



ISRAEL EDITION
VOL 7 • NO 9
PESACH 5785



המזרחי HAMIZRACHI

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Arba Imahot

The Stories of Four Mothers of Hostages on the Festival of Freedom



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World Mizrachi is the global Religious Zionist movement, spreading *Torat Eretz Yisrael* across the world and strengthening the bond between the State of Israel and Jewish communities around the world.

Based in Jerusalem and with branches across the globe, Mizrachi – an acronym for *merkaz ruchani* (spiritual center) – was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, and is led today by Rabbi Doron Perez. Mizrachi's role was then and remains with vigor today, to be a proactive partner and to take personal responsibility in contributing to the collective destiny of *Klal Yisrael* through a commitment to Torah, the Land of Israel and the People of Israel.

HaMizrachi

PUBLISHED BY WORLD MIZRACHI IN JERUSALEM

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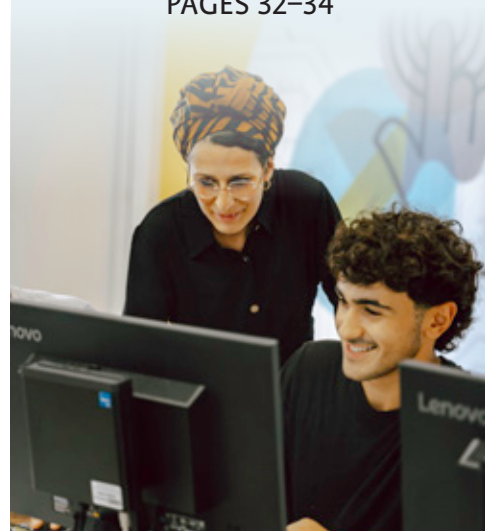
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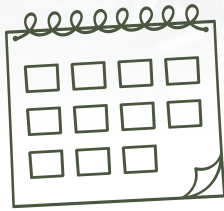
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ATTENTION ALL AMERICAN JEWS OVER 18*



From March 10th – May 4th 2025, it's your turn to
JOIN THE FRONTLINES
by voting for Orthodox Israel Coalition-Mizrachi



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*Jewish US citizens over 18 (by June 30, 2025) who primarily reside in the US

Heroines

The Champions of Jewish Redemption

Rabbi Doron Perez

One of the most striking features of the Exodus is the presence of so many heroic women. This is unmistakable and emerges clearly from a simple reading of the text at the beginning of the book of Shemot. Four remarkable heroines are presented to us as playing a pivotal role in the unlikely liberation from slavery. Each one stands as a woman of courage, heroism, and defiance against the evils of the Egyptian empire.

Were the heroic midwives Jewish or Egyptian?

The first two people we meet are midwives Shifra and Puah. This is the only time they are mentioned by name and we have no idea, from the simple reading of the text, who they are. They are presented to us in an ambiguous way which can be interpreted in ways that totally change their identity.

In the verse they are called “*hameyaldot ha'ivriyot*,” which could either mean the Hebrew midwives or the midwives of the Hebrews. If they are Jewish midwives, then they are identified by our Sages as the mother-daughter combination of Yocheved and Miriam, or perhaps the daughter and mother-in-law combination of Yocheved and Elisheva.¹

The verse could also mean, though, that they are the midwives of the Hebrews, suggesting that they were Egyptian midwives who were designated to attend to the birth of the Hebrews. This is the opinion of Abarbanel and Rav Shmuel David Luzzato (Shadal). The latter makes a strong argument that it is unlikely that Pharaoh would demand from the Jewish midwives to kill the children of their own people. Even at the pain of death, it doesn't seem feasible that they would murder their own kind.

In short, it is not clear whether they are Jews or gentiles, Hebrews or Egyptians. What is crystal clear, though, is their astonishing steadfastness and moral

courage to stand up against the empire of evil. They refuse to expedite the death and murder of innocent children because, as the Torah highlights, “they feared G-d.” Their values and internal morality gave them the courage and heroism to stand up for what they believed in, and not to kill innocent people, no matter the consequences.

They are the incredible heroines of Chapter 1. It is through their heroism and their heroism alone that the decree to kill every Jewish male did not succeed during the time of slavery and persecution.

The heroines who saved Moshe

If Shifra and Puah are the heroines who saved young Jewish male babies, then the survival and birth of one Jewish baby in particular, the future redeemer of Israel, was dependent on three other women. This is the focus of Chapter 2.

Strangely, none are mentioned by name, but all played a decisive role in the life of the one person mentioned by name in this saga – Moshe.²

During the terrible time when Pharaoh decreed all Hebrew male babies must be killed, it was completely understandable why many Jewish couples would choose not to have children. The future seemed hopeless: newborn sons would be murdered at birth, while daughters would face a life of slavery under Egyptian masters in a community depleted of Jewish men.

Yet despite this grim reality, the Torah tells us of a courageous act: a man from the house of Levi married a woman also from the house of Levi, and they conceived a child. Our Sages interpret this as a profound act of defiance and hope – bringing new Jewish life into the world even in the darkest of times, refusing to surrender to despair despite the horrific circumstances surrounding them.

These are the parents of Moshe: Yocheved and Amram. Our Sages identify the real heroine as the young Miriam, the older

sister of the yet-to-be-born Moshe. Her parents had separated during the decree to avoid having children and it was Miriam who confronted and admonished them for not wanting to bring children into the world, thereby hastening the demise of the Jewish people. By singlemindedly cajoling her parents, they were reunited and Moshe was born.

Our Sages likely identified Miriam as playing this pivotal role because the Torah explicitly mentions her heroism soon after the birth of her baby brother. When he was hidden among the bulrushes, Miriam actively protected her brother. Showing remarkable courage, she approached Pharaoh's daughter who had discovered him and cleverly suggested a Hebrew nurse – creating the perfect opportunity to connect Yocheved (their mother) with her son while he remained under royal protection.

The kingdom of conscience

The other remarkable heroine is, of course, Pharaoh's daughter. She commits the most blatant act of defiance against her father by not only saving but adopting him to the palace while secretly allowing his mother to feed him. She daringly brings up a Jewish child literally in the very palace of the king who single-mindedly decreed the death of every Jewish male child. As we know, this very baby spared by Pharaoh's daughter will defeat Pharaoh himself and liberate his entire people.

It is remarkable how many women, Jewish and gentile alike, played a defiant role of heroism and courage, which brought about the salvation of the Jewish people in the birth of the heroic savior. Shifra, Puah, Miriam, Yocheved, and Pharaoh's daughter.

Two remarkable things stand out. Firstly, the spirit of human and Jewish heroism in the face of impossible circumstances: Heroic Jewish women doing all they can for the survival of their people, and heroic Egyptian women living by their conscience and internal moral compass.

That right should triumph over might, and conscience over power.

There is an unmistakable spirit of female courage and heroism which uniquely brings about the salvation of the Jewish people. It is their daring defiance and standing courageously for the sake of either the love of their people and the pursuit of truth and justice that saves the day.

A generation of heroic women

It is therefore not surprising that our Sages say a very powerful comment about the spirit of the women of that time – “In the merit of righteous women our forefathers were redeemed from Egypt” (*Sotah* 11b).

Our Sages teach that this righteousness extended beyond just the named heroines, embodying the remarkable courage and life-affirming spirit of all women of that generation. While Jewish men endured crushing physical labor daily, the women took extraordinary measures to sustain their people's future. The Sages describe how these women, seeing their husbands exhausted from brutal work, would make themselves attractive and visit the fields where their husbands rested. There they would create moments of intimacy to conceive children, ensuring Jewish continuity. Through these acts of defiance, these women uplifted an entire generation, enabling the Jewish people to survive and eventually rise from the darkness of Egyptian oppression.

In our own generation, we witness this same remarkable heroism. For a year-and-a-half, our country has endured the suffering of war. Women were among those who lost their lives on that tragic day of

Simchat Torah, with many subjected to barbaric torture, while others were taken captive and endured inhumane treatment. Meanwhile, primarily male combat soldiers have been killed and injured by the thousands.

Throughout this ordeal, it is the mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, and grandmothers who have demonstrated extraordinary courage, sustaining the spirit of the entire Jewish people. They have preserved their households while separated from spouses, children, and parents – often performing the roles of two people to maintain family stability. The wives of *milu'im* reservists have carried on for months without their husbands. Over 300 women now raise families alone after losing their husbands. Among the hostage families, mothers have become the public face of endurance, bearing tremendous suffering with remarkable fortitude. Across society, women lead numerous initiatives supporting both the war effort and civilian needs.

In this edition, we pay tribute to the heroic women of our generation who continue to play such a pivotal role in lifting the spirit of our people at this challenging time. We share the experiences of four such mothers of hostage children, *Arba Imahot*, as an example of the many heroic women who lift our generation.

In Jewish law, women are generally exempt from time-bound *mitzvot*. Yet curiously, women are obligated in the time-bound *mitzvot* of Purim and Pesach. Why? Our Sages explain “they too were involved in the miracle of the day.” Some interpret this to mean women equally suffered under Haman's and Pharaoh's evil decrees. Others suggest a deeper meaning:

women weren't merely victims – they were active agents of salvation who defied these antisemitic oppressors. It was Esther who courageously confronted Haman, and the heroic women of Egypt who helped reverse Pharaoh's deadly decree. Their participation wasn't passive but pivotal to the redemption itself.³

Like then, so too today it is the heroic women of our generation who play a pivotal part in lifting the spirit of our people and fulfilling their critical role in the ongoing redemption of our nation.

1. *Masechet Sotah* 11, cited partially by Rashi in his commentary to this verse.
2. Pharaoh is also mentioned by name, but this is in the context of introducing his daughter – simply called “the daughter of Pharaoh.” Perhaps the namelessness of the protagonists is highlighting the workings of a whole system of Jews and gentiles, all directed by the Ultimate Protagonist, Divine Providence, in order to ensure the survival of Moshe who would redeem them from their suffering. G-d has many agents in the most unlikely places to ensure the unfolding of Jewish destiny.
3. *Masechet Megillah* 4b, dispute between Rabbeinu Chananel and Tosafot who argue the former and Rashi and Rashbam who argue the latter.



Rabbi Doron Perez
is the Executive Chairman
of World Mizrahi.



Wine or Grape Juice at the Seder?

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

The Talmud in *Bava Batra* (97b) explains that one can use grape juice for *Kiddush*: “A person may squeeze a cluster of grapes and recite *Kiddush* over it.” This is also ruled in the *Shulchan Aruch* (272:2). However, the *Mishnah Berurah* notes that it is preferable to recite *Kiddush* over aged wine.

For the *Seder* night, there is an additional reason to specifically drink four cups of wine, as some authorities hold that one does not fulfill their obligation with grape juice. Why? First, some argue that only drinking wine is considered a way of expressing freedom (*Kol Dodi Haggadah*, section 3, citing Rabbi Feinstein). Second, some argue that the *mitzvah* of rejoicing on the holiday is specifically fulfilled with wine (*Pesachim* 71a), and the four cups must be specifically “wine that gladdens,” which can fulfill both the obligation of the four cups and the joy of the holiday (Rav Zvi Pesach Frank, *Mikraei Kodesh* 2:35).

The later authorities have an interesting discussion on this topic, following the story about Rabbi Yehuda in the Talmud. There, Rabbi Yehuda testifies about himself: “If I taste [wine] only for *Kiddush*, *Havdalah*, and the four cups of *Pesach*, I have to bind my temples from *Pesach* until *Shavuot*” (*Nedarim* 49b).

This means that Rabbi Yehuda would minimize his wine consumption and only drink when required (i.e., for *Kiddush*, *Havdalah*, and the four cups). When he would drink the four cups of wine on *Pesach*, he would have to bind his temples afterward until *Shavuot* due to the headaches he experienced.

At first glance, this story suggests that a

person must force themselves to drink wine even when it is very difficult for them, and if so, it appears to prove that one must be particular about drinking wine rather than grape juice, even if the drinker suffers from it!

However, this proof is rejected for several reasons. First, we must distinguish between Rabbi Yehuda, who enjoyed drinking wine but suffered afterward, and someone who dislikes wine and whose drinking causes immediate suffering. In such a case, there is certainly no reason to force them to drink, as this would not be a way of expressing freedom (Rav Elyashiv, *Seder Pesach K'Hilchato* 2:3, note 9).

Additionally, it appears that Rabbi Yehuda forced himself to drink wine because he had no option to drink grape juice or similar alternatives, and therefore he was not exempt from the *mitzvah*, despite his suffering. However, someone who can fulfill the *mitzvah* by drinking grape juice (or even *chamar medinah*), clearly does not need to force themselves to specifically drink wine, even in a much less severe situation, and certainly if it causes dizziness or fatigue and impairs the *mitzvah* of recounting the exodus from Egypt, which is the main purpose of the night.

Why didn't Rabbi Yehuda have the option to drink grape juice? The answer is simple. Today we are accustomed to having grape juice available year-round, but in the past, grape juice was only available during the grape growing season (grape juice cannot be preserved – it turns to vinegar unless it is pasteurized or properly refrigerated). Therefore, since grapes typically aren't yet available during the *Pesach* season, Rabbi Yehuda could not fulfill the four cups requirement with grape juice!

Therefore, according to the basic law, one may use grape juice *lechatchila* for the four cups.

Thus, someone who has no difficulty with wine should drink wine, but someone who finds drinking wine difficult, and certainly if drinking wine

would make it harder for them to fulfill the *mitzvah* of recounting the exodus from Egypt, should preferably drink grape juice and fulfill the *mitzvah* of “*v'higadeta l'vincha*, telling your child,” in the best way possible! For such a person, drinking wine is not a way of expressing freedom but rather causes distress and sadness. The Rambam (7:9) wrote that one should dilute the wine with water so that “the drinking should be pleasant,” and from here we also learn that people who find it difficult to drink wine, whether due to taste or headaches, fatigue, etc., may drink grape juice. This was also the practice of the Chazon Ish and Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (though he would mix a little wine into the grape juice).

A person who cannot drink even grape juice can fulfill their obligation with *chamar medinah* (*Mishnah Berurah*, 472:37). What is *chamar medinah*? According to Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Igrot Moshe*, Orach Chaim, Vol. 2, 75), it is a beverage that is customarily served to guests as an honorable drink even when they are not thirsty (for example, natural juice or another important beverage).

The *Shulchan Aruch* (472:11) adds, based on the *Talmud Yerushalmi* (10:1), that there is a *hiddur* to use red wine (or grape juice), unless the white wine is of superior quality.

In summary, it is a *hiddur* in drinking wine, but grape juice is initially acceptable, and therefore someone who is concerned that wine will cause them fatigue or similar issues may initially drink grape juice.



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

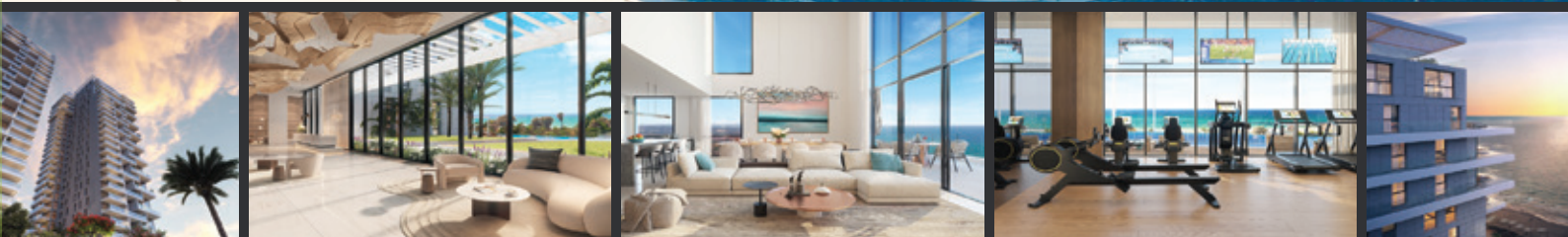
is the Nasi of World Mizrahi.

He is the Founder and Chairman of Sula-mot and La'Ofek, and serves as the Chief Rabbi of Gush Etzion, and Rosh Yeshivah of the Jerusalem College of Technology.



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ON THE FRONTLINES FOR ISRAEL

THE BIG 5

WHY YOU SHOULD VOTE OIC-MIZRACHI

1

SUPPORTING TORAH SCHOLARS ON THE FRONTLINES AND ALL THOSE WHO SERVE IN THE IDF, INJURED SOLDIERS AND BEREAVED FAMILIES

The Religious Zionist community is at the forefront of Torah learning combined with army service. Sadly, over 50% of the fallen soldiers since October 7th are from our Religious Zionist community highlighting our leading role **ON THE FRONTLINES**.

Your vote will directly impact the funding for our brave soldiers and their families, bereaved families and injured soldiers, and to establish a center for religious Lone Soldiers and B'not Sherut.

2

SUPPORTING TUITION SUBSIDIES AND ENHANCING A LOVE OF TORAT ERETZ YISRAEL IN OUR YESHIVOT AND SEMINARIES

Since Covid, MASA completely cut scholarships from North American Gap Year Programs. Through Mizrachi's efforts, scholarships for those in need were secured. Additionally, Mizrachi provides life changing Zionist experiences for Yeshivot and Seminaries.

Your vote will go towards ensuring that MASA scholarships and the funding of Zionist programming for Yeshivot and Seminaries is greatly expanded.

3

COMBATING ANTISEMITISM AND STRENGTHENING JEWISH IDENTITY ON CAMPUSES

Since October 7th we witnessed an unprecedented outburst of antisemitism on campuses.

Your vote will go towards securing funds to strengthen the Religious Zionist presence on campus through JLIC, Yavneh and Bnei Akiva shlichim.

4

BUILDING ACROSS THE LAND OF ISRAEL

Post October 7th we understand all too well how critical it is to establish and expand Jewish communities in our homeland.

Your vote will allow us to change the current KKL policy from limited building to building ALL OVER the Land of Israel.

5

ENSURING RELIGIOUS ZIONIST SHLICHIM IN YOUR COMMUNITIES AND JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS

From Mizrachi Leadership Programs, Bnei Akiva, Torah MiTzion, Bat Ami, Amiel-Straus to the Department of Education – Mizrachi supports the finding, funding and training of the main Religious Zionist Shlichim bodies.

Your vote will go to ensure that Religious Zionist values continue to lead the effort of ensuring Shlichim get to your communities and schools.



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The Best Kept Secret from Diaspora Jewry and How You Can Shape The Jewish Future

Q&A
with
Rabbi Doron
Perez



What is this big secret?

The **World Zionist Organization (WZO)** is one of the most influential organizations in the Jewish world. Some call the WZO 'the parliament of the Jewish people' as it is the only place where every Jewish Zionist can be a stakeholder.

The vast majority of Jews are unaware that Diaspora Jewry owns 60% of the WZO – the major stakeholder: 40% the Knesset, 30% US Jewry and 30% Diaspora Jewry outside the US.

Why has this been such a secret?

Since 40% of the control of this Israeli-based organization is by the Knesset, Israeli politicians have been the dominant force in the WZO. As more Jews make *Aliyah* and play roles in Israeli-based organizations, things are changing. I personally realized the influence of these organizations in recent years and how transformative their impact can be on the Jewish world. This also explains why there are more new slates who have realized the potential impact.



How is it such a powerful organization?

Very simple. The WZO owns 100% of **Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael (KKL)**, perhaps the most influential nonprofit organization in the world – **KKL remarkably owns the majority of inhabited land in Israel!** In other words, incredibly, the WZO – World Jewry and NOT the Knesset alone – owns the land itself. The development of land across Israel and **the massive budgets associated with these organizations impact a huge array of Jewish life globally and in Israel.** The WZO is also a 50% stakeholder in the Jewish Agency which also plays a major role in Israel-Diaspora relations.



What's really at stake?

The spending of **over \$1 billion per year!**

Positions and budgets of tremendous influence **directly affecting Jewish life in Israel and around the world**, such as:

- ✓ **Where** land is developed in Israel (e.g. will it include East Jerusalem and Yehuda v'Shomron)
- ✓ **Which** educational initiatives to support – although KKL is primarily about land development, it has an annual **education budget** today of 250 million NIS.
- ✓ Positions of major influence in the WZO, KKL and Jewish Agency affecting the **type of Jewish values** in all programming of the National Institutions.



Why is the Mizrachi slate in the US called the Orthodox Israel Coalition-Mizrachi?

Because it is a coalition of major Religious Zionist-oriented national organizations across the US including: RZA-Mizrachi, AMIT, YU, OU, RCA, Bnei Akiva, NCYI, Touro University, and Sephardic organizations such as Shvilim and UMJCA.



Who is eligible to vote in the US?

Every Jewish American citizen or permanent resident whose primary residence is in the US and is over 18 (by June 30, 2025) can vote in the WZO Congress elections once every 5 years.



Why vote OIC-Mizrachi?

More slates are running than ever, realizing the staggering influence at stake. Competition is always good but highlights the need to work extra hard to **ensure that the unique Religious Zionist voice is heard.**

An authentic Torah voice of integration and unity: integration between Judaism and Zionism; Torah learning and army service; between *Torah u'Madda*; balancing Israel and Diaspora needs.

In a post-October 7 world, Jewish unity is more critical than ever. The Mizrachi movement is deeply committed to the 'covenant of fate' as articulated by Rav Soloveitchik, which was what Hamas attempted to shatter.

Never before has a voice of integration and unity around our common values been more critical for the future.

OIC-Mizrachi is that future.

What have the OIC-Mizrachi in the US and Mizrachi worldwide done since the last Congress 5 years ago?

Secured **hundreds of millions of dollars** for:

- ✦ **Education** – Funding yeshivot, seminaries, MASA gap year programs, campus life and global Jewish education.
- ✦ **Land Development in Yehuda, Shomron and Key Areas** – Direct influence over construction in Gush Etzion, East Jerusalem, and other strategic regions.
- ✦ **Dispatching 600 Shlichim** annually to communities, schools, campuses, and youth movements across the globe.

In the 2020 election, OIC-Mizrachi received 22,700 votes out of 123,000. The assessment is that this time more than 250,000 people will vote. This means that **we will need at least 50,000+ votes to maintain and expand our influence.**

HOW CAN YOU VOTE AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE?



Vote online from March 10 – May 4.



Pay \$5 voter registration fee.



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מכון תורני לנשים ע"ש שרה בת יצחק יעקב רעננערט
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Pioneering Torah Study for Women: The Ever-Evolving Legacy of Matan

In 1988, Rabbanit Malke Bina along with a dedicated group of supporters, founded the Matan Women's Institute for Torah Studies. Their groundbreaking vision was to establish a Beit Midrash that would provide women with advanced high-level Torah learning opportunities. What began as a bold initiative grew into a dynamic center of learning and leadership, shaping the landscape of women's Torah study. Nearly four decades later, Matan continues to empower students with knowledge, skills and a lifelong connection to learning.

Matan has pioneered innovative approaches to Torah study, expanding its reach with 11 branches across Israel - including two main centers in Jerusalem and Raanana- serving tens of thousands of students of all ages and backgrounds. There are eight advanced Beit Midrash programs in Jerusalem and two in Raanana; the Eshkolot Educators Institute for US day school teachers; 180 weekly classes in person and on zoom; educational series and special events in Israel and beyond; weekly parsha podcasts in English and Hebrew with 500,000 listeners to date; the international mother-daughter Bat Mitzvah program; a popular summer learn and tour program; pre-holiday Y'mei Iyun and seminars and solidarity missions and home front activities.

In October 2024, Matan refocused its multidisciplinary Beit Midrash, headed by Rabbanit Rachele Sprecher Frankel and Rabbanit Rachel Harris. Programs integrate the study of Halakha, Talmud, Tanakh and Jewish Thought to equip women with expertise and leadership skills, empowering them to influence the future of Jewish life in Israel and around the world.

Boi Haruach: Elul & Beyond – a new program - is designed for young women seeking spiritual and intellectual growth and has infused Matan with fresh energy. In the wake of October 7th, they are eager



to connect with their heritage through vibrant Torah study starting in Elul and throughout the year.

The Advanced Halakhic Institute's Choshen Mishpat program, which this year welcomed a cohort of 20 scholars, is a rare opportunity for graduates of prominent Halakha programs across Israel, including Matan's Hilkhata Institute, to focus on judicial processes in monetary and civil law.

The Kitvuni Fellowship, launched in 2022 and headed by Dr. Yael Ziegler, is the only program of its kind which supports women scholars to write and publish books of Torah scholarship in English and Hebrew. The first of 18 books was published in August 2024, a second is due out shortly and another four in 2025 with the rest to follow. The program actualizes kitvuni l'dorot, writing for future generations, in the tradition of Queen Esther.

The Eshkolot Educators Institute, directed by Rabbanit Shani Taragin, enriches Tanakh knowledge and pedagogic skills for Jewish day school teachers through zoom-based learning, Israel-based seminars, mentorship by Matan faculty, and in-person study days in the USA. Teachers bring their enhanced knowledge directly to their students, benefitting their schools and communities.

Other major programs include an expansive range of studies in Tanakh, Talmud, Mishnah and Aggadah, the study of Talmud together with Jewish Thought and Chassidut, and advanced Talmud studies. The daily Daf Yomi group for women taught by Matan graduates and faculty, is now in its third cycle.

Since October 7th, 2023, Matan has actively engaged on the home front. There have been several solidarity missions, volunteering, visiting wounded soldiers and hosting uplifting events for soldiers and families of reservists. The monthly uplifting musical Rosh Chodesh tefillot, led by Matan HaSharon director Rabbanit Oshra Koren, fosters a sense of hope and renewal.

Matan is a vibrant home for scholars, leaders and changemakers. It provides a space for rigorous and dynamic learning and leadership development and sets the stage for women to influence and inspire the Jewish future on a global scale.



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A Mother's Faith

An Interview with Meirav Berger

On October 7th, 2023, seven female tatzpitanivot (lookout soldiers) were kidnapped by Hamas from the Nahal Oz military base. Agam Berger, a talented violinist who had only recently arrived at the base, was among them. Rabbi Aron White spoke with Meirav Berger, Agam's mother, shortly after Agam's release in January 2025, following 482 days in captivity.

Can you tell us about yourself and your family before October 7th?

My name is Meirav Berger, I am married to Shlomi and grew up in Holon, in a secular but traditional family. We have four kids, Agam and Liam the twins, our son who turned *bar mitzvah* last year, and our daughter who is nine. I work as an engineer for Egged.

Earlier in the year, my mother passed away aged 81, and I started a religious journey then, keeping Shabbat *l'ilui nishmat*, saying *berachot* and *tefillot*. It felt powerful to know that while she was not physically still with us, her *neshama* was still with us. I had always believed in G-d, but mainly saw Judaism through values, rather than *mitzvot*. I started thinking a lot about my purpose in the world and began to really understand the sense of Shabbat being a covenant between us and Hashem. I was trying to work out how I would convey this to my family – as a family, we loved to go on *tiyulim* on Shabbat. First I thought maybe I will keep three *Shabbatot* and then one Shabbat we will do *tiyulim* – but that doesn't work as Shabbat is a covenant, like a marriage – you can't have some weeks on and others off! Then I was thinking we should buy a caravan and do Shabbat in a caravan in nature parks. This is where I was at before October 7th.

What happened from your perspective on October 7th?

We had dropped Agam off near the base only a few days before; she had just finished the course to become a *tatzpitanit*. Agam called us in the morning and told us something was happening, and that terrorists were firing at them. It didn't even occur to me that she might be in danger – in my head, she's in some military bunker underground, and she is seeing it happening on the cameras. She's in an army base and she will



Agam with her extended family; Meirav at a hachnasat Sefer Torah at Hostage Square in Tel Aviv, January 2024; Agam reuniting with her violin. (PHOTOS: COURTESY)

be protected. As the day went on, we started to get more reports and rumors about what was happening. Then someone said that they heard the Nachal Oz base was overrun and destroyed. At that point, I threw my phone to the side, picked up my *Tehillim* and just started *davening*.

On *Motzaei Shabbat*, we were sent a film that seemed to show her being kidnapped, but no one from the army had come to us yet. I didn't watch the film, and it also wasn't 100% certain that it was indeed Agam. When the army came to us, they said she was missing, but they hadn't verified the film; they didn't know for sure. Shlomi and my daughters said it was her. The official terminology was that Agam is missing, "*menuteket keshet*." For the first one-and-a-half or two months, I was also "*menuteket keshet*" from people, except from very, very close family. I didn't answer my phone, I didn't watch the news, I wasn't sleeping, I was just reading *Tehillim*, which I finished a few times a day. Eventually, the army did tell us that she was seemingly kidnapped, but we didn't even know if she had arrived alive in Gaza. It was only after 2 months that we received a sign of life, both from intelligence and from hostages who returned in the first ceasefire.

How did you cope during those early months?

After a few weeks, the officers from the army who accompanied our family asked me if I wanted to start meeting other hostage families, and encouraged me to step outside a little. I asked to see a rabbi whose *shiurim* I had been listening to, Rabbi Aharon Levi. He came over and we spoke, and he asked me a question that greatly impacted my approach. He asked, "What do you think is hardest for Agam?" It was obvious to me that she is worried about me. "Don't give her a reason to worry," he said, and that gave me a lot of perspective. Throughout the time, I felt

Agam, and I knew she was feeling me, and so I realized I had to be strong, to exude strength, and to send messages of strength.

I also felt signs from Agam the whole time – for example, she had just started keeping a diary before she was kidnapped, and in it she had written, "I know that G-d is with me wherever I am, and *Am Yisrael* needs *ahavat chinam*." Her phone screensaver was "*derech emunah bacharti*." I felt this connection of *neshamot* throughout the 482 days.

She was also kidnapped because she was a Jew, and I wanted to be strong as a Jew – whether through Torah, *v'ahavta l'reiacha*, to find some Jewish meaning and purpose. This war has pushed us to reclaim our Jewish identity, why we are in this land, what is the purpose of our people and national life here.

We first met in January 2024 at a hachnasat Sefer Torah at Hostage Square, when you told me that freed hostages said Agam was saying berachot and refusing to light candles on Shabbat in captivity. Was that something that surprised you, and what else can you tell us about her time in captivity?

I know Agam is connected to her Jewishness, so on one level I wasn't surprised, but on another level I was. I didn't know how she was doing it. Was she risking her life to do this? To stay Jewish? It was her message to me and the world, that she is a Jew. And she did so many things throughout captivity to keep her Jewishness. She didn't cook for her captors on Shabbat. There were times the light was on, and her captors wouldn't turn it off, so she would sleep with the light on rather than turn it off herself.

On Pesach, she didn't want to eat *chametz*; they brought corn flour and she made something from it. She didn't eat meat for

the first 14 months until she was very weak and couldn't take it anymore. She received antibiotics. Liri (Albag) told her she had to eat meat because it wasn't safe for her to be so weak. Somehow in one of the places they were staying, they found a *sefer* "B'chayil U'beruach" by Rav Drukman, which is for soldiers explaining the *halachot* of war. She read about *halachot* during war, *pikuach nefesh*, that you can't keep a *mitzvah* if it endangers yourself, and so then she felt that she was allowed to eat meat.

On Yom Kippur, she asked to know when the times were; she ate *se'udah hamafseket*. Whenever they had an opportunity to see some TV or radio, they wrote down the information so they could know the dates of *chagim*. She used glue as *neirot Chanukah*. She received a *siddur* near the beginning. She had a needle and thread to fix some of their clothing, and when some of her clothing became unusable, she spent a few days sewing the fabric into a beautiful cover for her *siddur*.

Were there moments where your faith broke? What gave you strength? Did you always believe Agam would return alive?

Yes, overall I always felt and knew she would return alive, but there were moments of crisis. There were months on end with no sign of life, moments I wouldn't feel her as strongly. I can count them on one hand. I said Hashem took her, I am doing what my G-dly role is, and if she is not back yet, Hashem has more for me to do. I would go and tell her story – maybe I need to do more things. Maybe I need to do more politically.

Can you describe the days before she returned, and the moment of her return?

These were days of joy; we understood it was happening. I lived with the consciousness that it's happening, and I didn't read the news throughout the time. I would get updates from other mothers, but I didn't want to read the news myself. I knew there would be ups and downs, Hamas would say this and then that. We also had to prepare – her room was full of presents, and we bought her lots of things. I spent time imagining what I would say to her. We had been warned that she wasn't going to return the same person – and that scared me, as I wanted my Agam back!

When we were reunited, it felt like she had just left for Shabbat and come back; she was the same Agam. Of course, there is so much more under the surface, but her presence was so strong and powerful that it truly felt like the same Agam had simply returned home to us.



Agam has become a powerful symbol for many Jews around the world. For example, teenage girls in high schools were braiding their hair in her honor after learning that Agam had braided the hair of other hostages while in captivity. Were you surprised by her impact?

I had already begun to see the impact Agam was having even when she was in captivity! I was going around the country speaking, presenting her story everywhere – in one day I could speak at a school in Kibbutz Yavneh, Beit Shean, Beit Ora; in front of women, high-tech companies, youth groups, everywhere. We started a project of "Agam Lema'an Agam," encouraging women to go to *mikvah* in her *zechut*, as family values were so important to Agam. Many women started going to *mikvah* to help return Agam. And in the end, it was remarkable that she didn't return on Shabbat, but on a Thursday.

On Pesach, we celebrate redemption and going from captivity to freedom. What have you learned about *cheirut* (freedom) this past year?

Cheirut is in the soul. It is not only physical – *cheirut* of the *neshama* we achieve by being Jewish. Agam was a captive, but she had *cheirut* there; she kept her Judaism, she kept her identity, she had *cheirut*. They decided when she could eat and drink, when or if she could see the world, but she knew her identity and purpose, and she kept her freedom in her *neshama*. ■





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A Mother's Strength

A Conversation with Shelley Perez

For many Jews around the world, Daniel Perez has become one of the faces of this war and the hostage crisis. Daniel, a young officer and tank commander originally from South Africa and the son of Rabbi Doron Perez, World Mizrahi Executive Chairman, was declared missing after October 7th. For 163 torturous days, his family hoped for his return, until they received the devastating news that he had been killed on October 7th and his body was being held in captivity. Rabbi Aron White spoke with Shelley Perez, Daniel's mother.

Can you tell us about yourself and your background?

I was born in Cape Town, South Africa. After completing school I graduated and worked as a physical therapist. I made Aliyah and got married to Doron in 1998. We lived in Israel for 2 years, our oldest son Yonatan was born here and when he was 4 months old we went on *shlichut* to South Africa for 2.5 years. This amazingly became 15 years. In 2014 we made it back to Israel, and have lived here in Yad Binyamin for 10.5 years.

How would you describe Daniel to people who never had the chance to meet him?

Daniel was a very mischievous kid. He always had his own way of doing things. He was lively and honest, but always did things his own way. He was not an easy child to bring up as he was so strong-willed. As a young child, he and his

brother Yonatan got up to a lot of mischief together. Never rebellious but fiercely independent, he really gave us a run for our money.

I'll tell you one story about that. We were considering changing his school when he was 4, so we went to visit another school for a day to try out. I was sitting with him, and he said, "Mom, you can leave now!" When I arrived to fetch him, he told me "This is my new school now." I told him that Daddy and I had to still decide, but he had already decided that he wasn't going back to the old school, and this was now his new school. He started the next day!

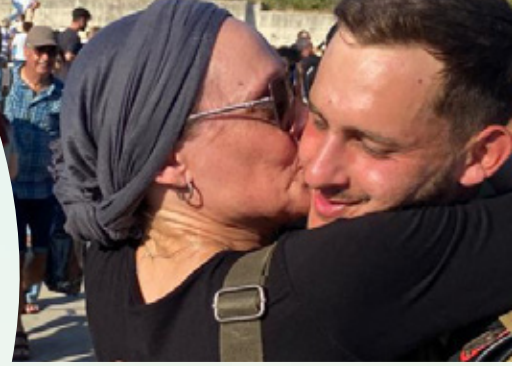
Daniel was on the move all the time, if he wanted to do something, he was completely focused. If there was a subject he liked, he would excel at it. He made friends within days of coming to live in Yad Binyamin, it was really incredible how quickly he integrated and learnt the language. He really enjoyed the freedom of being able to travel around independently. Daniel

and his friends made use of every minute they had together, going on buses all over Israel to beaches, natural springs, and restaurants – Daniel loved eating out. He would do anything for his friends, a true and loyal friend.

When he was 15, he went to school in Yerucham in the south of Israel, another school he was adamant to get into, there was one place and he got it.

During corona he found himself a job at *Misrad HaBriut* (Ministry of Health) for over a year answering corona-related questions. He had the authorization to release people from quarantine, he became the most popular person in Yad Binyamin and beyond. The phone didn't stop for him.

He then went to the army, where he really matured from a teenager who initially just wanted to complete his service and get into the next stage of life to a responsible, timely and organized individual. He fully embraced his role and learned from every



experience. He went to the commanders course and was selected as the *mitztayen* of the whole course (the valedictorian). When they announced that the *mitztayen* was Daniel Perez, we assumed it was someone else since it is quite a common name, but then our Daniel stepped forward, and we realized that was our Daniel Perez! That was when we started to realize how committed he was to the army and the Land of Israel. After that, he went to officers course and excelled there too.

He was a real mensch. He wasn't super talkative at home, but I knew that he loved being out and about with friends. We learnt early on that Daniel needed a lot of freedom and thrived when out with friends. He would visit his Anglo friends in Herzliya and go running at 6 in the morning on the beach there, always convincing a friend to come with him. When he was home he would often have friends over for barbecues, I noticed that these boys were never really on their phones, they were talking most of the time. Daniel formed deep meaningful relationships.

I am very grateful that he and I had such a good connection. My name for him was "*hachamood sheli*, my cutie." He could get me to do anything for him, he was persuasive in the nicest possible way.

On the morning of October 7th, Daniel was at the Nachal Oz base with his tank crew, just 850 meters from the Gaza border. What did Daniel do on October 7th?

Daniel had been at Nachal Oz for about 6-8 weeks. When we had visited him one *erev Shabbat* to give him and his tank crew food, Doron could hear shouting and gunshots from the border. Daniel reassured us, saying, "They are just playing up again." Doron told me about this, and I kept sending him messages to stay in his tank and be careful.

On October 7th, he ran to the bomb shelter at 6:30am like everyone else. A medic who was with *Tzevet Peretz* (Daniel's tank crew) in the bomb shelter told us that they were fully dressed and ready for any task, whereas others were still putting on clothes and shoes. *Tzevet Peretz* were ready for whatever was needed from them – little did they know... Daniel had trained his soldiers to be prepared for anything, at any time.

It's very difficult for me to discuss the details of what he and *Tzevet Peretz* did on that day. What Daniel did on October 7th was heroic. If he would have had the choice I don't believe Daniel would have



chosen any other way to leave this world, he was committed to saving Jews and protecting the Nachal Oz base.

The other soldiers loved him deeply. We didn't know the other soldiers personally, but they clearly loved him. We got to know more about Daniel through his friends. Every second week after October 7th, they would come and visit us, laugh and cry, all the time hoping and praying that he would come home. His friends are a huge comfort for me, they all have a part of Daniel in their hearts.

The stories they shared were remarkable – he would pick them up at 3am from the airport. One of his friends was going on a first date and was planning to take the bus. Daniel said, "You can't take a girl on a bus on the first date." He took my husband's car, drove them to the date, and waited outside for 4 hours to take them home. He always encouraged his friends to be the best they could be and was also always up for a sports or game challenge, of course including some sort of monetary bet!

You have had an emotional journey from October 7th through these past 500-plus days. What has given you strength through your journey?

During the first 163 days when we thought he was alive, I had a lot of hope. Literally the whole world was saying *Tehillim* and *davening* for him and still are, as we wait for him to be released so that he can have a *kever Yisrael*. There were so many *ma'asim tovim* and *mitzvot* done in Daniel's name. The support of the women around me, my very good friends, kept me going. It was torture – trying to work out what



happened in the tank, trying to put together every piece of information about what could have happened. Not knowing where your child is, if he is hot or cold, if he has had medical treatment or enough food was unbearable and torturous.

In some ways, I was blessed. There were no stories of torture yet from the hostages that had come out in the first deal! I didn't read the news or look at any pictures of what was going on in Gaza. Doron was constantly meeting with ministers to ensure that if there was a deal, soldiers would be part of it. We did all we could to try and find out some information, but we heard nothing until March 17th, 2024.

The last few weeks of that period were really debilitating, I felt paralyzed with fear for Daniel's life. I couldn't concentrate, I couldn't eat, I was exhausted, just trying to get through each day.

When we heard that Daniel had been killed on October 7th, I had this very guilty feeling of relief, like something had lifted off my chest. As painful as the news was, I knew two things – my son didn't suffer at the hands of these barbarians and that he is with Hashem. Although my mourning is so challenging, when I look at the families of the hostages who are (please G-d) alive, I feel like I can't even complain. Their torture for this amount of time is absolutely inexplicable and agonizing.

The funeral and *shiva* were so overwhelming. I hadn't seen people in months. I could only manage about 3 hours a day of the *shiva*. It was extremely overwhelming to suddenly have all these people around. Just having to see people is difficult. It's been better for me to be at home, with my friends, and try my best to look after myself – walk, go to ballet, go to trauma

tipul (therapy) every week. Small things like eating properly and sleeping properly have been my way of coping.

We've had a lot of *berachot* along the way: Yonatan *baruch Hashem* miraculously survived being shot in the leg on October 7th. He got married ten days later to a wonderful girl. She has been unbelievable during this period and we are all very close to her.

Shira has come out of her shell and has spoken around the world. And Adina is making beautiful artwork out of metal dedicated to Daniel. These are small comforts along the way after such a terrible tragedy.



What is your message to Jews around the world this Pesach?

What we've learned from Daniel was how he loved spending time with his many varied close friends and in whom he invested so much of himself. Definitely as women, we often don't do enough of that. There's always something to do at home. The group of friends that I have surrounding me are beyond special, each and everyone of them has given their all to hold me up. Even though it was such an intense time we all spent so much time together, it was a time to bond, laugh, and

cry together. We do things together now. Everybody comes to me most Shabbat mornings for *kiddush*. We laugh and bond. Women often don't make time to nurture themselves and be with friends.

The other important lesson is to grab opportunities for nurturing connections. I have decided to prioritize family events. Those are the times you remember. You don't remember the housework and work-related matters, but you do remember special times with friends and family.

I am very blessed to have wonderful parents-in-law, they come every week to be

with us, they even come when Doron is away to see me. This has been something terribly hard on them, but spending time together gives us all comfort. Life is about these moments and connections with those close to us, and that is something I have learned from Daniel.

With much gratitude to Hashem, we have recently been blessed with a gorgeous grandson. This is a huge gift and has brought a shining light into our family and entire extended family. With Hashem's help may he be blessed to merit Torah, *chuppah* and *ma'asim tovim*. ■

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A Mother's Wait

A Conversation with Anat Angrest

On the morning of October 7th, “Tzevet Peretz” (the Perez Tank Crew) fought heroically outside the Nachal Oz military base, defending against Hamas terrorists who were attempting to infiltrate Israel. Of the four-man crew, three soldiers were killed in action: Tomer Leibowitz, Itai Chen, and their commander, Daniel Perez. The tank’s driver, Matan Angrest, survived but was taken captive by Hamas. At the time of this interview, conducted just before Purim, Matan remains in captivity. Rabbi Aron White sat down with Matan’s mother, Anat Angrest, to hear her powerful story of uncertainty, fear, and unwavering hope.



Thank you for speaking with us, Anat, at this very difficult time. Before we talk about the events of October 7th and everything following, can you tell us about yourself?

Our family lives in the town of Kiryat Bialik near Haifa, and we have 4 children. Matan is the oldest, he is now 22, then my daughter Adi who is now in the army, Ophir who turns 17 this week, and Roi the youngest who is 9. I am a civil engineer, and my husband is a mechanical engineer. By October 7, Matan had already served for two-and-a-half years and was coming close to the end of his army service, and we were all prepared to go on a family trip together to mark the end of his army service.

What was your experience on October 7th, and when did you learn about Matan’s situation?

We had a meal on *Leil Shabbat* and went to sleep. In the morning, I woke up to alerts on my phone. I saw something was happening on the Gaza border where Matan was based. I texted Matan, and he said he was OK, so I went back to sleep. At 8, I started getting calls and messages that terrorists had invaded from Gaza, and I asked Matan to write to me, but he didn’t answer. I told myself,



The Angrest family. (PHOTO: COURTESY)

“He is in the *balagan*, he is doing some military operations, he will respond when he's available.”

Throughout the day, we started hearing more and more news, and Matan still wasn't answering his phone and WhatsApp. By the afternoon, people were already talking about the Nachal Oz base being conquered and destroyed. No one in the army was available. I didn't know who else was in the tank, so it was really hard to get any kind of information.

It took a few days before the IDF officers came to officially update us, and then they told us that Matan was missing; there was no information about him. Tomer's body had been found in the tank, but the other three soldiers from the tank were missing. We hoped that they were kidnapped – we were told that their phones were in Gaza. Then, when hostages came back in the first hostage deal, there were people who said they had seen Matan there, alive – he had been injured and told them some details of what happened on the morning of October 7th. In March 2024, we found out that Daniel and Itai were killed. The four families – Leibowitz, Perez, Chen, and ourselves, whose sons were together in that tank, have become one family. We go through everything together. Now, more than 500 days later, we are waiting for Matan.

It seems that initially you were less public in some of the campaigns, and in the past few weeks, you have become more public. Was that a conscious choice?

We realized that we need to speak up; it's not good to stay quiet. We had been told by some authorities that because our son is a soldier, it is more prudent to stay quiet. But they told that to the families of hostage soldiers in the past – Oron Shaul, Hadar Goldin, Gilad Shalit, and going back to Ron Arad. Eventually, we realized that maybe it is better that we do speak up, and there is also an important message for the Israeli public. Matan got up on the morning of October 7th to fight for the State of Israel and its people – they fought for us, and we need to fight for them.

Recently released hostage Keith Siegel was with Matan for a few months – what did you learn from him?

Keith Siegel spent a significant period of time with Matan, and so we heard from him that Matan is alive. We learned that Matan is in a very bad way, having already been injured on October 7th, and now the conditions he's being held in are difficult.

What is your message to Jews around the world?

We have hope because we know Matan is alive, and we can bring him back, heal him, and help him recover, and it needs to happen now; it's *pikuach nefesh*. The hope gives us strength, and we also get strength from the great support from the Jews in Israel and around the world, who all want Matan to come back home. We can't believe it's been so long, but we will not give up. Matan and his *tzevet* went to defend the state and its people, based on the values of saving lives and *arvut hadadit* (collective responsibility), and we cannot forget that – we must continue to do everything we can to ensure Matan comes back, and that his comrades Daniel and Itai should come back. ■

It is our fervent wish that by the time of reading, Matan, Daniel, and Itai and all of the remaining 59 hostages should have returned from captivity to Israel.





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A MOTHER'S VOICE TO THE NATION

The Journey of Meirav Leshem Gonen



On January 19th, 2025, Romi Gonen was released from Hamas captivity during the first day of the second ceasefire deal. Kidnapped from the Nova festival on October 7th, 2023, her smiling face became one of the most recognized images on hostage posters worldwide. Rabbi Aron White spoke with her mother, Meirav Leshem Gonen, about her 471-day battle for her daughter's freedom.

Can you tell us about yourself and your background?

I live in the north of Israel, am the mother of five children, and before October 7th worked as a business consultant to female business owners. I operated very much in my *arba amot* (personal space), I was not a person who was very politically active.

Can you take us back to the morning of October 7th? Where were you and what did you know?

At 6:35am, Romi called me to say there were rocket sirens. We didn't realize anything was out of the "ordinary," so I told her to try to find cover. She called back a little later to say the rockets were not stopping, but they couldn't get out in the car because they were stuck with hundreds of cars trying to leave. Romi was with her friend Gaia, and as they were

hiding in the bushes, they started to hear gunshots that I could hear on the phone. Then Romi called me a few minutes later to say she had been shot. Gaia had been killed, as had Ben Shimoni, the driver who had heroically driven back to save them. She said she was bleeding, and I just tried to stay on the phone with Romi as I heard the gunshots in the background. The call ended, and that was the last I heard from Romi. After that, there were hours of confusion, as we didn't know what was happening, and were trying to work out what had happened to Romi, as thousands of people tried to piece together what was happening to their loved ones.

In the early days, you in many ways became one of the faces of the hostage families. You spoke at the press conference on October 8th and, as an English speaker, were one of the first families

to speak to the English media. Was that something you consciously decided, or did it just happen?

At the beginning, there were not many of us speaking to the media as there was just so much chaos and confusion, but I spoke to any journalist who wanted to hear about October 7th. Relatively early on, it dawned upon me that this is not just a story of Israel, but we are the *am segula*, our fate is to have a central place in world events. What happens to us affects the world; I felt that very clearly. From very early, I understood this was a battle between good and evil.

At some point, after the first ceasefire, we were at a prayer event at the Kotel with Chief Rabbis and religious leaders from all around the world. There was a rabbi there who said something that really resonated with me: "We are living in historic times,

and history will judge for each person whether they chose evil or good.” There is a battle of the free world with the forces of evil. We are the first to meet it, and we will have to be the first as the Jewish people, but allowing the forces of evil to win here will affect the world at large. That gave us strength.

While I focused primarily on advocacy within Israel, I also participated in international efforts. I traveled to Germany and addressed the UN in Geneva, while my older daughter represented our family across various cities in the United States.

During the 471 days Romi was in captivity, there were many ups and downs, but I’m sure one of the hardest moments was when Romi didn’t return in the first cease-fire. What gave you strength during the difficult times?

I felt a profound obligation to protect my daughter’s life – this is fundamentally what being a mother means. My other four children were watching how I responded; I knew they were wondering what would happen if they were taken too. Even subconsciously, I wanted to demonstrate for them what motherhood truly means: you never stop fighting for your child.

I felt as I was speaking and being active that as a people we were learning a lesson and reinforcing our values on a national level. The battle for the hostages is about *arvut hadadit* (mutual responsibility), *ahavat hachayim* (love of life), *kedushat hachayim* (sanctity of life), to ensure we keep an eye on each other. This is true not only about the hostages but to ensure that we “see” each other, such as our brothers and sisters in Gush Etzion and other parts of the country who have lived with the threat of terrorism. This *arvut hadadit* doesn’t exist in any other nation; no one else feels this sense of brotherhood. We are all *neshamot* connected, part of the same creation. We are part of a moment when we have to reinforce these national values that are part of our DNA.

In Jewish tradition, the exodus from Egypt occurred in stages. Similarly, do you see Romi’s return to freedom happening in phases? What has this journey been like for your family?

That’s a thoughtful question. While I’m still processing everything, I can see distinct phases in our journey. First came the overwhelming joy of her physical return – that moment when she finally arrived home. Before that, her absence had created an enormous void in our family,



Romi reuniting with her father and siblings (PHOTO: MAAYAN TOAF/GPO); Rabbi Doron Perez in Borehamwood United Synagogue, UK. The shul “adopted” Romi Gonen and Daniel Perez to show their solidarity and support.

which we’re now gradually filling with her presence again.

Our relationship with Romi has been transformed by this experience. After spending fifteen months fighting for her return, we connect with her in entirely new ways. As a family, we’re now learning how to transition back to everyday life – a different kind of challenge.

There’s also been a shift in our roles. For over a year, we spoke about Romi, advocated for her, and imagined her return. Now she’s here, making her own choices and reclaiming her voice. We’re relearning to relate to her not as the subject of our advocacy, but as an autonomous person living her own life again. She’s no longer “our hostage” but simply our daughter, free to determine her own path forward.

Last year, at a conference in Ashkelon, you said: “True cheirut will be when Romi is with us for Seder night this year.” What is your message to Jews around the world this Pesach?

This year, the true *cheirut* (freedom) is *davka* to release ourselves from the prison of ego and rigid thinking. In Israel, we often cling so tightly to our opinions that we become unable to hear others. We fear that acknowledging any validity in different viewpoints might somehow undermine our entire worldview. This is a lesson we must learn – that we can remain strong in our convictions while still recognizing the complexity of reality and the legitimacy of differing perspectives. True freedom comes when we can listen to one another without feeling threatened. ■

Carmay-HaNadiv

A New Anglo Community



Jason and Eliana Feifel-Selesny

In the past months, many American families have moved into Carmay-HaNadiv. "We made Aliyah separately from the USA, met here, and got married in Israel!" said Eliana-Feifel Selesny. "We love living in Israel, both work in Tel Aviv, and feel blessed to be raising our daughter here. This past summer, we moved to Carmay-HaNadiv from Givat Shmuel."

Other couples have moved to Carmay HaNadiv having recently made Aliya. "We made Aliya in May and moved to Carmay HaNadiv from West Hempstead, New York, where we were very active in the Jewish community," say Elaine and Lester Bleich. "We moved to Carmay-HaNadiv because we were excited to be part of a new community in Israel. We are thrilled with our choice."

As people have been settling in, they have been learning much of what Carmay-HaNadiv offers to anglos. "Our favorite thing about Carmay-HaNadiv is the warmth and friendliness of everyone here. The people here couldn't be nicer," said Lester. "We really like how the Israelis and Olim unite to form one vibrant community centered around Torah. We also like being close to the surrounding fields and nature. This area of the country is developing and it's exciting to be a part of it," said Jason Selesny.

Many people are continuing to move this summer and in the coming years. "We were looking for a warm and growing Israeli community that we could join and become active members of," said Eliana. "We came for Shabbat to check out the area and decided that it would be our next home. We are currently renting an apartment here and view it as a great way to start out in the community." "If you are looking for a warm and vibrant community in Israel, where everyone cares about each other, we can't think of a better place to live than Carmay-Hanadiv," said Elaine.



Lester and Elaine Bleich



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AMIT's Vision for 21st Century Learning



An Interview with Shari Safra

As AMIT celebrates its centennial year, Rabbi Aron White sat down with Shari Safra, President of AMIT, to discuss the organization's remarkable journey from its founding as an agricultural school to becoming one of Israel's largest and most innovative educational networks.

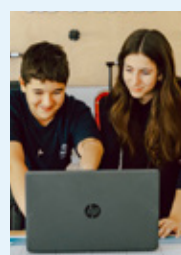
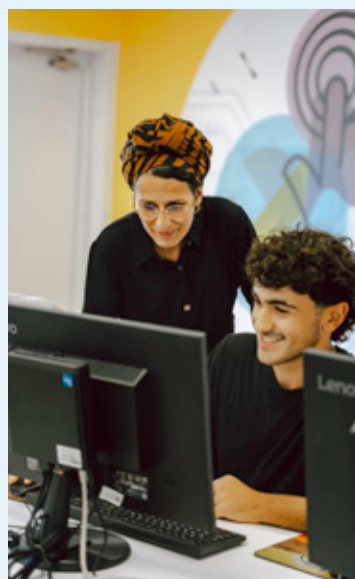
Thank you for meeting with us! AMIT was started 100 years ago, in 1925. What was AMIT then and what is AMIT today?

AMIT has always been about education. It was founded 100 years ago by Bessie Gotsfeld. She went to Israel literally with a suitcase of money to buy property to start an agricultural school. That was our origin. We started with agricultural schools, and we've certainly evolved tremendously since then. We still have vocational schools, though the vocations today aren't typically farming – they've evolved with technology and time. We have high schools, elementary schools, junior colleges, with lots of different tracks for different types of students. We have secular schools, religious schools, co-ed schools, and single-sex schools. We've really evolved to cover every aspect of education. Our tagline is “educating Israel, one child at a time.” Our goal was to create a school for each and every child that needs one.

Can you tell us a little bit about your background and involvement in AMIT?

I grew up in New York, attending public school on Long Island. I grew up in a Jewish household, but my AMIT journey and religious journey came later in life when I met my husband. I was introduced to AMIT a few weeks after having my first son. I went to an event where I met an AMIT graduate who had gone into one of our surrogate home schools when he was seven years old. He lived there through high school graduation, went into the army, and when he came home from the army, he didn't know where to go. Of course, the people at AMIT said, “This is your home, you come back to us.” Having just had a baby, I was deeply moved by the story of a child without a home or family to live with. I immediately went up to him after the event, and we connected.

I started learning more about AMIT around 2008. It was a slow start because I had my son, and then I had another – I have two



boys. I was going to AMIT events and had friends who were involved. Then in 2015, I traveled to Israel with AMIT on their 90th mission. That sealed the deal for me. Shortly thereafter, I joined the board and have been getting more involved since then.

I wanted to ask about the model in general, because within the Israeli school system, AMIT now represents a significant number of schools. You have this unique ability for the American community to be directly involved in a tangible way. I'm interested in what that looks like – how people in America are able to affect the education of Israelis in such a real way.

The U.S. board is a little bit different than other U.S. boards of organizations based in Israel because we're more than a "Friends of" organization. While "Friends of" organizations are typically just fundraising arms – which is very important, I'm not diminishing that model – we are involved in the Israeli operation. We work very closely with our Director General, Amnon Eldar, and his leadership team, and they report to the board. He is remarkable and, in my opinion, the best in his field.

It's very rare that there would be pushback, but we are in a position where we could push back and have pushed back on certain ideas, because he is a big thinker. He has amazing ideas,

and that's why AMIT has evolved the way it has. But everybody needs to be challenged sometimes, so we end up in meaningful conversations that go beyond "how much money did you raise in the U.S." We get the opportunity to learn about their research and development in education and their plans for growth – which types of schools they're looking to develop, what neighborhoods they want to expand into. That is all part of the U.S. board's purview and creates a very real connection to what's happening on the ground in Israel.

You mentioned AMIT was founded by Bessie Gotsfeld as part of Mizrahi Women. Even though the schools themselves are for all genders and types, I think it still has this very strong identity of female leadership. Could you speak about that?

Historically, once it spun off from Mizrahi and became a women's organization, it was exclusively women for many years. A few years ago, we amended our constitution so that men could sit on our board. Society has changed since there was a need for separate organizations. Now, the sexes intersect more than they did 100 years ago. Not being able to have qualified and interesting men on our board really felt like a lost opportunity. The goal is to keep it an organization where women get leadership positions and that still feels like a women's organization that welcomes men. We have amazing men on our board, from young leadership

through seniors, and the breadth of knowledge that comes from opening ourselves up is tremendous.

There aren't many people who get to have conversations about the overall direction of not just one school, but 90 schools. Are there any specific trends, whether in education or geography, where AMIT is expanding? And how has AMIT responded to the events of October 7th? What challenges have come up?

Regarding trends, recent reports have suggested that Israeli education has deteriorated. However, if we look at *bagrut* scores, AMIT's scores have not only not deteriorated, they continue to rise. We're consistently above the national average in both *bagrut* eligibility and quality. We have more students taking five-point subjects and more students on the Dean's List, which I believe means three five-point *bagruts* with a 90 or above, including math and English.

This success isn't sudden. About 10 years ago, we developed something called Gogia, which derives from the Hebrew word "*pedagogia*." It's a research and development concept with a physical location where we develop novel ways of teaching, meeting students where they are, and trying to transform the classroom into a 21st-century learning space that's not necessarily forward-facing with a teacher lecturing from the front. Gogia has become a training center where teachers from our 90 schools come to Ra'anana. We've even brought in teachers from other networks, non-network schools, and other countries. We're really leading in pedagogy and creativity.

Gogia focuses on teamwork, flexibility, and critical thinking, moving away from the traditional classroom model of memorization and regurgitation. We've also always had a holistic approach to education – not everything for every student is academic. If they have an interest in music or art, we foster that, because a student who is happy pursuing their passion will be more receptive to other subjects they might otherwise resist. This has been a 10-year undertaking that is now yielding results.

Since October 7th, we've certainly stepped things up, and that framework has served us well. We had online content for our students within three days of October 7th. By the 9th, our senior teams were in a war room, strategizing how to keep our students focused and engaged during this tumultuous time. Some schools were able to open, though obviously not in the south. As students were relocating, we had physical schools open within weeks. Until those physical schools opened, we had online content – not



AMIT's participation in the World Zionist Congress is crucial to ensure that education-centered religious values and Zionist ideology remain a central focus of the World Zionist Organization and the other national institutions of the Jewish people. In shaping the future of Israel, it is important for Religious Zionist leaders to have influence in institutions which impact the education system in Israel.

AMIT has been active in the World Zionist Organization since its inception, with female delegates initially representing Mizrahi Women. It is as important today, as it was at the time of the first congress, for female Religious Zionist voices to be heard at the table of world Jewry.

Chana Shields

Chair of the Board of Directors, AMIT

heavy academics, but touch points so the students could connect with someone, check in, and see their peers. We learned a lot from Covid; the online component of education enabled us to move forward immediately after October 7th.

Regarding geography, our premise is that we're in the periphery, but it's not necessarily geographic – it's both socioeconomic and geographic periphery. We have many schools in the south, a few in the north, and some in the center, but we tend to go to underserved communities. There's now a tender process in Israel where you no longer permanently own a school. Every five years, a school is put up for tender, and different networks can bid for it. If you have a school, you get it for five years with the right to extend for another five years if mutually agreed upon. This process has enabled us to think strategically about where it makes sense for us to be, to expand in certain municipalities, and to withdraw from others. Municipalities can now seek us out – they know where we excel and what their needs are. It's really a win-win for both us as a school network and the municipality, if they have the self-awareness to know their needs. Most often the mayors do, and that's been very positive.

Because it is the 100th anniversary, are there any plans for celebrating the milestone? And given that you have these 10-year programs, is there anything you're rolling out for what's coming?

We're actually still building a new campus. We have a campus right now called Kfar Batya, and we're relocating it.

My great aunt was in Kfar Batya when she came as a refugee from Hungary after the war.

Yes, it's one of the hearts of AMIT. We're building a new complex that will house a high school and elementary school, a sports complex, Gogia, and the AMIT headquarters. It's going to be a beautiful new, welcoming campus where we hope to have teachers and students from all of our schools come and experience Gogia. We hope that Gogia will become an even bigger training center for teachers from outside of Israel and educators throughout the world. Construction started right before the war but, remarkably, has been able to continue. Progress is incredible. We're hoping to open it in the next year or year-and-a-half. The hope is that our 100th anniversary and the Kfar Batya campus opening can combine to be a cause for celebration. ■



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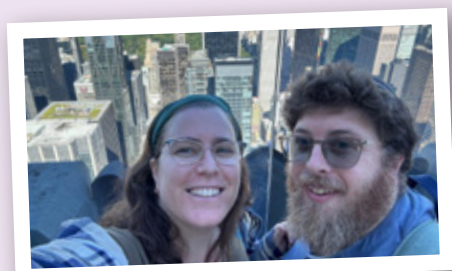
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SHAGRIRIM BALEV

Friends Setting Up Friends



Our Couples: Introducing Ella and Eli Feifer

Where was your first date?

Park HaMesila in Jerusalem. We ate pizza and then talked and walked along the tracks. We almost reached Beit Safafa before turning around and heading back. By the end of the date, we already knew there would be a second date.

Dating tip:

Try to create dates where you're doing something you enjoy. For example, painting, going to a live show, comedy bar, eating, etc. A date that includes something you enjoy can make things less awkward and helps you see your partner doing things they enjoy and creates shared experiences.

Why is it worth joining the Shagririm Balev database?

For us, it was very convenient because it removed the need for filtering. Someone else took care of deciding whether it was a good match or not.

What did you learn from the search process?

You can learn something about yourself and who you're looking for from every date. In the end, it's all about the right timing.

Tell us about your marriage proposal:

It wasn't really a proposal because we already knew we wanted to get married. Eli knows that Ella has a tendency to ruin surprises. So we chose the ring together and coordinated the date and location in advance and made it into a once-in-a-lifetime fun day. We went to Herzliya and went sailing there. We continued with a walk on the beach and had a picnic at the top of the cliff where Ella received the engagement ring.

Who are the ambassadors who set you up?

Eli's ambassador was Matanel Latner and Ella's ambassador was Shulamit Deitch Wolman. They are two amazing ambassadors who acted with determination and sensitivity.



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The Story We Tell

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks זצ"ל

It remains one of the most counterintuitive passages in all of religious literature. Moshe is addressing the Israelites just days before their release. They have been exiles for 210 years. After an initial period of affluence and ease, they have been oppressed, enslaved, and their male children killed in an act of slow genocide. Now, after signs and wonders and a series of plagues that have brought the greatest empire of the ancient world to its knees, they are about to go free.

Yet Moshe does not talk about freedom, or the land flowing with milk and honey, or the journey they will have to undertake through the desert. Instead, three times, he turns to the distant future, when the journey is complete and the people – free at last – are in their own land. And what he talks about is not the land itself, or the society they will have to build or even the demands and responsibilities of freedom.

Instead, he talks about education, specifically about the duty of parents to their children. He speaks about the questions children may ask when the epic events that are about to happen are, at best, a distant memory. He tells the Israelites to do what Jews have done from then to now. Tell your children the story. Do it in the maximally effective way. Re-enact the drama of exile and exodus, slavery and freedom. Get your children to ask questions. Make sure that you tell the story as your own, not as some dry account of history. Say that the way you live and the ceremonies you observe are “because of what G-d did for me” – not my ancestors but me. Make it vivid, make it personal, and make it live.

He says this not once but three times: “It shall be that when you come to the land which G-d will give you as He said, and you observe this ceremony, and your children say to you, ‘What does this service mean to you?’ you shall say, ‘It is a Pesach sacrifice to the L-rd, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and spared our homes’” (Shemot 12:25–27). “On that day you shall tell your child, ‘It is because of what the L-rd did for me when I came out of Egypt’” (Shemot 13:8). “In the future, when your child asks you, ‘What is this?’ you shall tell him, ‘With a mighty hand, the L-rd brought us out from Egypt, from the land of slavery’” (Shemot 13:14).

Why was this the most important thing he could do in this intense moment of redemption? Because freedom is the work of a nation, nations need identity, identity needs memory, and memory is encoded in the stories we tell. Without narrative,

there is no memory, and without memory, we have no identity. The most powerful link between the generations is the tale of those who came before us – a tale that becomes ours, and that we hand on as a sacred heritage to those who will come after us. We are the story we tell ourselves about ourselves, and identity begins in the story parents tell their children.

That narrative provides the answer to the three fundamental questions every reflective individual must ask at some stage in their lives: Who am I? Why am I here? How then shall I live? There are many answers to these questions, but the Jewish ones are: I am a member of the people whom G-d rescued from slavery to freedom. I am here to build a society that honours the freedom of others, not just my own. And I must live in conscious knowledge that freedom is the gift of G-d, honoured by keeping His covenant of law and love.

Twice in the history of the West this fact was forgotten, or ignored, or rebelled against. In the 17th and 18th century, there was a determined effort to create a world without identities. This was the project called the Enlightenment. It was a noble dream. To it we owe many developments whose value is beyond question and that we must strive to preserve. However, one aspect of it failed and was bound to fail: the attempt to live without identity.

The argument went like this. Identity throughout the Middle Ages was based on religion. But religion had for centuries led to war between Christians and Muslims. Then, following the Reformation, it led to war between Christian and Christian, Protestant and Catholic. Therefore, to abolish war one had to move beyond identity. Identities are particular. Therefore, let us worship only the things that are universal: reason and observation, philosophy and science. Let us have systems, not stories. Then we will become one humanity, like the world before Babel. As Schiller put it and Beethoven set to music in the last movement of the Ninth Symphony: *Alle Menschen werden Brüder*, “All men will be brothers.”

It cannot be done, at least as humanity is presently constituted. The reaction, when it came, was fierce and disastrous. The nineteenth century saw the return of the repressed. Identity came back with a vengeance, this time based not on religion but on one of three substitutes for it: the nation state, the (Aryan) race, and the (working) class. In the 20th century, the nation state led to two world wars. Race led to the Holocaust. The class struggle



led to Stalin, the Gulag and the KGB. A hundred million people were killed in the name of three false gods.

For the past fifty years the West has been embarked on a second attempt to abolish identity, this time in the opposite direction. What the secular West now worships is not the universal but the individual: the self, the “Me,” the “I.” Morality – the thick code of shared values binding society together for the sake of the common good – has been dissolved into the right of each individual to do or be anything he or she chooses, so long as they do not directly harm others.

Identities have become mere masks we wear temporarily and without commitment. For large sections of society, marriage is an anachronism, parenthood delayed or declined, and community a faceless crowd. We still have stories, from Harry Potter to Lord of the Rings to Star Wars, but they are films, fictions, fantasies – a mode not of engagement but of escapism. Such a world is supremely tolerant, until it meets views not to its liking, when it quickly becomes brutishly intolerant, and eventually degenerates into the politics of the mob. This is populism, the prelude to tyranny.

Today’s hyper-individualism will not last. We are social animals. We cannot live without identities, families, communities and collective responsibility. Which means we cannot live without the stories that connect us to a past, a future and a larger group whose history and destiny we share. The biblical insight still stands. To create and sustain a free society, you have to teach your children the story of how we achieved freedom and what its absence tastes like: the unleavened bread of affliction and the bitter herbs of slavery. Lose the story and eventually you lose your freedom. That is what happens when you forget who you are and why.

The greatest gift we can give our children is not money or possessions but a story – a real story, not a fantasy, one that connects them to us and to a rich heritage of high ideals. We are not particles of dust blown this way or that by the passing winds of fad and fashion. We are heirs to a story that inspired a hundred generations of our ancestors and eventually transformed the Western world. What you forget, you lose. The West is forgetting its story. We must never forget ours.

With the hindsight of thirty-three centuries we can see how right Moshe was. A story told across the generations is the gift of an identity, and when you know who you are and why, you can navigate the wilderness of time with courage and confidence. That is a life-changing idea.



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Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS, Yeshiva University



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The Faith of Righteous Women

Rabbi Reuven Taragin

The first chapter of *Sefer Shemot* describes the enslavement and suffering of the Jewish people. Though Pharaoh tried to suppress their growth through slavery, the Torah tells us his plan backfired: “As they persecuted them, so they grew” (*Shemot* 1:12).

When Pharaoh devised a more devious plan – the extermination of Jewish baby boys – the midwives Shifra and Puah defied his orders. When he commanded Egyptians to throw baby boys into the Nile, women still found ways to protect their children.

Yocheved gave birth to Moshe and, following the letter of Pharaoh’s law, placed him in a protective basket in the Nile. Miriam stood firmly by the river to ensure Moshe’s safety. Then Pharaoh’s own daughter retrieved Moshe and raised him in her home, defying her father’s orders. Pharaoh had tried to kill the Jews from within by using their midwives, but ironically, his own daughter saved and raised the Jewish savior.

Moshe was ultimately G-d’s agent to save the Jewish people, but he owed his life to the women who saved him. The Torah shows how Moshe embodied what he experienced – he was saved, so he saved others. Though drawn from the water, he was named *Moshe* (to draw), not *Mashui* (drawn), because he would become one who saved others.

The righteous women not only saved Moshe; they inspired many others, including their husbands. *Chazal* tell us that the men, depressed by the situation, decided to stop having children and divorced their wives. Why bring children into a world where boys were killed and girls enslaved?

The women convinced them to reverse this decision. Miriam challenged her father, Amram, who had led the divorce initiative. She argued that Pharaoh’s decrees were harsh but not absolute – ultimately, Hashem determines the results; our job is to do our part. Amram was convinced and led the remarriage initiative (*Sotah* 12a).

Even after the family was forced to leave Moshe in the Nile, Miriam maintained her faith. Amram expressed his frustration, but Miriam was not deterred and even

predicted that Moshe would become the savior of the Jewish people. Even in bleak circumstances, when redemption could only be seen “from a distance,” Miriam continued to believe.

These women were not exceptions but the rule. Jewish women showed similar faith and strength throughout. They visited their enslaved, depressed husbands in the fields, fed and pampered them, and convinced them to have children. When their husbands couldn’t help with births, they gave birth on their own, and Hashem sent angels to care for the babies (*Sotah* 11b).

Chazal saw the faith and righteousness of these women as the reason the Israelites merited redemption from Egypt: “In the merit of righteous women, our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt” (*Sotah* 11b). Though Hashem promised Avraham that his descendants would be redeemed (*Bereishit* 15:14), the merit of righteous women allowed them to leave after 210 years instead of 400. Hashem wanted to redeem the Israelites, but they needed to show faith in Him first (*Parashat Devarim, Derush* 5).

The women demonstrated this faith. It inspired the midwives and Pharaoh’s daughter to defy genocidal orders. Miriam used her faith to encourage the men to remarry, and the women of Israel inspired their husbands to have children. Yocheved’s and Miriam’s faith gave them strength to conceive, deliver, protect, and raise the future savior.

The Israelites in Egypt were not the last of our ancestors redeemed through righteous women’s merit. Women played central roles in many subsequent redemptive processes throughout our history, including Yehudit against the Greeks and Esther in Persia.

Women in our generation, particularly over the last eighteen months, continue to exhibit unique faith and strength. Women have sacrificed defending the Jewish people on October 7th and since, supporting their fighting family members, and responding to loss with inspiring faith.

Rachel Goldberg-Polin exemplifies this enduring faith. When her son Hersh was wounded and taken hostage from the Nova

Festival, she embarked on a worldwide campaign to secure his release while inspiring countless others to join her in prayer. Tragically, after nearly twelve months in captivity, Hersh was found murdered. Yet even in her profound grief, Rachel’s faith remained unshaken: “From the late morning of October 7th, I felt Hashem was here... The relationship is extremely strong because I know Hashem is here. I know Hashem is involved with this and has a plan.”

Righteous women have also been among the hostages. Agam Berger, wounded and kidnapped on October 7th, was held for almost 500 days, much of it alone. In captivity, she observed Shabbat and *kashrut* and fasted on Yom Kippur. Upon release, she shared: “I chose the path of faith. I went with the path of faith and returned with the path of faith.” Her suffering reinforced rather than shook her faith.

As we prepare for Pesach, let’s pray that the faith and inspiration of Rachel, Agam, and many other righteous women merit our redemption, just as our foremothers’ faith merited our ancestors’ redemption. “*Bayamim haheim, bazman hazeh*, in those days, at this time.”



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Rabbi Reuven Taragin

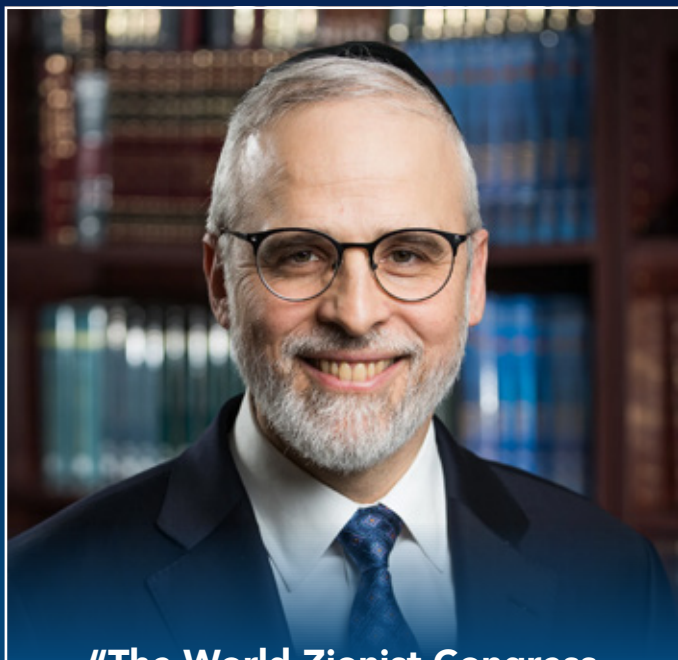
is Educational Director of Mizrahi and Dean of the Yeshivat Hakotel Overseas Program. His new book, *Essentials of Judaism*, can be purchased at rabbireuventaragin.com.



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Rabbi Moshe Hauer

Executive Vice President, Orthodox Union



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Director, OU Women's Initiative



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Miriam and Agam: Women of War and Water

Rabbanit Shani Taragin

The *Ariza*¹ explains that the final generation of exile will remarkably resemble the generation of the Egyptian exile on the eve of redemption. Just as *Bnei Yisrael* were redeemed from Egypt in the merit of righteous women¹ (e.g. midwives, Yochaved, Miriam, Bat-Pharaoh), we will be redeemed once more through righteous women.² Though separated by millennia, we find striking parallels between Jewish heroines of the past and the present, such as *Miriam HaNeviah* and Agam Berger. Both experienced brutal warfare, witnessed death and destruction firsthand, and yet maintained not only their will to survive but an unwavering commitment to their faith amidst chaos and despair.

Miriam's Egypt was a place of crushing oppression. She witnessed the systematic drowning of Hebrew infants and experienced the bitter taste of slavery. Yet even in this darkness, Miriam possessed extraordinary conviction; her prophetic confidence that redemption would come never wavered, even as she watched her infant brother floating on the Nile.

In our own era of oppression, Agam Berger reflected a similar spiritual resilience as she endured 482 days in Hamas captivity – a modern slavery in the tunnels of Gaza. Like Miriam, she witnessed unspeakable cruelty yet maintained her spiritual integrity. Even in captivity, she observed whatever *mitzvot* she could, keeping track of Shabbat and holidays, observing *kashrut*, and *tefillah*.

The connection of both women to water reveals a profound spiritual metaphor. Miriam's very name contains the Hebrew root for bitterness (*mar*), yet she transforms bitter waters (*yam*) to sweet ones. We first encounter her by the reeds of the Nile and then again singing a song by the Sea of Reeds. The *Midrash*³ teaches that her merit sustained the miraculous well that followed the Israelites through the wilderness, providing physical and spiritual waters for her nation in a place of thirst and desolation.

Agam's name means "lake" in Hebrew, directly connecting her to water. In *Tehillim* 114:8, we read "הִפְכִּי הַצֹּר אֶמָּיִם" – referring to the miraculous waters springing from stones in the wilderness, perhaps even the "well" of Miriam.⁴ As Miriam stood by waters of destruction, anticipating salvation amidst the reeds, Agam braided reeds of hair for her fellow captives, providing strength and support. During Agam's captivity, her mother Meirav (also a name of water – i.e. *many waters* or *waters of strife*) encouraged women throughout Israel to immerse in the *mikvah* as a spiritual merit for her daughter's release. The personalities of Miriam, Agam, and Meirav are intrinsically linked to water – the element of salvation and renewal in Jewish tradition.

The Maharal notes⁵ that women and wells share similar qualities – "the well represents the elevation of the lower realms, as the waters below the earth spring upward." It was through Miriam's merit – through her embodiment of this yearning for spiritual elevation – that the well existed, "for it is a source that rises and yearns upward." Both Miriam and Agam exemplify the capacity to draw from deep internal wellsprings of faith. Like water striving to break upward as a spring, their spiritual resilience flows against the natural gravity of despair, rising toward redemption.

Miriam and Agam are both also women of song, playing their respective tambourine/violin as a tribute to Hashem for national salvation. The *Midrash*⁶ reveals that the women followed Miriam's lead in song and dance with tambourines they had taken from Egypt. While still enslaved, confident they would one day sing praises to Hashem after their deliverance, they prepared for eventual salvation and celebration. Miriam took her tambourine, reminding them of their trust in divine redemption even while they were still shackled in bondage. Similarly, Agam's mother reported how her daughter prepared for her own liberation through spiritual steadfastness. Her commitment to maintain Jewish

observance despite her horrific circumstances was itself a declaration of faith that her situation was temporary, that redemption would come, and she would play her violin once again.

Today's Jewish women draw inspiration from both Miriam and Agam – women who maintained dignity and faith during unimaginable trials. As we navigate our own challenging times, these women of war and water remind us that Jewish history moves inexorably toward salvation. Like water that always unifies and never separates into individual particles, like the well that constantly strives upward against the pull of gravity, their faith teaches us to persist, to maintain our observance, and to prepare our tambourines – for redemption surely comes to those who await and prepare for it faithfully.

1. *Sotah* 11b
2. *Sichot* of Lubavitcher Rebbe Vaera, Shvat 1990
3. *Tosefta Sotah* 11:8
4. Ramban, *Bamidbar* 20:2
5. *Netzach Yisrael*, c.54
6. *Mechilta Shira*, 10



Rabbanit Shani Taragin

is Educational Director of Mizrachi, Mizrachi-Lapidot and Matan Eshkolot Programs for Educators, and the Rosh Women's Beit Midrash for Yeshiva University in Israel.



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Rabbanit Shani Taragin

Educational Director, World Mizrachi



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Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Nasi, World Mizrachi



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Beyond Religion: The True Test of Redemption

Rabbi Elie Mischel

When I ask my son at dinner what he learned in school, he often answers with a groan: “We learned about the *Yetziat Mitzrayim* – again!” I understand his reaction. We read this story twice daily in our *tefillot*, hear speeches about it when we read the *parshiyot* of the Exodus, and will soon teach it to ourselves and our children again at the *Seder*. But this story is only repetitive if we’re reading it wrong. The Torah is eternal; it’s the most contemporary book ever written, providing us with the divine lens through which we understand the events and challenges of our own time. When we read about the Exodus, we’re gaining insight into the patterns of redemption that continue to unfold in our world today.

“And the Children of Israel went up armed out of the land of Egypt” (Shemot 13:18). The Hebrew word for “armed” – *chamushim* – can also mean “one-fifth.” From this, *Chazal* teach that only one-fifth of the Israelites left Egypt, while four-fifths perished during the plague of darkness. This shocking teaching raises two critical questions: What made some worthy of redemption while others remained behind? And what are the implications of this teaching for our own times?

Chazal explain the criteria for redemption: “Israel possessed three good attributes in Egypt, by whose merit they were redeemed: they did not change their names, they did not change their language, and they separated themselves from licentiousness” (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 13:20).

Rabbi Yehuda Leon Ashkenazi explains that these three traits are not *religious* in nature, but rather *national* attributes that are the foundations of national identity. Hebrew names marked them as members of the Israelite nation. Their distinct language, Hebrew, bound them together as a people. And marriage within the faith

ensured the continuation of their national story. Religious observance alone wasn’t enough to qualify for redemption; to be redeemed, they had to identify themselves as part of the *nation* of Israel (*Sod Midrash HaToldot* 8).

Our people are woven from three inseparable threads: the Torah, the nation of Israel, and the Land of Israel. In modern times, many Jews have come to identify with only one or two of these elements while neglecting the others. Some focus entirely on following the *mitzvot*, believing this alone makes them complete Jews. Others may feel connected to the Jewish people but remain distant from the Land of Israel. Still others may love the Land but see no need to follow the Torah’s teachings. But Jewish identity cannot be parceled out this way – it requires all three elements. A Jew who keeps all the *mitzvot* but feels no connection to the Jewish nation or the Land of Israel has an incomplete Jewish identity.

I witnessed this confusion firsthand during a car ride with a young Orthodox Jew from New York. Despite being religiously observant, something was missing. As we discussed Israeli politics, he casually remarked, “You guys have such a crazy system here!” Those two words – “you guys” – revealed a tragic disconnect. Here was a *frum* Jew who saw himself as an American who practiced Judaism. He failed to understand that being Jewish means being part of the Jewish nation – that Israel’s problems are *his* problems, and Israel’s destiny *his* destiny.

Since October 7th, we have witnessed a remarkable awakening of Jewish national identity. Take Ginnifer Goodwin – before October 7th, she was a secular Jewish actress with little connection to her Jewish roots or to Israel. But when she was asked to speak out about Israeli hostages, she had to make a choice: “I was asked to post about the hostages, and my

husband and I talked about it – ‘What if I lose my career over this? What if I become some kind of pariah because I am standing up for us?’ And it came down to this: ‘We would be okay if we lost the house and had to pull the kids out from school.’ The truth is, there’s only one way this goes where I can sleep at night, and that’s the way where I not only embrace Judaism, but I fight for the continuation of our people.”

Across the world, Jews are rediscovering their connection to their people and their homeland. Though most are not keeping Shabbat or kosher, the key to redemption isn’t found solely in religious observance, but in making the conscious decision to bind one’s fate with the Jewish nation and claim its destiny as our own.



Scan here to purchase R' Mischel's book.



Rabbi Elie Mischel

is the Editor of *HaMizrachi* magazine and the author of *The War Against the Bible: Ishmael, Esau and Israel at the End Times* (2024), available by scanning the QR code above.



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From Slavery to Freedom: The Dual Message of Pesach

Rabbi Yona Reiss

"It was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair..." (Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*).

The Torah (Shemot 23:15) describes Pesach as the holiday that belongs to the "month of spring" (*chodesh haAviv*), signifying hope and rebirth. However, at the same time, Pesach also reminds us of our wintry despair as slaves in Egypt.

During the *Seder*, we commemorate both aspects. We recall the Pesach offering which symbolizes our deliverance from the servitude of Egypt, but we also partake of the *maror* (bitter herbs) which reminds us of the bitterness of our experience as slaves. The eating of the *matzah* also evokes both themes, conjuring up on the one hand memories of the *lechem oni* – the broken bread of affliction that we ate in Egypt – but also serving as the *lechem she'onin alav devarim harbeh* – the unleavened bread that we carried with us at the time of our emancipation, upon which we joyously recite the *Haggadah* (see *Pesachim* 115b).

This dual theme helps to explain a striking *Midrash* in *Parashat Beshalach*.

The *Midrash* (*Shemot Rabbah* 23:3) states that the articulation by *Moshe Rabbeinu* of the words *Az Yashir* when Hashem split the sea for the Jewish people served as an atonement for Moshe's previous usage of the word *az* ("*umei-az bati*") to complain to Hashem about how his initial encounter with the evil Pharaoh only led to increased slavery and suffering for his fellow Jews.

The *Beit Halevi* explains that the parallelism drawn by the *Midrash* between Moshe's initial frustration and his victorious song at the time of the splitting of the sea teaches us that the joy of the Exodus was enhanced through the previous experience of suffering. Paradoxically, we needed to endure devastating servitude so that we could

later rejoice in being the vehicle for the sanctification of Hashem's name. This can be likened to a patient who is ultimately grateful to his physician for providing him with bitter-tasting medicine to improve his overall health.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook (*Olat Reiyyah* on the *Haggadah*, s.v. *korech*) provides a similar explanation for the practice of Hillel (*Pesachim* 115a) to eat the *matzah* and *maror* together at the time of the *Beit HaMikdash*, a practice that we commemorate today by eating the *korech* sandwich at the *Seder*. According to Hillel, both the force of freedom, represented by the *matzah*, and the force of slavery, symbolized by the *maror*, must be fused together to strengthen our commitment to serve Hashem. Rav Kook adds (s.v. *zecher*) that the redemption represented by the *matzah*, together with the Pesach offering, has the capacity to sweeten the bitter memories of exile represented by the *maror*.

It is instructive that the Chizkuni writes that the reason the first *mitzvah* in *Parashat Mishpatim* is the fair and equitable treatment of Jewish slaves (who were sold into bondage based on poverty or to provide restitution for theft) is because our immediately prior experience of having been slaves in Egypt sensitized us to behave more humanely towards others in similar predicaments of hardship. There are many ways in which adversity has the potential to edify us once we appreciate the lessons that can be learned from the bitter herbs of life.

Along these lines, this year's celebration of Pesach is a time for us to reflect, both on a national and personal level, upon our trials and tribulations since the devastating events of October 7th. The vicissitudes of Egyptian enslavement enabled us as a people to reach greater heights in our comprehension of Divine providence and our

sensitivity towards others. So too we turn towards Hashem during this challenging time in appreciation for His many miracles that enable us to persevere as a proud nation guided by the moral principles of the Torah despite the despicable hatred and evil that all too often surround us. We therefore celebrate the *matzah* together with the *maror*, our deliverance in the throes of our difficulties, in recognition of the eternal Pesach message that all our experiences, no matter how bitter, can be harnessed as vehicles towards catharsis and redemption.

L'shana haba'ah biYerushalayim habenuyah.



Rabbi Yona Reiss

is the Av Beth Din of the Chicago Rabbinical Council and a Rosh Yeshiva at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary at Yeshiva University, where he serves as the Rabbi L. Katz Chair in Professional Rabbinics. He is also the Segan Av Beth Din of the Beth Din of America in New York, and is the author of *Kanfei Yona*, a compendium of essays and responsa about contemporary issues in Jewish law.



Rabbi Yona Reiss is on the OIC-Mizrachi slate in the World Zionist Congress elections.

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Rabbi David Warshaw

President,
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Rabbi Zvi Engel

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Educating Others By Educating Ourselves

Yaffa Setton

With the compilation of the *Haggadah*, our rabbis were at the forefront of education. Today, all educators know that if a lesson is to be internalized and taught effectively, it should be done in different ways and should be personally relevant. This allows for a deeper processing of information and a greater likelihood that the information and messages will be retained.

The *mitzvah* of *sipur yetziat Mitzrayim*, recounting the Exodus from Egypt, is accomplished through a variety of mediums. Through the *Haggadah*, *Seder* participants are engaged in learning through storytelling, song, analytical learning, inquiry-based learning, and discussion. The *ke'arah* (*Seder* plate) holds foods that are symbolic to the *Seder* and the holiday of Pesach, while also doubling as a prop, manipulated at various strategic points throughout the *Seder* to keep up the action and spark the children's curiosity. The *Haggadah* caters to both visual learners through pointing, demonstrating and performance of symbolic

actions, as well as auditory learners, through telling stories and singing songs.

Our complete immersion in the *Seder* and telling over of the story is reflected in the following statement from the *Haggadah*: In every generation, one must see oneself as if he personally left Egypt, as it says: "And you shall tell your child on that day, saying: 'It is because of what G-d did for me when I went out from Egypt.'"

At the *Seder*, we must tell the story by showing ourselves to have left Egypt. All that Hashem did during the Exodus was for each of us today – just as much as it was for the people of Israel at the time. The words of the *Haggadah* that we recite facilitate this. However, our reading of the *Haggadah* must not be rote. If we are to show, it must be evident in tone of voice, body language, and actions. This immersive experience for ourselves is what allows us to convey the story to our children. When our children see that something is of value to the significant adults in their lives through the behaviors or language that they model, they understand that it is something that they should value as well.

Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, a Chassidic Rebbe in the 19th Century, also known as the Sefat Emet, addresses the question of why we do not make a blessing on the *mitzvah* of *sipur yetziat Mitzrayim*, despite it being a positive commandment from the Torah. He answers that reciting the blessing would be a statement that this *mitzvah* is being done out of obligation, as the

blessing would include the word *v'tzivanu* (and He commanded us). According to the Sefat Emet, we should feel as if we ourselves came out of Egypt. In other words, the events are personally relevant to us. We are not simply telling our children about a series of events; rather, these events impact us intellectually and emotionally. To declare that this *mitzvah* is obligatory before its performance somewhat detracts from the personal desire to fulfill it. Therefore, it would be irrelevant to say a blessing commanding us to do something that we feel is already a part of us.

The Sefat Emet's answer reflects the essence of how we are to convey the story of the Exodus from Egypt. We tell the story as if we are telling a story of our own personal history, with passion and enthusiasm. We are wholly involved in conveying the events and their significance. As such, we do what is necessary to keep our listeners engaged. We ask questions, use props, and analyze the events and their significance. We engage all of the senses to ensure that the messages get through via different pathways. This way, we ensure that we express how the Exodus is not just our nation's story, but also our personal story. Once it is personal to us, it becomes personal to our children too, and becomes a part of their personal history. When the time comes, they will give over the story with the same enthusiasm, since they will feel its relevance to them.



Yaffa Setton

serves the Syrian-Sephardic communities of Brooklyn, NY and Deal, New Jersey as a Yoetzet Halacha and community educator. She is a Judaic Studies teacher at Yeshiva of Flatbush High School.



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Dr. Marian Stoltz-Loike

Dean, Lander College for Women
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THE LONG ARM OF JUSTICE

DR. ERICA BROWN

One of the most prominent visual images in the Exodus story is that of the human hand of freedom and G-d's outstretched arm of compassion. Moshe hit the Egyptian taskmaster with his hand, spread his arms over Egypt to announce certain plagues, and grasped his staff and extended his arm in victory as the Reed Sea waters parted. Later, in Shemot 17, Moshe held his arms up with the help of Aharon and Chur to fight the Amalekites.

G-d's long arm of justice reached and touched the children of Avraham, lifted up slaves suffering injustice, waved away challenges, clobbered enemies, gathered our people to safety, and pointed them in the direction of a homeland. We are reminded four times in the book of Devarim of G-d's outstretched arm as the symbol of the Exodus (4:34, 5:15, 7:19, 9:29). If we reduced the entire story to two words they would likely be "outstretched arm" that would

capture the remarkable partnership of G-d and Moshe.

We speak today of the arm of the law and the hand of kindness. The human body is both real and the basis of many spiritual and socially conscious metaphors. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks describes the beauty of the arm metaphor in *Radical Then, Radical Now*: "We are not insignificant, nor are we alone. We are here because someone willed us into being, who wanted us to be, who knows our innermost thoughts, who values us in our uniqueness, whose breath we breathe and in whose arms we rest; someone in and through whom we are connected to all that is." As vulnerable slaves willing to risk all for freedom, we rested in G-d's loving arms.

Yet the hand's power was not immediately obvious to Moshe. When expressing his many hesitations, Moshe asked G-d what to do if the Israelites failed to believe him. Rather than offer Moshe unconvincing platitudes about his strength and resilience, G-d asked him a simple question: "What is that in your hand?" (Shemot 4:2). G-d did not ask Moshe what he thought but rather what he saw. Moshe replies with one word: "A staff." G-d could have directed Moshe to throw down that staff without an intervening step. But before G-d asked him to cast it to the ground, G-d asked Moshe to look at his own hand.

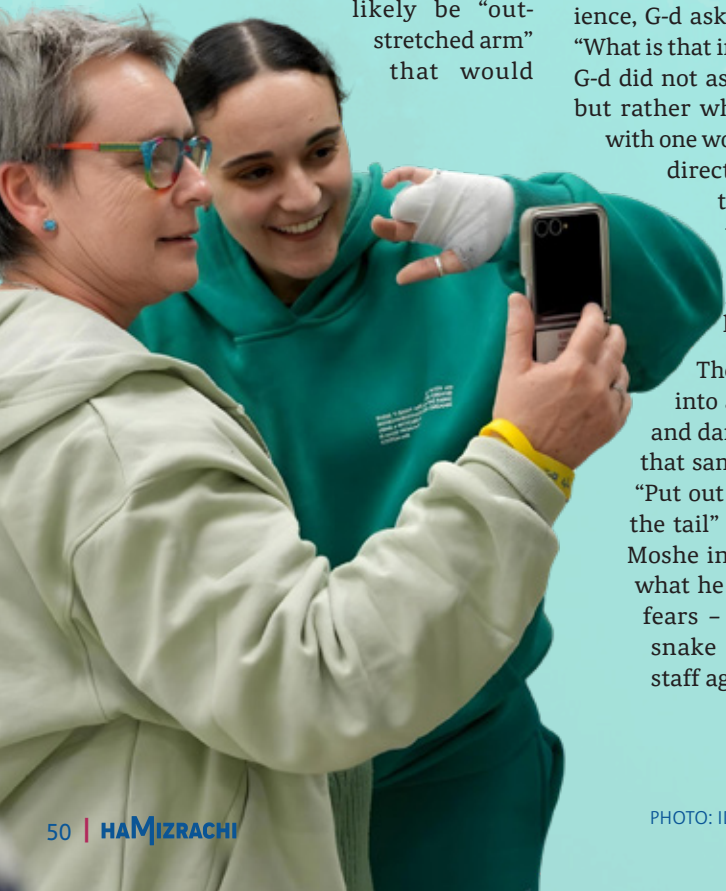
The staff on the ground turned into a snake, an object of fright and danger. G-d told Moshe to use that same hand to grab the snake: "Put out your hand and grasp it by the tail" (Shemot 4:4). What scared Moshe in the moment was exactly what he had to seize – his greatest fears – and when he did so, the snake turned right back into a staff again.

This alone would help the people "believe that the L-rd, the G-d of their fathers, the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac, and the G-d of Jacob" (Shemot 4:5) appeared to Moshe. Could it be as easy as this to impress and persuade these slaves? No. They continued their stubborn resistance. But something changed in Moshe. He learned the power of his own hand. There were miracles he could bring about with his own hand. G-d wanted Moshe to study his hand and learn its powers.

Then this happened again. G-d asked Moshe to put his hand into his chest: "He put his hand into his bosom; and when he took it out, his hand was encrusted with snowy scales!" (Shemot 4:5). G-d then directed Moshe to put his hand back to his chest and "when he took it out of his bosom, there it was again like the rest of his body" (Shemot 4:7). The snake was slithering, monstrous, and demonic, but it was outside of Moshe. His sudden skin deformities, however, were part of him. In these two incidents, Moshe learned that he had the ability to change that which was external to him and also had the ability to change himself.

G-d explained to Moshe why He had to perform this exercise twice: "If they do not believe you or pay heed to the first sign, they will believe the second" (Shemot 4:8). This second action was, on one level, a reinforcement of the first. Again, it did little initially to prove Moshe's authority to the people, but on another level, it went a long way in convincing Moshe that he could use his hands to transform an almost impossible situation.

Moshe needed to learn that empowerment must be real, so real you can touch it. Human agency emerges from the belief that both the mind and the body can move together to achieve majestic ends. There is nothing easy about the process, but the meaning and purpose it confers



transforms followers into leaders. American physicist Michio Kaku wrote that, "Humanity is like someone whose outstretched arms are reaching for the stars but whose feet are mired in the mud."

As Pesach approaches in our post-October 7th world, there is another hand I cannot stop thinking about. Emily Damari lost two fingers when she was shot by Hamas terrorists on October 7th. When she was released, we saw her bandaged hand and all the trauma it represented. Her mother, Mandy Damari, cleared photos of Emily's unbandaged hand for publication almost immediately after Emily's release.

Mother and daughter did not hide what happened to Emily. Her hand became an emblem of resilience and courage. It became a meme and a logo in the world of social media and a symbol of Emily's unbelievable strength and that of every hostage survivor. No one can ignore how terror breaks people and causes untold suffering, loss and uncertainty. Every single time Emily looks down at her hand or lifts it, she will, no doubt, be reminded of that black day in her life. But hopefully she will also see the hands of all of us all over the world who carried her in our prayers, who protested and celebrated her release. We have seen the hand of G-d in each hostage release. We have also seen the hands of soldiers holding each other up after one has fallen in the line of duty. We have seen the hands of kindness as visitors clasp new mourners and the hands of charity as volunteers sorted food and clothing.

Moshe began to claim his leadership not when he wielded great signs and wonders in Pharaoh's presence, but in the private moment G-d asked Moshe to look down at his hand. And in his merit, when we face situations where solutions seem elusive or impossible, we, too, must look at our hands as the tools of action that can bring change. They are the constant symbol of what Pharaoh could never take away: our agency.



Dr. Erica Brown

serves as a Vice Provost at Yeshiva University and directs its Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks-Herenstein Center for Values and Leadership. Her latest book is *Morning Has Broken: Faith after October 7th*.



Dr. Erica Brown is on the OIC-Mizrachi slate in the World Zionist Congress elections.

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Project Manager, Shvilim



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Beyond the Sea:

The Lasting Message of Pesach's Final Day

Rabbi Binyamin Blau

One of the most puzzling aspects of the *chag* of Pesach is trying to understand the nature of the end of *Yom Tov*. Whether it is one day in Israel, or two days in the Diaspora, it is hard to capture the nature of this time frame. On the one hand there is nothing qualitatively different from the days of *Chol Hamoed* that preceded it, and yet, on the other hand, there is a full prohibition to do *melacha* indicating that something is indeed unique about the seventh day of Pesach (and by extension the eighth day of Pesach as well).

As we consider this question, another custom demands our attention. It is *Klal Yisrael's* practice to recite *Yizkor* on the final day of Pesach. Our *chagim* are designated as times of great *simcha*, yet we integrate the solemn prayers of *Yizkor* into these joyous festivals. Why do we maintain this practice on Pesach and indeed on all the *chagim*?

Returning to our initial issue, we know, historically, that the splitting of the sea occurred on the seventh day of Pesach and that may be the key to appreciating this day's significance. Let us recall the scene. The Jewish people had finally departed from years of servitude in Egypt and they now faced a daunting challenge. The *Yam Suf* was in front of them and the Egyptians were on their heels. It appeared, at first, that perhaps all the miracles that they had experienced in Egypt as well as the dedication they had expressed by offering

the *korban Pesach*, would be for naught and they would perish right then and there.

This was a test for them to see if the events in Egypt would yield a permanent transformation or would be merely an isolated set of experiences. While initially they complained and were hesitant, eventually they did successfully navigate the difficulty and they emerged on the other side of the *Yam Suf* with their *emunah* strengthened.

This may explain why the end of Pesach is designated as a full *Yom Tov*. It carries a timeless message for the people of Israel: the inspiration we draw from the *chag* must sustain us as we face our own moments of splitting the sea. These past two years have presented countless such challenges, yet we have drawn upon our religious traditions to navigate even the most daunting trials. As we approach the end of Pesach, we reflect upon and internalize its lessons, preparing ourselves for whatever challenges lie ahead.

Building on this idea, we may be able to answer our second query as well. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik suggests that the purpose of *Yizkor* is for us to reflect on the lives of those who lived before us and to be sure that we are continuing their legacy. We need to learn the lessons of the past, draw on the inspirations of our ancestors' actions, and this way we are prepared for our future. Since that message is essentially the takeaway from each *Yom Tov*, saying *Yizkor* on those days is not only fitting but it is also appropriate.

One final reflection: Beyond our personal *Yizkor*, many *shuls* recite communal *Yizkor* prayers commemorating both those who died defending the State of Israel and those who perished in the *Shoah*. These *tefillot* have taken on even deeper meaning in the wake of October 7th. As we honor the memory of these noble members of the people of Israel, their sacrifices strengthen our resolve to emerge more resilient, both as individuals and as a nation.

As we celebrate the end of Pesach, may we draw upon the lessons of this *chag* to strengthen us for the future, and may this *Yom Tov* of *geulah* herald the ultimate *geulah* for which we so deeply yearn.



Rabbi Binyamin Blau

is the Rav of Green Road Synagogue in Beachwood, Ohio and the past president of the Rabbinical Council of America.



Rabbi Binyamin Blau is on the OIC-Mizrachi slate in the World Zionist Congress elections.

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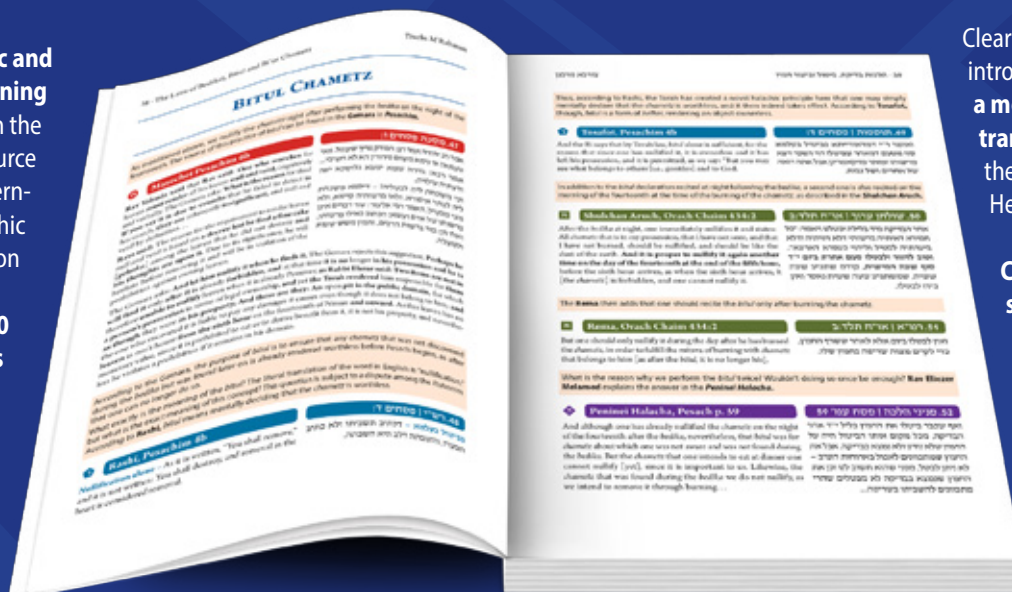


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Music of Captivity and Redemption

Dr. Rebecca Cypess

Shortly after his release from Gaza after 498 days in captivity, Sagui Dekel-Chen made a music video of the song *Keren Shemesh* (Ray of Sunshine), originally composed by the Israeli singer-songwriter Benaia Berabi. Dekel-Chen's recording is a contribution to the ongoing Tamari Project, named for Tamar Kedem Siman Tov, who was murdered with her family on October 7, 2023.¹

The video opens with Dekel-Chen describing how music sustained him during captivity: "At night I would sing to my daughters and speak to them about the meanings behind the words of special songs. In the morning, I would get up and walk to the corner of the room, playing love songs in my head." During captivity, he explains, "I created songs for myself that I was only able to write down on paper and sing aloud for the first time two weeks ago."

Despite his own newly recovered freedom, poignant echoes of sadness persist in Dekel-Chen's video. He speaks directly to the hostages still in captivity, encouraging them not to give up. His performance of *Keren Shemesh* is comforting and hopeful.

In the sincere and poignant tone of this song, Dekel-Chen is showing us something essential about music. At its core, music is a signal of life: it gives us the ability not just to create, but, ultimately, to make our voices heard. Such creative agency and assertion of humanity are never more important than in times of rupture and sadness.

The seventh day of Pesach is marked by another kind of music: the triumphant Song at the Sea recorded in Shemot 15. The Torah describes this moment as one of national celebration, a public commemoration of Hashem's miraculous rescue of His people from slavery and His triumph over their oppressors. Yet this passage also alludes to the long history of steady, faithful practice of music that led up to that celebratory performance.

After recounting the text of the Song at the Sea, the Torah relates that "Miriam, the prophetess, sister of Aaron, took the drum in her hand, and all the women went out after her with drums and dances" (Shemot 15:20). Rashi, citing the *Mechilta de-Rabbi Yishmael*, wonders why the women would have musical instruments with them at all. In the urgent moment of escape, when they could not linger even to let their bread rise, would they really have paused to pack musical instruments?

Rashi attributes the women's extraordinary decision to carry their instruments with them to their steadfast faith: "So certain were the righteous women of that generation that the Holy One, Blessed is He, would perform miracles for them, that they brought drums out of Egypt." The women carried their instruments so they would be ready for the musical celebration.

Amos Hakham, author of the *Da'at Mikra* commentary on Shemot, takes Rashi's observation a step further. He notes the Torah's use of the definite article to point to Miriam's drum: she took "the drum in her hand." Why not "a drum"? What was special about this particular drum? For Hakham, the definite article confirms that this was "the drum that was ready by [Miriam's] side and that she used regularly." Miriam was prepared to make music after crossing the Red Sea because she and the other women had been practicing music even in the darkest moments of their captivity.

Hakham's interpretation resonates with the well-known excerpt from the *Midrash Tanchuma* (Shemot 38:8) that it was the women who insisted that the Jews continue having children during their centuries of slavery. They held fast to their faith that Hashem would redeem them. That faith is preserved on the *Seder* plate in the form of the *charoset*. Given their faith in Hashem's salvation, they were obligated to ensure that the Jewish people continued. Redemption could come at any moment.

When Sagui Dekel-Chen continued making music through captivity, he was emulating Miriam and the other righteous women who, millennia ago, made sure that their voices persisted. By creating music – quietly, even silently, in his thoughts – Dekel-Chen maintained control over his own mind, refusing to give up or cede his humanity to his captors.

Dekel-Chen's recording of *Keren Shemesh* does not assume the celebratory aspect of the Song at the Sea, but the full story in this chapter of Jewish history has not yet been written. For now, Dekel-Chen is still making music that echoes Miriam's music at the time of slavery. This is music of hope and yearning – the music that came before the Song at the Sea. This is the music that anticipates the redemption of all our hostages, music that will ultimately, G-d willing, usher in a brighter and more peaceful future.

1. Sagui Dekel-Chen's recording of *Keren Shemesh* can be heard on the YouTube channel of the Tamari project, <https://www.youtube.com/@the.tamari.project>.



Dr. Rebecca Cypess,

a musicologist, is the Mordecai D. Katz and Dr. Monique C. Katz Dean of the Undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Yeshiva University.



Dr. Rebecca Cypess is on the OIC-Mizrachi slate in the World Zionist Congress elections.

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OLIM IN THEIR OWN WORDS



"I went to Nishmat for seminary and then I was a Madricha in Midreshet Lindenbaum for their gap year program.

After seminary, I made Aliyah as a Ktina Chozeret with Nefesh B'Nefesh since I also have American citizenship. Now I am a student at Bar Ilan University learning Talmud and Philosophy in Hebrew!

I'm living in Herzliya which has an amazing

community of Olim. It really feels like a family and I get rides to school every day since a lot of us here commute! Coming from London, although thankfully I've never been directly seriously affected by antisemitism, it's hard to avoid the sentiment. My family and I can't talk about Israel or wear Jewish symbols and dress without feeling anxious.

Being openly Jewish in Israel is such a privilege. Seeing Israeli flags, Hebrew signs, stores closed on Shabbat, and kosher food everywhere is so incredible!

Some tips that made my life way easier in Israel:

1. Call or go in person to appointments rather than online! It can be anxiety-inducing, but just be patient with yourself. Do it in English or Hebrew and the person on the other side will be there to help you.
2. Have an Israeli flag somewhere in your home to remind you of how awesome this country is.
3. Patience is key – everything takes time.
4. Have a folder with all your important documents and have secondary scans on your phone.
5. Have fun and talk to new people. Go out and see what an amazing country we have here!"

Odelle Epstein

I was born in Poland in 1937 and endured incredible hardships as a child during the Holocaust. When the Nazis invaded Poland in 1939, my family, along with thousands of others, was exiled to Soviet labor camps. In my memoir, *Bread or Death: Memories of My Childhood During and After the Holocaust*, I detail the terrifying journey my family undertook from occupied Poland to Siberia and through war-torn Europe, surviving starvation, forced labor, and unimaginable cruelty. I vividly recount the struggles and sacrifices of my family and the millions of Jews who faced similar fates during the Holocaust.

After surviving the war and years in displaced persons camps, I immigrated to the United States and settled in Omaha. There, I built a life for myself as a successful businessman while maintaining a commitment to Holocaust education.

My memoir, published in 2010, reflects my decision to break decades of silence, inspired by my grandchildren's curiosity and the need to preserve my story for future generations. The book has become a significant contribution to the memory of the Holocaust, offering readers insight into survival and resilience during one of humanity's darkest periods.

In the summer of 2024, my wife Marsha and I fulfilled a lifelong dream by making Aliyah to Israel, joining our daughter, son-in-law, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. This move marked a beautiful culmination of my life's journey, allowing me to spend my retirement years immersed in my Jewish heritage and surrounded by family in my homeland.

It symbolizes my incredible resilience and determination to find peace and connection in the land of my ancestors after a lifetime marked by upheaval and survival.

Milton & Marsha Kleinberg



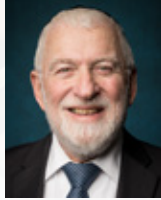
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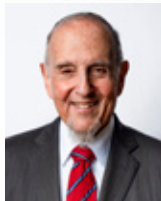
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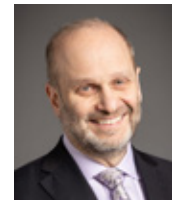
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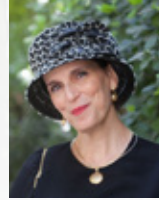
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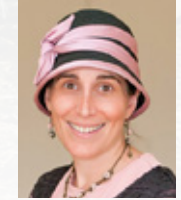
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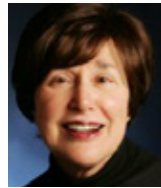
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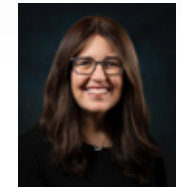
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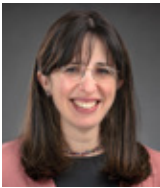
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Aleeza Ben Shalom

Pesach is the holiday of freedom. We sit at the *Seder*, recount the miracles, and remind ourselves that we are no longer slaves but a free people. But what does freedom really mean? It's not just about leaving Egypt; it's about stepping into a new reality – one where we have the power to build our future, our families, and our communities. And in this process, one of the greatest freedoms we experience is the ability to find our match.

There's an old saying in the *Gemara*: Making a match is as difficult as the splitting of the sea. It's a phrase we repeat often, but what does it really mean? Why is finding your person compared to one of the greatest miracles in history? And what does that mean for those of us trying to help people find love?

A miracle that requires action

When *Bnei Yisrael* stood at the edge of the sea, they were trapped. Behind them, the Egyptians were closing in. In front of them, the water stretched endlessly. Fear and doubt filled the air. And then, something incredible happened – not just the miracle of the sea splitting, but what came before it. Nachshon ben Aminadav jumped in. He didn't wait for the miracle. He acted, and then Hashem responded.

Dating often feels like standing at the edge of the sea. The challenge ahead seems impossible. But just like at the *Yam Suf*, the miracle only happens when we take that first step. And this isn't just about singles – it's about all of us. If we see two wonderful people and think they might be a great match, what's stopping us from making the introduction? Fear? Doubt? Worry about getting involved? But if we don't take action, the sea stays closed.

A path that isn't straight

When the sea split, it wasn't just one straight path. According to the *Midrash*, there were twelve paths – one for each

tribe. That means every *shevet* had its own unique way to get to freedom.

The same is true for dating. There isn't just one path to finding a match. Some people meet through family, others through a *shadchan*. Some go on five dates, others on fifty. Sometimes, the journey takes longer than expected. But that doesn't mean we're lost – it just means our path is different. The key is to keep walking, even when it feels like we're going in circles.

The role of the community

Bnei Yisrael crossed the sea as a nation. They supported each other, walked together, and experienced the miracle side by side.

Matchmaking is no different. It's not just a task for singles – it's a communal responsibility. We don't stand on the sidelines and wait for people to figure it out themselves. We help. We suggest. We think creatively. We care enough to get involved.

Yet many people hesitate. "I don't want to meddle." "What if they say no?" "What if it doesn't work?" But imagine if Moshe had hesitated at the sea. Imagine if Nachshon had waited for someone else to go first. Sometimes, our role is simply to take action, to be the one who moves things forward.

The freedom to choose

Pesach isn't just about physical freedom – it's about spiritual and emotional freedom, too. It's about the ability to create our future. And in dating, one of the most empowering ideas is that Hashem gives us free will. Yes, finding the right person is a heavenly process. Yes, it's compared to splitting the sea. But it's not entirely out of our hands. We have the ability to make decisions, take action, say yes, say no, and move forward with faith.

If making a match is like splitting the sea, then just as Hashem made a way for us then, He can make a way for us now. But we have to do our part. We have to step

in, trust the process, and be open to the possibilities.

Your turn

So here's the question: What's your next step? If you're single, maybe it's saying yes to the next suggestion someone makes. Even if you feel uncomfortable being set up by a friend or family member, consider saying yes this time. If you're a friend, parent, or community member, maybe it's making that introduction you've been thinking about but hesitating to act on.

Pesach is a time of renewal. A time when we remember that the impossible can become possible. A time when the sea can split before our very eyes. And who knows? Maybe this Pesach, your small act – your willingness to take that step – will be the beginning of something miraculous.

● Originally published on Aish.com



Aleeza Ben Shalom

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The Jewish Matchmaking Movement

is an exciting global collaboration between World Mizrahi and Aleeza Ben Shalom to guarantee future Jewish generations.



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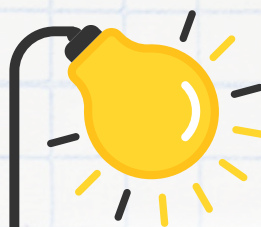
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Astute Merchant Who Left behind a Treasure

Glikl of Hemlin wrote her diaries for her children, and the texts she left behind give us a rare window into the life of a Jewish woman at the time and the people around her. Married at a young age, Glikl luckily married someone who she had love and a mutual respect for. This was the foundation of their relationship and when her husband began trading gold and pearls, Glikl was a full partner in the business. Along with raising 14 children, she also managed the "office", dealing with bills, contracts, letters, balances and hiring employees. Unfortunately her husband had a tragic accident 30 years into their marriage leaving her to manage the house and the entire business. Glikl had to start traveling herself to fulfill the needs of the business. While she did this she began keeping a journal in order to give to her children so that they may benefit from her experience and wisdom. She did this for 28 years. She wrote down everything that happened around her including stories of sages and important events around her. This gave us the unusual opportunity to learn from a wealthy woman of her time.



Adapted from *Iconic Jewish Women*
by Dr. Aliza Lavie. Scan the QR code
to purchase on Amazon.



DID YOU KNOW?

- All of the *chametz* in Israel is sold to just ONE person!
- In the Persian-Jewish tradition, everyone at the Seder table swat each other with green onions while singing Dayeinu!
- Pesach is the busiest time for hiking in Israel!

Test Your Knowledge



How much time does someone who makes *matzah* have from beginning to end while making the *matzah*?

How many different sections does the *Haggadah* have?

In how many countries do people only do one Seder?

Look for the answers in the Parshat Shemini Youth Edition – see below for more details!

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FLOURLESS CHOCOLATE CAKE

(ASK AN ADULT FOR HELP!)

Ingredients:

- 225g of chocolate
- 110g of butter or margarine
- 6 eggs
- 200g of sugar

Instructions:

1. Separate the whites from the yolks for four of the eggs, keeping the whites in a separate bowl and then add the last two full eggs in with the four yolks.
2. Add HALF of the sugar to the egg yolks and whisk together. Set aside.
3. In a different bowl, melt the chocolate and butter or margarine. Once melted, add the chocolate to the eggs and sugar bowl, whisking them together.
4. Whisk the egg whites with an electric mixer, slowly adding in the rest of the sugar until it starts to form soft peaks.
5. Finally, gently fold the egg white mixture into the chocolate egg mixture.
6. Once everything is combined, pour your batter into a pan and bake at 175° C or 345° F for 35 to 40 minutes, until the center is no longer wobbly and the top has cracked.
7. Take out of the oven, allow it to cool completely and then enjoy!





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