

THE BENJAMIN AND ROSE BERGER TORAH TO-GO®

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WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?



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Editors' Preface

We stand at a moment of great import in Jewish history. As our soldiers engage in combat against our enemies, we face another challenging chapter of this long *galut*, contemplating our place in the unfolding story of the Jewish people and reflecting on where we now stand.

Perhaps this reflection can be framed with the following idea from R. Yehonatan Eibeschitz (*Ye'arot Devash* drush no. 1). R. Eibeschitz wonders: Why does the seventh beracha of the Amidah conclude *go'el Yisrael* (He Who redeems Israel) in the present tense? Wouldn't it be more accurate to say that HaShem will redeem us (*yigal Yisrael*)? He answers that this beracha isn't only about the ultimate redemption. Of course, this beracha includes a request for the ultimate redemption — and indeed, those who follow *Nusach Sefard* and *Nusach Eidot HaMizrach* specifically reference the *geulah sheleimah*, the complete redemption. Yet, this beracha also encompasses our immediate needs. Every day of our *galut* is a crisis, and the threat is evident or not, there are people plotting against us. And every single day, HaShem has mercy on us and redeems us from these evil plots. That is why we refer to Him as *go'el Yisrael* — because His redemption is ongoing.

These comments poignantly summarize our *galut* experience. We, as a people, have always had to deal with crises and immediate threats, while also preparing and developing plans and systems to ensure that we can survive and thrive in this long *galut*. There are times when we must focus our energies on a more immediate crisis, and other times when we have opportunities to invest in long-term strategies for our survival and prosperity.

The attacks on Oct. 7 and the war that followed have been on our minds every day. Our prayers for the return of the hostages and the safety and success of our soldiers certainly have a

place in *Re'eh ve'anyeinu*, the seventh beracha of the Amidah. In addition to the prayers, the Diaspora community has been fully engaged in assisting our brothers and sisters in Eretz Yisrael and helping the war effort.

At the same time, the Diaspora community has had its own wake-up call. Antisemitism has been on the rise in recent years, but it has spiked significantly since October 7. People fear walking the streets while wearing kippot or other Jewish identifying clothing in locations previously considered safe. College campuses have become hotbeds of antisemitism, and this sentiment has also carried over to K-12 public schools in some places.

Jews in the Diaspora are now asking: Where do we go from here? What messages do we in the Diaspora need to learn from the Oct. 7 wake-up call? Should we be giving further consideration to Aliyah? Do we need to change the curricula in our schools to reflect this new reality?

For 18 years, the Benjamin and Rose Berger Torah To-Go has been offering profound insights and commentary on the holidays and related themes from esteemed thought leaders within the Yeshiva University community. This special edition is dedicated to upholding this cherished tradition while prompting reflection on a pivotal question: Where do we go from here? In this issue, we share insights into some of the issues more directly related to Oct. 7 and the war currently raging in Israel as well as some of the longer-term issues relevant to our *galut*.

It is our hope and prayer that the *Go'el Yisrael* brings us ongoing salvation in this war of good versus evil, and may He also speedily end the *galut* and bring about the ultimate redemption.

Dedicated in memory of our beloved

לעילוי נשמת רב זאב בן עזריאל

Mr. Willy Apfel a"h

Sheila and Ronny Apfel and Family

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THE BOOK AND THE SWORD

This article is an adaptation of the remarks delivered by Yeshiva University President, Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman, at the presentation of the Rabbi Jonathan Sacks Book Prize.

We all understand how charged this moment of time is for us sitting here tonight, and for the entire Jewish people. Many of us have children, nephews, and grandchildren fighting in the IDF right now. My son is in Givati, near Jenin, my nephew is in Gaza — they tell me they are safe; I allow myself to believe them. In a larger sense, all the soldiers fighting to defend the Jewish state are

our sons and daughters. We are glued to the news to hear any words of change, of progress, of loss God forbid, and of triumph.

On a much different scale, but still deeply disconcerting, we are all also sadly aware of the rise in antisemitism across the globe, in the United States, and especially on college campuses.

As we continuously work to support our brothers and sisters in the IDF and in Israel, we are also engaged in this struggle on college campuses on behalf of all the Jewish students around the country, and indeed for higher education and the future of the United States.



Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman

*President and Rosh Yeshiva,
Yeshiva University and RIETS*

It is with this backdrop that tonight's event takes on even greater significance. Tonight, we celebrate the book selected as this year's winner of the Rabbi Jonathan Sacks Book Prize. Given the theme of the book and the fact that the author is a distinguished teacher of Israel, it is of course organically fitting for us at this time to celebrate him and his book.

But there is a greater point to this moment to which I wish to draw your attention.

The midrash teaches us:

ספרא וסיפא ירדו כרוכים מן השמים.

The book and the sword descended intertwined from heaven.

Sifri, Ekev no. 40

I have long been intrigued by this image — the fact that the book and the sword are not just represented at the giving of the Torah, but are seen as interwoven. Similarly, the Midrash teaches:

הר חורב שבו נשמעה החרב.

[Sinai] is called "Har Chorev" because it is there that the sword (cherev) was heard.

Tanchuma, Bamidbar no. 7

One can see the sword (*cherev*) in the very name of the place in which the Torah was given (*Har Chorev*).

These two elements, the book and the sword, represent two very different sources of power. The sword represents physical strength and prowess. It speaks to soldiers on a field of war, or politicians and world leaders on a geopolitical scale. The book, however, represents the power of ideas. At first blush, one might think that the sword is stronger than the word. But all who study history know the truth that Shakespeare once noted, how those wearing rapiers (swords) are afraid of those with goose quills.

The victories of the sword are ephemeral, but ideas can penetrate in ways eternal.

At Har Sinai, the midrash teaches that wars will be necessary. Your difference will not go unchallenged; your blessing will need to be won and you will be

required to raise fighters who know how to wield a sword; but that is not the purpose. Your purpose is Jewish values, your purpose is the ideas, you are here to live by and spread Torah — you are here for the book.

Looking at Israel, fighting against terrorism, and even combating antisemitism here, we know we need the tenacity and strength that is embodied by the sword.

But what this moment has also shown is the central significance of our book.

My friends, we have seen very clearly the moral abyss beneath too many of our institutions of higher education. Some of the "elite" universities might have very large endowments, but they are morally bankrupt. Now more than ever we need institutions

 <p>CORE TORAH VALUES</p> <p>Yeshiva University is a unique ecosystem of educational institutions and resources that prepares the next generation of leaders with Jewish values and market-ready skills to achieve great success in their personal and professional lives, endowing them with both the will and wherewithal to transform the Jewish world and broader society for the better.</p> <p>YU.EDU/VALUES</p>	<p>TORAT EMET</p> <p>אמת TRUTH</p> <p>We believe in truth, and humanity's ability to discover it.</p> <p>The pursuit of truth has always been the driving force behind advances in human understanding, from Socrates' wanderings through the streets of Athens to the innovations of the Industrial Revolution. People of faith, who believe in a divine author of Creation, believe that the act of discovery is sacred, whether in the realm of philosophy, physics, economics or the study of the human mind.</p> <p>The Jewish people in particular affirm that beginning with the Revelation of the Torah at Mount Sinai, God entrusted eternal teachings and values to us that we must cherish and study diligently above all else, for they represent the terms of the special covenant that God made with us. All people, regardless of their faith background, should value the accumulation of knowledge because it is the way to truth and a prerequisite to human growth.</p>	<p>TORAT CHAIM</p> <p>חיים LIFE</p> <p>We believe in bringing values to life.</p> <p>Jewish thought asserts that truth is made available to human beings not simply so they can marvel at it but also so that they can use it. Students studying literature, computer science, law, psychology or anything else are expected to take what they learn and implement it within their own lives as well as apply it to the real world around them.</p> <p>When people see a problem that needs addressing, their responsibility is to draw upon the truths they uncovered during their studies in finding a solution. They must live truth in the real world, not simply study it in the classroom.</p>	<p>TORAT ADAM</p> <p>אדם INFINITE HUMAN WORTH</p> <p>We believe in the infinite worth of each and every human being.</p> <p>Judaic tradition first introduced to the world the radical proposition that each individual is created in the divine image and accordingly possesses incalculable worth and value.</p> <p>The unique talents and skills each individual possesses are a reflection of this divine image, and it is therefore a sacred task to hone and develop them. The vast expansive human diversity that results from this process is not a challenge but a blessing. Each of us has our own path to greatness.</p>	<p>TORAT CHESED</p> <p>חסד COMPASSION</p> <p>We believe in the responsibility to reach out to others in compassion.</p> <p>Even as we recognize the opportunities of human diversity, Jewish tradition emphasizes the importance of common obligations. In particular, every human being is given the same responsibility to use his or her unique gifts in the service of others; to care for their fellow human beings; to reach out to them in thoughtfulness, kindness and sensitivity; and to form a connected community.</p>	<p>TORAT ZION</p> <p>ציון REDEMPTION</p> <p>We believe that humanity's purpose is to transform our world for the better and move history forward.</p> <p>In Jewish thought, the concept of redemption represents the conviction that while we live in an imperfect world, we have a responsibility to strive toward its perfection. Regardless of a person's personal convictions about whether social perfection is attainable or even definable, it is the act of working toward it that gives our lives meaning and purpose. This common striving is an endeavor that brings all of humanity together.</p> <p>The Jewish people's task to build up the land of Israel into an inspiring model society represents this effort in microcosm. But it is part of a larger project that includes all of humankind. If the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice, then redemption represents our responsibility to work together in the service of God to move history forward.</p>
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The purpose of Judaism is not to fight antisemitism. We fight antisemitism so we can focus on our purpose — to spread God’s messages of truth and love, to sanctify God’s name, to enlighten and uplift the world.



of higher education that proudly and unapologetically seek truth, live by their values, respect the infinite worth of each and every individual, act with compassion and bring redemption to the world. Now more than ever we need the right ideas to take center stage and the need to emphasize the importance of books.

Yes, we need the sword, we need protection, but it must always be wrapped together with books, so we remember what it is we are fighting for.

The purpose of Judaism is not to fight antisemitism. We fight antisemitism so we can focus on our purpose — to spread God’s messages of truth and love, to sanctify God’s name, to enlighten and uplift the world.

And with all the challenges of today we are presented with an enormous opportunity. Jewish hearts are open like no other time in Jewish history. All throughout the world, Jews have rediscovered their identity. They naturally understand that they are connected to something greater. This is not just about antisemitism and hate. This is about a People searching for an authentic connection to their core being. If we listen closely, we can hear Hashem calling.

And we are not just witnessing this phenomenon within the Jewish community, but throughout the world. Universities, colleagues at work, media outlets are turning to their

Jewish friends to make some sense of this all. Just recently I was a panelist at a breakfast on leadership in higher education by *U.S. News & World Report*. Together with me were some of the leaders of the largest university systems in the country, including the chancellor of California State University, which has over 500,000 students, and the chancellor of SUNY, which has over 1.4 million students. Why did they invite me to speak with my much smaller institution of 7,000 students? Because there is an understanding that we represent 3,000 years of tradition. The depth we bring to the conversation is unmatched, and the clarity with which we convey our values is refreshing in a higher education world that at times seems paralyzed by its own defensiveness.

In modern history there has been no greater conveyor of Torah values and Jewish ideas than Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks. He was the light who led the way. YU is, of course, his natural home base. We are so proud to house this center and we are deeply thankful to Lady Elaine, the Sacks family, Joanna and the Sacks foundation for their great work in

perpetuating his legacy. At YU, we are all Rabbi Sacks’ students, and we thank them for their continued support.

As the natural promulgators of Rabbi Sacks’ scholarly legacy, YU stands as a proverbial light tower in the darkness that we now face in our society. As an institution devoted to the book, we are perpetuating the Torah and its values in a world that so desperately needs guidance and direction. While we stand ready to defend ourselves and the Jewish people when needed, we are, and will always be, devoted to the pursuit of truth and knowledge. The sword when we must, but the book always.

My friends, there are moments in time when history invites us to participate in its unfolding. This is such a pivotal moment, and I am pleased to have such great partners in our work to move history forward.



See more shiurim and articles from
Rabbi Dr. Berman at
www.yutorah.org/Rabbi-Dr.-Ari-Berman

ANSWERING THE CALL TO SERVE

Many Jews in the Diaspora are watching events unfold in Israel and feeling somewhat helpless. What can we do when we are 6,000 miles away? What perspective should we have towards the events that are taking place in Eretz Yisrael?

Our nation finds itself in a period of “*miluim*.” *Miluim* in modern Hebrew means reserve duty (especially in a military context). In *lashon hakodesh*, it has a different meaning. We use *miluim*, (from the word *malei*, to fill) to refer to situations where one person fulfills the needs of another, and in doing so, the giver’s needs are fulfilled more than the recipient’s.

As an example, the Mishna states:

על שלשה דברים העולם עומד על התורה ועל עבודה ועל גמילות חסדים

The world stands on three things: Torah, service (prayer) and acts of kindness.

Avot 1:2

An exploration of these three pillars reveals something intriguing. As individuals engage in Torah study with dedication and perseverance, they reap immense rewards through the guidance of exceptional roshei yeshiva, teachers and chavrutot. Those who progress

to become teachers come to realize an even greater benefit derived from their students. These students become catalysts, compelling the teacher to prepare meticulously for each lesson while posing questions that serve to refine and deepen the teacher’s comprehension of the subject matter.

The same is true regarding *tefillah*. Our rabbis teach us:

כל המבקש רחמים על חבירו והוא צריך
לאותו דבר הוא נענה תחילה.

If one prays for his friend and his needs are the same, he will be answered first.

Bava Kama 92a.

When this person prays for the fulfillment of a friend’s needs, he will discover that his own prayers, in the end, also serve to fulfill his personal needs first, resulting in a self-beneficial outcome.

The same is true regarding acts of kindness. The rabbis (*Ta’anit* 9a) comment on the pasuk (Devarim 14:22) *aser ta’aser: aser bishvil shetitaser*, tithe that you shall become wealthy.

The rabbis are telling us that when we provide tzedakah to others, we can actually become wealthy as a result. The desire to fulfill someone else’s needs will eventually benefit the giver.



**Rabbi Meir
Goldwicht**

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS

How do we merit fulfilling someone else’s needs in a way that we feel more fulfilled as a result? The Creator of the Universe created us with five senses. One of those senses is sight. Seeing properly is not just about sight with our eyes. We see in a different way with other parts of our body, we have “eyes of the heart” as Shlomo HaMelech said in Kohelet (1:16) *libi ra’ah*, my heart saw, and we have “eyes of the mind” as our rabbis often said “*ro’eh ani et devarecha*” I can see your opinion. Maharal makes this point in his commentary to Avot:

לפי האמת כח הראות הוא כח הנפשי נבדל
[מגשמי] יותר מכל שאר החושים, וכבר
הביאו ראיות ברורה על זה איך כח העין
הוא כח נבדל ... ועוד ראיה מן הכתוב כי
כח הראות הוא כח נבדל קרוב אל השכל, כי

משתתף השכל אם הראות כלשון "ראה", שכשם שיבא לשון ראייה על העין, כך יבא לשון ראה כל השכל, כמו רואה אני את דברי פלוני, וכתוב "ולבי ראה", ומזה מוכח כי כח הראות הוא כח נבדל.

In truth, the sense of sight has a spiritual element more distinct from the other senses [which are physical in nature]. Our rabbis have already proven this idea that the sense of sight is a distinct sense ... And another proof from the scripture that the sense of sight is a distinct sense connected to the mind is that the mind works together with sight as we find in the language "re'eh"; that just as the term "re'iyah" applies to the eyes, it also applies to the mind, as we find, "I can see the opinion of Ploni" and as it states "my heart sees," and from this we see that the sense of sight is unique and distinct [from the other senses].

Derech Chaim 2:9

The combination of the "eyes of the heart" and the "eyes of the mind" allows us to see properly with our physical eyes. The eyes of the heart allow us to explore details and the eyes of the mind allow us to see the big picture. When we have the proper balance between the details and the big picture, we can properly process what we see with our physical eyes.

How do we properly balance the details with the big picture? When we realize that Judaism is built on three aspects of faith: 1) *Ain od milvado*, there is nothing but Him; 2) *Torah min hashamayim*, the Torah comes from heaven; and 3) *Hashgacha pratit*, divine providence on an individual level.

Our belief that there is nothing but Him was revealed to us in the most pronounced way through the great miracles that took place in Egypt and when we left Egypt. We saw that he is capable of being *meshaneh itim umachalif et hazmanim*, He can alter time and change seasonal patterns. Anything and everything is in His hands.

The second aspect of faith is that the Torah that we received is divinely sourced. This aspect was revealed to us with great splendor at the time of *kabalat HaTorah* at Har Sinai. The Torah that we received at Sinai is the same Torah that we observe today. This Torah shall never be changed. It has been with us for thousands of years and continues to guide us.

The third aspect of faith, divine providence, was revealed to us in all its glory when we left Egypt, from a place where not a single slave successfully escaped, to a desert full of snakes and scorpions. Our Creator looked after our every need. From food that came from the heavens (manna) to the *amud anan* (pillar of cloud) during the day and the *amud eish* (pillar of fire) at night.

Maharal teaches us the following:

ודע כי ג' אמונות הם יסוד הדת, וכאשר חס ושלום תפול אחת מהם, תפול הדת בכללה; האחת, הוא ההשגחה, שהוא משגיח בתחתונים, ולא כמו שאומרים המינים (יחזקאל ח, יב) "עזב ה' את הארץ". שאם כן, למה נעבוד אותו, אחר שאין משגיח בתחתונים לפקוד את מעשיהם. האמונה השנית, שהכל הוא ביד ה', ואין דבר חוץ ממנו, וזהו אמונת מציאות השם יתברך ... לכך אמונת מציאות השם יתברך שהוא הכל, ואין דבר חוץ ממנו יתברך. האמונה השלישית, שידבר השם יתברך אל האדם, ויתן לו תורה, וזהו אמונת תורה מן השמים. וכנגד אלו שלש אמונות, שהם שרשים ויסוד לדת, צוה השם יתברך בשלשה רגלים. ונקראים "רגלים" על שם שהם רגלי הדת, שעומד עליהם הדת. כי חג הפסח בו נודע שהוא יתברך כל יכול על ידי אותות ומופתים, עד קריעת ים סוף שהיה בשביעי של פסח (רש"י שמות יד, ה), ובו נודע בבירור שהכל ביכלתו, ואין חוץ ממנו. וחג השבועות, בו נודע נתינת התורה. וחג הסוכות, שהושיב אותם בענני כבוד בשמירתו, וזה מורה על ההשגחה והשמירה שהיה עליהם, ולא עזב אותם, שהושיב אותם בסכות, שהיא השמירה. וכמו שאנו אומרים פורס סכת

שלום עלינו ועל כל עמו ישראל ועל ירושלים. *Know that the three aspects of faith are the foundation of religion, and if, G-d forbid, one of them falls, the entire faith system collapses. The first is divine providence, which involves God's supervision over the lower realms. It is not as some heretics claim, "The Lord has forsaken the land" (Ezekiel 8:12). If that were so, why should we worship Him if there is no providence over the lower realms to oversee our actions? The second belief is that everything is in the hands of G-d, and nothing exists outside of Him. This is the belief in the existence of G-d ... Therefore, the belief in the existence of G-d is that He is everything, and there is nothing beyond Him. The third belief is that G-d communicated with humanity and gave them the Torah. This is the belief in the divine origin of the Torah.*

Corresponding to these three aspects of faith, which are the roots and foundation of our religion, G-d gave us three festivals. They are called "regalim" because they are the supporting legs (regel) upon which the religion stands. The Pesach festival, during which it became known that He, blessed be He, is all-powerful through signs and wonders, including the splitting of the Red Sea which took place on the seventh day of Passover. Through this event, it became explicitly clear that everything is within His capability, and there is nothing beyond Him. The Shavuot festival is when the giving of the Torah became known. The Sukkot festival commemorates that He made them dwell in the clouds of glory in His protection. This signifies the providence and guardianship that was upon them, for He did not forsake them but made them dwell in Sukkot (booths), which represents protection. This is what we say (in our evening prayers), "He spreads the tabernacle of peace over us and over all His people Israel and over Jerusalem."

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These three aspects of faith, *ain od milvado*, *Torah min hashamayim* and *hashgacha pratit* express themselves in three different mountains. Har Sinai is the mountain of *Torah min hashamayim*. Har HaCarmel is where Eliyahu HaNavi stood opposite the idol worshipping prophets of Ba'al. The determination of who was a true prophet and who was a false prophet came about through a heavenly fire that came down and consumed Eliyahu's korban. On this mountain, *hashgacha pratit* expressed itself in a clear manner. The war against the army of Sisera was waged on Har Tavor. The chances of winning were infinitesimal, and yet Barak ben Avinoam managed to defeat the great army of Sisera. Devorah HaNeviah proclaimed "*min hashamayim nilchamu hakochavim*," the stars fought from Heaven. In other words, on Har Tavor it became clear that *ain od milvado*, there is nothing beyond the Creator of the Universe.

It is quite amazing that there is an allusion to these three aspects of faith in the Ma'ariv prayers that we recite each night when we say *ufros aleinu sukkat shelomecha*, spread upon us the sukkah of peace. The word *sukkat* סככת is an acronym for Sinai, Carmel and Tavor. This is our "iron dome," and as long as we strengthen ourselves in these aspects of faith, we can balance the eyes of the mind and the eyes of the heart, between the ability to see the details together with the big picture. Through this, we can learn to respond properly and think properly so that we can act properly.

Through this we should merit the fulfillment of the words of Yeshayahu HaNavi:

לֹא יִשְׁמַע עוֹד חֶמֶס בְּאַרְצְךָ שֶׁד וְשָׁכָר בְּגִבּוֹלֶיךָ וְקִרְאָת יְשׁוּעָה חוֹמֹתֶיךָ
וְשִׁעְרֶיךָ תִּהְיֶה לָךְ עוֹד הַשָּׁמֶשׁ לְאֹר יוֹמָם וּלְנֶגֶה הַיָּרֵחַ לַלַּיִל
יֵאֵיר לָךְ וְהָיָה לָךְ ה' לְאֹר עוֹלָם וְאֵלֶיךָ לְחִפְּאֻתְךָ. לֹא יָבוֹא עוֹד
שִׁמְשׁוֹךְ וְיִרְחָד לֹא יֵאֱסֹף כִּי ה' יִהְיֶה לָךְ לְאֹר עוֹלָם וְשָׁלְמוֹ יָמֵי אֲבֹלֶךָ.
וְעַמּוֹךְ כָּל־צָדִיקִים לְעוֹלָם יִירָשׁוּ אֶרֶץ נֶצֶר מִטְּעֵי מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי לְהַתְּפָאֵר.
הַקָּטָן יִהְיֶה לְאֶלֶף וְהַצָּעִיר לְגוֹי עָצוֹם אֲנִי ה' בְּעֵתָהּ אֲחִישְׁנָהּ.

The cry "Violence!" (Chamas) Shall no more be heard in your land, Nor "Wrack and ruin!" Within your borders. And you shall name your walls "Victory" And your gates "Renown." No longer shall you need the sun For light by day, Nor the shining of the moon For radiance [by night]; For God shall be your light everlasting, Your God shall be your glory. Your sun shall set no more, Your moon no more withdraw; For God shall be a light to you forever, And your days of mourning shall be ended. And your people, all of them righteous, Shall possess the land for all time; They are the shoot that I planted, My handiwork in which I glory. The smallest shall become a clan; The least, a mighty nation. I God will speed it in due time.

Yeshayahu 60:18-22

Libi BaMizrach: Living through the Current Matzav



Voices of a Nation:

Reflections from a Recent Mission to Israel

Hashem is constantly communicating with us. He speaks to us within our inner selves — our *neshamas*. He speaks to us through life itself and via the arc of history. Often, we do not hear the messages of Hashem; we struggle to listen or we cannot comprehend them. Yet they are always there.

When I had the merit and privilege to travel to Israel recently as a representative of our YU Torah Mitzion Kollel of Chicago together with a group of Yeshiva University students (men and women), I heard many voices. While no one can be certain about Divine communication, I feel that I absorbed

many messages from Hakadosh Baruch Hu through my experiences in Israel with bereaved families sitting shiva, reservist soldiers on the front lines, parents of hostages, and wounded soldiers in hospital beds. As a community representative, what I heard was meant not just for me, but also for our community outside of Israel. These voices continue to resonate with me after witnessing firsthand the incredible non-stop chessed, self-sacrifice, resilience, love and togetherness that has been happening in Israel. I hope they will impact others as well. Here are just a few of the powerful messages.



Rabbi Reuven Brand

Rosh Kollel, YU Torah Mitzion Kollel of Chicago

Spread Light

Tali Barazani delivered this message to our group directly. This grieving Jerusalem mother stood up from her low chair and addressed us as she sat shiva with her husband, Avichai, and their daughter in their Har Choma

home for their son, Dvir ז"ל Hy"ד, a 20-year-old staff sergeant who served in an IDF paratrooper unit. Dvir fell in battle in Gaza a few days earlier.

When our group of 35 college students arrived at the already packed Barazani family apartment, I explained to the grieving family that we there to simply be with them in their time of loss, representing Jews in America who want them to know that we are thinking of them and care about them. Avichai stood, held my hands in his and described his wonderful son, a religious young man and a swimmer. Then, before each student walked by to share the brief, traditional *HaMakom* condolence message in the presence of Rishon Letzion, Harav Shlomo Amar Shlit"a, who was present, Tali stood up. She called upon us *lehafitz ohr* — to spread light when we returned to America. She said her son fell fighting darkness, and it is up to us to continue his mission of spreading light.

I received the same personal charge from Doron Friedman, whom I visited as he and his wife, Liat, sat shiva with their daughters over the loss of their 21-year-old son Shachar ז"ל Hy"ד, also from the paratrooper division (a different unit) and the same high school as Dvir Barazani. Doron gave me a car magnet that matched the bumper sticker on the bench outside their Jerusalem apartment. It has a picture of Shachar smiling with a message inviting us to increase light and goodness in the world. Doron described how Shachar was a beacon of light and kindness, always looking out and caring for others, especially those with special needs and those, in Shachar's words, who "fall out of our line of sight." Shachar left his family a written ethical will and in it a message for the world: "Be good people. Smile. Strive to cause all those whom you meet to smile also...."



I was able to see a spark of this light of goodness in so many projects we did during the visit. The message from Tali Barazani was particularly timely, since we heard it just as we arrived from an experience of *ohr*.

We stopped at their home as we returned from an incredible dinner program in which the young men and women from YU helped staff a carnival for 150 mothers and kids in Tekoa (a thousand-family community in the Judean hills), whose husbands had been away at war for many weeks. Young women from Stern College painted little girls' faces while young men from Yeshiva College carried little boys in a circle of dancing as mothers looked on smiling. Countless women told me, over paper plates brimming with pizza, fries and salad, how meaningful it was that we brought one evening of joy, fun and relief to their lives. I watched one mother walk home with her three small children, one with special needs, and I wondered how these heroic women manage each day and what a privilege it was to bring them a little light for one night.

Strength

One of our Kollel alumni, R' Yosef Berman, directed me to the various

shiva visits during our stay. Long before joining us in Chicago for three years of *shlichut* with his family, Yosef served in a paratrooper unit. However, at the outbreak of this war, he was transferred to a unit that is responsible for assisting families of fallen soldiers. His job includes the tasks of informing family members, assisting with funeral arrangements, helping with shiva and coordinating memorial details. Heartbreaking tasks. During the first days after October 7, he spent all day at Har Herzl, moving from one funeral to the next — every two hours — from morning until close to midnight. At the time, he told me he did not need his requisite eye drops for several days. It was non-stop tears.

During my visit, Yosef shared with me a comment he heard from the grandmother of Gal Mescheloff Hy"ד ז"ל, a fallen soldier from Modiin, whose home I visited. I sat with his father, Nir, one morning during the shiva in Modiin. Gal's grandmother said she heard people murmuring that their family is "*misken*." This Hebrew word is translated colloquially as "*nebach*" or worthy of pity. She told Yosef directly to tell people that the family is not "*misken*" and that Am Yisrael is not "*misken*." She said emphatically that we

are mourning but we will soon rise from their place on the floor. We will not be broken. We are strong.

This idea that our people are strong, unbroken and unbreakable is evident across the country. Even from those whose situation was the most dire — the families of hostages — there were messages of strength. I heard this directly from Eliyahu Liebman, whose son, Elyakim, was held captive as he spoke to our group with Mearas Hamachpela in the background, and from Rav Doron Perez, who addressed us from his World Mizrahi office, awaiting any word about his captive son, Daniel.

Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon shlit”a has continued to emphasize this message to Jews in Israel and abroad. Thanks to Hashem, our army is strong, and our people are strong.

Vulnerability

In America we are secure in knowing we can handle almost all our problems ourselves. We have “Indeed” to fill jobs, apps for grocery delivery, and mental health professionals for personal crises. Even with rising antisemitism, most of us do not feel the type of vulnerability that previous generations faced.

In Israel, the conflict has precipitated a totally unexpected sense of vulnerability. The most obvious is the security situation in the wake of the attacks. Staying in a hotel with evacuees from Shlomi, a predominantly Sephardic, religious town on the Lebanese border, was a stark reminder to me of this challenge. During our visit, the students and I provided fun Oneg Shabbos and Motzei Shabbos activities for these evacuee families. On Friday night we also met with residents of Kfar Maimon, a religious moshav near Sderot, who told of their



ordeal during the October 7th assault. We cannot imagine the emotional and psychological impact of this vulnerability.

There are also more subtle vulnerabilities, which we witnessed firsthand: agriculture. One morning we got off our bus at the edge of a farm not far from Netivot in the South. We met Binyamin Binyamini, a Moroccan immigrant who arrived in Israel in 1951 and developed land that now spans 300 dunams. His son, Moti, led us to a field of cabbage that stretches as far as the eye can see. He explained that without the forty Thai workers who left at the outbreak of the war, all of his cabbage (among many other crops) will die in the field, his income will be lost and there will be a food shortage in Israeli supermarkets. As I picked cabbage (maybe a grey wool suit and dress shoes weren’t ideal attire) alongside our YU students and local Israeli high school kids for nearly two hours, I thought about vulnerability. Chazal speak of farming as an exercise in vulnerability and faith in Hashem — that He will cause the seeds to grow (*Gemara Shabbos* 31a). This farmer, Moti, is completely vulnerable. He has no means of rescuing his crops without Hashem sending him volunteers.

Today in Israel, farmers are feeling the vulnerability of not having enough labor to harvest crops, and many displaced families are facing economic insecurity. These realities remind us of our dependence on Hashem for all aspects of life, especially for our livelihood, as the Sforno explains in his commentary to Koheles (Perek 3).

Am Yisrael: One People

When we visited Tel Hashomer hospital in Ramat Gan one evening, our group met a wounded young man, Amichai, who — in his words — “merited to sacrifice his hands for Eretz Yisrael” (meaning he no longer has hands r”l). When asked what message he would share with students abroad, he emphasized that we are one people. All Jews are one nation, wherever we are.

Standing at a meeting point for a caravan of military vehicles about to enter Gaza, I saw soldiers of every background. They all share one goal: protecting the people, nation, and the land of Israel.

When I spoke to a crowded cafeteria of soldiers on an IDF base before handing out letters from students in Chicago filled with messages of love and support, the room erupted in response

We, in America, need to consider: What does it mean that the Jewish people are a nation? Do we see ourselves as part of a nation? How does this shape our spiritual and religious identity?

with a resounding Am Yisrael Chai melody. The unity was palpable.

The unity of the nation was evident everywhere we turned. I witnessed firsthand many of the small acts of chessed that Jews are doing for each other as one nation across Israel. My son, Chaim, and I were on our way out of the Duvdevan Bakery in Talpiot on erev Shabbos to an IDF base in Gush Etzion, when the cashier heard where we were going. She took two bags and filled them with challahs for the chayalim. As we walked out the front door, she added, “by the way, when *they* come here, they don’t pay.”

We, in America, need to consider: What does it mean that the Jewish people are a nation? Do we see ourselves as part of a nation? How does this shape our spiritual and religious identity?

Come Home

After serving lunch to a group of soldiers on the Lachish IDF base with Moti Mitteldorf, an American *oleh* who has spent months with his children volunteering on behalf of IDF soldiers in myriad ways across Israel, our group gathered in a small, low building near the mess hall for Mincha. The quaint *beit kneset* is outfitted with traditional Israeli furniture and covered with vibrant Torah pamphlets printed specially for wartime. After davening, a commander stood at the *bima* for an unscheduled, impromptu talk directed at the student visitors.

He praised their commitment to Am Yisrael and Israel and for leaving their

studies in the middle of the semester to be with Israel in Israel during its time of need. He repeated a phrase I heard often during our visit: “*zeh lo muvan me’elav*.” The people of Israel do not take our presence for granted. Yet, he continued; he reminded all of us that our ultimate home — the home of the Jewish people — is in Israel.

Although he spoke primarily to students, living in the springtime of their lives, the message is true for all of us. We all need to have a conversation that many more families in America are now having — the Aliya conversation. If we choose to move to Israel and when is only a secondary issue. The first step is to have a conversation. In this context it is important to consider why one would be pursuing Aliya.

For some, the recent revelation of rampant antisemitism on U.S. college campuses and the inaction of academic leaders combined with rising anti-Jewish acts across the world is a motivator. However, as I heard directly in recent days from HaGaon Harav Asher Weiss, *shlit”a*, and similarly in the name of HaGaon Harav Aharon Lichtenstein *zt”l* in the 1970s, this is not a reason to make Aliya.

The reason to move to Israel is that it is our home. It is our personal and national home — the land of our people since the times of our forefathers. It is the place where we will be redeemed. It is the place where Hashem will enable us to reveal the ultimate destiny of history: the complete Kiddush Hashem of *geulah*. The process of redemption is unfolding.

Those in Israel are “on the playing field” as it unfolds; those abroad need to consider how to join in the process. We need to have conversations about our future and where we see ourselves.

Tefillah

Many people who are not on the “front lines,” whether they are ordinary citizens in Israel or Jews living in America, feel a need and desire to help those in combat, evacuated or securing Israel across the country. Some can help financially, while others are able to assist personally. For most of us, our primary assistance can and must be spiritual. We know (even though we do not see it) that our physical world is one dimension of the authentic spiritual world. It is separated only by a thin veil. Our spiritual contributions affect our physical reality. Chazal teach us regarding the power of Torah:

א"ר יהושע בן לוי, מאי דכתיב: עומדות
היו רגלינו בשעריך ירושלם מי גרם לרגלינו
שיעמדו במלחמה שערי ירושלם שהיו עוסקים
בתורה.

R. Yehosha ben Levi asked: What is the meaning of the verse “Our legs were standing in your gates, Jerusalem”? Who caused our legs to be victorious in war? The gates of Jerusalem where they were studying Torah.

Makkos 10a

The same is true for tefillah — without it nothing is possible (Rashi Bereishis 2:5). Although Israel is making every human effort toward victory, it is insufficient without tefillah (Gemara *Niddah* 71a).

It is noteworthy that our YU student mission was called “Operation Torah Shield III.” It signifies that we arrived as *bnei Torah*, representing Torah and with the appreciation that the merit of our Torah, mitzvos and tefillah serve as a protective merit for Am Yisrael.

As many in Israel shared with me, our spiritual activities abroad on behalf of our brothers and sisters in Israel matters to them on many levels.

Our family has cousins who live in Yerushalayim. They have several married sons currently serving as reserve IDF soldiers in active service across Israel, including one son, who sustained serious eye injuries battling in Gaza. In his succinct way, their father, Eli, recently gave me one simple, clear directive: “keep davening.”

Emunah

The term *emunah* does not convey belief or cognition. It is about fealty and feeling. It is a faith that is lived. Today in Israel many people are leaning into *emunah* in remarkable ways. Whether it is the demand for *tzitzis* among not-yet-observant soldiers (we tied many sets while riding on our bus during the visit), the reaction of *chayalim* to dance and sing *niggunim* with me on their base near Gaza that weeks earlier had been overrun by terrorists, or the pride of an IDF chef showing off the *kashrus* policies posted in his kitchen, religious expression of our faith is apparent. Despite the terrible *midas hadin* (strict Divine judgment) that was revealed on October 7, people continue to see and feel Hashem's presence and promise to Am Yisrael.

We may have read the words of R. Yaakov Thaler, the father of Aryeh, a wounded soldier, who speaks of the kindness Hashem showed in saving his son from death, and reflects on the *emunah* he saw when he paid a *shiva* call to the family of Nati zt”l Hy”d, the medic from his Aryeh's unit who saved Aryeh and was killed trying to save others. *Emunah* is the foundation of everything: *v'tzadik be'emunaso yichyeh* (a righteous person lives by his *emunah*) is the entirety of Judaism encapsulated (Gemara *Makkos* 29a).

Despite the challenges of our time, we can listen to Hashem's messengers today who are calling us to increase our *emunah* and spirituality in our lives. Despite the darkness we have faced, we are filling the world with light as Hashem asks of us.

Hashem is sending these messages, among many other powerful and uplifting voices in our day. We can listen to them and incorporate them into our daily lives wherever we live.

Thank you to Avi mori, Mr. Etzion Brand and Professor Leslie Newman for their helpful comments.

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ARMING OUR SOLDIERS: Tefillin for our Fighters

Why are we seeing such unprecedented interest in tefillin among IDF soldiers?

Almost every week since Oct. 7, I have either been meeting with soldiers on their bases before they enter Gaza or meeting soldiers who were injured in Gaza and are now in the hospital. Thousands of these soldiers have asked me for tefillin. Over and over, they've said to me: "Rabbi Friedman — I have my bulletproof vest, I have my machine gun, but I will not enter Gaza without tefillin!"

For over 10 years, I have been building tefillin *gemachim* (tefillin lending services) on army bases all across Israel. Very often before a *chayal* enters a dangerous mission, he will put on tefillin and say Shema. When a *chayal* accepts upon himself to keep the mitzvah of tefillin daily, then he is given his own pair. Now, over 6,000 *chayalim*

have signed onto my list accepting to keep this mitzvah. Why?

Where is this deep-seated connection to tefillin — even among non-affiliated Jews — coming from?

Take Harel, for example. He was never fortunate to learn Gemara. Yet when he told me, "I must have tefillin; it's my spiritual protection," he was echoing the Gemara in *Brachos* 6a:

"וראו כל עמי הארץ כי שם ה' נקרא עליך ויראו ממך. ותניא, רבי אליעזר הגדול אומר: אלו תפילין שבראש."

"And all the nations of the land shall see that the name of the Lord is called upon you, and they will fear you" (Devarim 28:10). It was taught in a baraisa that Rabbi Eliezer the Great says: This is a reference to the tefillin of the head.

The one mitzvah, which, according to Chazal, puts fear in the eyes of our enemies is that of tefillin. The Gra understands this Gemara not as merely



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tefillin shel rosh (tefillin that goes on the head), but rather *tefillin sheb'rosh* (tefillin in the head). The power of tefillin lies in our integrating the meaning of tefillin and our desire to connect with Hashem into our heads — into our essence.

Eyal, another soldier, told me that he and his friends all recognize that what happened on Oct. 7 was way beyond the realm of *derech hateva*. IDF soldiers and fellow Jews aren't the only ones saying this. Even gentiles have heard about my tefillin campaign and reached out to me. One minister from England called me and stressed how clear it

is to him that the G-d of the Jewish People is the only answer to this terrible predicament. He stressed what our leaders have been saying: we cannot be victorious without the spiritual weapons of tefillin, prayer, and learning Torah.

This is similar to the words of Rav Asher Weiss shlit"a in a video he created to encourage us to provide tefillin for our soldiers (see <https://israelect.org/rabbinic-approbations/>). He explains in the video that it is clear to all that the only real Power that can save us is Hashem. The soldiers and I have encountered this numerous times, understanding that even with a strong army, without the spiritual support, we cannot succeed. He quotes the Rambam (*Hilchos Mezuza* 6:13), which states that we are surrounded by four mitzvos that together work to strengthen us: mezuza, tzitzis, tefillin shel yad, tefillin shel rosh. The IDF provides the first two, but not tefillin. That's why Jews from all around the world have stepped up to fill in this gap and provide the spiritual protection of tefillin for our soldiers.

The *Sefer Hachinuch* (Mitzvah 16) writes *acharei hapeulos nimshachim halevavos* — our hearts are drawn after actions. As physical beings, the pull of a mitzvah is stronger when it has a physical aspect to it — like tefillin. Tefillin is not just a mitzvah of *dibur* (speech); it is one of action. We are *k'viyachol* tying ourselves to Hashem.

When tying the straps to their arms, the soldiers feel a deep and special *kavana*. Their great yearning to connect and tie themselves to Hashem is palpable. Rav Gedalia Schorr zt"l (*Ohr Gedalyahu*, parshas Bo, page 58) writes that all mitzvos are a remembrance of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. He explains further: When we do a mitzvah, we are actually bringing down *ha'aros* (best explained

as spiritual powers) of that mitzvah into our present lives. Rav Schorr notes that the mitzvah of tefillin appears at the end of parshas Bo. Why is it specifically there? He explains that, at this stage in Jewish history, we are transitioning from being *avadim* (servants) of Paroh to *avadim* of Hashem. We know that there are four *parshiyos* (paragraphs) in tefillin. Rav Schorr explains that the first two discuss *yetzias Mitzrayim* and the last two discuss *kabalas ol malchus Shamayim* (accepting the yoke of heaven). He quotes the Sfas Emes who explains that tefillin is like a *shtar shichrur* — a document of freedom. With a *shtar shichrur*, one transitions from servitude to freedom. When a Jew puts on tefillin, he is freeing himself from all types of servitude to material matters. He is freeing himself from his own challenges and becomes a free person ready to accept the yoke of heaven.

When a soldier, or any Jew for that matter, puts on tefillin, he is not only bringing down the *ha'aros* of *yetzias Mitzrayim* to the world, but he is also reiterating his belief that he is a servant of Hashem and accepts Hashem as his King and Leader. In the merit of tefillin, and all of our mitzvos, along with our tefillos and tehillim, may Hashem bring a successful end to this war. May we see the safe return of the hostages, our soldiers, and a complete recovery of the injured.



The one mitzvah, which, according to Chazal, puts fear in the eyes of our enemies is that of tefillin.

THE OCT. 8 JEW

Our shul recently hosted Bret Stephens, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and foreign affairs expert. In his talk, he referenced a column he wrote for *The New York Times* reflecting on the atrocity of Oct. 7 titled, “For America’s Jews, Every Day Must Be Oct. 8.”

He opens:

There used to be a sign (which, for all I know, is still there) somewhere in the C.I.A.’s headquarters that read, “Every day is Sept. 12.” It was placed there to remind the agency’s staffers that what they felt right after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 — the sense of outrage and purpose, of favoring initiative over caution, of taking nothing for granted — had to be the mindset with which they arrived to work every day. There ought to be a similar sign in every Jewish organization, synagogue and day school, and on the desks of anyone — Jewish or not — for whom the security and well-being of the Jews is a sacred calling: “Every day is Oct. 8.”

Stephens goes on to share several important and insightful takeaways of how we must forever be different since the horrific and barbaric pogroms, the likes of which we haven’t seen since the

Holocaust. One of the key ones: “On Oct. 8, Jews woke up to discover who our friends are not.” Stephens continues to enumerate the “friends,” along with institutions of “prestige” and movements that abandoned us, betrayed us, and with whom we should no longer feel aligned or seek the approval of.

He concludes:

More than 3,800 years of Jewish history keeps yielding the same bracing lesson: In the long run, we’re alone. What can Oct. 8 Jews do? We can stop being embarrassed, equivocal or defensive about Zionism, which is, after all, one of the world’s most successful movements of national liberation... Jewish America abounds with dreamers and entrepreneurs who took crazy risks in their careers to find value and create things that never existed before. It’s time they apply the same talent and energy to creating new institutions that hew to genuinely liberal values, where Jews need never be afraid. In time, the rest of America may follow.

Bret Stephens is a proud Jew and supporter of Israel, a brilliant and insightful commentator, and his speech at Boca Raton Synagogue and his column calling for us to be Oct. 8 Jews



**Rabbi Efrem
Goldberg**

*Mara D'asra, Boca Raton Synagogue
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is a powerful and important framing. However, I believe there is more for the Oct. 8 Jew, a different change without which we cannot hope to defeat our enemies, and without which we cannot survive or thrive.

Leaning into our Judaism

The Oct. 8 Jew must not only lean into their unapologetic Zionism but must embrace, live, and promote unapologetic Judaism, Yiddishkeit, and Torah. The Oct. 8 Jew must find his or her voice, not only the voice and vocabulary to lobby, advocate, rally and fight for the rights of the Jewish state and the Jewish people. The October 8 Jew must find his or her distinctly Jewish voice, a voice informed and inspired by our sacred Torah. We must raise our voices of prayer and voices of study, our voices of Jewish unity and our voices of Torah justice and truth.

When Yaakov presents himself to his father Yitzchak to seize the blessings from his brother Esav, he disguises his

hands but not his voice. Troubled by the incongruity, Yitzchak wonders aloud, “Ha’kol kol Yaakov, v’hayadayim y’dai Esav, the voice is the voice of Yaakov, but the hands feel like the hands of Esav.” Noting the anomaly, that the voice of Yaakov is simply incompatible with the hands of Esav, our rabbis conclude (*Bereishis Rabba* 63:20):

הַקֹּל קוֹל יַעֲקֹב, בְּזֶמַן שֶׁקוֹלוֹ שֶׁל יַעֲקֹב מֵצוּי
בְּבִתֵּי כְּנָסְיוֹת אֵין הַיָּדִים יְדֵי עֶשָׂו, וְאֵם לֹא,
הַיָּדִים יְדֵי עֶשָׂו, אֲתָם יְכוּלִים לָהֶם.

“The voice is the voice of Jacob” —
when the voice of Jacob is found in the
synagogues, the hands are not the hands of
Esau, but if not, “the hands are the hands
of Esau.”

Antisemites and our enemies thrive when we are assimilated, apologetic, defensive, embarrassed, or afraid about our Jewish identity and Jewish values. When we lower the volume on our Jewish voices, they are empowered to raise their hands against us and pounce.

The Oct. 8 Jew must confront these enemies, sometimes on the battlefield, other times at congressional hearings, other times in the courtroom. But the Oct. 8 Jew must also confront himself and herself, confront their Jewish passion, Jewish pride, and Jewish practice.

In his short but extremely powerful book, *The War of Art*, Steven Pressfield talks about resistance, the force that holds us back from fulfilling our dreams and potential. He describes the dangers and the methodology of resistance and ultimately offers a strategy for how to overcome it. He writes:

Aspiring artists defeated by Resistance share one trait. They all think like amateurs. They have not yet turned pro. The moment an artist turns pro is as epochal as the birth of his first child. With one stroke, everything changes. I can state absolutely that the term of my

life can be divided into two parts: before turning pro, and after.

To be clear: When I say professional, I don’t mean doctors and lawyers, those of “the professions.” I mean the Professional as an ideal. The professional in contrast to the amateur. Considers the differences.

The amateur plays for fun. The professional plays for keeps. To the amateur, the game is his avocation. To the pro it’s his vocation. The amateur plays part-time, the professional full-time. The amateur is a weekend warrior. The professional is there seven days a week. The word amateur comes from the Latin root meaning “to love.” The conventional interpretation is that the amateur pursues his calling out of love, while the pro does it for money. Not the way I see it. In my view, the amateur does not love the game enough. If he did, he would not pursue it as a sideline, distinct from his “real” vocation.

The professional loves it so much, he dedicates his life to it. He commits full-time. That’s what I mean when I say turning pro. Resistance hates it when we turn pro.

Yes, the Oct. 8 Jew must know who are not among our friends. As Bret Stephens convincingly argues, the Oct. 8 Jew must be ready to build our own institutions that conform to our values. But most importantly, the Oct. 8 Jew must be ready to take their Judaism pro. From the observant to the unaffiliated, we cannot continue with our Judaism as usual, we cannot be amateurs with a casual attitude, lukewarm Jewish practices, impassive Jewish experiences and lives. Our Judaism must not be observed only on the weekends and holidays but must be there seven days a week. Our study and prayers must not be avocations but vocations. We must love our Judaism, the Torah and Hashem so much we are ready to dedicate our lives.

Digging Deeper

Certainly, the focal point of the current war, the clear front line, is in Israel, on the Northern and Southern borders. But the war has expanded and extended. We may be 6,000 miles away from the physical front lines, but make no mistake, in the administration of prestigious universities, in some offices of Congress and on public streets in major cities of America, the rise in antisemitism reveals that we are very much on the battlefield.

Our enemies want us to stop learning and living Torah? The Oct. 8 Jew responds by learning and live it more. They want us to abandon our values? Lean into them, hold on to them stronger, tighter. They want to dim the candle of Torah? Add more fuel, make it burn brighter. They want you to hide your yarmulka, tuck in your tzizis? Get a bigger yarmulka, longer tzitzis.

Someone recently asked me, if I had \$100 million to fight antisemitism what would I do with it? I said I wouldn’t buy ads on television or hire lobbyists in Congress. I would put every penny into reaching out to our Jewish brothers and sisters to stand taller, prouder, to live more Jewishly. I would send a mezuzah for every Jew and every Jewish student on a college campus to hang on their door. I would send candles for every Jew to light Friday night. We cannot win a war if we don’t know what we are fighting for. We can’t have victory if our own people are in the dark without the light of the Torah.

Don’t just take something upon yourself, don’t just become a better, bigger, and more practicing Jew as a merit for the soldiers on *their* front lines. Do it because it is how we fight on our battle front in this very same war. Over 150% of reservists showed up for this war, and we have to show up at

the same rate, give a 150% effort. They aren't afraid, we can't be afraid, they have courage of their convictions, we must have the courage of ours. This war has multiple fronts. They are doing their job on theirs, will you show up, will you serve, will you be counted, and will you be part of victory in our battle?

We need to dig deeper in relating to the plight of our brothers and sisters in Israel.

Distance can, at times, dull our sensitivities. As we look across the world at the realities our brothers and sisters face, we can view the situation in Eretz Yisrael as something far removed from our lives and remote. While there is always a value to increasing our sensitivities towards *acheinu bnei Yisrael* and the struggles of our brethren it is even more critical now as we all face the struggle of our generation.

As Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz zt'l (*Sichos Mussar* pp. 461-462), the venerated Mirrer Rosh yeshiva, points out that Hagar, Avraham's concubine, distanced herself from her son Yishmael so that she wouldn't have to witness his death in proximity to him with her own eyes. Similarly, Yocheved sent baby Moshe down the river in a basket to avoid seeing and being close to him at the time of his death. Ultimately, as we know, neither child died in these episodes, but the idea is clear: being close to the events as they unfold evokes strong feelings, be they positive or negative.

Rav Shmuelevitz continues to illustrate this point explaining the comments of Rashi at the beginning of Parashas Vayechi (Bereishis 48:7). Why was Rachel Imeinu's grave specifically on the road near Beis Lechem? Rashi writes so that when her descendants are leaving Israel and walking into exile, she will see them in their pain and anguish, and she will be aroused to beseech Hashem in such a way that her prayers will

ultimately be answered. Seeing firsthand and up close is the best way to relate to suffering.

We see this idea again in Moshe Rabbeinu's adult years. The Chumash relates that Moshe went out and saw the suffering of the Jews in Egypt. It was only when Moshe went out and saw their plight with his own eyes (see Rashi Shemos 2:11) that he was truly able to empathize with them in their suffering.

Rav Shmuelevitz's comments were said at a mussar shmooze during the Yom Kippur War. He stressed that if we want to really connect to the situation and feel like we are in it with our brethren, we need to make an effort to get as close as possible to the situation. Rav Shmuelevitz himself mentions that being in Israel and seeing the suffering and tragedy firsthand can be very impactful. Yet even for those who cannot visit, there are other ways to follow the situation and connect to it.

Jerry Jones, owner of the Dallas Cowboys, was the first to build a billion-dollar stadium. Everyone knows him as super successful and wealthy, but where did he get it from? He started out by purchasing 13 abandoned oil wells. There were enormous companies that sunk huge money into studying these sites and they thought they would strike oil, but when they didn't, they abandoned them and moved on. Jones and his partner said to themselves, Why start from scratch? If those big boys did research and thought there was something here, it is worth looking further. Sure enough, he struck oil in 12 out of the 13 of the wells.

When asked why he found oil while the others didn't, he said, "When they didn't strike oil they abandoned the sites and walked away. When I didn't succeed, I just dug a little deeper, and that's when I struck oil."

The Oct. 8 Jew needs to learn to dig deeper, muster all of our energy, courage and resources to stand tall and proud and to be practicing Jews. Stay closely informed of what is happening in Israel, not because you are a news junkie, but because each update is about members of your family, and you should be desperate to know what is going on with them. Reach out to friends and family just to check in. Let them know you are all thinking of them and that as long as their lives are disrupted, so is yours. Together, we will win the war in Israel, the battles outside of it and make our Jewish torch burn brighter than ever.

One Nation, One People, One Heart

On a trip to Israel, we were briefed by Brigadier General (ret.) Amir Avivi who shared tremendous insights into what happened, what is happening, and what he believes will happen next. He ended by telling us that while Hamas dealt us a devastating blow that horrible day, they made a gross and fatal miscalculation. They saw the vociferous debates over judicial reform, the political rancor and deep divide between the left and right, religious and secular, and they predicted that Israel would react to an attack by blaming one another, splintering, and falling apart. They didn't understand and could never predict or even comprehend the level of unity we would experience, how together we truly are, how much more we have in common than could ever divide us.

Hamas were not the only ones who grossly miscalculated. The Jewish people went to sleep on Oct. 6 bitterly divided, but after the events of Oct. 7, woke up on Oct. 8 a new people, a united people, an *am echad k'ish echad b'lev echad*, one nation, one people with one heart.

Continued on Page 30

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A close-up photograph of a person's hands in a laboratory. The person is wearing blue nitrile gloves and a brown long-sleeved shirt. They are holding a glass pipette with their right hand, and their left hand is also visible, also wearing a blue glove. The background is blurred, showing laboratory equipment and a clean, professional environment.

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Reflections on the Israel-Diaspora Relationship in our Current Situation

I write these words from Jerusalem amid a raging war, filling the moments between live TV broadcasts, visits to shiva homes, and talks at army bases. This article isn't a philosophical discourse on Israel-Diaspora relations, but rather stories that shed light on this current chapter of our nation:

Since the war began, my speeches start with, "Describe our situation in one word." Answers vary: hope, despair, unity. A New Jersey woman said "clarity," aptly capturing this era of moral discernment. My response is "opportunity." HaKadosh Baruch Hu has given us an opportunity. He gave us an elevator. We can stay where we are by not pushing any buttons, by not changing. We can, *chalilah*, descend to the basement. Or we can ascend to higher floors, to new heights of spiritual growth.

The air here is filled with Torah, heroism, sanctity, and light. Many Jews are reconnecting with their heritage, yearning to learn and do more.

In this pivotal moment, new heroes are emerging, embodying Torah values. "*Ki MiTziyon teitzei Torah*" — from Zion shall Torah go forth — and we must listen and heed its call. Amid the extremist voices from the progressive left and radical right, Israel's authentic Jewish voice resounds.

Many attended the Washington, D.C. rally, which showcased unprecedented support for Israel. Remarkably, similar rallies in London and France drew 100,000 each. A friend who attended the D.C. rally commented: "The rally's impact extends beyond the day. Participants returned transformed, infused with Jewish strength and pride." A father noted, "We attended to support Israel, but it also strengthened us."

My husband's friend shared a story of unity: He spotted a distant cousin at the rally, someone disconnected from Jewish life, unaffiliated with any synagogue or Jewish organization, who has never been to Israel. "He traveled all the way from Boston to stand with



Israel for the first time ever. On October 7, part of us died, but another part of us came to life."

During the last few weeks, I have met with delegations from New Jersey, London, New York and Chicago. One of the organizers asked about the "*matzav*." I pointed out, "You are the *matzav*! Who else flies 12 hours to a war zone if not for home or family? The fact that thousands of people are coming speaks to where your heart is and who you truly are. Thank you!"

At the shiva home of Binyamin Airley Hy"d in Beit Shemesh, I met Mrs.

Elisheva Kaminetzky, principal of SKA, who brought dozens of letters from her students describing the mitzvot they accepted upon themselves *l'ilui nishmato*. Right after that, a group of students from YU arrived to pay a shiva call, also on a mission to provide strength to the people of Israel.

There have been countless such visits, a testament to our global family. You can support Israel from afar. You can send money (and thanks to those who have done so), you can connect on Zoom. But you can also come in person.

Elie Wiesel eloquently stated that homecoming knows no bounds of age or distance. An 80-year-old Jew arriving in Israel for the first time feels an innate sense of returning home. We thank all of those who came home during this time.

Even in challenging times, the spirit of Jewish unity and support for Israel is thriving. Rabbi Shalom Stember and his wife, Dini, Chabad emissaries in Poland, faced a dilemma about hosting their annual Shabbaton amid wartime uncertainties. As an invited speaker, I shared their concerns. Despite the challenges of war and escalating anti-Semitism, they bravely proceeded with the event. Expecting modest attendance, they were astounded when 300 people, many typically absent from community gatherings including Yom Kippur, joined in solidarity and support for Israel, setting a new attendance record for them.

There is no rational explanation for this. Their *neshamot* had an awakening. Our job is to make sure that the spark remains ignited even after the war ends.

Rabbi Stember shared another remarkable story with me. Two notable community figures, previously estranged due to a past disagreement,

approached him together, declaring, "We have made up and are friends again. Please tell us what we can do together for the Jewish people."

This story of unity really resonated with me. Chaim and Hinda Hackelman's catering business was set to cater a Diaspora couple's wedding. War shifted the wedding to Europe. However, the couple surprised them with a different idea: They still wanted the Hackelmans to host a grand reception, not for wedding guests, but for women from Southern Israel. And so, in Binyanei HaUmah, an extraordinary event unfolded for 550 women — single mothers, evacuees, residents from Sderot to Netivot. There was special entertainment, elegantly set tables, lots of food and lots of love. All of it free — a gift from this couple who wants to remain anonymous.

This is just one example of the many acts of kindness, and the deep spirit of Jewish unity, that characterizes our times. This young couple's home is built on the foundation of exceptional chesed, and this story is a testament to the fact that we can be united even from a distance. When this young couple got married in Europe, they sang "*Im eshkech Yerushalayim*" under the chuppah. This couple did not forget.

Sometimes, children are the wisest in the room. When three Israeli teenagers were kidnapped in 2014, an American father shared that for the first time, his son had pictures of Jewish heroes hanging from his walls, instead of celebrities. This striking observation underscores the importance of nurturing Jewish values and a sense of connection to klal Yisrael in our homes, through meaningful, experiential Jewish education.

I shared a Facebook photo of Englewood, NJ kids selling "slime" to support IDF soldiers, raising thousands of dollars. In talks about the war, I highlight this image to show that support isn't just in grand rallies or massive funds. A 6-year-old's act of selling slime to help the Jewish people makes a lifelong impact that they will never forget.

Stephanie Sokol of the Five Towns teaches women to read Tehillim in Hebrew, slowly, word by word. They are saying Tehillim for us like a small child learns to read for the first time. This is one of the most touching tributes that I have heard.

We must celebrate these contributions, big or small, recognizing their collective significance.

After addressing over ten missions, I have begun to suggest that efforts should extend beyond places like Sderot to include Yale or Miami. These missions are crucial in the U.S. too, to reconnect with the Jewish community there. I urged them to invite people to synagogue, to educate about the moral battle we face, and to share the richness of Shabbat, the chagim, Torah, and God, and the existential battle between good and evil. These missions are essential, not just abroad but also closer to home.

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg of Boca Raton, FL led a mission to Israel precisely at a time of heightened anti-Semitism on college campuses and in the UN. It was the week when three university presidents appeared at a congressional hearing and couldn't say that calls for the destruction of the Jewish people violate their code of conduct, and that it depends on "context." Rabbi Goldberg observed, "Some say we should be worried about Israel, but I don't. It

has moral clarity and can distinguish between good and evil. I worry about Europe and America, which may be stronger and more secure, but lack moral clarity.”

This year, I’ve met many “gap year” students, filled with pride for choosing to stay, and some even contemplating a second year. They’ve faced challenges in conveying the significance of this experience to their families and communities. At Yeshivat Hakotel, I met students who see their Torah learning as a vital contribution to the nation, akin to the “iron dome.” They wonder if their mothers will allow them to push off college for another year.

I met a group of young people from London volunteering on a farm. One week picking oranges and pomelos

may be one of the most significant educational experiences of their lives.

A young volunteer showed me a letter from Rabbi David Teller of the Fuchs Mizrachi school in Cleveland. In it, Rabbi Teller, an Ivy League alumnus, expressed his embarrassment at being associated with this institution. He writes:

“I will take this opportunity, to shout from the rooftops if I need to, that our children need and deserve to be in a place, in a college or university, where first and foremost they can live proud, authentic, meaningful, and *safe* Jewish and Torah lives. That should always be the *ikar* and every college and university option should be seen first and foremost through that prism. Enough is enough. Let us regain our perspective and our pride.”

In summary, while I’m impressed by the growing interest in Aliyah among the small community of religious Jews, it’s important to extend this energy to the broader Jewish community, most of whom feel distant and disconnected and would never consider Aliyah. Those reading *Torah To-Go* are protected by a strong Jewish-American identity, but what of the countless others? We must act now to prevent a massive loss of Jews to assimilation, echoing the tragic losses in Europe in the last century. It is our challenge and our responsibility to reach these Jews before we lose them forever.

On October 7, when the gates of *gehinnom* opened, so, too, did the gates of identity, heroism, Torah and values. Let us not squander this opportunity.

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Waking to a Dream



Scientists have discovered that within five minutes of the conclusion of a dream, 50% of its content has been forgotten, and 90% of the details are lost a mere 10 minutes later. As a result, many people believe they don't dream at all. But it is quite unlikely that people never dream. It's far more likely that they have issues with REM sleep and memory recall due to sleep disturbances. Our external surroundings and circumstances play a significant role in crafting our dream recall and the dreams themselves.

This concept is echoed by Chazal,¹ who explicitly state that our thoughts and experiences during the day shape and mold our dreams at night. The Tanach is replete with stories anchored around dreams, but perhaps the best example of stimuli influencing our dreams is the storyline involving Yaakov Avinu in *Parshat Vayeitzei*, which describes two powerful dreams.

The first dream² occurs on Yaakov's

journey from Be'er Sheva to Charan, a majestic vision of a ladder ascending heavenward with floating angelic features. It is seen as a dream of unity of the Jewish nation and the fate and destiny of our nation scaffolded with holiness and purpose.

However, after 20 years of living in Lavan's home, even with his strong adherence to his faith and religious bearings, Yaakov gets caught in the mundane activities of his livelihood. So much so that commentators rush to defend him in his comment, *im Lavan garti* — saying that while I was living with the evil Lavan, I carefully guarded Tarya"g (613) mitzvot and didn't adopt his evil ways.

עם לבן הרשע גרתי ותרי"ג מצוות שמרתי ולא למדתי ממעשיו הרעים.

I lived with Lavan and kept the 613 mitzvot and didn't learn from his evil ways.

Rashi, Breishit 32:5

Yaakov is now dreaming about



**Rabbi Yehoshua
Fass**

*Co-Founder and Executive Director,
Nefesh B'Nefesh*

materialism³ — goats and sheep. And whereas in his first dream, God himself spoke to him and images of angels (plural) laced his dream, Yaakov now only speaks with one angel — with no other apparent divine communication.

The impact of Yaakov's surroundings, no matter how strong his observance, seemingly chipped away at his loftiness and his inspirational pursuits as is made evident in this dream. It is undeniable that our goals and aspirations are influenced by our environment, opportunities and resources. And we

1 Gemarat in *Brachot* 65b and *Avodah Zarah* 20b.

2 Breishit 28:10.

3 Breishit 31:11.

cannot deny that this phenomenon influences each one of us as individuals and collectively as a nation.

For millennia, we have had experiences of *im Lavan garti* and *Tarya"g mitzvot shamarti* — a difficult balancing act of survival and resilience, in order for us to continue in our *avodat Hashem*.

We were banished from our land and thrust into circumstances and surroundings that have tested our faith, morality and fortitude. Although we may have created institutions of worship and learning to strengthen our reach and widespread Torah study, we cannot deny that these surrounding influences of the adopted countries have impacted our national dreams.

When Hashem rescued and redeemed Bnei Yisroel from Mitzrayim — which has since become the archetypal example for our exile for generations to come — the Torah states:

לָכֵן אֶמַר לְבְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֲנִי ה', וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סִבְלַת מִצְרַיִם, וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעַבְדֵּיהֶם; וְנִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּזְרוֹעַ נְטוּיָה, וּבְשִׁפְטִים גְּדֹלִים.

Therefore, say to the Children of Israel: I am Hashem, and I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I shall rescue you from their service; I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgements.

Shemot 6:6

The Hebrew word “*lisbol*” means to suffer. In this *pasuk* Hashem declares that he will save the Jewish nation from the sufferings of Egypt. Some suggest⁴ that the word “*lisbol*” also means to tolerate. Bnei Yisroel had become accustomed to their surroundings. The power of inertia had stunted their dreams and aspirations to leave their enslaved state, which they had started to tolerate and even to accept. Acceptance,

to the point that they berated and protested against their leaders Moshe and Aaron for daring to go to Pharaoh to demand their release and to allow them to live in their divinely promised land.

The lesson we learn is strikingly clear: that one of our responsibilities in *galut* is in essence to **not** accept our situation; to recognize that we are not yet living in our intended, envisioned ideal state and that we are uneasy, uncomfortable, anxious and unsettled until we reconnect to our promise and our dream and are reunited with our Homeland.

We need to remember our collective dream. And if not self-generated, we are unfortunately doomed to be jolted from our tolerance of the present in order get back on course.

No doubt, this was why the angel tells Yaakov to recalibrate his spiritual compass immediately after having materialistic based dreams, and told him to return to his Land.

וַיֹּאמֶר, שָׂא-נָא עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה כָּל-הָעֲתִידִים הָעֹלִים עַל-הָאָדָם, עֲקָדִים נִקְדָּדִים, וּבְרָדִים: כִּי רָאִיתִי, אֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר לָכֵן עָשָׂה לָךְ.

And he said, Raise your eyes, if you please, and see that all the he-goats mounting the flocks are ringed, speckled, and checkered, for I have seen all that Lavan is doing to you.

Breishit 31:12

אֲנֹכִי הָאֵל, בֵּית-אֵל, אֲשֶׁר מִשְׁחַת שָׁם מִצְבֶּה, אֲשֶׁר נָדַרְתָּ לִּי שָׁם נָדָר; עַתָּה, קוּם צֵא מִן-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת, וְשׁוּב, אֶל-אֶרֶץ מוֹלֶדְתְּךָ.

I am the God of Beth-EL where you anointed a pillar and where you have made Me a vow. Now — arise, leave this land and return to your native land.

Breishit 31:12

It is understandable to have strong

feelings and deep connections to our host country in *galut*, especially toward those who have given us the religious freedom and opportunity to grow, but our true dream needs to be ever-present.

The paradigmatic example of creating deep roots in our hosting country is that of Yosef Hatzadik.

Throughout the story of Yosef, we see a metamorphosis of Yosef going from dreamer regarding his personal lofty aspirations to interpreter of other people's dreams. It is only upon seeing his brothers years later that he remembers the dreams of his youth.

וַיִּזְכֹּר יוֹסֵף אֶת אֲחָיו וְהֵם לֹא הִכְרָהוּ.

For though Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him.

Breishit 42:8

וַיִּזְכֹּר יוֹסֵף אֶת הַחֲלֻמוֹת אֲשֶׁר חָלֵם לָהֶם

Recalling the dreams that he had dreamed about them.

Breishit 42:9

Rav Nissan Alpert z”l points out that this is the very story of the Jew throughout our long *galut*. In every generation, the Jew becomes the leader of commerce, leadership and societal ranks and the leading voice for social action and change... but slowly forgets his own national dreams.

Rav Alpert points out that this is the meaning of “and we will be like dreamers.”

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת בְּשׁוּב ה' אֶת שְׁבִיבַת צִיּוֹן הֵינֵנו כְּחֹלְמִים.

A Song of Ascents. When Hashem brought back those that returned to Zion, we were like dreamers.

Tehillim 126:1

When we reconnect to our dream it will result in having our actions aligned

4 Rav Simcha Bunem Przysucha (1765-1827); Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk (1787-1859).

with our destiny. That when we return to Zion at long last. Our eternal dreams will finally be realized.

Over the last two decades, I have held thousands of conversations with Jews living in the Diaspora and realized that while many know what our national aspiration should be and where the Jewish people ultimately belong, there is a disconnect between knowing and feeling. Hundreds of years of *galut* have seasoned and conditioned our Jewish nation to focus on their religious and physical survival by tending to their immediate communal needs. This experience has jeopardized the long-term spiritual ambitions of our community and impaired our long-distance national vision.

I have always found it ironic that in the most famous debate on the mitzvah of *yishuv haaretz* between the Rambam and Ramban, our cerebral dissection and mental gymnastics on the language of the Ramban makes us miss the point.

The Ramban (*Hasagot* to *Sefer Hamitzvot*, *Aseh* no. 4), in his commentary on the Rambam's *Mitzvot*, forcefully underscores the mitzvah of living in the Land of Israel.

מצוה רביעית שנצטוונו לרשת הארץ אשר נתן האל יתברך ויתעלה לאבותינו לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב, ולא נעזבה ביד זולתנו מן האומות או לשממה. והוא אמרו להם: "והורשתם את הארץ וישבתם בה כי לכם נתתי את הארץ לרשת אותה והתנחלתם את הארץ..." היא מצוה עשה לדורות, מתחייב כל יחיד ממנו, ואפילו בזמן גלות כידוע בתלמוד במקומות

הרבה.

"... The mitzvah of possessing the land and settling it is a mitzvah that applies for all generations and to each individual."

The singular peculiarity of the wording *mitchayev kol yachid mimenu* (to each individual) has prompted generations of commentaries to extrapolate the meaning of the Ramban.

We can distill the approaches into three categories:

1. Some suggest that the Ramban opines that the mitzvah of *yishuv haaretz* does not apply to the masses before the arrival of the Mashiach, thus it is only falls upon the *yachid* and not the *tzibur*. This may be due to the nature of the edict of *galut*⁵ or the need of exile.⁶
2. Others suggest that the Ramban's intention is that this mitzvah only applies to specific individuals who will sanctify the land with their spiritual contributions, reading *yachid* as *yechidim*.⁷
3. While others suggest that the Ramban is emphasizing a duality of the mitzvah for both the *yachid* and the *tzibur*; either a) that the *tzibur* doesn't fulfill the mitzvah, the *yachid* needs to help the *tzibur* accomplish its mitzvah;⁸ or b) if the *tzibur* fulfills the mitzvah, the *yachid* still needs to do so;⁹ or c) or the *yachid* **needs** to help the **tzibur** accomplish its mitzvah.¹⁰

Again, these approaches are all cerebral. Trying to know, and trying to

understand, but avoiding an emphasis on what we are supposed to feel. *Galut* has so numbed our emotions and distorted our visceral feelings that we don't see the obvious *pshat* of the Ramban.

The simple and compelling reading of the Ramban is that the connection between the Jew and Israel is a mitzvah for all generations and for each and every one of us. There is no need for *pilpul* or *diyukim*. The Ramban is both emphatic and passionate. The mitzvah imposed on the individual is based on the fundamental connection and yearning that a Jew must have toward his or her Homeland.

This yearning is captured by one word: *chemda* (coveted).

It is infused in the very language of *birkat hamazon* where we refer to the land of Israel as *eret chemda tova urechava*, **a coveted land that is good and spacious**; *chemda* means the subject of our yearning. Chazal took this phraseology from a *pasuk* in Yirmiyahu:¹¹

בַּיָּמִים הַהֵמָּה יֵלְכוּ בֵּית־יְהוּדָה עַל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיָּבֹאוּ יַחְדָּו מֵאֶרֶץ צָפוֹן עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר הִנַּחְלָתִי אֶת־אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם: וְאָנֹכִי אֲמַרְתִּי אֵיךְ אֲשִׁיתֶךָ בְּבָנִים וְאֶת־לֶךְ אֶרֶץ חֲמֻדָּה נָחֳלֶת צָבִי צְבָאוֹת גּוֹיִם
In those days, the House of Judah shall go with the House of Israel; they shall come together from the land of the north to the land I gave your ancestors as a possession. I gave you a cherished land, the heritage **coveted** by the multitude of nations.
Yirmiyahu 3:18-19

Knowing something and actually feeling its truth are two different ways of

5 Ketuvot 111a, see also Shut HaRashbash no. 1.

6 Shelah, Parashat Devarim no. 15.

7 Tashbetz Katan no. 562, Kol Bo no. 127.

8 Yeshuot Malko, YD no. 66. Pe'at HaShulchan, Hilchot Eretz Yisrael 1:3.

9 Rivash no. 101 and 327.

10 Tzitz Eliezer 7:48.

11 Yirmiyahu (3:18-19).

perceiving or understanding things.

Knowing something is usually based on factual information, evidence or logical reasoning. It involves acquiring knowledge through observation, experience or study. It is often associated with having certainty or a high level of confidence in the accuracy of the information.

But to be inspired to action by that knowledge is the necessary next step.

Our experiences in *galut* have required us as individuals and even as a people to hunker down and gird ourselves with firming our knowledge, protecting our *mesorah* and focusing on the transmission of our laws to the next generations.

But something is missing.

The knowledge that we have accumulated should have inspired the spirit to action to reconnect to the

dream. But, unfortunately, our visceral relationship to Land and History has been narrowed through our life of remaining in survival mode all these years — causing our aspirations and dreams to be limited.

With the tremendous revival of Jewish life in Israel we indeed live in a blessed, miraculous time. History is beckoning us to stop dreaming of goats and sheep and start yearning for ladders ascending to the heavens.

The Oct. 8 Jew

Continued from Page 20

They didn't know what we are capable of, what we can accomplish when we come together, who we are at our core when all is on the line. Said the General, the secular are having a spiritual awakening and the Haredim are coordinating unprecedented networks of national service. The world and Hamas thought that the Jewish people were fractured and this would be the ultimate blow that would divide us. They, and to a certain extent we, never imagined how united, driven and unstoppable we could become.

The Torah describes that Yosef's brothers hated him to the point that *v'lo yachlu dabro l'shalom*." The Ibn Ezra explains, "*v'lo yachlu dabro l'shalom – afilu l'shalom*." It isn't that they just couldn't talk about the issues they disagreed about. It isn't just that they didn't want to be close, loving brothers. It isn't just that they couldn't debate respectfully. "*Afilu l'shalom*" — they couldn't even give each other a *shalom aleichem*. The hatred and intolerance had grown so deep that they couldn't

stand to even extend greetings to one another or to be in a room together.

Rav Yehonasan Eibshitz in his *Tiferes Yonasan* has an additional insight. When we disagree with people, we withdraw from them and stop speaking to them. We see them as "the other," different than us and apart from us. As our communication breaks down, the dividers go up, stronger and stronger until we can't find a way to break through them.

The antidote and answer are in our hands, and we remind ourselves of it three times a day when we pray. Our practice of taking three steps backward at the conclusion of the Amidah comes from a Gemara in Yoma (Daf 53) which states, "*Hamispaleil tzarich she'yafsiah shelosha pesios l'achorav v'achar kach yitein shalom*. The one who prays must take three steps back and only then pray for peace." R' Menachem BenZion Zaks (in his commentary on *Pirkei Avos*) explains that we cannot pray for, nor achieve, peace if we are not willing to step back a little and make room for

others and their opinions, their tastes and personalities. After stepping back, we ask "*oseh shalom bimromav*, God, please bring peace," and we then turn to the right and to the left. Explains R' Zaks, achieving peace and harmony means bending towards those on the right of us and those on the left of us, acknowledging them, engaging them, and making space for them. That is a prerequisite to the shalom, the peace we crave.

The atrocity that took place on Oct. 7 was unimaginable, but so is the will and faith of our people. If we want shalom, peace, we must be capable of speaking *l'shalom*, not just tolerating a fellow Jew but learning to love them.

On billboards, bumper stickers, and the sides of busses all over Israel is the motto *Am ha'netzach y'natzeiach* — the people of eternity will prevail. If we want to prevail, we must ensure that the Oct. 8 Jew is practicing a Judaism of eternity, united with the people of eternity.

CRUSADES, INQUISITIONS, & CAMPUS PROTESTS

**Is it Halachically Permissible
to Deny your Jewish Identity?**

*Based on a shiur given by Rabbi Lebowitz,
adapted by Rabbi Jordan Auerbach.*

Following the heinous attacks against Am Yisrael on Simchas Torah 5784, Jews in the Diaspora have felt something that most of us, Baruch Hashem, have never felt in our lifetimes. While we have all, undoubtedly, heard stories of the fear and anxiety that typified the experiences of Jews living in Europe during the many eras of persecution, we, living in the modern Western world, have thankfully been blissfully untouched by that acute feeling of being targeted for our Jewishness. We have all seen and heard of the many antisemitic incidents taking place on college campuses across the United States and even on city streets across the world; those who hate us have ripped down the posters of our brothers and sisters held hostage in Gaza while rallying in support of the terrorists who perpetrated the worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust.

We are suddenly living in a time in which walking down the wrong sidewalk in many cities while wearing a kippah could, potentially, put someone

into serious danger. This “new normal” has presented *shailos* that rabbanim of this generation generally don’t receive. However, there is certainly a precedent for what we are seeing and experiencing today. And we can look to the gedolim who have preceded us to show us a path forward in this trying time.

I recently received the following *shaila*, which illustrates the true extent of the reality we now face. “I was on my college campus, wearing a baseball cap and typical college student clothing, and as a pro-Palestinian protest was marching through the campus one of the protestors grabbed me by my shirt and asked, ‘Are you a Jew? In that scenario can I reply, ‘No’?”

Upon hearing this question many would, very reasonably, assume that this is a simple open-and-shut case. Of course, one can deny their Jewishness to save their life, this seems to be a clear case *pikuach nefesh* given the clear and present danger, and we know that the Torah commands us *to live* by the mitzvos not die for them. However, there are three major exceptions to the principle of “living rather than dying for the mitzvos.” One must die rather than



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transgress one of the “big three” *aveiros* (murder, adultery, idolatry). Still, when looking at the case we have before us, it does not appear to fit into any of those three categories and thus our question, again, seems to be an easy one to answer. However, after examining the sources and some responsa addressing this very question, we’ll see that the answer is far more complex than one may initially assume.

The *Shulchan Aruch*, when codifying the scenarios in which a Jew must give up their life rather than transgress a commandment, states the following:

אסור לאדם לומר שהוא עובד כוכבי' כדי שלא יהרגוהו.

It is forbidden for a man to claim that he is an idolater so that they will not kill him...

Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 157:2

What an astonishing halacha. The *Shulchan Aruch* explicitly rules that one cannot claim to be a non-Jew to avoid being killed. Why? Which of the “big three” *aveiros* is being violated when one claims to be a non-Jew?

Perhaps claiming to be a non-Jew is a more severe issue than we might assume. The Rosh (Rav Asher ben Yechiel 1250-1327), in his commentary on the *Talmud Bavli*, explains that when one feels threatened by idolators and claims to be a part of their religious group he is, in essence, claiming to believe in their religion.

אין לדקדק מכאן שיהא מותר לישראל לומר עובד כוכבים הוא כדי שלא יהרגוהו. דודאי כופר בעיקר הוא. דכיון שרוצין להורגו אם לא יהפוך לדתם ויהיה עובד כוכבים כמותם. ודאי כשאומר עובד כוכבים הוא הודה לדתם וקבל עליו אלוה שלהן.

We cannot infer from here that it is permissible for a Jew to say, “I am a non-Jew,” to avoid being killed. Indeed, fundamentally, it is a form of denying G-d because they wish to kill him unless he abandons his religion and becomes a non-Jew like them and therefore, when he says that he is a non-Jew, he is validating their religion and accepting their god upon himself.

Rosh, Avodah Zarah 2:4

The Rosh states that this sort of claim is viewed by halacha to be an acceptance

of an idolatrous or foreign religion, and as such would fall within the parameters of the Torah's prohibition on idol worship. The *Terumas Hadeshen* (Rav Israel Isserlein 1390-1460) follows a similar path and writes that if one is not careful with his language and professes to be a member of an idolatrous sect, he is viewed as one who denies the Torah in its entirety:

ולכך צריך לדקדק יפה בדברים הללו שלא יהא נראה כמודה בע“ז, שכל המודה בה כאילו כופר בכל התורה כולה.

Therefore, one must be careful on these matters so that he doesn't appear to validate idol worship because one who validates it is as if he denies the entire Torah.

Terumas Hadeshen siman 197

Do these Rishonim mean to say that a verbal pledge of allegiance to an idolatrous religion is equal to the actual practice of idolatry? It seems clear that while this would not constitute a direct violation of the Torah Prohibition of idolatry, it is certainly an *abizraihi* (a prohibited accessory or subcategory) of idolatry. Potential violation of *abizraihi* of idolatry would also compel a Jew to give up his life rather than transgress, and as such it seems, at least based on the approaches of the Rosh and *Terumas Hadeshen*, that when stopped on the street in Manhattan or on the quad of a college campus by the antisemitic mob, one would be compelled to admit that he is Jewish rather than profess to being a non-Jew.

However, even among the Rishonim, not all agree with the above approach,

that saying “I am a non-Jew” violates an *abizraihi* of idolatry. The *Or Zarua* (Rav Isaac ben Moshe of Vienna (1200-1270), based on a passage in the *Jerusalem Talmud* (*Avoda Zara* 2:1), notes that there is a debate among the sages as to the legality of denying Jewish identity when threatened, and based on this debate there is significant room to be lenient regarding this question. Later, in the era of the Acharonim, the Gra (Rav Eliyahu of Vilna 1720-1797), in his glosses on the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh Deah* 157:2), notes the Talmudic debate and casts doubt on the strength of the Rosh's reasoning.

When evaluating similar scenarios — unfortunately there is no shortage of related cases in our history — one comes across a Gemara in *Maseches Sanhedrin* (72), which discusses changing one's dress to conform to non-Jewish styles. The Gemara there relates that we must give up our life rather than adopt the styles and customs of the non-Jews, and even changing the lacing of our shoes would demand martyrdom. This Gemara, which clearly demands an extremely high level of Jewish distinction, would certainly seem to indicate that we cannot verbally identify with the idolators. However, the Nimukei Yosef (Rav Joseph ibn Habiba) notes, in his commentary on the Rif in tractate *Bava Kama* (BK 40b in the Rif's pagination), that the Gemara is specifically referring to a *sha'as hashmad* (a time of religious persecution typified by forced conversions), a time when Jews are called upon to show higher levels of religious conviction and are



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halachically obligated to give up their lives in far more circumstances than the halacha would generally require.

Are we now in a *sha'as hashmad*?

Does the current climate of overt antisemitism we are now experiencing in the Diaspora compare with the case described by the Gemara? If the sages of our time determined it to be so then the answer to our starting question may very well be that, indeed, since October 7th we find ourselves in a *sha'as hashmad* and we would, therefore, be required to proudly proclaim our Jewish identity no matter the danger.

It does not seem that major halachic authorities of our day believe that our current situation has reached such a level. As was made clear by Hagaon Harav Asher Weiss Shlita, a major posek and rabbinic leader from Jerusalem, today's reality is not one of ideological warfare. We do not find ourselves in a time when we are being confronted for our beliefs and compelled to adopt alternative ones, rather, we are facing a threat that is based on sheer unadulterated barbarism. Our enemies wish to destroy us entirely, not convert us en masse as has been the case previously in our history. It therefore stands to reason that simply denying our Jewish identity, or perhaps,

even claiming to be a member of a different religious group, would not be a violation of halacha.

It is also important to note the opinion of the Rama (Rav Moshe Isserles 1530-1572), found in his glosses on the Shulchan Aruch (YD 157:2). In his comments on the Shulchan Aruch's discussion of the permissibility of changing our dress to avoid identification as a Jew, The Rama writes that it is permissible to make a statement that has multiple possible interpretations regarding our religious identity. This novel approach gives license to the threatened Jew to cleverly allow the non-Jewish aggressor to believe that he has found a co-religionist while the intentions of the statement were meant to, quite literally, imply that the opposite is true. While this strategy may not always prove effective, based on the intelligence of the threatening party, it does indicate that there is certainly some flexibility in the situations that we may now, unfortunately, find ourselves.

...ואע"ג דאסור לומר שהוא עובד כוכבים
מכ"מ יוכל לומר להם לשון דמשתמע לתרי
אפין (נמוקי יוסף פ' הגזול) והעובדי כוכבים
יבינו שהוא אומר שהוא עובד כוכבי' והוא
יכוין לדבר אחר...

Even though it is prohibited to say that one is a non-Jew, nevertheless, it is permitted to

use ambiguous language so that the non-Jews will think that he is saying that he's not Jewish, but he really means something else.

Rama, Yoreh Deah 157:2

While it does seem that the halacha would allow someone to deny their Jewish identity in the current climate of antisemitism and overt acts of hatred against our people, it may not be the best approach. The Midrash (*Devarim Rabbah* 2:8) relates that Yosef Hatzadik merited burial in Eretz Yisrael while Moshe Rabbeinu did not. The reason given by the Midrash is that while Moshe identified, at least in one context, as an Egyptian and did not proactively make himself known to be an Ivri (precursor to Jew), Yosef was particular in identifying as an Ivri. It was this pride in his Jewish identity that set Yosef apart and granted him the merit to be brought out of Egypt and buried in the holy earth of Eretz Yisrael. May we all find the courage and strength to be like Yosef Hatzadik even in the face of the vitriolic hatred we see on the streets of the Western world. And may our brothers and sisters in Eretz Yisrael merit a quick and decisive military victory that leads to a lasting peace in *Artzeinu HaKedosh*.

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Our Role as Jews in Exile:

EDUCATING THE TEACHERS OF THE FUTURE

Our great leaders have always known that the key to survival in exile is to establish an educational system, ensuring that our children will continue to learn and thus protect the future of the nation. As Yaakov Avinu was preparing for his descent into Egypt for what would be the first exile of the children of Israel, he sent Yehuda ahead “*le-horot le-fanav goshna*” (Bereishit 46:28). Onkelos, citing one tradition, understood this simply to mean that Yehuda was sent as the advance party to make sure that arrangements for shelter and other necessities were in place before the family arrived en masse. Rashi, too, cites this view before setting out an alternative midrashic view which,

according to Rashi, means to establish a house of study (*bet talmud*) from which “*hora’ah*,” teachings, would emerge. This approach sees Yehuda’s mission as establishing a spiritual foundation for the ensuing exilic experience.¹ A focus on educating the young has been a hallmark of the Jewish people throughout its history. Early examples, cited in the Talmudim, include the efforts of R. Shimon ben Shetah (Yerushalmi *Ketubbot* 8:11) and R. Yehoshua ben Gamla (*Bava Batra* 21a) to ensure the education of the young.

With the Great Revolt raging, and as he realized the inevitability of the destruction of both the Beit HaMikdash and the city of Yerushalayim, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai prepared for



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the future. He recognized that the Beit HaMikdash was the spiritual and religious center of our nation. He also

¹ Bereishit 46, 28, Rashi ad loc based on *Bereishit Rabbah* 95, 3; Rav Lichtenstein in a talk on Parashat Vayyigash (available on the Har Etzion website <https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-bereishit/parashat-vayigash/vayigash-and-he-sent-yehuda-ahead-set-camp>) ominously suggests that Yosef, already ensconced in and comfortable with Egyptian life, did not perceive the danger that Yaakov feared. Those of us comfortable in our own *galut* to one degree or another might need to remain sensitive to small (and large) warning signs.

knew that the Beit HaMikdash was the educational center, and with its destruction, a new system needed to be established. In the famous story found in BT *Gittin*, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai asked the Roman Emperor Vespasian to spare the city of Yavneh and to protect its residents, among whom were the scholars who could already be found there. Thus, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai lay the foundation for ongoing spiritual life, even as the end of Jewish life in Eretz Yisrael appeared to be imminent.² Other tannaim established academies in their towns. A new exodus occurred in the lead up to and especially in the wake of the Bar Kochba revolt, with leading scholars shifting the balance of rabbinic talent toward the Babylonian diaspora, accompanied by the founding of the great academies housed there.

While the idea of Jewish education has been constantly valued, the question of what to teach and how to teach it has shifted over the centuries. We don't know a great deal about the curriculum of ancient schools, writes Barry Holz.³ We do know from Talmudic sources what they were teaching during the times of the Mishna and the Talmud.⁴ We also know that originally the goal of education was mimetic, for the student to know what the teacher knew. As the student matured, the focus shifted to

inquiry, to know much about what was taught. Originally, it was the father's obligation to teach his son,⁵ though the father would hire a teacher as the child grew older. The method of instruction was initially mimetic,⁶ which would transition into one of inquiry.⁷

As we fast forward to modern times, the decision about what subjects to teach and how to teach them is determined by the stakeholders of the schools,⁸ often by answering a series of questions outlined by Ralph Tyler, known as the "father of educational evaluation" of the 20th century.

- Who are the learners?
- What is the contemporary life like outside of school?
- What is the curriculum/subject matter?

Based on the answers to the questions, the school and the teachers develop a game plan: they outline learning objectives [or what they plan what to teach]; they discuss implementation [or how to teach]; and they develop assessments [or how they will evaluate if the students have learned]. This is known as the formal or standard curriculum.

In addition to a formal curriculum, every school has its own "hidden curriculum," which refers to the unspoken values and the culture of

the school. This hidden curriculum will vary depending on the school's location and demographics. Both curricula, the formal and the hidden, are important for all schools. They become increasingly important in discussions about what is being taught in Jewish day school as we prepare our students to survive in exile. Not only do we need to articulate educational philosophies about the 3R's [reading, (w)riting and (a)rithmetic], we need to consider the fourth R: religious philosophy. The fourth R introduces so many possibilities that it would be beyond the scope of this article.

What I would like to do, however, is to discuss another set of skills — one that can and should be in each day school. One that looks at the whole child. One that is definitely needed if we talk about living in exile. The curriculum of which I speak is that of soft skills.

What are soft skills? Why are they important in a Jewish day school? And, perhaps the hardest question of all — how can they be introduced into a Jewish day school curriculum that already has more goals than hours in the day?

Soft skills are those personal and interpersonal skills that enable one to interact effectively with other people and the world at large. There are many — Google the term and you will get a lot of hits. Some analysts will identify

2 *Gittin* 56b; Menachem Stein, <https://benyehuda.org/read/17765#fn:4>; in fact, as modern historians have observed, while exile of portions of the Jewish population did occur in the wake of the Hurban, Jewish life continued and within a generation, aspects of Jewish life in Israel had been restored to a great degree. H.H. Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, (George Weidenfeld and Nicholson Ltd., 1976) p. 314 et seq.

3 Barry W. Holz [2011], "Teaching the Bible in Our Times" in *The International Handbook of Jewish Education* edited by H. Miller, L. Grant and A. Pomson. NY: Springer, Science and Business Media, p. 373-388.

4 *Avot* 5, 21. At age 5, a child was to learn mikra; at age 10, he was to learn Mishna and at age 15, Talmud.

5 BT *Kiddushin* 29a.

6 Philip Jackson defines mimetic teaching as "the transmission of factual or procedural knowledge from one person to another through an essentially imitative process." Philip Jackson [1968] "The Mimetic and the Transformative Alternative Outlook on Teaching" in *Life in Classrooms*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. p. 115 [Chapter 6].

7 See Barry W. Holz [2011], "Teaching the Bible in Our Times" in *The International Handbook of Jewish Education* edited by H. Miller, L. Grant and A. Pomson. NY: Springer, Science and Business Media, p. 373-388.

8 The people or institutions who are interested in the curriculum of a school.

eight or ten soft skills. Others will specify what soft skills are appropriate for different ages of the child.

As I write this, there are many challenges facing educators and their students in our world. In a culture recovering from a global pandemic, students need to strengthen their content knowledge, learning skills, and social skills. In a world whose agendas are increasingly driven by social media, students and future leaders need to be able to communicate beyond sending text messages and emojis. In a multiverse sadly flooded with divisiveness, the students witness the worst kinds of bullying and attempts to silence dissent. Intentionally teaching soft skills can help with all these challenges and help ensure our continued survival during a time of exile.

As an introduction to the concept of soft skills, consider the following:

1. Communication
2. Critical Thinking
3. Resilience
4. Responsibility

What is Communication?

Communication is the act of transmitting information. Communication has traditionally been in four domains that revolve around different forms of a word [oral or written]. Communication can be productive [like speaking or writing] and it can be receptive [like reading and listening]. In recent years, educators have identified seven or eight C's of communication for 21st-century

students [The seven C's are: clear, correct, complete, concrete, concise, considered and courteous with the eighth being complete].⁹

Some suggestions for fostering communication in the classroom:

- Model effective communication by communicating clear expectations to the students — for how they enter the classroom, for what materials they need to bring with them to class, for how to submit assignments, for how to work independently and cooperatively.
- Build in time for students to reflect upon their learning as they begin a new unit [like with a KWL] and as they review what they have learned [like with a Turn and Talk].
- Reword your questions to the class so as not to imply there is only one right answer.
- Have students write down their responses before saying them out loud. It will help them to fully develop their ideas and give them confidence to speak.
- Encourage students to speak loudly so that all the students in the room can hear. Stand at the opposite end of the room from the speaker so that the speaker will need to speak loud enough for you to hear.
- Ask follow-up questions when a student responds so that the answer is more robust. Don't accept an answer that is only partially correct as a complete and correct answer.¹⁰
- Teach students how to track the

speaker in the classroom [whether the speaker is the teacher or a fellow student]. This will help students focus on listening to the speaker which also encourages the speaker to be more cogent.

- Assign reflective journals so that students can practice communication through writing.

What is Critical Thinking?

Critical thinking is the art of effectively analyzing information to form a judgment. Does forming a judgment about Jewish studies undermine the authority and authenticity of what they are learning? Not if you establish a ground rule that all questions are allowed if they are asked with respect. And not if you recall that our entire system of education can be traced back to teaching our children about *Yetziyat Mitzrayim* [the Exodus from Egypt] through questions. In fact, healthy doubt can be seen as an imperative in Jewish education. "A human must think and to think is to question, to probe, to criticize," says Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm in "Faith and Doubt." He continues: "We are naïve if we think we can teach Judaism, especially to a young person, without encountering genuine doubt."¹¹

Some suggestions for fostering critical thinking in the classroom:

- Formulate a big question that will direct the learning [an Enduring Understanding or Essential Question to use Understanding by Design terminology].¹²
- Refer back to the big question as

⁹ The seven C's were originally coined by University of Wisconsin professors Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center in their book *Effective Public Relations* published in 1952.

¹⁰ See Technique 2: Right is Right in Doug Lemov's *Teach like a Champion*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass. p.35.

¹¹ R. Norman Lamm, "Faith and Doubt" in *Tradition* 9:1-2 Spring Summer 1967, p. 14-51.

¹² See *Understanding by Design*, Expanded 2nd Edition by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development; 2nd Expanded edition, 1985.

you introduce the material and invite students to ask their own questions.

- Generate a summative assessment that asks students to reflect on the big question that drove the unit rather than spit back standard answers. Students can be asked to explain the process of answering the question or be given “unseen” material and asked to use the same skills in making meaning out of the new material.
- Encourage students to ask questions. Teach them that any question, asked with respect, is allowed. Our *mesorah* can handle the tough questions.
- When teaching Chumash, rather than jump to introducing Rashi’s question followed by Rashi’s answer, invite students to read through the pasuk and see what anomalies are worth investigating. This can be done for other meforshim as well and is a good way to teach the students which *parshan* can help them answer their particular question.

What is Resilience?

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity, about learning to cope. It is a soft skill that is encouraged and built rather than directly taught.

What are classroom practices that can help to foster resilience?

- Create a safe classroom where responsible risk-taking is encouraged and failing, and learning from the failure, is celebrated.
- Encourage students to set goals and

then to reflect on whether they have met those goals [and why or why not].

- Promote a positive sense of worth and the feeling that we should always try to do our best.
- Celebrate the progress and not only the outcome.

What is Responsibility?

“No man is an island,” notes John Donne.¹³ “Every man is a piece of the continent, A part of the main.” We live in a world where we are increasingly responsible for what is going on. What does it mean to be responsible? The Cambridge Dictionary says that to be responsible is “to have control and authority over something or someone and the duty of taking care of it, him or her.”¹⁴

Responsibility can be for oneself — nobody cares about us the way we care about ourselves. As Hillel notes in *Pirkei Avot* 1, 14: *im ein ani li mi li*? If I am not for myself, who will be for me? This idea is echoed in the Talmud in BT *Sanhedrin* 10a, with the phrase *adam karov etzel atzmo*, a person is first and foremost concerned about himself. We must learn to advocate for ourselves and conversely, be accountable for the actions we take. But responsibility extends to others — to our family, to our community, to society at large. This is famously summed up in the second half of Hillel’s saying *ukesheani le-atzmi mah ani*, if I am only for myself, what am I?

Not only does Hillel urge us to consider the other, we are held accountable for what others have done. Once again, we turn to Talmudic literature, this time to BT *Shevuot* 39a [with a parallel

statement in BT *Sanhedrin* 27b], that says *kol Yisrael arevim zeh ba-zeh*, all of Bnai Yisrael are considered guarantors for one another. The Talmud means it in a punitive sense — that if one person sins, his family and indeed the entire community can be held responsible and even punished if they did nothing to stop the perpetrator. Looking at it from a positive perspective, it means that there is an element in which we are all connected.

A beautiful analogy about our interconnectedness is seen in the words of Rabbi Moshe Alshich, a 16th-century commentator on Chumash (Adrianople-Salonika-Safed, protégé of R. Yosef Caro). On the phrase “*atem nitzavim*,” (We are all standing) [Devarim 29, 9], he explains that each person is considered to be like one piece of a complete body and that together we form the systems of a body. If one part is not working, the entire body suffers as well.

Some suggestions for fostering responsibility in the classroom:

- Expect that students show up on time with the proper materials [and model the same behavior yourself].
- Assign meaningful homework and review in a timely way in class.
- Establish rules in the classroom that are fair and easy to understand. Discuss with the students what the consequences are if the rules are not followed. Be consistent with how you enforce both the rules and the consequences.
- Have students explain why they were unable to complete an assignment and what they will do the next time to make sure they are able to do what is necessary. Insist that students ask

¹³ John Donne, 1624, line from *Devotion upon Emergent Works*.

¹⁴ https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/responsible#google_vignette.

for an extension if they need one to complete an assignment [don't give it to them automatically].

- Teach students how to work together whether as a pair or in a group.
- Hold each student accountable for work that is done with another student either as a pair or a group. [If one student winds up completing the assignment, none should get credit since they have failed to work together.]
- Ensure that students take care of their surroundings by cleaning up and leaving the place neat.
- Have students learn to accept responsibility for their actions and to follow through appropriately.

These soft skills are but the tip of the iceberg. By educating my future teachers about their value, they, in turn, can educate their students to grow up capable and strong members of society, to become the leaders of the next generation.

As Jews in exile, we need leaders. We need to communicate. We need to think critically. We need to be resilient. And we need to be responsible.

Or, in the words of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks:

*"Be a leader. Walk ahead. Take personal responsibility. Take moral responsibility. Take collective responsibility. Judaism is God's call to responsibility."*¹⁵

Resources on Communication:

"Teaching Communication Skills: A Toolkit for Educators" by Laura Corona, PhD, LEND (Leadership

Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities) and TRIAD (Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders) fellow; Whitney Loring, PsyD, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences, TRIAD Assistant Director of Training, and TRIAD Families First Coordinator; and Kristin Dorris, MS, CCC-SLP, TRIAD Educational Consultant. Vanderbilt Kennedy Center. <https://vk.vumc.org/assets/files/resources/teach-com-skills.pdf>

"Skills for Today: What We Know about Teaching and Assessing Communication" by Ross Metusalem, Daniel Belenky, & Kristen DiCerbo in Pearson 2017. <https://www.pearson.com/content/dam/one-dot-com/one-dot-com/global/Files/efficacy-and-research/skills-for-today/Communication-FullReport.pdf>

Resources on Resilience:

"Resilience: It Begins With Beliefs" by Sara Truebridge in *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, January-March, 2016 (Vol. 52, #1, p. 22-27), available for purchase at <http://bit.ly/1nArKuR>; Truebridge can be reached at resilienceST@gmail.com.

"Excellence for All" by Robert Sternberg in *Educational Leadership*, October 2008 (Vol. 66, #2, p. 14-19) http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/oct08/vol66/num02/toc.aspx

"We Must Teach Students to Fail Well" by Leah Blatt Glasser in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 1, 2009 (Vol. LV, #34, p. A56).

Resources on Critical Thinking:

"Getting Students Comfortable with Critical Thinking" by Bryan Goodwin in *Educational Leadership*, April 2023 (Vol. 80, #7, pp. 80-81).

"Colin Seale on Closing the Critical Thinking Gap" An Interview by Tara Laskowski in *Educational Leadership*, April 2023 (Vol. 80, #7, pp. 14-19); Seale's books are *Thinking Like a Lawyer* and *Tangible Equity*.

"5 IDEAS for Developing Real-World Thinking Skills" by Harvey Silver, Abigail Boutz, and Jay McTighe in *Educational Leadership*, May 2022 (Vol. 79, #8, pp. 38-42).

Resources for responsibility:

"A Tool to Help Students Make Good Decisions" By Jorge Valenzuela in Edutopia, June 2021. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/tool-help-students-make-good-decisions/>.

"Social-Emotional Learning Part III: Responsible Decision Making" by Caitlin Tucker, August 2022. <https://catlintucker.com/2022/08/sel-responsible-decisions/>.

"Helping Kids Make Decisions" by Gia Miller Clinical Experts: Grace Berman LCSW, Rachel Busman, PsyD, ABPP. <https://childmind.org/article/helping-kids-make-decisions/>

15 Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, "Answering the Call" (Vayera, Lessons in Leadership, Covenant & Conversation).

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VaAnochi B'Sof Ma'arav: Navigating the Exile



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshiva and Rosh Kollel, RIETS

Based on a shiur given by Rabbi Schachter, adapted by Dr. Alan Weissman which appears in the forthcoming Rav Schachter on the Parsha Volume III.

והורשתם את הארץ וישבתם בה.
You shall take possession of the Land and you shall settle in it. (Bamidbar 33:53)

The Ramban, in his *Hasagos* to the Rambam's *Sefer HaMitzvos*, lists a number of mitzvos that, in his opinion, the Rambam forgot to count. One of these is the mitzvah described in the above *passuk*, the requirement to conquer Eretz Yisrael and to settle the Land (*Hashmatos Mitzvos Aseh 4*). The Torah requires that we establish a Jewish government in Eretz Yisrael and, in the words of the Ramban, "we must not leave it in the hands of other nations." The obligation includes organizing a Jewish army to wage war and drive out the occupying Canaanite nations (and other kingdoms), and then settling in Eretz Yisrael. The Ramban writes that this is a *mitzvas asei* that is binding throughout all the future generations.

The *Megillas Esther*, a commentary on

Sefer HaMitzvos, generally defends the Rambam against the arguments of the Ramban. Here, in attempting to explain why it is that the Rambam neglected to count the mitzvah of possessing the Land and not allowing it to remain under non-Jewish sovereignty, the *Megillas Esther* cites the Gemara in *Kesubos* (111a) that teaches that *Klal Yisrael* (and the nations of the world) took three oaths. The Gemara bases itself on the thrice-repeated ambiguous *passuk* in *Shir HaShirim*:

השבעתי אתכם בנות ירושלם בצבאות או
באילות השדה אם תעירו ואם תעוררו את
האהבה עד שתחפץ.

I have adjured you, O daughters of Yerushalayim, by gazelles or by hinds of the field, should you wake or rouse the love until it pleases. (2:7, 3:5, 8:4)

The Gemara interprets as follows:

ג' שבועות הללו למה אחת שלא יעלו ישראל
בחומה ואחת שהשביע הקדוש ברוך הוא את
ישראל שלא ימרדו באומות העולם ואחת
שהשביע הקדוש ברוך הוא את העובדי כוכבים
שלא ישתעבדו בהן בישראל יותר מדאי.

In regard to what were these three oaths administered? One, that the Jewish People should not converge [upon Eretz Yisrael] in a wall [of force]; one, that the Holy One,

Blessed be He, adjured the Jewish People not to rebel against the nations of the world; and one, that the Holy One, Blessed be He, adjured the idolators not to subjugate the Jewish People more than is sufficient.

The *Megillas Esther* contends that the *shalosh shevu'os* (Three Oaths) are binding today, when the Jewish Nation still finds itself in *galus*, and they place a prohibition on the establishment of a Jewish government in Eretz Yisrael before the days of the Final Redemption. One of the Rambam's guiding principles to determine inclusion in *taryag mitzvos* (*Sefer HaMitzvos, shoreshei shlishi*) is that a command that is not applicable for all time is not included. Since the mitzvah does not apply in all generations, the Rambam did not include establishing a *medinah* in Eretz Yisrael among the *taryag mitzvos*.

It should be noted that the *Megillas Esther* was the first to take this Gemara as a halachic statement. The simple

understanding of the Gemara is that it is not intended to be binding as a *din*, but rather is to be taken as an *aggadeta* (homiletic teaching). Nevertheless, when the Zionist movement began in the late 1800s, the issue of the *shalosh shevu'os* was the primary objection of the Hungarian *rabbanim*, voiced most vociferously by the *Minchas Elazar* (5:12), to the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz Yisrael.

The *Avnei Nezer* (Yoreh De'ah 454:14,18), in a lengthy *teshuvah* regarding the mitzvah of *yishuv Eretz Yisrael* in current times, addresses the question of why the great Chassidic Rebbes did not make *aliyah*. He contends that there most definitely is a mitzvah of *yishuv Eretz Yisrael* today, and he explains that the primary mitzvah is to work in Eretz Yisrael and earn one's livelihood there. This engenders a more intimate relationship with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, who directly provides a person with his *parnassah* in Eretz Yisrael, unlike in *chutz la'Aretz*, where one receives his *parnassah* only through an intermediary, ministering angel.

In other words, the mitzvah is not merely *yeshivah b'Eretz Yisrael*, simply dwelling in the Land. Rather, the mitzvah of *yishuv Eretz Yisrael* entails earning one's *parnassah* in the Land, and thereby developing and improving the Jewish settlement there. If the Rebbes would have made *aliyah*, they would have been supported from abroad, and they would not have been able to accomplish their work with their *chassidim*, who would have remained in Europe. Since even if they had made *aliyah*, their mitzvah would have been very incomplete, they decided to remain in Europe.

In the course of his discussion, the *Avnei Nezer* (454:3-4) takes issue with the comment of the *Megillas Esther*.

He explains that the above-mentioned principle of the Rambam, not to include *hora'os sha'ah* (temporary rulings) in *taryag mitzvos*, cannot be applied to *yishuv Eretz Yisrael*. That principle relates to instructions that applied only once in history and are no longer relevant, like not leaving the *mon* over to the morning, Moshe's lifting his *mateh* to split the Yam Suf, or requesting gold and silver vessels as gifts from the *Mitzriyim* on *erev Pesach*.

However, mitzvos regarding the offering of *korbanos* are certainly included in *Sefer HaMitzvos*, despite the fact that, practically speaking, we are unable to perform these mitzvos until the days of *Mashiach*. These are conditional mitzvos, which depend on the presence of a *Beis HaMikdash*. Yet, they are included in *taryag*, since they do apply in theory throughout all generations. Thus, the *Avnei Nezer* argues, even if one should assume that the Gemara in *Kesubos* regarding the *shalosh shevu'os* was meant as a halachic statement and prevents fulfillment of *yishuv Eretz Yisrael* for a certain period of time, since it will come back in force in the days of *Mashiach*, it should be counted in *taryag*.

Moreover, the *Megillas Esther* seems to have conflated two different mitzvos — *kibbush ha'Aretz* (conquering the Land) and *yishuv ha'Aretz* (settling the Land). The *Megillas Esther* mistakenly thought that the Rambam denies the existence of a mitzvah of *kibbush ha'Aretz* and that the Ramban alone maintains that there is such a mitzvah. According to the *Megillas Esther*, the Rambam holds that the mitzvah to take possession of Eretz Yisrael applied only in the times of Moshe, Yehoshua, and Dovid, and will return with the coming of *Mashiach*, but it is not currently in effect.

This is not correct, as the Rambam in *Hilchos Melachim* (1:1) cites the

following *Beraisa*, quoted in the Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (20b):

שלש מצוות נצטוו ישראל בכניסתן לארץ להעמיד להם מלך ולהכרית זרעו של עמלק ולבנות להם בית הבחירה.

[The nation of] Israel was commanded to perform three mitzvos upon their entrance into the Land: to appoint upon themselves a king, and to eradicate the offspring of Amalek, and to build for themselves the *Beis HaMikdash*.

This Gemara indicates that this series of mitzvos must be accomplished in this specific sequence, beginning with the mitzvah to establish a Jewish government in Eretz Yisrael.

In the *Sefer HaMitzvos* (*mitzvas asei* 173) as well, the Rambam clearly does count *leha'amid lahem melech*, the mitzvah of *hakamas hamedinah*, and this mitzvah appears to be identical with the mitzvah to take possession of Eretz Yisrael. The thrust of "*mitzvah daled*," in which the Ramban takes issue with the Rambam's deletion of a mitzvah, does not refer to the mitzvah of *kibbush ha'Aretz*, i.e., *leha'amid lahem melech*, but to the mitzvah of *yishuv ha'Aretz*.

The source for both of these mitzvos is the *passuk*, *v'horashtem es ha'aretz veyishavtem bah*. The first part of the *passuk* is a mitzvah both according to the Ramban and the Rambam; both subscribe to "Zionism." It is the **second** part of the *passuk*, referring to *yishuv Eretz Yisrael*, that is subject to debate. But this mitzvah is completely unrelated to the *Megillas Esther*'s contention based on the *shalosh shevu'os*. These *shevu'os* relate only to the Jewish People and their *chovas hatzibbur* (communal obligation) to establish a *medinah*. The *shevu'os* were not addressed to individuals, in reference to their *chovas hayachid* (individual obligation) to live in Eretz Yisrael. [See *B'Ikvei HaTzon*, pp. 211-212, 216; *Rav Schachter on the*

Moadim, Yom Ha'Atzma'ut, section IV.]

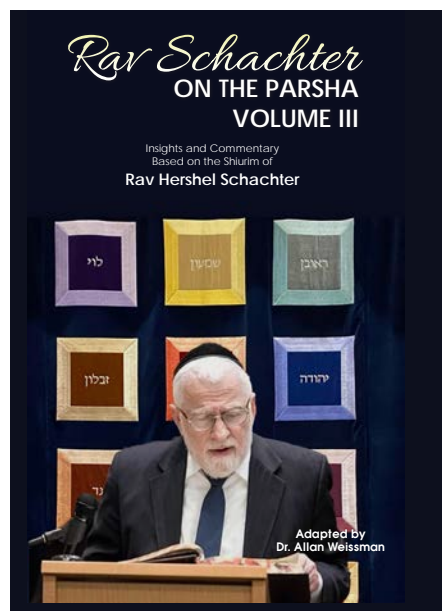
As far as accounting for the Rambam's failure to include *yishuv Eretz Yisrael* in his *minyan hamitzvos*, other *Acharonim* offer numerous suggestions. The *K'nesses HaGedolah* (*Sheyarei K'nesses HaGedolah, Yoreh Dei'ah* 239:33) writes that according to the Rambam, the mitzvah to live in Eretz Yisrael is only *miderabbanan*, and that is why he did not include it in *taryag*. Most of the later *Acharonim* disagree with this assertion and suggest that despite the fact that the Rambam agrees with the Ramban that *yishuv Eretz Yisrael* is a *mitzvah d'oraisa*, he had a specific reason to omit it from the count of *taryag*.

The *Avnei Nezer's* explanation (454:5-6) is based on a principle developed by the *sefer Ma'ayan HaChachmah*: Whenever the Torah lists two mitzvos and one mitzvah is designed to lead up to the performance of the other, the Rambam enumerates only the first mitzvah; listing the second mitzvah separately would be considered repetitive. For this reason, the Rambam saw no need to list the mitzvah to build the *aron* once he counts the mitzvah of building a *Beis HaMikdash*, the purpose of which is to house the *aron*.

If so, the *Avnei Nezer* points out, the Rambam had already counted (*mitzvas aseï* 187) the mitzvah of *hacharem tacharimem* — “you shall utterly destroy them” (*Devarim* 20:17) — to wage war against the seven Canaanite nations that inhabited Eretz Yisrael. How are we to visualize this mitzvah? To drive these nations out of the Land and then to return to *chutz la'Aretz* and leave the Land desolate? Certainly not! Clearly, the purpose of the mitzvah is to then **live** in Eretz Yisrael. Since the mitzvah of *hacharem tacharimem* is a prerequisite to the mitzvah of *yishuv Eretz Yisrael*, these mitzvos are not counted

separately among the *taryag mitzvos*.

Others suggest (see *Eim HaBanim S'meichah* 3:8) that the Rambam's omission is related to the recurrent theme that the Ramban famously discusses (*Bereishis* 26:5; *Vayikra* 18:25), that the primary location for *shmiras hamitzvos* is really in Eretz Yisrael. The Ramban explains that before *Matan Torah*, when mitzvos were voluntarily accepted, the *Avos* observed the mitzvos only in Eretz Yisrael. That is why Yaakov could marry two sisters, since at that time, he lived in *chutz la'Aretz*. In fact, Hashem arranged that Rachel died on the road at the start of Yaakov's entry into Eretz Yisrael, so that



he would not reside in the Land with two sisters as wives.

It turns out, then, that there is no separate mitzvah of *yishuv Eretz Yisrael*. Rather, living in Eretz Yisrael enhances every mitzvah, including Shabbos, *kashrus*, and *taharas hamishpachah*. It is a *mitzvah klalis*, a general mitzvah, and one of the Rambam's principles regarding *minyan hamitzvos* is that he only counted *mitzvos pratiyos*, specific mitzvos, in his *minyan hamitzvos* (*Sefer HaMitzvos, shoresch* 4).

[Since any mitzvah that one observes is enhanced when performed in Eretz Yisrael, if a traveler will reach Eretz Yisrael in time, there is something to be gained by waiting to *daven* in Eretz Yisrael instead of in *chutz la'Aretz*, or by donning *tefillin* again in Eretz Yisrael, even though he had already done so earlier that day in *chutz la'Aretz*.]

Another possibility is based on the notion that living in Eretz Yisrael affords a person a greater level of *hashgachah pratis* (Divine Providence), in line with the *passuk's* description of Eretz Yisrael:

אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ד' אֱלֹקֶיךָ דֹּרֵשׁ אוֹתָהּ תָּמִיד עֵינֵי ד' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בָּהּ מֵרָאשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד אַחֲרִית שָׁנָה
... a Land that Hashem, your G-d, seeks out; the eyes of Hashem, your G-d, are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to year's end.

Devarim 11:12

Accordingly, the mitzvah of *yishuv Eretz Yisrael* is subsumed under the mitzvah of *uvo sidbak* — “to Him shall you cleave” (*Devarim* 10:20) — the sixth *mitzvas aseï* in the Rambam's *Sefer HaMitzvos*, which instructs a person to become close to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. This is why it is not counted as an independent mitzvah.

In our generation, the mitzvah of *yishuv Eretz Yisrael* is even stronger than it was before. After all, the *passuk* we began with states, *v'horashtem es ha'aretz veyishavtem bah*, which implies that the mitzvah of *yishuv ha'Aretz* is related to the mitzvah of *kibbush ha'Aretz*. The mitzvah *bishleimusah* (in a complete fashion) is fulfilled when one lives in Eretz Yisrael when it is under Jewish control, something that we have merited to witness in our day (see *Piskei Teshuvah* 248, by Rav Avraham Pietrovski, *dayan* in Lodz). [See *The Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society* VIII, pp. 14-33.]

Our Responsibility to Humanity

As Jews in exile we must navigate many challenges. Frequently these trials demand that we adopt a defensive posture. We must retain our identity. We must traverse animosity. This sentiment is particularly powerful at times like this when it becomes clear to us that we resemble a lamb surrounded by seventy wolves.¹ But in exile we must also build and grow. And not just for ourselves. We must contribute to humanity, be a light unto the nations (Yeshayahu 42:6).

A Kingdom of Priests

Our concern for humanity is not limited to exile; it is at the core of our mission. Thus, before God gives the Torah to the Jewish people, he designates them as a kingdom of priests:

וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מְמִלְכַת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ אֵלֶּה
הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּדְבֹּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel.

Shemot 19:6

R. Avraham son of Rambam (in Rambam's name) and R. Ovadia

Seforno note that the accolade demands that we take responsibility for the spiritual needs of the entire world — like priests, the Jews are to serve the populace.

תהיו אתם בשמירת תורת מנהיגי העולם,
היחס שלכם אליהם כיחס הכהן אל עדתו ילכו
העולם בעקבותיכם ויהיו מחקים את מעשיכם
ויתהלכו בדרכיכם.

You shall be, through the keeping of my Torah the leaders of the world. Your relationship shall resemble the relationship of a priest to his flock. The entire world shall follow your lead and await your actions and walk in your path.

Commentary of R. Avraham Son of Rambam, Shemot 19:6

ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים. ובוזה תהיו
סגולה מכלם כי תהיו ממלכת כהנים להבין
ולהורות לכל המין האנושי לקרוא כלם בשם
ה', ולעבדו שכם אחד.

And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and through this you shall be a treasure from among the nations, for you will be a kingdom of priests to guide and teach all of humanity to serve God and serve Him unitedly.

Seforno, Shemot 19:6

R. Samson Raphael Hirsch
(Commentary to Sefer Vayikra



**Rabbi Netanel
Wiederblank**

Maggid Shiur, RIETS

20:26) sums up this perspective on chosenness:

... so that in no way does Jewish thought look on the choice of Israel as a rejection of the rest of humanity. It regards the choice of Israel only as a beginning, only the restarting of the spiritual and moral rebuilding of Mankind, only the first step to that future... where many nations will attach themselves to God, and become His People, and Israel's Sanctuary will not only be the central heart of Israel but the center of Mankind, who will have found their way to God.

A Nation Apart

There are, of course, many verses and statements in Chazal that highlight

¹ See Tanchuma, Toldot 5 and Ester Rabbah 10:11.

the singularity of the Jewish people. Misunderstood, they suggest that God only cares about the Jewish people. Certainly, God's election of the Jewish people is a central tenet of our belief. Each day we thank Him for choosing us among the nations and giving us His Torah (*asher bachar banu mi-kol ha-amim vi-natan lanu et Torato*). However, as we explain in the forthcoming volume of *Illuminating Jewish Thought*, chapters 29-33, God's choosing of the Jewish people and forming a special bond with them does not imply a lack of concern with the rest of humanity. On the contrary, as God tells Avraham when He initially selects him for his noble task, *ve-nivrichu becha kol mishpechot ha-adama*, "and all the families of the earth shall be blessed through you" (Bereishit 12:3).

How then are we meant to understand the sources that suggest that God is only concerned with the Jewish people?² How are we to explain the focus on ourselves?

R. Shlomo Fisher (*Drashot Beit Yishai* Ch. 26) offers a fascinating insight that will help us gain perspective on this topic. His thesis allows us to see the sources that highlight the essential differences between Jew and non-Jew, as well as the sources that play up the significant contributions of non-Jews, as two sides of a single coin. In the process, he also explains a baffling topic—vicarious suffering.

R. Fisher notes that there are two models for *bechirat Yisrael*. In one model, we find the Jewish people as the first among many nations. This approach can be seen in the verse *bni bechori Yisrael* (Shemot 4:22), which depicts the Jewish people as a *bechor*, a firstborn. This metaphor implies that

God has many children; however, like a *bechor*, we enjoy a special relationship with Him. But this distinction comes with a responsibility — as the *bechor*, we are responsible for the spirituality of the rest of the world.

This, too, can be seen in many verses. Rambam and Seforno's understanding of Shemot 19:6 (that we are responsible for the spirituality of the rest of the world) reflects this perspective. In this light, we understand such concepts as *ohr la-goyim*:

אֲנִי ה' קָרָאתִיךָ בְּצֶדֶק וְאַחֲזַק בְּיָדְךָ וְאַצְרֶךְ
וְאֶתֵּנְךָ לְבְרִית עִם לְאוּר גּוֹיִם:

I Hashem have called you in righteousness, taken hold of your hand, and kept you, and I have set you as a covenant of the people, for a light of the nations.

Yeshayahu 42:6

Thus, in the first model of *bechirat Yisrael*, we find the Jewish people as the first among many nations, a privilege accompanied with a responsibility towards our "younger brothers."

The second model of *bechirat Yisrael* is exemplified by the verse *hen am levadad yishkon u-va-goyim lo yitchashav*, "They are a nation apart, not counted among the nations" (Bamidbar 23:9). This is the model we find depicted in *Kuzari* as well as in many Kabbalistic sources. According to this, we are not just first among many nations, but categorically different, in a spiritual sense. According to *Kuzari* our souls are not the same as their souls.

According to R. Fisher, both components are true. There is a duality to our chosenness. We are both first among nations, *bni bechori Yisrael*, and at the same time wholly apart from them, *hen am levadad yishkon u-va-goyim lo yitchashav*. It is important

to remember that even according to the second model we are not saying non-Jews are deficient. Non-Jews play an important role in the world. They have and continue to make important contributions to the world and can achieve greatness. *Chasidei umot ha-olam* (pious Gentiles) have a portion in *olam ha-ba*. However, spiritually, Jews are a world unto themselves.

Our Dual Identity

With this duality in mind, we can better understand how some sources underscore the Jewish people's role as part of the broader mission of all of humanity, while other sources stress Jewish particularity. That is not to say that there is no debate about the Torah's attitude towards non-Jews. Without a doubt, certain thinkers are more particularistic than others. However, all thinkers must accept God's concern with all of humanity even as they embrace Jewish chosenness. Moreover, we, His people, must follow in His ways and also manifest concern with all of mankind.

The Rav noted that Avraham expressed these two elements of his identity when addressing the people of Cheit while buying a burial plot for Sara. He refers to himself as a *ger v-toshav*, a stranger and resident (Bereishit 23:4). Seemingly these two terms are incompatible, one is either a foreigner or citizen. Avraham teaches us that we must recognize we are both:

The first Patriarch, Abraham, introduced himself to the inhabitants of Canaan with the words, 'I am a stranger and a resident among you.' Are not these two terms mutually exclusive?

Abraham's definition of his dual status, we believe, describes with profound accuracy

2 One example is Rashi, *Shemot* 19:5, *ve-heim be-einai u-lefanai le-klum*, "but they [the other nations] mean nothing to Me."

the historical position of the Jew who resides in a predominantly non-Jewish society. He was the resident, like other inhabitants of Canaan, sharing with them a concern for the welfare of society, digging wells and contributing to the progress of the country in loyalty to its government and institutions. Here, Abraham was clearly a fellow citizen, a patriot among compatriots, joining others in advancing the common welfare.

However, there was another aspect, the spiritual, in which Abraham regarded himself as a stranger. His identification and solidarity with his fellow citizens in the secular realm did not imply his readiness to relinquish any aspects of his religious uniqueness. His was a different faith and he was governed by perceptions, truths, and observances which set him apart from the larger faith community. In this regard, Abraham and his descendants would always remain 'strangers.' . . .

Like other people, the Jew has more than one identity. He is part of a larger family of mankind, but he also has a Jewish identity which separates him from others. Each identity imposes upon him particular responsibilities. As a citizen of a pluralistic society, the Jew assumes social and political obligation to contribute to the general welfare and to combat such common dangers as famine, corruption, disease and foreign enemies ... freedom, dignity and security of human life. These are concerns which transcend all boundaries of difference.

The Jew, however, has another identity which he does not share with the rest of mankind: the covenant with God which was established at Mt. Sinai three thousand years ago... This identity involves responsibilities and a way of life which are uniquely Jewish and which, inevitably

set the Jew apart from non-Jews. It is particularistic, rather than universalistic... There is an inevitable tension in trying to uphold these two identities.³

Homiletically, R. Soloveitchik explains in "Confrontations" (p. 27) and *Reflections of the Rav* (pp. 169-177) that when Yaakov sends messengers to Eisav, he anticipates that Eisav will ask him three questions (Bereishit 32:18). In answering these questions Yaakov clarifies the nature of our dual identity. In one respect Yaakov states we have nothing to do with you, Eisav; we are a nation unto ourselves, with a unique past, present, and future. But, at the same time, we have so much in common. All humans share a *tzellel* Elokim, a common source; we face common challenges, and share a common fate. Eisav's first two questions relate to our spiritual identity: "Whose are you? (To whom do you pledge your ultimate loyalty?) And where are you going? (What objectives and goals do you seek for yourself in the future? Who is your God and what manner of life and discipline will He require of you and your descendants?)" Consequently, Yaakov commanded his representatives to reply boldly, clearly and precisely that their metaphysical identities, their spiritual future and social commitment were the private concerns of Yaakov. "They are your servant Yaakov's," and no human power may interfere or attempt to sever this eternal bond with God that had been established in the covenant

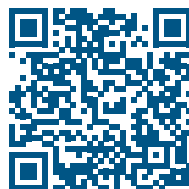
with Avraham (Bereishit 32:19).

However, Yaakov anticipated a third question: "And whose are these [cattle, gifts, etc.] ahead of you?" — Are you ready to contribute your talents, capabilities, and material resources toward the material and cultural welfare of the general society? Are you ready to give of your oxen, goats, camels, and bulls? Are you willing to pay taxes, to develop and industrialize the country? To this we answer in the affirmative. Yes, we are determined to contribute, to participate in every civic, scientific and political enterprise. We feel obligated to enrich society with our creative talents and to be constructive and useful citizens (Bereishit 32:21).

The Suffering Servant

In light of the above distinction, R. Fisher answers the very troubling question of Radak concerning the challenging prophecy of the suffering servant — *hinei yaskil avdi* — from Yeshayahu 52-53.⁴ To appreciate this fundamental teaching, we need to digress to analyze this baffling chapter.

The verses describe the servant of God suffering terribly. The identity of this servant, however, is unclear. Rashi understands that it refers to the Jewish people as a whole. According to Rashi, then, these verses inform the Jewish people that they suffer in the exile because of the sins of the non-Jews,



See more shiurim and articles from Rabbi Wiederblank at www.yutorah.org/teachers/Rabbi-Netanel-Wiederblank

³ *Reflections of the Rav*, Chapter 16.

⁴ This prophecy is famous for a different reason. These 15 verses are the most widely used by Christian polemicists attempting to find references to Jesus in Tanach. We discuss their claims in *Illuminating Jewish Thought* 30.11-12.

a notion sometimes called vicarious atonement:

ד אָבן חָלִינוּ הוּא נָשָׂא וּמִכָּאֲרֵינוּ סָבְלָם וְאַנְחָנוּ
חֲשַׁבְנָהּ נִגּוּעַ מִכָּה אֱלִקים וּמַעֲנָה: ה וְהוּא
מִחֲלָל מִפְּשָׁעֵנוּ מִדָּקָא מַעֲוִיתֵינוּ מוֹסֵר שְׁלוֹמֵנוּ
עָלָיו וּבְחִבְרָתוֹ נִרְפָּא לָנוּ:

4 Surely our diseases he did bear, and our pains he carried; whereas we considered him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.
5 But he was wounded because of our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquities. The chastisement of our welfare was upon him, and with his stripes we were healed.⁵

Yeshayahu 52:4-5

Rashi⁶ explains:

(ד) אכן חלינו הוא נשא - אכן לשון אבל בכל מקום אבל עתה אנו רואים שלא מחמת שפלותו בא לו אלא מיוסר היה ביסורין להיות כל האומות מתכפרות בייסוריהן של ישראל: חלי שהיה ראוי לבא עלינו הוא נשא.

Achen means "but" in all places. Thus, the verse means that now we see that this came to him [the servant] not because of his low state, but rather because he was chastised with pains so that all the nations be atoned for with Israel's suffering. The illness that should rightfully have come upon us — he (the servant) bore.

ואנחנו חשבנוהו - אנו היינו סבורים שהוא

שנאוי למקום והוא לא היה כן אלא מחולל היה מפשעינו ומדוכא מעונותינו.

We (the nations) thought that he (the servant) was hated by God, but he (the servant) was not [hated]; rather, he was pained because of our (the nations') transgressions and crushed because of our inquiries.

(ה) מוסר שלומינו עליו - באו עליו יסורי השלום שהיה לנו שהוא היה מיוסר להיות שלום לכל העולם.

The chastisement due to the welfare that we enjoyed came upon him, for he was chastised so that there be peace in the entire world.

Thus, according to Rashi, the suffering servant was chastised with pains so that all the nations be atoned for with Israel's suffering.

Rashi's comments are startling, as the notion of vicarious suffering seems foreign to Jewish theology, which always stresses that the guilty party is punished. Radak, in fact, cites several verses that appear to state that one person never suffers for the sins of another.⁷

Accordingly, Radak rejects Rashi's interpretation — it is inconceivable that one person or group of people suffers

to atone for the sins of another group of people. Radak therefore rereads the verses in an innovative manner. He understands that the non-Jews, upon seeing the inexplicable suffering of the Jewish people, eventually will conclude that the Jews must be suffering for their (i.e. the nations') sins — what else could account for such anguish? — but this is not actually the case. In reality, we alone are responsible for our fate.

אכן חלינו - הנה כתב יחזקאל הנביא בן לא ישא בעון האב ואב לא ישא בעון הבן כל שכן איש אחד באיש אחר וכל שכן אומה באומה אחרת,⁸ אם כן מה הוא חלינו הוא נשא, מחולל מפשעינו ובחברתו נרפא לנו, ואינו דומה לזה מה שאמר ירמיהו בספר קינות אבותינו חטאו ואינם ואנחנו עונותיהם סבלנו, כי הוא על דרך פוקד עון אבות על בנים, והוא כשאוחזים הבנים מעשה אבותם בידיהם, כמו שאמר לשונאי, שזהו משפט מאת האל שנושא הבן עונו ועון האב, ומה שאמר ירמיהו אמר על לשון הנוהים כי מתוך צערם לא יהיו דבריהם במשפט ובמשקל, וזה שיאמרו האומות אכן חלינו הוא נשא והדומים לזה הוא דברי עצמם לא שישאל סבלו עון האומות אלא הם יחשבו זה בדעתם כאשר יראו בעת הישועה⁹ כי האמונה שהחזיקו בה ישראל היא האמת והאמונה שהחזיקו הם בה היא שקר ויאמרו אך שקר נחלו אבותינו הבל ואין וגוי, יאמרו לפי סברתם אם כן מה

5 i.e., through his wound, we were cured.

6 Parts of these passages were removed from many printings of Rashi.

7 Consider the following examples:

דברים כד:טז: לא יומתו אבות על בנים ובנים לא יומתו על אבות איש בחטאו יומתו: רש"י שם: לא יומתו אבות על בנים - בעדות בנים. ואם תאמר בעון בנים, אבל מי שאינו איש מת בעון אביו, הקטנים מתים בעון אבותם בידי שמים: מלכים ב יד:ו: ואת בני המכים לא המית ככתוב בספר תורת משה אשר צוה ה' לאמר לא יומתו אבות על בנים ובנים לא יומתו על אבות כי אם איש בחטאו יומת: דברי הימים ב כה:ד: ואת בניהם לא המית כי ככתוב בתורה בספר משה אשר צוה יקוק לאמר לא ימותו אבות על בנים ובנים לא ימותו על אבות כי איש בחטאו יומתו: יחזקאל פרק יח כ: הנפש החטאת היא תמות בן לא ישא בעון האב ואב לא ישא בעון הבן צדקת הצדיק עליו תהיה ורשעת הרשע עליו תהיה:

8 First, he proves that one person or people cannot suffer for others.

9 i.e., the nations will incorrectly assume, when they see that their religion is shown to be false and Judaism correct, that the suffering experienced by the Jews was for the nations' sins. (Ironically, as Dr. David Berger pointed out, the Christians will apply their own theology to themselves.) Radak's understanding is plausible for verses 4 and 5, but he still must explain verses 11 and 12, which seem to parallel 4 and 5 except that God is the speaker, making Radak's justification of 4 and 5 impossible (in 4 and 5, the nations are speaking, so a theological error is plausible). But 11 and 12 are easier to deal with and can be interpreted as saying that He will bear the sins of the nations, i.e., although they do not deserve it, they will prosper because of us:

(יא) מעמל נפשו - מעמל נפשו שסבל בגלות יהיה לו גמול שיראה ישבע, כלומר יראה טוב שישבע בו:

היה הצער שהיו סובלים ישראל בגלות הנה לא היה בעונם כי הם היו מחזיקים אמונת ישראל ואנחנו שהיה לנו שלום ושלוה והשקט ובטח היינו מחזיקים אמונת שקר, אם כן החולי והמכאוב שהיה ראוי לבא עלינו היה בא עליהם והם היו כופר וכפרה לנו ואנחנו חשבנוהו בהיותו בגלות שהוא נגוע ומוכה אלקים ומעונה מיד האלקים בעונו והנה אנו רואים כי לא זה בעונו אלא בעונינו זה שאמר: *The prophet Yechezkeil declares, "A son shall not bear the iniquity of the father..." Surely, one person shall not bear another's sins, and certainly not one nation for another. If so, how do we reconcile this verse and the following one? Yirmiyahu's plaint in Eicha 5:6: "Our fathers sinned and they are no more, and we have borne their iniquities," is not relevant. It follows the principle, "He visits the iniquity of the fathers on the sons" (Shemot 34:7), meaning that if they continue to sin as their fathers did, they will be punished both for their own sins and their fathers'. Yirmiyahu, however, quotes the expression of the lamenters, who, because of their extreme anguish, did not word their lamentations properly, but lamented that they were suffering solely because of their parents' sin. Our verse,*

however, is the statement of the nations, who believe that Israel suffers for their (i.e. the nations') sins; not that Israel does, in fact, suffer for them. Then they see at the time of the redemption that their faith is false, so they ask, "Why did Israel, the believers in the true faith, suffer in exile all these years? Their suffering surely was not due to their own sins, since they adhere to the true religion. Paradoxically, we, who believed in a false religion, live in peace and tranquility. Apparently, the afflictions that rightfully should have befallen us befell Israel. That was surely for our sins, not for theirs."

Radak, Yeshayahu 53:4

However, Rashi appears to be the simpler reading of the verses. Moreover, Chazal seem to accept the notion of vicarious suffering, at least with respect to *tzaddikim*; and they derive this concept from these verses in Yeshayahu.¹⁰

עליו הכתוב אומר (ישעיהו נג:א) מעמל נפשו יראה ישבע וגו'. מכאן אמרו הת"ח שבדור הוא סובל עונות הדור שבתוכו בינו לבין עצמו ואין כל בריה יכולה להכיר בהן אלא הקב"ה לבדו ועליו הכתוב אומר (שם) ועונותם הוא יסבול. ...About him (the righteous person) the verse says, "Of the travail of his soul he

shall see to the full..." (Yeshayahu 53:11). From here, we see that a Torah scholar of the generation suffers the sins of that generation by himself, and no creation is able to recognize this — only Hashem knows. About him the verse says, "and their iniquities he did bear."

Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Rabba 27:4

What emerges from Chazal and Rashi is the notion that righteous individuals suffer for the sins of the nation, and the Jewish people, as a whole, suffer for the sins of the nations. We can easily identify with Radak's rejection of Rashi. How is it conceivable that the Jews will be punished for the sins of the nations? Where is the justice? What is the logic?

R. Fisher answers that the reason we bear the sins of the nations is because we are, to some degree, responsible for them. As a *mamlechet kohanim*, we are responsible to teach and minister to the entire world. If we are negligent in this task, we bear responsibility for their sins and suffer accordingly.¹¹ Numerous sources, such as *Ohr ha-Chaim* on Vayikra 19:17, suggest a similar approach to dealing with the

בדעתו יצדיק צדיק עבדי לרבים - עבדי הוא ישראל כמו שאמרנו בתחילת הפרשה, ופירוש בדעתו, כמו שכתוב כי מלאה הארץ דעה את ה', וכתוב כי כלם ידעו אותי, והנה עבדי ישראל שהיה צדיק ויודע את ה' יצדיק בדעתו גוים רבים, כמו שכתוב והלכו עמים רבים ואמרו לכו ונעלה אל הר ה' ואל בית אלהי יעקב ויורנו מדרכיו וגו'. ועונתם הוא יסבול - הוא בצדקתו יסבול עונות הגו' כי בצדקתו יהיה שלום וטוב בעולם אפילו לעכו"ם.

As opposed to Rashi, who explains the verse in past tense, giving the reasons for Israel's exaltation in messianic times, Radak understands this in the future tense, representing God's words.

(יב) לכן אחלק לו ברבים - רבים ועצומים הם גוג ומגוג והעמים אשר יבאו עמו אל ירושלים, כמו שאמר זכריה הנביא ואסף חיל כל הגוים סביב זהב וכסף ובגדים לרוב, וזה יהיה לו תחת אשר הערה למות נפשו גמול שמסר עצמו למיתה ביד העכו"ם בגלות יהיה לו כל הכבוד הזה ויהיה ממונם תחת ממונו שלקחו ונפשם תחת נפשו שימותו שם כל חיל גוג ומגוג כמו שכתוב.

הערה - שפך נפשו למות, וכן ותער כדה, ענין שפיכה אבל הוא בענין אחר.

ואת פשעים נמנה - כמו שפירשנו ויתן את רשעים קברו והוא חטא רבים, ויתכן לפרשו בגלות ור"ל חטא רבים שחטאו בו העכו"ם והוא נשא וסבל צערם, והוא על דרך וחטאת עמך. ולפשעים יפגיע - ואף על פי כן היה מתפלל בעבור הרשעים שהיו פושעים בו והיה מבקש מהם לברך את ארצם, כמו שאמר ודרשו את שלום העיר אשר הגלתי אתכם שם וגומר, וכמוהו מן הכבוד בלשון תחנה ובקשה הפגיעו במלך וישתומם כי אין מפגיע, גם יש לפרש בעת הגאולה ויהיה פירוש כמו שפירשנו ועונותם הוא יסבל, ורבותינו פירשוהו על משה רבינו ע"ה ואמרו תחת אשר הערה למות נפשו שמסר עצמו למיתה שנאמר ואם אין מחני נא מספרך אשר כתבת, ואת רשעים נמנה שנמנה עם מתי מדבר, והוא חטא רבים נשא שכפר על מעשה העגל, ולפשעים יפגיע שבקש רחמים על פשעי ישראל, וי"ת הנה ישיכל עבדי יצלח משיחא ותרנגם כאשר שממו כמו דסברו ליה בית ישראל וגו'.

¹⁰ This midrash seems to understand the suffering servant as a single righteous individual silently suffering because of the sins of his generation. Specifically, the *midrash* is explaining the following verse:

מַעֲמַל נַפְשׁוֹ יֵרָאֶה יִשְׁבַּע בְּדַעְתּוֹ יִצְדִּיק צְדִיק עַבְדִּי לְרַבִּים וְעֲוֹנֹתָם הוּא יִסְבֹּל:

Of the travail of his soul he shall see to the full, even My servant, who by his knowledge did justify the Righteous One to the many, and their iniquities he did bear.

¹¹ See R. Hirsch's comments to Devarim 32:43 on the phrase *ve-chiper admato amo*, "and His people are to bring atonement to His whole world of men."

righteous suffering for the sins of their generation.¹² In Volume 3 of *Illuminating Jewish Thought* (section 30.12) we attempt to elucidate this baffling phenomenon.

Perhaps R. Fisher's understanding of vicarious atonement is already alluded to in *Kuzari*. *Kuzari* (2:34) compares the Jewish people in exile to the dry bones depicted by Yechezkeil. No longer are we glorious and splendid; instead, we are like a body without a head and without a heart. Thus, Yeshaya describes the Jewish people as a grotesque suffering servant who "has neither form nor comeliness," someone "from whom men hid their faces." In other words, *Kuzari* understands that the suffering servant is the Jewish people in exile and that the servant's gruesome appearance reflects our lowly spiritual state. *Kuzari* then turns to the riddle of why this servant should suffer for the sins of the world:

אמר הכוזרי: ואיך יהיה זה משל לישראל, והוא אמר: "חולינו הוא נשא", וישראל לא מצא אותם מה שמצאם כי אם בעוונם?
ספר הכוזרי מאמר ב

The Khazar king: How can the suffering servant serve as a comparison for Israel, as it is said: "Surely our diseases he did bear?" That which has befallen Israel has come to pass on account of its own sins; Israel does not suffer for the sins of others.

אמר החבר: ישראל באומות כלב באברים, הוא רב חוליים מכולם, ורב בריאות מכולם....
The Chaveir: Israel amidst the nations is like the heart amidst the organs of the body; it is at one and the same time the

most sick and the healthiest of them ... Kuzari, Ma'amar 2

How does the analogy to the heart resolve the question of how the Jews can suffer for the sins of the rest of the world? The simple understanding may be that by being attached to the rest of the world, we are naturally affected. But perhaps *Kuzari* is alluding to the theory articulated by R. Fisher. The heart bears the responsibility of nourishing the rest of the body. If it fails to fulfill this mission, the maladies that injure the rest of the body will devastate the heart.¹³

Material Responsibilities

Thus far we have considered a Jew's spiritual responsibility towards humanity. However, numerous sources also point to his material responsibility. Yirmiyahu instructed the Jewish inhabitants of Bavel to "seek the welfare of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto the Lord for it; for in its prosperity you shall prosper" (29:7). *Bereishit Rabbah* 79:6 states:

ויהן את פני העיר התחיל מעמיד הטליסין ומוכר בזול הדא אמרת שאדם צריך להחזיק טובה למקום שיש לו הנאה ממנו.

He (Yaakov Avinu) began to set up carts and sell merchandise inexpensively. This teaches that a person must feel and express gratitude [in a tangible way] to a place (of residence) from which he benefits.

Another source that emphasizes our concern for broader society is *Avoda Zara* 25a, which notes that Scripture refers to the forefathers as *yesharim* or

straight. Netziv, in his introduction to *Bereishit*, explains that this is due to their concern for the betterment of the world. For example, Avraham prayed for the savior of Sedom even though its inhabitants were wicked:

זה היה שבח האבות שמלבד שהיו צדיקים וחסידיים ואוהבי ה' באופן היותר אפשר עוד היו ישרים. היינו שהתנהגו עם אורח"ע אפי' עובדי אלילים מכוערים. מ"מ היו עמם באהבה וחשו לטובתם באשר היא קיום הבריאה. כמו שאנו רואים כמה השתטח א"א להתפלל על סדום.

This was the greatness of our Forefathers. In addition to being righteous, pious and lovers of God to the utmost degree, they were also yesharim. That means they acted towards the nations of the world, despite their being detestable idol worshipers, with love and concern for their welfare, as this allows for the continuity of the creation. For example, we see how our forefather Avraham exerted himself greatly in prayer for the welfare of Sedom.

In the Messianic Era

While our responsibility to support and inspire humanity is particularly important during the exile, when we are ensconced among the nations, it will continue even after redemption. Indeed, Scripture emphasizes that our partnership with the entire world along with our unique role will be fully realized in the Messianic Era.

והביאותים אל הר קדשי ושפחתים בביתי תפלת עולתיהם וזבחייהם לרצון על מזבחי כי ביתי בית תפלה יקרא לכל העמים.
I will bring them to My sacred mount,

12 Commenting on the mitzva of chastisement (הוכח תוכיח את עמיתך ולא תשא עליו חטא) he writes the reason why the righteous are punished (lit. seized) because of the transgression of the generation (בעוון הדור נתפסים גדולי עולם) is because they could have done more to improve the Jewish people and prevent them from sinning in the first place.

טעם תפיסת הצדיק, הוא בשביל עוון הדור, אם יוכיחנו הרי הוא ניצול ממה נפשך, אם חזרו בתשובה הרי אין כאן עוונות שיתפס עליהם, ואם לא חזרו הרי נפטרת מתפיסה. כמו שגילה סודו ביד עבדיו הנביאים, דכתיב (יחזקאל לג, ט) ואתה כי הזהרת רשע מדרכו לשוב ממנה ולא שב מדרכו, הוא בעונו ימות ואתה נפשך הצלת.

13 *Kuzari* adds another dimension to the analogy. The sensitivity of the heart causes the effects of sins to be more pronounced.

And let them rejoice in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices Shall be welcome on My altar; For My House shall be called A house of prayer **for all peoples.**"

Yeshayahu 56:7

וְהֵבִיאוּ אֶת כָּל אֲחֵיהֶם מִכָּל הַגּוֹיִם מִנְחָה לָהּ
בְּסוּסִים וּבְרֶכֶב וּבַצִּבִּיּוֹת וּבַפָּרָדִים וּבַכְרָרוֹת
עַל הָר קֹדֶשׁ יְרוּשָׁלַם אָמַר ה' כֹּאֲשֶׁר יָבִיאוּ בְנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַמִּנְחָה בְּכָלִי טְהוֹר בֵּית ה':

"And they shall bring all your brethren **from all the nations** as a tribute to Hashem, with horses and with chariots, and with covered wagons and with mules and with joyous songs upon My holy mount, Jerusalem," says Hashem, "as the children of Israel bring the offering in a pure vessel to the house of Hashem."

Yeshayahu 66:20

כִּי הִנֵּה הַחֹשֶׁךְ יִכְסֶה אֶרֶץ וְעֶרְפֶּל לְאֻמִּים וְעֲלִיף
זֶרַח ה' וּבְבוֹדוֹ עֲלִיף יִרְאָה: וְהָלְכוּ גוֹיִם לְאוֹרָךְ
וּמְלָכִים לְנֹגֶה זֶרַחךְ:

For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the peoples; but upon you, Hashem will arise, and His glory shall be seen upon you. And nations shall walk by your light, and kings at the brightness of your rising.

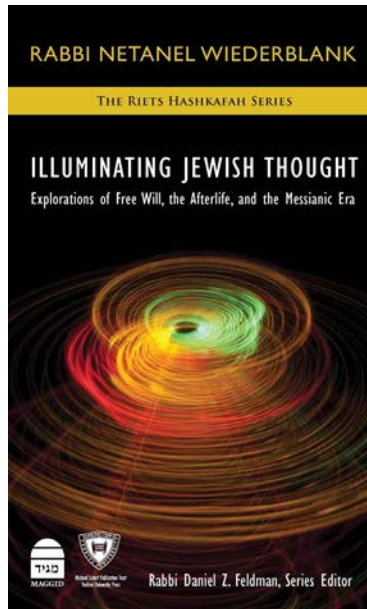
Yeshayahu 60:2–3

כֹּה אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת בִּימֵי הַהֵמָּה אֲשֶׁר יִחְזִיקוּ
עֲשָׂרָה אֲנָשִׁים מִכָּל לְשׁוֹנוֹת הַגּוֹיִם וְהִחְזִיקוּ
בְּכִנּוּף אִישׁ יְהוּדִי לֵאמֹר נִלְכָּה עִמָּכֶם כִּי שָׁמַעְנוּ
אֱלֹקִים עִמָּכֶם:

Thus says Hashem, Master of hosts: "In those days, it shall come to pass that ten men shall take hold, out of all the languages of the nations, shall even take hold of the skirt of a Jew, saying: 'We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'"

Zechariah 8:23

Significantly, each of the above verses emphasizes the special relationship we have with God along with God's concern and our responsibility for all of humanity. This dual focus, on the universal and the particular, shines in the prayer of *Aleinu*, which originates in the Rosh ha-Shana liturgy and now is recited thrice daily. The first stanza highlights Israel's preeminence: "It is our duty to praise the Master of all, to ascribe greatness to the Molder of primeval creation, for He has not made



Excerpted from *Illuminating Jewish Thought* (RIETS Press/Maggid)

us like the nations of the lands and has not emplaced us like the families of the earth; for He has not assigned our portion like theirs nor our lot like all their multitudes."¹⁴ The second stanza, though, longs for a day "when all of mankind will call upon Your name;" the ideal world is not one when we alone acknowledge God's sovereignty — it is one of universal recognition of God.

Conclusion

Certain segments of Jews sadly build a whole religion out of *tikkun olam*.¹⁵ Having fully embraced western egalitarianism they reject the notion of *bechirat Yisrael*, the idea that God chose the Jewish people as a special nation with a special purpose. The notion of *kedushat Yisrael*, a distinct sanctity granted to the Jewish people, is incorrectly seen as racist. Thus, the only manifestation of our singularity is the idea of responsibility towards others, *tikkun olam*. Accordingly, it becomes the centerpiece of their religion.

Sometimes, as a reaction, those who embrace Torah and *bechirat Yisrael* go to the other extreme. They associate the idea of *tikkun olam* with non-Orthodox Judaism and dismiss the concept that because of our chosenness we bear responsibility towards humanity. However, as we have seen, this too is false.

In dark times such as those we face now it is easy to forget this responsibility. Survival mode tends to kick in as we realize that we are a sheep surrounded by seventy wolves. At times like this we must focus on survival. However, even as we struggle to survive, we must not forget our broader mission. We must do our part to bring redemption, not just to ourselves, but to the entire world.

¹⁴ Moreover, the uncensored version, which includes the line "For they worship vanity and emptiness and pray to a god who cannot save," seems to allude to an essential difference between Jew and non-Jew insofar as we thank God for "not making us like the nations of the land ... who worship vanity and emptiness." This inference, of course, must be squared with the Torah's presumption that all humans have free will and no one is forced to serve other gods, a topic discussed Unit 5 of *Illuminating Jewish Thought*.

¹⁵ Whether this is the correct usage of the term or not is irrelevant for our discussion.

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