

Bars, Gifts to Children, Covid Shots: Rabbi M. Angel Replies to Questions from the Jewish Press

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Is it proper to have drinks in a bar?

People will decide for themselves if it's proper to have drinks in a bar, and under what circumstances they may decide to do so.

But speaking for myself, I think one should avoid entering a bar to have drinks. Bars, by definition, are places where people gather to drink alcoholic beverages...a classic place for idle chatter, gossip, excessive frivolity. There are better, finer places for socializing.

The popularity of bars is a reflection of prevalent hedonism in general society. By patronizing bars, we would be endorsing a set of values very much at odds with Torah values.

Drinking strong liquor, while perhaps appropriate in small quantities on Shabbat or special occasions, is something that should not be encouraged...not only in bars, but at home, in shul or anywhere else.

Rambam (Hilkhos De'ot 5:3) states: "One who becomes intoxicated is a sinner and is despicable, and loses his wisdom. If he [a wise person] becomes drunk in the presence of common folk, he has thereby desecrated the Name." In his section on the Laws of Holiday Rest (6:20), Rambam rules: "When one eats, drinks and celebrates on a festival, he should not allow himself to become overly drawn to drinking wine, amusement and silliness...for drunkenness and excessive

amusement and silliness are not rejoicing; they are frivolity and foolishness.”

It's fine to drink in moderation and on special occasions. It's not fine to drink excessively or in a hedonistic environment.

Is it proper to give children expensive presents for Chanukah? What about just gelt?

Why do we give presents on birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and other special occasions? Ideally, our gifts stem from the desire to express good feelings toward the recipients: we are thinking of you, we love you, we want you to be happy.

Giving gifts on Hanukkah, as on other special occasions, is a way of enhancing excitement and happiness. Children internalize the joyous spirit of the day. The holiday is forever linked in their minds with happiness.

The value of gifts isn't to be measured in dollars. An inexpensive present that the child really enjoys is better than an expensive present that the child will seldom or never use.

For our children and older grandchildren, we give checks. They know best what they want. With our younger grandchildren, we generally give their parents money to buy each of them a present that they would really like.

“Expensive” is a relative term. For wealthy people it means one thing; for less wealthy or poor people it means something else. It also depends on how many children and grandchildren will be receiving gifts. The goal should be to find the right level of giving based on one's own financial situation. Giving overly expensive gifts may not only be a financial burden on the givers; this may also lead to spoiling the recipients so that they keep expecting more and more with each passing holiday.

Rambam taught the importance of following the “middle path” that strives for a balanced approach to life. This lesson is important also in the realm of gift-giving. Happy Hanukkah!

Is it proper to be less than forthcoming about your vaccination status to avoid machloket or harassment?

I hope that all our readers are fully vaccinated and have also received booster shots. Given the seriousness of the covid 19 pandemic, it is essential for all of us to protect ourselves to the extent possible. Vaccinations are important not only for our personal health, but for the health of our family and associates. How tragic it is to learn about unvaccinated or under-vaccinated people who contract covid, who suffer, who die, who transmit the virus to their loved ones...all of which could have been prevented by having gotten vaccinated.

Everyone should know if the people near them are properly vaccinated. This is not merely a matter of idle curiosity, but could be a matter of life and death. A person who is asked about vaccination status should answer promptly and accurately. Truthfulness enables others to make responsible decisions.

Unfortunately, a great deal of contradictory information is available about the necessity of vaccinations. In spite of the recommendations of the leading medical experts, there are "anti-vaxxers" who vocally resist getting shots and who urge others not to get vaccinated. If they choose not to vaccinate, they should let the rest of us know. Life is dangerous enough without us having to be in close contact with people who choose not to protect themselves via the available vaccines.