



# Ohr Somayach Light Lines

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## Light Insight

### *L'Chaim!*

“...A festival of G-d for us.”  
(Exodus 10:9)

It is said that caterers don't like doing Jewish affairs. There's not a lot of profit in catering the food. The majority of the profit comes from the alcoholic beverages. And Jews are notoriously small drinkers. Statistics show that Jews have the lowest incidence of alcoholism of any ethnic group. Why?

A Jewish boy first encounters wine when he's eight days old. The mohel who performs the circumcision usually puts a few drops of wine in the baby's mouth. In other words, the first contact that this little fellow has with wine is in the context of a *mitzvah*. This experience is fortified throughout his

childhood. On Friday night and Shabbat morning, a Jewish child hears *kiddush* said over a glass of wine. And he himself will be given some to taste. At the departure of Shabbat, in the *havdala* service, wine will again play a central role.

On festivals, wine figures prominently. On Purim, one of the *mitzvot* of the day is drinking wine until one cannot distinguish between Mordechai the blessed and Haman the accursed! And on Passover the child will see his parents drink four cups of wine, symbolizing the four aspects of freedom from the servitude of Egypt.

A Jewish child isn't afraid of alcohol. He doesn't see it as a method of escapism — something to drown his sorrows — rather, it connotes the blending of the physical and the spiritual. Its context is

exclusively positive.

Judaism doesn't preach asceticism as the ideal route to spirituality. It does not advise us to withdraw from the physical, but rather to use the world as a resource, i.e. to take everything in the physical world and use it to come closer to G-d.

When Moses told Pharaoh they were going to make a festival of G-d, he said it was a “festival of G-d for us.”

To be a holy Jew, you don't abandon the body with its physical needs and desires, you elevate it. Every festival of G-d is also “for us.” It is for us to partake of the wonderful gifts of this world and, through experiencing the world's pleasures in their correct context, reach a higher appreciation of the One who sends us all these exquisite gifts.

*L'Chaim! To Life!*

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## LOVE of the LAND

*Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel*

### *Beit She'arim*

Catacombs, the ruins of a synagogue and an ancient olive press are all that remain of this ancient city which was an important town in Israel and

once served as the seat of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish High Court, in the time of the Temple.

In reference to the Torah's command “Justice, justice shall you pursue” the Talmud advises “follow Rebbi (Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi, the compiler of the *Mishnah*) to Beit She'arim.” During his illness this great sage was moved to the

healthier climate of Tzipori, but a grave was reserved for him in Beit She'arim. Inscriptions found on graves in the catacombs indicate that two of his sons were also buried there.

The synagogue, whose remains indicate that it was among the largest in the country, was destroyed by the Romans in the fourth century CE as a punishment for the resistance of the town's residents to Roman rule.

The Other Side  
of the Story

GIVING PEOPLE THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

*Judging favorably isn't just a good idea; It's a command from the...*

*Tree of Life*

A friend of mine had a Jewish legal question, but he didn't know which rabbi to ask. After inquiring, he was referred to a certain rabbi. Entering the rabbi's house, he found the rabbi at the table cutting out pictures of trees and pasting them on a paper. He therefore decided not to ask his question from this rabbi, who had nothing better to do than to cut out pictures of trees and make a scrapbook. Later, to his surprise, he found out that this rabbi was writing a legal treatise, on a topic concerning trees and therefore needed the pictures to illustrate the book. So the rabbi was not doing arts and crafts, but preparing his book.

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Response Line

**Joseph Slokowski wrote:**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*In this week's Torah portion why does G-d call Himself, "I am who I am?"*

Dear Joseph,

Rashi, perhaps the best known commentator on the Torah, explains this name to mean "I am and I will be" — I am their rescue now and will be in the future." Others explain this name to mean that G-d's true existence can't be comprehended by human logic. G-d is above time, since He created time. Therefore, He always was, He is now, and He always will be in the future, and all this He is in the present. The word *ehyeh* (I will be), spelled *alef, heh, yud* and *heh*, hints at this idea, as all the numbers mount towards 10: The numerical value of *alef* is one, symbolizing the past, *heh* is five, symbolizing the middle or present, *yud* is 10, symbolizing the end or the future, and the last *heh*, five, comes to say that all this is in the present.

**Kim Hornbeck wrote:**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*This is the first time I'm lighting a yahrtzeit (anniversary of passing) candle for my late father, and I don't know what prayer to say. Thank you for your help.*

Dear Kim Hornbeck,

There is no specific prayer to recite on lighting the *yahrtzeit* candle. It is fitting to stop for a few moments to remember the deceased and to spend some time in introspection, however. The *yahrtzeit* candle is lit at sundown on the eve of the anniversary of the passing and the candle should remain alight for twenty-four hours. It is a beautiful custom to light a candle on the *yahrtzeit*, as the flame of a candle is compared to a soul. Just as a flame is never still, so too does the soul continuously strive to "reach up" to G-d.