



# Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem



## This Issue Contains:

1. Who am I?
2. Elul
3. The World's Humblest Man
4. G Dash D in the WC
5. Mister Mussar
6. Two's a Crowd
7. Yiddle Riddle
8. Public Domain

### WHO AM I?

Shimon (Peter) from Donetsk, Ukraine <pat@sk-market.com.ua> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

My mum — Jew. My father — Russian...Who am I?

Dear Shimon,

You are 100% Jewish. According to universal Jewish tradition, Jewishness is based on the mother and only the mother. So you are Jewish and do not need conversion.

### ELUL

B. Ungar <Triumph613@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

We find that several acronyms are quoted from verses in reference to the month of Elul. For example, the first letters of the words "Ani L'dodi V'dodi Li — I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine" (Song of Songs 6:3) — spell "Elul" and are seen as a reference to the G-d's closeness to us during the month of Elul. But isn't "Elul" a Babylonian word? Is it authentic that verses in the Torah would be alluding to words that aren't Hebrew?

Dear B. Ungar,

A good point. The names of the Jewish months came into use when the exiled Jews of Babylon, who spoke Aramaic, returned to the Land of Israel in the time of Ezra. Previously the months had no names, but were referred to by number.

Nachmanides says these names are of Persian origin, but that doesn't preclude their also having Aramaic roots, as the Persian Empire succeeded the Babylonian Empire, and the language of Babylon was Aramaic.

So, how can the verses in the Hebrew Torah hint to Aramaic words? Actually, Aramaic is a sister language of Hebrew. According to the Kabbala it is actually a dialect of Hebrew. That is why most of the Oral Law is written in Aramaic, or in Mishnaic Hebrew which is a mixture of Aramaic and Biblical Hebrew.

The word Elul means "search," because during the month of Elul we search our hearts for evil and repent in preparation for Rosh Hashana.

Sources:

- Nachmanides Commentary to the Torah Exodus 12:2
- Targum Onkelos Bamidbar 13:2

### THE WORLD'S HUMBLEST MAN

Robert Samuels from Hamilton, Ontario <bobsam@fishnet.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

How could Moses write that he himself was "the most humble person on the face of the earth?" (Numbers 12:3) Isn't that itself a contradiction to being truly humble?

Dear Robert Samuels,

Your question reminds me of a story: When the practice of ritual slaughter was under attack in Great Britain, the famed Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky was called to court in its defense. The judge read from the deposition which lay before him: "Rabbi Abramsky," said the judge, "it says here that you are the foremost authority of Jewish Law in the British Empire. Is that true?"

"That is true, your honor."

"And that you are the most eloquent spokesman for Jewish Law in the British Empire?"

"That is also true, your honor."

"It also says here that you are the most senior rabbi in the British Empire. Is that correct?"

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Ask The Rabbi is written by Rabbi Moshe Lazerus, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Reuven Subar, Rabbi Avrohom

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"That is correct, your Honor."

Taken aback by the Rabbi's straight-forward responses, the judge said, "Rabbi Abramsky, how do you resolve your answers with the Talmudic teachings of humility?"

"It is indeed a problem, your honor," said the Rabbi. "But I'm under oath."

Moses was commanded by G-d to write that he was the most humble person, so he had no choice but to write it.

Knowing your own greatness is no contradiction to humility. On the contrary, ultimate humility is achieved by a person who excels in good attributes but takes no credit for his greatness. He realizes that all his achievements come from G-d, and therefore he isn't conceited or self-congratulatory.

### **G DASH D IN THE WC**

Sarede Switzer from Montreal, Canada  
<glazzies@hotmail.com> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,*

*If a secular book has the word G-d (with an o) can it be taken into a bathroom? Thank you!*

Dear Sarede Switzer,

It is permitted to take such a book into the bathroom, although it is best not to have it open to the page which has "G-d" printed on it. Read a different page while in the bathroom.

### **MISTER MUSSAR**

Gary Mussar <Gary.Mussar.mussar@nortelnetworks.com> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,*

*I have an interest in discovering the origins of our family name. I have found that a Rabbi Yisrael Salanter established the Mussar Movement which emphasizes the study and practice of Jewish values and ethics. It seems that the Mussar Movement originated in Eastern Europe. My father's parents emigrated from the Hungarian/Yugoslavian border area back in the early 1900s. I was wondering if you had any idea of what the name "Mussar" means and why it was associated with the Mussar Movement. I have found references in Arabic to "mussar" which is a type of turban. There appear to be references in Portuguese and Swedish as well. I don't know if these references stem from the Latin mus (mouse). Any insight you could provide into the origin of the name would be most appreciated.*

Dear Gary Mussar,

The Hebrew word "*mussar*" means "rebuke." It appears first in Deuteronomy 11:2 and is used many times throughout the Bible to mean "rebuke." The Mussar Movement encouraged people to study ethics and morals every day and thus "rebuke" themselves and achieve elevation and character improvement.

I don't know the origin of your family name, as it may be from other languages. If it is from Hebrew, then perhaps your family was called this because they demonstrated elevated character traits.

### **TWO'S A CROWD**

Yael from Montreal, Quebec <ymanan@po-box.mcgill.ca> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,*

*Why are even numbers said to come from unholy spheres?*

Sam Miller <millerr@mail.biu.ac.il> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,*

*On behalf of myself and my fellow students at two Talmud classes in Jerusalem, I submit the following: The Talmud states that a second cup of wine is dangerous. Rashi explains that this second cup constitutes "zugot" (pairs) which cause damage by demons. Please clarify the concept of "zugot" and explain why, if pairs are considered a bad omen, we use two loaves of challa on Shabbat?*

Dear Sam Miller and Yael,

There is a concept that *zugot*, pairs, can cause spiritual damage. The basic idea behind this is that even numbers are based on the number *two* while odd numbers are based on the number *one*. The number one represents the omnipotence of G-d, while the number two represents heresy, the disbelief in the omnipotence of G-d. Impure forces have no power against a person meditating on the omnipotence of G-d, so while someone does an activity based on the number one, the "demons" can't do anything to him, as his soul (or sub-conscience, if you will) is aware of G-d's Omnipotence.

Therefore, the danger of *zugot* doesn't apply when doing a mitzvah, such as eating *challa* Friday night. When a person performs a *mitzvah*, he does so because of his belief in G-d and is thus protected from these negative influences.

Furthermore, the Talmud implies that *zugot* only harm someone who is concerned with them. The Shulchan Aruch does not even mention *zugot* as a prohibition.

Sources:

- Tractate Berachot, 51b
- Tractate Pesachim 110a
- Rabbeinu Bechaye in "Shulchan Shel Arbah" citing Midrash Talpiot

# Yiddle Riddle

Last week we asked:

I have a new Yiddle Riddle for you, which I heard from my friend Avrohom Moshe Rosenwasser. When would I have to make at least 20 *berachot* because I drank one cup of orange juice?

Yochi Schnall <yochii@juno.com>

Answer:

On *motzei Shabbat*, Saturday night after Shabbat, if one forgets to say the added "*ata chonantanu*" paragraph in the silent prayer (*shemone esrei*), he need not repeat the silent prayer unless he eats or drinks before saying *havdalah*. However, if he forgets *ata chonantanu* and then eats or drinks before *havdalah*, then he must repeat the entire *shemone esrei* (19 blessings plus the blessing after the orange juice).

- Source: *Shulchan Aruch 294:1, Mishna Berurah 4*

## THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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

Re: Rav Milevsky, *zatzal*, and Ohrnet:

I just wanted to write you a short note to let you know how much I appreciated this week's Ohrnet. As a former student of Rav Milevsky, *zatzal*, while I lived in Toronto, I enjoyed his weekly *divrei Torah*. Seeing his insights on your web page was very gratifying. Could we out here in cyberspace see more of his thoughts? Thanks and job well done.

Gerry Rubinstein <grubinstein@worldsites.net>

**Ohrnet Replies:** Thanks for the words of appreciation, and we will try to make more Torah insights from Rav Milevsky, *zatzal*, available on our web site and via other channels.

Re: Shaky Salute (Ohrnet Vaera):

Your reader Z.G. wrote about her problem regarding handshaking in the business world. I think your answer was very tactful and pretty much exhaustive, as there are only that number of ways to say "I can't shake your hand." I have very similar problems, as I am also an observant female who deals with the non-religious world a lot. I go to College in NYC and work for a non-Jewish company. This topic was one of my biggest concerns as I was faced with my surroundings. I am a very outgoing, personable and friendly person, and

the issue of shaking hands or getting patted on the shoulder is very much a problem for me. Until very recently, I was very uncomfortable about the idea of telling someone that I can't shake hands with him, and I relied mostly on Hashem not bringing me into such situations. It didn't work. I had to gather all my courage and start telling people that "I am sorry, but I don't shake hands with men because of a religious reason. It's nothing personal. I'd very much like to, but, 'gotta do what you gotta do.'" The first subject of my experiment was my psychology professor, who after looking at me with huge eyes, said "Well, I respect that. Hold onto your beliefs and do not let *anyone* persuade you to change them." Wow, it was easier than I thought. The next couple of times were still difficult, but no one fainted or refused to speak to me after my announcement. Now, it comes out of my mouth just as easily as "Hi, how are you." I think the concept itself, while certainly not easy, is very beautiful and meaningful. But the bottom line is, you have to do it because it is the right thing to do in Hashem's eyes. So to all the Z.G.'s out there (including myself): *Chazak V'ematz!* Be strong!

Julia Gomberg <JGomberg@collegeboard.org>

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