



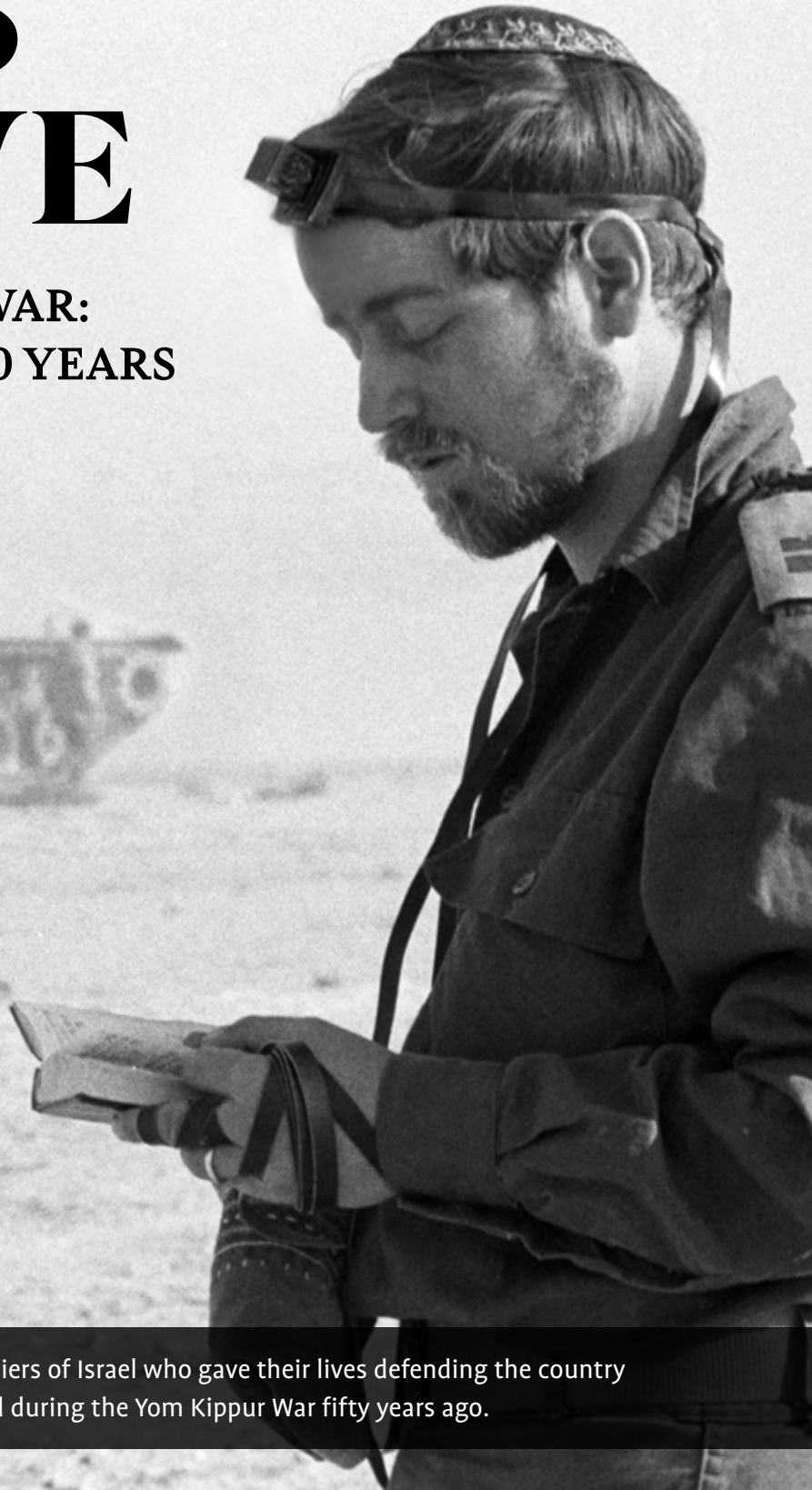
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DAYS OF AWE

THE YOM KIPPUR WAR:
REFLECTIONS AFTER 50 YEARS



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Dedicated in loving memory of the soldiers of Israel who gave their lives defending the country
in her greatest hour of need during the Yom Kippur War fifty years ago.



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CORRECTION: In the Tisha B'Av 5783 edition (Vol. 6, No. 3), "From the Charedi World to the IDF" – we initially wrote "During his initial period in the army he studied Hebrew for three months, and that was the only period in which he did not strictly observe *mitzvot*." This was a mistranslation – the article should have said "and that was the only time in which he was not surrounded by those who strictly observed *mitzvot*".

FROM THE Editor

“Life with an ideal worth dying for is a life worth living” (Dov Indig).

I didn't live through the Yom Kippur War, nor the pain, mourning and disillusionment that followed it. I've always known the facts – that 2,656 brave young men died, and over 9,000 were wounded, sacrificing themselves to hold off the Syrian and Egyptian armies until reserve troops could arrive. But it wasn't until I read *Letters to Talia* that I truly understood what our people sacrificed during those dark and painful days fifty years ago.

Letters to Talia records two years of correspondence between Dov Indig *hy”d*, a deeply idealistic *hesder* student, and Talia, a high school girl from a secular *kibbutz* in northern Israel – a correspondence that tragically ended when Dov was killed in a holding action on the Golan Heights on the second day of the war. The letters began after Dov met Talia's father during his military service. Taken by the young religious soldier's thoughtfulness, Talia's father urged her to reach out to Dov and ask him her questions about Judaism.

The letters reveal both Dov and Talia to be deeply thoughtful young people. A bookworm, Dov was conversant in Jewish philosophy, Religious Zionist thought and a broad range of secular subjects, knowledge he drew upon to passionately defend and explain the Torah's perspective on an impressive array of topics – from mixed dancing and intermarriage, to evolution and the Holocaust.

Most striking of all is Dov's intense idealism and his pride in serving in the IDF. As he began his third tour of duty in March, 1973, Dov wrote to Talia: “Hurray! I'm a soldier!... Every time I put on my uniform and receive my rifle I'm filled with joy and pride and strength... What pride I feel with my weapon in my hand!”

The child of Holocaust survivors, Dov was painfully aware of the significance of Jewish strength. After the horrific murder of eleven Israelis at the Munich Olympics,

he wrote: “Alongside the sadness I was also happy – the world remains the same, but how different the state of the Jewish people thirty years after the Holocaust! This time, when Jews are being killed, the Jewish people have a state, they have an army, and they are capable of taking retribution on their enemies... What an enormous difference there is between the Jewish people in the Holocaust – “like a sheep being led to slaughter” (Yishayahu 53:7) – and the Jewish people of our own generation – “poised like a lion, to tear off arm and scalp” (Devarim 33:20)... Here G-d has done us this great kindness, establishing a state for us immediately after the Holocaust and giving us superhuman powers to beat all our enemies... When we race along in tanks, storming a target and firing, and there is the loud noise of engines and shells bursting, with every shell that I load into the turret I shout, ‘Jewish blood is not cheap!’”

Indeed, Jewish blood is no longer cheap. We are fortunate to live at a time when every soldier sacrificed, every victim of terror, is properly felt as an incalculable loss. What path would Dov have taken, what impact would he have had on our people, had he lived? Where would we be today, if those 2,656 young men who gave their lives to defend us had lived? Fifty years later, these questions are no less painful.

“If the State of Israel is a Jewish state, in which the life, culture and spirit of the Jewish people are being renewed, in which the Jewish people are living their ideals and heritage, in which the Jewish people are strengthening their Jewish identity and developing it, then it's worth living here, and even fighting if necessary – and even dying for it, if it is so decreed.”

Dov wrote these words only a few months before he gave his own life in defense of his people. They are at once a comfort, for after two millennia of exile, our generation is blessed with a Jewish state. But they are also a challenge, to we who must carry on his legacy. Are we doing our part



to strengthen our people and our Land, to advance the final redemption, to build a state worthy of Dov's sacrifice?

May this year bring only blessing and peace, to all of *Am Yisrael*. And may we soon see the day when Dov, and all of his brothers in arms, are reunited in joy once again.

Elie Mischel



Rabbi Elie Mischel
is the Editor of HaMizrachi magazine.

Imprisoned by a “Concept”

Religious Reflections on the Yom Kippur War

Rabbi Doron Perez

The destruction of the third temple

The first 72 hours of the Yom Kippur War was the closest Israel has come, Heaven forbid, to destruction. That Yom Kippur, which fell on Shabbat of October 6th 1973, initiated the most horrifying few days in the country's history.

At 2pm on the most solemn day of the year, Egypt and Syria attacked simultaneously, catching Israel entirely by surprise. Israel's Bar Lev defensive line on the Egyptian border in the south, thought to be impregnable, fell within two hours. In the north, hundreds of Syrian tanks were rolling down the Golan Heights in what would become the largest tank battle since World War II. In those terrifying first three days, Israel lost around 1,300 soldiers, half of all Israeli losses in the entire war.

So desperate was the situation that Prime Minister Golda Meir was handed two cyanide tablets on the evening of October 8th, lest, G-d forbid, the State of Israel fall. Defense Minister Moshe Dayan believed that this was, perhaps, the “destruction of the third temple.” He convinced Golda Meir, using the desperate codename ‘Temple,’ to have nuclear warheads loaded onto jet planes at Tel Nof Airbase. If Israel was to fall then so would Cairo and Damascus. Such was the Israeli leadership's fear of the potential downfall of the Jewish state, only 25 years after its founding.

How could this happen only six years after Israel's extraordinary victory in the Six-Day War? The 1967 war was one of the most miraculous and shortest

in history, with remarkable results for Israel – tripling its size and liberating its ancient and holy city. How could the same Israeli military which mesmerized the entire world fall so far from grace and get caught blindsided, coming within an inch of its destruction so soon thereafter against the very same enemies?

What went wrong?

The Concept – הקונספציה

The failure which led to the surprise attack was a devastating mistake in the realm of thought – a conceptual blunder. It was a mental paradigm embraced and believed in blindly by Israel's intelligence leadership and hence by Israel's top military and political brass, a type of conceptual blindness which became known simply as “The Concept.”¹ “The Concept” made perfect sense to the leaders of the Israeli and American intelligence community at the time. It went like this: Egypt will not initiate a war until they have the air power to overcome Israel's air force. Syria will never attack alone unless Egypt attacks as well. Since Egypt clearly does not have the ability to defeat the Israeli Air Force, they definitely won't attack and therefore neither will Syria. In short, there is no way that Egypt and Syria will initiate a war they cannot win.

General Eli Zeira, head of *Aman* – Israeli Military Intelligence – was the greatest proponent of “The Concept.” No amount of evidence could convince him otherwise, as the logic of the concept was, so he and others thought, immutable. When the Syrians moved 800 tanks to the border, it was interpreted as a defensive move against a potential Israeli attack.

King Hussain's secret arrival in Tel Aviv on September 25th to warn Prime Minister Meir of an impending Egyptian attack was disregarded as an exaggeration. A huge build-up of Egyptian tanks and troops on the Sinai border was seen as Egypt “flexing muscles.” Reports on October 5th of Russia calling all civilians to leave Syria and Egypt was seen as an overreaction.

It turns out that “The Concept” was already obsolete a full year before war broke out. Egyptian President Sadat had decided that although he did not have the military ability to beat Israel, he was going to attack anyway. And so he began an entire year of planning his surprise attack.² The Israelis missed all the signs along the way.

Even when there was unequivocal evidence in the early morning hours of October 6th of a certain attack later that day, Israel did not preemptively strike or even call up the military reserves. Although Chief of Staff Dado Elazar was pushing for this, Zeira and American intelligence were still not fully convinced.³

The lesson is clear: once we are convinced of the veracity of our own logic, we can become imprisoned by it. Instead of challenging conceptions, we embrace misconceptions as a truth we cannot transcend.

Challenging misconceptions

“The Concept” came crashing down on Yom Kippur, at the climactic moment of the Ten Days of *Teshuva*. When we examine the process of *teshuva*, of genuine repentance, it turns out that we must begin by challenging our mental

paradigms and premises. If we don't question our deeply-held beliefs and conceptions, it is difficult to change our actions.

This is exactly the spiritual focus of Rosh Hashanah, the first of the Days of *Teshuva*. The Hebrew word our Sages have chosen for the New Year is *Rosh Hashanah* the "head of the year" and not the more obvious term *Reishit* Hashanah, the "beginning of the year."⁴

The reason our Sages picked this specific term of the head is because the *head* and *mind* are the keys to understanding the essence of the day.

Rosh Hashanah is a time of deep cognitive reflection, not a time of action. We examine our spiritual and mental paradigms and thought processes in preparation for the year ahead. It's a time for big picture mind mapping, not for meddling in minutiae or in specific actions. It is for this reason we do not focus whatsoever on individual actions nor any mention of sin or confession throughout the lengthy prayer service. Although part of the essence of *teshuvah* is confession⁵ - as we do throughout the *selichot* prayers of penitence and hundreds of times throughout Yom Kippur - we astoundingly do not utter one word of confession on Rosh Hashanah! We dare not get lost in detail, lest we fail to distinguish the forest from the trees. It's not time "to rearrange deck chairs on the Titanic," but rather to ensure that we are heading in the right direction. Rosh Hashanah is an intense exercise in systematic strategic spiritual thinking.

It is a time to challenge the very way we see the world. Just as "seeing is believing," so too "believing is seeing" - what we think and believe causes us to see our reality in a certain way. If we cannot conceive of ourselves differently then we cannot chart a different course of action. How we examine ourselves in thought on Rosh Hashanah will determine the type of atonement in action on Yom Kippur. If we remain trapped in false conceptions, we can never escape the consequences of the erroneous "Concept."⁶

Presumptuous and arrogant

Why did Israel fall prey to such a mistaken "Concept"? How did they get it so wrong? The answer it seems lies in two factors: presumptuousness and hubris.

For Israel and the Western mindset, it didn't make any sense to initiate a war

that you can't win. Yet that was exactly what President Sadat did!

According to Sadat's wife Jehan, her husband needed a war to restore honor and dignity to Egypt after it had devastatingly lost three major wars to Israel (the War of Independence, Sinai Campaign, and the embarrassment of 1967). Whereas Syria wanted to destroy Israel, as it was in close proximity to Israel's mainland positioned high up in the Golan Heights, Sadat's aim was to surprise and humiliate Israel, especially on its holiest day, in order to gain a restitution of honor so as then to negotiate a peace from a position of strength.⁷

Kissinger summed up the mistaken "Concept" well: "Our notion of rationality did not take into account the possibility of fighting an unwinnable war just to restore self-respect." This presumption almost cost the Jewish state its very existence.

What causes us to be so pompous so as not to doubt our presumptions?

More often than not, it is hubris and arrogance. We become too full of ourselves. Israel had fallen victim to her own victory of 1967. Israel's miraculous lightning victory of biblical proportions gave the country's leadership a feeling of invincibility. Israel believed its military to be brilliant and powerful and the Arabs' military to be clumsy and weak.⁸

Instead of exhibiting profound gratitude and humility, the leadership displayed arrogance and forgetfulness of our Heavenly blessings. As Rabbi Norman Lamm reflected regarding the war: "My mind, during this period, inevitably turned to the powerful passage in Devarim 8: "Beware lest you forget the L-rd your G-d... when you have eaten and are full and you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this success.'" Self confidence morphed into arrogance, and arrogance into unforgivable carelessness.⁹

Conclusion

Thankfully, the tide of the war turned on both fronts over Sukkot, and the war ended after three weeks of heavy fighting. Despite tragically heavy losses, Israel's incredible courage and bravery came through. The Yom Kippur War has been described as perhaps the most miraculous of all of Israel's wars.¹⁰

"The Concept" remains an eternal warning to always challenge our thought processes, perspectives and presumptions. It beckons us never to be victims of our victories, to always be grateful in the face of grace, to be unassuming and never pretentious, and to never stand with hubris but always remain humble before G-d.

1. Thus termed by the Agranat Commission, the National Commission of Inquiry set up in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War to investigate the mistakes in the prelude to the war.
2. Abraham Rabinovich, *The Yom Kippur War*, 36-37.
3. American pressure on Israel from President Nixon and Secretary of State Kissinger not to preemptively attack was immense. Defense Minister Dayan and Prime Minister Meir decided against a major mobilization or any preemptive strike in order not to be seen as the aggressor, as had happened in 1967, and not to risk losing US support should there be a war. Howard Blum, *The Eve of Destruction - the Untold History of the Yom Kippur War*, 143-144.
4. *Reishit* is the obvious word as it is not only the first word in the Torah, *Bereishit*, but it is also mentioned in Devarim (11:12) as "the beginning of the year, *reishit hashanah*." It is from here that the Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 17b) learns the concept of annual judgment on Rosh Hashanah. Nevertheless, our Sages chose Rosh Hashanah as the name of the festival and the talmudic tractate.
5. In his introduction to the Laws of Teshuva, Rambam considers the source of the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah* to be *וידוי* - confession.
6. Rabbeinu Tam supports this view of Rosh Hashanah, stating that the world was created in *thought* in Tishrei and *physically* in Nissan (Rosh Hashanah 27a). This is how he resolves the rabbinic statements that describe both Tishrei and Nissan as times of creation (Rosh Hashanah 10). First the world was created in thought, through a vision of the world and its ideal potential. Thereafter, in Nissan, it was created in reality. Clearly, the focus of Rosh Hashanah is the realm of thought.
7. Dr Noam Weissman, Unpacking Israeli History Podcast, *The Yom Kippur War - A National Catastrophe*.
8. Rabinovich, *The Yom Kippur War*, 6-8.
9. Rabbi Norman Lamm, *Remembering the Six-Day War*, Tradition 40, 2 (Summer 2007), 7-13. With thanks to Rabbi Aviad Tabory, who quotes this in *State of Halakha*, 76.
10. Chaim Herzog, *Milchemet Yom HaDin*, 250.



Rabbi Doron Perez
is the Executive Chairman
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An interview with Gael Grunewald, Chairman of the Mizrachi faction in the National Institutions

When Gael Grunewald made Aliyah at age 18, he knew he wanted to make an impact in the Jewish state, but didn't know exactly what that would look like. After decades of service at World Bnei Akiva and as Mizrachi's representative in Israel's National Institutions, Gael today is the Vice Chairman of the World Zionist Organization (WZO), as well as head of the WZO's Education Department, where he sends hundreds of Israeli shlichim around the world to serve as teachers in Jewish schools.

Rabbi Aron White spoke with Gael to learn about the National Institutions and his dream of sending a shaliach to every Jewish school in the world.

Before we talk about your current position, can you tell us a little bit about your background?

I grew up in France, and made Aliyah almost forty years ago. After learning in *yeshiva* and then at university for my computer science degree, I served as a head Shaliach for the Jewish Agency in Europe, during which time I lived in Belgium. I have been involved with Bnei Akiva and the National Institutions for the past 30 years, including serving as Director General of Bnei Akiva, Deputy Chairman of Keren Kayemet LeYisrael, and the head of the settlement division of KKL.

You have represented Mizrachi at the National Institutions since 2006. What are the National Institutions?

The National Institutions are a group of organizations – the World Zionist Organization, Keren Kayemet LeYisrael, the Jewish Agency – who are the representatives of the Jewish people as a whole. Israel is a sovereign country, and its state institutions officially represent the citizens of Israel. The National Institutions represent Jews from all over the world, and Jews from all over the world have their say in how they are run and what they do. There are so many different things that the institutions do, including encouraging Aliyah, promoting Jewish and Zionist education around the world, strengthening knowledge of Hebrew, providing social services for impoverished Jews, fighting antisemitism and BDS, and more.

The World Zionist Organization (WZO) was founded by Herzl in 1897, KKL was founded by the WZO in 1901, and the Jewish Agency was founded in 1929. The relationship between them is complicated and can be confusing. For example, the WZO is a little bit like the father, and the KKL is its child, but the child is today more wealthy than the father, as it owns some 14% of all the land in Israel.

In your current role, you are the Head of the Education Department at the World Zionist Organization. What does that entail?

Since the foundation of the State of Israel, the concept of *shlichut*, of sending representatives from Israel to Jewish communities around the world, has existed. I myself served as a *shaliach* in Belgium for Bnei Akiva. The Education Department sends hundreds of qualified teachers from Israel to Jewish schools and



communities around the world. I have been in this role since 2020, following the most recent World Zionist Congress elections, and we have experienced tremendous growth in this field. Only a few years ago, in 2015, there were maybe 60 or 70 *shlichim* sent by our department, and today we have over 300! We have teachers in communities from the USA to New Zealand – and there is so much room for growth. My dream is that every single Jewish school in the world, from *Charedi* to Reform, will have a representative of Israel, an Israeli *shaliach* there.

How do you envision the role of the shaliach?

We talk about three circles of influence – classroom, school and community. All our *shlichim* are qualified teachers in Israel, and their basic, formal role is to teach Jewish studies and Hebrew in schools. However, many of them take on roles that are much broader than that. This year, our *shaliach* in Dublin, Ireland, was like half of a Chief Rabbi! He taught *Daf Yomi* and *Tzurba M’Rabanan* and was involved in *kashrut* and running communal events – and this was all above and beyond his teaching role in the school. I can’t tell you how many stories I know of young students who make *Aliyah* and say it was because of the impact a *shaliach* had on them. Successful *shlichim* change lives!

You talked about the shaliach’s role in teaching Hebrew. Many graduates of Jewish high schools around the world today can barely speak any Hebrew. How can this be addressed?

You are correct. I am worried about the state of the Hebrew language around the world. I still know of some schools such as in Belgium and Canada that teach *Ivrit b’Ivrit*, but in many schools this no longer exists. In fact, in Jewish schools in Brazil and Argentina, where they used to teach Hebrew as a second language, they now teach English instead. There are many different methods and approaches to teaching Hebrew as a second language, which educational experts can discuss. However, I think that ultimately all solutions start with a question of priorities. Schools focus on what is important to them, and if Hebrew is important to a school they will find their preferred method of teaching it.



What do you say to heads of school, to convince them that teaching Hebrew is important?

First, it is the global language that connects Jews all around the world. Second, it helps give people the tools to be successful if they want to make *Aliyah*. And even for those who don’t make *Aliyah*, Hebrew allows them to connect to Israeli culture, music, and literature. And finally, it helps the students learn Torah. We don’t want our students to only learn Torah through translation their entire lives, and being able to learn Torah in the original *lashon haKodesh* is a real value.

How do you see shlichut developing in the coming years?

In addition to the growth in the numbers of *shlichim*, I think we are now getting more and more ideological and highly motivated *shlichim*. Twenty years ago, there were some *shlichim* who were looking to make money by going abroad. But now, as salaries and quality of life in Israel have risen dramatically, the gaps for many of the *shlichim* between their opportunities in Israel and abroad have become smaller. Those going on *shlichut* are motivated by a genuine desire to be ambassadors of Israel and Torah to communities around the world – and we are excited to keep bringing these ambassadors to more and more communities!

It is also critical that the State of Israel invests in the Jewish and Zionist identity of Jews around the world. If until now, Diaspora Jews have given so much to build and support the Jewish State, it is now incumbent on the State of Israel to invest and support in Diaspora communities, and to take responsibility for Jews all around the world. ■





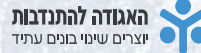
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World Mizrachi wishes “Tzeitchem L’Shalom” to the hundreds of Religious Zionist Shlichim going on shlichut this year, and continued success to our organizational partners in their endeavors to disseminate Torat Eretz Yisrael to communities around the world.

Rabbi Doron Perez
Executive Chairman, World Mizrachi

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THE MEANING OF THE YOM KIPPUR WAR

An Introduction by Rabbi Aron White

It is the fate of many young countries to fight formative wars in their early years. The newly independent United States of America fought a war of independence starting in 1775, and what is known as a second war of independence in 1812, as the birth pangs of its new-found independence. The newly formed French Republic spent its first decades careening from one war to the next, as the end of the monarchy set off a chain reaction affecting the entire European continent. The ripple effects of a new country entering the world stage often create antagonism, leading to wars that ultimately shape the character of the new nation. In this sense, the young State of Israel followed this historic pattern as it was forced to fight three major defensive wars in its first twenty five years – the War of Independence, the Six-Day War, and the Yom Kippur War.

Israel's War of Independence enabled Israel to survive beyond its day of declaration, as the young country defended itself from invasion from all its Arab neighbors. In the Six-Day War, Israel once again fought off the threat of destruction, and in a turnaround of biblical proportions, returned to the holy cities of Yerushalayim and Chevron and tripled its territory, all in less than a week. But what is the legacy of the Yom Kippur War, the three weeks of difficult battle in October of 1973? From the moment the sirens pierced the serenity of Yom Kippur until the war's completion, Israel lost close to 2,700 soldiers, fighting a fierce battle to protect the country from Syrian and Egyptian invasion. What is the legacy of this war, as we look back at it 50 years later?

In this edition, we will tell the stories of individual soldiers like Rabbi Yechiel Wasserman, whose bravery and sacrifice on the battlefield ultimately secured the Israeli victory. Rabbi Chanan Porat's personal story is also representative of the war's wider social impact, marking a low point for Israel's socialist leadership and opening up the country for social and political change. We also explore Israel's leadership during the war, including the legacy of Prime Minister Golda Meir and Rabbi Ovadia Yosef's *halachic* heroism in dealing with the unprecedented *agunah* cases after the war. Rabbi Moshe Zvi Neria's 1974 analysis offers a Torah perspective from the immediate aftermath of the war, while Rabbi Doron Perez reflects back from the perspective of today.

Last year, Sivan Rahav-Meir wrote about Uri Atzmon, a soldier from Kfar Sirkin. During the Yom Kippur War, he found a

shofar and *tallit* bag in an abandoned Israeli post in the Golan, inscribed only with the letters *Yud* and *Gimmel*. After the war, he spent months trying to track down their owner, but eventually gave up hope, assuming the owner had perished in the war. Each year, on Yom Kippur, Atzmon would place the *tallit* bag and *shofar* on their dining room table and tell his family the story of the Yom Kippur War, in memory of the unknown *Yud Gimmel*.

Recently, in a world where one WhatsApp status is worth a hundred phone calls, Uri's family members were able to find the owner, Rabbi Yitzchak Gutman. During the war, Gutman was a student at Yeshivat Har Etzion who was on a base in the Golan when, in the middle of Yom Kippur prayers, while fasting, a siren was heard and he ran towards a bunker, leaving his belongings behind. After the IDF retook the area from the Syrians, Uri Atzmon found the *shofar* and *tallit* bag.

In a moving gathering, both men got together with their children and grandchildren for the *tallit* and *shofar* to be reunited with their original owner. Ultimately Rav Gutman decided to *leave* the *tallit* in Uri's possession, as it had come to take on such significance for the family. But the most poignant part of the story was the meeting of two families. A religious family standing together with a secular family, united by the shared story of a *tallit* and the shared scars of when the family patriarchs fought side-by-side for Israel's safety.

At a time when societal tensions are high, the Yom Kippur War is a reminder of the basic truth that at times of need we can put political and religious differences aside. As Rabbi Soloveitchik wrote, we are one people who share one common destiny. May this year be a year of security and peace, both internal and external, for Israel and all the Jewish people.



Rabbi Aron White

is the Managing Editor of HaMizrachi magazine.

“We Had to Save Israel from Destruction”

A Personal Story of Heroism in the Sinai Desert

Rabbi Yechiel Wasserman serves as Co-President of the World Mizrahi movement, following many decades of work in Israel’s National Institutions. In October 1973, he was injured while serving in the IDF’s Tank Corps on the southern front, defending Israel against the invading Egyptian army. Rabbi Aron White spoke to Rav Wasserman to hear his story.

When the war broke out on Yom Kippur 5734, where were you?

On that fateful Yom Kippur, I was a sixth year *Hesder* student and I was *davening* at my *yeshiva*, Yeshivat Hakotel. I had recently got engaged to Rina and we were due to be married on Chanukah. The war caught all of Israel by surprise, so as we stood there *davening*, none of us could have imagined what was coming so quickly. One night I was in Yeshivat Hakotel with my roommate Yitzchak Statman, and the next day we were in our tank together near the Suez Canal responding to Egyptian anti-tank missiles. When we said *U'netaneh Tokef* in *Mussaf*, none of us thought the words "Who will live and who will die?" would become so tangible, so quickly. I was sitting in the same row as a student named Rav Shmuel Orlan *hy"*d, who was killed in the Golan the next day. "Who by fire, who by water?" – within a few days, I had friends who were killed in burning tanks and friends who drowned in the Suez Canal.

The war broke out at 1:55pm, and once it broke out anyone in the *yeshiva* who had served in the army was called up for reserve duty. It was a meaningful experience to leave the atmosphere of a *yeshiva* on Yom Kippur, together with another 150 students, to defend our country and people.

Where were you sent to fight?

I arrived at the location where my unit was gathering, *Gan HaAtzmaut* in Yerushalayim, and from there we were sent to the Sinai Desert. Israel was invaded by Syria in the north and by Egypt in the south, and some of us were sent to each front. At that time, there were four *Hesder Yeshivot* – Kerem B'Yavneh, Sha'alvim, Hakotel and Har Etzion. Many of the students had served in tanks (*Shiryon*), and it was to the tanks we were sent.

I served in Battalion 164, which was made up of many *Hesder* students. We arrived in the Sinai Desert on Sunday night, and began preparing our ammunition and tanks to join the battle to support the units already there. Egyptian tanks had crossed the Suez Canal into the Sinai Desert, and we were defending the south of Israel from their invasion. Beginning that evening, we fired at the Egyptian tanks, and fierce battles ensued over the next 72 hours. We advanced, but then were pushed back. I cannot begin to describe what it is like to be on the battlefield – the noises, the emotions, the sights. Haim Sabato wrote the book *Tium Kavanot, Adjusting Sights*, to describe his experiences on the battlefield in the Yom Kippur War. One has to be an



On October 6th, the Egyptian army crossed the Suez Canal and attacked Israel. Caught off guard, Israel had only 268 tanks fighting against some 2,000 Egyptian tanks when the war broke out. The reservists, including Rabbi Wasserman, were called up to the war, and eventually were able to push the Egyptians back across the Suez Canal. On October 25th, with the IDF 100 kilometers away from Cairo, Egypt surrendered. (IMAGE COURTESY OF UNPACKED, A DIVISION OF OPEN DOR MEDIA)

excellent writer to even begin to convey what the experience is like.

My role in the tank was to coordinate between the driver and the loader, telling the loader which ammunition to load based on the type of target we were facing. This involved me having to partially come out of the tank, while making sure to return inside to be protected from anti-tank fire. Israel was caught by surprise; Egypt had Sagger anti-tank missiles that were far more dangerous than what we had been aware of.

For 72 hours we barely slept or ate. On Wednesday morning, *Erev Sukkot*, our tank was hit by a Sagger anti-tank missile. I was struck by shrapnel – I would later learn that hundreds of pieces of shrapnel had hit me, including in my head and in my eye. Our tank began to burn. I was dragged out of the tank by our driver, Ezra Bashari.

What happened to you then?

With the last of my strength I grabbed my *tefillin* that were next to me as Ezra dragged me out. I was put onto another tank which rushed me to a field hospital in Refidim – by the time I got to the field hospital I had passed out. I woke up eight days later in Sheba Hospital in Ramat Gan, where I would be for the next eight months. Over those months I needed seven operations, as well as rehabilitation to relearn how to walk. The doctors also showed me just how close I had come to losing my life – had the shrapnel hit just a few millimeters away, it would have pierced my brain and probably killed me.



Rabbi Wasserman (middle) with fellow soldiers on their tank.

When I woke up in Sheba, my fiancée Rina was by the bed. As I came round, I asked her three questions. "Will you still marry me?" to which she said "yes." "Is the fighting still going on?" to which she just smiled wryly. Thankfully Israel was doing better then, but the battle was still raging and she didn't want me worrying about anything except my recovery. And finally, "What happened to my *tefillin*?" Everyone thought that my injuries must be making me imagine things – there were no *tefillin* with me in the hospital, and people just thought I was imagining things. But I knew I had grabbed my *tefillin*!

So what did happen with the tefillin?

Three months later, a soldier from Bnei Brak came to visit me, and told me that he has a present for me – and handed me the *tefillin*. He explained that when I was transferred to the tank that took me to

the Refidim field hospital, the *tefillin* fell into the belly of the tank. After the war ended and the tanks were being serviced, an engineer found them. He came out of the tank, and asked: "Anyone know who Wasserman is, whose *tefillin* were in this tank?" This religious soldier knew Rina from Bnei Akiva in Bnei Brak, and so he knew who I was. He said he would bring them to me. To this day, I wear those *tefillin* every day!

How do you look back at the war and your experiences now?

Many people focus on the failures of the Yom Kippur War – how Israel was surprised, and how close to 3,000 soldiers were killed. While these are definitely true, I don't think people focus enough on the fact that we ended up winning the war! If we hadn't stopped them, the Egyptians would have rolled into Be'er Sheva and the Syrians into Teveria. We prevented the destruction of Israel and we have to be thankful for and mindful of that. There was also a significant role played by the *Hesder* students, who served in hundreds of tanks, making a major impact on the war



Rabbi Wasserman and his family on a tank at Yad Lashiryon in Latrun.

effort. Many *Hesder* students were killed and injured in the Yom Kippur War, and it made a big impact when Israeli society saw that *yeshiva* students took part and fought side-by-side with the rest of Israel to defend our Land.

On a personal note, for many years I had some type of PTSD. I couldn't hear tank fire or even look at a picture of a tank, and I certainly couldn't watch anything like a war movie. Decades later, I felt I was ready

to confront this – I gathered my children and grandchildren, and we traveled to Yad LaShiryon, the Tank Museum at Latrun. There I climbed onto a tank with my whole family, told them the story of what happened, and we took a photo together on the tank. I think of that tank as my tank of victory, surrounded by my family in Israel. ■



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Gratitude and Humility

A Theological Response to the Yom Kippur War

Rabbi Moshe Zvi Neria ז"צ

In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, the nation was deeply traumatized. How could the entire military and political establishment have failed to detect the Arab attack? How could a nation that crushed its enemies during the Six-Day War come so dangerously close to defeat? In this essay, published in a small pamphlet titled *Milchemet Yerach HaEitanim* (1974), Rabbi Moshe Zvi Neria ז"צ addressed these painful questions with both clarity of vision and great faith.

With the attribute of mercy

“On the tenth day of the seventh month,” on Yom Kippur, the day on which the “nation of the G-d of Avraham” stands in fasting and prayer before its Creator, Arab nations unsheathed their swords – with the full support of the evil nation of heresy, the Soviet Union – against the nation of G-d in their Land. The goal of this war was not simply to reclaim territories which they had never developed or settled when they were under Arab control, but primarily to destroy the people of Israel who had returned to their homeland, to the chosen Land G-d had sworn to give to their forefathers. The attackers on this holy day planned not only a war of soldiers, but the slaughter of multitudes.

The murderous Kelt missile launched from Egypt to the heart of Tel Aviv and the Prog missiles launched from Syria into the Jezreel Valley had one goal – to murder and to destroy. Their intent was to destroy young and old, women and children, all at once.

Had these missiles reached their targets, we would have had, G-d forbid, tens of thousands of civilian casualties in this war. A holocaust of destruction was about to descend like a thunderbolt upon an innocent nation. However, the hateful goal of these evil doers, to maliciously harm G-d's people on their holiest day and to desecrate the holy day, the day of *Am Yisrael's* uniqueness and unity, backfired upon them and foiled their plot of mass murder.

The overwhelming attribute of mercy that defines that day – “As an eagle that stirs up her nest, hovering over her young” (Devarim 32:11) – was miraculously revealed that day, and the shield of salvation – “Hashem is my light,” “ה' אורי,” ‘on Rosh Hashanah,’ ‘And my salvation,’ ‘וְיִשְׁעִי’ ‘on Yom

Kippur” (*Vayikra Rabbah* 21:1) – protected the cities and towns of *Eretz Yisrael* from all of these direct attacks. The murderous missiles from Syria did not reach their target, most of them hitting trees and rocks, and the missile launched from Egypt to Tel Aviv was tracked and destroyed while still in the air, at the very last moment.

Even the enemy's surprise attack on Yom Kippur achieved the opposite of its intended goal: because the nation was gathered in synagogues, the IDF was able to quickly call up reserve troops, and the empty roads enabled the army to transport the soldiers more quickly to the front. Even more importantly, the experience of the lofty holiness of the day strengthened the morale of the soldiers, and the timing of this *milchemet mitzvah* (obligatory war), forced upon them in the midst of the fast, contributed greatly to their spiritual readiness to fight with courage and bravery, with attachment to Hashem and with self-sacrifice, with faith and trust.

Like the sorcerers of Pharaoh in their time, our enemies saw but did not understand what they saw. Their evil eye saw a nation cut off from the world, gathered in synagogues, wrapped in their *tallitot* and their fast, and absorbed in their prayers, and they thought: “here is the perfect time to confuse them and attack them!” However, this evil eye, insolent towards Heaven, did not see the eye from above – the “eye of Hashem is toward them that fear Him, toward them that wait for His mercy” (Tehillim 33:18) – the perceptive eye, vigilant and watchful, seeing men, nations, and all the inhabitants of this world.

Those who plotted murder did not know nor understand that “days have been formed and one of them is His” (Tehillim 139:16), that Yom Kippur is the special day of the Creator of the world and man, the day He put our first forefather through the test of *Akeidat Yitzchak* (which established the

nature of the Jews... who are ready to sacrifice their lives to sanctify the name of G-d, the day He revealed the thirteen attributes of mercy to our faithful shepherd, the day He gave the second set of tablets to Israel, and the day on which He said to *Moshe Rabbeinu*: “Behold, I make a covenant; before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been wrought in all the earth, nor in any nation” (Shemot 34:10), a covenant for this people that guarantees they will not be destroyed – “No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper” (Yishayahu 54:17).

On this holy day the nation of G-d was lifted up, the people near unto Him, and they merited holiness and purity – before Hashem you shall be purified – and woe to them who impinge upon the awesome holiness of the day, and woe to them who attempt to desecrate “Israel, Hashem’s holy portion” (Yirmiyahu 2:3).

We have a tradition: *Akeidah Yitzchak* took place on Yom Kippur, at the time of the *Mincha* prayer. It was during those hours that extraordinary young men bound themselves in a war of self-sacrifice. They went up to Heaven in flames, and in the merit of their binding and sacrifice, the rest of us remain alive and well.

The war that broke on Yom Kippur continued and became the war of *יָרַח הַאֲתָנִים* (Melachim I 8:2), the month of Tishrei which is “*אַיְתָן בְּמִצְוֹת*,” “strong in *mitzvot*” (Rosh Hashanah 11a). After the initial failures, Israel’s inner spiritual strength was revealed, its fighting strength and courage. And with great power and wisdom, Israel defeated its enemies and they were turned back. “The right hand of the L-rd is exalted; the right hand of the L-rd deals valiantly” (Tehillim 118:16).

“The wicked initiated war... to slay those who walk on a straight path. Their sword shall enter their heart, and their bows shall be broken. The few of the righteous are better than the multitude of many wicked men... Hashem supports the righteous!” (Tehillim 37:14–17).

Reflection and humility

“What is our strength, what is our might?... The wise as if they were without knowledge? And men of understanding as if they were devoid of intelligence?”

A great wonder plagues our thoughts: How could the “wise and understanding nation,” the glorious Israeli Defense Forces and our sophisticated intelligence services, the finest and sharpest minds, have become people who “have eyes but do not see and ears but do not hear?” How could such wise and experienced people have failed to see the enemy gathering at the gates, mobilizing large armies and preparing for war with terrible weapons? How could we have closed our eyes?

The answer is that this was not the sin, but the punishment! “For Hashem has poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes” (Yishayahu 29:10). The failures were so incomprehensible and so widespread among so many people, it is difficult to see this as an individual sin, as the responsibility of one person and not another.

It is shortsightedness to view the failures at the sin of individuals. Rather, we must understand that the sins and

mistakes of individuals led to a punishment of the nation; that the sins of man led to punishment at the hands of Heaven...

The painful vision of Yishayahu has been fulfilled through us: “the wisdom of His wise men shall be lost, and the understanding of His geniuses shall be hidden” (Yishayahu 29:14). As the Sages have said: “When the shepherd is angry at his flock he blinds the eyes of the sheep that walks at the front of the flock” (Bava Kama 52a).

After the Six-Day War, when G-d’s hand and glorious arm were revealed before His nation and portion, there were stubborn people who insisted that it was *their* hands that accomplished these miracles and *their* arms that saved our people. They repeated, over and over again: “Our wisdom, our understanding, our strength, our diligence, our planning and our vigilance protected us.” “And G-d does not go forth with our armies” (Tehillim 60:12).

The disastrous neglect leading up to the Yom Kippur War, the incomprehensible mistakes, the utter blindness to the enemy’s movements – all this must prove to our wise people and our experts that without the help of G-d there is no value to wisdom and understanding, to strength and might – “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, nor the strong man boast of his strength” (Yirmiyahu 9:22).

The most powerful army and the most courageous soldier require help from above; “if Hashem will not guard a city, [its] watcher keeps his vigil in vain” (Tehillim 127:1). “And the stout-hearted among the mighty shall flee naked on that day” (Amos 2:16).

Therefore, not only do we need a commission of inquiry to investigate the mistakes that were made, a commission that will focus on particular people and definite facts, but we also need a general commission for the entire nation, for discussion and soul searching. “Let us search and examine our ways” (Eicha 3:40). Let us examine the ways of the entire nation and see how far it has become distanced from itself, how far it has turned away from its essence, its identity, the generations that came before it and the great moments when it became a nation, which have sustained the nation and brought it to this time.

“When they have made an end of breaking in pieces the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished” (Daniel 12:7). Rashi explains this cryptic verse to mean: “When the uprightness and the strength of Israel’s hand is consumed... their suffering will end and the *Mashiach* will come.” This means that when their arrogance and braggadocio will come to an end, when the people no longer feel that they are superior because of their physical strength, then the sufferings which came to return the nation to clear thinking and to faith will end. “The salvation of man is futile; through G-d we shall gather might, and He will trample our adversaries” (Tehillim 60:13–14). And then the light of redemption will shine upon us, the light of *Mashiach*, “And all the earth shall know that Israel has a G-d, and all this assembly shall know that not with sword and javelin does Hashem save” (Shmuel I 17:46–47).

● Translated by Rabbi Elie Mischel.



GOLDA MEIR

FROM FAILURE TO HEROISM

(PHOTO: MARION S. TRIKOSKO/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)

ODELIA GLAUSIUSZ

Oriana Fallaci, an Italian journalist famed for her rigorous, unyielding interviews of world leaders, left her first meeting with Golda Meir in despair. “What am I to do with a woman like that? She reminds me so much of my mother – the same gray curly hair, her tired and wrinkled face, that sweet and energetic look.” In a recent press conference for the upcoming biopic, *Golda*, actress Helen Mirren called Meir “one of the most extraordinary characters I’ve ever played,” noting “...she was perfectly happy to toddle around in the kitchen making everyone coffee and playing the grandmotherly role. It’s a very different attitude to power... but it’s still immense power.” Still, Golda’s empathy and amiability should not be confused with weakness. “I defy anyone to argue that Zionism is not utterly incompatible with pessimism,” Golda wrote in her memoir. Her relentless determination, coupled with her care and devotion for Israel and its citizens, shaped Golda into a woman who was, in the words of Yehuda Avner, “an epic embodiment of true legends and legendary truths.”

Golda Meir made *Aliyah* from Milwaukee in 1920 and became increasingly involved in political affairs. In 1948, she flew to the US and defied everyone’s expectations by singlehandedly stirring the hearts of American Jewry with her powerful rhetoric, returning to Israel with fifty million dollars – double the amount hoped for. When she was voted in as prime minister after the sudden death of Levi Eshkol in 1969 – after serving as Israel’s ambassador to the Soviet Union, as Labour Minister, Foreign Minister and Secretary-General of the Labour Party – she buried her face in her hands and cried. “I had planned to come to Palestine, to go to [Kibbutz] Merhavia, to be active in the Labour movement,” she wrote. “But the position I was

now to occupy? Never. I only knew that now I would have to make decisions every day that would affect the lives of millions of people.”

The Yom Kippur War broke out under Golda’s watch, taking the lives of over 2,500 Israeli soldiers, and was, in Golda’s own words, “a near disaster.” Heavily criticized for her failure to mobilize troops early enough – despite having acted on the assurances of military intelligence – she resigned from her position after the war and went into retirement. Golda was exonerated by the official commission of enquiry after the war’s end, which praised her for her wisdom, common-sense and speedy decision making. The shrewd foresight she displayed in rejecting the idea of a pre-emptive strike (and the warm relationship she had earlier cultivated with Richard Nixon) allowed for an invaluable airlift of planes and weapons from America that steered the course of victory decisively in Israel’s favor. During the war, she barely left her office, and stayed true to the lesson she learned during the desperate years prior to Israel’s independence: “One can always push oneself a little bit beyond what only yesterday was thought to be the absolute limit of one’s endurance.”

Avner movingly describes Meir’s Sukkot visit to soldiers attempting to celebrate the holiday on a desolate battlefield. She talked to them with the “countenance of a concerned grandmother... [O]n that Sukkot day, this indefatigable and implacable old woman represented the very essence of Jewish self-defense; she was the fervent agent of the view that it was infinitely preferable to deal with power’s confounding implications than to be powerless again.” Her stoic leadership steered Israel to victory at a time when it faced the greatest threat to its existence. Yet for Golda herself, none of this mattered.

“It matters only that I, who was so accustomed to making decisions – and who did make them throughout the war – failed to make that one decision [insist on an earlier call-up]. I shall live with that terrible knowledge for the rest of my life. I will never again be the person I was before the Yom Kippur War.”

Later in life, she visited her old school in Milwaukee. She told students that far more important than deciding on their career was deciding the way they want to live: “If you are going to be honest with yourself and honest with your friends, if you are going to get involved with causes that are good for others, not only for yourselves, then it seems to me that that is sufficient, and maybe what you will be is only a matter of chance.” Golda Meir became the great leader that she was precisely because she did not seek out power. Her “immense power” lay in her rejection of power’s trappings, in her empathy, her idealism and her tireless action on behalf of her country and its citizens.



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Rav Ovadia and the Widows of the Yom Kippur War

Rabbi Ben Baruch

The challenge of *hatarat agunot*, or ‘freeing’ married women with missing husbands, is emotionally charged. For generations, *poskim* have grappled with many cases where married men have disappeared or been killed in circumstances making them difficult or impossible to identify. The *halachic* tension is obvious; on the one hand *poskim* want to do everything within their power to allow women to remarry. In a *teshuva* discussing the issue of identifying a dead person’s face through *tviat ayin* (*halachic* facial recognition), Rabbeinu Tam says that anyone who acts stringently against his ruling is a sinner (*Sefer HaYashar* 92). On the other hand, the stakes are high. If we permit a woman to remarry and the husband is in fact still alive, the resulting issues of *mamzerut* can be equally tragic.

This complex backdrop sets the stage for Rav Ovadia Yosef’s momentous undertaking following the Yom Kippur War. He was approached by Rav Mordechai Peiron and Rav Gad Navon, the Chief Rabbi and Assistant Chief Rabbi of the IDF, to head the *Beit Din* responsible for working through the list of nearly one thousand men killed in Israel’s bloodiest war since its independence. Rav Ovadia’s magnum opus, *Yabia Omer*, records his poignant introspection upon being tasked with the mission (*Even HaEzer* 3:1). He professed feeling inadequate for such a monumental task, but following earlier *poskim* who equate alleviating the suffering of *agunot* to saving a life, he felt compelled to do what he could.

Rav Peiron later described Rav Ovadia’s *modus operandi*: “With these cases [where identifying the soldier proved difficult], I saw Rav Ovadia’s true courage. His brain worked like a computer, and everything he did came from an approach of ‘I need to find a solution, I need to help these *agunot*, it’s not an option to leave anyone

in this tragic state.’ He always found a way, according to *halacha*. We all felt the weight of responsibility. Rav Ovadia would always ask me: ‘Perhaps this soldier is still around somewhere? Maybe he’s still alive?’ He was cautious, but he never had an ‘I can’t do it’ attitude. No Rav ever challenged any of our decisions regarding *agunot*... At the end of a year of difficult work and extended effort we identified all the hundreds of dead bodies, and declared all of the missing soldiers as no longer alive” (cited in Haggai Huberman, *Rav, Aluf*).

During a *hesped* for his father at Yeshivat Kerem B’Yavneh, Chief Rabbi Yitzchak Yosef recounted how his father burst into tears upon realizing that some of the *agunot* he was trying to free were the wives of *avreichim* in KBY’s *kollel*. Remembering the young men whom he had recently tested during the *Aseret Yemei Teshuva*, just before the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War, he cried: “He quoted the Pri Megadim, Shach and Taz with such clarity! Now I need to release his wife?!” (*Srugim*, Aug. 11, 2012, כָּהֵנָּה הַתִּיר אֶבְיָא אֶת הָעֵגוּנוֹת שֶׁל מְלַחֶמֶת, יוֹם הַכְּפוּרִים).

Although a thorough examination of the *halachic* issues is beyond the scope of this article, many of the questions revolved around *sugyot* at the end of Tractate Yevamot discussing the minimum proofs required to determine a husband’s death so that his wife may remarry. The three main categories discussed are facial recognition, identifying marks on the body, and other types of evidence based on personal belongings. Whether a court can rely on these proofs to establish death depends on a multitude of variables, such as the uniqueness of the evidence and the time elapsed since the death. Among the questions Rav Ovadia dealt with are whether photographs of a dead person are sufficient for identification (*Yabia Omer*, *ibid.*

3:17–20), or whether the ubiquitous metal ‘*diskit*’ (ID tag) issued to a soldier is considered a *siman muvhak* (unique piece of evidence) of the identity of a dead body (*ibid.* 3:2). Rav Ovadia generally ruled leniently in these cases, arguing that they fall within the acceptable types of evidence enumerated in the Gemara. Rav Ovadia also grappled with cases of circumstantial evidence, such as that of a fighter pilot whose plane exploded and crashed into the sea. Based on the testimony of an accompanying pilot who witnessed the crash and claimed no one could have survived, alongside the fact that a helicopter was sent to search for survivors and found no one, Rav Ovadia permitted the pilot’s widow to remarry (*ibid.* 4:1).

Although we pray that this area of *halacha* will never again have to be put into practice, the painful story of the Yom Kippur War widows stands as a testament to both Rav Ovadia’s *halachic* prowess and his unparalleled compassion.



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From the Hell of the Yom Kippur War:

Rav Chanan Porat's Miraculous Survival

Haggai Huberman

The sirens of the alarm that broke the silence of Yom Kippur 5734 throughout the country symbolized the beginning of a new era in the history of the State of Israel, different from anything the country had experienced during the first 25 years of its existence. In a complete surprise, at least to most of the citizens of Israel, the armies of Egypt and Syria attacked the complacent State of Israel. Their forces broke through Israel's defensive lines in the Golan Heights and in Sinai, and rushed forward. In the Golan Heights, which had largely fallen into the hands of the Syrian army, the IDF managed after only five days to contain the Syrians and push them back – and even penetrate deep into Syrian territory. On the Sinai front, where the Egyptian army had no intention of advancing beyond a range of ten kilometers anyway, the tide turned after ten days, when the IDF crossed the canal to the west and advanced into the interior of Egypt.

When the war broke out, Rav Chanan Porat put on his uniform and returned to the army. The brigade to which he belonged reached Tessa in northern Sinai. Uri Elitzur, who knew Chanan since the days they had studied at Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh, was among the fighters who came to Sinai from the Golan. "We landed in helicopters, and I was sure that we were beyond enemy lines," he recalled. "We started moving through the dunes, with our guns locked and loaded, not knowing who was where, expecting a surprise attack by the enemy at any moment. After a long walk, suddenly we see a group sitting around a fire, and Chanan is giving them a *shiur!* This was the first 'enemy' we encountered."

On Shabbat morning, *Parashat Bereishit*, after the IDF crossed the Suez Canal near Ismailia – the second wave of success – an eighty-two millimeter mortar shell fell

on Chanan, hit his shoulder and exploded behind him. A large amount of blood burst from his body. The medic tried to stop the bleeding with his standard bandages, and when this didn't work, he tore the heavy army uniform off Chanan and tried to stop the bleeding with their help.

Chanan's friends dragged him, naked, to a dilapidated dugout. They cried desperately for a half-track to evacuate him. Chanan felt that his time was running out. "Gasping for breath," as he wrote in one of his letters, he was sure that these were his final moments. "In my mind I parted from all my relatives and friends, from Abba, Ima, my wife and my children."

Serving in the medical battalion that operated in the battle area was Rav Shabtai Sabato, one of the top students at Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav and later the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Mitzpeh Yericho. He and Chanan had gotten to know each other a few years before the war, in Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav, when Rav Sabato, then a young 18-year-old student, stood near the older students to listen to their Torah conversations. "There I met the first rank of Torah scholars who later became *rashei yeshiva*, rabbis of communities, rabbis of cities. Among them, Rav Chanan Porat, then only 'Chanan,' stood out. He was a figure who could not be ignored, radiant and radiating."

On that day, Rav Sabato and his friends were overwhelmed by the large number of wounded soldiers. They worked day and night. Suddenly Rav Sabato realized that one of the seriously injured soldiers rushed to them was Chanan Porat. "I was shocked. He was very pale, as if completely bloodless. I noticed that he was bandaged. And I realized that a mistake had been made: he was brought to us even though he was already

bandaged and should have been placed in the line of the wounded waiting to be flown to the hospital. But since Chanan was already there, I decided to examine him.”

The examination saved Chanan’s life. Sabato discovered that in the storm of battle, the medics made a mistake and had not bandaged one of his severe wounds. The blood was draining so heavily from him that Chanan was about to die. The medics hurried to dress the wound, but even so, the doctor estimated that Chanan had no chance of reaching the hospital alive after losing so much blood. Since they had no more doses of blood left, the doctor ordered three medics, including Rav Sabato, to lie on the floor and donate blood. They quickly checked which blood was suitable, and injected it into Chanan’s body. “Suddenly the color came back to his cheeks, and we saw how a dead man could come back to life,” Rav Sabato recalled. “He opened his eyes, looked at me and recognized me. I said to him: ‘Chanan, when you get back to Israel, say hello to my parents.’ We didn’t know if we would get out of that inferno alive.”

Ari Elon, son of Judge Menachem Elon and brother of Rabbi Benny Elon, was among those who evacuated Chanan by helicopter. “Chanan was waiting for the helicopter to evacuate him,” he recalled, “and the chief medic, Professor Itamar Pitovsky, told me that I should talk to him the entire flight because he is in a serious condition, and that he should not be given water.” And that’s exactly what Ari Elon did: he talked to Chanan the entire time so he wouldn’t lose consciousness. “Chanan was in a stupor, but he managed to talk to me. He showed me his daughter Efrat’s red hat. I wanted to see if he was conscious and so I asked him what day it was. Half fainting, Chanan answered: ‘Today is Shabbat, *שַׁבָּת הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הִיא מְלֻזְעָה וְיִפְּוֹאָה קְרוֹבָה לָבֵא*, Shabbat is not a day to cry out, may healing soon come.’ Then he tried to wink at me and convince me to give him water, even though the doctor forbade it. I said goodbye to him when the helicopter took him to the hospital.”

The long weeks of recovery after the injury led Chanan to long reflections and soul-searching. ‘Why was I injured? Why was I saved? What hint was Heaven sending me? What is the most important thing I can do so that this life, which was given to me as a gift, will not be in vain?’ As he continued thinking, he came to the conclusion that if he had received his life as a gift, he must now dedicate it to action on behalf of the people of Israel. But what should he do? This he didn’t yet know.

One of the articles that influenced him in those days, when he was lying wounded in the hospital, was an article that he read in the *kibbutz* movement’s magazine, *Shadmot*. The article was written by the journalist Arnon Lapid, a member of Kibbutz Givat Chaim Ichud, and its title was “An Invitation to Cry.” Despair seeped into him from every line: “Together we will cry over the dreams we have given up, over the great things



Chanan Porat wounded in the hospital. (PHOTO: HAGGAI HUBERMAN)

that have become small, over the gods who lied, over the false prophets who have risen to greatness, for the lack of taste, the lack of will, the lack of power, for the present that does not possess a single ray of light, and for the future that will be never be the same. We will cry for the newly bereaved, the new widows and the new orphans, for the strong friendships that were cut apart, for the illusions that were shattered, for the speculations that were proven to be baseless, for the truths that were discovered to be lies, for the plans that were made but will never happen and for the sadness that came down like a cloud over every joy, forever...”

“Lapid’s deep despair hurt me so much,” Chanan later said, “that I felt that the wounds were reopening in me: Master of the universe, after all the trials and crises and failures, *Am Yisrael* rose up and defeated its enemies. If we had merited it, we would be obligated to say *Hallel* for victory in the Yom Kippur War – and he invites us to cry? At that moment, the spark was born in me that later led me to establish Gush Emunim.”

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



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Yovel on Yom Kippur – Alarm to Freedom

Rabbanit Shani Taragin

Every year, stories of trepidation and anticipation for salvation overwhelm us as we approach Yom Kippur following forty days of introspection and repentance. Since the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War fifty years ago, these sentiments have only deepened. Still flashing before our eyes while we pray are images of young men with *tallit*-covered heads racing out of *shuls* throughout the country to respond to military alarms. This year's commemoration of fifty years since the Yom Kippur War resonates personally as I was born just a few months before the war's outbreak.

How appropriate it is to commemorate the *Yovel* anniversary of the Yom Kippur War on the day when we traditionally pronounce the beginning of the *Yovel* – i.e., on Yom Kippur! “You shall count off seven weeks of years – seven times seven years – so that the seven weeks of years gives you a total of forty-nine years. Then you shall sound the horn loud; in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month – the Day of Atonement – you shall have the horn sounded throughout your Land.” (Vayikra 25:8–9). Seven cycles of counting *shemitta* years sensitize us to recognize Hashem as the owner of the Land, preparing ourselves for rebirth in the jubilee year. *Shofar* blasts herald the fiftieth year that will transform the status quo. Ancestral lands that have been sold are returned to their initial owners, and all servants are set free. The blowing of the *shofar* on Yom Kippur does not merely proclaim a fleeting message to indentured slaves but rejuvenates “all the inhabitants of the Land” for an entire year of *deror* – liberty, as we return to our national, religious and societal roots.

The Mishnah (Rosh Hashanah 3:5) and Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 33b) compare and contrast the various instruments and sounds of the *shofarot* of *Tishrei*. Most *Rishonim* maintain that on Rosh Hashanah there is a *mitzvah* to hear the *shofar* blasts as a call to *teshuvah* which bring the prayers of the nation to Hashem. The Rambam (*Sefer HaMitzvot*, #137) notes that the *mitzvah* of *shofar* on Yom Kippur of a *Yovel* year, however, is a *mitzvah* of blowing, incumbent upon every individual: “It is well-known that this *shofar* blowing for the jubilee is only to publicize the emancipation, and is part of the proclamation mandated by the verse: ‘And you shall proclaim liberty in the Land.’ It is not like the *shofar* blowing of Rosh Hashanah, which is ‘a remembrance before G-d,’ but rather designates the freeing of servants...”

Regarding *Yovel*, the Torah mentions the blowing of the *shofar* twice, first in the singular and then in the plural. The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 9b) rules that there is a double obligation; first the court blows the *shofar*, then each individual. The *Chinuch* (*Mitzvah* 331) explains that while the court's *shofar* blowing on Yom Kippur of a *Yovel* year notifies the public, each master must also blow the *shofar* individually as a reminder to release his servants. The courts blow the *shofar* first to recognize and proclaim the communal message and then each individual master must realize his limitations and allegiance to G-d and release his servants. These messages resonate loudly as we commemorate the *Yovel* of the Yom Kippur War. We are reminded of the sirens of fifty years ago, which like the *shofar* blasts of *Yovel*, humbled us after the hubris of the Six-Day War, recognizing our vulnerabilities and dependence on Hashem for our personal and national freedom.

The *Chinuch* further highlights the role of peer pressure as a powerful motivator; when masters hear the *shofar* blasts of many people, they are called to do the same as they emancipate their slaves. The cacophonous sounds of the numerous *shofarot* echo the dissonance they feel and force them to reevaluate their personal values as social disruption ensues. Every *Yovel* year, and particularly this one, awakens us to the sounds of our surroundings, beckoning us to redefine our national experiences and respond with humility. This message, explains Rav Hirsch (Vaykira 25:9) is apparent in the two *shofar* sounds blown to herald *Yovel* – the staccato *teruah* and the unwavering *tekiah*: “This call is sounded in the Name of G-d by the Great Court, which represents the nation as a whole; it is then continued by every one of the people and spreads throughout the Land. For it is a call from G-d into the midst of the country. It calls everyone and everything to the Master of all. Its purpose is to release the shackles of social bondage, in which everything is bound, *teruah*. And it restores everything to pristine social conditions, *tekiah*.”

May this *Yovel* of the Yom Kippur War awaken, restore and revive brotherhood, unity and humility!



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Days of Fear and Trembling: A Yamim Nora'im Reflection on the Yom Kippur War

Rabbi Reuven Taragin

Fifty years ago, Yom Kippur and the *Yamim Nora'im* took on new meaning.

The term “*Yamim Nora'im*” connotes the awesomeness of the high holiday period and the fear that our lives hang in the balance. This feeling was especially palpable on Yom Kippur fifty years ago – both personally and nationally.

In just its third decade of existence, Israel and its citizens faced an existential threat. The surprise Yom Kippur morning attack caught Israel off-guard. The Egyptian and Syrian armies made significant headway in both the north and south. People feared the worst.¹ Though Israel rebounded, almost three thousand soldiers lost their lives and nearly 10,000 were wounded.

The miraculous Six-Day War had given Israelis a false sense of security. They felt that the victory would deter future attacks and that expanding their borders created a safe buffer zone. The Yom Kippur War shattered these illusions.

The fear and vulnerability of war

During a time of war, people feel incredibly vulnerable. No one knows which side will win and who may be killed, wounded, or captured in the process.² But the wars of the State of Israel are even more terrifying. Israel's enemies threaten to obliterate the State and kill or drive out its populace. In addition, the state's army is a “citizen's army.” Everyone has a son, brother, parent, or cousin at the front, making the war and fear deeply personal.

The wail of sirens in Israeli cities expresses and reinforces the terror. In the words of Amos, “Does the *shofar* sound in the city without the people trembling?” (Amos 3:6).

The Torah teaches us to direct these feelings of fear toward prayer. We should realize that war and other suffering really emanate from Hashem, Who orchestrates them behind the scenes, and we should respond by blowing *chatzotzrot* (horns) to “remind” us of Hashem and ask Him to “remember” and save us (Bamidbar 10:9).³

The Rosh Hashanah connection

The *shofar* we blow on Rosh Hashanah is also connected to the emotions of war. Because the *shofar* was blown at times of war,⁴ hearing it conjures associated feelings of fear and vulnerability.⁵

The sounds we blow also connect to the emotions of war. The *teru'ot* resemble the cries of Sisrah's mother, who waited by the window for her son to return from war (Rosh Hashanah 33b). Expressing and identifying with these feelings of fear and distress remind us that on Rosh Hashanah, our lives also hang in the balance.⁶ Like the *chatzotzrot* blown at a time of war, Rosh Hashanah's *shofar* calls upon us to respond to distressing circumstances by remembering Hashem and doing *teshuvah*.⁷

If we respond to the *shofar* by remembering, returning, and committing ourselves to Him, we merit His “remembering” us and judging us favorably.⁸

A year-round reflection

Though the *Yamim Nora'im* should also be a time when we draw close to and strengthen our love of Hashem, they begin with the recognition that He is judging us and determining our fate for the upcoming year.

May the memory of the trauma of the Yom Kippur War help us feel the vulnerability we are meant to feel during this period – both this year and in the future.

a time of war. In ancient times, enemies attacked Jews when they heard the *shofar* blown on the morning of Rosh Hashanah, thinking the Jews were about to attack them (*Talmud Yerushalmi*, Rosh Hashanah 20b).

5. *Pesikta Rabbati* 40. See also Ran (Rosh Hashanah [3a in Rif]) who associates the Rosh Hashanah *shofar* with the verse in Amos that describes the blowing of the *shofar* at a time of war.
6. Rav Shlomo Elyashiv, *He'arot L'Masechet Rosh Hashanah* (33b).
7. Rambam, *Teshuva* 3:4. Rambam understands the “memory” the Torah mentions in reference to the Rosh Hashanah *shofar* (*Vayikra* 23:24) as referring to our memory. He explains the goal of blowing *chatzotzrot* at a time of war in the same way (*Ta'anivot* 1:1-2). The Rosh Hashanah *shofar's* goal of getting us to remember Hashem explains why the *Mishnah* about the “hands of Moshe” (which had a similar goal during the war against Amalek) is included in the chapter dealing with the laws of *shofar*. The prophet Yechezkel (33:1-9) compares his call to *teshuvah* to a *shofar* blown to warn a city of an approaching army. Like the watchman who warns the people by blowing the *shofar*, so Yechezkel warns the people of their need to do *teshuvah*.
8. *Sefer HaChinuch* (331), based on Rambam's *Sefer HaMitzvot* 137. For this reason, Rosh Hashanah is referred to as *Yom HaZikaron*, the “Day of Memory.”



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1. Defense Minister Moshe Dayan feared what he called “*Churban Bayit Shlishi*.”
2. See *Kohelet* 8:8, which points to war as reflective of man's lack of control over his own life.
3. Rambam (*Mishneh Torah*, *Ta'anivot* 1:1-2) categorizes blowing the horns as a form of prayer which inspires *teshuvah*, an outgrowth of remembering Hashem (*Teshuva* 3:4). This merits Hashem's “remembering” and saving us. See also Ibn Ezra (Bamidbar 10:9), who mentions the two forms of memory (ours and Hashem's).
4. *Yehoshua* (6:4-5), *Shoftim* (3:27, 7:16), *Shmuel I* (13:3) mention that the *shofar* was blown during wars. See also *Sotah* 43a, which interprets a verse mentioning *chatzotzrot* at a time of war as referring to a *shofar*, and *Ta'anit* 16b, which mentions they would recite verses of the *Shofarot* prayer at

Letters from the Front

Religious Zionist soldiers reflect on their experiences during the immediate aftermath of the Yom Kippur War

What characterized this war was the spiritual awakening among the secular soldiers. They say that in this war, it was clear that it was not “My strength and the might of my hand that has accomplished this for me” (Devarim 8:17), but that there is a higher power that saved *Am Yisrael*. And they say that when they return home from the front they will go to a *beit kneset* and make the blessing of *haGomel*. And in the field they are donning *tefillin* every morning.

Chaim Schechter, *Yeshivat Bnei Akiva, Pirchei Aharon*

We saw the hand of Hashem in this war. We were surrounded by heavy enemy forces on one side, and the sea on the other side, but we nevertheless held on. One time, one of their tanks came very close to us, right up to the gate of the base. Aharon Genser and I shot at them with machine guns and yelled: “These trust in chariots and these in horses, but we remember the name of Hashem our G-d!” (Tehillim 20:8). He immediately turned tail and ran away.

Hillel Unsdorfer, *Yeshivat Bnei Akiva, Ra'anana*

From the very light of the Mashiach, which has been revealed literally among and through us during these days of war for our existence, we send blessings of peace. Even as shells explode all around us, Hashem protects us. May we all be blessed with the blessing of strength that Hashem has placed in our hands, and may we merit to be immersed in Torah study and the awe of Hashem, with peace of mind.

Yigal, *Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav*

Thank G-d, after all that we experienced, I am alive and well. This war built us up, far more than anything else we learned and absorbed over the years – despite the severe shock and the great suffering we have been through.

I am convinced that whoever truly possesses, with clear awareness, the idea of redemption, will feel that we are experiencing a historic moment envisioned by our prophets concerning the end of days. Specifically this great crisis has made us feel that we are experiencing the birthpangs of *Mashiach*. Those prophecies, which foresaw such great disasters, were very far from our experiences. Perhaps because of our lack of recognition, we said that these events were still far off in the future. The great tragedies of this war, however, have brought us back to the truth, constantly reminding us that we are literally living through the times of redemption.

The young men who are able to maintain a little peace of mind, and can remember the promises of redemption to *Am Yisrael*, have brought great blessing to the other soldiers whose spirit fell from the heaviness of battle and the frightening experiences of battle, particularly during the first days of the war.

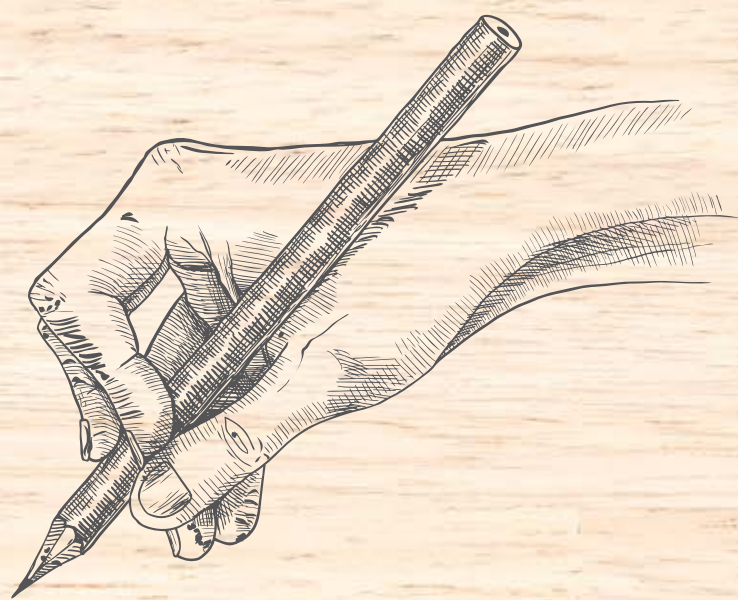
Elchanan Ben-Nun, *Yeshivat Har Etzion*

How were the Syrians stopped? How were the Egyptians stopped? We try to give explanations, but the true reason is this: *it was a miracle*. The soldiers feel that something unusual has happened here. And each one in his own way expresses this with words of faith.

Yehuda Meir Stern, *Yeshivat Bnei Akiva, Kfar HaRoeh*

During difficult moments, people seek out their faith and return to their roots. Every soldier has moments when he stops for a moment to think, and when you stop and think you also identify with your historical background, with everything that brought you to this moment, with the continuation of the path, and with the same faith that *Am Yisrael* has taught for generations upon generations.

Lieutenant Colonel, Battalion Commander,
Paratroopers



Let someone come now and try to argue that we are not an *am segulah*, a treasured nation... During peacetime, I know some of the *chevra* rebelled against words like this, about being an *am segulah*. It's *chaval*; I don't know how to pray, but if I did I would get up every morning and thank the G-d of Israel – not in a negative way, by saying “for not making me a gentile,” but rather “for making me a Jew.” In my first war, I didn't yet feel this way, but from war to war I feel that I am becoming, more and more, a Jew.

Ma'ariv, Interview with a Phantom Pilot

We reached the unit when it was already completely dark. Tanks were returning from their missions in Egypt. Suddenly I heard the sound of singing. Tens of soldiers were sitting in a small *sukkah*, passionately singing “*HaRachaman hu yakim lanu et Sukkat David haNofalet*,” “May the Merciful One raise up for us the fallen Tabernacle of David.” After many days of very difficult battles, there was an atmosphere of holiness and high morale in that *sukkah*. The officer who was invited to the *sukkah* said: “With morale as high as this, we don't have anything to worry about.”

Eliezer Sheffer, *HaTzofeh*

During these days and hours, the Jewish spark was lit within every Jew in *Am Yisrael*. We were overcome with a feeling of *mitzvah*, for we knew that with our bodies we were contributing to the defense of the nation and the Land. And on the other hand, we also felt natural human fear. With these two emotions, we fulfilled “*v'gilu bir'ada*,” “Rejoice in trembling” (Tehillim 2:11).

El Michutz LaChomot

Many soldiers here put on *tefillin* every day – and not only the religious soldiers. We've already reached the point where we no longer need to remind them. They come of their own initiative and ask for the *tefillin*. Some of them already know the *berachot* by heart and the order for putting on the *tefillin*.

Mordechai Bar Dagan, *Yeshivat Bnei Akiva, Pirchei Aharon*

What we can conclude from this terrible war is this: that the verse “Hashem will fight for you, and you shall remain silent” (Shemot 14:14) is so real that it is more real than reality itself. It's simply impossible to understand how such awesome miracles occurred, which saved the lives of dozens of us at the base. Even the atheists in our group cannot grasp the wonders of the Creator. It simply cannot be described in words.

Ya'akov Krotenberg, *Yeshivat Bnei Akiva, Pirchei Aharon*

It's hard to believe how the war changed people. Young men who were eating on Yom Kippur now put on *tefillin* every day, and plan to continue doing so going forward. I wonder if this is one of the reasons Hashem brings wars like this upon us, even with all the tragedy that comes with them.

David Farjun, *Yeshivat Bnei Akiva, Kfar HaRoeh*

● Originally published in Hebrew in *Milchemet Yerach HaEitanim* (1974).
Translated by Rabbi Elie Mischel.

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Drory studied for six years in the Piedmont region of Italy before returning to Israel. He currently serves as the chief winemaker at Agur, as well as his own creative endeavors such as creating Israeli vermouth for the first time. At Anava, he will serve as the winemaker, alongside head vintner Avinoam Inbar, where they will guide Anava members in every step of the winemaking process, from choosing their varieties of grapes, their blend, and every step up until they produce their ideal wine. “Each customer is going to be creating something new, and we are the assistant in that process. We begin with each customer asking them about their tastes, and even do blind taste sessions so we can learn which type of blends they like. We then will grow the grapes they choose, to ultimately create the blend they have worked on. We invite our members to be part of every stage of the process, from the planting, pruning and harvesting, to really experience the joys of what it means to make wine in the Land of Israel.”

Through their wealth of experience, Eyal and Avinoam will be attuned to the finest details, ensuring the best quality of each wine, according to the tastes of each customer. As well as the individual vineyards of each customer, they have planted another diverse vineyard with different varieties, to ensure the ability to adapt the blend over the years. There is a unique microclimate in this valley as, due to the wadis, parts of the area only begin receiving sunlight later in the day, creating a climate that is 5 degrees Celsius colder than the region as a whole. The different range of temperatures available is just one part of the versatility of the Harei Yehuda region.



For Eyal, winemaking is a deep personal experience, something he hopes to share with Anava members. “Today, most people live with such a disconnect from nature that we think a tomato or a cucumber is born in the supermarket – people have no idea what they look like in nature. When someone actually steps into a field, and joins us in working the land, pruning vineyards and blending grapes, it is a powerful experience, where suddenly what was once taken for granted is now appreciated. It was this that made me fall in love with winemaking in the first place.”

And while winemaking is a meaningful experience whether in Piedmont or in Bordeaux, there is something unique about making wine in the Land of Israel. “Sometimes while working in the vineyards, I will take a break and go for a walk, and it is not uncommon to stumble across one of the many ancient wine presses in our region, that date between two to three thousand years old. I try to imagine what our grandparents from the time of the Tanach and Mishnah experienced – and I can see it in front of my eyes, as I am growing wine just like they did! Since then, we took a long journey through the exile, and now have come home – on the one hand, everything has changed, but on the other, nothing has. It is this remarkable story that we invite you to join at Anava vineyards!”

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A Proud Daughter of Olim:

An Interview with Ambassador Tzipi Hotovely

Ambassador Tzipi Hotovely has emerged as one of the leading religious women in Israeli politics and diplomacy. After becoming a Member of Knesset at 31 and serving as a government minister, she has served as the Israeli Ambassador to the United Kingdom since August 2020.

Rabbi Aron White spoke with Ambassador Hotovely about her work, the Israel-UK relationship, and the connection between Israel and Diaspora Jews.

Thank you for speaking with us, Ambassador Hotovely. Tell us about your experience as Israel's Ambassador to the UK.

It has been a great and productive term here, even if it was difficult at the beginning, arriving during the middle of the pandemic. I was honored to be able to present my credentials to the Queen, which was a very special experience. We got to chat for about 20 minutes, and she was actually very informed about Israel – she said to me, “You have had too many elections!” My husband made the *beracha* on seeing royalty, and it definitely was a special moment.

Throughout your life, you have gone on shlichut three times – as a shlichah of the Jewish Agency to Atlanta, Georgia, as a shlichah of Bnei Akiva to France, and now the Ambassador of the State of Israel to the UK. What drew you to this line of work, representing and connecting people to Israel around the world?

You are correct – and I also served briefly in the government as the Diaspora Affairs Minister. I have always felt a strong connection to the Jewish Diaspora, as my parents made *Aliyah*, and I remember when my grandparents came to join us on *Aliyah* in Israel. I believe that *olim*, with all of their diversity and different

cultures and mentalities, have greatly enriched Israeli society. They become part of the great melting pot that is Israel, and bring with them creativity and new perspectives. I feel I understand Diaspora communities because of my family background, and feel very proud to represent Israel, as a child of people who made *Aliyah*.

On a day-to-day basis – when you aren't meeting with royalty – what does that actually involve?

I divide my role into aspects that people are aware of, and aspects that people pay less attention to. One of the well-known aspects of the role is interacting with the Jewish community, and representing Israel at official events. When I get to *daven* at Kinloss Shul on Yom HaAtzmaut, at the communal celebration hosted by Bnei Akiva UK and Mizrachi UK, I feel like I am transported back to Yerushalayim! I also find this role to be very significant, as there is this myth out there that the Israel government focuses on the Jewish community of America, and doesn't pay attention to other Diaspora communities. This is totally untrue – the relationship between Israel and Diaspora Jews is of critical importance, and all communities and their relationship with Israel are extremely significant.

One of the less well-known aspects of the UK-Israel relationship is our very strong relationship on all matters relating to security. Just a few weeks ago, we hosted a significant public event exploring this security relationship, and this is a relationship that has become stronger and stronger, with collaboration relating to Iran, the war in the Ukraine, as well as many other matters. The UK is a member of the UN Security Council and NATO, where it plays a critical role. Israel's security relationship with it is very strong, and is continually getting stronger.

It is interesting, I think many people reading the news would think that with the rise of BDS and anti-Zionism, the UK-Israel relationship is getting weaker. But you are telling a different story here.

There is no question that in the British media and on university campuses there is a lot of anti-Israel feeling – when I went to speak at the London School of Economics (LSE) I had to be escorted off the premises because of the strong protest against my presence. But that is not the whole picture. London and the UK have a long connection with Zionism, going back almost two centuries. The story starts with the Montefiore and Rothschild families and their philanthropy for *Eretz Yisrael* during Ottoman times, and it continued with the Balfour Declaration in 1917, issued by the British government as a letter to the Zionist Federation of the UK. Chaim Weizmann, who became Israel's first President, was very active in promoting Zionism in the UK. When Israel was founded, the relationship between the two countries grew. Margaret Thatcher was the first sitting British Prime Minister to visit Israel, but since then, Prime Ministers such as Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, David Cameron, Theresa May, Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak have all been strong friends of Israel.

One of the best things we do is bring politicians to Israel. Both Labour Friends of Israel and Conservative Friends of Israel bring delegations of politicians to experience Israel first-hand. For a country that is so often in the headlines, when politicians come to experience the country themselves they understand it better, and we feel these trips make a significant impact.



Top to bottom: Ambassador Hotovely with her husband, Or; Ambassador Hotovely and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak; Ambassador Hotovely and President Isaac Herzog (PHOTOS: EMBASSY OF ISRAEL LONDON PRESS OFFICE)

Another expression of this relationship is in the UK's voting patterns at the UN. For many years, the UK was what we call a red country, namely a country that would often vote for anti-Israel resolutions in the General Assembly. The UK is now a green country that very often votes against the biased and anti-Israel resolutions.



Top to bottom: Meeting with Suella Braverman, UK Home Secretary; Ambassador Hotovely with Israeli and UK foreign ministers Eli Cohen and James Cleverly (PHOTOS: EMBASSY OF ISRAEL LONDON PRESS OFFICE) Joint Chanukah candle lighting Bahrain-Israel-UAE Ambassadors to the UK (CREDIT: JEWISH NEWS); Ambassador Hotovely with her family (PHOTO: EMBASSY OF ISRAEL LONDON PRESS OFFICE).

You mentioned that the British media is often very anti-Israel. Many people around the world saw the recent video of a BBC journalist saying “Israel is happy to kill children,” to Naftali Bennett, for which she did later apologize. What is the reason for this media bias, and how do you work against it?

Firstly, there is clearly a lot of ignorance about Israel, and I take every opportunity to speak to journalists, to represent Israel on TV and radio and more. Each time we have a high-level Israeli figure come to the UK we have a press briefing which is an opportunity to tell more of our story.

Beyond responding to falsehoods and bias, we also try to tell people that Israel is not a one-dimensional story that is only about the conflict with the Palestinians. Take the past few years since the pandemic, in which issues of public health have come to the fore. From Israel’s response to the pandemic, to the tremendous start-ups in the field of bio-tech, there is so much that Israel offers the world in dealing with the issues of our time. Another example very relevant to this year is everything in the field of AI, in which Israel is very much at the forefront of innovation. To focus only on the conflict is to miss such a significant part of Israel’s story and contribution to the world.

When it comes to the conflict itself, there is also so much ignorance. I actually think that the story of the Dee family made a big impact on the British public. Lucy, Maia and Rina Dee were British citizens, and their murder was widely reported. Rabbi Leo Dee spoke powerfully of his experience and values, and this was Cambridge-accented English, and it made a big impact on the British public.

Our public diplomacy department also works with different communities, such as the Indian community and even the Muslim community, to build friendship and understanding from the bottom up. I always say that at Friday night dinners I almost never host Jews; almost all of our guests are non-Jews, so they get to see a Jewish Shabbat. At my Shabbat table, I hosted the British Foreign Secretary and Home Secretary together with their spouses. We hosted the Trade Minister and his wife, and their children had a playdate with our children. I want leaders of different backgrounds to experience *hadlakat neirot*, our customs and *minhagim*, so they have a real understanding of Jewish culture. One particularly powerful memory is the first Chanukah I was here, when we ran a joint, live-streamed event where I lit the *menorah* together with ambassadors in three capitals of Abraham Accords countries. London is a great place for strengthening connections with the Abraham Accords countries.

On the subject of the Abraham Accords, you arrived in London right around when they were being signed. How has that impacted your role?

I was probably the first Israeli ambassador to say “my first meetings will be with my Arab colleagues!” We have formed an excellent relationship with the ambassadors of the UAE, Bahrain and Morocco, including organizing an embassy soccer tournament between the workers of the embassy (Bahrain won).

On a more personal note, there are not many religious women who represent Israel as ambassadors. How has that impacted your work?

In one of my first meetings when I began this job, someone from the Jewish community here said, “You are almost the opposite of

the stereotype we are used to. We are used to Israeli ambassadors being secular men, who are 3rd or 4th generation Israeli, and you are a religious woman whose parents made *Aliyah!*” I am very proud to represent Israel, and think it is important that the diversity of Israeli society is expressed through Israel’s representatives. I wear it as a badge of honor that my parents made *Aliyah*. I think it is really important for people to know that our society is meritocratic, and it doesn’t matter what your background is and who your family is; you can find success in Israel. We need more women, and religious women, to be representatives of Israel! I also see my religion as a source of strength for me in this role – it grounds me and gives me clarity.

One of your roles is representing Israel to a younger generation – what are your thoughts about Israel and Jewish youth today?

I love engaging with the youth here – each year I get to host the winners of the *Chidon HaTanach* competition, and it’s one of my favorite things to do here. I think the past few years were challenging [because of COVID]; young people missed two summers of trips to Israel, and it does make an impact. I always encourage young people to take a gap year in Israel if they can. If they are religious, then at a *yeshiva* or seminary, and if not, then on one of the many other programs available. There is nothing like getting to live in and experience Israel for a year. ■



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Olim Giving Back to Israel



Rebecca Rubin Seligson

Making *Aliyah* wasn't an easy decision for me, and I was initially hesitant when my husband expressed his desire to move here. But during my year in seminary I fell in love with the lifestyle and people. Israel resonated with me in a way my home country couldn't. I knew I belonged here. *Aliyah* came with bureaucratic challenges, especially for our child with special needs. But with support from family, doctors, and kind-hearted strangers, we navigated the red tape. Our community and friends have become our family, providing unwavering support. I learned to be assertive, to fight for my son even in broken Hebrew, and discovered the power of using my voice. The *Chinuch Meyuchad* system has been a game-changer for my son's education, surpassing what we had before.

I noticed a lack of disabled representation in children's literature, and so I decided to write *Wheellustrated Tales*, a children's book featuring a child in a wheelchair, to normalize disabilities in children's literature and fill this void. Exposure to disabilities at a young age is crucial for promoting awareness and inclusion, and so I publish books and advocate for disability inclusion. By introducing children to characters with disabilities, they become more accepting. My latest release, *The Adventures of Incredi-Wheels & Triple S: The Mysterious Missing Book*, is available on wheellustratedtales.com.

From my *Aliyah* experience, I learned the importance of speaking up, despite language barriers. There's still much to discover, like feeling comfortable hiking alone and exploring nature's beauty. *Aliyah* also grants me the most important freedom – the freedom to have a homeland and to practice our faith without compromise and to be myself. As a descendant of Holocaust survivors, this significance is immeasurable. Overall, this has been a transformative journey filled with challenges, growth, and joy.

Rabbi Yosef Ginsberg

My journey began with a gap year program at Yeshivat Hakotel in 2009. I became so enamored with Israel that I stayed on and officially made *Aliyah* during my army service in April 2012.

The early years were challenging; I left my family and lived entirely on my own. Being a middle child of seven and, until recently, the only sibling in Israel, the transition wasn't easy. I've learned that the only way to grow is to face and overcome challenges rather than complain about them. This journey instilled in me passion, perseverance, and independence. Living in Israel has been transformative and enlightening, almost akin to being reborn. I found this land to be a place where I could truly thrive.

I'll always remember a defining moment early in my army service. During basic training, I was laying down flat in the Jordan Valley in the pouring rain, reflecting on the remarkable growth and maturity that just one year in Israel can foster. This realization became a cornerstone of my journey.

One important lesson I've learned is to actively create the change you want to see. In a small, well-networked country like Israel, it's truly possible. I've discovered an extraordinary sense of spiritual connection, experiencing how clearly G-d can be found here every moment of the day.

In 2015, I co-founded NCSY Israel to meet the challenges that Anglo teens face in adapting and integrating to life in Israel. Now, we are the premier youth movement in Israel dedicated to connecting, inspiring and empowering English-speaking teens through the values of Zionism, Torah and tradition.

Ultimately, making *Aliyah* and being in Israel is not just an accomplishment, but a key to freedom and self-discovery.





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Simanim: The Antidote to Despair

Rabbi Zvi Elon

Asheknazim, Sephardim and Jews from all over the world carefully observe the mystical custom of “simanim,” “signs,” on Rosh Hashanah. Rabbi Yosef Karo writes that it is customary to take different types of vegetables and pray accordingly for the New Year. Most famously, we dip an apple in honey and pray for a good and sweet new year.

Why do the Jewish people become kabbalistic mystics on Rosh Hashanah? The Gemara itself asks: “מָנָא הָא מַלְתָּא דְאָמִיר רַבְנָן” “How do we know that simanim are indeed influential?”

Every year before Rosh Hashanah, we read in *Parashat Ki Teitzei* about the *mitzvah* of *hashavat aveida*, that one who finds an object must not ignore the item but must return the object to its owner. Rabbi Chaim Ben Attar explains that this is true not only for lost objects, but also for people. If you see a person that is lost, there is an obligation to help him return him to the right place.

The Mishnah in “*Eilu Metzot*” explains that when one finds objects with identifiable characteristics, he is obligated to declare to the world that he has found the object. However, if the object found does not

have any recognizable characteristics, he is permitted to keep the object for himself (“הָרִי אֵלָיו שְׁלוֹ”¹). This *halacha*, however, presents a moral challenge.

Take, for example, a man who found a \$50 bill on the street. The bill is unidentifiable, and so the finder need not declare it to the world; the money cannot be returned to anyone, since no one can prove that it is his. The question, however, is why the finder can keep the money for *himself*. After all, he never owned this banknote! Ethically, why is he allowed to keep this money for himself? Should he not be required to dedicate the money he found on the street to charity or to a public fund?

Tosfot explain that since the object has no identifiable sign, we can assume that the owner of the object has given up on finding it. When an owner despairs of finding an object, the object becomes *hefker*, ownerless. Since the object now has no owner, the first person to find it becomes the rightful owner. If a person gives up, the outcome is *hefker*. *Gevald!*

Rav Kook *zt”l* explains that the most wonderful thing about *teshuva* is that it fills the entire world with hope – hope for every individual and hope for the existence of the world as whole. Therefore, the most dangerous thing and the antithesis of *teshuva* is despair.

As a society that believes in *teshuva*,

we must never let any individual fall into despair. The whole idea of Elul, as well as Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot, is that it is always possible to do *teshuva*, to improve and excel. Despair is the greatest danger. Giving up is simply not an option. For as Tosfot explain, when a person gives up and falls into despair, he abandons *himself*, G-d forbid.

On Rosh Hashanah, we come before Hashem and say to Him: “G-d Almighty, last year I asked for Your forgiveness, and also two years ago, and the truth is that this year I also have some things that I need to fix. People who see me might think that I am lost, that I am unidentifiable; they think that there is no way for me to do *teshuva*. But Hashem, look at what I brought tonight! I brought You an apple dipped in honey, a date and pomegranate, I brought *simanim*! I have an identity, Hashem – I have identification! And just like a lost object, if there is a *siman*, if there is identification, then there is no despair! I know that You will not give up on me Hashem, just as one does not give up on his lost object. If You believe in me, then I will believe in You. I believe in *teshuva*!” *Hashavat aveida*, returning what is lost, is the root of *teshuva*!

I pray that we enter this new year filled with hope and belief in *teshuva*! May we never stop hoping to return to Hashem, to return to ourselves, and to return to one another with a new sign of hope and love.

Shana Tova U’metuka!



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Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks שליט"א

I vividly remember the surprise and delight I had when I first read Jane Austen's *Emma*. It was the first time I have read a novel in which you see a character changing over time. Emma is an intelligent young woman who believes she understands other people better than they do. So she sets about arranging their lives – she is an English *shadchan* – with disastrous consequences, because not only does she not understand others; she does not even understand herself. By the end of the novel, though, she is a different person: older, wiser and humbler. Of course, since this is a Jane Austen story, it ends happily ever after.

In the more than 40 years that have passed since I read the book, one question has fascinated me. Where did Western civilization get the idea that people can change?

It is not an obvious idea. Many great cultures have simply not thought in these terms. The Greeks, for instance, believed that we are what we are, and we cannot change what we are. They believed that character is destiny, and the character itself is something we are born with, although it may take great courage to realize our potential. Heroes are born, not made. Plato believed that some human beings were gold, others silver, and others bronze. Aristotle believed that some are born to rule, and others to be ruled. Before the birth of Oedipus, his fate and that of his father, Laius, have already been foretold by the Delphic Oracle, and nothing they can do will avert it.

This is precisely the opposite of the key sentence we say on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, that “*teshuva, tefillah, and tzedakah* avert the evil decree.” That is what happened to the inhabitants of Nineveh in the story we read at *Mincha* on Yom Kippur. There was a decree: “In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed.” But the people of Nineveh repent, and the decree is canceled. There is no fate that is final, no diagnosis without a second opinion – half of Jewish jokes are based on this idea.

The more I studied and researched, the more I realized that Judaism was the first system in the world to develop a clear sense of human free will. As Isaac Bashevis Singer wittily put it, “We have to be free; we have no choice.”

This is the idea at the heart of *teshuva*. It is not just a confession, not just saying *al chet shechatanu*. It is not just remorse: *ashamnu*. It is the determination to change, the decision that I am going to learn from my mistakes, that I am going to act differently in future, that I am determined to become a different kind of person.

To paraphrase Rabbi Soloveitchik, to be a Jew is to be creative, and our greatest creation is our self. As a result, more than 3,000 years before Jane Austen, we see in Torah and in Tanach, a process in which people change.

To take an obvious example: *Moshe Rabbeinu*. We see him at the start of his

mission as a man who cannot speak easily or fluently. “I am not a man of words.” “I am slow of speech and tongue.” “I have uncircumcised lips.” But by the end he is the most eloquent and visionary of all the prophets. Moses changed.

One of the most fascinating contrasts is between two people who were often thought to resemble one another, indeed were sometimes identified as the same person in two incarnations: Pinchas and Eliyahu. Both were zealots. But Pinchas changed. G-d gave him a covenant of peace and he became a man of peace. We see him in later life (in Yehoshua 22) leading a peace negotiation between the rest of the Israelites and the tribes of Reuven and Gad who had settled on the far side of the Jordan, a mission successfully accomplished.

Eliyahu was no less a zealot than Pinchas. Yet there is a remarkable scene some time after his great confrontation with the prophets of *Ba'al* at Mount Carmel. He is at Mount Horeb. G-d asks him, “What are you doing here, Eliyahu?” Eliyahu replies, “I have been very zealous for Hashem, G-d Almighty.” G-d then sends a whirlwind, shaking mountains and shattering rocks, but G-d was not in the wind. Then G-d

sends an earthquake, but G-d was not in the earthquake. Then G-d sends fire, but G-d was not in the fire. Then G-d speaks in a *kol demamah dakah*, a still small voice. He asks Eliyahu the same question again, "What are you doing here, Eliyahu?" and Eliyahu replies in exactly the same words as he had done before: "I have been very zealous for Hashem, G-d Almighty." At that point G-d tells Eliyahu to appoint Elisha as his successor (Melachim I 19).

Eliyahu has not changed. He has not understood that G-d now wants him to exercise a different kind of leadership, defending Israel, not criticizing it (Rashi). He is asking Eliyahu to make a similar transformation to the one Pinchas made when he became a man of peace, but Eliyahu, unlike Pinchas, did not change. Even his words do not change, despite the momentous vision. He had become too holy for this world, so G-d took him to heaven in a chariot of fire.

It was Judaism, through the concept of *teshuvah*, that brought into the world the idea that we can change. We are not predestined to continue to be what we are. Even today, this remains a radical idea. Many biologists and neuroscientists believe that our character and actions are wholly determined by our genes, our DNA. Choice, character change, and free will, are – they say – illusions.

They are wrong. One of the great discoveries of recent years has been the scientific demonstration of the plasticity of the brain. The most dramatic example of this is the case of Jill Bolte Taylor. In 1996, aged 37, she suffered a massive stroke that completely destroyed the functioning of the left hemisphere of her brain. She couldn't walk, talk, read, write, or even recall the details of her life. But she was very unusual in one respect. She was a Harvard neuroscientist. As a result, she

was able to realize precisely what had happened to her.

For eight years she worked every day, together with her mother, to exercise her brain. By the end, she had recovered all her faculties, using her right hemisphere to develop the skills normally exercised by the left brain. You can read her story in her book, *My Stroke of Insight*, or see her deliver a TED lecture on the subject. Taylor is only the most dramatic example of what is becoming clearer each year: that by an effort of will, we can change not just our behavior, not just our emotions, nor even just our character, but the very structure and architecture of our brain. Rarely was there a more dramatic scientific vindication of the great Jewish insight, that we can change.

That is the challenge of *teshuvah*.

There are two kinds of problems in life: technical and adaptive. When you face the first, you go to an expert for the solution. You are feeling ill, you go to the doctor who diagnoses the illness, and prescribes a pill. That is a technical problem.

The second kind is where we ourselves are the problem. We go to the doctor who listens carefully, does various tests, and then says: "I can prescribe a pill, but in the long-term, it is not going to help. You are overweight, under-exercised and overstressed. If you don't change your lifestyle, all the pills in the world will not help." That is an adaptive problem.

Adaptive problems call for *teshuvah*, and *teshuvah* itself is premised on the proposition that we can change. All too often we tell ourselves we can't. We are too old, too set in our ways. It's too much trouble. When we do that, we deprive ourselves of G-d's greatest gift to us: the ability to change. This was one of Judaism's greatest gifts to Western civilization.

It is also G-d's call to us on Yom Kippur. This is the time when we ask ourselves where have we gone wrong? Where have we failed? When we tell ourselves the answer, that is when we need the courage to change. If we believe we can't, we won't. If we believe we can, we may.

The great question Yom Kippur poses to us is: Will we grow in our Judaism, our emotional maturity, our knowledge, our sensitivity, or will we stay what we were? Never believe we can't be different, greater, more confident, more generous, more understanding and forgiving than we were. May this year be the start of a new life for each of us. Let us have the courage to grow.



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Asking Forgiveness and Forgiving Others

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

The goal of Yom Kippur is explained in the verses in *Parashat Acharei Mot*: “And [all this] shall be as an eternal statute for you; in the seventh month, on the tenth of the month, you shall afflict yourselves, and you shall not do any work neither the native nor the stranger who dwells among you. For on this day He shall effect atonement for you to cleanse you. Before Hashem, you shall be cleansed from all your sins” (Vayikra 16:29–30).

The Torah establishes that Yom Kippur is intended for atonement for sins: “you shall be cleansed from all your sins.” The character of the day is derived from this goal. The Rambam describes Yom Kippur as “the apex of forgiveness and pardon for Israel,” and as a time of repentance:

“Yom Kippur is the time of *teshuva* for all, both individuals and the community at large. It is the apex of forgiveness and pardon for Israel. Accordingly, everyone is obligated to repent and confess on Yom Kippur” (*Hilchot Teshuva* 2:7).

Why does G-d forgive us? How should we behave in order for Him to forgive us?

As is well known, we must repent for both transgressions between man and G-d (בין אדם למקום) as well as transgressions between man and his friend (בין אדם לבן אדם). Regarding transgressions between a man and his friend, the *Shulchan Aruch* rules that “Yom Kippur does not atone until he reconciles with his friend” (*Orach Chaim* 606:1). Therefore, a person is obligated to reconcile with other people for the sins he committed against them, as Yom Kippur will not help him with these sins.

Many people customarily ask for forgiveness on Erev Yom Kippur from acquaintances and family members against whom they have not really sinned. However, it is important to realize that the main goal is to ask forgiveness from those people with whom we have a real quarrel or conflict.

Is a person obligated to forgive someone who apologizes to him when it is clear that the person apologizing is only superficially asking for forgiveness, but does not truly regret his actions and is likely to repeat his sin? It seems not. To do *teshuva*, it is not enough to ask for forgiveness. One must repent for his sins and take it upon himself not to do them again. As long as the person apologizing does not do so, he has not accomplished true *teshuva* and there is no obligation to forgive him. This principle emerges from the words of the Rambam and applies both to sins against G-d and to sins against man:

“Similarly, someone who injures a colleague or damages his property does not attain atonement, even though he pays him what he owes, until he confesses and makes a commitment never to do such a thing again, as implied by the phrase (Bamidbar 5:6), ‘any of the sins of man’” (*Hilchot Teshuva* 1:1).

Do not be satisfied with a verbal apology. The one apologizing must commit to avoiding his sin in the future. The Rambam writes that the person apologizing must placate the person he has wronged until the victim forgives him: “*Teshuva* and Yom Kippur only atone for sins between man and G-d, such as a person who ate a forbidden food or engaged in forbidden sexual relations. However, sins between man and man, such as a person who injures a colleague, curses a colleague,

steals from him, or the like, will never be forgiven until he gives his colleague what he owes him and appeases him. Even if a person restores the money that he owes [the person he wronged], he must appease him and ask him to forgive him” (*Hilchot Teshuva* 2:9).

The demand for true remorse is also expressed on the part of the victim. As Rambam states: “It is forbidden for the person who suffered the injury to be cruel and not to forgive the one who caused the injury. This is not the course of behavior for a descendant of Israel. Instead, since the person who caused the injury asks and pleads with him for forgiveness once or twice, and he knows that he has repented from his sin and regrets his evil deeds, he should forgive him. Whoever hastens to grant forgiveness is praiseworthy and is regarded favorably by the Sages” (*Hilchot Chovel U'Mazik* 5:10).

It is clear that the victim is only required to forgive if he knows that the person apologizing has “repented of his sin and regretted his evil.” At the same time, the victim must not harden his heart, but rather “whoever hastens to grant forgiveness is praiseworthy and is regarded favorably by the Sages.”

It seems that we can learn this attribute from G-d Himself. *Tomer Devorah*, by Rabbi Moshe Cordovero (1522–1570), opens with a parable. In *Sefer HaHeichalot*, G-d is referred to as “an insulted King,” a sobriquet used subsequently in various Kabbalistic and Chassidic works. What is the meaning of this name?

Rabbi Moshe Cordovero explains: The Master of the Universe knows everything – He is aware of the actions of each and every one of us, and the gap between them

and the command He has given us. The Almighty is omnipotent in His ability to strike sinners immediately, as He did to Yeravam who “stretched out his hand... and dried it up” (Melachim I 13:4). If He would run the world in this way, everyone and everything would be forced to do His bidding. The angels say to G-d: Why don't You act against the people who harm Your kingdom? This is why the ministering angels call G-d an insulted King.” G-d is forgiving. G-d is patient. G-d is not strict with us and continues to perform kindnesses for us.

We all want G-d to forgive us. But to achieve forgiveness we must adopt G-d's attributes: not to worry about our own honor and to know how to forgive others.

Once an elderly woman in her eighties came to my house on Erev Rosh Hashanah to do *hatarat nedarim*, the annulment of vows. At first I was worried; would I be able to release her vow? The story she told was truly shocking. Her eighty-three-year-old brother had recently explained to her why he refused to speak with her for more than forty years. Decades earlier, during a heated argument, the woman told their mother that she would never set foot in their house again. For forty years her brother harbored this painful sentence in his heart and refused to speak

to his sister. Only now, in their old age, did he propose that she annul her vow and reconcile with him.

The woman who stood in front of me declared that she did not remember ever saying such a thing to her mother. In her view, it was very unlikely she would have said something so harsh because she had always been on good terms with her mother. Nevertheless, she asked me to arrange an annulment of vows. It was easy to annul this vow, which was no longer relevant anyway. Her mother had died many years before, and her house no longer exists. After we symbolically annulled the vow, I couldn't stop thinking: what severity! For forty years, two siblings did not speak! Even if the story is true and the sentence was said – is it impossible to forgive?

One who wants to merit forgiveness must attach himself to G-d's attributes and not be strict. Whenever we are going through hard times and are in need, we pray and ask for mercy. However, in day-to-day life we take all the good in our lives for granted, as if we are entitled to this good by law. Do we really deserve this abundance? It turns out that we are not perfect, and we do not deserve all the blessings in our lives. And yet G-d is not

strict with us, He believes in us and gives us many chances to improve.

Particularly on Yom Kippur, we must embody G-d's attributes and not be overly strict with others. May G-d continue to be kind and tolerant with us, and may He seal us all for a good and happy year, a year in which G-d will fulfill all the wishes of our hearts, for good.



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An Interview with Rabbi Eliezer Kashtiel

Rabbi Netanel Elyashiv



Rabbi Eliezer Kashtiel, Rosh Yeshiva of the post-army yeshiva program at Bnei-David in Eli, has long been one of the most prominent voices in Israel's Religious Zionist community. With the publication of a new English translation of his popular *Siman Labanim*, a collection of lectures on the weekly parasha, English speakers can now access Rav Kashtiel's uplifting writings. Rabbi Netanel Elyashiv spoke with Rav Kashtiel about his approach to studying the parasha.

Rabbi Netanel Elyashiv: *Parashat hashavua* is a very broad and diverse field. How would you describe your personal approach to teaching the *parasha*?

Rabbi Eliezer Kashtiel: *Parasha* study is an opportunity to learn in depth about our *emunah*, *mussar*, and our national identity. My approach to teaching is also shaped by my personal inner feelings. I try to convey to students the very same things that touch me when I study, the things that give me strength.

RNE: Some try to connect the study of the *parasha* to current affairs, to find in the weekly portion of the Torah references to the weekly portion of the news.

REK: My approach is that studying the *parasha* is our chance to distance ourselves a bit from day-to-day life, to raise our view higher and reconnect with the eternal values of the Torah. I try to teach things that are not controversial, things that all of *Klal Yisrael* can relate to. When people gather together on Shabbat, we should be looking for common ground and core values. That's why I chose the title *Siman Labanim*. There are many children, with diverse ways, but we all come from the same fathers and mothers. The *parasha* and its teachings should unify us and allow us to deepen our common roots.

RNE: I suppose you also believe that *shul* should be designated as a “safe place,” and that the Rav should not engage in controversial topics. But some would argue that this makes the Torah irrelevant to people's lives.

REK: I indeed feel very much that way. I am not only a teacher, I'm also the Rav of a congregation, and I believe the *shul* should be a place where everybody can feel that they belong. The lessons of the Torah will be relevant to people's lives when the Rav places the emphasis on Torah and *mussar*, the most important principles and values of our faith, things that are so truthful and uplifting that nobody would contend them. There are many things that everybody agrees upon, but they also demand much work. Everyone in *shul* agrees that *shmirat halashon* and *tefillah* are important, yet everyone can acknowledge that we have much to improve in these fields.

RNE: You have witnessed firsthand the growth of the *mechina* pre-army *yeshiva* movement. What, in your view, is the most important innovation of this movement regarding Torah study?

REK: In the classic *yeshiva* world there was a clear distinction between the study of *emunah* or *hashkafa*, which can be very academic, and the study of *mussar*, which is clearly intended to affect one's life. Due to the intensity of the *mechinot*, in which students know that their time is very limited (one or two years followed by full army service) and due to the type of students that attend these programs, the approach to *emunah* is different. The students' goal is to incorporate everything they study into their lives, to find the practical meaning of every lesson. It is a very special connection between the high ideals of *emunah* and the practical demands of *mussar*. The study has an almost immediate effect.

RNE: We are beginning to study Bereishit again, which repeatedly focuses on brotherhood. The relations between brothers in Bereishit are mostly unsuccessful, like the relationship between brothers in Israel this past year.

REK: There is a unique quality to brotherhood that even a husband and wife do not possess. It is not a matter of choice, but rather a fact. You cannot threaten a sibling by saying “we are no longer brothers!”, for it is simply false. There is no option of canceling your connection. In the same way, Hashem chose our people, promising us that whatever happens, we will always be His nation.

This was the secret of Yosef, the most important person in Bereishit. He was the first to fully understand the essence of brotherhood. Yosef taught true brotherhood: you can sell me into slavery, you can harm me greatly, yet we will always be brothers. That is how Yosef became the savior of *Klal Yisrael*. ■

The Poetry of the Yamim Nora'im

Rabbi Eliezer Kashtiel

At the end of *Parashat Vayeilech*, the Jewish people are commanded: “וְעַתָּה כְּתוּבוּ לָכֶם אֶת הַשִּׁירָה” (Devarim 31:19). And now, write for yourselves this *shirah* (song or poem)

The Gemara derives the obligation to write a *sefer Torah* from this verse (Sanhedrin 21a). This teaches us that the entire Torah is termed a *shirah*. The Chatam Sofer points out that, nonetheless, David was criticized for describing the contents of the Torah as *zemiroth* (songs) (Sotah 35a).

Apparently, there is a difference between a *shir* and a *zemer*. A *zemer* is a melody that evokes emotions. The Torah is not a *zemer*; its purpose is not to produce a casual emotional experience. Torah study is a serious endeavor that requires concentration, effort and toil. Similarly, composing a *shir* requires skill; a *shir* follows rules and has structure and depth.

Rav Kook explains this distinction: “*Shirah* is the supreme expression of the intellect that emerges from broad and deep contemplation of the light of the Supreme G-d and experiencing wonder at His works. *Zemer* comes as the expression of emotion” (*Olat Re'iyah* 1, p. 200).

The calculated, exacting rhythm and wording of a poem are designed to impact our consciousness. Like poetry, the Torah can raise us above our simplistic understanding of reality and give us a broader, more meaningful perspective.

This is expressed in the organization of the *sedarim* (orders) of the Mishnah, reflecting the fact that the Mishnah is much more than mere compendium of technical *halachot*. *Seder Zera'im* (seeds) begins

with Tractate Berachot, signifying that we must approach nature with an awareness of the *berachot* (blessings) it contains. The remainder of this Seder deals with sharing one's blessings with others – the poor, *kohanim* and *levi'im*. *Seder Zera'im* intensifies our sense of gratitude for the kindness that Hashem bestows upon us, exemplified by the fact that a tiny seed planted in the ground can yield abundant produce. With that gratitude comes a mindset oriented toward giving.

Next, *Seder Mo'ed* (festivals) deals with our relationship with time, teaching us about its meaning and sanctity. The *mishnayot* teach us not only the *halachot* of the holidays, but their deeper significance as well. For instance, Tractate Rosh Hashanah does not deal exclusively with the laws of the *shofar*. Its first chapters discuss *kiddush haChodesh* (the sanctification of the new month) and the *molad* (birth) of the new moon. In purely astronomical terms, the moon is in no sense reborn, yet the Sanhedrin invested enormous effort in studying the birth of the moon and establishing the date of Rosh Chodesh. Why is this?

The Jewish months and the birth of the new moon represent the poetry of renewal and rebirth. These phenomena teach us that our world is not static; it contains the potential for rebirth and repentance. Rosh Hashanah reminds us of our moonlike capacity for renewal. Indeed, in the blessing recited at *kiddush levanah* (the sanctification of the new moon), we declare that the Jewish people “are destined to be renewed like it [the moon].” It is therefore significant that Rosh Hashanah is the only holiday that coincides with Rosh Chodesh, as the sages point out (Rosh Hashanah 8a).

One lacking poetical sensitivity will see Rosh Hashanah as nothing more than a technical demarcation of a calendrical change. The natural world, after all, remains unaffected by it. In order to perceive the deeper meaning of Rosh Hashanah, we must relate to it through the prism of *shirah* that is manifested in the Mishnah.

Similarly, only the final chapter of Tractate Yoma deals with the practical laws pertaining to the fast of Yom Kippur. The other seven chapters discuss the sacrificial service performed by the *kohen gadol* in the *Beit HaMikdash*. This reflects the essence of the day as a time to enter our own personal holy of holies and actualize our highest potential.

The practical laws of Yom Kippur can be condensed into a single chapter. However, in order for us to absorb the fundamental message of the day, we must be taught how to emulate the spiritual journey of the *kohen gadol*.

Like poetry, the spiritual world has rules. It has an order and a language of its own that fosters a comprehensive worldview synthesizing the intellectual and the experiential. This Torah worldview affords us the opportunity to relate to life with a broader and deeper perspective than we otherwise would.

● Translation: R. Dovid Sussman

● Editing and adaptation: R. Yitchak Twersky, Academic Language Experts



Siman Labanim is a ground-breaking English translation of Rav Kashtiel's popular collection of *shiurim* on the weekly *parasha*. With this publication, his uplifting writings are accessible to a wider audience. Rav Kashtiel, the Rosh Yeshiva of the post-army program of Bnei David in Eli, is the author of many volumes of *parshanut* on the Tanach and has long been one of the most prominent Religious Zionist voices in Israel today.

If you wish to purchase the *sefarim*, please contact Maura Ruskin at +972-523826844 or by email at maura.ruskin@gmail.com

Stonewalling of the Heart: The Shofar's Cry for Hashem

Rabbi Josh Lehman

What object plays the most important role in Judaism? The *shofar* announces its presence at every major juncture in Jewish history. From the giving of the Torah to its eagerly awaited blast that will symbolize the arrival of *mashiach*, and its pivotal role on Rosh Hashanah, the *shofar* is more than just an object; it is quite literally our past, present, and future.

Surprisingly, the source of the *shofar* in the Torah is nothing more than an afterthought, an epilogue in the story of *Akeidat Yitzchak*. After the test of *Akeidat Yitzchak*, we learn “And Avraham lifted up his eyes, and looked and behold behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns: and Avraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in place of his son” (Bereishit 21:13). This ram, offered by Avraham, is the origin of the *shofar*. But why did this ram, a sacrifice that was not even part of the test of *Akeidat Yitzchak* and was not commanded by Hashem, become the source of the *shofar* blast that resonates throughout our history?

Parashat Nitzavim, which always precedes Rosh Hashanah, offers insight into the significance of the *shofar*. Chapter 30 describes the blessings and curses that are set before the Jewish people. While they are similar to those presented in *Parashat Re'eh*, a glaring difference emerges. In *Re'eh* we are told that our blessings and curses hinge on our ability to properly fulfill the commandments. Conversely, in *Parashat Nitzavim*, the blessings extend beyond mere reward for performing *mitzvot*; we are told that we must also love Hashem. “See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil; in that I command you this day to love Hashem your G-d, to walk in His ways, and to keep

His commandments and His statutes and His judgments: then you shall live and multiply: and then Hashem your G-d shall bless you in the land into which you go to possess it” (Devarim 30:15-16). The *parasha* then proceeds to illustrate the curses that result from the opposing behavior, which one might presume to be hatred towards Hashem – the natural opposite of love. However, intriguingly, the *parasha* depicts the opposite of love quite differently: “But if you turn your heart away, so that you will not hear, but shall be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I announce to you this day, that you shall surely perish, and that you shall not prolong your days upon the land, when you pass over the Jordan to go to possess it” (Devarim 30:17-18). The curses do not arise from hatred toward G-d, but from turning our hearts away from G-d. The opposite of love is not hate but rather indifference.

Dr. John Gottman, renowned for his groundbreaking research on relationships, discovered a similar phenomenon among married couples. He pinpointed four negative communication behaviors that prove detrimental to any marriage, allowing him to predict divorce with an astonishing 93.6% accuracy. Among these behaviors is “stonewalling,” when individuals withdraw from interaction and emotionally shut down. Surprisingly, Gottman found that stonewalling is far more harmful than fighting, which, despite being unpleasant, signifies active engagement in the relationship.

The same is true in our relationship with Hashem. Ideally we want to love G-d, but even if we struggle to do so, we can still lean into whatever emotion we are experiencing and remain engaged with Him. The one thing we must never do is turn our hearts away from Hashem. We

must not stonewall Him and cut off our relationship.

This is the true significance of the *shofar*. The ram caught in the bush was not an afterthought of the story of *Akeidat Yitzchak*, but the bearer of a crucial lesson. The ram represents Avraham's ability to “raise his eyes” and seek out Hashem, engaging Him even when not commanded to. The *shofar* represents our desire for closeness with G-d, even when we are struggling in our relationship with Him. This is why we cry out to Hashem with the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah.

Some years, on Rosh Hashanah, our relationship with Hashem is inspired and passionate, while other years it can be waning, confused, or even carry resentment. The *shofar* tells us that no matter where our relationship with Hashem currently stands, we must remain in the relationship. We must engage G-d where we are and refrain from turning away from Him. For ultimately, Hashem wants only one thing from each of us: *rachmana liba ba'i* – He only wants our heart.



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JEW'S with VIEWS

We asked five accomplished Jews from around the world: Which part of the Yamim Nora'im tefillot do you find the most meaningful?



Shayna Goldberg

In every *Amidah* of Rosh Hashanah, we pray מְלוֹךְ עַל כָּל הָעוֹלָם כְּלוּ בְּכַבֹּדְךָ. We ask Hashem to “reign over the entire universe in Your glory” and to “reveal Yourself in the majestic grandeur of Your strength over all the dwellers of Your inhabited world.”

These words powerfully capture for me the essence of the *Yamim Nora'im*. These are not only days of personal judgment when individuals introspect, repent and yearn to be deserving of another year of life. It is also a time to recognize Hashem's kingship and beg Him to reign over not only the Jewish people but the entire universe. “Let everything that has been made know that You are its Maker.” We yearn for absolute clarity of purpose, for an understanding of both our personal and collective roles in life, and for direction for ourselves and for others. A world where “everything with a life's breath in its nostrils will proclaim that G-d of Israel is King and His Kingship rules over everything” will be a world of order and justice, a world filled with peace, meaningful interactions and experiences and a joint desire to fulfill G-d's vision in its entirety.

Shayna Goldberg is the author of the book “What Do You Really Want? Trust and Fear at Life's Crossroads and in Everyday Living” (Maggid, 2021), an editor for *Deracheha*, a website on women and mitzvot, and a *mashgicha ruchanit* for the SKA Beit Midrash for Women (Migdal Oz).



Isaac Barchichat

For me, the *tefillah* that stands out among all others is the *Kol Nidrei* prayer. This is the moment when each Jew throughout the world, religious or not religious, Zionist or not Zionist, for or against the current judicial reform, takes a moment to retrospect and reflect upon their purpose in this world.

This is a unique moment in the Jewish calendar, when young children come with their parents to *shul* and meet with their elders to pray all together for a year full of life and success.

In France, as in many other communities, the privilege to chant the *Kol Nidrei* is often given not to the *chazan* but to the oldest or wisest person in the congregation, creating a *de facto* connection between the different generations within the community. This is when we hope and pray that the chosen *shaliach* delivers our prayers to Hashem and convinces Him to positively accept our prayers. This is the most beautiful moment, when Jews throughout France pray together, united as one, with great hope for the future of our community.

Isaac Barchichat is a Yeshiva University graduate, Deputy Mayor in the Paris region, an activity community leader, director of a youth movement, married to Batya and a father of four. Isaac has been recently appointed Director of Mizrahi France.



Rebbetzin Leat Millunchick

As a mum of 5, *tefillah* has changed for me over the years. There were years when I was in *shul* from the beginning of *davening* until the end, or simply unable to *daven* at home without any disturbances. Later on there were days where my husband would catch an early *shacharit* and he would take over with the kids so I could *daven* at *shul*. More recently, we were blessed with twins and the pregnancy was very hard, so at this point in my life simply fasting on Yom Kippur was a challenge, and *tefillah* became secondary. As women, our relationship with *tefillah* can change depending on our circumstances, which is not a bad thing. It gives us a chance to stop and appreciate our blessings, and then, when life slows down again, we can reconnect to Hashem through *tefillah* more often.

The *Yamim Nora'im* are so packed with *tefillot*, that for me, whatever I manage to get through is a triumph. But the *tefillah* I connect with the most is *Ne'ilah*. By that point, the kids are sleeping, and I can take my time, alone, to *daven* and connect with Hashem and think seriously about the year gone by, what we achieved as a family, and what we want to achieve in the coming year. I think of the areas in which we've succeeded, and the struggles we have gone through. *Davening* at home, in the environment where we are making our lives flourish, allows me to connect to Hashem and be truly grateful and have the most meaningful *tefillah*.

Rebbetzin Leat Millunchick is a graduate of the Susi Bradfield Leadership Course at LSJS, Machon Puah and the Eden Centre. Previously, Leat was the head of informal education at Hasmonean High School. Leat is an accomplished doula and childbirth educator, and is passionate about nurturing healthy and sustainable family life. Leat is a graduate of Mizrahi's Shalhevet program and currently serves as Rebbetzin at Belmont shul in London, UK.



Rabbi Ben Zion Algazi

The *tefillot* of the *Yamim Nora'im* are a unique, once in a year opportunity. As Chazal say, we begin with the concept of "Open for me like the opening of a needle, and I will open for you like the width of the *heichal*," and ends with the shutting of *Ne'ilah*. The message is that there is a one-off opening and closing, and a unique opportunity that has to be grabbed. One who approaches the *tefillot* with this mentality has a completely different approach – these are not just any *tefillot*, but a unique opportunity that we don't want to miss.

If a poor person knows that there is a potential donor available to meet at one specific time, they will do whatever they can to be as prepared and present as possible for that time – and it is with that mindset that we need to approach the *tefillot* of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, a special time where we can pray for everything, on a personal and national level.

Rabbi Ben Zion Algazi is the Founder and Author of Tzurba M'Rabanan, a learning program with tens of thousands of learners around the world, and the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Hesder Ramat Gan.



Nediva Buechler

For me, as clichéd as it may be, the most meaningful *tefillah* during the *Yamim Nora'im* has always been *U'netaneh Tokef*. It is the only one that has been guaranteed to make me take stock, to remind me of the overwhelming and all-encompassing power of Hashem, and causes me to come as close as is personally possible to fully appreciating how things are completely outside of our control as humans. It makes me think of the people who have been lost, and the people I am afraid to lose in the future. It encompasses how much things can change in one short year, and how often we take that time for granted. It is the only *tefillah* that has ever brought me to tears, and on occasion, to my knees. It simultaneously terrifies me and makes me feel hopeful, it reminds me of my insignificance and my importance. It causes me to beg for what I hope the future will bring, and reminds me that the outcomes will be determined by a combination of my choices and how said choices are viewed in a Divine context. Am I good enough? Can I ever be? I guess we'll find out.

Nediva Buechler works as the Menahelit at Midreshet Amudim in Yerushalayim. She participated in Mizrahi's Shalhevet and Lapidot programs, as well as Matan's Eshkolot Educators program, and is passionate about infertility education. She has a background in graphic design, education, and tour guiding, and currently lives in Sha'alvim with her husband and son.



My First Yom Kippur: An Interview with Sivan Rahav-Meir

**Hillel Shalit and
Elad Hominer**

“The first time I observed Yom Kippur and fasted was at the age of 15. I met a religious girl from Tekoa, her name was Talia Castelenovo, and she invited me to experience Yom Kippur from the inside, for the first time in my life.” So began our interview with media personality and lecturer Sivan Rahav-Meir.

In Ramat HaSharon and Herzliya, where Sivan grew up, Yom Kippur was a quiet day, thanks to the Jewish character of the State of Israel, “but it was also a day of cycling with friends. After my first fast, I went up to Jerusalem by bus, and I remember buying food all the time. I bought food in the central bus stations of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, because I was really stressed by not being allowed to eat for an entire day. Ultimately, though, this wasn’t the main part of the experience. I almost didn’t feel like I was fasting, I had so much enthusiasm for the holy day. Today,” she admits, “the fasts obviously challenge me more, and are not as automatically exciting as they were at the beginning.”

The first Yom Kippur had a great impact on Rahav-Meir. “We prayed with Talia’s family at the Italian Synagogue on Hillel Street in Jerusalem. It’s interesting because this has become a kind of ‘גִּרְסָא דִּינְקוּוּתָא’ for me, ‘the learning of my childhood.’ You are very influenced by the initial wording that you hear, and this

nusach has become the version that I revert to in my thoughts, to this day. I will never forget how they repeatedly said the 13 attributes of mercy, ‘וַיַּעַבְרָה אֵלַי עַל פְּנֵי וַיִּקְרָא,’ And Hashem passed before him and proclaimed’ (Shemot 34:6), and all kinds of other poems and melodies that suddenly come back to me. I was very excited to recognize *Adon Olam*, but other than that, most of what I encountered that day was new to me: standing before G-d, saying ‘*ashamnu, bagadnu*,’ and the *vidui*, the idea of forgiveness and atonement and a fresh start. Lots of ‘scoops’ were waiting for me. That night I couldn’t sleep from excitement. We slept at Talia’s grandmother’s and talked into the night. I read the Yom Kippur *machzor* throughout the day, as if it were a book meant to be read straight through, from beginning to end. I tried to ‘crack it,’ because I felt it contained a secret code.”

Sivan Rahav-Meir was born in Ramat HaSharon, to Aryeh and Ronit Rahav, and grew up secular. At the age of six, she moved with her family to Herzliya, and began writing for the children’s newspapers ‘Chopper’ and ‘Pashush.’ When she was eight years old she was identified as a gifted child. Later, Sivan hosted TV programs on ‘Educational Television,’ including the children’s program ‘Banana Boom,’ and served as a youth reporter for the newspapers ‘Kulana’ and ‘Rosh 1.’

As a Ba'alat Teshuva, are you able to relate to those who were born into a religious home, and are very worn out from the religious burdens of everyday life?

“When people ask me to talk about my *teshuva* story, I always say that there’s no great wisdom to learn from it. The story of people who grow up religious is much more exciting to me, precisely because it is not exciting. There is no great wisdom in becoming a *ba'al teshuva*. You come from outside without any coercion, you simply fall in love with the Torah. No teacher at school ever told me to make a *beracha* or to *daven* and no one criticized me when I studied Torah subjects. I came from outside of my own free will and choice – straight to the Torah, to G-d, to the thing itself. It requires real strength to grow up *inside* the religious community, and to find renewal from within. To continue the legacy of the generations that came before you and to add your own floor to the building you inherited.

“That’s why I most admire people who grew up religious and who light the spark within,” she explains, and immediately adds that it’s not her idea: “Our sages explain that Yitzchak’s prayer was accepted because he was a ‘righteous man who was the son of a righteous man,’ as compared to Rebecca, a ‘righteous woman who was the daughter of a wicked man.’ Why was Yitzchak’s prayer answered and not Rebecca’s? Wasn’t Rebecca on a higher level, because she was a *ba'alat teshuva*? It seems that being a righteous son of a righteous man is not easy. If your father and grandfather went to *shul*, in a world that constantly calls on us to innovate and reinvent ourselves and to rebel and break conventions – yet you still go to the synagogue with enthusiasm – then you are on a truly high level.”

Does working in the largest news network in Israel and the pressure associated with it bother you during the days of selichot and teshuva?

“In recent years, the media has come to understand that the pulse of Elul and Tishrei can translate into good ratings. There are many broadcasts about *selichot*, and many places ask to interview me during this period, to talk about the holidays. They understand that there is a huge public that is traditional, that hearts are opening, that the heavens are opening. Or maybe I’m just naive and the media just understands that it brings viewers,” she smiles. “In any case, I don’t feel a contradiction between the essence of these days and work, for the most part. There are a lot of lectures, and great demand to hear them, in places that are considered ‘far away’ from religion, and it’s great fun. The King is in the field, and so are the people. It’s a shame that we don’t have two months of Elul!”

Doesn’t your work, and ours as well as members of the media, contradict the essence of teshuva? The tendency to gossip and share bad news?

“For years I was an integral part of the media and accepted all its basic assumptions. People say that the news station tells you every evening at 8:00 pm ‘Good evening,’ and then proceeds, for a whole hour, to prove to you why this is not true. For years I worked according to these basic assumptions – to get up in the morning and look for what the *Charedim* are doing wrong, what

the settlers are doing wrong, and in general, what is wrong with the world. Now, I’m not saying there aren’t problems, but the biggest problem of all is getting up in the morning and looking only for problems.

“Only a few years ago I realized that the word *חטון*, ‘sin,’ derives from the word *החטונה*, ‘to miss’ – and that it is a ‘sin’ against my mission to miss what I am supposed to be doing, to be in the wrong place. I am trying to correct this sin, this ‘miss,’ by using the talents I received to report on that which connects, unites, pleases, excites, and uplifts. To bring Judaism into the news as well. To understand that the *parashat haShavua*, the Torah portion of the week, is part of our pulse, part of our culture.”

Since Elul 5776, Rahav-Meir has been given a weekly class on *parashat haShavua*, connecting the *parasha* to current affairs. The class began as a local initiative but has become an event attended by hundreds of people every week, and many more watch it online. The class combines traditional commentators with personal stories, references to the news, the world of new media and the Israeli media, as well as letters that the audience themselves send to Rahav-Meir to read in the *shiur*.

“Among the general public,” says Sivan, “the reactions still surprise me. I did broadcasts on TV for many years and people would say ‘I saw you on TV.’ Okay, thanks for the update. But since I began speaking about the deeper issues of life, the soul, the Torah, the commentaries, people connect to the content itself. They say to me, ‘I have an idea from the Ramban to add to what you said,’ or ‘my wife was really moved by this commentary,’ and so on.

When I was chasing members of the Knesset for interviews, I never imagined that one day Keshet 12 would broadcast my *shiur* on *parashat haShavua*. It’s not something I even dreamed of.”

Can we say that you are the rabbi of the news people?

“Actually I’m more the address for questions people have about the behavior of other religious people. As we know, each religious person represents all religious people in the world, and I have to explain everything they do. I try to answer matter-of-factly, if I have an answer. It is very important not to get emotional, not to shout. I used to be upset and would come home angry after arguments like this. I hope that today I am more vocal, but also more calm. This is also my advice to others. But as the Rebbe of Lubavitch already said: ‘My goal is not to win arguments, my goal is to strengthen and help Jews.’ Meaning, my goal is not to fight and win and say to myself ‘I showed him!’ This is not the goal, not on the TV networks and not in life. The goal is to be useful, if possible.

IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVING WILLS

RABBI DR. SHLOMO BRODY

One of the lessons of the *Yamim Nora'im* is to confront our mortality. The Talmud teaches us that the books of judgment are open during this period, while our most moving *tefillot*, such as *U'netaneh Tokef*, remind us that life is ephemeral. Asking “Who will live and who will die?” forces us to recognize that we can't escape the ultimate day of judgment. Such recognition inspires us to repent and take life a bit more seriously. Even once Yom Kippur passes, confronting our mortality can help us live more meaningfully.

Our great sages taught us throughout the centuries that it is appropriate to plan ahead for illness and death. *Halacha* permits and even encourages people to purchase burial plots (*Kol Bo Avelut*, Vol. 1, p. 174), tombstones, and burial shrouds (*Aruch HaShulchan* YD 339:5) in advance. In fact, Rabbi Yosef Karo even allowed people to dig their own graves, provided that they were not in such a mental state that thinking about death could harm them physically or emotionally (*Beit Yosef* YD 339). Similarly, both Rabbi Chaim Falagi and the Chafetz Chaim urged people to sign a financial will and testament while they are healthy, in the spirit of the famous dictum of the Sages, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me?” There's no reason to leave these decisions to others. These sources make clear that advanced directives are the most prudent way to receive one's desired wishes while also avoiding unnecessary family strife.

In our times, it is critically important for people to sign an advance healthcare proxy and directive. Many choices must be made as people age or approach the end of life. People may no longer be able to speak for themselves, and sometimes decisions must be made quickly. These can be cases

of terminal illness, like an aggressive form of cancer, or a progressive or degenerative disease, like Alzheimer's or ALS. People may suffer sudden and drastic changes to their health, such as a heart attack or car accident. Or as so frequently happens, they must cope with aging and increasing frailty, with many nagging ailments.

In any circumstance, healthcare providers need to know that you want your decisions to be made within the framework of Jewish law. The default decision of what someone else might deem to be in “your best interest” may not coincide with Jewish values. Your family members need to know who should be making these decisions on your behalf. They also need to know which rabbi to consult with if there are *halachic* questions regarding certain treatments. Various organizations, including the Rabbinical Council of America and Agudath Israel, provide such forms for Jews to sign.

My own organization, Ematai, recently undertook the task of creating a document that can provide you with decision-making clarity along your healthcare journey. The document, called *Netivot* (“pathways”), has received the endorsement of Rabbi Hershel Schachter and Rabbi Mordechai Willig, and includes two parts. The first part is an advance healthcare directive that designates your proxy (and alternates), recommends the rabbi they should consult with, and declares that you want end-of-life decision making made in accordance with Jewish law and custom. It is a user-friendly document that can be easily filled out online or in print. Once it is signed, this is a formal legal document that will be respected by healthcare providers and hospitals.

The second document is a conversation guide to talk about your healthcare goals

and values. It gives people the opportunity to express their general decision-making preferences. These aren't easy conversations to have, but they are critical to help your proxy and rabbi better understand your goals and preferences so they can better apply them to each unique situation. It is also a gift to your loved ones, as it will help prevent family tensions and guilt caused by uncertainty and speculation about your values and preferences. Meaningful conversations about life and death can bring families together.

Whichever document you choose to use, the best time to take the initiative is today. *Im Lo Achshav, Ematai?* For if not now, when?



Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Brody

is the executive director of Ematai, an organization dedicated to helping Jews across the world navigate healthcare choices with Jewish wisdom. Learn more about Ematai's healthcare directive at www.ematai.org/netivot



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



ALIYAH DIARIES

The Old Bless and Switch Routine

Kally Kislwicz

There is a special blessing that parents give their children on the eve of Yom Kippur. It is a beautiful *beracha*, one in which we ask that our children be granted all the things we could ever hope for them. Years ago, my husband and I were lucky enough to get to say it four times. It is a longer version of the traditional Friday night blessing. A much longer version, actually.

There was a lot to be done in the waning pre-Yom Kippur minutes. The table was being cleared, leather shoes were being removed, teeth were being brushed, candles were being arranged, timers set, and so on. And amidst all of this we decided it was a good time to give a multi-paragraph blessing to each kid.

Ever suckers for efficiency, we agreed that he would start from the oldest child and work his way down, and I would start at the bottom and work upwards. And in the following 10 minutes of blessing and switching I learned that while what we want for our children cannot be summed up in just a few sentences, sometimes less is more because they are not fans of sitting still for so long.

My daughter was first on my list. I blessed her on the stairs, because that is where I found her after 2 minutes of panicking and saying 'where is the baby?'

She likes to climb stairs about as much as she likes to sing 'eensy weensy spider,' and to keep her from throwing herself down the stairs in a fit, I interspersed

my hopes for her future with hummed phrases about waterspouts and resolute arachnids. One down, three to go.

Next I found my three-year-old sulking under a pillow on the couch. He was very upset to have not been first in line for his *beracha*. This is a common theme in his life – on the first day of preschool his teacher asked me to list his fears, and the only one I could think of was being second. This is a problem, as he is chronologically third, and not as fast as those pesky boys who preceded him, so he is often to be found with the proverbial hairy chest (first is the worst, second is the best, third is the one with the...). He was not willing to be consoled in the 35 seconds that I had allotted for consolation, so I blessed the pillow and hoped that he would receive all that worldly goodness by osmosis.

On to my 5-year-old (I waved at my husband as we crossed paths) who was sitting inside a toy fort and was reluctant to let me in. He explained that he had already gotten his *beracha* from daddy and he didn't need more than one. I told him that I really wanted to bless him, and he conceded – provided I remained outside the fort. I again found myself hoping that my blessing was powerful enough to penetrate various man-made materials. Done.

And then onto my big boy, 7 years old and sprawled out on the couch reading a book. He saw me coming and sat up, bent his head forward so I could put my hands on his head, and put his arms around me in a hug. He sat still for the requisite two

minutes (which would have been more meaningful had they not been punctuated by my husband's 'where is the baby??') and kissed me and thanked me when I was done.

I went into Yom Kippur thinking that he is growing up to be such a good kid. They are all good kids. And in their honor I have composed the following piece of highbrow poetry:

I will bless you on the stairs
In your clothes or underwears.
Sulking, pouting, sitting still,
Will I bless you? Yes I will!
Can I, will I, in your fort?
When you're mad and out of sorts?
I will bless you, sweet or crazy –
Oh, man, have you seen the baby?



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

HALLEL and SHIMMAI

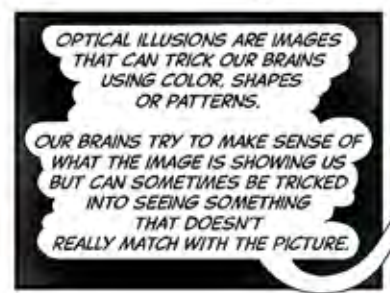
A MIZRACHI Yom Kippur Exploration



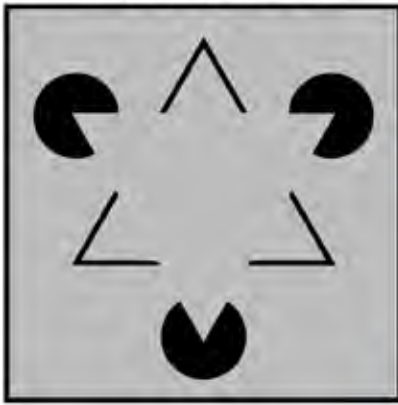
Anyone else feeling rifty and want to go back fifty?



Yael Harris Resnick



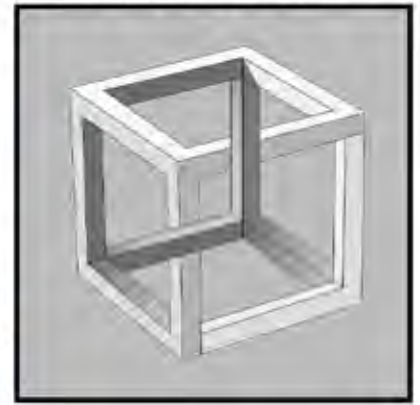
CAN YOU SEE A MAGEN DAVID IN THIS PICTURE?



ARE THESE LINES THAT ARE GOING ACROSS THIS CIRCLE CROOKED OR STRAIGHT?



IS THE CUBE OPEN FROM THE SIDE, THE TOP OR THE BOTTOM?



DOES THIS MILITARY PLAN HAVE WHITE ARROWS OR BLACK ARROWS?



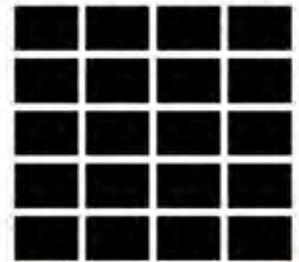
WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO BE ON DUTY IN THE ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES OVER YOM KIPPUR?

"THE NICEST PART OF BEING ON GUARD DUTY DURING YOM KIPPUR WAS THAT EVERYONE BROUGHT THEIR CUSTOMS TOGETHER TO MAKE IT SPECIAL. WE WERE FROM ALL DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS - ASHKENAZI, SEFARDI, MIZRACHI... SOME RELIGIOUS AND SOME NOT."

A STORY OF COMMITMENT:
"OUR COMMANDING OFFICER TOLD US WE HAD TO WEAR CLOSED TOE SHOES WHILE ON ACTIVE DUTY GUARDING OUR TANK. WE ONLY HAD SANDALS OR LEATHER BOOTS. (NOT YOM KIPPUR APPROPRIATE). BETWEEN ALL OF US, ONE GUY HAD A PAIR OF CANVAS SNEAKERS THAT WE EACH TOOK TURNS WEARING. THEY WERE HUGE ON ME. I REMEMBER FLOPPING AROUND, STRUGGLING TO WALK."

RABBI YONAH BERMAN, LONE SOLDIER SAYARIM TANK SCHOOL, 2002

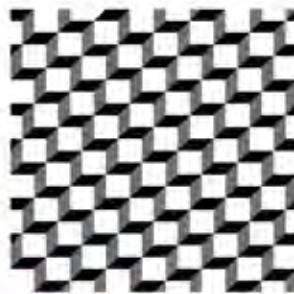
CAN YOU SEE SMALL GRAY SPOTS BETWEEN THESE BUILDINGS? ARE THEY REALLY THERE?



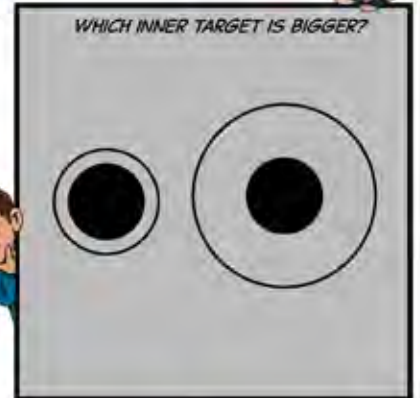
WHICH SOLDIER'S PATH IS LONGER?



ARE THE ROOFS OF THESE BUILDINGS BLACK OR WHITE?



WHICH INNER TARGET IS BIGGER?



DID YOU KNOW?

YOM KIPPUR AND WAR ARE CONNECTED IN OTHER WAYS TOO! SHOFAROT WERE USED IN TIMES OF BATTLE. THE SHOFAR WAS ALSO BLOWN, AS IT IS TODAY, AT THE END OF YOM KIPPUR.

I FEEL MUCH BETTER NOW.



SOMETIMES IT TAKES BEING IN THE DARK TO SEE THE LIGHT!



I DIDN'T REALIZE HOW MUCH LIGHT YOU CAN BRING INTO THE WORLD BY DOING SOMETHING HELPFUL - ESPECIALLY IF THAT SOMETHING IS TO BE IN THE DARK.



EVEN KIDS!

WISHING YOU MEANINGFUL, LIGHT FILLED CHAGIM! SHANA TOVA!





netivot

Advance Healthcare Directive & Conversation Guide

*If I am not for myself,
who will be for me?*

*And if I am only
for myself,
what am I?*

*And if not now,
when?*

FOR YOU:

Complete this form so your healthcare preferences are clear and your doctors know your Jewish values.

FOR YOUR FAMILY:

Give your family the clarity and comfort that they are honoring your wishes.

FOR YOUR FUTURE:

Don't wait until illness strikes and quick decisions must be made. Take the initiative today.



netivot GET STARTED NOW

- A guide to starting important conversations with your family
- Designate your healthcare proxy and rabbinic consultant
- Communicate your healthcare preferences and Jewish values
- Endorsed by leading Poskim, doctors, and attorneys

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- **option 18**
Jewish Organ Donation Initiative
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- RABBINIC TRAINING
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TO LEARN MORE ABOUT NETIVOT: READ THE ARTICLE BY RABBI DR. SHLOMO BRODY IN THIS EDITION OF HAMIZRACHI



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