



Ask The Rabbi...

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This edition contains:

1. Two Worlds -- Which is Better?
2. Answers to Last Week's Riddle

Susan from Seattle wrote:

Why is it that we mourn when someone dies, aren't they going to a better place? Shouldn't we be happy for them?

Dear Susan,

Your question highlights the paradox of how we experience the death of a loved one: Should we "be happy for them" as you say, or should we grieve deeply?

First of all, it is correct to mourn when someone dies. The *Shulchan Aruch* states "It is a great *mitzvah* to eulogize the dead in the proper way. The *mitzvah* is to raise one's voice and say those things that will break people's hearts to induce crying and to recall the praise of the one who has passed on."

The Talmud cautions, however, that this crying should not go on endlessly:

"There are 3 days for crying, 7 for eulogizing, and 30 days without laundering and haircuts. Eventually, though, it must stop. 'Don't be more merciful than Gd.'" This implies that there is a need to mourn, but with limitation -- that there is a reason to cry, but not forever.

On the other hand, it is also true that the deceased go on to a better place. We are taught that "This world is [but] a passageway to the next world" — the World to Come.

There are many reasons why we grieve when someone has passed away. One reason is that we cry for our own loss. We feel a genuine pain when losing someone close. People cry because they feel lost without the loved one, or out of empathy for the pain that the orphans and widow(er) suffer.

Another reason for our grief is that we are sad for the deceased's lost opportunities for accomplishment in this world. There is an advantage to this world over the next. In this world we show that we are worthy of receiving reward in the "next" world. This is a reason for us to desire to live in a world of hardship and lies rather than to rush off to the World-to-Come. The Vilna Gaon is noted for saying "Look at what can be accomplished in this world! For a few pennies you can buy a pair of *tzitzit* and fulfill a *mitzvah*. In the World-to-Come, no amount of money can buy you a *mitzvah*." For this reason people tuck in their *tzitzit* when entering a cemetery in order not to be inconsiderate of the feelings of the deceased (*lo'eg l'rash*).

Rabbi Yehuda Halevi points out that the Torah does not encourage us to belittle *this* life, and long for life after death. Quite the

opposite! The Torah makes it clear that we can enjoy the splendor of a deep and mystical connection with G-d while here on earth. Through prophecy and the like we enter the spiritual realm while still part of this world. While we are in this world, we are this-world centered, and are finally taken to the next world against our will.

Several years ago I asked Rabbi Michel Twerski of Milwaukee why we allow the *Yamim Tovim* (Festivals) to bring an early end to the *shiva* mourning period. The law is that if a major Festival occurs during the *shiva*, that ends the *shiva*. He answered that there are three advantages to the mourner from the *shiva*: He relieves his anger at Hashem for causing this loss, he deals with denial of the event of his loved one's death, and he relieves the guilt he feels at being alive while the other is not. The *Yamim Tovim* directly deal with the anger and the guilt. When you properly celebrate the *Yom Tov* you see the "big picture" and the Divine providence in everything that happens. After that, how can you be angry or feel guilt? "Denial" is important, but without the other two factors of "anger" and "guilt" it is not enough of a reason to allow us to continue the *shiva* and once again withdraw from the dynamics of everyday life. Our lives were given to us to be lived to the fullest.

Sources:

- *Shulchan Aruch*—*Yoreh Deah* 344:1.
- *Pirkei Avos*— 4:21.
- Talmud — *Moed Katan*, 27b.
- Rabbi Yehuda Halevi — *The Kuzari*, 1:109.

Last Week we posed the following riddle (submitted by one of our readers):

*There are four names listed consecutively in the morning *Shmoneh Esrei* with only one *vav* (instead of 3) separating them. What are they?"

The answer we expected was [in *Sim Shalom*]: "*Sim Shalom Tova u'Vracha*[*Bracha*] -- I know someone named *Sim* (and it's not Sy Syms).

However, the person who sent us the riddle actually meant that "all of the names are separated with a *vav*," and intended an answer that is also in *Sim Shalom* but further on: *Bracha v'Rachamim v'Chaim v'Shalom*."

Haim Roman of Jerusalem College of Technology E-mailed us an unexpected and brilliant answer: "In the *Bircat Avot* [first *bracha* of the *Shmoneh Esrei*] -- *HaE-HaGadol HaGibor v'HaNora*" which are four of the [descriptive] Names of Hashem.

Look for a new riddle next week!

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