

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### Putin Is War

*“Then Moses inquired about the goat of sin-offering, and it had already been burned! He was angry with Elazar and Itamar, Aharon’s remaining sons, and said, ‘Why did you not eat the sin-offering in the sacred area?’ And Aharon spoke to Moses, ‘Was it not this day they brought their sin-offering and their burnt-offering before Hashem? Now that such things have befallen me (the death of Nadav and Avihu), had I eaten sin offering today, would Hashem approve?’ Moshe heard and he approved.” (10:20)*

In 2015, Boris Nemstov started an investigation into the 2014 Russian intervention in Crimea. The report includes testimonials of Russian soldiers taken prisoner in Ukraine and photos of Russian military personnel who died in the hostilities. In the report, Nemstov wrote, “Putin is war. The cowardly and despicable war unleashed by Putin will cost the country a lot. We will be paying for this adventure with the lives of our soldiers, economic crisis and political isolation. We will pay with enmity from our long-time allies. No people are closer and more like kin to the Russians than the Ukrainians. These are our brothers –without any pathos – and the war between Russians and Ukrainians in Donbas is impossible to characterize in any other way except as fratricide.”

Nemstov was assassinated on the Bolshoy Moskvoretsky Bridge in central Moscow on February, 27, 2015. In Russia, fourteen printing companies refused to publish the report, and PayPal blocked an account raising funds for the report.

A country gets the leaders it deserves. The lust for Empire produces leaders with super-sized egos. I remember several years ago sharing a sauna in Cyprus with a bunch of Russians. The conversation turned to their leader, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. I mentioned that Putin was suspected of being instrumental in the murder of Boris Nemstov. They chuckled and proudly said that Putin knew how to look after himself. Their cold-bloodedness chilled even the roasting heat of the *schwitz* we were sitting in.

If you look at a Sefer Torah, you will see that the first word of the book of Vayikra is written in an unusual fashion. The last letter of *vayikra*, the *alef*, is written much smaller than the rest of the word. Why is the *alef* small? When Hashem told Moshe to write the word *vayikra*, meaning “He called,” Moshe did not want to write that *alef*. It seemed to Moshe that it gave him too much importance. How could he write that Hashem called to him? Who was he, after all? A mere man. Moshe would have preferred to write *vayikar*, “He (Hashem) happened [upon him].” In other words, Hashem just came across Moshe and did not “go out of His way” to appear to him, so to speak. In spite of Moshe’s protestations, Hashem told him to write *vayikra*, “He called.” Moshe put the *alef* at the end of the word as Hashem had commanded him, but he wrote it small.

What's in a small *alef*?

The *alef* is the letter that represents the will, the ego. It is the first letter of the word for "I" – *ani*. When a person sees himself as the Big A, the Big *Alef*, Number One, he is usurping the crown of He who is One.

But when a person sees himself as no more than a small *alef*, he makes room for the Divine Presence to dwell in him. His head is not swollen with the cotton candy of self-regard.

Moshe Rabbeinu was the humblest of all men. Moshe made himself so little that he was barely in this world at all. He did not even want to be a small *alef*. He, as no man before or since, saw that there is only one *Alef* in creation, only one Number One: Hashem.

Moshe made his own *alef* – his ego – so small that he merited that the Torah was given through him.

When Moshe finished writing the Torah, some ink was left in his pen. As he passed the pen across his forehead, the drops of ink became beams of light shining from his visage.

That extra ink that was left in Moshe's pen was the ink that should have gone to writing the Big *Alef*. Instead, it became a corona of shining light to adorn the humblest of men.

*"Moshe heard and he approved."*

As soon as Moshe heard Aharon's reasoning, the he was an *onen*, a mourner who has not yet buried his close family member, he agreed the Aharon could not have eaten the sin-offering. Rather than try and defend his opinion, Moshe was humble enough to back down immediately.

Would it be that our world-leaders had all have a tiny fraction of the humility of the Leader of Israel.

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# Q & A

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## Questions

1. What date was "yom hashemini"?
2. Which of Aharon's *korbanot* atoned for the Golden Calf?
3. What *korbanot* did Aharon offer for the Jewish People?
4. What was unique about the *chatat* offered during the induction of the *Mishkan*?
5. When did Aharon bless the people with the *birkat kohanim*?
6. Why did Moshe go into the *Ohel Mo'ed* with Aharon?
7. Why did Nadav and Avihu die?
8. Aharon quietly accepted his sons' death. What reward did he receive for this?
9. What prohibitions apply to a person who is intoxicated?
10. Name the three *chatat* goat offerings that were sacrificed on the day of the inauguration of the *Mishkan*.
11. Which he-goat *chatat* did Aharon burn completely and why?
12. Why did Moshe direct his harsh words at Aharon's sons?
13. Moshe was upset that Aharon and his sons did not eat the *chatat*. Why?
14. Why did G-d choose Moshe, Aharon, Elazar and Itamar as His messengers to tell the Jewish People the laws of *kashrut*?
15. What are the signs of a kosher land animal?
16. How many non-kosher animals display only one sign of *kashrut*? What are they?
17. If a fish sheds its fins and scales when out of the water, is it kosher?
18. Why is a stork called *chasida* in Hebrew?
19. The *chagav* is a kosher insect. Why don't we eat it?
20. What requirements must be met in order for water to maintain its status of purity?

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

## Answers

1. 9:1 - First of Nissan.
2. 9:2 - The calf offered as a *korban chatat*.
3. 9:3,4 - A he-goat as a *chatat*, a calf and a lamb for an *olah*, an ox and a ram for *shelamim*, and a *mincha*.
4. 9:11 - It's the only example of a *chatat* offered on the courtyard *mizbe'ach* that was burned.
5. 9:22 - When he finished offering the *korbanot*, before descending from the *mizbe'ach*.
6. 9:23 - For one of two reasons: Either to teach Aharon about the service of the incense, or to pray for the *Shechina* to dwell with Israel.
7. 10:2 - Rashi offers two reasons: Either because they gave a halachic ruling in Moshe's presence, or because they entered the *Mishkan* after drinking intoxicating wine.
8. 10:3 - A portion of the Torah was given solely through Aharon.
9. 10:9-11 - He may not give a *halachic* ruling. Also, a *kohen* is forbidden to enter the *Ohel Mo'ed*, approach the *mizbe'ach*, or perform the *avoda*.
10. 10:16 - The goat offerings of the inauguration ceremony, of *Rosh Chodesh*, and of Nachshon ben Aminadav.
11. 10:16 - The *Rosh Chodesh chatat*: Either because it became *tamei*, or because the *kohanim* were forbidden to eat from it while in the state of *aninut* (mourning).
12. 10:16 - Out of respect for Aharon, Moshe directed his anger at his sons and not directly at Aharon.
13. 10:17 - Because only when the *kohanim* eat the *chatat* are the sins of the owners atoned.
14. 11:2 - Because they accepted the deaths of Nadav and Avihu in silence.
15. 11:3 - An animal whose hooves are completely split and who chews its cud.
16. 11:4,5,6,7 - Four: Camel, *shafan*, hare, and pig.
17. 11:12 - Yes.
18. 11:19 - Because it acts with *chesed* (kindness) toward other storks.
19. 11:21 - We have lost the tradition and are not able to identify the kosher *chagav*.
20. 11:36 - It must be connected to the ground (i.e., a spring or a cistern).

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

## Words for Wine (Part 2)

In this special two-part essay we get into the Purim holiday spirit by discussing the various Hebrew words for Achashverosh's favorite alcoholic beverage – wine. In Part 1 we focused on the Hebrew words *yayin* and *tirosh*, attempting to differentiate between the two and tracing their etymologies to their most rudimentary roots. In Part 2 here we visit a whole bevy of words for “wine,” such as *chamar*, *shechar*, *sava*, *assis*, and *smadar*, trying to pinpoint their exact meanings and etymologies.

The Hebrew word *chamer* in the sense of “wine” appears three times in the Bible (Deut. 32:14, Isa. 27:2, and Ps. 75:9). Rashi (to Deut. 32:14) explains that *chamer* is the Aramaic word for *yayin*. Indeed, the Aramaic *chamar* or *chamra* appears several times in the Bible (Dan. 5:1-2, 5:4, 5:23, Ezra 6:9, 7:22) and is the standard word for “wine” throughout the Talmud and Targumim. *Chamar medinah* – “the wine of the country” – refers to any especially important drink in a given locale.

Similarly, Midrash Tanchuma (Shemini 5) notes that the Hebrew word *yayin* and the Aramaic word *chamar* both mean “wine” but allude to different properties of wine: The Midrash explains that the word *chamar* has a *gematria* of 248, which alludes to man's 248 limbs and recalls the fact that when one drinks wine, the beverage enters each of one's 248 limbs and causes one's body to become lazy and one's intelligence to become harried. In the same vein, the Midrash explains that *yayin's* *gematria* is 70, which equals that of the word *sod* (“secret”), alluding to the fact that “when wine enters, the secret exits” (see also *Sanhedrin* 38a), because wine often induces a person to divulge his innermost thoughts and secrets. Interestingly, the words *yayin* and *chamar* appear side-by-side in *Pittum HaKetoret*, which lists *yayn kafrisin* (ostensibly, “Cypriot Wine”) and *chamar chivaryan atik* (“old white wine”). I am not sure why both the Hebrew and Aramaic words are used in the same sentence.

Rabbi Moshe Ibn Ezra (1055-1138) notes in his work *Shirat Yisrael* that some grammarians have supposed that the meaning of *chamer* as “wine” is known to us via tradition, but that *chamer* itself is not cognate with any other Hebrew word. However, he disagrees with these grammarians and contends that the word *chamer* actually means “red” and serves as an adjective describing the color of wine (see Ps. 75:9, where the word *chamer* appears as an adjective to describe the noun *yayin*). Because most wines are reddish, the very word *chamer* eventually became a noun that referred to “wine” itself. A similar explanation is offered by Rabbi Yehuda Ibn Balaam (1000-1070). Likewise, Radak (to Isa. 27:2, Ps. 75:9 and in *Sefer HaShorashim*) writes that a special feature of wine is that it is red, which he explains is why the Arabic word *achmar* (“red”) is derived from the Arabic *khamr* (“wine”), which is clearly related to *chamer* in Hebrew/Aramaic. What is fascinating is that Rabbi Moshe Ibn Ezra claims that in Arabic there are over 100 words for “wine,” most of which are derived from a wine's various features, such as its quality, quantity or hue.

In a slight departure from this, Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) contends that the core meaning of *chamer* is actually “brown” (which is not so far off from red). With this in mind, he explains that *chamer* alludes to the reddish-brownish color of wine, while *chamor* (“donkey”) and *yachmor* (a deer-like Kosher animal mentioned in Deut. 14:5, I Kings 5:3) refer to brownish beasts. Rabbi Marcus argues that the core root of *chamer* is the biliteral CHET-MEM, from which the words *chum* (“brown”) and *cham* (“hot”) are derived. The connection between these last two words may be that when something is burnt in extreme heat, it often takes on a brownish color. In fact, Rabbi Marcus claims that the very word *braun* (“brown”) in German is related to *brennen* (“burning”) in German (and the same could be said of their English cognates).

Other linguists argue that the term *chamer* refers to the fermenting process, which is why it can mean “wine” (*chamer*) or “sourdough” (*chamirah*). When Joseph’s brothers brought Benjamin to him, the Torah reports that Joseph quickly left the room to cry elsewhere because “his mercy was awakened (*nichmaru*),” and he did not want his brothers to suspect that something was amiss (Gen. 43:30). This word *nichmaru* is spelled with a KAF, but Rabbi David Chaim Chelouche (1920-2016), the late Chief Rabbi of Netanya, notes that the KAF and CHET are often interchangeable. He thus explains that *nichmaru* refers to the festering and bubbling up of emotional sentiments that had long been fermenting within Joseph; this is similar to the idea behind *chamer* as fermented grape juice.

As we have already seen above, the trilateral string CHET-MEM-REISH may refer to either “wine” or “donkey.” The Talmud (*Eruvin* 53b) relates a humorous anecdote wherein a certain Galilean man was chided for not sufficiently accentuating the differences between the letters ALEPH, AYIN, and CHET in his speech. This Galilean man once publicly asked, “Who has an *amra*?” But those who heard him were confused as to whether he was looking for a “donkey” (*chamor*) to ride, “wine” (*chamer*) to drink, “wool” (*amar* with an AYIN) to wear, or a “sheep” (*amar* with an ALEPH) to slaughter.

There are even instances in the Talmud where a word spelled CHET-MEM-REISH can be read as either “wine” or “donkey” (see Ritva to *Bava Metzia* 77b and *Beit Yosef* to *Tur Choshen Mishpat* 190). Apparently to alleviate such confusion, Rabbi Yaakov Moelin (1360-1427), also known as the Maharil, pronounced the word *chamra* in the sense of “wine” with a *schwa* under the CHET (*ch’mara*), and *chamra* in the sense of “donkey” as having a *kamatz* under the CHET (*chamara*).

Following his system of phonetic etymologies, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 1:22-23, 11:3) sees the words *amar* (with an ALEPH), *chamer*, and *amar* (with an AYIN) as interconnected due to the interchangeability of the letters ALEPH, CHET, and AYIN. He understands the core definition of CHET-MEM-REISH (as in *chomer*, “matter/material,” see below) to be the unification and conglomeration of multiple components,

comparing this to *amar/omer* (“bundling” many stalks), *chamarim* (“piles” of similar items); and *amar* (“speech/statement”, i.e. verbalizations composed of many ideas/words focused on one motif). Based on this, Rabbi Hirsch (there and to Deut. 32:14) explains that *chamer* refers specifically to wine that had already undergone the fermenting process, whereby similar particles in the liquid cling together to create a new entity.

Jewish Medieval Philosophy coined the Hebrew terms *chomer* (“matter”) and *tzurah* (“form”) to better express the idea of fashioning a complete product from raw material. In that way, *chomer* refers to the raw materials, while *tzurah* refers to the fashioning and forming of those materials into a complex entity. Based on this, the Maharal (*Gur Aryeh* to Ex. 4:20, *Netzach Yisrael* ch. 31, and *Gevurot Hashem* ch. 29) writes that the *chamor* (“donkey”) is the most materialistic of animals, and its name even alludes to its close association with “matter” (*chomer*). Yet, he explains, it is precisely the donkey’s association with pure matter that makes it unique among non-Kosher animals: something that is so identified with formless matter must, *per force*, be a simple being, because its perennial connection to *chomer* precludes it from connecting to *tzurah*. As a result, in the Maharal’s view, the donkey becomes a symbol for utter simplicity.

With this in mind, the Maharal explains why – of all non-Kosher animals – the donkey is singled out for the mitzvah of *peter chamor* (Ex. 13:13, 34:2), and why Rabbah Bar Bar Chana’s Arab guide showed him that Mount Sinai was surrounded by scorpions that were “as big as white donkeys” (*Bava Batra* 74a). Because man is a highly complex creature (with a strong balance of *chomer* and *tzurah*), the *chamor* represents the wholly materialistic realm bereft of *tzurah* in which man cannot exist. Yet, the simpler something is, the more it recalls the most basic and fundamental elements of Creation, and so in that way, the donkey actually represents the Torah, which is the most basic Creation upon which all of reality hinges. The donkey thus signifies the human goal of totally aligning oneself with the Torah and stripping oneself of the complexities of reality that get in the way.

Although the Maharal does not connect the words *chamor* and *chomer* to *chamer* (“wine”), that connection is made explicitly in the work *Toldot Yaakov Yosef*, by Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Katz of Polonne (1710-1784). He explains that drinking wine (*chamra*) indulges in one’s animalistic desires, which causes a person to become stripped of one’s *tzurah* and more steeped in materialism (*chomer*). Similar explanations of the connection between *chamra* and *chamor* are found in *Ohalei Yehuda* (by Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh of Carpentras) and *Shoresh Yesha* (by Rabbi Yitzchak of Zeldin).

Perhaps influenced by this train of thought, Rabbi Yitzchak Sarim of Aleppo (1798-1873) offers a moralistic exhortation in which he writes that wine is called *chamra* because whoever drinks too much wine will end up losing his mind like a *chamor*, will be reincarnated after death into a *chamor*, and will become so moved as to proposition a *chamor* in the marketplace. This last point is based on a Talmudic passage (*Ketuvot* 65a).

Let us now turn to another possible word for “wine” in Hebrew – *shechar*. When the Torah forbids a Nazirite to consume *yayin* or *shechar* (Num. 6:3), Targum Onkelos and the Targum known as Jonathan render both of these terms into Aramaic as “wine,” that is, *chamar chadat v’atik* (“new and old wine”). Before citing Targum Onkelos, Rabbeinu Bachaya (to Num. 6:3) offers the exact opposite explanation, interpreting *yayin* as a reference to “old wine” and *shechar* as a reference to “new wine” (*tirosh*). Either way, both sources understand *shechar* as yet another word for “wine.” Indeed, the *Sifrei* (*Naso* §23) also teaches that *yayin* and *shechar* in the context of the Nazirite are two terms for the same drink.

Nonetheless, Rabbi Moshe Ibn Ezra (1055-1138) argues that the word *shechar* literally refers to any drink that might render a person intoxicated. This is seen from the fact that when the Torah forbids a *kohen* from entering the Temple after drinking *yayin* or *shechar* (Lev. 10:9), both Targumim render the word *yayin* as *chamar* and the word *shechar* as “(anything) that quenches” (i.e. makes a person drunk), and not just wine. He explains that when it comes to the Nazirite’s prohibitions, the Rabbis felt compelled to explain *shechar* as referring specifically to “wine” – and not just any

intoxicating beverage – because the Bible itself seems to limit the drinks forbidden to a Nazirite to those produced from grapes (see Num. 6:4 and Judges 13:14). Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra (to Num. 6:3) seems to disagree with this, as he explains that *shechar* in the context of the Nazirite includes any intoxicating beverage (cf. Maimonides’ *Laws of Nezirut* 5:1 and *Aruch HaSulchan HeAtid*, *Laws of Nezirut* 13:1-6, who explains that *shechar* refers to any alcoholic drink that has some wine mixed into it).

Nevertheless, Rabbi Avraham Bedersi in *Chotam Tochit* points out that *shechar* in rabbinic usage clearly refers to a drink other than wine. It usually refers to a type of alcoholic mead or beer made from figs, pomegranates, raisins or dates, and often had barley added to it (see *Pesachim* 42b).

Another possible word for “wine” is *sove* (spelled SAMECH-BET-ALEPH). This word appears in the context of the “rebellious son,” who overly indulged himself until he was *zollel* and *sove* (Deut. 21:20). The Mishna (*Sanhedrin* 8:2) and Targum Onkelos explain that *zollel* refers to him overindulging in meat, and *sove* refers to him binging on wine. This explanation parallels the usage of the words *zollel* and *sove* in Proverbs 23:20.

If this were all we had to go on, we could understand the word *sove* as meaning “drunk,” as Ibn Janach and Radak both explain (in their respective *Sefer HaShorashim*). However, another verse reads: “Your *sava* is diluted in water” (Isa. 1:22), and on that verse, the Targum, Rashi (to *Bava Batra* 15b), and Rabbi Yosef Kara all explain that *sava* actually refers to “wine.” Even Ibn Janach and Radak agree to this when explaining that particular verse (see also Rashi to *Avodah Zarah* 77a, that a cognate of this word, *savyuta*, refers to “wine merchants”). Rabbi Yosef Nechemias (to Prov. 23:20) notes that since drunkards are called *sovim*, the word *sava* came to also refer to “wine” itself.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) traces *sove* to the two-letter root SAMECH-BET (“circular”), noting that the drunkard circles the streets looking for a place to buy his next drink. Other words derived from this root that relate to “circular movement” include *sivuv/saviv* (“encircle”), *mesibah* (“party,” where people sit

around a table or guest of honor), and *seivah* (“old age”) and *saba* (“elder,” or “grandfather” in Modern Hebrew), terms that denote a person nearing the completion of his or her time in this world.

*Ohalei Yehuda* relates the word *sava* to its homonym *sava* (SIN-BET-AYIN), which means “satiated,” “satisfied” or “full.” He explains that this refers to wine’s ability to satiate one’s hunger or, conversely, to the fact that strong wine does not quench one’s thirst (as drinking too much wine could lead to dehydration). Based on the last point, he even considers a connection between *sava* and *tzamah* (TZADI-MEM-ALEPH), predicated on the interchangeability of TZADI and SAMECH, as well as BET and MEM.

Here are a few more words for “wine”:

1. The Torah (Ex. 22:28) warns farmers to be extra vigilant to not delay giving the required tithes from their *mel’ayah* and *dim’ah*. The Targum known as Jonathan renders the former word into Aramaic as *chamra*, which leads Rabbi Shlomo of Urbino (in his lexicon of Hebrew synonyms *Ohel Moed*) to list the Biblical term *mel’ayah* as a synonym for “wine.” Indeed, it is fairly explicit elsewhere in the Torah that *mel’ayah* refers to wine (see Num. 18:27). On the other hand, *Midrash Chefetz* (to Ex. 22:28) says that this term

actually refers to grapes, which are “filled” (*maleh*) with wine. Other commentators (including Rashbam and Rabbi Yosef Bechor Shor) explain *mel’ayah* as referring to grain (see Deut. 22:9) and *dim’ah* as referring to “wine” (and/or oil).

2. Menachem Ibn Saruk writes that *dim’ah* refers to “filtered wine” that has no sediment, such that it resembles the pure liquid of “tears” (*dim’ah*). Either way, it seems we have at least one more word for “wine” in Biblical Hebrew (see *Torah Shleimah* to Ex. 22:28 §478 for more sources that discuss whether *mel’ayah* or *dim’ah* refers to “wine”).
3. Rabbi Moshe Ibn Ezra explains that the word *assis* is derived from the verb *issui* (“squeeze,” “press,” “knead”), seemingly in reference to the process used to extract wine from grapes. In Modern Hebrew, *assisi* refers to anything “juicy,” and *issui* refers to a “massage” (by which a masseuse *squeezes* or *kneads* another’s epidermis).
4. Based on Symmachus’ Greek translation of Song of Songs (2:13, 2:15, 7:13), Dr. Edward Kutscher (1909-1971) claims that *smadar* refers to a type of “wine.” Nonetheless, in the Mishna (*Orlah* 1:7, *Gittin* 3:8), this word clearly refers to “unripe grapes,” and that is its classic definition.

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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**O**n the eighth day of the dedication of the Mishkan, Aharon, his sons, and the entire nation bring various *korbanot* (offerings) as commanded by Moshe. Aharon and Moshe bless the nation. Hashem allows the Jewish People to sense His Presence after they complete the Mishkan. Aharon’s sons, Nadav and Avihu, innovate an offering not commanded by Hashem. A fire comes from before Hashem, consuming them and stressing the need to perform the commandments only as Moshe directs. Moshe consoles Aharon, who grieves in silence. Moshe directs the *kohanim* regarding their behavior during the mourning period, and warns

them that they must not drink intoxicating beverages before serving in the Mishkan. The Torah lists the two characteristics of a kosher animal: It has split hooves, and it chews, regurgitates, and re-chews its food. The Torah specifies by name those non-kosher animals which have only one of these two signs. A kosher fish has fins and easily removable scales. All birds not included in the list of forbidden families are permitted. The Torah forbids all types of insects except for four species of locusts. Details are given of the purification process after coming in contact with ritually impure species. The Jewish People are commanded to be separate and holy – like Hashem.

# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

## THE AMIDAH (PART 9) — BLESSING OF FORGIVENESS

*“Prayer is not a miracle. It is a tool, man’s paintbrush in the art of life. Prayer is man’s weapon to defend himself in the struggle of life. It is a reality. A fact of life.”*

(Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer)

The sixth blessing reads: “Forgive us, our Father, for we have erred; pardon us, our King, for we have willfully sinned; for You pardon and forgive. Blessed are you, Hashem, the gracious One Who pardons abundantly.”

Our Sages (*Megillah* 17b), cite a verse from Yeshayahu (55:7) to teach that only after we have accepted upon ourselves not to repeat the mistakes of the past are we ready for the next step in the process of repentance—confession.

Confession is possibly the most difficult part of the process because it entails a person accepting responsibility for the wrong that they have done without trying to deflect the blame onto others. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter would relate that a common reaction of a person who is confronted with their wrongdoings and being rebuked is to apologize and say, “You’re right.” Rabbi Salanter points out that a more fitting reply would be, “I’m wrong,” and yet, typically, that is not the response. In clarifying, Rabbi Salanter gives us an incredible insight into the human psyche. No one really wants to feel inadequate or to be seen as inadequate. We prefer to regard ourselves as being morally upstanding people. Even though “you’re right” means that the person accepts the appropriateness of the rebuke, nevertheless, by avoiding the words “I’m wrong,” in their minds they are able to slightly deflect the discomfort and embarrassment of having been caught in the wrong. Our blessing here is teaching us, first and foremost, that when building our relationship with Hashem, we must be completely honest with Him, and, perhaps more challenging, honest with ourselves. This is why our blessing begins

with a statement of fact: “Forgive us our Father, for we have erred.” It is only by acknowledging our sins that we are able to begin the process of rectifying them.

As in the previous blessing, we switch from calling Hashem “our Father” to referring to Him as “our King.” Hashem’s reaction to willful sins is always much stricter than to other transgressions. Due to the severity of deliberate wrongdoings, we need to approach Hashem as our Ruler, not as our Father. Rabbi Yonatan Eibeshitz (1690-1764) was recognized as a brilliant prodigy already from an early age. At the age of twenty-one he was the head of the Yeshiva in Prague and one of the most captivating public speakers in the entire region. He was appointed as the head rabbinical judge in Prague, and later served as the Chief Rabbi of the prestigious “Three Communities” – Altona, Hamburg and Wandsbeck. In his work entitled *Ya’arot Devash*, a compilation of his ethical lectures and sermons, Rabbi Eibeshitz explains that deliberate sins start off as being inadvertent sins. At the beginning, a person is shocked by their own actions, but, as they become more frequent, the person is no longer so bothered by them, and, finally, they become deliberate and planned with forethought, and, even worse, with anticipation. Expecting fatherly love and compassion after behaving in such a shameful way is inappropriate. Rather, we require a different form of mercy to help erase the past. We must appeal to Hashem as our King in the hope that He will grant us royal forgiveness.

The obvious beauty of our blessing can be found in its concluding words: “Blessed are You, Hashem, the

gracious One Who pardons abundantly.” Hashem does not simply forgive. Rather, He forgives *abundantly*. Not only does Hashem forgive abundantly, but He *wants* to forgive abundantly. And it is up to us to equally want to be forgiven. The rewards for doing so are far-reaching and uplifting. Rabbah bar Chinana said in the name of Rav that anyone who sins and is embarrassed by their actions is forgiven for *all* of their sins (not just for the one sin that caused the embarrassment) (*Brachot* 12b). Rabbi Yom Tov ben Avraham Asevilli (1260-1320), known by his acronym “Ritva,” was the universally revered head of the famed Yeshiva in Seville and author of one of the classic commentaries on the Talmud. He explains that the potency of embarrassment is so great that it is considered as the equivalent of repentance. Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter (1865-1948) was the third Rebbe of Gur. He guided his Chassidim through the turbulent and deadly period

of the Holocaust. In 1940 he managed to escape Poland to what was then Palestine, where he began the arduous process of rebuilding the majestic dynasty that was Gur. The Rebbe would cite the verse in Yeshayahu (1:18), “If your sins are like scarlet, they will become white as snow.” He explained that embarrassment causes a person’s natural reddish complexion to turn white, which signifies that his sins are atoned for, because a person’s sins are erased due to their humiliation. So potent is embarrassment that the Chafetz Chaim would say that if a person knew beforehand that they would be embarrassed later that day, they would go to *mikveh* that morning to prepare for that special moment when they would be humiliated!

*To be continued...*

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## PEREK SHIRA

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by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

### THE SONG OF THE GRAPEVINE

**T**he grapevine says: “So says Hashem: ‘In the same way a wine-bearing grape is found on a cluster and one says, ‘Do not destroy it, as there is blessing within it,’ so too I will do for the sake of My servants, not to destroy all.’” (*Yeshayahu* 68:8)

Hashem compares His nation to a grapevine. Even if a vine consists mostly of rotten grapes, and the vine itself is flimsy and useless, the farmer will still tend to it for the sake of the wine that can be made from the good grapes after they are harvested, squeezed and fermented. So too, Hashem declares that although the majority of individuals in our nation are not yet fitting to be the blessing to Him as we were designed to be, He shall not to discard us. And moreover, in the same way that many people misuse alcohol, but

the grape is nonetheless a blessing for those who drink in good measure, so too Hashem blesses His people for the sake of the righteous who will utilize the blessing appropriately. Hashem derives sufficient satisfaction from the righteous alone, and He patiently waits for the entire nation to repent.

When all the grapes of our nation are harvested, and its wine produced, the blessing, joy, and song that will come from it will fill the world. Until then, we, too should see the good in everyone, ourselves included, and the song of the grapevine can be heard even today.

- Sources: *Radak*; *Shiras HaChaim*; *Beis Elokim*; *Siach Yitzchak*

\**In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Yevamot 2-8

### Yibum: “Brotherly Love”

“From here we learn that a positive command (an ‘*aseh*’) pushes off a negative command (a ‘*lo ta’aseh*’).”

It is evident from the name of this *masechta* that the theme of our current tractate is the mitzvah of *yibum* – what is known in English as “the Levirate Marriage.” This mitzvah and its rules are the predominant topics throughout the *mesechta*. Despite this English term, “Levirate,” it should be clarified that this mitzvah has nothing to do with Levites in particular. Rather, it stems from the Latin word for brother-in-law – *levir* – and is a fitting description of the nature of this mitzvah.

The Torah states:

If brothers reside together, and one of them dies having no offspring, the dead man's wife shall not marry an outsider. Rather, her husband's brother shall be intimate with her, making her his wife, thereby performing the obligation of a husband's brother (*yibum*). And the eldest brother who performs the levirate marriage... will succeed in the name of his deceased brother, so that his deceased brother's name will not be obliterated from Israel. But if the man does not wish to take his brother's wife, she will go up to the gate, to the elders, and say, “My husband's brother has refused to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel; he does not wish to perform the obligation of a husband's brother with me.” Then the elders of his city will call him and speak with him, and he will stand up and say, “I do not wish to take her.” Then his brother's wife will approach her brother-in-law in the presence of the elders and remove his shoe from his foot. And she shall spit before his face and answer him, saying, “Thus will be done to the man who will not build up his brother's household!” And that family will be called in Israel, “The family of the one whose shoe was removed.” (Devarim 25:5-9)

A novel concept can be seen in the Torah permitting a brother-in-law to marry his deceased brother's wife. Under any other circumstance, a man's wife would be

absolutely forbidden to his brother. This forbidden relationship would be one that would violate a severe Torah prohibition. However, for the sake of *yibum*, the brother is not only permitted to marry his brother's widow, but doing so is considered a mitzvah. (It should be emphasized that nowadays, due to a lack of the necessary purity and spirituality that existed in earlier generations, *yibum* is no longer an option and *chalitza* is always done instead.)

In the course of the *gemara's* discussion of this phenomenon of the Torah permitting an act which is normally forbidden, there is extensive focus on the principle of a positive command (an ‘*aseh*’) pushing off a negative command. The *gemara* states that a source for this mitzvah is the Torah permitting *shatnez* for the mitzvah of *tzitzit*. There is a juxtaposition of verses in the Torah, indicating that although the Torah normally forbids *shatnez*, the mitzvah of *tzitzit* nevertheless “pushes off” the prohibition and permits, for example, wool strings on a linen garment.

Aside from the legalistic derivation of *aseh docheh lo ta’aseh* found in *Shas*, a fascinating rationale for the principle of *aseh docheh lo ta’aseh* is found in the writings of the Ramban in his Commentary on the Chumash. He explains that a mitzvah *aseh* – an act of doing something that Hashem commands – stems from the mitzvah to love Hashem, whereas a mitzvah *lo ta’aseh* – refraining from an act that Hashem said not to do – stems from the mitzvah to fear Hashem. Since loving Hashem is relatively more important than fearing Him, there is a logical argument for a mitzvah *aseh* to override and supersede a mitzvah *lo ta’aseh*. (Of course, any fulfillment of a mitzvah *aseh* and a non-transgression of a mitzvah *lo ta’aseh* shows both a great love for Hashem and a great fear and awe of our Creator.)

▪ *Yevamot 5a*

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# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

## Demanding of His Dear Ones

The building of the Tabernacle is complete. It is the eighth day of the inauguration proceedings, and Aharon brings the special sacrificial offerings to mark this joyous and holy day. Moshe and Aharon bless the people, and Hashem's glory is revealed to the entire nation, as a Heavenly fire consumes the offerings. The people shouted for joy and fell on their faces, in joyful prayer and homage.

The sons of Aharon – Nadav and Avihu – moved by the sight of this Heavenly fire and the revelation of Hashem's closeness, desired to increase this closeness and bring their own offering – one that they had not been commanded to bring. Their offering – in content and form – was illegal in every respect. Moreover, it was illegal by the virtue of the fact that it had not been commanded. Subjective arbitrariness has no place in the service of offerings. Even the free-willed offerings must comply with prescribed forms. This principle – that nearness to Hashem must be specifically through acceptance of the yoke of His commandments and not through personal caprice – characterizes all of the Temple service. The offering of Nadav and Avihu ended in their deaths, because at the time of dedication, this message had to be communicated to all future *Kohanim*.

Yet, these men – Nadav and Avihu – are still called “My close ones.” After the fire consumed them, Moshe turns to Aaron and says, “This is what Hashem spoke, saying, ‘I will be sanctified through those near to Me, and thus I will be honored by all

the people.’” The meaning of these words is as follows: Through Hashem's strong actions against His close ones – even decreeing upon them death – it becomes manifest that His will is absolute. For even the greatest people, those close to Him – *precisely they* – are not allowed the slightest deviation from His Will. As a result, the people will come to recognize the weight of the obedience they owe.

Seen in this light, these words of Hashem contain consolation for Aharon, and he therefore remained silent. Had Nadav and Avihu *not* been “near to Hashem,” their sin may have been forgiven, and the Divine decree that was dealt them would not have been a warning of such significance to the people. The Gemara (Yevamot 121b) expounds on the verse in Tehillim, “And round about Him it is exceedingly stormy.” This teaches us that Hashem is exacting, even to a *hairsbreadth* (a play on Hebrew word for stormy) – for those who are closest to Him.

How different is this compared to society's attitude towards the ‘great men’ of the intellectual and political worlds, who are all but granted immunity for their moral lapses. They are hardly called to task, and news stories barely raise an eyebrow.

In Judaism, the greater the person, the greater are his moral responsibilities.

- Sources: Commentary, Vayikra 10:1-3