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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 Chukat 5768 - #43

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Would you like to ask Rav Aviner a question? E-mail mororly@bezeqint.net and the answers will come from Rav Aviner in 1 of 3 ways: 1. Drawn from his published material. 2. From my own records of questions and answers 3. If the question has not, to my knowledge, been answered in either of these sources, I will ask the question directly from the Rav.

Food for the Satiated or the Hungry?

[Parashah sheet "Mayanei Ha-Yeshua" – Parashat Shemini 5768]

If a miracle occurred and you were saved through the kindness of Hashem, it is good that you make a meal of thanksgiving at that time and date every year to publicize the wonders of Hashem. But there is another possibility: Give the money to the poor so that they can eat. This will certainly bring joy to the Master of the Universe, who sustains everyone.

If you complete a tractate of the Gemara or a holy book, it is certainly good to make a meal to celebrate the "siyum." But there is no obligation to invite many people or even ten people. You can have it by yourself and give the money you save to the poor.

A "chanukat ha-bayit – dedicating a house" is a proper custom. This means that the first use of the house should be for a holy purpose, such as Torah learning or prayer. But there is no obligation to eat. Since one should begin with a holy act, it is better to give the money to the hungry than to the satiated. As is known, in the State of Israel, a huge amount of people live below the poverty line, which is defined by the Government as a monthly salary of 2000 shekels for an individual and 3100 shekels for a couple. This is really not a lot of money.

One should certainly make a "seudat mitzvah" (festive meal) to celebrate a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, a Pidyon Ha-Ben or a Brit Milah. But the meal should be modest, since your guests have respectable houses and already have eaten or will eat. You can give the remaining money to the poor who live under the poverty line, which according to the above mentioned definition is 1,700,000 people. This is a lot of people. We do not have to tell you that a wedding is expensive: the hall, the food, the band, the photographer, etc... One should certainly rejoice on the day when a family is created in Israel, but there is no reason to exaggerate. You must remember that families already exist in Israel, and they live below the

poverty line. This is a fifth of the families in Israel, and it would be a wonderful beginning for the newly-married couple to help them.

A memorial for the departed is also holy. But one should remember the living whose lives are impoverished. Helping them would certainly honor the deceased.

Similarly, some have the custom to write a Sefer Torah in memory of the deceased. But in place of writing a Torah, it is possible to give life to the destitute, and this may even be a greater act. And regarding a meal for completing the Sefer Torah, the Torah would certainly be happy to pass it up and give it to the downtrodden.

Buying an etrog is a mitzvah. We should certainly buy a beautiful etrog as a "hiddur mitzvah – glorification of the mitzvah," but a "hiddur mitzvah" is only adding another one-third to the price. You can give the rest of the money to someone who cannot buy the fruit of an etrog tree or even fruit to eat.

If this is the case for a definite mitzvah, it is all the more so for acts which are not definite mitzvot, such as traveling to "kivrei tzadikim – the graves of the righteous," or things which are not mitzvot at all, such as amulets and all types of "segulot" (spiritual remedies). If you are looking for a "segulah," the greatest "segulah" is giving tzedakah. The Gemara in Shabbat (156b) says that astrologers told Rabbi Akiva that the day his daughter gets married, she will be bitten by a snake and die. He was obviously very worried. On the day of her "Chupah," she took a decorative pin out of her hair and inserted it in to the wall, and it struck a snake in its eye. In the morning, she when she removed it, the dead snake came out after it. Rabbi Akiva asked her: what good thing did you do? She said: On the day of the wedding, a poor person came to the door and because everyone else was busy with the meal, no one heard him. I took the portion you gave me, and gave it to him. Rabbi Akiva said: "Tzedakah saves one from death."

A birthday is very nice. Give respect and love. One day I received a letter from a young child from America: "Everyone gave me money for my birthday. I am sending it to you. Give it to poor children." What an amazing child!

And there are new creations, such as "amen meals" and parties for separating challah, but... When I say "poor," I do not mean people who ask for money in the street or who go from house to house, the Rabbis estimate that 90% of them are swindlers. I mean real poor people, including the elderly and single mothers. You can give them money if you know them personally, though a social worker or through known and trustworthy tzedakah organizations which have been checked.

At the same time, we should obviously struggle to expand governmental aid. While there is a great deal of aid, Baruch Hashem, there is still not enough. We should certainly enact laws to aid the poor and create local work for them, but in the meantime, it is incumbent upon us to help them.



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: Do I have to remove pareve food from a table if I am going to bring fleishig food and want to eat the pareve food with milchig food later?

A: Yes, unless you are positive that it will not touch the fleischig food.

Q: Which is preferable – davening with a minyan at seven in the morning or "Vatikin" (davening Shemoneh Esrei at sunrise) without a minyan?

A: Davening with a minyan is preferable. Also, one who davens "Vatikin" without a minyan need to join a minyan later to hear the prayers which require a minyan (Kaddish, Kedushah, Torah Reading, etc...).

Q: Is it permissible to eat a hard-boiled egg in a non-Jewish hotel outside of Israel?

A: No, because of the prohibition of eating "bishul goyim" (food cooked by a non-Jew) and it may also be cooked in a non-kosher pot.

Q: When I recite "Birkat Cohanim," is it permissible to intend the prayer for a particular person in the shul?

A: "Birchat Cohanim" is for the entire community including this person. You can personally bless this person after the davening.

Q: Is it permissible to set up a man and woman who will most probably not observe the laws of family purity if they get married or is it a problem on account of "do not place a stumbling block before the blind"?

A: It is a mitzvah, since they also have an obligation to marry. There is no problem of "do not place a stumbling block," since the transgression is not occurring at the time of the suggestion and there is no transgression in the marriage itself.

Q: Is it permissible to make a personal phone call at work?

A: On condition that it is necessary and brief, - they will certainly allow this.

Q: My friend goes to a discotheque while wearing his kippah. Is it worthwhile for me to tell him to take it off when doing so?

A: No, since his kippah informs everyone that he believes and accepts the mitzvot even if not in their complete sense.

Q: Is it really possible to really say that the Neturei Karta are Jewish? Haven't they left "Klal Yisrael"?

A: They are certainly G-d-fearing Jews, despite their error.

Q: When I lead the davening, I swallow the words. What should I do if I am asked to lead the davening?

A: Do not do so.

Q: Is there a problem for a young woman to remain as the only person on the bus with a male driver at night?

A: It is permissible, since the road has other people who drive on it.

Q: Is it permissible to benefit from the beauty of a church?

A: It is forbidden to benefit from idol worship in any way and any form.

Stories of Rabbenu – Our Rabbi

Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook

Herzl

Our Rabbi encouraged one of his students who was a baal teshuvah (a Jew who returned to being observant) to read Herzl's diaries.

Herzliyah (a city on the coast of Israel named after Herzl)

When the Yemenite Chief Rabbi of Herzliyah was installed, our Rabbi said: Secular Zionism marches with Herzl, and we march with Herzl and Herzliyah (Herzl plus "Kah" – one of Hashem's Names).

The Balfour Declaration

Our Rabbi related that he heard from Ha-Gaon Ha-Rav Menachem Mendel Kashar ztz"l (author of "Torah Sheleimah" and Shut Divrei Menachem) that during the period that the British Government was deliberating "The Balfour Declaration," to give the Jewish Nation a national homeland, the Jewish world was raging. Besides the wealthy British aristocracy who were opposed to it, there were some other small groups. Some of the public figures of "Agudat Yisrael" organized a gathering in Vienna whose purpose was to prepare a document to send to the British Government which said: "We pass on your favors." At the head of the gathering were the great authorities, Rav Yosef Engel ztz"l, Rav Meir Arik ztz"l and one other great Rabbi. They saw that the three Rabbis were whispering between themselves regarding the contents of the suggested document, and Rav Engel suddenly stood up and announced: "The hand which signs should be cut off!" With this, the gathering ended. (Ha-Rav Yitzchak Dadon in the book "Nishkafah Kemo Shachar," pp. 29-30 – Iturei Yerushalayim #6)

The State

A student said: "This is the State which the prophets promised?" Our Rabbi stopped him and said: "This is exactly the State which they promised!" (Ha-Rav Yeshayahu Doron and see Le-Netivot Yisrael vol. 2, p. 159 – Iturei Yerushalayim #6)



Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Tours of Cemetery

Q: There is a group that organizes tours in East Jerusalem. One of the tours is to the cemetery on Har Ha-Zeitim (Mt. of Olives). Is it permissible to go on an educational tour of a Jewish cemetery?

A: It is permissible.

Billable hours

Q: I am a lawyer and took a contract job which involves use of my own computer and logging onto a distant computer. I get paid for hours worked. I realized that some documents were loading very slowly. I thought that if I changed the memory settings on my computer, they might speed up. I started this procedure, the computer froze, and I lost 15 minutes of time. When I finally logged back on, the documents continued to load at their old pace--the slowness was not my own computer after all, but the employer's remote computer. When I submit my hours, should I subtract 15 minutes since I didn't do the substantive work, or should I charge for them because I was trying to improve my efficiency at doing my employer's work (even though I failed at doing so)?

A: It does not matter that you were unable to accomplish anything in that period of time. Since your goal was to help them to the best of your ability, you may charge them for your time.



Family Matters - Ha-Rav writes weekly for the parashah sheet "Rosh Yehudi" on family relationships

You Can Be Helped

Q: We are engaged and are soon to be married, but dark clouds cover the sky of our future. We argue all of the time and usually over inconsequential things. We hang between hope and despair. We should be approaching the happiest day of our lives, but we are trembling instead of being joyous. What should we do?

A: You should turn to a marriage counselor, or more precisely, a pre-marriage counselor. There is no shame in turning to a marriage counselor in general and to a pre-marriage counselor in particular. There are two extremes: on the one hand, there are people who want to solve all of their problems on their own. If they are unsuccessful, however, they prefer to dwell in the depths instead of reaching out for help. On the other hand, there are people who are lazy and are not ready to exert themselves, but since they do not exert effort, they do not accomplish anything. We say: a person must exert effort to solve his problems on his own, and if he is unsuccessful, he should search for help. There is no shame in this. You help me at times, I help you at times. This is why we have friends and why there is a societal structure. A pre-marriage counselor is a brilliant step. Every doctor will tell you the importance of early detection in which illnesses can be cured with relative ease. There are in fact various levels among people:

1. There are married couples who seriously argue, but refuse to seek counseling and they remain together in the depths. They are fools.
2. There are married couples who are up to their necks in water who seek professional counseling and are saved from the distress. They are wise.
3. There are married couples who seek marriage counseling when a seemingly unsolvable problem arises before it develops into a major difficulty. They are geniuses.
4. There are engaged couple who experience tension and turn to a counselor in order to marry in love, brotherhood, peace and friendship. They are Einsteins!

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