



## On the Air with Rav Aviner - #79

From Ha-Rav's weekly radio program in Israel

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### "Body Worlds" museum exhibit

Question: Why are the Ultra-Orthodox and the Chief Rabbi trying to prevent the exhibit "Body Worlds," which is an exhibition of preserved human bodies from German citizens who donated their body for this purpose, from appearing at the Israel National Museum of Science in Haifa? Two petitions against the exhibit are already making their way to the High Court of Justice, and Ultra-Orthodox leaders in the country vowed to stage mass rallies against it. Rav Yona Metzger – the Chief Rabbi – unequivocally ruled that "such an exhibit has no place in the Holy Land, and I therefore recommend that you don't get involved in this...The Jewish people, who take great care to honor and bury their dead, must extend the same treatment to non-Jewish deceased, so as not to prompt animosity and hatred towards the Jewish people." The Chief Rabbi further wrote that in the event that such an exhibit was to be held in Israel, "Our outcry would reach the ends of the earth." What is Ha-Rav's opinion?

Answer: If the Chief Rabbinate has already ruled that it is forbidden, it is forbidden. They are the ones who decide. A discussion of this issue is not really connected to embalming. Embalming is done to honor the deceased so that the body does not decompose. According to the Halachah, embalming is forbidden. Authorities permitted it in the rare case that the

deceased was being brought from far away – such as being brought to Eretz Yisrael – and there was a fear that the body would reek and decompose. This is the explanation of why Yosef embalmed Yaakov Avinu. Embalming is only to honor the deceased, but embalming a corpse to exhibit it in a museum is shaming the dead. The same strictures do not apply to non-Jewish corpses as they do for Jewish corpses, as Maran Ha-Rav Kook explained in Shut Da'at Cohain (#199). Just as a Jew has many strictures in life, he also has many strictures regarding his burial. There are many disputes regarding a non-Jewish corpse: if it is permissible to have benefit from a non-Jewish corpse, if there is a prohibition of "Bal Talin" (leaving the corpse unburied overnight), if there is a prohibition not to bury the corpse at all, if there is a prohibition of having an autopsy, etc... Many authorities permit an autopsy on a non-Jewish corpse for medical purposes and they rely on all of the lenient position, since medical needs are life-saving. But there is no medical need here! It is therefore not possible to rely on the lenient positions. Some people say that the goal of the exhibit is to teach the proper balance of one's body and proper health practices, and that this is a medical need. It is possible to compare them, but they are not the same. A medical student needs to learn on an actual corpse (although some argue that it is possible to learn on a plastic model), but there is no need for an actual corpse in order to teach the general public. In our days, it is possible to make excellent plastic models and they are even less expensive than using real corpses.

#### Bedikat and Biur Chametz for someone who will be away all Pesach

Q: If someone will be away for all of Pesach, does he perform Bedikat Chametz (checking for chametz)?

A: A person can include all of his chametz in the sale of chametz. If I sell the chametz in my closet, I do not need to search for chametz in the closet. In our case, the entire house or apartment is like a closet and he is exempt from cleaning it and checking it. There are some who say however that the obligation to check chametz is the night of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan and the sale of chametz only takes place during the day of the 14<sup>th</sup>. As a result, the chametz is mine at the time of Bedikat Chametz. But the Rabbis did not obligate one to clean and search for something which will not be his in the end. But this is all with the condition that one is not lending his home to a friend who is eating at a neighbor's. And there is an additional problem: if one does not perform Bedikat Chametz, he loses out on a mitzvah. Therefore, if I arrive at the place I will spend Pesach on the night on the 14<sup>th</sup>, I check there with a blessing. If I will not, in order not to lose the mitzvah, I can clean one room in my house such as the entrance way – which is not difficult – and I check there without a blessing.

#### Selling chametz for a house which does not have chametz

Q: If someone does not have any chametz in his house, does he still need to sell his chametz?

A: Yes, because maybe he had has some and forgot. Maybe he has some medicine which contains chametz, some alcohol which is chametz, or a package of biscuits stuck in some corner. It is impossible to be certain, and even if he is certain, he should sell it.

#### Kashering a barbeque for Pesach

Q: Is it permissible to use a barbeque for Pesach which I only used for meat during the rest of the year, but washed in the sink with chametz utensils?

A: You should clean it well and place it on the fire for an hour which will burn everything off.

#### Giving a little tzedakah to many or a lot of tzedakah to one person

Q: Is giving tzedakah to a large family considered giving tzedakah to many people?

A: It is written in Pirkei Avot (3:15): everything is according to the majority of one's actions. The Rambam explains there that it is preferable to give one shekel per person to ten people than give ten shekels to one person since every act refines a person's soul. This is all based on his performing many acts and this is not so if he gives money to ten people from the same family in one act. But one should also take something else into account: if I give a shekel to ten poor people, it is not much help since there is not much to buy with one shekels but if I give ten shekels to one person, it is worth something. Thus, from the perspective of the elevation of the giver, it is preferable to perform many smaller acts and from the perspective of the benefit of the recipient it is preferable to receive a larger one time sum. Therefore, giving to a large family is only considered one act.

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