

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE GREAT BLANDER

“And they will make the ephod...” (26:6)

Sometimes I think that someone has taken the whole world and put it into an enormous blender. Everything becomes more like everything else. And everyone becomes more like everyone else. The modern communications and information technology — “The Great Blander” — has minced regional and cultural uniqueness into a universal cultural cholent. And many religious leaders seek to blur the very real differences between faiths and make them into one big feel-good, self-righteous buzz.

It’s a gray bland world we live in.

It’s well nigh impossible for us to imagine a world of stark white-and-black, a world in which great holiness vies with the very real power of *tumah* (spiritual impurity), Satanism, black magic and witchcraft.

All this has gone from the world.

“For many days, the Children of Yisrael will sit with no king, no minister, no offering, no pillar, and no ephod or teraphim (Sorcerer’s divining tool).” (Hoshea 3:4)

The ephod was one of the priestly garments, and one of the holiest things in the world. When there is no genuine holiness in the world, there are also no *teraphim*, no genuine idols or idol worship.

A long ago, if someone wanted to follow the path of witchcraft, Heaven left the possibility open to him. Nowadays, just as a dark veil has fallen over holiness, so too, true contact with the powers of darkness do not exist.

We see a similar idea in the Book of Genesis (25:21):

“Yitzchak entreated opposite his wife because she was barren. G-d allowed Himself to be entreated by him.” When Rivka conceived, world history could have followed one of two paths: Either she could give birth to twins: one who would be the personification of good and truth, while the other stood for evil and falsehood. Alternatively, she could give birth to one child who would be a *synthesis* of great good and great evil — a great blandness.

Yitzchak prayed that there should be two children. Rivka prayed that there should only be one.

In the event, “G-d allowed Himself to be entreated” by Yitzchak’s prayer, meaning to the exclusion of Rivka’s. Why did G-d listen to Yitzchak and not to Rivka?

Rivka was a righteous person who came from evil parents, a *“tzadeket ben rasha”*. She knew true evil at first hand. It was unthinkable to her that there should be someone in the next generation of such evil. Infinitely preferable would be that evil should be diluted with good in one body. Yitzchak, however, was a righteous person who came from a background of holiness. He knew what moral excellence was. He had seen his father Avraham walk this planet. It was inconceivable to him that in the next generation there would be no one of outstanding righteousness like his father. Even if the price to pay would be the existence of incomparable evil, the existence of surpassing good and truth would be worth it.

Infinitely better than the Great Blandness.

• Sources: Vilna Gaon; Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky

PLEASE JOIN US...

...in saying Tehillim/Psalms and a special prayer to G-d for the safety and security of all of Klal Yisrael in these times of conflict and conclude with the following special prayer:

“Our brothers, the entire family of Israel, who are delivered into distress and captivity, whether they are on sea or dry land – may G-d have mercy on them and remove them from stress to relief, from darkness to light, from subjugation to redemption now, speedily and soon.”

GITTIN 72 - 78

Rava said, "Since Hillel needed to enact a decree (in a specific case) that 'giving against the receiver's will is indeed considered giving', it follows that in other cases 'giving against a receiver's will' is not considered giving."

A person who sells a house in a walled city may buy it back, even against the will of the buyer, within a year of the sale. A *mishna* in *masechet* Arachin (31b) teaches that when buyers began to hide at the end of the year in order to not be available to agree to accept payment from the original seller to redeem the house, Hillel enacted a decree to help the sellers redeem their houses. He decreed that the payment could be made *without* the presence or agreement of the buyer, and the original owner could just place the payment to the buyer in a room that Beit Din designated for this purpose.

Based on the need for Hillel's special decree, Rava in our *gemara* derives that otherwise a "giving" of payment against the will of the recipient is *not* considered a "giving", and would therefore not effect a redemption of a house in a walled city.

Regarding this rule, commentaries point out that it seems to be contrary to the Torah law of giving a get, which can indeed be given against the will of the wife. (A later decree of Rabbeinu Gershom Me'or HaGolah forbids divorcing a wife without her consent.) The Torah states regarding a get "*v'natan b'yada*" — "and he give the get into her hand" (i.e., domain) — even against her will. Why don't we learn from here that "giving" in general can be accomplished even against a recipient's will, such as in the case of redeeming a house in a walled city, without the special decree of Hillel? One answer offered is that we could learn from the giving of a get without her consent that payment against a recipient's will is considered "giving", but *repayment* against the recipient's will is not considered "giving". (Rashba)

• Gittin 74b-75a

Rabbi Zeira sat in front of Rabbi Asi, and others say that it was Rabbi Asi sitting in front of Rabbi Yochanan, and said, "The first, second and third days of the week are called 'before Shabbat', whereas the fourth, fifth, and sixth days of the week are called 'before Shabbat'."

In regard to what scenario is this statement taught on our *daf*? One explanation is that of a husband who gives his wife a get and says, "This is your get if I do not return after Shabbat." What does the husband mean when he says "after Shabbat"? Immediately after Shabbat? Within a day after Shabbat? Within a week? Within a year? Or something else?

He means "something else" answers the *gemara*. He means that that get takes effect if he does return within the first three days after Shabbat. These first three days are called "after Shabbat". The next three days are called "before Shabbat". This is how Rashi and other Rishonim explain our *gemara*.

The Rambam, however, explains it in a different manner. The scenario is if a husband tells two people to write and give his wife a get "after Shabbat". Until when can they do what they were instructed? Until the end of the third day following Shabbat is the answer provided. And if he said to write and give the get "before Shabbat", it must be done so only on Wednesday, Thursday or Friday of that week. Those three days are called "before Shabbat". This scenario is the one that is recorded in Shulchan Aruch Even Haezer 144:6. (A similar application of the concept taught here is found in the case where a person did not make havdala on Motza'ei Shabbat, see Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 299:6.)

• Gittin 77a

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

SILWAN TUNNEL — TOMB OF THE BARTENURA

Anyone who learns Mishna is familiar with the commentary of Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura. The tomb of this great scholar, who made *aliya* to Eretz Israel in 1488, is located on the Mount of Olives, opposite the opening of the Silwan tunnel.

On his way to Eretz Yisrael from his native Italy, this great rabbi visited Jewish communities in Sicily, Rhodes and Egypt, and wrote letters describing the customs of

these communities.

(*Editor's note:* I once was accompanied by a group of Ohr Somayach yeshiva students to visit sites in and near the walls of the "Old City" in Jerusalem, and the rabbi who led the group told how he had heard that a rabbi whom we both knew had a family tradition that this tomb was in the vicinity, and he searched intensively until he discovered its precise location.)



PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What two precautions were taken to assure the purity of oil for the *Menorah*?
2. How was Aharon commanded to kindle the *Menorah*?
3. What does *tamid* mean in reference to the *Menorah*?
4. What does *kehuna* mean?
5. Name the eight garments worn by the *Kohen Gadol*.
6. To what does Rashi compare the *ephod*?
7. In which order were the names of the Tribes inscribed on the *ephod*?
8. The stones of the *ephod* bore the inscription of the names of the sons of Yaakov. Why?
9. For what sins did the *choshen mishpat* atone?
10. What are three meanings of the word *mishpat*?
11. What was lacking in the *bigdei kehuna* in the second *Beit Hamikdash*?
12. Which garment's fabric was woven of only one material?
13. When the *Kohen Gadol* wore all his priestly garments, where on his head was the *tefillin* situated?
14. What does the word *tamid* mean in reference to the *tzitz*? (two answers)
15. Which garments were worn by a *kohen hediot*?
16. During the inauguration of the *kohanim*, a bullock was brought as a sin offering. For what sin did this offering atone?
17. Moshe was commanded to wash Aharon and his sons to prepare them to serve as *kohanim* (29:4). How were they washed?
18. What was unique about the bull sin-offering brought during the inauguration of the *kohanim*?
19. How did the oil used for the meal-offering differ from the oil used for the *Menorah*?
20. What does the crown on the *mizbeach haketoret* symbolize?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this week's Questions!

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

1. 27:20 - The olives were pressed and not ground, and only the first drop was used.
2. 27:20 - He was commanded to kindle it until the flame ascended by itself.
3. 27:20 - It means that it should be kindled every night.
4. 28:3 - Service.
5. 28:4,36,42 - *Choshen*, *ephod*, *me'il*, *ketonet*, *mitznefet*, *avnet*, *tzitz*, and *michnasayim*.
6. 28:6 - A woman's riding garment.
7. 28:10 - In order of birth.
8. 28:12 - So that G-d would see their names and recall their righteousness.
9. 28:15 - For judicial errors.
10. 28:15 - 1) The claims of the litigants, 2) The court's ruling, 3) The court's punishment.
11. 28:30 - The *Urim V'Tumim* — the "*Shem Ha'meforash*" placed in the folds of the *choshen*.
12. 28:31 - The fabric of the *me'il* was made only of *techelet*.
13. 28:37 - Between the *tzitz* and the *mitznefet*.
14. 28:38 - 1) It always atones, even when not being worn. 2) The *Kohen Gadol* must always be aware that he is wearing it.
15. 28:40,42 - *Ketonet*, *avnet*, *migba'at*, and *michnasayim*.
16. 29:1 - The sin of the golden calf.
17. 29:4 - They immersed in a *mikveh*.
18. 29:14 - It is the only external sin-offering that was completely burned.
19. 29:40 - Oil for the *menorah* comes only from beaten olives. Oil for meal-offerings may come from either beaten olives or from ground-up olives.
20. 30:3 - The crown of *kehuna*.

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Abarbanel

ON THE PARSHA

BY RABBI PINCHAS KASNETT

Tezaveh

Symbolism of the Priests' Garments

This Parsha deals primarily with the special garments worn by the High Priest and the regular priests during their service in the Tabernacle. Abarbanel offers several interpretations of the symbolism of these garments. One of those interpretations is as follows:

Four of the garments were worn only by the High Priest and were considered to have greater importance: the breastplate, the apron, the robe and the headplate. The other less important garments were the turban, the sash, the trousers and the tunic. The four special garments worn by the High Priest were worn opposite the four main components of the body: the head, the heart, the digestive area and the reproductive area. The headplate signifies that all of his thoughts should be directed to G-d. The breastplate over his heart indicates that all of his prayers should be for the benefit of the entire nation, which is why twelve precious stones corresponding to the nation's twelve tribes were set in it. The apron encircled his abdomen, indicating that he should eat and digest only those foods that G-d permits. Finally, the robe covering the reproductive organs indicates that our desires must be constrained by the dictates of the Torah, both publicly and privately. The golden bells attached to the bottom of the robe remind us that we cannot hide our private behaviors. Everything eventually becomes known within the community of Israel.

These four garments also correspond to the four types of service that the High Priest performed. The garments of the head correspond to the inner sanctuary, or Holy of Holies, which the High Priest entered only on Yom Kippur.

Here the intellect is represented by the ark and the Tablets of the Law. The second service was the lighting of the menorah, or candelabra, which was in the inner courtyard just outside the Holy of Holies. The breastplate with its twelve precious stones corresponded to the menorah since the letters engraved on the stones would prophetically light up in response to questions that the High Priest would ask of G-d. The third service was the arranging of the loaves of bread on the table, which naturally corresponds to the apron covering the digestive tract. The fourth service was the lighting of the incense on the golden altar. Just as the smoke from the altar announced the presence of the incense, so too the bells on the hem of the robe announced the presence of the High Priest.

The four garments of the regular priests were much simpler. Rather than employing the gold, silver, precious stones and expensive colorful fabrics of the High Priest's garments, these garments were made of simple linen and were much easier to make. They also corresponded to less religiously significant parts of the body: the skin, the bones, the flesh and the sinews. Finally, although the four specialized garments worn by the High Priest were indicative of his pre-eminence among the people, the fact that he wore the four simple garments as well indicated that he still retained his humility and remained connected to the other priests as one of them. Furthermore, in times of need he was expected to perform all of the duties of the regular priests, and on Yom Kippur when he was serving on behalf of the entire nation he further demonstrated his humility and connection to all the people by wearing only the four simple white linen garments.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

G-d tells Moshe to command the Jewish People to supply pure olive oil for the *Menorah* in the *Mishkan* (Tent of Meeting). He also tells Moshe to organize the making of the *bigdei kehuna* (priestly garments): a breastplate, an *ephod*, a robe, a checkered tunic, a turban, a sash, a forehead-plate and linen trousers. Upon their completion, Moshe is to perform a ceremony for seven days to consecrate Aharon and his sons. This includes offering sacrifices,

dressing Aharon and his sons in their respective garments, and anointing Aharon with oil. G-d commands that every morning and afternoon a sheep be offered on the altar in the *Mishkan*. This offering should be accompanied by a meal-offering and libations of wine and oil. G-d commands that an altar for incense be built from acacia wood and covered with gold. Aharon and his descendants should burn incense on this altar every day.

KARAITE CONUNDRUM

From: Bracha

*Dear Rabbi,
I know someone who claims to be Jewish but a Karaite. The person was saying things about Judaism which didn't seem right to me and the discussion became a little sensitive so I changed the subject. But I was wondering what you can tell me about Karaism and its relationship to mainstream Judaism.*

Dear Bracha,

For reasons I'll elaborate on shortly, there is no uniform belief and practice among Karaites, so my discussion can only be about Karaism in general since it varies from group to group and even from individual to individual within groups.

Although Karaism is relatively new, generally accepted as originating around 700CE or later, its main position is not so new and found expression in earlier groups, from which it derived its inspiration, such as the Sadducees (Tzadukim) and Boethusians (Baytusim) which are mentioned in the Talmud and emerged toward the end of the Second Temple period.

While all of these groups claimed to believe in the Jewish G-d and the Torah, they have always been considered by mainstream observant Judaism to be heretical because they reject the Divine origin of the Oral Law.

It is because Karaism accepts only the written form of the Torah, claiming to derive understanding and interpretations of the beliefs and laws of the Torah from verses alone, that it gets its name based on the Hebrew-Aramaic term for a Torah verse: *mikra* or *k'ra* - hence *Karaim* or Karaites, those who follow verses only.

Throughout the Middle Ages, there were a significant number of Karaites in communities spread throughout the Middle East and some of Eastern Europe. In modern times their numbers have diminished drastically and very few of these remaining descendants are "practicing" Karaites. There are small groups of people who do not descend from Karaites but have embraced, and are attempting to renew, Karaism in order to legitimize modern-day rejection of the Talmud.

Traditional Judaism has always refuted the claims of the Karaites with many logical and scriptural proofs. Some notable examples are the works of Rav Sa'adya Gaon, Ra'avad and Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi in *The Kuzari* (see part 3 for a detailed discussion). The following are but a few of their arguments:

Karaites reject the uniform, authoritative Oral Torah explanations of the Written Torah which traditional Judaism traces back to the knowledge G-d revealed to Moses at Sinai. Yet the Torah verses alone are so succinct and often obtuse that one could not possibly know with certainty what the Torah means or requires in any given verse. So without the Divinely-revealed, supplementary elucidations of the Oral Torah, the Karaites' understanding of the Torah is necessarily superficial, inadequate and subjective.

In fact, the Karaites claim that each person has the liberty to interpret and practice the Torah according to his own understand-

ing. The result is that rather than attaining objective Divine Will, they arrive at subjective human interpretations with no uniformity. Through this individualized and subjective approach, the immutable teachings of the Torah change according to time period, location, community, individual and even stage in life.

In addition, since Karaites rejects the Oral Torah, thereby rendering their understanding and observance of the Torah to subjectivism and non-uniformity, they undermine and make irrelevant the Torah's system of rewards and punishments. A Torah with no fixed meaning or application could not promise reward for upholding, or warn of punishment for abrogating, beliefs and practices that have as many correct interpretations as interpreters. As such, there can be no accountability or culpability.

A third major problem with Karaism is that without the Divinely-revealed Oral Torah to complement the terse and skeletal Written Torah, observance itself is a non-starter. There is no mitzvah in the Torah that can be practiced according to its sparsely-worded description in the Torah. Take *tefillin* for example, about which all that's written is "these words shall be bound upon your arm and be a sign between your eyes." Details involving what words, how to write them, what to write them on, how to bind them, with what, what shape, what color, what material, where on the arm or between the eyes, who wears them and when, are only some of what's missing in the command. All of this and more is detailed in the Oral Torah, without which the mitzvah could not possibly be kept.

Conveniently enough, Karaism claims that this, as certain other cryptic commands, are only metaphorical. But there are many other mitzvot which are just as cryptic, such as *shechita* or other kosher laws, which the Karaites do keep. The Torah doesn't say explicitly how an animal must be killed in order to render it fit for consumption and that only a Jew may do so, or what and where the forbidden parts of the animal are and that even a non-Jew may remove them. Yet, in these cases as in others, Karaites practice according to the dictates of the oral tradition. Since, as in these cases, it's impossible to do otherwise, the same should be with all Laws. The Karaites should either use no Oral Law whatsoever, or, since they rely on it in some cases, they should do so for every Law in the Torah, all of which are equally opaque.

Karaite scholars have attempted to defend Karaism against the criticisms leveled by mainstream Judaism, and even to claim that Karaism is actually the authentic, original Judaism in its stead. None of these compare with the erudition of Talmudic scholars, and their arguments are obviously weak and flawed.

Since the observance of some Karaite communities was closer to that of traditional Judaism and they were therefore more closely integrated into the Jewish community at large, some opinions maintain that Karaites are to be considered Jewish. However, since Karaism defines Jewishness through patrilineal descent (and not through the mother) and has different standards for conversion, and also because they may not have kept the laws of divorce properly, there exists some concern whether Karaites are Jewish or not, and even if so, whether it is permitted to marry them.

KAVANA - CONCENTRATION

“One must concentrate on the words and subject of each of the blessings of the Shemoneh Esrei. If this is too difficult, one should at least have concentration for the first blessing. If one did not say ‘Avot’, the first blessing, with proper intention, even if he said the rest of the blessings properly, he must still repeat the Shemoneh Esrei.” (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 101:1)

The Rema writes that in our times one does not repeat the Shemoneh Esrei for lack of concentration, since it is likely that it will happen again.

Normally when there is a difference of opinion between Rabbi Yosef Karo, author of the Shulchan Aruch, and Rabbi Moshe Iserles (Rema), the Sefardim follow the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch while the Ashkenazim follow the ruling of the Rema. However, the Kaf HaChaim writes in the name of the Chida, one of the leading Sefardic halachic authorities, that in this case the *minhag* of the Sefardim is *not* like the Shulchan Aruch, and they as well do not repeat the blessing. (Birkei Yosef)

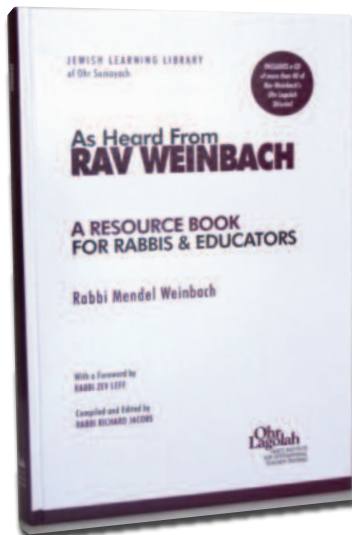
The Mishneh Berura explains that if one has not said G-d’s name at the end of the blessing, he can go back to “G-d of Avraham...” and repeat the blessing with proper concentration (according to Yalkut Yosef one goes back to “G-d of our Fathers...”).

The Importance of the First Blessing

The Avudraham explains that since the first blessing emphasizes G-d’s greatness, the invaluable merits of our Forefathers and our final redemption, which are the most important foundations of our faith, it is considered the most important of all the nineteen blessings of the Shemoneh Esrei. The Kaf HaChaim explains that it is the most important of all the blessings because most of the kabbalistic intentions are contained within it.

Considering the importance of the Shemoneh Esrei in general, and the first blessing in particular, one should take out time from his work or other learning in order to learn the meaning of the words he is saying, in addition to understanding the ideas contained in each of the blessings. In this way, each time he prays, his prayers will have increased merit. If it is too difficult to do this for all of the blessings, one should make a special effort for at least the first blessing.

- *Recommended reading: The World of Prayer by Rabbi Eli Munk; Shemoneh Esrei by Rabbi Zev Leff; The Shemoneh Esrei by Rabbi Avraham Feuer*



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ETHAN ILLFELDER

Age: 24 - Riverdale, Bronx, NY

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI): BS/MS Quantitative Finance and Risk Analysis (QFRA)

As his degree suggests, Ethan knows a bit more about numbers than the average sociology major. With that in mind it's probably not surprising that he was drawn to explore Judaism, which includes in its basic text — The Book of Numbers.

Ethan was brought up in a Reform family in Riverdale, New York. Although Riverdale has a thriving Orthodox community, he was never exposed to it or to the wonders of Judaism before college. A bright student, he attended the top academic high school in New York City — Stuyvesant.

Ethan chose to go to RPI in Troy, NY, for university studies. It is one of the best schools in the States for engineering, math and sciences. He ended up majoring in QFRA — a type of applied mathematics.

While Troy, NY, is not known for its vibrant Jewish community, RPI has a Jewish student population that consists of at least 10-15% self-identifying Jews (500-750). Ethan found himself looking for a community of students that he could be part of, and decided to join the Hillel on campus. During the preceding number of years before he joined, Hillel had fallen into decline, with fiscal mismanagement, lackluster attendance for religious services and an unengaged community. Ethan decided to do something about it.

The Sefer HaChinuch says that *mitzvot* and *aveirot* have an amazing effect on the psyche of a Jew. If one forces a *tzadik* to do even one *aveira* daily, he will become a *rasha*. Conversely, if one were to force a *rasha* to do even one *mitzvah* daily, he will eventually become a *tzadik*. This is a consequence of the Jews accepting the Torah by saying *na'aseh v'nishmah* — “we will do and we will hear”. By “doing”, we understand what we are doing, we come to appreciate it and it becomes a part of us — a process by which the intellect is bypassed, and yet is altered. If this is true for a *rasha*, it would all the more so be true for a *bai'noni* (“average” person, neither a *tzadik* nor a *rasha*) or a *tinok she'nishba* (one who is non-observant due to being raised without a Torah education).

Ethan revitalized the Hillel at RPI. He first became its treasurer, and then a year later was elected to be the pres-

ident. The response was tremendous and encouraging. There were more than fifty students coming to Shabbat dinners. This was followed by offering classes by local rabbis, and even starting a “meals on wheels” Shabbat program for the elderly and disadvantaged Jews in



Troy. The Hillel had almost no support from the national Hillel organization, and the local community of Troy was struggling to maintain its own few institutions. Hillel needed money, and Ethan rose to the cause. He incorporated the Hillel, and then obtained a US tax-exempt 501(c) 3 status for the organization. As an attorney who has worked on behalf of many applications for this status, I can attest that the IRS procedure is long and arduous, and filled with many disappointments. Ethan did it himself without a lawyer. He then began to raise

money for Hillel to fund the programs that he started. By the time he graduated, the Hillel was running a budget in the black and was a recognized force on campus. He got RPI to help fund a kosher-meal plan with reliable *kashrut* supervision, and even received help from them to provide *kosher l'pesach* meals for students who wanted them. By this time, Ethan was attending the Shabbat Minyan on campus, and was on the kosher-meal plan. The Chinuch's words were proven true again.

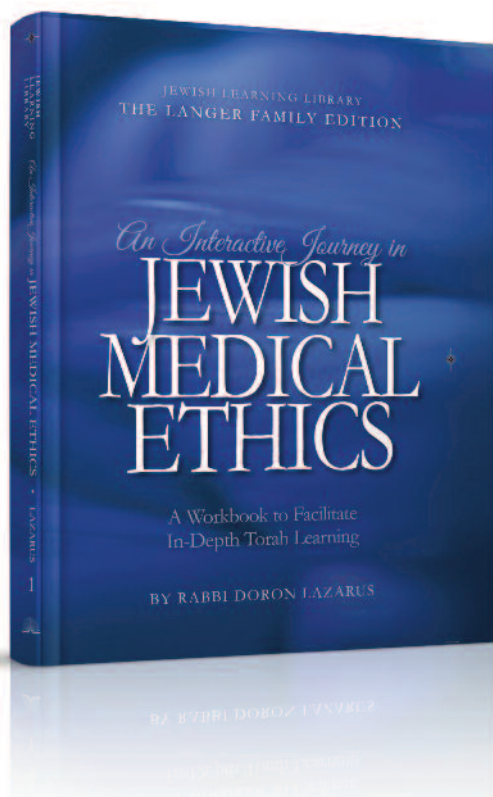
Word of Ethan's success reached the ear of Rabbi Jeff Surowitz, the Ohr Somayach staff member who serves as recruiter for our JInternship program in Jerusalem. Jeff pursued Ethan until he agreed to come on the program after graduation. He acquired an internship at JVP Venture Capital Fund as an analyst. Ethan loves his work evaluating hundreds of Israeli hi-tech start-ups to determine which ones the company should fund.

Ethan lives on campus at Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem and attends three hours of classes every evening after work. Of his experience at Ohr Somayach Ethan says, “It has been a wonderful opportunity to be exposed to a different facet of Judaism, and while my background was not shared by many of those whom I'm around, it is comforting to be around so many welcoming and friendly people. I am truly glad to be able to share my time here and learn in so many different directions.”

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