



ISRAEL EDITION
VOL 8 • NO 7
TU BISHVAT 5786

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Celebrating a New Chapter in Women's Learning

THE OPENING OF THE MIZRACHI TZEMACH DAVID WOMEN'S LEARNING HUB

PAGES 8-16



(PHOTO: KRIFKIND PHOTOGRAPHY)

This edition is dedicated in memory of all those tragically murdered in the devastating Bondi terror attack in Sydney, Australia. May their memory be a blessing.



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HaMIZRACHI

PUBLISHED BY WORLD MIZRACHI IN JERUSALEM

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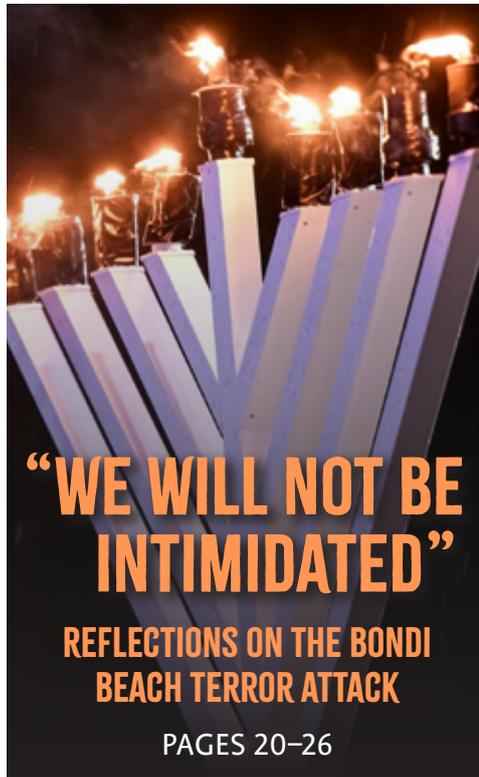
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CAMPUS CONNECTIONS

The student-run newsletter of Mizrachi Campus, bringing student voices, campus events, and real conversations to the forefront of college life – written by students and shaped by campus experience.

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The Banality of Evil

Judaism's Eternal Protest

Rabbi Doron Perez

What turns a father and son into cold-blooded killers? How do seemingly ordinary Australian citizens commit the worst act of terror in the country's history?

Sajid, 50, arrived in Australia from India on a student visa in 1998, eventually becoming a citizen and settling into Australian life. He had a degree in commerce, and his oldest child, Naveed, was a hardworking bricklayer. They were not foreign mercenaries or known terror operatives but ordinary law-abiding citizens from a Sydney suburb who blended into their community. Although Naveed had previously come to the attention of intelligence agencies years earlier, he was not considered a threat.

Yet father and son, Sajid and Naveed, meticulously spent months planning a mass murder of innocents. On that fateful day, on the first night of Chanukah, they calmly implemented their plan, shooting indiscriminately into a crowd of peaceful civilians at Sydney's iconic Bondi Beach for a full ten minutes, murdering fifteen people and wounding dozens more. From a young ten-year-old girl to elderly octogenarian grandparents, good innocent people and members of Sydney's Jewish community were mercilessly hunted and slaughtered. Their murderous shooting spree at the "Chanukah by the Sea" communal celebration attended by over a thousand people became a killing field.

Had Sajid and Naveed succeeded in fully implementing their diabolical plan, many more would have been murdered. They had prepared three bombs – two pipe

bombs and one "tennis ball bomb" – which they threw at the beginning of their attack and which thankfully did not detonate. Only by the grace of G-d were many more not killed and maimed.

'Ordinary' people, heartless murderers

This disturbing reality – that ordinary people can commit extraordinary violence – is not unique to Bondi. History is filled with tragic examples of individuals, communities, and nations that have become cold-blooded murderers in the name of an eliminationist ideology. Factors like radicalization, ideological fixation, personal grievances, or group influences have transformed otherwise normal people into violent killers.

The Holocaust, among the worst and most perverse acts of cold-blooded meticulous murder ever committed in the annals of human history, has afforded many scholars the opportunity to study the psychology and dynamics of evil. After all, millions of people and collaborators were needed to implement this catastrophe, which was committed over many years. It was in the aftermath of the Holocaust at the Nuremberg trials where the term 'crime against humanity' was first introduced as the most fundamental evil – indiscriminate mass murder of innocent civilians of all ages.

Hitler's willing executioners

Reserve Battalion 101 of the German military, and their actions, is one of the most researched units of World War II.

The members of this battalion were composed largely of middle-aged, working-class men from Hamburg, many of whom were not committed Nazis. Although they were not forced by an order to commit acts of murder of innocents and had the choice to return to Germany, only around 10% chose this path, while the vast majority perpetrated horrific murder.

Battalion 101 was a key perpetrator of the Final Solution in the Lublin district of Poland. Between July 1942 and November 1943, the unit was responsible for the direct shooting of approximately 38,000 Jews, the deportation of another 45,000 Jews to death camps, primarily Treblinka and Majdanek, and participation in the Aktion Erntefest (Operation Harvest Festival) massacre in November 1943, one of the single largest German killing actions against Jews in the entire war, which resulted in the murder of an estimated 42,000 Jewish prisoners in concentration camps over two days.

What made 'ordinary men' cold-blooded killers?

A major debate between leading professors of history, Christopher Browning and Daniel Goldhagen, over the actions of this battalion has become one of the most influential scholarly disputes about the role and motivations of "ordinary Germans" during the Holocaust.

Browning's interpretation, most fully developed in *Ordinary Men* (1992), emphasizes situational and social factors. He argues that these men became killers primarily due to a combination of obedience to authority, conformity, peer pressure,

and the brutalizing effects of war. For Browning, the reason that so few chose to opt out does not necessarily demonstrate fanaticism, but rather the power of group norms and the human tendency to conform under extreme circumstances. His conclusion is unsettling: given similar pressures, many “ordinary” people in other societies might behave in similar ways. Browning’s analysis is very similar to Hannah Arendt’s famous “banality of evil” explanation of Adolf Eichmann’s hideous actions.

Daniel Goldhagen sharply disagrees with this situational explanation in *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* (1996). He argues that Browning underestimates the ideological commitment of the perpetrators. According to Goldhagen, a deeply rooted, “eliminationist” antisemitism had long been embedded in German culture and predisposed ordinary Germans to view Jews as an existential threat requiring removal or destruction. In his view, members of Battalion 101 were not reluctant killers pushed by circumstance but willing executioners who understood and embraced the goals of genocide. Goldhagen argues that ideology, not mere obedience, was the driving force. He points to the exceptional cruelty many perpetrators displayed, the fact that few refused to participate in genocide, and the initiative these men often took in carrying out their murderous tasks.

This debate matters far beyond one battalion. Browning’s conclusion is deeply unsettling: under similar circumstances, ordinary people in any society might become killers. Goldhagen disagrees fundamentally. He insists that German culture itself bore unique responsibility – a distinctive, deeply embedded antisemitism that had long prepared Germans to embrace Nazi genocide.

Both scholars help us understand how ordinary people become mass murderers. Throughout history – whether Nazi Germany, Stalin’s Soviet Union, Mao’s China, or today’s Hamas and the Sydney terrorists – we see the same deadly pattern. Rabbi Sacks called it “altruistic evil”: an ideology, religious or secular, that dehumanizes certain people and justifies their murder. Once society accepts this ideology, institutions embrace it, peer pressure enforces it, and obedience to authority spreads it. Yet none of this – not ideology, not social pressure, not orders from above – can ever excuse individual guilt. Every person who chooses to murder bears full moral responsibility

for that choice. It remains the worst crime against humanity.

Judaism’s protest

The Torah, from its very inception, has a unique perspective on the human capacity for evil. While acknowledging the latent potential evil that can be committed by ordinary human beings, we are at the same time held to the highest expectations of moral accountability. Judaism is simultaneously an admission of our potential for evil and a perennial protest against it.

The first child to be born to a human mother – Kayin – murdered his younger brother Hevel in cold blood. Although G-d warned Kayin that “sin is crouching at the door” should he continue feeling dejected and disempowered by the dismissal of his sacrifice, he was unable to overcome his dejection and committed a horrific murder. His murder of Hevel becomes the Torah’s first indictment of everyday moral negligence: the refusal to take responsibility for one’s emotions and the humanity of others. Kayin is banished and cursed until the end of days for the despicable murder of his innocent brother.

The story of Noach widens the protest from the individual to the collective – indeed to all of humanity. The generation of the flood became so morally depraved with violence, robbery, and corruption, until all of human society lost its very moral *raison d’être*. G-d would not tolerate such irreversible moral rot, even if it meant the destruction of all of humanity:

“G-d saw that the wickedness of Man was great upon the Earth, and that every desire of the thoughts of his heart was but evil always. And G-d reconsidered having made man on earth and had heartfelt sadness. And G-d said ‘I will blot out man from the face of the earth...’” (*Bereishit* 6:5-7).

Only Noach’s righteousness saved him and his family to rebuild human society and give it a second chance.

Humanity would once again descend into moral madness with the totalitarian regime of the Tower of Babel and its rebellion against G-d. After the unraveling of the rebellion and the dispersion of all nations, Avraham, along with Sarah, would be charged to build a people and society of moral light and spiritual blessing, of justice and righteousness, for all humanity.

Judaism does not locate evil in mythic forces beyond human control. Instead,

it insists that moral catastrophe arises from everyday human choices, and that responsibility cannot be escaped by claiming ignorance, conformity, or fate. These stories collectively argue that evil is neither extraordinary nor inevitable, and that human beings are always accountable for resisting it.

Judaism as a whole emerges from these narratives as a sustained ethical protest against the banality of evil. Injustice and “altruistic evil” is the very scourge at the heart of the human condition, which the G-d of Israel demands to wrestle with and overcome. Equality and justice before the law, the infinite value of every human life created in G-d’s image, personal responsibility and moral accountability are inextricably linked to the Jewish vision for humanity.

The Israel Test

Today, the State of Israel, as the only Jewish country in the world, aspires to build a society based on the finest Jewish values. Israel represents collective Jewish life in the international community.

George Gilder, economist and Reagan Administration advisor, argues in *The Israel Test* (2012) that attitudes toward Israel reveal something fundamental about nations. Support for Israel signals a commitment to liberal civilization. Hostility toward Israel exposes a tolerance for nihilistic violence. How the world judges Israel, Gilder contends, shows which side nations truly stand on: ‘altruistic good’ or ‘altruistic evil.’ Just as the Torah demands we choose between moral accountability and the banality of evil, the world must choose how it responds to Israel – and to the Jewish people.

That choice reveals everything.



Rabbi Doron Perez
is the Executive Chairman
of World Mizrahi.



Making a Beracha when Smelling a Tea Bag or Coffee

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Many tea bags and coffee powders come with strong and pleasant aromas. This raises a practical question: when we smell a tea bag or coffee powder, must we recite the *beracha* over *besamim*? And if so, which one?

To begin with, the *beracha* of *besamim* is recited only on something intended to be smelled. The *Gemara* explains that if an item is not made for smelling, no *beracha* is said (*Berachot* 53a). For this reason, one does not make a *beracha* over *mugmar* used to scent clothing, since its purpose is to perfume garments, not to be enjoyed as a fragrance (*Shulchan Aruch* 217:3). The same applies to scented laundry detergents.

This principle leads to a discussion about spices used mainly for cooking. Their primary function is flavor, not scent. According to *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, such spices are not considered “made for smelling,” so no *beracha* is recited over them when merely smelled (*Seder Birkat Hanehenin* 11:9). Others, however, argue that although a spice is usually not designated for smelling, the moment a person intentionally takes it for fragrance, it gains the status of something meant for that purpose. The *Mishnah Berurah* (297:10) and many later authorities rule accordingly.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (216:2) states that if someone takes food with the intention to smell it, he recites the *beracha* “*haNoten re’ach tov b’peiros*” (based on *Berachot* 43b). This leads to a debate regarding cloves. *Shulchan Aruch* and the *Taz* (297:4) classify cloves as something used for food (even if only as a flavoring), and therefore suitable for the *beracha* “*haNoten re’ach tov b’peiros*”. The *Levush* (216:3) disagrees, arguing that something never eaten on its own cannot be called a “fruit,” and therefore that *beracha* does not apply. Indeed, *Shulchan Aruch* elsewhere (202:16) rules that someone who eats a clove by itself makes no *beracha* at all.

For this reason, according to the *Levush*, the correct *beracha* over cloves is “*borei*

atzei vesamim,” a ruling followed by many Sephardim (*Chazon Ovadia, Berachot*, p. 309). Other authorities, such as the *Eliyah Rabbah* and many Ashkenazi *poskim*, conclude that due to the dispute, one should use the more general blessing “*borei minei vesamim*.” This is also the tendency of the *Mishnah Berurah* (297:16). Several *Rishonim* likewise imply that cloves should receive “*borei minei vesamim*” as the primary *beracha*, because “*borei atzei vesamim*” is reserved for trees planted for fragrance.

Cinnamon follows a similar pattern: Sephardic custom is “*borei atzei vesamim*” (*Yalkut Yosef* 216:4), while Ashkenazim generally recite “*borei minei vesamim*” (*Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Seder Birkat Hanehenin* 11:3).

This brings us to tea bags and coffee powder. Tea leaves in a bag are not eaten at all. Consequently, the proper blessing on their fragrance is “*borei minei vesamim*” for Ashkenazim, and “*borei atzei vesamim*” or “*borei isvei vesamim*” for Sephardim, with “*borei minei vesamim*” used in cases of uncertainty.

Coffee powder presents a more complex case. The *Mishnah Berurah* (216:16) notes that since the powder itself was eaten in his time (often mixed with sugar), its fragrance would require the *beracha* “*haNoten re’ach tov b’peiros*.” Today, however, coffee powder is not eaten by itself in any form. It is used just like tea leaves – as a base for a drink. For this reason, its blessing aligns with that of tea: “*borei minei vesamim*” for Ashkenazim and “*borei atzei vesamim*” for Sephardim. These may also be used for the *besamim* of *Havdalah*, though it is preferable to designate special spices for that purpose (*Mishnah Berurah* 297:10).

While one may make a *beracha* over the smell of coffee powder, the aroma of the drink itself requires separate consideration. Someone who is drinking coffee does not make a *beracha* over its smell, since he is taking it for drinking, not for fragrance (*Tosafot, Berachot* 43b; *Rosh, Berachot* 8:3; *Shulchan Aruch* 216:2). “*Borei*

minei vesamim” is recited only when the item is taken for the purpose of smelling.

What if a person intends both to smell and to drink? The *Rosh* holds that a *beracha* is recited (*ibid.*). The *Vilna Gaon* argues that because the beverage is primarily meant for consumption, no *beracha* is said (*Biur HaGra* to 216). The *Biur Halacha* evaluates these positions and concludes that if someone genuinely takes a food or drink both to smell and to consume, he should recite the *beracha*. Even the *Gra*, he notes, would agree that if one takes it specifically to smell first, a *beracha* is appropriate, even if it will be consumed immediately afterward. The *Chazon Ish* (*Orach Chaim* 35:5), however, rules that since coffee is fundamentally a beverage, one should not recite a *beracha* on its aroma under any circumstances, and many follow his view.

Practically, someone drinking coffee and incidentally smelling it does not recite any *beracha*. If he intentionally smells the coffee, Sephardim would recite “*borei atzei vesamim*” or “*borei isvei vesamim*,” depending on the plant source, and Ashkenazim would say “*borei minei vesamim*.” Still, many follow the *Chazon Ish* and refrain from making a *beracha* altogether.



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

is the Nasi of World Mizrahi.

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

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A New Chapter in Women's Learning

Rabbi Aron White

For decades, Beit Meir at 54 King George Street in central Jerusalem has served as the headquarters of World Mizrahi. Over the summer of 2025, the building underwent a transformation, becoming not only the organizational headquarters but also a bustling center of women's Torah learning with the founding of the Mizrahi Tzemach David Women's Learning Hub.

"I have been part of many *batei midrash*, but what makes this unique is how it bridges different age groups," said Rabbanit Shani Taragin, *Rosh Beit Midrash* of the Mizrahi Tzemach David Hub. "It truly is a hub of learning, with programs for women straight after seminary, during college, and post-college." The *beit midrash* operates in partnership with the Tzemach David Foundation.

The Bnot Sherut Program

The newest and largest program in the Hub is the Bnot Sherut Program, run in conjunction with Nefesh B'Nefesh. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of young women staying in Israel after seminary to perform national service through Sherut Leumi, working for non-profit organizations, schools, and charitable institutions throughout the country.

"Young women often faced a choice between contributing to their nation through service or continuing in Torah learning," explains Rabbanit Taragin. "Those who prioritized Torah would often return to Stern College because they didn't see a supportive and nurturing Torah environment available during Sherut Leumi. This program enables students to contribute to Israel while being supported in a Torah atmosphere. In addition, Sherut Leumi can be a lonely experience for a young *olah* navigating her first steps in Israeli society. This program provides community as well."

Over 100 women participate in the program, living in an apartment building in central Jerusalem that was renovated by Nefesh B'Nefesh. Sunday evenings feature a class by a female teacher in the on-site *beit midrash*, and Tuesday evenings include dinner and learning at the Mizrahi Tzemach David *beit midrash*. The Tuesday program features premier guest speakers, including Rabbi J.J. Schacter, Mrs. Jen Airley,

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and Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz, among many others. Already, hundreds of applications have been received for the 2026-27 academic year.

“Our *Bnot Sherut Bodedot* cross the street to the Mizrahi *beit midrash* for amazing learning opportunities,” said Dafna Emmer, Director of the Nefesh B’Nefesh Bnot Sherut Bodedot Program. “Each week, talented and diverse educators create a warm and welcoming environment that nurtures the girls’ personal and spiritual growth while deepening their connection to Torah and strengthening them as they dedicate themselves to serving our country.”

Lapidot: Advanced Learning for Post-College Women

A second program at the Hub is Lapidot, a World Mizrahi initiative that has been running for several years. This advanced learning program targets post-college women, with a focus on those aspiring to become educators. The program’s high-level of learning attracts women from throughout Jerusalem who join for individual *shiurim* from the rigorous *Tanach* and *halacha* curriculum.

“From being in Lapidot this year, I’ve experienced tremendous spiritual and religious growth,” says Chevi Charlap, who made *Aliyah* from Woodmere, New York, two-and-a-half years ago. “The advanced *beit midrash* environment has challenged me to think more deeply, engage more seriously with learning, and take greater ownership of my *avodat Hashem*. Being surrounded by peers and mentors who are passionate and committed has pushed me to develop consistency and confidence in my learning.”

Yeshiva University in Israel

Yeshiva University in Israel forms the third component of the Hub. Its students live in central Jerusalem in the NBN buildings, with their *beit midrash* program taking place in the Mizrahi Tzemach David Women’s Learning Hub.

“Yeshiva University hosts its Women’s Undergraduate Torah Studies Program in the YUI-Mizrahi *beit midrash*,” said Barbara Vidomlanski, Director of Torah Studies. “Three mornings a week, the *beit midrash* and classrooms resonate with the vibrant pursuit of Torah, where intense study and shared wisdom nurture the spirit and strengthen the mind, forging a community dedicated to learning and growth. The learning is modeled in a traditional manner, where *chavrutot* learn under the guidance of experienced masters of Torah, including Rabbanit Shani Taragin, our *Rosh Beit Midrash*, followed by *shiurim* and group discussions to process the learning and delve deeper into modern applications for women in the 21st century.” Women also engage in directed independent study, each learning a topic under Mrs. Vidomlanski’s guidance.

A synergistic vision

For Rabbanit Taragin, one of the most exciting aspects of the Hub is how the programs overlap and benefit one another. “There are students from one program who then go on to study in another. All the students gain the benefits of being in a dynamic *beit midrash* environment, surrounded by other learners.”

Rabbi Danny Mirvis, CEO of World Mizrahi, described the program’s long-term vision: “We want the World Mizrahi headquarters in Jerusalem to be a thriving home of women’s scholarship and leadership. We are excited to be working with many fantastic partners and hope that our *beit midrash* will produce a new generation of leaders like Rabbanit Shani Taragin who will go on to transform the Jewish world.”



Rabbi Aron White is the Managing Editor of HaMizrahi magazine. He lives in Carmay HaNadiv, Kiryat Malachi, and serves as the Rabbi of Beit Knesset Tzameret Arnona in Yerushalayim.



(PHOTO: YONNA BRODER)



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JEWES with VIEWS

We asked
five women
who study in
the Mizrahi
Tzemach David
Women's
Learning Hub:
Who is your
female Torah
role model?



Avital Akselrud

When I think about *Tanach* personalities and role models, Chana stands out to me. She wasn't a leader in the loud or public sense, yet I believe she was one of the most influential women in *Tanach*. Her strength lies not in visibility, but in depth, intention, and quiet impact.

Chana didn't lead armies or crowds, but her relationship with prayer reshaped how we *daven* to this day. Through her words and actions, she modeled what authentic prayer looks like: personal, honest, and deeply intentional. In this way, Chana was an ideal teacher. She taught not through speeches, but through lived example. She showed us how to pray, how to advocate for oneself, and how to trust your inner voice even when others misunderstand you.

Chana's story is also one of struggle and balance. She waits, she hopes, she prays, and when her prayers are answered, she faces difficult, values-driven decisions. She reminds us that faith does not remove challenges but gives us the strength to navigate them with clarity and purpose.

For me, Chana represents leadership through integrity and education through example, lessons I strive to carry with me every day.

Avital Akselrud is an educator and kallah teacher with a background in teaching English and financial education. She is currently part of the Shalhevet program – of the Religious Zionist Shlichut Center founded by Mizrahi – as she prepares to go on shlichut with her husband and daughter.



Shira Reiss

Undoubtedly, my mother, *a"h*, Shifra Yehudis Orlan, who passed away a few years ago, is my role model. She was, and remains, my teacher and constant inspiration. I often think about how my mother *a"h* would act in certain situations.

My mother was a true Torah role model – not only through her knowledge, but through how she lived Torah values. Hashem was palpably at the center of our home; we grew up singing “*Baruch shem kevod malchuto*” (a song about praising Hashem). She lived with deep *achrayut*, often quoting sayings such as “*קְרִיבֵינָא דְאִיגְרָתָא*” *קרִיבֵינָא דְאִיגְרָתָא*, a phrase from the Talmud (*Berachot* 6b) that means, “A person who says something should be done must be the one to do it.” This teaching reminded us that when something needs to be done, we should take responsibility and act, rather than waiting for others to do it.

She was very knowledgeable in Torah and often had a *sefer* open. She encouraged me to learn *Tanach*, be open to learning new things, and think independently. She remains my *Imi Morati*, whose voice and teachings accompany me every day.

May this be an *aliyah* for her *neshama*, whose *yahrzeit* is this month. I can imagine her knowing smile at the fact that this comes out around her *yahrzeit* and saying something comforting along the lines of, “You see how Hashem takes care of us.”

Shira Reiss is a Data and Analytics Engineer, currently learning at Mizrahi Lapidot. She recently made Aliyah with her family and is living in Bayit Vegan, in Yeshiva University's Gruss campus.



Hadassah Bensoussan

When asked who my female Torah role model is, I immediately thought of Rabbanit Shani Taragin. I've been fortunate to learn from her for the past two years at YU Israel, and she has had a big impact on the way I approach both Torah learning and my life in general. Rabbanit Shani doesn't just teach *shiurim* with strong sources and depth, but shows us what it looks like to actually live a Torah-centered life.

Through the way she teaches and interacts with students, she constantly emphasizes the importance of *middot*, making time for Torah learning, and holding yourself to high standards. What stands out to me most is that she lives what she teaches. Whether through her dedication to learning, the way she speaks to people, or the expectations she sets for her students, she serves as a real example to look up to.

Learning from Rabbanit Shani has pushed me to be more intentional about my goals and the kind of person I want to become. She inspires me to take my learning seriously while also remembering that Torah should guide every part of my life, not just what happens in the *beit midrash*.

Hadassah (Strauss) Bensoussan grew up in Toronto, Canada, being very involved in Bnei Akiva. She recently made Aliyah in spring 2025 and now lives in Jerusalem. For the past year-and-a-half, she has been learning in the YU Israel x Tel Aviv University program.



Aliza Tokayer

To identify my female Torah role model, I turn to Queen Esther. One of my favorite verses in *Tanach* is Mordechai's charge to Esther in the *Megillah*: "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's house will perish..." (*Esther* 4:14).

This verse highlights a profound truth: salvation for the Jewish people is not dependent on one individual, but individuals have unique opportunities to lead. Esther's greatness lay in her unwavering dedication to her people and her wisdom to recognize when it was her moment to step up.

My role model is also an Esther – my mother, Esther Tokayer. She has built a Jewish home filled with a love for Torah, tradition, and the Jewish people. Through her roles as teacher, principal, and *Rebbetzin*, she has inspired countless individuals with her passion for Israel, Torah, and responsibility for *Am Yisrael*. Many of her students have made *Aliyah* or pursued Torah leadership because of her influence.

Even as others might slow down, my mother continues to serve her community, recently helping open *Yeshivat Barkai* to meet its growing needs. She remains a pillar in both the Sephardi and Ashkenazi communities of Brooklyn, offering guidance and support to anyone who seeks it.

Through her actions, my mother demonstrates what it means to be a true Torah role model: to remain engaged in the Jewish people's history, to know when to lead, and to give of oneself for the future of *Am Yisrael*.

Aliza Tokayer originally hails from Brooklyn, New York. She attended Stella K Abraham High School for Girls and spent her gap year in seminary at Michlelet Mevaseret Yerushalayim. She is currently serving as a lone Bat Sherut in Alyn Hospital in Jerusalem.



Ellie Haberman

My female Torah role model is *Rachel Imeinu*. Unlike public leaders such as Devorah or Miriam, Rachel's greatness lies in her quiet empathy, moral courage, and inner strength – reminding us that greatness does not always come with visibility.

One of Rachel's most defining moments is her extraordinary act of selflessness. The *Gemara* in *Megillah* teaches that she gave the *simanim* to her sister Leah on their wedding night in order to spare her humiliation. In doing so, Rachel chose compassion over her own love and destiny. This level of empathy is deeply inspiring. Rachel, who waited seven years for the life she believed was meant for her, teaches us to look beyond our own desires and expectations and to meet others with acceptance, understanding, and freedom from judgment.

Rachel's legacy continues beyond her lifetime. She was buried "on the way to Beit Lechem" so that she could stand with her children as they passed into exile. *Kever Rachel* remains a powerful reminder that no Jew walks alone – especially in moments of longing or pain. It is a place where Jews of all backgrounds come together to pour out their hearts to Hashem through the merit of our "Mama Rachel."

Ellie Haberman was born and raised in California and now lives in Jerusalem with her husband, Alex. After working at an Israeli software startup, she now has the privilege of spending her days studying Tanach, Halacha, and Machshava through the Mizrahi Lapidot program.



BEYOND THE GAP YEAR

How One Foundation is Revolutionizing Student Aliyah

The Tzemach David Foundation has emerged as a leading force in strengthening the connection between American Jewish students and Israel, particularly in the wake of October 7th. From revolutionizing educational pathways to creating supportive communities for gap year students serving in the IDF and Sherut Leumi, the foundation is helping young Jews see their future in the Jewish state. Rabbi Aron White spoke with Tamar Krieger Kalev, Executive Director of Tzemach David, to learn more about their work and vision.

Thank you for speaking with us, Tamar. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

I am Executive Director of the Tzemach David Foundation. For many years, I was a teacher and principal in America. Before this foundation started three years ago, I was an educational consultant for schools in Europe. I worked with many different Jewish day schools in Budapest, Copenhagen, Tallinn, Stockholm, trying to enrich their Jewish studies curriculum.

In 2019, David Magerman, who had a foundation in the States called the Kohelet Foundation, closed it down to open something new in Israel. He said, “why are we making life easier for people to live in America when we should be making life easier for people to see their future here in Israel?”

Our initial focus was to look closely at education here in Israel, specifically in the

Chemed (Chinuch Mamlachti Dati/National Religious) education system. We saw that many people don't make Aliyah – or use it as an excuse not to make Aliyah – because of concerns about the education system. Our question was: how can we revolutionize and change the education system so that it's good for olim and, by extension, good for all students in Israel? We began with a few months of research into that before the war brought about some changes.

How did October 7th change the focus of the Tzemach David Foundation?

Already before the war, David, who is a graduate and alumnus of the University of Pennsylvania, pulled his funding from the university as it was showing its values pretty quickly, and he felt this wasn't aligned with where he is or what he believes in. He redirected that gift to four

universities and one college here in Israel: Tel Aviv University, Bar-Ilan University, the Technion, Ben Gurion University, and the Jerusalem College of Technology.

After October 7th, we also saw a real shift in the students themselves. The gap year students who have been here feel a sense of mission and connection to Israel unlike anything they've experienced before. In a world often dominated by individualism and social media, this crisis opened their eyes: there are people their age fighting for our country, demonstrating courage and sacrifice they never imagined.

For those staying in Israel, we wanted to provide a sense of community on campus, which is why we're deeply involved in JLIC here in Israel – also a Mizrachi project. We want these students to feel they have a home while on campus as they transition to life in Israel.



How did the new Mizrachi Tzemach David Women's Learning Hub come to be?

As we started working with gap year students in Israel, we saw that army and national service is a ticket into becoming part of Israeli society and creating your network in Israel. However, it's a transition, and providing a sense of community during this time is very important. We want to create those opportunities.

When Mizrachi approached us about all these gap year students and this huge influx – in the past two years, we've seen an influx of both boys who are drafting into the army and girls into Sherut Leumi – we recognized that we need to provide a *Torani* environment for them to feel comfortable. They need to know that their kitchen is a kosher kitchen. We're taking off the training wheels slowly for them to see their destination here in Israel.

From this was born the idea of having a learning program for Sherut Leumi girls. Through our relationship with Mizrachi, we wanted to create this learning hub for them to have a home and a place to learn, with the support of Rabbanit Shani Taragin and Rabbi Hillel Van-Leeuwen.

What we thought was important is that this learning hub is not just a place where people check in and check out, but a place of continuous learning. The other learning programs that exist in this space ensure it's not just an empty hall that is visited once or twice a week, but rather an infrastructure where students feel like they're part of something larger than themselves. Being part of this learning hub at the World Mizrachi headquarters really provides that.



"Real integration happens when students serve – through the army or Sherut Leumi – because that's where community is built and a future in Israel begins. We are excited to be partnering with Mizrachi to help students form a strong community and to see themselves building a real future here in Israel."

David Magerman
Founder, Tzemach David Foundation

Is the focus primarily on students from North America, or is it also global?

Our main focus as a foundation is America, but what we do for American students is open to all. When we create a JLIC community or this learning hub, it serves students from all over the world!

What other programs is Tzemach David involved with at the moment?

We're creating college guidance missions to come here to Israel. We've done two missions already, and we're hoping for this coming year – in January and June – to do two more missions for college guidance counselors to see Israel firsthand. This is for the guidance counselors in high schools in America so that they can see which students make sense for Israeli universities. Instead of it being a theoretical experience, let it be a

very practical experience. For those guiding students in America, nothing can beat them seeing firsthand the wealth of university programs available in Israel.

The second initiative is a campaign we launched in October, geared towards 13- to 18-year-old students and their parents, to showcase why Israel is such a wonderful destination for higher education. It's not a scare campaign – it's a positive message showing that Israel can be an excellent choice for students, especially given what's happening on American campuses and the growing safety concerns there. The reality is that campuses here might actually be safer than they are in America. I think that's a game changer, along with the fact that university in Israel is much more affordable. Our goal with this campaign is for Israel to become a natural part of families' conversation when considering college options. ■



צמח דוד
Tzemach David
Educational Foundation

David Magerman, founder of the Tzemach David Foundation, is a leading philanthropist committed to strengthening Israel through education. He has supported transitional programs at several Israeli universities that help American students attend university in Israel and successfully integrate into Israeli society. Through Tzemach David, he has advanced K-12 education reform in Israel, fostered deeper engagement between American students and Israeli higher education, and backed key national initiatives in education and security – reflecting a deep commitment to Israel's future and Jewish continuity.

Before focusing his philanthropy on Israel, David founded the Kohelet Foundation in the U.S., which played a transformative role in Jewish day school education through initiatives like the Kohelet Fellowships, the Kohelet Prize, and the Philadelphia Jewish Day School Collaborative.

Professionally, David was a pioneering computer scientist at Renaissance Technologies, where he helped build the firm's equities trading group. He is now Managing Partner at Differential Ventures, investing in data-driven innovation.

Tamar Krieger Kalev is the Executive Director of the Tzemach David Foundation, where she leads initiatives to transform Israeli education and expand pathways for olim in both K-12 and higher education. An international educational consultant, curriculum designer, and leadership trainer, Tamar has extensive experience creating innovative learning environments, empowering teams, and guiding strategic educational initiatives that promote excellence, inclusion, and long-term opportunities for real growth and change.

From TikTok to Torah: Golda Daphna's Journey to Lapidot

Golda Daphna, a popular social media influencer, is among the new students at Mizrahi Lapidot. Rabbi Aron White spoke with her about her journey to Israel and joining the Mizrahi Lapidot program at the Mizrahi Tzemach David Women's Learning Hub.

Can you tell us about your background before moving to Israel?

I grew up in a family of *ba'alei teshuva* through Chabad and attended Beis Ya'akov, followed by SKA high school. After studying at MMY for a year, I went on to Columbia to study engineering, with plans to pursue medical school. During a summer trip to Israel, something clicked – I realized I didn't want to spend the next decade in America. So, I made the decision to make *Aliyah*. I arrived at the end of September 2023, and then the war broke out just a week later.

How did the war affect your plans?

The war had a profound impact on me. I found myself attending many funerals and *shivas*, and it made me realize that academic credentials didn't feel like the most important thing at that moment. So, I decided to join the IDF. As a biomedical engineer, I was assigned to a unit that provided medical equipment and whole blood units to the frontlines. I served throughout the war and just finished my service a few weeks ago.

How did you come to the Mizrahi Lapidot program?

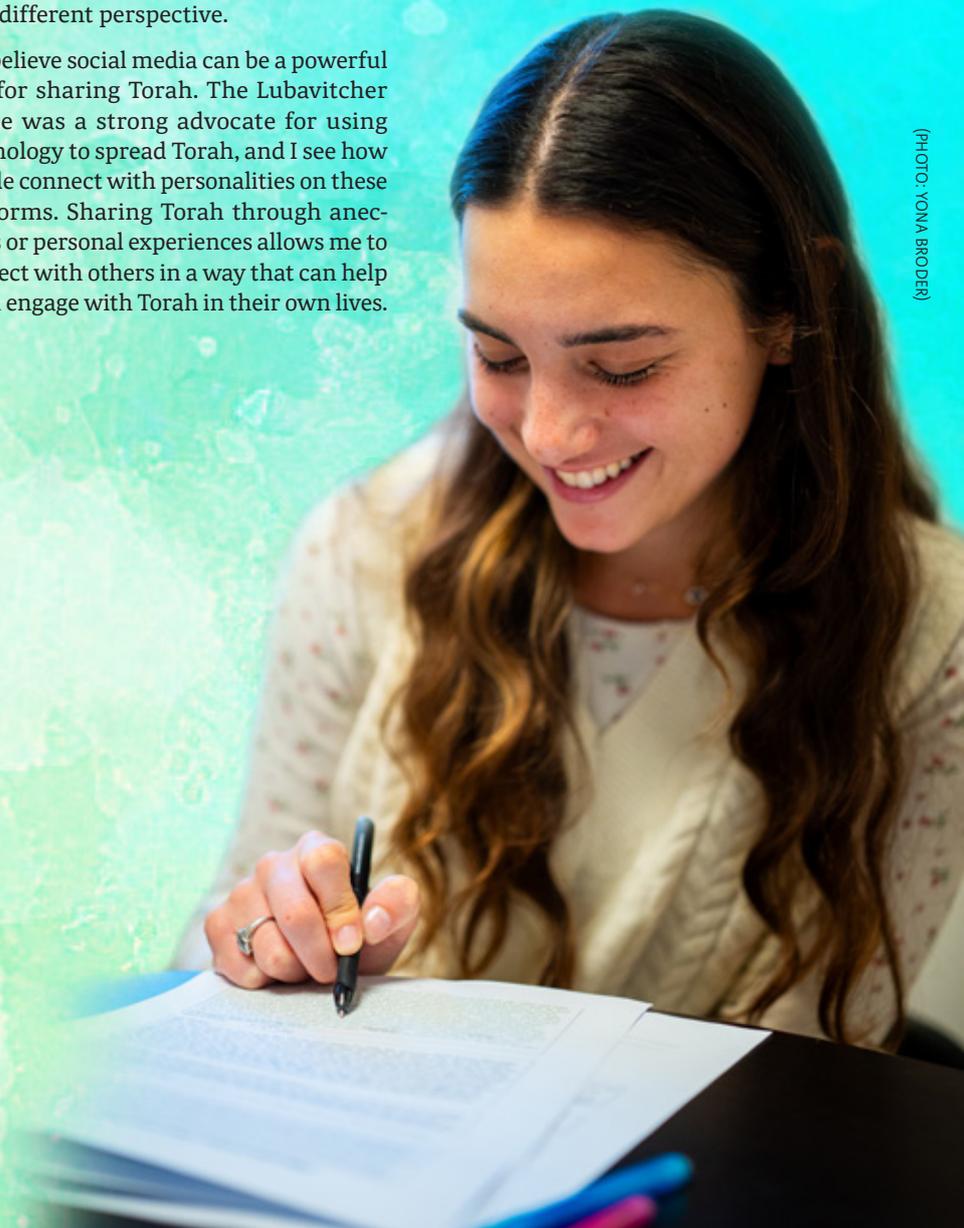
I posted on Instagram that I was looking for a serious Torah learning opportunity. I was living in Tel Aviv, but many of the *shiurim* I found seemed geared toward *ba'alei teshuva* or were at a more basic level. A friend told me about Lapidot, so I signed up, was accepted, and I love it! Although I've only been here for a few weeks, it's already given me a much deeper appreciation for the *halachic* system. Learning *sugyot* in depth, starting with the *Gemara* and diving into the *Rishonim*, really shows how seriously we take their opinions and how *halacha* is rooted in something profound. Sometimes, when you're outside of a Torah environment, you can lose that sense, so it's a real merit to reconnect with it.

You're also a prominent voice on social media. How did that happen, and what's your perspective on sharing Torah there?

I started my social media profile a few years ago and had about 30,000 followers on TikTok before the war. But I became more of an "October 8th influencer" after the war began. A friend suggested I start sharing content related to Israel, and my following grew, especially after I joined the army. At first, I used my platform to express some of my religious frustrations, but now I'm sharing Torah ideas from a very different perspective.

I do believe social media can be a powerful tool for sharing Torah. The Lubavitcher Rebbe was a strong advocate for using technology to spread Torah, and I see how people connect with personalities on these platforms. Sharing Torah through anecdotes or personal experiences allows me to connect with others in a way that can help them engage with Torah in their own lives.

The World Mizrahi Lapidot Program is a unique educational initiative designed for women seeking to deepen their knowledge of Torah while engaging in a rigorous academic environment. Offering in-depth learning of Jewish texts, from Gemara to halacha, the program provides a transformative experience that combines intellectual growth with spiritual development. Lapidot encourages a dynamic approach to Jewish learning, fostering a strong connection to tradition while empowering women to become leaders in the Jewish community.



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“WE WILL NOT BE INTIMIDATED”

RABBI SHUA SOLOMON ON LIFE AFTER BONDI BEACH

On the first night of Chanukah, Islamic terrorists murdered 15 Jews at a Chanukah celebration on Bondi Beach in Sydney, Australia – the deadliest terrorist attack against Diaspora Jews in over 30 years. Rabbi Aron White spoke with Rabbi Shua Solomon, the Rabbi of Mizrachi Bondi and President of the Rabbinical Council of New South Wales, about the tragedy and the community’s path forward.

Global Jewish attention is focused on the terrorist attack in Sydney on Chanukah. Could you tell our readers about yourself and the Sydney Jewish community for those unfamiliar with it?

I'm the Rabbi of Mizrahi Bondi, one of the Mizrahi *shuls* in Australia. Equally relevant from a communal perspective is my role as President of the Rabbinical Council of New South Wales. The Rabbinical Council represents all the Orthodox *shuls* and their rabbis to the community. It's made up of 50 members, and that has been a big part of my role in the community since the horrific terrorist attack on Bondi Beach last Sunday. The community is both in grief and mourning, but at the same time is very resilient. The amount of *chesed* and community unity that has been shown since that day has really been astounding.

There are about 50,000 Jews in all of Sydney. Most of them are traditional, certainly not religious, but when they go to *shul* they go to an Orthodox *shul*. A lot of them make *kiddush* on Friday night, certainly go to *shul* on the *chagim*, maybe a little bit more often than that. So it's a very traditional community and a community which is very connected to the State of Israel. Since October 7th, we've been enormously supportive, both financially and in other ways, to the State of Israel. And within that, of course, the biggest concentration of Jewish people – and not just Jewish people, but with Jewish people come *shuls* and schools and Jewish community organizations and kosher restaurants and the *mikvah* and all the institutions of Jewish communal life – is concentrated in East Sydney, in Bondi. There is also a community in other parts of the East and in the North Shore, but the majority of Jewish people, certainly the vast majority of religious Jews, live in the Bondi area.

For those unfamiliar with Australia, could you explain the cultural significance of Bondi Beach? Why does an attack at this location carry particular symbolic weight?

Bondi Beach is not just a central meeting point for the Jewish community – it's a symbol and icon of Australia and Australian culture; the relaxed, happy-go-free nature and attitude of Australians. It's probably the most well-known beach in Australia and one of the more well-known beaches in the world. Along with places like the Opera House, it's certainly a symbol and an icon of what Australia is known for throughout the world.

What has been your experience of antisemitism before and after October 7th? What discussions were happening in the community before the attack, and what was the response from local politicians?

Pre-October 7th, of course there were reports of antisemitism, but it certainly wasn't a main topic of conversation. It's not something people experienced in their daily lives. Certainly nothing like the scenes we see in Europe, for example. Post-October 7th, like almost everywhere in the Western world, there was a huge uptick in antisemitism. It started with small incidents – the weekly pro-Palestinian rallies in the city that often turned into explicitly antisemitic protests with hate speech that made the Jewish community feel very vulnerable. And then we had a number of incidents of vandalism, graffiti... There was a kosher restaurant just about 100 meters from the Mizrahi *shul* that was firebombed. There was an acid attack. The Adass Israel synagogue in Melbourne was firebombed. So we went from graffiti to vandalism to firebombing. The vast majority of the Jewish community felt that the government's response to all these things was weak and not good enough, and only emboldened those trying to do

these things. And then, of course, we had this horrific terrorist attack.

We just had a visit from Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, who was asked how he felt about the attack in Manchester compared to what he's seeing in Sydney – the words he used, and the words others have used, are “shocked but not surprised.” We're very much still in shock that this kind of thing has happened, but at the same time we have been warning the government about what happens when you don't take antisemitism seriously and you don't stop it in its tracks. This is very possibly the result. We've now experienced the most painful episode not just for the Jewish community, but the worst terrorist attack in Australia's history by far.

Can you talk about both the events of that day and the immediate aftermath? Where were you, and how were members of your community affected?

I was at a wedding that I was officiating. As I'm sure your readers are aware, on Chanukah we have many communal events – not just Chabad houses, but community *shuls* throughout Australia. Chabad is very public with their Chanukah events, lighting *menorahs* in public places, and every year Chabad houses run different Chanukah events all over the community. They're beautiful, they bring people together, often people that aren't necessarily regular *shul* attenders or going to other Jewish events on a regular basis. One of those happens every year, put on by Chabad of Bondi at Bondi Beach. There was food, there was music, there were all sorts of activities for adults and children alike. And then two terrorists showed up and started shooting. They did so for a number of minutes before they were stopped and neutralized. That led to scenes which – based on what I've seen since October 7th – were reminiscent of that day, though on a smaller scale with fewer people. I don't want to go into too much detail, but there were very, very difficult scenes for everybody. Everyone who was there, even if they were not physically hurt, has been very much affected mentally and emotionally. Thanks to a number of very brave people, including the volunteers and first responders from the community security group, more people weren't killed and injured.

Following that, there was a real sense of crisis in the community – shock, disbelief. I lost a couple of close friends. There's no one in the Jewish community, not just in Sydney but throughout Australia, who hasn't lost somebody or knows somebody who was injured or killed. We're not a huge community – there are just over 100,000 Jews in Australia. But with that shock and disbelief, there's also been a lot of resilience, a lot of *chesed*, a lot of opportunity to be with each other, to comfort each other, to stand strong.

On the eighth night, the community returned to Bondi Beach. 20,000 of us lit the *menorah* again. That was led by Chabad of Bondi, who were most impacted by what happened. Just over a week ago, 20,000 people came – the Prime Minister, the Premier, all sorts of different people to show their support. And the truth is that it's been very heartwarming, the expressions of support we've received from the greater Australian community. Every night they created a vigil, a bonfire where people would come. A lot of non-Jews brought flowers. Every night they did Chanukah lighting in a smaller way than we did on the last night, but every night a couple of thousand people would come. As we got later into the evening, Bnei Akiva would come and run a *tisch* for everyone and they would all sing together.



Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis paid a solidarity visit after the attack and met with rabbis and rebbetzins in Sydney.

The community is determined to stand on our own two feet and continue Jewish life proudly. If anything, more and more people want to commit to greater Jewish observance and deepen their connection to the State of Israel. This terrible tragedy has in many ways made us stronger – our observance stronger, our Jewish identity louder and larger.

It's still very early, but have there been any discussions about what this means for the future of the community and the ability to continue to have public Jewish life in Australia?

I very much hope not. We're working to make sure that's not the case. The government has provided us with tools that we didn't have before. But in terms of what the concrete future plans are, I think it's too early to say.

I also want to pay tribute to two friends of mine that I lost. Given that I'm doing this interview for *HaMizrachi*, I should mention that these two friends were instrumental in making the Mizrachi trip to Israel happen – the one we all did together, the rabbis and rebbetzins of New South Wales. There were about 25 of us, and I led the trip as President of the Rabbinical Council. Now that we've lost two members of our rabbinic group, that trip keeps coming back to all of us who were there – the incredible experiences and memories we shared.

Rabbi Eli Schlanger was very proud of his Judaism and his identity, but also reached out to each and every Jew, got on with everybody, found common ground with everyone, and spent his time just thinking of new ideas to increase Torah and *mitzvot*. Looking back on it, he was such an important part of lifting the *ruach* of everyone on that trip during the highs and lows that we all went through in those six days.

And then Rabbi Yaakov Levitan – when I first decided we're going to do this trip, Yaakov was my first call. In terms of the logistics and making sure everything was taken care of behind the scenes, there was no one like Yaakov in the community. He was also a very close friend of mine. I said, "Yaakov, I need you. I need you to come on this trip. I need you to be part of this. I

need you to come and just take care of everything." And the trip would never have happened without him. These were two incredible people that we lost among the 15 incredible *kedoshim* that are no longer with us.

Thank you very much for speaking with us.



The Sydney Rabbinic mission visiting World Mizrachi Headquarters in May 2025.



Rav Eli Schlanger Hy"d and Rav Yaakov Levitan Hy"d with their wives at the end of the Sydney Rabbinic mission with Mizrachi Missions.

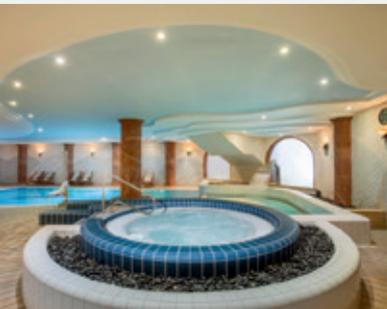


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The Complexities of Aliyah

Roi Abecassis

On the first night of Chanukah, we celebrated the wedding of our eldest son, Shahar, to his bride, Naama. The wedding took place the night after Islamic terrorists murdered 15 Jews at a Chanukah celebration on Bondi Beach in Sydney. Just before breaking the glass, we mentioned Jerusalem, as is customary. The rabbi performing the *kiddushin* mentioned the massacre in Sydney and called on the Jewish community there to buy one-way tickets to Israel immediately.

This sentiment echoed an editorial published that week in *Makor Rishon* by Hagai Segal, titled “Jews, Home.” In the wake of the massacre, Segal called on Diaspora Jews not to delay any longer but to make *Aliyah* immediately and en masse. He wrote: “The real lesson from the attack is a one-way plane ticket from Australia to Tel Aviv. There is an illusion that if only the governments of the world would deal more firmly with antisemitic instigators and allocate a few more vehicles for security, the Jewish communities abroad would be protected. But there is only one country in which they can protect themselves... A few hours after the massacre, photographs of candlelight vigils were distributed to all corners of the world, specifically in Australia. Someone posed with *tefillin* on the attacked beach. Very moving, but a photograph of Sydney Jews with a one-way plane ticket to Ben-Gurion Airport would be even more convincing proof that the real lesson has been learned. The Jewish state is not supposed to cultivate its relations with the Jews of the Diaspora now, but to urge them to make *Aliyah*.”

Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar, speaking at a conference in Rishon LeZion, declared: “I call on the Jews in England, France, Australia, Canada, Belgium: make *Aliyah* to Israel.”

Though I agree with them in principle, these statements caused me a certain discomfort. There is no dispute – the place of the Jews is in the Land of Israel. Mass *Aliyah* must occur not only when waves of antisemitism break against Jewish communities worldwide, but also in times

of peace and quiet. For 2,000 years, we yearned to return to our Land, and now that we have the historical opportunity to reach it, we must rise and ascend to Zion. We must not delay.

At the same time, I would like to make three observations about what was said.

First, it seems that the State of Israel remembers Diaspora Jewry primarily after severe disasters. Browsing the internet, I found calls by Israeli leaders to “return home” after the attack at the Hyper Cacher in Paris and the murder of a Jewish security guard at the entrance to the Copenhagen synagogue. After each attack, Israeli leaders emphasize that there is no longer a future for the Jewish community in this or that place.

Israel’s connection with Diaspora Jews must be continuous and strong. The State of Israel must prepare vigorously to open doors and hearts – allocating resources, building absorption plans, and creating housing and employment solutions for new immigrants. These steps take time and require advance preparation.

Second, calls of “Jews, come home” must be delivered with sensitivity to the real challenges immigrants face – leaving behind relatives, confronting mental and economic hardships, uprooting entire lives. This requires not just the right tone but genuine understanding of immigrants’ needs and concrete solutions.

Third, despite the calls for *Aliyah* and the terrorist attacks against Diaspora Jews, seven million Jews will not arrive in Israel next year. The Ministry of Absorption is preparing to double Western *Aliyah* and absorb 30,000 immigrants in 2026. But this is a drop in the ocean – we must recognize reality.

Many of our brothers and sisters will continue to live in Diaspora communities. Therefore, Israel must both encourage *Aliyah* and maintain strong connections with Diaspora Jews. We must send *shlichim* to communities that lack them, strengthen Jewish education worldwide, bolster Jewish presence on campuses, facilitate delegations between Israel and

the Diaspora, and assist communities fighting assimilation.

Signs of change are emerging. Last week, an American Jewish community purchased two residential towers with 200 apartments in Israel – an unprecedented concentrated purchase. Some will make *Aliyah* following their children serving in the IDF or studying in Israeli universities. Others will maintain an apartment in Israel for times of need.

Rabbi Drukman, whose third *yahrzeit* we recently commemorated, interpreted the verse “When the L-rd returned the captivity of Zion, we were like dreamers” as an alarm clock calling us to wake up. G-d calls us to awaken at the time of return to Zion, to join the divine movement and become partners in returning the Jewish people to their land.

Let us wake from the dream and encourage the growing trend of *Aliyah* – but with understanding of the difficulties involved and preparation for proper absorption. And let us not forget those who have not yet awakened, working to return the hearts of the fathers to the children and bring them home.



Roi Abecassis

is Head of the Department of Jewish-Zionist Identity at the World Zionist Organization and Deputy Chairman of KKL-JNF, representing the World Mizrahi movement in the National Institutions.



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SHAGRIRIM BALEV

Friends Setting Up Friends



Our Couples: Masha Broder & Kevin Brenkel!

Where was your first date?
Our journey began at the charming Café Denia in Jerusalem.

What did you learn from the dating process that you'd like to share? Do you have any tips?
Communication, time, and patience are the golden trio when building a lasting relationship. And here's the secret: don't go through it alone! Getting solid advice throughout the process is a total game-changer.

Why is it worth joining the Shagririm Balev database?
Shagririm is incredibly personal and intentional. They're not just scrolling through random profiles on the internet. Every introduction is thoughtfully considered - they actually meet with their candidates, get to know them personally, and carefully discuss potential matches. This isn't just matchmaking; it's creating connections that have real potential to flourish.

A funny story from one of your dates:
Apparently, all of Jerusalem wanted to witness our love story unfold! We kept bumping into people we knew on almost every single date. Talk about an audience!

A funny story from one of your dates:
Kevin went full romantic hero mode! The day before the big moment, he formally asked my parents for my hand in marriage. Then he whisked me away to a beautiful spot at Armon Hanatziv with a stunning bouquet of flowers and a picnic featuring my favorite foods that he cooked. After sharing a meaningful dvar Torah, he pulled out a creative photo collage from the day before that asked, "Will you marry me?" - and then came the ring!
The surprises didn't stop there - we shocked my siblings with our engagement news. Some didn't even know we were dating!

Who are the ambassadors who set you up and what would you like to tell them?
My ambassador was Yisca Elishevitz. Kevin's were Tzvi and Rivka Silver. You all have earned your place in Olam Haba! We're endlessly grateful for your dedication, persistence, and the incredible privilege of being matched through you. You never gave up on us for even a moment. And a special thank you to Toby Einhorn, who provided invaluable guidance that helped us move our relationship forward!

Mazal tov to Masha and Kevin - may your marriage be filled with endless blessings!

	477 total engagements		746 candidates dating now		5347 ambassadors (shagririm)
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TU BISHVAT: SEEDS OF REDEMPTION

RABBI JONNY BRULL

Tu BiShvat often feels technical and restrained – more of a calendar marker than a celebration. In truth, it is a *halachic* date, defined by Chazal as the New Year for Trees, establishing the cut-off point for calculating the age of fruit trees, with practical ramifications for *orla*, *neta revai*, and related agricultural laws.

Yet, as is often the case in *halacha*, what begins as a legal definition opens into a broader spiritual horizon. The Torah's agricultural *mitzvot* are not merely regulatory; they are formative. They train us to think in terms of process, patience, and long-term responsibility. Tu BiShvat, precisely because it is *halachic* in nature, invites reflection on how meaningful growth truly occurs – slowly, quietly, and over time.

From this foundation emerges one of the Torah's most enduring metaphors: the tree. Not just as poetic imagery, but as a lived reality shaped by law. A tree is planted with faith, nurtured without immediate reward, and judged only years later by its fruit. In this sense, Tu BiShvat offers a framework for understanding not only agricultural growth but Jewish history itself.

Iyov captures this truth powerfully: “For a tree has hope; if it is cut down, it will renew itself... at the scent of water it will bud” (*Iyov* 14:7-9). Even when a tree appears lifeless, its roots retain vitality. So too with *Am Yisrael*. Through exile, destruction, and dislocation, the Jewish people were cut back again and again – yet never uprooted. Faith, Torah, and connection to the Land remained alive beneath the surface.

That renewal is never instantaneous. Trees do not leap from seed to fruit overnight. They endure long seasons of hidden

development before visible results appear. Jewish history follows a similar rhythm. Exile resembles winter – barren on the surface, yet quietly preparing the ground for future growth. Redemption, like spring, unfolds gradually.

The prophets describe this renewal not only in spiritual terms but in unmistakably physical ones. Yechezkel declares: “You, mountains of Israel, will give forth your branches and bear your fruit for My people Israel, for they are soon to come” (*Yechezkel* 36:8). The *Gemara* records Rabbi Abba's assertion: “There is no clearer sign of redemption than this” (*Sanhedrin* 98a). When the Land of Israel once again yields its fruit for the Jewish people, redemption is already underway.

In our generation, this vision is no longer theoretical. *Medinat Yisrael* stands as living testimony to the rebirth of both people and land. Fields flourish where swamps once stood, orchards bloom where hills lay desolate. This agricultural renaissance reflects the deep reconnection between *Am Yisrael* and their Land. The revival of the Land mirrors the revival of the nation.

Yet the Torah insists that renewal demands responsibility. When *Bnei Yisrael* wandered in the wilderness, their complaint – “There is no place of seed, fig, vine, or pomegranate” (*Bamidbar* 20:5) – expressed a longing not only for food, but for rootedness. Hashem's promise of a fertile land – “a land of wheat and barley, vines, figs, and pomegranates” (*Devarim* 8:8) – came with an expectation: blessing requires cultivation. As the *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Kedoshim* 7) teaches, Divine abundance flows through human effort.

This finds its clearest expression in the *mitzvah* of planting. The Torah commands that when fruit trees are planted in the land, their fruit is forbidden for the first three years as *orla* (*Vayikra* 19:23). This law instills patience and discipline – the willingness to invest without immediate reward. The *Midrash* (*Tanchuma*, *Kedoshim* 8) adds that even when the land is full of

goodness, we must continue planting, just as others planted for us.

Planting trees in *Eretz Yisrael* is therefore far more than an agricultural act. It is a declaration of faith in the future and responsibility toward generations yet to come. It affirms our belief that Jewish life in this Land is enduring, and that redemption is built through steady effort.

Tu BiShvat reminds us that growth is not always dramatic. Much of what matters happens quietly, beneath the surface.

This year, that lesson speaks deeply to our community in Australia. The attack in Bondi on Chanukah shook us all to the core. It reminded us how quickly certainty can fade, and how fragile public confidence can become.

But *Am Yisrael* does not draw its strength from the surface. Our strength comes from our deep roots – Torah, community, *chesed*, and a deep sense of shared destiny. Those roots hold firm even when the world feels unstable, steadying our resolve.

Tu BiShvat teaches us that roots do more than help us survive; they help us rise up.

This Tu BiShvat, may our roots lift us higher: standing together with strength, building Jewish life with clarity and pride, and bringing more light and life into the world.



Rabbi Jonny Brull

is Director of Rav Rimon's Torah in English at Sulamot. He was previously Rosh Kollel Torah Mitzion and Assistant Rabbi at Mizrachi Melbourne.

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MIZRACHI A GLOBAL ORGANIZATION

A week-long *chesed* mission was held for 85 participants, run in partnership with Mizrachi Canada, Beth Tikvah Synagogue Toronto, The Jewish Journey and Mayanot: Taglit-Birthright Israel alongside Birthright's Volunteer Program.

Led by Rabbi Jarrod Grover of Beth Tikvah Synagogue and Rabbi Elan Mazer of Mizrachi Canada, the group brought members of the Toronto community to spend their mornings volunteering and their afternoons experiencing Israel through the Mizrachi lens.

To learn more or arrange a *chesed* mission for your community, contact missions@mizrachi.org.



Rabbi Daniel and Rebbetzin Ilana Epstein arrived to officially commence their roles as the Senior Rabbinic couple of the Mizrachi Melbourne community.

Mizrachi Melbourne President Benji Jotkowitz said:

“Rabbi Daniel and Rebbetzin Ilana bring with them a wealth of experience in communal leadership, education, and pastoral care, together with a deep passion for Torah, Zionism, and community-building. Their warmth, energy, and vision will no doubt enrich and inspire every aspect of our community life.”

We wish the Epsteins much *hatzlacha* in their new roles!



Hosted by Rabbi Avichai Appel, community rabbi in Frankfurt and Chairman of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis in Germany, the annual conference of the rabbis of Germany took place in Frankfurt and brought together 35 rabbis to discuss key issues facing their communities.

Rabbi Yechiel Wasserman, Co-President of World Mizrachi, was guest of honor at the conference. He highlighted Mizrachi's work in strengthening the connection between Diaspora Jewry, *Torat Yisrael* and *Medinat Yisrael*.

Executive Chairman Rabbi Doron Perez and CEO Rabbi Danny Mirvis addressed a mission of Australian legal professionals, brought to Israel by the World Jewish Congress and the Executive Council of Australian Jewry.

(PHOTOS: SHAHAR AZRAN / WJC)





Initiated by Rabbi Wasserman together with Rabbi Yitzhak Asiel, Chief Rabbi of Serbia and Mizrahi's representative to the World Zionist Congress, the first-ever Mizrahi Shabbaton in Serbia welcomed 120 participants – including community leaders and the Chief Rabbi of Croatia, Rabbi Kotel Dadon. Participants enjoyed *shuirim*, lectures, workshops, uplifting Shabbat meals with *divrei Torah* and *zemiroth*, and learned about the activities of Mizrahi around the world.



Rabbi Hillel Van-Leeuwen, World Mizrahi's Director of Leadership Development and Head of the Religious Zionist Shlichut Center, recently spent 12 days traveling across the US and Canada, visiting Mizrahi-trained *shlichim* and their families in Chicago, Saint Louis, Cleveland, Toronto, Detroit, Los Angeles, Oakland, Seattle, and New Jersey. As always, he was deeply moved by the *shlichim*'s unwavering dedication – balancing their roles in *shuls*, schools, campuses, and youth movements while raising their own families, and bringing faith, strength, and hope to their communities during these challenging times. These visits are a powerful reminder that together we are part of a quiet revolution, spreading the Torah of Eretz Yisrael and strengthening Jewish life across communities around the world.

World Mizrahi's Nasi Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon visited the communities of Melbourne and Sydney, Australia. As part of his visit to Mizrahi Melbourne, he addressed the Rabbinical Council of Victoria and led a fantastic "Horim v'Yeladim" learning session for parents and their children. While in Sydney, for the third year in a row, Rav Rimon was the honored guest speaker at the annual conference of the Rabbinical Council of New South Wales.



Mizrahi's Journey to Poland and Lithuania explored the centres of *Chassidut* and Religious Zionism, experienced the richness of pre-war Jewish life, and confronted the darkest chapters of our history. Led by Rabbi David Milston, Rabbi Doron Perez, and Jeremy Kurnedz, the week-long program was one of memory, learning, and deep inspiration.

One couple who participated shared: "It was such a privilege for us to take this difficult journey with such wonderful educators and guides, and a great group of people! וְעַם יִשְׂרָאֵל חַי!"

(PHOTOS: CHERYL MIRROP)



A new weekly learning series dedicated to understanding *tefillah* and the structure of the *siddur* was launched at the Mizrahi branch in Belgrade, Serbia. The initiative was led by Rabbi Yitzhak Asiel, Chief Rabbi of Serbia and Mizrahi's representative to the World Zionist Congress. Rabbi Yechiel Wasserman, Co-President of World Mizrahi, noted that this new weekly *shuir*, initiated by World Mizrahi, marks an important milestone in Mizrahi's growing activity across the Balkan region.

CROSSING THE SEA

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks *ב"ר*

Parashat Beshalach begins with an apparently simple proposition: “When Pharaoh let the people go, G-d did not lead them on the road through the land of the Philistines, though that was shorter. For G-d said, ‘If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.’ So G-d led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt prepared for battle” (*Shemot* 13:17-18).

G-d did not lead the people to the Promised Land by the coastal route, which would have been more direct. The reason given is that it was such an important highway, it constituted the main path from which Egypt might be attacked by forces from the north-west such as the Hittite army. The Egyptians established a series of forts along the way, which the Israelites would have found impregnable.

However, if we delve deeper, this decision raises a number of questions. First: we see that the alternative route they took was potentially even more traumatic. G-d led them around by the desert road towards the Red Sea. The result, as we soon discover, is that the Israelites, when they saw the Egyptian chariots pursuing them in the distance, had nowhere to go. They were terrified. They were not spared the fear of war. Hence the first question: why the Red Sea? On the face of it, it was the worst of all possible routes.

Secondly, if G-d did not want the Israelites to face war, and if He believed it would lead the people to want to return to Egypt, why did the Israelites leave *chamushim*, “armed” or “ready for battle”?

Third: if G-d did not want the Israelites to face war, why did He provoke Pharaoh into pursuing them? The text says so explicitly. “And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for Myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am Hashem” (*Shemot* 14:4). Three times in this one chapter we are told that G-d hardened Pharaoh’s heart (*Shemot* 14:4, 8, 17).

The Torah explains this motivation of “I will gain glory for Myself.” The defeat of the Egyptian army at the Sea would become an eternal reminder of G-d’s power. “The Egyptians will know

that I am Hashem.” Egypt may come to realize that there is a force more powerful than chariots, armies and military might. But the opening of our *parasha* suggested that G-d was primarily concerned with the Israelites’ feelings – not with His glory or the Egyptians’ belief. If G-d wanted the Israelites not to see war, as the opening verse states, why did He orchestrate that they witnessed this attack at the Sea?

Fourth: G-d did not want the Israelites to have reason to say, “Let us return to Egypt.” However, at the Red Sea, they did tell Moshe something very close to this: “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!” (*Shemot* 14:11-12).

Fifth: G-d clearly wanted the Israelites to develop the self-confidence that would give them the strength to fight the battles they would have to fight in order to conquer the Holy Land. Why then did He bring about a state of affairs at the Sea where they had to do exactly the opposite, leaving everything to G-d: “Moshe answered the people, ‘Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance Hashem will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. Hashem will fight for you; you need only to be still!’” (*Shemot* 14:13-14).

The miracle that followed has so engraved itself on Jewish minds that we recite the Song at the Sea in our daily Morning Service. The division of the Sea was, in its way, the greatest of all the miracles. But it did not contribute to Jewish self-confidence and self-reliance. “Hashem will fight for you; you need only to be still.” The Egyptians were defeated not by the Israelites but by G-d, and not by conventional warfare but by a miracle. How then did the encounter teach the Israelites courage?

Sixth: The *parasha* ends with another battle, against the Amalekites. But this time, there is no complaint on the part of the people, no fear, no trauma, no despair. Joshua leads the people in battle. Moshe, supported by Aharon and Chur, stands on a

hilltop, his arms raised, and as the people look up to Heaven, they are inspired, strengthened, and they prevail.

Where then was the fear spoken of in the opening verse of the *parasha*? Faced by the Amalekites, in some ways more fearsome than the Egyptians, the Israelites did not say they wanted to return to Egypt. The sheer silence on the part of the people stands in the strongest possible contrast to their previous complaints about water and food.

The Israelites turn out to be good warriors.

So why the sudden change between the opening of our *parasha* and its close? In the opening, G-d is protective and miracle-working. At the close, G-d is more concealed. He does not fight the battle against the Amalekites; He gives the Israelites the strength to do so themselves. In the opening, the Israelites, faced by the Egyptians, panic and say that they should never have left Egypt. By the close, faced by the Amalekites, they fight and win.

What had changed?

The answer, it seems to me, is that we have perhaps the first recorded instance of what later became a key military strategy. In one of the more famous examples, Julius Caesar ordered his army to cross the Rubicon in the course of his attempt to seize power. Such an act was strictly forbidden in Roman law. He and the army had to win, or they would be executed. Hence the phrase, “to cross the Rubicon.”

In 1519, Cortes (the Spanish commander engaged in the conquest of Mexico) burned the ships that had carried his men. His soldiers now had no possibility of escape. They had to win or die. Hence the phrase, “burning your boats.”

What these tactics have in common is the idea that sometimes you have to arrange that there is no way back, no line of retreat, no possibility of fear-induced escape. It is a radical strategy, undertaken when the stakes are high and when exceptional reserves of courage are necessary. That is the logic of the events in *Beshalach* that are otherwise hard to understand.

Before they crossed the Red Sea, the Israelites were fearful. But once they had crossed the Sea, there was no way back. To be sure, they still complained about water and food. But their ability to fight and defeat the Amalekites showed how profoundly they had changed. They had crossed the Rubicon. Their boats and bridges were burned. They looked only forwards, for there was no return.

Rashbam makes a remarkable comment, connecting Jacob's wrestling match with the angel to the episode in which Moshe, returning to Egypt, is attacked by G-d (*Shemot* 4:24) and also linking this to Yonah on the stormy ship (Commentary to *Bereishit* 32:21-29). All three, he says, were overcome by fear at the

danger or difficulty that confronted them, and each wanted to escape. Jacob's angel, Moshe's encounter, and the tempest that threatened to sink Yonah's ship, were all ways in which Heaven cut off the line of retreat.

Any great undertaking comes with fear. Often we fear failure. Sometimes we even fear success. Are we worthy of it? Can we sustain it? We long for the security of the familiar, the life we have known. We are afraid of the unknown, the uncharted territory. And the journey itself exposes our vulnerability. We have left home; we have not yet reached our destination. Rashbam was telling us that if we have these feelings we should not feel ashamed. Even the greatest people have felt fear. Courage is not fearlessness. It is, in the words of a well-known book title, feeling the fear but doing it anyway.

Sometimes the only way to do this is to know that there is no way back. Franz Kafka in one of his aphorisms wrote, “Beyond a certain point there is no return. This point has to be reached” (*Notebooks*, 16). That is what crossing the Red Sea was for the Israelites, and why it was essential that they experienced it at an early stage in their journey. It marked the point of no return; the line of no retreat; the critical point at which they could only move forward.

I believe that some of the greatest positive changes in our lives come when, having undertaken a challenge, we cross our own Red Sea and know that there is no way back. There is only a way forward. Then G-d gives us the strength to fight our battles and win.



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Why We Celebrate Tree Planting

Rabbi Reuven Taragin

At first glance, Tu BiShvat, the Rosh Hashanah for fruit trees, seems to be of mere technical significance – the calendar marker for the yearly *mitzvot* that pertain to fruits. Yet surprisingly, we treat it as a minor holiday on which we skip *tachanun* and avoid fasting. What are we celebrating?

It is also noteworthy that we only celebrate the Rosh Hashanah of trees, but not of other plants or even tree saplings (*Mishnah, Rosh Hashanah* 1:1). Why are trees more important than other vegetation?

Chazal teach us that tree planting is the best way to emulate and draw close to G-d (*Vayikra Rabbah* 25:3). Hashem planted trees when He created the world, and we are commanded to do so upon entering *Eretz Yisrael*. Early Zionists fulfilled this commandment by emphasizing tree planting in general and, specifically, on Tu BiShvat. Why is planting trees so important?

Man easily exploits the world without feeling responsible for its upkeep – a dangerous mistake. The Torah emphasizes this when describing Adam's placement in *Gan Eden*: he was put there “to work it and protect it” (*Bereishit* 2:15). Earlier, the Torah reveals that Hashem deliberately withheld plant growth until creating man to cultivate the earth. It is critical for man to see himself as responsible for maintaining and developing the world that G-d created for him.

Planting trees contributes more to the earth than planting other vegetation. Most plants produce little fruit and last only one season. Trees provide abundant fruit

over many years. They require years of nurturing before bearing fruit, but they're an excellent long-term investment – both for the quantity of fruit they produce and for their tall, strong presence in the fields. Planting trees demands patience and long-term vision, reflecting our responsibility to develop the world meaningfully.

This is why Rav Kook, when describing tree planting, distinguished between two Hebrew words for human motivation: *cheshek* (desire) and *chefetz* (will). Planting may begin with the desire for relatively quick food. But that emotion must be channeled into something higher – the ideological drive to create and contribute in the most meaningful way. This ideology finds its fullest expression in planting trees (*Meged Yerachim, Chodesh Shevat*).

In emphasizing the importance of tree planting, *Avot D'Rabbi Natan* asserts that one who hears of *Mashiach's* arrival while planting should first finish planting and only then greet *Mashiach* (*Nuscha Bet*, 31).

The association of planting with redemption also appears in *Masechet Ta'anit*. The Gemara tells of Choni Hame'agel's question about the famous verse that describes our redemption – “*Shir hama'alot b'shuv Hashem et shivat Tziyon, hayinu k'cholmim*, Song of steps: When the L-rd returns the returnees to Zion, we shall be like dreamers.” Choni wondered: Could a person sleep and dream for seventy years, the length of the first exile?

One day, Choni met a man planting a carob tree, which takes seventy years to bear fruit. He asked why the man was planting a tree he would likely never eat from. The man answered that just as he enjoyed trees planted by earlier generations, he was planting for future ones. After this encounter, Choni fell asleep for seventy years. Upon awakening, he met the man's grandson, enjoying the fruits of his grandfather's labor.

The two parts of the story connect deeply. Choni wondered about sleeping for seventy years and its connection to

redemption. Tree planting is part of the answer. Redemption comes when people see beyond themselves and work towards their nation's future. We complete our planting before greeting *Mashiach* because the belief expressed in planting trees helps bring him.

Knowing the temporary nature of their presence in each place, Jews in exile lacked motivation to invest in trees and other infrastructure. When we enter *Eretz Yisrael*, we must realize that we are finally home in a place that is our own, where our descendants will continue to live. We demonstrate this by planting trees.

Rav Kook saw this story as a model for the ideal form of tree planting and for what Tu BiShvat symbolizes: “The desire to plant trees should flow from an interest in helping future generations, symbolized perfectly by the carob tree” (*Meged Yerachim, ibid*).

On Tu BiShvat, we celebrate trees and what planting them reveals about us – both in general and specifically about our relationship with the land to which Hashem has returned us.



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Rabbi Reuven Taragin

is Educational Director of Mizrachi and Dean of the Yeshivat Hakotel Overseas Program. His book, *Essentials of Judaism*, can be purchased at rabbireuventaragin.com.



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Beneath the Surface:

Tu BiShvat, Esther, and the Blossoming Voice of Shir HaShirim and Women's Torah Study

Rabbanit Shani Taragin

Tu BiShvat, the New Year of Trees, celebrates invisible beginnings. While winter holds the Land, *Chazal* teach that the sap begins to rise, signaling growth beneath the surface and a future harvest in the making. Tu BiShvat honors not fruition, but potential – the faith that renewal begins long before it is visible.

This lens helps reflect on hidden yet transformative growth in Jewish history, particularly the rise of women's Torah learning today. Like the trees of Tu BiShvat, this growth has been patient, rooted, and often concealed, until its fruits begin to emerge.

The Torah compares humanity to a tree: “For man is a tree of the field” (*Devarim* 20:19). *Chazal* expand this metaphor to emphasize rootedness, continuity, and moral responsibility. This imagery is also applied to Torah in *Mishlei*: “It is a tree of life to those who hold fast to it” (*Mishlei* 3:18). Once Torah is understood as the *eitz chayim*, growth and fruitfulness become aspirational. Trees and vines no longer symbolize life alone, but Torah-infused life.

In this context, *Tehillim* uses botanical imagery for the woman in the covenantal home: “Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the inner chambers of your house; your children like olive saplings around your table” (*Tehillim* 128:3).

The vine is not wild growth. It must be cultivated, supported, and pruned. Its strength lies in enduring fruitfulness, not in size or display. *Chazal* note its blessing unfolds and improves over time (*Berachot* 35b), with care, nourishment, and patience. The vine's fertility is sanctified through responsibility. The *Eishet Chayil* echoes this: “Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her deeds praise her in the gates” (*Mishlei* 31:31). Her “fruit” is moral, spiritual, and communal, visible because it has been nurtured inwardly.

This contrasts with the Torah's rejection of the *asherah*, the pagan fertility tree. The Torah doesn't deny the instinct linking trees, growth, and feminine creativity; it redirects it toward covenant, Torah, and moral responsibility. Growth is affirmed

when disciplined by *yirat shamayim*; creativity is honored – but humanized.

This transformation reaches its peak in *Megillat Esther*. *Chazal* focus on Esther's dual name: “He [Mordechai] was raising Hadassah – she is Esther” (*Esther* 2:7). The *Gemara* explains she was called Hadassah because she was righteous, like the myrtle whose fragrance is quiet yet pervasive (*Megillah* 13a). The myrtle doesn't dominate; its power lies in subtlety.

Kabbalistic tradition links Esther to the *shoshanah* (lily) in *Shir HaShirim*: “Like a lily among thorns, so is my beloved among the daughters” (*Shir HaShirim* 2:2). The *gematria* of *shoshanah* and Esther is identical (661), suggesting a shared essence of concealed vitality and redemptive emergence.

Esther's life follows this botanical logic. She enters the *Megillah* hidden – “Esther did not reveal her people or her lineage” (*Esther* 2:10). Yet this concealment is not weakness; it is gestation. Like the trees of Tu BiShvat, her growth happens beneath the surface. At the crucial moment, her inner vitality rises: “If I perish, I perish” (*Esther* 4:16). Like the lily among thorns or the myrtle releasing fragrance under pressure, Esther's greatness emerges when pressed.

Chazal anchor this imagery historically. On the verse “Under the apple tree I aroused you” (*Shir HaShirim* 8:5), the *Gemara* explains this refers to the righteous women of Israel in Egypt (*Sotah* 11b–12a). Crushed by slavery, the men were overwhelmed by present hardships. The women, however, refused to let suffering erase the future. With reflective mirrors, they aroused their husbands beneath the apple trees, giving life to the next generation. Growth doesn't wait for ideal conditions. Redemption begins not with power, but with nurture; not with noise, but with faith in dark times. The *ra'aya* (female persona) of *Shir HaShirim* is not passive, but an active agent of *geulah*.

Reflecting on the female arboreal imagery in *Tehillim*, *Esther*, and *Shir HaShirim* on Tu BiShvat offers a coherent theology of growth. Renewal begins invisibly. Fertility

is sanctified by covenant. Redemption unfolds through women who cultivate continuity, wisdom, and faith across generations.

It is no coincidence that in our generation – particularly in *Eretz Yisrael* – we are witnessing the blossoming of women's Torah learning. *Batei midrash* and learning communities have taken root through years of dedication and humility. Their fruits – intellectual depth, spiritual leadership, and responsibility for the future – are increasingly visible.

Ultimately, all genuine growth – whether of trees, Torah, or people – demands *emunah* (*Shabbat* 31a). Those privileged to nurture spaces of Torah learning know that this work resembles tending a vineyard more than erecting a monument. It requires patience, attentiveness, and faith in processes that cannot be rushed. Tu BiShvat teaches us to honor beginnings before results. *Esther* charts the trajectory from concealment to blossom, and *Shir HaShirim* provides poetic voice, assuring us that even among thorns, lilies will bloom. *Chazal* remind us through fruitful imagery that when women engage deeply in Torah lessons and values, the fruit that emerges nourishes not only the present, but the future of *Am Yisrael*.



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From Seed to Soulmate:

A Tu BiShvat Guide to Growing Love

Aleeza Ben Shalom



Tu BiShvat, the New Year of the Trees, reminds us that growth does not begin with fruit on the branches. It begins quietly, humbly, deep underground. And the same is true in dating. If you have ever wondered how to build a relationship that does not just start beautifully but stays beautiful, this holiday offers a map. Love grows the way a tree grows: from the inside out, from the unseen to the seen, from a single seed to a strong, rooted, nourishing life.

1. Planting the seed: the small beginnings of a lasting relationship

Every love story begins with something tiny: a match, a conversation, a first date, a moment of curiosity. It is tempting to judge the entire future of a relationship in the first ten minutes, but seeds do not look like trees, and early dating rarely looks like marriage. The question is not, “Is this perfect?” The question is, “Is there something here worth planting?” Seeds represent potential. They ask us to slow down, pay attention, and trust that something meaningful can grow from something small.

2. Dating like a tree: building strong roots before expecting fruit

Once the seed is planted, the roots begin to develop. In dating, your roots are your values, your *middot*, your emotional health, your sense of self, and your connection to something bigger. Chemistry might be the spark, but character is the root system. Before looking for fruit such as excitement, comfort, or a sense of certainty, ask yourself: Are we growing strong roots? Do we share priorities? Can we communicate? Are we kind? Are we consistent? What grows underground determines what can grow above ground.

3. Pruning for love: releasing what holds you back

For a tree to thrive, old branches need to be pruned. Not because they were bad, but because they are no longer serving the growth of the whole. In dating, pruning means releasing old patterns, outdated expectations, or stories that keep you stuck in past heartbreaks. Maybe you are

holding onto fears, or maybe you are clinging to an idea of “my type” that has never actually worked for you. Pruning is an act of courage. It creates space for clarity, hope, and healthy connection. Without pruning, a tree gets tangled. Without pruning in dating, your heart does too.

4. Watering what you want to grow: dating with intention and consistency

Growth needs nourishment, and so does love. Just like water must be steady, not overwhelming, dating requires gentle consistency. Call when you say you will call. Show up for the plans you make. Lean in gradually. Let the connection breathe. Too much water drowns a seed, and too little leaves it dry. The key is balance: nurturing without smothering, showing care without forcing a future, and giving the relationship the steady, healthy attention it deserves. Water what you actually want to see grow.

5. Trees that bend but do not break: building resilience in your dating journey

Storms will come, both in nature and in relationships. What matters is flexibility. The healthiest trees bend with the wind. They do not snap at the first challenge. In dating, resilience means being open, adaptable, and willing to work through uncomfortable moments. Maybe someone is different from what you imagined. Maybe you hit a communication bump. Maybe you are scared because this feels real. Growth does not mean perfect conditions. It means staying grounded during imperfect ones. Bend, do not break.

6. Planting in the right season: why timing matters in love

Even the strongest seed will not grow if it is planted in the wrong season. Timing matters. Sometimes two wonderful people meet when one, or both, simply are not ready. Tu BiShvat teaches us that growth has seasons: planting, rooting, blooming, harvesting. In dating, this means checking in honestly with yourself. Am I emotionally available? Am I doing the work? Am I dating from hope, not fear? When you date

in the right season of your life, your heart has room to grow something real.

7. Root systems that last: family, values, and the foundation of marriage

A mature tree becomes part of an ecosystem. It affects its surroundings, shapes the landscape, and gives life to others. Marriage works the same way. The foundation of a strong relationship lies in shared values, aligned life goals, emotional generosity, and the willingness to build a home, a family, and a future together. These are your roots. Without them, love becomes unstable. With them, love becomes unshakeable.

A Tu BiShvat blessing

May the seeds you plant this year take root in clarity and grow with kindness. May you release what no longer serves you, nourish what truly matters, and build a relationship that stands strong through every season.



Aleeza Ben Shalom

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



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



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Growth Begins in the Dark

Shira Melamed

Tu BiShvat, in its most literal sense, means the fifteenth day of the month of Shvat. Although various titles and descriptions have been attached to this day throughout history, the name given by Chazal is, in many ways, the most meaningful. Referring to the day specifically as Tu BiShvat invites us to focus not only on the theme of trees and renewal, but also on the deeper significance embedded in the date itself.

Tu BiShvat is situated precisely in the middle of the month, on the fifteenth day – the point at which the moon shines in its full radiance. This placement is not incidental. Celebrating growth, renewal, and the potential of trees on a night illuminated by a full moon conveys a profound message about human development. When we plant a seed, turn the soil, and water the earth, we do so with a vision of what the seed will one day become. The blossomed tree – the full expression of potential – must remain in our minds even as we labor through the earliest, most hidden stages of growth.

This principle extends far beyond agriculture. It reflects a mindset essential for all growth-oriented endeavors. Processes in life often begin in darkness: effort, uncertainty, and gradual progress that may feel small or unseen. Yet the ultimate outcome – the “full moon” of our aspirations – must remain central in our consciousness if we are to reach our fullest potential.

Our tradition reinforces this theme in many areas. When a baby boy enters the covenant at his *brit*, the assembled community proclaims, “*ze hakatan gadol yihyeh* – this small child will one day be great.” We look at an infant who can do nothing for himself, and we declare a prayerful confidence in the greatness he can achieve. Similarly, we perform numerous *mitzvot* today in anticipation of the rebuilding of the *Beit HaMikdash*. We engage in these acts not because the Temple stands physically

before our eyes, but because we hold its future restoration at the forefront of our collective vision.

From all of this we learn an essential life principle: human potential can only be realized when we allow ourselves to envision the possibility of success.

There are two other dates on the Jewish calendar whose very names reflect their dates: Tisha B'Av and Tu B'Av. Like Tu BiShvat, the placement of these dates carries deep significance. Examining them broadens our understanding of how the cycles of the moon mirror the emotional and spiritual rhythms of the Jewish people.

Tisha B'Av, the ninth of Av, is the saddest date in our calendar. It marks several catastrophic tragedies, foremost among them the destruction of both the First and Second Temples. On this night the moon is barely visible. Its nearly absent light symbolizes the depths of grief, fragmentation, and loss. The dimmed moon teaches us how to mourn. In periods of real suffering – when a person faces pain so deep it defies articulation – we must not rush to illuminate or explain. We must not insist that the bereaved “look on the bright side” or imagine the fullness that may come later. At such moments, humility and compassion demand that we meet the grieving where they are, without minimizing the depth of their hurt.

Contemporary research echoes this wisdom. A 2022 NIH study found that emotional validation – acknowledging and accepting a person’s communicated experience – is essential for psychological well-being. Invalidating someone’s pain, by contrast, can trigger a sense of social rejection, which humans experience as a genuine survival threat. Judaism understood this long before modern psychology: true comfort begins with honoring the reality of another’s suffering.

Just a few days later comes Tu B'Av, a date associated with great joy and hope. In the era of the *Beit HaMikdash*, it was a day when the unmarried women of Jerusalem, dressed in simple white garments, danced in the vineyards in search of their future spouses. The *Gemara* teaches that Israel had no holidays as joyous as Tu B'Av and Yom Kippur. Here too the full moon conveys a lesson. Times of opportunity – of dreaming, striving, and opening ourselves to blessing – require a sense of inner wholeness. To receive goodness, one must believe oneself deserving of goodness. A young woman who ventured into the vineyards without confidence in her worth would, the Sages teach, return home empty-handed.

And so, across these three dates – Tu BiShvat, Tisha B'Av, and Tu B'Av – the moon becomes our teacher. It guides us in how to grow, how to mourn, and how to hope. May we learn from its cycles how to cultivate our potential, honor our pain, and open our hearts to the blessings that await us.



Shira Melamed

is the Director of Midreshet Torat Chessed, and received her degree in Social Work from Bar Ilan University and her Kallah Teaching Certificate from the Religious Council of Gush Etzion. Shira’s expertise on mental health has proven imperative to her students’ personal development. Her passion for Torah and chessed is contagious both inside and outside the classroom.

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Tu BiShvat and the Three Forms of Giving

Rabbanit Dr. Adina Sternberg

Tu BiShvat is one of the defining times of the year, marking the period when we must give from our produce to G-d or His representatives. Tu BiShvat establishes the “tax-year” for trees, but we are also expected to give from our fields and livestock.

This is an ideal time to reflect on the various offerings we are commanded to give and to ponder why the Torah requires so many different and accumulating gifts. By examining these offerings, we can uncover that each represents a fundamentally different psychological and theological relationship between man and G-d.

The first category is *bikkurim*, which emphasizes primacy. This commandment applies to the first fruits of the ground and the firstborn of animals. The defining characteristic here is chronological: we give the very first produce before the rest is even harvested or processed.

The second category is *ma'aser*, which focuses on quantity and proportion – specifically, one-tenth of the yield. The Torah outlines various tithes: the “First Tithe” given to the Levites in exchange for their service in the *Mishkan*, the “Second Tithe” consumed by the owners in Jerusalem to cultivate fear of G-d, and the “Poor Man’s Tithe.” Unlike the sanctity of the firstborn, the tithe represents a portion of the total harvest, separated after the work is complete.

The third category is *terumah*, which emphasizes quality. Described as the “fat” (*cheilev*) or the “choicest part” (*reishit*), this offering is given to the *kohanim*. Unlike the standard tithe or the chronological first fruit, *terumah* represents the giving of the very best of the produce (grain, wine, and oil).

Why does the Torah require such varied forms of giving? The answer lies in the different human experiences they represent.

Bikkurim represents total nullification before G-d. By giving the first item

immediately, the farmer acknowledges that the land and its fertility belong entirely to G-d. There is no human claim to ownership yet; the first fruits are a tribute to the Creator. This sentiment is encapsulated in the declaration made when bringing *bikkurim* (*Devarim* 26), where the individual recounts Jewish history – from the patriarchs to the Exodus – and acknowledges that the land is a divine gift. It is a text of pure gratitude.

In contrast, *ma'aser* represents a partnership. Tithing appears in the stories of the patriarchs as a reciprocal arrangement. Ya'akov, for instance, vows to give a tenth to G-d only if G-d protects him and provides for him. Giving over the tithes resembles a business deal: G-d provides the rain and soil, man provides the labor, and they split the profits. This mindset is reflected in the “Confession of *ma'aser*” (*Devarim* 26). Unlike the gratitude of *bikkurim*, the text for *ma'aser* is a report of compliance. The farmer declares, “I have listened to the voice of G-d... I have done all You commanded,” and concludes with a demand: “Look down... and bless Your people.” It is the language of a partner claiming his due share after fulfilling his contractual obligations.

These concepts shed light on the primal story of giving: Kayin and Hevel. Hevel brought the “firstborn of his flock and of their fat.” He combined the concepts of *bikkurim* (the first) and *terumah* (the best). His offering was an act of total submission, recognizing G-d as the source of all life – hence his name, “Hevel” (vapor/nothingness), symbolizing humility.

Kayin, however, brought “from the fruit of the ground.” He did not bring the first or the best, but rather a portion, which we might identify as a prototype of *ma'aser*. Kayin felt a sense of partnership with G-d in creation (his name implies “acquisition” or “creation with G-d”). While tithing is a legitimate form of worship, G-d rejected Kayin’s offering. The text implies

a chronological flaw: Hevel brought his gift immediately (“had brought”), while Kayin brought his “at the end of days,” after calculating his yield.

The rejection of Kayin teaches a vital lesson about the spiritual order. Partnership with G-d (*ma'aser*) is a valid and necessary religious stance, but it must be preceded by total submission (*bikkurim*). One cannot claim to be G-d’s partner before first acknowledging that G-d is the sole Creator and source of everything. A relationship based solely on business-like reciprocity (Kayin/*ma'aser*) without the foundation of humility and gratitude (Hevel/*bikkurim*) is spiritually hollow.

Ultimately, the Torah seeks to integrate these conflicting movements of the soul. Through *bikkurim*, the human being expresses humility and recognition of G-d’s sovereignty. Through *ma'aser*, the human being steps up as a responsible partner in the management of the world. Finally, through *terumah*, the human being acts out of love and generosity, giving the choicest parts to G-d. The complete service of G-d requires all three: the humility of the first fruits, the responsibility of the tithe, and the generosity of the heave offering.



Rabbanit Dr. Adina Sternberg is a Bible and Talmud scholar, teaches in Matan, the Midrasha in Bar Ilan and the Mizrahi Lapidot program for women. She is the author of *MeOhel Moed LiYemei Moed*, analyzing Biblical and Talmudic sources on the chagim.

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Tu BiShvat: Hope from Underground

Rabbi Zvi Elon

Tu BiShvat is a day whose meaning is not easy to grasp.

In the *Mishnah*, in *Masechet Rosh Hashanah*, *Beit Hillel* rules that Tu BiShvat is the Rosh Hashanah for trees. *Halachically*, this day marks the transition of the year with regard to *ma'asrot* and *shemitta*. In other words, a tree in *Eretz Yisrael* undergoes a kind of “maturation” on Tu BiShvat, a change in *halachic* status that affects how its years are counted – and this has very real practical implications in *halacha*.

That point is actually quite surprising. Tu BiShvat falls at the height of winter. It is literally the midpoint of the three winter months in *Eretz Yisrael* (without getting into the *halachic* distinction between calendar dates and the seasonal *tekufot*). In winter, trees don't bloom. Quite the opposite – they are bare. Leaves have fallen, branches sway in harsh winds. In plain language: this is not when trees look their best. Visually, this is the ugliest season of the tree.

And yet, it is precisely this day that *halacha* designates as the central moment in the tree's fruit-growing process – Rosh Hashanah, no less.

If you had asked me, I would have chosen the days of Nissan, the season of spring and blossoming, to mark the Rosh Hashanah for trees.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains this with a profound idea that is strikingly relevant today. He writes:

“What does conventional thinking say? When the time of blossoming arrives, when spring reveals itself before our eyes in thousands of buds and flowers, then we will joyfully celebrate nature's spring festival, blessed by G-d, which is also our own spring festival.

“But ancient Jewish tradition points us to the leafless trees in the very heart of

snowy winter. It shares a secret with us and whispers a moral lesson: behold, these trees are already celebrating today the renewal of the coming spring. Beneath the frozen, cracked, gray, and cold bark that wraps the naked trees, beneath that outer shell, new and vibrant life is already pulsing at full strength...

“Go out and see the trees at the height of their growth. Are they not adorned – with their fruits, their crowns of leaves, their branches? And then the fruits are plundered and picked, the leaves wither and fall, autumn winds come, bold winter storms arrive and tear away even the final leaf... and yet the trees are not broken. Their stature is not diminished. Despite all this devastation, they celebrate this day deep within themselves, in the inner chambers of their being – facing winter and its terrors – celebrating the festival of their revival, the festival of spring.”

Superficial eyes are unimpressed by a tree in winter. A child might point and say, “What a pathetic tree – poor thing, it has nothing.” But precisely at those moments, when everything looks gray on the outside, if we penetrate inward – beneath the surface of the ground – at the very time when rainwater saturates, nourishes, and multiplies the roots, we discover that everything inside is intensifying and growing. This is the moment of internal growth. What we see two months later is simply the result of that inner work.

Recently, I read a book by Eliya Cohen, who was held hostage in Gaza for over 500 days. It is impossible to describe what he went through there. He was held 50 meters underground, and he describes how every Friday night he and three fellow hostages – Or Levi, Eli Sharabi, and Alon Ohel – made *kiddush* over a cup of water. He tells how, whenever Hamas terrorists tried to give food to one hostage but not the others in order to create conflict, they refused to accept it unless everyone received food.

These are shattering stories of spiritual strength that are almost impossible to fathom.

But one idea comes up again and again: it was precisely those four hostages underground who managed to preserve their humanity, their faith, their bond with one another, and above all – their hope, in stark contrast to their despondent, morally bankrupt captors. He writes that it was precisely there, in the depths of captivity, that he felt himself growing and becoming stronger.

As I read Eliya's words, I thought of the tree that, above ground, appears completely withered and lifeless, while beneath the surface something is growing and developing with tremendous force. Like Eliya and his remarkable friends, who from deep underground revealed to all of us the power of faith, the power of hope, and the ability to keep dreaming of good – and believing in it – even in the darkest places.

Perhaps this is the great message of Tu BiShvat: even when everything on the surface looks barren and lifeless, that is precisely when profound growth is taking place. Seeing it requires a lens of faith – a Jewish lens, a lens of hope.

Tu BiShvat sameach.



Rabbi Zvi Elon
is Senior Educator at World Mizrahi.

The Almond Tree in Tanach: Symbol of Destruction and Redemption

Rivka Kahan

The almond tree, which blooms in the winter months, is closely associated with the holiday of Tu B'Shvat. In *Tanach*, the almond tree is not just a feature of Israeli agriculture but a multifaceted symbol of elements of the relationship between man and G-d. I would like to explore three narratives in *Tanach* in which the almond tree appears, in order to understand the meaning of this iconic image of Tu B'Shvat.

The fruit of the almond tree makes its first appearance in *Parashat Mikeitz*, as one of the products of *Eretz Yisrael* that Ya'akov commands his sons to bring as a gift to the irascible Egyptian officer who is, of course, Yosef in disguise. Ya'akov instructs his sons to bring "mizimrat ha-aretz," which refers, in the poetic words of *Bereishit Rabbah*, to crops that cause people to sing in joy. Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that, unlike the seven species that usually represent the natural glory of the land, the products that Ya'akov sent do not spoil and were thus preserved from previous years, before the famine decimated the crops. In this narrative, almonds symbolize the blessings and bounty of *Eretz Yisrael* even during the most difficult times.

A contrasting symbolism emerges from the haunting, initial prophecy of Yirmiyahu, in which the prophet is shown a vision of an almond branch as an image of impending national destruction. Hashem's ominous words - "I watch over My word to perform it" - make a punning play on the similarity between the word *shaked* (almond) and *shoked* (watch over). In the words of *Kohelet Rabbah* 12:7, the rapid, 21-day process of the almond's blossoming and ripening represents the three-week nightmare of the destruction of Jerusalem.

The passages from *Bereishit* and *Yirmiyahu* represent two opposing connotations of the almond tree's unique qualities. Whereas in *Bereishit*, the almond tree represents Hashem's blessings in *Eretz Yisrael*

even during a crisis, in *Yirmiyahu* the almond tree's unusual pattern of growth is associated not with divine mercy but with harsh, unremitting punishment.

Let us now turn to the story of Aharon's flowering staff in *Parashat Korach*, where both elements of the almond tree's dual symbolism emerge. In the wake of Korach's rebellion, Hashem commands each tribe to place a staff in the *ohel mo'ed*, and causes only Aharon's staff to flower with almond blossoms. This miracle demonstrates that Aharon and his tribe have been chosen for divine service, putting to rest Korach's complaint.

There are hints of both the punitive and uplifting symbolism of the almond tree in the miracle of the staffs. Many *Midrashim* and commentators draw a connection between the almonds of Aharon's staff and the prophecy of Yirmiyahu, suggesting that Hashem intends to convey that He will quickly punish anyone who, like Korach, challenges the *kehunah*. However, this miracle also contains a redemptive, hopeful symbolism. *Kli Yakar* suggests that the rapidity of the almond tree's cycle symbolizes the quality of joyful enthusiasm. He draws a connection between Aharon's flowering staff and Aharon's immediate, genuine happiness when he was reunited with his brother Moshe at the beginning of his story. Unlike the previous older brothers of the Torah, Aharon celebrated his younger brother's greatness. It was the humble goodness manifest in this sincere embrace that made Aharon fit to be *Kohen Gadol*.

In fact, the miracle of Aharon's staff is perhaps the most redemptive of all the miracles in *Tanach*. While previous miracles, such as the ten plagues and the splitting of the sea, are of cosmic import, they are followed shortly afterward by complaint and rebellion. By contrast, the miracle of the staffs draws Korach's rebellion to a close and marks this revolt as the people's last

major rejection of G-d and Moshe. Perhaps the reason for the uniquely transformative power of this miracle is that Aharon's staff becomes a fixture in the *Mishkan*, thus transforming the miraculous flowering of the almond branch from a dramatic flash in the pan to an eternal symbol from which the nation continues to learn.

It is significant that both narratives in which almond trees appear as a positive symbol are ultimately stories of reconciliation between brothers. The story of Yosef and his brothers culminates with their reunion, and the rebellion of Korach draws to a close with national reconciliation that draws upon the model of the relationship between Moshe and Aharon. As we have learned so powerfully over the past two incredibly difficult years for *Am Yisrael*, our redemption and strength are rooted in our unity. May we be inspired to approach each other with the enthusiastic, whole-hearted embrace of *Aharon HaKohen*, and to build relationships that do not fade like the almond tree, but remain strong and eternal like the miraculous flowering staff.



Rivka Kahan

teaches at Mizrahi Lapidot and Midreshet Tehillah, and develops scholarly and educational resources for AlHaTorah.org. Her upcoming book, *Emotional Landscapes in Tanach*, explores Biblical perspectives on psychological experience and is being published by Koren. She has taught at many midrashot and adult education programs, and worked for 20 years in high school education in the United States.



Strengthening Torah Leadership in Anglo Olim Communities

Young Israel in Israel and the Rabbinical Council of America recently hosted the Olim Torah Leadership Conference in Modi'in, bringing together close to 70 rabbis, rebbetzins, RCA members, and women leaders from Anglo *olim* communities across Israel for a full day of learning and collaboration.

The conference explored the challenges and opportunities facing the leaders of Anglo *olim* communities today. Highlights included introductory remarks by YI Israel Director Rabbi Yossi Goldin and Rabbanit Shani Taragin, an inspiring keynote conversation with Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander and Rabbi Shlomo Sobol on community building and creating belonging within *olim* communities, as well as an engaging closing Q&A with Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon on the future of the Dati Leumi community.

Through panels, breakout sessions, and facilitated discussions, participants shared experiences, developed practical tools, and built meaningful connections that will continue to strengthen *olim* communities across the country.

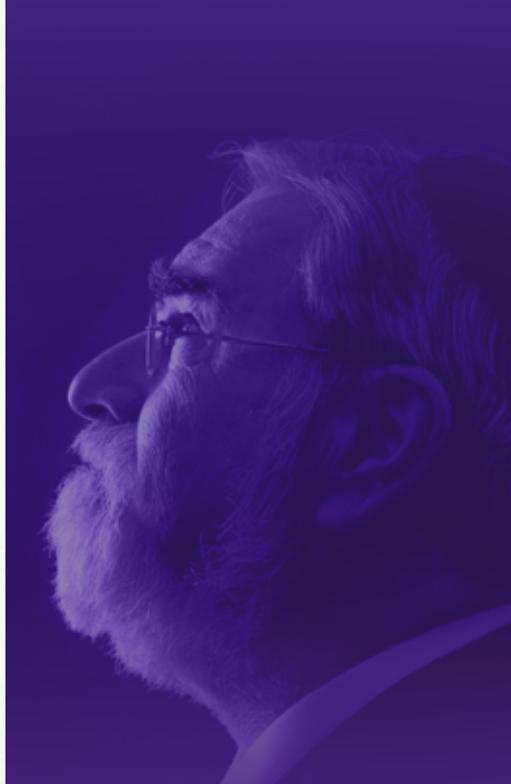
The conference strengthened networks, deepened shared vision, and reinforced the critical role of Torah leadership in shaping vibrant and resilient *olim* communities in Israel.

A special thank you to KKL (Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael) for supporting this event! (PHOTOS: KRIFKIND PHOTOGRAPHY)



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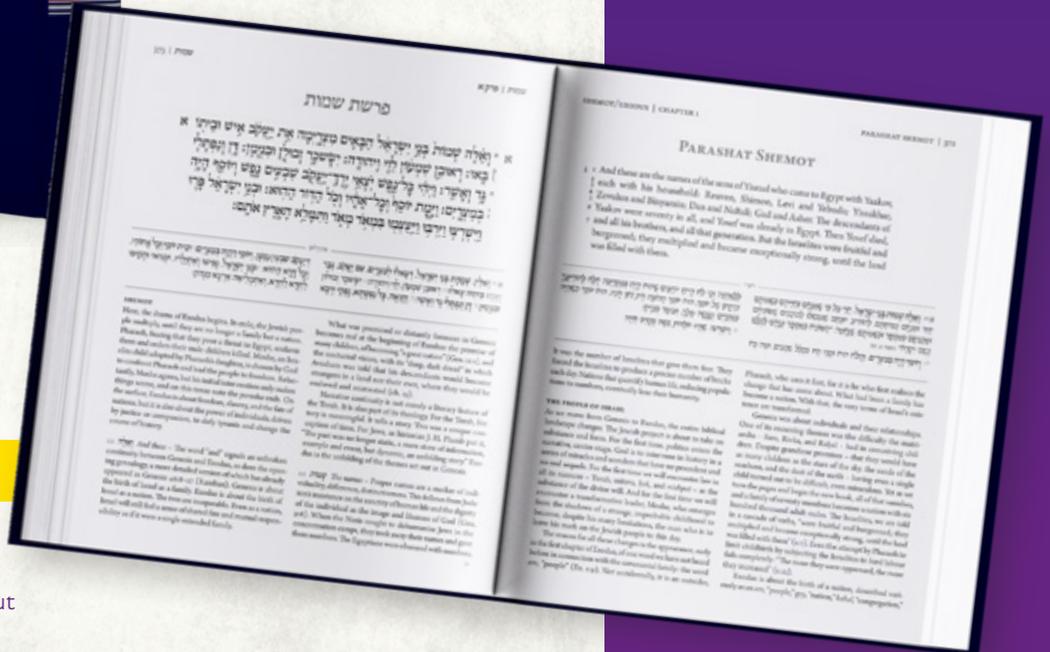


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The Honor of Israel: Rav Charlap, King David, and the Soul of a Nation

Rabbi Elie Mischel

The wagon wouldn't move. Rabbi Ya'akov Moshe Charlap, only 21-years-old, was coughing up blood from years of fasting, traveling on a horse-drawn cart from Yerushalayim to Yafo on doctor's orders. His students at the Etz Chaim *yeshiva* had scraped together pennies to send their skeletal teacher to the coast for rest. But now, approaching the sand dunes of Yafo, the wheels had sunk deep into the sand. The driver pulled and cursed, but the wagon stayed stuck.

"If the Master of the Universe is delaying," Rav Charlap said to himself, "there must be something important here." He climbed down from the wagon. Exhausted, sick, and carrying a suitcase, he walked through the sands until he reached Yafo. And there – he discovered what was so important.

It was just before Shavuot, 1904. Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook had just arrived that year to serve as the *Rav* of Yafo. On Shavuot, in the Sha'arei Torah synagogue, Rav Charlap heard Rav Kook recite *Akdamut* – trembling and weeping.

"I was shaken to the depths of my soul," Rav Charlap later wrote. "From that moment on, I cleaved to the Rav with intense love, and became his student and follower forever. I felt myself entirely seized by flames, all my physicality evaporating away, and my soul, which had become bound to the Rav's soul, ascending to the highest spiritual realms."

He thought he was going to Yafo to rest from bodily ailments. Instead he received spiritual-emotional healing. As the Ba'al Shem Tov had taught the Maggid of Mezeritch 150 years earlier, Rav Kook convinced him to serve G-d with joy, to stop the fasting and self-mortification that were destroying his body and depressing his soul. The young ascetic from the Old *Yishuv* met

the visionary of redemption, and Rav Charlap's life would never be the same.

Rav Ya'akov Moshe Charlap was born on the 29th of Shvat, 1882, in the Old City of Jerusalem. His father served on the rabbinical court of the Maharil Diskin. His grandfather, Rav Yitzchak, had come to Israel from Poland dancing – literally dancing – with such extreme joy that his entire town marveled. His love for the Land was in the boy's blood from birth.

By age 15, he was studying with Rabbi Yehoshua Tzvi Michael Shapira, an ascetic kabbalist, and by 18, he was already teaching at Yeshivat Etz Chaim. All of Yerushalayim celebrated when Rav Charlap was appointed *Rav* of the Sha'arei Chesed neighborhood when he was only 28. He was the first native born son to serve as rabbi in Jerusalem. If not for Rav Kook, he would have become one of the great rabbis of the Old *Yishuv*.

When Rav Kook founded Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav in 1924, Rav Charlap was appointed *Rosh Yeshiva*, a role he held until his passing in 1951. Though seventeen years younger, he was Rav Kook's *talmid-chaver* – student and friend in equal measure – and the two shared a close intellectual and personal bond. Through his writings and public teachings, Rav Charlap articulated and developed Rav Kook's philosophy, and after Rav Kook's death, he helped carry Rav Kook's vision to the next generation.

His writings fill volumes: six volumes of responsa called *Beit Zevul*, and most significantly, the *Mei Marom* series – discourses delivered at the third Shabbat meal, when heaven's gates open widest. In the pages of *Mei Marom*, Rav Charlap explained the mysteries of Israel's modern redemption. "One who studies these books," wrote Boaz Dromi, "feels that in every letter of the Torah the Creator peers out at him and reminds him that he has a

(PHOTO: ZVI ORON-ORUSHKES/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)

mighty, creative soul, full of life and power, that he himself is a letter in the Torah scroll.”

A powerful teaching in *Mei Marom* addresses the central question of his generation. How should Torah thinkers view the young, secular Jews flooding into Israel in the early 20th century who were smoking on Shabbat and abandoning the Torah? Were these heretical pioneers a danger to the Jewish people? From Rav Kook, Rabbi Charlap learned to look deeper.

When we first meet David in *Tanach*, he is described as *admoni* – ruddy and red like the wicked Eisav. But the verse adds: he had “beautiful eyes” (*Shmuel I* 16:12). What made David’s eyes beautiful? He could see what others could not.

When David arrived at Shaul’s camp, the army of Israel – reservists, farmers, tradesmen – was paralyzed by fear of Goliath. Superficially, they were an unimpressive army about to be slaughtered by the Philistines. But David saw something no one else did: “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the ranks of the living G-d?” (*Shmuel I* 17:26). David was the first Jew in history who understood that Israel’s army, the IDF, was the army of G-d.

David was far deeper than he initially appeared – and he saw holiness in his people that no one else recognized.

Rav Charlap explains that David existed on two levels: *nefesh* (soul) and *ruach* (spirit). At the level of *nefesh*, David was *admoni* and struggled with physical temptation. But at the level of *ruach*, he possessed a yearning for holiness like no other. The *Midrash* recounts that David told G-d: “Master of the Universe, each day I would plan where I was going, intending to visit this place or that house, but my feet would not take me there. Instead, my feet would bring me to synagogues and study halls” (*Midrash Tehillim* 119). Consciously, David planned to go to his palace, to feasts, to the pursuits of power and pleasure; spiritually, his steps were already moving toward holiness.

“Even in our own generation, the one chosen to lead may sin on the level of *nefesh*. Yet on the level of *ruach*, the light of the *Mashiach* still shines within him. Though his thoughts may wander, ultimately his steps are guided toward the houses of trial and the study halls... leading to complete spiritual rectification.” Superficially, the secular pioneers looked like Eisav – but they had beautiful eyes. Like David, the spirit of redemption burned in them. Their feet would one day bring them to holiness, even if they didn’t know it yet.

We are David, the generation that will bring us to the final redemption. And so Rav Charlap called on Jews to carefully study *Tanach* “to reveal the greatness of King David’s soul in all its layers and qualities, seeking both G-d and David our King. It is the responsibility of the righteous and leaders of the generation to delve deeply into David’s essence, to contemplate it inwardly, and to attach themselves to his soul.” By studying David, we can better grasp the complex greatness of our own generation.

But to truly understand the spirit and struggles of our generation, we must also recognize what exile stole from us: *honor*. “When Israel, the holy nation, forgets the strength of its own soul – when it loses sight of its greatness, its calling, its unique place in the world – the nations sense this weakness. They rise up proudly, trampling Israel’s dignity underfoot.”

In the era before *Mashiach*, many Jews lose the ability to grasp the grandeur of the Jewish people. They are too distant, too secular, too assimilated to perceive their own holiness. And so G-d

allows our enemies to rise up against us, to awaken our national consciousness and a healthy desire for self-respect.

“The only way to break free of this is for Israel to remember the loftiness of its soul, to lift its head once more, to put its honor on display, and to take pride in it. When Israel does this, the coarse arrogance of those who mock it will fade away.”

No more weakness and fear. No more apologizing for existing. No more begging the nations to accept us. When we forget our greatness, the nations of the world trample us. But when we remember who we are and rise up in pride and strength – “Hashem’s portion is His people” – their arrogance will fade away before the glory of our people.

Initially, “the dignity of Israel will reveal itself in ways that appear ordinary or secular” – such as Israel’s extraordinary technological innovation. “This creates space for the honor of Israel to be recognized even by those who are distant, allowing them to draw spiritual nourishment from the holiness of the Jewish people. In this way they too rise, and through it Israel itself is strengthened.”

The pioneers plowing the land and bringing it back to life. Jews defending themselves and crushing their enemies, as Israel crushed Iran and Hezbollah after October 7. These incredible accomplishments *appear* secular. But they restore the honor of Israel – and the honor of Israel is the honor of G-d Himself.

“When this demand for honoring the nation becomes deeply rooted – when it truly settles into the heart – then a deeper question awakens: What is the meaning of national honor? From this, we come to understand that the honor of Israel is nothing other than the honor of the living G-d, the Eternal One who unites Israel. Slowly, the light of the *Mashiach* will emerge, and the salvation of Israel will shine in the radiance of the King of life” (*Mei Marom*, Volume 6).

What begins as national pride will one day deepen into something far greater. *Am Yisrael* will come to see that its pride rests not in power or technology, but in being G-d’s chosen nation.

Rav Charlap died in 1951, as Israel’s strength, resilience, and national pride were only beginning to take form. Today, the holiness he recognized beneath the surface of our people is being revealed for all to see, as our nation returns to Torah and embraces its G-d-given mission. May we soon merit to see the full glory of David revealed, the honor of Israel restored, and the destruction of our enemies, once and for all.



Rabbi Elie Mischel

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

Kuma and The Battle That Will Never End

Inbar Gabay Zada

When the war was still raging, *Am Yisrael* ensured that no Jew stood alone. In those early months, the widows of Swords of Iron were surrounded – by family, neighbors, volunteers, and a nation united by shock and resolve. During *shiva* and throughout the first year, support came instinctively. People showed up. Systems mobilized. Care was immediate and visible.

Then the nature of the fighting shifted. Israel began to settle into what Israelis call “*shigrat milchama*” – a new routine shaped by ongoing tension, loss, and uncertainty. The global Jewish world adjusted to this wartime rhythm. Life continued. Attention shifted, as it must, toward what comes next. But the widows did not enter this new routine. For them, the battle did not transition into “routine.” It became quieter – and therefore easier to miss. An invisible battle, fought not on front lines but in living rooms and kitchens, over bank statements and bureaucracy, in the weight of decisions once shared and now carried alone. Alongside grief, a new fear began to surface – that they would be forgotten. This fear is voiced again and again by the widows themselves. And so Kuma’s work is guided by a simple commitment: to remain at their side – now, and as their lives continue to unfold.

Reut Shabtai lives in Jerusalem’s Kiryat Moshe. She is an occupational therapist and the mother of three daughters. Her husband, Gai, was wounded in Lebanon. He survived the initial injury – and passed away a week later from his wounds. The days immediately after his death were filled with people. Family members sat close. Friends checked in constantly. There was comfort in not being alone – in being held by a community that knew how to show up in moments of shock. And then, slowly, things changed. “When the day ends,” Reut says, “I know that there is no one to share my day with.”

What followed was not one dramatic moment, but many quiet ones – mornings that still needed structure, decisions that now had to be made without a partner to

share the weight. “I worry about our financial future,” she explains. “I worry about how I will raise the girls alone.” These worries surface in ordinary moments – when a bill arrives, when a form is unclear, when a child needs something extra and there is no capacity left to carry more. This is the invisible battle: steady, exhausting, and largely unseen. “I can’t do it alone,” Reut says. “That’s why I need Kuma.”

Kuma did not arrive with dramatic gestures or promises. It arrived with steadiness – through a professional staff member who sat with Reut, helped her navigate complex bureaucratic systems, safeguarded her benefits and entitlements, and thought with her not only about this month, but about what stability could look like over time. “I still carry the responsibility,” she says. “But Kuma takes the weight off my shoulders. They take away that constant pressure – of how will I raise my girls alone.”

This is the daily reality Shlomit Peretz knows well. Shlomit, who manages Kuma, brings to this work a depth that cannot be taught. Many readers will recognize her name – and her story. She is herself a war widow; her husband, Eliraz Peretz, was killed in combat 15 years ago. When she speaks with widows, it is not only as a program director, but as someone who has walked this road – who understands the questions that surface long after the crowds disperse: Where does strength come from now? What does rebuilding actually look like? “Again and again,” she says, “we talk about strength – how we find it, how we hold onto it, and how we learn to draw on it differently over time.”

Each widow Kuma serves is accompanied through a structured framework: assessing immediate needs, mapping financial and bureaucratic realities, securing entitlements, providing targeted financial assistance, and offering ongoing guidance as life changes. “Our goal,” Shlomit says, “is for every woman to know that she has someone to turn to – for whatever she needs. And so often they tell us: One day, when we are strong enough, we



Reut Shabtai (left); with her husband, Gai (right).

hope to help other women the way we were helped.”

Kuma is an initiative of the Sulamot organization, founded by Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon, and made possible through partnerships in Israel and across the Jewish world, including the World Miz-rachi movement and Miz-rachi Canada. Today, Kuma supports 234 widows across Israel, with the clear goal of reaching all 354 Swords of Iron widows, ensuring that no family is left without support. “On Tu BiShvat, we celebrate growth that happens beneath the surface – unseen, sustained long after the storm has passed,” explains Rav Rimon. “The battle these women face continues in that often invisible space. Our responsibility is to tend those roots patiently and faithfully, so that strength can grow where loss once stood. In this way, those who sacrificed their own family life for *Am Yisrael* are themselves held by *Am Yisrael*.”

This is not charity. It is responsibility – carried together.

To support Sulamot’s Kuma program and stand with Israel’s widows, please contact: inbar@sulamot.org. Donations are tax-deductible.



Inbar Gabay Zada
is Director of Development at Sulamot.

MIDTOWN JERUSALEM

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Midtown Jerusalem Complex, a partnership between architect Raphael De La Fontaine and Israel Canada, brings together a vibrant mix of urban experiences in the heart of the city.

The complex includes four residential towers, a luxury hotel, office and tourism spaces, and a historic building being meticulously restored and transformed into a luxury hotel.

Picturesque alleyways lined with shops, cafes, and restaurants weave throughout the complex, creating a rich and vibrant atmosphere for residents and visitors to enjoy.

TO SCHEDULE A MEETING EMAIL SIVAN LEVITAN
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ISRAEL CANADA

Death Penalty for Terrorists: A Halachic Perspective

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Brody

Recently, the Israeli Knesset debated a bill proposing that a terrorist convicted of murder with the intent to harm the State of Israel and the rebirth of the Jewish people in their homeland be sentenced to death. The proposal would make capital punishment mandatory rather than discretionary, allow its imposition by a majority of judges rather than a unanimous panel, and bar commutation. The bill has sparked intense political and moral debate, particularly regarding its apparent inapplicability to Jews who kill non-Jews for nationalist reasons. It also raises a fundamental question: how does Jewish law view the legitimacy of the death penalty in cases of terrorism?

At first glance, Jewish tradition appears to endorse capital punishment. This contrasts with the Western world, where nearly all countries have abolished the death penalty in civil penal systems. Even the Catholic church, historically more tolerant of capital punishment, revised its teaching in 2018, with Pope Francis declaring it “inadmissible” as an affront to human dignity. One exception is the United States, where the death penalty remains a subject of legal and moral dispute. Advocates and opponents alike often invoke Jewish tradition. A careful review of *halachic* sources is therefore essential, especially when assessing a state’s authority to execute its most heinous criminals.

The Torah mandates the death penalty in roughly thirty cases involving severe moral and spiritual violations. Capital punishment is embedded in the principles of justice articulated after the Flood: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed” (*Bereishit* 9:6). In cases of murder, the Torah seems to adopt a theory of just desserts: life for life, eye for eye (*Shemot* 21:23–24). Elsewhere, it emphasizes deterrence and social protection: “Thus shall you sweep out evil from your midst, and others will hear and be afraid” (*Devarim* 19:19–20). Medieval thinkers such as Rabbi Saadia Gaon and the author of *Sefer HaChinuch* framed capital punishment as a tool for deterrence and communal preservation.

Yet rabbinic tradition places formidable barriers on implementing these mandates. Talmudic law requires stringent evidentiary standards, including testimony from two eyewitnesses who warned the perpetrator immediately before the act. So restrictive were these rules that the *Mishnah* labels a court that executed once in seven, or even seventy, years as “destructive” (*Makkot* 1:10). Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarfon went further, asserting that had they sat on the *Sanhedrin*, no one would have been executed. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel disagreed, warning that such leniency would embolden murderers.



In practice, capital punishment ceased long before the destruction of the Second Temple. The Sages ruled that death sentences could be imposed only by the *Sanhedrin* in Jerusalem near a functioning Temple. Forty years before the Temple's destruction, the *Sanhedrin* stopped convening capital cases, concluding that rising violence made the death penalty ineffective as a deterrent. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch later argued that the biblical death penalty became less a practical policy and more a moral declaration: human life is sacred, but that sanctity depends on respecting others.

Nonetheless, historical evidence complicates claims that Judaism abolished capital punishment entirely. As Rabbi Professor Simcha Assaf documented, medieval and early modern Jewish communities occasionally executed criminals. Talmudic precedents suggest mechanisms for doing so even outside the classical *Sanhedrin*. Judges convinced of a murderer's guilt but lacking formal proof could imprison and slowly starve the accused (*Sanhedrin* 81b). Shimon ben Shetach reportedly executed eighty witches in a single day, violating standard norms. These actions were justified by Rabbi Elazar ben Ya'akov's principle: a court may impose punishments not strictly authorized by the Torah "in order to safeguard it" (*Sanhedrin* 46a).

Some Geonic and medieval scholars argued such measures were permissible only with a functioning *Sanhedrin*. The majority, however, held that Jewish communal courts retained authority to impose corporal punishment, including execution, when necessary for social order. Responsa literature records rare but real cases of executions to prevent lawlessness or preempt hostile interference from non-Jewish authorities. Many jurists remained uneasy, especially about executing fellow Jews.

A key theoretical foundation lies in *mishpat ha-melech*, the king's justice. When Israel demanded a monarch, they envisioned a ruler who would judge, govern, and wage war like other nations (*Shmuel I* 8:20). Maimonides explains that royal authority permits punishment, including execution, outside the strict evidentiary rules binding a *Sanhedrin*. Rabbeinu Nissim of Gerona argued that such a system was indispensable, since a state governed solely by *Sanhedrin* procedure could not function effectively. Modern scholars note that this logic undergirds the legitimacy of contemporary governments exercising penal authority.

In the modern era, rabbinic opinion remains divided. Israel's first Chief Rabbis, Yitzchak Herzog and Ben-Zion Uziel, opposed the death penalty, arguing that life imprisonment sufficiently protected society while avoiding *halachic* and moral concerns. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein contended that Jewish law would support capital punishment if, and only if, it deterred rampant murder. Rabbi Aharon Soloveichik rejected this, asserting that execution is an intolerably cruel sanction when its deterrent effect is unproven. Concerns over judicial error and systemic bias, feared by medieval authorities, have only been amplified in the modern forensic era.

The question of executing terrorists introduces distinct considerations. Terrorist murder is not merely a private crime but an act of political violence intended to intimidate a population and destabilize a state. In Israel, this debate has resurfaced repeatedly. Although Israeli law allows capital punishment in extraordinary cases, in practice it has been applied only once, in the Eichmann trial. Military courts theoretically retain the power to impose death sentences, but legal barriers, such as requiring a unanimous panel and the possibility of commutation

by political authorities, make them nearly impossible. The current legislative proposal seeks to change this by lowering the threshold to a majority decision and eliminating avenues for commutation.

Prominent rabbinic authorities, including former Chief Rabbis Ovadia Yosef and Shlomo Goren, argued that executing terrorists could be *halachically* permissible and appropriate if it enhances national security during protracted conflict. As Rabbi Itamar Warhaftig emphasizes, however, this depends on security, legal, and political expertise, not textual interpretation. Others add that choosing which terrorists "deserve" death could spark heated debates over arbitrary distinctions, diverting attention from broader security priorities. There is also concern that executions may turn terrorists into celebrated martyrs within Palestinian society, potentially fueling future violence.

Another motivation for the death penalty proposal is avoiding the release of convicted murderers in lopsided exchanges to release Israeli hostages. From a policy perspective, however, this rationale points elsewhere. If the goal is to prevent dangerous terrorists from returning to killing, the more direct solution is to reform laws governing prisoner swaps and commutations rather than expanding capital punishment. Executions should not substitute for structural improvements to Israel's detention and negotiation policies.

Ultimately, Jewish law does not require the execution of terrorists, even the most brutal. It permits it under limited conditions but demands prudence, proportionality, and sober judgment. The tradition calls not for symbolic or politically driven legislation, but for levelheaded, evidence-based decision-making that weighs security outcomes, diplomatic consequences, and moral costs. If military, intelligence, and political experts demonstrate that executions would meaningfully deter terror and strengthen Israel's security, a strong *halachic* case can be made. Otherwise, Jewish law counsels restraint, insisting that justice serve not anger or politics, but the long-term safety and moral integrity of the state.



Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Brody

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



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

CAMPUS CONNECTIONS

The student-run newsletter of Mizrahi Campus, bringing student voices, campus events, and real conversations to the forefront of college life — written by students and shaped by campus experience.

MEET THE CAMPUS CONNECTIONS FOUNDERS



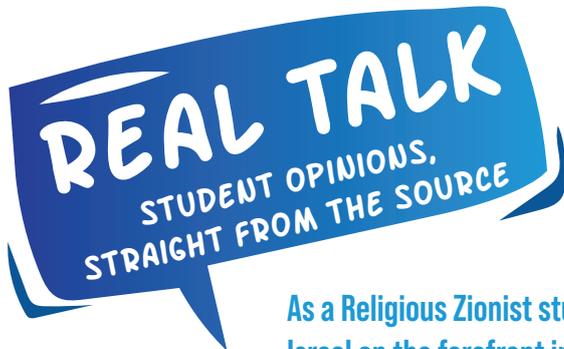
"We've just launched the new Mizrahi Campus Connections newsletter to bring you closer to the ideas, events, and experiences shaping college life today. With everything going on in the world, hearing from a college student's perspective is more important than ever."

Coby Pollack, Co-Founder and Co-Editor
Yeshiva University



"Our goal is to create a space to connect our student fellows to a larger audience, bridging the generational divide in the Mizrahi world. We hope to unite leaders across all ages in this forum."

Maggie Steinhouse, Co-Founder and Co-Editor
University of Maryland



Mizrachi Campus cultivates committed, forward-looking student leaders by empowering them to embody and apply Religious Zionist values within the real-world dynamics of campus life. It is part of Mizrahi's Maslul initiative, which operates under the auspices of Religious Zionists of Chicago, Religious Zionists of America, and World Mizrahi, alongside Maslul Gap Year and Maslul Plus (Shana Bet), and which creates a continuous pathway of growth, leadership, and engagement.

As a Religious Zionist studying at a secular college in the Diaspora, how do you actively keep Israel on the forefront in your everyday life? How do you actualize this?



Michal Mari
Macaulay Hunter College

Secular college can be a difficult adjustment for Jewish students, especially those just coming from their gap year, where Judaism comes easy. I attend Hunter College in Manhattan, which is not only secular, but has only a small Jewish community. Staying an active Zionist requires confrontation with other students every day, whether that be approaching the tables preaching to "globalize the intifada," or, more recently, we organized a program with the Jerusalem Education Institute to create a forum for open dialogue between students that may not normally be given an opportunity to converse. So although keeping Israel at the forefront is, in a sense, more difficult, secular colleges also provide opportunities to make change that you may not have been exposed to before.



Noah Meltzer
University of Maryland

A desire to stay connected to Israel is not a new phenomenon in Jewish history. We have been exiled from our land for thousands of years, and throughout that history, we kept Israel at the forefront of our minds. The rabbis who established the prayer book include lines such as *עַמּוֹ שְׂרָאָל* and *מִקְרָבָהּ יִדְוָה יִשְׂרָאֵל*. These daily moments can be a time to meditate on our longing to return to Israel. While this connection has ancient roots, now more than ever we can feel closer to Israel. On campus, there are many possibilities to run pro-Israel events or create ones! Lastly, don't underestimate the impact a small act can accomplish. For example, wearing an Israel shirt or tag on your backpack can create unexpected connections with others on campus.



Tamar Scheinfeld
Harvard University

At Harvard, I wear my Magen David necklace every day as a proud reminder of who I am and where my heart is. I stay connected with my rabbis and friends in Israel, grounding my learning and perspective in their guidance. I follow Israeli news daily to stay engaged with what's happening there, and I recite the *Mi Sheberach L'Tzahal* and *Tefila L'Shlom Medinat Yisrael* each day to pray for the people and land of Israel. Even on a secular campus, I speak about Israel with pride and purpose, ensuring that my Jewish identity and my connection to Israel remain one and the same.



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CAMPUS TORAH CORNER

Mordechai Weiss, Washington University in St. Louis



Every year, we celebrate four *Rosh Hashanot*, four new years: the new year for years, kings and festivals, tithing animals, and trees. As we approach Tu BiShvat, the new year for trees, a deeper understanding of the holiday seems to be required. In the first *mishnah* of *Masechet Rosh Hashanah*, Tu BiShvat is defined as the determining date for *terumot* and *ma'asrot*, *mitzvot* that only apply in *Eretz Yisrael*. The Torah, when describing the Land of Israel, defines it through its produce: "*Eretz chitah u'se'orah...eret zayt shemen u'devash*" (*Devarim* 8:8). The beautiful figs and dates provide more than mere decoration in the land; the fruit-bearing trees are the measure of the land's blessing and purpose. The Netziv explains that when the Torah says "*Eretz Tova*," a good land, its praise for the land is not just in terms of agriculture but also regarding its ability to sustain a nation living according to the Torah, responding to the Jew's spiritual state. The Torah makes the comparison of humans to trees "אִישׁ כַּעֲצֵי הַשָּׂדֶה" (אִישׁ כַּעֲצֵי הַשָּׂדֶה) – for a person is like a tree of the field (*Devarim* 20:19). This comparison applies to *Am Yisrael* as much as it does to us individually. Trees take time to seed, flower and bear fruit - thereby realizing their true potential and fulfilling their purpose. *Am Yisrael's* mission unfolds gradually, especially in the Land of Israel. Exile to *Chutz La'aretz* is

the transplanting of our tree in foreign (and sometimes hostile) soil, and the return to our Land allows us to replant and resume our growth in the soil that a Jew best thrives on. Rav Kook teaches in *Orot Eretz Yisrael* that the revival of *Eretz Yisrael* starts beneath the surface. After *galut*, we need to return to the Land and begin to thrive before growing the fruit of *kedusha* (holiness) once more. Tu BiShvat acknowledges not the blossoming, but when the sap starts to flow as the winter ebbs. That beginning of renewed vitality is before any bud, blossom, or fruit is visible. In fact, the trees often are completely bare! This teaches us that the most important part of the rebirth of Jewish life in *Eretz Yisrael* is the spiritual rebuilding we are working on right now (before the spiritual flowering is complete). Tu BiShvat shows *Eretz Yisrael* is alive at its core which responds to the spirituality of *Am Yisrael*. Growth in the Land is a direct result of the actions we take to connect to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, such as *mitzvot* and *tefillah*. Even when the tree is completely bare, the process has already begun. Now is the time to double down and make sure that the "date" to be grown is the biggest and most beautiful of all.

RECENT MIZRACHI CAMPUS (MC) HIGHLIGHTS



MC fellows on Derech Avot as a part of their Shabbaton in Alon Shvut



MC fellows at Jewish News Syndicate (JNS) event alongside Leo Terrell



MC fellow, Mordechai Weiss, led an October 7th vigil at Washington University, St. Louis



MC fellows at AZM-Biennial



MC fellows at Hunter College invited Charlotte Korchak to speak to students



Coby Pollack and Simona Pitterman representing Mizrachi Campus at the World Zionist Congress

הַמִּזְרָחִי

HAMIZRACHI

COMPILED BY: JACQUI AUSTEN
DESIGNED BY: LEAH RUBIN

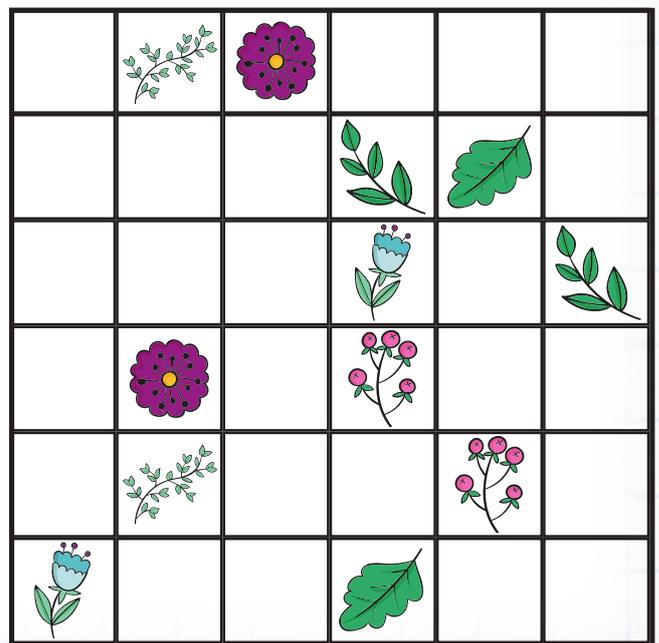
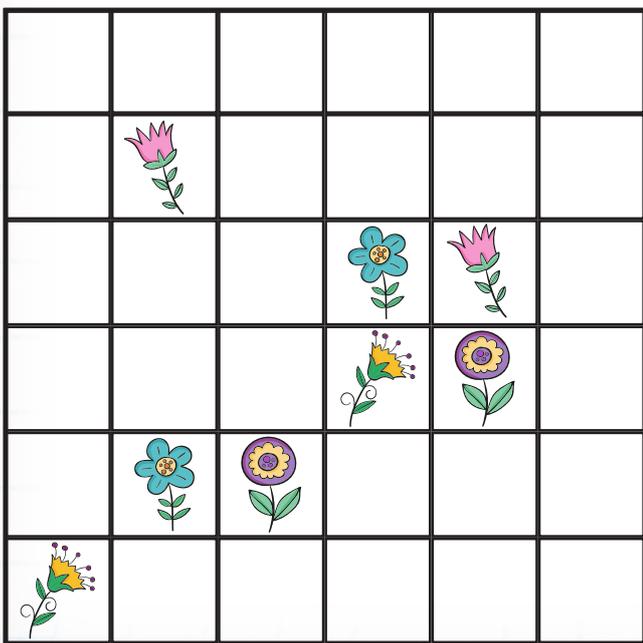
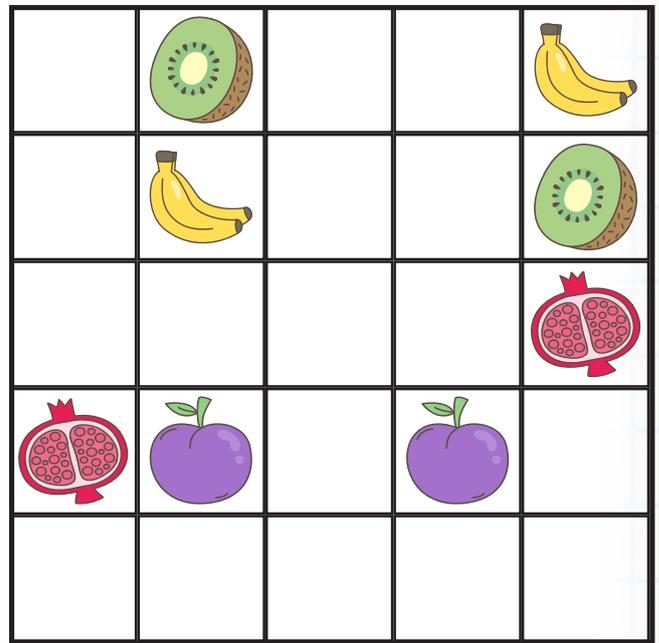
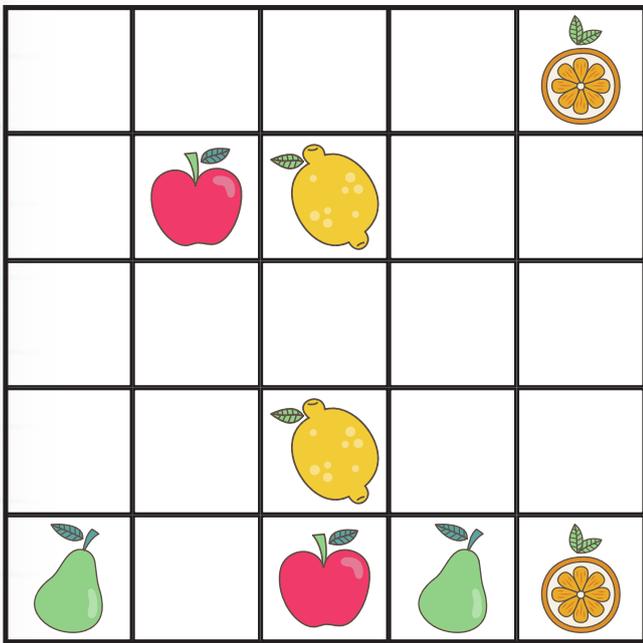
KIDS CORNER

GARDEN GRID

Your goal: Help the garden grow by connecting matching fruits, plants or flowers with a continuous path!

How it works: Look for pairs of matching fruits/foilage on the grid. Draw a path connecting each pair. The path can twist and turn, but...Paths cannot cross or overlap! Fill the entire grid. Every square must become part of a path. When all pairs are connected and no empty spaces remain, you've grown a perfect Garden Grid!

Tips: ★ Start with the pairs that feel easiest to connect. ★ Try not to block off space you'll need later.
★ Think like roots—sometimes the best path is the one that curves around!





MEET RUTH BADER GINSBURG



March 15, 1933 - September 18, 2020 (17 Adar 5693 - 29 Elul 5780)

Supreme Court Justice and Defender of Equal Rights

Ruth Bader Ginsburg was born to a working class family in Brooklyn, New York. Her family belonged to a traditional congregation in the city. She graduated from Columbia University's law school but found it hard to get a job because she was a woman, which was likely one of the many reasons why Ruth decided to fight for women's rights. She was a part of a team who formulated a law stating that employers could not discriminate against employees based on their gender. She was the first woman to receive tenure as a law professor at Columbia University and was the first in many fields throughout her life. She became the first Jewish female Supreme Court justice (and the second woman). She fought constantly in the name of equality for men and women, sometimes changing hundreds of years of traditions. She served as Supreme Court justice for forty years until her death and was an inspiration to young and old alike. She was affectionately known as RBG and two films were made about her life.



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



DID YOU KNOW?

- The biggest man-made forest in Israel is called the Yatir forest and is one of the biggest in the world!
- KKL (Keren Kayemet LeYisrael) plants 2-3 million trees each year!
- Science shows that trees can "communicate" through their roots, warning each other of danger and sending nutrients!

Test Your Knowledge



Which Israeli tree is on many ancient coins?

What Israeli tree can survive with almost NO WATER?!

How many years do you have to wait before you can eat from a fruit tree?

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

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TU BISHVAT SCATTERGORIES

Can you think of corresponding words for each letter?

P L A N T

1. Something blue _____
2. A plant/flower _____
3. An animal _____
4. A color _____





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