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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

A “Shayne Gelechte”

“And Korach took...” (16:1)

One of the few maxims in my sparse Yiddish lexicon is “a *shayne gelechte*.” Literally translated, it means “A fine laugh,” but idiomatically we would translate it something like, “If it didn't make you cry, you'd have to laugh.”

The Israeli political scene is a *shayne gelechte*. I've never been political, and my indifference – and sometimes hostility – to politics and politicians has been borne by a political system where we are either about to have the fifth election in two years or a coalition government so broadly-based that if you were to stand at the left-hand side of it, you'd need a telescope to see the right. And in between there's a vast floppy underbelly waiting to crash down on a hapless electorate.

By rights, this Holy Land should be ruled by those who are the least selfish, the least power-hungry, the most noble and the most honest.

We love democracy, but, presumably, the democratization of our lives has its limits: I'm not sure how many of us would submit to extensive invasive surgery based on a straw-poll taken on Twitter or Facebook. The idea that if you ask enough people a question, you're bound to come up with the right answer, is inimical to Torah thought. The spiritual Masters teach that “The

wisdom of the Torah is the opposite of the man in the street.”

Our esteemed Rosh HaYeshiva, HaRav Nota Schiller, *shlita*, once observed: “The Torah is a democracy of opportunity and an aristocracy of opinion.” Anyone can open a Talmud and start to learn. However, for your opinion to be significant, it must pass a self-policing system of peer approval that validates only the most expert.

And who are the most expert? To me, there is no perceptible difference between Mount Everest and K2, but K2 knows that Everest is taller than it. And thus it is with our *Gedolei HaDor*. When it comes to the great ones of the generation, each one knows who is more outstanding and in which areas he excels.

I suppose you could translate the phrase *shayne gelechte* with the English word “farce” – and that about sums up the state of the Israeli political system.

In 1887, Hon. John Dalberg-Acton wrote: “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority, still more when you superadd the tendency or the certainty of corruption by

authority. There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it.”

Our great Torah Sages sanctify the positions they hold, and not the reverse.

Possibly one of the most egregious power-grabs in history is revealed in this week's Torah portion. Korach, posing as a champion of the masses with consummate political skill, engineers a rebellion purely for his own ends, and manages to convince, among others, two hundred and fifty of the most august and important leaders of the people.

Joseph Goebbels (y"sh) said, "If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus, by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State.”

If that isn't a *shayne gelechte*, I don't know what is.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Korach, Datan and Aviram, and 250 leaders of Israel rebel against the authority of Moshe and Aharon. The rebellion results in their being swallowed by the earth. Many resent their death and blame Moshe. G-d's "anger" is manifest by a plague that besets the nation, and many thousands perish. Moshe intercedes once again for the people. He instructs Aharon to atone for them and the plague stops.

Then, G-d commands that staffs, each inscribed with the name of one of the tribes, be placed in the Mishkan. In the morning, the staff of Levi, bearing Aharon's name, sprouts, buds, blossoms and yields ripe almonds. This provides Divine confirmation that Levi's tribe is chosen for priesthood and verifies Aharon's position as *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest. The specific duties of the *levi'im* and *kohanim* are stated. The *kohanim* were not to be landowners, but were to receive their sustenance from the tithes and other mandated gifts brought by the people. Also taught in this week's Torah portion are the laws of the first fruits, redemption of the firstborn and various laws of offerings.

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Questions – Korach

1. Why did Datan and Aviram join Korach?
2. Why is Yaakov's name not mentioned in Korach's genealogy?
3. What motivated Korach to rebel?
4. What did Korach and company do when Moshe said that a *techelet* garment needs *tzizit*?
5. What warning did Moshe give the rebels regarding the offering of the incense?
6. Did Moshe want to be the *kohen gadol*?
7. What event did Korach not foresee?
8. What does the phrase *rav lachem* mean in this week's Parsha? (Give two answers.)
9. What lands are described in this week's Parsha as "flowing with milk and honey"?
10. When did Moshe have the right to take a donkey from the Jewish community?
11. What did Korach do the night before the final confrontation?
12. What sin did Datan and Aviram have in common specifically with Goliath?
13. Before what age is a person not punished by the Heavenly Court for his sins?
14. What happens to one who rebels against the institution of *kehuna*? Who suffered such a fate?
15. Why *specifically* was incense used to stop the plague?
16. Why was Aharon's staff placed in the middle of the other 11 staffs?
17. Aharon's staff was kept as a sign. What did it signify?
18. Why are the 24 gifts for the *kohanim* taught in this week's *Parsha*?
19. Who may eat the *kodshei kodashim* (most holy sacrifices) and where must they be eaten?
20. Why is G-d's covenant with the *kohanim* called "a covenant of salt"?

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

Answers

1. 16:1 - Because they were his neighbors.
2. 16:1 - Yaakov prayed that his name not be mentioned in connection with Korach's rebellion (*Bereishet* 49:6).
3. 16:1 - Korach was jealous that Elizafan ben Uziel was appointed as leader of the family of Kehat instead of himself.
4. 16:1 - They laughed.
5. 16:6 - Only one person would survive.
6. 16:6 - Yes.
7. 16:7 - That his sons would repent.
8. 16:7,3 - *Rav lachem* appears twice in this week's Parsha. It means "much more than enough greatness have you taken for yourself (16:3)" and "It is a great thing I have said to you (16:17)."
9. 16:12 - Egypt and Canaan.
10. 16:15 - When he traveled from Midian to Egypt.
11. 16:19 - Korach went from tribe to tribe in order to rally support for himself.
12. 16:27 - They all blasphemed.
13. 16:27 - Twenty years old.
14. 17:5 - He is stricken with *tzara'at*, as was King Uziyahu (*Divrei HaYamim* II 26:16-19).
15. 17:13 - Because the people were deprecating the incense offering, saying that it caused the death of two of Aharon's sons and also the death of 250 of Korach's followers. Therefore G-d demonstrated that the incense offering was able to avert death, and it is sin, not incense, which causes death.
16. 17:21 - So people would not say that Aharon's staff bloomed because Moshe placed it closer to the *Shechina*.
17. 17:25 - That only Aharon and his children were selected for the *kehuna*.
18. 18:8 - Since Korach claimed the *kehuna*, the Torah emphasizes Aharon's and his descendants' rights to *kehuna* by recording the gifts given to them.
19. 18:10 - Male *kohanim* may eat them and only in the *azara* (forecourt of the *Beit Hamikdash*).
20. 18:19 - Just as salt never spoils, so this covenant will never be rescinded.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Revolting Revolutions

Rashi's opening comment to the Torah portion of Korach (Num. 16:1) refers the reader to *Midrash Tanchuma*, which characterizes Korach's perfidious actions as both a *pasha* and *meridah*. In this context, these two words mean "rebellion," as Korach sought to *rebel* against Moses' leadership and assert his own authority. In the end, Korach and his followers suffered an ignoble death, and the rebellion was swiftly quashed. The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 49a) derives the rule that a *mored b'malchut* ("he who rebels against the kingship") deserves death from a prophecy said to Joshua: "Any man who contravenes (*yamreh*) your [Joshua's] mouth, and he does not listen to your words for anything that you will command him, he will be put to death..." (Joshua 1:18). For those keeping score at home, we've encountered three different Hebrew words for the verb of "rebellious": *poshea*, *mored*, and *mamre*. In this essay we will shed light on these ostensible synonyms by delving into their core roots and trying to understand how they differ from one another.

The word *pasha* most famously appears in Scripture in the sense of "rebellious" when the Moabite king Mesha, who had hitherto been a vassal to the King of Israel, rebelled (*vayifsha*) against Jewish hegemony and asserted his own independence (II Kings 3:4-5). That war saw the kings of Judah, Israel, and Edom unite against the Moabites in a story told both in the Bible and the Mesha Stele. *Midrash Tanchuma* expounds on the verse "a brother rebelled (*nifsha*)..." (Prov. 18:19) as similarly referring to Korach *rebellious* against his "brother" (i.e., cousin) Moses. The Talmud (*Yoma* 36b) explains that *pasha* denotes a "sin of rebellion," as opposed to *chet* and *avon* which refer to less overtly-rebellious sins. This understanding matches the Biblical usage of the term *pasha* as an expression of "rebellious."

That said, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breisau (1740-1814) asserts that the primary meaning of *pasha* is not "rebellion." Instead, he argues that the word *pasha* primarily refers to negligence that comes about through laziness. The literal *poshea* does not try to rebel or anger the one against whom he sins. Rather, the *poshea* is one whose indolence shows that he does not care about the repercussions of his actions. Indeed, elsewhere the term *poshea* refers to a watchman who did not live up to the vigilance expected of him (see Exodus 22:8 and *Bava Kama* 21b, 29a). He did not purposely try to undermine anybody's property rights. He simply did not care enough to be careful in stopping certain damages from happening.

When it comes to approaching the honor of a king – and especially to the King of Kings – a higher degree of mindfulness is expected. Laziness and apathy are tantamount to rebellion simply because by not making sure to live up to one's expectations, one actually slights the king's honor. It is in this sense that *pasha* was borrowed to mean "rebellion." In fact, in many cases, including the story of Mesha, Targum translates *pasha* as *mored* (see Targum to II Kings 8:22, Isa. 1:2, Jer. 33:8), which implies active defiance rather than just passive languor. [Targum also uses the Aramaicized form of the Hebrew *meridah* to render instances of the Hebrew *meridah* in Aramaic (see Gen. 14:4, II Kings 18:20, Isa. 36:5, Yechezkel 2:3).]

Ibn Janach and Radak trace the Hebrew word *meridah* to the trilateral root MEM-REISH-DALET, which they explain bears two different meanings: "rebellion" and "lowly/downtrodden." For example, when Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (II Chron. 36:13) and when the five kings rebelled against the four kings

(Gen. 14:4), the Bible uses verb cognates of *meridah* to denote “rebellion.” But the Bible also uses the phrase *aniim merudim* (Isa. 58:7) to denote especially “downtrodden” paupers.

The two lexicographers in question do not offer a way of uniting these disparate meanings of the root MEM-REISH-DALET, but Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 14:4) finds a way to do so. He explains that *aniim merudim* are considered so unfortunate and lowly that there is no friction or reprisal against those who abuse them. The way he puts it, there is no pushback (“rebellion”) against such abuses because the victim is anyways marginalized and considered too unimportant for mishandling him to elicit any response. Sadly enough, Zion was said to have reached such a sorry state of existence in the aftermath of the destruction of the First Temple (Lam. 1:7).

In his *Machberet Menachem*, Menachem Ibn Saruk has a different way of looking at things. Like Ibn Janach and Radak, Menachem classifies cognates of *meridah* as derivatives of the trilateral root MEM-REISH-DALET. However, unlike them, he classifies cognates of *merudim* as derivatives of the biliteral root REISH-DALET (“downward motion” / “descent”), in the sense that an especially oppressed and demoralized poor person has fallen so far down from the lofty place of a respected human being.

As is his way, Rabbi Pappenheim even traces the word *meridah* to the biliteral REISH-DALET, noting that the MEM is not essential to the root of the word. He explains that the verb *rodeh* (Gen. 1:28, Lev. 25:43) refers to “lording over others” in the Machiavellian way that rulers keep their subordinates/subjects “down,” such that they cannot assert their own independence. With this in mind, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that many three-letter roots that begin with the letter MEM actually derive from two-letter roots, with the letter MEM serving as a means of switching the meaning of the two-letter root to its exact opposite. In this case, he explains that the MEM that comes before the letters REISH-DALET in *meridah* yields the opposite of “lording over others” – i.e., “rebellion,” by which those others assert their control.

Our third synonym for “rebellion” is *mamre*. Moses calls the Jews *mamrim* in terms of their rebellious nature in refusing to heed G-d's word (Deut. 9:7, 9:24, 31:27), and a renegade elder who refuses to heed the rulings of the Sanhedrin is termed by the Mishna a *zaken mamre* (*Sanhedrin* 11:2). In a similar manner, the Talmudic term for an apostate who “rebels” against G-d is *mumar* (*Shabbat* 69a, 87a, *Eruvin* 69a-b, *Yevamot* 47b, and more places). Finally, a rebellious child is called a *ben sorer u'moreh* (Deut. 21:18), wherein the word *moreh* is a cognate of the term *mamre*. In the case of the rebellious child, the Midrash (*Sifrei* to *Ki Teizei* 218) offers an exegesis tying the word *moreh* in the sense of “rebelling” to the word *moreh* in the sense of “teaching,” explaining that the rebellious child has “taught” himself a different path. But this exegesis does not tell us the etymological basis for the term *mamre*.

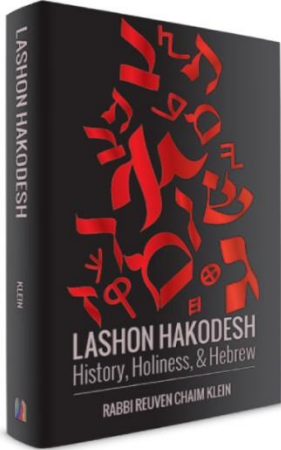
For that, we turn again to the early Hebrew lexicographers. Ibn Janach and Radak trace the various inflections of *meri/mamre* to the trilateral roots MEM-REISH-HEY and MEM-REISH-REISH, both of which can refer to “rebelling” or “changing [from what one was commanded to do].” Menachem, as we might expect, links all of these words to the biliteral MEM-REISH.

Rabbi Pappenheim goes into more detail about the root MEM-REISH, defined as “changing,” “switching,” or “getting rid of one thing so that something else can take its place.” He offers a list of Hebrew words related to this idea that are derived from this root, including: *mohar* (“bride price”), given in *exchange* for a woman's maidenhood; *maher* (“quickly”, “fast”), constantly-*changing* movement; *mar* (“bitter”), a taste rejected by one's taste buds who seek to *replace* it with something more palatable; *morah* (“razor”), the tool used for shaving one's hair that paves the path for new hair to *replace* that which was cut; *temurah* (“switching”), the illegal act of trying to transfer holiness from one sacrificial animal to another; and *amirah* (“saying”), speech used for the *exchange* of ideas, especially as proper etiquette demands that the parties involved in a conversation “alternate” taking turns in speaking.

When it comes to *meri/mamre*, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that just as foodstuff described as *mar* can be said to be “revolting” to the palate, so do the words *meri/mamre* denote a reaction to something unpalatable. Anytime a person repudiates something that does not agree with his senses/sensibilities (not just his sense of taste), said person engages in an act of *meri/mamre*. He “rebels” against that thing and disagrees with it. This concept can be applied to political leadership as well, such that when one “rebels” against the established rulers, one “switches out” their word for somebody else’s word and “replaces” the established leader by deposing him and installing somebody else.

Interestingly, Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) blurs the distinction between *meri/mamre* and *meridah/mored*. He proposes that both of those expressions are rooted in the two-letter MEM-REISH, whose core meaning is reflected in the honorific *Mar* (“Mister”) – an expression of “dignity” and “sovereignty.” The way Rabbi Marcus seems to understand it, when one “rebels” against authority, one is poised to assert one’s own self-possession and dignity, reestablishing himself as an autonomous being. (Rabbi Pappenheim’s list of MEM-REISH derivatives cannot include *meridah/mored*, because his classification system only recognizes monoliteral/bilateral roots with the additional third letter from the group of letters HEY, ALEPH, MEM, NUN, TAV, YOD, or VAV. In this case, the third letter would be DALET, which does not fit Rabbi Pappenheim’s system.)

In summary: *Pesha/poshea* means “rebellious” only in a borrowed sense, while its core meaning refers to negligence and laziness. *Meridah/mored* focuses on “rebellious” as a counter-response to a certain situation, especially as a means of rejecting the present rulership. *Meri/Mamre* focuses on “rebellious” as an act of switching allegiances from one party to another.



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COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

TO BELIEVE IS TO BEHAVE (PART 9)

(LAILAH GIFTY AKITA)

“These are the precepts whose fruits a person enjoys in this world, but whose principal remains intact in the World to Come. They are: honoring one’s parents; acts of kindness; early arrival at the study hall in the morning and the evening; hosting guests; visiting the sick; providing the wherewithal for a bride to marry; escorting the dead; praying with concentration; making peace between two people; and Torah study is the equivalent of them all.” (*Tractate Shabbat 127a*)

The eighth mitzvah on the list is praying with concentration. Rashi, explaining how this mitzvah fits into the context of the other *chessed*-orientated mitzvahs listed here, writes that many of the prayers we recite daily are not only for the benefit of the individual who recites them. Rather, they benefit the entire Jewish People. For this reason, the central prayer of the prayer services – the *Shemoneh Esrei* – is said in the plural and not in the singular as might be expected. We are not just praying for ourselves. However, prayer is not a completely altruistic experience. Our Sages teach (*Bava Kama 92a*) that when a person sincerely prays for mercy for his friend, *and he needs exactly the same thing*, his prayer for himself will be answered first. Our Sages are teaching us something absolutely fundamental: a vital component of standing in front of G-d and successfully beseeching Him to help us is heartfelt empathy for the difficulties of others. Profound prayers require concentration and intent so that they may reach their mark.

Praying with intent is so essential that Rabbi Yehuda ben Shmuel of Regensburg (1150-1217), known as Rabbeinu Yehudah HaChasid, writes in his formative work *Sefer Chasidim* that one should only pray the *Shemoneh Esrei* in a language other than Hebrew if doing so will allow the person to pray with greater concentration and intent. But if that is not the case, it is preferable to recite the prayers in their original Hebrew, even if they are not properly understood by the person.

We are being taught that in order for our spiritual lives to have true significance, they must be imbued with meaning and focus. We must *think* – both *before* we act and *as* we act – and not merely do things by rote. Rote is the bane of spiritual growth, and ultimately leads a person to feel disconnected from G-d and dissatisfied with their spiritual self. So insidious is rote that it can lead a person to make the most ridiculous mistakes.

Rabbi Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam, the twentieth century spiritual leader of the Klausenburg Chassidut, was revered by all for his saintliness and overwhelming love for each and every Jew. He once related that the very first question he received upon becoming the rabbi of a community was from one of his congregants, who approached him while wearing his arm *tefillin* and holding his head *tefillin* in his hand. He told the Rebbe that he had no idea if he was putting *on* his *tefillin* for the beginning of the morning prayers or if he was *taking them off after* having finished the prayer service! What was he to do? The Rebbe answered that he should put on the head *tefillin* and pray the morning service. Why? Because even if he had in fact already prayed that morning, it was crystal clear that he had not done so with any concentration whatsoever.

In the blessing before the recitation of the Shema in the morning, we entreat G-d to, “...instill in our hearts to understand and elucidate...and fulfill all the words of Your Torah’s teachings with love.” In

a very sharply worded critique, the Chofetz Chaim explains that very often our prayers are answered and G-d grants us the ability to “understand and elucidate.” But, due to our obliviousness, we don’t even realize that. We aimlessly continue living our lives with the same uniform regularity – not even stopping for a moment to realize that the priceless gift we requested has been bestowed upon us. However, when we pray with concentration and

intent, we are emphasizing to ourselves that every day is a new entity, replete with countless new opportunities to help us reach a heightened awareness of who we are. And to help draw us closer to G-d.

To be continued...

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Korach: Yoma 51-57

The Pillow-Pillar of Creation

*“Why was this stone called ‘even shetia?’ Because it was from this stone that the world was founded during Creation.”
 (“Shetia” is Hebrew for “foundation”).*

This teaching on our *daf* refers back to the term “*even shetia*” that was mentioned in the *mishna* on the previous *daf*. Prior to the destruction of the First Beit Hamikdash, as part of the Yom Kippur service the *Kohen Gadol* would place special incense on the *Aron HaBrit* – the Holy Ark of the Covenant – in the Holy of Holies. However, the *Aron HaBrit* was not present in the Second Beit Hamikdash. The *mishna* teaches that in the absence of the *Aron HaBrit*, the incense was instead placed on the *even shetia*, which, as our *gemara* explains, was the stone from which the world was founded during Creation. In English, this stone is therefore familiarly referred to as “the foundation stone.”

The basis for this concept of a foundation stone for Creation is a section in Tehillim. (50:1-2) “Hashem spoke and called to the earth, from the rising of the sun until its setting. From Tzion, the finery of beauty, Hashem appeared.” Chazal teach that we see here that Hashem called to the earth to initiate Creation. And that Tzion – “the perfection

of beauty” – was the place of the foundation of Creation.

A fascinating observation about this foundation stone is made by one of the great Torah commentaries, Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer HaLevi Eidels (1555-1631) – often referred to as “the Maharsha.” Granted, this source in Tehillim is cited in our *sugya* to show that Tzion was the foundation-place of Creation. However, he notes, we do not find anywhere in the Tanach, the *mishna* or the *gemara* any specific mention of the place of foundation being a *stone*! What, therefore, is the source that Creation began with a stone?

The Maharsha answers this question by citing a *midrash* that speaks about a very special stone that Yaakov Avinu used in the service of Hashem.

When Yitzchak Avinu grew advanced in age and failing in health, he endowed his son Yaakov with an especially beautiful and prophetic blessing: “Nations will serve you and kingdoms will bow down to you. You will be a master over your

brothers, and your mother's sons will bow down to you. Those who curse you will be cursed, and those who bless you will be blessed.” (Ber. 27:29) And when his mother feared that Yaakov’s brother that Esav would kill Yaakov for receiving the blessing that Esav felt should have rightfully been his, she sent Yaakov away to the home of her brother Lavan in Charan until Esav’s wrath subsided.

Rivka passionately told Yitzchak that she wanted their son Yaakov not to find a wife locally since the neighboring people were totally inappropriate for Yaakov. Rather, he needs to travel elsewhere in order to find a wife who would be a “kosher soulmate” for him. As a result, Yitzchak called Yaakov and said to him, “You will not take a wife of the (local) daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Betuel, your mother's father, and find a wife there from the daughters of Lavan, your mother's brother. And may the Almighty G-d bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, and you will become an assembly of peoples. And may He give you the blessing of Avraham, to you and to your seed with you, that you may inherit the land of your travels, which Hashem gave to Avraham.” (Ber. 28:1-4)

After receiving his father’s blessings, Yaakov began his travel. But before he departed the Land of Israel, he stopped along the way at the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever for fourteen years. The commentators explain that this “interlude” was meant not only to increase his Torah knowledge in general, but, in particular, to prepare him for the unique challenges he was likely to face as a result of being in the Diaspora and no longer in the holy Land of Israel.

After these fourteen years in yeshiva, Yaakov Avinu continued his travel to find a wife. Just before he

left the Land of Israel, he stopped for a night in a place called Luz, took stones from there, placed the stones under his head and slept. Our Sages teach that “only in that place did he lie down (albeit with the ground for a bed and rocks for a pillow), but during the fourteen years he learned Torah in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever, he did not lie down for even one night because he was engaged in Torah study.” (Ber. Rabbah 68:11)

When he woke up the next morning, he saw that Hashem had miraculously caused the stones to become united into *one single stone*. Yaakov Avinu took this special stone and declared, “Indeed,

Hashem is in this place, and I did not know it... How awesome is this place! This is none other than the House of Hashem, and this is the gate of Heaven.” (Ber. 28:16:17) Rashi explains that at that particular time, Hashem miraculously moved Mount Moriah, the future site of the Beit Hamikdash, to the same place where Luz was located.

Yaakov Avinu proceeded to take this stone, set it up as a pillar and then used it in his tendering a libation offering to Hashem. He prophetically announced, “And this *stone* will be a House for Hashem.” (Ber. 28:22)

The *midrash* concludes that this same stone was none other than the stone where the world began. And the location of this foundation stone would so fittingly be the site of the Beit Hamikdash, the ultimate place to fulfill the purpose of Creation of drawing close to Hashem.

- Yoma 54b

The students, alumni, staff and events of Ohr Somayach
by Rabbi Shlomo Simon

*Another article in the series on the Lauffer renovations and the people behind them.

Seva Dorn (25)

Born: Minsk, Belarus

Raised in Cleveland, Ohio

Cleveland State University – Business Administration

Mechina Program of Ohr Somayach: 2019 to date

Most people have heard of Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg and a cohort of other young entrepreneurs who either began their businesses as teenagers in a garage or who dropped out of college to build a disruptive business empire. Had Seva Dorn not found his way to Ohr Somayach, you probably would have seen his name in a list of the youthful business greats. But, Seva wasn't only Jewish, he felt Jewish – and as his success in business grew and he thought about his future, he realized that he cared more about his *neshama* than about his wallet.

Seva's parents grew up in Minsk and Pinsk in the former Soviet Union and while their families were proud of their Jewish heritage, observance of traditions and mitzvahs was minimal. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the opportunity to rediscover their Jewish roots presented itself. Seva's father taught himself Hebrew and found employment in a synagogue in Minsk as a Hebrew teacher and tutor. Seva's mother heard of an opportunity to study in the Gateshead Seminary in England and sent for an application.



Fortunately for the both of them, the application had portions that were in Hebrew, and Seva's mother could not read Hebrew. She heard about Mr. Dorn who was a Hebrew teacher at the Minsk synagogue and asked him for help in filling out the application. She was accepted and spent a valuable year at Gateshead Seminary. During that year, a correspondence between the two developed. When she returned to Minsk, they married.

At that time, in the early 1990's, many Jews left Russia. Seva's father's family moved to Ashkelon and his mother's to Cleveland. In 2000, Seva's parents followed his mother's family to Cleveland. Seva was five years old and spoke no English. The first school he attended was a Jewish one, but as he struggled with the language and the culture of his new home, his unhappiness affected his attitude towards that school, and his parents transferred him to public school.

The family was involved with the Chabad community in their Cleveland suburb, and when Seva got to middle school he was an active member of NCSY. After high school he came to Israel on a Birthright trip. Although he had been to Israel many times before to visit family, this trip was an eye-opener. He returned to Cleveland with a serious commitment to Judaism. Seva started college, joined a Jewish fraternity and became active in Chabad on campus.

In 2015, after his first year of college and upon the advice of his NCSY rabbi, he applied to the two-month summer JInternship Program at Ohr Somayach. He loved it.

In the meantime, SevSolutions, LLC, a Digital Marketing business that he started in high school was taking off. There weren't enough hours in the day to both remain in school and to run the company. And since his major was Business Administration, he was convinced that actual experience in running a business was more valuable than learning how to do it.

The business grew by leaps and bounds (it now has offices in the US, England and India) and Seva was fully invested in its success. But his mother was concerned about his spiritual life. Without disclosing her motives, she planned a trip for the two of them to London and Paris, where they would visit museums and other cultural sites and have a great European vacation. Seva was delighted. What she did not tell him until later was that they were going to spend a Shabbos in Gateshead with one of her former school friends.

That Shabbos changed Seva's life. He met Yosef Tzvi Schleider. Yosef Tzvi is a very successful businessman in his middle thirties with a large family, and to whom the Torah and his family were much more important than making money. Comparing himself to Yosef Tzvi, Seva felt that despite his own success in business, he had actually accomplished very little. He also realized that he was not growing spiritually. He had to find his purpose in life. Seva's wise mother had accomplished her goal.

He came back to Ohr Somayach's Mechina Program and stayed until Pesach of 2020. After going home for the holiday, he was stuck. Because of the Covid pandemic, Israel had closed its border even to returning students.

Not one to let the grass grow under his feet, Seva started learning daily with Rabbi Zalman Corlin, the head of the JLE program in the States, and with Rabbi Yaakov Lubow of our staff in Jerusalem, and also going to the *shiurim* of Rabbi Yisroel Brog's *Tiferes Avigdor Miller Yeshiva* on the campus of Telshe Yeshiva in Wickliffe, Ohio. He also started a new business – acrylic sneeze guards – the folding plastic partitions that are so ubiquitous in the time of Corona. He marketed them to schools.

His first major contract was with the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland and a consortium of other Jewish schools in the area. Through the recommendation of an Ohr Somayach alumnus, Toby Kaye, who is also Seva's US accountant, he met a young, Orthodox businessman who got him an appointment with a group of the top administrators of the consortium. He made his pitch and landed the contract. That got his newest business off the ground, and orders started pouring in from all over the country. In gratitude for his help in procuring the contract, Seva offered his new acquaintance a generous commission for his help. But Cleveland being Cleveland, his offer was declined and instead it was suggested that he give that same amount to *tzadaka*. Seva had never written such a large check to any charity. He had always plowed his profits back into his businesses. But this time he had no choice. He gave a large check to one of the local charity funds. With that act of *tzadaka*, he felt a *bracha* enveloping him, and that *Shamayim* was indicating to him that to be truly happy and successful in business, one had to give *maaser*.

As soon as the opportunity to return to Israel presented itself, Rabbi Brog advised Seva to return to Ohr Somayach. Seva realized that if he was ever going to feel fulfilled in life and prepared for marriage, he must learn Torah now – business could wait.

He returned to the Yeshiva on November 20, 2020. Being a returning student to the Mechina Program, he chose as his roommate, Moshe Males, whose father came from Cleveland. It was a good choice.

A few months later, as the two roommates were admiring the new Beis Midrash that had just been built on the Yeshiva campus, Seva suggested that they repaint their own Beis Midrash in the Lauffer building. Seva would provide the money and Moshe the labor.

As they were surveying the project, Nissim, another student in Mechina, suggested moving one of the bookcases to a different wall. When they did, they saw the mold and cracking behind the bookcase and realized that a paint job wasn't enough. Seva asked Moshe what a complete renovation of the space would entail. Moshe answered that the ceiling tiles and ceiling lighting, bathrooms, furnishings, steps, front door and walls at the entrance of Lauffer all needed replacing or repair. Seva told Moshe to order the material and then set about raising the money. Much of it came from Seva's own pocket, but other *talmidim* chipped in, some in quite a significant way. One student with a car drove across Israel to get just the right marble for the steps! Others helped to *schlep* the heavy materials so that Moshe could do the work. As you can see from the pictures and video, the project is nearing completion. And what a job they did! *Kol hakavod* to the *talmidim* of the Mechina program. Their extraordinary devotion and sacrifice to the yeshiva will go down in the annals of Ohr Somayach history for generations to come.

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LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

Sleep On It

It seems that there is a Biblical source for “sleeping on it” – the decisions that need some thoughtful reflection and time and could benefit from the passage of night before they are made.

Korach and his cohorts – Datan, Aviram, and On ben Pelet – stirred an uprising accusing Moshe and Aharon of misappropriating the leadership for themselves, when, in reality, the entire community is holy. Two hundred and fifty men joined the rebellion. Moshe heard their message and fell upon his face. His words to them: *Let morning come, and then G-d will make known who is His and who is the holy one... Whoever He will choose, He will allow him to come near to Him [serve as High Priest] (Bamidbar 16:5)* The test that Moshe devised would mean that each of the men risked their lives, knowing that if they participate, and are not selected as priests, they would die.

G-d did not need the night to think it over, and neither did Moshe. But Moshe wanted Korach and his followers to sleep on it. Well, not exactly to sleep – but to use the nighttime to reflect before taking action. Since the dispute would be decided by the destruction of the rebels, they were to be given time to come to their senses, particularly in the quiet and seclusion of the night, when everyone returns to the company of their own family and is free to commune with himself. There, at night, in his home, he is removed from the influence of inciting companions. Day is a time for activity, but night is a time for study and reflection. This is symbolized by the fact that the oil of the *ner tamid* – representing wisdom and Torah – was to remain lit from “evening until morning,” during the time most suited for contemplation.

Moshe also wanted to utilize this time to remonstrate with those who had gone astray, and he spends the rest of the day attempting to persuade them. He

approached Korach, and separately approached Datan and Aviram. Moshe understood that Korach had two motives. One, he was standing up for the rights of his tribe of Levi, which he felt were violated by the preference given to Aharon. Second, he sought the honor of the priesthood for himself, a motive that he disguised as an argument for equal rights for all. Datan and Aviram, on the other hand, primarily opposed Moshe’s political leadership. Thus, Moshe’s messages of persuasion were tailored to each. The hope was that, upon reflection, the men would come to their senses.

There was a fourth rabble-rouser listed in the verse, who we never hear about again – On ben Pelet. According to the Sages, when he was removed from the influence of the others, in the privacy of his own tent, his wife persuaded him to give up the rebellion. Similarly, the children of Korach, at the moment of decision, righted themselves and were spared the fate decreed upon their father.

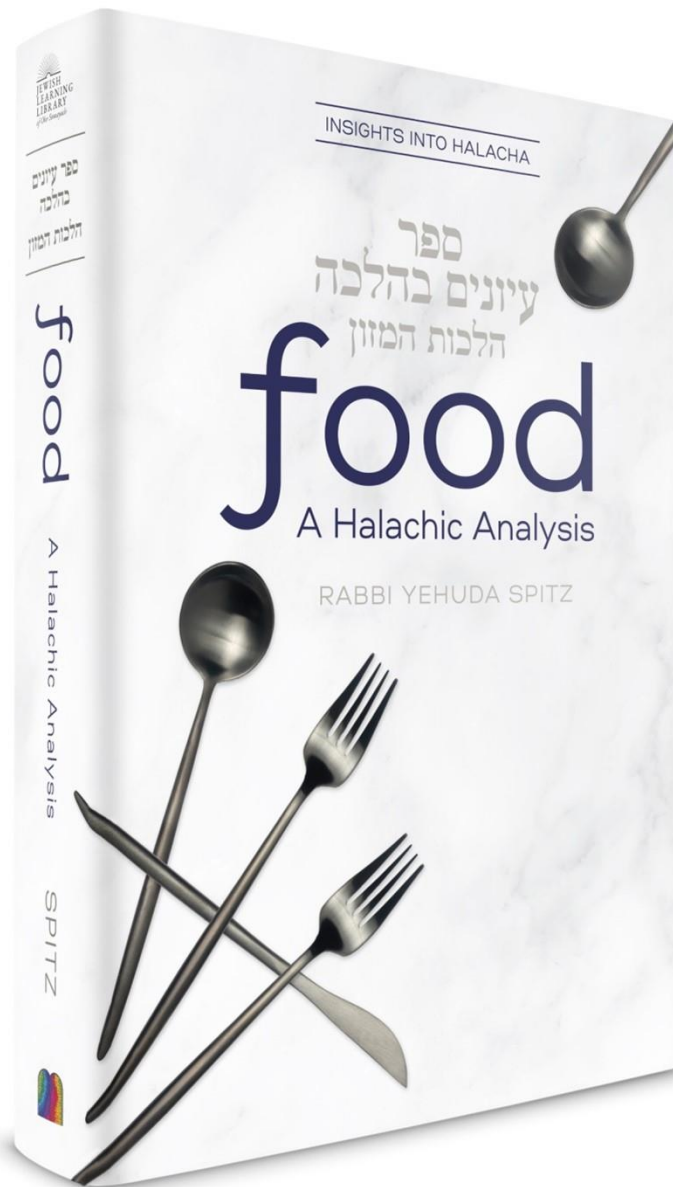
Even in the description of Creation, the morning comes after the night – *And it was evening, and it was morning*, is the refrain after each day of Creation. The word for morning, *boker*, is related to the word meaning to distinguish (*l’vaker*), for it is the time where the outlines of things emerge and it is possible to distinguish one thing from the other. Perhaps this applies not only in the physical dimension, but also in the realm of thought – things can become clear only after a nighttime reflection, removed from the influences of the day. The contemplation that night affords can often clarify complexities and allow our minds and hearts to tease apart the logical from the illogical and the good motives from the bad motives – emerging with clearly defined convictions and conclusions in the *boker*.

- Sources: Commentary, Bamidbar 18:5, Shemot 27:20-21, Ber. 1:5

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