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HAMIZRACHI

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THE RENAISSANCE OF Jewish MUSIC IN ISRAEL

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PURIM 5782

Dedicated by her children and family in honour and loving memory of Lidia Landau ע"ה
שושן פורים קטן, ט"ו אדר א' תשע"ט, on her third Yartzeit, on her third Yartzeit, on her third Yartzeit, on her third Yartzeit,
May she be a מליץ יוסר for רפואות and all other needs for us all and כלל ישראל



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“This true redemption is one that steadily puts an end to the scattered and sundered state of our nation, of dwelling in the lands of our enemies”

Marking the 40th yearzeit of **Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Kook** PAGES 54–56

THE RENAISSANCE OF **Jewish Music** IN ISRAEL

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COVER ART

From Highland Park, NJ, our cover artist **Ilan Block** has developed a unique painting style that is intuitive and improvisational, with many choices made on the fly. You can find examples of his work at flickr.com/photos/artbyilan/. He can be reached at ilanblock@gmail.com or found on Twitter @ilanblock. (Pictured clockwise from top-left: Aaron Razel, Shim Craimer, Ricka Razel, Ishay Ribo and Rabbi Shlomo Katz.)

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HAMIZRACHI

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FROM THE

Editor



ובליליא מאי עביד... יושב ושומע שירה מפי חיות שנאמר (תהלים מב:ט) יומם יצוה ה' חסדו ובלילה שירו עמי. מסכת עבודה זרה ג:

“And what does G-d do at night? He sits and listens to the songs of the angels, as it is stated (Tehillim 42:9): ‘By day the L-rd will command His loving-kindness, and in the night His song shall be with me.’” Masechet Avodah Zarah 3b

In the winter of 1998, a friend and I made a last-minute decision to go to Tzfat for Shabbat. We made no plans for where we would sleep or what we would eat; we just grabbed a container of babaganush and a few rolls from the Yeshivat Sha'alvim *chadar ochel* (cafeteria), and we were on our way. We hitched a ride to Bnei Brak, where we boarded a bus to Tzfat. Everything was going smoothly – until suddenly it wasn't. The bus was crowded with people, primarily Chassidim, and every seat was needed. But in the back of the bus, three young men were causing a ruckus, refusing to allow other passengers to sit down in the back rows of the bus. There was no reasoning with them, all three were obviously high on pot. Tensions began to rise, the bus couldn't leave, and stressed-out passengers eyed their watches; it was a two-hour drive to Tzfat, and Shabbat was coming soon. The situation seemed hopeless.

But then something extraordinary happened. A young man with a beard and a hipster vest made his way to the back of the bus, smiled at the

troublemakers, and said: “It's wonderful to meet you! If it's ok with you, let's sit together. I want to teach you a song!” Completely disarmed, the young men settled down, the passengers took their seats, and for the entirety of the trip to Tzfat, we were treated to a beautiful impromptu concert. When we stepped off the bus in Tzfat, we immediately approached our new hero. With a shy smile, he introduced himself. “My name is Aaron Razel – a joy to meet you!”

That was my introduction to the extraordinary music of Aaron Razel, and to a different kind of song: *the song of Eretz Yisrael*. Hearing Aaron sing, I felt something I had never felt before. No longer was I merely an American *yeshivah* student in Israel; Israel had somehow entered me.

A year later, the night before leaving Israel to begin college in New York, I sat on the floor of a small shul in Jerusalem, as Chaim David Saracik played his newest song, “*Anochi HaKel*.” He sang the words of Bereishit 31:13, in which G-d's angel calls upon Ya'akov to fulfill his vow and return to the Land of Israel: “I am the G-d of Beit-el, where you anointed a pillar, where you vowed a vow unto Me. Now arise, get out from this land, and return to the land of your birthplace.” Overwhelmed with emotion, I quietly vowed at that moment that, like

Ya'akov Avinu, I would one day return to our Land.

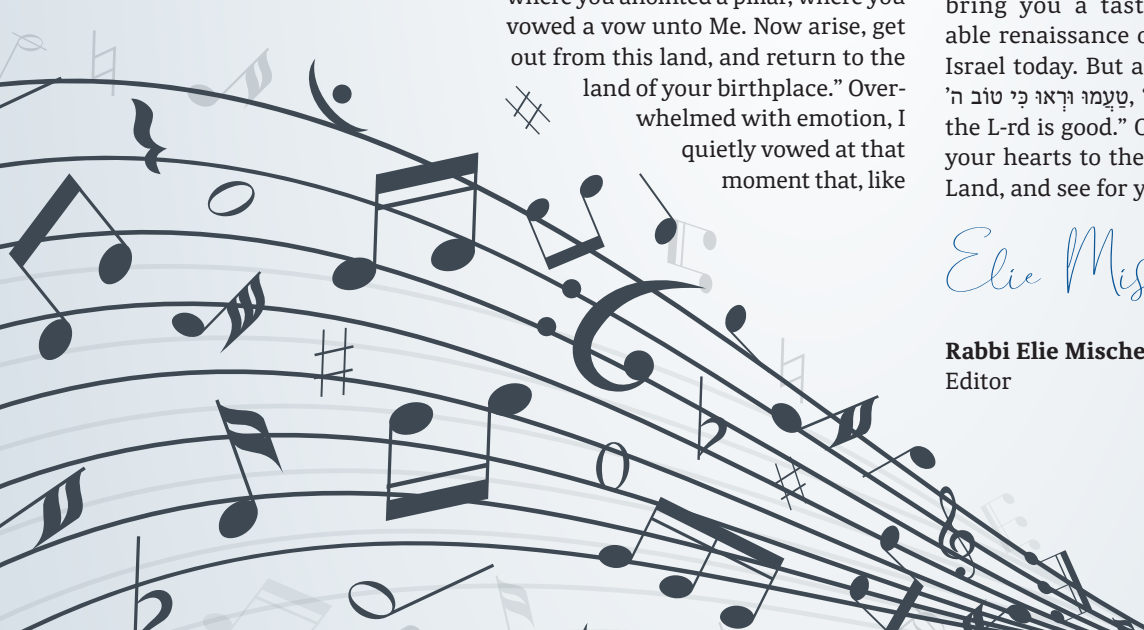
Rav Kook writes that “were it not for the nourishment it receives from the dew-of-life of the sanctity of the Land of Israel, Judaism in exile would have no basis for existence.” A Jew in exile can only survive through the *חזון הלב*, *המַיָּסָד על צִיּוּרִים שֶׁל תְּקוּוּהָ*, “the vision of the heart founded on pictures of hope” (Orot HaTehiyah, Chapter 8).

It would take me another 21 years to return to the Land of Israel, years in which the music of the Holy Land would form the vision of my heart and the picture of my hopes. On cold winter nights in New Jersey, we washed dishes to the meditative tunes of Eviatar and Meir Banai z”l. Driving home on late night road trips, our children fell asleep to the haunting melodies of Shivi Keller and Ishay Ribo. And how could we enter Shabbat without the uplifting *niggunim* of Rabbi Shlomo Katz and Meir Solomon? The song of the Holy Land sustained us in exile, and it was the music of Eretz Yisrael that gave us the courage to overcome our fears and return home.

In this edition of *HaMizrachi*, we bring you a taste of the remarkable renaissance of Jewish music in Israel today. But as King David sang, *טַעֲמוּ וּרְאוּ כִּי טוֹב ה'*, “taste and see that the L-rd is good.” Open your ears and your hearts to the music of the Holy Land, and see for yourself!

Elie Mischel

Rabbi Elie Mischel
Editor





Simchah and Song

The Language of the Soul

Rabbi Doron Perez

The month of happiness

The month of Adar is the month of happiness, the only time when the Sages command us to be happy for an entire month. Across the globe, communities joyously sing the iconic words of the Sages: מְשֻׁנְנֵת אֶדָר מְרֻבֵּין בְּשִׂמְחָה, “one who enters the month of Adar should increase their happiness.”¹

But how can the Rabbis command us to be happy for even one day – let alone for a full month? Is happiness not a transient emotion dependent upon a particular mood or circumstance? We are certainly happy at beautiful celebrations such as weddings (which we colloquially call a *simchah*), and on national holidays such as Purim we rejoice and celebrate. But is it really possible to be joyous all day, every day – for a month and beyond?² How can the Rabbis require such a seemingly unattainable ongoing emotional state?

The Rebbe of Ruzhin³ offers a fascinating insight into happiness deriving from the very wording of this Talmudic teaching. The Rabbis say that when we enter the month of Adar we should

increase our joy, and when we enter the month of Av we must decrease our joy. The language of the Rabbis implies that the Jewish people must *constantly* be in a state of *simchah*, all year long! We are merely commanded to increase or decrease our constant joy at different points throughout the year.



If the laws and commandments of the Torah are the body of Judaism, then simchah, happiness, is its soul.

In other words, the Rebbe is calling for a paradigm shift, offering a critical insight into the nature of happiness itself. *Simchah* is neither a transient emotion nor a fleeting feeling, but rather a *state of being*. Happiness is meant to be our ‘default position’; it is the basic spiritual frequency of inspired G-dly living. Yes, the intensity of our *simchah* will increase or decrease throughout the year as we experience the natural ups and downs of life. But

simchah should be the constant spiritual undercurrent of life; it is a sign of being in tune with our spiritual mission.⁴

If the laws and commandments of the Torah are the body of Judaism, then *simchah*, happiness, is its soul.

Our relationship with Hashem is far broader than the observance of religious law; it is a celebration of spiritual life. It is living with an inner sense of happiness and contentment and constantly rejoicing over the privilege of living in G-d’s world and in His presence. This is the meaning of עֲבוֹדַת ה’ בְּשִׂמְחָה, of serving Hashem with joie de vivre and profound joy.

Simchah as song

*All these curses befell you... since you did not serve Hashem your G-d with happiness and with gladness of heart.*⁵

Incredibly, the Torah states that the curses and punishments that befall the people of Israel are a direct result of serving G-d without *simchah*. The scrupulous observance of Torah and *mitzvot* is not enough. Divine service



devoid of joy is a foreign form of worship that totally misses the mark and with drastic consequences.

If Judaism's soul is *simchah*, then the language of the soul is song and music. Remarkably, the Rabbis interpret this specific verse as the source for song and music as an integral part of the *שְׁבוּחַת הַמִּקְדָּשׁ*, the daily service of the Temple. The Talmud⁶ argues that this verse is clearly speaking about the service of G-d, and since our service of G-d is primarily performed in the Temple, the verse must be referring to the Temple service. And since the most overt expression of happiness and gladness of heart is music and song, this must be the deeper meaning of the verse – that the Temple service must be accompanied by music and song.

Indeed, the *korban tamid*, the daily communal sacrifice brought every morning and afternoon, had to be accompanied by the beautiful singing of a choir of Levites, who would sing the psalm of the day.⁷ There is a dispute amongst the Rabbis as to whether the biblical requirement of song in the Temple service can be fulfilled with vocal singing, or whether musical instruments are also required by the Torah. In practice, the Levite choir was accompanied by a musical ensemble of multiple musicians playing five different instruments,⁸ making music an intrinsic part of the Divine service.

A symbol of humanity

Music is an indispensable part of spiritual life. A universal art form present in human culture and society since time immemorial, it is woven into

our very existence as human beings. The ancients, in early hieroglyphics, already depicted song and musical

instruments, and in the very first *parasha* in the Torah we encounter music. Yuval, a descendant of Cain, was the first person to *תָּפַח כִּנּוֹר וְעִינָב*, “play the lyre and the flute.”⁹ The Sages explain that Yuval was the inventor of musical instruments.¹⁰

Music is one of the most distinct creations and features of the human spirit. Vocal or instrumental, music uplifts our spirit and stirs our soul. What other medium gives expression to the range and depth of human emotions the way music does? It is somehow able to evoke past memories, experiences, feelings and sentiments with an unparalleled power and potency. In unique moments, singing, playing and listening to music can be a deeply transformative experience.

Metaphysical music

The Vilna Gaon famously extolled the great virtues of music, believing that the mystical secrets of spiritual life can only be unlocked through the wisdom of music.¹¹ Music is the most spiritual and esoteric of all human art. Both the visual arts – such as drawing, sculpting and painting – and literature portray the objects and events of our physical world. Music, however, reaches beyond this world. The notes emanating from vocal cords or instruments do not exist in this world; they

are ethereal, almost metaphysical creations.¹² As though borrowed from another world, they create a transcendental and heavenly experience. Mind and imagination, heart and soul, mystically join together this world and the next.

In this, the happiest of months, may we increase our joy; may the great gift of music – its rhythms, melodies and harmonies – unlock our deepest spiritual yearnings and enhance our daily celebration of the privilege of living in G-d's presence. May these months of redemption evoke a human and Divine transformation through which we will once again merit to see *כְּהַנִּיחַ בְּעִבּוֹדָתָם וּלְיָיִם בְּשִׁירָם* – the priestly Temple service and the stirring, holy and mystical melodies of the Levites.

Purim Sameach!

¹ Ta'anit 29a.

² Rashi explains that *simchah* is actually required for two months, beginning with Adar and continuing throughout Nissan as well, as both are months of redemption.

³ Rabbi Yisrael Friedman (1796–1850) was the one and only Rebbe of Ruzhin.

⁴ See Malbim, Yeshayahu 35:1, and my “Israel – the Happiest Place in the World”, *HaMizrachi* Vol. 2, No. 5.

⁵ Devarim 28:45–47.

⁶ Arachin 11a.

⁷ Tamid 7:4.

⁸ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, the Laws of the Vessels of the Temple 3:2–4.

⁹ Bereishit 4:21.

¹⁰ Midrash HaGadol p.126.

¹¹ Cited by Rabbi Yisrael of Shklov, *Introduction to Pe'at Hashulchan*.

¹² Dr. Daniel Shalit, *Yodea Nagen*, p. 41.

Rabbi Doron Perez is the Executive Chairman of World Mizrachi.



Cancel Megillat Esther? Not Now, Not Ever

Rabbi Marcus Solomon

Many have found *Megillat Esther* problematic. All through history, people have felt their own religious or moral sensibilities challenged by the story of Esther and Mordechai. Let's look at some examples.

For rabbinic scholars approaching the text through a *halachic* lens, *Megillat Esther* presents several thorny challenges. Troubled by Mordechai's refusal to bow before Haman, the rabbis of the Talmud and Midrash argued that there is nothing wrong with bowing down to another person as a mark of respect or even submission; there are many uncontroversial examples of such bowing throughout Tanach. Why then did Mordechai risk the welfare and safety of the entire Jewish people by refusing to do something *halachically* permissible – and under the circumstances, possibly even required?

More problematically, how do we reconcile Esther's apparent religious piety with her marriage to a gentile king, seemingly without protestation? Here, the rabbinic tradition compounds the problem, suggesting that Esther was not only Mordechai's relative as the text indicates, but indeed his wife. Thus, a married Jewish woman – considered a prophetess in rabbinic tradition – became the wife of the world's most prominent gentile!

It is not the place of this article to examine these questions, although it may be observed that the difficulty posed by Esther's 'intermarriage' engages the rabbis of the Talmud in a fascinating discussion about the parameters of sexual consent, an issue central to our society's re-examination of its treatment of women and its historic failure to understand and respect the centrality of consent in sexual relationships.

The Church Fathers, untroubled by possible infractions of *halachah*, were unsettled by the stark absence of G-d in the *Megillah*. Known as the expanded 'Greek Esther,' the Christian version of the *Megillah* is similar to our own tradition, but also contains significant additions that are entirely novel to the Jewish reader. The provenance of those additions is interesting but beyond the scope of this brief article (see the chapter "Expanded Greek Esther" in the recent *Jewish Annotated Apocrypha*, Oxford University Press 2020). What is important for present purposes is the focus and content of those additions. They are overtly religious texts, replete with references to G-d and lengthy and moving prayers by both Mordechai and Esther. The Church Fathers' reconstruction of the text is a radical departure from the Jewish tradition (although it must be acknowledged that the Midrash also crafts a prayer from the lips of Esther).

More recently, many have repudiated the narrative on moral grounds; by contemporary standards, the *Megillah* deserves to be 'canceled.' Critics point to chapter 9 of the text, in which the Jews appear to embark upon a rampage of revenge and the indiscriminate slaughter of tens of thousands of civilians. Again, this is not the place to address that critique, save to observe that it distorts the simple meaning of the text and focuses exclusively on 'Jewish revenge' while ignoring the horrific racist and genocidal threat that led to this response.

What are we to make more generally of these challenges and the rabbinic response to *Megillat Esther*?

The rabbis who canonized the Tanach were plainly 'awake' to the theological challenges presented by *Megillat Esther*, just as they were aware of the problems presented by *Shir HaShirim* and

Kohelet. It would have been convenient for the rabbis to rewrite the text as the Church Fathers did, require the study of its *halachic* explanations as part of the Purim rituals, or simply omit the *Megillah* from the canon and thus appease the censorious mob.

But the rabbis did none of those things. Instead, they ensured the unadulterated text, with all its complexities, would remain part of the eternal Jewish tradition, confident in the ability of each coming generation to meet the challenges of the tradition and distill its meaning and significance. Ultimately, *Megillat Esther* is an inspiring story of Jewish heroism, resilience and survival in an all-too-real and brutal environment. Its greatness required no Talmudic addenda, no G-d in neon lights, and no moral apologia.

We live in a Jewish world that too often exhausts itself in a sophisticated web of *halachic* analysis, competitive G-dly piety and strident moralizing. We should certainly explore these important issues, and take the time to study and discuss them. But as we re-read *Megillat Esther* this year, let's also relax in the confident understanding that we can discover G-d and heroism in the story and in our own Jewish narrative without too much agony. *Megillat Esther* inspires us with its commitment to Jewish continuity, heroic self-sacrifice, Jewish self-respect and discerning G-d's hand in history and the corridors of power. The rabbis of the Talmud understood the power of the story itself without distraction. So should we.

Rabbi Justice Marcus Solomon is the founding Rabbi of the Dianella Shule Mizrachi Perth. He was recently appointed a justice on the Supreme Court of Western Australia.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Send us your comments
editor@mizrachi.org

Jabotinsky

I APPRECIATED YOUR very interesting interview with Hillel Halkin, and particularly regarding his thoughts on Jabotinsky (Vol. 4, No. 8).

My father, Erwin Lamm z”l, was brought up in a strict Agudah environment in Vienna. His father forbade him from attending speeches by two great visitors to Vienna, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (“the Friediker Rebbe”) and Ze’ev Jabotinsky, who as a Zionist was anathema to an Agudah family. After the war, my father became a fervent Zionist and embraced Jabotinsky’s ideology, eventually becoming president of the Likud movement in Australia. He also greatly admired Chabad and its leader in Australia, Rabbi Yitchak David Groner zt”l.

While Halkin refers to Jabotinsky’s non-religious views, Jabotinsky must have had some form of Torah education. My late father recounted a speech in which Jabotinsky argued that Jews must proactively take up arms and defend themselves. Jabotinsky said that only once, before the miracle of the splitting of the sea, did G-d tell the Jews to remain passive while He fought on their behalf: ה' ילחם לָכֶם וְאַתֶּם תַּחֲרִישוּן, “G-d will fight for you, and you will hold your peace” (Shemot 14:14). A heckler challenged Jabotinsky by quoting a different verse: לֹא בְחַיִל וְלֹא בְכֹחַ כִּי אִם בְּרוּחַי אָמַר ה' צְבָאוֹת, “Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, said the L-rd of Hosts” (Zechariah 4:6). Jabotinsky retorted: “Do you know when we read that verse? On Shabbat Chanukah! After we proactively fought and won the battle against the Greeks, we declare our

recognition of *etzba Elokim*, that without G-d’s help we could not have succeeded!”

Many thanks for the excellent articles penned by so many wonderful authors. May *HaMizrachi* and World Mizrachi go from strength to strength!

Dr. Danny Lamm AM

*President, Mizrachi Australia and
Deputy Chairman, World Mizrachi
Melbourne, Australia*

Moral clarity

I WAS TROUBLED by two of the statements made in Professor Efraim Inbar’s essay, *Realpolitik Should Guide Israeli-Russian Relations* (Vol. 4, No. 8).

Professor Inbar puts a positive spin on Russia’s support of the Assad regime, arguing that it “proves to everyone that Russia does not abandon its allies – in contrast to the US.” Support of one of the world’s most repressive dictatorships, in some cases by indiscriminately bombing civilians and medical facilities, should be condemned – not commended as demonstration of loyalty.

Professor Inbar also claimed that “the Jewish people have a moral debt to Russia” for its fight against the Nazis and initial support of Israel. Yet Russia’s record as an enemy of the Jewish people far exceeds its record as a friend. Consider their role in the publication of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, pogroms and Red Army atrocities against Jews, decades of ruthless religious persecution, denial of Jewish emigration

rights, the “Zionism is Racism” UN resolution, and support of Arab armies in the 1967 and 1973 wars. It is Russia which owes something to the Jews, not the other way around.

Last year’s Palestinian assault on Israel was a reminder that moral clarity is imperative in times of conflict. As Russia threatens invasion of sovereign Ukraine, Professor Inbar’s comments only offer moral distortion.

Josh Feldman

Central Illinois, USA

Time to read

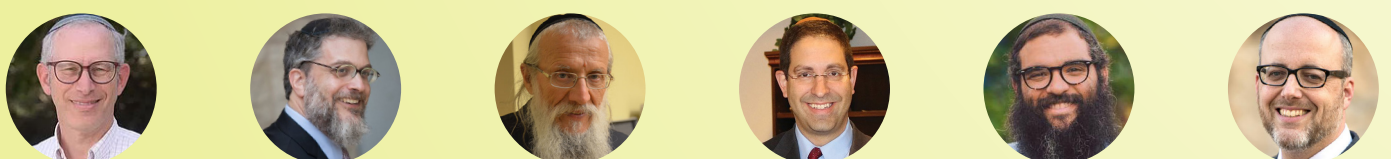
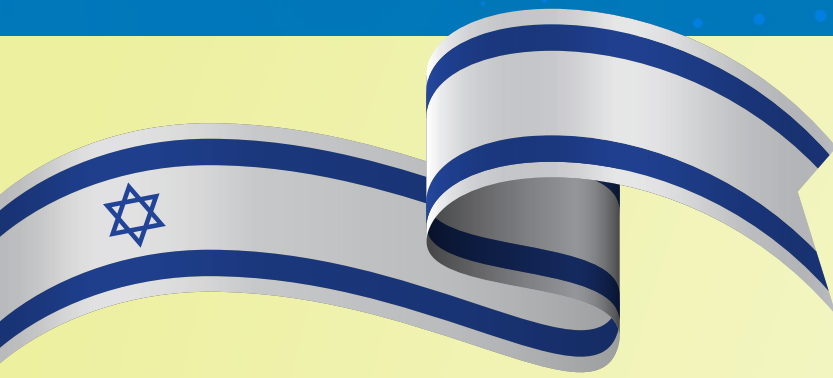
THANK YOU FOR an extremely interesting and informative most recent issue about the history of the Mizrachi movement (Vol. 4, No. 7). In that issue, one of the letters to the editor stated that *HaMizrachi* “always offers valuable reading material in shul”.

I have long bemoaned the fact that so much time is invested in creating Jewish/Torah magazines, yet since we are living in the smartphone generation, when everyone is so busy surfing websites, people only have time to read a proper magazine for a few minutes in shul on Shabbat morning.

I don’t own a smartphone and for the last couple of weeks, as I was eating my dinner, I actually read an article every night. I can truly testify that the most recent edition was an extremely good read!

Yisroel Stanton

Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel





Israel360 reflects Israel's international reach and Mizrachi's mission of spreading Torat Eretz Yisrael across the world. To celebrate Israel during the month of Iyar, Mizrachi brings inspiring Israeli speakers and thinkers to 360 communities all around the globe.

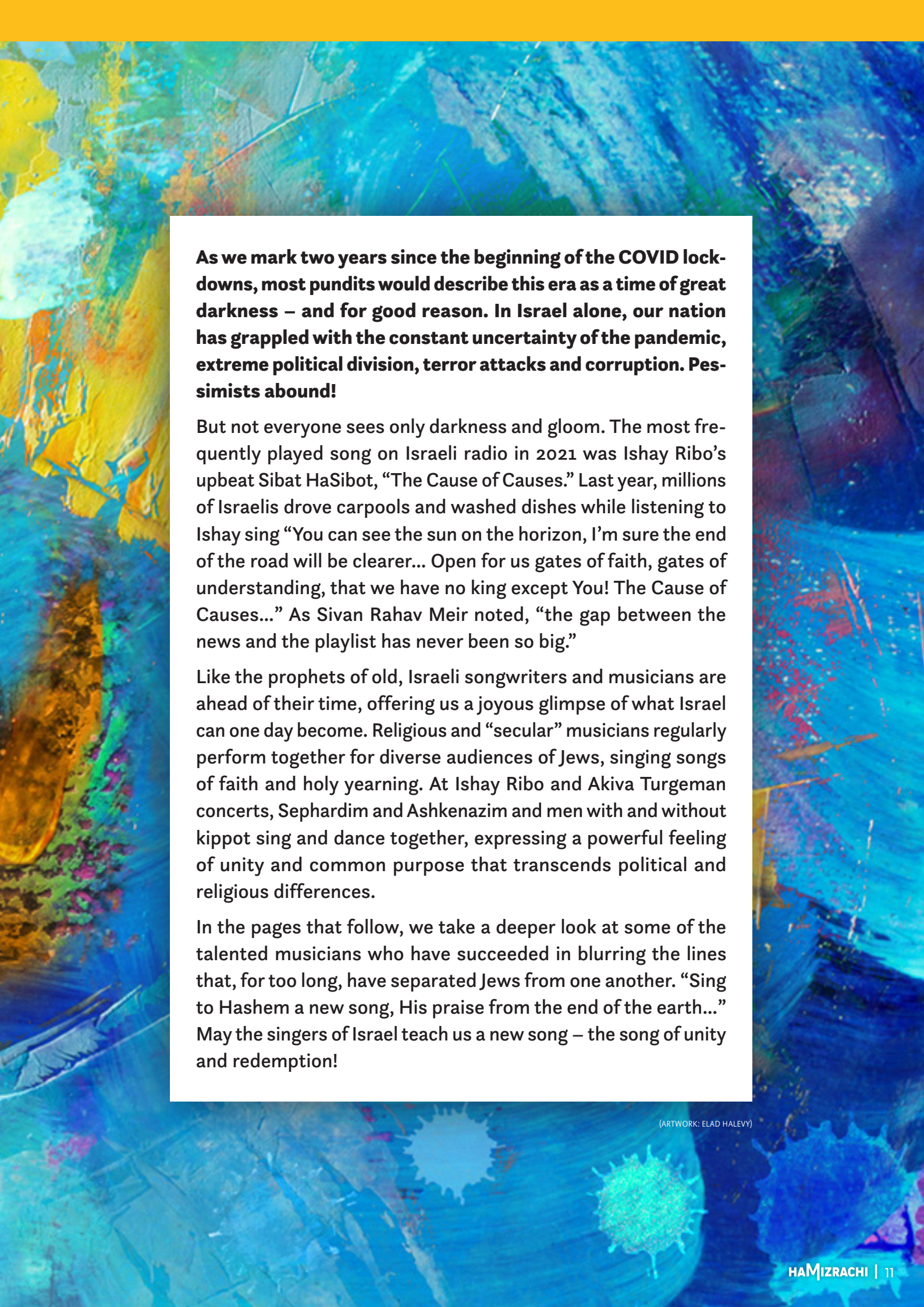
FOR DETAILS AND TO TAKE PART

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 World Mizrachi

The background is a vibrant, abstract painting with thick brushstrokes in shades of blue, green, yellow, and orange. A white musical note icon is positioned to the right of the word 'OF'.

**THE
RENAISSANCE
OF Jewish
MUSIC
IN ISRAEL**



As we mark two years since the beginning of the COVID lockdowns, most pundits would describe this era as a time of great darkness – and for good reason. In Israel alone, our nation has grappled with the constant uncertainty of the pandemic, extreme political division, terror attacks and corruption. Pessimists abound!

But not everyone sees only darkness and gloom. The most frequently played song on Israeli radio in 2021 was Ishay Ribo's upbeat *Sibat HaSibot*, "The Cause of Causes." Last year, millions of Israelis drove carpools and washed dishes while listening to Ishay sing "You can see the sun on the horizon, I'm sure the end of the road will be clearer... Open for us gates of faith, gates of understanding, that we have no king except You! The Cause of Causes..." As Sivan Rahav Meir noted, "the gap between the news and the playlist has never been so big."

Like the prophets of old, Israeli songwriters and musicians are ahead of their time, offering us a joyous glimpse of what Israel can one day become. Religious and "secular" musicians regularly perform together for diverse audiences of Jews, singing songs of faith and holy yearning. At Ishay Ribo and Akiva Turgeman concerts, Sephardim and Ashkenazim and men with and without kippot sing and dance together, expressing a powerful feeling of unity and common purpose that transcends political and religious differences.

In the pages that follow, we take a deeper look at some of the talented musicians who have succeeded in blurring the lines that, for too long, have separated Jews from one another. "Sing to Hashem a new song, His praise from the end of the earth..." May the singers of Israel teach us a new song – the song of unity and redemption!

(ARTWORK: ELAD HALEVY)



Writings ON THE Songs

Since Ishay Ribo released his debut album in 2014, *Tocho Ratzuf Ahavah (He Is Filled With Love)*, Jewish music has never been the same. Before he transformed the genre, religious Jewish music generally followed the simple formula of putting Biblical verses and sayings from Rabbinic literature to song. Ribo, however, writes powerful and poetic lyrics infused with Biblical and Midrashic references that are nevertheless astonishingly original. He has recreated the traditional *piyut*, giving ancient texts and teachings a fresh form that speaks powerfully to 21st century Israelis and Jews of every religious background.

In August 2021, Ishay Ribo performed for an audience of 3,500 people in the Kings Theater, in Brooklyn, New York. For the 32-year-old singer, this

concert marked a new milestone in his career. After an extraordinary rise to stardom in Israel, he is now sought after by Jews – and many gentiles – throughout the world.

But Ishay’s popularity is not a goal in and of itself; it serves a higher purpose. Explains Ribo: “We have a purpose and a mission beyond self-fulfillment – to connect Jews all over the Diaspora to Eretz Yisrael. To come to the Diaspora and give light and hope to Jews, and to show them the light of Eretz Yisrael.”

At the height of the COVID pandemic lockdowns throughout the world in 2020, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt”l and Sivan Rahav Meir met together with Ishay Ribo on Zoom for an inspirational encounter of music and words of Torah. These “writings on the songs,” commentaries on Ishay’s beautiful lyrics, are some of the powerful insights that emerged from that special day.



עוד ישמע / We Will Yet Hear

Words and Music: Ishay Ribo

*This is the day when the Heavens are open
This is a dream that materializes occasionally
This is an opportune time, opportune indeed
And from here is the proof that*

זֶה יוֹם שֶׁבו שָׁמַיִם נִפְתָּחִים
זֶה חֲלוֹם הַמֵּתְגַשֵּׁם בּו זְמַנִּית
זֶה זְמַן שֶׁמִּסְגָּל כֵּן מִסְגָּל
וּמִכָּאן הָרְאִיָּה הִיא שֶׁבְכֻלָּל

Lots of water cannot extinguish this love

מִיָּם רַבִּים לֹא מְכַבִּים אֶת הָאֵהָבָה

*It will be heard in this house:
The sounds of joy and gladness
It will be heard in this house:
The sounds of the bridegroom and bride*

עוֹד יִשְׁמַע בְּבֵית זֶה
קוֹל שִׁשׁוֹן וְקוֹל שִׂמְחָה
עוֹד יִשְׁמַע בְּבֵית זֶה
קוֹל חֲתָן וְקוֹל כַּלָּה

*This is a sound that connects souls here
This is a sound, no, there is no need to change
There is a hidden light here that is revealed to all eyes
A rhythm that makes everyone move,
Everyone can come and take*

זֶה צִלִּיל שֶׁמַּחְבֵּר פֹּה נְשָׁמוֹת
זֶה הַצִּלִּיל, לֹא, אִין צָרָה לְשִׁנוֹת
יֵשׁ כָּאן אֹר גָּנוֹז גְּלוּי לְעֵינַי כֹּל
קִצֵּב שֶׁגוֹרֵם לְזוֹז
כֹּל אֶחָד יִכּוֹל לְבוֹא וְלִטֹּל

Lots of water cannot extinguish this love

מִיָּם רַבִּים לֹא מְכַבִּים אֶת הָאֵהָבָה

*Soon, G-d, may there be heard
In the mountains of Judah, in the outskirts of the capital,
The sounds of joy and gladness
The sounds of the bridegroom and bride
An everlasting building, Amen, may it be His will*

מִהֲרָה הִי עוֹד יִשְׁמַע
בְּהָרֵי יְהוּדָה, בְּחוּצוֹת הַבֵּירָה
קוֹל שִׁשׁוֹן וְקוֹל שִׂמְחָה
קוֹל חֲתָן וְקוֹל כַּלָּה
בְּנֵן עַדִּי עַד אָמֵן כֵּן יְהִי רְצוֹן



Sivan Rahav Meir:

Have you ever noticed that under the bridal canopy, during the holiest moment, we are not focused at all on the present but pray for the future? "It will be heard in this house: the sounds of joy and gladness." True, the wedding is the climax. This is "the day when the Heavens are open." This is "is an opportune time," "there is a hidden light here that is revealed to all eyes." But what do we ask for at this moment? The future. The wedding is only one evening. After it's over, the young couple will experience together thousands of evenings that are ordinary, routine, and gray. And those evenings are really what it's all about. Those are the evenings for which we pray. That is when "it will be heard in this house: the sounds of joy and gladness." We pray that the couple will be privileged to find this happiness and joy always, between washing the dishes, putting the children to sleep and taking out the trash.

The French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, author of "The Little Prince," once gave this profound definition of love that a true marriage entails: "Love does not consist of two people gazing at each other with goo-goo eyes, but of two people looking together in the same direction towards the future, with a common goal."



My Heart / הלב שלי

Words and Music: Ishay Ribo

*My heart was torn into two
What the maid did not see on the sea
Like a pounding storm in the ocean
Like the beating of Miriam's drum
And there is no cure in the world*

הלב שלי נקרע לשניים
מה שלא ראית שפחה על המים
כמו סופה מן הים הולם
כמו תפה של מרים פועם
ואין תרופה בעולם

*My heart raises its hands
For some time it's not standing on its feet
An empty broken vessel
The Heavens are a barrier for me
How can I cross the sea on dry land?*

הלב שלי מרים ידים
כבר מועד לא עומד על הרגלים
שבר כלי שאין בו כבר מה
והשמים הם לי חומה
איך אעבר בתוך הים ביבשה

*And only You
Could convert my mourning to dancing
To purify the mundane
To soften everything in me
And only You understand
How to approach my heart
Relieve all the pain in me
Heal the heart*

ורק אתה יכול
להפך מספדי למחל
לזכך את החול
לרפך בי הכל
ורק אתה מבין
איך לגשת ללב שלי
משכך כל כאב שבי
מרפא את הלב

*My heart was torn into two
Half guilty, half for the sake of Heaven
Like a pounding storm in the ocean
Like the beating of Miriam's drums
And there is no cure in the world for the heart*

הלב שלי נקרע לשניים
חציו אשם וחציו לשם שמים
כמו סופה מן הים הולם
כמו תפה של מרים פועם
ואין תרופה בעולם ללב

*And there is another trouble
That distresses the flock
And there is no envoy to call out to the Rock
Only me in front of the entire ocean
And a broken heart*

ויש עוד צר
שמציק לצאן
ואין ציר שיצטעק לצור
רק אני מול ים שולם
ולב שבור



Rabbi Jonathan Sacks:

One of the most important distinctions I have learned from Jewish history is the difference between optimism and hope. Optimism is the belief that things will get better. Hope is the belief that, together, we can make things better. Optimism is a passive virtue, hope an active one. It takes no courage to be an optimist, but a great deal to have hope. Knowing what we do of our past, no Jew can be an optimist. But Jews have never given up hope. G-d's ultimate word – the Torah – is an extended message of hope in the future. Without this, Jews and Judaism would not have survived. Jews kept hope alive, and hope kept the Jewish people alive.



He is Filled with Love / תוכו רצוף אהבה

Words and Music: Ishay Ribó

*He withholds His staff
Without withholding His love
He holds out His scepter
To whoever reaches out their hand
He never looks away from His flock
Even when we're a wreck
We're still His most precious commodity*

חֹשֶׁף שִׁבְטוֹ
מִבְלֵי לַחֲשֹׁף אֶת אֲהַבְתּוֹ
מוֹשִׁיט אֶת שִׁרְבִיטוֹ
לְכָל הַפּוֹשֵׁט יָדוֹ
עַיִן לֹא מֵעַלִים מֵעַל צֶאֱן מִרְעִיתוֹ
גַּם כְּשֶׁאָנוּ שְׂבָרֵי כְלִים
עוֹדְנוּ כְּלֵי חֲמֻדָּתוֹ

*For He is filled with love, filled with love
His Home is spaciouly crowded, spaciouly crowded
Granting us pardon
Not just at Ne'ilah time
Praise befits You*

תּוֹכוֹ רְצוּף אֲהָבָה רְצוּף אֲהָבָה
בֵּיתוֹ צְפוּף לְרוּחָהּ צְפוּף לְרוּחָהּ
מִמְצִיא לָנוּ מַחִילָה
לֹא רַק בְּשַׁעַת הַנְּעִילָה
לְךָ דוּמְיָה תְהִלָּה

*His hands contain power
And there was no beginning to His beginning
Even a song as vast as the sand
Is only a fraction of His praise
Beyond the letter of the law
He leads His world
And before the angels
He provides for the safety of His people*

יָדָיו רַב לֹו
וְאִין רֵאשִׁית לְרֵאשִׁיתוֹ
גַּם הַשִּׁירָה כְּחוֹל הַיָּם
הִיא רַק מְקֻצֶּת שְׂבָחוֹ
לְפָנִים מִשׁוֹרֵת הַדִּין
מִנְהִיג אֶת עוֹלָמוֹ
וּמְלַפְנֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים
דּוֹרֵשׁ בְּשִׁלּוֹם עָמוֹ

*He shall "Give them glory instead of ashes
The festive ointment instead of mourning,
A garment of splendor instead of a drooping spirit"*

עֲתִיד הוּא לָתֵת פָּאֵר תַּחַת אֶפֶר
שָׁמֶן שִׁשׁוֹן תַּחַת אֲבָל
מַעֲטָה תְהִלָּה תַּחַת רוּחַ כְּהָה



Rabbi Jonathan Sacks:

Judaism took love and made it the centre of the universe. Three loves. "You shall love the L-rd your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might." (Deut. 6:5) "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." (Lev. 19:18) And "You shall love the stranger, for you were once strangers in a strange land." (Lev. 19:33-34). And these loves are a reflex of G-d's love for us. We exist because G-d loves. And when we love, G-d's light enters our soul. Loving others, we learn to love G-d and feel the fullness of His love for us. Opening ourselves to something other than ourselves, we become more than we currently are.

Reviving THE SPIRIT

ONE OF ISRAEL'S MOST POPULAR SINGERS, AKIVA TURGEMAN, REACHED THE TOP OF THE MUSIC CHARTS IN 2018 WITH THE HIT SINGLE "אל תעזבי ידיים" (NEVER LET GO).

SINCE BURSTING ONTO THE ISRAELI MUSIC SCENE, AKIVA (NOW KNOWN TO MILLIONS OF ISRAELIS BY HIS FIRST NAME) HAS FOLLOWED IN ISHAY RIBO'S FOOTSTEPS, COMPOSING DEEPLY RELIGIOUS SONGS THAT SPEAK TO THE ENTIRE SPECTRUM OF ISRAELI SOCIETY – BUT WITH A STYLE ALL HIS OWN.

NADAV GEDALIAH SAT WITH AKIVA TO TALK ABOUT FAITH, FAME AND FAMILY.

Nadav: You grew up in Dimona, the child of a Moroccan father and Canadian mother. How has that impacted your musical style?

Akiva: I have certainly been impacted by the very different musical styles I have been exposed to – I listened to Led Zeppelin when I was 12, and Meir Ariel and *piyutim* when I was 15! I have a deep connection to the world of Moroccan music, the *piyut*, the *bakashot* [liturgical supplications]. I'm very connected to it and grew up on it, and occasionally I'll include some ethnic instruments in my music. On the other hand, I also grew up on Western music. I call it *kibbutz galuyot* (the ingathering of the exiles)!

Nadav: Your music is about the everyday; you don't sing about abstract love or incomprehensible things. What are you trying to express in your music?

Akiva: Everything in life has grace and beauty. A song possesses emotional energy; it expresses the emotions that we try to convey to one another. Sometimes it's a love song for a child, or a love song for myself – for the child I was.

Today, the theme of most songs is love. But I try to mine all areas of life and not just the one emotion that is easiest to connect with. Struggles of faith, conflicts with parents, struggling with the death of a friend, the time I went to play music for a sick child. There are many emotions and experiences that can be expressed through song.

By the way, there are things that in the editing room I choose not to share. For every song that comes out, there are about eight songs that are shelved. There are certain things that I feel I have shared too much about, that are too personal.

Nadav: Is there a chance we'll hear more traditional *piyutim* from you?

Akiva: Yes, I might make an album of proper *piyutim*, and besides, I also have a Chassidic side. I studied at the Ramat Gan *yeshiva*, and it is possible that at some point in my life I will express the more Chassidic side of myself in music. At the end of the day, at the Shabbat table, I don't sing [my song] "Don't Let Go"; I sing 'אֵלֶיךָ אֶקְרָא ה' ("I call out to You Hashem"). This is what gives me life!

Nadav: What is the price of fame, of breaking into the mainstream of Israeli music?

Akiva: This is a question you can ask anyone who is successful in his field. It's not a natural way of life, and the workload is not normal. There are people who are hurt by it, and I know many people who find this kind of *shlichut* (mission) to be a heavy burden. It's important to pray for good mental health; I pray for this every day – to make sure I remain Akiva, the private person.

Nadav: What do you do to stay centered?

Akiva: I try to escape from all the publicity. I go out to the fields to be alone, to grab moments where I don't have to answer to anyone except myself and Hashem. I give thanks for all the good in my life, for every step of progress along the way. I didn't get to where I am from nothing. It wasn't sudden; I didn't sing in a reality show and suddenly become famous.



(PHOTO: GILAD TIDHAR)

Nadav: Still, there was clearly a turning point in your career.

Akiva: Yes, it happened when my song "Never Let Go" was the top song on the Galgalatz [Israeli radio station] billboard for two months. For audiences in Israel, I seemed to arrive from nowhere; for most people, I went from zero to a hundred all at once.

But professionally, as a musician, I progressed steadily, little by little. It took years to get to where I am today, which has helped me remain grounded. I don't take any of this for granted!

The balance for me is my home, the family. My wife would be happy if we hired some help for the house, but our goal is to remain simple. I come back from a show with my head in the clouds to wash dishes and remember who I really am. I consider myself a family man first and foremost: a husband and a father. This is what I was before all the success, and this is who I am, fundamentally, even more than being a singer.

Nadav: How do you measure the success of a Jewish singer today? And do you believe that art and commercialization can coexist?

Akiva: I always distinguish success from commercial success. Success is like what happened to me a few days ago: I released the song כמו שאת, "Like You," and someone sent me a message that she had listened to it five times in a row. She is pregnant, experiencing some complications, and the song really spoke to her. She felt the song was written about her and it gave her strength to get through a long and difficult night.

It's certainly possible that this woman will not attend any concerts or buy the album, but for me, this is the success

"SHLICHUT, THE SENSE OF MISSION, GIVES YOU STRENGTH.
IT'S EXHAUSTING TO CARE ONLY ABOUT YOURSELF."



I'm hoping for – that the songs will touch people from within. If it also translates into *parnasa* and ticket sales, that's great. But most importantly, the songs are a means to reach people.

I ask myself tough questions: Am I cynically exploiting people's emotions to make a living? This is a question I need to ask myself every morning. There are people who do this, though thank G-d I don't know them personally. I hope it does not exist here in Israel, and I hope and believe that no Jew is like that. Most importantly, I pray about this. It's important to recognize that "sin crouches at the door" (Bereishit 4:7).

Yes, I make commercial choices, such as choosing to produce a song because I believe it will reach more people. But financial considerations do not enter the creative process. I am not writing songs in order to advance my career.

With publicity and success comes a great deal of fear. In general, it is important to develop a practice of giving; as Eviatar Banai sings, בראי החוצה, בראי נצח, "let's go outside, let's go!" What saves me from anxiety is a real sense of *shlichut*, of mission.

I will be open with you. I feel anxious at the thought of what would happen to me if I am no longer famous, if I once again become anonymous. But Hashem has given me a role. Reb Nachman says that כבוד, "honor," derives from the same root as כבד, "seriousness." It's important to treat honor in a thoughtful and productive way. For example, to think: "for the moment, I am a successful singer – thank You Hashem! I will try to be and do what I can for as long as I am successful." Thinking this way eliminates the whole equation of "I have something to lose and so I'm afraid."

It's not just about my career – it's also about family and children. I don't want to be anxious about my children. I had friends growing up whose parents were always anxious and nervous. Anxiety is everywhere, and a person has to work to develop self-awareness in this regard.

It's about recognizing our personal place. Hashem wants me to be happy with what I have and not to be afraid about what will happen in the future. This is the basic recipe, and I consider myself a happy person who tries to be happy regardless of the success I am or am not experiencing in the eyes of others. Living in the moment with an attitude of *shlichut* is critical, and not specifically as a singer. It's an attitude that's critical as a parent, a guide, and as a person.

When Yosef was true to himself without regard for what others thought, he was harassed. But the Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that the moment Yosef realized he could be a *shaliach* of Hashem even in prison, and helped Pharaoh's butler and baker – it was at this moment that Yosef was transformed and uplifted! The truth is, a person can be a *shaliach* in any situation – on the stage or with his kids. And if one day there are no more concerts, then what? Is there no more Akiva?

Nadav: You don't get tired of constantly being a *shaliach*?

Akiva: On the contrary, *shlichut*, the sense of mission, gives you strength. It's exhausting to care only about yourself.

Nadav: A few months ago, you moved with your family from the Tel Aviv area to Jerusalem. What prompted your move?

Akiva: We lived in Tel Aviv for seven and a half years and had three more children there, but now we want to tap into the holiness of Jerusalem. The intensity of living in Tel Aviv didn't fit, and the lack of space suited us even less. We needed a chance to breathe, and so we set out on this journey. We don't know where we'll be in the future, but every Jew has a place in Jerusalem.

Nadav: Between us, what makes you laugh when you want to relax from all of this deep intensity?

Akiva: I can sit with friends and watch some funny movies. But the truth is, what really sets me free is going with my friends somewhere where I am not "Akiva," where we sit in a field near a spring with some beer, and I find myself playing guitar and singing songs in Russian! I know I come off as very heavy and serious sometimes, but I can also relax and fool around with the kids.

Nadav: Do people talk to you about your seriousness and depth?

Akiva: A few years ago, a couple approached me after a show and asked, 'Why don't you have happy songs? You look like an optimistic person.' The lady approached me, waved her index finger in my face and said in a commanding tone: 'Write happy songs!' I stuttered in response, 'okay,' and began to try to write happy songs. It took a while, but in the end, I succeeded, and wrote optimistic songs like שלום בבית ("Peace at Home") and הכול עוד אפשרי ("Everything is Still Possible"). But the stand-up comedy will have to wait!

Nadav Gedaliah is an Israeli journalist, blogger and writer.



Akiva in concert (PHOTOS: GILAD TIDHAR AND MARVA SHARON)



SINGING A NEW SONG IN THE JUDEAN HILLS

The Soul of Kehillat Shirat David

Rabbi Shlomo Katz

New beginnings

It was 2016, and I was living in the Zayit neighborhood of Efrat – a community of *olim*. I found myself among an incredible group of people who had not only moved to Israel, but who also understood that their *inner* work had only just begun. The group's passion and focus resonated deeply with me, at a time when I was already reevaluating my life's direction.

At that point, I had been working as a musician for nearly twenty years, and my professional life was on a clear trajectory exclusively centered around Jewish music. I had produced seven albums and was performing around the world. While I always did a bit of teaching on the side, I generally felt that I was fulfilling my calling when I stood on stage, sharing brief Torah teachings in between the songs.

But as time went by, I began to feel that I needed to bring something more to the world. When our *chevre* in Efrat asked me to lead them in building a

new *kehillah* – Shirat David – this 'more' began to take shape.

Living in a lonely world

Society today is characterized largely by individualism and illusion: every person sits behind their own protective screen, sharing distorted images and partial truths with strangers across the world. Alone, each person consumes the warped perspectives of others, judging their own life and building their own ideology off of these filtered fragments of reality. Together but apart, we build a skewed and splintered picture of the world, humanity, and ourselves, leaving many people feeling either lonely and insecure or phenomenally self-righteous and falsely connected. If this was true a few years ago, things have only gotten worse during the pandemic era.

Building a spiritual, growth-oriented community has never been so difficult – or so important. How do you convey the importance of the process of brokenness and becoming in a society based on false images of perfection?

How do you convey the values of community and togetherness when people can so easily resort to the virtual world? What is the role of a rabbi when all information is immediately accessible with the click of a button? And why is it unique, as well as a necessity, for such an endeavor to take place in the Holy Land?

With these thoughts in mind, I accepted the position of leadership of Kehillat Shirat David, a growth-oriented, shul-centered spiritual community in Efrat. Throughout the process of building our community, I have struggled with these questions endlessly – and am learning some beautiful lessons along the way.

Our principles

When our shul was first established, it was the warmest and most loving *minyán* possible. We gathered on Shabbatot and *chagim*, turning those high and holy musical experiences of my former career into genuine and joyful prayer. However, after a number of years, this didn't seem like enough.



Rabbi Shlomo Katz leading the Sukkot tefillot at Kehillat Shirat David. (PHOTO: COURTESY)

What were we doing the rest of the week? We dug deep to uncover the foundational values that would shape our unique and intentional community. With the challenges facing the world, we knew that we all needed something more than a physical building to house Shabbat services or even a daily *minyan*. We needed a spiritual home that would radiate the essence of *Avodat Hashem*, a place of passion that would inspire spiritual growth through song, and a supportive environment of longing and hope with other people who also dared to dream of a better world.

1. The ongoing process of *teshuvah*: First and foremost, *teshuvah* is not something we only think about during Ellul. Our community is built on a firm belief that people are at their best when they are actively engaged in a process of *becoming* – regardless of where they stand at the present moment. As individuals and as a community, we are all in a constant process of spiritual growth

and change, yearning to reveal our authentic selves to the world – and to ourselves. This is what the Chassidic Masters refer to as *gilui hanefesh*.

2. Authenticity over cynicism:

In order to actualize our unique purpose, live fulfilling lives and create genuine relationships, we must all find our own paths up the mountain of spirituality. However, this demands not only courage, but a safe space, free of judgment and expectations. The greatest roadblock on this journey is cynicism; if we doubt our own abilities or fear that others may mock us, we will never take risks in our *Avodat Hashem* to discover what truly works for us. If we can't cry, scream, dance, or sing our way through our prayer, how can the deepest needs of our heart find their way to Hashem?

3. Embracing failure: Of course, such an intense and vulnerable process opens the door for challenges and crises of faith. On

any genuine journey, there will be times when we are rising, on fire for Hashem, and times when we are falling, riddled with self-doubt and frustration at our own inability to progress. Guided by the words of Rebbe Nachman, we are committed to learning the art of how to walk, how to fall, and how to pick ourselves back up. Challenges are inevitable, but they do not define us. What makes us who we are is how we respond to these tough times, as well as how we support others through their struggles.

4. Living with questions:

Part of living an authentic, vulnerable, growth-oriented life means coming face-to-face with aspects of ourselves, our tradition, our relationships and our lives that leave us perplexed. Why would our loving Father in Heaven allow so much pain in the world? How could the Torah command us to do something seemingly impossible? Why do I struggle so much



to simply be myself? Navigating this journey not only means being willing to ask the hard questions, but also knowing that they don't always have clear answers. While uncertainty can be uncomfortable, together, we can learn to accept our limitations with humility while never giving up on our search for clarity.

5. **Aspiring for greatness:** In order to draw up a map for our personal growth, we first need a clear vision of who we want to be in the world and what we want the world to be. When envisioning our ideal self, it's crucial to think big. We are so used to lowering our expectations, staying within safe boundaries, and being told by the world that we are not enough. If we want to become the best and truest versions of ourselves, we have to first acknowledge that our soul is infinitely holy and essentially good – even if we don't feel that way right now. And just as we believe in our own unlimited potential, we need to practice looking at the world through cosmic eyes as well. That means talking openly about working to bring *Mashiach* and revealing the greatness and holiness hidden within every seemingly mundane moment.

Our tools

In order to bring these lofty ideas down into the reality of our daily lives, our community employs three powerful tools: The *Avodah* of Music, *Dibbuk Chaverim*, and *Talmud Torah*. In Chassidic thought, these things are not cute little activities we do to feel good or luxuries we indulge in when the important things in our lives are taken care of. They are essential aspects of *Avodat Hashem*, transformative acts that engage our bodies, hearts, minds and souls. Without these tools, our spiritual dreams will fall short.

1. **The *Avodah* of Music:** As a community Rav, I spend most of my time teaching, writing, and caring for my community. However, music still lies at the root of everything that I do, and in our community, we bring song into our prayer and learning, and prayer and learning into our song. When we experience the world of music – either as listeners or

creators – we gain the ability to go beyond our logical minds. As we move along in our journeys of growth and exploration, we need to be able to express ourselves in a way that isn't limited by our words and intellect.

Music also has the power to bring people together in a way that I have not experienced with any other medium. When a disparate group of individuals come together, each with different *kavanot*, lifestyles, and struggles, only music – particularly *niggunim* – can meet each person where they are and then elevate everyone together. It doesn't matter how long the *niggun* is or who composed it, but rather to what extent we allow ourselves to surrender to the journey on which it can take us.

2. ***Dibbuk Chaverim:*** However, the power of song can only go so far; *tefillah* is a form of *avodah*, and *avodah* is literally *work*. To experience truly meaningful and impactful *tefillah*, we first need to invest in tremendous effort and preparation. Like all difficult tasks, this one is also much easier when done as a group. It is no coincidence that our tradition requires a *minyan* for prayer. If a community wants to be able to reach great spiritual heights through their *tefillah* on Shabbat, they must work hard during the week to deepen personal and communal relationships.

By opening up to each other about what is really going on inside – our struggles, our *Avodat Hashem*, our deepest dreams – we elevate our community as a whole. While it is lovely to share Shabbat meals, help each other out in times of need, and celebrate *smachot*, it is only through mutual vulnerability that we can really grow together. Our role as members of the *kehillah* is not to judge or exclude others, but rather to encourage and support those with whom we share this journey.

3. ***Talmud Torah:*** While strengthening our relationships through talking and praying together is essential, we cannot forget the power of learning Torah together. So much of growth is about flying high, but without

the grounding roots of our tradition, no change will be lasting. With multiple daily *shiurim* for both men and women, our community is deeply anchored in the words of our Torah and *Chazal*. The timeless stories, laws, and lessons contained within Torah shape our goals, color our questions, and provide us guidance in every aspect of our lives. When engaging with the Torah, we must go beyond the intellectual pursuit of knowledge or the surface reading of ancient words. The learning we are opening our hearts with speaks to every part of who we are, and does not end when leaving the *shiur*. It shapes our whole world.

One of our greatest inspirations is the Piaseczna Rebbe, Reb Kalonymus Kalman Shapira zt”l, who led his Chassidic community through some of the darkest days in our history as a spiritual leader in the Warsaw Ghetto. Often referred to by the name of one of his *sefarim*, the *Aish Kodesh*, the Rebbe also wrote a work that has become a guiding light for our community, known as the *Bnei Machshava Tova*. In this short but powerful manual, the Rebbe outlines how and why our *Avodat Hashem* needs to be based on deep inner-soul work that is done together in a *chaburah*. The adults of our community gather almost every day in *chaburot* for men and women to delve into these kinds of writings together, actively engaging in the collective soul work described by the *tzaddikim* who somehow knew exactly what our generation would so desperately need.

Eretz Yisrael

Everything I've shared up until this point is applicable to every Jewish community around the world. But I believe that the power of what we are building is further amplified by the fact that we are living in Eretz Yisrael. We are so privileged to look out of our windows into the backyard of Jewish history. My home and *shul* are located on the road between Chevron – the city of our blessed *Avot* and *Imahot* – and Yerushalayim – the center of the universe and home to the past and future *Batei Mikdash*.



Left: Rabbi Shlomo Katz performing Havdallah at World Mizrahi's Mission celebrating Israel's 70th anniversary in Tel Aviv.

Facing page, top to bottom: Welcoming Shabbat at the World Mizrahi Yom Ha'Atzmaut 70 Mission in Tel Aviv; The Katz Family; Kehillat Shirat David in Efrat; Giving a shiur at Kehillat Shirat David.

Efrat is a place of transition, where our mother Rachel waited to cry for her children when they would be sent into exile, and where King David composed Tehillim, describing humankind's simultaneous fallibility and potential for greatness. On our national and personal journeys, we are always in motion, always moving back and forth from the force of our internal and external tides. Our community is acutely aware that we are part of that historic tradition of transition. Whatever we build today will have a long-term impact on what happens tomorrow. The future of our people, our tradition, our world, depend on us creating something authentic and meaningful, *here*, in Eretz Yisrael.

Where art meets life

While I believe that what our community is creating is unique, I think the need for change is the same across the Jewish world. Like everything important, I see this reflected in the music that is popular in our generation. When I hear Eviatar Banai belting out *Yesh Li Sikuyi* (“I Have A Chance”), Hanan Ben Ari singing about dreaming like Yosef HaTzadik, my brother, Eitan Katz, crying out *Ki Karov Eilecha* (“For it

is Close to You”), and Joey Newcomb simply stating “Thank You, Hashem,” I know for a fact that change has arrived. Jewish music, both traditional religious music that openly discusses spiritual challenges or modern Israeli music that integrates stories from the Torah or quotes from Jewish liturgy, resonates far more deeply today than it has in the past.

As Rav Kook predicted, modern Jewish music reflects the emphasis on *teshuvah* that people need to hear; the importance of engaging in an eternal process of becoming. My music has always focused on these ideas, but with the building of Shirat David, I now feel that we have a way to make these lofty ideas a part of our lives. We have found a home, together.

Ashreinu, Ma Tov Chelkeinu; how fortunate we are, how good is our portion!

Rabbi Shlomo Katz has served as Rav of the Shirat David community since 2016. He is an accomplished musician who has released multiple albums and conducted concert tours throughout the world. His passion for music has, in turn, become part of the very identity of Shirat David, shaping the unique character of their tefillot and other events throughout the year.

JEW'S with VIEWS

We asked five accomplished Jews from around the world to reflect the Jewish music that is most meaningful to them



Eitan Katz

When I listen to music, the most important thing, for me, is that the *niggun* (melody) reflects the deeper meaning of the words being sung. If the *niggun* does not deepen our understanding of the words being sung, if the composer chooses words for his *niggun* simply because they rhyme and superficially sound good, then the song is a waste – even if it has a catchy tune.

There are so many *niggunim* that I feel connected to. That being said, Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach's *Ani Ma'amin* (I Believe) is the one that hits me the hardest, especially when I am focused and can properly reflect on its meaning. Every word of that song is soaked through with yearning for *Mashiach*, the yearning that has sustained *Am Yisrael* for thousands of years.

Eitan Katz – a member of an extremely musical family – is one of the acclaimed Jewish singers of our generation, inspiring Jews all over the world through his powerful songs and niggunim. He recently released his eleventh album, Truma, with guest appearances by Joey Newcomb and Levi Falkowitz.



Rebbetzin Channah Hambling

A few years ago, we participated in a pre-Shavuot “Shabbat Chazzanut” in Alon Shvut. The guest chazzan was Shulem Lemmer, and his *tefillot* were beautiful and deeply moving. Once Chazzan Lemmer was on my radar, I began listening to his songs, and ultimately discovered *Face the Unknown*, which quickly became my favorite. Released in October 2019, it holds a special place in my heart. I was due to have a baby that November and so the words “Face the Unknown” carried extra meaning for me.

Since the pandemic arrived, the song has taken on a different meaning, reminding me that no matter who you are or where you come from we must all work together to make the world a better place. We all struggle and we all have our own problems, but we have to remember that together we can face the unknown and find the strength to continue.

Rebbetzin Channah Hambling grew up in London. She studied at Midreshet Yeud and participated in World Mizrahi and Matan's Lapidot program. She is currently the Community Rebbetzin at Birmingham Central United Synagogue.



Rabbi Dr. Benji Levy

This is like asking me who my favorite child is, when I love each in a unique way, or asking what my favorite food is, when it really depends on the mood I am in and the context of the meal. That being said, I've recently preferred listening to *niggunim* without words. For while music brings words to life, sometimes the words can get in the way of the music of life. Music is the language of the soul and a *niggun* is this in its purest form, without any distractions.

Lately my family has been singing the Berditchever *niggun* each Friday night. The author, Reb Levi Yitzchak, was known as the great defender of *Am Yisrael*, always judging favorably and interceding on behalf of our people. It is stirring and evocative from the very first line. There is no real verse and no real bridge, but there is a tradition that to sing it properly, one must elevate the key each time it is sung. This is a microcosm for the chorus of life, a constant journey requiring elevation from each of us, for in lifting it, it lifts us.

Rabbi Dr. Benji Levy is the Co-Founder of Israel Impact Partners, advising philanthropists across the globe. He was the CEO of Mosaic United, a major partnership between the Israeli Government and key leaders, and Dean of Moriah College in Australia, one of the largest Jewish schools in the world. He recently authored Covenant and the Jewish Conversion Question with Palgrave Macmillan and shares teachings online @RabbiBenji and on www.RabbiBenji.com.



Aliza Abrams Konig

I love music; I find listening to music evokes a range of emotions, inspires creativity and conjures up memories of my past. My favorite song does just that; it never fails to move me, and reminds me of beautiful personal memories.

Ani L'Dodi (I am to My Beloved) by C. Lanzbom of Soulfarm is the song I chose to walk down the aisle to at my wedding. Many people choose to walk down to a variety of versions of *Ani L'Dodi*, but the Soulfarm version holds particular significance for me.

During the year and a half I spent learning in Israel, I got hooked on Soulfarm. I went to a few of their shows and even crashed a wedding they played at The Moshav. Their music has always moved me; I find it deeply spiritual and uplifting. And so even though I hadn't heard it sung at other weddings, when it came to choosing a song to walk down to, it was the first song that came to mind. To surprise my husband, I arranged for a group of Chassidic back up singers to be at the *chuppah*, where they sang beautiful harmony to this song – *kapotahs* and all!

Aliza Abrams Konig is the Senior Program Director of the Leadership Scholars at Yeshiva University, an undergraduate program to develop emerging leaders for the Jewish future. She lectures on leadership, education, faith, prayer and issues related to the contemporary Jewish family.



Rabbi Josh Lehman

March of 2020 was a turbulent time for everyone, but for my wife and I, the onset of the pandemic and the ensuing pandemic came at a particularly inconvenient time. Our wedding was scheduled for March 16, and it quickly became apparent that our wedding would not be anything like what we had envisioned...

In an effort to cheer us up, my brother-in-law arranged for Yonatan Razel to sing at our *chuppah*, something we will never forget. As my wife walked down the aisle, he sang "Ashira" (I will sing to Hashem). In that moment, the words of the song spoke very powerfully to me; its call to have faith in Hashem and to rejoice in the goodness He gives us could not have resonated more. Despite the difficult times and Covid's effects on our special day, we had so much to be thankful for. That song will always have a place in my heart, not just for its beautiful lyrics and melody, but for the deeper perspective and joy that it gave us on the most significant day of our lives.

Rabbi Josh Lehman studied at Yeshivat Hakotel and served as a combat soldier in the IDF, after which he studied Computer Science at the Jerusalem College of Technology. After earning semicha from the Mizrahi Musmachim Program, he taught at Yeshivat Hakotel and Aish HaTorah. Together with his wife, he is currently the OU-JLIC Director at the University of Maryland.

Odeleya Berlin

A MUSICAL



(PHOTO: RAMI ZARNEGAR)



TRAILBLAZER

Avigayil Zayit

In a musical world that has traditionally been dominated by men, Odeleya Berlin has blazed a trail as a female, religious, halachically observant singer. Today, she performs in front of packed halls of thousands of women, success that has been years of effort in the making.

Odeleya was born into a musical family in the Israeli town of Elkana. Her father, Moshe Berlin, is a popular Klezmer performer, and Odeleya began to learn piano at the age of four. “When I was in high school, I was in a band with a group of friends, and we wrote music and sang together. As soon as we graduated most of them moved on to other things. I think they chose not to pursue their musical passion because there was no concept of becoming a singer as a religious woman.”

Odeleya’s tentative first steps into the field were accompanied by constant doubts; she wondered if this path could actually be successful. “When I finished my *Sherut Leumi* (national service), I created a band called *Tefillat HaDerech* with some other female musicians. I reached out to a cultural center in the Shomron to perform there for a women’s only event, but they didn’t know how to process such an idea, so the performance never happened.”

“I chose to study to be a music teacher at Michlalah College in Jerusalem. There just weren’t options for religious female musicians, so most of my

friends who were exceptionally talented went into more traditional fields like education and social work. Today the situation is dramatically improved – there are more programs for music in both high schools and musical colleges, and each year more and more religious women attend and graduate from these programs.”



For my first live performances, I would arrive with my little run-down car packed with all the speaker systems and instruments myself, and I was literally setting up the entire show on my own. I was making pennies, but I felt that my career was beginning to develop.

Together with a band named *Bat Kol*, Odeleya produced her first CD, and gradually her career began to build momentum. “For my first live performances, I would arrive with my little run-down car packed with all the speaker systems and instruments myself, and I was literally setting up the entire show on my own. I was making pennies, but I felt that my career was beginning to develop.”

After a few years of performing, Odeleya created an event called *Ochila* – a women’s only night of song and

prayer during the weeks leading up to the *Yamim Nora'im*. When the program debuted in 2008, 180 women attended. In 2021, over 4,500 women attended *Ochila* performances, with concerts both in Yerushalayim and Tel Aviv.

Odeleya also looks to use music to break down barriers between different sectors of Israeli society. “When I first organized concerts, I made sure that the fliers were distributed to reach both Zionist and Chareidi populations. Rather than focusing inwards on my own community, I want my music to create a shared experience and dialogue between communities.”

Her latest project is called *Sofash Im Shir*, “Songs for the Weekend,” a list of Jewish and Israeli songs that relate to the weekly parasha. “I feel connected to Jewish music with every fiber of my being, and in this project I want to share this passion with the world. I grew up close to the wellspring of Jewish experience and song, but this wellspring belongs to the whole Jewish people. I want to bring this connection to everyone, whether they live by the spring or are occasional visitors, and to touch as many hearts as possible.”

● A version of this article was originally published in Hebrew in *Olam Katan*.

Avigayil Zayit is the editor of the *Makor Rishon* website.



*“If You Have a Talent,
Share it With the World!”*

A CONVERSATION WITH RICKA RAZEL

Ricka Razel began her performing career in a family band as a teenager. Decades later, the now religiously observant mother-of-eight has returned to the stage – now playing only for female audiences. Rabbi Aron White spoke with Ricka to learn about her remarkable, inspiring and colorful journey.

As a teenager, you were the singer in a band together with your brothers, appearing on Israeli television.

However, you stopped performing for a significant period of time after that. Why didn't the band continue?

There are multiple layers to the story. We had played as a band in high school, but my brothers Aaron and Yonatan later became more religious, and so they were not comfortable with me being a female singer performing in front of a mixed crowd. But besides the religious angle, our band was something we did as teenagers, and as we grew older our lives moved on in different ways. We all went to the army after high school, and I actually got married while in the army when I was 19. Soon after that I had my first child, so as a young mother my family quickly became my main focus, and music was left by the wayside.

Did you find it difficult to no longer be performing music?

The band had just stopped by itself, but when Aaron and Yonatan started performing again a few years later it was very hard for me. We had always performed at weddings together, and now I couldn't join them; when they would be up there performing I felt very left out. I love them, and would love going to their concerts, but I felt that I wanted to be on the stage, sharing my music with the world! Baruch Hashem I was very happy in so many aspects of my life. My family had grown and I had eight kids. I was also running a real estate business, so I was very busy. But when I reached my forties I experienced a kind of mid-life crisis. I told myself, "I'm going to be a grandmother soon, my life is basically over; I need to follow my passion!" I knew that my real passion in life was to write music, and I began to go back to my songs.

How did you return to music after a twenty-year hiatus?

I slowly started writing music again, recording one song a month in a studio. I had all kinds of beginnings of songs – a chorus here, a verse there – and it was such a great experience to be back in that creative space, always thinking



about the music. At this point, I was still working my day job; I had a large family and it was the main source of income for our family. But my head and heart had shifted from real estate to my music. I would be showing people around apartments, but would find myself rushing them from one room to the next, I was just trying to finish the meeting!

I had to make a big decision – would I perform in front of men or not? This question forced me to grapple with religion in a way I had never done before. When my daughter was in first grade I began covering my hair, as I felt I wanted my kids to grow up in a religious environment. But I had chosen to observe Judaism in an external way, without really making a deep internal choice. Now I was facing a religious question that would have a major impact on my life. If I decided to not perform in front of men, I would be pigeonholing myself to a small niche of religious women, which meant I would get only five to ten percent of the performances that I could get if I would perform for everyone. I wrote a song about my struggle, *Rak Rotzah LaShir*, expressing the conflicts of just wanting to sing. We all experience religious dilemmas where we feel pushed, and it was a personal journey, but one that ultimately deepened my connection to Judaism. I made my decision that I would only perform in front of

women. I started to perform, and I loved it. I remember one night when I performed together with my brothers in Zappa, a music club in Jerusalem, when I released my album. I remember coming home that night and having a moment of clarity, that I had to give up my day job and focus on the music.

Tell us about your experience performing for American Jewish women as part of the Momentum program.

It is so amazing! My mother is American, so I have a huge place in my heart for *Aliyah* and *olim*, and I love helping people explore the Land of Israel. Whenever my aunts and uncles would come from America to visit us, I would always be the one to guide them around Israel and show off our country. Momentum is a program for American Jewish women who come to visit Israel, many for the first time, to strengthen their connection with Judaism. I was asked to join a group, and the trip was honestly one of the best weeks of my life. It was so special to join these women for their first visit to Yerushalayim, their first visit to the Kotel, and their first time going to a *mikvah*. I carried my guitar with me the whole time, and the singing brought the group together in an amazing way. Music has the power to connect people in a deeper way. Anyone – even those without a strong Jewish background – can sing *Am Yisrael Chai*. It created so

Ricka in concert with her daughter, Michal (PHOTO: ANDREA BROWNSTEIN/PHOTOLI PHOTOGRAPHY)

(ARTWORK ON FACING PAGE: ILAN BLOCK)

many beautiful moments that brought the group together.

I saw one of your Instagram posts about how music helped you connect with daily prayer in a new way. Can you tell us more about that?

I wanted to use music to help make *tefillah* more meaningful and accessible for women. I created an app called *Mitpalelet*, where I recorded the whole *Shacharit* with songs from many kinds of musical traditions. I live in *Nachlaot* in *Yerushalayim*, which is home to so many fascinating communities, both *Ashkenazic* and *Sephardic*. I also incorporated other tunes, like ones I learned when I lived for a year in *Jersey City* in *America*. It is often hard for women to find time for *davenning*, and so I made

this app so that when you are driving to work or are with the kids, you can listen to *tefillah* in the background to be able to connect in that way. I would love to add more *tefillot* to the app, such as *Hallel*.

What is your message to young women who have a passion and talent for music?

A huge change has happened compared to when I was growing up. There are now so many musical opportunities and events that are geared to women. There are also so many platforms to share your music online. I think that music is a great way to share a message with the world, to connect with yourself and to connect with G-d. If you have a talent, bring it out and share it with the world!

Having decided to only perform in front of women, I now feel that there is something pure and wonderful about the women-only space. In the general music scene, the media is often looking for flaws in the musicians and their performances. The religious media, on the other hand, is trying to bring good in the world, and thank G-d, I am very happy to be performing in this beautiful environment. I hope that I will be able to bring my music outside of the religious community too, to women in general. So many of us have similar experiences, face similar issues, and want similar things from life; to be loved, to have a family. I think that there is so much to offer as a woman singing and connecting with women together. ●

Ricka Razel
accompanying
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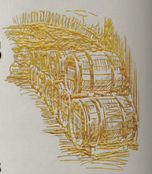
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Songs of Women, Water and War

Rabbanit Shani Taragin

Adar is a time for music, a source of joy and inspiration throughout our history. Rav Nachman explains that we do not recite *Hallel* on Purim because the entire *Megillah* is a song of praise! (Arachin 10b)

The Rabbis explain that the song of the downfall of Haman's ten sons is written in a "half-brick on a half-brick structure... so that they should never rise from their downfall." (Megillah 16b) Just as a wall built in this manner will not stand, so too, these individuals should have no resurgence. By contrast, the other songs in Tanach are written as "a half-brick arranged upon a whole brick and a whole brick arranged upon a half-brick," in which each line of the song is divided into a stitch of text, referred to as a half-brick, which is separated by a blank space, referred to as a whole brick. These songs include the Song of the Sea (Shemot 15) and the Song of Devorah (Shoftim 5), both of which are national military victory songs, but also songs of water and songs of women.

These songs of praise came after extended periods of subjugation and harsh oppression, when the suffering was almost unbearable. Shifting from depression to miraculous victory, the oppressed broke forth in song. Both songs contain similar details – victory over an enemy, the flooding of water, the destruction of chariots – as well as a similar rhythm, scope and breadth of vision, combining past, present and future. Both songs are sung in unison by the leaders of the time – Moshe and Miriam, Devorah and Barak – highlighting their different styles of leadership.

Watching her brother from afar by the banks of the Nile, Miriam anticipated salvation in the face of despair. When men separated from their wives due to Pharaoh's harsh decrees, Miriam advised her father Amram to remarry and continue to bear children (Sotah 12a). Miriam is called "Aharon's sister" to teach us that before Moshe was born she prophetically foretold the birth of the future savior of *Am Yisrael*! Though her father despaired when Moshe was cast into the Nile, Miriam was determined to see the fulfillment of her prophecy (ibid. 12b–13a). The Rabbis derive these lessons from the narrative which highlights the active responses of women such as Shifrah, Puah, Yocheved, Miriam, and Bat-Pharaoh to infanticide and oppression, in contrast to the relative passivity of the men of the generation.

Miriam's optimism and leadership are manifest once again at the Song of the Sea. Though Moshe initiated the singing, Miriam's song is of a different nature. "Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, picked up a hand-drum, and all the women went out after her in dance with hand-drums. And Miriam responded to them: Sing to Hashem for He has triumphed gloriously; horse and driver He has hurled to the sea!" Miriam did not lead the people in song by singing herself; she raised her drum and encouraged the women to dance on their own. Miriam motivated the nation to rise from their stupor and sing, transforming them from a reactive people to a proactive one!

Devorah the prophetess initiated her song in a similar manner, reinforcing the message of unique female leadership. Like Miriam, she lived under the

oppression of a chariot-based army and called upon the men to respond with a military attack. Barak, the military general, was afraid to wage war against the Canaanite menace alone, and so Devorah joined him atop Mount Tavor. She tells Barak that "there will be no glory for you in the course you are taking, for Hashem will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman." (i.e. Yael)

Devorah's victory song recounting the miraculous flooding of the Kishon river resonates with allusions to the Red Sea and Mount Sinai, reminding us of the miracles and melodies of *Am Yisrael* in the wilderness. Like Miriam, she composed her song to inspire the nation to follow the lead of "women of the tent" such as Yael – not necessarily with military might but with the spirit of courage and belief in Hashem! Whereas Miriam is introduced as a "sister of Aharon" in her song, Devorah calls herself "Mother of Israel," highlighting the development of leadership by righteous women in every generation.

Each generation offers poetic commentary through song, depicting its shortcomings while celebrating the triumph of commitment. The songs of women and water, of sisters, mothers and queens, remind us of the active roles women must play in catalyzing redemption, "to tell the righteous acts of Hashem"!

Rabbanit Shani Taragin is Educational Director of Mizrachi and the Director of the Mizrachi-TVA Lapidot Educators' Program.



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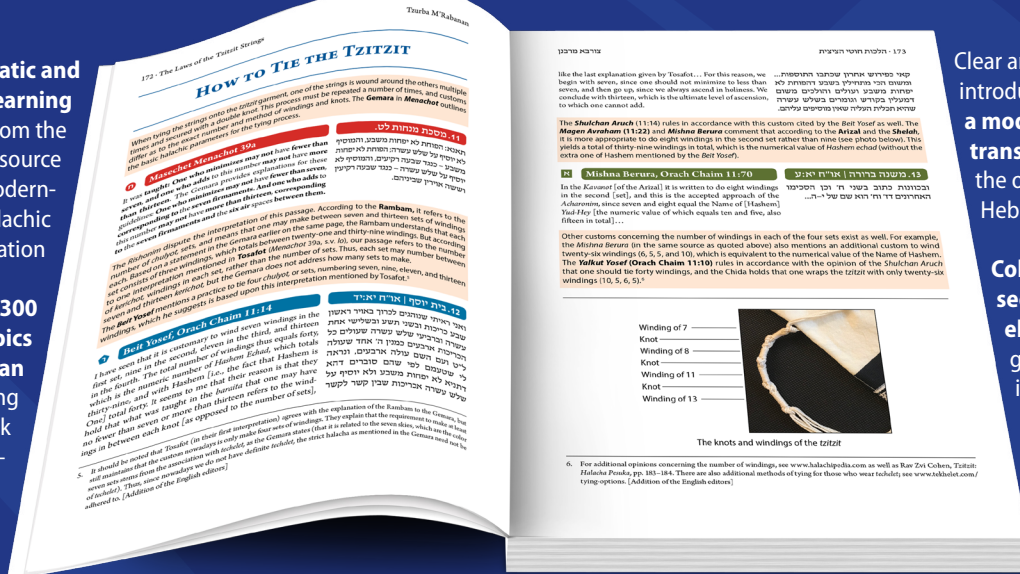


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The Niggun OF THE TZADDIK and the Niggun OF THE BA'AL TESHUVAH

Aaron Razel

In truth, there is no moment without a *niggun* (tune), just as there is no *niggun* that does not have its moment.

There is a *niggun* of the morning, and a *niggun* of the afternoon.

There is a *niggun* of midnight, when the northern wind blows.

There is a *niggun* the *Tzaddik* (righteous) hears, and he weeps like a *Ba'al Teshuvah* (penitent). And there is a *niggun* the *Ba'al Teshuvah* sings, which holds within it the light of the *Tzaddikim*.

There is a *niggun* which is itself repentance; you sing it and something begins to move, to awaken.

You play it and begin to soar. You are no longer who you were before the *niggun*.

There is a story of a boy who studied among gentiles, who was almost fully assimilated. At his school the students wore a uniform with a symbol of the cross. One day another student whispered to him: "I know you are a Jew. So am I. You should know: we can't remove the cross from our shirts for it will cause animosity with the gentiles, but wearing a cross on our shirts is not the way of our faith. What can we

do? There is a great Rabbi across the ocean, the Rabbi of the Chabad Chassidim. Jews all over the world send him letters with questions, and so did we, and he answered us. He told us to sew a small seam on the cross which the other students would not notice, but which would change the symbol of the cross. If you want, you can come to my house and my mother will sew the little seam on your shirt."

The boy, though he had never heard of Chassidim or Rebbes, went to the other boy's home. As his mother sewed the seam, she asked him if he had ever heard a Chassidic *niggun*. He shook his head. She went to the turntable and played a new record of Chabad *niggunim*.

The record was done playing. The boy asked to hear it again. The record finished a second time, and he asked to hear it once more. He did not leave before he had fallen in love with those *niggunim* with all his heart.

The two boys became friends, and they would sit and listen to the *niggunim* over and over, until the boy became a new person. He went home and said to his parents: "Beginning today I am a *Ba'al Teshuvah*!" He changed his clothes, the

food he ate and began to study. He became a *Ba'al Teshuvah* and made *Aliyah* to the Holy Land.

And if you will tell me: this never happened...

It happened. I married his daughter, my children are his grandchildren. And in every place where there is a Chassidic *niggun*, you will find him there.

There are Chassidic *niggunim* that you hear, and you are no longer the same person you were before you heard it.

Aaron Razel is a writer, composer and artist, one of the pioneers of Israel's Jewish music renaissance. His twelve albums include songs like *HaSneh Bo'er* (The Burning Bush) and *Zman HaGeulah* (The Time of Redemption) that have become part of the broader cultural landscape of Israel. He lives in the Nachlaot neighborhood of Jerusalem with his wife and children. This essay was originally published in Hebrew in his book *HaChayim K'Niggun* (Life as a Niggun).



HOW HEBREW MUSIC MADE ME AN



Yossi Klein Halevi

The Baal Shem Tov, founder of Chassidism, tells the story of a deaf man who came upon a wedding party. Watching the celebrants leap and twirl, he assumed he was observing the antics of madmen.

The Baal Shem intended the story as a metaphor for the mystical experience. But it could also serve as a useful metaphor for trying to understand the State of Israel without knowing something of its soundtrack.

No art form is as beloved by Israelis as Hebrew song. Perhaps this isn't surprising: the strongest Jewish art forms have traditionally been literature and music, and that has held true in modern Israel. From the earliest days of the Zionist movement, the experience of return was chronicled and vitalized by song. The joy of rediscovery of the lost land, the struggle of building and the price of defending: Israel was sung into existence and sustained ever since by song.

Many of the most cherished Israeli songs draw their lyrics from our great modern poets – Bialik, Rachel and Leah Goldberg, and Natan Alterman. For all the trivial songs we have inevitably produced, Hebrew music has never been trivial.

Like Israeli society, our music is constantly reinventing itself. Over the last decade, the Israeli tradition of fusing popular music with poetry has taken new form. Some of our leading rock musicians have rediscovered *piyut* – the prayer poems of the Jews of the Middle East. The result is a new genre: rock *piyut*. Some musicians are breaking away from the old forms and writing a contemporary Israeli version of prayer – at once celebrating faith and

struggling with doubt, like the songs of the Breslover Chassid, Shuli Rand.

For me, learning to understand – to revere – Israeli music was an essential step in becoming Israeli. Making this music my own allowed me to claim the Israeli experience, retroactively accessing the decades of Israeli life I had missed. One way I learned Israeli poetry was through a series of beautifully produced CD collections, each devoted to the musical interpretation of another poet.

I discovered just how deep the relationship is between Israelis and their music when I attended my first parents-teacher meeting at my daughter's kindergarten, early on in my life in Israel. The parents dutifully squeezed into little chairs and proceeded to sing the songs of Israeli childhood with such passion that they became transformed, restored to innocence. Many of those deceptively simple songs were written by our leading poets, codes to the Israeli personality and ethos.

Gradually, I discovered just how our music saturates the Israeli experience. I began to recognize lines from songs in our ever-malleable slang and even in newspaper headlines. And I came to regard our great musicians with the affection we reserve for intimate friends.

Where would we be without Naomi Shemer, who turned our holiest moments into secular celebrations and our secular experience into prayer? And Arik Einstein, who brought the '60s into Israeli music and whose tender and ironic ballads could function on their own as the great Israeli soundtrack?

And Danny Sanderson and Kaveret offering their wacky and profound take on Israeliness? And Meir Ariel and Shalom Chanoch, the great troubadours of Israeli rock, who bridged the romantic Israel of the founders with the hard-edged Israel of the children?

And *Habreira Hativit*, the Natural Gathering, heroically transforming our music in the 1970s from Ashkenazi to Israeli? And the Banais – Ehud, Meir and Eviatar – whose fusion of rock music and religious devotion and the vagaries of Israeliness transformed our sense of ourselves?

And Etti Ankri and Morin Nehedar and Narkiss, the great *paytaniyot*, female singers of devotional song? And Berry Sakharof with his strange and beautiful and haunting rock? And Yehudah Poliker who fused Greek and Israeli music and whose classic album, *Efer v'Avak*, "Dust and Ashes," gave voice to the Holocaust lament of the Second Generation?

The list goes on and on, a seemingly inexhaustible profusion of the Israeli soul. So much to celebrate, so much to be grateful for.

Yossi Klein Halevi is an award-winning author and Senior Fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem.



The Spirituality of Song

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks רצ"ל

With *Ha'azinu* we climb to one of the peaks of Jewish spirituality. For a month Moses had taught the people. He had told them their history and destiny, and the laws that would make theirs a unique society of people bound in covenant with one another and with G-d. He renewed the covenant and then handed the leadership on to his successor and disciple Joshua. His final act would be blessing the people, tribe by tribe. But before that, there was one more thing he had to do. He had to sum up his prophetic message in a way the people would always remember and be inspired by. He knew that the best way of doing so is by music. So the last thing Moses did before giving the people his deathbed blessing was to teach them a song.

There is something profoundly spiritual about music. When language aspires to the transcendent, and the soul longs to break free of the gravitational pull of the earth, it modulates into song. Jewish history is not so much read as sung. The rabbis enumerated ten songs at key moments in the life of the nation. There was the song of the Israelites in Egypt (see Yeshayahu 30:29), the song at the Red Sea (Shemot 15), the song at the well

(Bemidbar 21), and *Ha'azinu*, Moses' song at the end of his life. Joshua sang a song (Yehoshua 10:12-13). So did Deborah (Shoftim 5), Hannah (Shmuel I 2) and David (Shmuel II 22). There was the Song of Solomon, *Shir haShirim*, about which Rabbi Akiva said, "All songs are holy but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies."¹ The tenth song has not yet been sung. It is the song of the Messiah.²

Many biblical texts speak of the power of music to restore the soul. When Saul was depressed, David would play for him and his spirit would be restored (Shmuel I 16). David himself was known as the "sweet singer of Israel" (Shmuel II 23:1). Elisha called for a harpist to play so that the prophetic spirit could rest upon him (Melachim II 3:15). The Levites sang in the Temple. Every day, in Judaism, we preface our morning prayers with *Pesukei deZimra*, the 'Verses of Song' with their magnificent crescendo, Psalm 150, in which instruments and the human voice combine to sing G-d's praises.

Mystics go further and speak of the song of the universe, what Pythagoras called "the music of the spheres". This is what Psalm 19 means when it says, "The heavens declare the glory of G-d; the skies proclaim the work of His hands... There is no speech, there

are no words, where their voice is not heard. Their music³ carries throughout the earth, their words to the end of the world." Beneath the silence, audible only to the inner ear, creation sings to its Creator.

So, when we pray, we do not read: we sing. When we engage with sacred texts, we do not recite: we chant. Every text and every time has, in Judaism, its own specific melody. There are different tunes for *Shacharit*, *Minchah* and *Maariv*, the morning, afternoon and evening prayers. There are different melodies and moods for the prayers for a weekday, Shabbat, the three pilgrimage festivals, Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot (which have much musically in common but also tunes distinctive to each), and for the *Yamim Nora'im*, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

There are different tunes for different texts. There is one kind of cantillation for Torah, another for the *haftarah* from the prophetic books, and yet another for *Ketuvim*, the Writings, especially the five Megillot. There is a particular chant for studying the texts of the written Torah: Mishnah and Gemara. So by music alone we can tell what kind of day it is and what kind of text is being used. Jewish texts and times are not colour-coded but music-coded.

The map of holy words is written in melodies and songs.

Music has extraordinary power to evoke emotion. The Kol Nidrei prayer with which Yom Kippur begins is not really a prayer at all. It is a dry legal formula for the annulment of vows. There can be little doubt that it is its ancient, haunting melody that has given it its hold over the Jewish imagination. It is hard to hear those notes and not feel that you are in the presence of G-d on the Day of Judgment, standing in the company of Jews of all places and times as they plead with heaven for forgiveness. It is the holy of holies of the Jewish soul.⁴

Nor can you sit on Tisha B'Av reading *Eichah*, the book of Lamentations, with its own unique cantillation, and not feel the tears of Jews through the ages as they suffered for their faith and wept as they remembered what they had lost, the pain as fresh as it was the day the Temple was destroyed. Words without music are like a body without a soul.

Beethoven wrote over the manuscript of the third movement of his A Minor Quartet the words *Neue Kraft fühlend*, “Feeling new strength.” That is what music expresses and evokes. It is the language of emotion unsicklied by the pale cast of thought. That is what King David meant when he sang to G-d the words: “You turned my grief into dance; You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to You and not be silent.” You feel the strength of the human spirit no terror can destroy.

In his book, *Musicophilia*, the late Oliver Sacks (no relative, alas) told the poignant story of Clive Wearing, an eminent musicologist who was struck by a devastating brain infection. The result was acute amnesia. He was unable to remember anything for more than a few seconds. As his wife Deborah put it, “It was as if every waking moment was the first waking moment.”

Unable to thread experiences together, he was caught in an endless present that had no connection with anything that had gone before. One day his wife found him holding a chocolate in one hand and repeatedly covering and uncovering it with the other hand, saying each time, “Look, it’s new.” “It’s

the same chocolate,” she said. “No,” he replied, “Look. It’s changed.” He had no past at all.

Two things broke through his isolation. One was his love for his wife. The other was music. He could still sing, play the organ and conduct a choir with all his old skill and verve. What was it about music, Sacks asked, that enabled him, while playing or conducting, to overcome his amnesia? He suggests that when we “remember” a melody, we recall one note at a time, yet each note relates to the whole. He quotes the philosopher of music, Victor Zuckerkandl, who wrote, “Hearing a melody is hearing, having heard, and being about to hear, all at once. Every melody declares to us that the past can be there without being remembered, the future without being foreknown.” Music is a form of sensed continuity that can sometimes break through the most overpowering disconnections in our experience of time.



Faith is more like music than science. Science analyses, music integrates. And as music connects note to note, so faith connects episode to episode, life to life, age to age in a timeless melody that breaks into time.

Faith is more like music than science.⁵ Science analyses, music integrates. And as music connects note to note, so faith connects episode to episode, life to life, age to age in a timeless melody that breaks into time. G-d is the composer and librettist. We are each called on to be voices in the choir, singers of G-d’s song. *Faith is the ability to hear the music beneath the noise.*

So music is a signal of transcendence. The philosopher and musician Roger Scruton writes that it is “an encounter with the pure subject, released from the world of objects, and moving in obedience to the laws of freedom alone.”⁶ He quotes Rilke: “Words still go softly out towards the unsayable / And music, always new, from palpating stones / builds in useless space

its godly home.”⁷ The history of the Jewish spirit is written in its songs.

I once watched a teacher explaining to young children the difference between a physical possession and a spiritual one. He had them build a paper model of Jerusalem. Then (this was in the days of tape-recorders) he put on a tape with a song about Jerusalem that he taught to the class. At the end of the session he did something very dramatic. He tore up the model and shredded the tape. He asked the children, “Do we still have the model?” They replied, No. “Do we still have the song?” They replied, Yes.

We lose physical possessions, but not spiritual ones. We lost the physical Moses. But we still have the song.

¹ Mishnah, Yadayim 3:5.

² Tanchuma, Beshalach, 10; Midrash Zuta, Shir haShirim, 1:1.

³ *Kavam*, literally “their line”, possibly meaning the reverberating string of a musical instrument.

⁴ Beethoven came close to it in the opening notes of the sixth movement of the C Sharp Minor Quartet op. 131, his most sublime and spiritual work.

⁵ I once said to the well-known atheist Richard Dawkins, in the course of a radio conversation, “Richard, religion is music, and you are tone deaf.” He replied, “Yes, it’s true, I am tone deaf, but *there is no music.*”

⁶ Roger Scruton, *An Intelligent Person’s Guide to Philosophy*, Duckworth, 1996, 151.

⁷ Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*, II, 10.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks was the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth from 1991 until his retirement in 2013. He spent decades bringing spiritual insight to the public conversation through mass media, popular lectures, and more than 30 books. Rabbi Sacks passed away in 2020, leaving behind a legacy as one of the greatest Jewish thinkers of our generation, one who bridged the religious and secular world through his remarkable and ground-breaking canon of work.



Evocation and Expression

MUSIC AND SONG IN JUDAISM

Rabbi Reuven Taragin

Torah as song

We would expect the Torah to conclude with a seminal law or philosophical idea. Instead, it ends with *Shirat Ha'azinu* – with song. Chazal understood this usage of the term *shirah* as referring not just to *Ha'azinu*, but to the whole Torah. Like song, the Torah has many layers of meaning and harmonizes variant voices. We express our appreciation of this aspect of Torah by singing Torah – to many different tunes.

We, the singers

G-d and His word are the subjects of the song; His world is the singer. Tehillim 19:2 describes how Hashem's handiwork sings His praises. Man, the greatest of Hashem's creations, provides the music for this song. When describing the development of civilization, the Torah includes those who fashioned the first musical instruments (Bereishit 4:21). Music and song are central parts of man's existence.

Though we sing many songs, our most important ones are about Hashem, His world, His miracles, and His assistance. Our world and our lives are full of Hashem's presence for which we show appreciation through song. David Hamelech, author of the "sweetest Jewish songs," (Shmuel II 23:1) exclaimed: "I will praise Hashem with my life, I will sing to Him as long as I exist" (Tehillim 146:1-2).

Without song, our service of G-d is incomplete. When King Chizkiyahu failed to sing *shirah* to Hashem for saving him and the people of Jerusalem from Sancheriv's army, he squandered his opportunity to become the Messiah (Sanhedrin 94b). He believed his Torah learning was enough; clearly, it was not (*Midrash Shir HaShirim*).

How we are impacted

Music deeply impacts the soul; it soothes, heals, and inspires. King Shaul brought the young David before him to

play music in order to dispel the terrifying "bad spirit" that had engulfed him (Shmuel I 16:14-23). Music reduces stress and eases depression.

Music also inspires. Elisha used music to prepare him for prophecy (Maimonides, *Shemoneh Perakim* 5:2). Similarly, many Chassidic masters describe how music facilitates spiritual growth (*Tzav V'ziruz*, Ot 36). *Niggunim* are a ladder we can use to climb spiritually. This happens when the soul, inspired by our singing, sings in response (*Bnei Machshavah Tova*, Ot 18).

How we express ourselves

Song and music evoke emotion, but so do other phenomena, such as Torah learning and powerful messages and experiences. Music and song are unique in that they are also the way we express emotion. They are how we show that we care, how we engage, and how we express our feelings. The Gemara links "*Avodat Hashem* with happiness and goodness of heart" to song (Arachin 11a). Although Torah impacts the heart, song and music are how we express happiness and celebration.

Rashi makes this point regarding the first time *shirah* is mentioned in the Torah – the song of *Az Yashir* after *Kri'at Yam Suf*. When *Am Yisrael* saw the miraculous splitting of the sea and their subsequent salvation from the Egyptians, song spontaneously rose from their hearts (Shemot 15:1).

We sing our prayers to show that we care about what we are saying, using different melodies to distinguish between the emotions of the various prayers and seasons. Just as we use distinct tunes to show our appreciation for the uniqueness of each area of Torah, so we employ distinct songs to express different emotions in our various prayers.

Song is also at the heart of our Shabbat experience. Shabbat is meant to be more than just a day of rest. It is meant to be a day of enjoyment and appreciation. In *Covenant & Conversation* ("*Torah as Song*", *Vayelech* 5775), Rabbi

Sacks tells a story that shows how important *zemirot* are to the character of Shabbat:

A previous Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Avraham Shapiro, once told me a story about two great rabbinic sages of the nineteenth century, equally distinguished scholars, one of whom lost his children to the secular spirit of the age, the other of whom was blessed by children who followed in his path. The difference between them was this, he said: "When it came to *se'udah shlishit*, the third Sabbath meal, the former spoke words of Torah while the latter sang songs."

A Shabbat without song lacks the warm atmosphere so critical to holistic Jewish life and education. We must express our appreciation for the truly meaningful things in life. We do so through song.

Our song

Each person has his or her own song. We sing about what we are most passionate about, which itself reinforces them as our passions. May we merit to sing about the things that are truly important to us.

- *In memory of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l, who deeply felt and beautifully sang the song of Torah, Jewish life, and Hashem's world.*
- *With thanks to Adina Lev for her assistance with this article.*

Scan here to join Rabbi Taragin's daily Divrei Torah WhatsApp group



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



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One on One

with Shim Cramer

Originally from London, Shim Cramer made *Aliyah* in 2018 after 15 years as the Chazzan at the Riverdale Jewish Center in New York. Shim regularly shuttles back and forth between Israel and the Diaspora, singing at events across the world.

Beginning in 2003 in the midst of the Second Intifada, you were an integral part of the London-based Shabbaton Choir's "Solidarity Through Song" missions to Israel, led by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks *zt"l*. Tell us about some of your most memorable moments from these missions.

In 2003, during a very painful time in Israel, Rabbi Sacks was searching for a way to bring joy and comfort to the Jews of Israel. Together with Rabbi Chazzan Lionel Rosenfeld, the choir's musical director Stephen Levey, and subsequently with Jonny Turgel, we formed the "Solidarity Through Song" missions to Israel, with the goal of bringing the joy of music to survivors of terror attacks and to give strength to the many people suffering from the trauma of the Intifada.

Each of the eleven missions were extraordinary in their own way, but what binds them all together was the presence of Rabbi Sacks. It was awe-inspiring to share bus rides throughout Israel with him, discussing everything under the sun, from music and pressing issues of the day to the next book or article he planned to write.

One of our first visits was to the newly-rebuilt banquet hall of the Park Hotel in Netanya, where terrorists had murdered

29 people that year by detonating a bomb in the dining hall on Seder night. We performed in the same space for the survivors and their families, including a beautiful *Vehi She'amda* tune composed by Stephen especially for that concert. The reaction of the families that night was beyond words, and we realized then the importance of our mission.

I remember walking through the wards of Hadassah Hospital, where we found a young boy who was the victim of a terror attack the week before. It was deeply painful; the boy was blinded and had lost limbs, and had not spoken since the day of the attack. Walking into the room, we found his parents sitting in broken silence. We surrounded the bed and began to sing the beautiful *Ein Kelocheinu* by Tzvi Talmon. When our young soloist started the melody, the boy opened his mouth and started to sing with us. The emotions experienced in that hospital room are indescribable; I'll never forget that moment.

There were so many incredible moments, like the time we rushed a group of 200 children in Sderot from their homes to a bomb-sheltered concert hall, in between rocket attacks. We had the great merit to be here in Israel during very difficult times, and to make a difference.

How has *Aliyah* impacted your music career?

Making *Aliyah* from Riverdale, NY, to the Buchman neighborhood of Modiin, my family and I were immediately welcomed by family and friends. This was especially helpful, as I have traveled often to the US, UK and Europe for concerts, weddings and special community Shabbatot while continuing to serve as Chazzan at the Riverdale Jewish Center.

While COVID has made my transition into the music scene in Israel more challenging, I've been able to use the time to connect with incredible musicians, producers and event organizers. There is a thirst for music of all kinds here, and my deepening connection with the land and the people has given me inspiration to compose even more. I have a lot of new music coming and am in the process of developing a show featuring my own songs as well as some classics. Since my arrival, I've released a number of songs expressing the beauty of the land. The oneness we feel here to our spiritual home is inspiring and my music has certainly been influenced by that feeling. I am very excited for the future – and being able to say that Israel is my home is something I will never take for granted. ●



RABBI YOSEF ZVI RIMON Z"l

The Poet of the Return to Zion

When Bob Dylan won the Nobel Prize for literature in 2016 for his mastery of “poetic lyrics,” it highlighted the deeply intertwined relationship between song and poetry. Is *Az Yashir* a song or a poem?

The answer, of course, is that it is both. Poetry differs from prose in the musicality of its rhythm and language; throughout the ages, poetry was read, remembered and passed on through song. Indeed, the most powerful songs are poetic verses that are brought to life through music.

For the passionate Religious Zionist, the poetry of Yosef Zvi Rimon (1889–1958) is music to the ears.

Considered by Rav Kook to be “the poet of the return to Zion,” Rimon studied in Lida at the yeshiva of Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, founder of Mizrachi, before moving to Palestine in 1909.

Rimon’s poetry expresses his love and longing for the Land of Israel, capturing its holiness and beauty through deeply religious language at a time when the emerging culture in the New *Yishuv* was avowedly

secular. He was awarded the President’s Prize from President Yitzchak Ben Zvi in 1958, and his writings continue to inspire and uplift us to this day.

Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon, head of Mizrachi’s Educational Advisory Board and Rabbinic Council, believes his grandfather set a powerful example that we would be wise to follow today, in our own generation: “One of the unique things about my grandfather was that he was incredibly connected to G-d, while remaining incredibly open minded in a way that allowed him to connect with a diverse range of people.

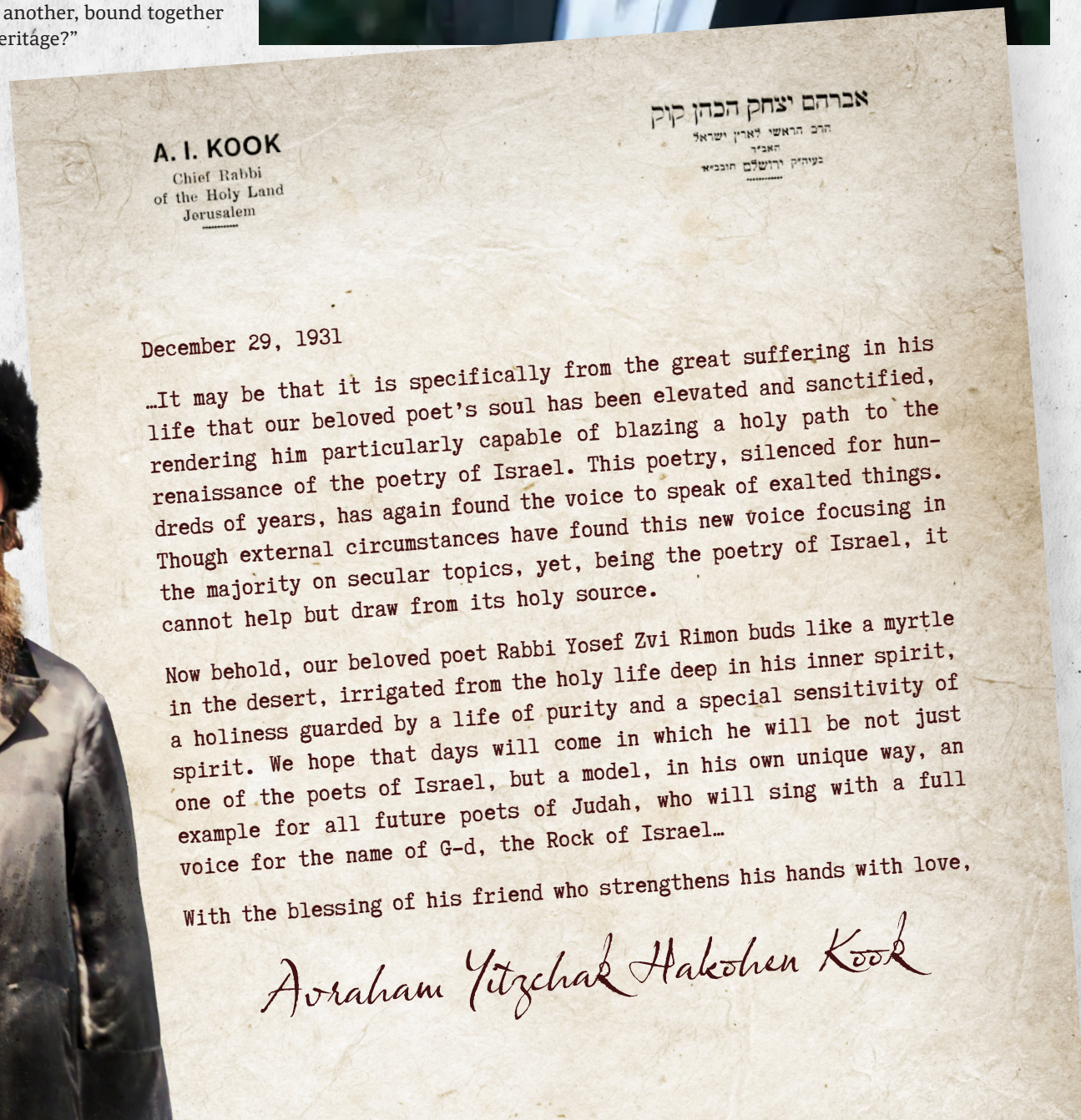
“My father remembers that he grew up spending lots of time with the leading secular poet Yosef Chaim Brenner, who loved my grandfather and publicized some of his writings.

“Other singers, some of the greatest of that time period, who from a religious and philosophical perspective were very different from my grandfather, were nonetheless close with him, and would love to read his writings.

“It is incredible to see where my grandfather’s writing was published: in publications of Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Kook and *HaTzofeh* (the Mizrahi newspaper), but also in secular publications like *HaMishmar* and *Hapoel HaTzair*. I miss that in our world today, and I sometimes ask myself: is it possible in our time for people with different views to be connected to one another, bound together by their Jewish heritage?”



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon
(PHOTO: YEHOShUA HALEVI)



A. I. KOOK
Chief Rabbi
of the Holy Land
Jerusalem

אברהם יצחק הכהן קוק
הרב הראשי לארץ ישראל
האגודה
בעיר ירושלים תשכ"א

December 29, 1931

...It may be that it is specifically from the great suffering in his life that our beloved poet’s soul has been elevated and sanctified, rendering him particularly capable of blazing a holy path to the renaissance of the poetry of Israel. This poetry, silenced for hundreds of years, has again found the voice to speak of exalted things. Though external circumstances have found this new voice focusing in the majority on secular topics, yet, being the poetry of Israel, it cannot help but draw from its holy source.

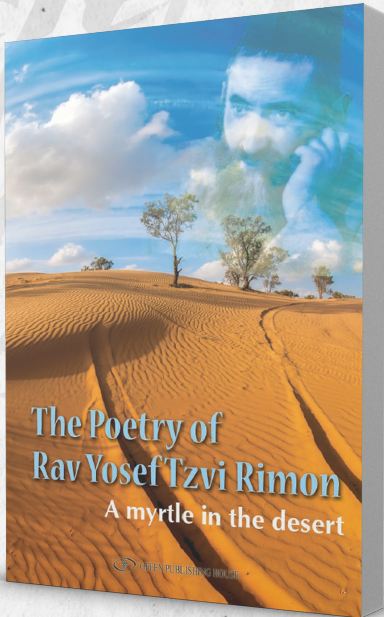
Now behold, our beloved poet Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon buds like a myrtle in the desert, irrigated from the holy life deep in his inner spirit, a holiness guarded by a life of purity and a special sensitivity of spirit. We hope that days will come in which he will be not just one of the poets of Israel, but a model, in his own unique way, an example for all future poets of Judah, who will sing with a full voice for the name of G-d, the Rock of Israel...

With the blessing of his friend who strengthens his hands with love,

Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook

I Came to the Sharon

בְּאֶתִי אֶל הַשָּׂרֹן



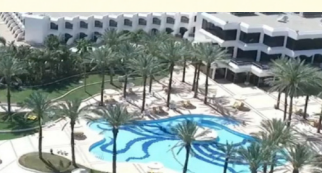
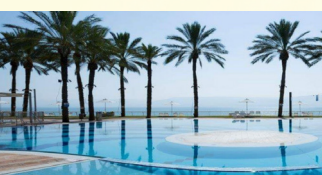
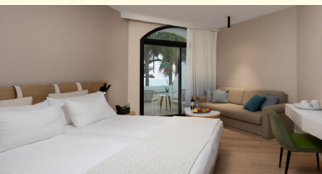
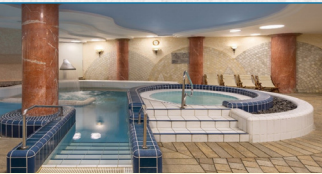
אהבתי סלעי ארצי
על הרריה.
כל אבן אומרה שיר.
אני עולה מאחת אל אחרת,
וקרבי תתעורר רנה:
אלה חיו כמותי,
חלמו הרבה, התגעגעו, -
חלומם רחוק מבוא -
ויהיו לאבנים...

I loved the rocks of my land
On its mountains.
Each stone sings a song.
I go up from one to another,
And inside I stir with glad song:
They lived like me,
They dreamed much, they yearned -
Their dream was long in coming -
And they became stones...

על קברות הקדושים
אתפלל,
אאהבם כשדות הפרחים
בם הם טמונים.
ואני מתפלל לאמונה,
לאהבה.
לבי לשתייהן
כאחת...

On the graves of the holy ones
I will pray.
I will love them like the fields of flowers
In which they are hidden...
And I pray for faith,
For love.
My heart relates to them
As one...

From *The Poetry of Rav Yosef Tzvi Rimon: A Myrtle in the Desert*
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Celebrating Purim in Walled and Unwalled Cities

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

There is a unique *halachah* pertaining to Purim: it has two dates. In most places, Purim is celebrated on the fourteenth of Adar, while in cities that were surrounded by a wall at the time of Yehoshua bin Nun, and in Achashverosh's capital city of Shushan, it is celebrated on the fifteenth.

In order to understand the reason for this distinction, we must first recall the order of events.

Haman's decree stated that on the thirteenth of Adar all the enemies of Israel could destroy, massacre, and exterminate all the Jews throughout the world. This decree was not abolished even after Mordechai and Esther's amazing rise to power, because by law any decree written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet could not be revoked.

Therefore, the only thing they could do was to issue an additional edict, also sealed with the king's signet, allowing the Jews to defend themselves and kill their enemies.

Until the thirteenth of Adar, it was unclear how matters would develop. Granted, the Jews had



In most places, Purim is celebrated on the fourteenth of Adar, whereas in Shushan, where the miracle was greater because all the events of the Megillah occurred there, and because the Jews took revenge against their enemies there for two days, Purim is celebrated on the fifteenth.

permission to defend themselves without interference from the Persian army, but who knew if they would succeed in defeating their enemies? Then, on the thirteenth of Adar, fear of the Jews fell upon the people of the land, and the Jews were able to defeat their enemies.

On the next day, the fourteenth of Adar, the Jews rested from battle, making it a day of feasting and joy.

In the capital city of Shushan, however, there were so many enemies of Israel that

the Jews were unable to kill them all in one day. Therefore, Queen Esther came before King Achashverosh and asked him to grant the Jews permission to take revenge against their enemies for one more day. Once he agreed to Esther's request, the Jews of Shushan continued eradicating their enemies on the fourteenth of Adar and rested on the fifteenth, making it a day of feasting and joy.

Since the first Purim was celebrated on two separate days, the Sages perpetuated this feature with their enactment. Therefore, in most places, Purim is celebrated on the fourteenth of Adar, whereas in Shushan, where the miracle was greater because all the events of the *Megillah* occurred there, and because the Jews took revenge against their enemies there for two days, Purim is celebrated on the fifteenth.

The Sages also enacted that in all prominent cities like Shushan, Purim should be celebrated on the fifteenth, and the indicator of a city's prominence is having a wall, like Shushan did.

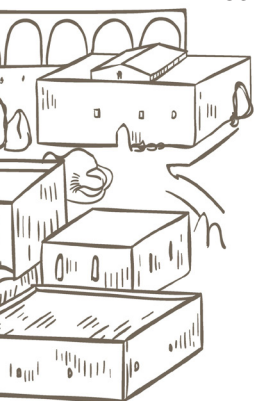
At that time, however, Eretz Yisrael was in ruins, and if they had based their observance of the enactment on the state of cities at that time period, there





would not be one city in all of Eretz Yisrael whose residents would celebrate Purim on the fifteenth of Adar, because none of them were walled at the time.

Therefore, in honor of Eretz Yisrael, the Sages decided that in all cities that were surrounded by a wall at the time of Yehoshua bin Nun, Purim would be celebrated on the fifteenth of Adar, even if they were currently in ruins, while in all other cities, Purim would be celebrated on the fourteenth.



The only exception is Shushan, as even though the city was established after Yehoshua's time, Purim is celebrated there on the

fifteenth, since the miracle occurred there.

Today, Jerusalem is the only city in which Purim is celebrated on the fifteenth of Adar, because it is the only place about which we have a clear tradition that it was surrounded by a wall at the time of Yehoshua bin Nun.

Regarding some cities it is uncertain whether or not they were walled at that time. There is even uncertainty about Shushan's exact location.¹

¹ See *Beit Yosef* 688:1; the main idea is based on Ran, and many *poskim* concur, including the Mishnah Berurah. The author of *Beit Yosef* himself explains that the main purpose of the distinction between the fourteenth of Adar and the fifteenth of Adar is to honor Eretz Yisrael and mention it on Purim. See Maharal's *Or Chadash* 9:11–16 for a discussion on the prominence of walled cities.

Rav Kook explains in *Mitzvat Re'iyah* 688:1 that the Sages instituted two days of Purim in order to differentiate between Torah commandments, whose times are fixed for everyone, and rabbinic laws, which can have two times, depending on one's location. Perhaps this is also why they established different levels of embellishment (*mehadrin*) with regard to lighting the Chanukah candles. And since we find that the Torah distinguishes between walled and unwalled cities (*Vayikra* 25:29; *Keilim* 1:7), the Sages made this same distinction on Purim. Furthermore, since all Torah laws relating to walled cities apply only in Eretz Yisrael, they established Purim according to when these laws began to take effect, namely, when the Israelites entered the land at the time of Yehoshua bin Nun. See *Mitzvat Re'iyah* loc. cit. where Rav Kook elaborates on the matter.

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed speaking at Yeshivat Har Bracha at the recent book launch of a collection of writings by Rabbi Yitzchak Reines, the founder of Mizrahi.

(PHOTO: YEHOASHUA MONTAL)

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed is one of the leading Religious Zionist rabbis in Israel. He is the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Har Bracha and author of *Peninei Halachah*, one of the most influential halachic works of our generation.



Temporary Exile

Rabbi Reuven Brand

Finally. For the first time I can write for *HaMizrachi* without guilt, because it's Purim.

Personally, this magazine helps me remain focused on and connected to Israel, ensuring Eretz Yisrael is a living part of my spiritual identity. With each edition, I am reminded of the bigger picture, of our land and our people. But at the same time, the magazine evokes mixed feelings, for I do not yet live in Israel. Each issue is tinged with a sense of "if only" – if only I were in Israel.

Experiencing *chagim* outside of Israel simply isn't the same. The beautiful Sukkah decorations and spotless etrog in Chicago are wonderful, but can Sukkot in Chicago compare with Sukkot in Israel, where the entire country explodes with the multicolored joy of the *chag*? The same is true of Pesach and Shavuot, when the entire country celebrates together. Even Chanukah, a Rabbinic holiday, comes to life differently in Eretz Yisrael, where whole neighborhoods are lit up by the lights of thousands of menorahs – a stark contrast to the lights of endless ads boasting deals on electronics and elaborate red and green lawn ornament arrangements.

The same is true for each holiday – with one exception: Purim. Purim is a great day for all of us living in the Diaspora. Purim is our holiday. It celebrates the story of Jews in a foreign land, grappling with life under a foreign government, struggling with observance, connection, identity and antisemitism. The Purim miracle, in the words of the Rabbis, is a *נס שְׁבוּחַי לְאֶרֶץ* – a miracle that took place *outside* of Israel. Finally, I can write about a

holiday in *HaMizrachi* without fear of missing out, for we celebrate Purim with as much spiritual joy in Chicago as Jews do in Israel. So what makes Purim different?

Each of the *chagim* highlights a particular aspect of our relationship with Hashem. The primary message of Purim is *אין עוד מלבדו*, "there is nothing else in life other than Hashem." Though G-d's name is absent from the Megillah and the story is one of human initiative and political intrigue, we celebrate it as a holiday specifically because we attribute the story to Hashem's guiding Hand.

Our appreciation of Hashem's presence is particularly important outside of Israel, where our apprehension of Hashem is less clear. In the hiddenness of the Diaspora the axiom of *אין עוד מלבדו* is most significant. No matter where or in what circumstance we find ourselves, we can remember these words and take strength. Perhaps this is why Maimonides teaches that while other holidays will disappear in the time to come, Purim is everlasting. *אין עוד מלבדו* is an eternal truth – it not only transcends space but time as well. And so Purim is the holiday that belongs to every Jew, in every place. Wherever we may be, geographically or emotionally, we can connect to the inner spark of Hashem, hidden within the world around us.

But we must conclude with a caveat. While the message and experience of Purim can be appreciated in any locale, the story of Purim reminds us that our ultimate goal is a world in which Hashem's presence is fully revealed. This is our vision of the Land and State of Israel. The Talmud teaches that the

tragic moment that precipitated the Purim scare was the participation of Jewish people in Achashverosh's party. This gentile celebration was no mere hedonistic bash; it had a deeper meaning. Yirmiyahu the prophet had foretold the Jewish people's return to Israel after seventy years, a prophecy Achashverosh believed would no longer come true. Hard as it is to believe, Jews feasted with gusto at a party celebrating the end of our people's hope to return to the Land of Israel to rebuild the Beit HaMikdash. Clearly, our people's collective forgetting – our comfort and complacency in exile – landed us in peril. We must remember this lesson in every exile, in every generation.

Although we celebrate Purim with exuberance in *chutz la'aretz*, we remember that our exile is temporary and toast for our return to the Land of Israel, just as our people did in the years following the Purim story – with the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash!

Rabbi Reuven Brand is the Rosh Kollel of the YU Torah MiTzion Kollel, a community Torah institution with a vibrant Beit Midrash, array of creative learning opportunities, unique women's initiative and diverse outreach programming. He lives in Skokie, Illinois with his wife, Nechama, and their five children.

The Spirit of Purim

Rabbi Hershel Schachter



The Rabbis record the tradition that although the Jewish people accepted the Torah at Mount Sinai out of their own free will, there was, nevertheless, an aspect of coercion involved. After the miracle of Purim, the people accepted the Torah again, this time without any element of coercion (Shabbat 88a). When we observe Purim, we celebrate this second accepting of the Torah. According to the Geonim, this is the reason that Purim alone was singled out from all the other holidays instituted by the Rabbis (and recorded in the *Megillat Taanit*) to have a *mitzvah of seudah* (eating a festive meal). Just as we must celebrate Shavuot with an elaborate meal as part of the commemoration of our accepting the Torah (Pesachim 68b), so too must Purim be celebrated with an elaborate meal for this same reason.

According to the Midrash, the element of coercion at the time of *ma'amad Har Sinai* that necessitated the later second acceptance was regarding the *Torah Shebe'al Peh*. *Am Yisrael* was fully prepared to accept G-d's written Torah, since it was clearly of Divine origin. But the bulk of the Oral Law consists of laws classified as *divrei sofrim*, laws developed by the rabbis over the generations, which have the status of biblical laws. The discretion and judgment of the rabbis is considered Divinely inspired, and therefore has been endowed with biblical status. The Talmud frequently cites the verse "The secrets of G-d are with those who fear Him" (Tehillim 25:14) to illustrate this point.

This is in no way a contradiction to the principal developed by the rabbis of *lo bashamayim hi* (Bava Metzia 59b),

that after the giving of the Torah G-d will no longer reveal any laws to man in a supernatural fashion, i.e. through prophecy, and any *bat kol* (voice from Heaven) proclaiming a law must be disregarded. G-d expects us to work out the law. At the same time, He has promised to assist the rabbis from behind the scenes to ensure they do not err. The binding force of any *psak* of any rabbi is based on the assumption that the individual *posek* was granted this supernatural Divine assistance.

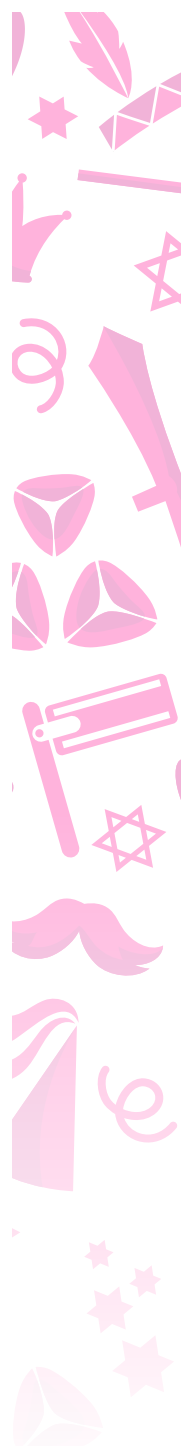
Am Yisrael at the time of the giving of the Torah apparently found it hard to accept this concept (see *Me'erot Neryah* 16a). At the time of the Purim miracle, a group of rabbis known as the *Anshei Knesset Hagedolah*, the Men of the Great Assembly, was establishing many of our ritual forms of observance – including *berachot*, *tefillot* and other areas of law – as they are still being observed today, two thousand years later. Just as the Jews realized that G-d's Hand was involved in the Purim story from behind the scenes, they also came to understand the principle of "the secrets of G-d are with those who fear Him", that G-d's Hand guides the rabbis' development of Jewish law and the Oral Torah.

Once the Jewish people accepted the Oral Torah again without any coercion, this part of the Torah began to flourish and develop in a much greater fashion than ever before. Indeed, the greatest part of the development of the Oral Torah took place, historically, after the days of Purim (see *Be'ikvei Hatzon* p.138, 114).

The *Shelah*, in his essay on Purim, cites the verse *וְהַדָּת נִתְּנָה בְּשׁוֹשַׁן בְּיַד הַיְיָ*, "and the law was given in Shushan" (Esther

8:14), as an allusion to the Jewish people's reacceptance of the Torah. The traditional festive Purim meal is eaten to celebrate this reacceptance and should be eaten with such an attitude. Becoming drunk and rowdy does not align with the spirit of Purim observance. Purim is not the Jewish Halloween. The custom of wearing masks and dressing up to conceal one's true identity is meant to show that just as in the story of Purim, one had to look below the surface to see the hidden Mover behind the events, so too in Torah study, one must always look below the surface, and read in-between the lines to absorb the insights of the Oral Torah. The custom of masquerading is meant to teach us, *al tistakel bekankan elah bemah sheyesh bo*, "Do not look at the outer appearance of the container, but rather at that which is hiding beneath the surface within it." This is also why G-d's name never appears in the *Megillah*. The hidden Oral Torah interpretation always enlightens the Written Torah and puts things into clearer perspective.

● A version of this essay was originally published at TorahWeb.org.



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A photograph of Menachem Begin, an elderly man with glasses, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie. He is speaking and gesturing with his right hand, pointing upwards. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Indisputably one of the greatest
and most consequential leaders
of modern Israel, the life of

Menachem Begin

was intertwined with some of the
most momentous events of
modern Jewish history.

Head of Jabotinsky's Betar youth movement in Poland, Begin was arrested by the Soviet Union's NKVD in 1940. Freed in 1941, he made his way to British-occupied Palestine, where he quickly became the leader of the Irgun Tzeva'i Le'umi, leading the underground organization into armed revolt against Great Britain. After Israel's founding in 1948, Begin became the head of the Herut party, leading the opposition to the left-wing Labor party for thirty years. In 1977, Begin's Likud party finally came to power, whereupon he served as Prime Minister for six and a half years, until the fall of 1983.

During his time in office, Begin signed a peace treaty with Egypt

and ordered the Israeli Air Force to destroy the nuclear reactor in Osirak near Baghdad, Iraq, shortly before it was to become operative.

He also directed the 1982 "Operation Peace for Galilee," aimed at dislodging the PLO from southern Lebanon, an operation that became a protracted conflict with many casualties.

The passing of his wife Aliza and the strains of office led Begin to resign from office in September of 1983.

March 7, 2022 (4th of Adar II 5782) marks Menachem Begin's 30th yahrzeit. We share these words of tribute from Rabbi Dr. Meir Soloveichik to honor his memory.



Raised in Brisk, Born in Jerusalem

Rabbi Dr. Meir Soloveichik

Yom Kippur, 68 CE. All of Israel, it seems, has assembled on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and all eyes are on one man, the high priest, as he pleads Heaven's forgiveness for his people. The cries of the crowd reach a crescendo as, in a moment commemorated to this day in the Yom Kippur liturgy, "the priests and the people standing in the upper court, hearing the Divine Name pronounced aloud by the high priest, bend and bow and prostrate themselves and declare: 'Blessed be the Name of G-d now and forever!'"

Yom Kippur, 1943. Jerusalem's ancient glory is gone. The narrow space in front of the Western Wall is filled with Jews immersed in worship, praying for themselves and for their European brethren, whose doom appears certain. Never has the long-ago destruction of the Temple seemed more immediate. As the sun is about to set, marking the close of the holy day, there is a sudden interruption:

And then, from both sides of the courtyard, in streamed British police armed with rifles and batons, threatening [the worshippers] with their very presence. They had come, "in the king's name," to prevent an "illegal act": the blowing of the shofar at the close of the Sabbath of Sabbaths. As the end of the prayer approached,

they squeezed further into the mass of worshippers, some even elbowing their way up to the wall. And when in spite of them the shofar was heard, their fury was unrestrained. They set upon the worshippers while prayer was still in progress. They hit out at heads; batons whistled through the air. Here and there was heard the cry of somebody injured. A song, too, burst forth: "Hatikvah." Then the police struck out in all directions and chaos reigned.

The eyewitness who wrote that account, Menachem Begin, is the man who, seeing what he had seen in the plaza at the Western Wall, committed himself to prevent any such thing from happening again. For, he wrote, "These stones are not silent":

They whisper. They speak softly of the Sanctuary that once stood here, of kings who knelt here once in prayer, of prophets and seers who here declaimed their message, of heroes who fell here, dying; and of how the great flame... was here kindled. This was the sanctuary, and this the country, which with its seers and kings and fighters was ours before the British were a nation. The testimony of these stones, sending out their light across the generations.

Who, it may be asked, taught Begin to hear the voice of the stones, to gaze at ruin and rubble and perceive the glory that once was? What gave this follower of the secular Zionist Ze'ev Jabotinsky such a profoundly religious connection to the Jewish past, and so ardent a determination to ensure the Jewish future?

The answer lies in the city of his birth: Brest-Litovsk, known to Jews everywhere as Brisk de-Lita, Brisk of Lithuania. The same city was home to my own forefathers, the Soloveichiks, and to the unique orientation to rabbinic Judaism that they pioneered and that would henceforth be known as the "Brisker way."

As biographers have noted, Menachem Begin's father, Ze'ev Wolf, was a passionate Zionist in a city whose rabbinic leadership leaned decidedly in the opposite direction. When Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern political Zionism, died in 1904, Rabbi Hayyim Soloveitchik ordered that the door of Brisk's Great Synagogue be locked lest anyone attempt to eulogize him there. One might therefore have expected the young Begin to reject the religiosity of those who had themselves rejected the Zionism of his own father.

But that was far from being the case. In 1972, thirty years after the destruction of their city by the Nazis, descendants of Brisk gathered in Israel to mourn their lost home. Addressing them, Begin spoke of the pride they shared in Brisk de-Lita, in its history of rabbinic scholarship and its "powerful titans of Torah, veritable cedars of Lebanon." Who among us, Begin asked his fellow townsmen, "didn't see himself as a kind of partner of Rabbi Yoshe Ber [Soloveitchik], or Rabbi Hayyim, as if we were at one with them all the days of our lives?"



Begin (top center) with his parents, his sister Rachel, and his brother Herzl in their home town in Poland, 1932. (PHOTO: GOVERNMENT PRESS OFFICE)

What did it mean to be a partner to the rabbis of Brisk? To follow the "Brisker way" involved – and still involves – melding one's mind with the great rabbis of the past by delving deeply into their understanding of *halachah*, Jewish law. The method, which proceeds through the close study of texts, is not only intellectual, it is emotional; at its core is the assumption that the distance of centuries can be traversed in an instant, and that the genius of the past can remain ever present.



The method, which proceeds through the close study of texts, is not only intellectual, it is emotional; at its core is the assumption that the distance of centuries can be traversed in an instant, and that the genius of the past can remain ever present.

In a striking image, the late "Rav," Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903–1993), would recall the experience of being taught as a child by his father in the method of his father, Rabbi Hayyim. Their lessons would focus

largely on the fierce debates in the Middle Ages over the writings of Maimonides (the Rambam, 1138–1204). "The Rambam," writes the Rav, "was a constant guest in our house."

In my young and impressionable mind there developed a dual impression: first, that the Rambam was being attacked by enemies who wanted to hurt him, and second, that the Rambam's only defender was my father. I felt strongly that without my father, who knows what would happen to the Rambam... When the lesson was over, and the Rambam was comforted and smiled, I too was delighted. I would... run to my mother and cry out the good news: "Mother, mother, the Rambam won!... Father helped him!"

But once in a great while my father did not succeed, and despite all his efforts the enemies of the Rambam defeated him... My father would raise his head and sadly state, "There is no answer. No one is capable of resolving these questions"... With a broken heart I would walk slowly to my mother and cry out to her: "Mother, Father cannot answer the Rambam. What will we do?" And my mother would tell me: "Don't worry. Father will find an answer to the Rambam. If he does not succeed, then when you grow up, perhaps you will find an answer."

Menachem Begin, son of Brisk, who studied in its *cheder* and who prayed in

its synagogue, was a true and faithful partner to this vision: never scrupulously observant in his religious practice, but always united with the Jews of the past and sustained by them in the face of uncertainty, turmoil, and terror. “True,” he commented in his 1972 address, “Brisk is where we came from. But we were born in Jerusalem.” To put it slightly differently: it was because he was raised in Brisk that he could honestly say he was born in Jerusalem.

If the British soldiers who set upon the praying Jews at the Wall, together with their leaders in London, underestimated the unbending firmness of Menachem Begin’s passion and commitment, it was because, to them, so powerful a connection was unimaginable.

This same connection to the immortal and ever-present past is what made Begin so different from many of his contemporaries at the founding of the state. Thus, David Ben-Gurion, for all of his love of the Hebrew Bible, harbored no particular warmth for the Jewish world that had been lost, the world that had unfolded in the two millennia between the Bible and the Israel Defense Forces – between, as it were, the Tanach and the Palmach.

Begin could not have been more different. He rejected Jewish impotence no less forcefully than did Ben-Gurion. But, like the Sephardim and the Religious Zionists who would one day form the backbone of his political party, he could not imagine and would never accept a narrative that slighted or elided all that Jewish Europe and the Sephardi Diaspora had accomplished. He was no less committed to the Jewish future than the most secular Zionist. But, for him, it was a future animated by the past.

Indeed, and once again in that same 1972 address, Begin would wryly recall the words of Ahad Ha’am in the late 19th century to the effect that the Western, emancipated Jew, having been granted the freedom he had so long sought to discard his Jewish

identity, had become, in that very act, a slave to an identity imposed from without (an identity, we might add in the light of history, susceptible of being withdrawn at any moment). “With us in Brisk,” Begin said, “it was the opposite; in circumstances of persecution and subjugation, we remained, deep inside, free. If Jews persevered and even flourished in exile, all the while remaining linked to the Land of Israel, it was because, Zionist and non-Zionist alike, they gathered in places like the Great Synagogue of Brisk on Yom Kippur, a day for re-enacting in their minds and souls the spectacle of the people and the priests standing in the upper court as if it were the day before yesterday.”



On Yom Kippur today, the Western Wall plaza is again packed with people. And now, as the shofars sound, no one harms or hinders the praying Jews as they exultantly exclaim, “Next year in Jerusalem!” The British soldiers are long departed, thanks in no small part to the man who had heard the whisper of those stones in 1943, over seventy years ago.

In 1941, arrested by the Soviet NKVD for his Zionist activities and sentenced to eight years in the gulag, Begin was in prison in Vilna. “I wondered where I would be on the next Day of Atonement,” he writes in his great memoir *White Nights*:

Where would my old father and mother be, and my brother and sister? And as the brain had no answer, the fearful heart replied with prayer. As I recited the words sanctified from generation to generation, as I prayed silently, I felt the impenetrable barriers that separated me and those I loved fall away... The cell vanished, the

walls disappeared, and there appeared in all its splendor the great illuminated synagogue [of Brisk] and my father’s humble dwelling, lit up by love, purity, faith, and the eyes of a loving mother. Kol Nidrei night in an NKVD prison... even such a night can be a night of solace, even such a day can be a day of identification with all that is good in man’s life.

Begin was right to worry about his parents; he could not then know that in the summer of that same year, the Nazis had conquered Brisk and murdered them and his brother. By 1942, Brisk de-Lita, a source of pride to Lithuanian Jewry for centuries and a spiritual jewel of the Diaspora, was gone. But not truly. For what Begin discovered in prison, at moments when hope seemed lost, was the power of prayer sanctified by generations to bring back his murdered parents, along with the Jews who had stood on the Temple Mount so many centuries earlier.

On Yom Kippur today, the Western Wall plaza is again packed with people. And now, as the shofars sound, no one harms or hinders the praying Jews as they exultantly exclaim, “Next year in Jerusalem!” The British soldiers are long departed, thanks in no small part to the man who had heard the whisper of those stones in 1943, over seventy years ago.

So much has been achieved – so much, that it is easy to forget what once was. If you visit Brisk itself on Yom Kippur today, you will see that the Great Synagogue still stands and that it, too, is packed with people. True, there is no Kol Nidrei, no re-enactment of the Temple service, no confession of sin – for the edifice in which so many once poured out their hearts in prayer is today a movie theater. Still, behind the glass façade that has been added to lend a modern sheen to the structure, the walls of the Great Synagogue of Brisk still bear witness.

Those walls, too, like the stones of the Wall in Jerusalem, whisper of another age and of the multitudes of Jews – fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, sisters and brothers, Yoshe

Ber and Hayyim and all the rest – who stood in prayer with their feet in Brisk and their souls in Jerusalem. Among them, next to his own father, was the little boy who would one day lead the people of Israel, while never forgetting where he, too, once stood, and who again and again would remind his countrymen that honoring Zionism and its magnificent achievements entails honoring those whom he and they had loved and lost:

This lies within our spirit – thanks to our parents and their love of the land of Israel, thanks to their prayers, thanks to their certain faith in the advent of the messiah, however long in the coming, however long the wait. They did not live to see the beginning of the redemption of our people, but their children did. And so with love of Israel, of the Land of Israel and of Jerusalem, we sanctify their scattered ashes and raise up their souls in sanctity and purity and will carry their love in our hearts from generation to generation.

● *Adapted from an essay originally published in Menachem Begin's Zionist Legacy (Toby Press, 2015).*

Rabbi Dr. Meir Soloveichik is the rabbi of Congregation Shearith Israel in New York and director of the Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought at Yeshiva University.

Prime Minister Menachem Begin arriving in the United States, accompanied by Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan.
(PHOTO: USAF/ WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)





Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Kook
delivering a shiur.

(PHOTO: MERCAZHARAV.ORG.IL)

STEP BY STEP

ON THE WAY TO REDEMPTION

The only son of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah Kook was one of the most influential leaders of Religious Zionism after the establishment of the State of Israel. Born in 1891, Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah spent many years learning in yeshivot in both Europe and Israel, while often learning with his father and assisting him with his rabbinic duties. After his father's passing in 1935, Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah devoted himself to editing and publishing his father's manuscripts, playing a central role in cementing his father's legacy as one of the great thinkers of modern Jewish history.

In 1952, Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah became the Rosh Yeshiva of the Merkaz Harav Yeshiva, where he served for thirty years until his passing. Many of his students, including Rabbis Chanan Porat, Shlomo Aviner, Tzvi Tau, Moshe Levinger and Chaim Druckman, became the leading Religious Zionist rabbis of the next generation. Following the Six-Day War, Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah initiated the Gush Emunim movement, through which many of his students would establish Jewish settlements in Judea, Samaria, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights.

Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah passed away forty years ago, on Purim 5742 (March 9, 1982). The following passage is excerpted and translated from his essay “הַמְּדִינָה כְּהַתְקִימוֹת הַזֶּזוֹן הַגְּאֻלָּה,” “The State as the Fulfillment of the Vision of Redemption” (L’Netivot Yisrael, 198).

The redemption of Israel, says the Jerusalem Talmud, accelerates “קְטַנּוֹת קְטַנּוֹת,” little by little. The Talmud's description corresponds to the way the redemption is described in the Torah and by the prophets, as well as in the works of the greatest medieval and early modern rabbis. The repentance that accompanies the redemption will proceed in this way, as will the practical process itself.

In the Purim story, the process of redemption occurs gradually. First Mordechai sat at the king's gate, then Haman was forced to publicly honor Mordechai, then Mordechai emerged in royal dress from a successful audience with the king, and finally the Jews experienced the light and joy of salvation.

In the case of the Purim story, the gradual nature of the redemption was embedded in relative lowliness. For Purim was not a true and absolute redemption in which exile ends with an exodus and complete liberation but rather a redemption within the exile, a salvation from its sufferings, even as the exile itself endures and we continue to linger in the Diaspora. Purim is a story of liberation amid captivity, in which we remain, in the Talmudic turn of phrase, “servants of Achashverosh” (Megillah 14a).

The Talmud (Megillah 17b) asks: “*Why did the rabbis establish the request for redemption [לְאַלְפֵי שְׁרָאָל] as the seventh blessing of the Amidah? Rava replied: Because they [Israel] are destined to be redeemed in the seventh year [of the coming of the Messiah], and so the mention of redemption was placed in the seventh blessing. But a Master has said, ‘In the sixth year there will be*

thundering, in the seventh year there will be wars, and at the end of the seventh year the son of David will come’ [implying the redemption will arrive in the eighth year, not the seventh]? War is also the beginning of redemption.”

Rashi explains that the redemption we pray for in the seventh blessing of the *Amidah* is not the final redemption from exile, but rather redemption from the troubles that constantly plague us. Yet this too is redemption. Indeed, the redemption from daily troubles is assigned its own blessing in the *Amidah*, in addition to the complete redemption we pray for in the blessings of the ingathering of exiles, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and the rise of the House of David. The redemption of the seventh blessing will happen slowly, over time, and through wars. Although the redemption we pray for in the seventh blessing is not the



ultimate redemption, its step-by-step nature offers us insight into the progression of the complete redemption of Israel described in the later blessings of the *Amidah*.

This true redemption is one that steadily puts an end to the scattered and sundered (מִפְּזָר וּמְפֹרָד) state of our nation, of dwelling in the lands of our enemies. It is a redemption that restores our people to its original glory as a united nation in our land, a land designated and belonging to us, a land befitting our nation's eternity and historicity. It is a redemption that returns us to the land of our inheritance from the borders of foreign lands. This true redemption brings realization to the Torah and reestablishes the Divine Presence through the return and reestablishment of our people in our land, in contrast to the great debasement of the Torah and the terrible exile of the Divine Presence that were associated with our exile. This redemption reestablishes and renews our lives with the full glory of its truth, with the benevolence of Hashem and the light of His precepts, and with the renewed strength that comes with settling and inheriting the land.

Living in the land is a precondition for observance of the entire Torah, and "equivalent to all of the *mitzvot* in the Torah" (*Sifrei, Re'eh*). Indeed, the imperative "that we not leave [the land] in the hands of any other nation or to lie in waste" is the fourth affirmative *mitzvah* that Ramban, the great father of Israel, adds to those enumerated by Rambam: "The *mitzvah* that the Sages went to great lengths to emphasize, namely, living in the Land of Israel – to the point that they said that if a person leaves it and resides outside the land, you should view him as an idolator, as it is said: For they drove me out today from abiding in the inheritance of Hashem, saying, 'Go serve

On Yom HaAtzmaut of 1967, about three weeks before the outbreak of the Six-Day War, Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah delivered a sermon at the Merkaz Harav Yeshivah that would later be seen as a prophetic vision heralding the great victory that lay ahead. He recalled his feelings on November 29, 1947, the day the United Nations General Assembly decided to end the British mandate in Palestine and to establish two independent states in the Land of Israel – a Jewish state and an Arab state:

"Nineteen years ago, on that famous night when the rulers of the nations voted to establish the State of Israel, when the entire nation was eager to celebrate its joy, I could not go out and join the celebration. I sat alone

and red-eyed because I was burdened with my sorrow. In those early hours, I could not accept what was happening, the same terrible news, that indeed the word of G-d was fulfilled through the words of our prophets, "And my land was divided!" Where is our Chevron – did we forget it?! And where is our Shechem – did we forget it?! And where is our Jericho – are we forgetting it?! And where is our Jordan? Where is each single piece? Every part of the four cubits of the land of G-d?! Did we want to give up a millimeter of them? G-d forbid! G-d forbid!"

Less than a month later, all of these holy places were once again in Jewish hands.

other gods,' besides other great lengths to which they went in their remarks about it – all stems from an affirmative *mitzvah* with which we were charged to inherit the land and to dwell in it. It thus is an affirmative *mitzvah* for all generations, mandatory upon every individual among us, even in time of exile, as is known from many places in the Talmud, and they said: 'settlement of the Land of Israel is equivalent to all the *mitzvot*.'"

Therefore the true redemption is revealed through the settling of the land, the establishment of our people in it and the ingathering of the exiles. "Put forth your branches," says Yechezkel (36:8) to the mountains of Israel, "Bear your fruits for My people Israel, for soon will they arrive," for the settlement of the land shall be renewed, the exiled captives shall be gathered within it, and Israel shall be restored in its land. The true redemption transpires at the

height of the land's material growth, when we inherit the land, when it is in our hands and not left waste in the hands of any other nation, when our government rules over it, and when our communal essence is joined with its holiness... In this way, through our control, the act of redemption is performed and the prophecy of the land fulfilled within it. Our nation's *mesirut nefesh* (self-sacrifice) to sanctify G-d's name, and the miracles and wondrous mighty acts that emanate from it, further adds to magnificent power and glory of the redemption.

"For our forerunners, who laid down their lives to sanctify G-d's name, miracles happened" (Berachot 20a).

"For G-d shall save Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah, and they shall dwell therein and possess it. The seed of His servants shall inherit it, and those who love His name shall inhabit it" (Tehillim 69:36-37). ●



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Strengthening Jewish Communities in the Jewish State

Rabbi Shmuel Slotki

In May 2021, Israelis and Jews around the world were shocked as violent mobs attacked Jews in Akko, Lod, Ramla and other cities with “mixed” Jewish and Arab populations in Israel. This drew attention to the challenges that these communities face on a regular basis; World Mizrahi and RZA–Mizrachi USA leaders came to visit these communities in person to better understand their challenges and needs. Over the years, many Jews have moved away from mixed cities to more affluent parts of the country, a population flight that has severely damaged the religious infrastructure of these communities. In response, Mizrahi formed the Israel Community Fund to raise money for embattled communities, and we at the World Organization of Orthodox Synagogues and Communities joined the project to partner in helping to direct resources to the appropriate projects.

On a visit to Akko in July 2021, Mizrahi Rabbis Doron Perez and Ari Rockoff met with Rabbi Yosef Yashar, Chief Rabbi of Akko, and members of the local *Garin Torani*, to learn about the community’s challenges. What they heard was deeply troubling. With so many Jews moving out of the area, those left behind feel like an embattled minority. Akko also suffers from an acute lack of religious leadership; despite being a traditional Jewish community with many shuls, there are



very few rabbis living in the area. The Jewish residents of Akko feel that they have been neglected by Israeli society, and are rapidly losing their place in the city.

Something had to be done, and so Mizrahi and the World Organization of Orthodox Synagogues and Communities resolved to act. The fundamental principle guiding our work in Akko is that to strengthen a Jewish community, you must strengthen its rabbinic leadership. Rabbis who are empowered through training and support can become crucial anchors for the community, giving residents a sense of belonging and community that will encourage them to remain.

Rabbis can also attract new families to the area and infuse the community with strength and vitality.

With this in mind, we partnered with an organization called Aseh Lecha Rav, led by Mrs. Adi Samson, which trains rabbis in Israel. Together, we identified and trained twelve rabbinic couples who have since moved to Akko to serve in communal roles there. At the same time, we provided the rabbinic couples with a rigorous training program focused on public speaking, counseling and mediation, to give them the tools they need to be successful leaders in a challenging community.

In the few months since the program was launched in October 2021 (pictured), the rabbinic couples have already succeeded in bringing a new spirit and energy to Akko’s Jewish community. We are excited to continue partnering with communities around the world to support our work in Akko (interested communities should reach out to RZA–Mizrachi USA). As the verse says “Let us strengthen ourselves for the sake of our people, and for the cities of Hashem!” (Shmuel II 10:12)

Rabbi Shmuel Slotki is the Director of the World Organization of Orthodox Synagogues and Communities.



ALIYAH DIARIES

My Aliyah Adventures

Rabbi Dr. Avi Rockoff

Getting here was half the anxiety. Layered onto all the regular complexities of travel were, of course, COVID-related regulations. Some of these are about to be waived. This seems a bit unfair, like learning that cheeseburgers, long banned, will be alright on April 1st.

One requirement was an *ishur* (approval) to enter the country based on an invitation from a first-degree relative. This involves proving you are their relative. (“Of course she’s my mom. Can’t you see me overreact?!”)

This *ishur* could be obtained either by applying to the Interior Ministry in Israel or to the consulate in Boston. We chose the former because several people, Americans and Israelis, warned us strenuously against having anything to do with the Boston consulate staff, having found them unconcerned and unresponsive.

We got nowhere with the Israeli application. Running out of time (our plane was to leave in a week), we contacted the consulate. Dalia answered at once, corrected my mistake (I had uploaded the wrong travel insurance form), and sent us the *ishur* in two days.

Our experience proves what all anecdotal experience proves: that smart is good but lucky is better.

Anyhow, the need for a relative to invite visitors to Israel is going away. For now.

For my application to the consulate, I copied and pasted my passport number. Unfortunately, I had ordered an updated passport, as the old one was going to expire in 12 months.

Over the years I’ve had many cards with numbers on them: social security cards, library cards, driver’s licenses, a TSA precheck card. At times these have worn out or gotten lost and been replaced. The new cards always had the same numbers as the old ones.

Harei ani k’veen shiv’im plus (i.e., I’m no spring chicken), yet despite having a collection of canceled passports, I never noticed that every new passport has a new number on it.

In a panic, I contacted Dalia. “We cannot re-do the *ishur*,” she said, “because it is less than two weeks from the other one.” [Note: never ask a bureaucrat the reason for any rule.] “Just show your old passport with the new one. It won’t be a problem.”

There are phrases that put you on guard. One is: “This story is really interesting!” Another: “It won’t be a problem.”

Shuli reassured me, pointing out that I had uploaded my new passport – with the new number – as part of the same application packet as the first page with the old number on it.

We made it through Logan Airport, where an airline employee had to review all our documents before we could check in. We made it through the automated part of passport control at Ben Gurion. Just one more hurdle – the short line at the second stage of passport check.

The clerk was brisk. “Passports,” she said. Then, “Application for entry.”

“This is not the correct passport number,” she said, looking crossly at my application packet.

“I made a mistake,” I said. “Please look at the actual passport on page 3 of the packet. It has the correct number.”

“Why did you put the wrong one?”

“I am sorry.” (“Because I am dumb?”) “I checked with the consulate. They could not issue a new permit because it wasn’t two weeks yet. They said you could look at my new passport and make the change. (*Detain me. Deport me. Only spare my wife – the grandchildren need her!* By the way, Dalia at the consulate missed the conflict between the passport number on the application and the one on the uploaded passport. Please don’t fire her! She’s nice).”

“But you put the wrong number,” said the clerk. She made a call in rapid-fire Hebrew (is there any other kind?). “He put the wrong number,” she told whoever it was. “It’s under two weeks. Should I let him in?”

I could tell by her crestfallen look that they told her she should.

“Here,” she said, sliding back both our passports. “Next time be more careful.”

We did not have a chance to bow and kiss the tarmac. But I did feel the urge to kiss the baggage claim luggage cart. Especially when – on my fourth try – I managed to pay 10 shekels (refundable) and dislodge the cart from the dispenser.

Not exactly crossing the Jordan. But still nice!

Rabbi Dr. Avi Rockoff and his wife Shuli have lived in Newton, Massachusetts for many years and are currently engaged in participatory research on the complexities of making Aliyah.



FOOD FROM ISRAEL

Hidden Foods

Susie Fishbein

The Megillah story opens with an opulent feast of the Persian monarch and it ends with a celebration of our miraculous victory. The story is one of covert miracles, in which G-d's role is hinted to but never stated explicitly. For this reason, we dress up in disguises on Purim, remembering that G-d disguised Himself in the Purim miracle. In this spirit, we celebrate with a feast in which we feature "hidden foods" – dishes that look like one thing on the outside, but like the story of Esther, reveal secrets hidden within. Whether stuffed, rolled or folded inside, such foods are a culinary wink to hidden miracles.

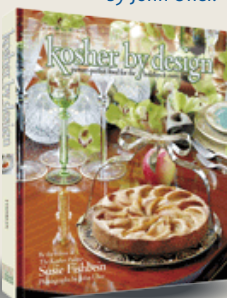
My family's favorite harkens back to the original *Kosher by Design*. Wonton

Wrapped Chicken is a real crowd pleaser and has graced my Purim *seudah* for two decades. When my kids were younger, I told them that the wontons, folded like little envelopes, symbolized the "lots" that were drawn to determine the date of what was supposed to be the annihilation of our people. The folding was always fun for the whole family and a great reminder that things are deeper than what we see on the surface.



Wonton Wrapped Chicken with Apricot Dipping Sauce

Reproduced from *Kosher By Design* by Susie Fishbein, with permission from the copyright holders ArtScroll/Mesorah Publications, Ltd. Photograph by John Uher.



Yields 8 servings

Marinated Chicken

- 1 tablespoon dark brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch
- 4 teaspoons dry sherry, sake, or cooking sherry
- 6 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 pound (450g) boneless, skinless chicken breasts (about 3 cutlets),

cut into approximately 32 (1-inch) squares

Wrappers

- 1 (12oz, 340g) package wonton wrappers
- Canola oil for frying

Apricot Dipping Sauce

- 12 oz (340g) apricot preserves
- 4 teaspoons yellow mustard
- 4 tablespoons teriyaki sauce

Marinate the chicken: In a small bowl, combine the brown sugar, salt, garlic, cornstarch, sherry, oil, and soy sauce. Mix the chicken squares with the marinade; cover and refrigerate for 8 hours or overnight.

Lay the wonton wrappers in a single layer. Place 1 square of the marinated chicken in the center of the wonton wrapper. Dab a small amount of marinade on each of the corners. Fold the wonton over the chicken by bringing each of the corners to the center of the square, overlapping slightly, like a squared envelope.

Heat the canola oil in a deep fryer or medium pot to 355–375°F (180–190°C). Fry the wontons for about 2 minutes per side, turning once.

Apricot Dipping Sauce: In a small bowl, blend the apricot preserves, mustard, and teriyaki sauce.

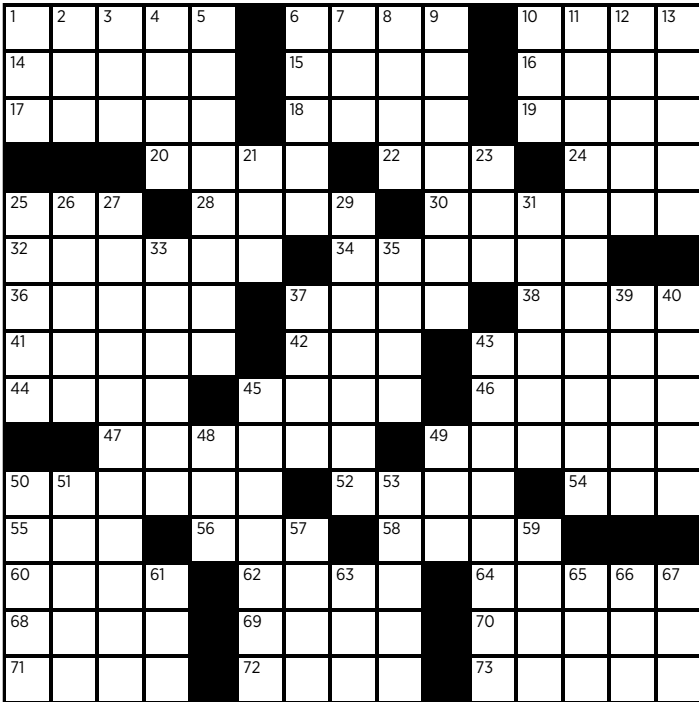
Serve wontons on each plate with the dipping sauce.

Note: Wontons may be fully prepared and frozen flat in a single layer and then put in plastic baggies for storage. To reheat, bake at 475°F (245°C) for 10 minutes.

HAMIZRACHI Purim

CROSSWORD

BY YONI GLATT
AUTHOR OF KOSHER CROSSWORDS



Across

- 1. Wheelchair-accessible routes
- 6. Funny actor Simon of "Star Trek"
- 10. Fine things?
- 14. Skating jumps
- 15. It makes Ari into a girl's name
- 16. Sans ice
- 17. Free-for-all
- 18. Bleacher feature
- 19. "Good heavens!"
- 20. City in northern Israel

- 22. Make like the end of Shabbat
- 24. Aviv preceder
- 25. Guys
- 28. Dweeb
- 30. One who observes Tisha B'Av in the winter
- 32. Chef Lagasse
- 34. "Mr. October" Jackson
- 36. Hound's trail
- 37. Formally surrender
- 38. Brings to a close

- 41. Tefillin part
- 42. Book before Jeremiah: Abbr.
- 43. Start of a prophet's comment, perhaps
- 44. Observer
- 45. Huge simcha
- 46. Had a home-cooked meal
- 47. "Yo, bro!"
- 49. "Rebel Without ___"
- 50. Famous Fawcett
- 52. World War II Pulitzer-winning journalist Ernie
- 54. One part of an NFL game
- 55. What one might do for shalom bayit?
- 56. Sabbath seat
- 58. Auto pioneer
- 60. Letter letters
- 62. Is sick
- 64. Rival of Paris, in literature
- 68. Mess up
- 69. Waze suggestions (Abbr.)
- 70. Comet's path
- 71. Own (up to)
- 72. Deer name
- 73. Wealth

- 9. Shmutz
- 10. "I'll take that as ___"
- 11. Common Purim costume
- 12. Not Tahor
- 13. Fashion
- 21. Seminary subj.
- 23. Be a nagger
- 25. "Steppenwolf" author
- 26. Drain
- 27. Common Purim costumes
- 29. What many do on Purim...or another title for this puzzle
- 31. Sonora snooze
- 33. Lion, for one
- 35. ___ HaChareidis (Congregation of God-Fearers)
- 37. "Shalom!", to Mario
- 39. Believer
- 40. Less mashuga
- 43. Common Purim costume
- 45. How kids are taught to learn Shema
- 48. Be a yente
- 49. Completely
- 50. Marshmallow item
- 51. It leads to a chupah
- 53. Composer Green
- 57. Chaim ___ (birth name of Gene Simmons)
- 59. Hurting
- 61. Jose Reyes has the most all time for a Met: Abbr.
- 63. Asher of note
- 65. Degree for Jared Kushner
- 66. ___ Od Milvado
- 67. NBA game extras

Down

- 1. Isaac's replacement
- 2. Fire truck item
- 3. Comic legend Brooks
- 4. "Not guilty," e.g.
- 5. Common Purim costume
- 6. Pan of note
- 7. He died when he heard of the Ark's capture
- 8. High spirits



Solutions to the Tu B'Shvat edition puzzle

KOSHER Crosswords
AND WORD GAMES!
BY YONI GLATT

HALLEL and SHAMMAI

A MIZRACHI PURIM ADVENTURE

Once upon a time machine, Hallel and Shammai were looking forward to their next time-travel adventure. Their trusty time machine, which had mysteriously taken on the shape of a ra'ashan (Purim noise-maker), seemed ready for an adventure, too! "Look at the control panel," Hallel said, "It's set to take us back 2,500 years to a place called 'Persia.'"

"No way!" exclaimed Shammai, "That would mean we're going back to the time of Megillat Esther! Do you know what my favorite part of the Megillah is? How all of the bad things in the story get flipped to good things."

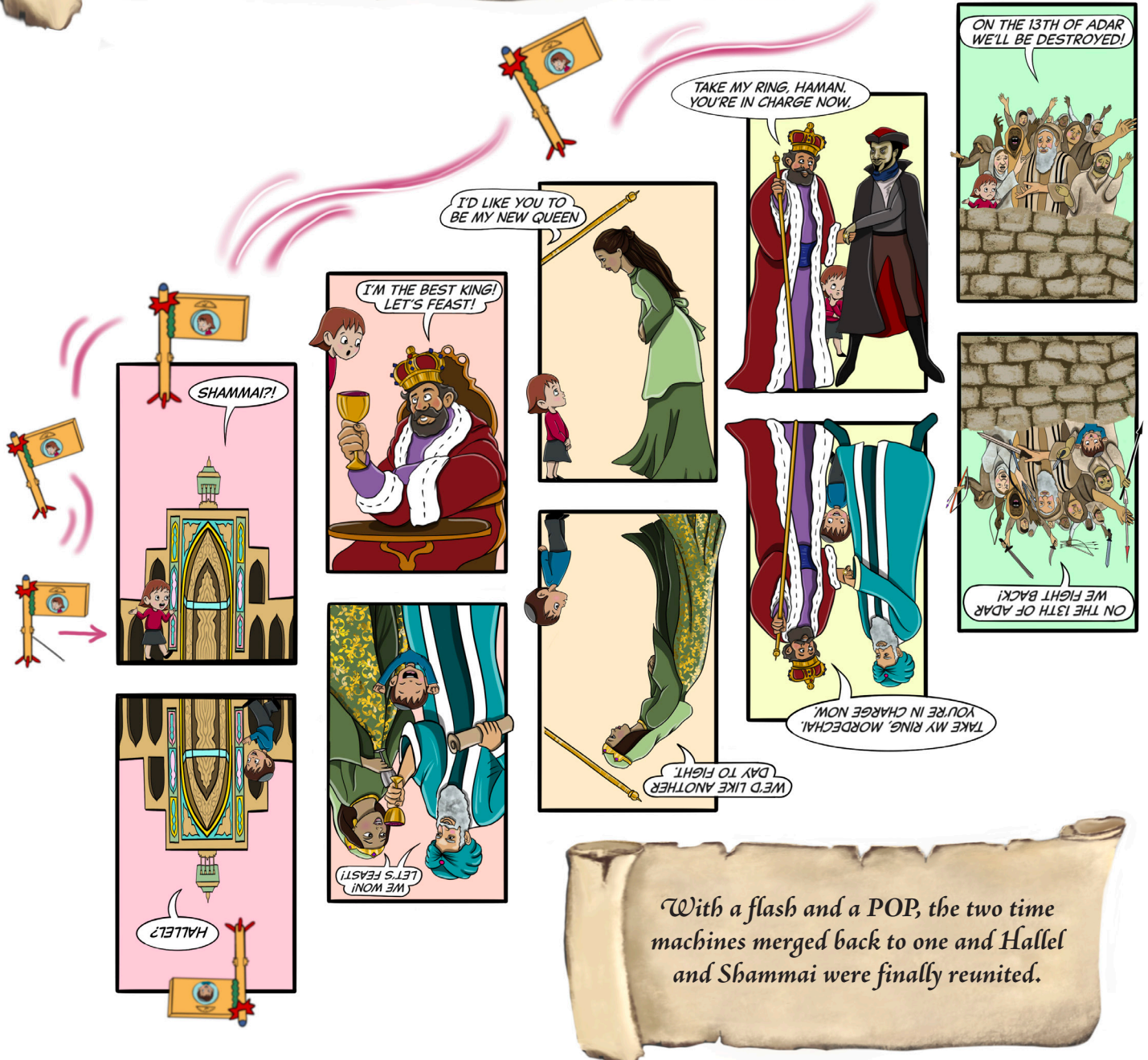
"What do you mean?" Hallel asked.

Shammai simply replied with the Hebrew words "VENAHAFOCH HU."

But Hallel still didn't understand, which is probably why she said: "I still don't understand."

SUDDENLY the time machine began to shake and quake. Hallel and Shammai looked at each other. What on earth was happening?! The time machine continued to shake and shake... until... with a POP and a flash it split in two! Hallel drifted one way, trapped in one time machine, while Shammai drifted in the opposite direction, trapped in another.

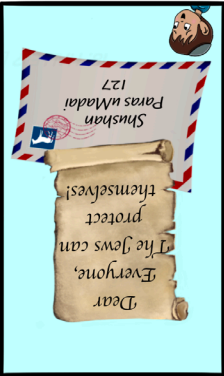
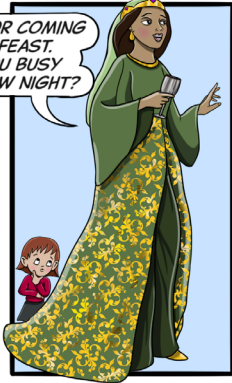
"Wait!" Hallel cried, "I don't know where it's taking me! Shammai, come back!"



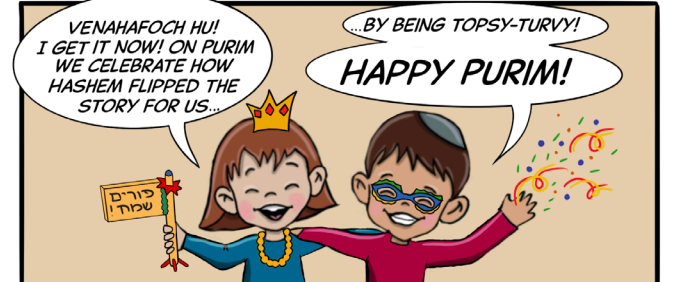
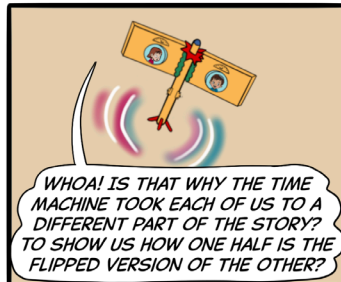
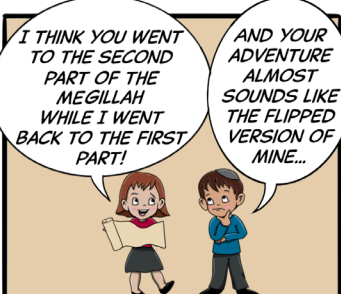
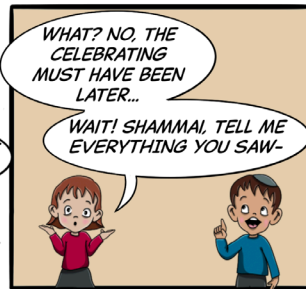
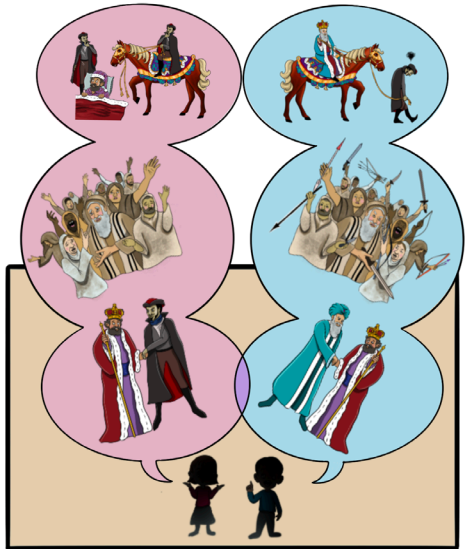
With a flash and a POP, the two time machines merged back to one and Hallel and Shammai were finally reunited.

WRITTEN BY
SHIRA GREENSPAN

ILLUSTRATED BY
Yael HARRIS
RESNICK
YaelHARRISRESNICK.COM



Yael Harris Resnick



Introducing

ת"וב

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