

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

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**Dedicated in memory of Cantor Jerome and Deborah Simons**



ישיבת רכנו יצחק אלחנן

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

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# THE PEOPLE MISSING FROM OUR SEDER

Pesach night, in general, is a time when so many different people gather people together: family, friends, neighbors — the *chacham*, *tam*, *she'eino yodea lishol* — even the *rasha* has a place at the table. *Kol dichfin yetei v'yeichol* — everyone is invited. But while everyone is invited, and many are present, inevitably there are those who are missing. These “missing” people are represented in the Seder as well. Who are these people?

The first person is Eliyahu. By opening the door and pouring him wine, and play acting his participation, we in a sense both invoke his presence but also call attention to the fact that he is absent. He is there but he is not there at the same time. The second person is Moshe. Read through Shemot and one can hardly begin any part of the story of the exodus without his name being mentioned. Yet we go through the whole Seder night, barely mentioning his name. But everyone knows he played a much more crucial role to the story.

I would suggest that these two people, Eliyahu and Moshe, represent two categories of people who are physically not at our Seder but nevertheless are very much thought about during the Seder.

Who does Eliyahu represent? Eliyahu is the figure who heralds in the time of the Messiah. In this sense, he represents the future. The people who are missing from our personal Seder table who we wish were here with us and we hope to be with us in the future. Every year we open the door anew, for each year we anticipate and hope that they will be present. And this could be anyone. It could be close friends or family that are presently a far distance away. Loved ones who used to spend Pesach together with us and are now spending it elsewhere. Or perhaps a different situation, members of our family from whom we are estranged: brothers or sisters, children or grandchildren that for whatever reason are distant from us. In fact, it could be people we have not yet met. The intended we have not yet

found, or the newborn we have not yet delivered. Any person who we hope and pray will join us at our Seder, if not this year, then the next. We think of them, even if they are not here; we think of them, even if we have not yet met them. These are the people we hope will join us, if not now then tomorrow. The people we want to be part of our lives.

Moshe, however, represents a different category of people who we miss. Not people who could potentially be with us, but people who meant so much to us in our lives and who are sadly lost to us. If Eliyahu represents the people of our future, Moshe represents the people from our past. And like Moshe who is so essential to the story of the Exodus, these people, even in their absence, are still present. They are always there in the background. Even after they move on from this world, they still serve as inspiration for us. We still turn to them for guidance and advice; we can still hear their voices; still feel the warmth of their embrace. Where

is Moshe at the Seder? He is nowhere but he is everywhere. He is not directly mentioned, but his presence is felt throughout the evening, for without him we would not be here to celebrate.

I remember the first time my wife and I made a Seder for our family and guests. We were accustomed to being the children at the table, assuming the set roles in which we were familiar. But it was another feeling entirely to be the ones who made the Seder — to prepare the Seder plate, to set the table, to lead the Maggid. When we recited the story and sang the tunes of the Haggadah, I thought of my grandparents' home; I thought of the previous generations who taught me this tune — their voices echoed in my head, their faces pictured in my mind's eye. Were they gone? Were they missing from the Seder? Or in some way, are they still present, as we sing their tunes, pass down their traditions, tell over their stories and remember their impact on our lives. It is very appropriate that we recite Yizkor

and invoke the names of our loved ones at the end of Pesach, because they have been with us all throughout this week, sometimes consciously other times subconsciously, but nevertheless always present.

The Seder is a multilayered and complex experience. It weaves together both the conscious and subconscious, the text and the subtext. When we open the Seder inviting all to join, *Kol dichfin yetei v'yeichol*, we invite those who are physically with us, *et asher yeshno po*, and those who are not physically with us, *ve-et asher einenu po*. It is not just our current family and friends who are sitting with us at the Seder but also all of the Moshes and Eliyahus of our lives. The past, present and future all come together to create a multi-layered multi-generational experience.

There are two endings to the Seder. The first is *Nirtzah* — when we sing *leshanah habah beyerushalayim habenuyah* — when our grand future will be realized, when differences can

be forgiven and friends and family are reunited, when Jews from all distances will come together in brotherhood and unity. But that is only the first ending. The second ending is when we finish the *Chad Gadya: V'ata Hakadosh baruch Hu v'shachat l'malach hamavet*. When G-d slaughters the angel of death, when death will be no more, the time of *tehiyat ha-meitim* — when past generations return and when we are reunited with our fathers and mothers, grandparents and grandparents, lost siblings and children.

Together, both of these endings herald in a time when those missing from the Seder are present at our Seder.

This Pesach, we should take a moment to appreciate those who are around our table, the special people in our lives, the ones who make us feel blessed, but at the same time, let us not forget those who are missing. For we are promised that in the end, we will all be home together. May we be *zocheh* to see that time come soon.

<p>SEEK <b>TRUTH</b></p> <p> <b>EMET</b> תנו</p>	<p>DISCOVER YOUR <b>POTENTIAL</b></p> <p> <b>ADAM</b> דתן</p>	<p><b>LIVE</b> YOUR VALUES</p> <p> <b>CHAIM</b> דתן</p>	<p>ACT WITH <b>COMPASSION</b></p> <p> <b>CHESED</b> תנו</p>	<p>BRING <b>REDEMPTION</b></p> <p> <b>TZION</b> תנו</p>
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## INSIGHTS FROM THE RAV ON THE MAGGID SECTION OF THE HAGGADAH

*As the thirtieth Yahrtzeit of the Rav approaches, we are again privileged to share a collection of his insights on the Haggadah. As we noted in these pages in advance of his twentieth Yahrtzeit, the Rav often observed that the Yom Tov experience of one who devoted time before its arrival to studying and reviewing the laws and themes of the holiday is immeasurably greater than the Yom Tov experience of one who did not do so. The Rav himself would thus offer many special shiurim prior to each holiday, including, of course, Pesach. What follows here is a small sampling of his many profound lessons and teachings relating to the Haggadah. I was zocheh to hear a few of these thoughts directly from the Rav myself; the others are culled from notes written and published in various venues by others. Any mistakes or inaccuracies here should be attributed solely to me.*

הא לחמא עניא די אכלו אבהתנא  
בארעא דמצרים. כל דכפין ייתי  
ויכול כל דצריך ייתי ויפסח.

***This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat; let all who are in need come and observe Pesach.***

We begin Maggid with a reference to the matzoh, describing it as “the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt.” Immediately thereafter, we declare that anyone who is hungry may come and eat (with us) and anyone who is in need may come and

observe Pesach (with us). What is the connection between the fact that our ancestors ate matzoh in Egypt and our invitation to others to join us?

When in Egypt, not all the Jews there were slaves; Chazal tell us, for example, that the enslavement was not imposed upon the tribe of Levi (see Rashi to *Shemos* 5:4, *d”h lechu*, citing *Shemos Rabbah* 5:16). It may further be presumed that not every Jew who was a slave suffered in the identical fashion; some may have been subjected to much harder physical labor than others, and some may have been more deprived

of basic necessities than others. What they shared was a sense of solidarity, of responsibility for one another. Those who had food, who were able to get even a small piece of matzoh to eat, shared what they had with those who were worse off, breaking their own matzoh in half, as we symbolically do at *Yachatz*. And it was this spirit of unity that led to the redemption.

When we invite the less fortunate to join us at our Pesach Seder, we are carrying on this tradition of solidarity and responsibility. By using the double language of this invitation, extending



it both to those who are hungry and to those who are in need, we are reaching out both to the poor among us, that is, those people who are literally impoverished and may truly not have enough food for themselves and their family members, as well as to those who may be financially quite wealthy and who have plenty to eat, but are "in need" because they are lonely, because they don't "fit in" anywhere, and because they have nobody with whom to celebrate and enjoy the holiday. We begin our retelling of the story of *yetzias Mitzrayim* by announcing that following the example of our ancestors in Egypt, we are one people, always ready to help each other.

### מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות. *How different this night is from all other nights.*

In the introduction to his *Hilchos Chametz U'Matzoh*, the Rambam records that there are two *mitzvos asei* incumbent upon us nowadays at the Seder on Pesach night (in the absence of the Beis HaMikdash, when we are unable eat the meat of the Korban Pesach, which we obviously cannot offer), namely the mitzvah to eat matzoh, and the mitzvah to tell the story of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. Among the Rabbinic mitzvos of this evening is the requirement to eat maror, which was Biblically mandated only as an accompaniment to the Korban Pesach and is now performed as a commemoration of what was done in the past (see *Pesachim* 120a, and Rambam *ibid.* 7:12).

It is noteworthy that the questions presented as part of the *Mah Nishtanah* include one question about matzoh, one question about maror, and two questions connected to the telling of the story of *yetzias Mitzrayim*, the one about dipping, a practice introduced in

order to inspire children to question, sensing something irregular, thus setting the stage for sharing the story (see *Pesachim* 114b and Rashi to 114a there, *d"h 'ad*), and the one about reclining, a practice designed to highlight our having achieved freedom as we reenact that which we talk about in relating the story (see Rambam, *ibid.* 7:7). One may wonder, then, why there are two separate questions in the *Mah Nishtanah* regarding the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*, and only one each regarding matzoh and maror, and, we may add, none at all regarding another prominent (Rabbinic) mitzvah of the night, namely, the obligation to drink four cups of wine.

The answer is that the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* actually has two very different aspects to it. One aspect is the simple retelling of the story to one's children (see *Shemos* 13:8), particularly as prompted by their questions (*ibid.* 13:14); that aspect, the intellectual aspect, is represented by the question about dipping, which is done, as mentioned above, to encourage the children to raise questions. The second aspect is the reliving of the experience, and the demonstration, both to ourselves and to others, that we truly feel as though we personally have just been redeemed from Egypt (see the Mishnah in *Pesachim* 116a and Rambam, *ibid.* 7:6). That aspect, the experiential aspect, is represented by the question about reclining, through which we indeed show that we are now free people, able to recline and eat in the manner of nobility. The drinking of the four cups of wine is just another example of that demonstration of freedom (note that the Rambam, *ibid.* 7:7, clearly states as much in linking the mitzvah to recline with that to drink the four cups as manifestations of freedom); no separate question is thus needed about the four cups, as the question about reclining already "covers" this aspect.

### עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים.

#### *We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt.*

We begin our response to the questions of the *Mah Nishtanah* by reporting the undeniable historical fact that "*Avadim hayinu L'Paroh...*" we were slaves to Paroh. It must be emphasized, though, that our statement is that we were indeed slaves to Paroh, but not that we were "*Avdei Paroh...*," Paroh's slaves. What is the difference? The former phrase describes a legal, social, status; each Jew in Egypt "belonged" to Paroh and had to function as a slave to him. This status did not, however, define the essential personality of any Jew there. He was a slave in the sense of being in a particular political and economic condition, a defined station in life, but that condition, that station, was incidental and external to who he truly was. The Jew in Egypt retained his independent mind, his own approach to reality, and thus continued to long for redemption. His status as a slave to Paroh was not existential; it was extrinsic to his personality, and he was therefore able to retain his dignity and his spiritual essence.

Strikingly, Paroh's Egyptian servants are indeed referred to as "*Avdei Paroh*" (*Shemos* 10:7 and 11:3); these people were in fact Paroh's slaves in the fullest sense of the term. They were inwardly and intrinsically slaves, their entire personality was identified with Paroh, and serving him was their entire purpose in life. They had no aspirations for freedom or for a change of status; this was their way of life. Jews, however, may find themselves in a certain socio-economic situation in which they suffer from terrible oppression, but this does not extinguish their desire for redemption. It is only before Hashem that we surrender our freedom; our status as servants to Him

alone is substantive, not incidental, existential not foreign, intrinsic to our personalities, not extrinsic. When reciting *Hallel*, we thus proudly declare ourselves “*Avdei Hashem*” (*Tehillim* 113:1), but we are not *Avdei Paroh* (see *Megillah* 14a).

ברוך המקום ברוך הוא ברוך שנתן  
תורה לעמו ישראל ברוך הוא.

***Blessed is the Omnipresent One, blessed is He; Blessed is He Who gave the Torah to His people Israel, blessed is He.***

The Haggadah introduces the famous passage regarding the “Four Sons” with a paragraph that serves as a kind of abbreviated *Bircas HaTorah*, preceding our embarking on the first of many expositions of Torah verses relating to *yetzias Mitzrayim* that follow. In this paragraph, Hashem is referred to as *HaMakom*, the Omnipresent. Why is this particular Divine Name used specifically here?

The Gemara (*Chagigah* 13b) discusses the prophets Yechezkel and Yeshayah, whose respective prophetic styles were very different, and notes that they each perceived the identical vision of Hashem’s throne, but their reaction and hence their depiction of it were not at all alike. Yechezkel’s description is quite detailed, while Yeshayah’s is relatively brief. The Gemara explains this distinction by comparing Yechezkel to a villager who rarely gets a glimpse of the king and is thus elaborately descriptive when he eventually does, while Yeshayah is likened to a dweller in the capital city who sees the king regularly and is thus not as dramatic in his presentation of what he sees.

This distinction might not, however, have anything to do with the level or intensity of the prophecies of Yechezkel and Yeshayah. Rather, their different styles reflect the very different times in

which they lived. Yeshayah lived when the Beis HaMikdash was still standing and Hashem’s Divine Presence could therefore still be openly perceived. His vision of Hashem’s throne was brief, as a detailed description was then not necessary, and his signature description was about His holiness (*Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh...* — Yeshayah 6:3), which then was still palpable. Yechezkel, however, flourished during the time following the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, and he prophesied while in exile. A more descriptive presentation was then needed, and his signature depiction was about Hashem being distant and transcendent, no longer immanent (*Baruch Kevod Hashem Mimkomo* — Yechezkel 3:12), but even having receded to “His place,” still relating to us.

The name “*HaMakom*” referring to Hashem thus describes His interaction with us from a distance, during challenging times, when His holiness is not that perceptible. One of the four sons is of course the *rasha*, the wicked son. He is alienated from holiness and thus far away from the God defined as holy. But although he is removed from Hashem, Hashem is still ready to embrace him, for while He may be distant, He Himself is still “the place of the entire world” (see *Bereishis Rabbah* 68:9). As such, He does not abandon anybody, and He is prepared to include everybody without concern for the person’s current moral standing. As we introduce the Four Sons with a word about the giving of the Torah, we refer to Hashem specifically as “*HaMakom*,” calling our attention to those who may yet seem far away from Hashem, because we wish to stress that the Torah was given to everybody, even the *rasha*, and he too has a share in it. Hashem is ready to invest in and devote significant attention to him as well, as we too should be.

כנגד ארבעה בנים דברה תורה.

***The Torah addresses itself to four sons.***

Why is it that particularly on the night of Pesach we stress the importance of reaching out to all different types of students, as represented by the “Four Sons?” A famous passage in the Gemara (*Niddah* 30b) relates that every embryo, while yet in the mother’s womb, is taught Torah by an angel, but before being born, he is smacked upon the face and he forgets what he has learned. The obvious question is, why bother to teach the child Torah at all if he is going to forget everything anyhow? The answer is that since the child has already learned Torah in the womb, that Torah, while ostensibly forgotten, remains in the deep recesses of his heart and mind. When he starts to learn during his lifetime, he then subconsciously begins to recall that which is embedded within him, and that recollection of something from long ago enables him to better internalize and actualize that which he is now learning.

On the night of *yetzias Mitzrayim*, every Jew experienced, among other things, the public display of *giluy Shechinah*, Divine revelation, which raised each person, at least for a moment, to a place of great understanding and perception of the Divine. Everybody there felt the presence of Hashem, and the extraordinary *giluy Shechinah* of that great night became embedded in our national psyche, and in the heart and mind of every individual Jew. At the Seder, we thus address every type of Jew, regardless of his intellectual ability or level of interest, and we restage the events of *yetzias Mitzrayim* in an attempt to reawaken that *giluy Shechinah* experience resting in the inner conscience of each and every Jew. The Seder night is thus a most appropriate night to try to connect with every type of student.



יכול מראש חדש.

**One might think [that the discussion of the exodus should start] from Rosh Chodesh.**

Why might one think that the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* should be in effect starting from Rosh Chodesh Nissan (if not for a specific source limiting it to the night of Pesach, as it is connected specifically to the mitzvah to eat matzoh and maror, which applies only that night)? We do not find such a similar proposition regarding, for example, the mitzvah of lulav, suggesting that it should be obligatory starting at the beginning of the month (of Tishrei). Why is *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* different?

The answer may be derived from the Rambam's presentation of the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* (*Hilchos Chametz U'Matzoh* 7:1), which he says is derived from the verse in the Torah that directs us to always remember ("zachor") the day when we left Egypt (Shemos 13:3). He then notes that this mitzvah is parallel to that which directs us to always remember the day of Shabbos (Shemos 20:8), which is also introduced by the same word "zachor." When it comes to Shabbos, we find that there is a requirement to remember it not only on the day of Shabbos itself,

Like Avraham, who overcame hostile public opinion, we too have the power of our free will to elevate ourselves without succumbing to the values of the culture around us that do not dovetail with those expected of the covenantal nation.

but starting already at the beginning of the week (see *Beitzah* 16a); the Ramban (to Shemos ibid.,) points out that this is why we identify the days of the week based on their progression towards Shabbos ("Yom Rishon BaShabbos," "Yom Sheini BaShabbos," etc.). This being the case, just as one must remember the Shabbos by anticipating, yearning for, and talking about it in advance of the day itself, perhaps so too we should remember the day of *yetzias Mitzrayim* by anticipating, yearning for, and talking about it in advance of the day itself. Hence the suggestion to begin relating the story of *yetzias Mitzrayim* on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, in order to be able to better prepare for and focus upon the day of *yetzias Mitzrayim* when it ultimately arrives.

מתחלה עובדי עבודה זרה היו  
אבותינו.

**Initially our ancestors were idol worshippers.**

The Mishnah (*Pesachim* 116a) directs us that in retelling the story of *yetzias Mitzrayim* on Pesach night, we should begin the narrative by sharing the negative element and conclude with the positive element. The Gemara there records one opinion according to which the "negative element" is the fact that our ancestors were originally idol worshippers. But while that negative piece of information is certainly true, dating back to Terach, the father of Avraham Avinu, who was of course an idolator, there is a positive lesson to be derived from this presentation as well, and that is the lesson of Avraham Avinu himself.

It is clear from the verses that are subsequently cited in the Haggadah (*Yehoshua* 24:2-4) that it was Hashem Himself who "took" Avraham and led him far away from the land of his upbringing; the initiative was that

of Hashem, as He, in effect, chose Avraham and invited him to embark on his fateful mission. In that sense, it is not the case that our ancestors initially did anything to deserve being selected; they were simple idol worshippers like everybody else. At this point of the Seder, as we just begin to relate the events of *yetzias Mitzrayim*, we express our indebtedness and our gratitude to Hashem for the fact that it was our forefather Avraham whom He "took" to be the founder of the covenantal nation.

At the same time, though, we also focus here upon the greatness of Avraham himself. After all, he lived as part of a culture where idol worship was the norm and which had its own code of ethics and morality. Despite this, however, he was determined to discover and hone his relationship with Hashem, thereby demonstrating that if someone is truly determined to "find" Hashem, he can do so even if it means going against what society stands for and encourages. Whatever Avraham accomplished can be accomplished by others, and even in modern times, we should not be swayed from pursuing our mission by the expectations of the society around us. Like Avraham, who overcame hostile public opinion, we too have the power of our free will to elevate ourselves without succumbing to the values of the culture around us that do not dovetail with those expected of the covenantal nation. Our way of life revolves around finding Hashem in all our activities, in whatever we do (see Rambam, *Hilchos De'os* 3:3, citing *Mishlei* 3:6).

אלו קרבנו לפני הר סיני ולא נתן לנו  
את התורה דייןנו.

**If He had only brought us before Mount Sinai and had not given us the Torah, it would have sufficed for us.**

In the famous passage of *Dayeinu*, the *Ba'al HaHaggadah* declares that it would

have been sufficient had Hashem only brought us before Mount Sinai but had not given us the Torah. The implication of this seems to be that there was independent importance in coming to Mount Sinai, quite apart from the fact that we received the Torah there. The question, of course, is what this means. Wasn't the entire purpose of going to Mount Sinai in order to receive the Torah? What happened there that was of value other than our having been given the Torah there?

The event of *Ma'amad Har Sinai*, the assembly at Mount Sinai, actually had two goals and hence two results. One was intellectual — the Jewish people there acquired the knowledge of Hashem's Torah and all its intricacies. The second was experiential — the people there perceived *giluy Shechinah*, Divine revelation, and were thus able to see Hashem in a manner not attained by even the greatest of our prophets (see *Mechilta to Parashas Yisro*, *Mechilta DeBaChodesh* No. 3). Even had we not received the Torah at Mount Sinai, and hence not achieved the intellectual result of that event, there was still independent worth in our simply being at Mount Sinai and experiencing the *giluy Shechinah* which was such an integral part of the event. And that alone would indeed have sufficed to obligate us to extend our thanks to Hashem.

When we engage today in the mitzvah of *talmud Torah*, we similarly focus upon the above two aspects. On the one hand, learning Torah is an intellectual pursuit; we study, we analyze, we infer, we conceptualize. This is the work of the intellect. Beyond that, however, one who learns Torah properly feels that he is confronting the infinite, and reacts with a feeling of excitement, awe, and even ecstasy, as he recognizes that he is in the midst of an encounter with the Divine. The experience of *talmud Torah* is thus not only an intellectual one but

an emotional one as well. The sense of *giluy Shechinah* that characterizes this experiential aspect of our having received the Torah at Sinai, while clearly intertwined with the intellectual aspect, stands on its own as significant enough to be highlighted.

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מצה זו שאנו אוכלין על שום מה. על שום שלא הספיק בצקם של אבותינו להחמיץ עד שנגלה עליהם מלך מלכי המלכים הקב"ה וגאלם.

*This matzoh that we eat is for what reason? It is because the dough of our ancestors did not have time to leaven before the King of Kings revealed Himself to them and redeemed them.*

The Mishnah (*Pesachim* 116b), cited in the Haggadah, quotes Rabban Gamliel as having taught that the reason we eat matzoh on Pesach night is that the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt suddenly, and in great haste, before there was time for their dough to rise and become leavened (see *Shemos* 12:39). The problem with this explanation is that they had already been commanded beforehand to eat matzoh, as an accompaniment to the Korban Pesach that was offered prior to their having been redeemed (*ibid.* 12:8). This matzoh clearly had nothing to do with their having to rush out before their bread could be properly baked.

The real question being addressed in this Mishnah is thus not why Hashem gave us this particular mitzvah to eat matzoh, or what He wants from us when we perform it. Rather, the question is what the mitzvah means to us, what we ourselves should think about and remember, what we should have in mind. Rabban Gamliel was looking to explain not why we eat matzoh, in the sense of why Hashem commanded us to do so, or what His motivation was historically in requiring

this action, as that to a great extent is ultimately unknowable to us, but rather what message we should draw from performing this mitzvah, what we are meant to understand by doing so, and what the action should symbolize to us. And the answer is that our redemption from Egypt, while awaited and anticipated, ultimately came suddenly and in an unexpected manner, and so too will our future redemption.

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בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאלו הוא יצא ממצרים.

*In every generation a person is obligated to envision himself as if he had come out of Egypt.*

Towards the end of *Maggid*, we cite the words of the Mishnah (*Pesachim* 116b), which teach that we are all to view ourselves as though we personally came out of Egypt. How exactly can we accomplish this? By trying to see the events of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* as something new, and not as an old, historical happening that took place in days of yore. We are to view our Biblical heroes — Avraham Avinu, Moshe Rabbeinu, etc. — as people who are alive, with whom we can interact and from whom we can draw personal inspiration. When relating the story of *Yetzias Mitzratyim* to our children, we should strive to present it as our own story, not as something that happened to unnamed ancestors of ours several millennia ago. We should talk as if we are an eyewitness to these events, not as someone relating testimony that we have heard second or third hand (which is unacceptable in *Beis Din*) even if it originates with a perfectly reliable source. By delving into, acting out, and recreating the events of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, we demonstrate that they are still very much alive and part of our own personal story.





## PERSPECTIVES ON THE HAGGADA

### A Positive Outlook Changes Everything

#### Rabbi Aharon Ciment

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There was light at the end of the tunnel for the Jewish people. They were enslaved for 210 years and finally Moshe is instructed by Hashem to inform the Jewish people they are going to be redeemed:

וגם אני שמעתי את נאקת בני ישראל אשר מצרים מעבדים אתם ואזכר את בריתי.

*Moreover, I have heard the groans of the Jewish people whom Egypt enslaves and I have remembered my covenant.*

#### Shemos 6:5

The Jewish people's response was indifference at best:

וידבר משה כן אל בני ישראל ולא שמעו אל משה מקר רוח ומעבודה קשה.

*Moshe spoke to the Jewish people though they didn't listen to Moshe because of shortness of spirit and hard work.*

#### Shemos 6:9

Seemingly they were so exhausted, they were incapable of processing or even believing their impending freedom. By contrast, in perek 4 in Parshas Shemos, the Torah seems to paint a different picture of Klal Yisrael's response to their impending freedom. As the pasuk tells us:

ויאמן העם וישמעו כי פקד ה' את בני ישראל. *And the people believed and they heard that Hashem had remembered the children of Israel.*

#### Shemos 4:31

In Parshas Shemos they eagerly anticipated and expected redemption by the hand of God, but a few chapters later, in Vaera, they were passive, perhaps indifferent, and essentially incapable of believing that they would actually be redeemed. How do we understand the difference?

Hashem commands Moshe to speak to Pharaoh that he send the Jewish people from his land:

בא דבר אל פרעה מלך מצרים וישלח בני ישראל מארצו.

*Go speak to Pharaoh and he will send the Jewish people from his land.*

#### Shemos 6:11

Typically, Moshe does as he is commanded by Hashem but here he demurs:

הן בני ישראל לא שמעו אלי ואיך ישמעני פרעה ואני ערל שפתים.

*Behold the children of Israel have not listened to me, so how will Pharaoh listen as I have sealed lips?*

#### Shemos 6:12

The commentators ask: doesn't a prophet have to be perfect? A prophet has to be wise and wealthy. He can't have any deficiencies. To compound the question, the Shelah asks: as Klal Yisroel stood at the foot of the mountain as they were accepting the Torah, every Jew was cured of their illnesses. If so, why wasn't Moshe Rabbeinu healed? Why was every Jew healed from their ailment and not Moshe Rabbeinu? Shouldn't Moshe Rabbeinu, the *adon hanevi'im*, the master of all prophets, be no worse than any other Jew who received a *refuah* for all their ailments. Moshe could finally have had his deficiency permanently reversed!

The Mishna Berura, 138:6, teaches us that we don't end any *aliyah* with a pasuk that speaks about something



bad. Understanding this halacha, Reb Eli Baruch Finkel asks how are we allowed on the weekday Torah reading to end the second aliyah of Vaera with the pasuk, “they didn’t listen to Moshe because of shortness of spirit and hard work”? Reb Eli Baruch explains based on the teachings of the Vilna Gaon that the Jewish people should have been enslaved for 400 years. However, due to back-breaking and debilitating work, the number of years was shortened to 210. Ultimately it was their back-breaking, intense labor that actually expedited their redemption! What was thought to be a negative was actually a positive, since it allowed them to leave earlier than anticipated. Reb Eli Baruch explains this is precisely why we are allowed to end the aliyah talking about the Jewish people’s intense labor — because their intense labor was their reason for their exodus out of Egypt 190 years earlier than expected. What is interesting to note is that our perspective or outlook on a situation actually can dictate halacha. Because we were able to take a negative situation and look at it from a different perspective, it allowed us to end an aliyah discussing our hardship without compromising on the halacha. This perhaps will help us understand why Moshe Rabbeinu was not healed at Har Sinai. The Ran in his *Droshos* (no. 5) teaches us:

והוסר ממנו בהשגחה גמורה הדיבור הצח, יען לא יחשב שהיות ישראל וגדליהם נמשכים אחריו, היה לצחות דברו כמו [שיאמר] על מי שהוא צח הדיבור שימשיך ההמון אחריו, ושהשקר ממנו יחשב אמת.

*Through divine providence, [Moshe Rabbeinu] was not eloquent in speech, so that nobody thinks that the Jewish people and its leaders followed because of his eloquent speech, like they say that an eloquent person can attract followers and even falsities can appear like the truth.*

The Ran explains that Moshe Rabbeinu had to have a speech impediment in

order for people to realize the Torah is sweet because it is inherently sweet regardless of who is transmitting the Torah. Even a person who is unable to speak can still deliver a sweet, beautiful Torah. What was originally thought to be Moshe’s weakness was actually the reason he was chosen to be the transmitter of the Torah. What we perceive as a negative is actually a positive. If Moshe’s speech impediment would have been healed, perhaps he never would have been the one to give over the Torah to the Jewish people. Moshe himself understood that to truly sanctify G-d’s name, he needed this impediment. Our perspective can change reality. It impacts our observance of a halacha and it allowed Moshe to be the transmitter of the our timeless Torah.

The ability to look with an *ayin tov* (positive outlook) takes constant work. Rabbi Yakov Kamenetsky in his classic work, *Emes L’Yaakov*, quotes the medrash in *Shemos Rabbah* that the Jewish people were given Shabbos as their day of rest and it was on that day that the Jewish people would inspire themselves with stories about the redemption. However, Pharaoh took away that day and they no longer had the opportunity to read those *megilos*. I believe that this is what changed between Parshas Shemos, where Klal Yisrael believed in the redemption, and Parshas Vaera where they didn’t believe redemption was coming. Initially, they were excited, they had a positive perspective because they trained themselves to think in a positive way. They read stories about the *geula* and they saw there was hope. But Pharaoh did not want them to have hope and he took away their day of hope, and by doing so they could no longer see the world with an *ayin tov*. Life has its challenges, but little do we realize if we change our perspective and see hope, it can change the narrative from being hopeless to being hopeful.

## We Are Survivors!

### Rabbi Lawrence Hajioff

*Professor of Judaic Studies, Stern College for Women*

I am writing these words two days after the tragic news of another terrorist attack in Israel. We were inundated with images of innocent men and children whose lives were taken way too early by people whose hatred for the Jewish people far exceeds their own love for their families and their own lives. As their loved ones cried as these holy kedoshim were being buried, we too could not help but feel the incredible loss for klal Yisrael and the loss of future generations that could have come from them.

This is nothing new. At one of the most intense moments of the Pesach Seder, we cover the matzot and lift a full glass of wine, and say the paragraph of *Vehi Sheamda*, which includes the lines, “For it was not one alone who rose against us to annihilate us, rather in every generation there are those who rise against us to annihilate us, but the Holy One, Blessed is He, saves us from their hand.” Some will even sing these words with a beautiful melodious tune. Why are we raising a glass at this moment? Why are we singing words that testify to the fact we have enemies who want us destroyed?

Avraham was referred to as an Ivri, Hebrew. The word Ivri comes from the word “ever”, the one who stood on the other side. All the world stood on one side, and he stood on the other. This isn’t a geographical statement, it means that Avraham had principles that set him apart from the rest of humanity at that time. Nimrod, seeing a threat in this independent thinker threw Avraham into a fiery furnace, which he miraculously survived. In much the same way, this ability to be isolated from the rest of the world, is how the Jewish

people, Avraham's descendants, were also isolated in Mitzrayim and thrown into a *kur habarzel*, a smelting furnace, which purified them. This insistence on being different, via dress, language and names, while maintaining a higher moral ground and ethical standards, elicits a visceral hatred in those who do not.

According to the midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 44:22) during Avraham's prophetic vision at the Covenant Between the Parts, God promised Avraham that he would exact retribution from the Egyptians and eventually free his offspring from slavery. This promise included salvation from future exiles too. God assured Avraham that "And also the nation that they serve I too shall judge" (*Bereishit* 15:14) The word "also" includes all the future kingdoms and nations that will persecute the Jewish people throughout our history, will not escape punishment, and, adds Rashi, that our enemies will be paid back for their cruelty. So it is only because of the promise that Hashem made to Avraham, that Hashem saves us from their hands and punishes them.

The Klausenberger Rebbe related that once he was languishing in a Nazi slave labor camp, and he was approached by a professor who asked him derisively, "So what do you have to say about the lot of the Jews now?"

He responded, "It will be good. I am not a prophet, rather my conviction is based on historic fact. How many nations have resolved to annihilate the Jewish people. Consider how many millions of Jews have already perished in sanctification of God's name at the hands of mighty empires and nationalities. Empires and nationalities, of which there remains no living trace today. The Jewish people continue to exist, their many persecutions and travails notwithstanding. There are today sizable families who trace their ancestry to a particular grandfather, who had

perished some generations earlier in sanctification of God's name, even as his executioners, and their commanders have fallen into total oblivion. Although I cannot tell you what will happen to me personally, I am nevertheless certain that the Jewish people as a whole, will survive, and will witness the downfall of their adversaries. I can guarantee this based on thousands of years of Jewish history, persisting to this very day." Lowering his head, the professor conceded the point to the Rebbe.

The first word of the stanza, "*vehi*" "it is this" signifies something very important about our survival abilities throughout the galut. The Abarbanel views the word *vehi* as a numerical acronym for the secret of Jewish survival. The Vav refers to the six orders of the Mishnah, the foundation of the Torah She Ba'al Peh. The Hey refers to the Five Books of Moses, Torah SheBichtav. The Yud is the Aseret Hadibrot which contains within it all the mitzvot of the Torah. Finally the Aleph refers to the ultimate One, God, that gave them to us. That is what stands before us, and permits us to keep enduring the long galut, our loyalty to the Torah, Hashem and His mitzvot.

The ability to raise our cups while reciting this passage may be because we have a greater vision than the galut we are currently in right now. We raise our cups to the future and the ultimate salvation that will arrive when Mashiach reveals himself and ends the end of every galut we have ever been through.

May we see the final redemption come to fruition very soon and end the galut speedily in our days.

## The Plagues of Yam Suf

### Deena Rabinovich EdD

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Among the more puzzling segments of the Haggadah is the section dedicated to contrasting the number of plagues (although here "beatings" or "pummelings" might be a better fit than "plagues") that God brought upon the Egyptian nation and on its army on land and at sea. Surely those who added this tannaitic discussion to the Seder text had more in mind than a quick multiplication quiz.<sup>1</sup> Not all haggadot had this segment. The Rambam's haggadah goes straight from *Detza'ch Ada'sh Beacha'v* to "Pesah, Matza U'maror," as does Rav Natronai's haggadah and other versions. The counting of the makkot on the sea is found in the haggadot of Rav Saadya and Rav Amram. The recounting by the three tannaim was apparently added to the Seder, presumably at one of the Babylonian yeshivot, along with the ever popular "Dayyenu" during the Geonic period.<sup>2</sup>

If the makkot at the Yam Suf (Sea of Reeds) was going to be included — and certainly if they were to be contrasted with those makkot in Egypt itself — then the discussion clearly needed to be placed precisely where we find it, following the enumeration of the ten plagues. The debate between Rabbi Yossi, Rabbi Eliezar and Rabbi Akiva assumes that there were makkot at Yam Suf, a fact they derive homiletically from Exodus 14:31

וירא ישראל את היד הגדולה אשר עשה ה' במצרים.

*And Bnai Yisrael saw the great hand that*

*Hashem had performed against Egypt.*  
(Robert Alter translation).

We will discuss this argument later on.

As we attempt to understand what relationship existed between the plagues God inflicted on Egypt and the destruction of its army at sea, we are interested in understanding how the tannaim read the Biblical chapters, what lessons they drew and why the passages in *Mekhilta* were incorporated into the Haggadah.

The makkot were inflicted by God to punish the Egyptians for how they treated their Jewish guests — for the slavery (*avdut*) and the affliction (*inui*)<sup>3</sup> — and to force Pharaoh's hand to free them. Beyond that, though, the Torah makes clear that there was also an educational component for Jews and Egyptians to learn about Hashem. Both needed to learn who God was and about the extent of His power and His requirements for humankind. Bnai Yisrael had to further recognize the special providence He was providing them in preparation for developing the covenantal relationship promised to Abraham.

What did each population know, or not know, about Hashem prior to the makkot? Let's look at what both know prior to the makkot.

When God first tells Moshe to return to Egypt and free the children of Israel, Moshe's response is that they (Bnai Yisrael) don't even know Your name (Ex. 3:13) and they won't believe that You sent me to rescue them (Ex. 4:1).

When Moshe and Aharon first appear in front of Pharaoh and demand the freedom of the people in the name of God, the monarch asks (Ex. 5:2):

מי ה' אשר אשמע בקולו.

*Who is God that I should listen to His voice?*

The people of Egypt will, over time,

learn about the God of Israel; the enslaved Jews will also learn bit by bit about the power of God. The first few makkot reveal God as the Creator of the World (the plagues of Blood, Frogs and Lice); those that follow show that God is involved in what happens in this world (the plagues of Wild Animals,<sup>4</sup> Pestilence, and Boils); the next three show Him as having the ultimate power (the plagues of Hail, Locust and Darkness).

The educational journey of Pharaoh involves him repeatedly taking one step forward and a step or two backwards. We see him bend a bit but keep returning to his starting point that the people of Israel must remain his slaves. It is only after the tenth plague in which his citizens are being struck down that Pharaoh orders that Bnai Yisrael leave immediately (Ex. 13: 31), possibly rushed into the decision by his understandably panicked advisors. He allows them to worship their God as they requested and asks to be blessed as well. But even at this point, we do not see clear proof that Pharaoh (or the Egyptians) have fully learned who God is. Just a few days later, when he thinks that the Israelites are lost in the desert, (a sure sign in his mind that their God is fallible), Pharaoh wastes no time in chasing after them to bring them back to servitude. The ultimate lesson is yet to be learned by Pharaoh and his army.

The educational journey of Bnai Yisrael is not so clearly outlined.

Bnai Yisrael were certainly aware that as the makkot progressed, the Egyptians were being targeted while they were being spared. That could well have been a powerful lesson of God's justice and mercy. As the makkot reached their apex, Bnai Yisrael show a willingness to bravely tie a lamb to their doorposts, slaughter the animal, and paint the lintels of their house with blood as the cries of their Egyptian neighbors are

heard. They pack their bags and, in the light of day, march across the land and out of the country as Pharaoh's soldiers stand down.

Their commitment — or at least their confidence — does not last long. With their backs to the sea, Bnai Yisrael are terrified as the chariots of Pharaoh roar toward them. Not for the last time, they insist to Moshe that this has all been a serious mistake and demand to be taken back into enslavement.

This is apparently the point that the tannaim in the *Mekhilta* were focused on, and the reason that their teaching was incorporated into the Haggadah. Clearly, the education of both the Egyptians and the Israelites was not complete and needed a final demonstration to seal the lesson. That is why the miracles — and the makkot — of *kriyat Yam Suf* (the splitting of the sea) were needed and why the rabbis stressed the ongoing connection between the plagues in Egypt and the battle at sea. But just what did the two peoples learn?

Pharaoh sees how God saved his former slaves, and, at this juncture, finally *acknowledges mi khamokha ba-eilim Hashem*, who is like You, Hashem (Exodus 15:11)? The Israelites perceive the *yad ha-gedolah*, the mighty hand of God, and finally reach the point where it can be said that they believe in Hashem, *va-ya-aminu ba-Shem*, and also in Moshe, His servant (Exodus 14:31).

That phrase becomes the textual justification for the tannaim who compare the events on the sea to the plagues.

וירא ישראל את היד הגדולה.

*And Bnai Yisrael saw the great hand.*

During the makkot, Hashem used his "finger" as the Egyptian magicians comment (Ex. 8:15). The "hand" of God, understand the tannaim in the *Mekhilta* passage, is five times as potent.



And even though the word *yad* appears *yad Hashem hoya be-miknecha*, Hashem's hand is on your cattle (Ex. 9:3) it is not *yado ha-gedolah*, His great hand, and doesn't achieve the same results.

From an educational perspective, *kriyat Yam Suf* also provides the next step for Bnai Yisrael's educational journey, what in education is called the "Gradual Release of Responsibility."<sup>5</sup> The goal is for students to move from observing the direct instruction of the teacher, to guided practice with the teacher, to independent work and application. In a classroom setting, a teacher will demonstrate a new skill or technique, model and outline the various steps, and then give students opportunities to practice, first with the teacher's help and then on their own. They have seen, they have listened, and then they have practiced. The students become active participants in the learning process rather than passive observers.

In Egypt, God did everything for Bnai Yisrael and they watched and learned about His Power and how He cared for them. Bnai Yisrael were, in fact, passive observers. At the Yam Suf, God is still doing most of the work, but Bnai Yisrael now must do something — they have to enter into the water. This was not an easy feat since they had no knowledge of when the water would return to its former strength and possibly drown them. According to the midrash, some of them had to enter the water before the water began to split.<sup>6</sup> The process underway proceeds slowly but inexorably. As they continue in the journey in the desert, they will gain more independence. When Amalek comes to attack, the Israelites fight a battle and win, assisted by the uplifted hands of Moshe in prayer. When they fight against Og and Sichon at the end of the 40 years, more of the responsibility has been shifted over to the people.

The redemption of the Bnai Yisrael from slavery was intended to have a broader significance — not merely freedom "from" (from the inhuman conditions imposed upon them by their slave-masters) but freedom "to" (to become the people of God with a mission to become a holy nation, a nation of priests). Leaving the land of Egypt was the fulfillment of "freedom from." Crossing the Yam Suf a week later with the Egyptian army drowned before their eyes opened the possibility of a new reality for the people, a freedom to do what they want, to believe in what they want to believe.

At the Yam Suf, Bnai Yisrael learned many things. They learned God was there for the long haul and would continue to support them even as they learned to be more independent. They were to use this new independence and maturity to deepen their connection to God.

They learned to acknowledge what had been done for them and began to sing the praises of Hashem (*Az Yashir*, Ex. 15:1-22). And even as they sang, they learned about nuance. They recognized the miracle and appreciated that it came with a cost, the loss of life. And to this day, the death of the Egyptians at the sea is marked in our prayers; full celebration of our freedom is not possible in light of the massive destruction inflicted on the Egyptian, and so only "half" Hallel is recited on the Seventh day of Pesah (and on the days of Hol Hamoed as well).

The tannaim in the *Mekhilta* therefore felt it important to see the events at sea as a series of makkot — unique and terrible — overwhelmingly more deadly than the plagues in Egypt itself. And, significantly, they saw a direct connection between the events in Egypt culminating in Makkat Bekhorot (the killing of the first born) and the makkot at sea.

The latter makkot in Egypt were quite severe and unusual. But even they paled when compared to the enormity of what took place at the makkot at the sea. While all the plagues propelled the Jews to a new level, a level of trust and faith, the makkot at the sea constituted a culmination of all of the events that took place in Egypt. The exponential intensification of the battle at sea which involved the beginning of initiative by the Jews themselves reflected a new beginning. A nation was created, forged out of the crucible of slavery. The process is not uncomplicated and there were defeats and setbacks along the way. But by stepping into the sea, the Jews displayed the fortitude needed to justify God's faith in them. Just a few short weeks later, God will concretize His promises to the Avot by giving them the Aseret HaDibrot and making them His nation.

Thus, the enigmatic tannaitic discussion of makkot at the sea show us how much our forefathers learned from the experience at the Yam Suf, lessons of gratitude and nuance, lessons of fortitude and independence, and lessons of bravery and belief — lessons that we still learn from today.

## Endnotes

1. The competing views of Rabbi Yossi, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva are set out in the midrashim: *Mekhilta* (Horovitz-Rabin) Va-Yehi parasha 6, p. 114, and *Mekhilta de-Rashbi* (Epstein-Melamed) Beshalah 14:31, p. 69. The Haggadah skips the citation from Ex. 14:31 and the opening comment: "And Israel saw the great hand": severe beatings and beatings one more unusual than the next, and unusual deaths and deaths one more severe than the next." Interestingly, a parallel source in *Shemot Rabbah* substitutes Rabbi Yehoshua, a contemporary of Rabbi Eliezer's, for Rabbi Yossi, who was a student of Rabbi Akiva.

2. S. and Z. Safrai, *Haggadat Haza"l* (Jerusalem: 1998), p. 148.

3. See *Tanchuma Va'erah* 14; *Shemot Rabbah* 9, 10; and *Eliyahu Rabbah* 8.

4. Makkat Arov can be translated as a plague of wild animals (the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda in the *Tanchuma*) or a swarm of insects (Rabbi Nechemiah in the *Tanchuma*) or swarms of birds (Resh Lakish in *Bereishit Rabbah*).

5. A phrase coined by Pearson & Gallagher (October 1983), "The Instruction of Reading Comprehension" in *Contemporary Educational Psychology*. Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Center for the Study of Reading.

6. *Sotah* 37a. Rabbi Yehuda discusses how while the different tribes were refusing to enter the water, insisting that one of the other tribes go first, Nachshon ben Aminadav, the prince of Shevet Yehuda jumped into the waters and the water split.

## Where is Moshe Rabbeinu in the Haggadah?

### Rabbi Yona Reiss

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ועל הים מה הוא אומר וירא ישראל את היד הגדולה אשר עשה ה' במצרים ויראו העם את ה' ויאמינו בה' ובמשה עבדו.

*And at the sea, what does it say? "And the Jewish people saw what the great hand of Hashem did to the Egyptians and the nation feared Hashem and they trusted in Hashem and Moshe His servant."*

### Pesach Haggadah

Incredibly, throughout virtually the entire Haggadah, which recounts the Exodus from Egypt that took place under the dedicated leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu, Moshe's name is not mentioned. There is a famous explanation from the Vilna Gaon that one of the major themes of the Haggadah is that Hashem took us out of Egypt by Himself, as we express in the words "*Ani Hashem — Ani v'lo malach ... Ani Hu v'lo acher*" (I am

Hashem — I and not an angel ... It was me and not anyone else) — so that we should not delude ourselves into thinking that salvation will come from the hands of mortals. Rather, we are reminded that we have nobody to turn to other than Hashem himself (see *Sotah* 49a). Accordingly, it is important that Moshe's name not become the focus of the Haggadah, or even a distraction from the divine source of our deliverance.

And yet, at the same time, there is one parenthetical allusion to Moshe's name in the concluding section of the Maggid section of the Haggadah, dealing with the reckoning of the plagues that afflicted the Egyptians. As the Tanna Rabbi Yosi Haglili tabulates the total number of adversities suffered by the Egyptians, he notes for each plague in Egypt there were five corresponding plagues (like the number of fingers in a hand) during the splitting of the sea. The full verse printed in the Haggadah that speaks of the "hand of Hashem" ends with the words, "they trusted in Hashem, and in Moshe his servant."

According to the Vilna Gaon's explanation, this is the exception that proves the rule. Since Moshe's name is only mentioned once, and even during this occasion in a supporting role as the "servant" of Hashem, we are thus sensitized to the realization that Moshe's name indeed does not appear elsewhere in the Haggadah, and are forced to understand that this is because his role in the redemption was not as our true savior, but as the servant of Hashem who is the true source of the redemption of our people.

Nonetheless, if this is the purpose of the parenthetical mention of his name, the point of Moshe's subordinate role would seem to be best expressed by eliminating his name altogether. Indeed, in the Rambam's version of the Haggadah, the entire section describing

the multitude of plagues during the splitting of the sea is omitted entirely, resulting in no mention at all of Moshe's name.

Some explain that the name of Moshe would have been eliminated altogether, except that Moshe's name needed to be mentioned in this specific verse, since it is forbidden to quote only half of a verse (see *Ta'anis* 27b). However, there are other verses in the Haggadah that are only quoted in part, including the immediately preceding verse cited in the Haggadah that refers to the "finger" of Hashem. Indeed, Rav Yitzchak Yosef shlita, quoting his father Rav Ovadia Yosef zt"l, writes in the *Yalkut Yosef* (Tefillah 2:131, n.17) that the incomplete verses in the Haggadah prove that one is permitted to quote a fragment from a verse for the purpose of amplifying a homiletic message. Thus, we still need to understand more fully why Moshe's name is mentioned even in passing.

Perhaps we can explain that it was in fact necessary to include Moshe's name in the Haggadah as an expression of *hakaras hatov* (gratitude) to Moshe for his supporting role, even if Moshe was not the ultimate force for our salvation. The Gemora in *Bava Kamma* (92b) notes that as a matter of proper etiquette, one should thank the royal waiter who brings the wine to the table, even though the king of the palace was truly responsible for providing the wine (see Rashi's explanation ad locum). Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt"l (as elucidated by Rav Hershel Schachter shlita in *Nefesh HaRav*, p. 112) understood that this Gemora is teaching an important principle about serving Hashem properly. If we do not show proper appreciation toward human beings, we will not learn to express the requisite amount of recognition and gratitude to Hashem. Thus, it could be that our version of the Haggadah similarly includes a solitary acknowledgment of

Moshe Rabbeinu, to inspire us towards the appropriate level of gratitude that we need to have towards Hashem for all the goodness that He has bestowed upon us (see *Pesachim* 116a in which Rav Nachman underscores the centrality of the theme of gratitude to Hashem in the Haggadah).

Rav Soloveitchik himself cited from his father a different explanation regarding the general omission of Moshe's name (*Shiurim l'zecher Aba Mori*, volume 2, pp. 158-160). Rav Moshe Soloveitchik zt"l noted that, although the Rambam omitted any mention of Moshe's name in his version of the Haggadah, he does write (*Chametz u'Matzah* 7:2) that a parent is obligated to tell a wise son during the course of the recitation of the Haggadah about "what transpired to us in Egypt, including the miracles that were brought about by Moshe Rabbeinu." However, we need to understand why there is no such requirement for a son of lesser erudition.

The midrash (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 3:1) expounds upon the verses in *Shir Hashirim* (3:1-4):

על משכבי בלילות, זה לילה של מצרים,  
בקשתי את שאהבה נפשי, זה משה ... עד  
שהביאתיו אל בית אמי, זה סיני.

*"Upon my couch at night" — this is the night of Egypt, "I sought the one I love" — this is Moshe ... "until I brought him to my mother's house" — this is Sinai.*

Rav Moshe Soloveitchik understood that this Midrash refers to Pesach night. The Jewish people "sought" to include their beloved leader, Moshe Rabbeinu, in the Haggadah, but, as the opening verse continues, *"I sought but found him not,"* because Pesach night belongs solely to Hashem, who redeemed us without an intermediary. However, when Moshe was brought "to my mother's house," representing the giving of the Torah at Sinai, he played a prominent role as the Torah teacher to

the Jewish people, and therefore merits having the Torah called in his name, as recorded in the verse, "the Torah of Moshe my servant" (Malachi 3:22).

Accordingly, Rav Soloveitchik suggested, based on his father's interpretation of the Midrash, that the obligation recorded by the Rambam to mention Moshe Rabbeinu's name in the retelling of the Exodus from Egypt to the wise son, relates exclusively to the Sinaitic experience of receiving the Torah, the climactic moment of the redemptive experience that only the wise son can truly comprehend. However, when telling the story of the Exodus to a child of lesser erudition, the focus is solely upon our emancipation from slavery in Egypt, regarding which any mention of Moshe Rabbeinu's name would be inappropriate since the redemption came from Hashem alone.

Thus, we can derive from the general omission of Moshe's name in the Haggadah that salvation comes from Hashem alone. From the single mention of his name in our version of the Haggadah, we are reminded to show gratitude towards the servants of Hashem as well. Finally, the Rambam teaches us that while deliverance comes from Hashem, there was a crucial role played by Moshe in delivering the fruits of such deliverance through the transmission of the Torah, which represents the ultimate fulfillment of our redemption.

## Partnering in the Process of Redemption

### Rabbi Shay Schachter

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"I am most proud to be a direct descendent of the Baal Shem Tov," said

the highly accomplished Professor Gheona M. Altarescu, M.D.

Dr. Altarescu is the director of the awe inspiring PGD laboratory at Shaare Zedek Hospital in Yerushalayim and is directly responsible for the birth of over 1,000 healthy children over the past 15 years. Dr. Altarescu is board certified in Internal Medicine and Clinical Genetics and took a leadership role in the breakthrough scientific research of the BRCA gene. A humble and unassuming Polish Jewish woman, Dr. Altarescu agreed to open her lab to a small group of young American rabbanim and give them a glimpse of the exceptional work that she does.

Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD) is a miraculous reality that I knew very little about before my visit to Shaare Zedek. Many couples are carriers of genetic disorders and are at high risk for transmitting them to their children. Until recently, the only way to detect whether an unborn child has inherited these genetic disorders was either through an amniocentesis or chorionic villus sampling. However, the couple can then be faced with the extremely delicate question of pregnancy termination. Now, through the modern advances in the science of IVF and PGD, doctors can microscopically determine the condition of an embryo, and implant only unaffected embryos back into their mother.

Adorned in our scrubs, we entered the lab and were completely overwhelmed by this unfamiliar new world. Seeing embryos develop under a microscope and watching the technicians carefully separate the healthy genes was truly fascinating and humbling to all of us. But then came the penetrating question from one of the female technicians. "I come to work every day, but rarely do I have the opportunity to speak openly with a rabbi. My days are spent editing genes, but I sometimes feel as if I am



playing God! Is this even considered appropriate work for a Jew to be involved with?"

What right do doctors ever have to treat a sick patient, after all, they too are playing God!? If one was destined to be sick, then who are we to change that painful reality? It took me some time to clearly formulate a perspective, but with Pesach approaching perhaps my thoughts are worth sharing.

When reading the Hagadah, one can mistakenly think that the Esser Makkos took place in a short span of time. But in truth, this was a lengthy process that developed over the course of at least a year. Klal Yisrael experienced the most dramatic scenes, culminating in the phenomenal experience of Kriyas Yam Suf.

One Leil HaSeder, my father told us a fascinating insight in the name of Rav Soloveitchik. Have you ever noticed that not once in the course of that year is there any mention of Klal Yisrael thanking Hashem or singing *shirah*?! How shocking that Az Yashir was only sung on the occasion of Kriyas Yam Suf! Were there no feelings of gratitude until that very last moment? One would at least expect a minimal level of recognition, a word of thanks, or a brief expression of song after experiencing the power of Makkas Bechoros! Perhaps the feeling of freedom had not yet been a reality to them, but there was still an entire week that followed their departure from Mitzrayim until the miracle of Kriyas Yam Suf unfolded. Why did nobody thank Hashem in that interim period either? And what was unique about Kriyas Yam Suf that warranted an entirely new response on the part of the Jewish people?

Rav Soloveitchik explained, based on a passage in the Hagadah:

לא על ידי מלאך ולא על ידי שליח אלא  
הקדוש ברוך הוא בכבודו ובעצמו.

*Not through an angel and not through a messenger, but rather the Holy One Blessed Be He personally [carried out the killing of the first born].*

Until this point, the Ribono Shel Olam did everything for us. We watched as the incredible story of our geula unfolded. Naturally, this is what we all expected to happen at the Yam Suf as well. Moshe Rabbeinu began to daven as the Jewish people were terrified of their impossible predicament. It was at that moment that Moshe Rabeinu was told, "*Mah titzak elay? Daber el Bnei Yisrael v'yisau*"! — Don't call out to Me. Tell the Jewish people to go! Hashem was informing Moshe Rabbeinu that things were now going to change. From here on in, human beings are going to be granted the opportunity and given the privilege to partner with Hakadosh Baruch Hu and create the next chapters of their own redemption. Until Nachshon Ben Aminadav initiated this miracle, nothing at all would have happened!

There are special times in history when we, as human beings, are invited to participate and collaborate with the Ribono Shel Olam in the process of our own redemption. It is those moments that are the most fulfilling and gratifying ones of our lives. When we recognize that Hakadosh Baruch Hu has entrusted us to further enhance His world and take part in creating a miraculous outcome. It is precisely at those moments, when we are personally engaged in the process, that we feel a most overwhelming sense of gratitude to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and indeed it was on that occasion that Klal Yisrael began to sing *Az Yashir Moshe U'vnei Yisrael*.

What greater privilege and honor can we be given than to know that the Ribono Shel Olam has placed His trust in us, and that He holds a firm belief in our ability to make a major difference in the unfolding of events that happen in our world.

I was awed when visiting the IVF-PGD lab because it is one of the rare opportunities where human beings are entrusted to partake, facilitate and collaborate with the Ribono Shel Olam in the process of personal geulah. It was an overwhelming feeling to be in the presence of such brilliant, selfless and righteous *shluchim* of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

As we celebrate our national redemption on Leil HaSeder, we can all take a moment to identify an unredeemed aspect of our society, and pledge to do what we can to partner with Hakadosh Baruch Hu in bringing that situation one step closer to a more positive and enriched existence.

## Strategies for Engagement at the Seder

### Rabbi Mordechai Schiffman, Psy.D.

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Our job at the Seder is to keep everyone engaged, intrigued, and inspired. Although this is especially true for any children present, it applies as well to adults of any age, including ourselves. This is a difficult task that we should approach intentionally and thoughtfully. Thankfully, the compilers of the Haggadah structured the text and rituals in such a way to afford us many opportunities for retention of attention.<sup>1</sup> What follows are three different components of the Seder that provide opportunities for increased engagement, with supplemental insights from the psychological and educational literature.

### Order

The Haggadah is a highly structured text. There is a specific order for when

and where we are supposed to recite and perform the different rituals. We emphasize this structure by chanting the order of the Haggadah even before we officially commence the first rung of “Kadesh.” The commentators offer several explanations for this tradition, including: that the recitation of the order serves as a memory device to help prevent mistakes (*Machzor Vitri*); it serves as a preparatory function to put one in the right mindset (*hazmanah*) for the upcoming spiritual undertaking (*Va-Yaged Moshe*); and that it functions as a way to create a sense of permanence (*keviut*) that is required (*Yismach Av*). Perhaps reciting the order in the beginning serves a pedagogic function as well. Teachers are encouraged to set an agenda and review it at the beginning of a class. The structure and clear expectations frame the upcoming learning, provide a sense of comfort and security for the learner, and help build motivation.<sup>2</sup> The same is true in the therapeutic context, and is why setting the agenda at the beginning of a psychotherapy session is a key component of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT).<sup>3</sup> Likewise, chanting the order of the Seder before officially beginning helps set the agenda and provide a clear framework for what is to come, serving as one strategy to help participants effectively engage in the learning experience.

## Curiosity

While order is essential, too much order can become predictable and boring. To maintain interest, we highlight the change from the ordinary in order to spark curiosity. The Talmud in *Pesachim* relates several practices that were done just to pique the interest of the children and encourage questions. These practices include giving out nuts to the children (109a, according to Rambam), lifting the matzot (109a, according to Rashi), dipping the vegetables twice (114b),

removing the food earlier than expected (115b), and pouring the second cup of wine (115b, according to Rashi).<sup>4</sup>

Psychological research on curiosity indicates that greater curiosity leads to higher life satisfaction and an increased sense of meaning in life.<sup>5</sup> In addition, curiosity is associated with enhanced memory,<sup>6</sup> and better job<sup>7</sup> and academic performance.<sup>8</sup> In the classroom, it is important for teachers to promote curiosity by fostering an environment where questions are encouraged and students feel safe taking risks, making mistakes and not knowing.<sup>9</sup> This should ideally be embedded into the family culture as well, particularly at the Seder. The traditional question prompts from the Talmud that promote curiosity can also become predictable and routine, such that other opportunities for questions and exploration should be provided. While fostering a sense of psychological safety — where everyone feels comfortable being vulnerable displaying lack of knowledge — is not always easy; it should be an area of focus on the Seder night.

Additionally, questions are not only a reflection of the learner’s curiosity but can be used strategically by educators to further promote curiosity. While this isn’t a natural skill for all, thinking through critical points in the Seder to ask pointed and poignant questions to promote exploration and discussion can enhance inquisitiveness and interest at the seder.<sup>10</sup>

## Experiential

Instead of a more traditional lecture-based learning style, the Seder provides an educational framework that is vibrant and multifaceted. While we are presented with a mix of stories and classic text-based learning and analysis, we are also told that these must be done in the presence of live props. We need the Pesach, matzah, and marror to be

present and seen as we discuss the ideas. Eating also forms an essential part of the learning experience. The symbolism and tastes of the food influence what we are supposed to be learning. Even our body posture is regulated to try and instill a sense of freedom. The Seder is not just a cognitive endeavor, but a fully experiential and embodied learning experience.<sup>11</sup> As is famously indicated in the Rambam’s formulation of “*chayav adam le-harot et etzmo*,” we are obligated to act in a way that reflects as if we ourselves are leaving Egypt. There are various added customs that expressly relate to this idea including walking around with matzah on our backs, as if we were leaving Egypt. Also fundamental to the Seder are the songs and traditional tunes that help express the more creative and artistic elements of our personalities. While not as common, many Haggadot depict beautiful imagery to help inspire the more aesthetic aspects. In all, these characteristics of the Seder also function to make the learning experience dynamic and stimulating.

In all, it is clear from these multidimensional aspects that the Seder offers many opportunities for inspiration and engagement. This is evident starting with the opening framing and agenda setting, continuing with the intermittent changes to capture the curiosity of the children, and concluding with the embodied and experiential aspects of the learning process. These multifaceted experiences are important for two reasons. First, they provide numerous hooks and a plethora of options for different learners and diverse personalities so that everyone will hopefully be captivated by some aspect of the Seder. Second, the Seder serves as a paradigm for an ideal educational experience, where everyone, despite how they usually like to learn, is exposed to, and encouraged to engage with, a fully immersive and multimodal learning environment.

## Endnotes

1. For a fascinating analysis of how the different sections of the Haggadah address the needs of different learners, see the introduction of Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimón's *Shirat Miriam: Haggadah MiMekorah*.
2. See Diep, A. N., Zhu, C., Cocquyt, C., de Greef, M., Vo, M. H., & Vanwing, T. (2019). Adult Learners' Needs in Online and Blended Learning. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 59(2), 223–253; Lewis, N. (2015). Daily agendas: The key to organizing the classroom. *Journal on Best Teaching Practices*, 2(1), 7-9, and sources cited within.
3. See Beck, J. S. (2020). *Cognitive behavior therapy: Basics and beyond*. Guilford Publications.
4. For an extensive analysis, see *Haggadah Shel Pesach: Metivta*, pp. 371-379
5. Kashdan, T. B., & Steger, M. F. (2007). Curiosity and pathways to well-being and meaning in life: Traits, states, and everyday behaviors. *Motivation and Emotion*, 31(3), 159–173.
6. Gruber, M. J., Gelman, B. D., & Ranganath, C. (2014). States of curiosity modulate hippocampus-dependent learning via the dopaminergic circuit. *Neuron*, 84(2), 486–496.
7. Kashdan, T. B., Goodman, F. R., Disabato, D. J., McKnight, P. E., Kelso, K., & Naughton, C. (2020). Curiosity has comprehensive benefits in the workplace: Developing and validating a multidimensional workplace curiosity scale in United States and German employees. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 155, 109717.
8. Von Stumm, S., Hell, B., & Chamorro-Premuzic, T. (2011). The hungry mind: Intellectual curiosity is the third pillar of academic performance. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 6(6), 574–588.
9. Jirout, J., Vitiello, V., and Zumburn, S. (2018). "Curiosity in Schools," in *The New Science of Curiosity*. ed. G. Gordon (Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publishers)
10. To this end, Dr. Erica Brown's *Seder Talk* is an invaluable tool to helping us towards this goal.
11. For more on experiential learning, see Kolb, D. A. (2014). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and*

*development*. FT press. For more on embodied cognition and learning, see Macedonia, M. (2019). Embodied learning: Why at school the mind needs the body. *Frontiers in psychology*, 10, 2098; Shapiro, L., & Stolz, S. A. (2019). Embodied cognition and its significance for education. *Theory and Research in Education*, 17(1), 19-39.

## What We Ought to Say at the Seder

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At the end of Parshat Bo, before the children of Israel exit Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, G-d commands the still-enslaved people to tell the story of their yet-to-be redemption to future generations.

וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בְּיוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּעֶבְרָא זֶה עָשָׂה  
ה' לִי בְצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם:

*And you shall tell your child on that day, saying, "It is because of what the L-rd did for me when I went free from Egypt."*

### Shemot 13:8

In His Infinite Oneness, as Maimonides explains, G-d does not experience time.<sup>1</sup> Past, present, and future converge. Yet for the Jews still waiting to witness a promised deliverance and experience freedom first-hand, I imagine this anticipatory commandment must have felt both premature and reassuring.

Over the last few years, gathering families and making Passover plans has been especially challenging. None of us know the future. Many have felt the pain of empty seats at the Seder table, as well as the joy of newly assembled highchairs. From the very young to the hard-wisdom won, the participants at the Seder present a range of ages, abilities, and attention spans. And with great blessing comes the great responsibility of handling

the complexities of intergenerational communication with care.

One of the most devastating stories of a mismanaged parent-child relationship is captured in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. The life of "[King Leir], ruler over the Britains in the year of the world 3105 at what time Ioas reigned in Iuda," was recorded in Holinshed's *Chronicles* and other sources Shakespeare frequently consulted throughout his career.<sup>2</sup> The play begins with the aged king's decision to resign the throne and divide his kingdom between his daughters while he lives so "that future strife may be prevented." Yet in forcing his daughters to compete for their portions—demanding each answer "Which of you doth love me most?"—he initiates a sibling rivalry that escalates to familial and political devastation. The youngest, Cordelia, refuses to flatter her father like her sisters, plainly stating, "I love your Majesty according to my bond, no more nor less." Her honesty is met with incredulity. Lear prompts her to mend her speech and she continues, "You have begot me, bred me, loved me. I return those duties back as are right fit: obey you, love you, honor you," adding she hopes never to be like her sisters who have husbands but claim to love their father "all." Cordelia's instant and severe banishment activates the question that powers the rest of the play: what *do* children owe parents and parents owe their children?

Though Shakespeare often sidestepped controversy by setting his plays in the pagan past, Cordelia's use of "bond," "obey," and "honor" would have had biblical resonance for his Protestant audience.<sup>3</sup> In the religious discourse of the day, the fifth commandment to honor one's father and mother was a basic tenant of faith. In the time of the Israelites' exodus, it was nothing short of revolutionary.

In ancient Egypt, the nuclear family



was the basic social unit. Monogamy was predominant, and census records show the average household included two adults and two children; sons grew up, married, and moved to start a new household, and the “mode of residence appears to have been of a neolocal type” in which new couples would live independently from their parents.<sup>4</sup> As a result of this common practice, sons focused on the needs of their spouses and couples on their offspring, creating a child-centric society that puts the tenth plague into sharper focus. “If thou wouldst be wise,” the Egyptian vizier Ptah-Hotep advises his son, “provide for thine house, and love thy wife that is in thine arms.”<sup>5</sup> In his account of Egypt, Herodotus notes that “to support their parents the sons are in no way compelled if they do not desire to do so, but the daughters are forced to do so.”<sup>6</sup> All of this, including the fact that Egyptians lacked kinship terminology for relatives beyond the nuclear family, illustrates a culture that distanced adult children from their elderly parents, with each successive generation living in relative autonomy from the previous one.<sup>7</sup>

Prior to their descent into Egypt, Bnai Yisrael lived and camped as large multigenerational families, but centuries of slavery had altered their living arrangements and eroded their values. While Egyptians might have been able to assist parents in their old age through slaves and financial support, the Israelites didn’t have such luxuries, creating a situation in which the older generation might be abandoned. In this light, the fifth commandment (*Kibud Av V’Em*) given to the Jewish people in the desert is radically countercultural:

כְּבֹד אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמְךָ לְמַעַן יָאָרְכּוֹן יְמֶיךָ עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־הָאֱלֹהִים נָתַן לָךְ:  
*Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land that your G-d giveth thee.*

## Shemot 20:12

In addition to establishing a form of social security for the newly fledged nation, as our Sages have taught, the placement of *Kibud Av V’em* among the first half of the Ten Commandments which focus on humankind’s obligations to their Creator implies one’s existence and assets, including parents, are all from Hashem, as is the obligation to honor them. In the words of Rabbi Sacks, “Honoring parents acknowledges our human createdness. It tells us that not everything that matters is the result of our choice, chief of which is the fact that we exist at all.”<sup>8</sup> It also consecrates the multigenerational family as essential to Jewish life and *avodat Hashem*. For the Abarbanel, honoring parents is fundamental to Judaism since our ancestors are the bearers of our *mesora*.<sup>9</sup> And perhaps contrary to popular belief and invocation, this *mitzvah* is not expressly for the young. Linking the verb *kabed* (honor) to wealth (as in Proverbs 3:9), Chizkuni implies that *Kibud Av V’em* is directed at adult children since fulfilling the *mitzvah* properly would require financial resources and a degree of autonomy, which is more befitting individuals in the stage of life when they are earning a living and having children of their own.

While it might seem that the divine injunction to honor one’s parents was a cultural necessity for the newly emancipated Israelites at Sinai, the second iteration of the commandment in Devarim underscores its timeless relevance.

כְּבֹד אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמְךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְמַעַן יָאָרְכּוֹן יְמֶיךָ וְלִמְעַן יִשָּׁב לָךְ עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־הָאֱלֹהִים נָתַן לָךְ:

*Honor your father and your mother, as your G-d has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with thee in the land that your G-d giveth thee.*

## Devarim 5:16

As society advances, the tendency for children to feel “ahead” of their parents advances too. And while we may tend to think a lack of respect toward adults is a 21st-century problem exacerbated by the digital age, the Torah shows this is hardly a contemporary phenomenon. After just forty years in the desert, even the Jewish people needed reminding, and our Sages suggest, the additional phrase “as your G-d has commanded you” inserted in the second iteration of the law of *Kibud Av V’em* underscores the ever-present potential for reverence recession.

The Talmud is not short on stories and discussions about the physical and emotional difficulties facing children of aging parents, including Rabbi Ismael’s mother who complains when he refuses to let her drink the water used to wash his feet.<sup>10</sup> In *Kiddushin* 31a, the Sages teach:

כִּיבוּד מֵאֲכִיל וּמִשְׁקָה מִלְבִּישׁ וּמִכֶּסֶה מְכַנִּים וּמוֹצִיא

*What is considered honor? He gives his father food and drink, dresses and covers him, and brings him in and takes him out, for all his household needs.*

Evidently, such acts cannot be performed unless the child cohabitates with his or her parent or is able provide a substitute caregiver. Of course, not all children are in such a position, and the *Shulchan Aruch* states that in fulfilling one’s obligation, the child need not incur personal financial loss but can draw on available resources from the parent; furthermore, if being physically present to serve as an aid prevents the child from meeting his professional responsibilities, he is not “obligated to miss work and end up a beggar’s son.”<sup>11</sup>

This is the predicament Lear’s eldest daughter Goneril finds herself in when her father comes to live with her. The cost of hosting the king and his hundred knights and squires drains her domestic resources, and she asks her father to

reduce his entourage in an effort to restore economy and order to her household. When Lear refuses, both daughters demand he justifies his need for not only one hundred, fifty, or ten companions, but even one. Although Lear is stubborn, Shakespeare elicits the audience's sympathy by portraying the painful reduction of an elderly man's agency and dignity in real-time. Before Lear storms out, he slings bitter curses at his daughters and declares, "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child."

The Talmud also has harsh words for a child who fails to fuse the right actions with the right attitude toward a parent.

תְּנִי אֲבִימִי בְּרִיָּה דְּרַבִּי אֲבָהוּ יֵשׁ מֵאֲכִיל לְאֲבִיו  
פְּסִיגֵי וְטוֹרְדוֹ מִן הָעוֹלָם.

*Avimi, son of Rabbi Abbahu, taught: There is a type of son who feeds his father pheasant and yet this behavior causes him to be removed from the World, i.e., the World-to-Come.*

#### Kiddushin 31a

For Rashi and Tosafot, meeting a parent's physical needs, even in excess, merits severe punishment if done with resentment and communicated with hostility.

The Haggadah famously records conversations between a father and four sons, identified not by names but by character traits. When introducing the questions of the three sons who speak, the Haggadah writes:

חָכָם מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר... רָשָׁע מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר...  
תָּם מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר

*What does the wise son say?... What does the wicked son say?... What does the simple son say?...*

In his commentary on the Haggadah, the Lubavitcher Rebbe shares that his father-in-law, the Friediker Rebbe, understood the words *mah hu omer* not as *what does he say* but as *mah hu (what he is), omer (he speaks)*, meaning that a person's true character can be discerned

from how he or she communicates."<sup>12</sup> For example, after observing the labor and expense that goes into the Seder, the Rasha asks:

מָה הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם

*What is this worship to you?*

#### Shemot 12:26

The Haggadah notes that his word choice of *lachem v'lo lo* ('To you' and not 'to him') is a verbal rejection of his father's values. In response, the Haggadah advises the father: "you will blunt his teeth and say to him, 'For the sake of this, did the L-rd do [this] for me in my going out of Egypt' (Exodus 13:8)." 'For me' and not 'for him.' If he had been *there*, he would not have been saved." While this response has been understood as a harsh yet deserved rebuke, what is gained here? Indeed, the son may still be in Mitzrayim mentally—enslaved to a cultural paradigm that distances fathers and sons—but how does further alienating an already alienated child help? For the Lubavitcher Rebbe, placing emphasis on the word "there" transforms the message from banishment to benevolence. Indeed, redemption during the Exodus was contingent on consent, and had this son been in Egypt at that time, he would not have been redeemed; however, the father implies, we are no longer *there* but in the present post-Sinai era, when every Jew is free to choose a relationship with Hashem at any moment.<sup>13</sup>

As the Haggadah implies, we can mitigate tensions between parents and children by being mindful of tense. In his book *Thank You for Arguing: What Aristotle, Lincoln, and Homer Simpson Can Teach Us About the Art of Persuasion*, Jay Heinrichs explains that the past tense (forensic rhetoric) is all about blame and punishment. "Look what you did!" "She started it!" The chief topics of past tense are guilt and innocence, and when people feel

judged, they get defensive. The present tense is demonstrative and is used for labeling and evaluation. "You never call." "You are a slob." The future tense is deliberative and deals with choices. Its chief topic, according to Aristotle, is the advantageous next thing. Admittedly, teaching my teen these tools has made arguing with her more difficult. Consider the following scenario.

*Me: You were supposed to be asleep by now.*

*My daughter: What time is it?*

*Me: 12:05 am.*

*My daughter: You're right. I should have been watching the time more carefully.*

*Me: Yes, you should have. I tell you all the time.*

*My daughter: I must have been too focused on [writing this essay that I'm really proud of / driving slowly at night to be more cautious / listening to Sarah, who's been going through a lot lately...]. I'll set an alarm right now on my phone for 10:30 pm every night and make sure I'm more careful in the future.*

*Me: ...Um, okay. Thanks.*

The reality is, of course, children are not perfect, and many parents are objectively problematic. Lear forces his daughters to compete for his love, and both the king and the Earl of Gloucester reject children who honor them justly in favor of flatterers who fan their egos. For their pride, greed, vanity, lust, duplicity, and ignorance, Shakespeare literalizes the curses G-d says will befall those who do not faithfully observe His commandments:

יִכְכֶּה ה' בְּשֹׁנְיוֹ וּבַעֲוֹנוֹ וּבְתַמְהוֹן לִבּוֹ: וְהָיִיתָ  
מִמַּשֵּׁשׁ בַּצְהָרִים כְּאִשֶּׁר יִמַּשֵּׁשׁ הָעוֹר בְּאַפְלָה  
וְלֹא תִצְלִיחַ אֶת־דַּרְכֶּיךָ וְהָיִיתָ אֶף עֲשׂוֹק וְגִזּוּל  
כָּל־הַיָּמִים וְאִין מוֹשִׁיעַ:

*G-d will strike you with madness, blindness, and dismay. You shall grope at noon as the blind grope in the dark; you*



*shall not prosper in your ventures, but shall be constantly abused and robbed, with none to give help.*

### Devarim 28:28 -29

During the 17th century, audiences were so unsettled by the pathos of an enfeebled and mad Lear wandering through the wilderness with the blinded and abandoned Gloucester that Nahum Tate composed an alternative ending, and Tate's "happier" version supplanted the bard's on English stage for over a century.

Although Lear and Cordelia both die in Shakespeare's tragedy, he does include a poignant scene toward the end when the two are momentarily reunited. When Lear struggles to recognize his own daughter, Cordelia requests, "O, look upon me, sir, and hold your hands in benediction o'er me," which summons to mind images of the Avot who gathered their offspring as their own eyes dimmed to bestow blessings upon them. Although Lear asks Cordelia for forgiveness, he never truly intuits his mistake: believing that the parent-child bond is about reciprocity instead of perpetuity and futurity. Although many commentaries read the promise of *ya'arichun yamecha* (*lengthened days*) in Shemot 20:12 and Devarim 5:16 as a quid pro quo reward for *Kibud Av V'em*, longevity in itself isn't always a boon when we consider the effects of aging, even when adult children do everything in their power to maximize comfort and dignity. Yet living long enough to see the transmission of Torah and the continuity of the covenant from one generation to the next is a most precious gift, one which Moshe Rabbenu—who spent his whole life living apart from his own parents—desperately yearned for.

In the Folio version of Shakespeare's tragedy, Gloucester's surviving son urges the audience at the end of the play: "The weight of this sad time we

must obey; Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say." However, after listening to Lear wish infertility on his own daughters at the height of his fury, we're left to wonder whether this is actually good advice. And if we do aim to speak only "what we ought to say," then "ought" according to whom or what?

G-d willing, our homes will host family and friends of varying degrees of cognation, habitation, and cerebation this Passover as each of us is bound to not only retell a story from our collective history but imagine ourselves personally experiencing the Exodus.

בְּכֹל דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיִּיב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ  
כְּאִילוּ הוּא יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם

*In each and every generation one is obligated to see ourselves as if they went out from Egypt*

### Pesachim 116b

Numerous laws and guidelines exist to help us navigate the Seder night for a multigenerational crowd. Laws pertaining to *what* we should say and *when* are extensive, including directives provided in the Haggadah itself.

וְכֹל הַמֵּרְבֵּה לְסַפֵּר בִּיציאת מצרים הָרִי זֶה  
מְשֻׁבָּח

*And anyone who adds [and spends extra time] in telling the story of the exodus from Egypt, behold he is praiseworthy.*

Yet the Seder also teaches us that it's not just what we say but how we say it that matters, and obligates us to exercise the highest levels of care in our communication with young and old alike. By saying what we ought, and

untethering the bestowal of kindness from compliance, we become blessings to ourselves and others and can look toward the future with faith and gratitude.

## Endnotes

1. See *Guide of the Perplexed* (especially 1:73)
2. Holinshed's Chronicles: England, Scotland, and Ireland. Volume 1. Project Gutenberg online.
3. See William J. Kennedy's "Shakespeare's King Lear and the Bible," *The Cambridge Companion to the Bible and Literature* (Cambridge, 2020).
4. J. Moreno Garcia, "Households," *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology* (2012).
5. The Instruction of Ptah-Hotep and the Instruction of Ke'Gemni, Trans. Battiscombe G. Gunn, Project Gutenberg online.
6. Herodotus, *An Account of Egypt*, Trans. G. C. Macaulay. Project Gutenberg online.
7. M.P. Campagno, "Kinship and Family Relations," *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology* (2009).
8. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, "The Structure of the Good Society," Yitro. <https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/yitro/structure-good-society/>
9. Shemot 20:12.
10. Jerusalem Talmud, *Peah* 1:1:23-24.
11. *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh Deah* 240:5.
12. *Likutei Ta'amim u'Minhagim*.
13. Based on the Rebbe's talks and writings, including a public letter dated Nissan 11, 5717 (April 12, 1957), [https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach\\_cdo/aid/2853/jewish/There-Here-and-Nowhere.htm](https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/2853/jewish/There-Here-and-Nowhere.htm)







## CELIAC DISEASE, MATZAH AND PATIENT AUTONOMY

When Pesach comes around, the frenzy to ensure everything is prepared kicks into high gear. Homes are cleaned, kitchens are kashered, and matzah, maror and wine are stocked. Yet for a growing number of Jewish community members, fulfilling the mitzvah of eating matzah is difficult. Celiac disease — defined as an immune reaction to the gluten protein found in wheat, barley, and rye — affects at least 1% of all Americans (and possibly more).<sup>1</sup> Today, however, there are numerous options for fulfilling the mitzvah of eating matzah, such as oat or spelt matzah. In this article, I would like to address the issue of whether a Celiac patient may choose, against medical advice,<sup>2</sup> to eat regular wheat matzah in order to fulfill the mitzvah.<sup>3</sup> This article will attempt to highlight the issue with regards to the role of the patient's autonomy — or ability to make their own decisions —

when it differs from medical advice.<sup>4</sup>

Choice as it pertains to the halakhically observant patient is not quite as simple as it seems. While it is true that anyone can technically choose a course of action in their life, those choices do not always meet the standard that the halakha expects. The Mishna (*Yoma* 82a) describes a case of a pregnant woman observing the fast of Yom Kippur. She feels the need to eat and the Mishna rules that we will allow her to eat if the experts agree that she should break her fast. The Gemara there analyzes under what circumstances we would be willing to trust the advice of experts against the patient's expressed wishes and feelings. Rabbi Yannai offers one interpretation of the Mishna that assumes we trust the patient when the patient tells us she needs to eat because a patient "knows his own bitter soul," or interpreted by the Rishonim as the

patient is the best judge of his or her own desperate situation. However, in cases where the physician requires the patient to break her fast and the patient refuses, R' Yannai changes his opinion. R' Yannai assumes that the patient is unable to accurately assess her needs in that moment due to the disease and therefore we accept the recommendation of the physician over the patient.<sup>5</sup> The second opinion offered by the Gemara is that of Mar Bar Rav Ashi, who suggests that when the patient requests food we will believe her against any number of experts because we trust in the patient's self-assessment. However, even according to Mar Bar Rav Ashi, if the patient refuses the food against medical advice, we will follow the expert even in a one-on-one dispute.

The novelty in Mar bar Rav Ashi's opinion is that in a case of one patient demanding treatment against at least

two physicians insisting it is not necessary, we will act in accordance with the stated needs of the patient himself. R' Yannai, however, will always follow the physicians against the patient alone as long as there are at least two physicians rejecting the patient's assertion.

Of course, a significant part of the reason for the machlokes is that we have two major concerns stacked against each other. On the one hand, eating on Yom Kippur is a violation of a *kares* prohibition, while on the other hand, not eating may result in a loss of life. The central question the Gemara is addressing is who ultimately should make the call in regards to the potential violation of eating on Yom Kippur? Yet no place is that more clearly seen than in the Gemara Yerushalmi in its explanation of a similar case. The Yerushalmi (*Yoma* 8:4) describes the scenario where in general, the agreement is with the Bavli that we trust whichever opinion errs on the side of eating in order to ensure that the person has a positive health outcome. However, in a situation where the patient says he is able to fast and the physician is unsure — even there, the Gemara insists we follow the rule of *safek nefashos lekula* (we err on the side of caution in life-threatening situations) and allow the patient to eat.

While it is clear from the Yerushalmi that the case is where the patient's choices are to eat or fast and risk a potential for death, it is not at all clear that the Bavli agrees to that framing. The Rosh (*Yoma* 8:13) suggests that the entire lens of the discussion is not one where the question is of potential death because if that were the case there is no question at all — of course the patient needs to eat because there is an actual risk of losing a life! Rather, he insists that the question the Gemara is interested in is where fasting will result

in falling ill and once a patient falls ill there are no guarantees about health outcomes at that point. In other words, the question that R' Yannai and Mar Bar Rav Ashi disagree on is whether the patient's potential illness is sufficient to violate Yom Kippur, even though fasting will not directly lead to a concern of death.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (618:1) rules in accordance with the standard understanding of the Gemara that we err on the side of ensuring that the patient in question breaks his fast even against multiple physicians who believe the patient may continue to fast. Included in his position is the perspective of the *Tur* and others, that we are interested in ensuring that the patient in question will not fall ill and potentially be in a life-threatening medical situation. The analysis becomes more complicated when considering the comment that the *Magen Avraham* adds to the analysis. He comments on the ruling in accordance with the opinion of Mar Bar Rav Ashi that even against many physicians we trust the patient's demand to eat — and even when the physicians claim that eating will itself be detrimental.

The scenario described by the *Shulchan Aruch*, where the danger for the patient is real but not immediately life-threatening, means that we will ignore medical advice given that there is an equally likely chance that the patient understands his own needs better than the likelihood of the experts. Yet when we add the assertion of the *Magen Avraham*, that changes the analysis because it is no longer a question of two groups of people both uncertain about the future outcome of the patient and attempting to make the best decision possible. Rather, it becomes a test of internal decision-making authority — and the *Magen Avraham* is of the opinion that because the Gemara

ultimately trusts the patient it does not matter if the physicians think the patient is wrong.

The obvious difficulty with this approach is pointed out by both Rabbi Akiva Eiger (*Ibid*) and the *Aruch HaShulchan* (618:5,6). Both are bothered that we would ever trust the patient's insistence that he needs food against the expertise of the physicians that the very food he asked for will cause damage. R' Eiger suggests that fundamentally there is a difference between food and medicine. Medicine that only ever has remedial benefits is the sole domain of the experts (and in today's world that means trained professionals). Food, on the other hand, is what we all eat and therefore in the case of the individual who needs to break his fast on Yom Kippur may be trusted to insist that he needs this food. Therefore in this case we would allow the person in question to eat the food on Yom Kippur. The *Aruch HaShulchan* poses a different solution, which is that we only trust the person against the physician in cases where the person is feeling faint but not yet sick to the point of bedrest or confined to the hospital.

Regardless of this particular difficulty, the *Machatzis HaShekel* points out that the inherent uncertainty of future outcomes is the ultimate reason why we defer to the particulars of the patient. He points out that even when the physician thinks that there is no particular reason to break the fast, we trust the patient because there is a concern right now where he will be ill from lack of eating. Therefore, argues the *Machatzis HaShekel*, certainly when the patient claims he needs food we will believe him, because the present concern overrides our concern of the future illness that animates the physician's claim that the food will be harmful.

When considering the case of eating

matzah to fulfill the mitzvah against the medical advice provided by professionals, the case is an inversion of what the Gemara is considering. In our case of eating matzah while suffering from Celiac disease we have similar variables. We have a patient who wants to eat a specific food and feels he needs it, and a physician — many of them — who advise that eating the matzah in this case will actually cause harm to the patient. If we were to accept the reasoning of Rabbi Eiger, that when it comes to food we will accept the patient's insistence, we could make a reasonable argument that despite the lack of a clearly pressing medical concern to allow him to eat the food, we can take the patient at his word that eating the matzah will be beneficial and would be permitted.

Of course, the argument could equally be made that in cases of inherent risk to a person, as long as he is both willing and the risk falls within acceptable limits — he may engage in that particular action. This principle, *shomer pesaim Hashem*, that allows us to take certain regular risks, is not generally applied to medical scenarios — as the *Aruch HaShulchan* among others — point out. Yet when it comes to refusing to obey the best medical advice it becomes more than a question of risk alone and equally an issue of the right of the patient to make his own decisions regarding his care. Food, as established earlier, can be viewed as something that does not fall under the normal rubric of medical decision making and can therefore enable a patient to ignore the advice of their medical advisors.

In the case of the celiac, it is obvious that there are different approaches when it comes to what is the best course of action for each patient. In recent years, research has been published regarding sudden onset celiac disease, which can result in severe life-threatening

complications that need urgent intervention.<sup>6</sup> While the chances of such an event are extremely low, they are certainly possible. Ignoring medical advice is not usually permitted by the halacha, yet in certain circumstances there may be rights to patient autonomy even in the face of likely injury to health. It also stands to reason that if there is any uncertainty from the perspective of the medical team, then we certainly can trust in the patient's stated desire to eat the matzah to fulfill his obligation.

Ultimately, principles of patient autonomy in halacha are complex and require reapplication to every case — each to its own specific details. Yet in certain areas where the halacha both recognizes personal interest and desire as well as the expertise of professionals, there are pockets where one can outweigh the other. May every individual faced with such difficult choices be given the strength to continue to fulfill the mitzvot that Hashem has commanded us in continued good health.

## Endnotes

1. Lebowitz, Benjamin. "Epidemiology, Presentation, and Diagnosis of Celiac Disease." *Gastroenterology*, vol. 160, no. 1, 2021, pp. 63–75.
2. The patient in question is not under the impression that the physician is incorrect about the medical facts — specifically that ingesting the gluten will cause some amount of damage. Rather the patient is apathetic towards any potential harm out of a desire to fulfill the mitzvah.
3. While the question of obligation to fulfill a mitzvah if it can cause medical damage is certainly relevant, it has been addressed at length elsewhere. See for example, *Responsa Minchas Asher* Vol. 1 No. 42,43; *Chazon Ovadiah* Vol. 1 No. 4, Vol. 2 No. 33. Additionally, many of the responsa discuss whether there is blanket exemption from performing mitzvot that cause pain or suffering to the actor, see *Responsa Binyan*

*Shlomo* No. 47 and *Responsa Besamim Rosh* No. 94. This article will not specifically address that perspective.

4. It is likely that the specifics of each particular patient and their specific set of circumstances will determine the outcome on an individual basis. However, for illustration purposes we will isolate the question as one where we treat Celiac disease as non-fatal in the short term. Although acute onset celiac disease is extremely rare, there have been documented cases. See Guarino, Matteo et al. "Life-threatening onset of coeliac disease: a case report and literature review." *BMJ open gastroenterology* vol. 7,1 (2020).

5. Note that R' Yannai does not rely on the expertise of the physician as the reason for accepting his recommendation rather on the fact that we can't rely on the patient in this case. This approach is vital to understand implied autonomy as will be discussed.

6. Guarino, Matteo et al. "Life-threatening onset of coeliac disease: a case report and literature review." *BMJ open gastroenterology* vol. 7,1 (2020): e000406. doi:10.1136/bmjgast-2020-000406





## THE TIMING OF SEARCHING, SELLING AND BURNING THE CHOMETZ

The requirement to search for chometz on the eve of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nissan is found on the opening page of *P'sachim* (2a). The Gemara (6b) requires a nullification (*bitul*) following the search.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (OC 434:2) codifies these halachos: after the search, immediately at night, one nullifies and says: all chometz in my possession that I do not see or burn should be null like the dust of the earth. It is good to nullify again at the end of the fifth hour of the day of the 14<sup>th</sup>, after which the chometz is prohibited and one can no longer nullify it.

### When to Sell the Chometz

The Rama adds: one should not nullify it (i.e., the chametz that he sees, 434:4) until after he burns the chometz, in order to fulfill the mitzva of burning

with chometz that is his. The universal custom of selling chometz affects all of these halachos, especially for those who leave their homes for all of Pesach.

When selling chometz, the places where the chometz is found are rented to the non-Jew. This enables additional methods of transfer (*agav* and *chatzer*) and helps resolve the problem of *achrayus* (responsibility for loss) which may exist (see MB 440:3, *Mekor Chaim* 436:4; 437:3).

The *Mishna B'rura* (436:32) cites a dispute whether one who intends to sell (or rent) a place on the 14<sup>th</sup> day to a non-Jew is required to search that place on the previous evening. He rules that one should not protest those who are lenient, but prefers if the sale and rental take place on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Nissan.

For this reason, an early sale is arranged for the 13<sup>th</sup>. This is necessary in any

event for travelers to Europe or Eretz Yisrael. The sale on the 14<sup>th</sup> is too late for them, as it takes place after the chometz is prohibited in their location.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (436:3) cites a dispute about whether one who leaves his home within 30 days of Pesach must destroy the chometz, or whether may he merely make it *hefker*, ownerless. The lenient view holds that there is no obligation to destroy chometz, as long as one owns no chometz on Pesach. Alternatively, the obligation is fulfilled by rendering the chometz ownerless. If so, selling the chometz to a non-Jew also fulfills the obligation (MB 27, 31), and even if searching is obligatory in order to destroy chometz, it does not apply to one who sells all of his chometz.

The *Mishna B'rura* (32) emphasizes that in order to not be required to search, one must specify that the entire place and all the chometz therein is sold

to the non-Jew. If selling fulfills the obligation to destroy, it is sufficient to rent the place. The Rosh (*P'sachim* 2:4) states that there is no need to destroy chometz. The Torah requires only to eliminate chometz from our homes (*tashbisu se'or mibateichem*, Sh'mos 12:15), a requirement fulfilled by selling it to a non-Jew.

The stricter view, based on the Mordechai (535), maintains that there is an obligation to search and destroy chometz, and that elimination by selling does not exempt the obligation to search. In deference to this view, some travelers rent the entire home except for one room. They search that room on the night before they leave. A b'racha is not recited if they search before the night of the 14<sup>th</sup> (436:1).

## Biur Chometz

It is customary to burn chometz on the day of the 14<sup>th</sup> (Rama 445:1). It is burned in the fifth hour of the day, followed by the second *bitul*, nullification (MB 6,7). Burning, as opposed to other forms of destruction, is done to fulfill the mitzvah according to R. Yehuda (*P'sachim* 21a) who requires burning.

R. Moshe Shternbuch (*Mo'adim U'zmanim* 194), assumes that the mitzvah is fulfilled when the last bit of chometz is eliminated. If so, the sale should precede the burning. For travelers who sell on the 13<sup>th</sup>, burning on the 14<sup>th</sup> in their location is done with their last chometz. Those who sell on the 14<sup>th</sup> should ideally burn their chometz after the sale. Since chometz is usually not sold until the fifth hour

when it can no longer be eaten, it may be difficult to burn after the sale. If so, one may burn the chometz earlier, just as the Rama allows burning the previous evening if one is concerned that the chametz may be lost. He fulfills the mitzva since the obligation to destroy chometz begins 30 days before Pesach (MB 8).

R. Shternbuch explains that travelers burn the last chometz in their home, as the Torah states (Sh'mos 12:15), "*mibateichem*," "from your home." Alternatively, the last possible hour is the time for burning according to R. Yehuda. For one who fears the chometz will be lost, the last hour is at night. For a traveler, it is before he leaves if he cannot burn it later. For locals, it is the fifth hour, ideally after the sale. For one who goes to work or is traveling on the 14<sup>th</sup>, it is earlier that morning.



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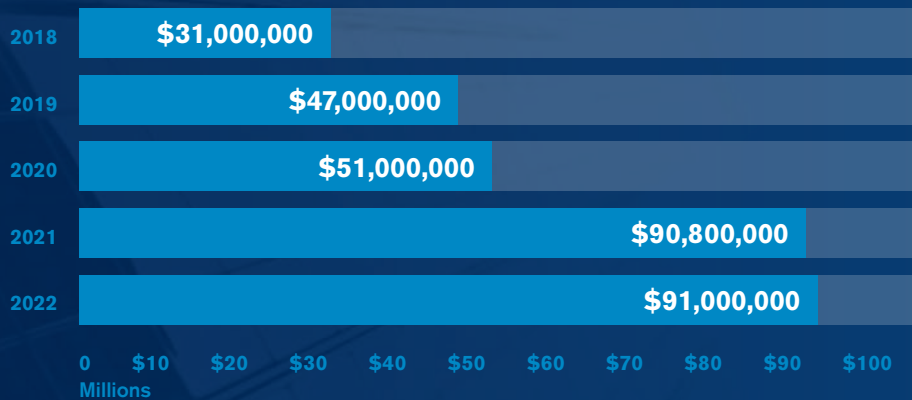




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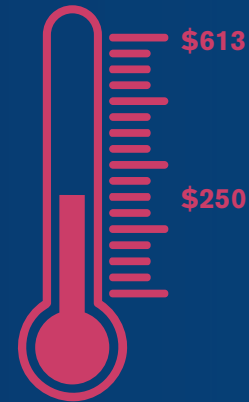
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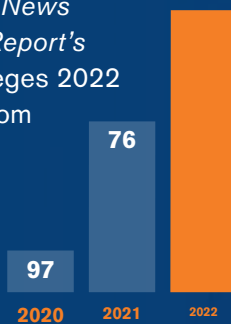
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# Table Talk: Quotes and Questions for Family Discussions

**Prepared by Rabbi Marc Eichenbaum**

Yeshiva University's Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks-Herenstein  
Center for Values and Leadership

**The Holiness of Israel:** When reading the following sources, reflect on what makes Israel holy. Is there holiness to the land itself? Is the holiness related to the mitzvot performed there? Are the relatively mundane activities done in Israel imbued with holiness as well?

## **Ketubot 110b**

The Sages taught: A person should always reside in Eretz Yisrael, even in a city that is mostly populated by gentiles, and he should not reside outside of Eretz Yisrael, even in a city that is mostly populated by Jews. The reason is that anyone who resides in Eretz Yisrael is considered as one who has a God, and anyone who resides outside of Eretz Yisrael is considered as one who does not have a God. As it is stated: “To give to you the land of Canaan, to be your God” (Leviticus 25:38). The Gemara expresses surprise: And can it really be said that anyone who resides outside of Eretz Yisrael has no God? Rather, this comes to tell you that anyone who resides outside of Eretz Yisrael is considered as though he is engaged in idol worship.

## **Ramban (1194–1270), Vayikra 18:25**

The Sages stated in the Sifri: “[If your hearts lead you astray and you serve and bow to other gods] and you will quickly be banished [from the good land that God gives you]” (Devarim 11:17): Even though I [God] am exiling you from the Land of Israel, you should still perform mitzvot so that when you return they will not be new and unfamiliar to you. An analogy: a man is upset with his wife and sends her to her father’s house. He says to her: “Keep wearing your jewelry, so that when you return they will not be new and unfamiliar to you.”

## **Rabbi Moshe Alpert**

Describing the first Israeli elections to the Knesset in 1949 (quoted in Vered Kellner, *Longings and Disappointments: A Voter in Exile in New York*)

At 5:35 AM we woke up, my wife, my brother Reb Shimon Leib and my brother-in-law Reb Natanel Solduchil. And after we drank coffee we put on Shabbat clothing in honor of this great and holy day, because 'This is the day the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be happy on it.' After 2,000 or more years of exile, you could say that from the six days of Creation until this day, we have not merited to see a day like this, that we are holding elections in a Jewish state. Shehechiyanu! Blessed is the One that kept us alive and sustained us and brought us to this day! So we went to the voting station near Chabashim Street with our identity cards in hand. With great and mighty joy we walked the short way there, and the entire way I walked like it was Simchat Torah and I was circling with a Torah scroll, because I was holding the identity card of our new Jewish State in my hand. ... Then the holiest moment of my life arrived. The moment that neither my father nor my grandfather had the privilege to experience in their lifetimes. Only me, in my time, in my lifetime, did I merit to experience such a holy and pure moment as this. ...What joy for me and my portion!

**Israel’s Role in the World:** How does Israel relate to the Jewish people’s mission to the world? What does Israel represent to the world? In what ways is Israel living up to this responsibility? In which areas can she improve?

## **Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888), Bereishit 48:3–4**

The Jewish nation is to represent agriculture as well as commerce, militarism as well as culture and learning. The Jewish people will be a nation of farmers, a nation of businessmen, a nation of soldiers and a nation of science.



Thereby, as a model nation, to establish the truth that the one great personal and national task which God revealed in His Torah is not dependent on any particular kind of talent or character trait, but that the whole of humanity in all its shades of diversity can equally find its calling in one common spiritual and moral mission and outlook in life.

### **Theodor Herzl (1860–1904)**

*Old New Land* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997), p. 248

The spell of the Sabbath was over the Holy City, now freed from the filth, noise and vile odors that had so often revolted devout pilgrims of all creeds when, after long and trying journeys, they reached their goal. In the old days they had to endure many disgusting sights before they could reach their shrines. All was different now. ... the lanes and the streets were beautifully paved and cared for. ... Moslem, Jewish, and Christian welfare institutions, hospitals, clinics stood side by side. In the middle of a great square was the splendid Peace Palace, where international congresses of peace-lovers and scientists were held, for Jerusalem was now a home for all the best strivings of the human spirit: for Faith, Love, Knowledge.

### **Chaim Weizmann (1874–1952)**

Address at the opening session of Israeli Constituent Assembly, February 15, 1949

Today we stand on the threshold of a new era. We leave the dawn light of provisional authority and enter the full sunshine of ordinary democratic life. ... Let us not be over arrogant if we say that this is a great day in the history of the world. In this hear a message of hope and good cheer goes forth from this place in the Sacred City to all oppressed people and to all who are struggling for freedom and equality.

**The Fulfillment of Prophecies :** Do you see the State of Israel as the fulfillment of the Torah's prophecies? If yes, which prophecies have been fulfilled and which have yet to be fulfilled? Do you see God's hand in the founding of Israel and in your personal life?

### **Yirmiyahu, 31: 16–17**

Restrain your voice from weeping,  
Your eyes from shedding tears;  
For there is reward for your labor...  
And there is hope for your future—  
Your children shall return to their land.

### **Tehillim, 126**

When the Lord brought back the captivity of Ziyon,  
we were like men in a dream.  
Then was our mouth filled with laughter,  
and our tongue with singing:  
then they said among the nations, The Lord has done great things for them.  
The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad.  
Bring back our captivity, O Lord, like the streams in the Negev.  
They who sow in tears shall reap in joy.  
He who goes weeping on his way, bearing a bag of seed,  
shall come back with a joyful shout, carrying his sheaves.

### **Golda Meir (1898–1978)**

*My Life* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1975), pp. 250–251

Sometimes I used to go to Lydda and watch the planes from Aden touch down, marveling at the endurance and faith of their exhausted passengers. “Had you ever seen a plane before?” I asked one bearded old man. “No,” he answered. “But weren’t you very frightened flying?” I persisted. “No,” he said again, very firmly. “It is all written in the Bible, in Isaiah, “They shall mount up with wings of eagles.” And standing there on the airfield, he recited the entire passage to me, his face lit with the joy of a fulfilled prophecy — and of the journey’s end.

### **Michael Oren**

*Six Days of War* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 307

[Commander] Motta [Gur] sat on the ground and gazed at the walled city. It was a bright, cool morning, and the sun was on his back. The gold and silver domes of the Temple Mount glowed before him. He closed his eyes, as if in prayer. He was about to enter the Jewish pantheon, along with King David, who’d conquered Jerusalem and in turned it into his capital; Judah the Maccabee, who’d purified the Temple after its desecration by the Hellenists; Bar Kochba, who’d thrown himself against Rome and lost the Jews’ last desperate battle for Jerusalem. Then came the centuries of enforced separation, landscape transformed into memory. And now the landscape was reemerging from dream, shimmering back into tangible reach.

**The Inherent Connection between Israel and the Jewish People:** How is the Jewish people’s relationship to Israel different to their connection to other lands they have lived in throughout history? Is this connection a spiritual, historical, or social one? What connection do you feel most strongly when you are in Israel?

## **Rashi (1040–1105), Bereishit 1:1**

In the beginning (Genesis 1:1): Said Rabbi Isaac: It was not necessary to begin here. Rather the Torah should have started with “This month is to you,” (Exodus 12:2) which is the first commandment that the Israelites were commanded, (since the main purpose of the Torah is its commandments). Why did God commence with “In the beginning?” Because of (the verse) “The strength of His works He related to His people, to give them the inheritance of the nations” (Psalm 111:6). For if the nations of the world should say to Israel, “You are robbers, for you conquered by force the lands of the seven nations of Canaan,” the people of Israel can reply, “The entire earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He; He created and gave it to whomever He deemed proper. When God wished, He gave it to them, and when God wished, He took it away from them and gave it to us.”

## **Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook (1865–1935)**

*Orot, Lights from Darkness, Land of Israel, Chapter 1*

The land of Israel is not an external thing, an external national acquisition, a means to the goal of general unity and strengthening of the physical or even spiritual. The land of Israel is an intrinsic section of the nation, attached to it with a living bond, entwined with its existence in internal uniqueness.

It is therefore impossible to explain the uniqueness of the sanctity of the Land of Israel, to actualize the depths of love for her, in any humanly rational way. It is only through the divine spirit which is on the nation as a whole, through the natural spiritual nature which exists in the soul of Israel, which spreads out through contemplating the Land of Israel as an external value which serves only the purpose of uniting the nation, even for the sake of enabling the Jewish idea in exile, guarding its form, strengthening faith and reverence and strengthening practical mitzvot in their proper form, does not produce durable fruit. This foundation is rotten, compared to the sacred strength of the Land of Israel. True strengthening of the Jewish idea in exile will only come via deep embedding in the Land of Israel; via yearning for the Land of Israel, [the Jewish idea] will continually receive all of its independent traits.

Anticipating of redemption is the force which maintains Jewry in exile, and the Judaism of the Land of Israel is the redemption itself...

## **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (1948–2020)**

*Future Tense* (New York: Schocken Books, 2012) pp. 46–47

In Israel, Jewish life is a community of fate. There, Jews, from the most secular to the most pious, suffer equally

from war and terror, and benefit equally from prosperity and peace. Judaism, in Israel, is a presence you breathe, not just a religion you practise. In Israel as nowhere else, Jewishness is part of the public domain, in the language, the landscape, the calendar. There you can stand amid the ruins and relics of towns that were living communities in the time of the Bible and feel the full, astonishing sweep of time across which the Jewish people wrestled with its fate as Jacob once wrestled with the angel. And there you become conscious, in the faces you see and the accents you hear, of the astonishing diversity of Jews from every country and culture, brought together in the great ingathering as once, in Ezekiel's vision, the dismembered fragments of a broken people joined together and came to life again. That is why, for Diaspora Jews, spending time in Israel is an essential and transformative experience of Jewish peoplehood and why Birthright, the American programme aimed at sending all young Jews to Israel, is so successful. At the same time, it is equally important that young Israelis spend time in the Jewish communities of the Diaspora. There they discover what it is to live Judaism as a covenant of faith, something many of them have never fully experienced before.

**Longing for Israel:** Throughout the centuries Jews have longed to return to Israel. Which elements of the following poems speak to you the most? How is our longing for Israel present in our prayer services? What is the value of continuing to long for Israel even after we have regained her?

## **R' Yehuda HaLevi (1075–1141)**

“My Heart is the East,” Translated from the Hebrew by A.Z. Foreman

My heart is in the east, and the rest of me at the edge of the west.

How can I taste the food I eat? How can it give me pleasure?

How can I keep my promise now, or fulfill the vows I've made

While Zion remains in the Cross's reign, and I in Arab chains?

With pleasure I would leave behind all the good things of Spain,

If only I could gaze on the dust of our ruined Holy Place.

## **Chaim Nachman Bialik (1873-1934),**

“To the Bird,” Translated from the Hebrew by Jonathan A. Lipnick

Greetings to you, kind bird, upon your return

From the hot lands back to my window

Back to your pleasing voice, My soul perishes  
In the winter when you leave.

Sing, tell me, my beautiful bird,  
About the wonders of the distant land.  
Is it full of evils and hardships also  
There in the hot beautiful land?

Will you bring me regards from my brothers in Zion, From  
my brothers far and near?

O happy they are! Do they know  
How I suffer, O suffer, from grief? ...

Tell me, my bird, the secret of all secrets  
And what did they whisper of their prey?  
Did they offer comfort or hope for days  
When its fruit like the Lebanon will roar?

And my brothers the workers who sow with tears,  
Have they harvested the omer with joy?  
O that I had wings to fly to the land  
Where the almond and date-palm blossom!  
What shall I tell you, good bird?  
What do you expect to hear from my mouth?  
From this cold corner of the earth you will not hear songs,  
Only dirges and sighs and wailing.

Shall I tell you about the hardships  
Which are known in the land of the living?  
O who will count the number of passing sorrows,  
The approaching and raging troubles?

Fly, my bird, to your mountain, your desert  
You are happy for you have left my tent.  
Were you to live with me, O wing of song,  
You too would cry bitter tears at my fate.

But weeping and tears will bring no cure  
These cannot heal my wounds.  
My eyes have grown dim, a sack filled with tears  
My heart has been struck like a weed.

Now the tears and the bruises have stopped  
But the end of my sorrow has not yet come.  
Greetings my dear bird upon your return  
Oh please cry aloud for joy!

**Rachel "HaMeshoreret" Bluwstein (1890–1931), "Perhaps," Palestine-Israel Journal, Vol. 3 Nos. 3 and 4 (1996).**

Perhaps it was never so.

Perhaps

I never woke early and went to the fields  
To labor in the sweat of my brow

Nor in the long blazing days  
Of harvest  
On top of the wagon laden with sheaves,  
Made my voice ring with song  
Nor bathed myself clean in the calm  
Blue water  
Of my Kinneret. O, my Kinneret,  
Were you there or did I only dream?

**Israel as a Refuge:** What was life like before we had Israel to turn to in times of persecution? How has Israel protected Jews throughout the world? How has this protection influenced our psyches?

**Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903–1993)**

*Kol Dodi Dofek* (translated by David Z. Gordon, 2006) Six Knocks

Eight years ago, in the midst of a night of the terrors of Majdanek, Treblinka, and Buchenwald; in a night of gas chambers and crematoria; in a night of total divine self-concealment; in a night ruled by the devil of doubt and destruction who sought to sweep the Lover from her own tent into the Catholic Church; in a night of continuous searching for the Beloved — on that very night the Beloved appeared. The Almighty, who was hiding in His splendid sanctum, suddenly appeared and began to beckon at the tent of the Lover, who tossed and turned on her bed beset by convulsions and the agonies of hell. Because of the beating and knocking at the door of the mournful Lover, the State of Israel was born. How many times did the Beloved knock on the door of the Lover?

**Dr. Erica Brown,**

*Blue and White Not Red*, October 15, 2015

So what would the Middle East look like if there were no Israel? What would our Jewish Diaspora community do were there no refuge in times of despair? Think of the fate of Jews from Yemen and Syria, Russia and Ethiopia, France and the Ukraine — to name but a few. They found a friend in Israel when they could no longer live in comfort or safety where they were. Israel does not say to Jews in need worldwide, "It's complicated." Instead, the message is, "Welcome Home." It's time for us to think about what loyalty means, even a complicated loyalty — if that's what it must be for some. It must fundamentally involve our love, our allegiance, our pride, our support and our willingness to put aside differences when the country is in pain. Blue, white and red cannot forever be the colors of a flag stained in blood.





# A DISCUSSION ABOUT ISRAEL AND ALIYAH

*Introduction: We asked four panelists to provide insights and guidance about Aliyah. This roundtable discussion recognizes that Aliyah is a very personal decision and each family has its own set of factors to consider. Yet these insights are valuable, not only for those considering Aliyah, but even for those who can't, at this time, see it as a possibility, and for those who are already living in Israel.*

**Rebbetzin Meira Davis** is Director of Rebbetzins' Programming at RIETS. She served alongside her husband, Rabbi Edward Davis, at Young Israel of Hollywood for 36 years.

**Rabbi Chaim Eisenstein** is a Ra"m (Rabbinic Faculty) in the YU Israel Kollel and the Rabbi of Beis Medrash Mevakshei Emes in the Mishkafayim neighborhood of Ramat Beit Shemesh.

**Mrs. Aliza Pilichowski** is the Mayor of Mitzpe Yericho.

**Rabbi Larry Rothwachs** is the Director of Professional Rabbis at RIETS and Rabbi of Congregation Beth Aaron in Teaneck, NJ. He accepted the position of Rabbi of the new Maromei Shemesh community that is being built in Ramat Beit Shemesh.

## Please provide some background about your connection to the Land of Israel and Aliyah

**Rebbetzin Davis:** In 1935, my mother's family fled from Germany to Palestine, where many of her European relatives had emigrated earlier. That sealed her love for Eretz Yisrael even though they later needed to emigrate to the United States for *parnasa* purposes. My mother, AH, inculcated a strong love for Israel, Zionism and Israeli

culture in her children. My husband and I had planned to make Aliyah at the conclusion of 10 years in his first Rabbinical position in Richmond, VA. In anticipation of this move, we spoke only Hebrew to our children. Ultimately, we were faced with some special educational needs which could not be addressed in Israel at that time. We moved to Hollywood, FL and became very invested in the physical and spiritual growth of our small new congregation and community. Two of our four children who now reside in Israel made Aliyah when they finished

their seminary programs. The other two made Aliyah with their families when their oldest children were entering second and third grades. Two of our grandsons whose parents and siblings reside in the United States made Aliyah after the army portion of their yeshiva's hesder program, with their next brother following in their footsteps this summer. A few years ago, my sister made Aliyah and recently remarried to a long-time American Oleh. They are all very happy and fulfilled living in Israel. My husband and I spend three months a year in Israel, though have not officially

made Aliyah.

**Rabbi Eisenstein:** During the first few years of our marriage, my wife and I thought that we would be spending the rest of our lives teaching Torah in America until the coming of Mashiach. We dreamed about the prospect of living in Eretz Yisrael, but never considered it a reality. Then I got an offer to teach at Yeshivat Netiv Aryeh, and it was a great opportunity, so we made Aliyah with our three young children and have been living here for the last 19 years.

**Mrs. Pilichowski:** My parents dreamt of making Aliyah for as long as I remember. My father would sing “*shirei am*” with us and listen to Israeli singers like Naomi Shemer and Uzi Chitman on our record player. My mother would long for us to be on a kibbutz and become true *chalutzim*. Making Aliyah was a part of our connection to Am Yisrael. My parents fully integrated the emotions of “*Am Yisrael al pi Torat Yisrael b'Eretz Yisrael*” (The Jewish people observing the Torah of Israel in the Land of Israel). When my husband Uri and I met, we knew that we wanted to live in Israel and raise our family here. We were privileged to study in Israel right after we got married before moving to America where we lived in Los Angeles and Boca Raton. Both of these communities, under the leadership of Rabbi Steven Weil and Rabbi Efrem Goldberg, developed deep connections to Eretz Yisrael. It was always understood that we would one day come back to Israel. We spoke to our children daily about the excitement and belonging that we longed for in Eretz Yisrael. When an opportunity provided itself, it was a natural progression to move back to Israel.

**Rabbi Rothwachs:** My wife and I both thought about Aliyah when we were newly married and planning our future together. However, as our professional

careers evolved, first in Jewish education and then in the rabbinate, we ultimately came to the conclusion that remaining in the U.S. was the most appropriate choice for our family. We recently announced that we hope to make Aliyah in a few years. While there is certainly some personal motivation involved — two of our married children are living in Eretz Yisrael and a third has plans to do so soon — we have decided to move in this direction at this time, as we have been offered an opportunity to spearhead a new community in Israel. Being able to fulfill our personal dream by making Aliyah, live closer to children and grandchildren, and continue to engage in community building, presents us with an opportunity that we have decided to seize.

### **Please provide some general observations that may be helpful for someone considering Aliyah.**

**Rebbetzin Davis:** Learning Hebrew can help with an ultimately successful Aliyah. It can be the key to communicating with one's surroundings, understanding the culture, feeling more connected to the people and the Land, and feeling an overall sense of belonging. Our grandchildren who are being raised in predominantly non-Anglo areas speak English with very strong Israeli accents. The ones in heavily Anglo communities speak English with American accents, even the younger ones who were born in Israel.

The more planning that is done in every area, the more successful the Aliyah experience can be. Prepare your family, with conversations about some of the big challenges: six-day work and school week, no Sundays off, time zone differences, missing family members who are far away, lower salaries, adapting to a new culture,

educational system and healthcare system, finding desirable and affordable housing, security concerns. Lowering expectations and being flexible helps.

It's important that family in Israel and outside of Israel are familiar with WhatsApp and Zoom, which can provide incredible and meaningful “visiting” opportunities with many family members and friends.

**Rabbi Eisenstein:** We have to start with the perspective that Eretz Yisrael is the best place in the world to live. No matter which stream of Orthodoxy speaks to you, there are opportunities for growth that are unparalleled elsewhere. For growth oriented people, there are so many diverse communities with a focus on Torah and spirituality.

That said, making Aliyah does come with challenges. First and foremost is *chinuch*. The education system here is significantly different than in the U.S. That in itself would not be a reason to forgo Aliyah. However, if one is coming with children between the ages of 9 and 17, there is a significant concern that the child will have a difficult time adjusting. I personally have told families not to come in certain situations because of this issue. Other families have moved here with pre-teens and teens and were successful. It is really important to do a lot of research and speak to mentors and rebbeim who have experience with this before deciding on Aliyah when one has children this age.

Second, in Eretz Yisrael, we merit to live in the palace of the king. In the palace of the King, there is a different emphasis — there is more of a focus on spiritual matters and less of a focus on materialism. We sometimes see ads in magazines by developers or other proprietors who try to present the possibility of living an American lifestyle in Eretz Yisrael. For the most part, that is not true. The homes are often smaller, cars are often more



expensive and the salaries that people earn don't usually allow for that same lifestyle. All in all, it is a worthwhile sacrifice to be able to live in the palace of the King. Yet it is important for those considering Aliyah to be aware that they will be living a more modest lifestyle in Eretz Yisrael.

When we made Aliyah through Nefesh B'Nefesh, they showed us a PowerPoint presentation about Aliyah that gave a more realistic view of what to expect when making Aliyah. One of the points that was made — which brings us to our third point — is that we should be aware that we are moving to the Middle East. Everyone is aware of the security challenges in Eretz Yisrael and the prospect of terror, *chas veshalom*. HaKadosh Baruch Hu gave us Eretz Yisrael as a place where we have the opportunity to reach great spiritual heights while also being in a place where there is a lot of tension, surrounded by people who want to destroy us. That reality creates a hardened culture that also requires adjustment. It is a culture that pervades many parts of life, from the schooling of children through professional life, and even daily interactions in the supermarket and on the bus. Israel life is truly like a *sabra* that is hard on the outside and soft on the inside. It is a challenging adjustment, but one that is worthwhile in order to achieve the spiritual heights that come along with living in Eretz Yisrael.

**Mrs. Pilichowski:** Aliyah is, like its namesake, an elevation. It is a privilege to live in a time where it is “easy” to make Aliyah. Uri and I had always imagined that we would move to Israel and our lives would be significantly more challenging than our lives in the United States. But in reality, it is all about one's perspective. When we moved to Israel, we had friends who had a fantastic opportunity to move to Germany. They decided,

quite quickly, that an international experience for their children would be a great educational experience. When I juxtaposed this to what I heard from many friends about their hesitations about moving to Israel, there was a striking contrast. After thousands of years of our parents and grandparents crying for the day that they could touch the Kotel, we are still hesitant about moving. There are definitely challenges when making Aliyah, but one's perspective is the overriding rule.

### **How should the topic of Aliyah be addressed in the Diaspora community? What does it mean to be a Zionist living in the Diaspora?**

**Rebbetzin Davis:** As someone who guides rebbetzins, and someone who has struggled with this personally, I can say that this is a challenging issue for many Rabbinic couples who feel they should make Aliyah, while weighing the important role they play in growing higher levels of Yiddishkeit in their communities and in outreach efforts.

In discussing this topic with one of my daughters who lives in Israel, we thought that each person knows what his or her considerations are when it comes to making Aliyah and can make an honest decision of what is best. That doesn't make someone less of a Zionist if they live in the Diaspora. We can still support and love Israel from afar.

**Rabbi Eisenstein:** I think it's important to recognize that there are people who try very hard to make Aliyah and for whatever reason are not able to do so. On the other hand, every Jew in the Diaspora should be dreaming, praying and open to the opportunity to come to Eretz Yisrael.

One of my great rebbeim, Rav Abba Bronspiegel, *zt”l*, would often tell a story of a late 19th century rav in

Europe who went to live in Eretz Yisrael, and his congregation felt that he was leaving them behind. Before he left, he told the apocryphal story of a Jew in Poland who was running away from a government official who constantly tormented him. On his way out of town, this official caught him and asked where he is running, to which the Jew replied that he was going to celebrate a holiday called “Yom Pleitaseinu” (the day of our escape). The official ran in to town and saw that no other Jews were getting ready for a holiday, so he went over to one of the other Jewish townspeople and asked why Yankel said that he is celebrating Yom Pleitaseinu. This other Jew was sharp and figured out what was happening, so he answered that Yom Pleitaseinu is a personal holiday. Each Jew has a day when he gets a message to celebrate Yom Pleitaseinu and Yankel just got that message. This rav told his congregation that his Yom Pleitaseinu has come, and it was time for him to go to Eretz Yisrael. We all have to look out for the call of our Yom Pleitaseinu, which may take time to come, or which may come to us in a very subtle way, and when it does come, try to take advantage.

**Mrs. Pilichowski:** The term Zionism was born in the Diaspora. In many ways, Zionism is more alive in the Diaspora than in Israel itself. I feel that my upbringing in the Diaspora heightens my appreciation for my life in Israel. Yesterday, as I was driving through traffic in Jerusalem, I lamented the extra time that my trip was taking. I looked out the window at the Temple Mount and stopped my train of thought and recognized that I am living the dream of our people. Sitting in traffic in Jerusalem! Thousands of people trying to move around a flourishing city, watching the construction of more roads, infrastructure, housing, and culture all around me is invigorating! We are living in the Zionist fulfillment



of our dreams. Being a Zionist in the Diaspora is powerful, but being in Israel and being in the front seat is an even greater opportunity and I am grateful for this gift.

**Rabbi Rothwachs:** When publicly addressing the topic of Aliyah, I prefer to differentiate between our national/communal obligation, on the one hand, and one's individual obligation, on the other. From a national/communal perspective, there is great value in promoting Aliyah and I believe that rabbis in the Diaspora should be clear and unapologetic in their messaging. There should be no discomfort, nor hesitancy, in proclaiming the message that the future of the Jewish people is in Eretz Yisrael, and thus, as a community, we should be able to plan passionately and, when appropriate, self-reflect critically. That being said, the question of Aliyah for individuals is a very personal one, and must be respected as such. There are many different factors that are relevant to the question as to whether one should make Aliyah, and, if so, when. This reality must be met with respect and individuals who choose to live outside of Israel should be supported and their personal choice validated. Nobody should be made to feel guilty for living in the Diaspora or feel that they are less Zionist because of it.

### **Should I date/marry someone who doesn't have the same approach as me to Aliyah?**

**Rebbetzin Davis:** It depends on how strongly you both feel about your positions, what each of your concerns are and if you are willing to be open and flexible. You are never going to fully agree on everything with your future or current partner. Figure out if this is a make it or break it condition for you or perhaps something you are willing to compromise on. Certainly it is easier if

you are both on the same page from the beginning.

One of my daughters was speaking with her soon-to-be husband the night before the wedding and she had no interest in making Aliyah, while he was determined to do so. He asked her to express what she felt was holding her back from going. She explained that her primary concerns were learning and using the language as well as having no family there. They compromised. They would wait to make Aliyah until their oldest child was going into first grade (which they missed by a year). That would give them time to establish some work experience and savings. By the time they actually made Aliyah, the family part was less of an issue, as by then, two of her sisters and one brother as well as her husband's brother were already living in Eretz Yisrael.

**Rabbi Eisenstein:** When it comes to dating in general, it is more important to focus on ideals than on the details. Like talmud Torah, chesed and other attributes that people look for in a spouse, they shouldn't be hyper-focused on which yeshiva they will send their kids to or which community they will live in, but on what their ideals are. The details can be worked out later. The same is true regarding living in Eretz Yisrael. If they have the same ideals, even if one envisions making Aliyah right away and the other a few years later, they can build off of those ideals. They might make Aliyah right away, or five, ten, twenty years later, but if they share the same ideals, it will make for a healthy relationship. When looking for a spouse, one should be looking for someone to strive with in Torah, davening and chesed, but also in a longing for Eretz Yisrael.

**Mrs. Pilichowski:** I don't know if there are cut and dry rules for who to date or marry. I strongly believe that in a committed relationship with mutual

respect (which I think is the most basic and most important part of any marriage), a couple can find the right path and make the right decisions. I am reluctant to say that living in Israel is the only path for everyone.

**Rabbi Rothwachs:** If an individual comes to the conclusion that living in Eretz Yisrael is essential for their future and a "nonnegotiable" point for discussion, then this needs to be shared openly before dating. In this type of situation, it would, in my opinion, be unfair to enter a relationship without disclosing this expectation, creating the potential for resentment down the line.

All of that being said, if one would ask me if making Aliyah should be on his/her list of "dealbreakers," I would advise them that this not be put on the list of critical goals while choosing a life's partner. Unlike other important values and personality traits, this is an area where there should be flexibility and openness. If the couple discovers that they are compatible and aligned in the most important of ways, I would be confident that they will ultimately decide how best to resolve any disagreements in this regard.

### **How does one navigate family conflicts relating to the decision to make Aliyah, both in terms of the nuclear family (e.g. one child is resistant to Aliyah) or the extended family (e.g. parents or siblings who might be hurt)?**

**Rebbetzin Davis:** If the issue is in the immediate family, this is a difficult situation which requires a lot of patience and discussion with those not on board — specifically having them articulate their concerns and/or fears of making Aliyah — which can be very real and valid. Some issues may

be resolved beforehand with creative thinking and further information for the child, while validating their concerns. An older child may opt to stay in America in a mutually acceptable arrangement with a trial period that could be extended depending on how it is working for everyone. We really need to daven for Hashem's help and guidance.

Regarding the extended family, the concerns should be acknowledged, not dismissed. Healthy communication, sharing feelings and listening to and validating each other's positions can pave the way to creation of ways to keep in stronger touch with each other and to promote understanding by all. Propose some means that can allow more connection on a regular basis, such as monthly family Zooms.

On a personal level, our nearest child lives 200 miles from us in Florida. None of our other children are closer than 1,100 miles from us. Four of them have made Aliyah. Our other four children and their families are in the northeastern United States. Three of our northern grandchildren have made Aliyah independently. My husband and I feel *bishvili nivra* WhatsApp, which enables our entire family, wherever they are, to share texts, news, pictures and videos at any given moment — a treasured gift. With additional audio-visual technology, i.e. Zoom, FaceTime, Google options, we can “visit” and “see” each other in real time. A true bracha. For me, this reinforces the much greater sacrifice of people who made Aliyah years ago and the difficulty for their out-of-Israel family to be in contact with each other.

**Mrs. Pilichowski:** Moving anywhere is very difficult and can have detrimental effects on both the nuclear and extended family. That being said, it can provide other opportunities. Most decisions are not black and white,

including leaving family. My advice to families that are even considering Aliyah at any point, is to open the conversation and always keep it on the table. It is important to share with both your children and your parents and siblings your love of Israel and why you long to be in Israel. One of my close friends thought that I was crazy for moving to Israel. She encouraged me to stay in the United States where life was just “easier.” After lobbying her point for many weeks, she said, “I know that you won’t ever listen to what I am saying, because your heart is in Israel.” After she expressed this, she recognized that some decisions are more important than a logical analysis. One of my colleagues who was relocated outside of Israel and was deeply saddened by her departure told me, “When someone comes to Jerusalem, a piece of Jerusalem is left in their soul that they have to return. It is like a magnetic pull. I know that I will be back, because my soul will make me come back.” Understanding that this is our home will always pull us back. Express these feelings always to the ones you love and will miss and more importantly, express them to yourself so that you know that you will come home.

**Rabbi Rothwachs :** Making Aliyah when a child, especially pre-adolescent or adolescent, is not on board, carries the potential of significant risk. I would certainly not recommend uprooting such a child(ren) without first seeking objective advice from qualified professionals, including mental health counselors and Jewish educators. In some cases, the underlying cause of the child’s resistance may be anxiety due to the anticipated changes or fear of the unknown, in which case, the issues could perhaps be properly managed. At times however, the presenting resistance may run much deeper and, if not appropriately honored and correctly addressed, the potential results can be

catastrophic. In certain cases, it would most certainly be a reason to put Aliyah on hold.

If the resistance presents from beyond the nuclear family, while there may be profound sensitivities at play, prospective Olim need not necessarily put their plans on hold. On the one hand, it is quite understandable that members of one’s extended family may find it quite challenging to support their loved ones’ plans to move to another country. Some may even dramatically react to such news with painful expressions of abandonment. While such reactions must be received with understanding and sensitivity, appropriate boundaries must be established when making major life decisions. In my experience, even when the initial resistance may be quite intense, reconciliation and acceptance ultimately follow.



## **RABBI SOLOVEITCHIK THE ZIONIST**

"Rabbi, if only I knew our suffering was paving the way for the Messiah," cried a Jewish refugee to R. Hayyim Soloveitchik of Brest-Litovsk shortly before his death in World War I—era Warsaw. R. Hayyim rebuffed him, questioning whether it was self-evident that the advent of the Redeemer justified the mass carnage and horrific suffering that came with the war.

One of R. Hayyim's grandsons was my mentor, R. Joseph Soloveitchik. The thirtieth anniversary of his death is being commemorated this Passover. He became known in North America as "the Rav," meaning the one preeminent rabbi. He devoted most of his creative efforts to advancing his grandfather's innovative approach to Talmud study, known as the "Brisker method," a conceptual approach to legal reasoning. But he broke with family opposition to secular studies, getting a PhD in philosophy at the University of Berlin and writing theological works that have earned the attention of Jewish and non-Jewish readers.

He never publicly acknowledged any personal doubts or misgivings about this choice, despite the controversy it provoked. The same held true privately, at least in my conversations with him. He also broke with the family's opposition to Zionism, serving for decades as honorary president of the Religious Zionists of America. Rejection of Zionism was widespread among many great Talmudists of his father's and grandfather's generations. He openly allowed that going his own way caused him a great deal of soul-searching and pain. His Zionist affiliation marked a departure from those he most esteemed.

Secular journalists typically ascribe pockets of rigorously Orthodox antagonism to Zionism to the belief that Jews will only govern themselves in the land of Israel when the Messiah comes. This explanation may hold true for some Hasidic groups, but not for non-Hasidim. Lithuanian rabbis, among whom the Soloveitchiks stand very tall, objected to the Zionist movement

institutionalized by Theodor Herzl in the 1890s for a straightforward reason: Its leadership was not God-fearing. The Rav's grandfather, R. Hayyim, associated briefly with the new, strictly Orthodox Agudat Israel party, which was formed in 1912. Agudists were critical of the Zionists to varying degrees. R. Hayyim's scions eventually turned away from Aguda, deeming it overly politicized. In the 1930s the young R. Joseph Soloveitchik served as one of Aguda's Torah authorities in North America. If not an anti-Zionist, he did not identify openly with the Zionist movement.

During World War II and its aftermath, he shifted from Aguda to the Mizrahi, which was a religious Zionist party. This turn came about because he recognized that old-fashioned methods of safeguarding Jewish existence were not equal to twentieth-century threats. In the modern world, one cannot rely on the tolerance extended by majorities to religious minorities in their midst. It was an age of mass movements and



angry mobs, and the time-tested Jewish strategy of appealing to the higher sentiments or narrower self-interest of the ruling powers did no good. The Jewish experience of Nazism naturally led to profound reassessments. The aspiration, and to the extent possible, the achievement, of Jewish self-rule and self-defense were now thought essential to survival, and to the self-respect without which bare physical survival is undignified. The State of Israel, in the Rav's opinion, did a great deal to improve the state of the Jewish people. This practical, historically informed line of thinking is how I understand his evolution into the spokesman of religious Zionism I encountered as a young man.

Rabbi Soloveitchik's outlook remains influential among religious Zionists. But in all likelihood it is a minority position. Most religious Zionists adopt a more eschatologically tinged theology of history. The dominant figure here is the great Talmudist and mystic Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, who died in 1935. He served as chief rabbi of the Ashkenazi community in Palestine. For him and for subsequent generations of acolytes, the return of the Jews to their homeland was not merely, or even primarily, a solution to the physical menace of an anti-Semitic world. It was a spiritual renaissance which could not but lead to messianic fulfillment.

Rabbi Hayyim saw secular Jewish nationalism as the sworn enemy of Orthodoxy. His grandson saw it as a valuable, creative, and useful movement with much to contribute to Jewish welfare. But the shift is perhaps less than it seems on the surface. The Rav continued to laud the positive achievements of secular Zionism although its ideology stood in conflict with adherence to God as Orthodoxy comprehends it. The more messianic tendency in religious Zionism of the sort inspired by R. Kook, by contrast,

celebrated the radical transformation of Jewish spirituality. It exalted the state and its military prowess in a way that R. Soloveitchik could not. It interpreted the secularism of leading Zionist activists, many of whom were inspired by socialist or liberal-nationalist eschatologies more than by biblical ones, as unwitting agents of divine historical cunning. Its expectations of the Jewish state were and remain to this day ebullient, and the depths of disappointment when history confounds expectation are equally profound.

R. Soloveitchik liked to recount the exchange between R. Hayyim and his fellow Jew in Warsaw because he realized it provided the key to his decidedly mundane brand of Zionism. If divine providence is irrevocably committed to cosmic redemption through politics, and if being on the right side of that history is the highest moral imperative, then the price to be paid in blood and suffering is a secondary consideration. For the Rav and the tradition he continued even as he diverged from it, the human cost cannot be ignored. This led him to insist upon the distinction between judgments of political prudence and theological claims about the working out of the divine plan. He was a religious man who was a Zionist, not someone who wanted Zionism to become a religion.

On the rare occasions when he made pronouncements on Israeli affairs, the lesson of that anecdote always seemed to be in the background. In 1968, at the height of the euphoria that followed Israel's victory in the Six-Day War, he ruled that decisions about concessions of land for peace should be left to military experts, not to rabbis. He said this in spite of his conviction that most of the land taken by the Israeli army is part of the biblical land of Israel and that occupying it fulfills a divine commandment. His point: The safety of the current residents of Israel should be

paramount, and Israel's military leaders are the most well-informed about the pros and cons of which positions to hold and which to abandon. Although he was skeptical about the prospects for peace, he went on the record to affirm that compromising Israeli rights was advisable for the sake of a genuine peace.

In 1982, Lebanese Christian militia allied to Israel perpetrated massacres at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. This time the Rav demanded that Prime Minister Menachem Begin appoint a commission of inquiry to investigate Israel's failure to prevent the massacres. Carnage and suffering make a claim upon a Torah-informed conscience.

Do such interventions make him a liberal, as some would say? This distorts more than it clarifies. It would be more accurate to think of R. Soloveitchik's political declarations as profoundly conservative. In the course of his life he moved from the anti-Zionist to the Zionist camp. But then, from within religious Zionism, so to speak, he criticized the transformation of politics into the anticipation of a messianic future.

The last two centuries are marked by a great thirst for messianic fulfillment. The goal has sometimes been material welfare, sometimes egalitarianism, or universal love, or national self-expression, or some combination of ideals. Often this has promoted rebellion against traditional religion, which is viewed as a brake on transformational idealism. At other times the language and passions of traditional religion have been mobilized, usually one-sidedly, on behalf of idealistic yearnings. In such times, it is vital that we keep faith with the eternal present of religious doctrine as manifest in the life of study, prayer, and interpersonal action. In this, as in so many other areas, my teacher was his grandfather's heir.



## **RAV SOLOVEITCHIK ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL**

*Editor's note: This essay is adapted from Reuven Ziegler, Majesty and Humility: The Thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (Jerusalem and New York: Maimonides School, Urim and OU Press, 2012), vol. 3 of The Rabbi Soloveitchik Library, series editor Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter, pp. 290-98. It appears with the kind permission of the Maimonides School and the publishers.*

### **The Two Covenants and the State of Israel**

In 1935, on his only trip to Eretz Yisrael, Rav Soloveitchik submitted his candidacy for the chief rabbinate of Tel Aviv as the representative of Agudath Israel, a non-Zionist, perhaps even anti-Zionist, political-religious

organization. By 1944, he was chairman of the Central Committee of the Religious Zionists of America. He testifies that his move to Mizrachi was not an easy one, as it entailed a break with his family's position and rejection by his rabbinic peers:

*I was not born into a Zionist household. My parents' ancestors, my father's house, my teachers and colleagues were far from the Mizrachi religious Zionists ... My links with the Mizrachi grew gradually; I had my doubts about the validity of the Mizrachi approach...*

*I built an altar upon which I sacrificed sleepless nights, doubts and reservations. Regardless, the years of the Hitlerian Holocaust, the establishment of the State of Israel, and the accomplishments of the*

*Mizrachi in the land of Israel, convinced me of the correctness of our movement's path. The altar still stands today, with smoke rising from the sacrifice upon it ... Jews like me ... are required to sacrifice on this altar their peace of mind as well as their social relationships and friendships. (Five Addresses, 34, 36)<sup>1</sup>*

A variety of factors—some related to fate and some to destiny—contributed to the Rav's support for Mizrachi and to his personal commitment to the State of Israel.

**I. Fate:** The last three of the famous "six knocks" described in *Kol Dodi Dofek* all deal with the State of Israel's contribution to Jewish survival. The State of Israel is a refuge for persecuted Jews; it establishes the

principle of Jewish self-defense; and it serves as a bulwark against assimilation for Diaspora Jews, many of whom maintain their sense of Jewish identity through identification with Israel and concern for its welfare.

**II. Destiny:** The State of Israel aids in the attainment of Jewish spiritual goals in several ways. First, by settling the land and exercising sovereignty in it, the Jewish community fulfills one of the 613 biblical mitzvot, “You shall possess the land and dwell therein” (Num. 33:53).<sup>2</sup> Second, the Jewish state is a natural and congenial environment for Torah study, a land in which the Jewish people can transplant and rebuild the destroyed Torah centers of Europe.<sup>3</sup> By helping establish Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel and building Torah institutions there, the Mizrahi paved the way for Jewish spiritual continuity following the eclipse of traditional European Jewish society in the Enlightenment and its destruction in the Holocaust. In this, the Mizrahi followed the path of Joseph, who, foreseeing the winds of change that would challenge his father’s traditional existence in the backwaters of an undeveloped country, prepared the way for Jewish spiritual continuity even in the sophisticated society of imperial Egypt. Like Joseph, the

The fact of *yad Hashem* being present in Israel’s creation does not necessarily mean that the State of Israel is “the first flowering of our redemption.”

Mizrahi leaders were also shunned by their more short-sighted brothers for their convictions and actions.

Third, the State of Israel can benefit not only the study of Torah but its application as well, for within the state it is possible to apply Halakhah to a broad range of issues, including modern technology and public life. Others, whether Reform or Haredi, may feel that the Torah cannot survive a confrontation with modern society, and therefore, it must either change in accordance with the times or retreat into isolation. The Rav strongly identified with the Mizrahi’s position that Torah can and should engage the world, that it can meet any challenge and be applied in any circumstance.<sup>4</sup> Thus, ideally, the State of Israel can provide a framework within which to realize the covenant of destiny by fostering Torah values and applying Halakhah to the full range of human endeavors.<sup>5</sup>

The Rav strongly felt the eternal connection of the Jew to the Land of Israel, and testified on many occasions that he had imbibed from his father and grandfather a love for the land and its sanctity.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, he believed that divine providence had decreed that in the dispute between Religious Zionists and anti-Zionists, the Religious Zionists had been correct.<sup>7</sup> Yet when we ask ourselves which elements of Jewish destiny can be attained *only* in the Land of Israel, we see that it is just the first of them—the specific mitzvah of settlement. The Rav felt that the broader elements of destiny—building Torah institutions, striving for *kedushah*, applying Halakhah to modern society and engaging the world—were equally relevant to the Diaspora and could be achieved there as well. His

identification with Mizrahi was based not only on its support for religious life in the State of Israel, but on broad philosophical principles with universal application: belief in anti-isolationism, human activism and creativity, and the Torah’s ability to purify man and society.<sup>8</sup>

In *Kol Dodi Dofek* and elsewhere, the Rav expresses his strong belief that God’s hand was manifest in the founding of the State of Israel.<sup>9</sup> Yet the fact of *yad Hashem* being present in Israel’s creation does not necessarily mean that the State of Israel is “the first flowering of our redemption.” Nor does the fact that the State is a gift from God mean that it is a value in itself. Rather, the Rav believes that it is an opportunity—an *important* opportunity but not the *only* one—for the Jewish people to protect its existence and pursue its destiny. The goal of combining the two covenants and thereby raising a people of fate to a holy nation of destiny is not limited to the Land of Israel. The State is an instrument that serves (or should serve) the larger values of the Jewish people and the Jewish faith.

## The Third Way

In short, the Rav believed that the State of Israel is nothing less than a gift from God that plays an important role in safeguarding Jews’ physical survival and identity, and that has the potential to serve as a basis for attaining their destiny. Yet it is also *no more* than that. In a letter written in 1957, the Rav stakes out his position against two other Orthodox approaches:

*I agree with you that there is a third halakhic approach which is neither parallel to the position of those “whose*



*eyes are shut” and reject [the significance of the State] nor the belief of those dreamers who adopt a completely positive stance to the point where they identify the State with the [fulfillment] of the highest goal of our historical and meta-historical destiny. This third approach (which is the normative one in all areas), I would allow myself to guess, would be positively inclined toward the State, and would express gratitude for its establishment out of a sense of love and devotion, but would not attach [to it] excessive value to the point of its glorification and deification.<sup>10</sup>*

Those “whose eyes are shut” are the Haredim, whom Rav Soloveitchik faults for refusing to acknowledge the miraculous nature of the State’s founding, denying its historical significance, and showing no interest in taking part in its development. The “dreamers” are the followers of Rav Kook, who regard the State as possessing inherent spiritual value and assign it an overwhelmingly important role in the unfolding of Jewish destiny. Before pinpointing where Rav Soloveitchik parts ways with them, we must first understand Rav Kook’s overall approach to the significance of the State of Israel—a State that in his day was yet to be born.

Rav Kook believes that Judaism comprises two “ideas,” the national and the spiritual.<sup>11</sup> These are not identical to fate and destiny. First, fate and destiny exist in a hierarchical relationship, while this is not so clear regarding the national and spiritual ideas. Second, the national idea means that the Jewish nation can express its inner essence only by exercising political sovereignty in the Land of Israel, while fate is a dimension of Jewish existence in all places and under all sovereignties. During the

two thousand years of exile, Rav Kook believes, Judaism itself was deficient, for it lacked the national half of its identity. Secular Jewish nationalists, therefore, are to be regarded as “holy rebels,” for although they reject the spiritual idea, they are helping foster a renaissance of Judaism itself through their restoration of the national idea. By reestablishing Jewish sovereignty in the Holy Land, they reconnect the Jewish nation to one of its two sources of vitality, hitherto missing, and thereby initiate an inexorable process of messianic redemption. Whether its founders are aware of it or not, the nascent State of Israel contains inherent spiritual value as “the foundation of God’s seat in the world,” and therefore, it constitutes “man’s ultimate happiness.”<sup>12</sup>

All such talk of deterministic historical processes, inborn essences, and holy rebellions is foreign to Rav Soloveitchik. He does not perceive any *inherent* value in sovereignty, other than fulfilling the specific mitzvah of settlement, nor does he assign any *inherent* spiritual value to the State, seeing it rather as a base from which to attain *other* objectives.<sup>13</sup> These objectives, fate and destiny, are the same ones Jews pursued during their long exile, since they can be attained in the Diaspora as well. Professor Gerald Blidstein points out that, unlike Rav Kook, Rav Soloveitchik does not accept the Zionist critique of Diaspora Jewish life. Therefore the Rav sees no need for a renaissance of Judaism, nor does he regard the secular Zionist rebellion against religion as a necessary stage in the dialectical unfolding of the Jewish essence.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, I would add, the Rav believes that if one can speak of a

Jewish national character, it is not one that is inborn and essential, but rather one shaped by the nation’s historical experiences. Not only does the Rav not speak of the “essence” of the Jewish people, he does not even speak of the sanctity of Eretz Yisrael as an inherent metaphysical property. Professor Blidstein reports that Rav Soloveitchik considered such thinking mythological: “I recall his developing the theme that the holiness of the land was not ‘mythological’ but a function of its providing the context for a holy society—again a fundamentally Maimonidean orientation.”<sup>15</sup> In a striking passage, the Rav writes that the idea of inherent sanctity approaches fetishism, the belief in the supernatural powers of physical objects:

*For [R. Yehudah Halevi and the Ramban], the attribute of kedushah, holiness, ascribed to the Land of Israel is an objective metaphysical quality inherent in the land. With all my respect for the Rishonim, I must disagree with such an opinion. I do not believe that it is halakhically cogent. Kedushah, under a halakhic aspect, is man-made; more accurately, it is a historical category. A soil is sanctified by historical deeds performed by a sacred people, never by any primordial superiority. The halakhic term kedushat ha-arets, the sanctity of the land, denotes the consequence of a human act, either conquest (heroic deeds) or the mere presence of the people in that land (intimacy of man and nature). Kedushah is identical with man’s association with Mother Earth. Nothing should be attributed a priori to dead matter. Objective kedushah smacks of fetishism.<sup>16</sup>*

Clearly, Rav Kook and Rav Soloveitchik are working with very different sets of assumptions. Yet

even within Rav Soloveitchik's own school of thought, some have questioned the scant attention he paid to certain values that are consistent with and even congenial to his philosophy, and others have developed Rav Soloveitchik's line of thought further than he himself may have. For example, one of his preeminent disciples, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, discerns in Israel the possibility of leading a more organic and integrated existence, as opposed to the fragmented nature of life in the Diaspora. Even the mundane aspects of one's life in Israel attain social and religious value by contributing to the stability and flourishing of the Jewish state, thereby lending one's life a greater sense of wholeness. Furthermore, without denying the validity or value of Diaspora Jewish life, Rav Lichtenstein views Israel as the epicenter of Jewish life and the locus of the Jewish future. Above all, the sanctity of the land, even when understood in halakhic and not mythological terms, lends a special quality to religious observance in Eretz Yisrael and fosters a sense of being nestled within the divine presence. Indeed, these dimensions of Eretz Yisrael and of Jewish national life within it exerted a powerful pull on Rav Lichtenstein, to which he responded by making *aliyah*.<sup>17</sup> These elements are not foreign to Rav Soloveitchik, but neither does he highlight them. Professor Blidstein aptly comments:

*This image of the State of Israel as a potential embodiment of the broadest ethical and societal vocation of Judaism, a vocation based on a broad covenantal commitment, is perceived by many students of the Rav to be implicit in his teaching. Curiously (and regrettably?), this positive and challenging image does*

*not recur frequently in the published texts available to us.*<sup>18</sup>

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik saw himself in light of the biblical Joseph. The latter's constant preoccupation was to safeguard the continuity of Abraham's tradition when relocated into a different civilization. In the Rav's reading, Canaan and Egypt are not just locations but cultures—the simple and old vs. the sophisticated and new. In our day, the Rav felt, the tasks of perpetuating and applying the Torah within new environments would inevitably need to be pursued in both Israel and the Diaspora. He devoted his untiring efforts and creative energies to pursuing these tasks in the leading country of the West. At the same time, he involved himself and expended great concern in ensuring the Torah's continuity in the State of Israel and in shaping the character and future of the young state. It is now up to the next generation to carry forward his work in both centers of Jewish life.

## For Further Reference

**1. The mitzvah of settling the Land of Israel:** Rambam does not include this commandment in his *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, but Ramban counts it as one of the mitzvot that should be added to Rambam's list (#4). While Rav Kook's followers make much of this Ramban, seeing it as a guiding factor for their socio-political activities and as a cornerstone of their worldview, Rav Yehuda Amital points out (in his book *Commitment and Complexity* [Jersey City, 2008], 106) that Rav Kook mentions it only once in his voluminous writings. It would seem that neither Rav Kook nor Rav Soloveitchik regards this as more than a mitzvah among mitzvot; therefore, Rav Kook bases

his extraordinarily high evaluation of Jewish sovereignty upon other considerations, while Rav Soloveitchik does not assign sovereignty a privileged position among Jewish values. However, Rav Kook's disciples, with a narrower halakhic focus than their master, tethered their understanding of the overriding significance of Jewish sovereignty to this mitzvah (whose status is disputed among *Rishonim*) and thereby elevated "possession and settlement" to a preeminent place among mitzvot.

**2. Hallel on Yom ha-Atzma'ut:** There are various reports as to the Rav's position regarding the recitation of Hallel on Yom ha-Atzma'ut. However, even if we were to assume that Rav Soloveitchik opposed its recitation, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein cogently points out that one cannot derive from this ritual question any conclusions regarding the Rav's attitude toward Zionism or the State of Israel (see his "Rav Soloveitchik's Approach to Zionism," *Alei Etzion* 14 [5766], 21–24). He compares this to the opinion of the "eighty-five elders, among them several prophets," who regretfully felt that, for halakhic reasons, they could not acquiesce to Mordecai's and Esther's request to establish a new mitzvah of reading the *megillah* (*Yerushalmi, Megillah* 1:7). Does this mean that they denied that a miracle had taken place in Shushan, or that the great salvation of the Jews from Haman's plot had been unimportant? Analogously, Rav Lichtenstein suggests that Rav Soloveitchik recognized the magnitude of the miracle in his day, but did not necessarily feel that Halakhah warranted the creation of new rituals. Note also that Rav Soloveitchik felt that the true meaning and significance of events would become apparent only with the passage of time. Therefore, just as the Sages waited some time before declaring Hanukkah a holiday

(*Shabbat* 21b), so too we should not be hasty in formulating new rituals after Israel's founding or after its astonishing victory in the Six Day War (reported by R. David Hartman, *Conflicting Visions* [New York, 1990], 23, 158; and *Nefesh ha-Rav*, 94).

## Endnotes

1. Actually, the Rav's father had earlier associated himself with Mizrahi when, in 1920, he became head of religious studies at the Mizrahi-affiliated Takhkemoni Rabbinical Seminary in Warsaw. The question of the exact timing of the Rav's move from Agudah to Mizrahi has been raised by R. Shlomo Pick, "The Rav: Biography and Bibliography," *B.D.D.* 6 (1998), 31–37. However, what interests us here is the Rav's self-perception. The above-cited testimony was delivered in an address to the Religious Zionists of America in 1962.

2. "Al Ahavat ha-Torah u-Geulat Nefesh ha-Dor," 424–25; *Five Addresses*, 137–38. See also For Further Reference, #1.

3. *Five Addresses*, 31–33.

4. *Five Addresses*, 152–57, 174–75, and "Mah Dodekh mi-Dod," 90–91 (the position that the Rav cites as "some say" seems to be his own, in contrast to that of his illustrious uncle R. Velvel).

5. *Kol Dodi Dofek*, 70–71.

6. See, for example, "Al Ahavat ha-Torah," 422–23; *Five Addresses*, 34–35; *Community, Covenant and Commitment*, 239.

7. *Five Addresses*, 31–36. This point is also apparent from the Rav's discussion of the six knocks.

8. See also *Community, Covenant and Commitment*, 201–02:

*I see two elements in the Mizrahi: (1) An Israeli political party that deserves credit for most of*

*the achievements of the religious community in Israel ... (2) A large movement committed to a specific ideology and worldview whose impact is significant both in Israel and in the Diaspora. This movement holds within its hand the answer to a serious dilemma: How can we insert our eternal [values] into the splendor of the modern world? How can we remain steadfast and strong in the very center of the modern society and sanctify the new and that which is occurring on a daily basis with utmost holiness? I cannot join up to any group or association that has emblazoned on its banner [the call]: "Separate from the vast world [and go] into dark caves and set yourselves apart from the world and the rest of the Jewish people." This retreat from the battle is the beginning of defeat and reflects a lack of faith in the eternity of Judaism and its ability to dominate the new world with its powerful currents and changing forms. According to the worldview of our movement, Judaism is immensely powerful and capable of achieving anything. The most developed society too, [even one] leaping and conquering new areas of the natural order, also requires our Torah, and only in it will it find satisfaction.*

9. See, e.g., *Five Addresses*, 170–73. Regarding the question of whether to recite Hallel in response to this miracle, see For Further Reference, #2.

10. *Community, Covenant and Commitment*, 163–64.

11. For a succinct presentation of Rav Kook's views on this subject, see his essay, "Le-Mahalakh ha-Ide'ot be-Yisrael," in *Orot* (Jerusalem, 1985), 102–18.

12. *Orot Yisrael* 6:7, in *Orot*, 160.

13. In "Yarhei Kallah" lectures delivered in the summers of 1978 and 1981, Rav Soloveitchik suggested that the mitzvot of appointing judges in every city in Eretz Yisrael and eradicating idolatry in Eretz Yisrael are both fulfillments of the commandment of "possession and settlement" of the land. Based on these insights, R. Yair Kahn suggests that these two mitzvot are not merely additions to the literal fulfillment of "possession and

settlement," but rather define its essence. In other words, mere sovereignty is not enough, but is instead a stepping-stone, or a *hekhsher mitzvah*, to the attainment of the larger goals of justice and divine worship. See his article, "Leha'avir Gilulim min ha-Aretz," *Alon Shevut* 145 (5755), 13–23.

14. "On the Jewish People in the Writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik," in *Exploring the Thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, ed. R. Marc Angel (Hoboken, 1997), 307–08.

15. *Ibid.*, 309.

16. *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, 150. See also *Family Redeemed*, 64.

17. See his "On Aliya: The Uniqueness of Living in Eretz Yisrael," *Alei Etzion* 12 (5764), 15–22, available online at [www.haretzion.org/alei.htm](http://www.haretzion.org/alei.htm). In an essay exemplifying the Rav's demand that his students think for themselves, that they be *talmidim* and not *hasidim*, R. Nathaniel Helfgot goes on to enumerate other components of Jewish national existence undeveloped by the Rav: Jewish autonomy as expressing *malkhut Yisrael*, the ability to apply Halakhah to national issues on all levels of governmental responsibility, the potential to develop a polity guided by Jewish values, and the consequent ability to serve as a "light to the nations." See his "On the Shoulders of a Giant: Looking Back, Yet Looking Forward," *Tradition* 39:3 (Fall 2006), 31–37.

18. Blidstein, *op cit*.



Find more shiurim and articles from Rabbi Soloveitchik zt"l at <https://www.yutorah.org/rabbi-joseph-b-soloveitchik/>



## Celebrating 75 Years of Yeshiva University's Impact on the State of Israel

Mrs. Stephanie Strauss

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Executive Director, Yeshiva University in Israel  
Director, S. Daniel Abraham Israel Program



# THE VALUES OF YESHIVA UNIVERSITY IN ISRAEL IN ACTION

We are entering one of the most reflective periods of the Jewish calendar, commencing with the holiday of Pesach and concluding with Shavuot. The exodus of *yetziyat Mitzrayim* is aptly referred to as our physical redemption and our emergence as an independent nation. Shavuot, also called *z'man matan Torateinu*, is the culmination of our nation's transcendent journey, our spiritual redemption.

The four cups of wine we drink at the Seder represent the four "*leshonot geula*" — *v'hotzeiti* (and I will take out), *v'hitzalti* (and I will save), *v'ga'alti* (and I will redeem), *v'lakachti* (and I will take as a nation), illustrating the four stages of redemption. Hashem "taking us" as his chosen people sets the stage for the apex of our peoplehood — our receiving of the Torah at Har Sinai, *k'ish echad b'lev echad* — like one person with one (united) heart.

The fifth and final stage of redemption mentioned in Sefer Shmot is *v'heveiti etchem el ha'aretz*, "and I will bring you to the land." Only after settling the land can we actualize our independence and thrive in our modern, burgeoning nation state. Israel at 75 continues to evolve through its own physical and spiritual redemptive process, and the achievements of the modern State of Israel in science, innovation and global responsibility, and of course its contributions to the world of Torah are too numerous to be listed on these pages.

At Yeshiva University, we teach our students to excel in those same areas and more. As the flagship Jewish university, we incorporate our core Torah values into our education, including Torat Tzion, the mandate to be a part of bringing redemption and to strengthen the deep bond between Yeshiva University and the State of

Israel.

The expansion of programs and offerings at Yeshiva University in Israel serves as a bidirectional portal of activity and a testament to that bond. Over the last several years, we have brought more students to Israel than ever before, to supplement and enhance their education by engaging with Israeli society and our more than 5,000 alumni olim.

Students can participate in a winter break trip to get a glimpse of the Israeli tech ecosystem, or they can spend a summer fully immersed in one of several experiential educational programs. Our students intern at strategic Israeli companies and non-profits, study at laboratories in Bar Ilan, run day camp for Israeli youth at risk, and participate in archeological digs.

This past fall we launched a semester abroad program to enable upper-

classmen and upper-classwomen to spend an additional YU semester in Israel, living at our Jerusalem campus, and taking a range of high-level academic courses to complement their Torah learning in our batei medrash at YUI.

All of these programs are designed to give students year-round opportunities to spend time in Israel in a uniquely YU environment, including shabbatonim, tiyulim, shiurim with YU Roshei Yeshiva, and networking and mentoring with our alumni.

As we emerged from COVID and the effects of the pandemic remained, we led a group of organizations to host a mental health expo for the Anglo community that was attended by more than 1,500 people. Recognizing the need to offer more, we opened the Jerusalem Therapy Center, a partnership between Wurzweiler School of Social Work and Amudim. The center offers therapy in English to olim, lone soldiers, gap year students and others at subsidized rates, while offering professional training seminars to clinicians and educators.

Our community outreach has intensified with compelling programming for alumni, including leveraging our professional network to assist recent olim in gaining employment. The Rosenbaum Aliyah



"Morim Shlichim" visiting from the World Zionist Organization's education department participating in a day of professional development at Yeshiva University

Incentive Fund provides additional support for alumni olim by offering loan repayment grants to those who qualify. We continue to work closely with government officials to pave the way for more YU graduates to make Aliyah; bringing the values inculcated in them at Yeshiva, and fully integrating into Israeli society.

In the other direction, we are blessed to have several Israeli faculty teaching at YU schools, including a graduate of unit 8200 who serves as director our master's program in cybersecurity, and the director of the "YU Innovation Lab," our university accelerator that gives Israeli startups entry to the U.S. markets. Each year, there are 15-30 bogrei Tzahal and sherut leumi studying at Yeshiva University, where they are

provided with scholarships and elevated to hero status.

We recently brought one hundred of the World Zionist Organization's "morim shlichim" to the Wilf campus for a day of professional development seminars with senior faculty of the Azrieli Graduate School for Jewish Education and Administration. These Israeli teachers will return to Israel imbued with a deeper understanding of Yeshiva University's unique role in the Jewish community and better equipped to meet the challenges of educating Jewish children on both sides of the ocean.

Just as YU's Israel campus serves as the conduit between Yeshiva University and the State of Israel, so too does Yom Ha'Atzmaut, as a manifestation of Am Yisrael B'Eretz Yisrael, serve as the bridge between the physical redemption of Pesach and the spiritual redemption of Torat Yisrael and Shavuot.

Our fervent prayer for the global YU community and for all of Klal Yisrael is that the *l'shana haba'ah B'Yerushalayim* that we sing at the Seder coupled with the gift of Israel's 75th Independence Day will bring the *geula shleima* in time to celebrate Shavuot in the rebuilt Beit Hamikdash.



YU brought students on the S. Daniel Abraham Program to the OurCrowd conference in Jerusalem to learn more about the startup ecosystem in Israel.





# SHIDDUCHIM, HOUSING AND ISRAEL'S ECONOMY: HOW YIRMIYAHU'S FOREWARNINGS BECAME TODAY'S SONGS

## **Od Yishama's Gloomy Context**

At any Jewish wedding today, the phrase sung with the most enthusiasm and joy is the familiar,

עוד ישמע בערי יהודה ובחצות ירושלם קול ששון וקול שמחה קול חתן וקול כלה.  
*Again there shall be heard in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride.*

If someone were to be cornered at a wedding and asked what this phrase means, they would probably answer confidently that it's a pasuk (verse) from somewhere in the Nevi'im (Prophets) about a bride and groom and happiness. And while the phrase is from the Nevi'im, and it *does* speak about a bride and groom, they might be surprised to find out that it's not a pasuk at all,

it's not really about a wedding, and the context is not at all happy.

The phrase “*kol sason v'kol simcha*” appears several times in Sefer Yirmiyahu, and each time the context is loaded with doom, destruction, and sorrow. Yirmiyahu generally uses the phrase not to celebrate weddings in Yerushalayim (Jerusalem), but to announce how they will come to a bitter end. Here are the first three times the phrase appears:

והשבתי מערי יהודה ומחצות ירושלם קול ששון וקול שמחה קול חתן וקול כלה כי לתרפה תהיה הארץ:

*Then will I cause to cease from the cities of Judah, and from the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride; for the land shall be desolate.*

**Yirmiyahu 7:34**

כי כה אמר ה' צבאות אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַנִּנִּי מִשְׁבִּית מִן־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה לְעֵינֵיכֶם וּבִימֵיכֶם קוֹל שִׁשּׁוֹן וְקוֹל שְׂמִיחָה קוֹל חֲתָן וְקוֹל כֻּלָּה:

*For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will cause to cease out of this place, before your eyes and in your days, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride.*

**Yirmiyahu 16:9**

והאבדתי מהם קול ששון וקול שמחה קול חתן וקול כלה קול רחים ואור נר:

*Moreover, I will cause to cease from among them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the lamp.*

**Yirmiyahu 25:10**

The phrase is less about weddings than about the city in which the weddings take place: Yerushalayim. The sound of weddings in the streets serves as a



barometer of Yerushalayim's spiritual and physical state. And for the most part, it's a gloomy forecast!

In all these instances, the context of this familiar phrase is the opposite of the joyful association we are used to. So why do we sing these words? **How has this phrase associated with doom and destruction become the most popular wedding song?!**

## A Hopeful Twist

The answer stems from the fourth time Yirmiyahu speaks about *kol chatan v'kol kallah*, where there emerges a ray of hope. Yirmiyahu declares:

כֹּה אָמַר ה' עוֹד יִשְׁמַע בְּמִקוֹם־הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָתֶם אֹמְרִים חֲרֵב הוּא מֵאִין אָדָם וּמֵאִין בְּהֵמָה בְּעָרֵי יְהוּדָה וּבְחֻצוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם הַנִּשְׁמוֹת מֵאִין אָדָם וּמֵאִין יוֹשֵׁב וּמֵאִין בְּהֵמָה: קוֹל שִׁשׁוֹן וְקוֹל שִׂמְחָה קוֹל חֲתָן וְקוֹל כַּלָּה קוֹל אֹמְרִים הוֹדוּ אֶת־ה' צֶבֶךְ־אוֹת כִּי־טוֹב ה' כִּי־לְעוֹלָם חֲסִדוֹ מִבָּאִים תוֹדָה בֵּית ה' כִּי־אָשִׁיב אֶת־שְׁבוֹת־הָאָרֶץ כְּבָרָאשְׁנָה אָמַר ה':

*Thus said the LORD: Again there shall be heard in this place, which you say is ruined, without man or beast—in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man, without inhabitants, without beast—the sound of mirth and gladness, the voice of bridegroom and bride, the voice of those who cry, “Give thanks to the LORD of Hosts, for the LORD is good, for His kindness is everlasting!” as they bring thanksgiving offerings to the House of the LORD. For I will restore the fortunes of the land as of old—said the LORD.*

**Yirmiyahu 33:10-11**

Despite all the destruction that will come, Yirmiyahu now declares that Yerushalayim will rise out of it, and once again, the celebratory cheering of weddings in the streets will return. This is a bombshell of positivity. If you look closely at these psukim, you'll notice that the song we sing is actually a carefully selected compilation of just

the scattered positive phrases within this prophecy.

In between the words that we sing, the doom continues. Yerushalayim is still desolate. There is not a soul to be found. The silence is disturbing and harrowing, just as in the first three prophecies. Yirmiyahu was presumably not singing and dancing while delivering even this fourth prophecy. And yet this time, Yirmiyahu pulls through in his prophetic power and declares that the desolation is only temporary. It's a prophecy of faith, of hope in the face of destruction, that one day there will be joy in the streets again and that Yerushalayim will return to its glory.

## Prophecy Becomes Reality

While this expression of faith is powerful and hopeful, it still does not quite match our modern context. Now, 2,500 years after Yirmiyahu gave this hopeful prophecy, when we attend a wedding in Yerushalayim, we sing these words not forebodingly as in the first three prophecies, and not longfully as in the fourth prophecy. Today, these words ring as a joyful description of the present. With weddings happening every day throughout Yerushalayim, we can finally celebrate what we see in front of us. While Yerushalayim still has a long way to go before it has reached its full potential and splendor, Yirmiyahu's wistful longing for the return of joyful sounds to Yerushalayim has become a cheerful and energetic description of reality.

## Yirmiyahu's "Once Again" Refrain

Yirmiyahu's hopeful phrase of "*od yishama ...*" is actually embedded in between a group of prophecies about what is to come, many of which involve the same phrase of "*od ...*" The prophecies right before and right after

the *kol sason v'kol simcha* declaration are less well known, but they are equally as dramatic.

The prophecy right before our wedding prophecy is about a field.

Yerushalayim is under siege and heading toward destruction. God tells Yirmiyahu, who has been thrown in jail for all of his prophesying about Yerushalayim's demise, to redeem a field in his hometown of Anatot, on the outskirts of Yerushalayim. God declares,

כִּי כֹה אָמַר ה' צֶבֶךְ־אוֹת, אֶל־לִהִי יִשְׂרָאֵל: עוֹד יִקְנוּ בָתִּים וְשָׂדוֹת וְכַרְמִים, בָּאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת.

*For thus said the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel: "Houses, fields, and vineyards shall again be purchased in this land."*

**Yirmiyahu 32:15**

Yirmiyahu is bewildered. Why is God asking him to waste his money buying back this field? Why would anyone want to own land near Yerushalayim? What a terrible investment in a piece of property that will surely only plummet in value.

Yirmiyahu expresses this to God:

(י"ז) אָהָה אֲדֹנִי ה' הִנֵּה אַתָּה עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ בְּכֹחַךְ הַגָּדוֹל וּבְזַרְעֶךָ הַנִּטְוִיָּה לֹא־יָפֵלָא מִמֶּךָ כָּל־דְּבָר: ... (כ"ה) וְאַתָּה אֹמְרֶתָ אֵלַי אֲדֹנִי ה' קְנֵה־לִּי הַשָּׂדֶה בְּכֶסֶף וְהָעֵד עֵדִים וְהָעִיר נִתְּנָה בְּיַד הַכַּשְׂדִּים! (17) Ah, Lord GOD! You made heaven and earth with Your great might and outstretched arm. Nothing is too wondrous for You!... (25) Yet You, Lord GOD, said to me: Buy the land for money and call in witnesses—when the city is at the mercy of the Chaldeans!?

**Yirmiyahu 32:17, 25**

Yirmiyahu says to God, I know you can do everything, and that you took the Jews out of Egypt and gave them the land of Israel. But to say that this piece of property will one day have value again? That's just too far.

God responds with a dramatic phrase familiar from Sefer Breishit, "*Hamimenu yipaleh kol davar*" "Is anything too

wonderous for me?” (Yirmiyahu 32:27)

Yes, God assures Yirmiyahu, one day this field will be worth something again. One day, people will actually want to buy property again in Yerushalayim. Yirmiyahu obeys, and begrudgingly buys the field back for a little over seven shekels. He could never have imagined that by 2023, the housing costs in Jerusalem would have skyrocketed, and that Jerusalem would become one of the hardest places in the world to buy property. One can only imagine how many shekels that piece of property in Anatot is worth today!

There are many songs that use the words, “*od yishama*.” There is even a song to the inspiring words, “*od yeshvu zekeinim uzkeinot birchovot Yerushalayim ...*,” a line from Zecharia 8:4-5 about children and elderly people playing and sitting in the streets of Yerushalayim.

It’s probably not surprising that we have yet to hear any songs celebrating the staggering housing prices in Yerushalayim, and how expensive it is to rent a one-bedroom apartment in Katamon. But Yirmiyahu would be crying from happiness to hear about it. **Yirmiyahu’s dramatic, wistful description of the returning demand of property in Israel has become so real that the country’s best economists have been trying for decades now to reel it back in.**

## The Return of Israel’s Economy

The final “*od*” phrase in this string of hopeful prophecies is the immediate continuation of the psukim about the return of weddings. How are new couples supposed to support themselves? Well, Yirmiyahu assures the Jewish people that the job market will flourish once again too:

כֹּה־אָמַר ה' צֶב־אוֹת עוֹד יִהְיֶה בְּמָקוֹם הַזֶּה  
הַחֲרִיב מֵאִין־אָדָם וְעִדְ־בִּהְמָה וּבְכָל־עֲרֵיוֹ נִוָּה  
רָעִים מְרַבְּצִים צֹאן: בְּעֲרֵי הָהָר בְּעֲרֵי הַשְּׂפֵלָה

וּבְעֲרֵי הַנֶּגֶב וּבְאֶרֶץ בְּנֵי־מִן וּבְסִבְיָי יְרוּשָׁלַם  
וּבְעֲרֵי יְהוּדָה עַד תַּעֲבֹרְנָה הַצֹּאן עַל־יְדֵי מוֹנֶה  
אָמַר ה'.

*Thus said the LORD of Hosts: In this ruined place, without man and beast, and in all its towns, **there shall again be a pasture for shepherds, where they can rest their flocks.** In the towns of the hill country, in the towns of the Shephelah, and in the towns of the Negeb, in the land of Benjamin and in the environs of Jerusalem and in the towns of Judah, **sheep shall pass again under the hands of one who counts them**—said the LORD.*

**Yirmiyahu 33:12-13**

Metzudat David explains (33:13):

ר"ל כ"כ יתרבו הצאן עד שלא יספיקו בעליהם  
למנותם בעצמו ויעמיד מונה במקומו להעביר  
הצאן לפניו למנותם:

*This means to say, there will be so many sheep that their owners will not suffice to count them on their own, and will appoint someone to count them in his stead to pass his sheep before him to count them.*

It seemed unimaginable that people in Israel would ever be prosperous again, but Yirmiyahu says that one day it will happen. People will be so financially comfortable again that they will need to hire others to take care of their wealth.

Not everyone who comes to Israel is thrilled about the first prophecy of the astronomic housing costs. Not everyone finds a spouse right away to celebrate the second prophecy. And not everyone who moves to Israel finds themselves suddenly so overloaded with money and possessions that they need to hire others to manage their wealth. But the combination of these prophecies is an astonishingly accurate description of today’s reality. What even a generation or two ago was a sacrifice and a plunge into the unknown has become a secure and sustainable option. Israel’s many wedding halls are booked to capacity, there’s a swelling job market and a strong economy, and there are communities with old people, young

people and everyone in between.

## Yirmiyahu and Today’s Aliya Trends

In recent years, Yirmiyahu’s prophecies have taken on even greater significance, especially for North American olim. Yirmiyahu’s prophecies of housing, marriage, and the job market are likely to resonate most strongly with young professionals establishing their lives and careers. And this is exactly the primary age bracket that is now moving to Israel.

Statistics published by Nefesh B’Nefesh and the Ministry of Absorption show that in recent years, the largest demographic of North Americans making Aliya has shifted from retirees to the 18-to-36-year-old bracket. Yirmiyahu’s focus on financial and family stability are exactly what is on the minds of today’s olim, and Yirmiyahu’s promise for a bright future in these areas is of the utmost significance to them. The rise of Israeli undergraduate programs in English, including Yeshiva University’s recent decision to launch undergraduate and graduate programs in Israel, is a further reflection of this historic development in Jewish history. **These students, young professionals and young families are coming to Israel and finding not the desolate and barren Israel described by Yirmiyahu at the beginning of the book, but the flourishing, prosperous country described at the end.**

Yirmiyahu promised we would progress from *od yiknu* to *od yishama* to *od ta’avorna*. And so it has happened: properties in Yerushalayim are valuable again. Weddings have returned. The economy is strong. Young people are coming to Israel like never before to write the next inspiring chapter of this eternal land. One can almost imagine, among the busy city streets and vibrant wedding crowds singing “*Od Yishama*,” Yirmiyahu smiling and singing along.



## **TORAH OF HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN: HOW DID RAV LICHTENSTEIN IMPACT RELIGIOUS ZIONISM?**

*Compiled by the editorial staff based on a shiur given by Rabbi Taragin, May 2022*

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein had a major impact on the Religious Zionist community and Israel. How did an American-raised rabbi, who was a student of Rav Soloveitchik and not of Rav Kook, have such an impact? Before dealing with that question, it is important to assess a different question: How did he process the concept of the modern State of Israel? In this article, we will explore several issues and how Rav Lichtenstein related to them.

### **Navigating Unprecedented Times**

We all believe we are living through a unique period of Jewish history. We now have sovereignty over Eretz

Yisrael. We can return to our ancient homeland. We can observe mitzvos that, historically, Jews have been unable to observe for centuries — shemitah, terumos, ma'asros etc. What sources do we draw from in order to navigate these issues?

Our natural response might be to look in Tanach which contains prophecies that discuss the ultimate redemption, and also presents challenges and obstacles that arise while living in Eretz Yisrael. Many people in Eretz Yisrael employ Tanach as a template for interpreting and navigating current events.

Rav Lichtenstein didn't take this approach. In his *sichos*, he emphasized the dangers of creating expectations based on prophetic visions. Chazal already warned us against calculating

the timing of the final redemption (*Sanhedrin* 97b). Furthermore, Chazal tell us that Yaakov wanted to reveal to his children how the final redemption would unfold, and this vision was taken from him (*Pesachim* 56a).

Rav Lichtenstein often spoke about the delicate balance between *ahavas Hashem* (love of G-d) and *yiras Hashem* (reverence of G-d), and that overconfidence in our relationship with Hashem can disrupt that balance. He referenced this idea in a *sicha* for *Parashas Shelach* in discussing the *ma'apilim*, who attempted to go to Eretz Kna'an immediately after Hashem decreed that the Jewish people spend forty years in the desert. This type of overconfidence — that Hashem loves us and we can and should live our lives confidently using prophetic visions



as our guide — undermines our *yiras Hashem* and the realization that the King of the Universe is ultimately determining history in a manner that is mysterious.

Rather than looking to Tanach to navigate the challenges of our time, Rav Lichtenstein would turn to the Talmud, to halachic constructs. Here are three examples.

First, in January 1997, as part of the Oslo Accords, Israel withdrew from most of Chevron. This occurred around the time of Chanukah and it put a damper on the yeshiva's Chanuka *mesibah* (party). Rav Lichtenstein delivered a *sicha* before the *mesibah* started. This would have been the perfect opportunity to quote verses from Tanach citing promises that the land will remain in our hands and that Chevron has a special connection to our Avos. Instead, for over an hour, he discussed the two halachic mechanisms available for disputing parties to settle their differences: *vitur* (unilateral relinquishment) and *peshara* (compromise). Rav Lichtenstein provided a thorough legal analysis of these approaches using classical commentaries on the Talmud and then assured his students that our withdrawal should not be viewed as one of *vitur*, giving up the land without any concern for it, but one of *peshara*, a compromise, which some thought at the time would have potential for peace. He noted that sometimes compromise might be painful, and we should be pained by the prospect of giving over land.

Second, Rav Lichtenstein delivered a *sicha* on the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel. Again, the *sicha* didn't focus on prophetic visions, but rather deconstructed and analyzed the various components of *yovel* (the jubilee year) such as *shichrur avadim* and *hachzaras karka* (freeing of servants and returning of land) and

how they can be applied to the socio-economic challenges in Modern Israel.

A third example occurred in the late 80's, when Rav Lichtenstein spoke to the students in the chutz la'aretz program of Yeshiva Har Etzion about issues relating to Aliyah. One of the students asked him what he experienced in 1948 as a teenager. Rav Lichtenstein said this his feelings were best reflected in Tehillim ch. 22. The theme of this chapter in Tehillim is crying out for help in a time of crisis and danger. While it is true that the War of Independence was a time of crisis and danger, even forty years later, it was this chapter of Tehillim, rather than the chapters of Tehillim that we recite when we say Hallel, that framed his memory of 1948.

## Two Conversations

Rav Lichtenstein's outlook can be observed in his own words by comparing two conversations that took place 50 years apart, one in 1962 and one in 2012. In 1962, Rav Lichtenstein made his first trip to Eretz Yisrael. He records a conversation that he had with his rebbe, Rav Yitzchak Hutner:

*One day, I went to see mori ve-rabbi Rav Hutner zt"l, who used to spend summers in Eretz Yisrael. He had an attachment to Eretz Yisrael—he had studied in Yeshivat Chevron when it was still in Chevron. He began to ask me what are my impressions, what do I see here, what do I feel. I discussed with him the vitality of Jewish life and the sense of total community, as opposed to the Diaspora, where one's life is more fragmented. He felt that you could have felt that wholeness and vitality in Eastern Europe as well. Then I said that I think there is a broader range of application of Halakha in Israel. In America, rabbinical courts handled only ritual law, and here they dealt with dinei mammonot (commercial and*

*financial cases) as well, so here you feel the resonance of Halakha in more areas of life. He said that you could have seen that in Eastern Europe or in North Africa also. I tried to get him to elaborate, and finally he exclaimed, "Why don't you mention the uniqueness of being in Eretz Yisrael? Chazal (Ketubot 112a) speak of Eretz Yisrael as a country that Moshe and Aharon didn't merit to enter, and we are there!" It was stunning to him to meet a ben Torah on an airplane flying to Israel, whose attitude was the same as if he were going to California. I walked out of there like a beaten dog.*

In 1962, Rav Lichtenstein viewed Eretz Yisrael through strict halachic structures. Let's fast forward to 2012. Rav Chaim Sabato interviewed Rav Lichtenstein on many areas of Jewish thought and they were collected in a sefer called *Mevakshei Panecha*, which was translated into English under the title *Seeking His Presence*. In one particular exchange, Rav Sabato asked Rav Lichtenstein why he prefers to view the establishment of the State of Israel from a more practical perspective as opposed to Rav Kook's followers who see it as a fulfillment of prophecy. Rav Sabato then added that Rav Lichtenstein's own rebbe, Rav Soloveitchik, wrote about the "six Heavenly knocks" in his essay "Kol Dodi Dofek," which follows a similar approach to that of the students of Rav Kook. Rav Lichtenstein responded:

*I don't know to what degree the essay "Kol Dodi Dofek" reflects the Rav's approach throughout his life. I would assume that Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook z"l would wake up in the morning, take in the sounds of the State of Israel, and feel, experience, the State of Israel. The Rav z"l did not wake up in the morning with this deep feeling. "Kol Dodi Dofek" was a very successful work, but it reflects a certain spirit, things that were said on Israel's Independence Day at a time when the State was beginning to strike roots,*

*but had not yet burst into full flower. It was at such a moment that the Rav said what he said. Those who claimed that he was against Zionist policy or an anti-Zionist were mistaken. He identified with Zionism. What is correct is that the theological component associated with the establishment of the State was not at the forefront of his thought. For me, since we made aliya, I have been more existentially connected to the State than the Rav was. Yet, I still would not approach it with the celebratory tones of Hegelian, historical knocking.*

These two quotes succinctly capture Rav Lichtenstein's approach to Zionism and Eretz Yisrael.

## Rav Lichtenstein's Impact

Rav Lichtenstein's approach was passed on to multiple generations of students, not only in Yeshiva Har Etzion, but in other yeshivos that were started by his students. Beyond the broader issues discussed above, there are other areas where Rav Lichtenstein made his mark on the hesder movement.

First, Rav Lichtenstein introduced the Lithuanian-style yeshiva to the hesder movement. To Rav Lichtenstein, Yeshivat Har Etzion and Volozhin were basically the same, with a few minor differences. He would even throw in Yiddish lines from time to time during his *shiurim* (which he then translated into Hebrew), because he saw in the yeshiva a connection to the yeshivos of pre-war Eastern Europe.

Second, in the Religious Zionist community, there is a tendency to focus more on national identity rather than individual identity. Rav Lichtenstein emphasized the importance of the individual in the State of Israel. He would often use the terms *Knesses Yisrael* and *Reb Yisrael*, where *Knesses Yisrael* refers to the entire Jewish people and *Reb Yisrael*, to the individual.

For example, regarding political discussions about peace for land, Rav Lichtenstein introduced the concept of *pikuach nefesh* (saving a life) into the discussion. If questions of war and peace were simply a national issue, there would be no room for discussion about *pikuach nefesh* since the *pikuach nefesh* considerations don't apply during wartime because war, by definition, entails risking one's life (see *Minchas Chinuch* 425). Rav Lichtenstein's emphasis on *pikuach nefesh* indicated that the issues also need to be analyzed from the perspective of an individual Jew and not only from a nationalistic approach.

He also stressed that the political agenda of the Religious Zionists shouldn't be wholly focused on land. There are other pressing issues that relate to the individuals in the State of Israel, such as social causes that need to be part of our agenda, as they too reflect Torah values.

A third issue is that Rav Lichtenstein had a sense of optimism for mankind. He often stressed the concept of *tzelem Elokim*, that man was created in G-d's image. This was often seen in the way that Rav Lichtenstein presented "outside" sources. As opposed to Rav Soloveitchik, who would quote other sources as a means of comparing Judaism to other philosophies, Rav Lichtenstein would quote other sources when they provided an insight into how we can better serve Hashem.

Rav Lichtenstein did not tolerate the xenophobic sentiments that some in the Religious Zionist communities express. He was very outspoken when Arabs were mistreated. When Libyan Airlines Flight 114 was shot down by Israeli fighter jets in 1973, Rav Lichtenstein and Rav Amital demanded a government inquiry even though many dismissed the "accident" as a necessary causality of a tense pre-

war environment. Every *erev Rosh Hashanah*, Rav Lichtenstein would personally wish a *shanah tova* to every single Palestinian worker in the yeshiva.

Fourth, Rav Lichtenstein was a consummate institutionalist. He believed in institutions and working together with other institutions, even when they had a different agenda. He never marginalized an institution because of their views and sought ways to work with these institutions, especially government institutions like the police or the IDF.

Let's conclude with a conversation between Rav Lichtenstein and Shimon Peres:

*In 1978, Shimon Peres visited the Yeshiva. He asked me what the political credo of the Yeshiva was. I told him the Yeshiva has no political credo, but we teach three things:*

- 1. Even when sitting in the bet midrash, you have a responsibility to the community;*
  - 2. When addressing these problems, you have to think deeply and not simplistically;*
  - 3. Even when doing what is right, you have to know how to respect other opinions and the people who hold them.*
- This has to be our educational goal. The question is not just what are the particular values we hold, but through which spectacles we view values, through which eyes. A man, said Blake, doesn't see with his eyes but rather through his eyes. What sees is the mind.*



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