

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### With the Help of Heaven

*“And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt...” (47:28)*

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement is a global campaign promoting various forms of boycott against Israel until it meets what the campaign describes as “[Israel’s] obligations under international law”, defined as withdrawal from the occupied territories, removal of the separation barrier in the West Bank, full equality for Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel, and promotion of the right of return of Palestinian refugees.

Voices against the BDS movement claim that it judges the State of Israel with standards different from those used to judge other political situations. For example, Charles Krauthammer wrote: “Israel is the world’s only Jewish state. To apply to the state of the Jews a double standard that you apply to none other, to judge one people in a way you judge no other, to single out that one people for condemnation and isolation – is to engage in a gross act of discrimination.” Retired Harvard Law Professor Alan Dershowitz compares the way BDS proponents “single-out” Israel for its human rights violations with the way Harvard president A. Lawrence Lowell defended his decision to impose anti-Jewish quotas in the beginning of the 20th century. When asked why there should be a quota on Jews, Lowell replied, “Jews cheat.” When reminded that Christians cheat too, Lowell responded, “You’re changing the subject. We are talking about Jews now.”

In this week’s Torah portion the quintessential exile of the Jewish People into Egypt reaches its conclusion with Yaakov and all his family firmly domiciled in the

Land of Goshen. In spite of all of Yosef’s public service to Egypt, rescuing the country from the ravages of a world-wide famine and skillfully navigating Egypt to a position of unrivalled prominence and power, we learn in the very first sentences of the book of Exodus that “a new king arose of Egypt, who did not know Yosef.” (1:8) Here is the archetypal source of the amnesia shown by host nations to their Jewish citizens: They welcome our skills and industriousness and then turn around and say, “Yeah, but what have you done for us lately?”

What causes this amnesia?

210 years later, when Moshe leads the Jewish People out of Egypt, they were immersed in idol worship. Clearly this did not happen overnight. In fact, from the moment the Jewish People entered Egypt, the effect of the spiritual impurity of that land started its work. Slowly but very surely it took its toll, and the Jewish people started to forget Who it is that helps and guards them.

When we write a letter or an essay or even a list or a drawing, we put an abbreviation of three letters either in Hebrew or English in the top right-hand corner of the paper. We write BS”D, meaning *B’sayatta d’Shamaya*, which is the Aramaic for “with the help of Heaven”. We declare that everything that we can write, think or create comes only with the help of Heaven.

When a Jew forgets from where his help comes, BS”D will turn into BD”S.

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Chullin 9-15

## Best Foot Forward

*“From where do we learn that principle that the Rabbis taught us that we should establish an item on its chazaka?”*

The principle of *chazaka* mentioned here in the *gemara* instructs us to keep the status quo of an item intact in a case when we have doubt as to whether its status has changed for some reason. The reader may find it helpful to view this Torah’s rule for deciding the halachic status of an item in a way that is perhaps similar to Newton’s First Law of Motion: “An object either remains at rest or continues to move at a constant velocity, unless acted upon by a force.” Of course it is not the same, and I intend it only as a teaching aid to compare this fascinating principle to a well-known law of physics.

*Chazaka* (lit. “holding”) is a Torah principle, despite the somewhat cryptic way it is mentioned on our *daf*, “From where do we learn that principle that *the Rabbis taught us...*” However, it is clear from the fact that the Sages of the Oral Law ask for its (*Torah*) source, that it is indeed a Torah concept. Our *sugya* seeks the source for it in the Written Law.

The source for *chazaka* in the Torah that our *gemara* suggests, debates, and then finally accepts, is the case of a house afflicted with *tzara’at*. This means that the house is “plagued” with a certain spot or spots on the inside, as described in the Torah. The upshot of the presence of *tzara’at* in a house renders the house and the contents as being *tamei* (a halachic status of spiritual and ritual impurity). This affliction of *tzara’at* is often poorly translated as “leprosy” and was applicable, as the Torah teaches, to clothing and people as well as houses, although this “disease” of *tzara’at* is not applicable today. We are taught that it was inflicted from Above as a punishment for negative and slanderous speech by the item’s owner.

A house that is suspected of having a spot that would render it a *bayit ha’menuga* – a house afflicted in this manner – must be inspected by a *kohen*, who decides its status after entering the house and viewing the *nega* (spot). Only a *kohen* can condemn the house and rule that it is *tamei*.

The Torah states the manner in which the *kohen* concludes his examination of the house before pronouncing it *tamei*: “Then the *kohen* will go out of the house to the entrance of the house...” (Vayikra 14:38) Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yonatan, “Perhaps while the *kohen* was walking out of the house the spot diminished in size to be less than the minimum measure and is therefore not an issue?” Since we see that the Torah is not concerned with this possibility, he concludes, it must be that the Torah relies on the assumption that the size is

unchanged unless known to be otherwise – and this shows the source and application of the Torah principle of *chazaka*.

A question is raised by Rabbi Acha bar Yaakov, that perhaps the Torah is speaking about the *kohen* walking out of the house backwards. In this manner the *kohen* is able to view the spot and ensure it did not change time even while he was exiting the house. Therefore Rabbi Acha bar Yaakov contends that we cannot learn the principle of *chazaka* from this section of the Torah.

The Sage Abayei, however, answers this question in two ways: First of all, walking backwards does not fulfill the requirement of the exiting – *va’yeitzei* – in the verse. In addition, even if it is a proper fulfillment of exiting, we still would need to rely on *chazaka* in the event that the spot is behind the door, in a place he cannot keep in his view even if he walks out backward.

The Sage Rava takes issue with both answers that Abayei stated. Regarding Abayei’s first point, Rava teaches that we find that the *kohen gadol* fulfills his requirement to exit (*v’yatza* in Vayikra 15:24) the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur by walking out backwards. This is taught in a *mishna*, that “his exit is like his entrance”, i.e. he exits while facing the Holy of Holies, walking backwards. (Rava also addresses Abayei’s second point, as taught in the *gemara*.)

Tosefot raises a question regarding a backwards *entry* into a *bayit hamenuga*. The *gemara* in Tractate Shavuot (17b) states that although one who enters this house becomes *tamei*, if he does so in a backwards manner he does not become *tamei*. Why should this differ from the way we view the exit of the *kohen gadol*? Tosefot answers that there is a distinction between *entering* and *exiting*. Entering is proper and normal only when done in a forward manner. Exiting, however, is considered normal also when done backward, as is the manner of a student taking leave of his teacher. In our day, in fact, it is the widespread custom for one who is departing the Kotel to walk away backward, while still facing this place where the Divine Presence resides. In a similar manner, we take three steps backwards from the intimate setting of being before the King of kings in His palace at the conclusion of each “silent” *amida* prayer.

- *Chullin 10b*

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# PARSHA Q & A

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1. Why is kindness towards the dead called “chesed shel emet” – kindness of truth?
2. Give three reasons Yaakov didn’t want to be buried in Egypt.
3. How do you treat a “fox in his time” (i.e. a commoner who rules)?
4. “When I was coming from Padan, Rachel died on me.... I buried her there on the way to Efrat...” Why did Yaakov say this to Yosef?
5. Initially, why was Yaakov unable to bless Efraim and Menashe?
6. What does *fillalti* mean?
7. What does “Shechem” mean as used in this week’s Parsha? (two answers)
8. Which individual is called “the Emori”? Why? Give two reasons
9. What did Yaakov want to tell his sons but was unable to?
10. What privileges did Reuven lose due to his rash actions?
11. What congregation from Yaakov’s offspring did Yaakov not want to be associated with?
12. What did Yehuda do after he heard Yaakov rebuke Reuven, Shimon and Levi? Why?
13. What does milk do to teeth?
14. Why is Yissachar like a “strong boned donkey”?
15. With what resource did both Yaakov and Moshe bless Asher?
16. In Yosef’s blessing Yaakov said “They embittered him...” Who are “they”?
17. Which descendants of Binyamin “will divide the spoils in the evening”?
18. From whom did Yaakov buy his burial place?
19. What oath did Yosef make to Pharaoh?
20. Which two sons of Yaakov did not carry his coffin? Why not?

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## Answers

*All references are to the verses and Rashi’s commentary, unless otherwise stated.*

1. 47:29 - Because the giver expects no reward from the recipient.
2. 47:29 - a) Egypt’s ground was to be plagued with lice b) At the time of the resurrection those buried outside Israel will suffer. c) So that the Egyptians wouldn’t make him into an idol.
3. 47:31 - Bow to him.
4. 48:7 - Yaakov thought Yosef harboured resentment since Yaakov had not buried Yosef’s mother, Rachel, in the *Ma’arat HaMachpela*.
5. 48:8 - The Shehina departed from him.
6. 48:11 - “I thought.”
7. 48:22 - a) The actual city of Shechem b) A portion.
8. 48:22 -Esav a) He acted like an Emorite. b) He trapped his father with words (*imrei pi*)
9. 49:1 - When *mashiach* will come.
10. 49:3 - Priesthood and Kingship.
11. 49:6 - Korach and his congregation
12. 49:8 - He drew back. He was afraid that Yaakov would rebuke him for the incident with Tamar.
13. 49:12 - It makes them white
14. 49:14 - Just as a donkey bears a heavy burden, so the tribe of Yissachar bears the yoke of Torah..
15. 49:20 - Oil-rich land
16. 49:23 - Yosef’s brothers, Potifar and his wife.
17. 49:27 - Mordechai and Esther.
18. 50:5 - From Esav.
19. 50:6 - Yosef swore not to reveal Pharaoh’s ignorance of Hebrew
20. 50:13 - Levi, because he would carry the Aron (Holy Ark). Yosef, because he was a king.

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# LOVE OF THE LAND

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

## No Complaints about the Weather

**W**hen it became too hot in the place where two great Talmudic Sages, Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi, were engaged in Torah study, they moved to a shadier spot. When the winter cold became too intense where they were studying, they moved to a warmer spot. They went to this trouble, explains Rashi (*Mesechta Ketuvot 112b*), in order to avoid complaining about the weather in the Land of Israel.

It must be assumed that these two Sages could have continued their studies where they were despite the heat or cold. Making the move to a more comfortable place probably entailed a loss of precious time that could have been dedicated to intense Torah study. They nevertheless were prepared to make this sacrifice to avoid the temptation of complaining about the weather of the Land they loved.

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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**A**fter 17 years in Egypt, Yaakov senses his days drawing to a close and summons Yosef. He has Yosef swear to bury him in the Machpela cave, the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sara, Yitzchak and Rivka. Yaakov falls ill and Yosef brings to him his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov elevates Ephraim and Menashe to the status of his own sons, thus giving Yosef a double portion that removes the status of the first-born from Reuven. As Yaakov is blind from old age, Yosef leads his sons close to their grandfather. Yaakov kisses and hugs them. He had not thought to see his son Yosef again, let alone Yosef's children. Yaakov begins to bless them, giving precedence to Ephraim, the younger, but Yosef interrupts him and indicates that Menashe is the elder. Yaakov explains that he intends to bless Ephraim with his strong hand because Yehoshua will descend from him, and Yehoshua will be both the conqueror of Eretz Yisrael and the teacher of Torah to the Jewish People. Yaakov

summons the rest of his sons in order to bless them as well. Yaakov's blessing reflects the unique character and ability of each tribe, directing each one in its unique mission in serving G-d. Yaakov passes from this world at age 147. A tremendous procession accompanies his funeral cortege up from Egypt to his resting place in the cave of Machpela in Chevron. After Yaakov's passing, the brothers are concerned that Yosef will now take revenge on them. Yosef reassures them, even promising to support them and their families. Yosef lives out the rest of his years in Egypt, seeing Efraim's great-grandchildren. Before his death, Yosef foretells to his brothers that G-d will redeem them from Egypt. He makes them swear to bring his bones out of Egypt with them at that time. Yosef passes away at the age of 110 and is embalmed. Thus ends Sefer Bereishet, the first of the five Books of the Torah. *Chazak!*

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# ASK!

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by Rabbi Yirmiyahu Ullman

## Distant Love

From: Elaine

*Dear Rabbi,*

*Since from before I became observant about a year ago, I have been dating a really great guy. He's intelligent, sensitive, considerate, attractive, and really everything I could ask for in a husband, except that he's not religious. When we met, that was not a problem for me, but now it is. I would not marry any non-observant person, including a Jew who is non-Orthodox. My boyfriend realizes that, and has made a lot of effort and progress to learn about Orthodox Judaism in order to decide if he's willing to become religious and get married.*

*But things have become complicated. I have been growing tremendously over the past year in Seminary. I'm also older and anxious to start a family, as so many of my friends already have. On the other hand, while he has been attending classes in a yeshiva for a few months, the time he can do that is ending. And, anyway, he has not made the progress I was hoping for. At this point, I can't say for sure that he's decided to become observant, and, even so, if he's willing to adhere to level of Orthodoxy as me.*

*So, for the first time in our relationship, we're experiencing a lot of pressure and tension. I'm feeling like he's arguing against everything, resisting, and lagging behind. He feels like I've become too extreme, and am pushing Judaism on him, or at least too much, too soon, rather than enjoying the growth together at a slow, natural pace.*

*I'll be honest, Rabbi, I really don't know what to do. On the one hand, we really love each other. On the other hand, what has the potential to bring us so much closer is actually pushing us apart. Should I just keep waiting for as long as it takes him, with the risk that for whatever reason he might not become religious in the end or might not want my level of religiosity, or should I let him go and focus on moving on, completely immersed in the lifestyle I have chosen for myself for life?*

Dear Elaine,

I empathize with your dilemma, but without knowing you both and more details, it's hard to recommend with certainty what you should do in your case. You both should really speak to someone who knows you personally. Nevertheless, based on what you've shared, and I know it's easier said than done, I think you should separate at this point, in order to alleviate the tension that has grown between you, and to let each of you freely explore and decide the direction you each want to grow

in. It sounds like he's been exposed enough by now to Orthodoxy that he basically gets a picture of what it's about. If his interest until now is not just because of you, but also because he is genuinely interested in Judaism, he will be interested in pursuing that interest even without you. And of course, once apart, he may even pursue it with more interest, once he feels he's doing it for himself, and not that it's being forced upon him or expected from him.

In the meantime, you need to move on and make an effort to realize your personal and religious aspirations to get married and establish a strictly observant family. Finding the right person might take time. But if you'll find your *besheirt* (soul-mate), it will be clear to you that your current relationship was rightly ended.

However, if you do not find someone else who is clearly the right one for you, and during your separation your current boyfriend on his own accord, even if it's with you in mind, arrives at a commitment to belief and practice at a level which is compatible with yours (and you could stipulate that he could let you know through a third party), at that time you could explore dating for marriage in the Orthodox manner.

Otherwise, what's your option? Given where you are, every question which he needs to consider critically in pursuit of truth is perceived by you as a threat to your life's goals and happiness. And given where he is, your well-founded fervor and urgency is perceived by him as extremism, which negates and threatens his sense of individuality and his world-view.

You certainly would not like him to insincerely go along with everything just in order to marry you. That could eventually result in his feeling miserably imprisoned and undermine and ruin everything you're aspiring for in Judaism. On the other hand, you can't be his guide and mentor to sincere acceptance of Orthodoxy. You see that isn't working.

For these reasons, my advice is that you should discuss this all very clearly and thoroughly with each other now, and agree that when he leaves yeshiva you should make a complete break with no expectations. He must not expect you to wait for him, and you must not expect him to become religious. If you are destined to be together for life, G-d will send him the right people at the right time to guide and help him to Him and to you. And G-d will also "provide" for you the time you'll need to wait. Otherwise, He will guide you away from each other and closer to your individual, respective paths in life.

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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Synonyms in the Hebrew Language  
by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

## Crouching Lion, Hidden Blessing

**Y**ou may have noticed an interesting parallel between Yaakov's blessing to Yehuda and Bilaam's blessing to the Jewish People. When Yaakov blesses his son Yehuda, he says, "Yehuda is [like] a lion cub (*gur aryeh*)... he bends and crouches like a lion (*aryeh*), and like a lion (*lavi*). Who can lift him up?" (Gen. 49:9). In a similar way, Bilaam blesses the Jewish People saying, "...he bends and reclines like a lion (*ari*), and like a lion (*lavi*). Who can lift him up?" (Num. 24:9). In just these two passages, we have encountered four Hebrew words that refer to a lion: *ari*, *aryeh*, *gur*, and *lavi*. As we shall soon see, there are several more Hebrew words which mean "lion".

The Talmud (*Sanhedrin 95a*) relates that Rabbi Yochanan said that there are six words for "lions" in the Bible: *ari*, *kfir*, *lavi*, *layish*, *shachal*, and *shachatz*. Rabbi Levi (in *Yalkut Shimoni* to Prov. 20) adds a seventh term, *gur aryeh*, and explains how each of these names is related to "lions" (a similar tradition is found in *Avot d'Rabbi Natan*, version 2, ch. 43):

1. *Ari* because everyone fears lions, and the root of the word fear (*yirah*) is comprised of the same letters as the word *ari*. *Tikkunei Zohar* (122a) explains that lions correspond to the sense of sight (the letters of the word *aryeh* rearranged spell out the word *reyyah*, "sight").
2. *Kfir* because anybody sees a lion will deny (*kofer*) his life. Others argue that *kfir* is related to the root *KAF-PEH-REISH*, which means to "cover" (like the *kapporet* which covered the Holy Ark), and refers to the lion's mane which covers him in hair.
3. *Lavi* because lions "grab" the hearts (*levavot*) of men by scaring them (when they roar). Rabbi Menachem Azariah of Fano (1548-1620) writes that a lion is called a *lavi* because when feasting on its prey it begins by eating the heart (*lev*).
4. *Layish* because the lion's teeth "knead" (*lash*) the skin of man like dough.
5. *Shachal* because people become "sick" (*choleh*) from fear when confronted by a lion.

6. *Shachatz* because the lion's teeth are very sharp like "arrows" (*cheitz*).

7. Rabbi Chaim Palagi (1788-1868) adds that *gur* is also an expression of "fear" (see, for example, Deut. 1:17 and Job 19:29).

The sources we have cited seem to understand that the seven words in question refer to the exact same "lion", but recall seven different attributes of the animal or human reactions to it. However, other sources assume that the different words for "lions" refer to different stages in a lion's life.

Rashi (to Ezek. 19:5 and Job 4:10) explains that a *kfir* is a young, but strong lion; a *shachal* is a medium-sized lion; and an *ari* is a big lion. The Vilna Gaon disagrees with this approach. He explains that there are three stages in the life of a lion, and at each stage it is scary for a different reason. When young, a lion's teeth are scary – at that point a lion is called a *kfir*. When it is older, its roar is scary – then it is called an *aryeh*. When it is even older, even its regular voice (i.e. when it is not roaring) is scary – then it is called a *shachal*. According to the Vilna Gaon, a *kfir* is a lion cub, a *shachal* is an old lion, and an *ari* is a middle-aged lion.

Rabbi Yaakov Baal HaTurim (to Num. 24:9) writes that a *lavi* is a younger lion than an *ari*, but does not explain where it fits in vis-à-vis *shachal* and *kfir*.

Similarly, Radak (to Judges 14:5) tracks the progression of a lion's life by saying that first it is a *gur* (a young cub who still nurses from its mother, see Lam. 4:3), then it becomes a *kfir*, then an *aryeh*, then a *lavi*, and finally a *layish*. Radak stresses that as long as a lion keeps growing older, it keeps getting stronger and stronger. He, too, does not explain where *shachal* fits in.

Abarbanel (to Judges 14:5) disagrees with Radak's position, and rejects the supposition that a lion's life goes through so many different stages. Instead, he explains that *gur* and *kfir* are synonyms for a young lion, and *aryeh*, *layish*, and *lavi* are all synonyms which mean an older lion.

Abarbanel in *Mashmia Yeshua* cites Rabbi Yosef Ibn Kaspi as explaining that the word *gur* for “lion cub” is related to the word *ger* (“sojourner” or “stranger”) because the lion cub’s agility allows it to always be on the move. In a similar vein, the Rashbam (to Gen. 49:9) notes that Yaakov compared Yehuda to a *gur aryeh* because it is faster and stronger than an older lion.

That a *kfir* is a relatively young lion is discernable from several sources. *Avot d’Rabbi Natan* explains that a *kfir* is an adolescent lion who is called so because he “denies” (*kofer*) his parents. Rabbi Yechiel Michel Stern (Rav of the Ezras Torah neighborhood of Jerusalem) explains that a *kfir* is not as fierce as an *aryeh*, which is why Micah (5:3) says that a *kfir* will attack sheep, which are domesticated and vulnerable, while an *aryeh* will attack the wild animals of the forest. Moreover, Psalms 104:21 says that a *kfir* roars to *ask* for its food, implying that it is too young to go out hunting for food on its own. See also *Zohar (Terumah 143a)* which says that a *kfir* is a weak, small lion.

While Radak explains that an older lion is first called a *lavi*, and afterwards a *layish*, the Vilna Gaon explains the difference between these two words differently. He explains that a *layish* is a female lioness that has not yet borne

children, while a *lavi* is female lioness that already has children.

Interestingly, the Italian scholar Rabbi Yishaya of Trani (to Hoshea 13:8) writes that *lavi/laviyah* is a separate species than lions. Rabbi Pinchas Eliyahu Horowitz of Vilna (1765-1802) similarly writes in his scientific almanac *Sefer HaBrit* that a *shachal* is a panther and a *layish* is a leopard. He understood that they are not alternate words for “lion”. Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) similarly writes that *namer*, *lavi*, and *shachal* are all words for a spotted leopard (or perhaps “tiger”). Nonetheless, Rabbi Yishaya himself admits that *shachal* and *shachatz* are different words for lion.

We also have to discuss the difference between the words *aryeh* and *ari*, but this article has to end at some point, so we’ll save that discussion for another time. Please email me if you want to hear more about the information I gathered on that front.

- For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at [rcklein@ohr.edu](mailto:rcklein@ohr.edu)

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# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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*Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch*  
by Rabbi Yosef Herman

## Parshat Vayechi Lasting Legacy

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**A**s Yaakov approaches the end of his days, he summons Yosef and swears Yosef to bury him in the Cave of Machpelah, the burial place of Avraham, Yitzchak, Sarah, Rivka, and Leah. Yosef swears that he will fulfill his father's final request.

Some time later, Yosef is summoned again to the deathbed of his father. This time, Yaakov blesses Yosef's children Efraim and Menashe. First, he passes on the blessing that he was given by G-d, the blessing of fertility, and the particular blessing of becoming a "community of peoples." This has specific meaning in that the tribe of Yosef will no longer be considered one tribe, but will be divided into two separate tribes – one of Efraim and one of Menashe. In this way, Efraim and Menashe assume the status of children, rather than grandchildren, of Yaakov.

After this pronouncement and before the actual blessing to these children, Yaakov makes an interesting comment that is seemingly out of place. He says to Yosef, "And I – when I came from Padan, Rachel died on me in the land of Canaan, on the road, when there was still a stretch of land to come to Efrat, and I buried her there on the way to Efrat, which is Beit Lechem."

This statement is usually interpreted as an apology for his having insisted on being buried in the Cave of Machpela (indeed swearing Yosef to this), though he himself had not buried Rachel, Yosef's mother, there. But if this was Yaakov's intention, the statement should have come at the first meeting, the purpose of which was to instruct Yosef to bury him in the Cave of Machpela.

Clearly, then, the statement must relate to its context – the blessings given to Efraim and Menashe. After Yaakov's name was changed to Yisrael, the Torah uses the two names, seemingly interchangeably. However, the

choice of Yaakov or Yisrael in any given context is deliberate. Yaakov is used as relating to Yaakov the person, whereas Yisrael is used in relation to the mission or future of the nation of Israel. Here, the name Yisrael is used up until this point, where the text switches to Yaakov, who then favors Yosef's children with a double portion in terms of tribal formation. Following this pronouncement, the text switches back to the name Yisrael, as the children are blessed with words that express their eternal, national mission. This doubling of Yosef's inheritance by counting his children as though they were children of Yaakov was a *personal* gift to Yosef. This privilege derived not from national considerations, but from individual personal ties which affected Yaakov the man.

Here, Yaakov recalls the woman he loved most deeply, the wife of his choosing, whom he had lost earliest and whose memory was most susceptible to being lost. Because she was not buried with the other patriarchs and matriarchs, he feared her memory and legacy might not endure in the collective memory of the people. Precisely the wife nearest to Yaakov's heart, whom he had envisioned as the principle mother of his future nation, might vanish from the hearts and minds of that nation.

To guard against this, or perhaps to compensate for it, Yaakov elevates Rachel's first born to the status of first-born by giving him a double inheritance of tribes. As G-d would ordain, some three thousand years later, the burial place of Rachel would occupy the most prominent and oft-visited burial place of all the patriarchs.

- Sources: Commentary, Bereishit 48:7

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# MEZUZAH MAVEN

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by Rabbi Ze'ev Kraines

## Office in Jewish-owned Company

*Q: I work in an office of a Jewish-owned company. In the past, I have always put a mezuzah on my own office door. But my present boss has indicated that he wouldn't be happy for me to put one up. He has many people from different religions and cultures in the building, and he feels that allowing the mezuzah would impact negatively on the smooth relations between his employees, thereby affecting productivity. He himself doesn't have one on his door.*

*I think this is a basic issue of religious freedom guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. How can I work every day in a room without a mezuzah?! My friends are telling me that I shouldn't make a fuss over this because an office is not obligated in a mezuzah. Can that be true?*

A: The status of an office in terms of mezuzah is a matter of halachic controversy. Indeed, many authorities rule that it needs a mezuzah only if the owner or renter lives in the office day and night. It is also not a storage area, because even if it has a desk, a telephone, a computer and a file cabinet, these are there to facilitate the work; the office is not there to store them.

However, other authorities assert that modern offices cannot be compared to the temporary market booths exempted by the Talmud, as people spend a good part of the day in their offices on a constant basis. Indeed,

the custom is to affix mezuzahs on Jewish-owned or rented offices, albeit without a *beracha*.

That being said, the obligation to put up a mezuzah falls on the owner or renter of the office and not on you. And since your employer could easily move you at any time to another room, he has not allocated your office to you in a way that can be construed as a rental. As such, you do not have a religious responsibility to affix a mezuzah on your employer's door, and you definitely can continue to work in your office, even if he will not allow you to affix a mezuzah.

In addition, your employer's judgment that placing the mezuzah would cause material damage to his business, whether correct or incorrect, would entitle him to rely on the lenient opinion in this matter. His refusal to allow you to do so cannot be construed as an assault on your freedom.

This consideration alone would also exempt you from reproving him any further.

- Sources: *Turei Zahav* 286:11; *Chayei Adam* 15:11; *Prishah* 286:22; *Chidushei Rabbi Akiva Eiger* Y.D. 286:11; *Aruch HaShulchan* 286:26; *Minchas Yitzchak* 2:83:4, 4:89:5; *Chovas HaDar* 3:8:24; *Shevet HaLevi* 2:156; *Rema* O.C. 656:1

Got a mezuzah question or story? Email [rabbi@ohrsandton.com](mailto:rabbi@ohrsandton.com) or submit on my website [mymezuzahstory.com](http://mymezuzahstory.com). Free "Mezuzah Maven" book for every question or story submitted (when published in the near future!)

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# @OHR

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*Profiles of Ohr Somayach students, alumni and staff*  
by Rabbi Shlomo Simon

*Adam Polinovsky – Age 23 – Born in Evanston, Illinois*  
*J101 Winter Zman 2018 to present*

The fact that Adam is here at Ohr Somayach – or even alive at all – is blatant demonstration of *hashgacha pratis* (Divine Providence). After the Germans captured the Ukraine in 1941, but before they reached their small village, non-Jewish neighbors murdered Adam's paternal great-grandmother's family, her parents and one brother in cold blood in front of her eyes. Her two remaining brothers died as soldiers in the Soviet army. Only she, her husband and small son (Adam's paternal grandfather) survived. They escaped from the Ukraine to Siberia, where they survived the war.

Adam's paternal grandmother was four years old when the Nazis entered her small Ukrainian village. The Jews were sent to a nearby concentration camp called Pichora. She and her mother were selected for extermination. A large burial pit was dug and the Jews were lined up at the edge, waiting to be machine-gunned to death. Her mother held her hand tightly as the gunner moved down the line. When the woman next to her was hit and fell, her mother hesitated for half a second and then fell into the pit with her daughter – both very much alive. As the bodies fell on top of them, they lay still very quietly, and after nightfall she and her mother climbed out of the pit unnoticed, eventually reaching a farmhouse where a non-Jewish Ukrainian family sheltered her daughter during the remaining three years of the war. With her daughter safely deposited, her mother, amazingly, found another family in a nearby village who was willing shelter her as well. She posed as a Christian servant girl, and would visit her daughter at least once a month, until the war's end, bringing her packages of food.

Adam's maternal grandfather, a physicist, also survived the war while fighting in the Soviet Army as an officer. For a country that, according to some estimates, lost nearly half of its fighting men of about 33 million

soldiers, that could be considered a *nes nighlah*, an “open miracle”.

Adam's mother was born in Tambov, a regional capital about 300 miles south of Moscow. She was the only Jew in her grammar school, and an object of anti-Semitism. Her father, who was stayed in the Army after the war and eventually rose to the rank of general, died when she was 14. A very gifted and musical child, she moved at age 15 with her mother to Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) to study piano at one of the best conservatories in Leningrad. She was one of only three Jews in the school. She graduated first in her class. After graduation she began a successful concert career, but longed to leave the Soviet Union and its overwhelming anti-Semitism. She and her mother had their chance in 1979 when a small window of opportunity opened for the Jews to leave. They eventually made their way to Chicago.



Adam's father survived the Soviet Army, which was extremely anti-Semitic. His nose was broken no less than ten times in anti-Semitic attacks by fellow soldiers. If he didn't have a “Jewish nose” before he entered the army, he did when he left. He and his family left the Soviet Union as it was breaking apart in the early 1990's and large scale emigration became possible. They also moved to the greater Chicago area, where his parents met and where Adam was born.

Adam grew up in Wheeling, Illinois, a suburb northwest of Chicago, without much of a Jewish community. His family was secular although his parents retained a warm feeling for, and an identity with, the Jewish People and our G-d. They celebrated Pesach, Rosh Hashana and Chanuka, and his mother even hosted a rabbi who taught classes on Yiddishkeit

to a large group of Russian Jews in their home for a number of years.

Adam was a thinker. Before his bar mitzvah he announced to his father that he had thought things through and decided that there was no G-d. His father told him: "I'm proud that you're questioning things and going through this journey. You're half right. There is no G-d, but G-d." That statement made a big impression on little Adam. He'd have to think again.

Adam inherited his musical ability from his mom. She taught him piano and arranged for him to have lessons in classical guitar. He's been writing poetry since he was eight years old.

Although to an older generation, like mine, rapping may not sound like music, to a younger generation, it very much is. That is the medium to which Adam has applied his musical and poetic talents. When he was 21 he started to record his rap music. He's had moderate success. Adam wants to spread a positive message to the world. One of the reasons that he's here in Yeshiva, he says, is to get "the message."

According to Adam, G-d has had a hand in his family's history and in his life from "Day One". As previously recounted, G-d had saved Adam's family from annihilation during the Second World War. He brought the family to America. After their marriage his parents had no children. While working at The Ark, a Jewish social services agency in Chicago, his mother happened to mention her disappointment to a fellow

staff member, a doctor, who "happened" to be a fertility specialist and an Orthodox Jew. His first piece of professional advice was that his mother should go to the mikveh. Although they were thoroughly secular, his mother listened. She was 38 years old and conceived immediately after her immersion.

And, now, G-d has brought Adam, an up-and-coming rapper, to Yeshiva.

Like the Purim story, Adam sees a series of seemingly random events as G-d talking to him, taking him by the hand and leading him to the Promised Land.

Early this past summer, "out of the blue," he got a call from a Chabad Rabbi whom he didn't know, inviting him to perform at the Chabad House in Niles, Illinois. In early August he rapped there. Shortly thereafter he received a "random" email from a *kiruv* Rabbi in the Chicago area, Doron Lazarus (a former *talmid* at Ohr Somayach), asking Adam if he'd like to meet with him. Adam agreed and began learning with Rabbi Lazarus for an hour each week. He also spent some *Shabbatot* with Rabbi Lazarus and his family. After about a month, Rabbi Lazarus sent him a link to the J101 program at Ohr Somayach. After looking at the program, Adam thought that it was the answer to his prayers. "It resonated with me," said Adam.

How does he like it? "I love it. I took it upon myself to absorb as much as I can. It's amazing. I see the value in Yiddishkeit. I would like to be a rabbi – a rapping rabbi."

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# BUSINESS ETHICS

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by Rabbi Ari Wasserman

## QUESTION

I am about to sign on with a firm that consists of a large non-observant Jewish team based in Israel and the US. I know that it's more complicated than my just stating that I won't work on Shabbat and Yom Tov, and I want to be clear with them regarding my participation before we go to contract.

My questions are as follows:

Can I send an email on Friday afternoon (close to Shabbat) to a non-observant Jew in the same time-zone, knowing that my email may be opened and answered on Shabbat?

If this is a problem, what's the guideline for how close to Shabbat an email should not be sent?

## HALACHIC BACKGROUND

The issue at the heart of this question seems to be the Torah prohibition of *lifnei iver* ("placing a stumbling block before the blind") – that is, causing an uneducated Jew to sin.

However, does *lifnei iver* really apply here? Does it apply to a situation where a non-observant Jew opens an email and possibly responds to it on Shabbat since it was sent to him close to Shabbat?

*Derech HaAtarim* suggests that it doesn't, stating: "According to the strict letter of the law, it's permissible to email a non-observant Jew on Friday right before Shabbat, despite the concern that he'll read it on Shabbat."

It support of this answer, *Derech HaAtarim* gives two reasons:

- #1: Typing on a computer on Shabbat is a rabbinic prohibition, and there is no agreement among the *poskim* whether the Torah prohibition of *lifnei iver* can be extended to rabbinic prohibitions.
- #2: It is not necessarily clear that the recipient of the email will write back on Shabbat (or even see the email). And again, there is no agreement among the *poskim* whether *lifnei iver* applies to such doubtful cases.

In support of the above, *Derech HaAtarim* cites Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach who writes in his *Minchas Shlomo* that even according to those who apply *lifnei iver* to a situation where there's

a doubt about whether someone will in fact do something prohibited, they apply it only when one brings that person a forbidden object. But when one doesn't give him such an object, but instead the matter depends on whether he'll open an email before Shabbat, it's possible to be lenient.

## RESPONSE

Truth be told, the ruling of the *Derech HaAtarim* does not seem applicable in your situation.

Re his reason #1 that there are *poskim* who don't extend *lifnei iver* to rabbinic prohibitions, this is not a strong basis to be lenient. In fact, *Derech HaAtarim* admits later in the book that *lifnei iver* indeed *does* apply to a rabbinic prohibition.

Re his reason #2 that it's doubtful if the recipient will even see the email on Shabbat, this simply does not reflect the reality of the regularity with which people in the secular world check email. If you send your email moments before Shabbat, the non-observant Jewish recipient will almost certainly read it on Shabbat. There is no doubt about that. So, even if Rav Shlomo Auerbach's ruling in *Minchas Shlomo* may give you some wiggle room, it is premised on there being a doubt that someone will in fact do something prohibited. But there's no doubt here.

Having established that there is a problem, the question remains how long before Shabbat do you need to send the email to be sure you are not in violation of the Torah prohibition of *lifnei iver*.

On the one hand, if the recipient checks his email all of the time – as most people do – you can send the email to him relatively close to Shabbat, since he'll very likely open it promptly upon receipt (before Shabbat starts). But, if he typically does not check regularly, you would need to refrain from emailing to him for a longer period of time before Shabbat starts.

I posed your question to Rav Yitzchak Breitowitz shlit"a, who responded as follows: "I believe that sending an email before Shabbos is permissible provided there is enough time before Shabbos for the recipient to open the message. As a somewhat arbitrary rule of thumb, I would suggest that Friday emails be sent to non-religious Jews no later than one hour before sunset (shekiah) wherever they are located."

- *L'iluy nishmas Yehudah ben Shmuel HaKohen Breslauer*