

Re'ei 5778

In a telephone conversation with my mother this week, she told me, to my surprise, that if she were to get a tattoo, it would be a small flower on her ankle. And I shared that I would want a small flower fairy on my ankle. I don't know about her, but I felt a little guilty just talking about it.

Jews don't get tatted, right?

Well, have you been to Tel Aviv lately? I have, and I can tell you that it seems like 90% of Tel-Aviv's Jews have tattoos. I felt like a bit of a fuddy-duddy without one. Some of us in this room are tatted, and even more of our children are, my own Tel-Aviv-nick daughter included.

I recently came across a report that in 2016, 1 in 3 Americans had at least one tattoo, which was up from 1 in 5 two years prior. I have no doubt that Jews are well represented in that statistic, while admittedly I cannot speak to the validity of the study. The fact is that Jews do get tattoos, and we seem to be doing so in increasing numbers.

Since tattooing comes up in today's *parashah* and I have been asked about it recently, I thought that today we'd do a little rabbinic study of that issue, and I will leave you with a broader question.

Link to source sheet:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/11ZLr6mGKTsba4NaULXK6U6Cuwm0O-fuGNKJofmKkEZg/edit?usp=sharing>

When I set out to talk about this subject, I knew Lucas's t'shuvah and I did not think I would draw a different conclusion than he does. However, now that I have studied the issue in more detail, I am less sure. It does seem to me that one could make a case for the halachic acceptability of getting

tatted, and as a rabbi, I am empowered to make that ruling--although I am not sure that I would.

The Jewish world--indeed, the entire religious landscape--has changed a great deal since Lucas's t'shuvah was published over 21 years ago. Scholars and Jewish leaders have begun to say we are living through a shift to a "post rabbinic era" in which the majority of non-Orthodox Jews no longer base their personal decisions on a rabbinic analysis of Jewish sources. The big question we need to be asking ourselves today--and this is very serious--is exactly how we make Torah a meaningful part of our lives and our decisions. How can we use Torah to meaningful purpose, with integrity, in today's world? That is something for us to think about.