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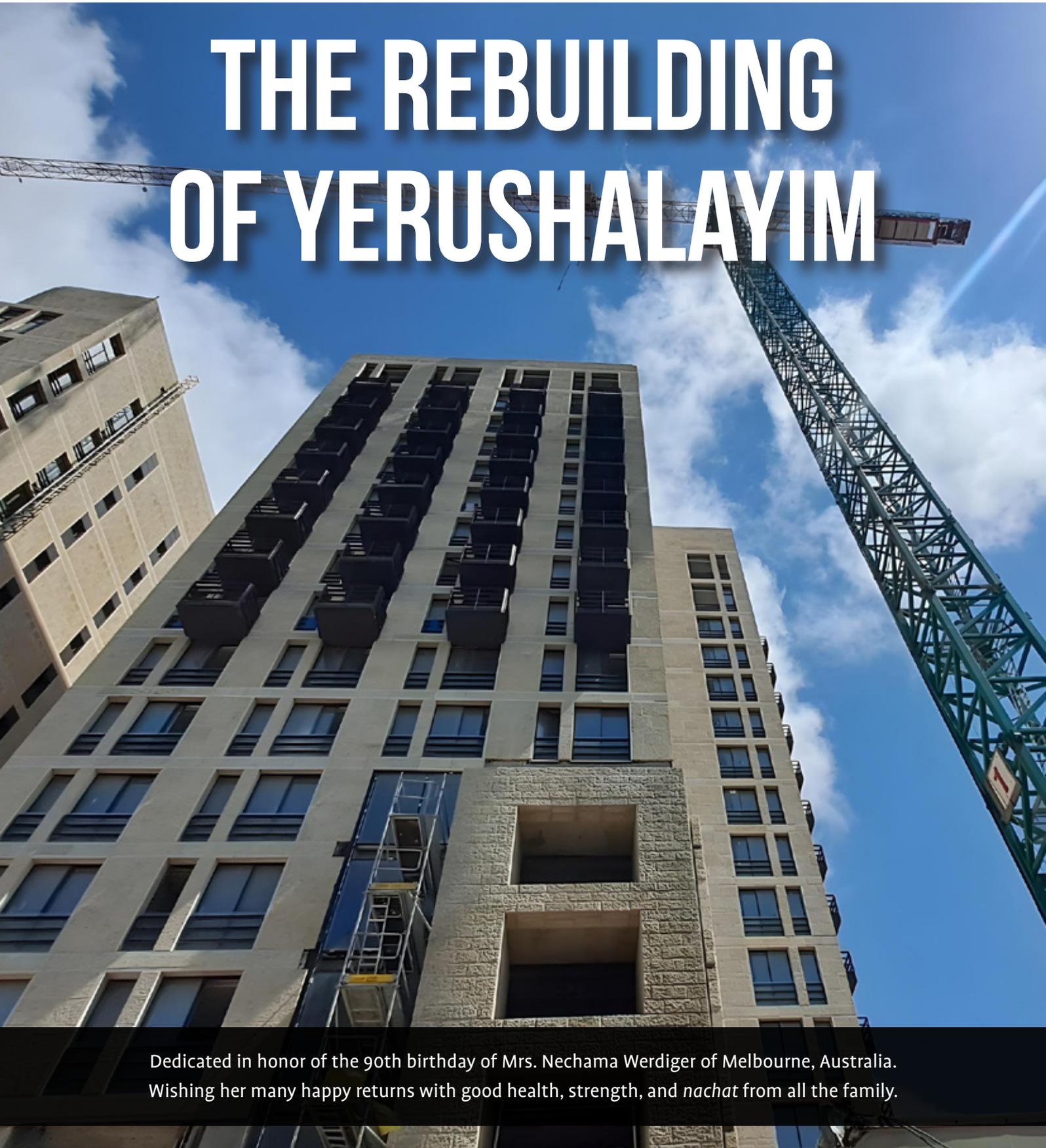
הַמִּזְרָחִי



# HAMIZRACHI

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Wishing her many happy returns with good health, strength, and *nachat* from all the family.



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## HaMIZRACHI

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**CORRECTION:** In the Yom HaAtzmaut 5785 edition, we wrote that “[Menachem] Kalmanson accepted the award posthumously on behalf of his brother, Elchanan Kalmanson, who was killed on October 7, 2023, while rescuing civilians during the Hamas attack on southern Israel.” In fact, the award was given to Menachem Kalmanson and Itiel Zohar, the other members of the squad. As the award is not given posthumously, Elchanan was not able to receive this official award to recognize his heroism.



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**ON THE FRONTLINES FOR ISRAEL**

Dear Friends,

We wanted to write a heartfelt note of thanks.

If you voted in this election – or helped others do so – thank you. **Your support for OIC-Mizrachi means the world to us.** We're especially grateful for those who went the extra mile, encouraging family and friends to join in strengthening the voice of Torah, *Am Yisrael*, and *Eretz Yisrael* in the World Zionist Congress.

The results won't be public for a few weeks, but no matter the outcome, we are so proud of what we built together. This campaign wasn't just about votes – it was about values, about community, and about a shared vision for a strong, vibrant future together **on the frontlines** of Jewish destiny.

With nearly 250,000 votes cast, every single one mattered – and so did every conversation, every email, every forwarded message. Thank you for believing in us. We look ahead to the next five years with hope, determination, and deep appreciation for the partnership we share.

**Thank you!**

Warmly,

The OIC-Mizrachi Team

# The Torah Destroyed Jerusalem

**Rabbi Doron Perez**

**W**e are all familiar with *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred, being the cause of the destruction.

However, Rabbi Yochanan offers another explanation – one so surprising that we would never dare express it if not for it coming from one of our greatest Talmudic sages. His insight gave me great pause, shifted my worldview, and revealed not only the immeasurable power of Torah for good, but also its potential, if misused, to cause havoc and destruction.

Rabbi Yochanan states that Jerusalem was destroyed because people followed the laws and judgments of the Torah. The Talmud immediately challenges this, asking how this could be when Torah law is precisely what we are commanded to follow. The Talmud clarifies: “Jerusalem was destroyed because people followed the letter of the law and didn’t go beyond the letter of the law” (*Bava Metzia* 30b).

This mind-boggling paradigm shift reveals a profound truth – the laws and judgments of Torah, when divorced from their spirit, are not only incomplete but can become a source of destruction. This realization helped me understand the limits of absolute truth. While nothing exceeds the truth of Hashem’s Torah, truth alone is

insufficient. It must incorporate other foundational Torah values to preserve its spirit and prevent it from tearing society apart.

## **‘This is the Torah’ – a source of life and death**

I later encountered equally challenging Talmudic statements that shook me. The Torah itself can somehow be both a source of life and, Heaven forbid, of death. As bewildering as this seems, evidence for the Torah’s dual nature appears throughout rabbinic literature.

The first source comes from a verse we recite when taking out the Torah. Either before the Torah reading (Sephardim) or immediately after (Ashkenazim), we point at the scroll and chant: “זאת התורה אשר שם משה לפני בני ישראל, This is the Torah that Moshe placed before the Children of Israel” (*Devarim* 4:44).

The Hebrew word *sam* means not only “placed” but also refers to medicine or an elixir. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi expounds: “What is meant by, ‘And this is the Torah which Moshe placed before the Children of Israel’? If one merits, it becomes for him a *sam hachayim* – an elixir of life; if one

does not merit, it becomes for him a *sam hamavet* – poison of death” (*Yoma* 72b).

Similarly, commenting on the Ha’azinu song, our sages convey this sobering idea: “Rava raised a contradiction – at the beginning of the verse it states: ‘My doctrine shall drop [*ya’arof*] as the rain,’ in a harsh manner, yet later it reads: ‘My speech shall distill as the dew,’ in a gentle tone. How can it be both? If one is a worthy Torah scholar, the Torah flows through him like gentle dew, but if not worthy, it breaks his neck [*orfehu*] like powerful rain. A *baraita* teaches that Rabbi Bena’a would say: Anyone engaging in Torah for its own sake finds it an elixir of life, as stated: ‘It is a tree of life to them who uphold it’ (*Mishlei* 3:18)... But anyone engaging in Torah not for its own sake finds it an elixir of death, as stated: ‘My doctrine shall drop [*ya’arof*] as the rain,’ where *arifa* signifies killing, as in: ‘And they shall break the heifer’s neck [*arefu*] there in the valley’ (*Devarim* 21:4)” (*Ta’anit* 7a).

One final analogy compares Torah to a powerful prince: “Rabbi Chananel bar Papa asked: What is meant by, ‘Hear, for I will speak princely things’ (*Mishlei* 8:6)? Why are Torah’s words compared to a prince? To teach that just as a prince holds power over life and death, so too do

the words of Torah have potential for life or death" (*Shabbat* 88b).

The warning is clear – Torah resembles a drug, rain, and a powerful ruler. Each carries potential for tremendous good and terrible harm: a drug can be either life-giving medicine or deadly poison; rain can bring gentle, life-sustaining moisture or devastating floods; a ruler can protect or destroy.

How can it be that the holy and pure revealed word of G-d might become a source of such destruction?

Perhaps one of life's greatest truisms is that whatever has the most potential for good also has the most potential for harm. When correctly understood and implemented, Torah creates immeasurable good, but in the wrong hands, it can yield horrific results. Torah resembles a nuclear weapon – in righteous hands, it deters and eliminates evil, but in the hands of the misguided, it can cause immeasurable destruction. Or a powerful ruler who can decide on the life or death of his subjects.

## Beneath the letter of the law

How can we ensure that Torah serves only as a source of life?

In our first source, Rabbi Yochanan himself offers the solution – *lifnim mishurat hadin*. Often translated as “beyond the letter of the law” or “the spirit of the law,” it literally means “within” or “beneath” the letter of the law – the foundation of the law itself. Just as we see only the tip of an iceberg projecting above water while the majority lies beneath the surface, Torah has deep roots and foundations. Just as a building without solid underpinnings endangers the entire structure, law without foundational values can cause the collapse of the entire system.

What are these critical foundations? I will highlight three as described by our sages:

**1. A Torah of life** – “See, I set before you this day life and good, death and evil” (*Devarim* 30:15). The traditional interpretation of Rashi and Seforno understands this to mean that Torah itself represents life and good, while departing from Torah leads to death and evil. However, Rabbeinu Bachya ben Asher presents a strikingly different view that aligns with the Talmudic perspectives we've discussed. He suggests that the verse is actually teaching us that Torah itself can be either “life and good” or “death and evil,” depending on how it is understood and applied.

This means Torah, when properly understood, becomes the ultimate source of life

and goodness. Yet when misunderstood or misapplied, this same Torah can tragically become a source of death and destruction. We see this contrast starkly illustrated in our world: Hamas and radical Islam have twisted G-d's Word into a culture that glorifies death and destruction, while Judaism has consistently championed a culture of life.

This is why the Torah explicitly urges us to “choose life.” We must choose the path of Torah that brings life to the world rather than death and destruction. Authentic Torah must perpetuate life, foster hope in humanity's future, and advance the principle of “live and let live” rather than “murder and die.”

**2. Derech erez precedes the Torah** – According to our sages, the principle of *derech erez* precedes Torah (*Vayikra Rabbah* 9:3) and forms one of its foundations. In his commentary on *Pirkei Avot* (2:2), Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch provides a comprehensive definition:

“*Derech erez* includes everything that flows from the human being's necessity to perfect his destiny and his shared life with others in society, through the medium and circumstances available to him on earth. The term is used in reference to earning a livelihood, establishing civic order, and referring also to the paths of morality with manners and decency that correct social life requires, and related to the ongoing universal and civil development of humanity.”

*Derech erez* thus embodies the dual ethics of civility and civic virtue. Civility means treating everyone with consideration, decency, and respect. Civic virtue means striving to act for the good of society and fellow citizens. It implies living in a manner beneficial not only to ourselves but focused on the greater good.

If Torah makes us selfish and self-centered – unconcerned for others' welfare and unwilling to contribute positively to society or treat others respectfully – then it becomes destructive, severed from its foundations.

**3. To be good and upright** – “You must do that which is right and good in the sight of Hashem...” (*Devarim* 6:18).

The Ramban explains that this represents the essence of the entire Torah. It is possible, he argues, to behave in morally questionable ways in business and political dealings – overtly bullying others or subtly manipulating them, never agreeing to any compromise in dispute or legal matter – even when doing so would be inequitable – and never seeking peaceful

and harmonious solutions. One could always stand on “principles” and never see the other person – being obstinate and divisive instead of generous and peace-loving, while simultaneously arguing that the Torah doesn't explicitly forbid any of this. On the contrary, one could argue that the law and *halacha* support such behavior, thereby justifying these means to achieve desired ends. One could be divisive, litigious and self-righteous, always perpetuating *machloket* and argument, never seeking peace, compromise, or mutually beneficial solutions.

Therefore, the Torah must establish that the principle governing civil laws is to be upright and good. In defending individual rights and personal truths, we can destroy the fabric of society and damage relationships. A good person seeks to treat others well, find harmonious solutions, forgive others' mistakes, and treat others as we wish to be treated – with kindness and generosity of spirit.

## Hillel and Shammai

May our Torah be like that of Hillel and Shammai who, despite endless arguments, always maintained good relations, even arranging marriages between their children (*Yevamot* 14b). Like Hillel, who always quoted Shammai's opposing view before his own, showing deep respect for differing perspectives – which is why we generally follow Beit Hillel's rulings (*Eruvin* 13b).

They taught us that arguments must always be for Heaven's sake – pursuing both *emet* (truth) and *shalom* (peace), not dividing the Jewish world into “us” and “them.” Righteousness must not become self-righteousness where people convince themselves they are absolutely right and everyone else absolutely wrong. Authentic Torah living means recognizing that Hashem seems less concerned with who is right and more concerned that His children get along with each other.

Like any parent would.



**Rabbi Doron Perez**  
is the Executive Chairman  
of World Mizrahi.

# Should We Recite Tachanun on the 29th of Iyar?

**Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon**

**T**he 29th of Iyar falls between two days when *Tachanun* is not recited – Yom Yerushalayim and Rosh Chodesh Sivan. Does this mean that *Tachanun* is also not recited on the 29th of Iyar?

A similar discussion exists regarding the 2nd day of Sivan. On the day before it – Rosh Chodesh Sivan – *Tachanun* is not recited, and even on the days following it (the 3rd through 6th of Sivan), *Tachanun* is not recited since these are the three days of preparation (*shloshet yemei hagbalah*) that preceded the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (*Shu"t Ha'elef Lecha Shlomo, Orach Chaim, Section 331*) writes that the custom is that *Tachanun* is also not recited on the 2nd of Sivan. He explains: "People customarily call it *Yom Meyuchas* (Distinguished Day) because it falls between two sacred days – Rosh Chodesh and the days of preparation. This reasoning makes sense... since it falls between two days when fasting and *Tachanun* are not observed, they treat it as if it were one of these special days, neither reciting *Tachanun* nor observing fasts."

In other words, when a certain day falls between two sacred days – this is a "*Yom Meyuchas*," a day that is influenced by the days surrounding it and receives from them a certain sanctity that results in *Tachanun* not being recited and fasting not being observed on it. Rabbi Shlomo Kluger brings proof for his words: The Talmud (*Ta'anit 18a*) discusses the holidays listed in *Megillat Ta'anit* and states that a day falling between two holidays is itself treated as a holiday: "since it falls between two holidays, they made it like a holiday itself." From this principle, we can infer

that when a day falls between two days on which *Tachanun* is not recited, *Tachanun* should not be recited on that intermediate day either.

However, most authorities (*Magen Avraham 494:4; Mishnah Berurah 494:8*) write that the reason *Tachanun* is not recited on the 2nd of Sivan is that the preparations for the giving of the Torah already began on this day. From their words, it appears that they do not accept the reasoning of *Yom Meyuchas*, and from this it follows that on a day that falls between two days when *Tachanun* is not recited (and on this day itself *Tachanun* should be recited) – *Tachanun* is, in fact, recited.

In practice, since most authorities do not accept the reasoning of *Yom Meyuchas*, *Tachanun* should be recited on the 29th of Iyar, and especially since this is the day before Rosh Chodesh, when some have the custom to fast due to *Ta'anit Yom Kippur Katan*, which is an additional reason not to cancel the recitation of *Tachanun* on this day.



**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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# Boneh Yerushalayim Hashem

## Building Jerusalem and Gathering Diaspora Jewry

By Doni Fogel

**בונה ירושלים ה', נדחי ישראל יכנס.**

### Hashem builds Jerusalem; Hashem gathers the exiles of Israel. <sup>1</sup>

Just after Jerusalem was reunified, the Jerusalem College of Technology (JCT) opened its doors with a clear purpose: to integrate Torah and technology, training religious Jews to build not just careers, but a nation.

Today, JCT educates thousands of students annually, including the highest percentage of *olim* (immigrants) at any Israeli college, in fields from engineering to nursing. But JCT's true story isn't found in statistics – it's in the fulfillment of a *pasuk* in *Tehillim*.

**...בונה ירושלים ה'...**

### Boneh Yerushalayim Hashem...

When Machon Lev for men began in rented space, in 1969, one could hardly imagine it would grow to occupy what is now a 15-building sprawling Lev Campus. Moreover, what started 25 years ago as Machon Tal for women has flourished. JCT has now raised over \$90 million to move Machon Tal out of rented space in Jerusalem and onto the future Tal Campus for women that will open in only three years.

The Malbim teaches that Hashem directly builds Jerusalem: "Hashem is occupied with its building, that Yerushalayim should be '...the city of Hashem, the holy place of the dwellings of the Most High...' <sup>2</sup> That Hashem will bring the scattered of Israel back into it, those driven to the four corners of the earth." <sup>3</sup>

**נדחי ישראל יכנס...**

### Hashem gathers the exiles of Israel...

Walk through JCT's halls and you'll hear accents from around the world: French, Spanish, Amharic, Russian, English. You'll meet an Argentine mother studying nursing while raising her family in Israel, a Chassid from Antwerp learning software development, and a lone soldier from New Jersey preparing for a career in cybersecurity. You'll witness Torah study beginning at dawn and continuing through nightfall alongside computer labs and collaborative projects.

Building Jerusalem and gathering exiles aren't just theological aspirations – they're national imperatives happening at JCT. These are the *nidchei Yisrael* – the "cast-offs," as the verse might translate – brought home and empowered in their ancestral land. They aren't just being gathered; they're being equipped. Jerusalem is being built.

Not only physically – though that too. JCT alumni staff Jerusalem's hospitals, build its communication systems, and serve in IDF intelligence



JCT students hail from Israel, America, Canada, England, France, Spain, South Africa, Holland, Hong Kong, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, Russia, Ukraine and Switzerland and 20 other countries!

units. But there's another kind of building happening: creating a society where Torah and professional excellence complement each other, where the next generation carries both Gemara and laptop.

In a world that often pulls religious Jews toward binary choices – yeshiva or university, tradition or innovation – JCT offers a third path. One deeply rooted yet forward-facing, amplifying Torah values in modern contexts.

Ask administration colleagues and you'll hear we're striving to continue the vision of our founder Professor Ze'ev Lev. Ask students and you'll hear about career opportunities, gratitude, and belonging. Step back, and you can almost hear the *pesukim* come alive.

Jerusalem is being built – through classrooms, coding, and care. The exiles are returning—not just to live, but to thrive. As JCT Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yosef Tzvi Rimon, exclaimed, "We are experiencing the beginning of the redemption – Indeed, we are a part of the redemptive process!"

From a seed planted fifty-five years ago, JCT has grown into a forest.

**Learn more about studying at JCT at [www.jct.ac.il/international](http://www.jct.ac.il/international) or help build Jerusalem and JCT by contacting [development@jct.ac.il](mailto:development@jct.ac.il).**

1. Tehillim 147:2

2. Tehillim 46:5

3. Malbim on Psalms, 147:2. Translation by Rabbi Mike Feuer via [www.sefaria.org](http://www.sefaria.org)

*Doni Fogel is the Vice President of the Jerusalem College of Technology (Machon Lev / Machon Tal).*

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# Jerusalem's Renaissance

## Q&A with Mayor Moshe Leon



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## What is your vision for Israel's capital in the coming years? How will it look in the future?

Jerusalem has already begun to be, and will be, the next big thing in Israel! The city is increasingly becoming the place where exciting and significant developments happen: diverse, sustainable and accessible construction on an unprecedented scale for all population types, including young people and young families. The employment areas will be of the highest quality – we're already seeing leading Israeli companies entering alongside international companies. Commercial spaces and leisure areas served by cultural centers, sports facilities, and top education in Israel will be part of the advanced urbanism and innovation featuring intensive mixed-use development. All this while maintaining its status and identity as a historic city that preserves and connects with its past.

No less important: the city is in the process of transitioning to one based on a public transportation network, light rail, micromobility, and walkability at the expense of private vehicle use. This ensures that the city will not only be beautiful and prosperous, but also stunning, clean, and environmentally friendly!

## What else is needed to strengthen Jerusalem's status as the capital of Israel and the Jewish people?

The revolution we are making in the city will help bring government offices, centers of governance, economy, and finance to Jerusalem to make it their capital in practice, not just in nice words. This will complete the revolution. Our city is the capital of the State of Israel and the capital of the Jewish world. We want everyone to feel this way, both in Israel and from the Jewish world, and to come here and see the city as their home, because this is the place to be!

## What is the most essential thing to implement in the city today?

What is needed today is to continue the revolution, with the same determination, the same momentum, and the same meticulousness. The vision and roadmap are already breathing and kicking.

## What is the most significant project currently being promoted by the municipality?

It's a complex of interconnected issues forming a single system: diverse housing with a transportation network, alongside advanced employment

opportunities, and within them a beating heart of exciting urban renewal. Of course, on a smaller scale, it's enough to look at what's being built in Givat Ram and the Begin Project, which is an exceptional and groundbreaking project on an international scale!

## Jerusalem is undergoing significant development, construction, and renewal processes, with entire neighborhoods changing their appearance, interchanges, transportation, and a new entrance to the city. How do you manage to preserve the unique character of the city alongside the massive renewal and development it is undergoing?

Jerusalem is a multifaceted city of neighborhoods and characteristics. On the western side of the city and its outskirts, an advanced and innovative city is emerging, with high-rise construction, advanced urbanism, and intensive mixed-use development that will create a new skyline when viewed from the city center westward. Within them beats a huge heart of urban renewal, changing the face of streets and neighborhoods, bringing social justice, economic justice, and environmental justice. The city's parts are connected into a living, interconnected fabric by a network of light rails that meet heavy rail and public transportation moving in dedicated lanes, helping to create a world of walkability, a return to community and streets that will be well-maintained and pleasant.

Alongside this, we are careful to preserve the city's identity and historical values, ensuring that the view eastward, toward the historic city and especially toward the Holy Basin [the Old City and its adjacent neighborhoods], is preserved both in terms of conservation but especially in terms of appearance and identity. So that the view eastward reveals a beloved and familiar landscape. Alongside all this: cities around it, with forests, open spaces, springs, and leisure areas. The complexity and strength enable development, identity, and preservation of values.

## To what extent does the security reality and the war that has been going on for a year-and-a-half affect the city?

I like to see crises as opportunities. Difficulty and crisis bring out the best in people. First, of course, the sense of loss and destruction that comes with war – we knew how to extract from it many constructive and moving forces of unity and shared life, and from these we found the strength and ability to deal with shortages in manpower and difficulties working with foreign entities. I feel and am convinced that we will emerge from this better, stronger, and more united. This is our strength!



PHOTO: YIGAL LEVI ARCHITECTS - SIL

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Ir Olam is the crown jewel of Akiva Zuravin - the visionary behind Jerusalem Estates, one of the city's most iconic residential landmarks. Rising in one of the capital's most promising neighborhoods, this world-class development masterfully weaves together ultra-luxurious residences, a premier office tower, refined retail, and a vibrant, verdant piazza - crafting a living experience unlike anything Jerusalem has ever witnessed.

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# From Woodmere to Yerushalayim

An Interview with Rabbi Heshie  
and Rebbetzin Rookie Billet

**Recent olim to Israel, Rabbi Heshie and Rebbetzin Rookie Billet served the American Jewish community for over four decades. Rabbi Billet is Rabbi Emeritus of the Young Israel of Woodmere and a past President of the Rabbinical Council of America, while Rebbetzin Billet had a distinguished career as a Jewish educator, principal, synagogue rebbetzin, and yoetzet halacha. Together, they built institutions and shaped Jewish life in the Five Towns of Long Island and beyond.**

**Rabbi Aron White spoke with the Billets to hear about their journey in Jewish communal leadership and their new chapter in Israel.**

**You served as a rabbinic couple at Young Israel of Woodmere for 40 years, while Rebbetzin Billet also led Shulamit Middle School and other educational institutions. Were these careers in Jewish communal service always your plan?**

**Rabbi Heshie Billet:** I was on a medical track, and my revered teacher, Rav Aaron Lichtenstein, called me aside and asked, “Are you planning to make *Aliyah* right away?” I said no. He responded, “If you’re going to be a doctor in Israel, you’re contributing something to the Jewish people, and you can continue with medical school. But if you’re not making *Aliyah*, then you have to do something for the Jewish people. You have to go into *chinuch* or the rabbinate.” Being a faithful, loyal student who loved Rav Lichtenstein, I took him at his word. I gave up medical school and went into *chinuch* and the rabbinate.

Initially, I had a small *shul* in Monsey. To get a big *shul*, you need experience – though it doesn’t matter what kind, any experience helps. I was also a teacher and an assistant principal. I taught in YU and JSS for three or four years, then taught for Rabbi Riskin in his new high school, Ohr Torah, for another three or four years. Rookie can tell you about her track – she was also on a doctorate track.

**Rebbetzin Rookie Billet:** Even as a high school student, I was interested in *kiruv*. I wanted to teach Torah, but only as a sideline. When I went to college, I fell in love with sociology and pursued my doctorate because being a professor seemed like a good career. Then we experienced a terrible tragedy – our infant daughter passed away at three months old, of sudden infant death syndrome. That created a certain kind of *cheshbon hanefesh*. There

was a hair dye commercial in those days with a woman running through a meadow saying, “If I have only one life, let me live it as a blonde.” I changed it to, “If I have only one life, let me live it as a Judaic studies teacher.”

So I changed tracks and started teaching Judaic studies, with Heshie’s encouragement. After 20 years of teaching, I became a principal and remained a principal or assistant principal for close to 30 years after that.

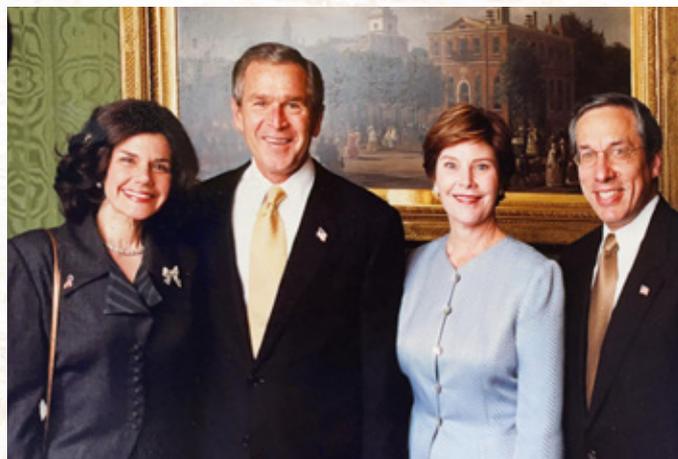
**Rabbi Heshie Billet:** I’d like to add that since I was a *shul* rabbi and there were no *yoatzot halacha* in those days, Rookie used to teach all the women in the community *taharat hamishpacha*. When the *yoetzet halacha* program became a reality in America, she said, “I don’t want to be a *yoetzet halacha*, but I would like to learn inside what I’ve been teaching based just on reading about it.” So she took the *yoetzet halacha* program with its 18 tests in America and several tests on biology and physiology – and she passed. Of all the *yoatzot halacha* in America at the time, she was the only one who wrote the answers to the tests in Hebrew. She became a *yoetzet halacha* and still answers questions from people who call her, though she doesn’t get paid for it and doesn’t officially function in that capacity.

**You mentioned the community where you were leaders. People know the Five Towns as one of the biggest Jewish communities in the Diaspora today, but what was it like when you began? How has it grown and changed?**

**Rabbi Heshie Billet:** I think we came there about 22 years after it began. Rabbi Binyamin Kamenetsky started the community and was rabbi for one year. Then my predecessor, Rabbi Shaya



Rabbi Hershel Schachter, Rabbi Mordechai Willig, and Rabbi Billet.



The Billets with Former US President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush.

Lebor, was there for 20 years before I replaced him. I was the rabbi there for 40 years. When I came, there were about 200 families in the community. When we left, the community had grown to about 1,300 families. The Five Towns became attractive as suburbs gained popularity and people moved out of the city – similar to how Teaneck developed in New Jersey. The Long Island Railroad provided a convenient 40-minute commute to Manhattan, and JFK Airport was nearby. The educational options were comprehensive – we had boys schools, girls schools, separate-gender institutions, and co-ed schools at both elementary and high school levels. Whatever type of Orthodox education parents wanted for their children was available. These advantages made it a magnet for Jewish families.

**Rebbetzin Rookie Billet:** I should add that there was a *mikvah* in Far Rockaway, but none in the Five Towns when we arrived. One was developed around 1981. There were some lawyers who handled it pro bono, acquired the property, and dealt with neighbors who opposed it.

**Rabbi Heshie Billet:** We were involved in building the *mikvah*, although it was really the laypeople who put in tremendous work. There was a Mr. Alpert who built many *mikvaot*. His daughter, Malky Alpert, and his nephew, David Schreiber, along with a whole committee, helped build the *mikvah* in the Five Towns. These community institutions were built through tremendous grassroots efforts.

There was a so-called *eruv* when I arrived, but when I toured it, I didn't really see much. So I invited Rabbi Shimon Eider, who wrote a book on *erubin* and whom I knew from Camp Morasha. He came out and advised us on what we needed to do to build a proper *eruv* that would be acceptable for anyone who wanted to use it. We invested significant money in building it. For the first five years, I personally checked it every Friday. Later, we hired someone to check it regularly.

We also established a *vaad hakashrut*. There were two butcher stores under it when I arrived, but when I saw how they washed and salted the meat, I decided not to buy from either. We decided to build a proper *vaad hakashrut* and hired people to run it. It has since boomed and expanded into a very fine operation recognized throughout the country. People from across the Jewish spectrum – Religious Zionist, Modern Orthodox, Charedi – all eat at establishments under our *vaad hakashrut*, which is something we're very proud of.

As the community grew, people were dying, and I wanted to see how they performed the *tahara*. When I observed the process, I thought, "If I die, I don't want them handling me." So with the help of some lay people, Rabbi Elchanan Zohn, and Rabbi Peretz

Steinberg, I taught serious classes to both men and women on how to perform a *tahara* properly. We established both women's and men's *chevra kadisha* groups. The people involved got hands-on experience at other places and learned to do it correctly. We created a wonderful *chevra kadisha* – it's sad to say it became one of the more popular community organizations, not because of the sadness of losses, but because people felt they were doing something holy and important. Every year on *zayin Adar*, they have a huge successful *melave malka* on the *yahrzeit* of *Moshe Rabbeinu*.

**Rebbetzin Billet, Shulamit pioneered certain educational approaches like 'Ivrit b'Ivrit' for girls in Orthodox schools. How did this shape your educational philosophy, and what impact did it have on Religious Zionist education in America?**

**Rebbetzin Rookie Billet:** I attended the original Shulamit in Boro Park from kindergarten through eighth grade, and to this day, I sing its praises. We live in Israel now, and I attribute my Hebrew fluency to the foundation I received at Shulamit. From day one of first grade in the Hebrew department, we didn't hear a word of English. That immersion truly taught us all.

When I became a principal later, I tried very hard to insist on teachers teaching *Ivrit b'Ivrit*. It's an uphill battle in America. The parents of my generation accepted it, but today's parents want learning to be easy for their children. They want their kids to love Judaism and learning, but they don't understand when I explain they'll love it that much more if they truly understand what they're learning and how to learn.

My teacher was Nechama Leibowitz, who taught us that "*lilmod Tanach bli Ivrit ze inuy b'lo iyun* – to learn Tanach without Hebrew is torture instead of depth of learning." I studied with her when I was 19 and again at 42, during two different years we spent in Israel. Our principal in those days was Dr. Judith Lieberman, who was also a colleague of Professor Nechama Leibowitz.

At Shulamit and other schools where I worked, we always marched in the Salute to Israel parade. We recited *Hallel* on Yom HaAtzmaut and eventually Yom Yerushalayim. We emphasized Zionism, Hebrew, and identification with the Land and people of Israel. We commemorated Yom HaZikaron and told stories of soldiers. We brought in parents who had served in the IDF. We really tried to instill this in the students, and I think that mission has been very successful in those schools that identify with Israel and Modern Orthodoxy.

**Rabbi Heshie Billet:** I'd add that Judith Lieberman, Rookie's principal in elementary school, was the daughter of Rav Meir Bar-Ilan and the granddaughter of the Netziv. So the connection goes all

the way back to Volozhin. And my teachers – Rav Lichtenstein and Rabbi Soloveitchik, the Rav – that also goes back to Volozhin, to the *Beit HaLevi* and Reb Chaim.

When I was in Israel in 1992 on sabbatical, I called Nechama Leibowitz and asked if I could learn with her. She offered me an hour a week, and I went to her apartment on *Rechov HaTzvi* behind the Central Bus Station. I studied with her *b'chavruta* every week for about 40 weeks. But the hour always stretched to three hours – one hour of learning and two hours of conversation, because Nechama was a great conversationalist and an incredible lady.

**Rabbi Billet, throughout your career, you've spoken up about issues of the day and support for Israel, while striking a balance between addressing important topics without being politically divisive. What was your approach, and how would you advise rabbis today on this balance?**

**Rabbi Heshie Billet:** I think it's very important that a rabbi not speak politics from the pulpit. There are issues associated with politics – if you support Israel, it's associated with some form of politics – but supporting Israel doesn't mean you have to speak in favor of one party or another. For elections, we always told people in the States to vote, not who to vote for. Of course, vote as a Jew. Vote your interest as an American, but never forget you're also a Jewish American, and Israel is important – as was Soviet Jewry when that was an issue, or Ethiopian Jews. I had the privilege of visiting the Falash Mura in Gondar. You have to care about Jewish people all over the world, wherever they are.

In the pulpit, Jewish causes were always important. Every Shabbat included a *dvar Torah* – never a political speech. But supporting Israel is political in a sense, talking about the importance of Israel and supporting its government.

**Rebbetzin Rookie Billet:** Sometimes in *shiurim*, people would say, “Rabbi, we want to hear your view,” because Heshie always had insightful perspectives on news. He and his mother were both news enthusiasts who followed newspapers closely.

**Rabbi Heshie Billet:** I did express opinions and sometimes got heat for it. When they signed the Oslo Accords, I came to Israel, got a Palestinian flag, took it out in *shul* and said, “This is what we signed an agreement with. It's like signing an agreement with Hitler. You've signed an agreement with murderers of your people. I don't think they'll ever change, and we'll have terrible problems.” Some were upset, saying, “They made peace, and the rabbi is saying this?” None apologized when Oslo failed and buses were being blown up in Jerusalem two years later.

Shimon Peres, the great peacemaker, was Prime Minister then, and he lost his position to his arch-enemy, Benjamin Netanyahu, because of the buses being blown up. And then in 2002, they bombed the Pesach *Seder* at the Park Hotel, killing about 40 people. It was horrible. So yes, sometimes I spoke out strongly, but history unfortunately validated those concerns.

I admit my leanings in Israel have always been right of center. I was a follower of Jabotinsky and an advocate for Begin and even for Lechi. But I also learned morality from Rav Aaron Lichtenstein, which was very important, and from the Rav. I had Rav Schachter as head of the *kollel*. So I learned Torah from many good people, giving me balance and perspective.

First and foremost, study Torah. The Rav used to speak of “the primacy of Torah.” But you also need to know what's happening in the world, and connections help. You must see the world to function in it – who but Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai went to visit Vespasian and made whatever deal he made? We always tried to meet influential figures. Natan Sharansky's first Shabbat in

America was at Young Israel of Woodmere. Yosef Mendelevitch's first Shabbat in America was there too. These weren't accidents – we were connected. I was also connected to IDF Colonel Yalon Farhi, who created *Shinui Kivun*. He identified left-wing NGOs connected to Arab communities that were undermining Israel, and we fought against them. That was important work. Still, you need balance, as Rav Aaron Lichtenstein taught us.

**Could you reflect on your recent Aliyah? What has it been like, and has your perspective changed on how you would counsel others considering Aliyah?**

**Rebbetzin Rookie Billet:** We have always wanted to make *Aliyah*. Before I met Heshie, I was dating a *yeshivish* young man, and one thing that made it difficult for me to commit to him was that he wasn't *Tzioni*. Heshie and I spent our first year of marriage in Israel – he attended a *kollel* at Yeshivat Hakotel, and I attended Michlalah in Bayit VeGan. We were already very comfortable and made friends with both Americans who had made *Aliyah* and Israelis.

The fact that we spoke Hebrew was crucial. Here's a cute anecdote – we each came into our marriage with our own complete set of *Kol Kitvei Shai Agnon*, which I don't think many couples could say! So *Aliyah* was our lifelong dream, but life happened, and we postponed it, though retirement *Aliyah* was always on our agenda.

We've maintained our connection to Israel throughout our careers. We spent a sabbatical year here in 1992, and I studied with Nechama Leibowitz during two different extended stays in Israel. We visited frequently and maintained connections with Israeli educators, rabbis, and communities. This helped prepare us for eventually making *Aliyah* when the time was right.

We've had an excellent *klita* (absorption), partly because we have many friends, both Israeli and American, and partly because our Hebrew, though American-accented, is very fluent. I always advocate for Hebrew study in the Diaspora. I feel so grateful, especially during this difficult wartime. I can listen to the eulogies at funerals of these incredible young people, hear the charges that commanders give their soldiers before battle, read important articles, and participate in tours – all in Hebrew. I'm grateful we can understand, communicate, and speak Hebrew.

Our *Aliyah* would be paradise if not for the war. It's been painful to witness the war's duration and how the noble goals haven't yet been met. I always say if only our enemies wanted what we want – to raise children, make a living, live and let live, accept people with different views – while sharing the same life goals.

**Rabbi Heshie Billet:** We're very proud that we have five grandchildren in the IDF. We know many soldiers and families and have attended too many funerals of people we know. Many of our friends have lost family members in battle.

Before the war, we traveled throughout Israel – north, south, east, and west. We have connections in almost every city, town, and village. We support the Druze and love them. We've been to every community in Judea and Samaria. We support not fanatics but the typical, wonderful settlers who get a bad reputation in the American press. They just want to live and let live. There are some extremists, and you must always be cautious of them. The Rambam says you must follow the middle path – extremism is not good.

**Let me ask about one other thing. I know you were appointed to the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad. Is that connected to something about Jewish soldiers in World War II?**



The Billets with two of their Israeli grandsons.

**Rabbi Heshie Billet:** It's a presidential commission. I was appointed by President Trump in his first term. The chairman was Paul Packer, who lives in the Five Towns and is a very active Jew. I was nominated by Chuck Schumer. The commission commemorates the Holocaust and what Jewish soldiers did overseas, as well as positive things done by American Christians abroad.

Regarding soldiers, Rabbi J.J. Schacter started Operation Benjamin after visiting a cemetery in Normandy. He noticed there weren't enough Jewish stars proportionate to the number of Jewish soldiers killed in action. Shalom Lamm later got involved. Operation Benjamin has changed many headstones, and we've participated in two missions. In the Philippines, we changed four headstones for Jewish soldiers who were mistakenly buried as Christians.

Last year in Marigny, France, through extensive research, we extricated the remains of a U.S. soldier buried in a mass grave with Germans. The German in charge of military cemeteries – a tremendous *ohav Israel* – helped us. We reburied Lieutenant Nathan Baskin in the U.S. military cemetery in Normandy. With guidance from Rav Moshe Weiss, we lined his grave with metal to create a Jewish cemetery within the larger cemetery. It was a tremendous *kiddush Hashem*.

**Rebbetzin Rookie Billet:** I relate strongly to Operation Benjamin because my father served in the U.S. Army during World War II. He was wounded in the Battle of the Bulge, which saved his life as he was sent to recover in London and then shipped back to the States. When I see those military cemeteries with walls of names of soldiers with no graves because they were killed in the Pacific or their ships were sunk, it's an honor to give recognition to these soldiers.

My father would be 102 this summer – he died too young, but now has over 140 descendants. When you think of all those lost soldiers, both for Yom HaZikaron and for America, it really brings home the tragedy.

**Rabbi Heshie Billet:** What Rookie just said illustrates the teaching of Chazal – one person can be the forefather of 140 descendants. Imagine how many descendants they could have had – it's a whole world.

I'd also recommend the Tank Museum in Latrun, which now has a new museum dedicated to Jewish soldiers who fought in

the Second World War, the Chaim Herzog Museum of the Jewish Warrior in World War II. It's incredible to see the disproportionate sacrifices Jews have made in these conflicts. The amount of research is impressive. I recommend everyone visit, though I wish they would allow guests to browse freely rather than only offering guided tours.

There's a full uniform of a Holocaust survivor who escaped to America and served as a paratrooper. His uniform displays many medals, and it has a patch that, when his daughter (a classmate of Rookie's) posted about it online, someone offered tens of thousands of dollars for it. She refused to sell, and instead it's hanging in the museum – she donated it.

### Can you reflect on your experience living in Yerushalayim?

**Rebbetzin Rookie Billet:** After the Six-Day War, there was a beautiful play called *Yerushalayim Sheli* – My Jerusalem. It featured songs and vignettes honoring the holy city and celebrating its reunification. One song that deeply moved me and my friends at the time was called *Lamut B'Yerushalayim* – To Die in Jerusalem. It told four stories of Jews from the Diaspora who yearned to reach Yerushalayim at the end of their lives, either to die there or to be buried there.

The final vignette described a soldier during the Six-Day War, caught in the fierce battle for Jerusalem. As his unit crossed the *kav hatefer* – the seam that once divided the Arab and Jewish sections of the city in Abu Tor – he suddenly realized the true wonder of *lichyot b'Yerushalayim* – to live in Jerusalem. That's exactly how I feel every single day.

**Rabbi Heshie Billet:** There's no other city in the world where you can so vividly experience the promised destiny of the Jewish people.

Jerusalem is a city of synagogues, study halls, culture, government, and of course, the Kotel with the Temple Mount. It's close to Gush Etzion, Chevron, and the ancient areas of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Here, the *Tanach* and the Talmud come alive – they are part of our daily reality.

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# כי מציון תצא תורה

## A New Generation of Religious Zionist Rabbis

On Parshat Behar–Bechukotai, right before Yom Yerushalayim, rabbinic students from the Musmachim semicha program will be joining the community of Ra’anana to share Torah in many synagogues around the city. Musmachim is a program of the Religious Zionist Shlichut Center, which was founded by World Mizrahi, and is the premier semicha program for Religious Zionist native English speakers learning and living in Israel. This is the latest impact moment of this innovative program which, having begun in 2019, already has over 30 graduates making an impact across the Jewish world. Here is the story of the Musmachim program.



For those who have visited “Beit Meir,” World Mizrahi’s headquarters in Yerushalayim, on Wednesday afternoons the building transforms into a *beit midrash* hosting the Musmachim program. This program trains the next generation of young rabbis, with a particular focus on those who will serve Diaspora communities on *shlichut*. As World Mizrahi’s Executive Chairman Rabbi Doron Perez explains, the program actually grew out of an earlier initiative, the Shalhevet *shlichut* training program.

“We started running the Shalhevet program in 2016 as a two-year leadership program meeting once a week for three hours,” says Rabbi Perez. “We aimed to teach people general leadership skills, public speaking, and provide them with the basic knowledge a *shaliach* needs. We were also teaching them fundamental *halacha* for different situations encountered during *shlichut*. But as the program became a victim of its own success and grew in numbers, we realized we needed a more rabbinic-focused program. So we created a new program called Musmachim to give young rabbis the *halachic* and rabbinic training they needed to become the cadre of future rabbis. Shalhevet, which had become very popular, would be streamlined into a leadership program for educators, rabbis, and public community leaders.”

Rabbi Binyamin Zimmerman, who leads the program as its director, describes its credentials and vision: “We are an RCA-approved *semicha* program recognized in Australia, South Africa, United Kingdom, Canada, and all English-speaking countries. The

*semicha* itself is given by the Va'ad Rabbanim of Mizrachi headed by Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon, and is signed by Rav Rimon, Rav Doron, and myself. We are planning a *Chag HaSemicha* for graduates from the first five years of the program, which will be held *iy"H* after Sukkot this year. This celebration will honor not only the first graduates of the program but also those who have already been on *shlichut* and accomplished wonderful things. It will showcase their achievements while inspiring future leaders, helping them understand that with our training and Mizrachi's connections, they too can make a difference in places where no one has been before – equipped with a skill set and organizational support that didn't exist in the past."

The framework of the program is both comprehensive and unique. "The program spans three years and covers all the major *sugyot* in *Masechet Shabbat*, *issur v'heter*, *kashrut*, and *niddah*, taught by Rabbi Binyamin Zimmerman," says Rabbi Perez. "Additionally, Rabbi Zimmerman brings extensive experience in *halacha* and technology, addressing everything from electricity and milking cows to hydroponic technology in *shemitta* and fertility issues handled by institutions like Machon Puah. In all areas where *halacha* intersects with technology, our students receive significant training. That's the second component. The third part is pastoral rabbinics – leadership training with psychologists to equip these potential *rabbanim* with all the necessary soft skills.

"What distinguishes this *semicha* program is that participants don't need to leave their current *yeshiva*. Many of our students study at Yeshivat Hakotel, Yeshivat Har Etzion, Yeshivat Sha'alvim, Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh, Yeshivat Otniel and others. We don't want to pull people away from their *yeshivot*; we want them to continue their studies there. Students complete the learning for our program while in their *yeshiva* and come to Mizrachi one day a week from 2pm to 7pm for *shiurim*. Because of the comprehensive nature of the program, we actually have some guys who are studying for the Rabbanut exams who are also in our program, as this gives a broader range of skills and training to train rabbis to lead communities."

Rabbi Zimmerman emphasizes that one of the program's strengths is its participants: "We have a very idealistic group of individuals, many who grew up in English-speaking countries and made *Aliyah* and served in the army. They bring broader life experience than many others and possess a deep ideological commitment to making a difference for the Jewish people, both in communities abroad and among *olim* in Israel.

"We carry significant responsibility, but also have the opportunity to train outstanding leaders, educators, and rabbis who will impact communities throughout the world. *Baruch Hashem*, we've seen success on two levels. First, our graduates have secured excellent positions, and second, numerous organizations and communities approach us – unfortunately, we receive more requests than we have graduates to fill these positions."

The Shabbat in Ra'anana will provide another opportunity for students to gain experience giving *shiurim* before they head to positions across the world. With rabbis currently serving in or heading to Canada, UK, Australia, USA, and Israel, the program is bringing some of the best and brightest to serve at the forefront of Jewish communities worldwide. ■

*If you are interested in having a graduate of the Musmachim program serve in your community, please contact Rabbi Binyamin Zimmerman, Rosh Kollel and Program Director, at [ravbinyamin@mizrachi.org](mailto:ravbinyamin@mizrachi.org).*



# LeOram Neilech

## Commemorating Yom HaZikaron



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World Zionist Organization  
Center for Religious Affairs in the Diaspora

To mark Yom HaZikaron, a moving ceremony was held in Binyanei Hauma under the banner of “LeOram Neilech – we will walk in their light.” The evening featured the stories of Aner Shapira, Rav Avi Goldberg, Alisa Flatow, Daniel Mandel, and Daniel Perez (ה' יקום דתם), and was accompanied by the music of Yonatan Razel.

Some of the most emotional parts of the event included when Rachel Goldberg played her violin to accompany her husband's clarinet as he appeared behind her on the screen, the audience singing as one after Cheryl Mandel asked everyone to join together in song, and when the representatives of the fallen were called on to the stage at the end of the event to place a 'stone in the building' in their memory.

Most of the 2,600 attendees were students from the gap year *yeshivot* and seminaries, many of whom were experiencing Yom HaZikaron in Israel for the first time. The event was organized by the Department for Religious Affairs in the Diaspora of the World Zionist Organization, headed by Mizrahi's representatives in the national institutions.

(PHOTOS: YOSI ROZENBOIM)



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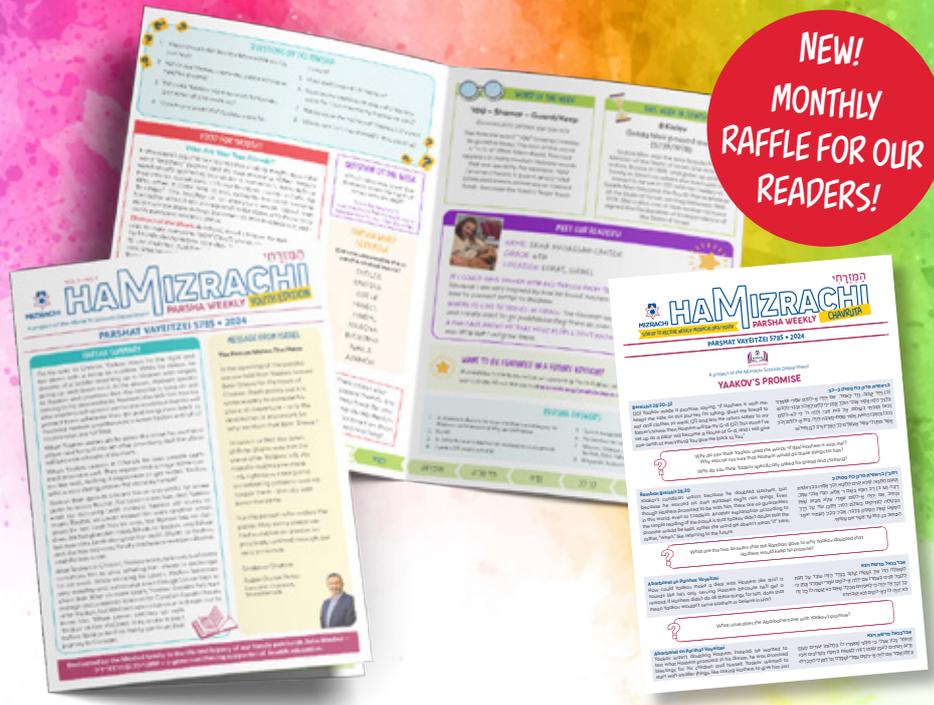


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# Diaspora and Homeland



## An Interview with Rabbi Eliezer Melamed



*Rabbi Eliezer Melamed is the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Har Bracha, rabbi of the Har Bracha community, and one of the leading rabbinic voices in Israel. He is the author of Peninei Halacha, a comprehensive series on Jewish law that has gained widespread popularity, with over 500,000 copies sold and translations in multiple languages.*

*Rabbi Aron White spoke with Rabbi Melamed to discuss his perspectives on the connection between Israel and the Diaspora, following Rabbi Melamed's first trip abroad to address a conference of shlichim.*

### **You have been teaching Torah here in Israel for decades. Was the subject of teaching Torah to Jews abroad something you dealt with during those years?**

I had the privilege of teaching many *olim*, and saw it as a great merit. Among the first groups I taught were *olim*, and there I encountered the great challenge of the ingathering of the exiles and absorption of *olim*.

### **Recently, you went abroad for the first time to participate in a conference of shlichim. Why now?**

This time they “succeeded” in convincing me that substantial benefit would come from my participation as a central guest at the conference of rabbis and *shlichim* of Straus-Amiel and World Mizrahi in Paris. I hope that indeed there was benefit in forgoing the *hiddur* of not leaving the Land of Israel.

In addition, for years I deliberated about what could be said to Jews living abroad. On the one hand, it's clear that one should speak about *Aliyah* to Israel, as it is obligatory for every Jew to make *Aliyah*, and the commandment of settling the Land is equal to all other commandments. However, on the other hand, the challenge is very difficult. I heard from a wise person that if you want to end a conversation with a Jew from abroad, you

should start talking about *Aliyah* – this will bring about its quick conclusion! Furthermore, Jewish law recognizes various legitimate reasons for postponing *Aliyah*. This creates a challenging gray area – it becomes difficult to discern when valid reasons have truly ended and mere excuses have begun. When must one fulfill the obligation to make *Aliyah* despite hardships? When might difficult circumstances justify delay? When should we respect someone's personal considerations as genuinely weighty arguments? These distinctions are not always clear. The challenge is so profound that I honestly question whether I myself – had I been born abroad in one of the developed and wealthy countries – would have possessed the strength to sacrifice my native language, established connections, and family ties to make *Aliyah* and begin life anew in Israel. This personal reflection led me to carefully consider what message is appropriate to convey to Jews born abroad when addressing the inevitable question that underlies every conversation between a *shaliach* or rabbi from Israel and Diaspora Jews: the matter of their obligation to make *Aliyah* to Israel.

### **Is that why you never previously went abroad?**

It may sound strange, but to a large extent, yes. On the one hand, I cannot ignore the central question of *Aliyah*; on the other hand, I didn't feel it was right to state the law that there is an obligation



to make *Aliyah* to Israel when these words cannot be heard, as our Sages have already said (*Yevamot* 65b): “Just as it is a commandment for a person to say that which will be heard, so it is a commandment for a person not to say that which will not be heard.”

Additionally, it is not appropriate for a person to demand that his fellow make *Aliyah* when he himself cannot know with certainty that if he were in the same situation, he would be able to withstand the challenge.

### What is the answer to this dilemma?

Over time, I developed a nuanced perspective on this matter. I came to believe that what we should appropriately ask of every Jew is to maintain a meaningful connection to the Land. This means that even if full immigration proves difficult, each Jew has an obligation to visit Israel according to their means, to remain invested in its welfare, to advocate for its development from their current location, and to support those who do make *Aliyah*.

Young people should strive to study in Israel for at least a year. Parents should endeavor to send their children to study there for a period. The goal is to reach a state where, even while primarily residing abroad, one develops a genuine bond with the Land and is considered, in some measure, its son or daughter. This connection can be so significant that when visiting Israel, as I explained in *Peninei Halacha* (*Moadim* 9:8), such a person would observe only one day of *Yom Tov* like permanent residents of Israel, rather than the two days observed in the Diaspora.

### Who is exempt from observing the second day of the Diaspora in Israel?

According to *halacha*, several categories of people are exempt from observing the second day while in Israel:

First, someone who comes to study in Israel for a year establishes a significant connection to the Land. From their arrival onward – both during that initial year and in all subsequent visits to Israel – they are exempt from observing the second day.

This exemption also applies to someone whose cumulative visits to Israel total approximately one year.

Additionally, those who have purchased an apartment in Israel, or whose immediate family members (parents or children) have made *Aliyah*, while they themselves are actively considering the possibility of *Aliyah*, are likewise exempt. The full details of these *halachot* are explained in *Peninei Halacha*, *Moadim* 9:8.



Top to bottom: Rabbi Melamed and his wife; Rabbi Melamed with World Mizrahi CEO Rabbi Danny Mirvis at the shlichim conference in Paris; Rabbi Melamed with Rabbi Moshe Sebbag, Chief Rabbi of the Great Synagogue in Paris. (PHOTOS FROM PARIS: AVI COOPERBERG)

## What did you learn from meeting with the shlichim and rabbis?

I heard many varied questions around community organization, prayers, the relationship with non-Jews, and of course around conversion.

## What is the role of the Religious Zionist public in the matter of shlichut and connection to Diaspora Jewry?

Religious Zionist *shlichim* need to express the complete position of the Torah. Unfortunately, some *shlichim* believe that their main role is to create a social atmosphere, but in truth, they need to carry the banner of Torah. To encourage Torah study for children, youth, and adults. One doesn't need to start with the laws that are difficult to observe, but with what elevates and brings people closer. For example, if Bnei Akiva *shlichim* ensure that their students learn daily laws such as 'honoring parents,' 'speaking truth,' the prohibition of theft, Shabbat *kiddush*, the commandment of marriage and being fruitful and multiplying, the students will feel great satisfaction, and many parents will join and encourage their children to join Bnei Akiva. Religious Zionist *shlichim* need to know that they are the most faithful representatives of the Torah, because they understand the central place of the people and the Land in the Torah, and they understand the destiny that G-d has designated for the people of Israel, to bring blessing to all the families of the earth through the establishment of an exemplary society in the Land.

## We are now celebrating Yom Yerushalayim. Beyond the spiritual and national importance of returning to Yerushalayim, is there any halachic significance to our victory and return?

Indeed, the most fundamental aspect is our return to Yerushalayim and the application of Israeli sovereignty over it, but this also has *halachic* significance. As explained in *Peninei Halacha (HaAm V'ha'aretz 9:11-12)*, the Sages instituted the practice of tearing one's garment upon seeing the destruction. There are three levels of destruction – the cities of Judea, Yerushalayim,

and the *Beit HaMikdash*. It is also brought in the *Gemara*: "Rabbi Elazar said: One who sees the cities of Judea in their destruction says: 'Your holy cities have become a wilderness,' and tears his garment. For Yerushalayim in its destruction, one says: 'Zion has become a wilderness, Yerushalayim a desolation,' and tears his garment. For the *Beit HaMikdash* in its destruction, one says: 'Our holy and beautiful house, where our fathers praised You, has been burned by fire, and all our pleasant things have become ruins,' and tears his garment" (*Moed Katan 26a*).

In other words, a person who would ascend to the Land of Israel, when reaching one of the destroyed cities of Judea, would make the first tear. When arriving at Yerushalayim, he would tear a second time. And when seeing the site of the *Beit HaMikdash*, he would tear a third time. Each tear is the length of a *tefach* (7.6 cm). These tears are treated with the same severity as those made for a father or mother who have passed away, which cannot be fully repaired, though one may sew them with uneven stitches if desired (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 561:1-4*).

Rabbi Yosef Karo explained in his *Beit Yosef (Orach Chaim 561)* that the definition of destruction depends on sovereignty, and therefore when governance is in the hands of gentiles, even if Jews inhabit the cities of Judea, they are considered destroyed (and so in *Mishnah Berurah 561:2*). Therefore, from the moment the State of Israel was established, on the 5th of Iyar 5708 (1948), all cities under the sovereignty of the State of Israel were no longer considered destroyed but rather built. However, for cities that were not yet under Israeli sovereignty at the time of the state's establishment, one would still need to tear.

Similarly, one would have needed to tear upon seeing the Old City of Yerushalayim. However, after the Six-Day War, when we merited, through G-d's kindness, to liberate Yerushalayim and all the cities of Judea, there is no longer a need to tear upon seeing Yerushalayim. This was the ruling of our rabbis, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook, Rabbi Shlomo Goren, and Rabbi Avraham Shapira.

However, regarding the Temple Mount, the accepted ruling was that one should still tear, because perhaps the tearing there is for the destruction of the Temple, and also because of the great desecration on the Temple Mount, where our enemies have turned our holy place into a focus of incitement against us. ■



Rabbi Melamed and participants of the Straus-Amiel annual conference for European shlichim and rabbinic leaders, in partnership with the Religious Zionist Shlichut Center (founded by Mizrahi), which took place in Paris in March. (PHOTO: AVI COOPERBERG)



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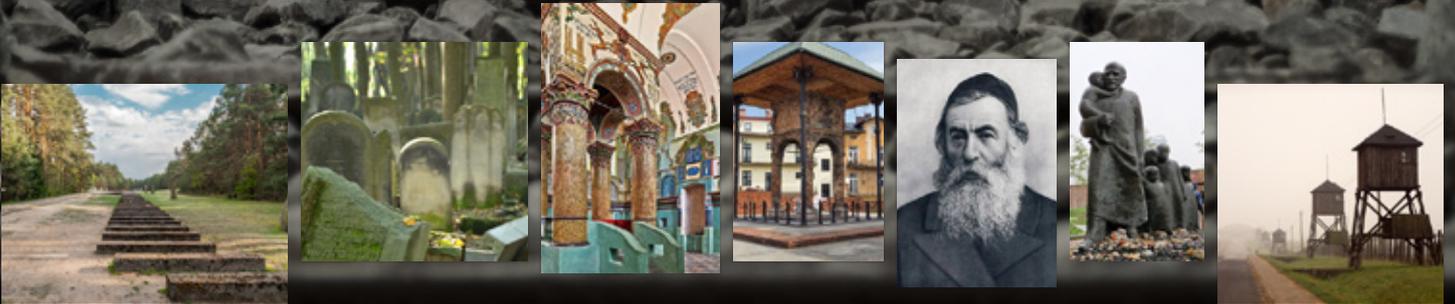
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# Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan: The Promise and Peril of America

Rabbi Elie Mischel



**T**hough he is rarely remembered or quoted today, the Jewish people were blessed with an extraordinary observer and leader in the person of Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan (1880–1949). One of the towering figures of 20th century Judaism and founding president of the World Mizrahi movement, Rabbi Bar-Ilan played a pivotal role in shaping both Religious Zionism and Modern Orthodoxy in America. In his classic memoir, *From Volozhin to Jerusalem*, he recorded a wealth of penetrating insights about Jewish personalities and communities across the globe. His succinct chapters honestly and often mercilessly analyze their unique strengths and weaknesses.

Though most of the individuals discussed in his memoir have long since passed away and faded from memory, Rabbi Bar-Ilan's work remains as readable as ever. His primary focus – people – is still the most compelling topic known to man.

Unlike many observers, Rabbi Bar-Ilan did not merely study history; he made history. Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan is, undisputedly, the father of the Religious Zionist movement in America and one of the greatest Jewish activists of modern times. He possessed unusual energy and an indomitable will – traits he would frequently need to draw upon during the many crises of his time.

“In his hands and on his shoulders. From morning to night and from night to morning. Restless days and sleepless nights, an unlimited capacity for work... He wasn't one of the movement, but the movement itself.”<sup>1</sup> Criss-crossing the country from one Jewish community to the next, he almost single handedly built a powerful network of over 2,000 local Mizrahi chapters that would play a critical role in the establishment of the State of Israel and in supporting the Jewish state during its vulnerable early years.

## A giant's son: childhood and the influence of the Netziv

As his family's “*ben zekunim*,” the child of his father's old age, Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan and his father Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (the Netziv) shared a uniquely close relationship, despite their significant age difference. Their special bond allowed him to observe and record intimate details of his father's personality and leadership that would otherwise have been lost to history.

The first volume of *From Volozhin to Jerusalem* is largely dedicated to the Volozhin Yeshiva, the renowned institution his father led for forty years. Although Meir was not yet 12 years old when the Russian government closed the *yeshiva*, his vivid descriptions breathe life into this lost world. He paints a captivating picture of the *yeshiva*'s atmosphere: “When an outsider would visit the *yeshiva* on a fine

winter night, he would see from afar the glittering lights in the distance and hear the captivating voices, and forget where he was. He would forget the purpose of his visit, and could not stop himself from walking towards the source of the magic, to the *yeshiva*. And when he reached the threshold of the building, seeing the hundreds of beautiful faces with illuminated eyes, filling the building with lofty passion, the visitor would stand there as if enchanted, his eyes open, his ears attentive, and without saying a word his facial expression said it all: "This is heaven on earth!"<sup>2</sup>

Rabbi Bar-Ilan offers intimate glimpses into his father's personality. He describes the Netziv's intellectual curiosity, which extended beyond traditional rabbinic studies: "My father had a strong interest in what today is called literature. He didn't know other languages (though he wished he did, for it would have allowed him to speak directly to government officials on behalf of the *yeshiva*), but he read everything in Hebrew that came his way. When the Hebrew newspapers *HaMelitz* and *HaZefira* [the first Hebrew newspapers in Poland and Russia] arrived in Volozhin... my father insisted that no one take a copy of the papers before he had a chance to read it all. He also ruled that it is permissible to read the newspaper on Shabbat, something others forbade. For him, reading newspapers was not a waste of time but rather an inner need to be close to everything that was happening in the larger world. By nature, he was no stranger to the world, so long as it did not contradict his love of Torah."<sup>3</sup>

The memoir is particularly moving when Rabbi Bar-Ilan recounts his father's final months. The Netziv found his forced inactivity particularly challenging: "My father suffered spiritually because he was no longer able to be as active as he was before... A man who was always doing and accomplishing, whose mind was constantly working... was now forced to sit as a prisoner in a narrow room. It was difficult for him to move from room to room, impossible to write letters or respond to questions of Jewish law, and in his heart he felt that his life of action and accomplishment was behind him. Is there anything more terrible than that? The only comfort he had was when some would speak about Torah or share news about *Eretz Yisrael* with him."<sup>4</sup>

## From Volozhin to the Zionist Congress

At the Seventh Zionist Congress in 1905, where Rabbi Bar-Ilan served as a Mizrahi delegate, the delegates voted on the controversial Uganda Plan. The plan emerged after Britain had offered the Zionist movement territory in East Africa (in present-day Kenya) as a potential Jewish homeland. Theodor Herzl, hoping to provide an immediate refuge for Jews suffering from violent antisemitism in Eastern Europe, had initially supported this proposal as a temporary solution. Though many Mizrahi delegates supported Herzl's plan, Rabbi Bar-Ilan joined Rabbi Yitzchak Nissenbaum, *hy"d*, in voting against it. "We should be ready to accept harsh conditions and even war if that is what is needed to inherit the complete and biblical *Eretz Yisrael*... It is our belief that *Eretz Yisrael* in its totality belongs to us." No other place, even if meant as a temporary refuge, could stand in the way.

As a traveling spokesman for Mizrahi, Rabbi Bar-Ilan helped establish branches throughout Western Europe. In this capacity, he found himself fighting on two fronts: against religious sectors that wholly rejected Zionism, and against secularists who threatened the future of religious factions within the Zionist Organization.

Rabbi Bar-Ilan's Zionist philosophy was characterized by a strong sense of national pride and a belief in the innate desire for Jewish self-determination. "It isn't a good sign when an individual or a nation seeks a reason for its own existence. A normal person does not rummage about in his mind trying to find a reason to justify his own life... It is not a good sign for the Jews of our generation that they constantly seek an explanation for why we must make *Aliyah* to *Eretz Yisrael* and why we must take steps to become an independent nation. If we were normal, we would desire, without any reasons, to leave the exile and return to a healthy national life, like other normal nations who have the will to fight for their national life. It is normal and does not require explanation or apology."<sup>5</sup>

Throughout his travels, Rabbi Bar-Ilan encountered many inspiring Religious Zionists, but one man in particular stood head and shoulders above the rest: Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook. When World War I broke out, Rabbi Kook found himself stranded in Europe, spending the war

years in Switzerland and later in England. Rabbi Bar-Ilan was deeply moved by Rabbi Kook's spiritual suffering in exile, the inner pain he experienced when compelled to leave the Holy Land. "Dwelling in a land that was not his, he was forced to wander far from the place of his life and spirit, at a time when the *Yishuv* was suffering and hoping for a better tomorrow. He was not like other people who loved *Eretz Yisrael* and Zion and yearned to live there. For him, the land was part of his being; in it, he saw light, and when he walked upon its soil his spirit was lifted. In every portion of it he saw a vision of redemption, and without it, he felt no purpose in his life. In Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, he loved to stroll; every step to him was precious and every new patch of land that discovered was a whole world. But when he was in London, he remained holed up in his room. What did the streets, the outside, the air, have to do with him? It was not his, and he had no portion in it."<sup>6</sup>

Still, for Rabbi Bar-Ilan, the greatness of men like Rabbi Kook did not obscure the accomplishments of the men and women whose names will not be remembered, who sacrificed everything for their nation and their land. In the introduction to his memoir, he pays tribute to these early pioneers, "who stood proudly in the face of those who scorned and mocked them, who willingly sacrificed their standing and reputation in their families and communities, and who sometimes even forgot their Torah learning and gave up their careers out of love for their nation and desire for their land. The story of these heroes, for whom no sacrifice was too dear, even the sacrifice of their lives, families and influence, has yet to be told. Among them are leaders from the Zionist movement, but there were also many religious Jews; great Torah scholars, teachers and simple laborers who made themselves the object of scorn through their speeches and activism for *Eretz Yisrael*."

## From Germany to America

Some of the most painful chapters of *From Volozhin to Jerusalem* record Rabbi Bar-Ilan's observations on German Jewry during World War I. "German Jews viewed themselves as full citizens, and believed completely in the righteousness of 'their' land and 'their' government, enlisting in the German army and going out to battle with great enthusiasm. In this regard, there was no difference between assimilated Jews,

nationalist Jews and the ‘ultra-orthodox’ – the German national spirit dominated them all... German rabbis received questions from patriotic young religious Jews that were inconceivable anywhere else: ‘If one is not obligated to go to war, is it permissible, according to Jewish law, to volunteer to serve at the front, or would this qualify as suicide?’ Only in Germany was Jewish patriotism this strong...”<sup>7</sup>

German Jews were not alone in their reverence for the “Fatherland.” Hard as it is to believe, Jews across Eastern Europe idealized Germany like so many immigrants idealize America today. “Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty?” (*Eicha* 2:15), asked every visitor to Berlin. In those days, Berlin was still loved by the Jews of Russia and Poland. This was the great city that served as a refuge to those running from the Russian Czar. In Berlin, the Eastern European Jew saw that people possessed the freedom to go where they wanted, to say what they wanted, to hear and read what they desired, after a life filled with restrictions... Everything that happened in Berlin was a wonder in their eyes... Berlin tugged at the hearts of Eastern European Jews, even before they saw it. And when they arrived there, they loved and revered it even more.”<sup>8</sup>

If early 20th century Jews loved Berlin, they yearned with all their hearts for America. Like the immigrants who imagined New York’s streets were paved with gold, Eastern European Jews painted an almost mythical picture of America in their minds – a promised land where persecution would end and every door would be open to them. Everything, they believed, would be better in America.

In Copenhagen during the war, Jews departing for America were feted with celebratory banquets and speeches. Envious speakers spoke about how fortunate this man was to emigrate to “America the great, the wealthy, the strong and influential.” “America was the land of great deeds, and from America we could expect salvation.”<sup>9</sup>

### America: What an unusual place!

While most European Jews idealized America, Rabbi Bar-Ilan reserved his sharpest and most incisive observations for this rising power. America’s opportunities and contradictions both fascinated and troubled him.



**Throughout the Torah and ingrained in every Jewish soul is the conviction that other lands, regardless of how favorable their living conditions might be, are nothing but exile – temporary stops, here today and gone tomorrow. Eretz Yisrael is the true homeland of the Jewish people, even if every Jew were to be exiled from it, and certainly now that they have returned!**

While visiting a Mormon museum in Salt Lake City, he smiled as the guide proudly displayed an “ancient” Mormon artifact that was merely 80 years old. “I thought to myself: we Jews consider rabbis who have lived in recent centuries as *achronim*, the ‘last ones.’ For us, ‘ancient’ means something that is thousands of years old. Clearly, the term is relative!”<sup>10</sup> This vast gap in historical consciousness led him to question whether traditional Jewish life could thrive in a country so bereft of history, and whether America would truly welcome the Jewish people.

Still, he was deeply impressed by America. He recognized that American Jews had “straightened their backs and abandoned their submissive attitude to the gentile master.”<sup>11</sup> “The ugly exile of persecution and dehumanizing poverty that characterized Jewish life” in Eastern Europe had ended in America. This newfound self-respect made American Jews more receptive to the Zionist message than their European counterparts. The promise of independence, strength, and Jewish pride at the heart of Zionist ideology resonated with their American experience.

Bar-Ilan was fascinated by America’s contradictions. Though America championed democracy, celebrity culture dominated public discourse. “In other countries, people would ask, ‘What is right and what is wrong?’ But in America people would ask, ‘Who agrees with this and who disagrees?’ What mattered was not the truth, but the importance of the person saying it.” American Jews were equally susceptible: “On the one hand, ‘every man does what is right in his eyes,’ but practically, everyone does what is right in the eyes of others. The man who leads a movement

or a powerful Jewish organization is a ‘man who knows what he is talking about’ – not because he can legally enforce his views but because people do not think for themselves.”<sup>12</sup>

Rabbi Bar-Ilan discovered that American Jews were less rigidly ideological and consistent in their thinking than the Jews of Eastern Europe. Many rabbis supported both Mizrachi and Agudath Israel. “If in Europe they understood that there are significant ideological differences between the two movements, in America they did not know about the differences – and they didn’t want to know... They didn’t examine the ideas or direction of the movement, but rather relied on personalities... And since every Jewish movement was led by important people, they chose the simplest route and supported all of them.”<sup>13</sup> Though American Jews have become more ideological in the century since Rabbi Bar-Ilan traveled the nation, many wealthy donors, to this day, regularly support both Orthodox and Reform organizations with radically different agendas.

Perhaps his most piercing observations concerned the contradictions within American Jewish religious life. “Orthodox Jews careful to observe every detail of Jewish law watched their children desecrate Shabbat without showing distress or concern. Others violated Shabbat themselves by going to work, but upon returning home after work, scrupulously ensured that Shabbat was observed carefully in their homes. This was neither fraud nor hypocrisy, but rather a spiritual condition... which resulted in people living in a world of contradictions, often without even realizing it. This is the deep tragedy of people living double lives who, unable to live with constant struggle, make peace with themselves... Outwardly, everything seemed fine, but from within, the Jewish community of America was filled with contradictions.”<sup>14</sup>

As World War I progressed, many American Jews became passionate “parlor Zionists,”<sup>15</sup> as Golda Meir would later call them. But their commitment only went so far. “Would significant numbers of Jews make *Aliyah*? Would wealthy Jews move to the land with their assets? Even at its height, American Zionism did not go that far.”<sup>16</sup>

In a revealing conversation with Louis Marshall, founder of the American Jewish Committee, Bar-Ilan challenged Marshall’s “Zionism is great, but not for

me” attitude. When Marshall asserted his children would remain in America while supporting the Zionist cause, Bar-Ilan didn’t hesitate to confront him: “If I am to speak with an open heart, I must say that you have made a logical error. The issue at hand is not your children, but the third and fourth generations and beyond of your descendants. Either they will not be in America, or they will not be ‘yours,’ at least as you understand it.” Marshall, not used to such directness, was rendered speechless.

History proved Bar-Ilan correct. Most of Marshall’s great-grandchildren intermarried, with little interest in Jewish organizations. The root problem was education. Despite living in New York City’s Jewish metropolis, Marshall sent his children not to *yeshiva* or Jewish day school, but to the Ethical Culture School of Manhattan. “Here stood out [Marshall’s] flaw, found so often among others like him in America: a profound ignorance of Jewish life and ideas. He failed to grasp that throughout the Torah and ingrained in every Jewish soul is the conviction that other lands, regardless of how favorable their living conditions might be, are nothing but exile – temporary stops, here today and gone tomorrow. *Eretz Yisrael* is the true homeland of the Jewish people, even if every Jew were to be exiled from it, and certainly now that they have returned!”<sup>17</sup>

### A message for our generation

Throughout his memoir, Rabbi Bar-Ilan grappled with a question critical for our own generation. Why do the vast majority of people remain passive even when so much is at stake? Why do good people consistently fail to rise to the moment and go about their lives as if the world is not crashing around them?

Reflecting on the great tragedy of American Jewish assimilation, Rabbi Bar-Ilan explained why Orthodox leaders failed to confront the challenges to religious observance in America: “There was a time when it was possible to build something beautiful from the American Jewish community. But those who were capable of acting, and perhaps even wished to act, were paralyzed by doubt that their efforts would bear fruit, and so they never took the first steps. They said to themselves, and sometimes even aloud, that their efforts would be futile, because ‘after all, this is America’ – and so their good intentions were

ultimately destroyed by their premature surrender of hope.”<sup>18</sup>

This same defeatism was on full display during the Holocaust. For most of his life, Rabbi Bar-Ilan was unquestionably a leading member of the Jewish “establishment.” But in 1943, as Jews were being slaughtered en masse by the Nazis, he became a vocal critic of the Jewish leadership class.

One meeting transcript reveals Rabbi Bar-Ilan’s frustration: “Rabbi Bar-Ilan complained bitterly about the indifference, inadequate action and lack of feeling [regarding European Jewry] on the part of American Jews compared with the Palestine Jews.” He highlighted the activism of the Jews of the *Yishuv*, stating that they “engage in street demonstrations, sign huge petitions [and] close shops.” He added, “They are discouraged by the silence of the American Jews.” To demonstrate solidarity with Jewish victims of Nazi persecution, Rabbi Bar-Ilan suggested a temporary closure of Jewish-owned businesses, proposing “for a day or half a day, or an hour or half an hour, including such shops as Macy’s, Saks and others, to show to the Jews as well as to non-Jews their sympathy for the Jewish victims of Nazi barbarism.”<sup>19</sup>

When the Jewish establishment dawdled as Jews were being slaughtered in Europe, Rabbi Bar-Ilan did not simply complain to friends and colleagues and then move on. Rejecting passivity with every fiber of his being, he rolled up his sleeves and *acted*.

Young Jews today desperately need to hear Rabbi Bar-Ilan’s message. In the 1960s and 70s, it was college students and young Jewish activists who formed the backbone of the Soviet Jewry movement, proving that youth-led activism could change the course of Jewish history. Yet today, as antisemitism overwhelms college campuses, relatively few young Jews are willing to stand up to the antisemites on campus. What is holding them back?

“Success or failure often depends on external circumstances that cannot be predicted. Yet people frequently fail despite favorable conditions because they lack initiative and self-confidence. Young people especially suffer from this, believing that those who make an impact in the world possess superior abilities that they themselves lack. However, if they were to examine and test their own capabilities, they might discover that most unknown individuals have no less talent than those

who have made names for themselves in world affairs... The only difference is that they lacked the courage to take the first step – and that lack of courage eliminated their possibility of creating something successful.”<sup>20</sup>

Rabbi Bar-Ilan’s message was simple: history doesn’t wait for perfect conditions or perfect people. You don’t need extraordinary talent to shape Jewish destiny – only the courage to take that first, decisive step. His legacy reminds us that in every generation, the Jewish future depends not on distant leaders or institutions, but on individual Jews willing to roll up their sleeves and act.

1. Temima (Florence) Bar-Ilan, *Dear Florence, Dear Mother and Dad*, 164
2. Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan, *From Volozhin to Jerusalem*, 105
3. *Ibid*, 138
4. *Ibid*, 188
5. *Ibid*, 401
6. *Ibid*, 588
7. *Ibid*, 506
8. *Ibid*, 621
9. *Ibid*, 502
10. *Ibid*, 467
11. *Ibid*, 471
12. *Ibid*, 438
13. *Ibid*, 439
14. *Ibid*, 440
15. Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Golda Meir: Israel’s Matriarch*
16. *From Volozhin to Jerusalem*, 562
17. *Ibid*, 524
18. *Ibid*, 425
19. Rafael Medoff, *Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan: Forgotten Pioneer of Jewish Activism*, <https://jewishaction.com/jewish-world/history/rabbi-meir-bar-ilan-forgotten-pioneer-jewish-activism/>
20. *From Volozhin to Jerusalem*, 391



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# Yom Yerushalayim: Our Gratitude and Prayers

Rabbi Reuven Taragin

**W**e celebrate Yom Yerushalayim this year during a tumultuous time, marked by vulnerability and fragility. Alongside our ongoing fight for survival on seven fronts, Israeli society is politically contentious and unstable. Many are frustrated with our government, which they view as incapable at best and corrupt at worst, while others are frustrated with the judicial system, which they see as politicized and hypocritical. As both the government and high court sit in Yerushalayim, the city has become the focus of ongoing protests. Many now associate the city with chaos rather than sanctity. How should we celebrate Yom Yerushalayim this year?

Chazal teach us that moments of thanksgiving should include expressions of both gratitude and prayer. Ben Azzai applies this to *Tefillat HaDerech* and directs one who completes a dangerous journey to give thanks for the past and pray for continued assistance in the future (*Berachot* 54a). *Birkat HaMazon* is another prayer of thanks that follows this pattern. After its first two *berachot*, which thank G-d for providing for us, the third blessing requests the rebuilding of Yerushalayim. These prayers are models for our Yom Yerushalayim celebrations, in which we express gratitude for G-d's blessings and pray for His future support.

*Sefer Tehillim* refers to G-d as the "Boneh Yerushalayim" (147:2) – the One Who is constantly rebuilding the city. Over the past century, and particularly since the first Yom Yerushalayim, He has accelerated this process. During this period, the Jewish population of the city has increased tenfold. On this Yom Yerushalayim, over 600,000 Jews call the city home. We are witnessing Zechariah's prophecies that Yerushalayim will "extend beyond its walls because of the multitude within it" and "old men and women shall yet sit in the streets of Jerusalem... and they shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets" (2:8, 8:4-5). Zion is no longer an abandoned widow; instead, she has been consoled by

and celebrates the return of her children, who have made her the worldwide center for Torah study.

The *Sheva Berachot* refer to Yerushalayim twice: the fifth *beracha* asks G-d to bring joy to the barren woman of Zion by returning her children, and the last asks Him to restore weddings to the city. Incredibly, we are privileged to see the fulfillment of both of these blessings in our time. When we recite *Hallel* on the 28th of Iyar, we express our appreciation for Yerushalayim's physical and spiritual revival.

Despite this revival, Yerushalayim remains a shell of its original and intended self. The city lacks many things, beginning at its center – the Temple Mount. Most of us have had the great *zechut* of *davening* at the Kotel many times over the course of many decades. We enjoy and are inspired by the *achdut* and uplifting spirit present there. When I dance down to the Kotel with Yeshivat Hakotel on Friday night, with Har HaBayit and the Yerushalayim mountains in full view, I am uplifted by the Jewish people celebrating Shabbat in Yerushalayim. Yet the Kotel is merely a remnant of the greater *Beit HaMikdash* and the full presence of G-d meant to reside there. And so we pray every day: "And to Yerushalayim, Your city, return with mercy, and dwell within it as You have spoken." When we recite these words, we should feel both joy in what has been accomplished and yearning for what remains incomplete.

The restoration of Yerushalayim began with our physical return but awaits its spiritual culmination. The *Shechina*'s return is a precondition for Yerushalayim's complete restoration: "And build it soon in our days, an everlasting structure. And establish the throne of David within it swiftly." Yerushalayim's permanence and the return of the Davidic dynasty depend on the return of the *Shechina*.

The frustration many feel towards our political and judicial systems is well-founded. We are meant to be governed by *David HaMelech*'s scion, guided by Davidian principles, and judged by those who, like

the judges we "once had," seek to apply G-d's will and law. All of this hinges on G-d's return to Yerushalayim. Our frustration with our political and judicial systems, along with our physical vulnerability, should strengthen our prayer for this return.

Though we often feel drawn to pray for our material existence, it is crucial that we focus our prayers on our ultimate eschatological goals – the return of the *Shechina* to Yerushalayim and the national repairs and restorations associated with it. Living at a time when the process of redemption has already begun and its continuation is more within reach than ever should help make these prayers more heartfelt.

This Yom Yerushalayim, let's thank G-d for our return to His city and pray that He will return as well, completing the eternal rebuilding of Yerushalayim and restoring the Davidic dynasty.

"And to Yerushalayim, Your city, return with mercy, and dwell within it as You have spoken. And build it soon in our days, an everlasting structure. And establish the throne of David within it swiftly."



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# Yerushalayim: The Final Stage of Repair

## Rabbanit Shani Taragin

**A**s we celebrate Yom Yerushalayim and approach Shavuot, we find ourselves at a powerful intersection – a moment that invites us to contemplate the profound significance of Yerushalayim in our collective national-religious journey. Shavuot not only marks the giving of the Torah but also the *yahrzeit* of David HaMelech – the king who conquered Yerushalayim (*Shmuel II* 5), and the time when we read the story of Ruth, his great-grandmother who planted the seeds for building the city and the Davidic dynasty.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi taught that Yerushalayim is “a city that brings all Israel together as friends” (*Yerushalmi, Chagiga* 3:6). This teaching takes on deeper resonance when we examine the narrative arc that *Shmuel HaNavi* carefully crafted through his writings of the books of *Shoftim*, *Shmuel*, and *Ruth*. The conquest of Yerushalayim by David represents the culmination of a long process of national healing that began with the horrific “*pilegish b’Givah*” incident – where a concubine was abused and murdered, triggering a tragedy that fractured our people and led to devastating civil war.

Shmuel’s narrative deliberately traces a geography of repair. He begins with his own father, Elkanah, who emerges from the same southern hills of Ephraim where the tragic story originated. Unlike the husband of the concubine, Elkanah demonstrates respect for his wives and builds a family through annual pilgrimages to Shiloh. Later, Shaul begins his journey searching for donkeys – echoing the man from Ephraim – but rises to unify the tribes in war against external rather than internal enemies. Significantly, Shaul hails from Givah, the very town where the tribes had gathered generations earlier to wage war against his tribe, Binyamin, signifying how unity had ultimately triumphed over tribal division. He is coronated in Mizpah, the same location where, after the *pilegish b’Givah* incident, the other tribes had taken an oath not to give their daughters in marriage to the tribe of Binyamin. Shaul’s coronation at this site symbolizes how a unified monarchy could heal the

divisions of the past and provide order in place of the previous chaos.

The journey of healing continues when Shmuel anoints David in Beit Lechem – which was the hometown of the *pilegish* who had been so brutally mistreated. It was in Beit Lechem that Ruth and Boaz had earlier demonstrated extraordinary kindness and moral integrity, creating a stark contrast to the cruel treatment the concubine suffered in these same fields generations earlier. Now, in this place of both tragedy and redemption, the prophet anoints their great-grandson David as king. But the process of national repair is not yet complete.

The final stage arrives when David conquers Yerushalayim – the walled city that the man from Ephraim (the Levite in the *pilegish b’Givah* story) had refused to enter, calling it a “*nochri*” (foreign) town (*Shoftim* 19:12). This decision to avoid the Jebusite city of Yerushalayim and instead continue further to Givah led to the tragic assault on his concubine. In an extraordinary act of *tikkun*, David – great-grandson of Ruth, who was herself called a “*nochriah*” – transforms this city of strangers into our eternal capital and selects its northern hill as the site of the *Beit HaMikdash*.

As we mark 58 years since Yerushalayim’s “modern” reunification – with 58 having the numerical value of the Hebrew word “*רח*” (*chen*, meaning “grace”) – this narrative speaks directly to our contemporary challenges of rifts and protests dividing our nation. Today, we too find ourselves in a state of painful division. Like the ancient tribes that struggled to see beyond their immediate grievances, we find ourselves caught in cycles of polarization that threaten our national resilience. Yerushalayim – with its complex tapestry of communities, histories, and sacred spaces – stands as both challenge and promise. It reminds us that true strength comes not from silencing opposition but from the difficult work of building bridges across differences. The message of *Shmuel HaNavi* resonates with urgency: victory is achieved when we recalibrate ourselves, repairing a fissiparous nation, and reunifying through the city “not divided amongst the tribes” (*Megillah* 26a).

In celebrating the significance of Yom Yerushalayim as we approach Shavuot, we embrace this profound legacy of repair. We are reminded of the process of “*רח*” beginning with Chana’s prayer for national salvation (*Shmuel I* 1:18), the *chen* that marked David’s selection (*ibid.* 16:22), and certainly the *chen* that Boaz found in Ruth despite her status as a Moabite foreigner (*Ruth* 2:10,13). We recognize that Yerushalayim stands not merely as a city conquered, but as the embodiment of our potential for unity amidst diversity, for wholeness after brokenness, and for divine presence within our collective human story.

When we understand Yerushalayim not only as a sacred city but as representative of an ongoing process of repair and reunification, we begin to see our contemporary divisions not as insurmountable obstacles but as opportunities for profound healing through sensitivity and kindness to the “other.” The miracle of Yerushalayim’s reunification calls us to the equally miraculous work of repairing the fractures within our communities, recognizing that only through this sacred labor can we fulfill our collective destiny as a united people standing before G-d in *Yerushalayim ha-bnuyah*.



### Rabbanit Shani Taragin

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# Jerusalem and the Power of Faith

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks שליט

In 2007, to mark the 40th anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem, Rabbi Sacks wrote an article for the *Jewish News* reflecting on his memories of the Six Day War.

There are times when you know you are living through history: that what you are witnessing will be remembered for centuries.

That is what I, and surely every Jew, felt on the day forty years ago when the word went round the world: *Har HaBayit beyadenu*, “The Temple Mount is in our hands.” That day, 28 Iyar, the Chief Rabbi of the Israel Defence Forces, Rabbi Shlomo Goren, carried a *Sefer Torah* to the Kotel, blew the *shofar*, and recited *Tehillim*.

Yitzchak Rabin, Chief of Staff at the time, described the scene: “We stood among a tangle of battle-weary men who were unable to believe their eyes or restrain their emotions. Their eyes were moist with tears, their speech incoherent. The overwhelming desire was to cling to the Wall, to hold on to that great moment as long as possible.”

When the Israelis reached the Jewish Quarter, they discovered that it had been reduced to rubble. Synagogues had been destroyed and holy places desecrated. Moshe Dayan made an immediate public announcement that Israel would act differently: “To our Christian and Muslim fellow citizens, we solemnly promise full religious freedom and rights. We did not come to Jerusalem for the sake of other peoples’ holy places and not to interfere with the adherents of other faiths, but in order to safeguard its entirety.” Israel has kept that promise since.

No people has ever loved a city as, for 3,000 years, Jews have loved Jerusalem. The Book of *Tehillim* calls it “beautiful in its heights, joy of all the earth, city of the great King” (*Tehillim* 48:2). The word ‘Jerusalem’ appears almost 700 times in *Tanach*. There are few laments that speak to us with such undiminished force as

the words Jews said, twenty-six centuries ago, when Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians: “If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy” (*Tehillim* 137:5-6).

Wherever Jews prayed, they prayed towards Jerusalem. At every wedding they broke a glass in its memory. At the two great climaxes of the Jewish year, on Pesach and at the end of Yom Kippur, they sang, *L’shanah haba’ah biYerushalayim*.

It is said that once Napoleon was passing a synagogue and heard sounds of lamentation. “Why are the Jews crying”, he asked. “They are mourning the loss of Jerusalem”, one of his officers replied. “How long ago was that?” he asked. “More than seventeen centuries ago,” the officer replied.

“A people that can mourn the loss of Jerusalem for so long, will one day have it restored to them,” Napoleon said. And so it was, forty years ago.

It is worth remembering that on the first day of the war, 5 June 1967, Israel sent three messages to King Hussein of Jordan – one through the United Nations representative, another via the American ambassador and a third directly. Israel would not attack Jordan if Jordan did not enter the war. Israel would “honor the armistice agreement with Jordan in its entirety.” Judea and Samaria, East Jerusalem, and the Old City, would remain under Jordanian control. There was no reply. Instead, Jordan attacked. Had King Hussein not hardened his heart, Jerusalem would still be in Arab hands. It is one of the great ironies of history.

I remember the first time I looked down on the Old City and the Temple Mount. I was standing on Mount Scopus, the original and now rebuilt site of the Hebrew University. I recalled the moment described in the Talmud when Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues

A man with a grey beard and glasses, wearing a black kippah and a black suit, is shown in profile from the chest up. He is looking towards the left, where there are ancient, weathered stone ruins. The background is a bright, sunny outdoor setting with more stone structures.

stood on the same spot, looking down at the ruins of the Temple. The Rabbis wept. Rabbi Akiva smiled.

“How can you smile?”, they asked. “The place that was once the most sacred spot on earth is now laid waste and a fox is walking across the Holy of Holies where once only the High Priest was allowed to enter, and only on the holiest of days.”

“I smile,” Rabbi Akiva replied, “because the prophets prophesied that Jerusalem would be laid waste, and they prophesied that it would be rebuilt. Now that the one prophecy has been fulfilled, can we doubt that the other will be likewise?” (*Makkot 24b*).

That was when I realized the power of faith. Jews never lost faith that one day they would return. And they did. It was faith that brought the Jewish people back to Israel and rebuilt the ruins of Jerusalem.

So, as we remember those events of forty years ago, let us thank G-d for the freedom to stand once again in David’s city, joining our prayers to those of our ancestors in the place the Divine Presence never left and to which the Jewish people has now returned.



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# Yom Yerushalayim: The Power of Our Values vs. The Power of Our Might

**Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander**

It is an immeasurable gift to live in Jerusalem. The city where our ancient ancestors walked, the symbol of redemption pined for by generations of Jews, the seat of the governing bodies of the State of Israel, as well as the city which hosts more *talmud Torah* than anywhere in the world and, above all, the abode of the *Shechinah*.

On top of all this, it is a privilege to live in Jerusalem because it is in many ways the de facto center of Religious Zionist life. Large portions of the community live in the city and its surrounding neighborhoods, and numerous institutions affiliated with our movement call it home. Wading through the packed streets on Yom Yerushalayim, one can see the logos of just about every Religious Zionist school in the country, all congregating in our sacred city to celebrate our miraculous deliverance in 1967, and the ongoing flourishing of our country since. As such, Yom Yerushalayim offers a fitting opportunity to celebrate – and reflect on – the Religious Zionist community.

The Religious Zionist community in Israel has stood out over these past many months, exemplifying the principles it holds so dear of commitment to the study and observance of Torah alongside a deep sense of fidelity to the Jewish people and the *halachot* of *milchemet mitzvah*. Not only have Religious Zionist Israelis rallied to serve – making up 27.4% of combat reservists despite comprising only 14.7% of the population – but we have also left a communal mark on civil volunteering. With 42% of our community regularly engaged in volunteer activities, supporting the elderly, providing emergency medical services, offering help for *milu'im* families, activities for displaced children, working on farms, and so much more.

Our *yeshivot* and *midrashot* continue to roar with the sounds of Torah, and our communities continue to grow. And for me, looking at the Ohr Torah Stone network of

schools and institutions, whose students exemplify our community's high rates of civil action, academic achievement, and military service (along with, tragically, the loss of 20 alumni and 38 first-degree relatives on the battlefield), I am filled with pride for the Mizrahi community, within Israeli society and the Jewish people.

And it is *davka* because of the pride I take in our community and feel that our Torah is *mushlemet* (complete) that I feel compelled to speak out. On Yom Yerushalayim – a day that celebrates G-d's intervention in our destiny – how can we stand by as some who march through the Old City's Arab *shuk* bang on doors, break windows, and plaster demeaning stickers on the homes of Arab families living in Jerusalem, chanting sayings that are incongruous with all the values that the Torah stands for?

How can such a noble community have in its midst those who think it is acceptable to curse, or G-d forbid attack, another human being, be they Muslim or Christian, in our *Medina*, where we are the custodians of its morality? While *halacha* demands that we destroy our enemies, it also tells us that monotheists that live amongst us must be treated with dignity and respect. So how can we look aside when some of our youth, wearing *kipot* and sporting *peyot*, enter Arab villages, burning homes and fields – without any provocation from that particular resident or homeowner – and then have the audacity to gather to pray *Ma'ariv*?

I know that rabbis, teachers, and administrators who have devoted their lives and careers to instilling within thousands of students the values and ideals of Religious Zionism, are reading these pages. As we approach Yom Yerushalayim 5785, we must have the courage to directly address these darker elements especially as seen in Yom Yerushalayim festivities, and push back against them.

There are steps that institutions can take to make sure such respect is upheld during these celebrations. For example, OTS' Neveh Shmuel Yeshiva High School has adopted the practice of conducting a celebratory march, without lacking in Zionist enthusiasm, through Machane Yehuda market and onward to the Kotel, without disruptively passing through the Arab Quarter. What similar steps will we all take to ensure that Religious Zionism's name will not be besmirched by the disgraceful acts of a vocal minority? We cannot tolerate either rogue actors or political leaders who – while our children and students are serving – hijack the Religious Zionist agenda, prioritizing the power of our might over the power of our values and convictions.

We, as educators, must proudly model the language and behaviors that reflect our movement's vision; a vision of bridging divides, inspiring others, and spreading the light of *Torat Eretz Yisrael*.

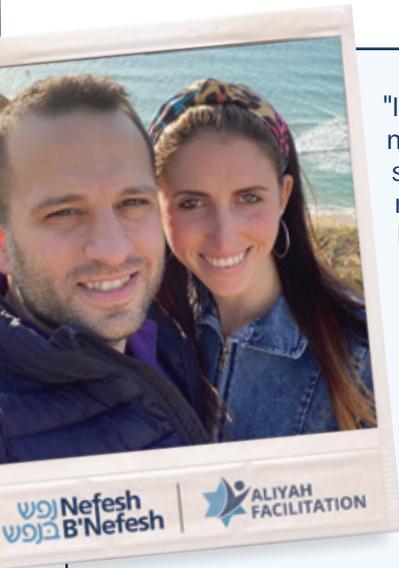


**Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander** is President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, an international network of 30 Religious Zionist institutions committed to illuminating the beauty and relevance of authentic Torah Judaism in the modern world. Prior to making Aliyah, Rabbi Brander was Vice President at Yeshiva University and the senior rabbi of the Boca Raton Synagogue, overseeing its explosive growth from 60 to more than 600 families.



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# OLIM IN THEIR OWN WORDS



"I currently live in Tel Aviv with my wife, Elisheva, and our son and newborn daughter. I made Aliyah at 18 from Great Neck, NY.

My connection to Israel started in high school through Bnei Akiva summer trips, where I learned about the importance of having our own state, economy, and army. As a grandson of four Holocaust survivors, I felt drawn to be part of it all.

After the army, I became a doctor in Israel and find great meaning in treating Jews, Arabs, and all faiths in Hebrew, serving my people with purpose. After medical school, I moved to Tel

Aviv and joined a community, and met Elisheva, who is Israeli, at a 2021 Shabbat Project Friday night dinner.

On October 8th, I was called to the army to serve as a combat unit doctor, and was trained immediately in battlefield medicine, serving 4.5 months in Miluim with a tanks and infantry battalion. Two months into the war, my son was born, and I held his Pidyon Haben in Gaza with our rabbi's help – a truly special moment.

For those considering Aliyah: Feeling 'too Israeli to be American, too American to be Israeli' is normal. Learn Hebrew thoroughly; it's key to thriving, especially at work. And remember, knowing the languages beats having a perfect accent."

*Scott and Elisheva Ehrenberg*

"I made Aliyah in 2016 from New Jersey in the United States and now live in Tel Aviv. My life has been deeply enriched by moving to a country that shares my value system. I'm surrounded by amazing people who made the choice to opt out of the status quo and forge their own paths. These people have become my closest friends and second family – they celebrate the good times with me and strengthen me through the hard ones.

I started a CV consultancy called Revamp Rezy that helps people land interviews at companies they want to work at. I work with candidates to translate their experience into language that directly answers how they'll solve that problem. Based on extensive research and testing, I format the CV in a way that aligns with how hiring teams actually read resumes – putting the right information in the right places. I also teach applicants how to customize their CVs to ensure they're fully optimized for specific job listings.

Since October 7th, my experience of living in Israel has only been reaffirmed. Despite the challenges, I've witnessed countless moments of inspiration and resilience that show me just how unique the people of Israel are. Despite deep differences, we unite and

thrive. Personally, I've stepped up and volunteered in ways I never could have imagined – from helping miluimnikim with their resumes to supporting displaced families returning home. I've encountered parts of Israeli society I would have never otherwise met and formed lasting, meaningful connections.

One thing I've learned from my Aliyah experience is to embrace the messy. No matter how much you plan and prepare, there will always be hiccups. Learning to roll with the punches and keep your head up can make all the difference. Navigating the Israeli job market and finding fulfilling roles has been one of the biggest challenges. I've learned to value the people just as much as the position – they truly shape the experience."

*Akiva Futter*



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# Jerusalem: A City That Joins Hearts Together

Dr. Deena Rabinovich

“Jerusalem built as a city that is joined together” (*Tehillim* 122:3).

The Yalkut Shimoni elaborates: Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi taught that Jerusalem is a city that makes all Israel friends, not only during festivals but throughout the year.

When I was six years old, my father’s sabbatical brought our family to Jerusalem. We rented an apartment in Kiryat Shmuel, and I attended first grade at Evelina D’Rothschild on *Rechov Ussishkin*.

One day, I decided to take the crowded bus home. Unable to see through the mass of passengers, I missed my stop. By the time I realized what had happened, I was completely lost, a small child adrift in an unfamiliar city. Too frightened to exit, I remained on the bus until the end of the route.

The bus driver, noticing a little girl trying desperately not to panic, asked where I lived. Having learned enough Hebrew to respond, I told him. Without hesitation, he restarted the bus and drove me directly back to my apartment. At that moment, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi’s commentary on the words of *David HaMelech* came to life – Jerusalem truly was a city that made strangers into friends.

This first encounter with Jerusalem’s unique character planted a seed in my young consciousness. The city wasn’t just streets and buildings but a living embodiment of *chesed* (kindness). That bus driver became for me the face of Jerusalem itself: watchful, protective, and inherently connected to all who dwell within its bounds.

Eleven years later, I returned for another year in Jerusalem, this time as a twelfth-grade student in Bayit VeGan. On Yom Yerushalayim, we participated in a *tiyul* that traced the footsteps of the paratroopers who had liberated the Old City.

Our journey concluded as dawn broke at the Kotel, where we prayed *shacharit*.

The feeling was overwhelming – pure joy and profound gratitude. The thrill of carrying the Israeli flag as our *degel* throughout our journey filled us with a sense of connection to both history and hope. This was the embodiment of the words of *David HaMelech*: “I rejoiced when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the House of the L-rd’” (*Tehillim* 122:1).

That predawn walk transformed my relationship with Jerusalem. No longer was it just a place of personal kindness, but now a living testament to national redemption. The abstract connection I had formed as a child became concrete – my own footsteps now added to the countless others that had traversed these ancient stones. The joy described in the psalm wasn’t simply happiness but a profound spiritual elation that comes from being part of something eternal.

Another fifteen years passed before I returned again, this time on my own sabbatical with my husband and five children. We rented a house in Talpiyot next door to Beit Shai Agnon.

On Shavuot night, I took my two oldest daughters – ages ten and seven – to join our *shul’s* walk to the Kotel. We set out in pitch darkness with few others on the streets. As we headed north on *Derech Chevron*, we began to notice other groups trickling in to join along the way. The roads, empty when we began, gradually filled with fellow pilgrims.

As we climbed the hill to *Sha’ar Yafo*, the sky began to lighten, and what had been a trickle of people transformed into a stream, then into a throng. Entering the gate, we could barely move forward as countless Jews converged. Carefully, we made our way through the Jewish Quarter until we reached the Kotel.

In that moment, I witnessed the verse come alive: “For there the tribes ascend,

the tribes of the L-rd – as a testimony for Israel – to give thanks to the name of the L-rd” (*Tehillim* 122:4).

We were no longer individuals or separate groups but had become one unified people, ascending together to give thanks, just as our ancestors had done for thousands of years.

This third experience completed a circle in my relationship with Jerusalem. As a child, I had been cared for by the city. As a young adult, I had celebrated its redemption. Now, as a parent, I was passing its legacy to the next generation. Watching my children’s eyes take in the same scene that had moved me years before, I understood Jerusalem not just as a place of personal memory or national significance, but as an eternal inheritance.

The ability to spend a year in Jerusalem had shaped me at each critical juncture of my life. My individual story was but one thread in the tapestry described by *David HaMelech* in *Tehillim* 122 – tribes ascending, joining together, becoming one. In Jerusalem, the personal and collective merge; every private moment of connection becomes part of an unbroken chain.

Jerusalem, the city that joins hearts together, had fulfilled its ancient promise.



**Dr. Deena Rabinovich**

serves as the chair for the Rebecca Ivry Department of Jewish Studies at Stern College for Women. She works closely with future and new teachers as the director of the Legacy Heritage Jewish Educators Program at Stern and the director of PEP at Azrieli. She is fortunate to maintain regular visits to Jerusalem, strengthening her deep connection to the city.

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# Remembered or Forgotten

## Leadership Lessons from the Book of Ruth

Bracha Rutner

**W**hen Benjamin Franklin served as Ambassador to France, he attended a group called the Infidels Club, dedicated to appreciating literary masterpieces. On one occasion, Franklin read aloud the Book of Ruth, disguising its origin. When he finished, the audience praised it as one of the most beautiful short stories they had ever heard. Franklin then revealed its origin, highlighting its timeless and universal appeal.

Franklin's anecdote reflects that the Book of Ruth is more than a story – it's a narrative filled with emotion, tension, and the challenge of doing what's right. Beneath its beauty is *halachic* complexity. The story's impact lies not just in its depiction of redemption, but in the decisions about law, leadership, and legacy – questions that still matter today.

This comes into focus through the differing responses of Boaz and Ploni Almoni to Ruth's entry into the Jewish nation. Ruth, a Moabite woman, presents a *halachic* dilemma: can she marry into the Jewish people?

The Torah says clearly: "No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of G-d; none of their descendants, even in the tenth generation, shall ever be admitted into the congregation of G-d" (*Devarim* 23:4).

Ploni Almoni, the closest relative (*go'el*), declines to redeem Ruth and Elimelech's land, citing fear for his legacy: "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it" (*Ruth* 4:6).

Boaz, however, does marry Ruth. His decision rests on an established *halachic* tradition: the prohibition applied only to Moabite men, not women. This is stated in the Talmud: "An Ammonite but not an

Ammonitess, a Moabite but not a Moabitess" (*Yevamot* 76b).

Boaz followed this ruling, while Ploni Almoni, despite knowing it, hesitated. He feared that a future *beit din* might overturn the decision, jeopardizing his descendants. As explained by Rav Zvi Pesach Frank and the Brisker Rav, he doubted the permanence of the *halachic* ruling.

But this was his error. He failed to grasp the nature of *mesorah* – traditions passed through generations that hold enduring authority, as opposed to those learned through logic. Not all *halachot* are subject to reinterpretation. The Rambam clarifies this distinction: "The Great Court in Jerusalem is the foundation of the Oral Law. They are the pillars of instruction, and from them statute and judgment go forth to all of Israel. And concerning them it is said, 'According to the law which they shall instruct you'" (*Hilchot Mamrim* 1:1).

Amasa's statement in *Yevamot* that Moabite women were permitted was a transmission of *mesorah*. The ruling was final. Ploni Almoni, unsure or unwilling to trust that *mesorah*, stepped back. That misstep cost him his name and legacy.

His caution made him a symbol of missed opportunity. While Boaz acted publicly and with conviction, Ploni Almoni faded into anonymity, a striking contrast to the eternal place Ruth earned.

This narrative is about more than just personal choices. As prominent individuals, Ploni Almoni and Boaz had not only personal obligations but also communal influence. Ploni Almoni's refusal to uphold an established *mesorah* undermined not only his own legacy but also public trust in the *halachic* system. In contrast, Boaz's willingness to lead publicly demonstrated faith in tradition and courage in action.

This is more than a tale of personal decisions. It's a study in leadership. Both Boaz

and Ploni Almoni had *halachic* knowledge. One led. One retreated. One built the future. One was forgotten.

And what of Ruth herself? Her bravery deserves the spotlight. She entered a new people and a foreign tradition with no promises, only faith. She had no power, no protection, and no guarantees. Still, she stepped forward. Her faith was not theoretical, rather it was lived.

That contrast is powerful. Ploni Almoni had *halachic* permission, community standing, and legal precedent. He froze. Ruth had none of those – and moved. Her name is remembered. His is not.

The Book of Ruth challenges us: when *halacha* supports a brave decision, will we act? Do we trust our *mesorah* – not only as a system of law, but as a guide toward justice, morality, and redemption?

It's not just a story about them. It's about us. When we have the chance to lead with strength and compassion, will we? And when we look back, will our names be remembered for stepping forward – or forgotten for standing still?



**Bracha Rutner**

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# When Will G-d Speak to Me?

Rabbi Chaim Steinmetz

**W**hen will G-d speak to me? As a *yeshiva* student in my early twenties, I was on a serious spiritual quest. I would pray intensely, and yearned to receive a response from G-d. I was looking for direction in making some difficult decisions, and wanted G-d to guide me. I was also struggling with questions about faith, and I hoped that a divine revelation would banish my doubts.

I became interested in the *Goral HaGra*, the lottery of the Vilna Gaon, named for the 18th century Rabbi Elijah of Vilna (though this practice is far older than the 18th century, and quite controversial as well; Maimonides condemns this practice as a desecration of G-d's name). There are multiple versions of how to conduct this lottery, but the basic practice is to take a *Tanach* and to turn pages at random in different directions seven times; then a verse is picked at random on the chosen page. This verse is believed to provide divine guidance for one's decision.

The most famous use of the *Goral HaGra* occurred on December 17th, 1950. In January 1948, the Haganah had sent a group of 35 reinforcements to the *kibbutzim* of Gush Etzion, which were besieged by Arab forces. They were killed in an ambush, and buried in temporary graves. After the 1949 Armistice Agreements, the 35 soldiers were returned from Jordanian-controlled territory for burial in Har Herzl. However, when they were brought back, only 23 of the original graves were still properly marked; the remaining 12 were reburied in unmarked graves. The families of those 12 unidentified soldiers were extremely distressed. They turned to Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank, the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, who referred them to Rav Aryeh Levin, the famed *tzadik* of Jerusalem, to ask him to use the *Goral HaGra* to identify the graves. Rav Levin initially said no, but after meeting the families, agreed to do so.

On the night of December 17th, Rabbi Levin, together with two representatives of the bereaved families, his son, and his son-in-law, gathered in a small *beit midrash*. They lit 12 candles, and recited *Tehillim*. Then they began the *Goral HaGra*, selecting a verse in *Tanach* to determine who was in each unmarked grave. And each time they did the *Goral HaGra*, the verse chosen contained the first name or last name of one of the unidentified soldiers. With this miraculous revelation, the graves could now be properly marked.

Sometime after I read this remarkable story, I faced a significant personal decision, and decided to try the *Goral HaGra* myself. It was an abject failure. Each time, the verse seemed comically irrelevant, an absolute non sequitur. Not only did the *Goral HaGra* not give me guidance, it seemed to mock my very interest in it. Several times over the following months, I tried this method again, and each time, it failed.

I was not going to hear the word of G-d by flipping the pages of a *Tanach*. So where would I find my revelation?

Shavuot celebrates a moment of awe and trembling when G-d spoke to the Jewish people at Sinai. While prophecy has long disappeared, the quest to hear G-d's word never stopped. Some sought to find revelation in the everyday. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch thought that our moral intuitions carry traces of the divine, and that humanity and justice and all the spiritual and ethical qualities of mankind received their eternal confirmation through this divine echo in man's heart.

Rav Chaim of Volozhin was asked by another rabbi to rule regarding an *agunah*, a woman whose husband was assumed to have drowned, but there were doubts regarding the evidence. He felt compelled to find a way to release this woman from her marriage, and wrote, "I have consulted with my Creator, and saw it was

my obligation to use all my might to find a solution for *agunot*; may G-d save me from mistakes." In his quest to help this *agunah*, Rav Chaim heard G-d's voice urging him to help her; he saw this moral imperative as nothing less than a divine revelation.

Everyday revelation can also be found in the ordinary and mundane, in what Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel calls "radical amazement." It requires us to look at the world with wonder and experience revelation in the song of a bird and the blossom of the tree. This form of everyday revelation extends beyond the historical moment at Sinai. Even those who were not present can hear the divine voice echoing through both the natural world and the depths of their own hearts.

Still, many of us thirst for more. And sometimes, if we keep looking, we can experience the extraordinary. The *Gemara* refers to a divine communication called a *bat kol*, which the 12th century commentary *Yad Ramah* translates as an echo, when one hears G-d's voice indirectly. But the *bat kol* need not be an actual voice; sometimes there are coincidences that seem just a bit too remarkable to ignore, and are an extraordinary revelation. Yes, I know that mathematicians will tell you that you need to always expect the unexpected, and that life will always have random moments. But when you see the world with radical amazement, you see beyond the numbers, and recognize these coincidences as a moment when G-d is winking at you.

As I grew older and moved past my *yeshiva* student stage, I became much more of a rationalist, and I was no longer on a quest. But even rationalists can sometimes experience a coincidence that makes them pause; and so it was for me.

My wife Lisa and I had struggled to have children into the third year of our marriage. One Friday night, after a long week, we chose to have dinner at home alone. During *kiddush*, we heard a knock on the



# The Stones Beneath Our Strollers: A Journey to the Kotel

Rabbi Andrew Markowitz

I had dreamt of taking my children to the Kotel for the first time.

Several years ago, my family flew to Israel for Sukkot to visit my brother who was learning there. In the weeks before our trip, I kept envisioning one moment: walking through the Old City, approaching the Kotel.

I had planned it to the exact spot – those final steps near Aish HaTorah, just before the Kotel would come into view. That's where I'd stop them and tell them how lucky they were. That *Moshe Rabbeinu*, the Chafetz Chaim – great figures across our history – never had the chance to stand where they would soon stand. That in our generation, all it takes is a passport and plane ticket. We have a privilege our ancestors only dreamed of.

The reality was... less inspiring.

We landed on a hot Sunday morning – Erev Sukkot. None of us had slept. It was 95 degrees. But I insisted: “We're going to the Kotel.” We schlepped through the Old City, strollers bumping over uneven stones, sweating and exhausted. *Yeshiva bochurim* helped us carry the strollers down the steps.

The path to the Kotel is never quite as smooth as you imagine. When I was younger, it always felt effortless. There was a rhythm to it – the *yeshivot*, the people, the sense of purpose in every step. But now – with children in tow, everything heavier, louder, slower – it felt different. The cobblestones caught the wheels. The steps caught my breath. Apparently, the holiest place on earth was never designed with strollers in mind.

And maybe that's the point.

The path to holiness has never been easy. Through centuries of exile and yearning, Jewish history has been full of bumps and barriers. And now that we've finally arrived – now that Yerushalayim is accessible – we sometimes can't see it for what it is. The blessing is so obvious that we overlook it. The sun itself becomes the

obstacle. Access has not automatically granted us appreciation; perhaps that was never the point.

We finally reached the spot I had dreamed of. I stopped. I gave my speech – sweating, sincere, full of feeling. My kids didn't look up. “It's too sunny,” they said. “Can we go back to the apartment?”

At the time, I felt like I'd failed. This dream I had cherished had fallen flat.

But maybe the problem wasn't the heat or their disinterest. Maybe I had mistaken awe for ease. I thought the moment would speak for itself. But Yerushalayim has always demanded more.

Strikingly, “Yerushalayim” doesn't appear even once in the Torah. The holiest city is described in *Sefer Devarim* as “*haMakom asher yivchar Hashem* – the place that G-d will choose.”

The Rambam explains: If nations had known its holiness, they would have tried to seize it. If they couldn't take it, they'd try to destroy it. And had the exact location been revealed too early, the tribes might have fought over it.

Rav Yitzchak Levi points to the verse: “*L'shichno tidreshu u'vata shama* – You shall seek out His dwelling place and go there.” The Midrash explains: “*tidreshu* – you must seek it yourself.” *David HaMelech* said: “I will not enter my house, I will not give sleep to my eyes, until I find a place for G-d” (*Tehillim* 132:3-4).

Holiness isn't handed to us. It's something we must seek. “She is Zion, and no one seeks her out” (*Yirmiyahu* 30:17). Yerushalayim requires seekers.

Maybe that's what we were doing on that hot, jetlagged walk through the Old City. Maybe that's what we're all doing when we try to give something sacred to our children. Every time we show up despite exhaustion, hold onto a ritual despite distraction, or remind our kids of a story they're not ready to hear, we're seeking. In the striving itself, we fulfill what Yerushalayim asks of us. Not just to arrive, but to

journey with purpose. Not just to stand there, but to struggle to get there.

My kids didn't notice the miracle that day. But I did. I saw it in the sweat and the schlepping, in the wheels catching on stones. The miracle isn't that it's easy to reach the Kotel. It's that we get to walk there at all.

We are a nation of seekers – Avraham leaving his homeland, Moshe gazing toward a land he would never enter, David searching for a resting place for the Divine. Yerushalayim has never been just a place on a map. It has always been about the journey.

And so, when the sun is in our eyes and the kids are too tired to see the wonder, we keep walking – not because it's easy, but because it's ours.

Yerushalayim is not only the city we reach. It is the story we continue. The responsibility we inherit. The quiet faith to show up again and again, even when the moment falls short of the dream. Because we are not just remembering a place. We are walking a path of longing, struggle, and promise. And we walk it not just for ourselves – but for those before us, and those after.

*Am hanetzach lo mefached miderech aruka.*  
The eternal people are not afraid of a long journey.



**Rabbi Andrew Markowitz**

is proud and privileged to be the Rabbi of Congregation Shomrei Torah in Fair Lawn, New Jersey. He is an executive committee member of the Rabbinical Council of America and the president of the Rabbinical Council of Bergen County. Rabbi Markowitz also teaches at Naaleh High School for Girls, in Ridgewood, New Jersey.



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# Yerushalayim: Emunah and Achdut

Rabbi Jonny Brull

“From the narrow straits I called to Hashem; He answered me with a vast expanse” (*Tehillim* 118:5).

This verse captured the spirit of *Am Yisrael* in June 1967. Surrounded by enemies on all sides, with Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq poised to attack, Israel braced for catastrophe. Mass graves were dug; the Defence Minister Moshe Dayan warned General Uzi Narkiss, who led the Central Command – if Jordan attacks Yerushalayim, don’t call out for reinforcements, as they are all needed elsewhere; if you cry out for help on the radio, no one will come. The future looked bleak.

But within hours, Hashem turned darkness into light. The Egyptian air force was wiped out, and victories followed across multiple fronts. The miraculous culmination: the reunification of Yerushalayim. Motta Gur’s words – “Har HaBayit is in our hands” – echoed around the world. Rav Shlomo Goren, arriving moments later at the Kotel, declared that he felt the Shechinah dwelling there.

What gave us the merit for such a miracle? The answer lies in two ancient stories about the first King of Israel to rule from Yerushalayim: *David HaMelech*.

In the first story (*Divrei Hayamim I 21*), David sees an angel of destruction poised over Yerushalayim, sword drawn. In response, he throws himself to the ground and pleads that the punishment fall on him alone. Hashem tells him to build an altar on the threshing floor of *Ornan HaYevusi*. David’s readiness to sacrifice himself for the people – his unwavering *emunah* – earns him the privilege of discovering the future site of the *Beit HaMikdash*. Jerusalem becomes not only a city saved, but sanctified. The message: Yerushalayim

represents *emunah* in the eternal destiny of *Am Yisrael*.

But why was Yerushalayim David’s capital at all? To explain this, we turn to a second, earlier story, when David becomes king over all of Israel (*Shmuel II 5*). Rather than ruling from his tribal stronghold in Chevron, David captures a neutral, Jebusite city on the border between Yehudah and Binyamin – Yerushalayim. It’s a bold choice that prioritises unity over personal comfort. David’s move fuses the children of Leah and Rachel into one kingdom. For this act of *achdut*, Hashem forever designates Yerushalayim as His chosen city.

These two elements – *emunah* and *achdut* – resurfaced on the night of Yerushalayim’s liberation in 1967.

The first took place at the Rockefeller Museum. Rav Goren, Chief Rabbi of the IDF, met with Motta Gur, whose brigade had met the angel of destruction, suffering terrible losses. The command not to enter the Old City still stood. But Rav Goren turned to him and said: “Jewish history obligates you to liberate the Old City.” When Gur faltered, Rav Goren called out: “Jewish history will not forgive an IDF commander who stood at the gates of the Old City and did not conquer it.” Here was David’s *emunah*, reborn – a refusal to yield to fear, rooted in leadership and *emunah* in *Netzach Yisrael*.

But the order had not yet come. That came through a second, fateful meeting – a nighttime session of Israel’s newly formed national unity government. In the days before the war, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol brought together Mapai, Cherut, Labour, and others – right and left – for the first united leadership over *Eretz Yisrael* since the reign of David and Shlomo. At 3 a.m. on 28 Iyar, Menachem Begin and Yigal Alon – political opposites – both urged Dayan

that the moment to liberate the Old City had arrived. Dayan agreed. And so, in what became known as the “Pyjama Meeting,” the leadership unanimously authorised the liberation of Jerusalem. This was David’s *achdut* reappearing in modern form – leaders with fierce ideological differences setting them aside for the sake of the nation’s future.

By dawn, the Jordanians had fled. At 10 a.m., Gur’s voice came over the radio: “Har HaBayit is in our hands.” Yerushalayim had once again become the city that “joins all of Israel as *chaverim*, as friends” (*Yerushalmi, Chagigah 3*).

These stories are not just history. They are a blueprint. In an era of division and fear, Yom Yerushalayim reminds us that the recipe for Jewish triumph is the same as it was in the days of David: *emunah* in Hashem and *achdut* among ourselves. When these two forces align, miracles follow.

May He who performed miracles for our ancestors redeem us soon, *chaverim kol Yisrael* – when all of Israel will stand together as one.



**Rabbi Jonny Brull**

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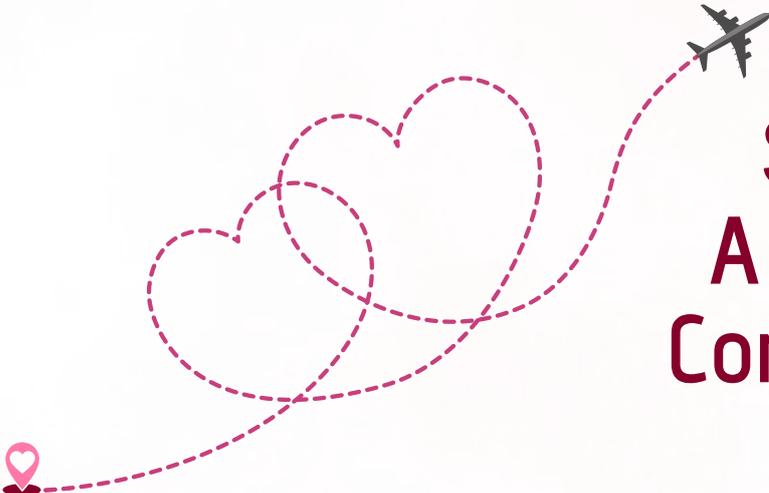
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# Sefirat HaOmer: A Journey Towards Connection and Love

Aleeza Ben Shalom

**A**s we follow the journey of counting the Omer, we find ourselves in a unique period of reflection and anticipation. This 49-day count, which bridges the joyous festival of Pesach and the revelatory holiday of Shavuot, is not just a ritual rooted in tradition; it is a profound metaphor for our quest for love and connection, particularly the pursuit of our soulmates.

The Omer period invites us to pause and consider the deeper meaning of time and growth. Each day represents a step towards spiritual refinement and connection to G-d, mirroring our own journey toward finding a partner who resonates with our true selves. Just as the Jewish people prepared themselves to receive the Torah on Shavuot, we too must prepare our hearts and souls for the reunification with our soulmate.

## The significance of the Omer

The counting of the Omer begins on the second night of Pesach, a time of liberation from slavery, both physical and emotional. It is during this period of counting that we transition from the freedom of Pesach to the commitment of Shavuot, when we receive the Torah. This is a time for introspection and growth, a time to cultivate qualities that will enrich our relationships and make us more receptive to love.

Imagine each day of the Omer as an opportunity to shed the layers of self-doubt and insecurity, much like how we peel away the bitterness of slavery to embrace the sweetness of freedom. Each count is a reminder that we are not just waiting for love to arrive; we are actively preparing ourselves to be the best partners we can be.

## Shavuot: the marriage of our souls

On Shavuot, we celebrate the moment when the Jewish people entered into a covenant with Hashem, akin to a marriage.

This sacred bond signifies commitment, love, and the promise to uphold the values and teachings of the Torah. Just as this relationship requires effort and dedication, so too does the journey to find and keep our soulmate.

Meeting our soulmate is not the end of our soulmate journey; it's just the beginning. It's a lifelong process that helps us count up as we celebrate our lives together. The process of counting the Omer teaches us that we must first cultivate our own spiritual and emotional well-being. Only then can we truly connect with another person and build a love that lasts.

## Finding love on the journey

As you count the Omer, reflect on what you wish to bring into your (future) relationship. What qualities do you want to embody? What values are important to you? Consider the importance of kindness, patience, and understanding – traits that will not only strengthen your connection with a partner but also improve your relationship with yourself.

Here are three ways to count the Omer with meaning:

- 1. Embrace Growth:** Just as we count the days, we should also count our blessings and the steps we take toward becoming the partner we aspire to be.
- 2. Prepare Your Heart:** As we prepare our hearts to receive the Torah, think about how you can prepare your heart for love. Engage in acts of kindness, practice self-care, and cultivate a positive mindset. The energy you put into your own growth will radiate outward.
- 3. Celebrate Connection:** Recognize that love is not just about the destination; it's about the journey. Celebrate the small moments, the connections you make, and the friendships you foster along the way. Each relationship teaches us something valuable and brings us closer

to understanding what we truly desire in a soulmate.

The counting of the Omer is a powerful reminder of the passing of time and the importance of preparation in our lives. As we count each day, let us also count the ways we can enrich our lives and the lives of those around us. The journey to finding a loving relationship is a beautiful process of becoming.

As we approach Shavuot, let us commit to opening our hearts to the love that awaits us, just as the Jewish people opened their hearts to receive the Torah. May this period of counting inspire you to cultivate love within yourself, embrace your journey, and ultimately lead you to the soulmate you have been waiting for.

● Originally published on [Aish.com](https://www.aish.com)



**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.



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#### **Where was your first date?**

We had a Zoom date and then we had our official first date at a restaurant.

#### **Dating tips:**

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#### **Why is it worth joining the Shagririm Balev database?**

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#### **What did you learn from the search process?**

Come with an open mind and heart to meet people. Don't say yes to every suggestion and don't reject every suggestion before the first date, but think about whether it's a good suggestion for you. Give yourself time to answer after a date.

#### **A funny story from one of your dates:**

We made up to meet at a cafe (a franchise with both Kosher and Non-Kosher branches). We entered a branch assuming it was kosher and started going through the menu quite confused by the options, then the waiter approached and asked if we really wanted to order something because the branch wasn't kosher. Then we had to take an hour-long walk to find a place to eat (with limited parking spots and not close to the restaurant area)... Finally we sat down for ice cream.

#### **Tell us about your marriage proposal.**

Three weeks into the war (which prevented us from meeting up), we only spoke on the phone... We managed to plan a date at the beach.

Shortly before Sukkot, we ordered a ring that Oriya loved, to be given at the right time. During those 3 weeks, I convinced Oriya that the company wouldn't be able to produce the ring soon because of the war. She came to the date and surprised me with chocolate chip cookies that she made (which I really love) and a picture of both of us for my office. I was a bit late to the meeting because of traffic and we missed the sunset. We sat eating cookies and grapes and during that I got down on one knee... It was just us and the sea, and because of that there's no documentation of this moment, which was decided spontaneously without special scenery or knowing when our next meeting would be.



**381**  
total  
engagements



**590**  
candidates  
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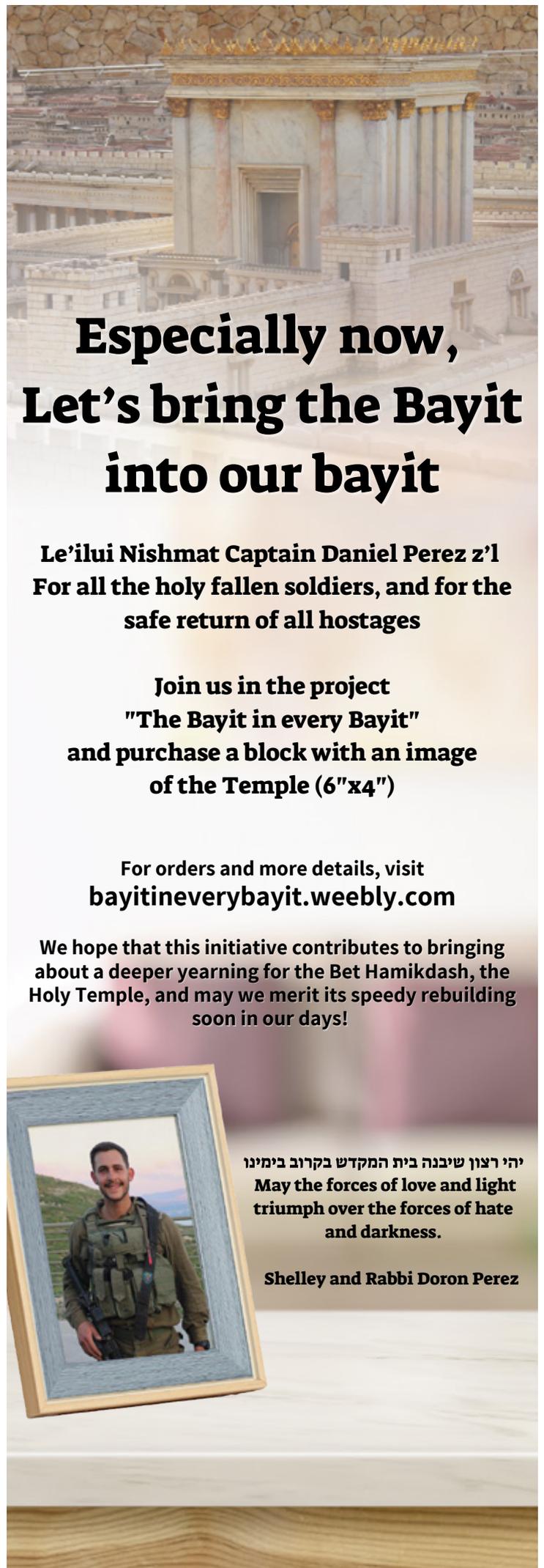


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triumph over the forces of hate  
and darkness.**

**Shelley and Rabbi Doron Perez**

# הַמִּזְרָחִי

# HAMIZRACHI

COMPILED BY: JACQUI AUSTEN  
DESIGNED BY: LEAH RUBIN

KIDS CORNER

## WORD ZIGZAG

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

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

Shavuot  
Jerusalem  
Cheese

Ruth  
Water

Torah  
Kotel

Golan  
Sinai  
Paratroopers

## MEET BERTHA PAPPENHEIM



February 27, 1859 - May 18, 1936 (23 Adar I 5619 - 7 Sivan 5696)

### *A Life Dedicated to Advancing Women*

Motivated strongly by her own immense struggles, Bertha Pappenheim was not still for a moment. Because she had needed others to care for her for so long, now she found her calling caring for others. She fought for women's rights and began her activism in Jewish women's organization in Germany. She worked in a soup kitchen and volunteered to tell stories in an orphanage. Eventually she became the director of the orphanage which she ran with great devotion, but she knew it wasn't enough and knew she needed to help more. She was a pioneer of social work as a profession by finding sources of distress and offering solutions. When she discovered that pogroms were responsible for much of the breakdown of Jewish families, she opened more homes to help protect the victims from further dangers. She was also a well known writer and translator who wrote plays, poems, prayers and fables for children and translated works from English, French, Italian, Hebrew and Yiddish, into German.



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



## DID YOU KNOW?

- Shavuot has many traditions surrounding its celebration, but not nearly as many halachot as our other holidays!
- The figure most associated with Shavuot (Ruth) wasn't born Jewish!
- It took only 3 hours for the Israeli army to defeat the Egyptian airforce in 1967!

## Test Your Knowledge



How many days did the war associated with Yom Yerushalayim take?

What are the other times other than Shavuot when all of Bnei Yisrael would come to Jerusalem to the Beit HaMikdash?

Which army unit were the ones to capture the Kotel back in 1967?

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

## WEEKLY PARSHA FOR YOUTH!

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## COOKIE DOUGH RICE KRISPIE TREATS!



### Ingredients:

#### Cookie Dough

- ½ cup of unsalted butter at room temperature
- ¼ cup of sugar
- ½ cup of light brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon of vanilla extract
- ¼ cup of milk
- 1 and ¼ cup of all purpose flour (baked first)
- ¼ teaspoon of salt
- ¾ cup of chocolate chips

#### Rice Krispie Treat

- 2 tablespoons of unsalted butter
- 12 ounces of marshmallows
- ½ teaspoon of vanilla extract
- 7 cups of rice cereal

### Instructions:

#### Cookie Dough

1. With help from a parent spread out your flour onto a cookie sheet and roast at 350 degrees Fahrenheit for five minutes. Allow to cool before using.
2. Grease a 9 X 13 pan with cooking spray.
3. In a bowl mix together the butter and the sugars with an electric mixer for 2-3 minutes. Then mix in the vanilla extract and milk. Then using a spatula, add in the heat treated flour and chocolate chips until everything is combined.

#### Rice Krispie Treats

With help from a parent, in a sauce pan add in the butter and marshmallows over low heat, stirring until completely melted. Then add in the vanilla extract and the rice cereal.

#### Combining

Put half of the rice krispie treat mix into the pan, then take all of the cookie dough and press it on top of that. After that, top it off with the leftover cereal treats. Cut into them when you're ready to eat them and enjoy!



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