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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/shut.html). On the Air presents a sample each week.

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Returning a lost object

Q: How do I return a bracelet which I found in the Central Bus Station?

A: Obviously, hanging a sign will be on no benefit, since no one will look at it. You can do three things:

1. Bring it to the lost and found of the Central Bus Station. Perhaps the owner will look for it there.
2. Bring it to the Police Station. Maybe the owner does not know that he lost it in the bus station.
3. There is an internet site for lost objects in Israel – www.ebood.com – where you can post it.

Q: What if no one claims it?

A: If a person knows that he lost it, despairs from finding it and then you find it, it is yours since you found an ownerless object. But if he does not realize that he lost it before you found it, you must return it, and you would have to hold on to it all of your life. But since the chances of him coming are slim, you should record the details and value of the object in a diary and you can use it. If he eventually claims it, you should give him the value of the bracelet.

Praying for an evil non-Jew to die

Q: Is it permissible to pray for evil non-Jews to die such as the President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad?

A: Yes. Why not? See the book "Mesillat Yesharim" (end of chap. 19) that it is a pious act to pray for evil Jews to repent. In general, we do pray for non-Jews to repent as we say in the prayer "Aleinu": "To repair the world of Shaddai, and for all living flesh to call Your name, and for all the wicked of the Earth to turn to You. May all the world's inhabitants recognize and know that to You every knee must bend and every tongue must swear loyalty." This is certainly our aspiration, but we have not heard that it is a problem to pray for a particular evil non-Jew to die. One should obviously pray with humility, since Hashem does not necessarily have to do for that which we pray. How we prayed and prayed for the death of Hitler, may his name be blotted out, but we suffered greatly by his hand. It is, however, permissible to do so in principle.

Writing a Torah or giving tzedakah to those who learn Torah

Q: Which is preferable – to write a Sefer Torah or to donate money to those who learn Torah?

A: A person is commanded to write a Torah. But what is the purpose? In order to learn Torah, not in order for it to sit in the Ark. Therefore, the Rosh (Tur, Yoreh Deah 270) followed by the Sha'agat Aryeh (#31) ruled that today one should buy printed books, chumashim in particular, in order to fulfill this mitzvah, since people now learn from books. This is a leniency. But there is also a stringency: you must also buy a Mishnah, Gemara, halachic authorities, etc... and you must learn them, since the essence is learning. Therefore, in order to fulfill all of the opinions, we participate in the completion of writing a Torah. A few times, I was invited to complete the writing of a Torah and with a trembling hand, I filled in one letter and it is considered as if I wrote the Torah. Regarding the question of which is preferable – writing a Torah or donating money to those who learn Torah, this is discussed by the Chayei Adam (Hilchot Sefer Torah, klal 31). He says that people mistakenly think that writing a Torah is most important. But this is in error since the purpose of Torah is for people to learn it. He therefore says that one should donate money to those learn Torah. He then adds that there is something is worse, when people have a "Hachnasat Sefer Torah," it is accompanied by eating and drinking, etc... People spend all of this money to feed those who are not hungry instead of giving the money to those who learn Torah. We should certainly have a "Hachnasat Sefer Torah" with singing and dancing and joy, but we do not need to eat all of the time. A religion of food! People are mistaken: in place of writing a Torah, they should give tzedakah to those who learn Torah.

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