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# HAMIZRACHI

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# FINDING LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS





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## HAMIZRACHI

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**COVER PHOTO:** The damage inside a home in Kibbutz Be'eri, the largest *kibbutz* overrun on October 7th. Over 100 people were killed in the *kibbutz*. (Credit: Alex Levac)

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# FROM THE

# Editor

## Safety or Destiny?

**N**ow is the time to come home. I know what you're thinking: "Now? Of all times to call on Jews to uproot their lives and move to Israel, you chose *this* moment? Israel is a war zone! Who in their right mind would leave the safety of suburban America to move to Israel? We all hope to be in Israel one day – but today is not that day."

But are Jews in the Diaspora really safer than Jews in Israel? The explosion of antisemitism throughout the world should make us pause. Over the last few months, a Berlin synagogue was firebombed, Jewish homes in Paris were spray painted with Stars of David, and over 300,000 protestors in London screamed "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free." All this as Jews are violently assaulted in Chicago and New York and many American universities become no-go zones for Jewish students.

It's true that living in Israel is not exactly a walk in the park. But every Jew – whether we make our home in Israel or the Diaspora – now lives in the shadow of October 7. Every Jew is a potential target. Frankly, my family feels safer living in Efrat, where we are protected by our holy soldiers and volunteer security team. With all respect to the many wonderful gentile police officers of the Diaspora, I'd rather put my trust in our own warriors, who are fighting for their people and their Land.

Still, it's worth asking a more fundamental question. Should "safety" be our primary life goal? Does G-d really want us to make the "safer" choice?

Preserving life is one of our greatest values. From the words "*vachai bahem*," "he shall live through them" (Vayikra 18:5), the rabbis learn that we should not give up our lives to fulfill a *mitzvah*, but rather "you should live by them, and not die by them" (*Sanhedrin* 74a). Unlike our radical Islamic

enemies, who happily sacrifice their children for jihad, we recognize the infinite value of every Jewish life. Nevertheless, there is far more to being a Jew than ensuring we and our children remain safe.

When G-d commanded Avraham to leave everything he ever knew for "a Land that I will show you," was He telling Avraham to play it safe? When David the shepherd boy walked into the camp of Israel and volunteered to fight Goliath, did he choose the "safer" path? When Esther said to Mordechai, "then I will go to the king contrary to the law, and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16), was she making a "safe" choice? When Matityahu and his sons rose up to battle the mighty Greeks instead of moving to Cyprus, did they do so after weighing the pros and cons and concluding that revolution was the "safest" approach? When young men and women from the Diaspora choose to serve as lone soldiers in the IDF instead of majoring in psychology at Rutgers, are they foolishly putting their lives at risk?

If "safety" was our highest ideal, G-d would have commanded Avraham to settle in a small village in Montana or the Australian outback instead of a Land fought over by empires since the beginning of time. Israel was never intended to be a "safe haven" for Jews, a Land where we would no longer have to defend ourselves from our enemies. Rather, as Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook often said, the strength and sacrifice needed in Israel simply takes a different form. Whereas in exile, our strength is expressed through "For it is for Your sake that we are killed all the time, [that] we are considered as sheep for the slaughter" (Tehillim 44:23), in Israel we stand up with heroism and pride as the Maccabees did when they rebelled against the Greeks.

After our neighbors Lucy, Maia and Rina Dee *hy"d* were murdered, I remember having an open conversation with my brother about what it means to live in Israel. We agreed that we would rather

our children grow up here and be a little traumatized but deeply connected to our people than have our children grow in the Diaspora without that trauma, but distant from the joy and suffering of *Am Yisrael*. As strange as this may sound, I thank G-d everyday that we made *Aliyah* in time to be here for this war, that my family has the merit to play a minor role in the epic story of our nation.

Israel is not a "safe space," not yet. But the present and future of our people is here, in the Holy Land. It is here, in the Land G-d promised us, where we will write the next chapter of Tanach, where Jewish heroes are made every day.

The day has come to embrace our destiny. It's time to come home. G-d is calling.

"I will whistle to them, and I will gather them, for I have redeemed them..." (Zechariah 10:8).

Elie Mischel



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



# Together We Will Win

## בעד"ה בַּיַּחַד נִנְצָח

Rabbi Doron Perez

**T**he past five years have been some of the most divisive in Israel's history. The fabric of society significantly weakened, and we experienced a phenomenon almost without precedent in the history of democracy - five rounds of elections within four years (2019-2022), unrelenting delegitimization of other Jews and the invalidation of the views of others. The country faced years of paralyzing political stagnation.

It turned out that the years of "Just Not Bibi" versus "Only Bibi" and the Prime Minister's unparalleled court case were just a gentle warm-up for what was to follow. Even when the political deadlock was finally broken in the election of November 2022, the situation only worsened.

One side wanted to change the legal system at all costs while the other protested against it at all costs - even if their protests would damage the economy and the IDF reserves. The internal crisis threatened to cause a rift between the State of Israel and many Diaspora communities. Everything became a zero-sum game and

everyone was unequivocally right, in their own eyes. Appalling demonization and the inability to listen to anyone else's opinion became commonplace. Most concerning to me was how moderates had become extremists. Few people were willing to listen to anyone else. We were left with echo chambers of self-righteousness and fundamentalists on both sides who were absolutely convinced that only they possessed the absolute truth.

The two sides were like high-speed trains hurtling towards a head-on collision, with neither train prepared to change course. I remember asking a government minister whether he was waiting for an assassination attempt before backing down. I sit on the board of the World Zionist Organization and on many occasions called for the board to be a unifying influence and not a divisive one. During a recent board meeting before Rosh Hashanah, one left-wing board member said that it was the right-wing that murdered an Israeli Prime Minister, not the left. I asked for permission to speak and said to him, "Are you waiting for the murder of a right-wing

prime minister by someone on the left, so it will be 1-1, and then things will be equal?" What has happened to us?!

The climax came on Yom Kippur. Who would have believed that on the holiest day of the year, in a Jewish state, we would see videos of Jews protesting the right of other Jews to pray in public? Almost every red line was crossed - an ominous sign that catastrophe was not far away.

And then came October 7.

We knew it would take something extraordinary to make us rethink it all. But even in our darkest nightmares, we never imagined the wake-up call would come in the horrific and devastating way that it did. On one dark day, everything changed.

On that Shabbat morning, the Gaza Envelope became the most dangerous and unprotected place for Jews on Earth since 1945. We witnessed atrocities on an unimaginable level, with more Jews murdered in a single day than on any day since the Holocaust. As a people, we suffered a terrible blow.

## The covenant

What unites us is not a social contract as articulated by Rousseau and Hobbes, but a totally different and uniquely Jewish idea: covenant. It is one of the most revolutionary principles of the Bible. Covenant means a connection that does not stem from personal interest and the preservation of private rights but rather from mutual destiny, purpose, trust and eternal commitment to the divine and historic task that we bear. Hashem Himself, so to speak, bonds Himself to this covenant and links the Jewish people's destiny to the spiritual destiny of humanity. G-d enters the covenant and calls on the entire Jewish people to bind themselves to Him and to each other with bonds of mutual care and love, for the sake of the Jewish people and the entire human race.

Within a few nightmarish hours on October 7, our mutual covenant of fate that had been profoundly compromised was renewed once more – through unbearable suffering, horrific scenes and shared remorse.

No more were we split into camps of supporters and opponents of legal reform. No “Just Not Bibi” or “Only Bibi,” no left and right, no ultra-Orthodox and secular, no reservists and those refusing to serve, no coalition and combative opposition, no Israeli Jewry and Diaspora Jewry.

Once again, we are one people. One national unity emergency government.

Hundreds of thousands of Israelis returned from overseas to defend their homeland, and thousands of global Jewish leaders are coming to support us and to strengthen themselves. Every day, solidarity groups from all around the Jewish global community arrive in Israel. Though people normally flee from war zones, three hundred thousand Israelis have returned during the war, growing the Israeli population by 3%! “Who is like your People Israel, one nation in the Land?” (Shmuel II 7:23).

No longer are we “a people spread out and divided,” as Haman said of us, but one People, united at last. But what price we have had to pay.

Our own son, Daniel, who fought in the Gaza Envelope on that fateful Shabbat, is one of the hostages presumed to have been taken captive in Gaza.

The world after Shabbat Simchat Torah 5784, October 7, 2023, must not be the same as what it was before. It needs a complete recalibration; a more enlightened Jewish world must rise from this darkness.

We must conduct our political and public interactions in a totally different manner.

The culture of mutual denigration must end. Destructive splits and baseless hatred gave rise to internal implosion and national fragility, which the enemy could sense and identify with ease.



**This wonderful unity must continue – not only during wartime but, most importantly, after the war is over.**

The culture of self-justification, accusations and finger-pointing is a corrosive impulse that only weakens us and eats away at us from within. We've experienced it for years in Israel and, to put it mildly, it has not led to any positive results.

The time has come to regroup and press restart, heeding the words attributed to Albert Einstein: “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.”

Woe to us if we revert to the same behaviors of recklessness and belligerence, of self-righteousness and canceling the views of others. This wonderful unity must continue – not only during wartime but, most importantly, after the war is over. Creating a new political culture of consensus, empathy and broad agreement must dictate all of our country's major decisions at every stage of the war and beyond. Obviously, at some stage, after the war and, please G-d, the attainment of all our goals, there will be a commission of inquiry. That will be a big test for Israeli society. The commission should be composed of people free of any political agendas and personal interest and void of any pre-ordained outcomes. It must be acceptable to as broad a majority as possible, or it will not be trusted. It must be part of our society's rehabilitation and not an encore to its deterioration. Not a committee that will deal only with military and political failure, but a forum that will be part of a process to rebuild mutual trust and solidarity, the very foundations of a healthy society.

With enough humility and generosity of spirit, I believe it possible to usher in a renewal of our national covenant. No one person or sector has the exclusive possession of truth, and no tribe has all the answers. We are all in the dark. Only G-d has the solutions.

We must not ‘waste’ this challenging time of crisis. We must transform our suffering into a time of mercy and goodwill.

## Transforming darkness to light

Chanukah is the only Jewish festival to take place in the heart of winter, during the darkest and longest nights of the year.<sup>1</sup> The Jewish response to darkness can only be light – rekindling the *menorah* lights in the Temple and bringing the light of the *chanukiah* to every Jewish household.

Ancient Greece is seen by our Sages as a kingdom of spiritual darkness, while Israel is viewed as the kingdom of spiritual light. The light of the spirit can and must transcend the darkness of the physical world.

Darkness descended on Israel on Simchat Torah. Yet the light of Hashem, His Torah, the incredible courage and heroism of our soldiers and civilians as well as the power of our common spiritual fate and destiny will transcend this darkness.

Jewish unity is the flaming torch that will guide us through the darkness. The motto of Israel facing this conflict is “*בְּיחד נִנְצָח*, together we will win.” If there is one thing Jewish history has taught us it is that genuine Jewish unity is our spiritual Iron Dome.

With G-d's help, we will not only win but usher in the next stage of Jewish redemption, when all of Israel will stand together as one people with one heart. No one knows for sure what the solutions will be going forward. But we do know that the best way to overcome the hurdles ahead is to face them together.

Together indeed, we will win.

רק בְּיחד נִנְצָח בעז"ה

1. The Torah's calendar is linked to the northern hemisphere, where Biblical and Talmudic history transpired.



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

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

**20,000**

people from around the world joined our Global Tefillah & Chizuk Event on October 9th



**160+**

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



**500,000**

views on digital content and inspiration connected with the war



**40+**

missions to Israel facilitated



**25000+**

Letters sent to soldiers and schoolchildren in Israel



**30+**

countries around the world were represented in our Global Women's Tefillah event on November 9th



**40,000**

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



**250**

apartments given to families from the south as part of the "Our Home is Your Home" program led by Mizrachi's representatives at the WZO



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# FINDING LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

**An Introduction by Rabbi Aron White**

**J**ust five months after celebrating its 75th birthday, Israel was plunged into darkness. From 6:30am on Shemini Atzeret morning, a cloud of darkness spread from the burning houses of Be'eri and the killing fields of Re'im, enveloping the whole of Israel and the Jewish world. The joy of Simchat Torah turned to confusion, terror and mourning, as an unimaginable horror unfolded.

As the details, numbers and stories emerged, we struggled to even find points of reference to process the murder of over 1,200, the injuring of 5,000 and the kidnapping of 240 Israelis in one day. Hamas inflicted more casualties in a single day than Israel suffered through the entire second intifada. The intelligence and military failure that failed to prevent this surprise attack felt like Yom Kippur War 2.0. The shock factor of a mass terror attack on a scale previously considered impossible felt like Israel's 9/11. The brutality and savagery of Hamas, the reports of which are too painful to read and watch, recalled the horrors of the pogroms that Israel was meant to prevent.

As a nation and as individuals, we experienced in those days a rollercoaster of emotions, almost all of them negative. Fear, for what was coming next. Confusion, as to how this could have happened. Sadness over so much loss. Pain and anguish over the fate of the hostages.

In the midst of the darkness, flickers of light appeared. Stories of heroism and courage began to emerge, first of individuals, then of tens, hundreds and thousands of brave Israeli soldiers and civilians who had run to the front lines and saved thousands of lives. From Thailand to Mexico, planes departed for Ben Gurion packed with Israeli reservists ready to fight for their country. Donations of every kind poured in from Israel and around the world, while Jews of unbelievable strength spent weeks working day and night to provide *chessed shel emet* for the dead. The determination and resilience to return and revive the destroyed communities was palpable – survivors of October 7th milked

their cows in Kibbutz Alumim and restarted their printing press in Kibbutz Be'eri, just days after the atrocities.

These painful weeks have made us rethink so many things, including the way we look at the Jewish calendar. We celebrate joyous *chagim*, but we don't usually think about how the stories played out in real time. We spend a few days remembering events that took place over the course of years. There were many years of darkness and uncertainty before the Chashmona'im finally defeated the Seleucid Greeks, and centuries of slavery in Egypt before we were miraculously freed. Those living through those dark times did not know how their story would end. We joyously celebrate their salvation, but perhaps we don't reflect enough on the genuine *maror* our people experienced before we tasted the bread of redemption.

Many of us have never experienced darkness, loss and suffering like this in our lifetimes. But just as it did on Pesach, Purim and Chanukah, we believe that the light of redemption will ultimately banish the darkness. May these moments of light be *mosif v'holech*, grow from night to night, until the light of redemption is fully ablaze for all the world to see. We hope this edition can provide you with some of those sparks, to find some of the light in the darkness.



**Rabbi Aron White**  
is the Managing Editor of HaMizrachi magazine.

Above: The Beit Knesset in Kibbutz Sa'ad, guarded by a soldier. On October 7th, Hamas terrorists were prevented from entering the kibbutz by the brave security team. Sa'ad was one of the few kibbutzim in the area to be spared. (PHOTO: SARAH EVRON)



# Gibor Yisrael: The Heroic Story of Elchanan Kalmanson

Rabbi Aron White

As the news of the Hamas invasion of southern Israel spread, hundreds of Israelis poured in from around the country to help. While Be’eri, Kfar Aza, Nir Oz and other kibbutzim were overrun by hundreds of Hamas terrorists, elite IDF units, off-duty policemen and many “ordinary” citizens engaged in heroic combat, without having been called up to duty. These heroes saved hundreds of lives - and many of them paid for it with their own. One such hero is Elchanan Kalmanson. This is the story of a father of five who jumped in his car, saved tens of lives, and died *Al Kiddush Hashem*.

**O**n the morning of Shemini Atzeret, 42-year-old Elchanan Kalmanson’s phone started ping-ponging. As Otniel’s head of security and a veteran of the Israeli security services (his precise role is still classified), he heard news of the massacre early on. “It doesn’t look good,” he told his parents and wife, “and I need to go and help.” His brother Menachem and nephew Itiel joined him. They jumped in their car and drove towards the Gaza border, to the unknown.

As thousands of rockets were fired into Israel, they kept driving towards the border. They heard that Kibbutz Be’eri was where they were needed most. Be’eri is the largest *kibbutz* in the Gaza envelope, and its 1,100 residents were now under attack by hundreds of brutal terrorists. They arrived at an unimaginable scene - smoke rising from burning homes, the sounds of gunshots, screaming and explosions everywhere. This was a full-blown battlefield, in the pastoral setting of a usually tranquil *kibbutz*.

“Elchanan had trained extensively in anti-terror security operations,” said his father, Rabbi Beni Kalmanson, in an interview with *Makor Rishon*. “When he arrived, the army had many special forces in Be’eri, but the terrorists had already overtaken tens of homes. The only way to help people was to go house to house, without knowing what you were going to find in each one.”

As the Shaldag special forces from the IDF tried first to secure the perimeter, ensuring no more terrorists could get into Be’eri, Elchanan, Menachem and Itiel took an armored truck from one of the soldiers there and began going from house to house to evacuate as many residents as they could. They experienced every possible scenario - in some houses they saved entire families, in others they tragically discovered that there was no one to save, while in others they saved children who had seen their parents murdered or kidnapped. In many cases, they had to neutralize terrorists before they could get into

the house. They successfully freed some families from their safe rooms, even as their house burned around them. They would pack ten or twelve people into the back of a truck made for 4 and drive them out of the *kibbutz* before heading back into the inferno. “Each time, we would say how much we don’t want to go back in,” said Itiel. “But we knew what we had to do.” Hour after hour, the ad hoc “Tzevet Elchanan” saved lives.

In many homes, after neutralizing terrorists, Elchanan would knock on the safe room door: “We are here to save you, open the door!” Several of the terrified families were worried that Hamas terrorists were trying to trick them into leaving the safe room, and they would start asking questions. “Which unit of the army are you from?” they asked. “Otniel - we are not from the army,” he responded. If they were still unconvinced, Elchanan had to prove they were genuinely Israeli. Sometimes they started singing Simchat Torah songs, but he was most successful in convincing

them that he was indeed Israeli when he recited the Shema. The families would open the door, hug him, and he would drive them to safety.

For 14 hours, Elchanan and his team went door to door, saving over 100 people. Be'eri is a town of 1,100 people, and army commandos had arrived by 8:30 am, but it would take close to 48 hours to clear the village of all the terrorists, many of whom had taken Israelis as human shields and hostages. Tzevet Elchanan entered a dark house, but a terrorist was inside, and released a round of bullets. Elchanan and Menachem were both hit, and tragically Elchanan died in Menachem's arms. Together with 85 residents of Be'eri and 26 policemen and IDF soldiers, Elchanan Kalmanson had fallen in the battle for Be'eri.

There are hundreds of stories of Israeli heroism on October 7th. 52-year-old Oz Davidian saved tens of people from the Nova massacre, while 9-year-old Michael Idan called the police and hid his 6-year-old sister after his parents had been killed in Kfar Aza. But the story of Elchanan Kalmanson encapsulates not only a story of individual heroism, but the greater arc of the story of October 7th.

Like Elchanan, most of the heroes of this day were not dispatched by institutions – the government, the army, or the intelligence – but were simply individuals who ran into the fire. And these heroes made no distinctions between different kinds of Jews.

Elchanan drove from Otniel to Be'eri, a distance of 100 kilometers, to save lives. Otniel is a Religious Zionist community in Harei Yehuda, while Be'eri is a secular *kibbutz* named after Berl Katzenelson, the spiritual father of the Labor Zionist movement. In November 2022, 80% of Otniel voted for Tzionut Datit and Likud, while



Elchanan Kalmanson and his family (PHOTO: COURTESY OF KALMANSON FAMILY)

80% of Be'eri voted for Labour, Meretz and Yesh Atid. They both could be said to be emblematic of two different camps that have been at loggerheads for the past

the code that bound them together, telling the families Elchanan was one of theirs.

As the Be'eri survivors comforted the Kalmanson family, thousands of religious and secular Jews had similar experiences across the country. After years of divide, we have been forced to unite, in tanks, *kibbutzim*, funerals and *shiva* homes. As our soldiers fight shoulder to shoulder, may we see the fulfillment of the verse “שִׂמְחֵנוּ כִּימֹת עֲנִיָּהֵנוּ Cause us to rejoice according to the days that You afflicted us” (Tehillim 90:15). Just as we have cried together, may we rejoice together in victory, peace and redemption.



“The fact I am alive is only due to Elchanan, and the people like him who came to save us,” said Yochai Ben-Gal from Be'eri.

nine months. But when Hamas attacked, it didn't matter. Elchanan and his team risked their lives to save Jews, wherever and whomever they were. The residents of Be'eri have comforted the mourning Kalmanson family, eternally grateful for Elchanan's sacrifice. And despite all the divisions, the words of Shema Yisrael were

Facing page: Destroyed home in Be'eri (PHOTO: TOMER PERSICO), Elchanan Kalmanson (PHOTO: YESHIVAT OTNIEL)



The tombstone of Elchanan Kalmanson. According to his brother Menachem, Elchanan was the first person in Israel's history to have two symbols on his headstone – that of the IDF and that of the Mossad. He was a Major in the IDF, and his position in the Mossad remains classified.

(PHOTO: MENACHEM KALMANSON)

# A Time of Horror, A Time of Happiness



## An Interview with Rabbi Doron and Shira Perez

*For Rabbi Doron Perez and the Perez family, the events of Shemini Atzeret have hit home in the most direct and painful way. Yonatan Perez, their oldest son, was injured in the fighting, and their second son Daniel is still missing, presumed captured by Hamas in Gaza. In an unbelievably complex emotional moment, Yonatan was due to get married just ten days after the atrocity, and the family had to decide whether to go forward with the wedding. Rabbi Aron White spoke with Rabbi Perez and his daughter, Shira, to hear about their experiences over the last few weeks.*

**You have been through an emotional rollercoaster over the last several weeks, but let's start from the beginning. What happened on the morning of Shemini Atzeret?**

**Rabbi Doron Perez:** We were at our home in Yad Binyamin – myself and my wife Shelley, our daughter Shira, and our oldest son Yonatan and his fiancée Galya. At 6:30 a.m. on Shemini Atzeret, the siren went off, so we knew rockets were being fired from Gaza. We ran to the *mamad* (safe room), and were going in and out of the *mamad* for the next hour. We thought it was a little strange, as there were more rockets than during previous attacks. Our son Yonatan is an officer in the paratrooper unit, and by about 8 a.m. his phone was pinging with messages pouring into WhatsApp groups from army officers, and so he felt he had to see what was going on despite it being Shabbat. It was hard to get a clear picture of what was happening – some people were reporting Hamas terrorists had broken in, there were pictures of Hamas with Israeli hostages, but the main word that kept repeating itself was “*hazui*,” “crazy.” Yonatan’s battalion commander put out a message that anyone with a weapon should come to Sderot. I said to him, “You have a fiancée, you only have your handgun, and there hasn’t been an official call up, just a general WhatsApp message. Are you sure you should go?” Yonatan said, “If my battalion commander said anyone with a weapon is needed, then I am going,” and he drove off. I was proud

of him, but as none of us knew what was really going on, at that point I wasn’t so worried.

At around 4 p.m. our phones started ringing constantly from a number I didn’t recognize. I didn’t want to pick up on Shabbat, but after about 20 calls I picked up. “I’m OK, Dad,” said Yonatan at the other end of the line – the clearest sign that something had happened. “I am in Soroka hospital in Be’er Sheva – I was shot in the leg, but the doctors say it isn’t a serious wound.” He had arrived in Sderot, and then gone on to fight outside of Sha’ar HaNegev Junction, Kfar Aza and Sa’ad before eventually fighting on the Nachal Oz army base – all in all, for 5 or 6 hours. He told me he had seen indescribable, unimaginable horrors, and he was worried about his fiancée’s family. Galya is from Sa’ad, and having seen some of the devastation in other *kibbutzim*, Yonatan was worried about her family.

This was also the first time that something was mentioned about our second son Daniel. Daniel is a tank commander, and was based on the Nachal Oz army base, the base that Yonatan had fought on. “I know where Daniel’s tank is stationed,” Yonatan said, “and it wasn’t there when I got there.” Yonatan had seen tens of dead soldiers on the base, so we saw it as a good sign that Daniel’s tank wasn’t there. We assumed he was with it fighting somewhere, and naturally he wouldn’t have his phone on him in that situation. So as it came to the end of *Yom Tov*, I was with

Galya, our future daughter-in-law, mainly worried about what we were going to find out from her family when *Yom Tov* ended.

**Shira:** I also wasn't so scared when the sirens began, or when Yonatan went to fight. I spent most of the day with Galya, and she just wanted to speak to her family. When we heard Yonatan was injured I was sad, but I was just assuming Daniel would call us after *Yom Tov*. I remember going to sleep very late after *Yom Tov*, and the next morning when I woke up I asked my dad, "Has Daniel called yet?" When he said no, that was when I started to get very worried about what happened to him.

### **So at this point, at the end of Yom Tov, most of your attention was on Yonatan, who you knew was injured in hospital.**

**RDP:** When *Yom Tov* went out, I made sure to stand by Galya as she called her parents, and breathed a sigh of relief when we heard they were OK – Sa'ad was one of the few *kibbutzim* in the area that the terrorists had not gotten into. We then drove to the hospital to visit Yonatan, and it was chaotic – there was ambulance after ambulance bringing in the injured and there wasn't an available bed, or even crutches, for Yonatan. We decided to bring Yonatan home late that night, so he could recover at home, as he could get more treatment from our doctor in Yad Binyamin than in the overwhelmed hospital. I looked all around the hospital, in case Daniel had been brought in, and a number of parents were doing the same. I was dealing with Yonatan and his recovery, but started to get worried about Daniel.

The next day, we began to feel that something was wrong. Yonatan started making calls to his peers in the army. After a while, we got an update from someone. This was not an official report, but Yonatan had been told that Daniel's tank had been found, with one of the four soldiers dead inside of it, but not the officer, so we knew it wasn't Daniel. It became clear that Daniel was missing in action. This was a very painful moment that we will never forget. I gathered the kids at home and together we went to share the news with my wife – we hugged, we cried, and it was a very hard moment.

On Thursday morning at 7:30 a.m., we got a knock on the door from the IDF, who officially told us that Daniel was missing in action. The army assigned a colonel to our family, who would be our liaison to provide us with accurate information, as in these situations there is fake news swirling around everywhere. The colonel in reserves Yossi Shemesh has been unbelievable, in touch with us every day, and he spent hours with us on that day.

**Shira:** I can still remember exactly how I was in my room, and Galya came and sat next to me. "We have unofficial news about Daniel." I broke down when she and Yonatan told me, and it was the first time I have ever seen my dad and Yonatan cry like that, they were so heartbroken. I genuinely felt like my heart was aching and sore, my whole body was sore, it was the first time I ever felt that level of pain. We were all feeling like that. It's the hardest thing I have ever been through. We have so many pictures of Daniel all around the house, and just seeing them was another stab in the heart.

Between those days and the official update from the army, I was numb and kept myself busy. I don't remember those days; it was all a blur. I remember one thing – that I would go to sleep very late, because I didn't want to hear bad news the next morning.

### **Around this time, while dealing with the news about Daniel, the question of Yonatan and Galya's wedding came to the fore. They were due to get married just 10 days after the massacre. How did you deal with that?**

**RDP:** On Tuesday October 10th, Yonatan's commander, who he fought side-by-side with, came to our home to tell us about the battle. It was only then that I realized it was a miracle he survived. Yonatan could easily have been killed, G-d forbid. To his left and right, soldiers were shot in the stomach, in the back, hit by RPGs. I came out of that meeting feeling so proud of his courage and so appreciative to Hashem that he was safe. Around 300 soldiers, including tens of officers, were killed on October 7th, and many were injured. At the end, the commander said to Yonatan, "*Am Yisrael* needs a lot of *smachot* now. I think you should get into your uniform and get married tonight in your garden. Your dad is a rabbi, he knows what to do!" From that conversation, I realized that continuing on with the wedding might be a healthy response.

We had to make a decision. My wife was adamant that they should get married, but we told Yonatan and Galya that this is their decision, and we would support what they want to do. "But dad, what do you think, it's your son who is missing?" Yonatan said. "He is your brother," I said, "and we will support what you choose." They decided to go ahead with the wedding, supported by us and Galya's parents, the Landaus. We canceled the wedding hall in Ashkelon but decided to have the wedding on the date originally planned, Tuesday October 17th, in a much smaller format according to the limitations of the military circumstances. Our friends in our community of Yad Binyamin organized the wedding on the local high school premises, transforming it into a beautiful wedding setting within five days.

The army had told us they thought it would be a while before Daniel's status changed, but I was still worried about the nightmare scenario of us discovering there would be a funeral the day before the wedding. I asked Rav Rimon if I was allowed to tell the army not to tell us any information if they heard it until after the wedding, and he gave us that *heter*.

**Shira:** The wedding was very hard at the start. The hardest part besides the *chuppah* was the photos. My sister Adina was taking photos of Yonatan, and I joined the photo. It was a photo of Yonatan with his sisters, but then it hit me hard that Daniel wasn't there.

**RDP:** After Yonatan waddled his way to the *chuppah*, still limping from his injury, the first thing he said to me was, "Dad, I could never imagine a scenario where Daniel was not at my wedding." For me, the hardest moment was when our very special rabbi, Rav Hillel Merzbach, spoke under the *chuppah*. He began emotionally and said that we have to acknowledge the one person who is not here. I broke down then – I had been trying so hard to put Daniel out of my mind for the *chuppah* to focus on the *simcha*, but the mention of Daniel broke me down. It was absolutely the right thing to mention Daniel, but it was really tough. He spoke about it and we *davened* for Daniel. It was 2 or 3 minutes of very hard emotions. But my exceptionally brave wife Shelley and I got through it, wiped our faces and transitioned to the *simcha*.

**Shira:** It was hard when we said Tehillim, the *chuppah* was super emotional. It was very powerful, but it was also happy. I have never experienced being so happy and sad at the same time. That was one of the most spiritual experiences I have ever had, it was so holy and beautiful. The idea that we could still be happy during this unimaginable situation, and do what the Jewish

people always do, and appreciate life and celebrate another *bayit ne'eman b'Yisrael* – it was hard but beautiful.

**RDP:** Somebody said to me that it was the holiest, saddest, happiest *chuppah* she has ever been at. I feel the wedding was a happy occasion. The lack of Daniel's presence was there, but we were so happy and it was a small wedding, with our closest friends and family. Some of my closest childhood friends flew in especially from South Africa and England to be with me. I danced a little with the flag of *Chativa 7*, Daniel's brigade, which was a subtle way of acknowledging his ever-present absence. There were a lot of Israeli flags. Yonatan was injured with many stitches, he danced on one leg, hopping and hopping, but it was very special. Galya has six brothers and brothers-in-law in the army, including Neria, who had been Galya and Yonatan's *shadchan*, and all of them managed to get out to be at the wedding. There was a tremendous amount of *simcha* and joy.

### **For a few days the wedding was the center of your attention. After the wedding, what happened next? How did you both deal with the new reality, and return in the coming weeks to any sort of regular life?**

**Shira:** It dawned on me after the excitement of the wedding was over – it's reality now. Before the wedding, I had been having Zoom school, but I hadn't been to one class, because I just couldn't. I started realizing I would have to continue on with real life. I have been blessed with an amazing school, with amazing teachers and principal, and they visited me during those days. Within a couple of days I started to go back to school. I thought it would be hard, but the first few days were easier. I wake up, go to school, but then something reminds me of Daniel, and then I get an ache in my heart. That's when it really hits you. I come home from school, and the door to his room is closed, as we can't bring ourselves to go in. There are those little moments throughout the day which are hard. Besides that, what keeps me high most of the time is sensitivity and support of the people around us. Each of us have our own friends, we have our family friends, and all the *davening* and love from *Am Yisrael* keeps me hopeful and positive and able to continue to have a normal life. One day I said to my mum that my life has split into two – before October 7th 6:30 a.m., and after. The little things don't matter, there are so many bigger things. You get up, you continue, that's who we are as a people. My parents are role models in that way.

**RDP:** I didn't do any interviews until after the wedding. I just needed time to process what we were going through and to get through the wedding in one piece. All requests were deferred until after the wedding. I did an interview at 8 a.m. the day after the wedding, and I started to see that people wanted and needed to hear stories of strength and hope at this challenging time. This wasn't only the story of a missing soldier, it was also the story of his brother getting married and the angst and turmoil of tumultuous conflicting emotions, all together. For me it started this new routine of so many requests to tell the story – radio and television interviews, many missions coming to Israel, and Zoom requests from around the world. I found it significantly easier talking to a screen than in person. The first *shiur* I gave at Midreshet HaRova, I spoke to the whole school, live-streamed as a Mizrahi event. It was the first live one, the girls were singing "*esa einai*," and it was very emotional for me as I came in. It was probably the hardest *shiur* I have ever given, I couldn't even look at the camera. But it became a little easier.



Yonatan and Galya's wedding.

My number one priority is obviously to be present for my wife and family as we navigate these uncharted and challenging times together. My amazing wife Shelley has a very strong connection to Daniel and was in constant daily contact with him despite his rigorous years in the army. Secondly, there have been so many requests and I couldn't cope with the volume of requests to speak. Rabbi Mirvis, Deputy CEO, has been running things at Mizrahi and I am doing as much as I can. He has helped me screen the interviews as well, as I can only deal with so much. I am not traveling overseas right now, and am trying to work as much as possible from home. I am trying to balance being present for those closest to me with and giving *chizuk* wherever I can to others. The new normal for me is finding a sense of routine, making sure I am taking care of myself and my family, while trying to give *chizuk* as much as I can.

**Shira:** One thing that I realized is that talking and telling our story brings people hope. We continued, we had a wedding. It's one of thousands of stories in Jewish history that captures who our people are. This is how we continue. Telling the story, meeting people who want to know what happened and feel close – it gives a lot of *chizuk*. Not only saying the horrible things that have happened, but also the light, the hope that has come out of it. It's a reminder that there is still light in this horrible situation. For me, that is who the Jewish people are. This is in our DNA.

**RDP:** Yonatan and Daniel grew up in the Mizrahi community in South Africa. After two days of *Yom Tov*, the community received the news that these boys who grew up in the community and who had fought on Shemini Atzeret – that one was injured and one was missing. Thousands turned out the next evening for a communal *tefillah* in the same *shul* where both boys had their Bar Mitzvah celebrations and where I had served as community rabbi. The Chief Rabbi told the story and there was a tremendous feeling of the South African Jewish community rallying together. Our incredible community in Yad Binyamin has done the same, as have so many of our friends and partners connected to World Mizrahi from across the globe. We are tremendously grateful for the outpouring of love, support and *tefillot* at this time. As we navigate tempestuous waters, this support gives us the strength we need to keep pushing through and to give strength to others. We are tremendously thankful for all the ongoing prayers, love and support. ■

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**MIZRACHI**

# A GLOBAL RESPONSE

**Whether in Israel or around the world,  
World Mizrahi and its branches have been leading  
our community's response to the war.**



**Rabbanit Tali Harris, a Mizrahi shlichah to the UK, speaking at a Mizrahi UK event "You Are Not Alone", in Finchley United Synagogue, London.**



**Mizrahi-JLIC students in Israel delivering supplies to soldiers.**





**Mizrachi Canada arranged for a women's global tefillah and challah bake, held in Efrat and streamed live around the world.**



**Mizrachi Netherlands organized a tefillah in Amsterdam, davening for the success of the IDF and return of our hostages.**



**Mizrachi-JLIC students volunteering on a farm in the south of Israel.**



**Rabbi Jerry Isenberg from Religious Zionists of Chicago together with a Mizrachi mission, dancing with IDF soldiers.**



**Gael Grunewald, Mizrachi's representative as head of the Education Department of the World Zionist Organization, on a speaking tour in France, telling the story of the war and galvanizing support for Israel.**



**Mizrachi Canada arranged for 50 families whose father/husband are in the army to receive food for Shabbat.**

# A Gift of Hundreds and Hundreds of Years

Rabbi Shlomo Weitzen

*On the morning of the attack, a critical line of defense against Hamas were the 'kitot konenut', the local security teams, in each of the many kibbutzim. In Kerem Shalom, a mixed religious and secular kibbutz, the 200 residents were saved by the brave actions of their kitat konenut. Tragically, two members of the team were killed. Rabbi Shlomo Weitzen's words, in memory of his son Amichai, moved the nation, providing deeply powerful chizuk just days after the tragedy.*

I am the father of Amichai Weitzen, who has lived in Kerem Shalom for six years. On Shabbat morning the siren sounded. The terrorists began to attack the settlement, and the people of the alert squad immediately jumped and fought like lions for six full hours.

They fought, and our son Amichai fought along with them. Amichai and his friend Yedidya – both originally from the settlement of Psagot, a settlement in which I serve as a rabbi – fell in this battle.

While Amichai left us at the age of 33, on the last day of his life he received as a gift many, many more years of life. He saved all the families of the village of Kerem Shalom. One cannot know how many years of life he saved. All of these years – may all of his friends and all of his families live many more years – and all the years of all their descendants, and all descendants of their descendants!

We were blessed with a precious son who is now 33 years old – plus hundreds of hundreds of years!

We are now in a time of war. Our enemies have wounded us and hurt us. But we feel that there is so much strength, strength to cope!

We thought, perhaps, that we were weak and had no strength. But suddenly it became crystal clear: we have great powers! We fight like lions! We are wounded, but like a wounded lion, we shall rise! We will once again find strength and joy!

I call on everyone to believe in our power, to believe in our strength. We will emerge from these painful hours far greater than when we entered them.

War can sometimes do what other days cannot. We do not want war, but if we are destined for war – the war will deliver us anew! A nation is created! A people is reborn!

We will start with a new foot, the right foot, after we defeat these savage enemies. For we now understand who we were dealing with.

All around me, I see – everyone is waking up! There is so much strength!

To all the security forces, to all the fighters, I say: Be strong! Have no fear! Do not worry! For if we are afraid – we will suffer even more. Due to your bravery, the entire world will finally see what really lies within our special nation.

And we send you our blessing: We gave our most precious gift for the People of



Amichai Weitzen hy" d (PHOTO: COURTESY)

Israel. We pray that all of you will return in peace and health, and that we will soon see better times.



**Rabbi Shlomo Weitzen**  
is the Rav of Psagot and a  
Ra"m at Yeshivat Beit El.

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# Reflections from a Mizrachi Mission to Israel

*In partnership with RCA and YU-RIETS*

## Rabbi Elazar Muskin

Soon after the horror of October 7, the idea of creating rabbinic solidarity missions began to surface. Three weeks into the war, we were on our way.

When we arrived at the ElAl counter at LAX, the Israeli security agent robotically asked, “What is the purpose of your trip?” When we said we were LA rabbis traveling to Israel for a rabbinic mission of support, her demeanor quickly changed, and she demonstratively thanked us for traveling at this perilous time. Throughout our trip, we were greeted with warmth and gratitude. Israelis, no matter their religious inclination or political view, wanted us to know that our presence was deeply appreciated.

The mission began at the Mizrachi office in Jerusalem. There we heard an emotional and inspiring address from Rabbi Doron Perez, head of World Mizrachi. It was Rabbi Perez’s first time at the office since the war began. He described his personal challenge of sending two sons into battle on the first day of the war. His son Yonatan was shot in the leg, but thank G-d, the bullet miraculously did not cause major damage. Yonatan was able to proceed as planned with his wedding the following week.

However, life did not resume as planned for Rabbi Perez’s other son. Daniel and his tank crew fought the terrorists until their tank was captured by Hamas. When the IDF finally recovered the disabled tank, they found one dead soldier inside, without a trace of Daniel or his fellow crew members. For the first two weeks of the war, Daniel was classified as “missing in action.” Eventually, the family was informed by the IDF that they had sufficient evidence to change Daniel’s status from “missing in action” to “captive in Gaza.” This news has given the family renewed hope that Daniel is alive, but at

the same time, the terrible pain of having a child in captivity.

Most moving was hearing how Yonatan was determined to return to battle as soon as possible. Rabbi Perez explained that when a soldier’s sibling is wounded, taken captive, or listed as MIA, the army does not allow the soldier to return to the army without his parents’ written consent.

The last thing a parent in this situation wants is to put another child in harm’s way. Yonatan, however, insisted that his parents allow him to continue serving, arguing that they themselves taught him to always put the needs of the Jewish people above all else. Rabbi Perez and his wife signed the form.

We encountered this very reaction on our visit to Kibbutz Zikim at the Gaza border. Today, the *kibbutz* residents have been evacuated, except for a skeleton crew overseeing security and the daily milking of the *kibbutz* cows. We met a very young looking 70-year-old, Kobi, who is considered the hero who saved the *kibbutz*. On that fateful morning, he awoke to unusual noise outside and immediately summoned his security team to join him in checking the perimeter of the *kibbutz*. At first, he thought the terrorists driving up in a minibus were IDF soldiers. When they pointed an RPG at him, he quickly realized they were terrorists and instinctively killed four, causing the remainder to retreat. Although it was clear to all that he saved his *kibbutz*, he refused to take any credit.

When I asked Kobi if he planned to return with his family after the war, he responded, “Yes, this is my home, and I will not abandon it.” He also admitted that he still lives with images in his head of the terrorists trying to penetrate the *kibbutz*. It will take some time, he told us, before he recovers, but he has every intention to overcome those haunting memories. He is

determined to recreate light in the midst of darkness.

In Ofakim, we visited the Ohayun family, who tragically lost their father, Moshe, and an 18-year-old son, Eliad, who were killed on Simchat Torah morning while trying to open the neighborhood shelters that were locked because no one dreamed they would ever be needed. Moshe’s sister took us on a walk near their home, to see exactly where Moshe and Eliad encountered the terrorists.

Security cameras showed that Moshe was able to kill the leader of the terrorists before he and Eliad were fatally wounded. 44 citizens of Ofakim paid the ultimate price, but without their heroic battle against the terrorists, many more innocent civilians would have been killed.

The Ohayun family is determined to memorialize their father and son as symbols of Israel’s strength. They, and all of Israel, will bring light to illuminate the darkness.



**Rabbi Elazar Muskin**  
is senior rabbi of Young Israel of Century City in Los Angeles, and a past president of the Rabbinical Council of America.

# יחד ננצח



## BRING A SOLIDARITY MISSION TO ISRAEL WITH WORLD MIZRACHI

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WORLD MOVEMENT

# WORLD MIZRACHI DELEGATIONS TO ISRAEL

Since the outbreak of the war, World Mizrachi has been involved in numerous missions of rabbis and lay leaders from around the world to Israel. Through the coming weeks, we are working on more than 40 missions. If you wish to plan a mission, please contact Ilan Frydman at ilan@mizrachi.org.



A mission in conjunction with RCA and YU-RIETS meeting with soldiers on base, together with Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon.



Meeting with hospital staff and visiting injured soldiers at Soroka Hospital. (PHOTO: KRIFKIND PHOTOGRAPHY)



Hearing stories of the atrocities from the International Spokesperson for the police. (PHOTO: KRIFKIND PHOTOGRAPHY)



The Mizrachi South Africa mission met with World Mizrachi leadership.



The Yeshiva University Operation Torah Shield III mission hearing from Rabbi Doron Perez.



Leading rabbis from Germany and Austria on a Mizrachi/ORD mission met with Chief Rabbi David Lau and joined him for a special visit and tefillah at the Kotel.



Rabbinic leadership from Germany and Austria met with Rabbi Doron Perez and Rabbi Yechiel Wasserman at World Mizrahi Headquarters.



Volunteering at an army supply distribution center by the Mizrahi-Midreshet HaRova mission, including graduates and parents of the Midrasha.



Deputy CEO Rabbi Danny Mirvis speaking to an RCA and YU-RIETS mission.



A mission hearing from the security team in Kibbutz Zikim, telling their story of what happened on October 7th.



The Kehilath Jeshurun mission at the site of the police station which was overrun by terrorists on October 7th in Sderot, and which was later demolished.



Visiting the Shura base, learning about the *chesed shel emet* with Mizrahi's Rabbis Binyamin Zimmerman and Bentzi Mann (PHOTO: KRIFKIND PHOTOGRAPHY)



Meeting with family members of hostages at the Bring Them Home Now Headquarters in Tel Aviv. (PHOTO: KRIFKIND PHOTOGRAPHY)



A mission from South Africa with Mrs. Miriam Peretz outside a shiva house in Ramat Beit Shemesh.

# A Soldier's Journal: The First Shabbat in the War

Dvir Sassi

All day Friday we trained and did exercises that were different from normal training. This time we understood the significance of the moment. We were motivated, and we didn't let the sun get us down. We didn't need to say much to each other; we were all here for one purpose.

Our daily schedule is very busy, from morning to night - training, training, and more training. Don't get me wrong, I'm not complaining; everyone here is working with joy and a smile.

My beloved Shoham spoiled the entire company with *challah* and *schnitzel* that made us all feel at home. The gesture lifted our morale and reminded everyone of the families for whom we are fighting.

Before Shabbat, I called my parents to see how they were doing, to get updates on my father from the hospital, and just to talk and hear their voices for a few moments. My father guided me on how to keep Shabbat during a time of war and answered all of my *halachic* questions, even as he was lying in bed in the hospital.

On Friday night we had a Carlebach *davening*, and almost the entire company joined us. You should have heard all of *Am Yisrael*, including the *chilonim*, the Tel Avivians and left-wing *kibbutzniks*, singing *Lecha Dodi* together and shouting *niggunim* at the top of their lungs. Our enemy must see this unity - and so must our leadership.

I am not exaggerating by saying that the Friday night *tefillot* here in the field with all those wearing uniforms suffused with purpose were even loftier than the *tefillot* on Yom Kippur at Yeshivat Sderot!

Shabbat morning. Exactly a week ago, my father went to battle in the streets of Sderot and was

wounded, and the city was overwhelmed with horrific scenes and terrible news. But we must stand up and take revenge.

I want to strengthen the leadership of our city, Mayor Alon Davidi and his deputy, Elad Kalimi. Over the last week, I've heard from everyone about the holy work they are doing around the clock to evacuate residents, visit the wounded and to go to cemeteries to honor the fallen. Alon and Elad, you are our role models.

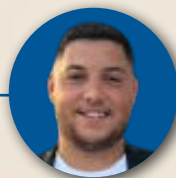
Even on Shabbat, we continue to train, to get comfortable with the armored vehicles and tanks that are assigned to our company and to arrange the equipment to the best of our ability.

From conversations with our company's officers, we realize that we are heading into a long campaign of several months. No problem - we are ready.

I have just one request from all of you before I finish. Preserve this unity, if not for you then for the soldiers in the field. This unity is the fuel that will take us through this war.

Don't forget: only with unity and with strength will we win.

● This essay was originally published in Hebrew in *Makor Rishon*.



**Dvir Sassi**  
is a reserve soldier in the Harel Brigade.



## Strengthening Olim in Times of Crisis

Nefesh B'Nefesh is staying focused on its responsibilities and unique capabilities committing our efforts to three main areas:

**Relief for Olim** in distress, **support** for our **Lone Soldiers** and their **families**, and **recruitment** and **coordination** of **volunteer physicians** to bolster Israel's national health care system.



**For more information about these initiatives:  
[WWW.NBN.ORG.IL/WAR-EFFORTS](http://WWW.NBN.ORG.IL/WAR-EFFORTS)**

# Rising Together: A Journey of Hope and Healing

with Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon's Sulamot and La'Ofek Organizations,  
Guided by CEO Rabbi Eli Taragin



*Since the war began, Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon, founder of nonprofits 'Sulamot' and 'La'Ofek,' and CEO Rabbi Eli Taragin, have been beacons of hope amidst a nation's challenges. They are lighting the way at a time of immense challenges for our nation, impacting the narrative of this unprecedented war, offering hope to IDF soldiers on Israel's frontline, their families, and the displaced communities who have lost almost everything. Their story, a tapestry woven by thousands of global partners, is one of positive changes for Am Yisrael in this time of adversity.*

## Rabbi Eli, please share the story behind the mobilization of Sulamot and La'Ofek immediately after Simchat Torah?

**Rabbi Eli Taragin:** As soon as Simchat Torah ended, Rav Rimon and I said we had to activate what we term in Hebrew as "צו 8 אֲזָרָה" – civilians enlisting themselves to support the war effort. *Halachic* questions to Rav Rimon were already pouring in on Simchat Torah itself, and our staff was being inundated with calls from soldiers and family members reporting the inadequate supply of essential protective equipment. Even though we immediately understood that this war was unlike any other, we also knew the drill from past emergency situations. An emergency relief fund for SOS needs was immediately established, funds that would be the difference between life and death. But in the same breath we also knew that we needed to already plan for "the day after" and we knew that we could count on the greater Jewish community to make it happen.

## What are the main focuses of your organization's operation during these critical times?

Recognizing significant shortages in equipment at the beginning of the conflict due to an unprecedented number of reservists, we established a comprehensive logistics center. This center efficiently processed requests from hundreds of units in the field, addressing needs ranging from winter gear to tactical equipment.

We provided vital equipment to over 35,000 soldiers within the first month of fighting. The response has been overwhelming, with soldiers expressing gratitude not just for the equipment but for the profound sense of support they feel from Jews worldwide. One commander sent me a message, "your equipment is filled with *ruach* – the spirit of the Jewish people – and that's what keeps us strong."

Understandably, our focus is two-fold, aiding the soldiers through our "Emergency Relief Campaign" and supporting affected communities through our "Atufim" program.

## Amidst the chaos and devastation, please share an uplifting moment for Sulamot and La'Ofek.

One powerful moment that most resonates, and I know will stay with me, was when we successfully provided over 5,000 ceramic bullet-proof vests to soldiers across the country, in collaboration with the IDF. The journey to secure these life-saving vests was a testament to the collective spirit of our community and the urgency of *Am Yisrael* all around the world to assist their brothers and sisters in uniform.

Thousands of people rallied to donate millions of dollars in order to protect the lives of our IDF soldiers. We worked around the clock to overcome logistical and bureaucratic hurdles, in order to procure the vests and deliver them to the soldiers quickly. When the shipment of vests finally arrived, on Erev Shabbat, it was an emotional milestone for everyone involved. Witnessing the tangible impact of our collective efforts brought a sense of accomplishment and great relief and became a reminder that, even in challenging times, unity and shared purpose can achieve remarkable outcomes.



## Tell us more about the “Atufim” program and assistance provided to evacuees from the North and South.

Our “Atufim” program, in partnership with World Mizrahi, provides aid to evacuees from both the North and the South. The purpose of the program is not only to address the physical needs of these families but just as importantly give encouragement and *chizuk* on a communal level. These are tight-knit communities that have experienced trauma on a personal level, and also in ways that have left their community feeling broken.

Atufim offers several branches of assistance.

### 1. Employment assistance:

Atufim offers assistance in finding work for people who have been displaced from their homes and are currently without a livelihood. As an organization we have had experience with this most important task. La’Ofek’s “JobKatif” project helped thousands of displaced families from Gush Katif in 2005 find work, transforming an 85% unemployment rate into an 88% employment rate. We have once again stepped up to assist a similarly displaced population through Atufim.

Since we started the Atufim program over 1,000 evacuee applications have already been received and our staff is working tirelessly to match them with employers.

### 2. Adopt-a-Community:

The Atufim program recognizes the necessity to strengthen the communities, both in the short-term and to ensure the stability and unity in the long-term. The goal is for the communities to eventually return back home. In that vein, the Atufim program has “adopted” five communities to date: Netiv HaAsara, Kibbutz Zikim, Moshav Yachini, Shokeda, and Tzochar, each with 500–900 individuals. In order to connect and strategize, I personally meet with the leadership of the community to understand their unique needs because their needs and goals – while all urgent – vary greatly. Atufim is dedicated to SOS needs (purchase of equipment, medicines), assisting families that have been financially affected, and integration of programming that will help strengthen the social, educational and community fabric. We have turned to Jewish communities worldwide to adopt these communities and assist in various ways.

### 3. Education:

Thanks to Sulamot’s expertise in the educational field, the Ministry of Education asked the organization to help establish a system of training and learning in the evacuees’ centers. Sulamot sends rabbis, lecturers and instructors to these centers to give uplifting talks and experiential lessons to children, youth and parents. This empowers and strengthens their spirits in these most challenging days.

## The global response to your initiatives has been remarkable. How has the partnership with World Mizrahi and the Tzevet Perez Campaign contributed to your projects?

We are immensely grateful to all our partners worldwide, especially to the World Mizrahi movement. The partnership has been crucial in funding life-saving equipment for IDF soldiers, adopting southern communities, aiding evacuees, and extending educational support. Together, we stand united, making a significant impact in the lives of those affected.

None of this would have been possible without the support of individuals and communities worldwide, which have given us the ability to contribute material needs where they are needed and more crucially is instilling a sense of unity and strength for the greater *Am Yisrael*. This is our opportunity to embrace our brothers and sisters, and it is touching to see how so many are rallying together with us to bring hope and strength to *Am Yisrael*.

Our message is clear: when we are united, we are stronger. Together, we can make a lasting impact and demonstrate the resilience of *Am Yisrael*.

## For those ready to contribute, where can they donate to support these ongoing efforts?

To contribute and be a vital partner in this ongoing effort, please visit [jgive.com/new/en/usd/donation-targets/113374](http://jgive.com/new/en/usd/donation-targets/113374) or email our development department at [inbar@sulamot.org](mailto:inbar@sulamot.org). Your support is crucial, and every donation contributes to healing and rebuilding.

Thank you for standing with us in this sacred mission.



# Olim Giving Back to Israel

## Wingz Israel

In July 2022, we made *Aliyah* from North Hollywood, California. Our restaurant, Wingz Israel in Giv'at Shmuel, embodies our dedication to this country. Recently, we prepared meals for 500 soldiers in four hours, a task surpassing our large event catering in Los Angeles. In five days, we served over 6475 meals, collaborating with organizations like Leket Israel to aid soldiers and other Israelis.

The soldiers' gratitude and the community's willingness to volunteer have been overwhelming, reinforcing our love for Israel and its unique unity. Despite the hardships caused by the pandemic and wars, we remain committed to our new home. These challenges are minor compared to Israel's collective experiences, and we contribute positively where we can. Our eagerness for the official opening of our restaurant grows, as we no longer feel like outsiders, but proud members of the Israeli community.

Our *Aliyah* was a heartfelt choice, influenced by our desire to unite with our fellow Jewish family in Israel. With our four sons, we felt compelled to return to our ancestral land. Despite facing conflicts earlier than expected and enduring difficulties, our commitment to Israel is firm. We chose to stay in Israel, considering the implications for the Jewish future and the values we wish to instill in our children, rather than seeking temporary safety elsewhere. Through all challenges, our spirit for Israel stays strong: *Am Yisrael Chai* forever!



## Candy Corner Israel

In 2009, we made *Aliyah* from Silver Spring, Maryland, to Israel with our three children, drawn by a desire for a closer connection to our homeland and a more spiritual Jewish lifestyle. We moved to Chashmona'im, which proved to be a welcoming community that eased our *Aliyah* process, surrounded by families who had shared similar journeys. My venture, Candy Corner Israel, aims to lessen the sense of distance for Israelis from their overseas family by delivering sweets with a touch of love.

In the initial week of the war, we included a "בְּאַהֲבָה" (with love) teddy bear with every order. Our "Sweets for Soldiers" campaign enables global sponsors to send candy platters to Israeli soldiers. We have delivered over 180 platters to army bases throughout Israel, each with a personal message from its sponsor, bringing joy to the soldiers. A particularly touching moment was when a family from Sderot who were displaced and are temporarily staying in a Jerusalem hotel, was planning their daughter's Bat Mitzvah. The events community came together to create a memorable party for this special family. Along with cakes, cookies, and other dessert items sponsored by other small businesses, we were fortunate to have the opportunity to donate a full candy buffet to help sweeten their *simcha*.



# BROTHERS IN LIFE, BROTHERS IN DEATH

On October 7th, brothers Noam and Yishai Slotki were killed as they defended Kibbutz Alumim from the Hamas onslaught. Their parents, Rabbi Shmuel and Tali Slotki, who had served as Torah MiTzion shlichim in Cleveland before returning to Israel, now live in Ramot. Their message of pride, hope, and unity in the face of tragedy has given strength to a nation in mourning.

**W**ith Israeli flags in their hands, hundreds of people gathered on the streets of Ramot, Yerushalayim, to pay their respects to Noam and Yishai Slotki on their final journey. The two brothers were killed defending Kibbutz Alumim. On the streets and at their funeral there were “Charedim, dati'im and chilonim, all of whom felt it was important to show their support, to hug our family, to say *Am Yisrael Chai*,” says Rabbi Shmuel Slotki, the bereaved father.

Rabbi Shmuel and Tali Slotki, parents to seven children, have been married for 33 years. On Simchat Torah, Noam (31) and Yishai (24) were at home in Be'er Sheva, each married with one child. Rabbi Shmuel and Tali were at a Shabbaton for prospective converts in Kfar Etzion, where, on Simchat Torah, they looked on as reserve soldiers received the call to immediately race to the Gaza border. Only after Shabbat did they learn that Noam and Yishai were missing. “Initially, we thought they just weren't responding, as it was a chaotic situation and their phones were off, but after a while the situation started to become clearer.”

When the sirens began blaring that morning in Be'er Sheva, Noam and Yishai heard from neighbors what was happening near Gaza. Yishai immediately jumped into his reservist gear and headed towards Gaza. A few minutes later, Noam decided to go too, and they met up on the way, getting into the same car. At 10:30, Noam's nervous wife determined the location of his phone; Noam was outside of Kibbutz Alumim, a religious *kibbutz*, only a few hundred meters from the Gaza border. During the *shiva*, the Slotkis would be shown actual CCTV footage documenting their sons' bravery in battle. “You see them arrive outside the *kibbutz* and park their car next to six vehicles that are all riddled with bullet holes, one even had been hit by an RPG. They knew full well what they were consciously getting themselves into but knew it's what they had to do. They got out of the car, advancing towards the enemy with their guns firing.”

Rabbi Slotki has served as a community rabbi for decades, in Ein HaNatziv and in Ramot, and serves as a reservist for the army Rabbinate. Right after Shabbat, he was called up to the Shura base, where the final *chessed shel emet* for those killed is performed by the army. “When I saw the sheer numbers of the dead being brought in, it began to dawn on me that it would only be a matter of time before they identified the bodies of Noam and Yishai. I wasn't yet *halachically* an *onen* as I didn't know for sure they had been killed. Those involved directly with identifying bodies asked me, ‘If we identify one son, but have not yet identified the second son, would you like us to inform you or not?’ On the one hand we do not delay a burial, but on the other hand, we do so if it is for the honor of the deceased. I weighed it up and felt that if it was going to be the situation, the greatest honor for them would be to be buried



Yishai and Noam Slotki hy"d  
(PHOTO: MEIR LAVI)



Rabbi Shmuel and Tali Slotki  
(PHOTO: NAAMA GREENBAUM)

together. I didn't know when I was asked the question that this was the actual situation. Noam had been identified early on, but it took a few days until they identified Yishai with certainty. They informed us of the death of both of them, and we buried them together that night on Har Herzl.”

This is not the first time Tali has suffered searing loss. Her brother Tziki was killed in 2002 when an army vehicle overturned. “My parents were very strong when that happened. There had been many mistakes that led to the accident – the driver was going too fast, talking on the phone, and other mistakes. My parents channeled their mourning into action, leaving no stone unturned to make sure that protocols would change, ensuring it would never happen again. My remaining siblings and my parents remained strong and united together. I now know that we, as our own family with our own children, need to find that strength together too.”

“One of the things we are trying to do following this tragedy is to move societal discourse in a different direction,” says Rabbi Slotki. “Many people see the sacrifices of Yishai, Noam and all the other fallen heroes as exemplifying the unity and mutual responsibility that we need as a society, and we want to make this more concrete. We, and many of the families of the fallen, want to see a new social contract in Israel, almost like a second version of the Declaration of Independence, but updated for 2023, that will last us another 75 years. We are seeing remarkable things, from the sacrifice of the fallen to the unity of the hundreds of thousands of reservists. We saw it in the crowd and the diversity of those who came to the funeral and *shiva*.”

“The actions of Yishai and Noam, and all those who fell that day, prevented Hamas from fulfilling their full plan. They had intended to get to Ashkelon and Be'er Sheva, and the brave fallen prevented that. Not only did they save Israel physically from even worse destruction, but their sacrifice and memory can be a turning point for Israeli society. It revealed something deep about Israeli society that had been overlooked for too long, and which we can hopefully maintain long after this war.”

● Based on an article originally published in *Makor Rishon*. Translated by Rabbi Aron White.

# JEW'S with VIEWS

We asked five accomplished Jews from around the world: In these challenging times, what is one moment that has given you inspiration?



## Rabbi Tzvi Wohlgelernter

When Rav Meir Shapiro started the *daf yomi*, he had a dream. Conceptually it is very simple – all the Jewish people united in learning the same *daf* everyday no matter what. The success of *daf yomi* has proven itself many times, however personally I never fully appreciated it until now.

Amidst all the chaos of war in our base in the south I had the great privilege of making a *siyum* on Masechet Kiddushin (and Seder Nashim) with a sponsored BBQ *seudat mitzvah* for over 100 soldiers. The joy of celebration of Torah cast a great light in the darkness we find ourselves in. It was particularly inspirational that we finished a Masechet which is all about a Jewish couple choosing to build a home together and continue the chain of the Jewish people.

This *siyum* followed the wedding of two soldiers on our base in a simple, yet moving *chuppah*. This event imbued in us an even greater appreciation of *Am Yisrael* and *Torat Yisrael*. The spirit of the Jewish people is rock hard. Needless to say once the copies of Bava Kama came out they were quickly snatched up by soldiers hungry for more Torah.

Rabbi Tzvi Wohlgelernter works for Mizrachi-JLIC at Givat Shmuel. He is currently serving as a reservist on an IDF base in the south of Israel.



## Orit Samuels

A moment that has given me inspiration during these challenging times (I have many in mind) is from last week, when I was helping with Mizrachi's global women's Unity, Song, Tefillah and Hafrashat Challah event in Efrat. A lot of preparation comes with these sorts of events that sometimes you don't enjoy the moment. It's like your own event and you want everything to turn out just right.

As the lights turned on, cameras were all on me, I stood on the stage and the producer gave me a thumbs-up that the event is now live streaming. There were over 400 women from around the globe and close to 400 women who came in person.

I stood there in awe, almost in tears as one who put so much energy in a single initiative, finally saw all the pieces come together, it was a moment of gratitude. I looked around and saw the amount of women that came together from all walks of life and all parts of the world **בְּאִישׁ אֶחָד בְּלֵב אֶחָד**.

I felt the need to say a **שְׁחִיבְנוּ** and so I did.

During these challenging times, when a single day that goes by feels like a year, when at nights it is hard to sleep and breathe, when we worry about our soldiers, those murdered, wounded and of course all of our brothers and sisters taken hostage, it is moments like this that inspire and give us hope. It is the sense of unity that will keep us together and give us strength.

**"אֶחֱיוֹנוּ כֹּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל הַנְּתוּנִים בְּצָרָה, בְּצָרָה וּבְשִׁבְיָה..."**

Orit Samuels lives in Efrat, having made Aliyah from LA in 1994. She is the program director for Yachad at Camp Ennismore, and is Israel Project Manager on behalf of Mizrachi Canada.



## Rabbi Bentzi Mann

In many past wars, I have found myself on the giving side – writing letters and sending care packages to soldiers. I sometimes wondered to myself: “Do these really go anywhere and make any difference?”

This war, I find myself on the receiving side, and I see just how much they do matter! Working in my role in the army is emotionally very taxing, and letters and *chizuk* really means a tremendous amount.

Sometimes the gifts are really perfect. Last week when I returned home I took out my guitar to play a little, and my three-year-old son Lavi broke my guitar pick. The next day, I was showing a group around our base, showing the *avodat haKodesh* that we do, and at the end one of the group came over to give me some tokens of appreciation – including a new guitar pick!

*Rabbi Bentzi Mann is the director of Mizrahi's Schools Department. He serves in the IDF, in the unit of the Rabbanut that identifies and prepares the deceased for burial.*



## Noa Lewis

I take a lot of inspiration from the words at the beginning of *shacharit*:

הַרְנִי מִקִּבֵּל עַל עֲצָמֵי מַצּוֹת עֵשָׂה  
שֶׁל וְאַהֲבַת לְרַעְךָ כְּמוֹךָ.

Every day, again and again, it gives me a goal for the day, inspiration for the day. What does Hashem want from me – when I am scared, worried about soldiers, when I am with people who are staying in hotels instead of their homes?

It always comes back: Hashem wants us to love our fellow person. When we love *Am Yisrael*, it is an expression of our love from Hashem, and brings us closer to the *geulah*.

*Noa Lewis is the CEO of ECHAD, and director of OLAH, a program for Jewish women in Europe.*



## Ari Bar-Shain

I am currently serving down South in an area that was heavily attacked on Shabbat over a month ago. The *beit kneset* where I am was sprayed with bullets during the massacre.

There is one *sefer* on the shelves that was pierced by a bullet, and the bullet ripped through the spine until it stopped on a page in the middle of the *sefer*. Upon opening the book, *Likutei Moharan*, to that very page (רפב), it seemed like Hashem was trying to send *Am Yisrael* a pertinent message.

The text reads: “Know that you must judge everyone favorably, even if they are evil, you must find within them something good.” (translated from Hebrew)

Before the war, our nation was torn apart internally. Political and social differences caused much animosity and there was name-calling. With the start of the war, however, it completely disappeared. The *achdut* has been tremendous.

From a group of *Charedim* in Meah Shearim bringing dozens of pairs of *tzitzit* to base, to secular Jews in Tel Aviv inviting rabbis to their homes to *kasher* their kitchens in order to cook kosher food for soldiers, to a Druze family driving hours to visit us and give us care packages, we feel like all of Israel is in this together. We put our differences aside, recognize that everyone has good inside them, and together, with Hashem's help, will win this war and return to a world of peace and unity.

*Ari Bar-Shain is a Platoon Commander in the IDF, currently serving in the south of Israel. He is a current participant in the Mizrahi Musmachim program, and an alumnus of Mizrahi's Shalhevet program.*

# ליזכרם

**On October 7th, the Hamas attacks on Israel killed more Jews than on any single day since the Holocaust. From babies to grandmothers, from religious to secular, men, women and children. May their neshamot have an aliya, and their memories be a blessing.**

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# From Darkness will Spring forth Light

*Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook zt"l*

*As we grapple with the most horrific slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust, we can find comfort by turning to the great Jews who came before us. On August 24, 1929, Arab rioters massacred 69 Jews and maimed scores of others in Chevron, sending shock waves through the Jewish community worldwide. Personally shattered by the massacre, Rav Kook, the chief rabbi of the Yishuv, wrote the following powerful words of encouragement.*

**T**hat holy spark of the foundations of redemption, from the holiness of the name of *Mashiach*, which was hidden in the depths since the *Beit HaMikdash* was destroyed and we were exiled from our Land, has begun to burn from under the heaps of the ashes of our bitter exile. Little by little, this holy spark began to ignite through those who established the Old *Yishuv*, and more recently it began to grow in strength in a practical way through the *Chibbat Zion* movement that preceded modern Zionism.

And the spirit of Hashem which is true for all eternity, remembering the kindness of our forefathers and the promise to bring a redeemer to their descendants, has suffused all the physical and spiritual aspects of this holy building up of the Land, and it has spread through all the communities of *Knesset Yisrael* through the help of the Zionist movement. All of this is from Hashem, for the World War brought great geopolitical changes, leading to Great Britain's conquest of the Land and its assumption of the mandate for the Holy Land, whereupon Balfour's declaration gave the political seal of approval to the return of our children to their borders.

These signs of the great times in which we live are a testimony to every believing Jew that Hashem, as a Shepherd who cares for His flock, is forming us once

again into a nation in the inheritance of our fathers, as the days of old. But these great signs, which must shine with all of their brightness and clarity, have faded through sleight of hand.

The holy foundations of this great vision possess a hidden spark of the light of *Mashiach*, the redeemer who is revealed, then hidden, and then revealed once more. For this reason, the process of revitalizing the nation and expanding Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel goes through many ups and downs. Every *yeridah*, every descent in this process, is a hiding of the redeemer, and every ascent, every *aliyah* which follows it, is an aspect of his revelation.

And all those who have followed the trajectory of the *Yishuv*, from its beginning until today, can clearly see that from every descent we have suffered there sprouted afterwards a far greater ascent and development. From every crisis there springs a great leap forwards...

It is clear that in proportion to this "covering" [of the light of redemption], so will be the greatness of the light that is revealed, the light that is buried under this great pile of darkness, to freedom from imprisonment. This time we hope that the force which binds all of Israel in every corner of the exile to the building up of the Land of Israel will increase and grow stronger. The love of holiness, which binds our souls

to the Land of our desire, will multiply by remembering the holy, pure and innocent blood that was spilled by evil murderers...

We are certain that from this terrible wound there will sprout a healing for the awful sickness of forgetting the name of G-d, the distraction that has plagued some of the groups working to build the Land. The foundational goal and higher purpose of gathering the people of Israel to its beloved Land is that we will once again, as in the days of old, carry the torch of holiness in all its purity before the nations of the world, to actualize the hidden holiness that lies in the inner soul of the nation in all its glory. This holiness will not be revealed unless all of our efforts are in the name of Hashem, the G-d of Israel, which is revealed by living lives of holiness in the light of His Torah which will light up the darkness of the world and through which the glory of redemption will be revealed...

In the end, the community of Israel will awaken – both those who are settling the Land and those in the Diaspora who are working to build the Land – to seek the soul of the rebirth of the nation, its redemptive secret, which is hidden in the depths of the present but which is the driving spirit of our people's urge to welcome the renewal of our glorious future...

● *Shuvu L'Vitzaron, Ma'amarei Ra'ayah, 360-362. Translated by Rabbi Elie Mischel.*





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# This Land Is Our Land!

## בְּיָמֵינוּ הָאֵלֹהִים בְּזָמַן הַזֶּה

### Rabbi Reuven Taragin

**W**hen Antiochus demanded that the Maccabees cede territory to him, Shimon HaMaccabi responded: “We have not taken a foreign land; we do not hold the property of others. Rather, the land is our ancestral inheritance taken from us lawlessly. When G-d gave us the strength, we returned it to ourselves” (Maccabees 1 15:33-34).

We, like Shimon, face similar challenges to our right to the Land of Israel. Let’s study his response.

#### Where it began

Hashem’s first words to the first Jew direct him to move to Israel. Though Avraham’s religious quest and commitment began decades earlier, the Torah skips over those stories and begins with his move to Israel. Judaism begins with the arrival of the first Jew in Israel.

Throughout Avraham’s life, Hashem continuously promises him and his children the land as their inheritance. This is why Avraham insists that Yitzchak’s wife move to Canaan (Rashbam, Bereishit 24:7). He understood that Hashem did not want Yitzchak to leave the Promised Land.

After Ya’akov and his family were forced to leave the Land, the rest of the Torah is about their struggle to return and settle there.

The return from the Babylonian exile and the Maccabean struggle for independence reinforced the eternal nature of our relationship with the Holy Land. Like our Avot, even after being removed from the Land, we continued returning to it. This is when and why the land became known as the “Land of Israel.”

#### Nachalat Avoteinu

Though we were exiled and others took control of our land, it remained ours because it is our ancestral inheritance. When we were still slaves in Egypt, Hashem said: “I have given the land to you as an inheritance” (Shemot 6:5). Even before arriving in Israel, the Jewish people already owned it (Bava Batra 117). This is

why we own the Land of Israel even when we are in exile (Tosafot, Bava Batra 44b). Even when conquered by others, the Land continues to be associated with us (*Shu”t Maharam* 536).

#### When G-d gives us strength

Ultimately, what makes the Land our ancestral inheritance is the fact that Hashem designated it for us. Shimon HaMaccabi hints at this by emphasizing that the retaking of the Land was not the result of mere might or political opportunity, but Hashem enabling us to take it back.

Rashi’s first comment on the Torah reinforces this idea.

Rebbe Yitzchak explained: Why did the Torah begin with Bereishit and not with the first commandment (הַחֲדֹשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם)? Because of the verse, “The basis of His actions, He explained to His people to give them the land inhabited by others” (Tehillim 111). If other nations accuse the Jews of being thieves for taking the land of the seven nations, they should respond by explaining that all the land belongs to G-d. He created it all and gives it to whom He sees as deserving. Just as He once gave it to them, He now took it from them and gave it to us.

Living in a period when Jews were scattered around the world and Muslims and Christians controlled Israel, Rashi foresaw a time when our return to the Land would be met with accusations of thievery. The Torah’s creation narrative aims to rebuff these claims. We are here because of an act of G-d; our mandate comes from Him.

Despite Rashi’s anticipation of these accusations centuries ago, we know that much of the world does not accept his response.

Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook explained that Rashi’s words aim not to convince others but to fortify our own confidence. This is implied by the verse Rashi quotes: “The basis of His deeds, He tells **His people**.” Though we may not be able to convince others of our Heavenly-ordained ancestral home, our recognition of this fact should bolster our confidence in the face of such accusations.

#### בְּיָמֵינוּ הָאֵלֹהִים בְּזָמַן הַזֶּה

This message has never been more relevant or essential. The Hamas massacre and subsequent war have unleashed the hatred of those who deny our rights to the Land of Israel. Enemies who do not care that the Biblical promise of the “river to sea” was given to the Jewish people alone seek to destroy us.

We should not be intimidated by this. Remember that Rashi predicted this situation almost a millennia ago and that Shimon HaMaccabi faced these claims over two millennia ago. Let us use their response to these claims to answer the accusations we face today.

May Chanukah remind us of the Divine basis of our return to and relationship with our Land and give us the strength to continue fighting to defend it.



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# From Sukkot to Chanukah: Restoration of Spirit

Rabbanit Shani Taragin

**T**he choice of name for Israel's current war, "Swords of Iron," was selected to broadcast the IDF's goal of eradicating the terrorist organization Hamas, whose emblem shows two crossed swords in front of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem framed by two Palestinian flags with the Islamic oath and creed, *Shahada*. I prefer, however, to call our current national operation "*Mashiv HaRuach*, Restoration of Spirit." Instead of referring to the outbreak of the war on Simchat Torah, forever diminishing the joy of the day, "*Mashiv HaRuach*" alludes to the overlapping date of Shemini Atzeret in Eretz Yisrael, when we began adding "*Mashiv HaRuach u'Morid HaGashem*, Who causes the wind to blow and the rain to fall." It reminds us of this war's spiritual goal – to restore our national spirit of unity and security in our Divinely promised Land.

Not only do we add this phrase to our daily *amidah* in the blessing of "*mechayeh haMeitim*" (Hashem's power to revive the dead) beginning on the eighth day following Sukkot, but it was also prophesied by the prophet Chaggai on the seventh day of Sukkot in 520 BCE, Hoshana Rabbah, the day before Shemini Atzeret when the war began:

"On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, Hashem's word came through the prophet Chaggai: Speak to Zerubavel son of Shaltiel, the governor of Yehudah, and to the high priest Yehoshua son of Yehotzadak, and to the rest of the people: Who is there left among you who saw this House in its former splendor? How does it look to you now? It must seem like nothing to you. But be strong, O Zerubavel – says Hashem – be strong, O high priest Yehoshua son of Yehotzadak; be strong, all you people of the Land – says Hashem – and act! For I am with you – says Hashem of Hosts. So I promised you when you came out of Egypt,

and My spirit (*ruach*) is still in your midst. Fear not!" (Chaggai 2:1-5).

Chaggai continued to encourage the leaders of the generation to wage war against Israel's enemies to secure military and political success. On the 24th of Kislev 520 BCE, he assured them that with the foundation of the second *Beit HaMikdash* they would witness agricultural success, miraculous victories, and reestablishment of monarchy. He chose the winter solstice, the longest night of the year and the time of greatest darkness, to instill the nation with the hope of sovereignty and redemption.

Unfortunately, Zerubavel and his successors did not initiate any apocalyptic wars. Still, Chaggai's prophecy echoed in the hearts and consciousness of the Hasmoneans, who in 168 BCE defeated the forces of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes and rededicated the altar of the *Beit HaMikdash* on the anniversary of Chaggai's prophecy followed by eight days of celebration from the 25th of Kislev.

They chose to broadcast their miraculous victory specifically with the lighting of the *menorah* to highlight the restoration of the spirit of Hashem promised by both Chaggai and his contemporary, the prophet Zechariah: "I see a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl above it... This is the word of Hashem to Zerubavel: Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit (*ruchi*) – said Hashem of Hosts."

This year, in the midst of war, as we light the menorah on the 25th of Kislev as an assurance and fulfillment of Hashem's "*ruach*" in our midst, we are reminded of the restoration of spirit prophesied by another prophet, Yechezkel. A prophet in the Diaspora, Yechezkel sees a valley of dry bones, a people massacred and mutilated. Hashem implores:

"Prophecy to the breath (*ruach*), prophesy, O mortal! Say to the breath: Thus said the Sovereign G-d: Come, O breath, from the four winds, and breathe into these slain, that they may live again... You shall know, O My people, that I am G-d, when I have opened your graves and lifted you out of your graves. I will put My breath into you, and you shall live again, and I will set you upon your own soil" (Yechezkel 37:9, 13-14).

The juxtaposed prophecy foretells the unity of the Jewish people – "I will make them a single nation in the land, on the hills of Israel, and one king shall be king of them all. Never again shall they be two nations, and never again shall they be divided into two kingdoms" (37:22).

When the Chashmona'im rededicated the *Mikdash* with the *ruach* of the *menorah*, they celebrated for eight days with olive branches, as they could not celebrate Sukkot properly due to the defilement the *mizbe'ach* (Maccabim Bet 10:9). This Chanukah, may we merit to complete the joy of Sukkot and Simchat Torah as our national-religious spirit is restored!



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# After the Lighting

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

It is written in the Orchot Chayim (*siman* 21) and in the Kol Bo (*siman* 44) that women have the custom to not do *melacha*, work, while the candles are lit, and so it is written in the Shulchan Aruch (670:1). In this way there is a built-in reminder that it is forbidden to use the lights of the Chanukah candles. The custom is not to do work for about a half-hour, because this is the minimum time required to fulfill the basic *mitzvah*. After this, it is permissible for women to do *melacha*.

Why, specifically, do women have the custom to not do *melacha* while the candles are lit? It's possible that since women traditionally do more work in the home, they need a reminder to not use the light of the Chanukah candles more than men. But it is also possible that women have this custom because they are attached more deeply to Chanukah, for the miracle of Chanukah was performed through a woman. For this reason, they celebrate Chanukah by refraining from work.

Which *melachot*, specifically, do women have the custom of refraining from? Some say that for the first half-hour after lighting, women refrain from all *melacha*, as they do on *yom tov*. Logically, however, it

seems that women should only refrain from *melachot* that are forbidden on *chol hamoed*, meaning *melachot* that are a bother, like doing laundry and ironing. Other *melachot* that are needed for Chanukah or to prevent a loss are permitted, as many *achronim* have ruled. Regardless, it is permissible to cook and bake, because these *melachot* are permissible even on *yom tov*.

In the Gemara, *rishonim* and Shulchan Aruch there is no mention of any custom to remain next to the candles after they are lit. Nevertheless, the Chavot Yair writes that there is a value to seeing and enjoying the candles (*Mekor Chayim*, Kitzur Halachot, 672): "It seems to me that the main part of the *mitzvah* is for the one who lights to be near the candles for a half-hour to see them and enjoy them, for the candles are also meant to remind us of the people's joy when they were able to light the *menorah* again after the miracle of Chanukah... And this is what it means when we say 'We do not have permission to use the candles but only to see them,' and therefore one who sees the candles can also make a blessing."

Technically, there is no *halachic* requirement to stay near the candles, but it is

a beautiful custom for the entire family to sit together next to the candles without rushing away, especially for the first half an hour. Sing together, talk with one another, and share words of Torah. In this way it is possible to feel the great miracle of Chanukah, the light of G-d Who loves us, and to receive the abilities we need to bring good to the world through Torah, good *middot* and holy deeds.



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# Gevurah in Our Day: From the Chashmona'im to the IDF

Rabbi Reuven Brand

**S**itting under the stars on the hard stone slab of an amphitheater, witnessing the swearing-in ceremony of newly minted Israeli tank soldiers, is a powerful experience. As a young Jew from the Diaspora attending the ceremony, I felt many emotions.

I was awed by the precision and professionalism of the officers and cadets. I was moved by the parents of these young soldiers, beaming with pride. I was also conscious of witnessing history, of experiencing firsthand a historic transition of the Jewish people. As a Jew, especially one still living in the Diaspora, I was attentive to what was playing out before my eyes – a new type of *gevurah*.

*Gevurah*, as Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zt"l* explained in an address to a Mizrahi

convention nearly 70 years ago, does not connote physical strength: “*Gevurah* signifies heroism. The hero is not the physically strong one, but the one possessed of the quality of heroism.”

For as long as our people could consciously remember, collective *gevurah* has meant one thing: The heroism of survival. Despite impossible odds, the Jewish people have done “the paradoxical, the absurd” in the words of the Rav: We have survived. We survived physically, despite being exiled, expelled and tormented. And we have survived spiritually, despite experiencing periods of loneliness and Divine hiddenness. Across centuries of oppression, our people collectively found the courage to cling to Hashem. As communities scattered across a vast Diaspora, we blessed

Hashem each day, אוֹזֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּגִבוּרָה, “Who girds Israel with strength.”

Individually, we have followed the strict interpretation of the Mishnah in Pirkei Avot (4:1): אֵיזְהוּ גִבּוֹר הַכּוֹבֵשׁ אֶת יַצְרוֹ: “who is a *gibor*? One who conquers his inclination.” Throughout our long history, we have lived in Christian, Muslim and secular cultures of every kind, subject to powerful cultural influences that threatened to pull us away from a life of Torah. On occasion, individuals have slipped into the tide of darkness, losing their grip on Hashem’s hand. Yet our people have overwhelmingly found the *gevurah* to uphold our inner spiritual and religious convictions, embracing Hashem with our choices, despite the ongoing moral chaos and confusion that has surrounded us.



Chanukah, however, reveals a different dimension of *gevurah*, a form of heroism from our distant historical past, “בְּיָמֵינוּ הַזֶּה” which is re-emerging in our day, “בְּיָמֵינוּ הַזֶּה.” It is the *gevurah* of the Chashmona'im. The Chashmona'im were Jews who became heroes through their military initiative. Hashem blessed their physical efforts with success, and the Rambam highlights their political victory as the reason for our celebration of Chanukah today.

In the modern era we have witnessed this *gevurah* in the soldiers in the IDF. A sparse group of courageous Jews formed this fighting force after the Holocaust and overcame impossible odds; with their improbable victory over six Arab nations, Hashem blessed them with the State of Israel. Today we witness this *gevurah* in young people who put their personal lives and aspirations on hold and dedicate years of their lives to national service, in *chayalim* who risk their lives by wearing a uniform that makes them a target of our enemies. Many thousands of these heroic young men and women have made the ultimate sacrifice, going up to the *akeidah* of Yitzchak, the paradigm of *gevurah*, but not returning from their journey.

The IDF has revealed new dimensions of *gevurah* within our nation. The Ramban interprets *gevurah* as “overwhelming force” (Bereishit 7:18), a form of strength and power the Jewish people could only dream of during our long exile. But this form of *gevurah* is no longer a fantasy, and

the IDF's reputation as a great military force is a constant source of pride for our people.

Most importantly, the IDF's purpose and guiding values express the deepest form of *gevurah*. It represents the collective will of the Jewish people to stand together in righteousness, to uphold our Divine values even in the height of battle.

The IDF's mission dictates that “Soldiers of the IDF shall act according to the values of the IDF and its commands, while abiding by the law, upholding human dignity, and respecting the values of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.” As Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook explained in his note on the daily בְּגִבּוֹרָה יִשְׂרָאֵל blessing: “This is the *gevurah* that is the bond of Israel, that is fitting for the ethically pure foundation and elevated value of a human being.”

The members of the *Chashmonai* clan, whose individual and collective *gevurah* we celebrate each Chanukah, are reborn in our own time through the holy and heroic soldiers of the IDF. Certainly, the legacy of the Chashmona'im is complicated, their efforts did not produce complete redemption and not every aspect of the IDF has achieved Rav Kook's spiritual vision. Nonetheless, the Chashmona'im of old and the *chayalim* of today are bound together through their *gevurah*, their heroic willingness to fight on behalf of Hashem, His

people and His land. For this we recite *al haNissim*.

When we sit at an Armored Corps swearing-in ceremony or see a proud young Jew crossing the street in uniform, defending the land of our fathers, we are witnessing a modern Chanukah miracle – but not an unexpected one. Long ago, the rabbis promised us that the *gevurah* of Chanukah would one day shine forth again among our people, “בְּיָמֵינוּ הַזֶּה הָיָה בְּזִמְנוֹ הַזֶּה,” as it was in those days, so it will be again in our time.” “שְׁשֶׁהֻיְנִי וְקִיְמֵנוּ וְהִגִּיעֵנוּ לְזִמְנוֹ הַזֶּה” Blessed are You Hashem, for the gift of seeing this promise fulfilled, before our eyes!



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(PHOTO: REFAEL AMAR/IDF SPOKESPERSON'S UNIT)

# The Keys to Understanding American Antisemitism – and Fighting Back

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ל"צ

*This article was originally published in January 2020, following a spate of antisemitic attacks in America.*

**T**he last two festivals to be added to the Jewish calendar prior to modern times – Purim and Chanukah – are both about antisemitism. There is one obvious difference between them: Haman, of the Purim story, wanted to kill Jews. Antiochus, of the Chanukah story, wanted to kill Judaism. It was the difference between Nazi Germany and Soviet Communism.

But there is another difference that has renewed salience after the horrifying knife attack in Monsey, NY. What saved Jews on Purim was behind-the-scenes influence: Esther's influence in the royal court. But the danger of antisemitism remained. What if hatred returned and this time there was no Esther around to save the Jews? That is one reason, according to the Talmud, why we do not say Hallel on Purim.

On Chanukah, by contrast, Jews fought back and won. The Maccabees became a symbol of Jewish activism, of refusing to live in fear. As a symbol of this, the original custom was to light Chanukah lights outside the front door of the house, or at least in a window facing the street, to publicize the miracle. Today, we see the lighting of giant menorahs in the most prominent public face of cities throughout the world.

Chanukah tells us not to curse the darkness, but instead to bring light to the world. It tells us to fight back and not to be afraid.

The shocking events in Monsey, together with those in Jersey City, Poway, Pittsburgh and elsewhere, are proof that the darkness has returned. It has returned likewise to virtually every country in Europe. That this should have happened within living memory of the Holocaust, after the most systematic attempt ever made by a civilization to

find a cure for the virus of the world's longest hate – more than half a century of Holocaust education and anti-racist legislation – is almost unbelievable. It is particularly traumatic that this has happened in the United States, the country where Jews felt more at home than anywhere else in the Diaspora. Why is it happening now?

First, because of everything associated with the internet, smartphones, viral videos and above all, social media. These have what is called a “disinhibition effect.” People are far more hateful when communicating electronically than when speaking face-to-face.

Cyberspace has proved to be the most effective incubator of resentment, rancor and conspiracy theories ever invented. Antisemitism thrives on conspiracy theories, versions of the Blood Libel and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, updated for the twenty-first century.

Second, because of the way people encounter these phenomena: often alone, in the privacy of their own home. This allows them to be radicalized without anyone realizing it is happening. Time and again, we read of people carrying out horrific attacks, while those who knew them recall not having seen any warning signs that they were intent on committing evil attacks.

The most dangerous phenomenon of our time is the “lone wolf” attack, because it is so hard to predict. The internet is particularly dangerous for loners, people in whom the normal process of socialization – learning to live with others who are not like us – has broken down.

Historically though, the most important factor in the rise of antisemitism is the sense among a group that the world as it is now is not the way it used to be, or ought to be.

The far left has not recovered from the global collapse of communism and socialism as ideologies. Hence the assault on Jews as capitalists and libertarians. The far right feels threatened by the changing composition of Western societies, because of immigration on an unprecedented scale and low birth rates among the native population. Hence white supremacists. Many radical Islamists are troubled by dysfunctions in the Muslim world. Hence the emergence of anti-Zionism as the new antisemitism.

These concerns do not, in and of themselves, lead to antisemitism. One other factor must be added.

When bad things happen, good people ask, “What did I do wrong?” They put their house in order. But bad people ask, “Who did this to me?” They cast themselves as victims and search for scapegoats to blame.

The scapegoat of choice has long been the Jews. They were the archetypal outsiders. For a thousand years, they were the most prominent non-Christian minority in Europe. Today, the State of Israel is the most significant non-Muslim presence in the Middle East. It is easy to blame Jews because they are conspicuous, because they are a minority and because they are there.

Antisemitism has little to do with Jews – they are its object, not its cause – and everything to do with dysfunction in the communities that harbor it.

Antisemitism, or any hate, becomes dangerous in any society when three things happen: when it moves from the fringes of politics to a mainstream party and its leadership; when the party sees that its popularity with the general public is not harmed thereby; and when those who stand up and protest are vilified and abused for doing so.

All three factors exist in Britain now. The same must not be allowed to happen in America.

What, then, must we do? The first priority must be to strengthen security in Jewish venues, to intensify police patrols and to develop habits of vigilance. The British Jewish community has a fine example in its Community Security Trust which, with the support of government grants, monitors risks, enlists thousands of volunteers to stand security duty and works closely with the government and local police forces. “Lone wolves” tend to seek soft targets, and the Jewish community must ensure as far as possible that there are no soft targets.

Next, we must recognize that while we have enemies, we also have friends – and they are many and strong. In Britain, as we faced a leader of the opposition who many of us felt had made his party a safe haven for anti-Zionists and antisemites, it was enormously important that non-Jews from all walks of life came out in our support. It made us feel we were not alone.

Many surveys in the United States have shown that Jews are the most admired of all minorities. We cannot fight



(PHOTO: NICOLA GREEN)

antisemitism alone. The victim cannot cure the crime. We need to make friends who will stand with us and help lead the fight. This is best done by explaining how antisemitism endangers everyone, because the hate that begins with Jews never ends with Jews.

Lastly, we must never forget the message of Chanukah: Fight back. Never be afraid. Whatever the threats, be proud to be Jewish and share this pride with others.

At times our history has been written in tears, yet we have outlived every empire and every civilisation that sought to destroy us. Our spirit, symbolized by the Chanukah candles, is indomitable. Where others spread darkness, let us bring light.



#### **The Rabbi Sacks Legacy**

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

# From Sukkah to Mamad and Homeward: Embracing the Light of Chanukah

Inbar Gabay Zada

Recently, as I settled my children into their beds in our Efrat home, I couldn't help but reflect that it was the first night since Sukkot that they were all sleeping in their own beds. Since Sukkot, they have slept in our *mamad* (safe room), due to the fear of rocket fire. It is a blessing that eludes thousands of Israelis and for which I am grateful. Nevertheless, it is jarring; instead of moving from the *sukkah* back into our home, we moved from the *sukkah* to the safe room.

Memories of the children eagerly preparing their beds for the *sukkah* seem like a blur. The subsequent weeks spent in and out of our safe room dominate my thoughts, for the war is still not over and the *mamad* door remains open and accessible.

Walking into my child's *gan* (kindergarten) and hearing Chanukah songs is surreal. As we wait for the haunting events of Simchat Torah to end – the sirens, the booms, the fear, and the desperate inquiries about the safety of our family and of the entire nation – I hear my children singing Chanukah songs. Is Chanukah already here? I feel as if *Am Yisrael* is stuck in a time warp. Yet time moves forward, the clocks have changed, and our lives are forever changed.

The dissonance mirrors the disjunction between the excitement of Sukkot and the stark reality of a cold winter approaching. On Sukkot, we leave the comforts of home and embrace our faith in Hashem. As Shemini Atzeret arrives, we return to the warmth and routine of our homes, signifying a hope for stability in the coming winter months. The *sukkah's* messages of faith, gratitude, and inspiration accompany us into the darkness of Marcheshvan.

As we move from Sukkot to Chanukah, a shift becomes evident. Sukkot prompts us to leave the home and dwell in the *sukkah*, while Shemini Atzeret beckons us back. The *mitzvah* of lighting Chanukah candles strengthens this concept of “home,” as every family lights a *menorah* in their own home.

Sukkot entails leaving home for seven days, while Chanukah centers us within. Yet, we do not shut our doors and windows to contain the light and warmth; it must be seen by others. The candles' light is intrinsically tied to the public sphere, lit “until there is no more foot traffic in the marketplace.” The Tosafists (Sukkah 46a) reflect on the Talmud's ruling that on Chanukah, unlike Sukkot, a person who sees the candles makes a unique blessing – *birkat haRo'eh* – enabling even a person who does not have a home and only sees the candles to praise the miracle of Chanukah. Publicizing the miracle – seeing the light from the outside – is inherent to the *mitzvah*.

Chanukah invites us to step from within the home to its entrance – a liminal space that bridges both inside and outside. In this delicate balance, the Chanukah candles radiate their light, illuminating not only our homes but also extending into the public sphere. Finding light in the darkness requires putting yourself in the darkness and then the protection of the lights.

The *mamad* door stands in stark contrast to Chanukah. It is a barrier meant to block out external threats, sealing off light, sound, and air. It hermetically shields

those within from the dangers that lurk outside. Standing at the entrance of our homes with an open door to light the Chanukah candles is a statement of faith. Yet, the *mitzvah* “*lehadlik ner Chanukah*” not only urges us to witness the light but actively involves us in bringing that light, infused with goodness and *chesed*, into the world.

As a child, counting *menorahs* on trips from Philadelphia to New York filled me with pride. These candles were an unspoken connection with fellow Jews who were proudly proclaiming, “I too am a Jew.” We experience this same connection today through hundreds of phone calls and emails from worried Jews from around the world. “You don't know me,” they explain, “But I too am a Jew. How can I help?”

We are witnessing an outpouring of *chesed* and love the likes of which I have never seen before. This Chanukah, as we stand at the threshold of our home, I will remind my children that we are bringing the warmth of our homes to the outside world which is in such desperate need of light. But I will also tell them that we must bring the light of others into our own home, recognizing the unparalleled *chesed* this terrible war has produced. It must encourage us even as we shiver in the cold and darkness.

No, we do not close our doors on Chanukah as one does in the *mamad*. In lighting the candles and opening our doors, we fulfill the essence of Chanukah – bringing light into our lives and sharing it with the world.



**Inbar Gabay Zada**  
is Director of Development at  
Sulamot for Jewish Education and  
La'Ofek – Hope for the Future.



# The Greek Worldview

Rabbi Chaggai Londin

Each year as Chanukah approaches, people frequently discuss the phenomenon of the “*Mityavnim*,” the Jews at the time of the Maccabees who sought to popularize Hellenism in Israel. It is a popular sport to speculate regarding which groups of Jews qualify in our own time as “*Mityavnim*.” However, I think that it is more productive to examine the mindsets and outlooks that represent “*hityavnut*” and which we must be wary of and fight against.

From the Greek perspective, we live in a materialistic world of competing forces. The Greeks were the first to theorize about atoms as the fundamental building blocks of our physical world. Theologically, they saw a world of multiple gods fighting with each other, each representing a different force in our world. In this materialistic worldview, the world is a zero-sum game of a competition for resources, and so there were constant battles between the Greeks and their neighbors. This worldview also led to the creation of the Olympics, something that institutionalized this competitive worldview and celebrated the physical prowess of the victor.

By contrast, the Jewish worldview perceives existence through spiritual, rather than material, lenses. Physical atoms are not the core of existence, but rather the world of the spirit and values. The world

is fundamentally united, under one G-d, rather than a plethora of competing forces. Hence, each person has their own value, and that value is not determined by how they compare to anybody else. Each person has their own G-dly nature, their own identity, and the identity and achievements of others are irrelevant. While we live in a physical world and all receive different things, ultimately our goal is to be happy with what we have, knowing that it is what Hashem wants.

One would think that in the 21st century, most people would be happy. We live in a civilization of material abundance, with historically high quality of life, and yet so many people are upset and depressed. The reason for this is that we’ve adopted a “Greek mindset” of competition in which each of us is valued only in relation to others. When a child comes home from school and his parents ask “what grade did you get on the test?” and the next question is “what grade did your friends get?,” the child will internalize a competitive view of the world.

In the Olympics, no one is rewarded for improving their own performance. The only thing that matters is whether an athlete can beat his competitors. But according to the Torah’s worldview, what really matters is achieving your own G-dly potential, irrespective of the people around you.

This applies to children and adults alike. Adults often feel that they have to constantly prove themselves through professional achievements. Young families go into debt buying things they don’t need, just to keep up appearances.

As we light the *menorah*, let us remember the Jewish worldview that beat the Greek one. Ultimately, we believe our world and each person is fundamentally spiritual, and so each person is infinitely valuable, making it unnecessary to compare ourselves to others. May we celebrate the spiritual victory of Chanukah, and apply its lessons to our own lives.



**Rabbi Chaggai Londin**  
is the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Hesder  
Holon, and is a resident of Sderot.

# Halachic Perspectives on Civilian Casualties

**Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Brody**

**A**s a matter of policy, the IDF only targets enemy combatants and prohibits aiming at enemy non-combatants. Some sources indicate that this was already the pathway of our Avot. The Torah states that Avraham was fearful before going to war to redeem Lot from captivity. One *midrash* asserts that he feared killing righteous people amongst the enemy population, only to be reassured by G-d that in this specific case all of his victims would be guilty (*Bereishit Rabbah* 44:4). A similar *midrash* asserts that Ya'akov was distressed by the prospect of killing the 400 men accompanying his vengeful brother Eisav, even though it was self-defense (Rashi, *Bereishit* 32:8). While violence is justifiable in such circumstances, Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrahi speculates that Ya'akov feared killing those who could be neutralized with non-lethal means. Alternatively, the Maharal suggests that Ya'akov was concerned about killing coerced combatants who did not truly intend to fight. These homiletic comments are not clear legal statements but reflect a general ethos of seeking to minimize casualties.

More bona fide *halachic* support might stem from the Biblical commandment to leave the fourth side of a besieged city open to allow civilians to escape. Ramban asserted that this provision teaches us to act with mercy towards our enemies, even during war time. Together, these passages might indicate that Jewish law demands attempting to minimize civilian harm during warfare. Indeed, while the Torah tells us to put “all men to the sword” (*Devarim* 20:13) in war, Rav Sa'adia Gaon, Netziv, and Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffman explicitly assert that this means to kill combatants. Non-combatants are not our targets.

Following the rape of Dina, Shimon and Levi wiped out the city of Shechem. Many commentators assert that the citizens were themselves guilty of misdeeds related to Dina's rape and therefore worthy of death. The Maharal, however, says the brothers justified their actions by asserting that in war, the entire nation is treated

as a collective, combatants and non-combatants alike. Yet as Rabbi Ya'akov Ariel has noted, this comment may only justify why the brothers were not punished for killing civilians amongst the combatants. Tragically, civilians are inevitably harmed in war. Maharal does not justify, however, directly targeting non-combatants. Indeed, as Rabbi Asher Weiss notes, Maharal himself argues that Ya'akov feared he would be punished for killing Eisav's reluctant warriors, even though they would certainly be more culpable than non-combatant bystanders.

In any case, any precedent from Shimon and Levi was rejected by Rabbi Shlomo Goren, who argued that the end of the Biblical narrative – in which Ya'akov censures his sons while on his deathbed – proves that the brothers acted wrongly. As he writes, “We are commanded... even in times of war... not to harm the non-combatant population, and certainly one is not allowed to harm women and children who do not participate.” Similarly, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein asserted that strategists should consider expected enemy collateral damage before making decisions. Moral constraints remain relevant in wartime.

One difficult ethical question relates to defining who is a non-combatant. Following an IDF raid in Kibiya in 1953 that resulted in the deaths of women and children, Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli initially suggested that a civilian who actively encourages or supports terror activity may be deemed a “pursuer” (*rodef*) who may be killed. This would be especially true if they were given an opportunity to flee, as King Shaul provided for the Kenites (*Shmuel* I 15). Rabbi Yisraeli tempered this novel and far-reaching conclusion by noting that much civilian support for terrorists stems from social pressure and compulsion; as such, one cannot apply the *rodef* classification to them. This entire line of thinking was rejected by Rabbi Hayyim David Halevi, who contended that the *rodef* classification could not be applied to anyone who was not actively involved in attacking someone.

In any case, Rabbi Yisraeli asserted that Jewish law recognizes international norms of warfare, provided that they are universally adopted and practiced. Accordingly, Geneva Convention protocols adopted by Israel would be binding, including the general requirements to only aim at military targets and to measure the proportionality and necessity of strikes that might cause unintended harm to non-belligerents. Such criteria, of course, lend themselves to broad interpretation. Moreover, as Rabbis Ido Rechin and Elazar Goldschmidt have argued, soldiers must not excessively endanger themselves to prevent non-combatant collateral damage, particularly when battling in asymmetric battles in which terrorists use non-combatants as human shields. Jewish law desires to minimize civilian casualties yet recognizes that when push comes to shove, priority must be given to one's own soldiers. The successful balance of these values is a *kiddush Hashem* as we try to uproot evil while remembering that all humans were created in G-d's image.

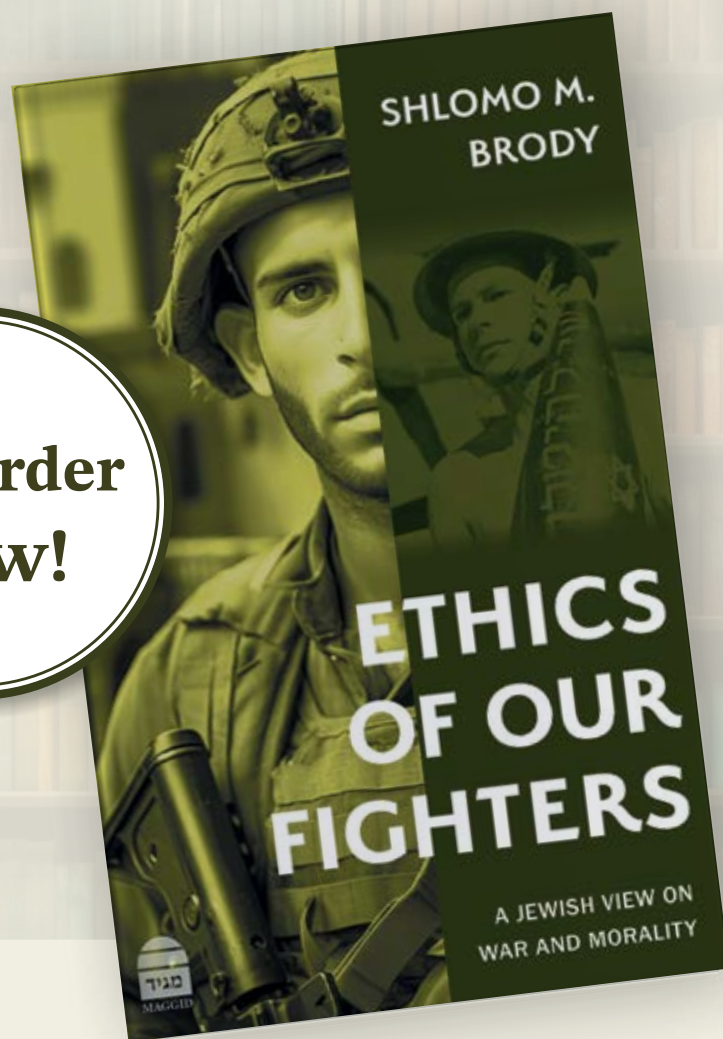


**Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Brody**  
is the executive director of Ematai and the author of *Ethics of our Fighters: A Jewish View on War and Morality* (Maggid).



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## **Ethics of our Fighters: A Jewish View on War and Morality By Rabbi Shlomo Brody**

Jewish fighters grappled with the moral dilemmas posed by the brutality of the world wars, battling “terror with terror” against the great Arab revolt, and fighting in the Warsaw Ghetto, and today as we fight Hamas and others who seek to destroy the state of Israel and her people.

From the author of award-winning *A Guide to the Complex*, in *Ethics of Our Fighters*, Rabbi Shlomo Brody tells the story of these political dilemmas and moral debates. It draws from the pivotal historical moments of the last one hundred years to weave together the most important writings of contemporary ethicists with the insights of the greatest rabbinic scholars.



# The Torah of my Forefathers

Kally Kislowicz

My great-grandfather, Reuven Yonah Rubinovitz, was born in Lithuania in the 1860s. He was the rabbi of the *shtetl* in the town of Vasilishuk, and the father of six sons and one daughter.

In 1907, his two eldest sons immigrated to America. They settled in a small town in Pennsylvania, where they were the only Jews in the area. In 1913, Rabbi Reuven Yonah sent a Torah scroll to his sons in America to help them stay connected to their Judaism. The rabbi himself came to America with the rest of his family (including my grandfather) in 1921.

When he was well into his 80s, Rabbi Reuven Yonah decided to make *Aliyah* so that he could die and be buried in the Holy Land. He passed away in 1959, at the age of 96, and was buried in Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, the rabbi's sons stayed in rural Pennsylvania for decades. They were one of 45 Jewish families in their town of Vandergrift, and the Torah was their prized possession. My grandfather read from the Torah every Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. He used it to teach my father, my uncle, and all the Jewish boys how to *lein* for their *bar mitzvahs*.

Over time, the Jews from the town moved on. My grandfather moved his family to the nearby city of Pittsburgh, where it would be more likely that his sons would meet and marry Jewish women. In the 1980s, when the last Jews left Vandergrift, my father brought the Torah to

Pittsburgh. It was lovingly restored, and it lived in a small synagogue for many years.

When I immigrated to Israel in 2016, I thought about the Torah. I thought about how my great-grandfather loved the Land of Israel so deeply that he wanted to die here, and how I was privileged to bring my family to live here. My father agreed that it was finally time to bring the Torah to Israel, and earlier this year we had the privilege of moving the Torah to its permanent home in my community in Efrat.

It brings me endless gratitude when this Torah is chosen to be used in our synagogue. Because it is so old, it is much heavier than the newer models – the person who does *hagbah* (raises the Torah in the air after it has been read) needs a spotter – so it is not taken out as regularly as its more modern counterparts. But I imagine the Torah doesn't mind. I've developed an anthropomorphic relationship with this Torah, so I think of it, sitting in the cool dark of the *aron kodesh* (the Ark), speaking gently to the younger Torahs, saying wise things and telling stories that start with, "One time, back in the *shtetl*..."

I thought of the Torah on Yom HaAtzmaut (Israel Independence Day), thrilled that for the first time in its long life it was spending this day in the place where miraculous history was made. I was highly aware of its presence in my synagogue on Yom Kippur, awed and humbled by the fact that my children and I are the fourth and fifth generations of my family



to pray alongside this Torah, and the first to do so in our homeland.

And I was so looking forward to celebrating with the Torah on Simchat Torah.

On the night of Simchat Torah I teared up watching my sons take turns holding it. I loved watching them dance, and I was excited that the Torah would be read from the following day.

But instead of celebrating with the Torahs on October 7th, they remained in their aron while we ran to the bomb shelter as sirens wailed throughout the country.

In the days that followed, I thought about those who had died, I thought about the hostages, the soldiers, and the families they had left behind to defend this land that we love so desperately. And during many sleepless hours, I thought about the Torah.

I wanted to tell the Torah that I was sorry that it had journeyed so far from the Cosacks only to find itself threatened and terrorized by Hamas in its new home. I wanted to say that it was okay to be afraid, because the road and the obstacles

ahead seem so long and insurmountable, but we will continue to pray and work together, doing all that we can to protect our people and defeat evil.

On that first Shabbat after the massacre, we read from Parshat Bereshit about how the world was dark and chaotic, but G-d created order and light with just a few words. The following week, we read about how G-d destroyed the world because it was full of hatred and violence, and He rebirthed it with a promise never to destroy us again. And this past week, we read the story of Abraham, who was aging and childless when G-d promised to make him a great nation, and that he would be strong and blessed in his beloved land.

And now I realize that the Torah does not need my words of comfort. The Torah's words are a reminder and a comfort to me. The Torah knows that to be a Jew is to be lonely and misunderstood. The Torah knows what it means to tenaciously pursue justice and righteousness, even when others mistake your virtue for immorality.

As the weeks progress, I will listen carefully as the Torah speaks of my ancestors

who were persecuted for being different, and hated for their unwavering faith in a G-d who cannot be seen. And I will pay close attention during the many weeks when we will read about my people on their long journey to the one place where we have been promised that we can live and practice our faith in peace.

I have no doubt that Rabbi Reuven Yonah would be overwhelmed with pride at the sight of his great-great-grandchildren, prospering in the land that he loved, donning the uniform of the Israeli army, prepared to defend everything that is right and good in this world. And despite the horror and depravity that we have witnessed, I have no doubt that the Torah is relieved to be here in the Jewish homeland, where it can steadfastly remind us that the road has always been long and arduous, but that we have prevailed again and again and again, and this time will be no different.

I don't have to tell the Torah that life can be harrowing and incomprehensible – it already knows. I need it to tell me how to stay strong and how to remain just and kind and brave even when I am overwhelmed by feelings of despair.

I will keep showing up on Shabbat to hear how the story of my people plays out. Because the story of Abraham searching for his ultimate home, is the story of Rabbi Reuven Yonah finally making it to the land of his dreams, is the story of me and my children who understand how blessedly fortunate we are to be here at this time. Even now. I don't know what the future holds. But I have faith that we will dance with our Torah on Simchat Torah next year.



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

## Looking for Speakers from Israel?



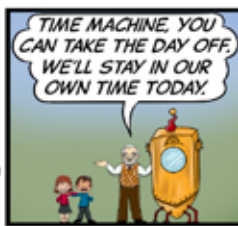
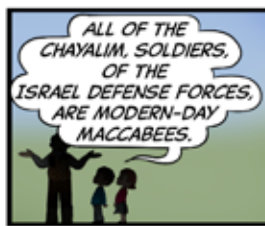
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# A Mizrachi Chanukah Dedication



**General Soldier**  
 I am a soldier in basic training. Until I get my official kumtah, I am proud to wear this one that matches my uniform. Olive being a chayal!  
 חיל הכללי

**Air Force**  
 Using fighter jets, planes and drones, I destroy enemy infrastructure, help ground forces, and gather intelligence. I am an (air) force to be reckoned with.  
 חיל האוויר

**Intelligence**  
 Let me (in)tell you that it's my mission to get top secret info to protect Israel from threats. I don't just gather intelligence; Thank G-d I AM intelligent!  
 אגף המודיעין

**Cyber Defense**  
 I provide technology for all military situations. I have read the terms and conditions. It's a hard drive, but it's an honor to help our soldiers re-boot.  
 אגף התקשורת והסייבר

**Military Police**  
 I specialize in detective work, gathering intel, and imprisoning law violators. Suspect there's a threat that can hide from me? Puuuuhleees!!!  
 חיל המשטרה הצבאית

**Combat Engineering Corps**  
 If the IDF needs a minefield dismantled, an enemy target sabotaged, or a bridge built to get from one point to another, I'm always (eng)near.  
 חיל הנדסה הקרבית



**Armored Corps**  
 My team and I operate an armored tank. In times of war, it's teams like mine that, with tanks to Hashem, give Israel the upper hand.  
 חיל השריון

**Artillery Corps**  
 War can require the big guns, and that's where I come in. Cannons, rockets, unmanned crafts... we give it our best shot to protect Israel.  
 חיל התותחנים

**Field Intelligence**  
 Shhhh! I use my camouflage and navigation training to secretly observe and gather information to help support other chayalim.  
 חיל האיסוף הקרבי

**Special forces including Paratroopers**  
 Thanks to my special training, I have what it takes to parachute into the battlefield to help defeat enemies of Israel. Am Yisrael Fly!  
 יחידות האש וההנדסה

**Golani Brigade**  
 Go Golani! Our kumtah color represents our work on the ground, where we operate in military operations. You can count on us to keep Am Yisrael grounded!  
 חטיבת הנגב

**Givati Brigade & Desert Patrol Battalion**  
 Give it up for Givati! I am part of this elite unit that performs special missions and anti-terrorist operations in the Southern region.  
 יחידת נבט"ר



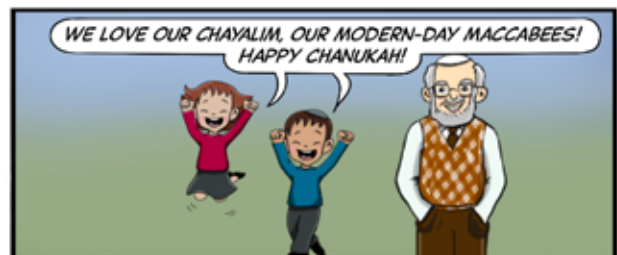
**Nahal Brigade**  
 I specialize in giving military and security support combined with agriculture. I will protect Israel wherever I am planted.  
 חטיבת הנחל

**Kfir Brigade**  
 Enemies (k) fear me. Kfir means lion cub- we are the youngest infantry of the IDF but we are also the largest, protecting Yehuda and Shomron.  
 חטיבת כפיר

**Border Protection Corps**  
 Bored(er)? Me? Never! I am responsible for protecting Israel by gathering intelligence and handling security along our land borders.  
 חיל הגנת הגבולות

**Navy**  
 I protect Israel's sea borders. I also perform search and rescue missions at sea. As you can sea, there's nothing SUBpar about our Navy.  
 חיל הים

**Home Front Command**  
 I specialize in protecting civilians during emergency situations. I am here to keep all of Am Yisrael safe. There is no place like home.  
 מפקד הערר



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[ואנשי כוחות הבטחון]

העומדים על משמר ארצנו וערי א-לקינו,  
מגבול הלבנון ועד מדבר מצרים,  
ומן הים הגדול עד לבוא הערבה  
[ובכל מקום שהם], ביבשה באויר ובים.  
יתן ה' את אויבינו הקמים עלינו נגפים לפניהם!  
הקדוש ברוך הוא ישמר ויציל את חיילינו מכל צרה וצוקה  
ומכל נגע ומחלה, וישלח ברכה והצלחה בכל מעשה ידיהם.  
ידבר שונאינו תחתיהם, ועשרם בכתר ישועה ובעטרת נצחון.  
ויקים בהם הכתוב: "כי ה' א-לקיכם ההלך עמכם,  
להלחם לכם עם איביכם  
להושיע אתכם"  
ונאמר:  
"אמן".

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*Joel Harris Pesnick*

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High-end modern design including a Smart Home system.

Located in Rabbi Shalom Rosner's community.

Eucalyptus is a natural continuation of Nofei Hashemesh and Nofei Aviv.



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