

# OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYIGASH • 7 TEVET 5780 JANUARY 4, 2020 • VOL. 27 NO. 10

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### The Sound Of Music

*"And they arose from Egypt and they came to the Land of Canaan to Yaakov their father." (45:25)*

In the 1960s a new form of advertising was discovered and made illegal almost immediately. Madison Avenue realized that flashing one single frame of an advertisement into a movie playing at 24 frames per second left a subliminal message imprinted on the mind of the viewer, a message of which he was totally unaware. Because of its extreme subtlety, the message managed to sneak under the defenses of the consumer and plant itself into his subconscious. Without knowing it, the next time he was shopping he had this overpowering attraction to buy FidoFeed over his usual brand of dog food.

In fact, Madison Avenue had invented nothing new, for they were merely applying a principle that was over three thousand years old.

In this week's Torah portion, Yosef's brothers return to their father Yaakov and have to tell him that Yosef is still alive. Naturally, they are concerned how to break the news. They feared that the shock of hearing that not only was Yosef alive but that he was now the ruler of Egypt might be too much for Yaakov. As they approached Yaakov's tent, they saw Serach, the daughter of Asher, coming out of the house to greet them. Serach was an extraordinary person, on a higher spiritual level than her contemporaries. She also played the harp beautifully.

They decided that the best way to break the news to Yaakov was for Serach to compose and play a beautiful song whose lyrics would say that Yosef was alive and well and living in Egypt. Then, with her harp, she would slip into her grandfather's tent and begin to play and sing.

Yaakov had never recovered from the imagined loss of Yosef, and was still in mourning till that moment when Serach began to sing. Softly she began, "My uncle Yosef is still alive; he is the ruler over Egypt." Serach's soothing music cocooned those highly-charged words. Yaakov imbibed the words, and the message, and blessed Serach: "Serach! You have revived my soul. May you live forever!" And, measure for measure, Serach's reward was that she lived until the reign of King David (another master of the harp) and was one of the few people to be taken to *Gan Eden* alive.

Music has charms to soothe a savage beast. It has the power to work on our emotions, to sneak below the level of the intellect and lodge its message in our subconscious. Before Yaakov could be shocked by the news that Yosef was alive, the message had already entered his consciousness subliminally, through the sound of music.

• Source: *Sefer Hayashar*

---

# TALMUD TIPS

---

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Vayigash: Nidah 65-73

### Recipe for Wisdom

*“What should a person do to become wise?”*

**T**his question is part of a *beraita*, and is one of twelve questions posed by the Jewish community of Alexandria to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya. The twelve questions were divided into four categories, and the question about wisdom was one of three pertaining to teaching a person how to act properly in the world.

Regarding the question about acquiring wisdom, he replied, “The person should spend much time studying Torah and only a relatively small amount of time in business matters necessary for sustenance.”

The Alexandrians persisted, “But many have done so and have not succeeded!”

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya explained, “Then he should pray that he be shown mercy by the One to Whom wisdom belongs.”

Based on the Sage’s two-part answer, the *gemara* asks why he first mentions the need for Torah study if wisdom ultimately depends on prayer. The *gemara* answers, “This without that is not sufficient.” Although prayer is certainly essential for wisdom, there needs to be a solid base of Torah study upon which one can grow in wisdom.

The Maharsha explains that the wisdom discussed in our *sugya* does not refer to “Torah wisdom” per se, but rather to what people call “intelligence” – the knowledge of dealing in a proper manner in one’s daily activities, although we are taught that a person’s intelligence is decreed from Above just prior to inception. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya is teaching us here that a person’s initial intelligence can be bolstered through Torah study and prayer.

Tosefot in Masechet Shabbat (156a) also teaches us this inspiring lesson. Despite Rava’s statement in Mo’ed Katan (28a) that “one’s children, life and sustenance are not dependent on merit but rather on *mazal*,” Rabbi Yochanan states in Shabbat that the Jewish People are above *mazal*. This means that they are not defined and restricted by the circumstances of a prenatal decree. Tosefot reconciles these two teachings: Although a person is born with certain “hardwired” traits and characteristics, he is able to surpass his natural limitations through great merit. From our *gemara* it appears that the “great merit” referred to by Tosefot is primarily achieved through Torah study and prayer.

• *Nidah 70b*

### Siyum HaShas: A Celebration for Everyone

**A**s we conclude the study of Masechet Nidah, we also participate in the Siyum HaShas festivities together with countless Daf Yomi participants worldwide. The completion of one Tractate is great cause for celebration – how much more so is the completion of the entire cycle of Shas, for the 13th time!

I have heard people ask: Is the Siyum HaShas celebration only for those people who actually studied every single page of the Talmud? Definitely not! It is an occasion for great *simcha* for the entire Jewish People. For those who have studied the more than 2,700 *daf* (two-sided pages) of the Gemara, as well as those who have not (yet). It is written in the name of the Gaon from Vilna that *everyone* should rejoice together when there is a *siyum* of any *mesechet*. How much more so when celebrating the *siyum* of the entire Shas!

According to the Gaon, this idea is hinted to in the Hebrew letters which spell the word *siyum*: *samech*, *yod*, *vav*, *mem*. If we look at each letter, we find that the *gematria* (numerical value) of the “hidden” part of the name of the letter is identical to the “revealed” part of the letter. For example: The revealed, spoken part of the letter *samech* is the “*samech* sound,” and is equal to 60. The hidden part, the remaining letters that spell *samech*, are *mem* and *chaf* – 40 and 20, which also add up to 60! And so on for each of the three remaining letters of the word for *siyum*. (*Yod* is spelled *yod*, *vav*, *dalet*; *vav* and *mem* need no math: *vav* and *vav*, *mem* and *mem*.)

This is a hint that the *simcha* of a *siyum* is shared by each and every member of the Jewish People. The “hidden parts” – those people not overtly completing the course of study – are *equal* with the “revealed parts” who have been actively engaged in this manner of Torah study. Even those not directly “making the *siyum*” share equally in the *simcha* of the completion of the study of a Tractate of the Torah or a Seder of the Mishna – or the entire Shas. All Jews have a share in the Torah!

So, whether or not you’ve completed the study of Shas this time around, we hope to see you at the Siyum HaShas, *iyH!* We wish a hearty “Mazal Tov” to all!

OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College

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

Love of the Land, written by RAV MENDEL WEINBACH, zt”l • General Editor: RABBI MOSHE

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

© 1992 - 2019 Ohr Somayach Institutions - All rights reserved • This publication contains words of Torah.

Please treat it with due respect. Editor’s disclaimer: Ohrnet Magazine is not intended to be a source for halachic rulings. In any real and specific case one should consult a qualified halachic authority for a ruling.

---

# Q & A

---

## Questions

1. What threatening words did Yehuda say to Yosef?
2. Why did Yehuda say his missing brother died?
3. Why was Yehuda the one to plead for Binyamin?
4. What do we learn from Yosef telling his brothers, "Go up to my father"?
5. What two things did the brothers see that helped prove that he was really Yosef?
6. Why did Binyamin weep on Yosef's neck?
7. Why did Yosef send old wine to Yaakov?
8. What did Yosef mean when he said, "Don't dispute on the way"?
9. What happened to Yaakov when he realized Yosef was alive?
10. Why did G-d tell Yaakov, "Don't fear going down to Egypt"?
11. "I will bring you up" from Egypt. To what did this allude?
12. What happened to the property that Yaakov acquired in Padan Aram?
13. Who was the mother of Shaul ben HaCanaanit?
14. When listing Yaakov's children, the verse refers to Rachel as "Rachel, wife of Yaakov." Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah are not referred to as Yaakov's wives. Why?
15. Yosef harnessed his own chariot instead of letting a servant do it. Why?
16. Why were shepherds abhorrent to the Egyptians?
17. Why did Yosef pick the weakest brothers to stand before Pharaoh?
18. What blessing did Yaakov give Pharaoh when he left his presence?
19. Yosef resettled the land of Egypt, moving the people from city to city. What were his two motives for this?
20. Whose fields were not bought by Yosef?

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

## Answers

1. 44:18 - He threatened that Yosef would be stricken with leprosy, like Pharaoh when he took Sarah from Avraham. Alternatively, Yehuda threatened to kill Yosef and Pharaoh.
2. 44:20 - Yehuda feared that if he said his missing brother was alive, Yosef would demand to see him.
3. 44:32 - He was the one who took "soul" responsibility for him.
4. 45:9 - We learn that *Eretz Yisrael* is higher than all other lands.
5. 45:12 - He was circumcised like they were, and he spoke *lashon hakodesh*.
6. 45:14 - Binyamin wept for the destruction of *Mishkan Shilo* built in Yosef's territory.
7. 45:23 - Elderly people appreciate old wine.
8. 45:24 - He warned that if they engage in halachic disputes, they might not be alert to possible travel dangers.
9. 45:27 - His *ruach hakodesh* (prophetic spirit) returned.
10. 46:3 - Because Yaakov was grieved to leave Eretz Canaan.
11. 46:4 - That Yaakov would be buried in Eretz Canaan.
12. 46:6 - He traded it for Esav's portion in the Cave of Machpelah.
13. 46:10 - Dina *bat* Yaakov.
14. 46:19 - Rachel was regarded as the mainstay of the family.
15. 46:29 - Yosef wanted to hasten to honor his father.
16. 46:34 - Because the Egyptians worshipped sheep.
17. 47:2 - So Pharaoh wouldn't see their strength and draft them.
18. 47:10 - That the waters of the Nile should rise to greet Pharaoh.
19. 47:21 - In order to remind them that they no longer owned the land, and to help his family by removing the stigma of being strangers.
20. 47:22 - The Egyptian priests.

---

# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

---

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language  
by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

## A Biblical Feast

According to the Midrashic works *Chuppas Eliyahu* and *Pirkei Rabbeinu HaKadosh*, there are eight Hebrew words for “food:” *ochel*, *dagan*, *shever*, *tevuah*, *tenuvah*, *yevul*, *bar*, and *mazon*. As we shall see in this essay, these words are not totally synonymous. Rather, some are more general words for “food,” while others are more specific types of “food.” Some words focus on certain aspects of “food,” while others focus on other aspects of “food.” Let’s begin.

*Ochel/maachal* is the most general of the words in question. Its root ALEPH-KAF-LAMMED refers to “eating,” and as such, *ochel* refers to anything which is “eaten.” Many grammarians have pointed out that this root does not just refer to “eating” but to any form of “consumption” or “destruction,” such as by fire (Ex. 3:2, 24:17) or sword (Deut. 32:42 and Jer. 46:10). In fact, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) actually traces *ochel* to the two-letter root KAF-LAMMED, which refers to utter destruction (*kilayon*).

*Mazon* is a bit less vague as it refers to a specific type of food (Gen. 45:23) – healthy food. That is, food which provides the “sustenance” that satisfies one’s bodily needs. Its root is either ZAYIN-NUN (according to Menachem Ibn Saruk and Rabbi Pappenheim) or ZAYIN-VAV-NUN (Ibn Chayyuj, Ibn Janach, and Radak), but all unanimously agree as to its general meaning.

The root of *yevul* is also subject to dispute, with some arguing that it is BET-LAMMED (Ibn Saruk and Rabbi Pappenheim), and others, that it is YUD-BET-LAMMED (Ibn Janach and Radak). Rabbi Pappenheim explains that BET-LAMMED refers to various forms of “decomposition” and offers two ways of fitting *yevul* into this definition: In *Yerios Shlomo* he explains that all produce is called *yevul* because the seeds “decompose” in order to give way to what grows from them. In *Cheshek Shlomo* he argues that especially perishable produce is called *yevul* because it can easily “decompose” if proper care is not taken.

Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) writes that *tevuah*’s root is BET-ALEPH, which means “coming/bringing,” and refers to any produce which “comes forth” from a seed or tree. The word *tevuah* was borrowed to refer to the results (i.e. “fruits”) of any action or behavior (e.g. Prov. 3:14, 18:20, 10:15). Rabbi Wertheimer notes that produce can be called *tevuah* even before it is fully ripe and even if it is still attached to the ground, as long as it is at least one-third mature (see the Jerusalem Talmud *Kelayim* 7:5).

Ibn Janach writes that produce is called *tevuah* becomes it “comes” at certain times of the year. Interestingly, Targum Onkelos (to Gen. 41:35, 42:1, Deut. 2:28, 7:13) translates *ochel*, *bar*, *shever*, and *dagan* into the same Aramaic word *avur* (which has a Hebrew form that appears in Joshua 5:11). Just as Targum Onkelos does not differentiate between *shever* and *bar*, neither does Targum Yonatan to Amos 8:5, translating both words in the same verse as *avur*. Radak (to Joshua 5:11 and in *Sefer HaShorashim*) explains that *avur* is related to the word *avar* (“past”), and refers to grain which grew in previous years, while *tevuah* is related to the word *ba* (“coming”) and refers to grain from the current year. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) explains that *tevuah* is related to “bringing” because it is the choicest type of produce, the type that a farmer would want to “bring” into his house.

Rabbi Wertheimer explains that *dagan* refers specifically to the five grains (simplistically-speaking, wheat, barley, oats, spelt, and rye), and only after they have been ripened, reaped, and put into a smooth pile (see Rashi to *Berachot* 47b). As an aside, Rabbi Yehuda HaChassid notes that the word *dagan* in *gematria* equals the numeric value of the word *ochel* (both amount to 57).

Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *tenuvah* refers specifically to ripe produce (Deut. 32:13). Its root NUN-(VAV)-BET refers to fully-developed products, both agricultural and verbal. This is why the expression *niv sefatayim* (Isa. 57:19) – literally “the product of the lips” – refers to especially well-developed speech.

Rabbi Pappenheim explains that BET-REISH, the two-letter root of *bar*, refers to “separation” or “exclusion.” For example, the word *bar* also means “son” because the child is “separated” from his mother’s body via childbirth. Similarly, *bor/borit* is a cleaning agent used to “separate” and “exclude” filth, and *bari/barah* refers to a sort of clarity/certainty by which all other options have been conclusively “excluded.” In terms of food, *bar* refers to grains which have already been “separated” from their chaff.

Rabbi Yitzchok of Volozhin (1780-1849) likewise writes that *bar* literally means “chosen” or “refined” because it denotes grain without the chaff (see also Nachmanides to Gen. 41:49). He explains that Yosef told the Egyptians to store the grain without its chaff (Gen. 41:35), because otherwise they would not have had enough storage space for everything.

In the King James Version of the Bible, the Hebrew word *bar* is translated into English as “corn.” However, this does not refer to that yellow stuff commonly found on the cob. Rather, the English word “corn” originally meant “grain with the seed still inside,” and commonly referred to whatever staple grain was used in a given location. After the discovery of the Americas, the word “corn” eventually became almost exclusively associated with what we colloquially call “corn” (aka *maize* in the relevant Native American languages).

The word *shever* seems to be derived from the trilateral root SHIN-BET-REISH, which means “breaking.” Radak (to Amos 8:5, Gen. 41:56, and in *Sefer HaShorashim*) and Meiri (to Prov. 10:3) explain that produce is called *shever* because it “breaks” the famine. Most instances of such usage in the Bible occur in the story of Joseph and his brothers, where Joseph instructed the Egyptians to save food to sustain them during the famine. Rabbi Yechezkel Weinfeld of Ramat Eshkol compares the Hebrew word *shever*, which “breaks” a famine, to the English term *breakfast* – that delightful meal which people eat in the morning, which “breaks” the nightly “fast.”

*Peirush HaRokeach* connects *shever* with *sever* (“hope”), because people look towards G-d trustingly and hopefully, while He provides them with food (see Ps. 145:15).

Menachem Ibn Saruk, *Peirush HaRokeach*, and Rabbeinu Bachaya all write that *shever* refers to food as a commodity that

is bought. Rabbeinu Bachaya even writes that the term *shever* implies a “sale.” This is seen in Rabbinic Hebrew, where *shover* means “receipt,” which attests to payment and thus “breaks” a litigant’s ability to claim a debt. In Modern Hebrew *shover* means “voucher,” while the word *kabbalah* means “receipt.”

Rabbi Avraham Rivlin points out that *shever* denotes both “breaking/destruction,” but also “building/sustaining,” for it is the sustenance which keeps people alive. This is yet another example of a word in Hebrew which has two diametrically opposed meanings.

Rabbeinu Bachaya notes that when Yaakov asked his sons to bring food from Egypt, he used the word *shever*, but not *ochel* or *bar*, because *shever* implies the edible grain along with the chaff. This was to allude to Yaakov’s sons that in the future they would endure bad times (the chaff) in the form of exile when they would be “broken” as a people, along with the good times (the grain).

Thus, *ochel* and *mazon* are general words for “food”, while *dagan* and *bar* are threshed and winnowed “grain”. The remaining four words mean “produce” in general, each with its own implications: *Yevul* is perishable, *tenuvah* must be ripe but *tevuah* does not, and *shever* is produce purchased in times of famine.

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

---

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

---

With the discovery of the goblet in Binyamin's sack, the brothers are confused. Yehuda alone steps forward and eloquently but firmly petitions Yosef for Binyamin's release, offering himself instead. As a result of this act of total selflessness, Yosef finally has irrefutable proof that his brothers are different people from the ones who cast him into the pit, and so he now reveals to them that he is none other than their brother. The brothers shrink from him in shame, but Yosef consoles them, telling them that everything has been part of G-d's plan. He sends them back to their father Yaakov with a message to come and reside in the land of Goshen. At first, Yaakov cannot accept the news, but when he recognizes hidden signs in the message which positively identify the sender as his son Yosef, his spirit is revived.

Yaakov, together with all his family and possessions, sets out for Goshen. G-d communicates with Yaakov in a vision at night. He tells him not to fear going down to Egypt and its negative spiritual consequences, because it

is there that G-d will establish the Children of Israel as a great nation although they will be dwelling in a land steeped in immorality and corruption.

The Torah lists Yaakov's offspring and hints to the birth of Yocheved, who will be the mother of Moshe Rabbeinu. Seventy souls in total descend into Egypt, where Yosef is reunited with his father after 22 years of separation. He embraces his father and weeps, overflowing with joy. Yosef secures the settlement of his family in Goshen. Yosef takes his father Yaakov and five of the least threatening of his brothers to be presented to Pharaoh, and Yaakov blesses Pharaoh. Yosef instructs that, in return for grain, all the people of Egypt must give everything to Pharaoh, including themselves as his slaves. Yosef then redistributes the population, except for the Egyptian priests, who are directly supported by a stipend from Pharaoh. The Children of Israel become settled, and their numbers multiply greatly.

---

# ASK!

---

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

## Bacteria in the Cafeteria

David wrote:

Why is yogurt with live *acidophilus* and *bifidus* cultures kosher to eat if we are not allowed to eat bugs?

Dear David,

Good question. Now let me ask you one: Why are we allowed to breathe? Zillions of microorganisms are floating around in the air, and we swallow some with every breath.

The answer is: The Torah prohibits only bugs which can be seen by the naked eye. Organisms seen only with the aid of a microscope are kosher.

The logic is this: The Torah was given to human beings, not angels. Its laws are geared to normal human experience. Bugs we see in 'real life' are forbidden.

'Invisible' ones - which seem like they exist only in a laboratory - are not forbidden.

When improved microscopes brought improved awareness of microscopic organisms, some people suggested that perhaps we should filter our water to avoid consuming the organisms. A renowned rabbi responded: "If you give a nickel to charity while holding it under a magnifying glass, do you get credit as though you gave a dime?"

Speaking of germs: Three amoebae are sitting on a park bench. Suddenly, one of them jumps up and runs off.

"Hey! Where did Harry go?" one asks the other.

"Guess he had to split."

- Sources: *Aruch Hashulchan*, *Yoreh De'ah* 84:6

## A Rose by Any Other Name

J. Kaplan wrote:

Are all men with the last name KAPLAN kohens?

Dear J. Kaplan:

Often, people named Kaplan are *kohanim*. This name is said to mean "*Kohen Ploni*" - "So-and-so the *Kohen*." Katz, another name common for *kohanim*, means "*Kohen Tzedek*" – "Righteous *Kohen*."

But having a name like Kaplan or Katz isn't proof of being a *kohen*. Two of my best friends are named Kaplan, and neither one is a *kohen*. In fact, I know someone named Cohen who is not a *kohen*!

A *kohen* is a male descendant of Aharon, Moses's brother. If you have a family tradition that you are a *kohen*, and that family members were called to the Torah as *kohanim*, then you need check no further.

If there is no family tradition, other evidence is required. For instance, an ancestor's gravestone inscription. Someone who can't determine his father's personal status is automatically considered a *Yisrael*.

Try looking up long-lost relatives, and ask them. If you are like many people, you may very well have relatives here in Israel, Russia or elsewhere whom you don't even know.

---

# LETTER AND SPIRIT

---

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

## Family Offering

**T**he unfolding drama climaxes in Yosef's revelation to his brothers, and climaxes again when they return to Canaan to share this longed-for news to an incredulous Yaakov. His heart stood still in a disbelief that melted into unspeakable joy. His spirit lived once more.

Yaakov chooses to mark the occasion with a special offering of thanksgiving. But it was a different sort of offering. Until now, all offerings in the Torah – by Noach and his descendants, by Avraham and Yitzchak – have been *olot*, “burnt offerings,” where the animal is consumed entirely by the altar's fire.

For the first time, Yaakov offers *zevachim*, also known as *shelamim*, literally “peace offerings.” This offering is brought freely to G-d, often as an expression of thanksgiving. In contrast to one offering an *olah*, the person offering a *shelamim*, and his family, partake in the meat of the animal, and in the abundant bread that accompanies the *shelamim*. Whereas *olah* expresses complete personal devotion to G-d, the *zevach* is a family meal. It consecrates the family's home and table as a temple and altar, and celebrates G-d's presence in the midst of a faithful family.

While non-Jews are invited to bring *olah* offerings to the Temple, the *shelamim* is a distinctively Jewish offering. The idea of being absorbed by G-d, and devoting oneself completely to Him is one that occupies non-Jewish minds as well. But the idea that everyday life can be imbued with the spirit of G-d is unique to Judaism. Spirituality is not only in the realm of the Temple and the altar; it exists at the dinner table and in the family rooms. Our physical and private lives, when lived in faithful commitment, become a dwelling place for G-d. If in the *olah* one expresses the notion of going to G-d, then the *shelamim* expresses the notion of G-d coming to us.

For the first time, Yaakov experiences the joy of a complete family life. The fissures have been repaired, and he is about to be reunited with his long-lost son. With this feeling, he brings this “family offering” to G-d. Notably, he brings this offering to “the G-d of his father Yitzchak.” In his humility, Yaakov does not celebrate the faithfulness of his harmonious family, but attributes these achievements to the merit of his father. With this awareness, his newly-complete family is prepared to begin their journey into nationhood.

• Source: Commentary, Genesis 46:1

---

# LOVE OF THE LAND

---

## Shimon Hatzadik

**S**himon Hatzadik was one of the last surviving members of the *Anshei Knesset Hagedola* (Members of the Great Assembly), who became the *Kohen Gadol* after Ezra who led the return of Jews from Babylonian exile to Eretz Yisrael.

When he was informed that Alexander the Great was leading an army to destroy the *Beit Hamikdash*, which the Jew-hating Kuttites (Samaritans) had convinced him was a threat to his Macedonian Empire, he took immediate emergency action. Donning the sacred garments reserved for performance of the Holy Temple services, he walked all night, together with Jerusalem notables, to meet this force. When the two groups finally met at dawn, the mighty king descended from his royal chariot and prostrated himself before Shimon Hatzaddik, explaining that it was this vision which he always saw leading him to victory in battle. The tables were thus turned on the Kuttites as the destruction which they planned for the *Beit Hamikdash* was visited instead on their idolatrous shrine on Mount Gerizim.

by Rabbi Shlomo Simon

**Eric Fisher, Chicago, Born: Seattle, Washington**

**Northwestern University: B.S. in Theater and Communications. CPA**

Anyone who was in the Yeshiva in the late 1980s and early 90s is sure to remember Eric Fisher. In those years the *bachurim* of the Yeshiva produced Purim plays that, in my humble opinion, have never since been matched in originality, production value and professionalism. I'm not showing bias when I say that. The Yeshiva rented out the hall across the street, Beit Pomerantz, which could hold approximately a thousand people. On Purim night it was standing room only. Almost every English speaker in Yerushalayim wanted to be there. The playwriting included such masters as Yaacov Fuchs, a professor of Modern European History (and now a lawyer), who might have rivaled Mel Brooks had he chosen a different career; Brandon Edwards, a graduate in film from UCLA and very talented playwright and director; Lyle Wexler, who was a real Hollywood screenwriter; and funny man, Joel Lome. If the Yeshiva's *talmidim* didn't include famous stars of stage and screen, we did have professional actors, singers and dancers who were on track for stardom. Eric Fisher was one of those professionals. He played the lead in "Fiddler on the Spooof," among other musicals.

Although he and his younger brothers grew up in a non-observant household in Seattle, Washington, his parents were proud Jews who wanted their children to have a Jewish education and sent them to an Orthodox Day School until Bar Mitzvah. After graduating from high school, Eric chose to attend Northwestern University in Chicago because of its Theater program. He wanted to be an actor. After college he joined a theater group in Chicago and worked as an actor for a couple of years. During a break between productions, he and a friend took a few weeks off and travelled to London to see some shows. While there, Eric decided to go to Israel for a short visit. He stayed on his cousin's kibbutz for a few days and then visited Jerusalem for a Shabbat experience. Someone told him that he could stay for free at the Heritage House in the Old City. That wasn't completely true. The "price" that was set by Rabbi Meir

Schuster, its founder, was a minimum of one class at a yeshiva. Eric agreed. That Shabbat he was sent to families for meals, where he met people like himself, who had joyously incorporated Yiddishkeit into their lives. Eric was impressed. On Sunday, Rabbi Schuster took him to a nearby yeshiva for a class. He was intrigued. He stayed for two days of classes. During those two days he learned more about his religion and heritage than he had during his entire lifetime. He knew then that he needed to learn more about Judaism. If its teachings were true he needed to live by them and his life would change dramatically.



He was brought to Ohr Somayach and heard a shiur from Rabbi Milevsky zt"l and was enthralled. His "short visit" to Israel turned into a two-year adventure.

In addition to the *shiurim* with Rabbi Milevsky zt"l, Eric learned *gemara* with Rabbis Tatz, Perlman and Rockmill, with whom he maintains a close relationship until today. He then returned to the States and went directly to Ohr Somayach in Monsey, where he learned in the Beis Midrash and took courses in accounting, leading to his CPA degree.

After getting married he moved to Chicago. His love of the theater never left him and he started working as an accountant for theaters in Chicago. He also became involved as a producer of Broadway shows. Recently, he has taken a job as the CFO of a start-up pharmaceutical company in Chicago.

He lives in Lincolnwood, an upscale Chicago suburb. He has one son and three daughters. For the past fourteen years he has been learning every morning in a *Kollel Boker* at Rabbi Pinchas Eichenstein's shul in Lincolnwood.

Eric was in Yerushalayim recently visiting his son who is learning at Rav Chaim Senter's yeshiva, and dropped in to Ohr Somayach. It was a pleasure to see him and reminisce.



**NEW SERIES**

*from* **Ohr**  
**Somayach**



**Q&A with Rav Breitowitz**

[www.podcast.ohr.edu](http://www.podcast.ohr.edu)

Rav Breitowitz answers common questions about Judaism.



**Harry's Video Blog**

[www.ohr.edu/harry](http://www.ohr.edu/harry)

Short weekly videos on the parsha by Harry Rothenberg, Esq.