

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### High Steaks

*"...My signs that I placed among them – that you may know I am G-d." (10:2)*

I can attest that the following is a true story.

Before returning to New York City after his post-high school tour, "Reuven," or "Robert" as he was then called, decided he would like to honor his Judaism and visit the Western Wall in Jerusalem. He picked as his caravanserai the Intercontinental Hotel on the Mount of Olives. He didn't realize that the Intercontinental was built on a graveyard, and not just any graveyard. The Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives is the most ancient and most important Jewish cemetery in Jerusalem. Burial on the Mount of Olives started some 3,000 years ago in the First Temple Period, and continues to this day.

On the eve of Israel's War of Independence in 1948 there were about 60,000 graves on the Mount of Olives. During the 19 years of Jordanian rule in eastern Jerusalem, roads were paved through the cemeteries, causing bones to be scattered, and tombstones were used as paving stones for roads in the Jordanian Army camp in Azariya, where an entire telephone booth was built out of tombstones. Jewish tombstones were also used as flooring in the latrines. Some of these graves were a thousand years old. A gas station and other buildings, including Robert's choice of lodging, the Intercontinental Hotel, were erected on top of the Mount. After the site was retaken by the Israeli army in 1967, about 38,000 smashed or damaged tombstones were counted.

On his first night at the Intercontinental, Robert thought he might sample some of the much-celebrated cuisine at the hotel's gourmet restaurant. He browsed the menu and selected the "well-aged" steak with champignons and chips a la star anise, flavored with cloves, nutmeg and mulled wine. "Mmm! Delicious!" he thought to himself.

The main course was served with all the false obsequiousness that only a waiter in an over-priced eatery can muster. "Enjoy your steak, dear sir!" Robert cut into his steak and out crawled a very alive worm.

Many years later, Robert, or Reuven as he was now called, reflected on the fact that dining on the graves of his grandfathers deserved a message that one day he would be steak for a worm.

*"...My signs that I placed among them – that you may know I am G-d."*

G-d is sending us signs all the time. Some are quite obvious, and to ignore them requires a heart as stubborn as Pharaoh's, but some signs become clear to us only when we have attained the spiritual level required to understand them.

- Sources: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Chullin 30-36

## Covering Up and Down

“Rabbi Zeira said in the name of Rav: One who does *shechita* needs to put ground under (the blood) and over the blood.”

One of the mitzvahs in the Torah is to cover the blood of certain animals after *shechita* (ritual slaughter). This mitzvah is called “*kisui hadam*,” and is taught in the verse which says that a person “who traps a quarry of a wild animal, or fowl that may be eaten, and spills its blood (i.e. through *shechita*), he will cover it (the blood) with ground.” (Vayikra 17:13) It’s important to note that this mitzvah is applicable to only *shechita* of a *chaya* (any kosher non-domestic type of animal such as a deer) or an *ohf* (any kosher bird or fowl), but not to a *beheima* (domestic type of animal such as cattle and sheep).

The statement by Rabbi Zeira in the name of Rav that the blood must be covered with ground both on top of it and underneath it is also taught later in our *masechet* in the sixth chapter (That chapter is actually called “*Kisui Hadam*,” which means “covering of the blood.) This halacha is derived from the wording of the verse. It states to cover the blood “*b’afar*”. If the intent was to merely cover over the blood on top after *shechita*, the Torah would have said this word without a letter *beit* as a prefix. But since the Torah included *beit*, our Sages learn from this that the blood is not merely to be covered, but to be *inside* the *afar* – sandwiched between two layers of earth. Other details of the laws for fulfilling this mitzvah are codified in Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah, *siman* 28.

Rabbi Zeira’s teaching is mentioned on our *daf* as part of a question on an act of kosher *shechita* that Rava did with Rabbi Yonah bar Tachlifa by shooting a bird with an arrow while the bird was in mid-flight! First the *gemara* resolves the obvious question of how they could be certain that the *shechita* happened in a kosher manner (answer: the neck was checked properly). Then the *gemara* asks how this *shechita* could have been done, since there was no apparent way to place earth on the exact spot where the blood from the bird would land. How, therefore, could the *shechita* be done with earth placed below the blood as well as above it, in accordance with halachic teaching of Rabbi Zeira in the name of Rav?

The answer given by the *gemara* is that he “prepared” the ground of the entire valley over which the bird flew. He didn’t put the ground there, so what does it mean that he prepared it? Rashi offers two explanations: he moved and ground up (pun intended) the earth of the entire valley; or he verbally designated that the already-soft ground of the valley would be used for the mitzvah of *kisui hadam*. Therefore, according to Rashi, we see that one must do or say something to show his intent to use a particular area of ground for the “floor” of the mitzvah, in addition to covering over the blood. Tosefot, on the other hand, later in the *masechet* (83b) writes that if there is already suitable ground at the place of the *shechita*, there is only a need to cover it from the top since there is already ground underneath. Both opinions are cited in the Shulchan Aruch.

Is there a reason we can understand for this mitzvah to apply only for the blood of a *chaya* or *ohf*, but not for that of a *beheima* as well? Of course, the ultimate reason is that it is the Will of G-d that it should be this way, but perhaps there is a logical reason for this distinction that might provide for us a better understanding of the mitzvah. Many answers are offered and I will briefly mention one.

The Midrash (Ber. Rabbah 22) teaches that the “pure” (i.e. kosher) *chayot* and *ofot* buried Hevel (Abel who was murdered by Kayin), showing him great dignity and respect. In reward for this, G-d commanded us to cover the blood of these animals, and not leave their blood scattered on the face of the earth, to likewise show them a special measure of dignity and respect. (I also suggest learning the commentary of the Malbim on the verse of *kisui hadam*, Vayikra 17:13. Regarding the *beracha* said for fulfilling the mitzvah of *kisui hadam*, see Aruch Hashulchan 28:8-9, who discusses in detail the variant texts of the *beracha* and the reasons for this variation.)

- Chullin 31a

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# PARSHA Q & A

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1. What was Pharaoh's excuse for not releasing the Jewish children?
2. How did the locusts in the time of Moshe differ from those in the days of Yoel?
3. How did the first three days of darkness differ from the last three?
4. When the Jews asked the Egyptians for gold and silver vessels, the Egyptians were unable to deny ownership of such vessels. Why?
5. *Makat bechorot* took place at *exactly* midnight. Why did Moshe say it would take place at *approximately* midnight?
6. Why did the first-born of the animals die?
7. How did Moshe show respect to Pharaoh when he warned him about the aftermath of the plague of the first-born?
8. G-d told Moshe "so that My wonders will be multiplied" (11:9). What three wonders was G-d referring to?
9. Why did G-d command the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh to Aharon, and not only to Moshe?
10. Up to what age is an animal fit to be a Pesach offering?
11. Prior to the Exodus from Egypt, what two *mitzvot* involving blood did G-d give to the Jewish People?
12. Rashi gives two explanations of the word "*Pasachti*." What are they?
13. Why were the Jews told to stay indoors during *makat bechorot*?
14. What was Pharaoh screaming as he ran from door to door the night of *makat bechorot* ?
15. Why did Pharaoh ask Moshe to bless him?
16. Why did the Jewish People carry their matzah on their shoulders rather than have their animals carry it?
17. Who comprised the *erev rav* (mixed multitude)?
18. What three historical events occurred on the 15th of Nissan, prior to the event of the Exodus from Egypt?
19. What is the source of the "milk and honey" found in the Land of Israel?
20. The only non-kosher animal whose first-born is redeemed is the donkey. What did the donkeys do to "earn" this distinction?

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## Answers

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

1. 10:11 - Since children don't bring sacrifices there was no need for them to go.
2. 10:14 - The plague brought by Moshe was composed of one species of locust, whereas the plague in the days of Yoel was composed of many species.
3. 10:22 - During the first three days the Egyptians couldn't see. During the last three days they couldn't move.
4. 10:22 - During the plague of darkness the Jews could see and they searched for and found the Egyptians' vessels.
5. 11:4 - If Moshe said the plague would begin exactly at midnight the Egyptians might miscalculate and accuse Moshe of being a fake.
6. 11:5 - Because the Egyptians worshiped them as gods, and when G-d punishes a nation He also punishes its gods.
7. 11:8 - Moshe warned that "All these servants of yours will come down to me" when, in fact, it was Pharaoh himself who actually came running to Moshe.
8. 11:9 - The plague of the first-born, the splitting of the sea, the drowning of the Egyptian soldiers.
9. 12:1 - As reward for his efforts in bringing about the plagues.
10. 12:5 - One year.
11. 12:6 - Circumcision and *Korban Pesach*.
12. 12:13 - "I had mercy" and "I skipped."
13. 12:22 - Since it was a night of destruction, it was not safe for anyone to leave the protected premises of his home.
14. 12:31 - "Where does Moshe live? Where does Aharon live?"
15. 12:32 - So he wouldn't die, for he himself was a first-born.
16. 12:34 - Because the commandment of matzah was dear to them.
17. 12:38 - People from other nations who became converts.
18. 12:41 - The angels came to promise that Sarah would have a son, Yitzchak was born, and the exile of the "covenant between the parts" was decreed.
19. 13:5 - Goat milk, date and fig honey.
20. 13:13 - They helped the Jews by carrying silver and gold out of Egypt.

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# ASK!

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Your Jewish Information Resource – [www.ohr.edu](http://www.ohr.edu)

by Rabbi Yirmiyahu Ullman

## Yeshiva

From: Stacey Roth in Boston, M.A.

Dear Rabbi,

Recently I have become interested in Judaism and have made a lot of progress by reading on my own and talking to religious people. Someone suggested that I learn in a yeshiva for women. How important is this?

Dear Stacey,

It sounds like you're off to a wonderful start. It's very important to benefit from a yeshiva experience for whatever time you can manage, for a number of reasons. I'll mention just a few of them here.

*Yeshivot* and seminaries offer the opportunity for total immersion in a Torah way of life, in an environment where everyone is striving to improve their knowledge and observance of Torah together. In a secular environment, *ba'alei teshuva* and many observant Jews feel like outsiders, and may be defensive regarding religious issues. It is healthy to live in surroundings that are congruent with one's lifestyle and beliefs; a yeshiva provides a community where being an observant Jew is mainstream and perhaps even trendy. This type of experience can have an impact on even a short-term visitor to the yeshiva or seminary, and give one a needed injection of enthusiasm and confidence.

The yeshiva also provides much-needed support during the initially difficult period of the newly-observant. "No man is an island entirely of itself, every man is a part of the continent, a piece of the main" (John Donne). Any change in the familiar patterns of life is difficult, especially when this change is accompanied by the acceptance of a vast and complex new system of living. Transition is made easier when one is "in transit" with others. People who have undergone similar experiences compare notes and learn from each other's successes and mistakes and can identify with each other's trials. "One who seeks advice, increases understanding" (Pirkei Avot 2:8).

Being part of a yeshiva or seminary also means being part of a community. Members of a community celebrate happy occasions together, and provide comfort and support in times of distress. Non-observant Jews are usually very impressed and moved by the extent to which religious people entertain the bride and groom at an Orthodox wedding. Stereotypes go crashing to the ground (and sometimes even the rabbis from the yeshiva) when the men begin juggling, somersaulting, and performing

handstands in order to contribute to the happiness of the occasion. These events enhance one's sense of belonging to a cohesive, caring community.

The yeshiva also helps one establish important contacts in the religious community. Visiting observant families on Shabbat and Festivals is an enjoyable way for the *ba'al teshuva* to learn about Shabbat and family life, and to actually see much that he has learned put into practice. Do you want to spend Shabbat with a family from Atlanta, Georgia, or perhaps Georgia of the former Soviet Union? Do you like Sephardi food or macrobiotic? Would you like to be with a large family? Chassidic, Lithuanian, or Yemenite? Jerusalem, Tzefat, or Bnei Brak? Do you want to meet a religious artist, author, physicist, doctor or investment banker? Someone in the yeshiva or seminary is able to direct any student to people who share his personal interests.

Finally, anyone interested in getting married will generally have more opportunities if he or she is part of a yeshiva. Rabbis, rebbetzins, and married couples associated with an institution of learning introduce people and help with *shidduchim*. Teachers and rabbis provide references for their students, and usually have the connections to be able to investigate the references of a prospective shidduch. Many *yeshivot* and seminaries not only help their students get married; they also assist the married couple in finding housing, financial assistance, and with any advice they might seek.

Most people cannot afford to spend long periods of time at yeshiva, and certainly cannot devote most of their life to the study of Torah. It is especially important for them to take time out to study so that they can improve their skills in the language and analysis of classical Hebrew and Aramaic texts. When they leave yeshiva they will be more independent in their studies, will have a wider choice of classes to attend, and will be more proficient in their prayers and blessings.

It is human nature to put off until tomorrow (or next month, year, or decade) anything that requires effort. Laziness has a surprising amount of strength for something so slow moving. "Hillel used to say...If not now, when?" (Pirkei Avot 1:14). "Do not say, 'When I have free time I will study,' for you may never have free time" (Pirkei Avot 2:5).

- Sources: Recommended reading: *After the Return*, Rabbi Moshe Newman & Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Feldheim Publishers

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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*Synonyms in the Hebrew Language*  
by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

## The Sign is Coming

In *Parshat Bo* there are three signs: The plagues in Egypt are called a “sign” (Ex. 10:1-2), the blood which the Jews were supposed to place their doorpost was called a “sign” (Ex. 12:13), and the *tefillin* which the Jews are supposed to wear is called a “sign” (Ex. 12:9; 12:16). The Hebrew word for “sign” in all of these cases is *oht*. However, there is another word for “sign” in Hebrew: *mofet*. In fact, the Ten Plagues are not just called *oht*, but they are also called *mofet* (Ex. 11:9-10). So what is the difference between an *oht* and a *mofet*?

Nachmanides (to Deut. 13:2) explains that an *oht* is a sign that is supposed to portend the fulfillment of a prophecy. For example, when a prophet predicts that if such-and-such will happen it will be a sign that something-or-other is true, then such-and-such is an *oht* which serves as a “sign” for the prophecy. Nachmanides further explains that the word *oht* (ALEPH-VAV-TAV) is related to the word for “coming” (ALEPH-TAV-HEY, or more commonly in its Aramaic form with a second ALEPH instead of the HEY), because it is a sign of things “to come.” The word *mofet*, on the other hand, denotes a “sign” that will come about in a miraculous way that bends the apparent rules of nature. Nachmanides explains that the word *mofet* is shorthand for *muflat/niflah/pele* (“wonderous”) with the LAMMED dropped for the sake of brevity.

Nonetheless, Nachmanides cites the *Sifrei* (to Num. 6:3) which explicitly notes that *oht* and *mofet* are the same thing. Nachmanides explains that this does not literally mean that the two words are true synonyms that bear the exact same meaning. Rather, it means that the two words refer to the same sort of phenomenon. *Midrash Lekach Tov*, also known as *Pesikta Zutrata*, cites the *Sifrei*, but adds that an *oht* is a “sign” about something in the future, and a *mofet* is a sign of something imminent. Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) explains that this is not a contradiction, because *Midrash Lekach Tov* understood that the *Sifrei* means that there is no difference between the two words in that they both mean “a sign”, but they can differ in the details as to *when* the implications of that sign are to manifest themselves.

Rabbi David Kimchi (1160-1235), also known as Radak, explains in *Sefer HaShorashim* that an *oht* is any type of “sign”, while a *mofet* refers specifically to the type of

“sign” whose purpose is to cause one to believe in something set for the future.

Rabbi Ovadiah Sforno (to Ex. 7:9) explains that when G-d sends someone to perform some sort of miraculous feat, then, depending on the purpose of the miracle, one of the two words in question will be used. If the purpose of the miracle is to relate a message about G-d, the term *mofet* is used. But, if the purpose of the message is to relate something about the messenger/medium, the term *oht* is used.

Rabbi Don Yitzchak Abarbanel (1437-1508) writes that some commentators claim that *oht* and *mofet* are synonyms that refer to supernatural phenomena. However, he disagrees with this understanding and explains that neither word refers to any supernatural wonders. Rather, both words refer to natural “signs”. An *oht* is a sign or symbol which can be within nature. For example, Gen. 1:14 reveals that the benefit of having a sun and moon is to serve as an *oht* for different periods of time. Moreover, *tefillin* is called an *oht* that symbolizes the Exodus, and the flags of each tribe had images which served as an *oht* that symbolized the tribe (see Num. 2:2). Abarbanel also notes that each letter of the alphabet is called an *oht* because that letter is a “sign” that represents a certain sound. All of these examples suggest that an *oht* can be a “sign” that lies within the confines of nature.

On the other hand, Abarbanel explains that a *mofet* refers to a non-physical “sign”, to a more abstract, logical argument. He explains that the word *mofet* is related to *yofi* (“beauty”) because the veracity of a logical argument lies in the beauty of its honesty. Indeed, the Radak in *Sefer HaShorashim* writes that the root of *mofet* is YUD-PEH-TAV.

The earliest person to use the *mofet* in this way was Rabbi Shmuel Ibn Tibbon (1150-1230), best known for having translated the works of Maimonides and others from Judeo-Arabic into Hebrew. He writes that *mofet* refers to a proof which conclusively proves a certain idea; while an *oht* refers to evidence which points in the direction of a certain idea, but does not conclusively prove it.

Malbim explains that an *oht* is any “sign” or “symbol” which is used to remind one of something that the sign symbolizes. A *mofet*, by contrast, is a supernatural “sign”

which is used to remind one of G-d – the ultimate mover behind all natural and supernatural phenomena. Malbim simplifies this distinction by explaining that every *mofet* is an *oht*, but not every *oht* is a *mofet*. [Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) contrasts *oht* with *eid*, writing that an *oht* is simply a reminder, while an *eid* serves to remind and spur one into action.]

Rabbi Avraham Menachem HaKohen Rappaport (1520-1594) writes in his work *Minchah Belulah* that there are two differences between an *oht* and a *mofet*: An *oht* directly brings one to a certain belief, while a *mofet* only pushes one in the direction of a certain belief but does not directly bring him to any conclusions. He writes that *mofet* is related to the word *mefateh* – “seduce” or “convince”, see *Devarim Rabbah* §7:9. Alternatively, he explains that an *oht* is a sign of the Heavenly realm, while a *mofet* is a sign in the Earthly realm. Finally, Rabbi Rappaport concludes that *oht* and *mofet* are simply synonyms that mean the exact same thing.

Malbim explains when Moshe turned his staff into a snake in front of the Jews it was called an *oht* because it was a sign to them that he was really sent by G-d. However, when Moshe performed the same act in front of Pharaoh it is described as a *mofet* because to Pharaoh it was simply a supernatural parlor-trick, but had no deeper meaning (because he denied G-d).

Rabbi Wertheimer writes that some claim that the root of the word *mofet* is *YUD-PEH-AYIN*, but that the *AYIN* is always dropped, and the *YUD* sometimes morphs into a *MEM*. Accordingly, he explains that *mofet* is related to *mofia* (“presents itself”), because a sign is the way one presents an idea to others. Alternatively, he explains that *mofet* to mean the “presentation of a new, hitherto unseen, phenomenon”.

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

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## LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

### Bread of Independence

**M**atzah is classically thought of as having dual symbolism – it is both the bread of affliction and the bread of freedom. It represents the poor’s man’s bread, the bread of slavery, but also is reminiscent of the bread we ate as we left Egypt in great haste – before the bread had time to bake.

Although the two contexts of consuming matzah – as slaves and then as newly-freed men – are vastly different, in each case the matzah evidences an oppressor who controlled our actions. Throughout the enslavement the Egyptian taskmasters’ ever-present whip ensured that we would have no time to bake our bread. When we left Egypt it was those same oppressors who did not give us enough time to wait for our dough to rise before chasing us out of their land. Matzah, then, is the bread of *servitude*, the bread of *dependence*.

Chametz, by contrast, is the bread of *social independence*. On the holiday of Pesach we recall the moment we attained freedom and independence. The day was set as a

memorial so that we would never forget how and in what manner we attained these gifts. The day of our rise to freedom and independence introduces a whole festival of seven days, marked not by the symbol of freedom, but the removal of chametz – the symbol of independence.

What is the message in this counterintuitive memorial? We refrain from nourishing ourselves with the bread of independence to remind ourselves that at the moment of our rise to freedom and independence, neither in our personalities nor in our possessions was there the slightest trace of independence. We were sunk in servitude and helplessness, and it was only by the kindness of G-d that we were brought to freedom and independence.

One who consumes chametz – the bread of independence – mistakenly assigns credit to the human achievement of freedom and denies the Divine origin of our national freedom. For this reason, he who eats chametz on Pesach is not only cut off from the history of our people, but also from any part of Israel’s future.

- Source: *Commentary Shemot 12:8; 12:15*

# MEZUZAH MAVEN

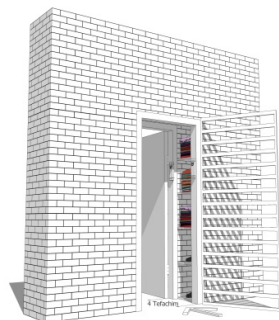
by Rabbi Ze'ev Kraines

## Security Gate in Front of Door

*Q: I've got a metal security gate right outside my wooden front door. Each of the doors has its own doorposts and lintel. Do I need two mezuzahs?*

A: If the space between the two doorframes is more than four *tefachim*, you would need two *mezuzahs*: The area between the two doors has the special status of a *beit sha'ar* (gate-house) and thus needs a mezuzah even though it is not four-by-four *amot* square.

If the space is less than four *tefachim*, a mezuzah should be put on the inner doorframe. The security door needs no mezuzah since the area it *encloses* is too small to be considered a *beit sha'ar*.



## Two Doors Sharing the Same Doorway

*Q: What if the doors are fitted within one wide doorway and thus share the same doorposts and lintel?*

A: In that case, even if the space between them is more than four *tefachim*, only one mezuzah is necessary. The inner door should get the mezuzah. Since it opens onto a large room, it has a clear Torah obligation, whereas the obligation of a small *beit sha'ar* may be rabbinic when it has no purpose other than as a passageway.

However, if the space between the doors has a distinct purpose, such as a storage area, a second mezuzah should be affixed on the outside door, without a *beracha*.

Even if the inner door only has space for a mezuzah on the outside of its post, since the mezuzah is within the doorway and under the lintel, it may face forward.

- Sources: Agur B'O halecha 14:4, 36:41

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

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POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: [info@ohr.edu](mailto:info@ohr.edu) • [www.ohr.edu](http://www.ohr.edu)  
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**Yisroel Meir Perelman**

Age: 30

Potomac, Maryland

U. of Wisconsin, BA in Religious Studies, 2011

Bar Ilan University, MBA, 2017

Ohr Somayach, Mechina, Intermediate and Beit Midrash, 2011-2016

## A Brief History of Timepieces

As long as humans have been on earth, we have been obsessed with Time. Adam, who, according to one Tana was born in Tishrei on or near the Autumnal Equinox (the point in time when day and night are equal, each lasting 12 hours), observed that each successive day was shorter than the last and each night longer. Believing that because of his sin the world was soon to be enveloped in darkness, and that the sun, and hence human life, would soon be extinguished, he did *teshuva* and prepared himself for the end. But with the Winter Solstice and the increasing length of daylight, he understood that G-d had established an astronomical law based on the rotation of the earth around the sun and that he was given a reprieve. To celebrate his joy, he established a “Festival of Light” on that date, the 25th of Kislev, which later became the Festival of Chanukah.

Adam, the “most Divine” of all humans, had an innate sense of the passage of time and was not in need of a clock. However, the accurate measurement of time is an endeavor that is shared by almost all of mankind. The very first *Mishna* in *Shas* teaches the correct time to say *Shema* in the evening. In the days of the *Mishna* there were no clocks or watches as we know them, so the time was determined by when certain activities took place in the Temple. And in the Temple those times were announced by sky-gazers. There was no need to know to the exact minute. Time to pray was announced by criers observing the sky. The Egyptians, it appears, invented sundials, which could tell approximate time if the sun was shining. The Greeks invented water clocks, which were a more exact method of timekeeping and not reliant on the weather. Hourglasses filled with sand were a good way of

measuring smaller amounts of time. In Europe, the earliest clocks had only an hour hand, there being no particular need for minute hands. Agricultural work depended mostly on daylight, and whether it was 10:23 am or 10:53 am didn’t make a big difference.



Early advances in the measurement of time came mostly from the Catholic Monasteries, where monks had very regulated days. They were also the earliest clockmakers. Clocks in those days had pendulums, which provided the energy to power them. With the invention of the mainspring and balance wheel in the 15th century, the miniaturization of clocks became a possibility, as was a very accurate measure of time. One of the first wristwatches ever produced was given as a present to Queen Elizabeth I 1571, and for hundreds of years wristwatches were exclusively women’s apparel. Later, in the

18th and 19th centuries, gentlemen carried pocket watches. Pocket watches required pockets, and as long as a gentleman had a waistcoat and the leisure time to extract his watch, open it and look at the time, it worked fine.

The English were the first to produce wristwatches for their army officers in the 1880’s, so they could synchronize their maneuvers. An officer on horseback wielding a sword couldn’t easily take the pocket watch out of his waistcoat, open it and see what time it was. Before synchronized wristwatches, coordinated attacks between different flanks of an army had to be made by signaling – which could be intercepted by the enemy. By the end of the First World War, in which armies equipped their soldiers with wristwatches, they became an item of male apparel. In 2016 there were approximately 1.2 billion watches sold worldwide.



Yisroel Meir Perelman and Jonathan Raymond, two graduates of Ohr Somayach decided to cash in on this market. They established a company called “Raymond and Pearl” (their website is: [www.raymondandpearl.com](http://www.raymondandpearl.com)). They manufacture high-quality Swiss watches with a sleek and contemporary face in the seven colors of the rainbow and with interchangeable straps.

Yisroel Meir Perelman grew up in a secular home in Potomac, Maryland. His Jewish education consisted of going to a Reform Synagogue Sunday School. While he was in college he became interested in religion and, as any “good Jewish boy,” studied Eastern religions, the Tibetan and Chinese Languages, and their religions. But then his life took a turn.

As he tells it: “In the summer going into my junior year, Hashem came to me. I felt I was waking up and was being driven towards an interest in Judaism.” He decided to study Hebrew, take courses in Jewish studies and start going to shul. In the second semester of his junior year he took a course titled “Jewish Cultural History”. The professor was Christian. Assigned reading was the *Tanach*. “I knew it was true,” says Yisroel Meir, “because the writing was too deep and intricate.” He was entranced by *Avraham Avinu*, and heard the message to “remember the Shabbat day and keep it holy.” That Friday night he made up his mind to do just that. Not being familiar with the

laws of Shabbat, he sat on his bed all day and read. He went to a *Shabbos Oneg* at JEM – Jewish Experience of Madison – the local college *kiruv* organization. And he liked it.

Yisroel Meir became “*Shomer Shabbos*”. By his senior year he was engrossed in learning *Derech Hashem*. The *kiruv* Rabbis in Madison were role models for him. He loved spending Shabbat at their homes, where he experienced a “wholesomeness” that he had never felt before. He attended a *Shabbaton* in Madison and saw a Kollel for the first time in his life. People invited him into their homes. He was intrigued and attracted by their kindness and humility and sense of purpose. He resolved to go to yeshiva. In his senior year, Rabbi Noson Adler of the Ohr Somayach staff came to Madison and helped him decide to come to the yeshiva. He learned at Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem for five years. Later, he earned an MBA from Bar Ilan University and started looking for business opportunities.

Yisroel Meir lives in Nachlaot with another graduate of Ohr Somayach, Noson Tzvi Woltermann. Yisroel Meir’s father, the Chief of Staff and General Counsel of the American Chemical Council, followed in his son’s footsteps and has become *frum*, planning to make *aliyah* and continue his own Torah learning.

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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**G**-d tells Moshe that He is hardening Pharaoh's heart so that through miraculous plagues the world will know for all time that He is the one true G-d. Pharaoh is warned about the plague of locusts and is told how severe it will be. Pharaoh agrees to release only the men, but Moshe insists that everyone must go. During the plague, Pharaoh calls for Moshe and Aharon to remove the locusts, and he admits he has sinned.

G-d ends the plague but hardens Pharaoh's heart, and again Pharaoh fails to free the Jews. The country, except for the Jewish People, is then engulfed in a palpable darkness. Pharaoh calls for Moshe and tells him to take all the Jews out of Egypt, but to leave their flocks behind. Moshe tells him that not only will they take their own flocks, but Pharaoh must add his own too.

Moshe tells Pharaoh that G-d is going to bring one more plague, the death of the firstborn, and then the Jews will

leave Egypt. G-d again hardens Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh warns Moshe that if he sees him again, Moshe will be put to death. G-d tells Moshe that the month of Nissan will be the chief month.

The Jewish people are commanded to take a sheep on the 10th of the month and guard it until the 14th. The sheep is then to be slaughtered as a Pesach offering, its blood put on their door-posts, and its roasted meat eaten. The blood on the door-post will be a sign that their homes will be passed-over when G-d strikes the firstborn of Egypt. The Jewish People are told to memorialize this day as the Exodus from Egypt by never eating chametz on Pesach.

Moshe relays G-d's commands, and the Jewish People fulfill them flawlessly. G-d sends the final plague, killing the first born, and Pharaoh sends the Jews out of Egypt. G-d tells Moshe and Aharon the laws concerning the Pesach sacrifice, *pidyon haben* (redemption of the first-born son) and *tefillin*.

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# BUSINESS ETHICS

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by Rabbi Ari Wasserman

## Wearing a Kippah in a Government Workplace

### QUESTION

I am considering taking a job with the United States government, which would require me to have dealings with foreign countries (not only Israel). I currently wear a *kippah* to work in New York in the private sector. But I have been told by a knowledgeable person that wearing a *kippah* while working for the government, especially in the type of position that I am looking to fill, is not as simple. Therefore, my question is: can I take the *kippah* off?

It's tough to know for certain, but it's possible that I would get the job even with the *kippah*. It's really an unknown. Also, I am gainfully employed in New York and would simply be switching jobs. It's not the situation of being unemployed, not having a salary, and only having one source of livelihood which requires removing the *kippah*.

However, the added variable here is that the senior officials who would decide whether or not to hire me could look askance at the *kippah*. Were I to outwardly represent myself as an Orthodox Jew, I would be seen as being biased pro-Israel, and therefore less effective in my job because certain foreign countries would likely be turned off by that, especially if I am dealing with Middle East security matters.

I think I could benefit the Jewish People in general, and the State of Israel in particular, if I were to hold this position, but from the government's perspective the *kippah* could be seen as a hindrance.

### HALACHIC BACKGROUND

Contemporary *poskim* are in agreement that wearing a head covering (whether a *kippah*, a cap or hat) is definitely obligatory at all times. Some forbid going bareheaded even for a livelihood, while others are more lenient, permitting it under certain conditions.

Rav Moshe Feinstein has ruled that one may be lenient and go bareheaded when there is a question of *substantial* loss. (The question of what would constitute a substantial or a minor loss should be discussed in each instance with a competent halachic authority.)

Rav Yitzchak Yaakov Weiss, a noted 20th century *posek*, specifically addresses the issue of removing the *kippah* for government work. In a responsum written in England in 1965, he states that it is impossible to establish a blanket policy for such cases, and each must be decided with consideration for the particular circumstances of the place and the time. Certainly, if the governmental agency does not object to the wearing of a *kippah* at work, there is no basis to be lenient about removing it.

In addition, before deciding to remove the *kippah* for an interview, some soul-searching is in order. Is there a sound reason to believe that a *kippah*-wearing Jew will definitely not be hired for this position? Or is it merely a hunch, a gut feeling, or just speculation based on a rumor? A hunch is not sufficient grounds to remove the *kippah*; there must be solid evidence. None of the *poskim* - even those who have ruled leniently, permitting the removal of the *kippah* for the sake of livelihood - allowed going bareheaded simply on a hunch that it could jeopardize a potential job offer.

### RESPONSE

I have posed your question to Rav Yitzchak Breitowitz *shlita*, and I summarize his answer below:

As a matter of basic logic you should not remove your *kippah*. First, there is no economic need. Second, whether this would affect your chances of getting the job is speculative. Third, while the Jewish People would benefit from your holding this position, it is doubtful that this is essential to our national welfare. If Hashem wants you to be in this position, He will put you there.

Rabbi Breitowitz added: "We should not be ashamed of who we are and what we believe in. It is not our responsibility to cut corners or seek leniencies because we think it will be for the greater good. We have to believe that obeying Hashem's laws will ultimately bring good to us and others."

Finally, Rabbi Breitowitz advised that if you do indeed get the job, it may be appropriate for you to remove your *kippah* in certain situations, and that is something you can mention during the interview.

- *L'iluy nishmas Yehudah ben Shmuel HaKohen*