

# OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT MATOS MASEI • 30 TAMMUZ 5781 JULY 10, 2021 • VOL 28 NO. 31

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### Sticks and Stones

*“...an utterance of her lips...” (30:07)*

**W**e are all so delicate. Our egos are so fragile. Our Sages tell us to run away from honor, but we all need self-worth.

One of the names for the soul is *kavod* – honor. As we say each day in our prayers, “So that my soul (*kavod*) might sing to you and not be silenced...” (Mizmor Shir Chanukat HaBayit). If you take all honor away from someone, they either die or go crazy. This was exactly what those Nazi monsters tried, and in some cases succeeded, to do to our brothers and sisters in the Second World War era. And when someone goes crazy and imagines himself to be someone else, he doesn't just think that he is the local bank manager. Rather, he imagines himself to be the most illustrious person he can think of, someone with the greatest honor. He imagines himself to be Napoleon, or herself to be the Queen of England.

One of the reasons why the Second Beit Hamikdash was destroyed was the incident of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza: A certain man had a friend named Kamtza and an enemy called Bar Kamtza. He once made a party and said to his servant, “Go and bring Kamtza.” The man went and brought Bar Kamtza by mistake. When the man who gave the party found Bar Kamtza there, he said, “What are you doing here? Get out!” Said the other, “Since I am already here, let me stay and I will pay you for whatever I eat and drink.” Said the host, “Absolutely not.” “Then let me give you half the cost of the party.” The host refused. “Then let me pay for the whole party.” Still the

host refused, and took him by the hand and threw him out.

Bar Kamtza was prepared to pay an enormous sum to save himself from humiliation. And if Bar Kamtza came to the party, it meant that he assumed that the host wanted to be his friend now – which could only have crushed him further.

No one can second-guess the Master of the World. No one can say *this* happened because of *that*. But when tragedies happen – and especially when they are close to home – each one of us must do more than a little soul searching.

This year, 45 holy Jews were crushed to death in Meron on Lag B'Omer. On Erev Shavuot, two more of our holy brethren were crushed to death and over 180 injured in Jerusalem.

As I write this, five people have died and 156 remain missing as a result of the collapse of an apartment building in Miami, Florida. The area is more than a third Jewish, with a large Orthodox population.

Stones can crush, and bodies can crush – but words can crush just as effectively.

It's not just sticks and stones that break bones.

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# Q & A

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## Questions – Matot

1. Who may annul a vow?
2. When may a father annul his widowed daughter's vows?
3. Why were the Jewish People not commanded to attack Moav, as they were to attack Midian?
4. Those selected to fight Midian went unwillingly. Why?
5. What holy vessels accompanied the Jewish People into battle?
6. Those who killed in the war against Midian were required to remain outside the "*machane*" (camp). Which *machane*?
7. Besides removing traces of forbidden food, what else is needed to make metal vessels obtained from a non-Jew fit for a Jewish owner?
8. "We will build sheep-pens here for our livestock and cities for our little ones." What was improper about this statement?
9. During the conquest of the Land, where did *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* position themselves?
10. What promise did *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* make beyond that which Moshe required?

## Questions - Masei

1. Why does the Torah list the places where the Jewish People camped?
2. Why did the King of Arad feel at liberty to attack the Jewish People?
3. What length was the camp in the *midbar*?
4. Why does the Torah need to specify the boundaries that are to be inherited by the Jewish People?
5. What was the *nesi'im*'s role in dividing the Land?
6. When did the three cities east of the Jordan begin to function as refuge cities?
7. There were six refuge cities, three on each side of the Jordan. Yet, on the east side of the Jordan there were only two and a half tribes. Why did they need three cities?
8. To be judged as an intentional murderer, what type of weapon must the murderer use?
9. Why is the *kohen gadol* blamed for accidental deaths?
10. When an ancestral field moves by inheritance from one tribe to another, what happens to it in *Yovel*?

## Answers Matot

1. 30:2 - Preferably, an expert in the laws of *nedarim*. Otherwise, three ordinary people.
2. 30:10 - If she is under 12 1/2 years old and widowed before she was fully married.
3. 31:2 - Because Moav only acted out of fear against the Jewish People. Also, Ruth was destined to come from Moav.
4. 31:5 - They knew that Moshe's death would follow.
5. 31:6 - The *aron* and the *tzitz*.
6. 31:19 - The *Machane Shechina*.
7. 31:23 - Immersion in a *mikve*.
8. 32:16 - They showed more regard for their property than for their children.
9. 32:17 - At the head of the troops.
10. 32:24 - Moshe required them to remain west of the Jordan during the conquest of the Land. They promised to remain after the conquest until the Land was divided among the tribes.

## Answers Masei

1. 33:1 - To show G-d's love of the Jewish People. Although it was decreed that they wander in the desert, they did not travel continuously. During 38 years, they moved only 20 times.
2. 33:40 - When Aharon died, the clouds of glory protecting the Jewish People departed.
3. 33:49 - Twelve *mil* (one *mil* is 2,000 *amot*).
4. 34:2 - Because certain *mitzvot* apply only in the Land.
5. 34:17 - Each *nasi* represented his tribe. He also allocated the inheritance to each family in his tribe.
6. 35:13 - After Yehoshua separated three cities west of the Jordan.
7. 35:14 - Because murders were more common there.
8. 35:16 - One capable of inflicting lethal injury.
9. 35:25 - He should have prayed that such things not occur.
10. 36:4 - It remains with the new tribe.

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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## Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

### Welcome to Rooster City

One of the stops that the Jews made in their forty-year sojourn through the wilderness was at a place called Etzion Gever (Num. 33:35-36, Deut. 2:8). This city is later mentioned in the Bible when King Solomon stationed his navy there (I Kings 9:26, II Chron. 8:17), and when King Jehoshaphat's ships broke down there (I Kings 22:49, II Chron. 20:26). Targum Yonatan (to Num. 33:35) translates the name Etzion Gever as "The City of the Rooster," thus assuming that the word *gever* means "rooster." Similarly, the Mishna (*Yoma* 1:8, *Sukkah* 5:4, *Tamid* 1:2) thrice uses the term "the call of the *gever*" to refer to daybreak, with the word *gever* understood as referring to a "rooster" (see *Yoma* 20b). In this essay we will explore the etymologies and implications of four Hebrew terms that refer to "chickens": *gever*, *sechwi*, *ziz sadai*, and *tarnegol*.

While the word *gever* sometimes means "rooster," it more often means "man/male" and seems to be a cognate of the word *gevurah* ("power" or "strength"). Interestingly, Rabbeinu Efrayim writes that a "rooster" is called a *gever* because its voice differs from that of other birds, as a man's voice differs from a woman's.

The Talmud (*Berachot* 7a) teaches that every morning there is one fleeting moment when G-d is especially angry, and a person who knows exactly when that happens can harness G-d's wrath to curse other people. The way the Talmud puts it, this moment can be determined by "seeing when the rooster's red crest turns white." In light of this, Rabbeinu Efrayim writes that Balaam called himself a *gever* (Num. 24:3, 24:15) because just like a rooster (*gever*) knows when G-d is angry, so too was he able to figure out the exact moment when G-d would be angry enough that a curse would prove effective. (Interestingly, a 2021 paper by Dr. Jessica L. Lamont of Yale University demonstrates that chickens were particularly associated with curse rituals in Ancient Greece.)

*Peirush HaRokeach* offers another reason why Balaam called himself a *gever*: Just as roosters engage in frequent copulation (see *Berachot* 22a), Balaam was likewise "one-

track minded." *Siddur HaRokeach* adds that just as the rooster closes one eye when G-d is angry, so too was Balaam blind in one eye, and just as the rooster stands on one foot when G-d is angry, so too was Balaam lame in one foot. Rabbeinu Bachaya (to Num. 24:3) adds that just as the rooster crows seven times (see *Perek Shirah* ch. 4, which attributes seven songs to the rooster), so did Balaam receive seven prophetic oracles.

*Peirush HaRokeach* explains that Etzion Gever was so-called because in that city lived people who were especially good at giving advice and had certain intuitions that resemble the rooster's ability to intuit the time of day. Rabbi Menachem Tziyyoni (1340-1410) similarly writes in the name of "the Kabbalists," that some of Etzion Gever's inhabitants were fluent in a certain form of esoteric wisdom called "The Knowledge of the Chicken" – which is alluded to in the name of the city.

The Hebrew word *sechwi* appears only once in the Bible, making it a *hapax legomenon* and a word whose actual meaning is quite unclear. The verse in which it appears reads: "Who places wisdom in the kidneys and who gives understanding to the *sechwi*?" (Iyov 38:36). But what is a *sechwi*? The Rabbis report that in some foreign place(s), people used the word *sechwi* for "roosters." The Babylonian Talmud (*Rosh Hashanah* 26a) identifies that place as Kennesrin (in North Syria), the Jerusalem Talmud (*Berachot* 9:1) identifies it as Rome, and the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 25:5), as Arabia. Be that as it may the rabbinic assumption is that the word *sechwi* means "rooster." Indeed, the Talmud (*Berachot* 60b) rules that when one hears the rooster's crow in the morning, one should recite the blessing, "Blessed are You... Who gave the *sechwi* the understanding to discern between day and night."

Nonetheless, most commentators understand that the word *sechwi* means "heart" – or, at least, *also* means "heart." These commentators include Ibn Janach in *Sefer HaShorashim*, Rabbeinu Chananel (to *Rosh Hashanah* 26a), Rashi (to Iyov 38:37), Ibn Ezra (there), Radak (*Sefer HaShorashim* and to Ps. 73:7), Rosh

(Berachot 9:23), Tur (Orach Chaim 46), and others. Siddur HaRokeach similarly explains that *sechwi* refers to a *neshama* (“soul”). Daat Mikra (to Iyov 38:36) cites other scholars as explaining the passage in Iyov as referring to different types of clouds, accordingly explaining that *sechwi* means “cloud.”

The way Rashi explains it, *sechwi* is related to the word *socheh* (“seeing” / “gazing,” see Targum to I Shmuel 17:42 and Isa. 21:8), referring to the “heart” as the machine that tries to “see” the future results and repercussions of a given action, or to the “rooster,” which has a special ability to “see” (things that are far away – Abudraham). Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) clarifies that the “seeing” in question refers to an intellectual sort of seeing, but not a physical seeing. He connects the word *sechwi* to the words *hasket* (which means to “listen” in an intellectual way, as opposed to the simple act of “hearing”) and *maskit* (attention-grabbing pictures engraved on a stone).

In a slight departure from these sources, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) understands *sechwi* to mean “skull.” He traces *sechwi* to the two-letter root SAMECH-CHET (“covering” or “barrier”). This root gives us words such as *sukkah* (“hut”), a covered enclosure; *nesech* (“pouring,” “libations”), covering a given spot with liquid, and *sichah* (“smearing,” “anointing”), layering something with oil. In that sense, *sechwi* refers to the “skull” which covers over the brain and serves as a protective barrier to shield that important organ.

The Bible relates that after the Assyrians conquered the Kingdom of Israel, they populated the area with Mesopotamian foreigners, each of whom imported their own native deities and idols to the Holy Land. More specifically, the people of Babylon brought their god Succoth Benoth, while the people of Cutha made images of their god Nergal (II Kings 17:30). The Babylonian Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 63b) relates that Succoth Benoth was an idol in the shape of a hen, while Nergal was a rooster-shaped idol. Based on this, Rabbi Chaim Futernik surmises that the term *sechwi* as “rooster” actually relates to the name of the Babylonian god Succoth Benoth.

Before we turn to the popular post-Biblical word *tarnegol*, there is another possible Biblical Hebrew term for “chicken/rooster”: *ziz sadai*. This term appears twice in Psalms (Ps. 50:11, 80:14), where it clearly refers to

some sort of bird. The Targum (there) always translates this term as *tarnegol bara* (“wild chicken”). Rabbi Dr. Yehuda Felix (1921-2004) points out that *tarnegol bara* also refers to the *duchifat* bird (Lev. 11:19), commonly identified as the hoopoe bird (see *Gittin* 68b).

The word *tarnegol* does not appear in the Bible, but appears many times in the Mishna (*Terumot* 11:9, *Maasrot* 3:7, *Shabbat* 5:4, 18:2, 24:3, *Pesachim* 2:7, 5:7, *Nedarim* 5:1, *Bava Kama* 2:1, 7:7, 10:9, *Bava Metzia* 5:4, *Bava Batra* 3:5, *Eduyot* 6:1, *Avodah Zarah* 1:5, *Chullin* 3:5, 12:1, *Meilah* 3:5, *Keilim* 8:5, *Parah* 5:6, *Taharot* 3:8). In fact, this word is also used in the Dead Sea Scrolls (11QT<sup>c</sup>) when speaking about the prohibition of raising chickens in Jerusalem, a prohibition also codified in the Mishna (*Bava Kama* 7:7).

Esteemed etymologist Rabbi Dr. Ernest Klein (1899-1983) reveals that the word *tarnegol* is borrowed from the Akkadian *tar-lugallu* (“cock”), assuming the interchangeability of NUN and LAMMED. This Akkadian term is itself a portmanteau of the Sumerian words *tar* (“bird”, similar to the Hebrew *tor*, “pigeon”) and *lugal* (“king”), perhaps an allusion to the rooster’s crest, which resembles a king’s crown. What’s fascinating is that Bilaam’s patron, the Moabite king Balak, was the son of somebody named Tzippor (whose name literally means “bird”), thus connecting Bilaam, who called himself a “rooster,” with somebody who is associated with “bird” and “king.”

As mentioned above, the Cuthean deity Nergal was an idol in the shape of a rooster, which Rabbeinu Chananel specifies looked like a wild rooster. Rabbi Meir HaLevi Abulafia (1170-1244) explains that the name Nergal alludes to a “rooster” because the word *tarnegol* contains the same letters as *nergal*. Alternatively, he explains that the name Nergal is related to the Hebrew word *ragil* (“frequent”), an allusion to the rooster, which is, as mentioned above, the animal understood to copulate the most frequently. Interestingly, the Jerusalem Talmud (*Avodah Zarah* 3:2) understands that Nergal was a foot-shaped idol, thus associating this god’s name with the Hebrew word *regel* (“foot”), and assuming the letter NUN of *nergal* is not integral to its core meaning.

For more about the Babylonian deities Nergal and Succoth Benoth, check out the encyclopedia section of my book *God versus Gods: Judaism in the Age of Idolatry* (Mosaica Press, 2018).

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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

## BLESSINGS OVER TEFILLIN: ONE BLESSING OR TWO?

### (PART 2)

*“I am not emotional about being the oldest man in the world, but it does mean something to me that I have donned tefillin for longer than anyone else.”*

Yisrael Kristal, 1903-2017, was officially recognized as the oldest living Holocaust survivor in 2014. In January 2016 he was recognized by the Guinness World Records as the world’s oldest man.

The Talmud (Brachot 60b) teaches that there are two blessings recited over *tefillin*. On putting on the arm *tefillin*, we say, “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to put on *tefillin*.” And on putting on the head *tefillin*, we say, “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us regarding the commandment of *tefillin*.” However, in Tractate Menachot (36a) a second possibility is raised: The second blessing is recited only if a person spoke in between putting on the arm *tefillin* and the head *tefillin*.

According to Jewish Law, speaking after putting on the arm *tefillin* and before putting on the head *tefillin* is a transgression. Making an unwarranted break in between makes a clear interruption between the two mitzvahs. Halachically, a disruption implies that the arm *tefillin* and the head *tefillin* are two completely independent mitzvahs. Subsequently, the first blessing no longer includes the head *tefillin*, and a new, separate blessing must now be recited.

In order to reconcile the two different versions in the *Gemara*, some commentaries say that the statement in Tractate Brachot – that two independent blessings are recited – is also referring to someone who makes an unnecessary break between putting on the two *tefillin*.

Rashi is of the opinion that the second blessing is recited only when a break is made between putting on the arm *tefillin* and the head *tefillin*. However, Rabbeinu Tam, one of Rashi’s grandsons, rules that two blessings are *always* recited over wearing *tefillin*, even when there is no interruption made between putting them on. The first blessing is said over the arm *tefillin* and the second over the head *tefillin*. Rabbeinu Asher (often known by the honorific title of the “Rosh”) points to an interesting divergence to be seen in these opinions of Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam. According to Rashi, it transpires that a person who can wear only *head tefillin* (because he has injured his arm such that it is not possible to wear the arm *tefillin*, or because the only *tefillin* available at that time are the head *tefillin*) will recite the first blessing: “... has commanded us to put on *tefillin*” although this is normally the blessing said over the *arm tefillin*. However, according to Rabbeinu Tam, that person would need to recite both the first blessing *and* the second one over the head *tefillin*.

The Halachic authorities who follow Rashi's ruling are, among others, the Rif and the Rambam. This halacha is codified by Rabbi Yosef Karo in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 25), and reciting just one blessing over both the arm *tefillin* and the head *tefillin* is the accepted practice of the Sephardic communities.

On the other hand (please excuse the pun), Rabbeinu Tam's opinion – to make two separate blessings – is accepted, among others, by the Ba'al Halachot Gedolot and the Rosh. It is codified by Rabbi Moshe Isserles, and is the accepted ruling for the Ashkenazic communities.

Fascinatingly enough, some authorities – Rashba, Ohr Zaruah and others – in explanation of Rashi, make a connection between how many blessings are recited and whether or not the mitzvah of *tefillin* is considered one mitzvah with two parts, or whether it is two completely separate mitzvahs. Accordingly, they suggest that if it is one mitzvah, only one blessing should be recited. But if it is two mitzvahs, each one deserves its own blessing. However, it is clear that not all authorities who say that only one blessing is recited are also of the opinion that *tefillin* is only one mitzvah.

According to Rabbeinu Tam, not only are two blessings recited, but the second blessing is actually the more important one. The first blessing is recited as the mitzvah is beginning, and the second mitzvah is articulated as the mitzvah comes to its complete fulfillment. Together with that is the fact that the head *tefillin* are considered to be on a higher level of sanctity than the arm *tefillin*, which seems to indicate that the blessing over the head *tefillin* is also of greater holiness. Rabbeinu Tam suggests that the loftier significance of the head *tefillin* is reflected in its being comprised of four different compartments, and that it has the Hebrew letter “*shin*” embossed on two of its sides. This is unlike the arm *tefillin*, which has only one compartment and no “*shins*” embossed on its sides.

In any event, the question remains as to why only one blessing would be said if the arm *tefillin* and the head *tefillin* are regarded as being two distinct mitzvahs. As a rule, each blessing is designed specifically for its precise purpose. For this reason, there are many different blessings that exist, in general. Why, then, is it considered acceptable here to recite just one blessing? Rambam, Shitat Rabbeinu Tam and Bet Ephraim all explain that since they share the same appellative – *tefillin* – and since the head *tefillin* are put on *immediately* after the arm *tefillin*, they may share the same blessing.

Whether one blessing is recited or two, about one thing, at least, there is no disagreement among the halachic authorities: The mitzvah of *tefillin* contains within it the most extraordinary blessings for whoever performs it!

*To be continued...*

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Matot-Masei: Yoma 79-85

### The Nature of the Ninth

Rabbi Chiya bar Rav from Difti taught, “Whoever eats on the ninth (of Tishrei) is considered as having fasting on both the ninth and the tenth.”

Rabbi Chiya bar Rav from Difti explains the basis for this novel mitzvah of eating prior to Yom Kippur and that the act of eating is deemed by Hashem as an act of fasting: The Torah states (in Vayikra 23:32), “You will afflict yourselves on the ninth day of the month (of Tishrei) at evening.” “Do we fast on the ninth?” says the Sage rhetorically. “Rather, we fast on the tenth (i.e. Yom Kippur)! It must be that this verse is teaching that whoever eats on the ninth (and then fasts on the tenth) is considered as having fasted on both the ninth and the tenth.”

Rashi explains the rationale for this derivation. The Torah says, “And you will afflict (*v’anitem*) yourselves on the ninth of the month in the evening.” This means that there is a mitzvah to prepare on the ninth in order to be able to fast on the tenth, meaning that there is a mitzvah to eat on the ninth. And since the Torah chose to express one’s eating on the ninth with the Hebrew word that the Torah uses for the affliction of fasting on Yom Kippur – *inui* – it follows that one who eats on the ninth is considered akin to fasting on that day, as well as fasting on the following day of Yom Kippur.

The upshot: Just as there is a mitzvah to fast on Yom Kippur, there is similarly a mitzvah to eat on the day before Yom Kippur, and one who eats on the ninth is considered as having fasted on both the ninth and the tenth.

This mitzvah of eating on the ninth of Tishrei is codified as halacha in Shulchan Aruch Orach

Chaim 604. Most authorities rule that this is Torah mitzvah, derived from this verse. Some, however, say that it is a rabbinically enacted mitzvah, and that the verse is an *asmachta* to the future institution of this mitzvah by the rabbis.

Rashi here and in Berachot 8b writes that the purpose of the mitzvah to eat on the ninth is as a lead-up in preparation for fasting well on Yom Kippur (to improve one’s ability to confess to Hashem one’s wrongdoings and attain atonement).

In this sense, eating on the ninth is intrinsically connected with the mitzvah to fast on the next day and can be viewed, in a sense, as “one long mitzvah.” However, Rashi in Rosh Hashana 9a and other Rishonim seem to indicate that the mitzvah to eat on the ninth is of an independent nature, and, therefore, an independent mitzvah that is not part of the mitzvah to fast on the tenth.

The commentaries discuss numerous practical differences in halacha that result from these two different understandings of the mitzvah to eat on the ninth. Here we will briefly try to touch on two of these matters of halacha.

One topic is whether the mitzvah to eat on the ninth applies to women (See Rabbi Akiva Eiger’s responsa, #15). If the mitzvah to eat on the ninth is inherently tied to the mitzvah to fast on the tenth, one should conclude that women are obligated in the mitzvah to eat on the ninth in the same way as are men. However, if eating on the ninth is an *independent* mitzvah, one would assume that women would be *exempt* from the requirement to fulfill the mitzvah of eating on the ninth (although common sense would almost certainly dictate for women to eat on the ninth, nevertheless, in order to facilitate their fasting on the tenth!) This exemption would be based on the rule that women

are exempt from a *mitzvah aseh she'hazman grama* – a “time-bound” mitzvah to do something (in this case, to eat at a specific time, i.e. on a specific date).

An additional matter to examine when considering these two ways of looking at the nature of the mitzvah to eat on the ninth is to determine whether the mitzvah *begins on the night* that begins the ninth day of Tishrei, or if the mitzvah applies *only in the daytime* that precedes Yom Kippur. If the mitzvah to eat on the ninth is meant to better fast on Yom Kippur, as Rashi writes on our *daf*, it stands to reason that the mitzvah to eat on the ninth is only in the daytime hours preceding the Yom Kippur fast. However, Rabbbeinu Nissim (Nedarim 63b) writes that the mitzvah should begin on the evening that begins the ninth, and continue throughout the day of the ninth. This would be consistent with the view that the mitzvah to eat on the ninth is comparable to eating on any

other independent Yom Tov, which begins with a special meal from at the onset of its date.

As a final note on this topic for now, we should not forget to address a seemingly obvious question when discussing the mitzvah to eat on *erev* Yom Kippur. The commentaries ask why the mitzvah to eat on the ninth is expressed in the terminology of *fasting* – *inui* – rather than of *eating* (*achila*). The key to answering this question is to know that one receives greater reward for doing a mitzvah that might be uncomfortable than for performing a pain-free mitzvah (“*lfum tzaarah agra*”). For this reason, the Torah expresses the mitzvah *to eat* on the ninth in terms of *fasting* – to teach that one who eats on the ninth receives the greater Divine reward of fulfilling this enjoyable mitzvah of eating, as if fulfilling it with the discomfort of fasting.

- Yoma 81b

Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach Institutions,  
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## @ OHR

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

**Netzach Mann (21)**  
**Born:** Szczecin, Poland  
**Home:** Volos, Greece

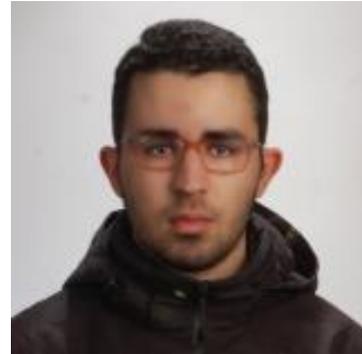
**Raised in** Szczecin, Poland; Thessaloniki, Greece;  
Windhoek, Namibia; Pretoria, South Africa;  
Vienna, Austria; Jakarta, Indonesia; Birmingham,  
United Kingdom; Dublin, Ireland

**Education:** University of Szczecin, Poland – BA in  
Marketing and Business

**Mechina Program 2021**

As one can tell from the above list of the places Netzach has lived, his parents moved quite often. Netzach's father was born on a farm in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) to parents who moved there from Poland. Not that Netzach's grandparents were Polish. They were *Romaniote* Jews from Greece. After surviving the Nazis in Greece during the Second World War by living in the mountains with the Greek partisans, they moved to Poland in 1946 where there was a small Romaniote community. They later moved to Rhodesia, where his grandfather tried his hand at farming. When Rhodesia became Zimbabwe, almost all of the white people left, including Netzach's father's family. They moved back to Poland.

His mother's family is from Salonika (now known as Thessaloniki after the Greeks captured it from the Ottoman Empire in 1913). A significant Adriatic seaport since antiquity, it became the only large city in the world with a majority Jewish population, as a result of the influx of Jews from Spain after the Expulsion of 1492. It was also the home of famous Sephardic Rabbis, including Rabbi Yosef Caro, the author of the *Shulchan Aruch* and Shlomo Alkabetz, the famous Kabbalist and author of *Lecha Dodi*. It also happens to be the birthplace of Dr. Albert



Bouria, the CEO of Pfizer, the developer of a COVID-19 vaccine.

If you have never heard of the Romaniotes, do not be surprised. I had never heard of them either until I saw Netzach's application to the Yeshiva and wondered how a Jew could end up in Volos, Greece, a city whose existence I previously was unaware of, yet was an important one in Romaniote history and which still has a *Beit Knesset* and a small Romaniote community.

Jews have lived in Greece since the time of Alexander the Great, about 2300 years ago. They were, in fact, the first settlement of Jews in Europe. Major communities were located in Volos, Salonika, Ioannina, Arta, Preveza, Chalcis, Chania, Thebes, Corinth, Patras and on the islands of Corfu, Crete, Zakynthos, Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Rhodes and Cyprus.

They speak *Yavanis* (or *Yavanic*), which is to Greek as Yiddish is to German or Ladino is to Spanish. It is basically Greek mixed with Turkish and Hebrew. It is still spoken today, and Netzach is fluent in both Yavanis and Modern Greek (along with English and Polish).

Netzach's father is an economist and diplomat who worked for the Polish Foreign Ministry since completing his education. After living in Rhodesia, where he grew up speaking English and Afrikaans for his first fourteen years, the family moved to Poland, where he finished high school and university. He did graduate work in the States and received a PhD in Economics from Columbia University. He was appointed to various Polish missions in various countries – hence, the family moved around the world.

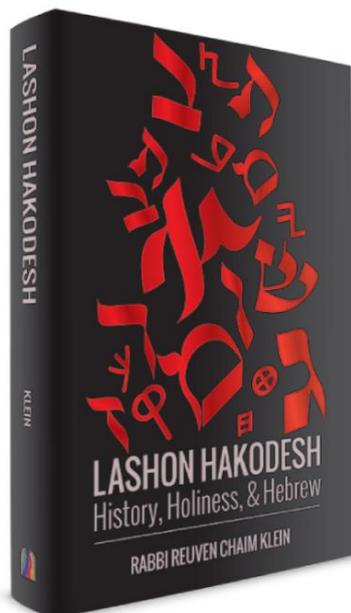
Netzach spent his first years in Poland, and when he was three his father was fortunate to be posted to Thessaloniki, Greece, home to Netzach's mother's family. At eight years old, they moved to Namibia in South West Africa. Then came a series of shorter moves, to Indonesia, Austria and Ireland. At the age of twelve they were in Pretoria, the capital of South Africa. They stayed for two-and-a-half years. When Netzach was fifteen they had moved to Birmingham in the UK for a year, and then back to Namibia and Greece. At seventeen, Netzach was back in Poland,

where he earned a BA in Marketing and Business at the University of Szczecin.

The family was always religious, keeping kosher and Shabbat as well as they could, given the difficulties one might expect to find in places like Namibia or Indonesia. Netzach *davened* and put on *tefillin* and kept those mitzvahs that he knew. After a year or so in university, he had grown lax in his observance and realized that to strengthen his connection to Judaism he needed to learn in yeshiva.

“As I began to study more about the history of the Jews, especially in Eastern Europe, I came to believe strongly in our traditions and our faith, which is so much greater than the individual. I want to serve Hashem and the Jewish People. I hope to learn all that the Yeshiva has to offer and then to establish a family and become active in my community.”

We are confident that Netzach will succeed *b'ezrat Hashem*.



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## Masei

### Life and Land

The Jews are at the end of their forty-year sojourn in the desert, and the Torah reviews all of the encampments. Then, Moshe informs the people that they are about to cross over the Jordan into the Land of Israel, where they will conquer and apportion the Land. Moshe is then told to convey the mitzvah of setting up six cities of refuge – three on either side of the Jordan.

These cities were established for individuals who committed manslaughter to seek refuge. A manslayer was not granted asylum if he acted intentionally or was criminally negligent. Neither did one need to be exiled if the death was a result of an unforeseeable accident. The cities of refuge absorbed those who killed unintentionally, but with some degree of carelessness – such as in circumstances where a cautious person acting responsibly would have recognized the possibility of a deadly result and would have been more careful.

The Torah warns that one may not accept ransom money in lieu of the death penalty for an intentional murderer or in lieu of flight to the city of refuge for an unintentional manslayer. In explaining this prohibition, the Torah writes, *Do not turn the Land in which you are into a hypocrite, for the blood turns the Land into a hypocrite, and there can be no atonement for the Land for the blood that is spilled in it, except by the blood of the one who spilled it.*

What does it mean that the Land would be turned into a hypocrite?

This is the soil that is destined to bear abundant fruit beneath G-d's blessed dew and sunshine. But the soil, the dew and the sunshine deceive, for no blessed seed germinates from within to give life and joy to mankind. G-d warns, *if you tolerate deliberate murder and careless manslaughter in your midst, you turn the Land in which you are rooted into a hypocrite!* The Land will disappoint your expectations and withhold the blessing that was meant to come from it. Human blood is the most precious sap nurtured by the Land, and innocent blood that is spilled turns the Land into a "hypocrite."

A human society that does not regard the blood of its members as sacred, and does not demand a reckoning for the spilling of innocent blood, breaks the terms under which it may possess its Land. Instead, in order to claim the Land and its bounty, society must demand that reckoning. The survival of a deliberate murderer is an affront to the higher dignity of man and is a breach of the contract under which G-d gave the earth to man and the Land to Israel. By committing murder, he forfeits his right to live.

These commandments were given just as the people are told that they will inherit the Land because they emphasize the sanctity of human life and represent the basic condition for Israel's right to possess the Land and enjoy its fruits.

- Sources: Commentary, Bamidbar 35:11, 33

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# PARSHA OVERVIEW

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## Matot

Moshe teaches the rules and restrictions governing oaths and vows, especially the role of a husband or father in either upholding or annulling a vow. The *Bnei Yisrael* wage war against Midian. They kill the five Midianite kings, all the males and Bilaam. Moshe is upset that women were taken captive. They were catalysts for the immoral behavior of the Jewish People. He rebukes the officers. The spoils of war are counted and apportioned. The commanding officers report to Moshe that there was not even one casualty among the *Bnei Yisrael*. They bring an offering that is taken by Moshe and Elazar and placed in the *Ohel Mo'ed* (Tent of Meeting).

The Tribes of Gad and Reuven, who own large quantities of livestock, petition Moshe to allow them to remain on the eastern side of the Jordan River and not enter the western Land of Israel. They explain that the land east of the Jordan is quite suitable grazing land for their livestock. Moshe's initial response is that this request will discourage the rest of the *Bnei Yisrael*, and that it is akin to the sin of the spies. They assure Moshe that they will first help conquer the Land of Israel, and only then will they go back to their homes on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Moshe grants their request on condition that they uphold their part of the deal.

## Masei

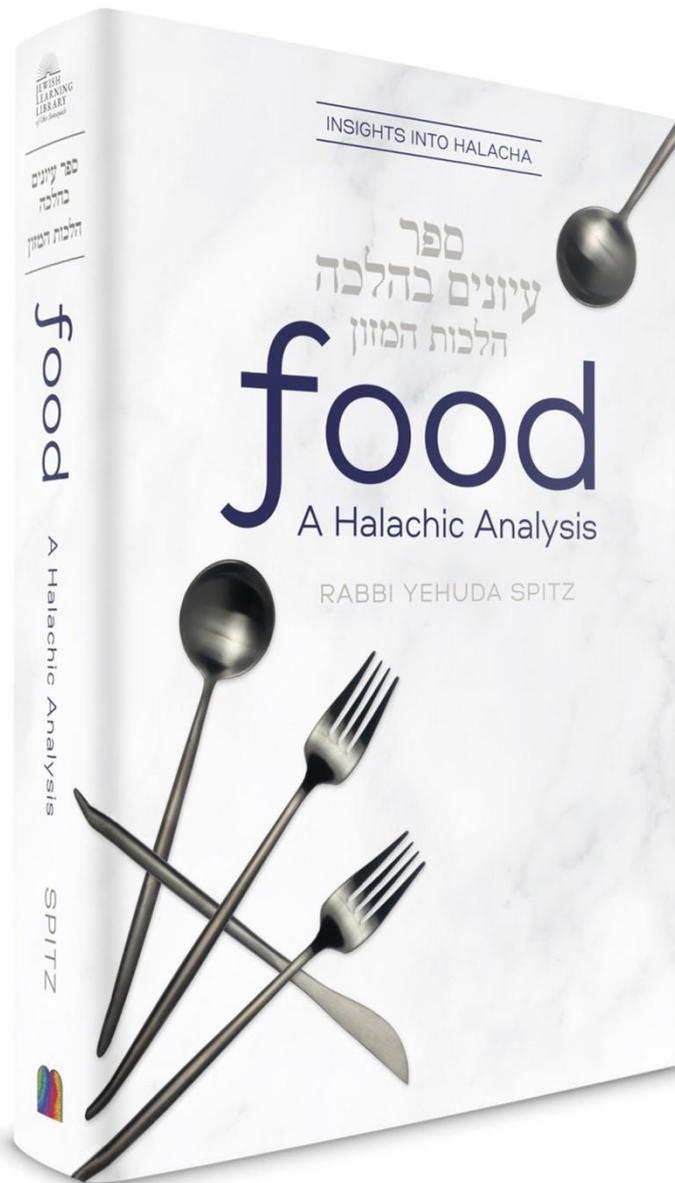
The Torah names all 42 encampments of the *Bnei Yisrael* on their 40-year journey from the Exodus to the crossing of the Jordan River into *Eretz Yisrael*. Hashem commands the *Bnei Yisrael* to drive out the Canaanites from the Land of Israel and to demolish every vestige of their idolatry. The *Bnei Yisrael* are warned that if they fail to completely rid the Land of the Canaanites, those who remain will be “pins in their eyes and thorns in their sides.” The boundaries of the Land of Israel are defined, and the tribes are commanded to set aside 48 cities for the Levites, who do not receive a regular portion in the division of the Land. Cities of refuge are to be established so that someone who unintentionally kills another person may flee there. The daughters of Tzlofchad marry members of their own tribe so that their inheritance will stay in their own tribe. Thus ends the Book of *Bamidbar/Numbers*, the fourth of the Books of the Torah.

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07:55 am	Shacharis
08:50 am	Eicha Reading
09:20 am	Special Kinos Reading & Explanation Rabbi Breitowitz, Rav, Kehillas Ohr Somayach
12:45 pm	Rav Yitzchak Breitowitz
1:45 pm	Rav Nota Schiller, Rosh Hayeshiva
2:45 pm	Rabbi Dovid Kaplan
3:35 pm	Rabbi Avraham Rockmill
4:25 pm	Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb
5:15 pm	Rabbi Reuven Lauffer
6:05 pm	Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair
7:00 pm	Mincha
7:45 pm	Rabbi Yehuda Samet
8.09 pm	Maariv
8.14 pm	End of Fast

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