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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.

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Learn about the Orthodox Israel Coalition-Mizrachi and why your vote matters!

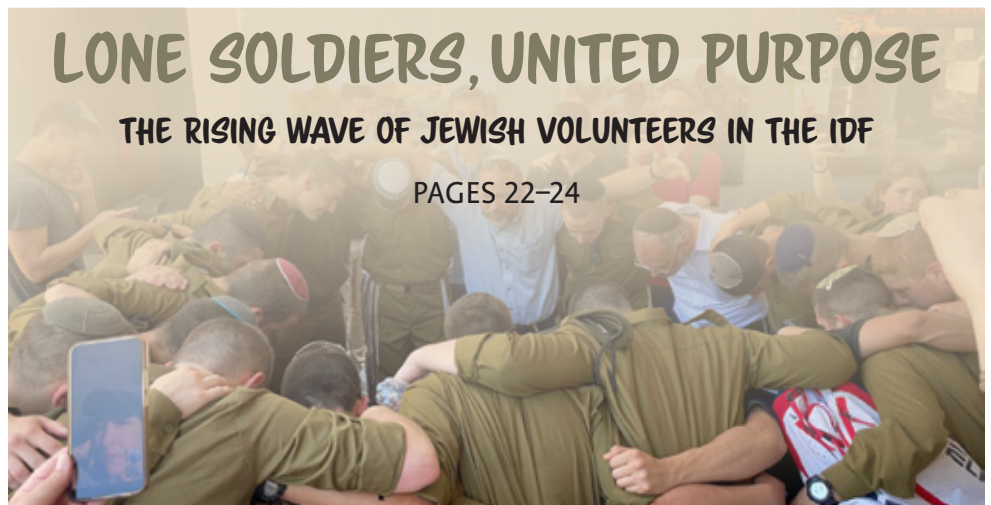
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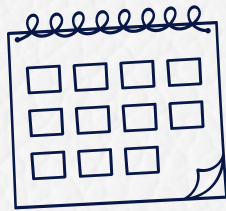
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Hamas, Haman and Hitler

Our Generation's Battle Against Evil

Rabbi Doron Perez

October 7th was a painful reminder of a truism of life – the existence of absolute, undiscerning evil.

Hamas lulled us to sleep with their brutal surprise invasion from ninety different places along the border. Evidence from Sinwar's communications made his plan clear – the absolute destruction of Israel. He attempted to get Hezbollah to attack the same day, which would have paralyzed Israel so that others such as Iran and other Palestinians in Yehuda and Shomron would join in, leading, G-d forbid, to the destruction of the Jewish state. Not only was this an unprovoked assault, but it was perpetrated by Gazan terrorists and civilians alike in the most ghastly, barbaric, and inhumane way. Murdering and maiming, torturing and stealing innocent men, women, and children from their homes laid bare the depth and depravity of what human beings are unfortunately capable of.

The truth is that absolute evil has existed for millennia. It constitutes a single-minded, systematic focus to destroy all good in the world. According to Torah tradition, it has a name – Amalek. The Torah commands us to always remember and never forget what Amalek represents.¹

This is the essence of *Parashat Zachor*. Our Sages instituted an annual public Torah reading on the Shabbat preceding Purim,

lest we forget Amalek's role in world affairs. The saga of the most infamous Amalekite, Haman, at the heart of the *Megillah*, is a sobering reminder of the existence of absolute evil and our obligation to confront it.

Final Solutions

Most ethical situations are not black or white, with little being absolutely good or bad. Nevertheless, world and Jewish history are testament to the undeniable existence of destructive ideologies of significant and at times complete evil.

Haman's diabolical precision plan of Jewish genocide is unparalleled in all of human and Jewish history. A plan to kill every single Jew in the entire world – every last one in all of the 127 countries of Achashveirosh's global empire – in one day.

What type of mind not only hates an entire people but conjures a plan to kill them all at the very same time in a 24-hour period everywhere in the world?! His Final Solution was on the brink of implementation, and it was only through the grace of G-d and the actions of Mordechai and Esther that his plan was thwarted at the last minute.

Thousands of years later, Hitler declared the same intention – the Final Solution. Tragically, he succeeded in murdering one-third of the Jewish people, and if not for

the hand of Providence guiding the actions of the Allied forces, he would have gone much further. Unstopped and unchecked, this type of evil would, G-d forbid, destroy every last Jew wherever they are.

Today, Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis, and the Ayatollahs of Iran wish to eradicate the Jewish state.

Douglas Murray – why do I support Israel?

Is this war only against the Jews? When asked how, as a gentile, he is so unapologetically supportive of the Jewish state, Douglas Murray, the British-American public intellectual, offered a penetrating answer. He said as follows: It is conceivable that fifteen million Christians or Muslims could be killed and if this happened, it would be a tremendous tragedy of unimaginable proportions. However, if fifteen million Jews were killed – meaning the fall of the State of Israel and death of all Jews – that would be the end of civilization as we know it. Western civilization, he believes, could not survive the destruction of the Jewish state. It would be like cutting off the whole tree that western civilization rests on – it would wither and die. The existential threat against the Jewish people is, in Murray's opinion, a threat of the forces of darkness and barbarism against the values of freedom, democracy,

and everything the West and America stands for.²

Murray brilliantly highlights what the destructive Amalek-type battle against the Jews is about: unbridled barbarism – whether in the form of secular National Socialism or Radical Islam – against the values of civility, freedom, equality, and human dignity exemplified by Judaism, Western and Judeo-Christian values as the founders of the United States articulated it.

This is exactly what the battle that Amalek has declared against the Jewish people since time immemorial is all about.

The perennial battle of good and evil

Even though Amalek no longer exists as a nation, it most certainly exists as an ideology. Its goal is to eradicate everything good in the world – first the Jewish people, and all those who stand for morality and justice.

Remarkably, only two nations are called *reishit*, the first of nations – the Jewish people, and Amalek.³ The point is clear. These two nations are pitted against each other in the perennial battle of good versus evil. Just as on an individual level we battle constantly between our good and evil impulses, so too these forces struggle with one another on a cosmic level – the collective mission of the Jewish people as opposed to that of Amalek.

It was not by chance that Amalek was the first nation to attack Israel as soon as we came out of Egypt, as we read on *Parashat Zachor*. Two remarkable points highlight Amalek's pursuit of evil: "How he happened upon you on the way and cut off all the stragglers at your rear, when you were faint and weary, and he did not fear G-d" (Devarim 25:18).

Firstly, there is no stated motive for this attack. Amalek was not motivated by any normative political or military reasoning. Theirs was not a battle over land or religion nor a war of defense, deterrence, or display of regional power. They chose to attack for no reason other than to commit evil for its own sake. To sow darkness at the very dawn of Israel's aspirations to be "a light unto the nations."

Secondly, Amalek always intentionally targets innocent civilians. Theirs is not a regular military confrontation but rather a purposeful and systematic attack on those lagging behind: the elderly, the young, the weak, and the infirm. They attacked not just any civilians, but the most vulnerable and defenseless in society.

Amalek today

Amalek-type evil has taken on a new name: Terrorism. The aim of terrorism is to do exactly what its name implies: to terrorize anywhere and everywhere. The acceptable international norm in military interaction is that one army confronts another, and only combatants in uniform fight against their counterparts. Targeting, capturing, and torturing civilians are totally beyond the pale of ideological and military conflict. Not for Amalek – for them it is specifically the civilians, the non-combatants, who are the aim of their terror. Terrorism, as fitting for an Amalek-type ideology, exists outside all norms of political, military, and societal conduct.

After 9/11, we thought we had witnessed the depths of what terrorist minds could devise. But October 7th revealed an even darker abyss, as Hamas demonstrated that human depravity knows no bounds.

History bears out another truism about Amalekite antisemitism – it may begin with the Jews but never ends with them. One can be sure it will spill over to all fair-minded, good people around the world. Buildings and planes in New York, trains in Madrid, buses in London, nightclubs in Bali, schools in Toulouse, stores in Paris, and coffee shops in Sydney are all fair game. Radical Islamic terror is the latest incarnation of Amalek's global mission. October 7th and Israel is the latest frontier in their barbaric battle against Judaism and the values of the West.

Our crucial role today

In the post-October 7th era, a younger generation of Israeli soldiers showed an astonishing spirit of courage and heroism. They put their lives on the line and continue to do so every day thereafter, displaying incredible resolve against our barbaric enemies.

So too in the Diaspora. Over the last sixteen months in communities and campuses across the globe, antisemitic and anti-Israel incidents have reached unprecedented proportions. Leaders in general and young leaders in particular have been called upon to stand up as the bulwark in the fight for the future of the Jewish state.

Like Mordechai and Esther who reversed Haman's decree and changed Jewish history, we are called upon to lead today. This edition is dedicated to many young leaders around the world making a difference – standing up and being counted on behalf of our people.

Yes, life is very nuanced and complex and must be viewed with great sophistication.

And yes, this Amalek-type hatred is rooted in a small minority with the majority being good, peace-loving people. Nevertheless, we have to be very mindful that our own nuanced sophistication does not cloud our vision in dealing with this scourge of evil. The advantage of our open, democratic "live and let live" society must not become our greatest weakness. Hamas and their supporters believe in "murder and die." We cannot prevail if we are not armed with robust moral clarity against this tyrannical ideology.

Parashat Zachor stands as our eternal reminder of vigilance, while Purim serves as our blueprint for confronting evil. Throughout history, the Hamans of the world have sought to sway the Achashveiroshes of their time, working to isolate, delegitimize, and persecute the Jewish people and the Jewish state. In response, we need modern-day Mordechais and Esthers who, with unwavering clarity and courage, will stand against this evil despite fierce opposition and seemingly insurmountable odds.

And behind it all stands the Almighty, orchestrating the unseen hand of Providence in the unfolding drama of Jewish and human destiny. Though His face may be at times hidden, as in the story of Purim itself, His presence guides the course of history, turning darkness into light and transforming moments of greatest peril into salvation.

1. Netziv (*HaAmek Davar*, *Shemot* 17:14) distinguishes between the nation of Amalek which no longer exists and the ideology of Amalek which persists to this day.
2. Ben Shapiro, "Our Last Chance To Save The West | Douglas Murray", www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5F0q6LPnT4.
3. Regarding Israel: "Israel is holy to G-d, the first of His grain..." (Yirmiyahu 2:3). Regarding Amalek, in Bilaam's prophecy: "When he saw Amalek, he took up his parable and said, 'Amalek was the first of the nations, and his fate shall be everlasting destruction'" (Bamidbar 24:20).



Rabbi Doron Perez
is the Executive Chairman
of World Mizrahi.

Commemoration of the Half-Shekel

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Origin of the custom

In the Torah portion of *Ki Tisa*, every Israelite aged twenty and above was commanded to give “half a *shekel* as an offering to Hashem” (Shemot 30:13). The commandment to give half a *shekel* is a biblical commandment and it was intended to fund public sacrifices and other Temple needs. The announcement for giving *shekels* is made on the first day of the month of Adar, so that the *shekels* would reach the *Beit HaMikdash* by the month of Nissan and to precede the giving of our *shekels* to Haman’s *shekels*.

Since the half-*shekel* was collected to fund *Beit HaMikdash* sacrifices, the commandment only applies when the *Beit HaMikdash* exists. Today, with the *Beit HaMikdash* destroyed, we practice giving “*zecher leMachatzit haShekel*,” the commemoration of the half-*shekel*, to charity.

Although the custom of giving “*zecher leMachatzit haShekel*” is not mentioned in the *Rambam*, *Tur*, or *Shulchan Aruch*, Sephardic Jews also observe this custom.

Amount to give

The original understanding of “half-*shekel*” is “half-coin,” which is half the weight and value of the *shekel* mentioned in the Torah. From the ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch*, it emerges that this refers to pure silver weighing three *‘dirham’*, which is 9.6 grams of pure silver. The *Rambam* emphasizes that to fulfill the biblical commandment, one must be particular both about giving a “half-coin” and about its monetary value equivalent to the Torah’s half-*shekel*.

Based on this definition, two main customs developed regarding how to fulfill “*zecher leMachatzit haShekel*”. The Sephardic custom is to give the current value of pure silver weighing half a *shekel*. This amount varies, and its current value can be checked on the Keter Institute’s website and similar sites (approximately 25 NIS). This custom preserves the monetary value of the original half-*shekel*.

The Ashkenazic custom preserves the aspect of the “half-coin”. According to this custom, “*zecher leMachatzit haShekel*” is given as half of the common coin in that place, meaning (in Israel today) half a *shekel*.

How many coins are given for the half-*shekel*? The *Maharam of Rothenburg* wrote that the custom is to give three halves: “Why do we give three halves for Purim money? Because the phrase ‘half-*shekel*’ appears three times in the portion of *Ki Tisa*, therefore we give three halves.” According to the *Vilna Gaon*, one should give only one “half-coin”, but the common custom is to give coins worth three half-*shekels* (in Israel).

The *Rema* writes that some say one should give both the value of a half-*shekel* and three halves of the local coin, but this is not the common practice. However, the *Biur Halacha* writes that “one whom G-d helps” and can practice this way – “fortunate is he and good for him”. Since in Israel today there is a half-*shekel* coin, and the value of a half-*shekel* is not high, it is proper to enhance the *mitzvah* in this way and give both three half-*shekel* coins and an amount equal to ten grams of pure silver (at least for oneself and one’s wife). However, according to the basic law, it is sufficient to give three half-*shekel* coins.

The *Tzitz Eliezer* writes that according to the basic law, one need not give specifically three coins of one-and-a-half *shekels*, but rather an amount equal to one-and-a-half *shekels*. Therefore, one who has many family members and finds it difficult to find enough half-*shekel* coins for everyone can give an amount equal to three half-*shekels* for each person. However, when possible, there is a preference to give three half-*shekel* coins rather than an amount equal to one-and-a-half *shekels*.

When and how to give

In *Masechet Soferim* it is written that it is the custom to give “*zecher leMachatzit haShekel*” before *Shabbat Zachor*. However, the *Maharil*

writes that the accepted custom is to give the money close to *Mincha* on *Ta’anit Esther*, and so wrote the *Rama* and *Mishnah Berurah*. It appears that the reason is that the custom of giving *shekels* in the month of Adar was intended to precede our *shekels* to Haman’s *shekels*, therefore we give the money before Purim.

In *Masechet Soferim* it is written that for the coins given for the half-*shekel* “it is forbidden to say they are for atonement but rather for donation,” and similarly the *Geonim* wrote that when giving the money one should be careful not to say that the money is given for “half-*shekel*,” so that the money does not become consecrated and forbidden for use. Nevertheless, many have the custom to say “*zecher leMachatzit haShekel*” at the time of giving.

The Torah states that only from age 20 does one give the half-*shekel*: “From twenty years old and above shall give an offering to Hashem” (Shemot 30:14), and so rules the *Rama*. However, according to the *Rambam* one must give the half-*shekel* already from age thirteen, and so rules the *Magen Avraham*. Nevertheless, the accepted custom was to give “*zecher leMachatzit haShekel*” also for children, and even for fetuses. Similarly, although women were not obligated in the half-*shekel*, the custom is that women also give “*zecher leMachatzit haShekel*” (*Kaf HaChaim* 694:27).



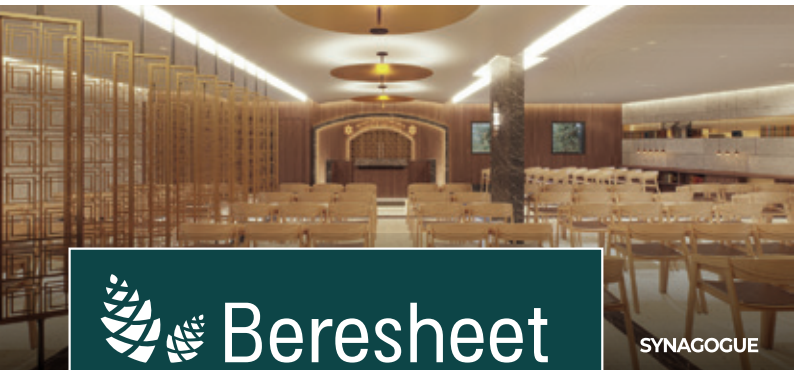
Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

is the Nasi of World Mizrahi.

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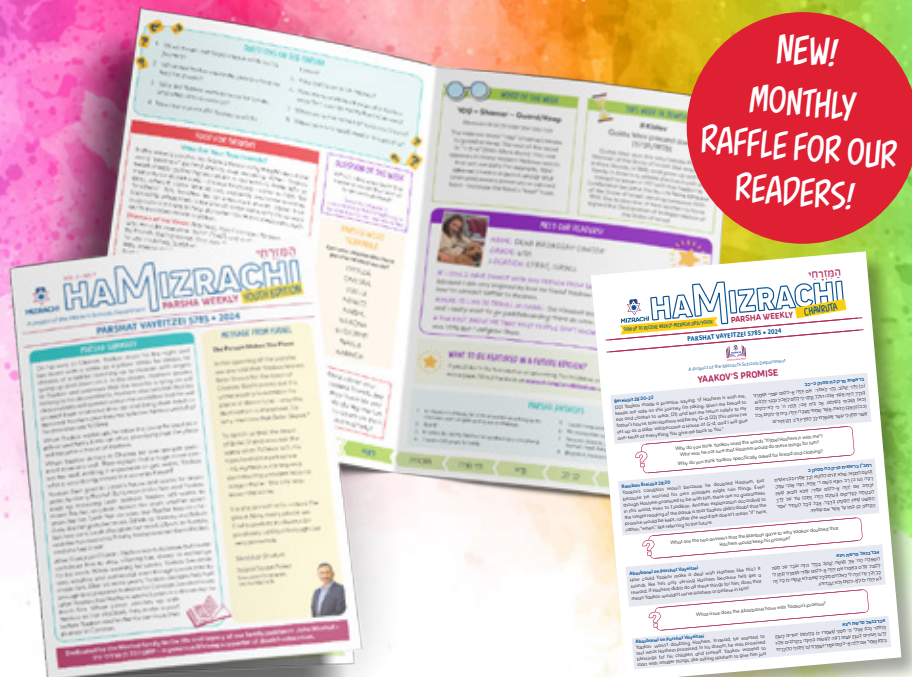
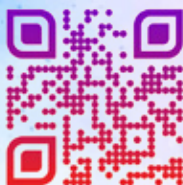


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new communities established: Meital, Shibolet (North) and Mevo'ot Arad Yatir, Hiran and Ir Ovot (South)

290

Teacher Shlichim in 126 schools in 97 cities worldwide including over 200 in schools across the US

600

Religious Zionist shlichim including 380 across the US sent to communities across the globe in 5784, coordinated by the Shlichut Center

800

displaced families provided with emergency war time accommodation in 7 temporary facilities

4,000

students from 50 yeshivot and seminaries participated in educational activities, including Yom HaZikaron and Yom HaAtzmaut events

2 million

NIS allocated towards Religious Zionist activities across France with 100 guest speakers, and supporting absorption of French olim

27 million

NIS procured for youth villages and Israeli Religious Zionist institutions

35 million

NIS in emergency assistance directed to evacuated communities

60 million

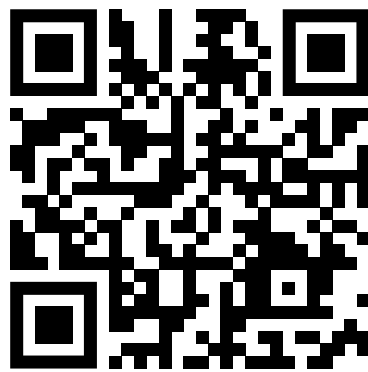
NIS invested in the development of the Golan, Galilee, Negev, Judea and Samaria

88 million

NIS benefiting yeshivot, seminaries and campus life and 10,000 gap year students from the US through Masa funding and other Mizrahi initiatives



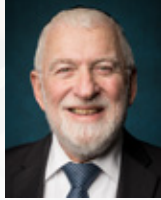
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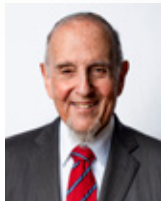
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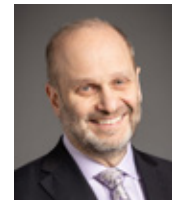
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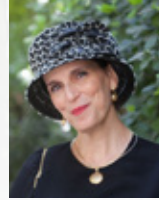
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Darshan-Leitner



Rabbanit
Chana Henkin



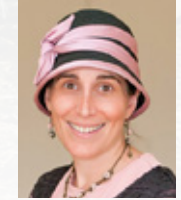
Rabbanit Yemima
Mizrachi



Miriam
Peretz



Rebbetzin Dr.
Adina Shmidman



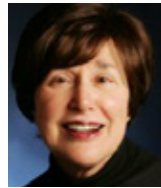
Rabbanit Shani
Taragin



Jen
Airley



Dr. Karen
Bacon



Dr. Rivkah
Blau



Elisheva
Kaminetsky



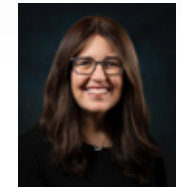
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Rabinovich



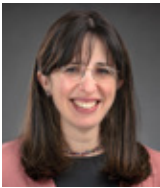
Rabbanit Esti
Rosenberg



Prof. Smadar
Rosenzweig



Prof. Shoshana
Schechter



Dr. Rebecca
Cypess



Rabbanit Rachelle
Fraenkel



Deena
Kobre



Sara
Munk



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Dr. Nechama
Price



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Rachel
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Yaffa
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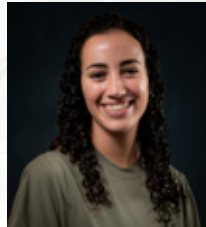
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Alexis Ackermann



Sydney Altfield



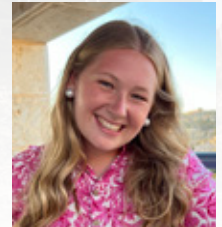
Rachel Amar



Rabbi Meir Avracen



Rabbi Mosheh Aziz



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Shalhevet Cohen



Mordy Dubin



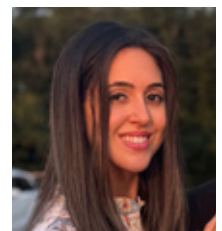
Rabbi Nachi
Friedman



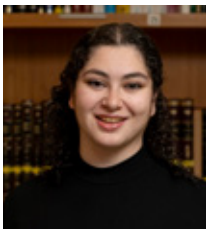
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Joshua Girnun



Rachel Girnun



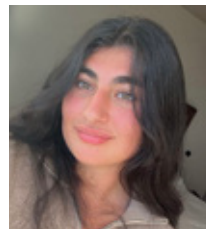
Tziviva Major



Abby Marcus



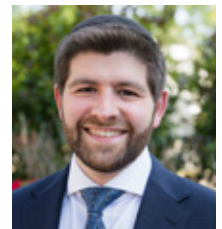
Rabbi Noah
Marlowe



Tamar Marquis



Avi Matanky



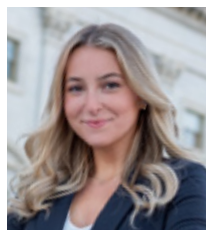
Rabbi Yair Menchel



Leora Orenshein



Hillel Pinsky



Yakirah Rosen



Miriam Seidman



Alison Sokal



Shiri Sokal



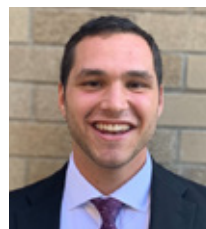
Charly Wartelsky



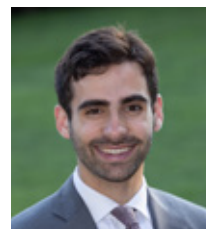
Emma Watman



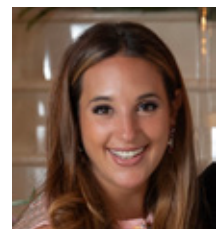
Noah Watman



Aytan Waxman



Sam Weinberg



Ashley Weiss

Allegra Arazi • Shoshana Bachrach • Rivka Bitton • Yocheved Sima Bohm • Michael Celler • Shira Donath • Hindy Feder • Ellie Fine
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Talia Baruch



Frumi Berg



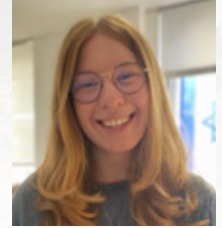
Tehila Bitton



Dovid Bluth



Caleb Breda



Shoshi Cantor



Rabbi Daniel
Gottesman



Jared Isaac



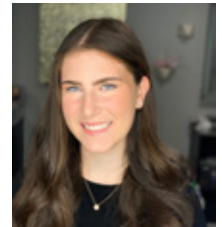
Emma Katz



Rabbi Judah Kerbel



Tamar Koslowe



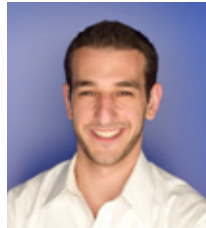
Michal Levine



Yael Miller



Daniel (Dani) Minkove



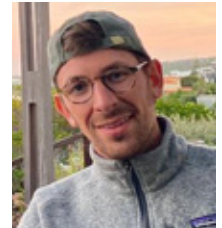
David Mirsky



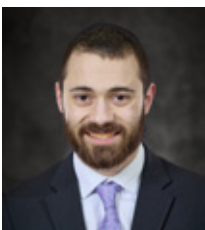
Jessica Mirsky



Yoni Nirenberg



Noah Oberlander



Uriel Sussman



Lexi Szafranski



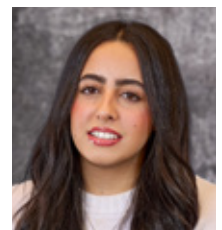
Rabbi Yehoshua
Szafranski



Rabbi Ikey Tawil



Rabbi Efraim Tepler



Noa Terenyo



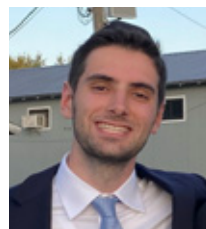
Meira Weiss



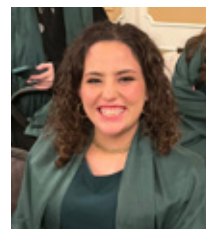
Jordana
Wertheimer



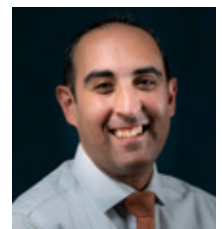
Rabbi Dov Winston



Moshe Wolff



Shoshy Zahtz



Moshe Zharnest

• Emanuel Hakimi • Lielle Holzer • Rabbi Andrew Israeli • Rabbi Shai Kaminetzky • Adele Katzenelenbogen • Hadassa Korn • Emma Ayelet Shields • Sarina Zoe Shields • Eliana Shimoff • Rabbi Yitzchak Sprung • Sam Wartelsky • Pearl Wexler

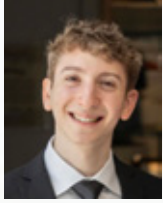
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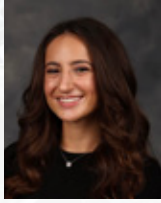
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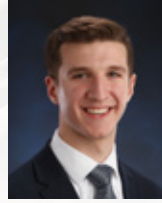
Simon Albert
Yeshivat Orayta



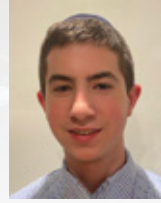
Avigail Amar
Tiferet



Ezra Baker
Ruach Hanegev



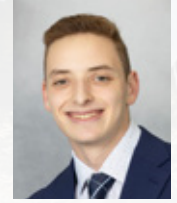
Benji Baronofsky
Yeshivat Hakotel



Elie Beer
Yeshivat Orayta



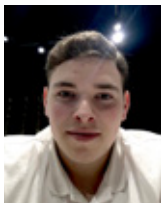
Ezra Berger
Yeshivat Torat
Shraga



**Nathaniel
Bierig**
Torah Tech



Noam Goldberg
Yeshivat Har Etzion



Yoni Greenwald
Yeshivat Netiv Aryeh



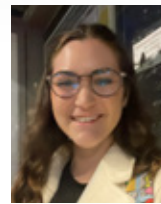
Leah Hornung
MMY



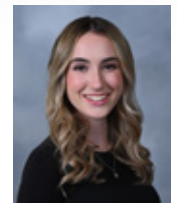
**Hannah
Klinghoffer**
Baer Miriam



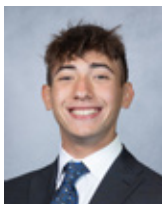
Molly Levin
Midreshet Torat
Chessed



Shaindy Lieberman
Midreshet Lev HaTorah



Sabrina Linden
Midreshet HaRova



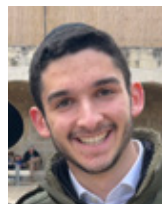
Tommy Newman
Yeshivat Torah
V'Avodah



Nosson Oirich
Yeshivat Lev HaTorah



Ayelet Ostrin
Migdal Oz



Yoni Panitch
Yeshivat Kerem
B'Yavneh



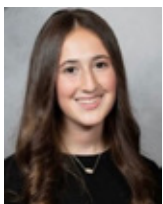
Joey Phillips
Yeshivat Torah
V'Avodah



Avigail Pinnick
Midreshet Tehillah



Simona Pitterman
Sha'alvim for Women



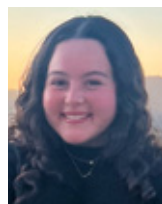
Jaime Schindelheim
Midreshet Torah
V'Avodah



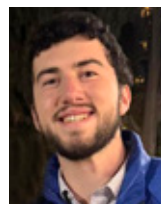
**Ariella
Schneider**
Tiferet



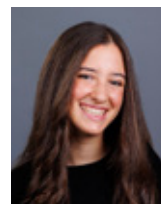
**Miriam
Schreier**
Nishmat



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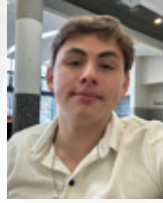
STUDENT AMBASSADORS



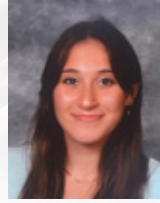
**Harrison
Brooks**
Yeshivat Orayta



Tara Cantor
Midreshet
Amudim



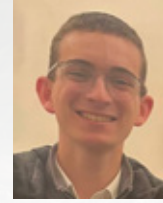
Akiva Davis
Yeshivat Eretz
HaTzvi



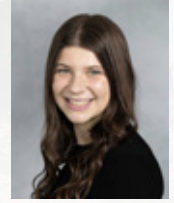
Talia Dubosky
Machon Maayan



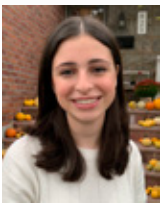
**Avigail Chana
Elazar**
Machon Maayan



Daniel Ferziger
Yeshivat Torah
V'Avodah



Eliana Fromer
Migdal Oz



Talya Lippman
Nishmat



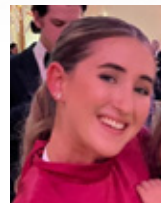
Jed Marcus
Yeshivat Har Etzion



Yitzchak Mishkin
Yeshivat Lev HaTorah



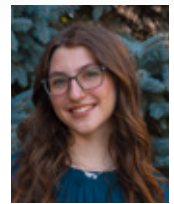
Ella Mordekai
Midreshet
Lindenbaum



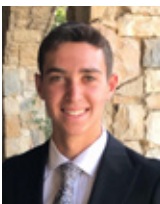
Ella Morgenstern
Midreshet Torah
V'Avodah



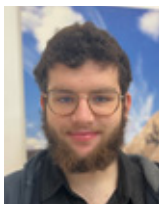
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Yeshivat Orayta



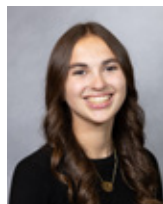
Bina Newman
Midreshet
Lindenbaum



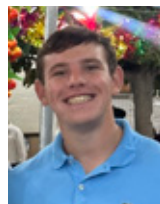
Coby Pollack
Yeshivat Sha'arei
Mevaseret Zion



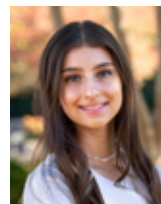
Noach Popack
Yeshivat Migdal
HaTorah



Yaffa Pressner
Midreshet HaRova



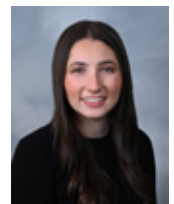
**Jeremy (Tzvik)
Rosner**
Yeshivat Sha'alvim



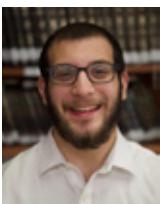
Aviva Rubin
Machon Maayan



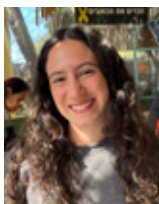
Tara Sanieoff
Midreshet Eshel



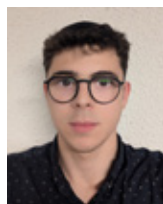
Tamar Scheinfeld
MMY



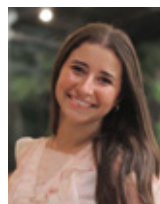
**Kevin (Akiva)
Sokal**
Yeshivat Lev HaTorah



Sonia Stern
Midreshet Torah
V'Avodah



Azaria Sussman
Yeshivat Orayta



Summer Teich
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Passing the Torch: Maslul Mizrachi and the Future of Religious Zionism

The future of Religious Zionism in America isn't about "what" but **who**. The answer? The next generation. To prepare them for leadership, Religious Zionists of Chicago, Religious Zionists of America, and World Mizrachi launched **Maslul Mizrachi**, a groundbreaking program designed to cultivate the most passionate future leaders of the movement.

In just one year, Maslul has already impacted nearly **80 participants**, immersing them in the essence of Religious Zionism. This isn't just a leadership program – it's a transformative journey shaping the ideological and practical foundation of tomorrow's leaders.

The Maslul Mizrachi experience

Maslul provides:

- A deep dive into Religious Zionist history, highlighting the sacrifices and triumphs that shaped the movement.
- Comprehensive Israel education, equipping participants with the tools to advocate and teach with confidence.
- Direct engagement with top-tier Religious Zionist leaders, including Rabbi Doron Perez, Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon, and Knesset members, offering unparalleled mentorship.

More than a program – a movement

Maslul Mizrachi is about building a movement. Participants emerge as empowered leaders, ready to inspire their communities, advocate for Israel, and strengthen Religious Zionism in the U.S. and beyond. In just a year, Maslul has become a game-changer, ensuring that the ideals of Torah, the Land of Israel, and *Am Yisrael* are passed on with strength and conviction.

This is just the beginning. *B'ezerat Hashem*, the future of Religious Zionism is indeed bright.

Maslul Mizrachi is all about giving gap year students in *yeshiva* and seminary the roots of Religious Zionism. Through monthly seminars, eye-opening trips, and hands-on experiences across Israel, students connect deeply with the land, the people, and the values that shape *Am Yisrael*. The goal? To inspire and empower the next generation of Jewish leaders who will bring their passion for Israel and Torah back to their communities.

Kobi Greenfield, Maslul Coordinator

Maslul is a transformative gap year experience for students who are interested in learning about the history and identity of Zionism and how to use those ideals to become a leader of the Jewish people. It brings students from various backgrounds and worldviews and creates an ecosystem where they can share their unique perspectives and transform Zionist ideals into a practical lifestyle. The participants gain both from a social and an intellectual element, allowing them to thrive as Jewish individuals and empowering them to step into their roles as leaders within the Jewish community.

Avigail Chana Elazar, Maslul Member



Maslul is the fourth leadership program I've done, and it is so much better than the other three, they don't even compare. Maslul combines values, education, and inspiration perfectly. It's not too rigid and serious and it's not too relaxed, everything we've done has been interesting and useful. A big *kol hakavod* to everyone involved.

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LONE SOLDIERS, UNITED PURPOSE

THE RISING WAVE OF JEWISH VOLUNTEERS IN THE IDF

Rabbi Aron White

The IDF is the army of the Jewish people, and thousands of Jews come from around the world each year to fight in its ranks. Religious Zionist institutions and yeshivot have been at the forefront of this, encouraging and supporting those individuals who take this brave step. Rabbi Aron White spoke with some of the young soldiers from around the world who have fought for the IDF in this war – part of an emboldened generation of young Jews who wish to be on the front lines of defending Israel.

Yeshivot Hesder are yeshivot in which Israeli students study Torah and serve in the army. In addition to the thousands of Israelis who take part in this, hundreds of foreign students attend these yeshivot and serve in the army. Some make Aliyah and serve as *olim*, while others serve in the Machal program – *Mitnadvei Chutz LaAretz*, volunteers from the Diaspora. The uniqueness of this is captured in the name: *mitnadvim*, volunteers. For Israelis, serving in the army is a legal obligation. For these soldiers from *chutz laAretz*, they are *nedivei lev*, volunteers whose hearts have moved them to choose to serve in the IDF.

“I wanted to be part of the Jewish nation, and I felt that I wanted to be part of the movement of young people who came from outside *Eretz Yisrael* and decided to stay,” said Ari Levine, originally from West

Hempstead, New York. “It is harder being a lone soldier than for Israelis – Israelis grow up with the IDF and see their siblings and cousins serve, which we don’t have coming from abroad.” Ari attended Yeshivat Hakotel, and then served in the IDF Combat Engineering Brigade. During this war, he has served as a reservist in both Gaza and Lebanon.

At any one time, there are over 3,000 lone soldiers, *chayalim bodedim*, from abroad serving in the army, and there are numerous programs that provide frameworks for Religious Zionist soldiers. The *Hesder* program dates back to the 1950s, and for decades yeshivot like Sha’alvim, Kerem B’Yavneh, Har Etzion, Hakotel, Ma’ale Adumim and more have had students from abroad join the army through these programs. In recent years, dedicated programs have been set up in American gap

year yeshivot to also allow their students to join *Hesder* through their programs – Lev LaChayal at Yeshivat Lev HaTorah, and more recently Yeshivat Torah V’Avodah also received *Hesder* status.

“Our job is for lone soldiers to not be alone,” says Rabbi Dudi Winkler, the director of the Lev LaChayal program. “When an Israeli soldier is off base, they have a parent pick them up from the station, and to help them do their laundry and cook them dinner. For lone soldiers, who is picking them up, doing their laundry, cooking for them? That is where we came in. There are so many ways to support lone soldiers, from practical help to psychological support for those fighting in war for months – and that is what we aim to provide through this program.” During this war, 150 students and graduates of Lev LaChayal have served in the IDF.



Machal soldiers have made an impact in the IDF throughout Israel's history. In 1948, many of the pilots who formed the Israeli Air Force were South African and American veterans of World War II who came to support the fledgling State of Israel. Certain lone soldiers, such as Michael Levin (an American lone soldier who fell in the Second Lebanon War) have achieved legendary status, inspiring hundreds to join the army. On October 7th, many lone soldiers like Nathaniel Young from London were killed (see "Finding Nechama - The Journey of Family Young", *HaMizrachi*, Tisha B'Av 5784, Vol. 7, No. 3), and Edan Alexander, a lone soldier from NJ, was kidnapped and remains (at the time of writing) in Hamas captivity.

Many Religious Zionist rabbis have pointed out that the obligation to serve in the IDF is not only based on citizenship, but is a religious obligation – as the Rambam writes, a *milchemet mitzvah* is a war to defend the Jewish people from its enemies. Once IDF service is framed as a religious obligation, it puts more onus on Jews from around the world to serve.

Throughout *Tehillim* there are many references to the religious aspects of being at war, and for today's *chayalim bodedim*, the situation is no different – being in the army is an experience that is profoundly religious.

"Generally being in the army and now specifically being at war more than ever, my life has been filled with constant uncertainty, as a result, my feeling of reliance and dependence on G-d for anything to happen has never been higher," says Eitan, who studied at Yeshivat Har Etzion before drafting to infantry. "My life is in the hands of G-d and the statement we say during *Hashkiveinu*: 'Protect us and remove from us enemies, disease, war, famine and sorrow, and remove obstacles from before us and behind us, and shelter us in the shadow of Your wings. For You are our Guardian and Rescuer' has never had more significance. Likewise, the saying that man plans and G-d laughs has never been more relevant to my life. When I say '*im yirtzeh Hashem*' about something in the future, it's no longer just a phrase but rather a reality that anything I may plan for is meaningless unless G-d wills it."

One of the features of the *Hesder* program from its inception has been the religious support that it provides, as one drafts into the army together with friends from *yeshiva*, and the *yeshiva* continues to maintain a connection with its soldiers while they are serving. This is true also for the programs for *chayalim bodedim* as well.





Since October 7th there has been a huge increase in the number of people interested in serving. “In the last few years there has been an increase in the interest in overseas students going to the army, but there is no question that October 7th also changed things,” says Hillel Kahn, the director of the *Hesder* program at Yeshivat Torah V’Avodah. “When I was interviewing dozens of guys to join our program, a common theme was that on October 7th, they felt that they had to do something. ‘How can I be an able-bodied young Jewish man, and not join the IDF during the war,’ was something many people said. That feeling of unity that everyone felt was translated for many young Americans as ‘I should be doing something tangible.’”

While the IDF provides essential support for lone soldiers, including housing allowances, the *yeshiva* programs offer a more comprehensive approach. These programs create a supportive community for groups of soldiers, combining practical assistance with psychological guidance and religious mentorship – ensuring that each soldier has the complete framework of support they need to thrive.

A theme of Purim is that during times of distress, we join together – “*Lech knos et kol haYehudim*, go and gather all of the Jews,” said Esther. The October 7th attack certainly brought out unparalleled levels of *achdut*, and feelings of unity from Jews around the world. The IDF lone soldiers are one of the most remarkable manifestations of this unity, in the most tangible way. Jews from London, Teaneck, Buenos Aires and Melbourne fighting together with those from Yerushalayim, Tel Aviv and Haifa – united by a common purpose, and a common destiny. No matter where a Jew is from, they can serve on the front lines for *Am Yisrael*. Religious Zionist Jews from around the world have heeded this call, and are a new generation of young leaders on the front lines.



Rabbi Aron White
is the Managing Editor
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SHAGRIRIM BALEV

Friends Setting Up Friends



Our Couples: Introducing Amit and Noam Vata

Where did you meet on your first date?

We met at Cafe Denya Jerusalem.

What did you learn from the dating process?

A lot of patience and faith. We both dated for quite a while and with quite a few people. It raises questions and frustration along the way. From our experience we understood that when you meet your match, things happen very quickly and there's great clarity.

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Tell us about your marriage proposal:

Amit is from Eilat and bringing her family from Eilat was challenging, so we decided that she would know when the proposal would be but not what would actually happen. In the end, it was important for Noam that it be a complete surprise. Amit was on a trip with her family, and her parents told her they were going to the grave of Rabbi Meir Baal HaNes and were stopping at the lookout point by Mitzpe Hod on the way. When they arrived she saw Noam waiting with his family. It was emotional and surprising.

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JLIC and Yavneh on the Front Lines: Building Jewish Campus Life After October 7th

During the past 16 months, college campuses have been in the news, with many questioning what place there is for Jewish students in the current climate. The Orthodox Union's JLIC (Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus) is active on dozens of campuses around the US and Israel, and provides guidance and leadership for tens of thousands of students. Rabbi Aron White recently sat down with four leaders from JLIC and Yavneh (a project of JLIC) to discuss the changing landscape of Jewish life on college campuses.

Please tell me a little about yourself, and your involvement in Jewish life on campus.

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan: I have the privilege of leading JLIC at UCLA alongside my wife for over 21 years now. Additionally, we serve as the JLIC Directors of the West Coast, overseeing JLIC couples in graduate schools, undergraduate schools, and junior colleges. We're now in over 30 campuses on the West Coast, and we're blessed to be doing this work, especially now when the Jewish community is turning to Torah for answers to their big life questions.

Rabbi Noam Friedman: I grew up in New Jersey with a typical Modern Orthodox tri-state area upbringing. After some serious flirtation with law school, I fell in love with campus work and have been with JLIC for over a decade. I started as the founding director of JLIC at Columbia University/Barnard College for 8 years, and currently serve as executive director of JLIC Mizrahi at Reichman University in Herzliya.

Tal Attia: As COO of JLIC, a large part of my portfolio is recruiting, hiring, and training staff to work on campus. Before serving

JLIC in this capacity, I worked on campus as a JLIC Director at Brandeis University and Binghamton University with my husband Isaac.

Gracie Newmark: I have been involved with JLIC and Yavneh since 2017 when it first began. I started as a fellow at Muhlenberg College and now serve as the Associate Director of Yavneh. Yavneh has developed a successful formula for cultivating future leaders and fostering vibrant Jewish communities. Every year, thousands of religious, passionate, motivated, educated, and relatable students enter college. Yavneh creates opportunities for these students to grow into leaders. Rooted in the values of loving all Jews and caring for others, Yavneh is developing the next generation of Jewish leadership – empowering hundreds of student leaders on campuses across North America. These leaders connect their peers to meaningful Jewish life, Israel, vibrant communities, and each other through peer-based relationships and innovative community-building initiatives. Over the past five years, Yavneh has successfully recruited, trained, and mentored a network of over 400 students, carrying out this mission on 95 campuses across North America.

Post-October 7th, what has changed in Jewish life on campus?

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan: There's been a real change in students' interest in being involved in community. For example, we started a simple program on Wednesday evenings called "Jewing Dinner" – Jews coming together for dinner, for no other reason than to have community. And it's exploded; we have 60, 70, sometimes 80 students coming per week. People are more interested now in everything from Torah classes to Shabbat lunch. We're seeing a real surge in participation across all types of programming.

Rabbi Noam Friedman: The post-October 7th landscape on an Israeli campus is obviously very different than it is for our North American counterparts. Many thousands of Reichman University students have served in reserves during this war; many hundreds of young people in our international community are *olim* and serve in the IDF. They continue to balance reserve duty with their academic responsibilities, while navigating the intense emotions of the moment in Israel and their new lives here, often thousands of miles from family and their original homes.

Tal Attia: Students have experienced more fear, deep discomfort, and disruption of their campus environment since October 7th. They have had professors express anti-Zionist views and had peers they thought were friends either stop talking to them or join encampments and protests. Certainly many students have expressed the feeling that their sense of belonging has been challenged. However, one cannot believe everything they see on the news. The media sensationalizes the extremes but fails to cover the day-to-day realities. The average inappropriate remark by a professor doesn't make the news, but neither does a bustling kosher cafeteria or an uplifting communal event that bolsters Jewish pride, belonging and agency.

Gracie Newmark: Since October 7th, antisemitism has become more visible, and many Jewish students feel a stronger need to assert their identity. There is a renewed sense of purpose, with students engaging in advocacy, education, and community-building in unprecedented ways. We have supported students in remarkable initiatives, from organizing campus vigils and challah bakes to running learning programs in honor of fallen

soldiers. Additionally, there has been a significant increase in interest in trips to Israel to volunteer. Through Yavneh's partnership with JNF-USA, we have sent numerous students to volunteer in southern Israel to help rebuild what was lost in the aftermath of October 7th. This opportunity has deepened our fellows' connection to the land and people of Israel as they experience a new side of the country they love.

What new opportunities for engagement now exist on your campus?

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan: New opportunities for engagement are everywhere now. We're seeing involvement from medical students, dental students, law students, and sciences – people from all walks of life. People are meeting with rabbis and the Jewish community even before coming to campus in ways we haven't seen before. Even simple programs are meaningful now. We had a breakfast program for people to come and meet each other, and one student came over and said, "I want to share something with you." We wondered what he would say, and he told us, "Having breakfast just so we can come and be together is such a Jewish thing. It's beautiful to see."

Rabbi Noam Friedman: We see some uptick in religious engagement that people have come to expect, but that's only part of the story. The ongoing challenges in Israel have also caused real struggles for many young people living here. Our professional team and community leaders strive to be attuned to these evolving needs and offer support however we can. In the early days of the ground incursion, a young man from our community got home from Gaza for the first time. He and his wife had both been called up within days of October 7th. His father, who himself had served as a lone soldier in the First Lebanon War, was present in *shul* when his son got an *aliyah* and *bentched Gmel* in a packed room of young *olim* and students. The father recounted his own experience getting out for Shabbat in 1985 after a difficult incident, reciting *HaGomel* in a *shul* where nobody knew his name. The contrast of watching his own son recite the *Gomel berachah* forty years later surrounded by supportive peers exemplified how much things have changed, and how important our community work is.



Gracie Newmark: Yavneh student leadership is built on peer-to-peer engagement. Leadership must empower students to transform their daily interactions – finding common ground, building relationships, and working together to create vibrant Jewish communities that are open and accessible to all students. Yavneh leaders are fostering positive Israel activism and dynamic Jewish programming at a grassroots level. Yavneh recruits and trains students during their gap year in Israel, develops all-star Jewish leaders through the Yavneh Fellowship during their time on campus, and strengthens students' connections to Israel through educational trips and programs. Yavneh NYC, powered by Yavneh Fellows across New York City's campuses, has engaged hundreds of students through comedy shows, paint nights, Torah learning, and volunteering. After the encampments at UCLA were removed, over 450 LA-based students joined together to help clean up their campuses, bringing Jewish unity in the face of antisemitism. The Yavneh Shabbat Project aims to strengthen Shabbat culture on campuses where it is lacking, with fellows traveling between campuses to create connections and plant seeds for sustainable Jewish growth. Through our "\$25 for 25" program, over 500 students in 21 countries have participated in weekly Torah learning, with pairs dedicating their learning to fallen soldiers.

How has JLIC and Yavneh provided you with the tools to deal with these new realities?

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan: Through the Yavneh Fellowship, we're able to engage students throughout California and the West Coast, even in areas where we don't yet have JLIC couples. Students are saying "We want something here in Arizona, in northern California, in eastern California" – places that weren't typically large hubs of Jews. They want to be part of the Yavneh Fellowship, engage other students, and want the leadership and Torah study. JLIC has been incredibly supportive of growth, giving opportunities to grad students, new undergrads, and transfer students who are looking for more areas of growth.

Rabbi Noam Friedman: At its core, JLIC has always been about building vibrant Jewish communities with strong personal relationships as an indispensable foundation. In the early months of the war, it was inspiring to see the mass mobilization of community members quickly procuring and delivering supplies and food to the many soldiers from our community who were called up. After the initial emergency response phase, where we saw tremendous community mobilization and support, our community has shifted back toward strengthening our core day-to-day functions – *minyan*, Shabbat meals and a strong Shabbat life in general, Torah learning, *chesed*, and strong social connections. In that sense, our work before the war prepared us well for our community's current needs.

Tal Attia: When the war broke out, JLIC sprung into action. Our leadership encouraged field staff to counter feelings of helplessness by taking – and empowering students to take – proactive and positive steps. Volunteerism has played a critical role in keeping up morale, fostering community, and building a sense of belonging amongst our participants. JLIC and Yavneh were well positioned before the war to do what was most needed – leverage the power of relationships, community, and learning – and so that is what we have continued to do.

Many people reading the news feel pessimistic about the prospects for young Jews on college campuses today. How do you feel, and what gives you a sense of optimism?



Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan: I have complete optimism for Jews on campus. We are seeing leaders grow in incredible ways. Each group that emerges has someone saying "I want to take responsibility," "I want my campus to have more." Students often come saying, "The programs are amazing, but I know another five Jewish students in our class who aren't yet coming – what can we do to get them involved?" People aren't turning away; they're turning in, asking how to grow and expand what's here. The students are bright, happy, smart, and engaged. They want a Jewish community that's exciting and dynamic, and we see tremendous potential.

Rabbi Noam Friedman: While I am increasingly optimistic about the unique opportunities that living in Israel presents to college students, I don't feel triumphalist about the state of North American campuses. The history of Jews and American universities is a storied one that we should hope gets repaired, even when it seems unlikely to succeed without addressing core institutional issues. From my new position in Israel, I've been inspired by students standing up for Israel and the Jewish people. There are few things more inspiring than living through this moment surrounded by young Jews in Israel, including countless university students, lone soldiers, and *olim chadashim* from around the world. Their conviction, clarity of purpose, and willingness to sacrifice in service of defending Israel – when you witness the actions of this young generation, it is impossible not to feel hope in the future of the Jewish state and the Jewish people.

Tal Attia: The news capitalizes on pessimism. Jews have always chosen to attend various universities, and I anticipate that they will continue to do so. For many, the equation hasn't changed all that much – secular college always had its challenges and opportunities, and they were prepared to undertake both. I am optimistic that students will continue to bring their intentional, value-driven selves to their campus communities, and seek opportunities for connection, learning, and leadership in their settings.

Gracie Newmark: Despite the heartbreaking events in Israel and difficult headlines, we have been incredibly inspired by the resilience and mobilization of our Yavneh fellows. Across the country, Yavneh students have stepped up to lead their communities, fostering Jewish pride and strengthening *Am Yisrael*. We are so proud of how the Yavneh network continues to bring light into the world during these dark times. More than ever, there is a growing sense that we are part of something bigger – a story that spans generations. The challenges are real, but so is the strength of Jewish students on campus. ■

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Americans are searching for meaning. Our Merciful Father, help us rise to meet this moment.

Bless President Donald J. Trump and Vice President JD Vance with the strength and courage to choose the right and the good. Unite us around our foundational, biblical values—of life and liberty, of service and sacrifice, and especially of faith and morality, which George Washington called the “indispensable supports” of American prosperity.

Guide our schools and college campuses, which have been experiencing such unrest, to inspire the next generation to pair progress with purpose, knowledge with wisdom, and truth with virtue.

Hear the cry of the hostages, both American and Israeli, whose pain our President so acutely feels. We are so thankful for the three young women who yesterday returned home and pray that the next four years brings peace to Israel and throughout the Middle East.

Almighty God grant all Americans the opportunity to realize our shared dream of a life filled with peace and plenty, health and happiness, compassion and contribution. Stir within us the confidence to rise to this moment, for while we trust in God, God’s trust is in us, the American people. America is called to greatness, to be a beacon of light and a mover of history.

May our nation merit the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s blessing, that like a tree planted by water we shall not cease to bear fruit. May all of humanity experience Your love and Your blessing. May it be Thy will. And let us say Amen.



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Building Tomorrow's Leaders:

A Conversation with Rabbi Shaul Feldman and Bini Dachs of Bnei Akiva of the US and Canada



Rabbi Aron White: Thank you both for meeting with me today. Could you start by explaining the nature, identity, and goals of Bnei Akiva of the US and Canada?

Rabbi Shaul Feldman (RSF): Bnei Akiva occupies a unique space within the Jewish community. We firmly believe that the State of Israel isn't just a political entity; it's an integral part of our religious identity. This means that every Jew, regardless of where they live, has a responsibility to contribute to Israel's growth and well-being. Our summer camps (Moshava) and day camps (Moshava Ba'ir) immerse young people in this philosophy of Religious Zionism, fostering leadership, a deep connection to Israel, and a sense of responsibility for the Jewish people.

Bini Dachs (BD): And we start young! Bnei Akiva encourages leadership and responsibility from a very early age. Our day camps engage not just the kids but their entire families and communities in Religious Zionism. Over the years, we've grown tremendously and are now recognized for our excellence in programming. I actually started as a *chanicha* (camper) in Bnei Akiva and grew up through the movement, eventually becoming the *Mazkira Artzit* (National Director) and now the Assistant Director. It's been a lifelong journey for me, and I'm passionate about passing that experience on to the next generation.

Can you tell me more about those summer camps and day camps, and how they've evolved?

RSF: Our five sleepaway camps offer a truly immersive experience. Campers spend two whole months living and breathing Religious Zionism. With the academic pressures kids face during the school year, summers provide a unique window for deep engagement and ideological growth. It's where they shape their Jewish identity and commitment.

BD: We started Moshava Ba'ir day camps 12 years ago to engage children earlier. They offer a taste of Religious Zionism for younger kids and those who can't attend sleepaway camp. They're also fantastic for community building. I remember a successful moment after the first summer of Moshava Ba'ir. A mom from Englewood told me her daughter, who had attended, was screaming from the car, "There's the Burma Road!" She understood what it was and explained it to her family. That's when I realized we were reaching communities we wouldn't normally reach, and it was very impactful.

What about your other summer program, Mach-Hach?

RSF: Mach-Hach is our Israel tour program for teens. Even with the current situation in Israel, we have over 1,100 teens signed up to visit this summer. It's a powerful testament to their commitment and their parents' trust in us. Thank G-d, we have created this reality that on Mach-Hach, you're not getting only Bnei Akiva-niks – you're getting kids who go to completely different camps. They're all coming to Mach-Hach, and I'm very proud of it. And let's be honest, you've got to be

nuts not to go to Israel with Bnei Akiva. Everyone goes to the best; you buy the phone you want from the best phone company because they're the experts. Who's the expert on Israel? Bnei Akiva. So obviously, they're going to come running to us.

BD: We've become the premier Israel tour program, known for a hands-on, authentic experience. Last year, despite the conflict, not one participant backed out. It was awe-inspiring to see their dedication. We had to make some adjustments to the schedule, but the teens were amazing. They understood they were on a mission, and they were supporting Israel by being there. We organized barbecues, they visited *chayalim*, *mefunim* (evacuees) – we tried to do those types of things. We brought in speakers, and it was very powerful to connect. We didn't want them just to be touring; they had to understand what was going on with *Am Yisrael* in *Eretz Yisrael* at this time. That was something very different. It was a powerful experience for everyone involved.

RSF: What's great about *Medinat Yisrael*, and I'm going to say it again and again – anybody who doesn't believe that we're living in days of redemption needs new glasses. It was a war zone, and yet these kids had a blast. They enjoyed themselves. They had fun. They loved it. It wasn't in any way like, "Oh, I'm scared." They just felt safe, sometimes safer than on the streets of New York. It was incredible. That's really unbelievable, what *Medinat Yisrael* has become.

I'd also love to hear about your seminary and yeshiva programs, especially YTVA becoming a hesder yeshiva.

RSF: YTVA and MTVA (for young men and women, respectively) emphasize *Torah V'Avoda* – Torah and Service. They immerse students in Israeli life, high-level learning, and the realities of Israeli society. TVA started 11 years ago with that vision. It's called *Torah V'Avoda* for a reason. We felt that a lot of the education we're giving, not just to our own *chanichim* but to the community as a whole – not only someone who went to Bnei Akiva but people who came to Shabbatons or were involved or heard about us – could benefit from an institution where this was the criteria when we started. I still hold by that: we want a *yeshiva* and a *midrasha* that could only work in *Medinat Yisrael*. If I put that institution anywhere outside of *Medinat Yisrael*, it won't work. That was the criteria; that's what we started.

BD: The uniqueness of TVA is its integration into the community. Students engage in *chesed*, visit *kibbutzim*, and experience different facets of Israeli life. They also go on numerous Shabbatons, visiting all types of Jewish communities in Israel. It's about understanding what it means to be part of *Am Yisrael* and what Israel is all about. It's not just about learning in the *beit midrash* but about living and experiencing Torah in the context of modern Israel. After October 7th, the girls created a program, just by demand of the students, and they gave it a very catchy name: TVStay.

RSF: Yes, 14 girls staying half a year for *shana bet*, with the majority staying to either do *sherut leumi*, attend college in Israel, or join the army – we had a few who did army – and then a group that's going to return to Stern. We believe that's a post-October 7th outcome. But the *hesder* program was in the works already for a few years before; it takes a very long time to get accredited. That's a whole article on its own, about how that happened, and some things you want to advertise, some things you don't. But thank G-d we got the full accreditation, and it's unbelievable – it's flying. We currently have 24 soldiers serving, 34 new *shana bet* guys who are drafting in March, which means that come April this year, we're going to have 60 active *chayalim* in the army. When they come out of the army, they live with us on campus in Baka; they're part of the *yeshiva*. The Rebbes maintain their relationship with them throughout. It has transformed the whole *yeshiva*. Our 50 *shana aleph* guys constantly see the *chayalim* coming in and out and their commitment.



Bnei Akiva also organizes community events like the Ishay Ribo concerts. What's the vision behind those?

BD: Post-COVID, we wanted to unite and uplift the Jewish community. Obviously, the world stopped, and we had to switch to Zoom programming. Even though we knew Zoom before, we had to change a lot, and we felt we needed to do something impressive and big to bring back this community and unite the Jewish people, and really show people what Bnei Akiva has been growing into. We're sitting here talking, and you get excited thinking about how Bnei Akiva's camps and *yeshivot* have done all these things, but people don't always know that or understand how much we've done. So what better way than to take Madison Square Garden – the most famous arena in the world – and be the first ever to put a religious Jewish singer there? We came to him and said, "We want to fill up Madison Square Garden with you." And he said, "Oh my gosh, that's like a dream. But how would that happen?" We said, "Leave it to Bnei Akiva; we have a way in."

It was incredibly powerful, uniting 18,000 people from all walks of Jewish life. After the October 7th attack, we channeled that energy into supporting the community and IDF soldiers through more concerts and other initiatives.

RSF: The concert was a huge success, but it was also challenging. We had to convince Madison Square Garden that we could pull it off, and there were logistical hurdles. But it was all worth it for the sense of unity and inspiration it created. It was amazing to see 18,000 people singing and *davening* together, regardless of their backgrounds or affiliations. It was a true testament to the power of Jewish music and shared identity. And we had to stick to our principles, making sure the entire event was *shomer Shabbat*, even with the secular staff involved. It was a powerful statement of our values. I'll tell you a funny thing: It was my son's *bar mitzvah* Shabbat in Israel, in Tzfat. It was Friday afternoon, and the way it works in the

Garden is, if you want to "challenge" a date and lock it in, you need to put down \$100,000, and that's non-refundable. We were constantly challenging that date, but we were secondary. Someone else was holding that date for our Elul concert, and I got a call that morning in Israel – it's winter, so it's almost Shabbat already in Tzfat. We get a call: "Okay, your challenge was accepted. Are you willing to sign? You need to wire \$100,000 now." It's an hour before Shabbat! Thank G-d, the chairman of our board was present at the *bar mitzvah*. So I told him, "Wayne, could you join me here? Let's call two other board members. We need your approval." Bini's in America saying, "We've got to do this," and thank G-d we're blessed that our board members are really vigilant. Our board is amazing. They see it. They push us.

BD: Honestly, I think this was the best thing we ever could have done for Bnei Akiva because it put us on the map. No other major Jewish organization has ever done this. People say, "Why Ishay?" Ishay for us is a Bnei Akiva-nik. He comes from France. He made *Aliyah*. He's *dati*, he's growth-oriented, he's a leader. He's done so much for *Am Yisrael*. We share the same values, making us natural partners. We worked so well together because we both had the same vision of what we were trying to accomplish. It just felt so united as one.

With the upcoming elections for the World Zionist Congress, what role does Bnei Akiva play in educating and mobilizing the community?

RSF: The elections are a crucial opportunity to highlight the importance of Religious Zionism and encourage active participation. Supporting the Religious Zionist coalition also ensures funding for educational programs that strengthen our connection to Israel. We believe it's crucial for the community to understand the impact of their vote, both in Israel and in the Diaspora. When you're going to an election, it's an opportunity to educate the community, but it's also an opportunity for the community to say, "I want to be

there. I see it. I see what they're doing. I believe in it." It's time to come home to unify us and say, "This is who we are." And it gives an opportunity to the community to put that little vote in that says, "I'm this. Push comes to shove, I'm this. I believe in this. I'm in awe of what they're doing, I'm in awe of what I'm part of." So this is the move to educate, but also for the community to look back and say, "I have a platform where I can be part of and identify 100% with the commitment to Torah, commitment to *chayalim*, commitment to *Medinat Yisrael*," and, as I said in the beginning, that the State of Israel is part of my religious identity – not just a state. It's not just like July 4th; it's my religious identity. So we're very excited that the election is coming at a time when there's a platform to give the Jewish community an ability to identify with something they believe in and to demonstrate that.

BD: One thing that is very important for people to understand is that these elections also have outcomes in dollars here in the United States. When you are supporting this coalition, Bnei Akiva will get funding to run Religious Zionist programming. Everyone in that coalition will get funding to run Religious Zionist programming. That's what it's doing. So it's not just "I'm supporting Israel" – you're supporting yourselves. Because if you want to have a meaningful Yom HaAtzmaut program, if you want to receive a packet on how to run a Religious Zionist Yom HaAtzmaut *tekes* (ceremony), if you want those things to happen, these elections bring dollars to make this happen.

Thank you both for sharing your time and insights. I'm truly inspired by the work Bnei Akiva is doing. It's clear that you're making a significant impact on the Jewish community and the future of Israel.

BD & RSF: Thank you, Aron. We appreciate your interest and support. We're excited about the future and look forward to continuing to build a strong, connected, and committed Jewish community. ■





BNEI AKIVA

is proud to stand with the



**ORTHODOX
ISRAEL
COALITION
MIZRACHI**

ON THE FRONTLINES FOR ISRAEL

Together, we strengthen Jewish identity, Zionist leadership, and unwavering support for Israel

OUR IMPACT as part of the Coalition:

Global Movement:

Inspiring Jewish youth worldwide

Shlichim Program:

Connecting communities to Israel

Snifim Across North America:

Local programming for hundreds of cities

Chinuch & Leadership:

Educating the next generation

Mach Hach & Moshava Camps:

10,000+ campers annually

Bnei Akiva remains at the forefront of empowering Jewish youth and ensuring a strong, proud, and united future for Am Yisrael





MIZRACHI

WORLD MIZRACHI HIGHLIGHTS

Mizrachi's Missions Department has hosted a number of missions over the past few weeks, including:

- A group of rabbis from the Rabbinical Council of America saw the devastation and efforts to rebuild in the north, as well as visiting communities and individuals affected by the war.
- Congregation Rinat Yisrael brought a group led by Rabbi Chaim Strauchler for a special program featuring volunteering, a visit to Chevron and meeting injured soldiers.
- A Mizrachi Canada group who visited a bereaved family and the family of an injured soldier who were both from the Toronto community, and assisted in cleaning and refurbishing a damaged home in Dovev on the northern border.
- Young Israel of Woodmere experienced volunteering, hosted a barbecue for our *chayalim*, and heard words of *chizuk* and inspiration from our Executive Chairman Rabbi Doron Perez.



Rabbi Danny Mirvis presented Richard and Rachel Silverman and family from Congregation K.I.N.S. of West Rogers Park, Chicago, with a special shield to thank them, Rabbi Leonard Matanky, and their wonderful community for their incredible support for soldiers spending the winter on the front lines.

World Mizrachi, together with K.I.N.S. and other generous supporters, has distributed essential winter gear for hundreds of reservists serving in challenging operational and weather conditions. Rabbi Mirvis, currently on his third stint of reserve duty this war, thanked the Silverman family on behalf of the reservists, and explained how meaningful their support is, warming the bodies and the hearts of our amazing *chayalim*.



World Mizrachi welcomed Adv. Rafael Antaki, Chairman of Mizrachi Brazil and Chairman of the Brazilian Zionist Federation, to Yerushalayim and our headquarters. Rafael met with Executive Chairman Rabbi Doron Perez as well as Co-President Rabbi Yechiel Wasserman, CEO Rabbi Danny Mirvis, and Head of Mizrachi's Latin America desk Jaim Nadel during his visit.

One shiur, SEVEN languages! Over 200 participants from dozens of countries from around the world tuned in to a special *shiur* by Rabbi Doron Perez on "Jewish Courage and Strength in Modern Times." The *shiur* was given in Hebrew and simultaneously translated into 6 languages as part of Torah MiTzion's online Beit Midrash program of "Lilmod."



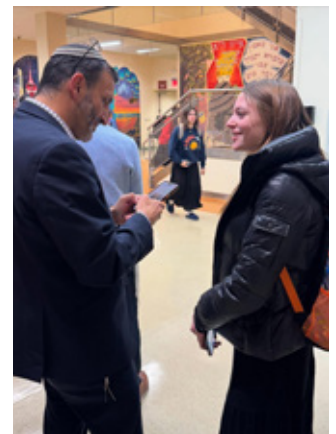


The ladies of Mizrahi OU JLIC at Technion came together for Rosh Chodesh Shvat to decorate pots for plants, which they then got to take home.

Co-Director Tova Levine reported: "It was so beautiful to see 28 women get together to celebrate planting new life and getting ready for the month of Shvat together. The night was sponsored by student Noa Segal in memory of her cousin Zechariah Haber, HY"D, who fell in battle in Gaza in 2023. He was a brilliant and modest man who was working on his PhD in developing grain and wheat for famine and drought climates, and was awarded a posthumous PhD. His life was connected to the Land of Israel and she thought it fitting to be honoring and celebrating the life that he lived through this special event.

The ladies got creative when decorating their pots and many laughs and smiles were shared throughout the evening!"

Executive Chairman Rabbi Doron Perez spoke at The Frisch School in New Jersey, inspiring the junior and senior students speaking about his son Daniel HY"D and his heroism on October 7th.



המרכז
לשליחות
ציונית
לתפוצות



Hundreds Attend Annual Shlichut Fair

The 9th Shlichut Fair was held in Jerusalem and was attended by hundreds of candidates this year looking to embark on a rabbinic or educational *shlichut* in communities abroad. The fair is organized by the Religious Zionist Shlichut Center, which was founded by Mizrahi, and brings together all the Religious Zionist *shlichut* organizations, including – for the first time this year – JLIC, who in partnership with Mizrahi brings *shlichim* couples to a number of campuses across Israel, in addition to their campus couples in the US.

Head of the Religious Zionist Shlichut Center, Rabbi Hillel Van-Leeuwen, said that "there is an even greater demand for *shlichim* from Diaspora Jewry now after October 7, as communities are looking for those who can connect and build the bridge between the local community and Israel. Some potential *shlichim* are worried about what the near future in Israel will bring and how that may affect their *shlichut* plans. However, the strong turnout for this event proves that patriotic feelings are stronger than those concerns!"





Haman: The First Antisemite

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks רב'ל

In a Vienna coffee house in 1933, two Jews were sitting together. One was reading the local Jewish newspaper while the other read *Der Stürmer*, the notoriously antisemitic journal. The first one asked, “How can you read that antisemitic drivel?” The second one smiled and replied, “When you read the Jewish press, what do you read? Jews are arguing, quarrelling, separating, out-marrying, assimilating. You only get the bad news. When I read *Der Stürmer*, what do I read? Jews control the banks, the economy, the press. If you want the good news, always read the antisemites.”

Antisemitism has returned, unbelievably within living memory of the Holocaust. It has returned in the Middle East, in parts of Asia, and devastatingly, to Europe. The subject of *Megillat Esther* holds immense contemporary relevance, containing perhaps the first recorded declaration of the world’s oldest hatred. We hear it in Haman’s words: “to destroy, to obliterate and to exterminate all the Jews, young and old, children and women in one day.”

Understanding antisemitism is incredibly difficult because it consists of contradictions. Jews were hated because they were poor, and because they were rich. They were hated as capitalists and as communists. They were hated for being clannish and keeping to themselves, and for getting everywhere and infiltrating everything. Voltaire hated Jews because they worshipped a primitive and superstitious faith. Stalin hated Jews because they were ruthless cosmopolitans who believed nothing.

The best way to understand antisemitism is to think of it as a virus. A virus attacks societies and corrupts them from within. It pretends to be like you until you let it in. The human body has sophisticated defenses against viruses – the immune system learns to recognize something that doesn’t belong and provides antibodies. How then do viruses survive? They mutate. And that is what happened to antisemitism.

Historically, we can trace antisemitism to Egypt under the Ptolemies, in the third century BCE. An Egyptian historian called Manetho wrote the first antisemitic tract, retelling

the Exodus story by claiming Jews left Egypt because they were lepers whom Pharaoh expelled. From Egypt, this hatred spread into Greek culture, then to Roman writers. The Greeks and Romans simply couldn't understand Jews – particularly their observance of Shabbat, which they interpreted as laziness.

The first major mutation came with the birth of Christianity – one of history's great tragedies. The first Christians were Jews who believed Jews would convert en masse to their faith. When they didn't, Jews paid a terrible price. To avoid blaming Romans for the death of their messiah, they shifted blame to Jews. This antisemitism appears in the Gospel of Matthew, worsens in Luke and John, and pervades the Church Fathers.

The second mutation emerged around 1096 with the First Crusade. Those liberating Jerusalem for Christianity massacred Jewish communities in Worms, Mainz, and Speyer. Jews were no longer just non-Christians – they became a demonic force of evil, responsible for every calamity from well-poisoning to the Plague. The Blood Libel emerged: Jews were accused of killing children to use their blood for Passover *matzot*.

Tragically, this Christian antisemitism eventually infected Islam. In the early 19th century, Maronite and Coptic Christians brought the Blood Libel to Egypt and Syria. The Damascus blood libel of 1840 marked a turning point. As recently as 1983, the Syrian Defence Minister published "*The Matzah of Zion*," claiming Israelis kill Arab children to make Passover *matzah*. The book remains a bestseller, demonstrating how Christian antisemitism poisoned the Islamic world.

The third mutation came in 1879 when Wilhelm Marr coined "antisemitism" – a new phenomenon where Jews were hated not for their religion but their race. This emerged across France, Germany, and Austria, justified by the pseudo-science of racial studies and social Darwinism. Its epicenters weren't just in Germany – the real centers were in Paris and Vienna. In Paris, Édouard Drumont published "*La France Juive*" in 1880, claiming "the Jews are running France." It remained a bestseller until 1945. In Vienna, an antisemitic mayor named Karl Lueger helped shape the young Hitler's worldview.

Nineteenth-century Jewry made a terrible mistake in response. They began to believe Jews were the cause of antisemitism rather than its objects. Many said, "Why are we hated? Because we are different. So let's stop being different." Some suggested abolishing dietary laws, moving Shabbat to Sunday, changing marriage customs – anything to be like everyone else. The result? Antisemitism didn't diminish one millimeter, and Jews lost their inner strength to resist.

Today we face the fourth mutation. It focuses not on religion or race, but nation – targeting Jews as a sovereign people in Israel. Anti-Zionism is the new antisemitism. While not every criticism of Israel is anti-Zionist, anti-Zionism embodies modern antisemitism. Its epicenter has shifted from Europe to the Middle East.

Throughout history, antisemites needed to justify their hatred through the highest authority of their age. In medieval times, it was religion. In the 19th century, science. Today, it's human rights – hence Israel faces accusations of apartheid, racism, genocide, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing at forums like the UN Conference Against Racism.

Jews cannot fight antisemitism alone. The victim cannot cure the crime. The hated cannot cure the hate. In Britain, we've demonstrated this principle. We led the fight for Christians to live freely anywhere; in return, Christians fight for Jews to live without fear. We created The Coexistence Trust, where Jews and Muslims combat Islamophobia and antisemitism together. Today, Britain stands unique – the fight against antisemitism is led by non-Jews, with every Prime Minister since Tony Blair declaring, "Jews will never be left to fight antisemitism alone."

The root lies in Haman's words: "There is a unique people scattered and dispersed through all the realms, and their laws are different from anyone else" (Esther 3:8). This is exemplified in the Purim story, which begins with "Mordechai would not bow down." Throughout history, when tyrants demanded submission, Jews stood firm. What some saw as our greatest vice – being stiff-necked – became our greatest virtue. If you have a stiff neck, it's very hard to bow down.

While every nation is different, only Jews consistently insisted on the right, duty, and dignity of difference. As the *Mishnah* in *Sanhedrin* 4:5 teaches, "When a human being makes many coins in the same mint, they all come out the same. G-d makes us all in His image, and we all come out different." A world without room for Jews has no room for humanity. If we believe every single human being is sacred, we will never abandon our differences to fit in.

What should Jews do to fight antisemitism? An incident from 1980s Moscow provides an answer. As the Soviet Union opened under perestroika, antisemitism resurfaced after 70 years of suppression. A young Jewish girl approached a visiting Orthodox rabbi from Manchester, trembling. "All my life, I never spoke about being Jewish," she told him. "Now people shout 'Jew!' at me in the street. What should I do?"

The rabbi, with his long beard and traditional black hat, replied, "Looking as I do, people don't mistake me for an Episcopalian. Yet in all my months here, no one has shouted 'Jew!' at me. Why do you think that is?"

The girl thought for a moment before answering: "Because they know if they shout 'Jew' at me, I will take it as an insult. But if they shout it at you, they know you will take it as a compliment."

If we want to fight antisemitism, let us walk tall and proud as Jews, and work with all humanity to banish hatred forever.

● Adapted from a lecture originally delivered at Yeshiva University on February 2, 2014.



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perpetuates the timeless and universal wisdom of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks as a teacher of Torah, a leader of leaders and a moral voice. Explore the digital archive, containing much of Rabbi Sacks' writings, broadcasts and speeches, at www.rabbisacks.org, and follow The Rabbi Sacks Legacy on social media @RabbiSacks.

WHY THE MEGILLAH IS NAMED AFTER ESTHER

RABBI REUVEN TARAGIN

Leadership is “a process of social influence in which one person enlists the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task.”¹ Both Mordechai and Esther play leadership roles in *Megillat Esther*. Their respective roles and the relationship between them are central to the *Megillah* and even account for its very name.

The *Megillah* introduces Mordechai, its first Jewish character, by describing his lineage and family history. Mordechai’s ancestors were among the leaders first exiled from Yerushalayim. Following their lead, he assumed a leadership role in Shushan.

He adopted Esther and discovered and foiled the plot to kill Achashveirosh. Later, he reacted to Haman’s decree by donning sackcloth in the royal court and commanding Esther to beseech Achashveirosh on behalf of the Jewish people. After Esther expressed hesitation, Mordechai responded with sharp rebuke. He emphasized the responsibility she had to use her position on behalf of her people and added that it was actually *her* fate, not that of the Jewish people, that hung in the balance. If Esther failed to act, Hashem would find another way to save the Jews, but she and her family line would be lost.

Mordechai definitely qualifies as one who “enlists (even after being rebuffed!) the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task.”² Esther, on the other hand, was initially passive. While other maidens vied for the chance to be queen, she was “taken” to the palace and, eventually, “taken” to Achashveirosh. Even her decisions, such as not revealing her nationality, were based on Mordechai’s directives.

Considering Mordechai’s central role, it is surprising that the *Megillah* is named after Esther. Should it not be named after Mordechai?³

The answer to this question lies in Esther’s response to Mordechai’s rebuke. She not only took action but also took

the leadership reins. She responded to Mordechai’s rebuke not by following his directions but with her own plan. Instead of immediately asking Achashveirosh to spare the Jewish people, she invited him and Haman to two parties.⁴

In addition, she included the Jewish people in the process and made Mordechai responsible for galvanizing them. By directing Mordechai to gather the Jews of Shushan and fast with them for three days in advance of her mission to Achashveirosh, Esther reminds us that Jewish salvation hinges not on the heroic actions of individuals but on the individual’s ability to inspire the rest of the people to identify with the mission. Like *Moshe Rabbeinu*, who needed the Jewish people to show faith in Hashem and His promise to free them, Esther needed the people to stand with her — by fasting and praying on her behalf.

With her response, Esther went from passive-directed to proactive-director. Mordechai was not the only leader; Esther also “enlisted the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task.” In fact, Esther’s emergence as leader eclipsed Mordechai’s leadership and turned him into one of those being led. From that point forward, Esther functioned as the *Megillah*’s central character while Mordechai faded into the background. In the *Megillah*’s critical chapters, when the “flip” – “*v’nahafoch hu*” – occurs, Esther plays the driving role. She brought Mordechai back into the picture only after Haman was hanged.

Mordechai recorded the story, but it is one that highlights Esther’s leadership and heroics. Though Mordechai was the initial leader, Esther ultimately conceived the plan of action and played the pivotal role. Thus, the *Megillah* bears her name: *Megillat Esther*.

Both of the *Megillah*’s leaders teach us important lessons. Mordechai exemplifies how true leaders must recognize pivotal moments in history, wrestle with the weight of necessary action, and inspire both themselves and others to rise to destiny’s call, no matter the personal cost.

Esther reveals how those who begin as followers must ultimately trust their own moral compass, seizing the mantle of leadership when destiny demands bold and independent action.

May Mordechai and Esther’s examples inspire us to fill the leadership roles meant for us.

1. M. Chemers, *An Integrative Theory of Leadership*.
2. Mordechai’s leadership continues after the miraculous turn of events in his authorship not only of the letters sent to reverse the decree (8:9), but also of those establishing Purim as a Jewish holiday (9:20).
3. Presumably, the *Megillah* is named after Esther because she is the only one mentioned in the last verse (9:32) that reports the Jewish people’s acceptance of Purim as a holiday and of the *Megillah* as part of the canon. This verse supports Chazal’s description (*Megillah* 7a) of Esther as the one who pushed the Sages to canonize the *Megillah* and the Purim holiday. That said, earlier verses describing the establishment of the holiday (9:29,31) mention both Esther and Mordechai. Ultimately, the question is why the last verse (and thus future credit) focuses only on Esther.
4. See *Megillah* 15b which questions this decision.



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Orphan to Heroine: The Transformation of Esther From Slumber and Silence to Speech

Rabbanit Shani Taragin

In recognition and honor of the courageous wives, mothers, and daughters of Am Yisrael

A profound Midrash in *Bereishit Rabbah* connects Esther's reign over 127 provinces to her ancestor Sarah, who lived 127 years. Rabbi Akiva used this parallel to awaken his sleeping students, suggesting that Esther's rule was no coincidence but rather a fulfillment of her spiritual heritage. Like Rabbi Akiva's students, Esther herself needed awakening – from passive acceptance to active embrace of her sacred purpose. Just as Rabbi Akiva invoked Sarah's legacy to stir his students' consciousness, Mordechai's challenge – “Who knows if it was for a time like this that you attained the kingdom” – awakened Esther to her deeper purpose and the heroic legacy she inherited from Sarah Imeinu.

Sarah, who was willing to sacrifice her personal future in Pharaoh's palace and again in forfeiting her matriarchal status to Hagar for the sake of the Jewish people's future, provided a blueprint for Esther's own journey from passive acceptance to active sacrifice. The number 127 thus becomes not merely a mathematical coincidence but a spiritual awakening – a reminder that Esther, like her ancestress Sarah, was called to transform personal circumstance into national salvation.

In the shadow of the Persian empire's grandeur, a young Jewish orphan named Hadassah lived under the protective wing of her cousin Mordechai. Her world would be forever altered when King Achashveirosh's officers arrived, forcibly gathering young women for the royal harem. The *Megillah's* deliberate use of the verb “וּתְלַקְחַ” – “And Esther was taken (וּתְלַקְחַ)”

to the king's palace” (Esther 2:8) creates a complex narrative tension. This same root (ת-ק-ל) appears repeatedly in the text, serving as a linguistic bridge between two worlds – her secure life in Mordechai's home and her forced entry into the royal palace. This verbal echo creates a dual reading of events: on the surface, we witness the fairy-tale rise of a common girl to royal status, while underneath, we experience the psychological trauma of a young woman torn from her family and faith.

This duality demands an emotional response from the reader that is itself conflicted: we might initially rejoice at Esther's “success” in winning the king's favor, yet the passive voice of “וּתְלַקְחַ” reminds us that this was no triumph but rather an abduction that severed her from her community, identity, and the protective embrace of her adoptive father. The text thus creates a sophisticated tension between external success and internal anguish.

This linguistic tension underscores the profound psychological trauma that follows. The Talmud (*Megillah* 13a) reveals the depths of Esther's isolation, noting that she had to hide not only her identity but also her basic religious practices. In the harem, where young women were prepared for their singular night with the king, Esther faced daily challenges to her faith. The *Megillah's* description of the women's “twelve months of preparation” (2:12) euphemistically describes a reality of deprivation and danger.

The *Midrash* emphasizes that Esther was taken “against her will and not for her

benefit” (*Aggadat Esther* 2). This unwillingness manifests in her behavior within the palace: While other contestants actively sought to enhance their beauty, “Esther requested nothing” beyond what Hegai, the guardian of the women, advised. This wasn't merely modesty – it was a form of passive resistance. By refusing to beautify herself beyond the minimum required, she demonstrated her deep reluctance to win the king's favor. Her apparent passivity masked both wisdom and a profound form of spiritual resistance.

This tension between forced participation and inner resistance continued even after her selection as queen. Her position remained precarious, caught between two worlds. For five years, she maintained her secret identity while witnessing the court's corruption and intrigue. The *Megillah* notes, “Esther did not reveal her nationality or her people” (2:20). This wasn't merely following Mordechai's advice; it was a daily act of survival in a hostile environment.

Esther's transformation from a passive to an active figure is marked by her journey from silence to speech. Initially, she is described through others' actions: she is “taken”, “brought”, and told what to do – “for Esther kept Mordechai's orders.” Her defining characteristic is her silence about her identity: “Esther would not tell her lineage or her nationality” (2:20). This enforced silence symbolizes both her powerlessness and her survival strategy. However, when faced with Haman's decree, Mordechai challenges not just her position but her silence itself: “For if you remain

silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish" (4:14).

It was at this crucial juncture that Mordechai delivered his immortal challenge: "Who knows if it was for just such a time as this that you attained the royal position?" (4:14). These words transformed Esther's understanding of her own journey, suggesting that her suffering had a higher purpose. The culmination of Esther's transformation comes in a subtle but profound textual reversal. Throughout the early chapters, we repeatedly see Esther following Mordechai's instructions. However, after their pivotal dialogue about her responsibility to act, the text presents a striking role reversal: "Mordechai went off and did all that Esther had commanded him" (4:17).

This shift marks the moment when Esther fully steps into her leadership role. No longer is she the passive ward following instructions; she has become an active leader whose words carry authority. The culmination of this transformation extends beyond her relationship with Mordechai. Her first major act of speech – "Go, gather all the Jews" (4:16) – marks her emergence as a leader for her entire people. She moves from following Mordechai's instructions to giving them, from being silent and spoken about to speaking with authority. The once-silent orphan becomes the voice of her people, her words preserved for generations in the *Megillah* that bears her name.

Mordechai's famous words – "for such a time as this" – continue to challenge each generation. They remind us that our personal circumstances, even our struggles and setbacks, may be preparing us for crucial moments when we must awake from slumber and indifference to action and leadership. Like Esther, we are called to recognize these moments when we must choose between comfortable silence and risky advocacy for our people and beliefs. True leadership begins with accepting responsibility for one's position and responding with courage, wisdom, and faith in a purpose greater than ourselves.

Today, we witness this same spirit of Jewish heroism in the women of Israel

who, like Esther, have transformed personal tragedy into collective strength. The *tatzpitaniyot* (female spotters of the IDF) who stood guard on Israel's borders, some making the ultimate sacrifice or enduring captivity, demonstrated the same unwavering commitment to their people that Esther showed in the Persian palace. Like her, they maintained their dignity and faith even in the darkest circumstances.

Like Esther before them, the wives of soldiers serving in Gaza demonstrate quiet heroism behind the front lines. They navigate a world of constant uncertainty while bearing extraordinary responsibilities – maintaining homes, pursuing careers, and soothing their children's anxieties. Though their courage may not make headlines, these women have become essential pillars of strength, sustaining their families and communities through daily acts of resilience that echo Esther's ancient example.

Perhaps most poignantly, we see Esther's legacy in the mothers of fallen and wounded soldiers, whose voices refuse to be silenced. Like Esther's transformation from silence to speech, these mothers have transformed their personal anguish into powerful testimony. Their tears and cries, like Esther's words to Achashveirosh, ensure that the world cannot ignore their people's plight.

As we face contemporary challenges to Jewish identity and security, these modern heroines, like Sarah and Esther before them, remind us that leadership often begins not with seeking power, but with accepting responsibility. Their stories teach that every position we hold, every capability we possess, carries with it an obligation to speak and act on behalf of our people and our principles when the moment calls. Their strength in the face of ultimate loss embodies Esther's message that sometimes we must "wake up" to play our pivotal roles "for such a time as this" – to transform the darkest times into moments of redemption.



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Not Just Another Oleh: Lessons from a Bat Yam Supermarket

Rabbi Elie Mischel

During Chanukah, my family enjoyed a quick getaway from our home in Efrat – a one-night, two-day vacation in the Tel Aviv area. We opted to stay in Bat Yam, the much more run-down and budget-friendly neighborhood just south of Tel Aviv and Yafo. While my kids were still sleeping soundly in our Airbnb, I snuck out early to buy some breakfast for a morning meal on the beach. As I stood at the local supermarket checkout line, the cashier – an older woman who was clearly not religious – looked at me with a big smile. She said in Hebrew: “You were in the war, right?”

I was embarrassed, as I often am, that I never served in the IDF. Here I was, a 44-year-old American *oleh* with bad knees, being mistaken for a soldier. But then I realized what had caught her eye – my *kippah srugah*, which marked me unmistakably as part of the Religious Zionist community. In her mind, my *kippah* meant I must have served.

Feeling awkward, I started to explain: “No, no – I’m just an immigrant from America, by the time I came I was too old to serve...” But rather than diminishing her enthusiasm, this revelation only increased it. “Wow, you left America to come *here*?” she asked excitedly.

Standing in the checkout line, it struck me. While some in the media seem determined to attack our community because of political differences, the reality on the ground tells a different story. This woman saw my *kippah* and immediately associated it with service and sacrifice. She knows, like most Israelis, that while Religious Zionists make up perhaps 12% of the country’s population, our community has borne a disproportionate burden in this war. Nearly half of the soldiers killed and wounded have come from our communities. In that moment, there was no politics, no agenda – just simple recognition of our community’s *mesirut nefesh* in protecting *Am Yisrael*.

Most of the time, when we speak about *Aliyah*, we understandably focus on the individual or family considering the move. Moving to Israel is transformative, challenging, and deeply meaningful for the individual. But there’s another dimension that we don’t talk about enough: what Israel needs from us. The question we should be asking ourselves is not just “Is *Aliyah* right for me?” but rather “What role could I play in building the Jewish state?”

Like Queen Esther before him, Nechemiah held a position of influence in the Persian court. But while Esther used her position to save the Jewish people in exile, Nechemiah took a different path: when he heard about Jerusalem’s plight, he didn’t just send money or prayers from afar. He left his prestigious position and came to rebuild.

Nechemiah arrived years after the initial waves of return under Zerubavel and Ezra. He could have rationalized staying in Persia – after all, there were already Jews in Jerusalem, there was already a *Beit HaMikdash*. But he understood something crucial: every generation of return to Zion has its own mission, its own walls to build.

The Vilna Gaon often spoke with deep emotion about how redemption would be quickened only through the ingathering of exiles and the building of the Land. He stressed that only through building up the Land would we be saved from the birth pangs of *Mashiach*. Two centuries later, we see how prescient his words were. Today’s “walls” might not be made of stone, but they’re just as crucial. We need more Religious Zionist Jews to strengthen our communities in Judea and Samaria. We need more *Garinim Torani’im* to bring Torah values into Israel’s cities. We need more *olim* who understand that settling the land isn’t just about personal spiritual growth, but about partnering with G-d in the unfolding redemption of our people.

Consider what Nehemiah accomplished. He didn’t just rebuild the physical walls – he revitalized the spiritual life

of Jerusalem. He was a transformative leader who strengthened both the city’s security and its soul. He restored the sanctity of Shabbat to Jerusalem, reorganized the Temple service, and helped rebuild Jewish communal life in the holy city. One person, arriving well after the initial return, showed how a passionate *oleh* could transform an entire community.

Today’s Diaspora Jews might think: ‘Israel is already built. Thank G-d, we have an army, an economy, millions of Jews. What difference can I make?’ That cashier in Bat Yam understood what so many abroad don’t see. She recognized the outsized influence of the Religious Zionist community in shaping modern Israel. We are settling the Land, strengthening Jewish sovereignty, and preparing the ground for the rebuilding of the *Beit HaMikdash*.

There is still so much to do. Every new *oleh* who joins our community multiplies our ability to build the Jewish state we dream of. The question isn’t whether Israel needs you – but only what role you’ll play in the unfolding story of Jewish redemption.



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 Homeschool to High-Tech: A Young Leader's Journey from JCT to Startup Founder

At just 16 years old, Eliyahu Masinter took a leap of faith. Leaving his home in Baltimore, he moved to Israel alone to study at the Jerusalem College of Technology (JCT). He had never been to Israel before. He didn't speak Hebrew. But he had a hunger for knowledge, a drive for success, and a vision for the future.

Now, as both a student and an entrepreneur, Masinter embodies the spirit of young leadership, balancing rigorous coursework while running an innovative startup, ScheduLearn, which is transforming how schools design their schedules. His journey—from an unconventional education to leading a growing company—highlights the power of initiative and perseverance, demonstrating the impact of young leadership in Israel's high-tech sector.

A Unique Path to Leadership

Masinter's background was anything but traditional. Homeschooled alongside his siblings, he quickly realized by age 12 that he needed a different learning environment. After a brief stint in Jewish day school, he returned to self-directed study, determined to shape his own future. By 15, he had earned his high school diploma through online courses and community college classes, spending long hours working alongside his grandfather in coffee shops, learning the discipline that would later define his success.

When college applications rolled around, he found himself at a crossroads, having missed deadlines for U.S. universities. His mother's research led them to JCT, an institution that integrates Torah study with top-tier academics. Despite the uncertainty, Masinter took the plunge and moved to Israel.

"I wasn't interested in a typical yeshiva, but I wanted to be in a place that prioritized Torah learning," he explains. JCT offered the perfect balance, immersing him in both high level academic and Torah studies.

From Hackathon to High-Tech Leadership

Masinter's leadership potential came into focus when he joined JCT's Great Minds Hackathon in 2022, organized by the Schreiber LevTech Entrepreneurship Center. Together with his teammates, Eyal Schachter and Benji Tusk, he took on the challenge of streamlining the complex process of school scheduling, a task that administrators often tackle manually over months.

Their solution, ScheduLearn, uses AI-powered software to generate optimized schedules in minutes while allowing for manual adjustments. Though their team didn't win the competition, they gained something far more valuable — the foundation of a viable business. Today,



ScheduLearn is working with 15 schools, with plans to expand to 50–100 next year.

Masinter credits the high-tech and entrepreneurial spirit of Israel with shaping his mindset. "Israel is a country where people see problems and immediately think of solutions. That energy is contagious. At JCT, we're surrounded by people who believe in innovation and aren't afraid to take risks."

The Power of Young Leadership

Balancing a startup with academics hasn't been easy. To dedicate more time to ScheduLearn, Masinter extended his senior year over two years. But rather than seeing this as a delay, he views it as an advantage. "One of the best parts of being a student-entrepreneur is that what we learn in class applies directly to our work. It even sparks new ideas for improving our technology."

JCT's support has been instrumental in Masinter's success, providing mentorship, resources, and an entrepreneurial ecosystem through Schreiber LevTech's accelerator programs. "JCT is a great place to be," he says. "We're more productive here than we would be working remotely from different cities."

A Message for Future Leaders

Masinter urges other young people to embrace the unknown and take action. "There's no better time to start a company than when you're a student. You'll always have obligations in life—family, work, responsibilities. Now is the time to build something great."

As JCT continues to shape the next generation of leaders in Israel's high-tech sector, students like Masinter prove that leadership isn't about waiting for the right opportunity—it's about creating it.

Ish Yehudi

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

In its “Audit of Antisemitic Incidents,” the ADL recorded over 2,100 acts of assault, vandalism and harassment against Jews last year, a 12% increase from the previous year and the highest total since tracking began in 1979. An AJC survey found that 90% of Jewish Americans believe antisemitism is either somewhat or a very serious problem. Antisemitism is rising, and while we overwhelmingly claim to be concerned about it, what are we willing to do about it?

When Haman approached Achashveirosh with his diabolical, genocidal plan to exterminate the Jews, he said, “there is a nation scattered abroad and dispersed among the nations.” The Talmud (*Megillah* 13b) expands on this conversation.

When Haman targeted the Jews for annihilation, he said to Achashveirosh, “Let’s destroy the Jews.” Achashveirosh replied, “Not so fast. I am afraid of their G-d, lest He do to me what He did to my predecessors.” Haman relieved the King of that fear when he said, “*Yeshno am echad*,” which translates literally as “there is a certain nation.” The Talmud quotes Rava, who explains that Haman was telling the King something much more strategic and insightful. Not “*yeshno am echad*, there is a certain nation,” but rather “*yoshnu am echad*, there is a sleeping nation.” Said Haman, “They are negligent of *mitzvot*, they are divided, fighting with one another. They argue amongst themselves while remaining fast asleep to what we want to do and how we threaten them.”

We were vulnerable and literally on the brink of extinction as a people because we were asleep. Our eyes were closed

to what was happening around us. We didn’t take the threats seriously and we didn’t stand up for our right to simply exist.

Haman recognized and took advantage of a nation that was sleeping. All he had to do was continue to lull the Jewish people into a false sense of security, to breed complacency and apathy, and at that moment he could accomplish his goal of ridding the world of our people.

Indeed, Rabbi Soloveitchik suggested that the true miracle of Purim is that an antisemite rose, threatened us, and we believed him. We didn’t excuse him, accept his bogus apologies, or say he didn’t really understand what he was saying. We didn’t just reject his tropes; we confronted him, took him at face value, and were determined not to let him threaten our people.

So how did we survive? What spoiled Haman’s plan? Why did we ultimately triumph over Haman so that we are here today and he is a distant memory? The answer is simple: Mordechai and Esther.

We understand Esther's heroism. She risked everything – her life, her family, her people – to confront the king without permission. But what made Mordechai a hero? If you think about it, Mordechai might seem like a villain, responsible for initiating the decree to exterminate the Jews of Shushan and beyond.

Would it have been so terrible for him to just bow down? Just once? Not only does Mordechai refuse to bow down to Haman, he insists on antagonizing him by remaining visible on Haman's route so that Haman would see him every day. Mordechai's behavior provokes Haman, who responds by declaring his intention to destroy not only Mordechai but all Jews. Even after Haman's plan has been pronounced, Mordechai continues to stand firm.

When Achashveirosh remembers what Mordechai had done to save his life and sends Haman to reward him with a public parade, Mordechai could have declined the honor. Instead, he accepts, which further infuriates Haman.

Why do we consider this person a hero of Purim? A closer look might suggest that Mordechai's pride put the Jewish people at risk. What was the source of his intransigence?

You might think it's simple – bowing down was idolatry, one of the three cardinal sins for which we must give up our lives rather than violate. Indeed, the Ibn Ezra suggests that Haman wore idolatrous symbols. Rashi comments that Haman had declared himself a deity. Either way, it would seem Mordechai was right not to bow down; he was simply following Jewish law while his peers were wrong for bowing, even if not doing so would mean risking their lives.

But that's not the whole story. The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 61b) says that the law of sacrificing your life rather than engaging in idolatry applies only if one truly believes in the divine nature of the idol. If one is bowing simply out of fear, one is not liable.

So why didn't Mordechai simply bow down to save the Jewish people?

Yes, Mordechai would have been entitled to bow down. To save his life, he could have been apologetic for his Jewishness and submitted to a virulent antisemite. But Mordechai understood what was at stake.

Mordechai, a humble scholar and righteous sage, witnessed Haman's growing antisemitism and his desire to see Jews and Judaism erased. He understood the antidote: To stand firm, to stand strong, and to stand as a proud Jew, a Torah Jew.

The answer was not to apologize for being Jewish, but rather to be the proudest and most tenacious Jew possible, and that is exactly what he did. This is how Mordechai is known in the *Megillah*: "*Ish Yehudi haya b'Shushan ha'bira*, There was a Jewish man in Shushan the capital." What does it mean, "a Jewish man"? Was there only one? There was a large Jewish population in Shushan!

The *Megillah* is telling us that while there were many Jews, some were abandoning their Judaism and others were failing to stand up for it. The Jewish community was asleep; there was only one *Ish Yehudi*, only one unashamed, unembarrassed, unapologetic Jew.

What happens when Jews stand up for ourselves, when we call out antisemitic song lyrics, tropes, and antisemites themselves?

By the end of the story, the *Megillah* tells us "fear of the Jews had fallen upon them and so no man could stand up against them." Why? "Because Mordechai, the proud, unashamed, unapologetic and fearless Jew earned the respect of his multitude of brothers, sought the good of his people and spoke for the welfare of the next generation."

One of the critical, but too often neglected, lessons of Purim is that the answer to our enemies is not to hide, apologize, or erase our Jewishness. To the contrary, it is to embrace and share our Jewish pride. When we act with confidence and pride, we gain respect. It is no coincidence that Mordechai emerged as a leader not only of the Jewish people but as a dignitary in the Persian government.

The *mitzvah* of Purim is to reach a point where we cannot distinguish between "cursed is Haman" and "blessed is Mordechai." We are very good at "blessed is Mordechai." We look to explain, excuse, justify, and see everyone as a blessing. But we need to remember that identifying a Haman and cursing him is as important as blessing a Mordechai. We have to call out antisemites, hold them accountable, and hold those whose silence makes them accomplices accountable.

If you share concern about growing antisemitism, the question is: what will you do about it? Certainly, we have to write letters, make phone calls, attend rallies, and hold antisemites and those who fail to condemn them accountable. But there is something else we must do. I can't help but notice that assimilation and intermarriage are at record highs, even as antisemitism is as well. Clearly, blending in entirely and erasing our differences is not only dangerously wrong theologically, it has no correlation to being safer and more secure. It is as if just when Jews try to downplay their Jewishness, our enemies will not let us forget.

We must appeal directly to the American people, carrying ourselves with pride, but also with dignity, honesty, integrity, and righteousness. If, like Mordechai, our neighbors come to know and respect us, they will be intolerant of leaders who dare promote antisemitic rhetoric or tropes. If we carry ourselves properly, those we work with, work out with, shop with, or live near will speak out and stand up to demand resolutions of condemnation and removal of voices of hate from critical committees.

This Purim, don't just dress up like Mordechai; act like Mordechai.

Be an *Ish Yehudi*.



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Purim: Lessons in Unity

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

Purim commemorates the salvation of the Jews in the 127 provinces of the Persian Empire millennia ago. While Purim is a holiday of rejoicing, food, drink and parties, we must maintain the proper focus on the lessons learned from this holy day.

The story takes place during a time of *hester panim* (Chullin 139b), which gives rise to Haman's edict to destroy, kill, and decimate all the Jews, from youth to elderly, young to women (Esther 3:13).

With G-d's "behind-the-scenes" intervention, along with the great courage and brave actions of Esther and Mordechai, the tables are turned. What Haman planned to do was done to him, his sons, and the enemies of the Jews throughout the kingdom. To remember this miracle – and that even in the most harrowing times, G-d never abandons His people – we celebrate Purim annually.

Today our nation faces an enemy that rises up to destroy us. The Amaleks of our day have inherited the bloodlust of their forefather, Haman. And though, at times, it may be difficult to see the hand of Hashem guiding our fate, Purim reminds us that Hashem is ever-present, and the forces of evil will never succeed.

While sincere repentance and heartfelt prayers will annul an evil decree against us, there is an additional key ingredient necessary for salvation that oftentimes seems to elude us. When we are united in *achdut*, as one nation with one heart, our spiritual fortifications are strengthened, and our nation retains the upper hand.

When we recognize that in the eyes of our enemies – from Haman to our enemies

today – we are very much one people, we will be inspired to connect and unite with our fellow Jews and become the one nation they perceive that we are. When Haman revealed his nefarious plan to Achashveirosh, he notably stated: “*yeshno am ehad*, there is one nation, that is scattered and dispersed amongst the nations, in every province of your kingdom, and their religion is different from all (other) nations, and the laws of the king they do not keep...” (Esther 3:8).

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zt”l* teaches, “Haman hated not individuals, but the people as an entity. He indicted not individuals, but the nation. I interpret ‘*am ehad*, one people,’ not in the sense of a certain people, but of one united people. Notwithstanding the fact that they are ‘scattered and dispersed across all the provinces of your realm,’ they are a united people. The fact that we live in so many countries, speak so many languages, dress in a variety of ways, have different concerns, and do not even know one another, does not deter Haman from looking upon us as a united people... The Hebrew word for ‘people,’ *am*, is related to the Hebrew word *im* meaning ‘with,’ ‘togetherness.’ Jewish peoplehood signifies both togetherness and the uniqueness that derives from togetherness” (*Megillat Esther Mesorat Harav*, 76,79).

While we may be different from our fellow Jews – and the differences are many, such as (but certainly not limited to) language, dress, style of head covering or lack thereof, political leanings, religious commitment and practices, countries of origin – we must remember that that which unites us is far greater than that which divides us.

When we received the Torah, we were privy to revelation because we camped “like one man with one heart” (Rashi, Shemot 19:2). Interestingly, the *Megillah* tells us that after the Purim miracle, “*kiymu v’kiblu haYehudim*, The Jews upheld and accepted, upon themselves and their seed...” (Esther 9:27). Chazal teach: “*kiymu mah she’kiblu k’var*” – they re-accepted what they had already once accepted (*Shabbat* 88a). This refers to their reacceptance of Torah in the time of Esther and Mordechai, which they had already accepted long ago, at the time of *Matan Torah*.

Perhaps we can propose an additional interpretation to this teaching of Chazal: They re-accepted brotherhood and unity upon themselves and their seed, as they had done once before, long ago, when they stood united at *Matan Torah*.

May we integrate the lessons of Purim into our own lives, so that we too merit the great and miraculous salvation of G-d. *Purim Sameach!*



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PURIM – LOTTERY AND CERTAINTY

RABBI SHALOM ROSNER

The Bnei Yissachar raises an interesting question. It is a bit peculiar that we refer to the holiday as Purim, which is derived from the “*pur*,” the lottery that Haman drew to determine the month during which to annihilate the Jewish nation. Why would we refer to the holiday with a name that represents the evil decree, rather than with a name that highlights salvation?

The simple explanation is that the entire episode described in the *Megillah* seems like one haphazard occurrence after another. Everything appears on the surface as a mere coincidence. Esther becomes queen, Haman seeks to kill the Jews, Mordechai is owed a favor, Haman selects a tree upon which he is later hanged. Amalek operates by denying divine purpose. The Torah describes their attack as “*asher karcha bad-erech*” (“who happened upon you on the way”) – suggesting a random encounter. This reflects Amalek’s core belief: that life is merely a series of coincidences. By promoting this worldview of pure chance and randomness (*safek* – uncertainty), Amalek attempts to undermine our faith in divine providence and make us doubt G-d’s active role in our lives. It is not a coincidence that the *gematria* (numerical value) of Amalek is the same as *safek* – both equal 240. Naming the holiday “Purim” underscores that it all appears as coincidence, but in actuality, Hashem is orchestrating events behind the scenes. G-d often acts in a hidden manner.

PLURAL VS. SINGULAR

Why is the holiday called “Purim” (plural) rather than “Pur” (singular), when it commemorates the single lot that Haman drew? The answer lies in understanding

the two distinct purposes for drawing lots in Jewish tradition.

The first type of lot is drawn when a person cannot make a decision and wants to leave it to chance. For example, if someone is unsure which of three sellers to buy from, they might draw lots to make the choice randomly.

The second type of lot is drawn to reveal G-d’s will. This is a more elevated purpose – not leaving things to chance, but seeking divine guidance. For instance, on Yom Kippur, lots were drawn to determine which goat would be sacrificed in the Temple and which would be sent to the desert. Similarly, when Joshua divided the Land of Israel, lots were drawn to determine which tribe would receive which territory, with the understanding that the outcome reflected divine will.

The name “Purim,” in plural, reminds us of these two contrasting uses of lots – Haman’s attempt to leave the Jews’ fate to chance, versus our understanding that G-d was actually guiding events all along.

The stakes on Purim were absolute: either the complete destruction of the Jewish people or their miraculous salvation. This may explain why we use the plural “Purim” rather than the singular “Pur.” It represents two opposing types of lots: Haman’s lot, which aimed to demonstrate that everything is random chance without divine guidance, and the ultimate outcome, which proved exactly the opposite. In a perfect example of “*v’nahafoch hu*” (complete reversal), Haman’s attempt to use the lot to deny G-d’s existence instead proved the opposite – Hashem’s presence and dominion!

DRINKING ON PURIM

On Purim, there is a tradition to drink wine until one can no longer distinguish between Haman and Mordechai. This custom has a deeper meaning: it reminds us that human understanding is limited. While we may think we can comprehend everything, we often misinterpret events as they unfold. This is different from the doubt that Amalek tries to instill in us. Their doubt is meant to make us deny G-d’s existence, but our uncertainty comes from a humble recognition that we cannot fully grasp G-d’s ways. When facing Haman’s

decree, no one could have predicted how salvation would come. The Talmudic phrase “*ad d’lo yada*, until one does not know,” teaches us not to overthink everything. Instead, we should focus on doing our part through practical efforts while maintaining *emunah* and *bitachon* in G-d. When we combine action with faith, redemption becomes possible.

ENHANCING HAPPINESS IN ADAR

In Adar, and in particular on Purim, we enhance our *simcha* – “when we enter Adar, we increase our joy.” But why is Purim particularly joyous?

Purim reflects miracles that transpired in a hidden manner. There is a greater feeling of certainty and happiness when one recognizes G-d’s activity within nature. The word *הנאה*, “joy,” has the same letters as *חשב*, “thought” – for it is all a matter of perspective, of recognition.

For the first time in history, our generation has the strength to defend ourselves against those who seek to destroy us. Despite the tragedies the Jewish people faced this past year, G-d’s presence has been visible throughout. The month of Adar especially calls us to recognize divine providence in our daily lives. This recognition is our strongest weapon against Amalek’s ideology of randomness and meaninglessness. Just as in the days of Mordechai and Esther, may we overcome today’s enemies through unwavering faith, leading us to clarity, gratitude, and true joy.



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A Second Purim of War

Rabbanit Rachelle Sprecher Fraenkel

Last year, we grappled with the nature of evil, with Amalekite wickedness and its manifestations as a trait of dark malevolence and hatred toward Israel. We discussed how, despite our limited understanding of evil's role in the world, our mission remains clear: "Those who love G-d must hate evil." We must fight evil to its end.

We spoke of our obligation to erase Amalek – not literally "from man to woman, from child to infant," but as was done to the Nazi regime: eliminating its institutions of power and symbols, its ability to spread and implement evil. We struggled with the command to be joyful when surrounded by so much sorrow, worry, and uncertainty.

How is this Purim different from last year's?

The broader picture reveals divine assistance on a biblical scale. The Hezbollah monster was no paper tiger but a threatening, fierce beast that, with G-d's help, we managed to overcome through Providence and strategy. Syria, once an exceptionally cruel regime, crumbled before our eyes. The ruins of Gaza echo King David's words: "His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violence (in Hebrew: his *hamas*) shall come down upon his own crown" (Tehillim 7:16). Yet the arm of evil is not fully broken, and Hamas' rule not completely erased.

We rejoice with many hostages who have returned from captivity while remaining determined to bring back dozens more to life, rehabilitation, and sadly, some to proper Jewish burial. After last year's initial shock – the antisemitism that erupted even before Israel fired a single shell at Gaza, the waves of hatred that swept through cities and campuses – this year, as humans tend to adapt, the pressure has

subsided. However, many Jews in the Diaspora are saying, perhaps for the first time in decades, that their time there may be limited. The countdown has begun.

There is one more significant change: Today's powerful empire has a new ruler. Jews worldwide watch and wonder: Will this 'king' be like Koresh or like Achashveirosh? Does he herald redemption, sovereignty, and renewed building, or is he a capricious ruler in whom we shouldn't place too much hope?

Rabbi Soloveitchik warns us against relying too heavily on temporary salvations and forgetting our vulnerability: "If circumstances can change so rapidly, literally overnight, if the chief minister who yesterday enjoyed the king's absolute trust can suddenly be condemned and executed, then who is wise enough to guarantee that such an irrational, absurd, neurotic change of mood won't repeat itself? The *Megillah* tells of human vulnerability, particularly Jewish vulnerability. Its events defy logic – a king condemns hundreds of thousands to death without asking their identity, then days later distances himself from the entire affair."

This carries a universal message, certainly a Jewish one: the vulnerability and fleeting joy of the Purim salvation stands in contrast to history-changing events where joy is deep and eternal – the Exodus, becoming a nation, and receiving the Torah. Yet this important message itself is a *galut* Torah – like the entire *Megillah* – written by Jews in exile, for Jews in exile, centered on fundamental issues of Jewish existence in Diaspora conditions.

A famous quote from Rabbi Lichtenstein uses a sports metaphor, saying that regarding the stadium of Jewish history we all inhabit, one must decide whether to be in the arena or a spectator. We've

learned that events of great significance to the Jewish people occur in various diasporas, and there are Jewish lives and responsibilities of great importance for Jews in exile. The question seems to be what historical role Jews will learn from and with the new ruler. Will it be a message of vulnerability and fragility at the hands of a capricious Achashveirosh, or will their renewed response to the return to Zion open an opportunity for him to grow into his role and become a modern Koresh? Unlike our ancestors in Shushan, we are not merely spectators awaiting the whims of foreign rulers. The modern Jewish state has demonstrated both its strength and its reliance on Divine Providence, even as Diaspora communities face renewed uncertainties. This Purim calls us to embrace both realities: the enduring vulnerability and the unprecedented agency we possess in shaping our destiny. Whether today's 'king' emerges as Koresh or Achashveirosh may matter less than how we ourselves choose to write the next chapter of Jewish history – not just as survivors of others' plots, but as active authors of our own redemption.



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DIGGING FOR GOLD

RABBI MOSHE WEINBERGER

Our Sages teach us that “When the month of Adar enters, we increase in joy” (*Ta’anit* 29a). How can we experience this joy? What is the source of this happiness?

According to the Sfat Emet (*Likutim, Chodesh Adar*), “When the month of Adar enters” isn’t merely referring to a calendar date. Rather, when Adar truly penetrates our minds and hearts, we experience ever-increasing joy. What kind of lives are we living which require this pick-me-up? Some people’s hearts are broken by life’s circumstances. Others struggle to experience emotion and need Hashem’s help to open their hearts, as the verse says: “And I will remove the heart of stone out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh” (*Yechezkel* 36:26).

The word Adar in Hebrew comprises two words – *Aleph dar* – “the letter *Aleph* resides.” The letter *Aleph*, with its numerical value of one, refers to the One Master of the world, while “*dar*” means to reside or live. If we create space in our lives for the Infinite One to dwell within us, we will live joyously, regardless of our life circumstances.

During this time of year, we read the Torah portions about the *Mishkan*. The proximity of Adar to the Torah’s commandments about building the *Mishkan* reveals a secret to obtaining joy.

If G-d is infinite, how can we create a dwelling place for Him in a *Mishkan* or *Mikdash*? Even the wisest of men, King Solomon, struggled with this question when he stated, “Behold the Heaven and the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain You; much less this Temple that I have erected” (*Melachim I* 8:27). How can anything in a finite world contain an infinite G-d? What is the purpose of the *Mishkan*?

The Rambam teaches that every Jewish man, woman, and child

must contribute to building the *Beit HaMikdash*. This contribution can take many forms, including physical labor, artisanship, monetary donations, and applies to every Jew, great and small. When listing the *Mishkan*’s materials, the verse states: “And this is the offering that you shall take from them: gold, silver and copper” (*Shemot* 25:3). The Lubavitcher Rebbe questions the order of these materials. He cites a concept in *halacha* of “we ascend in holiness, and we do not descend” (*Shabbat* 21b). So why then are the materials not listed in ascending value, from copper to silver to gold?

The Rebbe answers that it all depends on how we experience the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. The Sinai experience was not merely the most profound Torah lecture ever given. It was an event that allowed each mortal Jew to experience the power of, “I am Hashem your G-d” (*Shemot* 20:2). G-d, Who fills the whole world, and Who cannot be grasped by the human mind, told each Jew that he is “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (*ibid.* 19:6). In effect, Hashem was telling each Jew: “You are the most precious to Me, you are pure gold!” If we remain oblivious to this, we can never attain true joy in life.

If a prominent and respected individual gives someone a compliment, the receiver feels elated, especially considering that it comes from someone they esteem and admire. When G-d Himself tells a person, “You are the most precious thing to Me,” the joy one feels is multiplied exponentially. It is as if Hashem is saying “I don’t follow physical rules in this *Mishkan*. I live in gold, and you are gold!”

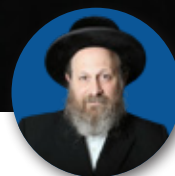
When discussing the *Mishkan*’s curtains, they are described as “design of the work

of a master weaver [*ma’aseh choshev*]” (*Shemot* 26:1). Rashi cites the *Gemara* (*Yoma* 72b) explaining that master weaving means: “weaving on both sides, one face from here and one face from there: a lion from this side and an eagle from that side.” According to *Chazal*, the outside and inside of the curtains were different and each side was beautiful.

Similarly, on Purim, events on the outside do not appear the same way on the inside. A Jew may appear ordinary on the outside but inside he is pure gold. A Jew is a “*ma’aseh choshev*,” a beautiful piece of artwork, different inside and out.

May we discover our inner beauty and realize how much the Infinite One cherishes us. May the realization that the Creator of the world finds us to be His most precious and dear creation enable us to re-accept the Torah with love and joy, fulfilling the words: “The Jews had light and joy, and gladness and honor” (*Esther* 8:16).

● Adapted by Dvora Miller Margolis.



Rabbi Moshe Weinberger

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Veiled Truths: Unpacking the Role of Secrecy in Megillat Esther

Dr. Nechama Price



Secrecy is a central theme in *Megillat Esther*. By naming the book after its heroine (whose true name is Hadassah), Esther (derived from the word סֵתֶר, secret) accentuates secrecy as a main theme of the book. Throughout the narrative, Esther is secretive of her identity and her relationship to Mordechai as well as her intentions behind hosting the King at two parties. What is behind her secretiveness?

A quick look through *Tanach* reveals many reasons to keep a secret, especially about one's identity. Twice in *Bereishit*, Sarah maintains an alias (Avraham's sister), rather than her true identity (Avraham's wife) to save her husband's life. She and Avraham feared that if the Egyptians knew her true role, they might harm him to get to her. At least at face value, the secrecy was for his safety and protection.

The similarities between this story and ours could provide us with insight into Esther's secretive nature. Sarah and Esther are both described as beautiful women (*Bereishit* 12:11, *Esther* 2:7), taken for marriage against their will by a foreign monarch (*Bereishit* 12:15, *Esther* 2:8), and hide their true identities from the monarch. With this as backdrop, we might suggest that Esther might have modeled her behavior after Sarah, and for a comparable reason – to protect Mordechai. Mordechai, the Court Jew, knew of many enemies who wished to harm the Jews. In that regard, it is reasonable that Mordechai kept his own Jewish identity a secret to avoid danger to his life. Only after Haman discovers Mordechai's Jewish identity (*Esther* 3:4–6), are all the Jewish people in danger.

The secrecy of Esther, when viewed through the prism of Sarah and Avraham,

highlights the importance of secrecy in helping someone else. However, other stories from the *Navi* highlight a different dimension to secrecy – protecting oneself.

One example of using secrets as a form of self-preservation is the story of Shimshon, the Judge. His most unique secret is the 'magical' powers of his uncut hair; it gives him incredible strength. While the *Plishtim* are unaware of his secret, his hair is left untouched and Shimshon is safe. As soon as he tells Delilah about the source of his strength, she cuts off his hair and the *Plishtim* capture him.

This example could offer insights for understanding the secrets of Esther. Esther is in a precarious situation, separated from the rest of the Jewish nation, and taken by the King of a foreign nation. Knowing how whimsically King Achashveirosh kills people in his lands (such as his first Queen, Vashti), Esther feared for her life (see *Ibn Ezra* 2:10). Therefore, Esther realizes she must hide her Jewish identity.

A third possibility might be that Esther hid her identity to allow for the possibility of her eventual selection as Queen, a position that could enable her to protect the destiny of the Jewish people (see *Ralbag* 2:10). Similar to David, who pretends to be an ally of King Achish, who promises to help fight Shaul and the Jewish people (*Shmuel I* 29) when David was masking his true intention of saving Shaul and the Jewish people.

Similarly, Esther sought to be Queen, not just for her own prestige, but to help the Jewish people through serving in a position of influence. For that matter, many Jewish leaders in *Tanach*, including Yosef and Daniel, serve the Jewish people

by being in the palace of the (non-Jewish) monarch. Yosef retains his identity, revealing it only to help his family during a famine to avoid starvation. So too, Esther reveals her identity to save the Jewish people from destruction at the hands of Haman.

All these other instances of secrecy in *Tanach* add dimensions of understanding to Esther's quest to maintain a private identity. From Esther's helping Mordechai, to her helping herself, to her helping the Jewish people, we have seen how secrecy can support her key objectives, thereby offering us added meaning to the *Megillah* and inspire us to find our own tools to enable our own participation in the greater Jewish story.



Dr. Nechama Price

is the Director of the Graduate Program in Advanced Talmud and Tanach Studies at Yeshiva University, Senior Lecturer of Bible and Jewish Studies at Stern College for Women, and serves as Yoetzet Halacha of Teaneck, Englewood, Tenaflly, West Orange, Livingston, and Long Branch NJ.

The Mashadi Jews: A Story of Survival and Perseverance



On Purim, we celebrate the salvation of Jews from the attempt to destroy them in Persia. However, there are many modern Persian Jews who also have remarkable stories of survival and perseverance. Rabbi Aron White sat down with Mr. Nissim Bassalian to hear about the remarkable story of the Mashadi community.

Thank you for speaking with us. Could you start by telling us about your own background?

My name is Nissim Bassalian, and I was born in Mashad in Northeast Iran in 1940. I lived in Mashad and then Tehran after Mashad became dangerous, and moved to the United States in 1977, a few years before the revolution in Iran.

How did the Jews end up in Mashad?

We came from Bavel, at the time of Koresh. Part of the Jewish people came to Iran, to the northern cities. There was a king called Nader Shah, a very strong king who attacked India. He asked to bring Jews from Gazvin and the north because he

trusted the Jews. They came to Mashad in the beginning of the 1700s. When the king was killed, they stayed in Mashad. They stayed together like in a ghetto – *eidgah*, like *eid*, a place to meet. They felt safer being there together. The Muslims in Mashad were not very friendly – they were very religious and wanted everyone to convert to Islam.

In 1839, they were looking for an excuse to attack the ghetto, the Jewish quarter. They accused us of a blood libel, saying we killed a boy, and attacked our houses three days before Pesach. Some people say they killed 28 or 36 people. They gave the community two choices – either they would kill all of us, or we would convert to Islam and they would leave us alive. We asked for 24 hours to decide, and the

community discussed it. The community decided that they would tell the Muslims they would convert to Islam, but it would be a show and they would keep Judaism in private. The women said they would make it work. This was a new group of *Anusim*, like in Spain, and when you think about it, it's really difficult to do. How do you teach the children in private, how do you make sure we don't work on Shabbat, Yom Kippur, and that we won't eat bread on Pesach?

They were the new Muslims, the new *jadidol-islam*. The Muslims were so happy that the 300–400 families had converted. It was very difficult for the Mashadi Jews to keep their Judaism. They had to show they didn't keep Shabbat and *moadim*, but kept them in private. Because they were living

in a ghetto, all the houses were connected – they had small doors connecting the houses. They did *shechita* in one house and brought the meat to another; on Pesach they prepared *matzah* in one house. On Shabbat, they would put a boy in the shop, and when a customer came, the boy would say his father went out and was coming back.

Marriage was important – they said they were naming their children's spouses from when they were 2 years old, deciding who they would marry as a way of ensuring marriages stayed within the community. It was very difficult – Imam Jomeih was the chief Imam, and they took two of the Jewish girls for him. After many years, they came back to the community. They didn't have any children with him; they did everything they could to keep true to their faith even in such difficult circumstances.

They were very careful about what to tell the children because the authorities would ask them questions like, "What did you eat yesterday?" They would buy the non-kosher meat and throw it away, while getting their own meat inside. They would buy bread and throw it away, but they managed to survive.

There were also some Jews who left Mashad then and went to Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, forming Mashadi communities there.

When you were born, was it still like this?

I was born 101 years after the events of 1839, what we refer to as *allah dayied* – "G-d decided it." When I was born, Iran was already ruled by the Pahlavi dynasty, so things were a little more relaxed – we still had to be very private about our Jewish life in Mashad, but by this point many Muslims realized that we had remained Jewish. The Shah was very good to minorities, so they couldn't do as much to us.

However, in 1946 there was another attack on our houses during Pesach. They attacked us from outside, once again with a concocted blood libel. A relative of ours sent a carriage to bring us out, but we had to pass through the crowds, and I remember as a boy getting hit by rocks that they were throwing at us.

This was during the time of the Pahlavi Shah; they were kind to minorities, and the Shah sent troops to Mashad to stop it. During the Pahlavi era, our Judaism became a little more visible, not as hidden. The local Muslims in Mashad were angry that the Jews had fooled them for decades by secretly remaining Jewish.

After 1946, my family moved to Tehran as Mashad became too dangerous. In Tehran, the situation was different – there were Jewish schools like the French "Alliance" system, and for high school, I went to a Jewish Iraqi school set up by wealthy Jews who had fled Iraq.

Meir Abdollah, a very wealthy Jew who fled from Iraq to Iran, built a big school and synagogue. I was planning to go to London to study at university, but my father passed away, and I had to remain to work to support the family. I got married in Tehran and had four children there. We had many synagogues. The Shah was very kind to minorities; we loved him. There was equality.

About this time the State of Israel was founded. What was the community's relationship with Israel like?

Many of my aunts and cousins moved to Israel – from Mashad, there were Jews who had said they were going on *Haj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca, but actually went to live in Yerushalayim. We also would go visit every year. El Al had a daily flight from Tel Aviv to Tehran! It would leave Tel Aviv at 6:30am and fly back at 12pm. The only reason the flight took two-and-a-half hours is because they couldn't fly over Saudi Arabia, so they had to fly over Turkey.

You moved to America in 1977, and two years later the revolution happened in Iran. What was that like for the community?

We were very worried. We are like one family – the marriages are mostly between cousins, with 95% marrying within the community and 70% marrying cousins. So it wasn't just knowing Jews were in danger; these were my aunts, my cousins – we are all family. Most came to America because they were sending their kids to study here – there were 150 to 200 students in America, and the students told their parents to come. And then more people came.

We are one big Mashadi family. We know everyone. In America, most communities are built around the synagogue, but we're not just going to synagogue together. The synagogue doesn't make us a community; we were one family before that. If anything happens to a Mashadi, we get the news within minutes. We know who got married to whom, and who passed away.

After the revolution, about 1,800 of the 2,000 Mashadis left Iran – some went to Israel, some to Europe (Hamburg, London, Milan), and some to America. Now we are mostly in New York, in Queens, and in 4 or 5 synagogues in



Great Neck. We have about 10 young rabbis, and the community is very strong. There are probably more than 20,000 Mashadis, but in Israel they are not a defined community. In New York, we remained as a community that is together. In Tehran today there are maybe 10 Mashadi Jews, none in Mashad. In London there are 300–400, in Italy less than 1,000.

What is life like for Jews who remained in Iran?

The Jews who still live in Iran try to never get involved in politics. They live comfortably now – they have freedom for their religious practice, and *kashrut* is well-maintained there. The regime's enmity with the State of Israel is politics, and the Jews try not to get involved in that. There is even a Jewish representative in the parliament of Iran, Sameach.

How does the Mashadi community maintain its connection to Israel?

We have a lot of relatives all over Israel; we take the community to Israel, we bring the children to Israel, trips to Israel. The children go to study in *yeshiva* and seminary; all my grandchildren came to Israel. My granddaughter got married in Israel in the middle of the war – we all came from America for a beautiful *simcha*. We can never forget that. We know that Israel is

our country, a part of our religion. The highest reward for keeping the Torah is *Eretz Yisrael*. The worst punishment is getting kicked out of Israel; we have to go there. The miraculous things that happen in Israel are amazing. Our rabbis and teachers teach us, and they get involved to be attached to Israel; our relationship to Israel is the best.

What keeps the community going to the next generation?

We thought about that when we got to America. The *Chassidim* came from Europe, and many of them changed because America changes everything – the freedom here, the intermarriages. We wondered what would be in the next decade or two. We put in a special *takana*, that anybody who marries outside the Jewish community is out of the community and cannot come back. At the beginning, there was a lot of discussion and arguments about that, but they accepted it and we made the *takana*. Every year we read it in the synagogue, and it has helped a lot. There have been intermarriages, but only 3–4 in the five decades we've been here.

Our rabbi, Rabbi Eliyahu Ben Haim, said that the only way to survive is *talmud Torah* – if you don't have proper Jewish study, it will not survive. Build Jewish schools, otherwise you cannot control everybody's life. We have been successful in that. We

have many synagogues, ten prayer services in the morning. Ninety percent of the attendees are young people; in Iran, it used to be only the old people coming.

We gave everything to the young generation – they handle the community, the *chesed*, the teaching. You give them the path, they have the talent, and they do it. It's a great honor to have such a wonderful young generation with that energy, with tremendous respect for their elders and leaders. We have tens of speakers in the synagogues, and many teachers – ten young rabbis whom Rabbi Ben Haim taught and gave them *semicha*. We are building another school and another synagogue.

In this way, we hope that with G-d's help we will be successful. If you have the *kavana*, the intention to do something good, then G-d helps. We are trying to tell the young generation before Pesach about what happened in 1839, what happened in 1946; otherwise, they won't know their own story.

Looking back at those difficult times, like when they attacked us in 1946, everything that happened has led to good. What we have now is the reward for the sacrifice of our forefathers – they left everything, they accepted danger and death to have what we have today. This is their reward. This is their *zechut*. ■





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JEWS with VIEWS

We asked
Bnei Akiva
representatives
from around
the world:
Do you
feel that
antisemitism
is increasing in
your country?
How does it
impact you?



Ido Guedj

Sweden

It is not easy to live as a Jew in Sweden and in the Scandinavian countries in general. Due to heavy Muslim immigration in recent years, antisemitism is widespread in the region and has even increased since October 7.

A central square in the city, where the main college building in Gothenburg is located, has become “Gaza Square.” It is full of protest tents, shocking displays, flags of Palestine, Hezbollah, and Hamas, and is occupied around the clock. Additionally, a “pro-Palestinian” demonstration takes place every Sunday. Within the Jewish community, students report experiencing antisemitism, discrimination, and hostility from others daily. Though I am a Religious Zionist *shaliach*, I do not walk around in public spaces with Jewish or Israeli symbols or speak Hebrew on the street out of genuine fear for my personal safety.

Yet despite all the darkness, and unfortunately there is a lot of it in Sweden, the light keeps burning. I see the rise of antisemitism in Sweden as a kind of “national awakening” among the younger generation. Those Jews who previously did not attach much importance to being Jewish are now proud of it. They initiate encounters between Jews. On the night of the anniversary of October 7, students all over Sweden took to the streets and hung up flyers reading “Am Yisrael Chai.”

Swedish Jews make a conscious choice each morning to embrace and defend their Jewish identity. I now appreciate what I once took for granted: the privilege of living in a Jewish state where we can openly wear Jewish symbols, speak Hebrew, and live freely as Jews. I hope that one day, Jews everywhere will have that same freedom.

Ido Guedj is a Bnei Akiva shaliach in Göteborg, Sweden.



Ariel & Roni HaCohen

New Zealand

We left Israel on October 8, 2023, to begin our *shlichut*. When we arrived, the community was on high alert for fear of antisemitic incidents. Fortunately, we have not experienced a single antisemitic incident directed at us, and we have the overall feeling that the country supports the Jewish community and always tries to protect and help them.

Our Bnei Akiva *madrichim* (college-aged students) have told us a few times that they experienced antisemitism at their university and on social media, and we have educated them on how to deal with it and tried to guide them through this situation.

Recently, there have been more personalities on social media calling for “hunting Israelis.” Some have gone so far as to set up a telephone hotline to report sightings of Israeli travelers (it is currently the high season for tourists here). Nevertheless, overall feelings here are relatively pleasant and we do not regularly experience antisemitism on the street.

Ariel and Roni HaCohen are Bnei Akiva shlichim in Auckland, New Zealand.



Leah Meyerowitz

South Africa

Our country's complicated history has shaped the colorful nation we are today and continues to influence the choices of our government and citizens.

The start of the October 7th war in 2023 poured salt on South Africa's most sensitive wound and awakened the South African government to the idea of 'apartheid' in another part of the world. This incited a sense of social responsibility to stand up for these 'oppressed people.' However, this activism quickly snowballed into an excuse to justify any anti-Zionist or antisemitic act in our country.

Before the war, I never felt the need to be wary of antisemitism. However, with our president chanting, "From the river to the sea" to hundreds of thousands of people, one becomes afraid of the ripple effects, both on the micro and macro scales.

I think the average South African simply does not care about what is happening in Israel or about the 'Jewish struggle,' as there is enough to worry about at home – like whether one will have electricity or running water. However, there are hotspots of antisemitism and anti-Zionism, and as a university student, unfortunately, the campus is one of those hotspots.

Having said that, despite the encampments, protests, and keffiyehs in lectures, I have never felt threatened to the point of removing my Magen David and yellow ribbon or denying my Jewish identity, which I realize is the great privilege of being a South African Jew. *B'ezerat Hashem* this era of South Africa's story will soon pass with greater clarity and realization of where true evil resides.

Leah Meyerowitz is a Bnei Akiva madricha in Johannesburg, South Africa.



Yishaya Sterling

Australia

Antisemitism and antisemitic incidents have increased exponentially across Australia since October 7. The Executive Council of Australian Jewry reported that in 2024, there were 2,062 reported anti-Jewish incidents, compared to 495 incidents in 2023.

Most notably, just a few weeks ago, a local daycare was set on fire and vandalized with antisemitic graffiti, and the local Jewish primary school, just a few hundred meters from my house, was also defaced with various anti-Jewish slurs.

Rav Soloveitchik *zt"l* famously distinguished between two aspects of Jewish identity: fate (chance) and destiny (choice). Antisemitism is an unforgettable reminder of the covenant of fate. However, it does not define my Jewish identity. Rather, it has reinforced my Jewish pride and encouraged me to further commit to the covenant of destiny. I continue to wear my *kippah* and *tzitzit* wherever I go, and I won't be intimidated in the face of terrorism.

Yishaya Sterling is the Merakez Bnei Akiva in Sydney, Australia.



Moshe & Leora Sigel

Brazil

Here in Rio, although the city is large, our community is small and everything takes place in the small ecosystem of the Barilan school and the Copacabana neighborhood.

In our small bubble, we do not feel any antisemitism. On the contrary, we feel much love and support on the streets. My son and I walk around freely and comfortably with our *kippot* on our heads.

There is a clear distinction between the Brazilian people and the government. There is a large Evangelical community here who support Israel passionately. On the street you feel the support. On the other hand, Brazilian president Lula is extremely pro-Palestinian and anti-Israel. Every other week he comes out with another statement against Israel and borders on being antisemitic. He compared the war against Hamas to the Holocaust and has said awful things that leave the Jewish community hurt and damaged.

The universities and academia are virulently anti-Israel, which causes great difficulty for our *bogrim* and *madrichim*. They do not feel comfortable expressing or showing their Jewishness. They definitely don't wear *kippot* on campus and have to avoid protests as they walk to class. Thank G-d, we don't have it so bad here, and all of the challenges just strengthen our *madrichim* and *bogrim's* sense of identity.

Moshe and Leora Sigel are Bnei Akiva shlichim in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

YOU HAVE THE POWER TO CHANGE LIVES: WHY YOU SHOULD SET UP THE PEOPLE YOU KNOW

Aleeza Ben Shalom

Have you ever met two wonderful people and thought, “Wow, they would be great together” – but then did nothing about it? If so, you’re not alone. Many of us have great instincts when it comes to making a match, yet we hesitate to take action. We assume someone else will do it, or we second-guess ourselves, afraid of what will happen if it doesn’t work out. But here’s the truth: if you don’t take that step, no one else will.

Making a match isn’t just for matchmakers or for people with decades of experience – it’s for you. You don’t need a degree in relationships or a special talent. You simply need to care enough to try. If you’ve ever introduced a friend to a great restaurant, recommended a book, or shared an inspiring podcast, you already have the skills. This is just another way to connect people and enrich their lives.

So, how do you start? Let’s break it down into simple, actionable steps so you can make a match – no experience required!

1. Open Your Eyes and Ears

Start by looking at the people around you. Who in your life is single, marriage-minded, and searching? This doesn’t just mean the people who actively ask for help – it includes those who may not openly talk about it but would be grateful for the effort. Make a mental list of your single friends, coworkers, neighbors, and community members.

Then, expand your view. Who else do you sort of know who is single in your extended circles whom you could get to know?

2. Keep a Running List

Professional matchmakers keep detailed databases, but you can start with something simple. Write down the names of singles you know and a few notes about them – their personality, what they’re looking for, and anything that stands out.

Think about people’s strengths and where they shine. Sometimes, people don’t see their own strengths, but you can. Think beyond appearances and potential

chemistry – consider values, personality, and life goals. The best matches are built on shared vision, not just surface-level attraction.

Lists help you remember connections you might otherwise forget and make the process more intentional.

3. Be Bold but Respectful

One of the biggest barriers to matchmaking is fear. What if they say no? What if they get offended by my suggestion? What if it doesn’t work out? Here’s the truth: rejection is part of the process. Not every match will lead to a wedding, but every effort brings people closer to finding the right person, and showing you care is a meaningful part of the process.

When suggesting a match, be confident and respectful. Instead of saying, “I think you should go out with this amazing person,” try something softer: “I know someone I think you might enjoy meeting. Would you be open to hearing about them?” Giving people a choice shows respect for their autonomy and keeps the conversation light and pressure-free.

4. Make the Introduction and Then Step Back

Once both people are interested, make a simple introduction. This could be through text, a phone call, or even a casual meet-up if they prefer. Your job is to connect, not to orchestrate every detail. Step back and let them take it from there. If they hit it off, great! If not, at least you cared enough to think of them.

5. Follow Up, But Don’t Overstep

After the introduction, check in – briefly. Ask, “How did it go?” rather than pushing for details. Some people will want to share, while others prefer to keep it private. Respect their comfort level. If it wasn’t a fit, no problem – stay positive and keep your eyes open for the next opportunity.

6. Learn and Improve

Like anything else, making a match gets easier with practice. Pay attention to what works and what doesn’t. Did you notice

certain qualities that make people click? Did you make a match that didn’t work out? What did you learn that can help you with your next match? Every experience teaches you something new.

7. Be Persistent

The more you do this, the better you’ll get. Don’t stop at one or two match suggestions. Make setting people up part of your mindset. If you keep your heart open and your network in mind, you’ll start seeing potential matches everywhere. And just remember, 99% of the time it won’t work. That’s normal! Success isn’t only found under the *chuppah*; it’s also found through the process and all the nos.

The bottom line: You can make a difference.

Matchmaking isn’t just about romance – it’s about helping people find meaningful connections. You never know how a simple introduction could change someone’s life. Even if the match doesn’t work out, the effort alone is valuable. It shows people they are seen and not alone in their journey. And maybe if the person is not for them, they will know somebody they could match them with.

So, what are you waiting for? You just might be the one who helps make that happen.

Now it’s your turn – take that first step, make that introduction, and watch how a single act of kindness can ripple into something beautiful.

● Originally published on Aish.com



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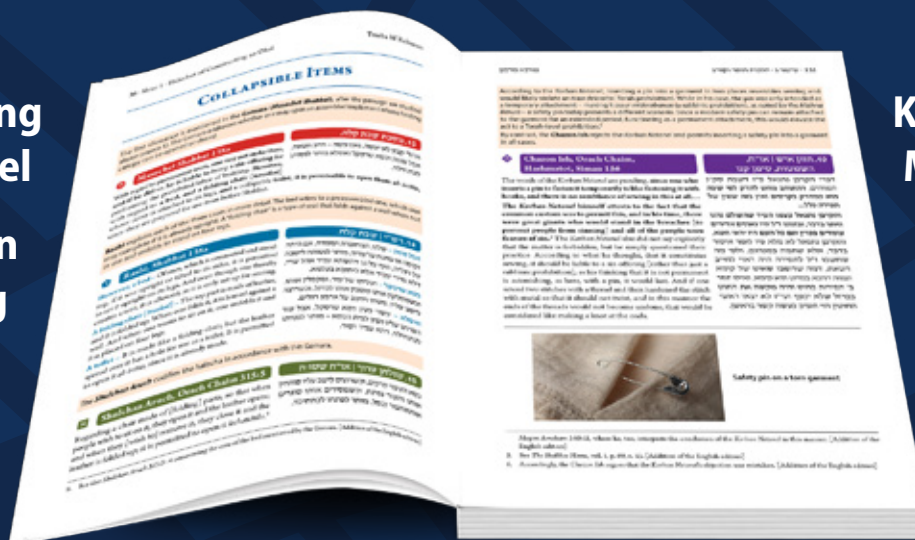
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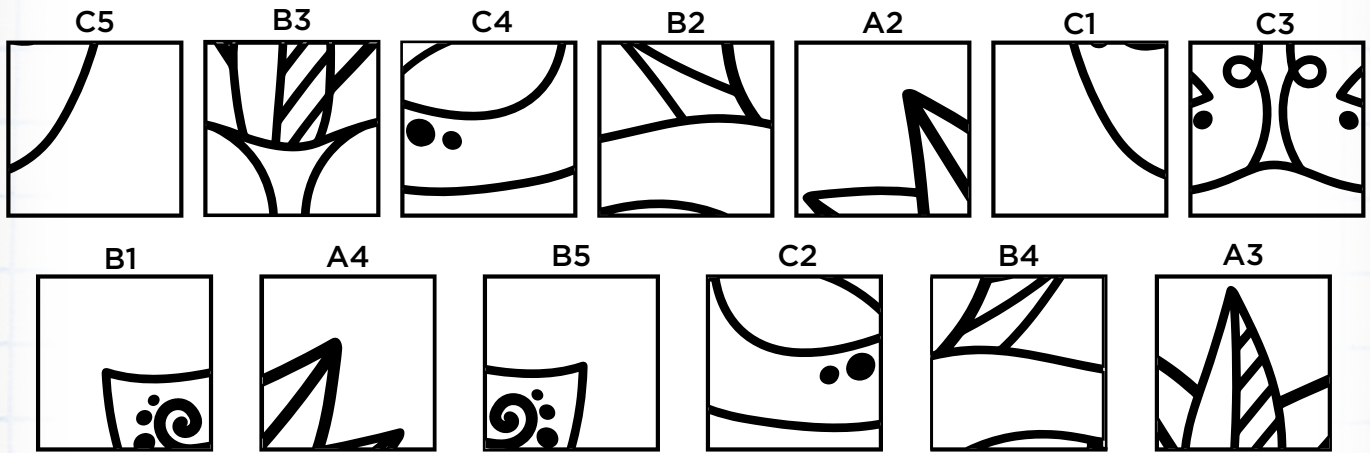
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KIDS CORNER

MYSTERY PURIM PUZZLE

Copy exactly what you see in each box below into the correct space in the grid to reveal the mystery Purim picture!



	1	2	3	4	5
A					
B					
C					

MEET HENRIETTA SZOLD



December 21, 1860 – February 13, 1945 (8 Tevet 5621 – 30 Shevat 5705)

Born in Baltimore to an important rabbi in the Jewish community, Henrietta was appointed from a young age as her father's assistant in both thinking and writing. Eventually she did something revolutionary for a woman in her days; she registered for rabbinical seminary in order to be able to study Judaism in the most in-depth manner possible. Having joined the Zionist Movement years before the First Zionist Congress, Henrietta decided to visit Israel in 1909. Having witnessed much poverty, disease and neglect on her trip, Henrietta came back and brought together thirty thousand women across the US and created the Hadassah organization. She then arranged for delegations to go to Israel and set up mobile health centers in all of the major cities. Eventually, due to her incredible work, Henrietta was appointed to be responsible for the health and education of all the Jews in Israel. Later, with her support, over fifteen thousand teenagers were brought over from Europe during World War II. The day of Henrietta's death, the thirtieth of Shevat, became Israel's Mother's Day and then eventually Family Day, in honor of all that Henrietta did in her lifetime, acting as a mother figure for all who crossed her path.



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



DID YOU KNOW?

- In 1912, over 100 years ago, Tel Aviv hosted the first Purim parade which is now a yearly tradition.
- The most popular Purim costume last year in Israel was an IDF soldier.
- The word "Tevet" ONLY appears in Megillat Esther and nowhere else in Tanach.

Test Your Knowledge



What does Purim Meshulash mean?

Where do people say Esther and Mordechai are buried?

Over about how many years does the story of Purim take place?

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

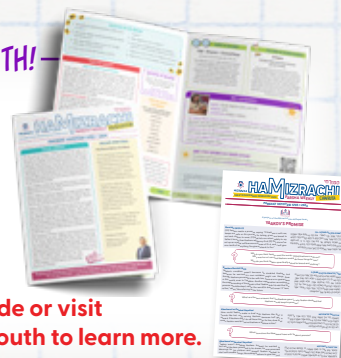
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PURIM WORD SEARCH

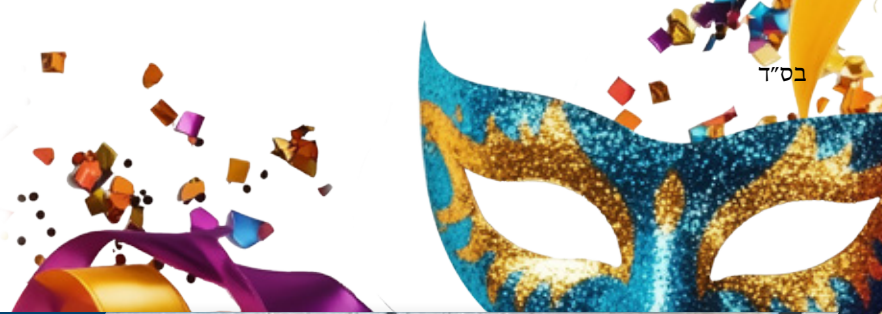
CAN YOU FIND ALL OF THESE PURIM RELATED WORDS?

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ESTHER	HAMAN
MISHLOACH MANOT	SEUDA
ACHASHVEIROSH	COSTUME
VASHTI	PURIM
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