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הַמִּזְרָחִי



HAMIZRACHI

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זכרנו להיים

For over a year in captivity, Agam Berger refused to eat non-kosher food. Then, her captors brought her a sefer left in Gaza by an IDF soldier.

See page 8 for her story.

(PHOTO: YACOV SEGAL PHOTOGRAPHY)

Dedicated in honor of all our heroic soldiers and reservists who are once again serving over the Chagei Tishrei period, and their selfless families.



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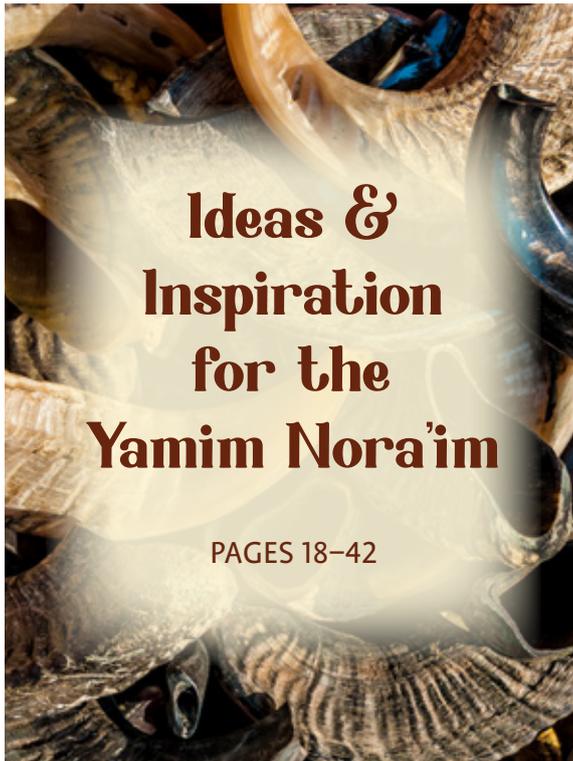
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TWO YEARS ON

A Time of Reckoning

Rabbi Doron Perez

The last time I saw our two boys together, Yonatan and Daniel, was on Rosh Hashanah 2023, exactly two years ago. Both were then serving in the permanent force of the Israeli army – Yonatan as a company commander in the paratroopers, and Daniel as an officer and tank commander in the tank corps.

Thankfully, they were both home for Rosh Hashanah with us in Yad Binyamin. How wonderful it was to be flanked by them during the *davening* over these two days. Little did I know this would be the last time I would be with them together again.

On Yom Kippur, they were both back in the army. On the first day of Sukkot, Daniel was with us while Yonatan was on duty. And on Simchat Torah, Daniel was positioned with his tank crew on the Gazan border, while Yonatan was with us at home with his then-fiancée Galya, ten days before he was to be married.

It was painfully decreed on that Rosh Hashanah and sealed on Yom Kippur that this would be Daniel's last. He would fall with crew members Itay Chen and Tomer Leibowitz, after two hours and sixteen minutes of great bravery in his tank's heroic battle. Matan Angrest was wounded and taken hostage alive, while the bodies of Daniel and Itay were taken to Gaza, where they all remain today, as of the writing of these lines.

The time of the *Yamim Nora'im*, the High Holy Days, is always one of intensity and

has never been more painful and poignant for me than since October 7th. It is a time not only for deep introspection on a personal level, but also on a collective level – especially so now, as we approach the second anniversary of this protracted war. It is a time to reflect on all that has been lost and all that has been gained, on what pains us and what inspires us – on how best to aim to live in the upcoming year of 5786.

The best of days and the worst of days

Perhaps the famous opening line of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* best captures for me, on both personal and national levels, that day of October 7th, Simchat Torah 5784:

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness...”

On a personal level, it was the worst of days, as we lost a son. Taken captive, after 163 days of anxiousness, prayer, and activism, Daniel *hy”d* was confirmed to have been killed on that day; his lifeless body awaits return for a dignified burial. We continue to suffer the consequences of that dreadful day.

Yet, it was also the best of days, as our son Yonatan was miraculously saved after many hours of dangerous battles. His

group of officers from the paratroopers fought bravely throughout the day, with three of them being ambushed, shot, and injured at Nachal Oz base in the afternoon of October 7th. That day could have ended differently – more tragically, Heaven forbid – for Yonatan and our family, but by the grace of G-d, Yonatan was thankfully and miraculously spared. He subsequently married and became a father. We became grandparents and my parents great-grandparents, with our grandson bearing the name of his heroic uncle. October 7th, Simchat Torah, is for me a day of both grief and thanksgiving; of loss and of life; of darkness and of light.

Season of light and season of darkness

On a national level, October 7th was the worst day in modern Jewish history since the Holocaust. No subsequent day compares to the magnitude of death and destruction, as well as the depth of depravity and barbarism experienced on that day. I recently spoke with a member of ZAKA who collected body parts from the devastation of that day. He told me that he had been at dozens of terror attacks – bus bombings, car rammings, and mass carnage over the past thirty years. Yet none of that, as terrible as it was, compared to the sight of acts of torture and sadistic savagery. Not to mention the inhuman depravity of taking 251 hostages of all ages, with 48 cruelly remaining in Gaza as of the writing of these lines.



It was also a time of blunder and blindness by Israel's military, intelligence, and political establishment. With the leadership smitten by a plague of darkness and a policy of appeasement and containment toward a brutal, self-destructive enemy, the problems that had been kicked down the road exploded with devastating consequences. The internal fighting in Israel over the proposed judicial reform in the months leading up to October 7th drove the country toward an internal collision course. Israel still must undertake a full introspection and reckoning regarding the tragic mistakes that led to October 7th.

Yet equally, no day in modern Jewish history revealed so much courage and clarity; unmatched self-sacrifice and heroism. A young generation that many had characterized as a self-absorbed TikTok generation emerged as a remarkable generation of *mesirut nefesh* and selfless commitment to our country and cause. A generation no less heroic than the defenders of 1967 and 1973, the founders of the State of Israel, the Maccabees, and perhaps even King David's army. They have earned their place among the pantheon of our greatest Jewish heroes and defenders.

Where the system failed and froze, individuals fought and rose. The blindness of the establishment was matched only by the brilliance of personal responsibility and courage of countless people. Thousands upon thousands of soldiers and civilians alike left their homes and altruistically put their lives on the line to stem the tide. Where the state stumbled, the individual spirit prevailed.

The countless stories of courage from that day are the greatest testament to Jewish identity and solidarity and the meaning of Israel. Forty such stories appear in the book *One Day in October*, generously dedicated by friends in the South African Jewish community to our son Daniel and the many heroes of Israel. These forty are but a glimpse into the thousands of others

- men and women who risked everything and often gave their lives to save people they didn't even know on that fateful day.

The superhuman self-sacrifice shown on October 7th has continued for nearly two years. Reserve soldiers - many of them parents and even grandparents - have left their families for repeated tours of duty, some serving their eighth tour. This spirit of service displayed by them and their families, who are paying a terrible price, reflects the best of what it means to be a Jew.

So many of our heroic hostages, too, have displayed extraordinary courage and resilience in impossible situations. One of many examples is Agam Berger, featured on the cover of this edition of *HaMizrachi*. Her unwavering faith and strength during her cruel captivity were remarkable. She insisted on eating kosher food wherever she could, defiantly refusing to cook on Shabbat even when threatened, and fasting on Tisha B'Av. Her family asked to minimize desecration of Shabbat during her release. She found strength to live and persevere by reading a booklet, *With Might and Spirit* ("B'chayil U'veruach"), that somehow made it to her in captivity, as we highlight in this edition.

"Who is like Your people Israel, one and unique nation in the land?"

5786

Today, as Israel faces threats on its borders, growing hostility around the world, and the return of internal derision and divisiveness, it is time for all of us to raise our game. To commit to the dual covenants of fate and destiny, in Rabbi Soloveitchik's words.

Of fate - that we are in this together and nothing fortifies the Jewish people more than standing together in unity, despite our diverse views, at a time of threat and challenge. We dare not let the internal

fissures of October 6th return, but commit and recommit to our deep sense of Jewish solidarity and our collective fate as a historic community.

Of destiny - we are called upon to defend with confidence and boldness our Jewish mission in the world. The Jewish state in Israel and Jewish communities around the world are under threat. Each and every one of us is called upon to stand up in defense of our people wherever we find ourselves, with faith and fortitude. The antisemitic threat of our enemies today is not against the Jewish people per se or against practicing Judaism, but rather against the existence of a Jewish state - Zionism. We must defend Jewish identity by affirming the absolute legitimacy of a sustainable Jewish state in *Eretz Yisrael*, and the inseparable bond it has with Jewish destiny. There must be no daylight between Judaism and Zionism, and the indivisible connection between Jewish identity and destiny - between the People, Torah, and the Land and State of Israel at the heart of our story.

Our enemies today wish to weaken us in two ways - to weaken the internal bonds of Jewish solidarity that bind us together and to sever the connection between Judaism and the Jewish state. And it is precisely these connections that we must strengthen - courageously and heroically - wherever we find ourselves in the year 5786.



Rabbi Doron Perez
is the Executive Chairman
of World Mizrachi.

One Who Overlooks Personal Slight

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

The *Gemara* states: “Rava said: Whoever forgoes his reckonings with others for injustices done to him, the heavenly court in turn forgoes punishment for all his sins, as it states: ‘He bears iniquity and passes over transgression’ (*Micha* 7:18). Whose sins does He bear? The sins of one who forgoes his reckonings with others for injustices committed against him” (*Rosh Hashanah* 17a).

Rashi explains: “One who overlooks personal slights’ – one who is not meticulous in measuring measure for measure against those who cause him distress, and abandons his strict standards and moves on, ‘his transgressions are overlooked’ – the attribute of justice is not meticulous with him, but rather abandons pursuing his sins and moves on.”

This is the principle of *middah keneged middah* – measure for measure. If we are willing to forgive and overlook the faults of those around us, even when they hurt or inconvenience us, then G-d does the same for us. But if we are harsh and exacting toward others, we invite the same treatment in return. The more we cultivate a spirit of forgiveness, the more that spirit surrounds us, both from above and from those around us.

Daily life is filled with small annoyances: someone cuts the line, takes our parking spot, slams a door just as we’re falling asleep. These moments are not just tests – they are opportunities. Each one is a gift, a chance to forgo resentment and earn divine compassion. As the sages teach: one who overlooks the faults of others finds that Heaven, too, overlooks his own.

The special power of one who overlooks personal slights appears in another teaching. “Those who are insulted but do not insult, who hear their disgrace but do not respond, about them the verse says: ‘But those who love Him are like the sun rising in its might’ (*Shoftim* 5:31).” (*Shabbat* 88b)

At first glance, the *Gemara* seems to praise those who aren’t bothered by insults. But

Rav Kook points out something deeper: the *Gemara* is not describing people who don’t feel insulted – it’s praising those who do feel the pain of being insulted, yet choose not to strike back.

“There are some moral teachings that weaken a person’s bold life force... but that is not the way of the Torah. The Torah’s path is that the soul should be strong, that our sense of dignity and the pain we feel when insulted should remain part of our full spiritual structure. This pain is appropriate for a human being created in the image of G-d – it reflects the nobility of the soul. But here lies the greatness: even with all the clarity and intensity of that pain – even though they are genuinely insulted – their moral sense and love for others is so strong that they refuse to respond with harm. They use the very force of the insult, the very sting they feel, to strengthen their self-restraint. They hold themselves back from causing pain, even to those who just caused them pain” (*Ein Ayah, Shabbat* 9:83).

Human nature is such that when someone is insulted, they feel the sting. This is actually a healthy trait – it reflects the fact that a person has self-worth. When others humiliate him or fail to recognize his value, it is natural to feel hurt. Therefore, the greatness of those who are “insulted but do not insult” is not that they never feel insulted, but that *even when* they are insulted – they choose not to respond in kind.

Often, a person who has been hurt or angered will lash out at the one who hurt them, hoping to ease their pain or to get revenge by inflicting even greater hurt in return. But the heroism of those who are insulted and do not insult lies precisely in this: they *do* feel the pain of the insult, and yet their love for others is so powerful that they refuse to hurt back. Because they know how deeply an insult wounds, they consciously choose not to inflict that pain on someone else. They may respond to the hurt, even explain to the offender

why their behavior was wrong – but they do so calmly, without striking back or causing humiliation. They speak with clarity, not cruelty.

We can learn a powerful lesson about yielding from a simple act we perform three times a day. At the end of the *Amidah* prayer, we take three steps backward. Why?

Rambam writes: “When one finishes the prayer, he bows and steps three steps backward... and they established that one should depart from prayer as one departs from before a king” (*Mishneh Torah, Tefillah* 5:10–11). In other words, stepping back is a sign of respect and reverence toward the King – toward G-d.

However, I once heard a deeper explanation: when a road becomes blocked and traffic is at a standstill, the only way to resolve the jam is for one or more drivers to reverse. Likewise, before we say “He makes peace” at the end of the *Amidah*, we step backward. Why? Because peace sometimes requires us to yield. It demands that we give others space, step aside, and allow room for everyone to move forward. Only after stepping back can we truly say: “He makes peace.”



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

is the Nasi of World Mizrahi.

He is the Founder and Chairman of Sulamot and La’Ofek, and serves as the Chief Rabbi of Gush Etzion, and Rosh Yeshivah of the Jerusalem College of Technology.



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Faith in Captivity

An Interview with Agam Berger

Twenty-year-old Agam Berger spent 482 days in Hamas captivity, yet never wavered in her faith. The IDF lookout soldier, kidnapped from the Nachal Oz base on October 7th, maintained her halachic observance even in the tunnels of Gaza – refusing to cook on Shabbat, keeping kosher despite severe hunger, and fasting on Yom Kippur. Her message upon release, “I chose the path of faith, and in the path of faith I returned,” has inspired Jews across the world. Rabbi Aron White spoke with Agam to learn how a small sefer found its way into the Hamas tunnels and became a source of strength during her captivity.



Agam, thank you so much for joining me for this interview. I understand there’s an incredible story about how a Torah booklet – “B’chayil U’veruach” – came into your possession while you were in captivity. We’re actually translating this booklet into English and publishing it around the world for Rosh Hashanah, and as soon as this idea came up, I remembered your amazing story with this booklet. Can you tell us about how the booklet first came to you?

We were being held in a tunnel – it was around January of 2024. I was with other hostages – Liri Albag, Emily Damari, Naama Levy, and Romi Gonen. We suddenly received a *siddur* along with this booklet, “*B’chayil U’veruach*,” and a newspaper. One of our captors brought them to us. He had received it from one of his superiors. Israeli soldiers had simply left these items in the field – they were probably distributed to the soldiers, and they might have had to leave quickly from that place. They brought the *siddur*, booklet and newspaper and asked what it was. When they realized it was in Hebrew and wasn’t military material they could use, they left it with us.

It was such a wave of Hebrew materials from home, and it was really exciting. The front cover of the booklet said it was a special edition of the booklet produced for *Milchemet Charvot Barzel*. Until this moment, we didn’t even know the name of the war – it was only when we saw the front cover of the booklet that we learned it was called *Milchemet Charvot Barzel* (the Iron Swords

War)! Even on such a basic level it was so meaningful to receive these materials.

Honestly, when you’re in a tunnel and bored with nothing to do, it was something to occupy our time. For me specifically, the booklet was fascinating because there’s a lot of depth in it – something I could connect with personally. It was also about the war, which interested me because you have all kinds of questions in your head in a situation like this: How do we approach warfare differently in Judaism? What about situations involving prisoners and captivity? When I opened the summary of the booklet, I realized it wasn’t the complete work, so I told myself I’d have to read the entire book when I returned home. I haven’t managed to do that yet, but I will! I kept it until the very end, until the last day we had this booklet with us. It gave me so much.

Beyond the fact that it interested me intellectually, I was struggling with a practical issue: I wasn’t eating the meat our captors brought us because it wasn’t kosher. It wasn’t real meat – it was canned meat, like canned sausage. We didn’t receive it very often, but sometimes they brought it, but I wouldn’t eat it as I knew it’s not kosher. I kept thinking, “I wish I had something that would tell me what to do. I can’t consult a rabbi. I know it’s *pikuach nefesh* (saving a life), but I still don’t feel like I have to do it.”

Around October-November of 2024, I was really getting weak and starting to get sick. It was getting worse. At that time, only Liri and I were together, and we talked about it. I said, “What

should I do? Should I start eating meat now?" I said, "I wish I had something that would give me guidance so I'd know what to do."

You didn't touch it for almost a whole year?

Yes, many times during that year they told me, "Just eat already! Why do you care? You're at war, it's permitted!" Each time I explained to them that while I could, I wasn't ready yet. I kept thinking I'd be coming home soon and could get stronger from healthy food at home. I told myself that when there was a deal and I knew I was leaving, then I'd stop eating it.

Liri and I went through this booklet together. Liri helped me collect various points while I read. Then she said to me, "Agam, listen, come look at what's written here." We read it together, and that's what helped me reach the decision to eat meat so I could get stronger. It was very difficult, and it came after a lot of deliberation. There was a chapter on *pikuach nefesh*.

Yes, I saw that it discusses the principle of "vachai bahem, and you shall live by them."

Exactly. The Torah says that despite the importance of the *mitzvot*, "you shall keep my laws and live by them" (*Vayikra* 18:5). There were many examples about not endangering oneself - regarding Shabbat and other *mitzvot* as well. So I said, "Okay, I understand." So I realized I was allowed to eat non-kosher meat. I told myself that it was OK for me to do it, until I would learn that there is a hostage deal; as soon I knew I would be returning home I didn't need to eat it anymore. The first bite that I took of the meat - I was crying.

About two months later, there was already a deal. After I found out, I only had two days before I came home. I had the opportunity to stop eating the meat before I returned home.

Since we're approaching Rosh Hashanah, can I ask if you remember anything from Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur last year?

Of course. We were in a house then, not in a tunnel where you're underground without light, not knowing what day it is.

How often were you moved between different locations?

It changed frequently. We moved around a lot. There was a period when only Liri Albag and I were together, and before every *chag*, we knew it was approaching. How do we figure out exactly what day it falls on? I had to know. The thought that Rosh Hashanah would just pass - that the evening of Rosh Hashanah would come and go without me even knowing - was really, really hard for me.

We tried two or three months beforehand to start calculating exactly what day it would be. We said, "Okay, last year, what day did it fall on?" Because with the Hebrew and Gregorian calendars - sometimes they align, sometimes they shift.

We tried to remember when Rosh Hashanah had fallen last year to figure it out. We tried all different methods to calculate when it would be. We even asked the terrorists about when the moon would be full, because they follow the lunar calendar too for their holidays. We tried our best - I don't know if we really got it exactly right. I think we either missed it by a day or got it right, but we still celebrated it on the day we thought it would actually fall.

We also asked for dates to eat, something special to mark the occasion. It came late, but we still got some special things. So it wasn't exactly Rosh Hashanah, but I knew I had done what I could.

For Yom Kippur, we counted the days from what we thought was Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur, and we actually fasted too.

Both of you fasted?

Yes, both Liri and I. She said that although she doesn't usually fast, she wanted to try and fast together with me. It was easier for both of us doing it together.

When it was possible to eat, we ate the pre-fast meal, and then we both fasted. We told them we wouldn't eat. In the morning when they said to eat, we said we wouldn't eat, and we'd only eat in the evening. There were two meals a day normally. When they brought us the food, they prepared it around seven, but we said we'd break the fast at eight because that would be twenty-five hours. So we just sat and looked at the food and waited.

Since the issue of humanitarian aid is in the headlines now, with discussions about aid reaching Gaza, did you witness how Hamas handled the aid that came in?

I can address that a bit. We saw that aid was coming in - it's not that it wasn't arriving. The trucks were waiting there. Hamas simply chooses what to do with the food. The superiors I was



with would make videos while sitting and eating whatever they wanted. There were periods with less food – I can't lie about that – but during periods when there was food, Hamas would take it for their superiors. They do whatever they want and deliberately choose to starve those who are imprisoned there.

And you received leftovers?

Yes. It's also known that they abuse the male hostages more. Wherever they can – why should they give them two pitas if they can give one and keep one more for themselves? Wherever they can abuse them, they do. And now only men are left among those who are alive, and that's intentional.

I want to ask about the story of braiding the other hostages' hair.

Yes, I can talk about that. During the first weeks, we were in tunnels with kids – an eight-year-old girl and a fifteen-year-old girl who had to take care of her little sister because they were without their parents. Their father had been murdered. We were also with the Goldstein family, who had small children too.

The braids were primarily to protect these kids' hair because we couldn't shower properly, so at least their hair would be neat and wouldn't get tangled or infested with lice. It was to protect their hair. Each girl thought about what she wanted, and I did what they requested. When the first deal happened, I knew when I braided their hair I was sending girls home, and this was the least I could do when they left, so they would feel good when they departed.

Wasn't it incredibly difficult to be braiding these girls' hair for their freedom when you were still in captivity?

I was genuinely happy. I knew there was a chance we – the soldiers – wouldn't be released any time soon. Thinking otherwise

would have been deceiving myself, because we also knew there were other categories of people who were relatively early priorities, and there would be several more stages before everyone left, and only then might they think about us. So it was truly gratifying to let them leave feeling good about themselves.

I'm sure you now know that when the other girls were released with their beautifully braided hair, people around the world were deeply moved by that image and what it represented.

It was really moving.

Of the hostages remaining in Gaza, were you held together with any of them?

No, everyone I was with in captivity has already been released. Most of them were released in earlier deals, and those who weren't – like Keith (Siegel), who was with us at the beginning – he was released just two days after me. So all the people I was directly held with have come home.

As we approach Rosh Hashanah, do you have a message for people around the world?

May all the hostages return to us by then – *amen, amen*. And if not, then please do everything you can to help, as if they were members of your own family.

Thank you for sharing your experiences with us. May we have only good news ahead.

Amen. ■

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Agam and Rabbi Aron White discussing the B'chayil U'veruach booklet.

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Rabbi Elchanan Nir
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Rachel Sharansky Danziger · Noa Lewis Sarit Zussman
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Hebrew: When the Spirit Blows Again
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Music by **Rachel Goldberg**
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Ditza Or (mother of captive **Avinatan**, may he return safely)
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War to Protect the People

Rabbi Chaim Drukman, zt"l

The value of saving a life (*pikuach nefesh*)

The Torah tells us that the last mission entrusted to *Moshe Rabbeinu* was **war**: “Take vengeance for the children of Israel against the Midianites; afterward you shall be gathered unto your people” (*Bamidbar* 31:2).

Our Sages (*Sifrei*, *Matot* 154) infer from the words “afterward you shall be gathered unto your people” that the only thing delaying Moshe’s death was Israel’s vengeance against Midian. “Afterward” – after battling the Midianites – and only then, would Moshe die. Moshe understood that promoting this war would in fact hasten the day of his own death! *Chazal* further deduce from the continuation of these verses that Moshe went to fulfill this mission with joy.

The final duty imposed upon *Moshe Rabbeinu*, the man of G-d, is going out to war, and he approached this task with joy and alacrity – even though he knew that this mission would bring him closer to death. From *Moshe Rabbeinu* we learn about the value of war, and through him we also encounter the lofty concept of the value of the army in Israel.

Pikuach nefesh, saving a life, is a fundamental and well-known concept. *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 328:2) states that it is a *mitzvah* to desecrate Shabbat on behalf of someone who is ill with a life-threatening disease. Moreover, one who hastens to desecrate Shabbat in order to save him is praiseworthy, and the one who delays – to inquire whether it is indeed permitted to desecrate Shabbat to save the patient – is a shedder of blood!

Mishnah Berurah (328:6) adds, based on the *Talmud Yerushalmi* (*Yoma* 8:5), that not only is one who asks whether one may desecrate Shabbat for the sake of *pikuach nefesh* acting improperly, but the rabbi who is asked is considered shameful. *Pikuach nefesh* is such a fundamental and basic value that its knowledge must be the common heritage of all, and if there is a Jew in the community for whom this matter is not clear and obvious, the responsibility for this lack of awareness rests on the rabbi’s shoulders, for it was his responsibility to explain the importance of *pikuach nefesh* to his community.

The duty to violate Shabbat applies even if it is **uncertain** that the actions will be life-saving. Moreover, this duty is not incumbent on one person alone – rather, **anyone** who can do this *mitzvah* should hasten to engage in it.

From this we see the importance of saving one life, one Jewish soul, as our Sages said (*Sanhedrin* 37a): “Whoever preserves one life in Israel, the Torah credits him as though he has preserved an entire world.”

If this is the case regarding one Jewish life, then certainly the value is doubled if one saves two Jewish lives, and it is multiplied many times if one saves many lives – dozens, hundreds, thousands, and so forth! And if the value of saving many Jewish lives is so great and lofty, then all the more so is saving *Klal Yisrael*, **the Jewish people as a whole**! Can we even measure the great virtue inherent in the *mitzvah* of participating in the salvation of *Klal Yisrael* from danger?!

The residents of Eretz Yisrael constitute Klal Yisrael

Rambam (*Sefer HaMitzvot*, Positive Commandment 153) rules that the *mitzvah* of *Kiddush Ha-Chodesh*, the declaration and sanctification of the new month, is contingent upon the Jews who live in *Eretz Yisrael*. To emphasize this point, he writes: “If we were to presume, hypothetically, that the Jews of *Eretz Yisrael* would disappear from *Eretz Yisrael*” – the reckoning of the calendar would be of no avail. Immediately after raising this hypothetical scenario of there being no Jews in *Eretz Yisrael*, he repudiates it: “Far be it from G-d to do such a thing! For He has promised that He would not completely eliminate every trace of the nation!”

Chatam Sofer (*Responsa*, *Yoreh De'ah* 234) infers from this “that if, G-d forbid, not a single Jew would remain in *Eretz Yisrael*, even if there are Jews living outside *Eretz Yisrael* — this would be considered ‘the annihilation of the nation,’ Heaven forbid!” If there is no Jewish residence in *Eretz Yisrael*, it is deemed as the elimination of the nation in its entirety! And since Hashem promised us that our nation will never be destroyed – it is consequently impossible that *Eretz Yisrael* could be completely devoid of Jews.

From here we learn that **the Jewish community of Eretz Yisrael is considered Klal Yisrael**. Of course, Jews living outside of *Eretz Yisrael* also belong to the Jewish people; however, the concept of “*Klal Yisrael*” applies only to those residing in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Therefore, when the security of the State of Israel is at risk, G-d forbid – it means that **Klal Yisrael** is in danger! Consequently, the Israel Defense Forces, which defends and protects the security of the State of Israel, in effect protects *Klal Yisrael*! The IDF engages, on an ongoing, daily basis, in the *mitzvah* of *pikuach nefesh* of *Klal Yisrael*. Can we express in words the great virtue of those engaged in this sacred *mitzvah*?!

Keeping Klal Yisrael safe

Shulchan Aruch (*Orach Chaim* 329:6) addresses the case of enemies besieging the towns of Israel on Shabbat – is it permitted for a Jew to go forth and fight them despite the attendant desecration of Shabbat?

This matter hinges on the objectives of the besieging gentiles: if their aim is merely to steal money, we do not desecrate Shabbat to fight them, because money is not as important as the holy Shabbat. However, if the gentiles’ goal is to harm Jews, one goes out to fight them despite the attendant desecration of Shabbat. If the besiegers have not indicated their motives, and it is not clear why they laid siege, we nevertheless desecrate Shabbat to battle them, as lives might be threatened.

Shulchan Aruch adds that if the city under siege is close to the frontier, even if the besiegers came only for hay and straw, we desecrate Shabbat to fight them. A frontier city is situated in

the borderlands between Jews and other nations. Any breach thereof entails great danger to the safety of the Jews. Thus, on behalf of such a city, we meet the gentiles in battle and desecrate Shabbat, even when it is known that the besiegers’ objective is merely robbery, and of items of little value, like straw and hay.

This ruling is based on the *Gemara* (*Eruvin* 45a). In his commentary there, Rashi explains why we desecrate Shabbat to defend a frontier city even when there is no risk to life: “We go out to [fight] them – lest they capture it, and from there it will be easy for them to conquer the land.”

Rema, in his glosses to *Shulchan Aruch*, adds: “even if [the besiegers] have not yet come, but intend to come.” In other words, if there is intelligence indicating **plans** to invade the land – even when the clear objective of the invaders is to steal trivial items – we must go out to meet them in battle, even if it entails desecrating Shabbat. And all this is due to the concern over possible future ramifications for the security of Israel!



This excerpt is from Rabbi Chaim Drukman zt”l’s *B’chayil U’veruach*, adapted and translated into English as *With Might and Spirit*. To see an extract of the book and to purchase the full online version please go to mizrachi.org/mightandspirit.





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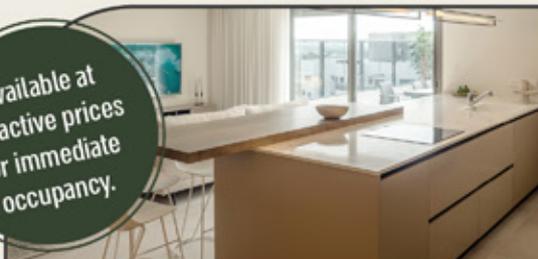
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AM YISRAEL'S HEROIC FAMILIES



During the almost two years of war, an unprecedented burden has fallen on reservists and their families. Hundreds of thousands of individuals are having to balance the regular obligations of family, work and finances with hundreds of days of military service. The Goldman family from Elazar are a remarkable example of what a milu'im family has experienced. For Aliza Goldman, originally from New York, her husband, son, adopted son, and son-in-law are all serving as reservists simultaneously, combining for well over 1,000 days of army service. In this powerful portrayal, adapted from a TV report from Keshet Channel 12, Aliza shares a glimpse of the life of Israel's heroic reservist families.

For the Goldman family in Elazar, Simchat Torah started the same as for everyone else, with a family *seudah* around the table. "On Simchat Torah, October 7th, we were sitting at this table, we happened to be all together, and from this table they got up and... went off to war."

Avishai, Aliza's husband, has served close to 400 days of reserve duty. Eitan, the oldest son, has served 326 days. Noah, a lone soldier adopted by the family, has served 360 days. Aliza's son-in-law is in an elite unit, and has served 265 days. The Goldmans' youngest daughter, Avital, is serving her regular army service. Overnight, the family went from a regular family to a family of reservists fighting for Israel.

"After the first months of the war, they started coming home – around Pesach – but then they were called back in the summer. Then there was the war with Lebanon, and then they were called back to Gaza again, then the north again – it has no end. One gets called up for 50 more days, the other reaches 200 days of *milu'im*, the other one comes home and then gets called up for another two months... There are so many of them that sometimes I don't even know where they are. Even when they tried to tell me, it was hard to keep track of each one. And maybe sometimes, I said, it's better that way."

Aliza is a medical researcher at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem, and is studying for

her PhD in bioethics at Bar-Ilan University. Right now she works mostly from home, to be with their youngest son. Since October 7, she set a new rule at home:

"Since the war started, when you come to my door, knock with a rhythm, a happy knock. Or call out: 'Aliza!' Don't just knock on my door." Despite the ever-present fears and stresses, Aliza focuses on putting everything in perspective. "I'm not a victim," she emphasizes. "There are families with killed or wounded loved ones, families of hostages who are suffering. A family doing reserve duty is a source of great pride." But after more than 600 days, it's not easy.

The reservists are trying to maintain what normalcy they can when they return home. Eitan is studying for his degree in physiotherapy, but he is trying to play catch-up after missing almost an entire year of studies. His wife Liat is self-employed, and despite all the challenges, they have become used to this new normal. Practically speaking, for a year and eight months they've been living separate lives.

"Going through an entire pregnancy, he wasn't there for most checkups," Liat reflected. "There was even one scan where they tell you if it's a boy or a girl. He was in Gaza. The doctor knew not to share that with me, because my husband isn't here. There were moments during the pregnancy when I said, 'That's it, I'm calling him, telling him to come home.' And I ended up calling a friend and crying to her.

"It's hard to explain to someone who hasn't been through it. What it means to go through 325 days of reserve duty, with every round sudden and unplanned. Everyone, family, friends, tries to help, but you can't really live with that uncertainty.

"When I saw there was a ceasefire with Iran, and on TV it said: 'Back to normal,' it made me laugh a little. It's not over for us, because we're living in a crazy 'normal' of 320 days of reserve duty."

"I didn't choose a career in the army," says Eitan, "I actually chose not to be in the army. I'm completely drained. I try to gather whatever strength I have left and somehow get through this again. But I'm already running on fumes."

For Eitan, a constant inspiration to keep pushing through and serving is that his father, Avishai, is also serving as a reservist. At 51, he is still doing everything that the other Golani soldiers are doing – patrols, night ambushes, even crossing into Lebanon when needed. "Dad's beating me," Eitan jokes, "he has done more days of *milu'im* than me at the moment."

"To be honest, I feel more aches than I used to," says Avishai. "When you sit down somewhere with a heavy pack, getting up isn't what it used to be. But I manage. It matters to me. First of all, our country needs us, our people need us. Without us, without the reserve soldiers, we won't survive here. It's a calling."

The manpower shortages of the IDF also mean that there are times when the tours of duty get extended unexpectedly. “In the middle of the deployment, they told us it was being extended: at least 30 to 40 days, and no estimated end date for now. That means I will reach roughly 420 days total, out of some 600 days of war. It’s insane. Eitan’s brigade was supposed to replace us after 60 days of deployment here in the north, but they were called up elsewhere about three to four weeks ago. So right now, there’s no one to replace us. We’re pretty stuck.

“The last time I got called up, it took me a few days before I told Aliza. Because how much more can you take? It’s just too much. If it’s planned, somehow you can manage, but all these unexpected call-ups... People plan things, vacations, or just errands you were supposed to take care of during those 60 days, you tell yourself, I’ll do it right after reserve duty, and now you can’t even do that? It’s just insane.”

Their daughter Avital remarked: “They called and told us their reserve duty was extended to 110 days. I didn’t even know what to say anymore. It’s madness.”

During these two years of war, the family continues on – a few months ago, the Goldmans made a wedding for their daughter, Avital. Aliza describes the emotions of trying to plan a wedding with most of the family at war. “When Eitan was in Gaza, my husband was in the north, and Noach was in the north, and Avital was about to get married, and I had to hold her together to support her, hoping her fiancé would be okay as he is fighting in an elite unit. There were moments that felt overwhelming, that I couldn’t breathe. It was hard to sleep. The quiet here at night and the thoughts running through our heads... we felt like the walls were closing in on us, suffocating us. I was dizzy.” Since their wedding, Avital’s husband has been



serving for most of the 10 weeks since – their honeymoon has been delayed.

The government has been increasing the benefits for reservists, but for Aliza, it’s a very partial solution. “I saw on the news that the government is giving subsidized massages and vacations to reservists, and I just laughed. You need to be home to use the benefits. What am I supposed to do if my husband is always on duty? When are we going to use all these massages and hotel stays? When will we go to a hotel? Do you know what happens when he comes back? I don’t need these benefits, really. What I really think is they should be home. No matter what benefits you give, people want to go back to their lives, there is a limit.”

Avishai runs a *sefarim* distribution business in Yerushalayim, and during his limited time not on reserve duty, has to keep the business running. “When I come back from reserve duty, I don’t go home. Even after a night spent out in the field. I have no choice, I go straight to work, and stay there until late. The business has to keep running, there’s no choice.”

The Goldmans are among an ever smaller group of Israelis who are bearing the burden of this war.

“At the beginning of the war, 300,000 reservists mobilized without being asked. Where are they now?” asks Aliza, “Why is my family on day 400? Where is everyone? And where are our brothers who don’t serve, the ultra-Orthodox? You need to come and serve, to help your brothers in the field – where are you? That’s the message I want to send. Every extra person means one more day at home. It’s that simple.”

“We are the yes-men of the country who, when the government says we are needed, will always turn up, no matter how exhausted,” says Eitan. “Even when the war ends, we’ll still need a large force stationed at the borders. But, I don’t know how we go on like this. I don’t know how I can go on like this. Something has to change. This can’t go on.”

“I don’t know where they’ll find all that manpower. And the government needs to understand that reservists are not an unlimited resource. Most of the guys doing ongoing duty are totally burned out. And thinking they can call us again and again and again and we’ll keep coming and smiling – it can’t go on like this. They have to divide the burden more fairly and logically,” says Avishai.

“What about next year? What about next year?,” says Aliza. “You called them, and they came. But tell them next year won’t be the same. Tell them you have a plan. A real plan, not massages. We have no choice but to change things.”

The Goldmans are among the heroes of Israel, who have put everything aside for the needs of *Am Yisrael*. As we celebrate them, the message is also clear. It is not fair for *Am Yisrael* to continue to expect so much from the Goldmans, rather than the burden being divided more equally. Something is going to have to change. ■



The Sound of Silence – Seeking Hashem's Unspoken Will

Rabbi Reuven Taragin

The centrality of the Akeidah

The *Akeidah* – Avraham's willingness to sacrifice his beloved son Yitzchak – was the climax of his ten Divine tests and the most powerful expression of religious commitment (*Rashi, Avot 5:3*). Surprisingly, only one *mitzvah* commemorates this event: the blowing of the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah. *Chazal* explain that the sound of the *shofar* serves as a reminder of Avraham's unwavering faith and our alignment with it (*Rosh Hashanah 16a*). We therefore use the horn of a ram, the animal Avraham sacrificed after being instructed to spare Yitzchak. It is a profound symbol of Divine guidance and our readiness to follow it.

Although the *Akeidah* may not have taken place on Rosh Hashanah itself, we commemorate it on that day because Rosh Hashanah is when we – and Hashem – reflect on our spiritual identity and commitment. The essence of Rosh Hashanah is *zikaron* (remembrance),¹ but its focus is *Malchuyot* (G-d's Kingship). The way we merit Hashem's favorable "remembrance" is by reaffirming and sharpening our commitment to Him – a resolute *kabbalat ol malchut Shamayim* (acceptance of the yoke of Heaven). Our identification with Avraham's willingness to sacrifice Yitzchak expresses this commitment clearly and decisively (*Sefer HaChinuch 331*).

The significance of the ram

Looking more closely, it is striking that we use a ram's horn to commemorate the *Akeidah*. Instead of choosing an object that would recall Avraham's readiness to sacrifice Yitzchak, we focus on the ram he offered after being told not to sacrifice his son. Why emphasize the less dramatic sacrifice of the ram rather than Avraham's heart-wrenching willingness to give up Yitzchak? Wouldn't his readiness to obey Hashem's original command more powerfully express his acceptance of G-d's authority?

The *parasha* itself underscores the importance of the ram. Two crucial postscripts to the *Akeidah* – Avraham's naming of the place "*Hashem Yir'eh*" ("Hashem has shown/been shown") and his receiving of the heavenly blessings – occur only after

he sacrifices the ram (*Bereishit 22:14–18*). Why was Avraham's willingness to sacrifice Yitzchak not enough to merit these blessings? What did his sacrifice of the ram add?

Going beyond the call of duty

The answer lies in the voluntary nature of Avraham's act. The sacrifice of Yitzchak was a direct fulfillment of Hashem's explicit command – a testament to Avraham's obedience. In contrast, the offering of the ram was voluntary, a demonstration of Avraham's initiative and eagerness to serve. After acknowledging Avraham's readiness to sacrifice Yitzchak and commanding him to stop, Hashem was silent. He gave no instruction about offering the ram. Avraham acted on his own (*Bereishit 22:13*).

The Torah emphasizes that Avraham "lifted his eyes" and saw the ram. He actively searched for a way to continue serving Hashem even after being relieved of his duty.² This detail – that the ram was "caught in the thicket" – is not incidental. *Chazal* understand it as a sign that the ram had been placed there by Hashem, prepared since the six days of Creation for this very purpose. Hashem wanted Avraham to follow up his willingness to sacrifice Yitzchak with the initiative to offer something in Yitzchak's stead.

Interestingly, the Torah tells us that Avraham saw the ram caught in the thicket. Why are we told this detail?

Chazal understand this as an indication that the ram was placed there by Hashem for Avraham to find.³ In fact, *Chazal* include the ram as one of the objects created during the six days of Creation for this purpose (*Avot 5:6*). Hashem wanted Avraham to follow up on his willingness to sacrifice Yitzchak with his initiative to sacrifice something in Yitzchak's place.

Avraham saw the ram this way, as well. This is how many commentators explain why he named the location "*Hashem Yir'eh*" – to commemorate Hashem having shown him the ram to sacrifice.⁴

The sound of silence

The second stage of the *Akeidah* – Avraham's sacrifice of the ram – teaches us a critical lesson. Hashem guides us not only through His spoken word – the Torah and *halacha* – but also through the events and circumstances of our lives. He expects us to serve Him not only by obeying His explicit commands, but also by actively seeking and seizing the additional opportunities He places before us.

This is what the *mitzvah* of the *shofar* commemorates each Rosh Hashanah. It reminds us that complete *kabbalat ol malchut Shamayim* requires more than obeying Hashem's stated commandments. It calls us to discern and fulfill His unspoken will as well.

May our commemoration of the *Akeidah* inspire us to "remember" how to live as true servants of Hashem, and may Hashem, in turn, "remember" us for life, health, peace, and success in the coming year.

1. This is the term the Torah uses to describe Rosh Hashanah (*Vayikra 23:24*).
2. This parallels the beginning of the *parasha*, where, despite the intense heat, Avraham searched for guests to host. Note the Torah's usage of the similar phrase – "*Vayisa einav*" (*Bereishit 18:2*).
3. *Ramban* and *Ohr HaChayim 22:13*. See also *Rashi* et al.
4. *Midrash Tanchuma, Vayeira 23* and *Ibn Ezra* and *Sefero to Bereishit 22:14*. One can see Avraham's words here as a continuation of his answer to Yitzchak (22:8).



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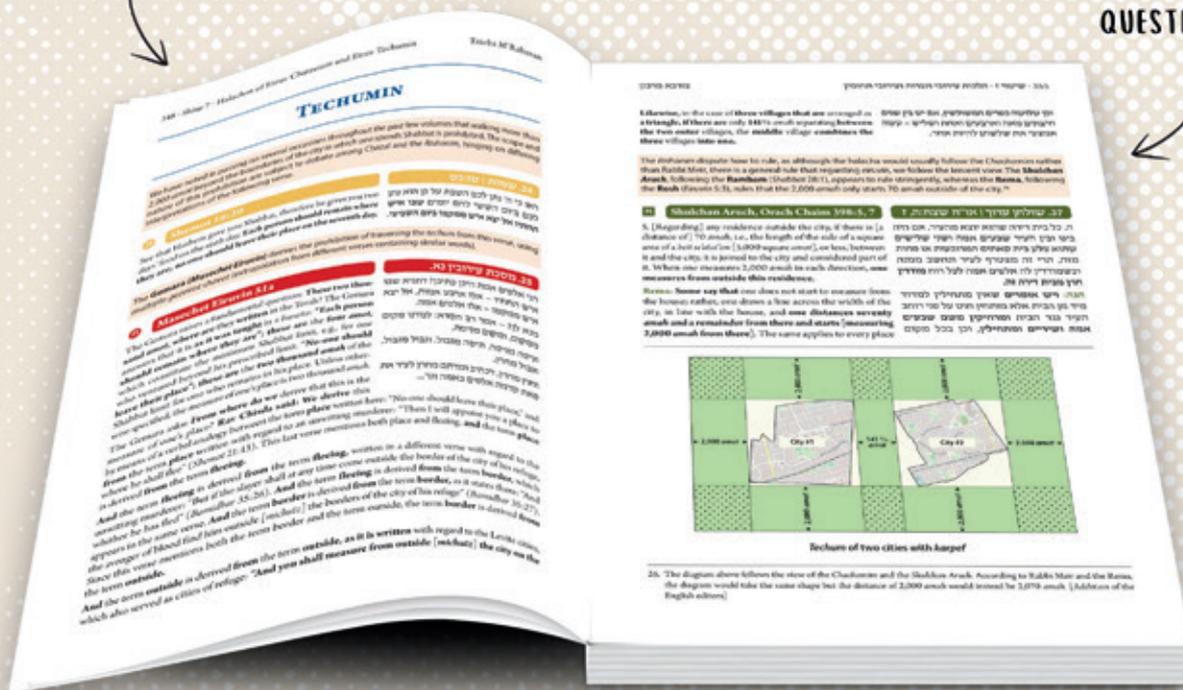
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Shema and the Shofar

The Coronation of Hashem in the Shadow of Crisis

Rabbanit Shani Taragin

The *Mussaf* of Rosh Hashanah is structured around three majestic pillars: *Malchuyot*, *Zichronot*, and *Shofarot*. The *Mishnah* (Rosh Hashanah 32a) records a dispute regarding the placement of *Malchuyot* and whether its verses should be accompanied by the *shofar* blast. Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri maintains that *Malchuyot* is recited within *Kedushat Hashem* (the sanctification of Hashem's name) without *shofar* blasts; Rabbi Akiva insists that *Malchuyot* must be conjoined with *Kedushat HaYom* (the sanctification of the day) accompanied by *shofar* blowing.

On the surface, this may seem a technical disagreement – a question of liturgical arrangement. Yet, as the *Gemara* and careful analysis reveal, the difference is profound. It reflects two fundamentally distinct conceptions of what Rosh Hashanah is at its core.

For Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri, Hashem's Kingship is a constant truth connected to His name, His essence, not contingent upon our coronation. The holiness of Rosh Hashanah stands on its own; it is a day set apart to recognize and affirm that Hashem is King, much as we might declare *HaMelech HaKadosh* in our *Amidah*. The day's sanctity is descriptive – a recognition of an eternal reality.

Rabbi Akiva, however, views Rosh Hashanah not only as a day of recognition, but as the day of Divine coronation. It is not enough to acknowledge Hashem's reign – we must actively proclaim and enthrone Him. *Malchuyot* is the essence of the day. For Rabbi Akiva, the *shofar* must accompany the coronation, for as we recite in *Tehillim* 47, it is the coronation trumpet! To crown the King without its resounding call would be unthinkable.

The *Gemara* sharpens this point: Rabbi Akiva's astonishment with Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri's position is not merely at omitting the *shofar*, but at potentially only reciting nine verses, omitting the tenth verse of *Malchuyot* – “*Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad*.” For Rabbi Akiva, whose life and death were defined by *kabbalat ol*

malchut Shamayim — accepting the yoke of Heaven's Kingship through reciting *Shema* – how could one crown Hashem without the ultimate declaration of His Oneness?

The *Shema* is more than a statement of theology; it is the act of coronation itself. It demands not only belief but loyalty, love, and readiness for sacrifice – as Rabbi Akiva demonstrated during times of crisis, from the Hadrianic decrees to his final moments, prolonging the word *Echad* as his soul left him (*Berachot* 61b).

This year, the echoes of *Shema Yisrael* have taken on new and poignant resonance. The countless cries of soldiers entering Gaza, braving danger to protect the nation, ring out with this sacred declaration. Victims of the October 7 attacks, in their last moments, breathed these words as their final testament of faith. Hostages, enduring unimaginable captivity, whispered *Shema Yisrael* as a lifeline to hope and connection with Hashem. Parents huddled in bomb shelters with their children, trembling but resolute, affirm the eternal truth of Hashem's unity amidst chaos.

Across the world, the cry of *Shema Yisrael* intertwines with the fervent chorus of *Am Yisrael Chai* – the people of Israel live, resilient and steadfast. These cries are not only expressions of faith but a collective coronation, a powerful acceptance of Hashem's kingship under the most challenging circumstances.

Since October 7, the Jewish world has experienced a seismic shift. Across Israel and the Diaspora, there has been a noticeable rise in acts of unity, prayer, *mitzvah* observance, and open declarations of faith. In countless conversations, people speak more readily about Hashem, about miracles, and about the need for spiritual strengthening. In the crucible of crisis, many have rediscovered what Rabbi Akiva lived – that the essence of Jewish identity is bound up with crowning Hashem as King.

These stirrings are not incidental; they are the footsteps of redemption. Zechariah's vision – “On that day Hashem will be One and His Name One” (14:9) – does not

begin in some distant Messianic future. It begins the moment we, as a people, make Hashem One in our lives. National coronation precedes universal coronation.

Rabbi Akiva's message to us this year is clear:

Do not let Rosh Hashanah be merely a day of recognition. Make it a day of enthronement. Do not be content to acknowledge Hashem's Kingship; declare it, proclaim it, and seal it with the *shofar* and the *Shema*.

When we say *Shema Yisrael*, we are not reciting a familiar verse; we are joining the eternal coronation ceremony. We are pledging loyalty to the King not only in times of peace but in times of trial. And when the *shofar* sounds, we are not merely recalling our covenant at Sinai – we are heralding the day when Zechariah's prophecy will be fulfilled. Each blast is a note in the anthem of Hashem's Kingship over the world. If we truly make Hashem One in our hearts and in our nation, then the day will come – and perhaps sooner than we dare to dream – when the whole world will echo our declaration: *Hashem Echad*.



Rabbanit Shani Taragin

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Kol Nidrei: The Victory of Divine Forgiveness

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ל"צ

Kol Nidrei, the prayer said at the beginning of Yom Kippur, is an enigma wrapped in a mystery, perhaps the strangest text ever to capture the religious imagination. First, it is not a prayer at all. It is not even a confession. It is a dry legal formula for the annulment of vows. It is written in Aramaic. It does not mention G-d. It is not part of the service. It does not require a synagogue. And it was disapproved of, or at least questioned, by generations of *halachic* authorities.

The first time we hear of *Kol Nidrei*, in the eighth century, it is already being opposed by Rav Natronai Gaon, the first of many sages throughout the centuries who found it problematic. In his view, one cannot annul the vows of an entire congregation this way. Even if one could, one should not, since it may lead people to treat vows lightly. Besides which, there has already been an annulment of vows ten days earlier, on the morning before Rosh Hashanah. This is mentioned explicitly in the *Gemara* (*Nedarim* 23b). There is no mention of an annulment on Yom Kippur.

Rabbeinu Tam, Rashi's grandson, was particularly insistent in arguing that the kind of annulment *Kol Nidrei* represents cannot be retroactive. It cannot apply to vows already taken. It can only be a pre-emptive qualification of vows in the future. Accordingly he insisted on changing its wording, so that *Kol Nidrei* refers not to vows from last year to this, but from this year to next.

However, perhaps because of this, *Kol Nidrei* created hostility on the part of non-Jews, who said it showed that Jews did not feel bound to honor their promises since they vitiated them on the holiest night of the year. In vain it was repeatedly emphasised that *Kol Nidrei* applies only to vows between us and G-d, not those between us and our fellow humans. Throughout the Middle Ages, and in some places until the eighteenth century, in lawsuits with non-Jews, Jews were forced to take a special oath, *More Judaica*, because of this concern.

So there were communal and *halachic* reasons not to say *Kol Nidrei*, yet it survived all the doubts and misgivings. It remains the quintessential expression of the awe and solemnity of the day. Its undiminished power defies all obvious explanations. Somehow it seems to point to something larger than itself, whether in Jewish history or the inner heartbeat of the Jewish soul.

Several historians have argued that it acquired its pathos from the phenomenon of forced conversions, whether to Christianity or Islam, that occurred in several places in the Middle Ages,

most notably Spain and Portugal in the fourteenth and fifteenth century. Jews would be offered the choice: convert or suffer persecution. Sometimes it was: convert or be expelled. At times it was even: convert or die. Some Jews did convert. They were known in Hebrew as *anusim* (people who acted under coercion). In Spanish they were known as *conversos*, or contemptuously as *marranos* (swine).

Many of them remained Jews in secret, and once a year on the night of Yom Kippur they would make their way in secret to the synagogue to seek release from the vows they had taken to adopt to another faith, on the compelling grounds that they had no other choice. For them, coming to the synagogue was like *coming home*, the root meaning of *teshuva*.

There are obvious problems with this hypothesis. Firstly, *Kol Nidrei* was in existence several centuries before the era of forced conversions. So historian Joseph S. Bloch suggested that *Kol Nidrei* may have originated in the much earlier Christian persecution of Jews in Visigoth Spain, when in 613 Sisebur issued a decree that all Jews should either convert or be expelled, anticipating the Spanish expulsion of 1492. Even so, it is unlikely that *conversos* would have taken the risk of being discovered practicing Judaism. Had they done so during the centuries in which the Inquisition was in force they would have risked torture, trial and death. Moreover, the text of *Kol Nidrei* makes no reference, however oblique, to conversion, return, identity, or atonement. It is simply an annulment of vows.

So the theories as they stand do not satisfy.

However it may be that *Kol Nidrei* has a different significance altogether, one that has its origin in a remarkable rabbinic interpretation of *Parashat Ki Tisa*. The connection between it and Yom Kippur is this: less than six weeks after the great revelation at Mount Sinai, the Israelites committed what seemed to be the unforgivable sin of making a Golden Calf. Moshe prayed repeatedly for forgiveness on their behalf and eventually secured it, descending from Mount Sinai on the Tenth of Tishrei with a new set of tablets to replace those he had smashed in anger at their sin. The tenth of Tishrei subsequently became Yom Kippur, the day of atonement, in memory of that moment when the Israelites saw Moshe with the new tablets and knew they had been forgiven.

Moshe's prayers, as recorded in the Torah, are daring. But the *Midrash* makes them more audacious still. The text introducing Moshe's prayer begins with the Hebrew words, *Vayechal Moshe* (*Shemot* 32:11). Normally these are translated as "Moshe besought, implored, entreated, pleaded, or attempted to pacify" G-d. However the same verb is used in the context of annulling or breaking a vow (*Bamidbar* 30:3). On this basis the Sages advanced a truly remarkable interpretation:

"[*Vayechal Moshe* means] 'Moshe absolved G-d of His vow.' When the Israelites made the Golden Calf, Moshe sought to persuade G-d to forgive them, but G-d said, 'I have already taken an oath that *Whoever sacrifices to any G-d other than the L-rd must be punished* (*Shemot* 22:19). I cannot retract what I have said.' Moshe replied, 'L-rd of the universe, You have given me the power to annul oaths, for You taught me that one who takes an oath cannot break their word but a scholar can absolve them. I hereby absolve You of Your vow'" (abridged from *Shemot Rabbah* 43:4).

According to the Sages, the original act of Divine forgiveness on which Yom Kippur is based came about through the annulment of a vow, when Moshe annulled the vow of G-d. The Sages understood the verse, "Then the L-rd *relented* from the evil He had spoken of doing to His people" (*Shemot* 32:14) to mean that G-d expressed regret for the vow He had taken - a precondition for a vow to be annulled.

Why would G-d regret His determination to punish the people for their sin? On this, another *Midrash* offers an equally radical answer. The opening word of *Tehillim* 61 is *la-menatzeach*. When this word appears in *Tehillim* it usually means, "To the conductor, or choirmaster." However the Sages interpreted it to mean, "To the Victor," meaning G-d, and added this stunning commentary:

"*To the Victor who sought to be defeated,*' as it is said (*Yishayahu* 57:16), 'I will not accuse them forever, nor will I always be angry, for then they would faint away because of Me - the very people I have created.' Do not read it thus, but, 'I will accuse in order to be defeated.' How so? Thus said the Holy One, blessed be He, 'When I win, I lose, and when I lose I gain. I defeated the generation of the Flood, but did I not lose thereby, for I destroyed My own creation, as it says (*Bereishit* 7:23), "Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out." The same happened with the generation of the Tower of Babel and the people of Sodom. But in the days of Moshe who defeated Me (by persuading Me to

forgive the Israelites whom I had sworn to destroy), I gained for I did not destroy Israel'" (*Pesikta Rabbati* 9).

G-d wants His forgiveness to override His justice, because strict justice hurts humanity, and humanity is G-d's creation and carries His image. That is why He regretted His vow and allowed Moshe to annul it. That is why *Kol Nidrei* has the power it has. For it recalls the Israelites' worst sin, the Golden Calf, and their forgiveness, completed when Moshe descended the mountain with the new tablets on the tenth of Tishrei, the anniversary of which is Yom Kippur. The forgiveness was the result of Moshe's daring prayer, understood by the Sages as an act of annulment of vows. Hence *Kol Nidrei*, a formula for the annulment of vows.

The power of *Kol Nidrei* has less to do with forced conversions than with a recollection of the moment when Moshe stood in prayer before G-d and achieved forgiveness for the people: the first time the whole people was forgiven despite the gravity of their sin. During *Musaf* on Yom Kippur we describe in detail the second Yom Kippur: the service of the High Priest, Aharon, as described in *Vayikra* 16. But in *Kol Nidrei* we recall the first Yom Kippur when Moshe annulled the Almighty's vow, letting His compassion override His justice, the basis of all Divine forgiveness.

I believe we must always strive to fulfil our promises. If we fail to keep our word, eventually we lose our freedom. But given the choice between justice and forgiveness, choose forgiveness. When we forgive and are worthy of being forgiven, we are liberated from a past we regret, to build a better future.



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We Can Rise Above

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

We know from both *Mishnayot* and from the *piyutim* that we recite on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur that this period of the year is when Hashem judges the world. After the Ramban succeeded in a debate with a Jewish apostate, he realized he had to flee Spain as his life was now in grave danger. He fled to *Eretz Yisrael* and gave a very long *derasha* on Rosh Hashanah covering all of the topics of the *yom tov*. He addresses a fundamental question in that *derasha*: how did Chazal know the *Aseret Yemei Teshuva* are days of judgment, since this concept never appears in *Tanach*?

Rambam quotes *Midrashim* which say that *Adam HaRishon* was created on the sixth day of creation, instructed not to eat from the tree of knowledge, violated the instruction, and was judged and punished, all on the same day – and was chased out of *Gan Eden*. At that time, Hashem told *Adam HaRishon* that just as He judged him on that day, so too, in all the future generations, all of his descendants will be judged on that day, Rosh Hashanah. The Ramban concludes that this tradition did not originate with *Moshe Rabbeinu* at *Har Sinai*, but rather with *Adam HaRishon*.

The Torah tells us that Adam was created *b'tzelem Elokim*, in G-d's image. The *Meshech Chochma* explains that having a *tzelem Elokim* implies that each of us has free will. Many psychologists do not believe

in free will, but it is one of the most important principles of Judaism.

Every morning we say to G-d that “the soul that You implanted in my body was given to me in a pure state.” We do not believe that because of “original sin” all human beings' souls are tainted. We are born with a pure soul and we only taint it if and when we sin. The commentators wonder what the significance was of recording the story of the tree of knowledge in the Torah if it is not relevant to us. They explain that the Torah recorded this incident to teach us how a typical human being might fall into the trap of sin.

In his commentary on the first chapter in *Chullin*, the Ramban quotes a fascinating *Midrash*. The prohibition against eating from the tree of knowledge was only a *hora'at sha'ah*, a temporary prohibition. On that Friday morning, *Adam HaRishon* was told that he would be permitted to eat those fruits on Friday night; it was only prohibited to him for a few hours! The *Midrash* comments that we ought to dig up *Adam HaRishon* from his grave, remove the sand from his eyes, and show him how the Jewish people always exercise self-control. If a married woman has not gone to the *mikvah*, her husband knows that he has to wait a week or two. When we slaughter an animal, we do not eat from the meat right away, but rather wait until we check the lungs to see if it is *treif*. When we plant a tree, we know that for the first three years we may not eat any of the fruit because of the *mitzvah* of *orlah*. The Jewish people have learned the lesson of self-control.

The Torah describes the ten commandments as being *charut* – engraved – on the tablets. The *Mishnah* in *Pirkei Avot* comments that the verse is implying that real *cheirut*, real freedom, can only be found by those who learn Torah and live a life of Torah. Many people have caused themselves to lose part of their free will. They are enslaved by their *yetzer hara* and have not at all trained themselves in self-control. By giving the Torah to the

Jewish people, Hashem gave us the ability to free ourselves from this enslavement and be truly free people who exercise their free will.

“Fortunate are you, O land, whose king is a free man [*ben chorim*], and your princes eat at the proper time, in might and not in drinking” (*Kohelet* 10:17). The *Zohar* explains that the verse is praising *Eretz Yisrael*, whose official King is Hashem, the One who gives freedom to human beings. He is the one who enables human beings to train themselves in self-control and to not be enslaved by their *yetzer hara*, and thereby be able to exercise their free will in a more complete fashion.

During this season of the year, Hashem makes Himself more readily accessible than all year long. The prophet Yishayahu encourages us to search out Hashem specifically during the *Aseret Yemei Teshuva*. May we all seize that opportunity before the holy day to come closer to Hashem Who created the entire universe from nothing, and by coming closer to Him we will strengthen our free will to make reasonable and balanced decisions in life by exercising our self-control.

May we all have a *g'mar chatima tova*.



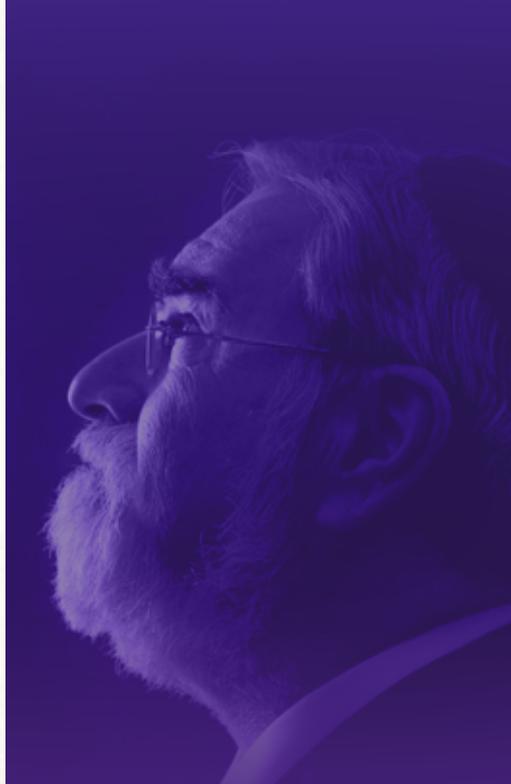
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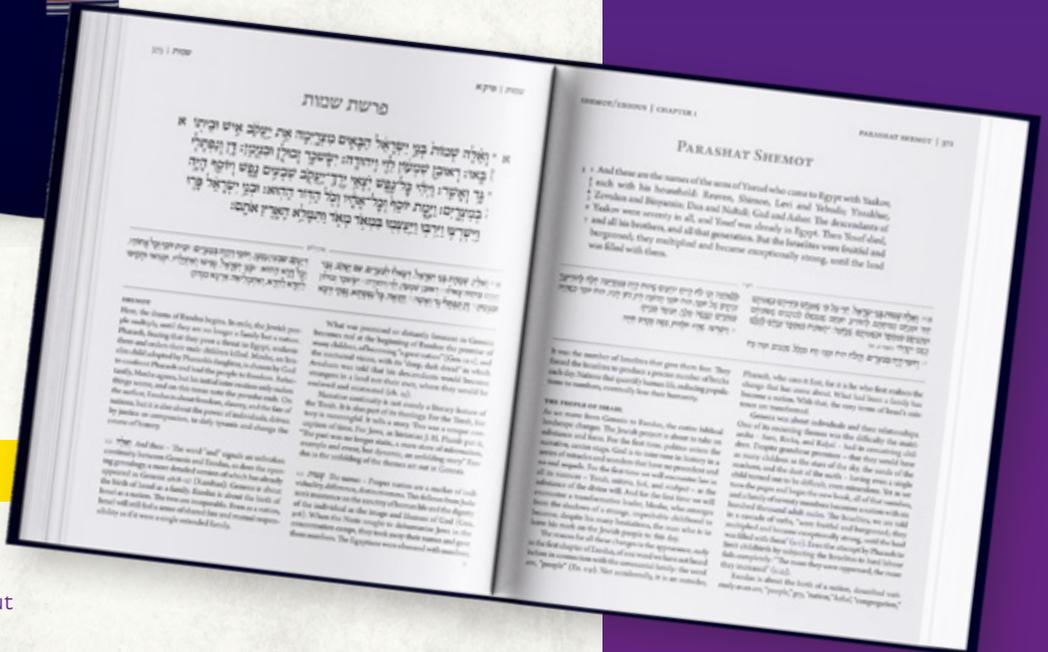


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A Post-October 7th Rosh Hashanah Machzor

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

The words of *tefillah* are timeless – rooted in *Tanach*, shaped by *Chazal*, and carrying our *mesorah* through the generations. But the emotions behind them shift with history's turns. October 7th reshaped Jewish identity, peoplehood, and our bond with the Land. Over the past two years, we have not only carried the weight of that day's sorrow but also witnessed extraordinary courage, unity, and achievements that have renewed our spirit.

This Rosh Hashanah, our prayers rise from the sorrow of that day and the strength forged in the struggle that followed. Here are eight passages from the Rosh Hashanah *tefillah* that take on new depth in its aftermath.

1. Hester panim

The quintessential verse of Rosh Hashanah: “תקעו בחדש שופר בכסה” (Tehillim 81:4) literally translates as “Blow the *shofar* at the new moon, on the concealed day of our festival.” *Chazal* associate the word *keseh* with *kisu* – something hidden. Rosh Hashanah is, in many ways, a concealed *chag*. The Rosh Chodesh elements are muted, and even G-d's divine presence – so central to *Yom HaDin* – remains hidden from most of humanity. By being judged, each person unwittingly submits to divine authority, yet remains unaware. On Rosh Hashanah, we strive to pierce that concealment – to unveil hidden truths and illuminate the shrouded presence of Hashem.

Unfortunately, on October 7th, His presence was profoundly obscured. Since then, we have experienced a more tempered period of divine concealment, punctuated by moments of great miracles. Yet the shadow of concealment still lingers. Rosh Hashanah is a day to unveil Hashem's hidden authority, and this year our yearning for the revelation of G-d's presence feels even more urgent. After two years marked by “*keseh*” (hiddenness) – of incomprehensibility – we long for *giluy* (revelation):

“הופע בהדר גאון עזר על כל יושגי תבל ארצה”
“Appear in the splendor of Your mighty glory
upon all the inhabitants of Your world.”

2. Restore our honor

My Rebbe, Rav Amital, recounted *davening* on Rosh Hashanah during the Holocaust in a charred cellar. Few had *machzorim*, and *tefillot* were recited by heart in cloaked darkness. When they reached the *tefillah* of “וגבון תן כבוד ה' לעמך” And so, grant honor, Hashem, to Your people,” some began to laugh and cry at what seemed like a preposterous dream. Our people were hunted like animals, murdered in cold blood. What possible honor could be granted to such a crushed and broken nation?

The survivors could not imagine that, over the next eighty years, the honor of our people would steadily rise, transforming despair into resilience and honor.

And yet, here we stand once again – mocked, scorned, and accused of baseless, malevolent crimes. Once more, our glory has been tarnished. We plead with Hashem to restore honor to His people and bring hope to all who seek Him.

3. Banish evil

In the section of Rosh Hashanah *tefillah* known as “ויבנו צדיקים,” we visualize the righteous people celebrating Hashem, while fervently praying for the eradication of evil from our world.

“וְכָל הָרָשָׁעָה כְּלָה כְּעָשָׁן תִּכְלֶה כִּי תַעֲבִיר מִמִּשְׁלַת זָדוֹן מִן הָאָרֶץ”
“And may all wickedness vanish like smoke, when You
remove the dominion of arrogance from the earth.”

In the past, we prayed to Hashem to remove forces of evil which we imagined as poised to attack our people and to threaten humanity. Currently, those forces of death and murder are unleashing their anger and violence upon us, and, of course, against all of humanity. They attack the Jews, but they murder humanity.

Today, the wicked governments and rulers mentioned in our prayers are clearly identifiable. *Baruch Hashem*, we have already witnessed the beginning of their downfall, as armies and nations bent on destroying G-d's people have been removed from this earth. With Hashem's help, we have begun this work, but we implore Him to complete it.

This *tefillah* calls not only for the removal of tyrannical governments (*memshelet zaton*) but also for the eradication of pervasive evil (*rish'ah*) that sabotages humanity. We have witnessed this evil rise not just in governments but among opportunists who exploit this conflict to unleash antisemitic hatred against us. We beseech Hashem to eliminate both corrupt regimes and the insidious evil that has distorted truth and perverted morality.

4. Instant memory

When recalling the covenant of Yitzchak, the Torah doesn't employ the term *zechirah* (remembrance) as it does for Avraham and Ya'akov.

“וְיִזְכְּרֵנִי אֶת בְּרִיתִי יַעֲקֹב וְאֶת בְּרִיתִי יִצְחָק וְאֶת בְּרִיתִי אַבְרָהָם אֲזָכֹר”
“And I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and
also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant
with Abraham I will remember” (*Vayikra* 26:42).

Chazal explain that since Yitzchak was prepared to be sacrificed, his ashes are “perpetually assembled” upon the altar of *Har HaMoriah*. They are so immediate and vivid that they require no special “act” of remembrance. It is as if Hashem looks directly below and instantly recalls Yitzchak’s sacrifice and courage.

If Hashem remembers the bravery of a single soul who was nearly sacrificed, and responds to his virtual *akeidah* ashes, how much more should He remember the countless lives tragically lost in the flames of that dark day, and the millions of His people denied dignified burial in Europe’s killing fields? How can a 21st-century Jew recite this verse without trembling, without turning to Hashem to remember our sacrifice? As history unfolds, so do our *tefillot* – the words remain unchanged, but their meanings grow richer, deepened by each generation’s experience.

5. Our sons, His son

At a deeply passionate moment in the *Musaf* prayer, we remind Hashem that we are not merely His subjects, but are also His beloved child:

“הֲבֵן יִקָּר לי אֶפְרַיִם אִם יֶלֶד שְׂעֻשׁוּעִים”
“Is Ephraim a dear son to Me? Is he a child of delight?” (*Yirmiyahu* 31:19)

We all recognize the depth and intensity of the love we feel toward our children, and by citing this verse we yearn for Hashem to see us through that same lens of parental affection. Tragically, during this war, we have lost too many sons and daughters. We stood alongside grieving families, hearing the heartbreaking cries of parents whose loss cannot be measured.

On Rosh Hashanah, recall this love and channel it: the love we felt toward our children and our students who protected us and defended us with their lives. Ask Hashem to mirror that love, to look upon His children as we do ours, with infinite compassion and affection.

6. Inner sheep

The *Mishnah* in *Rosh Hashanah* portrays all of Hashem’s subjects appearing before Him as “*b’nei maron*.” One interpretation of the *Gemara* for *b’nei maron* – the one adopted by *U’netaneh Tokef* – is that we appear before Him like sheep. Sheep are utterly helpless, at the mercy of their shepherd, unable to turn right or left, and defenseless.

This war has deepened our gratitude for the privilege of having a Jewish army to protect us. While October 7th was not the first pogrom in our history, it marked the first pogrom followed by a war. Yet, even amidst our courageous efforts to defend our land and people, we often contend with a disheartening sense of helplessness, acutely aware of our reliance on our Shepherd to protect and guide us through this darkness. Tap into that inner vulnerability. This year we know too well how to feel helpless as a sheep.

7. Release them

The first verse of *Zichronot* doesn’t take us back to any grand moment of Jewish history. Instead, we ask Hashem to have mercy on us, just as He had mercy on the animals in Noah’s ark. These animals had no merits nor covenants. They were merely creatures, sequestered in a dark, sweaty, and putrid ark for twelve months, with little light, air, or food. Hashem’s mercy was bestowed upon them simply because they were His creations who were suffering intolerable conditions.

Fifty hostages – our own people, our own children and brothers and sisters – are still enduring conditions far worse than the animals aboard the ark. Who can unsee the horrifying images of starving hostages languishing in airless, oxygen-deprived tunnels? We plead: Hashem, release them from their imprisonment, just as You released Your creatures from the confines of the ark. Show them that same mercy.

8. They will know

Finally, we return to the central theme woven throughout our *tefillot*: the hope we carry for the day we long for – a day hinted at every Rosh Hashanah – when the whole world will recognize His presence and embrace His will.

“וַיֵּדַע כָּל פֶּעוּל כִּי אֱתָהּ פָּעַלְתָּ וְיָבִין כָּל יְצוּר כִּי אֱתָהּ יִצְרָתוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר
כָּל אֲשֶׁר נְשָׁמָה בְּאֶפֶס ה’ אֱ-לֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מְלֶךְ וּמְלִכּוֹתוֹ בְּכָל מְשָׁלָה”

“Then every being will know that You created it, every creature will understand that You formed it, and all who have breath will declare: ‘Hashem, G-d of Israel, is King, and His kingship rules over all.’”

One day, Hashem’s presence will be unmistakable, a force that unites the entire world. Only His presence can lead humanity to rise above hatred, ego, and selfishness.

“וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כָלֶם אַגְדָּה אַחַת לַעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹנָהּ בְּלִבָּב שְׁלָם”

“Then they will all form a single bond, to do Your will with a perfect heart.”

Only through Hashem’s revelation can humanity come together as an *agudah achat* – a true unity born of shared purpose and wholehearted devotion. May we pray that Hashem reveals Himself to our wounded world, replacing darkness with light, evil with spirit, and murder with morality. May He renew His great love for His chosen people.



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Our Unique Neshamot

Rabbanit Rachelle Sprecher Fraenkel

In a video that touched Jewish hearts around the world, Yehuda Bachar – a strong, broad-shouldered young man in a tank top, a necklace around his neck, looking every bit the festivalgoer on his way to the Nova trance music gathering – is seen driving to the party. Yet, in what feels at first like a moment of jarring contrast, he is softly singing *Elokai Neshama* to the moving melody by Alma.

Yehuda was murdered in the Nova massacre. When his story emerged, we learned more about him: raised in an ultra-Orthodox home, he had chosen to leave his family's way of life, but remained a man filled with faith and inner light. That morning, on his way to Nova, a friend sent him a message of despair. Yehuda chose to respond not with advice or argument, but with this very song – its words a reminder that even when you feel stained, worn out, and broken beyond repair, your soul

remains pure, clean, and untouched. It can never be soiled. Even when you feel utterly alone, there is One Who breathed that soul into you, Who guards it every moment, and it is never too late to begin anew.

For Yehuda, gratitude was both a mission and his guiding instrument: “As long as the soul is within me, I give thanks before You.” In light of the tragic circumstances in which his story came to the world's attention, the blessing's closing words – “Who returns souls to lifeless bodies” – have taken on an even deeper meaning.

I encountered this short prayer again in a different context. A friend once told me about her own close friend who, for several years, had stopped observing *mitzvot*. After a long journey through the Far East, this friend returned home – and it was clear that something within her had changed. When she was asked what had happened, she replied simply: “I've started praying again.” “How so?” “Every day, I say *Elokai Neshama*.”

It is fascinating that a mere paragraph of six short lines could make the difference between a life of prayer and a life without it. How invaluable could it be if we managed to truly pray even one paragraph, with absolute focus and devotion? It is also worth pondering – why this passage in particular? What is it about

these words that draws a person face-to-face with the deepest truth of their being: that they are at once mortal and Infinite?

The famous *Mishnah* of Akavya ben Mahalalel is often associated

with somber thoughts of mortality and funerals:

“Reflect upon three things, and you will not come into the grip of sin: Know from where you came, to where you are going, and before Whom you will ultimately give account. From where did you come? From a putrid drop. Where are you going? To a place of dust, worms, and maggots. And before Whom are you destined to give account and reckoning? Before the Supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He” (*Pirkei Avot* 3:1).

Yet the 16th-century Salonika sage, Rabbi Moshe Almosnino, noticed something striking. Why does the *Mishnah* repeat itself? Rather than stating the facts outright, it poses these as questions, twice, and only then states an answer. His explanation: a person must reflect in two dimensions. Yes, you come from a lowly origin and will return to dust. But before you consider that, know also that your soul was quarried from beneath the Throne of Glory. “Know from where you come” – from the loftiest place. Let that awareness elevate your intellect and your spirit. And “Know where you are going” – not only toward the grave, but toward the return of your soul and spirit to the G-d Who gave it, for from Him it was drawn, going back to the home from which it came in its youth.

Rava, upon completing his prayers, would add a personal supplication: “My G-d, before I was created, I was not worthy. And now that I have been created, it is as if I had not been created... I am as dust in my life, all the more so in my death. Behold, I stand before You like a vessel filled with shame and humiliation... May it be Your will, L-rd my G-d, that I sin no more, and that what I have already sinned before You, may You wipe away in Your great mercy – but not through suffering or

harsh afflictions” (*Berachot* 17a). This raw and humble prayer, facing the fragility of existence and the heartbreak of falling short of one’s divine potential, eventually became part of the *vidui* confession of Yom Kippur.

Popular culture sometimes rephrases it more brightly: “Your birthday is the day G-d decided the world could not go on without you.” I’ve seen it on greeting cards and bumper stickers, often attributed to various rabbis. In the dark humor of my son’s *yeshiva* high school, the addition was inevitable: “And the day you die is the day G-d decided the world can manage without you.”

To my surprise, the bumper sticker actually appears in the writings of Rav Kook. In his meditative style, he reflects:

“Before I was created, it was proof that the world had no need of me; had there been something incomplete without me, I would have been born earlier. The moment I was created was the moment Heaven determined I was needed to fulfill some purpose in the perfection of reality. If my actions align with that purpose, then in this moment I am truly worthy (*kedai*). But if they do not, then in truth I am still as

‘unworthy’ as before I was born” (*Iggrot Ra’aya* #91).

I returned to these words recently when a close friend, an officer in combat in Gaza, was severely wounded. In the first days, we could think only of the shattering physical cost and the life forever altered. Later came the realization of just how close he had been to death – and the deep awareness that G-d had decided the world could not manage without him. In that moment, he was declared truly *kedai*.

I then remembered a *shiur* by Rabbi Tamir Granot in his Tel Aviv *yeshiva* on the eve of Yom Kippur. After studying Rava’s prayer and Rav Kook’s meditation, he suggested that each student add their own personal version of the prayer. He reached into his pocket, pulled out a slip of paper, and offered his own prayer as an example:

“My G-d! Before I was created, I was an infinite wholeness – a spark of the Divine above. And now that I have been created, I have been given the chance to manifest that infinite perfection in a finite world. Even though I am dust in my life and dust in my death, and though I know I am bound by the limits of time and matter, still my soul has no boundary, no end.

Therefore my dreams and aspirations are also without boundary or end. The wholeness destined for me is likewise without limit. I have within me a G-d-given power to fulfill my unique mission in the world. And if I am lacking, if I fall short – it is only because I am dust, for so I was created. But in every moment I yearn to grow, to perfect myself, to bring my vision of wholeness into every facet of my soul and my deeds in the world. Master of the Universe, I rejoice in You, and may You rejoice in me. Indeed, I am worthy (*kedai*)! And with Your help, I will yet be *kedai*.”



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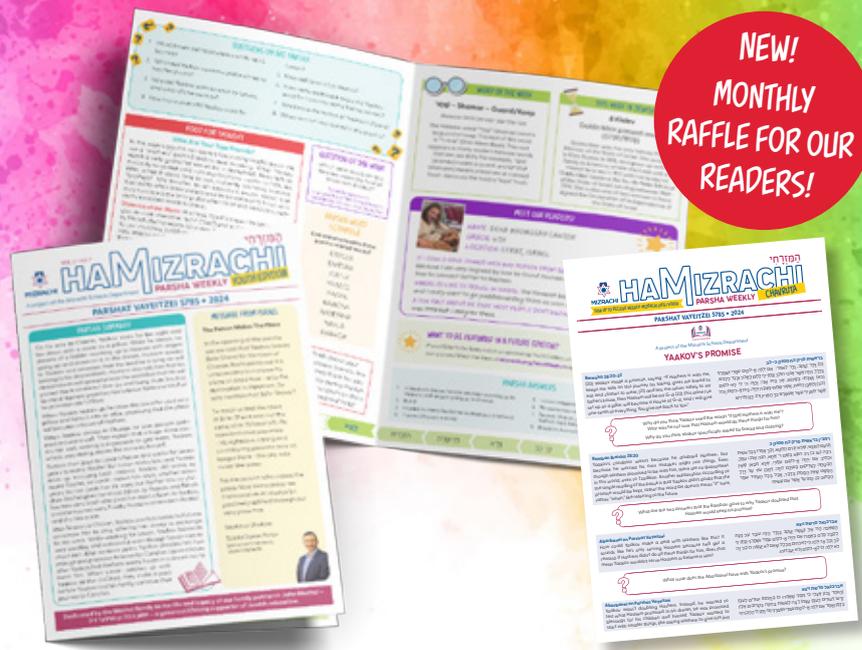
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The Long Road of History

Rabbi Elan Mazer

Over the past two years, there has been an almost crushing sense that the world is against us. We are bombarded with a public discourse that twists truth, morality, and justice into something unrecognizable. The sheer volume of anger and hatred directed not only at the State of Israel but at the Jewish people as a whole can feel like an unending onslaught. This constant barrage has been deeply disorienting. Right and wrong, truth and lies, good and evil – everything feels inverted. How is it possible to raise proud Jewish children when every headline seems designed to confuse them, to make them doubt what is right and what is wrong?

We find a profound source of strength and clarity in the prayers of Rosh Hashanah. On this day, when we reflect on the creation of the world and our place within it, our liturgy addresses this very sense of moral inversion:

”וּבְכֹן תוֹן פְּחָדָהּ אֵל-לֵקִינוּ עַל כָּל מַעֲשֵׂיהָ... וַיֵּדַע כָּל פְּעוּל כִּי אַתָּה פְּעַלְתָּ, וַיִּבִּין כָּל יְצוּר כִּי אַתָּה יִצְרָתָהּ.”

We pray for a time when the world will recognize that Hashem is King, and that His moral truth governs all. In asking for this, we are acknowledging that today, this recognition is absent. We live in a world where truth is hidden and evil is praised.

And yet we dare to remind G-d:

”כִּמוֹ שֶׁיָּדַעְנוּ הָ אֵל-לֵקִינוּ שֶׁהַשֵּׁלֶטוֹן לְפָנֵינוּ.”

“As we have always known, Hashem our G-d, that all sovereignty is Yours.”

We declare that even when the world does not see it, we have never wavered. We have always known the truth, and we have held fast to it.

We are not yet recognized, and often we are attacked for the very values that we uphold. But the day will come when:

”וּבְכֹן תוֹן כְּבוֹד ה' לְעַמָּהּ” – the Jewish people will be honored –

”שִׂמְחָה לְאַרְצָהּ, וְשִׂשׂוֹן לְעִירָהּ” – there will be joy in the Land, and Yerushalayim will rejoice.

This is the Jewish story. We are attacked for the very values that will one day be celebrated. But we keep walking, step by step, holding onto the truth and pursuing it no matter what.

This concept is at the heart of the Jewish experience. As Rav Kook wrote in *Orot HaTechiyah*:

“The characteristic of the Jewish people is not to be afraid of the long journey.”

We are a people of patience and endurance, quietly pursuing a divine revolution – bringing the light of *malchut Hashem* into the world, one action, one *mitzvah*, one generation at a time. Others demand quick results. Others are satisfied with temporary victories or passing recognition. But we, the eternal nation, are willing to walk the long road of history.

Rosh Hashanah reminds us that we are part of a cosmic story. We are judged not only as individuals, but as a people entrusted with eternity. We are part of the divine revolution of history – often unrecognized, sometimes despised, but ultimately unstoppable.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the words of *Shema Yisrael*:

”שִׁמְעַת יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֶל-לֵקִינוּ ה' אֶחָד” (דברים ו:ד).

The Ramban explains: *“Hashem Elokeinu”* – Hashem is our G-d now, in this imperfect world, even when others deny Him. *“Hashem Echad”* – one day His oneness will be revealed to all of humanity.

This is why *Shema* became the cry of Jews in every era – whispered in moments of danger, shouted in acts of courage. It is not only a statement of faith – it is a declaration of resilience. We know the truth, even if the world does not. We will hold onto it until the world sees it too.

Rav Kook adds in *Yisrael V'tchiyato* (ch. 15) that precisely through the suffering and obstacles of history, the Jewish people demonstrate the eternity of their values. If our Torah were merely a cultural fashion, we would have abandoned it long ago

under pressure. But the fact that we have held fast for millennia proves its eternal truth. Eventually, the nations will recognize: these are the values that last.

This Rosh Hashanah, our call is to embrace this sacred perspective. To give our children pride in belonging to this eternal people. To cling to our Torah, our *mitzvot*, our learning and teaching, and our acts of kindness. To strengthen our soldiers, who fight not only for Israel's safety but for the future of the Jewish people. To continue standing strong for *Am Yisrael*, even when the world is confused.

We are not merely surviving the onslaught; we are shaping the long arc of history. We can make a difference, even if the fruits of our labor are not immediately visible. We are part of a divine process that will culminate in the recognition of truth, justice, and the sovereignty of Hashem.

May this year be one in which we merit to be counted among those of whom the prayer speaks:

”וּבְכֹן צְדִיקִים יִרְאוּ וַיִּשְׂמְחוּ, וַיִּשְׂרִים יַעֲלֶזוּ, וַחֲסִידִים בְּרָנָה יִגִּילוּ.”

“Then the righteous will rejoice, the upright will exult, and the faithful will sing with gladness.”

May we have the strength to walk the long journey with courage, pride, and unwavering faith.

Shana Tova U'metukah.



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The Ultimate Test

Why We Remember the Akeidat Yitzchak on Rosh Hashanah

Rabbanit Sharon Rimon

"And may You remember the binding of Yitzchak for his descendants today with mercy" (*Musaf*, Rosh Hashanah).

On Rosh Hashanah we recall the *Akeidat Yitzchak* in the *Zichronot* blessing during the *Musaf* prayer, when we blow the *shofar*, in the Torah reading of the second day, and in the *piyutim*.

What is the significance of *Akeidat Yitzchak* and why do we specifically recall it on Rosh Hashanah?

"*Avraham Avinu*, peace be upon him, was tested with ten trials, and he withstood them all" (*Pirkei Avot* 5:3).

The life of *Avraham Avinu* was filled with challenges and trials that transformed him into a model figure of faith. Beginning with "Go forth from your land" (לְךָ יֵצֵא מֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן) and culminating in the trial of *Akeidat Yitzchak* - "Go forth... and offer him there as a burnt offering" (וְהֵעָלִיתָ אֹתוֹ... כֹּלֵךְ לְעֹלָה). The first "go forth" challenged Avraham with the loss of his past ("your land, your birthplace, and your father's house"), while the final "go forth" challenged Avraham with the loss of his future.

Each trial and challenge tested Avraham's special abilities, refined him, and revealed his unique strengths. The many trials he faced throughout his journey built within him a steadfast foundation of faith and good character traits, serving as our model for how life's challenges can develop and elevate us.

The trial of the binding is the pinnacle of Avraham's journey of trials, and the most difficult of them all. Avraham was required to sacrifice his son Yitzchak, who was given to him miraculously after 25 years of waiting, and through whom the continuation of Avraham's lineage was promised. This demand was a severe trial from a human-parental perspective, and even calls into question G-d's promise regarding continuity through Avraham - G-d's way in the world. This demand also

challenged Avraham's moral and ethical worldview and the Torah's way, which explicitly forbids human sacrifice.

Indeed, this was only a trial, and the text declares this from the beginning. But Avraham was unaware of this at the outset - he believed G-d was truly demanding that he sacrifice his son.

Despite the incomprehensible difficulty and many question marks, Avraham did not hesitate for a moment. He said "*Hineni!* - Here I am!" at the beginning of the journey, and again on the mountaintop with the knife in his hand, thereby expressing absolute readiness to obey G-d's will, and even to do so with alacrity and without hesitation or delay. He did this out of deep faith that G-d's word is always absolute justice and goodness, even when we do not understand this as human beings. Throughout the journey, Avraham also taught his son Yitzchak to follow G-d with complete obedience, without questioning, out of absolute faith in the righteousness of G-d's path.

At the decisive moment, after all preparations were completed, G-d intervened and prevented the sacrifice. And thus it became clear beyond any doubt that G-d never intended for Avraham to sacrifice his son, but only put him to the test. Avraham proved that he is a G-d-fearing person, willing to follow G-d's will even when it is difficult and incomprehensible.

The *Akeidat Yitzchak* is an extreme, one-time event, the likes of which never will be again. G-d never commanded any person to sacrifice another person, and certainly not to sacrifice a son. Only Avraham received this command, as the founding patriarch who exemplifies the highest faith in G-d. This faith meant being ready to literally sacrifice his life for G-d's word; to give up his most prized possession - the son he had awaited; to abandon the divine promise he had received and his vision of continuity; to set aside the moral values he believed reflected G-d's will; to

act purely on G-d's command rather than religious fervor; and uniquely, to be capable of immediately stopping when G-d commanded the opposite.

Yet precisely because the *Akeidat Yitzchak* is so exceptional and extreme, it becomes a defining moment that teaches us essential values and provides spiritual strength the Jewish people need throughout history: pure faith in G-d, obedience to His word, eagerness in fulfilling commandments, and readiness to sacrifice and endure trials - even martyrdom - for His sake. At the same time, we pray deeply that we won't face such extreme trials or need to literally sacrifice our lives, but can instead live by sanctifying G-d's name.

On Rosh Hashanah, when the books of remembrance are open before G-d and He is about to write our decree, we recall the *Akeidat Yitzchak* again and again in order to say to G-d: "We are the children of *Avraham Avinu!* In his merit, forgive us and decree good decrees upon us! Do not test us with overly difficult trials - our father Avraham has already proven his faithfulness to You!"

At the same time, we also remind ourselves that we are the children of Avraham, and we want to walk in his way and completely do G-d's will with love.



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Shofarot

Rabbi Moshe Lichtman

“Our G-d and G-d of our fathers, sound the great *shofar* for our freedom...” (Musaf for Rosh Hashanah, *Shofarot*). The phrase “great *shofar*” is borrowed from a verse in *Yishayahu*, also mentioned in the *Shofarot* section of *Musaf*: “It shall be on that day, a great *shofar* will be blown, and those lost in the land of Assyria and those cast aside in the land of Egypt will come and bow to the L-rd on the Holy Mountain in Jerusalem” (27:13).

On Rosh Hashanah of 1933, right after Hitler came to power, Rav Kook *zt”l* delivered a moving sermon in the Old City’s Churvah Synagogue. Based on the above-cited verses, he predicted the Holocaust and explained the reason for it. The following is a translation of his words:

The prophet prophesied about a **great shofar** of redemption, and we specifically pray for that. For there are various levels of the *shofar* of redemption: there is a great *shofar*; an ordinary, medium-sized *shofar*; and a small *shofar*.

The “*shofar*” of *Mashiach* is compared to the regular *shofar* – i.e., the *shofar* of Rosh Hashanah. The *halacha* determines three levels [of *kashrut*] with regard to the *shofar* of Rosh Hashanah:

1. The most preferred way to perform the *mitzvah* is with a ram’s horn.
2. Ex post facto, all *shofarot* are kosher.
3. A *shofar* from a non-kosher animal, or from a gentile’s animal which was worshipped as a god, is invalid. However, if one blows such a *shofar*, he discharges his obligation ex post facto. Furthermore, one is permitted to blow any *shofar* if he does not have a kosher one, provided that he does not recite a blessing on it.

These *halachic* categories mentioned in connection with the *shofar* of Rosh Hashanah correspond to various levels of the *shofar* of redemption.

What exactly is the *shofar* of redemption? When we say “the *shofar* of *Mashiach*” we mean an awakening and an impulse that

causes the revival and redemption of the Jewish nation. This awakening is the *tekiah* that gathers those who are lost and cast aside, bringing them to the holy mountain in Jerusalem.

At various times throughout Jewish history, there was an awakening and desire [for redemption] that originated in holiness. Even today, there are groups and individuals among our people who have such a desire. [This holy awakening] is based on a strong belief in Hashem and His Torah, [on an understanding] of the sanctity of Israel and its mission, and on a desire to fulfill G-d’s will, which is Israel’s complete redemption. This is the **great and excellent shofar** – a nation’s desire to be redeemed because of its lofty desire to carry out its grand mission, which cannot be done when [the nation] is exiled and oppressed.

At times, however, this sacred desire deteriorates. There isn’t much enthusiasm for lofty and sacred ideas. Nonetheless, healthy human nature – which also originates in holiness – still exists. This healthy human nature creates within the nation a simple, natural desire to become sovereign in its land, to arise and go free, to live a simple, free life like all the other nations. This natural desire, which stems from normal nationalistic feelings, is the **ordinary, medium-sized shofar** that can be found anywhere. This, too, is a kosher *shofar*; and even though the first type is preferable, “Ex post facto, all *shofarot* are kosher.”

However, there is also a third category of “the *shofar* of *Mashiach*,” and it too corresponds to the *shofar* of Rosh Hashanah. It is a **small, invalid shofar**, used under duress, when there is no kosher *shofar* to be found. If sacred enthusiasm – with its resultant, lofty desire for redemption – has expired; and if normal, human, nationalistic feelings – a desire to live honorably as a nation – have also expired; [that is], if it is impossible to blow a kosher *shofar* for our redemption, our enemies come and blow [the *shofar*] of redemption in our ears. They force us to hear the sound of the *shofar*. They shout and make noise in our ears,

denying us rest in the Diaspora. The *shofar* of an impure animal becomes the *shofar* of *Mashiach*. Amalek, Petliura, Hitler, etc. awaken us to redemption. He who did not listen to the sound of the first *shofar*, and he who did not want to listen to the sound of the second, ordinary *shofar* either – because his ears were closed up – will listen to the sound of the impure, invalid *shofar*. He will listen against his will.

Nonetheless, even *he* discharges his obligation. Even [this type of] nationalism – that of the staff, of Jewish persecution – contains some form of redemption. However, one is not to recite a blessing over this kind of *shofar*, as the *Mishnah* states, “One does not recite a blessing over anything that is a type of curse” (*Berachot* 6:4).

We pray that Hashem not force us to listen to the invalid and impure *shofar*. We also do not long for the ordinary, medium-sized – almost secular – *shofar*. We pray, “Sound the **great shofar** for our freedom,” a *shofar* that comes from the very depths of the sanctity of the Jewish soul, from our Holy of Holies. Then, the redemption will be complete.

Is history repeating itself once again?



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A New Year, A New Connection: Finding Ourselves, and Each Other, in the Days of Awe

Aleeza Ben Shalom

There's something about the sound of the *shofar* in Elul that shakes me. Not just my ears, but my heart, my thoughts, my sense of who I am and who I want to be. The Jewish new year isn't just a one-day event. It's a full journey – beginning in Elul, winding through Rosh Hashanah, climbing to the peak of Yom Kippur, and dancing all the way to Simchat Torah.

Each step invites us into deeper connection – not just with Hashem, but with ourselves, our loved ones, and our greater community. And while it's a spiritually rich time, let's be honest – it can also be incredibly lonely for those still waiting to build a family of their own.

Imagine walking through a simple meadow and seeing a king – your King – waiting there for you. No throne, no guards, no distance. That's Elul. Hashem is accessible, approachable, and near. It's the month to reflect, to realign, and to begin the work of coming home.

In a good marriage, we have moments when we feel the other person is right there in the field with us. And other moments when they feel far away, up in the palace, behind layers of distance or pain. Relationships, like the moon, wax and wane. They go through cycles. And Jewish life honors that rhythm – of closeness, of effort, of renewal.

Rosh Hashanah isn't just about apples and honey. It's about crowning Hashem as King of the Universe and King of our hearts. It's the moment we say, "I want You in my life."

But it doesn't stop there. Yom Kippur is not a sad day; it's a sacred day. A day of return. A day we get to cleanse our spiritual slate and come back to what matters. And in a way, it's like the emotional intimacy of a good marriage. After a fight, after disconnection, there's the power of reconciliation. Of starting again. Of choosing love all over again.

What about singles?

For singles, these holidays can feel heavy. I've sat across from many men and women over the years who tell me they dread this season. Not because they don't believe, not because they don't want to celebrate – but because they do. And they want someone to share it with. They want to build their own home, host their own guests, and feel like they belong to something greater.

To the singles reading this: I see you. Hashem sees you. Your time is coming. Keep preparing your heart, keep showing up, and keep the faith – even when it's hard.

To the marrieds reading this: Please make room at your table. Not just physically, but emotionally. Don't be so wrapped up in your own family and kugel recipes that you forget the person sitting alone in *shul*. Smile. Invite. Introduce. You never know what a small gesture can spark.

The holidays are also prime time for noticing people. New faces in *shul*, guests at meals, people passing in the street. Be curious. Be kind. Be match-minded.

You don't need to be a professional to make a match. All you need is a little heart and a little thought. Here's my secret formula: Find three reasons why two people should meet. Not just because "they're both single," but because you've thought it through. Maybe they share values. Maybe they have a similar rhythm in life. Maybe you sense a mutual softness or spark.

Then? Pitch the idea gently. Respectfully. You'll probably hear more nos than yeses. That's okay! It's normal, keep trying.

But whatever you do, don't throw spaghetti at the wall. Don't suggest someone just because you're feeling pressure to make a match. Singles deserve dignity. Mindful matchmaking is holy work.

The High Holidays remind us of the deepest truths: We're not here alone. We're part of a people, a history, a future. Our spiritual work isn't just about us. It's about how we show up for Hashem, for our spouse if

we have one, for our children or parents, and for our community.

And yes – helping someone find their soulmate is one of the greatest *mitzvot* we can do. It strengthens them, it strengthens their future family, and it strengthens *Am Yisrael*.

A tip and a blessing

Tip: As you move through the holidays, take five minutes after each meal or *tefilah* to look around the room. Ask yourself: Who's here? Who's not here? Who might benefit from an invitation, an introduction, or even just a smile? Let's open our hearts and homes a little wider this year.

Blessing: May this new year bring you clarity, courage, and connection. May your prayers rise up like incense, may your tears turn to joy, and may you – whether single, married, or somewhere in between – feel held by Hashem and embraced by your community. And may we all merit to help someone else find their match, and in doing so, bring more love into the world.



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SHAGRIRIM BALEV

Friends Setting Up Friends



Our Couples: Introducing Adena Hammer and Akiva Gluck!

Akiva and I are both 32. We have a few mutual friends on Facebook. We're both English speakers – Akiva from growing up in Australia, and Adena from home in Beit Shemesh. We've both been living in Jerusalem for the past four years, yet we never met and never would have met if it weren't for Shagririm Balev. None of our few mutual friends would have thought to set us up, since on paper we weren't exactly what each other was looking for. So, when Ayelet called Adena to speak about a potential match named Akiva – who had already agreed to meet her – she was skeptical, but with a little convincing, she agreed.

Why is it worth joining the Shagririm Balev database?

First of all, it's worth trying anything that might help you find your person :) Shagririm felt personal, with our friends looking out for us and dedicating time to think about us. We both also felt that anyone already on the Shagririm database is most likely looking for something serious that might end in marriage, which is what we both wanted. On apps and other sites, it's hard to filter out who is there for the same reasons you are.

A funny story from one of your dates:

Akiva made Aliyah four years ago, and Adena was born and raised in Israel. Adena tends to speak "Hebrish" (a mixture of English and Hebrew), and on the first few dates, she would start saying full sentences in Hebrew and Akiva would just nod along so Adena wouldn't know that he didn't actually understand what she was saying. On one date, Adena said something in Hebrew and Akiva just nodded and said, "Right, right," but that was totally out of context. So Adena asked, "Akiva, did you understand what I said?" Akiva replied, "I think you might think I speak more Hebrew than I do." So Adena asked, "How much Hebrew do you speak?" and Akiva replied, "Very, very little." That's when Adena realized there must have been whole conversations that were never understood...

Your Chuppah is beautiful – can you tell us about it?

Thank you! Adena designed it! I think we both just wanted to have our place and individuality in the wedding. Adena's a little more feminist and wanted to feel she had a place under the chuppah. Akiva's a little more of a traditionalist, so we made sure to mash both our thoughts and wants together and make it work in a way that made us both happy and excited!



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Teshuva and an Uncertain Future

Rabbi James Kennard

One of the most formidable barriers to effective *teshuvah* is the cynicism-inspired memory that we were here last year, regretting the same character failings, and no doubt we will be here confessing the same flaws again in the future.

What is the point of *teshuvah* if we know that it will not make a difference, that our inspiring resolutions to really change our ways will come to nothing almost as soon as they are tested by reality? When the possibility that we will be successful, and that *teshuvah* will mark the beginning of a different future, seems so minuscule that we are tempted to stop trying?

This is not just a psychological trial; it is also the essence of a *halachic* dispute.

The Rambam writes that one of the conditions for achieving “complete *teshuvah*” is that “the Knower of the future will testify of them (the penitent) that they will never return to this transgression” (*Teshuvah* 2:2). Does this mean that if one performs *teshuvah* today, but slips back into the same mistake tomorrow, then the *teshuvah* itself is nullified and never existed?

That is the view of the *Sha'arei Teshuva*. He declares that such ineffective *teshuvah* cannot provide atonement, even for the sins of the past (1:49). Yet the *Lechem Mishnah* states otherwise. He believes that the Rambam is not stating that the “Knower of the future” (i.e. Hashem) must testify that the sin is not repeated in the future in order for *teshuvah* to have been effective, but rather that the penitent must accept upon himself as a witness for Hashem that he will never return to the sin (*Teshuvah* 2:2).

For the *Sha'arei Teshuva*, a repeated sin in the future compromises *teshuvah* itself. For the *Lechem Mishnah*, it is the resolution at

the moment of *teshuvah* that is key, not what may or may not transpire later.

Rav Asher Weiss suggests that this *halachic* dispute explains why we read Chapter 21 of *Bereishit* on the first day of Rosh Hashanah. The opening verses relate the birth of Yitzchak but the major section of the reading concerns the sending away of Hagar and Yishmael and the latter's near-death experience when the travellers' water supply was exhausted. How is this relevant to the sublime themes of the day?

As Yishmael lies dying, an angel appears to his mother and assures Hagar that Hashem has heard “the voice of the boy where he is, בְּאֶשֶׁר הוּא שָׁם” (*Bereishit* 21:17).

The words “where he is” cry out for explanation. From where else could Yishmael's voice be heard if not from where he was?

Rashi, based on the *Midrash Rabbah*, explains that “where he is” teaches that he is to be judged according to the actions he is performing now, and not on the basis of what his descendants may do in future.

The *Gemara* is even clearer. “Rabbi Yitzchak said: A person is judged only according to their deeds at the time of their judgment [and not their subsequent actions], as it is stated with regard to Yishmael: ‘For Hashem has heard the voice of the lad where he is’” (*Rosh Hashanah* 16b). Rabbeinu Chananel adds: “Even if it is revealed and known [to Hashem] that when they grow they will adopt evil ways.”¹

These sources provide support for the *Lechem Mishnah's* interpretation of the words of the Rambam. We are judged on our commitment to change our behaviour, and not on the future reality (*Minchat Asher, Sichot al HaMo'adim*, 56).

The *Sha'arei Teshuva* poses a nearly impossible dilemma: How can any of us judge

whether our repentance is genuine when a future sin might prove that our remorse was meaningless all along?

The *Lechem Mishnah* offers not just hope, but a practical path to atonement despite our human limitations. When our repentance is genuinely sincere and our commitment to change is complete, we can receive divine forgiveness without being held hostage by an unknowable future. This standard is actually within our reach.

On Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Judgment, we pray not only for our repentance to be accepted, but for divine help in shaping that very repentance. When we recall the story of Yishmael's rescue, we ask G-d to hear our voices based on “where we are” at this moment – judged by our past and present actions, not by future deeds we cannot guarantee. This creates a framework for divine mercy that each of us can achieve.

1. See Maharal, *Gur Aryeh*, on *Devarim* 21:18, *Maharsha* on *Rosh Hashanah* 16b and others for a discussion as to why we do not apply the same principle to the *ben sorer u'moreh* in *Devarim* 21:18–21.



Rabbi James Kennard

has served as a school principal in the UK and for many years in Melbourne, Australia. He now lives in Ramat Beit Shemesh in Israel.



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— The Complementary Vidui —

The Complementary Vidui was written by Rav Binyamin Holtzman and inspired by Rav Kook's teaching, in order to complement the traditional Vidui prayer.

During our precious son Neriya's last moments with us, as is custom, we recited the Vidui prayer. It was then we remembered the complementary Vidui that we read together as a family each year before Yom Kippur, from a printed copy folded and stored in my *machzor*.

Each word spoke to us, knowing that we have truly lived and loved; making the choice even in our darkest moments to recognise and celebrate the bright sparks of love and goodness that fills our lives.

Our son Neriya had a strong will to live and to make the most of his life. He was determined to see the world with kind, soft and positive eyes.

At Neriya's funeral, we read the Complementary Vidui, it's words symbolising our son's life achievement: his choice to see the light, to have gratitude, to notice the blessing.

Many have asked us for a copy of these meaningful and uplifting words. We feel blessed to share this meditation with you.

We continue to live in very challenging times. We hope and pray that alongside the reflection and acknowledgement of our misdoings, this Complementary Vidui encourages us to open our hearts and acknowledge the things we did right. Let us lay emphasis on the many great and wonderful thoughts, words and actions we performed, both individually and collectively.

We are the Jewish people. We have the power to transcend, to create a world of goodness, kindness, encouragement, upliftment and celebration of life.

In turn, we pray that G-d opens His heart and blesses us with revealed good, for every individual and for the entire nation of Israel.

Avital and Gideon Harkham

הַיְדוּדִי הַמְשֻׁלִּים

-רב בנימין הולצמן

אָהַבְנוּ, בְּכִינוּ, גִּמְלָנוּ, דִּבְרָנוּ יָפִי. הֶאֱמַנּוּ, וְהִשְׁתַּדַּלְנוּ, זָכַרְנוּ,
we remembered we put in effort we believed we spoke beautifully we extended we wept we loved
ourselves

חִבְּקָנוּ, טַעַמְנוּ סִפָּר, יִצְרָנוּ, כָּמְהָנוּ, לַחֲמָנוּ עֵבוֹר הַצְּדָק,
we fought for justice we yearned we created we immersed ourselves we hugged
in learning

מְצִינוּ אֶת הַטּוֹב, נְסִינוּ, סָרְנוּ לְרָאוֹת, עָשִׂינוּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָנוּ.
we did as You commanded us we took the time to see we tried we took advantage of all the
good

פָּרַשְׁנוּ, צִדְקָנוּ לְפַעֲמִים, קָרָאנוּ בְּשִׁמְךָ. רָצִינוּ, שְׂמַחְנוּ, תִּמְכְּנוּ.
we supported we were happy we desired we called (in) Your name we were right(eous) sometimes we separated
ourselves from bad

...על כן, כשם שיש תועלת גדולה לתיקון הנפש בוידי העוונות... גם כן בוידי המצוות, למען ישמח בהם בלבבו, ויחוק ארחות חייו בדרך ה'.
הרב קוק, עין אי"ה, מסכת מעשר שני פרק ז משנה י

Just as there is great value to refine one's soul by the confession of sin, it is also important to confess one's good deeds
- enabling joy to penetrate the heart, and allowing the transformation of oneself in the ways of Hashem.

Rav Kook



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Rosh Hashanah - Understanding the Key to Relationships

Rabbi Alon Friedman

It is customary on Rosh Hashanah to extend greetings to one another. In addition to the traditional blessing of “*Ktivah v’chatimah tovah*, May you be written and inscribed for a good year” – I believe it is also appropriate to wish each other a hearty *mazel tov*. The reason is that on the very first Rosh Hashanah, a great wedding took place. Adam was introduced by G-d to Chavah, and they immediately married. If not for that union, none of us would exist. In a sense, we are all part of that joyous event.

Let me introduce you to this young couple. Adam, the *chatan*, was the most handsome man who ever lived. The Talmudic sage Rav Avahu describes Adam’s beauty as *mei’ein* – somewhat similar – to that of our patriarch Ya’akov, whose beauty was in turn somewhat like Adam’s (*Bava Metzia* 84a).

The *Gemara* teaches that Sarah, our matriarch, was among the four most beautiful women in the world (*Megillah* 15a). Yet *Chazal* also teach that compared to Chavah, Sarah was like a monkey compared to a human (*Bava Batra* 58a). Chavah, then, was the most beautiful woman of all time.

Their wedding was magnificent. The one who adorned Chavah as a *kallah* and led her to her *chatan* was none other than G-d Himself (*Bereishit Rabbah* 18:1). Afterward, the couple settled in the most exclusive residence imaginable: the Garden of Eden. With the entire world at their disposal, they were the wealthiest couple who ever lived.

Chavah now faced her first challenge – preparing food for her husband without guidance from a mother or teacher. While gathering food, she encountered “Mr. Serpent.” He persuaded her to prepare a meal from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.

She tasted it first, found it delicious, and then gave it to Adam.

Suddenly, they heard the voice of G-d. Adam realized he had sinned. At first, he tried to blame his wife, but to no avail. G-d held him responsible and expelled the couple from Eden. Humanity has borne the consequences ever since.

In today’s world, what might have happened after such a beginning? With divorce rates so high, many couples would likely have separated immediately. After all, if a wife misled her husband on the first day of marriage, what kind of future could they expect? Many counselors might even recommend divorce to avoid further complications.

But Adam did not take that path. Not only did he remain with Chavah, they stayed married for hundreds of years.

What guided his decision? Immediately after the episode, the Torah says: “*V’ha’Adam yada et Chavah ishto*, And the man knew his wife Chavah” – and she conceived and bore Kayin. Some commentaries explain that the word *yada* is past-perfect, referring to events before the sin. But in its plain sense, the verse follows the sequence of events.

The word *yada* also means “understood.” Adam had always known his wife, but now he gained new insight. After their expulsion from Eden, Adam did not lash out, blame, or abandon Chavah. Instead, Adam *knew* – he understood – his wife. He recognized that she was human and capable of error. Thanks to this understanding, he remained her partner. Together, they raised children and began developing the world for humanity.

This is a profound lesson. Many relationships collapse because of a lack of *yada* – the refusal to recognize that one’s spouse is

human. Yet the essential ingredient in any enduring bond is *yada* – understanding.

The *Gemara* puts it beautifully: “He who has understanding has everything within him, and he who lacks it, what does he have? He who acquires it, what does he lack, and he who has not acquired it, what has he acquired?” (*Nedarim* 41a).

When a couple builds a home, the Torah requires a *mezuzah* on the entrance. The *mezuzah* is placed on a slant, to satisfy opinions that it should be either vertical or horizontal (*Yoreh Dei’ah* 289:6). Perhaps there is a homiletical message here. For a home to be blessed and endure, each person must be willing to bend. Bending means compromise and understanding. If both partners insist on standing upright – seeing only their own perspective – the home will not last. But if they bend toward each other, the home will be strong and enduring.

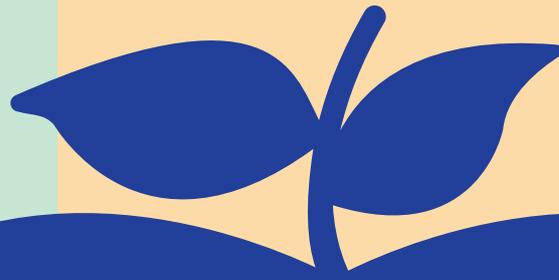
At weddings, guests often receive souvenirs. The most meaningful souvenir we can take from Adam and Chavah’s first day of marriage is this: their relationship endured thanks to *yada* – understanding. If we and our children apply this lesson, our homes and relationships will be blessed with joy and longevity.



Rabbi Alon Friedman
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The Broken Vessel: How an Alcoholic Poet Revived a Nation

Rabbi Elie Mischel

Five days after liberation, survivors at Bergen-Belsen sang Hatikvah during a *Kabbalat Shabbat* service. The BBC recorded their haunting voices. None could have guessed that these words – which would later become Israel’s national anthem – were penned by a bohemian alcoholic poet who died broke on New York’s Lower East Side.

Naftali Herz Imber, born in 1856 in Zloczov, Galicia, was an oddity from the start. As a child prodigy, he amazed rabbis with his Talmudic knowledge while simultaneously frustrating them with his rebellious streak. Stories tell of him inviting all the town’s beggars to Shabbat meals funded by his father’s money. When not “borrowing” from his poor father, Imber would spend Shabbat afternoons with a wealthy neighbor’s daughter, studying German literature instead of learning Torah.

By age 10, Imber was studying the Zohar and writing Hebrew poetry. His first poems weren’t about Jewish nationhood or longing but about the Austro-Prussian War and Jewish civil rights. At 12, he sent Emperor Franz Joseph a Hebrew poem and received twenty-five guilders in return. “The Emperor,” Imber quipped, “always gives twenty-five, guilders or lashes.”

At 15, Imber left home, cut off his *peyot*, and began wandering Eastern Europe. A medieval-style minstrel, he paid his way with poems and wit. In 1878, while tutoring the children of Baron Waldberg in Romania, he scribbled what would later become Hatikvah on a scrap of paper.

His path to the Holy Land came through an unlikely source: British diplomat Sir Laurence Oliphant, a Christian messianic mystic on a quest to establish a Jewish state in its ancient borders to “fulfill prophecy and bring on the end of the world.” Imber became his secretary, arriving in pre-state Israel in 1882 during the First Aliyah. While East European Zionist pioneers worked the land, Imber spent his days writing poetry and his nights reciting it in the new settlements, often after raiding their wine cellars.

It was Imber who first called these pioneers “*chalutzim*,” forever changing Zionism vocabulary. His 1886 Jerusalem-published volume *Barkai* (“Morning Star”) contained not just Hatikvah (then called “*Tikvatenu*”) but also “*Mishmar HaYarden*” (“Watch on the Jordan”), which also became a beloved classic.

Imber’s years in the Holy Land ended when his beloved patron Alice Oliphant suddenly died of a fever in Teveriah. The woman he called “noble” and treated as a surrogate mother was gone, and with her, his stability. What followed were decades of wandering: England, America, the Midwest, California, back east. He posed as “Mahatma Imber” in small towns, feuded with Theosophists, attempted to teach Kabbalah, married briefly, and drank constantly.

Meanwhile, his song took flight without him. As Zionism grew, “Hatikvah” became its unofficial anthem. At the First Zionist Congress in 1897, delegates sang it – without mentioning the author. While Jews worldwide embraced his words, Imber stumbled through America’s cities, asking: “Many people enjoy my ‘Hatikvah,’ many booksellers got rich on it – and what do I have after fifty years of work?”

On New York’s Lower East Side, he lived in a dark room at 113 Forsyth Street, burning candles at noon to read his own writing. By evening, he held court in cafes, paying for drinks with improvised verses until friends would help him home. Judge Mayer Sulzberger eventually became his patron, but limited him to one dollar a day, fearing what he’d spend on alcohol.

When Imber collapsed on Forsyth Street in October 1909, the Rivington Street Synagogue refused to host the funeral. Yet thousands turned out for his funeral at the Attorney Street Synagogue, where Galician and Romanian Jews fought over the right to bury Imber in their cemeteries. Despite the poet’s irreligiosity, Rabbi Joseph Scheff declared: “Good, kind, noble Imber was infinitely a holier, better, and more godly man than ever a synagogue congregation was.” The procession moved

through streets lined with mourners singing Hatikvah.

G-d’s work often unfolds in unexpected ways. As Rav Kook taught, even the secular *chalutzim* were agents of divine will, whether they acknowledged it or not. Similarly, Imber became an instrument for national redemption.

Imber’s original version of Hatikvah was steeped in biblical language and allusions. The poem contained references to “the city where David encamped” (*Yishayahu* 29:1) and included the line “Our hope is not yet lost,” echoing but inverting *Yechezkel* 37:11 where the people lament, “our hope is lost.”

When asked about his work, Imber explained: “For two thousand years Hebrew poetry has been nothing but lamentations... Now what I did was to do away with lamentations.” His most enduring achievement was giving voice to Jewish hope rather than Jewish suffering, helping shift the national narrative from mourning to return. Though he could barely manage his own life, Imber articulated a vision that helped revive an entire nation.

● This essay draws from Gerard H. Wilk’s “The Bohemian Who Wrote ‘Hatikvah’: The Career of Naphtali Herz Imber” (*Commentary*, January 1951), Shlomo Maital’s “Hatikvah – The real story behind Israel’s anthem” (*Jerusalem Report*, July 2018) and Dalia Marx’s “*Tikvatenu: The Poem that Inspired Israel’s National Anthem, Hatikva.*”



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).



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Teshuva for Killing a Comrade in War

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Brody

During the First Lebanon War, then known as Operation Peace of Galilee, a group of *hesder yeshiva* students sent Rabbi Shlomo Goren a haunting question. The *yeshiva* was preparing a memorial volume in memory of their friends who had fallen in war. In line with common practice, they were going to list each soldier with the epithet *HY"D*, "*Hashem yikom damo*, May G-d avenge their blood." One of their IDF comrades, however, had been accidentally killed by an IDF plane that had mistakenly identified them as an enemy target. Obviously, no one wished for G-d to take vengeance on the IDF soldier who killed one of their own. The friendly-fire incident was known by the soldiers but was unknown to the family, who they feared would suffer even greater emotional pain from this knowledge. The soldiers thus asked: Can we write *HY"D* next to the killed soldier's name?

Rabbi Goren ruled yes. The ultimate cause of their deaths was our ruthless enemy that forced us to fight. In any case, we shouldn't commemorate their deaths in an unusual manner that will perpetuate the guilt and anguish that their comrades feel for their role in this tragic incident (*Meshiva Milchama*, 3:2).

This sad tale highlights the horrific reality that friendly-fire casualties occur in every Israeli war. In the First Lebanon War, 25 soldiers were reportedly killed in friendly-fire incidents. As of August 1st, 2024, of the nearly 80 IDF casualties during the Iron Swords War from accidental-operational incidents, 31 were killed by so-called "friendly-fire." These incidents represent 3.5

percent of all IDF deaths in the war. Additionally, at least three hostages were accidentally killed in Gaza by IDF fire.

This phenomenon, of course, is not unique to the IDF and occurs in almost every army. The US lost 40 soldiers to friendly-fire in Afghanistan. In the 1991 Persian Gulf War, 35 US soldiers died from friendly-fire, representing almost 25 percent of US battle deaths. Such incidents are particularly traumatic for the soldiers whose errant fire kills their own comrades. These soldiers enter combat with the goal of protecting their people and their brothers-in-arms, only to find themselves suffering from the guilt of an awful mistake. Many Jewish soldiers turn to Torah for spiritual guidance on how they can gain atonement and inner peace after such terrible accidents.

In response to repeated queries over the years, a range of *poskim* have asserted that no *teshuva* is required for these friendly-fire mishaps. Not every mistake, including grave errors like this one, requires an act of repentance. To understand why, it pays to reflect on the *halachic* approaches to accidental killings.

Jewish law includes extensive discussion of what should be done with people who kill unintentionally. Murderers who intentionally kill receive the death penalty under Biblical law. But for unintentional or accidental killers, the Torah establishes cities of refuge where these individuals can find safe haven from a "blood avenger" who might seek to kill them (*Bamidbar* 35:28). The question arises as to which unintentional killers qualify for

refuge in these cities. After all, “unintentional” killing exists on a spectrum. The borderline negligent killer, who should have exercised greater care, is not permitted refuge and must fend for himself. Others, however, bear less guilt but still must go into exile for their role in this preventable tragedy. Besides providing protection, medieval commentators argue that this exile serves as both punishment and, in some manner, atonement (*kapparah*) for the bloodshed that resulted.

Of course, cities of refuge have not existed for many centuries. Nonetheless, throughout the generations, different decisors have utilized this paradigm to establish *teshuvah* rituals for people who kill unintentionally. The Maharam of Lublin, for example, suggested light forms of social isolation for a person who accidentally killed someone within a shooting range. The idea was to provide penitents with a pathway for self-reflection and atonement that could allow them to restore their place in society and ease their conscience.

A more complex case involves people who unintentionally kill in the process of performing a *mitzvah*, such as a court official (*shaliach beit din*) or a doctor. There’s a complex *halachic* discussion about whether such a person requires some form of atonement (*Aruch HaShulchan, Yoreh Deah 336:2*). The intent was positive and the results unexpected, yet perhaps more could have been done to prevent the tragic outcome. Without proof of negligence, however, we leave any question of culpability up to G-d. For the sake of “*tikkun olam*,” maintaining the social order, the Sages rule that imposing financial penalties or social sanctions will deter people from being willing to take on those crucial tasks (*Tosefta Gittin 3:8-9*). This sentiment has led to many similar types of rulings throughout the ages: As a general rule, we must not impose punishments on those who perform life-saving tasks on behalf of the community.

This belief drives another important ruling regarding *kohanim*. Normally, a *kohen* who has accidentally killed is disqualified from performing *birkat kohanim*, the priestly blessing (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 128:35*). Nonetheless, a range of decisors, such as Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, have ruled that this does not apply to soldiers who kill in active duty. We don’t impose such sanctions on those who kill while fulfilling this *mitzvah* (*Yechaveh Da’at 2:14*).

In this vein, we can understand why leading figures like Rabbi Asher Weiss and Rabbi Shlomo Amar have recently insisted that soldiers responsible for friendly-fire accidents should be told that they are not obligated to perform acts of *teshuvah* for these deeply regrettable incidents. In the fog of war, such tragedies are almost inevitable. Yet we still send out these fighters, our *shluchoi mitzvah* – emissaries fulfilling the holy obligation to defend *Am Yisrael* on behalf of the entire community – to carry out these critical duties. They remain innocent of wrongdoing, even when terrible tragedy results from their actions. Rabbi Weiss adds that if someone chooses to perform *mitzvot* in memory of their fallen comrade, this constitutes a fitting tribute. However, nothing more should be required as we help soldiers overcome their feelings of guilt and recover from this traumatic experience.

The ruling reflects the beauty of Torah, which recognizes that in the case of battlefield friendly-fire incidents, both the fallen and the accidental shooter were fulfilling *mitzvot*. Those killed remain *kedoshim* (martyrs) whose sacrifice must be properly commemorated, while the responsible comrades were our representatives who tried their best under incredibly difficult circumstances. We must give them and their loved ones all of the necessary support to overcome their loss and trauma, while making ourselves worthy of their sacrifices.



Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Brody

is the executive director of Ematai and the author of *Ethics of our Fighters: A Jewish View on War and Morality*.



A member of the Mizrachi Speakers Bureau
mizrachi.org/speakers



Heroes Fell. Heroines Rise.

A conversation with Shlomit Peretz, Director of Kuma and widow of Major Eliraz Peretz z"l

Led by Inbar Gabay Zada, Director of Development, Sulamot

With the loss of hundreds of soldiers in the Iron Swords War, a deep wound was torn into the heart of the nation. But alongside the pain, over 300 women – Israel's heroines – rose up, holding onto their families, their homes, and their hope.

Kuma is an initiative created by the **Sulamot organization**, under the leadership of **Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon**, to support IDF widows of the Iron Swords War. In partnership with the World Mizrachi Movement, Mizrachi Canada, and additional philanthropic partners, Kuma offers monthly financial assistance, emergency grants, rights navigation, household support, and more – helping widows navigate daily challenges and rebuild a future with stability and hope.

Shlomit, thank you for speaking with us. Can you share what life was like with Eliraz?

Eliraz had been serving in the army since we got married. He saw it as a calling – the most meaningful thing he could do for *Am Yisrael* during that time. In practice, I raised our four children mostly on my own, because Eliraz was almost never home – he served in a combat role. He was the deputy commander of Golani's Battalion 12 and would come home for Shabbat once every two weeks.

Major Eliraz Peretz z"l, son of Miriam and Eliezer, was killed on Friday, 11 Nissan 5770 (March 26, 2010), just before Shabbat HaGadol, two days before Pesach. At the time, our son was six, and our daughters were two, four, and just three months old. Our eldest, Or-Chadash, has memories of Eliraz. The girls, sadly, do not remember him at all.

In those early days after the loss, what helped you keep going – especially as a mother of four young children?

From the moment Eliraz was killed, I knew that my children no longer had a father – at least not physically.

I truly believe his spirit is always with us. But I also felt I had to do everything I could to make sure that the home we had dreamed of remained the home we wanted. A home filled with joy, music, hospitality, dancing... any chance I had to create a moment of happiness, I made sure to make it joyful and invited guests.

Shabbat and holidays were the hardest. During the week, I managed the home on a practical level – but on Shabbat, the atmosphere, the meals – it was too much. So I always made sure that people close to us were around, so there would be someone to help carry the energy of Shabbat with me.

You also made some significant choices – personally and financially. What guided those decisions?

Yes. I chose not to work for a while. I felt that if I went out to work, I would come home exhausted, irritable, and without patience for my children. I deliberately chose to stay home and only go to things that energized me. Financially, we relied solely on the support from the Ministry of Defense and the army.



Shlomit, Maj. Eliraz Peretz z"l, and their children.

Based on both your personal experience and your perspective as Director of Kuma, how would you describe the support system provided by the Ministry of Defense?

I am grateful for what they do provide – there is a monthly stipend and a social worker who supports us. But it's a large system, with very strict, sometimes rigid, rules. It offers a standardized response that doesn't always align with what families actually need.

What, in your eyes, makes Kuma so different from other forms of support?

Kuma is extraordinary in its ability to respond personally – to each

woman, according to what she truly needs, in every area of life. I always tell the women: "If there's something you need – even if you haven't said it – tell me." And they're deeply moved. They say Kuma's support covers everything – even things they didn't realize they needed.

When did you begin directing Project Kuma, and what brought you to this role?

After October 7, when so many more women tragically became widows, I didn't know how to deal with it. I didn't visit families, I didn't reach out to widows – I shut down. It overwhelmed me, and I didn't know how to process it myself.

Then I saw an ad – Sulamot was looking for a director for Kuma. I felt that this was my way to take everything I had experienced over the years, all the challenges, the helplessness, the emotional landscapes I've navigated and turn that into a tool to help other women.

Today I feel a deep sense of mission. This role carries enormous meaning. Women who reach out to Kuma tell me that knowing I'm a widow gave them the confidence to call. They say, "I don't have to explain so much – you understand. You know what I'm going through."

And I do. I really do.

What part of your work at Kuma moves you the most?

Honestly – everything. Sometimes all I do is listen, and that alone gives a woman the feeling that I'm truly living what she is living.

Each area that Kuma supports – these are things I personally struggled with for years. In the end, I see that the places I felt most weak or broken – those points of vulnerability have become my strengths.

The same places I once felt powerless – today give me insight into what other women are going through and what they will face ahead. And now, I can think about how to ease that journey for them.

You've spoken about the weight of the word "widow." How do the women you work with relate to that label?

Some of the women tell me it's hard for them to accept help. They feel like people are pitying them. As if the word "widow" has become a synonym for "pitiful." And I remember how hard that was for me. I had lived a life of mission, of strength – and suddenly, I became the woman people felt sorry for. And it's simply not true. Our husbands fell with bravery – for *Am Yisrael*, for the State of Israel. And these women – they are no less heroic.

How do you help shift that narrative – both for the women and for society?

I try to shift that mindset constantly – with the women themselves, and in society as a whole. The widows of the Iron Swords War are not pitiful. They are heroines of Israel.

Any support they receive is not an act of charity – it is our privilege. I feel that what we are doing through Kuma is not only support – it is *tikkun*. A repair of how widows are viewed, a correction of the gap between what they need and what they're actually given.

We're able to reach so many because when people understand just how personal this is – how precise, how much it comes from real life – they want to be part of it.

It's not just another project. It's a shared mission.

In closing – why do you believe Kuma is so essential today? What makes it irreplaceable?

The most significant thing – beyond the monthly grants that go straight into the women's accounts – is that Kuma helps with the basics, in a way that a woman can actually manage. We provide financial aid, economic guidance, and help with navigating bureaucracy – and none of that can



Shlomit with her children as her eldest, Or Chadash, enlists in the IDF – standing alongside Miriam Peretz, Eliraz's mother.



Tal Amsalem, a widow supported by Kuma, and her daughters, welcomed a baby born after her husband, Avichai z"l, was killed in action.

be taken for granted.

I can share from my own experience – there were government grants I was eligible for, but I didn't claim them. Not because I didn't need the money – but because I didn't have the mental or emotional energy to figure it out.

To upload forms, navigate the system, understand the portal... I didn't even know what I was entitled to. So I just didn't apply. I think no woman should have to give up what she deserves – especially not in the most vulnerable time of her life.

That's where Kuma makes an enormous difference. We do not just ask what's missing – we stay close, follow through, and make sure she actually receives what she needs.

And when a woman feels that someone sees her, holds her, and shares that responsibility with her – she knows she's not alone. And that feeling – that she doesn't have to struggle by herself – gives her strength. It gives her the power to rise.

And that, ultimately, is the story of Kuma. Not just support. Empowerment. We cannot replace the pain. But we can hold it with her – until she can hold herself.

Join Us in Strengthening Israel's Heroines

Shlomit's story is not only personal – it is a reminder of Am Yisrael's resilience rising from heartbreak.

Thanks to Kuma, Israel's heroines are not left alone in their most difficult moments.

Standing with these widows is not just a privilege – it is a national responsibility.

To partner and support the program,
email: inbar@sulamot.org

New Year, New Horizons

Challenges and Opportunities for Israel in the Region

Dr. Pnina Shuker and Col. (ret.) Dr. Eran Lerman

The “Iron Swords” War – the name Israel gave to the multidimensional conflict in which it found itself after the October 7th massacre – has yet to end, but it has already created a series of tectonic shifts in the Middle East. While the ongoing fighting in Gaza and the humanitarian distress there have long-term negative implications, other aspects – above all, the successful blows dealt to Iran and its proxies – also present considerable opportunities for Israel. Given the current American administration’s explicit commitment to expanding normalization and the relief felt by Arab nations when the “12-Day War” set back the Iranian nuclear project and halved its ballistic missile capabilities, these may yet be translated into closer strategic cooperation among the forces of stability in the region.

The combined action by Israel and America not only struck Iranian nuclear

facilities and project leaders and severely disrupted the senior command and control of the Revolutionary Guard and the army, but also exposed the weakness of Iran and its allies and their empty bluster, which had intimidated the region for years. Back in September 2024, Israel inflicted severe damage on Hezbollah and decapitated the organization’s top leadership and capabilities, and Hezbollah’s utter silence during the 12-Day War – the very purpose for which it was armed – speaks volumes. Israel then played an indirect role in hastening the fall of Assad’s regime, eliminating Syrian military capabilities, and had full freedom over Syrian skies. The regional players took note.

Yet Israel cannot rest on its laurels. Iran, though weakened, will seek to re-emerge as an existential threat. Internationally, the operation’s achievements must be leveraged to create enforcement mechanisms, whether by diplomacy or by force.

Regionally, Arab fear of Iran and appreciation for Israeli capabilities can lead to broad

cooperation, strengthening existing relationships and adding new ones.

Significantly, in the five years since the Abraham Accords, they have consistently proved their resilience despite the war’s vicissitudes. Neither the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain or Morocco downgraded their diplomatic representations. In some respects, the trade and even military cooperation ties (specifically with Morocco) grew closer.

Future normalization and regional dynamics

Given Israel’s effective action against the common enemy – Iran – eyes have been on normalization with Saudi Arabia. Beyond the economic and strategic benefits, this could pave the way for establishing relations between Israel and additional Muslim and Arab countries. The two countries were on a positive trajectory before the October 7th attack, which was to some extent intended to thwart this rapprochement. While full normalization will await the ending of the war in Gaza and a future – currently unlikely – expression of willingness to contemplate a two-state solution, much can be done in the meantime to improve relations.

As for Egypt and Jordan, both fear the consequences of the war, are committed to the Palestinian issue, and publicly condemn Israel for alleged war crimes, but at the same time, they do not want to

see Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood empowered. The threat of Iranian-sponsored subversion in Jordan strengthens covert cooperation with Israel, despite virulent public anger due to the Gaza war. Jordan even lent assistance to the international coalition that helped thwart Iranian attacks in April and October 2024. Egypt also faces sharp internal rebuke of its Israel policy but resisted pressure to renege on the 1979 Peace Treaty or allow provocative “convoys” through to Gaza. However, any attempt to push the Gazan population over the border would be deemed a serious threat to Egyptian national security and would lead to a confrontation.

Strategic opportunities on the northern front

It is yet too early to tell if the war’s achievements during 2024 will indeed generate strategic opportunities for Israel to stabilize its borders with Lebanon and Syria. Since the ceasefire in the north came into effect on November 24, 2024, Hezbollah has been in severe economic distress. Following the appointment of President Joseph Aoun and the formation of the new government led by Nawaf Salam, Israel and the new Lebanese leadership share a convergence of interests: maintaining the ceasefire and preventing Hezbollah’s recovery, both militarily and within the internal Lebanese system. The American demand for Hezbollah’s disarmament has not been met – but nor has it been dismissed out of hand. It is understood to be a precondition for economic aid to the country, cessation of IDF attacks, and IDF withdrawal from Lebanon. Moreover, a proposal for a gradual normalization agreement with Israel is also on the Lebanese leadership’s table. The organization’s duress, combined with Iran’s reduced situation after the 12-Day war, creates a window of opportunity for Israel to stabilize its border.

The fall of Bashar al-Assad on December 8, 2024, was a historical turning point for Syria. Russia’s entanglement in Ukraine and the collapse of Hezbollah as significant support hastened the collapse of a rotten regime. The new Syrian government, led by Ahmed al-Shara (aka Abu Mohammad al-Jolani), quickly positioned itself as the official authority and tried to project an image of moderation, bringing stability to the fractured country. It is indeed busy blocking Iran’s attempts to smuggle weapons to Lebanon – given Hezbollah’s role in sustaining Assad in power – and reducing the activity of Palestinian factions in the country.

However, the new regime has yet to gain real control over the armed factions operating in its name, as the massacres against the Druze have shown. To prevent the entrenchment of hostile forces near its border, Israel occupied a buffer zone on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights, maintains freedom of action over the country, and intervened forcefully on behalf of the Druze.

But while normalization with Syria is still far off, the US (which lifted sanctions on Syria) did curb Israel’s actions and then arranged for an open meeting between the Syrian FM and Israel’s Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer, Netanyahu’s alter ego. This can lead to a stable security agreement between the countries. Quiet Israeli involvement in Syria’s rehabilitation from utter ruin, in partnership with Jordan, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia, could be the first steps in building trust.

The lingering Palestinian question

Amidst all this, even if Israel’s Arab partners resist public pressures to renege on their agreements with Israel, the Palestinian issue in general, and the Gaza issue in particular, will continue to overshadow all

relations with Israel. It remains the central obstacle to expanding normalization with additional countries. Arab countries are united in their desire to end the war in Gaza and in their opposition to the “Trump plan” for Gaza: they vaguely support the Egyptian proposal for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, rejecting any forced migration. The Arab League’s adoption of the Egyptian proposal on May 17, 2025, underscores this. The exacerbation of the humanitarian situation in Gaza, along with the continuation of the war, may exhaust Arab and international patience.

Recognizing the magnitude of the strategic hour and the persistent threat of Iran and its proxies, regional partnerships need to be harnessed to establish a mechanism for ending the war in Gaza, expanding normalization, and leveraging military achievements into political gains.



Dr. Pnina Shuker

is a research fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security. She is an expert in national security, public opinion, and foreign policy issues.



Colonel (res.) Dr. Eran Lerman

is deputy head of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security.

JEWES with VIEWS

We asked five Mizrahi-trained shlichim: What can the Jewish world learn from the community where you did your shlichut?



Esther Shor

Less than two weeks after returning from Toronto, I am grateful for the chance to reflect on what the Jewish world can learn from the community where we served as *shlichim* for four years. If I had to capture it in one word, it would be *Hineni* – “Here I am.”

From the moment we arrived – back in the COVID days – we felt *Hineni* all around us: warm welcomes, Shabbat invitations, and meals arranged for our family. At Bnei Akiva Schools, the system was built to empower *shlichim* to give. Administrators, staff, and students alike told us clearly: “We are here for you. We want to hear from you.” When you feel sought out, you can truly give back – *Hineni*.

That spirit continued after October 7th. Within hours of the attack, the community leapt into action. One rainy evening, after we shared an urgent need for soldiers, people came with donations: a student offered his brand-new hydration pack, another a top-quality watch. Again – *Hineni*.

This is Toronto’s lesson: showing up with heart and *neshama*. It is no surprise that many students and families from this community are now making *Aliyah*, showing up here in Israel as well. May this year be filled with that same spirit – more present, more *Hineni*. Sometimes, we just need to press “refresh.” Thank you, Toronto, for the reminder.

Esther Shor made Aliyah at age eleven from Geneva, Switzerland. She taught Tanach and History at Amit Ma’ale Adumim High School for seven years and prepared for shlichut through the Manhigut Toranit program, in partnership with World Mizrahi, and the Shalhevet program of the Religious Zionist Shlichut Center founded by Mizrahi. Esther and her family recently returned to Haifa after four years of shlichut in Toronto, where she will teach at Amit High School and join the JLIC team at the Technion.



Rav Ben Menora

We spent three years on *shlichut* as the JLIC directors at Binghamton University. A college campus, by its nature, is transient. Yet within that constant flux we witnessed qualities that left a deep and lasting impression on us.

First, we saw the students’ genuine thirst for Torah, growth, and connection to Judaism. Though they came from a wide range of backgrounds, they joined together as a community bound by curiosity and a shared desire to grow. We were inspired by their openness, their questions, and their eagerness to deepen their Jewish lives.

Second, we encountered an extraordinary love for *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael*. Our third year took an unexpected turn after October 7th, when my *milu’im* unit was called up and I returned to Israel, while Ellie and our children remained in Binghamton. The students immediately rallied – not only to support our family, but to channel their pride and love for Israel into action, organizing ongoing programs and initiatives on campus. By the end of the year, several students and alumni had already made *Aliyah*, with more committed to follow. Their idealism and passion for *Am Yisrael* continue to inspire us.

What we learned at Binghamton is clear: the dedication and love for Torah, people, and land that we saw among this young community can serve as a model for established Jewish communities around the world.

Rav Ben and Ellie Menora, now directors of JLIC Mizrahi Herzliya, are graduates of the Shalhevet program of the Religious Zionist Shlichut Center founded by Mizrahi, and previously served for three years as JLIC directors at Binghamton University. Rav Ben is currently studying for semicha in the Musmachim program of the Religious Zionist Shlichut Center.



Rabbanit Tova Levine

We spent three unforgettable years on *shlichut* in Hale, Manchester, emerging from the pandemic into community life once again. Like every Jewish community, we shared in the full cycle of life – births, *bar* and *bat mitzvahs*, joys, and sorrows. But what stood out most was the community’s extraordinary warmth and generosity, and their ability to embrace people of every level of observance.

One highlight was hosting a group of Israeli soldiers through *Peace of Mind*, a program that gives IDF combat veterans space to process their service, including a week hosted by a Jewish community abroad. Southern Manchester welcomed them wholeheartedly – offering homes, touring with them, sharing meals, and celebrating Shabbat in the deepest way. Newcomers, too, were always invited in, from Shabbat meals to *chesed* projects. We ourselves experienced this embrace, from a ten-day meal train during quarantine, to a Tu B'Shvat plant, to fresh Shabbat flowers from our guests each week.

At Hale Shule, Shaare Haim, and throughout Southern Manchester, members of every background pitched in – running *kiddushim*, holiday events, committees, and *chesed* initiatives – all with the same spirit of making others feel at home. It is a community that became our home away from home, and one from which the whole world can learn the power of true welcome.

Rabbanit Tova Levine is Co-Director of the Mizrahi-OU JLIC at the Technion and Haifa University with her husband, Rabbi Evan Levine. She previously served as Assistant Rebbetzen in Hale, Manchester, and holds a Master’s in Social Work from the Hebrew University. They are graduates of the Shalhevet and Musmachim programs of the Religious Zionist Shlichut Center founded by Mizrahi.



Rabbi Yehudah Auerbach

During my *shlichut*, I was continually inspired by the students I had the privilege to meet. When people hear about the challenges Jewish students face on campus, the natural instinct is to respond with sympathy. But what I discovered is that these students don’t need pity. Instead, they are models of strength, resilience, and Jewish pride.

They carry their identity with confidence, even in environments that can be difficult. Rather than retreat, they lean in – building vibrant communities, leading Jewish life with creativity and joy, and excelling in every arena. Their ability to transform adversity into growth is not only impressive, it’s deeply moving.

The lesson I take from them – and what I believe the wider Jewish world can learn – is that resilience is more than endurance. It is the ability to thrive, to live joyfully and proudly as Jews in the face of challenge. These students embody the best of what *Am Yisrael* can be: courageous, visionary, and rooted in identity.

They remind us that the future of our people does not rest on fear, but on strength and hope. Far from being objects of pity, they are shining examples to admire and emulate.

Rabbi Yehudah Auerbach and his wife Hannah served as the JLIC Directors at the University of Chicago from 2021-25, where they engaged and served the student community. They are graduates of the Shalhevet and Musmachim programs of the Religious Zionist Shlichut Center founded by Mizrahi. They are now living in Israel with their four children.



Yiska Guberman

The Ottawa Jewish community is truly something special. One of the most remarkable qualities of this community is its genuine openness and inclusivity. Jews from all backgrounds, levels of observance, and traditions are welcomed warmly – without judgment and without assumptions based on outward appearance, either physically or spiritually. This creates a safe and uplifting space where everyone feels they belong.

Another unique feature of Jewish life in Ottawa is that there’s no single “Jewish neighborhood.” Instead, we are spread throughout the city, which makes every encounter with a fellow Jew – whether an old friend or a new face – an exciting and heartwarming experience. There’s a special kind of joy in these unexpected connections that constantly renew our sense of community.

Kindness and friendliness are central values here. People go out of their way to be welcoming, helpful, and supportive. It truly feels like a community that takes to heart the wisdom of the *Mishnah*: “Greet every person with a pleasant face.” That spirit isn’t just an ideal here; it’s something you feel in daily life. Ottawa’s Jewish community models how diverse Jewish life can thrive together with mutual respect, warmth, and genuine care.

Yiska Guberman and her husband Elisha served as shlichim in Ottawa, Canada after graduating from the Shalhevet and Musmachim programs of the Religious Zionist Shlichut Center founded by Mizrahi. They are currently working for JLIC Mizrahi Herzliya.

הַמִּזְרָחִי HAMIZRACHI

COMPILED BY: JACQUI AUSTEN
DESIGNED BY: LEAH RUBIN

KIDS CORNER

HIDDEN MESSAGE WORD SEARCH

Find the words listed below. They can be in any direction including diagonal. When you are done, write the remaining letters in order from left to right, top to bottom to reveal a hidden message for Rosh Hashanah!

(Tip: Using a highlighter will make it easier to see the remaining letters)

T	I	S	H	R	E	I	S	M	A	C	H	Z	O	R
H	H	A	N	A	H	S	A	H	H	S	O	R	P	A
S	E	L	P	P	A	S	C	A	P	E	G	O	A	T
S	R	H	C	I	L	H	S	A	T	N	M	S	I	N
E	A	A	V	U	H	S	E	T	A	E	H	S	I	F
L	F	F	O	R	G	I	V	E	G	T	F	A	S	T
I	O	D	N	E	H	O	K	R	N	E	V	A	D	S
C	H	A	O	L	V	A	A	M	I	T	Z	V	O	T
H	S	T	U	U	M	N	T	O	R	R	A	C	E	R
O	T	E	U	L	A	K	A	P	A	R	O	T	K	I
T	R	A	M	T	R	U	P	P	I	K	M	O	Y	N
H	O	N	E	Y	A	H	A	K	A	D	E	Z	T	G

Apples	Fast	Kohen	Tzedakah
Carrot	String	Daven	Mitzvot
Tishrei	Kaparot	Yom Kippur	Tashlich
Machzor	Pomegranate	Ram	Elul
Rosh Hashanah	Forgive	Date	Sin
Scapegoat	Shofar	Honey	Fish
Selichot			Teshuva

HIDDEN MESSAGE:



MEET ADA SERENI



June 22, 1905 – November 24, 1998 (19 Sivan 5665 – 24 Cheshvan 5758)

The Woman in the Black Dress

Ada and her husband Enzo were two Jews born in Italy both from Spanish Jewish families. At a young age they moved to Israel and helped to found Kibbutz Givat Brener until WWII broke out. Her husband Enzo was one of thirty-seven men elected to parachute behind enemy lines to help give information over to the British to try to help the Jews there. A year later when she still hadn't heard from her husband, Ada went undercover to try to find him and help organize secret immigration for Holocaust survivors. It was a risky operation that succeeded and failed many times. Ada was even arrested a few times. She was called "the woman in the black dress" and everyone knew that when she was at a shore or port, a ship would be leaving for Israel that night. After many years she found out her husband had been killed and she returned to Israel, where she lived past ninety and won the Israel Prize in honor of her special contributions to the state.



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



DID YOU KNOW?

- Apples are 25% air which is why they float!
- Honey never spoils!
- The seeds in a pomegranate are called arils.

Test Your Knowledge

What color was the thread tied outside the Beit HaMikdash on Yom Kippur and what color would it turn if *Bnei Yisrael* were forgiven?

Which *siman* is traditionally eaten after saying: "שתגזור עלינו גזירות טובות" on Rosh Hashanah?

What is something that is completely left out of Rosh Hashanah *davening* if Rosh Hashanah falls on a Shabbat?



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

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HONEY CAKE FOR A SWEET NEW YEAR!

Ingredients:

- ½ cup hot water
- ¾ cups of honey
- 2 large eggs
- ½ cup of vegetable oil
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1 ¼ cup of flour
- ½ brown sugar
- 1 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 tsp cinnamon

Instructions:

1. With help from a parent, preheat an oven to 180°C/350°F and spray an 8-inch round cake pan with cooking spray.
2. In a mixing bowl, take 1/2 cup of the honey, oil, vanilla, and eggs and whisk together
3. Add the hot water and whisk until combined.
4. Add in the flour, brown sugar, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and cinnamon, and mix until fully incorporated.
5. Pour the honey batter into the greased pan and with help from a parent bake for 28-30 minutes or until a toothpick comes out clean from the center.
6. Remove the cake from the oven and drizzle the remaining honey over the top.
7. Let the cake cool completely, serve and enjoy!





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