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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

The Torah of Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner

Parashat Yitro 5768

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Would you like to ask Rav Aviner a question? E-mail mororly@bezeqint.net and the question will be brought to Ha-Rav and I will e-mail you the answer.



The Fifth Commandment

[Questions from Iturei Yerushalayim #9]

Receiving money from parents

Q: I am a yeshiva student and receive major financial help from my parents. It does not sit well with me. Should I work a few hours a day and not take their money?

A: If your parents give you money out of their own initiative, they are happy about it and you are not pressuring them to give it, it is a mitzvah of honoring one's mother and father to take the money. Our Sages say that if a father wants to forego his honor and serve his son, his honor is waived (Kiddushin 31). Similarly, the Yerushalami (Jerusalem Talmud) says that a parent's will is his honor (brought in Tosafot d.h. Rabbi Tarfon ibid.), and this Halachah is quoted in the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh De'ah 240). This law also applies if one's parents are not wealthy since it is their will. Furthermore, this not only applies to a yeshiva student, but to any child.

A cheating father

Q: I fear that my father is cheating on my mother, but I am not positive. Should I share my concern with my mother?

A: You should first speak with your father and try to clarify what is actually going on. If it is true, try to convince him to repent, and then he will tell your mother. If this is impossible, then report it to her, based on the mitzvah of, "Do not stand over your brother's blood." (Vayikra 19:16).

A convert honoring his parents

Q: Does a convert have an obligation to honor his biological parents?

A: He is obligated in the same manner as a non-Jew is obligated to honor his parents. Honoring one's parents is included in the thirty-one mitzvot incumbent upon non-Jews (aside from the seven mitzvot for which they are liable for death if violated). As is known, Esav was evil and still honored his parents because it is a basic human trait. In the Torah, however, honoring one's parents is a stricter obligation. A convert is not obligated to this extent, because when a person converts, he or she is like a new-born person and not related to his family. A person, however, should not go from a higher level of holiness to a

lower level of holiness. Therefore, he is obligated to maintain the obligation he had when he was a non-Jew. Furthermore, one must honor his parents based on the obligation to show gratitude for what they have done for him (Shut Igrot Moshe Yoreh Deah 2:130 and Shut Yechaveh Daat 6:60).

The color of one's kippah

Q: I wear a black kippah, but this is only to honor my father. After I complete high school, I plan to learn in a Zionist yeshiva, since it better expresses my views. I will switch to a knit kippah, despite the objection of my father. I already want to switch and have spoken many times to my father, but he remains firm. What should I do?

A: There is no directive in the Torah regarding the color of one's kippah. All kippot are equal. The Rambam writes in Hilchot De'ot that the reason for the kippah is modesty. Therefore the larger the kippah, the more praiseworthy, but the color is not important. If the color had halachic significance, there would be reason not to obey one's parents, since if a parent tells you to transgress the Halachah, you do not listen, whether it is a Torah or rabbinic mitzvah, and even if it is a clear and agreed upon custom brought in the Achronim (later authorities). There is something else to consider. Most authorities hold that if one's parents receive no personal benefit or real pleasure from a command which they give their son, there is no obligation to listen to them. The Achronim, nonetheless, write that if the son is not pained, it is proper to listen to his parents. If he is pained, however, he need not listen. For example, if they ask him to wear a particular type of clothing and he is extremely hot, he need not listen (see Sefer Mora Horim Ve-Kevodam Ha-Shalem of Rav Naftali Yonah, chapter 1 #50, note 49). Therefore if the son is greatly pained by wearing a particular kippah, he is not obligated to listen. But as we said, the color of a kippah has absolutely no Zionist significance, and there are students in Zionist yeshivot who also wear black kippot. Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, wore a black kippah! If you are pained, however, you are permitted to wear any kippah your heart desires. Perhaps good advice is that when you go home you can wear a black kippah out of consideration for your parents.



Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a week. Some appear in the parashah sheets "Ma'ayanei Ha-Yeshu'ah" and "Olam Ha-Katan." Here's a sample:

Q: Why are the names of the months in Babylonian and not in Hebrew?

A: As a remembrance of the return to Zion from Babylonian. (Ramban)

Q: I am considering becoming a vegetarian. What is the Torah's opinion on vegetarianism?

A: It is a future vision. Now, we should be careful not to swallow up fellow human beings.

Q: If a child is swinging on a swing and another child runs under him and is injured, who is at fault?

A: The child who is running, since the child who is swing is acting in the normal manner.

Q: Is it permissible to eat popcorn which was wrapped in a plastic bag and made in a microwave which I am not sure of its kosher status?

A: It is permissible to use a microwave of uncertain kashrut status when the food is completely sealed.

Q: Is it permissible to add Tehillim (Psalms) in the middle of the davening?

A: We do not change the accepted formula of the prayers, but you can certainly add them at the end.

Q: Is there a problem of "Yichud" (seclusion) to have a "date" in an apartment which is not used on a daily basis if the door is closed, but not locked, and there is a chance that people will enter?

A: This is not how we act. The general rule is that on a "date" we are not simply concerned about the laws of "Yichud." Meet at a place where people are coming and going.

Q: Can an Ashekenazic Jew use Sefardic tefillin and vice-versa?

A: No. All tefillin are kosher, but it is preferable to use tefillin according to the custom of your ancestors.

Q: What is the Torah's opinion about being married to someone who is older than you?

A: It is permissible. The age difference is not important if the person is one-third older or one-third younger.



Stories of Rabbenu – Our Rabbi

Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook

The Land of Israel

Fruits of Israel

Our Rabbi would eat the fruits of the Land of Israel with great pleasure and would mention the words of the Bach (Orach Chaim 208 – that the fruit of the Land of Israel is imbued with the Divine presence). (Ha-Rav Tzefanyah Drori).

Separating Terumot and Ma'asrot (tithes)

Our Rabbi did not accept the abbreviated formula of the Chazon Ish for separating Terumot and Ma'asrot, since Ha-Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank and his Beit Din disagreed (because it does not specify the location of the tithes). The shortened formula was printed in our Rabbi's siddur, and he wrote on the side that it should not be used. He also wrote this in communal siddurim. He once did this in a small shul in Meah Shearim, and someone asked him: Whose permission do you have to write in the shul's siddurim? He responded: I am an agent of the Beit Din. (Ha-Rav Eliyahu Mali)

Agriculture

When a student asked our Rabbi which is the preferred profession, he said "agriculture" without hesitation.

He saw agriculture and the mitzvot dependent of the Land as the central element in the mitzvah of settling the Land. He often participated in planting trees on Tu Bishvat. (Ha-Rav Yosef Bermson)

Beit Shean Valley

A group of religious kibbutzim in the Beit Shean Valley (northern Israel) wanted to fulfill the mitzvot dependent on the Land, because without them it marred the feeling of settling the Land of Israel. They asked our Rabbi, and he responded: Ha-Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank already ruled that the Beit Shean Valley is exempt from the mitzvot dependent on the Land (since it is not within the territory to which Jews returned after the Babylonian Exile). If you want to

obligate yourself, it must be with the understanding that you are exempt. In the future, however, there will be an obligation in the entire Land of Israel.

Did you hear?

A student, who was serving our Rabbi, sat next to him while our Rabbi was sleeping. The student accidentally moved the chair and it made a loud noise. Our Rabbi woke up in alarm and said: "Did you hear?" "No, I did not hear anything." "You did not hear? You do not hear the powerful voice of Hashem which gathers the downtrodden of His Nation to the Land of Israel?!" (Ha-Rav Eli Horowitz ztz"l hy"d in Me-emek Chevron 2, Elul 5763, 94).



Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Separate seating on buses

Q: Many Charedim (Ultra-Orthodox) are insisting on separate seating on the bus with men in the front and woman in the back. Is this required?

A: It is not necessary. It is like walking on the street.

Were the Nazis Amalek?

Q: What is Ha-Rav's opinion of what Ha-Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik said in the name of his father, Rav Moshe, that anyone who identifies with the ideology of Amalek (to destroy us) has the Halachic status of Amalek, and thus the Nazis were Amalek?

A: Quite simply, Amalek is a race of people. It is possible to compare the Nazis to Amalek, but it is difficult to make a halachic ruling based on this comparison.

Q: Rav Soloveitchik said that since the Nazis had the status of Amalek, it was forbidden to receive reparations from Germany.

A: There are three opinions regarding reparations: It is completely forbidden, it is completely permissible and it is forbidden to accept reparations for pain and suffering since this is like granting forgiveness, but it is permissible to receive money for what they stole from us. There is also a difference between the individual and the community. Some authorities say that an individual can accept the money, but Klal Yisrael (the entirety of Israel) may not accept money, since this is like granting forgiveness.



Rav Aviner's article

from this week's parashah sheet "Be-Ahava U-Be-Emuna" of Machon Meir
(Translated by Rafael Blumberg)

Vaccinations are a must!

Question: I have heard many arguments against vaccinating infants, among them the following: There are numerous instances of infants being hurt by vaccinations. People say they serve no purpose. Quite the contrary, they weaken the infant's natural immune system. Numerous illnesses such as autism have proliferated due to vaccinations. Numerous illnesses have disappeared not due to vaccinations but due to increased hygiene. Vaccinations only serve the economic interests of the drug companies. In fact, all they do is to introduce a dangerous poison into the infant's body.

Answer: Obviously, the Torah does not write which illness should be treated with a vaccination, nor at what age, nor what drug and how much should be administered. The Torah is not a medical text in this sense. The Torah only says to listen to physicians, as it says, "Let them cure you" (Shemot 21:19). Obviously, this is referring to a real physician and not to someone who has decided to call himself a physician. Therefore, the question is: What do we do when there is a disagreement between physicians, with some claiming that vaccinations are dangerous, and bringing many arguments in support, and others claiming that not vaccinating is what is dangerous, and bringing arguments no less convincing. It's like a case occurring in the Sanhedrin in which some of the sages say that someone deserves the death penalty while others say that he is exempt. The Torah has decreed that we "follow the majority" (Shemot 23:2). The same applies regarding physicians, that we follow the majority (for example, regarding the point at which a sick person can begin to eat on Yom Kippur (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 618). Most of the world's physicians and those in Eretz Yisrael say vociferously that we have to vaccinate, and not just "most" but almost all. Therefore, this is the law. So ends the discussion. This is a halachah like any other, even more so, for there is the well-known principle that "a threat to life is more serious than a prohibition" (Chullin 10a). Therefore, what follows is not a halachic deliberation, for the ruling has already been passed down. Rather, it is an explanation to make the matter more palatable to our mind and heart.

Claim 1. There have been many instances of infants being hurt by vaccinations. Answer, or more precisely, two answers: 1) It isn't so. It is exceedingly rare. Obviously, for the infant that it happened to it constituted 100%. Yet all in all, we are talking about exceptions. Every year, hundreds of thousands of infants in Israel are vaccinated. How many are hurt? The lack of legal suits will provide an answer. 2) Even if there were many instances of harm, with every medical treatment there is a risk, yet you've got to weigh the alternate risk, and in that as well we follow the majority. Regarding that as well it says, "Let them cure you." The Torah gives physicians permission to cure people. If there were no risk, it would be obvious that physicians have to cure people, and what permission would be needed from Hashem?

Claim 2. Why expose an infant to risk, via vaccination, when he is presently healthy? Answer: The Tiferet Yisrael long ago ruled: If presently there is no danger, one is allowed to expose someone to minute risk presently in order to prevent a great and genuine danger in the future (Tiferet Yisrael, Yoma, Chapter 8, Ot 3). The same applies with all preventative medicine.

Claim 3. The physicians who support vaccination are untrustworthy. The whole thing revolves around the vested interests of the drug manufacturers who juggle billions of dollars. Answer: That is just an evil claim that doesn't merit a response. The world's physicians are ready to poison half a billion children each year for profit – that isn't going to go into their own pockets?! Their own children they vaccinate for money?! If you're using such arguments, then there's a counter argument that all sorts of quacks and scoundrels peddling alternatives to conventional medicine are juggling billions in their pockets.

Claim 4. Vaccinations serve no purpose. It is forbidden to interfere with nature. The best path is to conduct ourselves naturally. Answer: That is the argument of the Christian Scientists. Certainly we have to live as naturally as possible, but even there you mustn't exaggerate. Do naturalists eat raw potatoes or do they cook them? Do they chew on natural wheat kernels or do they bake bread? Do they wear fabrics for clothing or do they cover themselves with fig leaves? Do they go on foot or do they use cars? Do they squint or wear glasses? Do they

shout kilometers or talk on the phone? Do they walk around with sundials or do they wear electronic wrist watches? Do they write their learned treatises with a quill and pomegranate juice on papyrus or do they use a word processing package...

Claim 5. Parents are responsible for their children and no one can decide for them.
Answer: The Master-of-the-Universe can certainly decide for them, and we have already stated what the Halachah is. Society at large likewise makes decisions in various spheres in which the citizenry are irresponsible, and even indulgent regimes require use of seatbelts, helmets for motorcyclists, forbid drug use, etc. In the same way, society both can and must decide for parents incapable of parenting, and it removes their children from their domain. It can do the same here as well, when parents behave irresponsibly regarding their children. When all is said and done, many children die in the world because they have not been vaccinated. And if a child dies, can he sue anyone? If a child suffers polio, will he sue his parents? Moreover, if a child was not vaccinated and falls ill, he will make infants who have not yet been vaccinated sick. After all, children are not vaccinated right after birth but later on. It turns out that the unvaccinated child is endangering others, and society is allowed to defend itself. Some rule that the authorities must enforce mass vaccination in order to save the entire population (Refu'ah U-Mishpat I, page 79). Such things happen all the time. For example, recently, a particular population had the practice of not vaccinating its infants against measles, but the virus struck infants of families whose parents do vaccinate them but their infants had not yet reached the age of vaccination, namely, a year. There are places where all the children in a day-care center were smitten, and there was discussion of pushing up the vaccination age for measles/rubella /mumps to nine months. Yet even in the absence of a law requiring vaccinations, the problem can be solved by refusing to accept unvaccinated children into a daycare center or school, as in the practice in the U.S.

Claim 6. There is much scientific research that proves that vaccinations are harmful.
Answer: There is also research to the contrary, and as noted, we follow the majority. Yet we have to be aware that not every research project necessarily stands up to scientific criteria. For an article to be demonstrably rigorous, it must be published in a recognized, serious scientific journal and must be open to criticism. Without that, it is just conjecture.

Claim 7. Vaccinations have brought no benefit to the human race.
Answer: That's false. Vaccinations are the greatest achievement of modern communal medicine. Thanks to them, many illnesses have disappeared or almost completely been eradicated. Examples including hepatitis A (90% decline); the BHI microbe, which causes meningitis in infants (95% decline); polio; diphtheria; measles; whooping cough; tetanus; congenital rubella; and more.

Claim 8. It's true that many illnesses have disappeared, but that isn't thanks to vaccinations but to improved hygiene. Proof of this comes from books that show that the frequency of these illnesses was beginning to decline long before vaccinations were invented.
Answer: It is true that hygiene has had a blessed effect on the disappearance of many illnesses, but it has not succeeded in eradicating them, and it was vaccinations that did that. We have to discern the enormous changes that have transpired during the past fifty years since numerous vaccinations were introduced. For example, since the vaccination against Hepatitis A in 1999, this illness has almost entirely disappeared, and that is certainly not due to any marked change regarding hygiene. Even today, with all the hygiene, when there are no vaccinations, epidemics still strike. For example, in Ireland, three years ago rumors spread that the measles vaccine causes harsh side effects. As a result, vaccination figures went down from 100% to 30%, and then a measles plague struck, with hundreds of thousands of people being hospitalized and numerous fatalities – more than on the entire North American

continent. Even in Israel, among certain populations that do not vaccinate, there are numerous cases of contagion.

Claim 9. Many children are not vaccinated and nothing happens to them. Answer: This is due to "invisible vaccinations", in other words, because those children are surrounded by a ring of children who are indeed vaccinated. Yet where there are population pockets that do not vaccinate, epidemics break out. For example, in Pesach of 2003, following a visit to Israel by a Chareidi (Ultra-Orthodox) child from abroad, measles broke out in the Chareidi sector, where some do not vaccinate for ideological reasons. Within two weeks there were sixty cases of measles due to its fast spread. Let me just mention that measles can have harsh complications such as pneumonia, meningitis or even death. The rabbis ruled that they should vaccinate, and within a number of days thousands of children were vaccinated and the epidemic was stopped. Likewise, in 2005 there were ninety cases of polio amongst the Dutch Amish, and then their leadership ruled that they should vaccinate. In Bavaria, Germany, in which only 75% vaccinate against measles, there was an epidemic in 2002 and over 1,000 children became ill in a short span of time.

Claim 10. Vaccinating against measles causes Autism and similar disturbances. The fact is that Autism is greatly on the rise. Answer: This claim was disproved long ago. In Denmark a study was revealed that compared 400,000 children who had undergone vaccination and 100,000 who had not, and there were the same percent of cases of Autism. In England, a study was published showing that the percent of the population undergoing vaccination had not changed but that the number of occurrences of Autism had risen. Thus, vaccinations are not the cause. Rather, there has apparently been a change in the classification of Autism, and there is increased awareness of this disease.

Claim 11. I know of numerous cases in which precisely after vaccination an infant suffered a high fever, convulsions and other frightening phenomena. Answer: These are well-known, transient side effects and they appear on the fact sheet one receives at the Well-Baby Clinic when one brings one's infant to be vaccinated.

Claim 12. When all is said and done, vaccinations still are harmful. Answer: No they're not! And even if some harm were caused, such is the nature of all medicine. We therefore pray, "Heal us G-d, that we may be healed." Obviously, if G-d heals us, we shall be healed. The intent is, however, that human medicine heals, on the one hand, while making someone sick, on the other, and there is a calculation of benefit versus harm. Yet when G-d heals, there is no harm.

As I said when I started, all these claims I brought, and their answers, were not meant as a debate on whether or not to vaccinate, but only as an explanation, for the matter was already decided by Him who miraculously heals all flesh. G-d commanded us to follow the mainstream of medical thought and to heed the physicians armed with the image of G-d and the scientific intellect, they being His emissaries. Feel well!

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