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PARSHA INSIGHTS

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

THE GREATEST DARKNESS

“No man could see his brother, nor could anyone rise from his place...” (10:23)

The greatest darkness is when we think we see other people — but we don’t really see them; they are just floating figures in the background of the landscape of our lives — mere bit-players from “Central Casting”.

The result of “no man could see his brother” is that no one “could rise from his place” — the power of feeling sympathy becomes atrophied, dark and stunted.

We can give others the lip-service of sympathy but our

hearts can still be blind.

In Hebrew the word for sympathy translates literally “to be a partner in grief”.

Being a partner is not a spectator sport.

It requires a “seeing” that is pro-active, that reaches out into the darkness of another’s life and joins that life to ease its pain.

• Source: based on the Chiddushei HaRim

PARSHA OVERVIEW

G-d tells Moshe that He is hardening Pharaoh’s heart so that through miraculous plagues the world will know for all time that He is the one true G-d. Pharaoh is warned about the plague of locusts and is told how severe it will be. Pharaoh agrees to release only the men, but Moshe insists that everyone must go. During the plague, Pharaoh calls for Moshe and Aharon to remove the locusts, and he admits he has sinned. G-d ends the plague but hardens Pharaoh’s heart, and again Pharaoh fails to free the Jews. The country, except for the Jewish People, is then engulfed in a palpable darkness. Pharaoh calls for Moshe and tells him to take all the Jews out of Egypt, but to leave their flocks behind. Moshe tells him that not only will they take their own flocks, but Pharaoh must add his own too. Moshe tells Pharaoh that G-d is going to bring one more plague, the death of the first-born, and then the Jews will leave Egypt. G-d again hard-

ens Pharaoh’s heart, and Pharaoh warns Moshe that if he sees him again, Moshe will be put to death. G-d tells Moshe that the month of Nissan will be the chief month. The Jewish people are commanded to take a sheep on the 10th of the month and guard it until the 14th. The sheep is then to be slaughtered as a Pesach offering, its blood put on their door-posts, and its roasted meat eaten. The blood on the door-post will be a sign that their homes will be passed-over when G-d strikes the first-born of Egypt. The Jewish People are told to memorialize this day as the Exodus from Egypt by never eating *chametz* on Pesach. Moshe relays G-d’s commands, and the Jewish People fulfill them flawlessly. G-d sends the final plague, killing the first-born, and Pharaoh sends the Jews out of Egypt. G-d tells Moshe and Aharon the laws concerning the Pesach sacrifice, *pidyon haben* (redemption of the first-born son) and *tefillin*.

BAVA BATRA 11 - 17

Rav Avdimi from Haifa said, “From the day that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, although prophecy was taken from the Navi'im (Prophets), it was not taken away from the Chachamim (Torah scholars).”

The Maharsha points out that this teaching refers to the destruction of the First Beit Hamikdash, since the last of the Navi'im — Chagai, Zecharia and Malachi — lived only until the beginning of the Second Beit Hamikdash. He explains that the expression “From the day of the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash” does not mean from that exact day, but rather is meant to exclude the period of the Second Beit Hamikdash, and that there was indeed prophecy to Navi'im during the 70 years of the Babylonian exile.

The gemara originally quotes Rav Avdimi from Haifa as saying something that sounds similar to the above-quoted teaching, but is in fact quite different: “From the day that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, prophecy was taken from the Navi'im and given to the Chachamim”. This statement, however, is incorrect explains the gemara, since it implies that beforehand the Chachamim were not fit to receive prophecy, which is certainly not true. Therefore, the gemara explains what Rav Avdimi's statement must certainly have been: “From the day that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed, although prophecy was taken from the Navi'im, it was not taken from the Chachamim.” The Sage Ameimar adds that “A Chacham is 'better' (adif) than a Navi”, and explains how he derives this principle from a verse in Tehillim (90:12).

Rashi explains that although prophecy was taken from the Navi'im who were not Chachamim, it was not taken from the Navi'im who were Chachamim. This seems to imply that a person in the category of “Navi”, although certainly having chochma (Torah wisdom) since it is a requirement for a Navi (Masechet Nedarim 38a), did not possess the same high degree of Torah mastery to be considered a “Chacham”. (See the Maharsha, who, based on the gemara in Nedarim, presents a question on Rashi, since a Navi is required to be a Chacham, and suggests an answer that highlights a practical difference between these two categories.)

However, due to the question from the gemara in Nedarim, the Ramban offers an explanation of our Rav Avdimi's statement that differs from Rashi's explanation. The Ramban, in his “Chiddusim on Shas”, writes that there is an important difference between the nature of a Navi's prophecy and that of a Chacham. The prophecy of a Navi is one that is related to the Navi in the form of a vision or “mental picture” by G-d or one of His agents (“angels”). The prophecy of a Chacham, however, is one that derives in a “manner of chochma”, not like the vision of a Navi. Rather, a Chacham “knows the truth with the Divine Spirit (Ru'ach Hakodesh) that is within him”. I heard from a great Rabbi in Jerusalem what the Ramban means, based on the verse in Mishlei (7:3) that states to “write them (words of Torah) on the tablet of your heart”. A Chacham is a person who masters the depth, breadth and essence of the Torah, and has internalized it to make it part of himself. In a sense he is “a walking Torah”. And since the Torah is the way in which G-d communicates with us, a Chacham is attuned to hear and understand the ongoing communication between the Giver of the Torah and the Chacham who is able to fully receive it.

• Bava Batra 12a

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What was Pharaoh's excuse for not releasing the Jewish children?
2. How did the locusts in the time of Moshe differ from those in the days of Yoel?
3. How did the first three days of darkness differ from the last three?
4. When the Jews asked the Egyptians for gold and silver vessels, the Egyptians were unable to deny ownership of such vessels. Why?
5. *Makat bechorot* took place at *exactly* midnight. Why did Moshe say it would take place at *approximately* midnight?
6. Why did the first-born of the animals die?
7. How did Moshe show respect to Pharaoh when he warned him about the aftermath of the plague of the first-born?
8. G-d told Moshe, "...so that My wonders will be multiplied" (11:9). What three wonders was G-d referring to?
9. Why did G-d command the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh to Aharon, and not only to Moshe?
10. Up to what age is an animal fit to be a Pesach offering?
11. Prior to the Exodus from Egypt, what two *mitzvot* involving blood did G-d give to the Jewish People?
12. Rashi gives two explanations of the word "*Pasachti*." What are they?
13. Why were the Jews told to stay indoors during *makat bechorot*?
14. What was Pharaoh screaming as he ran from door to door the night of *makat bechorot*?
15. Why did Pharaoh ask Moshe to bless him?
16. Why did the Jewish People carry their matzah on their shoulders rather than have their animals carry it?
17. Who comprised the *erev rav* (mixed multitude)?
18. What three historical events occurred on the 15th of Nissan, prior to the event of the Exodus from Egypt?
19. What is the source of the "milk and honey" found in *Eretz Yisrael*?
20. The only non-kosher animal whose first-born is redeemed is the donkey. What did the donkeys do to "earn" this distinction?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 10:11 - Since children don't bring sacrifices there was no need for them to go.
2. 10:14 - The plague brought by Moshe was composed of one species of locust, whereas the plague in the days of Yoel was composed of many species.
3. 10:22 - During the first three days the Egyptians couldn't see. During the last three days they couldn't move.
4. 10:22 - During the plague of darkness the Jews could see and they searched for and found the Egyptians' vessels.
5. 11:4 - If Moshe said the plague would begin exactly at midnight, the Egyptians might miscalculate and accuse Moshe of being a fake.
6. 11:5 - Because the Egyptians worshiped them as gods, and when G-d punishes a nation He also punishes its gods.
7. 11:8 - Moshe warned that "All these servants of yours will come down to me" when, in fact, it was Pharaoh himself who actually came running to Moshe.
8. 11:9 - The plague of the first-born, the splitting of the sea, the drowning of the Egyptian soldiers.
9. 12:1 - As reward for his efforts in bringing about the plagues.
10. 12:5 - One year.
11. 12:6 - Circumcision and *Korban Pesach*.
12. 12:13 - "I had mercy" and "I skipped."
13. 12:22 - Since it was a night of destruction, it was not safe for anyone to leave the protected premises of his home.
14. 12:31 - "Where does Moshe live? Where does Aharon live?"
15. 12:32 - So he wouldn't die, for he himself was a first-born.
16. 12:34 - Because the commandment of matzah was dear to them.
17. 12:38 - People from other nations who became converts.
18. 12:41 - The angels came to promise that Sarah would have a son, Yitzchak was born, and the exile of the "covenant between the parts" was decreed.
19. 13:5 - Goat milk, date and fig honey.
20. 13:13 - They helped the Jews by carrying silver and gold out of Egypt.

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THE REASON(S) FOR EATING MATZA

Bo

Every year at the Pesach Seder we repeat the words of Rabbi Gamliel from the Haggadah: “What is the reason that we are eating this matza? It is because when G-d redeemed them from Egypt there was not enough time for their dough to rise and become leavened, as it says in the Torah, ‘They baked the dough that they took out of Egypt into unleavened cakes, for they could not become leavened since they were driven from Egypt and they could not delay....’ ”

The first difficulty here according to Abrabanel is that even prior to their hasty exodus G-d had already commanded them to eat *matzot* and avoid all leavened products. The *matzot* were to be eaten with bitter herbs along with the sacrificial Pesach lamb on the night *before* they were to leave Egypt. Why then does Rabbi Gamliel refer only to the unleavened dough that they took with them when they left in haste, and not to the matza which they had eaten the night before? Additionally, the verse from the Torah is very enigmatic. What does the Torah mean by “for they could not become leavened”? It would appear that just the opposite would have occurred. The verse refers to their having reached Succot, their first destination after having left Egypt several days before. Surely the dough would have risen and become leavened during that time. How then could they bake it into “unleavened cakes”?

Abarbanel answers as follows: Rabbi Gamliel is giving the main reason why we eat matza every year at the Seder.

However, G-d gave the command to eat matza and refrain from leavened dough before they left Egypt in order to magnify the extent of the sudden and miraculous mass exodus of the entire Jewish population. The people were eager to fulfill the mitzvah of matza, and they kneaded the dough under the assumption that they would be able to bake it before leaving Egypt. However, before they could accomplish the baking Pharaoh issued the expulsion order, and they hastily packed the unbaked dough, carrying it on their shoulders. Days later, when they reached Succot, they were able to bake the dough, and although they were afraid that the dough would have become leavened by that time, G-d miraculously intervened and they were still able to bake unleavened *matzot* from that dough. The entire incident was designed to impress upon them and further generations that the haste with which they left Egypt, together with the subsequent miraculous baking of the *matzot*, was an additional demonstration of G-d’s direct hand in all aspects of the exodus from Egypt.

Additionally, G-d commands us to refrain from eating leavened dough for a full seven days in order to further connect us to the miraculous redemption. To refrain from eating leavened products for a day or two would not be a sufficient reminder for later generations of the hasty exodus, as it is not at all unusual for people to refrain from such products randomly for short periods of time throughout the year.

PLEASE JOIN US...

...in saying Tehillim/Psalms and a special prayer to G-d for the safety and security of all of Klal Yisrael in these times of conflict and conclude with the following special prayer:

“Our brothers, the entire family of Israel, who are delivered into distress and captivity, whether they are on sea or dry land – may G-d have mercy on them and remove them from stress to relief, from darkness to light, from subjugation to redemption now, speedily and soon.”

SCENTS AND SENSIBILITY

From: Maya

Dear Rabbi,
What is the Jewish perspective on perfume for women or cologne for men, and when, or when not, are they considered appropriate?

Dear Maya,

From the Jewish perspective the use of “perfume” in its many forms is considered simultaneously feminine and sensual. That means that it is considered appropriate only when it is either permitted to be sensuous, or in situations which are not sensuous.

Thus, for women, wearing perfume for attraction is only permitted in the private sphere, for enjoyment between husband and wife.

However, if a woman wears perfume solely for the personal enjoyment of the scent, it is considered acceptable even in the public sphere, as long she wears it in a way, or contexts, in which, only she or other women may enjoy it. In such a case, and with good taste, she may also wear it in the presence of close male family members such as fathers, brothers and sons.

This would include even single women, who may also wear perfume in a way that does not draw the attention of men. An exception for a single woman to wear perfume in the presence of a man and for the purpose of appealing to his sensibilities would be on a *shidduch* date. Here, a man and woman, after preliminary prerequisites of compatibili-

ty, and within proper standards of decorum, meet essentially for the purpose of attracting, and being attracted by, the appropriate person whom they hope will be their future spouse.

Since Judaism considers the phenomenon of perfuming oneself to be feminine, a man’s wearing perfume is related to the Torah prohibition of “cross-dressing”. However, since nowadays so many men wear men’s perfume, i.e. cologne, it is not considered strictly women’s wear and is thus, strictly speaking, not forbidden as cross-dressing. Still, it is considered inappropriate, effeminate and “unmanly” for a man to wear cologne, even if worn for his own personal enjoyment.

However, as discussed above regarding women, if a man wears men’s perfume with sensuous intentions to attract, when doing so is inappropriate, it would be forbidden for reasons of immodesty. In such cases it would only be appropriate for a man whose wife enjoys her husband’s wearing cologne, and only then in private. In *shidduch* dating, unlike for single women, single men should generally assume wearing cologne to be inappropriate unless one knows for sure that it’s the accepted norm in his group.

An important qualification and distinction to the above discussion is that it applies particularly and specifically to perfumes, which by definition are intended to disseminate a pleasing, appealing and attractive scent. But deodorants, whose purpose, by definition, is to prevent or mask unpleasant odors, are permitted for use by all, in all contexts.

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

THE SOURCE OF THE “BIG STONES”

If you have ever gazed with wonder at those massive stones that form the Western Wall, and wondered where they came from, you are not alone in your curiosity.

For years archeologists have assumed that the giant lime-stones used by King Herod for the reconstruction of the Second Beit Hamikdash and the Western Wall came



from a quarry located in the Old City of Jerusalem. It is now believed that they came from an ancient quarry some four kilometers away, to the northwest of the Old City, in the Ramat Shlomo neighborhood of Jerusalem. It was discovered during a “salvage excavation” conducted by the Israel Antiquities Authority in conjunction with municipal plans to build an elementary school in the area.

ACTIVITIES FORBIDDEN BEFORE THE MORNING PRAYERS

It is forbidden for one to become involved with his personal matters before praying Shemoneh Esrei in the morning. (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 89:3)

The above prohibition begins at dawn. It is thus permitted to attend to one's own needs before this time (Mishneh Berurah in the name of Shelah and Cheshek Shlomo). However, the Eliya Rabba states that one should not do anything before at least saying the morning blessings (including the blessings on the Torah (Halacha Berurah). According to the Mishneh Berurah this requirement to say morning blessings only applies within a half-hour before dawn, but before that time one is allowed begin with his personal affairs without reciting the morning blessings.

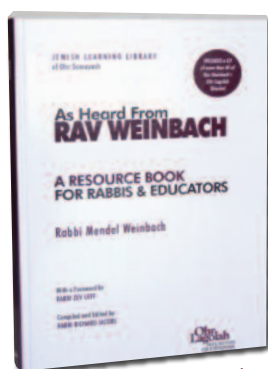
The Piskei Teshuvot writes that simple things, such as making a bed (Pe'er HaDor in the name of the Chazon Ish), taking out the garbage, and even placing dirty clothes in the washing machine and the like (Halichot Shlomo in the name of Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach) are permitted.

Only engaging in *personal* affairs before prayers is forbidden. However, one is allowed to engage in a mitzvah (that

cannot be delayed) before praying, like collecting charity. It is even permitted to prepare for Shabbat and Yom Tov before prayers (Aruch HaShulchan in the name of the Pri Chadash and Sha'arei Teshuvah). One must make sure not to miss saying Kri'at Shema and praying Shacharit at the proper time. Others only permit preparing and buying food for Shabbat before prayers if there is a concern that by praying first there may not be food available afterwards (Seder HaYom, brought in Magen Avraham). Others rule that one should also make sure not to cancel praying with a *minyán* (Ben Ish Chi).

It is also forbidden to set forth on a trip before praying Shacharit (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 89:3)

One is permitted to travel before praying in a pressing situation. A classic example given is if the caravan will not wait. Today this would translate to someone dependent on public transportation, with the only option being to travel at dawn, such as a flight requiring him to be at the airport before he can pray. There are many other examples which require clarification and a ruling by a qualified halachic rabbinical authority).



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TURNING OFF THE LIGHTS

The Ninth Plague in Egypt was the plague of darkness. When describing this plague the Torah relates that G-d told Moshe, “Raise your hand to the Heavens and there will be darkness (*choshech*) over the entire land of Egypt, and darkness (*choshech*) will materialize”. The Torah then reports that Moshe raised his hand towards the Heavens, and a *choshech-afeilah* arose in the entire land of Egypt for the Egyptians, while the Jews had light wherever they lived (Exodus 10:21-23). What does it mean that darkness will materialize? Is darkness a tangible object about which one can say that it “materializes”? Furthermore, in this passage the Torah uses two different words to mean darkness: *choshech* and *afeilah*. What, if anything, is the difference between these two words and their implications?

Rashi (1040-1105) explains that the materialization of dark refers to the fact that the Plague of Darkness was not just an extended night, but was even darker than night. Moreover, Radak (1160-1234) in *Sefer HaShorashim* writes that *afeilah* is something darker than *choshech*. How can there be two different types of dark? “Dark” is “dark” — or is it?

Malbim (1809-1879) answers these issues by explaining that *afeilah* is darker than *choshech*, because *choshech* denotes the regular darkness of night when the sun does not shine, yet the moon and stars still illuminate the sky. *Afeilah*, on the other hand, refers to a situation when not only does the sun not shine, but the moon and stars also do not exude light. In other words, *choshech* refers to the ordinary darkness of night, while *afeilah* refers to a situation of utter darkness.

The greatest Jewish philosophers have long debated the proper way of looking at the concept of darkness. Rav Saadia Gaon (882-942), Maimonides (1105-1204) and others view darkness as simply the lack of light. They argue that darkness itself does not exist; it is only the word for referring to a lack of light. On the other hand, Chizkuni, Radak, Yaavetz, the Vilna Gaon and others explain that darkness is a created entity in and of itself. They point to a verse in Isaiah which tells that G-d “fashioned light and created dark” (Isaiah 45:7) — a passage that clearly implies that darkness is something that needs to be created; it is not just a lack of light.

Those who understand that darkness is merely the absence of light argue that G-d is said to have “created” darkness by causing the sun to set, just as one who extinguishes a candle is said to have “made the room the dark”. Alternatively, darkness can still be “created” inasmuch as the

creation of clouds to block light can be called the creation of darkness.

Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) finds support for Maimonides’ understanding by noting that the word *choshech* is spelled the same as the word *chosech* (“lacks”), with the placement of the dot above the Hebrew letter of *sin/shin* as the only difference between the two words. This certainly alludes to the notion that darkness is just the lack of light.

Nachmanides (1194-1270) follows the Maimonidean approach that *choshech* generally denotes the lack of light, but concedes that in the context of the Plague of Darkness the darkness in question was not simply the absence of light. The darkness in Egypt was a real, palpable mist, which not only blocked light but added darkness. That tangible darkness is described in the Midrash as being “the thickness of a *dinar* coin”. Nachmanides likely saw reason to differentiate between the *choshech* of the Ninth Plague and *choshech* in other contexts because in the former case the Torah also uses the word *afeilah*, which implies a stronger form of darkness.

Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Parchon (an early Spanish grammarian from the 12th century) writes that the word *afeilah* means “covered”. Possibly based on this understanding, Rabbi Baruch HaLevi Epstein (1860-1940) writes that the Plague of Darkness was borne out by cataracts spontaneously growing over the eyes of the Egyptians, barring them from seeing the light of day.

Similarly, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Edel (1760-1828) writes that *choshech* simply refers to a lack of light (like the state of the sun at nighttime), while *afeilah* refers to a tangible entity which blocks the rays of light from reaching one’s eye. Accordingly, he explains that the Plague of Darkness was not simply a lack of light, but also had a light-blocking component (which he understands were special, dark clouds) that filtered the light of the day, and only allowed it to reach the Jews but not the Egyptians.

Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) finds an allusion to this way of defining *afeilah* in the wording of a prayer recited at the Passover Seder. In that prayer we request of G-d to be taken from the darkness of exile into the light of redemption. The actual words of the prayer read “from *afeilah* to *ohr gadol* (great light)”. In this analogy the opposite of *afeilah* is not simply light — that would be the opposite of *choshech* — but a *great* light that shall usher in the

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Some like to spend the *Yamim Nora'im* (High Holy Days) at the *shul* where they normally *daven*; some in the Yeshiva Gedola of their youth; some go to Uman; some to a hotel in Jerusalem or Miami Beach. Very few would choose to spend Rosh Hashana in Kandahar and Yom Kippur in Jalalabad. Rabbi Avraham Cohen did. They are, to date, among the highlights of his service in the US Air Force.

Rabbi Cohen grew up in a secular but somewhat traditional conservative home in Pittsburgh. His father, a securities lawyer, is from Pittsburgh, and his mother from Cleveland. After finishing college and being exposed to *Yiddishkeit* in Chicago, he decided to come to Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem and delve into his heritage.

After learning in the Yeshiva for a couple of years he married and spent time in Rabbi Shakovitzki's Kollel in Arzei HaBira, followed by learning in the Kollel of Yeshivas HaRan in Beitar, and then came back to Ohr Somayach for the Hertz Ohr Lagolah Program, which prepared him for his career as a rabbinical leader.

He joined the US Air Force as a Chaplain, and was posted to the Pentagon where he ministered to the military and civilian employees. Although he was a rabbi, both Jews and non-Jews sought his counsel and empathetic ear. During that time he attended two yearly Chanukah parties at the White House, where he and his wife met and had festive kosher meals with President George W. Bush and the First Lady.

Rabbi Cohen was posted to Iraq for about a year in 2006, and then to Afghanistan for a month in 2007. While in Kandahar, a city said to be founded by Alexander the Great, which is the second largest city in Afghanistan and a provincial capital, he conducted an abbreviated Rosh Hashana service for himself and two Canadian special-forces soldiers — both *kohanim*. (In a counter-eponymous twist, Rabbi Cohen is a *levi*, rather than a *kohen*.) In spite of the Taliban, or maybe because of them, the *U'nasaneh Tokef* prayer had

extra significance. The phrase “Who shall live and who shall die” has an immediate relevance in a war zone. As to the special mitzvah of the day, Rabbi Cohen says: “I feel that *HaKodesh Baruch Hu* placed me there to blow the *shofar* as a remembrance for all the Jewish *neshamos* (souls) that had been in that place from the time of Alexander until today.”

Ten day later he was in Jalalabad with the same two Canadian special-forces soldiers and another ten congregants. This time they were able to *daven* the entirety of the Yom Kippur service and fast until nightfall.

After completing active duty in 2012, Rabbi Cohen and his family moved to St. Louis where he worked as an investment advisor at Morgan Stanley, Inc. for three years. In 2015 he saw an ad for the position of Chief Rabbi of Menorah Park in Cleveland, Ohio — a large residential complex of assisted living, elderly and nursing homes in Beachwood, a largely Jewish suburb of Cleveland. The position includes not only counseling and visitation but also *kashrut* supervision (there are six kitchens)

and supervision of a rabbinical staff of five rabbis. With his experience in the military he felt confident that he could handle the multi-tasked position. “The military has taught me to be a good organizational head. There is no better leadership education; it is second to none.” Apparently the directors of Menorah Park thought so too. He was hired immediately and moved to Cleveland in the summer of 2015. Rabbi Cohen has a son, now learning in Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland, who gets to see his grandmother daily as she is a resident of Menorah Park.

In addition to his work in Cleveland, Major Cohen continues his Chaplaincy work in Mansfield, Ohio as the Wing Chaplain for the Mansfield Air National Guard Base. Rabbi Cohen recently paid a visit to the Yeshiva. He was in Jerusalem for the *bris* of his first grandson. “*Kein Yirbu*” — May there be many more to come!

