

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT KI TEITZEI · 11 ELUL 5777 · SEP. 2, 2017 · VOL. 24 NO. 46

PARSHA INSIGHTS

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

POST-TRUTH

“A perfect and honest measure” (25:15)

G-d’s imprimatur is Truth. In Hebrew, the word for “truth” — *emet* — consists of the first, the last and the middle letters of the *Alef Bet*. Truth is unmalleable, unswerving from the beginning to the end.

Not so in contemporary society.

In 2016, after much discussion, debate, and research, the word elected to be Oxford Dictionary’s Word of the Year was “post-truth” — an adjective defined as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief”.

Our society has given up on the truth. It doesn’t believe in an absolute truth, and in its stead it has replaced truth with the demand for “respect”. Seeing as truth doesn’t exist, by definition, your beliefs have an equal validity to mine. Thus you are obliged to respect and give place to my “truth” — seeing as it is as true or untrue as your “truth”.

A case in point is the metamorphosis of the word “narrative”.

“Narrative” means a story. It’s been misappropriated from the world of fiction.

Narrative has replaced the truth. For example, now we have an Israeli narrative and a Palestinian narrative. Implicitly, the use of the word “narrative” in this sort of way denies the existence of a third possibility – the Truth.

When I was growing up, if you wanted to call someone lighthearted and carefree, you said that he was “gay”. In the shifting quicksands of political correctness “gay” has been hijacked to sanitize what the Torah denounces as an abomination – “*toe’vah*”. Deviance becomes lighthearted and carefree. What a triumph for the spin-doctors!

Oh, and there’s another Brave New Word: Spin Doctors, meaning “liars”.

All the following nouns want to attach themselves to truth, but they all mean lies: poetic truth, parallel truth, nuanced truth, imaginative truth, virtual truth, alternative reality, strategic misrepresentations, creative enhancement, non-full disclosure, selective disclosure, augmented reality, nearly true, almost true, counterfactual statements, fact-based information...

Present day synonyms for the verb “to lie” include: to enrich the truth, to enhance the truth, to embroider the truth, to massage the truth, to tell more than the truth, to bend the truth, to soften the truth, to shade the truth, to shave the truth, to make things clearer than the truth, to be lenient with honesty.

Such are the shifting sands of reality and its linguistic mirages that plague our modern world.

Happy are we who know that there is something called “*emet*”! Truth. Happy are we who have “a perfect and honest measure” of the world.

SANHEDRIN 44 - 50

Prayer and Angels

Reish Lakish said, "One who makes an effort in his prayer here below will not have 'troublemakers' from Above." Rabbi Yochanan said, "A person should always ask for mercy that all should make an effort for his strength, and then he will not have 'troublemakers' from Above."

These two interpretations are taught in our *gemara*, and the Maharsha explains the textual basis for this dispute. These Sages offer two possible ways of learning the following verse: "Will you set up your prayer so that no trouble befall you, or any forces of strength?" (Iyov 36:19)

Rashi states that Rabbi Yochanan is including the efforts of the Administering Angels in helping a person's prayer prevent troubles. However, it seems that Rabbi Yochanan is teaching that a person should pray to these angels when he prays to G-d, in order to maximize the effect of his prayers in preventing tragedy. This understanding would pose a great dilemma in how we are taught to pray, as explained by the Rambam (in his Thirteen Principles of Faith) and other Rishonim and Achronim. We are taught to pray only to G-d, and not to any other entity — including an angel.

One approach is that Rashi means that a person should pray to G-d alone, but request that G-d allow His angels to help provide for his needs and protect him from troubles, and not allow His angels to be opponents to the prayer's wellbeing. (Maharal)

Another approach differs from Rashi's explanation. Rabbi Yochanan is teaching that a person should ask that *other people* should pray for him, and not that he should pray to angels to assist him. (Meiri)

This entire subject of directing prayers towards angels is one of great scope and practical consequence, and is discussed at length by the commentaries, especially those on the Siddur and Machzor. One common controversy is singing "*Barchuni l'Shalom Malachei HaShalom*" (Bless us for Peace, Angels of Peace) on Friday nights. Although the widespread custom is to include these words, there are some people who have the custom not to say these words since they appear to be a plea of prayer to angels.

• *Sanhedrin 45b*

Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: "One who unnecessarily delays the burial of the deceased transgresses a Torah violation."

The Torah states, "If a man commits a sin for which he is sentenced to death, and he is put to death, you shall then hang him on a pole. But you shall not leave his body on the pole overnight. Rather, you shall bury him on that same day, for a hanging human corpse is a blasphemy of G-d, and you shall not defile your Land that the L-rd, your G-d is giving you as an inheritance." (Deut. 21:22-23)

The *mishna* (45b) teaches that according to the *Chachamim* a man who curses the Almighty or worships idols and is sentenced to death by stoning is also hung afterwards. The verse above, however, teaches that after this capital punishment process the person should be buried without delay, and whoever is in charge of the burial violates a Torah prohibition if he fails to do so.

The next *mishna* (46a) explains the reason for burying him on the same day: "for a hanging human corpse is a blasphemy of G-d". This means that since the person was punished for cursing G-d, it would be a desecration of G-d's Name to leave his body hanging too long, since it would be a reason for people to say, "That's the person who blasphemed the Name of G-d". This *mishna* also states that if the burial is delayed in order to bring a coffin and shrouds the prohibition of "not delaying" is not transgressed.

• *Sanhedrin 46b*

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why must a captured woman mourn her family for a month in her captor's house?
2. What fraction of the inheritance does a first-born receive if he has a) one brother? b) two brothers?
3. What will become of a *ben sorer u'moreh* if his parents don't bring him to court?
4. Why is it a degradation to G-d to hang a criminal's body on the gallows overnight?
5. What do you do if you find a lost object that costs money to maintain?
6. Why does the Torah forbid wearing the clothing of the opposite gender?
7. Why does the Torah link the mitzvah of sending away the mother-bird with the mitzvah of making a railing on the roof of your house?
8. What mixture of wool and linen is permitted to be worn?
9. What three things happen to a man who falsely slanders his bride?
10. Although the Egyptians enslaved the Jewish People, the Torah allows marriage with their third-generation converts. Why?
11. Why is causing someone to sin worse than killing him?
12. If one charges interest to his fellow Jew, how many commandments has he transgressed?
13. What is the groom's special obligation to his bride during their first year together?
14. When is a groom required to fight in a non-obligatory war?
15. What type of object may one not take as collateral?
16. "Remember what G-d did to Miriam." To what event does the Torah refer?
17. If a poor person finds money, the one who lost it receives a blessing. From where do we derive this?
18. Who has the primary obligation to perform *yibum*?
19. Which two people in this week's *Parsha* are required to speak in *Lashon Hakodesh*?
20. How does the Torah describe those who cheat in business?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to This Week's Questions!

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

1. 21:13 - So her captor will find her unattractive.
2. 21:17 - a) 2/3 b) 1/2
3. 21:22 - He will eventually rob and kill to support his physical indulgences.
4. 21:23 - Because humans are made in G-d's image, and because the Jewish People are G-d's children.
5. 22:2 - Sell it and save the money for the owner.
6. 22:5 - It leads to immorality.
7. 22:8 - To teach that one mitzvah leads to another, and to prosperity.
8. 22:12 - Wool *tzitzit* on a linen garment.
9. 22:18 - He receives lashes, pays a fine of 100 silver *selah*, and may never divorce her against her will.
10. 23:8 - Because they hosted Yaakov and his family during the famine.
11. 23:9 - Murder takes away life in this world, while causing someone to sin takes away his life in the World to Come.
12. 23:21 - Three; two negative commandments and a positive commandment.
13. 24:5 - To gladden her.
14. 24:5 - When he remarries his ex-wife.
15. 24:6 - Utensils used to prepare food.
16. 24:9 - G-d punishing Miriam with *tzara'at* for speaking *lashon harah*.
17. 24:19 - From the mitzvah to leave the "forgotten bundle" for the poor.
18. 25:6 - The eldest brother.
19. 25:8 - The *yavam* (brother-in-law) and the *yavamah* (his childless brother's widow).
20. 25:16 - "An abomination (*to'evah*) to G-d."

OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College

POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

Love of the Land, written by Rav Mendel Weinbach, zt"l • General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman • Design: Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro

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THE REBELLIOUS SON

One of the more puzzling *mitzvot* in this *parsha* concerns the “wayward and rebellious son” who can be executed at the age of 13 for what appear to be relatively minor infractions. Briefly, the Torah describes a 13 year-old boy who does not listen to his parents, even after they discipline him. They bring him to the elders of the city and explain: “This son of ours is wayward and rebellious; he does not listen to our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard” (Devarim 21:20). He is then stoned to death by the people of the city in order to remove this evil from the populace and to instill fear in them as well.

Abarbanel explains that on the simplest level “wayward” refers to his deviating from the general path of the *mitzvot*, while “rebellious” refers to his intractable defiance of his parents. He is also guilty of explicitly transgressing the requirement to honor one’s parents. And finally, his drunkenness and gluttony places him even lower than animals, which eat only to satisfy their basic needs. The Talmud also says that he is essentially executed on his likely future behavior: stealing from his parents and committing violent highway robbery against the general public. This illustrates the general principle that “It is better to die innocent of transgression than to die guilty.”

Abarbanel explains further that when we look deeper into this situation we can see how far this young man has deviated from behavioral norms. Normally, in Jewish law no one can be executed without the testimony of two “kosher” witnesses. In this case, the only witnesses are the parents, who

would normally be disqualified from testifying against their own son. They also must bring him to the court themselves, another indication of their commitment to a procedure which could result in the death of their own offspring. His behavior and attitude would have had to be egregious in the extreme for the parents to overcome their natural inclination to be merciful toward their child. He is judged and executed publicly, and the Torah tells us that “...all Israel will hear and they will fear.” Everyone will shudder to think what such a deviant individual would be capable of once he reaches true adulthood.

The severity of his deviance is also indicated by the Torah’s choice of words in describing his personality. The word “*moreh*” — which is usually translated as “rebellious” — is directly related to the word for “teacher”. Not only does he not listen to his parents and rebels against them, he even seeks to reverse roles and become their teacher, attempting to convince them that his disavowal of the Torah and the norms of human behavior are actually the correct way to conduct one’s life. Anti-religious, anti-social, gluttonous and psychopathic behaviors have characterized human society since time immemorial, but rarely if ever have such individuals advocated their codification as the norms of society. This phenomenon is aptly described by King Solomon in Proverbs (30:11-13): “His father he will curse and his mother he will not bless. He will be pure in his own eyes and from his filth he will not be cleansed. One whose eyes are haughty...”

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

THE HOT SPRINGS AND THE TOMB

It is not often that the tomb of a Talmudic Sage is reached on a main road. Rabbi Yirmiyahu’s tomb is on the grounds of the Ganei Hamat Hotel next to the Tveria Hot Springs.



Tradition has it that this Sage asked his disciples to bury him on a main road so that he would be prepared to rise the moment Mashiach arrives.

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CUSTOMS OF ELUL

Beginning from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur we start blowing the shofar after the Shacharit morning prayers. There are places which also blow the shofar after the Ma'ariv evening prayers. (Rema, Orach Chaim 581:1)

In connection to the above the Ramban writes: I saw written in Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer (46) that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levy says: Moshe was on Mount Sinai for forty days. On the seventeenth of Tammuz he broke the Tablets, and then spent forty days in the camp. And then, on Rosh Chodesh Elul, G-d told him to ascend the mountain again. The shofar was blown in the camp on that day, as it is written in Psalms 47:6: G-d has ascended with the blast (of the shofar). Accordingly, the Rabbis instituted that the shofar be blown every year on Rosh Chodesh Elul. (Commentary of the Ramban on the Chumash, Shemot 33:7)

The Kaf HaChaim, quoting the Rosh's accounting of the above Midrash, writes: "The Rabbis instituted blowing the shofar in order to encourage the Jewish People to do *teshuvah*, as it is written, "Is the shofar ever sounded in the city and the people do not tremble? (Amos 3:6). It is also blown to prevent the Satan from mentioning the sins of the Jewish People. The Rosh writes that *minhag* Ashkenaz is to blow the shofar the entire month of Elul in the morning and evening after prayers. Among those who say *selichot* the entire month of Elul there are some who also blow the shofar the entire month during *selichot* when the thirteen attributes of mercy are read, in order to fulfill all opinions."

Some begin blowing the shofar the first day of Rosh Chodesh, while others begin on the second day (Mishneh Berurah). The Magen Avraham writes that there is support for both customs, and that one should not change from his family custom. (Kaf HaChaim)

According to Igrot Moshe (Orach Chaim 4 21:5), if the shofar was not blown after Shacharit it should be blown after Mincha, while Rav Elyashiv (Halichot VeHanhagot Tishrei p. 3) maintains that there is no shofar blowing after Mincha. Likewise, according to Rav Elyashiv one who prays alone does not need to blow the shofar.

The Mishneh Berurah writes that it was the custom in his country to recite "*L'David Ori*" (Psalm 27) every day after prayer in the morning and evening from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur. Kaddish is also recited afterwards. After stating the custom to recite the Psalm until Yom Kippur, he writes: "We have the custom to recite the Psalm until after Shemini Atzeret." Though the Shulchan Aruch does not mention the custom of reciting this Psalm, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef writes in Chazon Ovadia that it is a good custom to recite it after prayers each morning from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Hoshana Rabba.

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ELUL I — TRENDS IN TIME

“Enjoy life!”, “Just do it!”, and “Live it up!” are all catch-phrases and slogans of Western culture. That culture calls for people to do whatever they please in order to enjoy life without thinking of the future consequences. Western culture lives for the present. On the other hand, the Jewish approach is to always look towards the future. Before a person performs any given action he is expected to thoroughly contemplate whether its outcome will bring about something positive or not, and then act accordingly. In this essay and over the next few weeks, we will explore synonyms related to the Jewish concept of time and explain their deeper meanings.

The late Rabbi Moshe Shapiro (1935-2017) explains that the very word for time in Hebrew (*zman*) reflects on the Jewish view of time. *Zman* is related to the root-word *mizuman*, which means “ready” or “prepared”, and is used colloquially to refer to somebody who has been “invited”. Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) writes that the root of the word *zman* is *zamem* (to “plot” or “think ahead”). In essence, time is a means of preparation. For what? For the future! Thus, the very word for “time” reflects the Jewish *weltanschauung*, as it tells us to look to the future and not get stuck in the present or the past. (In Modern Hebrew “cash” is known as *mizuman* because, as opposed to checks or credit cards, it provides for a fast and easy monetary transaction and can readily be used to purchase a variety of commodities.)

There are, however, three more words in Hebrew for time — *eit*, *shaah* and *moed*.

Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur (1469-1549) writes that some people say that the word *zman* is a synonym of the word *eit*. However, he disagrees with those people and instead writes that there is a nuanced difference between the two words. HaBachur cites anonymous sages who mention a minute, philosophy-based distinction. However, he avoids offering an elaborate explication by writing that he does not have the energy to go into details. This sort of distinction is offered by HaBachur’s younger contemporary, Maharal of Prague (1525-1609), who wrote in *Netzach Yisrael* (ch. 26) that *zman* refers to the flow of time as an existing element of creation, while *eit* refers to time as an abstract concept.

Malbim explains that *moed* and *zman* refer to a pre-determined time set by man (or by G-d in the case of the *moadim*, “holidays”), while *eit* is a natural unit of time whose existence is evidenced through nature (e.g., *geshamim b’ittam* “rain in its *eit*”). This explanation does not seem to account for the difference between *moed* and *zman*, although one

could argue that *moed* is Hebrew, while *zman* is Aramaic. Indeed, the *Targumim* commonly translate instances of *moed* in the Bible as *zman*, although HaBachur points out that the word *zman* itself appears in some of the post-Exilic books of the Bible and in Ecclesiastes. Moreover, Rabbi Pappenheim points out that the word *eit* shares some common meaning with *zman*, because *eit* also refers to preparation and designation (e.g., in Leviticus 16:21 the man who is charged with sending the goat to Azazel on Yom Kippur is described as an *ish itti*, “designated man”). In fact, the Hebrew word *atid* (“future”) is derived from the word *eit* and is also a conjugation of a verb that means “to prepare”.

Others explain that *zman* is a span of time, while *eit* is a point of time within a larger span of time. In fact, Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) writes that of the three words for time, *zman* is the most general, *eit* is somewhat more specific, and *moed* refers to the most specific preset point of time (like a meeting which is scheduled down to the hour and minute). Similarly, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) writes that the word *zman* denotes time in general, while *eit* means a portion of time (it is related to *eteit* or *ettim*, which is a spade that breaks up soil into smaller units).

Rabbi Moshe Isserles (1520-1572) writes that he heard that some people view the phrase *bechol eit u’vechol shaah* (“every *eit* and every *shaah*” which appears in the second blessing of the Grace after Meals and the last blessing of the Shemonah Esreh) as redundant, choosing instead to only say *bechol eit*. However, Rabbi Isserles rejects this opinion and argues that *eit* and *shaah* are not synonymous, but refer to two different measures of time: *eit* refers to the annual seasons, and *shaah* refers to the hours of the day. Rabbi Yaakov Emden (1697-1776), in turn, takes issue with Rabbi Isserles’ assertion that *eit* refers to the seasons of the year by citing examples wherein the word *eit* refers to other (natural) phenomena, as well.

In his own discussion of the words in question, Rabbi Yaakov Emden explains that *moed* is the beginning of an appointed time, while *zman* is the entire duration of an appointed time and *eit* is any given point during that span of time. He concedes that these are only the technical differences between the terms, but in practical usage all of these words may be used interchangeably.

Author’s note:

Le’Zechut Refuah Shleimah for Bracha bat Chaya Rachel

BRIT MILAH CEREMONY

From: Patricia

*Dear Rabbi,
My daughter converted to Orthodox Judaism and married a Jewish man. They are expecting to have a boy, which of course will mean circumcising the baby according to Jewish practice. As gentiles, we would like to know what to expect about the ceremony in order to 1. Avoid as much as possible feeling out of place, and 2. In order to appreciate it as much as possible. Thank you for your consideration.*

Dear Patricia,

First, I offer my best wishes for your anticipated joyous occasion. Also, I commend you and your family's openness to learn about, and be a part of, the naturally unfamiliar aspects of your daughter's Jewish life. May you always have a loving and fulfilling relationship with her and her family.

The mitzvah of circumcision is called *brit milah*, a sign of the covenant with G-d. I'm sure the parents will choose a certified *mohel* (the term for the person who performs the *brit*) who is an expert in the Jewish and medical requirements for the procedure. The *mohel*, together with doctors' recommendations, decides if the *brit* can be performed on the required 8th day after birth, or when after that if it needs to be postponed for health reasons. The *mohel* is responsible for examining the baby before and after the *brit* to ascertain all is well. It is at the *brit* that the name is formally announced, and most people are particular not to reveal the name until at the *brit*.

At the beginning of the actual ceremony various people are honored to deliver the baby on a specially decorated and embroidered pillow or cushion, hand to hand, from the mother through the assembled until the baby is finally placed on the knees of the *sandek* (the one who holds the baby during the *brit*). This is often initiated by a couple who doesn't have children, and this mitzvah of *kvatter* is considered to be a *segula* (venue of good influence) for them to be fruitful. The wife of this couple takes the baby from the mother in the women's section and passes it to her husband in the men's section.

The baby is then passed among those honored from person to person in the direction of a special chair near where the *brit* will be performed, which looks like a kind of throne, called the Chair of Elijah the Prophet, who is considered to be present and overlooking at each *brit*. The baby is placed on the Chair of Elijah, as special prayers are recited to invoke divine favor on behalf of the infant.

Then the baby is taken from this chair and placed along the length of the thighs of the *sandek*, who also sits on a type of large, elevated throne-like chair, specially prepared for this purpose. The head of the baby is toward the waist of the *sandek*; the legs of the baby are toward his knees, facing the *mohel*. (Customs may vary in this positioning.) The *sandek* holds the baby's knees open, while the *mohel* performs the *brit*. During the actual *brit*, those involved in the ceremony wear a *tallit* (special prayer shawl), so that the *sandek* sits with the *tallit* draped over his head and the baby's face. This all takes place accompanied by the recitation of verses, supplications and blessings. Of course, there are very deep spiritual intentions to keep in mind.

The *mohel* applies an ancient, simple but ingeniously designed, sterilized instrument which isolates the foreskin to be removed, while simultaneously guarding the body part which remains. Then, the actual *brit*, which is the removal of the foreskin, is performed with great precision and alacrity, such that there is little blood and crying. The incision is immediately wrapped with special bandage by the *mohel*, the baby is quickly diapered, dressed, presented anew on the special pillow, and given some wine-dipped cloth to suckle — and usually stops crying straight away. The entire circumcision procedure usually takes less than one minute.

After the *brit* the child is lifted with the pillow from the *sandek* and the name that the parents choose is announced for the first time by a person honored with this rite, in the context of a special blessing over a silver goblet of wine. The baby is then returned via the *kvatter* couple back to the mother, who usually nurses him right away. A festive meal ensues in honor of the occasion, where small speeches of Torah ideas are shared, as well as spiritual singing. The entire day is considered to be a holy day for the entire family!

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YEHUDA CHAIM JOSEPH

Age 20 - Born: Rumford, Essex, England - University of Hertfordshire, England

According to the Rambam the belief in the coming of the Mashiah is one of the principles of our faith. We are told that in the end of days there will be a “*kibbutz goliot*” — Jews from the “lost tribes” will come back to Israel and rejoin their brethren, although they may have been separated for thousands of years and didn’t even know they were members of the Chosen People. In many ways Yeshivat Ohr Somayach is a *kibbutz goliot* in miniature. Students come from all over the world to learn here. That includes places where one would never expect Jews to live, like the Camerouns, Serbia, Lebanon, Singapore, India, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, China, South Korea, Japan or even down the road from the Yeshiva — the Arab villages of Yehuda and Samaria. Yehuda Chaim is one of these returnees who didn’t even discover that he was Jewish until he was 10 years old.

Yehuda’s mother is the daughter of a very prominent Chassidic rabbi who was one of the heads of a *chassidische* boy’s school in Stamford Hill — the most Orthodox enclave in London. She was one of 14 children. Very curious and explorative as a young teenager, she ventured outside the walls of their virtual ghetto and began to spend time and make friends with non-Jews in the multi-cultural soup which is modern London. Her family was scandalized by her behavior and she ran away from home. Soon afterwards she married a non-Jewish Nigerian man and moved to Plumstead, near Greenwich, a decidedly non-Jewish area of the city. Yehuda was born there, grew up as a Christian and went to a Christian primary school. Yehuda’s mother had virtually no contact with her Jewish family and he had no idea he was Jewish.

When he was ten years old his mother made, what seemed to Yehuda, a radical decision. She revealed to her children that she was a Jewess and, therefore, they were also Jews. She then moved with her four children to Chigwell, near Ilford, a very Jewish area of London, and enrolled her school-age children in the Ilford Jewish Primary School. They were the only multicultural students in the school, and, as such, were objects of much curiosity. For the

first few months it was very difficult for Yehuda socially. Fortunately, he was a very friendly and outgoing boy, and after a few weeks was quite popular with the other boys in his class. Since he had no Jewish background at all, he was far behind the rest of the class in Jewish studies. But the school provided tutors and he was soon up to speed. In grade seven he began at the King Solomon School in Ilford. He did quite well there and in his final year was Deputy Head Boy of the school. He then did his A levels and gained admission to the University of Hertfordshire.



King Solomon School is a modern Orthodox school, and Yehuda, while happily Jewish and somewhat mitzvah observant, wasn’t yet fully committed to the life of a religious Jew. A certain crisis brought him to a closer personal relationship to G-d, and his desire to continue growing that relationship brought him to the JLE of London — one of the most prominent *kiruv* centers in England. He studied *Derech Hashem* with Rabbi Sandor Milun and attended many other

classes. In his gap year, between A levels and University, he did an apprenticeship as an assistant teacher at the Crownfield Infant School, where he taught Jewish Studies to six and seven year olds. The JLE has helped send him to Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem for the past two summers. His experience in the Mechina Program has been very positive. He says: “I have improved tremendously and am very grateful to Ohr Somayach for giving me the opportunity to study here.”

Yehuda Chaim is now going into his second year at university, majoring in Geography and Geopolitics. After his life experiences in overcoming seemingly insurmountable obstacles, he has dedicated himself to helping other teenagers do the same. Last year he started a business giving motivational talks to high school students. It’s called “Motiv8” (their Facebook page is at [www.facebook.com/Motiveight Project/#](https://www.facebook.com/MotiveightProject/)). The business is growing quickly. He has contracts with many schools in England and already has 12 staff members. If you meet Yehuda Chaim you’ll understand why he’s so successful. It’s called charisma, or, as we say in Hebrew, “*chen*”.

FIRST STEP TO TESHUVAH

The *pasuk* in *Mishlei* (1:2) says “The parables of Shlomo, the son of David, the king of Israel, to know *chochmah* and *mussar* to understand sayings of wisdom.” The commentaries explain the difference between *chochmah* and *mussar* by explaining that *chochmah* is the knowledge to differentiate between what is and what is not permitted. *Mussar* is meant to help bring those ideas into action. This is accomplished through repetitively stressing the disgracefulness of transgressions and the nobility of *mitzvot* and through giving advice on how to battle one’s *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) and come to do the right thing. One without the other doesn’t work, as it says in *Pirkei Avot* (3:23): Without wisdom there is no fear of Heaven, and without fear of Heaven there is no wisdom (see *Sha’arei Teshuva* 3:3 and *Meiri* on *Mishlei* 1:2).

Let’s begin with the first part of what it says in *Avot*: “Without wisdom there is no fear of Heaven.” If one is unaware of what is required of him, he may easily transgress the Torah, even if he means well. For example, someone may decide to work on the *midah* (character trait) of *hakarat hatov* (giving gratitude), and he reads all the books on how important this *midah* is. So, when he comes to pay back his friend money lent to him, he adds a little bit, as a token of gratitude. Though he obviously meant well, he is actually transgressing the prohibition of taking or paying interest.

Another example is someone who reads plenty of *mussar* about speaking *lashon hara* and its severity. He thus takes great care to guard his mouth and never speak ill of anyone. However, when one questions him on an appropriate marriage or business partner, he silently refuses to reveal any negative traits about his friend, even though it may be required by halacha. Even if he knows that in such a situation he may be required to reveal the information, if he doesn’t know the conditions that one has to meet before relating the information it still doesn’t help him avoid the offense of speaking *lashon hara* (see *Chafetz Chaim* 4:11 and 10:1-2). In such a situation, while one is trying to follow halacha and guard his tongue, he is, in fact, transgressing halacha.

Even though in the cases above the person didn’t intend to commit a transgression, and did not purposefully transgress, the *gemara* still says that such an individual needs *kapara* (atonement; *Nazir* 23a). Especially in such cases when he wasn’t fully innocent, as he should have made time to learn the appropriate *halachot*. Halacha is, after all, the user’s guide for life. The *Chafetz Chaim* says that this is why the *Midrash* says that one who lacks knowledge can’t learn

mussar. The simple understanding is that the *mussar* wouldn’t help one who doesn’t have an understanding of halacha (See introduction *Shemirat Halashon*). As it is elegantly said in *Avot* (2:6): An unlearned person can not be a *chasid* (scrupulously observant person). (See *Midrash Shmuel* on *Avot* 3:23; *Elef Hamagen* of Rabbi Eliezer Papo, *drush rishon l’Shabbat Teshuva*; *Chazon Ish’s Emuna U’bitachon* perek 3).

There isn’t much a person can possibly do without knowing halacha, as almost every area of one’s life requires knowledge of the appropriate *halachot*. How can he speak if he isn’t versed in the laws of *lashon hara*, flattery and hurtful speech (*ona’at devarim*)? How can he listen to his friend speak without knowing the laws of when one is and is not allowed to accept *lashon hara*? How can he eat without knowing the intricate *halachot* of which *beracha* to make on mixtures of food? If he doesn’t make any preceding *beracha*, then the *gemara* says it is considered as if he stole the food (*Berachot* 35b), and if he makes an unnecessary *beracha* then he also transgressed a Rabbinical decree and at times, according to some opinions, even a Torah law. How can one do business without knowing the laws of buying and selling, overcharging, the intricate laws of taking interest and the laws of paying one’s workers on time? Needless to say, on *Shabbat*, where there are so many intricate laws, knowledge of halacha is crucial. Just moving certain things may be a problem because of *muktzah*, or selecting something from a mixture may fall under the prohibition of *borer* without the appropriate conditions. This is so to such an extent that the *Ya’arot Devash* says that if someone hasn’t learned *hilchot Shabbat* thoroughly it is impossible not to transgress *Shabbat*. In all of these scenarios we see it is impossible to live as a religious Jew without thorough knowledge of halacha. As the *Chazon Ish* states: With every movement one needs to seek the counsel of the *Shulchan Aruch*.

One of the things we ask forgiveness for in the *Viduy* is for “*viduy peh*,” which is confession of the mouth. This is referring to just reciting the *Viduy* without meaning it, as the *Rambam* says: Anyone who confesses but didn’t make up in his heart to leave those (inappropriate) things is compared to someone who dips in a *mikveh* with a dead animal in his hands (*Hilchot Teshuva* 2:3). When one declares he will not perform an *aveira* again without a background in halacha, his *Viduy*, too, is somewhat superficial. After all, how can he proclaim that he will not transgress again if he doesn’t know what the transgression consists of? Unless one is trying his

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CHECK IT OUT!

Elul, the Hebrew month preceding Rosh Hashanah, is here! Traditionally, this is a time for self-improvement and an opportunity to “get right with G-d” before the Day of Judgment. During this period, some meticulous individuals have a custom of having their *mezuzot* checked every year to make sure that the parchment and the letters have not been damaged.

However, this custom is not obligatory. The Talmud requires that an individual check his *mezuzot* only every three-and-a-half years. That being said, a yearly check-up is actually a good idea for *mezuzot* that might have sustained damage due to exposure to harsh sunlight or excessive humidity. Of course, if one notices that a particular mezuzah has been affected by the elements, he should check it right away.

Aside from these set times, it is customary to check one's *mezuzot* if he finds himself or his family in a “sea of troubles” or ill health. Our Sages attribute special protective powers to the mezuzah, and if things are going haywire there might be a glitch in the “mezuzah force-field”. Of course, it might be a good idea to check one's moral and ethical behavior at the same time!

Clearly, it is preferable to have one's *mezuzot* checked by a reliable *sofer* who is trained to pick up subtleties that the

layman's eye might miss. However, if your *mezuzot* were already checked by a professional *sofer*, the purpose of re-checking them now is mainly to see that the letters have not cracked or have otherwise been damaged by moisture or sun exposure. This kind of checking can be done by a competent layman, when necessary.

If you find no problems, you should immediately return the *mezuzot* to their posts. In this case, no new blessing is recited. Ideally, one should put them back without delay, as there are some authorities that require a new blessing after just a few hours, especially if one has engaged in other activities in the meantime.

When *mezuzot* are removed overnight, a blessing should be recited when they are re-affixed. If all the *mezuzot* are re-affixed at the same time, one blessing suffices for all of them.

If you replace a mezuzah on a different doorway, you may make a blessing even before the next day. However, you should make sure not to “demote” a mezuzah by moving it from a doorway whose obligation is clear to one whose obligation is doubtful.

• Sources: *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 128:3; *Mateh Efraim* 581:10; *Pitchei Teshuvah* Y.D. 291:3

Got a mezuzah question or story? Email rabbi@ohrsandton.com or submit on my website mymezuzahstory.com

OHRNET Elul Special

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hardest and makes time to learn halacha his *Viduy* is hardly sincere. With this we can understand the *gemara* that says that Chazal instituted the *beracha* of asking for help to do *teshuvah* after the *beracha* of asking for knowledge based on the verse in Yeshayahu (6:10) which says “His heart will understand and he will return” (See Megillah 17b). The simple reason behind this order is that the only way one can do proper *teshuvah* is through adequate knowledge of what G-d requires of him. It is thus impossible to perform proper *teshuvah* without first acquiring knowledge in halacha.

The *gemara* says that whoever learns two *halachot* a day is promised to be a “*ben Olam HaBa*” (Nidah 73b). The commentaries add that this is only through learning halacha, and

not just *gemara* (see Drisha on Yoreh Deah 246). We are also told to begin with learning the *halachot* that pertain to one's everyday life, as the Mishnah Berurah writes that a person's main learning should be in the section Orach Chaim of the Shulchan Aruch because its *halachot* come up all the time (Shem Olam, Sha'ar Hitchazkut, *perek* 7; also in introduction to Mishna Berura I). With all this said, setting aside time to learn the relevant *halachot* is perhaps the most proper and crucial thing to take on in this auspicious time for *teshuvah*. May we all merit making the most of this time. *Be'ezrat Hashem*, in a future essay, we will address the second part of what it says in Pirkei Avot, that if there is no fear of Heaven there is no wisdom.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

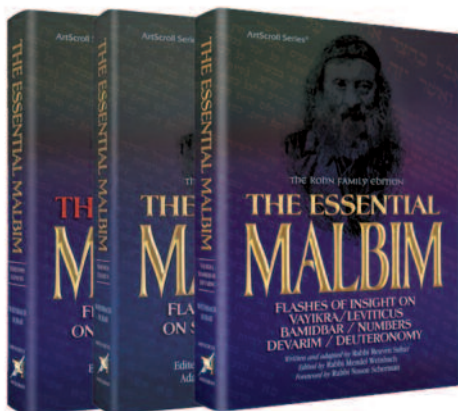
The Torah describes the only permissible way a woman captured in battle may be married. If a man marries two wives, and the less-favored wife bears a firstborn son, this son's right to inherit a double portion is protected against the father's desire to favor the child of the favored wife. The penalty for a rebellious son, who will inevitably degenerate into a monstrous criminal, is stoning. A body must not be left on the gallows overnight, because it had housed a holy soul. Lost property must be returned. Men are forbidden from wearing women's clothing and vice versa. A mother bird may not be taken together with her eggs. A fence must be built around the roof of a house. It is forbidden to plant a mixture of seeds, to plow with an ox and a donkey together, or to combine wool and linen in a garment. A four-cornered garment must have twisted threads — *tzitzit* — on its corners. Laws regarding illicit relationships are detailed. When Israel goes to war, the camp must be governed by rules of spiritual purity. An escaped slave must not be returned to his master.

Taking interest for lending to a Jew is forbidden. *Bnei*

Yisrael are not to make vows. A worker may eat of the fruit he is harvesting. Divorce and marriage are legislated. For the first year of marriage, a husband is exempt from the army and stays home to rejoice with his wife. Tools of labor may not be impounded, as this prevents the debtor from earning a living. The penalty for kidnapping for profit is death. Removal of the signs of the disease *tzara'at* is forbidden. Even for an overdue loan, the creditor must return the collateral daily if the debtor needs it. Workers' pay must not be delayed. The guilty may not be subjugated by punishing an innocent relative. Because of their vulnerability, converts and orphans have special rights of protection. The poor are to have a portion of the harvest. A court may impose lashes. An ox must not be muzzled while threshing. It is a mitzvah for a man to marry his brother's widow if the deceased left no offspring. Weights and measures must be accurate and used honestly. The *parsha* concludes with the mitzvah to erase the name of Amalek, for, in spite of knowing about the Exodus, he ambushed the Jewish People.

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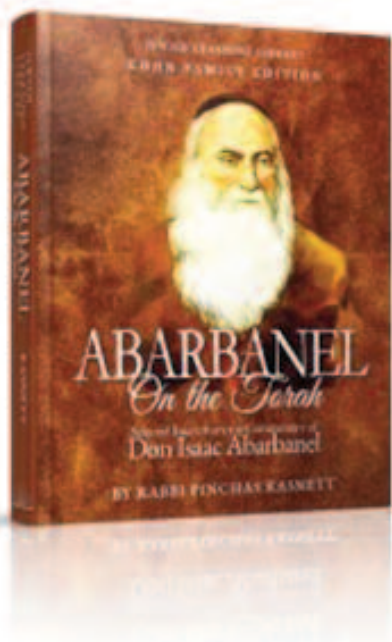
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