

OHR NET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

OUT OF PROPORTION

“Take vengeance for the Children of Israel...” (31:2)

Ohr Somayach had a unique experience last week. Virtually the entire student body and staff, together with loyal supporters throughout the world, joined together in a 32-hour all-or-nothing campaign to raise 2 million dollars for the Yeshiva. As it turned out, we raised a bit more than that (see unidy.org/os).

Apart from the amazing bonding experience and the change in the Yeshiva’s balance sheet that sees the red climbing back towards the black, and not forgetting the sheer good fun of the whole thing — we picked up much more than all that.

“Take vengeance for the Children of Israel...”

Why does the verse here refer specifically to the vengeance of the “Children of Israel”?

When the Midianites caused the Jewish People to fall into the sin of lechery at Sheetim, they were doubly culpable: First

for causing the sin, and secondly for the punishment that the Jewish People incurred.

Even though G-d created the world “measure for measure”, when G-d bestows His *kindness*, He does so disproportionately and in *far greater measure* than His strict judgment.

If the Midianites were punished for both the sin and the punishment of the Jews, how much more will someone be recompensed for both the mitzvah and its reward that he causes and facilitates another to do.

However much the Yeshiva and its friends made in the campaign in this world, how infinitely more is the reward for bringing so many Jews to do the mitzvah of *tzedaka* in the World-to-Come!

• Sources: based on Rabbi Leib Chasman in *Ohr Yehil*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Matot

Moshe teaches the rules and restrictions governing oaths and vows — especially the role of a husband or father in either upholding or annulling a vow. *Bnei Yisrael* wage war against Midian. They kill the five Midianite kings, all the males and Bilaam. Moshe is upset that women were taken captive. They were catalysts for the immoral behavior of the Jewish People. He rebukes the officers. The spoils of war are counted and apportioned. The commanding officers report to Moshe that there was not one casualty among *Bnei Yisrael*. They bring an offering that is taken by Moshe and Elazar and placed in the *Ohel Mo'ed* (Tent of Meeting). The Tribes of Gad and Reuven, who own large quantities of livestock, petition Moshe to allow them to remain east of the Jordan and not enter the Land of Israel. They explain that the land east of the Jordan is quite suitable grazing land for their livestock. Moshe’s initial response is that this request will discourage the rest of *Bnei Yisrael*, and that it is akin to the sin of the spies. They assure Moshe that they will first help conquer Israel, and only then will they go back to their

homes on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Moshe grants their request on condition that they uphold their part of the deal.

Masei

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

SANHEDRIN 2-8

THE FIRST QUESTION

Rav Hamnuna said, “The first judgment of a person is regarding Torah study.”

Rav Hamnuna states this based on a verse in Proverbs (17:14). Tosefot cites a *gemara* in Tractate Shabbat (31a): “First a person is asked whether he dealt honestly in business matters, and then afterwards he is asked whether he established fixed times for Torah study.” That *gemara* and our *gemara* pose an apparent contradiction, and require reconciliation.

Tosefot offers two answers. Answer one: The statement in Tractate Shabbat speaks about a person who learns Torah but does not establish fixed times for study. Our *gemara* speaks about a person who does not learn Torah at all. Answer two: The two *gemaras* speak about the *same* type of person, but Tractate Shabbat teaches although he is asked first about his business dealings, he is judged first about his Torah study, and this is what Rav Hamnuna is teaching here, that the first and primary judgment concerns a person’s Torah study.

The Maharsha resolves the apparent difficulty posed by these two different statements in a third manner. Rav Hamnuna teaches about the first question asked to a person who was capable of great success in his Torah study in this world, but failed to live up to expectations. The teaching in Shabbat refers to a person who was not capable of Torah scholarship, and therefore it was understandable that he would live a life of business matters, while maintaining connection to the Torah by establishing part of his day to its study. Therefore he is asked first about whether he indeed handled business dealings with honesty, and then asked about whether he was vigilant to establish fixed times for Torah study.

• *Sanhedrin 7a*

UNBIASED JUDGMENT

Rav said to him, “I am disqualified from judging your case”.

Our *gemara* tells of a case in which Rav’s landlord came to him, requesting that Rav be the judge in a monetary case the landlord was involved in, reminding Rav of the favor he had done for Rav as his landlord. Rav replied that he was ineligible to judge the case since he would be favorably biased toward the landlord when hearing the court case. Tosefot notes that Rav was not ineligible, strictly speaking, but was acting with an extra degree of cautiousness and piety. (See Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 7:7 regarding the variety of factors and halachic opinions that this matter entails.)

Our *gemara*, in which Rav declared himself as ineligible to judge a case when he perceived there was a positive bias to one of the litigants, reminds me of a personal story that occurred when I was a much younger Kollel student. I had agreed to rent out our apartment to a friend for his parents’ usage for a summer month for a certain price, and gave him the keys. He told me that he would get the money from his parents when they arrived and pay me upon my return. However, to my great surprise, he claimed that his parents arrived but had stayed somewhere else — unexpectedly to him as well — and that they had not used the apartment and he was therefore not obligated to pay me anything.

I was newly married, with debts, and had spent the anticipated rental windfall-to-come, and was not happy, so to speak. I went to my Rav for help and told him my “sob story”. He replied, “Moishe, I’m sorry but I can’t make any ruling in this case. First of all, you are my closest student and I have a special *chiba* (affection) for you (blush!). Secondly, I have heard your side of the case without the other person being present to defend himself from your claim. This is an additional issue since I will now be inherently favoring your claim, as it was not immediately countered. Therefore, I suggest that the two of you go together to Rav So-and-so, who anyway is considered the official judge in this location, and present your cases in front of him. We did, a compromise was reached, neither of us was “happy”, but we were also not so “unhappy” as to break off our friendship. In fact, after the first payment of many, I saw that he had great difficulty in raising the money (his parents didn’t participate even after the ruling), and I forgave the debt and we have remained friends until today.

• *Sanhedrin 8a*

PARSHA Q&A ?

Matot

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

Masei

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

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to This Week's Questions!

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

Matot

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

Masei

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

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Matot

WHY VENGEANCE AGAINST MIDIAN, BUT NOT AGAINST MOAV

In this *parsha* G-d commands Moshe to take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites. The commentators are all puzzled by the fact that Moshe is not commanded to take vengeance against the Moabites when it was the Moabite women who seduced the Jewish men into intimate immorality and idolatry.

Abarbanel explains that the Midianites were actually the instigators. He explains that Bilaam, after having failed to curse the Children of Israel, passed through Midian and advised them that the only way to bring about the downfall of the Jewish nation was through seduction. Bilaam remained in Midian in order to work out a plan. The Midianites gave their daughters free rein to encourage *Klal Yisrael* to transgress. Since the Jewish People had no quarrel with the Moabites, and had actually been instructed not to distress them or provoke war with them, the Midianite women were able to disguise themselves as Moabites and were able to circulate among the Jews, ostensibly selling them food and other supplies. Thus, when the Torah states in Parshat Balak, "Israel settled in Sheetim and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moab" — they were actually involved with Midianite women.

Abarbanel offers another possible explanation. When the

Torah states that "the people *began* to commit harlotry" it is referring to the idea that the Moabite women acted first, and when the Midianite women saw that the men were vulnerable they decided to use such seduction as a means to entice them to idolatry as well. This is why taking vengeance referred to Midian alone, as the Torah states in Parshat Pinchas, "Harass the Midianites and smite them, for they harassed you through their conspiracy that they conspired against you in the matter of Peor (the idol the Jews were enticed to worship)." The Moabite women caused the men to give in to their physical desires, but the Midianite women enticed them to commit idolatry, a much more serious and damaging transgression.

According to both explanations, however, the Midianite women were clearly guilty of bringing about both immorality and idolatry. This is reflected in Moshe's charge to the people after G-d had instructed him to "take vengeance for the *Jewish People* against the Midianites." When he instructs the people, however, he tells them: "Arm men from among yourselves, that they may be against Midian to inflict G-d's vengeance against Midian." The vengeance for intimate immorality belongs to the people, but the vengeance for idolatry belongs to G-d.

Masei

WHY THE ENCAMPMENTS ARE REPEATED

This *parsha* begins with a listing of the nation's encampments during the forty-year sojourn in the Sinai desert. Since each of these encampments had already been mentioned previously, Abarbanel questions the necessity of mentioning them again in this *parsha*. Abarbanel cites several reasons for G-d's commandment to Moshe to repeat the list of encampments.

Firstly, the listing is a demonstration of G-d's kindness to the nation, in that during the entire forty-year period there were only forty-two encampments. The nation was not required to be constantly on the move.

Secondly, G-d wanted to emphasize that the Sinai desert that they encountered in their travels was unlike other desert environments which can support human habitation either because they are close to settled areas or have sources of water which can also support agriculture. Later on, in Sefer Devarim, Moshe emphasizes this point, "...the L-rd, your G-d... who leads you through the great and awesome wilderness of snake, fiery serpent and scorpion, and thirst where there was no water." (Devarim 8:15).

Thirdly, since each and every one of these places was utterly barren and uninhabitable, it was only due to G-d's miraculous Divine intervention that such a large population of men, women and children could be sustained for such a long period of time. The prophet Jeremiah succinctly describes this miraculous reality, "...G-d... Who brought us up from the land of Egypt, Who led us into the wilderness, in a land of desert and pit, in a land of waste

and a shadow of death, in a land through which no man passed and where no person settled (Jeremiah 2, 6)".

Finally, by repeating the list of the encampments the Torah is hinting at G-d's presence throughout the various sojourns of the Jewish People in their future exiles. As the prophet Micah states, "As in the days you left the land of Egypt, I will show it wonders (Micha 7:15)." Furthermore, just as when they were taken out of Egypt they were brought into the wilderness, so too Yechezkel prophesies that in the final redemption from exile G-d says, "I will take you out from the nations and gather you from the lands to which you were scattered, with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath, and I will bring you to the 'Wilderness of the Nations', and I will contend with you there, face to face; just as I contended with your forefathers in the wilderness of Egypt (Yechezkel 20:35-36)."

This may explain the repetitious phrase at the beginning of the *parsha*, "...and these were their journeys according to their goings forth" — i.e. "from their final exile." Another interpretation is that the phrase "their goings forth" could refer to the generations to come in the exile. Sometimes they will follow the crooked path — symbolized by the encampment at Marah (bitterness) — and sometimes they will follow the straight path — symbolized by the encampment at Mitkah (sweetness). This summarizes the experience of the Jewish People while they are in the "Wilderness of the Nations."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

From: Brian

*Dear Rabbi,
I am not quite convinced that it really matters to G-d whether we eat kosher or not and whether eating kosher really has an effect on us that would be different than eating non-kosher food. Any thoughts you might have to share with me would be much appreciated.*

Dear Brian,

When G-d addresses diet in the Torah, greatly elaborating on the types of foods we may eat and under what conditions we can consume them, it's because it really does matter to Him.

However, I assume you mean to question what good our keeping kosher does for Him. That's a valid question. And the answer is: It's not for Him; it's for us.

In the realm of physical health, the adage "You are what you eat" makes perfect sense. Indisputably, the quality and quantity of foods we eat has a direct effect on our physical well-being.

The same applies in the realm of spiritual health. Just as every food has a unique nutritional value, lack thereof or even danger, so foods can either contribute to one's spiritual well-being, have little or no effect, or be outright harmful.

Yet long before the above-mentioned adage, our Sages taught that the G-d-given kosher laws prohibiting many of the things humans generally eat, or at least are not particular to avoid, or proscribing specific requirements beyond which most people are concerned, are designed to engender and maintain spiritual sensitivity and sensibility.

Thus, the Torah verse forewarning us from eating non-kosher food and thereby rendering ourselves "impure" (Lev. 11:43) is simultaneously understood to mean not only "impure" but also "occluded". Eating non-kosher food makes one spiritually course (Yoma 39a).

There was once a man who was collecting charity for a certain cause. He arrived at the office of a particular community leader and noticed there was only one picture on the wall of a particular saintly rabbi. The man asked why there was only one such picture, and why that specific rabbi. The man behind the desk replied with a story:

Before the War (WWII), a certain Jewish family in Hungary strayed away from the traditional Jewish community. Eventually, their cherished son was accepted to the University, becoming the pride of the family and expression of the measure of their "success" in assimilation. While away at school, the son strayed even further from his Jewish roots until he completely departed from observing Shabbat and the dietary laws.

After finally returning home for a visit, he was estranged from the "boredom" of Shabbat, until on Saturday night, with nothing else to do, he wandered into the local shul where a festive "Melave Malka" – celebration extending the Shabbat into Saturday night – was taking place. Despite his initial apprehension, he ended up enjoying the traditional Jewish food, music, dancing and Torah discussions that continued till morning.

The next day, he found that he was unable to eat, which continued through the coming days. His family, justifiably alarmed, took him to a particularly renowned doctor who could find no source for the ailment, but could only suggest that it had something to do with the food the young man last ate.

When the family found out that their son had last eaten at the grand Melave Malka, they immediately took him to the rabbi, accusing him of poisoning their son. The rabbi noted that hundreds of people attended the celebration, and none became ill. He then ordered food to be brought before the young man, who, at his parents' great surprise and relief, began to eat.

The rabbi exclaimed, "You see, your son is cured! Not that he was ill before you brought him here, but rather he was ill before he first arrived. But since then he's been cured of the non-kosher foods and habits he's indulged in, which, after having partaken of the holy, kosher food here, he's no longer able to stomach. If you want him to eat, then give him kosher food!"

Having finished his story, the man behind the desk meaningfully leaned toward his inquisitive guest and whispered with great emotion, "The young man was my father; he is the rabbi who is pictured on the wall, and regarding your question, 'Why him and only him?' Because thanks to him, and only him, I am here and who I am today!"

TRIBESMEN STICK TOGETHER

This week's installment features two words which are not only synonyms, but also homonyms. The word *mateh* sometimes means "tribe" (almost exclusively in Numbers and Joshua) and its plural form serves as the namesake for *Parshat Matot*. However, another word for "tribe" in Hebrew is *shevet* (or *shevatim* in plural). Moreover, both *mateh* and *shevet* share an alternate meaning: they both mean "stick". Other words for sticks are *mishenet*, *makel*, *sharvit*, and *choter*. In this essay, we will discuss the different words for sticks in Hebrew and highlight their differences in connotation. Then, using some of that data we will be able to understand the connection between sticks and tribes, which will help us discern the difference between the two synonyms for "tribe".

Malbim (to Jeremiah 1:11) says that the word *mateh* denotes a stick held by a dignitary, which demonstrates the honor due to him by showing his exalted status. *Mishenet* is a walking stick upon which an elderly person can lean (*mishan* means "lean" or "rely"); in other words, a cane. *Makel* is a rod used for hitting. In the Bible it generally appears in the context of a shepherd who hits the animals in his charge. (The word *makel* is probably related to the Hebrew word *malkot/makkot*, which means "lashes").

Rashi (to Sanhedrin 5a) writes that the word *shevet* denotes the authority and the associated responsibility. In the context of law, the *shevet* or *shotim* is the instrument used for flogging those whose offenses deserve such punishment. Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) explains that these terms originally referred to a stick used for hitting animals, and only refer to hitting people as a borrowed usage. The Vilna Gaon (1720-1797) writes that both a *mateh* and *shevet* are used for hitting, but differ slightly: to hit with a *mateh* one only needs to raise one's hand a bit in order for the impact to be felt, while to hit with a *shevet* one must wind up one's hit with energy for the impact to be felt. The word *sharvit* appears in the Scroll of Esther as the royal scepter held by the Persian king Ahasuerus. Some explain that *shevet* and *sharvit* refer to the same object, but that sometimes the Bible adds extra *r*-sounds to words (just as the Bible generally calls the ancient Syrian city Damascus *Damesek*, but sometimes calls it *Darmesek*).

Similarly, Rabbi Wertheimer explains that *mateh* denotes a stick held by a person in a position of authority. Of all the characters in the Bible who carried a stick, only Moshe's stick is called a *mateh* because he held a certain degree of authority unparalleled by any other Jewish leader on account of his dual role as a prophet and a king. Moreover, Rabbi Wertheimer argues that the word *mateh* is related to the Hebrew word *mateh* ("inclined") and refers to the curvature at the top of the stick used for gripping the object. He also explains that *mateh* and *makel* are only made from wood, while *shevet* can be made from wood or metal (see Psalms 2:9 which refers to an iron *shevet*). Indeed, Rabbi Yehuda ibn Kuraish (a ninth century Spanish grammarian) writes that the word *mateh* is specifically a stick made out of dry wood (although rabbinic tradition teaches that Moshe's *mateh* was made of blue rock — either sapphire or lapis lazuli). According to Rabbi Wertheimer, a *mishenet* is also made of wood, but must be an especially thick branch because a mere twig cannot support a walker.

The word *choter* is probably a Hebraized form of the Aramaic word *chutra* (which the Targumim use for translating *mateh* and *shevet* into Aramaic).

Rabbi Wertheimer explains in the name of Rabbi Yaakov Lorberbaum of Lissa (1760-1832) that the three words have different connotations. The word *makel* has a bad connotation (as it is generally associated with the meting out of punishment), the word *mishenet* has a good connotation (as it helps support an elderly person in walking), and the word *mateh* has a neutral connotation. With this, Rabbi Wertheimer explains why the staff with which Moshe performed miracles in Egypt and on the Red Sea is called a *mateh*: because the effects of his staff were positive for the Jews, but negative for the Egyptians, the Bible uses the word *mateh* which neither implies something positive nor negative.

Citing an explanation from Rabbi Shmuel Dovid Luzzatto (1800-1865), Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) writes that the words *shevet* and *mateh* actually have different meanings, but because they are conceptually related they became interchangeable. He explains that the word *shevet* originally referred to the leader of a tribe, while *mateh* originally referred to the other members of a tribe. The leader of a tribe is similar to a mast upon which a flag is mounted because all of the members of the tribe rally around the leader. In this way the word for a leader of a tribe is homonymous with the word for stick. Since all the members of a tribe are united behind their leader, references to them can be subsumed under the word used for the leader. Thus, the word *shevet* also came to mean members of a tribe because the leader of the tribe embodies the entire tribe itself. In terms of sticks, he argues that *shevet* and *mateh* can both refer to the exact same type of stick, but they refer to different parts of the stick. The word *shevet* refers to the top of the stick (just as the leader sits atop the hierarchal structure of a tribe), while the word *mateh* — seemingly related to the Hebrew word *lematah* (underneath) — refers to its bottom (just as the other members of the tribe live under the leadership of their clan chief).

Malbim (to Gen. 49:28) writes that the word *shevet* does not literally mean "stick", rather it means "branch," which was the most common item used as a stick. Based on this, he explains that *shevet* means branch and tribe because each of the Tribes of Israel is simply a branch of the greater family tree of Jacob's descendants.

Using the synonyms in question as a springboard for discussion, Rabbi Zev HaKohen Hoberman (1930-2012) sums up the dual role assumed by the Tribes of Israel. On the one hand, they are called *shevatim* because G-d has granted them certain forms of authority and responsibility over the nations of the world. Yet, paradoxically, they are also called *matot* (which he equates with the words *mishenet* and *chutra*) because they serve as Jacob's "cane" in death, upon whom he "leans" to carry on his legacy. In that way they are not autonomous, but simply follow the tradition of their illustrious forefather. Now you can re-read the title of this article and appreciate the pun.

Author's note:

Le'Zechut Refuah Shleimah for Bracha bat Chaya Rachel

LIFE CAN CHANGE ON A PRAYER

Above the Stars

In *parshat Lech Lecha* G-d tells Avraham to “Go outside” and see the stars. According to midrashic interpretation, G-d said to Avraham, “Go out from your astrology” — meaning, “Abandon your astrological calculations that you have seen by the signs of the zodiac, which indicate that you are not destined to bear a son.” (Gen. 15:5 and Rashi)

Based on the above, the Talmud explains that through prayer the Jewish People Avraham’s descendants also rise above the stars which can affect their destiny. Avraham and Sarah were barren, yet they prayed to G-d and were blessed with a son. Yitzchak also prayed, and a barren Rivka conceived. Through the power of prayer we too can merit to see miracles (see Rashi to Shabbat 156a).

How amazing it is to know that each of us has within ourselves a power so strong that nothing can stop it — except ourselves that is. How do we stop it? By not using it. Prayer is a great gift. It is as if G-d Himself is telling each one of us: “Pray to Me from your heart and I will listen, just as a loving father does to his child.” When it comes to prayer, the service of the heart, we all are qualified. Scholar and child, righteous and wicked, we all have a voice.

In fact, in the moment of prayer even a wicked person can be uplifted and transformed. King Menasheh, one of the

most wicked people who ever lived, guilty of the most severe sins against G-d, was taken captive. In an attempt to escape a violent and painful death he prayed to all of the false gods that he worshiped, without being answered. With no other option he decided to pray to G-d. Through his prayer he was not only rescued through an open miracle, but according to Rabbi Yehuda he was also granted a place in the World-to-Come. We see that the power of prayer can break all boundaries.

Persistence in Prayer

The Midrash relates the great power of persistent prayer. G-d says: Even if a person is not worthy enough to have his prayer answered and to receive kindness, yet if he prays increasingly, with many supplications, I will act kindly towards him. For it is written, “All of the ways of G-d are kindness.” (Midrash Tanchuma, Vayera 1)

Rabbi Yehudah HaChassid echoes this idea: Sometimes a person isn’t worthy for G-d to accept his prayers. Yet, through the power of his abundant prayers and much weeping, beseeching G-d for mercy, even though he lacks merit and good deeds, G-d may accept his prayers and grant his requests. (Sefer Chassidim 130)

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

“EVEN SHATIYA” — WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

In the Holy of Holies in the Beit Hamikdash there was a stone called *Even Shatiyah* (Foundation Stone) on which rested the Holy Ark. Even after the Ark was removed, the stone was the surface upon which



incense was offered on Yom Kippur.

Rabbi Yossi explains the name given to this stone: “It was from this stone that the universe was founded.”

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Ohr LaGolah Program graduate, 2017

The Gemara Berachot 35b says: Rabbah bar Bar Chana said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan who said in the name of Rabbi Yehuda ben Illa'i: "See how the later generations are not like the earlier ones. The earlier generations made the Torah their main focus and their work secondary, and they were successful in both. The later generations made their work primary and their Torah study secondary, and were successful in neither."

Upon meeting Rabbi Simi Lerner one can easily understand why he chose to become a licensed electrician. He is bursting with an electric energy that needs to be channeled. One can equally understand why he decided to make his main focus Torah and to become a Rabbi and teacher — his love for Torah and the Jewish People. In this way he is successful in both.

Simi grew up in Edgware in London, a part of the city with a large and vibrant Orthodox community. He went to Torah Temima Primary school and then to Menorah for high school — schools for the *yeshivische* community. After high school he came to Jerusalem to continue Torah study. He spent his first year at Ateres Yerushalayim in the Ramot neighborhood and then five years in Medrash Shmuel in Rechavia. In between these two yeshivas he went back to England to take the exams to become a licensed electrician. Upon returning to Israel he obtained his Israeli license as well.

He married his wife, Rivka from Zurich, Switzerland, and spent another year in the Kollel of Medrash Shmuel. During this time he read a number of *sefarim* by Rabbi Dovid

Sachter, a rebbe at Diaspora Yeshiva in the Old City, and spent the next two years learning with him. He got *smicha* during this time.

Although his schedule was very busy, he has found time to practice his vocation during *bein hasedarim*, the hours between the morning and the afternoon learning sessions in yeshiva, thereby fulfilling what Shammai says in Pirkei Avot 1:15: "Make your Torah study your main focus", and as the Rambam holds in Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:7: "Make your work secondary, and your Torah study a fixed matter."

Simi has been an avid student of Rav Samson Rafael Hirsch for many years, reading most of what the Rav wrote, along with studying the writings of his students. Recently Simi started a podcast at ravhirsch.org. Every week he gives a ten-minute *shiur* on some topic discussed by Rav Hirsch on the *parsha*. Enjoying the interaction with the listeners to his podcast, Simi has broadened his horizons and has accepted a position as a rabbi and teacher with JLE

London, a very successful *kiruv* center originally established by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, and very ably run by Rabbi Danny Kirsch, a former *talmid* of Ohr Somayach Yeshiva in Jerusalem. His main responsibilities will be to give *shiurim* on campuses in the London area and in "The Centre" in Golders Green.

Of his experience in the Hertz Institute of Ohr LaGolah at Ohr Somayach, Simi says: "The teachers are amazing with a wealth of knowledge. I'm everlastingly grateful to them and to Ohr Somayach for my education."



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