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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Understanding the Times

“And he named him Yissaschar...” (30:18)

When you close your eyes and think of Chanuka, what comes to mind? The lights of the menorah; the dreidel spinning; the aroma of latkes and donuts.

And of course, the sound of “*Maoz Tzur*.”

In that beautiful stirring Chanuka song, we sing of the *Bnei Bina*, the “*Children of Understanding*.” Who were those children and what was it that they understood?

On the festival of Lag B’Omer there is a widespread custom to shoot arrows from a bow and arrow. The symbol of the month of Kislev, the current month, is the bow (*Sagittarius, The Archer*). What is the connection between the bow of Lag B’Omer and the bow of Kislev?

Lag B’Omer commemorates the passing of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. On that day, before he left this world, Rabbi Shimon revealed much of the Torah’s hidden light. The “bow and arrow” symbolizes this revelation. How? White light seems indivisible, inscrutable. No detail can be discerned in its pure whiteness. The bow of the rainbow, however, reveals the secret anatomy of white light. It shows us how white light is really composed of all the colors.

Just as the rainbow reveals the hidden colors within the white light, so Rabbi Shimon revealed the hidden light within the Torah.

The most conspicuous event in the month of the bow, the month of Kislev, is Chanuka. Chanuka is the festival that celebrates the hidden light of the Torah. Yissaschar, the son of Yaakov most closely associated with Torah learning, was conceived on Chanuka and born on Shavuot. Birth is the ultimate revelation of the hidden. Just as the conception of life is something that only makes itself manifest after the fact, so Yissaschar’s entrance into this world connects the hidden and the revealed – the hidden light of Chanuka with its revelation on Mount Sinai on Shavuot.

Those “*children of understanding*” of whom we sing on Chanuka are Yissaschar’s children, who understood and inherited this connection of Chanuka to Shavuot. This is why the Book of Chronicles calls them “*men with understanding of the times*,” for they understood how the connection of those two times – Chanuka and Shavuot – are the link between the hidden and the revealed Torah.

• Source: *B’nei Yissaschar*

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Vayeitzei: Nidah 37-43

The Rabbi Asks You

A man asked Rava, "Is it permitted to circumcise on Shabbat?"

Naturally, Rava replied in the affirmative to this seemingly innocuous question. The Torah states that the mitzvah of *brit milah* is to be done on "the eighth day" of the child's life, which our Sages teach to mean that it is done "even on Shabbat."

It appeared that this was a straightforward case of "question asked, question answered." However, Rava suspected that there was more to the matter than the asker had presented in the question. "Is it possible that the man didn't know that the mitzvah of *brit milah* is fulfilled even on Shabbat?" Rava asked rhetorically. Rava decided to find out more, and went out to find the man who had just left.

"Please tell me the exact circumstances regarding the birth of the child whose mitzvah of *brit milah* you just now asked me about," Rava said. The man replied, "Although my son was born on Shabbat, I actually heard the baby's cry from inside his mother on Friday afternoon before Shabbat." (For some unknown reason, the man omitted this detail when he first asked Rava his question.)

Upon hearing this additional factor of the baby's cry on Friday afternoon, Rava issued a new ruling. He explained that in this case, following the clarification, the baby had reached a point in the birth before Shabbat which already constituted "birth." Only a *brit milah* that is fulfilled on the day called "*b'zmana*" – literally, "in its time," i.e. on exactly the eighth day from birth – is able to be fulfilled even on Shabbat. "However, in your case," said Rava, "doing the *brit milah* on Shabbat would be considered 'not in its time' and the rule is that 'any *milah* not done in its time may not be done on Shabbat."

It appears that Rava, in his great wisdom, and with the *nuach hakodesh* in his heart, understood that there was additional pertinent information regarding the case than was initially provided by the new father. He therefore pursued the asker for more details. As the sage Rav Dimi from Haifa taught, "From the day of the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, although prophecy was taken from the prophets, it was not taken from the Torah scholars." (*Bava Batra 12a*)

We see how great and how difficult is the challenge to properly answer a question regarding halacha. This is so when the answerer is an expert in Torah law and the asker is present and able to readily provide any needed follow-up information. But how much more is this challenge amplified when the asker is not present, and asks the question through a messenger or via a written letter – the methods we find in countless Responsa that we find in a myriad of *sefarim* by great halachic authorities throughout history! (These Responsa of halachic questions and answers are known as *shoo"tim*, the acronym for *sheilot v'teshuvot*.)

This is no less true for a modern method of asking questions about Torah topics and halacha in our time – by email to a specific Rabbi or to a supervised "Ask the Rabbi" service provided by a Torah organization. This is simply a modern twist on an established practice. Of course, ideally one should pose any question face-to-face to a local halachic authority, but this is not always possible. One may be living in a place where there is no such authority, or, for personal reasons, would not ask the question without the anonymity provided by this medium. A Rabbi available from an "Ask the Rabbi" service is one's only Rabbi in such a case.

The case in our *gemara* where Rava deduced that an unasked question was actually the intended question, reminds me of a story I once heard from Rav Mendel Weinbach, *zatzal*. A great Torah scholar from the previous century was given a chicken by a child on behalf of his mother to check whether or not it was kosher. The Rabbi examined the chicken and didn't find even the smallest sign of doubt that might call into question its *kashrut* status. He subsequently told the child to please return home to fetch the other chicken from his mother. When the child reached his mother and told her what the Rabbi had said, she said, "Oy vey!" It clicked with her that she had in fact sent the wrong chicken to the Rabbi for checking. When she sent the second, correct chicken, it indeed was ruled to be not kosher. The Rabbi had followed in the footsteps of Rava, understanding what the true question was, and his great Torah wisdom resulted in preventing a Jewish family from eating non-kosher.

• *Nidah 42b*

Questions

1. When Yaakov traveled to Charan, the Torah stresses that he departed from Be'er Sheva. Why?
2. On the night of his dream, Yaakov did something he hadn't done in 14 years. What?
3. G-d compressed the entire Land of Israel underneath the sleeping Yaakov. What did this symbolize?
4. Yaakov said "I will return with *shalom*." What did he mean by "*shalom*"?
5. Why did Yaakov rebuke the shepherds?
6. Why did Rachel, and not her brothers, tend her father's sheep?
7. Why did Yaakov cry when he met Rachel?
8. Why did Lavan run to greet Yaakov?
9. Why were Leah's eyes tender?
10. How old was Yaakov when he married?
11. What did Rachel find enviable about Leah?
12. Who was Yaakov's fifth son?
13. Who was Leah's handmaiden? Was she older or younger than Rachel's handmaiden?
14. How do you say *dudaim* in Arabic?
15. "G-d remembered Rachel." (30:22) What did He remember?
16. What does "Yosef" mean? Why was he named that?
17. G-d forbade Lavan to speak to Yaakov "either of good or of bad." Why didn't G-d want Lavan to speak of good?
18. Where are there two Aramaic words in this week's Parsha?
19. Who was Bilhah's father? Who was Zilpah's father?
20. Who escorted Yaakov into *Eretz Yisrael*?

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

Answers

1. 28:10 - The departure of a righteous person leaves a noticeable void in that place.
2. 28:11 - Sleep at night lying down.
3. 28:13 - That the Land would be easy for his descendants to conquer.
4. 28:21 - Completely without sin.
5. 29:7 - He thought they were loafing, stopping work early in the day.
6. 30:27 - Her brothers weren't born yet.
7. 29:11 - He saw prophetically that they would not be buried together; or because he was penniless.
8. 29:13 - He thought Yaakov was carrying money.
9. 29:17 - She cried continually because she thought she was destined to marry Esav.
10. 29:21 - Eighty-four.
11. 30:1 - Her good deeds, thinking they were the reason Leah merited children.
12. 30:5 - Dan.
13. 30:10 - Zilpah. She was younger.
14. 30:14 - Jasmine (*Yasmin*).
15. 30:22 - That Rachel gave Leah the "signs of recognition" that Yaakov had taught her, so that Leah wouldn't be embarrassed.
16. 30:24 - "Yosef" means "He will add." Rachel asked G-d for another son in addition to Yosef.
17. 31:24 - Because the "good" that comes from wicked people is bad for the righteous.
18. 31:41 - *Yagar Sahaduta*, meaning "wall of testimony."
19. 31:50 - Lavan.
20. 32:1 - The angels of *Eretz Yisrael*.

ASK!

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G-d in the Workplace

Mike wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

So, as I sit down at my desk and start the workday, is there a prayer I should be saying right then? How does a person bring Hashem to work, so to speak?

Dear Mike,

What an interesting question, and one that everyone should really ask himself!

Working gives you a chance to do countless mitzvahs and good deeds: keeping your word to employers, employees and clients, paying workers on time, treating fellow workers with respect, fulfilling obligations to support your family, contributing to the good of society. These

are all important parts of Jewish law that you can fulfill at work.

And simply supporting oneself is a mitzvah because it helps eliminate temptation to steal.

To paraphrase the words of our Sages, it is possible for a shoe-maker to stitch every stitch “in the Name of Hashem.” And the Talmud says, “Work is great because it brings honor to the one who does it.”

So, approach your work as an opportunity to serve Hashem by doing all that is required according to Jewish law, and pray for success in this goal.

And, above all, if you set aside time to study Torah in the course of your busy schedule (not at your employers' expense!), it is possible to elevate the mundane workday to a spiritual plane.

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Riddle

What mitzvah applies only to someone who is sitting, reclining, or lying down?

Answer

Standing up in honor of a Torah Scholar or an elderly person (“*Lifnei seivah takum, v'hadarta p'nei zakein...*” You shall rise before an elderly person, and honor the

presence of a sage.” – Leviticus 19:32)

Explanation: If a person is already standing when an elderly person enters the room, he should remain standing, and not sit down in order to stand up. If you will ask about the mitzvah of eating matzah on the first night(s) of Pesach, which needs to be done while reclining – the mitzvah of eating matzah applies even to one who is standing. This means that the standing person should first sit, then recline and only afterwards eat the matzah.

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WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language
by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

The Ovine and Caprine Families

The Bible uses fifteen or so different words to refer to sheep (ovines) and goats (caprines). Some are used exclusively for sheep, others for goats, and yet others for both species indiscriminately or collectively (known as “ovacaprines”). Some words denote specific genders or ages, while others are more general. In this essay we will clarify the differences in usage between all these words.

The word *seh* is a gender-neutral term that refers to a young goat or sheep. The Torah often uses the word *seh* in conjunction with a more specific word that denotes whether the animal is a sheep or a goat (see Ex. 12:5 Num. 15:11, Deut. 14:4).

Like *seh*, the word *tzon* is also a general term which refers to both goats and sheep, most commonly to an entire flock or herd. Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) traces the root of *tzon* to the letter TZADI, which means “goes out.” This refers to the fact that, in contrast to other domesticated animals, the dainty ovacaprines tend to always “go out” of the barn even in the winter (while the heavier bovines tend to stay inside when it is cold).

An adult female goat – sometimes known in English as a nanny goat or she-goat – is called an *eiz* (or *izzim* in plural). The Hebrew word *eiz* is related to the Arabic word for goat, *enzu* (with the NUN dropped in Hebrew, as often happens). Rabbi David Ibn Zimra (1479-1589) writes that unless an exact age is specified, the term *eiz* can refer to any female goat from the age of eight days until two years.

Rabbi Pappenheim traces the word *eiz* to the two-letter root AYIN-ZAYIN, which refers to something “stable, unchanging, unwavering.” Derivatives of this root include *azut* (“brazenness,” i.e. unwilling to compromise) and *oz* (“strength,” which allows something to withstand all opposition). In that spirit, he explains that goats are called *izzim* because their unbendable legs provide stable footing, enabling them to jump and climb with ease.

A *tayish* is an adult male goat, sometimes called a billy goat or buck in English. Rabbi Pappenheim traces the root of the word *tayish* to TAV-SHIN, which means “weakening.” For example, the word *netishah* (“abandonment”) refers to the weakening of a bond, *tash/tashash* refers to the “weakening” of energy, and a *yatush* (“fly”) is the weakest of all creatures. Accordingly, a he-goat is called a *tayish* because it is so strong that it is the polar opposite of “weakness.”

There are two words used for young goats: The word *gedi/gediya* refers to a kid until the age of one, while *seir/seirah* refers to young goats of all ages. Abarbanel (Lev. 16:5) writes that *seir* is related to *tzair* (“young”), while Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (Deut. 32:2) connects *seir* to *se’ar* (“hair”) because young goats are hairy. The word *tzfir* (Dan. 8:8, 8:21) is Aramaic for *seir*.

[One version of Maimonides (Laws of *Maaseh HaKorbanot* 1:14) maintains that *seir* specifically refers to a young goat in its second year (see Rashi to *Menachot* 91b), and is the only term for such a beast, while the other version maintains that the only term is *seir izzim* (see *Aruch HaShulchan HeAsid* for more about this point)].

Segueing to the ovine (sheep) family, the word *rachel* refers to an adult female sheep – known in English as a *ewe*. The Hebrew word *rachel* is related to the Akkadian *lahru* by metathesis (i.e. the Akkadian word uses the same consonants as the Hebrew word but in reverse order). Rashi (*Menachot* 107b) explains that a *rachel* refers to a ewe in its second year of life or older.

According to the Mishna (*Menachot* 13:7), the *rachel*’s male counterpart is the *ayil* (“ram,” *eilim* in plural). Another Mishna (*Parah* 1:3) explains that the term *ayil* refers to a male sheep that is more than a month into its second year. Rabbi Pappeneim traces the word *ayil* to the biliteral root ALEPH-LAMMED which means “powerful,” because the ram is the strongest, most powerful type of sheep (which otherwise tend to be weak and flimsy livestock).

Sometimes, Rabbinic literature refers to the “ram” as a *zachar shel rechalim*, literally “a male of the ewes” (*Parah* 3:3, *Bechorot* 5:3, *Bava Kama* 50a, *Yevamot* 121b). The difference between this term and the term *ayil* is not readily apparent. Rabbi Yisrael David Miller of Grodno (1839-1913) suggests that the Rabbis sometimes use this term instead of *ayil* when the

reader might otherwise confuse the word *ayil* with *ayal* (“deer” or “hart”). Others have suggested differentiating between a castrated and an uncastrated ram.

The Talmud (*Rosh Hashana* 26a) points out that the word *yovel* also means “ram,” and was borrowed to also mean a ram’s horn (Josh. 6:4-5), as well the fiftieth year – the *jubilee*, an English word derived from the Hebrew *yovel* – when such a horn is blown.

A young sheep within its first year is called a *keves/kivshah* (*Parah* 1:3). The *Pesikta Rabbasi* expounds on the word *keves* as though it were related to *kevisah* (“washing,” “laundering”), alluding to the sacrificial lamb’s ability to wash away one’s sins.

However, in fourteen places the Torah uses the word *kesev/kisbah* instead of *keves/kivshah*. Ibn Parchon, Rabbi Yishaya of Trani, Radak, Ibn Ezra, and other authorities cite the case of *keves-kesev* as a quintessential example of metathesis, in which consonants switch their order in a word without changing the word’s meaning. In other words, they understand that *keves* and *kesev* mean the exact same thing. Nevertheless, the *Turei Zahav* (*Orach Chaim* §143:2) rules that if a Torah Scroll has *kesev* written in it instead of *keves* (or vice versa) – it is unfit.

Other commentators explain that there are subtle differences between *kesev* and *keves*. Some Tosafists (*Panaech Raza* and *Baal HaTurim* to Lev. 3:7; *Peirush HaRokeach* to Lev. 4:32) explain that *kesev* implies a bigger or older sheep than *keves*. Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (1816-1893) in *HaEmek Davar* (to Lev 1:10) also follows this approach. Others, including Rabbi Shmuel Strashun (1794-1872), the Malbim (1809-1879), and Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (1843-1926), take the slightly different approach that *keves* always implies a young ovine, while *kesev* is a more general term that can refer to sheep of all ages.

Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) writes that *keves* is related to the word for “washing” (like the Midrash cited above), while *kesev* is related to the word *kisah/mechusah* (“covered”), because sheep are *covered* in wool.

Another word for a young sheep is *tle/tleh*. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 30:32) writes that it does not only refer to a young lamb but can also refer to a young human (see Rashi to *Megillah* 5b), just as the English word *kid* means both “young goat” and “young child.”

Rabbi Pappenheim traces the root of *tleh* to TET-LAMMED, the same root as the word *tal* (“dew”). Dew is essentially water vapor accumulated in the air that became so heavy that gravity pulled it down. Similarly, explains Rabbi Pappenheim, a *tleh* is an animal/person who had recently been born, and whose weight when pulled by gravity helped open the cervix and facilitate the birthing process.

Rabbi Meir Mazuz derives from Scripture that the words *tleh* (young sheep) and *gedi* (young goat) refer specifically to young animals still nursing from their mother (see Ex. 23:19 and I Sam. 7:9).

Our last word to cover in this essay is the one whose meaning is most obscured: *atud*. As some commentators have it, the word *atud* denotes a he-goat that is bigger and stronger than usual (see Ibn Ezra to Num. 15:25 and Isa. 1:11). This word is especially used in reference to the male goat which leads the flock (Jer. 50:8). Interestingly, Targum Onkelos translates *atud* both as *tayish*, “adult male goat” (Gen. 31:10), and as *gedi*, “young goat” (Num 7:17). The *Peirush HaTur HaAruch* (Gen. 31:10) and Rabbi Yosef Chiyun (Ps. 50:13) explain that *atudim* are fattened *kevasim* (young sheep). Alternatively, Nachmanides (Gen. 31:10) argues that *atudim* are any adult male ovacaprines.

[Other words for fattened animals include *karim* (Deut. 32:14, Ezek 27:21, Jer. 51:40) which might refer specifically to male sheep, and *meri/meriim*, which Rashi (to Isa. 1:11) explains are fattened ovacaprines, while Ibn Ezra (there) claims are fattened bovines. Rabbi Pappenheim traces the root of *meri* to REISH-VAV, which means “quenching/satisfying,” while he traces the root of *karim* to KAF-REISH which denotes “digging,” as the borders of luscious pasture lands on which *karim* graze were demarcated with ditches.]

Quick Summary: Ovacaprines: *seh* = young ovacaprines; *tzon* = herd of ovacaprines; *atud* might be any goat, or extra-large adult goat, or fat young sheep, or any male ovacaprines. Caprines (goats): *eiz* (pl. *izzim*) = female, possibly only adult; *tayish* = adult male; *gedi*, *seir*, and *seir izzim* = young goats. Ovines (sheep/ram): *rachel* = adult female; *ayil* (pl. *eilim*), *zachar shel rechalim*, and *yovel* = adult male; *keves*, *kivshah*, and *tleh* = young sheep; *kesev* and *kisbah* = alternate terms for *keves* and *kivshah*, or imply older sheep, or might be general terms for sheep that do not imply any age.

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

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Fleeing from Esav, Yaakov leaves Be'er Sheva and sets out for Charan, the home of his mother's family. After a 14-year stint in the Torah Academy of Shem and Ever, he resumes his journey and comes to Mount Moriah, the place where his father Yitzchak was brought as an offering, and the future site of the Beit Hamikdash. He sleeps there and dreams of angels going up and down a ladder between Heaven and Earth. G-d promises him the Land of Israel, that he will found a great nation and that he will enjoy Divine protection. Yaakov wakes and vows to build an altar there and tithe all that he will receive.

Then he travels to Charan and meets his cousin Rachel at the well. He arranges with her father, Lavan, to work seven years for her hand in marriage, but Lavan fools Yaakov, substituting Rachel's older sister, Leah. Yaakov commits himself to work another seven years in order to also marry Rachel. Leah bears four sons: Reuven, Shimon,

Levi and Yehuda, the first Tribes of Israel. Rachel is barren, and in an attempt to give Yaakov children, she gives her handmaiden Bilhah to Yaakov as a wife. Bilhah bears Dan and Naftali. Leah also gives Yaakov her handmaiden Zilpah, who bears Gad and Asher. Leah then bears Yissaschar, Zevulun, and a daughter, Dina. Hashem finally blesses Rachel with a son, Yosef.

Yaakov decides to leave Lavan, but Lavan, aware of the wealth Yaakov has made for him, is reluctant to let him go, and concludes a contract of employment with him. Lavan tries to swindle Yaakov, but Yaakov becomes extremely wealthy. Six years later, Yaakov, aware that Lavan has become dangerously resentful of his wealth, flees with his family. Lavan pursues them but is warned by G-d not to harm them. Yaakov and Lavan agree to a covenant and Lavan returns home. Yaakov continues on his way to face his brother Esav.

LOVE OF THE LAND

The Choice: Wealth or Land?

When the Patriarch Yitzchak passed away, he left all his possessions to his two sons – Yaakov and Esav. “Let us divide everything our father left us into two parts,” proposed Esav, “and I will exercise my privilege as firstborn to choose the portion I favor.”

What did Yaakov do? He took all of the wealth that they had inherited from their father and made that one

portion. The other portion was Eretz Yisrael. Esav, of course, chose the wealth, while Yaakov happily took Eretz Yisrael with the Machpela Cave in it. This division was duly recorded and it was this document for which the sons of Yaakov sent a messenger to Egypt when Esav challenged their right to bury their father in that patriarchal burial cave.

audio@ohr.edu

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

Assets for Life, Assets for Nationhood

Yaakov flees from his livid, bloodthirsty brother Esav and arrives penniless in his mother's birthplace, the land of Aram. He has nothing but the shirt on his back and he is tasked with starting a life and family. In the first episode upon his arrival at the well, we learn of the assets which Yaakov drew upon to build his future.

When Yaakov approached the well, he noticed the flocks along with their shepherds gathered by the well. A heavy stone covered the well – so heavy that it required the collective effort of many shepherds to roll it off.

We might expect the cover of a communal well to be light for the convenience of the many people who need access to the well. But here – in Aram – people do not trust each other to take only their fair share of water. Hence, they made the cover so heavy that only in the presence of many and by a combined effort could the well be used. Yaakov's most conspicuous asset was his physical strength. What others could do only by combined effort, he did alone and without strain. This would prove a critical material asset and would enable him to work days and nights for 20 years in the home of Lavan.

The second asset revealed here is Yaakov's unshakable sense of justice and rectitude. Yaakov cannot tolerate

dereliction of duty. He chides the shepherds – complete strangers – whom he finds idly biding their time: *The day is yet young! It is not yet time that the 'property' [sheep] should be gathered in. Water the sheep and go, pasture them.* He cannot tolerate their shirking responsibility to the property owners. This trait, too, will serve Yaakov well under the most trying conditions of servitude in Lavan's home.

Third, Yaakov displays his enthusiastic work ethic and alacrity in action. He rushes to someone's aid, even where the matter does not affect him personally – a trait that we may not have expected of one who has been described until now as one who sits and studies in his tent.

Yaakov's personality – the seeds of the personality of the Jewish People – comes into view. This nation will be called on to represent with equal dignity the various material and spiritual pursuits of life. With *strength, integrity and industriousness*, the Jewish personality is forged.

- *Source: Commentary, Genesis 29:10-12*

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POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

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NEWMAN • Design: RABBI ELIEZER SHAPIRO z"l / DANIEL FREEDMAN

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Harry Rothenberg, Born and Raised: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Columbia University, BA: 1988, Harvard Law School, JD *Magna Cum Laude*: 1993
Yeshivat Ohr Somayach Jerusalem: 3 years
Partner at the Rothenberg Law Firm, LLP (InjuryLawyer.com), New York and New Jersey Super Lawyer

How do you become a very successful New York lawyer representing injury victims in high stakes litigation while simultaneously representing the Jewish People? If one were to take a recipe from Harry Rothenberg's "cookbook," it might read something like this:

1. Take one smart aleck Jewish kid.
2. Add a dash of chutzpah.
3. Add 10 years of a somewhat stifling Jewish Day School education, where, despite the best efforts of Rebbeim and teachers, the Hebrew subjects fail to inspire.
4. Add two years in an Ivy League college, beginning at age 16, with all the temptations that a good-looking, smart, adventurous and marginally religious kid might encounter.
5. Send him to Israel for a year, spent more often than not on the beach in Tel Aviv to bake in the sun and surf.
6. Shake well until brain is sufficiently addled.
7. Send him back to another Ivy League School to finish his undergraduate education.
8. Mix in three years at Yeshivat Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem.
9. Add in three years of Harvard Law School.
10. Add in a serious work ethic, thoroughness, organization, an additional dash of chutzpah and years of courtroom experience.

And if you're in a hurry and don't have so many years to spend cooking the "slow" way, skip steps 1-7 and just concentrate on steps 8 to 10. One might also substitute any decent law school for Harvard in step 9.

The Rothenberg Law Firm, which is now celebrating its 50th year in existence, is one of the leading plaintiffs' personal injury law firms. Harry's peers have consistently awarded him the distinction of "New York and New Jersey Super Lawyer" since 2008 and he has won many awards of seven and eight figures in the courtroom for his catastrophically injured clients. He heads the New York

office of his firm, and was recently in Jerusalem to celebrate the *bris* of his newest grandson. We caught up

with him while he was visiting the Ohr Somayach campus to speak at one of the student programs here.

Harry was born in Philadelphia, the first of eight children to his parents who are lawyers and founders of the Rothenberg Law Firm headquartered there. They are also staunch members of the Orthodox Jewish Community in that city.



He went to the local Orthodox day school where he excelled academically, but chafed at the strict rules and rote religious education.

After graduating high school at 16, he entered the University of Pennsylvania where he was one of the very few Jewish students who wore a yarmulke. The pull to conform is very strong in every teenager, and, in that respect, Harry was pulled in the direction of the vast majority of his fellows on campus. Although he resisted the temptation to spurn his heritage, he hung on to it by a thread. Not one inclined to do things by half-measures, at the end of his second year he made two decisions. One was that he would transfer to Columbia University, which had a stronger Orthodox community of students. And the second decision was to spend a year in Israel at a yeshiva and figure out if he should remain in the religious fold or not.

He was accepted to Columbia as a junior and postponed his admission for a year to learn in Jerusalem. After a few months in a yeshiva it was clear to him that he had chosen the wrong one. He switched to the American Program at Bar Ilan where he pursued an independent study of the flora and fauna of the Eastern Mediterranean shoreline, mainly at the beach in Tel Aviv. As one might imagine, that experience in Israel did little to strengthen his attachment to *halacha*.

He spent his last two years in college at Columbia, graduating in 1988. After receiving an acceptance to

Harvard Law School, Harry decided to give Yiddishkeit one more chance, and this time he picked Yeshivat Ohr Somayach as the venue. He managed to convince the Harvard Acceptance Committee to let him defer admission for one year and then for another year at the end of the first.

It would be an understatement to say that Ohr Somayach “blew him away.” On his first day at the Yeshiva, Rabbi Chaim Salenger, the dorm manager, told him that he was going to tell him the rules of the dorm. Harry steeled himself for the usual long list of “don’ts.”

“Rule number one,” Rabbi Salenger intoned: “No girls in the dorms.”

“Rule number two, no drugs.”

“And rule number three, no *chillul Shabbos b’farhesia* (public desecration of Shabbat) while on campus. We don’t want to make the other students feel uncomfortable.” Rabbi Salenger stopped talking.

Expecting about fifty pages worth of rules, Harry asked: “What about the other rules?”

“What other rules?”

“What about coming to *davening* on time? A dress code? Behavior off campus?”

“No other rules,” Rabbi Salenger responded.

“You mean that’s it? Three rules?”

“Yes. Listen; if we told you that you couldn’t do this or couldn’t do that, or you had to do this or that, when you went back home, would you continue keeping the rules?”

“No.”

“Precisely! What’s the point of giving you all sorts of rules if you won’t internalize them and live by them?”

And Harry was introduced to the Ohr Somayach theory of Jewish Education. It suited him perfectly.

Rabbi Bertman’s Gemara *shiur* was an eye-opener. It was fascinating. The Rebbe was brilliant and could answer any question thrown at him. Instead of the rote learning he experienced in day school, Gemara was now an intellectual challenge. He loved it.

The opportunity to attend *shiurim* and be mentored by world-class lecturers and role models such as the *Roshei Yeshiva* Rav Nota Schiller *shlita* and Rav Mendel Weinbach *z’tl*, along with Rabbi Dr. Dovid Gottlieb and Rabbi Dr. Akiva Tatz, was the opportunity of a lifetime.

Harry also met and gained immeasurably from Rabbi Mordechai Becher, with whom he now learns in Passaic, and with Rabbis Abraham Rockmill and Reuven Geffen, with whom he remains close.

But the Rebbe who really changed Harry’s life was Rav Uziel Milevsky *z’tl*. Rabbi Milevsky was an unparalleled teacher of Chumash and other classic texts. His classes were performances by a Master Teacher, whose ability to weave together *Tanach*, *Gemara*, *Midrash*, *halacha* and *tefilla* was astounding. Harry said that he couldn’t believe that this was the same *Chumash* he had learned in day school. He was so mesmerized by Rabbi Milevsky’s *shiurim* that he bristled when anyone interrupted to ask a question. “It was like attending the opera or a Broadway show. Would anyone dream of interrupting the performance to ask for clarification from the singers or to repeat a passage? I waited until after the *shiur* to ask my questions.”

He developed a strong bond with Rabbi Milevsky, visiting the Rav’s house for many Shabbos meals. He even named one of his sons after him, after Rabbi Milevsky passed from this world. Harry often quotes Rashi’s statement about Moshe and Yehoshua, that as long as a student is alive it is as if his Rebbe is still alive, and so Harry feels that his Rebbe is still by his side as he continues to teach his Torah.

After his second year at Ohr Somayach, Harry got married and started studies at Harvard Law School. People ask him if he was impressed by the professors there after spending two years at Ohr Somayach. “The professors I had at Harvard were outstanding, but never rose to the level of my Rebbeim at Ohr Somayach.”

After law school, Harry returned to Ohr Somayach for another year, this time living off campus with his wife and their first two children. During that year, Harry began teaching for the first time, inviting his football teammates on Jeff Seidel’s Hebrew University team over to his home for Shabbos meals and to Ohr Somayach to study. He then returned to New York and started a job at a corporate law firm. After three years, he joined the family practice, which has expanded greatly over the years. He and his wife moved to Passaic, NJ, where they are pillars of the Jewish community. His wife Amy is the General Studies Principal of the Bais Yaakov of Passaic there.

Apart from his busy and successful law practice, he has a few *chavrusos* for his daily learning, speaks to Jewish audiences all over the world, and films the popular “Harry’s Video Blog” featured on Ohr Somayach’s website (www.ohr.edu) and on The Ohr Somayach Podcast, a link to which can also be found on our website.



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