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Text Message Q&A #102

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Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day! Here's a sample:

Shehechyanu for the Birth of a Child with Down's Syndrome

Q: Ha-Rav answered that if a child is born with Down's Syndrome, one should recite "Dayan Ha-Emet" on the distress as well as "Shehechyanu" on the joy. We – with Hashem's kindness – had a baby with Down's Syndrome born to us and we were very happy and are still happy, and we don't see any reason to recite "Dayan Ha-Emet"?

A: Fortunate are you! May those like you increase in Israel. But most people also feel some sadness, and one should therefore recite "Dayan Ha-Emet". Ha-Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv ruled that Shehechyanu should not be recited at all, and he is discussing a case where the parents are only sad and have no joy (Kav Ve-Naki #70). But the usual case is that there are mixed emotions.

Tefillin which Fell

Q: What should one do if Tefillin fell on the floor?

A: The basic custom is not to fast but to redeem the fast with Tzedakah. And one should also add Torah learning. Piskei Teshuvot 40:2.

Eating at the House of a Non-Religious Jew

Q: The laws of Kashrut prevent me from eating at the house of my non-religious friends. Isn't it more important to be strict with loving a fellow Jew and sanctifying Hashem's Name than keeping Kosher?

A: The laws of Kashrut are not a bother but service of Hashem and sanctification of Hashem's Name. It is true that for the sake of friendship one may decide to forgo strictures but not the basic Halachah. And one must be 100% certain that everything is Kosher (see Shut Igrot Moshe, Yoreh Deah 1:54, 2:43. And see Ein Aya on Berachot, p. 361).

### Holding Hands in Public

Q: My wife really wants to hold hands when we walk in the street. Is it allowed?

A: Public acts of affection are forbidden. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 152:11.

### Shaking a Woman's Hand

Q: In the text message response on the question: If a secular woman puts out her hand, can I shake it? Ha-Rav answered: No. Politely apologize: Forgive me, this is saved for my wife. I once heard that Ha-Rav Moshe Feinstein when facing the same situation would shake her hand - the reasoning being that not shaking a woman's hand is a Rabbinic prohibition but embarrassing a person is a Torah prohibition. Was this in fact the case, and if not, what about applying the above reasoning and allowing the handshake?

A: Ha-Rav Feinstein did mention this idea in his Teshuvot (Shut Igrot Moshe, Even Ha-Ezer 1:56, 4:32. See also Orach Chaim 1:113) but concluded that it is difficult to rely on it. This is especially true since the Beit Yosef (Yoreh Deah 195) mentioned that according to the Rambam it is a Torah prohibition and one should be killed rather than transgress it! We should not embarrass anyone, but here the woman is causing herself embarrassment. Ha-Rav Ovadia Yosef declined to shake hands with Prime Minister Golda Meir when he received the Israel Prize. And Rav Mordechai Eliyahu did not shake hands with the Queen of England. In both cases apologies were issued to the Rabbis on the same night for putting them in that situation.

### Relating to Jesus and Muhammad

Q: How do we relate to Jesus?

A: Our Sages say that he was an extremely talented Jew who spoiled his proper character traits and faith. The Rambam writes that he led a huge part of humanity to idol worship and spilling of our blood. Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 11:4 – the uncensored version.

Q: And Muhammad?

A: The Koran described him as uneducated, and as one with improper character traits and an inclination for women. And see Rambam, Igeret Teiman. But he has the merit that he led a huge part of humanity to the belief in one G-d (and see Teshuvot Ha-Rambam #448).

Special thank you to Orly Tzion for editing the Ateret Yerushalayim Parashah Sheet