

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### Striving and Thriving

*“And he lived...” (47:28)*

The national census for Jews living in Israel was approximately 6,700,000 in 2019. That of the United States was approximately 6,543,820 in 2018. If you add all the other places in the Diaspora, from France with around 450,000 Jews, to El Salvador, or North Macedonia, or the Philippines, who have around 100 Jews, and factor in the Israeli birth rate together with the increase in *aliya* to Israel from places like France – the Jewish population of the Land of Israel will exceed that of the Diaspora in the foreseeable future. This will trigger a number of halachic events and laws that have not occurred for nearly two thousand years.

We are coming to the end of our longest exile. The story of the Jewish People in the Diaspora has not been one of unremitting misery, despite horrific and terrible events. For much of our time in exile, we have managed to live and prosper without losing our identity among our hosts. Where did this ability come from?

Yaakov's intention when he came down to Egypt was only to “sojourn” – not to live there permanently. However, “*And he lived,*” the beginning of this week's Torah portion, tells us that Hashem told Yaakov to live out the rest of his life there. Also, the verb “to live” here suggests that Yaakov finally found peace in Egypt. At the end of his difficult life, he finally found tranquility. But didn't the Torah implicitly criticize Yaakov for wanting to dwell in tranquility, as we see at the beginning of the Torah portion of Vayeshev?

*“The actions of the Patriarchs are a sign to their children.”*

Yaakov's living and thriving in happiness in exile was a sign for the generations that you can live – and prosper – even in exile, by the diligent learning and the inspired living of the Torah, the qualities epitomized by Yaakov.

- Sources: Abarbanel, Akeidah, ArtScroll Chumash - Stone Edition

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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**A**fter 17 years in Egypt, Yaakov senses his days drawing to a close and summons Yosef. He has Yosef swear to bury him in the Machpela Cave, the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka.

Yaakov falls ill and Yosef brings to him his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov elevates Ephraim and Menashe to the status of his own sons, thus giving Yosef a double portion that removes the status of firstborn from Reuven. As Yaakov is blind from old age, Yosef leads his sons close to their grandfather. Yaakov kisses and hugs them. He did not think he would see his son Yosef again, let alone Yosef's children. Yaakov begins to bless them, giving precedence to Ephraim, the younger – but Yosef interrupts him and indicates that Menashe is the elder. Yaakov explains that he intends to bless Ephraim with his strong hand because Yehoshua will descend from him, and Yehoshua will be both the conqueror of *Eretz Yisrael* and the teacher of Torah to the Jewish People.

Yaakov summons the rest of his sons in order to bless them as well. Yaakov's blessing reflects the unique character and ability of each tribe, directing each one in its unique mission in serving Hashem.

Yaakov passes from this world at age 147. A tremendous procession accompanies his funeral cortege up from Egypt to his resting place in the Cave of Machpela in Chevron. After Yaakov's passing, the brothers are concerned that Yosef will now take revenge on them. Yosef reassures them, even promising to support them and their families. Yosef then lives out the rest of his years in Egypt, seeing Ephraim's great-grandchildren. Before his death, Yosef foretells to his brothers that Hashem will redeem them from Egypt. He makes them swear to bring his bones out of Egypt with them at that time. Yosef passes away at the age of 110 and is embalmed. Thus ends Sefer Bereishet, the first of the five Books of the Torah. *Chazak!*

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## TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

### *Pesachim 44-50*

#### The Superior Vineyard

*We are taught in a beraita, "A person should sell all of his properties to marry the daughter of a Torah scholar, and, also, a person should sell all of his properties to enable his daughter to marry a Torah scholar."*

**T**his *beraita* teaches that a person who is committed to the Torah – for himself and future generations – should be prepared to take bold action to help achieve these goals. Even today, when these measures may seem extreme where there is virtually total insistence on standing on one's own feet and also not sacrificing too much

for anything – there are two noted exceptions here for the sake of the Torah.

Let's examine one of these exceptions. A person should be prepared to sell everything he owns so that his daughter will be able to marry a Torah scholar. This is a dowry that will help the young couple get set

up with a home and their basic needs, and enable them to be immersed in Torah and mitzvahs. The *gemara* offers two reasons for doing this.

One reason is to help ensure compatibility. The *beraita* is a “Talmud Tip” for a parent who is a Torah scholar – or at least a parent who greatly values the study of Torah and the fulfillment of its mitzvahs. The *beraita*’s teaching is directed to this type of parent, as a parent who is not “Torah-centric” is very likely not interested in obeying the advice or halacha in this *beraita* (or any other one). Since the daughter of a Torah scholar will naturally be more aligned in her Torah way of life and her Torah way of thinking with a husband of the same Torah goals and Torah character traits – her parents should therefore do whatever they can to help her find and marry her “Torah soul mate.”

Our *beraita* describes such a marriage as comparable to the successful blend of grafting one choice grapevine with another one – *invei hagefen b’invei hagefen* – and as something that is very suitable and beautiful.

And the *gemara* teaches another motivation for parents seeking a Torah scholar to marry their daughter. A good parent certainly wants a son-in-law who has internalized the correctness and need to honor their daughter’s dignity and feelings. And whether or not she is the daughter of a Torah scholar, she is “a daughter of the King”, and, as such, should be treated as royalty with great love and respect. A husband who is a Torah scholar has the refined character traits and demeanor to treat his wife as not only Hashem’s princess but as “his queen.” The Rambam writes this idea succinctly, but with words that every parent and daughter need to know before and during marriage: “In the homes of Torah scholars, there exists nothing of an

undignified nature and no discord.”

• Pesachim 49a

## One

Ravi Acha bar Chanina asked, “What does the following verse mean?” ‘And Hashem will be King of the entire universe, and, on that day, Hashem will be One and His Name will be One.’ (Zecharia 14:19)

The essence of his question is to understand why the prophet says that Hashem will be One “on that day.” What about *today*? Of course He is One today, already – and has always been One and will always be One!

Rav Acha bar Chanina offers this explanation of the verse to answer his own (rhetorical) question: “This world is different from the *World to Come*. In this world, when hearing good news, a person says the blessing, “Blessed is the One Who is good and does good to others.” However, in this world, on hearing bad news, a person says the blessing, “Blessed is the true Judge.” But in the *World to Come*, there will be only one of these blessings – the one for *good* news – because there will no longer be any bad news.” In the future, it will be clearly recognized that everything that Hashem does, did and will do, is only *good* – and the blessing will reflect this recognition: “Blessed is the One, Who is good, and does good to others.”

Some commentaries point out that this is similar to the theme we express when saying *Shma Yisrael* – “Hear O Israel, Hashem, our G-d, Hashem is One.” Meaning: Although, nowadays, Hashem is recognized as the One and only G-d by the Jewish People – *Hashem Elokeinu*, i.e. Hashem, *our* G-d – in the future, Hashem will be recognized and acknowledged as the One and only G-d by all the nations and people in the world.

• Pesachim 50a

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# Q & A

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## VAYECHI

### Questions

1. Why is kindness towards the dead called "*chesed shel emet*" – kindness of truth?
2. Give three reasons Yaakov didn't want to be buried in Egypt.
3. How do you treat a "fox in his time" (i.e., a commoner who rules)?
4. "When I was coming from Padan, Rachel died on me... I buried her there on the way to Efrat..." Why did Yaakov say all this to Yosef?
5. Initially, why was Yaakov unable to bless Ephraim and Menashe?
6. What does *pillalti* mean?
7. What does "*Shechem*" mean as used in this week's parsha? (two answers)
8. Which individual is called "the *Emori*"? Why? Give two reasons.
9. What did Yaakov want to tell his sons but was unable to?
10. What privileges did Reuven lose due to his rash actions?
11. What congregation from Yaakov's offspring did Yaakov not want to be associated with?
12. What did Yehuda do after he heard Yaakov rebuke Reuven, Shimon and Levi? Why?
13. What does milk do to teeth?
14. Why is Yissachar like a "strong-boned donkey"?
15. With what resource did both Yaakov and Moshe bless Asher?
16. In Yosef's blessing, Yaakov said, "They embittered him..." Who are "they"?
17. Which descendants of Binyamin "will divide the spoils in the evening"?
18. From whom did Yaakov buy his burial place?
19. What oath did Yosef make to Pharaoh?
20. Which two sons of Yaakov did not carry his coffin? Why not?

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

### Answers

1. 47:29 - Because the giver expects no reward from the recipient.
2. 47:29 - a) Egypt's ground was to be plagued with lice; b) At the time of the resurrection, those buried outside Israel will suffer; c) So the Egyptians wouldn't make him into an idol.
3. 47:31 - Bow to him.
4. 48:7 - Yaakov thought Yosef harbored resentment since Yaakov had not buried Yosef's mother, Rachel, in the *Ma'arat HaMachpela*.
5. 48:8 - The *Shechina* departed from him.
6. 48:11 - "I thought."
7. 48:22 - a) The actual city of Shechem; b) A portion.
8. 48:22 - Esav. a) He acted like an Emorite; b) He trapped his father with words (*imrei pi*).
9. 49:1 - When *mashiach* will come.
10. 49:3 - Priesthood and Kingship.
11. 49:6 - Korach and his congregation.
12. 49:8 - He drew back. He was afraid that Yaakov would rebuke him for the incident with Tamar.
13. 49:12 - It makes them white.
14. 49:14 - Just as a donkey bears a heavy burden, so the tribe of Yissachar bears the yoke of Torah.
15. 49:20 - Oil-rich land.
16. 49:23 - Yosef's brothers, Potifar and his wife.
17. 49:27 - Mordechai and Esther.
18. 50:5 - From Esav.
19. 50:6 - Yosef swore not to reveal Pharaoh's ignorance of Hebrew.
20. 50:13 - Levi, because he would carry the *aron* (holy ark). Yosef, because he was a king.

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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## Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

### Vayechi: Boats, Ships and Nautical Rhapsody

Jacob blessed his son Zebulun by saying how the future tribe of Zebulun will settle the Holy Land along its coast, and will enjoy the fruits of naval trade (Deut. 49:13). In that context, the Bible uses the word *oniah* (“boat” or “ship”) for the very first time. This essay embarks on an exploration of several different words for “boats” and “ships” in the Bible and in later Rabbinic literature. We will boldly seek out the differences between these seemingly synonymous terms and come to new understandings of several words in Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and even English.

Dr. Raphael Patai (1910-1996) explains that *oni/oniah* is the most basic, general term for “boats” in Biblical Hebrew. As such, the Bible sometimes references different types of boats with modifiers attached to the word *onia*: *oni Tarshish* (I Kings 10:22) or *oniyot Tarshish* (I Kings 22:49, Isa. 2:16, Ps. 48:8, and more) refers to boats that were capable of traveling long distances – all the way to Tarshish (possibly Tarsus or Tunis). *Oniyot socher* (literally, “boats of merchants”) likewise refer to mercantile ships that were equipped for lengthy journeys (see Prov. 31:14). *Oni shayit* (Isa. 33:21) either refers to “row boats” that are powered by the motion of oars, being that *shotim* in Hebrew are “sticks” or “paddle rods” (Radak), or serves as a general term for boats that “swim” (*shat*) on the surface of the sea (Rashi).

Interestingly, there is one type of *oniah* whose meaning is not readily understood: that is *oniyot eiveh* (Iyov 9:26). Rashi explains that *eivah* is the name of a strong river, seemingly implying that this term refers to boats used in waters with strong currents. Ibn Ezra explains that *eivah* is a place name, seemingly implying that the term in question refer to boats that are sturdy enough to make the journey all the way to Eiveh. Alternatively, Ibn Ezra explains that *eivah* refers to some sort of fruit (or other commodity), such that *oniot eiveh* refers to boats commonly used for

transporting those products. Gersonides claims that *oniyot eiveh* are especially fast boats. Dr. Patai and Dr. Chaim Tawil argue that *eiveh* is related to the Akkadian word *abu/apu*, which means “reeds,” leading to *oniyot eiveh* as referring to boats made of reeds (which were typically insulated with tar and pitch).

Rashi and Radak explain that *dovrot* (I Kings 5:23) and *rafsodot* (II Chron. 3:15) both refer to seafaring rafts built by tying wooden beams together. Even Shoshan’s dictionary cites some scholars tying the Hebrew word *rafsodah* to the Akkadian word *rakasu* (“tying” or “knotting”). In later Hebrew, the term *rafsodah* refers to a “footstool” or “Ottoman” (see *Midrash Tanchuma*, Ber. 5). In Modern Hebrew, the term *rafsodah* has been redefined to refer to “wooden pallets” used for transporting goods. (It would be interesting to consider whether the English word rhapsody is related to the Hebrew *rafsodah*, especially given the fact that the etymon of that English term is the Ancient Greek word *rhapsodein*, “to weave/sew songs.” This is somewhat similar to a Biblical *rafsodah*, which was comprised of wooden beams tied together. (That said, the English word *raft* does not seem to be related to *rafsodah*, but is apparently derived from the Old Danish *rafft*, meaning “stick” or “beam.”)

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) traces the word *oniah* to the biliteral root ALEPH-NUN (“where”), from which the words *an/anh/le’an* (“where” and “to where”) come. Rabbi Pappenheim explains that the word *oniah* derives from this core meaning because a boat does not travel in a straight line to its destination, but rather it moves about and follows whatever path the waters push it in. Because a boat’s last stop is not readily obvious from watching its route, one might ask about such a seafaring vessel, “To where is it going?” Consequently, the very word for “boat” in Hebrew is derived from that question. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 16:8)

offers a simpler take on this connection, merely noting that the *oniah* is the vehicle that brings a person to a specific destination (i.e. “where”).

The word *sefinah* appears only once in the Bible (Jonah 1:5). By Mishnaic times, however, *sefinah* replaced *oniah* as the more common word for “boat.” It thus comes as no surprise that *sefinah* appears in the Mishna many times in many different contexts: *Berachot* 4:1, *Maaser Sheini* 5:9, *Challah* 2:2, *Orlah* 1:2, *Shabbat* 9:2, 11:5, 16:8, *Succah* 2:3, *Taanit* 3:7, *Gittin* 3:4, *Bava Batra* 5:1, *Avodah Zarah* 5:2, 5:4, *Chullin* 2:9, *Keilim* 2:3, 15:1, *Ohalot* 8:1, 8:3, 8:5, *Negaim* 11:11, 12:1, *Parah* 5:5, 9:6, *Taharot* 5:8, *Machshirin* 5:7, *Zavim* 3:1, 3:3, 4:1. (Rabbi Mordechai Koster once asked this author why the Bible calls the boat that Jonah boarded both an *onia* and a *sefinah*, but the author failed to find a good answer.)

Just as the Biblical term *oniyot Tarshish* referred to boats that could travel as far as that city, the Mishnaic term *sefinah Alexandrit* refers to deep-sea boats that would often embark from the Egyptian city of Alexandria (see Maimonides’ commentary to *Keilim* 15:1). On the other hand, *Sefinat HaYarden* refers to a smaller boat used for ferrying people across the Jordan River (*Shabbat* 83b). The Midrash (*Shemot Rabbah* 17:5) mentions a parable that refers to *sefinot shel piraton*, which are – as you probably guessed – “pirate ships.”

Rabbi Pappenheim offers four ways of understanding the etymology of the word *sefinah*: First of all, he argues that the shape of the *sefinah* resembles that of a vessel known in Hebrew as a *saf* (a liquid receptacle, see Ex. 12:22, II Sam. 17:28). Second, he argues that *sefinah* is related to *safah* (“edge” i.e. sea shore) because, when not in use, a *sefniah* is typically housed at a port along the edge of the sea. Third, he suggests that *sefinah* might denote a ship that is not as seaworthy as an *oniah*, so the *sefinah* must be kept closer to shore and is unsuitable for deep-sea excursions. Fourth, the term *sefinah* is related to *tzafun/safun* (“hidden” or “embedded”; see Deut. 33:19 and Abarbanel there) because all sorts of merchandise were typically packed up and transported on a *sefinah*. (I seem to remember seeing some commentators explaining that *sefinah* is related to *safun* because the bottom hull of the ship is immersed – i.e. “hidden” – in

the sea, while only the top part that floats above water remains visible. But, alas, the source of this wonderful explanation remains hidden from me for now.)

The Biblical Hebrew *avarah* (II Sam. 19:19) refers to “ferry boats”, which were used for crossing a river. It derives from the Hebrew verb *l’avor* (“to pass” or “to cross”). In the Talmud, an Aramaicized version of this word appears in the forms of *ma’abra* or *mabra* (*Shabbat* 32a, 139b, *Bava Kama* 116a, 117b, *Chullin* 81a, 94a).

Rashi and Radak (to Amos 4:2) explain that the Biblical term *sivot dugah* refers to “fishing boats” that fisherman employed when trying to catch fish. As Rashi notes, the equivalent term for a small fishing boat in Mishnaic Hebrew is *dugit* (see *Bava Batra* 73a). Rabbi Dr. Daniel Sperber explains that *dugit* is derived from the Hebrew word *dag* (“fish”), and refers to the sort of fisherman’s boat known as a *lembus* in Greek.

The *dugit* is also the subject of a halachic controversy: When one sells a *sefinah* (“main ship”), does one also intend to sell the *dugit* attached to it? According to Sumchos, since the *dugit* was attached to the *sefinah* and was typically towed by the mother ship in the middle of the sea, it is also included in the sale of the *sefinah* (*Tosefta Bava Batra* 4:1). However, others seem to disagree and maintain that one cannot assume that the sale of the larger ship includes the smaller boat (see *Yerushalmi Bava Batra* 5:1, and *Tosefta Succah* 3:2). The latter sources use a different word to denote a small fishing boat – instead of *dugit*: *iskupah*. *Iskupah*, in turn, derives from the Greek *skaphe*, which literally means “bowl” (and refers to a bowl-shaped boat). It is the ancestor to the Germanic word *scif* – the etymological forebear of the English words *ship*, *skiff*, and *skipper*.

Rashi (to Num. 24:24, Isa. 23:13, and *Sanhedrin* 106a) explains that the term *tzi/tzim* refers to especially large boats. The Malbim adds that this term is typically used for “battleships” because such vessels are typically built to be big and strong.

Before we conclude, we should mention several Aramaic words for “boats” or “ships” that appear in the Targumim and Talmud:

The Targumim sometimes translate *oniah* as *ilfa* (Jonah 1:3, Ps. 48:8, 104:26) and sometimes as *sefinah/sefinta* (Gen. 49:13, Deut. 28:68, I Kings 9:26). Similarly, Rashi defines *ilfa* as *sefinah* (Rashi to *Avodah Zarah* 10b), and also defines it as *oniah* (Rashi to *Eruvin* 53b). (*Ilfa* was also the name of sage in the Talmud in *Ketuvot* 69b.)

Rashi (to *Shabbat* 103b) writes that sometimes people mistakenly write ALEPH instead of AYIN and vice versa, because the sounds that those two letters make are quite similar to one another. In his work *Eitz Chaim*, Rabbi Yaakov ben Yehudah Chazzan of London (a 13th century English Tosafist) offers an example of this in the word *arva*, which means “small boat” or “yacht” in Aramaic.

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

That word is sometimes spelled with an AYIN (*Berachot* 57a, *Eruvin* 88b, *Bava Metzia* 80b, *Avodah Zarah* 40a), and sometimes is spelled with an ALEPH (*Berachot* 56a, *Shabbat* 20b, 67a, *Pesachim* 111b, *Taanit* 11a, *Ketuvot* 84b, 97a, *Bava Batra* 34b, *Avodah Zarah* 62b).

The Talmud also sometimes uses the word *borni* to mean “boat” (*Rosh Hashana* 23a, *Bava Metzia* 80b).

Rashi (to *Shabbat* 19b, 156b) writes in the name of the Geonim that *zuzi* (possibly related to the Hebrew word *la'zuz*, “to move”) means “boat” in Aramaic.

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## @ OHR –The students alumni, staff and events of Ohr Somayach

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by Rabbi Shlomo Simon

### The Painter

#### Yoram Raanan

Bloomfield, New Jersey  
University of Arts, Philadelphia, BFA (1975)  
Ohr Somayach Jerusalem 1976-1978  
Painter  
Lives in Beit Meir, Israel



In the olden days, when Ohr Somayach was young and backpackers were a central component of our student population, Rabbi Meir Shuster, ז"ל, brought Yoram Raanan (not his name at the time) to the Yeshiva, which was then located at the Mili Building on Rechov Tidhar. He had picked him up “off the wall” and had suggested to the budding artist that he would feel comfortable here. Yoram had been backpacking across Europe and the Middle East. While in Egypt, he and a fellow traveler decided to visit Israel. Like most backpackers, he had a very limited budget and had read in a guidebook that if one wanted a really good and free meal in Israel the place to go was the *Kotel Hamaaravi* in Jerusalem on a Friday night. Someone was sure to invite you to a tasty Shabbat meal.

Rabbi Shuster approached Yoram that Shabbat evening and invited him to his own apartment. The meal was delicious and the suggestion was made that Yoram might like a free place to stay and free meals with no strings attached, except for attending some interesting classes about Judaism. The offer sounded good to Yoram, but he also wanted his own studio for painting. Rabbi Shuster told him that Ohr Somayach would

accommodate him. Although space was at a premium in the Yeshiva building, they managed to give him his own room – with space enough to paint in.

Although he was not yet religious, Yoram had been raised in a “Conservadox” home. He knew how to *daven*, his family had kept kosher, went to shul on Shabbat and had Shabbat meals. Now, as a young Art School graduate, he identified mainly as an artist and wasn’t contemplating a commitment to Torah and mitzvahs. But he was willing to listen and learn.

After a few weeks in the Yeshiva, he met with Rav Mendel Weinbach, ז”ל. He expressed his reservations about taking on the yoke of Torah and mitzvahs and wasn’t sure that a Yeshiva was the place for him. Reb Mendel listened to him quietly. After he finished Reb Mendel still said nothing. “Aren’t you going to try to convince me to stay and become religious?” he asked. “No”, said Reb Mendel, “but you’re never going to be a complete person if you don’t.” Reb Mendel’s words penetrated his heart and Yoram stayed in the Yeshiva for the next two years.

In 1979, Yoram married a Canadian *baalat teshuva*, and the young couple settled down to raise a family in Jerusalem. After living in Har Nof for many years, they moved to Beit Meir, a rural farming community not far from Jerusalem, in 1994.

The family purchased a large six dunam (1.5 acre) property. Now, in addition to living in a natural setting with an obstructed view of the Mediterranean, he could paint, sculpt, and landscape his tract. He built terraces and fountains and gardens. His studio was now a massive 300 meter (more than 3,000 square feet) converted chicken coop.

Yoram’s art career took off. He exhibited all over the world and major museums and art collectors were collecting his works.

Four years ago, Yoram’s studio was consumed by a major fire. Here is his description of the event and its aftermath:

“On a windy night in November, 2016, a sudden fire destroyed my studio, together with over fifteen hundred of my paintings. I saw my studio go down in the fire. I witnessed the destruction of forty years of work, but I also recognized something else that night. The burning leaves falling off the trees, which would ultimately ignite the tinderbox that is a studio full of canvas, wood and paint, seemed to be little angels, floating down softly in the mountain air.

“I never really found the words to articulate how these two recognitions – destruction and celestial softness – could coexist for me at the same time. But, when I began painting again, my new paintings said what I could not. On the one hand, they were full of dark tones, sometimes even black and ashy. This was unlike anything I had painted in the past. But, at the same time, they were filled with gold, a color I had never felt necessary beforehand. It was as if the darkness of my loss had somehow opened me to a deeper truth, a new light.”

Most people would have been depressed by such a catastrophic event, but with his *emunah* intact, he saw the Hand of Hashem in the fire and was filled with a sense of hope. A spirit of freedom swept over him. Starting over was a challenge, but it was also a blessing. His finances were stretched to the limit. All his tangible assets had been burnt up. But, miraculously, and without his asking, money started pouring in from people all over the world who had read about his loss. Until that point in his life, he had given *tzedaka*, but had never taken it. Now the shoe was on the other foot and he humbly accepted donations. But he also felt that he had now incurred a debt. With the donations, he designed and built a new studio that was much more to his liking than the old. The ceiling was more than four meters high. There were more windows and more light. And he



dedicated himself to giving back to a world that had been so kind to him, in the form of his new and energized artistic expression. Whereas before, when he had felt somewhat inhibited in his painting, he now felt freer, much more confident and intense. The art world has noticed and they come flocking to his door from all over the globe.

Ever the optimist, he concluded our interview with these words:

“The future is great for all of us.”

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## COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

### LEARNING TORAH (PART 2)

*LIFE IS SHORT, AND IT IS UP TO YOU TO MAKE IT SWEET!*

(SARAH LOUISE DELANY)

*“Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to occupy ourselves with the words of Torah. Please, Hashem, our G-d, sweeten the words of Your Torah in our mouth and in the mouth of Your people, the family of Israel. May we and our offspring and the offspring of Your people, the House of Israel, all of us, know Your Name and study Your Torah for its own sake. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who teaches Torah to His people, Israel.”*

**A**fter having clarified that G-d wants us to be occupied with learning His Torah, the blessing then requests from G-d to sweeten those words of Torah so that we can enjoy them to their fullest. Like a delicious dessert, Torah needs to be savored and each “mouthful” needs to be cherished. Learning Torah is an activity that is supposed to encompass our very being. It should stimulate our intellect and, at the same time, should also kindle within us a spiritual passion. But this is not always so easy to achieve. The depth and breadth of the Torah are truly breathtaking and learning it so that its lessons are clear can be intellectually and physically exhausting. Ask anyone who exercises and they will invariably say that the most difficult part of exercising is actually beginning. Getting on the treadmill is often infinitely more challenging than the actual workout itself! Once the session begins, it actually becomes an enjoyable experience. And the

feeling of exhilaration at the end of an exercise session is incomparable. It is not just the achievement of goals that leaves the exerciser feeling accomplished and proficient, it is the journey to get there as well. In fact, the entire experience can be described as sweet.

And that is what we are asking G-d to help us with. Intellectually, we may know that learning Torah is an unparalleled experience, but sometimes it can be hard to “get going.” So, we beseech G-d that He let us taste its unequalled sweetness. A sweetness that will give us the enthusiasm to want to “taste” it every day, over and over again.

What is fascinating is that the entreaty in the blessing is not just for each individual person. Rather, it is for the whole of the Jewish Nation. Why? Because the sweetness of the Torah needs to be felt by everyone.

In Psalm 19:11, King David describes the Torah as being “sweeter than honey.” But honey is considered to be the sweetest of all delicacies, so how can the Torah be even sweeter than that? Rabbi David Kimchi (1160-1235), one of the foremost commentators on the Bible, explains that it is the honey’s very sweetness that makes it impossible to eat too much of it at one time. Eating honey in large amounts makes a person feel nauseous.

Not so the Torah. In fact, the opposite is true. The more Torah that a person “consumes” – the better it tastes.

*To be continued...*

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## LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

### The Younger Brother Will Be Greater

**W**hen Yosef presents his two children, Menashe and Ephraim, before his father for a blessing, Yaakov deliberately places his right hand – which Yosef assumed would be designated for Menashe, the elder son – on the head of Ephraim, the younger son. Yosef protests: *Not so, my father, for this one is the first born. Place your right on his head.* But Yaakov refuses, explaining, *I know it, my son... He too will attain greatness. However, his younger brother will become greater than he...*

This is not the first – or last – instance of the younger brother preferred to the first born. From the very first pair of brothers – Kayin and Hevel – we find divestment of the first born. Hevel’s offerings were pleasing to G-d and Kayin’s were rejected. Of Noach’s children, Shem was not the eldest. Among Avraham’s sons, Yishmael gave way to Yitzchak. Among Yitzchak’s sons, Eisav gave way to Yaakov. Among Yaakov’s sons, Reuven gave way to Yosef. Among Yosef’s sons, Menasheh gave way to Ephraim. The main dominion among the tribes was given to Yehuda. Moshe, too, was the younger brother, and David was the youngest of his brothers. Moreover, the first born throughout

Israel forfeited their status in terms of service in the Temple.

The first born is entitled to special privileges and is endowed with certain material rights. Reuven’s status as first born is described as privileged in rank and privileged in power. He is given a double portion of the inheritance. Power and spirit *should* go hand in hand, but historically they have not. Instead, a struggle between material power and Divine spirit rages. Until they can co-exist, physical prowess and spiritual power must be separated from each other. This will continue until the time when the *elder can serve the younger*, as prophesied to Rivka. A time when the physical and political might will be subordinate to the spirit. Until then, material power imagines itself to be the superior, but the truth is that it is always mastered.

The two crowns of power and spirit will ultimately be reunited in the Messiah, who will be king *and* priest, signifying the peaceful union of material and spiritual inheritances.

- Sources: Commentary Bereishet 48:19

*Ohr Somayach announces a new booklet  
Harmony of a Nation – Overcoming Baseless Hatred  
by Rabbi Chaviv Danesh [https://ohr.edu/Sinat\\_Chinam.pdf](https://ohr.edu/Sinat_Chinam.pdf)*

# THE RARE CALENDAR PHENOMENA OF 5781

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

(Part 9 of a new mini-series)

5781 is a year that is chock-full of rare calendar phenomena that we will *iyH* be witnessing, or, more accurately, taking an active part in. Let us continue exploring what is in store for us.

## Tisha B'Av on Sunday

The *Mishna* in *Masechet Ta'anit* teaches that “*Mishenichnas Av, Mema'atin Besimchah* – When the month of Av arrives, we lessen our joy.” This is due to the heralding of the tragedies that took place prior to the destruction of both *Batei Mikdash*, from the breaching of the walls of ancient Jerusalem on the 17th of Tammuz, until the actual destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash* on the Ninth of Av. As detailed in the *Mishna* and *Gemara Ta'anit*, both of these days have since become communal Fast Days, in remembrance of the tragedies that happened on these days.

In order to properly commemorate and feel the devastation, halacha dictates various restrictions on us during this three week period, getting progressively stricter up until Tisha B'Av itself. These restrictions include not eating meat or chicken, drinking wine, doing laundry, wearing freshly laundered clothing, or pleasure bathing. Many of these restrictions are generally still in effect until midday (*chatzot*) of the next day, the tenth of Av, with some people being strict during the entirety of that day for some of the restrictions (with the exception of a year when Tisha B'Av is actually being observed on the tenth of Av, since it actually fell out on Shabbat and was “pushed off” to Sunday, also known as “*Tisha B'Av HaNidcheh*”.)

## Ashkenazic or Sefardic Halacha?

However, this aforementioned timeline follows the general Ashkenazic *minhag*. On the other hand, many Sefardim start most restrictions only on the beginning of the week that Tisha B'Av falls out on, aka *Shavua Shechal Bo*.

Although there is no mention of these specific restrictions in the *Gemara*, they are indeed binding, Ashkenazic practice, as instituted by many *Rishonim*

and later codified by the great Ashkenazic authorities, including the *Rema*, *Derech Hachaim*, *Shevus Yaakov*, *Chayei Adam*, *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, *Aruch Hashulchan*, and *Mishnah Berurah*.

While several later Sefardic authorities maintain that it is proper for Sefardim to follow the Ashkenazic *minhag* and start the restrictions from Rosh Chodesh Av, nevertheless, most Sefardim are only accustomed to begin these restrictions from the actual week of Tisha B'Av, as per the actual ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch*.

In 5781, Tisha B'Av falls out on a Sunday. This means that accordingly, without an actual *Shavua Shechal Bo Tisha B'Av*, generally speaking, Sefardim for this year will not undertake any Nine Days restrictions, save for the proscription of partaking of meat and wine. Sefardim may shower, shave and do their laundry all the way up until Shabbat Chazon, which is Erev Tisha B'Av this year. On the other hand, Ashkenazim do not share this dispensation and would still need to keep all the Nine Days restrictions.

This does not mean there are not any dispensations available for Ashkenazim. For example, more people are permitted to be invited to a *fleishig Seudat Mitzvah* than normally would on a *Shavua Shechal Bo Tisha B'Av*. Also, there is more flexibility regarding cutting one's nails and washing childrens' clothing. Perhaps, if one has halachic permission to go swimming for his health “until *Shavua Shechal Bo*,” he would also be able to benefit from Tisha B'Av being on Sunday this year, etc.

## Sunday Night Havdalah

As Shabbat Chazon ends, along with our not-too-common *fleishig* Erev Tisha B'Av *Seudah Hamafseket* (aka *Seudat Shlishit*), and the fast of Tisha B'Av commences, the entire Havdalah service is not

recited right after Shabbat, as is normally the case. Rather, most of this Havdalah gets pushed off until Sunday night, with only certain parts of it performed at Shabbat's conclusion.

- In Maariv, in shul, on this *Motzei Shabbat-Tisha B'Av*, we recite "*Attah Chonantanu*" to allow performing *melacha* (or, alternatively, by simply saying "*Hamavdil Bein Kodesh L'Chol*").
- There is no *beracha* of *Besamim* (spices) at all, as that is considered *hana'ah* (benefit or pleasure), which we minimize on Tisha B'Av. It is also not recited on *Motzei Tzom* (Sunday night), since at that point it is no longer directly after Shabbat.
- On the other hand, the *beracha* of *Borei Me'orei Ha'Aish* is recited this *Motzei Shabbat/Tisha B'Av* – but as a stand-alone

*beracha*. It is generally recited in shul (or at home) after *Maariv*.

- On Sunday night-*Motzei Tisha B'Av*, the rest of Havdalah is recited. Yet, in this Havdalah we start only from the "*beracha* on the cup," and it consists only of that *beracha* and "*Hamavdil Bein Kodesh L'Chol*."

But there is still an unanswered question: What should the cup we are using on this *Motzei Tisha B'Av* Havdalah contain? Many of the Nine Days restrictions are still in effect until the next day, including those of eating meat and drinking wine. However, Havdalah still needs to be recited. So what are we to do? It turns out that this is actually a three-way *machloket* (disagreement among the halachic authorities).

*To be continued...*

*Written l'zechus Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v'chol yotzei chalatzecha l'yeshua sheleimah teikif u'miyad.*

*This author wishes to acknowledge Rabbi Shea Linder's excellent article on this topic.*

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