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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Comfort in Times of Loss

“He shall not come near any dead person; he shall not contaminate himself to his father and his mother.” (21:11)

Dealing with the passing away of someone we love is one of life's great challenges. Even someone of staunch faith can be challenged by the seeming finality of death. A frequently misunderstood concept in Judaism is *tumah* and *taharah*—usually translated as “impurity” and “purity.” The word *tumah* - meaning impurity - is connected to the word "atum", which means sealed. The Jewish idea of impurity is something that seals us off from holiness. The Torah tells us that the greatest source of *tumah* is contact with a dead human body. Now we're not talking here about physical decay or disease. A dead human body is *tameh* - impure - even if moments before in life, it was physically healthy in every way. Why should it be that a cadaver is the greatest source of spiritual impurity? When life leaves the body, it seems like The End. We don't see the continuity of the life of the soul in the World of Souls and the eventual reuniting of body and soul in the World to Come. These are at best intellectual concepts to us. But do we see it? We don't see it. The great barrier that separates us from those who pass

beyond this world, this greatest “sealing off,” this feeling that after life there is nothing — is the greatest impurity that can be. In *parshat Ha'azinu*, G-d says, **אָרְפָּא וְאָנִי אֶחְצֹתִי** – I struck down and I will heal. The word **אֶחְצֹתִי** can be read as *mehitzat* – My barrier –I will heal. This is G-d's promise that the doom of death is not eternal and this ultimate barrier to the life beyond will eventually fall.

The word *taharah*, purity, is related to the word for “shining” or “light.” The brightest part of the day, is called *tzohoraim* – noon. The most open part of the Altar in the Holy Temple was called the *tohorah shel haMizbeach*. *Taharah* is when the light of holiness reaches us. When Noach - Noah - built the Ark, God instructed him to put in a window – a *tzohar*. *Tzohar* comes from the same root as *taharah*. Just as a window lets light into a building, *taharah* lets holiness flood into our lives. We feel the eternity of the soul. The knowledge that death is only a temporary barrier is our greatest consolation in times of loss.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Yoma 23-29

Do I Count?

The leader said, "Show your fingers."

The *mishna* states this as a part of a lottery process that would take place for a specific activity to be done in the Beit Hamikdash. It was done in order to abide by the Jewish law that bans counting people. This ban against counting people has not only practical halachic applications, but esoteric and “deeper” ramifications as well.

Our Sages have taught: “It is forbidden to count Israel, as is written: ‘The number of the *Bnei Yisrael* will be like the sand of the sea, which shall not be measured....’” (Hoshea 2:1) The census taken in the time of King David brought great catastrophe: “David insisted, ‘Go count Israel’...And G-d brought a plague on Israel...70,000 died....” (II Shmuel 24, I Shmuel 15)

One of the activities necessary for the *avodah* service in the Beit Hamikdash was called *terumat hadeshen* – raising and removal of the ash formed on the Altar as a by-product of burning the sacrifices there. One *kohen* out of the group of *kohanim* whose turn it was to serve that day would have the merit to perform this task. But, if more than one wanted to do the *terumat hadeshen*, how was it determined which *kohen* it would be? Sometimes it was necessary to decide the winner by lottery.

We are taught in our *mishna* that the leader would tell all candidates to raise their fingers, meaning that each interested party should hold up one of his fingers. Then, a number was chosen, a number that was larger than the number of volunteers participating in this lottery. The leader would begin counting the fingers aloud, going around the circle more than once. When he concluded his call of the numbers, this lottery clarified the choice of the person who would merit doing *terumat hadeshen* for that day.

The central question here would seem to be: Why was this counting done in an indirect manner instead of just counting the people directly when conducting the lottery? And even if we can understand the reason for this counting prohibition, what is done in other, similar cases that require the counting of people – for example, counting people for a minyan or for a census?

The central concept appears to be a mystical one: The *ayin harah* (“evil eye”) holds sway over anything counted. Attaching a number to something, limits it, and thereby limits its capacity to receive blessing. The commentaries say that counting Jews directly can bring a harsh judgment on the individuals who, if not deemed worthy, may be punished.

In addition, the commentaries explain that when the Jewish People exist in a state of unity they are connected to their Source and do not need any added protection. However, when they are counted as individuals, they become disconnected, as it were, and are subject to individual scrutiny.

From our case of the *kohanim*, however, we see that it is permitted to count objects – e.g., fingers – which substitute for people. Moshe Rabbeinu counted the people through the “half-shekel” that each one donated. King Shaul counted them using lambs. Today, when counting the ten people required for a minyan it is customary to recite the verse, “*Hoshia et amecha...*” (Tehillim 28:9) – which consists of ten words.

As far as counting for a census that was proposed for Israel is concerned, HaRav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, *zatzal*, issued the following reasons to permit participation:

- **INDIRECT COUNT**

As previously mentioned, it is permissible to count objects – e.g., fingers – which substitute for people. In the census, it is not *people* being counted, but rather pen marks on a piece of paper.

- **ESTIMATION**

A large number of families forget, refuse, or simply do not bother responding. The census-takers fill this gap with government records and statistical guesswork (based partly on the number of doors in a given neighborhood!). Therefore, it is not a true count.

- **INCLUSIVE**

The census that was proposed in Israel made no inquiry about religion. Rather, it counts Israeli citizens of all backgrounds and nationalities. Therefore, it is not considered counting “The Jewish People” *per se*.

- **MECHANICAL MEANS**

The actual counting is not done by humans; rather, the census form is scanned into a computer.

Based on *all* the above, Rabbi Elyashiv permitted participation, but added that one should supply only the ID numbers, and leave out the names. This is in order to emphasize the fact that the count is indirect.

(A general remark about counting: It has been noted that the prohibition against counting directly does not seem to be written in the Shulchan Aruch, but rather is found in the writings of the commentaries and *poskim*.)

● *Yoma 23a*

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POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel - Tel +972-2-581-0315 · Email. ohr@ohr.edu

Contributing authors, editors and production team: Rabbi Nota Schiller - Rosh HaYeshiva,
Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz - Rav of Kehillos Ohr Somayach, Avi Kaufman, Rabbi Reuven
Chaim Klein, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Yaakov Meyers, Mrs. Rosalie Moriah, Rabbi
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Q & A

EMOR

Questions

1. Which male descendants of Aharon are *exempt* from the prohibition against contacting a dead body?
2. Does a *kohen* have an option regarding becoming ritually defiled when his unmarried sister passes away?
3. How does one honor a *kohen*?
4. How does the Torah restrict the *Kohen Gadol* with regard to mourning?
5. The Torah states in verse 22:3 that one who "approaches holy objects" while in a state of *tumah* (impurity) is penalized with excision. What does the Torah mean by "approaches"?
6. What is the smallest piece of a corpse that is able to transmit *tumah*?
7. Who in the household of a *kohen* may eat *terumah*?
8. If the daughter of a *kohen* marries a "*zar*" she may no longer eat *terumah*. What is a *zar*?
9. What is the difference between a *neder* and a *nedavah*?
10. May a person slaughter an animal and its father on the same day?
11. How does the Torah define "profaning" the Name of G-d?
12. Apart from Shabbos, how many days are there during the year about which the Torah says that work is forbidden?
13. How big is an *omer*?
14. On what day do we begin to "count the *omer*"?
15. Why do we begin counting the *omer* at night?
16. How does the *omer* differ from other *minchah* offerings?
17. The blowing of the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah is called a "*zichron teruah*" (sound of remembrance). For what is it a reminder?
18. What is unusual about the wood of the *esrog* tree?
19. Who was the father of the blasphemer?
20. What is the penalty for intentionally wounding one's parent?

Answers

1. 21:1 - *Challalim* - those disqualified from the priesthood because they are descended from a relationship forbidden to a *kohen*.
2. 21:3 - No, he is required to do so.
3. 21:8 - He is first in all matters of holiness. For example, a *kohen* reads from the Torah first, and is usually the one to lead the blessings before and after meals.
4. 21:10-12 - He may not allow his hair to grow long, nor attend to his close relatives if they die, nor accompany a funeral procession.
5. 22:3 - Eats.
6. 22:5 - A piece the size of an olive.
7. 22:11 - He, his wife, his sons, his unmarried daughters and his non-Jewish slaves.
8. 22:12 - A non-*kohen*.
9. 22:18 - A *neder* is an obligation upon a person; a *nedavah* is an obligation placed upon an object.
10. 22:28 - Yes. The Torah only prohibits slaughtering an animal and its mother on the same day.
11. 22:32 - Willfully transgressing the commandments.
12. 23:7-36 - Seven.
13. 23:10 - One tenth of an eipha.
14. 23:15 - On the 16th of Nissan.
15. 23:15 - The Torah requires counting seven complete weeks. If we begin counting in the daytime, the seven weeks would not be complete, because according to the Torah a day starts at nightfall.
16. 23:16 - It was made from barley.
17. 23:24 - The akeidas (binding of) Yitzchak.
18. 23:40 - It has the same taste as the fruit.
19. 24:10 - The Egyptian killed by Moshe (Shemos 2:12).
20. 24:21 - Death.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Strange Aliens

As strange as it seems, the Bible uses two different words to mean “foreigner/alien,” and often uses both terms side-by-side. The two terms in question are, of course, *zar* and *nachri*. For example, the Book of Proverbs recommends that a person not toot his own horn in telling of his own praises; rather he should wait for other people to compliment him: “A stranger (*zar*) shall praise you, but not your [own] mouth, a stranger (*nachri*) and not your [own] lips” (Prov. 27:2). In this passage and in many others (see Isa. 28:21, 61:5, Prov. 5:10 20:16, 27:2, Ovadia 1:11, Ps. 81:10), the words *zar* and *nachri* appear in tandem, as if they are synonymous with one another. In this essay, we will explore the etymologies and core differences between these two words, as well as later Hebrew words like *chiloni* and *hedyot*, which all seem to convey the same meaning.

It seems from the commentators that while both *nachri* and *zar* refer to “strangers,” they denote different degrees of “strangeness” regarding the foreigner. In making this case, Ibn Ezra (long commentary to Ex. 21:2) explains that *nachri* implies somebody from an entirely different nation, while *zar* implies somebody who is from the same nation as the speaker but from a different tribe within that nation. The same understanding can be gleaned from the Vilna Gaon’s comments to Proverbs 27:2. Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) points out that in several places the term *nachri* is used to mean the opposite of a relative (Gen. 31:15, Deut. 23:21).

Similarly, the Malbim explains that *zar* refers to somebody from the familiar locality, but who is nonetheless considered “strange” or “foreign” in terms of a particular behavior or habit. *Nachri*, on the other hand, connotes somebody who is a complete foreigner. The *nachri* comes from an entirely different land and different nation, thus making him strange in multiple ways, while the *zar* is strange in one specific way. In short, the *nachri* is

more unfamiliar than the *zar*. (By the way, I used to think that the English word *bizarre* is related to the Hebrew word *zar*, but *Oxford English Dictionary* feels otherwise.)

To give an example of how these words are used, the Malbim notes that a non-Kohen is considered a *zar* (Lev. 22:10, 22:12-13) vis-à-vis his “estranged” relationship toward *terumah* or sacrifices, from which he is forbidden to partake. But just because somebody is not a Kohen, does not make him a total stranger. Similarly, a man other than a married woman’s husband is considered a *zar* to that woman (see Deut. 25:5 and Yechezkel 16:32) because she is forbidden to him, even if he is not a complete stranger.

The Hebrew word *mamzer* (often translated as “bastard” or “illegitimate child”) is said to be related to the Hebrew word *zar* (*Yevamot* 76b). Given the Malbim’s understanding, this makes sense, because the *mamzer* is a full-fledged Jew. He is not a stranger or foreigner. He is only like a “foreigner” regarding his ability to marry into the congregation of Jews with acceptable lineage, but not regarding anything else. Therefore, he is termed a *zar* and not a *nachri*.

The Book of Proverbs (Prov. 2:16, 5:20, 7:5) compares foreign wisdoms to a woman who is a *zarah* and a *nachriah*. *Sefer Chassidim* (619) explains that *nachriah* refers to a non-Jewish woman and *zarah* refers to a Jewish woman. The Malbim explains these two parables as referring to different types of wisdom. Wisdom described as *zarah* is like a Jewish woman to whom one is not married. A Jew may technically marry her if he went through the correct procedure, so she is not totally estranged from him. This type of wisdom refers to the sort of discipline that is not directly related to Torah study, but could still be used to help further one’s understanding of Torah if one appropriately applies its lessons and methodologies. On the

other hand, *nachriah* denotes a form of wisdom that can be likened to a non-Jewish woman. Just as a Jewish man can *never* marry a non-Jewish woman, this type of wisdom can *never* enhance one's understanding of Torah. Rather, its heresies always remain irreconcilable and antithetical to the Torah.

The Bible (Ps. 81:10) also uses the words *zar* and *nachri* in describing foreign deities whom the Jews were prohibited from worshipping: "There shall not be in your midst a strange god (*el zar*), and you shall not bow to a strange god (*el nechar*)." Interestingly, the Talmud (*Shabbat* 105b) seemingly declines to understand the first clause of this verse in its literal sense as outlawing the worship of foreign gods. Instead, the Talmud interprets *el zar* as referring to one's evil inclination, saying a Jew is enjoined from allowing his evil inclination to lord over him. It seems that this forced explanation stems from the use of the word *zar*, which implies a form of strangeness that is still in some ways not totally foreign. The Talmud presumably reasoned that if this clause is referring to literal gods, then there is no way to justify the appearance of the word *zar*, because from the Jewish perspective there is no other god besides the One G-d Who would not be considered totally foreign (*nachri/nechar*). Because of this, the Talmud had to explain that *el zar* does not refer to foreign deities, but to the evil inclination, which is in some ways quite an intimate force (since it rests within a person), yet in other ways is quite foreign (because it goes against everything the Torah stands for).

Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) writes that the root NUN-KAF-REISH, from whence *nachri* derives, can bear two totally opposite meanings because its cognates refer to both "recognizing" (*makir, le'hakir*) and "not recognizing" (*nachri*). As a corollary of this, Rabbi Mecklenburg explains that a verb form of this word means to "deny" or "repudiate" (see Deut. 32:27, Iyov 21:29), which explains why the *Mechilta* (to Ex. 12:43) defines *ben-nechar* as referring to any heretic who *denies* G-d – whether Jewish or not.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) understands that *nachri* and *zar* are synonyms that refer to the same degree of estrangement, but that the etymological cores of the respective words

focus on different points. He too connects the word *nachri* with *makir/le'hakir* ("recognition"), which refers to the formation of preconceived mental schemata that allow a person to recognize somebody or something else without needing to deeply investigate. When one encounters a *nachri*, he has no preconceived cognition of that stranger, so he has a natural inclination to find out more about that person in order to fully recognize him – *le'hakir* that stranger.

On the other hand, Rabbi Pappenheim traces the etymological basis of *zar* to the biliteral root ZAYIN-REISH, which itself means "estrangement" or "disconnection," because the stranger or alien is *disconnected* from the society within which he now finds himself. The same man may be described as both a *nachri* and a *zar*, depending on whether we wanted to focus on the drive to better understand him (*nachri*) or if we wanted to focus on his estrangement from society (*zar*).

The Targumim often translate the Hebrew word *zar* into Aramaic as *chiloni* (for examples, see Onkelos to Ex. 29:33, 30:33 and *Peirush Yonatan* to Targum Yonatan to Gen. 42:7). On the other hand, the Hebrew *nachri* is Aramaicized by the Targumim as *nochrae* (see Targum to Deut. 17:15, II Shmuel 15:19, Prov. 27:2). As an aside, the Targum to Psalms (81:10, 137:4) actually reverses this trend, rendering *nachri* as *chiloni* and *zar* as *nochrae*. Either way, the Aramaic word *chiloni* denotes foreignness or strangeness, just like *zar* and *nachri* do (see *Yair* to Deut. 25:5 and *Me'at Tzari* there).

The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 24:7) also uses the word *chiloni* in the same way that Scripture uses the word *zar* (i.e. non-Kohen). The Midrash explains that the Torah commands that all Jews must "be holy" (Lev. 19:2) because if they want to "walk with G-d," then they must live up to His standards.

To illustrate this idea, the Midrash cites the following parable: A Kohen Gadol was walking on the road when he happened upon a *chiloni* (in this case, a non-Kohen). The *chiloni* said to him: "I will walk with you," to which the Kohen Gadol replied, "I am a Kohen, so I will only travel in ritually pure paths and I do not walk through cemeteries. If you want to walk with me [and adhere to this higher

standard], then good. But if not, then ultimately I will take leave of you and walk by myself."

The exegetical lesson of this parable underscores the notion that the *zar/chiloni* is alien to the Kohen Gadol because he fails to live up to the higher standard exemplified by the Kohen Gadol. In Modern Hebrew, the term *chiloni* refers to a "secular" or "irreligious" Jew, who is likewise estranged from Judaism and following the Torah's precepts. He too fails to live up to the higher standard exemplified by the rest of the Jewish People and makes himself into a foreigner.

The Hebrew word *hedyot* appears in the Mishna multiple times in several different contexts. Sometimes, *hedyot* refers to a "commoner," as

opposed to a member of the political/spiritual leadership (*Nedarim* 5:5, *Kiddushin* 1:6, *Sanhedrin* 7:10, 10:2, *Horayot* 3:2-3:3, *Zevachim* 13:3, *Arachin* 9:2, *Meilah* 3:7), while other times it refers to a regular non-professional person as opposed to a skilled or expert artisan/craftsman (*Rosh Hashana* 2:8, *Moed Katan* 1:8, 1:10, *Yevamot* 12:1, *Gittin* 1:5, *Bava Metzia* 4:4, *Keilim* 26:1, *Mikvaot* 10:1). The word *hedyot* is also sometimes used as a modifier to the word *kohen* to indicate a "regular Kohen" as opposed to a Kohen Gadol (*Yoma* 7:5, *Yevamot* 2:4, 6:2-5, 7:1, 9:1-3, *Ketuvot* 11:6, *Sotah* 4:1, 8:3, 8:5, *Gittin* 9:2, *Kiddushin* 3:12, *Maccot* 3:1, *Horayot* 3:5). This loanword actually derives from the Greek word *idiótēs* ("amateur" or "outsider"), which is the etymological forerunner of the English word *idiot*.

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

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The *kohanim* are commanded to avoid contact with corpses in order to maintain a high standard of ritual purity. They may attend the funeral of only their seven closest relatives: father, mother, wife, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister. The *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) may not attend the funeral even of his closest relatives. Certain marital restrictions are placed on the *kohanim*.

The nation is required to honor the *kohanim*. Physical irregularities that invalidate a *kohen* from serving in the Temple are listed. *Terumah*, a portion of the crop that is given to the *kohanim*, may be eaten only by *kohanim* and their household. An animal may be sacrificed in the Temple after it is eight days old and is free from any physical defects.

The nation is commanded to sanctify the Name of Hashem by insuring that their behavior is always exemplary and by being prepared to surrender their lives rather than murder, engage in licentious relations or worship idols.

The special characteristics of the holidays are described, and the nation is reminded not to do certain types of creative work during these holidays. New grain may not be eaten until the *omer* of barley is offered in the Temple. This Torah portion explains the laws of preparing the oil for the Menorah and baking the *lechem hapanim* in the Temple. A man blasphemes Hashem, and is executed as prescribed in the Torah.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

Priests of Life

The first duty of the *kohanim* is to avoid the impurity of death. While the rest of the tribes are commanded to occupy themselves with the burial of the dead – indeed it is considered the one “kindness of truth” – the *kohanim* alone are obligated to stand back. They may not come in contact with a corpse, nor may they remain under the same roof with one. Other prohibitions repeated specifically in connection with the *kohanim*, but also applicable to the rest of the nation, include making bald spots and cuts in one’s flesh, also pertaining to the signs one might make upon oneself to mourn the loss of a loved one.

Heathenism, both ancient and modern, tends to associate religion with death. The kingdom of G-d begins only where man ends. Death and dying are the main manifestations of divinity in that view. The deity is a god of death, a god who kills and never revives, who sends death and its harbingers – illness and poverty – so that man, mindful of his power and his own helplessness, should fear him. For this reason, heathen temples stood beside graves, and the foremost place of heathen priests is beside a corpse. There, where the eyes are dimmed and the heart is broken, they find fertile soil for the dissemination of religion. He who bears on his flesh a mark of death – a symbol of death’s power to conquer all – remains mindful of death, and performs the religious act *par excellence*.

But the *kohen*, the Jewish priest, is instructed to stay away from death. G-d is exalted not in the crushing power of death, but in the vibrant power of life, which has the power to elevate man, through his free choice, to eternal life. Judaism teaches how to live, so that in life we may overcome death – the enslavement to physical forces, to moral weakness. Judaism teaches how to live every moment of earthly life as a moment of eternal life, and how to live each moment marked by moral freedom, a life of thought and will, of creativity and achievement, and also pleasure.

When death calls upon other members of the community to perform acts of loving-kindness by tending to the physical shell of the soul, the *kohen* must stand back and keep away. In doing so, the *kohen* raises the banner of life beside the corpse. He awakens within the people’s consciousness the idea of life and reminds them of moral freedom, of man’s G-dly existence, which is not subjugated to the bodily forces that suppress all moral freedom.

Only when the duty of *life* requires even the *kohen* to fulfill his final responsibility as a husband, son, father or brother, or when an unattended corpse requires the *kohen* to take the place of the father or brother of the deceased – only then is his priestly responsibility superseded by his familial responsibility. In such cases, he is not only permitted, but indeed obligated to attend to the burial of the dead.

▪ Sources: Commentary, Vayikra 21:1-5

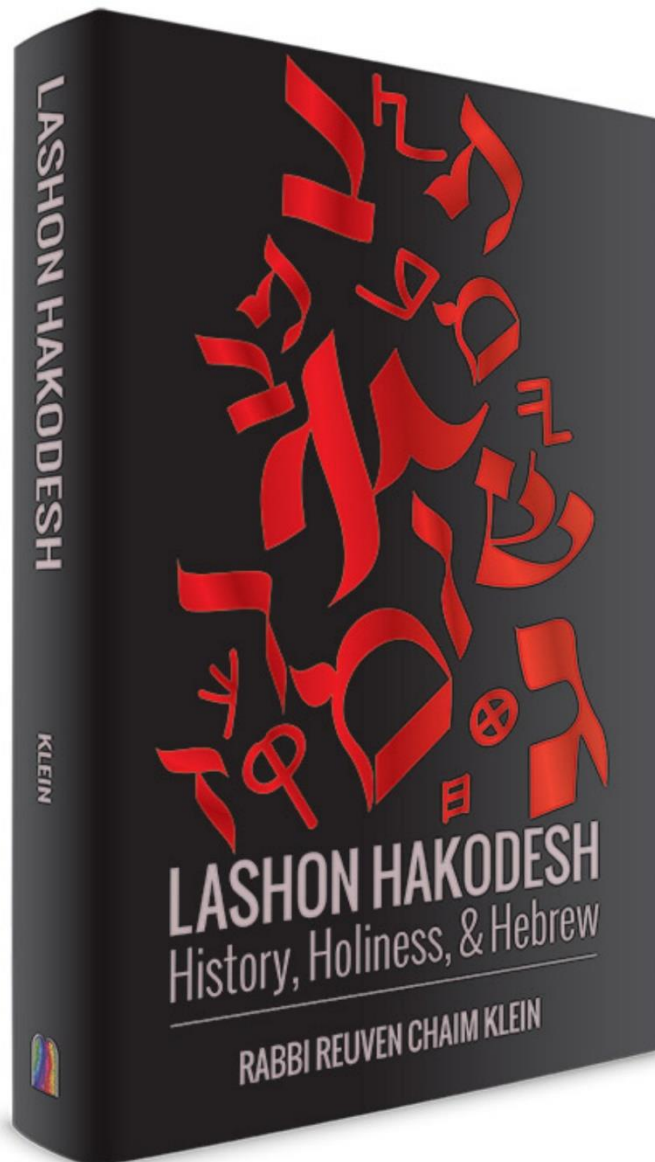
**May Hashem console our dear colleague Mrs.
Helena Stern on the passing of her beloved
brother, David.**

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

Lashon HaKodesh

History, Holiness, & Hebrew

By Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

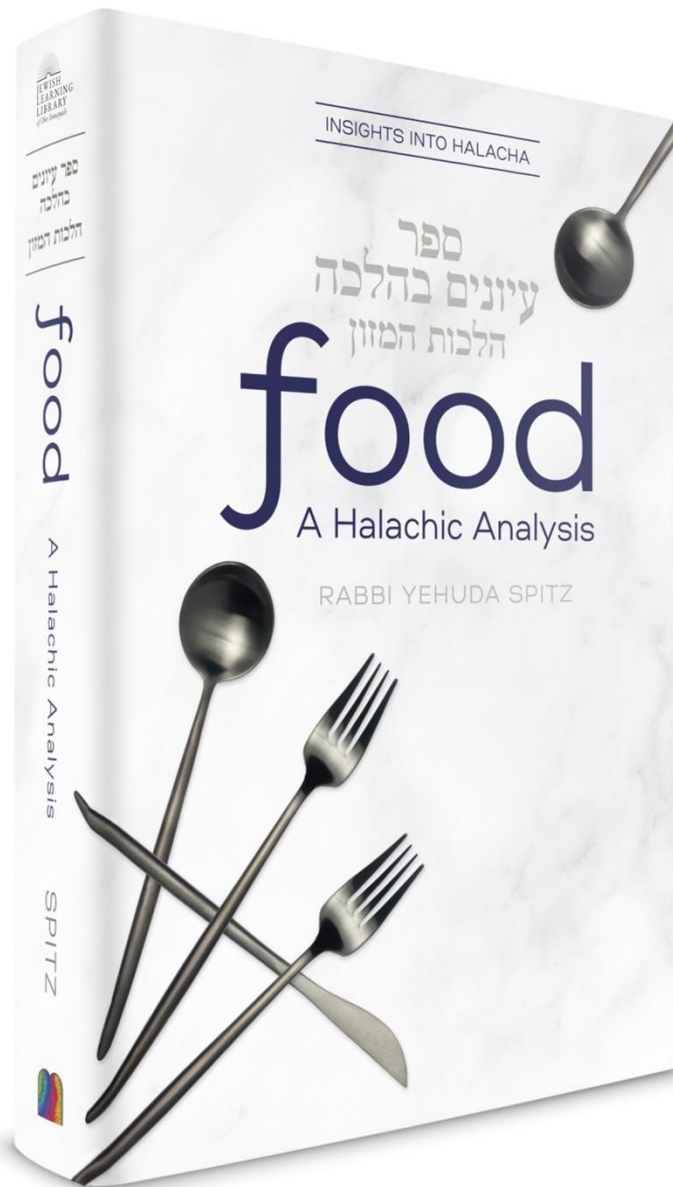


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