



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

This Issue Contains:

1. Bacteria in the Cafeteria
2. A Rose By Any Other Name
3. Answer to Yiddle Riddle



Dedicated by Herschel and Rachel Ainspan of White Plains, NY in honor of the birth of their b'chor Shmuel Yeruchom

Susan < mendysusan@juno.com > wrote:

Why is yogurt with live acidophilus and bifidus cultures kosher to eat if we are not allowed to eat bugs?

David Preiss < preiss@ecf.utoronto.ca > wrote:

Why does the Torah speak of forms of life that are visible only to the human eye?

Dear Susan & David,

Good question. Now let me ask you one: Why are we allowed to breathe? Zillions of microorganisms are floating around in the air, and we swallow some with every breath.

The answer is: The Torah prohibits only bugs which can be seen by the naked eye. Organisms seen only with the aid of a microscope are kosher.

The logic is this: The Torah was given to human beings, not angels. Its laws are geared to normal human experience. Bugs we see in 'real life' are forbidden. 'Invisible' ones — which seem like they exist only in a laboratory — are not forbidden.

When improved microscopes brought improved awareness of microscopic organisms, some people suggested that perhaps we should filter our water to avoid consuming the organisms. A renowned rabbi responded: "If you give a nickel to charity while holding it under a magnifying glass, do you get credit as though you gave a dime?"

Speaking of germs: Three amoebae are sitting on a park bench. Suddenly, one of them jumps up and runs off. "Hey! Where did Harry go?" one asks the other. "Guess he had to split." (Thanks to E.C.S.)

Sources:

- Aruch Hashulchan, Yoreh De'ah 84:6

Josh Kaplan < jokaplan@vassar.edu > wrote:

Are all men with the last name KAPLAN kohens?

Dear Josh Kaplan:

Often, people named Kaplan are *kohanim*. This name is said to mean "*Kohen Ploni*" — "So-and-so the *Kohen*." Katz, another name common for *kohanim*, means "*Kohen Tzedek*" — "Righteous *Kohen*."

But having a name like Kaplan or Katz isn't proof of being a *kohen*. Two of my best friends are named Kaplan, and neither one is a *kohen*. In fact, I know someone named Cohen who is not a *kohen*!

A *kohen* is a male descendant of Aharon, Moses's brother. If you have a family tradition that you are a *kohen*, and that family members were called to the Torah as *kohanim*, then you need check no further.

If there is no family tradition, other evidence is required. For instance, an ancestor's gravestone inscription. Someone who can't determine his father's personal status is automatically considered a *Yisrael*.

Try looking up long lost relatives, and ask them. If you are like many people, you may very well have relatives here in Israel, Russia or elsewhere whom you don't even know.

Yiddle Riddle:

Last week we asked: If a tree falls in a forest, and there's nobody around to hear it, does it make a noise?

Answer: Yes, it makes a noise. The verse says, "There is no speaker, and no words, without their voice being heard." (Psalms 19:4) Even if no creature hears the noise, Hashem hears it.

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Ask The Rabbi is written by Rabbi Moshe Lazerus, Rabbi Reuven Subar, Rabbi Avrohom Lefkowitz and other Rabbis at Ohr Somayach Institutions / Tanenbaum College, Jerusalem, Israel.

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