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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

From the Teachings of Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner

Parashat Sheleach 5768 - #41

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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.

Amulets

[Q&A from Rav Aviner's radio call-in show]

Question:

What is Ha-Rav's opinion about using amulets?

Answer:

Quite simply, the main method of solving problems throughout the generations was NOT by using amulets. For example, Lot was captured, and Avraham Avinu did not make an amulet. He went to war. Yitzchak did not make amulets. Yaakov had all sorts of difficulties with Lavan, but he did not make amulets. Moshe Rabbenu did not make amulets even though he was in great danger. King David did not make amulets. Even afterwards in the time of the Mishnah, there were many problems in life. People were killed, people had no livelihood, but we do not find that they made amulets. We do not find in the Torah, the Tanach, the Mishnah, the Gemara, the Rishonim (early authorities) and the Achronim (later authorities) that the established way to solve problems was with amulets. If a person is sick, he goes to the doctor and he prays. If a person does not have a livelihood, he seeks a financial advisor and he prays (see Niddah 70b-71a). If it was proper to use amulets the Torah should have said: "Hashem said to Moshe, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel, and when a stressful situation befalls the Nation and when sickness afflicts you, write an amulet." Why didn't Moshe Rabbenu say this? Why isn't it written in the Mishnah? Why isn't it written in the Shulchan Aruch? In the laws of the sick, it should say: "Write amulets!" Why did they hide this solution from us? There are two possibilities: 1. They did not know about this solution. It is impossible to make such a claim, however, that we are greater sages than the earlier generations of the great Rabbis. 2. They knew about this solution, but they hid it from us. This is also impossible to say that they hid something which could help us.

It is true that amulets are mentioned, but in very rare cases. For example, the Gemara in Sukkah (53a-b) relates that King David was digging to prepare to build the Temple and suddenly water burst through. He took a note and wrote Hashem's Name on it and threw it in. These, however, are extremely rare cases. It is possible that in exceptional cases, after great deliberation, they used this method, but we see that this was not the main way that they tried

to solve problems. An exceptional case is a story about the Noda BiYehudah, who was one of the great halachic authorities and could be quite sharp. A woman who was getting married came to him and begged: "An amulet, an amulet, an amulet. It is life or death!" He had mercy on her and gave her an amulet. He told her: "Open it in a month. If what I wrote inside has disappeared, everything will be fine." She opened it and it was empty. Ah! This is an interesting story about this genius. We therefore say that we only act this way in rare cases.

I personally only gave an amulet once. A woman once came to me crying. Her husband said that it was forbidden to use the dishwasher. He said that it was afflicted by the evil eye. I talked and talked and talked with him, but to no avail. And who was washing the dishes in the meantime? The wife with the sore hands. The man then mentioned an amulet. I gave them an amulet. How did I get an amulet? During the Six-Day War, they were giving out millions of amulets, which were later thrown on the floor. I collected amulets from the floor so that they would not be disgraced and put them in a plastic bag. I took the amulet, hung it on the dishwasher and – Baruch Hashem – the dishwasher washed dishes the way it was supposed to. I recall my sin today. I had pity on this woman since it was impossible to convince the husband otherwise. He wasn't washing dishes. But this is not the usual way.

I am not talking about Sefer Chasidim of Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Chasid, who wrote in one place that amulets are nonsense, and in another place that one who uses an amulet in a court case will be successful. This is a well-known contradiction. Some explain that there are two types of amulets: On which works and one which does not work. Since we learn Torah, however, we clearly see that this is not the way. If amulets save, why are so many people sick? Why are so many people suffering? Why are so many people poor? And where were they when six million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust? We see that this is not the way of the Master of the Universe. I do not say this in my name. Look what is written in all of the books or – more precisely – what is not written.



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Q: I teach fifth grade girls and sometimes take them outside to pray, learn and talk about all sorts of subjects. I have no doubt that outside of the classroom I have deeper and more open discussions, and that they return to class in a more exalted state. One of my fellow teachers pointed out that it is forbidden to pray outside. Do I have to give up my "custom" with my students?

A: Since you do not daven outside with the girls on a regular basis but only periodically, it is acceptable and commendable.

Q: My friend threw an electric appliance in the garbage, since he thought it was broken. I took it and it works, do I have an obligation to return it to him?

A: It is proper to return it to him, since it was thrown out by mistake.

Q: How should I wash my hands after using the restroom, shaving, and before praying?

A: It is enough to pour water on each hand one time.

Q: Is it permissible to daven the Shemoneh Esrei while sitting down when traveling?

A: If the time for praying will be over.

Stories of Rabbenu – Our Rabbi

Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook

Faith

The two alefs

Our Rabbi would often say that we need to increase the two alefs (i.e. the two words which begin with the letter alef): "Ahavah – love" and "Emunah – faith." "Ahavah – love" refers to the love of the Nation of Israel. "Emunah – faith" is not only believing that Hashem created the world, took us out of Egypt, gave us the Torah, and brought us to the Land of Israel, but faith that Hashem reveals Himself in our time and redeems us today. This is the reason that a Jew will be asked by the heavenly court: "Did you await the salvation?" (Shabbat 30), and the "Ron" (Rabbenu Nissim) adds one word: "be-yamecha" - in your days, i.e. the recognition that every occurrence that is in your times is an act of Hashem. (Ha-Rav Chaim Druckman – Iturei Yerushalayim #18).

There is nothing by chance

A neighbor's letter once arrived at our Rabbi's house by mistake. He said to the student who was aiding him: "This is not for me, but for the person who lives upstairs. Please bring it to them." The student forgot. The next night, our Rabbi asked again, and the student forgot again. When our Rabbi asked a third time, the student said: "Ha-Rav, it is not so terrible, it just came here by accident." Our Rabbi scolded him: "There is no such thing in the world! Everything is from Hashem! How can something be by chance? How can you be brazen to say that this was by chance?" (Ha-Rav Yechezkel Greenwald – Iturei Yerushalayim #18)

It will be okay

When our Rabbi was in the hospital and people said to him: "It will be okay," he rejected this idea since it is based on the assumption that the past was bad. He would respond: "It is good now! It is always good!" (Ha-Rav Yechezkel Greenwald – Iturei Yerushalayim #18)

Resurrection of the Dead

The Kabbalist Rabbi Mordechai Atiyah once came to visit our Rabbi in his house. They spoke for a long time and when the students arrived for the regular class, they waited outside. The door suddenly opened and both of them left together and they continued their discussion on the way. Despite the severity of the pain in his leg, our Rabbi escorted Rav Atiyah down the stairs and the entire way to the car in order to honor his exalted guest. During the walk and when he was surrounded by all of the students, Rav Atiyah definitively stated from the midst of an exalted spirit: "I am certain that we will soon merit seeing the Resurrection of the Dead." Our Rabbi responded on the spot: The Maharshadam says in his responsa that there are two meanings of the concept of Resurrection of the Dead. The clear and obvious meaning is that the righteous will merit aiding the wicked to repent, those whom our Sages define as "they are dead in their lives," and by repenting they will merit to live anew (Orach Chaim #17). Our Rabbi made this statement in a loud voice so that all of the students who were around would hear. He seemingly did this in order to prevent the possibility of great

disappointment of those who waiting impatiently for the Resurrection of the Dead in its other meaning. (Ha-Rav David Goldenberg – Iturei Yerushalayim #18).

Heretics and apostates

When our Rabbi met with Ben Gurion, he explained the difference between heretics who are still part of the Nation of Israel and apostates who are no longer a part, as he would do when he began teaching the book "The Kuzari." Ben Gurion said to him: "Give me an example of a heretic so that I can understand who you are referring to." Our Rabbi responded: "There are many." Ben Gurion stubbornly and forcefully repeated: "Nonetheless, give me an example." Our Rabbi later explained to the students: "What did he want me to do? To say to him: You!" Our Rabbi continued to explain that apostates, missionaries, have left the Nation of Israel. Ben Gurion again asked for an example. This time our Rabbi responded: "Rufeisen." (He was born a Jew, but converted to Christianity during the Holocaust and became a Carmelite Monk and missionary. He applied to become a citizen of Israel as a Jew under the Law of Return. He wanted to increase his influence and show that it is possible to be a Jew and a Christian. He is known as "Brother Daniel"). Our Rabbi positively noted that Ben Gurion's spontaneous reaction was a Jewish one: "What is there to talk about?! He is not a Jew!" And the Supreme Court of Israel in fact refused to accept his application.



Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Stories of our Rabbi (from Iturei Cohanim #153)

Q: Why do you publish these stories? Occasionally, the stories are unclear in their message or content. What is the overall meaning of these stories? Doesn't the publication of these stories have the potential to cause shame to our Rabbi from people who do not understand or misinterpret the purpose of these stories?

A: The benefit and meaning of publicizing "Stories of Rabbenu – our Rabbi" is that just as we are obligated to learn from the teachings of our great Rabbis, so too are we obligated to learn from their actions, character traits and practices. The entire Torah and Gemara are full of such teachings. The Gemara instructs us regarding honor, love, and awe of Torah scholars. The essence is certainly the Torah learning and ethical guidance we receive from Torah scholars, but there is also a place to have a personal connection with them and witness proper conduct. Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, also wrote a booklet "Le-Shelosh Be-Elul" about the ways and practices of Maran (our revered teacher) Rav Kook. In our case, all of us who knew our Rabbi a lot or a little are writing about him. Regarding your comment that occasionally the message or content of the stories are unclear, it is certainly possible. These stories go through a process of serious consideration and editing before being published, but it is nonetheless possible that there is something unclear or even in error. It is therefore extremely important to receive critical comments and for us to take them into consideration in order to change the style, add a clarification, or omit a story altogether.

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