Sinai etc. I can't find any sources for this. I would like to use this idea when I teach six graders the Torah Service. Any help would be appreciated.

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Dear Hillary Zana,

The idea you mentioned is found in *Ta'amei Haminhagim*. There it says that the public Torah reading is a symbolic reenactment of the giving of the Torah at Sinai: The *gabbai*, the one who decides whom to call to the Torah, symbolizes Hashem, who chose the Jewish people to receive the Torah. The person called to the Torah represents the Jewish People. And the one who reads the Torah represents Moshe, the "broker" between the Jewish people and Hashem!

Sources:

- Ta'amei Haminhagim, Shabbat 328, quoting Levush 141:4
- Thanks to Rabbi Sholem Fishbane

MISPLACED MERIT

Marion Zeiger < mardi@suntan.niehs.nih.gov >

Dear Rabbi,

I'm preparing a lesson for my synagogue on the concept of davening (praying) and studying Torah for a sick person's well-being (*refuah sheleima*). I know the custom, and that davening and learning gains one merit. I would like to know more about the following:

- History/origins of the custom.
- Mechanics — Exactly how does the davening and learning gain one merit in Heaven?
- How does the merit gained transfer to the sick person in whose name one davens and learns?

Dear Marion Zeiger,

The earliest source where praying for the sick is mentioned is when Abraham prays for Avimelech (*Genesis 20:17*). Later in the Torah, Moses prays for the recovery of Miriam, his sister (*Numbers 12:13*). There are numerous places in the Prophets as well.

The Talmud discusses the obligation to visit the sick and to pray for them. In fact the implication is that if one visits but does not pray for them, one has not fulfilled the mitzvah. The obligation to pray for the sick is found in The Code of Jewish Law, which states that when praying, one should ask that this sick person be healed along with the other sick people of Israel. The central prayer in Judaism, the *shemoneh esreh*, includes a blessing in which we pray for the sick.

How does it work? Some say that since the patient has inspired me (consciously or not) to perform a mitzvah, a commandment, and has caused the one who prays or studies Torah to draw closer to G-d, then the patient has direct merit as a result of the prayer. Another way of understanding this is the one who prays is binding himself to the patient, showing concern and sharing the patient's pain. The Divine calculation now must take into account not just the patient and his pain, but also all those who are praying for him.

Sources:

- Tractate Nedarim 40a
- Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 355

DISC O' DAVENING

Skidog@pol.net wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Do you know where I can buy audio tapes or CD's that teach one how to daven?

Dear Skidog,

You can order them via our web site. Check out Ohr Somayach's Audio Library - Category: Tefillah at:

<http://www.ohr.org.il/tape/desc07.htm>

For more information, please e-mail to Somayach@msn.com or fax to 905-886-6065.

Yiddle Riddle

During a certain period of the year, there is something we do three times a day, almost every day. We do it twice with one part of the body and once with another part of the body (according to Askenazic custom). What is it?

Riddle submitted by Rabbi Yonasan Taub

Answer next week...

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Re: Ben Ish Chai Riddle (Ohrnet Nitzavim):

You asked a riddle regarding "a town on the Euphrates in the time of the Beit Hamikdash which always celebrated the first day of Pesach for one day, while the first day of Succos, however, was sometimes observed one day and sometimes two." This is unfortunately untrue. There was a gezerah Pesach atu Succos (decree on Pesach because of Succos) that existed, so that there was always total uniformity in the observance of Yom Tov. If the messengers did not reach a place for Succos, that place had to keep two days of Pesach even if the messengers made it there in Nissan in time for Pesach. This is also why Shavuot was observed for two days, even though there was never any doubt as to its date of observance, since it is 50 days after Pesach.

*Rabbi Yitzchok D. Frankel Cedarhurst, NY
<Ydfrankel@aol.com>*

Ohrnet responds:

Excellent point, which we were aware of when we posted the riddle. Two possible avenues of explanations come to mind:

- The Ben Ish Chai (who is the source for our riddle) asked the riddle merely *lechaded et hatalmidim* — to sharpen his students' minds. (See *Berachot 33b*)
- The scenario was true *before* the decree was promulgated.

Re: Building a Succah on a Truck (Ohrnet Vayelech):

I would add the following, regarding using a parked truck on Yom Tov — one would of course have to make sure that no internal lights come on when one opens the door.

David <das1002@cam.ac.uk>

Re: Tashlich (Ohrnet Rosh Hashana):

Rabbi Orlofsky's idea behind the custom of throwing away sins and emptying out one's pockets at tashlich was a very well-expressed idea. However, the idea of throwing away sins is not brought down as the source of the custom. The main reason given for tashlich is Avraham's defeat of the Satan, who tried to prevent Avraham from going to the akeidah (binding of Isaac) by making himself into a body of water. A further idea is symbolizing the "anointing" of G-d as king, and the anointing ceremony usually took place at a body of water. Only tangentially does the Mishna Berura bring down the idea of shaking out one's pockets at tashlich (and none of the other major sources bring this down at all).

Benjie Gerstman <gerstbpg@netvision.net.il>

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