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

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FROM THE

Editor

Israel Will Overcome. America? I'm Not so Sure

“It is not the gun that does battle, nor the army that truly fights. The true war takes place far from the field of battle – deep in a man’s heart, in the hearts of the nations.” (Rabbi Moshe Zvi Neriah)

I recently met with a small group of American Christians in their 50s and 60s who came to Israel to express their love of Israel during this painful time. They called it “the ministry of presence”; sometimes, simply showing up and being present makes all the difference. Still, I couldn’t help but notice that the vast majority of Christians who support Israel are older. I asked the group’s pastor about the younger generation of American Christians. “Will they also support Israel?” With a pained expression, he said, “We’re not confident that America will make it, that America will be there in the end. We’re a country that no longer loves the Bible and G-d’s word. There are no guarantees.”

The pastor has good reason to worry. By all accounts, young Americans are turning away from religion in droves. According to the Pew Research Center, people who say they do not have a religious identity are projected to rise from about 30% today to over 50% in the coming decades. The main reason for this shift is “switching” – Christians deciding to no longer be Christian. In other words, America is suffering from a spiritual crisis of epic proportions, with the vast majority of the dropoff taking place among young Christians between the ages of 15 and 29. Millions of young Americans are turning away from G-d.

This is hardly an internal Christian problem. As G.K. Chesterton wrote, “When men choose not to believe in G-d, they do not thereafter believe in nothing, they then become capable of believing in anything.”

Young Americans who abandon their parents’ religious path are radicalizing in ways previously unimaginable. A new Harvard-Harris poll found that 51 percent of Americans between the ages of 18-24 believe that Hamas’ slaughter of Israeli civilians “can be justified.” Given the high number of antisemitic incidents at America’s top universities, it is reasonable to assume that radical anti-Israel beliefs are even more prevalent among the future leaders of the nation. “The road to hell,” Thomas Sowell prophetically said, “is paved with ivy league degrees.”

Without the moral grounding that religion provides, young people are struggling to distinguish between a genocidal terrorist group and the Jewish nation. Whether we realize it or not, we are fighting a war for the hearts and minds of America’s younger generation – and we are losing.

Still, the abandonment of G-d and the radicalization of American youth is not inevitable. The proof stands before our very eyes, here in Israel, where young people are on an entirely different trajectory from their American counterparts. Our young people are more religious than their parents’ generation. During our darkest hour, they have proven themselves to be Israel’s “greatest generation,” selflessly fighting to protect our people and avenge the atrocities of October 7. Filled with Jewish pride and love for one another, they are not only heroes, but also role models for young people across the world. I have no doubt that this incredible generation of Jewish heroes, driven forward by their faith in G-d, will lead us to victory over our enemies.

The religious revival of our youth is no accident, but rather a sign of the “great awakening” of our people foretold by our prophets about the end of days. “Days are coming, says Hashem, and I will send famine into the land, not a famine for bread nor a thirst for water, but to hear

the word of Hashem” (Amos 8:11). Our soldiers are thirsty for G-d’s word, for Torah and *mitzvot*. “This tangible living thirst, which fills the practical lives [of the Jewish people] with its light... calls out to the nation to wake up, rise up and shake off the dust of humiliation” (Rav Kook, *Orot HaTechiyah* 1).

America’s impending spiritual decline is real, and it does not bode well for the future. But let us not forget that G-d has a plan for the world, a plan far deeper than our human understanding can grasp. It may be that the spiritual decay of the West is setting the stage for the day when all of the nations will turn to Israel for guidance. “And many peoples shall go, and they shall say, ‘Come, let us go up to Hashem’s mountain, to the house of the G-d of Jacob, and let Him teach us of His ways, and we will go in His paths,’ for out of Zion shall come forth Torah, and the word of the L-rd from Jerusalem” (Yishayahu 2:3).

Perhaps that day is coming sooner than we think.

Elie Mischel



Rabbi Elie Mischel
is the Editor of HaMizrachi magazine.

Grit and Guts

Rising Up from Falling and Failing

Rabbi Doron Perez

One of the most remarkable qualities of the human spirit in general and the Jewish people in particular is grit. Grit is the inner strength to face hardship and adversity with unyielding courage and tenacity. The resilience to confront challenges and failures may be the most important quality needed to succeed in life.

Leadership thinker John C. Maxwell highlights this powerful and salient point when he says that “the difference between average people and achieving people is their perception of and response to failure” (*Failing Forward*, 2007).

Indeed, an indispensable part of life is dealing with mistakes and failures. No human being has ever avoided failure and sin. In the words of *Shlomo HaMelech*, the wisest of all men: “There is no righteous person on earth who does only good and never sins” (Kohelet 7:20). Whether we will fail is not a question of ‘if’ but rather of ‘when’ – it is inevitable and built into the human condition.

When we do indeed stumble, the critical question we must face is – how will we respond? Will we remain down and stumble further or will we pick ourselves up? Once again, the wisest of all men highlights how we ought to respond in another of his books of wisdom: “Seven times a righteous person will fall and rise, but wicked people will stumble in wickedness” (Mishlei 24:16). Righteousness is not about never erring but rather about picking ourselves up when we do, dusting ourselves off and continuing nonetheless.

Gersonides points out that the above verse implies that righteous people stumble many times and pick themselves up each

time, whereas a wicked person falls only once and cannot overcome. The ability to bounce back is a defining quality of successful spiritual living.

If this is true for our individual struggles it is most certainly equally true for our collective challenges as a people. This sentiment is clearly expressed by King David where he juxtaposes a Jewish army to that of their enemies in battle: “They will stumble and fall but we will rise with vigor. Hashem will provide salvation, the King will answer us when we call on Him” (Tehillim 20:8–9). Rabbi David Kimche points out that the verse implies that both Israel’s enemies and Israel stumble in battle. The difference is that the enemy falls and crashes whereas Israel is able to rise up from the fall with grit and determination, ultimately prevailing.

The greatest failure

The events of October 7, 2023, Simchat Torah 5784, is the greatest failure in Israel’s history. 1,200 civilians and soldiers alike were butchered, murdered, burnt, raped and tortured in a way reminiscent of the worst of the Crusades, Chmielnicki massacres, pogroms, and horrors of the Holocaust. Hundreds of hostages were taken of all ages and backgrounds – from the then 9-month-old Kfir Bibas to ailing and elderly octogenarians. All of this in one day.

Indeed, for a period of 6–8 hours on that day, the Gaza Envelope was the most dangerous place for Jews anywhere in the world since the Holocaust. It is hard to comprehend that a devastating attack like this could take place in an independent Jewish state with the strongest army and

the most advanced, technologically-driven military intelligence in the region. It was a horrific failure of epic proportions.

How will we react, as individuals and as a people? Will we be able to rise up from this failure with grit and courage and transform this dark time to one of light? Will we overcome great challenges and change this narrative of destruction into a story of hope and building a better future?

Israel and the Jewish people’s response thus far has been mind-boggling and deeply inspiring.

From the moment the surprise attack began, civilians and soldiers alike sprang into action. Heroism emerged everywhere. Civilians saved people they didn’t know at enormous personal risk and soldiers arrived from all around the country on that day, putting their lives on the line and blocking Hamas’ terror with their very bodies.

The weeks that followed have continued this remarkable self-sacrifice and tenacity. Israel has seen the largest turnout of reserve soldiers in her history. Three hundred thousand Israelis returned home to fight in the war – an incredible population growth of 3% – instead of fleeing the war zone. Thousands of global Jewish leaders from across the spectrum and hundreds of solidarity missions continue to flow to Israel from around the world.

Along with this remarkable courage and selflessness has come a rare spirit of unity – a deep sense of ‘all for one and one for all.’ There is a collective commitment to bring every hostage home and to destroy Hamas’ terror infrastructure, ensuring that no such threat exists going forward.

The Region of Revival

The nation's resolve to rebuild the destroyed Gaza Envelope communities is another extraordinary example of grit and guts, symbolized by the name chosen for the initiative to rebuild these destroyed communities. The Gaza Envelope region will now be called **חֶבְל הַתְּקוּמָה**, the Region of Revival.

Until now, this region of the western Negev has been defined by its proximity to Gaza – the Gaza Envelope. From now on, it will have its own independent name expressing neither geography nor the devastation of October 7, but rather the grit and tenacity of rebuilding and resurrection.

The root of the name **תְּקוּמָה** is **קָם**, meaning “to rise up.” It refers not only to getting up from a seated position but also and especially to rising up after having fallen. On October 7, we fell and failed badly as a country and a people. But on that very same day, we began to rise remarkably from the blood, lead and ashes.

A Jewish response

It will take years, but I have no doubt that, with Hashem's blessing, the Region of Revival will not only be rebuilt, but it will also become one of the most thriving areas in Israel. Both the population and size of the communities will grow to many times their original size. It is a priority for both the State of Israel and Jews all around the world to ensure that this region of the western Negev teems with life and luster like never before.

This is the Jewish response – to rebuild amidst the very destruction itself. We see a clear indication of such a response in the beginning of the book of Shemot. The new Pharaoh turns on the Jewish people, forgetting what Joseph had done for Egypt in her time of need. Pharaoh decrees cruel and debilitating slavery and harsh physical labor for all the Israelites, aiming to destroy the Jewish spirit. Astonishingly, exactly the opposite occurs: “And to the extent that [the Egyptians] persecuted them, the more they grew and expanded in number” (Shemot 1:12). The more they were afflicted, the more the population grew. The more Pharaoh sought to destroy, the more he unintentionally built us up.

A powerful example of the refusal to remain down and the indomitable Jewish spirit can be seen in our daily prayers.

Three times daily we recite Tehillim 145, known as *Ashrei*. Although the first letter of every line follows an alphabetical order, the only letter left out is the letter *nun*. The Talmud explains that this letter is left out because it is the first letter of the word **נָפַל**, which means “to fall” (*Berachot* 4b). Since there is a verse in the prophets suggesting, Heaven Forbid, an eternal falling, this letter was left out. “Fallen, not rising again, O Maiden Israel; Abandoned on her soil with none to lift her up” (Amos 5:2).

Judaism does not accept that the people of Israel will fall forever. There is always a way back. Even a hint in a verse of falling without recovery is against the spirit of Judaism. Indeed, the Talmud continues, the Sages of *Eretz Yisrael* interpreted this verse differently. “You will not continually fall, Rise O maiden of Israel!” Israel will surely rise again from destruction.

The Land of Israel and the Jewish state are themselves, as a whole, a remarkable “Region of Revival,” creating an economic marvel and agricultural oasis in what was until recently one of the most barren places on earth. Just as we returned impossibly from a 1,900 year exile, we will, *b'ezrat Hashem*, bounce back with grit and determination after the painful fall of October 7. The region that suffered the greatest destruction and death in Israel's history will become a miracle of reconstruction, revival and the celebration of life.

It is the Jewish way. Together we will prevail.



Rabbi Doron Perez
is the Executive Chairman
of World Mizrahi.

Kibbutz Nirim, 2 km from the Gaza border.
(PHOTO: MICHAEL CASHER)



ANAVA

VINEYARDS

Anava – A New Zionist Dream

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Anava Vineyards is a unique project that enables wine lovers and Zionists to invest in the Land of Israel, to own a vineyard and grow their own wine, fulfilling the words of the prophet Amos: *“The mountains shall drip with wine and all the hills will flow with it... they shall plant vineyards and drink their wines.”* Anava Vineyards is helping to make this prophecy come true. However, the project is so much more than planting vines, caring for vineyards and producing wine. Anava has education as its core value. Nadav Jesselson, owner and founder, is at heart an educator. For him, the most important thing is to share the feeling of involvement through the seasons of the year. Each year is different, with its own challenges and benefits. Each year is a world of its own, but the pattern is the same, year after year.

On Tu BiShvat, we talk about renewal. The annual life cycle is starting again. Soon the vineyards will be alive, budding with spring growth. It is appropriate to celebrate the Festival of Trees in a special way – especially this year. We have lived through a year of war and mourning unlike anything the State of Israel has never known. We have lost many friends and many heroes. We will never forget them. But despite everything, the seasons go on and nature continues reminding us to choose life. Life is stronger than death and despite the grief encompassing the land, life goes on. This project, in memory of the fallen, now carries even greater significance. It is imperative to continue working the land. Agriculture is the purest activity in modern day Israel. The vine is a symbol of life and renewal. The grape is one of the Seven Species and wine is “the fruit of the vine.”

For the wine lover, the connection could not be clearer. Wine is a combination of a person and a place. The person is, all at once, the vineyard owner, grower and winemaker. The place is our own special corner in the Judea wine region, which connects Biblical Israel with the start-up Israel of today through the mediums of the vine and wine.



As for the Zionist, there is no activity more fundamental than agriculture. Working the land, getting in touch with nature, respecting the environment and renewing the traditions of old.

Our team reflects our commitment. Nadav’s vision, drive and personality leads the way, but this is not just the dream of an idealist. He has gathered around him Israel’s finest experts, including agronomist and viticulturist Avinoam Inbar, winemaker Eyal Drory, and wine expert, Adam Montefiore. The stage is set for those who want to invest, share or assist in this endeavor by volunteering. The land benefits from those that invest and work on it, and they in return receive an educational experience that can’t be gained through books.

As Montefiore confirms: *“The wine region of Judea, on the foothills that rise to Jerusalem, is Biblical Israel coming to life. At Anava Vineyards, this is literally true. Next to the vineyards is a 2,000 year old wine press, and ancient terraces where our forefathers grew vines. Just being there and seeing this, adjacent to a modern-day vineyard, gives me the chills.”*

Anava Vineyards provides a unique opportunity to all who love the Land of Israel. Contribute to the land, give of yourself, and you will be paid back fivefold.

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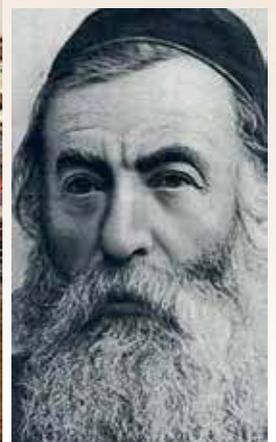
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Janusz Korczak, Oscar Schindler, Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever, the Vilna Gaon, Abba Kovner, the Rema and Reb Elimelech are some of the personalities we'll meet along the way.

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From the front lines of the IDF to projects around Israel, World Mizrachi has been playing its part in the war effort in Israel.



Gael Grunewald
Deputy Chairman, WZO



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1,000,000+

views on digital content and inspiration connected with the war

88 million

NIS raised

benefiting 50 yeshivot and seminaries and 3,000 gap year students from the US through Masa funding and annual Mizrachi Causematch campaigns since the last World Zionist Organization election

60+

Mizrachi missions to Israel from 14 countries around the world



4,000

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40,000

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600

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3300+

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2 million

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The Region of Revival

An Introduction by Rabbi Aron White

When the Talmud was written about 1,500 years ago, Jews lived in Babylonian communities both geographically and intellectually distant from a sovereign Jewish state. Despite this, a passage in Eruvin provides a strikingly relevant strategic assessment that shines a light on the events of the last two decades in Israel.

“If non-Jewish nations are threatening Jewish cities – if they are seeking money, one cannot violate the Shabbat (to push them back), but if they are threatening lives, one can break the Shabbat... However, **if they are threatening the towns on the border, even only to take wheat and chaff, one can violate Shabbat to push them back**” (Eruvin 45a).

The commentators explain that border towns are treated with greater sensitivity, as they are the most threatened. If they fall, they become a base for the gradual encroachment of the enemy. And so border communities must be defended with greater intensity, even if it is necessary to violate Shabbat to push them back, and even if our enemies are only threatening crops!

Jews have lived in and around Gaza for centuries, but since the foundation of the State of Israel, the Gaza area has become a threatened border region of our homeland. From Egypt in the War of Independence to the Fedayeen attacks in the 1950s, and continuing through the first and second intifadas, the Gaza border towns became *ayarot sfar*, “towns on the border,” that require extra protection. In 2003, the government of Israel officially designated this area as “*Otef Aza*,” the “Gaza Envelope,” which would be provided with additional benefits and support in light of the threat they faced.

But in the ensuing 20 years, rather than ensuring these towns were more protected as the Gemara advises, they were, tragically, less protected than other areas in Israel. These communities have borne the brunt of tens of thousands of rocket attacks, but by and large, the majority of the country accepted the situation as a liveable reality. Local residents often complained that 50 rockets on Sderot would gain barely a passing mention in the news, whereas one rocket fired at Tel Aviv would be a headline story. The start-up nation of the 21st century is exceptionally

focused on Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and the Central Region, so despite being a mere 40 miles from Gaza, these border towns were often overlooked. On October 6th, how many of us had ever heard of *kibbutzim* called Be’eri or Nir Oz?

In the weeks after the October 7th massacre, Israel’s government officially renamed the region bordering Gaza as “*Chevel HaTekuma*, The Region of Revival.” No more can we allow this region to slip to the periphery of our consciousness. The wisdom of the Gemara in Eruvin is now obviously true to all of us. Border towns are vulnerable, and their strength is a sign of the strength of Israel as a whole.

Discussing the importance of the Gaza region, Ariel Sharon famously said: “*Din Netzarim keDin Tel Aviv*, the town of Netzarim is as important as Tel Aviv.” Today, we need a similar change of mindset – “*Din Re’im keDin Ra’anana*,” “*Din Be’eri keDin Beit Shemesh*,” “*Din Yachini keDin Yerushalayim*.” In this edition, by telling the stories of the Region of Revival, we hope to put this region back in the center of our consciousness.

This Tu BiShvat, may we see the reflowering of this beautiful area, where “There shall again be in this place that is waste without man or beast, and in all its cities a dwelling of shepherds resting [their] flocks... in the cities of the lowlands, and in the cities of the south” (Yirmiyahu 33:12-13).

Below: Chavat HaShikmim, 3 kilometers (about 2 miles) from Sderot, December 2023. (PHOTO: RABBI HILLEL VAN-LEEJWEN)



Rabbi Aron White
is the Managing Editor of HaMizrachi magazine.

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● Re'im

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Jabalia

Deir al-Balah

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Rafah

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★ See page 22 to read about Atufim's campaign to help these highlighted communities, for which World Mizrachi is the global partner.

EGYPT

Torah V'Avoda: The Religious Farmers of Sa'ad and Alumim



25% of Israel's grain and 30% of its vegetables are grown in the Region of Revival. Among the many agricultural kibbutzim and moshavim in the region are several religious kibbutzim. Rabbi Aron White spoke with Eddie Isaacson from Kibbutz Alumim and Rabbi Eliav Lazar of Kibbutz Sa'ad to learn more about these Religious Zionist communities.

When Eddie Isaacson made *Aliyah* from Manchester in 1972, Kibbutz Alumim was only a few years old. “We had grown up on the Bnei Akiva ethos of *Torah v'Avoda*, and a *garin* of us organized to move to Alumim to work on the new religious *kibbutz*. Alumim was founded by Bnei Akiva in Israel, and groups of young people from Bnei Akiva in England and South America made *Aliyah* to settle it and to work the land growing crops and vegetables, to cultivate milk and more.” Despite being less than four kilometers from the Gaza Strip, the security situation was different than it is now. “Back in the '70s, it was quite common for people from Alumim to go to the beach in Gaza. The main reminders of war were when we worked the fields and would find unexploded bombs from the Six Day War, and sometimes even from World War II!”

Kibbutz Sa'ad is a religious *kibbutz* that was founded decades earlier, before the

founding of the State of Israel. “In 1948, Sa'ad faced relentless attacks from the Egyptians, who destroyed most of the *kibbutz*, so in 1950 Sa'ad was re-established in its current location,” explains Rav Eliav, a rabbi and farmer from Sa'ad. “There is one building still standing from the original *kibbutz*, which has been turned into a museum that tells the story of the religious *kibbutzim* in the War of Independence. Today, you can see on that building both the bullet marks from the War of Independence in 1948, as well the bullet holes from the fighting on Simchat Torah.”

The agricultural processes of a religious *kibbutz* are tied to numerous *halachic* questions. “Already when Rav Kook was Chief Rabbi, before the establishment of the State, there were numerous agricultural questions presented to him. For example, is there a way to milk cows on Shabbat?” says Eddie. “When I worked the machinery that would harvest the grains, we would



Rav Eliav in the fields of Kibbutz Sa'ad.

make sure to clean it very carefully when changing from the barley to the wheat, to ensure there wouldn't be problems with *kilayim* (forbidden mixtures). And I have been here long enough to have seen seven *shemita* years, and the different *halachic* approaches that have been employed each time. There have been many changes, many of them with new technology, such as Tzomet equipment that can be pre-programmed and which uses the *halachic* principle of *grama*. Other changes are more political. There is also something indescribable about one's connection to the Land in an agricultural community. Before Shavuot, the children in the kindergarten go out to the fields to bring in sheaves of wheat to decorate the *shul* – it's very special."

For Rav Eliav, the religious nature of *kibbutz* life is deeply spiritual too. "As a farmer, there are things you see in the Torah that you just wouldn't see otherwise. Take *Sefer Bereishit* – when I look at the stories of Yosef and his brothers, I see a story of tension between the brothers, who are shepherds, and Yosef, who is dreaming about wheat, namely being a farmer. This continues when Yosef takes control of the agriculture in Egypt, and then when the brothers move to Goshen so they can continue being shepherds. When I do *shemira* in a dark field by myself, I understand why Ya'akov was so scared when he was fleeing from Eisav. We are also literally continuing on the path of Nechemya, who describes how the farmers would hold their tools with one hand and their weapons with the other. For me, *Torah v'Avoda* doesn't mean someone who keeps the Torah and who also works. The Torah infuses our *Avoda*, but in fact when you work the Land of Israel, your *Avoda* also infuses your Torah!"

Alumim and Sa'ad are part of the first line of *kibbutzim* across from the Gaza border, situated between Be'eri and Kfar Aza, two of the communities most devastated on October 7. "In Alumim, there were dozens of terrorists who broke into the *kibbutz*, into the area where the foreign workers from Nepal and Thailand were living. They murdered 23 of the workers, and kidnapped another 8. Our *kitat konenut* (security team), together with 3 off-duty soldiers, fought with them for hours, and three defenders were killed at the gates – the Slotki brothers* who drove from Be'er Sheva to join the defense, and a member of the elite Yahalom engineering unit. The 13 people on the security team saved the lives of hundreds of members of the *kibbutz*."

Kibbutz Sa'ad was miraculously almost entirely saved. "People have tried to give all sorts of explanations, but we really don't have a logical explanation for why

dozens of terrorists caused such destruction in Kfar Aza up the road, but didn't come in to Sa'ad." However, in November, Rose Lubin, an *olah* from Atlanta who had been adopted by a family in Sa'ad, was killed in Yerushalayim while on duty as a policewoman. She was 20 years old.

Together with some 250,000 Israelis, the residents of Sa'ad and Alumim had to leave their homes a few days after the war began. "When we left our homes on October 8th, I literally had two squads of soldiers protecting me, as we were still scared of Hamas terrorists being in the area."

Today, the residents of Kibbutz Sa'ad are living in a hotel near the Dead Sea, and the residents of Alumim are in two hotels in Netanya. "In a funny way, the *kibbutz* is being pushed back to the '60s, into a real collective of everyone eating together and living together," says Eliav. There are also animated discussions relating to returning back home. It is unclear when the residents will be able to return to their homes, and in the meantime, there are different opinions about whether to stay at the hotel or to move to a city, where it is harder to maintain the close-knit community.

Eliav is serving in the army, and stayed in Sa'ad for military service, where his home has been transformed into a de facto army base. "For a few weeks I was here on military duty when everyone had left, and I didn't see my wife and kids for a while. I am now also continuing to tend to the crops – I am tending to everything from wheat to potatoes to avocados. Each has its own season, and if we don't water them and keep up with the seasons, we will lose a whole season of produce."

Eddie points out that religious *kibbutzim* have borne the brunt of war before. "In the War of Independence, 8% of all the religious *kibbutz* members were killed defending our country." After the horrors of October 7th, we pray that Sa'ad and Alumim will flourish once again, continuing their vision of *Torah v'Avoda*, harvest by harvest. ■

*Watch Mizrahi's video telling the inspiring story of Yishai and Noam Slotki hy"d, the brothers who fought bravely before tragically falling in battle on October 7: youtu.be/6rTmPppLIhQ

Facing page: A tractor in the fields of Kibbutz Sa'ad.
Below: Flowers being grown in Kibbutz Sa'ad.



World Mizrachi Missions to Israel

World Mizrachi has continued to bring high-level missions to Israel over the past few months, now totaling over 60, with participants from 14 countries. Many more missions are being planned and organized for the coming months. If you wish to plan a mission, please email missions@mizrachi.org.



A mission from Mizrachi Canada at Ichilov Hospital visiting IDF soldiers who were wounded in Gaza.



Alumni of Midreshet Torah V'Avodah experienced a Mizrachi mission, pictured here visiting Sderot.



Students from Central, Yeshiva University High School for Girls, tying tzitzit to be distributed to IDF soldiers.



A group from Holland at Netiv HaAsara, during their joint Mizrachi-KKL mission. (PHOTO: BONNIE SCHEINMAN)



Mizrachi France in Tel Aviv on their uplifting mission with World Mizrachi.



The impressive Yavneh On Campus Student Solidarity Mission, led by Rabbi Jonathan Shulman and Jeremy Tibbetts. The group of 75 students from colleges all across North America had a very impactful and meaningful program.

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The Neglected Zionists

Dr. Avi Picard

Approximately half of the residents of the Region of Revival (formerly known as the Gaza Envelope) live in Sderot, with a population of some 35,000. Along with Ofakim, Netivot and Ashkelon, among others, these towns were founded in the 1950s to house the hundreds of thousands of Sephardic immigrants then coming to Israel. Typically, these cities, known as עִירוֹת פִּיתוּחַ (development towns), have been overlooked and considered the periphery of Israeli society. In a 2018 article, Dr. Avi Picard offered a fascinating new look at these towns and the critical role they have played in the Zionist story.

At the beginning of its journey, the Zionist movement had two main tasks: the immigration of Jews to Israel, and the settlement of the entire Land of Israel. In the first waves of *Aliyah*, when the immigrants were young people imbued with idealism, the connection between the two parts of the Zionist mission was obvious, with *olim* moving to new settlements all over the Land of Israel. But as the Jewish national home became more established and Israel became a place of refuge for Jews who were suffering and persecuted, the connection between these two ideals became less natural. The suffering and persecuted who arrived in Israel wanted peace and quiet, not additional tasks and challenges of settling new places. Indeed, many of the immigrants in the 1920s and 1930s – the fourth and fifth *Aliyot* – settled in the big cities, rather than in the periphery of the land.

In 1948, when the great immigration began from the displaced persons camps, Eastern Europe, Iraq and Yemen, they were also settled in *ma'abarot* and refugee camps close to the populated areas of the country. The peripheral areas of the Negev and

central Galilee remained largely empty of Jews.

The mass *Aliyah* from French North Africa, mainly from Morocco and Tunisia, began in 1954. At that time, a policy was adopted that created a more direct link between immigration and settlement – a “from the ship to the village” policy. This policy resulted in almost all immigrants from North Africa being sent to the periphery, to cities like Ashdod, Ashkelon, Sderot and many more. The 1961 census indicates that immigrants from Morocco and Tunisia, who were 13% of the population in Israel, made up 50% of the Negev’s Jewish population but only 3% of the population of Tel Aviv.

Life in the periphery, in the immigrant settlements and the development towns in the north and south, contained many challenges: employment difficulties, few opportunities for high-level education, and above all a negative image. Nevertheless, those who chose to stay in these towns did not feel that they were being punished.

Many Israelis who worked in absorption viewed these people as pioneers. Unwitting pioneers, perhaps, who did not choose this

mission, but pioneers fulfilling a national mission nonetheless. Yehuda Berginsky, one of the heads of the absorption department [of the Jewish Agency], said of the Jews of North Africa: “We placed a yoke of *mitzvot* on them... We told them to be pioneers.” On another occasion, he noted that North African Jews are an asset to Israeli society, due to their great contribution to the settlement of the country.

The story of the development towns has often been simplified, such as in a 2018 series *Sallah, This is Israel*, which paints their story more negatively. He portrays the development towns as a form of punishment imposed on the Jews of North Africa in order to keep them away from the veteran Ashkenazi immigrants, and tells the story as if everyone in Yerucham just wanted to escape it. A television series is very powerful in its ability to tell a story and create drama, but often does so at the cost of deviations from the truth. The director’s desire to create drama also led him to rarely mention the great love that the first generation of North African immigrants had for the Land, nor the great dedication of the absorption workers.



Lova Eliav, the head of the team that established *Chevel Lachish*, aggressively forced the new immigrants to get off the truck that was taking them to *Moshav Otzem* – but he also stayed with the immigrants that entire night. The immigrants talk about the difficulties, shock, and manipulations they were subjected to in order to convince them to travel to those distant places – but they also describe how their parents warned them not to speak badly about the Holy Land. Bina Katsover, who moved to Yerucham with her family, relates: “We drove and drove, and early in the morning they dropped us off. [All we saw was] sky and sand. I said to my father: ‘What is this? Is this the Jerusalem you wanted to bring us to?’ He responded: ‘You will not speak slander about the Land of Israel!’” The actress Ruby Porat-Shuval, who also grew up in Yerucham, quotes her mother who said: “This yellow will become gold.”

The development towns were not the penal colonies of Israeli society. They were part of a large state program to spread the Jewish population throughout the country. This plan, which due to its enormous dimensions could not rely solely on the inclination of the hearts of young idealists and the country’s veterans, forced those dependent on the state’s resources to respond to its demands. Indeed, over the years the development towns suffered from many problems. Many of the residents, whose dependence on state resources diminished over time, left the towns.

It is important to understand something else: any criticism of Israel’s policy to move North African immigrants to the periphery can only come from a Zionist point of view, from those who accept the thesis that the State of Israel is the state of the entire Jewish people and not a country of immigration like the USA or Australia.

In countries of immigration like the USA, an immigrant arrives at his own expense, and in the best case scenario, the receiving country gives him a work visa. He must find housing and a livelihood on his own. He must come with a certain amount of money in his pocket, or otherwise he will not be allowed to enter. No country of immigration brings in destitute people at its own expense, takes care of housing for them (which may be problematic, dilapidated, or temporary – but at least it takes care to do so!) and feels an obligation to take care of their livelihood. Only in this context – the fact that Israel is the home of the Jewish people and not a standard country of immigration – can the Zionist act be criticized. The first generation of immigrants understood this, and felt that they had arrived home.

Today, after more than sixty years, it is difficult to continue to look at the development towns as fate-stricken places that one should stay away from. [Former] Minister of the Interior Aryeh Deri argues that the presentation of the southern development towns in the *Sallah* series is a heinous injustice. He himself witnessed the enormous change in these towns. In the 1980s, when he was the director of the Ministry of the Interior, he met with the mayor of Dimona, who asked him to demolish buildings where most of the apartments were abandoned and used as drug dens. Today, Deri pointed out, not only are those apartments full, but in all the towns new agreements are being signed to build tens of thousands of new housing units.

Moroccan and Tunisian immigrants, pioneers that Israeli society should recognize and cherish, enabled the establishment of these towns during difficult and challenging years. Negev towns are much more attractive today. They are not filled with new immigrants who have no choice, but with people who choose to come there

of their own free will. Young people who grew up in these towns choose to return there to build their own homes, and many others are also choosing to relocate there.

The major correction that Israeli society must make is to properly acknowledge and respect the pioneering work of the residents of the development towns. The initiative to establish museums about the foundation of the development towns is an important corrective step. The pioneers who built the Land without fanfare deserve to be added as pearls in the crown of Israeli pioneering.

The poet Erez Biton beautifully captured the feelings of the first generation of immigrants, quoting his father:

“Better half a house in the Land of Israel
Than many good and beautiful houses in
the Diaspora...”

● Originally published in Hebrew in *Makor Rishon*, April 2018

Below: The city of Sderot (PHOTO: KRIFKIND PHOTOGRAPHY)



Dr. Avi Picard

is a lecturer in the Department of Land of Israel Studies at Bar-Ilan University and a resident of Yerucham.



Doing our Part

Jennifer Niman

On Shabbat October 7 – Shemini Atzeret in *chutz la'aretz* – my husband came home from *shul* and said he heard a war broke out in Israel. My neighbor heard something about Arab paragliders over the Gaza border. It all sounded like crazy science fiction until Sunday night, when *yom tov* ended and we saw the news. The real news. It was all true, and worse than anything we could have imagined. Newscasters on CNN, usually no friends of Israel, were openly crying during the broadcast. Horrifying images, stories of pogroms, hostages, rape, murders, beheadings... And yes, paragliders infiltrating over the border.

For days, we in *chutz la'aretz* walked around in a daze, trying to get accurate news. Nothing was good. So many killed, so many kidnapped. And in the pit of our stomachs, more than anything, we felt: what can I do to help?

Finally an email went out asking for volunteers at Israeli farms. I filled out the form right away and quietly was thankful they didn't ask for my age! I was told that I was accepted, to buy a ticket and let them know my arrival date.

It wasn't very organized; I didn't even know who I was corresponding with. Just show up? Really? OK!

So I did. I bought a ticket to arrive in Israel on November 29. I ordered gardening gloves, packed my baseball hat collection, a sweatshirt, two pairs of sneakers, and off I went.

Thank G-d I joined some Facebook and WhatsApp groups targeted towards other potential volunteers. This opened up so many options. I joined a WhatsApp group manned by a couple of *tzaddikim* in New Jersey and signed up to volunteer in Bnei Netzarim in the Gaza envelope to do whatever farm work they needed.

The *moshav* has a *midrasha* whose dorms were perfect for housing us volunteers. Nothing fancy, but it was clean with



Jennifer preparing sandwiches for soldiers.

decent bathrooms and beds, and the price was right (free!).

We arrived at the *moshav* on a Sunday morning. Our driver Daniel, a gentleman from South Carolina, generously rented a large van to drive us all down from Jerusalem. We were a motley crew – a couple of 60-something ladies from LA, two *olim* and two Jews from New York – all heading south for an adventure and to work the Land.

We spent five full days working. Upon arrival, we went straight to a tomato greenhouse field, where we were told to trim the leaves off the branches from the knees down. We started by bending over but after 15 minutes – oy, our backs hurt. We dropped to our knees. After 20 minutes our knees hurt! So we dropped onto our tushes, and scooted from one plant to the next. We were trimming and laughing all at once! We kept at it until sunset. After showering, we were hosted by a *moshav* family for a delicious 3-course salmon dinner, including homemade ice cream. It was so meaningful to meet this family with nine children, whose husband and father was fighting in Gaza – just a few kilometers away, but another world.

Days 2 and 3 took us to the dragonfruit fields, where we learned to tie the cactus-like leaves in an upward position. It was prickly and difficult work! Our neighbors were the milk cows mooing all day.

On day 4, we pruned, picked and packed cherry tomatoes, which was fun and up

my alley since we could sit down while working. This farm even had a bathroom!

On day 5, my friend Perla and I packaged passion fruits, called *passiflora* in Hebrew, which was a beautiful and fragrant activity. The guys went to pick pineapples – a much harder task.

Every night at 6 PM we were served a delicious Israeli dinner – usually schnitzel with all the Israeli salads and dips. Working on a farm certainly builds an appetite! After dinner, we'd walk around the *moshav* and watch the fireballs explode over Gaza, proudly knowing it's "our boys" taking care of business and keeping us safe. We heard no sirens and saw no missiles. We slept deeply each night, like true manual laborers.

Over the next two weeks, I volunteered in other locations, making sandwiches for soldiers at Aroma in Beit Shemesh, helping at an old age home that lost its foreign workers, and tying *tzitzit* for soldiers.

I encourage all of my peers who have not made *Aliyah* yet to go volunteer. You will get more out of it than you can imagine – and our people need us.

Watch Mizrachi's video featuring Jennifer and the other volunteers at: youtu.be/h7wjl6l2CCk



Jennifer (Korobkin) Niman

was raised and still lives in Los Angeles. Jennifer travels to Israel as often as she can to see her Yerushalmi kids and most recently to volunteer in the October 7 war effort for a full month. Jennifer and her husband Tzvi aspire to make *Aliyah* in the future.

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YAD MORDECHAI

Rabbi Aron White

At first glance, Kibbutz Yad Mordechai seems unremarkable, producing honey sold throughout Israel. But just outside the kibbutz is a field filled with life-size models of Egyptian soldiers, which tell a remarkable story. During Israel's War of Independence, a few dozen fighters in Yad Mordechai defended the kibbutz from the Egyptian army, a powerful example of the way small communities have played outsized roles in defending Israel from its enemies.

When Yad Mordechai was established in 1943, its Polish-born residents named it after the recently murdered Mordechai Anilewitz, the leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The founders could not have realized that, like their namesake, they were also destined to write a significant chapter in Jewish history.

As statehood drew closer in 1948, the kibbutz became increasingly isolated. Local Arab townspeople blocked the roads to Tel Aviv, making it harder and harder to get supplies. On Seder night of 1948, three weeks before the declaration of independence, a caravan got through to Yad Mordechai, bearing *matzot* and seven guns. It was the last caravan to get through the Arab siege. Yad Mordechai was isolated.

As one of the southernmost Jewish settlements, on the road from Gaza to Tel Aviv (today's Kvish 4), Yad Mordechai was one of the Egyptian army's primary targets when they invaded on May 15th, 1948. The kibbutz sent the women and children to safety in the north, while the men stayed back to defend their homes. 150 men, with only 75 weapons, remained in Yad Mordechai.

For five days, from May 19th to May 23rd, the defenders of Yad Mordechai fought to protect the kibbutz. They were bombed by the Egyptian air force and were greatly outnumbered by the Egyptian infantry, but bravely fought for days. In the fighting, 26 Israelis were killed and 40 were injured. Eventually, the kibbutz fell, but they had saved precious time. The Egyptians needed a few days to regroup, before continuing up the coastal road towards Ashdod. During these critical days, Israel received its first planes, and on May 29th, in the Israeli Air Force's inaugural mission, four planes bombed the Egyptian army.



A life-size depiction of the Egyptian soldiers attacking Yad Mordechai.

The Egyptians were shocked, and never advanced further north than Ashdod. The kibbutz was reconquered by the IDF in November 1948. The five days during which the men of Yad Mordechai fought the Egyptian army were critical in ensuring the Egyptians never came close to Tel Aviv.

Though the story of Yad Mordechai is legendary, similar stories took place throughout the War of Independence. From Negba and Nirim in the south to Kfar Etzion and Ramat Rachel near Yerushalayim, many of the most significant battles of Israel's War of Independence were fought by and in small *kibbutzim*. Sometimes, the *kibbutzim* fell, but their heroic efforts delayed the invading forces and allowed the IDF to regroup and ultimately win the war.

A similar dynamic also occurred during Hamas' attack on October 7. Hamas intended to advance even further into Israel, but they were held up by security teams and brave individuals. Many of these courageous defenders fell, but their heroic efforts gave the IDF time to regroup, and ultimately expel the terrorists from Israel. The spirit of Yad Mordechai, and of small *kibbutzim* fighting off murderous invaders, lives on today. ■

Every year, **Tu B'Shvat** begins the planting season in Israel. This year's is more important than ever before. Why? As you know a tree is life, *Eitz Chaim He*, and this land *Eretz Yisrael* has seen too much death and destruction the last few months. We've all seen the pictures, the videos, heard the stories of the death and the destruction, the kidnapping and the horrors. Many people are looking for something meaningful, impactful and positive that they can do this year. This is the time of the year where we rebuild, replant, and bring life to Israel's soil by planting fruit trees across Israel.

This Tu B'shvat join people around the world "United 4 New Trees of Life"

Starting Tu B'Shvat schools, shuls, communities and people who love Israel worldwide are uniting to plant **12,000** NEW fruit trees near the Gaza border in memory of the **1,200** victims ת"ח. Thousands of new *mitzvot* will come from these trees and their fruits, like, *orlah, neta revai, trumot, maasrot* and *shmitta*, and will be a merit *leilui nishmat* the *korbanot*. By partnering with the farmers you will also share in these mitzvot according to **HaRav Yaakov Ariel**, former **Chief Rabbi of Ramat Gan** and director of **Machon Torah VeHa'aretz**.

Planting fruit trees now will accomplish these goals:

1. Support farmers and communities in the south. They lost family, friends, workers, their families moved out. Some are in the IDF and need help desperately. They're on the front lines risking their lives to keep us safe. Don't let them down! Help save their farms and safeguard the holy land!
2. Show Hamas and their supporters all around the world, that the Jews are in Israel to STAY! We're not going anywhere, we'll continue to GROW!!
3. Plant **12,000** new fruit trees of life in memory of, and *leilui nishmat* the **1,200** *korbanot* and create NEW LIFE!!!
4. Share in the unique *mitzvot* that can only be observed in Israel, and in its blessing!!!! (ויקרא 25:21) "וְצִיְתֵי אֶת בְּרִכְתֵּי לַכֶּם"

Our hearts and *tefillot* are with our beloved **Rabbi Doron and Shelley Perez**, Executive Chairman of the Mizrahi world movement, their entire family and **Daniel** who has been taken hostage. We hope in the merit of planting **12,000** trees, Daniel and the hostages will come back well, and soon!

Trees will be planted with **Zo Artzeinu - IsraelTrees.org** who have planted over **600,000** fruit trees across Israel. Help plant these trees *leilui nishmat* the *k'doshim* who were brutally murdered on October 7th. **Everyone** who helps plant will receive a personalized certificate suitable for framing. Trees can be dedicated in honor or memory of anyone. Every school, shul or family that plants 100 trees or more collectively, will have a personalized sign installed at their own orchard, and receive a photo of it to proudly display. Visit your orchard and be amazed at what you helped create! **Shuls or schools** can contact Zo Artzeinu at info@IsraelTrees.org to join this meaningful worldwide campaign.

Together we can achieve this goal, help bring Israel back to its feet by planting fruit trees **starting on Tu B'shvat**, creating new life and bringing new hope to the land of Israel. **Use** promo code **HaMizrachi** and a matching donor will double your trees for FREE!

To plant your trees or see moving videos, visit www.IsraelTrees.org/United4NewLife

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MIZRACHI
WORLD MOVEMENT



Rebuilding Lives, Embracing Evacuated Communities, and Paving the Path to Return Home

Living in distant hotels far from their homes and grappling with grief, the evacuees of communities from the Region of Revival (formerly Gaza Envelope) continue to face the stark reality of October 7th. In this interview, Rabbi Aron White spoke with community leaders from the Region of Revival about their experiences during the challenging first months in temporary accommodations. They also shed light on the transformative impact of the community-focused arm of the Atufim Project, led by founder Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon and a joint initiative of Sulamot, La'Ofek, and the World Mizrahi movement, which offers employment assistance for evacuated individuals and a glimmer of hope for the future of Israel's southern communities.

MEET ITAI LEVI, CHAIRMAN OF NETIV HAASARA:



Itai Levi, Chairman of Netiv HaAsara together with Young Israel of New Rochelle on an "Adopt a Community" tour of Netiv HaAsara with Sulamot.

Itai, take us back to those initial days when your community first arrived in the hotel?

Itai: Those initial days were the darkest our community has known. We were all reeling with profound loss. Within the confines of a hotel, we knew we needed to deal with the terrible atrocities we all experienced, and at the same time there was a strong sense of determination to persevere.

As you plan for the future, what challenges does Netiv HaAsara face?

Itai: Netiv HaAsara faces a dual challenge. It's a sobering reality that governmental support alone falls short, covering perhaps 50% of our needs at best. After this kind of catastrophe, it is imperative to find assistance from external sources, organizations, and compassionate individuals. The reconstruction of Netiv HaAsara hinges on this crucial support, without which the clock cannot be turned back to October 6th.

How did you first encounter the Sulamot team?

Itai: They just suddenly showed up. No one called them. They asked for nothing in return. These are true "Anshei Eretz Yisrael" who care about the future of Am Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael. They came with good will and an ability to make connections and make things happen. Sulamot gives me pride; they are connected to their roots in the Land and help us find the meaning we need to continue and return home to Netiv HaAsara. Sulamot blended heartfelt compassion with the professionalism demanded by this unfathomable situation and helped our community feel embraced.

How has Sulamot helped bereaved families in Netiv HaAsara?

Itai: Sulamot has played a pivotal role in directly channeling funds to those bereaved families who lost loved ones on October 7th. The *moshav* endured the profound loss of 20 individuals from 14 different families, forever altering their lives and ours. Bureaucracy does not deal well with emergencies, but Sulamot does.

Why do you need the Netiv HaAsara Emergency Response Team? Doesn't the IDF defend the moshav?

Itai: Netiv HaAsara's Emergency Response Team is crucial to our survival. Our *moshav* is situated on the border fence with Gaza; our homes, kitchens, and kindergartens are situated in the direct line of fire. It's imperative to recognize that both the IDF and the government are doing an excellent job, but they do not cover all security requirements – neither physically nor financially. To fortify our security components, we rely on support from private individuals and organizations. Our civilian response team needs weapons safes, armored cars, security cameras, and the funding needs to be raised from independent sources.

What message would you like to convey about the future of Netiv HaAsara?

Itai: I promise you this. We will return to the pathways of Netiv HaAsara, we will return and be strong and give strength to those who need it. But we need you, and we need Sulamot by our side. I have only gratitude for them and for you.

ORGANIZING EMERGENCY RESOURCES, LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS: MEET YANIV AND SISI ELBAZ FROM NETIV HAASARA

Tell us about the challenges you have faced since being relocated to Kibbutz Ma'aleh HaChamisha's Hotel?

Sisi: We received hundreds of donations of necessary items from people all over the world, but it needed to be organized or else no one would receive what they needed. My husband Yaniv and I set up this special place at the hotel, almost like a general store. There were hundreds of items, and so many people needed things. It was logistically overwhelming. I myself was emotionally overwhelmed, being evacuated and going through so much.

How did you navigate through this difficult situation?

Sisi: Sulamot's team helped us create this space inside a hotel, making it a systematic process and breaking down each thing that we needed to do into stages so that we could meet the needs of everyone who came by the store. People were desperate. They needed diapers: now. Clothing: now. They also needed more serious things like glasses and medicine.

THREADS OF STRENGTH, FROM ADVERSITY TO EMPOWERING APPAREL: MEET YANIV AND ANAT FROM KIBBUTZ ZIKIM



Yaniv making sweatshirts at the Yearim Hotel, and residents wearing the sweatshirts.

How did you deal with the aftermath of the terrorist attacks?

Yaniv: Anat and I were relocated to the Yearim Hotel along with the rest of the *kibbutz*. We own an apparel printing business and were determined to continue to work even from the hallways of the hotel. We managed to bring our portable labeling machine from the *kibbutz*, transforming the hotel hallway into a makeshift workshop.

Sulamot's task team, who were in the hotel every single day, suggested we use this as an opportunity for all of us to contribute to the healing process and to increase unity.

How did you work with Sulamot's task team to bring this initiative to life?

Together, we created a concept of sweatshirts that proudly bear the message "October 7, 2023, *Am Yisrael Chai*" and "Together We Will Win." October 7 symbolizes our survival and showcases our strength and resilience.

Was the initiative successful?

Yaniv: We distributed the sweatshirts to hundreds of displaced people in various hotels. While simultaneously offering my family a financial anchor, our goal was to infuse hope and unity into the hearts of those who had endured unimaginable loss and displacement – and it succeeded.

Together with Sulamot's task team, Anat and I echoed Rav Rimon's sentiment that "*Am Yisrael* is strong, and we need to be united to succeed." The sweatshirt unity campaign stands as a testament to the enduring spirit of our people, and it is a privilege to have played a role in fostering hope and unity during these challenging times.

TZOCHAR'S BATTLE BEFORE AND AFTER OCTOBER 7TH: MEET YANIV LEVI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF TZOCHAR

What sets Tzochar apart from other communities in the Gaza border region?



Yaniv Levi

Yaniv Levi: Tzochar is a *yishuv kehilati*, a community-based settlement, of 190 families and their livelihood is not dependent on agriculture. Unlike some of the other 32 communities in this region, even before October 7th, Tzochar lacked the financial strength and entrepreneurial initiatives needed for independent growth. We provide services for the other communities and *kibbutzim* in the region, but with no independent factories or initiatives. Before October 7, I was appointed by the regional council to help Tzochar overcome these obstacles and promote both community and financial resilience.

How has Tzochar's situation changed post-October 7th?

Yaniv Levi: Today, we are fighting for Tzochar's survival, especially after the government's decision to place us just 200 meters beyond the security demarcation line for additional security funding. People are displaced, they are in trauma, and they can leave to Tel Aviv to relocate. They are scared to return to Tzochar. But this is exactly what Hamas wants, and it is our responsibility to make sure that every family feels safe enough to return home to Tzochar.

Why is the stability of the entire region at risk?

Yaniv Levi: If even one of the 32 communities in the Gaza border settlements is abandoned, it would be a blow to the entire region, playing into Hamas' desires. Tzochar is the weakest link in the regional council. If Tzochar is not rebuilt and repopulated, this situation poses a serious threat to the stability of the entire region.

How does working with Sulamot impact Tzochar's outlook?

Yaniv Levi: Sulamot, with its unwavering commitment, has become our lifeline, promising to work with us to ensure that every family can return to Tzochar. They decided to adopt us, offering support at a time when governmental authorities and agencies are not yet functioning optimally.

This organization has a heart; they deeply care about us. We gave them a long list of needs, and they didn't balk. They gave us a warm feeling that we have a 'father,' someone to depend on. In the midst of the darkness, there is light. We are so glad and filled with pride that we are privileged to work with wonderful people like Rav Rimon, Rav Eli Taragin, and their team.

Join us as we rebuild lives and extend our embrace to eight evacuated southern communities: Netiv HaAsara, Tzochar, Holit, Zikim, Shokeda, Yachini, Talmei Elyahu, and Kerem Shalom.

Your support is the cornerstone of change. Contribute to the Atufim Project, and play a vital role in revitalizing these communities: www.atufim.co.il/en

The Gadol of Gaza: Rabbi Yisrael Najara

Odela Glausiusz

My heart races when I see / my enemy stabbing me with his eyes
Gnashing his teeth full of rage / to disperse the multitude of my troops.
Hasten, answer me mightily / G-d of Hosts. / How long until the end of awful things,
That I may rejoice and my honor triumph?
(Zemiroth Yisrael, Rabbi Yisrael Najara)

This poet seems to be talking to us directly. As I write this, it has been 85 days since the October 7th massacre. Hostages are still trapped in Gaza, soldiers are still engaged in a bitter battle, the country is still reeling. We're all asking, how long until the end of awful things? When can we rejoice again? Yet these words were written some four hundred years ago by Rabbi Yisrael Najara, a prolific poet, who, for much of his life, served as the rabbi of Gaza.

A fascinating figure, he was born in Tzfat around 1550 to a family of rabbinic scholars of Spanish origin. His grandfather, Rabbi Levi Najara, was among those exiled from Spain in 1492, and resettled in Constantinople. His father, Rabbi Moshe Najara, was hired as rabbi by the Jewish community in Damascus, before relocating to Tzfat, where he became a close friend and student of the Arizal. Rabbi Yisrael Najara himself spent long periods in Tzfat and Damascus, while also visiting Istanbul, Salonika and Bursa. This diverse background greatly informed his unique approach as a *paytan*.

Rabbi Najara was well-versed in Torah and *halacha*. But his true fame rests on his enormous poetic oeuvre. Scholars have identified some 1,000 poems composed by him, and, according to Professor Tova Beeri, evidence of his enormous popularity are the three editions of his

early collected poems entitled *Zemiroth Yisrael* that were printed during his lifetime. This was extremely unusual for his time and place. Indeed, the first edition, published in Tzfat in 1587, was the second book ever printed in *Eretz Yisrael*. It spread like wildfire. From as early as the seventeenth century, his poems were sung from Morocco to Persia, and his poetry became a model for *paytanim* who followed in his footsteps.

Najara's poems reached the Ashkenaz world as well, first appearing in 1702 in Frankfurt, when a little booklet entitled *Zemiroth Yisrael* was published by a group of mystics from Bohemia and Moravia. The mystical poetry of Tzfat likely entered central Europe through Italy (where Jewish circles were in contact with Sephardi communities of the Middle East), before extending east to Poland and Russia. Today, his most well-known poem, *Kah Ribon*, is sung at Shabbat tables around the world.

Why was he so influential, and why did his poetry reach so many people? The primary source of his work is the Tanach; his poetry is infused with verses of prophecy. In this vein, Najara was following in the tradition of medieval Sephardic poets like Yehuda HaLevi, Avraham Ibn Ezra and Shlomo Ibn Gevirol. His own contribution to the genre was to adapt musical models from the Ottoman empire in which he lived. He learnt the

versifications, techniques and forms of the Turkish and Arabic poetry and songs of his time and skillfully combined them with devotional Hebrew text. His poems were designed to be sung, and he designated a melody to almost every poem. By borrowing melodies of popular foreign songs sung by the local Jewish populace, and making them, in his own words, 'kosher,' he displayed a willingness to interact with and uplift popular culture that greatly bolstered his widespread popularity. To quote Professor Edwin Seroussi, it takes a real *talmid chacham* to make magic from combining texts. Najara was able to weave two remote verses together and imbue them with a renewed sense in song, dancing between Tanach and Talmudic allusions, and borrowing a wealth of different poetic forms to infuse his poetry with deeper meaning.

His genius also lies in his crystal-clear Hebrew that is a pleasure to listen to and is still easily understood today. He clothed lofty ideas in beautiful language, yet his language was accessible to the general populace. His words have withstood the most difficult test – the test of time – and his poems are still performed by modern Israeli singers. Yet not only his language, but also his ideas, still speak to us today.

Despite the despair in the opening stanza I quoted above, the same poem

continues: “Rock, with You, I can rush barriers. / To You I shall sing as long as I live.” This too, is still our response, hundreds of years later. With our rallying cry, *Am Yisrael Chai*, with our deeply ingrained awareness that “every generation they rise against us to destroy us, but the Holy One, Blessed be He, saves us from their hands,” we too continue to sing, to “rush barriers,” to do extraordinary things.

Back in November, Lt. Col. (Res.) Rabbi Yoel Rechel returned to the site of Najara’s *shul* in Gaza and sang *Kah Ribon* there before Shabbat. Charles Dickens once called the sea “that old image of Eternity that I love so much.” Watching Rabbi Rechel sing with the bright blue sea glistening behind him, it becomes easier to imagine Rabbi Najara standing in the same spot, gazing out at the same sea, marveling at the beauty of G-d’s world. The city facing the sea may have changed

beyond recognition, but the same waters lap gently onto the shore.

Kah Ribon captures the effervescent sense of awe and incredulity at the wondrous nature of G-d’s handiwork and the pure joy and inner peace that accompanies that profound gratitude. In flowing Aramaic, in terminology that appears to be borrowed from Daniel, Rabbi Najara writes that it is “beautiful” to declare G-d’s “mighty deeds and wonders” before Him, that His great and mighty deeds “humble the proud and raise the humble.” To the proud, it is enough to gaze out at the vast expanse of sea and realize that we are but a speck on the face of the universe. To the humble, it is enough to gaze out at sea to be instilled with a profound sense of purpose, to realize that we dwell in a beautiful world, and we are privileged to have been chosen to call that world home.

Kah Ribon ends with a plea to save us “from the lions’ jaws,” another allusion to Daniel. This time the lions’ jaws are Hamas, but their steely clamp is loosening. Daniel survived to tell the tale, and so will we. When singing *Kah Ribon*, we can imagine a future where the Gaza of Rabbi Najara returns to life, a Gaza of poetry and song.



Odelia Glausiusz

lives in Jerusalem where she works as a freelance writer and content curator.

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עדי דנן



אסיף לוגר



ארז מישלובסקי



הלל סולומון



איתי יהודה



בני וייס



איתי סעדון



גיל פישיץ



הצבא הישראלי על-במותיה חלל

שמואל ב. איסי
Operation Swords of Iron is already one of the longest wars in Israel's history. Tragically, hundreds of soldiers 7" have fallen protecting the land and people of Israel. We pay tribute here to 196 of the fallen, who have been killed since the ground operation in Gaza began. (PHOTOS: IDF SPOKESPERSON'S UNIT)

ה' יקום דמם



יהונתן ברנד



סלמאן חבקה



אלחנן אריאל קליין



נעם יוסף אבו



אליהו בנימין אלמקייס



דובי כהן



גלעד רוזנבליט



יהונתן יצחק סמו



מתן מאיר



משה לייטר



יוסי הרשקוביץ



סרגיי שמרקין



נתי הרוש



אברהם פטנה



שלמה גורטובניק



שחר פרידמן



רועי ביבר



עדי פרובוביץ



ג'מאל עבאס



עדי מאלכ חרב



רני טחן



חן יהלום



יקיר ביטון



אור ברנדס



אסף אלו סמה



בן זוסמן



בנימין יהושע נידהם



רניה שאער



תובל יעקב צנגני



יקיר ידידיה שניקלובסקי



איתן פיש



יהל גזית



גיל דניאלס



קובי דבש



איל מאיר ברקוביץ



עומרי רוט



נפתלי יונה גורדון



מאור כהן איזנקוט



ליאב אטיה



עמרי בן שחר



יונתן דין חיים



גדעון אילני



נתנאל מנחם איתן



אוריה יעקב



אחיה דסקל



בן שלי



יצחק בן בשט



ליאל חוי



ערן אלוני



רום הכט



אלישע לוינשטרן



עוז שמואל ארדי



ניק בייזר



טל פיליבה



לידור יוסף קרואני



ירין גהלי



נתנאל סילברג



דניאל יעקב בן הרוש



רותם יוסף לוי



אוריאל כהן



ליאור סיון



מעוז פניגשטיין



לביא גיהסי



אליסף שושן



אוהד אשור



אוראל בן



רואי אליאס



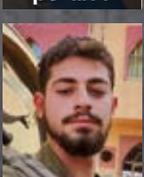
נדב פרחי



אליהו מאיר אוחנה



דוד בוגדנובסקי



גל הרשקו



איתמר שמן



רני תמיר



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אסף פנחס טובול



אפרים יכמן



רניה זיסק



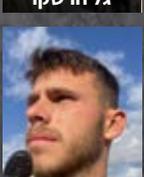
דביר דוד פימה



הראל שרביט



קוגנסטנין שושקו



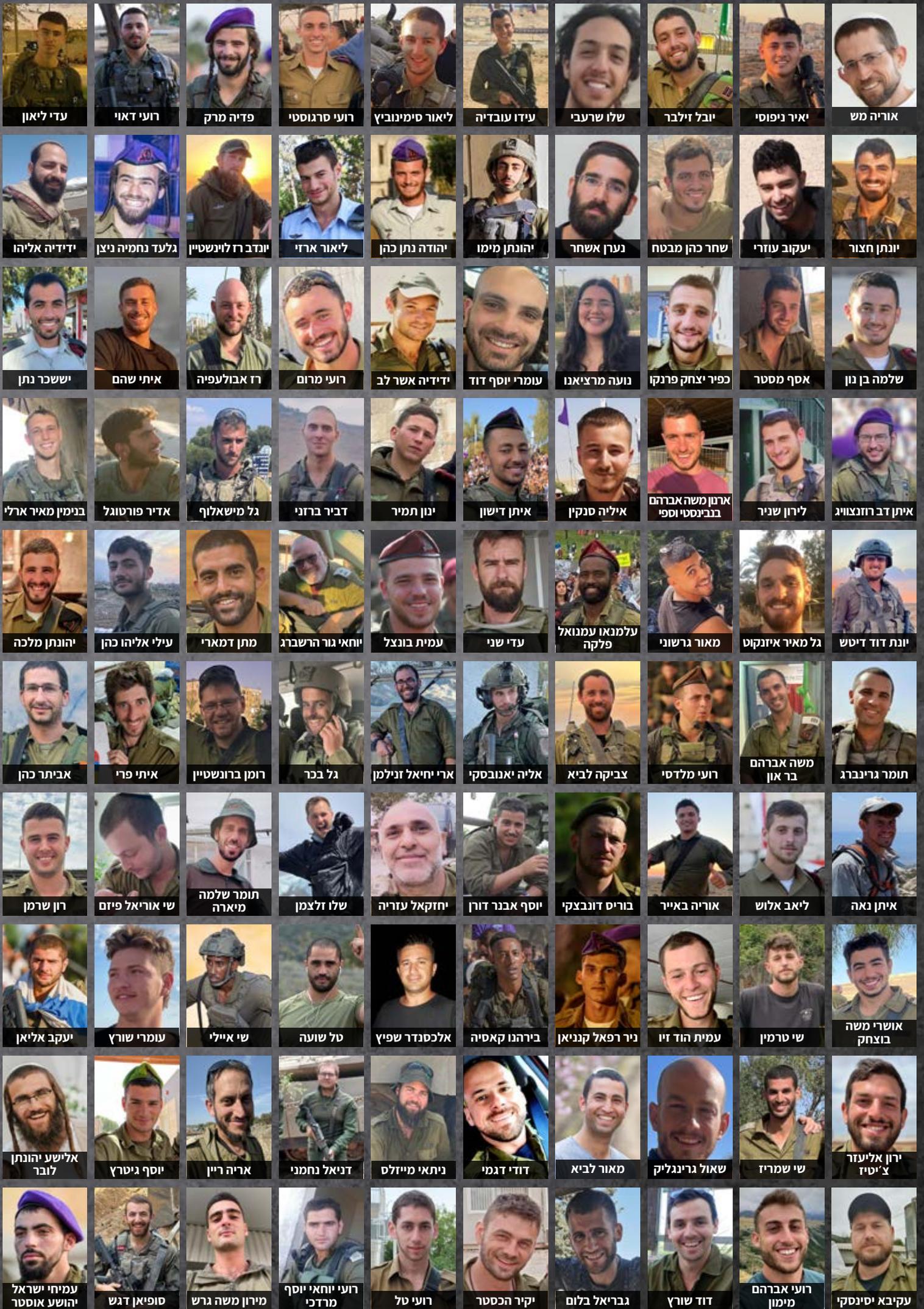
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לירון שניר

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בר און

תומר גרינברג

רון שרמן

שי אוריאל פיזם

תומר שלמה
מיארה

שלו זלצמן

יחזקאל עזריה

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לובר

יוסף גיטרץ

אריה ריין

דניאל נחמני

ניתאי מייזלס

דודי דגמי

מאור לביא

שאול גרינגליק

שי שמריז

ירון אליעזר
צ'יטיז

עמיתו ישראל
יהושע אוסטר

סופיאן דגש

מירון משה גרש

רועי יוחאי יוסף
מרדכי

רועי טל

יקיר הכסטר

גבריאל בלום

דוד שורץ

רועי אברהם
מימון

עקיבא יסינסקי

A Coat of Many Colors

Racheli Moskowitz

Every Shabbat, Racheli Moskowitz teaches her five-year-old the Parshat Hashavua. When she gently told him about the sale of Yosef, he protested with angry and tearful eyes. "How could they do this to their brother? That's not nice!" In response, Racheli wrote a poem for him – a tikkun, a fixing, for the sale of Yosef.

בְּנֵי חֵזֶר מִהַמְעֶרְכָה וְתַרְמִילוֹ מִתְפַקֵּעַ
מִכָּל מָה שְׁלֵא אָנִי אֲרַזְתִּי לוֹ.

My son returned from battle, his duffel bursting
With things I had not packed for him.

גְּרָבִים שֶׁתָּרַמָה קֵהֵלָה מֵאַרְגֵנְטִינָה
שְׂמִיכָה מְשֻׁבָצֶת בְּרִיחַ בַּיִת אַחֵר
מִגָּבֵת כְּחֵלָה מִמְשַׁפָּחָה מִהַמּוֹשָׁב
צִיצִית מִירוּשָׁלַיִם

Socks donated by a community in Argentina
A quilted blanket smelling like someone else's home
A blue towel from a family from the *moshav*
Tzitzit from Jerusalem

פְּלִיז מִתְנַת חֶבְרַת הִי-טֵק
צְעִיף שֶׁסְרָגָה קְשִׁישָׁה

A fleece jacket, gifted by a high-tech company
A scarf knitted by an elderly lady

גּוּפִיּוֹת שֶׁנִּקְנּוּ מִקְבוצַת פֵּיבּוֹקֶס
סֵדִין שֶׁנָּתַן לוֹ חֵבֵר

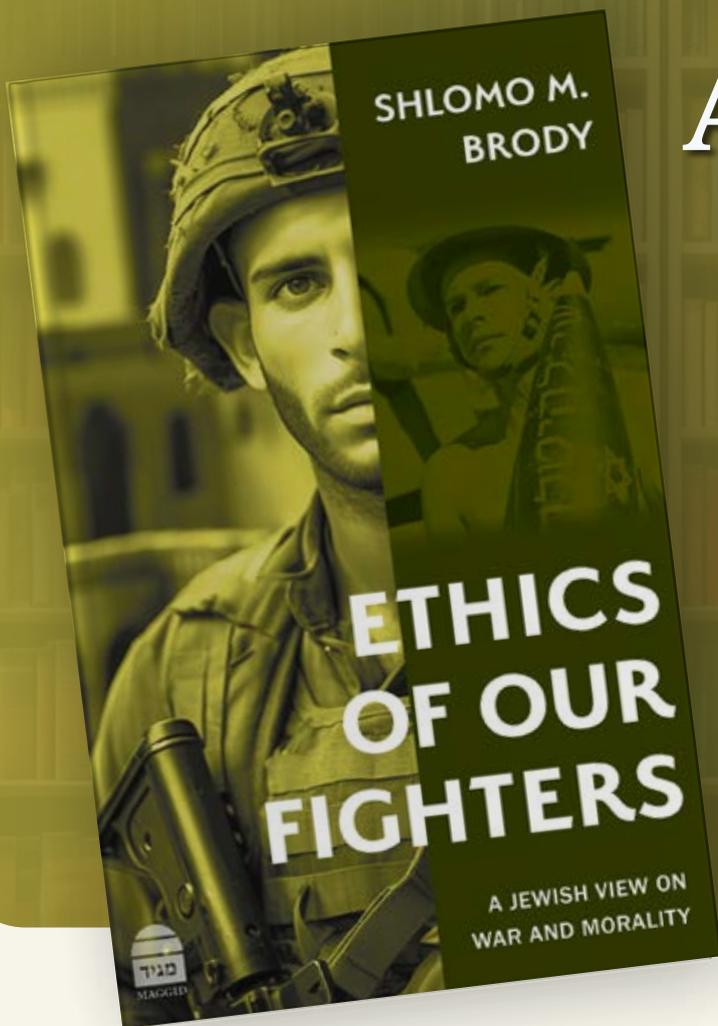
Undershirts purchased from a Paybox group
A sheet that was given to him by a friend

כִּפְפוֹת שֶׁנִּקְנּוּ נְעוּרוֹת
מֵעִל מְאֹרוֹךְ שֶׁל מִישָׁהוּ שָׂבָא וּבִקֵּשׁ לָתֵת.

Gloves bought by teenage girls
A jacket from the closet of someone who came and wanted to give.

פּוֹרְסֶת אֶת כָּל הָאֲרִיגִים
וְרוֹקֶמֶת כְּתוֹנֶת פְּסִים חֲדָשָׁה.
רְאֵה יוֹסֵף, עֲרְבוּ לָךְ אַחֵיךָ.

I spread out all of these garments
And weave together a new coat of many colors.
See, Yosef, your brothers were there for you.



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Aveilut of the Heart

The Relationship Between the Internal and External Actions of Mourning

Rabbi Elisha Loewenstern הי"ד

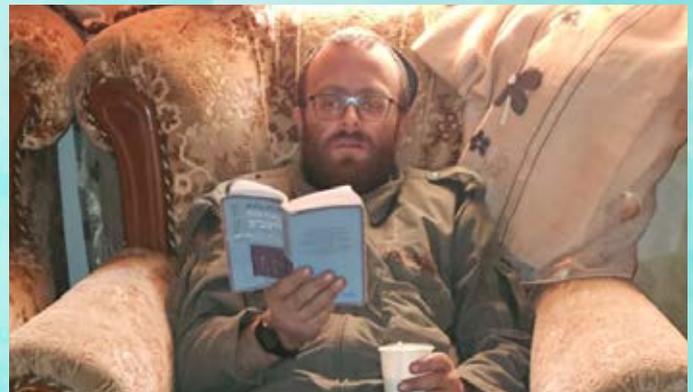
On Rosh Chodesh Tevet, 13 December, 38-year-old Rabbi Elisha Loewenstern of the Armored Corps was killed fighting in southern Gaza. Originally from Beit Shemesh, he was one of 8 graduates of Yeshivat Hesder Yerucham to have been killed fighting in this war. A prolific talmid chacham, Rabbi Loewenstern had written numerous Torah articles, one of which is a long analysis of the halachot of aveilut and their meaning. Rabbi Tzvi Gleiberman, a member of Mizrachi's Musmachim program, summarizes Rav Elisha's article here.

The *Shulchan Aruch* cites various practical *halachic* practices that must be followed while in mourning, such as not putting on *tefillin* on the first day of mourning, washing, ironing clothing or getting a haircut. All of these are external practices, which begs the question: does *halacha* also require one to experience internal grief or do the *halachot* of mourning only apply to external practices? If the *halacha* only applies to external practices, what value does mourning have without the inner experience it is meant to reflect?

Let's examine two different approaches to this question: that of Rav Shlomo Fischer, the *Beit Yishai*, and that of Rav Soloveitchik. Rav Soloveitchik emphasizes that mourning is not only about outward actions, but also includes an inner experience of sorrow and grief for the deceased. This view suggests that the various mourning practices prescribed in *halacha* are expressions of this internal grief. By contrast, the *Beit Yishai* contends that the primary obligation of mourning is one's external behavior, without necessarily emphasizing the internal emotional experience of grief. These external practices are a form of paying respect to the dead.

Other sources dealing with the laws of mourning can shed light on this fundamental debate:

Many of the laws of mourning are derived from Yechezkel's prophecy: "Say to the house of Israel... your sons and daughters whom you have left over will fall by the sword... you shall neither lament nor weep" (Yechezkel 24:21,23). Rashi explains: "You shall not observe mourning because you have no consolers, for no one among you is not a mourner, and there is no mourning except where there are consolers." The *Beit Yishai* explains that this implies that mourning is an external act performed in order to honor the dead and it is therefore meaningless when there are no comforters, as there are no people to honor the deceased person by their presence.



Rabbi Loewenstern learning while resting after being in his tank for days. (PHOTO: COURTESY)

However, Rav Soloveitchik could respond by citing the second half of Rashi's commentary: "Another explanation: For you will be afraid to weep before the Chaldeans in whose midst you are." According to the interpretation of the Radak, the prophet is saying that the Jewish people will be so overwhelmed by the magnitude of the destruction that they will not have the strength to mourn. According to this approach, there is no proof from this prophecy that mourning is primarily internal, for this specific instance was purely situational.

The Gemara says that "when a person dies without family to mourn them, ten people sit on their behalf," to which Rambam comments that "when a person dies who has no mourners to comfort them, ten people come and sit in his place for the seven days of mourning and the rest of the people gather around them." The people that are sitting are fulfilling the external aspects of mourning, but nowhere does it say that the people sitting are expected to show grief. This implies that mourning is a practical, external matter.

When discussing the concept of *osek b'mitzvah patur min hamitzvah*, that one who is involved in a *mitzvah* is exempt from performing another *mitzvah*, the Gemara states that this rule only applies if one is actively engaged with the *mitzvah* and is busy with it. When it comes to the *mitzvah* of mourning, the *halacha* obligates mourners to be immersed in the practicalities

of mourning, making them exempt from other *mitzvot*. This implies that the *mitzvah* of mourning is external and practical.

On the other hand, Rabbi Gershon ben Yitzchak, the Girshuni, argues that the primary aspect of the *mitzvah* of mourning is the emotional experience of grief. This is supported by a Gemara in Moed Katan that implies mourning does not occur during the *chagim*, as it contradicts the obligation to experience joy during *chagim*. But why should there be a contradiction between mourning and the joyous observance of the *chag*? According to the Girshuni, if joyous observance involves physical actions like eating meat and drinking wine, and a mourner is also permitted to eat meat and drink wine, there should be no contradiction between mourning and joy. Why, then, is the mourning of *shiva* incompatible with a *chag*?

The Girshuni postulates that both mourning and joyous observance of a *chag* are independent *mitzvot*. Mourning involves internal emotions, while joyous observance includes external actions. The Ramban, however, suggests that the reason for the apparent contradiction between mourning and joy of a *chag* is due to the public nature of *chagim*. He explains that the mourning of *shloshim* (the period after *shiva*) is private and doesn't conflict with the *chag* because the inner emotional aspect of mourning ceases before the *chag* starts. Thus, the practical aspects of mourning that occur during the *chag* don't contradict the observance of the *chag*. However, the *Beit Yishai* reconciles the contradiction differently, suggesting that the joy of a *chag* is primarily a practical commandment fulfilled by *korbanot*. Hence, when mourning interferes with these external expressions, it creates a contradiction.

The *Beit Yosef* and the *Hagahot Maimoniot* emphasize different aspects of mourning. According to the *Beit Yosef*, mourning involves both emotional and practical elements. Mourning is



Rabbi Loewenstern with his family. (PHOTO: COURTESY)

a way to honor the deceased, requiring active expression of grief, yet there is a limited obligation for mourning even when there are no close relatives to witness it. On the other hand, the *Hagahot Maimoniot* emphasizes the internal and emotional aspect of mourning, suggesting that it doesn't necessarily require outward, practical manifestations. He argues that the Torah acknowledges an emotional state of mourning even without explicit outward actions. Whereas the *Beit Yosef* focuses on the honor and expression of grief for the deceased, the *Hagahot Maimoniot* stresses the mourner's internal emotional state, presenting a nuanced view of mourning that involves emotional suffering but not necessarily overt actions.

In summary, the great *poskim* emphasized different aspects of mourning. Some consider the external and practical aspect to be primary, while others consider the internal experience of grief to be primary. We pray that *Am Yisrael* should only know joy, and no longer need to mourn in any way. ■

“He only died once. But he lived every day.”

Words of Inspiration from Hadas Loewenstern

Elisha was the love of my life. We spent thirteen beautiful years together, we have 6 children together. My oldest is 12-and-a-half, he will have his *bar mitzvah* a week before Rosh Hashanah, and my youngest is a 10-month-old baby girl, and we were so happy together.

My husband was a big *talmid chacham*. He translated the Gemara Steinsaltz into English, and he used to tutor secular *bar mitzvah* boys here in Israel for their *bar mitzvahs*. He did not waste time at all. He would do sit-ups with an app, that after 50 sit-ups gave a minute break. He would learn *Mishnayot* for a minute, and then do his next set!

When the war started he went to fight, and he told me that he felt privileged to defend *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael*. This is not about Hadas or Elisha Loewenstern. This is about the Jewish nation and this about our enemies trying to kill us throughout history. My husband was the first tank to go into the south part of the Gaza Strip. When some soldiers were injured, Elisha went to help them and that is when he was shot.

Talking about his death is secondary in my eyes, because he only died once, but he lived everyday. He died. Hashem decided that my husband would die, that is Hashem's decision, I can't change it. But, I am alive, and my six kids are alive, and we plan on living such a wonderful life. We will

live here in *Eretz Yisrael* and we will study Torah and will keep *mitzvot*, and we will be a happy Jewish family. And this is the true victory in my eyes.

There may be a time difference between Israel and the Diaspora, but, in our hearts there are no time differences. We love you so much, we feel you, we feel you in your *davening* for us. And *b'ezrat Hashem* we will all be together when *Mashiach* comes – all be here together, here in *Yerushalayim*, and I will give all of you a huge hug. The hugest hug ever.



Rabbi Elisha and Hadas Loewenstern. (PHOTO: COURTESY)

JEW'S with VIEWS

We asked five accomplished Jews from around the world: What lessons must we learn from the events of the last 3 months?



Rabbi Menachem Sebbag

After the massacre, I felt numb; there were no words I could utter to reflect the unfolding horror or bring healing. No words I could utter would avoid the traps of equivocation, bias, or other human failings. Facing this magnitude of brokenness, I felt wholly inadequate. Though we are physically far from what is transpiring, we mourn and worry together as one. We read, listen and feel the pain and sorrow. We look at our children and see the orphans, we look at our wives and see the widows and we imagine ourselves as parents burying our own children.

I watched as our community found solace in gratitude for the elements of life that were once taken for granted. Amidst the tragedy, a profound sense of appreciation arose for the blessings inherent in everyday existence, echoing our tradition's emphasis on gratitude as a cornerstone of spiritual practice. *Hakarat hatov*, recognizing the good, underscores the importance of appreciating the positive aspects of life. These tragic times are a stark reminder of the fragility of existence, prompting introspection within the community about the value of safety, community, and the sanctity of life itself.

We have begun to reflect on the significance of traditions that foster resilience and unity. The strength drawn from shared rituals, the support of the community, and the continuity of faith have become renewed pillars of gratitude. I have seen this ongoing tragedy elevate the appreciation for the intangible aspects of Jewish identity, reinforcing a sense of belonging.

Mumbling the *birchot hashachar* has become a thing of the past. We are now truly thankful for the simple things in life! May Hashem protect our brave soldiers, bring back our captives and heal those wounded in body and spirit.

Rabbi Menachem Sebbag is the rabbi of AMOS (Amsterdam Modern Orthodox Synagogue).



Rebbetzin Elise Peter-Apelbaum

What happened in Israel on October 7 made me realize how important it is for Jews to always be prepared and to know where evil is lurking. We unfortunately saw how many antisemites and envious people live among us around the globe. We must never rest on our laurels and think that other people take us as equals. On the contrary, we must always be vigilant and ready to defend ourselves.

In that context, it was fascinating to see how Jews have stood up and united after October 7. It didn't matter if someone was more orthodox or less, if one observes all the *mitzvot* or only a few. We were united and together again. And this is where I see our Jewish strength. In the face of global hatred, we proudly stood together and stood strongly together for Israel, our country.

As a *yoetzet halacha*, I also witnessed the strength and dedication of Jewish women. Despite the war, despite the difficulties of being home alone with their kids while their husbands are at war, despite the constant red alerts warning about rockets, they are making incredible efforts to continue running their home with Jewish values. I stand in awe.

Rebbetzin Elise Peter-Apelbaum is the Head of Mizrahi Prague in Czechia where she lives with her husband, Chief Rabbi David Peter, and their five children. She recently graduated as a yoetzet halacha and plans to help women in Czechia and France.



Leon Gamaroff

Prior to October 7, from my home in Australia, I witnessed a battle between two opposing camps in Israel, centered on proposed changes to the judicial system surrounding the Supreme Court of Israel. As a Jew living in *chutz la'aretz*, I was deeply saddened by the mass protests and hatred expressed through words and deeds. “Far right” or “far left,” “secular” or “religious,” “democratic” or “anti-democratic” – the words used throughout that time emphasized differences and opposition.

On October 7, Hamas terrorists invaded Israel and massacred, tortured and kidnapped over 1,200 Jews. They didn't distinguish between us – whether a Jew was left-wing or right-wing, for or against a two-state solution, or secular or religious. They simply massacred Jews or anyone associated with Jews – just as the Nazis did.

The lesson is clear. Jews focus far too much on our differences, and not nearly enough on what we have in common and what binds us together as a nation. We must all do our absolute best to change this and emphasize what unifies us – not what divides us.

Leon Gamaroff is a management consultant in Australia, and is currently in Israel as a volunteer during the war.



Tamar Krieger

The war began right as we were introducing a new foundation to improve education in Israel. Rather quickly, it was I who got a lesson in education. I learned about Israelis' resilience, our people's deep-rooted commitment to each other, and our society's extraordinary resilience. My mind-frame shifted from what support can we provide Israel to the understanding that in so many ways, Israel already has what it needs; the people of Israel are its great strength and that the world needs Israel more than Israel needs the world.

As an *olah*, the last few months have made me feel more Israeli than ever before. I feel part of something so much larger than myself. I feel safer here under the threat of rockets than I do outside of Israel, where overt and latent antisemitism are constantly lurking. Here my enemy is clear, but in the United States and Europe it is often hiding just beneath a polite veneer.

Although I miss my friends and family, I now realize that I am a part of a family of about 10 million Israelis. I am deeply touched by their acts of kindness, love, strength, and communal support, as well as the spirituality of the people. We are all expressing our innate potential under fire: Israel is strong because its people are committed to their nation and to each other.

Tamar Krieger is the Executive Director of the Tzemach David Foundation and is an international educational consultant, curriculum designer, and leadership trainer. Originally from the Philadelphia area, she now resides in Jerusalem.



Rabbi Aminadav Grossman

“I really shouldn't complain, so many others have it worse.” I've heard this sentiment repeatedly in the last few months alongside any admission of suffering or trauma.

My wife Rachel often speaks of army wives who inevitably end conversations about their challenges by saying things like “...but I really can't complain, my husband is able to come home.” Or another who hasn't heard from her husband stationed on the Lebanon border in weeks, “I can't complain, at least my husband isn't in Gaza.” And from the woman whose husband is in Gaza, “I can't complain, he's alive and well.” Even the woman whose husband in *miluim* tragically died from his wounds said at *shiva* when we visited, “I can't complain, at least I got to part from him in the hospital.”

Mi k'amcha Yisrael... The suffering is real and it's important to validate the range of emotional responses. But so is *hakarat hatov*. The dual perspective of deeply feeling our loss and looking for blessings – not silver linings – lends meaning to our lives.

Chazal point out that Leah was the first to express *hoda'a* (gratitude) when she named Yehuda, perhaps precisely because of the backdrop of her feeling distanced from Ya'akov, evidenced by the names of her previous children. True gratitude is only possible when we feel the pain in our lives, which highlights the blessings of daily life. This coexistence of suffering and gratitude is the Torah's path to resilience.

Rabbi Aminadav Grossman is the Rav of Beit Knesset Carmei Zion in Carmei Gat and the mental health professional for overseas students at Yeshivat Har Etzion. He is an alumnus of Mizrahi's Shalhevet and Musmachim programs, and serves as a reservist at the Shura base of the army rabbinate.

A Million Jews on the Way to Jerusalem

Gael Grunewald

When a young journalist in nineteenth-century Europe covered the Dreyfus affair, he was shocked by the blood libel, recognized the antisemitism at play, and envisioned the dangers it leads to. This young Jew understood that the only way for his people to deal with this evil was to establish a state. Within two years, he published *The Jewish State*. About fifty years later – too late – the State of Israel was established. “A safe haven for the Jewish people,” as he put it.

During its seventy-five years, the State of Israel was called time and time again to defend this mission, and it fought for the right of the Jewish people to live in the Land of Israel. From the day of its founding it has grappled with wars, intifadas, terrorist attacks, withdrawals, and ceaseless attacks – but there was not one day that the State of Israel did not devote its utmost attention to fulfilling this promise.

As a country desiring life, Israel did not remain at the bottom of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and developed Israel into a prosperous, strong and leading society. The largest Jewish community in the world lives in Israel and lives well. Although antisemitism continues to rear its ugly head throughout the world, here in Israel there is no place where a person is required to hide Jewish symbols in the public domain.

On Shemini Atzeret, the IDF blinked for a moment – and we immediately received a painful reminder of our enemy’s evil desires. In a blackout lasting several hours, they killed, massacred, raped, and kidnapped our families, our sons and daughters.

Images of riots, pogroms and horrors that we remembered through black and white photos on European soil came to life in 4K resolution, here in Israel, before our eyes.



Gael during his lecture tour in France.

With one difference: the nation of Israel stood up to defend itself.

Wherever this satanic evil came to harm, it met the absolute good – fighting for its life and values. Hundreds of young people left their homes on Shemini Atzeret, getting into their cars and driving south to fight the enemy. Within hours, we drove the enemy back to the trenches from which they came and hundreds of thousands of reservists were standing at the front ready to defend the right of the Jewish people to live in their land.

Within a few hours, the State of Israel responded with all its strength. Our air force, armored corps and infantry have bombarded the enemy non-stop for over two months.

It seems that on the seventh of October, the antisemitic dam was opened all over the world. Demonstrations in support of Hamas are held every week in capitals throughout the world. And many Jewish communities are suffering from unprecedented manifestations of antisemitism. In Los Angeles, a Jew who demonstrated for Israel was killed. In Paris, Jewish homes and shops were marked with stars of David. Jewish students are afraid to go to campuses in the USA. 87% of the

respondents who belong to the Jewish community in the Diaspora reported a dramatic decrease in their sense of personal security. Global antisemitism has reared its head again, and the Jewish people bow their heads.

Recently, I was on a lecture tour in France. I visited several cities and gave lectures to thousands of Jews. I have never felt so uncomfortable in France as I did on this last visit. The stories coming from communities around the world leave no doubt. I met a student who says she walks across her college campus with her head down and with quick steps. Children are afraid to go to school alone, and public gatherings have been canceled. In too many places in the world, it is not pleasant to be Jewish in the public square.

In these places there is no IDF to protect and no IDF to respond.

This war has made more and more Jews sharply aware that their Jewish identity is a significant component of their lives. Judaism is not just an ethnicity. It is a sense of belonging, tradition and values.

These two forces, antisemitism on the one hand and Jewish identity on the other, are together producing the next wave of



Meeting the Mizrachi France mission to Israel: Gael Grunewald, Aliya and Absorption Minister Ofir Sofer, Roi Abecassis, President of Mizrachi France Isaac Barchichat, KKL-JNF Chairwoman Ifat Ovadia-Luski, Rabbi Chalom Lellouche and Deputy Director of Mizrachi France Yohan Botbol.



Gael Grunewald, Yohan Botbol, Isaac Barchichat and Rabbi Avraham Dray, Director of Mizrachi France, visiting Kfar Aza.

immigration that is expected to reach Israel in the coming years.

Diaspora Jewry has a seismograph that is particularly sensitive to antisemitic vibrations. The Jews of Europe learned firsthand that the distance from marking Jewish shops to spilling their blood may be shorter than we imagine. Today more than ever, it is clear that the State of Israel was and still is a safe haven for the Jewish people.

The State of Israel has already experienced large waves of increased *Aliyah*, as we saw after the Six Day War, the fall of the Iron Curtain and other large *Aliyot*. Six months after this war is over, our fighter planes will be replaced by ElAl planes that will arrive here from all over the world.

A challenge is set before us which is a tremendous opportunity: a million new Jewish immigrants. This is a national mission. This will not be an increase in the number of sporadic families making *Aliyah* from a community here and a community there. This will be a massive *Aliyah* of communities, cities and entire countries,

an *Aliyah* that will strengthen society and the economy in Israel.

Let us examine the Jewish community in South Africa, which these days must recalculate its course. The South African government is considering severing diplomatic relations with Israel. There is no doubt that such a step will further burden Jewish life in an already unsympathetic country. The community is considering its future outside of Africa, in either Israel or Australia. The State of Israel must do everything it can to be the best option for this community and many others that will follow in its footsteps.

To allow this blessed wave of immigration to wash over Israeli cities and towns, the State of Israel must first and foremost mark the issue of absorption as a central goal in the years ahead. We must create different immigration and absorption paths that will be adapted to the needs of these communities and families, modular absorption programs that assist with housing, professions and learning Hebrew. With a focused and smart plan, the government can create an absorption

basket that will encourage immigrants to settle in areas of national priority, provide vocational training subsidies, and operate thousands of *ulpanim* for Hebrew.

The seventh of October was a wake-up call for the people of Israel to stand up to defend themselves. At the same time, the Shemini Atzeret pogrom was also a wake-up call for the Diaspora Jews to arise and immigrate to Israel.

A million Jews going up to Jerusalem...



Gael Grunewald
is Vice Chairman of the World Zionist Organization, Chairman of the Mizrachi faction in the national institutions and head of the education department.



Yosef: Man of Peace

Rabbi Eliezer Kashtiel

At the beginning of *Parshat Vayeishev*, the Torah describes the animosity that Yosef's brothers harbored toward him: "His brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, and they despised him and they were unable to speak with him peacefully... And his brothers said to him, 'Will you truly be a king over us, and will you truly rule over us?' And they despised him even more because of his dreams and because of his words" (Bereishit 37:4-8).

Rashi comments, "He spent much time with the sons of Bilhah, for his brothers would disparage them, but he would reach out to them." Yosef also reported to Ya'akov that his brothers were disdainfully referring to them as servants. All of this points to a major difference between Leah's sons and Yosef: Leah's sons felt that it was important to stress the differences in standing between the various members of the family, whereas Yosef sought to cultivate unity among all his brothers.

Yosef's overarching goal was for the brothers to live together in peace and harmony. He felt it was important to emphasize that they were all the sons of the same father, that they all shared the same roots.

It would seem that the *ketonet pasim*, the striped tunic that Ya'akov gave to Yosef, was symbolic of Yosef's role. The stripes of various colors symbolized the differences between the brothers, while the stripes' coexistence in the garment represented Yosef's capacity to unify the family.

This insight into Yosef's designated mission can help us understand the reason for his brothers' animosity toward him. Rav Kook discusses how enmity can be a constructive force:

"In order for individual elements to come into existence, each element must stand out with a unique identity... The fundamental reason for conflict in life and in society, and the purpose of all constraints on ideas or faiths, is to create a place where every individual value can develop properly and where others - other people, other nations, other attitudes and characters, or other concepts and faiths - will not usurp its place" (*Orot HaKodesh* 4:498).

When Yosef tried to foster unity within the family, his brothers were infuriated. They saw it as an attempt to erase their individual identities. The conflict between Yosef and his brothers thus represented a fierce battle between two different spiritual forces. As Rav Kook formulates it: "Two majestic voices can be heard in the world with great intensity... [One is] the voice of harmony, the voice that demands complete coordination, equivalence, and homogeneity, the voice of peace... In contrast, there also thunders... the voice that roars for the power of the lone individual, for the conflict of life in which every person seeks to overpower his fellow, and for the accentuation of every unique attribute" (*Orot HaKodesh* 4:493).

The Maharal teaches that the phenomenon of brotherhood will be cultivated by *Mashiach ben Yosef*, who will work to find common ground between all the various groups within the Jewish people and will

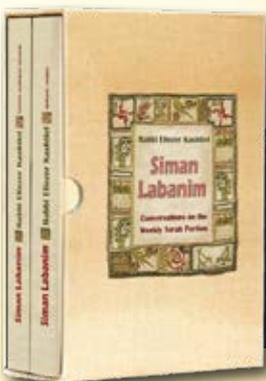
thus bring about the ingathering of exiles (*Netzach Yisrael*, 37).

Yosef would later teach his brothers the priceless value of harmony, brotherhood, and maintaining their connection to their father. In *Parshat Mikeitz*, the Torah describes how Yosef subjected his brothers to an exhausting ordeal until they finally acknowledged the idea that he had stressed throughout his life: "We are all the sons of one man" (Bereishit 42:11). In the same encounter, the brothers also discovered their capacity to join forces to save a single member of their family - in this case Binyamin - even if it meant that they would be enslaved.

Peaceful coexistence certainly requires an awareness of every person's uniqueness and of the vast diversity of the individuals in our nation. At the same time, it is important to identify the common characteristics that make all of us the same and to see to it that all of us, without exception, live together in harmony as parts of a cohesive whole.

Dedicated in memory of the 14 graduates of Mosdot Bnei David - Eli who have died defending Israel in this war.

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Tu BiShvat in Challenging Times

Confidence about the Future Rooted in Appreciation of the Past

Rabbi Reuven Taragin

At first glance, Tu BiShvat, the Rosh Hashanah for fruit trees (*Rosh Hashanah* 1:1-2), is of mere technical significance – the calendar marker for a new cycle of fruits. Surprisingly, though, we treat Tu BiShvat as a minor holiday on which we skip *tachanun* and avoid fasting. What are we celebrating on Tu BiShvat?

It is also noteworthy that we celebrate only the Rosh Hashanah of trees and not that of other plants. Why are trees more important than other vegetation? The answer lies in the Torah's parallel between man and tree.

Our relation to trees

The Torah justifies the prohibition against using a fruit tree as a battering ram by explaining that “man is like a tree of the field” (*Devarim* 20:19). In what way is man like a tree?

The Maharal uses the next chapter in *Devarim* to explain the comparison. When faced with an unsolved murder, the elders are required to sacrifice a calf that has never plowed in a ravine that has never been plowed. *Chazal* explain that we sacrifice the calf's potential productivity in order to atone for the lost potential “fruit” of the murder victim, who can no longer raise a family nor fulfill *mitzvot* (*Sotah* 46a).

Humans, like trees, have creative potential. We are commanded to value a fruit tree's productive potential to ensure that we value our own. This is why an unsolved murder requires atonement. We respond to the disregard for the value of human life with a ritual that reminds us of every living being's potential and the need to respect its realization (*Maharal, Tiferet Yisrael* 3). Tu BiShvat also reminds us of the “fruit” we can produce. As long as G-d grants us the gift of life, we must maximize it.

The resilience of the Jewish people

The Jewish people are similar to trees in another way. *Yishayahu HaNavi* equates Jewish history to “the days of a tree” (65:22). How are they similar?

Unlike annuals, which produce fruit for only one season and then die over the winter, trees regenerate each spring and once again generate fruit. The celebration of the Rosh Hashanah for trees in the middle of the winter emphasizes this special trait. Though trees seem dead on Tu BiShvat, in truth, they are about to begin a new growth cycle. *Iyov* adds that a tree also has “hope” – even if most of it is cut down, it can grow back.

The Jewish people are similarly resilient. Unlike other nations, which rise and then fade forever, the Jewish people have returned to prominence after two millennia of exile and persecution. Throughout Jewish history, we experienced many periods of suffering, but they were always followed by success and growth. After the Holocaust, we were in a desperate state. But Hashem comforted us with the miraculous founding of the State of Israel, which has fostered our people's physical and spiritual rejuvenation.

On Simchat Torah, we experienced such a low. On Tu BiShvat, let's remember that, like trees, we too will flower again and reach even greater heights.

Planting trees – believing in redemption

Avot D'Rebbe Natan states that one who hears of *Mashiach's* arrival while planting should finish planting and only then greet *Mashiach* (*Nuscha Bet*, 31). Why is finishing planting more important than greeting *Mashiach*?

Choni Hame'agel studied the famous verse that describes our redemption: “When Hashem returns us to Zion, we were like dreamers.” He wondered whether it was possible for a person to sleep for seventy years, the length of the first exile. One day, *Choni* met a man planting a carob tree. Knowing that it takes seventy years for such a tree to produce fruit, *Choni* asked the man why he was planting a tree whose fruits he would never enjoy. The man answered that just as he enjoyed the fruits of trees planted by earlier generations, he, too, was planting for future ones. *Choni* then fell asleep for seventy years. When he awoke, *Choni* met the man's grandson,

who was enjoying the fruits of his grandfather's labor (*Ta'anit* 23a).

What is the relationship between *Choni's* study of the verse of redemption and the man who planted trees for his grandchildren? *Choni* wonders about sleeping for seventy years and the connection to redemption. Tree planting is the answer. Redemption comes when we work for our people's future in this Land. We finish planting before greeting *Mashiach* because the faith expressed by planting trees is what brings him.

In exile, Jews traditionally lacked the motivation to invest in trees and other infrastructure. But in Israel, we must remember that we are now home – in a place that is our own where our descendants will *iy”H* continue living. We express this appreciation by planting trees for them.

Many around the world are once again challenging our rights to the Land. On Tu BiShvat, we appreciate our return to Israel and reaffirm our faith in our eternal relationship with it by enjoying the fruits of our ancestors' labor and investing in the Land for our descendants.



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Lessons from Yitzchak Avinu in Gaza: Planting and Digging Anew

Rabbanit Shani Taragin

Since the horrific massacre of October 7, the day we concluded and restarted our annual reading of the Torah, each *parashat hashavua* has resonated with timely messages, whispers of the Divine word to strengthen us as we confront contemporary challenges. *Parashat Toldot*, for example, which retells the narratives of Yitzchak in Gerar, identified by Professor Yehuda Elitzur as Tel G'ama / Kibbutz Re'im on the border of Gaza, was read six weeks after the IDF entered Gaza to destroy Hamas. The Torah teaches us of Yitzchak's agricultural success, followed by the jealousy of the neighboring Pelishtim and their disputes concerning wells in the southern areas of Israel (Bereishit 26:13-33). The *milah mancha* (*leitwort*) of the story, the word consistently repeated throughout the narrative, is *be'er* (well), which appears eight times. The repetition of this word underscores the significance of the theme, and is further highlighted by the name of Eisav's father-in-law, Be'eri. This word echoes with the bitterness we feel today as we recall the horrors of the *kibbutz* which carries the same name.

After plugging the wells dug by Avraham with earth, the Pelishtim continued to harass Yitzchak even after he relocated and redug his father's wells. The Torah recounts how Yitzchak's servants dug new wells of fresh water ("Esek" and "Sitnah") only to watch them become contested and quarreled over by the Pelishtim. These wells were followed by three others, two of which were named "Rechovot" and "Shiva." Biblical commentators are bothered by the Torah's recording of the seemingly trivial incidents of these seven wells in such detail. Nachmanides (26:20), consistent with his thesis that the experiences of the Patriarchs are signposts of Jewish history, explains the story of the three wells at the

beginning of the passage as corresponding to the three Temples; the first two were destroyed due to contention (*Esek*) and baseless hatred (*Sitnah*), while the eternal one yet to be built - "Rechovot," meaning "expansive" - will come at a time when strife and enmity will be phenomena of the past.

Beyond its prophetic meaning, Yitzchak's redigging of his father's wells teaches us the importance of continuity in the Land despite hardship and oppression. Though less glamorous than discoveries of new sources of water, stories of revisiting the past and maintaining his father's legacy are recorded to highlight the message of perpetuation. The dominant presence of Avraham's name in Yitzchak's narrative and the many parallels between their stories underscore the preservation of the spiritual inheritance of Avraham through Yitzchak.

The similarities between their stories, however, also highlight their differences. As opposed to Avraham, who went down to Egypt due to famine, Yitzchak is commanded to remain in the Land. In contrast to Avraham, the nomadic shepherd, Yitzchak is the first to engage intensively in agriculture, planting and digging to secure himself in the Land. Yitzchak must first redig his father's wells and legacy and then search for new ones on his own. But even when he does so, he is only successful when he adopts his father's dynamic lesson - "וַיֵּצֵא אֶת אֲבִירָם מִשָּׁם" (12:8, 26:22). Avraham realized, after being promised the Land, that he must move away from his Canaanite neighbors and create a new culture of calling out in the name of Hashem. Only when Yitzchak does the same and "moves away" from his Gerarite neighbors can he successfully call out in the name of Hashem.

The message of the Torah is astounding for today's times. Yitzchak's "disengagement" from Gaza helped him recognize and attribute his success in the Land to Hashem. Only then did Avimelech come to establish a peace treaty as he did with Avraham, allowing co-existence. Once again, Yitzchak distinguished himself; he learned the lessons of failed treaties and, instead of a long-lasting treaty, sufficed with an oath of peace. The Torah adds that on that day, a seventh source of water was revealed, and Yitzchak renamed the city of his father's oath (*shevuah*) to Avimelech - Be'er Sheva - this time after the seventh well.

Yitzchak's wells indeed foretell the future - not only of the *Batei Mikdash*, but of our struggles in Gerar / Gaza and our ultimate success. Security, agricultural bounty, and potential peace with neighbors will be achieved through perpetuating our patriarchal legacies of calling out in the name of Hashem. Simultaneously, the Torah assures us that if we continue to plant and dig - not tunnels of terror, but wells of water - investing in the continuity of our Torah, our Land, and our nation, then our efforts will yield long-lasting fruit.



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Tel G'ama, near Kibbutz Re'im (PHOTO: MICHAEL CASHER)

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Which Beracha do you Make First?

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

In Parashat Eikev, the Torah speaks in praise of the Land of Israel and mentions the seven species: “A land of wheat and barley and vine and fig and pomegranate, a land of olive oil and honey” (Devarim 8:8). From this verse, our rabbis learned the order of priority in *berachot* for the seven species. This law refers to a situation in which the *berachot* are equal – when you are making the same *beracha* on all of the foods in front of you. However, there is another rule that precedes this law – when you must make different *berachot* on the foods in front of you.

Different berachot

This is known as the rule of *מג"ע א"ש* – *mezonot, gefen, eitz, adama, shehakol*. When the *berachot* are different, one must first make the *beracha* of *mezonot*, followed by *gefen, eitz, adama*, and *shehakol* (Shulchan Aruch 211).

This rule implies that the significance of the *beracha* is more important than the value of the fruit itself. The first rule in determining priority in *berachot* is the more important blessing. Only if the *berachot* are equal do we consider the value of the fruit or food, and determine the order of priority accordingly.

Rules of priority only apply if you want to eat both foods

Sometimes, a person only intends to eat a certain food now, even though there are other foods on the table as well. For example, a person wants to eat meat, but there is also a cake on the table for dessert. Although the *beracha* of *mezonot* comes before all other *berachot*, one may make the *beracha* of *shehakol* first (Rema 211:5).

A preference for another fruit over the seven species

The Mishnah in *Berachot* discusses whether you make a *beracha* on the seven species first or on a fruit that you prefer. “If there are several types of fruit in front of him, Rabbi Yehudah says, ‘If one of the seven species is among the fruits, make

the *beracha* on it.’ The sages say, ‘Make the *beracha* on the fruit which is *chaviv* (the fruit you prefer)’ (Berachot 40b).

Rav Hai Gaon, Rambam (*Berachot* 8:13) and other *rishonim* rule according to the opinion of the sages that one should recite the *beracha* on the fruit he prefers. However, Tosafot, Rosh, Rashba and most *rishonim* rule according to the opinion of Rabbi Yehudah, that one should make the *beracha* on the fruit of the seven species.

What is the underlying logic of the dispute? Making a *beracha* on the seven species is an objective determination, deriving from the importance of the fruits, while *chaviv* is a personal determination. According to the sages and Rambam, one’s personal preference is the determining factor, and if he desires a certain fruit, he should make the *beracha* on that fruit. However, according to Rabbi Yehudah and most *rishonim*, the importance of the Land of Israel is decisive. Therefore, one must always make the *beracha* on the seven species, because the Land of Israel gives them special importance.

The Shulchan Aruch simply cites the view of the majority of the *rishonim*, that the seven species take precedence. Later, the Shulchan Aruch cites Rambam’s position, that one’s personal preference is the determining factor. It follows that the main approach in *halacha* is to make the *beracha* on the seven species, regardless of one’s personal preference. While Taz states that one may follow Rambam’s view, the *Mishnah Berurah* writes that one should give precedence to the seven species, for that is the view of the majority of *rishonim*. However, if one follows the Rambam’s view, there are *poskim* who can be relied upon.

Precedence within the seven species

“A land of wheat and barley and vine and fig and pomegranate, a land of olive oil and honey” (Devarim 8:8). The Gemara explains that among the seven species themselves, the fruits mentioned closest to the words “אֶרֶץ, land,” take precedence

when making a *beracha*, and that those fruits that follow the first “land” in the verse take precedence over those fruits that follow the second “land” in the verse (*Berachot* 41b). Therefore, the order for *berachot* is: olives, dates, grapes, figs, pomegranates (*Shulchan Aruch* 211:4).

There is an easy way to remember the order of precedence within the seven species: the fewer pits there are, the greater their precedence when reciting *berachot*. Olives have one pit, dates have a split seed (two pits), grapes have several seeds (usually three or more), figs have many seeds, and pomegranates are made up entirely of seeds.

The primacy within the seven species also stems from man’s participation in creation. Wheat and barley are usually eaten as bread, and so the Torah gives special importance to bread. Dates, olives and grapes are fruits from which man creates important things like oil, honey, and wine, so they come before figs and pomegranates. G-d created a world that requires our investment and repair. Therefore, fruits that we must invest more effort in receive greater significance in *halacha*.



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Terebinth, Lycium, or Mandrake

Ruchama Alter

Ninety-two percent! That is the estimated percentage of Jews who were farmers in Mishnaic and Talmudic times. They, unlike us, would have immediately known which vegetation the title of this article is referring to.

Aside from their historical significance, Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot are tied to agricultural seasons. Pesach is *Chag HaAviv* – holiday of the early unripe wheat. Shavuot is described as *Chag HaBikkurim*, holiday of the first fruit and the celebration of a successful farming season. Sukkot is *Chag HaAsif*, the time of the gathering crops before winter sets in. Our yearly cycle revolves around agriculture, and our lunar calendar is designed to ensure the holidays occur during the proper agricultural season.

Our appreciation for farming has increased during the war as most farms are left without workers. When we volunteer to help farmers harvest or plant their crops we acquire a better understanding of the arduous work it requires. Understanding the agricultural milieu of our forefathers now has greater meaning for us. What were their main crops, and in what regions did these crops grow?

Since bread constituted our forefathers' primary food, growing wheat was most important. Wheat fields spread throughout the lowlands (*shfelah*) from the area south of Chevron and northward. South of that, where the semi-desert begins, barley was the dominant crop, as it can thrive in less nurturing conditions. Barley was considered inferior to wheat as demonstrated in the *halachic* position of Rabbi Yishmael, whose *beit midrash* was in Kfar Aziz, south of Chevron. He ruled that alimony paid to a wife is to consist of double the amount of barley to that of wheat (Mishnah, *Ketubot* 5:8).

Olives and grapes were extremely important fruits. When one blessed the farmer, these two crops were mentioned alongside

wheat (*Bava Metzia* 107). Olives provided much more than food. Olive oil was used as a preservative, cosmetic and a source of light. The *gefet*, leftover seeds and skin, created fuel that not only burned but produced steam that increased the heat. *Chazal* ruled that one may not place a pot in *gefet* even before Shabbat, for *gefet* may cause the food to cook (*Tosafot, Shabbat* 48). Grapes were important for their nutritional value, but primarily for the production of wine. Used for *kiddush* and *havdalah*, wine, water and beer were the only drinks available at the time.

Dates grown in the Jordan Valley were famous worldwide. Appreciated during the First Temple period, the Jews returning to Israel from Babylonia realized the potential of this fruit and renewed date farming on a larger scale than before. They found types that were easier to dry and which could be preserved locally or exported. This trend continued in Greek and Roman times. Theophrastus, a colleague of Aristotle, tells of 11cm dates that grew in Israel (as opposed to 4cm today), and Pliny the Elder (1st Century CE) comments on the sweet dates grown in this region.

Figs and pomegranates, the last of the seven species, were important but not to the same degree. Figs grew in outlying areas and were mostly dried for self use. Pomegranates were grown primarily near Shechem. Pomegranate seeds, like grapes, were preserved and could last several months, supplementing the daily diet far beyond their growing season.

The persimmon, the wonder fruit of the world, grew around Yericho and Ein Gedi. The sap of this tree was mixed with and preserved in olive oil as soon as it was collected to create an exquisite perfume that was worth its weight in gold and exported to nobility in Egypt and Greece. The revenue from the persimmon paid for Herod's enormous construction projects, and later made Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi one of

the richest men in Israel. For a long time, the identity of this tree and the perfume making process was a mystery. Today, some scientists and farmers believe they have rediscovered this treasure. You can visit a persimmon farm on the northern shore of the Dead Sea.

Though we often lump shepherding together with farming, sheep were considered a hazard in ancient times and were not permitted to enter lush farming areas. Their terrain was mostly the semi-desert in the Judean Hills and the area south of Chevron. These were dangerous border areas often invaded by nomads, and guards were needed to protect the herds. David provided this service to the flocks of Naval (Shmuel I, 25).

Though many of these details seem exotic to us, agriculture was our forefathers daily reality. *Chazal*, with their deep understanding of farming trends and needs, provide us with multiple insights into this world. The Mishnaic *Seder of Zera'im* could only be created in Israel, where the people and the land were in harmony.



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The Stewardship Paradigm

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks שליט"א

Few texts have had a deeper influence on Western civilisation than the first chapter of Genesis, with its momentous vision of the universe coming into being as the work of G-d. Set against the grandeur of the narrative, what stands out is the smallness yet uniqueness of humans, vulnerable but also undeniably set apart from all other beings.

The words of the Psalmist echo the wonder and humility that the primordial couple must have felt as they beheld the splendour of Creation:

“When I consider Your heavens,
The work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars,
Which You have set in place.
What is humanity that You are mindful of it,
The children of mortals that You care for them?
Yet You have made them little lower than the angels
And crowned them with glory and honour.”
(Psalm 8:3-5)

The honour and glory that crowns the human race is possession of the earth, which is granted as the culmination of G-d’s creative work: “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.” This notion is fortified in Psalm 115: “The heavens are the L-rd’s heavens, but the earth G-d has given to humanity.” While the Creation narrative clearly establishes G-d as Master of the Universe, it is the human being who is appointed master of the earth.

Grappling with the challenging notion of humans as divinely-ordained owners and subduers of the earth, we come face to face with the fundamental questions of our place in the universe and our responsibility for it. A literal interpretation suggests a world in which people cut down forests, slaughter animals, and dump waste into the seas at their leisure, much like we see in our world today.

On the other hand, as Rav Kook, first Chief Rabbi of Israel, writes, any intelligent person should know that Genesis 1:28, “does not mean the domination of a harsh ruler,

who afflicts his people and servants merely to fulfil his personal whim and desire, according to the crookedness of his heart.” Could G-d have really created such a complex and magnificent world solely for the caprice of humans?

Genesis chapter 1 is only one side of the complex biblical equation. It is balanced by the narrative of Genesis chapter 2, which features a second Creation narrative that focuses on humans and their place in the Garden of Eden. The first person is set in the Garden “to work it and take care of it.”

The two Hebrew verbs used here are significant. The first – *le’ovdah* – literally means “to serve it.” The human being is thus both master and servant of nature. The second – *leshomrah* – means “to guard it.” This is the verb used in later biblical legislation to describe the responsibilities of a guardian of property that belongs to someone else. This guardian must exercise vigilance while protecting, and is personally liable for losses that occur through negligence. This is perhaps the best short definition of humanity’s responsibility for nature as the Bible conceives it.

We do not own nature – “The earth is the L-rd’s and the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24:1). We are its stewards on behalf of G-d, who created and owns everything. As guardians of the earth, we are duty-bound to respect its integrity.

The mid-nineteenth century commentator Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch put this rather well in an original interpretation of Genesis 1:26, “Let us make the human in our image after our own likeness.” The passage has always been puzzling, since the hallmark of the Torah is the singularity of G-d. Who would G-d consult in the process of creating humans?

The “us,” says Hirsch, refers to the rest of creation. Before creating the human, a being destined to develop the capacity to alter and possibly endanger the natural world, G-d sought the approval of nature itself. This interpretation implies that we would use nature only in such a way that

is faithful to the purposes of its Creator and acknowledges nature's consenting to humanity's existence.

The mandate in Genesis 1 to exercise dominion is, therefore, not technical, but moral: humanity would control, within our means, the use of nature towards the service of G-d. Further, this mandate is limited by the requirement to serve and guard as seen in Genesis 2. The famous story of Genesis 2-3 - the eating of the forbidden fruit and Adam and Eve's subsequent exile from Eden - supports this point.

Not everything is permitted. There are limits to how we interact with the earth. The Torah has commandments regarding how to sow crops, how to collect eggs, and how to preserve trees in a time of war, just to name a few. When we do not treat creation according to G-d's will, disaster can follow.

We see this today as more and more cities sit under a cloud of smog and as mercury advisories are issued over large sectors of our fishing waters. Deforestation of the rainforests, largely a result of humanity's growing demand for timber and beef, has brought on irrevocable destruction of plant and animal species.

We can no longer ignore the massive negative impact that our global industrial society is having on the ecosystems of the earth. Our unbounded use of fossil fuels to fuel our energy-intensive lifestyles is causing global climate change. An international consensus of scientists predicts more intense and destructive storms, floods, and droughts resulting from these human-induced changes in the atmosphere. If we do not take action now, we risk the very survival of civilisation as we know it.

The Midrash says that G-d showed Adam around the Garden of Eden and said, "Look at My works! See how beautiful they are - how excellent! For your sake I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil and destroy My world; for if you do, there will be no one else to repair it."

Creation has its own dignity as G-d's masterpiece, and though we have the mandate to use it, we have none to destroy or despoil it. Rabbi Hirsch says that Shabbat was given to humanity "in order that he should not grow overbearing in his dominion" of G-d's creation. On the Day of Rest, "he must, as it were, return the borrowed world to its Divine Owner in order to realise that it is but lent to him."

Ingrained in the process of creation and central to the life of every Jew is a weekly reminder that our dominion of earth must be *l'shem shamayim* - in the name of Heaven.

The choice is ours. If we continue to live as though G-d had only commanded us to subdue the earth, we must be prepared for our children to inherit a seriously degraded planet, with the future of human civilisation at risk.

If we see our role as masters of the earth as a unique opportunity to truly serve and care for the planet, its creatures, and its resources, then we can reclaim our status as stewards of the world, and raise our new generations in an environment much closer to that of Eden.



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Tu BiShvat:

History, Horticulture, Minhag, and Halacha

Hechaver Yossi Aron OAM

“There are four dates known as Rosh Hashanah... on the first of Shevat is the new year for trees, these are the words of Beit Shammai; Beit Hillel says on the fifteenth” (Mishnah, Rosh Hashanah 1:1).

“Tu BiShvat higia, chag la’ilanot, Tu BiShvat has arrived, the festival of the trees” (a popular Hebrew folk song dating back to the pre-State of Israel era).

Those who received their earliest Jewish education in Australia in the late 1940s and 1950s might well recall the many Israeli (or should one say Palestinian, for such was their nationality on their passports) Hebrew-speaking kindergarten teachers whose Zionist background led them to treat Tu BiShvat as one of the most significant of our holidays. We all received a good grounding regarding *kibbutz* and *moshav* life and the agricultural elements of the fledgling Israeli economy – especially oranges. We sang Tu BiShvat songs and together with those teachers or *madrachim* of the Zionist youth movements, some visited the *hachshara* farm in outer suburban Melbourne. And of course we planted trees in school and *shul* grounds – few of which, sadly, survived. In fact it would be some years before Yom HaAtzmaut overtook Tu BiShvat as the primary holiday for celebrating Israel.

But of course, Tu BiShvat, as per the above cited Mishnah, is essentially for *halachic* purposes the new year for trees. Given that it falls in the midst of the Northern winter when deciduous fruit-bearing trees are bare, it serves as an appropriate date for the division of seasons for *halachic* purposes, particularly those relating to tithing and the law of *orla*, the prohibition of eating the produce of a fruit tree during the first three years of its growth.

In that context, in the Diaspora where such laws (other than *orla*) hardly applied, and where agriculture was no longer the basis of most people’s livelihoods, *minhag* came to supplant *halacha*. To preserve the date’s significance, the custom of eating fruit, and particularly the fruit of Israel, was adopted. Emphasis was placed on fruits of Israel like figs, grapes, pomegranates, olives and dates, and Jews made a point of making their Sukkot *etrog* into preserves that would be eaten on Tu BiShvat. Where fresh fruit was not available, dried figs, dates and raisins filled the gap. That is the origin of the custom widely adopted even today to eat dried fruits, even when fresh fruits are now available.

More recently, the significance of Tu BiShvat has expanded beyond its *halachic* implications and ceremonies associated with eating fruit, becoming the festival of nature lovers and environmentalists – whose philosophies also have a place in our religious thought and practice. Interestingly, even the sages of the Talmud saw a connection between Tu BiShvat and the annual rainfall cycle; referring to Tu BiShvat being set at the time when “*rov gishmei hashanah*, most of the rainfall of the year” (that in Israel falls only in winter) has actually occurred.

Tu BiShvat plays a critical role in another way as well. As indicated above, its origins relate to the agricultural *halachot* which comprise one sixth of the Mishnah – the Order of “*Zera’im*.” In modern times, we tend to forget the extent of the relationship between agriculture, the agricultural cycle and *halacha*. But this cycle is more significant than we realize.

In our time, we tend to emphasize the historical aspects of the *shalosh regalim*, the biblical pilgrimage festivals. But in fact the Torah primarily views these holidays through an agricultural lens. Pesach is

the time of the barley harvest and the *omer* ceremony, Shavuot is the time of the wheat harvest and the *shtei haLechem* (two loaves) ceremony, and Sukkot, the *Chag HaAsif*, is the festival of ingathering at summer’s end.

There is more to it than that. This year is a leap year, when we will have two months of Adar. Today, a leap year is part of the fixed calendric cycle, but it was originally up to the *Sanhedrin* to decide if a given year was to be a leap year. And if such was the case, Pesach was delayed by a month. Think about it! Pesach is the strictest festival in our calendar, with severe sanctions for consumption of *chametz*, to the extent that many people who are not careful about keeping *kashrut* during the rest of the year do so during Pesach. Yet the actual date of Pesach is at the mercy of the *Sanhedrin*. If they saw that as a result of the lunar/solar year discrepancy it was falling too close to winter and the barley would not be ripe in time for offering the *omer*, they delayed Pesach by a month! This decision would also determine when the other festivals would fall out in the coming year. Whether we realize it or not, agriculture is the key to our calendar and so many of our laws and customs.

The Mishnah cited above tells us that the actual date of the new year for trees is the subject of a debate between Hillel and Shammai. In this case – as in the case of the order of lighting Chanukah lights – the *halacha* follows the ruling of Beit Hillel. The ruling that the *halacha* almost always follows rulings of Beit Hillel has widespread ramifications that go far beyond the holiday of Tu BiShvat.

Despite the ancient significance of agriculture to Jewish life – a significance reflected in the first of the six sections of the Mishnah, dedicated to agricultural laws – these laws became less relevant

after the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*, when Jews primarily lived outside of the Land. Hence, later *halachic* codes including the Tur (c. 1300) and Shulchan Aruch (c. 1550) did not pay much attention to those laws (even the Babylonian Talmud generally does not address these laws).

However, even after the *Beit HaMikdash* was destroyed, many of these *halachot* continue to apply to produce grown in *Eretz Yisrael*. There has been a renaissance in the study and implementation of these laws since the return of Jews to our Land and the reestablishment of Jewish agriculture across our homeland. In that context, Tu BiShvat has gained new meaning. That aside, Sephardic, Kabbalistic and more recently *Chassidic* circles have developed elaborate ceremonies to accompany the consumption of fruits – especially those referred to in the Torah as the blessing of our Land – all of which are designed to emphasize the significance of our biblical homeland and its produce.

Here in Australia, we are in the midst of the summer, when stone fruits and many others are ripe for picking. That aside, modern preserving technology and ease of transport across the globe, let alone across different climatic regions within Australia, means that seasonal differences in the availability of fruit are nowhere near as pronounced as they once were. We are incredibly fortunate to have access to a variety of fresh fruit to celebrate Tu BiShvat.

But long before many of the varieties with which we are now familiar had even been thought of, availability of fruit at this time facilitated celebration of Tu BiShvat with a variety of fresh fruits. Years ago, I heard from a group of post-Holocaust refugees who happened to arrive here on Tu BiShvat how absolutely amazed they were to be greeted with a platter of so many varieties

of fresh fruit of which they could not even have dreamed of in Europe, where shortages and rationing were still widespread.

I cannot conclude however without reference to the impact of October 7. When Israel was first founded over 75 years ago, we celebrated our return to our Land by honoring Jewish agricultural labor as a crucial element of the new Jewish era. Over time, things changed and we became dependent on foreign workers and Arabs to provide the agricultural labor that had been the forte of the pioneering generation. Since the attack of October 7, this dynamic has been called into question, as it is simply too dangerous to rely on Arab workers coming in from Gaza and the West Bank. This has led to an existential crisis for Israeli agriculture. Currently, volunteers are stepping in to harvest crops that would otherwise rot and be lost. But this is only a temporary solution. As we celebrate Tu BiShvat, we may need to mark the beginning of a new era in Israeli agriculture by returning to the celebration of agriculture and the values that underpinned the establishment of our State.



Hechaver Yossi Aron OAM
is the religious affairs editor of
the Australian Jewish News.

Olim Giving Back to Israel



(PHOTO: OR BEN ZERIHAN)

Sarah Ertel

"My name is Sarah Ertel, originally from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I made *Aliyah* to Israel for a full Jewish life and am now a *bat sherut* at ADI Negev-Nahalat Eran through Bat-Ami.

I moved to Israel to immerse myself in a community with values of faith, G-d-consciousness, and living in the Jewish heartland. Believing that Jews belong in Israel, I made the move and chose *sherut leumi* to integrate into Israeli society and culture, devoting a year to national service. Learning Hebrew was important to me, and this experience helped me feel more Israeli.

I met Doron Almog, the founder of ADI Negev-Nahalat Eran, while learning Hebrew at Ulpan Kibbutz Sde Eliyahu. I was inspired by their work with special needs adults and children, and the therapeutic use of horses and animals. Despite challenges, like being close to Gaza on October 7th, I felt a strong resolve to continue their work there.

Being a lone *bat sherut* was intimidating yet exciting for me. Despite my limited Hebrew, I found everyone welcoming and kind, helping me feel comfortable. After joining Ori Lone Bnot Sherut - NBN, Karen from Nefesh B'Nefesh visited me, understanding my situation. Ori supports lone *bnot sherut* nationwide, offering connection and help, especially during challenging times."

Ariela Davis

"One of the first things we did when we made *Aliyah* 3.5 years ago was plant two fruit trees. We arrived in Israel jobless with four kids, with the world in the throes of the coronavirus and somehow those trees symbolized for us the promise that patience, time and hope could bring. New fruit trees can't be enjoyed for three plus years due to the *mitzvot* of *orla* and *neta revai* and I wondered to myself what our lives would look like when we could finally taste them.

Nearly 3.5 years later, we are on the verge of tasting those fruits. Looking back, I could not have imagined I would be so lucky to work in the field I love as the Menahetet of Ulpanat Orly, a growing school where I am blessed to work with teachers who have become friends and students whom I absolutely love. I also couldn't have imagined we would be in the midst of the worst war Israel has seen in 50 years. I couldn't have imagined that my rabbi husband would find himself running the American program of IDSF, an organization of retired Israeli officers and that despite having come to Israel too late to serve in the IDF himself, would be working day and night to support the war effort through the organization. I didn't expect my kids would integrate so well or that my parents would make *Aliyah* and move around the corner from us. I didn't anticipate the many adventures, the ups and downs we have had in the years since our *Aliyah*.

I look at those trees, whose fruit we will finally be able to taste on Tu BiShvat and dare to imagine the freshness and sweetness and the promise that time, patience and hope has brought and *b'ezrat Hashem* will continue to bring."

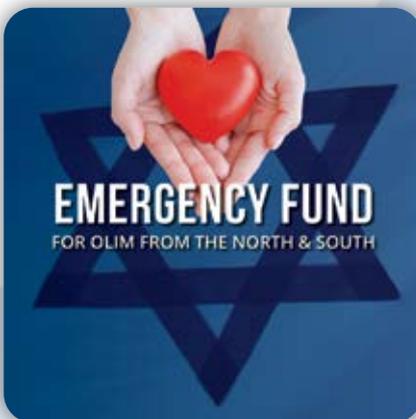


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The Torah of the Trees

Estee Fleischmann

Tu BiShvat was, quite literally, a dried-up holiday of my Diaspora youth. It meant apricots, apple rings and raisins - none of which I enjoyed, but symbolically were supposed to remind me that somewhere else in the world the thaw had begun and there was a blossoming of a fresh season. This changed for me when we were privileged, after patience and longing, to harvest the pomegranate tree in our Efrat garden in the fourth year after it was planted. With that, the new year of the trees came to represent a living *halachic* reality in a homeland we dreamed of for thousands of years of exile.

Tu BiShvat in the State of Israel is a day that recalls the deeply interconnected relationship between the Jewish people and the Land upon which we reside; our ability to nurture and grow the desert into paradise and the living fulfillment of the words of the prophets. In this unique year, it is profound to note that more Jews than ever have felt this connection. When in the course of history were this many Jewish hands involved in agricultural efforts? When have Jews of all ages and professions, of all nationalities and associations come together in great numbers to assist the planting, growing, harvesting and preparation of the fruits of the Land of Israel?

Though the holiday highlights our connection to the Land, it is particularly focused on the trees. What must we learn from the trees and how, particularly now, can trees inspire us? A series of verses from Tanach raise concerns that resonate with us deeply and can also provide answers that can give us clarity and strength during this difficult time.

Overwhelmed with pain and suffering, Iyov highlights the strengths bestowed upon the tree in comparison to man: “For there is hope for the tree. If it is cut down, it may still sprout again, and its shoots will not cease; if its root ages in the ground, and its stump dies in the dust, it will bud from the scent of water, and produce boughs like a new plant. But a man dies and wastes away; and when man has perished, where is he? As the water evaporates from a lake, and a river drains away and dries up, so a man lies down and does not get up” (14:7-12).

Iyov’s despair is palpable and familiar to us. Why do plants and trees renew, while man cannot? Man’s death is so final, yet arboreal growth and vegetation, less developed and sophisticated than humanity, have capabilities that elude us.

In two other books of Tanach we find the same comparison, but with a different emphasis. Both Yirmiyahu (17:7-8) and Tehillim (1:3), in nearly identical language, describe how man “shall be like a tree planted by the water, which casts its roots by the river, does not notice when it is hot, and has green leaves. It is a tree that is not worried in a year of drought and does not cease producing fruit.” In both cases, man is represented as a tree; strong, sustained by water, and able to offer lush green shade and continual fruit even under the most difficult of circumstances. Here, in contrast to Iyov, it is the image of man that represents hope, rather than the tree.

While Iyov is focused on the fleeting nature of man’s life, both Yirmiyahu and Tehillim see the expanse of eternity. Yirmiyahu relates to the believing man, and the author of Tehillim to the one who is connected to Torah. The metaphor is of the

human being who is strong, resilient, and unbreakable, who provides a canopy of support and the stability of sustenance to those around him. It speaks of the person who is defined by his deeds and not his days.

It is Yishayahu who expands this concept from the life of the individual to the realization of our national mission: “For the days of my people shall be as long as the days of the tree; my chosen ones shall outlive the work of their hands” (65:22). Our national identity is as strong, as lasting, and as powerful as the trees, but our legacy is through our deeds and our contributions to the world.

In this unique year, I pray that the holiday of Tu BiShvat takes on a greater significance for all Jews as we feel bonded to the Land and the people of Israel as we never have before. Through our labor of love to support farmers in need - either in person or from afar - the unity of the Jewish people will prevail. And now more than ever, that must be our legacy.



Estee Fleischmann

is Co-Director of Camp Stone with her husband Yakov. They made Aliyah to Efrat nine years ago with their five children from Cleveland, OH. They spend summers in Sugar Grove, PA and the rest of the time nurturing, supporting and growing the Camp Stone family.

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Israela

A New Path Home

An interview with Jaim Nadel



For 32 years Shalom Vach's Aliyah organization Alyah de Groupe has been supporting thousands of families making Aliyah from France. 3 years ago, his son Col. Golan Vach – who heads the IDF's famed National Rescue Unit of the Home Front Command – opened an extension organization Israela.

Israela, together with World Mizrachi, has taken the decades of experience in France and adapted it and offered it to families making Aliyah from South America. Israela, now in its third year of bringing groups of families on Aliyah – with the encouragement of the Ministry of Aliyah and Absorption, and partnering with the Jewish Agency and Nefesh b'Nefesh – is now expanding its support system into North America, England, South Africa and Australia, with the idea of having two groups of families making Aliyah this summer; an English-speaking group and a Spanish-speaking group.

World Mizrachi is proud to partner with Israela and to support family Aliyah with a formula that works – with a 98% success rate.

This interview with Jaim Nadel, one of the first families to make Aliyah with Israela, is a glimpse into the secret of our success.

Tell us about your life's journey.

My name is Jaim Nadel; I was born in Argentina in 1982 to a traditionalist family. When I was about *bar mitzvah* age, our entire family became *ba'alei teshuva*. I began studying in a Religious Zionist school and participated in Bnei Akiva activities. In Bnei Akiva, I served as a *chanich*, *madrich*, *rosh snif*, *rosh machanot*, and *mazkir*. It was a great and beautiful stage of life. Unfortunately, I couldn't undergo *hachshara* (agricultural training programs) or *Aliyah* to join the IDF. But the idea of *Aliyah* always lingered in my mind.

I pursued a degree in public relations, got married, and had three children. Today, my children are 16, 13, and 10 years old. In 2008, I worked in the youth department of the Madrid community, and later, we returned to Argentina. In 2018, our entire family moved to Costa Rica to work in the Jewish community there.

How did you decide to make Aliyah?

As the pandemic wound down around mid-2021, my wife and I began exploring options to leave Costa Rica. Returning to Argentina was not an option, and we considered Panama or Mexico, Spanish-speaking countries with communities dedicated to Torah and *mitzvot*. However, my wife uttered a decisive phrase: "I want to stop moving; I want to settle in a place and feel at home." That's when I replied, "That can only be in one place – in *Eretz Yisrael*." We calmly started the process with the Jewish Agency and began filling out the paperwork.

Was making Aliyah easy from your perspective?

By the end of 2021, we decided we needed to get to Israel by August 2022, so our children could start the school year on time. Filling out the Jewish Agency paperwork wasn't difficult, but it was tedious, with many details and back-and-forth communications until Pesach 2022. Although the date loomed in our minds, with less than five months left, we had no concrete plans. We didn't know where we wanted to live, we had many questions, and very few answers.

How did you get to know Israela?

When we were stuck during Chol Hamoed Pesach, an Israeli *shaliach* who taught in the school said to me, "Do you know about Israela? It helps with *Aliyah*, making it easier." I said, "Okay, give me the contact, and I'll call." I spoke to Rabbi Tzvi Elon, whom I knew from when he was a *shaliach* in Uruguay. He explained the project, the assistance provided, the advantages of going as a group, and so on. After that phone conversation, I called my wife and said, "My love, we have our *Aliyah* plan, and it's perfect," because that's how I felt. And with hindsight, I know we made the right choice.

How did everything unfold?

In a Zoom meeting, we met other families – all young families with school-age children, sharing a Latin culture and common goals, especially raising our children in a safe spiritual and physical environment. None of the group participants left their

country for economic reasons. Everyone was idealistic.

The group gathered in Argentina and met in person at a beautiful *shabbaton*. Unfortunately, we couldn't join them for Shabbat, but the positive energy was felt through Zoom and WhatsApp. We all shared the same doubts, fears, and anxieties, and being able to share and support each other was wonderful.

How did Israela help in the pre-Aliyah moments?

We had an issue with one of our documents for the Jewish Agency. I mentioned it to Israela's directors, and they helped us get it and resolve the Jewish Agency folder. They also facilitated the approval of our folder more quickly. We stuck to our original plan, and set an *Aliyah* date: August 16, 2022.

The people at Israela looked for a house for us, sending us photos and budgets for apartments. We chose one, and they handled everything with the apartment owner. We just arrived and signed the contract. We also discussed the apartment's furnishings, what we could afford, what we couldn't, what we wanted, and so on.

How was the arrival in Israel?

Baruch Hashem, we left Costa Rica on August 16, 2022, as planned. It's worth noting that making *Aliyah* with Israela doesn't void the benefits you receive from the Jewish Agency. We arrived at Ben-Gurion at 1am on August 18.

Despite the late hour, the airport was full of people who came to welcome us with songs, flags, and dancing. It was a dream-like experience, an emotion hard to describe in words. We arrived at our apartment, our new home. We had everything we needed; almost nothing was missing. It was like entering an Airbnb.

The story doesn't end there; it's actually just the beginning. Israela connected us with two Israeli families who helped us get settled throughout our first year. They helped us open a bank account, hire services, guided us on where to buy what we needed, invited us for Shabbat and holidays, and much more. It was incredible *chesed*.

What happened with the group of olim? The kehilla?

Everyone arrived within a few weeks. Thank G-d, we integrated wonderfully. We spent a lot of time together, especially on Shabbat. We are also part of a Religious Zionist *garin* with more than 60 families, so not only do we maintain our Latin culture, but we quickly learned Hebrew and all about Israeli culture. We shared everything – activities, schools, joys, and unfortunately, some sorrows. Our religious heterogeneity dissipated; we all grew spiritually and strengthened our connection with Hashem, Torah, and *mitzvot*. The atmosphere, the group, the *kehilla* – all contributed to



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Jaim and his family.

our growth. And we have also faced the war together, doing our part to help *Am Yisrael* overcome and, G-d willing, achieve victory.

Making group *Aliyah* with Israela was a very wise decision. It's worth learning about the program, asking questions, and removing all doubts. Israel is waiting for you! ■



MEET PROFESSOR NECHAMA LEIBOWITZ



September 3, 1905 – April 12, 1997 / 3 Elul 5665 – 6 Nisan 5757

Nechama Leibowitz was born in Russia and grew up in Germany; however, she and her brother, Yeshayahu, were given an education that focused on the Hebrew language. Nechama stayed in Germany until she received her doctorate, and then she sailed to the Land of Israel. Jerusalem had already heard of her, and, when she arrived, she immediately found a place as a Tanach teacher in the Mizrahi Women's Teacher Seminary in Jerusalem.

Over the years Nechama Leibowitz taught in many institutions and was the first woman to teach in *yeshivot*. Nechama created weekly *parsha* worksheets which she would send to her students who asked to learn Torah. In the worksheets, Nechama presented questions for study, ones that related to the Torah and its commentaries and each question indicated a level of difficulty. People from all over the country heard about Nechama's worksheets and thousands of people would sit on Saturday nights and try to answer the questions she had raised. On Sunday, they would send their answers back to her to see and correct. Nechama would make her comments, correct them, teaching and explaining to each sender. Nechama had some two thousand active students.



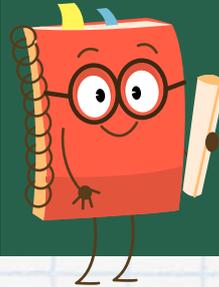
Adapted from *Iconic Jewish Women* by Dr. Aliza Lavie. Scan the QR code to purchase on Amazon.



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- Israel's top exports to other countries around the world are: olives, silan (date honey), za'atar spice, tahini and halva!
- Israel's national fruit is the sabra, aka the prickly pear! Be careful!
- Israel is home to 2,800 different plant species!

Test Your Knowledge



What is another name for Tu BiShvat?

What famous mountain in Jerusalem includes one of the Shivat HaMinim in its name?

How many trees were planted in Israel in the 21st century?

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

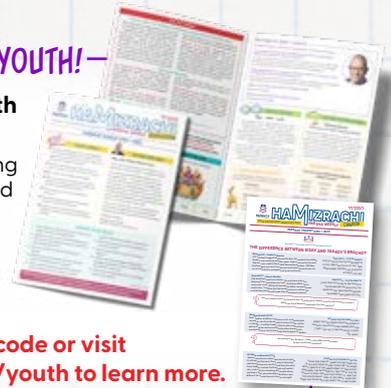
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TU BISHVAT MAD LIBS

Once upon a time in a _____ village, the townsfolk were gearing up for the _____ celebration of Tu BiShvat. The _____ decided to start a _____ tradition that year where every year they would _____ a _____ tree-planting event to add some greenery to their small _____ and each child who was 10 of age would _____ a tree and get the honor of naming it, a name that that tree would be called forever and ever.

As each child took their turns planting their _____, they declared the names proud and true. The first child _____ placed the tree in the freshly dug hole and declared her tree Sir _____ Appleton! The next child called his tree Madam Lily _____ . The third child called her tree Lord Keanu Leaves and so it went, until every single new tree was _____ and named. This new tradition became much beloved by all of the _____ and so, it continued year after year until the village was completely covered with so many named trees that the village was eventually renamed _____.



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