



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

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Heiko Evermann, Hamburg, Germany
< 113132.1763@compuserve.com > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I have a question concerning a greeting found in the Star Trek series, which, as someone told me, has a Jewish origin, and I would like to know more about it. Mr. Spock from the planet Vulcan greets people with "live long and prosper" while holding his hand towards them with a gap between his thumb and first finger, and a gap between his middle and third finger, forming something like the letter "W". I was told that Leonard Nemoy, the actor who plays Mr. Spock, has Jewish parents. I have also seen this hand symbol on plaques and souvenirs in Israel when I visited that country last year. It showed two hands forming this sign and around it was a Hebrew blessing, as I was told. I would like to know more about this and thought that you might be able to help me. Thank you in advance for your efforts.

Rachel < orbart@tezcat.com > wrote,

Dear Rabbi,

I have always heard that there is special relevance as to Jewish tribe concerning the wide separation of the third and fourth finger, and that doing this with both hands has a special mystical meaning. What does it mean if you can do this? What does it mean to be from a certain tribe with the ability to do this, and is this folklore? Tell me as many tidbits as you know, I am very interested.

Dear Heiko Evermann, Rachel and all you Trekkies out there,

Yes, Leonard Nemoy is Jewish, and his "Vulcanic" hand-gestures originate from the Torah.

The Torah commands the *kohanim*, the descendants of Aharon, to bless the Jewish people. They are to stand in front of the congregation, raise their hands to shoulder level and pronounce the "priestly blessings" found in the Book of Numbers (6:22): "May G-d bless you and keep you...."

This commandment has been performed by *kohanim* in synagogues until this very day. The prevalent custom today is that the hands are held together palms-down, and the fingers are split such that there are 5 spaces: One space between the thumbs, a space between the thumb and first finger of each hand, and a space between the second and third finger of each hand. The five spaces are an allusion to the verse in Song of Songs 2:8 which states that Hashem "peeks through the cracks in the wall." In other words, Hashem protects and watches the Jewish people even when He is hidden.

As mentioned, a *kohen* is someone descended from Aharon (Moses's brother) and therefore from the tribe of *Levi*. Even if a Kohen can't split his fingers in the proper manner, he can still give the priestly blessing. The ability to split your fingers in the proper manner is absolutely no indication that you are from the priestly tribe.

By the way, "Captain Kirk" (William Shatner) is also Jewish. (My wife went to the same camp as his daughter.) The phrase "Set your phasers to stun," however, is found nowhere in the Talmud.

Sources:

- Va'ani Avarachaim by Rabbi Yossee Pack, Ch. 32
- Mishnah Berurah 128:45

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Jacqueline Spiegel < jackie@petlab.mssm.edu > wrote:

I have read (and I am afraid I cannot give sources, sorry) that:

- *The fish were saved from being destroyed by the flood*
- *The flood water was scalding hot*

I was just wondering how this contradictory information is resolved. Thanks so much.

Dear Jacqueline Spiegel,

Good question! In fact, the Ramban wrote about this around 800 years ago. He gives two possible answers:

- The scalding water was in streams (like the Gulf Stream) above the continents only.
- Even if the boiling water was in the oceans, it would rise to the top (because heat rises) and the fish could escape to the depths for the 40 days.

This second answer does not explain how sea mammals — such as whales and dolphins who come to the surface to breathe — were saved.

Sources:

- Ramban, Bereishit 7:23

Norman N. Seif < NUSSEIF@prodigy.com > wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Can a restaurant that is vegetarian and uses all kosher ingredients, and were to undergo an halachic kashering process, and were to permit regular rabbinic supervision, ever achieve kosher status if it were to stay open on Shabbat? We are speaking of a non-Jewish (Chinese) establishment that caters to strict vegetarians (they do not even carry fish or cheeses).

Dear Norman,

Although special halachic considerations would make it difficult, a restaurant like the one you describe could theoretically become certified as kosher. In practice, it depends on the policy of the kosher supervisory council. I asked the Orthodox Union (OU) — one of the major kosher supervisors in the United States — if they would ever supervise such a restaurant. They said that their policy is not to give kashrut certification to any establishment that is open on Shabbat.

Yiddle Riddle

Baruch Serman < baruch@netmedia.net.il > wrote us with the following riddle:

When one of the Chassidic Rebbes was eight years old, he was asked a riddle: "What verse in the Torah has the first three words the same as the last three words?" He replied, "The verse where Moses did not say *emet* (the truth)." What did he mean?

Answer next week...

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

I asked a Rav about inviting people for Shabbos who are going to drive, and he said as follows: If the person lives within possible walking distance — even five or seven miles — there's no restriction on inviting them. (I once invited my next-door neighbor for a Shabbos meal, and he drove to my house. It was snowing...) If they live too far to walk then it depends: On Friday night you must invite them to come before sunset and offer them a place to spend the night, even if you don't have a guest room. (I asked the Rav how this is possible and he said "Wouldn't you give up your bed to a person who suddenly decided to observe Shabbos?") On Shabbos morning the Rav said it's not permitted to invite someone who lives too far to walk.

Laizer Gurkov < lurgkov@juno.com >

With regard to "Fins on the Scale" in Ohrnet Parshat Lech Lecha: I happen to have seen that the rabbis discuss a fish from the Spanish region called "sti(n)cus marinus" which has scales and not fins. They discuss how this fits with the mishnah that says "Any fish which has scales has fins," and whether it is actually kosher. Some Rabbis say that it must have fins at some point in its life, which it sheds, and it is therefore in accordance with the Mishna, and is also kosher (Pri Megadim Y.D. 83:3). Others hold that it is an exception to the rule which is intended to be a practical rule based on a 99.9 percent accuracy, and therefore it is not kosher (Kreiti u'fleiti of Rabbi Yonasan Eibeshitz 83.3 and Knesset Yechezkel of Rabbi Y. Katzenellenbogen). How this latter opinion fits with the Talmud which states that there is no practical application for the fin requirement is discussed by Haktav VeHakabala (R Y. Mecklenberg, Vayikra 11:9.) I wonder what we know about this fish today?

David Solomon < solomons@mail.netvision.net.il >