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Dedicated in memory of Cantor Jerome L. Simons

Israel at 70

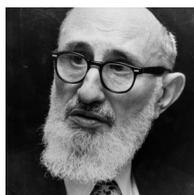


ישיבת רבנו יצחק אלחנן

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

An Affiliate of Yeshiva University

CENTER FOR THE JEWISH FUTURE



Commemorating the 25th
Yahrtzeit of Rabbi Joseph B.
Soloveitchik zt"l
The Rav on Religious Zionism



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from the 70 Years of the
State of Israel**

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**Commemorating
the 25th Yahrzeit
of Rabbi Joseph B.
Soloveitchik zt"l**
The Rav on Religious
Zionism

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KOL DODI DOFEK: A PRIMER

During his many years as Honorary President of the American Mizrahi, R. Soloveitchik delivered many addresses articulating his conception of Religious Zionism. Several of his Yiddish speeches were transcribed and published in Yiddish, along with Hebrew and English translations of varying quality. *Kol Dodi Dofek* (*KDD*), delivered on Yom haAtsmaut 1956, is his most ambitious statement and the only one that he later prepared for print (in Hebrew). Bearing in mind how little the Rav published in those years, the pains he took over *KDD* testify to the importance of the essay and its message. It was quickly adopted as part of the Israeli school curriculum in Jewish thought.

In truth, *KDD* is much more than a Zionist speech. It formulates a fundamental outlook on the nature of history and Jewish peoplehood. The ideas are of great importance and the structure is also significant.

Our discussion will look at the opening section only in passing. The Rav chooses to begin with a discussion of the Holocaust. In a word, his view is that we cannot presume to discern God's intentions and purposes in history, nor does Judaism encourage us to speculate about such matters. The halakhic imperative of suffering and catastrophe is to repent. Repentance means engaging in self-examination that leads to active response. The question we must ask ourselves is

not why God has brought about this misfortune, but what we are to do about it. As fundamental as this principle is for Jewish theology, it plays an equally important role in the practical realm. Those who passed the Holocaust years in the safety of North America must examine their own hearts with respect to their actions and omissions during those years. Those who are alive today (in 1956) must likewise think about their responsibilities in the face of new challenges and opportunities. Later, the Rav points to the tasks incumbent on his American audience. In the opening section he sets the stage for that part.

The Holocaust is a dark, incomprehensible chapter in Jewish

history. The next section — the famous “Six Knocks” — seems to restore a sense of divine purpose in history. At first blush, this section seems to undercut the Rav’s skepticism about our ability to explain history. Some readers feel as if the Rav, in his Zionist exuberance, had promptly forgotten everything he said at the outset.

To understand why this is not so, we should contrast the Rav’s view of Zionism with more militant or messianic strains in Religious Zionist thinking. Advocates for Religious Zionism often claim that contemporary events, properly interpreted, provide a clue to God’s plan for history. Armed with such knowledge we can be certain that redemption, messianic redemption, is taking place. This implies optimism that history is progressing irreversibly in a favorable direction. Furthermore, the progress envisioned is not merely mundane; it is unmistakable progress toward the messianic goal foretold by the prophets.

As we have seen, the Rav is skeptical about such claims to historical understanding. Whether or not the return of the Jewish people to their land, the reestablishment of Jewish sovereignty and other blessings are irreversible, whether or not they are indisputable harbingers of the messianic age, is not our business to determine. God’s ways are not ours. Whatever the ultimate outcome, we are obligated to respond to the reality we experience here and now. The Rav’s halakhic philosophy is about how we are to *act* rather than in how we *speculate* about God.

Speaking in 1956, the Rav enumerates six dramatic developments connected with the State of Israel. Note that he

does not take these remarkable events as a guide to future divine intention. He asserts the more modest thesis that in these events God is knocking on our door, in the phrase he adopts from Shir haShirim 5.

The first two are political: the very establishment of the state and its victory in 1948 and consequent expansion beyond the narrow borders of the 1947 Partition Plan were improbable, “almost supernatural.”

The third and fourth knocks address Jewish self-awareness. One dispels the notion that the long and abject exile of the Jews was a sign of their rejection by God. He attributes this view to Christian theology. Almost certainly, he derived it from John Henry Newman’s *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, which he studied carefully in the early 1950’s; elsewhere he quotes other ideas from this book approvingly. The other is that the state of Israel forces Jews who had despairingly embraced assimilation and self-hatred to reassess their identity as Jews.

The last two knocks address the physical situation of the Jew. The fifth, “perhaps the most important,” is the discovery that Jewish blood is not *hefker* (ownerless property); in other words, Jews are no longer expected to be passive victims. They are able to fight back. The sixth is that Jews today have a homeland, a place of refuge, a place where they will be taken in during times of persecution. These two knocks are entirely pragmatic in content. Even the secularist who cares nothing for Judaism or the Jewish spirit appreciates the value of the Zionist project for sheer Jewish survival and self-respect.

The Six Knocks state what God has done for us. But the important

question is how we (in 1956, the Rav’s audience; today, his readers) will respond. Before drawing practical conclusions, the Rav must deal with the fundamentals of Jewish identity. The reason for this digression is that the leaders of the State of Israel are not religious Jews. “We have complaints against certain leaders in Israel due to their attitude to traditional values and religious observance.” For many non-Zionist Orthodox Jews, including the “Israeli” branch of the Soloveichik family, this justifies a reciprocal attitude of hostility and theoretical indifference to the state.

The Rav’s immediate reply to this argument is that we, meaning Orthodox Jewry, are not free of fault. After all, we did not go to Israel in sufficient numbers to mold the society in its formative years. Even today, he says, speaking (let us remember) to American Orthodox Jews, we do not contribute financially as much as we should to building Torah institutions in Israel. From a halakhic perspective, our task is our own self-examination and repentance, not complaints about others.

The Rav’s deeper response is to analyze the nature of Jewish identity in order to properly understand our relationship to Jews who are concerned with Jewish welfare, even while they turn their backs on religious commitment. Against the Haredi tendency to narrow Jewish solidarity to the community of the committed, the Rav champions a broad conception of shared Jewish identity. Unlike certain “messianic” strands in Religious Zionism, his assessment of secular Zionism is based on what secular Zionists actually say and do rather than on the calculation that their work unconsciously paves the way for ultimate redemption.

There are two faces to Jewish identity: the covenant of fate (*goral*) and the covenant of destiny (*yeud*).

The Rav's distinction between fate and destiny is first presented as abstract phenomenological analysis and concrete sociological observation. In philosophical terms, a group constitutes a community of fate when four conditions are met: they have historical events in common; they identify with each other's suffering; they recognize responsibility in confronting challenges; and they engage in shared action. In fact, the Jewish people meet these criteria. Regardless of the degree or nature of religious commitment, Jews share a history; they feel the suffering of their fellow Jews (here the Rav invokes the famous image of the Siamese twins who are viewed as one person because when scalding water is poured on one head, both cry out in pain); they feel responsibility for other Jews, in good times and in bad; and they are capable of concerted action.

Fate is not chosen. We may try to escape our fate, as Jonah fled from his mission, but to no avail. Destiny is about choice. A nation, like an individual, "freely chooses an existence in which it finds the full realization of its historical experience." Having defined fate and destiny philosophically, the Rav now excavates the theological basis of the duality. The exodus from Egypt constituted the Jewish people in terms of shared fate: God extracted the people from slavery unilaterally. The covenant at Sinai gives the Jewish people its destiny and it is consequently negotiated between God and the nation. The Rav distinguishes two terms for the Jewish collective in the wilderness — the camp (*mahane*),

which comes together out of fear and is organized for military protection — and the congregation (*eda*, deriving from the same root as *edut*, testimony), which expresses the covenant of destiny.

The Rav goes on to explore the laws of conversion, in particular the two stages of *gerut*: circumcision and immersion. Circumcision is what introduces the male convert into the Jewish people. It represents the covenant of Egypt, the indelible physical mark of being separated from other nations to become part of the Jewish people. Immersion represents the Sinai covenant, the "elevation from life as it is to life infused with exalted vision." This section in the essay is of particular interest to *lamdanim* because of the Talmudic reasoning the Rav uses to buttress his argument. For example, he demonstrates, following Ramban, that once circumcision is performed as a halakhic act, as it is for an *eved Kenaani* (not merely as a surgical procedure), there is no need for repetition; it is done once and for all. Immersion must be repeated whenever the individual moves from a lower level of sanctity to a higher one (as when the *eved Kenaani* becomes a full-fledged convert).

Now, having completed his discourse on the religious response to evil and to historical opportunity and his analysis of Jewish peoplehood, the Rav moves back to his assessment of our present obligation. From a purely rhetorical point of view, returning to the main object of the speech is an appropriate way to finish. It leaves the audience with a direct message.

But the Rav does not merely rehash the points he made earlier. The entire frame of reference has been altered by the sections on Jewish peoplehood.

Before that portion of the discourse, the Rav spoke primarily in terms of what might be termed "Orthodox interests," what his son-in-law R. Aharon Lichtenstein sometimes called "tallit and tefillin issues." To be sure, he laments the insufficient population in the Negev — the peace initiatives of the early 1950's did not yet recognize Israel's permanent title to these areas and proposed their transfer to Arab (not yet Palestinian) sovereignty — and he alleges that American Jewry could have expedited settlement of these disputed territories. But this question too is approached in terms of the sanctity of Eretz Yisrael, rather than as a matter of physical security.

In the peroration, after the Rav has defined the duality of Jewish identity and the essential role that the covenant of fate plays in our religious outlook, the focus is not on religion and land but on the religious mandate of survival. At this point, the Rav's thesis is that the survival of the religiously committed community throughout the world is bound up with the fate of the *yishuv* in Israel. In this respect, the threat to Israel is no different than the threat to world Jewry in the Hitler years.

The covenant of fate implies not only the responsibility of religious Jews toward secular Jews; it also implies a common bond that enables the Rav, at the very end of his presentation, to chastise secular Zionism. Some militant Zionist ideologists and activists were bent on creating a "new Jew" who had nothing in common with traditional Judaism or traditional Jews, and who disdained identification with non-Israeli Jews. Others cared deeply about Jewish fate and devoted their lives to the Jewish people yet sinned against the covenant of destiny.

They did not believe, and did not want to believe, in the singular destiny of the Jewish people. All they can offer, in effect, is the compulsory fact of shared fate not the free partnership of a shared spiritual destiny. The Rav ends with the affirmation of the Jewish people's unique vocation: we are engaged in the world yet ineluctably and gloriously set apart.

Sixty years later, the Rav's theological discussions of divine Providence and Jewish identity are part of the permanent corpus of Jewish thought. What about the practical details of his discourse?

On one level, many American Jews, especially the "Yeshiva University" types, have responded to the Rav's challenge. When the Rav chose to build so much of his discourse on the "knocks" of Shir haShirim, he knew full well that R. Yehuda Halevi, in the *Kuzari*, had cited the same verses with respect to the Jewish return after the Babylonian exile. The woman who fails to respond to the man's knocking represents the failure of the Jewish people to go up to Israel in their multitudes. In 1956, aliya was not sufficiently a live option for American Jews, even Orthodox ones. Hence the Rav limited his call to less personal kinds of support. Today the percentage of our people who have made aliya is respectable, and they have done so for a combination of religious and Zionist motives, not under pressure of persecution. They have contributed mightily to the economic flourishing of Israel and to its educational institutions and in particular to the growth of religious education. Most of us have studied at Israeli yeshivot, so that our financial commitment to them is based more on gratitude than on altruism.

The Rav refers to the accusation of "dual loyalty" levelled against American Zionists. In those years these imputations emanated from America's entrenched elites who were intent on marginalizing the Jew. The dominant anti-Zionism of the time appealed straightforwardly to American self-interest rather than moral or pseudo-moral preaching: the Arabs had oil, the Jews did not; in the Cold War era, the interests of the United States dictated appeasing the Arabs rather than catering to a vocal minority group. Even then, the Rav appreciated the courage required of American Jews to stand up for Israel. In 1977 he warned Prime Minister Begin that such support could not be taken for granted, given that most American Jews identified with America and its culture.

The Rav was right. By then the cultural climate was changing. Nationalistic "America First" attempts to neutralize support for Israel were being replaced, especially in the conformist academic and media cultures, with ideological bullying intended to delegitimize Jews who failed to move in lockstep with the progressive agenda of the moment. This challenge is both a threat to Judaism in the Western world and an opportunity for young Jews to reassess their lives. The fourth of the Rav's knocks is still heard, albeit in a different way than the Rav recorded then.

Let me make it clear that our obligation to identify with Israel and to counter anti-Israel propaganda, even at the cost of our acceptance and toleration in powerful circles, does not mean that we must eschew any compromise on maximalist territorial claims or regard every Israeli action or omission as impeccable. Surely this

was not the Rav's position. In 1968 he ruled that decisions about land for peace should be left to military experts, not to rabbis. In 1982 he demanded that Prime Minister Begin appoint a commission of inquiry to investigate Israel's failure to prevent the massacres at the Sabra and Shattila refugee camps perpetrated by the Lebanese Christian militia allied to Israel. Yet there is an enormous distance between the counsels of prudence and criticism grounded in sorrow and love on the one hand, and virtually automatic and often ostentatious allegiance to the fashionable proclamations of the herd on the other.

The Rav was also right about the difficulty secularists faced in inventing the "new Hebrew man" and a new Israeli culture. The old dream of an Israel no longer "a people that dwells alone," but a small nation like any other nation, has been refuted by history. The ideal of a new culture, incorporating some fragments of traditional lore but independent of religious commitment, yet satisfying human spiritual yearning, has not come to pass. An increasingly potent Haredi minority may still champion an insular conception of Jewishness that ignores the covenant of fate. The greater danger is the one the Rav poses in his conclusion — the narrowing of the Israeli covenant of fate to ignore the larger Jewish people and the failure of secular culture to find a place for the covenant of destiny.

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THE FIVE DERASHOT AND THE RAV'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ZIONIST PROJECT

My husband has a relative who spent his public life fighting a bizarre war against Zionism and the State of Israel. An offended family member once asked this relative: What would the Jews who were interred in Displaced Persons camps after the Shoah have done without the help of various groups who smuggled them to Palestine?¹ He was completely unruffled by the question: They could have stayed right where they were, he replied, and learned Torah. This, of course, is an extremist's response and it would not be fair to view it as the position of the broader Yeshivish community (which in 1946 was shattered), then or thereafter.

The traditional communal rabbinic leaders, though, in the decades prior to World War II, had rejected the Zionist

movement, along with competing modernist movements that they viewed as mortal threats to the Torah way of life. It would not be unfair to assess their basic attitude as a passive one, resting on the bedrock principle that God would protect His people so long as they remained faithful to His laws. This "quietism" (to adopt the description that Lionel Trilling once ascribed to Chazal) is precisely what Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik came to reject as he gradually moved away from the negative reaction of his family and peers to Zionism. He addressed this fundamental distinction between a fatalistic approach [*goral*] and an activist approach seeking fulfillment of the destiny [*yi'ud*] of the Jewish people in the essay "Kol Dodi Dofek" based on a talk he gave in 1956.² Not surprisingly, that same distinction

— between a passive quietism and an active engagement with reality — underlies a talk he gave during those years to the members of the Hapoel HaMizrachi group, and which forms one of the essays in the collection now known as *Hamesh Derashot*, "And Joseph Dreamt a Dream."³

In this essay, the Rav analyzes two Biblical characters, Joseph the Dreamer and Abraham the Builder. Through his analysis of Joseph the Dreamer, or as the Rav depicts him, Biblical Joseph, the Rav develops the tension between *goral* and *yi'ud*, between a Jew who "is responding to the initiatives taken by others as they attempt to impose their vision of the Jews' place upon him," and a Jew who "chooses his own identity"; between a "Jew as object of the will of others or as subject of his own will."⁴

The young Joseph dreamt two dreams. The first dream featured sheaves of grain, encircling and bowing down to Joseph's sheaf in the middle. The second dream featured the sun, the moon and eleven stars, all bowing down to Joseph. In the Rav's reading, the context for the dispute between Joseph and his brothers was the Divine prophecy issued to Abraham that "your descendants will be strangers in an alien land." The brothers, though, focused on the fact that "Jacob dwelt in the land of his father's wanderings." In their view, life should continue as it had, and it was not their job or Jacob's to plan for changed circumstances that might arrive some time in the future. Joseph understood, though, that his two dreams foretold a rapidly approaching future, a future in which both the security of Jacob's family and a continuation of their way of life was in danger. For Joseph, the wheat represented a new economy and the celestial beings a new secular culture. The combination of the two dreams meant that the decree of *Brit ben haBetarim*⁵ would soon begin. The children of Abraham would find themselves strangers in a strange land, no longer living lives in "holiness and purity."⁶ Soon, Jacob and his family would have to confront a new society with "great and powerful technology creating wonders and changing the foundations of our life."⁷

Joseph feared that, "[i]f we will not be prepared for new conditions, the environment will swallow us! Our intellectual forces will completely assimilate" and only by preparing for the future that we be able to survive.⁸

Joseph advocated that it was necessary for Jacob's sons to put aside their shepherd's staff and embrace new

occupations. He insisted that they transition into farmers and builders. He wanted the family to learn how to cut stone and work with wood and metals, and not only rely on the production of woolen products. In short, he tried to prepare his family to adapt to new conditions.⁹ Joseph wanted his brothers to become Jews "of destiny and purpose," Jews who choose their "halakhic covenantal identity" even if this behavior also requires "historical, even political, behavior."¹⁰

Joseph's brothers strongly disagreed. They relished the "holiness and purity"¹¹ of their life in Canaan. They valued the freedom to live in isolation from the other nations. They cherished the opportunity to learn Torah as they grazed their sheep.

*They looked upon the future as a continuation of the present. They perceived all problems from within the framework of their life in Canaan, the land of their fathers' wanderings ... They did not need new frameworks or novel economic methods.*¹²

The brothers wanted to maintain the status quo.

Like the Biblical Joseph, the Joseph of 5662 (= 1902), i.e., the visionaries who founded Mirzahi that year, "had a dark foreboding of something terrifying, an apocryphal vision of catastrophe, of cataclysm, of tempest and imminent destruction." The sheaves of wheat hinted that the Jewish people:

*... would be enveloped by a new economic order. The lion's share of Jewry would be centered in the Western world, and society would be based on science where ... every scientific discovery will be publicized by the newspapers as the greatest sensation.*¹³

The Joseph of 5662:

*... unconsciously sensed that it was forbidden to rely on a continuation of the status quo, that great changes were about to occur in Jewish life for which we would have to be prepared. He sensed the advent of an era when there would be no yeshivot in Brisk, Vilna, and Minsk; when America would be turned into a place of Torah; and when Israel, the State of Israel, would become the core center of Torah.*¹⁴

The Rav's peers and, more important, his family, were opponents of Zionism in any form, including the religious variant.¹⁵ During his early years in America, the Rav was affiliated with Agudah. At some point after the war, though, he had a change of heart and became associated with and ultimately the leading rabbinic figure of the American religious Zionist movement.

The name for the Religious Zionist Movement, or Mizrahi as it is called in Hebrew, was coined from "*merkaz ruchani*," or spiritual center, and refers to the movement that was founded in 1902 [5662] by Rabbi Yitzchak Yakov Reines and others. Rabbi Reines' nascent movement was itself a response to a platform introduced by the Fifth Zionist Congress that had taken place the previous year, a platform that adopted the concept of Cultural, or Spiritual, Zionism. Cultural Zionism, led by, among others, Leo Motzkin, Martin Buber, and Chaim Weizmann, looked to revitalize Jewish culture via the Hebrew language.¹⁶ Secular learning and secular concepts of Judaism would replace part of the Orthodox program so that the State of Israel would not turn into a theocracy.¹⁷

In contrast, Religious Zionism, building on the ideas of the *Mevasrei Zion*, the "harbingers of Zion," sought to:

*Restore not only Jewish political freedom but also Jewish religion in the light of the Torah and its commandments... Judaism based on the commandments is a sine qua non for Jewish national life in the homeland.*¹⁸

While even the Mizrahi movement was beyond the pale for his family members and the rabbinic world from which he came, the Rav, like his Biblical namesake, looked back at the prewar landscape and concluded that the Mizrahi leaders had been correct. By identifying with Mizrahi, he was legitimizing a secular state of Israel and justifying cooperation with secular Jews in its maintenance. How did the Rav justify that decision? The most basic value was based on his inclination toward “*yi’ud*” rather than “*goral*,” of choosing to control our destiny, to whatever extent possible, rather than be victims of fate, “that a *Torat Hayyim* addresses the realities of the world rather than seeks an escape from them.”¹⁹

One of the Rav’s closest students and leading interpreters, Rabbi Walter Wurzberger, wrote as follows:

*The Rav’s z.t.l. endorsement of Religious Zionism is also closely related to his belief that taking the initiative in ameliorating natural, economic, social or political conditions, far from being a usurpation of divine prerogatives, represents a religiously mandated activity of becoming partners with God in the process of Creation.*²⁰

Equally important was the fact that the Rav also looked at all Jewish people as Bnei Avraham, a “nationalistic dimension of Jewishness” that:

... comes also to the fore in the Rav’s frequent references to the halakhic opinion that anyone who loses his life



*because of his Jewishness is regarded as having died al Kiddush haShem. He regarded this as precedent for his belief that anyone who gives up his life in the defense of the State of Israel should be viewed as having died al Kiddush haShem.*²¹

After all, “the Nazis persecuted all Jews, irrespective of their religious commitment or lack of same,”²² and for that reason the Rav admired the Zionist leadership for its “significant achievement in the ongoing struggle to create a focus of Jewish identity for Jewries which have lost their traditional moorings in the modern world.”²³

The Rav’s core belief was the primacy of halakha in expressing Jewish values; he insisted that halakha demands a sense of identification with all Jews, regardless of their religious convictions or practices.²⁴ He distinguished between standards for adjudicating halakhic decisions and standards for determining hashkafic or historical decisions. The former is determined by man, since once God gave the Torah to man “the rabbinic majority reigns supreme.”²⁵ The latter, however, is determined by God, who “decides as to whose

interpretation shall become the ‘law’ [historical development].”²⁶ This ruling is beyond dispute. In the controversy between Joseph of yore and his brothers thousands of years ago, God decided in accordance with Joseph’s interpretation of the historical process.²⁷ Similarly, in the debate over establishment of the State of Israel,

*... the Creator of the universe ... decided that the [historical] “law” will be as the Joseph of 5662 [religious Zionists] had predicted — in accordance with the view of him who had little faith in the future of East European Jewry and who dreamed of another land and other conditions.*²⁸

The Rav felt that the “Divine Providence ... employs secular Jews as instruments to bring to fruition His great plans regarding the land of Israel,”²⁹ and as such, we must work with those who are actively building the Jewish State. In reflecting about his choice to identify with Mirzahi, he believes that “there would be no place for Torah in Israel today were it not for the Mirzahi.”³⁰

If Joseph the Dreamer saw the need to plan for a new reality, Abraham the Builder erected the altars and offered the sacrifices upon which the Land of

Israel was acquired. Upon his arrival in the Land of Israel, Abraham built altars on four separate occasions as the Torah describes, and it was through this focus on sacrifice that he acquired a kinyan in the Land of Israel. The first altar that Abraham built was upon his entry into the Land, and on this altar he sacrificed his sense of belonging. Loneliness, “the loss of contact between man and the world in which he grew up, the world in which he was educated and in which he spent his childhood,” notes the Rav, “is one of the tragic experiences that can break a man.”³¹

In parallel, the sacrifice of loneliness was once again offered in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by members of the early aliyah movements, and by anyone who left behind family, friends, and community, who through their sacrifice helped to acquire and possess the land of Israel. All the builders of the land built “sacrificial altars.” During the War of Independence, during the pogroms of Tel Chai and Jaffa and Hebron, “when Jewish blood flowed throughout the length and breadth of the land of Israel; when the Arab bullet and the Arab knife did not distinguish between the Hebron Yeshiva students and leftwing kibbutzniks ... the entire Jewish settlement erected that great altar whereby the ancient possessory act of Abraham in respect of the land of Israel and the Lord of Israel was repeated.”³²

The second altar that Abraham built was constructed between Bet El and Ai.³³ Rashi, referring to the midrash in *Bereishit Rabbah*, explains that Abraham was praying for the welfare of his future children when they would be conquering the city of Ai

under the leadership of Joshua.³⁴ When discussing this altar, the Rav refers to ordeals of the early Zionists in working the land of Israel, and equates their work with suffering on behalf of acquiring the Torah since:

*There is no contradiction between building up the land and building up of the Torah, between breaking up the earth about the olive trees and clearing rods, and building yeshivot ... The crown of Torah bestows upon us our uniqueness and our individuality.*³⁵

The third altar that Abraham built also relates to the idea of children and preparing for their future. After Abraham separated from Lot, God appeared to him and promised him that his children shall be greater in number than the dust of the land. God commanded Abraham to walk around all four corners of the land which his descendants will be given.³⁶

The fourth and final altar is the one built on Har HaMoriah, where Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham was commanded to take Isaac together with two lads,³⁷ whom Rashi identifies as Ishmael and Eliezer.³⁸ Why was it necessary for Abraham to take his son by Hagar [Ishmael] and his *aide de camp* [Eliezer]? And furthermore, why were the two young men only able to accompany Abraham to the foot of the mountain? The Rav sees this story as a paradigm for how we are to get along with non-religious Jews, especially those who toiled to make the land of Israel habitable. There must have been some reason why Abraham needed his two companions. Perhaps Abraham would not have survived the journey to the mountain of Moriah if had gone alone with only Isaac. We must cooperate and work with those we live with. But we only cooperate to

a point. Our identity is at stake if we cooperate to a point of watering down ideals and sacrificing the basic tenets of the Torah.

*We, the members of Mizrahi, put into practice the philosophy formulated by Abraham in his declaration to the lads. To build a State of Israel, we march together with all the parties, because we believe that the State of Israel is the road that leads to Mount Moriah, and it is clear to us that we cannot succeed in this journey alone.*³⁹

While the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel convinced the Rav of “the correctness” of Mizrahi’s paths, the Rav notes the following caveat, extending the concept of sacrifice:

*I built an altar upon which I sacrificed sleepless nights, doubts and reservations ... The Mizrahi must understand that Jews like me ... who joined the movement and who draw their nourishment from the ancient Talmudic soil of Abaye and Rava, are in the category of Joseph. They are required to sacrifice on this altar their peace of mind as well as their social relationships and friendships. The Mirzahi must also understand that we do not use the phrase “Zionism plus religious” or “religious Zionism.” For us, there is only one unique noun — Torah. Israel is holy and dear because the Torah sanctified it and because the Torah’s future is tied to it.*⁴⁰

This switch was not an easy one for the Rav to contemplate. He faced opposition from his family and his peers. The switch was representative of his intellectual honesty and desire to provide a haven for the Jews.

But there is a limit to cooperation. In matters which relate to Mount Moriah, to matters that relate to halachic observance, we advance alone. There is to

*be no compromise regarding ... the final goal of our twice millennial journey back to the land of Israel and the ultimate transcendental-eschatological purpose and destination.*⁴¹

What, then, is the Rav's view on Zionism? The essay "And Joseph Dreamt a Dream," penned 60 years after the formation of the Mizrahi Movement, makes clear that the Rav saw Zionism as an extension of his general belief toward "man as an initiator, as active agent, as one who makes historical processes happen and promotes the achievement of social and historical objectives."⁴² How does this belief translate into action, especially in light of his reluctance to recite Hallel on Yom Ha'Atzmaut and his opinion toward aliyah?

Many have commented that the Rav's reluctance to recite Hallel on Yom Ha'Atzmaut stemmed a variety of halakhic considerations. Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, the Rav's son-in-law, noted that one major consideration was the Rav's understanding of *bal tosif*, the prohibition of adding mitzvot to the Torah.⁴³ Another consideration is the concept of *meharef u-megadef*, violation of the Talmudic principle that "He who recites Hallel every day is a blasphemer," since he is seeing God's presence in the miraculous and not in the providential.⁴⁴ Rabbi Moshe Meiselman, the Rav's nephew, notes that if the Rav was present at a minyan where Hallel was being recited on YH, "he simply stood there, silently, with his tallit over his head, until Hallel was concluded."⁴⁵

What was his attitude toward aliyah? Rabbi Meiselman notes that he heard the Rav discuss that the "Ramban's version of the mitzva to settle the Land of Israel is not mainstream halakha and is not relevant in

practice."⁴⁶ He did attempt to make aliyah in 1935 when he made what was to be his only visit to Israel, "wishing to build his home and his future" in the Land of Israel.⁴⁷ He did not receive the position of Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv and moved to Boston where he founded the Maimonides School in 1937. Yet it appears that he did consider another visit in the 1960's. In a poignant letter of response to Miriam Shiloh of Givat Washington,⁴⁸ he responds to her query about why he never made aliyah, especially since "now is a propitious time as well as a time of spiritual crisis" [she had just taught his essay "Kol Dodi Dofek" to her students]. His response, dated 17 Tammuz 1967, says the following:

Last year we decided, my wife z"l and I, to come to the Land and to spend six months there, to see the Land and the nation dwelling there. But many thoughts are in the heart of man, and what happened happened, and my sighs are many and my heart grieves! ... How could I now ascend to Jerusalem, when I am a man of a harsh and bitter spirit? G-d is not manifest when one is depressed, upset and pained. Madam need not justify her words. I, too, am a simple Jew. In the language of the Sages of Yavneh (Berachot 17), I would say: I am a teacher, and many work with the community in the field of Torah education, as teachers. My work is in the large city of New York, in an institution with many students, and their work is in Givat Washington or in another community in a small institution. Whether one does much or little, so long as one directs his heart toward Heaven. The work all of us do is dedicated to nurturing the values of Judaism, the ancestral tradition and the Torah of our masters, authors of the tradition and its sages.

It is over one hundred years since the formation of the Mizrahi, seventy years since the founding of the State of Israel, and 45 years since the Rav penned this article. Much has changed, and much remains the same. Not everyone who lives in Israel is a Zionist and not all Zionists believe that the focal point of the State of Israel should be Mount Moriah and the service of God. We tend to take for granted the existence of the State of Israel and perhaps are not fully aware of the significant contributions Israel has made in the worlds of science and culture. There are still sacrifices — far too many of them. But without the dream that Joseph dreamt, without his plans for a new future, where would we be today?

Endnotes

1 Many of the survivors did make it to mandatory Palestine, although the intransigence of the British who were enforcing the White Paper of 1939 frustrated the effort at every turn. There is a large and growing literature on the actions of President Truman and his administration following his receipt of the report prepared by Earl G. Harrison and his committee describing the desperate situation of the Jewish survivors. See, for instance, Angelika Konigseder and Juliane Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope: Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-World War II Germany* (Northwestern University Press 2001). A quick glance at some of the literature reveals that disappointingly, though not surprisingly, the actions of the administration in trying to get England to admit Jews in to Palestine is now mired in the same controversy as every other event relating to Jews settling the Land of Israel, in the battle between left, right and center over the legitimacy of the Zionist enterprise and the generosity (or duplicity) of the various nation-state actors depending on one's perspective. According to the *Holocaust Encyclopedia* of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, some 136,000 displaced Jews resettled in Eretz Israel, and over 80,000 in the U.S.

2 Rav Aharon Lichtenstein cites this very point, “the status of man as initiator, as active agent, as one who makes historical processes happen and promotes the achievement of social and historical objectives,” as the “alpha and omega of all forms of Zionism,” and as the key for understanding the Rav’s attitude toward Zionism. <http://www.gush.net/alei/14-02ral-zionism.htm>.

3 In a private communication, the Toras Horav Foundation confirmed that this talk was delivered in 1962. The derashot printed in the various editions over the years were delivered to the Mirzahi / HaPoel HaMizrachi membership between 1961 and 1966 (not 1962-1967 as the English volume indicated) but, except for the greetings sent in December, 1966, are not dated in the published volumes. The talks were given in Yiddish and four (plus the 1966 greetings) were published in Yiddish in 1967. A Hebrew translation of five derashot plus the greetings was issued in 1973 and an English translation of the Hebrew followed about ten years later. Page references in this article are to the Toras Horav reissue of the English version in 2002.

4 Gerald J. Blidstein [1989]. “On the Jewish People in the Writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.” *Tradition* 24,3, p. 28.

5 Bereishit 15, 13.

6 “And Joseph Dreamt a Dream” in *The Rav Speaks: Five Addresses on Israel, History, and the Jewish People*. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik 2002: Toras HoRav Foundation, p. 28.

7 Dream p. 28.

8 Dream p. 28.

9 Dream p. 27.

10 Blidstein, p. 28.

11 Dream p. 28.

12 Dream p. 29.

13 Dream p. 31.

14 Dream p. 3.

15 Rav Aaron Rakefet-Rothkoff, *The Rav: The World of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Vol. II*, pp. 112-116, (concerning R. Chaim, the Rav’s grandfather and R. Velvel, his uncle); it is true that the Rav’s father taught in the 1920’s in a Mizrahi seminary in Warsaw before coming to New York. Rakefet Vol. I p. 25-26; Shulamit Meiselman, *The Soloveitchik Heritage: A Daughter’s Memoir* (KTAV, 1995), 203-205. Rav Moshe was severely criticized for doing

so and he was cut off from the mainstream Yeshiva world, according to his daughter. (p. 216). That lesson was not lost on the Rav and it was not at all obvious that he would embrace Mizrahi.

16 Jewish Virtual Library, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/religious-zionism>, retrieved February 5, 2018.

17 Dream p. 35; the Rav observes that his grandfather loved Zion but wanted no part of Weizmann’s dream. On this point the Rav did not change his position when he became a Mizrahinik.

18 Jewish Virtual Library.

19 Walter Wurzbarger [1994], “Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik as Posek of Post-Modern Orthodoxy,” *Tradition* 29, 1, p.7.

20 Wurzbarger, p. 10.

21 Wurzbarger, p. 12.

22 Blidstein, p. 29.

23 Blidstein, p. 34.

24 Wurzbarger, p. 11.

25 Dream p. 25.

26 Dream p. 25.

27 Dream p. 32.

28 Dream p. 32.

29 Dream p. 36.

30 Dream p. 36.

31 Dream p. 25.

32 Dream p. 22.

33 Bereishit 12, 8.

34 *Bereishit Rabbah* 39, 16.

35 Dream p. 42.

36 Bereishit 13, 14-18.

37 Bereishit 22, 3.

38 Rashi ad loc based on *Pirkay deRabbi Eliezer* 31.

39 Dream p. 46.

40 Dream p. 36.

41 p. 47.

42 Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, “Rav Soloveitchik’s Approach to Zionism,” *Alei Etzion* 14, 2 2006.

43 In the article listed above, Rav Lichtenstein

draws an analogy from JT *Megillah* 1:7 about reciting Hallel on Purim.

44 Rabbi Moshe Meiselman, Communications, *Tradition* 33,2, 1999. In the original article, which appeared in 1998 in *Tradition* 33, 1, Rabbi Meiselman notes that the Rav explained that there are two ways in which “man sees God in nature. Some see God only in the miraculous. However, our obligation is to see God in the everyday process of nature. It is in this context that we recite the daily section of Psalms recited every morning, *pesukei de-zimra*, wherein we say *hak natan ve-lo ya’avor*, ‘He has given laws (to nature) that cannot be violated.’ Hallel, however, is for the miraculous. The Rav showed that Rashi says that only a prophet can distinguish between the providential and the miraculous. Hence, we may only say Hallel for a miracle identified by a prophet as such. Everything else remains providential. Someone who says Hallel every day sees God only in the miraculous and not in the providential. Similarly, the Rav maintained, someone who recites Hallel on non-miraculous events does so because he has skewed the importance of the providential aspect of God. He, too, is a blasphemer.”

45 It is worth noting that when Rabbi Meiselman consulted the Rav about what to do about reciting Hallel on Yom Ha’Atzmaut when Rabbi Meiselman was the Rosh Yeshiva at YULA, the Rav advised him not “to undermine his communal work.” As a result, writes Rabbi Meiselman, they would recite Hallel after the Kaddish Titkabel and not immediately after Shemoneh Esreh as would be customary on Yom Tov. This was a practice also recorded by Rabbi Walter Wurzbarger in his article “Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik as Posek of Post-Modern Orthodoxy,” *Tradition* 29, 1, 1994.

46 *Tradition*, 33:2, 1999

47 *Alei Etzion*, 14, 2. During this visit, at a time when he was still affiliated with the Agudah Movement, he applied to be the Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, but did not receive the position.

48 Rav Hershel Schachter, *MiPninei HaRav*, 2001, Bet Midrash of Flatbush, p. 254 with English translation by Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner on his blog “The Rebbitzin’s Husband.”

Seven Decades of Torah Life in the State of Israel

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STATE OF ISRAEL IS BORN

The first independent Jewish State in 19 centuries was born in Tel Aviv as the British Mandate over Palestine came to an end at midnight on Friday, and it was immediately subjected to the test of fire. As "Medinat Yisrael" (State of Israel) was proclaimed, the battle for Jerusalem raged, with most of the city falling to the Jews. At the

same time, President Truman announced that the United States would accord recognition to the new State. A few hours later, Palestine was invaded by Moslem armies from the south, east and north, and Tel Aviv was raided from the air. On Friday the United Nations Special Assembly adjourned after adopting a resolution to appoint a mediator but without taking any action on the Partition Resolution of November 29.

Yesterday the battle for the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv road was still under way, and two Arab villages were taken. In the north, Acre town was captured, and the Jewish Army consolidated its positions in Western Galilee.

Most Crowded Hours in Palestine's History

Between Thursday night and this morning Palestine went through what by all standards must be among the most crowded hours in its history.

For the Jewish population there was the anguish over the fate of the few hundred Hagdolah men and women in the Kfar Etzion bloc of settlements near Hebron. Their surrender to a fully equipped superior foreign force desperately in need of a victory was a foregone conclusion. What could not be known, with no communications since Thursday morning, was whether and to what extent the Red Cross and the Truce Comitee would secure civilized conditions for prisoners and wounded, and proper respect for the dead. Doubts on some of these anxious questions have now been resolved.

On Friday afternoon, from Tel Aviv, came the expected announcement of the Jewish State, and its official naming at birth, "Medinat Yisrael"—State of Israel, with the seating in of the first Council of Government. The proclamation of the State was made at midnight, coinciding with the sitting from Haifa of Britain's last High Commissioner. Within the hour, President Truman announced in Washington that the Government of the United States had decided to give de facto recognition to the Jewish State, with

Jews Take Over Security Zones

The battle for Jerusalem, which began when the British forces withdrew on Friday morning, continued all day Friday and yesterday. The crackle of small-arms fire and explosions of mortar shells were still being heard in the early hours of this morning as the battle entered its third day.

Repeated efforts on Friday evening and again on Saturday by the U.N. Truce Commission to bring about a "cease fire" were brought to naught when the Arab representatives failed to agree within the specified time limit.

On Friday morning, Jewish forces entered the Russian Compound and Zone C to reoccupy the buildings requisitioned from Jews last year. This operation was almost bloodless, but beyond the western edge of Zone C Arabs engaged the Jews in a stiff fight. The Arabs were forced back and the Barclays Bank area was taken.

In other parts of the city fighting flared up. Some occurred one after another the areas evacuated by the British. By last night, the quarters and

Egyptian Air Force Spitfires Bomb Tel Aviv; One Shot Down

Kfar Etzion, the Tel Aviv broadcasting station, reported at 2 o'clock yesterday afternoon that Tel Aviv had been bombed three times in the previous evening and morning, and that one plane had been shot down and its Egyptian pilot taken prisoner.

In the first raid, four planes attacked from a height of 300 feet. Two dropped bombs, while the others strafed the city. Little damage was caused. In the second attack two hours later, the airport to the north of the city was bombed, and an Air France plane parked there was damaged. The third raid was launched shortly before midday, but the planes were driven off without causing any damage.

Two settlements in the Negev had also been attacked from the air, the radio reported.

U.S. Recognizes Jewish State

WASHINGTON, Saturday.—Ten minutes after the termination of the British Mandate on Friday, the White House released a formal statement by President Truman that the U.S. Government intended to recognize the Provisional Jewish Government as the de facto authority representing the Jewish State.

The U.S. is also considering lifting the arms embargo but it is not known whether to Palestine only or the entire Middle East, and the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Jewish Provisional Government.

The White House press secretary, Mr. Charles Ross, told correspondents today that reaction so far to the recognition had been overwhelmingly favorable. He said this step had been discussed with Mr. Marshall and Mr. Lovett before action was taken, and it had their complete support.

Mr. Ross said that the President had decided several days ago to grant American recognition

Proclamation by Head Of Government

The creation of "Medinat Yisrael", the State of Israel, was proclaimed at midnight on Friday by Mr. David Ben Gurion, until then Chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive and now head of the State's Provisional Council of Government.



The first act of the Council of Government, as announced by its head, was to abolish all legislation of the 1949 White Paper of the less-than-adequate Provisional Council of Government, and to restore peace, assuring their full civic rights and full representation in all governmental organs of the State.

Mr. Ben Gurion prefaced the declaration with a review of the historic connection of the Jewish people with the Land of Israel and of their efforts to return, which never ceased throughout the generations of their dispersal, until the Nazi holocaust proved wrong the agency of the need for a Jewish State.

The Balfour Declaration of 1917, confirmed by the League of Nations, had given explicit international recognition to the state of the Jews.

2 Columns Cross Southern Border

By WALTER COLLINS
U.P. Correspondent

CATRO, Saturday.—A column

Etzion Settlers Taken P.O.W.

Fighting in the Kfar Etzion bloc continued throughout Friday, after Kfar Etzion

Special Assembly Adjourns

FLUSHING MEADOWS, Saturday.—The Special U.N. Assembly, called four weeks ago to discuss the U.S. proposal

INTRODUCTION

By the standards of world history, seventy years is a blink of an eye. Yet for the Jewish people, seventy years of Israel's existence is an incredible feat. The State of Israel represents the culmination and realization of the hopes and dreams of thousands of

years, of the desires and yearnings of a people in exile. To Jews, such a relatively short time is infinite in significance. Israel's seventieth year represents much more than just the year after sixty-nine. Seventy years is worthy of respect. After all, the Mishna in Avot

(5:21) states that it is the seventy-year-old who is the "seiva," the "hoary head," the old, wise, mature person, and the Torah commands us to rise before the seiva in great respect (Leviticus 19:32). The seiva deserves respect for spending a life growing, striving, learning, and teaching.

Indeed, in seventy years, Israel has grown and fought, learned and taught. Though it spends so much of its time simply defending its right to exist, it has accomplished more in its seventy years than many other nations have in their long lifetimes. To these seventy years, we stand in deference and respect.

The RIETS students at the Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim are proud to be able to express this respect with a unique project, spearheaded by fellow Gruss student Aron White, with the assistance Sam Dratch and Jacob Bernstein. In the following pages, seven semikha students of Gruss will discuss the seven decades of Israel's existence by focusing on a point, moment, or personality from each one of the decades. In doing so, they endeavor to paint but a small picture of the State of Israel, yet great in scope, in an effort to rise before the *seiva* that is Israel this year.

From Israel's beginnings in 1948, culminating in the modern State of Israel of 2018, these seven essays of seven decades read as one thematic whole, of an Israel that is rising, growing, expanding. Each essay expresses in some way the hope laid out in our prayer for the State of Israel that as it continues to rise, it will fulfill our messianic dreams, as "the beginning of the blossoming of our redemption."

In what way is that so? Not too long ago in *Daf Yomi*, an interesting passage appeared at the beginning of *Avoda Zara* 8b. There, the Talmud states:

מאה ושמונים שנה קודם שנחרב הבית פשטה מלכות הרשעה על ישראל פ' שנה עד לא חרב הבית גזרו טומאה על ארץ העמים ועל כלי זכויות מ' שנה עד לא חרב הבית גלתה סנהדרין וישבה לה בחנות.

One hundred and eighty years before the [Second] Temple was destroyed, the evil [Roman] Empire ruled over Israel. Eighty years before the Temple was destroyed, [the Sages] decreed impurity on the land of the nations and on glass vessels. Forty years before the Temple was destroyed, the Sanhedrin was exiled and sat in stores [at the Temple mount].

What is the meaning of these changes? Rav Kook writes beautifully in *Ein Ayah* (*Shabbat* 16) that each of these represented an important step to ready the Jewish people for exile.

One hundred and eighty years before the exile, when the Jewish people were still strong and united, God's wisdom introduced the concept of change of political power. Even while the Jewish people were still together, they would learn what it means to be ruled over by others. This would indeed inoculate them somewhat from the intense political vulnerability of the long exile, since they would have known of it even before leaving the land.

Eighty years before the exile, the Sages saw that the nation would need a protective ideology when they leave Israel. The declaration of impurity on foreign lands emphasized the specialness and worth of the Jewish people and the Land of Israel, even in exile. And the application of impurity to glass vessels, of newly-popular items in Jewish life, symbolized the need to apply the Torah to all new developments in the exile. The first maintains Jewish self-worth even as we are despised in the exile, and the second maintains the Torah's worth and applicability in a world that continually changes.

Finally, forty years before the destruction, the Sanhedrin was exiled. The law, when a people are united, represents the enforcement and

inculcation of that unity, through its moral and spiritual values, a law of love. But as the people became more and more divided, as sectarianism grew, the law was no longer seen as one of accord, but of discord. Slowly but surely, the Sanhedrin ceased to express the law as spiritually edifying — "*dinei nefashot*," and began to be viewed as solely hurtful — "*dinei kenasot*." The exile of the Sanhedrin represented the move of the law from an external force to an internal one, that the law itself is in exile with us, calling on the dispersed multitude to unite within our hearts and minds, even without a land.

In the same way that Rav Kook once wrote that to combat the cause of the destruction, namely, baseless hatred, we need to magnify our baseless love, we can say that to combat exile and truly live in our land, we need to reverse the process the Sages laid out for the needs of the exile. In the following pages, we will learn through our talented writers of the unique politics of Israel and the reestablishment of government in our land; we will learn how Israel has not only helped us realize our self-worth, but has given us pride in our nation and the land; we will learn how the Torah of Israel and its great teachers have tackled the new issues of our age. However, we still wait for the unity of the Jewish people, in the Land of Israel, with a Temple and a Sanhedrin in its rightful place. As Israel endures, we pray for that day when the political, spiritual, and communal unite for us in the future redemption.

Seven Decades of Torah Life in the State of Israel 1948–1957

Aron White

Fellow, YU Israel Kollel



14TH MAY 1948 – A TOUCH OF HOLINESS

The birth of the State of Israel was one of the most incredible moments in Jewish history. But because Israel is such a major part of our lives, and something we have grown up with, it is hard to comprehend that its birth almost didn't happen at all. Independence was not a foregone conclusion, but actually the result of a gripping story — culminating in a decision that came down to a single vote.¹

By May 1948, the UN had approved the Partition Plan, which promised a Jewish state in Palestine, and the worn-out British were preparing to leave Palestine on May 15th. There was international support for a Jewish state, and the British mandatory power were leaving, giving the Zionist leadership a golden opportunity — they had the chance to declare a Jewish State! But while the dream seemed within reach, it was by no means a simple decision. If they declared independence, it was clear

Israel would have to fight a war of survival on the day of its birth. Already since November, 700 Jews had been killed by local Arab attacks, and at this stage, the Jewish army did not even have a single plane — how on earth could they survive an Arab invasion on multiple fronts? U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall told Moshe Sharrett, the foreign minister in waiting, that declaring independence was tremendously risky, and that the Jews could not rely on U.S. support in the upcoming war. Independence beckoned, but with it, great danger.

On Wednesday May 12th 1948, the Moetzet Ha'am — the Jewish government in waiting — gathered to make the fateful decision. Headed by Ben Gurion, the Moetzet Ha'am consisted of thirteen men, though only ten could attend the vote.² History had its eye on them; the ripple effects of these men's decision would be felt around the world, and long into the future. The votes were cast: Four voted

against declaring independence, and six voted for.³ Two days later, on Friday May 14th, Ben Gurion read out the Declaration of Independence, sparking jubilation around the Jewish world. Israel would indeed be badly bruised by the War of Independence but it battled through, and the dream was born.

This story is a truly gripping drama, but it also contains within it a deeper level of Jewish significance. In halakha, there is the concept of a *davar shebikedusha*, a matter of sanctity, like parts of Jewish liturgy, such as *Barchu*, *Kedusha*, and *Kaddish*. A *davar shebikedusha* requires a quorum of ten men in order to be recited. Without this quorum — minyan — a *davar shebikedusha* is not recited. However, the *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* 69:1, and later commentaries⁴ qualify that ten men must be present, but only six of them are required to perform the service. For example, if some people in the room already prayed earlier, then as long as there are six

men praying, and an additional four men present, then that is sufficient.

Though the protagonists may not have known it, the decision to declare the state of Israel conformed to the exact rules of a *davar shebikedusha*. A minyan of ten Jewish men gathered, with six of them “performing the service”, voting for independence, fulfilling the minimum requirement of a *davar shebikedusha*. While of course not being a formal ritual or part of halakha, it is poignant that the decision to found the State of Israel conformed to the exact rules of a matter of sanctity.

What is it that makes the State of Israel not only significant, but holy? There is no one answer to this question. For some, the State of Israel is *inherently* holy — it is the living fulfilment of Biblical prophecies, the embodiment of the Divine promise that the Jews will return to the land and make it flower once again. For others, the State of Israel is a *vehicle* for holiness: government institutions rest on Shabbat, air traffic stops on Yom Kippur, and the Israeli government today is by far the largest supporter of Torah learning in the world.⁵ Rabbi Meir Soloveichik also notes a more subtle aspect⁶ — that the State of Israel is bound up with the *experience* of the holy and transcendent. The defining photo in Israel’s history is not of a Nobel Prize winner, a fighter jet, or skyscrapers in Tel Aviv, but of the three paratroopers at the Western Wall in 1967. It is a powerful image; at the end of a hard fought war, planned out in detail and trained for over years, the victorious soldiers look heavenward, humbled by the grand narrative of which they are just a small part — the transcendent is part of Israel’s national DNA. Thus in its essence, its function and its narrative, Israel is tinged with holiness.

Israel was declared in the late afternoon of Friday, May 14th. The Shabbos eve, Erev Shabbat, is a special time. Poignantly, the Mishna says that Erev Shabbat is the time when the more spiritual things in our world were created.⁷ As the sun set on that Friday afternoon, seventy years ago, our people experienced something truly amazing; a moment, whose beauty, and holiness, is wonderfully captured by Yehuda Avner:⁸

“As the sun went down, grimy, exhausted diggers assembled in the glow of a hurricane lamp hanging on the door of a stone ruin, hidden from enemy view, to recite the Sabbath eve prayers — Kabbalat Shabbat. It was a heavenly pause; Shabbat stillness seemed to reign over everything...”

“I have news. I have news.” To a man we scampered back into the flickering glow where Linder grabbed him (Mahler) by the arms and snapped, “Well — talk. What did you find out? ... Has Ben-Gurion declared independence, yes or no?”

(Mahler responded) “David Ben-Gurion declared independence this afternoon in Tel Aviv. The Jewish state comes into being at midnight.”

There was a dead silence. Midnight was minutes away. Even the air seemed to be holding its breath. “Oh, my God, what have we done?” cried one of the women diggers, fitfully rubbing her chin with the tips of her fingers. “What have we done? Oh, my God, what have we done?” and she burst into tears, whether in ecstasy or dismay I will never know. Then cheers, tears, embraces. Every breast filled with exultation as we pumped hands, cuddled, kissed, in an ovation that went on and on. Nobody wanted it to stop. “A leheim to the new state!”

“Wait!” shouted a hassid whom everybody knew as Nussen der hazzan — a cantor by calling, and a most

diligent volunteer digger from the ultra-Orthodox Mea Shearim Jerusalem quarter. “It’s Shabbos. Kiddush first.” Our crowd gathered around him in a hush as Nussen der hazzan clasped the mug and, in a sweet cantorial tone began to chant “Yom hashishi” — the blessing for the sanctification of the Sabbath day. As Nussen’s sacred verses floated off to a higher place of Sabbath bliss, some of us sobbed uncontrollably. Like a violin, his voice swelled, ululated, and trilled in the night, octave upon octave, his eyes closed, his cup stretched out and up. And as he concluded the final consecration — “Blessed art thou O Lord, who has hallowed the Sabbath” — he rose on tiptoe, his arm stiffened, and rocking back and forth like an ecstatic rabbi, voice trembling with excitement, he added the triumphantly exulted festival blessing to commemorate having reached this day — sheheheyanu, vekiyemanu vehegiyanu lezman hazeh.”

“Amen!”

Endnotes

1 The story of these days is told by Ze’ev Sharaf in his book, *Three Days*. Sharaf was the secretary of the transitional government that came to power when Israel was declared.

2 Two members, Yehuda Greenbaum and Rav Yehuda Leib Fischman, were trapped in besieged Yerushalayim, and Rav Yitzchak Meir Levin was in the United States.

3 David Ben Gurion, Moshe Shapira, Aharon Zisling, Moshe Sharret, Mordechai Bentov and Peretz Bernstein voted for, and Pinchas Rosenne, Eliezer Kaplan, David Remez and Bechor-Shalom Shitrit voted against.

4 Mishnah Berura 69:5.

5 See this author’s article “The State We Are In: The Missing Side of the State of Israel,” available at <https://www.torahmusings.com/2015/04/the-state-we-are-in-the-missing-side-of-the-state-of-israel/>

6 Lecture available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBUqH0G7OjY>

7 Pirkei Avot 5:6, see Maharal, *Derech Chaim* there.

8 Yehuda Avner, *The Prime Ministers*, p. 63.

**Seven Decades of
Torah Life in the
State of Israel
1958–1967**

Chezkie Glatt
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DECIDED TO BE UNDIVIDED

YERUSHALAYIM'S UNIQUE HISTORY AS THE SHARED HEART OF OUR NATION

Summer was in the air — freedom was so close he could almost feel it. My father, just a young boy at the time, dashed up the stairs of his apartment building, a loose knapsack swinging this way and that on his back, excited as could be on that warm day in early June. But even he, with the spring in his step, was not expecting the sight that met his eyes as he walked through the apartment's door. There was his mother, sitting in her usual chair, with her generally stern features shining with a remarkable glow. The normally

hard cheek bones were pulled upward into a wide grin, somehow still maintaining her composure but nearly giving in to an unrestrained joy. She pulled her cigarette from her mouth and quietly, firmly proclaimed, “Yerushalayim, Aaron. Yerushalayim is ours.” The significance of that statement, just barely expressed, was not lost on the small boy.

My grandmother, Anna Glatt a”h, was a Holocaust survivor. She experienced the worst horrors imaginable during the war years, losing 90 relatives from

her hometown and the surrounding area — including both of her parents and all five of her siblings — at the hands of the Nazis. One sister survived Auschwitz alongside her, only to die on the day of liberation. My grandmother's first request of the triumphant soldiers was a shovel with which she could give her sister a proper burial. For the rest of her life, determined as she was to reconstruct her destroyed world, my grandmother carried with her the burden of millions of murdered innocents. She was not quick to smile, let alone smile

widely. My father testified during the shivah for his mother that her grin that day was the largest grin he remembered ever seeing on her face (at least until she was past the age of eighty and was on the floor playing with her great-grandchildren, her truest revenge against the Nazis).

What was it about the recapture of Yerushalayim that so inspired my grandmother, that could shake her out of a lifelong focus on loss and a need to rebuild? I believe it was nothing short of a millenia-long focus on a yearning more enormous than that loss; but this requires further elaboration.

The Gemara, *Yoma* 12a, tells of a dispute between two Tanaim over whether or not Yerushalayim was “*nischalka l’shvatom*,” whether it was divvied up along with the rest of Eretz Yisrael as part of the portion of any specific tribe. The opinion of the Chachamim (and therefore, through the rules of psak, the likely halakhic conclusion) is indeed that it was not. However, the meaning of this enigmatic phrase, that Yerushalayim was not divvied up among the shevatim, is itself open to debate. Various approaches are suggested by the Rishonim; for our purposes in this brief essay, we will specifically highlight two.

One interpretation is found in the Baalei Tosfos.¹ Despite other potential difficulties (nearly explicit verses in Tanach included), this approach maintains that the term is to be understood as it literally reads: unlike the rest of the land, Yerushalayim was never divvied up among the shevatim. It remained the jointly owned property of the entirety of the House of Israel, in the center of which the Beis HaMikdash was built.



The famous march down to the Kotel on Shavuot of 1967. In the middle, wearing a talit, is Rabbi Yeshaya Hadari, the former rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Hakotel. Behind him to the right is Rabbi Dovid Miller, current rosh kollel of the RIETS Israel Kollel in Jerusalem. One can see Jews of all types and colors walking together, a truly historic episode.

However, working off the *Kesef Mishnah*, *Hilchos Beis HaBechira* 2:10, the opinion of the Rambam, *Hilchos Beis HaBechira* 6:14, appears quite different and perhaps more simply in line with the pesukim in Tanach.² The Rambam seemingly understood this term to mean that although Yerushalayim had, in fact, once been apportioned to the specific tribes of Yehuda and Binyamin respectively, it nonetheless was bestowed later by these very same shevatim into the joint ownership of all of Bnei Yisrael.

Thus, according to either approach, by the time the Beis Hamikdash was constructed, Yerushalayim was in the possession of all of Klal Yisrael, different than the rest of the land and its designated territories. However, while to Tosfos, this had *always* been its status, to the Rambam, it only

attained this unique state after an act of submission on the part of Yehuda and Binyamin.

To paraphrase the Rav in his work *Halakhic Mind*, “from the halakha itself the true philosophy of Judaism will emerge.” To illustrate this point, we can gain a deeper understanding of Yerushalayim’s unique status in our collective hearts by closely examining either of these halakhic approaches.

From the perspective of Tosfos, Yerushalayim was marked from the onset as the place that Hashem had chosen to rest His Presence. Unlike the rest of the conquered regions, Yerushalayim was left unapportioned, and remained in the public sphere more so than any other location. It was noticeably different; it was predestined for the use of all of Klal

Yisrael. Any Jew living during the time prior to the building of the Beis HaMikdash would have been able to appreciate that in some way, this city was singled out for an exceptional purpose.

On the flip side, according to the Rambam, such a presumption would have been far from obvious. While indeed, according to many midrashim and even the pesukim themselves (the Akeida took place on Har HaMoriah,³ for example), the idea of Yerushalayim as a focal point of service to the Ribbono Shel Olam had ancient roots — but it was not at all clear that this would be *the* designated spot for the Beis HaMikdash and the eternal center of our relationship with Hashem. Other places in Eretz Yisrael, such as Beit El (as in fact Yeravam took advantage of for his own purposes),⁴ could have rivaled Yerushalayim as worthy locations of Divine Presence, and might have had an opportunity to be chosen as “*hamakom asher yivchar Hashem Elokeichem bo lishakein shemo sham*”⁵ — the place which Hashem will choose to dwell. It was an act of devotion on the part of the two tribes vying for leadership at a time of turmoil, respectively representing two halves of a long-splintered nation (the eternal drama of the descendants of Rachel and Leah is, in my opinion, one of the great themes underlying the whole of Jewish history), which gave birth to Hashem’s decision to select this designated capital city as His eternal abode. Yehuda might have preferred the city of Chevron, while Binyamin and Yosef’s descendants may have opted for Beit El, but ultimately, both sides were willing to put aside personal ambitions and even personal ownership to settle on Yerushalayim, a city on the border.

This decision was orchestrated by Dovid HaMelech, whose own supreme insight and selflessness ensured that all of Klal Yisrael would feel they truly had a share in the holiest of holies.

These contrasting perspectives highlight, at least for me, what marks Yerushalayim as the most extraordinary site on Earth. On the one hand, it has always been at the core of our nation’s storied past; it has always been the place where our ancestors in every generation looked in prayer and in dream, a city rich in incredibly historic events and swelling with memories of noble deeds. On the other hand, that profound sense of destined greatness is, I believe, further deepened when knowledge of the fact that this *all could have looked very different* if not for the willingness of our people to put aside bickering and squabbling to unite as one proud nation serving its Creator with passion and reverence. This needn’t have necessarily been the particular destiny of the Jewish people, but it emerged as such and forever remains so.

Our Rosh Kollel in the YU Israel Kollel, Rav Dovid Miller, has on occasion relived the scene he experienced on that Shavuot in Yerushalayim in the year 1967. Bearded Vizhnitz chassidim strode beside bare-headed secularists, all of them heading toward the makom Hamikdash, which had so recently come back into their hands. Indeed, Rav Miller discovered years later that a non-Jewish filmmaker videoed this event and upon request, provided Rav Miller with a blurry picture of his younger self walking amid the assorted throngs of “pilgrims.” They all recognized that something far greater than any individual (or even

any individual sect) had taken place, and each person who walked the crowded path to the Kotel on that marvelous day understood that they were each inspired with the same sense of veneration and awe as they made their way to the pulsating heart of a nation steadily rising out of the ashes. To serve Hashem was their common goal, in humility and with reverence for what Yerushalayim, the “*ir shechubra lah yachdav*,” had always stood for.⁶ It was what my grandmother felt in Brooklyn in the sunny, smoke-dimmed light of her small apartment decades ago; it is what we strive to remember daily as we live out our existences in the YU Israel Kollel’s campus, trying to grow in erudition and develop our character. May it be Hashem’s will that all of Klal Yisrael stand as one, petty differences put aside, serving Him in unity in the fashion He most desires, in Yerushalayim HaBenuyah, speedily in our days.

Endnotes

- 1 Tosfos, *Bava Kamma* 82b (s.v. “*V’ein Mitame B’negaim*”).
- 2 See, for example, *Yehoshua* 18:28. For a more thorough analysis of the opinion of the Rambam, please see the following shiur on YUTorah.org given by my Rebbi, Rav Bednarsh: <http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/870312/rabbi-assaf-bednarsh/who-owns-yerushalayim/>
- 3 *Bereishis* 22:2.
- 4 *Melachim I* 12:29.
- 5 *Devarim* 12:11.
- 6 See *Talmud Yerushalmi Chagigah* 3:6.

**Seven Decades of
Torah Life in the
State of Israel
1968–1977**

Jacob Bernstein
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CHASING A TORAH REVOLUTION: KI MITZION TETZEI TORAH

With a sense of youthful passion, the State of Israel turned twenty years old in 1968, looking to make further strides in its development as a nation among nations. As with many twenty-year-olds, her drive to make a difference and confidence in a better tomorrow led to the planting of seeds, ones whose fruit we still reap today.

...כי מציון תצא תורה ודבר ה' מירושלים
(ישעיהו ב:ג)

... *For Torah emerges from Zion, and the word of God from Jerusalem.*

In his vision of the end of days, Yeshayahu describes a time when Torah will emerge from Jerusalem, spreading forth throughout the world. On the heels of '67, and the successful miracles of the Six Day War, the decade between 1968 and 1978 showcases some of the most significant and revolutionary personalities in the Torah world, embodying the spirit of this prophecy.

While by no means exhaustive, the following *olim* represent some of this decade's influence on Torah study; their impact reverberates today.

- Born in Riga, Latvia, **Dr. Nechama Leibowitz** immigrated to Israel after studying in Germany, and changed the face of **Tanach Education** as she taught her method of study in countless institutions and through the publication of her famous *Gilyonot*. Dr. Leibowitz became a full professor at Tel Aviv University in **1968**, and received the Israel Prize for Education 12 years earlier.

- Born in Paris, France, **Rav Dr. Aharon Lichtenstein** made aliyah after studying in the United States, and in **1971** began strengthening the Dati Leumi community and Hesder Movement through his position as **Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshivat Har Etzion and founding Rosh Kollel of the YU RIETS Israel Kollel.**

- Born in Baghdad, Iraq, **Rav Ovadia Yosef** immigrated to Jerusalem at the age of four, and “*hechezir atarah l'yoshnnah* — restored the past glory” to the Sephardic community, ultimately serving as the **Sephardic Chief Rabbi** of Tel Aviv from 1968–1973 and **Sephardic Chief Rabbi** of Israel from **1973–1983**.

- Born in Dublin, Ireland, **Rabbi Dr. Yehuda Cooperman** made aliyah after studying in Chicago, and revolutionized advanced women's learning by opening **Michlalah** in 1964. Michlalah received accreditation to grant degrees to students from the Council of Higher Education of the State of Israel in **1978**.

From Sephardim to Ashkenazim, Tanach to Gemara, Haredi to Dati Leumi, and from the “*arba kanfot ha'aretz* — four corners of the world,” these four remarkable individuals ascended to Israel and helped bring

about the Torah revolution that occurred from 1968–1978. Upon the footsteps of miracles, two of Isaiah’s prophecies were realized, as the “ingathering of the dispersed” (Isaiah 11:12) made their mark on the “Torah emanating from Zion” (Isaiah 2:3).

There is an additional Torah phenomenon that originated in this decade, one that has turned into something of an educational movement and mainstay in the Anglo-speaking Jewish community: *Shana Ba’Aretz*. What many in the Yeshiva University community now take for granted — that students spend a “gap year” (or more) learning in Israel — was not commonplace before this Torah revolution.

“We created a new world,” said Rabbi Dr. Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff,¹ as he recalled the creation of BMT, Beit Midrash L’Torah, in 1969. Together with Rabbi Moshe “Whitey” Horowitz, and with inspiration from Moshe Kobrin, the first Anglo-targeted *Shana Ba’Aretz* program for young men was created, with a mission of “exporting Torah to the Anglo world.” The word of Hashem now had a new route by which to emerge from Jerusalem, influencing Anglo communities around the world as students returned home from studying there.

This contemporary idea to send teenagers to Jerusalem to study Torah has a historical basis, albeit not one of success. The Gemara (*Bava Batra* 21a) describes a time when Chazal instituted an educational system in Jerusalem to solve a crisis facing a vast number of children who did not have parents who could teach them Torah. The location was chosen, explain Tosafot,² so that the students would witness the Kohanim and their service in Jerusalem, which would inspire them to

learn better. The Gemara itself invokes the verse “*ki miTzion teitzei Torah*” to support the idea that the new national educational platform should begin in Zion. Since Jerusalem was too far away to attract children without their parents accompanying them, Chazal instituted additional “schools,” which only attracted older students because they were already far from home.³ Ultimately, Yehoshua ben Gamla, the Kohen Gadol, is credited with creating the first ever localized Jewish educational system, which saved Torah from being lost from that generation.

In the late 60’s and early 70’s a new iteration of this story occurred and is still unfolding before our eyes, as great individuals have established a successful educational system that is far away from home, for children in their later teenage years, and in or around Jerusalem. Years ago, these very criteria made creating a schooling system almost impossible, and yet today they are commonplace components to many of the successful *Shana Ba’Aretz* programs. These programs originated for young women with Machon Gold, in 1958, and for young men with BMT, in 1969, and in the decade after the Six Day War, the *Shana Ba’Aretz* Revolution began. Thousands of Anglo young men and women have come to Israel, attending one of countless *Shana Ba’Aretz* programs to learn and grow, and have benefited from “*avirah d’Eretz Yisrael*.”

In the 21st Mishna of *Pirkei Avot*, Shmuel HaKatan highlighted significant milestones throughout a lifetime, ones that can be apropos to the anniversary of Israel’s existence as well.

בן עשרים לרדוף בן שלשים לכה.

A twenty-year-old chases and a thirty-year-old has attained strength.

It is not surprising to note how many

“30-under-30” lists exist to feature those in this age range who *chase* after a better world with passion and a healthy sense of optimism that change is achievable. Perhaps Shmuel HaKatan’s quote can be developed a bit deeper, beyond recognizing common phenomena in the emerging adult population.

Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran (Rashbetz), a 15th-century Spanish halachic authority, expounds on Shmuel HaKatan’s comments in his *Magen Avot*, a commentary on *Pirkei Avot*, ad loc..

The Rashbetz explains that a child who began his learning at the age of five will have completed the content of Mikrah, Mishna, and Talmud (each over the course of five years) by the age of twenty. It is now the responsibility of this twenty-year-old to *chase* after **these achievements**, to fortify them internally. After all, what better way to prepare oneself in advance of “the strength of a thirty-year-old?”

The Torah revolution that occurred between 1968 and 1978 was the result of decisions that Jews from four corners of the earth made: to fortify the young, passionate state with an identity of Torah. They chased after the achievements of those who came before them to strengthen Eretz Yisrael, and in doing so they changed the world of Torah as well.

Endnotes

1 Thank you to Rabbi Dr. Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff for allowing me to interview him about his personal reflections about this time period.

2 Tosafot, *Bava Basra* 21a, d”h “*Ki Mitzion*.”

3 See *Chiddushei Ritva*, *Bava Basra* 21a, d”h “*v’Adayen Machnisiin*.”

Seven Decades of Torah Life in the State of Israel 1978–1987

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“PRISONERS OF ZION” AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF FREEDOM

Just as the origins of modern Zionism can be traced back to the trial of Colonel Alfred Dreyfus, a trial also marks the turn of the fourth decade for the modern state of Israel. In 1978, Anatoly Borisovich Shcharansky’s sentencing to thirteen years of forced labor by the Soviet Government inspired protests around the globe, culminating in the march on Washington D.C. on December 6, 1987, when a quarter of a million people protested in solidarity with Soviet Jewry. With these two events as bookends, I wish to unpack a lesson from this period, fundamental to our celebration of Yom Ha’Atzmaut.

When I asked my mother for her recollections of that time, she was excited to share that she had Anatoly’s name on her bracelet before he changed

it to Natan Sharansky. From your local Bnei Akiva chapter, you could buy a plain silver C-shaped band that bore a name of a “Prisoner of Zion,” which she wore for years. It was that personal connection to the issue that inspired her to join the protests of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (SSSJ), along with her family and friends. “It was what everyone was doing, it was a bit of a social scene,” she conceded.

The bracelet was the brainchild of the SSSJ’s founder, Jacob Birnbaum. He planned to personalize the campaign, and he transformed the movement from “an abstract struggle for ‘Soviet Jewry’ into a concrete struggle for Soviet *Jews*, with names and stories,” author and journalist Yossi Klein Halevi reported.¹ “Over the years, the personal campaign became

an essential feature of the entire movement, drawing new recruits and energizing veteran activists.”

Natan Sharansky, however, is certainly the most famous refusenik. Perhaps it is due to his high-profile career in the public sector, or for his mesmerizing claim that he kept sane in extended solitary confinement in Soviet prison by playing mental chess games against himself. Yet I think he is famous because of Avital.

Avital married Natan Sharansky the day before she used her expiring visa to flee the USSR in 1974. Avital began her activism as a newlywed, and made her first trip to America to plead on her husband’s behalf in 1975; but it was only after his trial in 1978 that Natan’s plight received widespread attention. Avital began meeting with

dignitaries and diplomats, and found her way into the homes and hearts of Jews the world round.

Thirty years after Sharansky's walk to freedom across the Glienicke Bridge,² their daughter, Rachel Sharansky Denziger, explained how indebted she feels for the strength the protest gave to her parents, while in turn it was her parents who gave strength to the protests. Klein Halevi explained that it was "Birnbau's vision of a symbiotic relationship ... American Jews were inspired by the courage of Soviet refuseniks, who in turn were fortified by American Jewish support."

Why is this story about Diaspora Jews relevant to Israeli history?

When God signed a pact with Avraham at the *Brit Bein HaBetarim*, when the Land of Israel was promised to a not-yet existing nation, God explained that a prerequisite to national autonomy was to first be strangers in a land that is not theirs (Gen. 15:13). To a person who does not yet have children, it is an odd selling point to promise that the progeny must first be slaves before they can become masters of their own land.

R' Elazar HaGadol is puzzled as to why the Torah warns us about proper treatment of the "strangers' among us," and the Gemara (*Baba Metzia* 59b) is unsure if the message is repeated 36 times or 46 times. Tosafot add that the inclusion of the ten additional iterations under dispute are the verses that tell us the reason behind the sensitivity, and are not a warning in-and-of themselves. Meaning, on top of the uniquely repetitive statements warning us to treat strangers with love and kindness, there is another set of repetitive verses that reiterate the spirit behind the law. These are verses where Hashem tells us to treat the Other kindly, "for you were strangers in the

land of Egypt" (Shemos 22:20). The connection between our time in Egypt and our treatment of others is repeated in Shemot (23:9), Vayikra (19:10), and in Devarim (10:19; 23:8; 24:18).

We are told that "When strangers become your neighbors, do not wrong them. They are your community ... and love each one as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." This verse is juxtaposed with themes in the next verse that we should do righteousness because, again, God took us out of Egypt (Vayikra 19:33-36).

Within the basic vision of God's giving the Land of Israel is a prerequisite national training in empathy. To feel for those who have wandered as we have wandered, who have been enslaved as we have been enslaved, who have been persecuted as we have been persecuted. We will recognize their pain as it resonates with our national consciousness. We will hate injustice, because we have been victims of injustice and so we will be a beacon of righteousness from our own soil. It is a fundamental component of our *brit* with God from the *Brit Bein HaBetarim*.

It is injustice that inspires us, and our pursuit of justice that helps us earn our return, as Yeshayahu exclaimed, "Zion is redeemed with justice, and we will return to it through righteousness" (1:27).

That is why it is no coincidence that these movements have been inspired by trials, corrupted manifestations of justice. And it was from the beginning, at the first SSSJ rally on May Day 1964, that Birnbau insisted on having posters declaring "Let My People Go!" Egypt, the very first diaspora destination, still informing how we advocate for "strangers" who are our community, who are the names on our bracelets, the visitor in our living room,

and the prisoner on our mind even if they are in a cell across the world. They are strangers, but we know them, for their story is our story.

This message is integrally woven into the fabric of Israeli society. It is no surprise that Israeli support was first on the ground after an earthquake in Haiti in 2010, that we sent relief to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, and 140 tons of supplies to Indonesia and Sri Lanka after the tsunami in 2004. Going the extra mile, as part of their relief teams, Israel dispatches a troupe of medical clowns to fill the makeshift medical tents with warmth when it is most needed.

As we celebrate the founding of the State of Israel and commemorate Yom Hazikaron, it behooves us to dwell on what made it possible: the sacrifice and hardship, as well as wounds that are fresh and still healing. Central to our national narrative is our capacity to learn compassion and empathy from these experiences, forming a deeper understanding of the human condition.

The Mishna in *Avot* says that "*Ben Arba'im L'Binah*," forty is the age of wisdom. R' Ovadiah ben Abraham of Bartenura, as a proof-text, quotes Devarim (29:4), that it was not until after forty years in the desert that God gave the Jewish people a "*heart for understanding, eyes to see, and ears to hear*." Israel's fourth decade teaches us to open our ears to listen, our eyes to see, and our hearts to feel the plight of others.

Endnotes

1 Klein Halevi, Yossi. "Jacob Birnbau and the Struggle for Soviet Jewry" *Azure* (17) Spring 5764/2004.

2 Sharansky Danziger, Rachel "30 Years After Glienicke Bridge" *Times of Israel* Feb. 11, 2016 <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/30-years-after-glienicke-bridge/>.

Seven Decades of Torah Life in the State of Israel 1988–1997

Ben Keil

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OPERATION SOLOMON

In the decades since the founding of the State of Israel, the Jewish community has witnessed many of the prophecies of redemption recorded in the *Nevi'im Achronim*. One such notable occasion was in late May of 1991, when, in a clandestine military action called Operation Solomon, the Israeli Defense Forces evacuated over 14,000 Ethiopian Jews from Addis Ababa to Israel in the course of two days. While operations Moses and Joshua in the 1980s had already initiated the mass influx of Ethiopian Jews to Israel, the impressive nature of the 1991 operation captured the attention of the global Jewish community. At the conclusion of the operation, when the Israeli government revealed the details of the endeavor, the world stood in awe; after forty flights in thirty-five planes, almost the entire Jewish

community of Ethiopia had been relocated to Israel. The record they set for passengers in an airplane — 1,088 in an El Al 747 with its seats removed, according to Guinness — remains the world record, and includes two babies born in flight.

Many excited witnesses were confident that they were seeing the actualization of the words of Yeshayahu, 11:11:

והיה ביום ההוא יוסיף ה' שנית ידו לקנות
את שאר עמו אשר ישאר מאשור וממצרים
ומפטרס ומכוש ומעילם ומשנער ומחמת
ומאיי הים.

And it will be on that day, Hashem will again increase His hand, to acquire the remnant of His nation which is left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pasros, and from Kush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Chamas, and from the islands.

Usually in Tanach, the land of Kush seems best identified as a part of Africa; in particular, the area South of Egypt, and the historical location of the ancient Kingdom of Kush (circa. 800 BCE-350 CE). Understanding the verse this way, it would seem that, in the evacuation of the Ethiopians, this element of Yeshayahu's prophecy was coming true.

However, when it comes to this particular reference, the *Targum Yehonasan* seems dissatisfied with this typical approach. While through most of Tanach the Targum doesn't actually translate Kush and just transliterates it, a number of times he instead translates it as Hodu or India. (See Isaiah 18:1 and Tzephania 3:10.) That there would be confusion about the term is not surprising, since there were two different kingdoms, on opposite sides of the Ancient world,

with very similar names. Toward the twilight of the African Kingdom of Kush, the Asian Kushan Empire sprung up for a few centuries in what is now northern India and Pakistan, including the mountain range still known as the Hindu Kush, on the Pakistan-Afghan border. The Empire organized at about the year zero, and had influence in Asia for almost 400 years. The origin of its name is unclear, and while the Empire clearly did not exist during the time of the *Nevi'im*, historians are unsure regarding how long the term Kush had been used to describe the geographic area.

In two of the places in which the *Targum Yehonasan* translates Kush as Hodu (Yeshaya 18:1 and Tzephania 3:10), the prophet refers to “Naharei Kush,” the rivers of Kush. Considering that Nubia is mostly desert, and like Egypt, dependent on the Nile as the primary water source, it is possible that the mention of rivers is what pushed

the Targum to deviate from his usual identification of Kush as African.

The dispute regarding the location of Kush is even recorded in the Gemara (*Megillah* 11a). Regarding the first pasuk of Esther, which notes that Achashverosh ruled “From Hodu to Kush,” Rav and Shmuel disagree. One says that Kush was near Hodu, apparently identifying it with the geographic area of the Hindu Kush, adjacent to the Indian subcontinent, and near Persia, the seat of Achashverosh’s power. The other says that Kush was far from Hodu, indicating the African location that we usually presume.

What remains a mystery is why in Yeshaya 11:11, the *Targum* identified the area with India instead of Africa, especially considering that, in the list in the pasuk, it follows Egypt and Pasros, Upper Egypt, squarely between Lower Egypt and the Kingdom of Kush. Perhaps he was

swayed by the latter half of the verse, which lists Elam, Shinar, and Chamas, locations in Mesopotamia and Central Asia, to identify Kush with those locations instead.

When we look at history, however miraculous, it is comfortable for us to fit modern events into the prophecies we have preserved for millennia, but often, in our haste to connect our present with our past, we can overlook details of our tradition. But the reality that the IDF managed to relocate the Ethiopian Jewish community to Israel over a weekend doesn’t need to have been prophesied to be miraculous. If the decades since the State was founded have taught us anything, it is that prophecy is not the only way Hashem speaks to us in the modern world. Sometimes we hear the voice of God out of the pages of the prophets, and at other times, in the newspaper headlines, as we continue to carve out our destiny in Eretz Yisrael.

The Marcos and Adina Katz

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**Seven Decades of
Torah Life in the
State of Israel
1998–2007**

Eli Muschel

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TURNING OUR EYES TOWARD OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN¹

During the Second Intifada, Rabbi Moshe Faskowitz, the Rabbi Emeritus of the Torah Center of Hillcrest in Queens, NY, traveled to Israel. During his visit, while making conversation with his non-religious cab driver, Rabbi Faskowitz asked the driver where he was from. The driver responded that he was from the Gilo neighborhood of Jerusalem, an area which Rabbi Faskowitz knew was under consistent gunfire. While discussing how difficult it must be for the driver's family and the other residents of the area, Rabbi Faskowitz remarked how he wished Mashiach would come already to put an end to the violence and suffering. The cab driver, somewhat taken aback, responded, "What do you mean Mashiach should come?! Mashiach

bah! Mi tofais et kol hakadurim? — Mashiach is already here! Who else is catching all the bullets?"²

The cab driver's remarks seem to us as cute, an encouraging perspective of hope during a turbulent and tense time. However, there is tremendous depth to what he said. In fact, the cab driver's words allude to one of the deep secrets of *geulah*, redemption.

In the third *drush* of *Drashos HaRan*, the Ran deals with a famous question. Moshe Rabbeinu had every quality necessary for being the greatest leader and greatest prophet of all time. As the Gemara in *Nedarim* says:

אין הקב"ה משרה שכינתו אלא על גבור
ועשיר חכם ועניו, וכולם ממשה,
*The Holy One, Blessed be He, rests His
Divine Presence only upon one who*

is mighty, and wealthy, and wise, and humble. And all of these qualities are derived from Moses.

Nedarim 38a

But there is one most basic quality necessary for being a great leader and great prophet³ that Moshe did not have — he was a *kevad peh*, he had a speech impediment. How could it be, asks the Ran, and why would it be, that Hashem gave Moshe all the prerequisites for being the prophet to redeem klal Yisrael and lead them out of Egypt — except for this most basic and natural gift of speech?

The Ran explains that Matan Torah was the greatest event in the history of Klal Yisrael, the moment that eternally bonded us with HaKadosh Baruch Hu and made us into His chosen nation. Because of the unique significance

of this auspicious moment, Hashem wanted the process of the giving of the Torah, which started with the redemption from Egypt, to be done in a most supernatural way, one that would prove, without the possibility of questioning or doubt, that *Moshe emes v'Toraso emes*, Moshe and his Torah are true. We all know that someone who is a great orator can stand in front of a crowd and say things that are absolutely false, but because of his great persuasiveness, the audience will believe and accept everything he says. And the opposite is true as well. Someone with a speech impediment can express things that are obviously true, but because he can't articulate it well, people simply won't believe him. Hashem knew that if Moshe was a great speaker, later generations would say the Jews only accepted the Torah because of Moshe's power of oration. Had Moshe been a gifted orator, Kabalas HaTorah, the culmination of the redemption from Egypt, might have been discredited as a natural event, a performance staged by a human being with truth-distorting powers of persuasion. To dispel this illusion of a human-engineered Matan Torah, Moshe was given a speech impediment. His inability to convince Bnei Yisrael of the veracity of the Torah through his own faculty of speech served to emphasize that though he led Klal Yisrael from Egypt to Har Sinai, ultimately the redemption was brought about through Divine intervention alone, not through human effort or initiative.

The Navi Michah says:

כִּי־מִי צִאֲתָהּ מִצְרָיִם אֲרָאֶנּוּ נִפְלְאוֹת.
I will show him wondrous deeds as in the days when You left the land of Egypt.

Michah 7:15

Chazal derive from this verse⁴ that

the ultimate redemption will in many ways parallel *geulas Mitzrayim* — the redemption from Egypt. Perhaps we can extend the parallel to include the Ran's fundamental teaching as well.

In difficult times, we tend to adopt a “take-charge” perspective; we think of what we can do, what is in our hands to change the situation. The Ran is teaching us that although Hashem wants us to put in human initiative — and especially in difficult times, he wants us to strengthen our efforts in Torah, *avodah*, and *gemillus chasadim* — we must ultimately remember that the *geulah* is completely in Hashem's “hands” and not in ours. As important as our efforts are in shaping the destiny of klal Yisrael, those efforts always require Divine assistance. We can and must do the job that is upon us while realizing that ultimately it is not our own efforts that will bring Mashiach, but rather *yeshuas Hashem* — the salvation of Hashem. Just as it was Hashem's intervention alone that brought about *geulas Mitzrayim* — a message that Moshe's speech impediment underscored — so too, all future *geulos* will be the result of Divine intervention, not human initiative.

There's a phrase often quoted by Jews in times of *tzaros* — *yeshuas Hashem k'heref ayin*⁵ — typically translated as Hashem's salvation comes in the blink of an eye. We use this as a source of encouragement when a situation looks bleak. We remind ourselves that no matter how bad things look right now, our fortune can turn around in an instant. But Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, the *Kedushas Levi*, had a different way of understanding this phrase. He points out that the word *heref* in Tanach often has a connotation of desisting or turning away, as in “*heref mimeni v'ashmidem*

— release me and I will destroy them.”⁶ The Berditchever explained that *yeshuas Hashem*, Hashem's salvation, comes *k'heref ayin*, only when we turn our eyes away from ourselves, namely when we abandon the perspective that the *yeshua* will come from our own efforts. Only at that point, when we realize that nothing else can save us, that there are no more ideas to try, no more people to ask, nowhere else to turn but to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, only then does *geulah* really begin — *yeshuas Hashem k'heref ayin*.

We find Bnei Yisrael reaching this point of *heref ayin* at the end of Parshas Shemos, when they give up trying to deal with Pharaoh diplomatically, when they realize they cannot save themselves *b'derech hateva*, when they abandon their hope in mortal man, even their trusted leaders Moshe and Aharon, and thus they say (Shemos 5:21) “*yeireh Hashem aleichem v'yishpot*,” “may Hashem look upon you [Moshe and Aharon] and judge.” Only now, after this necessary realization, do we find Hashem saying (Shemos 6:1) “*Atah tireh asher E'eseh l'Pharoh*,” “**Now** you will see what I shall do to Pharaoh.” The *yeshuos* of Hashem are now ready to begin.

Galus Mitzrayim was not the only time in our history that diplomacy did not result in *geulah*. With the history of violence and terror that Klal Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael has been subject to for many years, but especially in the last 70, isn't it remarkable that of all the diplomats and politicians, many of whom had the best credentials and were considered the “best in the business,” not a single one of them was able to bring peace to the Middle East? That no attempt to make peace *b'derech hateva* succeeded highlights

the supernatural unfolding history of Israel and precludes a “non-Divine” reading of Israel’s history, similar to how Moshe’s speech impediment precluded a “non-Divine” understanding of Matan Torah.

The Land of Israel, specifically, is a place whose very essence engenders and necessitates the perspective of our constant, total reliance on Hashem. The Mabit teaches us⁷ that the way of Hashem’s *hashgacha* (providence) is that for every nation and land in the world, Hashem provides them with their sustenance at one time. When it comes to the land of Egypt, for example, Hashem fills up the Nile River once, and the land is constantly sustained and nourished from that point on. This is not the case, however, when it comes to Eretz Yisrael, about which the Torah says:

אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ דֹרֵשׁ אֹתָהּ תָּמִיד עֵינֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּהּ מִרְשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד אַחֲרִית שָׁנָה.
It is a land which the Lord your God looks after, on which the Lord your God always keeps His eye, from year's beginning to year's end.
Devarim 11:12

When it comes to the Land of Israel, we need to come to Hashem every single day to ask Him to sustain us here. But, asks the Mabit, doesn't that make Eretz Yisrael seem inferior to the other lands? Isn't it a deficiency that Israel needs constant supervision rather than receiving everything it needs in advance? The answer, says the Mabit, is that Hashem does this out of His love for us. Hashem provides for Israel in the way that ensures we are always looking up at our Father in heaven, never forgetting that it is He who constantly and consistently provides us with everything we need.

Even today, years after the Second Intifada has passed, *b'chasdei Hashem*, we still need to cling to this message. In action, of course, we still need to do our *hishtadlus*. Hashem wants us to learn, to *daven*, to improve our *bein adam l'chaveiro*. One day, we may even find out which of our efforts were helpful in bringing the *geulah*. But all of this *hishtadlus* must be done with the attitude that the *geulah* is ultimately in Hashem's “hands,” not ours. At a time when we are seeing world leaders

recognize Israel in unprecedented ways, we must not forget what Rabbi Faskowitz's Israeli cab driver understood, that *yeshuas Hashem k'heref ayin*, the *geulah* is something that only comes when we realize that Hashem is the only One who can bring it.

Endnotes

1 The sources in this article are based on a shiur given by Rav Moshe Weinberger in 2002 in Kehillas Aish Kodesh, Woodmere, NY titled “The Matzav in Eretz Yisroel: A Child's Eyes.” The shiur can be found on YUTorah. Thanks to Rav Weinberger for reviewing this article.

2 <http://www.yihillcrest.org/dvarshuki/Vaeira08.html>.

3 Rashi to Shmos 7:1 says that *nevuah* means to speak to a crowd.

4 See *Shemos Rabbah* 15:12 and 14:3; *Maseches Rosh Hashana* 11A; *Sefermo and Ba'al HaTurim* on Shemos 12:41-42.

5 The earliest appearance of this phrase seems to be in *piyutim*.

6 Devarim 9:14. See also, Shmuel I 15:16 and Shmuel II 24:16.

7 See Chapter 5 of *Sha'ar HaTeffilah* in *Beis Elokim*.

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THE MODERN STATE OF ISRAEL: TO DREAM WITH EYES WIDE OPEN

There is a joke told in certain circles that the Chabad and Zionist movements should get together — because Chabad has a messiah but no *geulah*, and the Zionists have a *geulah* but no messiah. While the philosophies of both movements are more sophisticated than this joke implies, it highlights one of the most fundamental ideas in the Zionist world view — the existence of a modern-day redemption. A main theme of the religious Zionist view is that the current State of Israel is part of Hashem’s plan for the ultimate redemption. Whether it is the birth pangs or footsteps of the messiah, or the beginning of the *geulah*, our time is portrayed as one of redemption. But as evident from the aforementioned joke, the existence and parameters of this redemption are

highly contested. With the opportunity to discuss the modern era of 5768–5778, I aim to call for a contemporary collection of thoughts, a *cheshbon hanefesh*, of where we are as a state and as a nation in this redemption process.

One of the staples of the Pesach Seder is the drinking of four cups of wine. As the *Torah Temima* (Shemot 6:6) points out, the vast majority of commentators and codifiers of halacha explain that the four cups represent the four “*leshonot shel geulah*,” languages of redemption. The Talmud Yerushalmi (*Pesachim* 10:1), however, presents these four phrases not as languages of redemption, but as four distinct redemptions. *Geulat Mitzrayim*, the redemption from Egypt, is but a title given to four singular redemptions. The *Torah Temima* praises this formulation as appropriate

both within the words of the Torah and within the requirement to drink four separate cups of wine. After all, why celebrate one event four separate times? The *geulah* was thus four small-scale and individual redemptions and not one single salvation.

But why would the Torah categorize the redemption in four independent parts? Why would the standard understanding of one redemption not suffice? Rabbi Yaakov Kranz, the Dubner Maggid, explains that the redemption from Egypt was characterized as four separate salvations to teach us a lesson in complacency. The Jews were challenged to not view their redemption as over once the servitude was no longer hard, nor once they were free in Egypt, and not even when they left Egypt before receiving the Torah.

Each stage of redemption was merely an introduction to the next stage. The Jews were not to become complacent, they were not to feel already redeemed. Each Jew was not to be satisfied with any one step, but should instead investigate further, to see where there was more room for redemption, and to strive for that next step.

There is another lesson to be learned: appreciation. If the redemption had been talked about as one act, the Jews would not have respected the significance of their unique status in each step of the redemptive process. Their national understanding would remain unchanged from one stage to another, in expectation of a redemption not yet here. The easing of labor, relief from slavery, and Exodus from Egypt would remain unappreciated, overlooked, and taken for granted because the redemptions of receiving the Torah and entering the land were not yet realized. To overlook the gifts of G-d with expectations of greater ones is to relate to Him with ignorance and arrogance. Taken together, these two ideas form a call for an honest understanding of the redemptive process, one that is neither complacent nor ignorant, one that both sees future growth while still acknowledging a substantive past and present. Redemption is a process, and as is true in every process, there are many points of triumph along the way before the ultimate goal is attained. This idea is lost on many in contemporary society. On the one hand, there are those for whom the redemption has arrived in full. Those who read the Haftarah of *geulah* on Yom Ha'atzmaut, not out of wishful optimism or prayer, but as an accurate reflection of the state of current events. The words "and the wolf lies with the lamb" come off their lips with no sense of irony, as a

perception of reality, not as a plea for a bright future. The constant assaults in the U.N. over the past ten years, the recent growth in the BDS movement, and the constant threat of war remain happily overlooked or imagined away. These people live in a dream state; a state of arrogant comfort that is less philosophically warranted than it is naïve. They feel we have nothing left to work on, nothing left to earn. It is them the Torah addresses when it says that *geulah* is a long process, a process with which you should never feel complacent. There are more redemptions and more work to be done to merit them, and this work should not be dreamed away.

On the other hand lies those for whom the blessings of Eretz Yisrael, its strength and prosperity, don't even register to their senses. Those who would more easily say *baruch Hashem* on finding a five-dollar bill than on Eretz Yisrael being called Eretz Yisrael once again. These people forget that tradition always had a future in mind. All the bracha goes unobserved and unappreciated — trying to be noticed by the eyes and ears of those who are willfully asleep. They are like those who open a stocked refrigerator complaining that they have nothing to eat. Both of these camps deny an authentic evaluation of where we are as a nation. Both must remember that *geulah* comes in parts, and our current position in the process must both be appreciated and appraised.

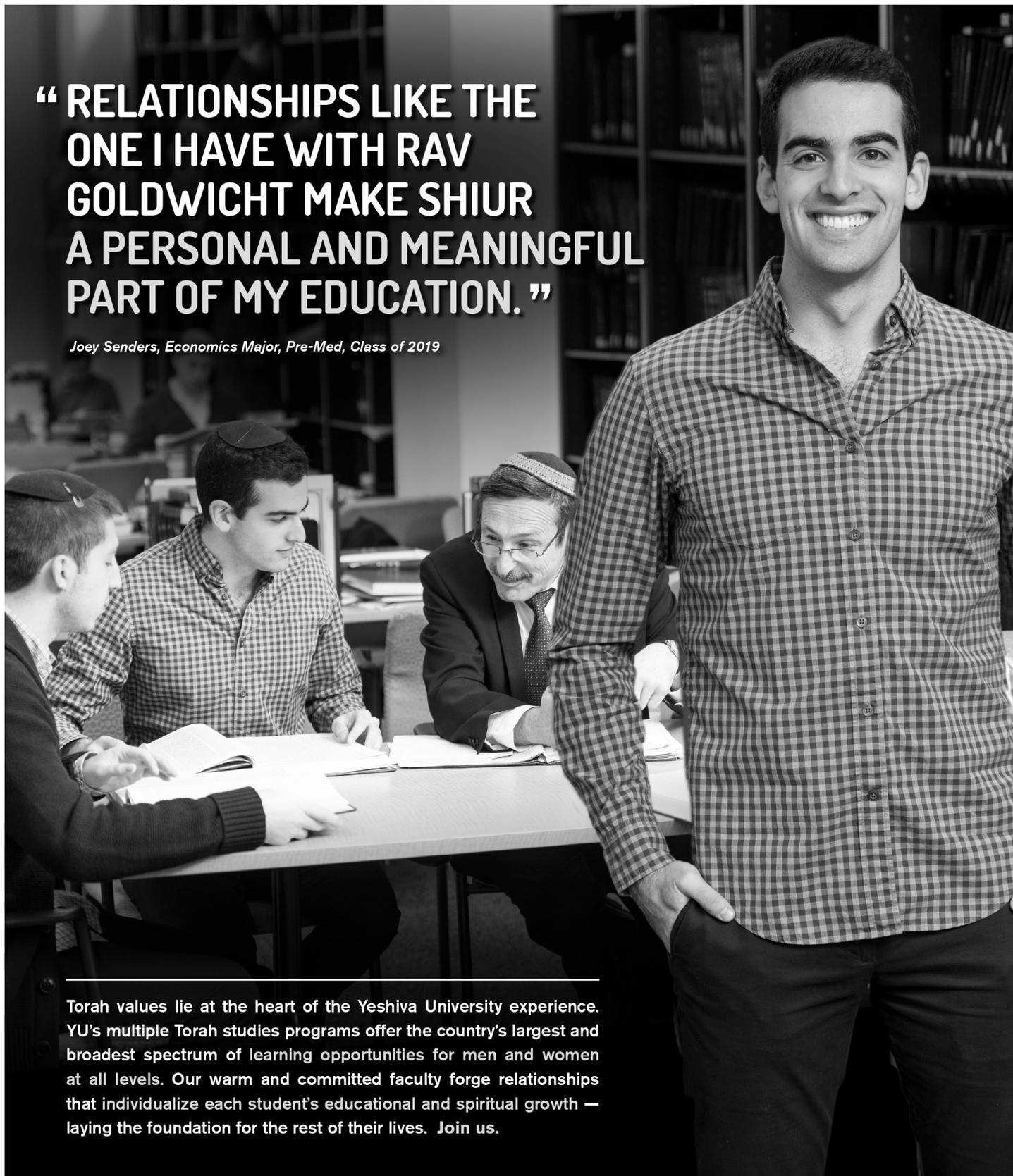
We need to genuinely understand who we are as a people as well. We are wont to deem Israel as the ultimate *ohr lagoyim*, light onto the nations, in its current state; pointing to our democracy within a neighborhood of dictators, and our unprecedented advancements in technology in the

last decade. These claims blissfully dream away the corruption scandals that have rocked our government in the past decade and forget that some of those at the helm of high-tech in Tel Aviv care little to nothing of being an *ohr lagoyim*, let alone for the *mesorah* of Torah itself. But to only criticize is to miss the fact that we have a moral enough nation to follow the example given to us in Tanach to hold the corrupt accountable, no matter the office. To only condemn is to miss the fact that the Jews behind Israeli technology startups are making the world a better, more sophisticated place. Those that point fingers at kollel members for abstaining from military service should first recognize the magnificence of a country in which Torah learning is more widespread than ever before. While those who chastise the military for its secular factions must first admit that it is certainly a holy endeavor to protect the Holy Land. We must honestly admit that although our *ohr* may flicker, it most certainly shines as well.

In the end, we must try and emulate the prayer of King David in Tehillim 126, who prayed that when the Jews return Israel, "*hayinu kecholmim*," they will be *like* dreamers. We cannot be dreaming to the point where we lose all faculty of judgment, nor can we be asleep and remain blind to the unprecedented blessing and opportunity we have as a state. We must reflect on ourselves, not as critics or fanatics, but as willful participants looking to bring the redemption. We must be *like* dreamers in our feeling of euphoria and wonder, but pinch ourselves awake when we realize we are dreaming. A *geulah* has come but *The Geulah* has not, and we must be steadfast in making sure it does arrive while never ignoring that it is almost here.

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