



Parashat Vaera - #313

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Mazal Tov When Someone Drops a Plate

[Shut She'eilat Shlomo 1:481]

Question: When someone drops a plate or glass and it breaks on the floor, there are always those who yell: Mazal Tov, and even clap in joy. Is this proper?

Answer:

1. One should certainly not do this, since it embarrasses someone in public, which is a severe prohibition. The Gemara in Berachot (43b) says that it is better for one to throw himself into a fiery furnace than to embarrass another person in public. Rabbenu Yonah explains that it is better to die than to violate embarrassing another person in public since it has an aspect of murdering another person (commentary on Pirkei Avot 3:15).
2. Hillel the Elder already responded to the potential convert who wanted to learn the entire Torah while standing on one foot: What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow (Shabbat 31a). If I dropped a plate, I certainly would not like someone to yell "Mazal Tov" to me in public, and I should therefore not do so to others.
3. If one wishes to respond, he should do a kindness and help him pick up the pieces of the plate. There are three characteristics which distinguish the Jewish People: they are merciful, they are bashful and they are performers of acts of kindness (Yevamot 79a).

Rav Aviner on...

The Ten Commandments for Asking Rabbis Questions

Compiled by Rabbi Mordechai Tzion, based on the

1. "Acquire for Yourself a Rabbi." (Avot 1:6)

This principle is not obligatory. One may ask several Rabbis a question, and if someone wants a lenient ruling, he is allowed to turn to a Rabbi who is known to give such a ruling. "If someone wishes to follow the rulings of Beit Shammai, he may, and if he wishes to follow Beit Hillel, he may" (Eruvin 6b). But one must be consistent.

Nonetheless, the best way to grow in Torah and the fear of G-d is to select a Rabbi who will most increase one's good traits, fear of G-d and Torah wisdom.

2. When to Ask Questions

Anything that a person can solve himself he should solve himself and not ask a Rabbi. Maran Ha-Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaCohain Kook presented a parable in Orot Ha-Torah (5:4): Some people always go places on foot. They may well indeed be strong and courageous, yet they arrive at their destination slowly, and cannot get to places necessitate riding on a horse. There are other people who always ride a horse, arriving everywhere quickly, yet they are lazy do-nothings. And there are still others who walk whenever they can, but ride a horse whenever they cannot walk.

It is the same with asking Rabbis questions. There are people who decide everything on their own. That is a problem, for with deep, complex questions one must take council with the Torah, and "the letters of the Torah are horses of fire". And then there are those who check everything out with the Torah. That is a problem as well, because one should exercise one's mind. Finally, there are people who decide what they can on their own, and what they cannot decide on their own, they bring to their Rabbi. That is the ideal path.

3. Precise Wording and the Art of Summarizing

It is important to learn the art of summarizing, i.e., relate only the necessary details to the Rabbi. It pays to write out the question precisely and to read it out loud instead of rambling on at length. Indeed, a halachic ruling is composed of two elements: the situation and the law (Commentary of the Gra on Mishlei 22:12).

One time a Rabbi was learning with his son-in-law. When someone would come to ask a question, the Rabbi would answer him and then they would continue learning. One day a woman arrived with meat and asked whether it was Kosher. The son-in-law said, "I'm just the son-in-law. The great Rabbi went out, and he will be back in an hour." The woman responded, "I don't have an hour. My children are home, crying. You tell me what the law is!" The son-in-law looked in the Shulchan Aruch, asked questions, found answers, clarified, came up with an operating principle, and in accordance with that principle issued a ruling.

Just at that moment the great Rabbi returned. The son-in-law said: "It's good you're back. This woman came here with this piece of liver. I asked questions, found answers, clarified, came up with an operating principle and issued a ruling."

The Rabbi answered: "Very good! But it's not liver, it's a spleen..."

The Rabbi must understand both the situation and the halachah.

So, the person asking the question has to be precise with his question. Most of the time, Ha-Rav repeats the question, in order to be certain that he has understood the reality of the situation.

Shlomo Ha-Melech did just that in the case of the two women, as it says in Choshen Mishpat 17:7: "The judge must hear what the two litigants say, and he must repeat

their points, as it says: The King said: 'One says, 'This is my son, the live one...'' (Melachim 1 3:23). The Rabbi must first get matters clear in his head, and then issue a ruling. For him to do this, one needs to provide him with accurate, specific information.

4. Non-practical Questions

One may ask a Rabbi a question that has no practical ramifications, or without intending to follow the Rabbi's ruling, but one must inform the Rabbi of this in advance. When a Rabbi is issuing a ruling that is going to be followed, he makes much more of an effort. So one should not deceive him.

When Ha-Rav Meir Brandesdorfer, author of *Shut Knei Bosem* and a member of the Beit Din of the Eidah Ha-Chareidit, was asked a halachic question, he would sometimes respond by asking in return, "Tell me the truth: Does this question have practical bearing?" When asked about this, he would explain that when a Rabbi issues a ruling with practical bearing, he has special, Divine assistance directing him to the truth of Torah. Another time he said, "A Rabbi is not an answer factory".

He also pointed out that all of the responses of the Rishonim and Achronim were written based on questions that were sent from all around the world, except for *Shut Terumat Ha-Deshen*, as brought in the *Shach*, *Yoreh Deah* 196:20 (The author himself invented the questions). This is so because a change in a small detail can change the halachic ruling (*Heichal Hora'ah*, pp. 17-18).

5. Those Present, and the Locale

One must take note of who else is present when one is asking a Rabbi a question. If it is a personal matter or a matter for discretion, it should not be asked with others present. Likewise, one cannot clarify important matters while walking along the street. Rather, one must approach the Rabbi in a serious manner in an appropriate place.

Ha-Rav Moshe Mordechai Ha-Levi Shulsinger related that he was told by Ha-Rav Yechezkel Abramsky, author of the work *Chazon Yechezkel*, "When you ask a question and expect an answer, look around to see if there is anyone in the vicinity whose presence could keep the Rabbi from answering, and if so, be prepared not to ask the question. We derive this from *Akeidat Yitzchak*. The whole time Yitzchak wanted to ask his father, 'Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?' but he thought the presence of the lads there would keep Avraham from answering him. Therefore, only after Avraham told them, "Stay here with the donkey," and Avraham and Yitzchak walk on alone, did Yitzchak ask.

Rav Shulsinger found a source for this idea in the *Talmud Yerushalmi* (*Sanhedrin* 1:2). Rabbi Yirmiya asked Rabbi Zeira: Isn't the city of Lod in Yehudah? He answered: Yes. He asked: Why then don't they intercalate the year there? Rabbi Zeira said: Because they are arrogant and lack Torah. Rabbi Zeira turned around and saw Rabbi Acha and Rabbi Yudah ben Pazi standing behind him (The *Pnei Moshe* explains that they were from Lod). Rabbi Zeira said to Rabbi Yirmiya: What have you done now?! The *Pnei Moshe* explains his word: You saw them, and you shouldn't have asked this question in their presence (*Pninei Mishmar Ha-Levi*, pp. 132-133).

6. Understanding the Rabbi's Answer

Listen well to the Rabbi's answer instead of guessing what he's going to say. The reason we ask Rabbis questions is to receive an answer from them, and not from ourselves. Sometimes we ask a Rabbi a question and he answers, "I don't know," or

“I’m not familiar with that.” Even this is a type of an answer, involving his taking a stand.

The Chazon Ish said: Even “I don’t know” is part of the Torah. In other words, when a person is reviewing his learning, he has to say, “This I now know and that I do not know” (Sha’arei Aharon Vol. 1, p. 44, in the “Sha’arei Ish” booklet). The Steipler Gaon once complained to a great Rabbi, “When I say, ‘I don’t know,’ everyone interprets it as though I was in doubt” (Orchot Rabbenu Vol. 1, p. 38, in the addenda at the end). Ha-Rav Chaim Kanievsky was asked, “When you answer a question with, ‘I haven’t heard,’ do you usually mean, ‘I don’t accept that’?” He answered, “I mean it literally” (She’elat Rav 1:22, #8; Segulat Raboteinu 257, note #319).

Sometimes one asks Ha-Rav about some practice or spiritual remedy, and he answers, “It has no source.” By this he means, “It has no source in the Torah, the Mishnah, the Talmud, the Rambam, or the Shulchan Aruch. Everything must be proven. Even regarding the Mishnah itself, the Talmud asks, “Where does this idea come from? There are things that are brought in the recent Sages with proofs, and we are obligated to observe them. Yet if a practice is recommended without proofs, even if one of the recent Sages mentions it, it is not binding. With all due respect, it is impossible for us to fulfill every practice recommended by every recent Sage, without proofs from ancient sources. Otherwise we will collapse under the unending flood of instructions, for thank G-d, there are a lot of recent Sages, and they’ve said a lot of things.

7. Unconventional Rulings

If a particular ruling has become very widespread, one should not diverge from it unless one’s own Rabbi rules differently (Shut She’elat Shlomo 2:223, 3:263)

8. Contradictory Rulings

Sometimes a Rabbi will answer differently than he has answered in the past. There are probably different circumstances or a borderline situation requiring the Rabbi to rule however he is inclined to rule at this moment (Sefer Ha-Chaim, of Rabbi Chaim ben Bezalel, the Maharal’s brother).

One time Ha-Rav Moshe Feinstein was asked a question and he ruled what he ruled, but his ruling went against what he himself had previously ruled in his Shut Igrot Moshe. His family wondered, “If you’ve changed your opinion, how can we go back and reprint the Igrot Moshe almost every year in exactly the same wording?” He responded, “What is the problem? There are two approaches. Both are the word of the Living G-d” (Meged Givot Olam p. 56).

9. The Same Question to Two Rabbis

Is one allowed to ask the same question to several Rabbis and in the end to decide whom to follow? A: It depends on what you are asking. The Gemara in Avodah Zarah (7a) says that one who asks a Rabbi a question about something and the Rabbi declares it impure may not ask another Rabbi who will declare it pure, and one who asks a Rabbi a question and he declares it forbidden may not ask another Rabbi who will declare it permissible. This ruling is quoted in the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 242:31). Why is it forbidden to ask the same question a second time to a different Rabbi? Some explain that it is because of the honor of the first Rabbi (Rashi to Niddah 20b): You asked a question and don’t like the answer so you are going to a different Rabbi?! You are shaming the first Rabbi! Others explain that when the first Rabbi rules, the object on which he ruled now has the status which he placed upon it. This means that if I ask a Rabbi if something is kosher or not and he rules that it is not

kosher, the ruling of another Rabbi cannot change it. The Halachah follows the second explanation (This is the opinion of most Rishonim – Rabbis of the Middle Ages – including Ra'avad, Ramban, Rashba quoted in the Ran Avodah Zarah ibid. and Rosh, ibid. 1:3). Therefore, when I ask a Rabbi a question about a piece of meat, the meat has the status of his ruling, but if I have another piece of meat and I have the same question, I can ask a different Rabbi. There are also questions regarding a person's activities: How do I act in a given situation? A Rabbi's ruling fixes the status of an object, but not the status of a person's activities. Regarding an object, you can only ask one Rabbi, but regarding a person's conduct, you can ask various Rabbis. Even in the case of an object, if I really, really want to ask a second Rabbi, I can ask a second Rabbi if I tell him that I already asked the first Rabbi. If the second Rabbi so desires, he can talk to the first Rabbi and try to convince him to change his mind (Rama ibid.). I remember that someone once asked me a question regarding the laws of Family Purity and I answered: she is impure. The questioner went and asked Ha-Rav Mordechai Eliyahu. Ha-Rav Eliyahu called me and said: "Rav, look at it from this perspective and that perspective." I then understood that it was permissible to be lenient and I said: "I retract, she is pure." Furthermore, it is obvious that someone who asks a theoretical question may ask as many Rabbis as he wants. You may also ask questions to different Rabbis at different times, since all Rabbis are Torah (And this is also the ruling of Ha-Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach in Ve-Alehu Lo Yiblo Vol. 2 #40).

10. Rabbis Who Rule Leniently and then Are Strict on Themselves

A Rabbi is allowed to permit something and then to treat it as forbidden to himself. The family of Rabban Gamliel were lenient for others but strict for themselves (Mishnah Shabbat 1:9). Although the Belzer Rebbe – Mahari"d – said that a Rabbi who provides supervision on a product and does not eat it at least once will not have much assistance from Heaven. When Ha-Rav Shmuel Salant, the Rabbi of Jerusalem, ruled that a particular food was kosher, he would eat from that food to show that he, too, relied on the food's Kashrut. And Ha-Rav Eliezer David Greenwald, author of Keren Le-David and Rav and Rosh Yeshivah in Satmar, who did not carry within the Eruv on Shabbat did so once to show that it was completely Kosher. Similarly, Ha-Rav Mendel of Vitebsk did not carry within the Eruv on Shabbat in Tzefat, but did so once on Shabbat Shuva to show that it was Kosher. And Ha-Rav Moshe Halberstam of the Eidah Ha-Charedit in Yerushalayim related that the Admor of Pupa was in Yerushalayim and carried out a book on Shabbat in order to show that the Eruv of the Eidah Ha-Charedit was Kosher. Commentary on Pirkei Avot 'Az Yomru' of Ha-Rav Yitzchak Aharon Goldberger, Dayan and Rosh Yeshiva for Pupa Chasidim, pp. 73, 77).

Truth or Superstition?

1\3rd of Gan Eden

Q: What is the source that if one sets up 3 couples and they get married one goes to Gan Eden?

A: There is no source. But it is certainly a great Mitzvah and one should exert great effort for it (and Ha-Rav Chaim Kanievski said: I have not heard. Segulot Raboteinu p. 230).

Corner of a Table

Q: Is it true that if one sits on the corner of a table he will not get married?

A: There is no such thing (And so too Ha-Rav Chaim Kanievski. Segulot Raboteinu p. 223. Shut Ve-Darashta Ve-Chakarta Vol. 5 Even Ha-Ezer #22).

Healing

Q: Is healing – treatment for physical and emotional illness by transferring energy – in the spirit of Torah?

A: From a scientific perspective it is nonsense, from the halachic perspective it is therefore superstition (Ner Be-Ishon Laila p. 120).

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