



ISRAEL EDITION  
VOL 7 • NO 7  
TU BISHVAT 5785



# הַמִּזְרָחִי HAMIZRACHI

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**HAMIZRACHI**

PUBLISHED BY WORLD MIZRACHI IN JERUSALEM

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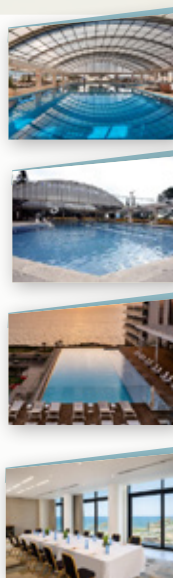
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# The Grit Factor

## Rebuilding North and South

**Rabbi Doron Perez**

**O**ne of the most remarkable qualities of the human spirit in general and the Jewish people in particular is grit.

What does this pithy word mean?

Professor Angela Duckworth defines grit in her best-selling book entitled simply *Grit* as “passion and perseverance towards long-term goals.” Shannon Huffman Polson in her book entitled *The Grit Factor* defines grit as “a dogged determination in the face of difficult circumstances.” Clearly grit is about inner strength and resolve to face hardship and adversity along the way to achieving our most cherished goals with unyielding courage and tenacity.

All of us stumble and fall along the way to achieving our aims. Everyone faces at some time seemingly insurmountable hurdles along the arduous journey of life. Often unexpected antagonism and great

obstacles stand in our way. When this inevitably happens – how do we respond? Will we remain down and stumble further or will we pick ourselves up? The wisest of all men, *Shlomo HaMelech*, highlights how we ought to respond in his great book of wisdom: “Seven times a righteous person will fall and rise, but wicked people will stumble in wickedness” (Mishlei 24:16). Righteousness is not about never erring but rather about picking ourselves up when we do, dusting ourselves off and continuing nonetheless.

Ralbag, Gersonides, points out that the above verse implies that righteous people stumble many times and pick themselves up each time, whereas a wicked person falls only once and cannot overcome. The ability to bounce back from stumbling in facing challenge and adversity is a defining quality of successful spiritual living.

If this is true for our individual struggles it is most certainly equally true for our collective challenges as a people. This sentiment is clearly expressed by King David where he juxtaposes a Jewish army to that of their enemies in battle: “They will stumble and fall but we will rise with vigor. Hashem will provide salvation, the King will answer us when we call on Him” (Tehillim 20:8–9). Rabbi David Kimche points out that the verse implies that both Israel’s enemies and Israel stumble in battle. The difference is that the enemy falls and crashes whereas Israel is able to rise up from the fall with grit and determination, ultimately prevailing.

### **The greatest failure**

The events of October 7, 2023, Simchat Torah 5784, represent the greatest failure in Israel’s history. 1,200 civilians and soldiers alike were butchered, murdered, burnt, raped and tortured in a way reminiscent of the worst of the Crusades, Chmielnicki massacres, pogroms, and horrors of the Holocaust. Hundreds of hostages were taken of all ages and backgrounds – from the then 9-month-old Kfir Bibas to ailing and elderly octogenarians. All of this in one day.

Indeed, for a period of 6–8 hours on that day, the Gaza Envelope was the most dangerous place for Jews anywhere in the world since the Holocaust. It is hard to comprehend that a devastating attack like this could take place in an independent Jewish state with the strongest army and the most advanced, technologically-driven military

Building at the temporary site of Kfar Azza in Kibbutz Ruchama  
(PHOTO: TZVI SIMCHA COHEN)





intelligence in the region. It was a horrific failure of epic proportions.

Over 120,000 people were evacuated from the south and the north and a Hezbollah onslaught followed the barbaric Hamas surprise invasion. Iranian and Houthi ballistic missiles and drones along with incessant terror attacks in Judea and Samaria created a seven-front war. Israel is in the midst of the longest and most exhausting war in its history with the release of 33 of the 97 remaining hostages being finalized as these lines are being written.

How will we emerge as individuals and as a people? Will we be able to rise up from the terrible failure of October 7th, ongoing exhausting confrontations, and the harrowing hostage predicament with grit, courage and determination? Will we be able to bring every hostage back, including our son's lifeless body along with his tank mates Itay and Matan? Will we be able to return the many tens of thousands to their homes and root out Hamas going forward?

Despite the many hurdles along the way, I have no doubt that Israel will certainly make every possible human effort to achieve all these goals.

The Jewish people in general and the State of Israel in our generation are the greatest example in all of human history of the "dogged determination" and "passionate perseverance to achieve our long-term goals" of the restoration of Jewish sovereignty and building together a spiritual and moral society in our ancient homeland as a beacon of hope for all of humanity.

It is only the most remarkable Jewish grit factor that enabled the establishment of Israel so soon after the ovens of Auschwitz and the greatest and most barbaric catastrophe in human history. Relentless attacks and challenges from the first day of renewed Jewish statehood have not dampened our dogged determination to move Jewish history forward.

Indeed, the Jewish people and Israel's response to the horrific atrocities and failures of October 7th have been breathtaking. From the moment the surprise attack began, civilians and soldiers alike sprang into action. Heroism emerged everywhere where civilians saved people they didn't know at enormous personal risk and soldiers arrived from all around the country

on that day, putting their bodies on the line in blocking Hamas' terror.

The weeks that followed continued this remarkable self-sacrifice and tenacity with the largest turnout of reserve soldiers in Israel's history. Remarkably, 300,000 Israelis returned home to fight in the war – an incredible population growth of 3% – instead of fleeing the war zone. Tens of thousands of Jews including many global Jewish leaders from across the spectrum and hundreds of solidarity missions continue to flow to Israel from around the world. Jews from every part of the world continue to support Israel and the IDF with incredible support and solidarity. Despite the many divisive issues and the harrowing hostage situation that Hamas is putting us through, there is a collective commitment to bring every hostage home and to destroy Hamas' terror infrastructure, ensuring that no such threat exists going forward.

Families in general and from the Religious Zionist community in particular have had fathers, sons and siblings – and sometimes even grandfathers – on the front lines for the better part of 15 months, not to mention the terrible losses and injuries.

### A time to rebuild

The nation's resolve to rebuild the destroyed Gaza Envelope communities and the devastated north is another extraordinary example of the Jewish grit factor.

The very name chosen for the initiative to rebuild the destroyed communities of the Gaza Envelope is *הַרְבֵּל הַתְּקוּמָה*, the Region of Revival. Until now, this region of the western Negev has been defined by its proximity to Gaza – the Gaza Envelope. From now on, it will have its own independent name expressing neither geography nor the devastation of October 7, but rather the grit and tenacity of rebuilding and resurrection.

The root of the name *תְּקוּמָה* is "קָם," meaning "to rise up." It refers not only to getting up from a seated position but also and especially to rising up after having fallen. On October 7, we fell and failed badly as a country and a people. But on that very same day, we began to rise remarkably from the blood, lead and ashes of adversity and antagonism. And we have continued with dogged determination every day

since then. Our enemies are being vanquished, our hostages are returning and our evacuees are returning to both the south and the north.

### When a yeshiva transforms a city

The two cities closest to the Gaza Envelope in the south and the Lebanese border in the north are Sderot and Kiryat Shmona respectively. In both cities there is a remarkable *Hesder Yeshiva*. Incredibly, the *yeshivot* in Sderot and Kiryat Shmona were the first educational institutions to return, blazing the trail of return and hope for the future. Both these institutions play transformative roles in their communities – of welfare, *chesed* and outreach as inspirational examples of *kiddush Hashem* – the way a *yeshiva* should be. We have highlighted in this edition of *HaMizrachi* the role that these two remarkable institutions play in the rebuilding of the communities and cities they are part and parcel of.

When Ya'akov arrived in Shechem after his years of exile, the Torah describes his arrival with an unusual phrase: "וַיַּחַן אֶת־פְּנֵי הָעִיר, He settled at the face of the city" (Bereishit 33:18). Our Sages note that the word *וַיַּחַן* shares its root with the word *חַן* (grace), teaching that Ya'akov brought grace to the city and elevated the quality of life for all its inhabitants (*Shabbat* 33). This transformation of an entire city was a true *kiddush Hashem*. Today, the *yeshivot* of Sderot and Kiryat Shmona, like many of the 70 *Yeshivot Hesder* that *Mizrachi* is proud to be affiliated with, carry on this tradition.

With grit, dogged determination and passionate perseverance for the long-term goal of rebuilding Jewish society together in the spirit of a love of the Jewish people and all created in Hashem's image, our holy Torah and the Land and State of Israel, we will indeed prevail.



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



# Holy Harvest: A Guide to Israeli Produce Abroad

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

When buying fruits and vegetables abroad, is it better to buy Israeli produce or to actually avoid buying it, because *terumot* and *ma'asrot* may not have not been taken from the fruit?

Rambam writes (*Hilchot Terumot* 1:22) that fruits exported overseas are exempt from *terumot* and *ma'asrot*. The Ra'avad disagrees and says there is a rabbinic obligation to tithe the fruit. Other *Rishonim* also rule that *terumot* and *ma'asrot* must be taken from Israeli exports (e.g. *Rosh*, *Sefer Ye'arim*, *Sefer HaChinuch*, *Rabbeinu Yonah*).

Rambam's position invites deeper analysis. *Terumot* and *ma'asrot* must be taken from fruit in *Eretz Yisrael* after the action that makes them ready for use (e.g., picking them from a tree). It seems from Rambam's wording that there is no such obligation if the produce is being exported.

However, most *Acharonim* argue that simple logic dictates that if fruit already have an obligation to be tithed in *Eretz Yisrael* (because they are ready for use), they should retain that obligation outside of Israel too. According to them, even the Rambam would agree that there is an obligation to tithe such fruit in our generation, because the action that made them ready for use was performed in *Eretz Yisrael*.

The Maharsham (1:72) writes that even those with a stringent approach to tithing fruits in *Eretz Yisrael* would exempt the fruit from tithing if the owner originally intended to export them. This theory was also mentioned by Rav Kook (*Mishpat Kohan* 46), even though he himself was careful to separate *terumot* and *ma'asrot* from such fruits without a *beracha*. Rav Ovadia Yosef was also lenient (*Yabia Omer* 10:46), while

the Chazon Ish (*Demai* 15:4), the Achiezer (*Kovetz Igrot* 309) and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (*Ma'adanei Aretz*, *Terumot* 1:22) all ruled that the fruits – even if they were always intended for export – must be tithed.

## Practical halacha

Most *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* hold that one should separate *terumot* and *ma'asrot*, but without a *beracha*. Nevertheless, the *Aser Te'aser* (21), Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer and Rav Ovadia Yosef all suggest that the lenient view has standing. Even those who are stringent can suffice with the Chazon Ish's abridged wording of the separation, i.e. make a photocopy of the wording, and place a coin next to it, upon which *ma'aser sheini* and *neta reva'i* will be *mecholel*, redeemed (at current exchange rates, a 5 shekel coin will suffice for 50 times). Take a little more than one hundredth of the produce and say, "I hereby declare that these are *terumot* and *ma'asrot* according to the *terumot* and *ma'asrot* wording in my possession," and then place this one hundredth in a bag and in the garbage.

## The value of eating Israeli fruits

The fruits of Israel possess a unique sanctity, and so there is a special merit in eating fruits from the Land. In the words of the Bach (*Orach Chaim* 208:8):

"The fruits [of *Eretz Yisrael*] imbibe the holiness of the *shechinah* dwelling in the Land... and therefore it is obvious that we insert, 'and we shall eat from its fruits and be satiated from its goodness,' in this *beracha* [of *al haMichyah*], because by eating its fruits we are nourished by the sanctity and purity of the *shechinah*."

This principle was emphasized by Rav Kook (*Orot HaKodesh* 3, p.295): "The food of *Eretz Yisrael* is innately holy and is only physical in its external appearance."

Partaking of the fruit of *Eretz Yisrael* is particularly important for those who do not yet live in Israel. For when one lives in a place void of the sanctity of *Eretz Yisrael*, one should at least try to connect to the holiness of the Land as much as possible. Eating fruits from Israel provides some connection to this sanctity and reinforces agriculture in Israel. Observing the *mitzvah* of separating *terumot* and *ma'asrot* also connects a person to *Eretz Yisrael*. One should make the effort to buy Israeli produce and enjoy the merits of eating the fruits of *Eretz Yisrael*.

Ideally one should separate *terumot* and *ma'asrot* without a *beracha*, easily and simply as described above. Yet even those who do not take *terumot* and *ma'asrot* have a *halachic* basis for their lenient approach.



**Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon**

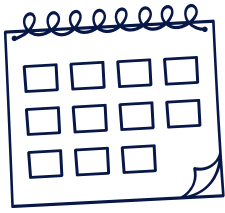
is the Nasi of World Mizrahi.

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.





From March 10th – May 4th 2025, it's your turn to  
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  - Leading fundraising campaigns, bringing in over **\$30 million for yeshivot and seminaries**
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  - Creating **communities on campus** for thousands of young *olim* across Israel
  - Annual budgets for youth movements and campus activities in America
- 4** October 7th has taught us all too well that **JEWISH UNITY** is a priority for the existence of the Jewish people. OIC-Mizrachi is **ON THE FRONTLINES** of promoting *achdut*, building trust, and combating the politics of division.
- 5** OIC-Mizrachi will stand for **YOUR VALUES** on World Jewry's biggest stage: Rebuilding Israel's north and south, combating antisemitism and investing in Jewish identity on campus, developing all parts of the Land of Israel, supporting *yeshiva* and seminary students, and enhancing Torah study and values.



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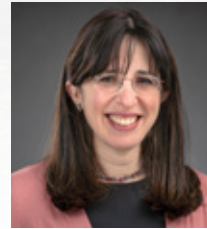
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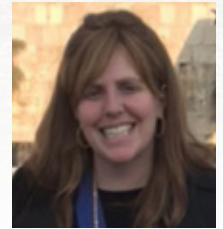
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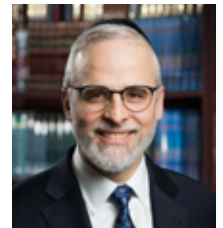
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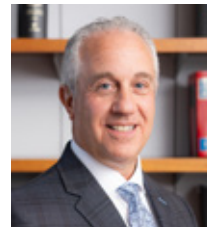
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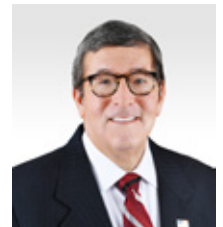
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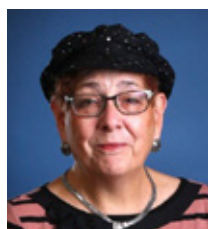
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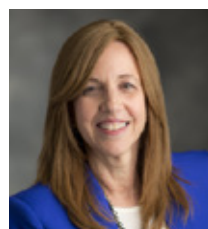
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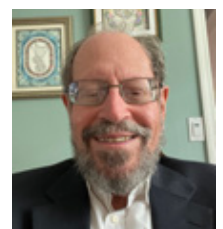
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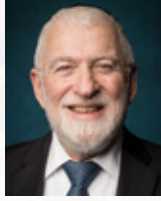
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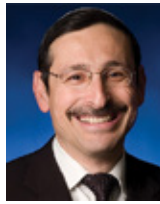
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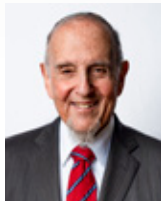
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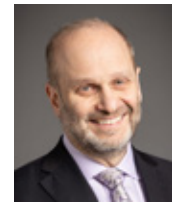
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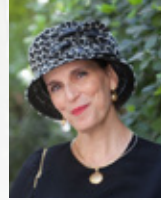
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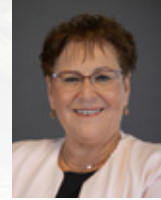
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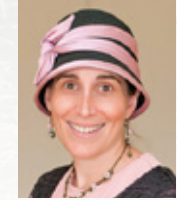
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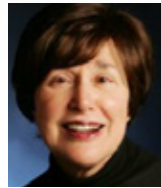
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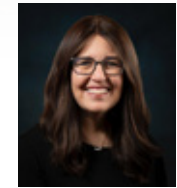
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# ON THE FRONT LINES OF REBUILDING

RABBI ARON WHITE

*From October 8th 2023 until November 27th 2024, Israel's north faced relentless bombardment from Hezbollah. As a ceasefire took hold, Israel's government and national institutions shifted their focus to rebuilding that would allow those evacuated to return home. Rabbi Aron White joined a trip to the Lebanese border to learn about the challenges faced by those wishing to return home, and Mizrachi's role on the front lines of rebuilding.*

Israel's northern region lies in the Biblical portion of Asher, and it is a fitting place to visit on the first day of Chanukah – Asher was promised olives in their portion, something that continues to this day. However, the impetus for this trip was a significant meeting of political leaders to help discuss the rebuilding of the north.

There were three main political partners represented: the regional council of Mateh Asher, which is a group of some 30 *yishuvim* and *kibbutzim*; the government of Israel, represented by Minister Ze'ev Elkin, who recently joined the government coalition in September 2024; and the Settlement Division of the World Zionist Organization, led by Gael Grunewald, one of Mizrachi's representatives at Israel's national institutions. The Settlement Division has spent most of 2024 building temporary homes for the residents of Be'eri, Kfar Azza and other *kibbutzim* in the Gaza Envelope – and now the attention is shifting to the communities affected on the northern border.

Even traveling to Israel's northern border itself is telling – Israel is much smaller, or in many ways has become smaller, due



## THE WAR IN THE NORTH

October 8, 2023

Hezbollah fires at IDF positions in the north, signaling the opening of the northern front of the war.

October 10, 2023

President Joe Biden's "Don't" speech, warning Hezbollah not to join the war.

September 16, 2024

The Israeli war cabinet officially makes the return of the residents of the north a war aim.

September 17, 2024

The "beeper operation" in which thousands of Hezbollah beepers explode.





to improved infrastructure. Our journey from outside Beit Shemesh to just outside Nahariya took less than two hours. While some regions are considered “peripheral” in Israel, the country’s compact size and modern infrastructure mean that even its most distant points are remarkably accessible.

Moshe Davidowitz, the head of the regional council, presented the needs that his residents have. He represents about 35,000 residents, most of whom have been displaced throughout the war. At the time of our meeting, in December 2024, out of 8,000 school-aged children, 2,000 were still displaced.

The overarching question for myself and all of us visiting was: “When will and should the residents return to the north?” The ceasefire had already been in effect for a month, so what was stopping them from returning?



**“The true test for the State of Israel is not only to return the residents of the north to their homes, but to bring prosperity and growth to the northern region. The Settlement Division is playing a role in improving medical services, education, transport links, and employment opportunities as part of this. I am thankful to G-d for the merit of representing Mizrahi at the forefront of settling Eretz Yisrael.”**

**- Gael Grunewald**

Moshe Davidowitz’s goal is to have 95% of residents back in their homes by the end of August 2025, allowing children to begin the new school year in September. This timeline mirrors the Gaza Envelope communities’ resettlement plan, where

September 1, 2024, was set as the target date for residents to return to either their original or temporary *yishuvim*.

The nine-month timeline became understandable as we witnessed the extent of destruction firsthand. While the Gaza Envelope faced intense devastation during October 7th and the subsequent four days of fighting, the north endured a different kind of crisis: fourteen months of continuous attacks from rockets, drones, and other weapons. Though spared from a single catastrophic day like October 7th, the north’s accumulated damage is extensive but less publicized. Individual attacks may not have made headlines, but thousands of buildings now bear the scars of this prolonged assault.

The damage extends far beyond direct attacks from Hezbollah. Many towns were transformed into makeshift military bases, bringing unexpected consequences. The constant movement of tanks, each weighing thirty times more than a car, devastated

**September 29, 2024**

Hassan Nasrallah is eliminated.

**October 1, 2024**

Beginning of ground incursion into Lebanon.

**November 27, 2024**

A 60-day ceasefire agreement comes into effect.

**December 8, 2024**

Bashar Assad falls, ending the 53-year Assad regime in Syria. The IDF moves into the Syrian Hermon and destroys large amounts of the Syrian army.



local infrastructure. Roads collapsed, along with their underlying networks of pipes and wiring, from the relentless weight of military vehicles. When we visited, local authorities were still cataloging these diverse forms of damage before repairs could even begin.

During our tour, we were taken to an Israeli Bedouin town called Arab Al Aramsha, a few hundred meters from the border. The town was evacuated in October 2023, and the Israeli army converted its large community center into an operations base. In April 2024, Hezbollah launched a joint drone and mortar attack against the facility. The head of security in the town showed us around, recounting the events. “Here was where the first drone came over – I got into shooting position, and was able to shoot

off its wing, bringing it down,” he said. A mortar shell exploded in the car park, destroying a vehicle. Another struck the operations center where soldiers were gathered, critically wounding officer Dor Zimel and injuring four others. Four days after the attack, Dor succumbed to his wounds.<sup>1</sup>

While the north was spared the catastrophic human toll of October 7th, it bears deep physical scars that will require substantial investment to heal. Under Gael Grunewald’s leadership, the Settlement Division has begun the crucial work of reconstruction, preparing for the safe return of northern residents to their communities. This rebuilding phase represents more than just recovery – it’s an opportunity to strengthen and enhance this remarkable region of Israel, ensuring

it emerges more resilient and vibrant than ever before.

1. Dor’s organs were donated to save the lives of multiple soldiers, including Kfir Zar, who appeared on the front cover of the Tisha B’Av edition of *HaMizrachi*.



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



## Cover Story

Following October 7th, many *kibbutzim* in the Gaza region were both physically destroyed and emotionally scarred. As they are still on the front lines of the war, the World Zionist Organization’s Settlement Division – led by Mizrachi’s Gael Grunewald – was tasked with building 7 temporary neighborhoods for them, such as an area for Kibbutz Be’eri in Kibbutz Chatzerim that was featured in the Sukkot edition of *HaMizrachi*. To date, in Kibbutz Ruchama around 130 families from Kfar Azza have been housed in the temporary homes built by the Division. The cover photo was taken on January 19th 2025, the day the first three hostages returned as part of the second hostage deal, including Emily Damari and Doron Steinbrecher, residents of Kfar Azza, who will live in this temporary dwelling until they can return to Kfar Azza.

*Pictured (L-R): Gael Grunewald, Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon, and Rabbi Doron Perez, at the temporary site of Kibbutz Kfar Azza in Kibbutz Ruchama. (Photo: Tzvi Simcha Cohen)*





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רשב"י אמר: תבל זו ארצו. ולמה נקרא שמה תבל?  
שהיא מתובלת מכל ארצות. שכל הארצות מח שיש בזו  
אין בזו, אבל ארץ ישראל אינה חסרה כלום,  
שנאמר "לא תחסר כל בה".

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai says:  
*Tevel is Eretz Yisrael. And why is it called 'Tevel'?*  
Because it has a sprinkling of everything. With  
all other lands, what one land has the other does  
not, but in *Eretz Yisrael* it is not lacking anything,  
as the *pasuk* says,  
"A land in which you will not lack anything."  
(*Yalkut Shimoni on Torah, 743:3*)

Photos by Tzvi Simcha Cohen (TSC) & Dov Kram (DK)



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# THE FIRST TO RETURN:

## The Yeshivot Hesder of Kiryat Shmona and Sderot Share Their Stories of Evacuation and Renewal

During this war, thousands of yeshiva students have served in the army. As residents of the north and south begin to return to their homes, some of these yeshivot are now playing another role, helping to revitalize returning communities. The Yeshivot Hesder in Kiryat Shmona in the north, and Sderot in the Gaza Envelope, are now on the front lines of rebuilding. Rabbi Aron White spoke with Eliav Samuel, from Yeshivat Kiryat Shmona, and Rabbi Ari Katz, from Yeshivat Sderot, about their yeshivot's journeys on the front lines of rebuilding.



### What happened at your yeshiva on October 7th?

**Eliav Samuel (Kiryat Shmona):** On Simchat Torah, about 150 students stayed in the *yeshiva*. We prayed regularly and after *kriat haTorah* (reading the Torah), rumors began to arrive about what was happening in the country. The head of the *yeshiva*, Rabbi Ariel Barkai, stopped the *chazan* for *Musaf* before the prayer for rain, and asked him to say a *mi shebeirach* for the soldiers slowly. Immediately after that, he asked all the students who were in the army to go to their rooms, turn on their cell phones, and carry them. By the holiday meal, only 80 students remained in the *yeshiva* as the rest were recruited and went to their units.

**Rabbi Ari Katz (Sderot):** *Baruch Hashem*, the *yeshiva* was spared, and the terrorists who were literally 2 minutes away at the police station never came to the *yeshiva*. Eleven of our *talmidim* who were serving in the Givati infantry brigade had come back to *yeshiva* for Simchat Torah, meaning they had their guns with them. When we started to hear what was happening, they ran down to the police station a few hundred meters away, where some of the main fighting in Sderot took place. Our students killed a number of terrorists that day. One of our rabbis, Rabbi Yossi Urim, saw a "soldier," who turned out to be a Hamas terrorist in disguise, who shot Rabbi Urim in the shoulder. He was taken to Soroka, and miraculously he survived.

### When did your yeshiva need to relocate, and where did it move to?

**Eliav Samuel (Kiryat Shmona):** On October 20, 2023, the government decided to evacuate Kiryat Shmona. The day before, we found space at the Nachalim *yeshiva* in central Israel, and the *yeshiva* relocated there in a single day. It's important to understand that half of our students were in the army while the other half continued their Torah studies without interruption.

**Rabbi Ari Katz (Sderot):** It was still *bein hazmanim* when the war broke out. When the *zman* started, we couldn't stay in Sderot and moved to Yeshivat Sha'alvim for around two-and-a-half months. The *yeshiva* was filled with *milu'im* soldiers throughout that time.

### Can you tell us about your students and rabbis serving in the army during this war?

**Eliav Samuel (Kiryat Shmona):** Over 100 students and more than 500 of the *yeshiva's* graduates enlisted in *milu'im* (reserves) and served in the army for extended periods. Some rabbis and *yeshiva* staff (*tzevet*) also enlisted in the reserves while evacuating their families and homes from Kiryat Shmona to various places throughout the country. We created a WhatsApp group for all those serving and sent *divrei Torah* there every day. To this day, the residents of Kiryat Shmona are scattered across over 500 communities in the country, and our rabbis and *yeshiva* staff





and their families are evacuated throughout the country – from Ma'alot in the north to Gush Etzion. Despite all this, they came every day to teach the students at our temporary location in central Israel.

**Rabbi Ari Katz (Sderot):** The majority of our older *talmidim* were either serving at the time or were called up for *milu'im* service. Some of our *Ra"mim* were also called up. They all served in *Azza* and then later in Lebanon. Unfortunately, we had six alumni who were killed – five in *Azza* and one in Lebanon. We also had a few students injured, one very severely, but *Baruch Hashem* they are recuperating.

### When did you return, and how did you approach the return?

**Eliav Samuel (Kiryat Shmona):** When the ceasefire in the north was signed, the head of the *yeshiva*, Rabbi Barkai, addressed the students about returning to the city. Immediately after the announcement, the students stood up and danced with joy! After a few days, we returned to Kiryat Shmona – home! The students, some of whom were visiting the city for the first time, are bringing life back to the abandoned city and studying Torah. As in the conquest of the land during the time of Yehoshua – the *aron* goes before the camp, and the study of Torah leads the return to the north.

**Rabbi Ari Katz (Sderot):** We were one of the first to return to the city after Chanukah. The *Rosh Yeshiva* said at the time that it was fitting that Torah would lead the way back, and for several months the city remained largely empty. We consistently provided professional emotional support to any student who requested it, and just as importantly, the *Ra"mim* spoke about *chizuk* and the important role the *yeshiva* would have in helping to rebuild the city.

### How have your yeshivot helped rebuild Kiryat Shmona and Sderot?

**Eliav Samuel (Kiryat Shmona):** We work closely with the municipality and community center, and every day, after Torah study, some students volunteer for a few hours: renovating homes for those in need, restoring public spaces, helping elderly residents return home, and more. One particularly meaningful renovation was the house of the Logasi family. Ilai Logasi was a soldier who was killed in Gaza; he had planned to renovate his single mother's house. His mother wasn't sure whether she could face returning to her home in Kiryat Shmona, but she decided to come back, and our *talmidim* helped renovate her home as Ilai had wanted. One elderly woman told us that when she returned home, she started crying, saying, "It was like angels calling when your two students offered to help repair my damaged home."



**Rabbi Ari Katz (Sderot):** We have been there for the people, organizing different activities for *milu'im* families and children, with more activities being planned for the future. One of our major projects is our “Big Brother” program where our students learn with local middle school students.

**What are your long-term plans for developing your yeshivot, and Kiryat Shmona and Sderot?**

**Eliav Samuel (Kiryat Shmona):** The *yeshiva* is part of the city! That’s how it has been for the 48 years since it was established, and that’s how it will remain. The connection with the city and our unreserved commitment to the city and the residents of the entire region is a central part of our *yeshiva*. We’re focused on helping residents return and bringing new residents to the city, along with renewing the city’s character and helping all residents return home. Beyond that, we are here for any need that may arise, 24/7. There are no locks on the *yeshiva* doors, and anyone who wants to can enter at any time to study Torah.

**Rabbi Ari Katz (Sderot):** The *yeshiva* plans to continue providing moral support to the entire community. One way we’re doing this is through actual building projects to show people that Sderot is growing: building a beautiful state-of-the-art campus for our girls’ *midrasha*, building a mini-motel so groups from Israel and the Diaspora can come visit, see and hear all of the tremendous stories from October 7th, and building an educational facility focused on heroism where all types of groups can come and learn – educational tourism. We are also going to make an effort to bring more families to the city by encouraging our students to build their homes in Sderot, as we have done throughout the years, but now with even more urgency! ■





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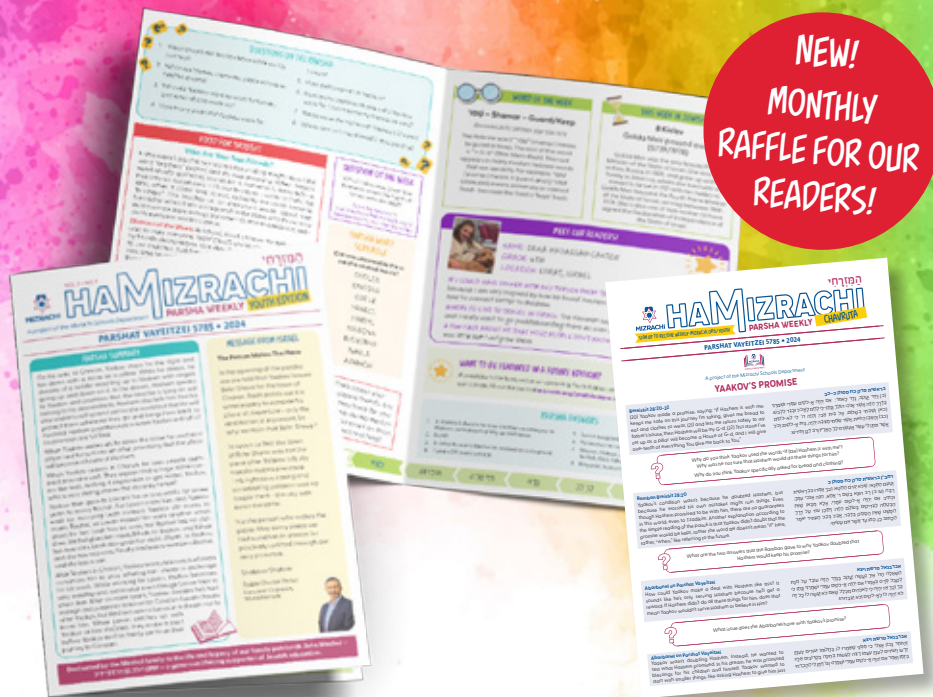


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# From Rockets to Renewal: The Golan Heights' Story of Resilience



Have you ever been to the Golan Heights at Israel's northern border? Are you aware of what's happening there?

I spoke to Yaakov Se-Lavan, deputy head of the Golan regional council. He says that over 2,000 rockets have been fired at the Golan from Lebanon and Syria since October 7, 2023. Yet, as we know, the residents of the Golan made the strategic and principled decision not to evacuate the area.

When the ceasefire was announced a few weeks ago, Yaakov was certain it would take time for the Golan region to recover from over a year of war. But they soon found out how much of Hezbollah had been destroyed. It also became clear how much Israelis love the Golan Heights. "I was shocked," he said. "People began booking reservations at hotels and B&Bs the day after the ceasefire. Last Friday, I noticed long lines at our restaurants and vineyards. The best part is that many of the tourists are coming for ideological reasons. A family from Petach Tikva told me: 'We purposely came here empty-handed - without even a bottle of water - so we can buy everything here to support your economy.'

"Since the IDF has moved into Syria, we feel much more secure. We have seen with our own eyes how the army has taken control of the area."

Yaakov had more positive news to share. He told me that he hadn't slept much over the past year because of the sirens; now his newborn son, Tal, his firstborn, is keeping him up at night.

At the *brit milah*, he told the guests that his wife had gone into labor when they were visiting the center of the country. "We went to Tel HaShomer and were



told by the receptionist that there was an unusually high number of births at the hospital, so we tried Beilinson - again we were told that they were overwhelmed. It was the same at Hadassah Ein Kerem as well. I laughed and said: 'I was beginning to feel like I was in a story posted by Sivan Rahav-Meir.'

"Then I looked at the dozens of people waiting in line and said to myself, 'This baby boom is a powerful statement. Something huge is happening here which we are privileged to be part of. What an incredible and resilient nation we are! We have suffered brutal attacks again and again, yet we continue to choose life.'"

And finally, there was more good news: a baby boy was also born last week to Ori Kallner, head of the Golan regional council. His firstborn's name is Kerem-David. *Mazal tov* on the births of these two new Golan residents.

● Translation by Janine Muller Sherr



**Sivan Rahav-Meir** is a media personality and lecturer. She lives in Jerusalem with her husband, Yedidya, and their five children, and serves as World Mizrahi's Scholar-in-Residence. She is a primetime anchor on Channel 2 News, has a column in Israel's largest newspaper, Yediot Acharonot, and a weekly radio show on Galei Tzahal (Army Radio). She is a member of the Mizrahi Speakers Bureau ([www.mizrachi.org/speakers](http://www.mizrachi.org/speakers)). (HEADSHOT: ARNON BUSANI)



# OLIM IN THEIR OWN WORDS



I made Aliyah in 2010, leaving behind the Jewish community of Miami to live in the homeland of my people - Israel.

Over the next decade, I lived across Israel, spending time in yeshiva, the army, and hi-tech before moving to Tzfat in 2020. There, I became very involved in the city's tourism industry, teaching Torah, helping visitors connect with its mystical

charm. However, everything changed with the outbreak of war on October 7th.

Tourism came to a complete halt, leaving Tzfat - a city whose livelihood depends heavily on visitors - in a state of economic crisis. Recognizing the urgent

need, I immediately began raising funds to support families and soldiers affected by the war. My efforts provided critical aid to over 25,000 people in northern Israel, delivering food, supplies, and hope during the darkest of times.

Now, as the war slows and immediate needs shift, my focus has turned back to Tzfat. The city's economy has been devastated, with families struggling to recover after a year without tourism. I am determined to help Tzfat rebuild by fostering connections and encouraging people to rediscover the city. My vision is not just about recovery - it's about breathing life back into the streets of Tzfat, reigniting its light, and ensuring its families can thrive once again.

*Eliyahu Pereira*

I made Aliyah because I've always felt a deep personal connection to the land and its history. As someone passionate about history - especially the history of Israel - making Aliyah was a dream come true. The professional opportunities here, especially in my field as a tour guide, allow me to show others the wonders of Israel while living in this incredible country. Recently, I've been running a variety of different volunteer missions around the Gaza envelope that focuses on volunteering and bearing witness to the atrocities that took place on October 7th.

I made Aliyah from Florida in 2014 after graduating from the University of Colorado. Today, I live in Givat Olga in Hadera, a spot halfway between Tel Aviv and Haifa, which has some of the best beaches and the most underrated nature reserve in the country. I've recently opened my boutique travel agency, 'Journey Through Israel'. Some might think it's crazy to start a travel company during such uncertain times, but as the saying goes, 'If not now, then when?'

Living in Israel has completely transformed my life. Life here comes with its challenges, especially after October 7th, but what's been amazing is seeing people still coming to Israel, eager to explore connect with and live in this land. Traveling with

them and sharing the beauty and history of Israel gives me hope - a powerful reminder of the resilience and spirit of this country. One 'Only in Israel' moment happened a few days after the war began when I was delivering gear to soldiers. A siren went off, and a family invited me into their shelter. Moments later, their forgotten pizza delivery arrived, and I found myself sharing pizza with them and the delivery guy in a stranger's shelter.

One thing I've learned from my Aliyah, it's the importance of resilience and adaptability. Moving to a new country has its share of challenges - embracing the unpredictability and finding humor in the small hurdles has helped me navigate the journey. Whether it's waiting in line, figuring out how things work, or launching my business, this mindset has been invaluable.

*Leo Loeffler*



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# MIZRACHI A GLOBAL ORGANIZATION



Our Mizrahi-JLIC campus couples are on the front lines of *milu'im* duty, community building, Torah study and care for thousands of *olim* and university students. Recently, they caught up with Mizrahi CEO Rabbi Danny Mirvis in Herzliya to share experiences and plan for a great year ahead. The campus couples are active in Givat Shmuel/Bar-Ilan University, Reichman University/Herzliya, and the Technion in Haifa.



Before Chanukah, at the initiative of World Mizrahi's Co-President Rabbi Yechiel Wasserman, a new branch of the Mizrahi movement was founded in Belgrade, the capital of Serbia. At the ceremony, which took place in the Jewish community center in Belgrade, participants included Chief Rabbi of Serbia Rabbi Yitzchak Isiel, head of the community in Subotica Mr. Robert Sabdusch, head of the community in Novi Sad Mr. Shem-Tov Treyer and many other members of the Serbian Jewish community. Mizrahi Serbia's first event took place over Chanukah.

**Maslul Mizrahi**, a project of Mizrahi-Religious Zionists of Chicago in partnership with Religious Zionists of America, is a new leadership program for gap year students, and is off to an exceptional start! The in-person sessions are structured around three core themes: Leadership, Advocacy, and Foundations. Participants have been inspired by influential leaders, including Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon, Nasi of World Mizrahi, and Dudi Rabi, who shared his courageous story of resilience from the October 7th events at Kibbutz Kerem Shalom. In the Advocacy component, students engaged in workshops led by Unpacked and heard insights from Bernie Moerdler, creator of the Bernie News Network. They are also deepening their understanding of Religious Zionism through a series of foundational classes taught by Kobi Greenfield, the program's director.

In the first of four planned trips scheduled throughout the year, students enjoyed an exclusive tour of the Knesset, observed a session in progress, and had the opportunity to hear from MK Ofir Sofer, Minister of Aliyah and Integration.

Mizrahi-Religious Zionists of Chicago describe Maslul as "a framework for the next generation of Mizrahi in America through programs to educate and empower college and post-college Jews, and a pathway for continued involvement and leadership in the Religious Zionist movement. The goal is to transform participants' lives with Torah and Zionism thereby revitalizing the next generation of American Jews."



Mizrahi Melbourne's Mark Leibler AC received Israel's highest civil award – the Presidential Medal of Honor from Israeli President Isaac Herzog, alongside fellow outstanding leaders Sir Frank Lowy AC, Malcolm Hoenlein, Maurice Levy, Julie Platt, Sir Trevor Chinn, Brigitte Zypries, and Ron Lauder. Rabbi Danny Mirvis, CEO of World Mizrahi, attended the ceremony and commented, "This is a hugely meaningful and fitting tribute for a lifetime of *shlichut* on the front lines of protecting and promoting the values of Am Yisrael, Torat Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael!"

(PHOTO: HAIM ZACH/GPO)

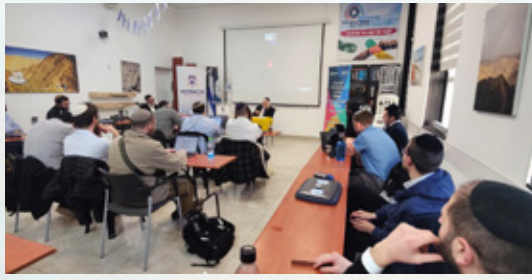


On the eve of moving the Paraguay embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, President Santiago and the Foreign Minister met with members of three families of hostages, including Rabbi Doron and Shelley Perez. President Santiago shared his unwavering support, expressing the solidarity of the Paraguayan people with Israel during this painful time. (PHOTO: RAFI BEN HAKUN)



The chairman of Mizrahi Croatia, Daniel Benko, visited the World Mizrahi offices. He met with Rabbi Yechiel Wasserman and Rabbi Danny Mirvis. The Mizrahi Croatia branch was established three years ago and the main programming takes place at the Beit Yisrael shul, led by Rabbi Dr. Kotel Dadon, where Mr. Benko is also the president.



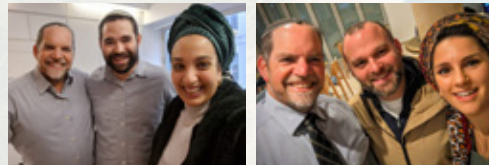


The Musmachim Semicha Program was privileged to host Rabbi Hershel Schachter for an exciting *shiur* on the topic of "The Principles Behind P'sak Halacha" followed by a lengthy question and answer session where Rav Schachter shared his thoughts on a host of topics. Besides the Torah taught, exposure to *gedolim* like Rav Schachter is a central element of Musmachim's educational vision.



Our CEO Rabbi Danny Mirvis and CFO Ilana Kadim paid a visit to the exceptionally impressive **AMIT Bienenfeld Havruta Yeshiva** – a home of educational innovation and excellence, in collaboration with World Mizrahi. They are pictured here with Alon Naftali, AMIT Deputy Director of Operations and Government Relations, and the management team of Havruta.

The Ambassador of Panama to Israel, His Excellency Ezra Cohen, met with Executive Chairman Rabbi Doron Perez and CEO Rabbi Danny Mirvis at World Mizrahi's Jerusalem headquarters. Mr. Cohen, who arrived in Israel to begin his tenure as ambassador in October, heard about Mizrahi's global activities and programs, and revealed that he is an avid reader of the HaMizrahi Parsha Weekly publication!



Rabbi Hillel Van-Leeuwen, World Mizrahi's Director of Leadership Development and Head of the Religious Zionist Shlichut Center, visited the **Mizrahi-trained shlichim families in London, Manchester, Brighton and Antwerp**. As always, Rav Hillel was very impressed with the *shlichim's* dedication to their work at their *shuls*, communities, schools, and youth movements while raising their own children, and by them being a source of faith, strength and optimism for other Jews during these trying times. Such trips remind both the *shlichim* and the Mizrahi staff that we are in the midst of a quiet revolution: bringing the Torah of Eretz Yisrael to more and more communities abroad.



World Mizrahi hosted a **mission tailored specifically for a group of senior doctors and consultants** who had come to Israel for an international conference. The doctors were primarily from Australia, with a number of American specialists. They met with medical teams, focusing on the medical challenges of October 7th and the ensuing wars in Gaza and Lebanon. There was a significant amount of sharing of medical approaches and knowledge making the whole experience extremely positive.

Executive Chairman Rabbi Doron Perez addressed the **Global Jewish Education Leaders Conference**, featuring leaders of 40 Jewish educational networks from around the world. The Conference was conducted under the headline "Jewish Education after October 7th".  
(PHOTO: FELIPE WOLOKITA)



We were honored to host **Isaac Barchichat, President of Mizrahi France**, pictured here at the World Mizrahi headquarters where he met with CEO Rabbi Danny Mirvis, Executive Chairman Rabbi Doron Perez, Mizrahi's representatives in the National Institutions Gael Grunewald and Roi Abecassis, and Mizrahi France's Director Jean-Charles Zerbib.

Our **Mizrahi-JLIC at the Technion** began their activities late this year due to the rocket fire that Haifa was suffering from. However, they are now in full swing and their Director Rabbi Evan Levine described some of their activities during the war-affected start of the academic year: "We had our opening Mishmar Monday, where students gather after a long day of classes to enjoy dinner together and engage in student-led Torah learning. We also had our first 'lunch and learn' of the year, which was great. Finally, we had our opening BBQ with over 85 students joining to meet other students, discover the JLIC community, and enjoy a delicious BBQ!"





# The Eli Kay Vineyard: A Living Tribute to Growth and Healing

**I**n the heart of the southern Negev, where the desert meets resilience, the Eli Kay Vineyard stands as a vibrant tribute to the life and legacy of Eli Kay HY"D. Established in September 2024 through a partnership between the Eli Kay Project, the Kay family, and Rimon Farms, this innovative initiative intertwines agricultural development with therapeutic rehabilitation, embodying Eli's profound love for the Land of Israel.

Eli Kay, an *oleh chadash* from South Africa, exemplified dedication to the Land of Israel through his life and actions. As a lone soldier in the IDF, he served with courage and leadership, rising to the rank of commander in the Paratroopers Unit. Following his military service, Eli devoted two years to agricultural work in the Negev and Gaza Envelope while completing a tour guide course, fostering growth and community in the region. He coordinated youth volunteer groups to farm and cultivate the land, deepening connections to Israel's heritage. For Eli, the soil of Israel was more than just land – it symbolized a living connection to the Jewish people's history and future. Tragically, Eli's life was cut short at the age of 25 when he was murdered by a Hamas terrorist in the Old City of Jerusalem on November 21, 2021, while on his way to work at the Kotel. Today, the Eli Kay Vineyard continues his vision, with 3,500 thriving vines standing as a powerful testament to his enduring legacy.

The vineyard is built around two key missions: agricultural development and therapeutic healing. Located in Lahav Farm's arid yet promising landscape, the vineyard transforms the desert into fertile ground, improving the region's soil quality and supporting Israel's agricultural economy. This green oasis symbolizes the potential of the Negev to flourish against all odds, much like Eli's own commitment to the land.

Beyond its agricultural contributions, the vineyard serves as a space for emotional and physical healing. It is a cornerstone of Lahav Farm's PTSD recovery programs, where civilians, soldiers, and first responders recovering from trauma engage in hands-on agricultural therapy. Activities such as planting vines, maintaining the vineyard, and tending the soil help participants find connection and renewal. Complementary programs like sheep herding, group discussions, and holistic practices enrich the therapeutic experience, offering a well-rounded path to recovery. To date, over 3,000 individuals have found healing in this nurturing environment.

The Eli Kay Vineyard combines agricultural growth with community resilience, serving as a model for





other regions. Future plans include expanding the number of vines, creating more therapeutic spaces, and improving visitor areas with shaded seating and pathways. The vineyard also plans to host tour groups to volunteer on the land and learn about its history and vision for the future. These initiatives aim to strengthen the vineyard's impact and connection to Israel's heritage while fostering growth and hope for all who visit.

Support from individuals, corporations, and organizations plays a critical role in sustaining this meaningful initiative. Sponsorship opportunities include dedicating individual vines in honor of loved ones, naming therapeutic spaces, and contributing to vineyard maintenance and therapy programs. These avenues of support allow the vineyard to continue its dual mission of growth and healing, fostering a legacy that aligns with Eli's vision.

The Eli Kay Vineyard is more than a tribute - it is a living testament to Eli's love for the Land of Israel and his dream of fostering connection, resilience, and unity. With every vine planted and every life touched, his legacy continues to flourish, inspiring all who encounter this remarkable project. Through partnership and support, the vineyard promises to grow even further, offering healing and hope for generations to come.

For more information or to take part in this project, please visit [www.elikay.org](http://www.elikay.org) or email [info@elikay.org](mailto:info@elikay.org)







# Making Prayer Accessible: The Siddur That is Bridging Israel's Religious Divide

*The siddur has long been among Judaism's most frequently published books, but Mordechai Rahum has introduced something entirely new – a siddur designed specifically for secular Israelis. With thousands of copies already sold, this innovative siddur has found an eager audience among Israelis of all ages, including many in the military.*

*Rabbi Aron White spoke with Mordechai to learn more about this unique project.*

## **Mordechai, can you tell us about your background?**

I grew up in Holon, and had very little connection to religion. We might have occasionally said *Kiddush* on Friday night (with the TV on in the background), and I came to synagogue for *Ne'ilah*, but that was really it. I worked in politics for several politicians, and then in finance. My journey towards religion really happened during Corona – we had a lot of time on our hands, and I started to watch some *shiurim* that people sent me. I started to discover an aspect of Judaism that I had never known about before – Judaism had been about rituals and festivals, but I started to learn about character development. For example, even something like the concept of *ma'aser kesafim*, giving one-tenth of one's income to *tzedakah* – I never knew that Judaism had concepts like this! It was like I had associated personal growth and development with American self-help books, and suddenly I saw that there was so much of this in Judaism.

I gradually started to do more religious practices, such as not driving on Shabbat, then not using my phone on Shabbat and more. But even as I continued to do more religious practices, coming to *shul* was something that felt intimidating and scary.

## **Scary? To someone who grew up going to synagogue, it's hard to understand that. Could you explain more?**

There is the feeling it's for "them." For me, Shabbat meant beach and *tiyulim*, and this is a feeling that many people have, that *shul* is a space for a different group, the religious. Also, I don't even know what I am doing there – what do I do there?! I walk into the synagogue, and then what? To go somewhere where I don't know what to do – the fear is paralyzing and it is embarrassing!

## **So how did you begin to attend shul?**

A friend invited me to a *shul*, he started explaining, and the pieces of the puzzle started to come together. I started to go to *shul* sometimes, but each time I didn't know what to do. I read *Arvit* when they were doing *Mincha*. I was on page 40 when they were on 20. It's frustrating – I don't know if it's my fault or the system. It's not just me, it's the same with many secular and young people. A few times I could see *chilonim* come in, with this look of fear and confusion – I would count until 30 and they would close the *siddur* and leave. Look at that – these are people



who are coming to synagogue, looking to connect, who are being lost because it's all too foreign and confusing. So that's when I had the idea – let's make a *siddur* for *chilonim*, *matchilim*, someone who doesn't know how to *daven*. I went to a few friends with it, they thought it was crazy!

I knew that if I didn't do it, it wouldn't happen. I started to write down questions that beginners have, people gave me answers, and then I put them next to the text. My aim was that someone could have no clue how to pray, but pick up this *siddur* and find answers to any question they have as they go along. I was sure there are many thousands like me. But I wanted it to be for other rituals too, not only for what to do in *shul*. I'll give an example – one of the first questions I had when I started compiling the *siddur* was: can I read *kriat Shema al haMita* on a chair? To a beginner, if it says in the name it's "on the bed," you might think you have to be literally on your bed to read it.

We have 70 different emojis in the *siddur*, showing people when to sit, stand, bow etc., as well as a mixture of user instructions and context about where the prayers come from.

**When did you release the siddur?**

We were ready to launch the *siddur*, and then October 7th happened. So we made a version for *chayalim* with soft binding, and printed 3,000 *siddurim*, and within two days I received hundreds of orders. It was the first days of the war, and I didn't even have a distribution system in place, so I drove around by myself. I traveled around the country to distribute, some to people very far from religion that I really never would have imagined. I asked them why they bought this. People gave fascinating answers: "My whole life I wanted to know how to pray, what they are doing there in *shul*, but I feel I can't walk into a *shul*, I can't learn it from YouTube." A Russian family said they had been waiting their whole life for this.

One person sent me a message a few weeks later saying thank you – using the *siddur* was the first time in their life they made *Kiddush*. They didn't know not to drink wine after *borei pri hagefen*, but here they learned how to drink wine properly. Some grandparents bought it for their grandchildren. One father said that I saved his child. The child had started drifting from religion, but this *siddur* is attractive and interesting, so he started to read it himself – the idea is that someone will want to pick it up. Then he took it himself to *shul*.

We've sold 1,500 copies to *chayalim* plus about 500 dedicated in memory of soldiers or those killed at Nova. We are working with the army as there is huge demand there, but need support for it. The *Rabbanut HaTzva*'it is already supportive, but we need funding to be able to print more *siddurim*. I have received videos of *chayalim* in Gaza and Lebanon praying with it, their first time praying.

My job isn't to make people keep Shabbat, but I am giving them tools to know their Jewish identity.

To find out more, visit [www.siddurariel.com](http://www.siddurariel.com)





# Does the IDF Code of Ethics Represent Torah Values?

**Brigadier General (Res.) Ari Singer**

**T**he IDF's code of ethics, known as "*Ruach Tzahal - Spirit of the IDF*," was compiled in 1994 by a committee chaired by Asa Kasher. In 2000, Brigadier General Elazar Stern, then the Chief Education Officer, led another committee composed of professors of Philosophy of Ethics to revise the first version. The manifest is divided into four fundamental values: Defense of the State of Israel and its residents, Patriotism and loyalty to Israel, Human Dignity, and Statehood. There are ten values derived from these fundamental values: Perseverance in the Mission and Pursuit of Victory, Responsibility, Reliability and Trustworthiness, Personal Example, Human Life, Purity of Arms, Professionalism, Discipline, Camaraderie, and a Sense of Mission. In the original document, these values are in alphabetical order except for the first value, considered the most essential of any army - victory!

The first draft generated much controversy from those who claimed that the Ethical Code had no trace of any Jewish or Zionist substance. As a result of this criticism, the fundamental value of **Patriotism and loyalty to Israel** (*ahavat haMoledet veNe'emanut laMedina*) was added as a fundamental value. A more "Jewish" translation would use "Love of the Homeland" instead of the *parve* word "patriotism" used in the IDF's official translation. The second version also included four sources of inspiration for the Code, one being "The tradition of the Jewish people throughout their history," which precedes the fourth source, "Universal moral values based on the value and dignity of human life."

Controversy continued after the second version. Opponents of the second version claimed that most of the authors, especially Asa Kasher, are identified with the extreme left of the Israeli political spectrum. Many of the committee members were on record justifying their refusal to serve in the IDF as a morally valid method

of political protest. The opponents claim there is a need for a different, more Jewish creed that better represents the fighting spirit of soldiers who fought in the Swords of Iron War and were faced with exceptional ethical challenges in a prolonged war in an urban theater of operations against a sub-conventional terrorist army.

In the current social climate, trying to change the code of ethics would be a mistake. But I also believe that changes are not necessary. A deeper look reveals terms that carry great significance in Jewish thought.

The first value, "Perseverance in the Mission and Pursuit of Victory," is a translation of *deveikut ba'mesima ve'chatira l'nitzachon*. The word *deveikut* is translated as perseverance, which does not capture its meaning. *Deveikut* epitomizes the most profound connection between a man and his wife (Bereishit 2:24) and the aspiration to have the same relationship with G-d (Devarim 13:18). The *Tanya* describes it as "the cleaving of spirit to spirit - the ultimate attachment and union as a result of love" (*Iggeret HaTeshuva* 9). *Nitzachon*, Hebrew for "victory," also derives from *netzach*, "eternity."

This value teaches two key lessons for modern warfare: Fighting spirit matters more than technology and weapons, particularly against enemies who spread fear and doubt. Additionally, mission planning must focus on *netzach*, on eternal objectives, rather than short-term gains.

The final value, *Shlichut*, goes deeper than its translations of "sense of mission," "loyalty," or "representativeness." In Jewish thought, *shlichut* describes a relationship between an emissary (*shaliach*) and their sender (*meshalaiach*). When I ask soldiers "Who is your sender?" their answers vary: active personnel typically name their commanding officer, while reservists say "my country." I suggest a broader view: our sender is our nation across all

generations - past, present, and future. While soldiers do take orders from commanders and the IDF follows government directives, the Jewish concept of *shlichut* sees the emissary as the "extended hand" (*yada arichta*) of the sender. This creates a more profound connection than the U.S. Army's concept of "selfless service."

I've analyzed many IDF values rooted in Jewish thought beyond the examples discussed above. While a full analysis of each value exceeds this article's scope, consider the value "Purity of Arms" (*Tohar haNeshet*). This phrase appears contradictory in Jewish thought, which is why I prefer the traditional rabbinic term "Holiness of the Camp" (*Kedushat haMachaneh*).

This discussion extends beyond theory. While most After-Action Reviews focus on technical and operational aspects, I use the IDF values (*Erkei Tzahal*) to evaluate the ethical and behavioral dimensions - what Jewish tradition calls *middot* - of military operations. Understanding these values through their Jewish context elevates soldiers beyond mere tactical considerations, fostering a deeper sense of purpose and resilience.



**Brigadier General (Res.) Ari Singer** served as the IDF's Chief Reserve Officer from 2017 to 2021 and currently serves in the Manpower Branch. Ari is a fellow at Misgav Institute for National Security and Zionist Strategy and a member of the Bitchonistim.



# ALIYAH



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# NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT



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# Faith, Music, and Persistence

An Interview with Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks שליט"א

*In January 2018, Rabbi Efrem Goldberg recorded an interview with Rabbi Sacks in Boca Raton, Florida. The following is an edited transcript of the interview.*

**Rabbi Goldberg:** You are a beacon of faith – you promote faith, you teach faith, and you inspire faith, not only among the Jewish people but around the world. Do you ever struggle with faith? Do you ever feel that you confront doubt? And in those moments of uncertainty, what do you do to overcome it?

**Rabbi Sacks:** Let me be very blunt with you. I have had many crises of faith. But I have never had a crisis of faith in G-d. I have had many crises of faith in man. One crisis began as soon as I began to understand the Holocaust and to understand that this took place in the heart of civilised Europe, not some third world country in some medieval century.

The biggest question of faith I had was: knowing all this was going to happen, how could G-d have faith in us? But I never lacked faith in G-d because I never expected the impossible from Him. I know perfectly well that He placed each of us here for a purpose and we are supposed to discern that and to walk ahead.

For me, the critical moment that defined my faith was achieved when I learned *Parashat Chayei Sarah*. It begins with the death of Sarah. There is Avraham, having lost his life companion at the age of 137. At that point, he has received from G-d three promises: Number one – I will give you the land. He promised that to him seven times. Number two – I will give you children – He promised that to Avraham four times. I will make you a great nation, they will be as many as the stars in the sky, as the sand on the seashore. And finally, I will make you not one nation but many nations.

But he has only one son. Where was the father of *many* nations? Where was the infinite number of descendants? What did Avraham do at that moment when he should have had a crisis of faith? He understood that G-d said: “Walk on ahead of Me.” So, he bought the first plot of land. He then made sure his son got

married so he would have Jewish grandchildren. Later, in a strange episode, he takes an additional wife named Keturah and has six more children, who become the fathers of many nations.

In other words, instead of expecting G-d to do it for him, Avraham realized that G-d was expecting him to do the hard work for Him. Once I understood that I never ever had a crisis of faith.

**Rabbi Goldberg:** What do you do when you run into a rough patch when you're having trouble connecting with davening, when you feel distant and don't feel the presence of the Almighty?

**Rabbi Sacks:** There are several things one can do: I try to listen as I'm *davening* and be surprised by one phrase or one sentence, and that will be my meditation for the day. I'll *daven* on that. It may stay with me for a week.

For example, we say every day in *Pesukei D'zimrah*, “G-d creates the cosmos and knows the name of every star.” That's G-d the Creator. Then it says: “G-d builds Jerusalem and ingathers the exiles.” That's G-d as the Shaper of history. But in between those two verses is a middle verse: “Who heals the broken heart, administers to their wounds.” There is King David telling us that sometimes healing one person's broken heart is as important as creating a universe or shaping history. You can live off that one sentence for a year! Never try to find *kavanah* for the whole of prayer. It doesn't work, for heaven's sake. One little thing at a time.

The second point is that prayer has to be sung. I've said many times that when language seeks to break free of the gravitational pull of earth, it modulates from speech to song. I've spent a lot of time in my chief rabbinate encouraging *chazzanim* to write new liturgical music, to use songs to make the service more



participative, and to encourage *shul* choirs. I'm not an expert in music but I made that a key element. I think that music frees the spirit and if you are ever short of *kavanah*, you need to have the *niggun*, the song, to *daven* with.

Third, something might just catch you if you create the silence in your soul to listen. When I'm at a critical point in my life, which is pretty much every day, I just listen: G-d, what are You telling me? Somehow prayer orients you. I call prayer "Jewish cognitive behavioural therapy." It changes the way you look at the world; it changes the way you feel about the world.

**Rabbi Goldberg: We are always promoting more Torah study and chesed opportunities. We are active on behalf of Israel. Some are involved in social action and social justice. What can the Orthodox community be spending more productive time promoting that is being overlooked?**

**Rabbi Sacks:** I think there are two that are being neglected. The first is, all that goes with the affective dimension of Judaism, the emotional life. There's some nice Jewish music here, but some of the most popular music is actually non-Jewish pop music set to Jewish words or a capella, which is great. I love it. The Maccabeats – I'm their biggest fan. But I like to see music coming from the Jewish soul. I think we haven't done enough with the affective dimension, and music is probably the most important.

We write everyone else's music. Irving Berlin wrote "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas," Mahler's eighth symphony, Catholic mass. Where do we write our music? I think we are missing the aesthetics of it and music is the most obvious example. Cinema, too, isn't used enough in this regard. There's just been a film called *Menashe*, a very moving film about *Charedim* in New York. I think we haven't done enough with that to tell people what the life of faith does for you. I have so many stories that I think ought to be made into film. Stories of ordinary people I know who have done extraordinary things.

Second, I absolutely think the Modern Orthodox community is missing out badly on *kiruv*. The difference between material possessions and spiritual possessions is that the more you share material possessions the less you have. But when it comes to a spiritual possession, the more you share the more you have. That is why Chabad can send out people all over the world where there is no *Yiddishkeit* whatsoever, places where you or I would lose our *Yiddishkeit* overnight because there's no support system. Yet, they are able to keep it, because they share it.

The Modern Orthodox community should be going out on campuses. Do you know how many Jews we lose on campus? 90% minimum! Yet we're not going out there. Every campus should host a nice Modern Orthodox *minyán*, *davening* three times a day, *Daf Yomi*, and everything *l'mehadrin*. But they aren't taking it out to people who don't have it. When you don't give, something in your spirit dies.

**Rabbi Goldberg: Looking at your life and productivity, whether the trajectory of ascending to the chief rabbinate, publishing 30 books, 17 honorary degrees, being named a Lord, etc., it just seems that you have had success after success, triumph after triumph. Have you ever experienced failure? Have you**

**ever had any challenges that you couldn't overcome and what gave you the tenacity to persevere?**

**Rabbi Sacks:** Ha! Have I ever experienced failure?! My goodness me! Oh!

I nearly failed my first year in university. I nearly failed my second year in university. I was turned down for virtually every job that I applied for. Since I was a kid, I wanted to write a book. I started when I was 20 and I gave it every minute of spare time that I had. Even when Elaine and I went to a concert I would be writing notes during intervals or between movements during a symphony. Yet, I failed for 20 years! From 20 to 40 I had a whole huge file cabinet of books I'd started and never finished.

What changed is I happened to be reading the preface to "Plays Unpleasant" by George Bernard Shaw. It opens by saying that if you're going to write a book, write it by the time you're 40 or forget it. I thought it was *min haShamayim*. Someone is telling me something because I had no idea why I happened to read that passage by that writer at that time. I thought to myself that it was my last chance. So, I wrote my first book at 40 and then I wrote a book a year ever since.

Winston Churchill put it beautifully – success is going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm. The secret is marrying someone who believes in you and then to just keep going. Never stop! All of the things that came much later, most of them unexpected – very moving but not the main thing – it's just "keeping on going" day after day.

A wonderful *midrash* in the introduction to *Ein Ya'akov* asks what is the main verse in the Torah? One [Tanna] said that it's loving your fellow man as yourself. A second said *Shema Yisrael*, accepting the yoke of Heaven. Then, Ben Pazi says: "The first lamb you shall sacrifice in the morning and the second lamb you shall sacrifice in the afternoon" (Shemot 29:39). It's about *Shacharit*, *Mincha*, and *Ma'ariv*. That's life! You keep hammering away and eventually you'll get there.

The only thing that is absolutely necessary is that you have to key into your mental satellite navigation system, your destination. Because if you don't know where you're trying to get to, you'll never get there. I knew I wanted to write a book. It took 20 years of failure until I finally succeeded in the twenty-first year.



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# Tu BiShvat 5785: Celebrating Productivity and Resilience

Rabbi Reuven Taragin

**A**t first glance, Tu BiShvat, the Rosh Hashana for fruit trees, seems to be of mere technical significance – a calendar marker for the yearly *mitzvot* that pertain to fruits. Surprisingly, we treat Tu BiShvat as a minor holiday; we skip *tachanun* and avoid fasting. What are we celebrating? Additionally, we only celebrate the new year of trees, as opposed to that of other plants or even tree saplings, whose year starts on a different date. Why are trees, specifically, worthy of celebration?

*Parshat Shoftim* draws a parallel between trees and humans when prohibiting the use of fruit trees as siege weapons, stating, “man is like the tree of the field” (Devarim 20:19). The Maharal connects this to the Torah’s next law about an unsolved murder, where a young, unused calf must be sacrificed in an uncultivated valley. The Sages interpreted this sacrifice of untapped potential as atonement for the murder victim’s unrealized “fruits” – their future family and *mitzvot* (*Sotah* 46a). Through this, the Maharal teaches that both humans and trees possess endless productive potential. By respecting a tree’s capacity to bear fruit, we learn to value humanity’s own potential for meaningful contribution (*Tiferet Yisrael* 3).

The Jewish people are compared to an additional unique arboreal characteristic. Yishayahu compares Jewish history to the life of a tree (65:22). What does he mean?

Like trees, the Jewish people have the unique ability to regenerate after setbacks. As opposed to annuals, which die over the winter, trees regenerate the following spring and once again produce fruit. Though trees seem dead on Tu BiShvat, in truth, they are actually starting a new growth cycle.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, the Jewish people possess unique resilience. While all nations experience decline, Jews are distinguished by their ability to recover and rebuild. Unlike other civilizations that fade after their historical peaks, the Jewish people have consistently risen after setbacks. The golden

age of David and Shlomo was not our final flourishing – we returned from the first exile and have rebounded from countless devastations and low points since.

As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks noted: “Jews have survived catastrophe after catastrophe in a way unparalleled by any other culture. In each case, they did more than survive. Every tragedy in Jewish history was followed by a new wave of creativity. The destruction of the First Temple led to the renewal of the Torah in the life of the nations, exemplified by the work of Ezra and Nehemiah. The destruction of the Second Temple led to the great works of the oral tradition, Midrash, Mishnah, and the two Talmuds. The massacres of the Jewish communities in Northern Europe during the First Crusade led to the emergence of Hassidei Ashkenaz, the German-Jewish Pietists... The Spanish Expulsion was followed by the mystical revival in Safed in the sixteenth century. The greatest catastrophe of all led to the greatest rebirth: a mere three years after standing eyeball to eyeball with the angel of death at Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, and Treblinka, the Jewish people responded by their greatest collective affirmation of life in two thousand years, with the proclamation of the state of Israel” (*Future Tense*, 54).

On October 7, the Jewish people suffered another catastrophe. After almost eighty years of thinking that the days of the mass murder, abuse, and demonization of Jews were behind us, we once again suffered barbaric attacks as well as international sympathy for the barbarians and condemnation of the State of Israel for defending itself.

Like we have throughout history, our people responded to this setback with vigor, not just by fighting and vanquishing our enemies on all sides but also by strengthening Jewish identity, *achdut*, and *Aliyah*. The death of so many of our brothers and sisters has not caused us to lose faith in life. On the contrary, it has reminded us of life’s great value and inspired us to maximize our own and help others do the same.

Tu BiShvat calls us to reflect on these parallels. In celebrating the renewal and resilience of trees, we recognize these same qualities within ourselves. The holiday reminds us that our potential demands fulfillment – it is both a gift and an obligation.

As we witness the Jewish people’s return to our ancestral land and renewed flourishing, we see the living embodiment of this tree-like resilience. May our recognition of these profound connections merit divine blessing, bringing security to our nation and allowing us to grow both as individuals and as a people, advancing toward our complete redemption.

1. The Bnei Yissocher (*Ma’amarei Chodesh Tammuz/ Av 4, Betulah B’machol 3*) highlights the similarity between the growth of trees and the human gestation cycle by explaining that the date of Tu BiShvat is forty days before the beginning of creation (25 Adar). Trees, like humans, begin forming forty days before any significant growth can be perceived.



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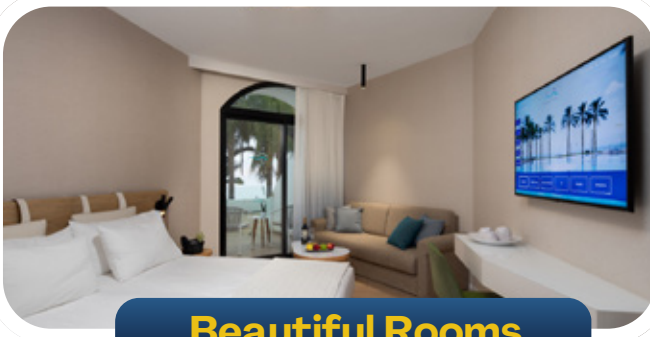
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# The Legacy of the Acacia Tree: Planting Seeds of Redemption

## Rabbanit Shani Taragin

In the heart of the Torah's narrative of the construction of the *Mishkan* to be read in the upcoming weeks, one seemingly humble material is chosen to form the very foundation of this sacred space: the acacia trees, *atzei shittim*. Mentioned repeatedly in Shemot chapters 25 and 26, the acacia wood was to be used for the beams, boards, and even the Ark of the Covenant itself. Despite its modest appearance, the acacia tree serves as a profound symbol of foresight, faith, and the eternal message of Jewish resilience.

The *Midrash* reveals an extraordinary insight: These acacia trees didn't simply grow in the desert by chance. Rather, our forefather Ya'akov, with prophetic vision, planted these trees in Egypt, instructing his children to take them when they would eventually leave (*Tanchuma*, Terumah 9). This seemingly simple act of planting trees carries deep significance, particularly as we approach Tu B'Shvat, the New Year of Trees.

What inspired Ya'akov to plant these particular trees? The *Midrash* teaches that Ya'akov saw through divine inspiration that his descendants would build a *Mishkan* in the desert. Rather than leaving this crucial material to chance, he took action generations before it would be needed. This act of planting wasn't merely practical preparation; it was a powerful statement of faith in the fulfillment of Divine promises of redemption.

The Kli Yakar elaborates on this theme, noting that the word "*shittim*" (acacia) is related to the word "*shtut*" (foolishness). In planting these trees, Ya'akov was engaging in what appeared to be an act of foolishness to his contemporaries. Who plants trees for a future temple while in exile? Yet this apparent "foolishness" was actually the highest wisdom – the wisdom of hope and unwavering faith. Rav Ovadia Sforno adds another layer of meaning to the choice of acacia wood. Unlike other trees, the acacia is known for its extraordinary durability and resistance to decay. This quality mirrors the eternal nature of the Jewish people's relationship with the Divine. Just as the acacia stands firm in harsh conditions, the Jewish people have demonstrated remarkable resilience throughout history.

Rabbi Soloveitchik explains that the Torah details that the planks for the *Mishkan* must be constructed from acacia wood, upright – *omdim*, "to teach the rule that the planks for the *Mishkan* must be cut from the acacia tree parallel to the direction of the tree's original growth (*derech gidulo*)" (*Sukkah* 45b). If *derech gidulo* is absent, the object itself is invalid. My former high-school principal, Rav Eliyahu Safran, elucidates that this was reason enough for Ya'akov Avinu to bring the *shittim* trees with him to Egypt and not leave them in the wilderness for his children to find on their own. It was important for them to see how the trees grew – standing and upright – so that they could see how they too should grow *derech gidulo*, with pride and confidence.

This message resonates particularly strongly as we celebrate Tu B'Shvat. The holiday, occurring in the depths of winter when trees appear lifeless, celebrates the hidden renewal stirring beneath the surface. Like Ya'akov's acacia trees, which waited generations to fulfill their purpose, the seemingly dormant trees contain within them the promise of spring's renewal. The Rebbe of Kotzk taught that the acacia trees, planted with pure intention and nurtured through years of exile, carried within them the tears and prayers of generations. These weren't merely construction materials; they were living testimonies to the power of Jewish hope and perseverance.

In our own times, as we face periods of darkness and uncertainty, the message of Ya'akov's acacia trees becomes ever more relevant; they remind us that even in war, we must plant seeds of triumph, and even in winter, we must prepare for spring. Just as he planted for a future he would not personally see, we too are called upon to act with faith and hope in the future redemption. Each positive action we take, each *mitzvah* we perform, each kindness we share, is like planting an acacia tree – an investment in the future that may bear fruit in ways we cannot yet imagine!



### Rabbanit Shani Taragin

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# Zephaniah's Cry: Don't Rely on America!

Rabbi Elie Mischel

**O**n March 25, 1955, a joyous wedding took place in Patish, a Jewish community in southern Israel near the Gaza border. The celebration, however, didn't last long. A group of fed-ayeen Arab terrorists from Gaza stormed the wedding, hurling grenades and opening fire on the guests. The attack left 19 people wounded, and 22-year-old Varda Friedman, who had come to Patish to help as a social worker, was killed.

Arriving two days later to express support for the community, David Ben-Gurion, then serving as Defense Minister after a year-long retirement from politics, was dismayed to see residents preparing to abandon their homes due to safety concerns. Several days later, he forcefully advocated for a plan he deemed the most logical solution: Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip. Prime Minister Moshe Sharet vehemently opposed the plan, fearing it would invite severe international backlash.

Ben-Gurion persisted. A month later, at an IDF parade, he gave a speech that is remembered in Israel to this day: "As a member of the Jewish people I say: With all due respect to the institutions of the United Nations and its members, until Yishayahu's prophecy that 'nation shall not lift up sword against nation' is fulfilled, and as long as our neighbors plot to destroy us, we won't have security unless it's through our own strength... In our region, acts of murder and sabotage, robbery and trespassing by our neighbors are becoming more and more frequent, and we must put an end to it - even if no one else wants to or is able to do so."

Sixty years later, Israelis are still debating whether Israel should rely on other nations in its battle against Islamic terror. Should Israel put its faith in America and defer to its wishes?

The prophet Zephaniah describes a fundamental change that will take place in Israel at the end of days - a shift that must occur for Israel to achieve its mission. "On that day you shall not be ashamed

of all your deeds with which you rebelled against Me... And I will leave over in your midst a humble and poor people, and they shall take shelter in the name of the L-rd... For they shall graze and lie down, with no one to cause them to shudder" (Zephaniah 3:11-13). Zephaniah prophesies that Israel will learn true humility, and because of that, she will no longer have to be afraid. But how, exactly, will this change come about?

Malbim explains: "In earlier times... Israel established alliances with other powerful nations, asking them for military assistance. Because they relied on these powerful nations, they learned from their evil ways. But at the end of days, when all of the nations recognize G-d and serve Him, Israel will no longer sin, because 'no one will cause them to shudder,' and they will no longer learn from those nations' [false] ideologies and [evil] deeds."

Zephaniah places the blame for Israel's suffering squarely on its dependence on powerful nations - nations like the United States. Ever since October 7, Israel's complex relationship with America has impeded the course of its righteous war against Hamas and Hezbollah. Though America supplies Israel with much of its weaponry and ammunition, this largesse comes at a very steep cost. At any moment, the United States can withhold military aid, leaving Israel in a dangerously vulnerable position.

But as Malbim argues, Israel's reliance on the United States extends beyond military dependency. Israel's unhealthy reliance on the US makes it uniquely vulnerable to damaging cultural influences from America. Far too many Israelis place the US on a pedestal, hungrily absorbing American movies, music and ideologies. America's role as Israel's influential "big brother" means that its woke culture and moral confusion have an outsized influence on Israel's own culture. "The voice is the voice of Ya'akov, but the hands are the hands of Eisav" (Bereishit 27:22). Ya'akov is distinguished by his voice, his words

and ideas, while Eisav is distinguished by his hands, his physical power. But today, because Ya'akov's descendants rely upon Eisav for physical support, they also revere the "voice of Eisav," which corrupts and cheapens Israeli culture.<sup>1</sup>

This is not a condemnation of America. Throughout its history, the US has been a nation of extraordinary kindness, rebuilding Europe after World War II and intervening in humanitarian crises overseas. For hundreds of years, it offered a safe haven to persecuted Jews all over the world. The problem is not that America is Israel's greatest ally, but that Israel places its trust in America.

Israel's strength lies not in being a superpower, but in its potential as a moral and spiritual guide for the world. "I will make you a light of nations, so that My salvation shall be until the end of the earth" (Yishayahu 49:6). Our mission is to shape global culture, not to be shaped by it. When we learn to place our trust solely in G-d, we will become the light unto the nations we are destined to be. "From Zion will come forth Torah, and the word of G-d from Jerusalem" (Yishayahu 2:2).

1. Rabbi Moshe Avigdor Amiel, *Hegyonot El Ami*, Genesis, 350



Scan here to purchase R' Mischel's book.



**Rabbi Elie Mischel**

is the Editor of HaMizrachi magazine and the author of *The War Against the Bible: Ishmael, Esau and Israel at the End Times* (2024), available by scanning the QR code above.



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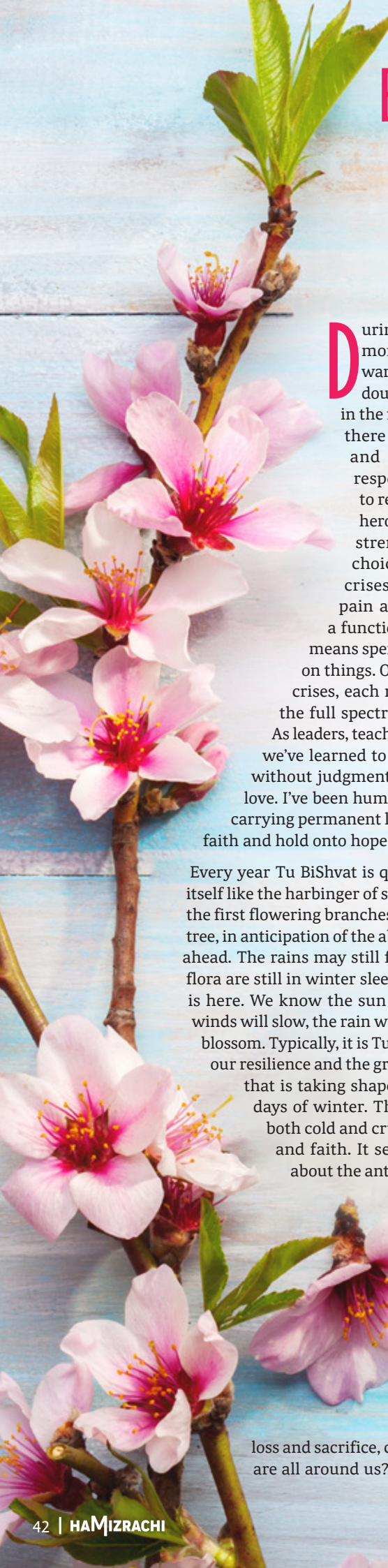


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# Embracing the Metaphors of Growth Amidst the Crises of Life

CB Neugroschl



**D**uring these last few years, and more specifically during the war, I'm struck by the choice to double down on faith and hope in the face of crisis. When, in fact, there is a full menu of choices and many other reasonable responses that I have learned to respect, this choice becomes heroic and a source of renewed strength for many. Faith is a choice that not only survives crises, it sustains us, even in pain and with loss. Perhaps it's a function of my age; turning fifty means spending more time reflecting on things. Over time, we witness more crises, each met with responses across the full spectrum of human experience. As leaders, teachers, friends, and neighbors, we've learned to be present in others' pain without judgment, offering acceptance and love. I've been humbled by those who, despite carrying permanent loss, choose to deepen their faith and hold onto hope for brighter days.

Every year Tu BiShvat is quite moving; it announces itself like the harbinger of spring. On cue, we celebrate the first flowering branches of the *shkedia*, the almond tree, in anticipation of the abundant growth that is still ahead. The rains may still fall; most of our fields and flora are still in winter sleep; but the signal of change is here. We know the sun will get stronger and the winds will slow, the rain will stop and the flowers will blossom. Typically, it is Tu BiShvat that reminds us of our resilience and the growth that will emerge, and that is taking shape, even during the hardest days of winter. This year's winter has been both cold and cruel and also full of courage and faith. It seems trite to talk or write about the anticipation of spring as if the coming growth could alleviate the immeasurable losses that we've sustained. How do we come to this year's Tu BiShvat with the memories of strength and resilience, loss and sacrifice, community and legacy that are all around us? In truth, this year, it feels

like Tu BiShvat is late, as if the calendar and the agricultural cycle hasn't quite caught up with where we all are. Every day we've waited for the blossoms of spring; for the light and warmth of spring, for the world to see the courage and the strength that *Am Yisrael* has demonstrated and endured throughout this long winter of endless war.

With the arrival of Tu BiShvat, this year, inspired by the charge of Rachel Goldberg-Polin, our generation's Mother Rachel, that "hope is mandatory," I'm choosing to embrace the opportunity to explore the metaphors of growth inherent in this *chag*. Let's consider the metaphor of the almond tree and branch – emblematic of Tu BiShvat – and the ideas it can offer us this year, with the hope that they can accompany us on this long road towards "spring" and the season of redemption.

On the surface, the emergence of the whitish pink blossoms of the almond tree represents an unending cycle of growth that is inherent in nature. Spiritually, we can embrace the message that growth is a constant, and our faith remains strong even while we endure winter and stagnation. The idea that we note and celebrate the hints of growth even when winter still reigns feels especially poignant this year. We are certainly in the midst of pain, and with it, have witnessed tremendous faith which serves as a beacon to light the way, or even as a life jacket, protecting us from the current dangers, and sustaining us for the future.

Where else in our tradition does this imagery of the almond branch intensify its force? Both Moshe and Yirmiyahu are leaders charged to lead a nation in crisis towards faith and both wield the powerful almond branch. Rav Ya'akov Medan contends that throughout the exodus and desert wanderings, Moshe (and occasionally Aharon) wielded a single, consistent rod as an instrument of divine miracles. When this same staff later sprouted almond blossoms in the Tent of Meeting, we realize its nature as an almond branch had been present from the beginning: "And Moshe went into the Tent of Meeting, and behold, Aharon's rod for the house of Levi had sprouted: it had brought forth sprouts, produced blossoms, and borne almonds" (Bamidbar 17:23).

Thus, when we celebrate the almond tree's blossoms we are called to imagine it as a signal, a beacon for miracles, for signs and wonders, for plagues and punishments, and for facilitating redemption. Interestingly, Rav Medan suggests another hint to redemption within the almond tree is that the almond tree blossoms ahead of schedule, so to speak, by emerging nearly two months before the full onset of spring. In this way, it represents a certain disruptive quality, embedded in nature. Like the almond tree that blooms out of season, redemption defies natural timing. Just as miracles transcend the ordinary course of



nature, they cannot be bound by our expectations of when they should occur. Moshe's use of the *mateh* as a tool for miracles, for breaking the rules of nature, reminds us that redemption can come *k'heref ayin* – in the blink of an eye – ahead of any anticipated schedule.

Rav Medan writes: "Indeed, like an almond tree, which rushes ahead to blossom and herald the spring before it actually arrives, the rod of Moshe is similarly always in a rush. All of its governance of the people of Israel is in haste, in a hurry, unnatural. Miraculous governance. And the whole essence of a miracle is skipping the intermediate stages, jumping ahead of the schedule, ahead of natural development."<sup>1</sup> Just as there is haste, a breaking of the natural process, in the redemption of Israel from Egypt, may the arrival of this year's almond blossoms speed up the miraculous and enduring redemption for *Am Yisrael*. I know so many of us are praying for just that, every single day!

Still, Rav Medan reminds us that while the almond tree blossoms first it is also the first to lose its blossoms. Similarly, the hasty redemption that Moshe's *mateh* enabled in Egypt was not sustained. Its impact withered and the people lost faith. This is demonstrated through the staff at *Mei Merivah*, resulting in Moshe and the Exodus generation being unable to enter the Land of Israel. The miraculous and hasty path of redemption lacked the endurance needed to forge a lasting bond between the Jewish nation and the Holy Land. Instead, we find that only a nation willing to fight and sacrifice for the land became the generation blessed to settle securely within it. We can view and understand these biblical generations in a new light this year as we pray for a final and lasting end to the current war and for peace and redemption at last!

Yirmiyahu's prophecy was also consecrated with the almond branch: "And the word of Hashem came to me, saying: 'What do you see, Yirmiyahu?' And I said, 'I see a rod of an almond tree.' Then the L-rd said to me, 'You have seen well, for I am watchful over My word to perform it'" (Yirmiyahu 1:11-12). Though this message portends swift destruction for Israel, we now understand that the almond branch embodies dual powers. The haste

of redemption manifests when the almond branch propels us forward with miraculous force because waiting is no longer possible. The hasty destruction comes when we fail to heed divine prophecy and underestimate the threats that surround us.

As we observe this season's new blossoms, their delicate white and pink buds mirror the Jewish people's nature. We are bound to natural cycles – the predictable arrival of seasons, our innate fears and frustrations taking root. Yet we are also nature's disruptors, operating on divine time where miracles remain both real and accessible. We embrace both pain and fear alongside faith and fortitude as equal partners in sustaining our prayers and driving us toward a better future. Like the almond tree, this duality defines us.

On Tu BiShvat this year, as we celebrate the blossoms, we welcome a season of both natural and supernatural growth. We know that even as petals fall, our people maintain an unwavering faith to plant and harvest, in abundance and beauty, with peace and security, so that our land and our people may be delivered through divine salvation and the final redemption. This is my prayer for Tu BiShvat 5785. *Keyn yehi ratzon*.

1. Rav Ya'akov Medan, *The Almond Tree*, <https://etzion.org.il/en/holidays/tu-bishvat/almond-tree>



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# The National Significance of the Land

Rabbi Moshe Avigdor Amiel zt”l

*In 1901, representatives at the Fifth Zionist Congress in Basel voted to create Keren Kayemet LeYisrael (KKL), to purchase land in Israel for the Zionist movement. Raising money from Jews around the world, KKL bought land across Eretz Yisrael, on which places like Tel Aviv, new neighborhoods in Yerushalayim and countless kibbutzim were established. From its inception, KKL was also instrumental in planting forests and nature reserves, as well as educational initiatives. Today, KKL owns and manages some 13% of all the land of Israel. KKL, through the World Zionist Congress, continues to have a huge influence on education in Israel and around the world.*

*In 1940, Rabbi Moshe Avigdor Amiel, the Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, spoke at an event about the significance of KKL. Rav Amiel was a member of Mizrachi, and his derashot contain powerful religious underpinnings for the Zionist movement (for a full profile of Rav Amiel, see “A Prophet of Truth” in the Tisha B’Av 5784 Edition of HaMizrachi by Rabbi Elie Mischel). In honor of Tu B’Shvat, we publish a translation of his words, extolling the religious significance of our national return to our land.*

**I**n the Diaspora we did not have cities or villages or settlements, because the settlements were not ours. Instead, we based our public life on the foundation of communities. We had ancient and very important *kehillot*, communities, and every community had communal funds, *keranot*, that were considered to be permanent and even eternal. But what came of all these funds? All of them were like dust that scatters, like a fleeting dream. And all of this why? Because in truth, without land we also have no hold on our communities. The land is their foundation. The Sages spoke well when they said that “The tribe of Levi is not called community, for it is written, ‘Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a community of peoples...’ He who has a possession is designated a ‘community,’ but he who has no possession is not designated a ‘community’” (*Horiyot* 6b). See how far the matter goes. The tribe of Levi, the most elite of all the tribes, from which came the

*kohanim* who dwelled always in G-d’s *mikdash* and brought sacrifices to the G-d of Israel and were constantly immersed in Torah and service of G-d – and yet they were not considered a “community” because they did not possess land. This is an important teaching for all those who thought to establish our national life on the foundation of communities and saw this as our unique mission. Reality came and smacked them in the face and confirmed the truth of the Sages’ words, that “He who has a possession is designated a ‘community,’ but he who has no possession is not designated a ‘community.’”

There is no nation in the world that from the beginning of its formation was so connected to the land as our nation. Only Judaism gave the name “Adam” to the first man because he was created from the earth. That is to say, someone without land lacks not just property, but also their fundamental human essence – their connection to “Adam” – making them incomplete as a person. This is especially true for nations: a nation without land is incomplete not just in its national character, but each individual member’s connection to their “Adam” essence is also diminished...





“The Sages decreed that the ‘*Eretz HaAmim*,’ the lands of the other nations, are considered impure,” and this impurity is not only connected to the land itself but even to the air... and this impurity comes because this is “the land of the nations.” On the one hand there is the ‘*Eretz HaAmim*,’ and on the other, ‘*Eretz Yisrael*.’ *Eretz HaAmim* belongs to all the other nations with the exception of the people of Israel, and so our dwelling there can only be a temporary dwelling. And *Eretz Yisrael* cannot exist without *Eretz*, without *land*. And who is concerned that we should have *Eretz*, *land*, in *Eretz Yisrael*, if not the *Keren Kayemet LeYisrael*?

We must know that while moveable items are acquired through the acquisition of land (מְטַלְטְלֵיךְ נִקְנִין אֶגֶב קַרְקַע), land is not acquired through moveable items. This is an iron rule in real life, that the one who owns the land will ultimately acquire the moveable items. This was our mistake in the Diaspora, that we were satisfied with moveable items, while they, the gentiles, had land. And we see that in the end, they acquired our moveable items through their ownership of the land. We will make this very same mistake in *Eretz Yisrael* if we are satisfied with building cities and glorious homes that rise up to the heavens, but leave the villages and the land to the Arabs. For in the end, they will acquire everything through their ownership of the Land...

There were those who believed that it was our “mission” to be scattered in exile forever, in order to spiritually influence the nations. But what do we see? We did not influence them, but rather they influenced us! Why? Because we are slaves in exile. This is typical: the Sages always referred to the master as the “*rav*.” “What a slave acquires, his *rav* acquires.” “The hand of a slave is like the hand of his *rav*.” The Sages used this word “*rav*” to emphasize that the master is not merely his slave’s master but also his “*rav*,” his *teacher*. The slave is the student! The slave does not only fear his master, but also possesses the awe of a student before his teacher, an awe similar to the “awe of heaven.” It is true – we *do* have a mission to fulfill, but it can only be fulfilled in *Eretz Yisrael*, about which is said, “For from Zion shall come forth Torah” (Yishayahu 2:3).

Do we really need to seek proofs from the written Torah and oral Torah to prove that redeeming the Land from the hands of foreigners is a great *mitzvah*? The *Rishonim* tell us that logic, *sevara*, is also from the Torah. When the *Gemara* seeks proof for the principle that “Anyone making a claim against another

person has the burden of proof (הַמוֹצִיא מִחֲבֵרוֹ עָלָיו הַרְאִיָּה),” it asks “Do we need verses to tell us this? Is it not common sense that if a man has pain he visits the healer?”... Is there any greater pain than the lack of land beneath our feet? Is there any greater disgrace than the disgrace of “Behold and see our disgrace – our inheritance has been turned over to strangers” (Eicha 5:1). And is there any greater healing for this illness than the *mitzvah* of redeeming our land?...

If in the past we had to warn, “Know what is above you” (*Pirkei Avot* 2:1), today we must warn, “Know what is **beneath** you.” Beneath you – the land beneath your feet, “your land, which strangers devour in your presence” (Yishayahu 1:7). She is yearning, begging, to be redeemed.

If we would want to prove this through the words of the Sages, the sharpest teaching is this: “In all the Land of Israel there is no ground more rocky than at Chevron” (*Ketubot* 112a). Rashi explains there, “It is a rocky area and not appropriate for fruit trees like the rest of the Land, and therefore it was set aside to bury the dead.” Consider that the *Me’arat HaMachpelah* is holy not only to Israel but to all of the nations of the world. Nevertheless, when we are involved in planting – plowing at the time of plowing, planting at the time of planting and reaping at the time of reaping – this is *more* precious to G-d than Chevron! And if only the land in Chevron was capable of being planted, this land would not have been set aside even for the graves of our holy forefathers! Rather, we would have sought out a different place for them, a place incapable of being planted.

These words penetrate deeply and show us how great the *mitzvah* of settling the Land of Israel truly is!

● From “*Ezer el Ami, Darka shel Uma*”, 117–119.  
Translated by Rabbi Elie Mischel.



# JEW'S with VIEWS

We asked five accomplished Jews from around the world: Which act of *chesed* during this war has touched you most deeply?



## Dr Danny Lamm AM

**B**ased on personal experience, I cannot single out one act of *chesed*, but since October 7th and during several subsequent visits to Israel, we have witnessed tremendous acts of *chesed* by *Am Yisrael* both in Israel and the Diaspora for *chayalim* and their families. There has never been such a profound demonstration of *הַאֲחִיכֶם יְבוֹאוּ לְמִלְחָמָה וְאַתֶּם כֹּל יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲרֵבִים זֶה לָזֶה* (all Israel is responsible for one another), with unprecedented mutual support for our nation during wartime.

Over 300,000 men and women spontaneously returned to Israel to volunteer their services to the IDF because they rejected the notion of *הַאֲחִיכֶם יְבוֹאוּ לְמִלְחָמָה וְאַתֶּם כֹּל יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲרֵבִים זֶה לָזֶה* (shall your brothers go to war while you sit here).

Tremendous fundraising efforts, conducted both in Israel and the Diaspora, supported soldiers in the war effort, families of soldiers, and displaced citizens in countless ways, demonstrating extraordinary *chesed*.

*Am Yisrael Chai.*

*Dr. Danny Lamm AM serves as the Deputy Chairman of World Mizrahi and President of Mizrahi Australia. His distinguished leadership roles include Past President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, Immediate Past President of the Zionist Federation of Australia, and Past Vice President of the World Jewish Congress.*



## Jo Grose

**D**uring the chaos of October 7th, as IDF units gathered across Israel, Tel Aviv restaurateur Yotam “Dok” Doktor recognized an urgent need to feed troops. His team quickly prepared thousands of meals, only to discover that two-thirds of the intended recipients kept kosher, making much of their first delivery unusable.

Undeterred, Dok worked with the Tel Aviv Rabbinat to secure emergency kosher certification. His initiative sparked a movement: restaurants throughout Israeli cities obtained emergency certification, welcomed *mashgichim*, closed on Shabbat, and transformed their spaces into meal preparation centers for the IDF and displaced northern families.

This story resonates on three levels: Dok’s swift creativity and leadership in crisis, the practical role religious authorities played in emergency response, and most importantly, as a powerful demonstration of respect and *achdut*. It exemplifies how understanding others’ needs – whether in crisis or daily life – defines true leadership.

*Jo Grose became Chief Executive of the United Synagogue in February 2023, having previously served as Director of Communities and Strategy, where she oversaw rabbinic recruitment, community development, and pandemic response. Her prior roles include leadership positions at PajeS and PJ Library following a career in educational publishing. An active community member, she serves as a trustee of the Yavneh Foundation Trust.*





## Tzachi Megnagy

In the wake of the devastating Swords of Iron War, the sheer scale of loss is unimaginable. So many lives, so many names, so many stories – each one a universe. As the numbers grew, a haunting question emerged: how can we ensure that every precious soul is remembered, that none are forgotten in the endless tide of grief?

The “Kaddish for Every Soul” initiative was born from this moment of heartbreak – a project of love, led by Chesed Chaim V’Emet in partnership with Achim LaOref and World Mizrahi. Its mission is simple yet profound: to ensure that every person who fell during the war is honored through the ancient and sacred Jewish prayer of *Kaddish*.

For an entire year, day after day, individuals will rise to recite this prayer for each soul. This isn’t just an act of tradition – it’s an act of pure kindness. It’s a way of saying, “We see you. We remember you. You mattered.”

In a time of such darkness, this initiative is a light – a reminder that even in our deepest pain, we can come together to honor life and uphold the values of memory, unity, and love. No soul will be forgotten. This is our promise.

*Tzachi Megnagy is Secretary General of World Bnei Akiva. A graduate of Mercaz HaRav and Har Hamor Yeshivot and Herzog Academic College of Education, he is a certified tour guide in Israel and for heritage journeys to Poland. Previously, he headed the Center for Jewish Heritage at Heichal Shlomo. Tzachi lives in Jerusalem with his wife, Tzila, and their five children.*



## Tova Levine

There was, and still is, tremendous *chesed* being done in Israel and around the world for soldiers, the injured, grieving families, families of hostages, displaced families, and all those affected by the war. What stands out most in my mind is how non-kosher restaurants in Tel Aviv chose to make their food and facilities fully kosher, albeit temporarily, to prepare meals for soldiers and displaced families during the intense early days of the war here in Israel.

This act went beyond physical support – it demonstrated recognition that someone else’s values mattered more than their own. They wanted to care for people different from themselves, ensuring everyone could receive nourishing, home-cooked meals, even if that meant compromising their usual business practices and beliefs.

I believe this represents a step toward a world filled with *achdut*. It was inspiring to witness everyone rise above boundaries that had stood for many years. If we could carry forward even a fraction of what we experienced during that time, we would live in a more unified Israel and connected world.

*Tova Levine serves as the Mizrahi-OU-JLIC Co-Director on Campus at the Technion and Haifa University in Haifa, Israel, alongside her husband, Rabbi Evan Levine. Previously, she served as assistant rebbetzin at Hale Shule during her shlichut in Hale, Manchester, UK. She holds an MSW from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and lives in Haifa near the Technion with her husband and four children.*



## Rabbi Martin Skudicky

In the months following the outbreak of war, an extraordinary wave of *chesed* swept through *Am Yisrael*. While many rushed to serve on the frontlines or donate supplies, my most meaningful experience of *chesed* came through my wife’s initiative to prepare weekly meals for *milu’im* families.

These families – often mothers at home with children – faced the enormous challenge of maintaining daily life while their husbands and fathers served in the army. Everyone sought to play their part, and this became ours. Each week, I would return home only to be immediately dispatched, often with my oldest daughter Emunah, to deliver meals to nearby *milu’im* families.

The most remarkable aspect was the consistent response at each doorstep: genuine appreciation and warm smiles. The interaction would invariably follow the same pattern – an exhausted mother, often carrying one child while others played inside, would say, “Thank you so much, you guys are amazing, this is such a huge help.” To which I would respond, “Not at all, thank you so much, you guys are amazing!”

The verse in Tehillim 89:3 says “the world is built on kindness.” Indeed, we will rebuild with the kindness that defines our nation. May we continue to give to one another with love and, *b’ezrat Hashem*, see Hashem respond in kind with the rebuilding of the *Beit HaMikdash* and the ultimate redemption speedily in our days.

*Rabbi Martin Skudicky serves as the Rabbi of Bnei Akiva South Africa and teaches at Yeshiva College School. Recently returning to South Africa with his family, he brings inspiration from his studies in Israel, where he received semicha through the World Mizrahi Musmachim program. Rabbi Skudicky is passionate about Jewish education and community building.*



# Planting the Seeds of Purim on Tu BiShvat

Emma Katz

“**W**e begin to inquire regarding the laws of Pesach thirty days in advance. While one might assume this allows sufficient preparation time, Rabbi Yitzchak of Neshchiz (the *Toldos Yitzchak*) offers a deeper interpretation: the spiritual elements of a holiday begin to emerge thirty days prior, allowing us to connect with its essence.

As we celebrate Tu BiShvat, we enter the thirty-day period before Purim, gaining access to Purim’s spiritual essence. But what connects Tu BiShvat and Purim? The answer lies in one element central to both: the tree.

When Haman discovers Mordechai’s refusal to bow to him, he returns home enraged, seeking counsel from his wife Zeresh about how to punish this personal affront. Zeresh responds immediately:

“Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, ‘Have gallows erected fifty cubits high, and tomorrow tell the king to have Mordechai hanged on it. Then you will be able to go in good spirits with the king to the feast.’ Haman was pleased with the idea and erected the gallows” (Esther 5:14).

Zeresh proposes building a tree for Mordechai’s execution – not only to end his life but to publicly humiliate him and deter others from disrespecting Haman. However, fate takes an ironic turn. “Then Charvonah, one of the chamberlains that attended the king, said, ‘In addition, there is the gallows that Haman erected for Mordechai, who spoke for the king’s good, standing at Haman’s house, fifty cubits high!’ ‘Hang him upon it!’ said the king. And they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordechai and the king’s wrath abated” (Esther 7:9–10).

This tree represents “*hikdim refuah l’makah*” – the solution Hashem provides before we

even comprehend the challenge. Before anyone knew of Haman’s plot against the Jews, Hashem had him construct the instrument of his own demise.

This tree, built by Haman, forges the spiritual connection between Tu BiShvat and Purim. Tu BiShvat marks the *Rosh Hashanah l’ilanot*, the new year for trees. People often question why we celebrate trees when branches stand bare, rather than during summer’s full bloom. The *Ziv Haminhagim* explains: though trees appear lifeless, sap begins flowing within them during winter. The leaves and fruits that will emerge in spring and summer are being prepared now, hidden from view.

Tu BiShvat teaches us to recognize this potential. Rather than celebrating visible achievements, we acknowledge the renewal beginning to stir beneath the surface. In our lives, we might look at the calendar, weather forecast, or world events and see only endless gloom. Tu BiShvat reminds us that Hashem is already preparing spring, though it remains concealed. Just as Haman’s tree contained the seeds of salvation, so too are the elements of our ultimate redemption planted around us. As we celebrate Tu BiShvat, may we view the world as a tree, understanding how close we are to that salvation.



Emma Katz

is originally from Highland Park, NJ, earned her Bachelors degree in Judaic Studies and Education from Stern College for Women, and her Masters degree in Jewish Education from Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration. Emma served as the Director of NILL, the Women’s Initiative of the YU Torah Mitzion Kollel in Chicago for five years. Emma currently lives in Linden, NJ with her husband, Rabbi Yossi Katz, and their four children, where she serves as the Rebbetzin at Congregation Anshe Chesed, and as the Community Programs Coordinator for the OU Women’s Initiative. Chesed, and as the Community Programs Coordinator for the OU Women’s Initiative.



# TU BISHVAT: A SEASON OF GROWTH AND REDEMPTION!

## Rabbi Jonny Brull

**T**u BiShvat, the new year for trees, represents growth, renewal, and the enduring connection between *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael*. It reflects both the physical and spiritual journey of the Jewish people and underscores our role in the unfolding process of *geulah*.

The Torah commands: “When you come to the land and plant any fruit tree, you shall regard its fruit as forbidden (*orla*); for three years it will be forbidden to you, it shall not be eaten” (Vayikra 19:23). This *mitzvah* teaches patience and foresight, reminding us that planting is an investment in the future. The *Midrash Tanchuma* (Kedoshim 8) elaborates: “Even though you find the land full of goodness, do not say, ‘We will sit and not plant,’ but be diligent in planting... Just as you found trees planted by others, so too you must plant for your children.”

Planting in Israel is more than an agricultural act – it is a *mitzvah* that signifies hope, continuity, and partnership with Hashem. It reflects our faith in the future and our responsibility to ensure that the blessings of the Land endure for generations to come. When the Jewish people journeyed through the wilderness, they lamented the lack of produce: “There is no place of seed, fig, vine, or pomegranate” (Bamidbar 20:5). Hashem reassured them with a vision of abundance: “For Hashem your G-d is bringing you into a good Land... a Land of wheat, barley, vines, figs, and pomegranates” (Devarim 8:7-8). The *Midrash Tanchuma* (Kedoshim 7) emphasizes that this abundance is both a gift from Hashem and a responsibility: the Land’s bounty requires active

cultivation, reminding us that our blessings are tied to our efforts.

The prophet Yechezkel directly connects the flourishing of *Eretz Yisrael* to the redemption of *Am Yisrael*: “But you, O mountains of Israel, will yield your branches and bear your fruit for My people Israel, for they are soon to come” (Yechezkel 36:8). The *Gemara* cites Rabbi Abba, who describes this agricultural renewal as the clearest sign of redemption: “There is no clearer sign of redemption than this” (*Sanhedrin* 98a). Rashi explains that when the Land of Israel yields its fruit abundantly for the Jewish people, *geulah* is imminent. We see its fulfillment in the modern agricultural renaissance of *Medinat Yisrael*.

*Medinat Yisrael*, the sovereign state of the Jewish people in their ancient homeland, embodies this prophecy. The transformation of barren land into thriving fields and orchards is not merely an agricultural success – it is a testament to Hashem’s promises and a reflection of the redemption process unfolding in our days. The renewal of the land parallels the revival of the Jewish people, demonstrating the interwoven destiny of *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael*.

The life cycle of a tree mirrors the journey of *Am Yisrael*. As Iyov states: “For a tree has hope; if it is cut down, it will renew itself... at the scent of water, it will bud and bring forth branches like a sapling” (Iyov 14:7-9). This imagery captures the resilience of the Jewish people. Like a tree enduring harsh seasons, we have faced destruction and exile, yet our roots – our faith and Torah – remain alive. Redemption, like

a tree’s renewal, emerges from these deep roots.

The process of *geulah* unfolds gradually, akin to the seasons of a tree. Winter, with its dormancy, represents exile – a time of hidden growth. Spring marks the awakening of hope and renewal, while summer and autumn bring the fruition of Hashem’s promises. The *mitzvah* of *orla* reinforces this message: growth takes time, and its fruits are revealed only after years of nurturing.

Tu BiShvat invites us to actively participate in the redemption of *Eretz Yisrael*. Planting trees, cultivating the land, and fulfilling Hashem’s *mitzvot* reflect our *emunah* in His promises and our commitment to building a brighter future. Even in moments of stillness, Tu BiShvat reminds us that growth is happening beneath the surface. The fruits of our labor, though delayed, are certain, rooted in the eternal covenant between Hashem and His people. This Tu BiShvat, let us celebrate the remarkable flourishing of *Medinat Yisrael* and recommit to nurturing its growth – physically and spiritually – as we move closer to the ultimate redemption of *Am Yisrael*.



**Rabbi Jonny Brull**

is Rosh Kollel Torah MiTzion at Mizrahi Melbourne. He learned for ten years at Yeshivat Har Etzion, and has a B.Ed in Torah Shebe'al Peh and Hebrew Language from Herzog College and an M.A. in Jewish Education from the Hebrew University.



# Beyond Captivity: Healing from the Echoes of Abuse

Rabbi Shaanan Gelman

After 470 days of captivity, three of our hostages – Emily Damari, Romi Gonen, and Doron Steinbrecher – were released into the loving arms of their families and returned to their nation. As they were being transferred by the Red Cross representative, the Hamas captors elected to play one final sadistic and cynical game, handing the women a “gift bag” containing mementos from their time in Gaza and a certificate of release.

To the casual observer, the notion that anyone leaving behind the merciless barbarians of Gaza would be interested in a “goody bag” is absurd and deeply offensive. At the same time, it does not strike us as a foreign concept altogether.

As we were leaving *Mitzrayim*, G-d made sure to lead us out via a circuitous route – *derech erez Plishtim*, through the land of the Philistines (Shemot 13:17). The Torah explains the reason for this curiosity – lest the nation witness open war and choose to revert back to *Mitzrayim*. But why would we wish to return to the hands of our former captors? For centuries they subjugated us, tortured us, murdered our babies, dehumanized us – why revert to an abusive relationship?

The Torah teaches that, as ludicrous as it may seem, *Bnei Yisrael* held onto the sweet memories of their time in Egypt: “We remember the fish that we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic” (Bamidbar 11:5). It is difficult to understand how fish, cucumbers, watermelons, and onions would be more important to them than freedom itself, compelling them to consider going back to Egypt! How do we make sense of their self-destructive and self-sabotaging behavior?

Believe it or not, such outwardly irrational behavior patterns have a psychological explanation. Developed by British psychologist John Bowlby, Attachment Theory suggests that we are each born with a fundamental need to form an emotional bond with a parent or primary caretaker. Those bonds are forged almost immediately upon entering the world. If the attachment created is a healthy one, or in Bowlby’s words, secure, we have a greater chance of developing healthier relationships later in life. If, however, the initial attachment was insecure – for instance, if we felt unloved, abandoned, or G-d forbid, threatened – then we form anxious or avoidant strategies.

With this in mind, we can better appreciate the counterintuitive reaction the Jews had to leaving Egypt. How did we receive emotional support in our nascency? In the form of onions, watermelons, garlic, and cucumbers. That was how we defined love and support. Hence, the moment we experienced the slightest degree of discomfort and instability, such as war or hunger, a switch went off in our minds calling us back to that unmet attachment of our youth. This is why we desperately clamored to revisit Egypt, for it was the only source of love and acceptance we knew.

For this reason, G-d warned us to take the long-short way out of Egypt: “Lest the nation regret having left Egypt the moment they see war.” If we stayed close enough to Egypt, we would seek to fulfill that unrequited need to be loved and nurtured by the Egyptians.

How do we break the corrosive neediness to return to the same types of relationships? The answer is to deconstruct those attachments and form new healthy ones – to become a new nation. To recognize that

G-d didn’t just pull us out, but He desired to create a new parent-child connection. When we allow ourselves to be guided by Hashem, and we accept a new set of rules and ethics, we break the cycle of abuse. When we have our own system, we don’t need our former slave owners to validate us and provide us with support.

One of the most heart-warming aspects from the post-October 7th era is simultaneously one of the most heart-wrenching ones. Those who were quick to lend verbal support for us after the attacks were often (though not always) the quickest to turn on us as our victimhood went out of style. How we craved their love, their sympathy, and adulation! We sought what everyone seeks – acceptance by others, to be viewed as human. But we did not find love in the arms of our abusers, though we hoped for it; instead, we found it in a renewed connection to our people, our Land, and our tradition.

As the world offers us a compensatory token for our release from captivity, we ought to be circumspect. Do not be tempted to peer inside the “goody bag”. Let go of the fantasy that the Jew will one day become a beloved creature. That will only happen when we return to Hashem and our Jewish identity with self-confidence and *komemiyut*.



**Rabbi Shaanan Gelman**  
is the Senior Rabbi of Kehilat  
Chovevei Tzion in Skokie, Illinois.





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# 20 MORE THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT BEING A MATCHMAKER

Aleeza Ben Shalom

**A**t Shagririm Balev, anyone can be a matchmaker. That's why we've partnered with Aleeza Ben Shalom to bring you expert advice in this two-part series. Whether you're just starting out or want to improve, these tips will guide you. Here's part two – practical insights to help you set up your friends and make meaningful matches.

1. Be humble.
2. Work with someone who is relationship or marriage-minded rather than working with someone who is looking for a date.
3. A majority of people are looking for someone who has a "good sense of humor." What they really mean is they are looking for someone with "their" sense of humor.
4. Respect boundaries. Some people want more guidance and support, others less. Help according to their need, not yours. And don't be afraid to ask if you don't know what they want.
5. As Nike say: Just do it! Set people up!
6. People have tastes, preferences, and ideas that you will find weird. No judgment.
7. Confidentiality. (shhhh)
8. Setting up members of your family will be the hardest cases you work with. That means you need to respect them and their needs, even if you are still angry about the time he cut your ponytail off in your sleep. Be respectful or get out of the game.
9. Grow a thick skin and be okay with rejection. Your ideas will be rejected. It makes the ones that work even sweeter!
10. Keep your mind focused on the popular phrase "there is a lid for every pot." Even if you don't believe it.
11. Network – you never know who you will meet.
12. Don't underestimate anyone. I just heard about a delivery man who made a match. Who would have guessed!
13. Remember the world is really small and soul mates are closer than you imagine.
14. Follow up, follow up, follow up. Not all people will call you back. Make the effort, call again. Don't assume they aren't interested. No call back is not a rejection, it's simply no call back. People do have a life other than dating.
15. Help alleviate the burden of being single by being thoughtful. Remember small things like birthdays which can be challenging for someone who is marriage-minded. By relieving their burden you will enable them to be happier the next time you set them up.
16. Read articles, books and blogs on relationships. Become a relationship expert.
17. Do your homework. Investigate your ideas before presenting to others.
18. Have patience with yourself and others.
19. Be persistent, not annoying. If you think you have a great idea, ask once. If

you get turned down, ask a month later. If you get a second no, you can try a third time after another six months passes. If the person still isn't open perhaps it isn't a great idea.

20. Learn the art of persuasion. Use it only for the good to help people see the positive traits that you see.

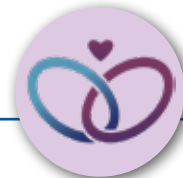
Send your own tips to the Shagririm Balev number below. We look forward to hearing from you!

● Originally published on Aish.com



**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.



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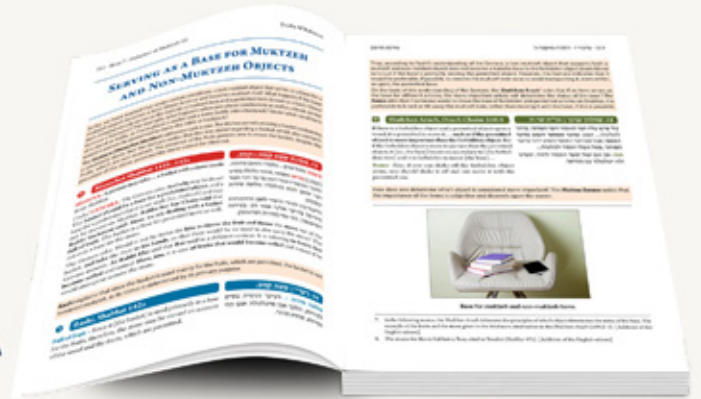
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**Katz Yeshiva High School**  
Boca Raton, FL

**Ma'ayanot High School for Girls**  
Teaneck, NJ

**Magen David Academy**  
Panamá Pacífico, Panama

**North Shore High School**  
Great Neck, NY

**Ohr HaTorah High School**  
Hollywood, FL

**Ohr HaTorah Middle School**  
Hollywood, FL

**Robert M. Beren Academy**  
Houston, TX

**SAR Academy**  
Bronx, NY

**TABC**  
Teaneck, NJ

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# HAMIZRACHI



COMPILED BY: JACQUI AUSTEN  
DESIGNED BY: LEAH RUBIN

KIDS CORNER

SOLVE THESE PUZZLES TO FIND THE TU BISHVAT RELATED WORDS!

 + **T** = \_\_\_\_\_

 - **UG** +  = \_\_\_\_\_

 +  = \_\_\_\_\_

**IS** +  + **L** = \_\_\_\_\_

 + **D** +  = \_\_\_\_\_

 +  +  = \_\_\_\_\_

 - **D** + **TH** +  = \_\_\_\_\_

 +  - **LL** +  = \_\_\_\_\_

CAN YOU FIND 15 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO PICTURES?





## MEET DOÑA GRACIA MENDES NASI



June 20, 1510 - November 3, 1569 (2 Tammuz 5270 - 13 Marcheshvan 5330)

When she reached her bat mitzvah, Beatriz de Luna discovered that her real name was Hannah Nasi and that her family had been secretly practicing their Judaism after being expelled from Spain. Hannah, known as Doña Gracia, was from one of the wealthiest families in Portugal, and so was her husband's family. When he died early into their marriage, her husband left his fortune to Doña Gracia. His brother did the same, making Doña Gracia the wealthiest woman of her time. She took the wealth and continued the important secret work her husband and his brother had done, taking care of the welfare of the exiled Jews to help them build new lives in the lands they had been forced to run to. She also used a kind of international intelligence agency that her husband had begun and she cared for the Jews wherever they were. She helped redeem captives, helped Jews escape and made it possible for the refugees to preserve their belongings and acclimate in a new land. She did many great things when she was alive, but her one dream was to build a state for the Jews who were being persecuted in Europe. She leased the city of Tiberias from the sultan at the time and she sent out emissaries to bring Jews spread out in the world to live there. Unfortunately Doña Gracia died a few years after the beginning of the foundation of the city and the dream was cut short.



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



## DID YOU KNOW?

- Today, there are over 200 million trees in Israel!
- Israel's national tree is the olive tree.
- A lot of foreign visitors come to Israel to learn about growing plants in a desert climate.

### Test Your Knowledge

What is the color of the flower produced by an olive tree?

In what two months can you see red anemone flowers in Israel bloom?

What were the 6 other trees that were in the running for being Israel's national tree?

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

### WEEKLY PARSHA FOR YOUTH!

**HaMizrachi Weekly Youth Edition & Chavruta**

Featuring Thought-Provoking Questions, Fun Activities, and Fascinating Insights!

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## MATCH THE FRUIT TO THE SEASON!

In Israel there is a best time for every fruit! Match the fruit to the season it tastes best.



SPRING



SUMMER



FALL



WINTER



ALL YEAR



CHERRY



PASSION FRUIT



STRAWBERRY



PEACH



APPLE



ORANGE



WATERMELON



MANGO



POMEGRANATE

Answer Key: Spring: Cherry, Watermelon, Mango / Summer: Peach / Fall: Pomegranate / Winter: Passion Fruit / All Year: Apples





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01

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02

03

### Top 3

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04

05

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