



Tazria-Metzora 5769

Prepared by Rabbi Mordechai Friedfertig

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Genuine Spiritual Aids

[from "Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah" – Parashat Shoftim 5769 – translated by R. Blumberg]

People oftentimes turn to Rabbis asking for "segulot" [spiritual aids or shortcuts] to help the sick. Besides going to the doctor, they look for spiritual tricks, recitation of a particular verse, or an amulet, just so there is some change for the better. Unfortunately, they are searching in vain for something that does not exist.

Some will respond: "Who says? My aunt had no children, she used a 'segulah' and now, thank G-d, there are children around her table." Yet someone else had a childless aunt who used no "segulah," and children were born to her anyway. The fact is that ten percent of barren couples experience spontaneous cures without knowing the cause.

It is impossible to build one's life on "segulot!" If someone has financial, health, or family problems, the answer is this: "Repentance, prayer and tzedakah ward off the evil decree!" One should pray to G-d, recite psalms, recite the regular prayers printed in the prayer book with feeling, from start to finish. All of this takes great devotion. And, he should repent! Yet people then ask: "How should one repent? Should one pray at the Western Wall?" Certainly the Western Wall is a holy place, but a person has to repent for his sins, those between man and G-d and those between man and man. He should give tzedakah to the poor, increase his kind acts to everybody, to his friends and neighbors, near and far, and to his parents, his children and his spouse. He should give of his money and his advice, his time and his energy. He should visit the sick, etc...

"Repentance, prayer and charity ward off the evil decree!" These are our spiritual resources, and there is no need to look for all kinds of strange things. Where are all of these strange things mentioned? In the Torah? In the Tanach? In the Mishnah? Is it written that when our great Sages had troubles, they used "segulot," with mezuzot and amulets? Where have we heard of such a thing? Not in the Torah, not in the Mishnah and not in the Talmud. Rather, they prayed and they repented and performed kind deeds. "The iniquity of Eli's house shall never be purged with sacrifice nor offering." (Shmuel 1 3:14). The Rabbis ask how is it that Abaye and Rava, who were from the line of Eli, lived long lives? They answer that Rava learned much Torah and performed many kind deeds. "A living Torah and lovingkindness" have the power to ward off a decree as harsh as dying young. Torah learning is certainly a genuine spiritual aid.



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: What should I do if my baby is crying in bed and I am in the middle of the Shemoneh Esrei?

A: It is permissible to go to him without talking.

Q: Is it permissible to travel outside of Israel for "Hitbodedut" (secluded meditation)?

A: Certainly not. It is possible to do so in Israel. Furthermore, one can have inner secluded meditation of closeness to Hashem in thought and emotion surrounded by others as our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, taught (Or Le-Netivotai 189).

Q: What should I do in order to avoid giving into temptation and touching my fiancée?

A: Meet in places where there are many people present.

Q: Is it permissible to learn Torah while I lay on my back?

A: One should learn with fear and awe, i.e. standing or sitting with an awe of holiness. But if a person is tired and needs to lie down, it is certainly proper to learn Torah at that time. One should lay on one's side as much as possible when doing so.

Q: Is there an obligation to kiss the mezuzah each time I pass?

A: No, but it shows a love of the mitzvah.

Q: Is it permissible to wear a piece of clothing made from non-kosher animals?

A: Yes.

Q: Is it permissible to put a backpack with holy books in it on the floor?

A: Yes, the bottom of the bag blocks them from being on the floor.

Q: How many prayers are women obligated each day?

A: Some say all of Shacharit and Minchah. Others say any prayer in any language and any formula each day, and it can be fulfilled by reciting the Morning Blessings.

Q: Is it permissible to color Tefillin black with a magic marker?

A: Yes. It is not from a non-kosher animal.

Q: Am I obligated to wash "netilat yadayim" every time I enter the bathroom which contains a shower as well if I enter to do the wash or brush my teeth?

A: No. It is not considered a bathroom like in the times of the Gemara.

Q: Is it permissible to place a Tanach on a Chumash?

A: No. The holiness of the Chumash is greater.

Q: When one opens a Tanach, it is possible that the Prophets (of less holiness) will be on the Chumash (of greater holiness). Can they still be bound together?

A: The Rambam therefore refrained from binding them together (Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 285). But the Halachah is that it is permissible to bind them together.

Stories of Rabbenu — Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook

Our Rabbi & Yom Ha-Shoah – Part 2

In preparation for Yom Ha-Shoah, a Rabbi in a yeshiva for younger students brought a film to show the students which included pictures which were shot by the evil ones during the Holocaust. There were those who sharply criticized the use of this medium to influence the student through images. When our Rabbi was asked about this matter, he responded that one must deepen awareness of the Holocaust in every possible way. (Gadol Shimusha pg. 80)

Our Rabbi said that it would have been appropriate to lay Eichman down on the ground and to have all of Israel step on him and trample him.

He once told his students that he recites "Av Ha-Rachamim" on every Shabbat and even Shabbat Yom Tov, Shabbat Rosh Chodesh and Shabbat Mevarchim (when we bless the new month). The Rabbis established this prayer over the decrees of Tach ve-Tat (Chelminski Massacres - 5408-5409), and although these decrees were horrible, they were like nothing compared to those of the Holocaust. And although they refrained from saying it on special Shabbatot, after the Holocaust, it is surely appropriate to recite it every Shabbat. As was his way, he did not force the students but rather said: "I recite it, and if this is your desire, act this way." And this is in fact how they acted from then on in our Rabbi's minyan. He would recite "Av Ha-Rachamim" with great emotion, and many times tears could be seen in his eyes. (Sefer Tzvi Kodesh pp. 240-241)



Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

The Prayer for the State of Israel

Q: Is there are obligation to stand for the Prayer for the State of Israel after the Expulsion from Gush Katif?

A: There is clearly no source regarding this matter since it is a new prayer. One can stand or sit, it is unimportant. It does not strengthen the State if one stands and it does not weaken the State if one sits. Each place should act as it desires. It is obviously not connected to the Expulsion from Gush Katif. Even before the Expulsion, there were problems: violations of Shabbat, a problematic system of justice, etc... If the Government is acting inappropriately we should recite this prayer twice. If someone is sick, we pray for him. If he becomes sicker, we pray more. Maran (our revered teacher) Ha-Rav Kook wrote that our Nation is sick, but it will heal. Whether standing or sitting, what is important is that we pray for it to heal. Fortunate is the Nation who loves to argue in shul regarding proper practice instead of arguing over money, riches, glory, etc...

*From Rav Aviner's Commentary on Birkat Ha-Mazon,
entitled Shir Ha-Ma'alot*

[From the Psalm Recited before Birkat Ha-Mazon on Weekdays
By the rivers of Babylon (Psalm 137)]

"Remember, Hashem, to the Edomites, the day of Jerusalem"

King David saw through the spirit of prophecy not only the destruction of the First Temple by the rivers of Babylon, but also the destruction of the Second Temple by the Edomites, who are the Romans (Midrash Shochar Tov 522 and Targum Yonatan). The "day of Jerusalem" was a horrible and bitter day, the day of the destruction of Jerusalem. How fortunate are we that we have merited the building of the Land of Israel and Jerusalem. The same expression "Yom Yerushalayim - Jerusalem Day," has been transformed from bitterness to sweetness, from darkness to light.

"Praiseworthy is he who will clutch and dash your infants against the rock"

How is it possible to do something so cruel!? Relax, the Children of Israel are the merciful ones, the children of merciful ones, and they never have and never will perpetrate such an act. But non-Jews have surely acted in this way. When the prophet Elisha came to Damascus to anoint Chazel to be king of Aram, he burst into weeping (Melachim 2 8:11). "And Chazel said: Why does my master weep? And he answered: Because I know the evil that you will do to the Children of Israel...and you will dash their infants" (verse 12). And this is indeed what the Babylonians did to infants during the destruction of the First Temple (Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra), as is mentioned in the kinot (lamentations recited on Tisha Be-Av). It is therefore possible to understand our sentiments. The Psalm does not say, however, that we would ever actually do this. In any event, it is better to transform feelings of distress to feelings of anger, and feelings of mourning into feelings of revenge. The Russian writer and thinker Tolstoy was an extreme pacifist. He thought that it was enough to merely have goodwill in order to bring peace into the world and not to use violence even in response to violence. A man asked him: And if you saw someone crushing a baby's skull? He responded: This would never happen! He did not see the Nazis. With G-d's help, we now have an army, and one who tries to injure one Jewish baby, a million soldiers will rise up against him.

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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim P.O.B. 1076 Jerusalem 91009 Tel.02-6284101 Fax.02-6261528

www.ateret.org.il To subscribe, send e-mail to: mororly@bezeqint.net

