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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Can't Take My Eyes Off You

"And Hashem has distinguished you today..." (26:18)

The Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci has been called "the best known, the most visited, the most written about, the most sung about, the most parodied work of art in the world." Like many examples of phenomenal success, such as the Beatles, critics and curators are at a loss to define exactly why the Mona Lisa has become the greatest icon of painting. Some say that it's the way the Mona Lisa's eyes follow you around the room. But that's true of any portrait where the subject is looking directly at the viewer. I once made a photographic portrait of Rav Moshe Shapiro, *zatzal*. A student of his purchased a print from me in the largest size I made. After a few weeks he told me that he gave it away to another *talmid* of Reb Moshe's because "his eyes kept following me round the room and I felt I was being watched all the time."

In his book "Adjusting Sights," about a religious soldier fighting on the Golan Heights in the Yom Kippur War of 1973, Chaim Sabato describes fighting in one of the most desperate battles – Nafah quarry – in which his platoon was wiped out by the Syrians. He writes that he had with him a book of Tehillim (Psalms), stained with the tears of his mother, and he opened it up and started to read,

"*Mizmor L'David, Hashem Ro'i...*" – Hashem is my Shepherd, I will not want." The Syrians were closing in on all sides and he got to the verse, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of Death, I shall not fear, for You are with me." He was walking, quite literally, through the valley of the shadow of Death. He writes, "It was as though King David had written it just for me. What was it that made you feel that all his Tehillim were about you? Like a portrait whose eyes stayed focused on you from every angle"

"And Hashem has distinguished you today..."

Because the Jewish People accepted the Torah and rejected idolatry, they "distinguished" Hashem as their only G-d, and Hashem has distinguished the Jewish People as His only people. Just as a lover who only has "eyes" for his "beloved," so too the Jewish People sense the "Eyes" of Hashem following them wherever they are. The words of King David, who said of himself, "I am prayer," are the voice of the Jewish People for all time, both in times of sadness and oppression, in times of war and death, and in times of joy and salvation. We never take our eyes off Hashem, and He never takes His "Eyes" off us.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Ki Tavo: *Keritot 23-28*

Of Goats and Sheep

Rabbi Shimon says, "... you might think that sheep are preferable to goats... the Torah states, 'and if he brings a sheep as his sin-offering'... this teaches that those types of animals are equal."

Since the Torah in virtually every place writes "sheep" before "goat," one might think that a sheep is a preferred offering when one brings a *korban* which the person could choose from either type of animal. However, Rabbi Shimon teaches in our *mishna* that since the Torah mentions goat before sheep in the section dealing with the sin-offering of an individual, we learn that both animal types are equal for the choosing. (Vayikra 4:28-32)

The *gemara* relates a fascinating event which occurred with King Yannai and his queen, and applies the teaching of our *mishna* to resolve their issue. While the king and queen sat at a meal, they disputed which animal was a better sacrifice: a goat, as per King Yannai, or a sheep according to the queen. (Rabbeinu Gershom)

They sought the opinion of the Kohen Gadol, Yissachar of Kfar Barkai, since his service in the Beit Mikdash included preparation and eating all types of animal sacrifices, including goats and sheep.

Instead of citing the ruling of the *mishna* that they are equal, he disrespectfully waved his hand at them and haughtily answered that sheep were better since, "if goats were of better or of equal status, they should have qualified for the daily communal sacrifice, whereas only sheep are designated!"

The king was offended by the insolent manner of the Kohen Gadol's reply and ordered that the man's right hand that was haughtily waved should be cut off. And when a bribe was offered, the king ordered both hands to be severed. The *gemara* explains that this particular form of punishment was, in fact, a Heavenly decree of a measure-for-measure sentence on the Kohen Gadol for

his showing lack of respect when serving in the Beit Hamikdash with cloth-wrapped hands. By covering his hands to keep them from becoming "dirty" with the sacrifices, the Kohen Gadol showed a great lack of respect for the proper manner of serving G-d in the Beit Hamikdash.

Rav Yosef states in our *sugya* that this Kohen Gadol should have known the correct answer to the royal question from our *mishna*, which teaches that both types of animals are equally acceptable. Ravina adds that he actually should have been able to discern this answer from the verses that serve as the source for Rabbi Shimon's teaching in the *mishna* that both types of animal are equal.

We might pause and wonder: Why did the Torah give two animal options if, in fact, both types are equally acceptable? Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch, in his commentary on the Chumash (Vayikra 4:27-35), explains a fundamental difference between these two "equal but different" animals, and the significance of this difference regarding an individual offering. A goat, Rav Hirsch writes, expresses individuality, whereas a sheep is a symbol of being "one of the herd." Therefore, if a person chooses to bring a goat as a sin-offering, he is emphasizing his own individual personality within the Jewish People, and his atoning with this idea in mind. On the other hand, a person who chooses a sheep is in effect saying that he sees himself mainly as one member of a great nation of others like him, and is seeking guidance and atonement from G-d with this thought in mind.

- *Keritot 28a-b*

Q & A

Questions

1. When did the obligation to bring *bikkurim* begin?
2. *Bikkurim* are from which crops?
3. How does one designate *bikkurim*?
4. Who shakes the basket containing the *bikkurim*?
5. What does "*v'anita v'amarta*" mean?
6. Which Arami "tried to destroy my father"?
7. When during the year may *bikkurim* be brought? Until when are the special verses recited?
8. Someone declaring that he separated *terumah* and *ma'aser* says: "And I didn't forget." What didn't he forget?
9. What were the Jewish People to do with the 12 stones on Mount Eval?
10. Six tribes stood on Mount Eval and six on Mount Gerizim. Who and what were in the middle?
11. Who "causes the blind to go astray"?
12. How does one "strike another secretly"?
13. Eleven curses were spoken on Mount Eval. What is the significance of this number?
14. Why are sheep called "*ashterot*"?
15. How is the manner of expressing the curses in Parshat Bechukotai more severe than in this week's parsha?

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

Answers

1. 26:1 - After the Land was conquered and divided.
2. 26:2 - The seven species for which *Eretz Yisrael* is praised.
3. 26:2 - When he sees the first fruit ripen on a tree, he binds a piece of straw around it to mark it as *bikkurim*.
4. 26:4 - The *kohen* places his hands under the hands of the one bringing it, and they wave the basket together.
5. 26:5 - Speak loudly.
6. 26:5 - Lavan.
7. 26:11 - *Bikkurim* are brought from Shavuot until Chanukah. The verses are recited only until Succot.
8. 26:13 - To bless G-d.
9. 27:2 - Build an altar.
10. 27:12 - *Kohanim*, *levi'im* and the Holy Ark.
11. 27:18 - Any person who intentionally gives bad advice.
12. 27:24 - By slandering him.
13. 27:24 - Each curse corresponds to one of the tribes, except for the tribe of Shimon. Since Moshe didn't intend to bless the tribe of Shimon before his death, he did not want to curse them either.
14. 28:4 - Because they "enrich" (*m'ashiro*) their owners.
15. 28:23 - In Bechukotai the Torah speaks in the plural, whereas in this week's *parsha* the curses are mentioned in the singular.

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ASK!

Your Jewish Information Resource by the Ohr.edu team – www.ohr.edu

Eytan M. Rodin from St. Louis, MO wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

What is the significance behind the fact that we put stones on graves that we visit? I've always done it, but have never understood what this represents. I know that rather than flowers we are supposed to give money to tzedaka (charity), which makes sense. It's the stones that puzzle me.

Cosette Sullivan from San Angelo, TX wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Shalom. I've been asked why Jews place rocks on graves...I don't know! Will you please give me the answer?

Dear Eytan M. Rodin and Cosette Sullivan,

A very early reference to this custom is found in a commentary to the Shulchan Aruch, written by Rav Yehuda Ashkenazi (early 18th century) called the Be'er Heitev. He quotes the Maharash who explains that the custom of placing stones or tufts of grass on the grave is for the honor of the deceased person, by marking the fact that his grave has been visited.

Once, when I was touring the Mount of Olives cemetery, my *Yerushalmi* tour guide told me the following story, a story that purports to explain this custom:

Sometime during the Turkish occupation of Israel, on a Shabbat, an Arab was murdered in Jerusalem. Quickly, the rumor spread that he was killed by a Jew and an immediate expulsion order was declared. The Jews of

Jerusalem had to pick themselves up and leave or be killed. A noted *Kabbalist* (mystic) came upon the scene of the crime, which was crowded with Arab onlookers. Even though it was Shabbat, the *Kabbalist* wrote one of G-d's names on a piece of paper and placed it upon the body of the dead man. The dead man rose and pointed to one of the Arabs standing in the crowd, who became violently afraid, and admitted that he had done the killing! The expulsion order was rescinded.

Shortly afterwards, the *Kabbalist*, who was an elderly man, approached the *Chevra Kadisha* (burial society) and asked that his own tombstone be pelted with stones after his death because he had written during Shabbat. He understood that due to the danger to life he had been permitted to desecrate the Shabbat, but he felt that some form of repentance was in order nevertheless. Stoning his grave would symbolize the stoning penalty meted out to Shabbat desecraters. At first the *Chevra Kadisha* refused because of the implied dishonor the stoning would represent to so righteous a Jew, but the *Kabbalist* persisted. Finally, they agreed to place stones on his grave, but only if they would institute the custom that all graves would have stones placed on them in the future. If stones were placed on everyone's grave, it would not be a dishonor to the *Kabbalist*. And from then on, stones were placed on the graves of all Jews buried in Jerusalem, and from Jerusalem the custom spread. And so it came to be that nowadays, Jews all over the world place stones on tombstones when visiting a grave.

This may not be the actual source of the custom, but it's an interesting story!

- Sources: Rabbi Yehuda Ashkenazi, *Be'er Heitev*; *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* 224:8

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language
by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Forms of Forgiveness

During the month of Elul and the Ten Days of Repentance we customarily pray that G-d forgive all our sins. These prayers use three different Hebrew words for forgiveness: *selichah* (whose verb form is *soleach*), *méchilah* (whose verb form is *mochel*), and *kapparah* (whose verb form is *mechaper*). In the paragraphs that follow we will explore the roots and etymologies of the three words for “forgiveness,” and explain how they differ from one another.

The term *selichah* and cognates thereof appear close to fifty times in the Bible. Most famously, after Moshe prayed for G-d’s forgiveness after the Ten Spies debacle, G-d responds “I have forgiven (*salachti*) according to your words” (Num. 14:20). Linguists connect the Hebrew word *selicha* to the Akkadian word *salahu* and the Aramaic *zelicha* which mean “sprinkling.” This may be a reference to the main component of ritual sacrifices, which is “sprinkling” their blood upon the altar. Indeed, cognates of *selichah* appear numerous times in regards to the “forgiveness” resulting from offering sacrifices (e.g., Lev. 4:20-35, Lev. 5:10-26).

The word *selichah* also refers to a type of liturgical poem, or *piyyut*, which begs for forgiveness. These poems were originally recited in the *slach lanu* blessing of the *Shemonah Esrei*, and hence are called *Selichot*. Nowadays, they are recited before the prayers commence or after the *Shemonah Esrei*.

The word *méchilah* and its related forms do not appear anywhere in the Bible. In fact, Ernest Klein’s *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language* writes that the root MEM-CHET-LAMMED is of uncertain etymology. However, Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur (1469-1549) notes that *méchilah* does appear in rabbinic literature and traditional Jewish liturgy. Besides referring to “forgiveness,” *méchilah* also refers to cancelling a debt or otherwise forgoing what one deserves.

Rabbi Moshe Meth (1551-1606) in *Matteh Moshe*, and Rabbi Yitzchak Eizik of Tirna (circa. 1425) in *Sefer HaMinhagim*, write that the three terms for forgiveness are associated with three different words for sin. For example, *selichah* is associated with *avon* (Num. 14:19) and *méchilah* with *pasha*. (Last year, we wrote about those three words in an essay titled “Degrees of Sin.”)

When adducing Scriptural proof to the connection between *méchilah* and *pasha*, Rabbi Moshe Meth and Rabbi Yitzchak Eizik of Tirna could not cite any Biblical verses which use the two in tandem because *méchilah* does not appear anywhere in the Bible. Instead, they connect the word *méchilah* to a similar word which *does* appear in the Bible. They cite the following verse to support the connection between *méchilah* and *pasha*: “I, [only] I, am He who wipes away (*mochel*) your rebellious sins (*pasha*)” (Isa. 43:25). In this way the two rabbis in question seem to equate *mochel* with *mochel* (“wipe away”). Similarly, Rabbi Aharon Fuld (1791-1840), in his glosses to HaBachur, suggests that the Hebrew root *mochel/méchilah* is derived from a portmanteau of *mochel* and *al* (“on top of”).

Similarly, Rabbi Moshe Yitzchak Avigdor (1801-1865), who served as the Chief Rabbi of various communities in Lithuania including Slonim, Kovno, and Shkoly, and Rabbi Yehuda Aszad (1794-1866), write that *méchilah* is related to the Biblical word *yachel* (Num. 30:3), which the Targum translates as “cancel” or “nullify.”

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) offers a fascinating theory that is quite germane to this discussion. He proposes that many three-letter roots beginning with the letter MEM are really derivatives of the two-letter roots made up of the remaining two letters, with the letter MEM serving as a means of flipping the meaning of the root to its exact opposite. He cites several examples of such a phenomenon: the two-letter root CHET-KUF (*chok*) means “engrave,” while the three letter root MEM-CHET-KUF (*machak*) means “erase;” the two-letter root LAMMED-TZADI (*leitz*) means “scorn/mockery,” while MEM-LAMMED-

TZADI (*meilitz*) means “justification/defense;” NUN-AYIN (*na*) refers to “movement,” while MEM-NUN-AYIN (*mana*) means “withholding;” REISH-DALET (*rad*) refers to “governing/ruling,” while MEM-REISH-DALET (*marad*) means “rebellion.” He continues to list many more examples of this phenomenon.

Although Rabbi Pappenheim does not use this theory to explain *mechilah*, perhaps we can apply his theory to this case. The two-letter root CHET-LAMMED primarily refers to the creation of something hollow. Some familiar conjugations of this root include *challil* “flute,” and *chillul* “desecration.” In many cases it refers to the concept of “defiling/profaning” something holy by emptying it of its holiness. A Jew who sins is essentially making himself a hollow vessel by emptying himself of his own holiness. Using Rabbi Pappenheim’s theory, *mechilah*, forgiveness – composed of the root MEM-CHET-LAMMED – is the mechanism by which G-d re-infuses the penitent sinner with holiness. In this way, MEM-CHET-LAMMED means to fill the hollow, being the polar opposite of CHET-LAMMED.

Our third word for “forgiveness” is *kapparah*. Rabbi Moshe Meth and Rabbi Yitzchak Eizik of Tirna assert that *kapparah* is especially associated with *chet*, “inadvertent sin” (e.g., Ex. 32:30). Rabbi Yechezkel Landau of Prague (1713-1793) notes that although in other parts of the Bible *kapparah* is associated with *avon* (e.g., Prov. 16:6, Isa. 27:9, and Ps. 78:38), since in the Pentateuch (i.e. the Five Books of Moses) it is associated with *chet* (as mentioned above), that connection remains the most important.

As you may have realized, the popular name of the high-holiday of Yom Kippur (“Day of Atonement”), and its Biblical name of Yom HaKippurim (“Day of Atonements”) are both derived from the word *kapparah*.

The Malbim writes that some explain that the word *kapparah* is related to *kofer/pidyon* (“redeem” or “ransom”). To explain this approach the Malbim writes that *kapparah* involves “paying a price” for forgiveness that usually takes the form of a ritual sacrifice. (Indeed we find many places in the Bible where the word *kapparah* applies to a sacrifice.) Nowadays there is a custom to perform a ritual on Erev Yom Kippur called *Kapparot*, in which one seeks atonement by giving a slaughtered chicken or alms to the poor.

Alternatively, the Malbim notes that others explain that *kapparah* is related to the word *kapporet* (“cover”). In elaborating on this idea the Malbim explains that *kapparah* is a form of forgiveness that simply “covers up” one’s sin on the surface, rendering it no longer “visible,” but does not completely remove or wipe away the sin.

We may harmonize these two approaches by noting that in English one “covers” one’s costs by somehow offsetting the expenditure. In this way, “covering” and “paying a price” can be different facets of the same idea. All in all, the Malbim notes that the term *kapparah* recalls the price paid for sin and focuses on the transactional nature of forgiveness/atonement.

Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) writes that while *selichah* may be quantitatively stronger than *mechilah*, *mechilah* is qualitatively stronger than *selichah*. In other words, *selichah* affects the entirety of one’s sin by *completely delaying* punishment to a later time. In this way it affects the entire *quantity* of the sin. On the other hand, *mechilah* is qualitatively stronger because it can *completely erase* at least part of one’s sin, even though it does not necessarily affect the entirety of the sin. In this way, *mechilah* effects a change in the *quality* of one’s sin (as opposed to simply deferring punishment for a qualitatively static sin).

Similarly, Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) writes that the word *selichah* refers to a temporary reprieve by which a sinner is not punished for his misdeeds all at once, but is given time to slowly repay his debt. The word *mechilah*, on the other hand, connotes immediate and complete forgiveness. Neither Rabbi Mecklenburg nor Rabbi Wertheimer addresses how these two terms differ from *kapparah*.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) offers a slightly more comprehensive explanation. He writes that *mechilah* refers to commuting the punishment that the guilty party deserves, *selichah* refers to correcting the relationship between the sinner and the one (or One) to whom he sinned, and *kapparah* refers to the total negation of any negative ramifications of the sin.

- For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at rkleim@ohr.edu

PARSHA OVERVIEW

When the Jewish People dwell in the Land of Israel, the first fruits are to be taken to the Temple and given to the *kohen* in a ceremony expressing recognition that it is G-d who guides the history of the Jewish nation throughout all ages. This passage forms one of the central parts of the Haggadah that we read at the Passover Seder. On the last day of Pesach of the fourth and seventh years of the seven-year *shemitta* cycle, a person must recite a disclosure stating that he has indeed distributed the tithes to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner. With this mitzvah, Moshe concludes the commandments that G-d has told him to give to the Jewish People.

Moshe exhorts them to walk in G-d's ways, because they are set aside as a treasured people to G-d. When the Jewish People transverse the Jordan River, they are to make a new

commitment to the Torah. Huge stones are to be erected and the Torah is to be written on them in the world's seventy primary languages, after which they are to be covered over with a thin layer of plaster. Half the tribes will stand on Mount Gerizim, and half on Mount Eval, and the *Levi'im* will stand in a valley between the two mountains. There the *Levi'im* will recite 12 commandments and all the people will answer "Amen" to the blessings and the curses.

Moshe then details the blessings that will be bestowed upon the Jewish People. These blessings are both physical and spiritual. However, if the Jewish People do not keep the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

Your G-d

After the devastating description of the future troubles that will befall the people of Israel if they betray the Torah, Moshe again calls the people of Israel to address them: *You have seen all that G-d did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land: The great acts of proof that your eyes have seen, those great signs and instructive miracles. But with all this, G-d did not give you a heart to recognize, or eyes to see, or ears to hear, to this day. Then, I led you for forty years in the wilderness; your clothes did not wear out on you, your shoes did not wear out on your feet. You neither ate bread nor drank wine... so that you might know that G-d is your G-d.* (Devarim 29:3-5, Hirsch translation)

What is the difference between the impact of the experience of the miracles and the great proofs, on the one hand, and the forty years of supernatural sustenance, on the other? Rav Hirsch explains that the experience of miraculous exodus should have sufficed to give the people knowledge of G-d – of His power, His nature, His rule, His justice. This should have transformed their view of the world and made their ear receptive to truth and duty, making them fit to be the people of G-d in the Land of G-d.

However, these experiences were still not enough to permanently impact their hearts, and allow the people to hear and see all the phenomena of the world as the handiwork of an all-powerful and ever-present G-d. Instead, it would require forty years of miraculous sustenance – the experience of having their personal needs, such as clothing, food and shelter, being cared for – to truly *know* that there is one G-d, exalted above all, yet near to all. The personal relevance of G-d to their lives could only be taught during these forty years of protection, trials and travails. For it is during these forty years that the nation learned that at every moment, G-d watches over and guides, examines and judges, helps and halts the fate and accomplishments of the nation and of every individual.

Rav Hirsch explains the verse in this way: "That G-d" – the one responsible for the Exodus and who guides the nation, is also "your G-d" – the G-d of each individual. This was the complete knowledge of G-d that was solidified by their personal experience of protection in the wilderness.

- Sources: Commentary, Devarim 29:3-5

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

Akiva Pearlman

Born: Seattle, Washington
Raised: Chelmsford, Massachusetts
University of Massachusetts, BA Chinese
Kung Fu Master



There is an apocryphal story about a young Jewish man who in his spiritual quest had travelled the world, worshiping in Native American sweat lodges, taking *ayahuasca* in the jungles of the Amazon under the guidance of a native *shaman*, experiencing a Catholic Mass at the Vatican, bowing on a prayer mat in Mecca and eventually reaching a mountain peak in the Himalayas where he met a famous Buddhist *guru*. In answer to the traveller's question as to the meaning of life and what his path through it should be, the *guru*, who was alternatively an old Jew from Brooklyn or the *Dali Lama*, answered with a question: "Who are you, my son?" "A Jew from New York," answered the traveller. "What are you doing here? You should look into your own traditions. Go to yeshiva in Israel." He did, ending up in Ohr Somayach and eventually becoming a great *talmid chacham*. This is not Akiva's story. It's nothing compared to his.

Akiva grew up in Chelmsford, Massachusetts, after his family moved there from Seattle when he was two years old. They were a very secular family and he grew up without knowledge of Shabbat, Rosh Hashanah or even Yom Kippur. They did try Chanukah for a couple of years, but reverted to Xmas the next. One might say, they couldn't see the forest for the Tree. But, they knew they were Jews and were proud of it, although Akiva and his siblings had no idea what it meant to be Jewish.

He was a very curious and precocious child. He was artistic and loved reading. He also loved science and mathematics. When he was ten years old, his aunt gave him a camera as a birthday present. It was wrapped in a newspaper from Japan. He was as

excited about the newspaper as he was about the camera. He was fascinated by the mysterious and seemingly unintelligible characters. He announced to his mother that one day he was going to be able to read that newspaper.

By the end of high school he wasn't sure what he wanted to study. His mother suggested that since he could draw so well, he should study art. Akiva received a full scholarship to study art at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. One of his first art classes was taught by Professor Wong, a Chinese professor and a well-known Chinese artist. Akiva loved the professor, who peppered his lectures with Chinese philosophy. After criticizing one of Akiva's paintings, he said to him: "Not everyone can be a good artist, you know." Taking the criticism to heart, Akiva dropped his major and switched to the study of Chinese.

He was a fast learner, but after two-and-a-half semesters of Chinese he felt the tug of the sciences, and decided to drop out of the University to study Chinese medicine. With almost no money in his pocket, he hitchhiked to the West Coast, where he hoped to save up enough money for a one-way ticket to Taiwan. In those days Mainland China was closed to foreigners. He eventually got to Taiwan and began studying the Chinese language in earnest with the purpose of entering a Chinese medical school or getting an apprenticeship with a Chinese doctor.

Ever the perfectionist, Akiva insisted on mastering Mandarin so that he could speak without an accent. His teacher told him

that this was impossible. There were no foreigners who could master the tonal subtleties of the Chinese language. He would always sound like a foreigner. However, instead of discouraging him, it only made him try harder. He spent weeks on mastering the difference between only two words that initially sounded exactly the same to him. He then returned to the teacher, who told him that she couldn't believe what he had accomplished. After a few years his Chinese was impeccable. (I can attest to this fact, because I have been to kosher Chinese restaurants in New York with Akiva, and the owners have told me that they are astounded at how he speaks Chinese perfectly and without an accent.)

In addition to studying Chinese, Akiva also studied art, music and *Kung Fu* – Chinese martial arts. One day he heard about a renowned Chinese doctor who was located at the base of a mountain in Central Taiwan. He travelled there and began learning traditional medicine from him. At the top of the mountain was a Buddhist monastery headed by an even more renowned master Chinese healer and Kung Fu expert, a true *shifu* (master teacher). Akiva asked the master if he could learn from him. The master told him that he could, but he would have to follow all the rules of the monastery. Akiva agreed, with the proviso that he wouldn't have to become a Buddhist monk. The monk's day began at 3 am. Upon waking, the monk was required to drink 14 large bowls of water. This was followed by an hour of strenuous exercise and difficult pushups. When he arrived, Akiva could do 19 pushups. All of the other monks were doing hundreds. The master told him to add one pushup a day. (By the end of his stay he was doing 685 pushups without a break.) After bathing in a nearby mountain spring, the monks would have a large breakfast and then tend to the daily chores, such as vegetable gardening and carrying huge buckets of water on their backs from the mountain spring to irrigate the monastery's gardens below.

Lunch was a bowl of rice and a bowl of water. A mid-day break was devoted to Buddhist study, including Kung Fu Meditation and calligraphy. They also made excursions into town to help the needy and the sick. They went to sleep at nightfall. After many months of this regimen, Akiva began to question whether the master would ever teach him Chinese medicine and martial arts. He knew he was being tested but he couldn't wait forever.

After three long years at the monastery, Akiva finally left. He had waited long enough. He was 23 years old and restless. He consulted with a few wise men as to his future and they all told him he should return to the States and get his undergraduate degree. He did. He completed his missing three years of college in one year, with a 4.0 average, and graduated with a degree in Chinese. Upon graduation he returned to China and began

working as an English teacher to support his medical studies. After a "chance" meeting with a famous Chinese Kung Fu movie director, he was hired to play a bit part in a new movie. The director also hired him to tutor the star of the film in English. In the course of the lessons, the actor discovered that Akiva knew martial arts. Many of the Kung Fu movies at the time had a white American Kung Fu master as its antagonist. With his command of Chinese and martial arts, Akiva was a cinch to play the bad guy in the movies.

After a successful, but relatively brief acting career, Akiva moved to Japan, where he again pursued his desire to learn Chinese medicine. He mastered Japanese in a year but failed to find the right school in which to learn medicine.

Around this time Akiva's father passed away and he began to contemplate the meaning of life in earnest. Until then, although a Buddhist monk, he was an atheist. But he also had a deep sense that there was something much deeper going on in the world than the phenomena that met the eye. He threw himself into the teachings that he had previously learned only superficially as a monk, examining Christian scriptures as well. Nothing satisfied him. There were too many unanswered questions and contradictions. He made a trip back to Boston to visit his mother and sent himself three large boxes of Jewish books from the local Jewish bookstore in Brookline. Back in China he had pored through these books. One of them mentioned the idea from the *Sefer HaChinuch* that if someone observes the mitzvahs constantly, eventually he will come to believe in G-d. Akiva, always up for a challenge, decided to test this idea. He would keep the mitzvahs (as he understood them from his reading) for a year and see what would happen. It worked! In less than six months of keeping Shabbat and *kashrut* and praying three times a day, he realized that there was a G-d who created the world and sustains it and Who commanded the Jewish People to keep the mitzvahs. He now knew what he must do. He came to Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem and learned in our Beit Midrash. That's when I met Akiva.

After a few *zmanim* in the Yeshiva, he made the decision to move to New York and find his *zivug*. He met his *aishes chail* after a long and grueling eight-year search. At the behest of a large US *kashrut* organization, the couple moved to Shanghai, where Akiva set up their China office. After a number of years, the family moved to Beijing, where Akiva was hired by a large Israeli Real Estate development company to establish its Chinese branch and to be its COO. In 2018, after 14 years and three children, the family moved from Beijing to Cleveland, Ohio, where Akiva is today employed as the COO of a large Mid-West real estate concern, and a staunch member of the Orthodox Jewish Community.