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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/shuf.html](http://www.kimizion.org/shiur/shuf.html)). On the Air presents a sample each week.

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### Seeing the President

Q: Should we try to see the President since he is the most honored person in the world?

A: You do not need to run to greet him. The Gemara in Berachot (9b) says that a person should strive to see non-Jewish kings, so that he will be able to perceive the difference between non-Jewish kings and the Messiah. President Bush, however, is not a king. It is possible to have a king who is not honored and an honored person who is not a king. Our Sages established this decree for a king, and provided the definition of a king. Don't worry. We will be able to tell the difference between him and the Messiah!

### Pictures of our forefathers

Q: Is it permissible to show pictures of our forefathers and foremothers to children?

A: We do not show pictures of our forefathers and foremothers for three reasons. 1. We do not know what they look like and we cannot invent things. 2. If Hashem wanted us to know what they looked like, he would have given us pictures. They knew how to draw during that generation. They knew earlier than that. There are drawings in caves. 3. If I draw Avraham Avinu like an Ashkenazic Jew, a Sefardic child will feel that he is not his

forefather. If I draw him like a Sefardic Jew, an Ashkenazic Jew will feel that he is not his forefather. If I draw him as a hybrid between an Ashkenazic and Sefardic Jew, an Ethiopian child will see that he looks white. This is horrible. We therefore avoid doing so. A child drawing on his own is fine. An Ashkenazic child will draw him as an Ashkenazic Jew, a Sefardic child will draw him as a Sefardic Jew, a Yemenite child will draw him as a Yemenite Jew. This is a child's imagination. We therefore avoid the problem. What do we do? We do not draw our ancestors with bird's heads like the famous Bird's Head Haggadah. This will certainly confuse children. We draw them from the back. I have also seen books which show the bodies without faces, just an oval. I am not saying that this is the end of the world, but we should try.

#### Removing Mezuzot

Q: Is it permissible to remove mezuzot when I move?

A: It is forbidden to remove the mezuzot, because one may not leave a house without mezuzot (if a Jewish resident is moving in). There are various options: 1. You can take the mezuzah cases which can be quite expensive. 2. One can buy less expensive, simple mezuzot – kosher, of course – if your mezuzot were expensive. 3. The new tenant can come with his mezuzot, and at the moment you remove your mezuzot, he puts up his mezuzot. 4. You can ask the new tenant for the money for the mezuzot. You are obligated to leave the mezuzot, but you are not obligated to lose money. You cannot take him to court for the money, but you can ask.

#### Forgiveness from the dead and bad dreams

Q: When my son was in the army twenty-two years ago, his good friend was killed. My son did not attend the funeral and did not go to comfort the mourners. Does he have to go to the grave and ask forgiveness from the deceased?

A: When we comfort, it is an act of kindness to the mourners. The mourners are sad and we need to strength them. If he wants to ask forgiveness, it is not from the deceased, but from the mourners. It is all dependent on the reality. If I caused the mourner pain, because I am a good friend and did not come, and there was a special loss in my absence, then I should ask forgiveness. If I was simply paying a shiva call – I obviously added, but my absence would not have caused any hurt, than I do not need to ask forgiveness.

Q: My son had a dream and his friend said: "Come to me, come to me." What should he do?

A: This is a good question, but it is unrelated to the first question. If your son woke up and is upset, he should perform a "hatavat chalom" (improving a dream). It is printed in the siddur. It is not in every siddur, since the siddur can get pretty thick, but it appears in most. He

gathers three friends together and says what is printed in the siddur. He does not have to reveal the dream and the friends say three times that it was a good dream as printed there.

#### Concentrating during prayer

Q: I am in fourth grade and it is very hard for me to concentrate during prayer. Is it permissible for me to daven only part of the davening?

A: It is obviously better to have concentration for part of the davening than having no concentration at all. A person does what he can. If you can only concentrate on one part, it should be an important part, i.e. Shema or Shemoneh Esrei. You can build yourself up. This week concentrate on one part, next week add a verse or a paragraph, or next month. Little by little, in stages, continue to add. One needs to understand that davening without concentration or without understanding also has value since a person is fulfilling what Hashem requested of you. This is stated in a responsum of the Rashba (vol. 1 #423). Many people outside of Israel do not understand one word of Hebrew and would we say that their prayers are not worth anything?! G-d forbid. A person does what he can. You should daven it all, and concentrate on what you can.

Q: So if I daven without proper intention it still has the value of prayer?

A: Yes, davening without proper intention for even one word has the value of prayer, even for an adult. The "Shelah" – Rabbi Yeshayahu Horowitz – has a saying: "Prayer without proper intention is like a body without a soul." If so, it is not worth anything. The Vilna Gaon says that this is not precise, since prayer corresponds to the sacrifices. There are two different types of sacrifices: A. "Zevachim" – animal sacrifices. B. "Menachot" – flour offerings. "Zevachim" is a body with a soul. "Menachot" is a body without a soul. Therefore, a person who davens with proper intention is like one who offers "Zevachim," and one who davens without proper intention is like one who offers "Menachot." The Holy One blessed be He also loves "Menachot" as it says: "And then the minchah offering of Yehudah and Yerushalayim will be pleasing to Hashem, as in past days and former years" (end of Shemoneh Esrei).

#### Postponing a brit milah in order to prevent Shabbat desecration

Q: If there is a brit milah on Shabbat and many of the guests will violate Shabbat to attend, should it be postponed until Sunday?

A: If the brit milah is postponed until Sunday, they fail to fulfill a positive mitzvah, since it is supposed to be performed on the eighth day. They do not fulfill a positive mitzvah for one day, but a major desecration of Shabbat is much worse. There are therefore authorities who permit postponing it. Others forbid postponing the mitzvah. In the book "Yalkut Yosef," Ha-

Rav Ovadiah Yosef brings both of these opinions and he permits using the opinion of delaying the brit milah. In the past, I did not advise people to postpone the brit milah, because I did not see halachic authorities who permitted such a thing and I did not see myself as having broad enough shoulders to permit it. When people delayed the brit milah without asking me, I did not say anything. I later saw authorities who ruled that the brit milah should be postponed – great authorities and Charedi (Ultra-Orthodox) authorities. As a result, if there will be a major desecration of Shabbat, i.e. many people violating Shabbat, not just one person coming, I tell people to postpone it until Sunday.

### Younger brothers

Q: Why is the younger brother often times more important than the older brother?

A: The firstborn has the exalted status of being the first, as Yaakov said to Reuven: "You are my firstborn, my strength and my initial vigor" (Bereshit 49:3). The firstborn has spiritual responsibility. This is the reason for the plague of killing the firstborn Egyptians. Why were the firstborn killed and not all of the Egyptians? The Egyptians considered the firstborn as the "kohain" of the house. Responsibility rested on him. The exalted status of being the first, however, is not everything, more important is human endeavor. The firstborn, therefore, may not fall asleep and think that everything is his. The firstborn is born with a position, but the next in line must struggle to conquer his position. This is a great teaching: You can exert yourself and succeed even more than one who has status. A person born a Jew certainly begins with a more exalted status than a non-Jew who is converting, but the convert has the ability to climb higher than a born Jew. A kohain begins with a more exalted status than a non-kohain. This is the holiness of the priesthood: "Who makes us holy with His mitzvot and commands us with the holiness of Aharon." A non-kohain does not possess this status, but he can climb ahead. The Gemara in Yoma (71b) relates that the kohain gadol once left the Temple and everyone followed him. When the people saw Shemaya and Avtalyon, they left the kohain gadol and followed after them, since they loved them more than they loved the kohain gadol. After Shemaya and Avtalyon left, the kohain gadol said: They are from the seed of the nations. They responded: They are from the seed of the nations who act like Aharon and not like the seed of Aharon who act like the seed of the nations [like you]. You see from here that these righteous converts climbed higher than the kohain gadol. The Mishnah in Horayot (3:8) says that prior for saving one's life is given to a "mamzer" (a child born of a forbidden union) who is a Torah scholar over an unlearned kohain gadol. A "mamzer" certainly has the most difficult beginning of all, but he can climb ahead. The first-born has the holiness of being the first-born, but if others exert themselves, they can rise to the top.