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הַמִּזְרָחִי



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

HAMIZRACHI

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Thank you, and a huge *yashar koach*
to all of you, our dedicated OIC-Mizrachi supporters!

Because of your commitment, your vote and your voice, OIC-Mizrachi achieved an excellent result in the World Zionist Congress elections in the U.S. Approximately 27,000 American Jews voted for our OIC-Mizrachi slate, an increase of about 25 percent since the last election.

Voter turnout was the highest in the history of the American Zionist movement, with seven new slates competing – 22 slates in total, compared with 15 last time around – an encouraging sign for the future of the Zionist movement.

The strong OIC-Mizrachi showing underscores our community's steadfast dedication to Jewish unity, the primacy of Torah learning and living, and the centrality of the Land and State of Israel – defended on the front lines by the IDF at this critical time.

We are also engaged in spirited World Zionist Congress elections around the rest of the world, after which the real work begins: advocating for the issues that matter most to our community and ensuring that our Torah values continue to shape the Jewish future.

We greatly appreciate your support and the outstanding efforts of all our partner organizations and ambassadors in the OIC-Mizrachi family.

With appreciation,

The OIC-Mizrachi Team



Fanaticism Destroyed the Beit HaMikdash. Fanaticism Will Rebuild It.

Rabbi Doron Perez

“Morality binds and blinds. It binds us into ideological teams that fight each other as though the fate of the world depended on our side winning each battle. It blinds us to the fact that each team is composed of good people who have something important to say.”

These are the powerful words that conclude the highly impactful book of social psychologist Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*. They contain, in my opinion, not only a brilliant insight into the dynamics of political ideological decay, but an exact description of what our Sages saw as the root of the destruction of Jewish collective society.

Sectarianism and *sinat chinam*

Famously, our Sages see *sinat chinam* – senseless hatred – as the salient cause for the destruction of the Second *Beit HaMikdash* (Yoma 9b). The Netziv, the famed Rosh Yeshiva of Volozhin, argues that ideological sectarianism and demonization of other groups is the root of causeless hatred:

“As a result of the senseless hatred in their hearts that one harbored for the other, they suspected all those who did not follow their path as a G-d-fearing Jew, of being a Sadducee and a heretic” (*Ha’amek Davar*, Introduction to Bereishit).

Indeed, prior to the destruction, sectarianism reigned supreme. The nation divided itself into many different sects – Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, and Sicarii – and even more sub-factions within these sects. There was scorn, disdain, and hatred one toward the other. Threatened by different values and beliefs, each saw the world in black and white terms; there was no middle road. It was a zero-sum game of ideological truth and intolerance. The hatred and infighting in Jerusalem were so disastrous on the eve of destruction that Josephus described the society as “a great body torn in pieces” (*The Jewish War*, 5:1).

G-d is a Roman general

According to Josephus, Vespasian – who led the Roman army and would soon become emperor and later replaced by

his son Titus – made a striking observation about Jewish internal conflict during the siege of Jerusalem. While his generals wanted to attack the city immediately, Vespasian disagreed. He argued that attacking would unite the divided Jewish factions against their common Roman enemy. Instead, he advocated patience – if the Romans simply waited, the Jews would destroy themselves through infighting without requiring any Roman military action.

“But Vespasian replied, that ‘They were greatly mistaken... without considering what was for their advantage, and for their security. For that if they now go and attack the city immediately, they will unite their enemies... But if they wait they shall have fewer enemies; because they will be consumed in their own sedition. G-d acts as a general of the Romans better than he can do; and is giving the Jews up to them... while their enemies are destroying each other with their own hands... let us sit as spectators... while the Jews are torn to pieces... by their civil wars’” (*Wars of the Jews*, 4:6).

Between Sinwar and Vespasian

Tragically, Vespasian's prediction proved correct. Despite facing a desperate situation – a prolonged siege with the threat of starvation – the Jews failed to unite against their true enemy, Rome. Instead, they turned on each other, destroying themselves from within.

Yahya Sinwar ignored the wisdom of Vespasian's strategy and chose to attack. On October 6, 2023, Israeli society was fracturing over judicial reform – two ideological camps hurtling toward collision. Sinwar could have waited for this internal division to deepen, but his hatred and bloodthirst drove him to act.

His barbaric attack murdered over 1,200 people and took 250 hostages, including our beloved son Daniel. We and countless others are forever broken.

But in their blind hatred, Sinwar, Nasrallah, and Khamenei made the same mistake Vespasian warned against – they united their enemy through attack. The results speak for themselves: Sinwar and Nasrallah are dead, Hamas and Hezbollah's leadership is decimated, Assad's Syria has fallen, and Iran's nuclear ambitions have been severely set back.

Nothing unites the Jewish people more than a murderous enemy bent on our destruction. Tragically, nothing divides us more than internal ideological battles when no existential threat looms.

Fanatical ideologues and radical truth seekers

The root of baseless hatred appears to be rigid ideological purity – absolute commitment to “my version of truth” that blinds us to other perspectives. A Talmudic sage identified this as the cause of Jerusalem's destruction: “Rabbi Yochanan says that Jerusalem was destroyed because people followed the laws and judgments of the Torah.”

The Talmud objects – this seems contradictory, since following Torah law is what we're supposed to do. Rabbi Yochanan clarifies: “Jerusalem was destroyed because people followed the letter of the law and did not go beyond the letter of the law” (*Bava Metzia* 30b).

A shocking truth emerges: even Torah law – clear, absolute truth – can become a source of societal destruction when applied without nuance or compassion.

Truth alone can be destructive rather than constructive. It must be anchored to other



Nothing unites the Jewish people more than a murderous enemy bent on our destruction. Tragically, nothing divides us more than internal ideological battles when no existential threat looms.

foundational Torah values to preserve its spirit. Qualities like *derech erez* and *shalom* – along with goodness, integrity, temperance, and respect for differing views – are essential to prevent truth-seeking from ending in destruction.

The paramount value of truth must not be severed from its moorings in common decency and constructive society-building. As the *Midrash* teaches, *derech erez* must precede Torah (*Vayikra Rabbah* 9:3), and *shalom* must keep truth in check.¹

Sons of light and sons of darkness

The Second Temple era War Scroll, found in the caves of Qumran by the Dead Sea, highlights the dangers of corrosive ideological purism. The text, likely written by the Essenes, describes its followers as “the sons of light” and all others, including fellow Jews, as “the sons of darkness.”

When we become so bound to our absolute truths, we become blinded to others. Those on our ideological team are enlightened and “good,” bringing spiritual and moral light to the world, while the other ideological teams are “bad” and immoral, the cause of spiritual darkness. When I am absolutely right and you are absolutely wrong, when the other is disqualified and delegitimized as part of “the dark side,” then the abyss of senseless hatred grows ever closer.

If this is the cause of destruction, then what is the cure?

Rav Kook and fanatical unconditional love

The personality and writings of Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook *zt”l*, the inaugural Chief Rabbi of pre-state Israel, deeply impacted my worldview and hence my life. In this edition of *HaMizrachi*, we honor his life and legacy on the approaching 90th *yahrzeit* since his passing.

No one saw greater spiritual depth and religious significance in the Zionist movement and the burgeoning national Jewish revival than Rav Kook. He became the leading ideologue in formulating Religious Zionism – articulating how to understand the Zionist revolution through a Torah perspective. He was also a person of remarkable dedication to his people and unmatched humility, particularly evident in his attitude toward his political detractors. It is this quality from which I wish to draw inspiration and that I believe is critical in providing a solution to the problem of religious fanaticism.

If zealous ideological fanaticism and causeless hatred are the problem, then, argues Rabbi Kook, a zealous and unconditional causeless love for our fellow Jews must be the solution.

He famously said: “If we were destroyed, and the world with us, due to baseless hatred, then we shall rebuild ourselves, and the world with us, with baseless love, with *ahavat chinam*” (Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, *Orot HaKodesh* III, 324).

Rav Kook argued that a new type of fanaticism is necessary for rectification – radical unconditional love. Since demonizing and hating others destroyed Jerusalem, judging others favorably and seeing the good in them regardless of circumstances is the path to reconstructing Jewish society, the *Beit HaMikdash*, and all of humanity.

Rav Kook himself embodied such love for all humanity and demonstrated an almost fanatical love for his fellow Jews. His student Baruch Duvdevani witnessed this remarkable incident:

“The Rav's heart overflowed with boundless love not only for *Klal Yisrael*, but for every single Jew. Dozens of students and I once accompanied the Rav home from a *brit milah* in the Old City. On our way, a group of religious zealots attacked us and threw sewage water all over the Rav. Passions were intense, and tempers flared. Later that day, prominent people came to express their disgust at this disgraceful act. One visitor was Norman Bentwich, Attorney General of the British Mandatory Government. He suggested that the Rav file suit against the perpetrators, and he would see to it that they are banished from the Land. The Rav replied: ‘I have no interest in legal actions, and I love them despite what they did to me. I love them so much that I am even prepared to kiss them. My entire being burns with love for every single Jew.’ This is what he said shortly after that disgraceful incident!”

Four tenets of unconditional love

Rav Kook's astonishing response to such an insult highlights four critical tenets of unconditional love that he deeply embodied.

1. Not taking things personally

We must work at not taking ourselves too seriously. Do we create G-d in our image and bring Him into our world on our terms, or did G-d create us in His image and bring us into His world on His terms? If the former, we become self-important and take our honor and prestige too seriously. We find it hard to forgive others and become wounded and insulted quickly. If the latter, as Rav Kook embodied, we are G-d-centered, focused on His honor and promulgating His values. We are either arrogant and self-centered or humble and self-effacing.

Emulating G-d means emulating His qualities – *vehalachta bidrachav*, walking in His ways. The most important Divine quality we are called to emulate, according to Rabbi Moshe Cordovero in his seminal work *Tomer Devorah*, is exactly this: the ability to suffer insults and not respond or avenge our honor. Hashem created human beings with free choice, allowing them to trample on His honor, deny His existence, and contravene His moral and spiritual laws. Yet, maintains Rav Cordovero, He is slow to anger and endlessly patient in meting out retribution, giving us time to repent. So we ought to be able to suffer insults and act with forgiveness and forbearance. The Ramban in his letter of life advice to his son focuses almost exclusively on being forever humble and slow to anger. Nothing is more G-dly than being humble, forgiving, and self-effacing.

Since Rav Kook was a truly G-dly person – with a healthy sense of self, totally self-effacing before G-d and deeply humble – he easily forgave the insult to his honor, dismissed the degrading attack, and forgave the perpetrator.

2. A good G-dly eye

Seeing the world through positive eyes means believing that all people are essentially good. Since all are created by a Being who desires good in the world, all human beings created in His image are inherently good – our core is a part of G-d, our soul. Most people see themselves as ultimately wanting what is good for society. If so, then others do too. Just as we are sometimes driven by personal agendas and insecurities, so are others. Just as we see

ourselves as having positive motives in general, so we ought to attribute the same positive motives to others. This requires an *ayin tova*, a good eye, seeing G-d as wanting the best for the world and for us, seeing ourselves and others and indeed all of life in a positive light.

Rav Kook could see that this terrible action stemmed from an ideological opponent who believed he was looking out for the honor of G-d and the Torah, however perversely implemented. Attributing positive intentions to others is a critical part of *ahavat Yisrael*. This stems from the imperative to judge others favorably.

3. Judging others favorably in all situations

Having a good and positive perspective of others is directly connected to our ability to judge others favorably. Almost nothing is more emphasized by our Sages regarding our attitude to others – the almost fanatical demand to judge others in all situations in a favorable light.

None of us has ever truly walked in another person's shoes. We rarely know all the facts about any incident that we use to judge others unfavorably. Even if we believe we have all the basic facts and evidence for our presumptions, we certainly are not privy to all the life circumstances and challenges they face. We definitely do not have the exact same personality and upbringing as them – we all have different “nature and nurture” from others. If we were them, would we have acted differently? It is impossible to judge – so who are we to judge? Who appointed us as judge, jury, and prosecutor? Love of our fellow demands that we always endeavor to judge others favorably. Most of us in most situations are not the decision makers imbued by society with the authority and responsibility to judge others. We should rather invest our energy into giving others the benefit of the doubt, with a positive eye and a kind and loving disposition.

Rav Kook saw an ideological opponent doing a despicable act. Yet he was somehow able to judge him favorably – not standing up for his own honor, attributing positive intentions to the other person while understanding the other person's ideological standpoint, fears and concerns, even if executed despicably.

4. Distinguishing between a person and their actions

Finally, sometimes we are called upon to judge because we are the decision maker

or judge who must issue a verdict. In a mind-boggling insight, our Sages teach that even a judge who must deliver judgment and condemn a perpetrator to punishment is still required thereafter to judge the individual favorably.² Remarkably, even if an action must be judged and the perpetrator condemned because of their actions, the judge is called upon to distinguish between the person's actions and the person themselves. Our Sages have taught us to hate sin but embrace the sinner and pray for their repentance. Hate sin and injustice, but love the sinner. Despise the action, embrace the person. People are far more than their particular actions, certain ideas, and some ideologies. A Jew who is part of our same historic community, sharing our common fate and collective destiny, should never be an enemy. Ideological opponents who all seek the good of our people are never enemies.

Rav Kook was able to do this in a remarkable way – to understand the ideological background of other Jews and always distinguish between destructive actions and well-meaning intentions. To discern between the person and their actions.

Very few of us can emulate the magnanimity and largesse of Rav Kook's example. We can, though, all strive to be much better. So much depends on it.

If the *Beit HaMikdash* was destroyed because of fanatical hatred, it will be rebuilt through radical love.

1. See *Yevamot* 14b, which highlights how the many arguments in *halacha* between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai never prevented them from marrying each other and its relationship to truth and *shalom* (*Zechariah* 8:19).

2. *Pirkei Avot* 1:8.



Rabbi Doron Perez
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Havdalah when Motzaei Shabbat Coincides with Tisha B'Av Eve

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

When Tisha B'Av falls on Sunday, the fast begins immediately after Shabbat. While we add “*Atah chonantanu*” in the *Amidah* prayer as on every Saturday night, we cannot drink from the wine. How, then, do we perform *Havdalah* on this Shabbat?

Halachot Gedolot suggests performing *Havdalah* on Shabbat itself from *plag hamincha* (without the candle blessing), but rejects this possibility, since immediately after *Havdalah* the fast would begin, and it is forbidden to fast on Shabbat.

In practice, there are three approaches among the *Rishonim* regarding how to make *Havdalah* on this Saturday night. The *Geonim* hold that *Havdalah* is performed at the conclusion of Sunday, after the fast ends. *Tosafot* wrote similarly: “When Tisha B'Av falls on Saturday night, it is customary to make *Havdalah* after the fast” (*Pesachim* 107a, “*Ameimar*”).

A second approach is that *Havdalah* should be made on Saturday night, but the wine should be given to a minor to drink. This is the approach written in *Sefer HaManhig*, who explained that there is no concern that the minor will become accustomed to drinking on Tisha B'Av in the future, because it is unusual for Tisha B'Av to fall on Saturday night, and this does not occur every year. However, the Meiri (*Ta'anit* 30b) believes that there is indeed concern that the minor will become accustomed to drinking on Tisha B'Av, and for this reason the Ramban also opposed this approach.

The third approach of Ramban, Rashba, and Ritva holds that when Tisha B'Av begins on Saturday night, no *Havdalah* is made at all. Their reasoning: unlike forgetting *Havdalah* (where the obligation exists but isn't fulfilled, allowing completion until Tuesday), here the fast makes Saturday night inherently inappropriate for *Havdalah*, completely deferring

the obligation. The Ramban suggests *Havdalah* was originally instituted with the exception that when Tisha B'Av falls on Saturday night, the obligation doesn't apply at all.

We find a similar disagreement regarding a person who was an *onen* (a mourner before burial) on Saturday night and whether he should make *Havdalah* on Sunday when the period of *aninut* ends. According to Rabbeinu Yonah, since on Saturday night he was exempt from making *Havdalah*, the obligation lapsed and the mourner is exempt from the compensatory obligation. However, according to the Maharam, the time for *Havdalah* extends until Tuesday, and therefore even the *onen*, who was exempt on Saturday night, needs to make *Havdalah* on Sunday, since at that moment the obligation of *Havdalah* applies to him.

But there seems to be a simple distinction between an *onen* and Tisha B'Av: An *onen* is exempt from all commandments, and if so, he was exempt from the commandment of *Havdalah*, and therefore he cannot make *Havdalah* even after the period of *aninut*. However, mourning does not exempt one from commandments, and therefore on the night of Tisha B'Av a person was obligated in *Havdalah*, except that he had no technical possibility of fulfilling it because he is forbidden to drink. Therefore, even on Saturday night the person is obligated, and therefore he should make *Havdalah* on Sunday, by way of compensation! If so, how can the Ramban equate *aninut* with Tisha B'Av?

Rabbi Soloveitchik beautifully explains this matter. In his view, the main purpose of *Havdalah* is not to conclude Shabbat, but to distinguish between the meals of Shabbat and the meals of the weekday. Just as we begin the Shabbat meal with *Kiddush*, so we begin the weekday meals with *Havdalah*. According to this, the Ramban

holds that since this Saturday night is not a time for eating, the commandment of *Havdalah* is completely removed. The inability to drink is a fundamental, not merely technical, defect – if one cannot eat and drink, the entire foundation of *Havdalah* is uprooted! Therefore, the obligation of *Havdalah* is completely removed, and it should not be completed at the end of the fast.

The Shulchan Aruch rules that *Havdalah* is made on Sunday, at the conclusion of Tisha B'Av. Although the Radbaz disagrees, the accepted opinion is in accordance with the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch, to make *Havdalah* at the conclusion of Sunday.

In any case, as mentioned, one should say “*Atah chonantanu*” in the evening prayer of Saturday night. If it is forgotten – one does not repeat the prayer, because one relies on the *Havdalah* over the cup that will be made on Sunday.

It is important to remind women who do not *daven Ma'ariv* to say “*Baruch hamavdil bein kodesh l'chol*.” According to Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, it is preferable for women to *daven Ma'ariv* on this Saturday night, and say “*Atah chonantanu*.” In any case, one who cannot pray the evening prayer should say “*Baruch hamavdil*.”



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

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ISRAEL CANADA

5 More Years for Am Yisrael

A few weeks after Sukkot, the 39th World Zionist Congress will convene in Yerushalayim. Since the previous Congress in 2020, Mizrachi's representatives at Israel's national institutions have made a huge impact on Jewish life around the world. From sending hundreds of *shlichim* around the world, to supporting rebuilding after October 7th, and so much more. We reflect here on the last 5 years, and look forward to making more impact in the next 5!





"Your Fight Was Not in Vain, My Son"

A Letter to My Son Amitay z"l

Rabbi Tamir Granot



The following article appeared in Hebrew in Makor Rishon following the war with Iran, and is translated here to English with permission of the author.

My beloved son Amitay,

There are no words to express how much I miss you, how much I wish I could speak with you now – especially these days. You left us at the very beginning of the war, in the days of terror and despair, when everything was uncertain, fragile, on the verge of collapse. I remember you speaking even then with words full of confidence and faith. You said: "We're not coming home until we hit them, until we bring back the last hostage." But at that point, it was a distant dream – a deep faith, but not yet reality. And none of us, not even you, could have foreseen what would happen next.

I still managed to send you the article I wrote on the second day of the war, "From Crisis to Birth," where I wrote about the potential to turn trauma into a starting point for a new future, a correction of our strategic, social, and spiritual failings. But we were still fumbling in the dark.

So I want to tell you, my son, that we have lived to see the verse fulfilled: "וְנִהְפֹךְ הוּא - אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלֹטוּ הַיְהוּדִים הַמָּה בְּשׁוֹנְאֵיהֶם", And it was reversed: the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them."

Think about where we started, and look where we are now!

2,500 years ago, the Persian Empire issued a decree of annihilation against the Jews. Purim is celebrated not only because we were saved, but because everything flipped upside down – "the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them."

About 30 years ago, another Persian kingdom – Muslim Iran – issued its decree of destruction. But now we know: we were not only saved, but everything has turned on its head: "the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them." We are living through a second Purim. To grasp the magnitude of this moment, I want to shine a light on some of the great turnarounds we've witnessed – things we couldn't see at the start of the war, things you didn't get to witness, but we are seeing now.

On that terrible Simchat Torah, we experienced utter defeat and humiliation. It felt like we had been thrown back into the days of exile – a pogrom. We didn't know how we would rise again. And now? We are living through a

sense of victory and pride. We've risen to our feet – Israel stands tall once more.

In the early days of the war, we realized we were under attack on seven fronts, and the head of the Iranian octopus threatened to destroy us. Today, my son – there is no more Hezbollah, no more Nasrallah, who took your life. They are gone. So are Sinwar, Deif and Hamas. So is the murderer Assad. The Houthis are a paper tiger. We destroyed Iran's nuclear program and exposed their shame and weakness to all.

At the beginning of the war, we felt controlled by the enemy, cast into the hands of fate. They dictated our agenda. We responded with revenge, with evacuations, with defense, with rescuing hostages. But we weren't leading. Now we're the ones setting the agenda. We're the ones shaping reality. We're changing the Middle East.

Then, among the nations, we felt like a lone sheep among seventy wolves. We prayed, as Rabbi Yehoshua once said to Emperor Hadrian, that the faithful Shepherd would protect the sheep from being devoured. And now? "הָעַם-יִקְוֶה וְיִשְׁאָא כְּלִיאוֹת, וְיִשְׁאָא כְּלִיאוֹת, Israel rises like a lion and lifts itself like a lioness." And it's not just about strength or might. We are leading the world in the battle for liberty, for humanity, for life.

Listen, my son, to what the Chancellor of Germany said: "Israel is doing the dirty work that all of us are afraid to do. They are fighting for all of us."

But the turnaround hasn't only been on the national level. When I look inside our own people, I see reversals just as dramatic.

From the terrible division before the war – during the days of the judicial reform and Kaplan protests – we discovered an incredible unity. At first, it was a survival instinct. But then we began to descend once more into division. And now, in the days since the launch of "Operation Rising Lion," we are united again. Only this time it's not a desperate unity of survivors – but the chosen unity of a people with responsibility, looking ahead and building its future. A unity of purpose.

And something else strange happened. In the beginning,

residents of the periphery – north and south – were attacked, evacuated, and cared for by the center of the country. Now it's the reverse: Tel Aviv is being bombed and shaken, and we're leaning on the periphery. Would you have believed that the Gaza border communities would become the safest place in the country?

There's been a reversal, too, in how we value our soldiers. In the early phase of the war, the ground fighters – the infantry, the tanks – were our heroes. Their bravery, sacrifice, and perseverance were the key to turning crisis into victory. But in the war with Lebanon, and especially with Iran, the focus shifted: now we see the strength of the pilots, the intelligence officers, the Mossad, the special forces.

I call the field soldiers “the mud people” – the ones who live in the dirt and drink ‘muddy’ coffee [Turkish coffee]. The intelligence officers and pilots – who mostly sit in offices – I call “the espresso people.” Usually, they come from different sectors of society. But now we understand: the espresso people alone can't win, and the mud people alone weren't enough to protect us from Hamas or to defeat them.

These internal reversals are astonishing. And I see in them a message: we are all in the same boat. All in the same line. We all need each other. One day I extend my hand, and the next, you do. We all reach out to help one another.

We must continue and complete this reversal – not just with political or constitutional compromise, which never interested you anyway. If everyone were like you – truly listening to one another, seeing the good in each person, recognizing the power of our differences – we would understand that our diversity is not a weakness but a tremendous strength, if used to build and not destroy.

I want to think with you: what is the secret of the Jewish turnaround? There's a divine, hidden, miraculous level to it. And a human, revealed, meaningful level. Like in the Book of Esther, where invisible threads are woven by a Master's hand into a redemptive story – so too we have seen small parts come together into a great picture of miraculous victory: the beepers, the radios, Nasrallah, Assad's collapse, Trump, Iran. A new biblical chapter is being written in our days. You will never be able to read it, my son, but you will surely be one of its heroes.

And there is also the human level. Esther discovers her inner strength, puts on her royal garments, transforms from a silenced victim into a great leader. The people learn to unite, to gather and fight. In our days – we have seen so much greatness: in the soldiers, in the reservists, in the volunteers, and sometimes even among the leaders. So many expressions of courage, kindness, generosity, human greatness, and faith.

The people of Israel came into the world to repair it, to lift sparks from the darkness. The first words G-d says to Abraham are: “לך לך... וְהָיָה בְרָכָה”, Go forth... and be a blessing.” That's the eternal Jewish DNA: a Jew must always be moving forward, growing, changing for the better. The Ba'al Shem Tov said this about the verse in Yechezkel: “וְהַחַיּוֹת, רָצוּא וְשׁוֹב” (Yechezkel 1:14) – the Jewish soul is either ascending or falling – there is no standing still.



Amitay Granot Hy"d (far left) and Daniel Perez Hy"d (second from right) at their graduation from officers course.

My dear brothers: we cannot afford to stand still. When the Jewish people stagnate – we sink. If you're looking for bourgeois comfort – go look among the nations. Among us, there is storm, inspiration, holy restlessness with the present, protest against what is, and deep belief in what could be better.

When we advance by our own initiative – goodness comes. When we fall asleep, grow complacent – crisis, evil, and disaster descend. But then, through our power to repair, to lift the sparks, to find light in darkness – we turn bitterness into sweetness. We change reality.

This turnaround requires courage, creativity, boldness, deep faith in G-d, and deep faith in the goodness that is and will be. All of these are revealed in moments of crisis.

My Amitay, I want to read with you the words you wrote in your journal, which we found after you fell in battle – and which we read without asking your permission, because you weren't here for us to ask. These words have become a compass for me for continuing the journey:

“A person has a sign in his life if he seeks something true, if his motives are pure... If he encounters difficulty along the way, if he gets stuck or falls – and there's anger or frustration – then something's not right, either in what he seeks or in the seeker himself.

“The sign that a person truly desires something real is that in hardship and in brokenness, he doesn't grow bitter or despair. Rather, he is filled with longing – a deep soul-longing to become greater, to be filled with goodness.” (from “A Dreamer and a Fighter,” journal excerpts, Captain Amitay Granot)

Just like a person, so too a nation: it does not fall into despair or hatred, but instead is filled with longing. A deep longing of the national soul, always striving to be greater, always drawn to goodness.

My beloved son,

I want to cry out to the heavens so you can hear: “You did not fight in vain, you did not fall in vain, none of them fell in vain. For from you, and from these heroes, the nation will be built!”

Abba



(PHOTO: IDF SPOKESPERSON'S UNIT)

The Jewish War

Rabbi Aron White

Despite having been at war for 620 days, the 12 days of war with Iran were different. For the first time in four decades, Israel was waging war with another state, and the war with Iran touched on our most existential fears. Ballistic missiles struck targets in Haifa, Tel Aviv, and Be'er Sheva, shutting down the Israeli economy, society, and airspace for those two weeks. No country in history has faced a missile barrage like this – and we knew it could have been worse. The thought that Iran could soon possess many times more missiles, or just a few armed with nuclear warheads, meant we knew we were fighting for our very existence. In 2012, Israel's political and military leadership seriously considered striking Iran, but significant splits in opinion prevented action. In 2025, there was complete consensus across the political spectrum and among military and security leadership. This was the time.

But beyond the existential nature of this 12-day war, there was something qualitatively and spiritually different about this conflict. It was the most Jewish war that Israel has ever waged. The government chose a Jewish name for the operation: *Am K'lavi*, taken directly from a verse in *Bamidbar*, rather than an opaque military phrase. "What is the verse that best summarizes this last year?" asked PM Binyamin Netanyahu at this year's *Chidon HaTanach* on *Yom HaAtzmaut*. "*Hein am k'lavi yakum v'cha'ari yitnasa*, Behold, a people that rises like a lion cub, and like a lion it arises," he said, teasing what would become the operation's name.

Am K'lavi both began and ended with the Prime Minister praying at the Kotel. At

11pm on Thursday, June 12th, the cabinet meeting that approved the opening strike ended with Yossi Fuchs, the Cabinet Secretary, reciting the *Tefillah LiShlom HaMedina* (Prayer for the Welfare of the State of Israel). In explaining the rationale for this war, Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir said it was "based on the moral imperative: 'One who rises to strike you, arise and strike him first' (*Sanhedrin* 72b)." One officer reported that in the Israeli Air Force Situation Room, after the first strikes and their remarkable success, another officer took a *shofar* to blow it triumphantly. As the cabinet was informed that American planes had bombed Fordow, Minister Ron Dermer said in a cracked voice, "*Baruch ata Hashem elokeinu melech haOlam, shehecheyanu vekiyemanu vehigianu laZman hazeh.*"

There are two important takeaways from this. Firstly, Modern Israeli society constantly debates its own identity and the balance between its Jewish and democratic elements. What was striking about this war is that in existential moments, the country naturally speaks a Jewish language. This was a reflexive societal response, one that felt natural and unimposed. In moments of existential threat, we defend ourselves from Iran not as a 77-year-old state, but as a 3,000-year-old people.

There is also a message here for Jews around the world, particularly Orthodox Jews. The great gift of a Jewish state has transformed Jewish identity and experience, allowing us to see G-d in history and society. In exile, G-d and religion were confined to the walls of the *beit midrash*, the "four cubits of *halacha*" – but in our own state, G-d and Judaism are to be found in

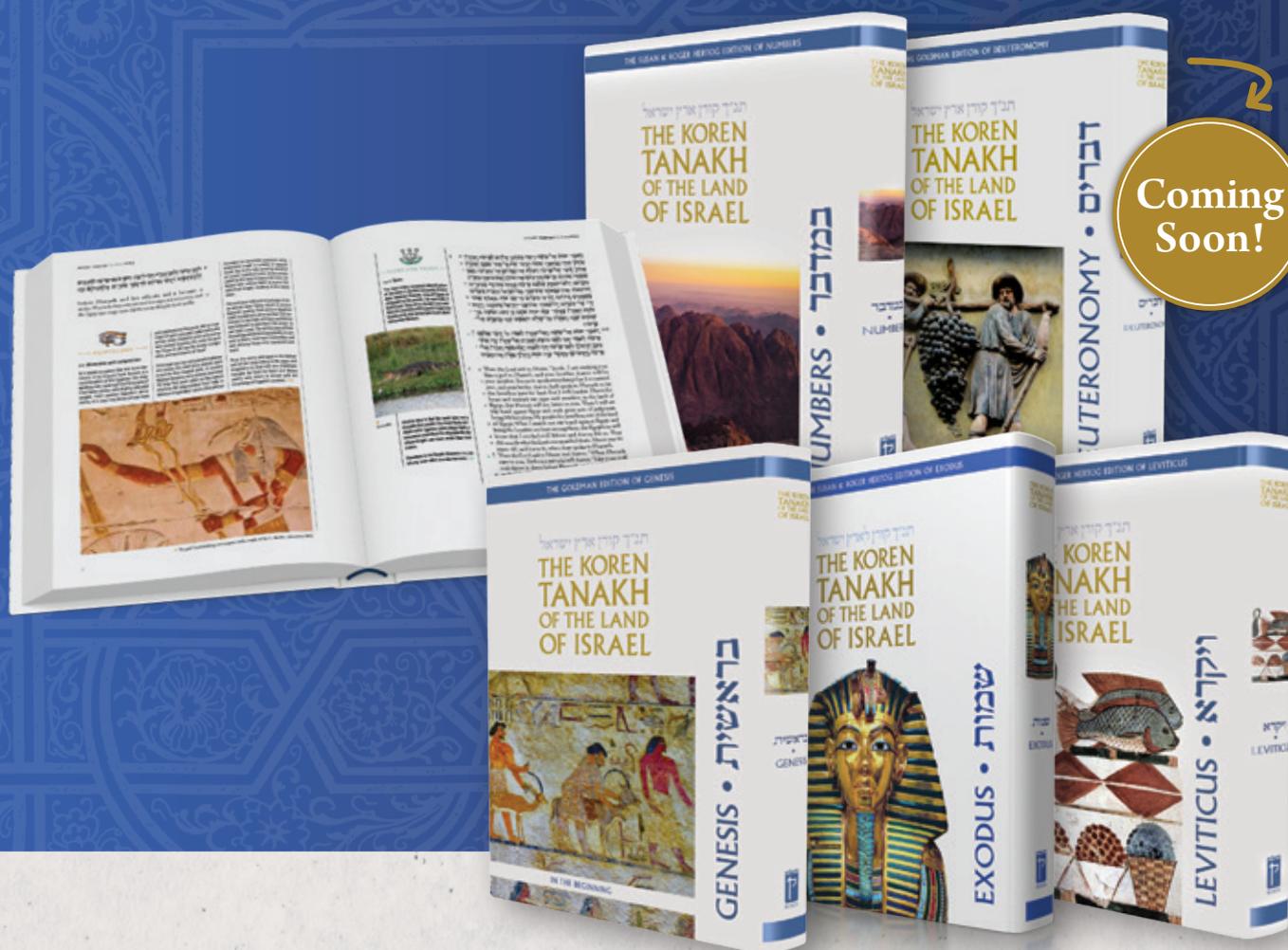
the life of our people, as one watches TV during national moments. For Jews in the Diaspora, Israel represents an opportunity to connect to this broader, reborn Jewish experience. Sadly, even within Israel, there are those who choose to replicate the exilic Jewish experience of Lithuania rather than participate in the new Jewish experience of the Land of Israel.

Experiencing this war, it felt like we were writing another page of the *Tanach* – the Jewish nation defending itself from its enemies with the miraculous help of Hashem. To ignore or deny this religious experience is to divorce oneself from the religious realities of our times. From Moshe to Yehoshua, from David to Mordechai, our religious leaders have also led us in battle. As our people once again rise like a lion, we are writing a new page in the chapter of our people. The question incumbent on each of us, to paraphrase Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, is: what is our letter in this new chapter of the Jewish scroll?



Rabbi Aron White
is the Managing Editor
of *HaMizrachi* magazine.

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MIZRACHI

WORLD MIZRACHI EVENTS



Dianella Shule – Mizrachi Perth hosted a weekend of learning, coinciding with the Mizrachi Australia conference. Leaders from across the country joined for professional development, *shiurim*, and community inspiration, as well as an online keynote address by Rabbi Doron Perez. Highlights included a panel on Jewish day schools post-October 7 and uplifting Shabbat *tefillot*.



Mizrachi Melbourne were honored to host Rabbi Leo Dee as scholar-in-residence. Throughout his visit, Rabbi Dee inspired the community with a series of powerful talks and *shiurim*, and made a deep impact through meaningful interactions with school students and Bnei Akiva.

We celebrated the end of another powerful year of the Shalhevet *shlichut* training program with a moving graduation event. Graduates received their certification from the World Mizrachi leadership, with inspiring words from senior staff and participants. This summer, over a dozen couples will embark on *shlichut* worldwide. Shalhevet is a two-year training program preparing committed, fluent English speakers for communal leadership.



World Mizrachi CEO Rabbi Danny Mirvis was honored to affix a *mezuzah* in the new Paraguayan embassy in Yerushalayim, thanking Ambassador Alejandro Rubin for Paraguay's outstanding friendship and support for Israel.



At Nachal Oz, Rabbi Doron Perez led an AIPAC mission from Chicago through the base, including the burnt Command Center. He shared his family's story of October 7, where his son Daniel Hy"d fought in his tank, and his other son Yonatan helped save soldiers from the Command Center.



Young Israel in Israel celebrated over 30 deaf/hearing-impaired Bar/Bat Mitzvahs with their families. The event featured addresses from World Mizrahi's Rabbi Doron Perez, deputy mayor of Jerusalem Chagit Moshe, Dr. Ravit Ochayon from The Jewish Agency, a festive *seudah*, and a special tour and moving *tekes* at the Kotel.

(PHOTOS: NACHSHON PHILIPSON / VIDEO EDEN)



Participants experienced three unforgettable days with World Mizrahi on the Yom Yerushalayim Open Mission, from dancing in the streets of Jerusalem to meeting October 7 heroes in the North and South. They witnessed destruction – and resilience – in border towns, volunteered at Pina Chama, and commemorated our fallen at Har Herzl.



Maslul Mizrahi marked the conclusion of its inaugural cohort with a rooftop banquet overlooking Har HaBayit. Students heard from Rabbi Binyamin Zimmerman and Stephen Flatow before receiving certificates and touring Machon HaMikdash. Maslul prepares seminary and *yeshiva* students for Religious Zionist leadership. (PHOTOS: YEHUDA CARDOSO)



The Torah Café program, supported by World Mizrahi, held its first Ramat Beit Shemesh Shabbaton. With *ruach*-filled meals, an inspiring *oneg*, warm hospitality, and a local walking tour, the weekend left a lasting impact. It was a Shabbat full of inspiration and connection – the perfect way to begin the summer season.



The Life of Rav Kook



Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook was born in Grive, Latvia, in 1865 to a scholarly and pious family. His father, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman, fostered a deep love for Torah, *mitzvot*, and *Eretz Yisrael*, often speaking Hebrew on Shabbat. From a young age, Avraham Yitzchak studied Torah diligently, including at the renowned Volozhin Yeshiva.

In 1886, he married Batsheva Rabinowitz, daughter of Rav Eliyahu David Rabinowitz-Teomim, though she tragically died only two years later. His father-in-law convinced him to marry her cousin, Raize-Rivka, and his first son, Tzvi Yehuda, was born in 1891.

Rav Kook served as rabbi in Zoimel (1888–95) and Boisk (1895–1902), publishing his early works during these formative years, including *Chavash Pe'er* (1891) on the *mitzvah* of *tefillin*. His nationalistic views deepened while in Boisk and there he began his commentary on *aggada*, *Ein Ayah*.

In 1904, he was appointed rabbi of Jaffa, where he dedicated himself to bridging the divide between religious and secular pioneers. He engaged with both communities through open letters and visits to settlements, publishing *Orot HaTeshuva* (1905) and *Ikvei HaTzon*. To support agricultural development, he encouraged land acquisition in *Eretz Yisrael* and wrote *Etz Hadar* (1907) on *etrogim*. He also addressed the practical challenges of *Shemitta* laws in *Shabbat HaAretz* (1910), permitting certain agricultural activities after land sale to Gentiles.

Rav Kook was invited to attend an Agudat Yisrael convention in Berlin in 1914. When World War I erupted during this trip, he sought refuge in Switzerland (1914–16) before traveling to serve as rabbi in London (1916–19). This period proved highly productive, yielding numerous personal writings later compiled in *Orot* and *Orot HaKodesh*. While in England, he witnessed the British Government's issuance of the Balfour Declaration, which Rav Kook viewed as a momentous occasion. He founded "The Banner of Jerusalem," a movement to unite religious and secular factions, though this initiative was short-lived.

He returned to the Land of Israel in 1919, settling in Jerusalem. Despite significant opposition, he worked actively to establish a unified Chief Rabbinate for *Eretz Yisrael*, becoming the first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi in 1921 and serving alongside the Sephardic Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Ya'akov Meir. He also sought to establish a comprehensive *yeshiva* for higher Jewish learning and to revitalize religious Jewish literature. While he had founded a small *yeshiva* in Jaffa, his Jerusalem institution would become *Merkaz HaRav*, a leading center of Torah learning and Religious Zionism that continues to this day.

Rav Kook passed away in 1935, leaving behind a profound legacy as both a *halachic* authority and visionary leader who provided a spiritual outlook through which to understand the miracle of modern Zionism – a perspective that lives on long after his passing.

Where Halacha Meets Aggada: The Complete Torah of Rav Kook

Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin zt"l

*The following essay on Rav Kook is taken from Rav Shlomo Yosef Zevin's (1888–1978) *Ishim V'Shittot*, 232–33, a collection of biographies analyzing the individual study methods of great rabbis of the 19th and 20th centuries.*

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Rav Kook was unique in our generation among the great Torah scholars in that he had complete mastery over both *halacha* and *aggada*. What does “complete mastery” mean? All the laws of the Torah were at his fingertips. When a Jew came and asked him a Torah question, Rav Kook did not need to look or search, to investigate or inquire. Instantly, he would find the relevant Talmudic discussions and early authorities pertaining to the matter, proceeding from *Gemara* to Rambam, then to the pillars of Jewish law. Along his path of discourse, he would illuminate and explain, clarify and analyze, as if he had just been engaged with the very issue under discussion. And if the questioner was a Torah scholar who had been contemplating that same matter before entering to see Rav Kook, and opened with his question, he would see that Rav Kook, without any prior preparation, would present before him mountains of novel insights on that very topic. His amazement knew no bounds.

This was not only in matters of *halacha*. The world of *aggada* was no less open before him. Vision and poetry, thought and research, contemplation and opinions – all of these flowed ceaselessly, like a spring that never runs dry, from his mind to his heart and from his heart to his mind. One did not know whether learning (*chinuch*) influenced wisdom (*chochma*), or wisdom acted upon learning, or whether both as one drew their spiritual strength from a supreme and exalted source.

Rav Kook was uniquely fluent in both *halacha* and *aggada*, in the revealed and the hidden teachings. But he was also remarkable in that these two worlds merged within him into one wonderful unity. *Halacha* was the body of *aggada*, and *aggada* was the soul of *halacha*. He knew this secret – that the revealed and hidden teachings constitute body and soul – and therefore there was no separation between them. And he, Rav Kook, did not separate them.

He himself embodied both *halacha* and *aggada*. How so? Some personalities are entirely like steel – decisive and sharp in “cutting *halacha*,” rendering clear legal rulings. Others have purely *aggadic* personalities – transcendent and poetic, with firm convictions, radiance and splendor, majesty and glory, devoted entirely to spiritual poetry and vision. Rav Kook uniquely combined both: strong and mighty in legal decisiveness on one side, yet possessing the pure innocence of angels on the other.

We saw his firm resolve in practical *halachic* matters, engaged in Torah's battles. He fought and was able to prevail against great Torah scholars who opposed him – for example, regarding his ruling on the permissibility of selling land during the *Shemitta* year. In offensive and defensive battles he went out to meet them, and he did not rest or remain quiet until he succeeded in implementing what he ruled and instructed. We also saw his resolute

and heroic nature in other areas when circumstances demanded it. We remember well the difficult episode of the court case [the 1933 Arlozorov murder trial, where Rav Kook defended the falsely accused Avraham Stavsky against charges of murdering Jewish Agency official Chaim Arlozorov – see “Who Murdered Chaim Arlozorov?”, *HaMizrachi*, Shavuot 5783, Vol. 6, No. 2], in which Rav Kook courageously stood up to save the life of a single Jew. His unwavering principles were evident even in his dealings with government authorities, displaying the highest form of courage.

Yet alongside this, David's harp hung above his bed. A heart full of feeling, brimming with love without boundaries. Love for all – for those near and far, for Jews and gentiles, for the simple-minded and those who walk crooked paths. Song – the song of comfort and repair, the song of beauty and splendor; vision – the vision of holiness and purity, the sanctity of existence and the purity of the universe.

Here too you find before us two sides of one nature: strength within kindness and kindness within strength. Examine carefully and you will discover: It was not *halacha* alone that motivated him to enter the battle over the *Shemitta* year with his Talmudic arguments, but rather his deep compassion for the crushing distress of the Jewish pioneers settling the Holy Land. While all the great rabbis of Israel offered comfort to the heart-broken farmers who came to them with this problem, they had no practical solution to offer.

Even his victorious battle in [the Arlozorov murder trial] was driven not by legal technicalities, but by faith and love – faith in the inherent holiness of the Jewish people, believing it impossible that murder and malice could truly be found among them, and profound love for a single human life, which represents ‘an entire world.’ It was from this sacred feeling of a pure heart that he drew the strength and courage to stand proudly and uprightly before government ministers and rulers.

● *Translated by Rabbi Elie Mischel.*



The Rabbi Who Knew No Strangers

A Student's Portrait of Rav Kook

Rabbi Ya'akov Moshe Charlap, zt"l

This letter was written by Rabbi Ya'akov Moshe Charlap (1882–1951) on July 16, 1945 – ten years after Rav Kook's death. Rav Charlap was not only one of Rav Kook's closest students but also his confidant and close friend, later becoming Rosh Yeshiva of Merkaz HaRav. Writing to a fellow student, Rav Charlap shares personal memories that reveal both his teacher's remarkable character and the deep impact Rav Kook had on those around him. The letter captures intimate moments from Rav Kook's wartime exile, his emotional return to Jerusalem, and his daily interactions with students and community members, offering rare insight into how Rav Kook's mystical worldview actually played out in practice.

Jerusalem, 16th of Tammuz, 5705

To my beloved friend, the distinguished scholar and man of learning, Rabbi Shimon Glitzenstein:

You have merited to be among the disciples of the light of Israel's eyes and our great teacher, Rav Kook, may his memory be blessed. When he was detained abroad during the previous war, having left the Land of Israel temporarily to participate in an assembly of great Torah scholars organized by Agudat Yisrael, he thought deeply about and waited eagerly for the results of this conference.

He departed from the Land of Israel on the 18th of Tammuz, 5674 (1914), after ascending to Jerusalem to embrace its soil and to mourn its destruction at the holy site of the Kotel. He was filled with hope that he would succeed in inspiring the masses of the House of Israel – its great leaders and all its population – with the love of the Holy Land of Israel, and to leave the exile while there was still time, before the oppressors would extend their hand against our treasured people, and to build Zion and Jerusalem upon the wellsprings of holiness and the *Mikdash*.

But the [first world] war preceded them and disrupted all the plans of the assembly. With great difficulty, Rav Kook managed

to leave Germany and come to Switzerland, where he remained for several years in St. Gallen, secluded in his tent, weeping and mourning over the destruction of our people in the Land and abroad, until he was called to London. He stipulated with the community that his residence there would only be temporary, like a sojourner in the land, until the first opportunity to return to the Land of Israel.

However, G-d sent him there to save many Jewish souls, especially the refugees from Russia, and to gladden tens of thousands of hearts, comforting them from the terrible troubles they had endured during that great war. When they needed to hide in cellars in London, he himself would stand at the entrances of the shelters and encourage their hearts not to fear the thunder and cannons of the German aircraft. When everyone saw him, they were confident that no harm would befall them. With his pure hands, he would lead them into the cellar with composure and peace of mind...

Indeed, all the private kindnesses that were done through him for thousands of individuals – besides his great and numerous activities in the public sphere – came from the good and awesome treasure that was hidden within him. For truly, the foundation of



his holy stature was that he was entirely focused on *Klal Yisrael*, and there was no sense of the individual in him at all.

When he needed to attend to an individual or particular matter, it never occurred to him that he was doing kindness with a particular person. For in his perspective, in the individual he saw with his clear vision all of *Klal Yisrael*, understanding that the individual is a link within it. He didn't speak this way in a calculated fashion, but rather spoke naturally from his innocence, that every individual is part of *Klal Yisrael*.

Not only was the individual as great to him as the collective, but he saw the individual together with *Klal Yisrael* literally, like looking at a limb of a person – one sees together with the limb the entire person, and when having mercy on the limb, it is only mercy on the entire person.

Even the concept of individual spiritual repair and fulfilling one's role in the world – so often discussed in works of *mussar* – was foreign to him. Without any effort or contemplation, he simply did not see himself as an individual, and the same was true for all of Israel: they were one unified whole. This perspective was so deeply embedded in his soul that when people honored him, it had no effect on him. He didn't need to struggle against enjoying the honor, because he understood that any honor belonged to *Klal Yisrael* – he had no greater share in it than anyone else.

When they asked him to pray for a particular person, together with his participation in the sorrow of the individual, all of *Klal Yisrael* stood before his eyes, and the sorrow of the individual was included within the sorrow of the collective. Through this very thing, he would bring salvation to the individual, because he elevated him into *Klal Yisrael*, of which it is said, "The mighty G-d will not despise" (*Iyov* 36:5).

Even when his close family members suffered, he felt no more for them than for anyone else. In his entire worldview, there were simply no individual distinctions – only *Klal Yisrael*. To him, what difference was there between family and strangers?...

And so it is true that all his thoughts and energies were directed toward *Klal Yisrael* and the sorrow of the Divine Presence. When he sat in seclusion in St. Gallen, he could not calm his thoughts or quiet his heart until he would imagine himself actually standing at the Kotel, pouring out his prayers before G-d. I keep the details of this private with me, but so deeply did his soul yearn for the Kotel that he made a vow: on the day of his return to Jerusalem, he would not enter any house before first going to the Kotel.

And so it was: on the 3rd of Elul, 5679 (1919), when he ascended to Jerusalem, he asked all the great crowd that went out to greet him to go to their homes, saying that he needed to approach a certain place before entering the inn they had prepared for him. I went with him to the Kotel.

Upon reaching the pathway to the Kotel, his face became white, and he murmured: "How lovely are your dwellings, O L-rd of Hosts! My soul yearns, indeed it faints for the courts of the L-rd; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living G-d" (*Tehillim* 84:1-2). Upon arriving there, he tore his garment and burst into tears, saying in his prayer: "Reign over the entire world in Your glory. Because of our sins... Merciful King." From there he went to greet the great ones of the city and returned to his home.

Sometimes in the middle of the night he would say he wanted to take a walk. He would head toward the Old City and walk until he was inside the walls. Then he would say: "Since we are close to the Kotel, let us approach there." After his bursting into the aforementioned tears and prayers – "Reign over the entire world," "Merciful King," and the like – he would return to his house and say: "We had a good walk."

He would say that beyond Jerusalem's inherent holiness, three specific places especially drew him to Jerusalem: the Kotel, the Great Synagogue built in the ruins of Rabbi Yehuda HaChasid's synagogue, and the Etz Chaim Talmud Torah.

Because he saw every individual as part of *Klal Yisrael*, he held no grudges against anyone who troubled him, even those who insulted or attacked him. Once, at a cornerstone-laying ceremony, someone publicly confronted him, causing a great uproar. The crowd pushed the man outside, and the commotion was so great that police were called and arrested him.

Rav Kook did not know about this, and when he returned home and learned that they had arrested the offender, he cried out and said: "Woe to my soul that through me one of Israel suffers!" He immediately ran to the telephone to plead for him that they should release him, and did not rest until he knew they had released him.

In this aspect of being entirely focused on *Klal Yisrael* and not the individual, he rose above all the people of his generation, from his shoulders and upward, taller than all the people. It is no wonder that they could not fathom the secret of his holiness. Indeed, he was a holy man of G-d in our midst, and blessed is the generation in which he dwelt.

● Translated by Rabbi Elie Mischel.



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Rav Kook and Unity

Rabbi Dov Kidron



Rav Kook always endeavored to find and create unity in every facet of life, even among seemingly opposing forces. The source of this attitude lies in the deep belief that all the existing elements, including the ultimate good and the worst evil, were created by the one Creator for the same purpose. Therefore, there must be a common denominator for everything that exists.

Unity in Torah study

One primary domain in which Rav Kook sought unity is the world of Torah study itself. When encountering different approaches in some areas of learning, he believed that the proper attitude is to attempt to reconcile the two. By searching for ways in which the different opinions complement one another and interact to produce a richer understanding, we will come closer to the truth. This contrasted the prevailing assumption in some scholarly circles to emphasize and magnify the dispute.

A famous example is comparing the views of two medieval scholars, Maimonides and Rav Yehuda Halevi. The former holds man's intellectual faculty in the highest esteem and striving to perfect it should be the aim of a virtuous person. On the other hand, the latter emphasized the importance of ethical and moral development.

Some believed there was no possibility of bridging the gap between these two opinions, and one must choose between them. This results, of course, in elevating one approach and denigrating the other. However, Rav Kook held the view that both opinions are true, so we must find a way to explain in what way the words

of one are enlightened and just, and in what way the words of the other are exalted and sublime and when treating them as such, a complete understanding of each opinion is achieved in depth.

Similarly, when addressing the different styles that different communities employ when studying Torah, he urged each one to incorporate the other's method. He saw the highest form of genuine erudition in the amalgamation of the two. Rav Kook felt that the hand of G-d brought occidental (Ashkenazi) and oriental (Sephardi) Jews together in the Land of Israel and wrote about the difference between their methods of learning, one which focused more on more profound argumentation and the other which emphasized a broad and orderly scope of knowledge, and wrote that there is no contrast between the two methods because each of them should use the other method as well. Each person should develop his talents according to his heart's inclination and influence and be influenced by his fellow, and then everyone will reach the highest rank.

A rabbi must be in consensus with all parties

Rav Kook felt that a rabbi must not represent a particular group, but must represent *Klal Yisrael*. Rav Yehuda Leib Maimon related that Rav Kook once told him that it is forbidden for a rabbi to belong to a particular party, even if its ideas and plans are close to his heart. Each party cares only about a specific aspect, according to its view. A party, by definition, does not see itself as expressing the will of the whole public. Therefore, a rabbi, who should view himself as belonging to the whole of *Klal Yisrael*, must not associate himself with a particular party. He believed that the role of the rabbis was to unite the people, and he wrote that one of the

leading causes of the decline in the dignity of the rabbis was the tendency of rabbis to identify with a particular group. Upon doing so, they create the perception of a rabbinate confined within a narrow framework of a specific group, entrenched within the smallness of the party with all its shortcomings and deficiencies.

Rav Kook practiced what he preached; Ben Zion Berman, a resident of Zeimel, the town in which the Rav first served as the official rabbi, later related: "During his tenure, many changes were made by him for the better, first and foremost: bringing peace to the community. Before his arrival, two rabbis served in the city's rabbinate, but they did not get along, and the town was divided into two. The dispute lingered until Rav Kook arrived and made true peace between them. In addition, he corrected all the deficiencies relating to hospitality, visiting the sick, and philanthropy and performed many more good actions for the benefit of the city. Who will count and enumerate the venerable actions of our Rav who acted for the benefit of individuals: how many poor people were saved by him from hunger, how many orphans did he take pity on, how many people would bless him every day for providing them with the means to begin supporting themselves, instead of relying on charity."

The animating force behind the quest for unity is the belief that, eventually, all will unite, and we must bring the world to its completion. The ultimate purpose of creation is for all beings to recognize the kingdom of G-d. That will be achieved through creating greater unity among all things that exist. That includes all human beings and other forms of life, too. Hence, he even wrote about the unity between all people and animals, and he always tried to find the common denominator between human beings, Jews, and non-Jews.

Rav Kook's constant aspiration for unity

Even during tense times, Rav Kook did not ignore the aspiration for unity whenever possible. For example, in the years 1928 to 1930, there was a great debate between Muslims and Jews over the right of Jews to pray at the Western Wall. The Muslims claimed that it was purely a Muslim site and that Jews were forbidden to pray there, and the Jews claimed that for thousands of years, Jews had prayed there, even before the establishment of Islam. In the summer of 1929, the Muslims began to violently attack the Jews, killing 133 Jews and wounding 339. After this terrible massacre, the Muslim Mufti of Jerusalem wrote a memorandum in which he justified the killings and disparaged the entire Jewish people, claiming that the Jews wanted to attack the Arabs first, and they only defended themselves.

In response, Rav Kook published his opinion that although the Mufti holds the supreme religious office of the Arabs, he does not represent most of them nor express their opinions and views. He added that he knew that the Arab people in general, as well as most of the Arabs of the Land of Israel, were full of sorrow and shame at the evil deeds that a small group of them had committed through incitement. He concluded with the hope that the tradition of peaceful and reciprocal ways will overcome the lie, deceit, and impurity and that it will be possible together to

build the lovely and abandoned Land of Israel and turn it into a paradise, as it should be.

Unity is a G-dly matter of every person's self-work

Rav Kook's personal preference of seeking unity by being non-judgmental was something he had constantly worked on to acquire, as is evident from this quote:

"A great and enlightening self-work is to completely remove anger from the heart, to look at everything positively, with compassion and boundless kindness, to resemble the upper eye... Also, for what the wicked do, even for the more absolute evildoers, to have compassion for them for being immersed in the mire of wickedness, and to find the good side in them, to reduce the value of evil... for such evildoers will also end up being corrected."

That is to say, he tried to look at everything like the "upper eye" in the same way that G-d looks at the world, from the virtues of mercy and grace. This quality of keeping an open mind and refusing to judge certain people or positions harshly is reflected in the following story: Rav Ze'ev Aryeh Rabiner was privileged to be Rav Kook's guest during his first Shabbat in the Land of Israel. Around the table, the conversation revolved around a specific extremist party, and he asked Rav Kook: Isn't this outlook too extreme? The Rav replied smiling: "You know, there is no extreme outlook that does not have a kernel of truth."

In other words, the total commitment to unity is part of a larger positive perspective that the entire creation is good. Most people are good and have good intentions, although they might not be aware of certain aspects in which they are wrong. Therefore, the way to prove to them their mistakes is not through fighting against them or through rebuking them. Instead, through showing them how their good intentions can be actualized in a more sublime and elevated way than they imagine, and once they realize it, they will be influenced truly and subtly.

Rav Kook's proactive and positive attitude is evident in a famous saying: "The pure righteous do not complain about evil, but add justice. Do not complain about heresy, but add faith. They do not complain about ignorance but add wisdom."

● Excerpted and adapted from "Who was Rav Kook?" by Rabbi Dov Kidron.



BREAKING FREE FROM SMALLNESS: HOW RAV KOOK CHANGED MY LIFE

RABBI ELIE MISCHEL

As we approach the 90th *yahrzeit* of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (3 Elul, August 27th), I am fascinated by a strange disconnect: while his influence within Israel has never been stronger, most Jews in the Diaspora remain largely unfamiliar with his revolutionary vision. Today, Rav Kook's teachings inspire many of Israel's greatest rabbis and thinkers, energize the settlement movement, and fuel the dynamism of Religious Zionism. Yet his ideas remain foreign to the way most Jews think outside Israel.

This disconnect isn't merely due to his challenging Hebrew prose. Many excellent commentaries now make his work more accessible. The deeper issue is that Rav Kook speaks a fundamentally different language – the language of *klaliyut* (collectivity) and of *penimiyut haTorah* (the inner Torah of Kabbalah) – the language of redemption itself.

My own encounter with Rav Kook transformed my life in ways I never anticipated. For years, I immersed myself in beautiful teachings about overcoming the *yetzer hara* and the holiness of every Jew. This learning shaped how I understood the world and what I taught in my *shul*. But by my mid-thirties, I felt an inexplicable frustration. Something was missing. I had spent years studying Torah that was ultimately about myself – my own spiritual growth, my own connection to G-d. It left me feeling small and unsatisfied.

It was then that I began studying the writings of Rav Kook, his son Rav Zvi Yehuda, and his students. I became addicted to his Torah. During my personal learning time, I found myself learning less *Gemara* and more Rav Kook. I made my way through *Orot*, one of Rav Kook's seminal works, with Rabbi Shlomo Aviner's explanatory commentary (for which I'll be eternally grateful), plowed through Rav Kook's letters, and dove into the works of Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlap and other students.

In studying Rav Kook's teachings, I wasn't merely learning another great *sefer*. His writings completely revolutionized my understanding of what Torah is and why we're here on earth. At the heart of his vision lies the crucial distinction between *pratiyut* and *klaliyut* – terms derived from the Hebrew words "*prat*" (particular/individual) and "*klal*" (general/collective) – a distinction that unlocks the entire purpose of Jewish existence in our time.

In exile, Jewish thought naturally focused on *pratiyut* – a constricted spiritual consciousness primarily concerned with one's personal relationship to G-d. In this mindset, we focus on our own *mitzvot*, our own spiritual growth, our own portion in the World to Come. Even our communities become extensions of this self-absorption. This narrow perspective – understandable during exile when national expression was impossible – ultimately misses the larger cosmic purpose of Jewish existence.

At the heart of Rav Kook's thought is *klaliyut* – often translated as "universality" or "the collective," but these translations fail to capture its essence. *Klaliyut* is a consciousness in which a Jew transcends his private concerns to see the destiny of the Jewish nation as central to his own existence. This isn't merely performing occasional acts of kindness for fellow Jews; it's a complete psychological reorientation. The *klaliyut* Jew "steps outside" his individual experience to see himself primarily as a cell within the living organism of *Am Yisrael*. He is motivated not by the pursuit of personal spiritual attainment or individual salvation, but by a burning commitment to G-d's plan for the Jewish people and their mission in this world – in other words, redemption. The entire focus shifts from "What will become of me?" to "What will become of us? How can I contribute to our national destiny?"

Take Tisha B'Av as an example: Someone who sees this day merely as a time to lament personal distance from G-d because we don't have a *Beit HaMikdash* is completely missing the point. This approach reduces Judaism to spiritual self-improvement and personal religious fulfillment – the hallmark of *pratiyut*. The world desperately needs G-d's presence, the *Shechina*, to reenter creation in a way unseen since the *Beit HaMikdash* stood. Our purpose is redemption – partnering with G-d to reveal His name and spread G-dliness throughout the world. This mission demands that we break

free from smallness and embrace *klaliyut* – the consciousness of the collective.

Rabbi Aryeh Levine once said of Rav Kook: “Who am I to judge the greatness of Rav Kook? But I can say this: I have never seen smallness in him!” This absence of smallness is what I found so liberating in Rav Kook’s writings. His vision extended far beyond the individual soul to encompass the entire Jewish people, humanity, and cosmos itself.

For five years while serving as rabbi, I immersed myself in Rav Kook’s teachings. I read his letters and marveled at his poetic Hebrew. And day by day, I grew increasingly dissatisfied with my American rabbinical life. Don’t misunderstand – being a *shul* rabbi is incredibly meaningful. When you’re the rabbi, many normal boundaries dissolve. People of every age and background sat at our table, and I learned from them all. Teaching Torah and helping other Jews was powerful and fulfilling.

But pulpit life can also feel suffocatingly small. The community drama over petty politics. The heated arguments over how long *davening* should take. The endless debates over whether a woman could serve as *shul* president. I began thinking: “Can I really spend my life dealing with these issues? *Am Yisrael’s* pants are falling down, and we’re worried about fixing our tie!”

I don’t mean to be dismissive – these are legitimate community concerns that require attention. But when such issues become our primary focus, consuming the majority of our time and energy, we’ve lost perspective on what truly matters. Reading Rav Kook’s letters, I found myself powerfully identifying with his frustrations. In one letter, he writes: “For a moment, I’m breaking free from the suffocating emptiness of the petty pursuits that stir and consume the masses” (*Iggrot Ra’aya* #691). His words captured exactly what I was feeling – a yearning to break free from the smallness that seemed to dominate communal life.

Rabbi Ouri Cherki explains the progression from the teachings of the Chassidic masters to those of Rav Kook. The Ba’al Shem Tov famously tried to travel to

the Land of Israel but only made it as far as Istanbul before being forced to turn back. As the *Chassidim* traditionally explain during the *Seudat Mashiach* at the end of Pesach, this wasn’t merely a failed travel attempt, but rather a part of G-d’s plan. As Rabbi Cherki explains, it wasn’t yet time for the deep teachings of *klaliyut* to be revealed to the world. The Ba’al Shem Tov’s divine mission was to reveal the holiness of the individual during exile, when national expression was impossible.

His great-grandson, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, managed to reach the Land of Israel and began to reveal the holiness of the Land and Jewish nationhood. But he too couldn’t remain permanently. He served as a transitional link, bridging individual and national holiness. Finally, Rav Kook arrived in Israel, stayed, and transformed it. Through him, the depth of our national mission was finally revealed, completing this historical-spiritual progression by restoring *klaliyut* to its rightful place (Rabbi Ouri Cherki, *A Clear Thought: World and Man in Rav Kook’s Teachings*, Introduction).

It’s not that Chassidic thought lacks holiness or depth – quite the contrary. The teachings of the Ba’al Shem Tov and his disciples represent an essential stage in our journey toward redemption. But they are not the final destination. The focus on individual spiritual perfection was perfectly suited to exile, when national expression was impossible. But now, in the age of redemption, we must expand our consciousness from *pratiyut* to *klaliyut*, from the individual to the nation.

Rav Kook’s thought, like *Chassidut*, draws from the “Secret Torah,” from Kabbalah. The three Torahs of Israel represent three different dimensions of time: The Written Torah belongs to the past – once written down, it can no longer be changed. The Oral Torah belongs to the present – constantly evolving through discussion and application. And the Secret Torah belongs to the future – it contains the seeds of wisdom that will fully blossom only in the messianic era.

This visionary dimension is what sets Rav Kook apart. More than any other

modern Jewish thinker, he possessed a clear vision of the redemptive future unfolding before our eyes. He prophetically described the eventual collapse of secular Zionism, which we witness today, and outlined the necessary steps toward final redemption.

Rav Kook’s teachings on *klaliyut* and Jewish nationhood have practical implications. They demand that we become activists for *Am Yisrael* and for redemption. His vision calls us to participate actively in the historical process of redemption – to build settlements, strengthen Jewish sovereignty in our land, and labor toward the spiritual revival of our people. As Rabbi Yitzchak Nissenbaum wrote in *HaMizrachi* in 1921, “The gravest sin of all is indifference to the fate of our nation.”

As I delved deeper into Rav Kook’s world, I found myself increasingly drawn to the great cosmic drama he described. The monumental struggles of Jewish nationhood, a people rising to fulfill its divine destiny after centuries of oppression – this was the real story of our time. *Am Yisrael* in the Land of Israel is living the epic narrative foretold by our prophets thousands of years ago, heroically battling enemies for sovereignty over our ancestral homeland. In comparison, American Jewish life felt small, almost trivial. You might say I ultimately left the *shul* and made *Aliyah* with my family because of FOMO – fear of missing out on the great drama of redemption.

In Rav Kook, G-d gave us an unparalleled gift; a taste of the prophets of old and the future redemption. May we merit to study his words – and to live by them.



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Home at Last: A Eulogy for Zvi Feldman, hy”d

The Talmud tells us that one reason we celebrate Tu B'Av is because the dead of Beitar were finally buried. In Israel today, we know this same anguish – families waiting to bury their sons, especially soldiers whose bodies are held by enemies.

On May 11th, 2025, the IDF announced they had recovered the body of Zvi Feldman, killed in Lebanon in 1982. Zvi died fighting at Sultan Yaakov that June, in a battle where 22 soldiers fell. At his burial, 43 years later, his sister Anna Cohen spoke these words.

Yesterday we heard that you had returned. It is a joy that is shrouded in great sadness, but we know that there is no joy like the resolution of doubts, and we are happy with the good we received. My dear brother Zvi, you have returned to us.

You have returned to the homeland that you loved so much. How symbolic that last Shabbat was *Parashat Acharei Mot* and *Parashat Kedoshim*. At this time you will find peace. Now that you are buried, you are buried as a warrior who defended the Land of Israel and our people, and you fell *al kiddush Hashem*.

I am so proud of you. And up there in the high and holy place where you are, I ask that you will be a messenger of righteousness over us and strengthen our prayers to Hashem, for the return of all the kidnapped, captives and missing from all of Israel's wars. “And may the sons return to their borders.”

I would like to end by reading a poem that you wrote when you were in high school, a kind of prophecy that fulfilled itself. Indeed, it fulfilled itself, and I found it when I was organizing your library. It is in your handwriting:

“I am here, yes it is me, the last of the last. A long time has passed since then, much more than a few years. I did not fall alone, of course not. It is just a pity that so many fell, and all the good ones.” Written by Zvika Feldman.

I will always remember you, my brother, forever.

The body of Zechariah Baumol, who also fell in the battle of Sultan Yaakov, was returned to Israel in March 2019. The body of Yehuda Katz still remains to be returned to Israel, and to 'kever Yisrael!

(PHOTOS: IDF SPOKESPERSON'S UNIT)



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Leadership at a Time of Crisis

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks 7"צד

The *parsha* of Masei always occurs at the heart of the Three Weeks. This is the time when we engage in an act of collective recall of our two greatest defeats as a nation. The symbol of the nation was the *Beit HaMikdash* in Jerusalem. So the symbol of the nation's defeat was the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*. It happened twice, once in the sixth century BCE, the second time in the first century of the common era. In both cases it happened because of poor leadership.

The first defeat was set in motion some three centuries before it happened by a disastrous decision on the part of King Shlomo's son Rechavam. The people were restless during the latter part of Shlomo's reign. They felt he had placed too heavy a burden on the people, particularly during the building of the *Beit HaMikdash*. When he died they came to his son and successor and asked him to lighten the load. His father's counselors told him to accede to their request. They gave him one of the finest pieces of advice ever given to a leader. If you serve the people they will serve you (*Melachim I 12:7*). Rechavam did not listen. The kingdom split. Defeat of both halves – the northern and southern kingdoms – was inevitable and only a matter of time. As Abraham Lincoln said: "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

The second defeat in the days of the Romans was the result of a complete collapse of leadership during the late Second *Beit HaMikdash* period. The Hasmonean kings, having defeated Hellenism, then succumbed to it. The priesthood became politicized and corrupt. Maimonides wrote, in his Letter to the Sages of Marseilles, that the Second *Beit HaMikdash* fell because Jews had not learned military strategy and the laws of conquest. The *Gemara* says it fell because of gratuitous hatred. Josephus tells us it fell because of conflicts within the forces defending Jerusalem. All three explanations are true and part of the same phenomenon. When there is no effective leadership, divisions open up within

the group. There is internal conflict, energy is wasted, and no coherent strategy emerges. Again defeat becomes inevitable.

In Judaism, leadership is not a luxury but a necessity. Ours is a small and intensely vulnerable people. Inspired, we rise to greatness. Uninspired, we fall.

But there is, oddly enough, a deeply positive message about the Three Weeks. For the fact is that the Jewish people survived those defeats. And they did not merely survive. They recovered and grew stronger. They became in the most positive sense a nation of survivors. Who gave them that strength and courage?

The answer is: three leaders whose names are indelibly associated with the Three Weeks: Moshe, whose message to the generations at the beginning of *Devarim* is always read on the Shabbat before Tisha B'Av, Yishayahu, whose vision gives that day its name as *Shabbat Chazon*, and Yirmiyahu, the prophet who foresaw the destruction and whose words form the *haftarot* for two of the Three Weeks.

What made these men great leaders? They were all critical of their contemporaries – but then, so are most people. It takes no skill whatsoever to be a critic. All three predicted doom. But Yirmiyahu himself pointed out that predicting doom is a no-risk option. If bad things happen, you are proved right. If they don't – well, clearly G-d decided to have compassion (see *Yirmiyahu 28*; Maimonides, *Hilchot Yesodei haTorah 10:4*).

So what made Moshe, Yishayahu, and Yirmiyahu different? What made them great leaders? Specifically, what made them leaders in hard times, and thus leaders for all time? Three things set them apart.

The first is that they were all prophets of hope. Even in their darkest moments they were able to see through the clouds of disaster to the clear sky beyond. They were not optimists. There is a difference between optimism and hope. Optimism is the

belief that things will get better. Hope is the belief that if we work hard enough together we can make things better. It needs no courage to be an optimist, but it needs courage, wisdom, a deep understanding of history and possibility, and the ability to communicate, to be a prophet of hope. That is what Moshe, Yishayahu, and Yirmiyahu all were.

Here is Moshe: “When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come on you and you take them to heart wherever the L-rd your G-d disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to Hashem your G-d and obey Him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then Hashem your G-d will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where He scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there Hashem your G-d will gather you and bring you back” (*Devarim* 30:1-4).

Here is Yishayahu: “I will restore your leaders as in days of old, your rulers as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City” (*Yishayahu* 1:26).

And this is Yirmiyahu: “This is what the L-rd says: ‘Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded,’ says the L-rd. ‘They will return from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your descendants,’ says the L-rd. ‘Your children will return to their land’” (*Yirmiyahu* 31:15-16).

The point about all three of these prophecies is that they were delivered knowing that bad things were about to happen to the Jewish people. They are not easy hope; they express hope rescued from the valley of despair.

The second characteristic that made Moshe, Yishayahu, and Yirmiyahu different was that they delivered their criticism in love. Yishayahu said in the name of G-d perhaps the loveliest words ever spoken to the Jewish people: “Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, My unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor My covenant of peace be removed” (*Yishayahu* 54:10).

Yirmiyahu, in the midst of his critique of the nation, said in the name of G-d: “I remember the kindness of your youth, how as a bride you loved Me and followed Me through the wilderness, through a land not sown” (*Yirmiyahu* 2:2).

Moshe’s love for the people was evident in every prayer he said on their behalf, especially after they had made the Golden Calf. On that occasion he said to G-d: “Now, please forgive their sin – but if not, then blot me out of the book You have written” (*Shemot* 32:32). He was prepared to give his life for his people. It is easy to be a critic, but the only effective critics are those who truly love – and show they love – those whom they criticize.

Third, Moshe, Yishayahu, and Yirmiyahu were the three prophets who, more than any others, spoke about the role of Jews and

Israel in the context of humanity as a whole. Moshe said to keep the commands “for they are your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations” (*Devarim* 4:6).

Yishayahu said in G-d’s name: “You are My witnesses... that I am G-d” (*Yishayahu* 43:12). And he also said: “I created you and appointed you a covenant people, a light of nations, opening eyes deprived of light, rescuing prisoners from confinement, from the dungeon those who sit in darkness” (*Yishayahu* 42:6-7). Yirmiyahu was the leader who defined for all time the role of Jews in the Diaspora: “Seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to Hashem on its behalf, for in its prosperity you shall prosper” (*Yirmiyahu* 29:7) – the first statement in history of what it is to be a creative minority.

Why did this universal perspective matter? Because those who care only for their own people are chauvinists. They create false expectations, narrow and self-regarding emotions, and bravado rather than real courage.

Moshe had to show (as he did when he rescued Yitro’s daughters from the local shepherds, see *Shemot* 2:17) that he cared for non-Israelites as well as Israelites. Yirmiyahu was told by G-d to become a “Prophet to the nations,” not just to Israel (see *Yirmiyahu* 1:5). Yishayahu in one of the most remarkable prophecies of all time showed as much concern for Egypt and Assyria, Israel’s enemies, as for Israel itself (see *Yishayahu* 19:19-25).

Great leaders are great not just because they care for their own people – everyone except a self-hater does that – but because they care for humanity. That is what gives their devotion to their own people its dignity and moral strength.

To be an agent of hope, to love the people you lead, and to widen their horizons to embrace humanity as a whole – that is the kind of leadership that gives people the ability to recover from crisis and move on. It is what made Moshe, Yishayahu, and Yirmiyahu three of the greatest leaders of all time.



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Rav Kook's Message for Tisha B'Av 5785

Rabbi Reuven Taragin

“All the Roman commanders who saw the internal conflict among the Jews viewed it as a gift from heaven and urged an immediate attack. But Vespasian wisely counseled patience: ‘If we wait, we will find our enemy fewer in number, after they have worn themselves out through their internal struggle. It is better to leave the Jews to destroy one another.’”¹

The *Beit HaMikdash* was destroyed because we saw each other as enemies. Our infighting weakened us and made us vulnerable to attack by our actual enemies, who waited patiently for us to exhaust each other. Indeed, the *Churban* was a natural result of baseless hatred, not just an external punishment. This historical lesson should serve as a stark reminder of the dire consequences of disunity.

Though we have finally returned to Israel after two millennia, we are still plagued by baseless hatred and its consequences. Hamas' invasion did not occur in a vacuum. They attacked us after months of our vicious infighting. Like 2,000 years ago, we weakened ourselves, and our enemies took advantage.

Thankfully, October 7 brought us to our senses, and we responded by standing together against Hamas. Left and right, religious and secular, fought shoulder to shoulder on the battlefield and supported each other on the home front.

Although we united, we were not unified. We fought a common enemy, but we did not strengthen our relationships with one another. Our *achdut* was merely external and thus disintegrated over time. In recent months, arguments and mutual recrimination have returned to October 6 levels. Right versus left, coalition versus opposition, religious and secular – all the familiar divisions have reemerged.

October 7 showed us the need for *achdut*. Everyone speaks about its importance, but also about how evil the “other side” is and why we lack *achdut* because of “them.” We all emphasize the importance of unity and speaking respectfully, but we often fail to apply this across divides. “They” are

the reason we face challenges in the war; “they” are why the hostages remain in captivity; “they” are to blame for the burden on reservists. Each group decides who is worthy of respect; each is demonized by others. Despite recognizing our need for unity after October 7, it still eludes us.

Rav Kook, whose ninetieth *yahrzeit* this edition marks, addressed a similar reality in his time. Divisions in Israeli society are not new. Baseless hatred sent us into exile and returned with us to Israel. Rav Kook decried the hatred and divisions he saw in the people returning to Israel:

“It seems that we are divided into two camps. We have become accustomed to using two names to define ourselves: ‘Religious’ and ‘Not Religious.’ These are new labels that were never commonly used among us before. We always knew that people are not equal in their spiritual levels... But to assign a fixed, defined name that designates parties and factions – that we never knew. The sacred unity that must rest upon Israel as a whole people is as though hidden from our eyes, and we grope like the blind in darkness. We have no other advice, truly, than to remove these foreign names from our camp.”²

Rav Kook viewed Jewish infighting in *Eretz Yisrael* as a greater desecration than exile itself: “Indeed, all the exiles, with all their degradation, do not compare in severity to that terrible desecration of G-d's name – the desecration of the name of Israel, the desecration of the name of our holy Land, the desecration of the name of all our sacred aspirations and longings, embodied in the return to Zion, the building of the Land, and the national revival that is powerfully awakening within us.”³

Scattered throughout hundreds of countries worldwide, we could not be unified. That should have changed upon our return to Israel. Thankfully, we now live as one people speaking the same language in our ancestral homeland. For our return to lead to redemption, we need to reverse the sin that caused the exile in the first place – baseless hatred.

Disagreement is natural. Hashem created each person differently. Two Jews have at least three opinions. However, we must remember that we are one people, one family, and act accordingly, even when we disagree. We should continue to strongly advocate for our positions, but always remember that we are negotiating with siblings.

May we heed Rav Kook's call from almost one hundred years ago: “Let us come to know one another under the inclusive name *Yisrael*, not by factional or partisan titles.”⁴ “Let us learn to look at each other as brothers. To see the others with the eyes of merciful brothers suffering together and ready to unify for one holy goal: assisting, honoring, and protecting the entire nation.”⁵ May doing so help us vanquish our enemies and merit the completion of the redemption and the rebuilding of the *Beit HaMikdash*.

1. *The War of the Jews*, Josephus Flavius.
2. *Ma'amarei HaRe'iyah* 1, 76.
3. *Ibid.*, 2, 365.
4. *Ibid.*, 1, 76.
5. *Ibid.*, 2, 365.



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Shelley and Rav Doron Perez



Rebuilding Homes: Hashem's and Ours

Rabbanit Shani Taragin

This Tisha B'Av, over 10,600 Israelis are displaced – evacuated from their homes due to Iranian missile strikes, in addition to the thousands still without permanent shelter since October 7. As we mark the day of mourning for national tragedies, modern scenes of dislocation awaken an ancient grief: the pain of homelessness. But in reflecting on the loss of our own homes, we turn our hearts to a deeper spiritual homelessness – of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, whose coveted *Beit HaMikdash* lies in ruins.

The Divine call of “I am with him in distress” (*Tehillim* 91:15) echoes through our displacement. Just as we were locked in our homes during COVID-19, and then again in bomb shelters during Operation “Rising Lion,” Hashem’s *mikdashai me’at* (synagogues and study halls) were closed as well. Perhaps we are meant now more than ever to hear Hashem’s cry every night (*Berachot* 3a) as He roars like a lion: “Woe to Me that I destroyed My house, burned My palace, and exiled My children.” The pain of *Am Yisrael*’s homelessness mirrors the Divine loneliness.

This symbiotic relationship emerged before building both Temples. *David HaMelech*, troubled by the dissonance between his cedar palace and the simple tent housing the *aron ha-brit*, declared: “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of Hashem dwells within curtains” (*Shmuel* II 7:2). Hashem’s response through Natan revealed that building the Divine home is not a personal project – it is a national destiny, a covenantal

unfolding requiring the establishment and security of David’s house and dynasty.

Chaggai’s piercing rebuke echoes this message: “Is it a time for you to dwell in your paneled houses, while this House lies in ruins?” (*Chaggai* 1:4). The people’s spiritual apathy led to material frustration. They planted much and harvested little – because although their homes were secure, Hashem’s home was not a priority.

Response #1: Yearning and prayer

Tisha B'Av calls us to reflect on rebuilding Hashem’s home with hope – not only in mortar and stone but in our priorities and yearnings. The *Sifrei* teaches that David was praised for seeking the *Mikdash*’s location even before being commanded (*Sifrei, Devarim* 62).

David vowed: “I will not enter my house... until I find a place for Hashem” (*Tehillim* 132:3–5). Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai explains that thousands fell in David’s wars because they failed to demand the *Beit HaMikdash*’s construction (*Midrash Tehillim* 17). “If those who never saw the Temple destroyed were punished for not seeking its construction, how much more are we accountable who have witnessed its absence?”

Our sages instituted daily prayers requesting: “Please, in Your great mercy, return Your presence to Tzion and restore the Temple service to Jerusalem.” They established “*Boneh Yerushalayim*” as a separate blessing in *Shemoneh Esrei* and *Birkat HaMazon*, ensuring that yearning for Hashem’s home permeates our daily consciousness. The *Kuzari* concludes that the *Shechina*’s return depends on our wholehearted longing, until we cherish even the stones and dust of Yerushalayim (*Tehillim* 102:15).



Response #2: Unity

Rebuilding - whether our physical homes or Hashem's spiritual dwelling - requires national cohesion and the end of destructive divisions. The Rambam (*Moreh Nevuchim* III:45) teaches why the *Beit HaMikdash's* location was deliberately hidden in the Torah: to prevent tribal discord over its placement. Only after establishing unified leadership could the Temple be built, "so that the command would belong to one, and quarrels would cease."

The *Gemara* (*Ta'anit* 30b) tells us that the fifteenth of Av became one of the most joyful days precisely because it marked reconciliations: tribes were permitted to intermarry, *Shevet Binyamin* was restored to the community, and barriers to pilgrimage were removed.

Response #3: Building new families

Building homes includes building families. Just as Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel declared, "There were no days as joyful for Israel as the fifteenth of Av and Yom Kippur" (*Ta'anit* 30b), when young women would dance in vineyards seeking life partners, we have witnessed a profound awakening to the urgency of building Jewish homes post-October 7.

This wedding renaissance embodies rebuilding. Each *chuppah* becomes a *mikdash me'at* where the Divine Presence dwells. Each new home creates a foundation stone in reconstructing our physical and spiritual homeland, leading to the eternal *binyan adei ad!* The most powerful response to those seeking to eliminate Jewish homes is building more through marriage and family. The final *sheva berachot* blessing takes on new urgency: "Speedily, Hashem, may there be heard in the cities of Yehudah and streets of Yerushalayim the sound of joy and gladness, the voice of groom and bride."

The path forward

As our hearts extend to all homeless brethren this Tisha B'Av, let us feel not only our displacement but Hashem's cosmic homelessness. Building our physical homes and rebuilding the *Beit HaMikdash* are interconnected aspects of divine partnership.

Every home rebuilt, family reunited, marriage celebrated, and act of *chesed* becomes a small sanctuary preparing the world for the ultimate home. Every prayer for Jerusalem and every tear shed contributes to rebuilding.

Through our return to unity and purpose, we hasten the day when both divine and human dwellings will know peace, and we finally return home to our Father's table.



Rabbanit Shani Taragin

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What did you learn from the search process?

A lot of faith in the process we need to go through. If I haven't found my match yet, I probably still have more work to do. Don't despair.
Always try to refine myself.

A funny story from one of your dates:

In Refael's profile, his sister wrote that he lives in Beit El, because at that time he was living there at a pre army program. I presumed that his family was from Beit El, and I imagined him in a certain way, which was why I said yes to the suggestion. While we were talking, I realized he lives in a town near Netivot, and he was far from the character I had imagined. I don't know if I would have gone out with him had I known.

Tell us about your marriage proposal.

Three weeks after our first date, without having spoken a word about marriage, and without having met each other's parents, we had a long date that ended on the Peres balcony on the beach in Jaffa, where Rafael pulled out a ring and asked me to marry him. (He chose it himself, and he has excellent taste) My first reaction was: Rafael, what are you doing?

Who are the ambassadors who set you up and what would you like to tell them?

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Eikha and the Prophecies of Consolation in Isaiah

Dr. Yael Ziegler

Eikha is a book of suffering, filled with enormous pain, bewilderment, despair and outrage. It offers no hope and no guidance for rehabilitation; the final verse trails off with a sigh of despair: “For You have surely rejected us, You have been greatly wrathful against us.”

However, *Eikha* does not exist in a vacuum. Surprisingly, the biblical narrative, and the story of the nation of Israel, do not conclude with exile. Cyrus allows the Judeans to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their Temple and community. While some of the biblical books of this period (such as Ezra-Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah) record both great excitement and great disappointment, these events imbue the nation with unanticipated potential for success. As the biblical story marches forward past exile, Israel’s optimistic outlook takes shape: redemption can follow exile, dispersion and loss of autonomy do not spell the end of the nation.

The “prophecies of consolation” in the book of Isaiah (chapters 40–66) focus on the period of the return to Zion.¹ These prophecies present Cyrus as G-d’s messenger (44:28–45:2) and urge the Judeans to leave Babylonia (48:20). Other prophecies address a personified Jerusalem, advising her that G-d is returning to the city along with her children (namely, her exiled populace), and promising Jerusalem a glorious future. These chapters pulse with jubilation and excitement; redemption is at hand, and Israel will return to a dazzling city. These prophecies maintain a special relationship with the book of *Eikha*, creating a dialogue between the book of destruction and the biblical passages that mark its reversal.

Hazal recognize the remarkable linguistic exchange between the books.² Noting that the prophet Isaiah lived long before the

redemptive events, they explain that Isaiah preempts Jeremiah’s harsh composition of rebuke by providing prophecies that offer a remedy in advance of the calamity.³

R. Nehemia said: Even though Jeremiah cursed them using an alphabetic structure [in] *Eikha* [chapter 1], Isaiah pre-empted and cured them for each verse until [the final one]. (*Eikha Rabbah*, *Petihta* 1:21)

The *Midrash* cites an alphabetical catalogue of suffering in *Eikha* chapter 1 (attributing authorship to Jeremiah), following the opening of each verse with a corresponding prophecy in which Isaiah rectifies the situation. These are some selected examples from the *Midrash*:

Jeremiah [in *Eikha*] said (1:2): “She surely cries in the night.”
Isaiah said (30:19):⁴ “She shall surely *not* cry.”

Jeremiah [in *Eikha*] said (1:4), “The *roads* to Zion mourn.”
Isaiah said (40:3): “A voice calls: Clear the *road* for the L-rd in the wilderness.”

Jeremiah [in *Eikha*] said (1:5), “Her adversaries were at the head.”

Isaiah said (60:4), “Those who tormented you will come to you bowed.”

Jeremiah [in *Eikha*] said (1:6), “Departed from the daughter of Zion is all her glory.”

Isaiah said (59:20), “And to Zion will come a redeemer.”

Jeremiah [in *Eikha*] said (1:8), “Jerusalem has surely sinned.”
Isaiah said (44:22), “I have erased her sins like a cloud.”

Jeremiah [in *Eikha*] said (1:10), “Her entire nation groans, they seek bread.”

Isaiah said (49:10), “They will not be hungry, and they will not be thirsty.”

Jeremiah [in *Eikha*] said (1:17), “Zion spreads out with her hands, there is no comforter for her.”

Isaiah said (51:12): “I, I am your comforter.”

(*Eikha Rabbah*, 1:23)

This literary *Midrash* lays the groundwork for viewing *Eikha* alongside the book of Isaiah. It turns out that the destruction of Jerusalem does not spell the nation’s end; Isaiah’s prophecies direct the biblical reader to the next stage of biblical history, in which G-d reverses *Eikha*’s dismal situation. Exile is followed by return, just as consolation follows grief.

● This article is an excerpt from “*Eikha and the Prophecies of Consolation in Isaiah*”, in *Lamentations: Faith in a Turbulent World* (Jerusalem: Maggid, 2021), 475–78.

1. Not all these prophecies of consolation console, some of these chapters offer harsh rebuke, over both past and present misdemeanors. Nevertheless, overall, these chapters offer optimistic messages, designed to launch and maintain a hopeful period of the return to Zion.
2. Biblical scholars also observe the various ways in which Lamentations correlates with the prophecies of consolation in Isaiah. See, for example, P. T. Willey, *Remember the Former Things: The Recollection of Previous Texts in Second Isaiah* (Scholars Press, 1997); B. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Isaiah: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); T. Linafelt, “*Living Beyond Lamentations: The Rhetoric of Survival in Second Isaiah*,” in *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe Lament and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 62–79.
3. This *Midrash* indirectly relates to the question of when chapters 40–66 of Isaiah were composed. The first chapters in Isaiah (1–12) relate to events that took place during the mid-eighth century BCE, while the chapters at its end (40–66)

relate to events that took place in the sixth century BCE. The *Midrash* assumes that Isaiah wrote these chapters prophetically, in advance of the event. Ibn Ezra (Is. 40:1) seems to suggest (in a typically cryptic fashion) that these chapters were not written by Isaiah, but presumably by a later prophet. For further discussion of this topic, see Amnon Bazak, *To This Very Day: Fundamental Questions in Bible Study* (Jerusalem: Maggid, 2020), 149–59.

4. In its search for corrective verses, the *Midrash* does not distinguish between the earlier and later prophecies of the book of Isaiah (although most of its examples are drawn from the “prophecies of consolation” at the end of Isaiah).



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The Carpenter, His Apprentice and His Wife

Rabbi Ari Kahn

In recounting the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*, the *Gemara* presents stories that both commemorate our collective tragedy and offer theological meaning for the *churban's* devastation. One such account stands out for its profound sadness. For the rabbis say as result of this episode their fate was sealed.

“Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: What is the meaning of ‘so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage’ (*Micha* 2:2)? There was an incident involving a certain man who set his eyes on his master’s wife, and he was a carpenter’s apprentice. One time his master needed to borrow some money, and his apprentice said to him: Send your wife to me and I will lend her the money. He sent his wife to him, and he spent three days with her. The master arose early and went to the apprentice, and said to him: Where is my wife whom I sent to you? The apprentice said: I sent her back immediately, but I heard that some youth abused her on the way. The master said: What shall I do? The apprentice said: If you listen to my advice, divorce her. He said to him: But her marriage contract is large and I do not have the money to pay it. The apprentice said to him: I will lend you the money, and you will give her payment of her marriage contract. The master arose and divorced her, and the apprentice went and married her. When the time came that the debt was due, and he did not have the means with which to repay it, the apprentice said to his master: Come and work off your debt with me. And they, the apprentice and his wife, would sit and eat and drink, while he, the woman’s first husband, would stand over them and serve them their drinks. And tears would drop from his eyes and fall into their cups, **and at that time the Jewish people’s sentence was sealed.** And some say for ‘two wicks in one lamp’” (*Gittin* 58a).

This story unfolds as a tragedy of lust, deception, and unspeakable cruelty. At its center stands a man who covets his

master’s wife – a betrayal particularly vile given that this very master had taught him his trade and secured his livelihood. His desire leads him to destroy his benefactor through calculated deceit, bringing about not only financial devastation but a final, crushing humiliation: the ruined master must now serve wine to his former wife and her new companion – his own former apprentice – left with nothing but his tears.

Despite the deviousness and cruelty displayed, we are at a loss to understand why one isolated act of infidelity and treachery resulted in exile. If this story was somehow a metaphor for the entire Jewish people, it would provide a greater explanation. Apparently, this story is symptomatic of a fault that existed within the people which caused the eventual destruction.

While the story begins with lust as the driving force, the *Gemara* suggests this may not tell the complete picture by offering two different interpretations of what actually occurred. The second interpretation describes “two wicks in one candle” – which Rashi explains as a metaphor for adultery, meaning the prohibition against sleeping with a married woman was violated. But what does the first interpretation suggest?

The *Gemara* emphasizes that the moment the husband witnessed this cruel spectacle and wept, the fate of the Jewish people was sealed. This raises a crucial question: was this act of cruelty separate from adultery, or did it include adultery?

When the *Gemara* presents adultery as an alternative explanation, it implies that the primary interpretation involves cruelty without adultery. In other words, the devastating impact came not from sexual transgression, but from the sheer heartlessness of forcing a man to serve his former wife and his betrayer – a humiliation so profound it triggered divine judgment upon the entire nation.

This interpretation is harder to grasp. If lust began the story but adultery wasn’t the ultimate sin, what truly motivated this devastating act? The answer lies in understanding what led to the destruction of the first and second *Batei Mikdash*. The Second *Beit HaMikdash's* destruction stemmed from *sinat chinam* – baseless hatred – not the sexual immorality that caused the first destruction.

The *Yerushalmi* expands this concept of *sinat chinam*, adding other elements that plagued the generation of destruction: “We find that the first *Beit HaMikdash* was only destroyed because of idolatry, sexual sins and murder, but at the time of the second *Beit HaMikdash* they were diligent in Torah study, careful with the commandments and tithes, and all elements of good were with them, but they loved money and hated one another with groundless hatred” (*Yoma* 1:1).

This creates a troubling portrait: scrupulously observant, devoted to Torah study, yet money-obsessed and filled with hatred toward others. Perhaps this describes our apprentice perfectly. If he lusted after the woman but remained chaste, it was likely due to his inflated sense of nobility and honor. His restraint probably only reinforced his exaggerated self-righteousness.

But what drove him to orchestrate such cruelty? Did he truly need to force his former teacher to serve wine to him and his new bride? Did he consider his mentor’s tears at all?

Clearly not. The apprentice was consumed by hatred – why else would he have taken that final, devastating step of forcing his former mentor to witness his ex-wife’s intimacy with her new husband? This wasn’t about lust or even greed. It was pure, calculated cruelty born of *sinat chinam*.

Before we return to the motivation of the apprentice, let us turn our attention to the behavior of the wife. For the most part she is treated as an object in the

story, sent by one man and then taken by another. The ease in which she seamlessly makes the shift from one man to the other is disturbing. She agrees to marry the apprentice. She chooses to sit and eat and drink as her ex-husband is now forced to watch and work. It sounds as if there is collusion between her and the apprentice.

Let us reconsider the story through a different lens. The husband appears to be an abusive personality who craves control over his victims. The apprentice understands this dynamic perfectly. When the husband seeks advice and is told to divorce his wife, he agrees without hesitation. No emotional attachment? No attempt to find her?

The apprentice anticipated this exact response. Now we understand the wife's attraction to the apprentice - they were both fed up with their abusive, manipulative master/husband. But lust wasn't the only motive, and liberation wasn't sufficient. The husband had to be utterly humiliated. This reframes the entire narrative: two victims of an

abuser conspiring not just to escape, but to destroy their tormentor through calculated degradation.

There is another crucial element needed to be understood in order to gain insight into the choice of this story as a paradigm used to describe the generation. Both the apprentice and the wife did not believe they did anything wrong. They did not think they sinned. These people were observant. But they harbored one dark place - a place of venom and hatred. The danger escalates when people not only sin, but convince themselves their destructive acts were actually righteous.

This captures the apprentice's essence - outwardly observant, inwardly poisoned. So enamored with religious appearances, he couldn't fathom that he was committing a grave sin. This self-deception was endemic to that generation's behavior.

Jealousy, desire, and hatred have plagued humanity since time immemorial. But when we justify our hatred and convince ourselves we're performing a *mitzvah*, we make repentance impossible.

The apprentice and his new wife savored their wine, relished the lesson they believed they had taught their "terrible, abusive" tormentor, and enjoyed having their new servant - until the Romans arrived and destroyed everything.



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THE MOURNING LIGHT

RABBI LARRY ROTHWACHS

On the surface, nothing changes. The fast continues. The *kinot* linger. The *Beit HaMikdash* is still in ruins. But something unexpected – and difficult to define – begins to stir. As the shadows lengthen on Tisha B'Av, we rise from the floor. We don *tefillin*. We soften our silence. And although the laws remain in place until nightfall, something inside us begins to shift. What is that shift? Why does the mood soften while the fast continues? Why, in the midst of mourning, does something else begin to emerge?

Over the generations, *halachic* authorities consistently maintained that Tisha B'Av must be fully observed until the day's end. Rav Hai Gaon rejected the Egyptian custom of wearing leather shoes in the afternoon. The Beit Yosef called early relaxation of mourning practices a *davar tamuah*, an inappropriate response to the gravity of the day. Yet even these authorities acknowledged a qualitative shift in the day's second half. Why?

We find clues in the practice of delaying *tallit* and *tefillin* until *Mincha*. We sit on low stools until midday, then rise to regular chairs. We add the prayer “*Nachem*” only at *Mincha*. Until *chatzot*, we are like an *onen* – one whose deceased loved one lies before them, too raw for comfort. After midday, it is as if we are beginning *shiva*. The grief remains, but we begin to breathe.

The *Mishnah Berura* quotes a tradition that even as the fire destroying the *Beit HaMikdash* raged in the afternoon, from its flames came a revelation: “And your iniquity is complete, O daughter of Zion” (*Eicha* 4:22) – Hashem poured His anger upon wood and stone, not upon us. Even in the punishment, there was mercy. The relationship was not severed.

This idea – that our very suffering signals Hashem's ongoing involvement – is deeply counterintuitive, yet it sits at the

core of our national theology. Rav Yonatan Eybeschutz explained that there is no greater comfort than knowing that Hashem still holds the reins. When suffering appears random, when tragedy strikes without rhyme or reason, we feel adrift. But when we recognize that the pain is part of a divine plan, however mysterious, we also sense His nearness.

The *Gemara* in *Berachot* (7b) tells us something jarring: when David fled from his son Avshalom, he composed a *mizmor* – a song. It seems absurd. Shouldn't he have written a *kinah*, a lament? His own son was leading a rebellion to kill him. But the *Gemara* explains that David had lived with a lingering fear ever since *Natan HaNavi* told him, in the aftermath of the incident with Batsheva, that consequences would come. Would they arrive in the form of a senseless tragedy? A blow from the outside? That kind of suffering is terrifying – not only because of the pain, but because of the distance, the fear that Hashem has turned away. But when David saw that the pain came from within – exactly how Natan had foreseen – he recognized Hashem's hand. Crushing as it was, it meant he had not been abandoned. Hashem was still present, just and engaged. And from within that clarity – not of comfort, but of connection – he sang.

This paradox – that devastation can itself bring comfort – is one we know intimately in our times. On October 7, we experienced loss beyond description, yet in the aftermath we also witnessed divine intervention and survival where there should have been none. It is impossible to ignore the pain, but equally impossible to deny Hashem's presence. We have felt this dissonance ourselves – walking from *kinot* to *Kabbalat Shabbat*, and sensing, almost despite ourselves, a flicker of hope.

The *Beit HaLevi* captures this idea through a *halachic* lens. If someone throws a

wallet into the street, it becomes *hefker* – ownerless. But if someone throws a glass vessel off a roof, it remains theirs until it shatters. They are not abandoning it; they are breaking it deliberately. So too, the suffering of the Jewish people is not a sign of abandonment. It is evidence that we are still His. We are not *hefker*. We are *shivrei kelim* – shattered vessels, not yet whole, but not discarded. We are not happy – we are *shivrei kelim*. But we are still His.

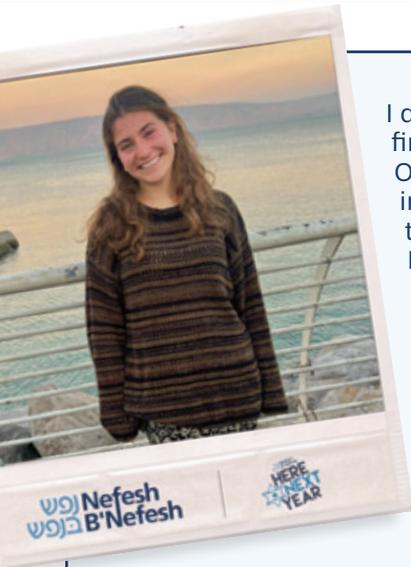
This explains the quiet comfort that stirs on Tisha B'Av afternoon. We are still fasting and mourning. The losses of the morning are not reversed. The destruction remains. But as we rise from the floor, we do so not because anything has changed, but because we have changed. We understand that we are not alone in our suffering. We are still in a relationship. Still seen. Still held. The shift is in us.

May the *nechama* of Tisha B'Av deepen – not because our sorrow disappears, but because we come to see it differently. May we feel Hashem's presence not only in our redemption, but even in our breaking. And may the day soon come when the mourning light gives way to full light, when Yerushalayim is rebuilt, and when consolation no longer needs to emerge from pain.



Rabbi Larry Rothwachs, LCSW, serves as the senior rabbi of Congregation Beth Aaron in Teaneck, NJ and founding rabbi of Meromei Shemesh in Ramat Beit Shemesh.

OLIM IN THEIR OWN WORDS



I decided to move to Israel after finishing Shana bet at Migdal Oz and trying one semester in America. It was clear to me that my Neshama belongs in Eretz Yisrael. In history, there has never been a time like now when we have the ability to make Aliyah so easily. Now is a time my ancestors dreamed of for centuries and I'm lucky enough to be able to take advantage of that bracha. There is no place in the world I'd rather be. I'd rather be here in Israel even

in the hard times than anywhere else. When we mourn, we mourn together, and when we celebrate, we celebrate together!

This year I started studying psychology at Reichman University. I live in Herzliya in an awesome community of people who, like me, have made Aliyah alone.

There is a really special vibe here because of our shared love of Israel. Everyone looks out for each other because we all get the struggle of moving here alone. Living in Israel feels like living aligned with my purpose. Everything takes on an added layer of meaning. Life here feels like it's in the proper perspective with focus on the things that really matter. There isn't a culture of instant gratification and I truly think it makes us so much happier and more content.

If anyone is considering staying in Israel next year, I say to do it! When you have the gut feeling that this is where you need to be, don't ignore it. Trust yourself and your instincts. There is a really special bond among all Olim and a real desire we all have to help each other out, so reach out to people! Everyone knows someone who knows someone who has been in your position and can help you figure out your way here."

Ariella Greenberg

They were meant to be married Sunday night at Psagot Winery. It was meant to be a celebration of love, family, and faith. But the war with Iran escalated, and new restrictions canceled the wedding.

What no one realized was that Naomi and Gavriel were never going to let Iran, or anyone else, stand in the way of building their Bayit Ne'eman b'Yisrael.

Weeks earlier, while planning Naomi's Shabbat Kallah, we found a breathtaking home in the Old City on Airbnb: the Maimon House. Its rooftop overlooked the Hurva Synagogue and the ancient stones of Jerusalem. It felt like destiny. We booked it.

When Psagot canceled, we were stunned. But Naomi and Gavriel were undeterred. Then came the call from Shira and Avi, the owners of the Maimon House.

'Have the wedding here,' they said. 'On the rooftop.'

From that moment, the kindness poured in.

A caterer from the Old City stepped in.

A keyboardist and singer volunteered.

Decorations appeared.

A Kallah chair. A photographer. A Chuppah.

Family and friends mobilized.

And by sunset, the rooftop of the Maimon House had become a sacred space. The Chuppah stood beneath the sky, the walls of Jerusalem as witnesses.

And there, Naomi and Gavriel declared to the world:

You cannot break us. You will not stop us.

Am Yisrael Chai.

In these painful, fearful days, while we mourn, cry out for our hostages, and pray for peace, this wedding became a shining moment of faith, resilience, and unstoppable Jewish joy.

This wasn't just a wedding despite war. This was the wedding their souls had longed for all along—intimate, powerful, holy, and deeply rooted in the eternal strength of our people.

We are endlessly grateful to all who made this miracle possible. Especially Shira and Avi, whose hearts are as beautiful as the home they shared with us.

To those who weren't there: you were with us in spirit.

This is your story too.

Am Yisrael Chai.

Scott Friedman,
father of the bride, Naomi, former Bat Sherut at NBN



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From Churban to Chibur: Reconnecting on Tisha B'Av

Rabbi Shalom Rosner

On Tisha B'Av we mourn the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*. We refer to it as the “*Churban*” – the Destruction. It is essential to understand what we lost, so that we can truly yearn for what we hope to rebuild. To gain a more profound understanding of the *Churban*, we will explore three *Gemara* that offer three different reasons for the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*.

The *Gemara* in *Yoma* 9b highlights that the first *Beit HaMikdash* was destroyed because the people violated the “big three” transgressions – idolatry, murder and promiscuous activity. The second *Beit HaMikdash*, which we are still mourning, was destroyed due to baseless hatred (*sinat chinam*).

However, the *Gemara* in *Nedarim* 81a takes a different approach, suggesting that the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* occurred because the people did not recite the *birchat haTorah*, the blessing before learning Torah. This is shocking. Is it possible that people were engaged in the study of Torah but due to a “technicality” of the lack of the recitation of a *beracha* preceding such learning, devastation and destruction ensued?

Lastly, Rav Yochanan states in *Bava Metzia* 30b that the *Beit HaMikdash* was destroyed because people did not act *lifnim mishurat hadin* – they only followed the strict letter of the law. They did not go beyond, didn't give an inch, and didn't show flexibility or compassion.

How do these three reasons – *sinat chinam*, lack of *birchat haTorah*, and not acting

compassionately – fit together? Are these three unrelated flaws, or can we find a unified perspective on why these failures triggered the *Churban*?

Before we address these questions, there is one more *Gemara* that needs to be explored to complete the puzzle. In *Sanhedrin* 96b, the *Gemara* describes a voice from heaven, a *bat kol*, that was heard as Titus ignited the *Beit HaMikdash*, stating three declarations: “*am ketila ketalt* – You killed a dead nation”; “*heichala klia klit* – You burned a burned building”; and “*kemach techina techint* – You ground already ground flour.” What does this last phrase mean? What does “grinding flour that is already ground” add to the first two declarations? The first is directed at the nation and the second at the *Beit HaMikdash*. What is the purpose of the third example relating to ground flour, and how does it relate to the *Churban*?

In Hebrew, words that share letters – sometimes in reverse – can reveal deep connections. For instance, *oneg* (pleasure) and *nega* (affliction) share the same letters but have opposite meanings. Similarly, *beracha* (blessing) and *bechor* (firstborn) are connected ideas, particularly in the context of receiving a double portion.

Similarly, *churban* and *chibur* share the same letters. *Churban* is the opposite of *chibur* – disconnection versus connection. More importantly, not all destruction is the same. There are two types of *churban*: total annihilation – burning something until it turns into ashes and can never be reconstituted; and dismantling – taking something apart but leaving the pieces

intact. The system is broken, but it's not gone. It's dismembered, not erased, and can be reassembled.

The *Churban* represents the second type. Though the *Beit HaMikdash* was destroyed, the Jewish nation was not obliterated. We were broken into pieces that can be reunited.

Here lies a powerful question: When do we start easing the mourning customs of Tisha B'Av? *Halachically*, it's after midday on the 10th of Av. But experientially, we begin to feel the shift on Tisha B'Av afternoon itself. That's when we start sitting on chairs and put on *tefillin*. Our minds begin to move toward returning to our daily lives. Yet ironically, according to the *Gemara* in *Ta'anit* 29a, that's exactly when the *Beit HaMikdash* began to truly burn. Why do we feel relieved when the situation actually worsened?

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik explains that up until that moment, it was unclear whether Hashem would punish the perpetrators or His beloved nation. Were we going to be destroyed, or would He destroy the temple as a *mashkon* – collateral – and allow the nation to exist? When the *Mikdash* began to burn, it became clear. Hashem chose the *Mikdash* as collateral. He sacrificed the building, not the nation. We were broken but not eliminated.

That's when the comfort begins. The destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* isn't a rejection of us – it's a declaration of the eternal connection that exists between Hashem and the Jewish nation. It represents the second type of *churban*:

dismemberment, not annihilation; disconnection, not deletion.

Now we return to the ground flour. Titus thought he had won. But the *bat kol* mocked him: "You ground flour already ground." What is flour? Ground wheat that has already been separated and fragmented. Titus thought he was destroying the Jewish nation, but in truth, the nation was already in a state of disconnection. But Titus didn't realize that flour can also become dough. It has value and can be rebuilt. The Jewish people were in shambles but could and would be rebuilt.

So what did we become disconnected from? The *Gemara* in *Bava Kama* 30a provides a powerful framework. To become a *chasid* (a pious individual), one should focus on three areas: laws of damages (interpersonal integrity), *Pirkei Avot* (personal ethics), and *Berachot* (religious connection).

The Maharsha explains that these three characteristics correspond to the three dimensions of existence: between person and person, between person and oneself,

and between person and G-d. These three dimensions mirror the three *Gemarot* that offer different factors leading to the *Churban*. The lack of blessing before learning Torah reflects our lost bond with Hashem - Torah was not cherished as a divine connection. Baseless hatred severed our connection with one another. Acting without compassion, strictly by the letter of the law, caused us to lose our sense of self.

The *Churban* didn't merely destroy a building. It reflected and sealed our disconnection from everything meaningful: from G-d, from each other, and from ourselves.

Yet this understanding points toward redemption. We brought about the *Churban* and caused the disconnection. If we want it rebuilt, we must initiate the reconnection in all spheres. We must recite blessings before studying Torah, approaching it not merely as intellectual exercise but as divine connection. We must cultivate *ahavat achim*, rebuilding relationships and establishing mutual respect among all Jews. We must strengthen our values, living with humility and compassion,

remembering from where we came and who we are.

As we experience the mourning on Tisha B'Av, may we be able to turn the *Churban* into a *chibur*, reconnecting to Hashem, to others, and to our true selves, so that we merit a complete redemption.



Rabbi Shalom Rosner

serves as rabbi of Kehillat Nofei Hashemesh in Beit Shemesh, and as the Rosh Beit Midrash of Machon Lev English Speakers program. He is the author of the Shalom Rav series, including Parsha, Haggadah and a newly released Birken.



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The Gift Hidden at Rock Bottom

Reflections for Tisha B'Av

Rabbi Leo Dee

Two years ago, I learned something strange about Israel – we broadcast television on Tisha B'Av.

It sounds trivial, but stay with me. For most of my adult life, I didn't own a TV. My wife Lucy threw ours out the window – literally – shortly after our daughter Maia was born. We never replaced it, never missed it.

So, on Tisha B'Av morning in 2023, when Channel 13 invited me to their TV studio, I was surprised. Broadcasts on Tisha B'Av? The day that commemorates the destruction of both Temples, the fall of Jerusalem, exile and persecution – surely, I thought, the airwaves would fall silent, as they do on Yom HaZikaron.

They don't.

Instead, Israel does something peculiar. It finds the saddest person in the country – the one carrying grief too heavy for words – and puts him on national television to answer one impossible question: “How are you feeling?”

Three months earlier, my wife Lucy and our daughters Maia (20) and Rina (15) were murdered in a Hamas ambush in the Jordan Valley. It was the worst day of my life.

So, in 2023, that person was me.

So, how was I feeling? I answered honestly: “Happy... and sad.”

It startled the presenter. In English, happiness and unhappiness are opposite emotions. But in Hebrew, they are not contradictory. *Sameach* (happy) and *atzuv* (sad) can live side by side. You can feel both at once. I have and I still do.

The TV presenter leaned in. “Explain!” he asked.

So, I told him about that morning in *shul*, about three peculiar

things that happened – rituals that, at first glance, made no sense. We didn't put on *tefillin*. We skipped *tachanun*, daily prayers of supplication. And when we read *Eicha*, the book of Lamentations, it described Tisha B'Av as a “festival.” How could the Jewish calendar's darkest day be described as a festival?

It had always puzzled me. But, standing there, three months after losing almost half my family, I finally understood.

You see, when you've lived your worst day, when you've fallen so far that there's no ground beneath you, something unexpected happens: hope sneaks in. You realize that tomorrow – *any* tomorrow – cannot be worse. It can only get better.

Most of us don't think that way. Most of us coast through life on a comfortable plateau. If you miss your train, the world feels like it's falling apart. But survivors of tragedy walk a different path. They know what rock bottom looks and feels like. Once you have been down there, every ordinary day feels miraculous.

It's a strange gift from G-d that those who suffer the most carry within them the greatest reservoir of hope. Perhaps that's why our Sages taught that the Messiah will be born on Tisha B'Av. From the deepest national tragedy we will see the greatest renewal.

Think about it. Even on Tisha B'Av, there are fragments of joy woven into mourning. It's not denial – it's design. Once you've hit rock bottom, the only way is up.

Just a few weeks after that Channel 13 interview, our nation experienced its own worst day – October 7th, 2023. We

plummeted to depths we had never imagined, witnessing barbarism, failure, loss, and heartbreak.

And yet, the same pattern emerged. Out of anguish came resolve. Our people – soldiers, families, and strangers-turned-heroes – stood taller than ever, rebuilding our national pride with courage and sacrifice. The only way was up. And then, when our government was on the verge of collapse, Israel attacked Iran and experienced unprecedented waves of retaliatory missile bombardment across the country. Political differences were put aside, as we saw the Jewish people rally to help one another once again and we witnessed another miraculous victory.

This is the paradox of Tisha B'Av. In remembering our lowest moments, we unlock the ability to cherish the ordinary – to feel joy even amid the sorrow.

We hope and pray that our worst days are now behind us. What awaits us? Redemption.

May it come speedily, in our days.



Rabbi Leo Dee

is an educator living in Efrat. His book “Transforming the World: The Jewish Impact on Modernity” was republished in English and Hebrew in memory of his wife Lucy and daughters Maia and Rina, who were murdered by terrorists in April 2023.



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Tefillat “Nachem” in a Rebuilt Jerusalem

Rabbi Jonny Brull

One of the most poignant moments in the Tisha B'Av *tefillot* is the addition of “Nachem” during the *Amida* at *Mincha*. The prayer mourns Jerusalem in raw, painful imagery: “the city that is mournful, ruined, scorned and desolate... mournful without her children... desolate without inhabitants...”

But as we think of a rebuilt Jerusalem, teeming with life, Torah, and sovereignty, many find themselves stopping mid-sentence. Is this description accurate? Can we really speak of a city “desolate without inhabitants” when Jewish children play in her streets, when IDF soldiers guard her gates, and when *tefillot* and Torah ascend from her *shuls*?

This is not a theoretical question. It speaks to the core of how we understand mourning, redemption, and truth in *tefillah*.

The source for reciting *Nachem* on Tisha B'Av appears in the *Talmud Yerushalmi* (*Berachot* 4:3), which discusses how individuals incorporate the themes of the day into their *tefillot*. Medieval authorities, such as the Rosh, argued that *Nachem* should be recited in all *tefillot* of Tisha B'Av. Yet the mainstream custom, as codified in the Rema (*OC* 557:1), is to recite it only at *Mincha*. This is based on the tradition that the *Beit HaMikdash* was set ablaze toward the end of the 9th of Av (*Ta'anit* 29a); therefore, it is precisely at that time that we turn to Hashem and plead for comfort and rebuilding.

That much is settled. But over the last century, the conversation has shifted. The miraculous establishment of the State of Israel and the subsequent reunification of Jerusalem have triggered discussions about whether the traditional wording of *Nachem* still reflects our reality. The

return to *Eretz Yisrael* and the establishment of *Medinat Yisrael* mark a clear stage in the unfolding redemption. Jerusalem is no longer “desolate” or “without her children.” Hundreds of thousands of Jews live there, and we witness daily miracles in its physical and spiritual renewal.

Rav Chaim David HaLevi *zt”l*, former Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, argued that saying *Nachem* in its original form borders on falsehood. How can we stand before Hashem and speak of desolation when our own eyes see the multitudes? He suggested (*Aseh Lecha Rav* 2:36–39) changing the text to the past tense (“the mournful city that was ruined, scorned etc.”). Similarly, Rav Nachum Rabinovitch *zt”l* proposed a revised version of the *tefillah*: rather than calling Jerusalem “mournful, ruined, scorned,” he suggested referring to “the mountain that is mournful,” namely *Har HaBayit*, thereby balancing both past suffering and present blessing.

Nevertheless, others have warned against modifying a *tefillah* crafted by earlier generations. Rav Ovadia Yosef *zt”l* (*Yechaveh Da'at* 1:43) maintained that even phrases which seem outdated carry spiritual depth and hidden meaning. He argued that while Jerusalem is rebuilt physically, its spiritual core – the *Beit HaMikdash* – is still in ruins. As long as that heart remains missing, the pain of exile persists.

Striking a careful balance, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein *zt”l* adopted a nuanced practice. While he preserved the phrase “the city that is mournful, ruined, scorned and desolate,” he omitted the subsequent line: “mournful without her children... desolate without inhabitants.” That line, he felt, could not be said honestly today. Yet he left the rest intact, understanding

that while Jerusalem flourishes, the full redemption has not yet arrived.

This approach reflects the dual nature of Tisha B'Av in our generation. We are not in the same place our ancestors were when they wept in *galut*. We have returned, in part. The land is no longer barren. The city is no longer abandoned. But the *Mikdash* is still absent, and so is the palpable presence of the *Shechina*. We mourn, but we mourn differently – not with despair alone, but with longing; not with hopelessness, but with hopeful anticipation.

“For You, Hashem, ignited it with fire, and with fire You shall rebuild it... I will be for her a wall of fire, says Hashem, and I will be her glory within.” These final words of *Nachem* lift us from sorrow to hope. They remind us that our *tefillot* are not merely laments of the past, but visions of the future.

May we soon merit to see the full comfort of Zion, rejoicing not only in the physical revival of Jerusalem, but in the rebuilding of the *Mikdash*, the return of the *Shechina*, and the complete redemption of *Am Yisrael*.



Rabbi Jonny Brull

is Rosh Kollel Torah MiTzion at Mizrachi Melbourne. He learned for ten years at Yeshivat Har Etzion, and has a B.Ed in Torah Shebe'al Peh and Hebrew Language from Herzog College and an M.A. in Jewish Education from the Hebrew University.

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Hearing the Unheard: A Recipe For Rebuilding

Rabbi Shaya Katz

Chazal provide many reasons for the destruction of the second *Beit HaMikdash*, but one in particular has captured the attention of the Jewish people. Campaigns abound about how to stop or counteract *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred (*Yoma 9b*) and for good reason. With modern technology enabling us to demean others without consequence, the avenues for unnecessary hatred are ever increasing.

And yet, when we think critically about the meaning of *sinat chinam*, it seems the punishment does not fit the crime. We are all, unfortunately, only able to imagine what the *Beit HaMikdash* was like. But it's safe to say that most of us would describe it as a place to directly serve Hashem. The *Kohanim* and *Levi'im* took care of daily, voluntary, and periodic *korbanot*. The *Sanhedrin* decided and adjudicated *halacha*, and the general population made pilgrimage three times a year to "see His Face" (*Devarim 16:16*). If the *Beit HaMikdash* served as the epicenter of our connection to Hashem, why would our negligence in connecting to others cause its destruction? Can we not maintain our service to Hashem even if we've been lax in our service to others?

Of course, in essence, every *bein adam lachaveiro* (interpersonal *mitzvah*) is ultimately also a *bein adam laMakom* (a *mitzvah* between man and G-d). Any *halacha*, and certainly any verse in the Torah, is the word of G-d. So on one level, our failure to treat others properly is inherently a failure in our service to Hashem. But if we drill deeper into the nature of interpersonal relationships, we may begin to understand why they bear even greater significance, especially in relation to the *Beit HaMikdash*.

"Hashem hates us" (*Devarim 1:27*) is a startling phrase. When *Moshe Rabbeinu* recalls the people of Israel saying these words,

one might instinctively assume they were uttered during a terrible calamity or at least a challenging moment in their history. Counterintuitively, the people said this because "He took us out of the land of Egypt." How could they possibly claim that *Yetziat Mitzrayim* led them to believe Hashem hated them? Did they willfully forget the many miracles He performed on their behalf? The unrelenting force He brought against their enemies? What prompted such a shocking conclusion about their relationship with Hashem?

The *Kli Yakar* (*Devarim 1:1*) suggests that this wasn't due to anything Hashem did or didn't do. Instead, it was a feeling they projected onto their relationship with Him, independent of their past experiences. In his words, the *Kli Yakar* explains: "They reasoned that once each of them hated the other, then, naturally, Hashem must also hate them." It was how others made them feel that shaped how they perceived Hashem. Our interactions with others are not played out in a vacuum. How we treat others – and how we are treated – changes us, not just in that moment, but for future interactions as well. Even if those future interactions are qualitatively different or seemingly unrelated, the emotional residue carries over. If we feel unappreciated by a coworker, we might feel unappreciated by a spouse.

Is it any wonder, then, that in a world where communication has devolved into impersonal text messages and shorthand, superficial statements to no one in particular, we also find it difficult to communicate in our *tefillah*? How we engage in our day-to-day relationships influences how we engage with Hashem. If we don't feel heard by others in our everyday lives, it becomes harder to believe we're being heard when we open our *siddurim*.

On the flip side, we can cultivate that sense of connection, positively, for others.

If we are attentive to others, they may be more able to feel heard by Hashem, too. In that sense, how we treat a spouse doesn't only preserve *shalom bayit*; it can also strengthen their *emunah*. Listening to a coworker doesn't simply fulfill our workplace responsibilities; it may also help make their *Mincha* more meaningful.

Sinat chinam doesn't just deserve punishment because it violates commandments. Our mistreatment of others creates the very feeling of divine neglect. When we make others feel ignored or unwanted, we can lead them to believe "Hashem hates me." The *Beit HaMikdash* is the space where our most important relationship, with Hashem, is cultivated. If we are not invested in that relationship, we are not worthy of the place that facilitates it. And at the same time, it is through strong, healthy, and loving human relationships that we help others nurture their own relationship with Hashem.

In the spirit of Rav Kook's boundless love for every Jew, let us learn to appreciate the unique contributions of those around us. Let us become that all-too-rare, sincere, listening ear for one another. Through our *ahavat chinam*, our baseless love, we can help others become more attuned to the enduring love already being shown to them by Hashem. And ultimately, as we reignite our collective desire to cultivate that relationship with Him, may Hashem grant us the rebuilding of the *Beit HaMikdash*, speedily in our days.



Rabbi Shaya Katz
is the rabbi of Young Israel of Oak Park.



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JEWSS with VIEWS

We asked five accomplished Jews from around the world: What changes have you seen in your community as a result of the challenges of the last two years?



Isaac Barchichat

Over the past two years, the French Jewish community has experienced profound changes, shaped by increasing challenges – most notably the tragic events of October 7th and the sharp rise in antisemitism that both preceded and followed it. Even before this dark day, antisemitic incidents had already reached alarming levels in France, with Jewish institutions and individuals regularly targeted. However, since October 7th, there has been an undeniable intensification: verbal aggression, physical attacks, and public displays of hatred have become far more frequent.

In response, our community has become more vigilant, resilient, and united. Security is a daily concern for schools, synagogues, and community centers, but there is also a renewed sense of solidarity across generations and organizations. People who were less engaged in the past are now actively involved, whether through advocacy, education, or support networks.

We've also seen a deepened connection with Israel, as well as an increased awareness among the broader French society of the threats we face. These times have forced us to reflect on our identity, our role in French society, and the importance of standing proud and united in the face of adversity. The challenges continue, but so does our resolve.

Isaac Barchichat is the President of Mizrahi France. Isaac is a Yeshiva University graduate, Deputy Mayor in the Paris region, an activity community leader, director of a youth movement, married to Batya and a father of four.



Rebbetzin Elise Peter-Apelbaum

The past two years have been incredibly challenging for *Am Yisrael*. I cannot recall ever feeling such intense fear for Israel in my entire life. Living in *chutz la'arezt*, we initially felt powerless, with our only recourse being to pray and send messages of empathy. Shortly after the war began, our community launched a fundraising campaign, successfully raising thousands of euros for the rebuilding of Kfar Azza. The Jewish school in Prague swiftly opened a class for Israeli families who had relocated here temporarily. The outpouring of love and support from our community toward Israel and Israelis was truly remarkable.

Last year, I led a three-day mission with Mizrahi Prague to Israel. Our goals were to meet with wounded soldiers, witness the aftermath of the conflict, and volunteer with Leket Israel in one of their fields. Many who could not join the mission contributed by sending gifts, money, or even children's drawings through us. It was heartening to see the positive impact our visit had on those in Israel, but equally on ourselves.

In summary, the past two years have demonstrated the unwavering support of the Prague Jewish and non-Jewish communities for Israel. I am immensely proud of our collective efforts and solidarity, and I *daven* for the swift and safe return of all the hostages.

Rebbetzin Elise Peter-Apelbaum is the head of Mizrahi Prague. She is a Yoetzet Halacha and a certified Kallah teacher. Additionally, she holds a master's degree in finance. Together with her husband, Rabbi David Peter, she raises their five children.



Rabbi Yitshak Asiel

When I began serving as a rabbi in March 1995, two representatives from Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs visited Belgrade. Their message was clear: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must never be allowed to escalate into a broader conflict between all Jews and Muslims, or between Judaism and Islam itself.

At that time, Yugoslavia was torn apart by war between Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks across Bosnia and Croatia. Over the years that followed, we built strong relationships with the Islamic community in what became the Republic of Serbia. Together, we demonstrated that people of different faiths could coexist with mutual respect and understanding. For six years, we hosted a weekly prime-time television program where a Mufti, an Orthodox priest, and I would sit together to discuss matters of broader social importance. The program reached audiences throughout the former Yugoslav region and was valued for fostering greater interfaith dialogue and understanding.

After October 7th, exactly what those Ministry representatives had warned against in 1995 came to pass. This new reality has prompted our Jewish community to focus on strengthening Jewish identity and developing a deeper understanding of the situation in Israel.

Rabbi Yitshak Asiel is Chief Rabbi of Serbia and President of the Federation of Jewish communities in Serbia.



David Alejo Cohen Duek

Over the past two years, our community has been deeply affected by the global and regional challenges, especially the events in Israel. We’ve seen both heartache and remarkable resilience. There has been a clear intensification in the emotional and spiritual connection to *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael*. People who were previously distant from communal or religious life have found renewed meaning in *tefillah*, Torah study, and, most of all, acts of *chesed*.

One significant change is the rise in grassroots initiatives – individuals and families taking responsibility for helping others, organizing *Tehillim* groups, *shiurim*, and support for lone soldiers or displaced families. There’s also been a greater sense of unity across ideological lines. Our community has become more attuned to the needs of others, more present, more real.

At the same time, we’ve also had to navigate fatigue and uncertainty. But through it all, we’ve witnessed that hardship can become a catalyst for growth when channeled with purpose and shared values.

We continue to work on strengthening the fabric of our community through empathy, education, and a strong sense of mission.

David Alejo Cohen Duek is the President of “LA CASA” Mizrahi Argentina, in Buenos Aires. He has been active in Jewish education and community building for over 7 years, working at different institutions as a volunteer.



Rabbi Shua Solomon

Our community has always been hugely supportive of Israel and the IDF, but since October 7th this support has taken on a new level of commitment and urgency. Almost everything we do as a *kehilla* is somehow connected to Israel. We recite *Tehillim* for our *chayalim* at *Shacharit*, *Mincha*, and *Ma’ariv* every day, and many in the *kehilla* have taken on a particular person – whether an injured soldier or hostage – to *daven* for.

Additionally, there are a number of people within the Mizrahi *kehilla* whose children are currently serving in the army or were serving during and after October 7th. This has brought an increased level of awareness and appreciation for the IDF, as it has become deeply personal for so many of us.

Despite Israel’s many challenges, the aftermath of October 7th has also led to more people seriously considering *Aliyah* as an option. The connection to Israel, its citizens, and soldiers has never been stronger.

Rabbi Shua Solomon serves as the Senior Rabbi of Bondi Mizrahi Synagogue in Sydney, Australia. Together with Rabbi Ryan Levine, he founded the Shalhevet leadership program which aims to send Jewish educators all over the world.

Date 'em Till You Hate 'em

Aleeza Ben Shalom

As we approach Tisha B'Av, a solemn day of reflection and mourning in the Jewish calendar, we are reminded of the profound lessons that history imparts. Tisha B'Av commemorates the destruction of the first and second *Batei Mikdash* in Jerusalem, events that were rooted in *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred, among the Jewish people. This year, I find myself pondering the concept of hatred, especially in the context of relationships and dating, as I recall my famous phrase: "Date 'em till you hate 'em." While seemingly playful, this phrase encapsulates a deeper message about love, connection, and the importance of empathy.

When I share this phrase with clients and friends, I always emphasize that it is not meant to be taken literally. Hatred is an intense and destructive emotion that can lead to division and heartache. Instead, "Date 'em till you hate 'em" serves as a reminder to keep an open mind and heart while navigating the often complex world of dating. It encourages individuals to continue exploring potential relationships until they reach a point of clarity about their feelings, whether that means realizing someone is not the right match or, in some cases, discovering a soulmate in someone they initially doubted.

This phrase is memorable and has proven useful across generations, from daters in their twenties to those in their seventies and beyond. It instills the idea that when in doubt, it's okay to keep dating and getting to know someone better. Sometimes, the initial spark may not be obvious, but as you invest time and energy into a relationship, deeper feelings can blossom. For instance, I had a client who was convinced after her first date that her match was not for her. However, she chose to heed

the advice of "Date 'em till you hate 'em," allowing the relationship to unfold. To her surprise, what began as uncertainty transformed into a beautiful love story. This illustrates the importance of patience and exploration in relationships.

In this light, I propose the concept of *ahavat chinam*, "baseless love," as an antidote to hatred. Instead of harboring unfounded resentment or judgment towards others, we can extend love and understanding within our circles. This approach encourages us to look for the good in people and to build connections based on trust and respect. When we encounter doubts about someone's character or intentions, we can choose to respond with compassion rather than suspicion. This does not mean blindly accepting negative behavior or turning a blind eye to harmful actions; rather, it is about approaching others with an open heart, seeking understanding first before jumping to conclusions.

Ultimately, "Date 'em till you hate 'em" is a playful reminder to engage with others, be it in dating or friendships, with a mindset of curiosity and connection. Each date, each interaction, is an opportunity to learn more about ourselves and others, to foster understanding, and to build bridges rather than walls.

So, as you navigate the dating landscape or any relationships in your life, remember: the goal is to grow love and connection, not to harbor hatred. Keep dating wisely, and let your heart guide you towards meaningful connections. Let us honor the lessons of Tisha B'Av by cultivating love instead of hatred, ensuring that our relationships reflect the values we hold dear.



Aleeza Ben Shalom

is a soulmate clarity coach, she was on Netflix's "Jewish Matchmaking" and is an in-demand speaker, expert, and author of numerous books. She leads the Jewish Matchmaking Movement, in partnership with World Mizrahi.



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



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COMPILED BY: JACQUI AUSTEN
DESIGNED BY: LEAH RUBIN

KIDS CORNER

TISHA B'AV NUMBER PUZZLE

Each number before the rows and above the columns means a block of boxes in that row or column to be shaded

Each number corresponds exactly to the length of a block.

If there are several numbers, their sequence corresponds to the order of the blocks.

There must be at least one empty (not filled in) box between two blocks.

Tip: Start with the big blocks aka the big numbers.

When the puzzle is complete, a Tisha B'Av related picture will be revealed!

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