

kol b'seder= copacetic

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.lang/2004-10/0729.html>

From: howard richler (*hrichler_at_sympatico.ca*)

Date: 10/06/04

Date: 6 Oct 2004 08:44:53 -0700

A colleague of mine tried to convince me that "copacetic" derives from the Hebrew "kol b'seder." I was surprised to find that many etymologists believe this is the likeliest source of the word. I find this ridiculous for several reasons, We know that the word first surfaces in Black English in the Southern USA in the early 1920s. Accordong to legend, sometime before this some Black customer would have asked some Jewish mercahnt "How things were going" and he would have responded "kol b'seder" (everything is in order) to the query. Is it not highly unlikely that a Jewish merchant at the turn of the 20th century would be responding in Hebrew, given that the language was not used as a vernacular at the time? Also, although "kol b'seder" is used as a catchphrase nowadays in modern Hebrew would it be likely to be used more than 100 years ago when the term supposedly morphed into "copacetic"? I would think that if any Hebrew expression was used a century ago, it was more likely "ha kol b'seder" not just "b'seder."

Any thoughts?