



ISRAEL EDITION
VOL 9 • NO 5
SUKKOT &
SIMCHAT TORAH 5787

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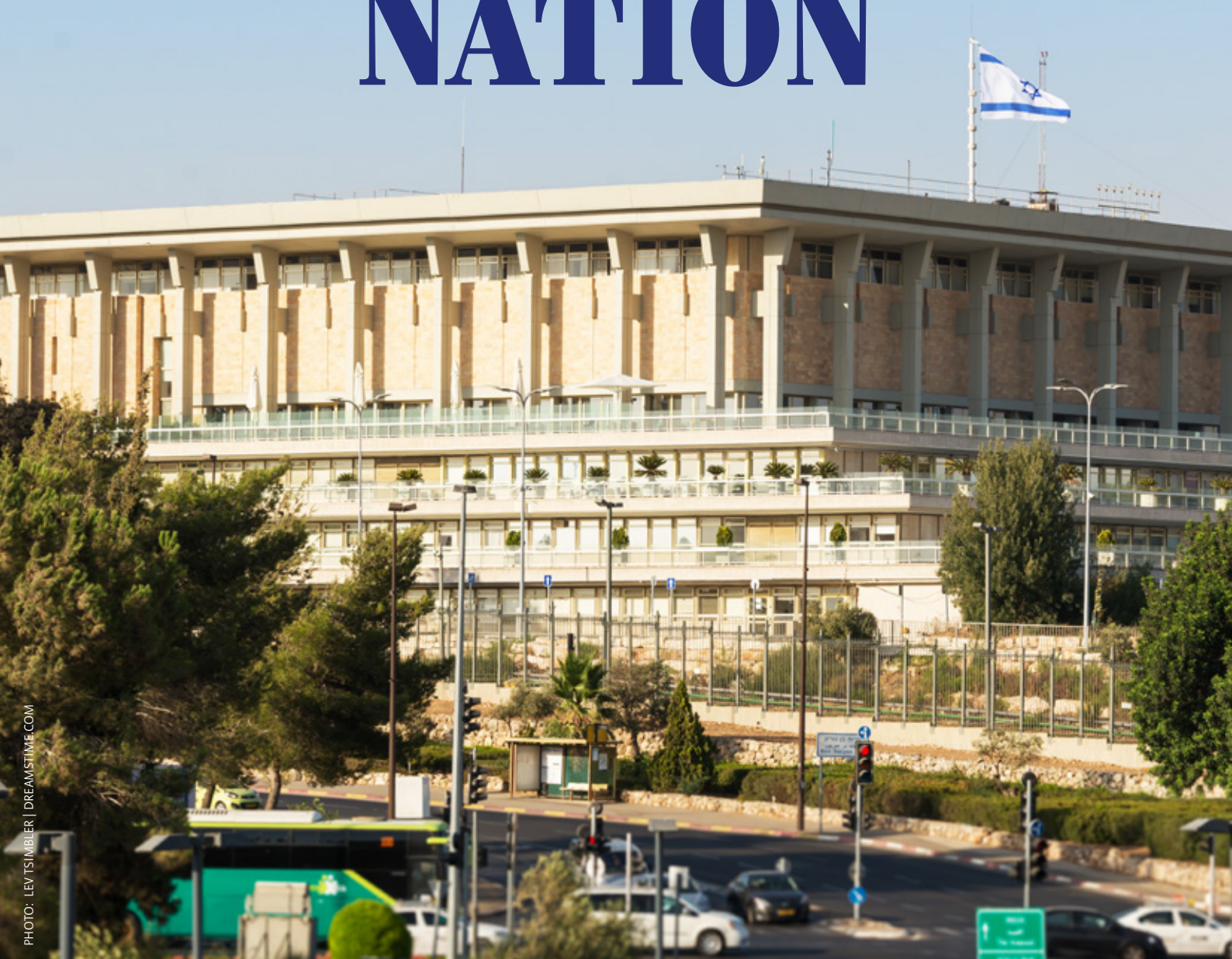


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Mazal tov to Pace Cooper, the new President of the Religious Zionists of America, and the newly elected National Board. We wish the new leadership tremendous success as they continue strengthening and growing the Religious Zionist movement across America.



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

HaMizrachi

PUBLISHED BY WORLD MIZRACHI IN JERUSALEM

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World Mizrahi wishes a "Tzeitchem L'Shalom" to its alumni families going on shlichut this year.
May you have continued success in your endeavors to strengthen Religious Zionist identity and to spread
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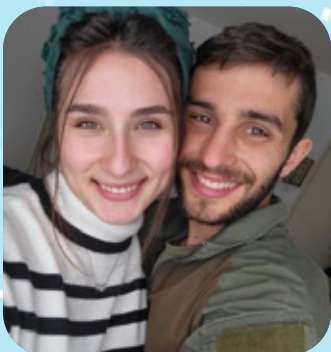
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Ten Commandments of Jewish Leadership

Rabbi Doron Perez

This essay is an extract from a chapter of Rabbi Perez's new book to be released in English in November entitled "Smallest Nation, Largest Family: Family as the Foundation of Jewish Identity".

Israel is currently experiencing one of the most tumultuous periods in its history. The current government brought about deep divisions, including the intense controversies surrounding judicial reform and *Charedi* enlistment, and of course the disastrous October 7th attack.

The previous government was also among the most divisive and short-lived in Israel's history, relying for the first time on an Arab party for a governmental majority. Before that, Israel endured five elections within the span of four years, almost unheard of in democratic societies. These dynamics revealed a constant struggle for dominance, in which each side sought to defeat the other in a zero-sum game of power, eroding the trust and solidarity necessary for a healthy society.

What follows are guiding principles for a different mode of leadership, presented in the form of ten commandments, aimed at restoring a much-needed sense of fraternity and solidarity.

1. The aim of politics is creating unity, not overpowering opponents

Machiavellian and Marxist politics believe that political leadership is an ongoing power struggle. Through this lens, politics is concerned only with obtaining and maintaining power, regardless of the consequences.

Jewish politics offers a fundamentally different vision. We are bound together in an enduring relationship, not as rivals seeking to overpower one another, but as partners who must cooperate, collaborate, and build together.

2. Political opponents are not the enemy

It is deeply corrosive to society when people describe political opponents as the greatest enemies of Israel, even greater

than Hamas. Surely, after October 7th, we know who our true enemies are: those who wish to harm and destroy us. From Yair Golan to the students of Itamar Ben Gvir, Israelis across the political spectrum rushed down south on October 7th to protect their country. How, then, can fellow members of our people be viewed as our greatest enemies?

A healthy society must create space for different ideological approaches that genuinely seek the good of the nation. The challenge of leadership is therefore not to eliminate ideological diversity, but to give it a legitimate place within a shared national framework.

3. It doesn't matter anymore who is right

The famous adage in Israel says, "Don't be right, be smart."

The great Talmudic sage Rabbi Yochanan taught that Jerusalem was destroyed because people judged strictly according to the laws of the Torah and did not go beyond the letter of the law. Society was destroyed because everyone was preoccupied only with being right, regardless of the consequences. Rashi explains that when the Torah commands us to do that which is good and upright in the eyes of G-d, it means that we must strive to go beyond the letter of the law, seeking win-win solutions and striving for what is fair and compassionate (Rashi's commentary to *Devarim* 18:6).

When is being right more important than the relationship itself? The answer is: in relationships where the issue at stake is more important than the relationship itself, such as in war against sworn enemies, where it is us or them. But where the relationship itself is more important than proving who is right, such as in marriage, parenting, friendship, and internal societal

cohesion, we must prioritize the integrity and long-term sustainability of the relationship over winning the argument.

4. Two diametrically opposite views can both be equally correct

One of the most important scientists of the modern era was the quantum physicist and Nobel Prize laureate Niels Bohr. He distinguished between two types of truth: trivial truth and profound truth. A trivial truth is one whose opposite is completely false. In mathematics, one plus one equals two; any other answer is wrong and absurd. But profound truths are entirely different. The opposite of a profound truth can be equally true.

Bohr reached this conclusion through his analysis of the behavior of light. He demonstrated that light sometimes exhibits wave-like behavior and at other times particle-like behavior, displaying contradictory patterns. This puzzled the brightest scientific minds. How could light behave according to two entirely different and contradictory modes at the same time?

Bohr concluded that light can simultaneously possess two totally contradictory properties, a profound truth. If this is true in the physical world, it is certainly true in the abstract world of ideology. Bohr's idea from the field of physics had already been articulated thousands of years earlier by the great Jewish sages regarding disagreements in Jewish thought and law. In a powerful passage, the *Gemara* recounts the many debates between the Houses of Hillel and Shammai, until a heavenly voice declared: "Both are the words of the living G-d; and the law follows Hillel" (*Eruvin* 13b).

How can both opinions possibly be right when their views are diametrically opposed? The answer is that even when

there is objective truth, reality is often too complex to be captured through a single perspective alone. Multiple approaches may illuminate different dimensions of that truth, both in quantum physics and in metaphysics.

5. Present the opposing view before presenting your own

What is fascinating about the above Talmudic source is the reason why the law follows Hillel and not Shammai. The *Gemara* maintains that it is not because Hillel was more learned or clever. Rather, it was because Hillel was considered more humble, always citing Shammai's view before his own. What does humility have to do with being more accurate in rulings of Jewish law?

The answer is that genuine humility is the key to wisdom. Only one who understands that truth is more complex than his particular opinion truly grasps the truth about truth. Hillel understood this best: that real-life issues are complex and often require a nuanced, multi-faceted understanding of truth. This is why Jewish law ultimately follows his rulings.

Imagine if every political speech began by saying, "Before I explain why I believe I am right, let me first explain the rationale of those who disagree with me." If every leader had to demonstrate that he or she genuinely understood the strengths of the counterarguments, society would become remarkably more humble. Such an approach could transform political discourse.

6. Attribute to others no less noble intentions than you attribute to yourself

One of the most destructive habits of political discourse is the assumption that my motives are noble while yours are corrupt: I am putting my country first, and you are putting yourself first.

This is spiritually poisonous. Healthy Jewish politics begins with a presumption of human dignity. If I believe that I am motivated by concern for the nation, I should at least be willing to believe that my opponent has the same positive motivations.

Our Sages teach, "Judge your fellow favorably" (*Pirkei Avot* 1:6). This is not merely an interpersonal ethic; it is also a political one. We must resist the temptation to explain disagreement by impugning the character of those with whom we disagree.

7. Argue with the opinion, not with the person

There is an important distinction between disagreement and delegitimization. Fight ideas vigorously, but never confuse an individual's ideas with his intrinsic worth. In sporting language: play the ball, not the man.

You can say, "I believe your policy is profoundly mistaken," without saying, "You are a bad person." The moment political disagreement becomes personal demonization, the possibility of reconciliation disappears.

If every election transforms citizens into enemies, societal capital erodes. A person is more than his political ideology.

8. Live by the golden rule

The Torah's great interpersonal principle is: "Love your fellow as yourself" (*Vayikra* 19:18). Hillel rendered it in the negative: what is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow (*Shabbat* 31a). This golden rule is simple enough for a child to understand but extraordinarily difficult to live by consistently.

Simply put: in every situation without fail, treat others as you want to be treated in that same situation. If I want my opinions to be heard, I must hear yours. If I want my political camp to be treated with dignity and compassion, I must treat your camp the same way.

9. Speak respectfully to ideological opponents

Words matter. Political rhetoric does not simply disappear when the speech ends. It penetrates the consciousness of society.

When we speak about fellow citizens as enemies, traitors, or illegitimate members of society, we should not be surprised when they speak about us in the same way. Trust is once again eroded, as each views the other with suspicion, fearing that, Heaven forbid, those who disagree may actually be enemies of the state.

Every election campaign ends, and political victory eventually fades. But we still have to live together. Burning the bridge of fraternity for the temporary satisfaction of political victory is damaging in the long term.

10. Unity is never uniformity

One of the great mistakes in political thinking is to confuse unity with sameness.

Uniform thinking leads to crushing totalitarian regimes, such as the Tower of Babel. This is because uniformity ignores a fundamental reality of human existence: our inherent differences. Reality is too complex to be understood through a single approach to objective truth. The Sages express the same idea when they say there are "seventy facets of the Torah." While there is one objective Divine truth, once Torah descends from heaven into the earthly realm, it branches into many legitimate interpretations. Absolute truth can manifest in multiple ways.

Of course, this does not mean that truth is relative and that "anything goes." That is the error of moral relativism, which denies the existence of objective truth. But the opposite extreme is equally mistaken. Absolutism, which assumes that only one perspective can contain the truth and that every other perspective must therefore be false, is also a distortion of reality.

The answer is more nuanced. There is objective truth, the truth of Torah, but within that truth there is room for a range of legitimate interpretations. This is the great balance of Torah Judaism: embracing absolute objective truth while recognizing that it can be understood through multiple legitimate perspectives, each shedding light on a different dimension of that truth.

Unity means embracing diversity of opinion, recognizing that different perspectives may each contain an element of truth and can all find their place within one overarching rubric of Divine Truth.



Rabbi Doron Perez
is the Executive Chairman
of World Mizrahi.

“I am in Gaza, and I Have One Hadas and One Aravah – Can I Recite a Beracha on This Set?”

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

First published in Israel Hayom (Hebrew), October 6, 2025, on the eve of Sukkot 5786.

Our lives are full of moments of challenge and difficulty – but it is precisely in those moments that we are tested. It is precisely then that the unity of family, nation, and society becomes a source of strength, joy, and hope. Sukkot is a festival of joy, and it symbolizes the wondrous unity of *Am Yisrael*.

An hour before the festival began, a soldier in Gaza sent me a message headed: “Urgent question from Gaza.” I was certain it involved a matter of *pikuach nefesh*. His question: “I am in Gaza, and I have one *hadas* and one *aravah* (in addition to the *etrog* and *lulav*). Can I recite a *beracha* on this set?” I was deeply moved. A soldier in the midst of combat, filled with the spirit of Torah, of faith, of longing to fulfill a *mitzvah*!

Chazal teach that the *aravah* symbolizes those who possess neither “taste nor fragrance” – those who seem to lack both Torah knowledge and good deeds. Yet without the *aravah*, one cannot recite the *beracha*. There is a *machloket* regarding the law when only one *aravah* is available; the accepted custom is not to recite the *beracha* in such a case (*Shulchan Aruch* 651:1 and *Mishnah Berurah* there). Without the “*aravot*” of *Am Yisrael* – those simple people who may feel they lack significance – the nation as a whole cannot endure. Every one is needed.

A further point connecting Sukkot to the theme of unity emerges from the *Gemara* in *Sukkah* 27, which teaches that while the *arba'a minim* must belong to you – “*mishelachem*” – the *mitzvah* of *sukkah* may be fulfilled in a friend’s *sukkah*. The reason: all of *Am Yisrael* are worthy of sitting together in one great *sukkah*. Since this is not physically possible, we divide



Each of us can decide: do we look at the tattoo, or do we look at the tefillin?

into smaller *sukkot* – but the essential reality remains: we are, as it were, one great *sukkah*. This is a festival of unity, and a festival of joy. And that unity is the source of our strength.

A soldier shared with me another moving story, this one from a soldier who served in Lebanon, about the challenging effort to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *arba'a minim*. The sets that reached the unit were few, and over time they deteriorated. They recited *Hallel* together, each soldier waving the set once and passing it to the next. When all the *aravot* fell off, they set out on a search across different bases until they found one partial set that managed to suffice for everyone.

When he returned from the war, he understood something profound: in battle, in the fight for the survival of *Am Yisrael*, “there are no empty *aravot*.” Every fighter is a pure soul giving his life for the nation – there can be no empty *aravah*. How wondrous is *Am Yisrael*; how wondrous are our soldiers.

Seeing the good is our choice. A soldier in Gaza told me that he encountered another soldier covered in tattoos – his entire body. The tattooed soldier said to him: “I have one last place on my body for a tattoo. I’m going to put it there for my

friends.” The religious soldier replied: “I see you have one completely free arm?” The soldier answered: “That’s the arm for *tefillin*. There I put no tattoos.”

Each of us can decide: do we look at the tattoo, or do we look at the *tefillin*? Do we see the problematic sides, or do we see the covenant? We all carry both tattoos – the “scratches” of our transgressions – and good things. Our goal is to see the good in others, to see good in ourselves, to see good in G-d’s world, and to merit, G-d willing, an abundance of goodness – goodness that brings yet more goodness in its wake.

Let us pray for our precious soldiers, that they not be harmed. Let us pray for the wounded and for all the families affected by the war. But let us remember: the events of Simchat Torah began after a period of profound division within *Am Yisrael*. The path to repair lies in our unity. Thank G-d, since the war began, the overwhelming majority of the nation has wanted unity, has wanted to be together. I believe that this unity has also brought about the great military achievements of this war – and will bring, G-d willing, further stages in the unfolding of our redemption.



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

is the Nasi of World Mizrahi.

He is the Founder and Chairman of Sula-mot and La’Ofek, and serves as the Chief Rabbi of Gush Etzion, and Rosh Yeshivah of the Jerusalem College of Technology.

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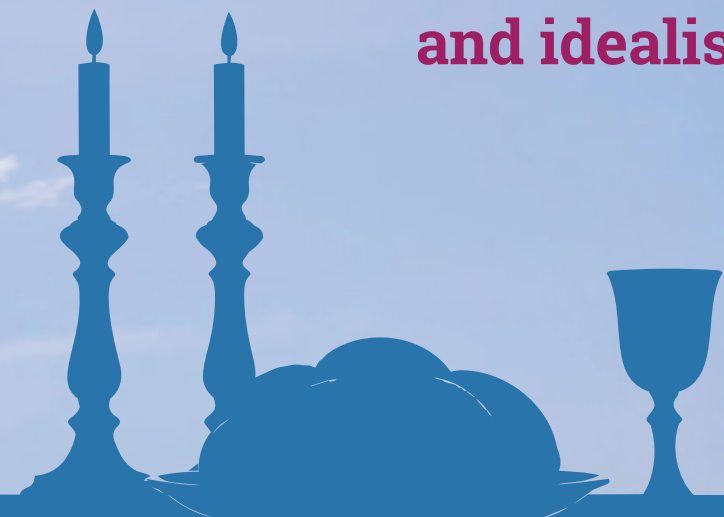
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Standing Before Giants: The RCA Solidarity Mission to Israel

Rabbi Menachem Penner

As I bid farewell to my RCA colleagues on the final night of our mission, I confided that I felt like one of the *meraglim*, the twelve spies sent in *Sefer Bamidbar* to scout the Land of Israel. I too had journeyed from *chutz la'aretz* and encountered “giants”: wounded soldiers, freed hostages, *milu'imnikim*, and *ba'alei chesed* of the first order. But unlike in *Sefer Bamidbar*, where the giants saw the *meraglim* as small grasshoppers, these modern-day giants did not see us in miniature. Quite the opposite. They were profoundly moved that we showed up, that we listened, and that we made the effort to simply be present, almost three years after October 7th.

That, more than anything, captures the essence of the RCA's most recent solidarity mission to Israel. From 29 Tammuz through 2 Av, a delegation of RCA *rabbanim* traveled from the Lebanese border to the Gaza envelope on a mission we called “*lechazeik u'lehitchazeik*”, to strengthen and to be strengthened, organized in partnership with World Mizrahi and the Barkai Center for Practical Rabbinics. It was my fourth RCA mission to Israel since the war began and, without question, the most stirring and consequential.

The war may be receding in certain respects, but it is far from over. Its consequences are only beginning to surface. Everywhere we turned, we encountered giants dedicating all their strength to *Am Yisrael*. Here are a few highlights that left a deep impression on us.

Day one of the mission opened with a briefing from Rabbi Yehoshua Fass and Marc Rosenberg on the work of Nefesh

B'Nefesh supporting *olim* and lone soldiers throughout the war. We then traveled north to meet Shlomi Ziv, held hostage in Gaza for 246 days before his rescue in *Mivtza Arnon*, the operation named for Arnon Zamora, the Yamam officer who fell bringing him home. For eight months, Jews across the world, including the rabbis in our group, *davened* for Shlomi. To stand beside him, alive and free, was to witness an open miracle from Hashem. We shared a meal at Noor, the first Druze kosher restaurant in Israel, owned by an IDF widow who lit a torch on the 76th Independence Day, and heard about the enduring covenant between the Druze community and the State of Israel. We visited the community of Shtula, on the Lebanon border, where fifty of the hundred families that were evacuated have returned. One Shtula resident who recently moved to the community, shared with us that he came not despite the danger but because of it. Someone, he told us, must hold the line.

At a barbecue with IDF soldiers on their base just meters from the border, we discovered that this was no ordinary unit. They were reservists, many already released from duty, who volunteered to come back and serve again. Among them stood Or, one of the youngest on the base. Her brother, a commander, was gravely burned in battle and spent the past year in the hospital. Since the army would not permit his return, he told her she would have to take his place. And so she did, heroically.

In Kiryat Shemonah, we slept in *tzimmers*, rented apartments in the homes of local residents, so that even our lodging would bring business to a community starved of tourism. We rose early to *daven* Shacharit at the local *Yeshivat Hesder* and learned alongside





its *Rosh Yeshiva* and recently demobilized soldiers. Seven hundred and ninety missiles struck Kiryat Shemonah during the war, and a third of its residents have yet to return. Local activists spoke candidly about what rebuilding will require – not just the physical infrastructure, but the sense of community that was shattered. And yet young families are choosing to move there as their *shlichut*. This is not mere idealism. These are people who sense that Israel needs them, and who answer that call without hesitation.

We continued to Tzfat to experience Beit Binyamin, a retreat center that Jen and Rob Airley opened in memory of their son Binyamin Hy”d, an IDF soldier who bravely fell in Gaza. This place of rest and renewal for so many who desperately need it – *milu'im* families, freed hostages, wounded soldiers and more – is a tremendous merit for the *neshama* of their son.

We ended the day at the Tel Hashomer rehabilitation center at Sheba Hospital, where visitors nearly trip over one another in their eagerness to tend to wounded soldiers, arriving with food, song, and art. Some wounds will never fully heal. But no one there is alone.

The final day carried our group south, first to Rabbi Doron Perez, Executive Chairman of World Mizrahi and President of the World Zionist Organization, whose son, Captain Daniel Perez Hy”d, was killed on October 7th and his body held hostage. At the Nova site, we heard from a survivor rescued by Younes, a Bedouin farmer who sheltered eight young people fleeing the festival. When terrorists came to his gate, he told them in Arabic that no Jews were there – a lie that saved eight lives and could have cost him his own. The last stop was to Netiv HaAsara, mere meters from the Gaza border, where twenty members of the community were murdered on Simchat Torah. We were led by Rabbi David Fine, a member of the RCA who recently became a part-time resident of the *moshav*. Although most residents have returned, one spoke candidly of her lingering fear and exhaustion.

I returned to America certain that I had spent days among genuine angels, people bearing an extraordinary sense of responsibility for *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael*. It is hard to know what to say to those who have endured so much. But words matter less



than we imagine. Showing up matters. Listening matters. Being present becomes its own source of strength, for them and for us.

The number of people visiting Israel on solidarity missions has significantly decreased; hosts told us they once welcomed far more visitors than they do now. I encourage you to join a Mizrahi mission. Tickets are costly and time is hard to find, but there is no substitute for visiting these communities and letting them know they are not alone, especially as October 7th recedes further into our past. It is the very least we can do for our people and our nation, still so deeply wounded.

Through the hard work of Rabbis Yossi Goldin and Shimon Rapoport of World Mizrahi, the impact of these few days will last a lifetime. We set out to strengthen. We returned strengthened.

● To organize a mission through World Mizrahi, please contact missions@mizrachi.org



Rabbi Menachem Penner

is Executive Vice President of the Rabbinical Council of America.



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Choosing For Our Home

“This is your house,” said our guide Oded, as we sat in the viewing pavilion of the Knesset chamber. It is August 2026, and the usually boisterous chamber sits empty on its summer and pre-election recess. Israel’s Central Election Committee is running public tours of the Knesset, so the public can learn about the upcoming election, raising trust in the process. The Knesset building has shifted mode, from the rough and tumble of party politics to the role of organizing its own refresh; the building is now the operating center as the Committee arranges Israel’s 26th election.

Oded is correct, as he brings us into the beating heart of Israeli democracy. Ever since Israel’s first election in 1949, the Knesset has been the home of “we, the people.” The citizens of Israel choose the 120 lawmakers, and are able to attend any Knesset debate that they want to, as well as being able to view all Knesset debates live. Each few years the public gets to assess their performance, and the ability to choose new representatives.

From the nerve center in the Knesset, the actual experience of democracy reaches every corner of Israel and even beyond. The over 7 million eligible Israeli voters will cast their ballots in over 12,000 polling centers; many in kindergartens and schools, with some in hospitals too. IDF soldiers across Israel’s many fronts will also be able to vote – from fortifications along Gaza’s ‘yellow line’, to the Beaufort Castle in the security zone in the north, soldiers and reservists will choose who they want to make the decisions about the war they are fighting. Israeli *shlichim*, including the *Morim Shlichim* sent by the WZO, are able to vote in Israeli consulates abroad. In what has become an informal Israeli tradition, the final results of the elections take a few days, due to the votes of Israeli soldiers at sea taking longer to be counted.

If you live in Israel, take advantage of your opportunity to choose our country’s leadership. Our state is an ongoing project, and this is our chance to decide whose vision for the country we want to empower. Get out and vote, and choose for our home.



Rabbi Aron White

is the Managing Editor of HaMizrachi magazine. He lives in Carmay HaNadiv, Kiryat Malachi, and serves as the Rabbi of Beit Knesset Tzameret Arnona in Yerushalayim.



The Religious Zionist Candidates Looking for Your Vote

AN ISRAELI ELECTION PRIMER

Gil Hoffman

For decades, the corridors of the Knesset had only a limited number of Religious Zionist members of parliament. Nearly all of them were members of the National Religious Party (Mafdal), and because they were relatively small in numbers, their impact was limited.

That has changed dramatically in recent years. The outgoing Knesset had a record number of Religious Zionist Knesset members, with 31 coming and going over the past four years.

The slate that billed itself as the Religious Zionist Party, which included Knesset members from the mixed religious and secular Otzma Yehudit and nationalist Charedi Noam parties, won 14 seats in the last election in 2022, the third most of all lists that ran, bringing 12 national religious MKs to the Knesset.

The Likud had a *minyan* of *kippot* in its faction, plus a female Religious Zionist in Environment Minister Idit Silman. The party headed by Benny Gantz had six Religious Zionist MKs before it disintegrated, and Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid had two.

How each of the 31 represented and served Religious Zionists in Israel and the Diaspora is, of course, up to interpretation, but their sheer numbers made their presence felt – and they had less of a problem getting a *Mincha minyan* in the synagogue on the first floor of the Knesset.

Now, with elections on the horizon on October 27th, it is looking like the number of Religious Zionist members of parliament will go down, in part because there are only three *kippot* in realistic slots on the Likud list. But what will rise is the number of parties represented in the new Knesset with Religious Zionist MKs.

Depending on how the current parties unite and how Israelis vote, the next Knesset could hold a record ten separate factions with Religious Zionist representation. Together they span the full spectrum of Religious Zionist Israelis, who disagree sharply on almost every key issue. What unites them is a shared conviction:

advancing the Torah of Israel for the People of Israel in the Land of Israel, each as they see fit.

To put the election into perspective, here is a primer of the Religious Zionist candidates in each slate who realistically could be elected into the next Knesset on Election Day, based on polls at the time this was written:

Amcha Yisrael

Laly Deraï, 51, had six children, including her son Saadya, a *yeshiva* student who fell in battle in Gaza. She made *Aliyah* from France at age 15. She is a member of the Mateh Binyamin Regional Council, a journalist, motivational speaker and advocate for service in the IDF. She earned a Master's degree in psychology from the University of London. She is 6th on the list.

Fleur Hassan-Nahoum, 53, was born in London and raised in Gibraltar, where her father was mayor and first minister. She studied law at King's College London before making *Aliyah*. She lives in Jerusalem, where she served as deputy mayor. She is now the special envoy of the Foreign Ministry for Innovation. She is 5th on the list.

Ofer Winter, 55, was born in Rechasim and raised in Kiryat Ata, both near Haifa. The eldest of four siblings, he lives in Mitzpe Netofa in the Lower Galil with his wife, with whom he raised eight children. He attended the National Security College, served in the Sayeret Matkal and Maglan units and then headed the Givati Brigade. He studied at the IDF preparatory academy in Eli and earned degrees from Bar-Ilan and Hebrew University. He is first on the list.

B'Yachad

Naftali Bennett, 54, was born in Haifa and raised there as well as in San Francisco, Montreal, and Teaneck, and lives in Ra'anana with his wife and four children. He served in the Sayeret Matkal



and Maglan commando units and earned a law degree from Hebrew University. He co-founded a successful software company and headed the Council of Jewish Communities in Judea and Samaria. He was Prime Minister from 2021 to 2022 and has also served as Minister of Defense, Economy, and Education. He is first on the list.

Jeremy Saltan, 42, studied at the Mateh Binyamin *yeshiva* in Beit El and Kiryat Malachi *yeshiva*, and earned an MA in international security and diplomacy from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Born and raised in Skokie, IL, he has worked closely with Bennett since he first entered electoral politics in 2012 as a political adviser, legislative aide, faction secretary, and coordinating his English-language media, diplomatic and field operations. A resident of Mevaseret Zion, he has served as a company commander in the IDF reserves, serving 636 days since October 7th. He is 23rd on the list.

Moshe Tur-Paz, 54, was born in Philadelphia to British parents and raised in Jerusalem, Haifa, and England. He lives in Kfar Etzion with his wife and five children. He studied at the Har Etzion and Neve Shmuel *yeshivot* and earned two degrees from Hebrew University. He served as director-general of the Jerusalem Education Authority, of the World ORT education network in Israel, and of the school system of the Religious Kibbutzim Movement. A Yesh Atid MK in the outgoing Knesset, he is 24th on the list.

HaDemokratim (The Democrats)

Yaya Fink, 42, was born in Jerusalem to a father from Scranton, Pennsylvania, and a mother from Brooklyn, and is the youngest of five siblings. He lives in the northern city of Yokneam with his wife and two children. He served in the IDF's Paratroopers Brigade, studied at Yeshivat Ma'ale Gilboa, earned an MBA from Hebrew University, and founded Darkei Noam, a liberal *parasha* sheet distributed in synagogues. He is 5th on the list.

HaTzionut HaDatit-Zehut (Religious Zionist Party-Zehut)

Itamar Eitam, 45, a father of six and the son of former cabinet minister and National Religious Party chairman Effi Eitam. He was raised in the Golan and lives in the Galil. A lieutenant colonel who commanded units in the IDF, he was wounded in Gaza and served close to 700 days in reserve duty since October 7. He has a Master's degree from Bar-Ilan University and studied at the IDF preparatory academy in Eli and at the Hispin *yeshiva* in the Golan. He is 6th on the list.

Moshe Feiglin, 60, was born in Haifa to Australian immigrants, raised in Rehovot, and lives in Karnei Shomron, where he and his wife raised five children. He studied at Or Etzion *yeshiva* and

served as an officer in the IDF Engineering Corps. A former Likud MK, he is 2nd on the list.

Tzvika Mor, 50, was born in Bnei Brak and raised eight children with his wife in Kiryat Arba. He studied at the Kiryat Shemonah *Hesder yeshiva* and Yeshivat Shavei Chevron and served in the Sayeret Matkal unit. Mor holds a PhD in psychology from the University of Cordova and degrees from Herzog College and Lifshitz College of Education. He is the chairman of the Tikva Forum, an association of families of Israeli hostages abducted to Gaza during the October 7th massacre, which he formed after the kidnapping of his son Eitan from the Nova music festival massacre to Gaza, where he was a hostage for two years. He is 5th on the list.

Simcha Rothman, 46, was born in Bnei Brak and lives in Pnei Kedem in Gush Etzion with his wife and five children. He studied at Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh and earned a law degree from Tel Aviv University. He served as a religious-affairs NCO at the IDF Military Engineering School. The chairman of the Constitution, Law and Justice Committee in the outgoing Knesset, he is 4th on the list.

Betzalel Smotrich, 46, was born in Chispin in the Golan Heights, raised in Beit El and lives in Kedumim in Samaria with his wife and seven children. He studied at Yeshivat Kedumim and Merkaz HaRav and earned a law degree from Ono Academic College. He served in the IDF Operations Division of the General Staff, in a shortened period of service. The Finance Minister in the outgoing government, he is first on the list.

Orit Strook, 66, was born in Jerusalem and lives in Chevron, where she and her husband raised 11 children and has been an activist for decades. She served national service at Bikur Cholim Hospital and Migdal Ha'emek, briefly lived in Yamit in Sinai, and studied at Michlalah College in Jerusalem. The Minister of Settlements and National Missions in the outgoing government, she is 3rd on the list.

Ohad Tal, 44, was born and raised in Eilat and lives in Efrat with his wife Tamar and their four children. He served in the IDF's Armored Corps as a tank commander, taking part in Operation Defensive Shield. He holds a BA in education administration from Bar-Ilan University and an executive MBA in public policy and administration from Hebrew University. A former *shaliach* to the Netherlands for the Jewish Agency and World Bnei Akiva, he went on to serve as deputy director of World Mizrahi and director of World Bnei Akiva. The chairman of the Religious Zionism faction and of the Public Enterprises Committee in the outgoing Knesset, he is 12th on the list.

Kachol Lavan (Blue and White)

Aliza Bloch, 59, was born and raised in Kiryat Gat and lives with her husband and four children in Beit Shemesh, the city where



she served as mayor. She has also taken a second residence in Kiryat Shemonah to show solidarity with residents of the bombarded northern development town. She earned a doctorate from Bar-Ilan University and has been principal of two schools. She is 3rd on the list.

Likud

Shlomo Karhi, 44, born in Ramat Gan and raised in the southern religious *moshav* of Zimrat, is the eldest of 17 siblings. He lives in Zimrat with his wife and seven children. He studied at the Kisse Rahamim and Merkaz HaRav *yeshivot* and the Lev Academic Center and earned a PhD in industrial engineering from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, after serving in the IDF's religious Netzach Yehuda battalion. The Communications Minister in the outgoing government, he is 23rd on the list.

Elisha Medan, 47, is the son of Rabbi Ya'akov Medan, the dean of the Har Etzion *Hesder yeshiva* in Alon Shvut. A founder of the community of Avigail in the Hebron Hills, he is married to Miriam and the father of six. An elite IDF commando, he was critically wounded in November 2023 in Beit Hanoun and lost both his legs. He has a Master's degree from Bar-Ilan University and studied at the IDF preparatory academy in Eli and at the Hispin *yeshiva* in the Golan. He is 15th on the list.

Moshe Saada, 54, was born in Ramot Meir, near Rehovot, to Rabbi Nissim Saada, and lives nearby in Mazkeret Batya with his wife and five children. He studied at Yeshivat Sha'alvim and served as a combat soldier in the IDF's Nachal Brigade. He holds a law degree from the Academic Center for Law and Science (Sha'arei Mishpat) and served 24 years in the Police Internal Investigations Department. He is 17th on the list.

Noam L'Yisrael

Avi Maoz, 70, was born in Haifa and lives in Jerusalem. He and his wife have 10 children. He studied at the Merkaz HaRav and Har HaMor *yeshivot*, served as a combat soldier in the IDF's Nahal Brigade, and was among the founders of Migdal Oz in Gush Etzion. A deputy minister in the outgoing government and a former director-general of the Interior Ministry and the Housing Ministry, he is first on the list.

Otzma Yehudit

Itamar Ben Gvir, 50, was born in Mevaseret Zion and lives in Kiryat Arba with his wife and six children. He studied at the Jewish Idea *yeshiva* under Rabbi Meir Kahane, earned a law degree from Ono Academic College, and did not serve in the IDF. The Minister of National Security in the outgoing government, he is first on the list.

Chanamel Dorfman, 31, lives on a farm near Shiloh with his wife and five children. He is an attorney who served as Ben Gvir's chief of staff for four years. He is 7th on the list.

Amichai Eliyahu, 47, was born in Jerusalem and raised in Shlomi. He and his wife live in Rimoni, in the Binyamin Regional Council, and have six children. He studied in several *yeshivot*, served in the Sayeret Matkal unit, and fought in the Second Lebanon War. The son of Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu, Chief Rabbi of Tzfat, and grandson of Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, who served as Israel's Sephardi Chief Rabbi, he was Minister of Heritage in the outgoing government. He is 4th on the list.

Limor Son Har-Melech, 47, was born in Jerusalem and raised her 10 children in Homesh, the evacuated northern Samaria community, and now lives in Shavei Shomron. She performed national civic service as a Bnei Akiva youth coordinator and studied at Orot Israel College. She is 5th on the list.

Yitzchak Wasserlauf, 34, was born in Jerusalem, raised in the Old City, and studied at the Oz VeEmuna *Hesder yeshiva* in Tel Aviv, where he lives with his wife and three children. He served in the Golani Brigade. The outgoing Minister for the Development of the Periphery, the Negev and the Galil, he is 3rd on the list.

Yashar

Yoram Cohen, 65, was born and raised in Tel Aviv and lives with his wife in Jerusalem's Ramot neighborhood, where they raised their five children. He graduated from the Noam *yeshiva* high school in Pardes Chana and the National Defense College and has two degrees from Haifa University and an honorary doctorate from Bar-Ilan University. He served in the Golani Brigade and for 34 years in the Shin-Bet Security Service, which he headed from 2011 to 2016. He is 2nd on the list.

Orit Farkash HaCohen, 55, was born in Petach Tikva, raised in Ashdod, and lives in Jerusalem with her husband and four children. She performed national service at Shaare Zedek Hospital and earned a law degree from Hebrew University and a public administration degree from Harvard. She has served as Minister of Strategic Affairs, of Tourism, and of Science and Technology, and is an MK in Benny Gantz's party in the outgoing Knesset. She is 3rd on the list.

Matan Kahana, 54, was born in Haifa and raised in New York and then Moshav Beit Gamliel, where he lives with his wife and raised four children. He studied at Netiv Meir *yeshiva* and earned a law degree from Bar-Ilan University. He served in the Sayeret Matkal unit and in the Air Force as an F-16 pilot, flying in the Second Lebanon War and several operations. As Minister of Religious Services he reformed the *kashrut* industry, and he has been an MK in the parties of Naftali Bennett and Benny Gantz. He is 5th on the list.





Laly Derai, MK Simcha Rothman, Aliza Bloch and MK Moshe Tur-Paz on a panel discussing Religious Zionism in Israel at the World Mizrahi Ideological Summit in Jerusalem, 2025. (PHOTO: YONA BRODER)

Tal Ohana, 42, was born in Yerucham, the southern development town where she served as the first female mayor and before that as deputy mayor at age 26. She is a graduate of the Stern Academic College of the Jezreel Valley and completed a master's degree from the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy at IDC Herzliya. She is 19th on the list.

Elyasaf Peretz, 39, is an educator and father of three who was raised in Givat Ze'ev and lives in Jerusalem. He founded and ran an organization of bereaved siblings after his brothers Eliraz and Uriel were killed in combat. He himself served in the Golani brigade and earned degrees from Bar-Ilan University and the Schechter Institute. His mother, Miriam Peretz, won the Israel Prize and ran for President. He is 20th on the list.

Shira Shapira, 51, an architect and city planner, led the national project memorializing October 7th. Her eldest son, Aner, 22, saved many lives at the Nova festival on October 7th and lost his own, catching and throwing back seven grenades hurled by Hamas terrorists at the shelter where he and others had taken cover, before the eighth exploded and killed him. He was the eldest of

her seven children. Her husband's grandfather, Chaim Moshe Shapira, was a signatory of Israel's Declaration of Independence and later a cabinet minister for Hapoel HaMizrachi and the National Religious Party, which he helped found. She is 10th on the list.

Elazar Stern, 69, was born in Tel Aviv and raised five children with his wife in Hoshaya in the Galil, which he helped found. He earned degrees from Bar-Ilan University, the Kellogg-Recanati International program of Tel Aviv and Northwestern Universities, and the National Defense University in Washington, D.C. A reserve major-general, he served in the Sayeret Matkal unit, headed the IDF's Personnel Directorate, and served as chief education officer. An MK since 2013, he served as Minister of Intelligence. He is 12th on the list.

Yaffa Tebeje, 35, is among the eight children born to her parents who made *Aliyah* from Ethiopia in Operation Moses. Born in Karmiel, she is a socioeconomic activist who founded and runs an innovation and entrepreneurship center in Ashkelon, where she lives and was a student leader at the local college, where she



earned two degrees. She speaks fluent Russian and Amharic and is 21st on the list.

Chili Tropper, 48, was born in Jerusalem and lives outside the city in Nes Harim with his wife and four children. He is one of 10 children born in Jerusalem to Faigie and Rabbi Danny Tropper, who made *Aliyah* from New York and founded the Gesher Center. Chili studied at Horev *yeshiva*, served in the IDF's Duvdevan unit and earned degrees from Open University and Lander Institute. He was a high school principal before becoming an MK and Culture Minister in Gantz's Blue and White party. He is 6th on the list.

Yisrael Beiteinu

Rafi Ben-Shitrit, 60, was born in Beit She'an, the city where he served as mayor, lives with his wife, and raised five children, one of whom was killed in battle in the IDF on October 7th. He served in the IDF's intelligence unit, studied at Oranim College, and held senior roles in the Religious Zionist Bnei Akiva youth movement. He is 2nd on the list.

Dan Illouz, 40, was born in Montreal and made *Aliyah* to Israel, where he lives in Jerusalem's Arnona neighborhood with his wife and two children. He earned a law degree from McGill University and in public policy from Hebrew University. He served as an MK

with Likud in the outgoing Knesset and before that as a member of the Jerusalem city council. He is 10th on the list.

Sharon Sharabi, 50, was born in Tel Aviv and lives in Alfei Menashe in Samaria. His brothers Yossi and Eli were held hostage in Gaza. Eli came home after 491 days but Yossi was killed in Gaza. Eli's wife and daughters were murdered on October 7th. Sharon was a vocal voice to bring his brothers home. He is 6th on the list.



Gil Hoffman

served as the chief political correspondent and analyst of The Jerusalem Post and executive director of HonestReporting and has lectured about Israel in all 50 US states.



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HEADSHOT CREDITS: Ofer Winter: Nadav Margalit; Naftali Bennett: Avi Ohayon / Government Press Office of Israel; Moshe Tur-Paz: Haim Zach / Knesset Archives; Tzvika Mor: Efrat Mor; Moshe Feiglin: Lior Yado; Ohad Tal: Ronen Horesh / Knesset Archives; Aliza Bloch: Sharon Gabay; Simcha Rothman: Shlomi Amsalem / Knesset Archives; Betzalel Smotrich: Avi Ohayon / Government Press Office of Israel; Shlomo Karhi: Shlomi Amsalem / Knesset Archives; Limor Son Har-Melech: Ronen Horesh / Knesset Archives; Moshe Saada: Ronen Horesh / Knesset Archives; Amichai Eliyahu: Ronen Horesh / Knesset Archives; Yitzchak Wasserlauf: Ronen Horesh / Knesset Archives; Matan Kahane: Itzhak Harari / Knesset Archives; Orit Farkash HaCohen: Shlomi Amsalem / Knesset Archives; Chili Tropper: Yanai Yechiel; Dan Illouz: Noam Moskowitz / Knesset Archives

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How We Vote

Rabbi Reuven Taragin

"At 5:35 AM, we woke up: my wife, my brother Reb Shimon Leib, and my brother-in-law Reb Natanel Solduchil. And after we drank coffee, we put on Shabbat clothing in honor of this great and holy day, because 'This is the day the L-rd has made, we will rejoice and be happy on it.'

"After 2,000 or more years of exile, you could say that from the six days of Creation until this day, we have not merited to see a day like this, that we are holding elections in a Jewish state. *Shehecheyanu!* Blessed is the One Who kept us alive and sustained us and brought us to this day!

"So we went to the voting station near Chabashim Street with our identity cards in hand. With great and mighty joy, we walked the short way there, and the entire way I walked as if it were Simchat Torah and I was circling with a Torah scroll, because I was holding the identity card of our new Jewish state in my hand. My happiness and joy knew no bounds! The assistant at the voting station brought the ballot box, and the chairman called out to me and said, '*V'hadarta pnei zaken*, And you shall honor the old man' – and told me that since I was the oldest person present, I would be the first to vote. With a thrill of awe and holiness, I handed my identity card to the chairman, who read my name aloud from the card and the voters' register.

"The deputy chairman wrote down my name and handed me the number 1, then handed me an envelope. I went into the other room, where there were ballots from all the parties. With a shaking hand, moved with holiness, I took one ballot marked 'B' for the Religious Union party and placed it inside the envelope. I reentered the polling room and showed them I held only one envelope. Then the holiest moment of my life arrived – the moment that neither my father nor my grandfather had the privilege to experience in their lifetimes. Only I, in my time, in my lifetime, did I merit to experience such a holy and pure moment as this. What joy for me and my portion! At 6:28 AM, we returned

home and went to pray. What a great holiday!" (*Sivan Rahav Meir, A Personal Account of the 1st Israeli Elections in 1949*, April 8, 2019).

This is how Rabbi Moshe Alpert, an ultra-Orthodox rabbi who served as the leader of several Jewish communities in Jerusalem during the Mandate, described his experience of voting in the first Israeli Knesset elections in 1949.

Nearly eighty years and countless election cycles later, many of us have come to take for granted the privilege of voting for a Jewish government in a Jewish state. We should not. For nearly two millennia, our people lacked the opportunity to vote for Jewish representatives in our own country. Regardless of the candidates or the outcome, we should recognize and appreciate the profound *zechut* of possessing this right.

Jews know how to celebrate elections. Indeed, we take full advantage of the democratic process by consistently fielding one of the world's largest numbers of political parties per capita. This situation complicates voters' decision-making. Many party platforms are similar, and numerous significant issues are under debate. How, then, should we choose?

While each of us must ultimately make a personal decision, the Torah provides guidance. The verse describing the appointment of a king states "place a king upon yourself" – implying that the people bear responsibility for the appointment (*Devarim* 17:15). Yet the conclusion of the verse appears to suggest otherwise: "that Hashem, your G-d, chooses." Who, then, is ultimately responsible: the people or Hashem?

The *Sifri* (*Shoftim* 14), emphasizing the end of the verse, views Hashem as the ultimate Chooser, with the prophet designating the individual to be appointed. This was indeed the process by which Shaul, David, and many subsequent kings were selected. The Ramban, however, identifies a difficulty with this interpretation: the continuation of the verse instructs the people to select a Jew rather than a gentile as king. If Hashem determines the king through

the prophet, the need for Torah guidelines regarding eligibility becomes unclear.

The Ramban therefore cites a second interpretation, which emphasizes the words "place a king upon yourself" and asserts that the decision rests with us. The phrase "that Hashem, your G-d, chooses," on this reading, means that we should use Hashem's will as our guiding criterion. As *Chazal* instruct, we should align our will with Hashem's will and desire what He desires (*Pirkei Avot* 2:4). This alignment should inform both our daily choices and our selection of leaders.

Ultimately, the Ramban favors a third interpretation that connects Hashem's will to our decision-making: Hashem "chooses" whomever we appoint, provided the selection aligns with His guidelines. The decision rests with us, and Hashem affirms our choice.

May we, together with the Jewish people, select leaders in a manner that merits Hashem's support and blessing for their endeavors.



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ISRAELCANADA

The Menorah as the Symbol of the State of Israel

Rabbi Shimshon HaKohen Nadel

In 1956, the UK Parliament gifted the Israeli Knesset with a menorah that still stands outside of Israel's legislature until today. Though deeply symbolic, the depiction of the menorah reflected a religious and historic debate in the early years of the State of Israel.

The official symbol of the State of Israel is a *menorah* flanked on each side by an olive branch. This familiar image was designed by Gabriel and Maxim Shamir, two brothers from Latvia who studied graphics and design in Berlin prior to making *Aliyah*, and were responsible for creating a number of emblems, medals, stamps, and currency for the young state. Their *menorah* was adopted as the official emblem by the Provisional Council of the State of Israel on February 10, 1949.

It's easy to understand why the developing nation adopted the emblem. The *menorah* has been a central Jewish symbol since antiquity. In addition to its role in the *Mishkan*, the *Beit HaMikdash*, and the Chanukah story, images of the *menorah* have been found in synagogues, cemeteries, mosaics, and seals throughout Jewish history. The decision to surround it with olive branches is based on the prophet Zechariah's vision of a *menorah* flanked by olive branches (Zechariah 4:3).

But the choice of the *menorah* was not without controversy.

Upon careful inspection, the *menorah* depicted on Israel's national emblem is the same *menorah* that appears on the Arch of Titus in Rome. Built circa 81 CE by Emperor Domitian to commemorate the victories of his brother Titus, including his conquest of Jerusalem, the south panel of the Arch famously depicts Roman soldiers with celebratory wreaths on their heads parading vessels taken from the Holy Temple: the *shulchan*, trumpets, fire pans, and at its center, the *menorah*.

Chief Rabbi Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog strongly objected to the choice for Israel's emblem, as he believed that the *menorah* which appears on the Arch is not the *menorah* from the *Beit HaMikdash*. For Rabbi Herzog, the most problematic aspect of the Arch of Titus *menorah* is its hexagonal base. According to the Talmud (*Menachot* 28b) and Rashi (*Shemot* 25:31), the *menorah* had a three-legged base and not a hexagonal base. Images of a

three-legged *menorah* appear in carvings on many ancient synagogues and graves and ancient mosaics throughout Israel.

Rabbi Herzog was also troubled by the depictions of dragons and other mythical beasts like griffins, lions, eagles, and sea creatures that are found on the base of the Arch of Titus *menorah*. According to Rabbi Herzog, it is inconceivable that such idolatrous creatures could be represented on a *menorah* that stood in the Holy Temple. The use of objects ornamented with dragons is strictly forbidden by Jewish law (*Mishnah, Avodah Zara* 3:3).

Given these significant deviations from Jewish tradition, Rabbi Herzog concluded that the *menorah* depicted on the Arch of Titus cannot be the *menorah* from the *Beit HaMikdash*. Instead, Rabbi Herzog suggested that it is possible that something happened to the original base of the *menorah* on its way from Jerusalem to Rome, leading the Romans to replace the original base with the hexagonal base depicted on the Arch.

Rabbi Herzog concludes and writes, “What emerges from this is that our government has not done well today when we have merited again the light of Zion symbolized by the *menorah*, copying specifically the image of the *menorah* on the Arch of Titus which was made by the hands of foreigners and not made in the purity of holiness according to the Torah of *Moshe Rabbeinu*, a genius of geniuses, and from other sources derived by *chachmei Torah*. And not just that, but an expert archeologist testified before me that the *menorot* depicted on the graves in the catacombs of Rome are all three-legged, as are all of the *menorot* depicted in mosaics of the remains of synagogues found in the Land of Israel.”

Rabbi Herzog was not the only one to question the identity and authenticity of the *menorah* that appears on the Arch of Titus. Both Rabbi Yosef Kapach and the Lubavitcher Rebbe believed that the branches of the Temple *menorah* were straight and not curved, based on an illustration of the Rambam in the manuscript of his *Peirush HaMishnah* on Tractate *Menachot*. Accordingly, they did not believe that the *menorah* on the Arch of Titus accurately depicts the *menorah* from the *Beit HaMikdash*.

It would appear as if the Shamir brothers anticipated the objection – at least the objectionable mythical beasts on the base of the Arch of Titus *menorah* – and obscured the images in the emblem of Israel. Instead, they appear as faint squiggly lines on the emblem’s base.

“

For centuries, the Arch of Titus represented the destruction of the Holy Temple and Jerusalem and our people’s long exile. But following Israel’s independence, that very same image took on new life and new meaning.

Rabbi Herzog advocated that the Provisional Council adopt one of the other submissions, but his opposition fell upon deaf ears. Even other Religious Zionist rabbis did not voice an objection. Very quickly, the controversial new emblem gained acceptance. In time for Israel’s first Independence Day, the Religious Zionist newspaper *Hatzofeh* chose the new emblem to grace the cover of one of its supplements. Ultimately, the symbol was formally adopted by the Jewish State.

For some, the choice of the *menorah* from the Arch of Titus in Rome for the newly created modern State of Israel was symbolic and meaningful. For centuries, the Arch of Titus represented the destruction of the Holy Temple and Jerusalem and our people’s long exile. But following Israel’s independence, that very same image took on new life and new meaning. Now that they had built a state and returned home to Jerusalem, Israel’s founding generation viewed the image with a newfound sense of hope and even victory. And so the *menorah* of the Arch of Titus, along with other images invoking the famous relief in Rome, began to appear on Jewish book covers, monuments, and religious art, following the founding of the State of Israel. What was once a symbol of derision has now become a symbol of national pride!



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Replica of the Arch of Titus relief (displayed at the ANU – Museum of the Jewish People) (PHOTO: DERIVATIVE WORK: STEERPIKE/PUBLIC DOMAIN/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)

Calling for Aliyah, Remaining a Family

Roi Abecassis

This past July, I had the privilege of leading a conference in Jerusalem devoted to one of the most important questions facing the Jewish people: how do we hold together the vision of *Aliyah* and the responsibility we bear toward millions of Jews living outside Israel?

Over the course of the day, ministers, rabbis, educators, heads of *yeshivot* and *midrashot*, *shlichim*, and representatives of organizations from Israel and the Diaspora gathered to discuss this question. Despite the diversity of views in the room, one thread ran through almost every conversation. As the Executive Chairman of World Mizrahi, Rabbi Doron Perez, put it: “We may be a small nation, but we are the largest family in the world.” It was a single sentence that reminded everyone present that a family is not measured by whether all its members live under the same roof, but by whether they continue to feel responsibility for one another even when separated by continents.

One particularly moving moment came when Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu opened his remarks by apologizing for not speaking English. It was clear how much it pained him to be unable to address world Jewry directly. Beyond the personal gesture, there was an important message: if we want to strengthen the bond between us, we need to learn to speak to one another – not only in the same language, but with genuine listening, mutual familiarity, and respect.

One of the central discussions of the day took place between the Minister of Aliyah and Absorption, Ofir Sofer, and the Minister of Diaspora Affairs and the Fight Against Antisemitism, Amichai Chikli. On the surface, each is charged with a different mission – one focused on bringing Jews to Israel, the other on strengthening Jewish life in the Diaspora. Yet their conversation demonstrated that there is no contradiction here. Minister Sofer captured it in a single sentence that stayed with me: “Where there are strong Jewish communities, there is *Aliyah*. Where there are no strong communities, there is no *Aliyah*.” Minister Chikli completed the picture by emphasizing that in a period of rising antisemitism, investment in Jewish education, schools, and communities is a national interest of the State of Israel. The message was clear: strengthening Jewish communities is not



an alternative to *Aliyah* – it is one of the conditions that makes *Aliyah* possible.

Another panel addressed the question of *shlichut*. Israeli educators raised a genuine dilemma: is it right to send our best teachers to Jewish communities around the world, at a time when Israel's own education system is suffering from a serious shortage of excellent teachers? The discussion laid bare the tension between Israel's domestic needs and its broader responsibility for the future of the Jewish people. Alongside the challenge, there was wide agreement that high-quality *shlichut* is a strategic investment in the future of the entire Jewish people.

Considerable interest was also generated by the conversation between journalists Chagai Segal and Amit Segal, father and son. Beyond their debate about *Aliyah* itself, a deeper question emerged: does Israel's responsibility toward Diaspora Jews end with the call to come home, or is it also obligated to strengthen Jewish life for as long as Jews choose to live outside Israel? There is no simple answer, but the very fact that the question was asked illustrated how clearly the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora cannot rest on ideology alone. It must be built on a genuine sense of partnership and shared responsibility.

That is also the thought I carried with me as I left the conference. I believe with all my heart in *Aliyah* and in the vision of *kibbutz galuyot*, the ingathering of the exiles. But precisely because of that belief, I am convinced that as long as millions of Jews live in the Diaspora, they remain our family and our responsibility. We do not need to choose between encouraging *Aliyah* and strengthening Jewish communities around the world. On the contrary, a strong Jewish community, connected to Israel and to its own identity, is the very soil from which *Aliyah* grows.

The challenge of our generation is to continue calling every Jew to come home, while in the same breath remaining one people, committed to one another wherever we live.



Roi Abecassis

is Head of the Department of Zionist Jewish Identity at the World Zionist Organization and Deputy Chairman of KKL-JNF, representing the World Mizrahi movement in the National Institutions.



**“Disconnect Your
Emotions, Matan.
We Are at War.”**

**A FIRST-HAND
ACCOUNT BY
MATAN ANGREST**

On Hoshana Rabbah last year, the Jewish world united in joy as the last twenty hostages were released from Gaza. Among them was Matan Angrest, a tank driver who was the sole survivor of his four-man crew. After two years in captivity, we are now able to hear his account of that day firsthand.

This testimony is adapted from an upcoming documentary about Captain Daniel Perez Hy"d, the commander of Matan's tank, due to be released in 2027.

At 6:30 am, a little after the first sirens and impacts, Daniel and I were the first to wake up. We looked at each other as we heard not only sirens, but explosions right next to us. We immediately jumped out of bed, woke Tomer and Itay, and all four of us ran, already geared up, into the shelter, the protected space very close to our living quarters.

We waited there until we received an order. Daniel was on the phone, trying to get more information, trying to understand what to do. Do we jump into the tank? Do we stay in the shelter? Are we needed? And after a very short time, Daniel turned to us and said: "Guys. Come on. To the tanks!"

We left the shelter and ran as fast as we could with all our equipment. It's not easy – helmets, vests, explosions all around you, people shooting. We got into the tank as quickly as possible, operated it in the fastest and most professional way we could, went out through the gate, and the battle began.

At the beginning, we didn't know the scale of what was happening. No one prepared us for something this big. We exited the gate and suddenly saw a white vehicle. We didn't know if it was ours. We got closer and saw it had a Palestinian license plate. Very quickly we understood that something unusual was happening – a Palestinian vehicle inside Israeli territory is not something that occurs every day. We put away our phones. We said our goodbyes to our families. "We'll talk later. Whatever will be, will be. We are actively engaged in an operation." And then we simply began to act as a tank: running over cars,

shooting at cars. The main thing was that there would be no living, moving threats in our area.

We did a lot of patrols. We went up to a position called Point 76, and on the way there was a small explosion in the tank. We thought it was a mine. I don't know exactly what it was, but the side of the tank was slightly damaged. The terrorists were shooting at us a great deal with MAGs and M16s, with danger of sniping. As time went on, we began to understand that this was not a normal event.

When we entered the outpost, the first thing I saw was many bodies of dead terrorists. From that I understood there were probably more inside the base. Our main mission was to cover the observation operations room, and so we positioned ourselves with the cannon aimed toward it so no terrorists could emerge. There was a second tank, Yoni Golan's. Daniel understood there was no reason for two tanks to remain in the same place. One would stay inside the outpost; the other would go out and carry out attacks, destroying enemies outside before they could reach it. We went out through the gate.

I will never forget what I saw next. Outside were three Golani soldiers lying still on the ground, their vests on, their weapons already taken. I said to Daniel and the team: "Look at this. How did this happen? Maybe they need help? What is happening here?" At that moment, reality truly hit me. I was shattered seeing our soldiers like that. You just want to get down, to help, to see if you can save someone, evacuate them. And then Daniel



said to me: "Disconnect the emotion, Matan. We are at war right now." In retrospect, I understood. If we had gone down to help them, there may well have been someone waiting there, ready to ambush us. There are considerations that go beyond what your eyes see. You have to think ahead. I agreed with that in retrospect, despite all the difficulty and sorrow in it.

Later we met an armored Namer vehicle. It had gone through its own battle, many of its soldiers killed, and those who remained didn't really know how to operate or deal with it. Daniel said to them, without hesitation: "Come with us. Drive after me." And the Namer joined us. There was a really special moment when we came down from the position and Daniel got out of the tank to hug Shilo from the Namer. I saw it through the rear camera. I accidentally switched to it and suddenly saw Daniel talking with him, embracing him. I even joked: "Okay, I have seniority, I'll lead the team." But what stayed with me was that Daniel took the Namer under his command. It wasn't really his role, but he adopted them, supported them, gave them another angle and another set of eyes in the fighting.

Then Daniel said something that, for me, was unbelievable. He told us that our mission was to prevent a kidnapping. At the time it really surprised me. I was a fighter, a tank driver, in combat. What did kidnapping have to do with any of this? But what is extraordinary, in retrospect, is how accurate he was. There were not just one but multiple kidnapping incidents that day. When I heard that radio recording after I returned – hearing him say our goal was to prevent a kidnapping event – I thought: how did he know? Seeing how things connected, and how precise his assessment had been, was incredible.

We went back up to Point 76. Itay, the gunner, saw terrorists near the fence and immediately alerted Daniel. And then suddenly Daniel told me: "Driver, reverse fast." I thought: "What? Daniel, what are we doing? Are we driving toward them?" I was driving backward asking him what was happening, and he answered: "Yes. We're going toward them." There was some kind of charge. I drove as fast as I could, and meanwhile Daniel was encouraging us – "Good, good driver. Good. You're all machines. Well done." He knew we were in a difficult situation and needed everyone to stay sharp.

Of course there is always fear. But at that moment, I felt a sense of mission. I felt I was doing what my entire service had trained me for. There was a kind of floating feeling. On one hand, this was the engagement I had wanted my whole service to prepare me for – to prevent our enemies from entering the country. But at that moment, you put everything else aside. That minute, or even less, of the rush reflects the whole battle, understanding there is something bigger than yourself.

I passed between two trees through a narrow passage, Daniel guiding me. Then I turned left and saw tens of people, if not more. Many faces. Many people running. Some with weapons, some without, everything mixed together. As a tank, even alone, you have to look at all of them and act. I had to run over one, then move to the next and the next. Daniel was shooting, Itay was shooting. You needed to kill one and move on – it wasn't enough to kill one or two, there were more and more. I remember being in a kind of ecstasy, a rage. Like nothing you did was ever enough. You needed to remove the threat, then another one, then another. Daniel was constantly directing me – "Right, see him, he's here on the left." There were bodies, and you needed to verify and eliminate the threat. A shell was fired from the tank. I remember seeing terrorists thrown into the air. It was a few minutes of pure madness, shifting from holding a position to suddenly being in direct physical contact, running people over, firing a shell at forty or fifty meters. These are things not everyone gets to experience.

Daniel's decision to charge was the right one. The friction he created, I believe, prevented many terrorists from advancing further into the country. There were those we killed and those who fled back. The easiest thing would have been to say: "What can we do? Let's wait for more forces." But Daniel made the decision to engage the enemy. That is something I truly admire and respect. It



Top to bottom: Daniel speaking with Shilo outside of his tank; Daniel's tank after it was hit. The above photos and the photo on the previous page are screenshots from video footage taken on October 7th from army vehicles, used with permission from the soldiers' families.

was not obvious. I don't think everyone would have been able to make such a decision.

Then, unexpectedly, the tank was hit. It started burning from the inside and outside. My eyes were closed and I was half dazed, not really aware of what was happening. I remember shouting: "Peretz, Peretz, Peretz!" No one answered...

When I returned after two years in captivity, I was not in good condition, quite thin and pale, with many treatments still ahead. They told me that Daniel's funeral was taking place the next day. The fact that he returned on the same day as me is something I think is very special. Everyone told me not to go: my parents, the medical staff – they wanted to protect me, and said there would be another time when the family sat *shiva*. But something inside me, because of the special connection I had with Daniel, made it very important for me to be there. To show my presence. To support the family. To speak to Daniel personally. We had fought together, and beyond the fighting we were close friends. I told myself that if I didn't go, I would regret it for the rest of my life.

When I went up to speak, I just felt something in my heart – this was my moment. I overcame myself and got up. My father asked: "Matan, should I come with you?" I said: "No, Dad, sit. It's okay. I'm going." I hadn't prepared anything. Nothing was



Matan speaking at Daniel's funeral, the day after returning from captivity.

planned. I simply spoke from the heart. And thank G-d, I had the privilege to truly pay my final respects and to be there.

For me, Daniel Perez is a hero of Israel, placed among the greatest names of those who have done the most heroic things in this country. His command, his fighting spirit, and his character speak for themselves. He should be remembered as a real hero. What he did was extraordinary, and what his team accomplished under his command is truly worthy of admiration and appreciation. ■



Matan Angrest being filmed for the upcoming documentary about Daniel Perez Hy"d.

A Forgotten Display of Zionist Unity

Dr. Rafael Medoff

The Zionist movement always expected the Negev desert would be part of the future Jewish state. But London and Washington had other ideas.

In August 1946, a joint British-American committee proposed what came to be known as the Morrison-Grady plan, which would have divided Mandatory Palestine into semi-autonomous Jewish and Arab provinces under British rule. The Negev was to be controlled exclusively by the British.

A remarkable display of Zionist unity thwarted that danger.

The Zionist leadership decided to fight the British-American plan by establishing facts on the ground. In the weeks leading up to the High Holidays that year, Zionist factions from across the political and religious spectrum united to plan the overnight creation of eleven new Jewish settlements in the Negev, to take place immediately upon the conclusion of Yom Kippur.

Describing one of the scenes that unfolded in the moments after Yom Kippur ended, a young Religious Zionist participant recalled a legend concerning the Ba'al Shem Tov, founder of *Chassidut*, and the custom of blessing the new moon immediately after the fast.

One year, he wrote, clouds obscured the moon as Yom Kippur drew to a close, making it impossible to recite the blessing. The Ba'al Shem Tov "began to concentrate very intensely on some mystical formulas in an effort to bring out the moon," to no avail. Meanwhile, his followers began their post-Yom Kippur custom of singing and dancing, and their enthusiasm drew their leader into their joyous circle. "The moon suddenly appeared and lit up the sky," the young settler wrote. "Said the Ba'al Shem Tov: 'What my intense concentration did not accomplish was brought about by the joy of the *Chassidim*.'"

"If the Ba'al Shem Tov had been standing the evening after Yom Kippur in Be'erot Yitzchak, and had seen hundreds of *chalutzim* [pioneers], hand on shoulder, tightly interwoven, surrounding chain-wise the main vehicles loaded with provisions and dancing joyous dances before ascending to the eleven new *yishuvim* [settlements], he would have placed himself in the center, jumped to the very heavens and drawn the moon from behind the clouds, saying, 'What political means, discussions, and conferences cannot accomplish, the *Chassidim* of Eretz Yisrael accomplish through the burning joy of creation.'"

Changing the map

What they created, on the "Night of the Eleven Points," were Jewish outposts across the Negev and the adjoining Gaza region.

The settlers came from a variety of Zionist factions, united in purpose and passion. Some of the settlements were established by members of Labor Zionist youth movements, including the sites they named Be'eri (the pen name of Labor Zionist icon Berl Katznelson), Mishmar HaNegev, and Urim. Three others – Shoval, Gal-On, and Nirim – were created by members of the further-left Hashomer Hatzair movement. Two, Kfar Darom and Tekuma, were established by the Religious Zionists of Hapoel Hamizrachi.

"The map of Palestine was changed yesterday when eleven new Jewish settlements were established in a sweeping dawn-to-dusk action," the *Palestine Post* (later the *Jerusalem Post*) reported. "At dawn, scores of vehicles brought men and building materials" – other accounts estimated that 300 of the 1,000 settlers were women – "to the eleven chosen sites, stretching from Gedera to Rafah, and by darkness tents and fences had been erected and the beginnings made on the construction of the first huts."

Unity in America, too

American Zionists were united in their support for the settlement initiative.

Rabbi Dr. Abba Hillel Silver, co-chairman of the American Zionist Emergency Council – the umbrella for all major US Zionist groups – called the creation of the settlements "a magnificent tribute to the indefensible spirit of the *Yishuv*."

The US Labor Zionist journal *Furrows* hailed the new communities as "the reply of the *Yishuv* to every attempt by the British to convert the Jewish homeland into a ghetto."

The "courage and resourcefulness" of the settlers "brought a thrill of pride and admiration to the whole Jewish world," the editors of the *Detroit Jewish Chronicle* wrote. Framing the episode in quintessentially American terms, the paper asserted that "the operation can be compared only with the magnificent spirit which spurred the pioneers to conquer the American West."

An unconquerable spirit

That spirit has been manifest again and again in the years since, as the “eleven points” communities have borne the brunt of being situated along Israel’s front lines. During the 1948 War of Independence, the eleven towns played a crucial role in fighting off Egyptian advances and ensuring that the Negev would become part of the Jewish state.

During the Hamas invasion of October 7, 2023, Be’eri and Nirim were especially hard-hit. But today, rebuilding proceeds and life is slowly but steadily resuming, as their courageous residents draw on the inspiration of 1946 to navigate the challenges ahead.

A cartoonist's perspective



This political cartoon by Arie Navon – later one of the most famous cartoonists in Israeli history – appeared in the Labor Party daily newspaper *Davar* on October 9, 1946.

Titled “This Week in Sport,” it features two goalkeepers. One, smoking a pipe – the cartoonist’s standard symbol for the British – is labeled “Anti-Zionist Regime,” with eleven balls in his net. The other, the Jewish goalkeeper, has just one ball in his net, labeled “Rafiah” – a reference to the Rafiah prison camp in the Negev, where the British detained thousands of Jewish political prisoners in the 1940s (note the barbed wire structure behind the Jewish goalie). The landscape in the background features eleven towers and a flag reading “The Negev.” The caption at the bottom, “11:1,” gives the score.



Dr. Rafael Medoff

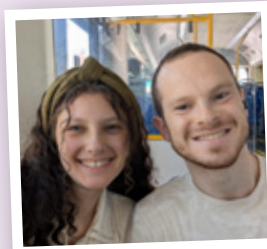
is the author of numerous books on Jewish and Zionist history, including the *Historical Dictionary of Zionism*, co-authored with Chaim I. Waxman.



SHAGRIRIM BALEV

Friends Setting Up Friends

Our Couples: Introducing Shira David and Ezra Goldberg (both of them are shagririm too!)



Where was your first date?

Our first date was at Rak Marak in Ramat Gan. We both over-hyped our love for soup over text before, so it felt appropriate. On the way, Ezra ran into his best friend who told him he was going to get engaged and the first thing Ezra said to me was “nothing you say can ruin my mood now.”

What did you learn from the dating process that you’d like to share?

We learned that it never hurts to go on a date and see how it goes. Shira pushed off the first date twice and was debating going on a second one, but decided it was worth it to give Ezra another chance.

Why is it worth joining the Shagririm Balev database?

It feels good to have the seal of approval from a good friend before you go out with someone. Going on lots of irrelevant dates isn’t fun and when you go through shagririm you know that someone who knows you well already vetted the person for you.

A funny story from one of your dates:

Early in our dating, we were hanging out at Shira’s apartment and she walked Ezra down to his car to say goodbye without her phone or keys. We ended up talking in the car until 3 am and went up to find that she was locked out of her apartment and her roommates didn’t wake up from our knocking. We ended up having to sleep by Ezra’s parents, who Shira had only met briefly. She woke up really early and played Solitaire for two hours alone in the room until Ezra came to get her.

Tell us about the marriage proposal:

We really wanted to propose to each other and not have the proposal be one sided. We planned the day together and each planned a small surprise. In the morning, we went for a hike in the north where Ezra gave Shira a series of paintings he made with parodies of poems that she likes. Afterwards we went to a vegan Indian restaurant in Pardes Chana that we love. We ended the day at the beach where Shira sang and played on the guitar a parody of a Noah Kahan song we both like.

Is there anything else you want to share?

Who you marry might not be who you expected to marry when you started dating. If someone has good qualities it’s always worth giving them a chance. You might be a better match than you think.

Who are the ambassadors who set you up and what would you like to tell them?

Shira’s sister, Tzippy Kornfeld, and Ezra’s cousin, Tali Shapiro. Thanks for all the continuous effort. We know that one successful match really represents hours and hours of work for us. We really appreciate all your time, caring, and energy.



588

total
engagements



802

candidates
dating now



6120

ambassadors
(shagririm)



Want to join? Want to bring it to your community?

Message: +972 58-532-3242
Email: shagririmbalev@gmail.com
Visit: en.shagririm.org.il

I Don't Defend Israel

Shabbos Kestenbaum

With more than 20 million followers across all social media platforms and more than a billion views monthly, Sean Kelly's *Digital Social Hour* is one of the most influential podcasts in the world. When I was invited to debate 10 Palestinians on his show recently, one of my ideological opponents asked me a simple question: "How can you keep defending Israel?"

Perplexed, I asked him to clarify. "Given the starvation, the indiscriminate bombardment of infrastructure, and the ongoing genocide, how can you keep defending Israel?"

I responded simply: I have never in my life defended Israel, nor do I have any intention to start.

You see, I explained, late last year Israel's Foreign Minister, Gideon Sa'ar, took me and other Jewish American political commentators to the Kerem Shalom border crossing to see first hand

the more than 800 humanitarian aid trucks crossing from Egypt, inspected in Israel, and ultimately delivered into Gaza. I watched for hours as pallets larger than people were inspected, holding anything from feminine hygiene products to baby formula to clothing to medicine, all being facilitated and allowed by the Israeli government.

As we watched in amazement, I asked a young IDF soldier how she felt about her job managing the roads each morning to allow the safe crossing of those trucks. "To be honest, Shabbos," she told me, "I feel conflicted. I feel conflicted because my cousin is a hostage. His name is Edan Alexander."

Edan Alexander, of course, was the last living American released from Hamas captivity. That succinct response solidified for me my relationship to the State of Israel. As the Jewish people were grappling with the largest single-day massacre since the Holocaust, and while their own family members were quite literally being held hostage in the terror tunnels of Gaza, the same Jewish people nevertheless ensured to the best of their ability that no innocent Gazan civilian suffered as a result.

That fact is not something I defend, nor rationalize, nor attempt to justify. It is something I yell from the rooftops. As I stated directly to Sean Kelly and the 10 debaters that day, I laud and applaud the State of Israel. I thank Hashem each day that such a country exists, such a fighting force exists, and such a people

exist. The world would be a much better place if more countries looked more like the United States and Israel, and certainly looked less like Khan Younis and Tehran.

My message this Sukkot is just as simple. Jewish strength is not the absence of vulnerability. Jewish strength is what we choose to do while vulnerable.

The *sukkah* is, by definition, a vulnerable structure. It has walls, but they are temporary. It has a roof, but it is deliberately incomplete. We leave the security of our homes and place ourselves in a structure that reminds us that ultimately, our safety does not come from walls, weapons, or fortresses. It comes from Hashem.

The lesson of Israel is not that Jews are no longer vulnerable. It is that we are no longer defenseless.

This Sukkot, we sit beneath a fragile roof and thank Hashem for the strength to defend our people, the courage to protect our values, and the faith to know that ultimately, He is the One who protects us.



Shabbos Kestenbaum

is a political commentator at PragerU and former lead plaintiff in a landmark civil rights lawsuit against Harvard University. He is a regular contributor on national media, has testified multiple times in front of the United States Congress, White House, and Israeli Knesset, and lectures internationally on religious freedom, Gen Z, and American politics.



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

The Ink of Resilience:

Writing Our Eternal Story After October 7th

Inbar Gabay Zada

Just hours after operating on the frontlines of Lebanon – the latest chapter in three years of relentless combat – fighters of the 551st Paratroopers Commando Brigade gathered in Jerusalem to reunite with the families of their unit's 12 fallen heroes. Side by side, soldiers and grieving widows, parents, and siblings stepped forward to write the final letters in a *Sefer Torah* dedicated to their fallen.

Holding the quill was Rav Yehuda Elon – a 20-year reserve combat fighter in this very brigade, a *Sofer STaM*, and the guiding hand behind Sulamot's *Otiot Shel Ahava* (Letters of Love) program. Leading the event was Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon, Founder of Sulamot and Nasi of World Mizrahi – known to many as “The Soldier's Rabbi.”

When the ink dried, the room erupted into song, soldiers and families joining in a circle of tears and raw emotion.

“This Torah will not sit tucked away in a cabinet,” Rav Yehuda shared with deep emotion. “It will lead our battalion's soldiers onto the battlefield, carrying the light of our fallen brothers wherever we go.”

For Rav Yehuda, carrying a *Sefer Torah* into battle is second nature; during months in Gaza, he kept parchment and ink tucked in his army kit. “In the heart of a Gaza neighborhood, amidst heavy combat and exhaustion, our commander asked me to run the exact same Torah experience for our guys that I normally lead for children and adults around the world,” he recalls. “Under fire, we gathered. I told our soldiers: ‘If you are standing here, it means you understand how vital you are – without you, we cannot succeed. You are a letter in the *Sefer Torah*.’ The very first to step up and write his letter was Eilai Cohen z”l. Just days later, Eilai fell in battle.”

This vision began 13 years ago through a friendship with Ofir Libstein z”l. Rav Yehuda, who learned *STaM* calligraphy to process trauma after the Second Lebanon War, possessed the scribal vision. Ofir – a dynamic *kibbutznik* and late Mayor of the Sha’ar HaNegev Regional Council – possessed the executive heart to bring it to the world.

Coming from different walks of life, the two formed a bond over a shared love for *Am Yisrael*. Ofir, a secular Israeli, believed with every fiber of his being that the Torah does not belong exclusively to any one sector – it is the living, beating heart of every Jew.

Ofir often reflected: “For generations, Jews put coins in a tin box to build the Land of Israel. Today, the new Zionist coin is a letter in the *Sefer Torah*, how every Jew anchors their stake in our eternal story.”

On October 7th, Rav Yehuda rushed south to search for Ofir. By afternoon, he learned his dear friend had fallen heroically defending his home at Kibbutz Kfar Aza – wearing on his wrist the *Otiot Shel Ahava* bracelet inscribed “*One Letter, One Nation*”.

In the shadow of that devastating loss, Rav Rimon and Sulamot recognized the sacred power of Rav Yehuda and Ofir's shared dream. Stepping in to adopt *Otiot Shel Ahava* under its organizational umbrella, Sulamot provided the scale and infrastructure to carry their vision into a new era. Today, a *Sefer Torah* is being written in Ofir's memory through *Otiot Shel Ahava*'s programming around the world, and will soon be brought to his own *kibbutz* in a deeply moving *Hachnasat Sefer Torah* – a powerful symbol of unity bridging all parts of Israeli society.

“I'll never forget standing in Izmir, Turkey, during an *Otiot Shel Ahava* workshop,” Rav Yehuda recalls. “A young boy stepped up to write a letter. His name was Muhammad Cohen – his mother a Jew from Bat Yam, his father a Turkish Muslim. Miles from any Jewish center, he carried two worlds in his name. As we dipped the feather into the ink together, I guided his fingers onto the quill. ‘We are writing a *Sefer Torah*,’ I told him, ‘and in this Torah, there is a letter that belongs only to you. Without your letter, this scroll cannot be completed.’ When we finished, he looked up with wide, shining eyes. He realized that no matter where he was born, no matter what name he carries, he has an eternal, undeniable place in the story of the Jewish people.”

Rav Yehuda recalls another profound moment in Buenos Aires. “A 102-year-old woman named Marta walked up to me with incredible fire in her eyes. She rolled up her sleeve, showed me her tattooed numbers from Auschwitz, and said: ‘I am 102 years old, and for 102 years I have been waiting for someone to tell me that I, too, am a letter in the *Sefer Torah*.’ She held the quill and wrote her letter.”

“That is the whole point,” Rav Yehuda says, his voice filled with emotion. “Whether it's an IDF soldier, a Holocaust survivor or a second-grader in New York – every Jew matters. And for our bereaved families, this brings profound comfort: when every Jew has a place in the scroll, no one is ever forgotten.”



Rav Yehuda and soldiers on the beach of Gaza writing a *Sefer Torah*

This reveals a beautiful truth about how a nation survives three years of relentless war: **we hold one another.**

“When a woman loses her husband in battle, she cannot be expected to bear that weight by herself,” reflects Rav Rimon. “She needs to know that all of *Am Yisrael* is standing with her – giving sacred meaning to her husband's ultimate sacrifice. When we provide practical support alongside a deep spiritual anchor, that is a true embrace.”

While Sulamot equipped these soldiers for the frontlines and sustained their wives through grueling reserve duty, it is now stepping in to hold their fallen comrades' families. Through Project Kuma, Sulamot cares for 270 widows and 600 orphans – shouldering the financial, logistical and emotional weight left behind so no family carries that darkness alone.

It is a sacred circle: our soldiers defend our homeland, Project Kuma rebuilds the physical foundations of these shattered homes, and now *Otiot Shel Ahava* gives them a spiritual anchor.

Woven from the tears of October 7th, the bravery of our defenders, and the unbroken chain of our past, this scroll proves that every Jew belongs – and our story will never end.



Inbar Gabay Zada
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THE POWER OF COLLABORATION:

A SEMINAR FOR ZIONIST FEDERATION LEADERS IN BUDAPEST

RAFAEL TURIEL

A seminar for Zionist Federation leaders was held in Budapest from June 12th–14th, organized by the WZO's Department for Organization and Connection with Israelis Abroad.

Presidents and representatives of 24 Zionist Federations, from the United States to Australia, South Africa, European nations, and India, gathered for the event, including representatives of World Mizrahi from the USA, Italy, Serbia, Austria, and Switzerland. The conference's theme was "The Power of Collaboration," centered on the need to build mutual understanding and share information as a foundation for meaningful cooperation between Federations. The theme aligned naturally with *achdut* – the concept of unity that stood at the heart of WZO President Rabbi Doron Perez's remarks throughout the weekend.

The workshop was led and facilitated by Omri Gefen, a professor at Tel Aviv University and a leading expert in negotiation and mediation. Rabbi Perez, WZO Chairman Yaakov Hagoel, Department Director Yair Lootsteen, and other WZO senior staff participated actively throughout.

On Shabbat, Maya Kadosh, Israel's Ambassador to Hungary, addressed the group, outlining the prospects for Israel-Hungary relations in light of the country's recent change of government. Budapest was not chosen by chance – it is the birthplace of Herzl, and the city retains a strong and living Jewish character to this day.

The discussions ranged widely, identifying numerous areas of common ground for Zionist Federation action beyond the traditional focus on supporting *Aliyah*, effectively redefining the Federations' role in the current era. Among the topics addressed: the approximately one million Israeli citizens living abroad and the question of the second generation; strengthening Jewish identity and Zionist education within communities, particularly among young people; *hasbara* and the fight against the rising tide of antisemitism worldwide; reclaiming the term "Zionism" from the distorted narrative that has taken hold in global discourse; support for small and



dispersed Jewish communities; and deepening relationships between Jewish organizations in Israel and around the world.

The spirit of the gathering was well captured by Reuven Rennert, President of the Austrian Zionist Federation and Mizrahi representative: "Sitting in a room in Budapest with Jewish leaders from twenty-four different countries, you quickly realize something striking. On the surface, our communities – whether in India, Australia, or right here in Europe – face entirely different daily realities. But once the conversations begin, it becomes clear that we are all answering the same call. We share one overriding goal: keeping the connection between our communities and Israel alive, strong, and deeply rooted.

"Spending Shabbat together, and particularly the opportunity to share it with Rabbi Doron Perez, brought that shared mission into sharp focus. We live in an era when leadership is constantly debated and theorized. But to sit with someone whose vision is so authentically grounded in his own lived experience changes the atmosphere in the room. His quiet, unyielding dedication was not merely inspiring; it provided a genuine anchor for the entire weekend. It reminded us that *achdut* is not just a concept, but something we actively practice. We did not gather simply to exchange ideas; we drew on our shared strength to ensure that we can build real, lasting bridges to our homeland in the years ahead."



Pictured with Rabbi Doron Perez (third from left) are several Mizrahi representatives who serve as chairs of Zionist Federations in their respective countries (left to right): Rabbi Yitzhak Asiel (Serbia), Mark Levenson (USA), Reuven Rennert (Austria), Rafael Turiel (Italy), Yonatan Bollag (Switzerland). Together, they represent the significant role that Mizrahi continues to play in strengthening the global Zionist movement.

With the relationships established over these three days, the work now turns to building a common platform to support joint initiatives and projects. In this era more than ever, unity and collaboration between Jewish organizations worldwide, and between those organizations and Israel, are the key to achieving concrete results in the four years leading up to the next Zionist Congress.



Rafael Turiel
is Vice President of the Italy Zionist Federation and Mizrahi representative in Italy.

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Celebrating 30 Years of Torah MiTzion

For three decades, Torah MiTzion has sent Religious Zionist educators to Jewish communities around the world, reaching thousands of Jews each year. Ahead of the 30th anniversary Gala Celebrations, Rabbi Aron White spoke with Rabbi David Yushubayev, who led the Torah MiTzion kollel in Moscow for more than two decades. What began as a one-year commitment in a city he describes as a spiritual desert became a 25-year project that brought thousands of Russian Jews back to their heritage and homeland. This is his story.

Before we turn to Torah MiTzion, tell us where your own story begins.

I was born in the Soviet Union and grew up in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Judaism was part of my background, but only in a very limited sense. As a child, I knew a little about Pesach and *matzah*, but we were very far from observing Torah and *mitzvot*. Shabbat and keeping kosher were simply not part of our lives.

We immigrated to Israel when I was 11 years old, and my life began to change. Through a combination of circumstances and what I believe was Divine Providence, I was accepted to a religious *yeshiva* high school in Bat Yam – even though I didn't wear a *kippah* and *tzitzit* to my interview! From there I continued to Yeshivat Hakotel, served in the army, and went on to study in kollel.

Then, in the 1990s, the great immigration from the former Soviet Union began. There was an enormous thirst among the new immigrants for Jewish knowledge and connection. Because I spoke the language and understood the background, I was asked to become involved.

We organized programs, seminars and classes, and helped with the spiritual absorption of many new immigrants. At Yeshivat Hakotel, together with the heads of the *yeshiva*, we opened an *ulpan* for young Jews arriving from the Soviet Union. We also arranged dozens of *britot* for people who had previously had almost no connection to Judaism.

Around the same time, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz asked me to help with his *yeshiva* in Moscow. It was one of the first serious Jewish educational institutions established there after the Iron Curtain came down. After I got married, Rabbi Steinsaltz asked me to become the head of the *yeshiva*. My wife, our child and I moved to Moscow for a year. It was an extraordinary experience. There were many visitors and students, people who were hungry to learn. Eventually the *yeshiva* developed into more of a seminar program for teachers, and we returned to Israel.

A few years later, Zeev Schwartz approached me about establishing a Religious Zionist learning center in Moscow. I initially thought that chapter of my life was over; I was married, had children, and was living and working in Israel. But the request was persistent, and eventually we decided to go for one year – which became 25!

What did Jewish Moscow look like when you arrived?

It was really a spiritual desert. The main synagogue was attended largely by elderly people. There were very few young people and families, and there was tremendous isolation.

Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, the Chief Rabbi of Moscow at the time, very much wanted this initiative to happen, as did the Jewish Agency. There were very few Zionist frameworks in Moscow, and they wanted to create something that would connect young Jews not only to Judaism but also to Israel and

Zionism. We had young men and families involved, and the students took part in many different educational and community activities.

Over time, however, I felt we needed to reach a younger audience. There were many young Jews who were not connected to the Jewish schools or to any organized Jewish framework, and we had to find a way to reach them. So we began a program for young people, supported through scholarships. Today that young-adult program is really our flagship.

Over the past six years we have also developed activities specifically for teenagers. Some attend Jewish schools, while others have no connection to any Jewish educational framework. They come to weekly programs, holiday activities and Shabbat events.

What kind of impact has that had?

The impact has been extraordinary. I have photographs of many weddings of young people who came through the program. Couples have told us directly that without Torah MiTzion in Moscow, they doubt they would have built Jewish homes.

Think about what that means. Young people who might never have met, never have connected to Judaism, or never have built a Jewish family found that connection through our community.

And it isn't only the couples who became fully observant. Many others built Jewish homes, strengthened their connection to Judaism, began keeping Shabbat or *kashrut*, and became more involved in Jewish life.

You also built a permanent home for all of this activity.

Yes. With G-d's help, over a period of about five years we were able to build our own *beit midrash* and Torah MiTzion building in central Moscow, close to the central synagogue.

We also have extensive activities for women and for families, including classes and community programs. Our events can attract hundreds of people. We organize large programs around the Jewish holidays – at one hotel in central Moscow, more than 300 people have taken part in a communal *seder* – and we run programs for adults and families throughout the year.

Thank G-d, it has been incredibly successful and fruitful.

Is there one story that captures what Torah MiTzion has achieved?

There are many, but I'll tell you about one family.

The husband was very learned and deeply committed to Torah and *mitzvot*, while his wife was very far from Judaism and did not want to hear about it. Their differences had become so great that they were on the verge of divorce. It happened to be just before Purim, and we were holding a Purim meal at our school. The husband asked his wife to come with their child. She didn't want to, but eventually she agreed to bring the child.

Years later she told us that something happened to her that day. She walked into the building, and somehow her entire heart changed. She couldn't even explain exactly what had happened, but she decided that she wanted her child to continue

learning about Judaism – and that she wanted to begin a journey herself. Today they are not only together; they are among the leaders of the Jewish community in Moscow.

There are many stories like this. People who never imagined they would become observant. People who began keeping Shabbat or *kashrut*. People who found their Jewish identity and built Jewish homes.

I still hear stories today about things that happened through Torah MiTzion that I never even knew about.

How does Aliyah and the connection to Israel fit into your work?

That is another important part of what we do. Many people who were involved with us eventually immigrated to Israel.

We are also very strongly Zionist. In fact, throughout Russia and the former Soviet Union there are very few institutions that combine a strong Jewish religious identity with an explicit connection to Israel and Zionism.

We speak about Yom HaAtzmaut, Yom Yerushalayim, the IDF and the connection between Jewish life and the State of Israel. That message is an integral part of our educational work.

After 25 years in Moscow, I returned to Israel a few years ago. Today I continue to help from a distance, supporting and guiding the work there.

Looking back, I originally went for one year. I never imagined that one year would become 25. But when you see the families, the young people, the weddings and the renewed Jewish lives, you understand that every year was worthwhile. ■



Sukkot: The Dual Festival

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks P"3

Parashat Emor outlines the festivals that give rhythm and structure to the Jewish year. Examining them carefully, however, we see that Sukkot is unusual, unique.

One detail which had a significant influence on Jewish liturgy appears later on in the book of *Devarim*: “Be joyful at your feast... For seven days celebrate the Feast to the L-rd your G-d at the place the L-rd will choose. For the L-rd your G-d will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete” (*Devarim* 16:14–15).

Speaking of the three pilgrimage festivals – Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot – *Devarim* speaks of ‘joy’. But it does not do so equally. In the context of Pesach, it makes no reference to joy; in that of Shavuot, it speaks of it once; in Sukkot, as we see from the above quotation, it speaks of it twice. Is this significant? If so, how? (It was this double reference that gave Sukkot its alternative name in Jewish tradition: ‘zman simchatenu, the season of our joy’.)

The second strange feature appears in *Emor*. Uniquely, Sukkot is associated with two *mitzvot*, not one. The first: “Beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the L-rd for seven days... On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and willows of the brook, and rejoice before the L-rd your G-d for seven days” (*Vayikra* 23:39–40). This is a reference to the *arba’a minim*, the ‘Four Kinds’ – palm branch, citron, myrtle and willow leaves – taken and waved on Sukkot.

The second command is quite different: “Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths, so your descendants will know that I made the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the L-rd your G-d” (*Vayikra* 23:42–43).

This is the command to leave our house and live in the temporary dwelling that gives Sukkot its name: the Festival of Tabernacles, booths, huts, an annual reminder of portable homes in which the Israelites lived during their journey through the wilderness.

No other festival has this dual symbolism. Not only are the Four Kinds and the tabernacle different in character: they are even seemingly opposed to one another. The Four Kinds and the rituals associated with them are about rain. They were, says the Rambam (*Moreh Nevuchim*, III:43), the most readily available

products of the Land of Israel, reminders of the fertility of the land. By contrast, the command to live for seven days in booths, with only leaves for a roof, presupposes the absence of rain. If it rains on Sukkot we are exempt from the command (for as long as the rain lasts, and provided it is sufficiently strong to spoil food on the table).

The difference goes deeper. On the one hand, Sukkot is the most universalistic of all festivals. The prophet Zechariah foresees the day when it will be celebrated by all humanity: “The L-rd will be King over the whole earth. On that day the L-rd will be one, and His name the only name... Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the L-rd Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the L-rd Almighty, they will have no rain. If the Egyptian people do not go up and take part, they will have no rain” (*Zechariah* 14:9, 14:16–17).

The Sages interpreted the fact that seventy bulls were sacrificed in the course of the festival (*Bamidbar* 29:12–34) to refer to the seventy nations (the traditional number of civilizations). Following the cues in *Zechariah*, they said that: “On the festival [of Sukkot], the world is judged in the matter of rain” (*Mishnah, Rosh Hashanah* 1:2). Sukkot is about the universal need for rain.

At the same time, however, it is the most particularist of festivals. When we sit in the *sukkah* we recall Jewish history – not just the forty years of wandering in the wilderness, but also the entire experience of exile. The *sukkah* is defined as a ‘*dirat arai*’ – a temporary dwelling. It is the most powerful symbol of Jewish history. No other nation could see its home not as a castle, a fortress or a triumphal arch, but as a fragile tabernacle. No other nation was born, not in its land, but in the desert. Far from being universalist, Sukkot is intensely particularistic, the festival of a people like no other, whose only protection was its faith in the sheltering wings of the Divine Presence.

It is almost as if Sukkot were two festivals, not one.

It is. Although all the festivals are listed together, they in fact represent two quite different cycles. The first is the cycle of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot. These tell the unique story of Jewish identity and history: the Exodus (Pesach), the Revelation at Mount Sinai (Shavuot), and the journey through the Wilderness

(Sukkot). Celebrating them, we re-enact the key moments of Jewish memory. We celebrate what it is to be a Jew.

There is, however, a second cycle – the festivals of the seventh month: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are not only about Jews and Judaism. They are about G-d and humanity as a whole. The language of the prayers is different. We say: “Instill your awe upon all Your works, and fear of You on all that You have created.” The entire liturgy is strikingly universalist. The ‘Days of Awe’ are about the sovereignty of G-d over all humankind. On them, we reflect on the human – not just the Jewish – condition.

The two cycles reflect the dual aspect of G-d: as Creator, and as Redeemer. As Creator, G-d is universal. We are all in G-d’s image, formed in His likeness. We share a covenant of human solidarity (the Noahide covenant). We are fellow citizens of the world G-d made and entrusted to our care. As Redeemer, however, G-d is particular. Whatever His relationship to other nations (and He has a relationship with other nations: so Amos and Yeshayahu insist), Jews know Him through His saving acts in Israel’s history: exodus, revelation and the journey to the Promised Land.

No sooner have we identified the two cycles than we see what makes Sukkot unique. It is the only festival belonging to both. It is part of the cycle of Jewish history (Pesach-Shavuot-Sukkot), and part of the sequence of the seventh month (Rosh Hashanah-Yom Kippur-Sukkot). Hence the double joy.

The Four Kinds represent the universality of the festival. They symbolize nature, rain, the cycle of the seasons – things common to all humanity. The *sukkah* represents the singular character of Jewish history, the experience of exile and homecoming, the long journey across the wilderness of time.

In a way not shared by any other festival, Sukkot celebrates the dual nature of Jewish faith: the universality of G-d and the particularity of Jewish existence. We all need rain; we are all part of nature; we are all dependent on the complex ecology of the created world. Hence the Four Kinds. But each nation, civilization, religion is different. As Jews we are heirs to a history unlike that of any other people: small, vulnerable, suffering exile after exile, yet surviving. Hence the *sukkah*.

Humanity is formed out of our commonalities and differences. As I once put it: If we were completely different, we could not communicate. If we were all the same, we would have nothing to say. Sukkot brings both together: our uniqueness as a people, and our participation in the universal fate of humankind.



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The Booths of October:

Sukkat David and the Rebuilding of a Nation

Rabbanit Shani Taragin

During Sukkot, we add to the final section of *Birkat HaMazon* the petition for Hashem, *HaRachaman*, to raise up “*sukkat David ha-nofelet*” – the fallen *sukkah* of David. The words are drawn from the prophet Amos: “בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶקְרִים אֶת-סֻכּוֹת דָּוִד הַנִּפְלֹת וְגִדְרֹתֶי אֶת-פְּרִצֵיהֶן – On that day I will raise up the fallen *sukkah* of David; I will wall up their breaches, I will raise up its ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old” (*Amos* 9:11). Often these words pass by almost unnoticed. This year, they will not. We enter Sukkot 5787 three years after Simchat Torah 5784, when terror brought down actual *sukkot* in the communities of the Gaza envelope, and just weeks before elections on October 27th that will shape the character of Jewish sovereignty itself. An ancient image of a fallen booth suddenly feels remarkably close to home.

The Malbim reads this *pasuk* as compressed history: first a fixed royal “house,” then a diminished “*sukkah*” of Davidic satraps in Second Temple times, followed by total collapse in exile. Restoration unfolds gradually, mirroring the clauses of the *pasuk*: a leader arises, the nation accepts the yoke of Divine commandments, and only then is permanence rebuilt.

The Maharal of Prague (*Netzach Yisrael*, ch. 35) explains why the *navi* employs the fragile image of a *sukkah*. When a house falls, it is, in a sense, truly gone; rebuild on the same site, and you have a new house, not the old one restored. A *sukkah* is different. It is never meant to be permanent; it can be re-erected with relative ease, and it remains, in every sense, the same *sukkah*. Davidic kingship is therefore called a *sukkah* and retains that name even after its fall: its restoration is not the creation of something new, but the re-establishment of what already exists in potential. This is also why Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 96b) call the *Mashiach* himself “*bar niflei*” – the son of the fallen one”: his kingship is raised, not founded anew. Like a *sukkah* whose covering scatters while its frame remains, some trace of Davidic leadership through the exilarchs and worthy leaders of every generation persisted even when no king sat upon the throne.

A house can invite the illusion of self-sufficiency; a *sukkah*, open to the sky, insists upon vulnerability and dependence. Mighty empires that appeared to be impregnable houses vanished when they fell. *Am Yisrael*, by contrast, has fallen repeatedly and risen again in almost the same motion – rebuilt from the ashes of the *Shoah* not as something new, but as the very *sukkah* raised again by its own survivors. We saw this again on October 7th, when a state that had imagined itself a fortress of steel discovered how quickly breaches could open – and then watched as citizens and soldiers raised the fallen *sukkah* with their own hands, faster than any institution could have planned. Three years later, that work continues. Communities are being rebuilt. Evacuees are returning to their homes. The physical structures may be reconstructed, but the deeper work of rebuilding a society remains before us.

Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook taught that the path toward the full revelation of the Davidic kingdom passes through many stages. The falls along the way are not necessarily deviations from the process, but can themselves constitute part of it – as a birth cannot bypass the travail of labor. The falls of these past three years need not be read as a rupture in an otherwise smooth story. They can be understood, however painfully, as part of a difficult process moving toward redemption’s “complete birth.” The *Midrash* (*Bereishit Rabbah* 88:7) sets an even broader horizon. It asks who awaits the raising of David’s fallen *sukkah* and answers: Hashem Himself. The rebuilding of this *sukkah* is therefore not merely the restoration of a kingdom; it is a stage in the repair of the world. Every act of rebuilding we undertake, however local, is bound up with that universal horizon.

The Rambam (*Hilchot Talmud Torah* 3:1) rules that the crown of kingship was given to the House of David forever. The Maharal notes that even when the monarchy itself did not exist, leadership from Judah was never entirely absent as worthy leaders served as a kind of “minor kingship,” bridging exile and its eventual completion. Today, for the first time in two thousand

years, Israel chooses its own leaders. The elections of October 27th, held so close to the holiday of Sukkot and to the three-year mark of October 7th, are an opportunity to fulfill that same prophetic charge: “I will wall up their breaches.” We are called to leave our *sukkot* (booths) and enter the election booths to choose leadership that mends breaches rather than widens them; leadership that understands that the true resilience of this national House is measured not by concrete and walls alone, but by unity, humility and a shared sense of purpose.

Sitting this Sukkot in our own fragile booths, still healing from three years ago, we hold two truths at once: real vulnerability and real cause for joy. This is the deeper message of *sukkat David ha-nofelet*: what has fallen need not be lost. A *sukkah* can fall, but it is not destroyed. Its breaches can be repaired, its ruins can be raised and become a dwelling place of blessing once again.

May our communities be rebuilt stronger than before. May we enter the election booths with the humility and faith of *Chag HaSukkot* to repair breaches, accept Hashem’s sovereignty, and merit the rebuilding of the fallen *sukkah* – *HaRachaman Hu yakim lanu et sukkat David ha-nofelet*.



Rabbanit Shani Taragin

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Cloud Coverage

Rabbi Larry Rothwachs

Somewhere in your house tonight, an app is quietly working. Cameras watch the door. A thermostat learns your habits. A password manager guards everything you own. By any technical measure, you will fall asleep more secure than any generation before you. And then Sukkot arrives, and for seven days you trade all of it for a roof with holes in it, all by design. And yet, sitting in that rickety structure open to the sky, many of us feel something the locks and cameras never quite managed: we actually feel safe.

Chazal suggest that this is precisely the point.

The Torah doesn't just command us to sit in a *sukkah*; unusually, it also tells us why. "So that your generations will know that I sat the Children of Israel in *sukkot* when I took them out of Egypt" (*Vayikra* 23:43). Simple enough, it seems. We sit in a *sukkah* to remember that we once lived in one. But what exactly are we meant to remember? The *Gemara* records a debate, not over what happened in the desert, but over what the *sukkah* symbolizes. Rabbi Akiva says it recalls the literal huts the Israelites built for shelter. Rabbi Eliezer disagrees: the *sukkah* recalls the *ananei hakavod*, the clouds of glory that surrounded and protected the nation throughout its wandering (*Sukkah* 11a).

Rabbi Akiva's opinion is intuitive. Sit in a hut, remember huts. Rabbi Eliezer's is harder to follow. What does a structure of wood, canvas, and *schach* have to do with a cloud of glory? There is no resemblance between the two.

Rabbi Nissim Alpert *zt"l* explains that nothing we build could ever resemble a cloud. Clouds are formless, fleeting, impossible to grasp. The memory we are meant

to access is not of shelter, rather of *hash-gacha pratit*, of total, unearned dependence on G-d. Bricks and mortar can create the illusion of protection, but a cloud cannot. It leaves you exposed, and that exposure is the whole point.

So why does this require leaving the house? Because the house is not neutral. Its walls do exactly what walls always do: manufacture a feeling of self-sufficiency that a cloud never could. Inside, it is easy to forget how much of our safety was never truly ours. The Torah's solution is to physically strip that illusion away: to walk out from under the roof and sit beneath the sky, with only *schach* between you and the stars. The instinctive feeling of vulnerability doesn't last. It gives way, almost without our noticing, to something closer to genuine security. The flimsier structure sharpens what the sturdier one had dulled.

Now consider your own house. We have built our own permanent structures, not of wood but of code. Firewalls, two-factor authentication, encrypted storage. A phone in your pocket gives you more reach, more knowledge, and more control than any previous generation could have imagined. By every reasonable measure, we should be the calmest people in history.

We are not. Anxiety and disconnection are rising right alongside our technological sophistication. Something in that equation doesn't add up, unless the premise was wrong from the start. Permanent structures, digital or physical, were never built to satisfy the human need for meaning. Constant connectivity produces loneliness more reliably than it produces community. The *Gemara* in *Sukkah* 2b puts it simply: for seven days, leave your permanent dwelling and live in a temporary one.

That is what the *sukkah* is inviting us to do. Step outside the systems that make us feel in control, and rediscover the far less comfortable, far more honest feeling of being carried by something else. The clouds of glory were not an app, a setting, or a security system. They are found where they have always been found: in *shul*, at a table with people who actually know you, in prayer, in the quiet recognition that none of this was ever fully in your hands. For those fortunate enough to live in *Eretz Yisrael*, that recognition doesn't end after seven days. It is the air the country breathes.

That is the *sukkah*'s real offer. Not a smaller house, but a truer one. May we step out from behind our walls this year – digital and physical alike – and find shelter, once again, in the clouds.



Rabbi Larry Rothwachs,
LCSW, is the founding rabbi of Meromei Shemesh, the Director of Professional Rabbis at RIETS, and the director of StepAhead Counseling.



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Love in the Sukkah

Aleeza Ben Shalom

There's something about Sukkot that feels almost contradictory. We leave our sturdy homes and step into something temporary, fragile, open to the elements. The roof is unfinished. The walls sway a little. And yet, this is called *zman simchateinu* – the season of our joy. Because real joy doesn't come from perfect conditions. It comes from presence, from connection, from choosing to show up even when things aren't so sturdy.

If you're dating, or longing for a relationship, that message hits close to home. So many people are waiting until everything feels "ready" – until they feel more secure, more certain, more put together. But love doesn't happen in the perfectly constructed house. It happens in the *sukkah*. It happens when you're willing to be seen in the in-between. Dating, at its best, is not about presenting a finished version of yourself. It's about inviting someone into your world while it's still unfolding – letting them sit with you under a roof that lets in a little light, and maybe a little vulnerability. And that takes courage.

Then comes Simchat Torah. After days of introspection and meaning, we don't sit quietly reflecting – we dance. We hold the Torah close and move with joy, in circles, again and again. No one asks if they're a good enough dancer. No one waits on the side until they feel ready. We just join. And I think about how many singles are standing on the sidelines of their own lives, watching relationships happen for other people, waiting for the perfect moment to step in. But relationships are not built from perfection. They are built from participation – from showing up, from saying

yes, from taking the next step even when you don't know exactly where it leads.

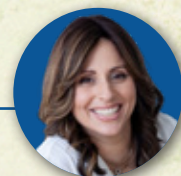
This is where the work of the Jewish Matchmaking Movement becomes essential. We don't just need more singles trying harder. We need communities stepping up. There was a time when every community understood that helping people find each other was a shared responsibility. Today, too many people say "I don't know anyone for you" and step back. But what if that changed? Just as every community has a rabbi, a teacher, a leader – what if we also had someone who leads in connection? Someone who notices who is single, thinks about possibilities, makes introductions, and hosts events a few times a year. We call this matchmaking. And we don't need someone else to do it. We need someone in your community to say yes. Maybe that's you. Maybe it's someone you know. But someone has to go first – because when one person begins, something shifts. Introductions start happening. People feel seen. Hope becomes tangible again.

We don't do this just so people can go on more dates. We do this so we can dance more – so that the joy we feel on Simchat Torah doesn't stay in the synagogue, circling the *bimah*. So that it expands into wedding halls, into homes, into communities filled with connection and life.

So what can you do, starting now? First, shift your mindset: you don't need to be a matchmaker to make a match, you just need to care enough to try. Think of one person who is single, and one possible match for them. Make a simple, thoughtful introduction – no pressure, no long explanation. Then follow up, because your belief in someone matters more than you think. And if you're single: keep showing up.

Don't wait until everything feels perfect. Step into the *sukkah*. Step onto the dance floor. Let yourself be part of the process. Love isn't something you arrive at – it's something you build together.

As we move from Sukkot into Simchat Torah, may we carry that message with us. May we have the courage to open our lives even when they feel unfinished, and the willingness to step forward even when it feels uncertain. May we, as individuals and as communities, take responsibility for helping one another find connection. And may we merit to dance not just in celebration of the Torah, but in celebration of one another – at weddings, in joy, in the homes and families we help create.



Aleeza Ben Shalom

is a soulmate clarity coach. She was on Netflix's "Jewish Matchmaking" and is an in-demand speaker, expert, and author of numerous books. She leads the Jewish Matchmaking Movement, in partnership with World Mizrahi.



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Sukkot: Bringing Heaven Down to Earth

Rabbanit Mali Brofsky

There is a unique arc to the *chagei Tishrei*. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are days of rarefied spiritual intensity, during which we strengthen our relationship with G-d and recommit ourselves to bettering our relationships with others. Five days later, we build *sukkot* and live within them for seven days. We move from the heights of G-d's throne room to the most grounded place possible: temporary dwellings in our backyards. What is the significance of this progression?

To understand this, we begin with the Sefat Emet's striking explanation of why Sukkot is called *zman simchateinu*, the time of our joy (*Sukkot*, 5638). He notes that the verse in *Tehillim* says, "L'yishrei lev simcha, Joy belongs to the upright of heart (97:11). After Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur purify us of the year's accumulated transgressions, we become upright-hearted people. Joy then awakens within us on its own, once the obstruction of sinfulness is removed and there is nothing left to block it.

A second teaching of the Sefat Emet expands on this (*Sukkot*, s.v. *simchat beit hasho'eva*). Joy itself, he explains, is a *kli*, a vessel. It is the instrument through which we draw down the spiritual light that was opened during the *Yamim Nora'im*. Without this vessel, that light remains above, valued by us, but unmanifested in our daily lives. Joy is therefore not only the reward for the experiences of *Tishrei*. It is the mechanism by which that effort becomes actualized in this world.

This leads us to the symbolism of the *sukkah*. The *Gemara* asks why the verse describing the future *Beit HaMikdash* calls it "the House of the G-d of Ya'akov," (*Yishayah* 2:3) rather than the G-d of Avraham

or Yitzchak. It answers that Avraham is associated with the word *har*, a mountain, as at the *Akeidah*: "on the mountain, G-d will be seen" (*Bereishit* 22:14). Yitzchak is associated with *sadeh*, a field: "Yitzchak went out to converse in the field" (*Bereishit* 24:63). But Ya'akov called the place where he saw the ladder connecting Heaven and earth a *bayit*, a house: "and he named the place Beit El" (*Bereishit* 28:19) (*Pesachim* 88a).

A mountain is transcendent and majestic, but essentially unreachable. One stands at its foot and gazes upward. A field is the opposite: flat, open, entirely of this earth, with no reaching toward the sky. A house is the synthesis. Its foundation sits on the ground like a field, while its walls and roof rise upward like a mountain.

This is exactly what Ya'akov saw in his dream: a ladder "set on the ground, its head reaching the heavens" (*Bereishit* 28:12). He then says, "This is verily the House of G-d, and this is the gateway to the Heavens" (*Bereishit* 28:17). The ladder is both grounded and reaching upward toward G-d. Commenting on this image, the Sefat Emet writes that Ya'akov himself is the ladder, "his body below, and his soul reaching the heavens" (*Vayeitzei*, s.v. *b'pasuk v'hinei sulam mutzav artza*). Every one of us is meant to be such a grounded yet reaching being: not a mountaintop that we admire but visit only occasionally, and not a field that never strives upward, but living a life that stands on earth and still reaches toward Heaven.

Rav Kook draws a similar conclusion. Ya'akov's innovation was turning the pillar he had built at Beit El into a *bayit*, as the verse says: "and this stone, which I have set as a pillar, shall be G-d's house" (*Bereishit* 28:22). A pillar, like a mountain, is

something you gather around and admire from outside. A house is something you enter and dwell in. "It is not enough," Rav Kook writes, "to assemble around the pillar. One is obligated to go inside, into the house, into the inner essence" (*Igrot HaRe'iyah*, Letter 346).

This is the progression from the *Yamim Nora'im* to Sukkot. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the mountain and the pillar: the elevated encounter we experience as we stand before G-d in awe. Sukkot is the grounded translation of that experience. We are enjoined not merely to experience holiness as an intense but transient phenomenon, but to bring it into our daily lives. We must take the love of G-d and the refinement of character achieved during the *Yamim Nora'im* and build a structure with them, one grounded in ordinary life: in our daily *tefillot* and fulfillment of *mitzvot*, and in our choices about how we behave in our ongoing encounters with others. And ultimately, as the Sefat Emet reminds us, that is the source of true joy.



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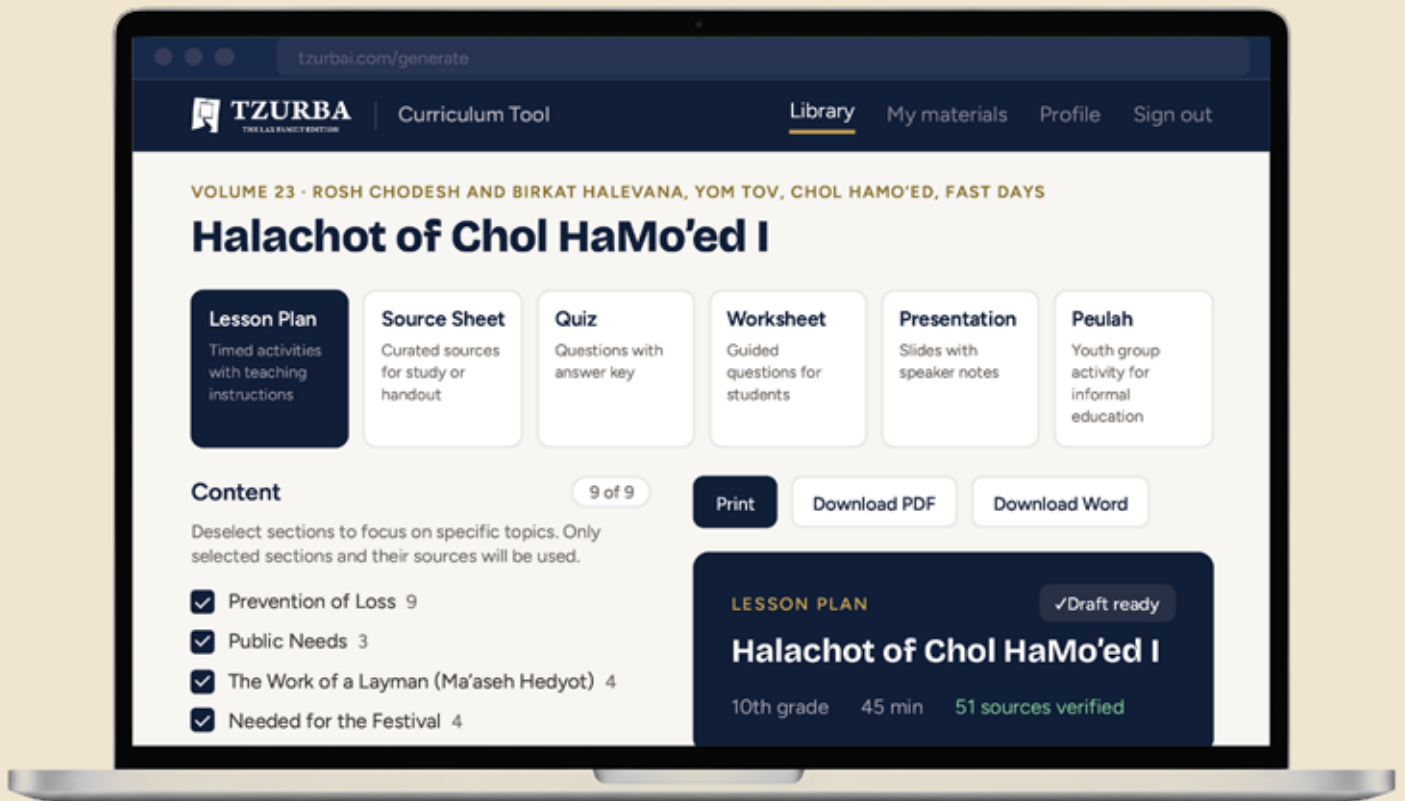
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The Strength of a Fragile Sukkah

Rabbi Dr. Leonard A. Matanky

Every year, between Yom Kippur and Sukkot, I wonder what someone unfamiliar with Judaism would think if they watched us prepare for the holiday. A few years ago I found out. An old friend, a professor at a local university, asked what I would be doing that week, and I began describing Sukkot.

"We buy a *lulav*, a palm branch bound with myrtle and willow. We take an *etrog*, a citron that looks like an oversized lemon but costs far more than anyone thinks a piece of fruit should. We carry them into the synagogue each morning and wave them in every direction. And then we build a *sukkah*. It has walls, but its roof is intentionally incomplete. We leave our homes and eat every meal there for a week."

He looked at me for a moment. "So let me understand this. You purchase expensive fruit, wave branches around in synagogue, and then spend a week eating in an unfinished hut, all to demonstrate that G-d protects the Jewish people?" I smiled. "Exactly." I decided not to mention the *hoshanot*, or our annual battle with the bees in the *sukkah*.

Beneath the humor lies a serious question. Few Jewish holidays are as rich in symbolism as Sukkot, and few are as difficult to explain. Why these four species? Why celebrate in autumn rather than spring, when we actually left Egypt? Are the *sukkot*, as Rabbi Eliezer maintained, a remembrance of the Clouds of Glory, or, as Rabbi Akiva argued, the actual booths our ancestors lived in? Our tradition offers many answers, but on one point there is remarkable agreement.

The *sukkah* is the enduring symbol of G-d's protection. "So that your generations shall know that I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in *sukkot* when I brought them out of Egypt. I am Hashem your G-d" (*Vayikra* 23:43). Throughout *Tanach* and *Chazal*, the *sukkah* is more than a historical memory. It becomes a metaphor for Divine shelter. *David HaMelech* prays that G-d conceal him

from those who seek to harm him, and the *Gemara* uses the *sukkah* the same way. Yet that only deepens the mystery. A *sukkah* requires little more than two full walls and part of a third. Its roof is porous, it is exposed to wind and rain, and it hardly resembles the fortress one associates with protection. Why not a castle, a wall or a mighty city? I have always been drawn to two answers.

The first comes from Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook *zt"l* who noticed that the Torah concludes the *mitzvah* of *sukkah* with the seemingly unnecessary words "I am Hashem your G-d." A *sukkah* by itself offers little protection. What transforms it into a fortress is not the strength of its walls but the strength of the faith of those who dwell within it. Rav Kook called the *sukkah* a *mitzgar hagana*, a fortress of protection, not for its construction but because it reminds us that the security of the Jewish people rests upon our covenant with G-d.

That lesson resonates for a generation privileged to witness the rebirth of Jewish sovereignty in Israel. Religious Zionism has never believed that military and spiritual strength stand in opposition. We need both. We build a formidable army, and we build impressive *batei midrash*. We cultivate technological innovation, and we cultivate Torah. We recognize the courage of those who defend Israel while remembering that our resilience depends on something deeper than iron and concrete. The *sukkah* teaches that even the strongest nation must never forget the source of its strength.

The second insight begins with why the Torah describes the *sukkot* as those in which the Jewish people lived when G-d brought them out of Egypt. Why emphasize the journey? Perhaps because Judaism has never been defined only by destinations. The desert was where a nation of former slaves became a covenantal people, where we learned dependence upon G-d, responsibility for one another,

and devotion to Torah. The fragile *sukkah* reminds us not merely where we ended up, but how we became who we are.

This explains why the *sukkah* is one of our most beloved *mitzvot*. Its walls are temporary, its roof incomplete, its structure fragile. Yet generation after generation, it is where families gather, where traditions pass down, where children absorb memories that become their own, and where faith quietly takes root.

Perhaps that is what I should have told my professor friend. Rather than explaining the holiday, I should simply have invited him into our *sukkah*. He would have seen parents and children hanging decorations, heard stories told across the table and songs carried late into the evening, and learned about Jews who built a *sukkah* in defiance of the law, and soldiers who built one under fire.

He would have discovered what every Jew eventually learns. The strength of the *sukkah* has never been in its walls. It is in the people who build it, the Torah they carry into it, and the G-d Whose presence they invite to dwell within it.



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Sukkat Shalom

Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb

In explaining why it is permissible to eat in another person's *sukkah* on the first night of Sukkot – despite the fact that personal ownership is required to fulfill the obligation of *lulav* and *etrog* on the first day – the *Gemara* (*Sukkah* 27b) cites the verse: “kol ha-ezrach b'yisrael yeishvu ba-sukkot, every native in Israel must dwell in huts” (*Vayikra* 23:42).

More than the exact mechanics of this derivation, what is most interesting is the language the *Gemara* uses to express the point: “this teaches us that it is fitting for all Jews to be able to sit in one *sukkah*.”

It is striking that the *Gemara* communicates an otherwise straightforward law in such an evocative manner. What does this image of the entire people sitting in a single *sukkah* mean? What deeper message is being conveyed?

Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook explains that unity among Jews is actually the most natural spiritual state. While we like to make jokes about Jewish in-fighting – 2 Jews, 3 opinions, etc. – the truth is that factionalism and divisiveness run counter to our essence. Unfortunately, explains Rav Kook, our sins contaminate our soul and, as a consequence, cloud the reality of our unity.

The good news is that this tragic situation can be repaired after Yom Kippur, as the holiness of the day and the purifying powers of *teshuvah* have the power to return things to the way they ought to be. We emerge from Yom Kippur, therefore, closer not only to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, but also to our fellow Jews.

The arrival of Sukkot, coming on the heels of this purification, is an ideal opportunity to demonstrate the increased feelings of brotherhood and harmony between all Jews. It is this *achdut*, suggests Rav Kook, refracted through the lens of our holy Torah and *mitzvot*, that the *Gemara* is alluding to when it describes the entire Jewish people is sitting together in one *sukkah* (*Mo'adei Ha-Re'ayah*, 96).



The arrival of Sukkot, coming on the heels of this purification, is an ideal opportunity to demonstrate the increased feelings of brotherhood and harmony between all Jews.

This idea may also illuminate a phrase woven into our *tefillot*: *sukkat shelomecha* – the *sukkah* of peace. Perhaps the intent is not only protection from some external threat, but something more intimate: the *shalom* within. The *sukkah* of peace, on this reading, is the shelter of *achdut* – the unity that holds a family together even when the winds blow hardest.

While the *sukkah* – and the holiday of Sukkot – may lend particular focus to this idea, the Rambam (*Moreh Nevuchim* 3:43) actually suggests that fostering friendship and cultivating closeness is a larger goal of all of the festivals.

The Maharatz Chajes (*Niddah* 34), a great nineteenth-century Galician scholar, deepens this idea with a striking observation. He turns his attention to a well-known *halachic* phenomenon: certain rabbinic rules governing the ritual purity of food – rules that ordinarily distinguish between *chachamim* and *amei ha-aretz*, scholars and the uneducated – are suspended during the holidays (*Chagigah* 26a).

The Maharatz Chajes acknowledges that these distinctions may be necessary during the rest of the year to preserve the integrity of *taharot*, ritually pure food. But their practical consequence, even if

unintentional, is corrosive: they breed distrust and make it impossible for these two groups to share a meal together. On festivals, he argues, this situation becomes intolerable, because it directly contradicts what he considers the primary purpose of *aliyah la-regel*, the pilgrimage to Yerushalayim, which is, in his words, “*lechaber et libot Yisrael zeh la-zeh*: to bond the hearts of Israel to one another.” And so the rabbis relaxed the laws governing the purity of food and allowed the different groups to eat together, so that, as he puts it, “*tigadel ha-ahavah v'yitchabru ha-levavot zeh la-zeh*, the love between Jews will grow, and their hearts will bond together.”

This is a message worth internalizing, because genuine expressions of *ahavat Yisrael* and real *achdut* tend to emerge only in the shadow of tragedy. More often than not, it takes the spilling of Jewish blood – whether in Israel or anywhere in the world – to remind us of our essential brotherhood.

But *achdut* is not a value reserved for our darkest hours. It can be achieved, and must be pursued, in good times as well. What better occasion, then, to deepen our love for fellow Jews than the celebration of the festivals – and, in light of Rav Kook's insight, what better time than Sukkot?

May we all be blessed with a beautiful Sukkot, shared with family and united with all of Israel.



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The Torah Circle Never Breaks

Jen Airley

A couple of years ago on Yom Yerushalayim, I stood on a rooftop overlooking the Kotel and the festivities below. For a brief moment, I felt as though I had a glimpse of what Hashem “sees”: tens of thousands of Jews singing and dancing in circles in celebration of Jerusalem’s reunification. At first I watched from above, captivated by the beauty of it all – the singing, the movement, the unity. But after a few moments I felt an almost instinctive need to run downstairs and join the dancing. I no longer wanted to observe the circle; I wanted to be part of it.

That moment gave me my personal “bumper sticker”: “*b’toch ami ani rokedet*, Among my people, I dance.” The phrase was inspired by the Shunammite woman’s words to Elisha’s servant, “*mitoch ami anochi yoshevet*, I dwell among my own people” (*Melachim II* 4:13). I am part and parcel of my people.

On Simchat Torah, Jews dance in circles. It is one of the most recognizable scenes in Jewish life: Torah scrolls lifted high, children on shoulders, singing that grows louder with each *hakafah*. At first glance it appears spontaneous and festive. But perhaps the most important detail is the shape itself. Why circles?

Judaism repeatedly returns to circular forms. Mourners eat round foods – eggs and lentils – after a funeral. Brides circle their grooms beneath the *chuppah*. On Sukkot we circle the *bimah* with *hoshanot*. Jewish time itself is cyclical: Shabbat returns each week, holidays each year, and the Torah reading cycle ends only to begin again immediately with *Bereishit*. The circle represents continuity and infinity – no beginning, no end, every point connected to another. Unlike a straight line, a circle never truly breaks.

This is why dance occupies such an important place in Jewish spiritual life. In the final chapters of *Tehillim*, David HaMelech writes: “*Yehalelu shmo b’machol*, Praise His Name with dance” (*Tehillim* 149:3), and again, “*Halleluhu b’tof u’machol*, Praise Him with drum and dance” (*Tehillim* 150:4). The

word *machol* does not simply mean dance – it refers specifically to circular dancing, communal and collective. Jewish joy is not meant to remain confined to the individual. We praise Hashem not only with words or thoughts, but with our entire being, together.

Since October 7th, Simchat Torah has been emotionally transformed. A day once associated almost entirely with celebration now carries grief, memory, heroism, and national pain. Many Jews vow, “We will dance again!” And in the same breath they ask how and where the strength and the courage will come from. Perhaps Judaism’s answer lies precisely in the circle.

At the mourner’s meal, we eat round foods because grief moves in cycles. Sorrow is not linear – it returns in waves, revisits memory, and slowly becomes integrated into life. Simchat Torah presents the other side of that same truth. The circle of dancing does not erase pain; it carries it. We do not dance because suffering has vanished. We dance because despair does not have the final word.

The Talmud offers a remarkable image of redemption: “In the future, the righteous will sit in a circle, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, will be among them” (*Ta’anit* 31a). Redemption is imagined not as a throne room or a battlefield, but as a dance circle – no one at the head, every individual facing the Divine directly while remaining part of a greater whole. On Simchat Torah, scholar and child, religious and secular, wounded and joyful – all move together. The circle dissolves hierarchy. Torah belongs not to elites, but to the entire nation.

We conclude the Torah with the death of *Moshe Rabbeinu*, a moment of uncertainty and loss. Yet before we leave *shul*, we begin again with *Bereishit*. Judaism refuses to allow the Torah story to end. Every ending contains the possibility of renewal.

This feels particularly urgent today. The Jewish people are still grieving. Families carry unbearable loss. Soldiers remain on the front lines. Entire communities have been permanently changed. And yet the

Torah circle continues – not because we are naïve, not because the pain has disappeared, but because Jewish history has always demanded the courage to begin again.

This is the deepest message of Simchat Torah. Jewish continuity is not built through study, memory, or belief alone. It is also built through movement – through physically joining the circle of the Jewish people and refusing to step outside it. On Simchat Torah, we dance holding the same Torah our grandparents held, singing words Jews have sung across continents and centuries. For a few moments, individual stories become part of something eternal.

May we merit to see the fulfillment of David HaMelech’s words: “*Hafachta mispedi l’machol li*, You transformed my mourning into dance” (*Tehillim* 30:12). May the circles of grief that have marked these painful years be transformed into circles of comfort, unity, and enduring joy.

The Torah circle never breaks. The Torah is eternal. And so are we.



Jen Airley

made Aliyah in 2006 to Beit Shemesh with her husband and children. When their son Binyamin was killed Nov. 18, 2023 fighting in Gaza, she went from being an exercise physiologist and personal trainer to international speaker and ultimately founder of Beit Binyamin, a retreat center in Tzfat for those directly affected by the war. She can be reached through the website BeitBinyamin.org.



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David Raziel: The Ilui Who Fought Back

Rabbi Elie Mischel

A seven-year-old boy was walking with his father at the edge of a town in Eastern Europe when a stone flew at them out of nowhere. They turned to find a gentile child a little way off, arm already cocked for the next throw. The boy moved to chase him down, but his father caught his arm and, instead of scolding, asked a question: don't we say three times a day, "*v'limkalelai nafshi tidom*, and to those who curse me, let my soul stay silent, my soul like dust to everyone"?

The boy's face burned. "That's how we behave? Then I'm leaving that line out of my *davening* from now on." He meant it. For the rest of his life, David Raziel skipped that line every time he stood for *Shemoneh Esrei*.

Before Menachem Begin, there was David Raziel. As commander of the Irgun, he ended the policy of *havlagah*, "restraint," under which Jews absorbed Arab attacks without striking back, and put the underground on the offensive for the first time. The fighting force he built became the army Begin inherited.

What set Raziel apart was not that he was a gifted commander, but that he was also an *ilui*, a Torah prodigy, who left the *beit midrash* because his people needed him.

Barred by the British from entering the Land, Raziel met Jabotinsky in France, arriving in religious garb. Secular though he was, Jabotinsky said: "For a man like him I have been waiting these fifteen years."

Raziel was born in 1910 in Smorgon, in modern-day Belarus. His family made *Aliyah* in 1914, just as the First World War broke out, and the Ottoman authorities promptly expelled them from the Land for holding Russian citizenship. He spent the next several years of his childhood in exile, wandering with his family through Russia and Lithuania before they finally returned home for good in 1923.

Through those years his only teacher was his father. It didn't hold him back. By eight he knew nearly all of *Tanach* by heart; by twelve he had finished *Shas*. At eleven, learning *Pesachim*, he was already mailing his own *chiddushim* to his grandfather, Rav Yehuda Leib Gordin, head of the *beit din* of Łomża and a rabbinic advocate for Mizrahi. Rav Gordin showed the boy's writings to his fellow rabbis and took to calling David his *malach*, his angel.

He applied to the Slabodka *yeshiva* in Hebron, then withdrew, because Slabodka taught in Yiddish and he would not learn Torah in any language but Hebrew. He went to Merkaz HaRav instead, where he became a close student of Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook. He studied there in the summer of 1929, when Arab rioters massacred the Jews of Hebron, among them the students of the *yeshiva* he had nearly joined. Raziel enlisted in the Haganah in Jerusalem that week, and his first task was to help bury the dead of Chevron.

He advanced quickly in the Haganah. But the group was committed to *havlagah*, and when a group of commanders broke away in frustration, Raziel joined them, and became a founding member of their new movement, the Irgun. The night after Yom Kippur, 5691, he left the *yeshiva* and dedicated himself to the underground.

Raziel wrote to Rav Zvi Yehuda to break the news. "When I recall the state of my learning at the time I entered the *yeshiva*, it is very sweet to feel that I have climbed level upon level, and that my strength now is not what my strength was then. These

two years... left their imprint on the entire course of my life to come."

The reply came two days later. "Peace and blessing to you, my dear and beloved David... I am, however, greatly pained, and all the members of our circle will be pained by this as well when they learn of it." Still, Rav Zvi Yehuda would not let the parting be a rupture: "Even if this announcement of yours does indeed hold, you are not withdrawing and severing yourself from us entirely. Your parting is hard upon us, but the fruit of your faith is beautiful upon us."

In the Irgun, Raziel was committed to Torah and *halacha*. Through all his years in the underground he would not even drink a cup of coffee before *Shacharit*.

Raziel was appointed commander of the Irgun in 1938, at the impossibly young age of twenty-seven. In 1941, with Rashid Ali's pro-Nazi coup threatening to open Iraq to the Germans, the British released him from prison and asked the Irgun to send a sabotage team. Instead of sending his men, he led them, as he always had. A German plane strafed his car near Habbaniyah and killed him at thirty-one.

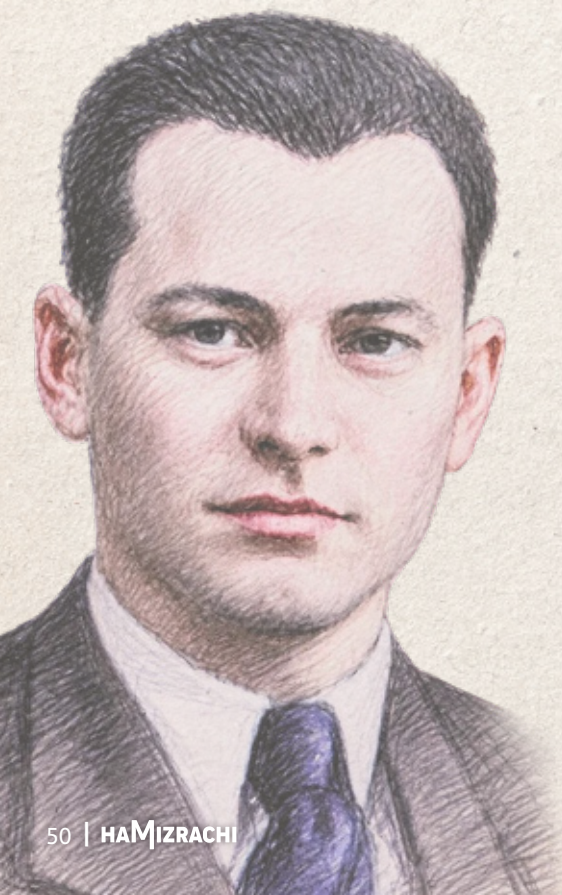
David Raziel was the first of a line we now know well. Today's heroes of *Hesder* and the *mechinot*, the holy warriors who carry a *sefer* in one hand and a sword in the other, are his children.

● Sources: David Raziel memorial biography, Gal-Ed Memorial Park archive (park.gal-ed.co.il); Moshe Nachmani, B'Koach U'v'Ruach: The Life and Writings of David Raziel, and related articles at hakibbutz.org.il; Ze'ev Carmeli interview in Boaz Dromi, "In Strength and in Spirit," *Olam Katan*, *Matot-Masei* 5786; Doron Bar, "David Raziel: A Pre-State Hero's Story of Final Rest," schechter.edu.



Rabbi Elie Mischel

is the Editor of HaMizrahi magazine and the author of *Countdown: American Jews and God's Plan for Redemption* (2026).



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Bein Chayim LeChayim

Rabbi Rafi Ostroff serves as head of the religious council of Gush Etzion. In this role, he oversees kavod acharon, the final honors accorded to the deceased, for the region's residents and its fallen soldiers, while also helping shape how Israel delivers religious services nationally. Rabbi Aron White sat down with Rabbi Ostroff to discuss an approach that is rooted in tradition yet strikingly innovative, one that allows Israel to honor its dead without losing sight of the needs of the living.

Tell us about your background and how you came to lead the Religious Council in Gush Etzion.

I was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, and grew up in a traditional Jewish home. After the Yom Kippur War, my parents made Aliyah, fulfilling a promise my father had made. We settled in Netanya, where I became active in Bnei Akiva, an experience that shaped my Religious Zionist identity.

I later studied in several yeshivot, including Merkaz HaRav and Yeshivat Har Etzion, where I received semicha. After marrying, my wife and I spent a year in Ukraine on behalf of the Orthodox Union, helping establish a Jewish community following the fall of Communism. When we returned to Israel, I managed the Chief Rabbinate's Conversion Authority during a period of significant immigration from the former Soviet Union. I then spent many years with World Bnei Akiva, directing programs that brought young Jews from around the world to Israel – work that gave me a global perspective on Jewish life and its diverse challenges.

For the past fifteen years I have served as head of the Religious Council of Gush Etzion and its chevra kadisha. The role combines practical leadership with significant halachic responsibility, and every day brings new questions that require balancing Jewish law with the needs of a growing society.

Many readers outside Israel may not be familiar with a religious council. What does it actually do?

In chutz la'aretz, religious services – mikvaot, eruvim, kashrut, marriage registration,

community rabbis, and the chevra kadisha – are provided through the local synagogue or Jewish community. In Israel, because the state serves as the framework for Jewish public life, these responsibilities are carried out by local religious councils. In Gush Etzion, for example, we have around 30,000 residents living in roughly thirty communities. We oversee two cemeteries and eighteen mikvaot, and support rabbis serving many of the communities. Although our central office is small, we coordinate dozens of employees across the region.

One unique aspect of the chevra kadisha is that much of its work is carried out by dedicated volunteers who serve families during some of life's most profound moments.

How does the burial system work in Israel, particularly for people from overseas who wish to be buried here?

Every Israeli citizen registered with National Insurance is entitled to burial without charge in the area where they live. The local chevra kadisha guides the family through the entire process.

For those who are not Israeli residents, the system is different. Burial plots can be purchased, with prices varying by location. Jerusalem, for instance, commands higher prices because available land is limited. The sale of these plots also helps fund cemetery development. Unlike burial itself, the construction and expansion of cemeteries is not fully government-funded, so nonprofit chevra kadisha organizations rely on this income to meet the country's growing needs.

You have spoken publicly about the challenges surrounding burial space in Israel. What makes this such a pressing issue?

After years in this field, I became convinced that the traditional approach to burial is no longer sustainable on its own. Israel's population has now passed ten million and continues to grow. We have to think carefully about how we preserve both our values and our limited land. This is not a uniquely Israeli problem – many countries across Europe and around the world are grappling with the same challenge as a result of dramatic global population growth over the past century.

Over the past two decades, this has driven significant innovation in Israel. In major cities, burial is no longer limited to traditional single-level cemeteries. Purpose-built structures – including multi-level burial complexes and, in Jerusalem, underground burial tunnels – have been developed to make responsible use of available space. These solutions were carefully examined by leading halachic authorities and approved by the Chief Rabbinate, specifically designed so that every burial maintains the halachic requirement of connection to the earth. Israel has chosen a distinctive path: preserving the Jewish tradition of permanent burial while developing creative, halachically sound solutions for a growing population.

Around the world, many countries lease burial plots for a number of years before remains are respectfully reinterred elsewhere, allowing cemeteries to serve future generations. Israel, by contrast, provides permanent burial – but with a rapidly

growing population, that model is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain.

As someone who has spent years studying *Gemara* and serving as head of a *chevra kadisha*, I began asking whether our own tradition offered another approach. During the Second Temple period, *Chazal* describe *likkut atzamat*, the respectful collection of bones approximately one year after burial and their placement in an ossuary. This practice appears throughout the *Mishnah*, *Gemara*, and *Shulchan Aruch*, so from a *halachic* perspective it is well established.

When I raised the idea with leading rabbis, no one questioned its *halachic* legitimacy. The hesitation was practical: would families accept it, how would it work today, and should longstanding custom be changed? Those questions led me to research the issue in depth, publish articles, speak at conferences, and establish a nonprofit organization dedicated to exploring this model as a sustainable solution for Israel.

We have since heard from thousands of people who say they would choose this approach – many see it as a way to preserve Israel's limited land for future generations while remaining fully within the framework of *halacha*. It could also make family burial more achievable and significantly reduce costs.

I often think of Rabban Gamliel, who insisted on a simple burial so that financial pressures would not burden families. His example reminds us that Jewish tradition values dignity over extravagance. In our generation, perhaps we should be asking how burial can reflect responsibility toward the future – conserving land and resources for those who come after us.

How would *likkut atzamat* work in practice today?

The initial burial would look much like a traditional one, with the individual buried in the ground with full dignity and respect. After approximately one year, once the family has completed the traditional period of mourning, the *chevra kadisha* would carefully transfer the remains to a specially prepared ossuary in accordance with *halachic* guidelines.

The family could participate in a meaningful ceremony marking the conclusion of the first year, after which the ossuary would be placed permanently in a dedicated section of the cemetery with a memorial plaque. Families would continue to visit on *yahrzeits* and other occasions, exactly as they do today.

I find this especially meaningful because Jewish mourning already unfolds in



An aerial view of the Gush Etzion cemetery.

carefully defined stages – *shiva*, *shloshim*, and the first year. This ceremony provides a natural conclusion to that process while preserving the dignity of the individual and creating a permanent place of remembrance.

Has this model been introduced in Gush Etzion yet?

Not yet, though we are actively working toward it. There are cemeteries elsewhere that are prepared to begin, but people naturally look for leadership before taking the first step.

The primary reservations have come from those concerned about changing established custom rather than from *halachic* objections. At the same time, I have received support from many highly respected rabbinic authorities across different communities. Some have spoken publicly, while others have expressed private encouragement but feel that introducing such a significant change requires broader consensus.

For me, this illustrates an important dimension of *halachic* leadership: sometimes the challenge is not determining what is permitted, but helping a community embrace change thoughtfully and responsibly.

What about Jews living overseas who purchase burial plots in Israel?

That continues exactly as before. In countries such as the United States, where land is more readily available, there is generally less urgency to consider alternatives. In parts of Europe, however, where permanent burial is often not possible, there has been growing interest in whether this model might offer an additional option.

I also believe these conversations extend beyond the Jewish community. Many societies are searching for environmentally sustainable approaches that still honor tradition and human dignity, and Jewish law has resources that may contribute meaningfully to that broader discussion.

Some have expressed concern that reviving *likkut atzamat* in Israel could encourage efforts to repurpose historic Jewish cemeteries in Europe. I see those as entirely separate issues. The preservation of Jewish heritage sites, particularly in places where once-vibrant communities were destroyed, remains vitally important. At the same time, we must address the real needs of a growing Jewish population in Israel and plan responsibly for future generations.

Before we finish – Gush Etzion's cemetery has particular historical significance, doesn't it?

It does. The cemetery dates back to the original Gush Etzion communities before the establishment of the State of Israel. Following the Six-Day War, when Jewish life returned to Gush Etzion, the cemetery was re-established and has served the region ever since.

In recent years it has become the resting place of members of the security forces from the area who gave their lives in service of the country. Their presence has added another layer of meaning – making it a place that reflects both the history of Gush Etzion and the enduring commitment of its people.

For many visitors, it has become not only a place of remembrance but of gratitude and inspiration, connecting past generations with those who continue to build and protect the State of Israel. ■

הַמִּזְרָחִי HAMIZRACHI

COMPILED BY: JACQUI AUSTEN
DESIGNED BY: LEAH RUBIN

KIDS CORNER

The Ushpizin Mystery

The seven Ushpizin are on their way to the sukkah, but who is who and what do they have to say?
Working your way down, match 2 clues to each guest. Write the letters in the order that the Ushpizin visit, with each letter in the color coordinated box. If you pick correctly, the letters will spell out a special message!

(S)

A ladder stretched into the sky,
As angels travelled low and high.



I started life by tending sheep,
Then wrote holy songs our people keep.

(L)

(H)

My jealous brothers sent me away,
But Hashem had plans for a future day.



Upon an altar I was tightly bound,
Until another korban was found.

(G)

(L)

A sling and stone were all I brought
Against the mighty man I fought.



I left my home at Hashem's command,
And journeyed toward the Promised Land.

(H)

(A)

In special garments I would stand,
And serve Hashem at His command.



I stored up grain before years of need,
And saved my family through every deed.

(A)

(M)

Beside a bush that burned with flame,
I heard Hashem call out my name.



My twelve sons grew, as Hashem had planned,
Into the tribes of our great nation's land.

(A)

(A)

I dug deep wells throughout the Land,
And stayed where Hashem said I should stand.



When friends were fighting or grew apart,
I brought them together with love in my heart.

(C)

(C)

My tent stood open, warm and wide,
With food and welcome found inside.



I climbed the mountain through fire and awe,
And brought down Hashem's Torah and law.

(E)

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MEET EMMA LAZARUS



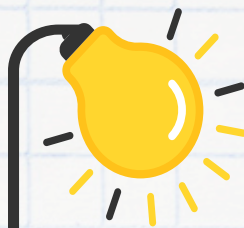
July 2, 1849 – November 19, 1887 (12 Tammuz 5609 – 3 Kislev 5648)

The Statue of Liberty's Poet

Growing up in America, Emma Lazarus was lucky enough to have private tutors whom her father insisted on due to her poor health. She began writing poetry and her proud father published her first book of poetry when she was only fourteen. From then on she published hundreds of poems and translated them from German and French. When she was about thirty, Emma met many of the Jews who had escaped from the pogroms in Russia. Many of them arrived in the USA to Ellis Island and were in terrible conditions on the island. Emma visited the refugees there and wrote about their conditions in newspapers, drawing people's attention to them. Thanks to her, many immigrants were offered work. Around the same time, France gifted the US the Statue of Liberty. Understanding that this statue would greet future refugees to the US, she wrote a sonnet called "The New Colossus" which was included in the book published for the ceremony. Eventually her words were inscribed on the base of the Statue of Liberty.



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



DID YOU KNOW?

- The word "ushpizin" is Aramaic for "guests."
- People often call the entire bundle a "lulav," but the lulav is really only the palm branch.
- Schach must be made from something that grew from the ground but is no longer attached to it, such as branches, reeds or bamboo.

Test Your Knowledge



What other two mitzvot can you actually enter?

What were the enormous celebrations that happened in the Beit HaMikdash during Sukkot?

Why do we dance in circles on Simchat Torah?

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

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COMMEMORATING SIMCHAT TORAH 5784

As we mark three years since the tragedy of Simchat Torah 5784, we remember those we lost and honor the extraordinary courage, resilience and unity shown by the people of Israel and Jews around the world. We give thanks for the return of the hostages and pay tribute to our soldiers and reservists and to the families who supported them, whose sacrifice and dedication have carried our nation through these difficult years. As we continue to heal and rebuild, may we always draw strength from one another and remember that we are stronger together.

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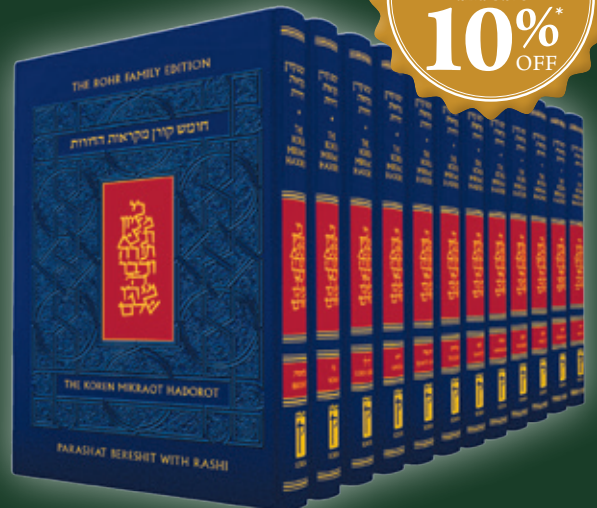
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