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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

The Torah of Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner

Parashat Metzora 5768

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archived at www.ateret.org.il/new/home.php

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.

Birchat Ha-Ilanot – Blessing for Seeing Fruit Trees in Bloom in the Spring

Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, for nothing is lacking in His universe, and He created good creatures and good trees in it, for mankind to benefit from them.

How beautiful is this tree!

If our holy Rabbis established a blessing for seeing the beauty of a tree, why did they also reject its beauty and say: "Rabbi Yaakov said: One who walks on the road while learning [Torah] and interrupts his learning and says: 'How beautiful is this tree! How beautiful is this plowed field!' – The Torah considers it as if is liable to death" (Avot 3:7)?

"Maran" (our revered teacher) Rav Kook explains that there are many levels in all aspects of the world. Individuals who possess exalted spirituality obviously see the light of Hashem shining in a tree, but the light of Hashem which is found in the Torah is even brighter. A tree contains life, but the Torah contains the "life of life," i.e. the very source of life. When a person who is learning Torah abandons the "life of life" for life, it is like abandoning life for a cessation of life. He is therefore liable to death (Orot Ha-Torah 9, 7).

Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, adds that everything depends on how one looks at the tree: Is it an independent creation detached from the source of life or is it connected to the Living G-d? The problem therefore is when he "interrupts his learning, meaning that he breaks his connection to the Master of the Universe to relate to the tree. The author of this Mishnah is in fact the same Rabbi Yaakov who says later on: "This world is like a lobby before the World to Come" (Avot 4:15). This means that this world does not have an independent importance, but its value comes from its connection to the World to Come (Le-Netivot Yisrael vol. 2, p. 144). Our Rabbi, Rav Tzvi Yehudah, taught this idea when he said: A million lights in the lobby also illuminate the banquet hall.

On account of the light, a lantern has value. On account of the soul, a body has value. On account of the Torah, the tree has value.

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Hilchot Birchat Ha-Ilanot – the Laws of the blessing of seeing trees

- This blessing is only recited once a year.
- One only recites this blessing when he sees two fruit tree, even if they are of the same type.
- Sefardim only recite this blessing in the month of Nisan, Ashkenazim recited it even in Adar and Iyar.
- We may recite this blessing even on Shabbat and at night.
- Women also recite this blessing.
- We may recite this blessing on a fruit tree which is in a pot or in a greenhouse
- Some have the custom to go out of the city to a place with many trees with a minyan to recite this blessing.



Text Message Responsa



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: Is it permissible to recite the bedtime Shema while lying down in bed?

A: It is permissible to recite it while on your side if you are already lying down. It is preferable to recite it while sitting or standing.

Q: With the help of Hashem, we will have a baby boy. Is it permissible to use a local aesthetic at the Brit Milah?

A: The custom is not to do so if the Brit Milah is performed at the proper age.

Q: Is it permissible to learn Torah with someone who is stubborn not to wear a kippah.

A: You should not learn with him, because one needs fear of Heaven; but you may teach him.

Q: I made a pool for my children in the backyard. Is it permissible during the Shemittah year to empty the water on to the lawn?

A: Yes. In this case, watering the lawn is an unintended act since it does not matter to you at this moment if it is for the benefit of the lawn or not. The same ruling applies to washing the floor (if as a result the water flows on to the lawn).

Q: Is it permissible to eat pareve chocolate without a hechsher when the ingredients are kosher?

A: It is forbidden and there is a need for a hechsher, since we are not experts regarding many ingredients (and some may contain non-kosher substances).



Stories of Rabbenu – Our Rabbi

Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook

Ha-Rabbanit Chavah Leah, our Rabbi's wife

A picture of Ha-Rabbanit Chavah Leah, taken before their wedding, hung in our Rabbi's home and everyone could see it. On her yahrtzeit, our Rabbi would weep and relate how he begged her not to go out and bring fire-wood to the sick in the Old City since she herself was sick. She nonetheless went and returned with pneumonia from which she died. Rav Hutner, her brother-in-law, said that the doctor gave her a shot and he did not know that she had a heart problem and she died from it. Our Rabbi, however, would not say such a thing.

Even forty years after she ascended on high, our Rabbi would speak with emotion and crying as if she had died that day. (Ha-Rav Yechezkel Greenwald)

Our Rabbi did not say "Eishet Chayil" before Kiddush on Shabbat night. When a student asked him about this, he somberly responded: I do not have an "Eishet Chayil" (woman of valor – since Ha-Rabbanit Chayah Leah died).

I am not a Rebbe

Our Rabbi said to his students: If you see a "hanhagah" (practice) which I perform, do not perform it. I am not a Rebbe. Eat a meal with me because it is "seudah shlishit" (the third meal of Shabbat), not because I am a Rebbe who passes out "Shirayim" ("leftover" – there is a custom to gather around a Chasidic Rebbe and to eat his leftovers). (Romem Eldobi)

Serving Torah Scholars

A student who was serving in our Rabbi's home was in doubt whether when Elisha poured water on Eliyahu's hands it was considered "serving Torah scholars" (Berachot 7b, Ein Aya – Berachot chap. 1:87). Once, when he brought our Rabbi a cup of tea, he asked: "Ha-Rav, is this serving a Torah scholar?" Our Rabbi was quiet for a long time and said: "It is unclear if I am worthy of being called a Torah scholar." He was quiet again and then added: "The essence of serving a Torah scholar is learning (halachic) reasoning as Rashi explains" (Berachot 47b). (Ha-Rav Eliyahu Mali)

Fear of Heaven

After the Yeshiva moved to the new building, our Rabbi noticed that there were students who were talking during davening, and he looked out them with a severe stare. The same occurred the next day, and then a third time. On that day after davening, he went to the library and cried. When he was asked about it, he responded: If my words are not heard, it is a sign that I do not have fear of Heaven (see Or Le-Netivotai 25, 308, 326). (Ha-Rav Yechezkel Greenwald)

Special thank you to Fred Casden for editing the Ateret Yerushalayim Parshah Sheet