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# הַמִּזְרָחִי HAMIZRACHI

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## ISRAEL AS A LIGHT UNTO THE NATIONS



(PHOTO: IDF SPOKESPERSON)

Dedicated in memory of one of the great Religious Zionist leaders of our generation, Rabbi Chaim Drukman זצ"ל, marking the *shloshim* since his passing. He was a teacher par excellence, a builder of *yeshivot* and educational institutions across Israel, one who deeply loved all of *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael*, and one of the greatest torchbearers of Religious Zionist values.



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

## HAMIZRACHI

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# FROM THE

# Editor

## Enough with Olam Haba Already!

“There is such a thing as a small and cramped eternity; you see it in many modern religions.”  
(G.K. Chesterton)

**W**hat is the goal of living a Torah life? If you ask people this question (as I have!), you’ll hear answers like “I want to be close to Hashem” and “by living a Torah life I fulfill G-d’s will and earn a portion in *olam haba* (the world to come).”

Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato, the *Ramchal*, appears to agree. At the beginning of *Mesilat Yesharim*, he writes that “man was created solely to delight in G-d and to derive pleasure in the radiance of the Divine presence... The place of this pleasure is *olam haba*... But the path to arrive at the ‘desired haven’ is this world... ‘this world is like a corridor before the world to come’ (Avot 4:16).”

It seems the purpose of life in this world is to acquire our portion in the world to come – where children are always cute and never whine, where Belgian waffles and ice cream are *healthy* snacks and where we will sit in blissful closeness to Hashem. Case closed!

Or is it? There is something about “*olam haba* Judaism” that feels small, even self-ish. Though belief in the existence of *olam haba* is a central tenet of our faith, it is telling that the Torah never explicitly speaks about the next world. “A person should never declare that he performs *mitzvot* and studies Torah... to merit a portion in *olam haba*... This is not the approach of the prophets or the wise” (Maimonides, Laws of Repentance 10:1). As Rabbi Moshe Miller puts it, “Living this way... is the life of a prostitute. Yes, the expected payment is a portion in the world to come, but all that does is elevate the transaction to that of a high-priced courtesan...”

Why, then, does *Ramchal* make *olam haba* the goal of Jewish life? And if “*olam haba* Judaism” is not truly our goal, what are we really here to accomplish?

Incredibly, we find the answer in the *Mesilat Yesharim* itself, in chapter 19 – where *Ramchal* explicitly rejects his initial argument! “He whose motivation in his divine service is to purify his soul before his Creator... and receive reward in the world to come... does not have the best of motives. As long as a person is motivated by his own benefit, his divine service is for his own self-interest.”

Rather, our *true* purpose in life is “to serve solely to raise and increase the honor of the Master... [The pious Jew] longs for redemption because then the honor of G-d will be exalted... He prays always for the redemption of Israel... For it is impossible for the honor of G-d to be raised except through the redemption of Israel...”

If so, why does *Ramchal* stress the importance of *olam haba* at the beginning of the book? Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook explains that the opening chapter of *Mesilat Yesharim* is meant for those just beginning a life of serving Hashem. Beginners must reject materialism and choose, instead, a life dedicated to the spirit and *olam haba*. But this is merely the *first step* in serving G-d. Every Jew’s true goal must be to increase G-d’s glory in *this world* – by yearning for and doing our part to bring redemption!

The Jewish people were not chosen merely to learn *daf yomi*, pay *yeshiva* tuition and serve faithfully on the *shul* board’s expansion committee with the goal of earning a portion in the next world. These are all holy *mitzvot*, but ultimately a *means* to a far greater end: bringing redemption and G-d’s glory to this world!

“All of Israel have a share in the world to come” (Sanhedrin 90a). Don’t worry – our mansions in heaven will be waiting for us after we reach 120 (though I, for one, am not in a rush to get there!). We are here to raise G-d’s honor – in *this world*!

“The currents of our time demand a far greater and loftier spiritual force...” (Rav Kook, *Iggrot Ra’ayah* #363). A Judaism devoid of longing for redemption is a

“small and cramped eternity”, a Judaism shorn of all its grandeur and depth. It is a stunted, shallow form of religion that our children, who long for great ideals, are likely to reject.

At our Shabbat tables and at *kiddush*, from *shul* pulpits to podcasts, let us speak, without embarrassment, of *geulah*. And when we turn our hearts to G-d in prayer, let us beseech Him not only for health and wealth, or even our own spiritual growth, but for His glory to be revealed to all mankind. “And do not let Him rest, until He... makes Jerusalem the praise of all the earth.” (Yishayahu 62:7)

Elie Mischel

**Rabbi Elie Mischel**  
Editor



**Rabbi Elie Mischel**  
is the Editor of HaMizrachi magazine.



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# LOWDERMILK AND THE LAND

## Impressions of a Gentile Soil Conservationist

Rabbi Doron Perez

**T**he story of the regeneration of the Land of Israel – its soil, trees and plants, flora and fruits – is one of the greatest stories in the history of regenerative agriculture. It is an undeniable ecological marvel that has inspired Jew and gentile alike.

### Walter Clay Lowdermilk

One such gentile was one of the world's leading soil conservationists – an American by the name of Walter Clay Lowdermilk. In many countries, inappropriate land usage and abuse of natural resources lead to dehumanizing situations of poverty, famine and death. Mankind, as he put it, will destroy the basis of its food supply by irresponsibly squandering its natural resources.

Lowdermilk dedicated his life to helping countries throughout the world protect, reclaim and maximize the usage of their lands in order to better feed their populations. Beginning in the 1920s, he dedicated his 50-year career to this cause, working in 34 countries as an expert advocate of fruitful relationships between people, their lands and their natural resources. He worked with the Belgian Relief Effort after World War I, in China in the 1920s to help avert famine, and with the Soil Conservation Service in Italy in the 1930s.

In 1939, Lowdermilk traveled to Mandatory Palestine on a fact-finding mission.

His plan was to analyze soil in a climate that was similar to that of California's Dust Bowl, which he hoped to develop. Nothing prepared him for what he saw. Seeing the incredible revitalization of the Land wrought by Jewish pioneers with little background in agriculture, he was awed. He was witnessing a miracle – before his very eyes!

### Twain's tirade

Like most Americans of his time, Lowdermilk's assumptions about the state of the Holy Land were shaped by one of America's greatest writers, Mark Twain. In 1867, more than a decade before the founding of the first modern Jewish agricultural settlement of Petach Tikvah, Twain joined a chartered vessel of American travelers through Europe and the Holy Land. The book he would publish two years later, *The Innocents Abroad* or *The New Pilgrim's Progress*, chronicled these travels in his inimitable and humorous way. A bestseller, it was his most popular book during his lifetime.

Twain's description of the Land was bitingly harsh. He was shocked by the desolation of the Holy Land, writing: "There was hardly a tree or shrub anywhere. Even the olive and the cactus, those fast friends of worthless soil, had almost deserted the country. No landscape existing is more tiresome to the eye than that which bounds the approaches to



Walter Lowdermilk (PHOTO: DAVID ELDAN/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)

Jerusalem. The only difference between the roads and the surrounding country, perhaps, is that there are more rocks on the roads than in the surrounding country. Palestine is desolate and unlovely..."

### A land comes alive

This all started to change in the 1880s, when Jewish pioneers began building agricultural settlements in the desolate and marsh-infested Land. By the time Lowdermilk arrived on his inaugural visit he would attest: "When Jewish colonists first began their work in 1882...

the soil had eroded down to bedrock in over one half of the hills. Streams across the coastal plain would choke with erosional debris from the hills to form pestilential marshes infested with dreaded malaria... Those who can read the record that has been written in the Land know that this state of decadence is not normal.”

He marveled at what the pioneers had achieved: “The country is evolving toward a modern, scientifically directed and richly diversified economy with fruits, vegetables, poultry and dairy products... Rural Palestine is becoming less and less like trans-Jordan, Syria and Iraq, and more like Denmark, Holland and part of the United States” (*The Promised Land*, 1944).

Lowdermilk was so moved by the miraculous achievements of the Jewish pioneers that he and his wife eventually decided to become full participants in the Zionist enterprise. In 1944, he outlined a local water development plan which became known as the “Lowdermilk plan”. In the 1950s, he settled in Israel, and his plan and expertise would contribute significantly to the building of Israel’s National Water Carrier. His contributions were recognized by the renowned Technion University of the Sciences in Haifa, where a department was named in his honor. He was a true lover of Zion.

What would Lowdermilk say today, 75 years after the establishment of the State? Israel has accomplished the seemingly impossible, transforming a land of scarce resources into a water surplus oasis! A world leader in desalination, drip-irrigation and water recycling, Israel has reshaped the once-barren soil into one of the most lush, fruit-yielding areas in the world. Having planted over 250 million trees, a country that was barren of trees only 150 years ago is now one of the only countries in the world with more trees today than a century ago.

### A covenant between a land and a people

How can we explain this seemingly impossible rebirth of the Land? The answer, it seems, lies less in the realm of the rational and physical than in the mystical and metaphysical. It is the fulfillment of Divine promise and ancient prophecy.



Walter Lowdermilk and Chaim Halperin, the first director general of the Israeli Ministry of Agriculture. (PHOTO: THÉODORE BRAUNER/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)

“I will give to you, and to your seed after you, the Land of your sojournings, all the Land of Canaan for an everlasting possession, and I will be your G-d” (Bereishit 17:8). Rabbeinu Bechaye explains that the unusual phrase *לְאָדָמָה עוֹלָם*, “an everlasting possession”, is a great sign of G-d’s providence over the people of Israel. For from the day they were exiled from their land, no other nation has been able to inhabit and settle it in their place. The Land remains desolate and destroyed until her children return.<sup>1</sup>

There is a remarkable reciprocal relationship between the Jewish people and the Land – an inexplicable love affair between a people and a place unparalleled in the annals of human history. Just as the Jewish people have never forgotten the Land, praying incessantly to return to Zion and Jerusalem, the Land never forgot her children. She remained loyal, never allowing any other people to cultivate her.

### Tu BiShvat and ‘seeing the light’

On Tu BiShvat, the Jewish people plant trees and practically celebrate the ongoing love affair between a people and their Land – a Land which has once again miraculously come alive.

In this edition of *HaMizrachi*, we explore the Jewish people’s responsibility to be a “light unto the nations” – a nation illuminating the world with spiritual and moral light. Walter Clay Lowdermilk understood that Israel was destined to fulfill this role. “If we were interested

in the regeneration of man, let all the righteous forces on earth support these settlements in Palestine as a wholesome example for the backward Near East, and indeed for all who seek to work out a permanent adjustment of people to their lands.”

May we soon see the day when the entire world is enlightened by the light of the Land, when “many nations shall go and say: ‘Come, let us go up to the Mount of Hashem, to the House of the G-d of Ya’akov, that He may instruct us in His ways, and that we may walk in His paths.’” (Michah 4:2)

*Tu BiShvat Sameach!*

1. Ramban on Vayikra 26:32 makes the same point, seeing this as a blessing within a curse.



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



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*Dubai, UAE*

"We are delighted to be participating in the World Orthodox Israel Congress – a unique opportunity to learn with Jewish leaders from around the world."



**Rabbanit Shani Taragin**  
*Alon Shvut, Israel*

"Attending the Congress is a most appropriate way to celebrate 75 years of Jewish sovereignty and statehood in our Homeland – joining representatives across the world to continue to plan, plant and build for the future!"



**Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schacter**  
*New York, USA*

"Very excited to participate in this international gathering of Jewish leaders on this extraordinarily historic occasion! Join us!"



**Mrs. Sofia Cohen**  
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"There is no better way that we could think of to celebrate 75 years of the State of Israel than to be in *Eretz Yisrael*, at this Congress, and celebrate with Jews from around the world."



**Mr. David Brykman**  
*Melbourne, Australia*

"This is a unique opportunity for Religious Zionist communities from all over the world to unite and collaborate on meaningful strategies to advance and enrich our *kehillot*. I am very excited to be a part of this important event."

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**Rabbi Dr. Leonard Matanky**  
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"The World Orthodox Israel Congress promises to be a historic gathering of Religious Zionists from across the globe with one goal, to strengthen our movement, thereby strengthening world Jewry."



**Rebbetzin Natalie Altman**  
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"As the world gets smaller because of technological advances, issues around education are more globalised and their solutions can be shared. I can't wait to share and to learn."



**Rabbi Dr. Seth Grauer**  
*Toronto, Canada*

"It's a historic event at a historic time and a wonderful opportunity for the Religious Zionist community to come together to have a meaningful impact on the Jewish future."



**Mrs. Raizi Chechik**  
*New York, USA*

"I am truly grateful to World Mizrachi for bringing our community together to celebrate all that we have built and been blessed with thus far, and to connect and strategize regarding all that we have yet to accomplish for our communities, our children, and our future."



**Rabbi Kalman  
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"We're excited to participate in this historic opportunity to define and articulate what Religious Zionism stands for and to chart steps to propel our movement forward."



**Mrs. Hannah Reuben**  
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"Bringing leadership from across the globe to share ideas and grapple with difficulties – what could be more inspiring? This is set to be a historic and monumental occasion and it is an absolute honour to be a part of that."

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# Connecting Israel to the Diaspora

On Thursday January 5th, World Mizrahi's Center for Zionist Shlichut to the Diaspora hosted over 400 potential *shlichim* in Yerushalayim for its annual Shlichut Fair. Bringing together numerous Religious Zionist organizations who send *shlichim*, the evening allowed Israelis to hear about *shlichut* opportunities all over the world. The event was graced by the presence of Minister Ofir Sofer, the newly-appointed Minister of Aliyah and Absorption, and MK Ohad Tal, former head of the Center.

“At a time when there is a lot of discussion about Israel-Diaspora relations,” said Rav Hillel Van-Leuween, the head of the Center, “there is no better way of building connections than sending hundreds of *shlichim*. Through face-to-face relationships, they are a human bridge linking Jews around the world to Israel, and we are excited to see what they will achieve!”



Mizrachi's leadership and representatives in the National Institutions, and heads of shlichut organizations, together with MKs Ofir Sofer and Ohad Tal.



Rav Hillel Van-Leuween, head of the Shlichut Center, welcoming potential shlichim to the fair.



MK Ofir Sofer, Minister of Aliyah and Absorption, speaking to the press at the fair.



(ALL PHOTOS: DAVID STEIN)

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An Introduction by Rabbi Elie Mischel

יְכִירוּ וַיֵּדְעוּ כָּל בְּאֵי עוֹלָם, כִּי אֶתָּה הוּא  
הָאֱ-לֹקִים לְבַדְּךָ לְכֹל מַמְלָכוֹת הָאָרֶץ.

A sailor in the United States Navy during World War II, my grandfather's service nearly ended before it began. When a fellow serviceman from Texas demanded that he reveal his “Jew horns”, my grandfather – not known for his patience – hit the antisemite so hard that he knocked him unconscious. He was fortunate to avoid being court-martialed!

Witnessing the dramatic rise in antisemitism in recent years, many Jews understandably assume that nothing has changed since the Holocaust. But even as antisemitism intensifies, many non-Jews – and particularly Christians – now view our people with nothing short of affection and turn to us for inspiration and guidance.

Last month, 80 years after my grandfather taught that Texan a lesson, I visited the small town of Granbury, Texas, to speak with local Christians about Israel and their relationship with the Jewish people. From the moment I walked into my host's living room, I was overwhelmed with love and affection. For the next eleven hours, I didn't have a chance to breathe! One after the other, pastors and simple Christians peppered me with questions about Torah, the Hebrew language and Israel – recognizing that I, as an Orthodox Jew, possessed an understanding of the Bible that they could only dream of.

With my own eyes, I witnessed the fulfillment of the verse in Zechariah: “So said Hashem Almighty: In those days ten people from all the languages and nations shall take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his cloak and say: ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that G-d is with you’” (Zechariah 8:23).

As Israel grows ever stronger and more confident, we are blessed with opportunities that were unimaginable during the long generations of exile. Do we have a duty to share the light of Torah with non-Jews? What are the risks and rewards of engaging with others who are different from us?

In this edition of *HaMizrachi*, we examine our responsibility, as individuals and as a nation, to actively serve as a light unto the nations. From Evangelical Christians throughout America's Bible belt to growing groups of Noahides in southern India, Nigeria and the Philippines, gentiles all over the world are yearning for the truth of Torah. Will we be there to teach them?

“And many peoples shall go and say: ‘Come and let us go up to the mountain of Hashem, to the house of the G-d of Ya'akov; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the word of Hashem from Jerusalem” (Yishayahu 2:3).

# Interfaith or Multifaith?

## A Conversation with Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

**One of the Orthodox Jewish community's most respected voices, Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein serves as the Director of Interfaith Affairs for the Simon Wiesenthal Center. Rabbi Elie Mischel spoke with Rabbi Adlerstein to reflect on his important work and how he navigates the complexities of multifaith dialogue.**

**Your position at the Simon Wiesenthal Center places you at the forefront of the Jewish people's relationship with other religions. What are your goals in connecting with people of other faiths, and what have you learned?**

We have several goals. First and foremost is advancing the good of the Jewish people and of the State of Israel. We are a small, embattled country, and a small embattled religion, beset with enemies on all sides and sometimes from within, with a shrinking list of dependable allies. One of the last dependable sources of support for the State of Israel, and sometimes for the Jewish people, are other faith communities – Christians in particular.

We also have a second goal that is *lishma*. For the first time in 2,000 years, we have an opportunity to speak our minds as believing Jews and provide guidance to others who wish to know the *dvar Hashem* (the word of G-d) about pressing social issues.

Often, these groups are embattled in their own ways, and are looking for someone to hold their hand or pat them on the back and say, "Listen, we are theologically incompatible with each other. But we share in our gut and our minds a firm conviction in the existence of a *borei olam*, a Creator, of His communication with man, of normative demands that are immutable and without which man and mankind will not be happy."

I have learned a number of things in doing this work. The assumption with which many of us grew up, that every Christian is out to convert us, and that converting us is at the very top of their list of priorities, is simply not true. There are tens and probably hundreds of millions of Christians who are neither antisemitic nor particularly zealous about recruiting others. Not that they've become "reform"; we're talking about true believers. But history has taught them that direct proselytizing is often counterproductive and not as effective as trying to live as exemplars of their faith and hoping that others will be attracted to it.

When people challenge me and say "what do you have against Christian proselytizing? Don't you guys *daven* three times a day that you want everybody to profess your religion?" My response is "First of all, no – we *don't* want everybody to become Jewish. We want them to be monotheistic, but we're not proselytizing for Judaism. Secondly, we don't go door to door trying to convert people. We don't believe the world is divided into two universes – the world of the believers and the world of the sword, meaning those who still have to be converted. Our goal is that the entire world will, in messianic times, come around to their senses with a lot of handholding from *mashiach*, and see the truth." *Lehavdil*, there are Christians who believe the same thing. Their job is not to spread the good news by handing you Bibles or leaving them in your motel room, but to simply live lives that other people would want to emulate. And I have far less of a problem with that.

I've also learned of the extent of genuine Christian love for Jews and for Israel. I could go on for a while telling you about many of these people. I'm not going to venture a guess as to how many and what percentage of Christians love Israel, but many of them are deeply connected to the Jewish roots of Christianity. Their central belief is an image from the book of Romans of all non-Jews being grafted onto the "tree" of Israel, with the trunk of the tree being the Jewish people.

Ironically, this parable itself is lifted from one of our prophets, but it really is a paraphrase of G-d's blessing to Avraham Avinu, a *berachah* that shocked me the first time its beauty hit home. כל משפחת האדמה, ונברכו בך, "And through you, all the families of the earth will be blessed." Rabbi Jonathan Sacks *zt"l* said "Look, Christianity and Islam are not quite our cup of tea. But isn't it something that a majority of people on the face of the globe today see Avraham Avinu as their spiritual father?" It's something that has paid off in recent years with the Abraham Accords.

My training was as a teacher of Torah; I never expected to work with non-Jews. I was a *maggid shiur* at the time, when I



Rabbi Adlerstein courting Israel's neighbors at the National Prayer Breakfast in DC. (PHOTO: COURTESY)

was drafted unexpectedly to do this kind of work. I thought, "Wow, this is the kind of thing that Reform rabbis do! What am I going to talk to Christians about?" But I discovered very quickly that not only can Orthodox Jews do the job, but at least in the case of religious Christians, they can do it far better than anybody else. There is an instant connection and shared vocabulary, and there is even an instant trust that neither side is going to bother trying to convert the other. We're not suspected of trying to convert them, because they know we don't proselytize. And they know that Orthodox Jews don't make good targets for Christians. It doesn't work!

So much of our vocabulary coincides. We talk about G-d in intimate terms, as One Who surrounds us 24/7, a G-d we feel responsible to, where there are consequences to our actions and not everything is up for grabs, and a G-d Who cares about us. This instantly gives us things to talk about, without having to get into theological points that separate us.

**Many of the writers in this edition of HaMizrachi argue that it is important to develop relationships with people of other faiths. Are there dangers in engaging in interfaith work?**

Of course there are serious dangers, but the fact that there are dangers doesn't relieve us from the responsibility of doing the work that has to be done. Our challenge is to develop people with the right set of tools to successfully and safely engage with other religions.

I make a point of speaking with an *adam gadol*, a great rabbinic leader, at least once a year, to check in. I ask questions when particular issues come up, but at my yearly check up, I say "tell me if I'm getting in too deep, or if I'm veering off in the wrong direction." I have been pulled back a number of times, though most of the time I've surprisingly received a green light to go full steam ahead. I think it's important for anybody who's involved in this work to have *rabbeim* and *chaverim* they can speak with.

Rav Soloveitchik's position on this is very important. The Rav was 100% against interfaith dialogue; he wrote about it, it's a matter of record. His opposition to it was surpassed only by his cousin, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein zt"l. Yet, the Rav always had one person whom he trusted to do interfaith dialogue. For many years it was Rabbi Walter Wurzberger zt"l, and when he passed away, the baton was passed to Rabbi Dr. David Berger.

How does this fit with the Rav's opposition to interfaith dialogue? Somebody had to speak to the broader world on behalf of the Torah community, to explain the Torah viewpoint, because we don't want Reform and Conservative rabbis to speak for us. The Rav was afraid that many people would get it wrong - there are plenty of those people around today - and some would "give away the ranch". I can point to examples, not for this interview, of how people involved in classic interfaith dialogue improperly "gave away the ranch". But real *bnei Torah* with a strong *mesorah* (tradition) from their rabbis are less likely to stumble in this way.

The strongest allies of the State of Israel are evangelical Christians. They're not the only ones. In every mainline Protestant domination, even the very liberal ones with an anti-Israel, pro-Palestinian stance, you will find many people who are ardently pro-Israel. There are good people out there, and we have to find them. But traditional evangelicals remain our best friends.

Interestingly, the evangelicals did not participate in the decades of interfaith dialogue, where people would discuss a text, trade insights and see how their different faiths could enrich each other. That's the kind of dialogue the Rav rejected; he insisted that we don't share a common vocabulary through which we can express our religious feelings. The evangelicals had a similar attitude. They said "What? We need Catholics to know ourselves? We split with them 500 years ago; what are they going to tell us?"

Ironically, we have a clearer path to working with evangelicals. Neither of us are interested in this classic kind

of interfaith dialogue. They want to know what we can do together. They'll say, "We're beset with lots of problems. Externally, politically, and how to survive in a society that is hostile to traditional religion. You guys can help us, or we can help you! Let's talk."

This kind of dialogue is very, very different from the old kind of interfaith dialogue. At the Wiesenthal Center, we call this "multifaith dialogue". With this kind of dialogue, you can build projects in different communities that take advantage of religious fervor and conviction, without getting into theology. It's the power of faith itself that still speaks to almost half of America. Good things can happen from there.

The greatest danger is insidious proselytizing. Many people promise that they don't proselytize, but then you discover that it's a shell game, and parts of the ministry's corporate structure doesn't proselytize, but other parts do. We don't want any part of that. Some organizations, the Wiesenthal Center included, stop short of any association with any group that even has a meaningful alliance with groups that proselytize to Jews. I have no problem with their proselytizing to non-Jews. But those who target Jews, who are active in the State of Israel, we want no part of.

On this issue, there are members of our community who overreact. *Baruch Hashem*, these *kanaim l'dvar Hashem* (zealots for the word of G-d) say that any amount of support from the Christian community is not worth one Jewish soul - which is absolutely true. But we're people who must deal with pragmatic realities; that's what *halachah* is about. Chazal put it in two words: כְּבִדְהוּ וְחָשְׁדוּהוּ, "respect them and suspect them". Our approach must be equal parts of both. We must respect them, but without diluting our religious principles. And we must always look over their shoulder to see what lurks in the background. אֵין לּוֹ לְדַיֵּן אֶלָּא מֵה שֶׁעֵינֵינוּ רוֹאוֹת, "you can only deal with the evidence you have before you". You do your research, and you have friends planted in various places who can help you. Making these meta-*halachic* decisions is never foolproof, but Hashem doesn't expect more than that.

There are Jews, among them many wonderful *geirim* (converts) who grew up in the Christian community, who tend to view everything in the Christian world through the lens of their own experience, and think every Christian is a proselytizer. They'll say, "everybody I knew back then wanted to save Jewish souls. That's *really* what's behind every non-Jew." And there are a few people who make a living off of this claim. But this attitude is an overreaction and dangerous to the State of Israel. Though their suspicions generally come from a good place, it's not in the interest of *Medinat Yisrael* or the Jewish people globally.

### Does teaching Torah to non-Jews qualify as interfaith dialogue?

It's a *halachic* issue. What parts of Torah are you allowed to teach and what parts are you not? This is a *sugya* (topic) that everybody working in this field must learn thoroughly and discuss with responsible *poskim*. There are certainly different points of view on it.

The *poskim* I speak with believe that anything concerning the *sheva mitzvot bnei Noach* (Seven Noahide Laws) is permissible to teach. If people want to know the word of G-d, you should certainly teach them! The *sheva mitzvot bnei Noach* includes Who Hashem is, what we were created for and what His expectation is from us. Not G-d's expectations of the Jewish



Rabbi Adlerstein with Salim Joubran, Arab justice of Israel's Supreme Court. (PHOTO: COURTESY)

individual, but from the rest of mankind. The book of Bereishit is overflowing with these ideas.

Personally, I feel comfortable teaching certain areas of Torah to non-Jews, but not others. I've told non-Jews who wanted to come to some of my *shiurim* that this material is not for you. I'm not comfortable teaching the detailed laws of the *avodah* in Vayikra. But if you go through Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch's commentary on Vayikra and study his teachings on the ethos of the sacrifices and what each sacrifice is meant to accomplish - these teachings are important for non-Jews as well. Certainly the *mevakesh*, the seeker, should not be turned away.

The Rambam was asked: is it permissible to teach Torah to non-Jews? He answered: "Of course not! However, I would make an exception for Christians. If Christians ask you questions about Tanach, you *should* teach them."

Now, the Rambam hated Christianity, though I don't know if he ever met a Christian in his life. He lived in Muslim countries, his tormenters were all Muslim, but he did not like Christianity. And so his position on this is very surprising. The Rambam held that since Christians believe in the Bible, we are not concerned that they will pervert it. Now, I'm not sure he would write that today, but he *did* write it back then. Because they value the Torah, if you show them the truth, they might accept it.

In his *Seridei Eish*, Rabbi Yechiel Ya'akov Weinberg writes that when the Rambam said this, it wasn't because the Rambam thought that teaching Christians would lead these Christians to convert to Judaism. Rather, the Rambam simply meant that they'll see the truth, that they'll see what Hashem is trying to communicate to them. ■





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# Why Religious Zionists Should Engage with Christian Zionists

Rabbi Pesach Wolicki

**A**s a rabbi working in Jewish-Christian relations, I am often asked about the permissibility of the work I do. If opposed to my line of work, the questioner will usually cite the Rambam (Maimonides), the 12th century scholar who ruled that Christianity is a form of idolatry (Laws of Idolatry 5:4). For many in the Orthodox Jewish community, the ruling of such a towering *halachic* figure makes them uneasy. Though there are great *halachists* who do not view Christianity as idolatry, for many Orthodox Jews, Rambam trumps all, and so they assume it is prohibited to engage in any religious conversations with Christians or members of other religions. In fact, as we will see, Rambam himself explicitly rejects this view.

The Rambam was certainly no fan of Christianity. He lived during the times of the Crusades and was acutely aware of the Jewish people's terrible suffering at the hands of the Christians of his time. In addition, Rambam's unique formulation of monotheism meant that he deemed a Trinitarian understanding of G-d (Father, Son and Holy Spirit as co-equal and co-eternal) as pure idolatry.

In light of this, the following statement about Christianity from Rambam's *Mishneh Torah* is all the more remarkable.

Jesus the Nazarene... who imagined that he was the Messiah and was killed by the court, Daniel had prophesied regarding him, as it states "Those rebellious among your own people will rise up in fulfillment of the vision, but will fail." And is there a greater stumbling block than this? That all of the prophets spoke of the Messiah redeeming Israel, saving them, gathering in their dispersed and strengthening their observance of the commandments; and this one, [Jesus], caused their loss by the sword, the exile of their remnant, their suppression, replacing their law, and leading most of the world astray to serve a god other than Hashem.

However, the thoughts of the Creator of the world - man is not capable of conceiving of them, for His ways are not our ways and our thoughts are not His thoughts.

And all of these matters of Jesus the Nazarene - and of the Ishmaelite who arose after him [Muhammad] - were solely in order to pave the path for the king Messiah and to repair the entire world to serve Hashem together, as it states, "Then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of Hashem and serve Him shoulder to shoulder."

How so? The entire world has now been filled with the concept of the Messiah, the concepts of the Torah, and the concepts of the commandments. These matters have spread to the most distant lands and to nations of uncircumcised hearts. They discuss these matters. Regarding the commandments of the Torah - some say these commandments were true but have since been negated in our days and were not to be practiced for the future. Others say that hidden matters are meant by them and that they are not meant to be understood according to their simple meaning, but that the Messiah has already come and revealed their secrets.

And when the true king Messiah will arise and will succeed and be exalted - as a direct result they all will retract and know that their ancestors bequeathed falsehood to them and that their prophets led them astray. (Laws of Kings, Chapter 11)

Rambam's remarkable statement is extremely nuanced and complex, and so a careful, honest, and fair assessment of his words is in order. I do not wish to "cherry pick" some of Rambam's statements while ignoring others. Neither will I claim that Rambam would assign a different *halachic* status to today's Christianity, even though Christianity would later go through a major transformation resulting from the Protestant Reformation, leading to thousands of denominations with many theological differences from the Christianity that existed in Rambam's generation. Conjecturing about what thinkers of earlier time periods *would have said* under new circumstances is unhelpful and intellectually dishonest.

Instead, let us carefully and honestly read what Rambam himself is saying. The context of the above quotation is his *halachic* treatment of the concept of the Messiah. Rambam lays out the definition of the term and the qualifications of a would-be claimant to the title. In this context, Rambam makes the following four points:

1. Jesus was not the Messiah. In fact, he had the opposite effect of the Jewish Messiah; i.e. he led Jews away from Torah and into greater suffering.
2. Nevertheless, Jesus was a significant catalyst of G-d's plan "to pave the path for the king Messiah and to repair the entire world to serve Hashem together."
3. This "paving" and "repairing" come about through the spreading of the core ideas and ideals of the Torah to the entire world.
4. When the real Messiah will come, Christianity will be proven false and will be rejected by its adherents in favor of an entirely Jewish form of faith.

In other words, Rambam held firm to the position that Christianity is idolatry. At the same time, Rambam considered Jesus and the religion he spawned as part of G-d's plan "in order to pave the path for the king Messiah and to repair the entire world to serve Hashem together..." These two points do not contradict one another. In his eschatology, the Rambam saw that Christians would eventually acknowledge what we say everyday in our *Aleinu* prayer - "Then Hashem shall be King over all the earth; on that day Hashem shall be One and His name One." Moreover, he understood Christianity as a step in that direction.

What is Rambam saying about Christianity? Does he view Christianity as a positive or negative force in the world? The short answer is that in the broad historical view, Christianity is both. It was disastrous for the Jewish people, leading to a decline in Torah observance and a great deal of suffering. Yet, in the big picture, Christianity was very good for the world. It has served as a vehicle for spreading the knowledge of Torah, its commandments, and the biblical plan for the world, "paving the path" to the ultimate redemption.

In sum, Rambam is making two critical points: (1) that Christianity has been problematic in the past yet is

valuable for the long-term future, and (2) that Christianity was harmful to the Jewish people but brought good to the nations of the world.

In my conversations with Jews who are uncomfortable with Jewish-Christian dialogue, I often hear three different sentiments express their opposition. They can be summed up as: (1) "Who cares what Christians think of us?"; (2) "Christians are historically our enemies. They can't be our friends. They just want to convert us!"; and (3) "Christianity is *avodah zarah!*" This passage of Rambam provides a sound response to all three of these challenges.

It is understandable that many Jews believe it doesn't matter what the nations of the world think of us. Centuries of enmity and persecution are reason enough to feel this way. The problem with this attitude is that it's *wrong*; it *does* matter what the nations think of us! In fact, what the nations of the world think of us speaks directly to the G-d-given mission of the Jewish people on this earth.

Although this point can be proven using many sources - scriptural, liturgical, and Talmudic - I will use the *Aleinu* prayer recited three times daily as an illustration. The first paragraph of *Aleinu* speaks directly to Jewish particularism: "For He has not made us like the families of the earth and has not placed our portion among them..." We proudly state that *we* serve Hashem and the nations do not. We thank Hashem for our unique status. However, lest one think that this Jewish particularism is the end goal, along comes the second paragraph.

The second paragraph of *Aleinu* speaks of the Jewish covenantal mission "to perfect the world in the kingdom of G-d so that all people of flesh shall call Your Name. All the inhabitants of the earth shall know and recognize that to You all knees shall bend, and all lips shall swear." The opening words of the second paragraph - *Al kein*, "Therefore" - link it causally to the first. In other words, the particularism of the Jewish people spelled out in the first paragraph is intended to facilitate the universal goals of the second paragraph. We are meant to be the catalyst for the recognition by all humanity of the one G-d.

Jews who claim "it doesn't matter what the nations think of us" do not deny the universal mission of Israel to spread



Rabbi Wolicki speaking to African Christians visiting Israel for Sukkot. (PHOTO: COURTESY)



A Bible study for German Christians in Efrat. (PHOTO: COURTESY)



Rabbi Wolicki leading a tour for leaders at the Bible Lands Museum.  
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knowledge of G-d to all humanity. Rather, they likely believe that this goal will somehow be miraculously achieved by a kind of “flip of the switch” at the end of days; that at some point there will be overtly miraculous events that will cause “the lights to go on” and all the non-Jews, regardless of how distant they may have been from faith in G-d, will instantaneously believe in Hashem.

But if this sudden eschatological vision is correct, why would Rambam see a need to “pave the path” for the coming of the Messiah by inculcating the peoples of the earth with Biblical values and ideas? If their faith will be the sudden result of G-d “turning the lights on”, what difference does it make what they believe before that time comes?

More fundamentally, there is neither a Torah source to support it nor is there a rationale for believing that the transition to faith will happen suddenly and miraculously. Why would G-d do that? What value is there in a faith attained under the duress of extreme miraculous revelation rather than development through free will? One can argue that G-d’s ways are unknown to us and this is, in fact, His plan for humanity, but without a source to support it, it remains an irrational and unfounded belief.

Rambam believed that humanity will come to faith in G-d gradually, through a long historical process. This process may even – and often does – involve tragedy for the Jewish people along the way. This leads directly to the point of our discussion, namely the value – both religiously and pragmatically – of Jewish-Christian dialogue and bridge-building in our times.

Strangely, many of those who believe humanity will suddenly and miraculously accept the truth of Judaism are Religious Zionists. The two most fundamental tenets of Religious Zionism are (1) that historical processes leading to the redemption happen *gradually*, and (2) we are responsible to *actively participate* in the redemptive process. Therefore, Religious Zionists believe that the modern State of Israel and the mass ingathering of Jews to Israel represent the beginnings of the final redemption foretold throughout the Bible.

Herein lies the inconsistency. Is this gradual process of redemption limited to the ingathering of Jewish exiles and the founding of a Jewish nation-state in the Land of Israel? Isn’t it logical that the process of drawing the nations closer to faith in Hashem and to true Biblical values will happen gradually as well? It is inconsistent to believe in a



Rabbi Wolicki with a group of Hispanic-American pastors in Jerusalem.  
(PHOTO: COURTESY)

gradual process which includes the acceptance of imperfect intermediary steps regarding one aspect of the redemptive process – the ingathering of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel – while rejecting the possibility of a similarly gradual process with regard to the universal aspects of the Jewish eschatological vision.

Do we believe that we are called upon to be active participants only in the building of the Jewish nation-state but not in the process of *tikkun olam bemaalchut Shadd-ai*, “the perfection of the world under the sovereignty of the Almighty”, as spelled out in the second paragraph of *Aleinu*?

As for the claim that we must not have dialogue with Christians because Christianity is idolatrous, the response is the same. Are we meant to wait for the sudden “flip of the switch” when all believers in other religions will miraculously drop their mistaken theology in favor of Judaism? Or is it more likely that we are obligated to engage with those willing to listen and to promote Jewish understandings of Biblical text, faith, and the Torah’s definitions of right and wrong? Should we ignore the progress – both theological and ethical – that the Christian world has undergone in drawing closer to our understanding of G-d’s word? Are we incapable of recognizing the footsteps of the universal redemption of all of humanity?

To those who claim, as if it is axiomatic, that we can have nothing to do with worshipers of idolatry, let us return to the Rambam. In the Laws of Sacrifices (3:2), Rambam rules that a non-Jew can offer a sacrifice in the Temple “even if he worships idolatry”. To illustrate this point, imagine a rebuilt *Beit HaMikdash* in Jerusalem. Imagine that someone who staunchly cites the Rambam’s definition of Christianity as idolatry is waiting in line to bring an offering in the *Beit HaMikdash* – and the next person in line is a Christian! The Rambam is clear. He rules that a Christian can offer sacrifices in our Temple *without changing one iota of his Christian faith*. Apparently, for the Rambam, idolatry does not disqualify one from serving G-d alongside Jews. Furthermore, as we have noted above, in Rambam’s view, Christianity’s status as idolatry does not disqualify it from being a positive force that paves the way to universal knowledge of Hashem. Why, then, would anyone believe that the Rambam is opposed to any and all interaction with Christians?

Many Jews claim that it is forbidden to discuss matters of religious content with Christians. Yet it is the Rambam himself who rules that it is permissible to teach Torah to

Christians because they accept the divinity of the Tanach (Responsum 364). As counter-intuitive as this ruling may be, the Rambam – who ruled that Christianity is *avodah zarah* – also ruled that it is permissible and even a positive endeavor to study Torah with Christians.

Rambam lived in a time when Christianity was anything but friendly to the Jewish people. He believed it to be an idolatrous faith. And yet he had the breadth of vision to see that, paradoxically, something that threatens Judaism and Jewish survival in one era may, at the same time, be a force that assists in bringing about the ultimate success of the Torah and Judaism in the future.

As for the issue of Christian proselytizing: While it is certainly true that a large percentage of the Christian world still seeks to actively convert Jews to Christianity, it is also true that increasingly there are many Christians who reject this goal. This change is occurring across the Christian spectrum.

Moreover, despite what many Jews believe, the vast majority of Christian support for Israel is not tied to the goal of converting Jews. Christian support for Israel and the explosion of interest in what Christians refer to as the “Hebrew” or “Judaic” roots of Christianity is a direct outgrowth of the increased emphasis on the Torah – what Christians refer to as the Old Testament – and the apparent fulfillment of prophecies relating to the ingathering of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel.

Whether or not this fascination with Israel is a passing fad, a tactic for missionary work, or a genuine and sincere devotion is an open question. The truth is that there are Christians who fall into each of these categories. One thing is certain and unarguably true: the surest way to ensure these developments are steered towards a long term and positive view of Judaism resulting in reliable support for Israel is to engage those Christians who have opened themselves up to a relationship with our people. Those who recoil from this open door and refuse to engage with Christians will ensure that the current window of opportunity in the Jewish-Christian relationship will be fleeting. How is this the wise course to choose?

The historical barriers that many Jews feel towards a respectful relationship to Christianity are understandable. We Jews have long memories. But we must take a lesson from Rambam and be broad-minded and humble enough to see that “His ways are not our ways, and our thoughts are not His thoughts.”

In a similar vein, only a century ago, Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook wrote in uncompromisingly negative terms when discussing Christian theology (*Kovetz* 7:155, *Kovetz* 6:203, *Orot* 33). At the same time, when discussing the value of religions in general and Christianity in particular, the very same Rav Kook wrote:

The inner ethical content that any religion contains must be respected. And it is appropriate for any intelligent person to understand that those who practice those religions according to their traditions are involved in *avodat Hashem* – service of G-d – in their own way. (*Linvuchoi haDor*, ch. 8)

The lesson to be learned from these great rabbinic luminaries is difficult for many to digest. We can have stark disagreements with members of other faiths and reject their



Rabbi Wolicki at an academic symposium on Jewish-Christian relations at Canada Christian College (PHOTO: COURTESY)

theology in the strongest terms. And yet, simultaneously, we can respect their positive role in G-d's plan, look forward to worshiping side by side in the *Beit HaMikdash*, and even, as Rambam ruled, study Torah together with them.

More and more Christians are reevaluating their understanding of Jews, Torah, and the origins of Christianity as an offshoot of Judaism. These are monumental changes! Like the refounding of the State of Israel, this too is part of the “first flowering of the redemption”. The principles that apply to the process of our own national redemption must guide us here as well. We must recognize that historical changes happen gradually, and that it is our duty to actively participate in these changes and bring the nations closer to the Torah's ultimate goal. In the words of the Rambam himself:

...to pave the path for the king Messiah and to repair the entire world to serve Hashem together, as it states, “Then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the L-rd and serve Him shoulder to shoulder” (Tzefanyah 3:9).



**Rabbi Pesach Wolicki**

is the Director of Ohr Torah Stone's Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding and Cooperation. Together with Pastor Doug Reed, he hosts *Shoulder to Shoulder*, a popular weekly podcast that gets to the heart of issues that matter to people of faith. He is a regular contributor to [Israel365news.com](http://Israel365news.com), a pro-Israel news site serving the Christian community.

# From Antisemitism to Ohr Lagoyim

Rabbi Tuly Weisz

**A**s a kid in Ohio in the 1980s, my Bnei Akiva *madrichim* always gave us the same warning when we went on trips: we must not make a *chillul Hashem*, because, after all, so many non-Jews *hated* us! When I became a *madrich* myself, I flipped the argument, and told the kids that since so many non-Jews *loved* Israel and the Jewish people, we must be on our best behavior and make a *kiddush Hashem*. Antisemitism is the flipside of our ability to be an *ohr lagoyim*; to achieve the latter, we must understand the former.

In recent months, Jewish conspiracy theories have become widely accepted by everyone from celebrities to sports stars. At the same time, Hamas has successfully convinced a gullible world that Israelis are occupiers who have stolen their land, while progressive politicians add fuel to the fire by accusing Religious Zionist leaders of racism. It's all very shocking – but it shouldn't be. In working closely with the Christian community for more than a decade, I have seen how ancient stereotypes often lie just below the surface. In response, I believe that we, the Religious Zionist community, must unite to fight against the very source of the twin evils of antisemitism and anti-Zionism: Replacement Theology.

When Christianity first separated from Judaism 2,000 years ago, the new religion claimed that its “New” Testament superseded our “Old” one, and that they were the “New Israel”. Known as Replacement Theology, this perverse belief system suggests that G-d broke His promise to the Jewish people after we rejected the Christian messiah. Accordingly, our Torah is outdated, our Land doesn't belong to us and we are fair targets for hostility and hatred. This theological perversion at the root of today's dangerous antisemitism is a direct challenge to the Religious Zionist



When we embrace the study of Tanach and begin teaching it to our neighbors, colleagues and the entire world, we will begin to extinguish the flames of antisemitism.

community whose motto is “*Am Yisrael, B'Eretz Yisrael al pi Torat Yisrael.*”

At the same time, many Christians today reject Replacement Theology and are, ironically, our greatest friends and supporters. According to a 2020 Pew survey, 70% of evangelicals believe that G-d gave Israel to the Jewish people (compared to only 32% of Jews!). These numbers should guide us as we defend our people from antisemitism. We should not be embarrassed to cite our status as G-d's chosen people and our divine right to the Land, for these arguments will be widely embraced by *millions* of American Christians. As antisemitism increases, our community must initiate Tanach-based advocacy with increasing urgency and religious fervor. We have always studied *Torah lishma*, for its own sake; but now we must teach Torah for *our own sake*.

No matter where you live, chances are that many of your non-Jewish neighbors and coworkers would love to hear about your love for the Torah. Their eyes will tear up when you share your family's history over the last century, especially if you had relatives in the Holocaust or suffered from Christian antisemitism. They will love to hear about your visits to Israel and your experiences walking in the land of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The Jewish people were not given the Torah merely to survive in exile. G-d chose us to be an *ohr lagoyim*, a light unto the

nations, a mission that can only be fully achieved when we are settled in our Land. Now that we have returned home, we have a historically unprecedented opportunity to teach millions of gentiles the wisdom of Torah. There is no playbook for this chapter of our history; we have never experienced a moment like this. But the stakes are high, and we must rise to the occasion!

It is a rule of history: when Jews abandon the Torah and behave like all the other nations, the nations persecute us. When Israel recklessly follows western values, the nations hate us even more. Only when we fulfill our destiny and teach the nations how to live G-dly lives based upon Torah values will we transform Israel from the most condemned country into the world's spiritual superpower.

When we embrace the study of Tanach and begin teaching it to our neighbors, colleagues and the entire world, we will begin to extinguish the flames of antisemitism. But even more importantly, the study of Tanach will ignite the spark of Jewish pride in each and every one of us – building a fire that will soon become a blazing light unto all the nations of the world!



**Rabbi Tuly Weisz**  
is the founder of Israel365,  
an organization dedicated to  
strengthening Israel by building bridges  
with those who share our faith-based values.

# Not Just the Seven Noahide Mitzvot

## *An Interview with Rabbi Oury Cherki*

Hillel Shalit

*From India to the United States, Brit Olam: The Noahide World Center is leading a fast growing Noahide movement.*

“I was wondering what’s holding up the process of redemption,” says Rav Oury Cherki, “and I realized that the main point of contention between the left and the right, broadly speaking, is that the right thinks about the Jewish people and the left thinks about the world. Meanwhile, Judaism actually talks about the Jewish people for the sake of the world. I said to myself that the place where these two sensitivities can come together is in Judaism’s universal message. It’s nothing new. It’s the dogma of the Noahides, spelled out in our old, trusted sources.” With that, Rav Cherki set out to found an organization that would make Judaism accessible to the nations of the world.

“I decided it would be a good idea to start telling the world that the Jewish people have a message of *tikkun olam*, a message that emanates from the innermost depths of Judaism. It emanates from rabbis, from people who are loyal to the Torah of Moshe with every fiber of their being, from people who are driven by their ideals.”

In *Parashat Noach*, Hashem commands Noah and his children to fulfill certain commandments known as the seven Noahide *mitzvot*. Rav Oury Cherki, however, explains that these seven *mitzvot* are just the beginning. The larger goal, he says, is to glorify the name of Hashem in the world and transmit Judaism’s universal message to all nations.

Rav Cherki, the rabbi of Congregation Beit Yehudah in Jerusalem, founded *Brit Olam* eleven years ago and serves as



Rabbi Cherki in Prague at a conference of Bnei Noach, together with Rabbis David Peter and Manis Brosh. (PHOTO: COURTESY)

chairman of the organization. He was fascinated by prior efforts to spread Judaism in the world: the activities of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the work done by Rabbi Menachem Borstein with encouragement from Rabbi Mordechai Eliahu, and more. “So,” says Rabbi Cherki, “I founded an organization and called it the Noahide World Center, or in short, *Brit Olam*, and thank G-d, with time, we’ve seen great successes and a lot of interest around the world. Before we started *Brit Olam*, the whole subject of the Noahides was only only vaguely understood or even considered fiction. That is no longer the case today. In fact, many people throughout the world identify as Noahides and are associated with our organization.”

### **How many Noahides are there in the world?**

“It’s hard to give an exact number. I’d estimate that there are around fifty thousand in the world.”

Over the years, Rav Cherki has published a special *siddur* and a *halachic* guide for Noahides. “We have very meaningful support from the Jewish people’s brightest lights. I wrote both a *siddur* and a *halachic* guide for Noahides, and we have approbations both from the chief rabbis of Israel and from the leading *halachic* decisors,” he explains.

Rav Cherki describes the *siddur*, entitled *Brit Olam*, as similar to the Jewish *siddur*. “It has instructions about how to pray, and it has the text of prayers. Noahides aren’t required to recite any particular

prayer, but they often want to go into a synagogue and follow the Jewish prayers. But the problem is that the text of the Jewish prayers doesn't work for them. They can't say "our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov." So we made them a *siddur* that helps them follow the prayers and is relevant to them. It also includes instructions for lifecycle events – weddings, births, divorces, funerals, holidays – and ethical guidance from *Pirkei Avot* and more."

Rav Cherki's *halachic* guide is called *Brit Shalom*, and there's a lot more to it than the famous seven Noahide *mitzvot*. "The seven Noahide *mitzvot*," he says, "aren't the goal. They're the foundation. A person starts with loyalty to seven *mitzvot*, and then there's lots of information taken from Jewish law and general ethical teachings that are relevant to everyone. Everything is backed up with Talmudic and *halachic* sources. We offer guidance that can change the life of any person on Earth."

Among the examples that Rav Cherki gives are the *mitzvah* of honoring one's parents, which is illustrated by the story of the non-Jew Dama son of Netina; the subject of international relations and what the Torah says about war or a given type of government; the prohibition of cruelty to animals; and more.

"Formally, the Noahide laws only prohibit eating from an animal that's still alive," says Rav Cherki, "but the rule against harming living things comes from the Torah, and it applies to Noahides as well. The Noahides want to know what's allowed and what's prohibited. They ask whether hunting and fishing are allowed. There are many details to the rules against worshipping other gods, too. I was contacted by someone from the island of Sakhalin, north of Japan, a backwoods a world away. He wanted to build a house, but under his house, he discovered the remnants of a Buddhist temple. He asked me whether he was allowed to build there or not. If Noahides want to offer sacrifices to Hashem, can they or not? We have guidance for these questions."

At *Brit Olam*, there are a number of departments operating in an array of languages: French, English, Russian, Spanish, Portuguese, Indian dialects, and more. "There are inquiries in many

languages. The *halachic* guide has been translated to sixteen languages, and we're working on editions in Arabic and Japanese," Rabbi Cherki says. "We hope that people everywhere in the world will buy this *halachic* guide, because it's important for understanding what Judaism demands of them."

### What kind of reactions did you get when you started doing this?

"People get baffled, or sometimes incredulous, about any new thing. I'm very happy to say that I met with almost no opposition. At the end of the day, Torah scholars know that the material about Noahides exists, that it's not made up. The question for them is simply how relevant it is to our lives, and whether to ask rabbis to work with Noahides. That doesn't always go without saying, but once it's been explained, it's definitely received well. We have individuals and many communities around the world of people who want to know more."

Rav Cherki believes that the State of Israel has an important role to play in teaching Judaism to the nations of the world. As far as he's concerned, there must be no distinction between Judaism and the Jewish state. "The goal is to get the State of Israel involved. It shouldn't just be something that rabbis do. It should be the Jewish people addressing the world – and the *Jewish people* today are represented by the State of Israel. At some point, the government of Israel must take responsibility for this movement."

During the last two *Shemitta* years, Rav Cherki received a request from the Chief Rabbinate to provide a Noahide living in Israel who would

be able to buy state lands for the year. "According to some *halachic* decisors," he notes, "selling land to a non-Jew is problematic, but selling to a Noahide who lives in the country is allowed. I brought them a few Noahides who were elated to be able to help. They felt that they were partners with the Jewish people – instead of feeling patronized, with someone else telling them what to do, they felt that all of us are working together to bring G-d's kingship to the world."

The status of Noahides is enshrined in *halachah*, and it's different from the status of non-Jews who belong to other religions. To be considered a Noahide, a person has to leave his old religion and declare before a court of three judges that he accepts the seven Noahide *mitzvot*. "It's a *halachic* status that's explained in Rambam's *Hilchot Melachim*, chapters 8, 9, and 10. It starts with personal acceptance, done privately, which is completed later on when the person appears before a court," notes Rav Cherki. "It's a very exciting event for them, people say *Shehecheyanu*, they feel like it's a holiday. The person is transformed from being a non-Jew to becoming a Noahide, to whom the Jewish people relate and have what to say."

The declarations before the judges take place in Israel, around the world, and sometimes even over Zoom, under *halachic* oversight. Rav Cherki says that many Noahides came because they were disappointed with Christianity or other religions. When it comes to Islam, the situation is more complicated. "There's a real, concrete danger to someone who wants to leave Islam. They identify as Noahides, but socially, they keep going



Davening together with some of the Noahides. (PHOTO: COURTESY)



to their mosque, because they know that otherwise, they could get hurt.”

### What variables affect your work on the ground?

“There are ups and downs in our work, but it doesn’t change. We want to build a critical mass where there are so many Noahides that the world can’t ignore them. In the meantime, we only have tens of thousands of Noahides, a number that does not yet demand attention. Nevertheless, we’re starting to talk about it in intellectual circles, and interest is growing. Any person who wants to cling to the G-d of Israel must know that he can be a Noahide.”

“We’re working on building awareness. We’re working on a pan-European Noahide congress, and we want to have such a congress in the United States and in South America, too. The goal is to get to the point of a worldwide Noahide congress that takes place in Israel, attended by Noahide representatives from all over the world, accompanied by leaders and heads of state. It will be a tremendous contribution to sanctifying G-d’s name in the world. After all, the prophets say that the State of Israel is a sanctification of G-d’s name before the nations, and we’re making our contribution to that.”

In Congo, for example, there are about a hundred Noahides, and the leader of the community consults regularly with *Brit Olam*. Just a few weeks ago, a community of sixty-five families from Arizona joined the Noahides and asked to affiliate with *Brit Olam*. In southern India there are roughly a thousand Noahides organized into communities, and a *Brit Olam* envoy has been dispatched to them.

“There are seven billion people on Earth, and we’re far from getting even to the first billion, but we know that just as redemption will come step by step, *tikkun olam* will come the same way,” Rav Cherki says with confidence.

“Today, in every Jewish community in the world, there are non-Jews who visit the local synagogue and want to take part, and they can’t be ignored. They ask the rabbis for help. Often the rabbis suggest either conversion or nothing at all. We try to help the rabbis so they know how to guide these people, people for whom conversion isn’t necessarily



A portion of the crowd at the recent conference in Prague. Participants joined from Italy, France, and the Czech Republic, as well as other European countries. (PHOTO: COURTESY)

right but who want the light of the G-d of Israel in their lives.”

In his remarks, Rav Cherki talks briefly about a Noahide’s daily life. “In India they held a Tanach competition for Noahides. They also organized a choir that sings the Noahide anthem I wrote. In Texas, the Noahides told us about a local slaughterhouse that sometimes takes parts from animals before they’re dead. They asked whether they should boycott the slaughterhouse because of the rule forbidding meat cut from a live animal. They ask us about weddings. Does there need to be a marriage contract? A *chuppah*? Some Noahides even designed a special *mezuzah* for Noahides with the number seven on it, to distinguish the Noahide *mezuzah* from a Jewish *mezuzah*.”

Rav Cherki also describes questions that arise when one spouse joins the Noahides while the other remains committed to a different religion. “How can they live together? A Noahide whose wife is a Christian asked whether they can be buried next to each other. I said, Yes, as long as there’s no cross on the grave. The couple searched for a connection with each other, and they found the verse “You shall love your fellow as yourself,” which is written in the Torah and – not to compare the two – the New Testament. The Noahides have a lot of creativity!”

### Over the years, have you come up against any opposition to your activities?

“There’s been very little opposition. There are a few rabbis who say, “why are you dealing with non-Jews, you need to deal with Jews first.” “The poor

of your city take precedence,” and the like. I’m in the habit of answering that *tikkun olam* isn’t like charity. Instead, it’s part of the essence of the Jewish people: “All the families of the earth shall be blessed through you” (Bereishit 12:3). This is the mission for which G-d chose us. Usually there’s more reluctance or hesitation than opposition. It’s almost impossible to find someone who will actually say this work isn’t appropriate or desirable.”

### And around the world?

“Obviously some members of other religions object to it. Christians and Muslims feel threatened, but for the time being we still haven’t gotten big enough for there to be major objections, either. Sometimes, though, there’s definitely criticism that goes along with the general criticism of Judaism as a whole.”

### How can the average Jew help with your work?

“We conduct seminars for Jews to teach them about the subject and how they can help people who come to them. We train them as mentors for Noahides. We also have leadership training seminars for the Noahides themselves. When a large enough group comes together, a seminar can be organized.”

● Originally published in Hebrew in *Giluy Daat*, October 26, 2022.

# In the Eyes of the Nations

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks זצ"ל

In Moshe's day the Israelites must have appeared to an outside observer as a small, undistinguished people, children of slaves, who did not yet possess a home. Even many generations later, after they had conquered the Land, appointed a King, and built the Temple, they were a minor power compared to the great empires around them. They never reached the scale or prestige of Mesopotamia or Egypt, Assyria or Babylon.

Yet Moshe was convinced that something had happened to them of world-transforming significance. They had been touched, chosen by G-d for a great task, one that would affect not only them but also those who came in touch with them. The G-d of Israel was not like the gods of other nations. The faith of Israel was not like the religions of other people. Of this Moshe was sure. He knew with a certainty that what had happened to Israel would reverberate far beyond Israel:

"Observe [this Law] carefully, for this is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'" (Devarim 4:6). What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the L-rd our G-d is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this Law I am setting before you today?

According to Ramban, the meaning of this passage is that "the statutes and ordinances have the great benefit that they will bring honor from others to those who observe them. Even their enemies will praise them."

Sforno interprets it differently: through the Torah "you will be able to refute a heretic by intellectual proofs." It is not so much that others will admire Israel as that they will acknowledge the Divine source of its laws. The Jewish people will be living proof that G-d exists and has communicated with mankind.

R. Shmuel David Luzzatto sees the text from a different perspective. "This is a refutation," he writes, "of those who say that the statutes Moshe gave Israel were adopted from the Egyptians and the other peoples of his time. Moshe's contemporaries would have known far better than we do if this had been the case... How could Moshe have been so foolish to say to the Israelites that the nations, when they heard of these statutes, would say that Israel is a wise and understanding nation? Rather they would say that Israel is a foolish and inferior nation, because its laws were stolen from others." Moshe, suggests Luzzatto, knew there was

something different about the laws of Israel, which would not have been the case if Israel had simply adopted the practices of its time.

Whichever interpretation we take, the implication of Moshe's words is clear. The Torah would have an impact far beyond the boundaries, literal or metaphorical, of Israel. At no time in the biblical era could this be said to be true, but it came true nonetheless. The Greeks, struck by the intensity with which Jews studied Torah, called them 'a nation of philosophers'. Then came Christianity and Islam, two faiths tracing their ancestry to Avraham and drawing much of their inspiration from the Hebrew Bible. Already in the twelfth century, Maimonides could write (in a passage long censored and only recently restored):

"The whole world is already filled with the words of [the Christian] Messiah and the words of the commandments, and these words have spread to the farthest islands and among many unenlightened peoples, and they discuss these words and the commandments of the Torah."

The effect of Christianity and Islam was to spread the Jewish message – albeit in ways with which Jews could not fully agree – throughout the world. Today these religions represent more than half of the six billion people on the face of the earth. The 'Judeo-Christian ethic' and the Abrahamic faiths have shaped much of the civilisation of the West. The Torah really did become 'your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations'.

The book of Devarim is the great text of covenantal politics – the idea of a nation linked together in an explicit bond, a foundational text or constitution of mutual responsibility. It is a highly distinctive form of politics. Unlike the politics of power, it is predicated on the equal dignity and freedom of all its citizens. It involves a narrative – the story of the origins of the people and how they came to join together in collective enterprise to pursue the common good.

One of its most distinctive features is that it is essentially moral. It sees the nation as charged with a mission, a set of values, a destiny and responsibility. The health of the nation is directly related to the degree with which it is true to its vocation. John Schaar, writing about the political beliefs of Abraham Lincoln, summarizes the idea well:

"We are a nation formed by a covenant, by dedication to a set of principles and by an exchange of promises to uphold and advance certain commitments among ourselves and throughout the world. Those principles and commitments

are the core of American identity, the soul of the body politic. They make the American nation unique, and uniquely valuable, among and to the other nations. But the other side of the conception contains a warning very like the warnings spoken by the prophets to Israel: if we fail in our promises to each other, and lose the principles of the covenant, then we lose everything, for they are we.”

The single greatest experiment in covenantal politics in modern times has been the United States. From the beginning, its founders saw themselves as the children of Israel of their day, escaping from Egypt (=England) and a cruel Pharaoh (England’s kings), across the Red Sea (=the Atlantic) to what George Washington called ‘the almost promised land’.

In his 1849 novel *White-Jacket*, Herman Melville set out the connection between the American dream and the story of Israel: “We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people – the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world. G-d has predestined, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls. The rest of the nations must soon be in our rear. We are pioneers of the world; the advance-guard, sent on through the wilderness of untried things, to break a new path in the New World that is ours.”

The story began in 1630. Aboard the *Arabella* as it sailed for New England, John Winthrop articulated the vision of the Pilgrim Fathers. Speaking in conscious imitation of Moshe, he invited his fellow settlers to ‘enter into a covenant’ with G-d and to ‘follow the counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our G-d.’ If they failed to live

up to the covenant ‘the L-rd will surely break out in wrath against us,’ but if they were true to its terms, ‘The L-rd will be our G-d, and delight to dwell among us, as his own people, and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways.’ They would then find ‘that the G-d of Israel is among us.’

Winthrop ended his oration by quoting from Devarim: “I shall shut up this discourse with that exhortation of Moshe, that faithful servant of the L-rd, in his last farewell to Israel (Devarim 30). ‘Behold, there is now set before us life and good, death and evil, in that we are commanded this day to love the L-rd our G-d, and to love one another, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His ordinance and His laws, and the articles of our Covenant with Him, that we may live and be multiplied, and that the L-rd our G-d may bless us in the land whither we go to possess it... Therefore let us choose life that we and our seed may live, by obeying His voice and cleaving to Him, for He is our life and our prosperity.’”

What is extraordinary about America is that this deeply theological way of speaking about national purpose did not end with the 17th century. It has continued to this day. One of the least well known, yet sustained commentaries to the book of Deuteronomy is the collected inaugural addresses of American presidents, from George Washington to George W. Bush.

In the first inaugural in 1789, George Washington declared, “It would be peculiarly improper to omit in this first official act my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the universe;” and warned that ‘the propitious



(PHOTO: API)

smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which Heaven itself has ordained.” In his second inaugural (1805), Thomas Jefferson compared the story of America to the exodus: “I shall need, too, the favor of that Being in whose hands we are, who led our fathers, as Israel of old, from their native land and planted them in a country flowing with all the necessaries and comforts of life.”

More than a century and a half later, in 1961, John F. Kennedy was still using the same biblical cadences: “I have sworn before you and Almighty G-d the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago. The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life. And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe – the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of G-d... With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth G-d’s work must truly be our own.”

In 2001, the vision still drove George W. Bush: “[W]e are guided by a power larger than ourselves who creates us equal in his image... Americans are generous and strong and decent, not because we believe in ourselves, but because we hold beliefs beyond ourselves... We are not this [nation’s] story’s author, who fills time and eternity with his purpose. Yet his purpose is achieved in our duty, and our duty is fulfilled in service to one another.”

No other country in the West uses this intensely religious vocabulary. It is particularly striking in view of the fact that the American constitution, in the form of the First Amendment, formally separates religion and state.

It was the great French writer, Alexis de Tocqueville, who in the 1830s, in the course of his classic *Democracy in America*, explained the paradox. There is a separation between religion and state, but not between religion and society. “Religion in America,” he wrote, “takes no direct part in the government of society, but it must be regarded as the first of their political institutions.” What he meant was that, though it had no power, it had enormous influence. It sustained families. It bound communities together. It prompted people to join voluntary organizations for the promotion of the common good. It was the basis of a shared morality which, precisely because it was upheld by faith, did not have to constantly be enforced by law. “In France,” he noted, “I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and

the spirit of freedom marching in opposite directions. In America I found they were intimately united and that they reigned in common over the same country.”

We owe to Robert Bellah the idea that America has a “civil religion” – a set of beliefs and a shared faith that underlie its public and political life. Public theology has been part of America’s political culture from the very beginning. That public theology is based, as Bellah notes, on the Tanach. American presidents speak of Divine Providence and the sovereignty of G-d. They refer to covenant and the moral bonds by which societies are sustained. The liberty of which they speak is biblical rather than libertarian: a matter less of rights than responsibilities, not the freedom to do what one likes, but the freedom to do what one ought, thus contributing to the common good. The “American story” is essentially that which Moshe articulated at the end of his life. America is the promised land to which successive generations of immigrants have come to find freedom from oppression and build, in John Winthrop’s famous phrase, “a city upon a hill”.

The story of the Hebrew Bible is intensely particularistic. It tells of how one people, long ago, experienced oppression and was led to liberty through a long and arduous journey across the desert. Yet no story has had a greater impact on the political development of the West. Moshe knew that the events of his time had a significance that went far beyond those days and that people, and that they would eventually become an inspiration to others. So it came to be. When black Americans sang, ‘Let my people go,’ when South American liberation theologians in the 1960s based their work on the Hebrew Bible, when Nelson Mandela called his autobiography, *The Long Walk to Freedom*, each was adopting Israel’s story and making it their own. “Since the Exodus,” said Heinrich Heine, “freedom has always spoken with a Hebrew accent.”

It is a disservice to Judaism to see its teachings as meant for Jews alone. Moshe knew that G-d had summoned Israel to be more than just one other nation among the many that have surfaced in the course of history. It was to become an example, a role model, a living tutorial in what it is to construct a society built on the idea of the equal dignity of all under the sovereignty of G-d.

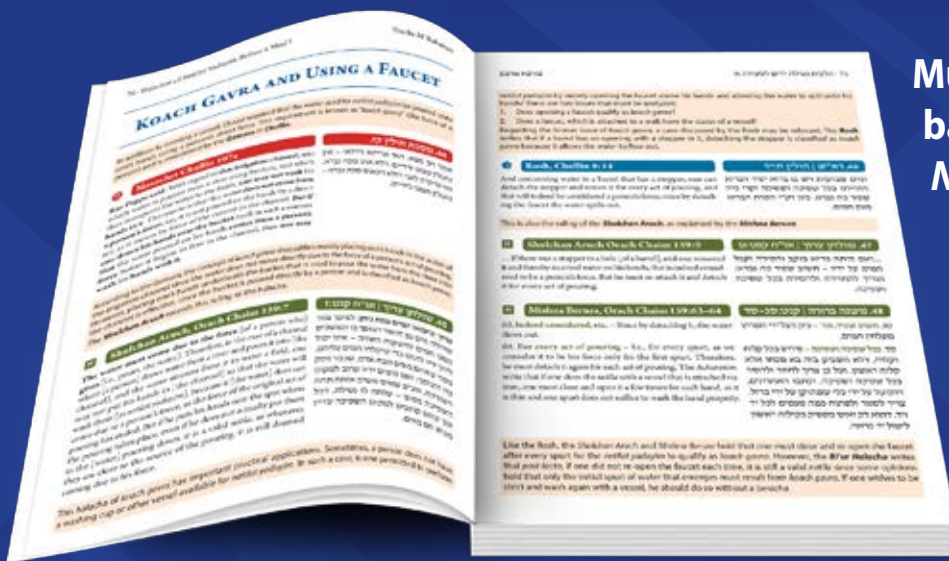
As Paul Johnson put it in his *History of the Jews*: “It seems to be the role of the Jews to focus and dramatize these common experiences of mankind, and to turn their particular fate into a universal moral.” That is what Moshe meant when he said: “This is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations.” It was a supreme challenge then. It remains so now.

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# Is it Permissible to Accept Charity from Christians?

Rabbi Dr. Daniel Friedman

Every year, Israeli charities receive hundreds of millions of dollars in contributions from American Christians through organizations like the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, John Hagee Ministries, and Christian Friends of Israeli Communities. Many Jewish institutions welcome the funding, which they use to fund *Aliyah*, build settlements in Judea and Samaria, and to support other worthy causes in the Land.

Nevertheless, many rabbis have prohibited the acceptance of Christian charity, including such prominent voices as Rav Elyashiv zt”l, Rav Avigdor Nebenzahl, and Rav Dov Lior. This article examines and responds to their concerns.

What are the objections to accepting Christian donations? Rambam writes that there is a *mitzvah* to banish idolatry from *Eretz Yisrael* (Avodah Zarah 7). Some contend that accepting Christian charity ultimately strengthens missionary efforts in the Land, constituting a violation of this *mitzvah*. It should be noted, however, that proselytizing is illegal by Israeli law.

Rav Nachman teaches that accepting *tzedakah* from gentiles disqualifies one from *eidut* (testifying in court, Sanhedrin 26b). The Gemara lists two exceptions, permitting such charity if it is accepted privately or if one needs the money to live. The Sages further suggest that it is sinful for idolaters to give *tzedakah* because they generally give for ulterior motives (Bava Batra 10b). If, indeed, they are giving for pure reasons, acceptance of such charity would be meritorious for them. Since we do not wish to provide merit, thereby granting them longevity, one should not accept such charity (*Ktav Sofer* YD 114).

The Gemara concludes with two further exceptions, ruling that it is permissible to accept their *tzedakah* for the sake of peaceful government relations or if we distribute the funds to other idolaters. These four exceptions are codified in the Shulchan Aruch (YD 254). The Rema further

qualifies the *halachah*, restricting the prohibition against accepting charity to fund the poor. We may, however, accept institutional donations.

Significantly, the Rambam rules that the prohibition only applies to idolaters. Consequently, since we have a duty to fund needy Noahides, we may likewise accept their charity. The *poskim* debate whether this exception includes all non-idolaters (*Tzitz Eliezer* 15:33) or only those who have formally accepted Noahidism (Radba”z). What then is the *halachic* status of Christians? Are they idolaters, Noahides, or simply “gentiles”? This debate has swirled for centuries. Some authorities consider Christians idolaters (Rambam, Noda Biyehuda, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein) while others disagree (Rashi, Rosh, Meiri, Tosafot, Aruch HaShulchan). Fascinatingly, Rav Ya’akov Emden suggests that Jesus’ mission was to promulgate Noahidism among the gentiles, furthering G-d’s will (*Resen Mat’eh*).

Using these principles, we may argue the case for accepting charity from Christian Zionists. Working backwards, the first defense is that Christians may be considered Noahides. Next, even if we deem them idolaters, we may nonetheless accept their charity if the following criteria apply: Do we need the money to live? Does it maintain peaceful relations? Is the money employed for institutional needs?

Counterintuitively, the Gemara permits accepting their charity if they are driven by ulterior motives. As such, the big question is: Why are they giving? As you might expect, there is no black-and-white answer to this question. Each individual and organization gives for a different reason, making it incumbent upon every recipient to determine the appropriateness of the donation. As the *Tzitz Eliezer* (18:66) emphasizes, even when everything is kosher according to the strict letter of the law, “the wise man’s eyes are in his head”. If the donors are seeking a greater foothold in our beloved *Eretz Yisrael*, it behooves us to proceed with caution.

In his discussion of the four non-kosher animals specified by the Torah, Rabbeinu Bechayei likens each animal to a regime that exiled the Jewish people. The fourth animal, representing Rome, is the *chazir* (pig). Many mistakenly believe, he writes, that this animal’s name indicates that it will return to its primordial kosher status in the messianic era. Rather, the name *chazir* indicates that just as Rome exiled us, they are destined to *return* (*lehachzir*) us to our Land! While much has changed over the course of history, to this day Rome remains the seat of Christianity. Western Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant, is the result of a synthesis between Judaic and Roman traditions (*Rabbeinu Bechayei*, Vayikra 11:4).

Witnessing the efforts of Christian Zionists such as Lord Balfour, President Truman, and John Hagee, one cannot help but wonder if we are seeing the unfolding of Rabbeinu Bechayei’s prophecy. Maybe, just maybe, American Christian largesse is but one element of the fulfillment of our 2,000-year-old dream for the day when “the nations shall bring your sons in style and carry your daughters upon their shoulders” home to the Promised Land (*Yishayahu* 49:22).



**Rabbi Dr. Daniel Friedman** is the founder of Israel365, an organization dedicated to strengthening Israel by building bridges with those who share our faith-based values.

# Mishkan and Mikdash, Windows and Weddings

## Shining and Sharing Light Inside Out

Rabbanit Shani Taragin

**S**efer Bereishit begins with the theme of man “calling out” names – the Name of G-d, the names of animals, and even, with great arrogance, the name of man himself. Due to man’s sins, Hashem disperses the nations through seventy different languages, but with the goal of mankind ultimately reuniting and proclaiming together, with a common language, the Name of G-d (Tzefanyah 3:9).

The fixing begins with Avraham calling out G-d’s name, and is continued by *Am Yisrael*, his chosen descendants, who call out G-d’s name through *mitzvot*. At the burning bush, Hashem instructs Moshe: “When you take the people out of Egypt, you shall worship G-d on this mountain” (Shemot 3:12), for the goal of freedom is the service of G-d. Ramban explains that redemption comes to fruition when the *shechinah* reveals itself through the *mishkan*, a conduit for *Bnei Yisrael* to call out the name of Hashem. But the ultimate means of the worship of Hashem to the world will come through the *mikdash* in the Land of Israel, as the nation sang by the Red Sea: “You will bring them and plant them in Your holy mountain, the place for You to dwell in, O L-rd, the *mikdash*, O L-rd, which Your hands established. The L-rd will reign forever and ever” (Shemot 15:17-18).

The *mishkan*, a modest and intimate structure, radiated closeness between man and G-d in our early stages of national development. By contrast, the *mikdash* was a colossal structure broadcasting splendor and majesty to the entire world, the fulfillment of our national redemption that began 480 years earlier with the Exodus. Its construction required foreign artisans and the importing of raw materials. *Shlomo HaMelech* oversaw this royal project, imposing national taxes and seeking foreign alliances to contribute to this great endeavor. The *navi* “bookends” its description of the *mikdash* building project with Shlomo’s marriage to Pharaoh’s daughter, followed by hundreds of weddings to foreign women to forge treaties and expand Israel’s global reach.

Shlomo commissioned ten basins, ten tables and ten *menorot*, reflecting the

increased needs of a growing nation and its many visitors. The *Yalkut Shimoni* (185) explains that the ten *menorot* held 70 lights, corresponding to the seventy nations of the world, demonstrating Israel’s influence over neighboring countries. In contrast to the *mishkan*, where the *keruvim* faced one another and symbolized the *shechinah*’s presence among the Jewish people, Shlomo added golden *keruvim* facing outward, symbolizing our goal of bringing G-d’s name to the broader world. He built magnificent edifices to attract nations to Jerusalem, where they would first appreciate Shlomo’s wisdom and ultimately be drawn to the *mikdash* and Divine leadership.



Shining light unto others requires that we respectfully recognize our differences and reject philosophies which undermine our unique history and identity.

The windows of the *mikdash* are described as *chalonei shekufim atumim*, “transparent sealed openings” (Melachim I 6:4). These windows were unique – “narrow inside, but wide on the outside, to radiate light to the world” (*Vayikra Rabbah* 31:7). Shlomo believed it was time to fulfill the *raison d’etre* of the creation of the world – to call out in the name of Hashem through the *mikdash*. *Vayechaleihu*, “he finished it”, (Melachim I 6:14), completing the process of *Vayechulu* (Bereishit 2:1), of Divine creation.

During his prayer inaugurating the *mikdash*, Shlomo uses a term from *Shirat HaYam*, *machon leshivtecha olamim*, “a place where You may dwell forever”, four times – declaring the culmination of Jewish and world history, as G-d’s immanence was now clear for all nations to see! “For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick

clouds the peoples; but upon you Hashem will shine, and His glory shall be seen upon you. And nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance” (*Yishayahu* 60:2-3).

But *sefer Melachim* also warns us of the challenges of windows facing outward and the dangers of marrying foreign women – even if the goal is to bring G-d’s light to the broader world. Foreign influences and conflicting values can easily infiltrate the people of Israel. Even *Shlomo HaMelech* fell prey to the vices of his wives and concubines. Shining light unto others requires that we respectfully recognize our differences and reject philosophies which undermine our unique history and identity.

Today, we are once again living in a time of incredible opportunity, when the miracle of modern Israel and the restoration of the Jewish people allow us to share G-d’s light with the world. Israel is once again a paradigm of intellectual, technological, economic, social and architectural prestige. This time, however, we must attribute our successes to Hashem and never lose sight of our goal of calling out in His name. As we prepare for the restoration of a *machon leshivtecha olamim*, a *mikdash* that will eternally bring G-d’s light to the world, may we merit to share our light with others – without diminishing our own.



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# Radiating From Our Land

## Becoming the *Ohr Lagoyim* we are Meant to Be

**Rabbi Reuven Taragin**

**“F**or darkness shall cover the earth, and thick clouds the peoples; but upon you Hashem will shine, and His glory shall be seen upon you. And nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance” (Yishayahu 60:2-3).

Many people cite Yishayahu’s description of the Jewish people as an *ohr lagoyim*, “a light unto the nations”, as a clarion call to serve as light unto others. But what way of life will make this possible?

### A light from the Land of Israel

Though most associate our responsibility to enlighten the nations with Yishayahu’s *ohr lagoyim*, the foundation of this call to action lies in the Torah itself.

As the Jewish people prepare to enter *Eretz Yisrael* and begin their lives as a people in their land interacting with other nations, Moshe encourages them to continue observing *mitzvot*. One of the many reasons he gives is that other nations will see this observance as wise and intelligent.<sup>1</sup>

Naturally, people and nations want to live in a way that others approve, understand and respect. This often leads to assimilation and abandonment of one’s unique values. But Moshe taught the first generation of Jews entering *Eretz Yisrael* to avoid veering away from Torah and *mitzvot* in the hope of being appreciated and respected by other nations. Though our people may feel

self-conscious about our different way of life, the nations will only respect us as wise and intelligent if we remain true to the Torah.

But the Torah goes even further. Our goal is not merely to make the nations appreciate our values and way of life, but to teach them to live by Torah values as well. At the footsteps of Mount Sinai, Hashem explained that His *mitzvot* help us play the proactive role of *mamlechet kohanim*,<sup>2</sup> serving as “a nation of ministers”.<sup>3</sup> As *kohanim* teach and inspire the Jewish people, all of *Am Yisrael* is charged with teaching and inspiring the other nations of the world.<sup>4</sup>

*Am Yisrael*’s unique role is hinted to at the very beginning of our history, when Hashem promised Avraham that his children would be like the stars of the sky.<sup>5</sup> Why did Hashem compare us to the stars? The Netziv explains that the Jewish people, like the stars, are meant to enlighten the entire world.<sup>6</sup> Like Avraham Avinu, we are meant to guide all of humanity and draw them closer to Hashem. Hashem chose us and gave us the extraordinary tools of Torah, *mitzvot*, and the Land of Israel to teach and enlighten the rest of the world.

### Reflecting the right light

In chapter 60, Yishayahu mentions our *ohr lagoyim* role towards other nations as a continuation of his description of the revelation of Hashem’s light upon us.<sup>7</sup> Hashem reveals His light to us and we, in turn, spread it to the nations of the world. Like the moon which reflects

the light of the sun, the Jewish people radiate Hashem’s light to the rest of the world.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, Rabbi Hershel Schachter *shlit”a*,<sup>9</sup> links *ohr lagoyim* to the Torah’s description of the nations of the world seeing “Hashem’s name upon us and revering us”.<sup>10</sup> Our relationship with Hashem and personification of the ideal form of *tzelem Elokim* serves as a model for all humanity.

Sforno<sup>11</sup> asserts that we must play a proactive role. Like the first Jew, Avraham Avinu, who drew people to serve G-d by “calling out in Hashem’s name”,<sup>12</sup> we his descendants should inspire people to recognize Hashem’s presence and role in the world.

Radak<sup>13</sup> links *ohr lagoyim* to another famous Yishayahu prophecy: “For out of Zion shall go forth Torah, and the word of Hashem from Jerusalem.”<sup>14</sup> The Torah expresses Hashem’s light<sup>15</sup> that the Jewish people must teach the world. By embodying Hashem’s light through our personal lives, we spread this light to others.<sup>16</sup>

Radak sees *ohr lagoyim* as connected to “For out of Zion shall go forth Torah”. The next verse describes world peace: “Nations will not raise swords against each other and no longer study the art of war.” The juxtaposition of world peace to *ohr lagoyim* teaches that peace will be achieved only once people are unified by the light of Torah. As opposed to John Lennon – who, in his song *Imagine*, linked world peace to the negation of ideology – Yishayahu teaches us that world



peace can only be achieved through shared values.<sup>17</sup>

Rav Kook<sup>18</sup> explains that this is why it is critical to emphasize the religious and spiritual sides of our national identity. In order for the Jewish people to radiate Hashem's light to the rest of the world, we must ensure our State is rooted in and guided by the light of His Torah.

Desperate to be accepted by secular society, many Jewish movements and elements within the State of Israel have diluted Jewish values and adopted contemporary ones – often using the term *ohr lagoyim* to justify this shift. They hoped that accommodating Judaism to contemporary tastes would bring others to identify with and learn from them. In truth, reforming Judaism to reflect modern sensibilities meant that, instead of radiating Hashem's light, they were merely reflecting contemporary values. By losing touch with the light of Torah, they were ultimately seen by others as no more meaningful than the society they were mimicking.

### Fulfilling our true role

As foreseen by Yishayahu, our return to *Eretz Yisrael* is bound up with serving as an *ohr lagoyim*. This role will earn us respect and bring peace to us and the entire world. Yet this vision remains elusive.

Despite Israel's significant contributions to the world – including drip irrigation, electric car grids, Waze, USBs, pillcams, solar windows, space cameras and myriad other technologies – Jews continue to be hated. The State of Israel is the most vilified nation on the planet and lives under constant threat of attack. This is because we have not yet fulfilled our mission to become a true *ohr lagoyim* – a nation that brings the genuine light of Hashem to the world and offers humanity true direction and meaning.

May we soon realize the true vision of *ohr lagoyim*, inspire the world through Torah – and thereby bring peace to the State of Israel and the entire world!

1. Devarim 4:6.
2. Shemot 19:6.
3. Rashi (ibid.).
4. Sforno (ibid.). See also R' Avraham ben HaRambam (ibid.) who records that his father explained that we are meant to be role models for the other nations.
5. Bereishit 15:5.
6. *HaAmeck Davar*, ibid.
7. Yishayahu 60:1–3. These *pesukim* are the source for the *hit'oreri* stanza of *Lecha Dodi*.
8. See Metzudat David and Malbim. Our role is to bring the nations of the world to commit themselves to Hashem as opposed to idol worship.
9. "Our Light unto the Nations", *HaMizrachi*, Rabbi Sacks Commemorative Edition 5782 (Vol. 4, No. 6).

10. Devarim 28:10.
11. Sforno, Shemot 19:6.
12. Bereishit 12:8, 13:4.
13. Radak, Yishayahu 42:6. See also Sforno (Shemot 19:6) who links our role as "a nation of priests" to this verse.
14. Yishayahu 2:3. See also Michah 4:2.
15. Mishlei 6:23.
16. See Radak, who explains that we must teach other nations the 7 *mitzvot* they are meant to observe.
17. See also Tzefanyah 3:9.
18. *Hamspeid BeYerushalayim*.



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## Get to Know...

# Sivan Ya'ari



## An Interview with Rabbi Dr. Benji Levy

*The founder and CEO of Innovation: Africa, a nonprofit that has brought clean water and electricity to over 3.8 million people across ten African countries, Sivan Ya'ari is a living and breathing “light unto the nations”. Raised in France, educated in the United States and living in Israel, Sivan uses Israeli solar, agricultural and water technologies to make an extraordinary humanitarian impact that simultaneously strengthens Israel’s reputation throughout Africa and beyond.*

### Why did you found Innovation: Africa?

I founded Innovation: Africa in 2008 after I witnessed what true poverty meant and learned how it could be alleviated by simply harnessing the energy from the sun. Over 620 million people across sub-Saharan Africa live without access to electricity or access to safe and clean water. Yet the solution is simple – the sun exists and the water exists.

By installing a few solar panels we can pump clean water from the aquifers just a few meters beneath the ground and we can provide light to schools and medical centers, thereby transforming rural communities and providing them with hope and dignity.

### What does it mean for you to use Israeli technology and know-how to save lives?

I am a proud Israeli, a proud Zionist and immensely grateful to have the opportunity to do our work in the name of Israel. Israel is a small country, but it has made the desert bloom. I believe it is our obligation to help other countries and rural communities do the same.

### Many of our readers have never been to Africa. Can you describe the poverty you’ve seen there? How does it compare to what you experienced growing up?

My first experience in Africa was when I was working for Jordache Jeans in Madagascar. Though I personally grew up in what I considered to be a poor home, I only truly understood what poverty meant when I was in Madagascar. I saw many villagers who were unwell, unable to receive medical care, medicines or

vaccines, and women waiting to give birth at night, guided only by candlelight and harmful kerosene lamps.

Having seen solar panels on almost every rooftop in Israel, I knew there was a simple solution to this and that I had to act. That’s how it all started, providing solar energy to a health center and then bringing light, village by village, to medical centers and then schools. Now, crucially, we are using solar energy to pump clean water.

### That’s why I tell people you embody the idea of a “light unto the nations”! What were the early days like? What were some of the challenges you faced?

I made many mistakes and failed many times. But each time I learned from the experience. One of my earliest challenges was not understanding the relationship between energy and water. For a long time I thought that powering schools and medical centers would be the key to helping these villages. Yet we saw that people were still getting sick and students were still unable to attend school. When I returned to visit one of the schools we powered with solar energy, I saw hardly any students there. The head teachers said they “are too weak to walk”.

I should have spent more time understanding the challenges that these rural communities were facing. It turns out that the people were getting sick because they were consuming contaminated water from open sources. The only way to help these children and their families improve their quality of life, health and wellbeing is to provide them with access to safe and clean water.

Now, as we seek to expand, we are facing supply shortages and other challenges as a result of the global pandemic. But it has only reinforced our commitment to providing communities with brighter and healthier futures.

### **It seems your aim is to break the cycle of poverty. What role does energy play in this, and how have you made an impact in this space?**

Providing water to an entire village is a gift that will immeasurably change the lives of thousands of community members and break the cycle of poverty. At the highest level, water improves the health of the villagers, enables more students to attend school and alleviates pressure on the women who are no longer required to travel significant distances to collect water from contaminated sources and can now use their time more effectively. In turn, this leads to economic stability, as the villagers are then able to grow vegetables and sell the surplus in local markets. They then also establish businesses like brick-making and agricultural programs.

Similarly, providing solar energy to a school or medical center truly transforms the wellbeing of the students and patients. With solar energy, electricity for lights is installed throughout the school or medical center as well as in the homes of the teachers and nurses. Students are able to reach their full potential and go on to higher education, thereby helping to empower the future leaders of tomorrow. With electricity, the facilities are able to utilize laptops, essential medical equipment and, most critically, power a vaccine refrigerator, which given the current pandemic is more critical than ever.

### **On a personal level, what does it mean to you to know that what you created impacts so many people?**

It is truly humbling, but I know that I alone would not have been able to make such an impact. I work with an incredible team of experts – civil, water and electrical engineers working tirelessly towards our common goal.

### **What motivates you to work so hard to help people you have never met?**

Seeing the smiles on the faces of the mothers as they open the taps of clean water, and the faces of the children as they switch on a light for the first time. It is truly priceless, because we know that from this moment on, their lives will be changed for the better.

There is a verse in the Bible where G-d says to Abraham “I will make you a great nation and you will be a blessing and all people on earth will be blessed through you.” I believe it is our obligation as a great and truly blessed nation to help those in need, even if we’ve never met them and perhaps never will meet them.

### **What are some of the Jewish values that are reflected in the work you do?**

As a Jewish woman, I believe that it is important to be a beacon of light, an *ohr lagoyim* and share the blessing of our technological advancements with those who are less fortunate. I am immensely proud that Innovation: Africa embodies the notion of *tikkun olam*, helping to heal our world in the name of Israel.

Every human being is special and deserves to be honored and treated equally. The Jewish saying that “he who saves one life, saves an entire world” is certainly true. Each life is sacred and we are privileged to help millions of people across Africa live healthier and happier lives.

### **How has your work changed you?**

I believe I am more focused and have clearer goals. I am blessed to have surrounded myself with an incredible team who inspire me and help advance the organization.

**Rabbi Dr. Benji Levy** is a co-founder of the philanthropic advisory Israel Impact Partners, Keshev mental health center, and an AI summarizing start-up called Tanna. He is the former CEO of Mosaic United, Dean of Moriah College and teaches globally in person and online @RabbiBenji: [www.RabbiBenji.com](http://www.RabbiBenji.com)



Sivan Ya'ari in Tanzania – opening taps of clean water for the first time. (PHOTO: COURTESY)



# BLAST

## From the Past

הסיטמה של הגאולה האמתית שלנו היא, כי לא רק שאל  
היהודים היא שאלת הגוים, אך גם שאלת היהדות הי  
לא רק שאלת היהודים, אך גם שאלת הגוים, כלומר  
כי לא רק היהודים צריכים ליהדות, אך כל העולם כולו, עול  
הגוים, בע"כ זקוק הוא לכה"פ לרוחה של היהדות, זוהי „אחרי  
הימים של הנביאים...

כי יחסו לו להעולם לחם וחופש — זוהי אכסיו  
וסכמת, אבל באמת אי-אפשר לו לחסרון זה להמנות לעול  
ל-זמן שלא יתגלא גם החסרון של קדושה וטהרה, כ"ז שהעול  
קוע בנ' שערי טומאה...

אמנם רחוקה היא עדיין לכאורה תקות „אחרית הימי  
ל הנביאים אבל גם היא רחוקה מאד... ישתדל

## Judaism for the Gentiles

Rabbi Moshe Avigdor Amiel zt"l

*Though rarely discussed today, the San Remo Conference of April 1920 was a critically important milestone in the creation of the modern State of Israel. World leaders and dignitaries from Europe and America gathered in the Italian Riviera where, after intense deliberation, they adopted the San Remo Resolution, which shaped the future political landscape of the Middle East.*

*The international council affirmed the 1917 Balfour Declaration, recognizing the “historical connection of the Jewish people to Palestine and the grounds for reconstituting their national home in that country.” The de jure sovereignty of Palestine was vested in the Jewish people, though it would only come into practical effect with the expiration of the British Mandate in 1948.*

*World Jewry immediately recognized the awesome significance of the San Remo Resolution. Spontaneous celebrations broke out in cities all over the world, as the Zionist dream appeared to be on the cusp of fulfillment. The breakthrough dominated the pages of HaMizrachi, where the era's leading Religious Zionists highlighted and interpreted San Remo's religious significance. Rabbi Moshe Avigdor Amiel, one of Mizrachi's most penetrating thinkers, published a series of articles titled “San Remo and Jerusalem” in the months following the conference. The following excerpt is from the July 19, 1920 edition of HaMizrachi.*

**T**he crucial element of our true redemption is this: It is not only the “Jewish question” that is important for the gentiles, but also the “Judaism question”. Meaning, it is not only the Jewish people who need Judaism – the entire world needs Judaism! The nations of the world need the spirit of Judaism. These are the “final days” spoken of by the prophets.

It is axiomatic that “the world needs bread and freedom”. But in truth, this need will never be filled so long as the world is lacking holiness and purity, so long as the world is immersed in the fiftieth level of impurity.

It's true that this prophetic hope for the “end of days” seems far off in the distance, but the day will surely come, even if it carries.

The voice of the prophets was always like a voice calling out in the wilderness. But the voice of one who calls out in the wilderness will surely echo, and one who does not hear the original call itself may still hear the echo...

# G-d has Heard My Prayers: The Jews have Arrived!

## An Interview with Colonel Golan Vach

Commander of the IDF's National Rescue Unit, Colonel Golan Vach and his team have achieved global fame for their incredible humanitarian work. From Haiti to the Philippines, Colonel Vach's unit has saved lives and created a tremendous Kiddush Hashem. Rabbi Aron White spoke with the Colonel to hear more about the unit's incredible work.

### How did you begin working in humanitarian rescue?

I was in IDF special forces for many years, and in 2009 was asked to lead a new search and rescue unit. It was intended for use during emergencies in Israel, and also to help with international emergencies. In 2010, we went to Haiti after it experienced a tremendous earthquake. We were able to save lives – I personally helped extract a 63-year-old man who had been trapped under a building for 108 hours. Since then, our unit has been active in saving lives in the Philippines, Mexico, Albania and other places around the world.

### What are your unit's capabilities and work methods?

We are creating a revolution in search and rescue. In December 2022, a senior UN official who leads emergency response spent 3 days with our team, and said we achieved more in simulations of fallen buildings than any of the UN's 56 teams. Since helping in Surfside after the collapsed building in 2021, I have served as a consultant to the United States Federal Emergency Management Agency, helping them adapt their models of emergency response. When the federal government asked us to help with the Surfside disaster, it was the first time the US government had ever turned to a foreign country for assistance with a civilian disaster.

Our main innovation is Integrated Intelligence, which tries to draw from every possible source of information. You arrive at a building that has collapsed – how do you know where people were, and where there are most likely to be survivors? Gathering information from every available source – the families, the architects, even Amazon, can be critical. Amazon requires a little more explanation! When we arrived at Surfside, we were dealing with a condominium building, where some people lent apartments to their cousins and some spent only a few weeks a year in their apartment. How could we know who was in the building at the time it collapsed? We asked Amazon who had ordered deliveries to the building in the three days before the collapse, and that allowed us to identify that a certain couple was living on the seventh floor in a particular apartment. This is one small example of how we are able to creatively use every source of information about a site that may have a life-saving impact.

### What response do you get when you arrive as an Israeli delegation?

For many people around the world, when I tell them I have come from Jerusalem, they are in a daze – it seems like I stepped out of a fairytale or magical world! In 2017, we were called to assist with a collapsed building following an earthquake in Mexico City. There were 40 people missing, and I was told that the family members of the missing wanted to meet me. I came into a tent with about 200 people, and introduced myself: "I am Golan from Yerushalayim", and instantaneously, the crowd rose to its feet and many of the women began to cry. We have set up field hospitals in countries around the world, and almost without fail, the first baby born in the hospital will be named Israel by their parents. To date, there have been 23 Israels born around the world in these hospitals! A school teacher following the hurricane in the Philippines told me she had prayed to G-d for help, and when she saw that the Jews had arrived she knew that G-d had heard her prayers! It gives me goosebumps sometimes to see the reactions people have when a representative of Yerushalayim arrives to help.



IDF aid mission in Brazil. (PHOTO: IDF SPOKESPERSON/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)



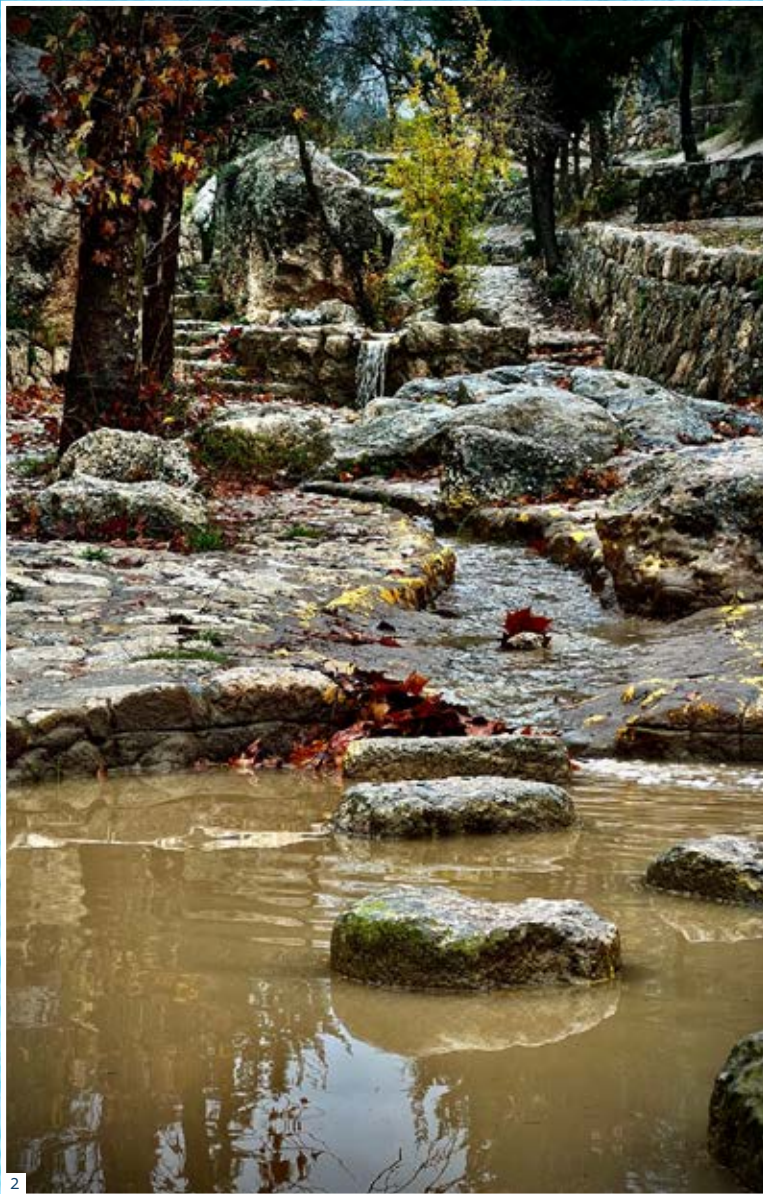
With Mr. Sebastian Rhodes Chief Emergency Response Section at UNOCHA. (PHOTO: COURTESY)



The Israeli delegation in Surfside, Florida. (PHOTO: COURTESY)



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# ט"ו בשבט חג האילנות



5



6



7

1. A tree in Sde Boker (PHOTO: AVI THERET ON UNSPLASH) 2. After the rain in Park Canada (PHOTO: ELI BERKOVITS) 3. Sabra (PHOTO: HOWIE MISCHEL) 4. Trees in Sde Eliezer (PHOTO: DANIEL COHEN)  
5. Almond trees in Beit Shemesh (PHOTO: SARA ORENSTEIN) 6. Poppies blooming in Neve Michael (PHOTO: ELANA GOTKINE) 7. Derech Burma (PHOTO: ROXY WOLFISH)

# JEW'S with VIEWS

We asked five accomplished Jews from around the world: Which modern Israeli most inspires you?



## Rabbi Zvi Engel

The modern Israeli who most inspires me may seem a strange choice for an Orthodox rabbi: an Israeli rock star named Aviv Gefen. As a young man, he openly mocked religious Jews and those who settle the Land in fulfillment of a Divine charge. To many people in the religious community, his soul seemed all but dead. And yet, as we remember every year on Tu B'Shvat with the rebirth of trees in Eretz Yisrael, what looks lifeless can suddenly come back to life.

During the pandemic, a caustic remark by a friend celebrating the mortality rate in a religious town shocked Gefen, causing him to rethink his hostility. He did not begin laying *tefillin* or keeping Shabbat, but he did begin a *teshuvah* process, expressing love for Jews he once vilified. Gefen publicly admitted that he was guilty of baseless hatred and sought to make amends. At a Chabad in Ramat Aviv, he passionately praised Jewish peoplehood, extolling those who learn Torah and calling for a reconciliation between all sectors of Israeli society. In Beit El, a few weeks after Tisha B'Av, he publicly apologized for his once intemperate words about Religious Zionist Jews.

Gefen expressed his feelings of kinship by releasing a single called *Batzoret*, "Drought", recorded as a duet with Avraham Fried. The song emphasizes the need for solidarity in the face of challenge and worry, envisioning dry, parched land giving way to reanimated life. "How beautiful to see the grapevine flowering in the wasteland."

Rav Soloveitchik once said that faith in the coming of *mashiach* depends upon our faith in Knesset Yisrael, in its ability to do *teshuvah*. May Aviv Gefen reinvigorate this faith in all of us!

*Rabbi Zvi Engel is Rabbi of Congregation Or Torah in Skokie, Illinois, and First Vice President of the Rabbinical Council of America.*



## Tzipi Schlissel

The person who inspires me the most is not famous, and he never served in a public position.

He was a modest man who was נִחְבָּא אֶל הַכְּלִים, "hiding among the baggage", like Shaul HaMelech. He carried himself like a simple person, but the values he lived by are a beacon for me in everything I do.

My father, Rabbi Shlomo Raanan hy"d, was the grandson of the first chief rabbi, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook zt"l. He studied in *yeshiva*, engaged in Torah research, and was filled with a great love for the Land of Israel and all Jews. When he moved to Chevron, the city of our fathers, he was happy. When people asked him why he chose to live in a dilapidated trailer in Chevron, he would explain that he was living in the place where King David's palace might have stood before he reigned in Jerusalem!

On the eve of Rosh Chodesh Elul in 1998, a terrorist climbed through the window and brutally murdered my father with a knife in his own home.

The terrorist murdered my father's body, but not his spirit, for we moved to Chevron and built a community in his memory. The Torah study that is heard every day in the very place where my father was murdered continues his path – the path paved by his grandfather, who saw the redemption in the return of Zion and the return of the people of Israel to their Land.

*Tzipi Schlissel, a resident of Chevron, is a guide at the museum in Beit Hadassah in Chevron and the author of Hebron Breaks The Silence: Personal, Historic and Political Documentation.*





## Rabbi Bentzi Mann

A few years ago, a school principal asked me to take part in a mentoring project his school was running. It sounded like a great cause, and soon after, I was paired with an amazing student, Or Chadash Peretz. I very soon realized that Or Chadash – “Or Cha” – was the son of Major Eliraz Peretz hy”d, who was killed during an army operation in the Gaza Strip. This also meant he was the grandson of Miriam Peretz.

I had the opportunity to meet Miriam at an event a few years later and mentioned my connection to her grandson. Her warmth, appreciation and gratitude blew me away. I experienced first hand the greatness that so many in Israel and around the world have begun to appreciate. It is no wonder that Miriam was awarded the Israel Prize and honored with lighting a torch at Israel’s official Yom HaAtzmaut ceremony.

While her authenticity and charisma are evident, it is Miriam’s life story of resilience and hope in the face of tragedy that make her such an inspiration. Her childhood was not easy – after making *Aliyah* with parents who could neither read nor write, she grew up in immigrant absorption camps – but nothing could have prepared her for the tragedies to follow. After losing her husband and two of her sons, she had every reason to give up on her faith. Instead, she chose to become a source of inspiration to all of Israel. May Hashem continue to give her strength!

*Rabbi Bentzi Mann is the Director of the Schools Department at World Mizrahi.*



## Dr. Shaena Abramowitz

I was 38 years old, and blessed to have finally found my soulmate after many years of searching. I was navigating the first delicate stages of our marriage while settling a remote mountaintop on the southeastern tip of Judea with only one other family in a two kilometer radius.

It was exactly then that Hashem had me meet Miriam Fuld. Two weeks after Ari, hy”d, her husband of nearly 25 years, was murdered, Miriam brought her family to our home on the Arugot Farm for a day of healing and connecting.

Miriam did not choose her plight of pain, devastation and loss. She did, however, choose her response. Rather than succumb to grief and self-pity, Miriam valiantly picked up the torch and continued spreading Ari’s light to the nation he so dearly loved.

Miriam told me that Ari was the ideologue and she was the mom. But over the last four years, Miriam has courageously worn both crowns with dignity and grace, continuing to be the loving matriarch of her beautiful growing family as well as spearheading the Ari Fuld Project and continuing her late husband’s holy work.

When my days are challengingly long, juggling a homestead life, a revolving door of visitors, two Judean babies, and the many physical and existential threats to our home, I think of Miriam’s dignity and poise, and her steadfastness in her mission.

Sometimes we choose hardships, and sometimes they choose us. However they come, our response is what matters most. Thank you Miriam for being an example of resilience and grace, to me and all of the women who are working for our Land and our people.

*Dr. Shaena Abramowitz is an experienced educator who lives on the Arugot Farm in Judea with her husband, Ari, and children, Dvash and Shilo.*



## Rabbi Daniel Kaplan

When I walked into the Gush *beit midrash* for the first time on a grade 10 Israel program, I had no intention of going to *yeshiva* after high school. But when I was introduced to Rav Yehuda Amital zt”l everything changed. I was in awe!

It was surreal to personally meet a man who survived the atrocities of the Holocaust with unwavering faith in Hashem, a Torah giant leading a Hesder Yeshiva in Gush Etzion. Rav Amital was a man of vision, integrity and courage. He reminded me of Rabbi Akiva; even in difficult times, he was hopeful and optimistic about the future of *Am Yisrael*.

In his eulogy for Rav Amital, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein said: “As the *Kaddish* deals not with death but with life, so too his was a Torah of life. In the depths of his soul, Rav Amital continuously felt the impact of the Holocaust, and this prodded him to make sure that here in *Eretz Yisrael* he would serve G-d in an atmosphere of life, rather than in a climate of death.”

His path was one of life and joy, a way of serving G-d that resonated with me. And so yes – after high school, I returned and studied in the Gush and had the privilege of soaking up Rav Amital’s Torah and way of life. I still get goosebumps when thinking of his *sichot* and powerful *davening* on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. And when I’m struggling during difficult times, I take one of his books off the shelf and find myself infused with his hope and joy. I will be forever grateful to have been his student.

*Rabbi Daniel Kaplan is Rabbi and Executive Director of Mizrahi South Africa.*



# Should You Buy those Jaffa Oranges in the Supermarket?

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

**W**hen buying fruits and vegetables abroad, is it better to buy Israeli produce or to actually avoid buying it, because *terumot* and *ma'asrot* may not have not been taken from the fruit?

Rambam writes (Hilchot Terumot 1:22) that fruits exported overseas are exempt from *terumot* and *ma'asrot*. The Ra'avad disagrees and says there is a rabbinic obligation to tithe the fruit. Other Rishonim also rule that *terumot* and *ma'asrot* must be taken from Israeli exports (e.g. *Rosh*, *Sefer Year'im*, *Sefer HaChinuch*, *Rabbeinu Yonah*).

Rambam's position invites deeper analysis. *Terumot* and *ma'asrot* must be taken from fruit in *Eretz Yisrael* after the action that makes them ready for use (e.g., picking them from a tree). It seems from Rambam's wording that there is no such obligation if the produce is being exported.

However, most Acharonim argue that simple logic dictates that if fruit already have an obligation to be tithed in *Eretz Yisrael* (because they are ready for use), they should retain that obligation outside of Israel too. According to them, even the Rambam would agree that there is an obligation to tithe such fruit in our generation, because the action that made them ready for use was performed in *Eretz Yisrael*.

The Maharsham (1:72) writes that even those with a stringent approach to tithing fruits in *Eretz Yisrael* would exempt

the fruit from tithing if the owner originally intended to export them. This theory was also mentioned by Rav Kook (*Mishpat Kohen* 46), even though he himself was careful to separate *terumot* and *ma'asrot* from such fruits without a *berachah*. Rav Ovadia Yosef was also lenient (*Yabia Omer* 10:46), while the Chazon Ish (*Demai* 15:4), the Achiezer (*Kovetz Iggrot* 309) and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (*Ma'adanei Aretz*, *Terumot* 1:22) all ruled that the fruits – even if they were always intended for export – must be tithed.

## Practical halachah

Most Rishonim and Acharonim hold that one should separate *terumot* and *ma'asrot*, but without a *berachah*. Nevertheless, the *Aser Te'aser* (21), Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer and Rav Ovadia Yosef all suggest that the lenient view has standing. Even those who are stringent can suffice with the Chazon Ish's abridged wording of the separation, i.e. make a photocopy of the wording, and place a coin next to it, upon which *ma'aser sheini* and *neta reva'i* will be *mecholel*, redeemed (at current exchange rates, a 5 shekel coin will suffice for 50 times). Take a little more than one hundredth of the produce and say, "I hereby declare that these are *terumot* and *ma'asrot* according to the *terumot* and *ma'asrot* wording in my possession," and then place this one hundredth in a bag and in the garbage.

## The value of eating Israeli fruits

The fruits of Israel possess a unique sanctity, and so there is a special merit in eating fruits from the Land. In the words of the Bach (*Orach Chayim* 208:8):

"The fruits [of *Eretz Yisrael*] imbibe the holiness of the *shechinah* dwelling in the Land... and therefore it is obvious that we insert, 'and we shall eat from its fruits and be satiated from its goodness,' in this *berachah* [of *al haMichyah*], because by eating its

fruits we are nourished by the sanctity and purity of the *shechinah*."

This principle was emphasized by Rav Kook (*Orot HaKodesh* 3, p.295): "The food of *Eretz Yisrael* is innately holy and is only physical in its external appearance."

Partaking of the fruit of *Eretz Yisrael* is particularly important for those who do not yet live in Israel. For when one lives in a place void of the sanctity of *Eretz Yisrael*, one should at least try to connect to the holiness of the Land as much as possible. Eating fruits from Israel provides some connection to this sanctity and reinforces agriculture in Israel. Observing the *mitzvah* of separating *terumot* and *ma'asrot* also connects a person to *Eretz Yisrael*. One should make the effort to buy Israeli produce and enjoy the merits of eating the fruits of *Eretz Yisrael*.

Ideally one should separate *terumot* and *ma'asrot* without a *berachah*, easily and simply as described above. Yet even those who do not take *terumot* and *ma'asrot* have a *halachic* basis for their lenient approach.



**Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon**

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# A Land of Olive Oil and Honey

Rabbanit Sharon Rimon

**T**he Land of Israel is described in Devarim as a good Land, with abundant water and fruit, and full of all good things: “For Hashem your G-d is bringing you into a good Land, a Land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths, springing forth in valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, and vines and fig-trees and pomegranates; a Land of olive-trees and honey; a Land where you will eat bread without scarceness, and will not lack anything in it...” (Devarim 8:7-9).

After 40 years of wandering in the desert, lacking sources of water and sustenance, the Torah promises the people of Israel that they will finally enter a good Land where miracles will not be needed to survive - where water flows in streams, the soil is fertile, and trees grow and bear fruit. All that remains to be done is to eat and thank G-d: “And you will eat and be satisfied and bless Hashem your G-d for the good Land that He has given you” (ibid., 10)

Reading these verses, you might think that the Land of Israel is idyllic, a place where people can live without any effort, like *Gan Eden*. However, in reality, Israel is not characterized by large streams and has few water sources in comparison to other countries. Throughout history there have been many periods of drought and famine in Israel, and even today we have dry years without rains in which there is serious concern about low water levels in the Kinneret and the nation’s water supply.

In fact, the Torah itself describes the difficulty of obtaining water in Israel and the Land’s dependence on rain. However,

this weakness is actually an advantage; the dependence on rain reminds us of our dependence on G-d and the need to turn to Him in prayer (Devarim 11:1-17). The Land of Israel will become deserted like a desert if we cut off our connection with G-d, or it could be full of goodness like *Gan Eden*, so long as we hear G-d’s voice walking in the garden.

The period of wandering in the desert was a preparation for life in Israel, for we learned to deal with suffering and difficulty: “And you shall remember the journey which Hashem your G-d has led you these forty years in the wilderness, to afflict and test you... And He afflicted and made you hungry, and fed you *manna*... so you would know that man does not live by bread alone, but by every thing that comes from the mouth of Hashem does man live” (Devarim 8:2-3).

During times of suffering, we realize that G-d also gives us the strength to cope, holds our hand and helps us through the difficulties. From this we understand that G-d is causing our suffering, as a father does to his son, in order to educate him: “And you shall know in your heart, that as a man chastens his son, so Hashem chastens you” (ibid., 5)

On the other hand, we also experienced miraculous divine abundance in the desert, and learned how to relate to it: “Your clothing did not wear out, nor did your foot swell, these forty years... Who fed you in the wilderness with *manna*, which your fathers knew not, to afflict you and test you, to do good for you in the end” (ibid., 4, 16).

The *manna* was the daily miracle that we received in the desert every day, and thus constituted a test in itself: would we feel the hand of G-d, even when we received in abundance? Would we trust in G-d to give us everything we need, just as He brought us *manna* every day? Would we be thankful for the good things we had, and not complain and ask for more? Would we respect the rules G-d set for us regarding the *manna*, gathering it at the right time and in the right amount? And would we remember this abundance was a gift from G-d, or take it for granted?

During the journey in the desert, our people learned that in times of difficulty, G-d would always take care of us. And on the other hand, we learned that G-d’s hand is behind the abundance we receive, and that we always depend on Him. Both the good and bad are governed by G-d, Who watches over everything and controls all.

These critical lessons accompany us every day, in both times of adversity and times of plenty, when all we must do is eat, be satisfied and bless G-d for the good Land He has given us.



**Rabbanit Sharon Rimon**  
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(PHOTO: HOWE MISCHEL)

# Tu BiShvat: The Turning Point

Shoshana Judelman

A student once asked the Ba'al Shem Tov why we sometimes feel far from Hashem when He is everywhere. The Ba'al Shem Tov responded that this is like a father teaching his child to walk. At first the father holds the child by the hands, but then backs away to spark in the child a desire to reach the father. When the child takes hesitant first steps, the father catches the child, but then backs away. This pattern is repeated over and over again in a way that strengthens the child's muscles and empowers him to grow.

Life is a continuous cycle of falling and getting back up, of closeness followed by distance, of moments of accomplishment followed by times of doubt. One half of this process is more enjoyable than the other, yet each cannot exist without the other.

In the parable, the moment of falling is the catalyst for new growth. We see this reality reflected in so many ways in Hashem's world. What superficially looks like the darkest moment is actually a portent of the coming dawn; the receding tide is, in reality, the base of a new wave. If we can tap into that perspective, we might change the way that we look at ourselves in times of failure.

Every year we read about *Am Yisrael* experiencing this cycle. When we

descended to Egypt, we sank lower and lower into slavery and impurity for 210 years until it all appeared hopeless. And then, from the depths of our suffering, we cried out to Hashem: "The children of Israel were groaning under the bondage and cried out; and their cry for help from the bondage rose up to G-d" (Shemot 2:23).

*Chassidut* teaches that the redemption began the moment our people groaned. That was the turning point, even though, on the surface, nothing had changed.

The Netivot Shalom compares *Am Yisrael's* experience in Egypt to that of a seed planted in the ground. The seed must rot away before new life can bloom from it. To the observer, this process looks long, hard, and sad. The seed decays and practically dies. But then, just when all hope seems gone, new growth springs forth.

In this analogy, if an impatient person were to interrupt the process and dig up the seed during the rotting period, they might despair, thinking everything was for naught. All they would see is destruction and failure. They would miss the point. The quiet dark place is not a place of ending, but a place of beginning to gather strength for new efforts. It is a necessary descent for the purpose of ascending.

Tu BiShvat, the new year for the trees, recognizes this moment in the cycle. It does not occur when trees are in full bloom, or even when they begin to blossom. On Tu BiShvat, the trees are bare and dead-looking. What are we celebrating?

Rashi explains that Tu BiShvat marks the day when most of the rains have passed, and the trees have been nourished enough that their sap begins to run

(Rosh Hashanah 14a). Beneath the surface, hidden from our eyes, the tree has hit a turning point, a first step towards new life. Tu BiShvat doesn't celebrate accomplishment, it celebrates potential.

Tu BiShvat tells us to hold on, that even if we don't yet see the fruits of our labors we should not give up. In moments of failure, anxiety, and exhaustion, we must remember that Hashem is backing away to cause the "sap" to run inside of us, to spark the desire in us to reach for Him in an even stronger way.

When Hashem showed Moshe the burning bush, it was devoid of foliage and "fruit". Yet the fire represented the continuous potential that lies inside of us.

The Egyptian exile was painful and harsh, bringing us to the verge of extinction. But it was a necessary step to becoming *Am Yisrael*. The 210 years of slavery were a purification process through which we were forged into a nation like no other. A nation that understands salvation will come, even when it seems all is lost. A nation of believers who saw redemption and continue to reach for it.

May we be blessed to know that the winters of life are the preparation for the springs, that Hashem is with us in every stage, that our fire is still burning strong, and, most importantly, that every time we fall and get back up, we are coming closer to the final redemption, may it come speedily in our days!



**Shoshana Judelman**

teaches Chassidut for Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya in Jerusalem and in the Shirat David Community in Efrat, and guides at Yad Vashem.

# Time Traveling to My Roots: A Trip to Never Forget

Ed Stelzer

**H**ave you ever wondered what life was like for your grandparents or great-grandparents? What if you could travel back in time to breathe the air they breathed, feel the glory of their triumphs and painful agonies of their losses? Would you do it? Last month, I did just that. Well, almost – I came as close as I could without a science-fiction time travel machine.

Together with Jews from around the world, I recently ventured to Lithuania and Poland, the land of my ancestors, on a life-altering journey coordinated by World Mizrachi. The trip was led by Jeremy Kurnedz, World Mizrachi senior board member and Executive Director of Midreshet HaRova, Rabbi David Milston, *Rosh HaMidrasha* at Midreshet HaRova, and Rabbi Doron Perez, Executive Chairman of World Mizrachi. None of them call themselves scholars of the *Shoah*, yet they are that in spades.

We didn't just visit the places where millions of our ancestors resided and later perished, we *lived* in their stories, *walked* in their footsteps, and could literally *smell* the bitter tang of their finality even to this day. They came back to life when we sang and swayed to their songs of heartbreak, danced joyously to their vibrant *niggunim*, and, most poignantly, they lived on when we learned the Torah they left behind. From a place of darkness, we saw a vision of the future.

Over eight gut-wrenching days, we visited Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Majdanek. We spent a frozen evening in the hideouts of partisan fighters. We said a collective *kaddish* at landmarks of utter destruction like the town of Jedwabne, where Jews were corralled by their neighbors into a locked barn and incinerated by fire. We walked in silence to the Łopuchowo Forest, where Jews were gunned down, naked, en masse, into pits of death. We honored the lives of mothers, fathers, and children of all faiths and backgrounds, and felt the pride of Jewish resistance as

we concluded our trip in the shadows of the Warsaw Ghetto.

But this trip was not only about the *Shoah*. We were also transported back to the *shtetls*, *yeshivot*, and *kevarim* of the lost world of Torah and *Chassidut* that thrived before the Holocaust. We learned *daf yomi* at Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin, where the seeds of the *daf* were planted by Rabbi Meir Shapiro. We *davened*, danced, and sang at the *tziyun* of Rav Elimelekh of Lizensk, and were immersed in the Torah of the Vilna Gaon, the Piaseczner Rebbe, and the *Rema*.

Throughout the trip, we also traced the roots of the State of Israel. In an incredible moment, we stood at the exact spot in Vilnius where seventy Religious Zionist delegates gathered 120 years ago and founded the Mizrachi movement as part of the World Zionist Organization. Rabbi Perez led a moving *tekes* illustrating how far the Mizrachi movement evolved from 1902 and what it means to Israel and the world today.

The trip was also profoundly personal. When asked why I came on this journey, I reflexively responded in the Yiddish that I learned in my household growing up: “*ich bin a Poylisher Yid*, I am a Jew of Polish lineage.” At one point I visited the first home of my dad, who passed away when I was a boy, to try and get a glimpse of the childhood of the father I hardly knew. His house still stands, but it is no longer a home. Later in the trip, I was finally able to truly understand the story my mother used to tell me of when she was a young girl with rats biting at her neck as she lay afraid in the still night of her labor camp barracks.

And throughout, I cried. I cried in anger, unable to comprehend how such evil could propagate for so long. I cried in disbelief, at the sacrifices and unfathomable decisions mothers and fathers had to make so their children could live. I cried out wondering what I would have been like



Participants of Mizrachi's 2022 Journey to Poland and Lithuania standing outside the building where Mizrachi was founded in Vilna 120 years earlier.

had I been alive at that time. I cried for the childhood my parents lost. I cried for the family I never knew or who were never born. And in some small way, by standing where they lived, fought, escaped, and survived, I touched the *neshamot* of my family tree. And my tears stand as testimony to a love I never knew but now hold close to my heart.

Yes, I time-traveled. Viscerally living and breathing our collective past ensures that we will never forget, and relying on the bright future of *Am Yisrael* enables us to assert with confidence: never again.



**Ed Stelzer**

builds startup businesses in regulated industries out of a NYC-based venture capital fund and advises Jewish non-profits on how to grow and scale.

# Rav Drukman was Not the Last of His Kind

Sivan Rahav-Meir

ilanblock.com

**R**egarding Rav Chaim Drukman zt”l, who passed away on the last night of Chanukah, there is one moment I will never forget. It was ten years ago at the funeral of Rav Avraham Zuckerman, who was head of Yeshivat Kfar Haroeh. Rav Drukman, who studied at the *yeshiva* as a boy, eulogized Rav Zuckerman with great emotion and suddenly spoke words through his tears that, in my eyes, are a key to understanding who he was: “We thought we would be the last generation in the world to put on *tefillin*! We thought no one would ever again say ‘*Shema Yisrael!*’” he declared to the massive crowd, among them thousands wearing knitted *kippot* who were not familiar with the former state of affairs to which he referred, when he thought he might be the last of his kind.

But such was the reality in which Rav Drukman grew up in eastern Europe. At that time, the feeling was that everyone was being swept away and abandoning Judaism and that there was only one direction: *out* – that the world of Torah and *mitzvot* was disappearing, and that the religious public had become tiny and negligible. The grammar school he attended was under communist control, which meant he had to be present on Shabbat. When he refused to write in his notebook on Shabbat, his teacher forced

him to do so. He even had to go to school on Yom Kippur! During the war, his family was on the run, escaping death at the hands of the Nazis several times. In 1944, at the age of twelve, he arrived in Israel as a refugee, without his parents who came later. At the age of 15, he was forced to interrupt his studies in order to work as a delivery boy. Several years passed before he returned to the *yeshiva*. It should be noted that his eventual wife, Dr. Sarah Drukman, was the only female religious student who studied medicine at the Hebrew University in those years.

When he began leading as a *madrish* in Bnei Akiva, the Religious Zionist youth group, one of his proteges saw him walking down a street in Givatayim with a *lulav* and *etrog* during Sukkot. The boy was startled and impressed, as it was unusual in those days to see a young religious man proudly walking through the streets in this way. Yet Rav Drukman and others from that generation established an empire of hundreds of educational institutions, youth movements, organizations, and communities. The direction of large numbers of young people shifted. “We succeeded,” Rav Drukman concluded in the above eulogy. “There is a next generation. Actually, there have now been two or even three generations that say ‘*Shema Yisrael*’ and put on *tefillin*.”

This was the achievement of someone who was an indomitable driving force, especially in the area of education, and profoundly influenced a multitude of followers – someone whose daily agenda was full until the age of 90. Tens of thousands of his students followed him to his final resting place, a testimony that he truly was not the last of his kind.

In his memory.



**Sivan Rahav-Meir**

is a media personality and lecturer. She lives in Jerusalem with her husband, Yedidya, and their five children, and serves as World Mizrahi’s Scholar-in-Residence.



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# A NEGLECTED PRAYER

RABBI DR. ABRAHAM J. TWERSKI ZT”L



*Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski zt”l, one of the most beloved leaders of our generation, was both an eminent psychiatrist and a Torah scholar who used psychological insights that enhanced application of Torah principles to everyday life. Founder of the Gateway Rehabilitation Center in Pennsylvania, the author of more than 60 books, and a regular contributor to HaMizrachi magazine, he lectured extensively on the topics*

*of chemical dependency, stress, self-esteem and spirituality. We will observe his second yahrzeit on the 18th of Shevat. May his memory be a blessing for all of Am Yisrael.*

**W**hat we pray for is a good indication of how important things are to us. We pray for long life, good health, *parnassah*, and *nachat* from our children. The intensity of our prayers reflects the degree of their importance. Nothing equals the intensity of our prayers for life and health, because without these, whatever else we have pales in comparison.

In the more comprehensive *siddurim*, there is an introductory prayer attributed to Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk, one of the foremost *Chassidic* masters. As in other prayers, we pray for forgiveness of our sins, for Divine guidance, for good judgment, and for freedom from the enticement of the *yetzer hara*, the inclination to indulge in animalistic behavior. But there is one request not found anywhere else, to the best of my knowledge. We ask G-d to “help us to see the merits in our fellow humans and not their faults.”

It is not uncommon for some people to be critical of others, but is far less common to praise others. Seeing faults in other people is likely to be defensive. It is a way to bolster one’s own sagging self-esteem.

The Talmud says that the faults we see in others are actually our own faults. The Ba’al Shem Tov once happened to see a Jew violating Shabbat. True to his own belief, he felt that he must himself be guilty of having violated Shabbat, else he would not have noticed it. When a thorough soul-searching failed to reveal where he had violated Shabbat, he prayed for Divine enlightenment. It was revealed to him that he had once heard the defamation of a Torah scholar. Inasmuch as the Zohar says that a Torah scholar possesses the holiness of Shabbat, this was tantamount to a violation of Shabbat.

Before being critical of another person’s behavior, think of your own defects. The Ba’al Shem Tov said that the world is a mirror. As we are generally blind to our own shortcomings, G-d arranges that we should see them in others, and we should realize that we must correct our own faults. The next time you wish to say something negative about someone, pause and think. You might be revealing your own shortcomings.



# Four Stories

Rabbi Shmuel Jablon

(PHOTO: HOWIE MISCHER)

## Story #1

From the moment my children were born, we taught them to love Israel and that Israel is where we truly belong. Every Friday night, as part of my blessing to them, I would add the following words: “May you merit to become great in Torah, to marry and perform acts of kindness, to love all of *Klal Yisrael*, to love the Land of Israel – and to do all of these in our Holy Land!”

One year before we made *Aliyah*, my parents brought our entire family to Israel in honor of my mother’s 70th birthday. At the end of our trip, as we sat on the plane, ready to return to the United States, my then 8-year-old son Akiva began to cry. I asked him why. “Because we’re leaving Israel. I don’t want to leave Israel!”

## Story #2

Just prior to making *Aliyah* eight years ago in the midst of Operation Protective Edge, I took my then 12-year-old son, Mordechai Bentzion, to see his beloved Philadelphia Phillies play one last game. Before the game, he went to retired former all star Greg Luzinski’s autograph booth. When he came back to our seats he told me about their brief discussion.

“Mr. Luzinsky, this is my last game here.” “Why?” “We’re moving.” “Moving? Where?” “To Israel.” “Israel?! Why in the h— would you do that?!” “Because we’re Jewish. That’s what Jews do!”

## Story #3

Prior to making *Aliyah*, I interviewed for a few principal positions at schools that advertised themselves as “Religious Zionist”. Shortly after visiting one, I received a phone call from the school’s president.

“Rabbi, it was clear to everyone that you can do this job; you have all the experience needed. We have just one question: if you become our principal, would you agree not to talk about *Aliyah*?” Taken aback, I said: “Absolutely not. I talk about all the *mitzvot* – *kashrut*, Shabbat, *Aliyah* – all of them. Of course, I always talk nicely, no fire and brimstone. But I would never agree to not talk about a *mitzvah*.” I never heard from them again.

At another school, I interviewed with the entire board. One of the officers asked: “Rabbi, I read an article you wrote about the goals of a Religious Zionist education. You said that by the end of 12th grade, a student should want to make *Aliyah*. What if we want our children to love Israel, support Israel, visit Israel, study in Israel – but live here?”

I responded, “You mean not even as a goal? Not even when health, finances and family all make it possible?” “Correct.” I said, “Please forgive me, but that’s classical Reform Judaism – not Religious Zionism. A Religious Zionist must always view *Aliyah* as a goal.” I never heard from them again.

After these two interviews, we decided that it was, indeed, time for us to make *Aliyah*. We told our children that it was finally time. They cheered.

## Story #4

Last year, my son Mordechai Bentzion (long over the Phillies) was assigned to guard duty for Shabbat in Chevron, as part of his training for the paratroopers. Before Shabbat, he called to talk and for his *berachah*. He started to cry.

“Mordechai, what’s wrong? Are you ok?” He replied, “I’m great. I’m crying because I’m so happy. I remember that when you drove me to school in first grade, you always played the song “חַבְרוֹן מְאֵז וְלִתְמִיד” (Chevron, Now and Forever) every day. And now I’m here, protecting Chevron! What a *zechut*!”

Rav Kook often said that *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael* possess an innate *segulah*, a unique holiness, and are “wedded” to one another. The nation of Israel is not merely a large “insurance company” to which each individual pays in and gets back. It is a holy, unified nation with sacred goals.

When considering and teaching about *Aliyah*, it is not sufficient to ask what is best for us or our families. One must also ask what is best for the holy “entity” known as *Am Yisrael*. Though some might temporarily remain in exile, every Jew’s ultimate goal must be to return to Israel, to fulfill the prophecy of the ingathering of the exiles and participate in the rebirth and flourishing of, as Rav Kook put it, “the State of Israel, the Throne of Hashem in this world.”



**Rabbi Shmuel Jablon**

is the Executive Director of Shapell’s / Darche Noam and Midreshet Rachel v’Chaya in Jerusalem. He and his wife were recently blessed with their third *sabra* grandchild.



# ARE WE THERE YET?

Rabbi Reuven Brand

**T**he child in us never dies. This is a good thing, especially when it comes to our connection with Hashem. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik praised our childlike spiritual qualities in a magnificent eulogy for his longtime friend, Rabbi Chaim Heller zt”l, lauding Rabbi Heller’s childlike sincerity, purity and genuine *emunah*.

A hallmark of childhood is the familiar question “are we there yet?” Whether shouted from the back of an Oldsmobile station wagon or murmured from the middle seat of a transatlantic flight, children constantly repeat this familiar refrain. In truth, it is a question that continues to plague us even as we grow into adulthood.

As adults, we may catch ourselves asking “are we there yet” when checking Google Maps or Waze, but we also ask this when reflecting on the deeper purpose of our lives. We often create our personal image of what “getting there” looks like, such as financial security or achieving a particular life cycle milestone. Year after year, we ask: are we “there” yet, but “there” seems always just out of reach.

Most importantly, on rare occasions, our inner child asks this question on a deep, spiritual level.

At some point in our lives, most of us have been “there” spiritually. We have felt a serene moment of Divine closeness, whether standing at the foot of the *Kotel* at sunrise, while walking quietly in a snow-covered path in Eastern Europe or swaying during *Shemoneh Esrei* of *Neilah*. In the months and years following those powerful experiences, we try to recover those “high” moments, to once again climb the mountain of Hashem and arrive at that great spiritual destination.

This yearning of our souls is essential to living a G-dly life. It drives us to pursue aspirational paths of religious growth and to reach beyond our current state of being. But this yearning is also hazardous and comes with a cost. For how often in our lifetime do we actually “arrive”? And

even when we do, how long do we stay in that holy state? As David HaMelech asked, **וְמִי יַעֲלֶה בְּהַר ה' וְמִי יָקוּם בְּמִקְוֵם קִדְשׁוֹ**, “Who shall ascend the mountain of Hashem, and *who shall stand in His holy place?*” We may ascend the mountain, but don’t stay there very long.

How long can we pursue an elusive goal before becoming frustrated and disillusioned? Does Hashem really want us to spend our entire lives chasing a goal that we can rarely achieve and slips through our fingers in the blink of an eye?

The answer is yes and no. Yes, Hashem wants us to lead a life of searching, striving, and pursuing. But at the same time, this pursuit is not about arriving at a destination. The pursuit itself – the spiritual seeking – is the goal.

Rav Kook describes this in his personal writings: “I am always connected to the holy pain of seeking higher completion, a yearning that is not satisfied and need not be satisfied... but the thirst itself must grow greater and greater, and this itself will become the source of the deepest pleasure...”

Spiritual seeking is fueled by youthful impatience. But once we realize that the journey, the yearning for G-d, is itself the goal, we slow down and appreciate each step. We can worry less about whether we are “there” yet and focus more on the journey and how we are doing along the way.<sup>1</sup> We discover that true spiritual accomplishment does not “arrive” at some later point, but rather is experienced *now*, in the search itself.

This approach to life is individually affirming and rewarding, and it can also help us relate to our collective Jewish reality, specifically the Jewish state.

The Torah luminaries who embraced and amplified the values of Religious Zionism in the modern era articulated a vision of a nation whose society and political institutions would shine with an authentic spiritual light. They foresaw the destiny of our people in its fullest national expression of

*kiddush Hashem*. Unfortunately, we have not yet arrived at this destination. The reality we experience today, seventy-five years after the founding of the State of Israel, is not ideal. It’s easy to wonder: why are we not “there” yet?

However, if we understand and accept that Hashem’s expectation of us is to sanctify the journey and appreciate the opportunity to bring His light into the process of redemption, we can worry less about the ultimate destination.

May we appreciate the gift of the State, Land, and people of Israel and its remarkable blessings – every step of the way!

1. A *halachic* example of seeing the journey as the destination is the concept of **שָׂכָר פְּסִיעוֹת**, reward for walking to *tefillah* in a synagogue. While there’s no spiritual benefit in purchasing *tefillin* or *arba’a minim* at a Judaica store farther from your home, it is preferable to pray in a *shul* that is farther away than others, when all other factors are equal. Rav Yitzchak Hutner zt”l uses a comment of the Maharal to explain this phenomenon, noting that *tefillah* is about the process of coming closer to Hashem. It is a journey. Hence, any preparatory walking is itself part of the process of *tefillah* and praiseworthy. Unlike other *mitzvot* that are result oriented, the goal of *tefillah* is the process of journeying close to Hashem.



**Rabbi Reuven Brand**

is the Rosh Kollel of the YU Torah MiTzion Kollel, a community Torah institution with a vibrant Beit Midrash, array of creative learning opportunities, unique women’s initiative and diverse outreach programming. He lives in Skokie, Illinois with his wife, Nechama, and their five children.



# Shagririm BaLev

## Changing the Game of Shidduchim

Only a few years ago, a small-scale shidduchim initiative was launched at a religious college in Yerushalayim. Over 100 weddings later, Shagririm BaLev has taken the Religious Zionist community by storm. With World Mizrahi now a full partner in the project, we are proud to share the exciting story of Shagririm BaLev, its success thus far, and its dreams for the future.

From Yenta to YUConnects, the complex world of *shidduchim*, religious matchmaking, has changed dramatically as technology and communal norms have developed and shifted over time. Shagririm BaLev, which was founded in 2019, is an incredibly successful new project with over 100 successful matches, demonstrating how innovative thinking and technology continues to upend the ancient practice of matchmaking.

With over 5,000 students studying at separate men's and women's campuses, the Jerusalem College of Technology – also known as Machon Lev and Machon Tal – is Israel's largest religious college. With so many students studying in gender-separated campuses, helping students find their *bashert* is a high priority issue. But most students weren't interested in being set up by traditional matchmakers. "When a survey was taken, students said that they wanted to be set up by friends rather than by *shadchanim*," said Rabbi Shlomo Annapolle, who works for the project. "So we built a system that combines the best of modern technology and algorithms with a human touch."

The program's simplicity is a key to its success. A single person who wants to take part chooses a *shagrir*, an "ambassador", who represents them. The *shagririm* have access to the Shagririm BaLev database, which contains information about all the singles taking part in the program. Using advanced algorithms, the program provides the *shagrir* with a list of potentially compatible matches for their friend. The *shagririm* present these suggestions to their friends, who make the final decision about whether or not to go out for themselves. It's a balance of technology and old-fashioned human wisdom.

Tuvia Sleigh made *Aliyah* from Atlanta, Georgia when he was 23. While living in Givat Shmuel, he was introduced by a friend, Zvi Silber, to the Shagririm BaLev project. The Shagririm algorithm suggested he go out with Shira Edrei from Kiryat Arba. Despite coming from very different backgrounds and social circles, the Shagririm program helped them meet, and after dating for a few months they got engaged and married.

Shmuel Zomer and Hodaya Lasri were another couple who met through



Tuvia Sleigh and Shira Edrei.

Shagririm. "I like the fact that my *shagrir* was someone who really knew me," said Hodaya. "Many times, women feel they get bad suggestions for dates because the person setting them up doesn't really know them. We actually have now become *shagririm* ourselves, and have successfully set up one married couple! When setting



Shmuel Zomer and Hodaya Lasri.

our friends up, we feel we can ask the right questions and help them have a much more positive experience.”

To date, there are over 6,500 singles who are part of the Shagririm BaLev database. Over 5,000 first dates have happened through the program, and over 110 couples are married today because of it. The 100th wedding brought things full circle, when Renana Rimon, daughter of Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon – the Rosh Yeshivah of Jerusalem College of Technology and Head of Mizrachi’s Educational Advisory Board and Rabbinic Council – married Oriah Kaplan, after meeting through Shagririm BaLev.

As the program has grown, World Mizrachi decided to become full partners in the project. “Shagririm BaLev has made a huge impact in Israel, and we are proud to be full partners of the program now,” said Rabbi Danny Mirvis, Deputy CEO of World Mizrachi and board member of Shagririm BaLev. “We are excited by the opportunity to leverage Mizrachi’s global network to



Rav and Rabbanit Rimon, their daughter, Renana and her husband, Oriah.

scale this fantastic initiative, which brings together the best of advanced technology and human insight. Global initiatives for singles are just one of the topics to be discussed at our upcoming World Orthodox Israel Congress in April.”

Eliezer Noy, the newly appointed CEO of Shagririm, is excited about the new vistas the program can open for Jewish life. “As well as our program in Israel that grows on a daily basis, we are looking forward to rolling out our program for Diaspora communities in the coming months. The opportunities are endless – we are excited by the idea of a Jew from Boston finding their spouse in London, and a Jew from Berlin finding their soulmate in Yerushalayim. For many singles who have been dating for a while, there is a sense of desperation and frustration, where they feel they have exhausted all of the relevant possibilities in their circle. Creating this international network will exponentially increase the options for singles, creating new opportunities and hope.”

With over 150 Shagririm BaLev couples dating as we go to print, many more weddings should, with G-d’s help, be around the corner. And as World Mizrachi prepares to bring Shagririm BaLev to communities across the world, matchmaking for the international Religious Zionist community may never be the same!



World Mizrachi’s Rabbi Danny Mirvis congratulates Eliezer Noy on his new position as Shagririm BaLev’s CEO.





# ALIYAH DIARIES

## Turning the Other Cheek

Kally Kislowitz

**M**any years ago, my husband and I were in the market for bookshelves that could hold our ever-growing library of Jewish books. Our hand-me-down Ikea shelves had withstood many years, many moves, and served as 'home base' in many rounds of hide-and-seek tag. The bowed, warped wood seemed to be silently beseeching me to put it out of its misery.

Off we went to a furniture store in suburban Ohio that boasted top quality, custom woodwork.

"We have a lot of books", we told the saleswoman. "Not novels, more like text books, tomes if you will, big, heavy, volumes. We need wide shelves that can hold a lot of weight."

She assured us that shelves purchased from this establishment were up to the task. So we handed her our credit card,

and the new shelves arrived several weeks later.

As the delivery men unwrapped and properly positioned the new bookshelves, one of them sauntered over to the table where stacks and stacks of books were waiting to be arranged in their new home. He opened up a Chumash.

"What is this?" he asked.

"That's the Bible", I told him, "it's written in Hebrew".

He picked up a volume of *Shas* (Talmud). "And what's this one?"

"That's a book of Jewish law. The Bible tells us the laws, but the rest of these books explain how, exactly, to keep the laws".

He seemed puzzled.

"I'm Christian. I spend a lot of time in church. But the only law I really know

is 'turn the other cheek'. I don't need hundreds of books to explain that to me."

"I get it," I said. "But Jews don't like to keep things simple. If we were told to turn the other cheek, we would write books that described how, precisely, to turn the other cheek. Should it be turned from right to left, or from left to right? And how quickly should we be turning it?"

"Imagine that," he said, as I held myself back from wondering aloud if one might be required to turn the cheek of one's ox who had fallen into a neighbor's open pit, and whether women and children would also be obligated in cheek-turning.

A year later, the shelves started to break. We had not adequately conveyed the size and weight of our library on that fateful day in the furniture store. We had them repaired after their long

journey on the lift we sent to Israel, but the time has clearly come for them to go the way of their Ikea predecessors.

We need new bookshelves, and the space we have for them is a bit unique, so we called a local carpenter to discuss the possibility of designing something for us.

We began to describe what we needed, “We have a lot of books – not novels, more like text books...”

“*Achil*,” (Dude!) he interrupted, “just tell me, how big is your *Shas*?”

We have come a long way from suburban Ohio.

This reminded me of when I went shopping in Jerusalem for a dress for my son’s *bar mitzvah*. With the help of a wonderful saleswoman, I found something that I really liked. As we stood side by side in front of the mirror, she nodded her approval and said. “You go change, and I’ll start looking for a *mit-pachat* (headscarf) to match.”

No one at Nordstrom Rack ever offered me such a service. It’s nice to be amongst my people.

While in grad school in middle America, I was once asked to bring a note from my rabbi verifying that Sukkot was

an actual holiday and not merely an excuse to get out of an assignment (as if it can’t be both!). This past summer, my Israeli employer’s human resources department published a gloriously long list of days that the office will be closed throughout the month of *Tishrei*.

But before I get overly sentimental about these ‘Only in Israel’ moments, I have to be honest in pointing out that the reason we immigrants notice and mention these moments so often is that they bolster our spirits when life here is inevitably challenging. Like during August, when the kids are so completely over every kind of entertainment that is not YouTube, and the heat feels like it is personally punishing me for looking wistfully at my favorite sweater tucked away in the closet, and parents throughout the country anxiously wait for news of whether the kids will go back to school on September 1st or if a teacher’s strike will render YouTube their primary source of information for an ever-extending period of time.

It’s so nice to be reminded that I fit here because I spend so much time not fitting. I haven’t yet figured out how to shine in Hebrew – I make fewer jokes, I don’t strike up conversations with strangers quite as frequently. And a few

weeks ago, I couldn’t even sing along in my own car when my kids’ entire road trip playlist was comprised of Israeli artists of whom I had never heard. I was overcome by alternating waves of emotion – deep gratitude that my kids are so much more integrated and at ease here than I will ever be, and blinding rage that Omer Adam and Ravid Plotnik don’t sound more like ‘90s rock.

So I will revel in the times when I am fully understood and accepted, and I will persevere in this weird in-between of both belonging and being an outsider.

And when things get rough I will simply turn the other cheek. Shammai argues right to left, but Hillel says left to right.



**Kally Kislowicz**  
made Aliyah from Cleveland, Ohio,  
to Efrat in 2016.

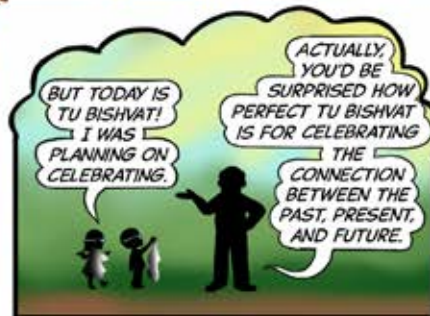
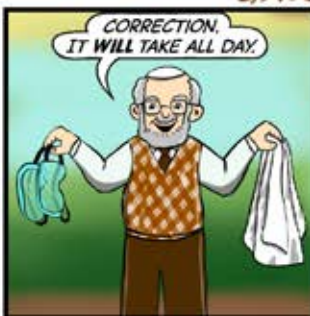
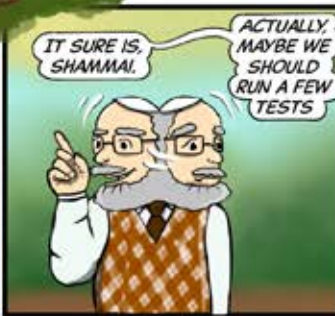


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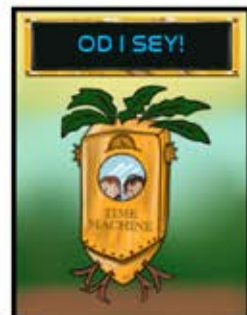
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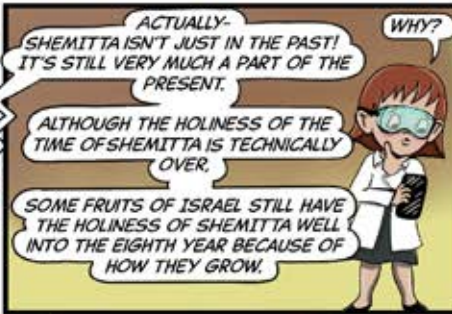
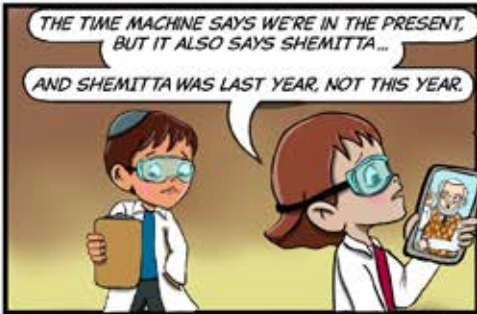
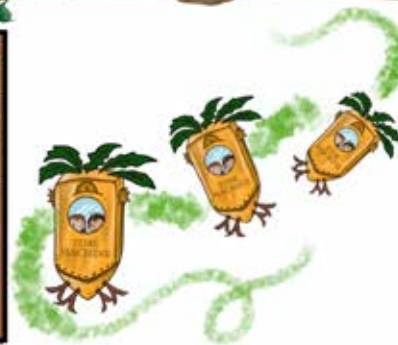
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### TEST NUMBER ONE: THE PAST IS THE TIME MACHINE READY TO TRAVEL TO THE PAST?



TEST NUMBER TWO: **THE PRESENT** IS THE TIME MACHINE READY TO BRING US BACK TO **THE PRESENT**?



TEST NUMBER THREE: **THE FUTURE** IS THE TIME MACHINE READY TO TRAVEL TO THE **FUTURE**?



SO NOW THAT WE'VE TESTED THE TIME MACHINE, WOOD IT BE OK IF I TEST SOME TU BISHVAT J-OAKS ON YOU?  
 HOW DO TREES USE THE MIZRACHI WEBSITE? THEY LOG IN!  
 WHICH TREE FITS IN YOUR HAND? A PALM TREE!  
 WHY DID THE TREE FEEL STUMPED? IT COULDN'T GET TO THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM!  
 WHY DO TREES NEED SHEMITTA? FOR REST!  
 NESHAMALEH, WHY DON'T YOU JUST LEAF THE A-CORNY JOKES TO ME?



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