



ISRAEL EDITION
VOL 6 • NO 8
PURIM 5784

הַמִּזְרָחִי HAMIZRACHI

WITH GRATEFUL THANKS TO THE FOUNDING SPONSORS OF HAMIZRACHI
THE LAMM FAMILY OF MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon Welcoming the New Nasi of World Mizrachi



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon
NASI

Rabbi Doron Perez
EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN

#BringThemHomeNow



MIZRACHI
WORLD MOVEMENT

www.mizrachi.org
office@mizrachi.org
+972 (0)2 620 9000



NASI

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

CO-PRESIDENT

Rabbi Yechiel Wasserman

CHAIRMAN

Mr. Harvey Blitz

EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN

Rabbi Doron Perez

ACTING CEO

Rabbi Danny Mirvis

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTORS

Rabbi Reuven Taragin

Rabbanit Shani Taragin

World Mizrachi is the global Religious Zionist movement, spreading *Torat Eretz Yisrael* across the world and strengthening the bond between the State of Israel and Jewish communities around the world.

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

PUBLISHED BY WORLD MIZRACHI IN JERUSALEM

EDITOR

Rabbi Elie Mischel
editor@mizrachi.org

MANAGING EDITOR

Rabbi Aron White

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Leah Rubin

PROOFREADER

Daniel Cohen

HaMizrachi seeks to spread *Torat Eretz Yisrael* throughout the world. HaMizrachi also contains articles, opinion pieces and advertisements that represent the diversity of views and interests in our communities. These do not necessarily reflect any official position of Mizrachi or its branches. If you don't want to keep HaMizrachi, you can double-wrap it before disposal, or place it directly into *genizah* (*sheimos*).

To dedicate an issue of HaMizrachi in memory of a loved one or in celebration of a *simcha*, or for other HaMizrachi enquiries, please email production@mizrachi.org.

HaMizrachi is available to read online at mizrachi.org/hamizrachi

In partnership with



Torat Chesed

An Interview
with Rabbi Yosef Zvi
Rimon

PAGES 12-16



The Scene of Destruction

Visiting the Gaza Envelope

PAGES 32-35



חילון

First hand accounts
from our heroes, and
remembering the fallen

PAGES 20-30



Purim Torah

PAGES 42-53



JEW'S with VIEWS

Jews from
around the
world share which
song they have most
connected with
during the war

PAGES 36-37

REGULARS

4 Rabbi Doron Perez
40 Sivan Rahav-Meir

42 Rabbi Reuven Taragin

44 Rabbanit Shani Taragin

46 Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l

48 Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

54 Kids Corner

FROM THE

Editor

A Purim Revival

Over the last century, the vast majority of Diaspora Jewry became progressively, and seemingly inevitably, more secular. With an intermarriage rate among non-Orthodox American Jews of 72%, all signs have pointed to the imminent end of Diaspora Jewry – until now.

In late January, New York radio talk show host Sid Rosenberg visited Israel for the first time, broadcasting his popular show from Jerusalem. “I say all the time, if Hamas wanted to try and ruin the spirit of the Jewish people and break us – the exact opposite has happened, you’ve brought the Jew out in me... I’ve always been a proud Jew, but I’ve skipped going to synagogue and over the past few years, even the High Holidays. But two weeks after October 7, my wife joined a temple, I’ve started to go to Friday night Shabbat dinners... and I’ve even sat and learned Torah with a rabbi” (JNS).

Meanwhile, Matisyahu – the superstar reggae musician who in recent years distanced himself from Judaism – reacted similarly to the massacre of October 7. On the Ami’s House podcast, he explained that his “*pintele Yid*,” his “Jewish spark,” was awakened. “Over the years, [being Jewish] became less central to me. And right now it’s come back, full force.”

Israel’s religious revival, particularly among IDF soldiers, is well documented. High demand for *tzitzit* and *tefillin* and moving scenes of religious and “secular” soldiers praying together have become tangible signs of a spiritual awakening. But the impact among Diaspora Jews, though less obvious, seems just as real. According to a Chabad survey taken in the wake of October 7, 86% of respondents said that community members were experiencing a “deeper connection to their own Jewish identity.”

Though today’s spiritual revival may seem unprecedented, the Jewish people have been here before. During the generation of

the Purim story, the great majority of Jews were assimilated. “For what reason were the Jews of that generation deserving of destruction?... Because they participated in the banquet of the evil [Achashverosh]” (*Megillah* 12a). Most Jews of that era identified as Persians first and Jews second, if at all.

We tend to view Mordechai and Esther as righteous Jews who, from the very start of the *megillah*, rejected the assimilation of their brothers and sisters. The sages portray Mordechai as a rabbi, a member of the Great Assembly and one of the nation’s great spiritual leaders, while Esther is described as a deeply religious woman who secretly maintained her Torah observance in Achashverosh’s palace. But there is another, more historical approach offered by many commentators, which views Mordechai and Esther very differently.

“Mordechai” and “Esther” are Persian names. Mordechai is named for the Babylonian god Mordoch, while Esther is named for a Persian goddess. The contrast to their fathers’ Hebrew names, “Yair” and “Avichayil,” is stark. The implication is that their parents, Jewish exiles from Jerusalem, had established themselves in Persian society and hoped their children would become full-fledged Persians, unencumbered by Jewish names and differences. Mordechai, a successful politician, was part of the Persian upper class, while Esther was so distant from the Jewish community that no one in Achashverosh’s palace suspected she was a Jew. Like the other assimilated Jews of their time, neither Mordechai nor Esther heeded the call of the emperor Coresh to return to Israel. In other words, they were very similar to most Diaspora Jews of our own time.

But everything changed with Haman’s decree. “The removal of Achashverosh’s ring [for the sealing of Haman’s decree] was more effective [at encouraging the Jews to repent] than the forty-eight prophets and the seven prophetesses who prophesied on behalf of the Jewish people” (*Megillah* 14a). Haman’s rise to power triggered a

spiritual crisis for Mordechai. People he thought were friends and allies remained silent in the face of Haman’s decree, just as so many ‘friends’ of the Jewish people have remained silent today after the massacre of October 7. For the first time, Mordechai understood that he was part of the nation of Israel, discovering a Jewish pride he never knew he had. Esther, ultimately, made the same noble choice. She reclaimed her Jewish identity, and risked her life to defend her people.

As Mordechai and Esther went, so did the Jews of their time. The terror of Haman and the heroism of Esther sparked a religious revival unlike anything the nation had experienced before. “*Kimu mah shekiblu kvar*, They confirmed what they had accepted earlier” (*Shevuot* 39a), reaccepting the Torah in the wake of the miracle of Purim. Nevertheless, despite the revival, only a small percentage of Diaspora Jewry returned to the Land. As recorded in Ezra and Nechemia, only 42,500 Jews returned to Israel, while the vast majority, including the wealthiest and most influential Jews, remained in the Diaspora. Tragically, an incredible opportunity was lost.

This is our moment. *Am Yisrael* is awakening, and we now have the chance to complete the miracle of Purim. This time, we pray, the script will be different and masses of Jews from all over the Diaspora will return home.

“Awaken, awaken, for your light has come!”

Elie Mischel



Rabbi Elie Mischel
is the Editor of HaMizrachi magazine.

Never Despair

The Eternal Lesson of Purim and The Fast of Esther

Rabbi Doron Perez

Despair. If I had to pick one word which to my mind is the polar opposite of everything Judaism stands for, it would be despair. It is this very same sentiment of despair and hopelessness that the Fast of Esther and festival of Purim totally reject.

There is no such thing as despair in the Jewish worldview. Darkness and difficulty, pain and suffering, exile and anguish, struggle and challenge – unfortunately, yes. But dejection and despair? Never.

D-Day

The 13th of Adar – the most **Diabolical and Dangerous Day of Destruction** in Jewish history.

If ever there was a time that seemed completely hopeless, it was Haman's global plan for the genocide of the entire Jewish race. No day in all of Jewish history represents utter despair more than the 13th of Adar in the 12th year of King Achashverosh's rule. No day was more desperate and dangerous for all Jews than this day. Yet somehow, no day had the diametrically opposite outcome of any reasonable or rational assessment – the greatest threat ever of Jewish annihilation was transformed into the most astounding and unlikely salvation.

Indeed, never before or since has any enemy of Israel attempted with such diabolical precision to kill, Heaven forbid, every single Jew in the world at the same time – beginning and ending on one day.

Two factors make Haman's plan even more outlandish. First, the Jews were dispersed among all 127 countries of King Achashverosh's empire. The plan to destroy them involved meticulous planning – gathering of intelligence, precise execution and implementation. Second, this event took place over 2,500 years ago at a time predating the technological advancements of our modern era when the entire world is one global village.

The depth and depravity of Haman the Amalekite's bombastic and barbaric hatred and willpower resulted in the most diabolical plan of potential Jewish annihilation ever conceived. Not a 'Final Solution' secretly planned in the not-so-well-known city of Wannsee to be executed over the course of years, but one planned publicly in the Persian capital of Shushan, decreed in every single spoken language throughout the entire empire, and to be implemented in one day.

The verses couldn't be clearer: "Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Achashverosh... In the first month, that is, the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Achashverosh they cast *pur*, that is, the lot, before Haman from day to day, and from month to month, to the **twelfth month, that is, the month Adar**... And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman the son of Hamdata the Agagite, the Jews' enemy. Then were the king's scribes called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and there was written according to all that Haman had commanded unto the king's satraps, and to the

governors that were over every province, and to the rulers of every people of every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language; in the name of King Achashverosh was it written, and sealed with the king's ring. And the letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, **all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar**, and to take the spoil of them for a prey" (Esther 3:6-13).

"VeNahafoch Hu" – The Remarkable Reversal

And then, in an unlikely and remarkable change of fortune, every element of this meticulously planned "Final Solution" was totally turned on its head, all on that very same day, the 13th of Adar. Haman unexpectedly fell out of favor with the king, and Mordechai and Esther convinced the king to send out an additional decree allowing the Jews to defend themselves against all who wished to destroy them. This decree was sent out in exactly the same way and designated the 13th of Adar as a day of defense and battle against the murderous Jew-haters across the empire. Instead of global Jewish annihilation, the Jews utterly defeated their enemies throughout the empire, killing 800 terrorists in Shushan, including Haman and his ten bloodthirsty sons, as well as 75,000 terrorists and accomplices throughout the empire.



As stated in the *megillah*: “Now in the twelfth month, that is, **the month Adar, on the thirteenth day**, when the king’s commandment and his decree drew near to be put in execution, **on the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them, it was turned to the contrary, and the Jews had rule over them that hated them.** The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Achashverosh, to lay hands on those who sought their hurt; and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all people... Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them” (Esther 9:1-5).¹

The 13th of Adar was converted from a day of destruction to the great day of salvation. Since the battles were completed on the 14th of Adar in all cities and on the 15th of Adar in Shushan alone, Purim and Shushan Purim were instituted on these two days for future generations as eternal days of celebration and thanks for the miracle.

The pivotal day in the story is, without a doubt, the 13th of Adar itself. This is the day of the most remarkable reversal, the designated time of ultimate destruction which was transformed into the greatest day of deliverance and redemption in Jewish history. This is the day of “**וְהַיְחַדְּשׁוּ אֶת הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה**,” when everything turned around. This remarkable day lives on in Jewish consciousness for posterity as the Fast of Esther.

Ta’anit Esther

Why do we fast on this day? What is the purpose of this particular fast? After all, this is the Jewish people’s only annual fast of the prophets which is unrelated to the destruction of the Temples.² Additionally, the fast is not mandated anywhere in the *megillah* nor in the Talmud, but was only established in post-Talmudic times during the era of the Geonim.

Ta’anit Esther also has the unusual distinction of being the only fast which, when it falls on a Shabbat, is observed earlier. All other fasts which commemorate the destruction are always deferred to a later date.

Why indeed do we fast on this day and what is the nature of its commemoration?

The earliest source dealing with the Fast of Esther is that of Rabbi Achai Gaon who highlights a fascinating point.³ He opines that the purpose of this fast is to recall the fast that took place on this very day of the battle of the Jewish people against their enemies. The *megillah* refers to this day as “a time of gathering” (Esther 8:11), so much so that the Talmud refers to this day as a “**זְמַן קְהִילָה לְכָל**, a time of gathering for all,” when the Jews gathered together for fasting, supplication and prayer.⁴ Rav Achai maintains that all the Jews fasted and prayed together for the defeat of their enemies on that day. The Fast of Esther is therefore a remembrance of that miraculous day when the Jews gathered as one to fast and pray while those who could, fought for their lives.⁵ In short, the fast is an eternal reminder of our spiritual connection to Hashem and how the power of relentless advocacy and prayer can transform seemingly impossible and desperate situations.

The Fast of Esther is an everlasting testament to the remarkable power of reversal. A day destined for imminent annihilation can become the very day of immediate redemption. It is for this reason, Rabbi Achai Gaon says, that only this fast is observed earlier. This fast recalls miraculous redemption which we wish to hasten, whereas the others commemorate tragic destruction which we wish to defer. The fast recounts the profound power of activism and prayer to remake our reality, while the festival of Purim celebrates the triumph of hope over despair and salvation over dejection.

May our current war with Hamas, especially as we celebrate the month of Adar, elicit a miraculous turnaround leading to the

release of all of our hostages and the destruction of our Haman-like enemy.

The message of the three days of the Fast of Esther, Purim and Shushan Purim is clear – in G-d’s world, there is never room for despair, only for hope!

1. The verses describing the dispatching of the second decree are almost identical to the first one. The verses that follow state that 500 enemies were killed in Shushan on the 13th of Adar, an additional 300 the next day, and a total of 75,000 across the empire.
2. The other four fasts all revolve around the destruction of the Temple. The 10th of Tevet commemorates the beginning of the Babylonian siege, the 17th of Tammuz commemorates the breaching of the city walls, the 9th of Av commemorates the destruction of the Temple and the Fast of Gedaliah commemorates the murder of the last Governor of Judah, facilitating the final exile of Israel’s remaining leadership.
3. *Sheiltot of Rav Achai Gaon*, 67.
4. *Megillah* 2a.
5. This is also the opinion of Rabbeinu Tam (cited in the Rosh, *Megillah* 1:1), in the Tur (O. Ch. 666) and the Mishnah Berurah, and is the majority opinion. The *Shibolei HaLeket* and *Orchot Chaim* believe that the Fast of Esther recalls Esther and the people’s three-day fast before approaching Achashverosh (Esther 4:16), but most opinions reject this view in favor of the former.



Rabbi Doron Perez
is the Executive Chairman
of World Mizrahi.



Mizrachi's Schools Department Presents:

Two exciting weekly publications for youth, schools, and families!

HaMizrachi Parsha Weekly - Youth Edition

TAILORED SPECIFICALLY FOR YOUNG MINDS!

- ✓ **Solo Learning:** Kids can engage with the Parsha at their own pace.
- ✓ **Shabbat Table:** Enhance your Shabbat experience by discussing and sharing insights with family members.
- ✓ **In School:** Perfect for teachers who wish to add excitement and understanding to the Parsha.

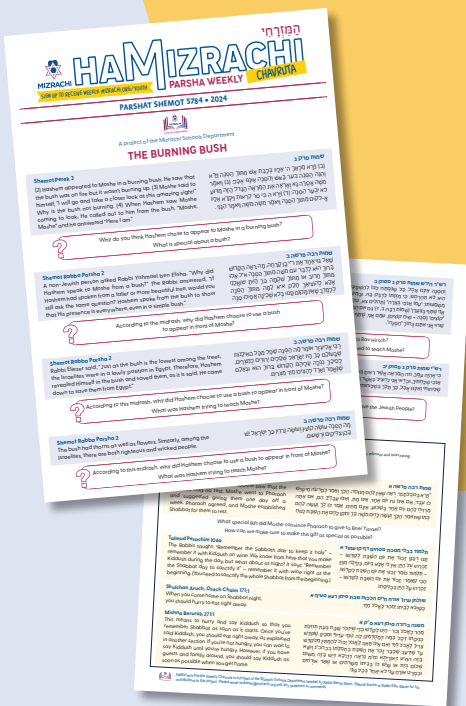
Featuring Thought-Provoking Questions, Fun Activities, and Fascinating Insights!



ALSO AVAILABLE IN SPANISH, PORTUGUESE AND GERMAN!

HaMizrachi Parsha Weekly - Chavruta

LET'S LEARN TOGETHER!



- ✓ **At Home:** Perfect for kids wishing to explore on their own or with family
- ✓ **In School:** In class, with Chavrutot (partners) or in the Beit Midrash
- ✓ **Parent-Child Learning:** Bond over Torah with meaningful ideas
- ✓ **Youth Groups:** Learn, discuss and engage

Featuring Diverse Sources, Guiding Questions, and Relevant Halachic Topics

DIVE IN, DISCOVER, AND BE DELIGHTED!



TO RECEIVE THESE PUBLICATIONS, SCAN THE QR CODE ABOVE OR VISIT MIZRACHI.ORG/YOUTH

We continue to daven for the speedy release, physical and emotional well-being of Daniel Perez, son of World Mizrahi Executive Chairman Rabbi Doron Perez and Shelley Perez, who has been held hostage in Gaza since Simchat Torah. Please continue to pray for Daniel Shimon ben Sharon amongst all the hostages.



דניאל פרץ
DANIEL PEREZ
(22)



**BRING
HIM**



HOME NOW!

**HOSTAGES AND MISSING
FAMILIES FORUM**

From Education to Hityashvut:

An Interview with Gael Grunewald

Gael Grunewald has completed his term as the Head of the Department of Education at the World Zionist Organization (WZO) and returned to the position of Head of the WZO's Chativa LeHityashvut, where he previously served for five years until 2020.

During his tenure as Head of the Education Department, Gael significantly expanded the department's activities, doubling the number of shlichim it sends to the Diaspora by collaborating with other organizations and government ministries. This has made a significant difference for smaller Diaspora communities that were previously underserved. Rabbi Aron White spoke with Gael to learn more about his transition to the Chativa LeHityashvut.



Shifting from Jewish education to the Chativa LeHityashvut seems like a drastic shift.

The Mizrahi movement has always acted under the banner of the nation of Israel, the Torah of Israel and the Land of Israel. In the Department of Education, I worked to spread the Torah of Eretz Yisrael to the people of Israel in the Diaspora. Today I am more concerned with the task of settling the people of Israel in the Land of Israel. I know this mission very well from my previous tenure and I am very excited to work with the people who are on the front lines of the war and the front lines of settling the Land.

What is the role of the Chativa LeHityashvut in the current war?

Normally, the Chativa LeHityashvut is active in the field. It knows the needs and requirements of the various local councils very well and how to respond to their needs. Naturally, during war-time, the needs and demands increase and the relevance of the Chativa LeHityashvut increases accordingly. Ultimately, our division is an executive arm of the Israeli government and Israel's Ministry of Community Affairs, which is headed by Minister Orit Strook. After October 7, the Chativa LeHityashvut put all its resources at the disposal of Minister Strook to quickly respond to the needs of the evacuees.

Can you give us a concrete example of what the Chativa LeHityashvut does?

When a community is forced to quickly evacuate a war zone, there is high potential for chaos. Members of southern and northern communities were forced to disperse to different hotels and vacation villages, separating community members from one another. To maintain community unity and resilience, our professionals intervened immediately to support the evacuees. The State of Israel also established the Tekumah Authority to strengthen the Gaza Envelope communities, now renamed as the "Region of Revival." The Chativa LeHityashvut knows how to build temporary communities and has played a leading role in doing so. We work in full cooperation with the Tekumah

Authority Director Brigadier-General Moshe Edri, who does holy work with real professionalism and infinite sensitivity.

How do you define success?

This is a difficult question to answer. To me, real victory does not depend only on the IDF's heroic efforts in Gaza, but also on the future of the border communities. We must establish more businesses, more farmers, and have more children. This is the mission of our people. This is also our challenge in the north. The State of Israel will require significant resources to return the tens of thousands of residents in the north who were evacuated from their homes. Just as importantly, we must invest in strengthening Jewish settlement in the area.

Is the entire Chativa LeHityashvut focused on the war right now?

Like every office and company in Israel, several of our employees were called up to the reserves, and our remaining employees are naturally focused on the war. At the same time, we do not have the luxury of setting aside all of the division's ongoing tasks. We are moving forward on all fronts. Together with the Ministry of Community Affairs, the Civil Administration and the Israel Lands Authority, we are in the midst of building 11 new communities in southern Israel. This is a historic initiative that I launched in my previous term and, thanks to the good work of those who came after me, it has progressed very well. Beyond that, we are also responsible for all the communities of Judea and Samaria who are under significant pressure.

The State of Israel has a long way to go, but *Baruch Hashem*, we are on the right path. The Chativa LeHityashvut will be there to help more Jews put down roots in more communities throughout the Land of Israel. ■



Be in Israel
BU@BIU

Find Your Passion at Bar-Ilan University

We believe that education is not just about acquiring facts or gaining expertise, but about igniting the flames of passion within each student. With a vibrant campus, a diverse community, and a commitment to excellence, we strive to awaken your thirst for knowledge and help you pursue your dreams.

Why Bar-Ilan University?

- Ranked in the top 2% of all universities in the world – *Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities*.
- One of Israel's leading and fastest-growing institutions of higher education.
- Cutting-edge scientific research and significant academic advancement in all faculties and departments.
- Wide range of undergraduate, graduate, doctoral, and postdoctoral programs in English and in Hebrew.
- International School: Dedicated staff members and academic advisors provide assistance in a variety of areas.
- Vibrant Jewish life on campus.
- Located in the metropolitan area of Tel-Aviv.
- **NEW! Multilingual Undergraduate Programs** First year in English with intensive Hebrew Ulpan. Integrate into Hebrew program from second year. Programs include **Engineering, Computer Science, Life Sciences, and LLB (Bachelor of Laws)**.

Come join us on our beautiful campus and give yourself the opportunity of a lifetime.

Contact Us

International School, Bar-Ilan University
Tel: +972-3-738-4245 | Email: intl.info@biu.ac.il
Website: biuinternational.com

Double Opportunity

Roi Abecassis

October 7 shook *Am Yisrael's* security and social foundations to the core. Nevertheless, despite our pain, suffering and fear, we are now facing two great opportunities.

First, the pre-war divisions within Israeli society seemed to be insoluble, with each side stubbornly standing its ground in a way that would inevitably lead to a head-on collision. But then, lo and behold, we suddenly witnessed a huge outpouring of unprecedented mutual responsibility. Differences and divisions were forgotten and a feeling of forgiveness emerged on both sides. All the volunteer projects – donating, caring, giving – in Israeli society gave us a special sense of togetherness and unity, while the arguments about legal reform were left by the wayside.

Second, Israel-Diaspora Jewry relations have suffered in recent years, with much tension around explosive issues such as the Western Wall agreement, the Law of Return and the legal reform. Here too, it seemed the chasm between Israel and world Jewry was becoming dangerously wider. And then, lo and behold, October 7 gave birth to a sweeping sense of unparalleled global Jewish solidarity, with more than one billion dollars donated to Israel, hundreds of solidarity missions, and hundreds of thousands of Jews all over the world doing, praying and demonstrating support for Israel.

In addition, the rush of global antisemitism has also brought Israeli society and world Jewry together, strengthening our mutual resilience, responsibility and destiny. We must not let these two opportunities pass us by!

Since its very inception, the Mizrahi movement has been a bridge between the different camps in Israeli society and between Israeli and Diaspora Jewry. Now, Mizrahi must grab these two opportunities and lead the recovery process on both fronts.

About a month ago, there was a changing of the Religious Zionist guard in the National Institutions in Israel. Gael Grunewald became Head of the Chativa LeHityashvut, which strives to develop the country, Rabbi Doron Perez was appointed Head of the The Center for Religious Affairs in the Diaspora, which works to promote Torah and Zionist values among Diaspora Jewry, and I became Head of Education in the World Zionist Organization (WZO), a department responsible for more than 260 *shlichim* all over the world.

I am excited about the privilege I have been granted. For more than two decades I have been involved in the world of *shlichut* – first as a young *shaliach*, then as Mazkal of World Bnei Akiva and lately as the person responsible for the WZO's Shlichim Department. Over this time, I have been honored to serve Mizrahi in the myriad challenges and opportunities facing the Jewish people.

Here are just some examples of what the WZO's Center for Religious Affairs in the Diaspora and Education Department, and Keren Kayemet LeYisrael (KKL) have been doing recently:

“My Home is Your Home” – we connected hundreds of Jews with apartments in Israel with families of the hostages and families evacuated from their homes, who were able to live in these apartments, rent-free, for three months.

We produced more than 30 video clips – “The Spirit of Our Nation” – in which leaders and educators spread uplifting messages of strength and hope, garnering hundreds of thousands of views.

Over 1,800 overseas *yeshiva* and *midrasha* students here in Israel spent solidarity days in the south, visiting *kibbutzim*, Sderot and Ofakim, volunteering in the fields and helping arrange meals for IDF soldiers.

The Education Department ran a convention in New Jersey for 170 *shlichim* in North America. Hundreds of *shlichim* are

serving schools and communities around the world, with many having temporarily returned to Israel to fight in the reserves. Our *shlichim* are a ‘living bridge’ between Israel and Diaspora Jewish communities, who are thirsty for a meaningful connection to Israel at this time.

KKL has invested hundreds of millions of shekels in strengthening the communities in the Region of Revival (Gaza Envelope), supporting the emergency response teams, and absorbing evacuated families in hotels even before the government stepped in. In 2024, it plans to invest massively in rehabilitating the Region of Revival and in deepening the newly solidified connections between Israel and Diaspora Jewry.

The Jewish people have always known how to grow and become stronger from their crises, courageously displaying faith, hope and resilience.

Be'ezrat Hashem, if we stay united, together, we'll come through this time as well.

Am Yisrael Chai!



Roi Abecassis
is Head of Education at the
World Zionist Organization and a
representative of World Mizrahi
in the national institutions.



MIZRACHI
WORLD MOVEMENT



WORLD CLASS TRAVEL
www.wct.co.il

Come to Israel this Pesach!

Join World Mizrachi's Educational Tours
and Enjoy Special Hotel Deals
with World Class Travel

KING DAVID

WALDORF ASTORIA

DAVID CITADEL

DAN PANORAMA

- Chol Hamoed Solidarity Tours
- Volunteering Opportunities
- Educational Experiences
- Special hotel rates for Mizrachi guests

Ask us about great hotel deals in Tel Aviv

**For more information and booking:
wct@mizrachi.org**

Torat Chesed

An Interview with Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

On the 25th of Adar Rishon 5784, the anniversary of the founding of the Mizrachi movement, World Mizrachi announced that Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon would become its new Nasi.

Rav Rimon is already world-famous for his Torah, leadership and chesed. Rav Rimon's appointment comes after extensive involvement with World Mizrachi in multiple capacities over recent years. His Nesiut will open a new chapter in the revitalized World Mizrachi movement, alongside Executive Chairman Rabbi Doron Perez and Acting CEO Rabbi Danny Mirvis.

Rabbi Aron White sat down with Rav Rimon, to hear more from the new Nasi about his upbringing, influences, and visions for the future.



Though you live in Gush Etzion today, your upbringing was in Tel Aviv. How did your family come to be there, and how does your childhood still affect you today?

It all begins with my great-grandfather, Ephraim Eliezer Granat Rimon, who made *Aliyah* from Poland in 1908 to Yafo. He lived very close to Rav Kook, the Chief Rabbi of Yafo at the time, on Rechov Zerach Barnett. He was incredibly dedicated to building the community there – he transformed half of his home into a *shul* and *beit midrash* called Kehal Chassidim, leaving the other half for his family! It was a tough time, as the Ottoman authorities made life very difficult.

A year later, his son, my grandfather Yosef Zvi Rimon who I am named for, made *Aliyah* to Yafo too and became very close with Rav Kook. My grandfather was a poet, who wrote beautiful poems infused with religious meaning. Rav Kook considered him to be one of the greatest Jewish poets of the past few centuries. My grandfather changed the family name from Granat to Rimon, and actually consulted with Shai Agnon to choose the name.

My father David Rimon served in the Haganah, the precursor to the IDF that helped to found the state. He stayed in Tel Aviv too, and that's how I came to grow up there. When I was in the army in Hesder, a secular comrade of mine asked me where I live, and I told him Tel Aviv. He asked, "Do you mean Bnei Brak?" I told him, "Tel Aviv, the corner of Gordon and Dizengoff!" You can't get more central Tel Aviv than that! Growing up in that environment came with challenges, and many of my friends from childhood did not remain religious. There is no question it gave me a deeper connection to *Am Yisrael*, strengthened my dedication to my own beliefs, and had a big impact on me.

Who were and are the Rebbeim who had the greatest impact on you?

I feel blessed to have had a connection to many *gedolim*. Rav Goren, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Rav Mordechai Eliyahu, Rav Ovadia, the Steipler, Rav Elyashiv, the Tzitz Eliezer – these are all *rabbanim* I have spoken with and had different types of relationship with. When I was in high school, I loved learning Rav Ovadia's *teshuvot* (legal responsa) in *Yabia Omer* and *Yechaveh Da'at*, and I would often go to him to ask him about them.

Growing up I went to *yeshiva* high school, and I was very close to my school principal Rav Aryeh Bina, who made a big impact on me. After that, I studied at Yeshivat



Rav Rimon at his wedding dancing with Rav Lichtenstein.

Har Etzion under Rav Amital, and with the rabbi who had the greatest impact on me, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l. I feel blessed that for many years, I would speak to Rav Lichtenstein almost every day. Rav Lichtenstein was a figure full of Torah and *yirat shamayim*, with a knowledge of the breadth and depth of Torah that was astonishing. His commitment to Hashem was absolute; Hashem was the center of his world. He also had a broad perspective, and could analyze reality in such a deep way. Often you would come to him with a question with two different possible answers in your head, but he would approach it in such a different and out of the box way and provide a way of thinking that was totally original. His character traits and the way he treated other people were exemplary; he was a remarkable figure.

What were the most powerful experiences from your army service?

I served in *Chel HaShiryon* (IDF Tank Corps) in *Chativa 188*, through the Hesder program. The first part of my service was together with other *yeshiva* students, but later in my service I was together with all of *Am Yisrael*. Army service created strong and long-lasting bonds with other soldiers. The IDF gave me a powerful feeling of *shlichut*, that we are a generation who have merited to fight for our people and our land. *Am Yisrael* has the great merit to wear the uniform of the IDF, to defend our people. It's a special *zechut*!

The army also teaches you many things that you then can apply to all areas of life. You learn to what extent you can function with limited sleep. When you are running late for *misdar* (roll call), you learn how much you can do in 20 seconds. When you are on a *masa* (hike), and someone has to be the one to carry the stretcher, you learn what it means to really help a friend, even when you have no strength left – and to find reserves of strength you didn't know



Top to bottom: Rav Rimon with his Rebbe, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein; Rav Rimon during his IDF service.

you had. These experiences teach you life lessons that apply in civilian life too.

One of the first *sefarim* that I wrote was *Hilchot Tzava*, a practical guide to *halacha* for soldiers in the army. Since the war began on Simchat Torah, I have visited many army bases to speak to and meet with soldiers. I have a suit now that I don't ever want to take off except for dry cleaning – I have hugged thousands of soldiers wearing it, it is very holy!

Did you always want to be a rabbi and a teacher of Torah?

I always wanted to be a doctor, and my father also thought I was going to do that. My brother took that route and is today a leading geriatric doctor. Since high school, I always loved learning, especially *halacha*, but professionally I wanted to be a doctor. When I was in my fifth year of *yeshiva*, Rav Lichtenstein called me to his office, and he spoke to me for a quarter of an hour about how important it is to be a doctor – he described in great detail how valuable and meaningful a profession it is. “But,” he said, “in your case I think your *shlichut* is to teach Torah.” Gradually, I changed direction, and stayed another year and then another learning in *yeshiva*. Three years later I became a *Ra"m* and then remained in that world of teaching Torah.



I have a suit now that I don't ever want to take off except for dry cleaning – I have hugged thousands of soldiers wearing it, it is very holy!

How did you meet your wife?

When I was in my sixth year of *yeshiva*, a *Ra"m* from the *yeshiva*, Rav Eliyahu Blumenzweig, opened a new Hesder *yeshiva* in Yerucham. He wanted me to come and teach there, but I didn't think it would be so easy for me to find a wife in Yerucham, a small town far from the center of the country! We agreed that I would come two days a week to teach there. But then I met Rav Blumenzweig's daughter, Sharon, and at the end of the year we got married. She is a masterful teacher of Tanach, with tremendous knowledge of it all, and has written two books so far about it. We are blessed with eight daughters, and three grandchildren. The last few months have been difficult with a number of sons-in-law in the army, and we pray for their continued success and safety.

At what point did you begin to connect with and teach Jews from outside of Israel?

I grew up learning English at home, as my mother was originally from England. All of the *shiurim* I give in English are ultimately in her merit and an *aliyah* for her *neschama*. I started teaching in English about 30 years ago through Rabbi Haskel Lookstein, who asked me to write educational programs in *halacha* for Yeshivat Ramaz in Manhattan. He said that in order to do a proper job, he would bring me to Ramaz for a week, so that I could understand the students; sitting in Gush Etzion writing a curriculum for students from New York wouldn't work if I didn't really know them. I was there for a week in the lower school and upper school and gave some *shiurim*. That was my first entrance to that world, and it grew from there. I wrote my first *sefarim* in Hebrew, but about 22 years ago, the Koschitzky family sponsored a translation of my *sefer* on *Shemitta* into English. I was very happy. My mother's Hebrew was not fluent, she couldn't read a whole book in Hebrew, and she read the Jerusalem Post for her news. I was happy she could read my whole *sefer*! Gradually, more of my books were translated into English. Six of my twenty five books have been translated, with hopefully more to come!



After the disengagement from Gush Katif in 2005, you set up an organization to help the thousands of Israelis who were kicked out of their homes. How did you get involved with that?

At that time, I was fully engrossed in my studies and teaching within the *beit midrash*. But when I received a call from rabbis in Gush Katif on the day of the uprooting, I realized there was a pressing need to help the people from Gush Katif. So, I rallied thousands of volunteers to assist with immediate needs like laundry and food. It became clear, however, that the greatest need was for employment. 85% of people were without work, and many felt lost without a sense of purpose.

Initially, employment assistance wasn't my expertise at all! Despite trying to engage governmental resources, it was apparent they were insufficient. Thus, JobKatif emerged as a grassroots effort, evolving from a volunteer initiative into a professional organization.

Helping people was incredibly challenging. Many were farmers needing to switch careers, people who were over 40 or 50, feeling disheartened about their future. We had to think outside the box. We recognized that just finding jobs wasn't enough; they needed comprehensive support. So, we developed a strategy that focused on employment assistance, skill development and mentoring to navigate the transition successfully.

Through JobKatif, we assisted 3,500 individuals in securing employment, established 280 new businesses, and even received an award from President Shimon Peres for our efforts. Moreover, it connected me with Jews worldwide whose support was instrumental in our success. This experience laid the groundwork for La'Ofek, which continues our mission of empowering marginalized groups.

La'Ofek builds on the success of JobKatif, extending our model to empower marginalized groups like Ethiopian Israeli women, impoverished IDF soldiers, and at-risk youth. For example, our Achetenu-Nachshonim program helps hundreds of Ethiopian women gain acceptance into Hebrew University's nursing and occupational therapy programs. We also assist thousands of impoverished IDF soldiers with employment opportunities through our Ta'asuchayil program, and hundreds of at-risk youth through our Notim Yachad vocational training program.



Rav Rimon in Or Akiva: Kids are excited to study Mishnah with Sulamot's Ratzim LaMishnah series.

You also founded Sulamot, a Jewish education organization. How did this happen?

Sulamot was founded to inspire and innovate in the field of Jewish education. The content revolution, which originally began with the publication of *sefarim* on *halacha*, has since expanded into various fields within Jewish education, profoundly impacting how Jews of all ages experience Judaism.

During Operation Tzuk Eitan (Protective Edge in 2014), we launched Ratzim LaMishnah, an action video series that brings Mishnah study to life for children, incorporating captivating narratives, text comprehension, and analytical tools. Initially dedicated to the memory of the 38 soldiers lost during Tzuk Eitan, the project quickly gained traction, with over 170,000 children worldwide eagerly embracing Mishnah study.

When the war broke out, in addition to our regular programming, our focus shifted towards supporting soldiers and providing emergency relief. We also launched Project Atufim for eight communities displaced from their homes. While there are parallels to Gush Katif, a notable distinction is that these communities have the prospect of returning home. Hence, our efforts are geared towards aiding them during displacement. We focus on employment through La'Ofek and the revitalization of community life, along with the reconstruction of their *kibbutzim*, *moshavim*, and *yishuvim* through Sulamot.

I encourage my staff to dream big, and I'm immensely proud of their accomplishments over the past 19 years.



Rav Rimon speaking to a mission from Brooklyn, NY at Har Herzl.



Rav Rimon with a group from Great Neck, NY.



Rav Rimon with one of La'Ofek's "Achetenu" nursing students at Hebrew University.

You are also the Chief Rabbi of the Gush Etzion Regional Council. What does that role include?

There are 22 towns in the region, and each town has its own *rav*. The job of the rabbi of the whole council is to care for the entire region, both in terms of *halachic psak* as well as the spiritual level of the communities as a whole. Certain questions that come up relate to the area as a whole, such as questions regarding agriculture and *mitzvot haTeluyot ba'aretz*, *mitzvot* relating to the Land of Israel, that affect the whole region. When Arabs burned thousands of dunams of trees during a *Shemitta* year, we faced an interesting question. Can you replant the trees, because even though it is a *Shemitta* year, it is needed for security? I also give *shiurim* across the different *yishuvim*, to strengthen Torah across the area. We initiated learning programs for teenagers on Saturday nights, with thousands of teenagers participating. It's my job to see the big picture, to think about both the questions that arise and the spiritual atmosphere in the region.

I am also the Head of the Batei Midrash at Machon Lev in Yerushalayim, an institution dedicated to Torah and *madda*, and I am the *halachic* guide for that institution.

You are now becoming the Nasi of World Mizrahi. How did your connection with World Mizrahi develop, and what is your vision for the movement as Nasi?

My connection began when Rabbi Doron Perez was in South Africa. I visited him there and we became close. When he made *Aliyah* to lead Mizrahi, Mizrahi had *halachic* questions, and I loved talking with him about them. Rav Doron is a remarkable individual, and I pray every day that his son Daniel should return home soon with the other hostages. Rabbi Danny Mirvis, the Acting CEO of World Mizrahi,



Today the mission of Mizrahi is to bring unity in the Jewish people, to spread the light of Torah among the Jewish people, to bring the light of Eretz Yisrael to the whole world.

was a student of mine in *yeshiva*, and we were close when he was in Melbourne as a Mizrahi rabbi.

I believe deeply in the leadership of Mizrahi as well as the mission. When you see them giving strength to Mizrahi around the world, strengthening communities and inspiring adults and teenagers to love *Medinat Yisrael*, Torah, and *Am Yisrael* - I feel very connected to this vision. I then became involved with Mizrahi Musmachim, the Mizrahi *semicha* program,

where I teach and sign the certificates for *semicha*. I also have visited many communities around the world through Mizrahi's Yom HaAtzmaut program, Israel360.

The Mizrahi movement has a unique *shlichut*, as it has had throughout the generations. Today the mission of Mizrahi is to bring unity in the Jewish people, to spread the light of Torah among the Jewish people, to bring the light of *Eretz Yisrael* to the whole world. We have many challenges as a people, but we are living in a time that our grandparents could never have imagined. Despite all we have gone through since Simchat Torah, I believe we as a people will arrive at a higher place than we were before, in terms of *achdut*, and the continuing building of our Land and our Torah. We are blessed to have unique opportunities after 2,000 years, and *b'ezrat Hashem* we will be successful! ■

Top to bottom: The graduation ceremony for the Mizrahi Musmachim, June 2023; Acting CEO Rabbi Danny Mirvis, Nasi Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon, Executive Chairman Rabbi Doron Perez. (PHOTO: YACOV SEGAL)



ADVERTISE IN HAMIZRACHI



- **NINE EDITIONS A YEAR**
- **40,000 COPIES EACH EDITION**
- **DISTRIBUTED ACROSS THE ENGLISH SPEAKING WORLD AND VIA MIZRACHI'S DIGITAL CHANNELS**

Advertise in HaMizrachi!

Reach the global Religious Zionist community through HaMizrachi magazine. Distribution of over 40,000 magazines across Israel, USA, Australia, Canada, the UK, and South Africa. Options are available to advertise in each country at a separate rate.

Reserve your page today! Email production@mizrachi.org for more details



ORTHODOX ISRAEL COALITION



AMIT
Building Israel. One Child at a Time.



Achievements of the representatives of the Orthodox Israel Coalition in the National Institutions as part of Mizrahi's global representation.

30,000

participants in international conventions for strengthening the connection to the State of Israel

2 million

NIS towards supporting solidarity delegations during the war

290

Teacher Shlichim in 126 schools in 97 cities worldwide **including over 200 in schools across the US**

27 million

NIS raised for youth villages and Israeli Religious Zionist institutions

4 million

NIS towards activities in Religious Zionist communities across the world





MIZRACHI
WORLD MOVEMENT

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



Gael Grunewald
Deputy Chairman, WZO



Roi Abecassis
Deputy Chairman, KKL



1,000,000+

views on digital content and inspiration connected with the war

88 million

NIS raised

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

80+

Mizrachi missions to Israel from 14 countries around the world



4,000

yeshiva and seminary students participated in educational activities, including Yom HaZikaron and Yom HaAtzmaut events



40,000

soldiers received crucial equipment through the Sulamot/Tzevet Perez campaign, including 5,000 ceramic vests

600

Religious Zionist shlichim including 380 across the US will be in communities across the globe in 5784, coordinated by the Shlichut Center

3300+

letters and videos received from 13 countries sent to soldiers and schoolchildren in Israel



2 million

NIS towards Religious Zionist activities across France with 100 guest speakers, and supporting absorption of French olim



160+

members of Mizrachi staff, program participants and shlichim serving in the IDF

A RETURNING MILITARIAN



Like most of the IDF soldiers on the front lines, Eitan Phillips was called up to serve, leaving his wife, children and civilian job to fight for his country. After two months of fighting in Gaza, Eitan sat down with Rabbi Aron White to share his experience. Eitan, who studied in Mizrachi's Musmachim program, offered remarkable insights about the day-to-day experience of war, and the emotional and moral journey of serving on the front lines against Hamas.

Thank you for talking to us, Eitan. Before we talk about your wartime experiences, can you tell us about your background?

I grew up in London, was active in Bnei Akiva, and came to Yeshivat Hakotel planning to join the Hesder program. I joined the army in 2015 and served for a year and a half in the tank corps. Since then, while studying for my undergraduate degree at Hebrew University, and my Masters at Haifa University, I have served each year for *miluim*. I was called up to my unit at 3:00 AM the night after October 7th, and was just released from fighting in Gaza a few days ago.

When did you go into Gaza?

When we were called up, we trained for a number of weeks, and it became clear we were training for going into Gaza, as opposed to training for operations on the Lebanese border. The main function of tanks in the army is for conquering territory, and there is a lot of training for how to operate in formation and how to work tactically together with infantry to conquer territory. Our tanks are the previous generation Merkava 3 tanks, complex machinery that requires lots of preparation, such as straightening the tracks, before being used in operations.

After weeks of training, we were told that our operation was not being called on, and that we should go home – and then within 24 hours of getting home, we were told the operation was on again! We headed down to some of the staging grounds in the south, and in the middle of the night our division of tanks headed into Khan Younis.

When the sun rose, we woke up to our first morning in Gaza. The buildings around us were completely deserted, but in the course of the day we saw and engaged groups of Hamas terrorists. For the first 3 days, I did not leave the tank for a second. Each tank has 4 soldiers – the commander, driver, shooter and loader, and my job is the loader. I actually got overwhelmed at certain points by the claustrophobia of literally not leaving an enclosed space for that long, and when we were able to get out I was quite overwhelmed. But we were on the move, working with other units of the IDF to take over Khan Younis, which we worked on for the next two months.

As the days wore on, I also started to feel strong homesickness. Even when you know exactly why you are away, and are busy doing really important work, it's still hard to be away from your wife and children.

During those weeks, our physical living was very basic – we ate mainly tuna and kabanos, and I didn't have a shower for 3 weeks. After 5 weeks I was able to come home for a weekend, and it was amazing to see my wife and kids again. That morning I dropped off the kids in their *gan*, and I found myself sitting in the car just crying. It wasn't happy or sad tears, it was just an intense emotional experience. It is hard to put into words, but it's disorienting, even intensely confusing, to go from the destruction and darkness of war in Khan Younis to normal life and children playing in the streets, all within a few hours. There is a certain disconnect that many soldiers feel when they come home, feelings that are hard to properly relate to those that were not in Gaza. We have now had processing sessions helping us deal with this feeling of reacclimating to civilian life.



Eitan inside his tank.

This may be a silly question, but on a day-to-day basis, how frightened do you feel?

We did kill a number of Hamas terrorists who shot at us, and saw a mortar explode in front of me, but it is not constant fire for all two months. However, while you are in Gaza there is always the fear that at any moment you can be shot at by a sniper, an RPG, or a mortar. That fear is always in the background. A few weeks into our operation, we got a message over the radio that one of the tanks in the unit had been hit. "Elisha has been killed, Tom and Shachar are injured." Elisha was a good friend of mine, Elisha Loewenstern, one of the nicest people I have ever met. He was a *talmid chacham* who was learning Rambam all the time while we were in Gaza, and who worked in hi-tech in his civilian life. We didn't have time to mourn, none of us could attend Elisha's funeral or *shiva*, as we had our mission that we needed to fulfill. We would later learn that Shachar lost his leg as well.

We continued to move through Khan Younis, going from target to target. I am just one soldier and know what my unit was doing, but there was so much going on, with units above ground, below ground. So all I am sharing is just from the perspective of one soldier, not the overall picture.

Our last week in Khan Younis was the first time we had any interaction with Gazan civilians, and that added another whole layer of engaging with some of the moral questions of war.

What do you mean? What moral questions were raised for you?

This was my first time being in a war, and there are certain moments that are initially very difficult to wrap your head around. One night, we were told we had to reach a certain Hamas compound by a certain time, and when we got there, we saw they had turned it into a makeshift hospital, with hundreds of civilians around. Some of the infantry went in and started getting the Hamas guys out, but it was impossible to operate with all the



Eitan's unit meeting with Hadas Loewenstern, wife of Elisha hy"d.

civilians there, so they started to move the civilians out of the hospital. I sat there in a tank, seeing children and the elderly walking through the streets with their hands raised, which was very difficult for me.

I started to discuss it with my tank driver, himself a philosophy student at university. He said, "Eitan, think about what we are doing - we are trying to get civilians out of the line of fire, just like we are doing in Israel!" He was right - in Israel, hundreds of thousands of civilians have been moved from their homes out of the conflict zone. If Gaza had a normal government who cared for their people, they would have moved their civilians out of the line of fire, but they did just the opposite! So we had to deal with population movements, but all of it was to get civilians out of the line of fire, because we cared more for them than Hamas did. This was a very important framing for me.

The other thing I learned, and clarified both through what I saw and through discussions with my comrades, is what the battlefield really is. War is an arena where you face constant moral decisions, in real time, all the time. A lot of people sitting in TV and radio studios around the world fundamentally miss this - they philosophize about all sorts of things, but they're detached from reality. I have heard some people say: "Yes, Israel has the right to destroy Hamas, but there has to be another way to wage the war." This is actually privilege-based ignorance, of people who don't know what war, and especially war in urban areas against terrorists, actually is. With my own eyes, I saw the IDF capture 70 Hamas operatives, some of whom personally took part in the October 7th massacre. I know that there was absolutely no way to do this without first moving the civilians out of the Hamas compound. It may be uncomfortable, but you cannot pretend that there is another way to do this when there isn't.

These decisions also are made in real-time by commanders who are responsible for the lives of many soldiers. When we were in civilian areas, we communicated to the people that they could not enter within a 50 meter perimeter of the tanks. During Operation Tzuk Eitan (Protective Edge, 2014), a number of times "civilians" came close to tanks, before detonating explosive devices. One day, a woman crossed the perimeter and started approaching the tanks. Our unit fired warning shots in the air, called out to her to stop, but she kept approaching. In the end she was actually killed by accident as a bullet rebounded and hit her. The commander making that decision cannot sit and philosophize - he has seconds to make a decision, based on the perceived risk to the lives of the soldiers under his command. Pundits and journalists with zero experience of the battlefield really don't know what that is like.

One thing that also grounded me is that we in our unit were constantly discussing these issues. In the tanks, at night, we would have animated discussions about getting the balance right, and what the right thing to do was. For me, the very fact that we have a goal to maintain our morality, in the face of Hamas who have no morality, and the fact that we are constantly discussing these issues, is already a strong sign that we are on the right path.

I also had a powerful realization in the midst of these discussions - that for me, Zionism means dealing head on with moral challenges, rather than backing away from them. It would be more convenient to be able to back away, to just quit the war and not have to face moral questions. But we don't have that luxury. Zionism means we have to deal with all the realities, all the difficult questions, and I am proud of all of us for doing that.

Tell us about some of the soldiers you are fighting with.

Our division of tanks was all reservists of whom about 60% were secular and 40% were religious. Just my tank was such a fascinating cross-section - the commander of the tank is younger than me, and a secular *kibbutznik*. The shooter is a Yemenite Jew from Rechovot who doesn't keep Shabbat and is a big fan of British rap, but was passionate about ensuring we *davened Kabbalat Shabbat* together every week. And the driver was a Hesder Yeshiva graduate like myself. Each week, the four of us *davened Kabbalat Shabbat* together - first the Yemenite *nusach* and then Ashkenazi!

People sometimes misunderstand and think that people have to serve in reserve duty. Technically that is true, but there are many ways for people to get out of it. The people fighting are choosing to be there, choosing to continue even when it takes a



Eitan with his friend and fellow tank soldier Asaf Feldman, whose aunt and uncle were kidnapped by Hamas on October 7th.

long time and takes an emotional toll. War is not easy, but the overwhelming feeling is that we as a group are going to stay and do whatever is needed to get the job done.

Between the religious guys in the unit, and with many of the secular guys too, I found myself learning and talking about Torah a lot while we were there. Somehow the Torah gave me a lot of comfort in those challenging times.

What do you mean – in what way was Torah comforting to you?

This was my first time in a war, experiencing things that are much bigger than me, and it's hard to find a way to process them. The Torah is so eternal and multi-generational, you can always find something in the Torah that can help you understand more. I mentioned that I cried in the car in Tel Aviv. I didn't have the language to really understand why I was crying – but then I look at *Sefer Bereishit* and see how our forefathers and foremothers cried, what they cried for, and I start to understand my own emotions more. I even started a form of WhatsApp blog from Khan Younis, discussing different Torah ideas I had whilst in the tank – writing, and especially writing Torah concepts or at least engaging in ideas, really helped me.

What were your feelings like when you came out of Gaza and returned home?

I am still processing it, as there are so many emotions. We know we have done something very important, but the job isn't finished yet and we know our unit may be called back to carry on fighting. But it is always the right emotion to feel thankful. Thankful to G-d for protecting me and our unit. Thankful to Elisha who made the ultimate sacrifice, and to Shachar who lost his leg, to protect *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael*. Thankful to my wife Elana, who despite



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu congratulating Eitan and his tank unit for their work in Khan Younis. (PHOTO: SCREENSHOT FROM YOUTUBE VIDEO)

being pregnant and watching our two kids continued to give me strength and support throughout. And thankful to *Am Yisrael*, whose messages of support from Israel and the Diaspora gave us so much strength. I am thankful that I have had the huge *zechut* to play a very small part in the incredible story that is *Am Yisrael's* struggle to defend its people, land and sovereignty.

We are still in the middle of this war, but we have to continue to believe. One thing that I feel so strongly is that as well as believing in Hashem, we have to really believe in *Am Yisrael*. We have seen such strength, our spirit is strong, and we cannot lose hope. We have been able to fight militarily, spiritually, emotionally, and even if it may take more time we need to keep our spirits up. With faith in Hashem, and with faith in *Am Yisrael*, *B'Ezrat Hashem* we will win this war, return all the hostages, and be able to continue building *Medinat Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael*. ■



Eitan with his tank unit.



MIZRACHI
WORLD MOVEMENT

World Mizrachi's Missions to Israel

85+ MISSIONS SO FAR



Students of Yeshivat Har Etzion (Gush) hearing from Ari Bar-Shain, a participant on Mizrachi's leadership programs, at the site of the Nova music festival.



Our mission from Mizrachi Canada (Toronto) volunteering at a farm in Kfar Maimon.



Volunteering at a lettuce packing plant with the mission from Young Israel of Staten Island and Kemp Mill Synagogue.



National Council of Young Israel's Leadership Mission met members of a special army unit that NCYI support.



The NCSY Canada and Shaarei Shomayim shul mission from Toronto sponsored a BBQ and Moshav Band performance at an IDF Air Force base.



Mizrachi UK's rabbinic solidarity mission visited Kibbutz Be'eri.



As part of the SKA mission, the students held a special bat mitzvah celebration for girls from the north and south of Israel.



During their trip, the Mizrachi France solidarity mission of 40 participants visited the Knesset.



Over 25 educators from yeshivot and seminaries were taken to the south for training before bringing their students to the area as part of Flying the Flag Down South project.



Mizrachi Canada's Women's Mission visited the site of the Nova music festival.



A solidarity mission from Chicago, with 50 participants from two communities (Congregation KINS and Congregation Or Torah), picking kohlrabi at the Leket fields in Rishon LeTzion.



"Bergen County Unites for Israel": A World Mizrachi and Sulamot mission with 120 participants from six communities in Teaneck and Bergenfield.

BRING A SOLIDARITY MISSION TO ISRAEL WITH WORLD MIZRACHI

FOR MORE INFORMATION: MISSIONS@MIZRACHI.ORG

A MOTHER'S PAIN, A MOTHER'S PRIDE

THE FAITH OF JEN AIRLEY



ON THE 5TH OF KISLEV, 21-YEAR-OLD BINYAMIN AIRLEY HY"D FELL IN GAZA. SINCE THEN, BINYAMIN'S MOTHER JEN HAS BEEN AN INSPIRATION TO ALL OF AM YISRAEL, SPEAKING OPENLY FROM THE HEART WITH EXTRAORDINARY STRENGTH AND FAITH. RABBI ARON WHITE SPOKE WITH JEN TO HEAR ABOUT BINYAMIN'S LIFE AND LEGACY.

Thank you for speaking with us, Jen. Can you tell us about your family and your journey to Israel?

I am from Florida, my husband Robert is from Manchester and we met in Yerushalayim. We got married in 1999 and started our lives together in New York. For me, the plan was always to make *Aliyah*. Robert wasn't as eager. During Thanksgiving in 2003, he went on a mission to Israel with the Red Shul of the Five Towns, and in Chevron he had a powerful, emotional experience. When he got home he said, "Alright, I'm ready for a five-year plan to make *Aliyah*." Hashem helped us out, and we reached the financial target we had set sooner than we expected, so three years later we moved with our three kids to Ramat Beit Shemesh. In Israel, we had another three children. Binyamin was our oldest son. When we moved, he was only 4 years old, so we weren't thinking about him serving in the army, but it was also clear that the path we were taking was one where our children would serve in the army.

Tell us about Binyamin.

Physically, he was tall and good looking, but even more beautiful and strong on the inside. He was very connected to the ideal of growing as a person, that real *gevurah* is the battle with the *yetzer hara*, and growing to be the best person he could be. "*Eizehu gibor, hakovesh et yitzro*, Who is strong? One who conquers his desires." When he was in the army, he had said: "We need to do what we need to do, but the real battle is fought through our prayers."

He went to quite a few different schools. Ultimately, by 11th grade we found the right fit - which ended up being a *yeshiva* high school in Eilat. He thrived there before joining the *hesder yeshiva* in Tzfat. It's fitting that he received his education at opposite ends of the country, because he loved every inch of this country and knew almost every junction, almost every natural spring, and almost every *tiyul* in Israel.

He wanted to join an elite army unit. He passed the test for paratroopers, and joined Unit 101. He was drafted in August 2021 and really loved the *yeshiva* boys he was with.

He was taken up to *shamayim* on November 18th. He was actually supposed to be finishing his service in December 2023, but he probably would have stayed on longer. He wouldn't have been able to return to *yeshiva* while the war was still going on - he wanted to continue fighting and couldn't stand the idea that others would be fighting while he would be far from the war.

Where were you, and where was Binyamin, on October 7th?

Binyamin spent a lot of time on a farm near Neve Tzuf, protecting the area there. On Sukkot, he was doing *shemirot* in Chevron with the army, but was released on Hoshana Rabbah for *chag*. He went to Neve Tzuf to make a *minyan* for Simchat Torah.

We were in Ramat Beit Shemesh for Yom Tov. Once we saw all the surreal scenes of all the soldiers driving on streets that are usually silent on Shabbat, I knew that Binyamin had also been

called up. That night, he called to say that he was at a base in the north, and from there they were helicoptering down south.

His unit went to Nir Am, a *kibbutz* adjacent to Sderot, checking house by house to make sure there were no terrorists. After a few days, he called from some landline to tell us he was ok. After some time, his *tzevet* went to a paratrooper training base for intensive training to prepare for going into Gaza. Before they went in, the army hosted a family picnic on October 27th just outside the base. We had a couple of hours all together. On Monday they gave in their phones and on Tuesday they went into Gaza, where he fought for two and a half weeks before he was killed.

He trained as a “*Negevist*,” a role given to the stronger soldiers who operate the Negev machine gun. When they were training to go into Gaza, he was in a group of 16 guys who were essentially bodyguards of the brigadier general and the special equipment for all the paratroopers in Gaza. Technically, they were “safe,” as they weren’t on the frontline of battle, and other soldiers were assigned to protect these guys. Binyamin was frustrated that he wasn’t fighting himself. At one point, the other *Negevist* got injured, so Binyamin was then given the Negev gun and was involved in the fighting.

They were stationed in northern Gaza. There was a house from which Hamas terrorists were shooting. The soldiers engaged them, but they weren’t able to neutralize the terrorists from afar. One *mefaked*, Jamal Abbas, a Druze soldier, along with his right-hand man Shachar Friedman, said: “I’m going in – we just can’t have the terrorists shooting at us and putting many soldiers in danger.” Binyamin saw they were going in and he still had his Negev, and he said: “You need ammo. I am coming with you.” He pushed his way in to join the soldiers. They got into the house, killing two terrorists, but one was hiding in the corner, and he killed all three of the IDF soldiers. It was typical of Binyamin to push his way forward – to take care of whatever needs to get done.

This was on Shabbat morning, November 18th. When were you informed that he had fallen?

That Shabbat morning, I was at *shul*. Right after Torah reading I started feeling antsy and unable to stay. My ten-year-old daughter was surprised to see me going home, but I said I felt I had to go home and say Tehillim. I was bawling and *davening* for a while – I didn’t know what I was feeling. I just told my daughter I wished everyone could be home for Shabbat together. My Chana sat there hugging me. She gave me *Sefer Mitzvat HaBitachon* (*The Mitzvah of Trusting G-d*) and said, “I think you need this.” We learned together, wiped my face and carried on. We got ready for lunch, and that afternoon we were taking a nap. My husband, who had been napping on the couch downstairs, woke me up and frantically said: “Get dressed and come downstairs.” “Are the kids ok?” I asked him. “No,” he said. I worried something happened to Chana, but why was it so quiet? No ambulance siren? As soon as I left my room and saw the soldiers at the staircase, I knew what that meant. I understood the phrase: “*Vayidom Aharon, And Aharon was silent*,” when he learned of the death of his sons. There was nothing to say other than “*Baruch Dayan HaEmet*.”

I asked them when he had fallen, and they told me the battle was between 9:30 and 10:30 in the morning – pretty much when



Jen and Binyamin hy”d.

I had left *shul* and came home. It was a shock, but on some level it wasn’t.

The soldiers were special. They were very caring, gentle, and figured out how to tell the other children, who were in different places for Shabbat. It was surreal.*

When a soldier dies defending Israel, there is often a dynamic where the private pain of the family and friends becomes also the national pain of a whole nation. Did you experience that?

At the time we felt it was just our tragedy; we know a lot of people, and at the funeral it was pouring rain. All we could see were the people in the front who we knew; we had no idea how many people were there, many of whom we had never met. We knew it was live streamed for our family in the Diaspora, but only later learned that so many people we don’t know from Israel and around the world also watched it. It was very personal to begin with, but as the *shiva* was getting larger and larger, it dawned on me that you never know who is hearing you and watching you. Binyamin became someone people could connect with, a *dugma*, a role model, and people want to learn from him and gain inspiration from him. Every step of the way he has reached hundreds and thousands more people; we never could have imagined that he would reach so many people. He was our Binyamin, but now he belongs to everyone, as every soldier does. I feel that way visiting other *shivas* – these soldiers are all my soldiers, they are all our soldiers. Everyone feels this connection to them.

I was hesitant, but decided that I should speak at the *levaya*. I asked each person to take on one thing to try and improve themselves as a person. People I never met were coming into the *shiva*

*Editor’s Note: In the past, it was IDF policy to not to inform families of a death on Shabbat. However, in an age of pervasive social media and instant knowledge, this policy was changed. Unfortunately, numerous families of fallen soldiers and terror victims found out through neighbors and WhatsApp messages, rather than through trained IDF soldiers. In order to prevent this problem, the IDF now informs families of a loved one’s death on Shabbat.

and talking about it – one woman even told me she had turned her whole house kosher! I tend to be a positive person and try to help others and pick them up, but on a one-to-one basis, not with crowds. I think people have connected because I am just a mother, and I speak from the heart – I am just going one day at a time, speaking to whichever person, group or community Hashem brings our way.

You have become a source of strength for many others, but what gives you strength?

Firstly, I really feel that Hashem is constantly sending us hugs and kisses. I take great comfort in the verse, “*Shivtecha u'mishantecha heima yenchamuni*, Your rod and Your staff – they comfort me,” that even when there is judgment, I know it all comes from Hashem, and we can still find Hashem even when the judgment of his rod and his staff is painful. I take comfort knowing that He is watching out for me. I also take great comfort seeing the thousands of people Binyamin is now touching, the people who are striving to learn from him and grow because of him. It is the greatest comfort – thousands of people are learning from him and taking things on in his memory. He is part of bringing *Mashiach*. I really feel Binyamin is giving me the *koach* to keep going, and Hashem keeps sending me people to speak to. I see the growth of *Am Yisrael*. It's remarkable and a great comfort.

We cry every day for him – when we see a new picture of him, when we hear something else that he accomplished – but we have made a conscious decision not to ask “*Lama, Why?*”, but “*Le'ma, For what? What can we do now?*” There is no point in going down the dark road, staying in bed. We have moments. We feel, we acknowledge, we pick up and move forward. He wouldn't want it another way. He wants us to dance.



Binyamin hy"d and his father Robert.



How do you want Binyamin to be remembered?

Binyamin was a magnet for all kinds of Jews, and had a way of bringing people in. One thing he loved doing was bringing people along to *Kabbalat Shabbat*, so one thing we want to do is to create a spiritual, emotional place for therapeutic recovery. There are so many soldiers who have become religiously inspired during this time, from wearing *tzitzit* to connecting to other elements of Judaism. Binyamin learned in the Tzfat Yeshiva, and we want to create a program there that can be a point of entry for them where they can heal in a religious context.

Binyamin's essence was also intertwined with *kedusha*, with holiness. He believed deeply in *kedushat haAretz*, the holiness of the Land of Israel, and that this holiness is intertwined with *kedushat Am Yisrael*, the holiness of the people of Israel. He really believed that we are fighting this war to enable Jews to be able to live all over Israel, and believed passionately in Jews moving to live here. On Sukkot, he was involved in planting a new vineyard in the Shomron. It was so Binyamin that at his funeral, the first rain of the season started to fall. He believed deeply in the gift of *Eretz Yisrael*.

You are speaking to communities around the world. What is your message to the Jewish people?

Part of Binyamin's legacy is that he really maximized his life, even if it was short. The message I hope he leaves is to inspire everyone to try and be their best self, and to maximize everything in their life. I really believe that each of our soldiers who have fallen in this war are working in heaven, building the *Beit HaMikdash*, and it is our job, here in this world, to work to bring it down, and with it the complete redemption. ■

Olim Giving Back to Israel



נפש Nefesh
בנפש B'Nefesh

ALIJAH
FACILITATION

Levi Margolin

“For those considering making *Aliyah*, my advice is to act decisively and embrace the experience. Living in Israel is special, and its joys and challenges are best understood by experiencing them firsthand. Take a chance, come experience it. You will never know the joys of living here without living here! It’s truly so special.

Living in Israel has been a remarkable journey. One of the greatest joys is the pride it brings to my parents. It also gives a sense of connection for my extended family, as they can say they have a relative living in Jerusalem. Our home has hosted over a thousand guests from across the globe for Shabbat, an experience that has deeply enriched our lives – being a part of Jewish history with every breath, every step, every milestone in life.

My move to Israel started in 2012 while leading a Birthright Israel trip, I met an Israeli woman who caught my eye. This led me to extend my stay, initially for three months, during which I started working at Mayanot, the organization I was leading Birthright trips with. By 2014, I had completed my *Aliyah* within Israel. Initially, it didn’t pan out with the Israeli woman, but I stayed in Israel to see what life could bring and, long story short, I am now the Executive Director of our Birthright Israel division and that Israeli woman is now my wife!

This entire journey has taught me the importance of patience, especially when adapting to the bureaucracy and culture in Israel. Asking for help and embracing the local community have been also keys to my success here – playing the *oleh chadash* card is still fun for me!

My life in Israel is filled with inspiring and humorous ‘only in Israel’ moments. During the war, I’ve been involved in visiting soldiers and displaced families, which has led to recognition due to my social media presence and community efforts. I’ve experienced the unique social fabric of Israel – like when I, a Chabadnik, can be seen with non-religious people, celebrating together and encouraging others to join us or when I have run-ins with local officials who are also my neighbors.”

Dr. Ken Bendik

“My name is Ken Bendik. My wife and I made *Aliyah* on October 18, 2023, moving from Los Angeles to Israel. This significant move was driven by a deep sense of belonging in Israel, especially in light of the ongoing war. We felt an undeniable pull to be in Israel during this critical time. Last March, I attended Medex which, as a dentist, made my process of obtaining my Israeli Dental License remarkably smooth.

I meticulously followed NBN’s instructions and requirements, which streamlined the entire process. Allison Levine Speiser was instrumental in this journey. After submitting and getting my documents approved, she advised me to contact her once we made *Aliyah*, promising to ensure that my license would be issued. True to her word, about a week after our arrival, my license was issued.

Despite NBN offering to delay our planned *Aliyah* flight due to the war, the thought of not being in Israel was impossible to us. It felt like abandoning a close relative in their time of need. Being in Israel during this period has been really moving, particularly witnessing the fighter jets and soldiers. Seeing our Jewish army in action and soldiers with their rifles, each on a sacred mission, brings tears to our eyes and reinforces our decision to be here. The experience of making *Aliyah*, especially during the war, has been both emotional and affirming. The sense of purpose and connection to Israel has only increased since our arrival.

For any medical professional considering obtaining an Israeli license, I strongly recommend attending Medex in March – even those thinking about *Aliyah* more down the line. NBN’s guidance and support is invaluable, and I can’t imagine navigating this process without their help. In Israel, the sense of community and shared mission is also really palpable, and being here, contributing in our own way, feels exactly right.”



נפש Nefesh
בנפש B'Nefesh

MEDEX

Hineni

Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

After fighting for over a hundred days, the soldiers of Gedud 9215 were discharged. Rabbi Baruch Weintraub received a Medal of Honor on behalf of Gedud 9215 and was chosen to speak at a ceremony honoring the battalion. The following are a translated selection of Rav Baruch's remarks.

What are we thinking and feeling today as we are released from service?

At least for me, and I believe many of you can identify with me, the answer relates to where

I was this morning. Today is the 7th of Shevat, the *yahrzeit* of my father, Moshe Dov Weintraub z"l, and I spent the morning at my father's grave. My father was born in Romania during the peak of the Second World War and the *Shoah*. His parents hid together with him in a bunker and ran from place to place so as not to be captured. At the age of 6, he made *Aliyah*, and later served in the Six-Day War in Sinai and in the Yom Kippur War in the Golan as a reserve soldier. After the Yom Kippur War, one of his relatives suggested that he leave the country. "There will always be wars here," he said to my father. My father did not answer him with words but rather through action. He stayed here, and at the age of 39 – the same age that I am now in this war – he served in the first Lebanon War in 1982.

I don't think my father's story is unusual; I am sure there are many here today with fathers or grandfathers whose personal history is similar. This is the answer to the question I began with. We feel the way our fathers and grandfathers did – that when our brothers ask, "Where are you?," we will say "*Hinenu*, we are here."

Our success, as ordinary soldiers, should not be measured only by military achievements. The first question recorded in Tanach is the question that Hashem asks Adam: "*Ayeka*, Where are you?" Adam did not know how to answer this question, and so he hid. The first person to properly answer this question is our forefather Avraham. The answer is: "*Hineni*, I am here." Ever since Avraham, *Am Yisrael's* answer has always been "*Hineni*." From our bondage in Egypt to the Babylonian Exile, from the Spanish Inquisition to the Russian pogroms, and from the Holocaust in Europe to the wars that the Arabs rage against us here in the land of our forefathers. In every generation, there are people who stood up and said "We are here, we believe in the Jewish people's mission to transform this world into a better place, and we are ready to sacrifice and risk our lives for this belief in good." Everyone who is here in Gaza had the choice to not be here, yet chose to say "*Hineni*." With that choice, we have joined a very long march, a very long journey, of people who believe in good.

Who knows, with Hashem's help, perhaps the next letter in the *megillah* will be written by our children – not with tanks, fire, and smoke but rather with tools of building, growth, and love. "ה' עז לעמו יתן, ה' יברך את עמו בשלום" Hashem will give His people strength, Hashem will bless His people with peace."



Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

is a graduate of Yeshivat Har Etzion. He fulfilled his Hesder army duty as a tank soldier in the Armored Corps. After serving as the Assistant Head of the Torah MiTzion / Yeshiva University (YU) Beit Midrash in Toronto, Rav Baruch was appointed community rabbi of Mevaser Zion, Tel Mond. In 2018, Rav Baruch returned to Yeshivat Har Etzion to teach a Shana Bet shiur.



Rabbi Weintraub deep inside Gaza, writing an article in memory of his student Shai Pizam hy"d who fell in Gaza on December 15, 2023. (PHOTO: YESHIVAT HAR ETZION)



AMBASSADORS OF THE HEART

אני לדודי ודודי לי

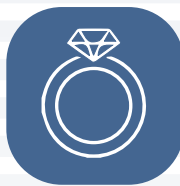


**ISRAEL'S MOST SUCCESSFUL
SHIDDUCH INITIATIVE IS COMING
TO YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD,
AMBASSADORS OF THE HEART!**

**SIGN UP NOW
AND HELP YOUR FRIENDS
TO FIND THEIR SOULMATES!**



**DISCREET & SECURE
FOR ALL SINGLES**



**ENGAGEMENTS
EVERY 3 DAYS**



**ADVANCED
ALGORITHM**

A project of



Scan here to apply to
become an ambassador:



<https://en.shagririm.org.il/>

The Ambassadors of the Heart (aka "Shagririm Balev") project is based on volunteers and donors and is not for profit. The project maintains a high level of discretion and the database is closed with access to ambassadors only.

The Scene of Destruction

Visiting the Gaza Envelope

Rabbi Aron White

In January each year, Israel's Route 232, the main highway connecting the towns of Sderot, Ashkelon and Re'im, is filled with people traveling to the forests and fields on the Gaza border. *Darom Adom*, "The Red South", is a celebration of the beautiful red anemones that flower here at this time of year. This year, a steady stream of cars and buses are driving on Route 232, but they are visiting a wounded region that became the "Red South" in a very different way on October 7th. The lush green fields, orchards and flowers provide moments of respite as one travels between the sites of disasters and atrocities that are hard to comprehend.

Our trip, a Mizrahi mission of rabbis from the UK, visited Sderot, the site of the Nova party massacre, Be'eri and Ofakim. Each place had a different feel and was a unique experience. But more significant than the physical sites were the extraordinary people we met there.

Sderot – an urban shoot-out

Arriving on Herzl Street in the center of Sderot, you don't immediately realize that you have arrived at a war zone. It feels like a standard, old Israeli street, with apartment blocks and a *makolet*, with an empty plot of land covered in sand and metal. On October 7th, a three-story police station stood on that plot of land. It was attacked by 26 Hamas terrorists, who wanted to take control of the station to enable them to rampage freely around the city. Yair Avinoam, one of the brave people who fought Hamas on that day, showed us around, interspersing his walking tour of the area with photos, videos and WhatsApp voice-notes from October 7th on his phone.

Yair works as a prison guard and is a member of the civilian security team, the *kitat konenut*, together with paramedics, hi-tech workers, and other ordinary civilians. On the morning of the



attack, after 20 minutes of non-stop rocket sirens, messages began circulating about a terrorist infiltration into the city. The *kitat konenut* jumped into action, and Yair was directed to head to the police station, where there were reports of fighting. Yair arrived, and saw a car with the driver and front passenger shot and two girls in the back seats. He pulled the girls out under fire, and found one of the students at the Sderot Yeshiva to give the girls to. Their parents were tragically killed, but, thanks to Yair, the two young girls survived.

As Yair showed us where he fought, he saw a policewoman across the road. “She was in the building when the terrorists arrived,” he told us. The battle for the police station lasted for many hours, with 9 policemen losing their lives. This policewoman managed to get to the roof, where she lay for hours pretending to be dead. She was lying in puddles of water, as the shooting had exploded the water tanks on the roof, and had to make sure she didn’t shiver. Eventually, special forces brought her down from the roof. After 48 hours of fighting and once it had become clear that no Israelis in the building were still alive, an IDF helicopter and two tanks leveled the police station.

The destruction we witnessed at the police station was a stark contrast to our conversation with Rabbi Dovid Fendel, the Rosh Yeshiva of the Sderot Yeshiva. He told us about his plans to continue developing the city. The spirit of Sderot was wounded, but as always in this Israeli capital of resilience, it was not broken.

Re'im – where the music stopped

As we drove to the site where the Nova festival took place, almost every road sign pointed to a location that is now etched into collective Jewish memory. The Sha'ar HaNegev junction, Kfar Aza, Nir Am; each of these saw death, destruction and heroism on October 7th. It would take weeks to actually visit every site and take in all the stories from that day.

Arriving at Re'im Park, we saw the field where the central stage of the festival stood, and what seemed like countless pictures of young people who were slaughtered there. 371 were killed, hundreds more injured, and 45 taken as hostages to Gaza, making this the single largest murder scene from that day. The partiers came from all over the country, ensuring the pain of October 7th touched every major city in Israel. While our group was there, the mayor of Yavneh, a mid-sized town nearer to the center of

the country, was lighting a candle next to each of the pictures of the 6 citizens of his town who were murdered.

We saw a young man with a cane walking around the pictures. I asked if he had been at the Nova, and he said he had been at Be'eri. I asked him if he would be willing to speak to our group, and so he and two friends told their story. They were in a commando unit of Sayeret Matkal (General Staff Reconnaissance Unit) that was called in the morning of the attack and they fought the Hamas terrorists at Sha'ar HaNegev and Be'eri. All three of them were injured in the fighting. One rabbi asked them how old they are. “21,” he said.



Three members of Sayeret Matkal who were injured on October 7th address the mission.

Be'eri – the epicenter of pain

Of all the locations we visited, Be'eri is where the physical destruction is most visceral. Elad Keidar, a *kibbutz* member, told us his story amid a row of destroyed homes. His pain is unimaginable. His parents were murdered, his mother’s body is still being held in Gaza, and his sister with special needs was saved from her burning home. It is hard to describe the experience of walking through a burned house. Like a modern version of Pompeii, you get a glimpse of the community’s day-to-day life, preserved amid the utter destruction. The family pictures on the refrigerator, burned. The food mixer in the kitchen,



Above: The memorial at the site of the Re'im massacre. Left: The site of the battle of the police station in Sderot.



The group speaking with Elad outside a destroyed home in Be'eri.

melted out of shape from the fire. Clothes and toys in the bedroom, remnants of a normal family living an ordinary life. Seeing the life of October 6th interwoven with the death of October 7th was emotionally overwhelming.

As one rabbi put it, you can still see the remnants of *Gan Eden* amidst *Gehennom*. The paths are beautiful, some homes are untouched, while others are ruined beyond repair. Most jarring is the way time has frozen. The clinic, where 21-year-old Amit Mann treated the wounded for six hours before she herself was killed, is still covered in bullet holes, and much of the wreckage of the attack is still there. The *sukkah* outside Elad's home is still standing, months later. Signs in the dining room still advertise the Tai Chi class for October 10th and the parent-children activity planned for October 24th. By that date, 9-year-old Emily Hand and other children from the *kibbutz* were being held hostage in Gaza. At the time of writing, most of the *kibbutz* members are living in hotels near the Dead Sea, with a number of residents still held hostage in Gaza.

Ofakim – Moroccan pain and life

On the drive to Ofakim, we passed the beautiful fields alongside Road 241. These fields were the route taken by many of those saved from the Nova festival. Encouraged by local residents and policemen who realized it was the only safe route, hundreds of partiers ran or were driven across these fields, arriving at Patish, Netivot and Ofakim.

At Ofakim, we are welcomed into the beautiful home of Moshe Ohayon, who was murdered together with his son Eliad on October 7th. Michal, Moshe's sister, told us the story of her "powerhouse" brother. They grew up in a large Moroccan family in the center of the country, but Moshe moved to a new neighborhood of Ofakim to help develop one of Israel's poorer cities. He was a "chesed powerhouse," helping hundreds of families each week.



Hearing the story of Moshe and Eliad Ohayon hy"d.

He arranged for local army bases to contribute surplus food to the community, helping to feed 500 people a day. When the opportunity to lead a social entrepreneurship program arose in Haifa, he drove two hours each way to lead the program. On Hoshana Rabbah, just 24 hours before his murder, he hosted a *Sukkat Shalom*, a meeting in the *sukkah* of members of different parts of Israeli society. On Simchat Torah itself, he hosted a large number of children with special needs who were enjoying a special *Yom Tov* celebration. He never stopped giving, until literally his last day.

When the first terrorists arrived in Ofakim, the residents were confused. Initially, many mistook them for IDF soldiers in strange uniforms. Ofakim is a half-hour drive from Gaza, and is part of the south rather than the Gaza envelope. It was difficult for people to grasp that terrorists from Gaza could be driving

around Ofakim. Most of the fighting took place on Tamar Street, with each house on this suburban road carrying a story. Moshe and Eliad Ohayon were murdered in front of one house. Rachel and Moshe Edri, who famously kept the terrorists distracted for 18 hours by giving them cookies before being saved, live further down the road. As we walked around the neighborhood in the driving rain, we could feel the residents' fierce determination to continue living here. On October 7, they fought for their homes and families – and they are determined to stay.

Concluding thoughts

For decades, Jews around the world have come on missions to Israel, but the missions of the last few months have been radically different. In the last 50 years, Israel has fought wars and faced terror attacks – but on October 7th those two horrors merged into one. The battle front was not at the Suez Canal or in a field in the Golan Heights, but on streets in Sderot, Be'eri and Ofakim. The warriors who fought back included the IDF, the police force and local security teams, but also ordinary residents who did whatever they could to defend their homes. The fact that homes became the battlefield raised sensitive issues on our mission. In Be'eri, Elad asked us not to photograph certain homes, whose owners are not comfortable with their private home being photographed by the masses of visiting groups.

What remains most powerful on these trips is not the places, but the people. Those hours of October 7th affected hundreds of thousands of people, each of whom carry a story and emotional scars. One can read and hear countless stories, but nothing compares to a first-hand interaction with those who lived through that day.

Most remarkable was that every person we met smiled. The handful of people we spoke to represent thousands of Israelis who have experienced loss and trauma that will never fully heal. But their spirit is strong; they are not broken, but determined. And it is their spirit that reverberates among those who visit them, and through them around the world. *Gan Eden* may have been turned into *Gehenom* – but they are determined to rebuild their lives.

On a personal note, during this mission I experienced one of the most moving moments of my life. About a month-and-a-half prior, I had volunteered to join the IDF, along with many other olim and Israelis who had previously not served who were now signing up to join the war effort. As we were standing in the burned home of the Keidar family in Be'eri, I received the call from the IDF telling me my enlistment date. At least on a personal level, I felt I was making the tiniest impact in the large machine that is the IDF, in helping my country ensure no Jewish homes would ever be burned again.



Rabbi Aron White
is the Managing Editor of HaMizrachi magazine.

Deloitte.

You Analyze Develop Impact Here

Looking for challenging
work in audit or tax?

Our Beit Shemesh office is growing.
Come join an exciting opportunity to serve US clients
from Israel in English!

Check out the opportunities at
Deloitte on our career site:
www.jobs.deloitte.co.il/



JEWES with VIEWS

We asked five accomplished Jews from around the world: Which song have you most connected with during the war?



Shai Abramson

A few days after the war began, Chanan Ben Ari released a song called *Moledet*. It manages to capture so much that we are feeling today. The final verses bring me to tears each time: “You are unique and the only one, you will always be my homeland. Even on the edge of the abyss, even in *Gehenom*, you are *Gan Eden*.” This is our story in this Land. It will always be our homeland; we are deeply connected to this place. There has been such sadness and pain in the last few months, but even in the midst of hell our homeland is still *Gan Eden*. I have found myself singing it to myself at all points of the emotional rollercoaster of the last few months – as I returned home from *shiva* calls and funerals, and also as I returned from inspiring moments, like weddings of soldiers in uniform.

I also connect deeply to the *Tefillah for Chayalei Tzahal*, the Prayer for the Soldiers of the IDF, which is so unique and speaks deeply to us now. I was asked to sing it in the Knesset on Tu BiShvat, the Knesset’s 75th birthday, and it was so moving – we associate the Knesset as a place of division, but praying for the welfare of our soldiers is something that unites us all.

Shai Abramson was appointed Chief Cantor of the Israel Defense Forces in 2008. Abramson serves as the representative cantor of the State of Israel, and participates in this capacity in formal state occasions and ceremonies.



Sherri Mandell

I appreciate the simplicity and power of the song “*Am Yisrael Chai*.” This song symbolizes the grit, determination, love, passion, resilience, steadfastness, will, persistence, and – most importantly – the eternity of the Jewish people. These three words summarize the mission of the Jewish people.

Am – be a nation, a holy nation, the nation of Israel. No matter how many people hate you and want to destroy you, insist on the holiness of your nation and mission.

Yisrael – after fleeing from Esav and fighting with the angel of Esav, Jacob is left alone and wounded. His name is changed to Yisrael, he who struggles with G-d and with man and prevails. Notice that Jacob is left alone – he is in solitude – but he prevails. We, as the Jewish people, will always be a singular nation and we will struggle, even in our own country – but we will be victorious. That is the promise that G-d gave us, and that is our deepest faith.

Chai – the vitality of this nation is astonishing. The whole nation has come alive to fight our enemy. High-tech firms in Tel Aviv dedicated their staff to helping the survivors of October 7, grandmothers are driving down south to pick fruit, hundreds of soldiers abroad on vacation flew home to fight. Instead of walking away or cowering in fear, we are all embracing our nation.

We know how to choose life and to live life in the fullest way. Because we are here not only for ourselves, but for the whole nation. And for eternity.

Sherri Mandell is a certified pastoral counselor, and is the co-founder of the Koby Mandell Foundation which runs healing groups and camps for bereaved families and children. Her latest book is “The Kabbalah of Writing: Mystical Practices for Creativity and Inspiration.” She received a National Jewish Book Award in 2004 for her spiritual memoir, “The Blessing of a Broken Heart.”



Shim Craimer

The song that has inspired me in these most trying of times is Chanan Ben Ari's haunting "Shevurei Lev." One of Chanan's many talents is to write melodies that really connect to his lyrics. The power of these words can only truly be understood if they are accompanied by a soulful passionate melody. Each melodic line matches perfectly with the poetic lyric.

This song provides us with the means to cry out to Hashem, to show Him that we know He is in charge. Only He knows everything we are feeling. Only He has the means to pardon and forgive, to embrace us and ensure that we will never give up. Only He has the power to heal our broken hearts and renew lives. And these are the feelings that make this song so special. Chanan gives us the magic of musical expression to not only allow us to grieve during such turmoil in our beloved homeland, but to also give ourselves hope. We cry to Him, but we also know Hashem has the power to mend our broken hearts.

Shim Craimer was born in London and studied music at the Royal Academy of Music. Shim spent 15 years in New York as the Chazzan of the Riverdale Jewish Center and continues to return there on a regular basis. Shim travels the world as a Ba'al Tefillah and performs in concerts, weddings and other events with many Jewish orchestras and ensembles. He has released a number of albums and videos and continues to produce new material every year.



Ricka Razel

This war made me realize the real incredible impact of music – both the comfort it brings and how it helps us connect to our emotions.

On October 7th, we all experienced a state of shock. That night I was supposed to perform at a big dance concert (*Hakafot Shniyot*), but instead of the *hakafot* we got *hatkafot* – bomb attacks. Instead of performing, I sat with Yael Kalifa in my house and together we sang "Acheinu," an ancient prayer that all of a sudden took on a new, real, and emotional meaning.

The song begins with: "Our brothers, the family of Israel, who are in danger and bondage, whether on land or at sea," and continues with a prayer for salvation. We were wordless on that horrible day and this song expressed exactly what we were feeling at that moment. The song became a savior.

In the following weeks, I played music for families evacuated from their homes and for injured soldiers. Each time we sang "Acheinu," I felt the power of unity, of coming together with song, hope, and a shared sense of prayer.

Ricka Razel began her performing career in a family band as a teenager. Decades later, the now religiously observant mother-of-eight has returned to the stage – now playing only for female audiences. Ricka is currently recording a new duet together with Nina, of the musical duo Yonina.



Rabbi Yossi Goldin

The songs that have given me the most strength during these challenging months have been two songs that my two-year-old son, Yaacov, came home singing a few weeks after the war began.

The first song is called *אֶנְחֵנוּ לֹא נִפְחָדִים*, which describes *Am Yisrael's* confidence that is based in *אֱתָהּ ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ ה' אֱתָהּ* – we know that Hashem is with us and will protect us. The second song is called *אֵל תִּירָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵל תִּירָא*, which focuses on another aspect of our confidence – namely that we as a nation are as strong as a lion, and therefore we have the ability to protect ourselves and defeat the enemy. These two songs have become a staple in our home each Shabbat.

To me, the combination of both songs speaks to the crucial balance we must have as a nation during a time of war. On the one hand, we must exude a confidence of spirit and a trust in the strength of our army to defeat those who want to destroy us. On the other hand, we must always remember that ultimately our success in this war depends on Hashem – and we must continue to pray that He guide us to a complete victory.

What gives me the greatest strength is the symbolism of being taught these two songs by my toddler child – the comfort in knowing that despite the challenging times we live in and despite all the pain and fear, my children are growing up with a deep sense of conviction and passion for the Jewish nation and what we stand for, from my oldest in high school to my youngest in *gan*.

Rabbi Yossi Goldin is Director of Young Israel in Israel, Branch Coordinator for NCIY, and heads the Shuls Department at World Mizrahi. He is also Israel Immersion Coordinator and Placement Advisor for YU/RIETS in Israel.



MIZRACHI
WORLD MOVEMENT



Rediscovering Hope in the Gaza Envelope's Lesser-Known Communities



by **Inbar Gabay Zada**
Director of Development at Sulamot

In the heart of the Gaza Envelope, amidst the rugged terrain of the Negev, a narrative of resilience, unity, and triumph is unfolding. The communities of Shokeda, Tzochar, and Talmei Eliyahu, generally overlooked by the media and lacking in supplemental security funding from the government, radiate hope in a region well within the line of fire.

Under the visionary leadership of Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon, Sulamot has embarked on a journey to adopt eight communities affected by the terror of October 7th through Project Atufim. This project, in partnership with World Mizrachi, not only sheds light on the challenges faced by these communities but has also brought incredible moments of joy as our joint effort begins to yield fruit and people slowly begin to return home. This is their story.



Rabbi Eli Taragin, CEO of Sulamot, joins the children of Shokeda in planting a tree upon their return home in February 2024.



The joyous Hachnasat Sefer Torah celebration in Shokeda marks their first return home since October 7th.

SHOKEDA: A STORY OF RESILIENCE

Surrounded by eucalyptus forests and anemone fields, Shokeda stands as a testament to its people's unwavering spirit. On October 7, as terrorists targeted neighboring *kibbutzim*, Shokeda faced a harsh reality: they were simply not prepared for such a crisis. Already contending with regular rocket fire, the community's trauma deepened. Its primarily young families endured a hasty evacuation and four months of displacement as their loved ones served on the frontline.

In response to this crisis, Sulamot acted swiftly, recognizing the need for leadership and support. Through thorough assessment, an executive director was appointed to spearhead rebuilding efforts and tend to the community's emotional well-being. Sulamot's collaboration with Shokeda has guided the recovery journey, implementing long-term rehabilitation plans.

The return of Shokeda's residents in mid-February marked a poignant milestone. Amongst the familiar trees, children played and neighbors reunited, brimming with joy and relief. Reflecting on the journey of the past few months, Rabbi Eli Taragin, Sulamot's CEO, was invited to plant a tree – a symbol of growth, resilience, and enduring partnership. As the saplings take root, it will serve as a poignant reminder of Shokeda's strength and the transformative power of hope.



The entrance to Tzochar, where community members tragically lost their lives to terrorism on October 7th.

TZOCHAR: STRENGTH AMIDST VULNERABILITY

Though Tzochar narrowly avoided a direct attack on October 7, the community suffered the tragic loss of three of its members who died while defending their main junction during the assault. With insufficient protective measures and a lingering sense of fear, residents were adamant about not returning home without security and stability. Unfortunately, government funding was denied due to the town's location – just 200 meters shy of the bureaucratic line determining eligibility for assistance.

In a remarkable turn of events, Sulamot's relentless fundraising efforts have yielded a triumph: by mid-February, half of Tzochar's community returned home.

Thanks to the generous support of Jewish communities and individuals across the world, Sulamot secured vital funds for a comprehensive security camera system, transforming Tzochar's streets into places of safety rather than fear. This remarkable achievement not only signals a pivotal moment in Tzochar's journey but also underscores the profound impact of the collective action of Jewish communities that partnered with Sulamot's Atufim project in the face of terror.

TALMEI ELIYAHU: BEYOND THE HEADLINES

Despite its significance, 9 out of 10 people have never heard of Talmei Elyahu. Yet the lives of several hundred individuals hang in the balance as the future of the northwestern Negev *moshav* is determined.

On that fateful October morning, members of the emergency squad stood as guardians, creating a human wall to deter terrorists from infiltrating on October 7th, bravely defending their home from terror. Yet Talmei Elyahu faces an uphill battle. Adjacent to Tzochar, it also falls short of government security funding, even as it is well within the line of rocket fire.

Undeterred, Sulamot is addressing critical security gaps and nurturing the dreams of Talmei Elyahu's residents. Through collaborative efforts and unwavering determination, the community is reclaiming its sense of security and unity.

Without our support, an entire Jewish community in southern Israel may be abandoned, depriving its residents of the chance to return home – something we are determined to prevent.



Tomato picking in Talmei Elyahu resumes after the events of October 7th.

“THEY THAT SOW IN TEARS SHALL REAP IN JOY”

Sulamot founder Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon says that in order to rebuild shattered communities, young people must play a pivotal role. “These families are in trauma and they need to *want* to return. If the children feel excited about their return, the parents will too. Rather than focusing on fear, we want these young families to focus on a hopeful future.”

Echoing this sentiment, CEO Rabbi Eli Taragin elaborates on Sulamot's holistic approach: “Through Project Atufim, we're not merely focusing on security; we're also leading the development of parks and promenades in Tzochar and Talmei Elyahu. Each playground area is designed to assure children that they are safe and strong.”

Fulfilling Queen Esther's poignant cry for action, “Go, gather together all the Jews” (Esther 4:16), individuals, alongside Jewish communities from around the globe, have rallied to support the Atufim initiative, ushering in a new dawn of hope and renewal for these lesser-known communities.

“The eight communities we're partnering with are emerging stronger, united in their determination to overcome adversity.” Rabbi Taragin further emphasizes, “Every initiative that Project Atufim advances, whether it involves physical spaces or programs enhancing emotional well-being, is meticulously crafted. Each endeavor represents empowerment, safety, and the enduring vitality of *Am Yisrael*.”

As blossoms of hope unfurl in the Gaza Envelope, a new chapter begins – one filled with promise, possibility, and the enduring spirit of *Am Yisrael*.

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

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

From New Jersey to Gaza: *A Woman of Valor*

Sivan Rahav-Meir

A few weeks ago, I spent Shabbat with the Israeli community in Tenafly, New Jersey. A few minutes before Shabbat began, arriving straight from important meetings in Washington, D.C., Ron and Orly Gilboa, parents of hostage Daniella Gilboa, joined us.

I have been praying for Daniella bat Orly – and suddenly, Orly was here. Hundreds of people came together for the Friday night meal this past Shabbat and, a moment before *kiddush*, Rabbi Yitzchak Gershovitz, the local Chabad *shaliach*, asked everyone to dedicate the singing of *Eishet Chayil*, “Woman of Valor,” to Daniella, while praying for her speedy return.

Eishet Chayil is a hymn from the book of *Mishlei* that is sung every Shabbat on Friday night. Each verse begins with another letter of the *alef-bet*. The words are generally dedicated to the woman of the house, to a mother or to a wife, or to all the women of our nation. And now we were being asked to dedicate these words to Daniella. We were sending them from New Jersey to Gaza.

“A woman of valor, who can find?...
Her lamp is not extinguished at night...
Strength and splendor are her garments...
Give her the fruit of her hands...”

So began a most meaningful and inspirational Shabbat. When I asked Orly what sustains her, what gives her strength, she said it is precisely what was happening that Shabbat in New Jersey and elsewhere – gestures of solidarity and mutual responsibility from throughout the world, prayers and lovingkindness on the part of people she never met before but to whom she is now connected in the depths of her soul.

May we all hear good news.

● *Translated by Yehoshua Siskin.*



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. She is a primetime anchor on Channel 2 News, has a column in Israel's largest newspaper, *Yediot Acharonot*, and a weekly radio show on *Galei Tzahal* (Army Radio).



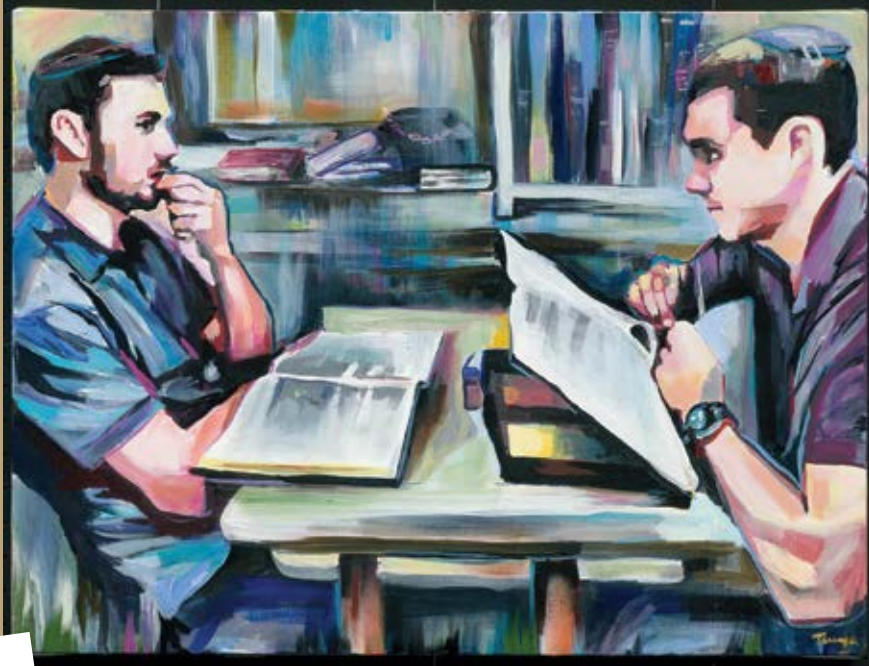
A member of the Mizrahi Speakers Bureau
mizrahi.org/speakers





TZURBA

THE LAX FAMILY EDITION



NEW!

Tzurba Volume 18

The third volume of Hilchot Shabbat topics

DEDICATED IN LOVING MEMORY OF

David Schwartz ז"ל AND *Yakir Hexter* ז"ל

WHO FELL TOGETHER IN GAZA PROTECTING
ERETZ YISRAEL AND AM YISRAEL

כ"ז טבת תשפ"ד 8, 2024 JANUARY

Volume 18 is available for pre-order on tzurbaolami.com/shop

Orders will be fulfilled at the end of March once the volume is printed. Check the website for more info.



MIZRACHI

SECURITY & NON-DIGITAL PRINTED PAPER



ERETZ YISRAEL AND WORLD MIZRACHI

 **TZURBA**
THE LAX FAMILY EDITION

TO PURCHASE

To purchase Tzurba volumes in Israel
go to tzurbaolami.com/shop

FOR MORE INFO

For more info about Tzurba please
contact neil@tzurbaolami.com

available at


A Time of Confusion and Clarity

Rabbi Reuven Taragin

The Jews of Shushan were confused. They considered Shushan and the Persian Empire their home and viewed themselves as central to its social and political structure. They knew Haman hated them, but assumed the king would never adopt his genocidal suggestions. Haman was an extremist, but the Persian ‘mainstream’ was tolerant and accepted the Jewish people. Achashverosh invited them to his lavish party. How could he suddenly call for their annihilation?

Like Yosef in Egypt, Persian Jews contributed to society and thought they were safe. Like Ya’akov’s family, they were suddenly targeted for persecution. For the first time since Egypt, the Jewish people were back in exile and, once again, subject to the whims of their host nation and its leaders.

The Babylonian and Persian empires were the first of many stops during our lengthy exile. We returned to Israel and rebuilt the *Beit HaMikdash* but were exiled again after its destruction. Scattered across the globe, we continued suffering the same fate. We contributed to our host countries and often achieved positions of power and prominence. We assumed that we were safe because we were appreciated and respected. And then, often without warning, we were attacked, persecuted, and even banished.

The Jews of Shushan were merely the first Jews to experience the confusion of exile. Jews of England, Germany, France, Spain, Russia, Ukraine, and eventually everyone in European and Arabic lands suffered the same fate.

Today, we are even more confused than our ancestors. Our liberal societies purportedly do not judge their citizens based on their religious or ethnic identity. We assumed that our Jewish identity would no longer be an issue and that we would no longer be attacked. Though there would always be antisemites, we were confident that the educated and tolerant mainstream had learned the lesson of the Holocaust. We assumed we would never again be hypocritically singled out or demonized.

We were wrong. Since October 7, organizations like UN Women have accused us of the very crimes that were perpetuated against our people. Over 1,200 Jews were slaughtered on October 7, but we are the ones accused of genocide.

Jews in New York, London, and Paris are confused. How could hundreds of thousands march in favor of Hamas and the destruction of the State of Israel, shouting Nazi propaganda? How could universities, supposed bastions of humanism and multiculturalism, tolerate calls to attack and murder Jews? How could the ICJ seriously consider the slanderous claims against the State of Israel?

Thousands of years have passed since Shushan, but we remain confused. Why are we always attacked, mistreated, isolated, and lonely?

Yechezkel explains that Hashem uses antisemitism to stem our assimilation (20:32–33). When Jews see themselves as part of broader society, Hashem ensures that society will remind us that we are different. We are the nation that dwells alone (Bamidbar 23:9), and Hashem has given us a unique mission.

Don Isaac Abarbanel, the most prominent Jew among the Spanish exiles of 1492, believed Yechezkel’s prophecy spoke to his generation as well. Spanish and Portuguese Jewry flourished in the Iberian Peninsula for centuries, but with the advent of the Inquisition, they were suddenly persecuted and banished. Based on Yechezkel’s prophecy, Abarbanel explained that the persecution was meant to remind Iberian Jewry that they were different and did not truly belong in exile.

Anne Frank responded similarly to Nazi oppression: “The persecution reminds us that we are not like the rest of the nations of the world – we have a higher purpose... We can never become just Netherlanders, or just English or representatives of any country for that matter. We will always remain Jews” (*Diary of a Young Girl*, April 11, 1944).

Yirmiyahu begins *Megillat Eicha* by wondering why the Jewish people are so isolated,

and why no one consoles us when we suffer. He answers that Hashem keeps others from sympathizing so that we are forced to return to Him. Knowing that only G-d cares for us forces us to turn to Him.

Like the Jewish people in the times of Yechezkel, Yirmiyahu, and the Abarbanel, we now have clarity. We gained entry into elite schools, professions, and neighborhoods. We thought our host countries had fully accepted us and believed our societies had overcome racism, prejudice, and discrimination. But recent events are a rude reminder that this is not the case.

The time has come to revisit and internalize the words of Anne Frank: “Who has made us Jews different from all other people? Who has allowed us to suffer so terribly up until now? It is G-d who has made us as we are, but it will be G-d, too, Who will raise us up again. Who knows, it might even be our religion from which the world and all peoples learn good, and for that reason and only that reason do we suffer.”



Scan here to join Rabbi Taragin's daily Divrei Torah WhatsApp group



Rabbi Reuven Taragin
is Educational Director of Mizrahi
and Dean of the Yeshivat Hakotel
Overseas Program.



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

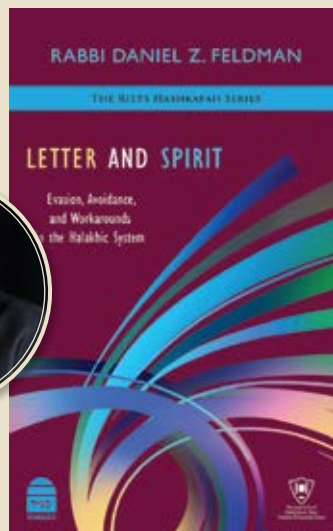
AVAILABLE NOW

from

Koren Jerusalem

in association with

Yeshiva University Press



LETTER AND SPIRIT: Evasions, Avoidance, and Workarounds in the Halakhic System by Rabbi Daniel Feldman

Halakha contains apparent “workarounds” – such as the sale of chametz to non-Jews before Pesach or the use of the *prozbol* to avoid the cancellation of loans. Rabbi Daniel Feldman draws upon the history and halakhic treatment of these mechanisms to consider when and why some of them are accepted, some are resisted, and some find mixed responses but all are attempts to remain loyal to the letter and the spirit of the law.



DIVREI SOFERIM: The Transmission of Torah Shbe'al Peh by Rabbi Hershel Schachter

For the first time Rav Schachter presents, in one volume, the teachings of our Sages from across the generations together with his own personal approach regarding the *Torah Shebe'al Peh*, the halakhic process, and the importance of *Mesorah*.

Words of Peace and Truth

Rabbanit Shani Taragin

Mordechai and Esther, the authors of *Megillat Esther*, place the story in the historical context of Persian King Achashverosh – as opposed to the Jewish community of “*Shivat Tzion*,” the returnees to Yerushalayim. In doing so, they highlight the disconnect between Persian Jewry and their brethren in Israel. They describe the Persian capital as “*Shushan HaBira*, Shushan the Capital,” a highly charged term – for the only other city in Tanach referred to as “*HaBira*” is Yerushalayim in David’s prayer for his son Shlomo to build the *Beit HaMikdash!* (Divrei HaYamim I 29:1,19). This is one of many allusions in *Megillat Esther* to Yerushalayim and the *Beit HaMikdash*, intended to subtly criticize the Jews of that era for remaining in Persia after Cyrus’s proclamation in 538 BCE allowing exiled nations to return to their homelands and rebuild their temples. Only 42,360 Jews returned to Yerushalayim (Ezra 2:64), while the multitudes remained comfortably settled in their Diaspora communities. When writing and editing the *megillah*, Mordechai, Esther and the *Anshei Knesset HaGedola* used satire to expose and criticize the Jews for their loss of direction, identity and values. Through humor, irony, and exaggeration, they mock the Jews for not answering the Divine call of *Shivat Tzion*.

In addition to repetitive stark parallels and literary connections between the palace of Achashverosh and the *Mikdash*, the entire storyline is laden with implicit criticism of the Jews for their preference of Shushan over Yerushalayim. This year, as we read the *megillah* on *Motzaei Shabbat*, well-rested and fed, we have an opportunity to pay close attention to the satirical messages at the conclusion of the *megillah*, when we would expect a mass “*Aliyah*” movement following the rise of Persian antisemitism and threats of Jewish genocide.

Mordechai instituted special enactments (Esther 9:20–22) reflecting the prophet Zechariah’s message of helping the needy

and establishing unity (through *mishloach manot*) to assure successful long-term settlement in Israel and the establishment of the *Beit HaMikdash* in Yerushalayim. The closing verses tell us that “The Jews undertook and irrevocably obligated themselves and their descendants, and all who might join them, to observe these two days in the manner prescribed and at the proper time each year” (9:27). Instead of obligating themselves to move to Israel, they left the responsibility to make *Aliyah* for their children, instead celebrating a two-day Diaspora holiday to commemorate the message “and the memory of them shall never perish among their descendants.”

Frustrated by the passivity of her fellow Jews, Esther “wrote a second letter of Purim for the purpose of confirming with full authority the aforementioned one of Mordechai the Jew” (9:29). What did she write in this second letter? One short phrase – “*Divrei shalom ve’emet*, words of peace and truth” (9:30). This phrase is first found in the prophecies of Zechariah when he responded to a delegation of Jews visiting Israel while the second *Beit HaMikdash* was under construction. The Diaspora Jews wondered whether they must continue fasting on the ninth of Av if redemption is clearly underway. Zechariah explained that the long-term success of rebuilding is not up to G-d, but rather to them – if they settle in the land espousing values of “peace and truth” (Zechariah 8:18–19). If the nation builds a community in the Land with “*shalom*” and “*emet*”, not only will they cease fasting on the ninth of Av, but all the fast days of destruction will be transformed to holidays!

Unfortunately, the *megillah* ends on a sour note. Instead of returning to Israel to build a value-based society and celebrate more holidays together, the Jews remain in the Diaspora. “Just as they have assumed for themselves and their descendants the obligation of the fasts with their lamentations,” they continued to observe the fast days in commemoration of national

calamities (Ibn Ezra, Esther 9:30) – and they’re taxed! This second letter explains the reason for the long-term establishment of Purim. It is an annual reminder of the prophecies of Zechariah which remain unfulfilled!

Why didn’t Diaspora Jewry immediately complete their *Nefesh B’Nefesh* applications and prepare for *Aliyah*? Perhaps a mass return to Yerushalayim was not realistic given Samaritan security threats and a weak economy and social infrastructure. Nonetheless, Mordechai, Esther and the *Tanna’im* instituted a holiday that would remind *Am Yisrael* that should such an opportunity for return arise again, especially under looming threats of antisemitism, they would know how to properly respond.

The *megillah*’s message is “disguised” and easily missed if we are unfamiliar with the prophecies of Tanach. There is no time better than the present to “unmask” its eternal encouragement to return to Israel, establish a value-based society of “peace and truth” and merit the rebuilding of our *Mikdash* in Yerushalayim, as our fast days and mourning are transformed to annual days of celebration. The fulfillment is up to us!



Rabbanit Shani Taragin

is Educational Director of Mizrahi and the Director of the Mizrahi-TVA Lapidot Educators’ Program.



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

נפש Nefesh
בנפש B'Nefesh

ALIYAH:
THE TIME IS

NOW



WWW.NBN.ORG.IL

נפש Nefesh
בנפש B'Nefesh

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP TO BUILD A STRONGER ISRAEL THROUGH ALIYAH

 **הסוכנות היהודית
לארץ ישראל**
THE JEWISH AGENCY
FOR ISRAEL


Ministry of Aliyah
and Integration


קוד קופת לישראל
K.K.L. - J.N.F.

 **JEWISH
NATIONAL
FUND
USA**

Purim Thoughts

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ל"י

During his time as Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Sacks often spoke on BBC radio, addressing both Jewish and non-Jewish audiences. It is remarkable to read his words about antisemitism and how we relate to our enemies in the year 2024 – it reads as if he had written these remarks today! We publish here two of Rabbi Sacks' teachings, that were first broadcast on BBC Thought For The Day.

Remember the Past, Put it Behind You, and Build a Better Future

If you're driving through a Jewish area this Saturday night or Sunday, don't be surprised if you see lots of children in the streets wearing fancy dress and masks, or people going from house to house delivering presents of food and drink. The reason is that we'll be celebrating Purim, the most boisterous and exuberant of all Jewish festivals.

Which is actually very odd indeed, because Purim commemorates the story told in the book of Esther, when Haman, a senior official of the Persian Empire, persuaded the king to issue a decree to annihilate all Jews, young and old, men, women and children, on one day: a warrant for genocide. Thanks to the vigilance of Mordechai and the courage of Esther, the decree was not carried out, and ever since, we've celebrated by reading the story, having parties, giving to the poor and sharing gifts of food with friends.

I used to be very puzzled by this. Why such exhilaration at merely surviving a tragedy that was only narrowly averted? Relief, I can understand. But to turn the day into a carnival? Just because we're still here to tell the story?

Slowly, though, I began to understand how much pain there has been in Jewish history, how many massacres and pogroms throughout the ages. Jews had to learn how to live with the past without being traumatized by it. So they turned the day when they faced and then escaped the greatest danger of all into a festival of unconfined joy, a day of dressing up and drinking a bit too much, to

exorcise the fear, live through it and beyond it, and then come back to life, unhaunted by the ghosts of memory.

Purim is the Jewish answer to one of the great questions of history: how do you live with the past without being held captive by the past? Ours is a religion of memory, because if you forget the past, you'll find yourself repeating it. Yet it's also a future-oriented faith. To be a Jew is to answer the question, "Has the messiah come?," with the words, "Not yet."

There are so many parts of the world today where ancient grievances are still being played out, as if history were a hamster wheel in which however fast we run we find ourselves back where we started. Purim is a way of saying, remember the past, but then look at the children, celebrate with them, and for their sake, put the past behind you and build a better future.

● *This is a transcript of Rabbi Sacks' broadcast on BBC Radio 4's Thought for the Day, February 22, 2013.*



Purim and the Longest Hatred

In a few days' time we'll be celebrating the Jewish festival of Purim. It's a joyous day. We have a festive meal; we send presents to our friends; and gifts to the poor, so that no one should feel excluded. Anyone joining us on Purim would think it commemorates one of the great moments in Jewish history, like the Exodus from slavery or the Revelation at Mount Sinai.

Actually though, the truth is quite different. Purim is the day we remember the story told in the book of Esther, set in Persia in pre-Christian times. It tells of how a senior member of the Persian court, Haman, got angry that one man, Mordechai, refused to bow down to him. Discovering that Mordechai was a Jew, he decided to take revenge on all Jews and persuaded the King to issue a decree that they should all – young and old, men, women and children – should be annihilated on a single day. Only the fact that Esther, Mordechai's cousin, was the King's favorite allowed her to intercede on behalf of her people and defeat the plan.

Purim is, in other words, the festival of survival in the face of attempted genocide. It wasn't until way into adult life that I realized that what we celebrate on Purim is simply the fact that we're alive; that our ancestors weren't murdered after all.

Like many of my generation born after the Holocaust, I thought antisemitism was dead; that a hate so irrational, so murderous, had finally been laid to rest. So it has come as a shock to realize in recent months that it's still strong in many parts of the world, and that even in Britain yesterday a cleric appeared in court charged with distributing a tape calling on his followers to kill Jews.

What is it about Jews – or black people, or Roma, or foreigners – that causes them to be hated? The oldest explanation is probably the simplest: because we don't like the unlike. As Haman put it, "Their customs are different from those of other people." And that's why racial or religious hate isn't just dangerous. It's a betrayal of the human condition. We are different. Every individual, every culture, every ethnicity, every faith, gives something unique to humanity. Religious and racial diversity are as essential to our world as biodiversity. And therefore, I pray that we have the courage to fight prejudice, of which antisemitism is simply the oldest of them all. Because a world that can't live with difference is a world that lacks room for humanity itself.

● This is a transcript of Rabbi Sacks' broadcast on BBC Radio 4's *Thought for the Day*, February 22, 2002.



The Rabbi Sacks Legacy

perpetuates the timeless and universal wisdom of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks as a teacher of Torah, a leader of leaders and a moral voice. Explore the digital archive, containing much of Rabbi Sacks' writings, broadcasts and speeches, at www.rabbisacks.org, and follow The Rabbi Sacks Legacy on social media @RabbiSacks.



Do the Laws of Mourning Apply on Purim?

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

The Mishnah lists special days that [prematurely] end a mourner's *shiva*: "Shabbat counts as part of the seven days and does not end the *shiva*, while festivals end the *shiva*... Rabbi Gamliel says: Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are like the festivals, but the sages say: Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are like Shabbat" (*Moed Katan* 19a). This means that if a person buried his relative before one of the festivals, the festival interrupts the *shiva* and cancels it, while Shabbat does not interrupt the days of *shiva*, but is counted as one of the days. Regarding Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the *tana'im* differed as to whether they are treated like a festival (and interrupt the *shiva*) or as Shabbat (and do not interrupt the *shiva*).

Does Purim interrupt *shiva*?

The Mishnah does not mention Purim as a day that interrupts *shiva*, and the *rishonim* argued about its status. According to *Sefer HaMiktzo'ot* (Rosh, *Moed Katan* 3:85), the reason the festivals interrupt *shiva* is that there is an obligation to rejoice in them, and so Purim, on which there is also an obligation to rejoice, also ends *shiva*.

On the other hand, Rabbeinu Gershom (*Mordechai*, *Moed Katan* 909), Maimonides (Laws of Mourning 11:3) and others believe that Purim does not end *shiva*, but rather counts as part of the seven days. Their proof is from the Mishnah, which did not count Purim among the festivals that end *shiva*. Practically, the Shulchan Aruch rules according to the opinion of the majority of the *rishonim*, that Purim does not end *shiva* (*Yoreh Deah* 401:7).

How is mourning on Purim practiced?

Among the *poskim* who rule Purim does not interrupt *shiva*, there is a dispute as to whether and how mourning is practiced on Purim. According to Maimonides, Purim is considered like a regular day of *shiva* in

regards to mourning practices: "The dead are not eulogized on Chanukah and Purim, nor on Rosh Chodesh, but all the regular laws of mourning apply on these days."

On the other hand, according to the Maharam of Rothenburg, since Purim is a joyous day, mourning practices are not observed on Purim, even though Purim does not end *shiva*. Purim is like Shabbat, on which mourning is practiced in private but not in public, and so on Purim, mourning is practiced privately. "A Jew once died three days before Purim, and I told [his relative] that he should not mourn [on Purim] in any way, for he must observe '*mishteh v'simcha*,' and on Chanukah and Purim it is forbidden to eulogize and fast... but mourning practices done in private should still be practiced, for Purim is not better than Shabbat."

The basis of the debate concerns the nature of the obligation to rejoice on Purim. In his interpretation of the view of the Maharam, the Ritva explains that Purim is characterized as a day of joy, explicitly comparing it to the biblical *mitzvah* of joy on the festivals. Therefore, there is a contradiction between the joy of Purim and mourning, which is the opposite of joy. The result is that the *mitzvah* of joy prevails over the *mitzvah* of mourning, because the *mitzvah* of joy on Purim is a national *mitzvah* (*Megillah* 5b).

On the other hand, in his interpretation of Maimonides' view, the Ritva explains that even though it is a *mitzvah* to have joy and make a feast on Purim, these *mitzvot* do not override even the rabbinic rules of mourning. According to Maimonides, mourning practices do not interfere with the *mitzvot* of Purim, for a mourner can still read the *megillah*, give *matanot le'evyonim* and *mishloach manot* and make a *seudah*. In other words, though Purim possesses *mitzvot* that are joyous, Purim is not, in essence, a day of joy, and there is no fundamental contradiction between the *mitzvot* of Purim

and the *mitzvot* of mourning, which can be observed side by side (*Moed Katan* 28b).

The practical halacha

There is a contradiction in the Shulchan Aruch's ruling on this matter. In the laws of mourning (*Yoreh Deah* 401:7), he rules according to the Maharam, that one only observes mourning practices on Purim in private, because as a general rule, we follow the lenient view in matters of mourning. However, in the laws of Purim, he rules like Maimonides, that "all mourning practices are observed on Chanukah and Purim" (*Orach Chaim* 696:4-5). In practice, both Sephardim and Ashkenazim rule like the Maharam, that mourning is only observed in private on Purim. Therefore, on Purim, mourners observing *shiva* wear normal shoes, untorn shirts, and are permitted to greet others, as he can on Shabbat. However, marital relations and bathing in hot water remain forbidden, for these are private matters.



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

is the Nasi of World Mizrahi.

He is the Founder and Chairman of Sulamot and La'Ofek, and serves as the Chief Rabbi of Gush Etzion, and Rosh Yeshiva of the Jerusalem College of Technology.

TRUTH AND TRANSFORMATION IN MEGILLAT ESTHER

SHAYNA GOLDBERG

Esther undergoes a magnificent transformation in the *megillah* that carries her name. In the early chapters of the *megillah*, she is a passive character, an orphan adopted and raised by her cousin, Mordechai. Esther looks to him for guidance in how to conduct herself, and when taken to the palace, she follows Mordechai's instructions to remain silent about her identity and her upbringing. Even in Esther's first recorded conversation with Achashverosh, when she tells him that his servants Bigtan and Teresh are plotting to assassinate him, the text emphasizes that she says it all "in the name of Mordechai" (2:22).

But beginning in chapter 5 of the *megillah* we encounter a new Esther. Suddenly, she is proactive and assertive. There is an abundance of verbs describing everything she is busy doing. She meets with the king, invites him to parties, comes up with ideas and calls all the shots. Esther has a game plan for how to save the Jews from Haman's evil decree, and courageously risks her life by approaching the king without an invitation. Even after Haman is hanged, she continues to take initiative, asking for the decree to be canceled, for the Jews to be given days to fight their enemies, for Haman's sons to be hanged and for the *megillah* to be written down.

The turning point in Esther's personal development is clearly her exchange with Mordechai in chapter 4. Mordechai says: "Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king's palace. On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another quarter, while you and your father's house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have

attained to royal position for just such a crisis" (4:13–14). Esther immediately replies by telling Mordechai: "Go assemble all of the Jews who live in Shushan, and fast on my behalf" (4:16).

What about this conversation has the power to effectuate such a significant change in Esther's core personality and approach? What shakes her out of her passivity and positions her to save her people? There are several possible explanations. It could be that Esther didn't realize how desperate the situation was, and so receiving the information directly from Mordechai motivates her to take action. Alternatively, perhaps she was aware of the decree, but it was Mordechai's belief in her that empowers her and gives her the confidence that she has the potential to make a difference in a way she hadn't internalized before. It could also be that Mordechai gave Esther a sense of mission and purpose, which gives her life meaning and direction. Until this point, she had been alone in the palace, pondering why she had been put in such a difficult situation. Suddenly, she understands her own personal significance and her unique role in Jewish history and destiny.

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein brings another perspective. He suggests that Esther was neither oblivious to the situation nor lacking self-confidence or a sense of purpose, but rather apathetic and complacent. Sheltered in the palace, she was not inclined to put her life on the line when the king had not called for her. And so Mordechai responds: "Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king's palace," telling her, in essence, to stop making excuses. Either she cares enough to take action, or she

doesn't. The Jews will be saved. The question that faces her is, 'What role do you want to play?'

Esther faces a moment of truth, and is forced to look deep inside herself and to decide what really matters. She realizes she has to stop hiding, take responsibility and make decisions that will shape Jewish history.

The Gemara in *Chullin* 139b explains that the name Esther appears in Devarim 31:18: "וְאֶנֶּכִי הִסְתַּר אֶסְתֵּר פְּנֵי בְיּוֹם הַהוּא", And I (Hashem) will hide My face on that day." G-d is hidden in Megillat Esther. But Esther, as we all do sometimes, also hides from herself.

Esther teaches us to stop hiding and to embrace duty, however it comes. When we are ready to face the truth as Esther did, we are capable of significant transformations.



Shayna Goldberg

is the author of the book *What Do You Really Want? Trust and Fear at Life's Crossroads and in Everyday Living* (Maggid, 2021) and a mashgicha ruchanit in the SKA Beit Midrash for Women of Yeshivat Har Etzion (Migdal Oz).

Sing a New Song

In Memory of Yaron Chitiz *hy*"d

Rabbi Doron and Gila Chitiz

One of the most anticipated moments during *megillah* reading is hearing the reader rattle off all of the ten sons of Haman in one breath. The Gemara calls this list a *shira*, a song, because when one looks at the list in the actual *megillah*'s parchment, it resembles "a half brick over a half brick" structure with two columns on either side. The Gemara explains that this particular type of structure is relatively unstable and prone to toppling and suggests that this style was chosen purposefully for the list of Haman's sons, to hint that "they should never rise from their downfall" (*Megillah* 16b).

Rabbi Yaakov Medan, Rosh Yeshivat Har Etzion, says that this song, as well as all the rest of the songs we find in Tanach, is meant to express gratitude for winning a war. The Song of the Sea, *Shirat Hayam* (Shemot 15), celebrates the victory over the Egyptians, the Song of the Well (Bamidbar 21) commemorates the victory over Sichon and Og, and the Song of David (Shmuel II 22) celebrates David's victories in the many battles with his enemies. Similarly, the song of Devorah (Shoftim 5), and the song of the kings of Canaan (Yehoshua 12) are victorious in nature as well.

These aforementioned songs acknowledge G-d's hand in their victory, together with the efforts of the soldiers who risked their lives. In many cases, the singers of these songs are women, who were the first to sing, rejoice, and play musical instruments after a war, as Miriam and Devorah did after the splitting of the sea and the victory over Sisera. When the warriors would return from battle it was customary for the women to welcome them in song, as in the story of David (Shmuel I 18:7) and the tragic case of Yiftach's daughter (Shoftim 1:34).

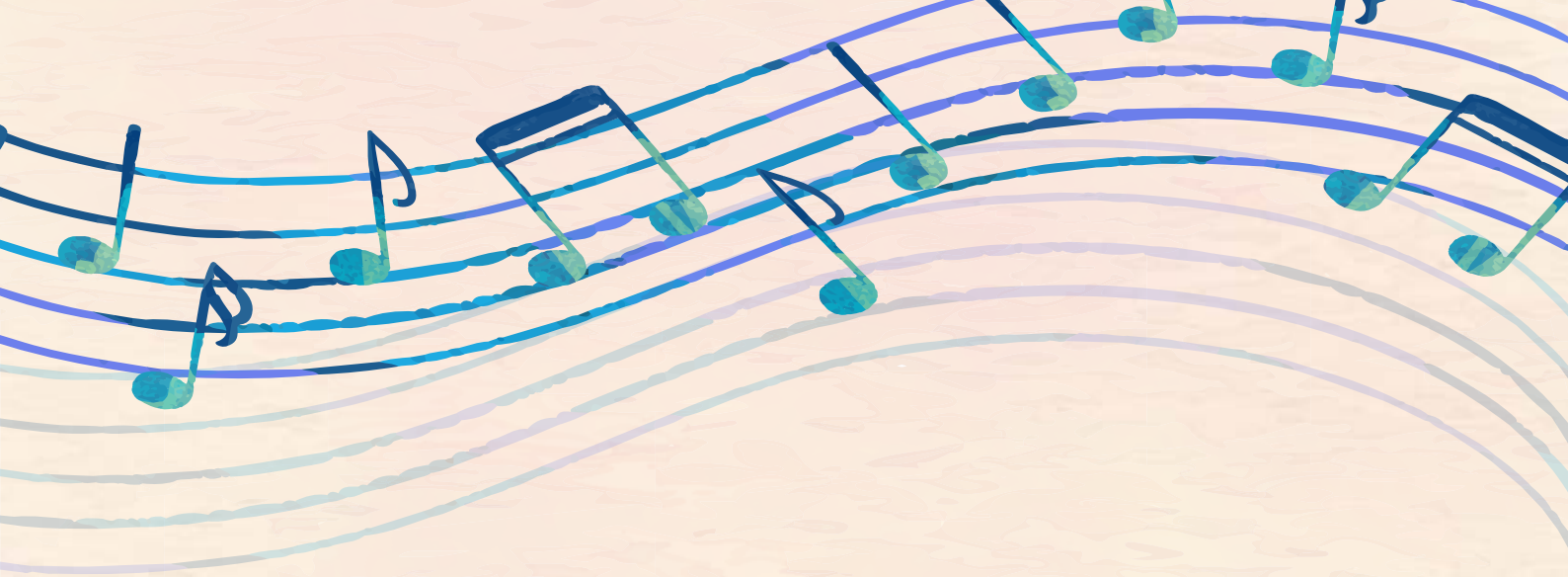


It seems that women, who generally did not participate in the battle itself, assumed the role of singing praise to G-d, both during the war and after they emerged victorious.

Since the beginning of our current war, which began on Simchat Torah, we have witnessed an upsurge of singing, both at the frontlines and at home. Soldiers are singing, families are singing, and music is connecting people to one another and to Heaven.

Yaron Chitiz *hy*"d, our brother who fell in battle in Gaza on December 26th, returned home for a visit only once during the war, for what turned out to be his final Shabbat in this world. During a very lively Friday night dinner full of talking and interesting discussions, Yaron banged on the table and said: "There's no chance that in Gaza they sing more *zemirot Shabbat* than here." This was our call to action, and we, too, began to sing – a powerful and memorable experience of the entire family together again, working our way through the *bencher*, song after song, well into the night.

Song allows us to feel connected with our soldiers on the battlefield, joining them spiritually while they fight the battles on



our behalf so that we can live in our homeland. Music has the ability to connect, to express and capture what words cannot, to transcend to other dimensions. Song enables us to powerfully connect with our precious soldiers on the front lines, and with Jews across the globe, who are also singing at their Shabbat tables.

At the beginning of the *megillah* we read: “On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine” (Esther 1:10). The Gemara asks: “Is that to say that until now his heart was not merry with wine? Did it take seven days for him to achieve merriment? Rava said: The seventh day was Shabbat, when the difference between the Jewish people and the gentiles is most apparent. On Shabbat, when the Jewish people eat and drink, they begin by occupying themselves with words of Torah and song of praise for G-d” (*Megillah* 12b).

Since Yaron’s death, just three days after that memorable Shabbat, singing at the Shabbat table has become an even more moving experience for us and for thousands of others. We receive such heartwarming and comforting messages from so many people around the world who share with us that they sing extra *zemirot* around their Shabbat table in memory of Yaron. In his death, he managed to inspire so many households to strengthen their bonds with Hashem and each other through song every Shabbat.

There is a recurring theme in many of the *zemirot* we sing on Shabbat. Many of them describe the yearning to rebuild the *Beit HaMikdash*. Though one might think we yearn for the *Mikdash* in order to bring sacrifices or participate in *aliyah la’regel*, the reason given in the *zemirot* for our yearning for the rebuilding of the *Beit HaMikdash* is so that we will be able to sing to Hashem:

“יבנה המקדש, עיר ציון תמלא, ושם נשיר שיר חדש”

“May the Temple be rebuilt, Zion’s city full again, and there we shall sing a new song” (*Tzur Mishelo*)

“למקדשך תוב ולקודש קודשך אתם די ביה יחדו רוחו ונפשיו ויזמרו לך שירי ורחשי”

“Return to Your Temple and to the Holy of Holies, a place where souls can rejoice and sing songs and praise” (*Ya Ribon*)

Just as the women living in the time of Tanach led the people in song, it is our job – those of us who are not fighting on the front lines – to lead our people in song today. Together with our soldiers, let us sing like Yaron, and increase song in our lives and at our Shabbat tables. Through this we connect with Jews throughout our using *zemirot Shabbat* to connect with each other, our brave soldiers, and Hashem in these trying times. We pray that we also connect with the Jews of the future (and may we all be included), who will merit to sing *zemirot* in the *Beit HaMikdash*.

The list of the sons of Haman in *Megillat Esther* can be read as a victorious song, when G-d turned Haman’s war of extermination against the Jews upon Haman and his own family in the aftermath of the war led by Haman’s sons to exterminate the Jews. “On the day that the Jews’ enemies looked forward to ruling over them, it was reversed, the Jews should rule over their enemies” (Esther 9:1).

Through our *zemirot* may we all merit to fill our homes with holiness, spirituality, *shalom bayit*, and a connection with all of *Am Yisrael* – past, present, and future. May we soon sing a song of victory over our enemies in our day as we did in the past, and may we soon experience light and rejoicing: “לְיְהוּדִים הָיְתָה אוֹרָה וְיָקָר לְיְהוּדִים הָיְתָה אוֹרָה וְיָקָר לְיְהוּדִים הָיְתָה אוֹרָה וְיָקָר לְיְהוּדִים הָיְתָה אוֹרָה וְיָקָר לְיְהוּדִים הָיְתָה אוֹרָה” (Esther 8:16).



Rabbi Doron Chitiz is the secondary school rabbi of King Solomon School in Hakfar Hayarok and is the educational director of Kehillat Shivtei Yisrael in Ra’anana. He is a worldwide sought-after teacher, lecturer and musician. **Gila Chitiz** is a project manager at Koren Publishers. She has degrees in Jewish studies and Tanach and is currently pursuing her MBA. She has learned and taught in midrashot around Israel. Rabbi Doron and Gila are graduates of Mizrachi’s Shalhevet program and were shlichim in Johannesburg, South Africa from 2019-21.



Purim: Time to Stand Up and Speak Out

Rabbi Ben Kurzer



One of the most dramatic moments of *Megillat Esther* occurs when Mordechai impresses upon Esther how critical the situation is and the unique role she must play. I have often found this conversation inspiring but never more than this Purim. Mordechai's words remind us all that there are moments in life where we are faced with choice and must stand up to boldly face the challenge ahead.

Interestingly, Mordechai's words seem to contradict an earlier directive at a crucial moment in Jewish history. "כִּי אִם-הִחַרְשׁוּ, תִּחַרְשׁוּ יָשִׁי בְּעַת הַזֹּאת, If you stay silent at this time," Mordechai explains, things will not end well. Yet there was an earlier moment in history when the Jews were told to do exactly that – to stay silent!

Almost a thousand years earlier, as our nation was trapped at the sea and the Egyptians were bearing down on them from behind, they cried out to G-d. At that moment, Moshe told them, ה' יִלָּחֵם, לְכֶם וְאֶתֶם תִּחַרְשׁוּן, G-d will fight for you and you will be silent." The phrase תִּחַרְשׁוּן shares its root with תִּחַרְשׁוּן and its connotation is not just about being silent – in *halacha*, a חרש is both deaf and mute and, in the ancient world, unable to function properly in society. Why were the Jews by the sea told to sit back and remain silent, while Mordechai demanded that Esther speak?

The stories of the splitting of the sea and the Book of Esther are paradigm examples of two different ways that G-d manifests in the world. The era of the Exodus was a time of open miracles, with supernatural plagues, manna from heaven and the

clothing that would not fray. By contrast, the age of Mordechai and Esther was defined by "hester panim, the hiding of G-d's face," when G-d's role in the world is hidden from the naked eye.

When it is clear to all that G-d is running the show, our role is to sit back and "remain silent." There is no need to get involved in any active way. However, during times of *hester panim* it is crucial for us to act. Mordechai's rousing words to Esther echo through the generations, for through most of our history G-d's hand has been hidden. Though we must learn to recognize the Hand of G-d, we must also act and participate in our own redemption.

My teacher, Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky, often shares this idea to encourage us to actively uncover the depths of the *Torah She'ba'al Peh*, the Oral Torah, and become an active participant in G-d's eternal conversation with *Am Yisrael*. However, since Simchat Torah I think of Mordechai's message in a different way. The horror of October 7 led to sickening demonstrations of antisemitism across the world, from the UN to Harvard to Leeds and beyond. As the world turns against us, we must not remain silent. Like Esther, we must raise our voices and become advocates for Israel and our people in every way possible.

The most alarming part of Mordechai's warning comes at the end of his message to Esther. He does not tell Esther that the fate of the Jewish people rests on her, but rather that her own fate is at risk. "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and rescue will arise for the Jews from elsewhere." G-d is the eternal saviour of our nation and will stand by us to the end

of time, but if we do not stand with our nation at this time, we will be the ones who lose out: "you and your father's household will perish."

To be a Jew in this world is different today than it was six months ago. Our enemies look upon us with hatred simply because our brothers and sisters have been forced to go to war to defend their homes and their families. Yet this is not the time to "be silent" and hide our Jewish identity, thinking that we will be left alone and escape unharmed. If we do not stand proudly as Jews today, it is us and our families who stand to lose out. We will be forgotten by history.

As we approach Purim, I pray that Mordechai's words inspire us all to stand openly and proudly as Jews with confidence in our future and with the strength to stand up to our enemies.



Rabbi Ben Kurzer
currently serves as the rabbi of Pinner United Synagogue. In May 2024, he will become the senior rabbi of Golders Green United Synagogue.

The Last Day of Haman's Life: A Talmudic Midrash

Rabbi Dr. Alan Kimche

The last day of Haman's life starts off well – but ends poorly. Immensely wealthy and powerful, with his genocidal plan for the Jewish people in full swing, Haman is honored to be invited to an intimate royal drink with the king and queen for the second time in two days. However, by the end of the day he is humiliated, forced to honor his archenemy by parading him publicly in the king's robes on the king's horse. Finally, Haman is executed by hanging, the fate he had planned for Mordechai. All this is stated explicitly in the text of the *megillah*.

The Talmudic *midrash* (*Megillah* 16a) fills in a rich account of missing details, adding a deeper background story, bringing these events to life and conveying some of the inner messages of the *megillah*.

Firstly the date is significant. In the text of the *megillah* (3:12) we read about the events of the 13th of Nissan that year. Royal couriers are sent to the cities of the Persian empire, instructing all citizens that eleven months later, on the 13th of Adar, there will be a massacre of the Jews by royal decree. Mordechai immediately rushes to inform Esther of this danger, and she agrees to risk her life in an attempt to change the king's mind, on condition that Mordechai unites the Jewish people in three days of fasting and prayers. The three-day fast was to start immediately, on the 14th, 15th and 16th of Nissan.

The Talmud comes to the inevitable conclusion that Pesach was canceled that year because of the fast. No *matzah*, no *seder* – everything was canceled. Mordechai's rabbinic power was sufficient to make that decision, to focus everyone's mind on prayer and *teshuvah*.

Fast-forward three days to the morning of the 16th. The king instructs Haman to honor Mordechai by dressing him in royal robes, placing him on the king's horse

and declaring him to be a most honored person.

Where and how did Haman find Mordechai, his most hated opponent, to invite him to be honored? For this we need the Talmudic *midrash*. It is the turning point in Haman's fate, from a meteoric rise to power to an instant fall.

The Talmud portrays Mordechai teaching Torah to his students. On this day, the 16th of Nissan, he had a special topic – *inyanei d'yoma*. The 16th is the day of the *Omer* barley sacrifice and the start of the *Omer* counting for all later generations. In Temple times, this day saw an elaborate ceremony centered around a fistful of newly harvested flour placed on the altar as thanksgiving for the sustenance of the new harvest.

At the time of the Purim events, approximately 2,500 years ago, the Jewish people had only recently been exiled from Jerusalem after close to 1,000 years of daily Temple service. In the absence of the *korbanot*, the Torah laws pertaining to each aspect of the Temple service was studied as a substitute for the ritual. This is what Mordechai was teaching. He was teaching the particular method used by the Kohen for grasping a '*kemitzah*,' taking a fistful of flour, releasing the thumb and little finger, leaving three fingers grasped around a very small amount of flour. This was the central act of the *Omer* ritual, which permitted the '*chadash*,' the new crop, to be eaten.

At this point Haman came to a critical realization – that the eternal destiny of the Jewish people would prevail over his amassed wealth and power, that his genocidal plans would fail and that he himself was doomed. This is the crux of the *megillah* and the source of the joy of Purim.

Referring to his offer of a fortune to be granted permission to eliminate the Jewish people, Haman says: "Clearly a few grains of your flour is more powerful than

my ten thousand talents of silver." By the end of that day he was executed.

There is an interesting parallel in the words of Bilam (Bamidbar 23:10): "Who can measure the dust of Ya'akov?" Rashi explains that even with the dust of the earth the Jewish people are able to perform numerous *mitzvot*: the ashes of the *Parah Adumah*, the dust of the *Sotah*, and the prohibition of planting *kilayim*. Bilam, like Haman, was determined to destroy the Jewish people, only to realize that *Am Yisrael* is indestructible. Like Haman, he saw that this is derived from our ability to make use of everything life offers, even seemingly insignificant items like dust, ashes or flour, and by dedicating it to a *mitzvah*, transforming it into something of eternal value.

More than ever, we are waiting for a Purim miracle, that the Hamans of our times, insanely driven '*l'hashmid laharog u'leabed et kol ha'yehudim*' will find that the eternity of our *mitzvot* is infinitely more powerful than all the wealth of Iran and Qatar, and that the indestructibility of *Am Yisrael* will once again be clear to all. May we soon see the destruction of our enemies and the return of the hostages.



Rabbi Dr. Alan Kimche

is the Senior Rabbi of the Mizrachi Community in Melbourne. A student of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l and Rav Chaim Shmuelewitz zt"l, he holds a PhD in Talmudic Law from University College London. Rabbi Kimche founded and led the Ner Yisrael Community in Hendon, London before making Aliyah in 2019.

הַמִּזְרָחִי

HAMIZRACHI

COMPILED BY: JACQUI AUSTEN
DESIGNED BY: LEAH RUBIN

KIDS CORNER

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE - PURIM EDITION! Can you spot the 15 differences?



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

PURIM WORD SEARCH

CAN YOU FIND ALL OF THESE PURIM RELATED WORDS?



ADVISOR

KING

CHAG

MASK

CHARITY

MEGILLA

COSTUME

MORDECHAI

ESTHER

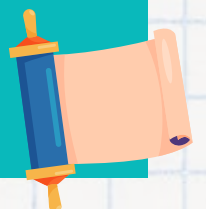
QUEEN

GRAGGER

SEUDAH

HAMANTASCHEN

VASHTI





MEET SARAH AARONSOHN



January 6, 1890 – October 9, 1917 / 14 Tevet 5650 – 23 Tishrei 5678

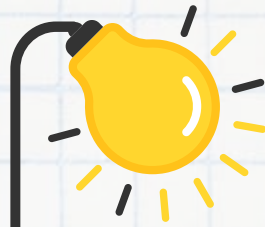
Sarah Aaronsohn was born in Zichron Ya'akov, a moshava her parents had moved to from Romania in 1882 with their firstborn son, Aaron. Sarah had moved to Turkey for a short time but when she learned of the terrible decrees that the Turkish had imposed on the moshava from letters she received from her family, she came back. In her absence, her brother had established a spy network called Nili which was capable of giving important and complex information over to the British who were fighting the Ottoman or Turkish Empire.

During the day, Sarah would manage the research station and her father's home in Zichron Ya'akov; at night she would convert her friends' notes into code and watch for a ship that might arrive, at risk to her life. When a ship appeared on the horizon during dark, moonless nights, Sarah would race to hang clothing on a line – yellow, red, and green signaling whether she had information and whether it was important or even crucial.

Unfortunately the Turkish officers eventually realized there were spies in the area and they found Sarah and her father. Just two months later, Turkish Jerusalem surrendered to the British.



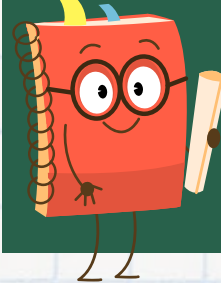
Adapted from *Iconic Jewish Women* by Dr. Aliza Lavie. Scan the QR code to purchase on Amazon.



DID YOU KNOW?

- The first mention of the use of costumes to celebrate Purim was by Rabbi Yehuda Minz, a 15th century Italian rabbi!
- A theory about the origins of the word hamantaschen is that it's Yiddish, *mohn* meaning poppy seed and *taschen* meaning pockets, aka poppy seed pockets!
- The oldest mask was found in the Judean Desert, is made of stone and is thousands of years old. (We don't recommend googling it!)

Test Your Knowledge



Whose name is not mentioned even once in Megillat Esther?

What holiday historically came first? Chanukah or Purim?

When there are two months of Adar, which Adar do we celebrate Purim in?

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

WEEKLY PARSHA FOR YOUTH!

HaMizrachi Weekly Youth Edition & Chavruta

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



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



HOW TO MAKE THE BEST HAMANTASCHEN (MAKES 16-20)



Ingredients:

- 1 stick (½ cup) unsalted butter or margarine, at room temperature
- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 tbsp milk (or non-dairy milk)
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for rolling
- ¼ tsp baking powder
- ¼ tsp salt
- Your favorite filling (we recommend a jam/jelly or chocolate!)

Step-by-step instructions:

1. Beat the butter and sugar together with a whisk until smooth.
2. Add egg, milk, vanilla and lemon zest until mixed thoroughly.
3. In a separate bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder and salt.
4. Add the dry ingredients to the wet mixture and mix with a spoon until well combined. If the mixture seems too wet, add a tablespoon of flour at a time until a firm dough is formed.
5. Form dough into a disk and cover with plastic wrap. Put your dough in the fridge for at least 1 hour, up to 24 hours.
6. Once the dough is chilled, make sure you clean a counter and keep extra flour nearby to keep the dough from sticking!
7. Roll out the dough to be ¼ inch / 5mm thick.
8. Use a round cookie cutter (or an upside down cup) to cut out your cookies. To keep the dough from sticking to your cutter, dip the cutter into flour before each cut.
9. Place your cookies on a baking sheet and carefully place about a ½ a teaspoon of your favorite filling(s) in the middle of the circle and then pinch corners together tightly.
10. Pop into the fridge for 10 minutes, or freezer for 5 minutes, to ensure hamantaschen hold their shape. With an adult's help, preheat your oven to 400°F (200°C).
11. Bake for 7–9 minutes. Allow them to cool, and enjoy!



Dare to Discover!

Study in English at a Global Top – 100 University **The Hebrew University of Jerusalem**

International Degree Programs

- | Bachelor's Degrees
- | Master's Degrees
- | PhD and Postdoctoral Research
- | Internships and Short-Term Programs



Join our
DIGITAL OPEN DAY
APRIL 14 | 6:00 PM JERUSALEM TIME

