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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

On the Air with Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner

Rav Aviner answers questions of Jewish Law and faith on the radio in Israel on Tuesday & Thursday nights (To listen: www.kimizion.org/shiur/shut.html). On the Air presents a sample each week.

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***Correction – There was a mistake in one of last week's answers. Here is the correction .

Moving the chanukiyah

Q: Can I light the chanukiyah inside and carry it outside?

A: No, you may not. It must be lit in the correct place. If you moved it a little bit, it is no problem, but in general it should not be moved.

The remaining oil in the chanukiyah

Q: Do you have to burn the remaining oil in the chanukiyah?

A: You do not have to burn it, but you have to dispose of it in a non-disgraceful way. You cannot simply throw it in the garbage because this is treating it disgracefully. Here are two examples for disposing it. You can pour it in the ground next to the house or you can wrap it in two plastic bags and place it on top on the garbage. You can also place it in the "geniza," but this is not a good idea because it will make it dirty.

Sick children and a new house

Q: My son bought a new house about four years ago, and since then one of his children has been sick just about every month. He never had a "chanukat ha-bayit – dedication of the house." Could this be the reason for the children being sick?

A: No, there is no connection between the two things. Children are sick a lot. This is not a rare occurrence, especially because people have a lot of children here. Having a "chanukat ha-bayit" is a custom, not a mitzvah. He did not perform a good custom, but it is not a transgression. It is not a transgression for which one suffers, and even if he did sin by performing such a transgression he would suffer, not his children. Both before, during and after the children are sick he should prayer, repent and give tzedakah. These always help.

Child cheating on test

Q: My son received a test back in school without a grade and a note from both the teacher and principal that he cheated. He insists that he did not cheat, and the student next to him cheated off of him. What should I do?

A: If he did not copy, he should write a respectful note to the teacher and principal stating that he did not cheat. By doing so, he is placing blame on the other student, and it is a problem of "lashon ha-ra" (speaking evil against others), but if he did not cheat he has to say so. The letter should not be an attack or accusatory, because that causes others to attack back. It should be respectful.

A child who has gone off the path

Q: What should I do with my child who wants nothing to do with Torah and mitzvot?

A: In dealing with children, there are no tricks or patents. If there was, Avraham would have used it with Yishamel. Yitzchak would have used it with Esav. Moshe would have used it with his grandson who worshiped idols, etc... So what do you do? You must build bridges and trust. He has to trust you. He suspects you, and takes every word and look as a critique. Little by little you have to build the bridges which collapsed. The more he feels your authority, the more he will rebel. You have to listen to him, come to him, talk together. You have to figure out how to live together without making demands. You can say something like: "You do this and you know that it pains us, but we love you until the end of time. Let us figure out how to stay close." If he does not listen to you, find someone he trusts – a family member, a friend, a neighbor – and have them talk to him. You have to talk together again and again and again, and maybe you will move a millimeter. One step forward and two steps back. It is a long process. There is no miracle cure. Children go through crises, ups and downs, and they need a parent. When? You can't know, but one day the door will be open. You have to have love, understanding and patience. Rav Kook has three letters to Rav Milstein whose sons abandoned Torah, the Nation of Israel and the Land of Israel. Rav Kook tells him to support them spiritually and financially, and talk to them. If it does not have an effect now, it will have an effect later. If it does not have an effect later, it will have an effect with their sons. If it does not have an effect with their sons, it will have an effect with their grandsons. He placed the "tractate of patience" before him. With the help of G-d, you will not have to wait that long, but you need to be patient.

Statute of limitations on debts

Q: Is there a time limit on paying debts?

A: No. The Shemitta year cancels out debts, but if one writes a "prozbul" (a document which gives the debt to the Jewish court who collects it and then gives it to the lender), there is still an obligation to pay. The Mishnah says that if one lends on condition that the Shemittah years does not cancel the debt, the debt is not canceled. The Chatam Sofer says that even if one forgot to make this stipulation, the debt is not canceled.

Tzedakah obligation

Q: I agreed to give tzedakah to an institution for a year, and they would take it out of my bank account each month. The year ended and they continued to take it out. I called and they said that they need the money. Can I stop giving to them?

A: Yes, you fulfilled your agreement, and now you can give to anyone you wish.

Forgiving someone who was disrespectful to a Rabbi

Q: In the community where I live, there is someone who was disrespectful to the Rabbi, and I can't even talk to him. He does not seem to regret what he did, and I don't think that he will accept my rebuke. Do I have or am I permitted to forgive him?

A: This is not your honor, it is the Torah's honor. We are not obligated to forgive someone who has not requested forgiveness. You are allowed to forgive someone who has done something to you. If you have a good heart, you can forgive him. This is an act of piety. Here, he was not disrespectful to you, he was disrespectful to the Rabbi, you therefore cannot forgive him in place of the Rabbi. If you are angry with him in your heart, you have to tell him that you are upset for this or that reason. This is like what Rashi says about Yosef's brothers. The Torah says that they could not speak to him peacefully, and Rashi explains that out of their shame, you learn their praise: They did not speak to him one way, but feel differently in their heart (Bereshit 37:4). It is even worse for someone who shames a Torah scholar. There is no cure for his ailment. In the Gemara in Baba Metzia (84b), Rabbi Elezar Be-Rabbi Shimon dies, and they laid him on a slab in the attic for many years. One day, they saw a worm came out of his ear, and they were surprised. He came to them in a dream and said that it was because he once heard a Torah scholar shamed and did not protest. On such things, we need to protest. We need to protest everything which is against the Torah, but this in particular. Shaming a Torah scholar is not only his shame, but the shame of the Torah. Disputes and disagreements are acceptable, but not shaming. It is written in the books that Torah scholars do not want to discuss this subject, because then people will say that they are saying it for their own benefit. Torah scholars therefore do not

talk about this, but it is very severe. The Gemara in Sanhedrin (99b) says that a heretic is one who shames a Torah scholar. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Sanhedrin 10:1) compares this to a structure of stones. If one stone is shaken, the entire structure is shaken (Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin 10:1). That is to say, one who scorns any Torah scholar, knocks over the entire building of the Oral Torah in Israel. The Radvaz (vol. 4 #187) writes that even a Torah scholar who errs should not be shamed. His proof is from the Gemara in Sanhedrin (99a) that a Torah scholar named Rabbi Hillel – not Hillel the Elder – said that the Messiah will not come. Rav Yosef said: May Hashem forgive his sin and he brought proofs. Rav Yosef spoke to him in the third person with honor, and said that he erred and should be forgiven, because the damage done by shaming him would be much worse than the damage done by him saying that the Messiah will not come!

The cross of a Chevrolet

Q: Is the cross on a Chevrolet forbidden?

A: I understand that it is not really a Christian cross, it is simply a decoration. It is similar to when someone writes a plus sign, he is not writing it in connection to Christianity. The Shulchan Aruch explicitly writes that a decoration in the form of a cross which is not connected to Christianity is permissible.

A mourner buying a winter jacket

Q: Can a mourner who has to travel outside of Israel buy a winter jacket?

A: It is correct that a mourner does not wear or buy new clothing. Since he needs to in this case, the solution is to put a little dirt on it here and there before he wears it – just a bit – and then it is no longer new. As is known, he can also give it to someone else to wear for a little, but this is easier.

Q: Can he step on it?

A: This won't really help because the floor is clean and shoes are usually clean. It is best to put a little dirt on it.

Bringing boss coffee with milk after a meat meal

Q: Can I bring my (Jewish) boss a cup of coffee with milk after a meat meal?

A: You certainly cannot bring him coffee with milk after a meat meal. You have to let him get it himself. If he gets it himself, we do not throw stones. There is an opinion of the Tosafot (Chullin 105a) that you can eat milk after meat from one meal to the next, but we do not hold that like. There is also the custom of Jews from Holland to wait only an hour,

but I understand that he is not from Holland. There is therefore a problem and he will need to get it himself.

Seeing the moon through glasses

Q: When they would sanctify the new month by the sighting of the moon, could one of the witnesses see the moon through glasses or would he need a naked-eye?

A: There has been much discussion among halachic authorities whether seeing through glasses is considered seeing. The majority of authorities rule that it is considered seeing. This question arises when we sanctify the new moon each month nowadays or when we read the Torah since we have to see the parchment. The majority say that seeing through glasses is considered seeing.

A cohein with glasses

Q: Can a cohein wear glasses or is this considered a blemish which would disqualify him from serving in the Temple?

A: This is not considered a blemish. A blemish is something which protrudes out, like having extremely protruding eyes. This is something unique which draws people's attention. Wearing glasses does not draw people's attention. There is a different problem for coheinim. It is forbidden for him to have extra clothing. It invalidates his service. Glasses, however, are not considered clothing.

Cohain and a convert

Q: I have been dating a woman for the last three years who converted to Judaism. I am a cohein and recently found out that a cohein cannot marry a convert. Is there anything I can do?

A: This is a real tragedy. There is no solution. It is not a stricture, but a law, so there is no getting around it. It is a difficult trial and sad. Everything is for the best. How is this for the best? I do not know, but everything is for the best. May Hashem send both of you worthy partners.

Praying over distress

Q: If a person davens to Hashem to remove a distress and Hashem answers, won't he receive a different distress in its place if Hashem has decided that he will suffer?

A: We are commanded to pray. There is daily prayer, and in addition, there is an obligation to pray when one is in distress. There are even Rishonim (early authorities) who hold that daily prayer is a rabbinic mitzvah, and prayer when one is in distress is a Torah mitzvah.

Someone who is therefore in distress must pray. This is what Hashem told us to do, as it says, "When you go to wage war in your Land against an enemy who oppresses you, you shall blow the trumpets, and you shall be recalled before Hashem, your G-d, and you shall be saved from your enemies" (Bamidbar 10:9). The reason that Hashem sends a person distress is in order for a person to pray. It is not like we think that we daven because we have distress. It is the exact opposite. This is written in connection to our foremothers. They were wise, wealthy, beautiful, and Hashem said that if I give them children they will not pray. Hashem desired to hear the prayers of the righteous. Pray increased devotion to Hashem, He therefore sends prayers so that we will pray. After one prays a lot, there is no longer a need for the distress, so Hashem removes it. This is obviously not math, and there are other reasons for distress that we do not understand.

Praying only for Redemption

Q: Instead of praying for all sorts of things, shouldn't we only daven for the Redemption and then all the problems will be resolved?

A: This is not a good idea, because what will be until the Redemption arrives? We do not know when the complete Redemption will be. Should everything be in a destroyed state until that time? We do not say that either we receive everything or nothing. The Shemoneh Esrei is built around the 13 requests in the middle, and included are prayers while we are since in exile. Rashi says that when we daven at the beginning that Hashem should redeem us, this is redemption within exile. We were in exile for 2000 years, and during this time we needed all sorts of things even though it was not yet the Redemption. An example of redemption within exile is Purim. We were in exile, and Hashem still saved us and this was also a great thing. We therefore pray not only for Redemption, but also for smaller things.

Chinese Medicine

Q: Is it permissible to use Chinese Medicine?

A: The Torah does not teach us which types of medicine are good and which are not good. The Rambam in his letters to the Sages of Marseilles writes that there are three ways to discern if a certain type of medicine is beneficial. Through intellect, trial and prophetic revelation. Chinese medicine is built upon all sorts of things which are not clear and we therefore cannot intellectually ascertain if it is beneficial. Experience has shown us that Chinese medicine does not work any more than a placebo. When someone takes a placebo, the brain releases endorphins which help heal the body. And we have not received a prophetic revelation. The Chinese do not even use Chinese medicine, Europeans come and use it.