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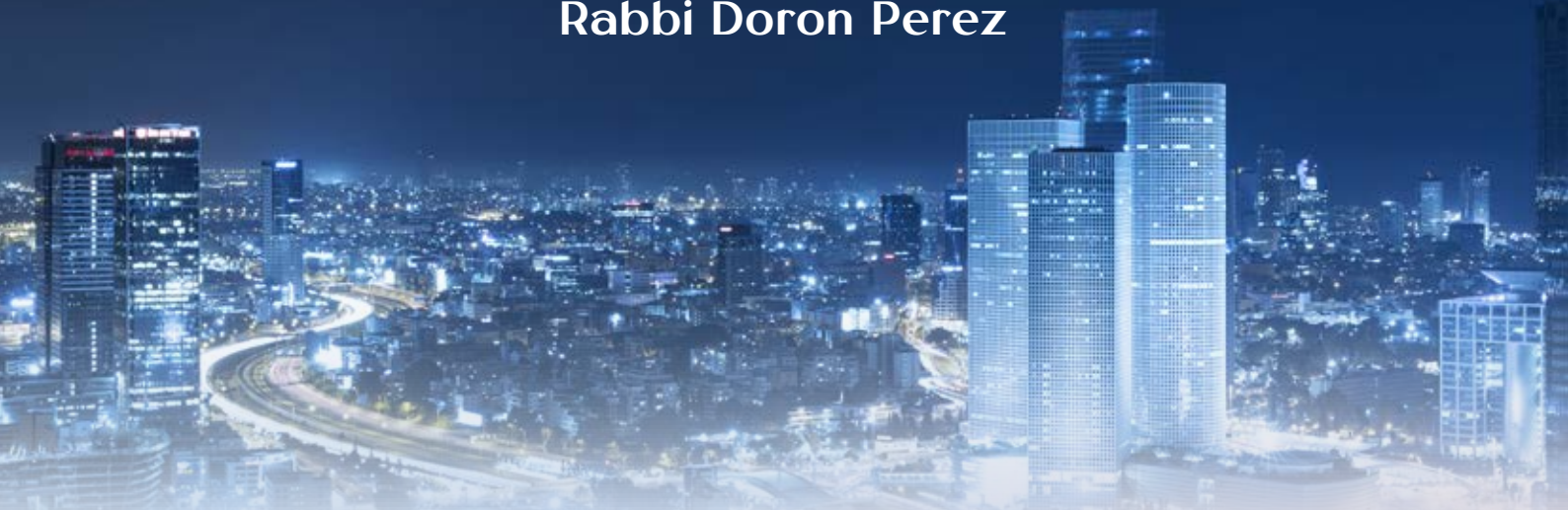
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# A TALE OF TWO CITIES

## Bridging the Gap between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv

Rabbi Doron Perez



**T**he distance between Israel's two largest cities, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, represents the greatest challenge facing Israel today.

Of course, I am not referring to the 50 kilometers that separate the two cities but to the religious, social and cultural schism which lies at the heart of modern-day Israel. There are many fault lines in Israel's social order, but none as crucial to the long-term success of our nation's future.

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens portrays the social and cultural milieu of French and English society at the time of the French Revolution, making Paris and London the setting for his social critique. In a similar sense, the two greatest cities of modern-day Israel – Jerusalem and Tel Aviv – capture Israel's salient social and cultural challenges.

### Two remarkable cities

The two cities are remarkable symbols of the astonishing success of the Zionist enterprise. But they couldn't be more different.

Founded in 1909 on the barren sand dunes north of Jaffa, Tel Aviv is a new and modern city of over 450,000. The epicenter of Gush Dan, the Greater Tel Aviv metropolitan area, home to over four million people, it is the focal point of almost half of Israel's population and the undisputed hub of Israel's commercial life

– an extraordinary achievement for a city which did not exist 110 years ago!

Not to be outdone, the story of modern-day Jerusalem is no less remarkable. In contrast to Tel Aviv, the 4,000 year old holy city is one of the oldest cities in the world. The greatest surviving city of antiquity, it has been destroyed twice, besieged 23 times, attacked 52 times and recaptured 44 times. Israel's largest city, Jerusalem now has a population of 900,000, growing eighteen-fold in only 100 years!

### Clash of cultures

Culturally, the two cities could not be more different. Home to the Temple Mount, Judaism's holiest site, Jerusalem is the cradle of religious yearning and practice for Jews, Christians and Muslims. There are more *shuls*, churches and mosques within one kilometer of the Temple Mount than any other place on earth. Jewish Jerusalem has seen explosive growth in the number of *yeshivot*, seminaries, and *Chassidic* courts, and is home to tens of thousands of religious students from Israel and the Diaspora.

Tel Aviv stands in stark contrast. Known as the first modern 'Hebrew city', it was largely built by waves of early secular pioneers. The greater Tel Aviv area has become known as *Medinat Tel Aviv*, "The State of Tel Aviv", a sort of state within a state of primarily liberal and secular middle- and upper-class Israeli Jews.

In the State of Israel's early years, religious communities also flourished in Tel Aviv, which was home to 650 *shuls* and over 20 *Chassidic* courts. Sadly, the religious community steadily declined, and by 2010 over 100 *shuls* were permanently closed while the vast majority of the others became inactive. Most religious Jews and communities in the area relocated across the highway to Bnei Brak and other parts of Israel. Only a handful of *yeshivot* and dwindling *Chassidic* courts remained.

Though a modern city, Tel Aviv is surprisingly monolithic, made up almost entirely of secular Jews of a similar socioeconomic status and only a tiny Arab population. In stark contrast, Jerusalem is 38% Muslim, while the Jewish population, making up 60% of the city, is religiously diverse. At the same time, Tel Aviv was built on uncultivated and uncontroversial land, while many neighborhoods throughout Eastern Jerusalem and the Old City are hotly contested lands.

### The monumental schism

Jerusalem is ancient and sacred, while Tel Aviv is modern and secular. Jerusalem is Middle Eastern, while Tel Aviv is Western. Jerusalem is Israel's spiritual center, while Tel Aviv is its commercial one. Tel Aviv votes left, Jerusalem votes right. Tel Aviv is the city that "never rests", while Jerusalem grows quiet as Shabbat approaches. Jerusalem is the city our people are prepared



to die for, Tel Aviv the city where we live and let live. Jerusalem is profoundly Jewish, while Tel Aviv is Israeli. Tel Aviv is a city of high-risers and beachfronts, Jerusalem of hallowed history and biblical memory. In Jerusalem, over 100 people a year experience 'Jerusalem Syndrome', a psychiatric condition of those who experience a messianic high, while in Tel Aviv bars and nightclubs, the 'highs' may be of a different nature. Tel Aviv is an earthly city, Jerusalem a heavenly one.

### History repeating itself?

How can these two cities live together, as one nation? For decades, the cities have coexisted by minimizing their interaction, a workable solution in the short-term but dangerous for the long-term viability of the nation. Jewish history is a cautionary tale, demonstrating the disastrous consequences of creating two separate and distinct societies within the borders of the Land of Israel. Barely 80 years after Kings David and Shlomo founded the first united Kingdom of Israel, the nation was torn asunder into two separate states. During the time of Rechavam, the son of Shlomo and grandson of David, the nation split into the southern religious Kingdom of Judah, with Jerusalem as its capital, and the northern idolatrous Kingdom of Israel, with Shomron - Samaria - as its capital (Melachim I, Chapter 12).

Two different kings; Rechavam in the south, Yeravam in the north. Two capitals and two cultures. A more Torah-committed kingdom in the south and extended Jerusalem area, a more idolatrous and pagan culture in the north. The nation's split brought devastating consequences, which we suffer from to this day.

Only a few hundred years later, the Assyrian King Sancherev descended with his armies from the north, conquering and exiling the ten tribes of the northern kingdom. Indeed, we are all called Jews today because by and large we are all descendants of the tribe of Judah, the southern kingdom, which survived the Assyrian onslaught. Ten of the twelve tribes have been lost to Jewish history as a consequence of the people's split along religious and cultural fault lines.

Two hundred years after the rebuilding of the Second Temple, we suffered yet another schism in the Land of Judea between the Hellenistic Jews and the Hasmoneans, leading to the struggle of Chanukah. Later, the Pharisees and Sadducees devolved into infighting which greatly weakened the Judean State and ultimately brought about its destruction.

### Two cities, one society

Thankfully, the cultural gap between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv has slowly and steadily grown smaller over the last decade. Tel Aviv is becoming more religious, while Jerusalem has become more commercial and modern. Jewish life in Tel Aviv is reborn, with thousands of religious young adults moving to the city, reinvigorating old communities and establishing new ones. The new arrivals have established *yeshivot*, learning centers and hundreds of new kosher restaurants. At the same time, Jerusalem is now linked to Tel Aviv by a direct, 28-minute train line, while Mayors Olmert and Barkat developed a long-term plan for the business and commercial modernization of Jerusalem. These are very encouraging trends.

Interestingly, of the hundreds of highways and intercity roadways in Israel which have been given numbers to more easily identify them, the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv Highway has appropriately been named Road 1. This is most symbolic as I fervently believe that bridging the cultural divide of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv is the most crucial issue on Israel's national agenda. As history has proven, nothing is more important to ensure the State of Israel's success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Jews and Israelis, heaven and earth, body and soul, secular and spiritual, left and right, ancient and modern must come together if the State of Israel is to be a sustainable and united country capable of facing the challenges ahead. Both are central to Judaism, and both are essential ingredients of a harmonious Jewish identity.

May we soon see the day when Jerusalem and Tel Aviv stand together "as one person with one heart".



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



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# A Festival of Eights

Rabbi Dr. Benjamin Elton

When we think of Chanukah, the number eight is very prominent. Though we do not light eight candles until the last night, for every day of the festival we see the eight branches of the *chanukiah*, reminding us of the “eight-ness” of the holiday. But number eight used to be much less evident. If you had celebrated Chanukah in Talmudic times, you might not have thought very much about it, because the eight-branched candelabra we are used to seeing on Chanukah is merely an elaboration of the *mitzvah* of lighting and not the essential *mitzvah* itself.

The Talmud rules that the obligation to light on the evenings of Chanukah consists of *ner ish u'veito*, one candle per person and their household. The basic *mitzvah* of lighting requires only a single flame for each night, placed in the doorway of each Jewish home. Since that time, however, the transition from the basic *mitzvah* to our contemporary practice has been absolute and complete. The basic *mitzvah* has become totally eclipsed by its elaboration, making the number eight a dominant feature of the holiday.

The rabbis say concerning the Jewish people that “if they are not prophets they are at any rate the descendants of

prophets”. We must therefore ask a critical question. Why did the Jewish people transform Chanukah into a holiday of eight?

The number eight represents the covenant of our people with Hashem. Circumcision, the quintessential sign of our covenant, takes place on the eighth day. Shemini Atzeret, when G-d and the Jewish people unite without company or distractions, is the eighth day of Sukkot, while the Yovel year, the eighth year that follows seven *shemitta* cycles, is when the Land of the covenant is returned to its original owners. Each of these “eights” represents the enduring and renewing covenant between G-d and the Jewish people.

That is why the number eight is emphasized in Chanukah. Chanukah was the time when the covenant was nearly broken, but ultimately salvaged and restored. The Greeks and their supporters sought to replace Judaism with Hellenism, and Hebrew thought with Greek thought. Significantly, a key part of the conflict concerned circumcision, the covenant of the eighth day. The Greeks regarded the human body, properly developed, as representing perfection, and so circumcision – based on the proposition that the human body is imperfect and must be fixed through obedience to G-d’s command – was naturally anathema to the Greeks.

When the Syrian Greeks entered the Temple, they must have been very confused. Whereas a statue of the gods stood at the center of every Greek temple, at the center of the Second Temple in Jerusalem there was nothing. During the First Temple era, the Ark of the Covenant stood in the Holy of Holies, but it was hidden shortly before the destruction of the First Temple. In the Second Temple era, the Holy of Holies

contained nothing other than the incorporeal presence of G-d. When the Greeks entered the Second Temple, they filled this physical space with an altar to Zeus. In doing so, they were not attempting to replace G-d, but rather something much more insidious. They sought to preserve the G-d of Israel, but also to redefine Him, as merely the most powerful god amongst many others.

To accept the Greeks’ redefinition of Hashem would destroy the covenant of Israel in a single blow. If the Almighty is in the same class as Zeus of the Greeks, the Jupiter of the Romans or Wotan of the Germans, there would be nothing special about G-d or the Jewish people, and certainly no covenant.

The story of Chanukah recounts the Jewish people’s rejection of the Greek attempt to humble G-d and dissolve our covenant with Him. The Maccabees beligerently attacked Greeks and their Hellenised Jewish allies, circumcised Jewish boys and smashed Greek places of worship, for they were fighting for the survival of the covenant itself!

What the eight days of circumcision are for an individual boy, the eight days of Chanukah are for the entire people. It is the affirmation and renewal of the covenant. This is why our people have continually emphasized the number eight in our celebration of the festival of Chanukah. It is a time recommitting ourselves to our covenant with the one G-d, whose Temple was restored in those days, at this time.



Rabbi Dr. Benjamin Elton is the Chief Minister of The Great Synagogue of Sydney, Australia.







# Mizrachi Chanukah Challenge

בימים ההם בזמן הזה  
In those days and at this time

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## Responses to “Would This Sermon Make You Angry?”

**IN HIS LETTER** from the Editor, Rabbi Elie Mischel (Vol. 5, No. 5) challenges Diaspora Jewry to consider if they would be angered by a pulpit rabbi arguing for *Aliyah* from the pulpit.

I belong to a Religious Zionist community, *daven* in a Religious Zionist *shul* and work in a Religious Zionist school. So would a sermon about *Aliyah* coming from any of these Religious Zionist institutions make me angry? Of course not.

True, there may be reasons why some of us are here and not in Israel, and some of those reasons may be totally or somewhat valid for now, but it is still better to live in Israel, which is a basic Jewish value. Simply put, the *mitzvah* of *Aliyah* applies to all of us, whether we are capable of fulfilling this *mitzvah* today or desire to do it at some point.

From the day our students begin studying Torah with the story of Avraham’s *Aliyah*, or studying Navi with the story of Yehoshua leading the Jews into Israel, our educational system promotes the centrality of Israel and importance of living there. Most of the Torah actually describes the journey towards the Land of Israel. Chazal regularly make comments about the importance of living in Israel, sometimes going so far as to state that one who lives outside of Israel is merely practicing the *mitzvot* for when he can one day do the real thing in Israel (how to understand this comment lies outside of the scope of my letter).

This does not negate the fact that Diaspora Jewry has much to offer the Jewish people.

We can still be partners with our brethren in Israel. But our history and tradition make clear that we are the junior partners in this Jewish journey. Current events further support this idea, as Israel has become the dominant religious, political and intellectual center of the Jewish people today.

Messaging that promotes *Aliyah* is no different than messaging that exhorts our community to learn more Torah, do more *chessed*, or attend *minyán* more often. Some of the messages we hear from the pulpit may be hard-hitting, and they may even feel very personal or hit raw nerves. But we need to ask ourselves whether we prefer rabbis who lead us in a mission-aligned (and of course, appropriately stated) fashion or rabbis who are nervous about upsetting congregants for “saying the wrong thing”.

I am reminded of the famous joke about the new rabbi who, on his first week on the job, gives a sermon about keeping Shabbat. The president of the *shul* approaches him following *davening*, telling him that he should avoid discussing Shabbat, as some of the congregants are not Shabbat observant. Taking the message to heart, the rabbi speaks about *kashrut* the following week. Once again, the president approaches the rabbi following *davening*, asking him not to speak about *kashrut*, as some congregants do not keep kosher. This pattern continues for a few weeks, until, exasperated, the rabbi asks his president, “What should I speak about?” The president responds, “That’s simple. Just speak about Judaism!”

*Aliyah* is easier today than it has been for two thousand years. Yet most of our community is quite comfortable in the Diaspora. I imagine that one can find parallels to the time of Ezra



and Nechemiah, when many rationalized staying in Bavel *lechatchila* and made arguments for why most Jews were not making *Aliyah*. Chazal did not view their arguments fondly. I suspect that future generations will also ask why we didn’t make *Aliyah* in larger numbers when it was relatively easy compared to previous generations.

We should celebrate the fact that many members of our community make *Aliyah*, and often under difficult conditions. And yes – our rabbis should continue to preach our values from the pulpit.

**Rabbi Daniel Alter**  
Head of School, The Moriah School  
Englewood, NJ





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**I GREATLY APPRECIATE** Rabbi Mischel's candor in his latest editorial regarding the responsibilities of rabbis in the Diaspora to encourage *Aliyah*. His comment that "there are more rabbis in Israel than street cats" specifically hits home. While in Israel on my final pilot trip before making *Aliyah*, I learned that community rabbis do not generally get paid in Israel, and that gap year *yeshivot* require significant funding from the Diaspora in order to survive. Both of these realities are significant disincentives for the rabbinic establishment to make *Aliyah* and to promote it from the pulpit.

I was recently a guest at a meal together with a prominent rabbi who made *Aliyah* after leading his community in the Diaspora for many years. When I asked him about why he waited until he retired to make *Aliyah*, he talked about his mission in the US. But then he said sadly: "We had a family to support; we needed the *parnossa*. Many rabbis in the Diaspora earn hundreds of thousands of dollars in places like the Five Towns, Monsey or Boca Raton. You can't make a living like that as a rabbi in Israel."

Many people remain in *galut* for financial reasons. I hope Mizrachi will devote a future feature to these financial challenges.

**Rhona Silverman**

*Deerfield Beach, Florida, USA*

**GREAT SERMON! INSPIRING!** However, it's easy for me to come to that conclusion having already made *Aliyah* and now living in the same country as my children and grandchildren. I discovered that when you make *Aliyah*, your Judaism goes from black and white to color. The "only in Israel" moments more than make up for any inconveniences. Yes, some prices may be higher, but healthcare, education and one car (instead of two) are all more affordable. I am grateful that I am able to work here in my profession and that I have made amazing new friends. With the help of technology, I have succeeded in maintaining many close relationships abroad.

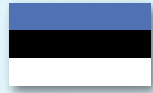
Would I have made *Aliyah* had I known in advance about a global pandemic limiting my trips abroad? Yes! About the sacrifice of many material luxuries? Yes! About the hurtful loss of a significant relationship in the States? Yes! Any difficulties I have had do not compare to the experiences of the brave pioneers who founded this great Jewish state or to the sacrifices made by those who lost their lives safeguarding it. My life is so much more meaningful here. I only wish I had made *Aliyah* sooner.

I have one addition to your sermon. To quote my son, Rafi, in his article "Why I Could Not Live Anywhere Else" in Yeshiva University's *Kol Hamevaser* magazine: "Centuries from now, where will my descendants point on their family tree and say, 'This is where we returned from the exile?'"

**Rachelle Miller**

*Raanana, Israel*





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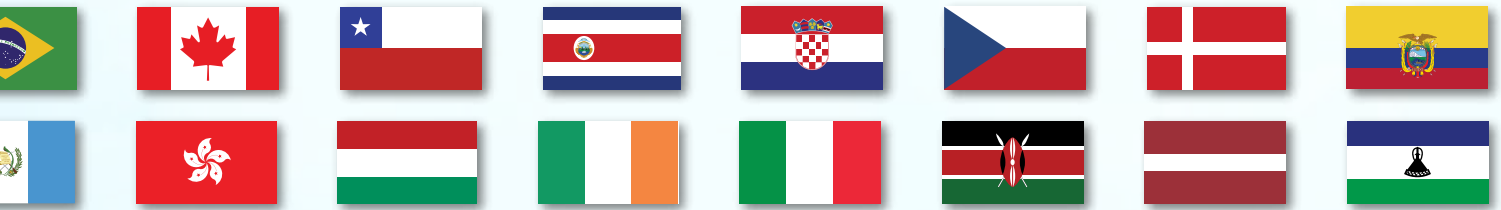
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# Torat Tel Aviv

## A Religious Revival in the Heart of “Secular” Israel

An Introduction by Rabbi Aron White

*People say to me that Tel Aviv is the most secular city in Israel. I say to them, “Tel Aviv has over 500 shuls, tens of yeshivot, and over 900 eateries with kosher certification. This is the most secular city in Israel?!”*

*(Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv-Yaffo)*

Founded just over a century ago, Tel Aviv is one of Israel’s most remarkable cities. No Israeli city is building higher or faster than Israel’s city that never sleeps, as the sand dunes of its pioneers have been transformed into malls, hotels and skyscrapers. It is the economic and technological engine of Israel’s economy, and new projects like the Gush Dan light rail and a planned metro system promise to propel its growth to new heights.

Tel Aviv is often associated with Israeli secularism, but there is more to the city than meets the eye. From its inception until today, religious communities have played a key role in the story of Tel Aviv. Some of its earliest neighborhoods were built by religious pioneers; Shabazi and Kerem HaTeimanim by Yemenite Jews, and Neve Tzedek by the *Chassidic* Shalom Rokach. Some of Religious Zionism’s greatest leaders, including Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, Rav Ze’ev Gold and Rav Yehuda Leib Maimon, lived and taught Torah in Tel Aviv, while the Chief Rabbis of Tel Aviv are a Who’s Who of leading *poskim* of the 20th century – Rav Ben Tzion Uziel, Rav Moshe Avigdor Amiel, Rav Shlomo Goren, Rav Ovadia Yosef, and today, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau. Maale Eliyahu and Orot Shaul, *Hesder Yeshivot* with hundreds of students, are located in Tel Aviv, alongside tens of religious schools, youth groups and organizations.

Tel Aviv’s story has always been about new waves of immigrants, and in recent years, new waves of religious Jews have moved to the city, increasing the city’s religious population. At the same time, many young, religious, and single Anglos have moved in, creating a Tel Aviv version of the Upper West Side. In the last year alone, several rabbinic couples have taken up roles geared to building the community among young Anglos in Tel Aviv. The recent wave of French *olim* has brought thousands of traditional and religious families to the city, also elevating the city’s kosher culinary scene to new heights. Organizations like Rosh Yehudi have brought idealistic couples to the city, spreading Torah to secular and traditional Jews. To paraphrase one of the city’s most famous sportsmen, Tal Brody – Tel Aviv is on the religious map, and is staying on the religious map.

Our Torah is eternal; the cultural waves of secular society may challenge, but will never extinguish, its holy light. As we celebrate the eternity of Jewish tradition and identity, Chanukah is an opportune time to celebrate the light of Torat Tel Aviv!





# Shining the Light of Torah: The Zeira Family and Rosh Yehudi

*For many years, Yisrael and Moriah Zeira lived with their eight children in a religious yeshuv near Chevron. What made them decide to leave their familiar tight-knit community and move their family to the heart of Tel Aviv? And how did they launch Rosh Yehudi, one of the most impactful Kiruv organizations in Tel Aviv?*

*Rabbi Aron White spoke with Yisrael and Moriah to learn more about this remarkable family's journey.*

## When did your connection to the city of Tel Aviv begin?

**Yisrael:** I was born and grew up in Tel Aviv, so I always had a connection to the city. After high school, I studied at Yeshivat Shavei Chevron in Chevron, and later became the director of the yeshiva. During the early '90s and the years of the Oslo Accords, we ran numerous public campaigns to ensure that Chevron would remain under Israeli sovereignty. As I was organizing protests and rallies in the center of Tel Aviv, a thought struck me: Why are we only doing a campaign like this in Tel Aviv when there is some kind of political threat? Why don't we engage with Jews in Tel Aviv all the time?

Political protests are probably the least wholesome way to teach our Religious Zionist worldview to the broader population. Rather than shouting one-line slogans, wouldn't it be much better if we could build meaningful relationships? And rather than talking about security concerns, wouldn't it be better to share our deep worldview of *Am Yisrael*, *Torat Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael*?!

I realized that Tel Aviv is the cultural, academic and economic center of Israel, and the atmosphere there has an impact on the whole of Israel. Within our Religious Zionist communities we would say that the people of Tel Aviv were out of touch, but the truth is, we were out of touch with *them*!

## How did Rosh Yehudi develop?

**Yisrael:** About 25 years ago, we began Rosh Yehudi, an outreach organization that would run a few *shiurim* for *ba'alei teshuva* and those interested in learning more about Judaism. We wanted to reach out to people by offering them something deep, by learning genuine and meaningful Torah with them.

After a few years of following this model, one couple who was involved with the organization decided to move to Tel Aviv to begin running *tefillot* and hosting people for Shabbat meals. We were skeptical, but more people came to the *tefillot* than had come to the *shiurim*, and they were inundated with guests for Shabbat meals. Today, we have nine families living in different neighborhoods of Tel Aviv. Five years ago, we also made the move to Tel Aviv, and hosting people on Shabbat is a core part of what we do.

**Moriah:** Each week we host between 20 and 40 people in our home for one of the Shabbat meals, and the other meal is reserved as family time. On *chagim*, we can even host 50 people at a meal, which is a lot of work, with all the shopping, cooking, hosting and cleaning! We are inspired by the model of Avraham and Sarah, who had an open tent. But there is a lot of work involved and a constant balancing act; we have to know when to carve out time for our children and when to open our home to even more guests.



The people we host are all in different places on their religious journeys; some come from totally non-religious backgrounds, while others left religious observance and are now looking to re-engage. These Shabbat experiences can be truly transformative. We sing, share a *dvar Torah*, and ask a question that everyone answers. People's hearts open as the words, and sometimes tears, flow. They stay long into the night; in order to end the evening and get people to go home, we had to set the timer so the lights would go out for a half-hour. But people learned the trick and stayed through the dark until they switched on again!

After people connect through the Shabbat meal, the next stage of their journey is starting to learn Torah one-on-one and by joining *shiurim*.

It is hard to convey the depth and emotions each person experiences on their path to *teshuva*. One woman worked as an air hostess for ELAL, and she gradually began becoming religious. I helped her at so many different stages – how to handle her family that was not supportive of her decision, how to *kasher* her apartment, and how to date in a religious world that was so foreign to her. There were frustrations, laughter, tears and joy.

### How has living in Tel Aviv impacted your family?

**Moriah:** There has been a lot of *mesirut nefesh*, as we have to sacrifice a lot of time with our family to open our home to others. The flip-side of this is that the women who I work with feel like my extended family! When I dance at a wedding of a woman who has been at our home for years, after we have gone through so much together, it really feels like we have formed an extended family bond!



Part of the crowd at Kikar Dizengoff for Yom Kippur davening.

**Yisrael:** There is definitely a culture shock when you move from Kiryat Arba to Tel Aviv! Some of our older children were already out of the house when we moved, while the younger ones had to leave their friends at school and Bnei Akiva behind. The street looks very different in Tel Aviv compared to Kiryat Arba, but I don't think any of them were weakened spiritually. Many of our kids even became spiritually stronger! The children are part of the community work we are doing, some more and some less. And we are constantly working out the right balance between giving to the wider community and to our own family.

### Do you encourage people to move to Tel Aviv?

**Yisrael:** Yes, though not everyone. You need to be strong in your Torah values and beliefs, as there is a very different atmosphere here. But we need many more young couples to join us and to make an impact on this city! ■



Hakafot Shniyot in Central Tel Aviv after Simchat Torah.



The Frank family, one of the Rosh Yehudi couples living in Tel Aviv.

Facing page, left to right: Moriah Zeira with a student; Yisrael Zeira giving a class.



# A Snapshot of Torat Tel Aviv





5



6



7



8



**There are countless *shuls* and organizations in Tel Aviv – here is a glimpse of some of the religious life in the city.**

1. Daniel and Mikhayla Reidler, active members of the 126 Ben Yehuda community, graduates of Mizrahi's Shalhevet program
2. Torah Tech, a gap year program based in Tel Aviv that combines learning and tech internships
3. Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein giving a *shiur* as part of the Midrash Aviv program, a *beit midrash* program in Tel Aviv under the auspices of Yeshivat Har Etzion
4. Hallel on Sukkot 2022 outside the Beit Ariella library
5. Yeshivat Orot Shaul dancing on the first day of *choref zman*
6. A Yom HaAtzmaut *tefillah* at Kikar Atarim led by Rosh Yehudi
7. *Havdallah* in the Center of Tel Aviv, organized by Chabad on the Coast/Young Jewish Professionals
8. Yom Kippur *davener* in Kikar HaBima in the heart of Tel Aviv, lead by Rabbi Jonathan Feldman of Tribe/Am Yisrael Foundation, an organization that builds community and provides learning opportunities for young *olim* in Tel Aviv



# Bonjour à Tel Aviv

## How Mizrachi is supporting French Aliyah in Tel Aviv

Rabbi Aron White

From Ishay Ribo to the proliferation of French restaurants all over, French *Aliyah* is making its mark on Israel – and on Tel Aviv most of all.

French Jewry, the third largest Jewish community in the world, has sent a wave of new *olim* to Israel over the last decade. From 2010 to 2019, 38,000 Jews made *Aliyah* from France – more than the total number of *olim* from the United States and Great Britain combined. Many of these *olim* have settled in Tel Aviv.

“French Jews arriving in Israel often experience a culture shock,” says Rabbi Yonatan Seror, rabbi of the *Toldot Yitzchak shul* in the heart of Tel Aviv. “They are used to a strong-knit community life, which often does not exist in Israel. Additionally, the religious categories used in Israeli society don’t really fit French Jews. Many French Jews are traditional, keeping Shabbat and kosher, and though they do not outwardly look religious, they get a shock when their children go to *chiloni* (secular) schools with Israeli children who have no religious background at all. My *shul* is 80% French *olim*, and there is a great need to support this community.”

World Mizrachi’s French Desk, led by Rav Avraham Dery, has been very active in supporting these developing

communities. World Mizrachi has partnered with Qualita, the French equivalent to Nefesh B’Nefesh, providing programming and religious leadership for seven French *oleh* communities throughout Israel through the *Kehilot Koltot* program.

Rabbi Seror’s community in Tel Aviv is one of those communities. The *shul* is located in the heart of the city, right next to Kikar Rabin, and provides *shiurim*, activities and a sense of community for hundreds of French *olim*. Rabbi Seror and his wife Elisheva run events for all ages – from communal *seder* nights hosting over 100 people, to *bar* and *bat mitzvah* classes, and events for French gap year students living in Tel Aviv. French Jewry has a distinctly Sephardi and Moroccan flavor, and the *hilula* for the Baba Sali and Rav Yitzchak Kaduri are also important events.

Mizrachi is also working to connect Jews in France to Israel. Each year, World Mizrachi sends delegations of French rabbis from Israel to France where they support the Jewish community and build connections to Israel that encourage *Aliyah*. “There are two ways to encourage *Aliyah* – by speaking to Jews in *chutz la’aretz* and encouraging them to move to Israel, and by strengthening communities of Jews who have already made *Aliyah*,” said Roi Abecassis, Mizrachi’s head of the

Department for Religious Affairs in the Diaspora at the World Zionist Organization. “When people know that there are strong communities to move to, it makes it more likely that they will come.”



The Toledot Yitzchak *shul*, one of the many in Tel Aviv with a large French community.



Rav Seror teaching in France as part of a World Mizrachi delegation in November 2022.



Rav Yonatan and Rabbanit Elisheva with young French Jews.



# WORLD MIZRACHI

## Strengthening Jewish Life Around the World This Year





**"I DON'T KNOW OF ANY OTHER ORGANIZATION THAT HAS ACCOMPLISHED SO MUCH IN JUST ONE YEAR."**  
**- MK SIMCHA ROTHMAN (RELIGIOUS ZIONIST PARTY)**

Yad L'Olim, founded by former MK Dov Lipman in June 2021, has become a critical voice for Olim within the halls of the Israeli government, influencing policies related to Olim and the Aliyah process. In addition, Yad L'Olim provides Olim with the personal assistance they need to navigate the complex steps of their acclimation to Israel. To date, Olim from 22 different countries have turned to Yad L'Olim for help with both individual and community needs.

**131**  
**MEETINGS WITH**  
**GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS**

**23,742**  
**OLIM GIVEN**  
**PERSONAL ASSISTANCE**

**8,284**  
**OLIM REFUGEES PROVIDED**  
**WITH BASIC NECESSITIES**

**50,000 +**  
**OLIM FAMILIES REUNITED**  
**DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC**





# The Tenth Man in Florentin, Tel Aviv

Aaron Razel

PHOTO: HARVEN SAPIR PIKMIKI ISRAELI/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

It's a Tel Aviv morning. I arrive early, seeking a coffee shop where I can pass the time until the meeting. It's a beautiful moment for a coffee with a little whipped cream, the radio and a croissant.

A shrill voice interrupts my day dreaming. "We need a tenth man for the *minyan!*" He is wearing a cardboard *kippah* on his head, in the middle of Florentin. "Come, brother, come complete the *minyan!*" Another one of the dozens of *shuls* planted here in the alleyways. Some are entirely empty, while others are open to the praying public.

This could be a nuisance, but I decide to join them. I approach the *shul*, and realize that they are still missing another person. And so I stand outside together with him, to help him recruit for the *minyan*. Many people pass through Florentin, a neighborhood overflowing with students and young people passing by.

I feel for a moment like one who sees but is not seen. And so too the *shul* and the *gabbai*, all of us transparent, as befits messengers of the hidden G-d, the disappearing One.

In the meantime I sit on the side of the *shul*, answering *amen* to *kaddish* and washing the hands of the *kohanim*. A son of the tribe of Levi, with coffee I prepared in the old kettle in the kitchen, without a menu, but with a purpose.

Tell me why?

Why are the coffee shops here so full? Why are the *shuls* empty? Why aren't the waiters in the coffee shops searching for a *minyan*? Why are the *shuls* not full with young people?

I need to leave already for my meeting; I am thinking about how to escape. But now they are taking out the *Sefer Torah*. I see it coming towards me. Never before have I felt as if the Torah itself wanted to approach me, to draw close...

I run to the Torah. I kiss it and am teary-eyed. And I promise it: one day they will run to you here; the young people of Tel Aviv will dance with you in the coffee shops!

I am about to go outside to the street, to escape the *minyan*, but they call me up to the Torah. The Levi *aliyah*. I find myself making the blessings over the Torah like I have never done before. I hold back my tears, tears that did not fall even during *Neilah* at the *Kotel*. What a merit!

Here in the empty synagogue in south Tel Aviv, in the end, I made a *minyan*.



Aaron Razel is a writer, composer and artist. His twelve albums include songs like "Ha'Sneh Bo'er" (The Burning Bush) and "Zman Ha'Geulah" (The Time of Redemption) that have become part of the broader cultural landscape of Israel. He lives in the Nachlaot neighborhood of Jerusalem with his wife and children. This essay was originally published in Hebrew in his book "HaChayim k'Niggun" (Life as a Niggun).



# Batei Varsha

## The Story of my Pioneering Tel Aviv Family

Rabbanit Shani Taragin

**T**his edition of *HaMizrachi* – in which we both celebrate Chanukah, the holiday of education and the establishment and strengthening of our homes, and revisit the religious history of Tel Aviv-Yaffo – is personally significant for me. My family's history is bound up together with the history of Tel Aviv; our personal story of darkness and light, of exile and redemption, is representative of the history of the city, and of our nation as a whole.

My grandmother, Adina Deutsch-Russak was born in Yaffo on 7 Nissan 5684 (April 11, 1924) to her parents Eliezer (“Layzer”) Deutsch and Breindel Fenigstein. Breindel was born in Warsaw, the fifth of twelve children born to Shaul Yitzchak and Riva Fenigstein. Shaul Yitzchak’s father was killed in the pogrom of 1871, a popular protest against Jewish ‘exploitation’ of the native population. Following his father’s death, Shaul Yitzchak went to live with Rebbe Shmuel Eliyahu Taub of Zvolin from age 9 to 13 and was then forced to serve in the Czar’s army until he was 19. After marrying Riva Endstein, the niece of the *Sfat Emet*, in 1883, Shaul Yitzchak resettled in Warsaw and became a successful spice merchant. Although he initially did not subscribe to the Chovevei Tzion movement, his sister’s *Aliyah* to Yerushalayim and raids against the Jews in Warsaw in 1905 – during which his own factory workers tried to kill him – led him to move his family to Israel.

They traveled through Odessa and sailed on the “Sesorovich”, reaching the Jaffa Port on December 26, 1905. After a brief stay in Yerushalayim, Shaul Yitzchak purchased three large buildings and a courtyard on the border of Tel Aviv-Yaffo (today’s Rechov Selma and Kibbutz Galuyot) from the German Templar of the “American Colony”, Johann Georg Kappus senior, for 15,000 golden francs. He named this

neighborhood *Batei Varsha* (Houses of Warsaw) and it became one of the first Jewish neighborhoods which helped create a continuous Jewish presence in Jaffa.

*Batei Varsha* provided housing for the large Fenigstein family as well as many Jewish refugees of the Second Aliyah, including Yitzchak Ben-Zvi, the future president of Israel, who founded the Bar Giora Association there in 1907. Shaul Yitzchak would personally go down to the Jaffa port to welcome *olim* to his home, encouraging them to open small businesses on his farm and participate in his courtyard synagogue of Gerrer *Chassidim*, a hub for the growing Jewish communities of Neve Tzedek and Neve Shalom.

The family survived by manufacturing margarine, candles and ground coffee. After being relocated by the Ottomans to Petach Tikvah during World War I, the Fenigsteins returned to *Batei Varsha* in 1917 under the British Mandate. On arriving, they found their farms destroyed and the complex occupied by British soldiers. Undeterred, they resettled their homes and established a sewing-textile business in place of their destroyed businesses.

In 1920, my great-grandmother Breindel married Layzer Deutsch, who had made *Aliyah* from Hungary in 1914. Before making *Aliyah*, Layzer studied at Rabbi Dovid Zvi Hoffman and Rabbi Solomon Breur’s *yeshivot* in Frankfurt. He escaped recruitment to the German army – and near certain death in the trenches of World War I – by purchasing Turkish citizenship. On his ‘return’ to Turkey, an ally of Germany, he ran off the ship as it stopped at the Jaffa port. Now a citizen of Turkey, he resided with fellow Hungarian Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, the “Rabbi of Jerusalem”, through the end of the war. After the war, Rav Avraham Chaim Na’eh, who had married Breindel’s older sister



One of the original *Batei Varsha* buildings.

Devorah and was serving as secretary for Rav Sonnenfeld’s *beit din*, suggested that Layzer marry Breindel Fenigstein. The wedding ceremony took place as most family celebrations did, in *Batei Varsha*, where the young couple soon established their home.

On May 1, 1921, after Winston Churchill refused to cancel the Balfour Declaration, Arab riots broke out in Yaffo, the second largest Jewish-Arab city in the British Mandate, with 16,000 Jews and 26,000 Arabs. The Arabs murdered thirteen Jews in the Jaffa streets as they rampaged their way from the Jewish communities of Neve Shalom and Neve Tzedek to Beit HaOlim and *Batei Varsha*. Members of the Haganah managed to move the Fenigstein family and *Batei Varsha* residents to Tel Aviv while Shaul Yitzchak, together with his sons and son-in-law Layzer Deutsch, stayed behind to protect the complex alongside the Haganah fighters. Armed with only one gun and a few bullets, they chased away the attackers and succeeded in saving *Batei Varsha*.



Though my great-grandfather Layzer worked for his father-in-law distributing margarine, he chose to pursue a livelihood in the United States, making his way to Los Angeles where he worked as a *shochet* and opened a kosher meat business. In 1924, he left his pregnant wife Breindel and three-year old son Yehoshua Shmuel in *Batei Varsha*, intending to bring them as soon as he was settled. My grandmother, Adina z”l was born a few months after her father left and only met him five years later, when Layzer sent boat tickets for his family to join him.

In 1929, Breindel left with her two children to the Jaffa Port, accompanied by armed British soldiers to protect them against Arab rioters. It was a tearful parting, as Breindel didn’t know if she would ever see her family or her home in Jaffa again. After a thirty-day boat trip to New York followed by a four-and-a-half-day train ride to the west coast, Breindel and her two children were reunited with Layzer in Los Angeles.

Meanwhile, the Arab riots of 1929 forced the Fenigstein family to once again abandon their home and move in with Rabbi Nechemia Berman on Kalisher Street in Tel Aviv. Though they later returned home, they were forced to flee once again during riots of April 1936, when Arabs looted and burned down the *Batei Varsha* complex. Though some residents returned to rebuild the three courtyards, Shaul Yitzchak’s family remained in Tel Aviv. Longing for his home, Shaul Yitzchak continued to visit his beloved home every Friday, until it was completely destroyed once again on August 15, 1947, on the eve of the War of Independence. In 1956, under the State of Israel’s Development Authority, *Batei Varsha* became the grounds for the Tel Aviv police offices, and it remains so today.

Yosef Moshe Russak, my “Saba Joe”, grew up in Seattle, and met my grandmother Adina at the family’s “kosher eatery” in Los Angeles. They married and moved to Seattle, where they helped build the Jewish community and raised my mother and her siblings. In 1946, Layzer and Breindel returned to Israel to live near their Fenigstein family relatives in Tel Aviv, across the street from the *shul* of the Gerrer *Chassidim*. My mother recalls visiting her grandparents when she came to Israel for the year soon after her marriage, and would later bring our own

family on annual Sukkot trips to visit our family in Tel Aviv.

I grew up with my Savta’s Hebrew melodies and lullabies, and merited to host her in Alon Shvut after our *Aliyah*. I recall driving my grandparents from Gush Etzion to their hotel in Yerushalayim and seeing my grandmother cry as we drove by the Israeli soldiers in Beit Lechem. Remembering her childhood and the foreign British soldiers who ruled Israel at that time, she was overcome with emotion and appreciation for the miracle of a Jewish state protected by a Jewish army.

In 1994, while expecting our second child, I was invited to attend a Fenigstein Chanukah family reunion in Tel Aviv. The first descendant of Breindel Fenigstein-Deutsch to make *Aliyah*, I was introduced to my “long-lost” second and third cousins. I learned about our *Batei Varsha* legacy and the role my mother’s family played in establishing Jaffa and Tel Aviv. Inspired by Shaul Yitzchak’s pioneering spirit, we named our son, born a few days after the reunion, Yehuda Shaul, to perpetuate the legacy of his commitment to *Am Yisrael*, *Eretz Yisrael* and *Torat Yisrael*. Today, my son lives around the block from Sderot Nordau and a few minutes walk away from his great-great-great grandfather’s estate of *Batei Varsha*. An active participant in Yakar Tel Aviv and Torah learning for students and young professionals in Tel Aviv, Yehuda Shaul, together with many other descendants of his namesake, is *Baruch Hashem* continuing the legacy and message of Chanukah – the *chinuch* of the home, and the reestablishment of sovereignty in our Land.



Shaul Yitzchak and Riva on roof top of *Batei Varsha*.



One of the original *Batei Varsha* buildings.



A plaque commemorating *Batei Varsha*.



**Rabbanit Shani Taragin**  
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Lapidot Educators’ Program.



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World Orthodox Israel Congress  
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# Rav Yitzchak Nissenbaum *hy" d*

## A Spiritual Warrior for Eretz Yisrael

An appreciation of the life of  
HaMizrachi's founding editor  
in commemoration of his  
80th *yahrzeit*

*Rabbi Elie Mischel*



"You cannot be, I know, nor do I wish to see you, an inactive spectator... We have too many high-sounding words, and too few actions that correspond with them." (Abigail Adams, October 16, 1774)

**A**bigail Adams' impassioned letter to her husband John could easily have been written about a very different man, in a very different time: Rav Yitzchak Nissenbaum hy" d (1868–1943). A pioneering Religious Zionist leader and the founding editor of *HaMizrachi*, Rav Nissenbaum was never to be found on the sidelines of history, content to stand idly by while others grappled with the complex issues of his time. A fearless Religious Zionist, he repeatedly and tirelessly called upon our people to reclaim the glory of *Am Yisrael* and return home to our Land.

The most talented speaker and greatest *darshan* of the Mizrachi movement, Rav Nissenbaum is largely unknown today, for the passage of time is cruel to the reputations of all but the most famous actors of history. Rav Nissenbaum himself had no illusions that he would be remembered by future generations, frequently citing the verse in Kohelet: "There is no remembrance of them of former times; neither shall there be any remembrance of them of latter times that are to come, among those that shall come after" (Kohelet 1:11).

Unsurprisingly, I was only vaguely familiar with his name when I first plunged into the *HaMizrachi* archives two years ago. But it didn't take me long to realize that Rav Nissenbaum was not only *HaMizrachi*'s founding editor and most prolific writer, he was also the movement's heart and soul.

In addition to publishing ten books of *drashot* and thousands of articles in *HaMizrachi*, Rav Nissenbaum penned *Alei Cheldi*, a fascinating memoir and treasure trove of eye-opening stories describing his life in the early Religious Zionist movement. Though the pages of my personal copy are beginning to crumble, the memoir is brimming with life, passion and humor. More than once, entranced by another fascinating story of Rav Nissenbaum's encounters with Bialik or Rav Kook, I forgot to get off the bus and missed my stop. Much of the material for this tribute is drawn from this work.

The more I read, the more I realized that Rav Nissenbaum was not merely another important rabbi from a bygone era, but he had also become my Rebbe. I often ask myself, "What would Rav Nissenbaum say about the articles I'm writing? What would he think about the state of Religious Zionism in the Diaspora today?" Penetrating in his analysis

of the Jewish community and unafraid to speak his mind, I'm certain he would have plenty to say – and that he would ruffle more than a few feathers!

## Becoming a lover of Zion

Born in Bobruisk, Belorussia, Rav Nissenbaum lost his father at a young age. His mother, a sickly woman with a chronic cough, was left to support four young children on her own. At the end of *shiva*, he assumed he would have to leave his *cheder* to help his mother run the family store. But his mother turned to him in tears and said: "No, my son! This wasn't your father's desire, nor will it be mine! Return to your learning and study with diligence, and both of us – your father there [in heaven] and I here, will have *nachas* from you!" Though the family was in dire financial straits, nothing would interrupt young Yitzchak's studies. It was a commitment that would later pay off handsomely, enabling Rav Nissenbaum to draw upon decades of Torah scholarship as he made the case for Zionism throughout Eastern Europe.

Immersed in Talmud study as a teenager, Rav Nissenbaum often *davened* in the *Chassidic beit midrash* near his home, drawn by the powerful tunes and mystical prayers like *גְּבוּרָה*. At the same time, he was fascinated by the new world of Hebrew literature that began to flourish in the late 19th century, devouring the writings of authors like Nachman Krochmal, Rabbi Shmuel David Luzzatto, Eliezer Zweifel and the early Zionist Peretz Smolenskin. Most significantly, these modern writers led the young *yeshiva* student to immerse himself in the study of Tanach and Jewish philosophy, areas of study generally ignored in the *yeshivot* of Eastern Europe. His deep knowledge of *Nevi'im* and *Ketuvim* and seminal works of Jewish thought like the *Kuzari* would form the foundation of his Religious Zionist worldview.

A highly regarded young Torah scholar, Rav Nissenbaum began thinking deeply about *Eretz Yisrael* during the *Shemitta* year of 1888–1889, when the *heter mechirah* leniency was used for the first time to support the new Jewish settlements in the Land of Israel. The leniency, which allowed Jewish farmers to sell their land to non-Jews so that they could continue to work the land during *Shemitta*, sparked passionate *halachic* debates in *yeshivot* throughout Europe. Rav Nissenbaum explains that "the spirited debates concerning the laws of *Shemitta*, which centered on the great value of the new agricultural settlements of the *Yishuv*, transformed me into a *chovev tzion*, a lover of Zion..."

## Turning down the Rabbinate

While studying at the famed Volozhin Yeshiva, Rav Nissenbaum joined the *yeshiva*'s secret Zionist association called *Netzach Yisrael*, remaining active even after the Russian government forced the *yeshiva* to close in 1892. The next year, he attended a secret meeting of the *Chovevei Tzion* movement, led by the famed early Religious Zionist leader, Rav Shmuel Mohilever. Word soon reached Rav Mohilever about the brilliant young Nissenbaum, leading Rav Mohilever to



Title page of *Alei Cheldi*, Rav Nissenbaum's Autobiography, 1930



offer him the opportunity to become the secretary of the new “*Merkaz HaRuchani*” movement, usually abbreviated as “Mizrachi”, the predecessor to the Mizrachi movement that would later be founded by Rav Yitzchak Ya’akov Reines in 1902. When Rav Nissenbaum arrived in Bialystok in 1894 to assume the position, Rav Mohilever looked at the young man with penetrating eyes and quietly said, “So young!”

Working closely with Rav Mohilever, Nissenbaum found himself at the epicenter of the budding Religious Zionist movement. Each day, he wrote dozens of letters to Chovevei Tzion chapters from Vienna to New York, recruiting thousands of new members for the movement and raising money to support the new *Yishuv*. He quickly developed a close relationship with Rav Mohilever, often assuming his rabbinic duties in Bialystok while the great rabbi traveled to conduct business on behalf of Chovevei Tzion.

Though Rav Nissenbaum had always assumed he would one day become a community rabbi, his experience working under Rav Mohilever changed his mind. “During the years that I worked for Rav Mohilever, I met tens of community rabbis who came to Bialystok to pour their hearts out to Rav Mohilever about the suffering they were experiencing in the rabbinate, primarily due to the powerful laypeople in their towns. I began to reflect upon the state of the rabbinate and realized that the vision I had of the rabbinate – that I would be able, as a rabbi, to do important work for our people and our Land – was false. I began paying close attention to Rav Mohilever’s experience with the community in Bialystok, and I realized that even he was limited in his influence, due to powerful members of the community who held the reins of power in their hands and religious zealots who used the glory of religion to impede any initiatives that were not their own. I thought to myself: if this is the reality of the great *gaon*, Rav Shmuel Mohilever, what hope could I have to make an impact as a young rabbi unknown in the broader Jewish world?... I realized that the rabbinate buries its own in suffering, and that it would be better for me to find another path.”

Disenchanted with the rabbinate, Rav Nissenbaum embarked on a new path that would give him extraordinary influence over the young Religious Zionist movement. As a young boy, he was entranced by the many traveling *maggidim*, inspirational preachers, who passed through Bobruisk, including the famed Maggid of Kelm, Rabbi Moshe Yitzchak Darshan. Studying each speaker closely, the young Nissenbaum would stand on a chair at home and imitate their speaking style and hand motions. Later, as a precocious and learned teenager, he spoke periodically in local *shuls* and study halls. But it was Theodor Herzl’s emergence and the first Zionist Congress that launched his career as a sought-after speaker. “During the months after the first Congress, there was not one *beit midrash* in all of Bialystok where I did not speak in praise of Zionism! *HaMelitz* [a famous Hebrew-language newspaper in Russia] invited me during Chanukah of 1897 to speak at the Ohel Moshe synagogue in Warsaw, established by members of the Chovevei Tzion movement. I came, I spoke, and I conquered [באתי, דרשתי ונצחתי]”



*HaMizrachi*, 1918

For years, Rav Nissenbaum spoke every Shabbat at Moriah, Warsaw’s leading Zionist *shul*, where over a thousand people regularly crammed into the sanctuary, hallways and stairwells to hear the master orator speak. Grounded in decades of Torah learning, Rav Nissenbaum convincingly argued that Torah and Zionism are inseparable. “His great strength as a speaker was in his words, which were never forced or angry, but which, step by step, convinced the audience that his message was exactly what the prophets and Midrashim intended to convey... His words came across not as a ‘possible’ explanation, but as the one and *only* explanation of the text” (Moshe Krone, *Morai V’Rabbotai Achai V’Rayai*, 25). Rav Nissenbaum’s books of *drashot* were snapped up by rabbis from all over the world, who used them as their “go-to” source for sermons, much as the rabbis of our generation depend heavily on the teachings of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks *zt”l*.

Shortly after the first World Zionist Congress, Rav Nissenbaum became the formal representative of the Odessa Committee, officially known as the Society for the Support of Jewish Farmers and Artisans in Syria and Palestine. For eleven years, he traveled all over Europe, speaking in over three hundred communities. With Zionism now a hot button issue, Rav Nissenbaum often encountered hostile criticism.

In Sosnowiec, Poland, Rav Nissenbaum was summoned to the local rabbi’s home, where he found a group of ten, visibly angry *Gerrer Chassidim* who appeared ready to physically assault him for the crime of speaking in favor of Zionism. In no uncertain terms, the *Chassidim* told Rav Nissenbaum that he was forbidden from speaking in their town about Zionism. If this would cause him financial harm, they were prepared to compensate him for his loss – but under no circumstances would he be allowed to speak! Unfazed, Rav Nissenbaum responded: “The Zionists of this town invited me to speak, and only the Zionists can cancel my speech. To the demands of others – no matter who they might be – I will not listen!” When the time came for Rav Nissenbaum’s speech, the Zionists found that the doors of the *shul* were locked – and no one had a key! As a crowd gathered outside the *shul*, unsure what to do, the *Gerrer Chassidim* responsible for the prank laughed and celebrated their victory. Fortunately, the synagogue’s non-Jewish maintenance man



said: “Is it really impossible to open the synagogue doors without a key?” and proceeded to break open the door! Rav Nissenbaum concludes: “I went up to the *bimah* and gave my *drasha*. That Shabbat was *Parashat Shelach Lecha*, and so I spoke about the new *meraglim* (spies) of our time!”

## A Who's Who of early Zionism

Rav Yitzchak Nissenbaum, it seems, knew *everyone*. The pages of his memoir are peppered with fascinating anecdotes and memories of his encounters with famous rabbis and leading Zionist figures, many of whom he counted among his close friends.

The brilliant and often caustic Rabbi Yaakov Dovid Wilovsky, known as the *Ridvaz*, then serving as the Rav of Bobruisk, attended Rav Nissenbaum's *bar mitzvah*. He paid close attention as the young Yitzchak gave his speech, an exposition of a complex *halachic* discussion he had studied in Rav Eizel Charif's *Emek Yehoshua*. At the conclusion of the speech, the *Ridvaz* peppered the young boy with questions. After hearing the young Yitzchak's answers, the *Ridvaz* said: “They used to say that a good *yeshiva* boy is able to come up with his own novel insights for his *bar mitzvah*. Nowadays, though, it seems that all it takes to be a good *yeshiva* boy is the ability to understand what *other* people write!”

As a young man, Rav Nissenbaum was offered an unusual job opportunity – to be the *mashgiach ruchani*, the spiritual guide, at a Jewish school run by *maskilim* (activists promoting Jewish “enlightenment”) with controversial and often secular goals. Concerned that working for the school would ruin his reputation and damage his future career as a community rabbi, Rav Nissenbaum turned

to Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, the legendary founder of the “Brisker method”, for advice. After he explained the situation at length, Rav Chaim said: “If you have the ability to influence Jewish children and share the spirit of Judaism with them, no other consideration should be permitted to stop you from doing so!” Though Rav Chaim was opposed to Zionism, his son, Rav Moshe Soloveitchik, would later accept Rav Nissenbaum's offer to become a Talmud instructor at Mizrachi's *Beit Midrash l'Rabbanim - Tachkemoni Gevoha* in Warsaw, where the curriculum included both Talmud and secular studies.



Participants of Mizrachi's Journey to Poland and Lithuania in November 2022. During their walk on the Maslul HaGevura, the Heroes Trail, in the Warsaw Ghetto, the group gathered at Rav Nissenbaum's monument with the modern-day HaMizrachi magazine.



Always honest, Rav Nissenbaum admits that the written works of Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan, the famed *Chafetz Chaim*, did not speak to his heart. But when he met the *Chafetz Chaim* personally, he was deeply moved by his humility. “He didn’t speak from the front of the *shul*, in front of the *aron kodesh*, where all the other speakers would stand, speaking instead from the *bimah* in the middle of the *shul*. And when he finished, he did not sit [in an honored place] at the front of the *shul*, sitting instead in the middle of the *shul*. Every time he walked into the *shul*, people surrounded him and engaged him in conversation. When he responded, his words were carefully chosen and thoughtful. Clearly, he lived what he wrote in his books about guarding one’s speech!”

When Herzl burst onto the scene, Rav Nissenbaum quickly developed a warm relationship with the legendary leader, often serving as the line of communication between Herzl and the members of Chovevei Zion. He had no qualms about working together with the “secular” Herzl and others like him on behalf of the Zionist cause, resolute in his own beliefs but also deeply respectful of others. At the World Zionist Congress, Herzl felt comfortable enough to join Rav Nissenbaum and some of the other religious delegates for *Shacharit* at a local *shul*, where Herzl was honored with the *Levi aliyah*. After *davening*, as Herzl schmoozed and laughed with Rav Nissenbaum and the other men at the *shul*, someone asked him: “Our honored doctor, are you really a *Levi*?” Herzl smiled and said: “I know I’m definitely one of the three!”

While sitting in an attorney’s waiting room, Rav Nissenbaum bumped into Mendele Mocher Seforim, the “grandfather of Yiddish literature”. In the course of their conversation, Rav Nissenbaum innocently asked him if he was considering making *Aliyah*. Mendele’s response was epic: “He stood up from his chair, paced around the waiting room, then stood in front of me and yelled angrily: ‘What? Me, move to *Eretz Yisrael*? In my *Eretz Yisrael*, King David is still sitting on his throne and playing his harp, the prophet Yishayahu is still standing at the gates of Jerusalem rebuking government ministers for their sins, the Temple still stands and the Levites are playing their trumpets and cymbals! And now? *Oy vavoy!* I’ll come to Jerusalem and see that all of this is merely a golden dream. And then what will I do?’” In other words, the famous writer’s attitude was similar to that of many religious Jews in our time, who only plan to make *Aliyah* when *Mashiach* comes and Israel finally lives up to their expectations!

Old friends and study partners from their time in the Volozhin Yeshiva, Rav Nissenbaum and the famed poet Chaim Nachman Bialik remained close throughout the rest of their lives. In the early 1930s, shortly before his death, Bialik returned to Warsaw and spoke at Rav Nissenbaum’s Moriah synagogue. After Rav Nissenbaum’s warm introduction, Bialik told the crowd that “since the time of Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi until today, no man of Israel has arisen who has studied, spoken and preached about the love of Zion and the building up of the Land like Rav Yitzchak Nissenbaum!”



Petach Tikvah, 1911

## A life-changing journey to the Holy Land

Sadly, Rav Nissenbaum’s personal life was marred by a succession of tragedies. In 1899, his beloved only son, Avraham Yosef, passed away. His wife, shattered by the loss, passed away a few years later, leaving him broken and alone. In 1905, bereft of family and seeking to start anew, Rav Nissenbaum decided the time had come to see the Holy Land for himself. He embarked on an arduous journey to *Eretz Yisrael* that became, unquestionably, the greatest experience of his life. Over the course of his trip, he would visit nearly every Jewish town and settlement throughout the Land, copiously recording his impressions and insights along the way. A third of his autobiography is dedicated to this journey, providing a critical historical record of life in the early *Yishuv*.

Upon disembarking from his ship at the port of Jaffa, Rav Nissenbaum was pained to find non-Jewish workers speaking languages he did not understand. “Strange, strange, strange! Strange languages, strange people, strange customs. But in my heart I felt a sweet joy, for my feet were now walking upon the Land of my fathers! I raised my head in pride and looked all around me. Who are these people, and what connection do they have to this place? I am the son of the Master of this Land, and I have returned home to my Father’s embrace!”

Rav Nissenbaum’s tour of the Land was eye-opening. Roads were decrepit or non-existent, and he was forced to travel by donkey for several days over barren and rocky hills. While traveling to the new settlement of Rechovot, he spotted a young Jewish laborer hoeing the tough ground, preparing the land for planting. The sun and heat were intense, and sweat streamed down the man’s face into his eyes. His hands were filthy, his face covered with dirt, and his clothing completely soaked through with sweat. Awed by the young man’s herculean efforts, Rav Nissenbaum developed a new appreciation for the laborers of the new *Yishuv* who were building up the Land of our fathers with blood, sweat and tears.

In the pre-air conditioning era, the heat was oppressive and inescapable. While staying in Teveria (Tiberias), he – and



everyone else in the city – slept on the roofs of their homes to find some relief from the heat. In a settlement in the Galil during the heat of the summer, his host served him lemonade with ice. Surprised, Rav Nissenbaum asked his host where the ice had come from. “Do you have a machine that makes ice?” Laughing, his host explained that the “ice” was actually packed snow from Mount Hermon, which an enterprising worker carried in a sack to the settlements in the area.

Many of the Jewish pioneers struggled to make ends meet, and some lived in appalling conditions of poverty. But Rav Nissenbaum was farsighted enough to envision a future far brighter than what he saw in 1905. Visiting Ein Zeitim, a struggling settlement just north of Tzfat with land ill-suited for agriculture, he noted its refreshing breeze and beautiful weather. One day, he imagined, this would become a beautiful vacation destination!

Traveling through the Galil, Rav Nissenbaum was struck by the sheer emptiness of the Land. “I’ve been traveling for over five hours... and I haven’t seen one home, one planted tree, one seeded field or any living thing! Was the Land like this when our forefathers lived in this place? The Galil in those days was crowded with habitation; if I was traveling in ancient times, how many villages and cities would I have encountered! And yet there, in the exile, there are anti-Zionists who claim that this entire Land is already settled by strangers and there is no room here for the children of the Land!” I often think of Rav Nissenbaum’s insight on my commute from Gush Etzion to Beit Shemesh. Looking out the window of the bus, all I can see are empty hills, waiting for their children to return home.

In Petach Tikvah, Rav Nissenbaum witnessed the new *Yishuv*’s growing secular/religious divide firsthand.



Rabbi Yehoshua Stampfer

Founded in 1878 by religious Jews from the old *Yishuv*, tensions ran high between Petach Tikvah’s religious founders and their primarily secular workers. As the guest speaker on Shabbat, Rav Nissenbaum rebuked the religious Jews of Petach Tikva for not embracing the workers and hiring Arabs at cheaper prices, passionately quoting the Talmud Yerushalmi’s prohibition: “Do not hire gentile workers [when Jewish labor is available]!” Infuriated by Rav Nissenbaum’s speech, Rabbi Yehoshua Stampfer, the head of Petach Tikvah’s *va’ad*, ran up to the *bimah* to refute him. While staring at Rav Nissenbaum, he yelled: “You want us to welcome these workers – these sinners! – into our homes and give them work in our orchards, while they violate everything holy before our eyes and corrupt our children!” The workers in the audience, deeply insulted, stormed out of the *shul* in protest. Afterwards, Rav Nissenbaum spoke with the workers in their barracks all through the night, asking them not to blame all of the religious farmers for the painful words of Rabbi Stampfer. Most of the religious farmers *did* care for the workers, and if the workers could show a little more respect for Judaism and tradition, he believed the rift could be healed.

### Founding editor of HaMizrachi

Though Rav Nissenbaum was one of the earliest members of Mizrachi after its founding in 1902, he temporarily left the movement during the Uganda controversy in 1903, when many of Mizrachi’s leaders supported the plan to make Uganda a temporary “safe haven” for the Jewish people. But after his visit to the Land in 1905, he more deeply appreciated Mizrachi’s efforts to establish religious schools in the new *Yishuv*, and soon rejoined the movement.

In 1918, shortly after the conclusion of World War I and the issuing of the Balfour Declaration, Rav Nissenbaum was appointed the founding editor of *HaMizrachi*, a critically important role that would place him at the epicenter of Religious Zionism. Published in Warsaw, the original *HaMizrachi* was a weekly Hebrew-language newspaper that regularly featured contributions from the leading Religious Zionist thinkers of the era, including Rav Moshe Avigdor Amiel, Rav Shmuel Halevi Brot, Rav Yitzhak Yehuda Trunk of Kutno and, of course, Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook. The mainstay of the publication, however, was Rav Nissenbaum himself. In addition to regularly writing feature articles, he also contributed hundreds of Torah essays over the years in a regular column entitled *Resisim*, “Fragments”, in which he masterfully interpreted Biblical and *aggadic* sources through a modern, Religious Zionist lens.

Rav Nissenbaum repeatedly turned down positions of leadership in the Mizrachi movement, saying “I am of the *sganim* (the deputies)”, the people who generally act and do more than those in charge. But in 1937, when Rav Shmuel Halevi Brot moved to Antwerp, Rav Nissenbaum was forced against his will to serve as the President of Mizrachi in Poland, a position he would fill with honor and dedication as the dark clouds of the Holocaust descended upon Eastern European Jewry.



## A light in the darkness

In 1939, only months before the start of World War II, Rav Nissenbaum published his tenth and final book, *Masoret V'Cherut, Tradition and Freedom*. In his introduction, he writes: "This book is a child of its time, a frightening and dangerous time. In sadness was it born, in sadness was it shaped. But it will give encouragement and comfort to the generation that is passing and the generation that is to come, to strengthen their commitment to their nation, Torah and Land and their faith in redemption – a redemption that will come to the world through the pain and terror of our times, just as the prophets saw in their visions."

When the Nazis occupied Warsaw, he refused offers to escape the city. Already an old man, he chose to remain with his people, to help in any way that he could. Nathan Eck, a Warsaw Ghetto survivor, describes a secret meeting of Warsaw's Zionist leadership in early 1940, citing Rav Nissenbaum's powerful words. "It is time now for *Kiddush HaChayim*, the sanctification of life, and not *Kiddush Hashem*, the holiness of martyrdom. In the past, the enemies of the Jews sought the soul of the Jew, and so it was proper for the Jew to sanctify the name of G-d by sacrificing his body in martyrdom, in that manner preserving what the enemy sought to take from him. But now it is the body of the Jew that the oppressor demands. For this reason the Jew must defend his body to preserve his life" (Nathan Eck, *התועים בדרך המות: הרוי והגות בימי הפליון*, 244).

As conditions worsened in the Ghetto, Rav Nissenbaum remained a pillar of strength. In his diaries about life in the Warsaw Ghetto, Michael Zylberberg writes that he and several other educators came to Rav Nissenbaum for advice during the summer of 1941. Hoping to provide some joy for the children of the Ghetto, the educators planned to produce a play in which the children themselves would be the actors. But what play should they perform? Rav Nissenbaum urged them to choose a play based on Yitzchak Lamdan's powerful Hebrew poem, *Masada: A Historical Epic*. The educators were shocked. The story of Masada ends in disaster! How could they ask children to perform such a play under the horrific conditions of the Warsaw Ghetto? Rav Nissenbaum calmly explained: "We must try. We must at the very least prove to our young people that Jews can fight back against their oppressors! This play will give them strength and courage to stand up for themselves." The educators, including Janusz Korczak, were deeply moved. Rav Nissenbaum's advice was accepted, and in August 1941, thousands of young Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto sang the song of faith of Masada (Michael Zylberberg, *A Warsaw Diary, 1939–1945*).

The circumstances of Rav Nissenbaum's death are unclear, but one account in particular rings true. According to Moische Flumenbaum, on January 1, 1943 (24 Tevet, 5703), the Nazis shot Rav Nissenbaum when he refused to stand in the wagons bringing the Jews of Warsaw to Treblinka. Just before he died, he yelled out to other Jews: "Do not go to Treblinka!" With his final breath, he called upon his people to act and save themselves from the hated enemy.



HaMizrachi, December, 1920 and 100 years later in December, 2020.

רוח מיוחד דורש להספקתו מעשים מיוחדים, "a unique spirit can only be satisfied with unique deeds" (Rav Kook, *Orot Yisrael* 5:3). Rav Nissenbaum was a unique spirit, a Jew who refused to despair during the darkest of times. He believed with all his heart that the glory of *Am Yisrael* would soon rise again: "The day will come when the spirit of the redeemer and the prophet will return to the Hebrew nation, when the sparks of freedom hidden in the hearts of its children will merge once again into one great fire, and the heavy and rusted bonds of thousands of years of slavery will melt away from its body and soul. One desire, the desire for redemption, will overcome them all, and the Hebrew nation will return, upright, to its Land..." (Rav Yitzchak Nissenbaum, *היהדות הלאומית*, 120).

May we, the fulfillment of Rav Yitzchak Nissenbaum's dreams, never take the blessings and miracles of our time for granted. And may Rav Nissenbaum's life and teachings give us strength and hope, all the way to redemption!



**Rabbi Elie Mischel**  
is the Editor of HaMizrachi magazine.



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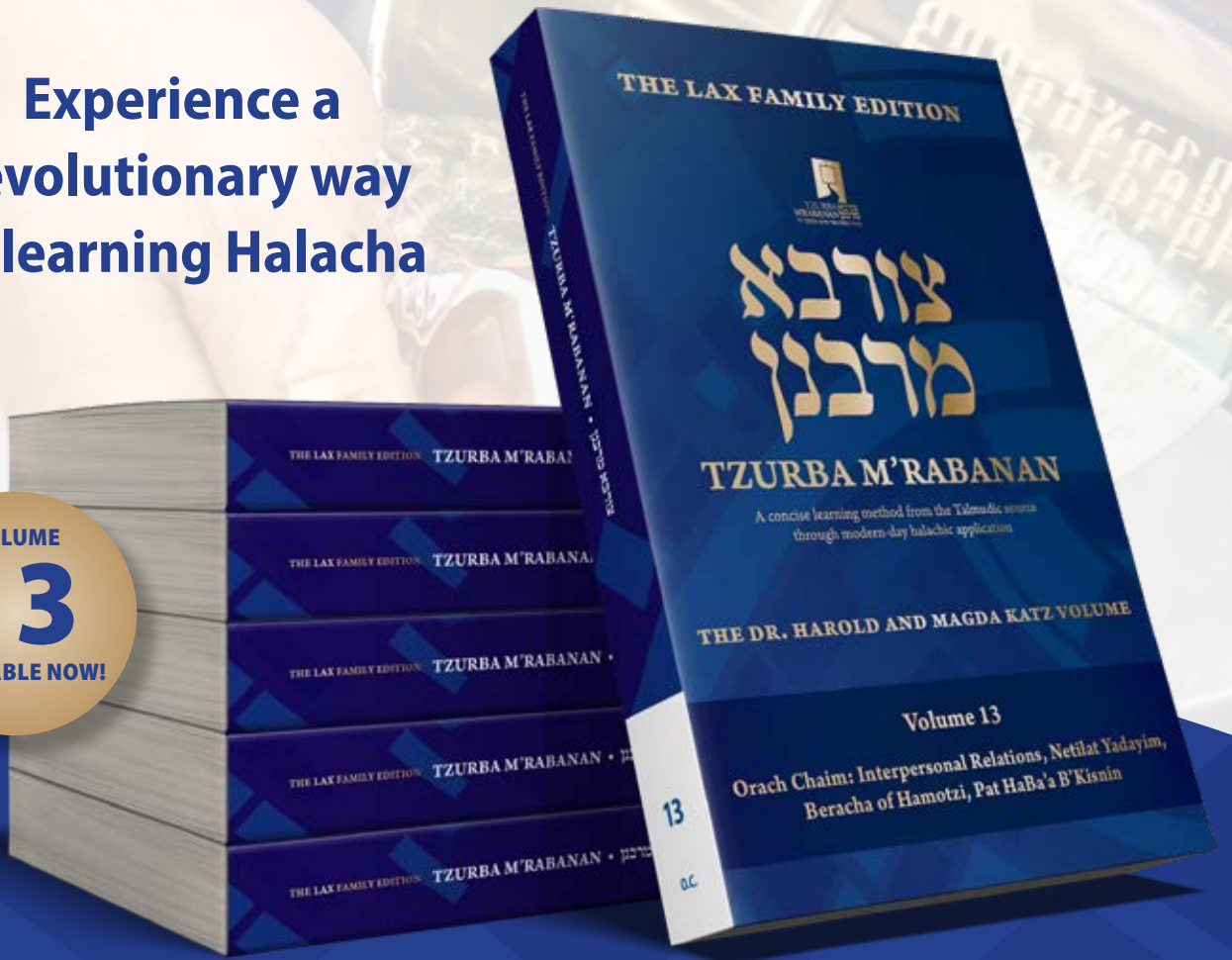


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# Paving His Own Path

## 3 Days in Boisk with Rav Kook

Rav Yitzchak Nissenbaum hy”d

A leading rabbinic figure of the early Religious Zionist movement in Eastern Europe, Rav Yitzchak Nissenbaum authored an extraordinary autobiography, *Alei Cheldi* (1930), in which he vividly portrays many of the greatest rabbis and Zionist leaders of his time. In this passage, translated for the first time, Rav Nissenbaum recalls his visit with Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook in 1903, just before Rav Kook made Aliyah to become the Chief Rabbi of Jaffa.

In the winter of 5664 I traveled around Courland in Western Latvia, and while in the city of Mitau, I decided to make my way to Boisk, even though it was extremely cold and the distance was very long – more than ten hours by wagon. The purpose of my visit to that city was to meet the local rabbi, Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook.

I had heard of Rav Kook many years earlier. While still young, I read his article about the Netziv of Volozhin in Sha’ul Pinchas Rabinowitz’s *Knesset Yisrael*, and as a former student of the Volozhin Yeshiva who loved his old rabbi [the Netziv], I greatly enjoyed what he wrote. Subsequently I read what he wrote in his *Ittur Soferim* [a short-lived Torah journal edited by Rav Kook in 1889 – Ed.]. While he was a rabbi in the city of Žeimelis, I heard that he had immersed himself in the study of the *kabbalah* and that he conducted himself with piety and austerity. When a guest came from a different city, he would give him food and drink, and on parting from him, he would thrust into a pocket of the guest’s clothing a slice of bread and accompany him four cubits outside his home, in fulfillment of the rabbinic statement that “we did not let him go without food and escort”. However, I did not take a special interest in this rabbi. He had not played any formal role in the *Chibbat Zion* movement or thereafter in the Zionist movement, nor had he authored any books of importance. What, then, had he to do with me?

However, at the beginning of this year (5664), I learned that he was to be installed as rabbi of Jaffa.

I spent three days in the city of Boisk, and each day I sat for several hours in Rav Kook’s home and we discussed various matters of *halachah* and *aggadah* and the questions of life. I saw before me not an ordinary rabbi who takes the well-trodden path, but an intellectual who paves his own. He had not yet found this path, but he was searching for it along the entire length, breadth, and depth of Judaism, diving into the sea of both Talmuds, *midrash*, philosophy, *kabbalah*, *Chassidut*, and even modern Hebrew literature, and surfacing with precious stones with which to pave his way.

On one occasion I asked him: “My master the rabbi, it is your intention to ascend the throne of the rabbinate of Jaffa and the Jewish *moshavot*. There you will face new questions that are absent in the exile: the questions of the



Jewish agricultural community. Have you made a point of engaging with and delving into the laws that are contingent on the land?”

“Yes,” he answered, “and not only the laws that are contingent on the land, but also the laws that are contingent on the *Beit HaMikdash*, for I am a *kohen!*”

When we once spoke of the second day of *yom tov* that is observed in the exile but which we do not observe in the Land of Israel, the rabbi spoke at length about the value of work and the harmony of Torah and daily life. Through this lengthy discussion I discovered that the rabbi grasped the manner in which Judaism develops over time and understood precisely those places where Torah diverges from the new philosophies that have taken form in the wider world. His aspiration was to weave the severed strand that binds Israel to the world and to restore to Judaism its former, all-embracing wings.

I parted from him in peace and friendship. A short time later, the rabbi made his way to the Land of Israel.



# BLAST

## From the Past

### רסיסים

כ"א.

לא ידעתי נפשי שמתני.

האסון היותר גדול, שהביאה הגלות לישראל, הוא זה, ששמה אותו לאינו יודע נפשו... ישראל נמשל לאגוז: אעפ"י שמלוכלך בטיס ובצואה, אין מה שבתוכו נמאס, אבל הוא שנה מה יש בתוכו והשב, כי כל עיקרו אינו אלא הקלפה שנפלה לתוך הסנופת של הגלות, ונמאס בעיני עצמו... ישראל נמשל לאגוז: אם אתה מכסה שרשיו בשעת נטיעו, אינו מצליח, ואי אפשר לגנוב המכס ממנו, מפני שהוא נשמע וניכר, אבל ישראל בגלותו החל לכסות מבניו הקטנים, הנטיעות הרכות, את שרשיו העתיקים וגם לטשטש את קלפת-רוחם הישראלית, וכל ישמע קולם העברי וכל יכירום כל רואיהם, כי הם זרע ברך ה'... ישראל נמשל לאגוז: מה אגוז זה, אתה נוטל אחד מן הכרי וכולם יורדין ומתגלגלין זה אחרי זה, כך ישראל לקה אחד מהם פולס מרגישים, אבל גם את הרגש הלאומי הזה מתאמצים לדכא בהזקת היר ולהעלימו מעין רואים... ולא רק האגוזים הקטנטנים שלנו שאסילו אם תפוצצם לרסיסים לא תמצא בהם כל גרעין אכיל, אלא הנטיעות שאתה תובעם ואינם ונותנים, ולא

פרך שבקרבנו, הם ש'עושים צדקה מאליהם', נותנים על פניהם כסוה אנושי כללי, לכל יהסדו בהם, כי מרגישים הב כצרות אחיהם ומגלים בזה את שרשיהם... הם אינם, מפרנסין את עניי עכרים עם עניי ישראל מפני דרכי שלום, כחוק לתורת ישראל הלאומית, אלא מפרנסין עניי ישראל עם עניי אחרים מפני דרכי האנושיות... והכל מפני ש, לא ידעתי נפשי שמתני הגלות, והיא גם רחמה את, עמי נדיב למרככות זרים... הגאולה - צעדה הראשון הוא: העם יודע את נפשו, מכיר מה שבתוכו ומערך כערכם את כשרונותיו וסגולותיו. את הקלפה שנפלה לתוך הסנופת של הגלות הוא, כמרק ושופך ומדיח, עד שנשטה יפה את שרשיו הוא מגלה לפני נטיעותיו, עד שהן גדלות בהצלחה ונעשות לזרע ברך ה'... אולם קודם כל צריך העם להכיר, שאינו יודע את נפשו, ואז יחל ללמוד לדעת אותה... כשהיו ישראל בסצרים משועבדים בטיס ולבנים והיו מאוסים ובזויים בעיני המצרים, ולשנעשו בני חורין ונגאלו ונעשו סגנים על כל באי עולם, והיו צוכות העולם תמהות... והיו ישראל אומרים להם: כשם שאתם תמהים עלינו, כך אנו תמהים על עצמנו - לא ידעתי נפשי שמתני וגם לעתיד לבוא כנסת ישראל אומרת לאומות העולם: אל תשמחי איכותי לי, כי נספתי - קמתי. הייתי יושבת בחושך - ונספתי, אולם

In this "Fragments" column from the April 4, 1920 edition of HaMizrachi, Rav Yitzchak Nissenbaum calls upon the Jewish people to "know their own souls" - to reject the humanistic ideals of Western civilization and proudly embrace the uniqueness of the Torah and the Jewish people, G-d's chosen nation.

Over 100 years later, Rav Nissenbaum's call for Jewish particularism and pride remains as powerful and compelling as ever, evoking the spirit of Mattityahu and the Chashmonaim. We are not, ultimately, "Greeks", "Americans" or "Argentinians", no matter how badly we hope to fit into our host societies. We are Jews, and whether we live in Israel or in the Diaspora, our primary responsibility is to strengthen and support the Jewish people. We are G-d's holy princes - and we must not be ashamed to say it!

"If in the hearts of our people there flows the warm blood of the Chashmonaim... all of our strength will be sanctified in order to fulfill the great goal of our people - the goal of Zionism!" (Rav Yitzchak Nissenbaum, Derushim v'chomer L'Drush, Derush Rishon, 1902).

### לא ידעתי נפשי שמתני מרכבות עמי נדיב

"I did not know my own soul; I have placed foreign chariots over the princes of my people."  
(Shir HaShirim 6:12)

The greatest disaster that exile has brought upon the people of Israel is this: that we have become a people that does not know its own soul...

The people of Israel are compared to a walnut: "Even though it is filthy and covered with dirt and excrement, that which is inside the nut remains unsoiled" (Chagigah 15b). But the nation has forgotten what lies within it and believes that it is only a shell that has fallen into the filth of exile, and so it has become disgusting in its own eyes.

The people of Israel are compared to a walnut: "If you cover its roots at the moment of planting, it will not thrive." And "just as a walnut cannot be stolen by customs thieves, for the matter will

be heard and known, so too the people of Israel: wherever a Jew goes, he cannot say that he is not Jewish, for he is recognized, as it is written, 'all that see them shall recognize them, that they are the seed which Hashem has blessed'" (Yishayahu 61:9, Shir HaShirim Rabbah 6:11). But the people of Israel in their exile have begun to "cover" their young children, concealing from these tender seedlings their ancient roots in order to obscure the unique spirit of Israel, so that their unique Hebrew voice should not be heard and others should not recognize them as the blessed seed of Hashem.

The people of Israel are compared to a walnut: "Just as with walnuts, if you take one walnut from a heap, all of the other walnuts fall down and roll after one another, so too if one Jew is stricken, all of them feel pain" (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 6:11). But today, [many Jews] make great efforts to suppress and hide their national feeling from the eyes of the nations. Not only our "tough walnut Jews", whom even if you break them into small pieces you will find little that is edible inside (and "do not give charity to their





brothers even if they are asked”); and not only our “average walnuts”, whom if you break them open you will find edible food inside (and “give charity when they are asked”); but even the “soft walnuts” among us, those who “give charity on their own initiative”, wear a disguise of humanism upon their faces, so nobody should suspect them of harboring any special feelings for their Jewish brothers and their Jewish roots.

They do not “support the poor gentiles together with the poor of Israel because of the ways of peace (וְדַרְכֵי שְׁלוֹם) (Gittin 61a), according to the laws of the Jewish nation, but rather support the poor of Israel together with the poor gentiles because of their “humanistic” ideals.

All this is because “I did not know my own soul” in exile, and have made the “princes of my people” into chariots for strangers.

The first step of redemption is this: a nation that knows its own soul, that recognizes what is within it and appreciates its abilities and uniqueness. The shell that fell into the filth of exile must be scrubbed clean until it is once again made beautiful. It must reveal its ancient roots to its children, its tender seedlings, so that they will grow strong and become “the seed which Hashem has blessed” (Yishayahu 61:9).

However, before anything else, the nation must recognize and admit that it does not know its own soul. Only then will it begin to learn and to know itself!

“When the people of Israel were in Egypt, enslaved in mud and bricks, they were abominable in the eyes of the Egyptians. But when they became free men and were redeemed, they became leaders of all

mankind, and all the nations were astonished. And the people of Israel said to them: just as you are amazed by us, so are we astonished by ourselves – ‘I did not know my own soul!’” (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 4:12).

In future times, “the congregation of Israel will say to the nations of the world: ‘Rejoice not against me, my enemy; though I have fallen, I shall arise’” (Micha 7:8). “I was sitting in darkness” – and so I fell, but “when G-d brought me out to light” – I arose! When I sat in darkness, “I did not know my own soul” and so I fell, but when I leave the darkness for the light, the knowledge of my soul will return – and I will arise!

● Translated by Rabbi Elie Mischel.

Above: Remains of the ancient synagogue in Umm el Umdan, Modiin (PHOTO: HOWIE MISCHEL)





# JEW'S with VIEWS

We asked five accomplished Jews from around the world: Which one of our forefathers or foremothers do you turn to most for inspiration?



## Ruth Diner

**A**vraham Avinu was the first to ask: Who created the world? A seeker from a young age, he searched for a transcendent creator. He went through this journey alone, rejecting Mesopotamian culture, all while dealing with childlessness, relocation and *Akeidat Yitzchak*, among other challenges.

The one constant was Avraham's deep faith in Hashem. He continuously rediscovered Hashem's kindnesses even within his struggles, seeing each challenge as a message from G-d to come closer to Him.

The Midrash (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 5:11) sheds light on Avraham's uniqueness. A king commanded two servants to fill reed baskets with water, but since the baskets had holes, all the water spilled out. While one servant was deeply frustrated, considering the task a complete waste of time, the other was content to fulfill his master's command. The Vilna Gaon explains that the king's intention was to clean the baskets, and so it was irrelevant whether the water could be contained. The goal was the process itself; the end did not matter.

Though he did not understand G-d's plan, and the *Akeidah* seemed to contradict Hashem's promises, Avraham was content to fulfill his Master's command. He remained focused on the process of serving Him, trusting G-d, completely – teaching all of us, his descendants, the power of simple faith.

As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks once wrote: "The man promised as many children as the stars of the sky has one child to continue the covenant. The man promised the land "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates" has acquired one field and a tomb. But that is enough."

*Ruth Diner is the deputy principal of Yeshiva College Girls High School in Johannesburg, South Africa.*



## Gil Hoffman

**W**hen I was born, my grandmothers on both sides wanted me to be named Ya'akov, in memory of one's father and another's grandfather. But my parents had already decided to name me Gil, which is one of several Hebrew words that mean happiness.

Just as the many words for snow in the Eskimo language each have different nuances, so do the Hebrew words for happiness. We later found out that Gil is joy from receiving good news – a perfect fit for my career as a journalist.

Out of respect for my grandmothers, my name is Gil Ya'akov, which can translate into "he will monitor with happiness", which fits my new job leading the monitoring of international media coverage of Israel.

Ya'akov Avinu had a very eventful life that would have kept the media busy. He was born into a power struggle with his brother that intensified. He used brilliant political maneuvers to purchase and then receive his father's blessing.

He dealt with challenges from his corrupt father-in-law and internal family strife among his wives and sons. Only when the first female journalist – Serah Bat Asher – informed him that his son Joseph was still alive and he reunited with him did he obtain the happiness he deserved.

Whenever there have been challenges in my life, I have turned to Ya'akov for inspiration and pondered how much he overcame. Our forefathers bequeathed their descendents – the Jewish people – their ability to prevail over every obstacle. May we continue to do that – with joy.

*Gil Hoffman is the executive director of HonestReporting, the former chief political correspondent of The Jerusalem Post and the only speaker known to have lectured about Israel in all 50 US states.*





## Rabbanit Margot Botwinick

**M**y 4-year-old son loves asking about Hashem. “Who are Hashem’s mommy and daddy?” “Is Hashem married?” “Is He stronger than Spiderman?” His questions are sharp and penetrating... for a four-year-old. Sometimes I wonder, is my relationship with G-d as thoughtful as his?

There are many Midrashim about how Avraham discovered G-d. Notably, in each story, he’s a different age! Which was it – was Avraham 3, 10, 48, 70 or 75 when he discovered Hashem? The explanation that speaks to my personal experience is that *all* of these seemingly conflicting accounts and ages are true. Avraham re-discovered G-d at each new stage of his life.

When Avraham looked up at the sun and moon as a small child, when he was asked to sacrifice his son, when his wife passed away, and as he went through all of life’s ups and downs – at each of these stages he understood G-d differently, each time with more depth than before.

As we go through our own lives, whether it’s becoming a parent, dealing with sickness, navigating complex relationships, moving to a new country or community, switching jobs or whatever opportunities or difficulties come along, Avraham challenges us to rediscover G-d over and over again. Our relationship with G-d can and should be as vibrant and layered as life itself.

*Rabbanit Margot Botwinick is the Rabbanit of Yeshiva University in Israel’s new Torat Tziyon program. She also teaches in Midreshet Torah V’Avodah and other seminars and institutions around Israel.*



## Rabbi Daniel Kraus

**S**o much has been written about these larger-than-life personalities, and more is yet to be written, taught, and debated around various aspects of their character and life. Despite the greatness of each of our forefathers and foremothers, it is Avraham who stands out for me as an icon of inspiration. Though Avraham earned and developed his greatness by actively seeking out G-d and subsequently committing himself to serve Him, his faith and commitment became a part of the Jewish people’s DNA.

At the core of Avraham’s moral code was his commitment to hospitality. I remember when I first read Manhattan restaurateur Danny Meyer’s signature book, *Setting the Table*, where he shares amazing stories and anecdotes that underscore the importance of great hospitality. Yet I couldn’t help but compare each and every example he shared to what amounts to the world’s first hospitality conference – the story of Avraham and his three guests.

In this story, Avraham demonstrated the foundational principles of true *hachnassat orchim*. Avraham waited outside of his home, seeking out opportunities to be hospitable. He did not delegate or pawn off any aspect of hosting guests; he rolled up his sleeves and got to work himself. And Avraham did not limit his hospitality to ‘important’ people. He didn’t ask probing questions to determine who his guests were and whether they were worthy of his attention. His goal was simple and pure – to give and to engage. Period. Nothing was contingent on status, and there were no ulterior motives.

May we follow in Avraham’s footsteps!

*Rabbi Daniel Kraus is the Director of Community Education at Kehilath Jeshurun in New York City and the Associate Vice President of Strategic Partnerships for the Birthright Israel Foundation.*



## Aviva Stern

**H**ashem takes Avraham outside and likens his future progeny to the stars of the sky. The Netziv explains that since Avraham was already promised descendants numbering the dust of the earth, the metaphor of innumerable stars teaches him, and us, something new. Each star is a unique source of light, with the ability to contribute and guide others. So too every child of Avraham can bring light to the world, influence others and impact the entire universe.

It’s easy to feel that we are merely going through the motions of life without making a significant difference. Even Avraham feared he wouldn’t leave a legacy! But Hashem reassures Avraham that he will. This promise, that each of his children will be a star, is an inspiration to me.

On Rosh Hashanah, I reconnected with a student I hadn’t seen in a very long time (she is now the age that I was then!). She said that every Rosh Hashanah during *Mussaf*, she thinks of the first Mishnah of *Masechet Rosh Hashanah* that we learned, sang, acted out and memorized together, back when she was in 5th grade.

I only taught 5th grade once, and I only taught Mishnah once. I was inexperienced, and it was hardly a highlight of my career. And yet, that sing-song Mishnah, and me, the teacher who taught it, are what she remembers during the most awesome moments of the year.

I’ve had the privilege of teaching Torah to hundreds of students over the years. When the daily grind of classroom teaching has me doubting whether I’m making an impact, I turn to Avraham and the promise he received: that every Jew can illuminate the entire world. That was Hashem’s promise to Avraham, and it’s a promise that continuously inspires me.

*Aviva Stern currently teaches at Ulpanat Rosh Tzurim and serves as a Yoetzet Halacha for the Efrat community. She has previously taught middle school in Efrat and New York.*



# The Crying that Suddenly Turned to Joy

Rabbi Yehoshua Weitzman

It was Chanukah, the night before my wedding, and I wanted to receive blessing and guidance from Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook zt"l. I spoke with Rabbi Yossi Badihi, Rav Kook's personal assistant, who suggested I come to Rav Kook's home at the time of Chanukah candle lighting, since everyone else would be at their homes lighting candles and Rav Kook would be available to speak with me.

I followed his advice, and so I merited to be with Rav Kook for the lighting of the Chanukah candles. The Rav prepared himself, washed his hands, made the blessings and lit the candles, and afterwards sang *Maoz Tzur*, according to the custom of the Jewish people. The Rav was not a singer, but he sang the song with great focus and intense emotion.

When he sang the first lines of each stanza, describing the suffering of the people of Israel throughout the generations, Rav Kook wept. But when he came to the final sentence of each stanza, which relate the various miracles of salvation, his crying was immediately transformed to joy, and he sang with great happiness. It was incredible to witness the change in Rav Kook's mood as he sang the different parts of the song.

It was evident that Rav Kook's mind was in control of his emotions and guided him at all times. When he had to be sad, he was sad from the bottom of his heart to the point of crying. And when he needed to be joyous, in one moment he was joyous with all his heart.



Rabbi Yehoshua Weitzman is the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Ma'alot Ya'akov, and was a student of Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook.



# Worse Than Extermination

Rabbi Reuven Taragin

Chanukah parties with family and friends are one of the highlights of this special time of year. Though an appropriate way to celebrate, the Shulchan Aruch *paskens* that these parties are not obligatory because, as opposed to Purim, Chanukah was not established as a holiday of “feasting and joy” (*Orach Chayim* 670:2). Why was Chanukah instituted this way? Why is the celebratory feast central to Purim, but not Chanukah?

The *Levush* suggests that Purim commemorates our salvation from the physical threat of annihilation, and so we celebrate it in a physical way. By contrast, Chanukah only commemorates a spiritual threat. The Greeks did not seek to annihilate us, but rather to assimilate us. Because our lives were not in danger, Chanukah is commemorated spiritually, through the *neiros*, but not with physical feasting.

The *Taz* rejects the *Levush* in very strong terms: “This is not correct!” The *Taz* felt that the *Levush* minimized the significance of the Grecian threat by presenting it as “merely” spiritual. He cites Chazal who say: גְּדוּל הַמַּחֲטִיא אֶת הָאָדָם יוֹתֵר מִהוֹרְגוֹ, “Causing another to sin is worse than killing him” (*Orach Chayim* 670:3).

The root of this teaching is the Midrash’s explanation of the Torah’s harsh treatment of the nations of Ammon and Moav. *Sefer Devarim* prohibits marrying converts from these nations – even ten generations after their conversion (*Devarim* 23:4)! The Torah even commands us to ignore their needs and welfare. The *Midrash Tanchuma* explains these verses as referring to a time of war. While we offer peace to other enemies before declaring war, we make no such offer to Ammon and Moav (*Pinchas* 3).

By contrast, the following verses exhort *Am Yisrael* to welcome converts from the nations of Edom and Egypt, whom we are permitted to marry after only three generations. Why do we welcome the converts from the ghettos and offered acceptance within broader society. Most Jews have taken

killed our children, but not the people of Ammon and Moav?

The *Midrash Tanchuma* explains that while the Egyptians attacked us physically, Ammon and Moav did something even worse, conspiring with Bilaam to ensnare our ancestors in sin with Moabite women. Luring another to sin is worse than killing them, because killing only removes the victim from this world, while sin removes one from the next world as well.<sup>1</sup>

For this reason, the *Taz* objects to the implication that a spiritual threat is less significant than a physical one. Chanukah commemorates salvation from a spiritual threat – a *greater* salvation than that of Purim!

The Midrash and the *Taz* remind us to live our lives in this world in a way that enhances our life in the next one, for “this world is merely an entryway into the next one” (*Pirkei Avot* 4:17).

For this reason, the Mishnah teaches that if someone is forced to choose between saving the life of his father (when one’s father did not teach him Torah) or his *rebbe*, he should prioritize his *rebbe*. His father brought him into this world, but his *rebbe* brings him to the next one.<sup>2</sup>

While most enemies of the Jewish people have sought to destroy us, the Greeks tried to change our identity and the nature of our religious conviction. The Chanukah victory was not merely a military victory of the few over the many, but a reassertion of and commitment to our unadulterated Jewish identity.

Chanukah commemoration throughout the generations emboldened our ancestors to resist the temptation to assimilate into the surrounding culture. It inspires us to remain a distinct people committed to our Torah and traditions.

In recent generations, sustaining our unique identity has become more difficult. In many countries, we were freed from the ghettos and offered acceptance within broader society. Most Jews have taken

advantage of the opportunity and assimilated in one form or another. Though we are still attacked and killed because of our ethnicity, we lose far more people to assimilation and intermarriage.

Assimilation and even intermarriage threaten Jews in Israel as well. Though we live as a free nation in our own land, modern media and the internet constantly expose us to the world’s culture and mores. Chanukah reminds us that what we learn from the world around us must not steer us away from our Torah and traditions.

May Chanukah inspire us with pride in our unique spiritual identity and strengthen our commitment to our eternal heritage.

*Chanukah Sameach!*

1. Many commentaries explain the Haggadah’s description of Lavan as having tried to “destroy everything”. Though Lavan did not want to kill Ya’akov and his family, he wanted to assimilate them, which was tantamount to their destruction.
2. This is why the best expression of *ahavat habriyot* (love of Hashem’s creations) is bringing them closer to Torah (*Avot* 1:12), and why the righteous are described as being alive after their death, while evil people are described as being dead even in this world (*Berachot* 18b). True life is in the next world. We are alive in this world when we live in a way that earns us a place in the next one.



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**Rabbi Reuven Taragin**  
is Educational Director of Mizrachi  
and Dean of the Yeshivat Hakotel  
Overseas Program.



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# Chanukah 2.0

Miriam White

**C**elebrating Chanukah is so familiar – the Hallel, menorah lighting, *sufganiyot* and family time – it’s easy to forget just how surprising it is that we celebrate Chanukah as a festival at all! Why do we observe such a significant holiday commemorating the rededication of the Temple, when we don’t have a holiday to celebrate its initial dedication during the time of Shlomo HaMelech? In fact, most people don’t even know the original date of the Temple’s dedication. Why do we place so much significance to the rededication of the Temple?

In an essay written by Rabbi Norman Lamm, “*On Being Too Practical*” (January 2, 1960), he offers a beautiful explanation:

“... the answer, my friends, lies in the differences between building and rebuilding, between constructing and reconstructing, between dedicating and re-dedicating. When there is a new movement, a new campaign, a new idea, a new vision, anything that has with it the power of novelty, then it is almost assured of freshness and vigor and enthusiasm. The decision to build something new is not a spiritually difficult achievement. Everyone is anxious, everyone is aroused, everyone excited. The people involved in such a project generally move forward with a great surge of strength and spirit. But the decision to rebuild, that is far more difficult. To approach a rubble and try to make of it a habitable home; patiently pick up the pieces of the past and paste them together; to take the tattered ruins of a former majesty and somehow restore them; to patch together what time and circumstance have ravaged - for this the masses have little enthusiasm, less spirit, and no patience...

*We therefore celebrate Chanukah in honor of the Maccabean achievement of rededication, while we have no comparable holiday commemorating Solomon’s achievement. We give historic reward for the zeal of undertaking a task which would no doubt have frightened weaker souls and dissuaded them by the threat of faded glory, tired emotions, and secondhand sentiment.”*

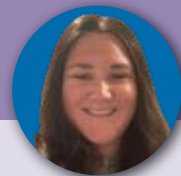
With these powerful words Rabbi Lamm inspires us to think about Chanukah as the holiday of rebuilding, when we remember that it is possible, with heroic effort, to rebuild that which has been destroyed. Innumerable times throughout the millennia, our people have thrived, created and built, only to see it cut down by enemies who seek to destroy us. Somehow, with extraordinary heroism, our forefathers and foremothers continuously got back up, repaired the damage and rebuilt.

In the days before the declaration of the State of Israel, one small yet significant decision remained undecided. What would be the official symbol of the new State? A committee was set up to receive suggestions, and over 450 ideas were submitted, including the *magen David* and the *hamsa*. Ultimately, Gavriel and Maxim Shamir of Shamir Brothers Studio were selected as the designers of the State of Israel’s official symbol. Their initial design featured a menorah with the Star of David hanging over each branch, two olive branches on the side, and the name Israel on the bottom. In the end, the menorah chosen for the design was the menorah depicted on the Arch of Titus, a peculiar choice criticized by former Chief Rabbi Isaac HaLevi Herzog, who said, “Apparently foreign

hands have been involved, and it is not all in accordance with the sacred text”.

Despite the critique, I believe the menorah depicted on the Arch of Titus and featured in the official symbol of the State of Israel reveals a message of rebuilding. What once was lost and destroyed will be rebuilt. To celebrate Israel, as it enters its 75th year, is to celebrate the greatest act of rebuilding in human history. Reflecting on the menorah of the Arch of Titus, we are inspired by the message of Chanukah – knowing that we too have arisen from destruction and exile to return to our Land.

שְׁחַיִּינוּ וְקִיְמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעַנוּ לְזִמְן הַזֶּה



**Miriam White**

is a Mashgicha Ruchanit at Midreshet TVA in Yerushalayim. Before making Aliyah she worked as the Director of Religious Guidance at YUHSG (Central) and as assistant director of NCSY GIVE.



# EIGHT WONDERFUL GIFTS for Eight Wonderful Days



## THE FEIGENBAUM SIDDUR Rabbi Yitzchak Feigenbaum

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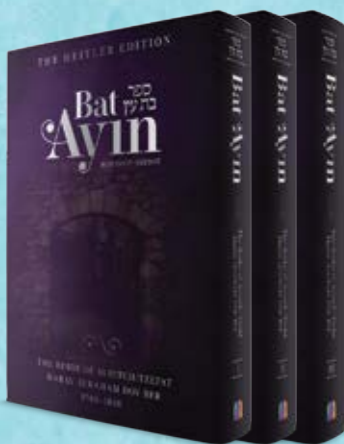
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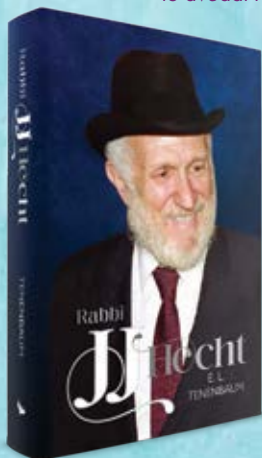
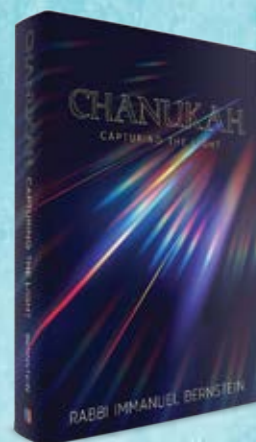
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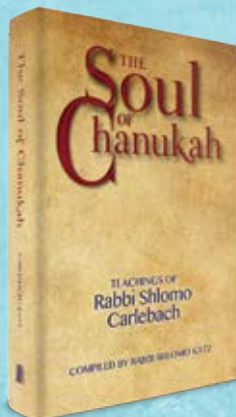
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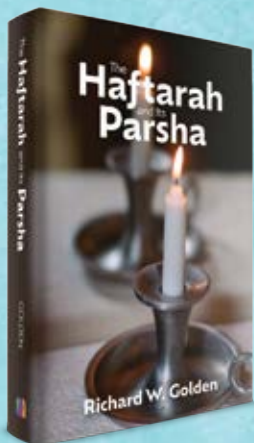
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# Reflections of Rav Soloveitchik on Chanukah

Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander

When the Rambam wrote the *Mishneh Torah*, he stated that his purpose was:

...so that the entire Oral Law might become known to all without difficulty... I have called this work *Mishneh Torah*, for a person will be able to first read the Written Torah and afterward read this [*Mishneh Torah*] (*Introduction to the Mishneh Torah*).

Given the Rambam's stated objective, there is much to be learned from the content and context of the Rambam's *Hilchot Chanukah*. When codifying the Biblical holidays, the Rambam lists them in calendrical order, and Rav Yosef Karo, in his *Shulchan Aruch*, follows suit. Rav Karo discusses the rabbinically instituted holidays of Chanukah and Purim in calendrical order as well. The Rambam, however, codifies Chanukah and Purim in historical order, placing Purim before Chanukah. Furthermore, the Rambam does not codify them in distinct treatises, but as one treatise, *Hilchot Megillah v'Chanukah* (The Laws of *Megillah* and Chanukah), as if they constitute one holiday. Additionally, while the Rambam generally discusses only the *halachic* dimensions of each holiday, he opens the laws of Chanukah with a review of the holiday's backstory. What explains these various oddities in the Rambam's codification of Chanukah?

Rav Soloveitchik explained that the shift in order and style of the laws of Chanukah reflects the stated purpose of the *Mishneh Torah* - to systematically summarize the Oral Tradition. Therefore, when organizing the rabbinic holidays, the order chosen was one consistent with the *halachic* development of these days. Purim is the holiday where the legal battle was waged over the ability to institute holidays not prescribed in the Torah:

Our rabbis taught: Forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses prophesied to Israel, and they neither took

away from nor added anything to what is written in the Torah, save only the reading of the *Megillah* [the holiday of Purim] (*Megillah* 14a).

The establishment of Purim set the precedent for establishing additional rabbinic holidays such as Chanukah. This idea is accentuated in the language used by the Rambam to codify the rituals of Chanukah, in which he regularly inserts references to the Purim holiday.

These days are known as Chanukah. Eulogies and fasting are forbidden **just as they are on Purim**, and the kindling of lights is a *mitzvah*... **just like the reading of the *Megillah***. All who are obligated **to read the *Megillah*** are also obligated in the kindling of the Chanukah light (Laws of Chanukah 3:3-4).

Unlike the *Shulchan Aruch*, written only with the aim of offering a practical guide for contemporary observance of *halacha*, the *Mishneh Torah* both delineates and defends the entirety of the Oral Tradition, leading the Rambam to explicitly anchor Chanukah in the precedent of Purim.

Similarly, since the Chanukah experience took place after the canonization of the Written Law, the story of Chanukah is the only holiday in which both the story and its legal juridical components are part of the Oral Tradition. Therefore, Maimonides must include both the stories and laws of Chanukah.

Rav Soloveitchik further noted that the only place the story of Chanukah is found in the Talmud is in *Tractate Shabbat* (21b). Why is the story taught there, and not in the tractate of *Megillah*, which focuses on rabbinic holidays?

Though Chanukah and Shabbat are distinct experiences, each plays off the other. Chanukah's holiday experience brings the light found in the Jewish home and allows it to radiate into the public thoroughfare. The laws regarding the *menorah's* location

and time of lighting are determined by pedestrians' ability to see its illumination in the public thoroughfare.

Yet this goal is only achievable when a Jew also experiences Shabbat. Shabbat is celebrated by retreating from the public arena of life. We experience Shabbat primarily within the privacy of our home, our spiritual epicenter. Introducing the festival of Chanukah in the middle of *Tractate Shabbat* reminds us that we can only perfect the public thoroughfare when the private arena is strong and vibrant. Conversely, if the Shabbat experience leads to a permanent withdrawal from broader society, it becomes an obstacle to achieving the divine purpose of the chosen people.

As we usher in this Chanukah season, let us commit ourselves to the sacred synergy between Shabbat and Chanukah, to both calibrating our personal spiritual compass and fulfilling the mission of *Knesset Yisrael* as "a light unto the nations".



**Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander**

is President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, an international network of 30 Religious Zionist institutions committed to illuminating the beauty and relevance of authentic Torah Judaism in the modern world. Prior to making Aliyah, Rabbi Brander was Vice President at Yeshiva University and the senior rabbi of the Boca Raton Synagogue, overseeing its explosive growth from 60 to more than 600 families.

(HEADSHOT: SALLY KATZIN)



# Why Do We Need a “House” on Chanukah?

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War - Chanukah 1973 - soldiers asked if they were permitted to light Chanukah candles in the field.

Rabbi Ya'akov Frank, grandson of the famed Rabbi Tzvi Pesach Frank zt"l, permitted soldiers living in tents to light Chanukah candles, but forbade soldiers in the field without tents from lighting candles with a blessing. Why?

Rabbi Frank's ruling is based upon Tosafot, who write that a person who sees the Chanukah lights but is not able to light candles himself makes the following blessing: "Who has wrought miracles for our forefathers, in those days at this time" (Shabbat 23a).

This blessing is unusual and unique to the Chanukah candles. When it comes to other *mitzvot*, like shaking a *lulav*, there is no special blessing for one who cannot fulfill the *mitzvah* himself but witnesses another person doing so. Why is the *mitzvah* of Chanukah candles different?

Tosafot offer two explanations: 1. The Chanukah miracle is uniquely special, and so a blessing is made available even to those who do not light themselves; 2. There are people who do not have a house, and are therefore unable to fulfill the commandment of lighting Chanukah candles. Tosafot's second answer is the basis of Rabbi Frank's ruling. Without a house, it is impossible to fulfill the commandment of Chanukah lights!

The *mitzvah* of Chanukah candles is radically different from the *mitzvot* we fulfill on Purim. On Purim, we all gather in the synagogue and read the *Megillah* before a great audience. On Chanukah, however, each individual lights the *menorah* in his own house. Why is the *mitzvah* performed this way? Why is it necessary to light candles in one's home?

Rabbi Ya'akov Moshe Charlop zt"l, a student of Rav Kook, explains that the lighting of Chanukah candles is meant to resemble the lighting of the candles in the Temple. However, as opposed to the Temple in which the *kohanim* are responsible for the lighting, on Chanukah we are *all kohanim*! On Chanukah, we all have the special merit to illuminate the world with the light of G-d. This is why we light inside our homes, individually; for we are all partners with G-d!

As a general rule, we light the candles at the entrance of our homes (Shabbat 21a). However, the Gemara adds that in times of danger we light the candles on a table inside of the house. Simply understood, we light inside the home because saving a life overrides all the commandments. The Ritva writes that it is permissible to light inside the home even if there is merely a risk of anguish or hatred.

Rav Kook, however, offers a deeper explanation. He explains that by placing the candles outside, we share the light of Torah,

its commandments, holiness, ideas and values with all of mankind. There are times, however, when the world is not ready to receive the light we are trying to transmit. During these times of danger, when evil winds blow in the world, we hold on to our inner light and try to illuminate the light within our house, within our homes and families.

It is possible to take this one step further. In order to influence the external world, we must first build our own, internal world - our homes! We must first gather all of our inner strength before we can bring the light of G-d to the world in a profound and impactful way.

Let us strengthen ourselves by constantly guarding and preserving the light of Torah, by being meticulous about our observing the Torah and its commandments, and equally meticulous about maintaining high standards of morality and integrity. On Chanukah, let us act in a priestly way - not only remembering the *kohanim*'s role in lighting the candles and shedding light on all of *Am Yisrael*, but also elevating ourselves and illuminating our surroundings and all those who are near and far from us.

*Chag Urim Sameach!*



**Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon**

is Head of Mizrahi's Educational Advisory Board and Rabbinic Council. He serves as the Chief Rabbi of Gush Etzion, Rosh Yeshivah of the Jerusalem College of Technology and is the Founder and Chairman of Sulamot and La'Ofek.



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# Chanukah in Hindsight

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks <sup>1</sup>/<sub>33</sub>

History itself has a history. Our perspectives shift over time, and some moments may only seem meaningful in retrospect. We don't always understand the real significance of an event until many decades later or sometimes even centuries. A classic example of this is the history of Chanukah.

At one level, the Chanukah story is very simple. From the days of Alexander the Great of Macedon, Israel was under the dominion of the Alexandrian Empire of the Greeks. This meant that in the third century BCE, it was under the control of the Ptolemies who were based in Egypt and Alexandria. Then, during the second century BCE, Israel came under the domain of the Seleucids who were based in Syria.

The Seleucid leader, Antiochus IV, who modestly called himself Epiphanes, meaning "G-d made manifest", decided to force the pace of Hellenisation on the Jews of the Land of Israel. Among other things, he forbade the public practice of Judaism, erected a statue of Zeus in the Temple, and offered swine before it as a sacrifice, in a desecration of Jewish values that Jews of the time called the Abomination of Desolation.

An elderly Priest called Mattityahu, and his sons and their supporters known to history as the Maccabees, rose in revolt. Over the next three years they scored a momentous victory over the Seleucids, reconquering Jerusalem and bringing it back under Jewish sovereignty. They cleansed the Temple and rededicated it, lighting the great Menorah, the candelabrum that stood in the Temple, for a celebration lasting eight days.

That is the story of Chanukah as captured in history in the first and second books of Maccabees. But that is not how the story was ultimately told within the Jewish tradition, as it was ruled that the two books of Maccabees, and others under the same title, should be called *Sefarim Chitzoni'im*, apocryphal works, and kept out of the Bible. The Chanukah story that is told instead is a very different one, with a powerful message.

The Talmud tells us that in the first century, in the last days of the Second Temple, a Rabbi called Yehoshua Ben Gamla established a network of schools throughout Israel. The result of this was that from the age of six, every child in the country received a publicly-funded universal education. This was the first education system of its kind anywhere in the world, and also a clear indication of the now familiarly Jewish commitment to education and to ensuring our children are literate in their heritage. According to the Talmud, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Gamla's memory is blessed, because without his intervention the Torah would have been forgotten in Israel. Without him, there would have been no survival of Judaism and ultimately no Jews.

What Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Gamla and the other Sages understood, and what was not understood at the time of Chanukah itself, was that the real battle against the Greeks was not a military one, but a cultural one. At the time, the Greeks were the world's greatest in many fields. They were unparalleled in their advances in art, in architecture, in literature, in drama, in philosophy. Even today, their achievements have never been surpassed. But Jews nonetheless believed, and surely history has borne this





out, that there is within Judaism, within ancient Israel and still within its heritage to today, something special. Something worth fighting for. Judaism, with its emphasis on the sanctification of life, and the belief that every human being was created in G-d's image, held eternal truths that we could not abandon. This was the unique distinction between the culture of the Greeks and the world of Torah and Judaism. As a result, Jews have always known that the real battle is not necessarily fought on the physical battlefield with physical weapons, but rather in the hearts and minds of future generations.

So Judaism, and the Jewish people, became a faith and a nation no longer focusing on its military heroes, but on its spiritual ones. It became a civilisation rooted in texts, and in teachers, and in houses of study. We became the people whose heroes were teachers, whose citadels were schools, and whose passion was learning and the life of the mind. The end result was that Judaism did survive and thrive throughout the centuries, whereas Ancient Greece, the Greece of Athens, the Greece of Alexander the Great, declined. In fact, it was only a short time after the events of the Chanukah story that Greece began its decline, and Rome rose to take its place.

That is the message of Chanukah, and to articulate our story, we focus in a rather beautiful and symbolic way on just one tiny detail of the original chain of events: That one cruse of pure, undefiled oil was found by the Maccabees among the wreckage and defilements of the Temple, just enough to light the Menorah until more oil could be sourced.

One of the most interesting aspects of this shifting perspective from the original way of telling the story to the current way is reflected in the name of the festival itself. Chanukah, from the word *chanuch*, means re-dedication. That is what the Maccabees did to the Temple. They re-dedicated it, as described in the books of Maccabees. Yet over time, Chanukah became connected to the word *chinuch*, a word meaning education. What we re-dedicated was not a physical building – the Temple – but living embodiments of Judaism, namely our children, our students, the people to whom we teach and hand on our heritage and values. From being the festival of a military victory, Chanukah became the festival of a spiritual and civilisational one.

I believe this history of our history has a message for us all. It teaches us this fundamental truth, as relevant to our lives today as ever before: To defend a country physically you need an army, but to defend a civilisation you need education, you need educators, and you need schools. Those are the things that kept the Jewish spirit alive and the Menorah of Jewish values burning throughout the centuries in an everlasting light. Often what seems at the time to be the headline news, the military victory, is, in the hindsight of history, secondary to the cultural victory of handing your values on to the next generation.

If we do that, we will ensure that our children, and theirs, light up the world.

Chanukah Sameach!







# Chanukah and The Hope We Build Together

## Personal Reflections on the Life and Teachings of Rabbi Sacks

Jonny Lipczer

**R**abbi Sacks was given many accolades, honors and titles. He was a lord and a professor. But the title that was most important to him was “Rabbi” – teacher. Because teachers, education, synagogues and schools are the things that kept the Jewish spirit alive and Jewish values burning throughout the centuries in an everlasting light.

He was passionate about education, and he always made time for young people in particular. In the classroom, he’d stoop down to their level, even sitting with them on the floor.

A few years ago, my then seven-year-old son asked me a question about one of the biblical personalities. I didn’t know the answer, but I knew who would. I emailed Rabbi Sacks, and a few days later, I received a response by way of a WhatsApp voice note, spoken in his characteristically eloquent style, and at a level that my son could understand. He had a unique ability to be able to direct a message to any audience, regardless of their age or background – and he embraced technology in ways few religious leaders have, so that he could be more accessible to the people that matter.

Over the last two years we have missed Rabbi Sacks’ voice of moral clarity, his leadership and his wisdom. During these

turbulent times in which we are living, his perspective on current affairs would be profoundly affirming and filled with hope.

In the dark winter months, the Chanukah lights are one of the great symbols of Jewish hope, illuminating the message of survival against all odds.

The Greeks, Rabbi Sacks said, gave the world the concept of tragedy, while Jews gave it the idea of hope. You can’t have Judaism without hope.

While discussing a fascinating Talmudic argument (Shabbat 22a) about Chanukah, Rabbi Sacks drew out an incredible message of hope:

Can you take one Chanukah light to light another? Usually, of course, we take an extra light, the *shamash*, and use it to light all the candles. But suppose we don’t have one. Can we light the first candle and then use it to light the others?

Two great Sages of the third century, Rav and Shmuel, disagreed. Rav said ‘No’. Shmuel said ‘Yes’. Normally we have a rule that when Rav and Shmuel disagree, the law follows Rav. There are only three exceptions, and this is one.



Why did Rav say you may not take one Chanukah candle to light the others?

Because, says the Talmud, you diminish the first candle. Inevitably you spill some of the wax or the oil. And Rav says: Don't do anything that would diminish the light of the first.

But Shmuel disagrees, and the law follows Shmuel. Why?

The best way of answering that is to think of two Jews: both religious, both committed, both living Jewish lives. One says: I must not get involved with Jews who are less religious than me, because if I do, my own standards will fall. I'll keep less. My light will be diminished. That's the view of Rav.

The other says: No. When I use the flame of my faith to light a candle in someone else's life, my Jewishness is not diminished, it grows, because there is now more Jewish light in the world. When it comes to spiritual goods as opposed to material goods, the more I share, the more I have. If I share my knowledge, or faith, or love with others, I won't have less; I may even have more. That's the view of Shmuel, and that is how the law was eventually decided.

This is the message of hope. The hope that if we work together – rather than in isolation – and share our Judaism, we can make things better. We can take the flame of our faith and help set other souls on fire.

In *To Heal a Fractured World*, Rabbi Sacks describes the difference between optimism and hope: "Optimism and hope are not the same. Optimism is the belief that the world is changing for the better; hope is the belief that, together, we can make the world better. Optimism is a passive virtue, hope an active one. It needs no courage to be an optimist, but it takes a great deal of courage to hope. The Hebrew Bible is not an optimistic book. It is, however, one of the great literatures of hope."

If we work together, we can make things better. That, says Rabbi Sacks, is hope. If you lift someone else, you yourself are lifted.

Chanukah is our celebration of the end of the Greek occupation of Jerusalem and the restoration of Jewish sovereignty to Jerusalem. The word Chanukah, from the word *chanuch*, means rededication – which is what the Maccabees did to the Temple. Chanukah is also connected to the word *chinuch*, meaning education. Rabbi Sacks explained that what we rededicated was not a physical building – the Temple – but rather living embodiments of Judaism, namely our children, our students, the people to whom we teach and hand on our heritage and values.

Those of us who grew up in youth movements or student organizations felt his dedication to education and his encouragement of young people even more acutely. Rabbi Sacks would publish booklets specifically with them in mind, such as the *Little Books of Big Questions* for students, and the *Letters to the Next Generation*. He would regularly make visits to university campuses, and he was often a guest at Bnei Akiva, during good as well as challenging times, offering strength and encouragement when it was most necessary.

In 2002, I led Bnei Akiva in the UK. Just weeks into the start of the year we heard news from Israel that a suicide bomber had detonated his belt on a bus in Tel Aviv, and that one of our

members, Yoni Jesner hy"d, was on that bus. Yoni was rushed to hospital, and we quickly arranged an evening of prayer at our London headquarters. Yoni was still in intensive care, but we knew there was no hope.

As news spread of the gathering, Rabbi Sacks called me to say he would like to be with us. He didn't wait to be asked; he knew this is where he was needed. He addressed the packed room, giving strength to Yoni's many friends and his wider Bnei Akiva family. It was a challenging moment for Bnei Akiva, and in Rabbi Sacks we had a leader we so desperately needed to light the way. His presence with us that night was a tremendous source of comfort and hope.

Whenever Rabbi Sacks visited Israel, I would invite him to speak to Bnei Akiva students on their gap year. He never once refused. On one occasion, when he had finished speaking, he sat down, turned to me, and asked, "Was that okay?" This was one of the Jewish world's greatest orators, the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth, and he was asking *me* if he spoke well! This spoke volumes about his humility. He was a foremost leader of the Jewish community, but recognized that I was the leader of this group, and so my opinion mattered to him. In three short words, I learned from him that it is not the honors we receive that matter, but the honor we give.

Rabbi Sacks is missed every day. May his voice continue to illuminate the world with light and hope, and may his memory and legacy be an everlasting blessing.



**Jonny Lipczer**  
is Director of Communications  
at The Rabbi Sacks Legacy.



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(FACING PAGE LEFT PHOTO: NICOLA GREEN)





# “A Fire in his Soul”

## Chana Bunim Rubin Ausubel Reflects on the Life of Irving Bunim



*Perhaps the most impactful lay leader in American Jewish history, Irving Bunim zt”l was a man driven by Ahavat Yisrael, love of Israel. A successful businessman also known for his insightful commentary on Pirkei Avot, Ethics from Sinai, Bunim used his Washington contacts to rescue thousands of Jews from the Holocaust and help them resettle in the United States. As a driving force behind the Young Israel movement and Rav Aharon Kotler’s partner in founding Beth Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, New Jersey, Bunim set Orthodoxy on a path to success in the United States. In parallel, he was a proud Religious Zionist who made extraordinary efforts on behalf of the new State of Israel.*

*When he passed away in December of 1980, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein declared his death an “aveilus d’rabim”, a loss for the entire community. December 27, 2022 (the 3rd of Tevet) marks Irving Bunim’s 42nd yahrzeit.*

*In 2018, Eric Haliuni (Weisberg), founder and Executive Director of Toldot Yisrael, interviewed Chana Bunim Rubin Ausubel, author of As Long As The Candle Burns, about her father’s extraordinary efforts on behalf of Israel and the Jewish people. The following is an edited and abridged version of their conversation.*

### Tell me a little bit about your father’s love for Israel.

My father had the greatest love for *Eretz Yisrael*, more than I could ever describe. It’s easier to give examples of how his love for Israel translated to action.

In 1947, he was in the textile business, where he worked with huge crates of textiles. Together with Eddie Silver, the District Attorney of Brooklyn, he hid surplus guns from World War II under the textiles in these huge cartons and shipped them to Israel.

That same year, Dov Gruner was sentenced to be hanged by the British for his participation in the Irgun’s arms raid on a police station in Ramat Gan. My father flew to England and made an appointment with Lord Pakenham, the Under Secretary of State, hoping to convince him to rescind the sentence of Dov Gruner. He tried very hard, but sadly, Dov was hanged.

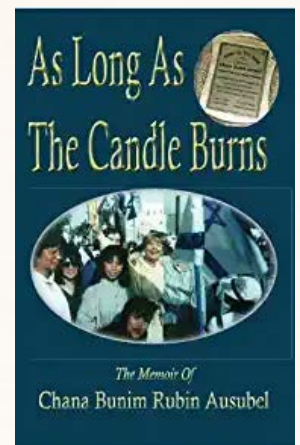
My father yearned his whole life for an independent state. When he came to Israel after independence and saw an Israeli flag, he wept. I also remember, one year shortly after the Independence War, when a ship arrived in New York from Israel. My father had recently had surgery and was very sick. But he was adamant: “I’m going to see our ship!”

He also loved Jabotinsky and was one of his supporters, working with him to convince the Jews of Eastern Europe to move to *Eretz Yisrael*. People would ask my father, “How can you have Jabotinsky in your home one day and host a Torah scholar like Rav Elchonon Wasserman hy”d in your home the next day?” He

said, “I like *emet*, I like truth and honesty. I like an honest and a truthful Torah scholar and I also greatly admire a true Zionist - and that was Jabotinsky.”

For many years, Ben-Gurion refused to allow Jabotinsky to be buried in Israel. In 1964, when Ben-Gurion was no longer Prime Minister, my father flew to Israel to meet with Levi Eshkol about the importance of bringing Jabotinsky to Israel for burial, which they finally did. In 1980, the year before my father died, Menachem Begin presented him with the Jabotinsky Order Life Achievement Award.

He wanted to live in Israel, but my mother had a new baby and was afraid of the living conditions here, so they remained in America. Still, he felt that everybody should have a *chelek*, a part of *Eretz Yisrael*. He bought property in Herzliya, gave it to a *moshav* and said to the people in the *moshav*: “Listen, if you keep the laws of *Shemitta* and all the laws of the Torah, I will pay all the taxes and you can keep all the profit from this property.”



The memoir written by Chana Bunim Rubin Ausubel.



My father also had a great love for the Hebrew language. Though he was born in Volozhin in 1909 and moved to the United States at about the time of his *bar mitzvah*, he spoke Hebrew fluently. When we had to read difficult Hebrew literature in school, the students in my class would come to our house and my father would teach it to us. The teacher wondered how everybody got such good grades when they weren't paying attention in school! When reading the *Kuzari*, he would tell me where Yehuda Halevi was quoting from *Tehillim* or elsewhere in *Tanach*; he knew all the sources! He also knew *Bialik's* poems by heart.

### Can you tell me a little bit about how he was active during the Holocaust?

Oh, boy! My brother wrote a big book on this, called *A Fire in His Soul*, a biography of my father.

We didn't have a single relative in Europe, but he was a great lover of Rav Kook, and he said, "Every Jew is my brother." That's why he helped. He gave up his business, he gave up everything, to speak and raise funds to help Jews during the Holocaust.

Throughout the war, he was always in Washington trying to get visas for Jews in Europe to bring them to the United States. He played a critical role in bringing the *Mirr* Yeshiva to Shanghai and ultimately to Oswego, New York. When the Yeshiva arrived in America, he was in Oswego all the time bringing them pots and pans, and things they might need.

My father, one of the leaders of the *Va'ad Hatzalah*, brought hundreds of European *rashei yeshiva* and their students from Soviet- and Nazi-occupied territories to America, including Rav Aharon Kotler of Kletzk. Together, he and Rav Kotler went to Washington DC where they succeeded in getting Dean Acheson, the Secretary of State, to help a great many of our brothers. Rav Aharon didn't speak English, so my father was the interpreter. Rav Aharon once said to Acheson, in Yiddish, that "one Jew, saving one Jew, is worth more than your life!" He urged my father to translate what he said into English. "Tell him, Bunim, tell him!" But how could my father say that to Dean Acheson? So instead my father said to Acheson: "Queen Esther said that she was given a kingdom in order to save the Jewish people. Mr. Acheson, perhaps this is why you were given the great position of Secretary of State - so that you can save people!"

I remember that there was an emergency during those difficult years, and he had to raise thousands of dollars immediately. It had to be done quickly, even though it was Shabbat. So on Shabbat morning, he got in a car together with a rabbi and drove to the

Jewish neighborhoods. People said, "If Irving Bunim and a rav are driving in a car on Shabbat, it must be an emergency." He raised thousands of dollars that day to save Jews. *Pikuach nefesh*, the preservation of life, overrides the entire Torah.

### Growing up, I knew of your father because of the Young Israel movement.

He started the Young Israel movement. He and a few others felt that the old kind of synagogues were not attracting young people, who would only show up at the synagogue to say *kaddish*. He was afraid that Orthodox Judaism would be lost, as Conservative Judaism was then very strong.

He said, "Let's build a *beit kneset* that attracts young people - a *shul* where they wouldn't sell *aliyot*, a *shul* with singing, to encourage and inspire young people to come to the synagogue." That's how the Young Israel movement started. He even designed the movement's emblem!

### How did your father's example influence you?

It's because of my father that I am here, in Israel, since 1981. He always said that this is where Jews belong. It was his *chinuch* (education) that inspired me to become a principal so that I could inspire other young people to come here, to *Eretz Yisrael*. ■



Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Rabbi Aharon Kotler and Irving Bunim. (PHOTO: BMG LAKEWOOD)

## TOLDOT תולדות YISRAEL ישראל

Toldot Yisrael is a Jerusalem-based nonprofit dedicated to recording and sharing the firsthand testimonies of the men and women who helped found the State of Israel. 1,300 video interviews (more than 4,000 hours of footage) have been conducted to date and are housed in The National Library of Israel, the official library of the State of Israel and the Jewish people. The interviews and several acclaimed film series are shown in schools across the Diaspora, sent by Israel's Ministry of Education to every history teacher in Israel, and can be viewed at [www.youtube.com/toldotyisrael](http://www.youtube.com/toldotyisrael). More information about Toldot Yisrael is available at [www.toldotyisrael.org](http://www.toldotyisrael.org).



# A Tekoa Miracle that Began in Chevron

Sivan Rahav-Meir

(PHOTO: DAVID HIRSCH)

*On Sunday night, May 8, Yair Maimon of Tekoa was drinking tea with his wife on his front porch when he spotted an Arab terrorist climbing the security fence a few meters away. Without hesitation, he quickly rushed his wife and seven children inside and grabbed his M16 rifle, which he owned as a civilian member of the community's security team. When he rushed out his front door, he realized the terrorist had outflanked him. He turned around to discover the terrorist coming towards him with a knife in his hand. At short range, he shot and killed the terrorist just in time, averting what could have been a disaster for the entire Tekoa community.*

“**H**i Sivan, I know you don't usually publish stories like this, but I feel the need to share.

My name is Avraham Maimon, I'm the brother of Yair Maimon, the hero from Tekoa who killed the terrorist who tried to break into his house yesterday.

Here is another side to the story: On Sunday evening, May 8, my mother was sitting in her home in Kiryat Arba, when she began to feel an overwhelming distress in her heart. Although she was tired and exhausted from Shabbat where she hosted all her children, she felt that something big was about to happen.

In a spontaneous decision, she walked down to the Cave of the Patriarchs, the tombs of our fathers and mothers, and began to weep and pray, though she did not know for what.

In those very moments, Yair and his wife decided to go out for tea on the balcony of their house, and you know what happened next.

When I first called my mother to tell her what was going on, she just replied: “I know something happened. Just tell me everyone is okay.”

There is a hidden world that we do not see: a connection between mother and son; a connection between the Fathers and Mothers of our Nation to us, their children; a connection between Chevron and Gush Etzion; a connection between prayer and reality. May we hear good news.”



A picture uploaded by Tekoa resident Yair Maimon to Facebook on May 9, shows him and his wife drinking coffee outside their home alongside the caption, 'Waiting for the next terrorist.' (PHOTO: FACEBOOK)



**Sivan Rahav-Meir**

is a media personality and lecturer. She lives in Jerusalem with her husband, Yedidya, and their five children, and serves as World Mizrahi's Scholar-in-Residence. She is a primetime anchor on Channel 2 News, has a column in Israel's largest newspaper, Yediot Acharonot, and has a weekly radio show on Galei Tzahal (Army Radio).



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# JERUSALEMITES

*An occasional series of interviews with notable veteran olim who make their homes in Jerusalem.*

David Olivestone



## PEARL BOROW

*Rebbetzin Pearl Borow is one of the most beloved teachers in Jerusalem's Anglo community. She made Aliyah in 1999 when her husband, Rabbi Aaron Borow, retired from his shul in the USA. Although now in her upper 80s, Rebbetzin Borow continues to enthusiastically teach several weekly classes on Navi and other topics for the OU Israel Center, Emunah Women, and Tovei Ha-Ir, amongst others. Elegant, dynamic, and highly articulate, she describes herself as a "people person", a characterization that is validated whenever she speaks.*

**If I may say so, you've reached quite an advanced age. Do you have any plans to slow down?**

I do think about it once in a while... but I love teaching and I'd rather you suggested that I give up making *challah* every week than to give up teaching.

**Over the years you must have given many thousands of shiurim. Surely you don't have to spend any time preparing now?**

But I love to learn! Whenever I give a *parashat haShavua* shiur, there's always something new to discover. When I teach *navi*, my delight is to find some *peshat* or angle that I haven't thought of before. So on the days when I'm giving a class, I do work on it for several hours. There is simply no end to learning.

**You must have had an extensive Jewish education.**

Believe it or not, I had to fight for it. My father was a *rav* in Brooklyn, NY, the sound of learning Torah filled our home, and I was very much attracted to it. However my parents didn't think it was necessary for me to have a formal Jewish education because I was a girl. So I started in public school, but I wasn't happy. I kept saying I have to learn how to *daven*, so at six years old I campaigned to switch to the Crown Heights Yeshiva, which I soon did.

**Did your father take more notice of you after that?**

No, those were the times when girls' education simply wasn't important in families like ours. But my mother became my champion. She tried to keep me busy, because she didn't know what

to do with me. She introduced me to poetry at a very early age, the most amazing poetry, and I really think that that was what led me to *navi*, with the feeling of words fitting together in a certain rhythm of speech, conveying the magnificent ideas and messages of the *nevi'im*.

**Where did you go to high school?**

My father said, "It's enough, you know how to *daven*", so he registered me in a public high school, but I fought like crazy once again and in the end I went to the Yeshiva University High School for girls. From there I went on to Brooklyn College and I also took evening courses at the Brooklyn division of YU's Teachers Institute, which was the only place where a young woman could continue to learn in those days.



### Did you then go to work?

I majored in math, which I really enjoyed in high school and found to be very beautiful. This was in the 1950s, which saw the beginning of computers, and I got a job which I loved at a pension plans company, creating retirement plans for teachers all over the USA. But I had gotten married in my last year of college, and once I had my first child it simply was not acceptable in our world to continue to work.

### Your husband became a community rabbi?

When he got his *semicha*, he was hired as the rabbi of the *shul* in Montgomery, AL. I always said I wouldn't marry a rabbi because I felt that my mother was quite unappreciated as a *rebbetzin*. But I have to admit, it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. Still, Montgomery was day and night different from Brooklyn. Most of the Jews there were very far from *frumkeit*, but it was a wealthy community with beautiful homes, and southern women were really coddled and treated with gallantry. This was just before the beginnings of the civil rights movement, and we stayed there for five years.

### Did you do any teaching there?

No, the Hebrew school was very small and only my husband and the *shochet* taught. We wanted to start a day school, but couldn't get even five families to join. Eventually, we realized we had to move, not only because we needed schools for our kids, but also because of how the local culture was rubbing off on them. The final straw was when one of my boys came into *shul*, pointed to a *chumash* and said, "Gimme that cotton-pickin' bible".

### Where did you move to?

In 1964, my husband became the *rav* of Congregation Nusach Hari B'nai Zion, a large *shul* in a very nice neighborhood in St. Louis, MO.

### What was your role there?

I was a very active *rebbetzin*, and I had no intention of doing anything professionally, but soon I realized we

needed more income if we wanted to send our kids to college. I took some courses at Washington University and spoke to one of the administrators, who told me that my math degree and my knowledge of computers were way out of date, and "...in any case, you're a people person, didn't you ever think of teaching?" I said I didn't think I would be a good teacher and went home very discouraged. Now I'm not making this up, but the moment I got home the phone was ringing. It was the principal of the local day school who was desperate to find a teacher for *navi* and *dinim*. I was about to say no, but I heard my voice saying, "I think I'd like that, but I don't know how." He told me he would help me, and he really did, and got me started. I was hooked, really hooked, and I never turned my back on it after that. I did take some courses to hone my skills, but I now regret very, very strongly that I didn't pursue any higher degrees in education because there were a lot of curricular ideas I wanted to work on, but I lacked the tools.

### When did you start teaching adults?

After 18 years, it was time to move on from the day school. I started teaching courses in Judaism and Jewish history to unaffiliated and non-observant adults in the community. That's when I really started to appreciate the wonders of Jewish history and world history. Soon I was asked to speak for other organizations, and I also gave a Shabbat afternoon *shiur* in my house. All that continued until my husband retired and we made *Aliyah*.

### Why didn't you just stay on in St. Louis?

My husband believed that a retired *rav* should never stay in his community, and we both felt very strongly that Israel was where we belonged. I was a very staunch member of Bnei Akiva as a teenager, and I felt very comfortable when we came to Jerusalem.

### When did you begin teaching here?

A friend introduced me to the OU Israel Center and I first taught a course on the

seven *nevi'ot*, and helped start a women's *beit midrash* in the afternoons. I was also invited to teach for Emunah and Tovei Ha-Ir, and for many years I have taught a weekly *navi* class in Hebrew for women in my *shul*.

### Why do you love to teach navi so much?

It's music; even the prose is music. The writing is utterly beautiful, and it is so full – there is so much to learn. So much of the philosophy of Judaism is derived from the words of the *nevi'im*, as well as so much of our history. And that's why I love to teach the commentary of Malbim so much. He really wants you to understand the *peshat* – how specific words are used to convey the deeper meaning. He is sometimes wordy and hard to get through, but when he's done, he really leaves me breathless.

### Finally, would you say that you have fulfilled your dreams?

In terms of my family I must say that I have, because, *baruch Hashem*, I have many great-grandchildren, although I'm hoping that He will let me see a fifth generation. As far as my teaching is concerned, as I said, when I set out it was never actually a dream of mine, but I cannot even put into words the tremendous, tremendous satisfaction I get out of it.



**David Olivestone**

is an award-winning writer who served on the staffs of the British Museum and of the Encyclopaedia Judaica. He was Director of Communications at the Orthodox Union in New York before making *Aliyah* to Jerusalem with his wife Ceil in 2013.



# HALLEL and SHAMMAI

## A Mizrahi Chanukah Misadventure





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