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From Tisha B'Av to Tu B'Av: The Sin and the Solution

Rabbi Doron Perez

This year marks the 50th anniversary of arguably the most daring hostage rescue operation in modern history.

On July 4th, 1976 – the 6th of Tammuz, 5718 – the State of Israel carried out Operation Entebbe, later renamed Operation Yonatan, in memory of Yoni (Yonatan) Netanyahu, the older brother of Israel's Prime Minister and the commander who fell leading the mission. Palestinian and German terrorists had hijacked an Air France flight carrying 248 passengers and diverted it to Entebbe Airport in Uganda. After the non-Israeli and non-Jewish passengers were gradually released, 106 hostages remained – 84 Israelis and Jewish passengers – while the Air France crew courageously stayed behind, refusing to abandon them.

In an extraordinary overnight raid conducted 2,500 miles from Israel, elite commandos from *Sayeret Matkal* flew to Uganda and rescued 102 of the 106 hostages.

In contrast to that single night's operation, it would take 853 excruciating days for the last of the 251 hostages – cruelly dragged across the border on that horrific day in October 2023 – to be brought home.

January 26th, 2026, marked the first time in almost twelve years that there were, thank G-d, no hostages – alive or deceased – held in Gaza.

I believe that the reason every last hostage returned home from Gaza, and that nearly every hostage returned from Entebbe, can only be explained by an idea I have repeated on numerous occasions since first expressing it at Daniel's second funeral: we may be the smallest nation, but we are the largest family.

All for one, one for all

At Entebbe, Israel was prepared to sacrifice her finest soldiers, as indeed happened to Yoni Netanyahu, in order to save fellow Jews, Israelis and non-Israelis alike.

In Gaza, almost fifty years later, soldiers and reservists fought not only to defeat our enemies, but to bring their brothers and sisters home. Soldiers endangered their lives in extraction operations where, tragically, some paid with their lives. Time and again, I heard from soldiers how they had searched every corner of Gaza to find our son Daniel and all of the hostages. It felt, they said, as though they

were searching for their own brothers and sisters. I also spoke with a number of soldiers involved in the excavation efforts to recover the remains of the last deceased hostage held in Gaza, Ran Gvili. They described the dangers they were willing to endure for the privilege of bringing him home for burial, and of giving his parents, and indeed all of the Jewish people, some measure of closure after more than two years of what may be the most harrowing period in Israel's history.

They behaved not only as patriots or comrades-in-arms, but as siblings bringing their brother home.

Across the Jewish world, Jews in every corner of the globe lived with the fate of the hostages as if they were their own children. From Jerusalem to Johannesburg, Moscow to Washington, Sydney to New York, Jews everywhere responded with a shared sense of familial love and solidarity. Prayers, mutual anguish, solidarity missions, political advocacy. We became like a single organism, “like one person with one heart.” One family.

Jews, it seems, will always – when push comes to shove – do almost anything to bring our hostages home: from Entebbe

to Nachshon Wachsman to Gilad Shalit to the recent war in Gaza. Our enemies have always known this about us, and they exploit what they perceive as our weakness – our love of life and our refusal to abandon our own – by taking hostages and demanding impossible prices for their release.

When one steps back and looks at the sweep of Jewish history, a pattern emerges. Time and again, we will do almost anything – pay exorbitant prices, take enormous risks – to bring every last one home. All for one.

Why? To some, it seems irrational – even irresponsible and reckless.

Until the last hostage: bonds of brotherhood

Why do we do it? The answer, I believe, is not found in geopolitics, patriotism, or military strategy nor in religious doctrine or law. It is found in something more intuitive and primal: the mystery of familial belonging, the bond of brotherhood.

Remarkably, there are two stories of Jewish captives in the *Chumash*, and in both cases only a single hostage is taken. And in both cases, the rescuers are prepared to sacrifice everything to save that one person.

This goes back to our spiritual DNA, to the very dawn of Jewish history, when the first Jew, our founding father Avraham, was confronted with this very dilemma when his nephew Lot was taken captive.

When Avraham hears that Lot has been captured, the same Lot who had separated from him and chosen to live in the morally corrupt city of Sodom, turning his back on everything Avraham stood for, he does not hesitate for a moment. Avraham risks everything: his life, the lives of all the members of his household, and his entire G-d-given mission for the benefit of humanity. He mobilizes every able-bodied man he has, 318 in all, and launches a daring military attack against the armies of four powerful regional kings.

I have often wondered: why does Avraham not seek counsel from G-d? Why was he prepared to sacrifice his life and his divinely-mandated mission to save his errant nephew? How did he know this was what G-d would want?

The answer, I believe, is embedded in the text itself, in a single word that explains

everything. When the Torah tells this story, it does not say that Avraham heard that his *nephew* had been captured. It says: “And Avraham heard that his *brother* had been taken captive” (*Bereishit* 14:14).

There it is. Lot was not merely a sinful, wayward relative. Lot was his *brother*. The moment Avraham saw Lot through the eyes of brotherhood, there were no more questions to ask – no cost-benefit analysis to perform, no rational threshold beyond which rescue becomes inadvisable, no need to consult anyone, not even G-d. A brother had been taken. You go. That is all. It is written in our hearts with bonds of blood, and no further instruction is required.

The captive maidservant in Arad

The second incident recorded in the *Chumash* also involves a single captive. The Canaanite king of Arad attacks Israel while they are still in the desert and seizes one prisoner: “And the Canaanite king of Arad who resided in the Negev heard that Israel had arrived by way of the Atarim, and came out to war with Israel and took from them a captive” (*Bamidbar* 21:1).

The Torah describes the captive in the singular – one hostage. Rashi, citing the opinion of the Sages, identifies the captive not as a person of standing but as a simple maidservant, perhaps the most socially marginal member of the community. And yet the Children of Israel go to war, risking their lives to free her.

Family is family

In a family, no one is expendable. No one is left behind. Every single life, every single member, carries infinite and equal value.

Which father would not dive into raging rapids to try to save his drowning child? Which brother would not charge into a burning building for his sister?

I am not even certain it is *halachically* permitted to take such extreme risks to one's own life when the chances of saving another are slim. And yet a parent or sibling would rather die trying than live knowing they could have acted and didn't. That is the beautiful logic, or illogic, of family. The ties that bind are not written in law books or policy manuals, but in bonds of blood; in the deep, mysterious bonds of heart and soul.

It is this sense of familial connection among Jews, this instinct of brotherhood, that explains the lengths to which we have always been prepared to go for one another in times of need.

The sin and the solution

When brothers turn on each other and betray the ethic of brotherhood, the consequences are catastrophic. The first murder was Kayin killing his brother Hevel. Yosef's brothers sold him into slavery and left him for dead. The destruction of the Second *Beit HaMikdash* was brought about precisely by this collapse of brotherhood: *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred among Jews.

If Tisha B'Av is the day we suffer the consequences of baseless hatred between brothers, then Tu B'Av is the remedy. It is the day on which, across different generations, brothers and sisters came back together, when inter-tribal harmony was restored in Israel. The Sages (*Ta'anit* 30b) record three such instances: when women were permitted to marry men from any tribe; when the ban on the tribe of Binyamin intermarrying with other tribes – imposed after the terrible sin of the Concubine of Givah – was lifted; and when King Hoshea of the Northern Kingdom removed the guards from the road to Jerusalem, allowing the ten tribes to once again reach the *Beit HaMikdash* and intermingle with the tribes of Yehuda and Binyamin of the Southern Kingdom.

The heartfelt kinship of brotherhood among Jews in Israel and around the world is what motivated Operation Yonatan in 1976, and what ensured the return of every last hostage from Gaza by 2026.

From Avraham to Arad, from Entebbe to Gaza, the same clarion call rings out – the call of the Jewish family that Avraham first expressed to Lot when tensions arose between their shepherds: “Let there not be strife between me and you... for we are brothers” (*Bereishit* 13:8).



Rabbi Doron Perez
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Did They Fast During the Period of the Second Beit HaMikdash?

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

In his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, Rambam establishes that during the era of the Second *Beit HaMikdash*, people fasted on Tisha B'Av:

“During the period of the Second *Beit HaMikdash*, they did not fast on the Tenth of Tevet or the Seventeenth of Tammuz. Rather, whoever wished to fast could fast, and whoever did not wish to fast was not obligated. Therefore, they did not send out [messengers] for Tevet and Tammuz. G-d said: ‘Thus says Hashem: the fast of the fourth, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth’ – as if He placed the choice in their hands regarding these days, whether they wished to fast or not. The fast of the fourth is the Seventeenth of Tammuz, since Tammuz is the fourth month; the fast of the fifth is Tisha B'Av, which falls in the fifth month; the fast of the seventh is the Fast of Gedaliah; and the fast of the tenth is the Tenth of Tevet, as it falls in the tenth month. They did fast on Tisha B'Av even though it was left to their discretion, because multiple tragedies were multiplied upon it” (*Rosh Hashanah* 1:3).

At first glance, Rambam's position is puzzling. Why would they fast while the *Beit HaMikdash* was standing?

The simple explanation is that the Second *Beit HaMikdash* was incomplete. Central elements were absent from the Second *Beit HaMikdash*: there was no Ark, and perhaps no resting of the Divine Presence. Therefore, they still fasted over the loss of the first *Beit HaMikdash*, because the essential core was missing.

The Sfat Emet holds that sometimes they fasted and sometimes they did not. When there was peace, they did not fast, not even on Tisha B'Av. When conditions were difficult and they were subject to foreign domination, they fasted.

However, the plain reading of the Rambam suggests they always fasted.

In any event, it is noteworthy that the Talmud indicates that the determining factor for fasting or canceling a fast is not the existence of the *Beit HaMikdash*, but rather the political reality: whether there is peace or there is not. The fast is not only about the past. It concerns what is happening in the present, and serves as a reminder for the future as well.

First, it relates to present reality – which is why it depends on whether there is peace or war in our own time. When there is hardship and no peace, everything joins together as a continuation of the destruction of the Temple. This is why the *kinot* include the massacres of 1096, the burning of the Talmud, the Holocaust, and similar tragedies.

Second, the fast serves as a reminder that even in good times, even when the Temple stands, one must still maintain proper conduct. Things can always, G-d forbid, change.

There may be yet another dimension. Sometimes a person's circumstances are so good that he fails to appreciate just how good they are. Perhaps there is meaning in fasting even when the Temple stands – to remember the absence and recall that reality in which we lacked all that goodness. Sometimes light is only perceived against the backdrop of darkness. Only by contemplating the destruction can one truly grasp the exalted and wondrous reality of the Divine Presence.

Perhaps this is the special significance of the elegy “*Eish Tukad b'Kirbi*, A Fire Burns Within Me,” which describes the wonders we possessed during the Temple's existence and the things we now lack – similar to the passage we recite immediately following the Kohen Gadol's service on Yom Kippur.

Today, tragically, the Temple is destroyed. Yet there is much we have merited. We have merited returning to the Land and

returning home after two thousand years. We have merited the restoration of part of Jerusalem, the establishment of a state, and the flourishing of Torah. Yet so much is still missing – spiritually, in terms of sovereignty over the Land, and above all in terms of the resting of the *shechina* and the felt presence of G-d's sovereignty among us.

On Tisha B'Av we weep over all that is lacking – over the destruction of the Temple, over the departure of the *shechina*. Within that weeping we also remember additional sorrows that are a continuation of the destruction, such as the devastation of Gush Katif and the uprooting of its residents and the slaughter of October 7th. Yet we also remember all that we have, thank G-d, been granted – and in this the weeping takes on an additional dimension: Are we truly conducting ourselves in a manner worthy of all we have received? And furthermore: if we have merited so much, if we have merited the beginning of the redemption, then we possess the capacity to reach even greater heights. We have the capacity to demand more of ourselves – and the higher we are privileged to stand, the freer we are, the more we are obligated to care for those who struggle and to help them to reach the great dream of their own lives.



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

IT IS DIFFICULT to exaggerate the importance of *Eretz Yisrael* in our tradition – difficult, but not impossible. Rabbi Moshe Lichtman writes (*HaMizrachi*, Pesach 5786, Vol. 8, No. 9) that “*Eretz Yisrael* is a central theme of the holiday of Pesach and the *Haggadah* we read at the *Seder*.” This seems overstated. We do not mention the Land of Israel frequently in the *Haggadah* and when we do, it is often not given prominence. For example, *Dayeinu* lists entering the Land as one of fourteen things we are grateful for. Another verse mentioning *Eretz Yisrael* may only be included as part of a proof text that subsequent generations were also freed at the Exodus.

In two telling instances, *Chazal* downplay the *Eretz Yisrael* theme at the *Seder*. We expound upon four verses from the *Mikra Bikurim* passage and stop our interpretive endeavors just before “And I brought you to this place” (*Devarim* 26:9). Secondly, the *Seder* highlights four expressions of redemption, thereby leaving out “And I will bring you to the Land” (*Shemot* 6:8). These two items reflect a conscious decision to emphasize the Exodus alone on Pesach night and to leave the Holy Land for other occasions.

Granted, some authorities relate a potential fifth cup to “*V’heveiti, I will bring.*” However, many rabbinic luminaries reduce or negate this theme. Rashi and Rashbam know nothing about a fifth cup. Maharal (*Gevurot Hashem* 65) and Netziv (*HaEmek Davar, Shemot* 6:6) think the fifth cup is unrelated to “I will bring.” The *Ba’al HaMeor* rules against Rabbi Tarfon and the fifth cup. The Rosh (*Pesachim* 10:33) cites an opinion that only someone thirsty can drink a fifth cup. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 581:1) does not mention it and Rema only writes of drinking a fifth cup when thirsty. Even those who do introduce a fifth see it as voluntary and not obligatory. The fifth cup is simply not a major player in our tradition.

Judaism incorporates many important values, but none of them are central to every event. This caution applies to Torah study, compassion, faith, prayer, and the Land of Israel.

Rabbi Yitzchak Blau

Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivat Orayta
Alon Shvut, Israel

■ ■ ■

Rabbi Moshe Lichtman’s response:

Rabbi Blau doesn’t deny that *Eretz Yisrael* is an important component of Judaism; he just feels that one shouldn’t exaggerate its importance.

The main focus of the *Seder* is undoubtedly the Exodus. Therefore, other concepts will be harder to find. That’s why I mentioned the verse that says that the ultimate goal was to enter *Eretz Yisrael*,

showing that it is crucial to the story. After all, Rabbi Blau himself fusses about the fact that the fifth language of redemption was left out of the *Haggadah*, downplaying, in his view, the importance of *Eretz Yisrael*. If so, why were the words “In order to bring us, to give us the Land...” left in this paragraph? For the proof being made – that future generations were also redeemed – they are entirely unnecessary.

“In every generation, one is obligated to see himself as if he left Egypt, as it says, ‘You shall tell your children on that day, saying, ‘Because of this, Hashem did [these things] for me when I left Egypt.’” Hashem did not redeem only our forefathers; He also redeemed us with them, as it says, ‘He brought us out of there...’”

The *Ba’al Haggadah* could have stopped there. The point – that future generations were also redeemed – had already been proven three times over, through the words “for me,” “I,” and “us.” If anything, the mention of *Eretz Yisrael* could have been omitted entirely; after all, the word “us” appears there too, which would have been sufficient. So why continue? Why belabor it? The answer, I believe, is that the additional words “in order to bring us” were included deliberately, to drive home that the Exodus was never only about leaving Egypt. The goal was to arrive somewhere: to dwell as a holy people in our Holy Land.

Anyone familiar with *Chazal*’s copious statements on *Eretz Yisrael* knows that they had no problem “exaggerating” its importance. “Anyone who dwells in *Eretz Yisrael* is like one who has a G-d, while anyone who dwells outside the Land is like one who worships idols.” “Dwelling in *Eretz Yisrael* is equal to all the *mitzvot* in the Torah.”

One of the clearest statements on the matter comes from an unlikely source: “*Eretz Yisrael* is the peg upon which the entire Torah hangs!” Those are the words of Rav Yaakov Emden – the same *gadol* whose idea was the central focus of my article, which Rabbi Blau chose to sideline in favor of the two-to-three sentence preamble I had written as a mere introduction.

Regarding the fifth cup, the *Da’at Zekeinim MiBa’alei HaTosafot* says it best: “Four cups correspond to four redemptions... and the fifth cup... corresponds to ‘I will bring [you...].’ For that, too, is redemption, as people say: ‘If a master frees his slave and gives him all that he owns but does not bring the slave to his dwelling place, what has he accomplished?’ Similarly, had Hashem failed to bring us to *Eretz Yisrael*, what good would the exodus from Egypt have been?”

If *Eretz Yisrael* was peripheral to the *Seder*, no one told the Tosafists. The fifth cup exists precisely because the Exodus without the Land is an incomplete redemption. Sounds pretty central to me. ■

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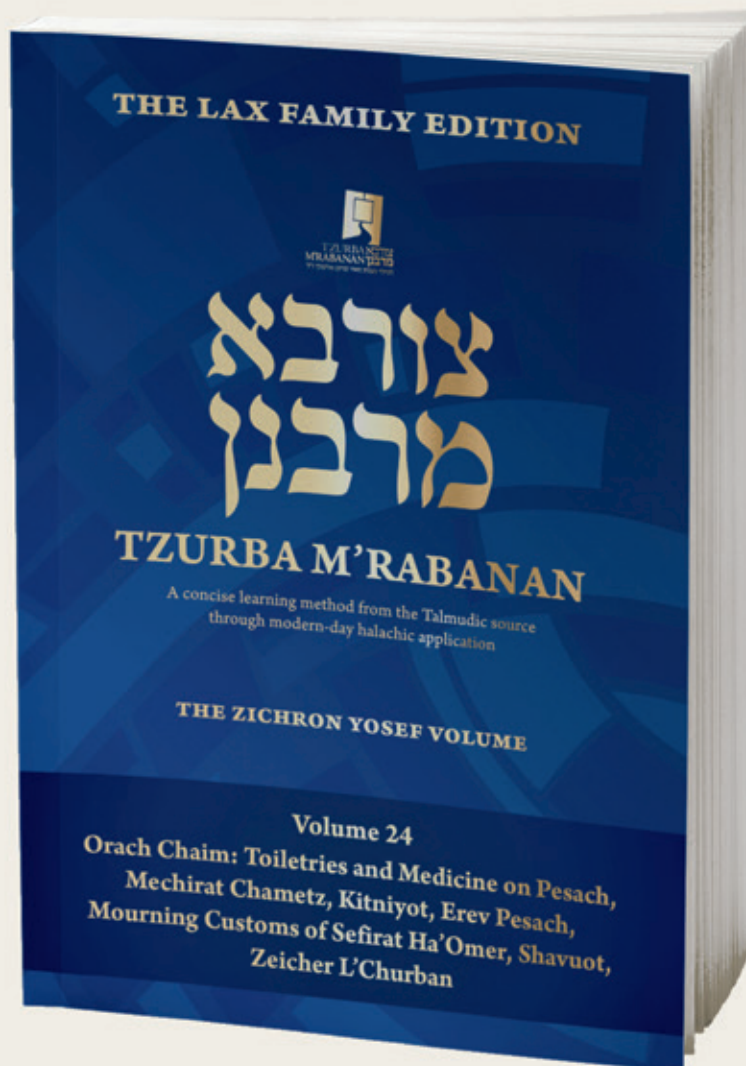
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Beyond Imagination

On Sunday, July 4th, 1976, the people of Israel woke up to remarkable news. The IDF had freed 102 hostages and crew held by Palestinian terrorists at Entebbe Airport, on the coast of Lake Victoria in Uganda. As thousands of people danced, greeting the freed hostages at Lod Airport, Israel's Knesset convened a special session, which Knesset Speaker Yisrael Yeshayahu-Sharabi opened with *Tehillim* 118: "From the straits I called out to G-d, and G-d answered me with breadth. Hashem is with me, I have no fear – what can man do to me?... All the nations of the world surrounded me... but Hashem has helped me." Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin told the Knesset of the "daring, brave and ingenious effort" by which the IDF had been successful in the mission, which would be known as *Mivtza Yonatan* in commemoration of fallen commander, Yoni Netanyahu.

But fifty years on, why does this operation still maintain a special place in Israeli history? There were hostage release operations before and after Entebbe. There was Palestinian terror before and after Entebbe. What about this operation left such an indelible mark?

I believe there are three parts to the answer. Firstly, it was not only an operational success, but it was a strategic victory in a decade long battle against hijackings. Taking over planes had become a favored tactic of Palestinian terror groups, and at points in the early 1970s it was happening almost monthly. It was a problem for the Israeli government, but other governments too who were being extorted by this new form of piracy in the skies. Following Entebbe, the tactic did not die out entirely, but it decreased rapidly. Unfortunately, Palestinian terrorists would innovate and find new methods, but Entebbe helped to end one particular chapter of violence.

Secondly, the Entebbe operation, then and now, spoke to something very deep about the Israeli psyche. One of the founding principles of Zionism was the creation of a state as a safe haven for Jews. Entebbe expanded that principle from passive to active – not only was the State of Israel open to Jews from around the world, but Israel would send its army to rescue Jews wherever

they were. It is not obvious that a young military has the will and remit to go far beyond its borders to rescue its citizens – but there was and is complete consensus in Israel about this type of operation. The Jewish state will go to extraordinary lengths to protect Jews, even far beyond its borders.

But thirdly, Entebbe moved the goalposts on what we considered possible. As the passengers disembarked the Hercules planes in Lod, Israeli journalist Ya'akov Achimeir asked a freed hostage: "Did you think that the IDF would come to rescue you?" "*Beshum panim va-ofen*," was the emphatic response, "Absolutely not. We didn't imagine this at all." At the time, indeed it was beyond imagination; nothing like this had been done before, as shown in our interview with an Entebbe rescuer in this edition, even the IDF special forces didn't know if it was possible. Entebbe made us believe that the impossible was possible. This has now become an intuitive part of how we think – when Israel is at war, we almost wait and expect for some kind of miraculous, unimaginable operation to occur: when the Mossad explodes thousands of Hezbollah beepers it sold to them, or the Israeli Air Force sets up an operating base in the Iraqi desert, we have now almost come to expect it. Entebbe resonated in such a deep way, as the State of Israel had done something that was beyond imagination. Israel continues to face incredibly complex challenges – fifty years on, we should be inspired to go beyond imagination.



Rabbi Aron White

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“I FLEW TO ENTEBBE AS AN ISRAELI AND RETURNED AS A JEW”

Some 100 Israeli soldiers landed in Entebbe on the morning of July 4th 1976 to rescue the Israeli hostages held there. Among them was R, a young commander whose identity is protected for security reasons. Rabbi Aron White spoke with R about his experiences, and how his reflections on that remarkable day have matured over time.

Before we talk about Entebbe itself, can you tell me a little about your background and how you ended up in Sayeret Matkal?

I'm 73 years old today, and I was born and raised on a *kibbutz*, where I've spent virtually my entire life. Back then, the *kibbutz* was completely communal – there were shared dining halls, communal laundries, and children slept in children's houses rather than with their parents – so the people I grew up with became, in many ways, more like siblings than friends. That environment shaped how I understood responsibility, collective identity, and service to the country.

Joining the army was simply what everyone around me did. In the *kibbutz* movement there was an almost unquestioned assumption that you gave as much as you could to the state, but I wasn't some exceptionally driven teenager dreaming about elite military service. In fact, I began pilot training and didn't continue, and then, almost by coincidence, someone directed me toward *Sayeret Matkal*, which ultimately changed the course of my life.

At the time, the unit didn't possess the mythological status it has today. It was extraordinarily secretive, to the point where you couldn't tell people where you served, what you did, or where you had been. Friends would return home on weekends sharing stories from their military service while we sat quietly, unable to

say anything at all. Although at the time that silence simply felt normal, I understand now that it also created a certain emotional distance from the outside world.

What kind of operations was the unit focused on before Entebbe?

The unit essentially operated along two parallel tracks. The first involved covert operations tied directly to Israeli security, where success meant remaining invisible; in that world, if gunfire erupted, it usually meant something had already gone wrong. That way of thinking was almost the inverse of conventional military logic, where combat itself is often considered proof that soldiers are engaging the enemy.

The second mission evolved during the 1970s as hijackings and hostage situations became increasingly common around the world and especially connected to Israel. The country was confronting attacks constantly – from the children's home in Misgav Am to the Savoy Hotel in Tel Aviv – and the unit gradually became responsible not only for responding to those crises, but also for inventing the operational doctrine for dealing with them. There wasn't any established handbook or accumulated institutional knowledge. Every incident required improvisation, adaptation, and rapid planning, because one week you were preparing for

a school siege, the next for a hotel takeover, and the next for an airplane hijacking. Entebbe emerged directly from that reality.

When the Air France plane was hijacked in June 1976, did you immediately understand that your unit would be involved?

Not at all, because in the first days nobody truly understood where events were heading. The plane was hijacked in Athens, then flown to Libya, and eventually to Uganda, but from Israel's perspective there was still enormous uncertainty about whether this would become a military matter at all.

At the time, I was already serving as the operations officer of the unit under Yoni Netanyahu, but despite the hijacking we actually continued with other operations in Sinai because there was still no clear indication that Israel intended to intervene militarily. We travelled to Sinai to do what we needed to, and as intelligence slowly began arriving from Entebbe, however, discussions intensified throughout the military establishment. Officers everywhere were trying to imagine possible responses, most of which turned out to be unrealistic or impossible, until eventually, by Thursday evening, Dan Shomron informed us that our unit would likely lead the rescue mission. The timing of the operation was based on the deadline set by the terrorists, and at that point we had less than 48 hours to prepare for an operation unlike anything Israel had ever attempted before.

That is actually jaw-dropping. What did it feel like at the time, knowing you had only two days to prepare?

Honestly, we functioned almost automatically, because there simply wasn't time to fully absorb the magnitude of what was being asked of us. People today often imagine Entebbe as a flawlessly engineered operation planned in meticulous detail, but the truth is much more complicated. Looking back, I think the operation's success itself obscures just how extraordinary, and even dangerous, the entire undertaking actually was.

We were attempting to plan a hostage rescue mission 4,000 kilometers from Israel in less than two days, and from a purely professional military perspective that is almost unimaginable. I vividly remember a meeting on Shabbat morning with Yoni Netanyahu, Shaul Mofaz, Muki Betser, and the other officers, during which we asked ourselves a very direct question: were we truly prepared for an operation of this scale?

The answer had three parts. The honest answer was no – not in the sense that we refused to go, but in the sense that we were nowhere near the level of preparation we believed such a mission required. There simply wasn't enough time to conduct the kind of planning we were accustomed to – contingencies, escape routes, required levels of intelligence and reconnaissance and more. Secondly, we also believed that no Israeli government would realistically approve such a mission because it seemed too extreme, too dangerous, and too improbable to authorize. But then we reached a third conclusion, which was perhaps the most important one of all: if the government *did* decide to launch the operation, then we were unquestionably the best force available to carry it out. That was the mindset with which we boarded the planes.

Did anyone oppose going?

No, there was no refusal and no resistance based on fear. The discussion was entirely professional. We were used to preparing difficult operations over the course of months, not days, and suddenly we were expected to execute an operation halfway across the world with barely any preparation time at all. Over the years I've said something that sometimes makes people uncomfortable: if the operation had failed, history would likely judge those preparations very differently. Success has a way of making everything appear inevitable and brilliantly planned, but at the time many aspects remained uncertain, improvised, and dangerously unresolved.

You were on the first Hercules plane that landed in Entebbe. What do you remember from the flight?

The flight itself was physically and emotionally exhausting. People tend to imagine dramatic music and heroic anticipation, but the reality was hours of tension, turbulence, heat, silence, and fatigue. We flew under radio silence in Hercules aircraft through extremely difficult conditions, sitting on the floor surrounded by equipment and weapons rather than comfortably in seats. There was no sense of glamour about it.

In my view, the true heroes of Entebbe were the pilots, because what they accomplished was extraordinary beyond words. Flying four Hercules aircraft in formation, under complete radio silence, through storms and over enormous distances before landing at a hostile airport in the middle of the night required astonishing skill and discipline. They didn't even know if there would be any lighting for them when they would be landing these large planes.

Throughout the flight, my mind was consumed by operational concerns. As operations officer, I kept replaying every detail in my head: had I overlooked something, forgotten intelligence, failed to prepare one of the teams properly? At the same time, I also commanded one of the assault teams myself, so mentally I was balancing strategic responsibility with the immediate task of preparing my men for combat.

What was the feeling when the planes landed in Uganda?

The first thing I remember, strangely enough, was the silence. After nine exhausting hours inside the aircraft, the ramp opened and suddenly we stepped into this quiet tropical night filled with warm air, palm trees, and open green fields. For a brief moment it didn't even feel like a battlefield.

But reality returned almost immediately. We drove toward the terminal in the black Mercedes and accompanying Land Rovers designed to resemble Idi Amin's convoy, while my team's role was to secure the outside perimeter as the main assault force entered the building.

One moment remains especially vivid in my memory: the encounter with two Ugandan soldiers standing at a checkpoint near the terminal. There was hesitation about whether to shoot immediately or attempt to preserve the element of surprise, but eventually gunfire erupted. At that exact moment, I genuinely believed the operation might collapse, because in hostage rescue missions surprise is everything. Once loud gunfire begins, you fear the terrorists will start killing hostages before you can reach them.

But somehow the operation continued moving forward.

When did you first feel the mission had succeeded?

During combat you don't really think in those terms because your entire consciousness narrows into movement, timing, commands, and survival. The emotional moment came later, when the hostages finally began leaving the terminal. They were terrified and confused, and many of them didn't fully understand what was happening. We attempted to load them onto jeeps to bring them back to the aircraft. We had planned how many people would be in each vehicle, but in the chaos the hostages climbed onto every available vehicle, desperate not to be left behind.

And then I experienced something I've never forgotten.

I suddenly heard a voice inside me saying: "R, you are saving Jews."

I'm the son of Holocaust survivors. From my father's family in Poland, only his mother survived, while from my mother's family almost nobody remained alive. In that moment, standing in Uganda thousands of kilometers from Israel, I understood something emotionally that I had never fully understood before: nobody came to save the Jews in Europe, but now we had come to save Jews.

That realization struck me with enormous force. You saw Israeli soldiers escorting Jewish hostages through the darkness toward Israeli planes while wounded people, dead people, and terrified families moved together under armed Jewish protection. The scene felt almost biblical to me, like a modern version of the Exodus unfolding in front of my eyes. That image never left me.

Did you fully process the significance of Entebbe when you returned to Israel?

No, not at all. While the hostages landed in Lod airport to the media fanfare, we landed back in Tel Nof military airport. We landed back in Israel on Sunday, had 24 hours off on Monday, attended Yoni Netanyahu's funeral on Tuesday, and on Wednesday resumed normal operational activity. I was only 23 years old, and I came from a world where emotions weren't discussed openly, especially in families shaped by the Holocaust, where silence often became the dominant language.

So although the country exploded with celebration and collective joy, internally I mostly returned to routine without fully processing what had happened.

When did that understanding begin to change?

It changed only forty years later, when I was invited for the first time to speak publicly about Entebbe before Jewish communities abroad. Through those encounters – with students, military audiences, Israelis living overseas, and Jews from many different backgrounds – I gradually realized that Entebbe was not only an Israeli military story. For many Jews around the world, it symbolized something far deeper: the idea that Jews were no longer helpless.

Over time, layers began peeling away inside me emotionally and intellectually. One night I woke up with a sentence in my head that suddenly felt completely clear: "I flew to Entebbe as an Israeli *kibbutznik* and returned as a Jew."

Growing up in Israel, particularly in the secular *kibbutz* world, my identity had been overwhelmingly Israeli – agricultural, collective, local. But through Entebbe, and through meeting Jews around the world afterward, I came to understand myself as part of a much older Jewish story extending far beyond the borders of Israel itself.

How did October 7th affect the way you think about Entebbe today?

Profoundly, because after October 7th I no longer believe it's possible to speak about Entebbe as a clean heroic story disconnected from the present. To talk about events from Entebbe alone after October 7th feels sterile.

Entebbe almost becomes a benchmark against which one can measure the difference of our situation today.

One question haunts me constantly: why did the world applaud Israel after Entebbe in 1976, while after the massacre of October 7th antisemitism exploded across the world almost immediately? After Entebbe, Jews everywhere felt pride and protection, whereas after October 7th many Jews suddenly felt fear again – in Europe, America, Canada, Australia. People removed *mezuzahs* from their homes, Israelis abroad stopped speaking Hebrew publicly, and Jewish communities felt vulnerable in ways they had not experienced for decades.

And then there is the hostage issue itself. In 1976, Israel launched a rescue operation within days, whereas today the reality in Gaza was infinitely more complicated – underground tunnels, fragmented intelligence, dispersed hostages, and a massive battlefield. But what troubles me most is not only the military complexity. It is the internal division within Israeli society itself. In 1976, Israelis woke up united after Entebbe. Religious and secular, left-wing and right-wing – none of those distinctions mattered that morning because the hostages had returned home. There was no societal debate about what to do, as the operation had happened before anyone could imagine. Today, after October 7th, we have lived through years of internal arguments while heroic soldiers continue fighting and dying, but Israeli society spent two years tearing itself apart over the question of hostage release operations, negotiations and more.

I increasingly believe that Israel now faces two enormous challenges simultaneously: physical survival and internal unity, and I'm no longer certain the second challenge is any less important than the first.

Because ultimately the essential question is not only political. The deeper question is why we live here together at all, why we raise children here, and what kind of future we want to build together despite our disagreements.

At Entebbe, I never asked whether the hostages were religious or secular, left-wing or right-wing, *kibbutzniks* or city people. They were Jews in danger, and we went to bring them home. That understanding feels even more urgent to me after October 7th, because Jewish history teaches us something difficult but unavoidable: our fate remains shared whether we like it or not. ■

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The Entebbe Rescue

Rabbi Norman Lamm zt"l

Rabbi Norman Lamm was one of the most profound Modern Orthodox teachers, whose sermons manage to be both timely and timeless.

This drasha was given by Rabbi Lamm the Shabbat following the operation in Entebbe, at St John's Wood shul in London.

If we were to search Scripture for an appropriate expression of our relief, joy, and thanksgiving at the heroic and brilliant rescue by Israel of the over 100 Jewish hostages kept by Arab and German terrorists in the Entebbe Airport in Uganda, one important verse would come to mind: “כעת יֵאָמֵר לְיַעֲקֹב וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל מֶה” פָּעַל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, Now it shall be said concerning Jacob and Israel, what hath G-d wrought?” What indeed hath G-d wrought! How great and miraculous was the deliverance, how wondrous was the rescue! From the depths of despair, we were brought to the heights of joy and gratitude – but we are mindful of the loss of three lives, and the disappearance of one of the hostages.

Indeed, for the last several days our national mood has been reminiscent of the heady days following the Six-Day War. And yet, this very association with the Six-Day War raises problems that were debated then too. Amongst these is should we really be thanking G-d for this victory, or congratulating the Israelis who risked so much and achieved so mightily? Should we be reciting this verse, “What hath G-d wrought?” or the verse immediately following it: “הֵן עַם כְּלָבִיָּא יָקוּם וְכָאֲרִי” Behold a nation arises as a lioness, and lifts up its head as a lion.” Should we be proclaiming, “What hath G-d wrought,” or “(Israel is) a nation that arises like a lioness and lifts up his head like a lion?” After all, it is these courageous young men who risked their lives – and the prestige of Israel – in a raid concocted so quickly and executed so brilliantly. So, which shall it be: מֶה פָּעַל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל and its religious consequences; or הֵן עַם כְּלָבִיָּא יָקוּם and its political-military ramifications?

This is no idle speculation. Two attitudes strive for supremacy within each of us, and the two attitudes are present in our community as well. One of them, perhaps the minority, is what might be termed

quietistic. It advocates בְּשִׁחוּן, complete faith in G-d, to the exclusion of man's strength or power. In fact, it is somewhat contemptuous of man's activities. The other point of view, much more prevalent, is activist. It focuses exclusively on what the teachers of *mussar* called הַשְׂתַּדְּלוּת, effort or initiative. It disdains appeals to faith, and comes dangerously close to the boastfulness against which Moses warned us: “בְּחַי וְנֹעֲצִים יָדִי עֲשֶׂה לִּי אֵת הַחֵיל הַזֶּה”, it is my power and the strength of my hand which has made for this success of mine.”

The first attitude is one which responds only with the words מֶה פָּעַל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, What hath G-d wrought; the second knows only the following verse, הֵן עַם כְּלָבִיָּא יָקוּם, it is a nation which arises as a lioness.

Secularist man tends to see science and technology and all human achievement as displacing the Divine in the world. The secularist mentality is such that it perceives human genius in competition with G-d's work, and holds that religion is meaningful only when science has no answer and technology no solution – as if faith in G-d were a function of human ignorance. It sees no reason to exclaim about what G-d wrought, when it knows that achievement is a result of a nation arising like a lioness. We have here the echoes of the “secular city debate” which was current in theological circles a number of years ago. In a less sophisticated manner, we can always hear such arguments and challenges as, “can you still believe in G-d – or in Torah, or observe the commandments – in a space-age?”

Opposed to this is the outlook of religious man who, in his faith, often fails to appreciate the importance of human creativity, of science and technology – even while he makes use of it and enjoys the benefits and advantages that it has brought to civilization. In a way, such an approach is a subtle indication that it accepts the secularist

premise that man's achievements are in competition with and seek to displace those of G-d, except that we side with G-d in this contest and exclaim, מֶה פָּעַל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל!

Neither of these, to my mind, is authentically Jewish. I must hasten to add that I deny as well the kind of compromise which attributes success to man and failure to G-d.

There is such a way of thinking which ascribes human vulnerability and natural cataclysms to G-d, and man's triumph – to man. In the insurance industry, when we speak of natural disasters or catastrophes, we employ a euphemism, “an act of G-d!” (Indeed, I heard of an Orthodox Jewish insurance agent who was seeking to sell a policy to an equally pious potential client, and said to him, “Now if there should occur an act of G-d, G-d forbid...”.) Such a mentality recites “מֶה פָּעַל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, What hath G-d wrought,” only at the occasion of bad news. But if there is economic success, or a career triumph, or a military victory, then this mentality is one which then recites הֵן עַם כְּלָבִיָּא יָקוּם, it is a result of my genius, my talent, my competence. But such a division of credit and blame is manifestly unfair.

What should be the authentic Jewish attitude? I believe it is: that neither one is adequate! We need both verses – מֶה פָּעַל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – in order to avoid the arrogance that comes from the successful exercise of human power, and הֵן עַם כְּלָבִיָּא יָקוּם to avoid the paralysis of human power that is often the result of spiritual passivity.

There is no fundamental contradiction between the two verses, although we must always live in the tension between them. A truly religious Jew sees G-d's wisdom in man's wisdom, and G-d's power in man's power. For G-d and man, according to Jewish teaching, are partners in creation, and it is G-d who delegated to man the role of His surrogate in the mastery of

creation. If indeed man is “the image of G-d,” then man’s deed must reflect G-d’s personality. In such a case, a manifestation of human wisdom or the benevolent use of human power for creative ends, must be seen as a reflection of the character of G-d. No wonder that the *halacha* directs us to recite special blessings upon encountering unusually wise or powerful men, in which we declare our gratitude to G-d for sharing His power and wisdom with mere flesh and blood. For us, *הן עמ פלביא יקום*, *מה פעל אל-א* is a reflection of *מה פעל אל-א*.

If there is no *השפעת אדם*, if there is no human initiative – what the Zohar calls “*אחוריתא דליתא*, initiative from below” – the world must remain fallow, and the dark forces of nature will reign supreme in the absence of such human creativity. I recall the story of a farmer in Maine who bought an old and dilapidated farm. Slowly, he repaired the sheds, plowed the land, pruned the trees and hedges, fixed up the farmhouse. After he had finished, the local parson came by for a visit and, beholding the scene of this successful renovation, said, “I am glad to see what the L-rd has done to this farm.” Whereupon the farmer, in typically laconic Yankee fashion, responded, “You should have seen this farm when the L-rd had it alone!”

Indeed so, G-d insists that man become the tool for His creative work. If He has it by Himself, He will refuse to do any more with it.

Similarly, if Israel had not undertaken its brilliant exploit, we would have lost not three or four hostages, but over 100, Heaven forbid. Without *הן עמ פלביא יקום* we would have had no occasion to say *מה פעל אל-א*. Without those Israeli lions, we would not today be thanking G-d. Perhaps when we are next solicited for the campaign on behalf of Israel, we will not groan and moan and complain, but remember

the risks that these young lads of Israel embraced when they undertook this arduous and dangerous maneuver.

And yet – and yet! Human agency alone cannot be held exclusively responsible for this miracle! I shudder to think what might have been, the untold errors and accidents and slip-ups that might have made a shambles of the entire effort and would not only have resulted in a massacre of the hostages and the would-be rescuers, but in a devastating public reaction to the futile Israeli effort. I can understand the censure of Israel by the French Pilots Association on the basis of a possible failure – though I ordinarily find it difficult to sympathize with anything French these days. Indeed, if not for *מה פעל אל-א*, we would have no occasion for pride which would lead us to exclaim *הן עמ פלביא יקום*. Without G-d, our lions would be of no avail.

So we offer today our warmest and most deep-felt felicitations to the Israeli Defense Forces, the lions of Israel. Not only Jews, but decent people throughout the world will join us in these congratulations. This is especially true of England, which not too long ago had the uncomfortable experience of having a representative of the Crown humiliated by that obese psychopath, Idi Amin, when the Ambassador came grovelling and bowing and scraping before him. Now, England too can hold up its head higher and exclaim with all the world about Israel, *הן עמ פלביא יקום*.

But no less – and even infinitely more – must we offer our prayer for thanks to Almighty G-d and exclaim “*מה פעל אל-א*, What hath G-d wrought,” in so protecting and prospering our Israeli soldiers in this extremely perilous effort.

I cannot help but think, at this occasion, of how G-d bends man to His purposes, how little we know of what role we play in history. It seems such a short time ago

that Israel was banished from UNESCO, and the representative of Lebanon came up to the rostrum of the United Nations and arrogantly crowed, “Israel is a country which belongs nowhere!” And now look at “what G-d hath wrought”: in the same week that Israel managed this brilliant coup of saving its hostages from Uganda, Lebanon is in the deepest throes of its most agonizing despair, it has effectively ceased to be a nation, it is – and I say this without any special satisfaction – a country which is a non-country, it is itself nowhere! How ironic is the justice that G-d executes upon the nations of the world. *מה פעל אל-א*!

The same coordination of an intersection between the Divine and the human must always be part of our understanding of the forces of history, and this understanding must guide us in all our endeavors – not only that of Israel’s military and political and economic security, but also in our efforts for Torah whether in Israel (and I speak specifically of such great and distinguished *yeshivot* as Kerem B’Yavneh, on whose behalf I have come to these shores); whether Jewish activity in the United States, or Jewish education in England.

In offering our congratulations to Israel and our thanks to G-d Almighty, in expressing both verses in profound appreciation of this historic event in which Israel proved to be so bold, so swift, so quick and so powerful, our lesson is clear: we must learn from this heroic act to inspire ourselves to heroism in pursuit of our spiritual goals as well. And here too we must be – bold and swift and quick and powerful. For so we read this afternoon in the fifth chapter of *Avot*:

“יהודה בן תימא אומר: הוי עז כנמר, וקל כנשר, ורץ כפז, וגבור כפארי, לעשות רצון אביה שבשמים Be bold – as the leopard; and swift – as the eagle; and quick – as the deer; and powerful – as the lion. And all this must be done – in order to carry out the will of our Father in Heaven.” ■



The Battalion They Choose to Forget

Rabbi Elie Mischel

It was Shavuot, 1948, and two groups of Jews were converging on the same rocky hillside outside Jerusalem from opposite directions. One group wore the dusty fatigues of the Palmach – young, mostly secular, hardened fighters blasting and clearing a secret bypass route through the Judean Hills to break the Arab siege of the city. The other group, Charedi *yeshiva* students, wore their *Yom Tov* clothes. Labor is forbidden on Shavuot – but Jerusalem was under siege and starving, and *pikuach nefesh*, the obligation to violate almost any commandment to save a life, overrides even *Yom Tov*. They had come to move rocks.

When the two groups met somewhere on what would become known as the Burma Road, the siege of Jerusalem was over. It is one of the more remarkable scenes of Israel's War of Independence, and one of the least remembered. That is not an accident.

The story begins three months before statehood, in the spring of 1948, when Jerusalem was under siege and slowly starving. The engineering corps of the new Jewish state was desperate for manpower to dig trenches, fill sandbags, and build fortifications in the border neighborhoods where Jewish and Arab Jerusalem pressed against each other in the dark.

The agreement was brokered by Chief Rabbis Herzog and Uziel, and its terms were straightforward: *yeshiva* students between 17 and 27 would report for fortification work once or twice a week, for eight-hour shifts. They would study Torah during the day and build walls at night. Outstanding scholars would be exempted; the rest would serve.

Every *yeshiva* in Jerusalem signed on – not only the Religious Zionist *yeshivas*, but also Chevron and Satmar, Ger's Sfat Emet and Chabad's Torat Emet, Porat Yosef and Toldot Aharon, across the full Lithuanian, Chassidic, and Sephardic spectrum. The unit was initially called *Gdud Bnei HaYeshivot*, the Battalion of Yeshiva Students, but its soldiers renamed it *Gdud Tuvia* after their commander, Tuvia Bir, a Haganah veteran. The sons of the greatest *roshei yeshiva* were on the roster alongside everyone else. Rabbi Yechezkel Sarna and Rabbi Meir Chadash, heads of the Chevron



PHOTO: FRED CSASZNIK, IDF AND DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT ARCHIVES

Yeshiva, did not exempt their own sons. Their names appear on Tuvia Bir's lists to this day.

Roughly 350 men served in *Gdud Tuvia*, though about forty percent of those who reported were disqualified at the medical examination before they even began. Most were Holocaust survivors who had made their way to Jerusalem's *yeshivas*, and the malnutrition and lung disease they carried from the camps rendered them unfit even for fortification work. Those who remained went out night after night in civilian clothes, digging communications trenches in Sanhedria, building positions in Makor Chayim, and clearing stones on the road that would eventually break the siege.

The soldiers were not of one mind. The battalion published two issues of a journal called *HaMivtzar*, "The Fortress," and the pages are full of debate. One writer asked openly whether he was even permitted to leave the *beit midrash*. Another student answered strongly on the following page: "This is the duty of every Jew in general, and our duty as *yeshiva* students in particular." Some served because the rabbis instructed it, others because they saw it as a step toward redemption. But they all showed up. A supervisor from *HaShomer HaTza'ir* later praised *Gdud Tuvia* in the press as a model unit, remarkable praise from a man whose movement had little natural sympathy for *yeshiva* students.

Since October 7th, the debate over Charedi enlistment has moved from chronic argument to genuine crisis. Some 80,000 Charedi men of draft age sit outside the IDF while the army openly says it needs

them. Yet the official Charedi position, backed by mass rallies, remains opposed.

Gdud Tuvia demolishes the argument that the choice is binary. In 1948, with the survival of the Torah world genuinely hanging by a thread, *roshei yeshiva* of every stripe found a way to balance Torah learning and national service. They negotiated, compromised, sent their own sons out into the dark, and those sons came back at dawn to *daven vatikin*. The Torah world did not collapse. It flourished.

Gdud Tuvia does not fit neatly into the current Charedi narrative of total separation from the state and its army, which is why its story has been allowed to fade. It is selective memory in the service of a political position. But the precedent exists, and it was set by the greatest Torah leaders of the previous generation. That is not so easy to erase.

● Sources: Muki Tzur's introduction to Rabbi Yehuda Leon Ashkenazi's *Haggadah Ivrit*; "The Haredi Soldiers Who Served in Israel's War of Independence" (National Library of Israel); "The Hesder Boys of 5708," Aharon Kornfeld, *Arutz Sheva*, 1987; interview with Kobi Bir, *Faith and Security* documentary series, January 2025.



Rabbi Elie Mischel

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



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The Birth of a Nation

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ל"צ

The book known as *Devarim* (“words”) was originally known as *Mishneh Torah* – the repetition or restatement of the Torah. Hence the name Deuteronomy, “a second (statement of the) law.” In it Moshe restates, with some additions and some omissions, both the history and legislation contained in the previous three books.

But there is also something new. The first verse of the book uses a phrase we have not heard before in the Torah, though it takes a sensitive ear to hear it: “These are the words Moshe spoke to all Israel [*le-chol Yisrael*] in the desert east of the Jordan, that is, in the Aravah, opposite Suf, between Paran and Tofel, Lavan, Chazerot and Di-zahav” (*Devarim* 1:1).

It was R. Ephraim Luntschitz [1550-1619] in his commentary *Kli Yakar* who noted that the phrase *kol Yisrael*, which appears eleven times in *Devarim*, exists nowhere else in the five books of the Torah. Until now the Israelites have been described as *Bnei Yisrael*, “the children of Israel.” Now for the first time they are no longer the children of Israel – they are simply Israel.

What does this signify? It means that the Israelites were about to become something they had not been before. Until now, they had been linked vertically, by biological descent. They had a common ancestor: Ya’akov, who was given the name Yisrael. They were his descendants. They were part of the same family tree. They were his children.

With the subtle shift from *Bnei Yisrael*, the children of Israel, to Yisrael, Moshe was preparing the Israelites for a new mode of existence. Now they would be linked horizontally, to one another. They were no longer children. They were about to become moral adults. Their unity was no longer simply a matter of a common past. They were about to create a shared future. They would no longer exist in a state of dependency, relying on Moshe and through him, G-d, to provide for their needs, welfare and

safety. Henceforth they would have to take responsibility for one another.

Through this subtle linguistic shift, Moshe is indicating that once the Israelites crossed the Jordan they would have to become a nation, not just a family. They would have to learn to function collectively. They were about to create a society. They would have to fight wars, defend themselves, institute systems of justice and welfare, and learn the necessity for, as well as the limits of, politics.

None of that had been necessary in the wilderness. G-d provided their needs, fought their battles, sent them food and water and gave them shelter. G-d would still be with them in the future, but only rarely in the form of miracles. No longer would it be G-d serving the people – giving them all they need. It would be the people serving G-d. That was to be their new identity. The nation would be defined by the covenant their parents had made at Mount Sinai. It would be their constitution, their mission, their task, their destiny. They were about to become, not just individuals, but a people:

“Then Moshe and the priests, the Levites, said to all Israel, ‘Be silent, Israel, and listen! This day, you have become a people of Hashem your G-d. Obey Hashem your G-d and follow His commands and decrees that I give you today’” (*Devarim* 27:9–10).

Hence the intense peoplehood dimension of Judaism. Today’s secular culture is highly individualistic, and contemporary forms of spirituality reflect that fact. Nowadays we often think that G-d is about me, not us. Nor is this new. Religion has often been thought of as a private engagement of the soul. Dean Inge defined it as “what a person does in his solitude.” Walter Savage Landor called solitude the “audience chamber of G-d.” Octavio Paz spoke of it as “the profoundest fact of the human condition.”

Judaism holds the precise opposite. “It is not good for man to be alone.” The *parasha* of *Devarim* is always read on the Shabbat



before Tisha B'Av – and there is a verbal connection between the parasha and the opening of the Book of *Eicha*: the word “*eicha*, how,” itself.

Moshe says: “How [*eicha*] can I bear alone your contentiousness, your burdens and your quarrels” (*Devarim* 1:12). *Eicha* opens with the words: “How [*eicha*] lonely lies the city, once so full of people!”

Immediately we hear that *Eicha* is not only the word these two verses have in common. They also share the word *levadi* / *vadad*, meaning “lonely, alone, solitary.” To be alone is not something to celebrate but to mourn. Judaism is a religion not of individuals but of a people. Faith does not belong to the private recesses of the soul. It belongs to the life we live together. Where people meet is where G-d is to be found.

Sickness and bereavement force us in upon ourselves. Yet in Judaism, we pray for healing for those who are ill “in the midst of all the other sick of Israel.” We offer consolation to mourners with the words, “May G-d comfort you in the midst of the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.” We specifically emphasize the not-aloneness of the ill and the bereaved. They are part of a people – and that is part of the healing, the consolation.

Likewise at a wedding, one of the seven blessings (*sheva berachot*) says: “Bring great happiness and joy to one who was barren [Zion], as her children return to her in joy. Blessed are You, L-rd, who gladdens Zion through her children.” It is as if the entire Jewish people, past, present and future, are present at the wedding, taking delight in this new couple.

So deep does this idea go that the word for human “life” in Judaism – *chayim* – is in the plural, as if life alone were not a life. The word *simcha* in Hebrew is impossible to translate precisely. It does not mean “happiness, joy, rejoicing” – because each of these emotional states can be experienced by someone alone, whereas *simcha* in Judaism always refers to a collective celebration. *Simcha* means “the happiness we share with others.”

Jewish law tells us to make the blessing of *shehecheyanu*, “Who has kept us alive and sustained us and brought us to this time” on seeing a friend whom we have not seen for at least thirty days. Why specifically this blessing? Because, as Choni Hame’agel says in the Talmud: “Either companionship or death” (*Ta’anit* 23a). A renewal of friendship is therefore nothing less than a renewal of life itself.

Life alone is not a life. Hence the remarkable ruling of Maimonides: “One who separates himself from the community, even if he does not commit a transgression but merely holds himself aloof from the congregation of Israel, does not fulfill the commandments together with his people, shows himself indifferent to their distress and does not observe their fast days but goes on his own way like one of the nations who does not belong to

the Jewish people – such a person has no share in the world to come” (*Hilchot Teshuva* 3:11).

This is so strange a law that we have to go back and make sure we have understood it correctly. The person concerned has committed no sin – except that of holding himself apart from his people. Yet that is sufficient to rob him of the world to come. Judaism is a collective faith – the faith of a community, a people, a nation.

This is all the more striking because Judaism is a faith that ascribes radical value to the individual: “One who saves a single life is as if he had saved an entire universe.” Judaism values the individual without being individualistic. That is a very subtle distinction, and few cultures have ever managed it. I once asked Paul Johnson, a Catholic and the author of the superb *A History of the Jews*, what he found most impressive about Judaism. He replied: “It has managed, better than any other culture known to me, the delicate balance between individual responsibility and social responsibility.”

That is the deep significance of the shift in the book of *Devarim* from “the children of Israel” to “Israel” – from a group of individuals with a common ancestry to a nation bound by collective responsibility. G-d did not choose, nor did He make a covenant with, individuals as individuals – the righteous, the holy, the pure, the innocent, the upright. He made a covenant with an entire people, righteous and not-yet-righteous alike.

Why? Because that, we believe, is where G-d lives: in interactions, in the life we share. That is what we seek to sanctify: the relationships between husband and wife, parent and child, teacher and disciple, employer and employee, leader and follower, friend and stranger. That – as against the hyper-individualism of our late capitalist society – is a lesson worth re-learning. We find G-d in the “we,” not the “I.”



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Between Eicha and Esther: From “How?” to “How Can I?” – From Ruin to Resolve

Rabbanit Shani Taragin

Mishenichnas Av mema'atin b'simcha is the solemn counterpart to mishenichnas Adar marbim b'simcha (Ta'anit 29a). The Jewish calendar is not merely a sequence of commemorative dates; it is a spiritual pedagogy, training us to live with paradox: joy and grief, redemption and ruin. It is within this rhythm that the cry of *Eicha* reverberates, summoning *Am Yisrael* to moral introspection at moments of national fracture.

The first cry of *Eicha* is Moshe's. Standing at the threshold of *Eretz Yisrael*, he asks: “*Eicha*, How can I alone bear your burden?” (*Devarim* 1:12). This is not yet destruction but strain; not exile but the burden of leading a people not yet prepared to bear the weight of its destiny. Moshe's *Eicha* is the cry of leadership confronting a nascent nation.

The second *Eicha* is Yishayahu's cry: “*Eicha*, How has she become a harlot, a faithful city” (*Yishayahu* 1:21). The city of Yerushalayim, once defined by faithfulness, has become spiritually estranged; the covenantal relationship itself appears ruptured. If Moshe's *Eicha* expresses the burden of carrying *Am Yisrael*, Yishayahu's *Eicha* expresses the agony of witnessing what the nation has become.

These earlier voices prepare the reader for the devastating *Eicha* of Yirmiyahu's laments. *Megillat Eicha* opens with the cry: “*Eicha*, How alone lies the city, once so full of people!” (*Eicha* 1:1). Yerushalayim sits isolated, shattered, emptied of glory. Chazal link all three biblical cries into a single historical progression (*Eicha Rabbah*, *Petichta* 24), read consecutively from the Shabbat preceding Tisha B'Av through the day itself: Moshe saw a people burdened by internal discord, Yishayahu saw a society corrupted by moral failure, and Yirmiyahu witnessed the devastation that followed.

A century after the exile, Queen Esther responds to genocidal threat with a related but transformed expression (read to the tune of *Eicha*): “For how (*eichachah*) can I see the evil that will befall my people! And how (*eichachah*) can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred?” (*Esther* 8:6). This subtle linguistic shift from *Eicha* to

eichachah marks a profound transition in Jewish consciousness. Yirmiyahu asks: how did we become solitary, bereaved, and ruined? Esther asks: how can I remain silent while my people are threatened? The first is the cry of devastation after catastrophe; the second is the cry of responsibility before catastrophe becomes irreversible.

Esther's cry may be understood not merely as allusion, but as commentary on the three earlier laments. Where Moshe, Yishayahu, and Yirmiyahu trace the national descent from dysfunction to destruction, Esther introduces a new possibility. Rather than asking how tragedy occurred, she asks how she could possibly stand by and watch it occur. Her cry transforms grief into responsibility, anguish into action, and vulnerability into courage. Esther's words become *Tanach*'s answer to the entire sequence of *Eicha*. Moshe identifies the challenge, Yishayahu diagnoses the failure, Yirmiyahu mourns the catastrophe, and Esther charts the path forward. The fourth *Eicha* does not erase the previous three, rather, it redeems them, teaching that Jewish history must move from explanation to obligation, from “How did this happen?” to “How can I prevent it from happening again?”

There is also a striking evolution in imagery. *Eicha* portrays Yerushalayim “*k'almanah* – as a widow,” abandoned and desolate. Esther, by contrast, is a woman in exile who begins hidden and vulnerable, yet emerges with dignity, courage, and strategic brilliance. The grieving woman of Zion and the courageous woman of Persia are not opposites, but complementary expressions of the same national drama: what it means to survive physically and spiritually when other nations abandon us, when the world feels unstable and Hashem appears hidden.

That hiddenness is central to both *Megillot*. In *Eicha*, Yirmiyahu implores his audience to turn to Hashem, and implores Hashem, who seems painfully absent, to remember our shame (5:1, 20). In *Esther*, G-d is concealed within the architecture of seemingly ordinary events. Between them stands the uniquely Jewish capacity to live without illusions and yet without

surrendering to despair. This message remains painfully current. Persia is no longer merely an ancient empire; in modern form, it continues to cast a shadow over Jewish vulnerability. Reish Lakish teaches (*Yerushalmi*, *Megillah* 1:5) that all the books of the Prophets and Writings will be nullified in the days of *Mashiach*, but *Megillat Esther* will never be nullified. Our cries of despair (*Eicha*) may one day be forgotten, but the echoes of Esther's *eichachah* will endure and charge us to act, to defend, and redeem.

Jews do not sanctify grief for its own sake. Mourning is meaningful only when it awakens responsibility. The question “How did this happen?” must mature into “How can I respond? How can I rebuild? How can I strengthen faith, unity, and moral clarity?” Devastation must become the beginning of renewal, not the end of hope. Moshe's *Eicha*, Yishayahu's *Eicha*, Yirmiyahu's *Eicha*, and Esther's *eichachah* form a single liturgy of Jewish historical consciousness: the burden of leadership, the pain of rebuke, the grief of destruction, and finally the courage of responsibility. The first three teach us how a nation unravels; the fourth teaches us how it begins to rebuild. The path from *Eicha* to *eichachah* – from “How?” to “How can I...?” is the path from ruin to resolve, and from destruction to redemption.



Rabbanit Shani Taragin

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The Beit HaMikdash: What We Are Missing

Rabbi Reuven Taragin

Tisha B'Av is the saddest day of the year. It is when we mourn the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* and yearn and pray for its restoration. This mourning and longing extend beyond a single day; rather, we are expected to mourn throughout the year, and our regular *tefillot* – including *Shemoneh Esrei*, *Birkat Hamazon*, *Hallel*, and *Lecha Dodi* – consistently reference the rebuilding of Yerushalayim, with particular emphasis on the *Beit HaMikdash*.

Although we formally acknowledge the importance of the *Beit HaMikdash*, comprehending its true significance is another matter. We struggle to grasp the magnitude of the *churban* because none of us ever experienced or witnessed the *Beit HaMikdash* firsthand. Our mourning resembles that of a young child at his mother's *shiva*, unaware of the true nature of his loss and unable to appreciate the gravity of the situation.

To pray meaningfully for the return of the *Beit HaMikdash* and the restoration of the Temple service, we must first understand the significance of the *Mikdash* and the purpose of the *avodah* performed there.

Three *parshiyot* in *Sefer Shemot* present distinct aspects of the original *Beit HaMikdash* – the *Mishkan*. These dimensions are rooted in the experiences of the *Avot* and further developed by the *Rishonim*. Each of these dimensions deserves careful attention.

Divine presence and relationship

Hashem first presents the objective of constructing the *Mishkan* to *Moshe Rabbeinu* in *Parashat Terumah* at *Har Sinai*, immediately after revealing His Presence to the Jewish people. The Ramban explains that this juxtaposition indicates the *Mishkan* serves as a continuation of the Sinaitic revelation.

Like *Har Sinai*, the *Mishkan* and *Beit HaMikdash* served as sites where Hashem's *shechina*, a term related to *Mishkan*, resided among the Jewish people. This indwelling symbolized Hashem's Presence in the world and His unique relationship with us. The Torah thus refers to the *Mishkan* as the “*Mishkan Ha-eidut* (testimony),” signifying that it testified to Hashem's personal relationship with us (see, for example, *Shemot* 38:21 and *Bamidbar* 1:50 and 53).

Parashat Terumah opens its account of the *Mishkan* with the vessel that most clearly expresses this testimony: the *Aron Hakoresh*. Situated at the *Mishkan*'s innermost and holiest point, the *Aron* contained the *luchot* that Hashem gave *Moshe* at *Sinai* as a tangible testimony to His covenant with the Jewish people. Both the *luchot* and the *Aron* are called *eidut* and *brit* because they attest to the covenant.

Hashem's relationship with us is further reflected by the *keruvim*, which stood atop the *kaporet* above the *Aron*. The *keruvim* were fashioned in the form of a man and a woman embracing to symbolize Hashem's

loving relationship with us. *Parashat Terumah* adds that Hashem's *shechina* rested atop the *Aron* and that His words to *Moshe* emanated from in between the *keruvim*.

Hashem thus maintained the covenant He began at *Sinai* through the *Aron Ha-eidut*, which housed the *luchot* He gave *Moshe* as a testimony to His covenant with us as a people (See Ramban to *Shemot* 25:1).

The *Mishkan* enabled Hashem's continued Presence among the Jewish people as they journeyed through the desert and settled in *Eretz Yisrael*. Ultimately, the *Mishkan* transformed into the *Beit HaMikdash*, and Hashem's Presence became eternally associated with *Har HaMoriya*. The *Mishkan* was the vehicle by which Hashem's Presence traveled from Mount *Sinai*, where He appeared to the Jewish people, to *Har HaMoriya*, His eternal resting place.

Ya'akov Avinu

Hashem first revealed His Presence to *Ya'akov Avinu* on *Har HaMoriya* through the dream he experienced while sleeping there, as described in *Parashat Vayeitzei* (see Rashi, *Bereishit* 28:11, who explains, citing *Chazal*, that *Ya'akov* slept at *Har HaMoriya*). His dream consisted of a ladder with heavenly angels ascending and descending, with Hashem perched at the top (*Bereishit* 28:12–13). When *Ya'akov* awoke, he recognized Hashem's Presence there and the



place's significance as Hashem's "house" and the gateway to heaven (ibid., 28:16–17).

Kedusha

Hashem's Presence in the *Mikdash* rendered it a holy place. Consequently, we were required to show respect to the *Mikdash*, and only those who were *tahor* (pure) were permitted to enter (*Vayikra* 15:31).

In the wilderness, the *shechina* also generated *kedusha* throughout the Jewish encampment. This required a level of purity not only in the *Mikdash* but also in the homes of the *Levi'im* and the general population. Therefore, individuals contaminated by bodily emissions were required to leave the camp of the *Levi'im*, and those with *tzara'at* had to leave even the encampment of the *shevatim* (*Bamidbar* 5:2–3 as explained by *Pesachim* 67).

With the construction of the *Beit HaMikdash* in *Eretz Yisrael*, the *kedusha* radiated throughout the Land. The *Mishnah* (*Keilim* 1:6) describes ten levels of *kedusha* that extend from the *Kodesh HaKodashim* outward to the rest of the country. Since Hashem is the source of *kedusha*, His Presence in *Eretz Yisrael* generates sanctity throughout the Land.

Shechina in exile

This also explains Yechezkel's *ma'aseh hamerkava* (heavenly chariot) prophecy,

in which he depicts the *shechina* departing the *Mikdash* into exile (*Yechezkel* 1). The *Mikdash* needed to be destroyed; Hashem's Presence left beforehand to make that possible (*Yechezkel* 10:18–22 and *Rosh Hashanah* 31a).

Chazal teach that after the *churban* of the *Beit HaMikdash*, the *shechina* went into exile together with the Jewish people and itself requires redemption (*Megillah* 29a). Although Hashem's choice of *Har HaMoriya*, and His eternal Presence there can never be undone (Rambam, *Hilchot Beit Habechirah* 6:16), the full revelation of that Presence will return only with the rebuilding of the *Beit HaMikdash*.

Our avodah

After *Parashat Terumah* details the building of the *Mishkan* as a recreation of how the *shechina* appeared on *Har Sinai*, *Parashat Tetzaveh* adds a second dimension: the *avodah* done in the *Mishkan*. No *avodah* was done on *Har Sinai*. In fact, the Torah emphasizes that the *kohanim* were prohibited from even entering (*Shemot* 24:2). *Parashat Tetzaveh* establishes that the *kohanim* are meant to perform *avodah* in our *Mishkan*. In addition to describing the clothing of the *kohanim* and the inauguration service, *Parashat Tetzaveh* opens and closes with the consistent *avodot* the *kohanim* performed in the *Mishkan*: the *ner tamid* (*Shemot* 27:20–21), *korban tamid* (*Shemot* 28:38–42), and *ketoret* (*Shemot* 30:1–10; regarding the

centrality of these three *avodot*, see also *Divrei Hayamim* II 2:3).

Because the *shechina* resides in the *Mishkan* and *Beit HaMikdash*, these locations also serve as places where we serve Hashem. And, like with our relationship with Hashem, the *avodah* must be consistent and uninterrupted. The *kohanim* regularly offer the *tamid* and *ketoret*, ensure the showbreads remain on the *shulchan* at all times, and light the *menorah* to maintain a continuous stream of light.

This distinction also explains the different name *Tetzaveh* uses for the Sanctuary. While *Parashat Terumah* refers to it as the *Mishkan*, *Tetzaveh* calls the Sanctuary an *Ohel Mo'ed* – a tent of meeting. Whereas *Terumah* describes the creation of a *Mishkan* for the *shechina* to reside, *Tetzaveh* depicts a sanctuary where we can encounter Hashem through our *avodah*.

Parashat Tzav adds that the *kohanim* maintain a constant fire on the *mizbei'ach*. Indeed, the *mizbei'ach* is the center of our *avodah*. *Korbanot* are offered there throughout the day and consumed on it throughout the night.

But the central *korban*, which opens and closes the day, is the *korban tamid*. The end of *Parashat Tetzaveh* describes this *korban* (*Shemot* 29:38–42) and connects Hashem's continued appearance and communication with the Jewish people to the *korban* and the *mizbei'ach*. In contrast to *Parashat*

Terumah, which describes Hashem's words as emanating from the *Aron*, *Parashat Tetzaveh* associates His words with the *mizbei'ach*, upon which the *korban tamid* and other *korbanot* are offered.

Indeed, *Terumah* and *Tetzaveh* focus on different vessels. *Parashat Terumah* mentions the *Aron* as the first vessel and makes no mention of either of the *mizbechot*. *Parashat Tetzaveh*, on the other hand, makes no mention of the *Aron*, but mentions both of the *mizbechot* and the consistent *avodah* done on each.

The Rambam describes the *Beit HaMikdash*, as presented in *Parashat Tetzaveh*, as a place established for *avodah*. In *Sefer HaMitzvot*, he defines its purpose through the two *avodot* that bookend the *parasha*: the *ner tamid* and the *korban tamid* (*Sefer Hamitzvot LaRambam*, Aseh 20; see also *Sefer Hachinuch*, Mitzvah 95).

In his *Mishneh Torah*, the Rambam includes the laws pertaining to building the *Mikdash* in *Sefer Avodah*, and he focuses specifically on the *korbanot* and the *mizbei'ach*. The Rambam begins his presentation of the laws of the *Beit HaMikdash* by describing the *mitzvah* as building a *Mikdash* ready for "the sacrificing of *korbanot*" (*Hilchot Beit Habechirah* 1:1). When he lists the vessels, he mentions the *mizbei'ach* first and, though he then lists the other vessels, he makes no mention of the *Aron*.

The Rambam (*ibid.*, 2:2) continues his discussion of the *mizbei'ach* in the second *perek*, where he describes how the *Mikdash* was built around the specific site where the *mizbei'ach* needed to stand – the place *David HaMelech* purchased after seeing the heavenly angel there, and where the first *korbanot* were offered by Adam, Kayin, Hevel, Noach, and, most importantly, *Avraham Avinu*.

Avraham Avinu

The *Beit HaMikdash* was constructed at the site where *Avraham* demonstrated his willingness to sacrifice *Yitzchak*, as the *Mikdash* is intended to serve as the location for offerings modeled on *Avraham's* devotion.

Avraham made this point when, after sacrificing the ram in place of *Yitzchak*, he named the place "Hashem Yireh" (*Bereishit* 22:14). *Rashi* explains that his intention was that Hashem would choose this place for His *shechina* and to have *korbanot* offered here."

Shlomo HaMelech

Although the *Beit HaMikdash* primarily serves as the site of sacrificial service and

other forms of *avodah*, it also functions as the spiritual center of worship worldwide. It is the focal point toward which we direct our *avodah she-balev* – our prayers (*Berachot* 30a).

Shlomo HaMelech made this point in his prayer before the *mizbei'ach* on the day he inaugurated the *Beit HaMikdash*. He requested that Hashem hear and answer the prayers of the Jewish people when they direct them toward the *Beit HaMikdash* (*Melachim I* 8:22–53). Since the *Mikdash* is the site of our Divine service, our *avodah she-balev* can also be directed to Hashem through it.

Sadly, after the *churban*, we can no longer perform the *avodah* in the *Beit HaMikdash*, and the gateway it provided for our prayers is now limited. Instead of praying through the *Mikdash*, we now pray for it to be rebuilt.

Atonement

Hashem completes His commandment to build the *Mishkan* in a third *parasha* – *Parashat Ki Tisa*. After *Terumah* describes the vessels and *Tetzaveh* the *avodah*, *Ki Tisa* adds the *machatzit hashekel*, the coin each Jew donated towards the *Mishkan*, both in that first year for its construction and in future years for its *korbanot* (*Shemot* 30:11–16).

The *parasha* explains that the contribution achieves *kaparah* – atonement for sins. *Rashi* explains that the *korbanot* bought with the donations achieve the *kaparah*. *Korbanot* offered in the *Mikdash* atone for those who donate toward them.

The Eigel

Chazal teach us that the entire *Mishkan* atoned for the *chet ha-eigel* (sin of the golden calf). Both the *avodah* (*Shemot Rabbah* 38:7) and the donations, specifically the gold that the Jews had previously donated towards the *eigel*, atoned for the creation and service of the *eigel*.

Rashi understood this *kaparah* to be the central purpose of the *Mishkan*. Though the Torah records Hashem's instruction to build the *Mishkan* before recounting the story of the *chet ha-eigel*, *Rashi* maintains that the command was actually given only afterward, as a response to the sin, so that the *Mishkan* could serve as the vehicle through which atonement for the *chet ha-eigel* would be achieved.

Sefer Vayikra

Even if it is not the primary purpose of the *Mishkan*, all agree that it served as a

source of *kaparah* for the *eigel*. It also facilitated atonement for future sins through the *korbanot* offered there. Alongside the fixed communal offerings brought each day, on Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh, and on Yom Tov, individuals could bring personal *korbanot* to atone for their own transgressions. *Parashat Pinchas* details the communal offerings, while *Parashat Vayikra* and *Parashat Tzav* describe the personal ones.

Parashat Acharei Mot presents the highest expression of this process: the *avodah* of Yom Kippur. Our fasting and prayer on Yom Kippur are meant to center around the service performed by the *kohen gadol* in the *Beit HaMikdash*, through which the fullest measure of *kaparah* is attained. Our observance today preserves only a shadow of that ideal. In the absence of the *Beit HaMikdash*, we lack both the *avodah* of the *kohen gadol* that made Yom Kippur complete and the ability to bring personal *korbanot* for atonement.

Our tefillot

Each of these three dimensions – the return of Hashem's *shechina*, the reinstatement of the *avodah*, and the opportunity for atonement – runs through our *tefillot*.

Without these aspects of our lives, the *Kuzari* (2:29–30) compares us to a body without a brain or a heart, like scattered, dry bones, with only a small remnant of life within them. May a deeper appreciation of what we are missing enhance our *tefillot* and enable us to witness the return of the *Beit HaMikdash*, speedily in our days.

● For a version of this essay including footnotes, go to mizrachi.org/hamizrachi.



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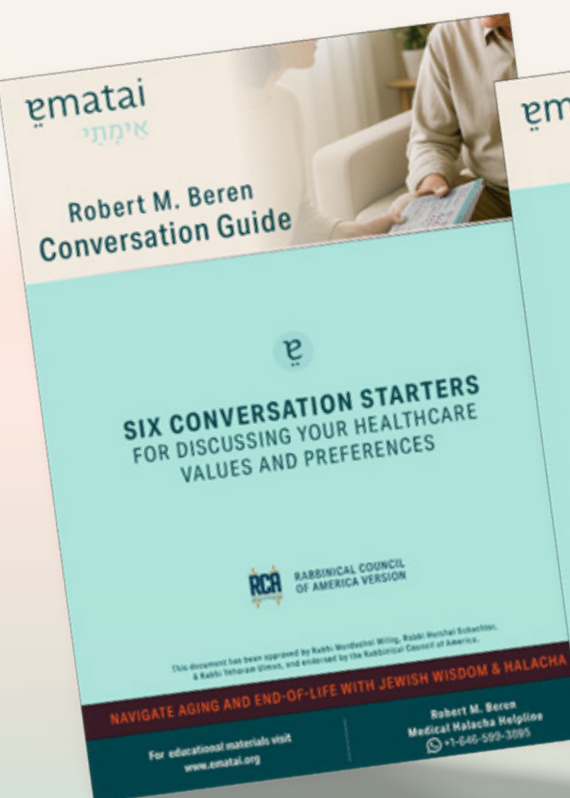
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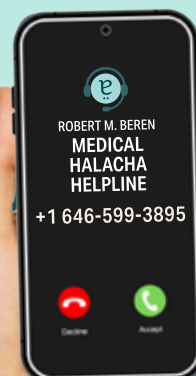
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Learning Aveilut Throughout the Year

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Brody

On Tisha B'Av, it is traditionally encouraged to study *Hilchot Aveilut* (the laws of mourning), one of the few subjects deemed appropriate for the saddest day of the Jewish year. Many extend this practice throughout the preceding nine days. But this association has fostered a broader assumption: that mourning laws, including the relevant sections of *Mo'ed Katan*, should be avoided the rest of the year entirely.

Clearly, if you have a question regarding *aveilut*, you should ask someone or learn the relevant texts. The real question is one of boundaries: should mourning be a subject of elective, purely theoretical study when there is no immediate need? As we'll see, this discussion reveals something deeper about how Judaism approaches mortality itself.

Hesitation over these topics often stems from a traditional anxiety about metaphysical danger. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (*Sichot HaRan* 8) explicitly urged people not to “delve deeply” into matters of calamity. In his worldview, human thoughts do not merely process reality; they actively shape it. Dwelling too intensely on theoretical tragedy can inadvertently draw those negative energies toward the one studying.

Even the greatest *poskim* shared this sensitivity. The Chatam Sofer recounts that he had just received a learned responsum from his illustrious father-in-law, Rabbi Akiva Eiger, on the laws of mourning – politely euphemized in the tradition as *Hilchot Semachot*, “The Laws of Joys” – when word reached him that his mother had died. He could not help feeling that his very engagement with the subject had somehow invited the tragedy (*Shu”t Chatam Sofer*, YD 346).

The Talmudic principle he invoked is: “*Kol de-kafid, kafdi bahadei; u-de-la kafid, la kafdi bahadei*, malign forces trouble those who are troubled by them; those who pay them no mind, they leave alone” (*Pesachim* 110b). Because Rabbi Akiva Eiger was unbothered by such anxieties, he was inherently immune and could engage with the subject freely. The Chatam Sofer, writing after *shiva*, nonetheless suggested to him that such theoretical study was best reserved for Tisha B'Av itself.

Other authorities recommend engaging with such texts more briskly (*Beit Lechem Yehudah* YD 245:4) or studying them privately rather than in groups (*Shayarei Kneset Ha-Gedolah* 245:3).

None of this amounts to advocating ignorance of the laws. Rabbis must clearly learn these laws to guide the people. Indeed, the Chatam Sofer himself authored numerous responsa on *aveilut* throughout his life. It reflects, rather, a strand in Jewish thought that counsels against dwelling on mortality beyond what necessity demands.

Many *poskim*, however, consider such fears unwarranted and especially misplaced when they lead to the neglect of Torah study. Jewish texts are saturated with mourning: the stories of Avraham, Aharon, King David, and Iyov are only the most prominent examples. Studying *Mo'ed Katan*, the minor tractate *Hilchot Semachot*, and similar texts is an act of Torah study no different from any other.

This point is made in an oft-cited passage in *Sefer Chassidim* (#261, Margoliot edition). Writing in the medieval period, when *Mo'ed Katan* and similar works had fallen into neglect, the author urges readers to treat the tractate as a *meit mitzvah*, an unattended corpse with no one to care for it. Just as a *meit mitzvah* obligates whoever encounters it to stop and attend to it, so too a neglected area of Torah obligates us to engage with it, precisely because no one else will.

He captures this neglect with an analogy of quiet devastation. A father has several daughters, all skilled in respectable crafts of weaving and embroidery. Suitors come eagerly for each of them. One daughter alone goes unclaimed. She too is a weaver, but she weaves mourning garments and burial shrouds. No one wants to be near that.



She pleads with her father: had she made festive clothing like her sisters, she would have found a husband long ago. His reply is not consolation but prophecy: “I praise you above them all, for in the end, everyone will come to you.”

Sefer Chassidim then applies the parable directly to *Mo'ed Katan*, which cries out to G-d asking why no one studies it. G-d's answer is the verse from *Kohelet*: “It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all mankind, and the living will take it to heart.” The tractate is not lesser for what it contains. It is, if anything, more essential.

This is the crux of the matter. The hesitations we have traced – metaphysical anxieties, the advice to study quietly or quickly, the personal fear of confronting mortality – are understandable and may be respected. But they reflect individual temperament, not a genuine prohibition. The daughter weaving shrouds is doing nothing shameful. She is doing something most people are simply not yet ready to face. Judaism insists that we face it. Confronting mortality is not morbidity, but wisdom. The living, as *Kohelet* reminds us, are meant to take it to heart.

Indeed, the Sages praise those who sew their own burial shrouds in their lifetime, a point noted by later *poskim* (*Beit Yosef*, YD 339). As Rabbi Chaim Falagi asserted, “Praiseworthy is the man who makes his own burial shrouds while he is alive and in the best of health” (*Ruach Chaim*, YD 352). To study the laws of mourning is to weave those same shrouds: to acknowledge, with honesty and care, that death is the end of all mankind, and that this fact demands our attention rather than our silence.

Sefer Chassidim goes on to suggest that those who are fearful to learn this subject can pray beforehand, or study it quietly by themselves. Study these laws with the gravity they demand, and you are not only safe but praiseworthy. Indeed, he promises those who learn this “*meit mitzvah*” subject will receive great reward.

As Rabbi Shlomo Aviner has shown, leading contemporary *poskim* across the spectrum embraced this approach without reservation. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik regularly taught *Mo'ed Katan* and related matters to his students (*Mi-Peninei HaRav*, 211). Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach gave public classes on these topics and urged both laypeople and rabbis to know *hilchot aveilut* so as not to be caught unprepared (*Halichot Shlomo: Moadei Hashanah*, 439). Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, Rabbi Yosef Elyashiv, Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, and many others did the same.

Judaism has never shied away from death. Our first morning prayers thank G-d for the renewed gift of life, acknowledging in the same breath that He will one day reclaim it. Our tradition understands that confronting mortality is not morbidity but wisdom. The awareness of death, held honestly, is precisely what gives life its urgency and meaning. We cannot afford to avoid the laws of mourning. We need to draw inspiration from our mortality, not flee from it. The daughter who weaves shrouds may be the last one sought, but she is the one everyone will eventually need. Tisha B'Av reminds us of this once a year. The Torah invites us to learn it all year long.



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Tisha B'Av and Chet Hameraglim

Rabbi Shalom Rosner

Parashat Devarim always falls on the Shabbat before Tisha B'Av. The connection runs deeper than the calendar. The word *eicha* appears in the *parasha* – the same word that opens the Book of *Eicha*, which we read on Tisha B'Av night. But there is a second connection as well: Moshe's rebuke of *Bnei Yisrael* for the sin of the *meraglim* (the spies), which took place on the ninth of Av. That night, the people wept without cause. G-d's response: if you cry tonight for nothing, you will cry on this night for generations. And so it has been. Both *Batei HaMikdash* were destroyed on the ninth of Av, and catastrophe after catastrophe has fallen on this day throughout Jewish history.

Rabbi Frand (*Power of a Vort*) offers a striking insight into the connection between the sin of the *meraglim* and Tisha B'Av. The sin of the *meraglim* was, at its core, a form of *lashon hara* – they spoke negatively about the Promised Land. The *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 104b) finds an allusion to *chet hameraglim* embedded in *Megillat Eicha*. The first four chapters of *Eicha* are written in *aleph-bet* order – with one notable exception. In

the second, third, and fourth chapters, the letter *peh* appears before the letter *ayin*, reversing the alphabetical sequence. This is no accident. It symbolizes that the *meraglim* spoke with their mouths (*peh*) about things they had not seen with their own eyes (*ayin*).

Perhaps this is what *Chazal* are teaching us about *lashon hara*: one of the forces that makes it so pervasive is the tendency to report what we have not personally witnessed.

This sheds light on a perplexing *halacha* regarding *nega'im*. When a person is afflicted with *tzara'at* – understood as a spiritual punishment for *lashon hara* – only a *kohen* may determine whether the *nega* renders him *tamei*. The *kohen* may consult an expert, but he must see the *nega* himself. A blind *kohen* cannot make such a determination (*Meiri, Sanhedrin* 34b). The reason, perhaps, is precisely this: since *lashon hara* so often spreads through hearsay, through judgments passed on things never actually witnessed, the *kohen* who rules on the very affliction caused by that sin must see it with his own eyes. A *kohen*

who cannot see cannot rule – because to do so would be to pass judgment on something unseen, the very pattern of behavior the *nega* comes to correct. Even when we do witness something firsthand we are forbidden from spreading *lashon hara* – but rumors passed without any firsthand knowledge are all the more destructive.

As we mourn on Tisha B'Av and reflect on the sin of the *meraglim*, may we take upon ourselves to be more careful about spreading things we have not witnessed ourselves – and in doing so, strengthen the *ahavat Yisrael* that will bring us the *geula sheleima*.



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The Hidden Joy of Tisha B'Av

Rabbi Azarya Berzon

A verse in *Eicha* describes Tisha B'Av as a *mo'ed* – and on this basis, we omit *Tachanun* on this day. The *Aruch HaShulchan* (559) explains that this reflects our faith in the fulfillment of the Divine promise (*Zechariah* 8:19) that at the time of the redemption, this day will be transformed into one of rejoicing. But this requires clarification. Today it is a day of grief and mourning. How can we treat Tisha B'Av as a *mo'ed* based on what it will become in the future?

The Talmud (*Ta'anit* 30b) states: “One who grieves over the destruction of Jerusalem *ro'eh b'simchatah* – sees its joy.” Why “sees,” in the present tense, rather than “will see” (*yireh*) in the future?

In his *Drashot*, the Chatam Sofer addresses a remarkable phenomenon: a nation that continues to weep over the destruction of its Temple thousands of years after the event. According to legend, the Greek philosopher Plato posed this very question to the prophet Yirmiyahu. There is nothing like this in the historical record of any other nation.

To answer his question, the Chatam Sofer invokes two Talmudic principles about mourning. First, there is no consolation

before one's deceased relative has been buried (*Avot* 4:18). Second, G-d decreed that the dead are gradually forgotten from the heart (*Pesachim* 54b).

When a person suffers a loss, he is intensely bound to the deceased. His grief stems from the fact that the person is still vivid and present in his mind – he cannot be consoled. But G-d decreed that with the passage of time, the finality of death settles into the heart, and slowly the mourner becomes able to accept consolation and return to ordinary life.

Why, then, do we still mourn and weep over the loss of the *Mikdash*? Why do we refuse consolation? Why has the Divine decree that “the deceased will be forgotten” never taken hold? The answer is that we remain profoundly connected to the *Mikdash*. It is still alive for us. And there can be no consolation before burial. Embedded within our mourning, our weeping, our refusal to be consoled, is the implicit conviction that the *Churban* is not final – that the *Mikdash* is only temporarily absent, alive in our hearts, and destined to be rebuilt. If the *Churban* were truly final, the Divine decree of *shich'chah min halev* – forgetting – would long since have taken effect.

In mourning over the *Churban*, then, the consolation emerges from the mourning itself. The very fact that we can grieve over something that occurred more than two thousand years ago proves that the *Mikdash* is not gone. Our mourning is itself a *kiyum nechamah* – an embodiment of consolation.

There are two kinds of crying: *bechi shel yiush*, the cry of despair, which is characteristic of the nations of the world, and *bechi shel tikvah*, the cry of hope, which is unique to our people. The first fades with time and is buried in the past. The second continues to strengthen our faith until the coming of the final redemption.

This is why Tisha B'Av is a *mo'ed* already now. Our very experience of this day testifies that the *Mikdash* exists now. Our mourning itself gives Tisha B'Av its status as a *mo'ed*; hence we omit *Tachanun*. We see the joy of the day through our tears.

May we merit the cry of hope until we witness the *Mikdash* rebuilt before our eyes – speedily and in our days.



Rabbi Azarya Berzon

is the Rav of Kehilat Oz LaMelech in RBS and a distinguished Talmid Chacham with decades of leadership in Torah education. A talmid of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, he has served as Rosh Yeshiva, Rosh Mesivta, and Kollel leader at prominent institutions in Israel and worldwide, including founding Yeshiva Sha'arei Mevaseret Zion and Michlelet Mevaseret Yerushalayim. Renowned as a scholar, educator, and speaker, Rabbi Berzon has delivered thousands of Torah shiurim and has inspired communities worldwide as a Scholar-in-Residence.



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WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP TO BUILD A STRONGER ISRAEL THROUGH ALIYAH

Essay for the Tenth of Av: Redeeming the Ruins

Dr. Erica Brown

How do we behave in exile, especially when we do not feel as though we are in exile? We turn to Yirmiyahu, the prophet who foretold of the first exile to Babylon, for advice. He preempted what the ancient Israelites may have thought was the appropriate religious response by writing a letter to his followers. The gloom and doom that we would naturally expect the prophet to suggest – and that fills page after page of his prophetic testimony – is curiously absent from his letter. Instead, he presents a formula that strikes us with its contemporary resonances.

In chapter 29, we read of the letter that Yirmiyahu wrote to a group of exiles in Babylon, which he dispatched from the land of Israel with Elasah, the man whom King Tzidkiyahu sent to Babylon to see King Nebuchadnezzar. In addition to Elasah's diplomatic mission, he was also to present this letter as guidance for the small but growing community of exiles. The chapter begins with the letter's intended audience:

"This is the text of the letter which the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the priests, the prophets, the rest of the elders of the exile community, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar has exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon..." (Yirmiyahu 29:1)

The condition of exile changes personal and communal identity. You are in one place but your heart and mind are in another. To quote Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi: "I am in the west, but my heart is in the east." To be an exile is never to reconcile yourself with where you are, but to live in a persistent hope of where you want to be.

Yirmiyahu, perhaps realizing the crippling impact of dislocation on the soul of a people, advised against this kind of

thinking: "This said the L-rd of Hosts, the G-d of Israel, to the whole community which I exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters. Multiply there, do not decrease. And 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." (*ibid.* 29:4-7)

In line after line, Yirmiyahu adds to his demands across generations, not only in the immediacy of the day but with the foreknowledge that exile can become more than a momentary condition – a way of life, for decades if not centuries.

Build houses, he tells them. Plant gardens. Seek the welfare of the city. Building a house is a statement of permanence. This is Yirmiyahu's starting point. Yet as he moves on, we realize that building a house is perhaps the least permanent act on his list. After all, no matter where you are, you need some form of shelter, even if, as an exile, you build something temporary in keeping with your desire to leave. Planting a garden implies a longer stay – sowing and cultivation require time, and a deeper investment in the life you are living.

In a *Midrash* on the famous psalm "By the Waters of Babylon" (*Tehillim* 137), the rabbis say that the question "How can we sing a new song on strange land?" was not rhetorical, but literal. The Levites, in their desperation, cut off their thumbs so that they would not be able to play their instruments for the enemy King Nebuchadnezzar (see Rashi on *Kiddushin* 69a). They sat instead on the banks of the river and bemoaned their loss. But the *Midrash* alludes to something darker: by cutting off their thumbs, they made themselves

ritually unsuitable for serving G-d in the Temple precincts after their exile (see *Vayikra* 21:17). Signs of mourning that are permanent can show profound loss – but may also reveal a lack of faith in the future.

Many of Yirmiyahu's prophecies are harsh, and we might not expect him to offer us a positive prescription for exile. Yet he does. He tells us to become good people, raise good children, and be good citizens, no matter where. He also offers us the belief that a stronger people will make a stronger nation when the exile is over and redemption is on the horizon.

Yishayahu, too, offers his guidance on rebuilding: "And they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall renew the waste cities, the desolations of many generations" (*Yishayahu* 61:4).

We are the people who rebuild ruins. And when, as the *Gemara* teaches, we get to heaven and G-d asks each of us, "Did you work for redemption?" we can each say, "Yes, I did" – with a full heart.

● Adapted from Dr. Erica Brown's *In the Narrow Places: Daily Inspiration for the Three Weeks* (Maggid, 2011).



Dr. Erica Brown

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The Mitzvah We All Carry: From Mahjong Tables to Mountain Trails

Inbar Gabay Zada, Director of Development at Sulamot

Four women shuffle mahjong tiles on a terrace at the Jerusalem Windmill. In a Detroit pool, swimmers do lap after lap to raise funds for Israel's "Wonder Women." In Bergen County, New Jersey, a community opens its homes to the widows of fallen soldiers, hearing their stories and raising crucial funds. A few thousand miles away, a man moved by hearing one widow speak runs 94 miles through an Arizona canyon for Kuma.

None of them set out to make a statement about Tisha B'Av. None of them coordinated with one another. And yet, this year, that's exactly what they did.

Tisha B'Av mourns what *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred, cost us. This year, grassroots efforts answered with the opposite, channeling their hearts toward Kuma, Sulamot's initiative, founded by Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon, supporting the IDF widows and orphans of the Iron Swords War.

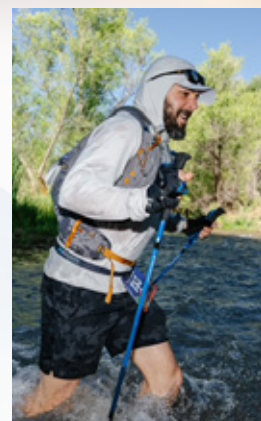
"It is moving to see Am Yisrael unite and to see how each person finds their own unique way to care for the widows," says Rav Rimon. "The Jewish people are uplifted when we think of everyone, forgetting no one, especially those who paid a heavy price so that Am Yisrael would prevail in the war."

Nowhere was that clearer than in Bergen County. Twenty years ago, Reva and Aaron Tokayer turned their grief over their son Ilan z"l into Shabbat Chayal, a tradition uniting local synagogues behind Israel's soldiers. This year, for the first time, the entire program turned to support Kuma. "Grief, even after twenty years, is lonely," Reva says. "We felt that we could pay our story forward by supporting the families in need of an understanding ear and an extended arm." Widows Inbal Moyal and Raz Tahan traveled across Bergen County, carrying forward the legacy of their husbands, Chief Warrant Officer Uri Moyal *Hy"d* and Sergeant Major Rani Tahan *Hy"d*, men whose deaths, as the saying goes, commanded us to live: **לָנוּ אֵת הַחַיִּים**.

"Rav Rimon's vision to help each widow according to their individual needs is an unmatched way of fulfilling the great *mitzvah* of caring for *almanot* and *yetomim*," said Rabbi Daniel Fridman of the Jewish Center of Teaneck, who spearheaded the Bergen County Kuma mission. "There can be no greater communal debt than that which we carry to these families." Volunteers across the county rose to support the widows as



Rabbi Daniel Fridman of the Jewish Center of Teaneck with widows Raz Tahan, Inbal Moyal, and Bergen County Shabbat Chayal volunteers



they shared their stories of heartbreak and resilience, helping a program that already supports over 250 widows and is growing to meet the needs of all 370. The volunteers were so moved that they built a Kuma mission toolkit: a way for any community, anywhere, to open its homes and hearts to Kuma's widows too.

One who answered that call was Dov Sebrow. Moved by hearing Raz Tahan speak in Bergen County, he self-funded his entry and gear so every dollar would reach the widows, then ran 94 miles of the Sedona Canyons race in Arizona, and has already signed up to return next year and continue to raise awareness and funds for Kuma.

The local Frisch Parents Association mobilized for Kuma as well. More than 100 women came out for Inbal, Raz and their fellow sisters in arms. They came to listen; they stayed to give, packing care packages for Kuma's families.

That spirit, women showing up for women, carried across the ocean too. In Jerusalem, the *Mahjong Mavens*, founded by a group of friends, turned their weekly game into "Mahjong & Merlot for Kuma," an evening at the Jerusalem Winery beside the historic Yemin Moshe Windmill. When talk turned to fund-raising, Kuma felt like the obvious answer. "Mahjong brings women together around the table, creating friendship, community, and belonging," Shira Grunstein says. "Partnering with Kuma is a natural extension of that spirit: women showing up for women who have sacrificed so much." She sees it as the start of something larger, an initiative inaugurated in Jerusalem but reaching mahjong circles across the globe, so

that everywhere Jewish women gather to play, they come to know exactly what Kuma is.

In Detroit, Shelley Littman has run a community swim-a-thon for years, and since October 7th for Israel: first for farmers, then for IDF soldiers, and this past March, as "Team Frum & Fit," for Kuma's widows. A community of women, Littman explained, swimming to support women who lost their husbands defending the homeland.

And they are far from alone. From Los Angeles to Chicago to New York, communities have helped to raise funds for Kuma.

Each found their own unique way to show up for Israel's heroines. That may be the truest answer to Tisha B'Av: not one grand gesture, but many small, stubborn refusals to let grief have the last word. *Am Yisrael* uniting, in the rhythms of everyday life, behind the extraordinary women who carry a responsibility that belongs to us all. **Heroes fell. Heroines rise.**



Am Yisrael needs you. Become a Kuma ambassador. Host an event. Run a race. Deal a hand of mahjong. Whatever you love, lend it to this cause: raise funds, spread the word, or simply donate. Email inbar@sulamot.org or visit kuma.sulamot.org/en/eng/ to find your way to rise with them.



The Happiest Day

Rabbanit Sally Mayer

What is the happiest day of the year?

The *Mishnah* in *Ta'anit* has the answer: Yom Kippur and Tu B'Av. The *Gemara* there (30b) explains why Yom Kippur earns this distinction – we achieve atonement and forgiveness for all our sins. But why is the fifteenth of Av a happy day? The *Gemara* offers six reasons, drawn from events that occurred on this date across history. Looking for their overarching theme helps us understand the nature of the day.

The first reason is that the Jewish people were permitted for the first time to marry across tribes, having been restricted since the desert years to marrying within their own tribes. The second is that the tribe of Binyamin was permitted to marry within the Jewish people once again, following the national tragedy of the concubine at Givah at the close of *Sefer Shoftim*, which had ended with an oath forbidding inter-marriage with Binyamin. Both events represent the reunification of the Jewish people after periods of strife, expressed through the cementing of bonds between tribes through marriage.

The third reason is that on this day, the Jews in the desert realized that the last of those condemned to die there had finally passed away. Each Tisha B'Av, Rashi tells us, they would dig graves and sleep in them. Those who woke in the morning knew they had been granted another year. In the fortieth year, everyone woke. Assuming they had simply miscalculated the date, they waited – and only when the full moon rose on the fifteenth of Av did they grasp the truth: the decree was over, and they would all live to enter the Promised Land.

The fourth reason is that King Hoshea ben Ela dismantled the military checkpoints

that Yarovam ben Nevat had set up over 200 years earlier to prevent Jews from making the pilgrimage to the *Beit HaMikdash* in Jerusalem. People could now choose for themselves between Jerusalem and the golden calves. Both of these reasons represent, at best, incomplete happiness. The end of dying in the desert closes a tragic chapter rather than opening a triumphant one, and the mere removal of a barrier to G-d's service is hardly cause for celebration in itself.

The fifth reason is that Tu B'Av was the day those killed in Beitar during the Bar Kochba rebellion were finally permitted burial, after the Romans had refused to allow this since the fall of Beitar on Tisha B'Av, until a new Emperor came into power (*Jerusalem Talmud, Ta'anit* 4:5). When the survivors found the bodies miraculously intact, the blessing of *hatov v'hameitiv* in *Birkat HaMazon* was instituted to express gratitude for this.

Burying the dead from a failed rebellion that cemented our lack of independence until the modern State of Israel seems, at first glance, a strange reason for the happiest day of the year. But our recent experience with the return of the hostages this past Sukkot can help us understand this unique kind of joy. We rejoiced especially at the return of the living; but we also gave deep thanks for the return of those who were murdered, allowing their families to bury them in *kever Yisrael*. Many of us said *Baruch hatov v'hameitiv* that day.

The final reason is that Tu B'Av was the last day wood donations were brought to the *Beit HaMikdash* for the fire on the *mizbei'ach*. The *mizbei'ach* was G-d's table; in its absence, our own table – where we welcome guests – serves as its counterpart in our homes.

What do these reasons share? They are not simply anniversaries of joyous occasions. They are small steps in longer processes, partial or full remedies for difficult realities, completions of painful chapters. They remind us that bittersweet victories are worth celebrating, and that hope itself deserves to be honored.

Tu B'Av carries a romantic quality through its connection to marriage in the first two reasons, but its deeper romance lies in something larger. Each of the *Gemara*'s reasons invites us to look honestly at difficulty and loss, and find within that very moment a reason to rejoice. Not because everything is resolved or the story has ended well, but because something real has shifted, something has opened. The capacity to celebrate the incomplete, to mark the partial victory, to look ahead with genuine optimism, may be the most distinctly Jewish form of joy there is. Tu B'Av does not erase the past. It simply insists on the future.



Rabbanit Sally Mayer
is Rosh Midrasha of Ohr Torah
Stone's Midreshet Lindenbaum.



A member of the Mizrahi Speakers Bureau
mizrahi.org/speakers

The Shagririm Revolution

Over the past five years, Shagririm Balev has helped more than 500 couples get married through an innovative matchmaking system. World Mizrachi is a global partner in bringing Shagririm to communities around the world. Rabbi Aron White spoke with Ayelet Glatt to find out more about the Shagririm revolution.

Tell us a little about how you became involved with Shagririm Balev.

My husband and I had just returned from *shlichut* in Cape Town, arriving back in Israel only a couple of weeks before October 7th. During maternity leave, while my husband was serving in Gaza, I found myself thinking about what my next form of *shlichut* would be. One of the things that stayed with me from our years in South Africa was how difficult dating can be in smaller Jewish communities, where opportunities are naturally limited and everyone tends to know the same people. I was also thinking about *olim* who come to Israel after making the life-changing decision to move here, only to discover that building a social network – and ultimately finding the right person – can be far more challenging than they expected.

When I discovered Shagririm Balev, it felt like a natural fit. It addressed something I cared deeply about: helping people build Jewish homes and strengthening connections across the Jewish world.

For readers unfamiliar with it, what exactly is Shagririm Balev?

The initiative began at Machon Lev, a religious college in Jerusalem, where a group of students recognized that while traditional matchmaking has its place, friends often know one another best. Their idea was simple: instead of waiting for someone else to solve the *shidduch* challenge, why not take responsibility for helping their own friends?

With the support of Machon Lev and later World Mizrachi, that idea developed into a platform where ambassadors – *shagririm* – represent people they know and care about. Rather than creating profiles for themselves, they create profiles for friends and family members, review potential matches generated by the system, and connect with other ambassadors to explore possibilities.

Most people in the Modern Orthodox community already meet through friends and family. Shagririm Balev has taken that natural process and scaled it dramatically. Instead of relying solely on the people within your immediate circle, you become



Head Ambassadors with Rav and Rabbanit Rimon

connected to thousands of ambassadors who are all looking for opportunities to help others. You know that conversation around the Shabbat table – “I know someone wonderful; does anyone have an idea?” Shagririm takes that conversation and makes it a global network.

The growth has been extraordinary. In the first year there were around fifty weddings; in the second, that number doubled to approximately one hundred. Today, as Shagririm Balev enters its sixth year, more than 550 couples have married through the platform – statistically, a new engagement takes place every two days.

What makes Shagririm different from other matchmaking initiatives?

Most initiatives focus almost exclusively on singles themselves – encouraging them to join another platform, attend another event, or sign up for another service. Shagririm Balev takes a fundamentally different approach by speaking to the entire community, giving friends and family a real opportunity to actively help. The message is simple: if you know singles and care about them, you can do something about it. Friends, siblings, neighbors, rabbis, teachers, and community members all have a role to play. We are encouraging people to take personal responsibility for matchmaking, rather than outsourcing it to someone else.

Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon is himself an active ambassador in the system. He helped facilitate a match between an *oleh* from New Jersey and an Ethiopian-Israeli woman from Rosh HaAyin. At first glance, it wasn't an obvious match, and he found himself wondering whether it would really work. Then he stopped and asked himself: “Why



Anglo Ambassadors event with Aleeza Ben Shalom

am I deciding for them?” He suggested the match, they met, and today they're married.

To me, that story captures the essence of Shagririm Balev. The role of an ambassador is not to decide who belongs together; it's to create opportunities that might otherwise never exist, drawing on the best of technology and a global network.

We see that principle in countless stories. Recently, a couple in their sixties became engaged through the platform. I've seen children sign up their parents because they wanted someone advocating for them. One of my favorites: an 89-year-old woman whose great-granddaughter added her to the system. It was a beautiful reminder that there is no age at which people stop hoping for companionship and connection.

What's also remarkable is the shift in how people think. Ambassadors start listening more carefully to their friends, paying attention to what they're looking for, and actively keeping an eye out for opportunities. Instead of saying, “I hope someone helps this person,” they start asking, “What can I do?”

How has the movement expanded beyond Israel?

After seeing the success of the Hebrew platform, World Mizrachi recognized that the same challenges existed throughout the Jewish world and invested in building an English-language version. Over the past two years, we've seen growing participation from communities in Australia, South Africa, England, and North America, with new ambassadors joining regularly from across the English-speaking

world. Already, a significant percentage of the couples who get engaged through Shagririm are English-speaking.

The next major stage is expansion across the United States, in partnership with the Orthodox Union and World Mizrahi. We already have American couples who have become engaged through Shagririm Balev, and we're increasingly hearing from communities abroad that are eager to bring the model to their own cities.

Looking ahead, what comes next?

As the network expands internationally, we want to ensure that ambassadors receive training and support so they can make thoughtful and meaningful suggestions. Research consistently shows that one of the biggest frustrations singles face is not receiving enough quality suggestions – and that is an area where communities can make an enormous difference.

Ultimately, the success of Shagririm Balev comes down to a simple idea: building Jewish homes is not someone else's responsibility. When ordinary people decide to care, listen, and take action on behalf of their friends, remarkable things happen. The hundreds of weddings we've already seen are proof that a community willing to take responsibility for one another can genuinely change lives. ■

But I Don't Know If I'm Good at Setting People Up?

Ayelet's Five Tips for Getting Started with Matchmaking

1. Just get started.

I used to think matchmaking wasn't my thing – but the truth is, I simply wasn't trying. Once I started actively thinking about people and looking for opportunities, I was able to help create meaningful connections, including a couple who eventually got married.

2. You don't have to do it alone.

One of the greatest strengths of Shagririm Balev is that it guides you through the process. You receive support, tools, training, and suggested matches. The system helps you build profiles and identify potential connections. You don't need to be an expert to get started.

3. We don't measure a mitzvah by how naturally it comes to us.

No one says, "Giving *tzedakah* is important, but I'm not really good at it," or "Visiting a mourner isn't my thing." If something matters, we do our best to contribute. Helping someone find a life partner is a tremendous *mitzvah*, regardless of whether it feels natural or easy.

4. Friends and family are still how most people meet.

Research consistently shows that many successful relationships begin through personal connections. Singles are often waiting for the people around them to think of someone, make an introduction, or open a door. If everyone assumes someone else will do it, many opportunities will be missed.

5. The most important matchmaking skill is listening.

Start by listening. Ask your friends what they're looking for, what matters to them, and what their experiences have been. When you genuinely know and understand people, you become far more likely to recognize a meaningful match when the opportunity arises.



SHAGRIRIM BALEV

Friends Setting Up Friends



Our Couples: Introducing Jordana and Yonah Woodrow!

Where was your first date?

Our first date was for coffee at Cafe Gan Sipur in Gan Sacher in Jerusalem. After getting there we realized we both don't even like coffee!

What did you learn from the dating process that you'd like to share?

The fear of dating is real and once you go out on that first date it becomes a lot easier. Still insanely nerve wracking every time, but it is always worth meeting in person before saying no.

Why is it worth joining the Shagririm Balev database?

It's worth it because you have someone to go through the profiles for you and choose what they feel is right for you, instead of you seeing everything which can be overwhelming.

A funny story from one of your dates:

We were about to go for dinner after a beach day and Yonah was delayed. Then he called me to tell me that he accidentally locked himself in the bathroom after his shower and had to climb out the little window. I still question the story and don't understand how he actually got out.

Tell us about the marriage proposal:

We went for a nice dinner and Yonah kept on telling me he was going to take me to a new "dessert place" he saw online. We started walking in the direction of Yemin Moshe (in Jerusalem) and I was almost positive there was no dessert place there. We walked up to an area that had flowers and pictures and he proposed. Turns out the dessert place was actually his uncle's house where both of our families were waiting. Now we still refer to his uncle's house as the dessert place!



550

total
engagements



802

candidates
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6082

ambassadors
(shagririm)



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Rebuilding the Jewish People:

From Mourning, to Comfort, to Connection

Aleeza Ben Shalom

Every year, as the Jewish calendar turns toward the summer's most emotionally charged stretch, we're asked to do something deeply human and deeply uncomfortable. We sit on the floor on Tisha B'Av, mourning destruction, loss, and the fractures between us. And then, almost immediately, we're asked to get up, dust ourselves off, and begin again – because just days later, we arrive at Tu B'Av, a day our Sages describe as one of the happiest on the Jewish calendar. A day of love. A day of connection. A day when matches were made.

If that feels like emotional whiplash, it's because it is. But it's also the point. Tisha B'Av isn't only about what was destroyed – it's about why it was destroyed. The *Gemara* teaches that the Second *Beit HaMikdash* fell because of *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred. Disconnection. Judgment. Distance between people. Tu B'Av represents the repair: choosing love where there was once separation, rebuilding not with stones, but with relationships. And

nowhere is that more real than in the world of dating and marriage. Everyone I work with is, in some way, navigating the space between those two days – the heartbreak of what didn't work, and the hope for what still could.

That's why the days between Tisha B'Av and Tu B'Av aren't just a transition – they're an opportunity. Within the Jewish Matchmaking Movement, we've begun to call this stretch Jewish Matchmaking Week. From the day after Tisha B'Av until Tu B'Av, communities around the world are encouraged to actively step into the role of connector, supporter, and builder. Because rebuilding the Jewish people doesn't only happen through institutions. It happens through introductions. Through noticing someone who's still single. Through making that call you've been meaning to make. Through setting up that match you weren't sure would work – but might. We don't sit back and wait for Tu B'Av to celebrate love. We build toward it.

And let's not forget *Shabbat Nachamu*, the Shabbat of comfort. After the depth of mourning, we're offered a collective exhale – a reminder that healing is not only possible, it's already beginning.

It's also one of the most powerful, and often overlooked, opportunities for connection. There's something uniquely grounding about Shabbat: no swiping, no distractions, just real conversations, shared meals, and the kind of presence that allows people to actually see each other. Hosting a *Shabbaton* on *Shabbat Nachamu* isn't just convenient timing – it's aligned with the emotional rhythm of the calendar. From comfort comes connection.

So what can you actually do during Jewish Matchmaking Week? Start simple. Host a Friday night dinner and invite a mix of singles – people who might not otherwise meet. Organize a community learning

night focused on relationships. Create a “matchmaking circle,” a small group of friends or community members who gather specifically to think of matches for one another. It takes the pressure off any one person and turns it into a shared mission. And perhaps most importantly, shift your mindset. Instead of thinking, “It's not my place,” start thinking, “Maybe it is.” Because it is. We are all, whether we realize it or not, part of the fabric that either separates or connects.

Tisha B'Av reminds us what happens when we let that fabric tear. Tu B'Av reminds us what's possible when we choose to mend it. So this year, don't just move from mourning to joy – be part of the bridge between them. Be the reason someone meets. Be the reason someone tries again. Be the reason a story begins. As I always say: “Matches make families, families create communities, and communities change the world.” May you have the courage to see who's in front of you, the wisdom to know how to help, and the blessing to witness the connections you spark turn into something lasting, meaningful, and full of light.



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.

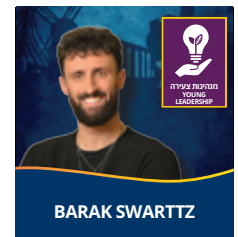
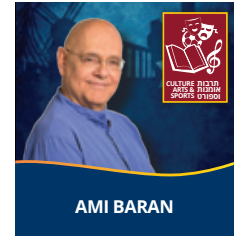
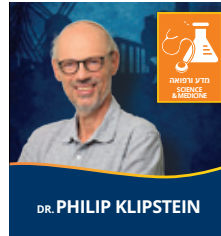


**Jewish
Matchmaking
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The Jewish Matchmaking Movement is an exciting global collaboration between World Mizrahi and Aleeza Ben Shalom to guarantee future Jewish generations.

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JEWS with VIEWS

We asked five
leading figures:
What is your
top piece of
dating advice?



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

First, believe in yourself. You are a good person, and with Hashem's help, there is a life partner waiting for you.

Second, invest effort. Do everything you can in this area – including seeking guidance from a professional. Even people who succeed in many areas of life often benefit from an outside perspective.

Patience matters more than people realize. A survey of thousands of happily married couples found that 46% believed, up until the fifth date, that the person they were dating was not right for them. Even when the chances seem small, keep going. Great things develop over time.

Ask yourself: what am I truly looking for? Write down everything you want in a spouse, then whittle the list down to ten items, then seven, then three or four. Those are the things that genuinely matter. This isn't about compromising – it's about becoming more precise. When you know what truly matters, you can more accurately recognize the right person when they appear.

One final point: in an age of abundance, people often have much in common with someone they're dating, yet don't continue – because they wonder if someone better is out there. Instead of asking "Is there someone better waiting for me?" ask: "Can I build a good home with this person? Can this person be a good parent to my children?" That is the right question.

With Hashem's help, may you merit finding a worthy match, someone of good character and reverence for G-d, very soon.

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon is the Nasi of World Mizrachi. He is the Founder and Chairman of Sulamot and La'Ofeq, and serves as the Chief Rabbi of Gush Etzion, and Rosh Yeshivah of the Jerusalem College of Technology.



Aleeza Ben Shalom

People often think the most important thing in dating is chemistry. Or timing. Or finding "the one." But after years of matchmaking and coaching singles, I believe the most important thing is learning to ask the right questions – because the questions you ask shape the way you date, the way you think, and the way you connect.

I hear singles ask, "Does my soulmate even exist?" I understand the fear behind that question, but there's a more useful one: "Where might I find them?" Your soulmate exists. The goal isn't to prove it – it's to put yourself in places where connection can happen.

After a first date, people often ask me, "Is this person my soulmate?" That's too much pressure for one coffee. Ask yourself instead: "Am I curious to learn more?" If the answer is yes, that's reason enough for a second date.

Even small shifts in the questions you ask on a date can change everything. Instead of "What do you do?" try "What do you love about your work?" One gives you information. The other gives you a window into someone's heart.

Dating isn't about finding perfect answers. It's about learning to ask better questions – and better questions lead to clarity, and to finding the one.

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.



Jamie Geller

Dating can make you a little crazy. So pick one sane person to keep you grounded.

Not a committee. One. A paid professional or a trusted volunteer like your mom. The one human you can be totally honest and completely vulnerable with, the one you call at 2am to replay the whole date, down to what he ordered and what it meant. Just like we don't have a different rabbi for every question, but one trusted rabbi who walks us through life, you need one trusted voice here too. Because who you marry is the biggest decision you will ever make, and if you put it to a vote you will drown in everyone's opinion but your own, unable to tell a red flag from a green flag from the flag you sewed yourself out of pure panic.

Mine was my Rebbetzin Judy Young *a"h*. I did not just tell her about the man I was dating. I brought him to meet her. By the end of the night, we were engaged.

She cut through my noise with crystal clarity. She helped me breathe again. And when I walked to my *chuppah* it was with absolute *menuchah* *hanefesh*, the biggest smile and the bounciest step of any *kallah* you ever saw.

Everyone needs a Judy. Go find yours.

Jamie Geller serves as the Chief Communications Officer and Global Spokesperson for Aish, leading the organization's media strategy and public relations. Widely known as a best-selling author and media entrepreneur, she leverages her communication expertise to expand Aish's global impact and digital reach. (Headshot: Yehuda Levi)



Ayelet Glatt

Being part of a community of more than 5,500 people actively trying to set up their friends exposes me to remarkable dating advice – from sharing the real reason behind a rejection with the people setting you up, to trying a fourth date in an escape room, to building a full and meaningful life while you're still single.

But when I thought about the best dating tip I could share, I realized it wasn't any of those.

What inspires me most is seeing thousands of singles who, despite wanting to build their own homes, spend time and energy helping others build theirs. They search profiles, make suggestions, and genuinely cheer on friends they want to see succeed.

We have a beautiful concept in Judaism: "*Kol hamitpalel al chaveiro na'aneh techilah*" – one who prays for another is answered first. It's not a guarantee; it's a mindset. When you're longing for something in your own life, you can turn that longing outward and use it to help someone walking the same path.

Whether you're single or married, ask yourself: who did I help this week? Is there someone I can introduce, encourage, or reach out to? *Shidduchim* were never meant to be a solo journey. They're a community effort, and every one of us has a role to play.

Ayelet Glatt is the international coordinator for Shagririm Balev. She holds a degree in Tanach and Special Education from Herzog College, and served as a World Bnei Akiva shlichah in Cape Town, South Africa.



Lori Palatnik

Do. Your Homework: Know not just what you want, but what you *need*.

A lot of people "fall in love," but what they are really falling in is infatuation, which is counterfeit love. It looks like love, feels like love, but it's fake. And in the world of dating, it could be fatal.

Do some work *before* you go on the first date.

What are your meaningful life goals and values? The person you marry should share those. If you don't know them, don't date. You risk either morphing into theirs, which could lead to a relationship crash down the road ("Who am I?") or dating endlessly with no clarity. Until you know who you are and where you are going, you don't know who to go with.

Yes, you will share similar meaningful life goals and values, but some things will be complementary. Personality opposites tend to attract – because you are half a soul yearning for completion. If you are in touch with your challenging qualities of sometimes being impulsive or anxious, the last thing you need is someone like that. You need someone steady and easy-going. Get it?

Take a breath. Think. Do your homework. Then date.

Lori Palatnik is the founding director of Momentum, international speaker, and the author of several books including, "Turn Your Husband Into Your Soul Mate". (Headshot: Belen Fleming/Beu Photography)

Tu B'Av: From Division and Destruction to Unity and Rebuilding

Michal Horowitz

Among the many dates on the Jewish calendar, Tu B'Av stands out as something of a mystery. Unlike the *yamim tovim*, it is not associated with a specific *mitzvah*, nor is it rooted in a single defining historical event.

And yet, *Chazal* describe it in striking terms: “There were no greater festivals for Israel than the fifteenth of Av and Yom Kippur” (*Ta'anit* 26b). This statement is both startling and profound. What is the nature of Tu B'Av that places it alongside Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year?

The *Gemara* (*Ta'anit* 30b) lists several significant events that occurred on this day: the cessation of the deaths of generation of the wilderness, the lifting of restrictions on inter-tribal marriage, the reinstatement of access to Yerushalayim, and more. Each of these moments represents a form of restoration – a healing of division, a return to unity, a removal of barriers within *Klal Yisrael*. Tu B'Av is not defined by a single miracle, but by a recurring theme: the rebuilding of connection within *Am Yisrael*.

This idea is expressed most beautifully in the well-known practice described by *Chazal*. On Tu B'Av, the daughters of Yerushalayim would go out dressed in borrowed white garments and dance in the vineyards, calling out: “Young man, lift your eyes and see what you choose for yourself” (*Ta'anit* 26b).

At first glance, the scene is surprising. But beneath it lies a powerful message. The garments were borrowed so that all the maidens would feel equal, with none ashamed of wearing something less fine

than her neighbor. The setting was shared, open, and the same for all. The focus was not on external distinctions, but on inner qualities, character, and values. Tu B'Av becomes a day that celebrates not only unity, but the creation of new bonds – the building of homes, the forging of relationships, and the strengthening of *Klal Yisrael* through connection.

Tu B'Av emerges precisely from the period that immediately precedes it. We move from the Three Weeks, culminating in Tisha B'Av – a day marked by destruction, division, and *sinat chinam* – to Tu B'Av, a day characterized by rebuilding, closeness, and *ahavat Yisrael*. Where Tisha B'Av represents the consequences of broken relationships, Tu B'Av represents the possibility of repair. Where Tisha B'Av reflects distance – between man and his fellow, and between the nation and G-d – Tu B'Av reflects renewed connection. This is a deliberate progression built into the calendar itself. The same nation that experienced destruction is given the capacity for rebuilding. The same people who sowed division can choose unity.

Perhaps this is why Tu B'Av is compared to Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur, we stand before Hashem seeking forgiveness and closeness – a day of purification and restored relationship between man and G-d. On Tu B'Av, we are called upon to restore and strengthen our relationships with one another.

The message of Tu B'Av is deeply relevant to our own lives. We often think of growth in terms of personal achievement – in

Torah, in *mitzvot*, in individual development. While these are certainly essential, Tu B'Av reminds us that the way we relate to others is just as important. As *ovdei Hashem*, we must seek every day to build connections. Like the daughters of Yerushalayim in their borrowed garments, we must act with sensitivity and compassion toward one another.

Tu B'Av calls upon us to be builders – of relationships, of unity, and of a stronger *Klal Yisrael*. It reminds us that even after periods of loss or distance, whether between man and G-d or man and his fellow, rebuilding is always possible. Perhaps this is the quiet power of this day. It does not command with dramatic rituals or obligations. Instead, it offers an invitation: to reconnect, restore, and rebuild.

May we merit to internalize this message – to seek connection, repair division, cultivate unity, and build relationships grounded in respect, sensitivity, and love for one another.



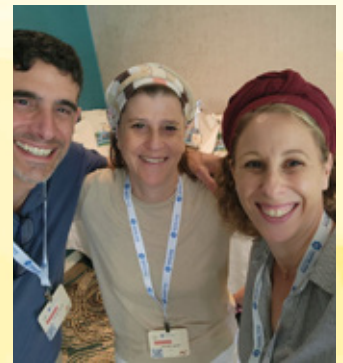
Michal Horowitz

teaches regularly scheduled classes, as well as presents guest lectures, on various topics related to Torah, Judaism, Jewish thought, and inspiration. She is the author of *Abled: Living With A Disability, A Torah View*.

Morim Shlichim

Morim Shlichim is a program of the World Zionist Organization – led by Gael Grunewald, head of the Education Department of the WZO and Mizrahi representative in the National Institutions – bringing over 250 Israeli teachers to teach in schools across the USA, Latin America and Europe. Over the past few months, *shlichim* gathered for training in Chicago and Panama. “This *shlichut* program has a tremendous impact across Jewish communities in the Diaspora,” Gael said. “As one school principal in the US told me, there is no substitute for the Israeli spirit that they bring, that impacts students, parents and other teachers.”

If you are interested in bringing shlichim to your school, visit shlichut.org.il/contact



הַמִּזְרָחִי HAMIZRACHI

COMPILED BY: JACQUI AUSTEN
DESIGNED BY: LEAH RUBIN

KIDS CORNER

WORD ZIGZAG

Find all of the words in the puzzle. All the letters must be connected by tiles on top, below, left or right from it, but not diagonally.

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

Unity
Fasting
Beit HaMikdash

Tisha B'Av
Tammuz
Kinnot

Jerusalem
Eating
Drinking

Torah
Eicha
Nachamu



MEET ZIVIA LUBETKIN



November 9, 1914–July 11, 1978 (12 Cheshvan 5674–6 Tammuz 5738)

Resistance Fighter in the Warsaw Ghetto

Zivia Lubetkin was one of the most remarkable Jewish resistance leaders of the Holocaust. Born in Beten, she grew up in a strong Jewish community and became active in Zionist youth movements. In 1939, while attending the Zionist Congress in Switzerland, she had the chance to remain safely outside Poland, but chose to return to Warsaw to stand with her people. Inside the Warsaw Ghetto, where hundreds of thousands suffered from hunger, disease, and brutality, Zivia helped organize secret schools, newspapers, and cultural programs to preserve hope and dignity. When news spread of deportations to concentration camps, she joined others in preparing armed resistance. Though they had almost no weapons, the fighters united. Zivia helped gather money, purchase arms, and recruit supporters. During the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943, the resistance shocked the Germans with fierce courage. When the ghetto was destroyed, Zivia escaped and later led survivors to safety. After the war, she came to Israel. Her legacy of bravery continued through future generations, including her granddaughter, one of the first female combat pilots in the IDF.



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



DID YOU KNOW?

- *Shlomo HaMelech* built the First *Beit HaMikdash*.
- *Tzidkiyahu HaMelech* was the king during the time of the destruction of the First *Beit HaMikdash*.
- *Sefer Melachim* is the *sefer* which records the destruction of the First *Beit HaMikdash*.

Test Your Knowledge



What city do we mourn for on
Tisha B'Av?

What material shoes do we avoid
wearing on Tisha B'Av?

Which empire destroyed the
Second *Beit HaMikdash*?

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

WEEKLY PARSHA FOR YOUTH!

HaMizrachi Weekly Youth Edition & Chavruta

Featuring Thought-Provoking
Questions, Fun Activities, and
Fascinating Insights!



Scan the QR code or visit
mizrachi.org/youth to learn more.



DECODE THE QUOTE

Decode the secret Hebrew message by using the symbols to uncover each hidden letter and phrase!

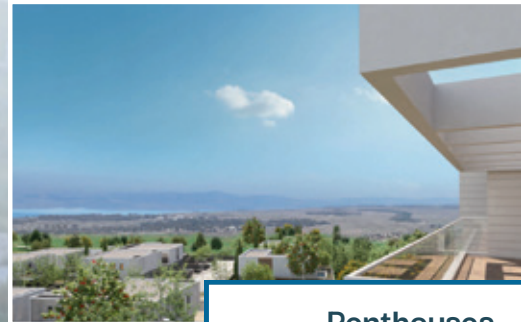
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YOUR ANGLO COMMUNITY IN THE GOLAN

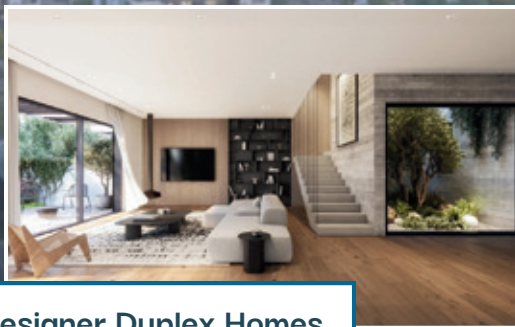
Your new home. In nature. In Katzrin



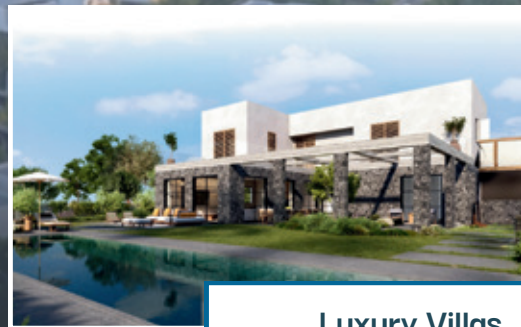
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from 1.78m NIS



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For more information, to book a Zoom appointment or one on one consultation in Ra'anana, Modi'in, Beit Shemesh, Jerusalem, Efrat or Katzrin contact Daniel Cohen:

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