



Text Message Q&A #119

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

Gemara Learning in Korea

Q: In South Korea, there is much interest in learning Gemara. Is this worthwhile?

A: Certainly not. It is forbidden to teach Torah to non-Jews and it is forbidden for a non-Jew to learn Torah. The Torah is betrothed to us and not to them. One does not learn Gemara for an intellectual experience – which is their interest – but out of Yirat Shamayim – fear of Heaven (Chagigah 13a).

Reform and Conservative Conversions

Q: Are Reform and Conservative conversions valid?

A: Certainly not. An essential element of the conversion is accepting the yoke of the Mitzvot, and this is lacking. Shut Achiezer 3:26. Shut Igrot Moshe, Yoreh Deah 2:128, Even Ha-Ezer 3:3. Shut Shevet Ha-Levi 10:224. Shut Mishneh Halachot 12:193.

Matrilineal Descent

Q: Where is it written in the Torah that Judaism follows matrilineal descent?

A: Devarim 7:3-4. Kiddushin 68b.

Q: I heard that some say that it was a later decree?

A: Nonsense. It is explicitly mentioned in Ezra 7:3-4, and he did not invent it.

Staring at Women

Q: Is it forbidden for men to stare at women, or do women also have to be careful that men not stare at them?

A: Both. "A woman needs to be modest and careful that men not stare at her, aside from her husband". Rabbenu Yonah, Igeret Ha-Teshuvah 159.

Coca Cola

Q: Is Coca Cola Kosher in all countries?

A: Not necessarily. There are many ingredients. It requires certification (See the amazing Teshuvah regarding the Kashrut of Coca Cola in Shut Karnei Ha-Hod, end of Volume 2, of Ha-Rav Tuvia Gefen, who served as Rabbi in Atlanta, where Coke is produced in America. He discusses the secret ingredient in Coke).

Q: Is it true that Coca Cola is unhealthy?

A: This is a medical question. All soft drinks cause damage on account of the sugar. And some claim that Coke causes damage on account of the phosphoric acid which causes continuing damage to one's kidneys.

Bill with Tchernichovski

Q: Is it appropriate for the State of Israel to put out a bill with the face of the poet Shaul Tchernichovski, who was married to a non-Jew?

A: It is not appropriate.

Tzedakah to a Criminal

Q: A person evaded taxes and is now having a trial which could end up in jail-time. Is it possible to give him Tzedakah for an expensive attorney who could save him?

A: This has nothing to do with Tzedakah. But it is a kindness. Kindness is according to the need and ability. But it seems that there are other persons who are more in need of a kindness (Ha-Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach was once asked regarding a Jew who stole a significant amount of money and was serving a jail sentence in America. Is it proper to collect large sums of money to help free him because of the Mitzvah of Pidyon Shevuyim – Redeeming Captives? Ha-Rav Shlomo Zalman said: "Pidyom Shevuyim?! What does this have to do with Pidyon Shevuyim? Pidyom Shevuyim is when non-Jews kidnap a Jew for no reason, and put him in jail. According to my understanding, they don't kidnap Jews in America in order to extort money. After all, the Torah says 'Do not steal', and he stole. On the contrary, it is good for him to sit in jail a little and learn that it is forbidden to steal." Ha-Rav Shlomo Zalman added that if they wanted to collect money for his wife and children, however, it would obviously be a Mitzvah. Ve-alehu Lo Yibol Volume 2, pp. 113-114).

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