

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary • YU Center for the Jewish Future

# THE BENJAMIN AND ROSE BERGER TORAH TO-GO®

Established by Rabbi Hyman z"l and Ann Arbesfeld

MARCH 2021 • PESACH 5781

# PESACH

Dedicated in Memory of Cantor Jerome & Deborah Simons



ישיבת רבנו יצחק אלחנן

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

An Affiliate of Yeshiva University

CENTER FOR THE JEWISH FUTURE



## Preparing for a Post-Covid World

What lessons can the  
Jewish community take  
from pandemic?



## Aliyah During a Pandemic

Perspectives and  
reflections

# We thank the following synagogues which have pledged to be 5781 Pillars of the Torah To-Go® project

**Beth Jacob Congregation**  
Beverly Hills, CA

**Bnai Israel – Ohev Zedek**  
Philadelphia, PA

**Boca Raton Synagogue**  
Boca Raton, FL

**Cong. Ahavas Achim**  
Highland Park, NJ

**Cong. Ahavath Torah**  
Englewood, NJ

**Cong. Beth Sholom**  
Lawrence, NY

**Cong. Beth Sholom**  
Providence, RI

**Cong. Bnai Yeshurun**  
Teaneck, NJ

**Cong. Ohr HaTorah**  
Atlanta, GA

**Cong. Shaarei Tefillah**  
Newton Centre, MA

**Darchei Noam Glenbrook**  
Northbrook, IL

**Green Road Synagogue**  
Beachwood, OH

**The Jewish Center**  
New York, NY

**Riverdale Jewish Center**  
Riverdale, NY

**United Orthodox  
Synagogues**  
Houston, TX

**Young Israel of  
Century City**  
Los Angeles, CA

**Young Israel of  
Hollywood-Ft Lauderdale**  
Hollywood, FL

**Young Israel of  
Lawrence-Cedarhurst**  
Cedarhurst, NY

**Young Israel of  
New Hyde Park**  
New Hyde Park, NY

**Young Israel of  
New Rochelle**  
New Rochelle, NY

**Young Israel of  
Scarsdale**  
Scarsdale, NY

**Young Israel of  
West Hartford**  
West Hartford, CT

**Young Israel of  
West Hempstead**  
West Hempstead, NY

**Young Israel of  
Woodmere**  
Woodmere, NY

Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman, President, Yeshiva University

Rabbi Yaakov Glasser, David Mitzner Dean, Center for the Jewish Future

Rabbi Menachem Penner, Max and Marion Grill Dean, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

Rabbi Robert Shur, Series Editor

Rabbi Joshua Flug, General Editor

Rabbi Michael Dubitsky, Content Editor

Andrea Kahn, Copy Editor

Copyright © 2021 All rights reserved by Yeshiva University

Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future

500 West 185th Street, Suite 419, New York, NY 10033 • office@yutorah.org • 212.960.0074

This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with appropriate respect.

For sponsorship opportunities, please contact Rabbi Russ Shulkes at russ.shulkes@yu.edu

# Table of Contents **Pesach 5781**

Dedicated in Memory of Cantor Jerome & Deborah Simons

## Introduction

**4** **Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman:** When the Stakes are High

## Perspectives on Pesach



**6** **Mrs. Aliza Abrams Konig:** Did you Learn Anything New this Year?

**7** **Rabbi Elisha Bacon:** Avadim Hayinu: Framing the Seder Experience

**9** **Rabbi Josh Blass:** Mitzvas Matzah: How We Choose to Tell a Story

**10** **Rabbi Lawrence Hajioff:** Three Reasons We Were Slaves in Egypt

**12** **Rabbi Dr. Daniel Lerner:** Matzah – The Jewish Brand

**14** **Rabbi David Pahmer:** So the Children will Ask: Karpas

**16** **Rabbi Mordechai Willig:** What is Hagada?

## Preparing For A Post-Covid World



**18** **Rabbi Menachem Penner:** Relishing Pandemic Prayer, But Yearning to Return

**28** **Dr. Yael Muskat:** Jewish Smachot, Revisited

**33** **Rabbi Dov Winston:** The Impact of Covid-19 on the Local and Global Jewish Communities

**37** **Rabbi Seth Grauer, Mrs. Elisheva Kaminetsky, Rabbi Jonathan Knapp and Dr. Laya Salomon:** Learning in the Time of Covid-19: Challenges, Lessons, and the Future of Jewish Education

## Aliyah During a Pandemic



**44** **Rabbi Moshe and Ariela Davis:** A Leap of Faith

**47** **Dr. Moshe and Elizabeth Glasser:** Alone, But Never Lonely

**50** **Rabbi Elie and Dr. Rebecca Mischel:** Go Home Jacob



## WHEN THE STAKES ARE HIGH

**H**igh stakes can be stressful but they also present opportunities. Moments of great consequence reveal and create character as our truest selves often emerge from the cauldron of crisis. We have all lived through this in some measure during the past year. In the way we masked, practiced social distancing and maintained proper safety measures, our actions had the potential to either save lives or put other people at risk. Moreover, as a community identified by our faith, our collective decisions carried the possibility of either desecrating or sanctifying God's name. There was

much at stake this past year. And as such we were required to act deliberately and consciously each and every step of the way.

High stakes are at the center of the Pesach experience, as seen by the central mitzvot of chametz and matzah. The Torah instructs us:

לא תאכל עליו חמץ שבעת ימים תאכל עליו מצות.

*Do not eat chametz, but for seven days eat matzah.*

In one verse, the Torah teaches us about two mitzvot that are conceptually distinct but actually intrinsically connected. The Talmud,

for example, says that rice and millet cannot be used to bake matzah, the matzah used to fulfill our obligation at the seder, because such cereal grains cannot leaven (*Pesachim* 35a). The lesson of this ruling is that if there is no potential to become chametz, the bread cannot be defined as matzah since matzah and chametz are two sides of the same process. Left unchecked, the mixture of flour and water naturally leavens to become chametz. Matzah, however, is when the process of becoming chametz is arrested. In fact, one could say that the distinguishing factor between matzah and chametz is *shimur*. Our intention



Find more shiurim and articles from Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman at <https://www.yutorah.org/Rabbi-Dr-Ari-Berman>

and careful vigilance to stop the natural flow of the leavening process is what sanctifies the dough being baked and prevents it from becoming prohibited.

This sense of matzah as emerging from a process deliberately fashioned with halakhic high stakes finds its most dramatic expression in the medieval custom to bake the matzot for the seder after the sixth hour on erev Pesach. Considering the fact that we are so careful in our preparations for Pesach to prevent any possibility of owning chametz, it is particularly striking there is a custom to bake matzah at the very time when chametz is actually prohibited. And even more striking is that the matzah produced under such circumstances is considered the most fit for the night of the seder. But this custom is better understood in light of the defining element of *shimur*. It is after the sixth hour when the stakes are highest that the significance of our actions is most highly felt.

The message of matzah is learning how to forge ourselves individually and communally specifically in moments when our attention and focus matter. Matzah must emerge from a world where the prospect of chametz is possible. Because without the possibility of chametz there is nothing at stake. Like matzah our personal and national character are forged specifically from moments when our actions make the most difference.

This past year has been an exercise in operating under similar circumstances. We have learned to pay close attention to activities we rarely thought much about. How close are we standing to one another? Did I bring a mask? Who have I been in contact with? For the entire world the stakes have been high. But if there is any lesson from the character of matzah it is that true character is specifically formed in such moments. It is when the stakes are high that heroes are born.

And over the past year, I have seen a lot of heroes in our community including our Roshei Yeshiva, faculty, staff, alumni and students. Our care and concern for the safety, well-being, and dignity of others have served as a stark reminder for the power and potential of our actions. When so much has been at stake we have risen together as a community and embraced the opportunity of the moment, realizing the gravity and power of our actions.

And it is my wish to all of you, as we hopefully are turning a new corner on this year-long battle, that we all remember the enduring character lesson from the character of matzah. Our actions matter. Each of us matter. And when the stakes are highest we have the potential to truly distinguish ourselves.

Wishing you a happy and healthy Pesach!



## MASTER'S DEGREE IN JEWISH EDUCATION

Where Teaching is Sacred  
Learning Transforms

Your Journey Starts at:  
[yu.edu/azrieli](http://yu.edu/azrieli)



**Azrieli**

Azrieli Graduate School of  
Jewish Education and Administration



# SEVEN PERSPECTIVES ON THE HAGGADA

## Did You Learn Anything New This Year?

**Mrs. Aliza Abrams Konig**  
 Director of Alumni Engagement, Yeshiva University

When I was a student in Midreshet Moriah, I was very fortunate to spend a year and a half learning with Rav Yitzchak Mirsky. During that time, Rav Mirsky published a Haggadah with his own commentary. One d'var Torah he shared with us left an everlasting impression on me. I saw it as a personal challenge to follow through on year after year.

Rav Mirsky asks, “why do we call the Haggadah by the name Haggadah”? He answers that it simply comes from the word *lehagid*, to tell. We might then ask, perhaps the Haggadah

could have been named something more descriptive, like *sipur yetziat Mitzrayim*, recounting the story of the Exodus. After all, we know *hamarbeh harei zeh meshubach*, the more one talks about it, the better it is. The Baal Haggadah could have used that as the title of the Haggadah but chose not to.

To understand why the title “Haggadah” was chosen, it is helpful to look at where the word comes from: the root is *hey, gimmel, daled*. In Parshat Bo in 13:8 we have the passuk in which the directive to recount the story of Hashem taking Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt is given. The passuk reads:

וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּעִבּוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם.

*And you shall explain to your son on that day, “It is because of what the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt.”*

Why did the Torah use this word

וְהִגַּדְתָּ, explain? It is one thing for the Baal Hagaddah to use this word, but the Torah had many other options. There could have been a more specific directive given, for example, tell your son, recount for your son, but instead the word explain is used. To better understand this word choice, we must dig a bit further and look at the first time we see the word in the Torah. The first time we see the word *hagid* is when Hashem speaks to Adam in Bereishit 2:11. This is just after Adam and Chava had eaten from the forbidden fruits in Gan Eden, their eyes were “opened,” and they realized they were not clothed.

וַיֹּאמֶר מִי הִגִּיד לְךָ כִּי עִירַם אֶתָּה הַמֶּן הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לִבְלֹתִי אֶכֶל מִמֶּנּוּ אֶכְלָתָּ.

*Hashem asks, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?”*

Hashem’s choice of words is

interesting, since there was no one else in Gan Eden to have made Adam and Chava aware of their nakedness. Rav Mirsky points out that in this example, the meaning of *hagid* is to teach something new to someone that they did not know before that moment. Hashem was implying that someone made Adam and Chava aware of the concept of their not being clothed.

Another place in which the word *hagid* is used with a similar meaning is in the story of Yosef telling his brothers to return to their father, Yakov, to share that Yosef was in fact still alive. Bereishit 45:13 reads:

וְהַגַּדְתָּם לְאָבִי אֵת כָּל כְּבוֹדִי בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֵת כָּל  
אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתֶם וּמַהֲרֶתֶם וְהוֹרַדְתֶּם אֶת אָבִי הַנֶּה.  
*And you must tell my father everything about my high station in Egypt and all that you have seen; and bring my father here with all speed.*

This was new information to Yakov, similar to the previous example in which Hashem asked Adam who had told him about his nakedness. The brothers were being told to tell Yakov about this new information about Yosef being alive.

This is precisely the challenge Rav Mirsky posed to each one of us. Teaching the Haggadah each year can be a hard task. On one hand, the information must be taught to a variety of levels depending on who is sitting at your Seder table. It must be engaging and encourage the asking of questions. Children have the opportunity to see the story of *yetziat Mitzrayim* through their eyes as they grow. Their perspectives and thoughts change with their maturation. Simultaneously, a parent has the responsibility to think about the messages being imparted to the children each year. What new ideas

are being taught to our children, ourselves, our guests?

The challenge to teach something new each year is real. How can we do that? The story has not changed; we know how it ends. There are no new discoveries about *yetziat Mitzrayim*, the exodus from Egypt. This is, in fact, the challenge the Baal Haggadah was posing to each of us when choosing the name Haggadah — that each year we must learn something new.

It is quite amazing to see that each year, new Haggadot come out, that each year new perspectives on the Seder and Haggadah are shared. We are, in fact, able to learn new ideas each year. This is perhaps a far larger message for life in general: we may at times feel stagnant, that life looks the same from year to year, when in fact it is our responsibility to try and view every scenario from a new perspective. To learn something new, to grow in a new way. Since this Pesach may again look different from past years shared with family and friends, it is my hope that we are all safe and that whomever we share the Seder with, we are able to share new Torah and old Torah in a way that enriches each of our experiences.

## Avadim Hayinu: Framing the Seder Experience

### Rabbi Elisha Bacon

*Mashgiach Ruchani and Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Torah Studies, Yeshiva University*

Following the Ma Nishtana, the four questions that launch the Maggid section of the Haggadah, the Haggadah responds with Avadim Hayinu. Commentators raise many

textual questions on this short paragraph.

- 1) We declare that we were slaves in Mitzrayim and Hashem took us out. How does that answer the four questions concerning the mitzvos of the evening posed in the Ma Nishtana?
- 2) The Haggadah first states we were *avadim*, slaves, to Paroh in Egypt and then later says, if Hashem hadn't taken us out, we would still be *meshubadim*, beholden, to Paroh. Why the change in language from עבד to משעבד?
- 3) How can the Haggadah state unequivocally that had Hashem not taken us out at that time we would still be slaves in Egypt until this very day? We know from major historical trends that many factors throughout history could have led to our freedom. Powers rise and fall, cultures change, political attitudes shift, and at any given point we may have left Egypt through so-called natural forces.

The commentators grapple with these questions and offer different answers. A look at two of these approaches reveals a couple of larger themes that frame our Seder night experience.

The *Maaseh Nissim* by Rabbi Yaakov from Lisa, 1760–1832, explains that the author of the Haggadah is not trying to directly answer the four questions. Instead, he is positing a fundamental belief. We, the Jewish people, were slaves in Egypt and we served Paroh. As slaves, we did not have the luxury of questioning our duties or negotiating our terms. We obeyed without understanding or comprehending the purpose of our jobs or the relevance of the tasks. Such is the life of a slave; he faithfully carries out his duties to his master and such was our life under Paroh's rule.

But as the Jewish people transition into freedom, we have questions about the meaning of our jobs, the mitzvos and their import. We are even encouraged to ask questions and as such, we begin the Haggadah with the four questions. But before the Haggadah begins to explore the depth of the mitzvos, thereby giving the commandments more richness, the author of the Haggadah pauses to teach a critical lesson: Even though we are transitioning to freedom, we accept that we are committed servants of Hashem. Just as we served Paroh without question, so too our service of Hashem is not predicated upon understanding the mitzvos. We begin our Pesach Seder with Avadim Hayinu to fundamentally frame our relationship with Hashem as humble, grateful servants who recognize Hashem's goodness and we submit unconditionally to His will. Only after firmly establishing this belief do we then begin to uncover more meaning behind the mitzvos. What emerges from the *Maaseh Nissim* is that our first experience of the Seder night is to recognize that through the process of *yetzias Mitzrayim* and reenacting that event, we reaffirm our total, unequivocal loyalty to Hashem.

Rav Yitzchak Hutner, in a beautiful piece in *Pachad Yitzchak* (Pesach Maamar 42), elaborates on this point. Rav Hutner explains that every action a Jew does to serve Hashem constitutes *avodas Hashem*. This includes explicit mitzvos from the Torah, as well as seemingly mundane actions that are performed with the intention of being better able to serve Hashem. For example, the explicit mitzvah of keeping Shabbos is clearly part of our *avodas Hashem*. But it is also true that eating a healthy diet so that we have energy to serve

Hashem better is also fulfilling our *avodas Hashem* (Rambam, *Hilchos Deios* 3:2–3). Since this is the case, the Torah avoids the term *avodah* when describing mitzvos in favor of labeling mitzvos individually. The one exception to the rule is Pesach night. The mitzvos of Pesach night — matzah, karbon Pesach, etc. — are referred to broadly as *ve'avadeta es ha'avodah hazos* (Shemos 13:5). Why use the broad terminology of *avodah* to describe the mitzvos of the night? Rav Hutner bases his answer on a halacha regarding becoming an *eved*, a servant. When a master acquires an *eved*, he commands the servant to perform an act of servitude for the master. By responding to that command, the servant cements his relationship with his master as an *eved*. What emerges from this halacha is that while a person who is already an *eved* may perform the very same service as the person who is just becoming an *eved*, the function of that service is fundamentally different. In the former, the servant is fulfilling the responsibilities of his position, while in the latter, the service functions as *kinyan avdus*, concretizing the servant master-relationship. On Pesach night, reenacting *yetzias Mitzrayim*, we enter into a bond and relationship with Hashem as faithful servants to our master. The significance of the mitzvos of the night are not individual commandments that we practice because we are servants of Hashem. Rather, these mitzvos represent, in a broader way, the cementing of our relationship to Hashem. Hashem commands us this night to eat matzah and a korban Pesach, and we react not out of prior loyalty to serve Hashem but as a response to Hashem beckoning us to enter into a sacred relationship of *eved* to *Adon* (Master).

As such, the Torah uses the broad term *avodah* to describe the night's activities, because the individual mitzvos unite under one umbrella of entering into our relationship with Hashem. This is one dominant theme of the Seder night: our total commitment to serving Hashem who freed us from bondage, becoming *avdei Hashem*.

The *Maaseh Hashem*, Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi, takes a different approach to answer our initial questions. Avadim Hayinu, he says, is picking up on the last of the four questions, which is: Why do we lean at the Seder, which symbolizes and demonstrates our complete freedom from bondage? The answer is that Hashem alone, through the might of His hand, took us out of Egypt and freed us from Paroh. The significance of that statement cannot be underestimated, explains the *Maaseh Hashem*. Hashem had many means at His disposal to free us from Paroh. He could simply have planted the thought in Paroh's mind to let the Jewish people go. However, had the Jewish people exited Egypt through more natural means, had Paroh simply let us go out of the goodness of his heart, the Jewish people would have been indebted forever to Paroh for their freedom. The message conveyed by the words "Hashem took us out of Egypt with a strong outstretched hand" is that we owe thanks and allegiance only to Hashem and to no one else, not Paroh and not Egypt. This further explains why the author of the Haggadah uses the language of *meshubad*, beholden. Had Hashem, Himself, not taken us out of Mitzrayim, the Jewish people would still be *meshubad*, beholden, to Paroh even if we were no longer slaves. We would forever owe *hakaras hatov* to Paroh or whoever

ultimately provided our freedom. Hence, we lean on the Seder night to demonstrate our complete freedom from all peoples, and Avadim Hayinu articulates our *hakaras hatov* to Hashem for personally taking us out of Mitzrayim.

We see from the *Maaseh Hashem* that *hakaras hatov* is understood as a real *shibud*, almost like a contractual obligation upon a Jew to return the favor to one who has helped him. Rav Hershel Schachter in *B'ikvei Hatzon* 16:7) quotes Rav Soloveitchik's *peshat* on the following pasuk:

כִּי לֹא יִחַדֵּל אֲבִיוֹן מִקְרֹב הָאָרֶץ עַל פְּנֵי אֲנָכִי  
מִצְדָּק לְאִמֹר פֶּתַח תִּפְתַּח אֶת יָדְךָ לְאֶחֱיךָ לְעִנְיָךְ  
וּלְאֶבְיָיִךְ בְּאַרְצְךָ

*For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: open your hand to the poor and needy kinsman in your land.*

#### **Devarim 15:11**

Poverty always exists and it is a moving target. Sometimes a person is in the position to give and other times that very same person may need to receive. As such, the Torah understands that giving tzedakah is an obligation and the recipient is beholden or has a *shibud* to pay back that kindness. We may all find ourselves on different sides of that coin at some point in our lives.

At the Seder night, this powerful theme of *hakaras hatov* emerges. The Rambam in *Sefer HaMitzvos* (mitzvah 157) states that an integral part of the mitzvah to tell over the story of *yetzias Mitzrayim* is to give thanksgiving to Hashem for all his kindness that He bestowed upon us.

As we begin our journey on the Seder night, we reinforce these two salient themes that inform the Pesach experience in particular, as well as our

broader Jewish identity. We affirm our fidelity to Hashem whom we serve with complete faith, and we express our unbridled *hakaras hatov* to Hashem. Furthermore, by realizing *hakaras hatov* is a *shibud*, we commit to inculcating that middah into our very beings so that we are always expressing thanksgiving to all those who show us kindness.

## **Mitzvas Matzah: How We Choose to Tell a Story**

### **Rabbi Josh Blass**

*Mashgiach Ruchani, Yeshiva University*

On first blush, the mitzvah of *achilas matzah* seems straightforward. *Al shum mah?* This matzah that we point to and consume, what is its significance? The Hagaddah proffers the well-known answer that it represents the bread that did not have a chance to rise upon our narrow escape from the servitude in Mitzrayim. However, as in life itself, the issue is far from simple. For while we understand the matzah's historical resonance, the Torah deepens the significance of this mitzvah by referring to the bread as *lechem oni*.

The Gemara, in *Pesachim* 115b, provides two different explanations as to why matzah is given this designation. According to one opinion it refers to *aniyus* — remembering our days of poverty and servitude. According to a second opinion, it refers to the redemption — *lechem she'onim alav devarim harbeh*, bread that is used as the fulcrum in the telling of the story of freedom and redemption. The meforshim are puzzled as to why the same object is utilized for two opposite emotions

and experiences — poverty and freedom; surely the Torah could have thought of a different expression for either servitude or freedom?

Perhaps the point is that we are given a choice as to which perspective we want to adopt when thinking about our national narrative. We could choose to focus on the poverty, the backbreaking labor and the humiliation, or we could choose to sing a *shira chadasha*, a new song that celebrated the ultimate joyous conclusion despite the existence of the initial dark chapters.

This might be the answer to the well-known question posed by many Rishonim as to why the first mitzvah given after *yetzias Mitzrayim* is that of *kiddush hachodesh*, sanctification of the new moon. The *ba'alei machshava* highlight the exceptional nature of this mitzvah in that *kiddush hachodesh* reflects man's ability to sanctify the moon, which in turn determines when bread becomes chametz, on which day we are subject to *kares* for not fasting on Yom Kippur, and a whole host of other critical halachos. According to the *Kedushas Levi*, the verse (*Shemos* 12:2) "*rishon hu lachem*" — it is a first for you — is essentially saying that Hashem, the "Rishon," is given over to Bnei Yisroel through their ability to sanctify the moon. What a transformative mitzvah to begin the Jew's sojourn through the desert! Bnei Yisroel had the choice to view themselves as slaves still dealing with the reverberations of hundreds of years of slavery, or they could view themselves as regal *bnei melachim* and as an *am segulah*, a treasured nation. Beginning the journey with the mitzvah of *kiddush hachodesh*, and all that it implies about the grandeur of man, and specifically *am Yisroel* as

a *mamleches kohanim*, allowed Bnei Yisroel to frame their experiences in a psychologically healthy and productive fashion. We are given a choice how to view *yetzias Mitzrayim* specifically, and Jewish history in its entirety. Do we experience our life through the prism of the downtrodden *aniyus* or through the perspective of *geulah*?

In a real sense, many of us are enslaved by the narrative of our lives — how we look back on a difficult childhood, how we deal with suffering and with setbacks — and we frame our lives through the prism of that negative narrative. To some degree there is a certain spirit of *cheirus* that comes with choosing to write a positive script of our life. The goal is to be able to acknowledge and give voice to frustrations and even pain, and at the same time to genuinely feel that we have the capacity to transform every incident that has befallen or will befall us into opportunities for real growth and meaning. That is also a freedom of sorts. The matzah in its duality and complexity speaks of the entire process of national and personal redemption, and challenges us in our perception of our own life's journey.

## Three Reasons We Were Slaves in Egypt

**Rabbi Lawrence Hajioff**

Faculty, Yeshiva University's Stern College for Women

Many nations begin with wars, infighting and challenges between themselves and those people around them. But why did Hashem decree that the Jewish people should begin its role in history as slaves? Wasn't there

a better method that God could have chosen to start the Am HaNivchar, the Chosen People of world history, who one day would be receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai and fulfill the mitzvot therein?

Our sages describe three reasons we needed to begin our role on the world stage with a 210-year sojourn in Mitzrayim, many years of which we were slaves to Pharaoh and Egypt.

1. To strengthen the Jews' trust in God.
2. To develop a close relationship with God.
3. To show the Jews the consequences of an over-zealous pursuit of materialism.

The Torah in Bereishit (15:7-8) describes how Avraham was told that his descendants would be slaves in Egypt:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָם ה' אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ כְּשָׂדִים לָתֶת לְךָ אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְרִשְׁתָּהּ. וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹהִים בְּמָה אֲדַע כִּי אִירְשֶׁנָּה.

*He said to him [Avraham]: "I am God Who brought you out of Ur Kasdim to give you this land to inherit it." He said, "My Lord, how will I know that I will inherit it?"*

The Gemara in *Nedarim* (32a) explains that Avraham's question had in it a lack of emunah that would somehow remain with his descendants, and which required the Egyptian exile to help remove it from their souls.

אמר רבי אבהו אמר רבי אלעזר מפני מה נענש אברהם אבינו ונשתעבדו בניו למצרים מאתים ועשר שנים ... שמואל אמר מפני שהפריז על מדותיו של הקדוש ברוך הוא שנאמר במה אדע כי אירשנה

*Rabbi Abahu said in the name of Rabbi Eliezer, "Why was Avraham punished by having his descendants enslaved for*

*210 years in Egypt?" Shmuel answered, "Because Avraham doubted God's [credibility in fulfilling His promise – Rashi]. This is reflected in the verse: 'How will I know that I will inherit the Land?'"*

Egypt was, as the Torah (Devarim 4:2) describes, a *kur habarzel*, an iron crucible, which has the power, explains Rashi, to purify gold and remove all dross that is found in it. So too, the Jewish people are like gold that needed a fiery cleansing to prepare them to receive the Torah. As Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg explains in *HaKtav V'HaKabbalah*, God's true purpose behind the Egyptian slavery was to purify the Jewish people [of their baser characteristics], just as gold is purified in a crucible. He wanted to remove the base metals so that only pure gold would remain. To this end, many of those Jews who were unworthy died in the plague of darkness, and only those who remained were chosen to receive the Torah.

How would being a slave help purify us? What does being a slave and then being redeemed by God do for our emunah and the emunah of future generations? The *Sfat Emet*, Shemot, Parshat Va'eira, 5634, explains that the purpose of the Exodus from Egypt was that we should know that God brought us out from there:

כי כשאדם שוכח ומתגאה לומר כחי ועוצם ידי כו' אז צריכין להביאו במיצא ושיראה כי הכל מה' יתברך ויציאת מצרים היה הכנה לדורות.

*For when a person forgets this and grows proud, saying, "My strength and abilities created all this success for me" (Devarim 8:17) he must be brought to a state of helplessness to show him that everything is from God." The entire exile was a preparation for future generations.*

Sometimes you have to go to the

lowest low before you can reach and appreciate the highest high, explains, Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, *Michtav M'Eliyahu*, Vol. I, p. 158:

וכן בכל פעם שהיה צורך לתת אפשרות לצדיק להתעלות במדרגה גדולה עליונה מאד, נזרק הצדיק אל סביבת השפלים היותר גרועים למען ילמד מהם את פחיתות הרע ויתאמץ בטוב עד מרום קצו.

*Every time there is a need to give a righteous person the possibility of rising to a very high level, he is thrown into the worst environment so that he should learn that evil is futile, and thus strive to reach the highest limits.*

Similarly, when Israel needed to prepare to accept the Torah, God did not send them to the Heavenly Yeshivah from where Moshe took the Torah, but the opposite: He sent them into bondage in Egypt, to be slaves to people who had sunk to the forty-ninth level of impurity, which is the most depraved and Godless level of physical existence.

This slavery brought the Jews to a state where “they cried out to God (to return to Him)” (Shemot 2:23). This teshuva, a return to God, which began at the polar extreme of physical enslavement and frustration, was the cause of their astonishing ascent to the spiritual level of receiving the Torah, which is comparable to the forty-ninth level of spiritual purity.

The third reason for the slavery comes from the Ba’alei HaTosfot (*Tosfot Shalem*, Shemot, Va’eira, p. 22). The purpose of slavery was to remove from the souls of the Jewish people any extreme desire for money and material success. At the outset, the Jews were offered payment for every brick they made, and because of their desire for money they made more than necessary. After this, the

Egyptians forced them to continue making bricks at the same rate as when they were being paid. This experience would remain with the Jewish people for generations to come. Whenever we become hyper focused on material success and make that our *raison d’être*, we remind ourselves of the futility of pursuing money for its own sake, and instead realize that only spiritual goals last into the next world.

In conclusion, Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, *Michtav M'Eliyahu*, Vol. II, pp. 17–18, reminds us that everything that occurs to the Jewish people has an inner aspect to it. The exile in Egypt appears to a normal person as a physical slavery. But a spiritually-oriented person sees that it was a slavery of the soul, and that this was the real cause for physical slavery. In short, we were slaves to the yetzer harah, the evil inclination.

The Torah calls Egypt “Mitzrayim,” from the root *meitzar*, which means “constriction” and “distress.” It also signifies a boundary. The title of Egyptian kings — Pharaoh in Hebrew — is also significant. Its root meaning is “to lay open or untie,” implying that the goal of Egyptian impurity was to break down the defenses of our personality and lay it wide open to the inroads of the yetzer harah.

May this Pesach allow us as individuals and as a nation to build our emunah and free ourselves from all the parts of our personality that are keeping us in a slave mentality. In the merit of this, may we bring the final redemption of Mashiach and return to our rightful homeland Israel with the third and final Beit Hamikdash. Amen.



## MASTER OF SCIENCE IN TAXATION

Where Excellence  
Meets  
Entrepreneurship

Your Journey Starts at:  
[yu.edu/tax](http://yu.edu/tax)



**Sy Syms**

Sy Syms School of Business

# Matzah – The Jewish Brand

**Rabbi Dr. Daniel Lerner**

Judaic Studies Faculty, Yeshiva University

The idea of “brand identification” has become embedded in our culture and economy. A brand is a collection of experiences and associations connected with a particular company or entity. Whether it is the Nike swoosh, the Starbucks siren, or Disney’s silhouette of Mickey Mouse, effective branding involves the ability to create a simple yet profound association with a company’s products.

In 1916, one of the most successful matzah manufacturers was the Pacific Coast Biscuit Co. in Portland, Oregon. Each spring, the Jewish Tribune of Portland would carry the following advertisement:

“This trademark stands for supreme quality.” Resting just above that headline was a large, conspicuous swastika.

The advertisement continued: “Whenever you see the famous swastika sign just remember its significance to the fathers and its present meaning. Then, it meant brightness and prosperity — today it is the symbol of purity and quality. When buying matzahs, the swastika is your surety of purity.”

For five years the Pacific Coast Biscuit Co. sold matzahs sealed in a carton branded with a swastika.

Until Hitler unfurled his new red banner in 1921, the swastika was merely a symbol of good luck. Yet to our modern eye, the swastikas on matzah is an affront; as contradictory as a *hashgochah* on pork!

Ironically, it could be argued that the entire Pesach Seder is a study of contradictions:

- The four cups of wine we drink symbolize redemption, yet it is customary to use red wine and we spill out some of our wine when recalling the plagues inflicted on the Egyptians (*Divrei Yirmiyahu, derashot*) thereby diminishing our joy despite the fact

the punishment was justified.

- Maror recalls the bitterness of our suffering but serves as a condiment for the *korbon Pesach* (nowadays commemorated by koreich) celebrating our redemption.
- We dip our karpas and maror as a sign of aristocracy, but the karpas is dipped in salt water to evoke the tears shed by our enslaved ancestors. In contrast, the bitter maror is dipped in the sweet charoset.
- The apples in charoset recall the fertility of the Israelite women and the Divine protection afforded to their babies. Its texture reminds us of the mortar the Israelite slaves had to produce for bricks.
- Many have the custom of eating a hard-boiled egg at the Seder, representing both the *korbon chagigah*/Festival Offering and *aveilut*/mourning.
- We recline for matzah (redemption); sit up straight for maror (servitude); and then recline when we eat matzah and maror together (“*Zecher l’mikdash*,”



*K'Hillel*"), symbolic of redemption.

• After Birkat Hamazon, before we begin saying the second part of Hallel, the Shulchan Aruch (*Orach Chaim* no. 480) cites a custom to open a house door that leads outside as an expression of faith that tonight is the *leil shimurim* — a night of protection and ultimate redemption. Yet, at the same time, the Magen Avraham comments that if it is dangerous outside, then don't open the door since we shouldn't rely on a miracle!

And of course, there is matzah. Above anything else, matzah is the brand identity for Pesach. The Torah's name for Pesach is "*Chag HaMatzot*."

There are two passages in the Haggadah that deal explicitly with the reason for matzah.

The first is "*Ha Lachma Anya*," which identifies matzah as "the bread of affliction."

The second is "Rabban Gamliel...," who explains that "the dough of our fathers did not have time to become leavened" before they were redeemed; "for they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay..."

These two references also reflect the contradictory themes of slavery and freedom.

The entire seder simultaneously commemorates both our exile and our redemption. How do we reconcile these opposites?

The answer, according to Rabbi, Dr. Abraham Twersky, ZT"l is that we do not need to reconcile all conflicts.

So much of modern psychology is focused on the resolution of contention. This, explains Rabbi Twersky, has resulted in people eschewing all conflicts. Living with ongoing stress has become

unthinkable. Rabbi Twersky argues that the loss of tolerance for conflict has had a profound impact on interpersonal relationships as well as on the intrapersonal psyche. For so many people, addictions, lack of job stability, the unprecedented divorce rate is, to a great measure, due to the inability to withstand conflict, and the desire to seek immediate relief from all frustrating situations.

The Pesach Seder is characterized by the coexistence of conflicting ideas. The concept of freedom espoused in Torah is quite distinct from our modern culture's, where the ultimate aim of freedom is the absence of all discord. *Cheirut* — the Torah's definition of freedom — includes the capacity to live meaningfully despite stress and the ability to grow in the face of conflict.

The *cheirut* of the Torah means the freedom and ability to live with stress and conflict, to eat the pesach, the matzah, and the maror. Without such conflict — *lo yatza yedei chovato* — we cannot fulfill our obligations of the Pesach Seder.

Rachel Yehudah, a leading authority on PTSD and resilience, studied a group of Holocaust survivors to determine how they handled life after barely escaping genocide. She found that resilience is not a constant, steady state. Despite the common belief that people are either resilient or vulnerable, strong or weak, healthy or sick, Yehudah maintains that people can experience these states simultaneously.

The Seder emphasizes an essential aspect of spirituality: the ability to live with conflict. Perhaps it is this very ability is essential to our continuity.

The swastika as a brand can come

and go. Indeed, Hitler's predicted "thousand-year Reich," with all of its hubris and devastation, lasted only 12 years and four months, yet the Jew and his humble matzah is at two millennia and counting!

The last Seder in the Warsaw ghetto occurred in April 1943. There, a young boy named Mordechai was sitting with his family around their table. The Seder was bereft of matzah, wine, or anything resembling a Yom Tov meal. They had no maror per se, but bitterness surrounded them. The ghetto was burning, the sound of marching soldiers, gunshots and bombs drowned out the cries of the resistance fighters trying bravely to withstand the Nazi onslaught. Mordechai, who had just finished reciting the *Mah Nishtanah*, said: "*Tati*, I have asked you the four questions but I still have one more question: *Tati*, will I be here tomorrow?"

Tears streamed down the father's face as he turned to his young son and answered: "My dearest Mottele. I cannot promise you that I will be here tomorrow or that you will be here tomorrow. But I swear to you that there will always be Jewish children who will ask the *Mah Nishtanah* and who will continue that which is holy to Klal Yisrael."

Matzah is paradigmatic of the Jewish experience as it transcends specific times and locales. Perhaps that is why it remains the most consistent brand in Jewish history. During the darkest and most foreboding times of Jewish history, matzah inspires us with a message of hope. Exhorting us to remember our humble origins, transcend our present fears and anticipate a glorious future.

# So the Children will Ask: Karpas

**Rabbi David Pahmer**

*Judaic Studies Faculty, Stern College for Women*

In framing the Pesach Seder, the Torah seems to try to capitalize on children's natural curiosity. On this night we want to transmit much to the children, and the Chumash lays out the method by structuring the education around questions and answers: "When your child asks..." Chazal expand on this in several ways at the Seder, prescribing that we do some activities that promote the child's curiosity in the first place. One example of this is the mitzva of karpas.

בִּי הֵיכִי דְלִיהוּי הֵיכִירָא לְתִינוּקוֹת.

*In order to be noticed by the children (to provoke them to ask about it).*

## **Pesachim 114b**

Although this is intended to get the children engaged in the proceedings, in some homes it has an opposite effect: the child might ask about karpas but get unsatisfying answers. The humorous response (and often the only answer that the parent has) is, "so that you should ask!" I suspect that this circular non-answer is the best parents can provide because over the years karpas has lost its original meaning, or has accumulated a *mélange* of contradictory meanings, and it is now covered in a fog of confusion and mystery.

Actually, it doesn't take much to unravel the mystery, to reveal a very understandable practice that in the past was not given much explanation because little explanation was required. However, let us see what karpas has turned into first.

The *Magen Avraham* writes<sup>1</sup> that the term "כרפס" is an anagram of "ס' פרך"

meaning (60 [myriad] laboring), which presumably suggests that the karpas is intended to represent the enslavement of the Jewish People in Mitzrayim. Since elementary school teachers love wordplay to enrich students' connections to unfamiliar terms, many teachers emphasize this comment of *Magen Avraham*, thus permanently associating slavery with the procedure.

Additionally, more sophisticated, creative explanations of the term karpas have been connected to the clothing of Yosef Hatzadik, which his brothers stripped from him when they plotted to kill him; this suggests that this step of the Seder is intended to acknowledge the roots of the subsequent enslavement.<sup>2</sup>

Many have the practice of dipping the karpas into saltwater.<sup>3</sup> Saltwater has no apparent significance, so it would seem that if we combine the image presented by *Magen Avraham* with saltwater we can explain the saltwater as referring to the salty tears of the enslaved Jews.

We are told to be very careful to eat only a tiny quantity — one small bite only. Clearly this would seem to confirm the imagery of enslavement — lowest class, financial distress, insufficient food. The mystery of karpas seems to be now all consistent — it looks like we are dramatizing the terrible suffering of the Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim, from which Hashem saved us! This makes karpas almost the same as maror, which is explicitly described in the Hagada as having that meaning. For many, this is what karpas is all about.

The main difficulty is that there's nothing about eating a bit of tasty food that conveys the image of slavery; so if Chazal were trying to evoke that image, they chose a poor method of

doing so.<sup>4</sup>

We can see an alternative understanding of what Chazal intended in the practice of karpas by looking at it differently.

Although we refer to this procedure as karpas, the Talmud does not give it that name. It is not actually given any name. It is known simply as the "first dipping" (the second dipping is maror). The Talmud is clear that it involves vegetables and that we recite the appropriate bracha "Pri Ha'adama" on them. If no vegetables are available apart from maror, then use maror for this too. The word karpas makes its way into the hagadas during the Middle Ages, and the Maharil seems to be the first to refer to "כרפס" as the vegetable of choice.<sup>5</sup> In Farsi (then as now) this is simply celery when pronounced "karafs." (Check this yourself on Google Translate if you can read Farsi script.) This has nothing to do with the word "karpas" found in Megillat Esther, which refers to a kind of cloth or fabric. Clearly, whatever Chazal intended for this step did not have anything to do with the word "karpas."

Since this procedure is called a "dipping" in the Talmud, we would expect that it would be clear what dip we are using. However, the Talmud does not specify. Some Rishonim infer that since no specific dip is prescribed, then the only option is the one used for the "second dipping" — namely, charoset (which is what we dip maror into).<sup>6</sup> Others infer that since no specific dip is prescribed, then any convenient liquidy sauce is intended, such as vinegar.<sup>7</sup> This second opinion is the common practice, although the range of suggestions is broadened to include saltwater as another option. Presumably, saltwater can function as vinegar for these purposes. As much

as tears seem to be salty, we are not expected to eat our vegetables in tears or with tears. The karpas is clearly intended to be a dip, but since Chazal didn't specify whether there is anything significant about what we dip into, and as mentioned above, our practice is not to use charoset for karpas, we should be able to choose whatever we please. Since we are talking about celery or similar green vegetable or vegetables, like a salad, what would we choose to dip the salad in? In our world, we use salad dressing — which is some variant of vinegar, oil, salt, or other spice. In other words, when the Rishonim suggested vinegar or salt water, they were suggesting simple dressing, not because the dressing had some ritual significance, but exactly the reverse — because it didn't have to be charoset, which does have ritual significance, so it could even be anything mundane, like vinegar (or even saltwater).

Why would Chazal prescribe eating a tiny quantity of vegetable? What does tininess represent? Unfortunately, this is a misunderstanding. Chazal never prescribed limiting the karpas at all. They intended that we eat as much as we want or as little as we want.<sup>8</sup> If we eat the salad then Chazal expected that we would eat a sizeable amount; after all, it is an appetizer. Then why do we insist on eating no more than a tiny bit? This is because over the years a disagreement arose over the correct conclusion of karpas — must we recite a bracha achrona or not? On one hand, since we finished this course, then a bracha achrona is warranted. On the other hand, perhaps we need to keep the bracha rishona over karpas active until after eating maror,

which will not get its own bracha rishona.<sup>9</sup> Chazal intended one or the other of these practices, so they intended a full course for karpas and either we would recite the bracha achrona or we wouldn't, depending on whom you ask. However, some Rishonim came to realize that by eating less than a kzayis we can bypass the question altogether and make everyone happy (except the participants at the Seder of course), because eating such a small quantity never necessitates reciting a bracha achrona but keeps the bracha rishona active.<sup>10</sup> Keeping in mind that Chazal never intended to limit the karpas helps us acknowledge that perhaps we are intended to enjoy it.

It becomes clear that the karpas procedure is simply the appetizer course — the salad — and it is unusual because we normally wouldn't serve the appetizer right away, or before the matza, or as a separate course — depending on the prevailing practices. So why are we doing it now? Because it emphasizes the luxurious results of the geula. It is the same type of practice as reclining. Because whether we indulge in this luxury the rest of the year or not, tonight we do because tonight we put on a show of rising to extreme heights of status — as a stark contrast to the conditions of slavery where we began our peoplehood.

A practical consequence of reframing the karpas as a display of freedom, rather than enslavement, is whether to recline while eating karpas. The intention of Chazal is that we recline for the foods that refer to our freedom (such as matza and wine), but not for those that refer to our enslavement (such as maror). Which of these is karpas? According



## Make the most of your summer

### בין הזמנים

### Earn a Master's in Social Work

- Flexible Schedule
- Classes Live Online
- Scholarships Available

To Learn More Contact:  
[sofia.ludwig@yu.edu](mailto:sofia.ludwig@yu.edu)



**Wurzweiler**  
 Wurzweiler School  
 of Social Work

to this understanding, this is like the first course of the meal, or even more demonstrative of freedom than the regular food of the meal, so reclining would be warranted.<sup>11</sup>

When a child asks about the karpas, the answer should be informative and especially relevant to the beginning of the Seder. Since there are two overarching themes we highlight during the Seder — slavery and freedom — our answer will reflect one of those. If we take the position that karpas is like maror, then the answer is something like we were slaves in Mitzrayim,<sup>12</sup> but it isn't so clear why eating celery or vegetables represents that. However, if karpas is to express freedom, then we might say one of the few answers that the Bach provides.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps we say: we have a first course just like the royalty do, because Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim and raised us to this level of status... or, we say this is so we don't get too hungry because we have a lot to talk about because tonight is a big deal... or, he quotes from the Maharal that appetizers are common, so the children won't necessarily be puzzled by it — but after having this salad course, the salad course after hamotzi (which is maror) will be the strange thing, so when we have the provisions for that already on the table it makes the child wonder what's going on.

Looking at what the Talmud describes for the early part of the Seder, we find the following picture: After Kiddush, we serve the vegetables in dip (karpas), even before the meal proper begins, to confuse the children and demonstrate that this night is different from ordinary nights. In case their curiosity is not sufficiently aroused, pour another kiddush cup of wine,<sup>14</sup> and remove the food before eating the meal!<sup>15</sup> All of this is expected to

inspire the children to ask about the weirdness,<sup>16</sup> and if all else fails, the Hagada explicitly spells out the Mah Nishtana to bring out all of this.

## Endnotes

1. *Shulchan Aruch* 473:4, quoting the Maharil. Actually, the Maharil takes this wordplay seriously and defends his father's practice of taking leek (כרתי) when celery was unavailable on the grounds that it is also known as a type of כרפס, according to one interpretation of Rashi, *Succa* 39b.
2. Rabbeinu Manoach on Rambam, *Chametz Umatza* 8:2; See also *Torah To-Go*, Pesach 2016, and 2018 (two essays).
3. This is mentioned as an option in various sources, mostly Ashkenazi ones.
4. Still, it seems that the Maharil did view karpas this way, and even finds another allusion to the enslavement in the karpas by noting that it resembles the straw to make bricks if it grows fully, although he does not mention tears or poverty.
5. In *Seder R. Amram Gaon* it appears fourth in a list of suggested vegetables; in R. Yosef Tuv Elem's *piyyut* it appears second; in *Machzor Vitri* it is third out of five, but the label "karpas" is used for this step in the seder.
6. Rambam, *Chametz Umatza* 8:2; *Machzor Vitri* 69.
7. Rashbam, Tosfos 114a; Also *Shulchan Aruch* 473:6.
8. However, the Rambam does insist on at least a minimum of *kzait* like the other required foods.
9. See *Beis Yosef* 473, who infers this dispute from a dispute regarding whether the bracha over karpas covers the maror.
10. This is the policy described in the *Shulchan Aruch*.
11. *Kaf Hachaim* addresses this question and cites the various authorities on both sides of the issue. This depends on a bigger question actually — is reclining warranted when eating the meal? If not, then karpas likewise would not necessarily need reclining; if yes, then reclining for karpas would depend on how to view it. The *Shulchan Aruch* (472:7) recommends reclining for the whole meal.
12. This is what the *Pri Chadash* quotes from the *Rokeach*.

13. *Siman* 473 (See *Torah To-Go*, Pesach 2008)

14. *Shulchan Aruch* 473:7.

15. *Pesachim* 115b.

16. See Tosfos there who remarks that we are trying to get the children to ask about all the unusual things that happen at the Seder — the few contrived things that we do only serving to spark their questioning.

## What is Hagada?

### Rabbi Mordechai Willig

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS; Rabbi, Young Israel of Riverdale

The Rambam writes:

כל מי שלא אמר שלשה דברים אלו בלי חמשה עשר לא יצא ידי חובתו ואלו הן. פסח מצה ומרור. פסח על שום שפסח המקום על בתי אבותינו במצרים שנאמר ואמרתם זבח פסח הוא לה' וגו'. מרור על שום שמרור המצריים את חיי אבותינו במצרים. מצה על שם שנגאלו. ודברים האלו כולן נקראין הגדה. *Anyone who has not said these three things on the night of the 15th has not fulfilled his obligation, and these are: the Pesach sacrifice, matza and maror. The Pesach to commemorate that the Omnipresent passed over the homes of our ancestors in Egypt, as it is stated (Exodus 12:27): "And you shall say: 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord ...'" The maror to commemorate that the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors in Egypt. The matza to commemorate that we were redeemed. These [three] things are all called "Hagada."*

### Hilchos Chametz Umatzah 7:5

What exactly is the Hagada?

Colloquially, it begins with Kiddush and ends with Chad Gadya. The Rambam seems to limit it to a brief portion, attributed in the Mishna (*Pesachim* 116a-b) to Rabban Gamliel. The earlier Mishna (116a), which refers to the bulk of Magid, from *Avadim Hayinu* until *Rabban Gamliel Omer*, seems to be excluded.

Perhaps the answer lies in the source of the mitzva of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim*. The Torah states:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָעָם זְכוֹר אֶת הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה  
אֲשֶׁר יֵצְאֶתֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים כִּי בָחֹק  
יָד הוֹצִיאָהּ אֶתְכֶם מִזֶּה וְלֹא יֵאָכֵל חֶמֶץ ...  
שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תֹּאכַל מִצַּת וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי חֹג  
לָהּ. מִצּוֹת יֵאָכֵל אֶת שִׁבְעַת הַיָּמִים וְלֹא יִרְאֶה  
לָךְ חֶמֶץ וְלֹא יִרְאֶה לָךְ שָׂאֵר בְּכֹל גְּבֻלְךָ וְהַגְדַּתְךָ  
לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּעִבּוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי  
בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם.

*And Moses said to the people,  
“Remember this day, on which you went  
free from Egypt, the house of bondage,  
how the Lord freed you from it with a  
mighty hand: no leavened bread shall  
be eaten. ... Seven days you shall eat  
unleavened bread, and on the seventh  
day there shall be a festival of the Lord.  
Throughout the seven days unleavened  
bread shall be eaten; no leavened bread  
shall be found with you, and no leaven  
shall be found in all your territory. And  
you shall tell your son on that day, ‘It  
is because of what the Lord did for me  
when I went free from Egypt.’”*

**Shmos 13:3–8**

The Rambam writes:

מצות עשה של תורה לספר בנסים ונפלאות  
שנעשו לאבותינו במצרים בליל חמשה עשר  
בניסן שנאמר זכור את היום הזה אשר יצאתם  
ממצרים ... ומנין שבליל חמשה עשר תלמוד  
לומר והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר בעבור זה  
בשעה שיש מצה ומרור מונחים לפניך.

*There is a positive commandment to  
discuss the miracles and wonders that  
our forefathers experienced in Egypt on  
the night of the 15th of Nisan as it states:  
“Remember this day, on which you went  
free from Egypt.” (13:3) ... From where  
[is it derived that the mitzva occurs] on  
the 15th night? From the verse (13:8)  
“You shall tell you son on that day,  
‘Because of this,’” at the time that matza  
and maror are placed before you.*

**Hilchos Chametz Umatzah 7:1**

There are apparently two parts to this mitzva. One is an independent mitzva of *zechira* (based on *Shmos* 13:3), which is mentioned in the Torah before the mention of matza and unrelated to it. The second is “*hagada*,” (based on the word *v’higadeta*) found in the Torah (13:8) after it mentions matza. Hagada is connected to matza. The first Mishna (116a), which includes Magid until Rabban Gamliel, is *zechira*. The second Mishna, Rabban Gamliel’s statement, is “*hagada*.”

This thesis can be proven from the Rambam’s Seder. The word “*hagada*” is found in the Gemara (115b) — we remove the table from the one who says the “*hagada*,” so that the children will ask questions. The Rambam (8:2) places the removal of the table before Ma Nishtana, a practice we fulfill by covering the matza.

Every printed Hagada instructs us to uncover the matzos before *Avadim Hayinu*. After all, this is “*mas’chil big’nus*” (we start with the Jewish people’s disgrace), the beginning of Magid referred to in the first Mishna (116a). However, the Rambam (8:4) postpones the return of the table and its matzos until just before *Rabban Gamliel Omer*. Why is this so? Are we not told that matza is “*lechem oni* — *she’onin alav devarim harbeh*,” the “bread” upon which we recite many words (115b)?

The answer is that only the second Mishna, the description of (korban) Pesach, matza, and maror and their reasons, the three things that Rabban Gamliel describes as indispensable, are connected to the matza, and therefore must be recited in its presence. The first Mishna, the bulk of Magid, is *zechira*, the independent mitzva of *sippur yetzias Mitzrayim* unrelated to matza and fulfilled even in its absence.

A remarkable custom can be a practical outgrowth of this dichotomy. The Rama (O.C. 530:1) records a custom to recite the Hagada on Shabbos Hagadol from *Avadim Hayinu* until “*l’chaper al kol avonoseinu*.” The *Bi’ur Halacha* cites the Vilna Gaon who disputes this custom based on the words of the Hagada “*yachol mib’od yom ...*” The Hagada should not be recited on erev Pesach, but only after nightfall when matza and maror are placed before you. It certainly should not be recited on Shabbos Hagadol.

The Rama could answer simply that while there is certainly no obligation, it is still an appropriate custom. However, another question can yield a deeper answer. Why do we stop at “*l’chaper al kol avonoseinu*”? Why don’t we complete Magid on Shabbos Hagadol?

What words follow “*l’chaper al kol avonoseinu*”? *Rabban Gamliel Omer!* The Rama anticipated the Vilna Gaon’s objection and agrees that the part of Magid that is connected to matza and maror is recited only on Seder night. Only the first and major section of Magid, recorded in the first Mishna (116a), may be said earlier. It begins with *Avadim Hayinu* and ends with “*l’chaper al kol avonoseinu*,” the words just before the second Mishna (116b): *Rabban Gamliel Omer*.

The presence and lifting of matza and maror are linked to *v’higadeta l’vincha*. They are visual aids for the momentous annual opportunity and responsibility of transmitting the *mesora* to the next generation. Many of us were unable to fulfill this mitzva last year. Our shuls were shut and visiting parents and grandparents was prohibited due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We hope to safely resume this critical mitzva this year and we fervently pray: Next year in Yerushalayim.



## **RELISHING PANDEMIC PRAYER, BUT YEARNING TO RETURN**

**T**he COVID-19 pandemic has changed so many aspects of our lives: the way we work, the way we study, the way we communicate with family, friends, and co-workers. How has it changed our most important relationship — our connection with Hashem? Have our tefillah conversations undergone a transformation? Are we davening in a more — or less — meaningful way amid this crisis? What can we learn from the crisis that can be applied to our tefillah after the pandemic?

*“Mi-ma’amakim keraticha Adonai”*  
— From the depths I call out to You, My God. The saying goes that there are no atheists in a foxhole. An

existential crisis often drives us to genuine tefillah, to moving, heartfelt pleas. I assume that you, like me, have had moments, especially early in the pandemic, when we were brought to tears out of anxiety and desperation. I broke down multiple times in March and April during my Amidah when hearing ambulance sirens outside my home. It seemed for a time that the world as we knew it was coming apart, and that palpable fear raised the quality of our prayers. For much of this year, however, our tefillot suffered. Yes, the constant dread *should* have helped us to pray. But most of the time, our inability to focus and our mental exhaustion from this prolonged crisis have made it difficult

to rise to the occasion of thrice-daily meetings with God. We needn’t be too hard on ourselves; it is only natural to struggle with tefillah when our day-to-day existence leaves us with little peace of mind.

We have also largely been banished from our shuls. We have lost the beauty, grandeur, and holiness of our miniature Temples, along with the inspiration provided by *devarim she-be-kedushah*, communal singing, uplifting baalei tefillah, and the warm feeling of joining as a community to encounter the Divine. Even when we have the *zechut* to gather for a minyan, whether in the synagogue or in some sort of tent, we find ourselves rushing

through the davening, either to avoid the dangers of extended exposure to strangers or to manage the discomfort of the weather.

At the same time, we have been surprised to find joy and meaning in our living room prayers. After an initial period of adjustment, we found that davening alone, without the pressures of keeping up with a chazan, and without the distractions of people talking to our left and right, was rather uplifting. We have discovered a newfound beauty in slowly pronouncing the words of the siddur. We noticed powerful words and phrases in the davening and we

---

## **Will we resume our close connection with the beit kneset, restoring tefillah be-tzibbur as a regular part of our lives? Or will we remain in the comfort of our homes, rationalizing that we pray more effectively at home anyway?**

---

have even taken a few moments to contemplate tefillot that we have raced through on thousands of occasions. We had moments, even if just a few, when we experienced tefillah as a

breath of fresh air at an overwhelming time, a relaxing and welcome break from life rather than a chore.

What awaits us when this terror comes to an end? Will we resume our close connection with the beit kneset, restoring *tefillah be-tzibbur* as a regular part of our lives? Or will we remain in the comfort of our homes, rationalizing that we pray more effectively at home anyway? Will communal tefillah resume with the many ills of pre-COVID services? Or will the break from shul allow us to reassess what our minyanim should be? When we again stand shoulder to shoulder in shul, will conversations pick up where they left off in March? Or will the six feet of distance we have maintained for the past year give us the perspective that we are physically in close proximity to our fellow worshippers, but each standing alone in the presence of the King?

We must rise, as individuals and communities, to the challenge of synthesizing the power and purpose of *tefillah be-tzibbur* with the meaning and beauty of personal tefillah. We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reset our shul experiences, using the newness and excitement of a post-pandemic return to public life with the lessons learned from a year of private conversations with God.<sup>1</sup> Synagogues should spend time — now, as the pandemic rages on — thinking about how to recreate their minyanim to allow for greater religious expression and inspiration. Which parts of communal tefillah are the most uplifting? Which sections remain foreign to most worshippers and would benefit from further explanation? How long should the prayers last, and how much time

should be allotted to each component of the service? Are there ways to make people feel more comfortable in shul, to welcome those who, even before the pandemic, sensed barriers to their involvement? A diverse committee of shul members, guided by a rabbi who understands the meaning and laws of tefillah, can make critical changes to the synagogue experience.

But what can we do as individuals? How can we mold the shul experience to our own liking, most notably the slower pace and relaxed feeling that we have tasted at home? We can try to bring our “living room prayers” to the synagogue.

While the fast pace of the chazan at a shul minyan can't be ignored completely, there are ways to manage the challenge of a runaway minyan.

First, we can get to shul just a few minutes earlier. Much of the pressure to keep pace with the minyan can be alleviated by getting to shul on time, or even by starting just a few minutes earlier than the tzibbur. I'm not suggesting that we get to shul ten(!) minutes early. Simply that we arrive two to three minutes ahead of schedule. That commitment of a few minutes can radically change our experience.

Next, we can leave out some of the prayers. Yes — skip some of the davening. Of course, it is more appropriate to skip in tefillah if we have already done our part to arrive on time to shul and to start with the tzibbur. If we then fall behind, we can take the liberty to leave out sections of davening rather than force ourselves to mumble through whole sections of tefillah. As Rav Yosef Karo writes in the beginning of the *Shulchan Aruch*, “Better [a] few supplications with

concentration, than much without concentration.”

We are afraid to heed Rav Karo’s advice. We imagine, mistakenly, that he is speaking to someone who has trouble reading Hebrew, a novice *mitpallel*. We, who benefitted from a day-school education, must be among those who are obligated to say every word, *kavanah* notwithstanding.

Several years ago, Yeshiva invited a select group of 12<sup>th</sup> graders to see what YU had to offer. They participated in morning seder in the Glueck Beit Midrash and experienced, first-hand, the *kol Torah* of 500 young men studying Torah. They heard shiurim from the *gedolei Torah* that we call our *roshei yeshiva*. At the end of the day, they joined Rav Hershel Schachter and Rav Meyer Twersky, shlit”a, for a discussion about tefillah. What, they asked, could they do to improve their *kavanah*?

Rav Twersky, who insisted on speaking after Rav Schachter, explained that *kavanah* is a function of perception. If we are truly desperate for God’s help, we will have little trouble concentrating during the Amidah. He asked the young men to think of a time that they had davened a meaningful Shemoneh Esreh — even once. They were each brought back to a time of crisis, whether family-related, Israel-related or otherwise. When they felt a genuine need, they had no trouble turning to Hashem. Why then, do they struggle with everyday tefillah? Because we

all fail to understand the fragility of our day-to-day existence. We fail to realize that each and every day, we survive — and thrive — only because of Hashem’s care. As Rabbi Soloveitchik explained, it is for this reason that the Rambam counts daily tefillah as a Biblical obligation. Our daily supplication to the Ribbono shel Olam should alert us to our constant state of existential crisis.<sup>2</sup>

Rav Schachter, in his inimitable style, answered the student’s question in a much simpler way. “I skip a lot of tefillos. It’s not possible to keep up with the tzibbur and daven properly.” The boys were stunned. Unfamiliar with the Rosh Kollel, they couldn’t tell at first if he was joking. Rav Schachter, one of the *gedolei ha-dor*, doesn’t say every word? He explained that the long Tachanun said on Monday and Thursday — *ve-Hu Rachum* — is composed of three parts. He says one-third of the tefillah each time he recites the prayer.

Of course, he does more than just skip prayers. Rav Schachter arrives very early to the beit midrash so that he can say Pesukei de-Zimra in a proper way. However, when faced with a time crunch between the Amidah and the keriyat ha-Torah on Monday and Thursday, he opts to say less with *kavanah* rather than more without. We should feel comfortable to follow his lead.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, we can control the length of our private Amidah. Even if the minyan we join proceeds more

quickly than we would like, there is little reason to rush the centerpiece of our davening — the Shemoneh Esreh. Although there is much value in listening intently to *chazarat hashatz*, and one should refrain not just from talking, but even from learning Torah during the repetition of the Amidah, one need not cut their own Amidah short to participate in Kedushah or to answer amen to the chazan’s blessing.

Even if we cannot fully recreate the calm that we experienced during our living room prayer moments, we can decompress three times daily as we take our three steps forward to begin the Shemoneh Esreh. Before starting to speak, I try to drop my shoulders and take a deep breath. Without actually speaking, I reintroduce myself to my Maker, saying, “Hi, it’s Marc (I assume he still knows me by the name I grew up with!), checking in from [wherever I am davening that tefillah]. I’d like a moment to speak with you.” I wait, patiently, until the madness of my day has been pushed aside and I feel as if I’m standing alone with God. And then I start “*Adonai* — my master, *sefatai tiftach* — open my lips ...”

When I feel the tension of the world returning, and my mind starts wandering to the mundane issues I am facing, I stop to take another breath. I remind myself that my *hishtadlut*, my efforts, will not guarantee me success. In fact, I am standing before the One who can fulfill my needs and wishes. He has granted me an audience and is patiently listening to my requests. A



Find more shiurim and articles from Rabbi Menachem Penner at <https://www.yutorah.org/Rabbi-Menachem-Penner>

sense of calm returns as I realize that I don't need to solve my problems alone. God is there to help.

If I am not rushing through my Amidah, I feel comfortable pausing to think about what I am saying. I can ask myself, "How does this particular berachah relate to me today? Is there something specific I should be adding to this request?" When I think of something I need, or, perhaps more importantly, something that another needs, I feel free to detour from the text and to reach out to God in my own words.

As Rabbi Yehuda ha-Levi explains in *Sefer Ha-Kuzari* (Book 3, section 5), the time of prayer can become the "fruit of our day," an island in a sea of life's challenges, and a time we look forward to — even crave — in the storm we call "life." This gift of tefillah can be found during the Amidah, even as we come back to shul.

Along with our efforts to enhance our tefillot in shul, we will need to remind ourselves, especially when it is burdensome to get to shul — a rainy Shabbat afternoon, a late night when we still need to daven Maariv — of the importance of coming to shul for *tefillah be-tzibbur*. For many months we have been told that God wanted us to stay home to guard our lives and the lives of our family members. I hope we have listened well to our poskim and will continue to put the mitzvah of "*venishmartem me'od le-nafshoteichem*" above other considerations. But when attending a minyan is safe, we must remind ourselves of the halachic obligation and the tremendous benefits of communal prayer.

Davening at home may, at times, be one's only option. But it presents an inherent difficulty. One of the primary purposes of prayer is to shake us from

the comfort of our surroundings and to expand our worldview.

When we gather with others to pray, we are reminded of the myriad needs of the community and the Jewish people as a whole. Even at home, we pray in the plural, asking God to care for others along with each one of us. Repetition, however, has desensitized us to this aspect of our tefillot. Encountering our friends and neighbors at minyan inevitably jars our memories and refocuses us on the problems faced by others. Moreover, the experience of praying with a minyan allows us to, once again, see ourselves as part of a larger entity, Klal Yisrael, and to pray more fervently for the fulfillment of the national goals of the Jewish people as expressed through the latter seven *bakashot* of the Amidah.

We are also uprooted from the comfort of "our space" and thrust into the four *amot* of God. Maharal (*Netivot Olam, Netiv ha-Avodah*, chapter 5) explains that a journey to shul is rewarded with extraordinary "*sechar pesiyot*." Ordinarily, our travel is just a necessary step to performing a commandment in a different location. With tefillah, however, there is inherent value in venturing from our homes before commencing our rendezvous with God. The further we walk from our homes — even if we pass a closer shul on the way to minyan — the greater the sense that we have left our own space and entered that of our Creator. With every step — away from our home and toward the synagogue — we remind ourselves that we must pray not just for our personal needs, but to see the world from God's perspective, praying for His nation and the revelation of His holy Name.

Finally, we are forced at shul to listen to one another. As lofty as prayer may be, it consists primarily of something that we all *enjoy* doing — listening to ourselves talk. Public prayer asks us to remain silent as *someone else* takes the lead. Of course, many people talk or busy themselves with other activities as the chazan chants. By doing so, they display their discomfort with attending to the words of another. Aside from the halachic benefits of attaching ourselves to the *chazarat hashatz*, we learn self-control and sensitivity by having to listen to someone else.

We step out of our homes to encounter tefillah in its most lofty state. Surrounded not by the comforts of our personal space, but by the holiness of the shul, we become more spiritually attuned. Surrounded not just by our family, but by community members, we become more sensitive to the needs of others. Surrounded not just by quiet, but by the voice of a *shaliach tzibbur*, we must make room for another and join with others to petition Hashem.

A great opportunity lies before us: The chance to return to shul with a freshness and renewed excitement, coupled with the lessons of powerful prayer experiences at home. We must blend the muted melody of personal tefillah with the structured symphony of communal prayer to move closer to God than ever before.

## ENDNOTES

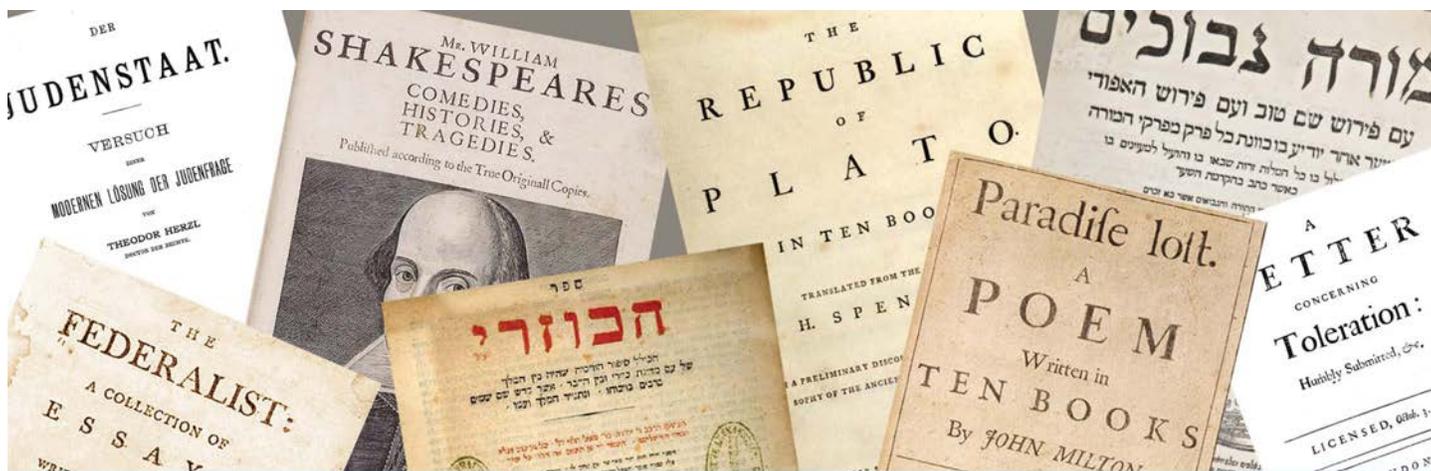
1. I, along with many of my rabbinic colleagues, are indebted to Rabbi Kalman Topp of Congregation Beth Jacob in Los Angeles, California, who stressed this point to many synagogue rabbis at a webinar sponsored by RIETS.
2. In a shiur delivered to the Rabbinical

Council of America in 1963, the Rav elucidated the famous disagreement between Rambam and Ramban as to whether there exists a Biblical obligation of daily prayer. Ramban, in his comments to Rambam's list of the 613 mitzvot, states that the Biblical mitzvah of prayer is brought about only at a time of crisis. When one we

feels an urgent need, their our faith must lead them us to petition Hashem. Rambam, disagrees, stating that there is a mitzvah to daven every day. Rabbi Soloveitchik argued that Rambam fundamentally agrees with Ramban — the commandment to pray is triggered by existential crisis. According to Rambam, however, the human condition

is one of never-ending crisis. The mitzvah to pray each day reminds us that we need God's constant support to navigate the perils of everyday existence.

3. Readers are encouraged to speak to their local rabbanim to best decide what to omit when needed.



# Jewish & Western Texts in Conversation

A Summer Seminar for Modern Orthodox High School Juniors and Seniors

June 24–25, 2021 in New York City

**Unique seminars on Torah and Western texts**, with Rabbi Dr. Meir Soloveichik and YU faculty

**Separate learning tracks** for men and women

**Network with intellectually driven** Modern Orthodox **student leaders**

**Exclusive intellectual experiences** in New York City

This program is highly selective and there is no cost to students. To learn more, please visit

[www.yu.edu/strasus/summer](http://www.yu.edu/strasus/summer)

 /YUStrausCenter

 /YUStrausCenter

 strauscenter@yu.edu



Yeshiva University  
THE ZAHAVA AND MOSHAEL STRAUS  
CENTER FOR TORAH AND WESTERN THOUGHT

# World-Renowned YU Rebbeim

Ready to inspire your  
religious growth.

Rabbi Yehuda  
**WILLIG**

Rabbi Michael  
**ROSENSWEIG**

Rabbi Hershel  
**SCHACHTER**

Rabbi Eli  
**SHULMAN**

Rabbi Aryeh  
**LEBOWITZ**



**Yeshiva University**

Since 1886

**BUILDING TOMORROW, TODAY**

# WORLD-CLASS GRADUATE EDUCATION

**Your Journey to Success Starts at YU**

**Learn More at: [yu.edu/graduate](https://yu.edu/graduate)**



**BUILDING TOMORROW, TODAY**  
YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

# World-Renowned YU Torah Educators

Ready to inspire your  
religious growth.

Professor Shoshana  
**SCHECHTER**

Professor Nechama  
**PRICE**

Professor Smadar  
**ROSENSWEIG**

Professor Naomi  
**GRUNHAUS**

Professor Deena  
**RABINOVICH**



**Yeshiva University**

Since 1886

**BUILDING TOMORROW, TODAY**

SOME HAVE WELL GUARDED  
TRADE SECRETS

WE JUST CALL THEM  
FAMILY TRADITIONS



**HERZOG LINEAGE**

**NINE GENERATIONS OF PATIENT WINEMAKING**

# Exceptional YU Professors

Ready to propel you from  
classroom to career.

Dr. L. Santos  
**PHYSICS**

Dr. E. Belbruno  
**MATHEMATICS**

Professor J. Diament  
**COMPUTER  
SCIENCE**

Rabbi Dr. M. Soloveichik  
**JUDAIC STUDIES**

Dr. S. Poczter  
**MANAGEMENT**



**Yeshiva University**

Since 1886

**BUILDING TOMORROW, TODAY**



## **JEWISH SMACHOT, REVISITED**

**F**or me, COVID-19 was represented by a neatly packed bag of hostess gifts that I had bought in February for my son's wedding in April. I was very aware that this occasion was a blessing and I did not take it for granted. Nevertheless, as it became obvious that the wedding could not proceed as planned on that date, the bag of hostess gifts became a constant reminder of the new reality of COVID-19 and the ways in which it impacted life. The questions and unknowns were relentless. Would there be a celebration? Would our family be able to attend the celebration? COVID's toll is, of course, first and foremost, felt in the loss of life and the grieving of those who lost loved ones. In the shadow of

this devastation, there also has been anxiety and sadness about the way COVID has upended and threatened to steal the precious moments that punctuate our lives. The path toward a simcha during a pandemic has often been compared to a roller coaster, with many ups and downs; yet the journey and the lessons learned through it have left an impact that I think will last for a long time to come.

### **Why Celebrations are Important**

In their book *The Power of Moments*, Chip and Dan Heath explain that certain moments shape our lives. Brief but special experiences can “jolt us, elevate us and change us”

in ways that help create a life-long narrative. Experiences are worth more by far than any possessions in shaping our identities and creating happiness, specifically if they are shared with others. They especially create memories and feelings of pride and connection (Caprariello & Reis, 2013). While there are ways to make even mundane moments special, there are occasions that lend themselves to commemorations. Anniversaries, graduations, birthdays, the first day of a new job and retirement are all examples of auspicious milestones in life, and marking them with a celebration can be very beneficial for our psychological well-being.

Weddings, bar and bat mitzvot or “*semachot*,” as they are called in the

# A Network of 70,000 YU Alumni

## Ready to connect you to your dream job.

Ilana K. '19  
**ALBERT EINSTEIN**  
COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

Max C. '20  
**UBS**

Sarah T. '20  
**ACCENTURE**

Noam A. '20  
**GOOGLE**

Jason B. '20  
**LINKEDIN**



# Yeshiva University

Since 1886

**BUILDING TOMORROW, TODAY**

religious community, often refer to what society at large would call “rites of passage.” First formulated by Arnold Van Gennep, these moments are important because they are transitions in life when we undergo a change in status, where there is an “old me” and a “new me.”

From a psychological point of view, the rituals and celebrations of the rites of passage are what help the individual make this important transition. In his book *Deeply Into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage*, Ronald L Grimes states that a transition can happen without the “rite” or the celebration, but without the celebration there is greater risk of speeding through the “intersections of the human life course.” The festivity ensures that we don’t “slide” into the next step in life, but rather walk into it intentionally, held by the ones we love, grounded in the past and confident in the future. Unattended passages create a feeling of “unfinished business” that can impact the commitment and joy felt afterward. In all cultures, rites of passage, or *semachot*, have commonalities: they have both social and ritual aspects. These aspects create a sense of belonging to a community and a connection reaching far into the past, which help fuel a sense of belonging, continuity, and safety, and they create memories that bond families and friends.

Jewish tradition places great importance on these events. There are new halachic obligations for a bar mitzvah boy and a bat mitzva girl. In many instances, the boys and girls study certain material in preparation of these events so that the moment has greater significance. At a wedding, a time when two single people change status to become lifelong partners,

there are many traditions and halachic rituals. Two men must witness the ceremony and ideally a minyan must be present at the ceremony. Additionally, there is a special mitzvah for others to join in the wedding festivities to rejoice with the bride and groom.

Interestingly, these halachot seem to corroborate the findings in research as well as the value of particular details in wedding celebrations. There are studies that indicate that weddings are correlated to successful marriages when they are shared with family and friends. The hypothesis is that the social aspect has two prongs: one is that the public pronouncements of commitment create an added layer of obligation for the couple; and the second is the social support, the feeling that “all my friends are rooting for me” (Baker & Elizabeth). These halachot line up with these findings perfectly. The mitzva to have a minyan for the ceremony helps create the public declaration of commitment and the mitzva to rejoice with the bride and groom provides the social support for the couple.

### **Reframing Celebrations During COVID-19**

The challenges imposed by COVID seem to strike right at the core of how we celebrate. We are limited by the number of people we can have at the celebration and by the activities we can perform during the event itself. How do we create meaningful rites of passage given these realities?

After considering our Jewish traditions and the available psychological research, and after speaking to people who had to make changes to their simchas, a picture

becomes evident. Not only can the celebration go on, but it can be deeply meaningful, and it can create profound happiness. In fact, the *semachot* that have transpired during COVID have truly been special. When asking young graduates, bar and bat mitzva boys and girls and brides and grooms about their special days, they repeatedly stated, “It was so special”; “It was better than anything I could have imagined”; “I will never forget it”; and “I am so grateful.” *Semachot* today are life affirming, and it is especially important amid the current sadness to amplify joy whenever possible, albeit with increased sensitivity.

Incredibly, finding ways to celebrate is something people began to do instinctively. In just weeks, new ways of celebrating were invented. Drive bys, floats for graduations, decorating the lawn, Zoom meetings and live streams became new methods of celebrations. The beauty of these methods is that they incorporate the two key aspects mentioned above: they create public pronouncements of celebration and they create social support for those celebrating.

An example of such a unique celebration was personal to me. On the day that my son’s wedding was initially planned, his friends and my soon-to-be daughter-in-law’s friends and family made a spontaneous drive by. Despite the rain, their friends and her community rabbis drove by the kallah’s house and danced to music blaring from their cars. As a bonus, making the event even more memorable, a local news station came by and featured this event on the evening newscast! A day that could have been stressful turned into a day to remember thanks to the efforts of caring friends and family.

A simcha during COVID is an opportunity to think about what is important for each of us. It is a chance to have conversations we might otherwise not have had, and to make deliberate decisions about aspects of the event that we might otherwise have taken for granted. And in fact, approaching the event with this heightened intentionality can make even the “normal” aspects of the event much more appreciated. When priorities must be reassessed, it is often touching to see what results. A poignant example comes to mind: During the season of bar mitzvahs, one boy in our community said, “All I want is to be able to lein in shul. This is the shul where I grew up and this is my grandparents’ shul and I just want to lein inside of it.” Miraculously that was worked out, and he was able to read his Parsha with a minyan and his parents and grandparents were there to hear it. The bar mitzva boy was jubilant, as was his family. How sweet it is, when things that used to be taken for granted are now seen for their true value.

Similarly, for many, having a smaller wedding created more intimacy and warmth and greater appreciation of everyone who could be there. One recent bride said, “What made my wedding special was that everyone who attended really wanted to be there. I was concerned that having less than half the number of guests I had planned would make my wedding less fun, but that could not have turned out to be any less true. Being with family and friends who could be there was one of the most special things that I could have asked for. My wedding was so different than planned, but I truly felt nothing was missing. I wouldn’t have changed a thing.”

## **Some Practical Tips for Making a Simcha During COVID-19 (and Beyond)**

### **Don’t Forget the Flowers**

With our priorities shifting in light of new realities, it is reasonable to ask ourselves: do the flowers (and music and giveaways) still matter? The answer is that they do but in a different way than we might have thought. Research repeatedly shows that spending more money on a wedding doesn’t make it more special. At the same time, a defining experience is deepened by making it beautiful and memorable (Heath & Heath, 2017). For some people, the flowers and decor make the experience feel special and festive. With so much out of our control, others may find themselves enjoying planning the clothing, or the logo for the bar mitzva boy, or they might find meaning in selecting the exact songs for the band. In each of these examples, what is important is not the items themselves, but the experience of selecting them and the symbol they become, designating this as a special and significant day. So yes, COVID has shifted our priorities and has rightly made us question what is truly important and what is excessive or unnecessary. But as we reframe our thinking and make new choices, we don’t have to cancel the beautiful details and sensory experiences that make our celebrations special.

### **Express Gratitude**

For each simcha, there is a reason. All the planning and preparing is a manifestation of blessing. So amid all there is to do, we should continually remind ourselves about the blessing of it all. And we should find ways to verbalize and actualize this gratitude

often. In addition to being grateful to Hashem for the event itself, there are countless people around you who are holding you up as you are celebrating it. One big take away for me during this time has been the great importance of the friends, family, vendors at the event, or those watching from afar. As I watch clips throughout this pandemic of special moments, whether they be bar mitzvahs or drive bys for birthdays, I am struck by the generosity of those who are celebrating in whatever way they can. It is always a mitzva to attend a simcha and to be “*mesameyach*,” but it is highlighted and magnified when there is so much at stake and so much sacrifice involved in doing so safely. I will personally forever be grateful to the remarkable friends of my children, our friends and community, and our family for making the efforts they did to make our children’s wedding day special.

### **Allow and Expect the “Roller Coaster” Feelings**

It is normal to have many mixed feelings leading up to a big event, and that is certainly the case under today’s more complicated circumstances. There are no wrong feelings. Whether happy or sad, excited, or worried, feelings come to us whether we want them to or not, and they need to find expression even if they are challenging. Allow yourself to express and to feel the sadness or worry about what you wish could have been. If you notice that difficult feelings are lingering, create a toolbox to deal with the difficult emotions. Techniques that some find helpful can include speaking to a friend, journaling, doing something enjoyable or soothing, exercising, or many other varieties of self-care. Acknowledging negative

feelings is key. Only after validating the challenging emotions can we intentionally shift our attention toward more positive pursuits.

### **Avoid Judging Yourself and Others**

As you make decisions and others around you do as well, you may find yourself judging yourself harshly, or judging others for what they choose to do. You may talk to others in similar situations who make different decisions than you do. Remember the personal nature of the celebration, and that every person must choose what works best for them. Negative judgments and thoughts will simply create more animosity and division, when what we need most is unity.

### **Be Present**

“Being present” at the simcha itself is easier said than done. Being present means really noticing the people who are with you, taking in the meaning of the moment, enjoying the details, and appreciating the music. Take a moment to really notice and make eye contact with everyone who is there, and to acknowledge those who joined in virtually. This mindfulness of the moment requires practice and preparation. In the months leading up to the event, try to add a mindfulness practice to your routine. Mindfulness is the ability to really participate in the moment and is a skill that is acquired by incorporating it into your daily life; by being mindful as you breathe, walk, eat or even stand in line. With stronger mindfulness skills under your belt, you will be more able to turn your mind into the present and truly enjoy the moment.

### **Remember, Challenge Builds Resilience**

You may worry about the effects of all the unknowns and ups and downs on your family or on the chattan and kallah or the bar or bat mitzva child. But in fact, these hurdles can be strengthening. Resilience is built by overcoming and bouncing back after disappointments and challenges. The need to refocus what is important is only beneficial. Difficult discussions that push us to clarify what we prioritize empower us to make our next steps more meaningful.

---

**The need to refocus what is important is only beneficial. Difficult discussions that push us to clarify what we prioritize empower us to make our next steps more meaningful.**

---

### **In Conclusion**

One day, back in April 2020, I said to Suri, our friend and amazing party planner, “You know how to make these moments special. Just like Esther, maybe you have been preparing for this day all along.” I admit, this seems a bit melodramatic.

But actually, there is a lot at stake in planning these major life cycle events. Life’s occasions need to be marked so that the new generation of young boys and girls, couples, graduates, and others feel encouraged, enveloped, and loved, not forgotten or embittered. This applies to smaller moments as well, such as receiving a first internship, winning a middle school debate, writing your first article for the college newspaper, or retiring from a job. The opportunity is there to make these experiences as meaningful as ever. We look forward to a time when we can celebrate *semachot* safely without social distancing, masks, or capacity limits. Yet the tools and attitudes that shaped our *semachot* during this time, including evaluating priorities, personalizing celebrations, practicing gratitude, staying flexible, and focusing on the purpose of it all can be carried with us and can enhance the way we celebrate life’s moments together in a post-pandemic world.

### **REFERENCES**

- Baker, M & Elizabeth, V. (2013) Tying the knot: The impact of formalization after long-term cohabitation. *Journal of Family Studies*, 11(8), 254-266.
- Caprariello, P. A., & Reis, H. T. (2013). To do, to have, or to share? Valuing experiences over material possessions depends on the involvement of others. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 104(2), 199–215.
- Gennep, A. (1960). *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Grimes, R. L. (2000). *Deeply into the Bone: Re-inventing Rites of Passage*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Heath, C., & Heath, D. (2017). *The Power of Moments: Why Certain Experiences have Extraordinary Impact*.



## **THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE LOCAL AND GLOBAL JEWISH COMMUNITIES**

Isolation, quarantine, and shul shutdowns have disturbed the very fabric of the Jewish community model that we once held so dearly. In ancient times, to be excommunicated or shunned from one's community was to be removed from interacting with another soul. The *metzora*, one who was struck with the skin disease, *tzaraat*, is the paradigm of isolation in the Torah.

כָּל יָמֵי אֲשֶׁר הִנָּגַע בּוֹ יִטְמָא טָמֵא הוּא בְּדָד  
יֵשֵׁב מֵחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה מוֹשְׁבֹו.

*He shall be unclean as long as the disease is on him. Being unclean, he shall dwell apart; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.*

**Vayikra 13:46**

The verse clearly notes that one must leave the camp entirely. Without further study it seems obvious that a Zoom or a FaceTime call with a *metzora* would be forbidden because the quarantine of the *metzora* is not as much about a physical infection, like COVID, but rather a spiritual one that could easily be transmitted even virtually.

COVID, in distinction from the *metzora*, has forced us to physically distance ourselves from one another, yet spiritually we have remained connected through technology. As our communities have undergone our own quarantines, we have simultaneously experienced the

expansion of our global community, and in some sense, the dismantling of our local ones. I certainly do not mean to discount the endless hours of work that community leaders have put in to keep their communities together in these difficult times. Rather, I speak from personal and shared experiences that maintaining a sense of community during the pandemic has been an uphill battle for every rabbi, educator, and administrator, who have been tirelessly working around the clock. Despite our best efforts, it is an unfortunate, yet, real fact, that since our shuls have not been able to gather in our usual manner, there has been an inevitable breakdown in

the communal structure as we have previously known it.

In contradistinction, while communities on a micro scale have encountered difficulties in keeping everyone connected, on a macro level, organizations and select, sought-after speakers have experienced an unprecedented growth of their own virtual communities. I have the esteemed privilege of running community programming for Yeshiva University and I have witnessed first-hand how our programs as well as those from other similar organizations have grown and far surpassed their previous attendance records.

Naturally, there was always a certain geographic limitation to every institution's reach. While our incredible Yeshiva serves as a bastion for Torah on a global level, never before has there been such a systematic opportunity to invite the roshei yeshiva, teachers and scholars of these hallowed walls into the living room of anyone from Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, and Israel concurrently. As a concrete example, one regular program under my auspices that has been virtual since the onset of the pandemic has multiplied tenfold. Other programs that have previously reached hundreds now reach thousands. Our programs have always strived to innovate and inspire. That has not changed. What has, is the capability of individuals across the globe to join and access these programs from the comfort of their living rooms.

Coveted, "celebrity" speakers, who have naturally been bound previously by their geographic constraints, have experienced similar growth. These speakers, many of whom are closely followed on YUTorah.org,

have begun welcoming attendees to their live Zoom shiurim from all over the world. Educators who once had only a handful of attendees at their live classes can now easily reach many more of their fans with a simple click of a button. While in the past we might have been limited by the invisible walls surrounding our communities, our present reality of physical isolation has ironically expanded our ability to learn with nearly any educator, anywhere and at any time.

---

## **Our present reality of physical isolation has ironically expanded our ability to learn with nearly any educator, anywhere and at any time.**

---

With many classes and programs both locally and globally taking place on a computer screen there has been "virtually" no difference between attending a Zoom class hosted by a shul and attending a nationally run (and acclaimed) program. This has shifted the community experience for many and has inevitably led to lower attendance in local community-based programs. In turn, some shuls have reduced the number of programs and classes they run due to waning interest from those previously committed, including some who may have simply

shown up for the social opportunity, which no longer exists.

Due to this major shift in how we learn Torah and experience community this should cause us to ponder: what will our post-COVID communities look like? Will we once again be confined by our geographic walls or will our borders remain open? Will Zoom programming cease to exist on a national level or will global enterprises continue to impact the way we think about our local communities? These questions maintain significant relevance as we have now begun to feel the approach of a post-pandemic world.

To answer this question, we turn to the topic of the *korbon Pesach*. The sacrificial lamb that was brought on the eve of Pesach in Temple times is unique in that it possesses many qualities unlike any other sacrifice in the Torah.

The Mishna in *Pesachim* notes a significant distinction between this sacrifice and others:

אין שוחטין את הפסח על היחיד — דברי רבי יהודה, ורבי יוסי מתיר. ואפילו חבורה של מאה שאינן יכולין לאכול כזית — אין שוחטין עליהן.

*We do not slaughter the Paschal lamb on behalf of an individual, only for a group of people; this is the statement of Rabbi Yehuda. And Rabbi Yossi permits it. And even if there is a group of one hundred who together are unable to eat an olive's volume of it, we do not slaughter on their behalf.*

### **Pesachim 91a**

There are two takeaways from this Mishna: 1) An individual (at least according to one opinion) is not allowed to bring the *korbon Pesach* by himself and 2) Inherent within the commandment of bringing the

*korbon Pesach* is that participants must partake of the sacrifice. If they do not plan to eat it, presumably together, then they may not even sacrifice it altogether. The implication of this Mishna is that the *korbon Pesach* is meant to be enjoyed as a meal with a larger group. The imperative is so great that it literally may not be fulfilled without one.

The source for this Mishna is found in the introductory description of this commandment in the Torah:

דַּבְּרוּ אֶל כָּל עֵדוּת יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר בְּעֶשֶׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ  
הַזֶּה וְיִקְחוּ לָהֶם אִישׁ שֵׂה לְבֵית אָבִתָּה שֶׁה לְבַיִת.  
*Speak to the whole community of Israel  
and say that on the tenth of this month  
each of them shall take a lamb to a  
family, a lamb to a household.*

### **Shemot 12:3**

The Mishna understands that this extensive focus on “family” and “household” implies that this is not a sacrifice that can be enjoyed by one person but rather demands a group. Generally, there are two types of sacrifices: *korbon yachid* — the individual’s sacrifice — and *korbon tzibbur* — the national sacrifice. The *korbon Pesach* appears to be a hybrid of these two as the *korbon chaburah* — the group or community sacrifice.

Rabbi Soloveitchik zt”l elaborates on this idea further:

*Interestingly, the symbol of redemption in the Torah is the korban Pesach, the paschal offering, which is a very strange sacrifice. The concept of chavurah, community, is completely nonexistent in regard to other*

*offerings: shelamim, chatas, olah, and asham ... The Pesach differs from all other sacrifices because it is a symbol of cherus, freedom. The Torah calls the paschal lamb a lamb for each parental home, a lamb for each household because freedom expresses itself in the realm of bayis, of community, of being together. Bayis is a new category which was revealed to the Jews as they gained their freedom.<sup>1</sup>*

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch zt”l remarks further that:

*... God wanted to create ... not an “ecclesiastical congregation” to worship Him, but a people, a nation, a society. From this redemption must emerge a state whose whole social existence is to be rooted in God, built by Him, founded upon Him, fashioned by Him, and dedicated to Him. And it was with the korbon Pesach that God laid the foundation stone of this edifice.<sup>2</sup>*

To boldly combine the descriptions given by these great sages, we conclude our understanding with the following formulation: The *korbon Pesach* is a sacrifice that is uniquely suited to establish and reestablish our unified nationhood year in and year out. Our national unity is achieved by the gathering of smaller sub-communities enjoying a single meal together. To translate this into modern day terms, we achieve national unity when each individual community around the globe can achieve its own sense of communal pride and camaraderie. Perhaps, the community Seder that typically takes place in

many shuls around the country is a remnant of what once was in the days of our Temple and the *korbon Pesach*.

With this, we now have a more profound understanding of the critical value of the individual communities that make up our larger global Jewish network. National Jewish unity is a value that is achieved on the micro level with individual communities gathering for meals, classes, and programs in their own homes, social halls and shuls. Indeed, we value the international interconnectivity and community, but not as a replacement for our local congregations and gatherings.

The world of COVID, in many ways, has created a world of *bidieved*, less than ideal situations and circumstances. We are not meant to be sustained through a virtual community but rather by an in-person one. We have endless appreciation and gratitude to the Almighty that He has given us the alternative of virtual programming and nationally-based platforms by which so many have remained connected in these unprecedented times. Yet, we must never forget that these are not replacements for what once was, but rather temporary measures to keep us “together” in some form while awaiting our return to our local community structures.

I believe that the global virtual community enterprise that has been developed during these times will continue to flourish in a post-COVID world but always



Find more shiurim and articles from Rabbi Dov Winston at  
<https://www.yutorah.org/Rabbi-Dov-Winston>

as a secondary measure, with our primary communities defined by our geographic boundaries.

The greatest proof to this is the *metzora*. The *metzora* experiences exile and isolation but is never meant to live like this permanently. He is, rather, told to bide his time, regain confidence in the people whom he betrayed, and once again rejoin the community. Rabbi David Fohrman notes numerous textual and practical parallels between these two sacrificial paradigms. Upon deeper reflection of the comparison between the *korbon Pesach* performed in Egypt (Shemot, chapter 12) and the *korbon metzora* (Vayikra, chapter 14), there seems to be an inextricable conceptual link between these two seemingly unrelated sacrifices.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, even the Ramban makes this comparison in his comments on the *metzora*:

והנה המצורע ותורת הבית המנוגע וטומאת המת קרובים והנה הם כדמות פסח מצרים...  
*And behold the metzora, all of the principles of the house that is afflicted and impurity from the dead are connected and behold there is a similarity to the korbon Pesach in Egypt...*

The nexus between the two sacrifices becomes clear when we note that each of them serves as a necessary component to enable the community to flourish. Just as the *metzora* leaves exile and rejoins his congregation by way of his sacrifice, the Jewish nation achieves a sense of unity by way of the development of individual micro *chaburot* surrounding the *korbon Pesach*. The isolated *metzora* and the Jewish nation without the *korbon Pesach* could only survive temporarily in these less than ideal states. The Jewish people need the *korbon Pesach* to fulfill our nationhood and the *metzora* needs to leave exile and rejoin his nation in order to truly thrive. Ultimately, through the strengthening of the micro communities the macro, global Jewish community can continue to grow and blossom as well.

There is so much that is unknown about what lies ahead for us in a post-COVID world. Nonetheless, I remain optimistic that our local communities will once again join together and thrive on the individualized personal connections that can only be made at a shul kiddush and at an in-person class, rather than over Zoom. We will

continue to use Zoom as a platform to include those from near and far, but that will remain secondary to the shuls and community centers just down the block.

May Hashem redeem us from our physical and spiritual exiles, and may He reunite our communities so that we may bring the *korbon Pesach* once again this year in Jerusalem.

## Endnotes

1. *Festival of Freedom*, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, page 43.
2. *The Hirsch Chumash*, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Shemot 12:3, Page 167.
3. See [www.Alephbeta.org](http://www.Alephbeta.org), "The Tzaraat Purification Ritual: What Does It Mean?" and "What Does The Passover Sacrifice Teach Us About The Metzora?"

Were you  
**Koveah**  
time to learn today?

**Daily Learning**  
What you want, when you want, at the pace you want

Visit [www.koveah.org](http://www.koveah.org) to start adding more learning to your day!



**Koveah.org**  
Learn something new every day

 Yeshiva University  
CENTER FOR THE JEWISH FUTURE

Rabbi Seth Grauer  
Mrs. Elisheva Kaminetsky  
Rabbi Jonathan Knapp  
Dr. Laya Salomon



## LEARNING IN THE TIME OF COVID-19: CHALLENGES, LESSONS, AND THE FUTURE OF JEWISH EDUCATION

We asked expert educators to provide us with insights into the future of Jewish education as we emerge from the pandemic, using the following questions as a guide: 1) Has the pandemic changed our view of what Jewish day schools should be doing? 2) What innovations should be continued going forward? What are the opportunities and challenges in allowing a permanent distance learning option? 3) Are children behind as a result of the pandemic? 4) How has the pandemic changed the way we view the role of the teacher outside of the classroom?

### Rabbi Seth Grauer

#### Rosh Yeshiva and Head of School

*Bnei Akiva Schools of Toronto*

One of the most common questions educators are asked these days is: to what extent will the educational changes and systems put in place during the pandemic continue in a non-pandemic world? There are undoubtedly many lessons we will learn from these last 12 months (and counting), and schools of all types

will certainly see lasting changes as a result of the COVID changes forced upon us. I believe one incredible lesson is that our day school systems cannot effectively be replaced with an online educational system without accepting massive trade-offs and significant compromises.

Our children thrive and succeed through human contact. *Chavruta learning, shiurim, tisches, chagigot, shabbatonim* and so much more are the lifeblood of our yeshivot and day schools, and these simply

cannot be replaced virtually. Is it possible to combine synchronous and asynchronous lessons in an effective way whereby math and science can be taught? Absolutely.

Is this combination of videos, Zooms, independent learning, and home schooling effective for all? No way.

Some students have thrived academically within an online world; however, many students who struggle academically have found the current setup in an online educationally

independent world difficult. Students with executive functioning challenges have had a very hard time adapting even with support. While perhaps applicable to a greater extent in elementary grades, parents have had a very hard time keeping up with the new demands being placed upon them. Yet what makes our yeshivot and day schools unique is the massive emphasis on social emotional well being and religious growth — both of which are severely compromised in an online world.

When a rebbe cannot *daven* with his talmidim and female religious role models cannot have meaningful discussions in person without masks with their talmidot, something significant is lost. High school is an incredibly complicated time in the life of an adolescent/emerging adult, and personal, sincere support is simply not the same online.

Are students behind as a result of the pandemic? They are not necessarily academically behind. This, of course, depends on how effective the school was at transitioning to an online educational system. However, I would argue that students are behind religiously, socially, and emotionally, and that is of much greater concern. It might take years before we truly know the answer and fully recognize the impact this period had on our students.

The pandemic has highlighted for day schools that the role of the teacher is so much greater than being a supplier of knowledge or even a trainer of skills. I once asked my rebbe, Rav Aaron Lichtenstein, what the role of a teacher is. Rav Lichtenstein responded (paraphrasing): A teacher has three primary responsibilities: 1) To teach the material within the curriculum;

2) To help his/her students learn the skills necessary to be able to learn on their own; and 3) To imbue within his/her students a love of learning. And (said Rav Lichtenstein) their level of importance is in reverse order!

In an online world, No.1 is relatively easy and when done properly, No. 2 can be achieved with a great deal of success as well, but the real challenge that so many of my colleagues have recognized is excelling at No. 3.

Let us all hope and pray that we can return to our schools to continue to teach and learn in person, face to face and without barriers, as quickly as possible.

## **Mrs. Elisheva Kaminetsky**

### **Principal, Judaic Studies**

SKA HALB, Hewlett, NY

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us all to recalibrate and approach things in new ways. Fault lines in our relationships and institutions have been highlighted and magnified. At the same time, we have learned how to compensate for what we don't have and have shown strength and resilience that we didn't know we possessed. There are many things in our lives that we never considered as privileges or opportunities, like hugging a grandparent or going on a school trip, that we no longer take for granted.

Many years ago, while attending a PD (professional development) session about "flipped classrooms" [a type of blended learning where students are introduced to content at home and practice working through it at school], a colleague turned to me and said, "I've always believed, that

while many areas of life would one day be taken over by machines and computers, we as educators were safe, that we were necessary, and need to be physically present to do our jobs. But now, listening to this presentation on 'flipped classrooms,' I wonder if we, too, will someday be replaced by computers." Over the past year, the learning in many of our schools has continued seamlessly despite the pandemic. We are so thankful for the blessing of technology that has allowed students to connect with teachers remotely. At the same time, person-to-person direct instruction has become more precious than ever, proving that the relationship between teacher and student is of paramount importance in education.

Educating the whole child has long been the mission of our Jewish day schools. As educators, we nurture the social, emotional, religious, and intellectual growth of each child. We care, not just about what our students know, but about how they feel and how they connect to their learning. We look to ignite their passions and help them nurture their own relationships with Hashem, with Torah, and with the community. Role modeling and connections to mentors have proven to be among the greatest influences in the development of a child. For eight to ten hours a day, and many evenings and weekends, we partner with parents in the true fashion described by Chazal, "*talmidim k'banim*" (students are like our children).

During the current COVID crisis, in keeping with our dedication and commitment to being in touch with and supporting the social-emotional needs of our students, we've acquired new tools to assist in

navigating these difficult times. By using our classrooms and studies to allow students to reflect and share their feelings about what they are learning and experiencing, students create meaning and can connect the learning to their lives. Now more than ever when students and teachers come to school, whether in person or on Zoom, we are aware of the undercurrent of anxiety, tension, inability to rely on health, finances, summer plans, and even plans for the next day. We have become acutely aware of what it means for a child to go to school while their parents are sitting shiva. After all, in some cases, they are Zooming into school from a room right next to where the mourners are sitting.

We have seen the incredible need for students to socialize and connect in a deep and meaningful way with

---

**During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers are confronted with new home and school obligations and stressors; sometimes giving a Zoom lesson in the same room with their own young children who are taking their own Zoom classes.**

---

their teachers and their peers, and we, at school, look to compensate for the toll that social distancing has taken on students' ability to do so. As educators, we must always remind ourselves that, even when things are "normal," each student is a world of their own. When they arrive in our classrooms, they each bring their own set of emotions and life circumstances with them.

The same applies to our teachers, of course, many of whom are working parents and have always faced the age-old juggling act of balancing home and work. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they are confronted with new home and school obligations and stressors; sometimes giving a Zoom lesson in the same room with their own young children who are taking their own Zoom classes. We've implemented a periodic teacher survey to take the pulse of our teachers. This includes "check-ins" to help gauge how they're doing; a place to share concerns, struggles, and successes; and a culture of care and concern for not only the whole child, but for the whole teacher as well. Teachers have joined faculty-led book clubs, seminars on self-care, and school-sponsored cooking demos to help foster connection among the staff as we support each other during these times.

Additionally, our teachers have become experts in Zoom technology and in making distance learning engaging. In post-pandemic days, these tools can be transferred to the classroom and will also give students who are out of school for medical reasons to continue to have access to their learning in meaningful ways. In addition, in previous years, teachers have offered extra help to students

by phone or email; now students can benefit from math tutoring, answering Chumash questions, and meeting with guidance counselors in the evenings on Zoom, providing a more authentic meeting experience.

Before this crisis, we, as educators, were not aware of the eagerness with which students yearned to be in school, face to face, with their friends and teachers. In all probability, neither were the students themselves! This enthusiasm motivates us to take advantage of every minute we have together, fostering relationships that will impact our young people for a lifetime. As educators, we are vital links in the transmission of our Mesorah and we are grateful for every day that we are able to continue connecting to our students in a meaningful way.

## **Rabbi Jonathan Knapp**

### **Head of School**

*Yavneh Academy, Paramus, NJ*

*L'Zecher Nishmas Yisrael Yaakov ben Dov v'Zlata, Jack Tarzik, whose first yahrzeit is 26 Nissan. Jack was a pioneer in the field of informal Jewish education and mentor to many aspiring educators. I, and many others, sorely miss his advice and presence.*

To a large extent, it feels premature to speak about lessons we can derive and apply in a post-COVID world. Our community has endured, and continues to experience, tremendous suffering including loss of life, illness, disruption of routine, frayed relationships, loss of parnassah and increased anxiety, among other issues. We continue to daven, fervently, that people should be spared any further

illness and that Hashem should send refuah and nechama to those in need.

While it may be too early to determine definitively the long-term takeaways from this time, schools are dynamic institutions and have already implemented many adjustments, some of which will likely remain in a post pandemic world.

One of the true successes over the past several months has been the ability of our yeshivot to provide in-school instruction while preserving public health. This commitment to maintain live instruction has given our students the education and socialization they desperately crave and deserve.

### **The Pandemic and Jewish Education**

While Jewish day schools have always served as essential resources for the broader community, the pandemic has thrust some of the normal roles of schools — such as teaching “soft skills” — into higher visibility.

Over the past several years, schools have increased their attention to developing social and emotional skills in our children. Teaching empathy, grit, and resilience have emerged as key components of a vibrant day school curriculum. At Yavneh Academy, we have designated staff members to develop our curriculum and focus on these essential life skills. These educators support our main classroom teachers in working with our students throughout the day, focusing on learning how to recognize emotions, navigating conflict, and building empathy. In the midst of this pandemic, we are seeing a great need for these skills. We are finding that those children who can draw on these attributes are better equipped to navigate these challenging times.

Indeed, the COVID pandemic has elevated this focus on developing emotional skills in children to another level. It has sharpened the need for schools to care for the whole child, and even the whole family.

---

**This challenging time has forced us to look at some of our most beautiful religious traditions, like bar and bat mitzvah celebrations, unpack them to their simplest forms, and re-sanctify them with a focus on their actual religious meaning.**

---

Building emunah in our students is another crucially important priority. How often do we talk about God with our children, in school or at home? Explicitly focusing on finding emunah-shaping opportunities to engage our students has already proven highly beneficial. Our school has incorporated this focus at every grade level with age-appropriate conversations. For the first ten weeks of this year, I engaged our 8th graders with weekly emunah discussions. We explored various ways to grow

our emunah, ranging from exploring Hashem’s amazing world to focusing on tefillah, looking for evidence of Hashem’s hand in our daily lives, and studying Chumash. Based on the subsequent comments and conversations, I could tell that some of the students really took to particular ideas that most resonated with them personally.

### **Innovations Going Forward**

Utilizing Zoom has opened up new vistas for parental engagement, giving parents the availability of using Zoom for school-related conferences, meetings, workshops, and more. It has also provided increased opportunities for multigenerational participation in milestone events, Erev Shabbat programming, special visitor days, Siddur celebrations, and other programs. While we strive to maintain that face-to-face relationship, Zoom has given our students opportunities to connect with presenters, educators, and experiences from those all around the world. Furthermore, for children who are out of school due to long-term illness, Zooming into class can be life-changing for staying connected.

In addition, like many schools, we have created multiple minyanim for social distancing and contact tracing purposes. These smaller davening experiences have been encouraging and inspiring. More students can participate. It feels that everyone’s participation matters! These small venues also create new educational opportunities and provide chances to integrate some of the emunah concepts mentioned earlier.

This challenging time has forced us to look at some of our most beautiful religious traditions, like bar and bat mitzvah celebrations, unpack them to their simplest forms, and re-sanctify

them with a focus on their actual religious meaning. We may imagine that we want to revert to "normal" as the pandemic abates, but we will need to pause before rushing back into what once was. I believe that the pandemic has broken various cycles that we would not otherwise have thought to disrupt. The same would apply to other school programs and events.

One thing remains abundantly clear: in-school education is essential and indispensable, especially for our youngest learners. There is simply no replacement for that experience long term.

### **Are Children Behind?**

Originally, there was much fear and concern about the potential academic impact of COVID-19 on our students. Baruch Hashem, we haven't seen it. This is directly attributable to the heroic efforts of our teachers! Teachers have proven to be absolutely essential, and the way they have faced the herculean challenges of this pandemic continues to amaze me. When history looks back on this time period, along with the extraordinary

heroic work of doctors, nurses, medical professionals, and other front-line workers, we will recognize the incredible dedication and significant sacrifices made by our day school teachers.

At Yavneh, through the dedicated efforts of our parent body, we created a volunteer tutoring program that has stepped in to fill the void for particular students. This program has proven to be mutually beneficial, since many retired teachers or others who find themselves with extra time on their hands feel fulfilled and invigorated by making a meaningful difference in the life of a child. Many adults also lost their sense of routine and this has filled a void for many of them as well.

For schools that have managed to remain open during the 2020–2021 school year, it doesn't seem that our students are behind in their work. Curriculum-wise, they have probably had more class than usual since other forms of programming have been diminished. Eventually, there will be standardized measures and metrics to further confirm these

assumptions and early findings. The question might be more relevant in the affective realm: How has the stress of quarantines, Zooming, worrying, etc. impacted our children? In the early childhood years, children's learning and development is centered around play. Those skills are harder to measure, and the potential impact will take longer to determine.

### **The Role of Teachers Outside the Classroom**

When we began teaching on Zoom in the spring of 2020, the inability to connect with kids outside of class was an enormous challenge. Even while we were teaching them, we lost out on the hallways, lunchroom, and playground conversations. All those opportunities and connections help form a foundation for what we do in the classroom. But our teachers have learned to adjust. They have pivoted, developing brilliant new ways of fostering the teacher-student relationship. We know as educators that developing that connection is the key to learning. With our smiles covered, or faces behind screens at



times, teachers have learned other nonverbal cues of encouragement and ways to show their belief in their students. The pandemic has placed teachers in a role where they need to check in and connect with kids more outside of the classroom. They care about the social and emotional growth of the children and how they are doing spiritually. As we applaud and express admiration for our teachers, it is vitally important that we continue to check in and monitor the impact of the pandemic on our faculty, both emotionally and physically. This should be done both on an organizational level as well as on an individual level.

Rabbi Soloveitchik, in his powerful *Fate and Destiny* (translated from the Hebrew *Kol Dodi Dofek*), describes the approach and philosophy of a person of destiny. According to the Rav, when such a person is confronted with suffering and evil, that person, “recognizes the world as it is and does not wish to use harmonistic formulas in order to gloss over and conceal evil. The man of destiny is highly realistic and does not flinch from confronting evil face to face.” Rather, the Rav explains, this person acknowledges the existence of pain and suffering in the world. “Evil exists, and I will neither deny it or camouflage it . . . I ask one simple question: **What** must the sufferer do so that he may live through his suffering?”

The Rav famously differentiates between **what** and **why**. “We do not inquire about the hidden ways of the Almighty, but, rather, about the path wherein man shall walk when suffering strikes. We ask neither about the cause of evil nor about its purpose, but, rather, about how it might be mended and elevated. How shall a

person act in a time of trouble? **What** ought a man to do so that he not perish in his affiliations?” Our schools have responded to this crisis with clarity, conviction, and resolve.

Overall, I am very encouraged and optimistic about where our students are today. Many are flourishing. They realize with renewed enthusiasm how much they love being in school! At the same time, those who are struggling need more support and attention than before and schools are doing their best, with partnership from parents who are also balancing new challenges, to fill those needs.

## Dr. Laya Salomon

### Associate Professor

*Yeshiva University's Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration*

### The Pandemic and Jewish Education

More than changing our views of what day schools should be, COVID-19 has changed our understanding of what day schools are, and have always been, doing.

This reminds me of the Jewish understanding of *teva* (nature) and *nes* (miracle). While all of God’s creations are miraculous and wondrous, the wonder becomes habitual when we observe it on a regular basis. It’s when we experience something that defies everyday nature — the unique waterfall, the near-death escape — that we recognize the remarkability and immenseness of all that surrounds us.

Schools have always been working valiantly to tend to nearly every aspect of their students’ growth and development, and we’ve become

accustomed to that. When the pandemic hit and we were all thrown into disarray and our children were home from school for a few months, we realized how much day schools do and how much we need them to nurture our children’s academic, social, and spiritual selves.

One important aspect of the educational experience that has been highlighted during the pandemic is the value of parental partnership. We as parents have been forced partners in our children’s education, and while there were many ugly parts of the experience, an invested interest in, and need to know about what our children were learning and doing, ensued. In some respects, despite the distance, we got to know our children’s teachers better than ever. Schools have operated in partnership with parents long before the pandemic, and to varying degrees. This experience gave both stakeholders — parents and schools — an opportunity to consider how meaningful those partnership were and what aspects of the partnership could be deepened even more.

### Innovations Going Forward

Another benefit: when the limitations of learning surfaced, so did the possibilities for learning. When remote instruction became the norm, we experienced educational opportunities that we never thought possible. Remarkably, without a physical school to attend, learning continued and teachers prepared lessons where students were collaborative, engaged and on-task. We became aware that a deliberate and planned system of learning can happen outside the schoolhouse as well, and I believe this realization will be a mainstay in the future.

Still, there is so much to gain from the socialization, interactivity, collaboration, and individualization provided by in-person instruction. Parents who have traditionally sent their children to brick-and-mortar buildings, and have benefitted from that experience, are certainly not looking to replace it entirely.

I believe the success of distance learning signals a few other considerations for Jewish schools, such as:

- What else can technology do to enhance students learning? We didn't conceive of the possibility until we were forced to; what can we possibly conceive of without being forced?
- Our educational systems are formed by location, since schools are generally comprised of children within a given mile radius. How can we include distant students into our Jewish educational system? What can we do better, and do more, to unite learners across the globe? We always say the Jewish world is a small one and I would welcome the opportunity to make it even smaller.

### **Are Children Behind?**

While many say that children are behind as the result of the pandemic, I don't think this is the case, and most of the school leaders I've spoken with have concurred. While the 2020–2021 academic year began with some lag in learning and the need to recalibrate, for the most part, children have caught up. Many schools prioritized learning goals well by focusing on fundamentals, such as reading and writing skills, and putting forth extra efforts to ensure students were reaching benchmarks in these areas. Literacy skills are key, since they open pathways to all forms of learning,

including independent learning that may be needed to catch up.

---

**The pandemic led us to blur the lines a bit between “inside” and “outside” the classroom, so that what was traditionally seen as “outside” the classroom has now been invited “inside.”**

---

### **The Role of Teachers Outside the Classroom**

I think and hope that the pandemic led us to blur the lines a bit between “inside” and “outside” the classroom, so that what was traditionally seen as “outside” the classroom has now been invited “inside.” Education should have never been about rigid lesson plans and mass dissemination of knowledge to all students equally. Connecting to a child's inner life and family life — understanding their preferences, talents, oddities, and personal challenges — is part of educating the child. Caring, loving, and engaging with all aspects of a child is not a role relegated to outside the classroom. The teacher's primary role is in the classroom, and the uniqueness that each child brings into that learning sphere becomes part of

the process of educating him or her. I think the pandemic highlighted this educational truth immensely.

More important, I think the pandemic changed the way we view “the teacher.” The extent to which our children felt nurtured, safe, and cared for during the most tumultuous months depended largely on our teachers, and nearly all of them rose to the occasion. And as we continue to celebrate our teachers, I think it's imperative that our newfound appreciation comes with much more than niceties and pats on the back. There needs to be a change within, and by that I refer to a change within ourselves and within our community. A change within ourselves is a call for introspection in how we perceive and relate to Jewish day school educators. Do we genuinely value their work? Do we recognize the nobility of the profession? Would we encourage our own children if they were to choose this career? As a community, we need to herald the work of the Jewish educators who are entrusted with shaping the future of our children. Teaching is complex and sophisticated work. The multi-faceted and delicate nature of the job points to the need to identify individuals who are best suited for it. Those who are bright, skilled, committed, and deeply caring belong in the field of chinuch, and they will be looking to our community for encouragement and support. We can demonstrate that support through our voices, through our resources, and through our genuine, united efforts at ennobling the field of Jewish education.

## ALIYAH DURING A PANDEMIC

Rabbi Moshe ('08R) and  
Ariela ('03SCW) Davis



## A LEAP OF FAITH

It is a struggle that many grapple with, and in particular those of us in the world of *avodat hakodesh* — rabbis and Jewish educators. By virtue of our profession, we have a drive to educate and to impassion our congregants and students with the Torah and Jewish values we so strongly maintain, including our intense connection with Medinat Yisrael. In our capacity as Jewish leaders, we are given the platform to share our love of Israel and it is truly invigorating to be able to share that passion with others and to inspire them. And yet, there is a great dichotomy in the soul of the Jewish educator: We live to share these values with others and yet we crave to live them ourselves.

Every year on Yom HaZikaron and Yom HaAtzmaut, there was a void we felt being so far away that a short ceremony and blue and white cupcake could not fill. When you find yourself checking the *Times of Israel* far more often than *The New York Times*, and are moved to tears by hearing HaTikvah and seeing the Israeli flag, it is a constant reminder of where your heart lies. Each time we left Israel after rabbinic missions or student trips, there was an emptiness inside, an aching to be home.

But many people feel this ache and there are reasons why they don't make the jump. For us, there were several reasons why it took so long.

We lived a very fulfilling life in

Charleston as rabbi of a warm and growing shul and Judaic director of the school. We had formed intense relationships as our congregants grew in their Judaism. We witnessed monumental steps as *baalei teshuva* embraced a new life, and officiated at their weddings and the births of their children. Far more than we inspired them, they inspired us, and in building a Torah community together, we had become a family. It was unfathomable to leave.

But with our oldest daughter in 8th grade, and without a Jewish high school in town, we faced a fork in the road. We could send her away, as many do, we could look for a different pulpit in a bigger city, or we could fulfill our lifelong dream of aliyah.

Aliyah had several challenges: Neither of us had careers that segued into the Israeli market. We did not have good connections in Israel and our careers were so much a part of our identities. We had no idea how we would support a family in Israel or if we could ever feel professionally or even spiritually fulfilled. For months, we went back and forth.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik speaks so beautifully about the concept of “missing the moment” in his *Kol Dodi Dofek (Fate and Destiny, Pg. 25)*, particularly in regard to Yishuv ha’Aretz. If we were ever going to give aliyah a shot, we knew that now was our time to jump, lest we miss the moment.

And so, after 12 years in the American rabbinate and nearly 20 years in Jewish education and administration, we arrived at the difficult decision to leave behind the careers we loved to move to the place where our hearts resided; in essence, taking a leap of faith into the unknown.

We used the word, “bittersweet” in our aliyah announcement to our community and it was truly the fitting word to describe our feelings. There was so much excitement about fulfilling a lifelong dream, but it was accompanied with a giant pit of uncertainty in our stomachs and a great many tears. Even after making our announcement and embarking on our plans, we questioned our sanity many times.

Several months later, the COVID pandemic broke out and Jewish professional opportunities disappeared. The Jewish Agency and Israeli government offices closed, making our aliyah timeline uncertain. Nefesh b’Nefesh cancelled their

charter flights and El-Al grounded their planes.

There could not have been a better time for cold feet. Our shul asked us, a good number of times, if we would consider delaying our aliyah. Our passion, training, and experience was primed for a life of *avodat hakodesh* in the Diaspora and perhaps COVID was a necessary wake-up call for us to remain in the life that we already knew.

---

**If we were ever  
going to give  
aliyah a shot, we  
knew that now was  
our time to jump,  
lest we miss the  
moment.**

---

Each of us had our moments of doubt and we strengthened each other. *Bitachon* became a very real concept.

With much *hashgacha pratit* and several deviations from our original plans, we made aliyah in August. We have not regretted it for one day. Within a short time after our arrival and with tremendous *Siyata D’shmaya*, we found new jobs, our children began making new friends, and we have experienced some of the beauty of life in a Jewish country.

We watch our children learn on Zoom and despite all the technological barriers, there is a *temimut* (wholesomeness) in their education that we had previously rarely seen.

There is a *yirat shamayim* that we see in our 7-year-old son’s rebbe in his love of introducing first graders to the world of Torah. Our hearts swell with pride as our daughter participates in *daglanut*; as we hear them speak Hebrew with our neighbor; as we watch our son recite *Pirkei Avot* by heart; and as we see our children hike the land and look at the views surrounding us. They learn in school about Hashem giving the land to Avraham, and Yehoshua conquering Eretz Yisrael, and then they walk on that very land when they go to the candy store or on a simple errand. We feel Erev Shabbat here in a way we never did in America; with Friday being the day off, the country takes its collective break from the hectic workweek. We feel the bustle in the air as the bakeries fill with people buying challah (amazingly subsidized by the Israeli government so that everyone can enjoy), religious and non-religious preparing for Shabbat, each in his or her own way. We planted trees in our yard and marveled in excitement when our stubborn pomelo tree finally began to bloom on Tu B’Shtat. We drive past streets, highways, and communities and are thrilled at the names: Kibbutz Galuyot, Mesilat Tzion, Menachem Begin, Lamed-Hey. We see Yad Hashem here in a way that we never did before.

With all its magical moments, aliyah is not always smooth, and aliyah during COVID has certainly had its challenges. There are two messages from Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook that helped provide perspective as we charted our new life in Eretz Yisrael.

Rabbi Moshe Zvi Neria (*Moadei Ha’Reiya*, pg. 151), one of Rabbi Kook’s leading students, relayed the

story of a wealthy Polish Jew who consulted Rabbi Kook about making aliyah. He explained to Rabbi Kook that in Poland, he had significant profits from his successful businesses and that if he moved to Israel then his financial portfolio would dramatically diminish, and as such aliyah was not feasible for him. Rabbi Kook responded that the balance sheet of aliyah is assessed on a much greater scale than the trivial numbers generated by his business portfolio. This is symbolized by the destruction of Sichon the King of Emori, who lived in Cheshbon just prior to our entrance into the Land of Israel. The lesson is that the Jewish people needed to establish a new orientation to Cheshbon — calculation. In destroying Sichon the King of Cheshbon we made a bold statement that our capacity to inherit the Land of Israel does not rest in the hands of accountants and financial advisors, but rather in The One from whom we will one day be accountable for our true *din ve'cheshbon*.

Each time we told people we were making aliyah, we would look at each other and wait for the inevitable comment to come: *Mazal tov, that's so nice. So, what will you be doing there?* People would warn us that jobs are scarce in Israel, that there's a lot of *lachatz*, stress, and tell us that if we were lucky enough to get jobs, that the salaries are low in Israel, and how could we possibly support our family?

Interestingly, we have found that when we meet new people in Israel, the first question they ask is not about our jobs. They ask about our children, where we made aliyah from, where we live now, and what we like about Israel. We have heard from countless people that *parnassah* in Israel is *me'al ha'teva*, miraculous, and we have seen

it ourselves. The *cheshbonot* in this country are different than in America.

Prior to getting married, if a single, career-minded person consulted only his accountant and financial planner about the implications of marriage on his bank account, he probably wouldn't get married. Likewise, if a person came to a decision about having children, sending those children to Yeshiva day school, buying kosher food, and purchasing a home in a Jewish neighborhood purely based on financial considerations, none of those decisions would have been made. Why should aliyah be any different?

The second message of Rabbi Kook that helped provide perspective on aliyah comes from Rabbi Yehuda Leib Maimon, one of the drafters of Israel's Declaration of Independence and the founding editor of the Torah journal *Sinai*. In an article published in *Sinai* (*Sinai* 5, Pg.43), Rabbi Maimon explored the reasons we do not recite a birkat hamitzvah upon making aliyah. He writes that he asked Rabbi Kook this question. Rabbi Kook responded that aliyah is just the beginning of a much bigger mitzvah, as noted by the Ramban in his commentary to the Sefer Hamitzvot (*Hasagot*, 4:1):

שנצטוונו לרשת הארץ אשר נתן הא-ל יתעלה  
לאבותינו לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב ולא נעזבה  
ביד זולתנו מן האומות או לשממה.

*That we were commanded to inherit the land which God gave to our fathers to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob and not to be left in the hand of others from the nations or to desolation.*

Each individual's aliyah therefore lays the way for the fulfillment of this broader mandate, but no one person completes the task. Likewise, on this question of birkot hamitzvah, the

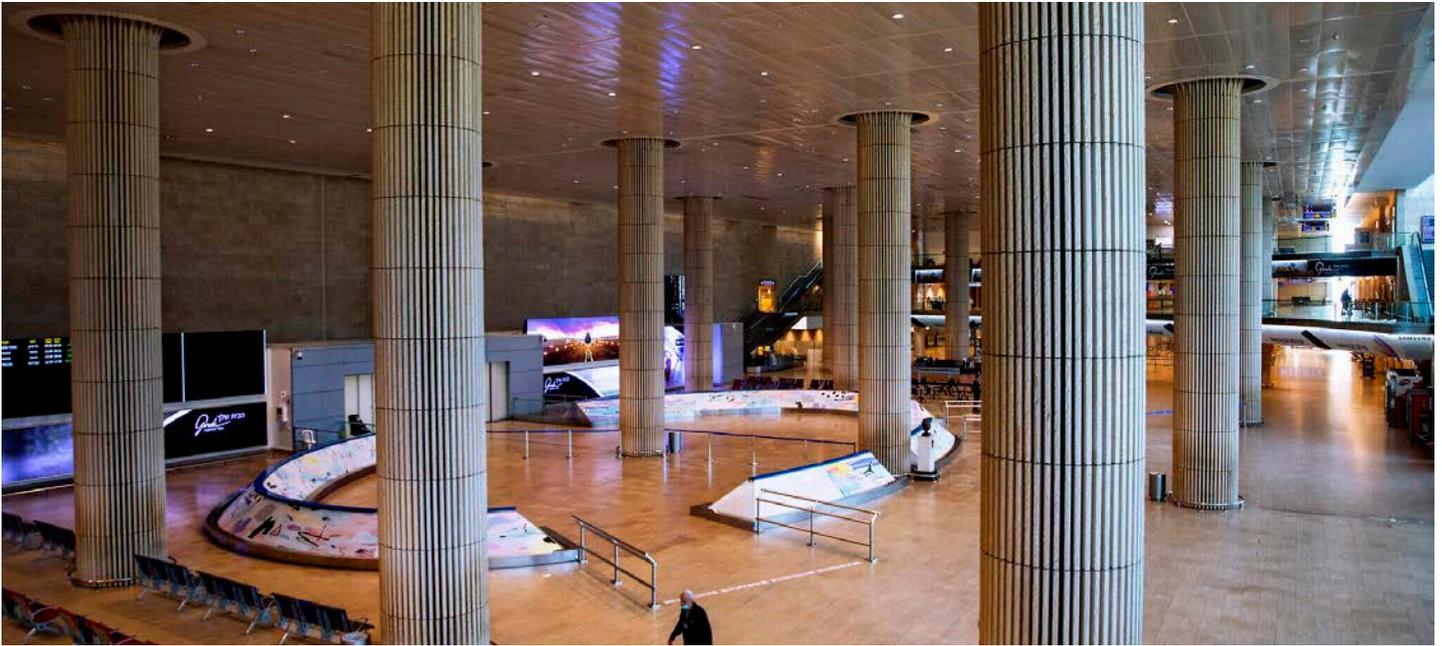
Rashba (*Teshuvot HaRashba* 1:18) writes that we do not recite a beracha on something that is not completely within our control to complete. Since there are many external factors that impact our ability to completely inherit the land, Rabbi Kook explained that it is not yet time to recite a birkat hamitzvah.

If there is anything we have learned from our experience, it is that aliyah is a process. Arriving in Ben Gurion airport with a temporary *teudat zehut* in hand is not the end of the story, it is only the beginning. Aliyah means a life of living in a country where, to some extent, you may always feel like a foreigner. Where each conversation with the phone company, the bank, tax office and post office will feel like a challenge. As in our case, it is not easy to find a profession that is as fulfilling, both spiritually and financially, as one might find in the States. But that's the beauty of Rabbi Kook's message. Each difficulty mastered is a part of our own process of *kibush Eretz Yisrael*.

We miss our community greatly and keep in touch with many people. We would be lying if we did not admit that we miss the ability to be *mashpiah*, to educate and to inspire as we were able to in our previous life. There may always be that piece that's missing and that was our small sacrifice to live the dream. But as we look around at our birthright, the mountains and valley surrounding our home, the place that Moshe Rabbeinu only dreamed of entering, every sacrifice feels well worth it.

## ALIYAH DURING A PANDEMIC

Dr. Moshe ('05YC, '17AZG) and Elizabeth ('07SCW) Glasser



## ALONE, BUT NEVER LONELY

When we began our aliyah journey in August 2019, the obstacles seemed large, but conquerable — we had to sell our home, find new jobs, find a new community, improve our Hebrew. The initial forms on the Nefesh B'Nefesh website, the first phone interview with our aliyah advisor, the first rush to assemble documents and paperwork — it all felt a little unreal, like we were planning for something so far away we couldn't see it. In the words of Tehillim 126:1, *beshev Hashem et shivat Tzion, hayinu k'cholmim* — in our return to Tzion, we felt like dreamers.

The reality soon became clear, and the obstacles began to mount. Finding

more and more documents, filling out forms in Russian (Elizabeth was born in the former Soviet Union), digging up birth and death dates for long-gone relatives — all of this began to feel like obstacles were being sent our way. And the basic life issues were not getting any easier; we began to realize how difficult it would be to learn Hebrew, every meeting and webinar we attended about where to live seemed to leave us more confused than before, we frequently received contradictory information about financial issues (it turns out that paying taxes in two countries is really complicated), and we still couldn't find the right time to take a pilot trip. We decided to wait until after Pesach.

Wrong choice.

At that point, we began to hear rumblings about a new disease that was causing problems in China. We weren't particularly worried — we had heard it before. SARS, MERS, swine flu, avian flu, even Ebola — all had been publicized as world-ending pandemics that failed to materialize. A bad flu season usually caused hundreds of thousands of casualties worldwide — a tragedy to be sure, but one that did not compare to the horrific history of smallpox, polio, or the influenza epidemics of the past. We had conquered this sort of thing — it just didn't happen in first-world countries anymore.

Right?

By the time schools and businesses began to lock down in late March 2020, we had already completed our paperwork and had the all-important Jewish Agency interview — the final step in the approval process. All we were waiting for was the “Mazal Tov” letter — the email that states you have been approved for aliyah and inviting you to apply for your immigration visa. It was at this time that we began to receive “advice.”

Almost everyone who gives advice is well-meaning. They want to help. They want to contribute. They want you to benefit from their experience and their wisdom.

One of the constant complaints of the pandemic era has been the lack of clear instructions: when will schools open, what will the plan be, how will the government ensure safety, when will the vaccine be ready, how will we know what side effects will be risked. All these are important questions, and people feel justified in their rage against the system, or the government, or the authorities for failure to provide leadership and information in a timely fashion.

But here’s the thing: No one actually knows any of those answers. No one knows whether it is safe to open schools, or whether the safety measures being recommended are really enough, or how effective the vaccine will be. No one knows the answers because these are questions we have never had to address before. No one alive has dealt with a modern, world-wide pandemic. Caution is good and science provided some answers, but the big questions, especially at the beginning, simply had no answers. So everyone provided their own.

The advice we received was generally that we should wait. Wait to leave, wait to sell our home, wait to go to Israel. You can’t take a pilot trip, how can you go? You can’t get a job, how can you go? You can’t sell your home, how can you go?

These were important, and even urgent questions. Since the immigration visa is only valid for a limited time, applying meant that we were going. But how could we make such a permanent decision in times of such uncertainty?

It began to feel as though forces were marshalling against us, that the world was trying to stop us. Maybe we were being sent a message. After all, was this really so urgent? Couldn’t we wait a little? We had never felt such intense pressure in the past. What was driving us now?

Making aliyah was something we had discussed in the abstract for a long time. We had looked into moving to a different community in the U.S., but every time we did, it felt like we were just trading one type of difficulty for another. The decision to make aliyah was not borne out of a lack of options — we had a wonderful life and home in New Jersey, good jobs, and a Nabisco factory just down the road that made the whole town smell like cookies. But as the desire to make aliyah grew, we began to see the urging everywhere. The tefilla is filled with the yearning for Eretz Yisrael. Stories of political instability in Europe and the unrest from the growing pandemic increased the feeling that the world was changing. We knew where we wanted to be.

For more than thirty-five years, our family had run a Pesach program. For us, making Pesach involved packing for Arizona or Florida, selling our

chametz, and running around for ten days, keeping our 800–1000 guests happy. Completely unrelated to the pandemic, we made the decision to shut down the company for Pesach of 2020.

Our very first Pesach at home in New Jersey was not as we envisioned, with everyone packing the in-law’s home. It was instead each home alone, every family by themselves. Instead of 800 people at our seder, there were only three. And when we said, *hashata hacha, l’shana haba b’ara D’Yisrael* — this year we are here, next year in the Land of Israel, we knew what our decision was going to be. We had said it so many times — *l’Shana haba’a B’Yerushalayim* — next year in Jerusalem. Well, it was time to decide. Were we only saying it? Or did we really believe it? A few days later, our “Mazal Tov” letter arrived. There was no longer a question.

There were, however, plenty of obstacles remaining. Selling our home was no easy task, since preparing a home to be sold involves lots of infectious people wandering around your nice, disease-free house. Packing up the house, as well as choosing what to bring directly to Israel made for a difficult challenge. All the advice about what to bring and what to leave is contradictory, so feel free to do whatever you want.

Then there were the larger obstacles. The closer we came to the date of our flight, the more difficult things seemed to get. First the luggage rules changed. Since we were bringing everything with us (and not sending a lift), we needed every bag we could get. Then, El Al shut down entirely, leading to a scramble to replace the flights with other airlines. Every day, it seemed, our flight was changed. But eventually,

we had our confirmed date. Our house was emptied and sold. Our belongings were packed.

Driving to the airport was a strange experience. As much of our family as possible accompanied us, but the two of us were in another car with all of the luggage — a large SUV absolutely packed with fifteen very large duffels, and at that point, we barely remembered what was in them. The drive was nerve-racking, not because of any time crunch, or traffic, or bad weather. We had plenty of time, the roads were clear, the day was lovely. But it felt like another obstacle would rise up to stop us. The relief at getting there, at seeing our ticket confirmed and arriving at the gate, was the same as only one other.

As the chazzan for many years for Neilah, there is an incomparable lifting that occurs at the moment of *Hashem Hu Ha'Elokim*; there is a lightness that cannot be matched as the tefillah ends. It feels as though a great weight, one you didn't know was there, is suddenly removed. We felt that as the plane took off. It was really happening. We cried as the plane lifted into the air.

These were all the emotions. But the physical differences were tangible as well. Everyone at their airport wore masks of various kinds — face shields, breath masks with filters, air purifiers around the neck. There was no large gathering of families and photographers, no Israeli officials to welcome us onto the plane, no fanfare. We were gathered in a small area and checked by extra security, but everything seemed so subdued. On the plane, to the credit of all the passengers, there was as much restraint as could be reasonably asked on a twelve-hour flight. Only about

half the flight were Olim; most of the rest of the passengers were Israelis headed home, or boys headed to yeshivas. There was no attempt to make a minyan, that bane of every flight attendant; people davened in their seats.

Those who flew to Israel in the 90s may remember that it was common for the passengers to applaud upon landing in Israel, as it felt like an achievement. But that reaction had become uncommon; in the last ten years, it was rare to hear that reaction from passengers. This time, the applause was powerful.

But even amid that joy, the welcome we received at the airport was muted. The airport itself was almost entirely empty — no crowds welcomed us, no family was allowed to pick up their newly-arrived loved ones. We had the good fortune of having close family in Be'er Sheva who generously lent us their home for our two-week quarantine.

The most important word we learned in Hebrew was “*bidud*,” quarantine. While many words do not translate precisely (there is a reason even non-Jewish English speakers know about “chutzpa”), this word captures the essence of the idea far better

than the English clinical term from 1660's Latin. While the English word quarantine refers to the length of the confinement (the Latin “*quadraginta*” is a reference to the forty days Venetian ships would be kept from the dock if suspected of disease), the Hebrew term *bidud* refers to the status of those suffering it — they are alone. No one in or out, no one to provide aid, comfort, or entertainment. Solitude, police enforced.

But that's not what happened. People called, people Zoomed, people dropped off food and gifts and asked what they could do. People in quarantine themselves wanted to make plans to show us this beautiful country and wanted to know when we would be able to visit. People wanted to introduce us to their friends — maybe he has a job for you? Maybe your kids can play?

For a little while, we felt alone, foreign, in another land not our own, isolated from everything. To paraphrase Shemot 2:22, *geirim hayinu b'erez nachriyah* — we were strangers in a strange land.

Then we opened the door, and we were home. *Simcha l'artzecha v'sasson l'irecha*.





WELCOME HOME!

## GO HOME JACOB

When we married sixteen years ago, we were on the “five year aliyah plan.” Rebecca would get her doctorate in psychology, and Elie would finish law school and start a career as a corporate lawyer — because it was realistic for an American to practice corporate law in Israel. We had our plan!

But as we soon learned, life was more complicated than our plan. Elie wasn't satisfied with corporate law and began exploring assistant rabbi positions. Before we knew it, we were pursuing a different dream, and living a deeply meaningful and interesting life as a community Rabbi and Rebbetzin. We got our feet wet at the Young Israel of Staten Island, and came to Congregation Suburban Torah in Livingston, NJ, eight years ago — where we immediately threw ourselves into the joys and challenges of community life.

The rabbinate is all-encompassing; between long-term projects, lifecycle crises, and the day-to-day intensity of work and family life, the aliyah dream slowly moved to the backburner of our consciousness. The cognitive dissonance of believing in the imperative of aliyah while working day and night to build up a community in the Diaspora was simply too great — and so we tried not to think about it, at least not too often.

But just beneath the surface the yearning was always there, periodically muscling its way to the forefront of our minds and shouting for attention. The inevitable disappointment of the American Yom Ha'atzmaut experience; the pang of jealousy we felt when hearing that another friend was making aliyah. As one sibling after another moved across the ocean, we couldn't help but feel left behind. Most of all, it was the yearning that

every Jew feels, the cry of the soul that G-d directs to every one of us: “And I will put my spirit in you, and you will come to life, and I will place you in your own land...” (Yechezkel 37:14)

When we shared our aliyah plans with the Livingston community, we were astounded by the reaction. The vast majority of the congregation reacted in the same way: “We wish we were going too!” Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop writes that “the nature of a Jew is opposed to exile, and is constantly seeking ways to leave exile and return to the root of his nature” (*Mei Marom*, Volume 6, Chapter 57). It's one thing to read these words, but quite another to see and hear this yearning expressed throughout the community.

Still, why *now*? Why give up meaningful jobs that we both love and are deeply grateful for to make aliyah this summer? The answer is multilayered.

With children already in high school, we feel the clock is ticking. In a few years, our older children will be graduating high school and leaving home. Though we are far from old, our window for making aliyah together as a family is closing.

On a deeper level, turning forty this year strikes us as an opportune time to take the leap. The Mishna in *Pirkei Avos* teaches that “with the age of forty comes understanding.” The source of the Mishna’s teaching is a verse from Moshe’s final message to the people of Israel, after forty years in the desert: “But Hashem did not give you a heart to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear until this day” (Devarim 29:3). The people of Israel achieved a new level of understanding of life as they entered the land after forty years of wandering in exile — a transformation we hope to experience ourselves.

At the same time, our decision to make aliyah is based on more than purely personal considerations. In the last two years alone, we’ve seen a spate of anti-Semitic attacks in America, from extremists on both the left and the right. Never before has our community felt so vulnerable, and so afraid to speak its mind. Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, in an oft-quoted passage, explains that we are experiencing a pattern of events that has repeated itself throughout our exile:

היודע קורות הימים והמצולות אשר שטפו  
באלפי שנים על עם המעט והרפה כח וחדל  
אונים הנה דרך ההשגחה, כי ינחו משך שנים  
קרוב למאה או מאתים ואחר זה יקום רוח  
סערה ויפוצ המון גליו וכלה יבלה, יהרוס  
ישטוף לא יחמול, עד כי נפזרים בדודים ירוצו,  
יברחו למקום רחוק ושם יתאחדו, יהיו לגוי,  
יגדל תורתם, חכמתם יעשו חיל, עד כי ישכח  
היותו גר בארץ נכריה, יחשוב, כי זה מקום  
מחצבתו, בל יצפה לישועת ה' הרוחניות בזמן  
המיועד, שם יבוא רוח סערה עוד יותר חזק,

יזכיר אותו בקול סואן ברעש יהודי אתה ומי  
שמך לאיש, לך לך אל ארץ אשר לא ידעת.  
*“For the thousands of years that swept  
over the diminutive nation, so weak  
and helpless, it was the way of Divine  
Providence that they would rest for  
close to a hundred or two hundred  
years. Afterwards, a storm wind would  
emerge and give rise to many waves;  
it would destroy, decimate, wear them  
out, demolish, and sweep away without  
mercy. The Jews would flee to a distant  
place and there they would reunite into  
a nation. They would grow, rise up, their  
wisdom would lead them to success, until  
they would forget they were strangers in  
a strange land. They would think this  
is the place from which they originated,  
and lose hope for Hashem’s spiritual  
salvation at the appointed time. There,  
an even stronger storm wind would come  
and it would remind them with a raging  
sound and an earthquake: “You are a  
Jew. Who made you into a man? Go for  
yourself to a land you do not know...”*  
**Meshech Chochmah, Vayikra 26:44**

At a protest this past spring, Jacob Frey, the Jewish mayor of Minneapolis, was speaking with a crowd of angry protestors, trying to show them how much he empathized with their pain. Suddenly, one of the leaders of the protest — looming over the mayor — put Frey on the defensive, asking him if he would commit to the spot to defunding the Minneapolis police. “Yes or no!” She then handed the microphone to Frey, who responded in a barely audible voice, “I do not support the full abolition of the police.”

With that, the crowd began to scream at the mayor, over and over again: “Go home Jacob, go home!” Defeated, Jacob Frey slowly walked away with his head down, on the walk of shame. “Go home Jacob, go home!”

There are times when G-d speaks through prophets, but there are also times when the words of those prophets are written on subway walls and tenement halls, when G-d’s message reaches us from the most unlikely places. “Go home Jacob, go home!” Watching this scene unfold in Minneapolis, we heard an echo of similar words first uttered thousands of years ago, to the original Jacob.

After living in exile for twenty years in Lavan’s house, Yaakov was confronted by an angel of G-d: “I am the G-d of Beit-El, where you anointed a monument, where you vowed to Me a vow. Now arise, leave this land and return to the land of your birthplace” (Bereishit 31:13). “Go home Jacob, go home!”

We are not running away from America, a country that has been so good to us personally and to our people. In moving to Israel, we do so with Jewish pride and strength, as a fulfillment of the words we say in Birkat Hamazon: “May He ... lead us upright to our land” — *komemiyut l’artzeinu!* We pray that the United States should remain a nation of chessed and a hospitable home for American Jewry. And yet — the events of our time seem to point in one direction: *home*.

It cannot be said enough that we are living in miraculous times; that we are blessed to witness events our great grandparents could only dream of. It is awe-inspiring to play our small role in fulfilling the great hope of the Jewish people: “Sound the great shofar for our liberty, and raise a banner to gather our exiles, and gather us together from the four corners of the earth...” May we merit to soon see all of our people return home, in joy and celebration!



**UNDERSTANDING FREEDOM • MEDICATIONS ON PESACH**

**CHILDREN AT THE SEDER • HOW TO CLEAN A KITCHEN THE RIGHT WAY**

**THE LESSONS OF THE FOUR CUPS • THE EXODUS AND ARCHAEOLOGY**

**YOM TOV SHENI • THE LAWS OF MATZA BAKING**

**THE IDEAL VEGETABLE FOR MARROR • HOW MUCH MATZA DO YOU NEED TO EAT?**

**HAGGADAH INSIGHTS • CUSTOMS AT THE SEDER • THE TEFILLOT OF PESACH**

**PESACH AND SEFIRA • APPRECIATING JEWISH HISTORY • ACHARON SHEL PESACH**

**PREPARE FOR PESACH WITH THOUSANDS OF SHIURIM ON**

**THE MARCOS AND ADINA KATZ**

**YUTORAH.ORG**

**NOW AVAILABLE FOR IOS AND ANDROID MOBILE DEVICES!**



ישיבת רבנו יצחק אלחנן

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

An Affiliate of Yeshiva University

CENTER FOR THE JEWISH FUTURE