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

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THE NATURE OF REVOLUTIONS

Revolution, Evolution and the Dynamics of Sustainable Change

Rabbi Doron Perez

At the core of Judaism is a revolutionary spirit: the inability to accept things as they are and the desire to continuously change ourselves and the world for the better. In many ways, Judaism is a protest against how things *are* in favor of what they *ought* to be.

Mordechai and Moshe, the main protagonists of the Purim and Pesach miracles, were revolutionary leaders who shaped the course Jewish history. Moshe was hand-picked by Hashem, leading millions of slaves to a miraculous redemption, unparalleled in the annals of human history. Mordechai refused to bow to Haman and, together with Esther, astonishingly reversed the imminent edict of total annihilation.

But revolution is a double-edged sword. A revolution effects change extraordinarily quickly, but that haste requires skipping stages of development that are essential for lasting change. It's no surprise that many revolutions are short-lived, often leaving a wake of destruction in their path.

The Purim paradigm

For this reason, the Sages insist that the natural redemption of Purim serves as the model for our future redemption. Reflecting on the morning sun, Rabbi Chiya the Great said to Rabbi Shimon the son of Chalafta: "Such is the redemption of Israel. It

begins slowly, progressing stage by stage; the more it progresses, the more [its light] increases" (*Yerushalmi*, Berachot 1:1).

The Talmud then cites five chronological verses from *Megillat Esther* which highlight the gradual ascendancy of Mordechai and the salvation and redemption he brings to the Jews. As the morning sun rises slowly but surely, stage after stage, bringing light to a dark world until it shines in full glory, the redemption of Purim occurred naturally, with a step by step progression. This is how the Sages envisioned the future redemption of Israel.

This teaching explains a critical *halacha* relating to the Jewish calendar. Whenever there is a leap year and we add a second month of Adar, Purim is always celebrated during the second month of Adar. This seems to violate *halachic* principles such as *אין מעבירין על המצות* ("do not pass over a *mitzvah* at hand") (*Megillah* 6b), *זריזין מקדימין למצות*, "one with alacrity performs *mitzvot* right away" (*Pesachim* 4a), and *מצוה הבאה לידי איל תחמיצנה*, "if a *mitzvah* comes before you do not let it grow old" (*Mechilta*, Shemot 12:17). Why do we push off the *mitzvot* of Purim by an entire month?

The Sages explain (*Megillah* 6b) that Purim must be in the second month of Adar in order *לשמוך גאולה לגאולה*, "to connect the two redemptions" and ensure that the celebration of our redemption from Haman

in Adar is juxtaposed to the celebration of our redemption from Egypt in Nissan, never more than a month apart.

Although a thousand years separated these two redemptions, the Sages insisted that they must be celebrated in close proximity to one another, for the redemption of Purim informs the way we experience Pesach and is the blueprint for the future redemption.

The original Pesach vs. the Pesach Seder

The stage by stage, natural redemption of Purim is similar to the way we celebrate Pesach today, and entirely different from the fast-paced, original redemption from Egypt.

פסח מצרים, the original Pesach celebrated in Egypt, is *not* the paradigm for *פסח דורות*, the Pesach celebrated through all the generations of Jewish history, and it is certainly not the paradigm for the future redemption. In fact, the way we celebrate Pesach is the antithesis of how the redemption actually occurred.

The redemption from Egypt occurred *בְּחִפְזוֹ*, in a hurry. This word describes the rushed way the Pesach sacrifice was eaten in Egypt and it is also why we ate unleavened bread, *matzah*, for there was no time for the dough to rise as we rushed to leave Egypt (*Shemot* 12:11, 39; *Devarim* 16:3). The name Pesach, "to skip over", implies that

Hashem Himself was in a rush, skipping over the homes of the children of Israel (Rashi, Shemot 12:11).

By contrast, our annual Pesach Seder is the antithesis of תַּפְזוּז (Mishnah, Pesachim 9:5). There is nothing fast about the Seder; the name itself means order and structure. Broken into 15 orderly stages, each step builds upon the ones before it. Like nobles, we eat slowly while reclining. We eat the afikoman at the end of the meal, the way the korban Pesach was eaten in Temple times – while full and satiated, not like fleeing slaves. It is forbidden to drink the four cups of wine consecutively, one after the other (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 472:8), highlighting the importance of the process of redemption. They must be drunk in their allotted time as part of the order of the Seder. Each cup fulfills a different part of the process of redemption. The process is paramount.

Sustainable change and the future redemption

The same is true of the future redemption, as the prophet Yishayahu states: כִּי לֹא בְחֶפְזוֹן תֵּצְאוּ וּבְמִנוּסָה לֹא תֵלְכוּ, “for you will not leave in haste and will not go in a rush” (52:12). The future redemption cannot be rushed, but must be a slow, incremental process.

Why is there such a sharp discrepancy between the original redemption from Egypt and its annual celebration? And why must the final redemption occur slowly?

Rabbi Ya'akov Moshe Charlap, the great student of Rav Kook, explains that because the original redemption happened quickly, it was not internally transformative. The people of Israel were physically redeemed but remained psychologically unchanged, and so it is no surprise that many Israelites longed to return to Egypt. The redemption from Egypt was not permanent; sadly, many exiles would follow in the generations ahead. The final redemption, however, will be everlasting, and so it must occur slowly and thoroughly, without skipping any steps.

The message is clear: *sustainable change may begin with revolution, but is made lasting*

through evolution. As both the redemption of Purim as well as the annual Pesach Seder make clear, sustainable change can only occur through a systematic process of incremental change.

The impact of the revolutionary redemption from Egypt was short-lived. A mere three months after the Exodus, the people descended into idolatry and worshiped the golden calf, followed soon afterwards by the tragic sin of the spies, resulting in the tragic death of the entire generation in the wilderness.

Given the consequences, why did Hashem choose to redeem us from Egypt in haste? Our Sages explain that during the years of slavery our people had sunk to the 49th level of spiritual impurity. We were at the precipice of oblivion; had Hashem not redeemed us immediately, it may have spelled the end (Or HaChayim, Shemot 3:8). In extreme circumstances, where there is no other choice, revolution may be necessary as a last resort. But the consequences of revolution can be severe, as we have seen many times throughout history, from the guillotines of the French Revolution to the October Revolution of 1917, which led to the evils of the Soviet Union and the deaths of millions. Long lasting change must happen incrementally.

At the same time, change through evolution alone can take far too long. In many cases, stagnancy and rote adherence to social norms can prevent necessary change from taking place. And so the evolutionary process desperately needs the revolutionary spirit. It is only by combining the two that successful and sustainable change can occur. We must have it both ways.

At World Mizrachi, we believe in revolution through evolution. Our Torah is both inherently timeless and relevant to every generation. Through the genius of the Oral Torah, our Sages demonstrate that Torah speaks to all epochs and aspects of life, balancing the need for revolutionary change with a deep respect for the process, mesorah and integrity of halacha. Jewish living must simultaneously be both forward-thinking and conservative, pushing boundaries but never beyond the pale.

The same principles form the basis of our views on women's leadership, Torah scholarship and empowerment. There is so much room within halacha, as guided by our great rabbinic authorities, to explore every possible vista of expression and progress in these areas. At the same time, revolutionary changes must take place in an evolutionary way that uplifts the whole system in a constructive, sustainable and transformative way.

The redemptions of Purim and Pesach occurred, in large part, thanks to the innovative and courageous leadership roles of Jewish women like Esther, Yocheved, Miriam, Shifrah and Puah. Although these festivals are time-bound, women are fully obligated in the mitzvot on both festivals, for, as Rashi and Rashbam explain, women played an indispensable leadership role in bringing about the redemption.

In this spirit, Mizrachi is proud to regularly feature the extraordinary impact that Religious Zionist women are making on our national and spiritual life. May we continue to be agents of positive change in all areas of life with the spirit of revolution through evolution, so that all we accomplish is constructive and long-lasting.



Rabbi Doron Perez
is the Executive Chairman
of World Mizrachi.



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orthodoxisraelcongress.org



Expanding Jewish Education Worldwide

The international Yael Foundation conference, in partnership with World Mizrachi, brought together community rabbis, school principals and professional educators from 28 countries and five continents. The delegates gathered in Paphos, Cyprus, for action-filled and practically-focused days of professional development, built around a Gala Dinner celebrating the Yael Foundation's impressive and growing impact around the globe.

Mizrachi's delegation included Gael Grunewald, our senior representative at the National Institutions, Deputy CEO Rabbi Danny Mirvis, Director of Schools Department Rabbi Bentzi Mann, and senior international educators Ms. Raizi Chechik (Jewish Center of Manhattan, NY) and Rabbi Chaim Cowen (Leibler Yavneh College, Melbourne, Australia).



Community rabbis, school principals, and professional educators attended the international conference.



Raizi Chechik, Rabbi Danny Mirvis, Rabbi Chaim Cowen, Rabbi Bentzi Mann, and Gael Grunewald.



Eliezer Lesovoy, CEO of the Yael Foundation, Rabbi Danny Mirvis, Gael Grunewald, and Rabbi Shmuel Azman, Chairman of the Yael Foundation.



Raizi Chechik and Nadine Duque, principal of Yavne school in Mexico.



Gael Grunewald presenting at the conference.



Rabbi Chaim Cowen presenting at the conference.



Rabbi Bentzi Mann in conversation with a conference participant.



Rabbi Danny Mirvis speaking with a conference participant.



Shuli Rand performing at the Gala Dinner.

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From Zion Will Come Torah

*An Interview with
Rabbanit Shani Taragin*

There are few teachers of Torah more popular today than Rabbanit Shani Taragin. Serving as World Mizrahi's Educational Director and Director of Mizrahi's Lapidot Educator's Training Program, she maintains a breathtaking schedule of classes in Israel and around the world. Rabbi Aron White spoke with Rabbanit Taragin about her childhood, the world of women's learning, and her dreams for the future.

You have made a career and a calling of teaching Torah. When you were growing up, what did you want to do?

From a very young age I loved learning Torah; my parents would both learn with each of us (eight children, Baruch Hashem) every night, and over the Shabbat table we would each be asked to give a *dvar Torah*. Shabbat afternoons I would sit and read *The Midrash Says* on the *parasha* from start to finish and our *shul*, "The White Shul", provided learning groups followed by an *oneg* every Shabbat afternoon. For me, the learning was also the *oneg*. In addition, from the time I was 8 years old, I was fascinated by science and wanted to be a pediatric neurologist. My father is a doctor and I would read his copy of *Scientific American*, particularly the *Amateur Scientist* column. I remember being fascinated reading articles about surgeons who succeeded in connecting the right and left hemispheres of the brain, and possible ways to enable people to think and enhance cognition. I think there was always a connection between my medical interest in the brain and my love of learning and teaching Torah. I thought I would pursue a career in the medical field and simultaneously continue to learn and teach Torah, so when I registered for Stern College, I majored in Judaic Studies and Biology.

I remember having a life-changing conversation with my father about my career plan. He recommended that I choose what I wanted to specialize in. "You can't be a great mother of a large family, a great doctor and a great teacher," he said. I might have been able to be a good doctor, but I wanted to invest in affecting change in the world. I also realized that I wanted a large family. And so as much as I love science, I was more passionate about learning and teaching Torah, and so that is the path I chose. I feel blessed that today, in addition to teaching Tanach and Gemara, I am able to combine my love of science and my passion for Torah in my role as a *Yoetzet Halacha*, which addresses the interaction between *halacha*, fertility, intimacy and women's health. My kids still suggest that one day I should attend medical school. Who knows?!

Who were your role models of women's Torah scholarship?

When I reflect on my role models, they help me appreciate the progression of women's learning from its most traditional roots, to growing scholarship in Tanach and then to *Torah she'ba'al peh*.

Growing up, there weren't many women who were presented as Torah scholars. Until 10th grade almost all my Torah classes were taught by men, but then I started to have female Tanach teachers.

When I arrived at Yeshiva University High School for Girls (Central), I met women who really learned, taught and breathed Torah – women like Mrs. Esther Kraus, Rebbetzin Abby Lerner, Mrs. Rena Gopin-Wolf, Mrs. Sokolow, and Mrs. Aryeh. They taught me the teachings of Rav Soloveitchik and Nechama Leibowitz.

When I came to Israel, I met Rabbanit Malke Bina and Dr. Bryna Jocheved Levy, who opened the doors of Tanach and *Torah she'ba'al peh* for me and showed me there is no glass ceiling in Torah scholarship. After a year in Michlalah, I spent my Shana Bet learning in the Matan Matmidot program for Gemara, Tanach and *halacha*, and three afternoons learning Gemara with Rav Yair Kahn at Nishmat. Rabbanit Henkin and Rabbanit Bina taught Gemara as well, inspiring me and hundreds of talmidot to enrich our lives of *avodat Hashem* through learning while living Torah. People suggested that I focus on one or the other, on either Tanach or Gemara, but here, however, I didn't feel I had to choose a specialty – I wanted to learn and teach both *Torah she'bichtav* and *Torah she'ba'al peh*. I continued learning in Matan while I completed my degrees in Tanach and Talmud in Bar-Ilan University, while also starting a family and teaching in Machon Gold, followed by Midreshet Lindenbaum, Matan, and other seminaries, *batei midrash* for women, and summer programs.

How do these changes in women's learning reflect changing attitudes within the Religious Zionist and Modern Orthodox communities?

Initially there were greater opportunities to learn *Torah she'ba'al peh* in America, led by Rav Soloveitchik and Rabbi Mordechai Willig, who taught the first Gemara shiur to women at Stern College in 1977. When Rabbi Brovender opened a program for women in Israel that focused on Gemara study (Bruriah), it began with American women who were studying in Israel. The first *midrashot* like Machon Gold were predominantly focused on teacher training for the Diaspora. It took about another ten years for Israeli *midrashot* to get off the ground.

When I came to study at Michlalah for my first year in Israel (1991–1992), I would learn a few nights a week in the Brovenders' *beit midrash*. The American students were significantly more advanced than most of the Israelis. Fast forward thirty years, and though there are more American high schools teaching Gemara than Israeli schools, there are many more *midrashot* offering advanced *Torah she'ba'al peh* in Israel than there are in America. There has been a shift, with Israel now becoming the center for advanced Torah study for women.

This development has numerous ramifications. *Yoatzot Halacha* are more accepted here by rabbinic authorities, largely because the spectrum is much wider in Torah scholarship. In the Diaspora, it is more politicized and polarized within the Modern Orthodox spectrum. Leading US *rabbanim* who were more supportive of the *Yoatzot Halacha* program 25 years ago are now more suspicious and circumspect due to a trend of liberal female “rabbis” in America.

Here in Israel, the focus is on women's Torah scholarship and teaching. There may be some political undertones, but they are not as stark as they are in the Diaspora, and not as community-based. The number of women engaged in advanced Torah learning is far greater in Israel, and Baruch Hashem there are many opportunities for observant women to teach and inspire in high schools and *midrashot* here.

I feel lucky and grateful to be part of that transition, from there to here; for many years, most of my *chavrutot* in learning and

students were American, but now I see my Israeli daughters and *talmidot* continuing and advancing that learning.

Until about fifteen years ago, the overwhelming majority of teachers in *midrashot* were men. We must certainly continue to appreciate the role of *rabbanim* and *poskim* in our community. But having predominantly male teachers in women's programs doesn't create an ideal religious environment for women. Women of all ages require female role models both in teaching and demonstrating Torah lives – in the *beit midrash* and in the home. Now that women are more knowledgeable and involved in Jewish thought and *halachic* discourse, they are more qualified to inspire, educate and play greater roles in Torah-value-based organizations.

I have *talmidot* who express “*kinat sofrim*”, “the envy of scholars”, of *yeshiva* students who have the opportunity to forge meaningful *rebbe-talmid* relationships. “Why can't we have a *rebbe* to go to *shul* and spend Shabbat with?” I remind them that they should definitely have a Rav to whom they address difficult *halachic* questions, but the Rav shouldn't be their role model for life. They need a “*rabbanit*”, a female Torah role model to go to *shul* and spend Shabbat with – to see how she cuts vegetables *halachically*, how she dresses, exercises, and raises her children. She can help guide her students as they choose between going to *shul*, nursing a child, or both. This is a significant and incredibly positive shift to help maintain *mesorah*, especially if we don't live with our mothers and grandmothers as we once did.



Rabbanit Taragin with the 2020 graduates of the Lapidot Educator's Training Program.



Rabbanit Taragin (center) together with Rabbanit Chana Henkin (left) and Rabbanit Rachelle Fraenkel (right) at Mizrahi's Siyum HaShas in Jerusalem, January 2020.



Rabbanit Taragin with her family.



Rabbanit Taragin with some of the participants of the Lapidot Educator's Training Program, at the World Mizrahi Leadership Shabbaton in Ein Gedi, January 2023.

How does Mizrahi's Lapidot program fit into this story?

It is imperative that we train women in teaching both Tanach and *halacha*. In high schools today, it is critical to have female role models for teaching and living *halacha*, so we started Mizrahi Lapidot to train these women in understanding *halachic* sources, pedagogy of *halacha*, and *halachic* topics pertaining particularly to women. Until now, in many schools, women taught Tanach and Jewish philosophy but not *halacha*, because they didn't feel sufficiently confident. It is so important in areas of *halacha* to have women teach and impart the importance of living a *halachic* lifestyle as personal role models – Shabbat, *kashrut*, *mo'adim*, and especially laws of *ervah* and *nidda* which are very sensitive and raise issues of women's physical and mental health.

Over the last few years, many womens' seminaries with a heavy focus on Talmud study have struggled to attract students from the Diaspora. What is causing this trend?

Many factors have contributed to this. In America, due to financial restraints and career pressures, many talented women find it difficult to pursue learning *Torah she'ba'al peh* long term, which requires serious dedication and investment to develop proper skills and scope. They are also disillusioned by the few positions available to teach *Torah she'ba'al peh* in the US and the general financial pressures accompanying careers in Jewish education. Those passionate about Jewish education will often opt to invest in skills in other areas of Torah which may inspire more students in middle and high schools.

Secondly, the learning of Gemara has unfortunately become very stereotyped in the United States among both young men and women and is associated with liberal "open" Orthodox organizations and the mitigated observance of *halacha*.

In the media today, liberal voices are amplified more loudly than more conservative and traditional voices, so young women have come to associate Gemara learning with the more liberal camp. Those who prefer to be associated with the traditional community will opt out of learning Gemara altogether.

Thirdly, women know that their obligation to learn *Torah she'ba'al peh* is predominantly for functional purposes – to hone their knowledge, understanding and practice of *halacha*. Beyond that, learning is an expression of a devotional goal of strengthening one's relationship with Hashem. Throughout history, many women have found that they develop a stronger relationship

with Hashem through learning Tanach, *tefillah* and *machshava* more than through the intricacies of Gemara. These women want to focus on those means of "*ahavat Hashem*", and rightly so.

Finally, this is tied to a general shift I have seen in the last ten years in Jewish education. Due to general concern about how kids are growing up, and how the broader world and the Jewish world has changed through technology and social media, parents and educators are more concerned today with their kids being *frum* and inspired than they are with their children and students acquiring skills and content. When that happens, people naturally begin focusing less on Gemara. Is this a done deal that we must accept as the new normal, or should we try to change our educational culture? Rav Aharon Lichtenstein z"l wrote that every woman must be exposed to *Torah she'ba'al peh*, to in-depth Gemara study in order to strengthen her functional and devotional Jewish beliefs. Beyond that, each woman should continue to pursue Torah learning to strengthen her devotion to Torah and *mitzvot*.

Most women will choose to pursue inspiration through Tanach and *machshava*. If so, it should be through appreciation of our texts! There are the few who are completely enthused by Gemara and feel that it genuinely strengthens their commitment to Torah and *mitzvot*. They may be the minority, but they are a minority who should be celebrated, guided and invested in so that they may serve as proper religious role models in *Torah she'ba'al peh* for the next generation!

Your teaching schedule is famously packed and demanding. You teach an incredible number of classes each week across Israel, and to the Diaspora on Zoom. Why do you push yourself so hard?

In our *tefillah* three times each day, we ask Hashem פתח אֶת יָדְךָ וּמַשְׁבִּיעַ לְכֹל חַי רִצּוֹן, "You open Your hand and satisfy every living thing's will". A beautiful Chassidic *vort* explains that we are asking Hashem to provide us with "*ratzon*", with willpower. Every day I ask Hashem to give me that *ratzon*, that drive to share *dvar Hashem*. I ask Him to provide me with the religious, physical, mental and emotional strength to be the best *eved Hashem* I can possibly be, and to be able to inspire others.

No matter how tired I am, Torah learning and teaching give me strength. The joy and love of sharing *dvar Hashem* is incomparable to anything else or any other pursuit. It is not just relegated

to the classroom. My children are my favorite students; living teaching is teaching your children. Even regular conversations at home can be infused with teaching *dvar Hashem*. It's the most invigorating aspect of my life!

What are some of your dreams for the future?

On a macro level, my goal is to work together with *gedolei haDor*, *rabbanim*, *rabbaniyot* and leading educators to teach Tanach and Torah *she'ba'al peh* to as many women as possible, without compromising on quality, while also catering to many different aspects of *avodat Hashem*. This expresses itself in different ways for different groups. I have met many professional women in their 50s who say they now want to learn more Torah, as they did not have the opportunity to do so when they were younger. We need as many community *batei midrash* for women as possible, places that enable women at each stage of life to enhance their *shemirat mitzvot* and *talmud Torah*.

Another new development is the growing social and cultural experiences for women in Torah communities which I hope to strengthen and encourage. Men have so many of these cultural and social religious programs – *melave malkas*, *siyumim*, breakfast and evening groups that form around *daf yomi*, *halacha yomit* and *perek yomi*. Now these experiences are beginning to develop for women through wonderful organizations and programs.

Another change that needs to be fostered is the number of female Torah teachers available as a resource to women at each stage of life. Men who go through Jewish schools and *yeshivot* can often choose between 30 or 40 rabbis and find the three or four whom they most connect with and develop and maintain a relationship with them. Simply having more female teachers at each stage of Torah education will provide women more opportunities to form those essential connections to teachers, *rabbaniot*, *mashpiot* and *mashgichot*. We also need additional professional training in

mental health, pedagogic methods and qualitative curricula for existing Jewish studies teachers to raise the level of properly teaching and inspiring textual skill, content and way of life.

There are young women who feel that if they stay in Israel after learning in *midrasha*, they won't be able to continue their high level learning in a religious and academically-challenging environment. For that reason, many *midrashot* encourage students to leave Israel to go to Stern College, where they can stay within a religious framework in *chutz la'aretz*. But this is changing, Baruch Hashem. As of Elul 5783, Yeshiva University is starting a program in Israel which will provide Anglo college students with a comprehensive religious framework, including religious student life, *tiyulim*, *shabbatonim* and more. Young people can make *Aliyah* and continue their religious development in a framework that is inspiring, enriching, supportive and comfortable. We are creating that environment for them here in *Eretz Yisrael* as part of the process of *geulah! Ki miTzion teitzei Torah!*

Lastly, together with my husband, children and grandchildren, I hope to bring greater glory to Torah. And through building our Jewish home, I hope to help others build theirs, which will catalyze Hashem to rebuild His! ■



Rabbanit Taragin, together with World Mizrahi's Head of Leadership Programs Rabbi Hillel Van-Leeuwen, with the 2022 graduates of the Lapidot Educator's Training Program.

The Path to Redemption: The Revolution of Women's Torah Study

Shira Lankin Sheps

I feel lucky to have been born in this generation.

When I reflect on our shared histories and look toward the future, I comfort myself with the ever-burgeoning awareness that we are shifting to a new stage of Jewish history, a pre-Messianic era that is transforming the future of our people. I see the evidence every day.

The world is in a state of flux. Old systems that no longer serve the shifting consciousness of this world are breaking. Ancient prejudices, judgments, misconceptions, and limitations are lifting. We are living in a time of self-actualization, enlightenment, and even possible transcendence.

Not coincidentally for Jewish women like me, a world that has been kept separate is opening up for us: the world of Torah study.

Only in recent generations has there been a widespread initiative to teach Jewish women Judaic studies. We were kept from it, given only the information we needed to know to run our households and raise our children. We were taught in stories, through oral narratives, and kept away from books. We wrote our own *techines*, prayers in our own *mama loshen*, because we weren't taught Hebrew and Aramaic, the languages of our Sages. Language, words, and books have a way of opening up the world. Even when I was in college, my teacher taught the women in his class Gemara from xeroxed sheets, to discourage us from purchasing our own Gemaras.

Luminaries like Sarah Schenirer, Prof. Nechama Leibowitz, and many other female pioneers over the last century believed it was essential for women

to learn – that we could enrich the lives of Jewish women and the broader Jewish community by teaching Torah to women. The last hundred years have yielded groundbreaking role models and institutions that have shaped a new path forward.

The community of women I have learned with throughout my lifetime is hungry. They are professionals in their own rights, excelling in all manner of fields and practices, incredible homemakers, wives, mothers, and community members. They are devoted to spiritual growth, to their relationships with G-d, and to their pursuit of knowledge.

For me, there is no feeling like sitting amongst women engaged in Torah study, their minds alight with the love of learning, their voices echoing the arguments of our ancestors, and their eyes bright with joy as they form their own insights.

One of the reasons I moved to Jerusalem was because I

wanted to continue my own growth in Torah study. I wanted to have access to a well-spring of knowledge, to teachers who would welcome me in their classrooms. I chose the Matan *beit midrash*, founded thirty-five years ago by Rabbanit Malke Bina, to be my spiritual home. For five years, I've had the incredible opportunity to study from my teachers, Dr. Yael Ziegler and Rabbanit Shani Taragin, who I had learned from when I was in Israel during my year in seminary.

Recently, I had the honor of hosting Rabbanit Shani, who gave a *shiur* to my community in my home. I had been having many conversations with my teenage daughter about what it feels like to fall in love with Torah learning. She struggled to understand what I meant; the way she had been learning did not spark the same passion in her. I encouraged my daughter to come with me to the *shiur* to learn from my teacher. It was a *halacha shiur*; long, complex and utterly fascinating. My house was filled to the





Rabbanit Shani Taragin giving a shiur at the opening of the new Matan Snif in Ramot Bet, Jerusalem. (PHOTO: COURTESY)

brim with women who had come out to learn from Rabbanit Shani, and the house was silent as everyone present absorbed her words. The room was transfixed.

In the middle of the *shiur*, I received a text from my daughter, who was sitting across the room. “*Ima*, I understand now.” Afterwards, she remarked to me that she had felt it, that spark. I turned to look at her; I watched her follow the complicated *halachic* process and the ins and outs of the biblical narrative that was offered alongside it. I saw her absorb the meaning that enriched our understanding of a *halacha* that was previously taught to us by rote. When it was over, I embraced her and whispered, “This is how I learned to fall in love with Torah, too.”

When the doors are opened for women to engage the Torah with both our minds and souls, we come running. When I sit in the auditorium in a Matan class, I am surrounded by women of all ages. Women in their early twenties sit next to and study with women in their nineties. Women who have engaged in high-level learning over a lifetime study together

with women who have come to it later in life and dedicated their golden years to Torah study. It is not only the Torah that is enthralling, but the engagement of the class. The questions, answers, and ideas flowing throughout the room, weaving a web of community between us all. It is a community born from the well of Torah.

We are in the final stages before the ultimate redemption, a redemption which the Torah tells us will come in the merit of righteous women. I believe I have met these righteous women, the teachers, students, and community pillars who will lead us to that hallowed moment in time. They are the continuation of a long line of role models who have opened the doors for women’s Torah study and have brought Tanach, *halacha*, and Gemara alive for Jewish women.

I feel blessed to be a part of this movement, as we raise each other up in preparation for the return of the *Beit HaMikdash* and the revelation of the *Shechinah*. May we merit to see it with our own eyes!



Shira Lankin Sheps,

MSW, is a writer, photographer, and clinically trained therapist. She is the creator and publisher of *The Layers Project Magazine*, an online magazine that explores in-depth insights into the challenges and triumphs of the lives of Jewish women. She is the author of “*Layers: Personal Narratives of Struggle, Resilience, and Growth From Jewish Women*” published by Toby Press in 2021. She facilitates *The Layers Writing Workshops*, and has written with hundreds of women over the years, helping them explore their personal narratives, discover meaning in their struggles, and share their stories in a safe and healthy way.

The Women who Saved the Dagan Hill



Today, the Dagan hill in Efrat is a bustling neighborhood of close to 400 Jewish families, with a high percentage of Anglo olim. But Dagan, on the northernmost edge of Efrat, would likely be a suburb of Arab Beit Lechem if not for the heroic efforts of an extraordinary group of women in July of 1995. Rabbi Elie Mischel spoke with Marilyn Adler, Sharon Katz, Eve Harow and Nadia Matar to learn about their story.

Tell me about your backgrounds and how you came to Efrat.

Marilyn: I was born and raised in Brooklyn, the daughter of Holocaust survivors. I came to Israel to study at Machon Gold, and then returned a few years later, and immediately joined a settlement in Sinai to protest the evacuation. My husband and I came to Efrat in 1989, which at that time was a small community of 300 families where we felt we could make a difference.

Eve: We made Aliyah from Los Angeles in 1988 and moved straight to Efrat. The First Intifada, a terror war against Israel, was in full swing, and we made Aliyah right into it. We were the 300th family, and I was pregnant with our fourth child. We felt we could fit in here.

I was involved in one pro-Israel demonstration in Beverly Hills before we made Aliyah, but otherwise I wasn't an activist. Making Aliyah changed my personality. When you make Aliyah – not because of persecution, but because you want to be here – there is a drive inside of you to make a difference.

Sharon: We made Aliyah with five kids from Woodmere, NY in 1992. In America, I was the Eastern Editor of the Hollywood Reporter, writing about the entertainment industry. In Israel, I would use my writing skills in ways I never dreamed of – to fight for Eretz Yisrael.

Nadia: I grew up in Belgium, made Aliyah in 1987, and met my husband, an American *oleh*, after I came here, and moved to Efrat soon afterwards, to help settle Yehudah and Shomron. We felt that making Aliyah was not enough, that we had to continue making Aliyah every day, to do more for *Am Yisrael*.

After the First Intifada, when things settled down, we would drive to Yerushalayim through Beit Lechem – it was the only road at that time – and would see only one soldier along the way. Life was relatively calm, and my plan was to be a stay-at-home mom. Things turned out differently!

For many of our readers, the Oslo Accords are like a bad dream; you want to wake up and forget it ever happened. But as Santayana said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." What was life like on the ground in Efrat in 1995? What was the government planning to do with the Dagan hill?

Nadia: In 1992, Rabin and Peres came to power, after making their four famous promises – no talks with the PLO, no division of Jerusalem, no Palestinian state, and no abandoning the Golan Heights. But very quickly, they showed their true intentions, and soon began negotiations to give away the Golan. The Oslo Accords followed soon afterwards.

Eve: I remember the day Oslo was signed. We were watching it on the news, and I started sobbing. Here we were, giving away places that are part of who we are – to an enemy. It was clear that we wouldn't be able to go to Kever Yosef, that Chevron was a mess. We felt the government had betrayed us. They pushed Oslo through very undemocratically, stealing votes.

Sharon: On the day the Oslo Accords were signed, my children and I were driving home through Beit Lechem from Jerusalem. Suddenly a mass of Arabs ran into the middle of the street and began dancing around our car – dancing, chanting and laughing. We all said *Shema*, and Baruch Hashem came home safely, but I never forgot that chilling moment.

Nadia: Seeing the way things were going, my mother-in-law, Ruth Matar, insisted that we had to do *something*. So we created a movement to show the world that *Eretz Yisrael* belongs to the Jewish people. We called it *Women for Israel's Tomorrow*, because there is no tomorrow without Yehudah and Shomron. It was a way to demonstrate that not only settlers with long beards cared about the Land, but also “normal” wives and mothers. Ultimately, the media began calling us Women in Green, because at one of the protests we were wearing green hats.

The first Oslo agreement was signed in 1993, the Arabs began their terrorist attacks in 1994, and the second Oslo agreements were signed in 1995. According to these agreements, any open area in Yehudah and Shomron, even if it was designated to be part of a Jewish community, would be handed over to the Palestinian Authority. At that time, the Zayit, Tamar and Dagan hills of Efrat were not yet built, and we realized they would be given away. That's what pushed us to act.

Marilyn: Day-to-day life in Efrat was normal, and the town was thriving. But the Oslo Accords loomed over everything. The government was putting us at risk by creating indefensible borders and arming the Palestinians with 40,000 guns. We spent many evenings going to demonstrations with our children.

Eve: It was clear that the Palestinian Authority was not our friend, even though the Rabin government had just given them guns, foolishly thinking the PA would help fight Islamic Jihad and Hamas, who still hadn't seen the light about the benefits of peace. Anybody who was against this, of course, was labeled as “anti-peace”. The media was constantly smearing the settlers and the settlements.

Tell me about the planning of the Dagan hill demonstration. How did the four of you pull it off?

Marilyn: The neighboring hill of Tamar was slated for construction; it was meant to become a new neighborhood of Efrat. But Arabs began protesting there, and the government acquiesced and stopped the construction. We knew we had to do something in response. We couldn't stay passive! We were inspired by the women of Chevron, women like Miriam Levinger zt”l, who moved into Beit Hadassah in 1979 and successfully established a Jewish presence there.

Nadia: The four of us began meeting in Efrat to figure out what to do. We chose to make a statement on Dagan, which was the furthest undeveloped hill designated for Efrat that we could reach. These hills belonged to us, even if they weren't developed yet.

Sharon: We hoped that if we could hold onto Dagan, the northernmost hill in Efrat, and create a Jewish presence there, the hill



Dagan hill, 1995.

and everything to its south would be included as Jewish land in the peace talks. So we organized a group of friends, most of whom were Anglo, and we called them individually and asked them to join us in a Zionist act. This was long before WhatsApp!

Marilyn: We didn't tell the other women the specific details of our plan. It may sound crazy to you, but since we were activists, we were afraid our phones were tapped. All we told the other women was that we were planning something *l'maan Eretz Yisrael*, “for the sake of the Land of Israel”. And they all answered “*Hineni*”.

Nadia: We told the women – “be ready on July 20, make sure your husbands are available to watch your kids, and bring a sleeping bag and a flashlight”. Only when the day came did we tell everyone, “we're going to the Dagan!”

Walk us through your “Aliyah” to the Dagan hill. Did anyone try to stop you?

Eve: The day finally came, and we drove up to the Dagan towards the end of the afternoon. It wasn't prohibited to go up to the Dagan at that time; it only became a closed military zone after we went up there. But it was hard to get to; there was only a dirt road to the Dagan, so it was a bumpy ride. We wrecked our tires that week.



The encampment on the Dagan.

Sharon: We immediately planted Israeli flags and our signs, “Givat HaDagan” and “Jewish Mothers for the Land”, and started setting up camp. Shortly afterwards, the army came and asked us what we were doing. We told them clearly why we came: “We are holding onto the Land of Israel!” They seemed amused, and said: “Have a nice picnic. Leave before dark and don’t plant any trees!” and then left. We were surprised; we thought we would be quickly arrested or evicted. But they didn’t take us seriously. The moment they left, we pulled baby trees out of our trunk and planted them!

Eve: We did not think we would be up there for almost two weeks; we thought we would stay the night, have a demonstration and get some press. Each morning we woke up and wondered how we were still there. At the time, civil disobedience and massive demonstrations hadn’t yet taken off.

Marilyn: When night came, it was frighteningly dark. My husband Josh, Sammy Fenner and Dr. Baruch Serman, who had helped with the planning, came to do *shemirah*. Though many of the women carried pistols, we felt we needed more protection.

Eve: Nobody was fooling themselves that we were camping out at a park; Dagan is right next to southern Beit Lechem.

Marilyn: We prepared press releases in advance to be given to the news agencies, flyers for Efrat, as well as a car with a megaphone to announce in Efrat: “we have liberated the Dagan – come join us!”

Throughout that first night, people from all over the Gush joined us on the hill. There was no electricity, so Ilan Paz from Alon Shvut brought a gigantic floodlight and other equipment. I remember Nadia got a call on her satellite phone. She answered: “*Shalom*, you’ve reached Givat HaDagan!”

Nadia: We began calling people to tell them we were on the Dagan, and little by little word spread. More and more people came – there was electricity in the air. It was a moment of *hitromemut ruach*, of elevation of the spirit.

Eve: We had this overwhelming feeling that maybe we’re making a difference, that we could actually *do* something to save a part of *Eretz Yisrael*.

Marilyn: Early the next morning, we saw a group of Efrat women walking up the long path with coffee and cake – a god-send! Dozens of people started showing up with tents, and soon Dagan became a tent city. As more and more people came, it was my job to coordinate who slept in each tent. I offered Rabbi Shlomo Riskin a quiet spot on the edge of the camp, but he wanted to stay in the middle of the camp. Wearing a suit and tie, he opened up his Gemara and sat and learned!

It was Friday, and over a hundred people worked to prepare the camp for Shabbat. We set up a huge *sukkah*-like tent as a dining room, and another as a *shul*. Rav Shimon Golan was our rabbinic guide, and he helped us put up an *eruv* as well as an *eruv techumin*, so people could join us from the main part of Efrat on Shabbat. People brought a *Sefer Torah* and food and drinks for everyone who would stay on the hill for Shabbat.

We had a beautiful Shabbat. In the late afternoon, we saw a huge group of people from Efrat coming to join us for *Seudah Shlishit*. It’s a moment I’ll never forget.

You ended up staying on the Dagan hill for twelve days. What did you do while you were up there?

Sharon: I helped organize the food for a camp full of “residents”, visitors and volunteers. We built a make-shift kitchen that was always stocked. Other women organized activities for the kids,

shiurim and tefillah. It really became a new community with an incredible devotion-to-Eretz-Yisrael vibe.

Politicians came up all the time and asked us what we wanted. Our response was always the same: "We want to hold on to our Land". "Do you want a cemetery? Or a forest? Then you can put up a caretaker house." "NO! We want the Dagan to be part of Efrat, a community with homes and children." I think they were exasperated that we wouldn't compromise. But we weren't politicians. We were women who loved the Land.

Nadia: As our stay on the Dagan lengthened, each woman made arrangements for their families. Many of the kids joined us on the hill. It wasn't simple, juggling our families, the demonstration and the press. Our husbands made it possible.

Eve: My four-month-old baby was with me most of the time, because I was nursing him. And my husband and five other kids would come in and out all through the time we were there.

During the protest, we uncovered man-made shafts in the ground. We called in archeologists to investigate it, and it turns out these shafts were part of an ancient aqueduct system built during the second Temple era, to bring water to Jerusalem – an incredible feat of engineering. The discovery gave us strength; it drove home that these hills belong to us, to our people.

How did the media react to what you were doing?

Eve: We were amazed by how much attention we received from the press – we were front page news. The local radio stations started each morning by broadcasting "Boker tov l'nashim b'Givat HaDagan", and every night, the evening news opened with an update on what was happening on the Dagan hill. We couldn't believe it.

We hosted a major press conference on the Dagan hill, and arranged for a tractor to be there to start digging for the future neighborhood's cornerstone while the press were there.

Members of Knesset, like Uri Ariel, came to sit with us, and they asked us what we wanted. We made clear that this demonstration was not just about Efrat – it was about *all* of Yehudah and Shomron. At every press conference, we encouraged other communities to do what we were doing.

Nadia: We were the match that lit a much greater fire. Other communities, like Beit El and other places, soon followed our example.

Marilyn: We had great success with both the right- and left-wing press. They saw us as "pure", without any ulterior motives. They saw that we were very dedicated to Eretz Yisrael and that we were justified in our fears of what the Oslo Accords would bring. But we were also "normal" people who didn't fit the "settler" mold.

Sharon: We were mothers, and we were *olot*. They couldn't believe how normal we were! I remember one of the journalists writing "their accents were music to my ears".

Eve: Ron Maiberg, a culture reporter from Ma'ariv, came to speak with us. He was very surprised by what he saw. These were not the settlers he was expecting. A lot of the women were wearing jeans, and some had advanced degrees. We were weird ducks. These were not typical *Gush Emunim* women, but rather Anglo women who lived in nice houses and who were trying to make a point. His article was very important for framing this as an unusual demonstration, as something different.



Nadia: The journalists admired us. We were there in the middle of the summer, it was incredibly hot and there was no air conditioning.

Eve: Many people were involved in what happened on Dagan, people who didn't receive attention or recognition. There is no way the four of us could have done this on our own. But the press were interested in this angle – that four mothers who didn't seem like classic “settlers” were leading this demonstration. So we went with it. It put a positive spin on the whole story, making it less militaristic, and helped Israeli society see us differently.

The Dagan demonstration also changed the way our Israeli neighbors viewed us. Steve Rodan from the Jerusalem Post wrote about the powerful impression we made on the Israeli women in Efrat, some of whom originally viewed us as spoiled Americans.

Coming from America, where we had to build Jewish community for ourselves, perhaps we had more of an activist mentality than many of the Israelis, who were used to the government building schools and *shuls* for you.

[Ed. note: On August 4, 1995, Rodan wrote: “For the Israeli-born women in Efrat, the sight of women leading men... appeared novel. They acknowledge that most Israeli women would not dare to confront both the government and the norms of their male-centered society.”]

Nadia: I remember a journalist said to me: “you know you're going to be evacuated soon, right?” I said: “So what, we'll come back up! We're going to build a neighborhood here for our children – and one day, we'll invite you for coffee.” She said: “time will tell”. I think it's time to invite her back to Dagan!

How did the demonstration on Dagan end?

Marilyn: The police came every day we were there, saying this was an illegal outpost and they had orders to take us off the hill. One morning, we even woke up to eviction notices taped onto our makeshift kitchen. But they never did anything.

I had a good relationship with them and I believe they respected what we were doing. I asked a policeman to let me know when the eviction would be, because there were many young children on the hill and I wanted to avoid a traumatic situation. The police officer told me when the eviction would happen – on July 31 – and we quickly got the word out to people all over the country. On the day of the eviction, over 1,000 Jews came from all over Israel to support us.

We studied Martin Luther King's example of civil disobedience, to ensure there would be no violence. We would be like a sack of potatoes – we wouldn't fight the soldiers, G-d forbid, but we would make them carry us. We printed out flyers with guidelines, to ensure nobody spoke negatively or acted violently. On the day of the evacuation, we yelled into the megaphone: “Brothers, brothers, we love you – we're doing this for you and all of the Jewish people!”

Eve: On the last day, when the army came to physically remove us from Dagan, it took them all day. We sat in a circle with our arms locked together, and chained ourselves to one another.

When they brought us down to the bottom of the hill, we would run back up. It was a chaotic scene. The government didn't really know how to handle us; they hadn't experienced this before. This was before the forced evacuation of Gush Katif.

Sharon: As we were being dragged off the hill, we shouted over and over again: “It doesn't matter how many times you remove us, we'll be back again and again, because this is our home and our Land!”

Marilyn: Over 200 of us were arrested, put on buses, and brought to the Russian Police Compound in Beit Lechem, where the IDF had a base. Some of us were released later that day, while others were kept overnight.

Eve: People had a hard time absorbing that someone like me, an American *olah*, could end up nursing her baby in a jail in Beit Lechem after getting dragged off a hill.

Nadia: As soon as we got home, we began planning our next *Aliyah* to the Dagan. Hundreds of us went back up to Dagan the next night. This time, we were quickly arrested and brought back to Beit Lechem.

Unlike the first time, however, they then put me and Rabbi Shlomo Riskin in a van. We drove for hours, and had no idea where we were going. We only found out afterwards that activists all over Israel had heard we were arrested and were demonstrating on our behalf, demanding that we be released. To avoid the demonstrations, the army drove us on a roundabout route to the Abu Kabir prison in Tel Aviv. All night long, I heard hundreds of demonstrators protesting outside of the jail. The next day, I was brought before a judge, who released me on bail. Months later, we had a court case, and I was punished with two hundred hours of community service.

In the meantime, as soon as we were released, we planned our next *Aliyah* to the Dagan. That time, we brought large shipping containers to the hill, to make it more difficult for the army to take us down.

Ultimately, you won the battle for Dagan. What changed the government's mind?

Sharon: One of the reasons we succeeded was that we didn't know we couldn't. We didn't know that we couldn't stand up against the government, we didn't know women couldn't fight for the Land, we didn't know that mothers had no chance against the army. We didn't know we couldn't fight in our own way for *Eretz Yisrael*, so we succeeded.

One morning we woke up to an Arab protest right outside our camp. The Arabs had a big sign that said “fair well”, instead of farewell. We took that as a good sign. They were wishing us good luck!

Nadia: The local council in Efrat eventually got involved and took over the battle for Dagan and the other hills that were not yet built. In the end, the local council reached an agreement with the government, and a *yeshiva* was established on Dagan, Yeshivat Siach Yitzchak. When this agreement was reached, we declared victory, and we moved on to fighting Oslo in other areas of the country, and then Gush Katif.

Marilyn: There is a backstory to the victory that we only found out about later. At some point after the Dagan demonstrations, the Israeli government met with the Palestinian Authority to decide which lands would be part of Areas A, B and C in Yehudah and Shomron. A military officer who was at the meeting told us that they initially planned to include the Dagan and Tamar hills in Area B, under Arab control. But then they changed their

Top right: Sharon Katz and family at the encampment.

Top left and middle: The encampment on the Dagan.

Bottom: Women protesting on the Dagan.



minds. They said: "Put those hills in Area C, we don't want to deal with those crazy American women again!"

Looking back 28 years later, what did you learn from the experience? How did it change you? And what lessons would you share with the next generation of olim?

Nadia: When there is a decree, you can't stay home and *kvetch*, you have to get up and act! This is what I learned from the Levingers and the Porats, from the women of Beit Hadassah in Chevron and from our experience on Dagan. We realized that if the government was afraid to act, we would have to step in and ensure the Land would remain ours. Sometimes history calls upon us to leave our comfort zones and act. Baruch Hashem, we succeeded. Today, after Gush Katif, I understand that settlement is not enough. The only way we will safeguard our being here is by applying Israeli sovereignty over Yehudah, Shomron and the Jordan Valley. That is what Yehudit Katsover and I dedicate all our time to with the Sovereignty Movement.

Sharon: Act like an *oleh*. No matter how many years you are in Israel, live here as if you are new. Then every stone becomes precious to you. Act like an *oleh* – be naïve. Don't accept the fact that you are only one person and cannot possibly make a difference. You can! If you give your heart to the Jewish people, you can and will succeed.

Eve: I didn't fight in any wars or serve in *Sherut Leumi*. Here was a chance for us to do our part to hold onto *Eretz Yisrael*, to be a part of this great story. I don't think people expected it from women in a place like Efrat, which has a bourgeois image. But people here did some amazing things, things that were not easy to do.

For me, the Dagan was the beginning of an entirely new chapter in my life. Oslo was a wake up call that we couldn't assume Yehudah and Shomron would be ours forever. We have to fight for it. Not enough people have yet woken up, and so we still have to fight.

I ended up with a radio show on Arutz Sheva which turned into a podcast, Rejuvenation, on the Land of Israel network, which I still have until today. I began speaking about Israel, doing advocacy work, and eventually became a tour guide and got another masters degree, to teach people to appreciate our Land. I couldn't dedicate my entire life to protests and demonstrations; I needed to focus on the sunny side of Israel too.

Today I was giving a tour in the Shomron, where "little" people are doing unbelievable things, acts of incredible *mesirut nefesh* that will never make the headlines. These are the truly great people, who prove that we can all make a difference. Not doing anything is tantamount to letting the bad guys run the show.

Nadia: When I grew up in Belgium, we did not experience antisemitism. We had a good Jewish life, and I went to Bnei Akiva. But I always felt like a stranger – that I wasn't *home*. When I came to Israel for the first time, I realized that this is where I belong. Of course, a Jew should be allowed to live wherever he wants to. As individual Jews, it's possible to live a very nice life in exile. But as a people, there is no future for us anywhere but *Eretz Yisrael*.

If you want to *make* Jewish history – you can only do that in Israel. As Jews, we can choose to be players on the soccer field, or spectators who watch the game from the stands. Come and be part of those who are playing on the field; don't just be a



Sharon, Eve, Nadia and Marilyn.

spectator! If another million Jews come home, the world will see that this Land is ours.

What did the Dagan experience mean for your family?

Marilyn: My children had a firsthand and powerful Zionist experience right here in their own backyard, which strengthened their convictions regarding our rights as Jews in all parts of *Eretz Yisrael*. Not surprisingly, some of our children have made their homes on the Dagan. We have four generations of my family living here. I have to pinch myself to believe it!

Sharon: This summer, my family celebrated our 30th anniversary of moving to Israel. We took a tour of Efrat from the south to the north, the Rimon to the Dagan, and we told the story of our family on each hill. Love of our community and our willingness to struggle to keep it and build it, is in the blood of our children and grandchildren. Today my eldest son lives in Givat HaDagan; he met his wife during the Dagan demonstration when they were teenagers!

Eve: I get a lot of joy going to visit my son, who also lives in Givat HaDagan with his wife and three kids, because I remember looking out of the bus as they were taking me away to jail and seeing my son standing with my husband, watching me get arrested.

It wasn't easy for the kids. We were trying to be an example for them, to show them what love of the country meant, and that you have to sacrifice. Many people made far bigger sacrifices down the road.

Sharon: I remember standing on Dagan in 1995. We had an incredible view of the "old Efrat", and dreamed that one day, Dagan would be connected to Rimon, Efrat's first neighborhood, like a string of pearls. We dreamed it – and it came true. ■

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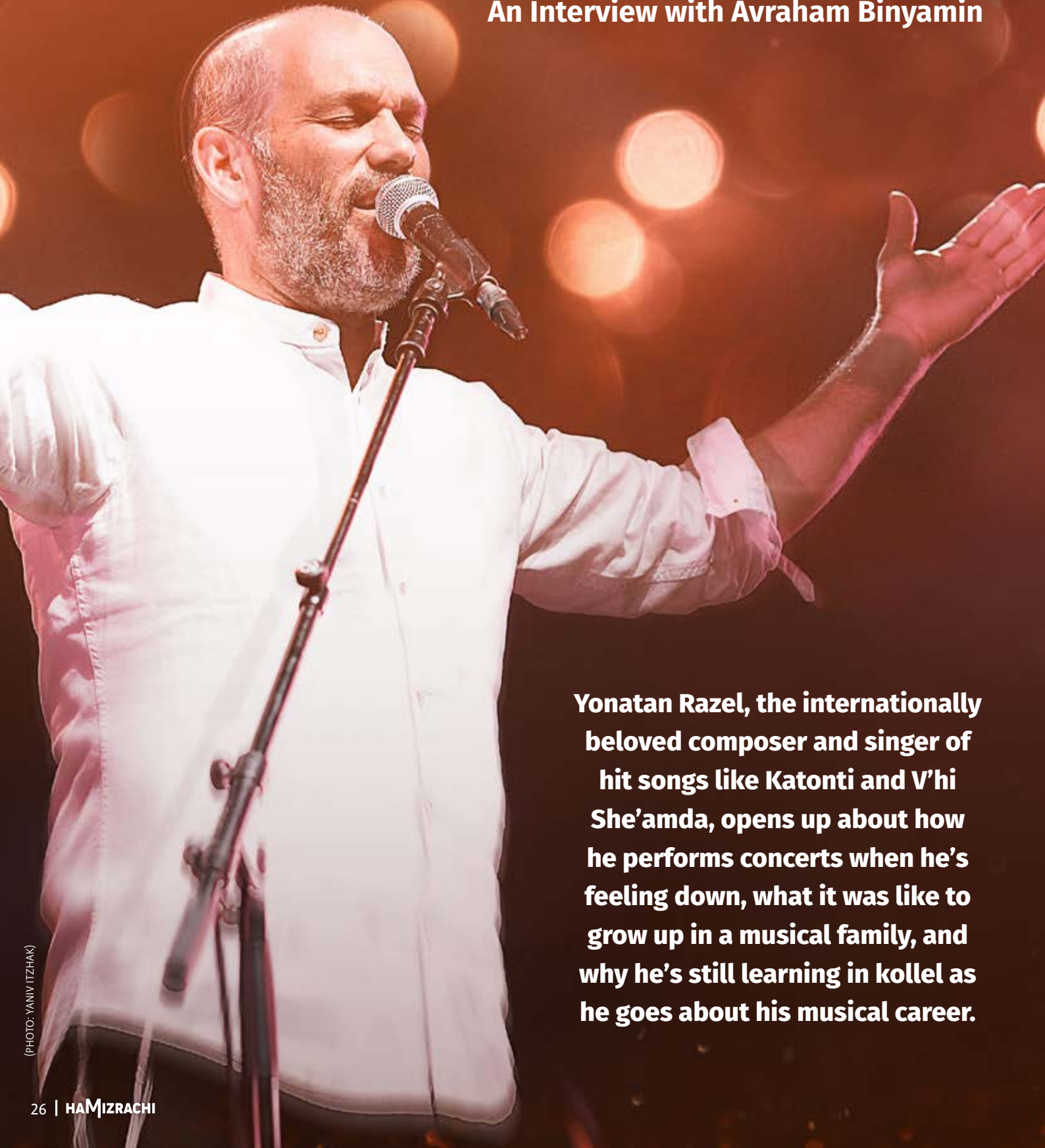
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The Secrets of Yonatan Razel

An Interview with Avraham Binyamin



Yonatan Razel, the internationally beloved composer and singer of hit songs like Katonti and V'hi She'amda, opens up about how he performs concerts when he's feeling down, what it was like to grow up in a musical family, and why he's still learning in kollel as he goes about his musical career.

The Razels – Yonatan, Aaron, Rika, and Yehuda – are a musical family nearly as famous in Israel as the legendary Banais. Yonatan and Aaron were born in America. Their parents, Micha and Carol, met during their time at a university there, then returned to Israel and settled in Nachlaot, where the family embarked on a gradual process of returning to Judaism.

The children received intensive music lessons starting at a young age, learning to play the piano, recorder, contrabass, violin, and flute, and also to write music. In the late eighties, they performed together as a particularly talented family band, naturally called the Razel Band.

Tell us about your family. How did you all become so musical?

Music was a kind of family enterprise, something that we grew up on with a crazy amount of hard work. Aaron was once asked in an interview how all of us ended up choosing a Charedi or Charedi-Zionist (*Chardal*) direction. He said that we grew up in a home that was Charedi – Charedi about music!

We didn't grow up as artists at all. There wasn't the idea that Yonatan's writing a song, or that Aaron or Rika or Yehuda is the artist. The way we grew up, we all played music and created and collaborated. We practiced together. We performed together. It's very powerful. If you look at my life and my siblings' lives, we don't live our lives as soloists. I chalk up a lot of our success to that.

I'm not some kid who discovered at age 16 that he wanted to write songs. I grew up in a home where everyone played and everyone was an artist and collaborated and performed, and that created an atmosphere that was sometimes really rigid and hard in terms of the workload, but it also imbued us with a love of hard work and industriousness that I like to think we received from the education we were given.

I have a good friend who's an only child. He told me there's something special about never having needed to share his chocolate. But I'll say the opposite: there's something special about having always studied music and piano together with a brother or sister. It's something that taught me from the beginning about working together, and that's one of the good parts of it. Obviously when everyone grows up and has a career, that calls for extra sensitivity and understanding that everyone has his own world and his own boundaries and his own territory and the things he likes to do, but that togetherness is something we imbibed from a really early age.

At this stage of your lives, what kind of dynamic do the differences between you create?

Often someone will see me on the street, come over and hug me and say, "Look, I was overcome by your song. You changed my life." I'll nod and say thanks, and then he goes on, "and please send regards to Yonatan when you see him!" It happens all the time, and it helps me work on being humble, too.

I want to talk about how to find joy in life, and what tips you can offer as a musician. People often come to a concert without feeling happy inside, but there's no choice – they've got to dance. Based on your experience, how do you stimulate joy? And how do you hold onto it?

Above all, when I perform, I want to touch people's hearts, and when I'm not in touch with my own heart, I can't touch someone else's heart. It's too far away. When you're in a state of emotional

transmission with the audience, you can't have an emotional block. Over the years, I learned that I can't avoid this connection with the audience, even if it's complicated or very deep or hard. If I totally repress something that's bothering me, I can't give to others.

But forget about performances for a minute. I think this is one of the best pieces of advice for being happy, for living a healthy life. Let's say someone's in a tough situation; something is bothering him, but now he's got to be happy. So for example, let's say your child comes home from school with a whole story and really needs your attention. But at the very same time, you're dealing with your own problem; there's an issue at the bank, or something going on at work. Now your kid needs your attention, and you really can't let your personal problem get mixed up with him right now. So first of all, you have to be in touch with that.

When I talk with my child, but there's another child I'm holding in my other arm and she also needs my attention, I deal with both of them and I juggle. The same goes for where I am personally. Sometimes, I have to contain and hold the side that hurts: "I know it hurts, but now we're on stage. You need to tone it down a bit, and we'll talk afterward."

When I was younger, I would repress things. It's like when you have a kid who's crying and you say, "Come on, it's nothing, get over it". But these days, I understand that taking that approach is not only a little bit cruel, but practically, it just doesn't work. These days, the same way I tell a kid who needs me, "I'm with you", "Come on, let's dance", "Let's make some cookies", when I'm in a place where it hurts, I do something in between. I try not to tell myself "Yonatan, be happy" or "don't pay attention to the pain". Instead, I try to position myself in a kind of communication, a sort of dialogue with myself, and this often gives me strength that I bring with me to the performance. I make some comment that's truthful: "Guys, I'm dealing with something tough right now. Let's find strength together with this next song." I take it to a place where I can be saved.

Meaning, you keep your pain or sadness present with you at the concert?

Exactly. Sometimes you have to ignore it and put down some kind of barrier, but for the most part, particularly since I work in the emotional sphere, living with an emotional block doesn't work. You can use this power of complexity and difficulty, and go from there to something really, really authentic and exciting. If I'm at a concert and I don't feel good about myself, I don't start off with wildly happy songs. I start with a melody of fervor and longing, and I move up from there.

Where have you had occasion to do this?

Not long ago, I went up to perform in a new hall that was actually being dedicated that night. Right before we started playing, the whole sound and lighting system completely failed – right when we were at the first song! I was standing there sort of bare and helpless in front of five hundred people. So I used this technique. I said, "Okay, this is where I am. It's a disaster." I could have made a fuss or gotten annoyed or said, "Sorry, guys, we'll start the show in a few minutes", but instead I took a guitar that was lying there on the side, I sat on the edge of the stage, and I said, "Come on, guys, I'll tell you a story until things get worked out."

I approached it a bit like surfing, and it was actually really funny and enjoyable in the end.

Rebbe Nachman has an insight about the words “They shall attain joy and happiness, and agony and groaning shall flee” (Yishayahu 35:10). He says that when you pull happiness into the circle, it’s only natural that the agony goes away.

Very true. My brother Aaron has a song he wrote about that.

Since you got married, you’ve spent most mornings learning Torah in kollel. What drives you to study? How has it changed your life?

Not everyone can do it, and I can’t do it all the time either, but when my morning is dedicated to learning, it has a huge effect on my life. It’s the most important part of the day, when everyone’s waking up and going out and starting to rush at life. By choosing instead to learn Torah, it’s a choice to go to a place where you turn off your phone and encounter Hashem. I really appreciate the inner beauty of studying Torah, the encounter with infinite wisdom and infinite beauty. Besides fulfilling the most important *mitzvah* in the Torah, there’s something about that decision that builds up the soul the right way.

A few years ago, I founded a *kollel* called *Shirat HaLeviyim* in Givat Ze’ev with a group of adult *yeshiva* students. I try to be there every day for morning studies. It’s a very interesting group, with a lot of people who work afternoons and evenings in a range of professions, from builders to business owners, and a lot of people who chose to become religious. The group has coalesced around a few *chevrutot* who start the morning with studying the *daf yomi* in depth, and after that I learn on my own and also teach.

I’m a guy who really, really, really likes to study Gemara. Gemara and *aggadah* and *midrash*. Since I didn’t grow up this religious,

I still get a lot out of studying *chumash* with commentaries, studying Gemara in depth, and studying *halacha*. The meat and potatoes, as they say.

On the other hand, there’s been no time in my life when I only studied Torah all day. Even after I was discharged from the army, my day was split in two. I’d study, but I’d also go to write, compose, and perform.

Was there ever a time when you’d had enough of music and decided to go in a different direction? Shepherding? Psychology? What brought you there, and what put an end to the time-out and brought you back to music?

It’s pretty much history at this point, although even now I still have an inclination inside that looks elsewhere.

I had a period of deep inner searching, and I wasn’t comfortable with the music I’d published at the time. After many years of lots of pressure from my career and practicing, I felt that it was time to move on. I started studying at *yeshivot*. I went through all kinds of inner searches. I worked in all sorts of jobs, like you said. I couldn’t go on, just staying on the train, letting it speed ahead without looking out the window. I needed a different direction in life.

I always have that need to stop or make adjustments to myself. I’m a person who makes and lives music and lives a lot of other things at the same time. My life takes me to other places – in my relationships, in my studies and in my actions. I’m not a person who’s focused on his career. Maybe it’s something of a fault, but that’s not always my top priority, and there are ups and downs inside me, too.



I mean, there are periods when I'm really into recordings and intense musical activity, and there are periods when I take a step away. I need to be more grounded. When I was in basic training, I really enjoyed doing physical things, sweating. Those are other parts of me that I have inside.

We know you mainly through the way you've put verses and other people's words to music, not so much through personal words of your own. Do you have a pile of songs waiting to get out of the drawer that we've got to know about?

I actually do have a few songs I wrote – whether it's *Ki MiTziyon Tetze Ahava*, or *Sach HaKol*, and now I have songs called *Mehager* and *Simu Lev El HaNeshama* – but it's true that I don't really feel that I'm someone who expresses himself through music. I feel that I'm someone who works with music as wisdom, as beauty, as aesthetic.

I don't see music so much as a tool for expressing myself. It's more that I use it and see it as something with beauty and wisdom to enjoy. I'm not here to tell you my life story. I'm here to share the beauty of music with you, to arouse emotion, longing.

I've had a few conversations with people who said, "Look, where are you hiding yourself in your songs? We can't find you there." I told them, "I'm not a newspaper or diary. My private life isn't the subject of my songs. I'm not a notice board."

There's something about the popular music we grew up with. The art is actually a window into the soul of the person who created it. What he's been through. Sometimes it can even be highlighted in yellow – "I got divorced, I fell in love." But my natural inclination is to use art as a kind of parable, containing something a bit more hidden. You don't need to get personal to stir up emotion. This approach stands out more in classical music, like Mozart, or Beethoven and Bach, and without comparing them, the melodies created by the Chassidic greats. Their songs obviously came from inside them and where they were spiritually at the time, but they didn't reveal their emotional world. When the Alter Rebbe composed a melody, it's true that he breathed himself into that melody, but he's not there to tell me exactly what he was experiencing at the moment he wrote the song.

In recent years, you've participated in the Tzama project, with unforgettable performances of old Chabad tunes. You've also participated in huge Tzama concerts at Binyanei HaUmah in Yerushalayim.

It's hard to overstate the effects of Tzama and the hugely broad-based movement that's come out of it – the concerts and albums and the multi-day *Chassidut* fair. It's something very, very important and powerful in a lot of ways, with a lot of repercussions. It's clear that these aren't concerts where you come for an hour of fun and then you go home. When I look at the phenomenon or the movement from above, I see that it's producing tremendous changes.

A lot of singers who call themselves "secular" took part in the Tzama initiative, and they achieved amazing things



(PHOTO: YITZCHAK HERTZ)



through it. They've created outstanding duets and executions there that are very exciting. It's an extraordinarily electrifying concert, and it's done with very pure motives.

The idea of bringing out the power of Chassidic melodies, and of including many artists who aren't religious, who connect with the audience and themselves through *niggunim*, is a really important gift and a really important building block in the spiritual and social process that we've been undergoing here as a nation in recent decades.

Aside from playing music together, have you formed deeper connections with other artists, connecting through serving Hashem?

I've had the opportunity to connect with a wide and varied spectrum of artists, and some of those connections have developed into friendships of many years. Generally, artists in Israel are very deep people who are searching, and many Israeli musicians are on a very high spiritual level. Working together as artists leads naturally and immediately to questions, conversations and learning that's a lot deeper. Some of these friendships have developed into *chevrotot*, and some became dear friends. It's a wonderful gift.

- This interview was originally published in Hebrew in *Karov Eilecha*.



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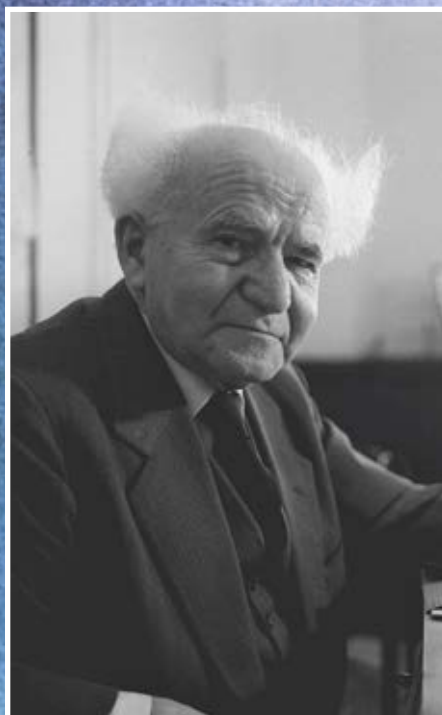


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The Chazon Ish, Ben-Gurion and Rav Tzvi Yehudah

Haggai Huberman

The only son of Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook was one of the most influential leaders of Religious Zionism after the establishment of the State of Israel. In 1952, he became the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav, where he served for thirty years until his passing. Many of his students, including Rabbis Chanan Porat, Shlomo Aviner, Zvi Tau, Moshe Levinger and Chaim Drukman, became the leading Religious Zionist rabbis of the next generation. Rav Tzvi Yehudah passed away on Purim 5742 (March 9, 1982); may his memory be a blessing for all of Am Yisrael. In this essay, Haggai Huberman explores Rav Tzvi Yehudah's perspective on secular Israelis and how it differed from that of the Chazon Ish.

A few months ago, while visiting Paris, a local guide took us on a tour of the old quarter of the city. We were standing in front of a narrow alley whose width only allows the passage of one person at a time, and so if two people simultaneously walk down the alley from different directions, one person must push himself up against the wall until the other one passes. The guide explained that a few hundred years ago, when two

people came to alleys like this one at the same time, the poor were forced to give way to the rich. In those days, the rich and poor wore very different clothing, and so it was clear to all that the poor must allow the rich to pass.

My Paris tour reminded me of something that happened almost exactly 70 years ago – the meeting between David Ben-Gurion and the “Chazon Ish”, Rav Avraham

Yeshaya Karelitz zt”l, on October 20, 1952. The background to the meeting was an ongoing coalition crisis that seemed intractable at the time. A month before, on *Erev Rosh Hashanah*, the representatives of the Charedi parties Agudat Yisrael and Poalei Agudat Yisrael left the governing coalition because of their opposition to the recruitment of women into the IDF, leaving the coalition with only 60 members of the Knesset. To better understand the Charedi

position, Ben-Gurion asked to meet with the Chazon Ish.

Besides the Chazon Ish and Ben-Gurion, the only person present at the meeting, which took place at the home of the Chazon Ish, was Ben-Gurion's personal secretary, Yitzhak Navon – later the President of the State of Israel. Navon describes the extraordinary meeting in his autobiography, *Kol HaDerech*.

Ben-Gurion opened the meeting by addressing the Chazon Ish: “I came to talk to you about one issue: how can religious and non-religious Jews live together in this country, without us exploding from within? Jews come here from many countries, by the hundreds and thousands, with different traditions, different cultures and different views. Our country is in danger – the Arabs still want to destroy us – and we must find a way to bring all the different parts of our people together. This is the fundamental problem: we have many kinds of Jews, and how will we all live together?”

The Chazon Ish answered him with a parable from the Talmud: “If two camels meet on the road at a narrow gate, and one camel is loaded with a burden and the other is not loaded with a burden, the one that has no burden must give way to the camel that is loaded with a burden. We religious Jews are compared to the loaded camel, for we bear the heavy burden of the *mitzvot* – and so you, [the secular Jews,] must clear the way for us.”

Ben-Gurion patted himself on the shoulder and replied: “And *this* camel does not carry the burden of *mitzvot*? Is the *mitzvah* of settling the Land of Israel not a *mitzvah*? Is it not a burden? And the young people that you are so opposed to [in the IDF], who are sitting at the borders and protecting you – isn't that a *mitzvah* too?”

The Chazon Ish answered: “In the merit of our Torah study, they are safe.”

Ben-Gurion said: “But if these young people didn't protect you, the enemies would slaughter you!”

The Chazon Ish answered: “On the contrary. In the merit of our Torah study, they live, work and are protected.”

“I do not despise the Torah,” said Ben-Gurion, “but if nobody is alive, who will learn the Torah?”

The Chazon Ish answered: “The Torah is the tree of life, the elixir of life.”



And again Ben-Gurion said: “Protection of life is also a *mitzvah*. כִּי לֹא הַמֵּתִים יְהַלְלוּ - ‘It is not the dead who will glorify G-d.’ In any event – how will we live together?”

The Chazon Ish answered: “I see Shabbat desecrations, cars and trucks driving to the beach on Shabbat, instead of *davening* and learning Torah and leading a Jewish life. It outrages the soul to see such Shabbat desecration in the Land of our fathers!”

Ben-Gurion replied: “I personally don't go to the sea on Shabbat, but if laborers are working all week, don't they deserve to dip in the sea on Shabbat? That is their right. You cannot force them to learn Torah, but they are also Jews, and they also do important things. You cannot force them to keep Shabbat. And if they don't go to the beach, will they come to the synagogue?”

The Chazon Ish answered: “I believe that a day will come when everyone will observe Shabbat and *daven*.”

Ben-Gurion replied: “If they want to – I will not object to them doing so, but it cannot be forced on them. There should be no religious or anti-religious coercion. Each person should live as he sees fit.”

Navon writes: “The argument went on for a long time. They each held fast to their views without compromise. Ultimately, they stopped arguing, approached the bookcase and talked about books. They parted amicably and shook hands. After the meeting, Ben-Gurion told me: ‘This is an impressive Jew; he has wise eyes and is modest.’ He was very moved by the visit, but continued to emphasize: ‘We need to find a way to live together. Otherwise, this

is a more serious danger than the danger of our external enemies.”

Chanan and Yochanan seek “Anat” in Ein Harod

The parable of the “burdened camel and the unburdened camel” caused great indignation among Israel's secular public. Using the framework of the narrow alley of Paris, the Chazon Ish claimed that the secular Jews of Israel are poor in values, compared to the religious Jews of Israel who are rich in values. Therefore, the poor must make way for the rich.

But we, the religious Jews of Israel, must ask ourselves honestly: are the “secular” Jews of Israel really an “empty camel” as the Chazon Ish said, or are they actually a “full camel”, albeit with different values?

Rav Tzvi Yehudah HaKohen Kook zt”l had a very different view concerning this question. The following story appears in my book *Chanan Porat: The Story of His Life*. I originally heard it from Rabbi Yochanan Fried, and I quote it here in its entirety.

In 1964, the Ein Harod-Tel Yosef regional school asked Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav to send two students to participate in a symposium on the topic: “What are young people doing in their free time?” Rav Tzvi Yehudah assigned the task to the late Rabbi Chanan Porat and Yochanan Fried. The two arrived at Tel Yosef, where the conversation shifted to the spiritual world of *yeshiva* students, Torah study, the IDF recruitment of religious boys and girls, and more.

After an hour and a half, a teenage girl stood up, introduced herself as Anat, and asked: "If you are truly such good people, what can you learn from us?" Chanan, like any good Jew, answered her with a question: "And what can you offer us, for example?" Those present teased Anat ("you're disturbing the conversation!"), and the discussion continued.

At the end of the meeting, Chanan went home to Kfar Pines, while Yochanan Fried traveled to Jerusalem, where he told Rav Tzvi Yehudah about their experiences at the symposium. When he mentioned Anat's question, Rav Tzvi Yehudah asked, "And what did you answer her?" Yochanan replied: "We asked her what she could offer us, but she didn't say anything."

Rav Tzvi Yehudah's reaction was harsh. For twenty minutes, he tore into Yochanan Fried mercilessly: "Shame on you! You traveled all the way to Ein Harod, and you weren't able to learn anything from these people? You couldn't learn anything from this Anat of Emek Yizrael? It's possible to learn from every person – including a teenage girl who lives in the valley!" Rav Kook then began listing everything that could be learned from Anat: her love of the Land of Israel, her connection with the earth, her dedication to working with her hands, the

brotherhood among the Jews of the *kibbutz*, and much more. Rav Tzvi Yehudah finished his harsh rebuke: "I don't understand what happened to you!"

When Yochanan Fried told Chanan Porat about their Rebbe's words, Chanan was deeply troubled. He understood Rav Tzvi Yehudah's lesson well: there is something to learn from every person in Israel, and particularly from those working the Land – even if they are not religiously observant. Even if we are convinced that we are right and that others have much to learn from us, we also have something to learn from others. If we don't find anything to learn from them, it's a sign that we haven't searched deeply enough or that we don't want to look deeper.

Yochanan Fried tried to contact Anat, calling all the *kibbutzim* in Emek Yizrael to get her contact information – but her trace had disappeared. Over time, it became clear that Anat was not her real name; at the symposium, she made up the name because she felt embarrassed. All of Rabbi Fried's attempts to locate her were in vain.

"Anat" became a code word between Yochanan and Chanan when they talked about religious and secular values. When Chanan decided to publish his

correspondence with the girls at the Gesher seminaries, the image of that unknown girl who called herself Anat came before his eyes, as well as the lesson Rav Tzvi Yehudah taught him: there is something to learn from everyone, including the secular *kibbutzniks*. And so he called his book *אֶת עֵנַת אֲנֹכִי מְבַקֵּשׁ*, *In Search of Anat*.

● This essay was originally published in Hebrew in *Matzav HaRuach*.



Haggai Huberman
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Nefesh B'Nefesh: Spotlight on MedEx



Ariella Shepetofsky

Hi! I'm originally from Staten Island, New York, but Israel has always played a major role in my life. Throughout my years attending Central, Sha'alvim, Moshava IO, Queens College and Physical Therapy school, the question was not "will I move to Israel?", but rather, "when?"

I've learned that there is no "perfect time"; at each stage there are benefits and challenges. For me, finishing school and knowing I would have the means to support myself as a physical therapist gave me the confidence to make *Aliyah*. Realistically, moving to a new country, learning a new language, starting a new job, living in a new community, and dealing with Israeli bureaucracy may not be easy, but plenty of people have done it before me – so why can't I?

Learning Tanach and reflecting on Jewish history, I feel so fortunate to be able to do something that even *Moshe Rabbeinu* could not. I am living in our Jewish homeland, filled with *kedushah*, and I even get a *mitzvah* for each step I take in the Land. What a *beracha*!

Professionally, NBN's MedEx in NJ was my first step. They helped clarify which documents I would need to be eligible to take the Israeli PT licensure exam. I found out about the Zoom medical ulpan, where I was able to learn medical Hebrew even before I arrived. At MedEx, I was able to meet with reps from different hospitals – and even get my first and current job at ADI Israel Rehab. There are many unknowns when making *Aliyah*, but having job security is something which helped throughout the process.

My top tip for people considering *Aliyah* is to talk to people. Each person has a unique perspective, specific experiences, and different strengths to share. The attitude is: If we can do it, so can you and we would love to help!

A big thank you to my family, friends, and Nefesh B'Nefesh for helping me "live the dream".

Michael Teitcher

My wife and I began planning for *Aliyah* since we got married. Israel was always the place we wanted our kids to call home – culturally, spiritually, and physically. We also saw *Aliyah* as an opportunity to contribute personally and professionally to the Jewish nation in ways that were not as palpable in the US.

NBN's MedEx 2022 was a pivotal step in our *Aliyah* process. By simplifying the medical licensing process, MedEx removed what seemed like an overwhelming barrier to being able to establish ourselves here. Being at MedEx and seeing others going through the same process was inspiring and motivating. It was also comforting to meet with potential employers and see job prospects materialize before our eyes!

We have had all the usual challenges in getting ourselves and our children adjusted to living in a new country. Encouragement from our family has been helpful. Although sometimes it feels like we are just figuring out how to be functional adults, our new neighbors and friends have been very generous with their time and knowledge. People have been very supportive.

I just completed my adaptation period at Shaare Zedek Medical Center in Jerusalem and have joined the Department of Neurology full-time. Adjusting to a new system in a new language takes some patience – for me and my colleagues alike. After *Aliyah*, all I had to do was send in a picture of my *teudat zehut* and I had my medical license in-hand less than two weeks later! When I tell this to native Israelis, they are stunned! The MedEx conference was especially helpful, Allison and Ronen from NBN were amazing, and I was able to submit all my documents and requests for specialty recognition well in advance of arriving home.



For more information about MedEx 2023: www.nbn.org.il/medex | medpro@nbn.org.il

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Was Trumpeldor Mashiach Ben Yosef?

Moshe Nachmani

Born in 1880 in Piatyorsk, Joseph Trumpeldor served gallantly in the Russian army, losing his left hand during the siege of Port Arthur. Drawn to Zionism, Trumpeldor moved to Israel in 1912, but was expelled by the Turks in 1915. At a refugee camp in Egypt, Trumpeldor met Ze'ev Jabotinsky, where they hatched a plan to create a Jewish unit in the British army – a unit that eventually became the Zion Mule Corps. After serving with distinction at Gallipoli, Trumpeldor and other Zion Mule Corps veterans became the core of the British army's Jewish Legion, which helped liberate Israel from Turkish control in 1917–1918.

In 1919, the Jewish Defense Committee sent Trumpeldor to the Galilee to fortify the Jewish settlements in the region. On March 1, 1920 (the 11th of Adar), Trumpeldor and seven other Jews died while defending Tel Chai against Arab attackers. The last words attributed to Trumpeldor, טוב לָמוֹת בְּעַד אֶרְצֵנוּ, אֵין דְּבַר, "Never mind, it is good to die for our land," inspired Zionists all over the world. The city of Kiryat Shmona is named in their memory. May their memory inspire us all to serve our people – with strength and courage!

According to Jewish tradition, before *Mashiach ben David* will come *Mashiach ben Yosef*, who symbolizes the heroism of the people of Israel. This is mentioned in many books of *Kabbalah* and originates in the sayings of the Sages (Sukkah 52a, Zohar 1:25). In recent generations, *gedolei yisrael* have pointed to a variety of personalities who were known for their great bravery and dedication to the settlement of our people in the Land, claiming that they contained “sparks” or “aspects” of *Mashiach ben Yosef*.

In Rav Kook's famous essay, *המקדח בירושלים*, a 1904 obituary for Theodor Herzl, he describes the *Mashiach ben Yosef* as one who “physically strengthens the nation and provides for their other human needs, one who stems from the unique foundations of Yosef and Ephraim.” Rav Kook illustrates this idea through the example of King Achav, who also contained an aspect of *Mashiach ben Yosef* because “he loved Israel very much”. Though Rav Kook said this in his obituary for Herzl, his words are equally relevant to another Zionist personality.

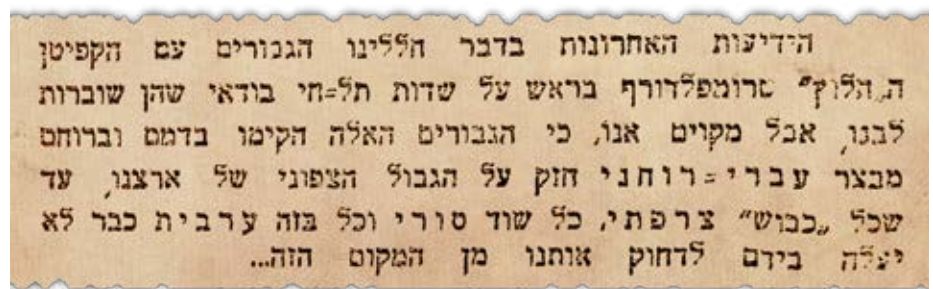
A national hero

Joseph Trumpeldor was the national hero whose personal bravery awakened the latent heroism in the Jewish masses. One of Trumpeldor's friends eulogized him: “With you, we were a tribe of lions; without you, we are sheep without a shepherd.” Yesha-yahu Drezner, one of the Tel Chai fighters, said of him: “Seeing him from afar, we were strengthened and encouraged.”

Trumpeldor became famous around the world as one of the founders and commanders of the the Zion Mule Corps. All the NCOs and some of the officers in the regiment were Jewish, and while training was done in English, routine orders were published in Hebrew.

At the time Rav Kook spoke about Herzl, Trumpeldor's name was just beginning to become known in the Jewish world. In later years, and particularly after the Battle of Tel Chai, Trumpeldor became known internationally as the “Jewish national hero”, a rare expression used in articles about him in the newspapers of the time.

The attribute of heroism was associated with Trumpeldor far more than it was associated with Herzl, who represented the Jewish people's stubborn demand for national rebirth. And so Rav Kook's words about the national heroism of *Mashiach ben Yosef* are more appropriate concerning



The recent news of the fall of our heroes, led by Trumpeldor “the pioneer” on the fields of Tel Chai, breaks our hearts. But we hope that these heroes, with their blood and spirit, have established a powerful Hebrew fortress at the northern border of our Land, so that any French “conquering”, Syrian robbery, or Arab plundering will not succeed in removing us from this place... (HaMizrachi, March 1920)

Trumpeldor, particularly after his last battle at Tel Chai.

Chazal's description of Achav, “who continued fighting even after he was struck by arrows, so as not to frighten Israel,” cited by Rav Kook, accurately describes Trumpeldor's leadership in the last hours of his life, when he was suffering excruciating pain yet found the strength to encourage his friends to continue to fight.

In Trumpeldor there was the great light of *Mashiach ben Yosef*. According to ancient sources, the *Mashiach ben Yosef* was destined to appear precisely in the heights of the Galil, where Trumpeldor lived and worked: “[There shall step forth a star out of Ya'akov]... and shall smite through the corners of Moav’ (Bamidbar 24:17). Said Rav Huna in the name of Rav Levi: This teaches that Israel will be gathered in the upper Galil and the *Mashiach ben Yosef* will watch over them...” (*Midrash Lekach Tov*).

Mashiach ben Yosef was also described by Chazal as the “Anointed for War” because he was destined to go to war against the nations and begin the redemption. They further stated that *Mashiach ben Yosef* would fall in battle after only a few remnants of Israel would gather to him. As Rav Sa'adia Gaon explained in *Emunot V'Deot*: “Since time has passed and we have not returned [to the Land], we will be returned without repentance... And [our ancestors] also said that the reason for this would be the standing of a man from the seed of Yosef on Har HaGalil, and the remnants of people from the nation would gather around him... and he would sit there for a certain time, and then he would fight... and a man who was from the seed of Yosef will be among the slain.” (*Ma'amar* 8, Chapter 5)

Joseph Trumpeldor was not biologically “from the seed of Yosef”, but there is no doubt that he inherited the qualities of the righteous Yosef. Joseph Trumpeldor was named after *Yosef HaTzaddik* because he was

born in the month of Tevet, when the *parshiyot* describing the story of Yosef are read.

Rav Saadia Gaon wrote that *Mashiach ben Yosef* would stand in the Galil, and indeed both times that Trumpeldor came to Israel he chose to settle there – in Migdal and Degania, in Kfar Giladi and in Tel Chai – and friends and admirers gathered around him. In the battle for the defense of the Galil, Trumpeldor fell, saying in his final moments that “It is good to die for our land”, which became a symbol of heroism and devotion to the Land of Israel.

Bar Kochba comes to life in Tel Chai

Trumpeldor's similarity to Bar Kochba's soldiers was mentioned in *Ha'aretz's* announcement of his death: “Joseph Trumpeldor, the hero of Israel, has fallen! Like a magical figure of old, this man, a descendant of the ancient heroes of Israel, was of the camp of Bar Kochba, a follower of the hero from Gush Chalav” (*Ha'aretz*, March 5, 1920).

After Trumpeldor's death, the writer and poet S. Ansky wrote: “I met him often in Petrograd and Moscow. He was an unusual person, strong, courageous and upright in body and soul. With his strong and tense lips, his hand pressed to his side, he seemed like a soldier in the army of Bar Kochba, passed down to us from previous generations... he was complete, fearless and silent. Even his severed hand reminded me of the legend of the heroes of Bar Kochba, who demonstrated their strength of will and self-sacrifice by cutting off their fingers.”

The name of the Beitar movement also expresses Jabotinsky's belief that Trumpeldor was the successor of Bar Kochba. He spelled the name as ביתר, which stands for בְּרִית יוֹסֵף וְתְרוּמָתָדֹר, even though Trumpeldor is generally spelled in Hebrew with a v, because he wanted to connect two historical episodes – the heroism of Trumpeldor and his friends at Tel Chai and the bravery of Bar Kochba in his last fortress in the city

of Beitar (בֵּיתר) during the Second Temple period.

As is well known, many *gedolim* initially believed that Bar Kochba was the *Mashiach*, even though he did not carefully observe the *mitzvot*. Bar Kochba's status as a national hero was enough for Rabbi Akiva and the sages of his generation to consider him the *Mashiach* or at least the *Mashiach ben Yosef*. Similarly, Abarbanel wrote: "When Rabbi Akiva saw the miracles and heroic deeds performed by Ben Koziva (Bar Kochba) in all the Roman lands, he thought in his heart that he was the messenger of Providence, the *Mashiach* of the G-d of Ya'akov, but only in the matter of waging war and taking revenge upon our enemies" (*Yeshuat Meshicho*, 1:4).

Since the days of Beitar to the present, many have criticized Bar Kochba. But Trumpeldor himself identified with him. While studying at the university in Petrograd, Trumpeldor attended classes by the historian Shimon Dubnov. In one of the lessons, Dubnov said: "Yochanan of Gush Chalav and Bar Giora should not have fought against the Romans, for the zealots should have known that they had no chance of victory against the Roman Empire." Hearing this, Trumpeldor asked for permission to speak and responded: "This is exactly how the historians dismissed the Bar Kochba rebellion too! In every generation, we have preachers and moralists who advise us, out of a desire for *shalom bayit*, to kiss the whip of those who are stronger than us – weak people who consider our nation as lowly of spirit and

unworthy of being independent with our backs straight and tall. This is why we are begging for favors and collecting crumbs from the tables of our rulers!"

● This essay was originally published in Hebrew in *Olam Katan*.

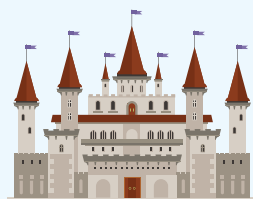


Moshe Nachmani
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JEW'S with VIEWS

We asked five accomplished Jews from around the world: What is your best Purim costume of all time?



Rabbi Judah Mischel

Over the years, my family has enjoyed many great coordinated Purim costumes, from Moroccan jalabiyas and unicorns to a *shtetl* theme. While adding to the raucous fun of Purim, wearing costumes reflects the day's theme of hiddenness and revelation. Hiding our identity lets us imagine depths that lie beneath our perceived reality, what is beyond appearances.

Into a *shul* walk an ex-president and Mordechai *haYehudi*. Who are they really? Are they the people we know via their everyday persona? Are we our social roles? Or are we playing fictional characters? Perhaps our self-images within professional settings, and even with friends, are like 'costumes'. But who are we?

'Persona' derives from the Greek *prosopon*, 'mask'. Ancient Greek actors wore a *prosopon* on stage – but not to conceal themselves, rather to reveal their character and their inner emotions to the audience. Our Purim mask, too, reveals something that we hide. *Megillat Esther* means 'Revelation of the Hidden'.

As we 'dress up' for different roles in life, our actions and choices also fluctuate. Our behaviors are *levushim* which can conceal our true desire to live with *Yiddishkeit* and make holy choices. In the beginning of the *megillah*, we participated in the non-kosher feast of Achashverosh. But *nahafoch-hu*, 'it was reversed', and by the end, we re-accepted and upheld the Torah. On Purim we realize that beneath our 'costume' is who we really are: a Jew connected to Hashem.

The most meaningful costume is dressing up as *myself*, revealing *me*, a Jew who desires closeness with Hashem. This Purim, may we not hold back – from being our truest self. *LaYehudim hayta orah... kein tihyeh lanu!*

Rabbi Judah Mischel is Executive Director of Camp HASC and author of *Baderech: Along the Path of Teshuvah*.



Yaeli Davis

On Purim you can dress up as anything you desire, but it's precisely this freedom that makes the decision so difficult. It's hard to pick my favorite Purim costume. I've been a princess, Rebbe Nachman (my dad collected Breslov *kippot*) and a clown. But last year's costume takes the cake. It was my first Purim since getting married, and so I forced my husband into doing a couples costume. But that was only the beginning of the struggle; when we flew to South Africa for the holiday, we still hadn't agreed on a costume.

At the last moment, we ran frantically to 'Mr. Price' in South Africa and found our costume: Dr. Doofenshmirtz and Perry the Platypus from the children's TV show *Phineas and Ferb*. I spent my first Purim in South Africa walking around with a cardboard platypus tail stapled to my bright green dress, a brown fedora and bright yellow shoes, while my husband Yoni made himself a long paper nose and borrowed his sister's lab coat.

Yoni does a good impression of his character ("Perry the Platypus, how unexpected of you..." – if you know, you know), so people knew instantly who we were. We made an unusual sight in Johannesburg – an incompetent evil scientist and a British lady in a bright turquoise dress with a stapled-on tail.

When dressing up for Purim, we usually think about what looks best on us and what others will think of us. But Purim represents the exact opposite. It's about moving beyond our selfish selves and bringing joy to one another – even if it means walking around with a platypus tail!

Purim Sameach!

Yaeli Davis, originally from London, met Yoni, her South African husband, at a kibbutz ulpan while working with cows. She is a Mizrahi campus organizer at the Technion.



Eli Lebowicz

Writing this piece about Purim costumes feels like a microcosm of the entire Purim costume experience itself. I want the finished product to be original and clever so when people see it on social media they like it. (But unlike *mishloach manot* where regifting is an option, like that box of raisins you got 10 seconds ago that you're totally redistributing to someone who you didn't think you were good enough friends with to be on your primary list.) Inevitably though, I wrote this a bit last minute, so forgive me if this is the costume equivalent of going through the closet before *megillah* reading, finding an old Michael Jordan jersey and going as "a basketball player."

I did see an all-year-round Purim store in Brooklyn recently, making me wonder if there's someone who recently decided to do wedding shtick as a full-time job, whose parents are certainly disappointed.

I've had some pretty costumes over the years, including dressing as The Penguin from Batman and going as an actual penguin while collecting money for *tzedakah* while holding a sign that said "Need money so Morgan Freeman can narrate my life." But the best costume I've had was the Tin Man from Wizard of Oz. It didn't matter that the silver cloth I wore didn't make it through the day intact. It meant a lot since I had had heart surgery a couple months prior, making many of you reading this wonder if I look great for someone in their eighties or terrible for someone in their mid-thirties. My wife going as Dorothy and my 6-month-old as an adorable lion helped me get rid of some of the rust I felt physically and comedically.

Eli Lebowicz is a standup comedian who has performed at Jewish events all over the world, including at some shuls that were nervous about having comedy since they had someone in 1985 who wasn't clean. You can book him to perform at EliComedy.com.



Talia Borenstein

Growing up, I watched my mother master Purim every year. I remember her creativity and ingenuity coming to life. One year in particular, my mother dressed up as Professor McGonagall, I was Hermione, and other family members were Hagrid, Harry Potter, and Ron Weasley. With the robes and details, it was, simply put, epic. Then came the *mishloach manot*: long pretzels as wands, Jelly Bellies with their unique flavors, chocolate frogs from our local chocolate store, and more! To top it off, she then composed a memorable poem connecting and bringing it all together.

After many hours of running around and delivering *mishloach manot*, our family would gather around our dining room table with the *mishloach manot* that we had received, and one by one we would each select one to open, read the note or poem that came with it, and judge their creativity (and who, of course, gave the best snacks!).

As a parent myself now, I attempt to channel the desire and dedication my mother showed us as children. I strive to create memories that are everlasting around our Jewish holidays for my family. I hope that by creating an experience for them, years from now when they are raising their children, they will look at Purim as an opportunity to build memories and joy as a family.

Talia Borenstein, MSW is the Director of Member Engagement at Boca Raton Synagogue.



Rabbi Noam Friedman

A number of years ago, while reading something or other about the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, a very bad pun popped into my head. Derrida, born to Sephardic Jewish parents in Algeria, is perhaps most famous for having promulgated "deconstruction", an approach I should probably allow more philosophically adept minds to attempt to define. Despite not having really understood the little Derrida I had read in my life, I became fixated on this very bad pun and resolved to bring it to life.

When Purim of that year approached, I printed a t-shirt with a blown-up photo of Derrida's brooding visage, brow furrowed and wavy white hair slanted upward at impossible angles. I paired it with a yellow reflective vest and tools befitting a construction zone. I was a deconstruction worker.

The pun was made all the more timely by the fact that during those days I found myself working on an actual construction site. Purim that year fell out in the middle of Columbia University's spring break; I then served as OU-JLIC rabbi at Columbia and Barnard, and was building houses through Habitat for Humanity alongside 20 amazing students in Charleston, South Carolina, where we celebrated Purim with the wonderful local Jewish community.

All in all, I think there were two people who appreciated the pun. I recently met a third. If this column elicits one or two more, I just may dust ol' Jacques off to take him for another spin this Purim. In any case, I made myself laugh, which is good enough for me.

Rabbi Noam Friedman is the co-director of Miz-rachi OU-JLIC at Reichman University in Herzliya. He previously served as the director of OU-JLIC at Columbia University before making Aliyah with his family this past summer.



A Revolution of Jewish Pride

Rabbi Elie Mischel

Antisemitism is back – and it’s no longer disqualifying, even in the greatest halls of power. In May 2021, as Hamas rockets rained down upon Israeli homes and Rashida Tlaib accused Israel of bombing Palestinian schools, President Biden praised the congresswoman, saying “I admire your intellect, I admire your passion, and I admire your concern for so many other people.” Meanwhile, former President Trump has no problem dining with white nationalist Nick Fuentes and the antisemite Kanye West, legitimizing Jew-haters who formerly occupied the margins of society.

Many hope this is simply a passing phase. During Shavuot of 2020, Black Lives Matter rioters in the Fairfax neighborhood of Los Angeles shouted “Kill the Jews”, scrawling antisemitic graffiti on the walls of five Orthodox synagogues and three day schools. But when I spoke with a local Orthodox rabbi the following week, he downplayed the incidents and said “give it time, it will blow over”. Umm, not exactly.

Other Jews have called out the problem, but maintain that the solution is not in our hands. Rabbi Jeffrey Myers of the

Tree of Life Congregation in Pittsburgh told CNN: “It cannot fall on Jewish people alone to fight these acts of hate. Victims are not the ones to cure antisemitism.” Yes, we are sometimes victims, and in Pittsburgh, tragically so. But is passively hoping that the good gentiles of America stand up in our defense the wisest response to antisemitism?

Certainly, as believing Jews, we must turn to Hashem in prayer – just as Mordechai and Esther did in Shushan, thousands of years ago. But Mordechai did not rely only on prayer. He took active steps to defeat and destroy the Jew-haters who threatened our people. I believe he has much to teach us – if we are willing to listen.

The man who would not bow

The time period of Purim is eerily similar to our current generation. Like the United States, the Persian kingdom took great pains to emphasize its tolerance and acceptance of all peoples, *לְעִשׂוֹת, כְּרִצּוֹן אִישׁ-נָאִשׁ*, “to do according to the will of every man”. But just as the “tolerant” United States now tolerates blatant antisemitism among its political class, Persian “tolerance” led to the rise of Haman, who

sought nothing less than the genocide of the Jewish people.

The Jews of Persia prudently bowed before Haman, assuming the antisemitism he personified was just a passing phase and would soon blow over. Only Mordechai refused to go along: *וּמֶרְדֵּכַי לֹא יִכְרַע, וְלֹא יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה*, “and Mordechai would not bow down or prostrate himself before him” (Esther 3:2). The *midrash* describes a strange backstory to Mordechai’s obstinate refusal to bow: “Haman said to Mordechai: ‘Why won’t you bow down to me? Your grandfather Ya’akov bowed down before my grandfather Eisav!’ Mordechai answered: ‘My grandfather [Binyamin] was not yet born when Ya’akov bowed down to Eisav... I am G-d’s nobleman, for all the other tribes were born in exile, but my grandfather was born in Eretz Yisrael!’” (Esther Rabbah 7:9)

Mordechai’s rationale seems faulty. It’s true that the father of his tribe, Binyamin, was not yet born when the rest of the family bowed down to Eisav. But why should the timing of his forefather’s birth exempt him from bowing to Haman? And why is it significant that Binyamin, alone among the sons of Ya’akov, was born in Eretz Yisrael?

An Eretz Yisrael Jew

Exile is synonymous with *fear* – a debilitating spiritual condition. Rav Kook writes that “it is impossible for the Divine spirit and the light of G-d to rest upon the people of Israel unless they first remove from within their souls the terrible fear which has clung to them like an infected wound from their years of exile and persecution at the hands of lowly and evil enemies” (*Ikvei Tzon*, 21). In exile, our vision is impaired; our fear of the gentiles makes it difficult to clearly assess our situation and reach the appropriate conclusions. In the words of Rav Moshe Avigdor Amiel, “Jews in exile are worshippers of idolatry in purity” (*Avodah Zara* 8a). This refers to the exile Jew’s inner nullification of self to the cultural influences of the gentiles. In exile, we constantly think: ‘what will the gentiles say?’ instead of ‘what will the Jews say?’” (*Ezer el Ami*).

The Jews of Persia, a frightened minority living in a foreign land, instinctively bowed before Haman. They couldn’t conceive of any other alternative.

But Mordechai was different. The Megillah describes him as *אִשְׁרֵי הַגִּלָּה מִירוּשָׁלַם*, as a Jew “who was exiled from Jerusalem” (*Esther* 2:6). This is a strange introduction; Mordechai was hardly the only Jew of his time who was exiled from Jerusalem! But the Megillah, of course, is not merely informing us of Mordechai’s background; it is telling us who Mordechai is, in essence! Though living in exile, Mordechai identified as a Jew of Jerusalem – an “*Eretz Yisrael Jew*”! He never forgot that he was G-d’s royalty, a Jew who was *יְכֹנְיָה מֶלֶךְ-יְהוּדָה*, a Jew of royal lineage “exiled together with Yechonyah, the King of Judah”!

Alone among the Jews of Persia, Mordechai remained impervious to the spiritual degradation of exile. Though he lived in *galut*, he was not “*galuti*”. He consciously identified as a noble Jew of the Holy Land. Ya’akov, the man of exile, might bow to our enemies, but Mordechai is a descendant of Binyamin, the only son of Ya’akov to be born free and proud in our own Land. Mordechai refused to bow – for Jews of the Holy Land do not bow to antisemites!

Mordechai’s defiant act ignited a revolution of Jewish pride – a revolution which transformed the Jews of Persia. At the beginning of the story, we were

pachdanim, a frightened people, a “nation scattered and dispersed” (*Esther* 3:8). But by the end of the story, we were *giborim*, brave warriors who struck fear into the hearts of the nations: “No man could withstand them; for the fear of them was fallen upon all the peoples” (*Esther* 9:2).

This was Mordechai’s greatest achievement – *לְחַנֵּךְ אֶת הָעָם בִּימֵי שְׁפִלוּתוֹ לְרוֹחַ גָּדֻלוֹ* – “to educate the nation during its time of lowliness to develop a spirit of greatness” (Rav Kook, *Orot*, 5). And how did he accomplish this? By reminding the people that they were not merely Jews in exile, but also the glorious nation of *Israel*! By reconnecting the Jews of exile to their glorious heritage in the Land of Israel, Mordechai awakened his people and revealed their latent glory!

By the end of the Megillah, Mordechai reaches the pinnacle of power, replacing Haman as vizier. But he remained known as “Mordechai the Jew”: *מֶשְׁנֶה: פִּי מְרַדְּכֵי הַיְּהוּדִי*, *לְמַלְכָּה אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ*, “For Mordechai the Jew was second to King Achashverosh, and great among the Jews.” Not only did his proud Jewishness not diminish his power, it was the very source of his strength! By refusing to identify as a Persian – even in the very halls of Persian power – Mordechai demonstrated that the Jewish people are unlike any other. We don’t operate by the rules of normal nations, nor do we need their approval, even when we live among them.

To Persian antisemites, Mordechai the “*Eretz Yisrael Jew*” was deeply disconcerting. Mordechai feared no man and was impervious to their tactics of intimidation. Under his leadership, *וְכָל-הַיּוֹדֵם הָיוּ בְּרִיָּה*, “everything was turned upside down”; instead of Jews cowering in their synagogues behind armed guards, it was the antisemites’ turn to be afraid. *כִּי-נָפַל פַּחַד-מֶרְדֵּכַי, עֲלֵיהֶם*, “for the fear of Mordechai had fallen upon them” (*Esther* 9:3).

They had good reason to be afraid, for Mordechai was neither merciful nor forgiving to antisemites. When Achashverosh commanded Haman to honor Mordechai, Mordechai humiliated Haman:

Haman stooped down and Mordechai mounted [on his back]... and kicked him. Haman said: “Is it not written in your books, ‘Rejoice not when your enemy fails?’” Mordechai replied: “That refers to a Jew, but in regard to you it is written, ‘And you shall tread upon their high places’” (*Megillah* 16a).

A path forward

As Mordechai proved, we will not defeat antisemitism by waiting for it to blow over or by emphasizing our victimhood and hoping our non-Jewish friends come to the rescue. Our path to salvation will come from looking *inward* and remembering who we truly are!

Ultimately, we are neither “Persians” nor “Americans”, neither “South Africans” nor “Australians”. As Mordechai reminded the Jews of his generation, we are the children of Israel, G-d’s chosen people – the greatest nation on earth! “Not only are we different from all the other nations, set apart by our unique national history that has no parallel among the peoples of the earth, but we are also loftier and greater than any other nation! If we know our greatness then we will know ourselves, but if we forget our greatness, we will forget ourselves; and a nation that forgets itself will be small and lowly...” (Rav Kook, *Orot*, 5).

When we remember who we truly are – *Eretz Yisrael Jews* who never bow to antisemites – we recognize Jew haters for what they truly are – *dust in the wind*. When we remember that we are G-d’s royalty, the likes of Haman, Ilhan Omar and Nick Fuentes will cower in fear! “For behold Your enemies, Hashem, behold Your enemies will perish...” (*Tehillim* 92:10).

As the miracle of Purim reawakened Diaspora Jewry’s pride, spurring thousands of Jews to return to the Land of Israel, so may the antisemitism of today awaken our people’s pride – and bring them home!



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The Therapeutic Joy of Purim

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ל"צ

There is a unique law in the approach to Purim. *Mishe-nichnas Adar marbim b'simcha*: "From the beginning of Adar, we increase in joy." It is stated in the Talmud (Ta'anit 29a), and is based on the passage in the Megillah (Esther 9:21-22) in which Mordechai sends a letter throughout the land instructing Jews "to observe the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and the fifteenth day, every year – the days on which the Jews obtained rest from their enemies and *the month which for them was turned from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday.*"

This in turn refers back to the text in which Haman decided on the timing of his decree: "In the first month, the month of Nissan, in the twelfth year of Achashverosh, they cast *pur* (that is, lots) before Haman from day to day, *and from month to month* until the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar" (Esther 3:7).

The difficulties, though, are obvious. Why an entire month? The key events were focused on a few days, the thirteenth to the fifteenth, not the whole month. And why *simcha*? We can understand why the Jews of the time felt exhilarated. The decree sentencing them to death had been rescinded. Their enemies had been punished. Haman had been hanged on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordechai. Mordechai himself had been raised to greatness.

But is joy the emotion we should feel in perpetuity, remembering those events? The first warrant for genocide against the Jewish people (the second if one counts Pharaoh's plan to kill all newborn Jewish males) had been frustrated. Is *simcha* the appropriate emotion? Surely what we should feel is relief, not joy. Pesach is the proof. The word "joy" is never mentioned in the Torah in connection with it.

Besides which, the Talmud asks why we do not say Hallel on Purim. It gives several answers. The most powerful is that in Hallel we say, "Servants of the L-rd, give praise", meaning that we are no longer the servants

of Pharaoh. But, says the Talmud, even after the deliverance of Purim, Jews were still the servants of Achashverosh (Megillah 14a). Tragedy had been averted but there was no real change in the hazards of life in the Diaspora.

It seems to me that the *simcha* we celebrate throughout the month of Adar is different from the normal joy we feel when something good and positive has happened to us or our people. That is *expressive* joy. The *simcha* of Adar, by contrast, is *therapeutic* joy.

Imagine what it is to be part of a people that had once heard the command issued against them: "to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews – young and old, women and children – on a single day" (Esther 3:13). We who live after the Holocaust, who have met survivors, heard their testimony, seen the photographs and documentaries and memorials, know the answer to that question. On Purim the Final Solution was averted. But it had been pronounced. Ever afterward, Jews knew their vulnerability. The very existence of Purim in our historical memory is traumatic.

The Jewish response to trauma is counterintuitive and extraordinary. You defeat fear by joy. You conquer terror by collective celebration. You prepare a festive meal, invite guests, give gifts to friends.

While the story is being told, you make a rumbustious noise as if not only to blot out the memory of Amalek, but to make a joke out of



the whole episode. You wear masks. You drink a little too much. You make a Purim spiel.

Precisely because the threat was so serious, you refuse to be serious – and in that refusal you are doing something very serious indeed. You are denying your enemies a victory. You are declaring that *you will not be intimidated*. As the date of the scheduled destruction approaches, you surround yourself with the single most effective antidote to fear: joy in life itself. As the three-sentence summary of Jewish history puts it: “They tried to destroy us. We survived. Let’s eat.” Humour is the Jewish way of defeating hate. What you can laugh at, you cannot be held captive by.

I learned this from a Holocaust survivor. Some years ago, I wrote a book, *Celebrating Life*, to write my way out of the depression I fell into after the death of my father, *zichro livracha*. It was a cheer-you-up book, and it became a favorite of the Holocaust survivors. One of them, however, told me that a particular passage in the book was incorrect. Commenting on Roberto Begnini’s comedy about the Holocaust, *Life is Beautiful*, I had said that though I agreed with his thesis – a sense of humour keeps you sane – that was not enough in Auschwitz to keep you alive.

“On that, you are wrong,” the survivor said, and then told me his story. He had been in Auschwitz, and he soon realized that if he failed to keep his spirits up, he would die. So he made a pact with another young man, that they would both look out, each day, for some occurrence they found amusing. At the end of each day they would tell one another their story and they would laugh together. “That sense of humour saved my life,” he said. I stood corrected. He was right.

That is what we do on Purim. The joy, the merrymaking, the food, the drink, the whole carnival

atmosphere, are there to allow us to live with the risks of being a Jew – in the past, and tragically in the present also – without being terrified, traumatized or intimidated. It is the most counter-intuitive response to terror, and the most effective. Terrorists aim to terrify. To be a Jew is to refuse to be terrified.

Terror, hatred, violence – the dark forces that are currently ravaging country after country in the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia – are always ultimately self-destructive. Those who practice them are always, as was Haman, hoisted on their own petard, destroyed by their very will to destruction. And yes, we as Jews must fight antisemitism, the demonisation of Israel, and the intimidation of Jewish students on campus.

But we must never let ourselves be intimidated – and the Jewish way to avoid this is *marbim b’simcha*, to increase our joy. The people that can know the full darkness of history and yet rejoice is a people whose spirit no power on earth can ever break.

Purim sameach!



Minorities and Meaning in Megillat Esther

Dr. Yosefa (Fogel) Wruble

When Mordechai is introduced in the Megillah's second chapter, it recounts his tribal pedigree and descentance from the first wave of exiles with Yehoyachin. Esther is described as beautiful like many other female and male biblical protagonists, but greater emphasis is placed on her deceased family:

"And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter; for **she had neither father nor mother...** when **her father and mother were dead**, Mordechai took her for his own daughter."

The juxtaposition of Esther's lost roots parallels the people's loss of homeland. Both are exiled from their native setting and find a substitute home. This is the first place in which the Megillah sets up a parallel between its two mistreated minority groups: women and the Jewish people. The identification of Esther with the broader Jewish entity is declared outright in the 7th chapter, when she confronts Achashverosh at their private party in the presence of Haman: "For we are sold, I and my people (וְאֵנִי וְעַמִּי)". Esther could have easily said "For my people are sold", but she emphasizes her identification with them by adding the first person possessive. While this certainly enhances the dramatic impact of her words, it also highlights their parallel plights.

The first occurrence of mistreatment of women is the court's overreaction to Vashti. Her refusal to appear before the men was the appropriate response. Extra-biblical sources testify that Persian courts held separate parties for men and women precisely because the mens' parties were drunken and often included lewd entertainment. The banishing of Vashti is done so that "every man should bear rule in his own house" (1:22). The motivation is out of an embellished fear that other women may

also come to assert themselves in their marriage. Achashverosh's court is more incensed by Vashti's refusal than her husband, who responds obediently to their demand that she be dethroned.

This first overreaction foreshadows the way Haman will react to Mordechai's future act of disobedience. Here too, the disobedience is performed in a semi-public setting and it is the king's servants who call attention to its problematic nature (3:3-4) long before Haman himself notices, pointing to the influence of the court officials. In both cases, it is the threat to power that catalyzes the reaction. With Vashti the concern is over household dynamics. With Mordechai, the officers emphasize his identity as a *Yehudi*. Again a parallel is set up between the potential threat of women and the Jews.

Another parallel: Both the people and women are referred to as nameless groups. The beautiful maidens are rounded up to be immersed in oils and incense in preparation for a night with the king (2:2-4). The Jews, on the heels of Mordechai's row with Haman, are lumped together in what seems to be a baseless claim of separatism (3:6, 8). The women are classified as beautiful and the Jews as uncooperative. Both are represented by stereotypes.

Why is this consistent parallel significant?

First, it illustrates the universal tendency for strong powers to take advantage of their weaker populations. However, both experience a transformation in the Megillah. The Jewish people defends itself against its enemies, described using the same phrasing used to describe Haman's desire to dispose of them, "to destroy, and to slay, and to cause to perish" (8:11, לְהַשְׁמִיד וּלְהָרֹג וּלְאַבֵּד) and the Persians are scared of them (8:17). The weak become the powerful, even if only for a short period of time.

Mordechai convinces Esther to be an agent of change (4:13-14). Her first act of leadership mobilizes "all the Jews of Shushan" to fast in prayer, again pairing Esther with the people. While it is clear that antisemitic policies are a fixture of history best done away with, this opinion is less clear when it comes to the treatment of women. Even in a society still centuries away from systematic change in this realm, the Megillah's mockery of the Royal court's treatment of women suggests that the balance of power requires recalibration.

Chazal (Megillah 7a) depict Esther as the sole advocate for the Purim festival's inclusion in the Jewish calendar and for the canonization of her book. The request is framed as a powerful first-person plea, *establish me for generations/write me for generations*. In this manner, *Chazal* continue the parallel between Esther and the people. She is the Jewish people; she is their story. By commemorating the Purim story we remember one of our greatest Jewish heroines, in a time when both may have easily been forgotten.



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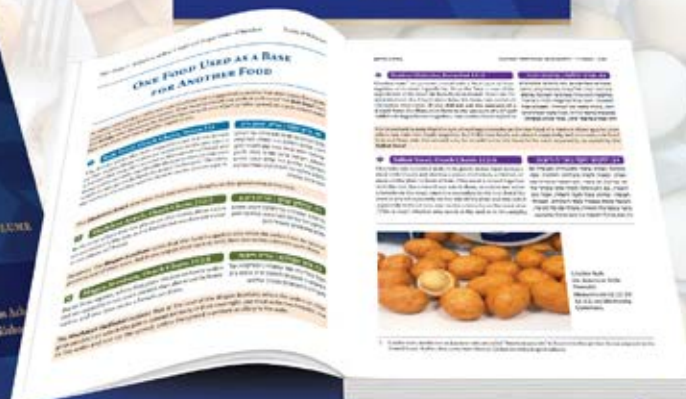
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May a child help form a zimmun?

What beracha is made on dessert?

**Are we obligated to wash
mayim acharonim today?**

Is it Permissible to Give Candy as Mishloach Manot?

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

It is a common custom today to include candies of all kinds in *mishloach manot* on Purim. But is it possible to fulfill the *mitzvah* in this way?

It seems that this question depends on the different reasons suggested for the *mitzvah* of *mishloach manot*. According to the *Terumat HaDeshen*, *mishloach manot* are supposed to be used by the recipient at the Purim *seudah*, and candies are not usually eaten at the meal. On the other hand, according to the *Manot HaLevi*, the delivery of the dishes is intended to increase the unity of the people of Israel, and so it is necessary to send foods that will be used by the recipient and strengthen the bond between him and the giver. Sweets definitely meet this criteria.

Is it possible to find clarity from the wording used by the Rambam and the *Shulchan Aruch*? Rambam (2:15) writes that one should send “two portions of meat or two kinds of cooked foods or two kinds of food”, and the *Shulchan Aruch* also uses similar language (695:4). The simple understanding of their words implies

that you should specifically send food, not sweets.

However, the Gemara (Megillah 7b) cites several cases in which rabbis would send sweets as *mishloach manot*: Rabbah wanted to send a cup full of *kimcha d'avshuna*, which is sweet flour (Rashi, “*d'avshuna*”), or *kashba*, which is sugar cane (The *Aruch*, cited in *Tosfot Avodah Zara* 14b, “*chatzav*”; Rambam, *Perush Hamishnayot*, *Avodah Zara* 1:5). Mari bar Mar used to send *chulia*, another kind of sweets (Rashi, *chulia*). From these cases we can learn that it is permissible to send sweets in *mishloach manot*, and it is likely that Rambam and the *Shulchan Aruch*, who mentioned meat, cooked dishes and foods, did not intend to forbid sending sweets. This is how the *halacha* is written (*Sheyarei Knesset Hagedolah*, *Hagahot Tur*, 10; *Chayei Adam*, 155:31)

Halacha l'Ma'aseh

Practically, it appears that there is a *hiddur mitzvah*, an enhancement of the *mitzvah*, to give foods that are intended for the Purim

seudah. But certainly, according to the *halacha*, one fulfills the *mitzvah* of giving *mishloach manot* by giving candies and sweets. Of course, in addition to giving two types of food, you can add whatever you'd like to the *mishloach manot*.

At the same time, when giving *mishloach manot* to children, giving them candy, chocolates and things they enjoy should be a priority!



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Purim: Reconnecting with Our True Selves

Rabbi Reuven Taragin

The sin

The students were struggling to find an answer. Why were the Jews of Achashverosh's empire threatened with annihilation? What terrible sin had they committed? Perhaps they were being punished for participating in the hedonistic 180-day Shushan feast? If so, responded their *rebbe*, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, only Shushan's Jews should have been culpable.¹

With his students at a loss, Rabbi Shimon provided the answer. The Jews were punished for worshipping idols.² If so, asked the students, why were the Jews ultimately saved? If they were guilty of idolatry, G-d should have allowed them to be destroyed!

Rabbi Shimon explained: The Jews were spared because they did not *actually* believe in the idols they physically bowed to. Though they were forced to bow, it was not an expression of their true belief. And so Hashem responded in kind, *pretending* to decree the Jews' annihilation, even though he did not actually intend it (Megillah 12a).

The commentators ask: If the Jews were not truly committed to the idols they were forced to bow to, why did Hashem pretend to decree their annihilation? Though bowing down to idols is never justified, it is not a punishable offense when done under duress (Rambam, *Avodah Zara* 3:6).

Posturing

The answer lies in the danger of posturing. By nature, people try to relate to the different types of people they interact with. We look for common ground and try to speak each other's 'language'. The danger, however, is that by trying to relate to others we can forget our own identity.

The challenge of interfacing with others while maintaining our cultural independence is even greater when we live and function in a foreign society in exile. Despite her status as queen, Esther herself was unable to reveal her true identity in Achashverosh's court (Esther 2:20).

The consequences of this dual identity can be severe. Even if we avoid full assimilation

into the surrounding culture, we are often unable to truly be ourselves. Over time, the values we "pretend" to believe become who we truly are!

For this reason, in the Purim story and throughout the ages,³ when the Jews pretended to serve a foreign god and outwardly identified with their host nation, G-d acted as if He was severing his relationship with them by causing those very nations to turn against them. Hashem recognizes the grave danger in "pretending", and does what is necessary to ensure His people do not assimilate.

The moment of truth

After Haman's decree, the Jews faced a moment of truth. Which 'world' was their real one? What was their true identity?

Thankfully, the Jews were able to reconnect with and sharpen their true identity, allowing Esther to do the same (Esther 7:4). They clarified their identity, and in response, Hashem clarified his true intentions.

Sefer Tehillim describes G-d as אֱלֹהֵינוּ, as our "shadow" (121:5). The Ba'al Shem Tov explains that G-d's relationship with us reflects the way we relate to Him. When we muffle our identity, He muffles his love and care for us. When we assert our true selves, He expresses his true love.

Revealing by concealing

The costumes we customarily wear on Purim remind us that our faces and clothing may not accurately reflect our true selves. By wearing costumes and concealing our external selves on Purim, we emulate our ancestors by reconnecting with and embracing our true, *internal* selves.

Today's global village

The burning issues of the Purim story are particularly challenging for people living in the contemporary global village. Even Jews living in the Jewish State of Israel connect to, interact with, and are deeply immersed in the broader world. The impersonal communication so prevalent online allows us to cultivate multiple

identities. But do our multiple identities and immersion in the broader culture blur our *true* identity and beliefs?

Though meaningful for all generations, Purim is uniquely relevant to Jews in the 21st century. Purim is the time to ensure that our engagement with other cultures does not blur our own religious and cultural identity. Though we must try to impact the broader world, we cannot do so at the expense of our own uniqueness.

As we return to our own Land, may we also return to our true personal and national selves – *bayamim hahem bazman hazeh!*

1. It seems that participating in the hedonistic meal warranted, in principle, a decree of annihilation, indicating that hedonism is deeply problematic. Rashi (Esther 4:1) connects idolatry to hedonism.
2. Rashi ("shehishtachavu") explains that this refers to a sin in the time of Nevuchadnezzar.
3. See Yechezkel 20:32-34.



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A Horse, a Horse, My Kingdom for a Horse¹

Rabbi Moshe Miller

Haman was the first one to associate the idea of happiness with Adar. The Talmud² tells us that he rejoiced when the lottery chose Adar because Adar was the month of Moshe's death.³ He reasoned that it would be an auspicious time to destroy the Jews, making him happy. But how would Moshe's death assist Haman's plot? In other words, what is the connection between Moshe's death and Purim?

After the death of Moshe's sister Miriam, *Am Yisrael* lost its miraculous source of water in the desert, the well that accompanied them throughout their wanderings.⁴ The people complained of thirst, and G-d told Moshe to take his staff and speak to a rock in the Jewish people's presence, which would then provide water in response to his request. However, Moshe hit the rock with his staff instead of speaking to it. Furious with him, G-d decreed that he will not be the one to lead

Am Yisrael to the Promised Land, condemning him to die in the wilderness.

The *midrash* explains Moshe's failure:

*[If you had spoken to the rock] to bring forth water, it would have done so. Then, Yisrael would have derived a lesson [of supreme importance] by a fortiori logic. Yisrael would have concluded that if a rock that is neither punished nor rewarded for its actions obeys G-d's commands, how much more must we [who are rewarded and punished for our actions] obey G-d's commands?*⁵

This logic is patently absurd. Moshe addresses the one unprogrammed entity in Creation, the one creature with free will – human beings

– and demands behavior of them based on the behavior of all the programmed entities in Creation that do not have free will! Whenever we face an apparent absurdity in the Torah, we must escape the boundaries of our thinking. We must realize that the Torah teaches us something with this ludicrous logic that contradicts everything we thought we knew. And it turns out that the only way to understand this bewildering logic is through Purim.

There is a striking *midrash* that lifts the veil:

*"Hashem, You are a dwelling" (Tehillim 90:1) teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He is the dwelling of the world, and the world is not the dwelling of the Holy One. Rabbi Abba bar Yudan said, 'think of a warrior who rides on a horse with many weapons on his right and left. The horse depends on the rider, and the rider does not depend on the horse, as the verse states, "That You ride on Your horses (Chabakuk 3:8)."'*⁶

A visitor from another planet who sees small bipeds riding horses might understandably think the horses are giving directions. They are, after all, much larger and more powerful than the men riding them. But, upon further observation, he would understand that the horse is just an engine generating energy. It is, in fact, the small biped, the rider, who is directing the horse. This *midrash* suggests that the world is comparable to a horse, and G-d is



its rider. Humankind produces prodigious energy, but the rider determines the uses.

It is well known that G-d's name does not appear in the Megillah. However, the *midrash* teaches that wherever the text uses the word, *HaMelech*, "the king", unaccompanied by the name Achashverosh, it can refer to G-d Himself.⁷ In light of this, consider Haman's answer to Achashverosh's question about honoring a man the king wishes to esteem. This man, answers Haman, should be placed on "a horse on which **the king** has ridden". If this *HaMelech* refers to G-d, then the horse that G-d rides is the world itself. And if Haman views himself as the rider of this horse, he believes that he will both produce energy *and* direct it. In which case, the "turnabout", "*v'nahafoch hu*",⁸ is the realization that human beings do not do any directing. No matter what we do, the utilization and impact of our deeds have little to do with the plans we make, as we all discover throughout our lives. Our work often leads to a completely different result than what we imagined. Indeed, life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans.⁹

This penetrating insight is the essence of the *a fortiori* argument that Moshe failed to teach the Jewish people. His failure stemmed from his assumption that people are innately different from rocks or computers. Rocks invariably obey G-d's commands, just as computers obey human instructions. We cannot deduce, *a fortiori*, that humans should abide by G-d's commands because rocks and computers are not free agents, whereas humans are. But from the point of view of purpose in Creation, the argument is perfectly reasonable. The logic suggests that G-d has specific expectations for the outcome of Creation. For humans to fulfill Divine expectations, they must follow instructions. If they do, they will be rewarded; if they don't, however, nothing will change. Creation will turn out the way G-d wants it to, no matter what humans do. The only difference human action makes is how Creation affects *them*, not how humans affect Creation. Human activity can result in personal reward or punishment. But

there is no way that human effort will make a difference in the Divine plan's outcome.

There was one historical moment when this truth came vividly to life. An astonishing scene in the Megillah contains what may be the most momentous dialogue in the entire Tanach.¹⁰ When Mordechai hears of Haman's genocidal decree, he sends a message to Esther that she must intercede with the king. Esther replies that it's hazardous to seek an audience with the king without an invitation, a perfectly reasonable response. We would expect Mordechai to answer, "Esther, my dear, this is the moment for you to fulfill your destiny. Isn't it obvious that you were installed as queen for this opportunity to mediate on behalf of your people? You shouldn't even be considering the possible consequences for yourself." But he does not.

Instead, Mordechai says the most remarkable thing. "Esther, you don't need to interfere on our behalf. Surely, you didn't think I wanted you to appear before the king to save the Jewish people! Whether you go to Achashverosh or not, the Jewish people will be saved. The only difference your intervention makes is to you. If you don't go in, you and your father's house will be lost. If you do go in, you will win eternity. And you will redeem your great-grandfather Shaul's mistake in allowing Haman's great-grandfather Agag to live long enough to reproduce."¹¹ But your intercession won't make the slightest difference to anyone else – only to you." This profound truth is precisely what Moshe was meant to teach *Am Yisrael* in the desert. We were supposed to derive from this superficially silly reasoning that G-d's plan for the world will always succeed – no matter what we do or don't do. The only difference free will can make concerns the reward you will receive or the punishment you will suffer. Free will allows you to be part of G-d's plan or to withdraw from it. Nothing more or less.

Human beings will always be engines producing energy. We have the option to decide how that energy will be used. We have the right of first refusal. And so Mordechai says: "Would you like to intervene,

Esther, or would you prefer someone else achieve G-d's goal? But make no mistake – salvation will be accomplished no matter your choice."

This is how Purim became the antithesis of Moshe's death. And this is why Haman was wrong to be excited by his lottery's results. He would have been correct to rejoice had we still suffered from Moshe's failure to teach our people the lesson of the rock. Fortunately, Haman was wrong – for Mordechai and Esther understood that our choices only affect ourselves but G-d bestrides the world like a rider straddles a horse.

1. William Shakespeare, *Richard III*.
2. Megillah 13b.
3. Kiddushin 38a.
4. Ta'anit 9a.
5. *Midrash Aggadah*, Bamidbar 20:8. Rashi bases his commentary on two verses – Bamidbar 20:12 and Devarim 32:51 – on this *midrash*.
6. *Bereishit Rabbah* 68:9.
7. *Esther Rabbah* 3:10.
8. Turnabout is a central theme of the Megillah's story as expressed in the verse, "There was a turnabout and the Jews prevailed over their enemies." (Esther 9:1).
9. This profound observation is widely attributed to John Lennon, who included it in his song, *Beautiful Boy* (1980). The first attribution, however, is to comic strip author Allen Saunders in *Reader's Digest* magazine (January 1957).
10. Esther 4:8–15.
11. Shmuel I 15:9 and Megillah 13a.



Rabbi Moshe Miller

is the author of *Rising Moon: Unraveling the Book of Ruth*, described by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l as "A bold, original and deeply thought-provoking work." He is also the author of the forthcoming book, *Things You Should Know: A Brief Guide for the Newly Perplexed*.

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Questions that have No Answers

Sivan Rahav-Meir

Approximately 4,000 women participated this past autumn in a *Mitchadshot* (Women's Renewal) presentation on Zoom in which they heard Ephraim Rimmel speak. Ephraim lost his wife Tzipi and his daughter Noam in a devastating traffic accident caused by a reckless driver on December 1, 2019. Ephraim was disabled, and his son, Itai, was critically injured. He said the following:

"When this happened, I was reminded of something I heard as a young man from Rabbi Yehuda Amital: "A good question is preferable to an answer that's not so good." At the time, I thought this concerned a question in a Torah class. In other words, if the rabbi asks a question and you cannot come up with a good enough answer, it's preferable to just live with the question. But the rabbi was referring to life itself.

"And now, for the first time in my life, I have to contend with a question that is more powerful than any answer I can find. I do not know why this accident happened. We are accustomed to ask Google any question we might have, receive a multitude of responses, and then scroll down until we find the appropriate answer. But in this case, I can't find one. I do not understand what the Holy One blessed be He is doing here, and I definitely think that I could have written a different script.

"But that was precisely when my journey towards rehabilitation began. From the moment I understood that I could never understand, only that I knew that I did not know, I decided to do the very best that I could."

Ephraim recently married Ayelet Coleman, who lost her husband Adiel in a terrorist attack. "Whoever wants a second chapter, to



Ephraim Rimmel and Ayelet Coleman (PHOTO: FACEBOOK)

begin again, I say you have to want to want. To exert every effort to try. Neither of us arrived at chapter two because chapter one was not good. We loved chapter one very much. But we do not run the world and cannot allow the big questions to thwart us. Both of us lost so much light, it would be unfortunate if the world would also lose the light that can shine from us alone."

● 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 has a weekly radio show on Galei Tzahal (Army Radio).



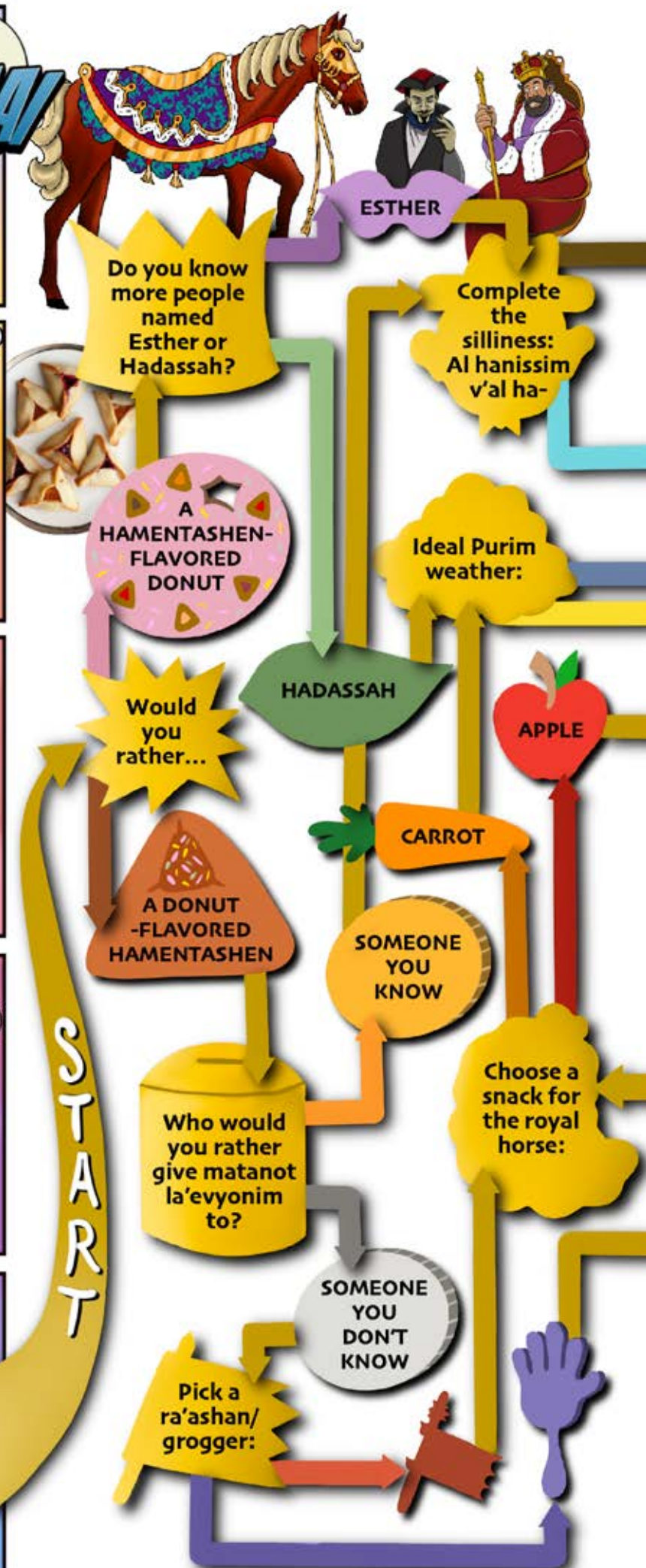
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LICORICIA OF WINCHESTER
Like Queen Esther, Licoricia of Winchester had to manage a relationship with her king that could go bad at any moment. Living in the 1200s in England was challenging for Jews who were a minority in the population and regularly experienced prejudice. Licoricia used her wealth and power to lend money to Jews in need. She even intervened several times on behalf of fellow Jews by defending them to the king, Henry III. While she got along well with the king and even lent him money, he had her imprisoned twice (though she had done nothing wrong). She was murdered in her home in 1277.

DOÑA GRACIA MENDES NASI
Like Queen Esther, Doña Gracia Mendes Nasi kept her Jewish identity hidden and then lived openly as she worked to save her people. In the 1500s, Doña Gracia devoted her life to helping and rescuing fellow marranos (secret Spanish-Portuguese Jews). Doña Gracia built shuls, yeshivot and hospitals and even rescued Jewish captives from pirates in the Mediterranean Sea. Towards the end of her life, Doña Gracia reestablished a Jewish settlement in Tiveria as a place of refuge, working to bring Jews back to Eretz Yisrael.

ASNAT BARZANI
Like Queen Esther, Asnat Barzani was honored like a queen. She lived in the 1600s and was treated like royalty for her brilliant Torah scholarship. When she married Rabbi Jacob Mizrachi, one of her father's best students, Asnat made sure that part of her marriage agreement was that, because she was a scholar, she would never have to do household chores. When Asnat's husband died, she took over running the yeshiva.

SIVAN RAHAV-MEIR
Like Queen Esther, Sivan Rahav-Meir is a voice for the Jewish people. A successful broadcaster and reporter, Sivan also uses her influential voice in another powerful way: to teach Torah. Her learned and meaningful insights on the weekly parasha inspire thousands of people around the world every week. Sivan and her family spent a year doing shlichut in North America on behalf of Mizrachi to help connect more Jews to the Land of Israel, Am Yisrael, and the Torah. Sivan's voice continues to reach far and wide; she has written a number of books and, like Queen Esther, people all over the world enjoy reading Sivan's writing.



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