

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

THE CALCULUS TO MULTIPLY

*“The children (Esav and Yaakov) agitated within her (Rivka), and she said, ‘If so, why am I thus?’...” (25:22)*

**K**ing Chizkiahu refused to procreate because, through prophetic insight, he saw evil people amongst his offspring.

Yishayahu the Prophet criticized him, telling him he had no business entering into the calculations of Heaven: *“What the Torah requires from you, that is what you do.”* (Talmud Bavli, Berachot 11a)

Therefore, if it not for a direct command from G-d, “Be fruitful and multiply,” Chizkyahu’s reckoning was correct. If you know that amongst your progeny there will be evil offspring, better not to have any at all.

However, this only applies to the male of the species. Women have no Torah commandment to procreate.

*“If so, why am I thus?”*

With this we can understand Rivka’s question.

Rashi tells us that whenever Rivka passed by the doors of a house of idol worship she felt her unborn fetus struggle to emerge. She knew that her child was destined to be an idol worshipper. *“Why am I thus? Why should I labor to give birth to a child who will be evil; I am not Yitzchak. I am a woman, and I have no obligation to reproduce.”*

• Source: Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveichik

PARSHA OVERVIEW

**A**fter 20 years of marriage, Yitzchak’s prayers are answered and Rivka conceives twins. The pregnancy is extremely painful. G-d reveals to Rivka that the suffering is a microcosmic prelude to the worldwide conflict that will rage between the two great nations descended from these twins, Rome and Israel. Esav is born, and then Yaakov, holding onto Esav’s heel. They grow and Esav becomes a hunter, a man of the physical world, whereas Yaakov sits in the tents of Torah developing his soul. On the day of their grandfather Avraham’s funeral, Yaakov is cooking lentils, the traditional mourner’s meal. Esav rushes in, ravenous from a hard day’s hunting, and sells his birthright (and its concomitant spiritual responsibilities) for a bowl of lentils, demonstrating his unworthiness for the position of first-born. A famine strikes Canaan and Yitzchak thinks of escaping to Egypt, but G-d tells him that because he was bound as a sacrifice, he has become holy and must remain in the Holy Land.

He relocates to Gerar in the land of the Philistines, where, to protect Rivka, he has to say she is his sister. The Philistines grow jealous of Yitzchak when he becomes immensely wealthy, and Avimelech the king asks him to leave. Yitzchak re-digs three wells dug by his father, prophetically alluding to the three future Temples. Avimelech, seeing that Yitzchak is blessed by G-d, makes a treaty with him. When Yitzchak senses his end approaching, he summons Esav to give him his blessings. Rivka, acting on a prophetic command that the blessings must go to Yaakov, arranges for Yaakov to impersonate Esav and receive the blessings. When Esav in frustration reveals to his father that Yaakov has bought the birthright, Yitzchak realizes that the birthright has been bestowed correctly on Yaakov and confirms the blessings he has given Yaakov. Esav vows to kill Yaakov, so Rivka sends Yaakov to her brother Lavan where he may find a suitable wife.

## BAVA METZIA 65 - 71

*“A rental fee is due to be paid only at the end of the rental period.”*

With this halachic teaching regarding when rental payment must be paid, the *gemara* makes a distinction between two cases which seemingly appear the same, and yet one case is permitted while the other case is prohibited.

Our *mishna* states that a person is permitted to rent out his courtyard in the following manner. He may set the rental price at 10 *sela'im* to be paid in advance for the year, or 12 *sela'im* — one *sela* for each month — if the renter prefers to pay monthly. However, the *mishna* also teaches that if a person is selling his field, he is prohibited by the laws of *ribit* (usury) from offering this same choice of the method of payment. What's the difference?

In the case of a rental, the lower price (10 *sela'im* for the year) is a *discount* for paying in advance. The market price for the courtyard is one *sela* per month. No *ribit* interest is being paid since the rental fee is due to be paid only after the property has been used that month. This is permitted. On the other hand, in the case of sale the entire payment from the buyer is due right away at the time of sale. Therefore, if the price for up-front payment is 10 *sela'im*, then charging 12 *sela'im* for paying in monthly installments is considered a type of *ribit* interest, since it is as if the seller has lent the buyer 10 *sela'im* at the time of the sale, and is then proceeding to collect 12 *sela'im* during the year, which constitutes a gain on his original “loan” of 10 *sela'im* at the original time of the sale.

• *Bava Metzia 65a*

*“A person who increases his wealth by means of usury and taking forbidden interest on a loan actually gathers this wealth for someone else who is gracious to the poor.” (Mishlei 28:8)*

This verse from the Book of Proverbs teaches a clear message that one who takes money unjustly will find that the money will not remain with him, but instead will be saved up for someone else who will use it to be gracious to the poor. The *gemara* on our *daf* asks: Who is this one who is “gracious to the poor”? The Sage Rav offers the example of “Shvor Malka”. Shvor Malka was a Persian king who would take money from Jews and give it to his non-Jewish servants, who are the “poor” mentioned in the verse since they are *lacking* in *mitzvot* (Rashi).

The Maharsha cites Rashi's commentary on the verse in Mishlei: “The government hears about him, that he is becoming wealthy through illegal means, and they confiscate his money, with which they build bridges and repair highways. This is being gracious to the poor.” The Maharsha states that Rashi's explanation is based on the Midrash of Rabbi Tanchuma.

The Maharsha adds that this reference to Persian kings who built bridges is in accordance with a teaching at the beginning of Masechet Avoda Zara (2b). There the *gemara* states that at the time of “future judgment” the Persian kings will disingenuously claim their righteousness by bragging that they built bridges for the sake of helping the Jewish People learn Torah and fulfill *mitzvot*. Of course this was not true, since they did it for their own gain to collect tolls and taxes in order to increase their own wealth and strengthen their own power.

• *Bava Metzia 70b*

## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why was it important that Yitzchak look like Avraham?
2. Why does the Torah stress that Rivka was Betuel's daughter and Lavan's sister?
3. What are the two differences between Tamar's pregnancy and Rivka's pregnancy?
4. Why was Esav named Esav?
5. Who gave Yaakov his name?
6. How did Esav deceive his father?
7. Why was Esav faint when he returned from the field?
8. Why are lentils a food for mourners?
9. What was the birthright that Yaakov bought from Esav?
10. Why was Yitzchak not permitted to go to Egypt?
11. Why did the Philistines plug up the wells?
12. Why did Yitzchak lose his sight? (three reasons)
13. At what age should one anticipate his own death?
14. Why did Rivka ask Yaakov to bring two kid goats?
15. Why did Esav leave his special garments with Rivka?
16. What fragrance did Yitzchak detect on Yaakov's garments?
17. What was the "fat of the land" promised to Esav?
18. When will Esav be freed from subjugation to Yaakov?
19. What inspired Esav to marry the daughter of Yishmael?
20. Knowing that Machalat was Yishmael's daughter, it's self-evident that she was the sister of Nevayot. Why, then, does the Torah state that Esav married "Yishmael's daughter, the sister of Nevayot?"

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 25:19 - So everyone would agree that Avraham was indeed his father.
2. 25:20 - To praise her, that even though her family was evil she was righteous.
3. 25:24 - Rivka gave birth at full term to two children, one righteous and one wicked. Tamar gave birth after seven months to two righteous children.
4. 25:25 - He was born fully developed. The name Esav is based on the Hebrew word for "made".
5. 25:26 - G-d.
6. 25:27 - Esav deceived Yitzchak by asking questions that suggested that he was very strict in mitzvah observance.
7. 25:29 - From having murdered.
8. 25:30 - They are round like a wheel and mourning is like a revolving wheel that eventually touches everyone.
9. 25:31 - The right to bring sacrifices.
10. 26:2 - Through the *akeida* he had attained the status of a *korban* and was forbidden to leave Eretz Canaan.
11. 26:15 - They felt that either marauders would attack to capture the wells, or, if attacking for other reasons, they would use the wells as a water supply.
12. 27:1 - a) From the smoke of the incense offered by Esav's wives to their idols; b) From the angel's tears which fell into Yitzchak's eyes at the time of the *akeida*; c) In order for Yaakov to receive the blessings.
13. 27:2 - When he reaches five years from the age his parents were when they passed away, until five years after.
14. 27:9 - One for Yitzchak and the other to offer as a *korban Pesach*.
15. 27:15 - He suspected that his wives might steal them.
16. 27:27 - The scent of *Gan Eden*.
17. 27:36 - Italy.
18. 27:40 - When the Jewish People transgress the Torah.
19. 28:7 - Seeing that his father despised his current wives, he resolved to take a wife from his father's family.
20. 28:9 - To indicate that Yishmael died between her betrothal and her wedding, and that it was Nevayot who gave his sister in marriage to Esav. Knowing the date of Yishmael's death, we can determine the date of Esav's marriage and thus Yaakov's age, 63, at the time of his flight from Esav.

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Toldot

## YITZCHAK'S BLESSING TO YAAKOV

**A**t the end of his life Yitzchak decides to give a blessing of prosperity and family dominance to his oldest son, Esav. His wife Rivka hears of his plan and concocts a charade to enable the younger son Yaakov to surreptitiously “steal” the blessing from the blind Yitzchak. There are numerous difficulties with this episode. Why does Yitzchak want to bless the morally and spiritually deficient Esav? Why doesn't Rivka share with her husband her clear prophetic knowledge that Esav was destined to be subservient to Yaakov? Finally, how can a blessing intended for Esav end up being fulfilled in Yaakov?

Unlike Avraham, Yitzchak was unclear which of his two sons would take over after his death. He recognized that Yaakov's moral and spiritual commitment surpassed Esav's, but in the end he decided that Esav's first-born status tipped the scales. It is likely that his intense love for Esav blinded him to the truth. The verse that introduces this episode, “...Yitzchak had become old and his eyes dimmed...” should be interpreted both literally and figuratively. However, in order to provide Esav the opportunity for spiritual merit, Yitzchak directed him to prepare a meal from scratch in order to at least demonstrate his commitment to honoring parents.

Rivka had received a clear prophecy before the twins were born: “Two nations are in your womb...the elder shall

serve the younger.” The reason she did not share this prophecy with Yitzchak initially may have been due to the fact that she had sought out the advice, which resulted in the prophecy, without Yitzchak's permission. She also may have deferred to his higher spiritual and prophetic level. However, to share the prophecy with him now could actually be counterproductive. Still blinded by his love for Esav, Yitzchak could end up blessing Yaakov begrudgingly or withholding the blessing from both sons, leaving everything in G-d's hands. Rivka wanted Yitzchak to give Yaakov the blessing voluntarily and with a full heart.

In the end, Yaakov successfully passes himself off as Esav and receives a full-hearted blessing from his father. How can a blessing in error take effect? Abarbanel explains that a human being, even a prophet, is only a conduit for a blessing, a blessing which ultimately comes from G-d. The blessing is essentially a prayer, a petition for a desired result. This can be explained metaphorically: A farmer intends to plant barley but accidentally plants wheat instead. His intention has no effect on the outcome. Only wheat will grow. Yitzchak is only a conduit for the will of G-d. The blessing will only “grow” in Yaakov, just like only wheat will grow in the field.

## PLEASE JOIN US...

...in saying Tehillim/Psalms and a special prayer to G-d for the safety and security of all of Klal Yisrael in these times of conflict and conclude with the following special prayer:

*אחינו כל בית ישראל*

*“Our brothers, the entire family of Israel, who are delivered into distress and captivity, whether they are on sea or dry land – may G-d have mercy on them and remove them from stress to relief, from darkness to light, from subjugation to redemption now, speedily and soon.”*

## COMMUNICATING WITH THE DEAD

**From: Jared**

*Dear Rabbi,  
According to Judaism, are the deceased aware of what's going on with the living and can there be any communication between the living and the dead?*

Dear Jared,

There are very many sources and stories which indicate that the dead are aware of what happens with the living, and that it is possible for there to be interaction and communication between the living and the dead. There are forbidden ways involving magic, witchcraft and demonology. But there are also ways which are permitted. In Jewish sources, this connection is particularly found between, but not limited to, people who share a strong spiritual connection, such as family members or rabbis and students.

One such source (Berachot 18b) addresses your specific question and presents several fascinating incidents that demonstrate the above. One of those incidents is as follows:

The father of the Talmudic scholar Shmuel was very respected by people, such that they entrusted money with him in order for him to distribute it to orphans. When his father died, Shmuel was not present in order for his father to pass on the whereabouts of this money, which thereby disappeared. After time, people came to refer to Shmuel as "the son of the one who consumed the orphans' money".

[Interestingly, this comments on the tainted nature of people. Despite having trusted Shmuel's father in his lifetime, once he died, rather than judge him favorably, (as we'll see they should have), they accused him of stealing the orphans' money.]

Shmuel sought his father in what the Talmud refers to as "the courtyard of death". Rashi explains this to be the cemetery. The Gr"m explains it to be a particular spiritual plane in which departed souls reside, and which can be accessed through the dream state. In either case, Shmuel initiated contact with the realm of the dead only through Torah-permitted means.

There he meets certain lower souls and tells them that he seeks one named "Abba". The souls reply there are many named Abba. He adds that he seeks one named Abba the

son of Abba. They reply that there are many Abba the sons of Abba. Only after clarifying that he seeks Abba the son of Abba who is also the father of Shmuel do they inform him that his father is in the "Yeshiva on High".

[Interestingly, since there were many named Abba the son of Abba and not all could have been sons whose father died between conception and birth, this implies that unlike the Ashkenazi custom not to name children after people still alive, in Talmudic times not only was it common to name after the living as the Sefardim do nowadays, but even to name a child after its living parent.]

In the meantime Shmuel sees the soul of the great Talmudic sage Levi sitting aside from the other souls. When Shmuel inquires why Levi didn't go up to the Yeshiva on High, Levi replies that for as long as he had refrained in his lifetime from attending the yeshiva of Rabbi Afas and thus slighting his honor, he would be barred from going up.

When Shmuel's father arrives and sees Shmuel, he cries and then he smiles. He explains to his son that he cried because Shmuel would soon die and be joining him, but smiled because Shmuel is greatly honored in what his father refers to as "this world". Shmuel responds that if so, he requests that Levi should be permitted to go up. Levi was then immediately elevated to the Yeshiva on High.

Shmuel then asks his father where the orphans' money is. He tells him it can be found in the floor under the basin of their grinding stone where the upper and lower bags contain the family's money, while the bag in the middle is the orphans'. When Shmuel asks his father why he stored the money in this way, his father explained that he did so in order to ensure the safe-keeping of the orphans' money even by incurring loss to his own:

He told Shmuel, "If a thief comes to steal the money from where it's buried, he will only find the upper bag, which is ours, and that of the orphans' below will be spared. Similarly, if the earth damages the money, it will only damage the lowest bag, which is ours, but that of the orphans' above it will be protected".

## LAWS FOR MAKING UP FOR A MISSED PRAYER — PART 3

One can make up for a missed prayer only during the (next) “time of prayer”, but not when it is not the time of prayer (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 108:3). For example: In a case where someone who missed Shacharit waited awhile after praying his obligatory prayer (such as after Mincha that afternoon), he can no longer make up for the Shacharit prayer that he missed. The reason is because the Rabbis only instituted making up a prayer while one is already involved in praying an obligatory prayer (like Mincha), and since he is praying he can add the “substitute” prayer. But if he is not involved in prayer he cannot pray this additional prayer. (Pri Chadash, Shulchan Aruch HaRav and others)

Many of the later Rabbis disagree with the above ruling, and although they maintain that ideally one should not delay praying the substitute prayer more than the time it takes to walk four *amot* or say *ashrei*, however, if one delayed he can still pray as long as the time of that prayer has not passed. Therefore, if one missed Mincha, and during Ma’ariv did not

make it up, he can still pray the additional prayer until dawn. (Ma’amar Mordechai, Chayei Adam and others)

The Mishneh Berurah concludes this halacha by quoting the Derech Chaim as follows: Ideally one who did not pray the make-up prayer immediately after his obligatory prayer should pray it as a *nedava* (voluntary prayer); namely, one should say, “If I am obligated to pray an extra prayer, then this is it, and if I am not obligated to pray a make-up prayer, then this is a voluntary prayer.” Since the Mishneh Berurah did not mention adding something new in the prayer it seems that this is not a requirement. However, the Kaf Hachaim advises to add something new in this prayer since it is easy to do, and one will thereby comply with all opinions in doing so.

Although “after the fact” (*bidi’aved*), one technically has until the end of the prayer time to make up a missed prayer, the Halacha Berurah by Rabbi David Yosef states that if one began to eat he must stop and pray before continuing.

### LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

## GOREN ARAVNA — BEGINNING OF THE BEIT HAMIKDASH

Whenever Jews throughout the world visit and pray at the site of the remainder of the Western Wall, they recall the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. But what was the first step taken for the *establishment* of that sacred building?

When a plague struck the Jewish people as punishment for the census conducted by their king, a message from G-d was conveyed to David by the Prophet Gad: “Go up and build an altar to G-d on the threshing floor of Aravna the Jebusite.”



(Shmuel II 24:18)

King David was welcomed by Aravna, who offered everything he needed for building and equipping such an altar. But David insisted on purchasing the site and the animals that were sacrificed upon it, bringing an end to the plague.

It was on this purchased site that the Beit Hamikdash was built by David’s son. This is one of three sites, say our Sages, whose Jewish ownership cannot be disputed since it was actually purchased.

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BY RABBI REUVEN CHAIM KLEIN

## LOOKING FOUR DIRECTIONS

The Bible (Genesis 28:14) relates that when G-d blesses Jacob and tells him that his descendants' population will "burst forth" in all four directions, He uses the following words to refer to those directions: *yam* (west), *kedem* (east), *tzafon* (north), and *negev* (south). However, in another context (Deuteronomy 3:27), when G-d tells Moses to gaze upon the Holy Land from which he was barred from entering, He tells Moses to look at all four directions: *yam*, *tzafon*, *mizrach* (east), and *teiman* (south). In essence, while the words for west and north remain the same, the Bible uses two different words to mean east (*kedem* and *mizrach*) and south (*negev* and *teiman*). What is the difference between these synonymous doublets? This matter actually becomes quite complicated upon the realization that the Hebrew language has three words for every one of the four directions!

As we shall see below, the different words for the four directions focus on different aspects of those directions and are generally based on either the movements of the sun or certain topographical characteristics of the Holy Land.

Rabbeinu Bachaya explains that the word *yam* literally means "sea", and is also used to refer to the west because the Mediterranean Sea lies at the west side of the Holy Land. The west is also called *ma'arav* because as the sun sets, the shapes of shadows become mixed up (*me'urav*). Thirdly, the word *acharon*, which literally means "last", also means west because it is the last place along the horizon where the sun is located before setting in evening.

There are three words for east: *mizrach*, *kedem*, and *panim*. *Mizrach* is related to the word *zarach* (shine) and refers to the direction from which the sun first shines in the morning, while *kedem* is related to the word *kodem* (early or forward) and refers to the fact that the rising-sun first shines from the east. The word *panim* (literally, "facewards") also means east because when Adam was created the front of his body faced eastward.

As mentioned above, the common Hebrew word for north is *tzafon*. The commentators offer several explanations for the etymology of this word: Some compare the word *tzafon* to *tzafun* which means "hidden" because in the northern parts of the world (i.e. the Arctic zone) the influence of the sun is

"hidden", as the cold temperatures there obscure the sun's warmth. Alternatively, because the sun generally remains south of the celestial equator, the north side is considered "hidden" from the sun's presence. Others claim that *tzafon* is related to the word *tzifiya* (gazing) and refers to the fact that one can determine north by gazing towards the Heavens and following the Northern Star. Another approach argues that the word *tzafon* refers to Mount Tzafon (identified by scholars as Jebel Aqra on the border between modern-day Turkey and Syria, a mountain mentioned in the Bible which lies due north of the Holy Land.

The Talmud sometimes uses the Aramaic word *estan* to mean north (e.g. Ketubot 23a). Rabbeinu Bachaya (1255-1340) proposes that the word *estan* may be related to the Aramaic word *asuta*, which means "health", and alludes to the fact that the north-wind possesses certain healing properties (see Yevamot 72a). In fact, some people have a custom of exclaiming "Asuta!" ("Gesundheit!" in Yiddish) when hearing another sneeze, so as to bless him with good health.

The word *darom* means south, and the commentaries explain that *darom* is a portmanteau of the words *derech yom* ("the path of the day"), because the sun generally remains in the southern hemisphere of the celestial map during the day. The south is also called *negev* (literally, "dry") because the southern part of the Holy Land is a dry and arid desert-land.

There are two more words for north and south which you might be familiar with from another context: *teiman/yemin* (right) and *smol* (left). The Bible uses the words right and left to refer to the south and north, respectively. This understanding presupposes that eastwards is one's frame of reference, because, as we mentioned above, Adam was created facing eastwards. Therefore, because one facing eastwards encounters north to his left and south to his right, the very words for north and south can be left and right. In an interesting geographical anomaly, the Hebrew words for left and right are found in place-names near the Gulf of Aden between Africa and Arabia. One travelling northwards in the Gulf of Aden will approach Yemen (related to *yemin*) on his right, and Somalia (related to *smol*) on his left.

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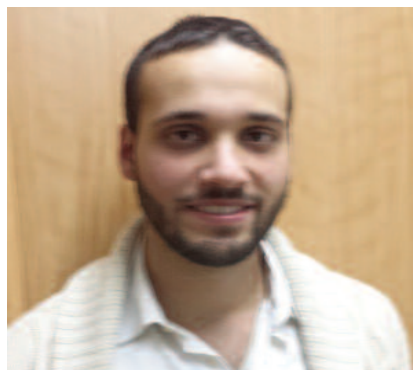
## GAVRIEL ZARRUK

Age 27 - Livorno, Italy - University of Pisa  
Student in Mechina Program

The history of Jews in the Levant is a long one. By and large, before the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 relations between the people and the rulers of those lands and the Jews were relatively good. Libya was an exception. Unlike other countries in North Africa, Libya was conquered by the Italians in 1911. Until 1936 the Jewish community there was quite prosperous and well integrated into the economy, professions, educational system and the government of the country. Beginning in the mid-30s the climate changed. Mussolini — the fascist dictator of Italy — and Hitler entered into an alliance. Germany pressured the Italians to enact laws that dispossessed Jews of their citizenship and civil rights. In 1938 Italy capitulated to the pressure and started disenfranchising its Jews. In 1942, during the Second World War, Jews were deported to concentration camps in Libya. While these were not extermination camps, they might have become extermination camps if the Allies had not defeated Rommel and his Wehrmacht divisions in 1943. Because many Jews had been displaced, their economic situation was poor even though the British, who were then governing Libya, were benevolent to the community. In 1945 the Arab population, needing no particular cause, made a pogrom on the Jewish community and killed almost 150 people, destroying many synagogues and businesses. In 1948, after Israel was established as a State, there were more riots. Most Jews emigrated to Israel, some to Italy and a small community was left in Bengazi and Tripoli.

Gavriel's father was born in Bengazi and his mother in Tripoli. In 1967, after the Six Day War, Arab passions flared

up against the Jews and the small community left, leaving only a handful of Jews in Libya. Gavriel's grandparents and their families moved to Livorno, Italy, where there was an established Libyan Sephardi community of about 700 Jews. But it was a dwindling community. Young people were either making *aliyah* or moving to the larger cities like Rome. There were not enough Jewish children to justify a Jewish day school when Gavriel was growing up, so he went to public school. His family, including his six brothers and sisters, is religious and keeps Shabbat and *kashrut*. His Jewish education was through afternoon classes at his synagogue.



After graduating from high school, Gavriel chose to study History and Political Science at the University of Pisa. As in much of Europe, there was quite a bit of Anti-Semitism and anti-Israel sentiment in Pisa — mostly from left-wing Italians, of which there are many. Realizing that there was no future for Jews in Italy, he made *aliyah* in 2014. After working at various jobs in Tel Aviv, Gavriel made the decision to make up for lost time and get a more comprehensive Jewish education. His rabbi in Bnei Braq suggested that the best place for him was Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem. He has a sister who has been learning in Neve Yerushalayim for over a year and a half, so he has family here in Jerusalem. He came to the Mechina Program in Elul. Of his experience so far, Gavriel says: "It's a very good environment here. I feel the *simcha* of the *mitzvot* and I am learning to understand the *mitzvot*. I also really like the atmosphere in the homes of the families that I have been invited to for Shabbat."

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