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הַמִּזְרָחִי HAMIZRACHI

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US AND THEM?

A Reappraisal of the Religious Zionist–Charedi Relationship

Dedicated in memory of Mr. Kurt Rothschild, גרשון בן מרדכי ז"ל, World Mizrachi's legendary president. Kurt was a spiritual giant, a 'one in a generation' man with a never-ending spirit of contribution and commitment to כלל ישראל in general and Religious Zionist causes in particular.



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“The truth is that the time has come to rethink our relationship with Agudat Yisrael.”

Rabbi Moshe Avigdor Amiel's 1934 essay on the relationship between Mizrachi and Agudat Yisrael PAGES 36–37

“FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN”

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HAMIZRACHI

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FROM THE

Editor



An Afternoon with Rav Steinsaltz zt”l

On the 6th of Av we will commemorate the third *yahrzeit* of Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz zt”l, one of the most impactful and colorful rabbis of our generation.

My wife’s uncle was a close friend and supporter of Rav Steinsaltz for many years. When his mother passed away about 13 years ago, Rav Steinsaltz wished to pay a *shiva* call, and needed a driver to bring him from New York City to the *shiva* house and from there to the airport. Knowing of my fascination with Rav Steinsaltz, the family arranged for me to be the driver.

I quickly learned to expect the unexpected. After settling into the car, he asked me to tell him about myself. When I explained that I was the assistant rabbi at the Young Israel of Staten Island, he said: “I have family in Staten Island. But let me ask you – what connection does a sane man like you have with Staten Island?” But he was just getting started. He said: “Assistant rabbi? Some assistant rabbis are just meant to arrange chairs. Are you one of those?”

Rav Steinsaltz was brilliantly, deviously funny; he was the antithesis of self-important rabbis who take themselves far too seriously. Speaking about the rabbinate, he said “the Chief Rabbi of Rome is the only Chief Rabbi I like, since he’s a part-time Chief Rabbi.” And he had no qualms about speaking bluntly, or even sharply; he didn’t mince words. In our discussion regarding interfaith dialogue, he said: “The Jewish *machers* forced me to meet with nine Catholic cardinals and give them a *shiur*. The cardinals didn’t want to meet with Reform or Conservative rabbis – only Orthodox!” After the *shiur*, Cardinal Francis George of Chicago later told Rabbi Yehiel Poupko that “Rabbi Steinsaltz spoke to us for an hour and offended us from beginning to end! But he was right about everything he said...” On

Jewish-Christian dialogue, Rav Steinsaltz said: “We dance together, but we don’t dance the tango. Just the cha-cha!”

One of my teachers at Yeshiva University was Rabbi Ozer Glickman zt”l, whom we affectionately referred to as the “ROGue” (Rabbi Ozer Glickman). Rabbi Glickman was a Jewish Renaissance man; a Torah scholar, philosopher of the law, banker, musician and more; a man who could not be placed inside a box or “classified” as a particular type of Jew. Rav Steinsaltz was cut from the same cloth; he was a man of extraordinary curiosity and wisdom who was too complex and authentic to be categorized. He was a rebel in spirit, the “rogue” among the rabbis, who perceived the world differently than mainstream Torah scholars. As Isaac Bashevis Singer once said, “only small fish swim in schools.”

Schmoozing together in the kitchen, Rav Steinsaltz’s conversations moved

seamlessly back and forth, from the Talmud to mystery novels and from the world’s deepest lake (Lake Baikal, in Russia) to the Tanya. Rav Steinsaltz was fascinated by almost everything, including science, sports, and people. “I am also interested in people – sometimes I even like them!”

There are many biographies published in the Orthodox world that portray great rabbis as, in Rav Steinsaltz’s words, “plastic saints” – as perfect people who never made mistakes. Rav Steinsaltz, however, understood that perfection is for angels; that it is our *striving* that makes us uniquely human. He wrote that “every man is a contradiction... a combination of the holy and the trivial. One has to integrate it all into some workable unity by building one’s life as though it were an annex in the court of the Holy Temple, the inner chambers of which one can never be sure of entering.” If anyone has ever succeeded in living these words, it is Rav Steinsaltz himself. May his memory be a blessing, for all of *Klal Yisrael*.



(ARTWORK: ILAN BLOCK)

Elie Mischel

Rabbi Elie Mischel
Editor

● A version of this tribute originally appeared in the Jewish Link.



Rabbi Doron
Perez

Senseless Hatred

Cause and Cure

How is it possible to be genuinely kind to someone and to hate them at the same time? How is it possible to learn Torah and fulfill *mitzvot*, yet somehow harbor feelings of hatred for others? Remarkably, the Talmud discusses this very point regarding the generation of the destruction of the Second Temple:

“During the Second Temple period the people occupied themselves with Torah, *mitzvot* and loving kindness. Why, then, was the Temple destroyed? Because they acted with *sinat chinam* – senseless hatred” (Yoma 9b).

Indeed, the generation of the *churban* (destruction) is described by the Sages as one occupied with Torah learning, *mitzvot* and loving kindness. How could such a lofty generation also be guilty of causeless hatred?

The Netziv of Volozhin explains: “As a result of the senseless hatred in their hearts that one harbored for the other, they suspected all those who did not follow their path as a G-d-fearing Jew of being a Sadducee and a heretic” (*HaAmeik Davar*, Introduction to Bereishit).

The Netziv suggests that the generation of the *churban* showed loving kindness to their *own* communities, but not to *other* communities. They believed that only *their* community’s way of serving G-d was authentic, while all the others were suspected of perverting the Torah and G-d’s will. They loved and cared for those who shared their



The people showed endless kindness to members of their own factions, but scorned and hated those whose values and beliefs threatened their own.

philosophy and traditions, but rejected those who did not.

Prior to the destruction, sectarianism reigned supreme. The nation divided itself into many distinct sects – the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots and Sicarii – and even more sub-factions within these sects. The people showed endless kindness to members of their own factions, but scorned and hated those whose values and beliefs threatened their own. They saw the world in black and white; there was no middle road. It was a zero-sum game of ideological intolerance. The hatred and infighting in Jerusalem was so disastrous on the eve of destruction that Josephus described the society as “a great body torn in pieces” (*The Jewish War*, Book 5:1).

This was the causeless hatred that led to destruction.

Sons of light and sons of darkness

How do disagreements deteriorate into such deep hatred?

The Second Temple era War Scroll, found near the Dead Sea in the caves of

Qumran, suggests an answer. The text, likely written by the Essenes, describes its followers as “the sons of light” and all others – including fellow Jews – as “the sons of darkness”.

Language like this changes the rules of discourse. When we use words like these, we are no longer debating views or ideas, but rather delegitimizing the other as a person. These phrases cause a debate of *ideas* to devolve into vicious *ad hominem* attacks against other people. It’s no longer about right and wrong, but about you and me. All who think and act like me are “good” and bring spiritual light and morality to the world, while all who disagree with me are “bad” and immoral, the cause of spiritual darkness. When I am absolutely right and you are absolutely wrong, when the other is totally disqualified and considered part of “the dark side”, we are treading dangerously close to the abyss of senseless hatred.

Never-ending elections

We are deeply blessed to be living in a renewed and independent Jewish state. At the same time, our people are struggling with many internal and external challenges – extremely divisive issues that touch on the very essence of Jewish life and destiny. This is particularly true today as we prepare for a fifth election in under four years. For the last four years, the electorate has been split down the middle, unable to form a stable ruling majority.

This troubling reality has eroded our sense of unity. The ongoing elections not only cost billions of shekels and make sustainable governance impossible but they are also having a damaging and corrosive effect on the country's societal cohesion. When parties are in constant "election mode", they remain forever focused on the shortcomings of political opponents and seek to sharpen their differences in order to differentiate themselves and attract votes. This is true during the internal party primaries and then again in the national elections, leading to a continuous culture of criticism and condemnation.

At the same time, differences of opinion have become so intense that debates quickly descend into delegitimization, demonization and sometimes even blatant hatred. There is little respectful and democratic discourse anymore; we have lost even a basic sense of *derech erez* and civility in our political interactions.

The cause of divisiveness is clear. But what is the cure?

In search of national peacemakers

"Aharon the *kohen* ascended *Hor Hahar* and died there in the fortieth year... in the fifth month on the first of the month" (Bamidbar 33:38). The Torah makes a point of telling us that Aharon passed away on *Rosh Chodesh Av* – the only *yahrzeit* date explicitly mentioned in the Torah. Remarkably, this date is

recorded in *Parashat Masei*, which is read every year around the time of *Rosh Chodesh Av*.

None of this, of course, is coincidence. The Torah is charging us to recall the life and legacy of Aharon HaKohen as we begin observing the Nine Days of mourning for the Temple. At this time of year, when we reflect on the spiritual cause of the *churban*, we must think of Aharon. Aharon is the antidote to the culture of our time, when disqualifying and canceling others is *de rigueur*, Aharon shows us the way forward.

More than anyone else in Jewish history, it is Aharon's personal example, qualities and expertise that are needed most in our time. At the very dawn of our national history, he was the "national peacemaker", doing everything in his power to encourage peace and harmony among his fellow Jews regardless of their prior differences and painful disagreements.

Today, we are in desperate need of national peacemakers in the spirit of Aharon – bridge builders and unifiers who can overcome divisions and polarizing politics. Unity does not require uniformity and differences need not lead to disqualification. We need leaders who passionately but respectfully argue for their own views without vilifying others. We must reject the language of "sons of light" and "sons of darkness" and remember that objective truth can include diverse views

and beliefs. Rabbinic teachings are replete with such famous principles as "70 facets of the Torah" and "both opinions are those of the living G-d". The Torah has multiple facets, interpretations and opinions, all of which can contain truth.

In this edition of *HaMizrachi* we focus on the relationship between the Religious Zionist and Charedi communities and that which both separates and unites us. It is our hope and prayer to encourage a discourse concerning our ideological disagreements in a spirit of profound *Ahavat Yisrael*, for our bonds of love and camaraderie far outweigh our disagreements. We must never forget that we share a common destiny.

"If we were destroyed, and the world with us, due to baseless hatred, then we shall rebuild ourselves, and the world with us, with baseless love, with *ahavat chinam*" (Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, *Orot HaKodesh* III, 324).

Rabbi Doron Perez is the Executive Chairman of World Mizrachi.



Rabbi David Blackman

Worthless Abominations or a Pleasing Aroma?

The Meaning of Haftarat Shabbat Chazon

“Do not continue worthless flour offerings; the incense is an abomination...” (Yishayahu 1:13). In the *haftarah* of Shabbat Chazon, we read Yishayahu’s harsh words describing G-d’s rejection of our sacrifices. But why single out the flour offerings (*mincha*) and incense (*ketoret*)? And why is the *mincha* considered “worthless”, while the *ketoret* is an “abomination”? The Meshech Chochmah on Devarim answers these questions with a powerful insight.

Most sacrifices can be brought by individuals or in partnership with others. The Gemara, however, explains that the *mincha* offering is an exception to this rule. When the Torah describes the *mincha* offering, it refers to an individual, a *nefesh*: “When a person (*nefesh*) brings a *mincha* to Hashem...” (Vayikra 2:1). From this verse, the rabbis derive that a *mincha* offering may only be brought by an individual and not in partnership with another (Menachot 104b).

Interestingly, though the *mincha* cannot be brought in partnership with other individuals, it may be brought on behalf of the entire Jewish people. The *korban omer*, the *shtei halechem* and the *lechem hapanim* are all *mincha* offerings brought on behalf of the nation. The Meshech Chochmah explains that this is due to the difference between a partnership (*shutfut*) and a community (*tzibbur*). Whereas a partnership is made up of two or more people, a community is viewed as a unified, singular entity. The Jewish people as a whole are referred to as a *nefesh*, as one one expanded soul: “The soul (*nefesh*) of Yaakov’s household that came to Egypt...” (Bereishit 46:27). When a community brings a *mincha*, it is as if one

person – the united soul of Israel – has brought the sacrifice.

The *ketoret* is made up of 11 ingredients, one of which, the frankincense (*chelbena*), has a terrible smell. By itself, the *chelbena* smells awful, but as part of the *ketoret*, its negative smell is nullified and its unique qualities combine with the other ingredients to produce a beautiful scent.



When the wicked join together, they use their destructive energies to harm the world. But when they are scattered among others, their destructive tendencies are not merely nullified, but actually benefit the world!

The Gemara explains that the *ketoret* represents the Jewish people. There are among us “*chelbena* Jews” who possess an unpleasant “spiritual aroma”. Our mission, however, is not to exclude them but to make them a part of the broader community, so their negative qualities are nullified and their unique positive attributes can bring out the good in the rest of the nation.

“The scattering of the wicked benefits themselves and the world... the assembling of the wicked injures themselves and the world” (Mishnah, Sanhedrin 72b). When the wicked join together, they use their destructive energies to harm the world. But when they are scattered among others, their destructive tendencies are not merely nullified, but actually benefit the world! They will use their unique qualities to help the community! When the Jewish

people are united, even the wicked contribute to the cause of holiness!

In the *haftarah* of Shabbat Chazon, it is the lack of this unity that Yishayahu laments. He refers to the people as “chieftains of Sedom” and the “people of Gomorrah”, for the people were driven only by self-interest, losing all sense of community and unity – a failure that can only lead to destruction. For this reason, Yishayahu says: “Do not continue worthless *mincha* offerings” – for the *mincha* can only be brought by a united community. When communal unity dissolves, the *mincha* offering becomes a “partnership offering,” which has no *halachic* standing and is a “worthless” offering.

And what of the *ketoret*? If the Jewish people act only as individuals without communal unity, the wicked “*chelbena* Jews” are no longer nullified among the righteous, but rather stick out like a sore thumb, “damaging themselves and the world”. Without unity, the *ketoret* no longer produces a beautiful scent, but rather becomes disgusting – an “abomination”!

“Then the *mincha* offerings of Yehudah and Yerushalayim shall be pleasing to Hashem as in the days of yore and in the years of old” (Malachi 3:4). When *Am Yisrael* learns to transcend its selfishness and join together in unity, our *mincha* offerings will no longer be “worthless” but rather pleasing and sweet to Hashem. May we soon see that day!

Rabbi David Blackman, a close student of Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein zt”l, and his wife Deborah have been the leading rabbinic couple of the Jewish Learning Centre (JLC) in Sydney since its inception in September 1996.



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Interview with Rabbi Aaron Rakeff-Rothkoff

I THOROUGHLY ENJOYED your Shavuot issue of *HaMizrachi* (Vol. 5, No. 2) and especially enjoyed the major interview with “Arnie” Rothkoff which is how I knew him as my classmate at Manhattan Talmudical Academy, class of 1955. He was one of the smartest kids in our class – a class with some very smart kids, Gerry Blidstein and Judah Rosenberg (Yehudah Ben-Meir) among others.

I recall that “Arnie” was the editor of the “Academy News”, a bright light in the world of *yeshivah* journalism. Reading about his extraordinary accomplishments was most rewarding.

In 1959, I spent a summer at Kfar Haroeh and Yeshivot Bnei Akiva with Rabbi Moshe Zvi Neriah, and subsequently helped found the American Friends of Yeshivot Bnei Akiva, experiences which increased my appreciation of Rabbi Rakeff-Rothkoff’s history with Bnei Akiva even more.

Your magazine stands out amongst the numerous offerings on the table in the foyer of the Lido Beach Synagogue. Keep up the excellent work and I promise to not read your publication during *davening* but will take it home and read it there!

Alan H. Zwiebel

Lido Beach, New York, USA



On bridge building among tribes

I RECENTLY PICKED up a copy of *HaMizrachi* magazine and found it to be a fine magazine that is dedicated to what the old Mizrachi movement represented, both in America and Israel – that of a unifying and moderate movement that contributed to the stability of the government. I note in particular the essays by Rabbi Doron Perez (*Jerusalem - In Need of Bridge Builders*) and Rabbi Ari Rockoff (*Tribes*) which powerfully call for unity among the broader people of Israel.

Dr. Philip M. Fishman

Newton, Massachusetts, USA

Religious Zionism and Chassidut

I LOVE HOW the magazine has evolved. The past issue on Shavuot and Religious Zionism’s incorporation of *Chassidut* (Vol. 5, No. 2) was both highly relevant and enlightening. Thank you!

Meir Traube

Woodmere, New York, USA

Important, but inaccurate

I BELIEVE THAT Rabbi Dov Singer is one of the foremost educators of our age. He is leading, in my opinion, a revolution in *chinuch* that all serious Jews should pay attention to.

Rabbi Singer laid out his educational vision in *Religious Zionism Needs Chassidic Education!* in the most recent *HaMizrachi*. In it, he offered many critiques of contemporary Jewish education in Israel and offered his view of how important educational issues should be tackled. However,

in his righteous zeal to engage the reader, he chose to dig up old communal wounds, portraying an overly-simplistic view of the Jewish world – *Litvaks* vs. *Chassidim*.

While it is true that these groups of Jews have ongoing and real ideological differences that deserve public discourse and serious discussion, this is not what Rabbi Singer did. Rather, he set up a strawman in order to make his point. While many (myself included) have critiques of the *Litvish* model of education, these critiques are not well-served by needlessly engaging in simplistic broadsides.

Litvish Jews have a great and storied heritage. They have produced many great *talmidei chachamim*, including some of Rabbi Singer’s own *rebbeim!* Furthermore, Jews of both *Litvish* and *Chassidic* stripes not only walked into the gas chambers together, but also worked hand in hand to rebuild Jewish society in both Israel and the Diaspora. The civil war between these two sides of Ashkenazi Judaism has long been over.

Jewish communities, and especially our young men and women, are better served through a model that has a *Litvish* mind and a *Chassidic* heart, which offers seriousness and spirituality. A model such as this could offer more than either model should be able to alone. We are lesser as Jews and educators when we think otherwise.

Zachary Beer

Washington Heights, New York, USA



World Mizrachi mourns the passing of our dear friend and legendary President

Kurt Rothschild z"l גרשון בן מרדכי ז"ל

A humble giant, who lived for the People, Torah and Land of Israel, with unshakeable determination, exceptional *menschlichkeit*, pioneering leadership, and endless love.

We are heartbroken and our hearts go out to his wife Edith, and children Lenny, Naomi, Michael and the extended Rothschild family at this time.

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Ariel Chesner

Flying the Flag 2022: The Grand Finale



“Flying the Flag” is a revolutionary new program launched this year by the Department for Religious Affairs in the Diaspora. Intended to develop a new generation of *shlichim* from the Diaspora, “Flying the Flag” is a year-long series of programs for gap-year and college students that directly address their future role as *shlichim* in the Diaspora. After engaging over 1,700 students from the Diaspora throughout the year, we concluded a year of training with two exciting Yom Yerushalayim events celebrating the value of *shlichut*.

First, we sent two Flying the Flag ‘Dream Team’ delegations to Europe and the United States to celebrate Yom Yerushalayim. Each ‘Dream Team’ consisted of four talented educators who worked together to inspire Jewish communities with a love for our eternal capital through Torah, music and multimedia. The European team electrified diverse audiences in Sweden, Switzerland, Austria, England, Scotland, and France, while the US team inspired students in the tri-state area, Philadelphia, and Chicago. I’ll never forget a moment during the US trip when a young woman said to me: “Next year I plan to join the IDF. Never in all my years in school have I had such a powerful Zionist experience. Thank you!”

Our second event, in partnership with Masa, brought gap-year students in Israel together to celebrate Yom Yerushalayim with an inspirational musical performance by Rabbi Shlomo Katz. Our keynote speakers, Rabbi Doron Perez and Rabbanit Shani Taragin, spoke of the importance of being a *shaliach* for *Am Yisrael* wherever you are in the world. Hundreds of students signed up to help RZA-Mizrachi USA inspire the American Jewish community with a love for Israel and Religious Zionism in the years ahead.

May they soon return home, together with all of *Am Yisrael*!

Ariel Chesner is the Director of the Center for Religious Affairs in the Diaspora at the World Zionist Organization. He previously served as the Director of the Resource Development department at World Bnei Akiva. Ariel lives with his wife Ephrat and their 5 children in a small yishuv in southern Israel.



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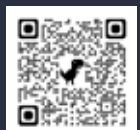
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MOVING BEYOND THE CHAREDI-DATI LEUMI DIVIDE

An Introduction by Rabbi Aron White



On September 28, 1971, a Mizrachi-Hapoel HaMizrachi declaration signed by over 800 rabbis was published in *Der Tog-Morgen Journal*, a Yiddish New York newspaper, calling on American Jews to join Mizrachi and support its many schools and kibbutzim in Israel.

The signatories predictably included Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Rabbi Aharon Soloveitchik and Rabbi Joseph Lookstein, the leading Religious Zionist rabbis of the era. Younger rabbis who would later gain great prominence, including Rabbis Norman Lamm, Aharon Lichtenstein and Shlomo Riskin, also signed the declaration. But the letter also included some surprising signatories. Rabbi Naftali Neuberger, the Executive Director of the Ner Yisroel Rabbinical College for over six decades, joined the declaration, as well as Rabbi Eliyahu Machlis, a leading figure within Torah UMesorah and head of the Bensonhurst Vaad HaRabanim.

What led rabbis from a wide spectrum of Orthodoxy to join together in support of Mizrachi? Though we cannot speak for those who are no longer alive, the declaration itself may hold the answer. It called upon the Jewish community to support Torah education, fund religious communities in Israel, and fight for legislation in the Knesset that would follow halachah. What Orthodox rabbi – whether Religious Zionist or Charedi – wouldn't sign such a declaration?

In this edition of *HaMizrachi*, we step back to reflect on the complex relationship between the Religious Zionist and Charedi communities. Though our communities differ in significant ways, we share far more in common as Orthodox Jews committed to Torah and mitzvot. Our writers, both Religious Zionist and Charedi, honestly and openly explore these differences and what our communities can learn from one another.

In the spirit of Tisha B'Av, may we learn to disagree with mutual respect and love, and do our part to speed the coming of the redemption.



Rabbi Aryeh Meir

“FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN”

On Charedim and Religious Zionism

Historically, Religious Zionism has generally been verboten in the Charedi world. In this essay, Rabbi Aryeh Meir, a member of the Charedi community in Israel, argues that both Charedim and Religious Zionists would benefit from greater interaction between the two communities.

At the height of the pandemic, Israel’s Health Ministry’s policy of housing Covid-19 patients in specially designated hotels facilitated an unusual encounter between Charedi and Religious Zionist *yeshivah* students. While sharing the same hotel lobby (that was converted into an ad-hoc *yeshivah* study hall), the two groups got together for a joint discussion panel on their communities’ respective worldviews. Notwithstanding differences between them, it seemed natural to *yeshivah* students of both ilks to include their new peers in discussions they were already conducting among themselves.

But from the perspective of many Charedi leaders, the panel was grounds for banning *yeshivah* students from entering Covid-19 hotels altogether. The dialogue itself, irrespective of its content, was considered worthy of censure. “This is how the *Haskalah* movement began,” one rabbinic figure noted.

Over the last few decades, very little Torah or public dialogue has taken place between the two communities. This is true not only of human discourse but also of books and other literature. My great-grandfather made a living by selling books in Bnei Brak. When he approached the Chazon Ish to ask whether he should sell books written by Rav Kook zt”l, the latter responded: “*Halachah* books – yes; *Aggadah* books – no.” Since then, all of Rav Kook’s books, together with other Mizrahi-affiliated publications, have been removed from Charedi bookshelves and from internal *halachic* and Torah discourse.

From the Charedi perspective, it seems that the Religious Zionist way of life shares a similar status to full-blown secularism. Indeed, every Charedi school student has heard the adage that “a *Mizrochnik*” – the familiar pejorative for Religious Zionists – “is worse than Esav.” The former tries to have it both ways, maintaining superficial allegiance to both traditional and secular practices, which is even worse than the latter. In Charedi eyes, there is no common ground, no scope for meaningful dialogue.

While there were understandable causes for the original break between the Charedi and Religious Zionist communities, I believe that today this rift requires reexamination. Both communities have been transformed over the years,

and the State of Israel, whose status constitutes the main reason for the hostility between them, has also changed. These changes should facilitate and even invite dialogue and closer cooperation between our communities.

Polemic or dispute?

Chazal distinguished between disputes that ought to take place within the traditional study hall and those that belong outside of it. The arguments between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel exemplified the first type. The Sages’ polemical war against the *tzedukim*, which was one of communal survival, belongs to the second variety.

The Gemara documents several debates between Chazal and the *tzedukim*. Unlike regular Talmudic disputation, the Sages aimed to reach total victory in the form of ideological expulsion. Their views were out of bounds and had to be purged by means of the sharpest polemic. One illustration of this approach is Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai’s response to the *tzeduki* position regarding a daughter’s inheritance: “He told him: Fool! Our complete Torah should not be as their idle chatter. [...] They defeated them, and the day was made into a holiday” (Bava Batra 116). The *tzedukim* were considered enemies rather than peers, and the Sages’ attitude towards them was dismissive and contemptuous.

The *tzedukim* were, of course, unusual. Chazal tolerated many views within the Jewish fold, and their world is thus replete with constructive disputes, sometimes more collegial and sometimes less, and is generally characterized by the uniquely pluralistic position of “these and these are the words of the living G-d.” Disputants observe and learn from the virtues and arguments of the other side. The emphasis on debate and discussion, often animated and even fierce, enriches the *beit midrash* and its occupants. Variety leads us to consider new points of view, including those we can learn and grow from.

This continues to be true today, as is exemplified by the debate between *Chassidim* and *Misnagdim*. Today, unlike the situation in the past, the arena for this debate is firmly inside the *beit midrash*. Moreover, *Chassidim* and *Misnagdim* have learned from each other; Lithuanian davening and

service of Hashem has become more spirited, while *Chasidim* have adopted Lithuanian methods of *halachah* and Torah pedagogy.

But pluralism has its boundaries. It applies only to disputes “for the sake of Heaven” (Pirkei Avot 5:17). Within this framework, each party recognizes that the other is making a serious argument, rooted in Hashem’s Torah. Given this common assumption, and despite *halachic* differences that threatened to undermine the sense of unity, much effort was invested to ensure men and women of different variant schools continued to marry among one another (Yevamot 12). But when the debate is “not for the sake of Heaven”, with one outside the pale of our tradition’s basic assumptions, matters become altogether different.

The current Charedi approach to the Religious Zionist community, intentional or otherwise, is akin to the Sages’ attitude to the *tzedukim*. The attitude is disrespectful and displays no desire for serious or candid dialogue; a recurring theme in official Charedi media outlets is that fear of Heaven escapes through the holes in a knitted *kippah*. Yet, it is hard to point to a fundamental religious disagreement between the Religious Zionist and Charedi communities. Both believe in the same Torah, observe the same *halachah*, and espouse similar patterns of authority and instruction. The Orthodox approach to the Reform movement is easy to understand: the gap in basic assumptions is too large to bridge, and the discussion cannot be characterized as a debate between legitimate options. But why has the Religious Zionist world been subjected to similar treatment?

Reasons for the rift

The short answer to why our communities don’t speak to each other is simple: the Jewish state. *Charedim* considered a secular Jewish state to be a grave threat to Jewish tradition. The fear of secularization and the resultant refusal to cooperate with the state and participate in the project of its building, in its institutions, and certainly in its culture became a central feature of Charedi Judaism. It is this feature that separated the *Charedim* from their Religious Zionist brothers.

Religious Zionism’s close cooperation with the secular wing of the Zionist movement repelled the Charedi leadership. For one, the association led to *halachic* leniencies of which Charedi society deeply disapproved. At the early stages of the Jewish state, one of the focal points of the rift was the Bnei Akiva movement and the *halachic* permissiveness of religious *kibbutzim*. This suspicion over *halachic* motivation deepened during the era of Rabbi Shlomo Goren, who in Charedi eyes symbolized the establishment of a plastic *halachah* susceptible to the interests of a secular state. Religious Zionism’s accommodating attitude towards the state motivated the Charedi perception of being faced with an anti-traditional movement in traditional garb.

Alongside the religious concerns, the main motivation for the split between *Charedim* and Religious Zionists was political rather than ideological. The need to establish Charedi society as an independent and united social movement rallying to a single standard led to the exclusion of many Orthodox groups and worldviews that previously had a home in the traditional *beit midrash*. Rabbi Elazar Menachem Shach in particular purged certain elements from the Charedi world for the sake of a unified communal authority. The same is true of the Religious Zionist community, which



was distanced from the Charedi community for primarily non-religious reasons.

The homogenization of Charedi society, which was seen as essential for strengthening its political and educational institutions in the face of tremendous threats, greatly weakened our ability to conduct serious debate on matters of ideology. What used to be grounds for disagreement now became grounds for ostracism.

Deep changes

The good news is that the situation that divided our communities has changed significantly. Over the last few decades, the Jewish state and its religious conflicts have changed significantly. The state and its population have become more religious. There is an affinity – not only rhetorical but also financial and institutional – between the state and its more traditional constituencies. If words such as “Zionism” and “nationalism” were once identified with the secular left, today they possess a strong religious connotation, while Israel’s culture now incorporates traditional imagery and vocabulary.

The struggle between religion and secularism endures, of course, and in some respects has even intensified. Yet, the state is no longer clearly secular and neither is Israel’s dominant culture. The religious tensions are thus not between the state and religious people, but rather internal tensions within state institutions that are not due solely, or even mostly, to *Charedim*. On the contrary, the state is no longer considered by most of us to be a threat to Judaism. The secular threat is identified today with other institutions, such

as the militantly secular “New Israel Fund.” The word “state” thus no longer inspires religious fear, and militant secularism has been condensed to a relatively small minority in Israel.

The effects of these changes on the Charedi community are readily apparent. *Charedim* are much more identified with the state than they used to be, both in theory and in practice. The Charedi public has become part of Israel’s right-wing political bloc. It is no longer a “swing vote” in Israeli politics, standing aloof from the country’s core issues while lobbying for its parochial interests. Younger *Charedim* in particular identify with the State of Israel. They do not feel the persecution or victimization that the older generation still remembers; if they do, they do not see themselves as powerless to respond. In short, *Charedim* no longer view the state as an implacably hostile monolith, but as a project that can be responsive to the Charedi point of view. Unsurprisingly, *Charedim* now often adopt a more respectful approach to national days of mourning, and even holidays like Yom HaAtzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim.

Concomitantly, the Religious Zionist community has undergone its own changes, converging with *Charedim* in several respects. Feeling betrayed by a secular majority that defended Oslo and the disengagement from Gaza, many Religious Zionists view themselves as political dissidents. The tagging of residents of Judea and Samaria as “settlers” and “post-Zionist” trends on the Left have broken faith between Religious Zionists and their old secular comrades. On the whole, the Religious Zionist sector is far more aware of the state’s deficiencies, both religious and practical. Today, Religious Zionists are often the hawks in the fight for the state’s religious character, even more so than *Charedim*.

On numerous fronts, the two communities have moved towards one another. There were always some Charedi individuals who were more open to Israel’s formal and informal institutions, but this trend has morphed from a small group of individuals to a coherent, expanding community with its own identity and institutions. The internet, moreover, has brought *Charedim* closer to certain elements of Israeli culture, which used to reside outside the pale of Charedi society. At the same time, Religious Zionists have become far more diverse on matters of *halachic* stringency and the distance from secular culture, to the degree that there are no clear and set norms on these and related matters. For some, the commitment to religion is very rudimentary, while the *halachic* observance and cultural isolation of the *Chardal* (Charedi-nationalist) sector is indistinguishable from those of mainstream Charedi society.

Even the more liberal wings of Religious Zionism have moved rightward religiously. It has become a challenge to find co-ed Religious Zionist schools, and many Bnei Akiva branches – to say nothing of the more right-wing youth groups – separate the sexes. Politically, the Religious Zionist community now fully recognizes the complexity of the state’s secularism. It understands that for the state to be what it ought to be it needs active religious guidance. Its mere existence, even as the “blossoming of our redemption,” is not enough.

Most promising of all, perhaps, is the progress of the Religious Zionist rabbinate and its *batei midrash*. *Yeshivah* institutions in the Religious Zionist sector have experienced a renaissance of a sort the Charedi Torah world can mimic

and benefit from. Merkaz Harav and Yeshivat Har Etzion are illustrious *batei midrash*, producing impressive figures such as Rabbi (Yosef Zvi) Rimon and Rabbi (Eliezer) Melamed. Some alumni have gone on to start great institutions of their own, and others have become prominent scholars in all Torah areas.

Is the difference relevant today?

In light of this convergence, what, if anything, still justifies the distance between the Charedi *beit midrash* and the Religious Zionist one? The fierce philosophical and practical debate over the state, which tore the religious community apart from within, has long subsided. Both *Charedim* and Religious Zionists understand that the State of Israel is not (yet, at least) the anticipated final redemption; at the same time, it does not preside over some kind of internal exile. Most members of both communities do not deny the great significance of the state as part of a Divine plan of returning to Zion. Given the common ground between them, our communities’ alienation from each other seems counter-productive.

The truth, however, is that serious differences remain, and the path to reconciling them is long. Military service, and the resentment of the Religious Zionist sector over Charedi non-participation, is a profound divider. Moreover, the liberal wing of Religious Zionism, which is part and parcel of Religious Zionist society, makes reconciliation a difficult task. There are too many rabbis in the Religious Zionist camp whose theological and *halachic* views are too close for comfort to those of the American Conservative movement. The association between Religious Zionists who take religion seriously and those who do not reduces the chance for a rapprochement with *Charedim*. Despite the growing political schism within Religious Zionism, this remains a single community with porous boundaries.

The Charedi fear that affiliation with Religious Zionism would channel some of that community’s religious liberalism into the Charedi world is understandable. However, it seems to me that the complete exclusion of the Religious Zionist *beit midrash* from the Charedi world, as though Religious Zionists were *tzedukim*, is a mistaken policy. *Charedim* should learn to distinguish between rabbis and between a society’s subgroups – just as the Charedi world asks non-*Charedim* to do concerning its own sectors and leading figures. Even if maintaining distinct educational systems and *batei midrash* remains legitimate, there is no reason to refrain from being acquainted with the rich Torah literature that Religious Zionism has produced. Moreover, though *Charedim* often pretend otherwise, the dangers of liberalism are present even within the Charedi camp. Rejecting the Religious Zionist world wholesale does not protect us from it, and on the contrary, we have much to learn from Religious Zionists who have strengthened themselves religiously despite exposure to elements of liberal culture and ideology.

It seems to me that despite the differences, both communities would benefit from a cross-pollination of *batei midrash* along the lines of Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel. Our differences should not be ignored, but neither should they be exaggerated. Dialogue, not cold shoulders, is the response to our decreasing but ongoing estrangement. We share many aims and goals while disagreeing about strategy and execution. Institutional unification at the moment is



Sha'arei Shmuels Beit Midrash (PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)



Midreshet Lindenbaum Beit Midrash (PHOTO: MEIR ZAROVSKY)

neither possible nor desirable, but mutual understanding may be within our grasp. The convergence produced by circumstances outside our control should now be advanced through conscious efforts.

In fairness, our communities do not bear equal blame for the lack of dialogue. Serious Religious Zionists have never denied that they have much to learn from *Charedim*. They admire our resistance to secularism, and many Religious Zionist rabbis have studied in Charedi institutions. To one degree or another, the Religious Zionist community knows it can benefit from engaging with us; when the two groups of *yeshivah* students held their joint panel, no objections were voiced from the Religious Zionist side of the fence.

It is time for *Charedim* to recognize that the same is true in the other direction. The benefits of dialogue may strike the Charedi reader as Pyrrhic; some may seem to derive from the very flaws that caused Charedi society to keep Religious Zionism at arm's length. It is certainly possible that benefits and flaws are inseparable, whether in their *batei midrash* or in ours. Yet, we should learn to distinguish between them, critically assessing what is right and beneficial to import, and what price is appropriate to pay in doing so.

Advantages of the “other beit midrash”

Choice and love of G-d: The Religious Zionist community does not assume its youth will automatically be receptive to their community's aspirations, and so Religious Zionist education tries to provide students with internal motivation to remain religious. Religious Zionist education focuses on love far more than on fear. At the Carlebach *minyán* I attend on Friday night, I see Religious Zionist young men praying with remarkable energy, a countenance of devotion to G-d on their faces. Charedi prayer, by contrast, can be cold and fearsome – in particular in its Litvish incarnations. For those who take to the Charedi style, it may work well; but there is little available for those who would benefit from a more spiritually animated touch. Teaching children to serve Hashem because they *want* to rather than (just) because they *have* to is a Religious Zionism strength the Charedi world would do well to replicate.

The Religious Zionist approach is not without its dangers. Fear of Heaven is an absolute virtue and *mitzvah* observance is an absolute duty. Basing religiosity on personal desire could lead to a waning of religiosity when that desire diminishes. But fear of Heaven can wane too. I myself try

to combine the two approaches in my own life and in the lives of my students.

The focus on a personal connection with G-d has produced a serious study of *emunah* in the Religious Zionist sector. Tanach, *aggadah*, Talmudic philosophy, and the important texts of Jewish thought supplement lectures in *hashkafah* from the heads of Religious Zionist *yeshivot*. The aim is to know and understand Judaism from within itself, in the spirit of the vision of Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch, who promoted a “self-aware Judaism”.

One of the serious problems in Charedi *yeshivah* education today is students' lack of familiarity with the philosophical foundations of Judaism, which can breed misunderstanding of why we learn Torah in the first place. Following the Religious Zionist approach, even without adopting identical texts, would make a positive difference in Charedi education.

Torah relevance: Besides the serious study of the Jewish faith, the other distinguishing feature of the Religious Zionist Torah curriculum is its relevance to daily life. The Charedi emphasis on *Torah lishma*, “Torah for its own sake”, while admirable, leaves students with a sense that the Torah is an artifact rather than the animating force of Jewish existence today. We spend an entire *yeshivah zeman* (term) learning *shor shenagach et haparah* (an ox that gores a cow), though none of us live on a farm, without asking what tort law means for our own lives. This is one of the most serious problems facing the world of Torah education.

The emphasis on Torah's relevance to daily life has produced several important Religious Zionist figures and institutions. Uniting them is the desire to translate the Torah into the language of contemporary society without sacrificing any of our texts' original vitality. Projects such as the Puah Institute, the journal *Techumin*, and the Eretz Hemdah *beit midrash* stand out in this regard. Torah scholars from the Charedi camp have begun to participate in these efforts, though Charedi society as a whole remains barely acquainted with them.

Here too, there could be costs. The purity of the Torah is tarnished when it is mixed with the grittiness of the outside world. As much as we would like our surroundings to conform to the pristine *halachic* theory of the *beit midrash*, more often than not the reverse occurs, relaxing rules that should be stringently maintained. This is not true in all cases, and oftentimes there is a need to strike a balance between *halachic* stringency and the practical needs of life

outside of the study hall; excessive detachment from the world can lead to extreme *halachic* stringency. At any rate, it is important for us to be aware of the serious project of making the Torah both relevant and accessible, even if we dispute the rulings of some of its advocates.

Fighting discrimination: Charedim can learn from Religious Zionism outside of the *beit midrash* as well. In the Religious Zionist community there is virtually no discrimination between Ashkenazim and Sefardim, Ethiopians and converts. All are welcomed. Differences between Sefardi and Ashkenazi *halachic* traditions are respected, yet the community is not divided by ethnic lines. Indeed, regular interaction between *halachic* cultures is mutually enriching. A prime example of this in a *halachic* sense is Rabbi Melamed's very broad *halachic* work *Peninei Halachah*.

Communal pluralism is beneficial even for the *beit midrash* since it opens up the fullness of the Torah to the student. *Halachah, mussar, Chassidut, lomdus* – all are legitimate in the Religious Zionist *batei midrash*, and many *yeshivah* institutions offer classes in each of these fields, sometimes from a broad range of teachers. In a Lithuanian *yeshivah*, by contrast, it is hard to find a *mashgiach* who will discuss a Chassidic source or deviate from the tradition of acceptable texts.

But diversity has costs as well as benefits. It can be plausibly argued that the Religious Zionist world has no clear tradition and its acceptance of variant streams renders it wishy-washy and religiously weak. Even if this is the case, we can learn and gain from studying Religious Zionism's strengths without surrendering our own. Even if the Charedi community adopts but a small part of the inclusive and accepting spirit of Religious Zionism, we will have profited much.

Good citizenship: Lastly, Religious Zionism's spirit of good citizenship has much to teach *Charedim*. Covid-19 unequivocally

proved the importance of grounding Torah in *derech erez*. The Religious Zionist community sees no tension between the two; religiosity and good citizenship complement one another, and both are in fact religious duties.

Of course, this strength is a direct result of one of the deepest differences between *Charedim* and Religious Zionists: their respective attitude to the state. *Charedim* do not have to adopt the state-centered approach of the Religious Zionist community, but they could benefit greatly from adopting their respectful stance towards it. Even if we assume the state is not necessarily the “beginning of the redemption” or the “foundation of Hashem's seat in the world,” we still need to be good citizens, both for prudential reasons and because the principles of *derech erez* demand it.

Our primary goal in this world is to extend the sovereignty of G-d's holiness. This ambitious aim requires the basic unity of those faithful to G-d's Torah – a unity that needn't flatten or blur legitimate differences but must bring us together despite our differences. Indeed, a significant part of our tradition is the maintenance of differences for the sake of Heaven. But disputes for the sake of Heaven are always between respectful peers, rather than between hostile opponents. This communication and conversation, in a spirit of Jewish unity, will strengthen all parties: “Ephraim shall not envy Yehudah, and Yehudah shall not besiege Ephraim.” (Yishayah 11:13)

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PHOTO: LEVI MEIR CLANCY ON UNSPLASH

The Cornerstones of Charedi Culture



Rabbi Moshe Taragin

We live in an age of ideology. Seismic shifts in Jewish history over the past two hundred years have produced a wide range of ideological camps, creating fissures that didn't exist in the past and probably will not exist in the future. In our modern Jewish reality, these ideologies offer differing responses to major questions such as the founding of the State of Israel, the Holocaust, and the challenges of modern culture.

In addition to ideological prisms, the different Jewish communities have developed unique cultures and customs. Setting aside its ideological beliefs, what are the bedrock values and strengths of Charedi culture? How can people who don't live in these cultures better appreciate these values and incorporate them into their own communities and personal lives?

In this essay, I will not address the significant ideological question regarding the State of Israel and focus solely upon Charedi culture. Additionally, I will only assess the culture of *Israeli* Charedi society. Though many people in the Diaspora identify as Charedi, their economic and cultural conditions and their lifestyles are vastly different from those of *Charedim* in Israel. Lastly, my observations are those of an onlooker; I do not personally live in the Charedi community.

Centrality of Torah

Every Jewish male is obligated to study Torah, and to form his identity based on G-d's word and will. Thankfully, in recent generations, we have extended the value of serious Torah study to women as well.

Ideally, when freed from other responsibilities, each of us should dedicate our time and energies to serious Torah study. So it was in the perfect world of *Gan Eden*, and so it will be in the perfect world of *Olam Haba*. The Rambam describes the next world as one in which all obstacles and distractions from drawing close to G-d will be removed, a place where the righteous "sit with their crowns on their heads" enjoying the Divine light.

Sadly, we currently inhabit a fallen world which demands human toil and industry, a fractured world which demands repair and renovation. It is difficult to study Torah when we are also engaged with the affairs of this world – as noble as those affairs may be.

How should we respond to the crushing reality that we aren't naturally "available" for full-time spiritual experience? The issue was debated between Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (Berachot 35b). The former adopted a practical approach, endorsing human industry even at the cost of full-time Torah study. He recommended that a person submit to the normal work routine – and study Torah with whatever little time remains.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai responded in shock: "if this routine is widely applied what will become of Torah excellence, which demands relentless and colossal investment?" Instead, Rabbi Shimon advocated a life of complete and comprehensive commitment to Torah study, while relying upon Hashem to provide material needs. Though the Talmud doesn't rule in favor of either opinion, it notes that Rabbi Shimon's approach is harder to reproduce. It takes courage, passion

and the willingness to submit to a life of financial hardship and uncertainty.

For most of our history, this question wasn't a burning communal issue, as most Jews barely eked out a living and simply struggled to survive. Beginning in the 18th century, as European nations removed many of the discriminatory laws preventing Jews from integrating into society, the equation changed dramatically. Many Jews embraced these new financial opportunities and the material comforts that soon followed.

At the same time, a new Charedi culture emerged which rejected professional and financial advancement to preserve time and resources for Torah study. For the first time, the debate between Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Shimon began to play out on a national scale. Charedi culture adopted Rabbi Shimon's heroic agenda, choosing a life of poverty for the sake of immersion and, hopefully, excellence in Torah. In our own time, the Charedi community – men, women and children – is dedicated to supporting and excelling at Torah study. Unsurprisingly, this has resulted in an explosion of Torah study and accomplishment.

"Da'as Torah": supreme authority of Torah scholars

How do we make decisions? Torah authorities make *halachic* decisions and moral decisions should also be guided by religion. What about areas of life that are not fully guided by *halachah* or moral considerations such as marital choice, finance, and medical treatment? Though many believe these matters may be left to each individual's free will, the doctrine of *da'as*



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Torah assumes great Torah scholars possess almost supernatural insight which should guide Jews in every area of life.

While many people recoil from ceding their free will to others, *da'as Torah* is a throwback to a bygone era of prophecy, when supernatural insight was widely accessible. In that era, our people balanced their own free will with higher truths delivered by prophets. *Da'as Torah* assumes that even now, when we do not have prophecy, a surpassing mastery of Torah enables qualified individuals to access supernatural truths – truths which should guide one's personal decision-making.

Cultural insulation

Modern culture has become vulgar and overpowering. Every religious person must filter out the wholesome from the crass, and select the meaningful from the empty. Charedi culture applies a harsher filter by creating an insular society that is disconnected from the surrounding culture. Whereas non-*Charedim* filter, Charedi society *insulates*.

Charedim protect their society by banning devices which access broader media and by vilifying secular culture as a foreign and harmful element. Charedi culture has also created its own “cultural stream” through independent news outlets, magazines, and media, thereby lessening dependency upon broader cultural sources.

“Cultural disconnect” doesn't just filter out unhealthy messages and media, but builds a societal barrier between the Charedi world and the broader population, further limiting unhealthy cultural influence. In today's world of endless media, we all have to “screen” the culture we enjoy. Charedi society screens more aggressively.

Centrality of family

In a society which deemphasizes professional advancement and broader cultural engagement, it is only natural for family life to become paramount. Charedi families tend to have more children due to strict policies about birth control, and their many children usually stay close to home. As most Charedi boys don't serve in the army or attend university, they either live at home or in *yeshivah* dormitories, where they remain attached to their families. Girls live at home until marriage.



The family-centered culture of the community is one of the most underappreciated elements of Charedi culture. Family support is critically important to psychological well-being and also increases chances for success in life. In an age of widespread family dysfunction, it should not be difficult to appreciate the Charedi emphasis upon family life.

Even after marriage, extended families live in close proximity to one another. For the sake of cultural insulation, most *Charedim* choose to settle in Charedi-dominant cities. Because of these factors, children usually remain deeply connected to their families and involved in each other's lives, and their family is their bedrock of support, *chessed* activity and community.

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Social coding

Charedi society imposes strict “social coding” which governs areas such as dress, gender interaction, social settings, dating, political alliances and many other aspects of human experience. Though some of these codes are driven by *halachic* concerns, many of them are social instruments meant to create conformity and belonging.

Human identity is always a blend of conformity and authenticity. To redeem ourselves from solitude we enter the union of larger communities. However, membership in larger groupings requires individuals to constrain some of their personal expressions to abide by the larger customs of the collective. If our society demands too much conformity, we are forced to abdicate personal expression and individual identity. If there is too little conformity, we are left alone. Charedi culture is willing to pay the price

of personal authenticity to achieve a larger payoff of social belonging and, hopefully, stronger religious commitment.

Delayed adoption of technology

People often remark that a particular person “isn't so religious, he is more *modern*”. But why is the word “modern” the antonym for “religious”? It is a lazy and even harmful use of terminology, as it demonizes anything new and modern as hostile to religion. Modernity is irrepressible and cannot be halted. It provides new tools which empower us but also poses hidden risks which can harm us. Each person must decide how quickly to adopt modern tools or how long to wait on the sidelines, until the unseen dangers are better understood.

Charedi culture chooses to delay its adoption of technology until the hidden dangers can be better assessed and hopefully curtailed. They pay a price for not employing these tools, but they receive the benefit of better understanding the unknown hazards. Eventually, everyone – even *Charedim* – will use a smartphone. But those who delay its adoption can better safeguard themselves until the technology becomes absolutely vital.

Fifteen years ago, during a plane flight, a *Chassid* who knew little about computers asked me about the internet. After describing the technology, I cautioned him that, in twenty years, he would not be able to pay his bills without the internet. He looked at me wisely and said “yes, but at least I will benefit from twenty years of safety”. I had initially thought I was sitting next to a caveman. I now realized that he was sitting next to a guinea pig. I would experiment with new technology, discover the hazards and create a roadmap for his eventual adoption. Who would meet with better success – the caveman or the guinea pig? Again, it is hard to decide.

Community or identity?

Community is where we live – but identity is who we *are*. No Jew should ever be labeled or label themselves as Charedi, Religious Zionist, Modern Orthodox, or any other communal designation. We should all aim for one common identity: to become *ovdei Hashem*, passionate and committed Jews. Labels are a poor man's substitute for actual identity. It is easier to

stamp yourself as a particular “type” of Jew than it is to actually construct religious identity through the experiences which truly matter: Torah study, *mitzvah* performance, *chessed*, piety, moral behavior, prayer, love of Jews and love of country. Identity should never be based upon a label.

Independent of identity, each of us must decide which community best enables the type of life we seek. No communal mode is perfect; each possesses flaws and opportunities. True perfection can only be attained independently of communal labels and cultures. Do not confuse identity with community, and do not live identity through communal or ideological labels.

We are all Ultra-Orthodox

Many people translate the term “Charedi” as “Ultra-Orthodox”. This is an incorrect translation with potentially devastating consequences. *Every* Jew, regardless of which community they live in, has a religious responsibility to become “Ultra-Orthodox” – to fully and passionately devote himself or herself to G-d. Each of us should choose the community that will help us accomplish this all-important goal. If you believe that a Charedi lifestyle will better help you achieve religious growth, you must absolutely join that community!

By calling only *Charedim* “Ultra-Orthodox”, non-*Charedim* are implying that they, themselves, are excused from Ultra-Orthodoxy. But none of us are excused from religious growth and aspiration; *every* Jew must strive to be Ultra-Orthodox! Each of us must live the fullest religious experience we are capable of. Each of us must select a community which best enables that goal. If there is one label we should apply to our identity, let it be “Ultra-Orthodox”; we should accept no less for ourselves.

Rabbi Moshe Taragin has taught at Yeshivat Har Etzion since 1994. He previously taught Talmud at Columbia University and Yeshiva University, and served as Assistant Rabbi at the Fifth Avenue Synagogue. Rabbi Taragin is the author of the popular online shiur “Talmudic Methodology” and he co-wrote the commentary for the The Krengel Family World Mizrahi Edition of the Koren Yom HaAtzma’ut Machzor.





Rabbi Moshe Taub

CAN WE LEARN FROM EACH OTHER?

Tales from Lakewood, Young Israel and Beyond

Rules of engagement

Although, *b'chasdei Hashem*, I have been writing a weekly column for the past twelve years, this article has been the most painstaking one to complete. With fits and starts I have, over the course of two months, repeatedly rewritten and overhauled this essay.

It is axiomatic that every *frum* Jew believes that his or her *hashkafah* is the most authentic form of *yiddishkeit*. No serious Torah Jews believe that they or their communities are but a footnote in the eternal story of Judaism, playing only a secondary role in bringing the *Mashiach*. When discussing different communities and their ways of life, we must be mindful that challenging someone's *hashkafah*, if done insultingly and without tact, could be an act of emotional murder. We must be careful.

At the same time, we mustn't put our heads in the sand and ignore the fact that our differences are very real, and often in weighty ways. Only when we can openly admit this and let some steam out of the proverbial pressure cooker can we get on to the critically important work of learning from each other. Otherwise, cries of "why can't we all just get along?!" become pollyannaish and incantational.

Wrong mindsets

When considering what each community can learn from the other, the first step is to avoid the 'changing of minds' trap. If that is your goal, you're likely to be disappointed. We must accept that other Jews have their own *rebbeim* and parents, and so long as they are following in their path of *mesorah*, our job is only to support them and not to seek to change them (*Iggrot Moshe*, Or HaChaim 1:186 s.v. *v'af*).

Humility is critical to this discussion. There was a time when articles or books of Jewish thought were written only by the greatest *poskim* and *gedolim* of a generation, and even in those cases it was rare – Rav Sa'adia Gaon, Rambam, Maharal, to name a few. It is only in modern times when everyone feels they can weigh into this mighty and turbulent sea without the life jacket that is the entire corpus of the written and oral Torah.

Lastly, I do not intend to write a polemic, but rather to share my personal experiences and attempt to live in both the Charedi and Religious Zionist communities.

Living in two worlds, trusted in none

I was raised in my father's Modern Orthodox *shul*, yet went to *yeshivah* in Lakewood. I learned from Rabbi Dovid Soloveitchik, but have served as a *rav* at two Young Israel shuls. I currently teach in a Beis Ya'akov and a Telshe



Yeshivah, while also writing and editing for what some would describe as a Chassidische-leaning magazine, *Ami*.

I have the unique perch of not just working with people of all stripes, but also to learn, negotiate and consult with them in matters of Torah and *hashkafah*.

Living in many 'worlds' may sound like a pleasant ideal, however, in reality, it just means that neither 'side' trusts me. Those on the 'right' think I may have fallen under the spell of culture, and those on the 'left' feel I am a quasi-secret agent, seeking to hypnotize their children to wear a black hat and grow *payot* behind their ears.

But they are both wrong.

Growing up, I attended the Eitz Chaim elementary school, where the *rebbeim* were from Lakewood, Yeshiva University and Chabad while the students were a mix of Chassidic, Modern Orthodox, *yeshivish* and not-yet-*frum*. It was an idyllic upbringing, perhaps lost to time.

As a child, the greatest lay Torah scholar I knew was a man named Dr. Silverberg, who wore a *kippah serugah*. Who cares what *kippah* he wore? While somewhere deep in the recesses of mind I knew our *hashkafot* may not have been fully aligned, I viewed our differences like the differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews. Though the Sephardic approach to *chazara* (warming food on Shabbat) is considered a violation of Shabbat by Ashkenazim, I understand that Sephardim are following their own *poskim* and *rabbanim* and so their approach is legitimate. Perhaps a more apt allegory for these *hashkafic* differences is, *lehavdil*, Major League Baseball's American and National Leagues. I grew up in Toronto watching the American League, and so whenever I stumbled upon a National League game some of their rules and customs seemed foreign to me – but the game was essentially the same.

Moving to New York in 2015 was a culture shock. The lines in the sand between our communities have hardened and the ideal of respecting the *mesorah* of others is too often a mere pantomime instead of a deep and innate feeling.



The dangers of technology and modern culture and its many poisons must not be seen as a Charedi or Religious Zionist issue. We must fight together for a culture that is palatable for our most precious souls.

A proposal

What follows may seem passé, yet sometimes we must have the courage to be unoriginal.

We are living in frightening times. Our youth are being spiritually challenged in ways not seen since the days of Hellenism. Satan is many things, but being a fool is not among them. The *bnei Torah* from each camp must now focus on the myriad of concerns we share and work together to protect our youth. The dangers of technology and modern culture and its many poisons must not be seen as a Charedi or Religious Zionist issue. We must fight together for a culture that is palatable for our most precious souls.

Noach, in the greatest failure of a *ba'al teshuvah* movement in history, was unsuccessful in leading humanity in repentance to Hashem. But perhaps this was inevitable – for Noach was alone.

Rav Shraga Feivel once pondered: What happened to Avraham's many students? Where are they? What happened to their families? He explained that Avraham could only offer *one* religious path – the path of *chessed*. Only after Yitzchak and Ya'akov introduced new ways to serve Hashem, through *gevurah* and Torah, would students be able to find the proper religious paths for themselves and remain committed to Hashem for generations.

Our youth are looking for a *teiva*, an ark, to steer them through a very stormy world. We have the tools to save them. They need a multitude of leaders and streams of thought, all culled from *mesorah*, to choose from. Without these choices, many young people will ultimately choose to leave Torah observance altogether.

It is not a coincidence that the story of the *dor haflagah*, the generation of dispersion, follows the story of Noach. While Noach teaches us that we cannot succeed alone, the *dor haflagah* reminds us of the challenges of working together with a group.

Rav Hutner, in one of his famous bon mots, once said: "The miracle of seventy rabbis sitting in different rooms and making the same changes for Ptolemy's translation was a great one. But even greater still would be if they were in the same room and agreed on those changes!"

I propose a meeting of the minds. A get-together of activists, *askanim* and leaders from both camps to discuss the common issues that are in front of us.

Rav Kook and Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld had significant disagreements, yet joined together on their Shabbat campaign throughout the Land of Israel. We must do the same.

I recall several years ago, when in Buffalo, a young Chassidic *chatan* stayed in the hotel across the street from the *shul* for Shabbat. He came to every *shiur*. After Shabbat he cried to me: "I was always told that modern Jews were not *frum*. But I learned so much from this Shabbos! I was touched in ways I never felt before."

Each *mesorah* has so much to offer!

The Baal HaTanya and his *rebbe*, the Maggid of Mezeritch, once entered a wedding together. The proverbial "you go first" debate ensued. Finally, the Baal HaTanya said, "I will go through the door and you, being a *ba'al mofes* (a miracle worker), can go through the wall!"

The Maggid looked at his student and, with a twinkle in his eye, responded, "Let us make an even greater miracle. Let us widen the doorway and we then can hold hands and walk through together."

Rabbi Moshe Taub serves as the Rabbi at Young Israel of Holliswood. He teaches in many NYC yeshivot and schools and serves as Rabbinic Editor and weekly columnist at *Ami Magazine*.

IN TWO WORLDS:

AN INTERVIEW WITH RABBI AVROHOM AND ESHKIE LEVENTHAL

Since making Aliyah in 2005, Rabbi Avrohom and Eshkie Leventhal have straddled multiple worlds. Their children attended both Religious Zionist and Charedi schools and yeshivot, their shul is open to a wide spectrum of Jews, and Rabbi Leventhal's organization Lema'an Achai works with Jews of all stripes and types.

Rabbi Aron White sat with the Leventhals to hear about their journey and the lessons they have learned about "living in the gray" and navigating multiple communities.

How would you describe your own upbringing?

Eshkie: Both of us grew up in the Charedi world. I was born in Boro Park, raised in Monsey and moved to Lakewood before marriage, so I lived in the main triad of American *yeshivish* communities! I even went to Chassidic schools, so I was not exposed much to the outer world. I would never have imagined that one day I would have a picture of Rav Kook hanging on my wall!

R' Avrohom: I grew up in the Charedi *yeshivah* community in Baltimore and studied at the Talmudic Academy, a school with Charedi leadership and a diverse student body. I later learned at the Scranton *yeshivah*, which is part of the Lakewood system, and from there moved onto Ner Yisrael, which is more open. My parents were open to Zionism, with a special place in their hearts for Israel. My mother would tell us how she wrote about the birth of the State of Israel for her fifth grade report – an event which only occurred two years before! We were not labeled as "yeshivish" or any other way; we were Jews and that was it.

Even to this day there are two types of Charedi communities. In Lakewood, Boro Park and most of Monsey there isn't much of a Zionist community or a feeling of connection to *Eretz Yisrael*. Honestly, their home community is their Yerushalayim; they might go to *Eretz Yisrael* for a vacation, but it's not a fundamental part of their being. In Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles and other communities there may be a Charedi atmosphere, but there is much more openness. In those communities many would say they are "*chovevei tzion*" rather than Zionist, but they are much more connected to the Land than the other communities.

You made Aliyah from Baltimore in 2005 to Ramat Beit Shemesh, and your family members have a mix of approaches and hashkafot – some children are more American and some more Israeli, with some more Religious Zionist and others more Charedi. How do you keep a family with so many differences connected to one another?

Eshkie: When we made *Aliyah*, we carefully chose schools for our children. They were coming from Baltimore, so we placed



R' Avrohom and Eshkie with some of their children and grandchildren.

them in "Charedi-lite" schools, but eventually shifted them over to "Religious Zionist *Torani*" schools. We were happier with the more open schools. I once went to a parent-teacher conference at one of the Charedi schools wearing a denim skirt, and I felt so judged it was like I was in a jail. I had studied at Chassidic schools in America but I felt far more judged and self-conscious in the Charedi schools in Israel. That being said, I am very proud that each of our children has their own opinions and personality, and didn't feel the need to be exact copies of their parents.

R' Avrohom: The first year of *chinuch* is challenging. *Olim* often experience an identity crisis, but children also have the opportunity to find themselves and their own path. My oldest daughter went to a Charedi school and a Charedi seminary but ended up marrying a guy who went to the army, and they do not consider themselves Charedi today. They initially sent their kids to a Religious Zionist school, but a new school called *Netzach Yisrael* opened up which is categorized as *Mamlachti Charedi*. It is a Charedi school that is much more open to *Eretz Yisrael* – when you walk in the building, there is a quote from Rav Kook on the wall!

One of the myths people have about *Aliyah* is that you have to choose between Religious Zionist and Charedi, but we have

been able to find a lot of people living in the gray, with aspects of both worlds. Ramat Beit Shemesh has grown tremendously – Ramat Beit Shemesh Aleph now has close to 40,000 residents and about 20 schools, allowing each family to find the type of *hashkafah* and style that fits them. And as I said, each child will form their own path. One of my sons, who has long *payos* and wears a *shtreimel*, was walking in the street early in the pandemic without a mask. A policeman stopped him to give him a ticket. When he asked him for his ID, my son took out his army ID – giving the policeman such a surprise that he let him off!

Your shul also is also a blend of Religious Zionist and Charedi. Can you tell us more about it?

R' Avrohom: Our shul is called Kehillas Shivtei Yeshurun (KSY), and I served as the President there for 8 years. It's grown from 15 to 190 families in the last ten years under the leadership of Rabbi Yaakov Haber, and it is incredibly diverse. You have mostly Anglos, some Israelis too, Charedi, Charedi-lite, Religious Zionist, *Torani*, *Chardal*. Within a three-minute walk you could have a homogenous shul of any one of those types, but people choose KSY because they want to be somewhere diverse.

There has been a significant shift. When people made *Aliyah* between 2005 and 2010, there was a very strong sense of having to conform to what others were doing. Since 2010, people making *Aliyah* have been able to be themselves more, and this has really helped people. *Aliyah* is more successful when you feel you can breathe! For example, there are many people who *daven* in a Charedi shul throughout the year, but *davka* go to another shul on Yom HaAtzmaut in order to say Hallel. For them, their shul generally provides them the best community for their family, and they feel they can supplement and ensure they are connected to Zionism as well.

Eshkie: One of the most important things we have learned is to make informed decisions, and not to make life-changing decisions based on conversations in the park or in the stairwell. There was a family of *ba'alei teshuva* who made *Aliyah* a few years ago, and they chose to enroll their kids in Religious Zionist schools. The first week they were here he met a neighbor in the stairwell who told him in quite certain terms how the Religious Zionist school wasn't *frum* enough, and that he had to move his children to the school his kids were in. That school required a hat and jacket for the interview, which this father didn't even have, but the zealous neighbor lent him his. Thinking this was the only way to succeed in Ramat Beit Shemesh, the *ba'al teshuva* switched his children to a Charedi *cheder*, which was totally inappropriate for them. Six weeks later, his 12-year-old decided he didn't want to be religious because he didn't fit in.

When you make *Aliyah* there is so much to learn and take in, so take your time, and don't be pressured even by well-meaning and strong-minded neighbors. You have to do what works for you!

Rabbi Leventhal – you run a highly successful chessed organization called Lema'an Achai. How do the differences between the Charedi and Religious Zionist communities impact the work you do?

R' Avrohom: When I walk into the office, there are people working together from across Israeli society. I think it provides a model for how our society as a whole can function. We have therapists who are Charedi, and therapists who are formerly religious. We match each person with the client who will work best for them, doing whatever is in the best interest of the client. Ultimately, we all have the same goals, and I am proud that a diverse group of people are able to work together. ■



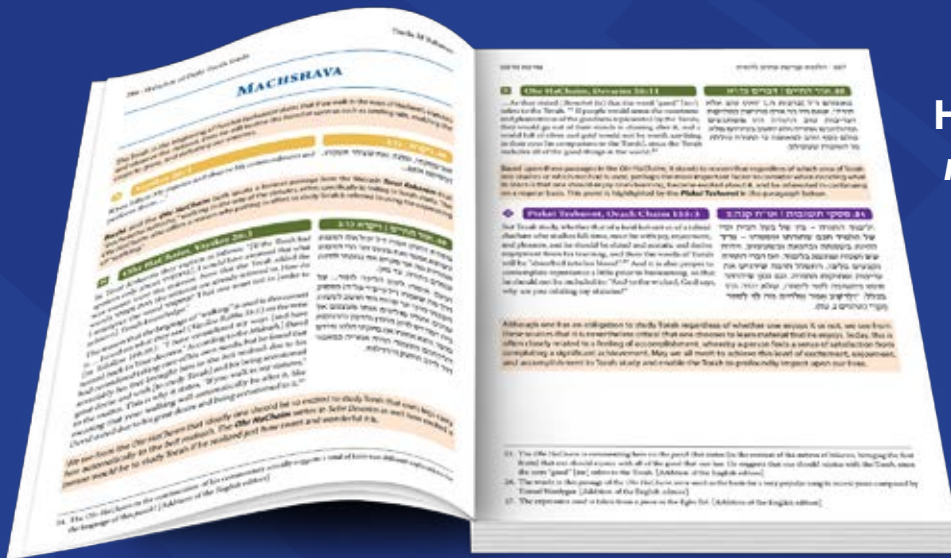
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When Mizrachi Leaders Built Charedi Neighborhoods in Israel



Shlomo Zalman Shragai (1899–1995), one of the great Religious Zionist leaders of the 20th century, served as the Mayor of Yerushalayim from 1950 to 1952 and the head of the Aliyah Department at the Jewish Agency from 1954 to 1968, when over half a million Jews made Aliyah. In his memoirs, Shragai shares the remarkable story of how he helped bring numerous Charedi communities to Israel.

I had two goals when I reached out to religious communities. I generally encouraged Jews to make *Aliyah*, but I specifically hoped to bring religious Jews to the land so their influence would be felt in the cultural and social fabric of Israel. I hoped that in the future we would reach a point where the religious community would be the majority of the population of Israel.

I began conversations with *Admorim* and their *Chasidim*, who were very interested in the idea of setting up Chassidic communities in different locations. This initiative led to the creation of Kiryat Sanz in Netanya, Kiryat Mattesdorf in Yerushalayim, Kiryat Sassov near Ramat Gan, Kiryat Itri in Yerushalayim and more. I also met with *rashei yeshivah*, and this led to the founding of Kiryat Telz (Telz-Stone) on the road between Tel Aviv and Yerushalayim. I have to mention the efforts of the Finance Minister Pinchas Sapir who helped the project find its funding, and David Ben-Gurion encouraged the initiative. In total we founded 15 such communities, totalling 50,000 people.

When I had the idea of creating Chassidic and *yeshivah* communities, the command of Rabbi Akiva rang in my ears: “Rise up and fill *Eretz Yisrael* with Torah!” (Bereishit Rabbah). This is an eternal command to Orthodox Jews from all denominations – from Mizrachi to Neturei Karta! If we really want the State of Israel to reflect Torah ways and values, there is only one practical approach, which is to get up and fill *Eretz Yisrael* with Torah. If religious Jews from Western countries do not come to Israel just because they are too comfortable there, by sitting there they are contributing to the secularization of Israel. Our approach is that rather than criticizing this or that aspect of Israel, they should get up themselves and make *Aliyah*, for the sake of Hashem and His Torah.

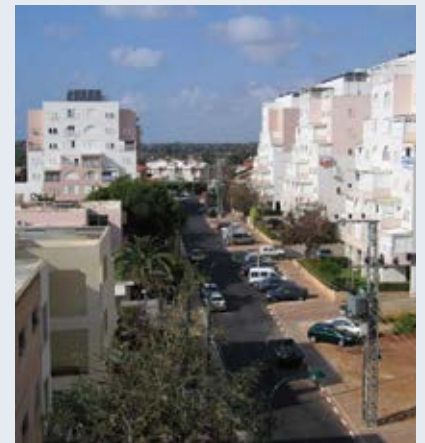
● Originally published in *Sefer Shragai Volume 1*, page 309 (published in *Yerushalayim*, 1981).



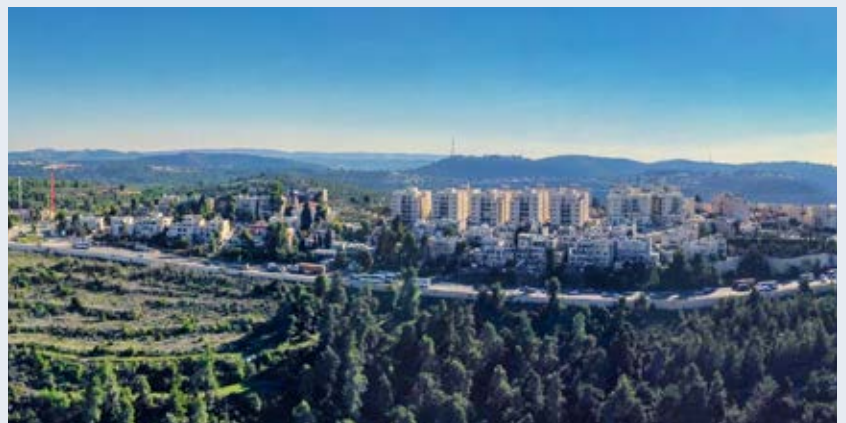
Kiryat Mattesdorf (PHOTO: YONINAH/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)



Kiryat Itri (PHOTO: YONINAH/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)



Kiryat Sanz, Netanya



Telz-Stone (PHOTO: HAGAI AGMON-SNIR/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)



Suzie
Steinberg

RAMAT BEIT SHEMESH: A Home for One and All

On my daily power walk around the circular street of Nachal Dolev, I take in the sights around me. I pass a young Charedi *kollel* couple pushing their smiling baby in a stroller. I quickly jump out of the way as a small troop of young boys wearing knitted *kippot* ring their bells and whiz past me on their bicycles. Before I'm able to resume my stride, I make way for the girls rollerblading in my direction, sporting the Bais Ya'akov uniform of light-blue collared shirts and navy-blue skirts. Two Religious Zionist men are engaged in an animated conversation outside the Charedi *Mas'at Mordechai Beit Midrash*, a shul where men and boys from across the religious spectrum learn and daven at all hours of the day and night. Welcome to Ramat Beit Shemesh Aleph, or "RBS A" in the vernacular.

I cannot say that Jews of all streams live in blissful harmony here in Beit Shemesh. Anyone who has followed the news headlines over the years will know that this is not always the case. While we are fortunate to live at a time when there is a place that every Jew can call home, our country is also extremely divided. The borders between the Charedi and Religious Zionist communities are clearly defined, with each group passionate about its ideology. The communities generally lead parallel lives with limited interaction between the two.

Several years ago, I cold-called a newly discovered Israeli relative that I had come upon through genealogical

research. One of the first questions she asked me was what *chug* I belong to. I didn't even understand the question correctly. As far as I knew, *chugim* were after-school recreational activities. I didn't understand why this was of interest to her, but I answered that I had once participated in a women's choir. She clarified that she wanted to know which community in Israel I identified with. Before we could continue our conversation, she needed to know which box she could place me in.

This dynamic of clear boundaries also exists in Beit Shemesh, a microcosm of Israel that is home to every type of Jew. However, due to the heavy presence of Anglos, there are several neighborhoods in RBS where one can find shades of gray. Some *olim* make a conscious decision to abandon some of their long-held beliefs (i.e., the importance of secular education) when they land at Ben-Gurion Airport in an effort to help their children fully integrate into and be accepted by the Charedi community. While this is often uncomfortable for the parents, they believe that, in the long run, their children will benefit from clear messages leading to a clear identity. But other *olim* believe that both the Charedi and Religious Zionist communities have strengths and weaknesses and so they try to take the best of both worlds. It is not uncommon for these out-of-the-box families to be affiliated with more than one camp.

Rabbi Danny Myers, the rabbi of a Religious Zionist shul and the principal of a Charedi elementary

school, circulates comfortably in both communities. The wall in his office displays a showcase of *rabbanim*, among them Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, Rav Kook, Rav Shach, the Satmar Rebbe, and many other rabbis with a broad range of ideologies. He wears *tzitzit* with *techelet* and is an outspoken proponent of visiting *Har HaBayit*. Rabbi Myers believes that there is an organic process taking place in RBS in which some members of both the Religious Zionist and Charedi communities recognize some of the values of the other camp and try to incorporate those values into their own lives. Parents in RBS have established elementary and high schools that are officially Charedi but aim to teach secular studies on a high level and inculcate in their students an appreciation for the army as well as the diverse groups that are part of the landscape of the country in which we live. A Religious Zionist elementary school in RBS that identifies with the *Chardal*¹ stream sends many of its male graduates to a high school that learns only religious studies for the first three years, similar to the Charedi model. In the 12th grade, they catch up on their matriculation exams. Following the lead of the *Charedim*, they work tirelessly to limit their children's exposure to the internet and other less desirable influences.

Rabbi Myers talks about various initiatives over the years that have aimed to bridge the gap between the Religious Zionist and Charedi communities in RBS. Years ago, an *achdut* (unity) group put out a yearly



pamphlet consisting of *divrei Torah* from rabbis of both communities. Rabbis from one camp would invite rabbis from the other community to speak in their *shul*. On Shabbat Chanukah, hundreds of people would attend a Friday night *tisch* with rabbis from both communities sitting at the dais. Before the COVID pandemic, a group of 15 rabbis from both communities, Israelis included, would meet every few weeks to discuss how to bridge the gap between the various communities in RBS.

RBS resident Rabbi Karmi Gross took note of the growing population of people who identify as Charedi but want to play a larger role in Israeli society and established Beit Midrash Derech Chaim, Israel's first Charedi *hesder yeshivah*. The students learn Torah for 6-7 hours a day and then study computers at a university level at night. Derech Chaim's students graduate with a degree in Computer Science, specializing in cyber technology, and then serve for two years in tech units in the IDF. The boys enter the army with the mission of being *mekadesh shem shamayim* (sanctifying G-d's name) and hoping to serve as a bridge between the various camps by maintaining "boundaries but not walls". A mother of one of the boys was once surprised to receive a phone call from her son's secular commander asking to spend Shabbat in their home. After working with her son for two years, he saw something very special in him and in his upbringing and wanted to experience it himself.

Similarly, Chaim was told from day one by his secular commander not to expect any special treatment as a religious soldier. Approximately six months later, his commander called him from a bakery. He was planning a birthday party for a soldier in the unit and wanted to make sure that the cake he bought had a *hechsher* that Chaim would be comfortable with.



A Ramat Beit Shemesh Chanukah celebration at an army base. (PHOTO: COURTESY)

The commander also assured him that since the cake was dairy, he had requested that the soldiers not eat meat beforehand. One soldier at a time, the Derech Chaim boys are bridging the divide.

Yom HaAtzmaut is a day when the shades of gray in RBS are also visible. Some families who identify as Charedi host barbecues and may even have Israeli flags hanging from their balconies. Others will *daven* in a different *minyan* than usual in order to recite Hallel on that day. Some Charedi shuls say a prayer for the safety of the IDF and learn in memory of fallen soldiers on Yom HaZikaron. For years, on every Chanukah before the pandemic, an American Charedi would charter buses for members of the community to visit Israeli army bases, where he would distribute fleece jackets to the soldiers and throw a huge Chanukah barbecue for them.

Socially, there is also some mixing between the communities. A popular local summer day camp provides wholesome fun for campers from across the religious spectrum, while a new housing project is populated by *Chassidim*, *Charedim*, Religious Zionist

and secular Jews, all living together in peace.

In RBS, you will find people who stand firmly in their box as well as others who choose to lead more nuanced lives, each choosing the path that works for them. I feel very fortunate to live in such a beautiful community in our wonderful Land, where every type of Jew can feel at home.

1. *Chardal*, an acronym of *Charedi Leumi*, refers to Religious Zionist communities that also incline towards many aspects of Charedi ideology.

Suzie Steinberg is a social worker living in Ramat Beit Shemesh. She writes for many newspapers and magazines and recently published a children's book titled "Hashem is Always With Me".

(PHOTO: BRIANSPECTOR.COM)





Rabbi Reuven Taragin

Our Closest Relatives

Appreciating and loving

Hashem creates each person differently because we each have a unique mission.¹ Our distinctive appearance and fingerprints reflect unique outlooks, perspectives, abilities, and personalities, all of which help us realize our personal missions (*Talmud Yerushalmi*, Berachot 63b).

Naturally, we value our own strengths and inclinations more than those of others. This, coupled with feelings of competitiveness, often triggers strife and even the baseless hatred that caused the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* and our exile.

“Who is wise? One who learns from *all* people” (*Avot* 4:1) The more different people are from us, the more we can learn from them, which helps us appreciate and, ultimately, love one another.

The periods of the Three Weeks and Nine Days, culminating with Tisha B’Av, are a time when we are meant to work on appreciating other Jews. We will do this by reflecting on our relationships with other Jews and other segments of the Jewish community.

One people – the existential base

Our relationship with other Jews and with all of humanity has a deep, existential root. Based on the *mishnah* in *Avot* (1:14) which questions the worth of one who cares only about himself, Rav Shimon Shkop explains that we are meant to see our existence as inclusive of all of Hashem’s creation (*Sha’arei Yosher*, Introduction). This applies to all of humanity, whom Hashem created in His image, and particularly to Hashem’s children, the Jewish people.

We must care for other Jews not only because of our shared mission but because of our personal relationship

with each of them. We are all Hashem’s children, and we are all brothers. The special treatment the Torah commands us to offer other Jews reflects and reinforces this familial relationship. This includes practical assistance (such as lending money without interest, care for and return of lost objects, and the preferential offering of charity and *chesed*) as well as emotional love and closeness.

The fraternity of Ovdei Hashem

Many Modern Orthodox and Religious Zionist Jews more easily identify with open-minded secular Jews than with more parochial, *yeshivish* Jews. This is especially true in Israel, where Religious Zionist Jews serve shoulder-to-shoulder with secular Jews in the IDF.

Nevertheless, our community should share a unique bond with those who share and live by our core Torah values. We should identify most with Jews who believe in and appreciate Hashem’s creation of the world and of man in His image, His redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt in order to serve Him, and His giving us the Torah and *mitzvot* as guides of how to do so. We should feel closest to those who dedicate their lives to *avodat Hashem*. Chazal described the special relationship we have with Jews committed to Torah and *mitzvot* as “*achicha baTorah u’vamitzvot*”. The Torah’s commandments to love, respect and assist other Jews apply most to those who share our Torah values (*Yevamot* 24b).

Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein wrote: “When all is said and done, we should recognize and realize that what we share with the Rightist community far, far outweighs whatever divides us – although, in the nature of things, the focus within the community is upon the divisive element. I sometimes

have the feeling that, with regard to perceiving that community, we are often somewhat remiss... Surely we need to recognize, and the point can hardly be overemphasized, *that our basic affinity is with those – past, present or future – to whom tzelem Elokim, malchut shamayim and avodat Hashem (the divine image, divine sovereignty, and the service of G-d) are the basic categories of human existence.*”²

David HaMelech asserted camaraderie with all G-d-fearing people. He said to Hashem: *Chaver ani l’chol asher yerei’ucha*, “I am a friend of all those who fear You.”³ Though those who fear Hashem may serve Him in different ways, we are united by our shared goals and mission.

Identity through identification

As Modern Orthodox Jews, we ambitiously seek to learn from the best that the world has to offer – an approach that can help us appreciate the strengths of all Jews, and the Charedi community most of all. As Torah Jews, our two communities share a way of life committed to Hashem’s Torah, *mitzvot*, and master plan. May we always see the good in one another!

1. *Rechovot HaNahar* 3:20. See also *Sefat Emet*, Korach 5647.

2. “Centrist Orthodoxy: A Spiritual Accounting”, in *By His Light: Character and Values in the Service of G-d*

3. *Tehillim* 119:63. The verse implies we should also feel an affinity towards other G-d-fearing people even if they are non-Jewish.

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

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Rebuilding Sisterly Beams, Wings and Curtains of Friendship



Rabbanit
Shani Taragin

As we approach Tisha B'Av once again, it is difficult to absolve ourselves of the rabbis' painful admonition: "Any generation in which the Temple is not rebuilt, it is considered as if they themselves destroyed it" (Yerushalmi Yoma 1:1). Individually and as a nation, we must internalize the lessons of the destruction and proactively begin the process of repentance and rebuilding. Rav Kook famously called upon *Am Yisrael* to practice *ahavat chinam*, baseless love, as a means of repairing *sinat chinam*, the baseless hatred which led to the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*. But there is also a lesser known path to rebuilding the *Mikdash*, a path hinted to in the instructions for building the original sanctuary detailed in *Parashat Terumah*.

When describing the various vessels and components of the *Mishkan*, the term *panim*, "face", is used several times, most remarkably in the context of the *keruvim*: "And the *keruvim* shall spread out their wings on high, screening the ark-cover with their wings, with their **faces one to his brother...**" (Shemot 25:20). The *panim* also appear in the context of the showbreads and the *menorah*, and are thrice mentioned in the description of the incense altar, underscoring the significance of the intimate face-to-face relationship we are meant to create with Hashem.

Another atypical expression is used when describing the curtains and beams of the *Mishkan*: "Five curtains shall be coupled together, each one to **her sister**; and the other five curtains shall be coupled, each one to **her sister**" (26:3). "Two tenons shall there be in each board, each joined to **her sister**; thus shall you make for all the boards of the *Mishkan*" (26:17).



The curtain and beams of the *Mishkan* are compared to sisters, for sisters share so much in common...

Repeatedly, the curtains and beams are described as sisters, connected and intertwined with one another!

This same expression – "a woman bound up with her sister" – appears only one other time in Tanach, referring to Yechezkel's vision of the celestial angels surrounding Hashem: "Their wings were joined **one to her sister**" (Yechezkel 1:9). Yechezkel later realizes that these angels are in fact the very same *keruvim* which represent the presence of the *Shechinah* in our midst (10:20). The *keruvim* that were described in Shemot as "**facing his brother**" are described in Yechezkel as being **connected like sisters!**

These expressions highlight the unique relationships necessary for the construction and maintenance of Hashem's presence, the figurative links and literal bonds of unity which create a "face-to-face" meeting with G-d. With these evocative expressions, the Torah is saying that the uniquely close bonds formed by sisters are essential to building a relationship with Hashem and rebuilding the *Beit HaMikdash!*

The curtain and beams of the *Mishkan* are compared to sisters, for sisters share so much in common – monthly and life cycles, challenges of fertility, pregnancy, nursing, child-rearing and relationships. When I recently spoke with renowned speaker and author Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller-Gottlieb, she shared a powerful insight.

"Religious women in different communities should learn from one another. From the Religious Zionist community we may learn the value of love for *Eretz Yisrael*, and from the Charedi community we may learn the value of uncompromising *tzniut*. Without criticizing the other, we should be confident in our paths of *Avodat Hashem* and bond through a mutual respect for proper adherence to *halachah*."

Brotherly love is essential for rebuilding a society of *achva* (*ach-va*), of true brotherhood, in which each of the *keruvim* may once again face "his brother" and allow for Divine revelation and communication. But when the *Mishkan* is actually constructed, the curtains and beams of sisterly love precede the construction of the vessels and the *keruvim*. Before a face-to-face "brotherhood" relationship with Hashem is restored, we must first create a *sisterhood* of respect.

Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi teaches that the word *yeriot*, curtains, is homiletically connected to the word *reut* – the word for female friendship! Female friendship is the foundation of the *Mishkan* and, together with the "sisterly" wings of the celestial chariot, provides protection and unity for our people. Though we may have different "flight patterns", as religiously-observant women we must intertwine our wings in order to fly and rebuild our Father's chariot here on Earth!



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Rabbi Dr. Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff

A Sacred Obligation to Help the Charedim Enter the World

(ARTWORK: ILAN BLOK)

The following is an excerpt from HaMizrachi magazine's interview with Rabbi Dr. Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff in March 2022.

Our relationship with the Charedi world in Israel is challenging, and army service is the touchstone issue. According to *halachah*, no Jew in the world, no one in Teaneck or Lakewood, is exempt from the army; every Jew must come and fight. It's a *milchemet mitzvah*, an obligatory *mitzvah* to fight to defend our people. But here you have religious people refusing to serve. It's ironic; if anyone should be exempt from the army it should be those who are Shabbat violators. *מי האיש הירא וירד הלכב ילד וישב לביתו*, "What man is there that is fearful and faint-hearted? Let him go and return to his home" (Devarim 20:8). The *pasuk*, of course, is talking about those who are sinners, who lack *yirat shamayim* (fear of Heaven). It's the religious Jews who must serve in the army!

The *Charedim* look at the world and they see what happened to those of us who left the ghetto. Millions upon millions of Jews are no longer with us, totally assimilated and intermarried. Look what's happening in America – millions of Reform and Conservative and unaffiliated Jews are being lost. If Chabad or Aish don't pick them up, they'll be lost to our people forever. It's a spiritual holocaust. And so the *Charedim* are afraid to come out into the big world.

Rav Shach knew Rav Soloveitchik was a *gaon* in Torah learning. He was a bigger *gaon* than Rav Shach – there's no two ways about it! But he believed that while the Rav could live in two worlds, the rest of us can't do it. They look at a guy like me and say "all right, he was able to do it. But we're afraid." The *Charedim* are afraid to join the world!

But the amazing thing is that in Israel, the dynamic has changed; it's no longer about synthesizing the two worlds of the holy and the secular, because the two worlds are now one! In Israel, if you're a lawyer, a doctor, or if you work for the sanitation department – whatever you do outside of the *beit midrash* is a fulfillment of the biblical *mitzvah* of *yishuv Eretz Yisrael*, of settling the Land! You're in the army, in the Foreign Ministry – whatever you do is a *mitzvah*!

It can't go on this way. One father can support three children. But when three children have their own children, and you end up with 30 grandchildren and great-grandchildren who want to sit and learn, who is going to support them? And who wants to be a *schnorrer*? Read what my Rebbe wrote in *Halachic Man* – Jews have to live in *dignity*! We, our Religious Zionist community, have to set an example for the Charedi community. We have

to show them that one can come out of the ghetto and embrace the world of today and remain a *gaon*, a *tzaddik* and a *chassid* – there is no contradiction!

Who preserved the Torah? Who brought it over from Europe? It was the Charedi community. Think of what we owe the Mir Yeshiva in Shanghai! Instead of being negative and critical of the Charedi world, we have a sacred obligation to help them.

I knew Rav Aharon Kotler and Rav Shneur Kotler quite well. I stand by my belief that if Rav Aharon had come to Israel he would have become a big Religious Zionist, like the rest of Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer's family. Rav Yehuda Meltzer founded HaDarom, the first Hesder Yeshiva!

Change can happen over time. 120 years ago, Chabad was no different than Satmar. Today, Chabad is in all the headlines, all over the world, doing incredible things. Change can happen in the Charedi world as well. We just have to be there to help them.

Rabbi Dr. Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff is Professor of Rabbinic Literature at Yeshiva University's Caroline and Joseph S. Gruss Institute in Jerusalem.



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Shall We Never Sled Again?

Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein's Classic Exchange with Rabbi Aharon Feldman

*In 2009, Rabbi Aharon Feldman, Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivat Ner Yisrael in Baltimore, Maryland, published **The Eye of the Storm: A Calm View of Raging Issues**. Despite its title, the book is a passionate and frequently angry polemic “directed towards those parts of the Jewish people which are not Jewish” – a group in which he includes secular Zionists in Israel and the Diaspora.*

*In the Spring 2010 issue of **Jewish Action**, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein zt”l, Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivat Har Etzion, penned a powerful review and critique of Rabbi Feldman’s book. Though he shared Rabbi Feldman’s commitment to Torah values, Rabbi Lichtenstein was deeply troubled by Rabbi Feldman’s wholesale dismissal of the Zionist movement and its accomplishments. Rabbi Lichtenstein wondered why Rabbi Feldman could not take a more nuanced view acknowledging that Zionism and the State of Israel had contributed greatly to the character of Judaism, even while its vision and reality leave much much to be desired. It is possible to appreciate the imperfect accomplishments of Zionism while also working to restore the glory of Torah in Eretz Yisrael!*

Most memorable, however, were Rabbi Lichtenstein’s personal recollections of his childhood friendship with Rabbi Feldman. Though they now found themselves in different ideological camps, he yearned for the day when the Religious Zionist and Charedi communities would draw closer together. May we soon see that day!

If I may intrude in a personal vein, Rabbi Feldman’s persona arouses in me latent but very warm memories. We were classmates during 1942–1943 in the shiur of Rabbi Yaakov Bobrovsky zt”l, at Talmudical Academy of Baltimore – I, a spindly nine-year-old immigrant of limited social skills and of dubious acculturation; he, a bit older, firmly entrenched in both a home of Lithuanian rabbinic stock and in his native American milieu. We were both eager, and bright; he, beyond that, to me, a tower of strength. He befriended me and invited me frequently to his home. I still fondly recall the chilling warmth of joint sledding in Druid Hill Park on Sunday afternoons. When my family moved to Chicago after a year, the friendship gradually dissipated. But the memory and the appreciation linger...

Dear Reb Aharon: That pair of juvenile prattling sledders is now well past seventy-five. Each has, *besiyata diShmaya*, in successive contexts, respectively, learned much Torah and has been blessed with the ability and the circumstances to enable reaching out and personally transmitting to others that which we have been

endowed. It stands to reason and is, presumably, mandated by a joint mission, that our worlds meet and attain mutual fruition. As we both painfully know, however, this occurs all too rarely.

Must the walls that separate our communities and our institutions soar quite so high, the interposing moat

plunge quite so deep? Shall we never sled again?

Thank you to Ari Gontownik for his help with this article.

Excerpted from Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, “Hands Across the Ocean: A Review of Rabbi Aharon Feldman’s *The Eye of the Storm*,” *Jewish Action* vol. 70, no. 3 (Spring 2010).





Seven Principles for Maintaining Jewish Dialogue

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

The Three Weeks between the Fast of Tammuz and the Ninth of Av is the saddest time of the year, when we mourn the destruction of the First and Second Temple. Twice Israel suffered defeat and exile. The first – the conquest of the northern kingdom followed a century and a half later by the destruction of the First Temple and the Babylonian exile – was a direct consequence of the division of the kingdom into two after the death of Solomon. The second – defeat at the hands of the Romans and the destruction of the Second Temple – was the result of intense factionalism and internal strife, *sinat chinam*.

Today, across the Jewish world, there remains much internal conflict. When individual Jews or groups of Jews have disagreements, as inevitably happens, we have to find ways to overcome them respectfully, to ensure we continue to thrive as a people.

To that end, I have set out below what I regard as seven of the key principles for maintaining Jewish dialogue. I hope some, or all of them, speak to you.

- 1** Keep talking, even when you disagree. The more you talk, the more you are likely to eventually find a way to work together.
- 2** Listen deeply to one another. Hear what your opponent is saying. Listening is profoundly therapeutic. It is also deeply spiritual. The good news about the Jewish people is that we're among the world's best speakers. The bad news is that we're among the world's worst listeners. This has to change. *Shema Yisrael*, the great command, means, "Listen, Israel."
- 3** Always be humble and modest by striving to understand the point of view with which you disagree. That was the way of Hillel. It remains the first rule of conflict management.
- 4** Never seek victory. Never ever seek to inflict defeat on your opponents. If you seek to inflict defeat on your opponent, your opponent – such is human psychology – will seek to retaliate by inflicting defeat on you. The end result will be that even if you win today, you will lose tomorrow, and, in the end, everyone will lose. Don't think in terms of victory and defeat. Think in terms of what is best for the Jewish people.
- 5** If you show contempt for other Jews, they will show contempt for you. If you show respect for other Jews, they will show respect for you. If you seek respect, give respect.
- 6** Remember that the ultimate basis of Jewish peoplehood is *kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh*, "all Jews are responsible for one another". We may not agree on anything, but we remain a single extended family. If you disagree with a friend, tomorrow he or she may no longer be your friend. But if you disagree with a family member, tomorrow he or she is still part of your family. Being a family is what keeps us together. We don't need to agree with each other, but we do need to care about each other.
- 7** G-d chose us as a people. He didn't choose only the righteous; He chose all of us. It is as a people we stand before G-d, and it is as a people we stand before the world. The world doesn't make distinctions, antisemites don't make distinctions. We are united by a covenant of shared memory, shared identity, and shared fate, even if we have differing perspectives on our faith.

The Sages said that the Torah was given to make peace in the world. How can we, the Jewish people or the State of Israel, be at peace with the world if we are unable to live at peace with ourselves? Bear this in mind the next time you are tempted to walk away from some group of Jews that you think has offended you. We are each called on to make some effort, some gesture, to listen to one another, to forgive one another, and to stay together as an extended, almost infinitely varied family. That is the only ultimate *tikkun* for the echoing grief of the Three Weeks that has haunted our history, and reverberates still.

“Fading Differences”



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

As part of a broader discussion about American Jewry, Avi Borgen asked Rabbi Hershel Schachter, Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshiva University’s Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), to reflect on the differences between the Modern Orthodox and yeshivish communities in America.

Many of the differences between the communities are fading. I recently spent Shabbos with Moishe Bane, the President of the OU, and we *davened* together at an Agudah shul. I asked him, “what percentage of the people here send their kids to college?” He said “95%!”

Years ago, it was specifically the Mizrachi community that had lawyers and doctors and engineers. Now the Agudah community also has lawyers and doctors and engineers! The Agudah became like the Mizrachi. There isn’t that much of a difference anymore.

The Chafetz Chaim once told a parable about a wealthy man with two married daughters. One son-in-law liked to eat *milchigs* (dairy), while the other liked to eat *fleishigs* (meat). The wealthy man supported both of his sons-in-law, but they never ate at the same table for dinner, since one ate *milchigs* and the other ate *fleishigs*. But then the wealthy man lost his fortune, and they could only afford to eat *milchigs*. But the two sons-in-law still sat at two tables! Then the formerly wealthy lost even more of his money, and all the family could afford to eat were potato peels that they scavenged

from the garbage. But still the two sons-in-law ate at separate tables! The father-in-law said to them: “Originally, when one of you was eating *milchigs* and the other was eating *fleishigs*, you sat at two separate tables. But now that we’re all eating potato peels, why can’t we all sit together?”

The *Chassidim* and *Misnagdim* used to have very different approaches to serving Hashem. They didn’t accept each other’s paths. But now we’re all down to eating potato peels! What’s the difference between *Chassidim* and *Misnagdim* today? Everyone is the same now!

The same is true of the Religious Zionist and *yeshivish* communities. In America, everyone is now pretty much the same.

Rabbi Hershel Schachter is a world renowned posek, a senior Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshiva University and Rosh Kollel in RIETS’ Marcos and Adina Katz Kollel.



Rabbi Schachter speaking at London’s Evening Beis, on his recent trip for the Mizrachi UK Weekend of Inspiration. (PHOTO: MIZRACHI UK)



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Mizrachi and Agudat Yisrael: Enemies or Allies?

Rabbi Moshe Avigdor Amiel

One of the first rabbis to join the Mizrachi movement, Rabbi Moshe Avigdor Amiel (1882–1945) was one of the great writers and public preachers of his time, whose oratorical skills could move even the most hardened hearts. In 1920, he was elected as one of the delegates to represent Mizrachi of Poland at the Mizrachi World Convention in Amsterdam. He made such an impression upon the Jewish community that he was soon appointed Rabbi of Antwerp, one of the largest and richest Jewish communities at the time.

In 1936, Rabbi Amiel made Aliyah in order to serve as Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, the largest Jewish community in the Yishuv, where he worked to improve relations between the religious and secular segments of the community. As Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Amiel founded Yeshivat HaYishuv HaChadash, a yeshivah high school which combined religious and secular studies. This yeshivah, later named in Rabbi Amiel's memory, was used as the model for the Bnei Akiva high schools later established throughout Israel.

One of Mizrachi's most penetrating thinkers, Rabbi Amiel was troubled by the often contentious relationship between Mizrachi and Agudat Yisrael, founded in 1912 to strengthen Orthodox institutions in opposition to the Zionist movement and Mizrachi. In this powerful 1934 essay, Rabbi Amiel senses the impending destruction of European Jewry and calls upon Mizrachi and Agudat Yisrael to find common ground in a spirit of brotherhood. Though written 88 years ago, Rabbi Amiel's essay continues to resonate in our time.



Anyone who desires to speak the truth is forced to admit that we at Mizrachi, with our limited strength, will not accomplish very much if we act alone. If we wish to avoid the fate of *אֲנִי חַיָּה עַד שֶׁיִּסְתַּחֲבֹב* (an animal that becomes unfit for a sacrifice and is sent out to pasture until it dies [Mishnah Temurah 3:3]), we must seek out partners to assist us in our holy work – whether we want to or not.

Where will we find these partners? Will we find them among those on the left who continue to distance themselves from us and our values? It is clear that there is only one source to which we can turn: to those on the right.

“A partnership with Agudat Yisrael?” you will ask with skepticism, “Is such a thing possible?” The truth is that the time has come to rethink our relationship with Agudat Yisrael.

Many people from our camp mistakenly believe that Mizrachi was established primarily to battle against the Agudah; that this *milchemet mitzvah* (obligatory war) is not merely a means to an end but rather an end in itself and the central purpose of Mizrachi’s existence. I know it is true that there are many groups within Agudat Yisrael who feel that the entire purpose of the Agudah is to battle against Mizrachi, but one wrong does not justify another.

Though Mizrachi and the Agudah disagree on several matters, both parties fly the flag of Torah and the spirit of Torah. Unfortunately, the relations between them are not at all in the spirit of Torah, whose “ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace” (Mishlei 3:17), nor do these battles add to the glory of Torah. The battle with the Agudah is not a *milchemet mitzvah*, nor is it even a *milchemet reshut* (optional war)! The fighting between us brings destruction to the entire Torah world, degrading the glory of Torah and our community and thereby strengthening those on the left who oppose us and laugh as we fight amongst ourselves.

Did we at Mizrachi not publicize, soon after our founding, the following platform: “The purpose of our association is to draw close and not to distance, to build and not to destroy, to walk in ways of pleasantness and peace, to respect the honor of our opponents and to make peace among the various parties.” Did we intend for these words to guide only our relationship with those on the left? Was our intention regarding Agudat Yisrael to distance and not to draw close, to reject even those views of theirs that are correct and to judge them

always unfavorably? Is there really nothing positive that we can learn from the Agudah?

On the other hand, does Agudat Yisrael not see that in the new *Yishuv of Eretz Yisrael*, Mizrachi alone bears the burden of battling for the glory of Torah against our [internal] enemies, “those who ravaged and ruined you who come from you” (Yishayahu 49:17), who wish to uproot the Torah from Israel? How can the Agudah watch all this from afar and sit on its hands, content with doing nothing? Has the Agudah given notice that it cares not for what happens in the broader Jewish community of Israel? The Agudah restricts its focus to Poland, but if, G-d forbid, *Eretz Yisrael* is built according to the spirit of the secular camp that seeks to uproot Torah, will this not detrimentally impact the Jews of Poland? Ultimately, *Eretz Yisrael* will become the center of worldwide Jewry, and if *Eretz Yisrael* is not ours, what will become of the exile?

If *Eretz Yisrael* is built in the spirit of Torah it will be the greatest possible sanctification of G-d’s name. And if, G-d forbid, it is built in the spirit of idolatry, it will be the greatest desecration of G-d’s name since the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*. Does the responsibility for the future of *Eretz Yisrael* not fall upon all of the faithful believers of Israel?

“We toil and they toil, we awaken early and they awaken early...” (Berachot 28b). Mustn’t we learn from those on the secular left who used to be divided into different groups like *Tze’irei Tziyon* and *Poalei Tziyon*, but for the good of the movement gave up their unique names and united to become one federation of workers for the Land of Israel? Why are only the Torah Jews torn into different factions that cannot work together? Why can’t we join together to form a federation to build a holy *Eretz Yisrael*? We do not have to combine into one organization in order to work closely together!

I am reminded of a sad story shared by the rabbis (Gittin 58a): “There was an incident involving the son and the daughter of Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha the High Priest, who were taken captive and sold into slavery to two different masters. After some time the two masters met in a certain place. This master said: I have a male slave whose beauty is unmatched in all of the world, and that master said: I have a female slave whose beauty is unmatched in all of the world.

“The two masters said: Come, let us marry these two slaves to one another and divide

the children born to them between us, as they will certainly be very beautiful. They secluded them in a room. The young man sat in one corner and the young woman sat in the other corner. He said: ‘I am a priest and the descendant of High Priests. Shall I marry a female slave?’ And she said: ‘I am the daughter of a priest and the descendant of High Priests. Shall I be married to a male slave?’ And they wept all through the night. When dawn arrived they recognized each other and fell on each other and wept until their souls departed. And with regard to them, Yirmiyahu lamented: ‘For these things I weep; my eye, my eye runs down with water, for my comforter is far from me’ (Eicha 1:16).”

How painful is this story! A brother and sister, both suffering and both the children of the same father and mother, find themselves together in a room. But instead of working together to find a way to escape from their suffering, “this one sat in one corner and that one sat in the other corner,” each one taking pride in their own *yichus* (genealogy) and demeaning the other. Ultimately they recognize each other, but only after it is too late to escape. The only thing left for them is to weep together until “their souls departed.”

Mizrachi and Agudat Yisrael, the two halves of the religious community in our time, are threatened with destruction by both our external enemies and the evil winds that blow within our own nation. But instead of working together to ensure the Torah is not forgotten among the people of Israel, G-d forbid, each camp sits in its own corner, insulting and degrading the other. I fear that when the time comes and we finally recognize that we are brothers, there won’t be anything left to save.

With regard to them, Yirmiyahu lamented: “For these things I weep...”

● Translation by Rabbi Elie Mischel of Rabbi Moshe Avigdor Amiel, *Ezer el Ami: Torah v’Tziyon*, 39–42.

Facing page, bottom: A section in “Hahed” newspaper (December 1932 edition) covering Mizrachi and Agudah news. Hahed was published in Eretz Yisrael between 1926 and 1952, and tried to encourage a Zionist spirit among Charedi Jews.

JEW'S with VIEWS

We asked five accomplished Jews from around the world: What do you think about during the moments before we read Eicha?



Rabbi Ya'akov Trump

It's a time of complex emotions. I think first about the unnecessary tragedies that unfolded during the final years before the destruction of the first *Beit HaMikdash*. It was a tumultuous time, when the last kings of Israel reigned in quick succession and Judea plunged into a futile war against the Babylonian empire that could only end in destruction. I think of Yirmiyahu's pain, how he was chosen to become a prophet against his will to warn a nation that was unwilling to hear his criticism, a generation incapable of self-reflection. I dwell on the tragic moment when King Yehoyakim publicly threw Yirmiyahu's Megillah of Eicha into the fireplace to silence his message, and how the rabble flung Yirmiyahu into the pit as his prophecies began unfolding.

But then I also remember that Yirmiyahu refused to give up on his people. I remember his love for those who refused to heed his warnings. I think of Yirmiyahu writing a letter to the Jews already in exile, giving them hope and direction, and bidding them to be active members of their host societies.

As Eicha begins, I try to channel the emotions of Yirmiyahu – his pain and exasperation on the one hand, and his compassion and understanding on the other. Yirmiyahu saw, firsthand, that our people sometimes act as its own worst enemy, and yet he never lost faith in them. I ask Hashem to have compassion on us as a community and for us, in turn, to learn the lessons of the past so we may soon be redeemed, together.

Rabbi Ya'akov Trump is the Rabbi of the Young Israel of Lawrence-Cedarhurst, New York.



Shoshana Judelman

A lifetime ago, at sleepaway camp, we sat on the outdoor basketball court and read Eicha by candlelight. I remember the somber tone of the evening but also the poignant beauty of hundreds of Jewish teens sitting together to read this scroll of agony and yearning. It connected us to each other and to our collective past in a unique and empowering way. Modern kids reciting ancient words, together.

I continuously seek that kind of connection, the feeling of being a link in the chain of Jewish practice and community that has stretched on for millennia. At the intersection between history and memory the past becomes personal and each one of us can tap into the strength of our people.

One of the most precious items I own is my grandmother's rolling pin. I never met her, but I think about her often. She passed away just a few years after immigrating to America from war-torn Europe. When I use her rolling pin, I feel her presence, her hands over mine as I roll out the dough. I imagine her *davening* to Hashem for her family's safety and health, for faith to see her through the challenges. In my mind's eye, I see countless generations of Jewish women doing the same thing. And I join them.

In the moments before Eicha, I imagine the collective energy of these *tefillot* going up to storm the heavens and beseech Hashem to take us out of darkness and bring us close to Him, with the *geulah shleimah*.

Shoshana Judelman teaches Chassidut for Shiviti Women's Institute in Jerusalem and in the Shirat David Community in Efrat, and is a guide at Yad Vashem.



Rabbi Doron Podlashuk

With a body as supple as a tree trunk (I can hardly touch my knees when bending!), I only have one thought in mind during the moment before Eicha: how am I going to get through this excruciating exercise of sitting cross-legged on the hard floor?

Once I finally settle into a semi-comfortable position, I hear the words of Yirmiyahu: *Eicha yashva badad*, “How the city sat alone”. But instead of feeling morose, my mind wanders to the daily traffic jam I sit through while trying to enter Jerusalem. I daydream about another entrance to the city cutting through a mountain that will open soon and cut my travel time by twenty minutes. And then I feel guilty that I cannot connect to the tragic words of the prophet. As we read the depressing descriptions of Jerusalem, it becomes harder and harder to get into the mood. I just can’t see Jerusalem that way!

Reading Eicha and mourning for Jerusalem today is not a simple task. I am blessed to work in the city, in a *kollel* where words of Torah are heard all day. Seeing its tremendous development, both spiritual and physical, the destruction of Jerusalem described by Yirmiyahu seems far away. Yet with all that we have, we must remember that the crown jewel is still missing. The *Beit HaMikdash*, the home of the *Shechinah* and the center of our national consciousness, remains in ruins. I remind myself that although we have come a long way, we are still lacking what’s most important.

With G-d’s help, next year we will have a *Beit HaMikdash*. And then, most importantly, I won’t have to sit in this excruciating position ever again!

Rabbi Doron Podlashuk is the Director of the Selwyn & Ros Smith and Family Manhigut Toranit Program, and the Director of the English Tzurba M’Rabanan Series.



Rabbanit Sally Mayer

Before Eicha, I find myself thinking of the bitter arguments that tear families and communities apart.

The Talmud (Gittin 56) relates that during the Roman siege against Jerusalem just before the destruction of the Second Temple, the zealots wanted to fight to the death while the Sages wanted to surrender to salvage what they could. The zealots burned down the storehouses of grain in the besieged city to force a fight, and the city descended into a terrible famine. When Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai asked his nephew, Abba Sikkara, leader of the zealots, why they wanted to kill the people with famine, Abba Sikkara answered that if he publicly disagrees with the zealots, they will kill him. Together they devised a plan for Rabbi Yochanan to secretly leave the city to make a deal with Vespasian, ending the siege and saving the people.

The zealots were so fanatical that even their leader feared them and couldn’t reason with them. This inability to talk with one another, to calmly consider the other’s view and come to a compromise is a malady affecting us today as well. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai was somehow able to bridge these gaps, by maintaining familial connections even with those with whom he bitterly disagreed and working together to devise a creative solution.

Rabbi Yochanan was not only a giant of Torah knowledge but also humble and kind, always quick to extend a greeting to people approaching him, whether Jews or gentiles. His humility and respect for all people were the keys to his success in bridging the gaps during that challenging time – and these qualities are the secret to greater understanding and unity in our generation as well.

Rabbanit Sally Mayer is Rosh Midrasha at Ohr Torah Stone’s Midreshet Lindenbaum.



Rabbi Binny Freedman

My mind wanders to a story I heard years ago. During the summer of 1942, on a train to Treblinka, a father is overheard telling his young son: “You see? That’s a tree!” He must have told his child stories in the ghetto, but the boy had never actually seen a tree...

Such stories tear at your soul. On a train to Treblinka, crushed into a cattle-car with no food or water, after years in the ghetto, this father still wanted to teach his son! We Jews always focus on the future, never losing hope despite the pain.

But then I hear: *Eicha*? How did it come to this? How could a civilized world allow one-and-a-half million children to be murdered? How could our world sink to such depths of evil? How could Cossacks literally ride through human beings tied to trees in 17th century Ukraine? How could the Catholic Church burn our ancestors alive at the stake in 15th century Spain?

As the reading continues, I try to put aside theology and philosophy and focus on that first word: “*Eicha*?” How can we even begin to comprehend what we have been through? “*Ayekah*?”, “Where are You Hashem?” But then I remember this question was first asked of humanity, when G-d said to Adam in the Garden: “Where are you? Yesterday we were so close, but you have lost your way...” I realize I must ask a different question; not ‘where was G-d?’ but ‘where was man?’

Rabbi Binny Freedman is Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshivat Orayta.



Dr. Pinchas Polonsky

The Messianic Process of Modern Israel:

The 3 Stages of Shaul, David and Shlomo

1 TRADITIONAL JEWISH MESSIANISM: THE CHALLENGE OF OUR TIME

As Maimonides put it, we will only be able to grasp the messianic process fully when we actually experience it firsthand. It is not surprising, therefore, that throughout Jewish history there has been a continuous reinterpretation and refinement of messianic concepts.

According to traditional Jewish sources, the redemption will unfold in two distinct phases linked to two messiahs, *Mashiach ben Yosef* (the *Mashiach* the son of Yosef) and *Mashiach ben David* (the *Mashiach* the son of David). *Mashiach ben Yosef* will put in place the material conditions for the redemption, after which he will “die” and be replaced by *Mashiach ben David*, who will bring the process of redemption to fruition. According to this traditional approach, the *Mashiach* will arrive at a particular moment in the future, without distinct stages.

Over the last 250 years, the redemption and the two messiahs were reassessed by

leading Jewish thinkers and the founders of Religious Zionism. At the end of the eighteenth century, Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna, the Vilna Gaon, taught that *Mashiach ben Yosef* does not refer to a particular person but rather an epoch, a time of change. In the mid-nineteenth century, Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer contended that the messianic era was not the end of days, but a part of ongoing human history – and that the Jewish people were responsible for bringing the messiah themselves.

In the early twentieth century, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook identified the secular Zionist movement with *Mashiach ben Yosef*. The goal of secular Zionism was to normalize the Jewish people by establishing and then protecting a sovereign Jewish nation like other nations. This goal was similar to that of King Shaul, the first Jewish king and archetypical *Mashiach ben Yosef* figure. Just as King Shaul’s role was to prepare the way for the coming of King David, secular Zionism would prepare the

way for *Mashiach ben David*. Rav Kook’s understanding of the messianic process has become the standard view of mainstream Religious Zionism.

Today, almost 90 years after Rav Kook’s passing, we must reevaluate his understanding of redemption. Secular Zionism has successfully achieved the goals of normalizing and protecting the Jewish people through the establishment and success of the modern State of Israel. According to Rav Kook’s two-phase model of messianic philosophy, it is now time for secular Zionism – the modern manifestation of *Mashiach ben Yosef* – to “die” and be replaced by *Mashiach ben David*. Unfortunately, there is still no sign of him; no political or social movement in modern Israel could plausibly be identified as *Mashiach ben David*.

How should we perceive our own generation? Which phase of the messianic process are we currently living through?



2 A PROPOSED CORRECTION: THE THREE PHASES OF REDEMPTION

To answer these critical questions, we must refine the standard model for redemption.

As described in the books of *Shmuel* and *Melachim*, Jewish monarchy went through three phases of development, represented by the reigns of three Biblical monarchs: Shaul, David, and Shlomo. Shaul, a descendant of Rachel associated with the tribes of Yosef, is a root of the messianic projection of *Mashiach ben Yosef*, while Shlomo is a root of the messianic projection of *Mashiach ben David*, for he is the son of David. David himself, however, seems to have no place in this two-part messianic scheme!

I propose to return David to his proper place in the messianic process. I believe that the three Biblical kings represent a three-phase messianic process, with each phase reflecting the main values and goals of respective generations of the Jewish people.

The reign of Shaul (Mashiach ben Yosef): normalization and security

King Shaul sought security and normalization, goals he accomplished by unifying the people and strengthening their hold on the Land of Israel. Spiritual aspirations, however, were not his priority.

When the people of Israel asked the prophet Shmuel to appoint a king for them, normalization and security were their explicit goals: “That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles” (Shmuel I 8:20). Sovereignty, social stability, and national security were their top priorities.

Given this backdrop, it is unsurprising that King Shaul made no attempt to bring back the *Aron HaKodesh* to reestablish the *Mishkan*. Instead, he allowed the *Aron HaKodesh* to remain in Kiryat Yearim throughout his reign. Indeed, throughout King Shaul’s reign the *Aron HaKodesh* is hardly mentioned, for Shaul had little interest in building a religious center. Though he invites the prophet Shmuel to stand at his side, he does so only to gain respect from the people, ultimately ignoring some of the prophet’s instructions.

A similar dynamic can be found in modern Israel, in which the secular state shows



For King David, the nation of Israel was the manifestation in this world of Divine Providence, and so the nation’s religious revival and relationship with G-d took priority.

respect for Judaism while having little real interest in religion.

The reign of David: spiritual revival

King David made spiritual matters an essential component of his policies. When confronting the enemy, Shaul’s army regarded the Philistines’ verbal insults as an attempt “to defy Israel”, an insult to the honor of the people and the nation (Shmuel I 17:25). David, by contrast, saw these insults as aimed against G-d, asking, “who is that uncircumcised Philistine that he dares defy the ranks of the living G-d?” (Shmuel I 17:26).

For King David, the nation of Israel was the manifestation in this world of Divine Providence, and so the nation’s religious revival and relationship with G-d took priority. David paid special attention to the advice and guidance of the prophet Natan, who often reprimanded him, and restored the *Aron HaKodesh* to its proper place in Jerusalem. Though G-d did not allow him to do so, David yearned to build the *Beit HaMikdash*, the spiritual center of the people of Israel.

The reign of Shlomo (Mashiach ben David): a universal appeal to humanity

By the time King Shlomo assumed the throne, Shaul and David had secured the safety and stability of the nation and begun a religious revival. This allowed Shlomo to take the next step: bringing the belief in G-d and the Torah to other nations. He advanced this mission through his many dynastic marriages and by raising the political and economic status of his kingdom. To a great degree, he succeeded in teaching the surrounding idol-worshipping peoples to revere the G-d and people of Israel.

For this reason, Shlomo was the right man to build the *Beit HaMikdash*: “Thus, all the peoples of the earth will know Your name and revere You, as does Your people Israel; and they will recognize that Your name is attached to this House that I have built” (Melachim I 8:41–43). With the *Beit HaMikdash* serving as a magnetic attraction to non-Jewish leaders like the Queen of Sheba all over the world, King Shlomo could now bring the teachings of Torah to all of humanity.

The trajectory of these three kings of Israel can serve as a framework for understanding the messianic process – and where our generation fits in.

Our present moment corresponds to the completion of the first phase of redemption – the reign of Shaul, who represents the *Mashiach ben Yosef*. The next phase will not yet bring the final redemption of Shlomo and *Mashiach ben David*, but rather the religious revival of King David. This second phase is clearly present in modern Israel, and its arrival is led by the Religious Zionist community, who are settling Judea and Samaria and bringing a religious revival to cities throughout Israel through *Garinim Torani'im*. Like King David, the Religious Zionist community is not satisfied with a national-secular revival, but seeks a national-religious revival as well.

There are clear parallels between the transition from Shaul to David and the shifting phases of redemption in our own time. Just as Shaul feared that David was coming to replace him and tried to eliminate him, the old Zionist elite is confronting the settlement movement and attempting to discredit and eliminate it. Shaul’s pursuit of David was ultimately unsuccessful, and so too will be the attempts of the old elite to tear down the settlements. At the same time, just as David refused to fight against Shaul and revered him as the King of Israel, the Religious Zionists respect and support the ideals of Herzl’s Zionism.

We are living at a time of transition between two messianic phases: the phase of Shaul, *Mashiach ben Yosef* and secular Zionism on the one hand, and the phase of David, the interim messiah of spiritual revival and Religious Zionism. The third and final phase of King Shlomo, the era of *Mashiach ben David*, is still beyond the horizon.

3 THE MISSION OF OUR GENERATION

Given our place in the messianic process, what is the mission of our generation? I believe our religious agenda must work on two levels: taking practical steps for today while also laying the groundwork for the next and final phase.

One hundred years ago, Rav Kook called upon religious Jews to support secular Zionism, *Mashiach ben Yosef*, for it was the *Mashiach* of that time. At the same time, Rav Kook established Yeshivat Merkaz Harav to educate future leaders who would prepare the next phase of the messianic process.

In our time, we must find the same balance. As we strengthen the settlement movement and continue the religious revival in Israeli society, we must also develop those aspects of Judaism that will become the foundation for the final phase of redemption, *Mashiach ben David*.

The main difference between Kings David and Shlomo was the character of their mission. David made Jerusalem the political and religious center of the nation, the focal point of the nation of Israel. Shlomo took the next step and made Jerusalem the spiritual center of humanity's connection to the G-d of Judaism, so that "all the families of the Earth will be blessed through you" (Bereishit 12:3). To prepare for the reign of Shlomo, to make the Divine spirit accessible to the nations of the world, we must add universal parameters to today's national Religious Zionism.

In 1910, Rav Kook argued that while at the present moment the Jewish people were divided into three ideological camps – those who focused on G-d (religious), nationhood (Zionist), and humanity (universalist) – the Judaism of the future would be a synthesis of all three: G-d, the people of Israel, and humanity.

A century ago, many influential Orthodox rabbis argued that national Zionist ideals contradicted the values of Judaism. Today, however, these ideals harmoniously coexist in Religious Zionism. Similarly, many people today believe that universal values such as science, technology, art, democracy, human rights, ecology, the value of development itself, and many others are somehow foreign to Judaism. In fact, integrating these values into Judaism is not only possible, but also absolutely necessary, for otherwise we cannot become a "light unto the nations".

For this reason, Religious Zionists should combine these universal values with Jewish tradition – but without compromising the national and Orthodox religious elements of Religious Zionism. We must proceed carefully, adopting only what we can define as "sparks of Divine Light".

Religious Zionists must begin to turn outwards, so that "teaching will go out from Zion; and the word of the L-rd from Jerusalem" (Yishayahu 2:3), to all the nations of the world. By doing this, the ideals of Judaism will become universal values, and Israel and Jerusalem will become the global spiritual center.

An important contribution to this work is made by cross-cultural enrichment, interfaith dialogue (especially with Christianity), and also by *bnai Noach*, "non-Jews professing Judaism". All these play important part in fulfilling the prophecy: as our people's body is revived from "dry bones" in modern Israel, and G-d is about to "make breath enter" the body (Yechezkel 37:5), the breath will come "from the four winds" (Yechezkel 37:9), that is, from around the world.

In the heyday of secular Zionism, as in the days of King Shaul, the Temple Mount did not play a role in Israeli life. When the Israeli army captured the Old City of Jerusalem in 1967, the Chief Rabbinate issued a ban to prevent Jews from ascending the Temple Mount. Recently, as in the days of David, we have witnessed an increasing interest among Israeli society in the Temple Mount. Many rabbinic authorities now permit Jews to ascend and pray there. Like King David, our generation must accept that the *Beit HaMikdash* can only be built in the forthcoming era of *Mashiach ben David*. In the meantime, our preparation should focus on practically increasing

Jewish pilgrimage to the Temple Mount, while simultaneously teaching our people that the Temple cannot be only for internal Jewish needs, but must also serve as a link between G-d and the nations of the world. Recognizing the universal significance of the *Beit HaMikdash* is a necessary condition for its rebuilding.

In our current phase of redemption, the phase of King David, we must actively work to bring the phase of King Shlomo, the era of *Mashiach ben David*. By integrating universal values into Judaism, making Judaism accessible to non-Jews and increasing our awareness of the universal role of the *Beit HaMikdash*, we will play our part in bringing the final redemption – may it come speedily, in our days!

● The full text of this essay, and other writings by Dr. Polonsky, are available at www.PinchasPolonsky.org/en/.

Dr. Pinchas Polonsky is a Russian-Israeli philosopher and educator. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, he was a leading Torah teacher in the Moscow underground and was one of the founders of Machanaim, an organization that assists Russian immigrants in Israel learn more about their Jewish heritage. The author of *Bible Dynamics: Contemporary Torah Commentary*, Dr. Polonsky's research focuses on the Torah of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook.

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Sivan Rahav-Meir

Thoughts for Shabbat Chazon



The Shabbat before Tisha B'Av is called *Shabbat Chazon*, the “Shabbat of Vision”. In the Torah we read Parashat Devarim, and the *haftarah* begins with the words וַיִּשְׁאָל יְהוָה, “the vision of Yishayahu”.

Perhaps we need to shake the dust off of this word וַיִּשְׁאָל, “vision”. We don’t speak of it much on a daily basis as we go about our lives. Tisha B’Av is an annual reminder of our great national story, a story that is far greater than each of our individual stories. Over the last two years, it seems that the people who dwell in Zion have one great desire – 61. That someone will be able to get 61 seats in the Knesset! But our people did not return to *Eretz Yisrael* merely to form a government of 61 seats. We came back to our land after two thousand years of exile to be a blessing to this region and a blessing to the entire world.

Words like “redemption” or “holiness” never frightened our ancestors, neither in exile nor at the beginning of the Zionist movement. Today our lexicon is much more modest. We frequently talk about “rights” but not about our obligations, about global values but not traditional Jewish national values, and our grand hope is simply to create a system in which all of the tribes of Israel will somehow get along with each other – without a shared vision.

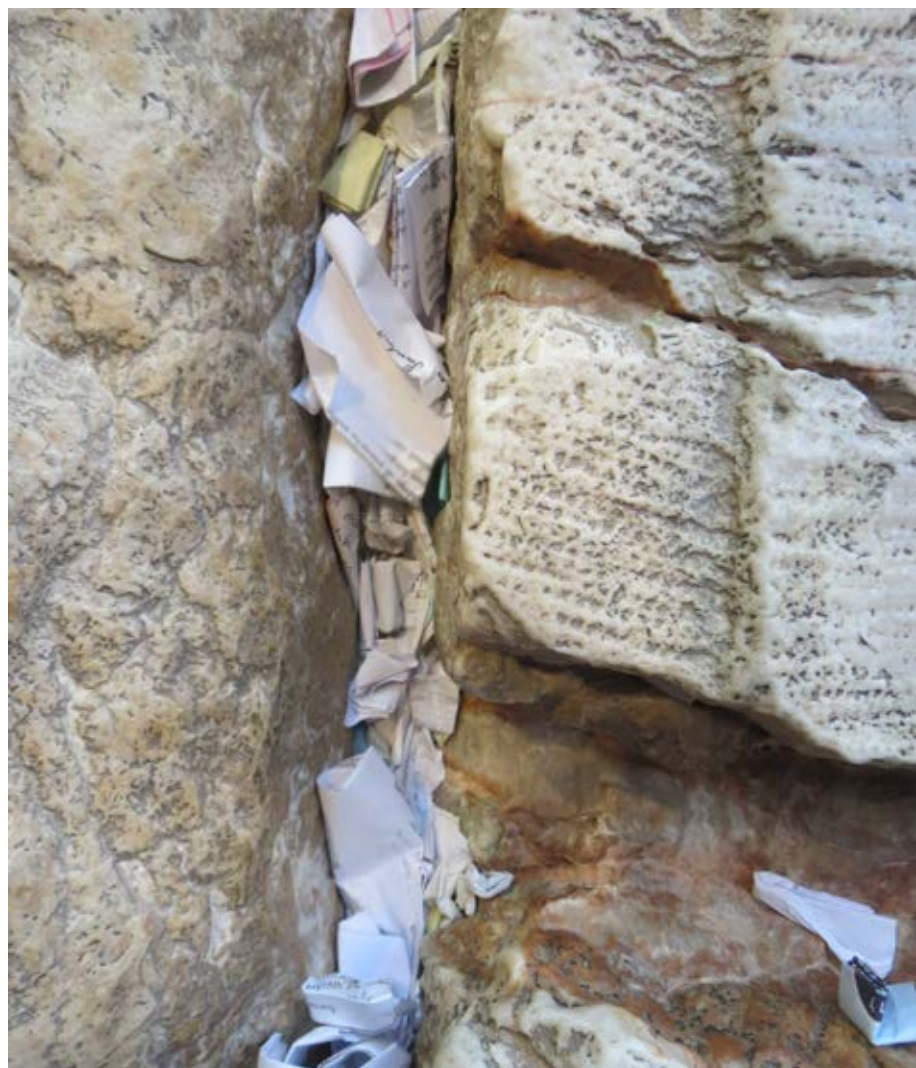
Our commentators explain that *Shabbat Chazon* is the Shabbat on which each one of us must expand our vision and imagine the maximum – the redemption of our nation and the personal redemption of each and every one of us. This is the time to pay attention to what is missing in the world, to absence, to space, to trouble, to distress – and to pray for the good.

After two years of Covid-19, after the disasters of Meron and Surfside, after so many painful terrorist attacks, it is not difficult to connect to grief and demand a corrected world.

Rav Kook once wrote: “We have begun to speak of great things, among ourselves and in the ears of the entire world, and we have not yet finished. We are still in the middle of our speech.” Tisha B’Av is not just a day to

mourn what we have lost, but a day of remembering what is expected of us.

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).



ABOVE AND TOP PHOTO: HOWIE MISCHEL



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Is the Ninth of Av a Relevant Fast Today?



Rabbi Heshie and Rookie Billet

With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, followed by the dramatic reunification of Jerusalem in 1967, does it really make sense to observe a fast that commemorates the destruction of the two ancient Holy Temples?

It is certainly true that the *Beit HaMikdash* has not been rebuilt. But despite the complications surrounding it, Jewish sovereignty over the Temple Mount is a fact; the power to rebuild the *Beit HaMikdash* is in our hands. Why then must we suffer through a 25-hour fast on the Ninth of Av during the hottest days of the summer?

Over the years, we observed several special Tisha B'Av experiences in wonderful summer camps - Camps Galila, Morasha, and Munk. These camps ran meaningful programs centered around creative services with explanations of the *kinot*, the lamentations of Tisha B'Av, that we recited while sitting on the ground like mourners. However, these programs and rituals could have all been done much more comfortably and just as meaningfully with food and water in our bodies!

The answer to the question lies in a deeper understanding of Tisha B'Av in the context of the bigger picture of Jewish history. One of the *kinot* we recite on Tisha B'Av begins with *מי יתן רִאשִׁי מַיִם*, "Who will turn my face into water..." It was written by Kalonymus ben Yehuda of Mainz about the destruction and massacre of the Jewish communities of Speyer, Mainz, and Worms in Iyar and Sivan of 1096 during the First Crusade.

In the *kinah*, the author states that although the death of the victims of the Crusades are worthy of separate days of mourning on the days of their



Remembering the past is the key to being prepared for the future!

respective destructions, just as we mourn our destroyed Jerusalem Temples, "we should not add a festival of grief, and we should delay our grief for later". Rabbi Isaac Herzog explains this to mean that we should not mourn the victims of the 1096 Crusade on Shavuot which is proximate to the calamity, but should wait until after Shavuot to commemorate the tragedy (*Pesakim U'ketavim* 2:99).

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, however, explained the *kinah* differently. According to the Rav, Kalonymus ben Yehuda is telling us that the tragedies at the time of the Crusades derive from the destruction of the Temples which we mourn on Tisha B'Av. For this reason, all national Jewish tragedies should be observed on Tisha B'Av, which is the national day of Jewish mourning for all calamities that have befallen our collective nation (*Kinot*, 1970).

Following the Rav's reasoning, some segments of the Jewish community have questioned the propriety of designating 27th Nissan as Yom HaShoah, arguing that the Holocaust should be included in our Tisha B'Av liturgy, just as the York massacre of 1190 is mourned on Tisha B'Av. Nevertheless, it is fair to note that Yom HaShoah was never designated as a fast day! Rather, it was set aside as a day to reflect about and remember the Holocaust, its millions of victims, its survivors and its heroes.

In order for our people to protect and defend ourselves and to fulfill our

ultimate destiny, we must always be cognizant of the past. As long as we have enemies that seek to destroy us, we must be prepared to defend ourselves. By remembering that our enemies have tried to destroy us throughout our history, we renew our dedication to self-defense. Remembering the past is the key to being prepared for the future! And though we could certainly remember the persecutions of the past on Tisha B'Av while hydrated and nourished, the drama, strain and tension of the 25-hour midsummer fast brings the memory of past events to life.

Zechariah prophesied that one day in the future, Tisha B'Av will indeed be transformed to a happy day: "The fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth months will become happy days and festivals for the household of Israel" (Zechariah 8:19). Tisha B'Av, the fast of the fifth month, will one day be a *Yom Tov*! By remembering the past and mourning what we have lost, we prepare the way for a time when there will be no more mourning, when *Am Yisrael* will celebrate the rebuilding of the *Beit HaMikdash* - speedily in our days!

Rabbi Heshie and Rookie Billet recently made Aliyah after long and distinguished careers in Jewish community work in the United States. Rabbi Billet is Rabbi Emeritus of the Young Israel of Woodmere and a member of the US President's Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad. Rookie Billet recently retired after a long career as a Jewish educator, principal, shul Rebbetzin, and yoetzet halachah, and hopes to contribute to life in Israel.



Rabbi Yechiel Wasserman

RABBI AKIVA THE OPTIMIST

It happened that Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria, Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Akiva went up to Jerusalem. When they reached Mount Scopus, they tore their clothing. When they reached the Temple Mount, they saw a fox emerging from the Holy of Holies. The others started weeping; Rabbi Akiva laughed. They said: "Why are you laughing?" He responded: "Why are you crying?" They said: "A place so holy that it is said of it, 'the stranger that approaches it shall die,' now foxes walk there, and we shouldn't cry?" Rabbi Akiva said: "That is why I laugh. For it is written, 'I shall have bear witness for Me faithful witnesses, Uriah the Priest and Zechariah' (Yishayahu 8:2). What is the connection between Uriah and Zechariah? Uriah lived at the time of the First Temple, and Zechariah was at the time of the Second Temple! The Torah is making Zechariah's prophecy dependent upon Uriah's prophecy. With Uriah, it is written: 'Therefore, because of you, Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the Temple Mount like the high places of a forest' (Michah 3:12). With Zechariah it is written, 'Old men and women will sit in the streets of Jerusalem' (Zechariah 8:4). As long as Uriah's prophecy was not fulfilled, I feared that Zechariah's prophecy may not be fulfilled either. But now that Uriah's prophecy has been fulfilled, it is certain that Zechariah's prophecy will be fulfilled." With these words they replied to him: "Akiva, you have comforted us! Akiva, you have comforted us!" (Makkot 24b)

This famous passage is difficult to understand. When the rabbis reached Mount Scopus and saw the destruction of the Temple Mount, all of them tore their clothing in accordance with *halachah* – including Rabbi Akiva. But a short while later, when they reached the Temple Mount, Rabbi Akiva began to laugh. What changed during the time of that short trip? Why did only Rabbi Akiva laugh? And why did Rabbi Akiva's insight make such an impact on the other rabbis? Surely they already knew the verses Rabbi Akiva cited!

A careful study of the story brings us to one conclusion: only Rabbi Akiva, with his extraordinary personality, vision and optimism, could have responded this way. Imagine the socio-political situation of the Jewish people during the time following the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* and the trauma of war and destruction which was permanently etched in their consciousness. They still remembered the *Beit HaMikdash* in its glory, the *kohanim* doing their holy work and the *levi'im*

who sang so beautifully there. How could they not be depressed?

Our rabbis taught: When the Temple was destroyed, many Jews became ascetics, binding themselves neither to eat meat nor to drink wine... Rabbi Yehoshua said: "My sons, listen to me. Not to mourn at all is impossible, because the blow has fallen. To mourn too much is also impossible, because we do not impose on the community a hardship which the majority cannot endure"... The rabbis have therefore decreed: A man may stucco his house, but he should leave a little bare... A woman can put on all her ornaments, but leave off one or two." (Bava Batra 60b)

After tearing his clothing at Mount Scopus, Rabbi Akiva thought to himself: "Will we forever live depressed? Isn't it our duty to inspire a new spirit and hope in the hearts of the people?" As he walked in heavy silence with the other rabbis to the Temple Mount, Rabbi Akiva became determined to change the attitude of his friends – and the entire Jewish people. Seeing a fox at the Holy of Holies, Rabbi Akiva consciously sought verses of consolation and hope. Yes, the other rabbis

knew these verses, but only Rabbi Akiva could think of them at such a time. "Akiva, you have comforted us! Your optimism has infused us with optimism!"

Rabbi Akiva's entire life was one of optimism and faith. It is what gave him the strength to begin learning Torah at the age of forty, and to persevere through many years of terrible poverty. It was Rabbi Akiva who said that "all G-d does is for the best", and it was Rabbi Akiva who established the blessing of redemption. And it is Rabbi Akiva who continues to give us strength and optimism, even during the most difficult times.

This, too, is the mission of World Mizrahi – to bring optimism to every corner of the Diaspora. After two thousand years of exile, our people are finally returning home to our Land, working together to rebuild the *Beit HaMikdash*. May we soon see that day!

Rabbi Yechiel Wasserman is Co-President of World Mizrahi.



RETURN THE TORAH TO ITS PROPER PLACE!



Rabbi Elan Mazer

Among the most controversial issues in the State of Israel today are questions concerning religion and state. From buses on Shabbat to *chametz* in hospitals, any change to the sanctified ‘status quo’ of religious affairs in Israel leads to uproar. Most Jews believe the State of Israel should incorporate Jewish values, and most reject religious coercion. However, striking the ideal balance between these values is a point of great tension between the Religious Zionist, Charedi, and secular factions. Within this debate, one term has gained much attention and is often used in extreme distaste – *medinat halachah*, the notion of transforming the State of Israel into a state based on *halachah*. For secular Jews (and many religious Jews as well), the prospect of Israel becoming a *medinat halachah* is frightening, leading to fears that Israel will one day resemble the Iranian theocracy.

Why are so many Jews afraid of *halachah*? How is it possible that *mitzvot* and *halachah* can be compared to the radical edicts of murderous regimes? Why isn’t *halachah* associated with justice, compassion and positive values? “Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace!”

Though we are familiar with Torah as a personal religious creed that we choose to live by as individuals, we struggle to grasp it as a doctrine by which a nation can be governed. For millennia, we did not experience Torah as a national constitution, but only on an individual level, with each person using the *mitzvot* as personal religious guidelines. Our experience of *halachah*, for the last two thousand

years, is limited to daily actions and restrictions like refraining from eating non-kosher food or praying three times a day. The notion of a government implementing these same restrictions and requirements is foreign to us.



Why isn’t halachah associated with justice, compassion and positive values?

The Gemara explains that the exile and destruction of our homeland caused an annulment of Torah like no other: “And my eye shall drop tears and tears, and run down with tears, because G-d’s flock is carried away captive’ (Yirmiyahu 13:17)... Since Israel was exiled from their place, there is no greater neglect of [the study of] the Torah than this” (Chagigah 5b).

This passage is difficult to understand. During the past two thousand years of exile, Torah literature has expanded immeasurably, with the completion of the Talmud and countless commentaries and scholarly works. How, exactly, has there been a “neglect” of Torah? In *Shabbat HaAretz*, Rav Kook explains that the Gemara is lamenting the contraction of the Torah from a national experience to an individual religious guide. After the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash* and the exile of our people, Torah no longer existed on the national and governmental level. As Yirmiyahu laments: “Her gates are sunk into the ground, He has smashed her bars to bits; her king and leaders

are in exile, instruction is no more; her prophets, too, receive no vision from Hashem” (Eicha 2:9).

The rabbis explain that a central theme of Eicha is mourning for the exile of the *Sanhedrin*, the legislative body of the Jewish people. Its exile parallels the exile of G-d’s presence, which is now confined to individuals. “Since the day the *Beit HaMikdash* was destroyed, the Holy One, blessed be He, has nothing in His world but the four cubits of *halachah* alone” (Berachot 8a). The “four cubits of *halachah*” symbolize our individual worship of G-d, and the restricted application of Torah during a time of exile. The destruction we mourn on Tisha B’Av encompasses not only the physical destruction of the Temple but also the retreat of Torah from a national legislative guide to a personal religious creed.

After 2,000 years of experiencing Torah solely as individuals, the prospect of a *medinat halachah* appears frightening, provoking fears of religious coercion. However, in its fullest form, Torah was always intended to form the basis of a national legislative and governmental system that enlightens and uplifts every aspect of life.

This is why we mourn. And this, too, is the call to action in our generation – to embrace the full scope of Torah and to develop it to the point where its compassionate and inspiring values will once again be manifest in all aspects of our lives. May we soon return the Torah to its proper place of glory – to the very center of our national life!

Rabbi Elan Mazer is National Director of Mizrachi Canada.



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mizrachi.org/speakers



Susannah Schild

Ein Prat: A Window into our Past

In the footsteps of our prophets

On a quiet day, the Ein Prat Nature Reserve is idyllic. A cool stream, known as Nachal Prat, flows through the middle of the reserve, nourishing plentiful fig trees, wild mint, purple flowers, and tall reeds. The sound of rushing water gently drifts through the air. Along the river there are magical hideaways, perfect for quiet contemplation. Crystal pools of water are plentiful at Ein Prat; some are tucked away in the shade of trees while others are framed on all sides by walls of alabaster rock. This little desert oasis in Judea is indisputably beautiful.

Only a half-hour from Jerusalem, the Ein Prat Nature Reserve has its fair share of visitors. Nature seekers can enter the reserve from several spots: at Ein Prat, Ein Maboia, Ein Kelt, and Ein Shaharit. But despite the reserve's popularity, many people are unaware of the rich history of Nachal Prat, a history that illustrates our people's age-old connection with the Land.

Like many other sites in Israel, you'll find several ancient ruins around Nachal Prat. There are old aqueducts and Ottoman-era gates, ancient palaces and synagogues, and a monastery. But Nachal Prat is also explicitly referenced in the Tanach, most notably as the stream that flows by the city of Anatot (modern day Almon-Anatot), where Yirmiyahu the prophet lived and prophesied.

An almond rod

Anatot, an ancient Judean town located just above Nachal Prat, was a city of *kohanim*. Yirmiyahu lived in Anatot just before the destruction of the first *Beit HaMikdash*, and the natural terrain affected his life and prophecies.



In Yirmiyahu's first prophetic vision, Hashem asks the awestruck prophet to identify a wooden rod. This rod is neither a branch of a tree nor a stick, but rather a finished and refined piece of wood, a *makel*, a walking stick. Yirmiyahu doesn't hesitate. He promptly identifies the rod as having been made from an *etz shaked*, an almond tree, which symbolically represented the fate of our people. כִּי־שָׁקֵד אָנֹכִי עַל־דְּבָרִי לְעֵשׂוֹתוֹ. "For I will quickly bring My word to pass" (Yirmiyahu 1:12). The verb שָׁקֵד denotes speed or haste; just as an almond tree is the first tree to blossom in springtime, calamitous events would soon unfold.

How did Yirmiyahu know so much about wood? With the exception of carpenters and woodworkers, most of us can't identify a piece of almond wood merely by looking at its grain. The answer to this mystery lies near Yirmiyahu's hometown in the valley of Prat. Visit Nachal Prat in January, and you'll see a world of pale pink and white almond blossoms growing plentifully near the stream. Growing up near Nachal Prat, Yirmiyahu would have

been familiar with the unique color and grain pattern of almond wood.

Between a rock and a hard place

In another powerful prophecy, Hashem asks Yirmiyahu to do something strange: "Take the belt that you bought, which is around your hips, and go at once to Prat and hide it there in a hole of rock" (Yirmiyahu 13:4). Modern-day commentators believe that the Prat referred to in this verse is our very own Nachal Prat, located in the valley below Almon-Anatot. It's unlikely that Hashem sent Yirmiyahu on a metaphysical journey to the Euphrates River (as suggested by Rambam); it is far more likely that Yirmiyahu was sent on a short excursion to his own backyard – to Nachal Prat.

Once he reached the water, Yirmiyahu took his linen belt and placed it beneath a rock in the stream. It's easy to imagine what this belt looked like when Yirmiyahu returned "many days" later. After being pummeled by the current of the stream, nibbled by fish, and worn thin by tough rock, the



linen belt would have disintegrated into bits by the time of his return.

As Hashem explained to Yirmiyahu, the belt represented the people of Israel. Although the nation once served as G-d's belt of splendor and glory, their sins would lead to their national disintegration, a painful fate for a formerly glorious people.

Rich with history and beauty

The history of Nachal Prat doesn't end with Yirmiyahu. Generations later, after the Jewish people returned from the Babylonian exile to the Holy Land, the Maccabim fought their fourth battle against the Greeks near Nachal Prat. Following the battle, the Maccabim escaped into the recesses of Nachal Prat to hide from their enemies. With its caves and crevices and a constant fresh water supply, Nachal Prat was the perfect place for them to hide.

Later in history, after the Jewish people were once again exiled from the Land, Christian monks gravitated to Nachal Prat. The famous monk Haritoun, who later built a monastery in Nachal Tekoa near Jerusalem, built his first monastery along Nachal Prat - the perfect place to experience silence in nature and commune with G-d. The fresh water, plentiful figs and almonds, and caves that could be used for shelter made it even more appealing.

Visiting Nachal Prat today

The Ein Prat Nature Reserve is one of the most beautiful natural sites in the Jerusalem area. Appropriate for both low-key outings and serious hikes, it boasts a 20 kilometer path that leads from one side of the reserve to the other, alongside a crystal-clear stream.

In the summertime, cool water and shade offer a welcome escape from the Mediterranean heat. There are swimming and wading spots, jumping pools and waterfalls, and you can see many fish, birds, frogs, and other animals that gravitate towards this desert oasis.

Rich in biblical history, a trip to Nachal Prat is more than just a beautiful day out in nature. The Ein Prat Nature Reserve serves as a window into our past, the *Tanach*, and the lives of our forefathers.

Susannah Schild was born and raised in New Orleans, Louisiana, lives in Gush Etzion, and is the founder of hikingintheholyland.com, an inspiring guide for all who enjoy hiking in Israel.





Rabbi Yosef
Zvi Rimon

THE PROZBUL IN OUR TIME

WHAT IS A PROZBUL?

When Hillel saw that the wealthy were refusing to lend money to the poor and violating what is written in the Torah - "Beware lest there be any reprobate thing in your heart..." (Devarim 15:9) - Hillel instituted the *prozbul* (an institution, *proz*, to encourage the wealthy, *bul*, to lend), which ensures that a loan will not be canceled due to *shemitta* (Shevi'it 10:3-4).

This is the substance of the *prozbul*: "I submit to you, such-and-such individuals, the judges in such-and-such place, that whatever debt is owed to me, I shall collect it at any time I desire", and the judges or witnesses sign below.

How could Hillel make loans stay in force after the end of the *shemitta* year, thereby abrogating a law of the Torah? According to Rava, Hillel was able to do so because a court has the authority to declare property ownerless, while Abayei argues that Hillel could enact the *prozbul* because nowadays *shemitta* observance is required only by rabbinic law (Gittin 36a-b).

HOW PROZBUL WORKS

"One who submits to a court - the debts owed him are not subject to cancellation" (Mishnah Shevi'it 10:2).

The Torah says to forgive loans to "your brother". By using this wording, it addresses a private person rather than a court. The requirement to forgive a loan therefore does not apply to a court, in keeping with the understanding that the basis of this *mitzvah* is the prohibition against showing ownership of money. No such law exists regarding something that belongs to a court, because the judges are not owners of the object, but representatives of the public (*Sifrei*, Re'eh 113; Yerushalmi 10:1).

TIMING

A *prozbul* is written in the month of Elul at the end of a *shemitta* year; it cannot be written after Rosh Hashanah, because by then the debt has been erased. At first glance, it would seem that a *prozbul* should be prepared on the last day of Elul, to prevent the cancellation of all loans made until then. However, many permit writing a *prozbul* from the beginning of the month, based on the *halachic* rule that unless otherwise stated, a loan comes due no earlier than thirty days after it is given. Therefore, any loans extended during Elul are not canceled.



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THE COURT

"Shmuel said, 'A *prozbul* is written only in either the Court of Sura or the Court of Neharda'" (Gittin 36b).

The implication is that a *prozbul* may be written only in a court of note (*Shulchan Aruch*, Choshen Mishpat 67:18). However, Ramban (*Sefer ha-Zechut*, Gittin 18b) and others argue that Shmuel's view is not authoritative, and Rema rules that a *prozbul* may be written in any court - especially today, when loans are canceled only by dint of rabbinic law.

The Rishonim also debate whether the court must be present at the writing of the *prozbul*. *Shulchan Aruch* and Rema indicate that the judges do not need to be present (Choshen Mishpat 67:21). Accordingly, the practice is to include in a *prozbul* the names of leading judges and to read and sign it before two witnesses. Nevertheless, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l formulated a *prozbul* text that accommodates both views. It includes the names of major judges, but is signed by three individuals instead of only two. This way, if the *halachah* requires the judges to be present, the signatories are considered judges rather than witnesses.

SOME PRACTICAL ADVICE

- Specific borrowers' names do not need to be included in a *prozbul*. Instead, the *prozbul* says that the lender submits to the court everything he is owed by all borrowers.
- The lender recites the text of the *prozbul* before the court. The spaces for name, date, and place of preparation are filled out, and then the court signs.
- For a joint account owned by a husband and wife, both their names are simply written down. If the wife has a separate account or has made separate loans, the husband must ask to be his wife's agent and add to the text of the *prozbul* that he is also acting for his wife.

CONCLUSION

After filling out a *prozbul*, some individuals go out of their way to make a loan, even a small one, to fulfill the *mitzvah* of relinquishing a loan.

May Hashem always nourish us with dignity, and never with loans or gifts from other human beings!

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon is Head of Mizrahi's Educational Advisory Board and Rabbinic Council. He serves as the Rabbi of the Gush Etzion Regional Council and is the Founder and Chairman of Sulamot.



A Unique Love

*Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak
HaKohen Kook*

On the third of Elul, August 30th, 2022, we will commemorate the 87th yahrzeit of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook zt”l. One of the greatest rabbis and thinkers of modern history, Rav Kook’s influence has grown exponentially since his death in 1935.

In this short commentary, translated from Olat Ra’ayah, his commentary on the siddur, Rav Kook explains how the supernatural attachment of the people of Israel to the land fundamentally differs from the relationship other nations have with their lands.

לאמר לך אֶתוּ אֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן חֶבְל נַחֲלֹתְכֶם. בְּהִיּוֹתְכֶם מְתֵי מִסְפָּר כְּמַעַט וְגֵרִים בָּהּ.

“Saying, ‘To you I will give the land of Canaan as your allotted heritage.’ When you were few in number, a handful, merely sojourning there...” (Divrei Hayamim I 16:18-19)

The holy attachment that the people of Israel have with their Holy Land is not comparable to the natural attachment that all nations have to their own lands.

The natural attachment that other nations have to their lands can only develop over a very long period of time, through a great number of events. The natural way this connection develops is as follows: a large and powerful nation enters a particular land with the goal of settling there permanently. Then, over a long period of time, the nation grows accustomed to the land and develops a historical affection for it.

Over the course of centuries, the people develop a spiritual connection to their land, passing this affection on to their descendents so that it grows from generation to generation.

The attachment of the people of Israel to its beloved land is different, for this Divine attachment derives from the Source of holiness. The holy seal of our attachment to the land began to be expressed בְּהִיּוֹתְכֶם, מְתֵי מִסְפָּר, even when we “were few in number,” and כְּמַעַט, in a very short time, developing immediately upon our arrival in the land, and even before we entered the land.

Knesset Yisrael’s connection to the Land of Israel is unique for we are גֵּרִים בָּהּ, we dwell in the land in a ‘temporary’ way, as if we are strangers. What we naturally did to settle and possess the land did not create our connection to the land, for our attachment is an eternal Divine creation, rooted in the word of G-d and His holy covenant with us. A law and eternal oath, “He commanded, and it endured” (Tehillim 33:9). “When you were few in number, a handful, merely sojourning there...”

Olat Ra’ayah, Part 1, p. 203





Rabbi
Yirmiyohu
Kaganoff

Rabbi Charlap or Rabbi Herzog?

The Chief Rabbi Controversy of 1936

When Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook passed away in 1935, two eminent rabbis were considered to fill the position as Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of *Eretz Yisrael*. Both Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlap and Rabbi Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog, the finalists for the position, were highly respected *gedolei yisrael* and *poskim* who identified strongly with Mizrachi and shared Rav Kook's vision for a *halachic* Jewish state in *Eretz Yisrael*. Both rabbis were comfortable working together with people of different backgrounds and were respected by many non-orthodox Jews.

At the same time, the candidates had significant differences. Rabbi Charlap, who prided himself on having never stepped outside of *Eretz Yisrael*, was a product of the *cheder/yeshivah* system. Having been born and educated in the 'old *yishuv*' (the religious community in Israel that predated the modern Zionist movement), Rabbi Charlap received no secular education. Despite being a close student and friend of Rav Kook, who was often viciously attacked by members of the old *yishuv*, he maintained close ties with the community. At the same time, Rabbi Charlap shared Rav Kook's kabbalistic perspective on secular Zionism and wrote many important books elucidating Rav Kook's kabbalistic perspective. When Rav Kook passed away, Rabbi Charlap was appointed his successor as the active *Rosh Yeshivah* of *Merkaz Harav*.

Rabbi Herzog's background was starkly different. Born in Lomz, Poland, he moved as a child with his family to England and later to Paris, where he received an advanced secular education at the Sorbonne and a doctorate at the University of London. A classic renaissance man, he was fluent



Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlap
(PHOTO: ZVI ORON-ORUSHKES/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)

in numerous modern and ancient languages, and conversant in a wide variety of academic disciplines. Unlike Rabbi Charlap, he was a man of the world who lived in the cultured nations of the west, only visiting *Eretz Yisrael* once to make funeral arrangements for his father.

By contrast, Rabbi Herzog's extensive Torah knowledge was largely self-taught. He never attended any *yeshivah*, and his primary face-to-face *rebbe* was his father. Nevertheless, while pursuing his secular education, he corresponded extensively with the great Torah giants of his era. Appointed the Chief Rabbi of Dublin, Rabbi Herzog was involved in Ireland's struggle for independence, and when the Irish Free State was born, Rabbi Herzog became its first chief rabbi. During his years in Ireland, he became acquainted with several great Torah scholars based in London, including Rav Kook, who lived in London during much of World War I.



Rabbi Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog
(PHOTO: PUBLIC DOMAIN/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)

While Rabbi Herzog was in *Eretz Yisrael* in 1934 for his father's funeral, the position of Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv-Yaffo, a position once held by Rav Kook, became available. Rabbi Herzog actively pursued the position, giving lectures and meeting with great Torah scholars throughout the land, believing that this position would enable him to move to *Eretz Yisrael*. The other finalists for the position were Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, at that time the head of Boston's Council of Orthodox Synagogues, and Rabbi Moshe Avigdor Amiel, then the rabbi of Antwerp. A member of Mizrachi, Rabbi Amiel received the movement's support and won the election, and Rabbi Herzog returned to Ireland.

Within a few months, however, Rav Kook passed away, and the position of Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi became available. Both Rabbi Herzog and Rabbi Charlap were nominated for the position, and a heated debate among



their respective supporters ensued. Although the two rabbis personally maintained a dignified distance from the angry debates over their candidacies, some of their supporters published false claims and misquoted other Torah leaders to further the case of their chosen candidate.

Many who opposed Rabbi Herzog believed that his secular education disqualified him for the position. Rabbi Yehudah Leib Maimon, the leader of Mizrahi in Israel, was opposed to Rabbi Herzog's candidacy, explaining that he did not want "a doctor in English, but rather a *gadol* in *halachah*." Rabbi Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky, a close personal friend and backer of Rabbi Herzog, begged him to remove any reference to his doctorate from his name. Rabbi Herzog refused, however, explaining that "people should consider me for what I am, not what they want to make of me."

Others supported Rabbi Charlap because they believed him to be the natural successor to Rav Kook, and



Although the two rabbis personally maintained a dignified distance from the angry debates over their candidacies, some of their supporters published false claims and misquoted other Torah leaders to further the case of their chosen candidate.

because they believed that the new *yishuv* should be led by a rabbi familiar with the old *yishuv*. Rabbi Herzog, though friendly with Rav Kook, had never been his student. Furthermore, his cultured European background was radically different from that of the rabbis of the old *yishuv*. Nevertheless, Rabbi Herzog was politically savvy and befriended many influential rabbis throughout *Eretz Yisrael*, ensuring he had many passionate supporters of his own.

On election day, the atmosphere was tense. As the seventy electors gathered to vote, the British Mandate police were called in to control what was becoming a distracting protest. The police were forced to move the protestors away from the assembly hall so the voting could take place in peace. When the vote was finally counted, Rabbi Herzog had won a narrow victory, 37 to 31, over Rabbi Charlap. Though many of Rabbi Charlap's supporters remained bitter over the outcome, Rabbi Herzog went on to distinguish himself, and the future State of Israel, throughout his tenure as Chief Rabbi, until his death in 1959.

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff served as a community rabbi in Buffalo, New York and Baltimore, Maryland. He is the author of several books and hundreds of articles, and currently lives in Jerusalem.



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20	B	E	A	T	E	N	21	T	O	22	W	E	R				
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28	E	M	E	S	29	H	O	A	R	D	30	S	T	A	R		
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49	E	D	50	J	O	H	N	51	R	O	L	E	S				
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61	O	R	A	62	T	E	63	E	64	L	A	L	65	T	I	C	S
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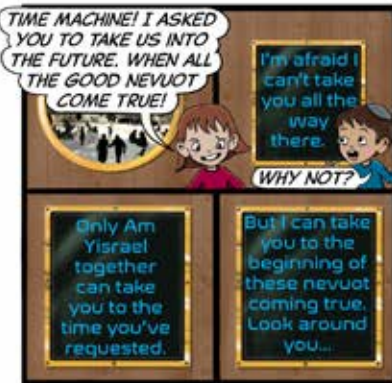
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