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Ask A (Different) Rabbi

Historic first-ever visit

By Amy Klein, Religion Editor



Can a religious businessperson keep his Internet site open on Shabbat? What about a Web site uploaded on Shabbat -- can a religious person look at it? Are you allowed to watch television on Shabbat if the set has been on since before sundown?

These types of modern-day halachic questions aren't addressed in the Talmud or the ancient rabbis' books of wisdom, but they are at Jerusalem's Eretz Hemdah Institute, The Institute for Advanced Jewish Studies.

Rabbi Yosef Carmel, dean of the institute, which trains rabbis for advanced, post-ordination study (equivalent of a Ph.D), will be visiting Los Angeles this week.

The Institute, which opened in 1987 to train future Zionist rabbinical leaders of the State of Israel, has graduated some 100 rabbis from its seven-year course. The institute also grapples with modern-day questions of Jewish law. Its Web site, "[Ask A Rabbi](#)," which is affiliated with the Orthodox Union, has answered more than 1

1,000 questions pertaining to Jewish law. Last summer, when Israel was at war with Hezbollah, Eretz Hemdah ("beautiful land") opened a special hotline for soldiers. Some questions: What should a soldier do with his car if he has to drive to base on Shabbat? How can a man in combat celebrate his son's pidyon ha-ben (redemption of the oldest son).

Carmel will be lecturing at Rabbi Daniel Korobkin's school, Kehillat Yavneh (5353 W. Third St.) on Friday Oct 27 and Shabbat Oct. 28, on topics such as "Dilemmas in the World of Halacha" and "Indirect Business Transactions on Shabbat."

Inquiring Minds Want to Know

Ignorance is not really bliss, as current events have proved. Rather, knowledge brings about understanding and peace, especially when it comes to faith and religion. That's why Wilshire Boulevard Temple has opened up [The Center for Religious Inquiry](#), an adult education institution hoping to build bridges between all faiths.

Partnering with the Center for Religious Inquiry at St. Bartholomew's Church in New York and St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral in Minneapolis, Wilshire Boulevard's new center will feature religious leaders, scholars, ethicists and scientists from different religious backgrounds and is open to Angelenos of all faiths. Its motto is "Mipnei d'archei shalom" (Because it leads to paths of peace).

"After 144 years, we are recommitting our historic temple campus not just as the center of Jewish life and practice, but, now, as a home to all religious exploration," said Rabbi Stephen Julius Stein, director of the Center for Religious Inquiry.

Programs include the tried and true, such as "Intro to Judaism," and special lectures such as "The Jewish Bible in Christmas Art," and a lecture series titled, "America: The Moral Nation," whose last panel discussion, "What Is a Just War?" is scheduled for Nov. 14. Next semester's programs will include a deeper look into different faiths, as well as classes on Jewish topics, such as "Not Madonna's Kabbalah," an introduction to Jewish mystical literature.

The center is one of a number of Los Angeles Jewish organizations featuring lectures and classes for adults, but hopes to be different because "rather than presenting a speaker on a topic or himself, we're hoping to thread these into a larger socio-cultural context," Stein said.

"It's necessary because the world is an increasingly complicated place," he said. "It's becoming ever more focused on religious ideas. And in our small, humble way, we hope to be a center where people can come and encounter learning and explore religion in a safe environment."