

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### What's Wrong With Wikipedia?

*"...in the Tent of Meeting..." (1:1)*

I must admit to a tinge of nostalgia for the demise of that great 244-year-old creaking behemoth called *The Encyclopedia Britannica*. It has been ten years since the last printed edition. Britannica continues online in its electronic version, but as far as its online future is concerned, I'm not so convinced. I think people are far more likely to search Wikipedia than Britannica.

One reason, of course, is because Wiki is free, and everyone likes free. However, I think there's another reason. We love democracy. Anyone can write an entry in Wikipedia. In our society it is axiomatic that democracy is the only legitimate form of social organization. Our mindset is that the will of the majority is the best, the fairest, and indeed the only way to run society. This ideology seeps into other areas of life as well, including encyclopedias. Critics of Britannica claim that it suffers from the biases of the experts it employs. Wiki, however, suffers no less from bias. An article in Forbes magazine reports that Feng Zhu, an assistant professor in the Technology and Operations Management unit at Harvard Business School, and Shane Greenstein of Northwestern's Kellogg School of Management, found that in almost all cases, Wikipedia was more left-leaning than Britannica.

We love democracy, but, presumably, the democratization of our lives has its limits: I'm not sure how many of us would submit to extensive

invasive surgery based on a straw poll taken on Twitter or Facebook. The idea that if you ask enough people a question, you are bound to come up with the right answer, is inimical to Torah thought. The spiritual Masters teach, "The opinion of the Torah is the opposite of the man in the street." Rav Nota Schiller, our esteemed Rosh HaYeshiva, once observed, "The Torah is a democracy of opportunity and an aristocracy of opinion." Anyone can open a Talmud and start to learn. However, for your opinion to be significant it must pass a self-policing system of peer approval that validates only the most expert.

The Book of Bamidbar deals in great detail with the laws and history of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle.

*"...in the Tent of Meeting..." (1:1)*

The Ramban draws striking comparisons between these laws and the Revelation at Sinai. The Mishkan, the Beit Hamikdash, and, to this day our synagogues, are the distant echoes of that revelation. They all remind us that Judaism is based on revelation and not the "wisdom of the masses." The Torah was not given as the "Ten Suggestions; please twitter this to your friends and see what they think." It was given as Ten Statements, Divine and immutable. Maybe check that on Wikipedia and see if I'm right?

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Meron 2021

These words are written while funerals are still taking place and so many families are joined by the entire Jewish People, who mourn the tragic and unfathomable loss of life at Mount Meron on Lag B'Omer this year. And there are many injured individuals – both physically and emotionally – whom we pray will be healed by the Healer and the healers quickly and completely. But here I would like to share a recent conversation I had with a colleague, in the hope that it will inspire if only one person in a small way to strive for a future that will be as bright for our nation as it was at the time of the Beit Hamikdash.

A few weeks ago, in Talmud Tips for Yoma 16-22, in an article titled “Personal Space,” we addressed the nature of one of the miracles that took place then and there: Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav, “When they stood, they were extremely crowded, but when they bowed down they had a lot of room.” There we cited Rashi’s explanation that although it was extremely crowded in the Beit Hamikdash, there was nevertheless a miraculous expansion of one’s personal space for prostration in order to say *Vidui* – a verbal confession to Hashem of one’s sins. The person would miraculously have full use of a surrounding *daled amot* (four cubits) in which to prostrate and verbally confess, without a concern that the person nearest him would be within earshot and be able to hear this private admission – a factor which could potentially inhibit a person’s confession due to embarrassment of others hearing his verbalizing his personal transgressions.

It has been reported that many survivors who were present at Mount Meron who felt certain of imminent passing from this world said *Shma Yisrael*, the traditional act of a Jew taking his final breath. Presumably, they also said or thought whatever type of *Vidui* was possible under the constraints of time and place of the sudden and swift tragic event.

A few days ago, a reader of this column reminded me of what I wrote only a few short weeks earlier, that Rashi explains the Rav Elazar’s words “They would

stand in a crowded manner” (in the Beit Hamikdash) as follows: “The word for “crowded” in the text is *tzafufim*, which Rashi says is based on the Hebrew root-word *tzaf*, which means “to float.” He explains that the multitude of people in the Beit Hamikdash were so crowded that the physical human pressure on all sides caused them to be lifted from the ground and to be “floating” in the air without their feet being on the ground. I related there my own experiences, as well as those of my wife and friends who have attended funerals of great rabbis in Jerusalem over the years, which at times included turnouts of people that numbered in the hundreds of thousands. And sometimes, the scene being terrifying, with being lifted from our feet and moved like a wave to a place some distance away. For anyone who has not experienced this feeling of helplessness, it reminded me of driving a car on ice in my youth, when it was futile and meaningless to try and steer or use the brakes, due to a lack of traction and the “feet” of the car not making proper contact with the street. At least once I ended up in a shallow (fortunately!) ditch on the roadside. I am not advocating for either being or not being in such a crowd – especially when it involves a mitzvah – but one should at least be aware of what might happen and take necessary precautions as possible.

I replied to the reader that I appreciate his appreciation for having learned something from the “Torah Tips” article, and that after the horrific Meron incident I wanted to share an additional insight I had while crying in shock. In the Beit Hamikdash, despite the squeezing pressure experienced by the entire nation standing there (to be more exact, they were floating above ground) – there is no mention that *anyone was ever injured* in the slightest. I suggested that this great safety was also a display of another miraculous act by Hashem. He protected His nation from harm in “His house.” But that was then and there. May we merit the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash and the renewal of Hashem once again showing us great miracles emanating from His gracious Countenance toward us – maintaining peace throughout the world and safety for all of us in all places and at all times. Amen.

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# Q & A

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## BAMIDBAR

### Questions

1. Why were the Jewish People counted so frequently?
2. What documents did the people bring when they were counted?
3. What determined the color of the tribal flags?
4. What is the difference between an "ot" and a "degel"?
5. How do we see that the Jews in the time of Moshe observed *techum Shabbat* - the prohibition against traveling more than 2,000 *amot* on *Shabbat*?
6. What was the signal for the camp to travel?
7. What was the sum total of the counting of the 12 tribes?
8. Why are Aharon's sons called "sons of Aharon and Moshe"?
9. Who was Nadav's oldest son?
10. Which two people from the Book of Esther does Rashi mention in this week's Parsha?
11. Why did the *levi'im* receive *ma'aser rishon*?
12. Which groups of people were counted from the age of one month?
13. Name the first descendant of Levi in history to be counted as an infant.
14. Who assisted Moshe in counting the *levi'im*?
15. Why did so many people from the tribe of Reuven support Korach in his campaign against Moshe?
16. Why did so many people from the tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar and Zevulun become great Torah scholars?
17. In verse 3:39 the Torah states that the total number of *levi'im* was 22,000. The actual number was 22,300. Why does the Torah seem to ignore 300 *levi'im*?
18. The firstborn males of the Jewish People were redeemed for five *shekalim*. Why five *shekalim*?
19. During what age-span is a man considered at his full strength?
20. As the camp was readying itself for travel, who was in charge of covering the vessels of the *Mishkan* in preparation for transport?

### Answers

1. 1:1 - They are very dear to G-d.
2. 1:18 - They brought birth records.
3. 2:2 - Each tribe's flag was the color of that tribe's stone in the breastplate of the *kohen gadol*.
4. 2:2 - An "ot" is a flag, i.e. a colored cloth that hangs from a flagpole. A *degel* is a flagpole.
5. 2:2 - G-d commanded them to camp no more than 2,000 *amot* from the *Ohel Moed*. Had they camped farther, it would have been forbidden for them to go to the *Ohel Moed* on *Shabbat*.
6. 2:9 - The cloud over the *Ohel Moed* departed and the *kohanim* sounded the trumpets.
7. 2:32 - 603,550.
8. 3:1 - Since Moshe taught them Torah, it's as if he gave birth to them.
9. 3:4 - Nadav had no children.
10. 3:7 - Bigtan and Teresh.
11. 3:8 - Since the *levi'im* served in the *Mishkan* in place of everyone else, they received tithes as "payment."
12. 3:15, 40 - The *levi'im*, and the firstborn of *Bnei Yisrael*.
13. 3:15 - Levi's daughter Yocheved was born while the Jewish People were entering Egypt. She is counted as one of the 70 people who entered Egypt.
14. 3:16 G-d.
15. 3:29 - The tribe of Reuven was encamped near Korach, and were therefore influenced for the worse. This teaches that one should avoid living near the wicked.
16. 3:38 - The tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar and Zevulun were encamped near Moshe, and were therefore influenced for the good. This teaches that one should seek to live near the righteous.
17. 3:39 - Each *levi* served to redeem a first-born of the Jewish People. Since 300 *levi'im* were themselves firstborn, they themselves needed to be redeemed, and could therefore not redeem others.
18. 3:46 - To atone for the sale of Yosef, Rachel's firstborn, who was sold by his brothers for five *shekalim* (20 pieces of silver.)
19. 4:2 - Between the ages of 30 and 50.
20. 4:5 - The *kohanim*.

# Q & A

## NASO

### Questions

1. What is the significance of the number 8,580 in this weeks Parsha?
2. Besides transporting the Mishkan, what other service performed by the leviim is referred to in this Parsha?
3. On which day did Moshe teach the command to send those who are *temeim* (ritually impure) out of the camp?
4. Name the three camps in the desert.
5. Who was sent out of each of the camps?
6. A person stole from another and swore that he was innocent. If he later confesses his guilt, what are his obligations?
7. Who determines which *kohen* receives the gifts that must be given to the *kohanim*?
8. What does the Torah promise a person who gives *matnot kehuna*?
9. Why are the verses about *matnot kehuna* followed by the verses about the *sotah*?
10. Why is the *sotah* given water from the holy basin?
11. What does the *kohen* do to the hair of a *sotah*?
12. When a *sotah* who is guilty of adultery drinks the water, she dies in a very specific fashion. What happens to the adulterer?
13. Before the name of G-d is erased, the *sotah* has the option either to admit guilt or to drink the water. Does she have a third option?
14. What are *chartzanim*? What are *zagim*?
15. What sin does a *Nazir* commit against himself?
16. Where was the cut hair of a *Nazir* placed?
17. A *kohen* should bless the people "with a full heart". What word in the Parsha conveys this idea of "a full heart"?
18. What is the meaning of the blessing "May G-d bless you and guard you"?
19. What is the meaning of the blessing "May G-d lift up His countenance upon you"?
20. The tribe of Yissachar was the second tribe to offer their gifts. Why did they merit this position?

### Answers

1. 4:47-48 - It is the number of *leviim* between ages thirty and fifty.
2. 4:47 - Singing and playing cymbals and harps to accompany the sacrifices.
3. 5:2 - The day the Mishkan was erected.
4. 5:2 - The camp of the Shechina was in the center, surrounded by the camp of Levi which was surrounded by the camp of Yisrael.
5. 5:2 - A *metzora* was sent out of all three camps. A *zav* was permitted in the camp of Yisrael but excluded from the two inner camps. A person who was *tamei* from contact with the dead had to leave only the camp of the Shechina.
6. 5:6-8 - He pays the principle plus a fifth to the victim, and brings a *korban asham*.
7. 5:10 - The giver.
8. 5:10 - Great wealth.
9. 5:12 - To teach that someone who withholds the gifts due the *kohanim* is deserving of eventually bringing his wife to the *kohanim* to be tried as a *sotah*.
10. 5:17 - The holy basin was made from the mirrors of the righteous women who left Egypt; the *sotah* strayed from the example set by these women.
11. 5:18 - He uncovers it.
12. 5:22 - He dies a similar death.
13. 5:27 - Yes, she can refuse both: She can refuse to admit guilt and also refuse to drink the water. (After the Name of G-d is erased, she loses this option.)
14. 6:4 - *Chartzanim* are seeds. *Zagim* are peels.
15. 6:11 - He abstains from enjoying wine.
16. 6:18 - It was placed on the fire under the pot in which the *nazirs shelamim* offering was cooked.
17. 6:23 - "*Amor*."
18. 6:24 - "May G-d bless you" that your property may increase, "and guard you" from robbery.
19. 6:26 - "May He suppress His anger."
20. 7:18 - The Tribe of Yissachar was well versed in Torah. Also, they proposed the idea that the *nesiim* should offer gifts.

# Reading Megillat Ruth on Shavuot

Here are seven reasons why we read the Megillah of Ruth on Shavuot:

1. The events occurred during the harvest season. Shavuot is the harvest festival.
2. Ruth was a convert to Judaism. Conversion is an individual *Kabbalat HaTorah* – receiving and accepting the Torah.
3. Ruth the Moabite was permitted to marry Boaz, based on a *drasha* (a teaching in the Oral Law) of the verse, "A Moabite may not marry into the Congregation of Hashem" (*Devarim 23:4*). This hints at the unity between the Written Torah and the Oral Torah.
4. King David was born on Shavuot. The Megillah of Ruth concludes with David's lineage.
5. To teach the greatness of *gemillut chassadim* – acts of loving-kindness.
6. To teach that the Torah is acquired only through affliction and poverty.
7. The name "Ruth" has the numerical value of 606. At Mount Sinai the Jewish People accepted 606 mitzvahs in addition to the 7 Noachide Laws which were incumbent upon them already (606 plus 7 equals the 613 mitzvahs).

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## The students, alumni, staff and events of Ohr Somayach

by Rabbi Shlomo Simon

This is the first in a series of articles about this project.

### Mechina Program Renovation

I would like to report a sensational news story that has been unfolding over the past few months at our Ohr Somayach campus – the renovation of the Mechina Program's Lauffer Building.

In itself, of course, the renovation of a yeshiva building that is in need of some repair is nothing to write home about, let alone write an article about. However, because the process and the people involved in this renovation are so unique, it deserves to be publicized.

The Lauffer Building was originally built when we moved to our present location in Maalot Dafne in 1977. After almost 20 years of extensive use it was in serious need of a facelift and some other structural and cosmetic surgery. One of the members of the Mechina staff, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, had recently lost his father, Reb David Lauffer, ז"ל, and he asked the family to provide funds to renovate the building in his father's name.

The renovations needed were extensive. The plain floors and plastered walls were replaced with marble; a beautiful internal staircase was built; and offices, classrooms, and a library were added. The renovation of the building is a testimonial to and an illustration of the loyalty and love that our staff shows to Ohr Somayach – or, as we like to say, the Ohr Somayach Family. The building now bears the name of his father.

The Mechina Program, as well, has gone through a number of transformations (or renovations to stay true to the title of this article) throughout the years. It has been variously known as the Beginners' Program, the Shores Program, and the Mechina Program. For many years now it has been under the able leadership of Rabbis Reuven Geffen, Shlomo Schiller, and Guy Matalon.

Originally a preparatory program for the Intermediate Program, it has morphed into a program that is tailored for *talmidim* who are at different levels in their spiritual journeys.

The highest level is the *Gemara shiur* given by Rabbi Dr. Guy Matalon. When Rabbi Matalon considers a *talmid* ready, he will recommend that he apply to the Beis Midrash Program, where Rabbi Uriel Goodwin will *farher* (test) him. If he passes the exam, the *talmid* will be placed in one of Beis Midrash entry *shiurim*. The test requires that the *talmid* be proficient in reading *Gemara* and Rashi and be able to prepare the *Gemara* on his own, without *Artscroll*.

The Mechina Program requires the *talmid* to learn for two *sedarim* a day. Some in the program are working at night or studying for a degree. A few months ago, one of the *talmidim* with a flair for design decided that the Lauffer *beis midrash* would look better if one of the bookcases was placed on an opposite wall. When he emptied the bookcase and began to move it, he discovered why it had been placed precisely there. The wall behind the bookcase was peeling and cracked and filled with mold. He showed it to Moshe Males, a Mechina student who had worked in construction and had just gotten his degree in Structural Engineering in Israel. He knew exactly what to do to correct the problem. Another *talmid* suggested that they approach the yeshiva to fix it. Moshe told him: "The yeshiva has enough problems just trying to pay the *rabbeim* on time; they can't be burdened with another expense." Just then, another *talmid*, Seva Dorn, told Moshe not to worry, that he would provide the funds needed to fix the problem. Moshe undertook to do the work himself over *bein hazmanim*.

After extensive repairs to that wall, the *talmidim* decided that one new wall in their *beis midrash* wasn't enough. The whole *beis midrash* needed fixing. The ceiling was stained from water damage, the lighting fixtures needed replacing, and the whole room needed repainting. Again, the *talmidim* of the program provided both the funds and the work. And they didn't skimp; they used the best materials and the most expensive type of paint. It turned out that other *talmidim* were also professional construction tradesmen. The *beis midrash* is now spanking new. But, said the *talmidim*, why stop there? The outside door and the inside walls at the entrance to the lower floor of Lauffer were replaced and renovated. The bathrooms are almost done. The process is continuing; the work is professional and beautiful. And it was all financed and done by the students of the Mechina. Truly a story worth reporting!



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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

## TO BELIEVE IS TO BEHAVE (PART 6)

(LAILAH GIFTY AKITA)

*“These are the precepts whose fruits a person enjoys in this world, but whose principal remains intact in the World to Come. They are: honoring one’s parents; acts of kindness; early arrival at the study hall in the morning and the evening; hosting guests; visiting the sick; providing the wherewithal for a bride to marry; escorting the dead; praying with concentration; making peace between two people; and Torah study is the equivalent of them all.” (Tractate Shabbat 127a)*

**T**he fifth mitzvah is that of visiting the sick. So significant is this mitzvah that our Sages teach (Nedarim 39b) that when a person visits someone who is sick, they take away with them one-sixtieth of the sickness when they leave. Rabbi Menachem ben Shlomo Meiri, the brilliant thirteenth century Talmudist, explains that the patient enjoys their company so much that it makes them feel better than they did before the visit.

Not surprisingly, what our Sages knew two thousand years ago has become an integral part of understanding disease and trying to combat it in our modern world. For example, the research department at Johns Hopkins Medicine has published findings showing that people with a family history of heart disease, who also had a *positive outlook*, were one-third less likely to have a heart attack within five to twenty-five years than those with a more negative outlook. What makes this research even more startling is that the statistics remained unchanged even for those with a family history of heart disease. As part of the Johns Hopkins study, in order to reach their final conclusions, the research team created medical definitions of “positive” and “negative” which could be quantified. But, as the head of the research team put it, “You don’t need a survey to assess your own positivity. I think people tend to know how they are.”

A few lines later, on the next page, the Talmud relates that one of Rabbi Akiva's students fell ill and no one came to visit him. Rabbi Akiva, who was the leading Torah authority in his generation, came to see him. Rabbi Akiva saw that the conditions his student was being kept in were detrimental to his health. According to some accounts Rabbi Akiva himself improved the conditions, and according to other accounts he instructed household members to sweep the floor and sprinkle water over it to settle the dust. The student was revived after Rabbi Akiva’s visit, and was so overwhelmed with gratitude that he told Rabbi Akiva, “Rebbe, you have returned my life to me!” From this story it is possible to begin to appreciate the many positive consequences of visiting the sick. According to one opinion, when those looking after the sick student saw the esteem that Rabbi Akiva held him in, they immediately started to treat him with more respect and to tend more attentively to his needs.

In his ethical work titled *Seder Hayom*, Rabbi Yechiel Yehoshua Rabinowitz, the Rebbe of Biala, writes that visiting the sick is the highest form of kindness there is. As the Talmud teaches, it has no limits. The Rebbe

adds that sometimes with encouraging and kind words, a visitor can revitalize an ill person to the point that the patient will tell everyone afterwards that *because of the visit* they now feel like a new person.

Undoubtedly, when done properly, visiting a sick person assists the patient and helps them find new strength to fight their illness. However, there is an additional dimension to this as well. Visiting the sick is also beneficial to the person who is doing the visiting. Too often we may take our good health for granted. We may just assume that we are supposed to be well. But when we visit someone whose health is not in the best of shape, it should serve as a reminder that good health is a delicate reality that can – and sometimes does – change in a moment. When we pay a sick call, we should use it as a means to remind ourselves that we should always be aware of where our good health comes from, and we should show our appreciation to the One who gives it to us.

• *To be continued...*

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## LOVE OF THE LAND

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Selections from classical Torah sources that express the special relationship between the people of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach, *zatzal*

### The Torah and the Land

**I**n the second chapter of the *Shema* we recite each morning and evening, we repeat Hashem's warning that turning away from Him to worship idols will result in being exiled from the land He has given us. This is immediately followed by the commandments of tefillin and mezuzah.

This connection is explained by the Midrash (Sifri Ekev) with a parable:

“A king became angry with his wife and sent her off to her parents' home. As he banished her, he instructed her to continue wearing her royal jewelry even while she was away so that she would be familiar with them when she eventually returned to his palace.

“In similar fashion Hashem instructed His beloved people as He banished them from His palace, Eretz Yisrael, to continue being distinguished with their mitzvahs so that they would be familiar with them when they returned.”

Tefillin and mezuzah are mitzvahs which are not dependent on living in Eretz Yisrael, unlike the many mitzvahs relating to agriculture, and they are as incumbent upon a Jew outside of Eretz Yisrael as upon one in the land. Why, then, is this connection made between these mitzvahs and the land?

The answer lies in the unique spiritual status of Eretz Yisrael, which is directly ruled by Hashem without the involvement of angels or any other heavenly forces. Mitzvahs fulfilled in Eretz Yisrael therefore have the ultimate spiritual quality, whereas those fulfilled outside of the land are of only secondary quality. This is

communicated in the statement of our Sages (Sifri Re'eh) that living in Eretz Yisrael is equivalent to all the mitzvahs of the Torah.

This unique status of Eretz Yisrael is also expressed in the land's sensitivity to sin. The Torah warns us that Eretz Yisrael is not like other lands and it will vomit out those who contaminate it (Vayikra 18:25). When the Kuttim (later known as the Samaritans) were brought to Eretz Yisrael by the Assyrian conqueror Sancheriv to replace the Ten Tribes he had exiled, they continued to worship idols, and Hashem sent lions to devour them (see Melachim II chapter 17). In their native land they were not punished in such swift fashion, but Eretz Yisrael cannot tolerate idolatry.

Hashem sanctified the nation dwelling in His land by commanding them with mitzvahs, and warned them that if they contaminate this land with idolatry or licentiousness, the land will vomit them out.

“Love of the Land” is therefore not expressed by merely mouthing patriotic slogans, but by maintaining a standard of loyalty to Hashem's Torah, and living according to the moral standards set by the Torah – which will grant us the privilege of remaining in our beloved land with security and sanctity.

- *Adapted from Nachmanides' Commentary on Vayikra 18:25*

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## WHAT'S IN A WORD?

### Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

#### Shavuot: Brilliant Prohibitions

An ancient custom for the Holiday of Shavuot, dating back more than 1,000 years, calls for reading *piyyutim* which list the 613 commandments. These liturgical compositions comprise a category of poems known as *azharot* (literally, “warnings” or “prohibitions”). In this essay we will consider the etymological basis for the Rabbinic Hebrew word *azharah*. In doing so, we will explore how *azharah* differs from other seemingly synonymous terms like *issur* and *lav*.

When Jethro advises Moses on how to establish a judicial system, he tells his esteemed son-in-law, “And you shall warn (*v'hizhartah*) them about the statutes and the laws, and you shall notify them of the path that they shall walk in and the actions that they shall do” (Ex. 18:20). In this passage,

Jethro uses a verb cognate of the word *azharah*, and, in fact, cognates of this root appear some twenty-two times throughout the Bible. The word *azharah* itself in the sense of a “prohibition” first appears in the Mishna, where it occurs a handful of times (*Pesachim* 3:1, 4:1, *Sanhedrin* 7:7, and *Karetot* 3:10). This particular word often denotes the “warning” aspect of a prohibition (i.e. “thou shall not...”), as opposed to the punishment aspect (for examples, see *Yevamot* 2b and *Sifrei Naso* 1).

All the early Hebrew lexicographers – including Menachem Ibn Saruk (920-970), Rabbi Yonah Ibn Janach (990-1050), Rabbi David Kimchi (1160-1235), and Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Parchon (the 12th century author of *Machberet He'Aruch*) – understand the source of the word *azharah* to be the trilateral root ZAYIN-HEY-REISH. They

understand this root to have two very distinct meanings: on the one hand, it means “warning” (hence, *azharah* is a “prohibition”), and on the other hand it means “light” (Hoshea 7:16, Ps. 132:12). None of these grammarians intimate a connection between the two distinct meanings of that root.

However, Maimonides’ son, Rabbi Avraham Maimuni (1186-1237), writes that the root of *l’hazhir* in the sense of “to warn” is the three-letter root ZAYIN-HEY-REISH, which means “light” or “brilliance” (*zohar*). He explains that one illuminates another’s intellectual perception by instructing that person as to his or her responsibilities. Therefore, “warning” a person can be said to be “shedding light” on that person’s expectations. Accordingly, the shared theme common to both meanings of this root is the concept of “enlightenment,” both in the literal sense of bringing “light” and in the figurative sense of “enlightening” a person through adding to their knowledge.

The late Rabbi Dr. Jose Faur (1934-2020) infers from this that at its core the word *azharah* does not just refer to what the Torah outlaws (“negative commandments”), but also to what the Torah prescribes (“positive commandments”). For this reason, the poetic liturgical compositions known as *azharot* list both types of mitzvahs – not just the negative commandments.

But not everybody agrees that the root of *azharah* is the trilateral root ZAYIN-HEY-REISH. Some trace the word to the two-letter root ZAYIN-REISH (“estrangement,” as in *zar*), while others even suggest that its source is the monoliteral ZAYIN. In fact, there is one case in which a cognate of *azharah* is spelled without the letter HEY, which we have assumed until now is part of its root: In Lev. 15:31, G-d tells Moses, “and you shall warn (*v’hizartem*) the Children of Israel from their impurities...” The word used here to denote the warning is *v’hizartem*, instead of the expected *v’hizhartem*. Rabbeinu Efrayim touches on this point by noting that “warning” (*azharah*) a person means telling a person he should “ estrange” himself (i.e., make himself *zar*) from that which he has been warned against.

Similarly, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) traces the term *azharah* to the biliteral

root ZAYIN-REISH. One group of derivatives of this root are headlined by the word *zoreh*, which means “to scatter” (see, for examples, Ex. 32:20, Lev. 26:33, Ruth 3:2, Ps. 106:27). A sub-derivative of that is the word *zohar* (“light”), which denotes the way light *scatters/spreads out*. In the same way that rays of light spread out in order to illuminate as much as possible, an enlightened person must spread out his intellectual purview across a wide body of knowledge in order to be cautious and not violate what is expected of him. Rabbi Pappenheim explicitly notes that *azharah* does not mean “a warning,” as many have understood it. Rather, he explains that the verb *la’hazhir* means “to enlighten.” For example: “You shall enlighten them and they shall not incur guilt” (II Chron. 19:10), “And you shall enlighten them from Me” (Yechezkel 3:17). Enlightening a person as to his obligations is tantamount to forewarning them about what they should be careful of. Thus, even as Rabbi Pappenheim traces *azharah* to the biliteral ZAYIN-REISH, he still offers the same basic explanation as Rabbi Avraham Maimuni, who traced that term to the trilateral ZAYIN-HEY-REISH.

Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) traces the word *zohar* to the monoliteral root represented by the letter ZAYIN. He explains that this letter stands for “visual revelation” of that which can be seen by the eye, as Hebrew words derived from this root are related to the realm of the ocular. Most notably, the Hebrew pronoun *zeh* (“this”) is derived from this root, and according to rabbinic tradition always refers to something perceivable by the sense of sight. Other words associated with this root include *zach* (“pure”), *zahav* (gold”, i.e. shiny and sparkling), *ziv* (“countenance,” dazzles one’s eyes), *zikim/zekukin* (“sparks of fire,” glitter and shimmer), *zanav* (“tail,” which protrudes from behind an animal and is quite visible), *ozen* (“ear,” which protrudes from a person’s head and is also quite visible), and *chazah* (which either refers to “vision” itself, or to *chazeh*, “chest,” i.e. a very visible part of the body). In the same sense, *zohar* refers to a “light/enlightenment” that illuminates the eye. Interestingly, Rabbi Marcus notes that the Germanic words for “seeing” (*sehen* in Modern German, *zien* in Dutch, *zen* in Yiddish, *sien* in Afrikaans, *see* in English) also seem to be phonetically related to the letter ZAYIN.

Elsewhere, Rabbi Marcus contends that the Hebrew word *zohar* with a ZAYIN is actually derived from the earlier Biblical Hebrew words *tzohar* (“light”) and *tzoharayim* (“noon,” when the sun’s *light* reaches its peak) with a TZADI. The way he explains it, the letter TZADI later morphed into a ZAYIN (as the two letters are often considered interchangeable), such that *tzohar* became *zohar*.

In Biblical Hebrew, the word *assur* means “tied up” with actual ropes or cables. However, in at least one particular instance, that term assumes more of an abstract meaning: “When a man vows a promise to G-d or he swears an oath to tie a tying (*l’essor issar*) on his soul, he shall not profane his words – in accordance with all that exits his mouth shall he do” (Num. 30:3). In this verse, “to tie a tying” is meant in the proverbial sense, namely, to create prohibition upon oneself by forbidding a certain action or item. This usage is akin to the English expression “my hands are tied,” which means I am prevented from taking certain actions, but does not literally mean that my hands are tied with ropes or cables. This abstract meaning of *assur* and various cognates thereof appear countless times through the Mishna, such that *assur* in post-Biblical Hebrew came to mean “forbidden” or “prohibited.” As a result, the word *issur* (“prohibition”) is a more abstract derivative of the Biblical *assur* (“tied”), and refers to the rule that renders something forbidden.

Rabbi Pappenheim ties the word *assur* to the biliteral root SAMECH-REISH (“removal”), explaining that when one is tied down, then one’s freedom of movement is “removed.” In fact, the notion that the ALEPH of *assur* is superfluous to the actual root has already been noted by the early grammarian Rabbi Yehuda Ibn Chayyuj (945-1000), who adduces that the phrase *bet ha’surim* (Ecc. 4:14) is the semantic equivalent to the phrase *bet ha’assurim* (see Gen. 39:20, 40:3).

Finally, the noun *lav* is an anthimeria derived from the Hebrew word *lo* (“no,” “not,” “do not”). This word does not appear in the Bible, but can be found quite often in later rabbinic writings. In most cases it simply denotes a prohibited act that the Bible has warned a person *not* to do, even if the punishment for the proscribed action is not as severe.

To quickly summarize our findings, we spoke about three words that refer to “prohibitions” that proscribe certain actions. The word *azharah* seems to focus on a prohibition as a way of “enlightening” a person of his duties and expectations. The word *issur* focuses on a prohibition as a way of “tying” a person’s hands, so to speak, and banning him from taking certain actions. And finally, the word *lav* denotes a prohibition as a “no-no” that people are enjoined from committing.

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

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May it truly be for all of us  
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Chag Somayach!**

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# PARSHA OVERVIEW

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## Bamidbar

The Book of Bamidbar – "In the desert" – begins with Hashem commanding Moshe to take a census of all men over age twenty – old enough for service. The count reveals just over 600,000. The *levi'im* are counted separately later on because their service will be unique. They will be responsible for transporting the Mishkan and its furnishings, and assembling them when the nation encamps. The 12 Tribes of Israel, each with its banner, are arranged around the Mishkan in four sections: east, south, west and north. Since Levi is singled out, the tribe of Yosef is split into two tribes, Efraim and Menashe, so there will be four groups of three. When the nation travels, they march in a formation similar to the way they camp.

A formal transfer is made between the first-born and the *levi'im*, whereby the *levi'im* take over the role the first-born would have had serving in the Mishkan if not for the sin of the golden calf. The transfer is made using all the 22,000 surveyed *levi'im* from one month old and up. Only *levi'im* between 30 and 50 will work in the Mishkan. The remaining first-born sons are redeemed with silver, similar to the way we redeem our first-born today. The sons of Levi are divided into the three main families of Gershon, Kehat and Merari (besides the *kohanim* – the special division from Kehat's family). The family of Kehat carried the Menorah, the Table, the Altar and the Holy Ark. Because of their utmost sanctity, the Ark and the Altar are covered only by Aharon and his sons, before the *levi'im* prepare them for travel.

## Naso

The Torah assigns the exact Mishkan-related tasks to be performed by the families of Gershon, Kehat, and Merari, the sons of Levi. A census reveals that more than 8,000 men are ready for such service. All those ritually impure are to be sent out of the encampments.

If a person, after having sworn in court to the contrary, confesses that he wrongfully retained his neighbor's property, he must pay an additional fifth of the base-price of the object and bring a guilt offering as atonement. If the claimant has already passed away without heirs, the payments are made to a *kohen*.

In certain circumstances, a husband who suspects that his wife had been unfaithful brings her to the Temple. A *kohen* prepares a drink of water mixed with dust from the Temple floor and a special ink that was used for inscribing Hashem's Name on a piece of parchment. If she is innocent, the potion does not harm her, but, rather, it brings her a blessing of children. If she is guilty, she suffers a supernatural death.

A *Nazir* is one who vows to dedicate himself to G-d for a specific period of time. He must abstain from all grape products, grow his hair and avoid contact with corpses. At the end of this period he shaves his head and brings special offerings. The *kohanim* are commanded to bless the people. The Mishkan is completed and dedicated on the first day of Nissan in the second year after the Exodus. The prince of each tribe makes a communal gift to help transport the Mishkan, as well as donating identical individual gifts of gold, silver, animal and meal offerings.

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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*

## Bamidbar

### To The Manner Born

**A**fter the description of the national census and the formation of the camp, the Torah describes the nature of the service of the Leviim and the manner of their counting.

The Leviim are appointed as guardians. Their mission is described as various forms of guardianship: of the Sanctuary, of Aharon [the Kohanim], of the entire community. Preparing the nation for, and educating it to the Sanctuary, is integral to the mission of the Levite guard. In this capacity, the Levi assists the Kohen, whose essential task is to direct and educate the people. (The linguistic root of Kohen means to prepare and direct.)

The position of the Leviim was initially given to the firstborn of each family. The firstborn in each family was in a way responsible for fulfilling G-d's Will within his family circle. As the Jewish people emerged from Egypt, they were gathered in groups of tribes, families and households. In order that these separate groups should remain united in a common mission, G-d appointed the firstborn within the families and homes to bear, cultivate and defend G-d's Will in the midst of families. In this way, each family was connected to the Divine mission of the national community. This is why the firstborn were consecrated to G-d. (Shemot 3:13)

Now, when this common element of Divine mission was given symbolic expression through the Sanctuary housing the Torah, it was necessary to appoint guardians. The firstborn, who had already been sanctified, were the natural choice. But they had forfeited this position when they failed to prove themselves the champions and guardians of Torah

during the sin of the Golden Calf. What was expected of them was done by the Leviim – only the Leviim had rallied to the call of Moshe to stand up for the honor of G-d. In return, G-d raised the Leviim and assigned to them the task of the firstborn, which they had earned by virtue of their staunch commitment.

The Leviim are not counted from the age of twenty, as is the rest of the population, but rather from the age of one month – the legal age of viability. This indicates that their calling as Leviim entails far more than the performance of service assigned to them in the Sanctuary. This service – guarding the Sanctuary during the encampments, transporting the Tabernacle components and furnishings during travel – is only an outgrowth of their essential mission. For *that* work, the Leviim are counted from age thirty and upwards. (Bamidbar 4:33). But for their essential mission – securing the Torah which the Sanctuary represents – they are counted from one month old.

Because there were always more Leviim than necessary to fill the shifts required for service in the Temple, the Leviim had much spare time on their hands – time intended, and indeed used, for them to immerse themselves in Torah scholarship. In this way they became great Torah scholars and brought the Torah back to the people. *This* is the way they performed their most essential function of safeguarding the Torah. And for this vital task, training from the cradle was required to guide and direct the infant to a loftier and higher calling.

- Sources: Commentary, Bamidbar 3:6-15

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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*

## Naso

### The Priestly Blessing

*Speak to Aharon and his sons as follows: Thus shall you bless the Children of Israel...May G-d bless you and keep you. May G-d illuminate His Countenance for you and favor you. May G-d turn His Countenance toward you and establish peace for you. (Bamidbar 6:23-26)*

**T**he priestly blessing speaks to three layers of blessing. The first – blessing and keeping – refers to the possessions that require safeguarding; the blessing alone without protection not be sufficient – they must remain in our possession to prove to be a true blessing. This is the blessing of prosperity and material possessions.

But there is more to life than prosperity and comfort – these alone leave a soul unsatisfied. The next blessing showers upon us G-d’s illumination and favor. This illumination and grace refer to spiritual gifts; when granted, they endow us with spiritual wisdom whereby the aims of G-d are illuminated and revealed, so that we may understand our history and task in life.

Finally, there is one more layer of blessing. Material and spiritual blessings have already been pronounced. The final blessing – the crown of all three – is G-d *turning His Countenance* toward us. The meaning of this blessing is G-d’s closeness. We will attain it if we properly utilize all the material and spiritual assets granted to us. After our eyes have been enlightened to recognize His will, we are to channel our material and spiritual assets toward the fulfillment of the Divine aims revealed to us. We do not yearn for G-d’s closeness in order to attain through it material and spiritual blessing. Rather, we seek material and spiritual blessing in order to do with it G-d’s Will – so as to be *worthy* of His closeness. That closeness is the absolute good.

The “Countenance” of G-d are His aims. If G-d illuminated those aims and we properly utilized our G-d-granted spiritual abilities and material means to

achieve those aims, then this final blessing will vest: He will direct to us all the aims of His rule in nature and history. Because G-d is interested in the formation, continuance and development of a G-d serving people and community, the purpose of His rule will be focused on those people – they will be the object of His providence.

This, in turn, will lead to peace and harmonious accord. In the words of Rav Hirsch, “Every breath drawn by an individual who truly serves G-d will elicit a responsive chord from the universe around him.”

When these blessings were recited in the Sanctuary, they were merged into one sentence, rather than three separate pronouncements followed by a congregational “amen.” In the Sanctuary, no “amen” was recited at all. Instead, the people pronounced “Blessed be the Name of His glorious Kingship for eternity.” Additionally, the Kohanim held their hands over their heads instead of at shoulder level, as they would do when blessing a congregation outside of the Temple.

All of these differences express the universal and far-reaching blessing emanating from the Sanctuary. “Amen” is an expression of personal acceptance and taking to heart. If “amen” were to be recited by only the fraction of the people standing in the Sanctuary at the time of the blessing, the blessing would be limited in its reach. Instead of saying “amen” and acting as *recipients* of the blessing, the people present are considered as if they pronounced the blessing along with the Kohanim. In this manner they are preserving the character of the blessing for the entire community.

- Sources: Commentary, Bamidbar 6:23-26

## Special Shavuot Feature!

### Why Was Six Scared of Seven?

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

In the Land of Israel, the Festival of Succot lasts for a majestic eight days. The Festival of Pesach lasts for an almost-majestic seven days. And the Festival of Shavuot lasts for just one day. It seems a little paltry compared to the other two and yet the Festival of Shavuot represents the absolute foundation of Judaism – the day that the Holy Torah was given to the Jewish Nation.

Why would it be that this day which exemplifies everything that Judaism stands for be encapsulated in just one day? And why is it that Shavuot is a Festival that seems to be devoid of any real trappings? It's true that cheese-cake appears extensively on the Shavuot menu, but there is no obligation to eat it (what a relief for the lactose-intolerant and the cheese-cake intolerant!). Pesach and Succot, on the other hand, are chock-a-block full of symbolism with special activities and special foods.

In Jewish philosophy, numbers are very significant. The Maharal of Prague, Rabbi Yehudah Loew, explains that the number seven represents the natural world. The number seven stems from the seven days of the creation and the seven days of the week. A number seven will always be connected to nature. The number eight, on the other hand, represents something that is beyond the natural world, something that belongs to the spiritual realms. With this in mind we can understand why Succot lasts eight days, since it's a time of intense spirituality culminating in Simchat Torah and our expression of love for G-d. But why would Pesach last for only seven days? Why is Pesach, the Festival of Freedom – the time that we commemorate all of the super-natural miracles that God wrought for His Chosen Nation – represented by the number seven? And, last of all, Shavuot, one of the holiest and spiritually transcendent days of the year, is just one day. Why?

Pesach does not finish when Pesach ends! The Festivals are given to us to draw closer to G-d and to join together with Him in such a way that we feel their

influence throughout the entire year. Pesach is the Festival of Freedom, but Pesach does not define for us what freedom means. Freedom from what? Freedom for what? Pesach is the beginning of a process that ends with Shavuot. Shavuot, the Giving of the Torah, was the defining moment in Jewish history and theology. Of what use is freedom from slavery and subjugation if that freedom is not harnessed to aspirations and goals that will transform us into something better than we were? It transpires that Pesach really does have eight days in a sense. However, the eighth day – the culmination of everything that Pesach truly represents – is seven weeks later on Shavuot. Shavuot is the moment that we, the Jewish Nation, moved out of the physical realms and into the spiritual ones instead. By accepting the Torah on Sinai we declared our absolute allegiance to G-d. We took our oh-so-precious, new-found freedom from Egypt and slavery and we dedicated it to G-d. That is why there are no unique activities on Shavuot that set it apart from the other Festivals. On Shavuot we celebrate by learning G-d's Torah. What could be more Heavenly than that? We do not base the Festival around physical signs because to do so would be too “seven-like” and would detract us from the very essence of the day.

There is a famous children's joke, “Why was six scared of seven? Because seven eight (ate) nine”. The children think it's hilarious and the adults think that it's ridiculous.

And I think that without Shavuot we would really have to be scared of the number seven, scared of the tremendous power that physicality has in the world and how it overwhelms and consumes us so easily. But we don't remain in the realm of seven. From Pesach through Shavuot we push forward and metamorphose into the number eight, leaving the physicality behind as we soar into the spiritual spheres that contain nothing but ourselves and Our Father in Heaven.

Bliss. Pure bliss. Far, far more sublime than even the tastiest cheese-cake in the world.



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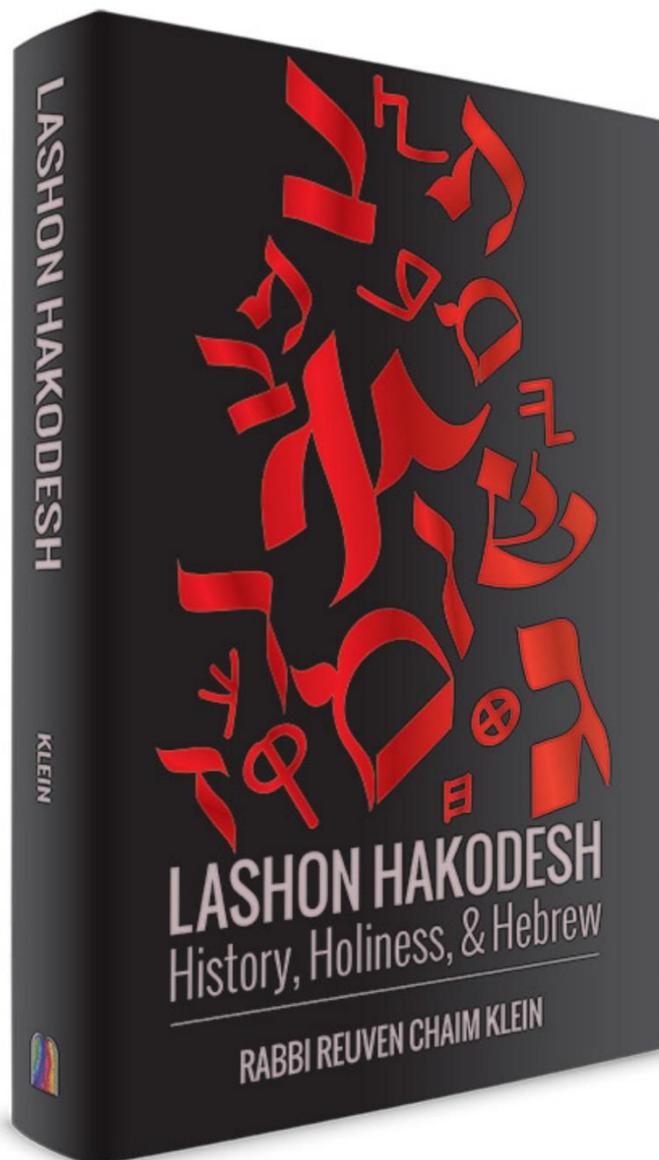
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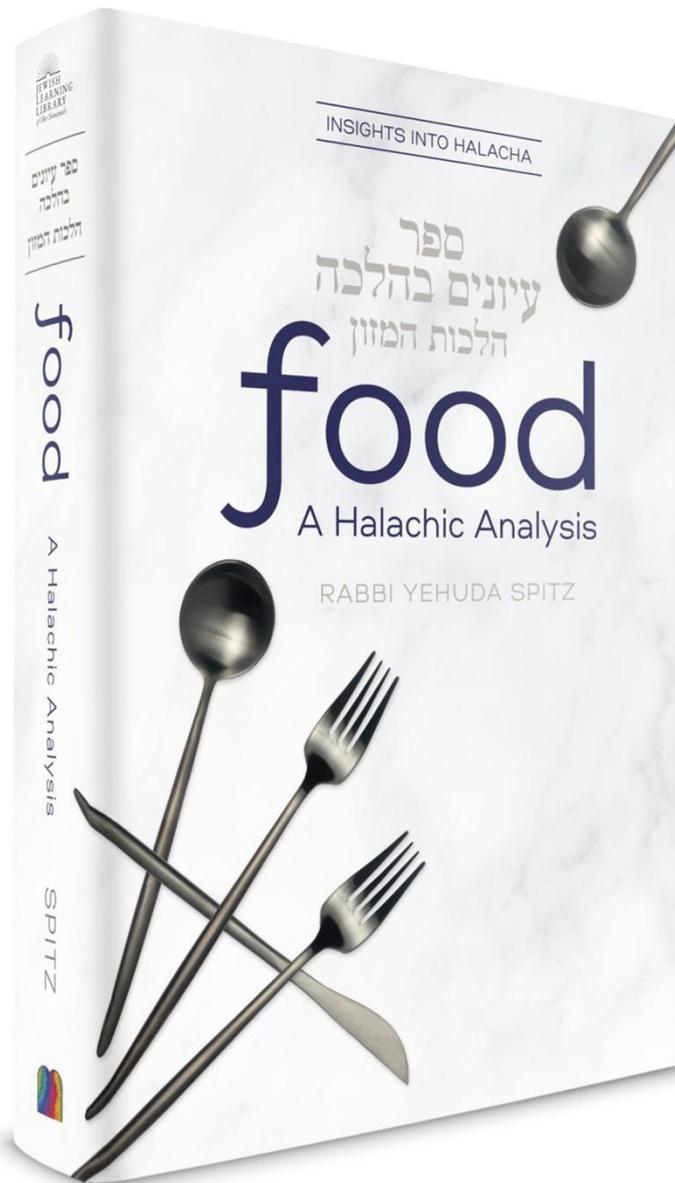


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