

# OHRNET

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THIS WEEK IS BEHAR OUTSIDE ISRAEL - SAVE THIS FOR NEXT SHABBAT

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### How Much Do You Love Really Your Neighbor?

*“I will turn my attention to you...” (26:9)*

**R**abbi Yoel Teitelbaum, the Satmar Rov, זי"ל, was well known for his unwavering defense of Torah values. What is less known is that he was incredibly kind and generous. He was always in debt, but when people in trouble would come to him, he was unstinting in his giving and he poured out his heart and he emptied his pockets.

As fast as the money came in, he would give it out. Once, a known conman managed to weasel his way in to see the Rabbi. This con spun the Rabbi a heart-breaking story. He said, “Rebbe, I have a wife and ten children. My wife is in a mental institution and one of my children is in debt and was thrown out of his apartment.” He poured out a tale of woe that would melt the heart of a metal robot. The . Rebbe gave him everything he had, emptying out his pockets. He said, “Go get your son an apartment and pay your wife’s medical bills. Here, take this!” He thrust money into the conman’s hands. As the

conman was leaving, the Rebetzin, the Rabbi’s wife, came in. The Rabbi said, “You never heard such a terrible story as this man just told me. His wife is in a mental hospital. His son has been evicted!”

His wife said, “You know who that was? That was Yossel. Everyone knows him and knows that he is a total conman, a complete thief. He really got you.” “But you should have heard the problems he has!” The Rebetzin said, “He has no wife! He has no children! Not a word of what he said is true!” Said the Satmar Rov, “Oh, Boruch Hashem it’s not true!”

That is really loving your neighbor as yourself.

“I will turn my attention to you.” If we turn our attention to our fellow man, Hashem turns His “Attention” to us and blesses our every action.

# Q & A

## Questions

1. To what do the words "bechukotai telechu" (walk in My statutes) refer?
2. When is rain "in its season"?
3. What is the blessing of "v'achaltem lachmechem l'sova" (and you shall eat your bread to satisfaction)?
4. What is meant by the verse "and a sword will not pass through your land"?
5. Mathematically, if five Jewish soldiers can defeat 100 enemy soldiers, how many enemy soldiers should 100 Jewish soldiers be able to defeat?
6. How much is "revava"?
7. Which "progression" of seven transgressions are taught in Chapter 26, and why in that particular order?
8. What is one benefit which the Jewish People derive from the Land of Israel's state of ruin?
9. What was the duration of the Babylonian exile and why that particular number?
10. How many years did the Jewish People sin in Israel up till the time the northern tribes were exiled?
11. In verse 26:42, the name Yaakov is written with an extra "vav." From whom did Yaakov receive this extra letter and why?
12. What positive element is implied by the words "and I will bring them into the land of their enemies?"
13. In verse 26:42, why is the word "remember" not used in connection with the name of Yitzchak?
14. Why does the Torah say in 26:46 "Torot" (plural) and not "Torah" (singular)?
15. What happens when a poor person dedicates the value of a man to the *Beit Hamikdash* and doesn't have sufficient funds to fulfill his vow?
16. If a person says "The leg of this animal shall be an *olah* offering" the animal is sold and sacrificed as an *olah* offering. What is the status of the money received for the animal?
17. If a person dedicates his ancestral field to the *Beit Hamikdash* and fails to redeem it before *yovel* what happens to the field?
18. Where must "*ma'aser sheini*" be eaten?
19. When a person redeems "*ma'aser sheini*" what happens to the food? What happens to the redemption money?
20. How does a person tithe his animals?

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

## Answers

1. 26:3 - Laboring in Torah learning.
2. 26:4 - At times when people are not outside (e.g., Shabbat nights).
3. 26:5 - You will only require a little bread to be completely satisfied.
4. 26:6 - No foreign army will travel through your land on their way to a different country.
5. 26:4 - Two thousand.
6. 26:4 - Ten thousand.
7. 26:14,15 - Not studying Torah, not observing *mitzvot*, rejecting those who observe *mitzvot*, hating Sages, preventing others from observing *mitzvot*, denying that G-d gave the *mitzvot*, denying the existence of G-d. They are listed in this order because each transgression leads to the next.
8. 26:32 - No enemy nation will be able to settle in the Land of Israel.
9. 26:35 - 70 years. Because the Jewish People violated 70 *Shemitta* and *yovel* years.
10. 26:35 - 390 years.
11. 26:42 - In five places in the Torah, Yaakov's name is written with an extra "vav" and in five places the name Eliyahu is missing a "vav." Yaakov "took" these *vavs* as a pledge that Eliyahu will one day come and announce the redemption of Yaakov's children.
12. 26:41 - G-d Himself, so to speak, will bring them into their enemies' land. This means that even when the Jews are in exile, G-d will supply them with leaders who inspire them to keep the Torah. This guards the Jews from assimilating into the host culture.
13. 26:42 - Because the image of Yitzchak's ashes (who was prepared to be brought as an offering) upon the altar is always before G-d.
14. 26:46 - To teach that both the Written Torah and the Oral Torah were given to Moshe on Har Sinai.
15. 27:8 - The person whose value was donated goes before the *kohen*, who sets the obligation according to the poor person's ability to pay.
16. 27:9 - The money is "*chullin*," meaning it does not have "holy" status, except for the value of the animal's leg which does have "holy" status.
17. 27:16 - It becomes the property of the *kohanim* who are on rotation at the beginning of *yovel*.
18. 27:30 - In Jerusalem.
19. 27:31 - The food becomes permissible to him outside of Jerusalem. The redemption money must be brought to Jerusalem and used to purchase food to be eaten there.
20. 27:32 - He passes them through a door individually and he marks every tenth animal with a rod smeared with red dye.

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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

## THE AMIDAH (PART 11) — BLESSING OF HEALTH AND HEALING

*“Prayer is not a miracle. It is a tool, man’s paintbrush in the art of life. Prayer is man’s weapon to defend himself in the struggle of life. It is a reality. A fact of life.”*

(Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer)

**T**he eighth blessing reads: “Heal us, Hashem, then we will be healed; save us, then we will be saved; for You are our praise. Bring complete recovery for all our ailments, for You are Hashem, King, the faithful and compassionate Healer. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who heals the sick of His people Israel.”

Our Sages ask why the eighth blessing in the Amidah is the blessing for health and healing. “Rabbi Acha said: Because *Brit Milah*, which requires healing, is designated for the eighth [day]; they therefore placed it [the blessing for healing] eighth (*Megillah* 17b). As mentioned in the previous blessing, the Maharal (*Ner Mitzvah*) writes that the number seven represents the natural cycle. The number eight, however, is representative of a concept that is far loftier. The number eight symbolizes the realms of the spiritual, unencumbered by the physical. Eight embodies the concept of being above and beyond nature. We are commanded to perform the *Brit Milah* on the eighth day because there is no rational, logical reason why we, the Jewish People, should still exist as an identifiable, cohesive nation after all these millennia. We exist in the realms of the number eight, protected by Hashem’s promise to our forefather Avraham that we will always exist.

By “healing” being placed here as the eighth blessing, we are being taught an essential lesson. It may seem to us that it is medical research and technology that are the cause of the medical establishment’s incredible

successes in being able to heal us and nurse us back to good health. But it is not so. Rather, it is Hashem Who heals. It is Hashem Who grants the doctors and researchers the ability and insight to understand how to treat the sick and cure the ailing. This does not mean that we should not turn to doctors for help. We should. However, as the Rashba writes, we must place our trust in Hashem, and hope that the doctors we have chosen will serve Him well.

Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky (1886-1976), one of the foremost leaders of Lithuanian Jewry and who, after escaping communist Russia, headed the Rabbinical courts in London for seventeen years before moving to Israel, points out that this blessing is the only place where the phrase “For You are our praise” is found in the *Amidah*. Rabbi Abramsky explains that a person might imagine that it was the doctor who cured them, and therefore we state that it is Hashem we praise. It is true that we need to have an enormous appreciation for the efforts of the doctor, but the doctor is Hashem’s intermediary, and ultimately our praise should be directed to Hashem.

“Heal us Hashem, then we will be healed” seems to be somewhat repetitious. The *Eitz Yosef* explains that when Hashem, Himself, heals, all of the disease and all of the symptoms are removed permanently. That is why the phrase repeats itself. We ask Hashem to heal us and we acknowledge that Hashem’s healing is unlike that of humans, who are sometimes able to remove all traces of the disease and sometimes not.

Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai (1724-1806) was possibly the most prolific scholar of his generation. He is generally known by the acronym of his names: *Chida*. He authored more than sixty books that cover the entire gamut of Jewish knowledge, ranging from Jewish law to the most esoteric dimensions of Kabbalah – and everything else in between. In *Birkei Yosef*, his commentary to the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law), he notes that the *gematria* (numerical value) of the Hebrew word *Shechina* (Divine Presence) is 385, which is exactly the same *gematria* as one of the descriptions of Hashem, “*Rofeh Chinam* – He Who heals for free.”

Rabbi Zelig Reuven Bengis (1864-1953) was the Chief Rabbi of the *Eidah Chreidit* in Jerusalem. He was the recognized authority in Jewish law, and his brilliance was such that his extraordinary and insightful essays were so profound that they were unfathomable to all but the most brilliant Torah scholars. Rabbi Bengis was once attending a *Brit Milah*, but the *brit* was not taking place. Time was dragging and no one seemed to know why. After quite a delay, Rabbi Bengis approached one of the family members to ask what the problem was. The family member told him that the father of the eight-day baby was desperately sick in the next room. His situation was so dire that his demise was imminent, and they were waiting until he passed away in order to give the newborn baby his father’s name. Rabbi Bengis was aghast and told the family member that the prophet Eliyahu – Hashem’s representative at every *brit* – was present with them for

the mitzvah. Rabbi Bengis cried out, “Instead of waiting for the father to die, we have to pour out our heart in prayer and implore Hashem to cure him!” He then went into the room where the father was lying on his deathbed, pleading with Hashem to grant him life and good health. After a while, the father started showing signs of consciousness, and Rabbi Bengis ruled that the *brit* should take place immediately. The child was given a different name and his father lived for another eight years.

It is important to point out that our blessing is not solely focused on physical ailments. It is also referring to any spiritual ailments a person may have. However, as opposed to physical sickness, which is not something to be ashamed of, spiritual ailments are a source of embarrassment. It is not difficult to admit to being physically unwell, but it is difficult to admit to being spiritually “unwell.” Even if the admission is only to oneself, a considerable amount of inner strength is required to acknowledge it.

With the power of prayer we can tap into the supernatural realms. We can ask Hashem to heal us. Heal us from our spiritual ailments and our physical ones, even when every medical option has been exhausted and the doctors say there is nothing left to do. Because G-d is truly the “Faithful and Compassionate Healer.”

*To be continued*

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

## he Year of Seven (Part 2 of 2)

The Torah commands that every seventh year be declared a Sabbatical Year, during which the Holy Land must be left fallow, and all loans are to be considered remitted. This year – 5782 – is a Sabbatical Year, so I thought it would be appropriate to discuss two Hebrew terms used to refer to the Sabbatical Year: Shemittah and Sheviit. The first essay focused on the term Shemittah (“slipping away”) and explores various Hebrew words which appear to be synonymous with that term. This second essay focuses on the term Sheviit (“the seventh one”) and expounds on other related Hebrew expressions whose etymologies seem to be connected to the root of that word.

The Mishnaic tractate dedicated to discussion of the laws of the Sabbatical Year is dubbed *Masechet Sheviit*. The word *sheviit* literally means “the seventh one” and is plainly the ordinal form of the Hebrew word *sheva* (“seven”). This makes sense because, after all, the Sabbatical Year serves as the *seventh* year of a seven-year cycle. Indeed, the word *sheviit* already appears in the Bible when referring to the Sabbatical Year (Ex. 23:11, Lev. 25:4, 25:20, Deut. 15:12, and Nechemia 10:32) and is the common word in the Mishna for that year.

Another word related to both *sheviit* and *sheva* is *shavua* – but this word hold two distinct meaning, which are found in Biblical Hebrew and in Mishnaic Hebrew. Usually, the word *shavua* in the Bible means “week” in the sense of a seven-day period of time (e.g., Gen. 29:27–28, Lev. 12:5, Deut. 16:9), and the term appears multiple times in the Mishnah in that sense (*Bava Metzia* 9:11, *Erachin* 2:1, *Negaim* 1:3-4, 3:1, 3:3-8, 4:7, 5:1-2, 5:4-5, 7:3, 9:1, 10:1, 10:15, 10:10, 11:7, 12:6-7, and 13:1).

However, the word *shavua* can also refer to the seven-year cycle which is used to track the Sabbatical Year. In fact, every time *shavua* appears in the Book of Daniel (Dan. 4:24, 9:25-27, 10:2-3), it seemingly refers to a “period of seven years,” not a “week.” This is also the meaning of *shavua* several times in the Mishna (*Sheviit* 4:7-9, *Bava Metzia* 9:10, *Sanhedrin* 5:1, *Makkot* 1:10, and *Parah* 8:9), as Rashi

constantly clarifies for us (see Rashi to *Pesachim* 12a, 86a, *Moed Katan* 12a, *Sotah* 44a, *Bava Metzia* 110b, and *Sanhedrin* 97a).

Besides *shavua*, there is another Hebrew word which means “week” that we might be familiar with. The Bible states: “And he [the Kohen] shall wave the Omer before G-d for your appeasement, on the morrow of the *Shabbat* shall the Kohen wave it... And you shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the *Shabbat* –from the day of your bringing the waved Omer – seven complete *Shabbatot* shall they be, until the morrow of the seventh *Shabbat* shall you count fifty days...” (Lev. 23:11, 11:15-16) Ibn Ezra and Nachmanides clarify that in this passage, the word *Shabbat* has two different meanings. In the first two instances, the word *Shabbat* refers to a specific holy day (i.e., the first day of Passover), while in the latter two instances, the word *Shabbat* means “week” and refers to the counting of seven *weeks* from the Second Day of Passover until the Festival of Shavuot (Pentecost). This understanding is reflected by Targum Onkelos who translates the first two instances of *shabbat* as *yoma tova* (i.e., *Yom Tov*, “holiday”), and the latter two as *shavua*. Indeed, Nachmanides correctly notes that *shabbat* as “week” can be found many times in the rabbinic vernacular (see *Taanit* 4:7, *Megillah* 3:4, *Ketuvot* 1:1, 5:6-7, *Eduyot* 4:10, *Nedarim* 8:1, *Bava Metzia* 9:11, *Bava Batra* 5:10, *Sheviit* 2:6, and *Niddah* 4:5).

As Nachmanides puts it, the word *shabbat* is thus a synecdoche, that is, a term which refers to both a part of something and the whole thing. In this case, *shabbat* refers to both a specific day within the week (i.e., Saturday), as well as to a whole week. By the same token, the Sabbatical Year is also called *shabbat* (Lev. 25:2, 25:4, 25:6, 26:34-35, II Chron. 36:21), and the seven-year cycle in which a Sabbatical Year falls out is likewise called a *shabbat* (see Lev. 25:8). This name for the Sabbatical Year, of course, highlights its Shabbat-like rules that require one to “rest” from working the ground

Nevertheless, Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) points out that nowhere else in the Bible is the word *shabbat* used in the sense of “week” besides in the context of Counting of the Omer. Because of this, he argues that even in that context, the word *shabbat* does not literally mean “week,” but is related to *shabbat* in the general sense of “cessation/resting,” like the root SHIN-BET-TAV means in other places. Rabbi Mecklenburg explains that the seven weeks of Counting the Omer are referred to by a cognate of *shabbat* because during the interim weeks between the Omer Sacrifice (offered on the second day of Passover) and the Two Loaves (offered on Shavuot), new grains are not used for ritual sacrifices in the Temple, so one can be said to be “ceasing” to use new grains until Shavuot. Thus, the weeks in question may be characterized by this “cessation” and can appropriately be called *shabbat*, because they resemble the weekly Shabbat on which we cease from all forms of creative labor.

Rabbi Mecklenburg traces both the terms *shabbat* (SHIN-BET-TAV) and *shavua* (SHIN-BET-AYIN) to the biliteral SHIN-BET, whose core meaning is “returning.” Even though in Rabbi Pappenheim’s biliteral root system, the letter AYIN is not one of the seven radical letters that join with biliteral roots to create a trilateral root, in the case *shavua* there is ample room to argue that SHIN-BET-AYIN can nonetheless be traced back to the biliteral root SHIN-BET because in Aramaic the word for “seven” is *shav*, which is the same as the Hebrew *sheva* without the letter AYIN.

Rabbi Mecklenburg relates these terms to the word *shvuyah* (“captive”), because one taken captive is stuck within a closed system, which repeats itself over and over and constantly “returns” back to the beginning. In the same way, the words *shabbat* and *shavua* represents circular periods of time which automatically restart when they have reached the number seven (whether seven-day periods, seven-week periods, seven-year periods, or, as mentioned by the Medieval Kabbalists, even seven thousand-year periods).

Rabbi Pappenheim offers a similar explanation, noting that when one successfully “returns” to one’s home, one no longer needs to engage in any further movement towards reaching that goal and thus effectively “stops.” As a result, *shabbat* in the sense

of the cessation of movement or effort flows from the idea of “returning.” As a corollary of this, he adds that a “captive” has been deprived of her freedom of movement and is thus forced to remain in a state of “resting” as though she has already “returned” home.

When Hashem warns that He will punish those who sin “sevenfold” the amount of their sin (Lev. 26:18, 26:24, 26:28), the word *sheva* in that context does not literally mean “seven” in the numeric sense, but rather refers to excessive punishment which repeats itself over and over, as though it functioned like a *shabbat/shavua*. In the same vein, when one undertakes a *shevuah* (“swear/oath”), one voluntarily enters oneself into a closed system, wherein one is bound to follow certain rules. Whether one swears to do or not do something (or that he did or did not do something), he becomes obligated and tied down (like a “captive”), in a way that compels him to fulfill his word.

Rabbi Mecklenburg claims that the importance of the number “seven” and its cyclical nature is embedded in nature. Although the seven-day week does not represent any astronomical phenomenon (unlike the day, month, and year, which roughly correspond to the earth’s rotation on its axis, the moon’s orbit around the earth, and the earth’s orbit around the sun, respectively), Rabbi Mecklenburg sees evidence of seven-based cycles in music theory, which recognizes seven musical notes, and Rabbi Moshe Zuriel adds that the same can be found in color theory, which recognizes seven distinct colors of the rainbow. We may add to this other phenomena like the existence of seven planets visible to the naked eye, seven Hebrew letters that receive a *dagesh*, the seven orifices in the human head (see *Sefer Yetzirah* 4:3), and perhaps the reputed seven-chambered uterus. (Nonetheless, the first examples are not foolproof and could ultimately be understood as social constructs. The existence of seven notes and seven colors could easily be attributed to a human consensus that arbitrarily chose seven as an important number, and consequently sees those elements as reflecting that number. In reality, it is possible that the musical notes or colors on a rainbow can be broken up into any number, even though we are not socially conditioned to thinking of those elements in terms of other numbers.)

That said, Rabbi Mecklenburg still sees a difference between the words *shabbat* and *shavua* even when they both mean “week.” He explains that *shabbat* refers specifically to a “seven-day calendar week” which begins with Sunday and culminates with the Sabbath. To him, the fact that the week concludes with *shabbat*, allows the Sabbath to lend its name to the entire seven-day period preceding it. On the other hand, the word *shavua* is a cognate of the word *sheva* (“seven”) and simply refers to any seven-day period that need not necessarily start on Sunday and end on the Sabbath.

Interestingly, Rabbi Dr. Alter HaLevi Hilowitz (1906-1994) presumes that even *shavua* means “weeks” in the sense of calendar weeks, and not common weeks (i.e., any seven-day period). He thus explains that using the name of the holiday of *Shavuot* implies that the holiday’s date should be determined by calendar weeks that always start on Sunday and end on Shabbat. Because of this, he argues that the name *Shavuot* lends credence to the heretical Sadducean view that the Counting of the Omer always begins on a Sunday, so that *Shavuot* will always occur on a Sunday—after seven complete “calendar weeks.” Because of this complication, argues Hilowitz, the rabbis refrained from calling the holiday *Shavuot* and instead used the term *Atzeret* (see my previous essay “Stop! It’s *Shavuot*,” May 2018).

Earlier, we cited Rabbi Mecklenburg who intimated that *sheva* may sometimes not literally mean “seven,” but just “a lot.” This idea is seen in earlier sources, as well: For example, when Lemech laments the possibility of him sharing the same fate as his ancestor Cain, he says: “for sevenfold (*shivatayim*) has come up against Cain, and Lemech, seventy-seven (*shivim v’shivah*)” (Gen. 4:24). Yet, Rabbi Saadia Gaon’s *Tafsir* (to Gen. 4:24) translates this passage into Arabic slightly differently: “for much has come up against Cain, and Lemech, more and more.” Thus, Rabbi Saadia Gaon takes the number “seven” in this context as non-literal, instead simply standing in for “a lot.” Similarly, another verse reads: *sheva yipol tzaddik v’kam* –“For seven [times], the righteous man falls and arises” (Prov. 24:16). Here too, Rabbi Saadia Gaon renders the word *sheva* as “many” instead of literally “seven” (see also Ibn Ezra and Gersonides there).

The Talmud (*Shevuot* 36a) cites Rava as ruling that when a person repeats a positive or negative utterance by saying “no no” or “yes yes,” then this constitutes an oath. Rashi explains that because in doing so, one repeats the word in order to “strengthen” what he is saying, this is conceptually similar to an oath, which is intended to strengthen the force of one’s verbalization. The famous Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew lexicon connects the two meanings of SHIN-BET-AYIN (“seven” and “swear”) by defining the latter as “seven oneself, or bind oneself by seven things.” In fact, we find in the Bible that the oaths of treaties were accompanied with seven animals (Gen. 21:23-33), or a multiple of seven animals (II Chron. 15:11-15). Thus, it seems that the number seven was somehow associated with affirming the oath taken, so all oaths came to be called a *shevuah* as a result. As *Sefer HaChinuch* (Mitzvah 330) explains the connection between *shevuah* and *sheva*, repeating something seven times strengthens that speech act and symbolizes its everlasting value. Indeed, Targum Onkelos to Gen. 24:9 translates a cognate of *shevuah* into a cognate of *kiyyum* (“establishing/everlasting”).

The connection between *shevuah* and *sheva* is also noted by Ibn Ezra (to Gen. 21:31) and Nachmanides (to Num. 30:3), who cryptically comment on the relationship, but do not further elaborate. Elsewhere, however, Ibn Ezra offers a fuller explanation of the connection: *Sefer Yetzirah* (4:2) asserts that the first six numbers represent the six cardinal directions (up, down, left, right, forward, and backward), while the number “seven” (*sheva*) represents G-d Himself who is in the middle of everything (serving as the Prime Mover). Based on this, Ibn Ezra suggests in several places that *shevuah* is related to *sheva*, because when one undertakes an oath, one essentially draws a connection between that about which he swears and the existence of G-d (who is called “the Seventh One”) in order to make a truth-claim. It is as if the oath-taker said, “Just like G-d is true, I swear that such-and-such is/will be true.”

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 21:23) accounts for the connection between *shevuah* (“oath”) and *sheva* (“seven”) by explaining that ever since Hashem created the world in Seven Days, the number seven came to be especially associated with Him and came to universally symbolize His role as

the Creator and Master of the Universe. Indeed, seven continued to be a significant stock number in many Ancient Near Eastern texts. Based on this, Rabbi Hirsch explains that the act of undertaking a *shevuah* actively places the oath-taker under Hashem's direct control, as if to say, "If what I am saying is not true, then I hereby deliver myself into Hashem's hand to do to me what is just." Like Rabbi Pappenheim and Rabbi Mecklenburg, Rabbi Hirsch also sees a link between *shevuah* and *shevuyah*, arguing that just like the *shevuyah* has been taken captive, so too is the oath-taker "captured" within Hashem's direct control.

Rabbi Moshe Elyakim Bria Hopstein (1757-1828) writes that *shevuah* is related to *seviah* ("satisfaction/satiation") because taking an oath in Hashem's name is one way to "cling to Him," and the truly righteous are never satisfied until they have wholly clung to Him.

Interestingly, Rabbi Yitzchok Avigdor Lubchansky of Milwaukee notes that the positive commandment

to swear in Hashem's name (Deut. 6:13, 10:20) – as opposed to the name of any other deity – is listed as the *seventh* positive commandment in Maimonides' list of the 613 commandments. This again illustrates the connection between Hashem, swearing, and the number seven.

We conclude with the inspirational words of Rabbi Yeshayahu Horowitz (1555-1630), author of *Shnei Luchos HaBris (Shelah)*, who wrote that Hashem created the world in six days and rested on the seventh as a way of alluding that a person ought to utilize his entire lifespan – with the average human lifespan considered seventy years (Ps. 90:19) – for fruitful endeavors and not waste them. He adds that the Torah's commandments that revolve around the number seven (like the prohibition of eating *chametz* for seven days, or the seven days of celebration after a bride and groom are wed) also serve to remind a person to fully take advantage of his seventy-year lifespan and never waste his days.

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# PEREK SHIRA

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by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

## THE SONG OF THE APPLE TREE

The apple tree says: “Like an apple tree among the forest trees, so is my beloved amongst the young men. In his shade I desired and sat, and his fruit was sweet to my palate.” (*Shir HaShirim* 2:3)

**A**mong the trees of the forest, the apple tree stands out with its sweet fruit, pleasant fragrance and bright colors. However, it has comparably less shade than many other trees. It sings of how the Jewish nation chose to accept the Torah for the sweetness of its promised fruit, even though it is a lifestyle that involves hard work and little shade. This is unlike the other nations who refused the Torah, preferring instead the comforts of this world which is like a fruitless, shady tree. It also sings of our trust in Hashem in accepting His Torah without inquiring as to its contents, in the same way as the apples begin to grow before their protective leaves have finished growing. The apple tree begins to grow in the month of Nissan and completes its growth after 50 days, in Sivan. This represents the 50 days from the Exodus in Nissan until the giving of the Torah in Sivan.

Therefore, the apple tree reminds us of our faithful relationship with Hashem, and of how any

discomforts involved in performing His mitzvahs are outweighed by their sweetness and the eventual eternal comfort in the World to Come. The secular dream of idly enjoying life in the shade can be enticing, but the sweet tones of the apple tree’s song help to dispel doubts and to remove temptations.

- *Sources: Perek B’Shir (by Rav’ Chaim Kanievsky); Shir HaShirim Rabbah 2:2; Shabbat 87a, according to Ben Yehoyahah; Midrash Chazis, according to Sefer HaIkarim 3:1 (cited in Nachalei Devash)*

- *\*In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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**T**he Torah promises prosperity for the Jewish People if they follow Hashem's commandments. However, if they fail to live up to the responsibility of this calling, then chilling punishments will result. The Torah details the harsh historical process that will fall upon them when Divine protection is removed.

These punishments, whose purpose is to bring the Jewish People to repent, will be in seven stages, each more severe than the last. Sefer Vayikra, the Book of Leviticus, concludes with the details of *erachin* – the process by which someone vows to give the Beit Hamikdash a certain monetary value for a person, animal or property.

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# PARSHA PONDERERS

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by Rabbi Rafi Wolfe

## Ensuring the Redemption

“I will remember my covenant with Yaakov; as well, my covenant with Yitzchak, and I’ll remember my covenant with Avraham, and I’ll remember the land.” (Leviticus 26:42)

This Torah portion describes all the devastating things that will happen when the Jews will be exiled from their land. After all these events are described, Hashem assures us that we will not be forgotten. We are assured that we will evade total annihilation despite our enemies’ plans otherwise. Hashem tells us that He will recall the covenant He made with our forefathers: To be an eternal nation, living peacefully in our homeland. When the Torah writes the name of Yaakov, it is written with an extra letter "vav". Rashi points out that this happens five times in Tanach. This is meant to correspond to the five times that Eliyahu the Prophet’s name is written without the final letter “vav.” This teaches that Yaakov, so-to-speak, “took” a letter from Eliyahu’s name as collateral to ensure that Eliyahu will come and announce the imminence of their final redemption to Yaakov’s descendants. Yet, if this is the lesson of the extra letter in Yaakov’s name, why did it need to be demonstrated *five* times? Would not *once* have been sufficient?

One suggestion offered is that it is to signify that it was as if Eliyahu took an oath on the five Books of the Torah that he will definitely announce the final redemption of the Jewish nation from exile. The problem with this approach is that once an oath was made, why was there a need for Yaakov to take collateral from Eliyahu? Conversely, if Yaakov took collateral from Eliyahu, why was there a need for an oath? Therefore, another approach is necessary.

Whenever a person takes collateral from another, the custom is to confirm the arrangement with a handshake. The fivetimes Yaakov took a letter from Eliyahu’s name correspond to the five fingers in a person’s hand. As well, the numerical value of the letter *vav* is six, and five of them make thirty, corresponding to the thirty parts in the human hand (*Oholot* 1:8). This is to show that it was as if they “shook on it,” so that there would be no doubt that Eliyahu would nounce the final redemption.

Another answer takes a more numerological approach. The names of our three forefathers contain thirteen letters, as do the names of the four foremothers, which together

results in the number twenty-six. This is true using the name Yaakov. Twenty-six carries great significance, as it is the numerical value of Hashem’s name. However, if we use Yaakov’s other name – Yisrael – the total becomes twenty-seven. This corresponds to the twenty-seven letters in the alphabet of the Torah. But, what does all of this have to do with our verse?

The name "Yaakov" represents the masses; those who are not necessarily learned in Torah, but who are in awe of Hashem and spread the message of His Unity. This is why the names of the forefathers and foremothers, using the name Yaakov, correspond to the name of Hashem. On the other hand, the name "Yisrael" represents the Torah scholars. This is evident from a comment of Rashi elsewhere, where he explains a verse which seemingly redundantly says "Yisrael" five times (Numbers 8:19). Rashi says that it corresponds to the five Books of the Torah. Therefore, the combination of the forefathers’ and foremothers’ names, using the name “Yisrael,” corresponds to the twenty seven letters in the Torah.

However, in the future, Eliyahu will come and will “return the hearts of the fathers due to the sons, and the hearts of the sons due to their fathers” (Malachi 3:24). Meaning, everyone will have perfect knowledge of Hashem and His teachings, from the smallest of minds to the greatest of scholars. Therefore, the masses, represented by the name "Yaakov," will need another letter attached to their name. This will allow the names of the foremothers and forefathers to combine to twenty-seven letters, representing the Torah. Consequently, the letter “vav” was added to Yaakov’s name. This was done five times to represent the five Books of the Torah, which the Jewish People will have then become masters of.

May this happen soon and speedily in our days.

- *\*This essay is based on Maharal's Gur Aryeh and Chasam Sofer's Torat Moshe to Leviticus 26:42*

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# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

## Triple Covenant

At the end of the difficult description of the tragedies that will befall the Jewish People in exile, the Jewish heart is reawakened and is humbled before Hashem. When this happens, Hashem says He will remember “My ‘covenant Yaakov’ and also My ‘covenant Yitzchak’ and also My ‘covenant Avraham.’” These are not the covenants that Hashem established *with* each of the Patriarchs, but rather the covenant named Yaakov, the covenant named Yitzchak and the covenant named Avraham.

These covenants are covenants of historical destiny, rooted in the lives and personalities of the Patriarchs. They represent the periods which mark our emergence from exile, and are recorded in that order – first Yaakov, then Yitzchak, then Avraham.

Our Sages teach that the three Patriarchs established the three daily prayers: Avraham instituted the morning *shacharit* prayer, Yitzchak the afternoon *mincha* prayer, and Yaakov the evening *ma’ariv* prayer. Correspondingly, the lot in life of each accorded with one of these three times of day.

Avraham’s lot was illuminated with increasing brightness. While he challenged the beliefs of those around him, and forged a new path, he was treated with great respect and honored as a “prince of Hashem” by his neighbors.

Yitzchak’s lot was clouded with declining light. While he was blessed with the material wealth of Avraham, he did not enjoy the favor of his fellow men. Instead, they envied his blessings, and he was forced to seclude himself and his household.

Yaakov’s lot was enshrouded in the darkness of night. His life was a string of trials and tribulations, including being swindled by his father-in-law, nearly killed by his

brother, the early loss of his beloved wife, violation of his daughter by Shechem, and the loss of his most precious child.

All three, despite the vast differences in their lots, represent the nearness of Hashem and the destiny of the Jewish People. Our destiny as a nation has already, and will continue to, reflect similar changes in fortune, albeit in the reverse order.

The covenant “Yaakov” is written first, and is emphasized by means of an extra letter (*ktiv malei*). The *galut* will define Jewish destiny for a long time. But when it is finally perceived and experienced as the rectification it is meant to be, the Jewish heart will find its way back. When the Jewish star transforms even the darkest night into a shining revelation of devotion and loyalty, the suffering and blood will not be in vain. After being the object of hatred, the Jewish People will have become an example for the nations.

The night of exile will begin to wane, and the covenant “Yitzchak” will begin. No longer being the object of hatred, the Jew will be the object of envy. In the midst of growing prosperity, living among nations wavering between humaneness and envy, the Jewish People will have to preserve their unique character, just as Yitzchak did.

When they have passed the second test of exile, fulfilling Torah amidst prosperity and envy, then they will enter the covenant “Avraham.” They will devote themselves to Hashem and His Torah in the midst of the nay-saying nations. Actualizing the full goodness and truth of Torah, they will earn first the respect of the nations, and then *and the Land I will remember* – a return forever to Eretz Yisrael.

- Sources: Commentary, Vayikra 26:42

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Yevamot 58-64

## Building a World of Torah

Rabbi Akiva says, “If one studied Torah in his youth he should also study Torah in his advanced age; if he taught students in his youth, he should also teach students in his advanced age.” It was taught, “Twelve thousand pairs of Rabbi Akiva’s students were in an area of land that stretched from Gevat to Antipatris in Yehuda, and they all died in one period of time because they did not treat each other with sufficient respect. And the world was desolate of Torah until Rabbi Akiva came to our Rabbis in the South and taught his Torah to them. These Rabbis were Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehuda, Rabbi Yossi, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua. And these are the very ones who upheld the study of Torah at that time. Although Rabbi Akiva’s earlier students did not survive, his later disciples were able to transmit the Torah to future generations.” It was taught, “All of Rabbi Akiva’s students died in the period from Pesach until Shavuot.”

It is important to note that although we are taught that they died during the period from Pesach until Shavuot, our tradition informs us that not a single student died on Lag B’Omer. Lag B’Omer is a day that we commemorate and celebrate due to it being the day on which Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai left this world, and according to tradition is also the day on which he revealed the Kabbalistic teachings of the Zohar.

Our *sugya* teaches that Rabbi Akiva’s earlier students died because they did not sufficiently honor each other. Our great Torah commentaries offer a variety of explanations for why this tragedy occurred. I am especially fond of the following explanation, one which I was taught by my dear friend and renowned Torah educator Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, *shlita*.

The Torah students of Rabbi Akiva were meant to be the spiritual leadership for the next generation. They would secure the continuity of the teachings of Torah *Shebe'al Peh* (the Oral Law). They would interpret it, explain it to the masses and make correct halachic rulings. This is why

their absolute purity was essential. They required a special purity in every aspect, not only in matters between themselves and Hashem but also in any dealing with other people. Therefore, *Chazal* identify even an apparently minute character flaw as being the root cause for the terrible plague and their untimely death.

When Rabbi Akiva’s students had died, the issue of the lack of required purity no longer existed. That was the moment when Rabbi Akiva could begin again with five new Torah students and start the process of rebuilding Torah in the world. It may sound somewhat paradoxical, but until all of the original students had passed from the world, it was not possible for Rabbi Akiva to successfully carry on teaching Torah for the next generation. This means that Lag B’Omer, which was a day without the plague (and many say it was the day when the plague completely ended) was also the time when Rabbi Akiva could successfully continue with his holy teachings.

In a metaphorical sense, what transpired with the original students is like finding cracks in the foundations of a building. When there are cracks on the fiftieth floor, you just need some filler to take care of the problem. At most, perhaps a wall needs to be replaced. But when the problem is in the foundations, the entire building has to be taken down and the foundations redone from scratch. Taking down the whole building is an enormous disaster, but it would be even more dangerous to leave the building up since it would threaten not just those who live in it but all those who live in its vicinity. The deaths of Rabbi Akiva’s students were undoubtedly a great calamity, one that our Sages describe as being even greater than the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. But to leave them in place as the leaders of the next generation would have been an even greater calamity.

My prayer on the eve this year’s Lag B’Omer: May Hashem help us sufficiently honor each other, and merit the safe and successful continuity of Torah forever and the eternal thriving existence of the Jewish People.

▪ Yevamot 62b