



PERSPECTIVES

ISSUE 11 | Shavuot 5781 | May 2021

The magazine of **aish**^{uk}

**REMEMBERING
RUTH BADER
GINSBURG**

JUSTICE FOR
**SARAH
HALIMI**

ZOOMING IN
EDUCATION POST-COVID

**THE LOST TRIBES
OF ISRAEL**
WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

**LOCKDOWN
LEMONADE**
TURNING COVID GLOOM
INTO SOMETHING GREAT

**THE ART OF
LISTENING**

FOR THE LOVE
OF FOOD

A LOOK AT KOSHER
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SHAVUOT

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EDITOR'S WELCOME

WELCOME TO OUR BUMPER SHAVUOT EDITION!

Rabbi Ari Kayser, our editor-in-chief and I are delighted to have been able to partner with so many exceptional contributors to bring you an edition that is bursting with meaningful content to connect your soul and stimulate your mind. There are so many great reads in this mag that I hope you keep it next to your bed or on your coffee table in order to read and then reread it. I have edited a number of publications in my time, but this one is a special one, I promise! And if I am wrong, I will treat you to a slice of creamy Shavuot cheesecake!

This edition's articles exhibit the breadth and depth of Judaism, and also explore the complexity of being Jewish today. We have showcased heroines ranging from Ruth, the Moabite princess, to our contemporary heroine, the notorious Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Supreme Court judge. We have a really fun food feature with ambitious entrepreneurs in the start-up kosher business, and top educators around the country share the insights they have gleaned from the pandemic. We tell the tragic story of Sarah Halimi, so brutally murdered, and of the shadow war between Israel and Iran. We have an article on Jewish resilience, the art of listening, the 10 lost tribes, and a recipe section to tantalise your taste buds. We have endeavoured to cover it all and hope it reflects the richness of Jewish life. If this magazine achieves one goal, I hope that it instils in you a deep sense of Jewish pride.

Shavuot is a time of much jubilation and joy for the Jewish people, where we come together to celebrate the wellspring of wisdom that is our eternal Torah, followed by a milky marathon of delicacies. This time makes me nostalgic for those icy, Johannesburg winter nights when my friends and I would stay up through the night listening to the compelling *shiurim* on offer. The buzz of a shul brimming with keen minds was electric!

Let us unpack what it is that we are really celebrating by commemorating the receiving of the Torah. For what do we have without its priceless principles and sage advice for how to live a life of meaning? I cannot for a minute imagine a world devoid of its timeless wisdom. It offers teachings to crack us open and allow us to taste the delight of spiritual honey, right out of the jar, so sweet, so fresh.

To me, a world without Torah is a world without life, a world where the grass is dry and dead and the riverbed trickles with unquenchable thirst. That canvas of the world is not one that would allow our Jewish souls to thrive. A Jew's task is to wake up every morning to embrace the day ahead, and for a task so sacred, the revitalising elixir of Torah is required.

I have always loved Torah learning and, over the past few months, I have been lucky enough to learn from a wonderful person on a weekly basis. I have also started to teach a weekly class for women. These capsules of time have quite literally changed my life and have ignited within me a deep and profound appreciation for Torah, our everlasting anchor. I recently had a discussion with my grandmother, who is 87 years old and a fountain of sober wisdom. She shared with me her insights on the importance of roots, and told me, definitively, that religion is the safest bet to preserve our roots. In essence, this is what the festival of Shavuot is about – the celebration of our eternal roots that are so firmly planted in the nutritious soil of Torah. I hope that by travelling with us through this spectacular edition, you too will be inspired to grab your Divine inheritance with both hands and allow it to root you in the world, so that when fierce winds blow, you stay grounded.

This Shavuot, let us step up to the plate and take ownership of the legacy that belongs to us. May the journey be sweet so that the gift of Torah bears fruits that are sweet and delicious. It is there to imbue our lives with the deepest joy and compel us to realise that we have indeed inherited the worthiest treasure of all, the handwritten and original manuscript authored by God Himself. If we could get in touch with that, it would be pretty neat.

On behalf of Rabbi Rowe, Rabbi Kayser and the entire Aish team, we wish you a beautiful *chag! L'chaim* to a Shavuot that is as meaningful as it is magnificent, and of course milky and mellow!

Blessings,

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REMEMBERING

PRINCE PHILIP

020

FEATURES

008 REMEMBERING RUTH BADER GINSBURG

020 A PRINCE AMONG MEN

023 PASSING THE BUCK(INGHAM)

030 THE ART OF LISTENING

102 PERSPECTIVE – THE AISH UK 2021
UPDATE

124 A JOURNEY TO FIND THE SELF

38

THE LOST TRIBES
OF ISRAEL



050 JUSTICE FOR SARAH HALIMI

062 THE ISRAEL-IRAN SHADOW WAR

066 THERE CAN BE MIRACLES

070 LESSONS FROM MY GRANDFATHER

086 SPEAKING INTO THE NEXT MILLENNIUM

SHAVUOT

026 IF THEY'RE FREE, I'LL TAKE TEN



034 THE UNSUNG HERO

047 A RESILIENT NATION



082

SPIRITUAL

- 092 JUSTICE WITHOUT GOD IS TERRIFYING
- 098 RABBI REACTS TO AN ATHEIST'S CLAIMS

EDUCATION

12

ZOOMING IN,
NOT ZOOMED
OUT



DÉCOR & DESIGN

- 082 ESTHER TAYLOR'S 10 DESIGN
COMMANDMENTS

COMMUNITY CARE

- 075 BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY

FOOD & WELLNESS

- 054 FOR THE LOVE OF FOOD
- 104 GLUTEN INTOLERANCE –
REAL OR IMAGINED?

11

IT'S CHEESECAKE
TIME



TECH

- 086 SPEAKING INTO THE NEXT
MILLENNIUM

REFLECTIONS

- 122 LOCKDOWN LEMONADE

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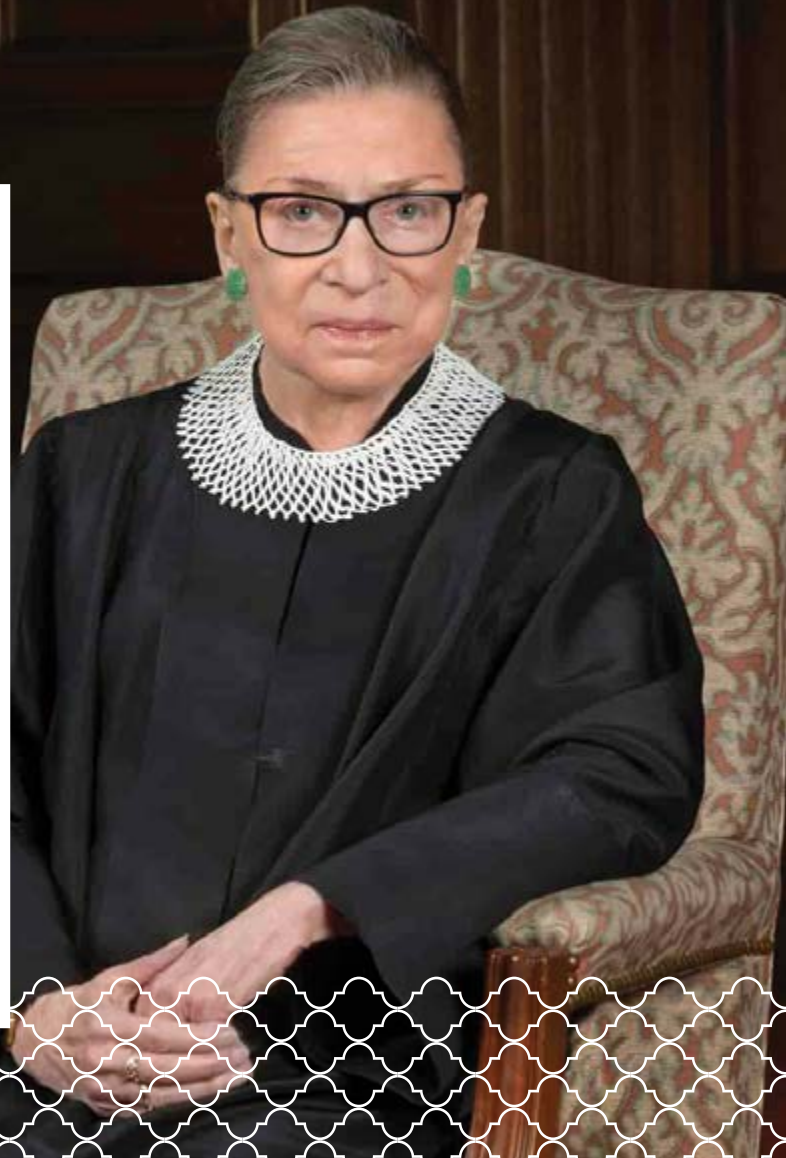


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HEROES OF HISTORY



R E M E M B E R I N G

Ruth Bader Ginsburg

THE NOTORIOUS RBG FOUGHT FOR HER PLACE AT THE
TABLE, JUST LIKE DEBORAH – THE FIRST FEMALE JUDGE
RECORDED IN JEWISH HISTORY.

by SHALVIE FRIEDMAN

“Mummy why are there no lady pilots?”

It was an innocent question, asked by my then six-year-old daughter as we boarded an international flight.

“Of course there are lady pilots,” I brushed off the question, feeling a bit uneasy. I wasn’t certain that I had ever had the pleasure of being on a flight with a female at the helm.

I sometimes forget how privileged we are to raise our daughters in a world where seeing male-only pilots is a puzzling sight, not a matter of course. And every now and then I get reminded. Sometimes I am reminded by an innocent little question just how wonderful it is to raise daughters in this world full of opportunity.

Luck was on my side that day. As we buckled up and set up the kids with their array of colouring books and flight-friendly activities, I heard a distinctly feminine voice over the intercom: “Good morning ladies and gentlemen. This is your captain speaking...” Naturally, we were thrilled. Later in the flight we went up to the cockpit to meet our first “lady pilot” and she graciously posed for a picture with my awe-struck daughters.

I was reminded of this moment in the weeks following Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s passing. I spent those weeks devouring articles, insights, opinion pieces and memoirs of the ‘Notorious RBG’. Phrases like “glass ceiling”, “gender equality”, “pop icon” and “dissent” were used.

I am not an American and was not brought up with Ruth Bader Ginsburg as a hero. So when I had the opportunity to see exactly who this woman was and how she fought for her place at the table, I was moved, emotional and buzzing with inspiration.

As I uncovered more about RBG, I was struck by one thing. In almost every picture of the judge, I was intrigued by the various neckpieces she wore with her Justice Robes.

These jabots have become a symbol of female empowerment, worn by many not just to represent RBG, but to encourage others to stand up for all that she symbolised.

For example, Banana Republic sold her neckpieces online after her passing and donated 100 percent of its proceeds to the International Centre for Research on Women, honouring Justice Ginsburg’s legacy for women’s rights and equality.

When asked about the meaning behind this accessory, Bader Ginsburg once commented: “You know, the standard robe is made for a man because it has a place for the shirt to show, and the tie.” Bader Ginsburg and Sandra Day

O’Connor, the first female US Justice, “thought it would be appropriate if we included as part of our robe something typical of a woman”.

So, originally, it seems that RBG did what women have been doing for centuries – she accessorised! In a world that was predominantly male, she found a space – not just to suit up (or robe up in this case) – but also to bring something uniquely feminine to the table. A

constant reminder to her fellow justices, her audience and society at large, that she was a woman. The femininity of the neckpiece with the authority and dignity of the robe together give us a picture of who the Notorious RBG was.

Soon Ginsburg’s neckpieces took on a personality of their own. A supreme court justice is expected to be impartial – not to use their honourable platform to express personal political options. But it has been thought that each one of RBG’s neckpieces is seen to represent a specific stand that she took, or her position on the matter that she was judging.

It is so full of symbolic meaning that the very item of clothing that was used to proudly display femininity was also used to portray opinion, individuality and, let’s be honest, sass.

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— 69 —

DEBORAH WAS IN A LEAGUE OF HER OWN. SHE JUDGED THE PEOPLE AT A TIME WHEN THERE WAS ABSOLUTE ANARCHY.

I am reminded of a female justice who came before Ruth Bader Ginsburg – long before. Around 3 000 years before, to be precise. She was the first female judge recorded in Jewish history. Her name was Deborah.

Deborah was in a league of her own. She judged the people at a time when there was absolute anarchy – people were pushing back against any form of judicial leadership. And yet, she was so well-respected and authoritative that she was nationally accepted as *the* judge of the time.

As a woman in those times, that made her impressive and unique – but it also made her vulnerable.

Deborah, like RBG, had a symbol. She became famous throughout Jewish history as the prophetess who sat under a palm tree – the Palm of Deborah.

I think that if we look deeply into the symbolism of the palm tree, it too represents the co-existence of femininity and unwavering stamina.

Unlike a typical courthouse, which is a physical building or structure, Deborah judged the people from the plains of Ephraim. There is no Jewish law that would have required Deborah to set up her court outdoors. Her reasons, it seems, are personal and very symbolic.

Date palms appear many times in biblical poetry. In the book of the *Song of Songs*, for example, King Solomon compares the female lover to a date branch. She is tall in stature, strong, regal and she gives off the most wonderful fruit.

King David in *Psalms* similarly describes the righteous at the end of time who will bloom – like a date palm. This tree is once again presented to show the stamina needed to last until the end of days; righteousness and goodness; coupled with a vision of fertility – bearing fruit – a fundamental symbol of femininity.

There was another woman named Deborah who also had a special relationship with a date tree. Rebecca, Isaac's wife, had a wet nurse called Deborah. It seems that she raised Rebecca, and later travelled with her as she made her way to meet her husband Isaac. On the way, she died and was buried beneath a date tree. In fact, some suggest it was the very same date tree under which the prophetess Deborah later judged.

A wet nurse, who takes care of babies! A woman so different from Deborah the Judge, who is ruling the people. So different, yet at their core, representing the same values. Both the wet nurse and the judge nurture, encourage and help shape the vision on which the future generations are built.

Rabbi David Kimche (1160-1235) suggested an alternative motive for judging from the shade of a date tree. It served as a reminder to all the men who came to seek her council. She recognised how this position made her vulnerable as a woman and she only judged outdoors, in the public eye. There was never an opportunity for her to be anything but safe and public. She wore her femininity like a badge, or rather, like a neckpiece. I am a woman. I am tall, strong and unwavering, like a date tree. And I am feminine, nurturing – and even vulnerable.

See a contradiction? I don't.



Rebbetzin Shalvie Friedman grew up in Johannesburg, South Africa and received her BSc in Maths and Finance from the University of South Africa. She studied Jewish Thought and textual analysis at the Nishmat Seminary in Jerusalem. Shalvie has taught in high schools in Johannesburg, as well as at many seminaries in Israel, both for newly observant students as well as those from religious backgrounds. She currently teaches Jewish Studies at Hasmonean Girls School as well as teaching for various parts of the Aish family all while raising her own family.



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ZOOMING IN not zoomed out

EDUCATION POST-COVID –
THE VIEW FROM JEWISH EDUCATORS.

by SARA ELIAS

If dining tables could go into therapy, that's where mine would be right now. The life it signed up for largely involved getting dressed to the nines for Shabbat and yom tov meals, a civilised existence of good food and good conversation. In March 2020, like pretty much every dining table everywhere, it was taken over by computers, books and all the other paraphernalia of the schoolroom as our family grappled with the realities of remote learning.

With the dust barely settled and the prospect of further lockdowns not entirely eradicated, educators are only just beginning to assess the realities of the post-COVID landscape. The switch to remote learning – a seismic change that would normally have been at least 10 years in the planning – happened pretty much overnight. So where does this once-in-a-lifetime revolution leave teachers, parents and, most importantly, children?

In March 2020, educators had to hit the ground running – very, very fast. Most had barely heard of Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams or Zoom, and there were inevitable teething troubles as schools raced to find the best platforms to deliver education remotely while concurrently offering provision to key-worker children still in school.



Rachel Fink, headteacher of JFS



A universal observation among the educators and parents I spoke to was that there was a marked improvement in online provision from the first lockdown in March

2020 to the third lockdown in January 2021. Rachel Fink, headteacher of JFS, the largest Jewish school in Europe, echoed the feelings of many: “The second lockdown was a success – we were far more prepared, staff had had a lot of training on Microsoft Teams, which itself had also been adapted better by then. The key to our success: our staff were more skilled and our parents were with us.” By December 2020 at Hasmonian girls’ and boys’ schools, all students had been provided with Chromebooks, and the headteachers of both schools advised the students to take them home over the winter holiday. This act of foresight proved invaluable when the third lockdown was imposed – with children unable to return to school for the spring term, but with their Chromebooks to hand, both schools could transition straight into online learning.

Throughout both lockdowns, platforms such as Zoom were crucial for teaching live lessons, by which a teacher and their class would log on at the same time and the teacher would teach a lesson in real-time, often screen-sharing instead of using a whiteboard as they would in the classroom.

Other methodologies were used, such as teachers pre-recording lessons which children could then access at any time. The benefit of this was the students could then pause and replay as many times as they wished. This was especially important for households with a limited number of screens, where children had to take turns and therefore did not always have a screen available at the time when live lessons were taking place. The one disadvantage of this for teachers, however, was that these could be very time-consuming to put together. One headteacher said it could take up to one-and-a-half hours to record a three-minute clip. However, this did lead to some amazing creativity.

One of my own children’s teachers pre-recorded a variety of literacy lessons dressed up and in character, pretending to be Mary Poppins or Professor McGonagall. Not only did this delight the children, but for the home-schooling parents, it was hugely helpful in engaging their charges.



Debbie Lebrecht, headteacher at Hasmonian High School



Initially, not all teachers were able to rise to the occasion. Debbie Lebrecht, headteacher at Hasmonian High School for Boys, echoed the comments of many educators: “Many teachers found it terrifying at the beginning; we needed to put in a lot of support. Most would say they are much happier to be back at school. Some will never be comfortable with online.”



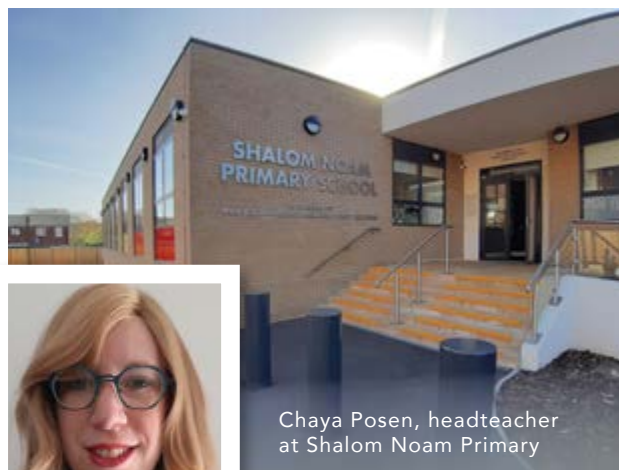
Joshua Rowe, chair of governors at The King David High School in Manchester, reported that there had been tremendous resistance to remote teaching from the unions: “They were telling the teachers not to do it.” Despite this: “Some teachers took to it like ducks to

water, even if others were quite resistant. Within a few weeks they got used to it. Teachers generally report that they had to work harder. In the classroom, lessons carry themselves. Online, it’s more of a lecture and teachers need more material.”



**THERE’S BEEN A GREATER
LEVEL OF THOUGHTFULNESS
AND CARE, WITH THE CHILD
AT THE CENTRE. IF I COULD
BOTTLE ONE THING, IT’S THE
PARENTAL SUPPORT.**

Across the board, there is great admiration from headteachers for their staff. “Staff have been incredible,” said Judith Caplan, headteacher at North West London Jewish Day School, a primary. “They adapted to everything I asked them to do. They have worked much longer hours than they would have done had they been in the building.”



Chaya Posen, headteacher at Shalom Noam Primary

This was echoed by Chaya Posen, headteacher at Shalom Noam Primary School in

north London: “The biggest challenge was the lack of work/life balance for staff who wanted to support the children and parents in their classes 100% and had to juggle this with their own family responsibilities. Personally, I think every staff member deserves a medal!”



Katherine Brice, headteacher at Hasmonean High School for Girls

At Hasmonean High School for Girls, headteacher Katherine Brice reported that staff had been “tremendously supportive of each other, with those who were struggling being helped by those who had ‘got it’”. There is no question that teaching live online lessons was daunting, as staff felt very exposed: not

only were they teaching the children they could see on screen, they were only too aware of the parents and carers who might also be listening in off-camera. But as one mother said to me, this was “a wonderful opportunity for me to understand teaching methods, hear the curriculum being taught – generally be much more present and informed about my child’s education”. She added: “It was impressive to watch some children with working parents develop their organisational skills and independence, getting onto the Zoom lessons themselves, making sure they had the right material for the lesson.”



**TEACHERS HAVE COME
TO REALISE THAT THERE
ARE DIFFERENT TYPES OF
TEACHING, NOT JUST
CHALK AND TALK.**



Not all children, however, were able to grasp the nettle. Rabbi David Meyer, executive director of PaJeS (Partnerships for Jewish Schools) explained: “This has been a year of disrupted learning, not a year of no learning. For some there has been greater disruption than for others, for example, for those from disadvantaged homes.”

Brice added: “The real problem is those who will have dropped out of learning, who will be lost to education and who will find it hard to get back. Some disadvantaged children need to be in school as much as they possibly can be. The widening of inequalities is just the worst thing.”

Lebrett commented that “literacy and numeracy in younger years will suffer”, and at least one primary school teacher agreed that children will inevitably end up with gaps in their knowledge from things they

didn’t learn properly in lockdown. However, “there’s no point chucking summer schools at this”, continued Lebrett, “we will need a gradual re-catching up. Also, teachers are worried about the current year 10s and 12s. Taking your GCSEs, sitting in an exam hall, is a very maturing experience. They need to learn that discipline. They have missed out on that.”

Parents are in agreement – as one mother said: “I hope that formal exams will be reinstated as I think that’s a rite of passage and an adrenaline boost that children can draw on for the rest of their lives.”

One headteacher was candid enough to admit that even her own children hadn’t learnt as well during lockdown, but Fink reminds us that the situation is not necessarily as bad as people fear: “Everyone’s falling behind – people love to say this. But I don’t agree so much. There has been a difference to the overall year 7 cohort, for example, we have seen quite a drop in reading age, but we have worked hard to get them back to where they should be quickly. The challenges will be more social and emotional. Academically, you can catch up.” She does, however, add: “Some children are struggling to get back into routine, a lot have lost social skills. We are seeing behaviours we would not usually see in our younger students.”

Overall, however, there was a sense of the children’s delight at being back in the school setting, as evidenced by Rowe: “It’s remarkable to see how the kids have adapted to coming back with all the masks and the restrictions. They are so overjoyed to see each other. People said the kids wouldn’t be able to cope with it, but no problem; if anything, the kids’ behaviour is better than ever.”

Rabbi Meyer observed one important plus of remote teaching: “Teachers have come to realise that there are different types of teaching, not just chalk and talk.” Specialist platforms such as Hegarty Maths, Mathletics and Lexia were already in use in some schools before the pandemic started, but they became a much more important tool during lockdown. Lebrett explained: “They add so much that we now use them at school. We have blended learning, both using and not using computers in the classroom. For example, Hegarty Maths offers a different kind of explanation, which is more pictorial than looking at a board.”



As Brice explained, there are different ways to learn: “You need to teach to every single sense.”

As helpful as all this innovation has been, one headteacher reported a staff member describing how they were suffering from “cognitive overload”. This applied especially to those having to teach live lessons to a class of children in front of them at the same time as being on camera for children isolating at home. One mother I spoke to sympathised: “They are not Houdinis! They must have found it exhausting. How could they be expected to be so many things at once?”

A common complaint among teachers was the lack of guidance from the government, with advice and information changing at the drop of a hat. I, personally, was enormously impressed at the agility of my children’s schools to adapt to ever-changing rules and requirements, with calm, informative emails being sent out almost daily at one point. However, most I spoke to pointed to the support they were able to give to one another via WhatsApp groups, citing the PaJeS and Barnet headteacher groups as being especially effective. As Rabbi Meyer of PaJeS explained: “Without doubt the biggest positive has been the importance of collaboration. The Education Select Committee led by Robert Halfon has been so impressed by the way that Jewish schools responded to COVID that it has asked PaJeS for a report. The reason we were so effective from day one was that PaJeS set up over 20 WhatsApp groups on every level – from chairs of governors to school admin staff, so they could all share their difficulties and challenges.”

Brice added that these groups had been “incredibly helpful and supportive. A single headteacher alone [without that support] would be quite a lonely place to be.” She also commented that the Jewish education sector as a whole had done well because education is “really valued in the Jewish community”.

Linked to this is not only the support that schools gave to each other, but also the way in which whole school communities – governors, staff, parents – united. “I’m proudest of the way we pulled together. Lots and lots of very appreciative emails from parents [telling us we got it right],” remarked Brice.

“Everybody pitched in,” said Fink. “Far less of ‘what’s in it for me’ and far more of ‘what’s in it for someone

else’. There’s been a greater level of thoughtfulness and care, with the child at the centre. If I could bottle one thing, it’s the parental support.”

It’s encouraging to know how well Jewish schools have adapted, but there was unanimous agreement among teachers that there is nothing like the experience of learning in front of a real teacher, in a real classroom, with real children sitting all around you and not just disembodied heads in little black boxes. Brice again: “This doesn’t change the fundamentals of teaching, which is relationships. Being present in the classroom is incredibly important. Not having personal contact is very difficult. The body language tells you an enormous amount in the classroom. You can get a sense that someone hasn’t got it simply by their body language.”

Lebrett agreed: “The absolute human connection of learning. It is as much a social exercise as it is an academic or pedagogical process. We mustn’t forget that.” She added: “This might put the brakes on the people who thought that teachers would go and robots would come in!”

Not surprisingly, gaining the attention of children in the younger age categories was not easy. “It was challenging to ensure every child was fully engaged,” said Chaya Posen. “Some staff felt that having a teaching assistant present in the lesson was invaluable in ensuring they could reach every child. Other teachers used breakout rooms so they could support children in smaller groups.”

Of course, there are still many unknowns about how lockdown learning has really impacted our children, and it is too soon to make judgments. I really felt the anguish of one mother who spoke to me about her son’s experience of this year’s 11 plus: “He took the 11 plus when he was not at his best in terms of mental and emotional health. I do wonder if he would have got into the school of his choice if it wasn’t for the lockdown. I don’t know. I’ll never know. But I do think that he would have had a better chance in a regular world and not in a lockdown world.”

Another angle is the absence of experiences that would normally take place outside of the classroom, including school trips. “Our young people have missed out on going to Israel and Poland,” Fink told me.



“These trips shape our young people and set them up for the future. Therefore, the lack of these will have ramifications. The school is in black and white. I want to do all the colouring in.”

Some changes are very welcome. Parent-teacher meetings no longer have to be done in person now that systems such as SchoolCloud allow both parties to log in at leisure from the comfort of their homes. And several headteachers commented with a laugh that snow days – once a day off for children – would be a thing of the past now that work can be uploaded at the click of a mouse.

Additionally, teachers have become more technologically adept and have shown an ability to think creatively, for example, using tech to bring in experts from all over the world to speak to classes, as at JFS, where a professor Zoomed in from Bar Ilan University, or a mass women’s Megillah reading was attended not just by female students, but also by their mothers (again at JFS). Fink talked about the idea of taking a virtual Tanach walking tour around Israel or hooking up with the Weizmann Institute to watch a science experiment. The possibilities are endless. Similarly, parents are much more likely to attend events from home. If you’re attending an online talk on drugs

or alcohol, for example, no one else needs to see that you are there.

Another beautiful example of the positives of tech was PaJeS’s Unite with Light Chanukah initiative, where 5 000 children from different schools all over the world joined online to light together. This idea – the brainchild of a teacher at Broughton Jewish in Manchester – showed “the power of partnerships”, said Rabbi Meyer, turning a small concept into a massive programme.

There is hope that one of the things gained this year has been a renewed appreciation of home and family life and their place in a child’s education. Rabbi Meyer suggested that this role has been reset. “Pre-COVID, it was all the responsibility of the school. That is foreign to the way that Jewish values are. Now, hopefully, we can come back to a more balanced approach where parents see they have something to give to their children’s education.”

Fink added: “Every time there has been an issue in society, schools have been expected to find a solution. The entire community across denominations needs to come together, not just schools.”



**ONE OF MY OWN CHILDREN'S
TEACHERS PRE-RECORDED
A VARIETY OF LITERACY
LESSONS DRESSED UP AND
IN CHARACTER, PRETENDING
TO BE MARY POPPINS OR
PROFESSOR MCGONAGALL.**

“My great fear is that we go back to what was,” observed Rabbi Meyer. “What PaJeS is planning to do is to try and generate some questions about innovation inside the classroom. To consider how the curriculum is being delivered both in content and delivery, secular and *kodesh*. I would love to start with a blank sheet – what do we want our children to come away with at the end of their Jewish education? The schools are doing such a great job that the centre of a child’s Judaism is the schools, but home, school, shul – each of these pillars should be the foundation of a child’s education. Hopefully COVID can catalyse this re-evaluation.”

A universal among those I spoke to was the praise, awe and pride for the children in their schools. The word resilience was mentioned many times. Parents, too, were gratified by this. When I asked some friends what made them proudest about the ways that their children had coped, many had a similar reply: “Their resilience. My kids never moaned or complained. They got on with it.”

Who knows how children will feel when they look back at this experience as adults, but I was struck by a comment from Judith Caplan: “These children will never forget this experience, just as children in World War Two never forgot the effect of evacuation.”

So, how did the children themselves feel about home school? I conducted a brief survey among my own three. “I didn’t like it very much because I didn’t get to see my friends in person and it was just a bit harder,” my nine-year-old told me. “No offence, parents, but parents aren’t teachers, and teachers I feel give me more motivation, and also being in the classroom.”

My eight-year-old said: “When I’m in the classroom, there’s nothing going on but the work, and when I’m at home, there’s tons and tons of things going on. That’s what I didn’t like about homeschooling.”

My 12-year-old commented that she really liked the independence: “I could just get on with what I had to do. But I really missed my social life.”

The son of a friend was probably quite typical in having missed his school friends, his football team and going on holiday. But I will leave the last word to my son’s best friend, whose profile name on the class Zooms read simply: “I miss school.”

I think we all did.

**A HUGE THANK YOU TO ALL OF
THE EDUCATORS WHO GAVE OF
THEIR TIME TO BE INTERVIEWED
FOR THIS ARTICLE.**



Before becoming a mother, Sara Elias was a journalist, working mainly on a food magazine. Currently a governor at North West London Jewish Day School, she is an avid listener to radio, podcasts and *shiurim*.



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Image credit: Allan Warren



A PRINCE AMONG MEN





PRINCE PHILLIP STOOD FOR THE JEWISH COMMUNITY AND HE STOOD AGAINST NAZI SYMPATHY WHEN TO DO SO WAS STILL CONTROVERSIAL.

by **RABBI DANIEL ROWE**

Across the country, flags were lowered to half-mast. The British nation mourned the loss of national patriarch Prince Phillip. Lots spoke of his great service to the nation, his dignity, non-pretentiousness, fortitude and other stoic Briticisms that he so embodied. Some struggled to find compelling dramatization, and for good reason. To be a Royal is, of necessity, to play no direct significant role in shaping national narratives, to lead no social revolution, no matter how compelling, and to recoil from anything that might be interpreted as having an opinion on anything of substantial public interest. It is to ubiquitously stand in the national background, embodying some kind of national character that is as universal as possible.

Despite its blandness, the very institution of royalty carries a message of national unity and British identity. That is its essential function. But that does not mean that its key players never play roles of enormous national significance. The Duke played such a role. He took a stand at least once in his career when to do so was somewhat controversial. He stood for the Jewish community and he stood against Nazi sympathy. Today that is a given. Back then it was not. And for that stand, British Jews can be forever grateful.

In 2005, Prince Harry, then 20 years old, dressed up for a fancy dress party as a member of the Nazi party. A picture appeared in *The Sun*. Within the walls of Buckingham Palace a debate raged as to how to handle it. Harry had apparently intended it as a kind of ‘dressing as our World War II enemy’ stunt. He had not intended malice. If the Royals would apologise, would this risk a public expectation for apologies in other situations? But the family moved decisively. The community had expected no less than a public apology. But the Royals went further. Prince Charles personally accompanied Prince Harry to the home of then Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, to apologise to the rabbi who represented the Jewish community.

The sensitivity to Jewish suffering ran deep. But in his childhood, Phillip was surrounded by the Nazism that was sweeping through Europe. As the only son of Prince Andrew of Greece and Denmark, he had been forced to flee as a child, to Western Europe, eventually arriving in Britain. Three of Philip’s sisters married Nazis. His sister Sophie named one of her children after Hitler himself. When his great Uncle Ernst died, his coffin was bedecked with swastikas.

Phillip took a radically different path. At the tender age of twelve, he witnessed pro-Nazi thugs pinning down a Jewish boy in his boarding school in Scotland. The gang shaved the boy’s head off leaving him humiliated. The young Phillip ran over to the boy and gave him his own cricket cap to save him from further humiliation. Reflecting on the incident years later, then Prince Phillip described it as a “small and insignificant incident”. But his instinctive defence of a vulnerable Jewish boy, against the tide of the crowd, would stay with him for life. “It taught me a very important lesson about man’s capacity for inhumanity.” A few years later he joined the Royal Navy to fight the Nazi regime. When he married Elizabeth in 1947, his Nazi family members, including his own sisters, were banned from attending the wedding.

When the young Prince’s father and family fled Greece, his mother stayed behind in Athens. In 1967, as a lonely and ailing widow, she was invited by her son and daughter-in-law to live at Buckingham Palace in London. Two years later, she died and was buried in the Royal Crypt in Windsor Castle. But before she died she had expressed her wish to be buried on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. The request was unusual, but not completely out of the ordinary. The site is holy to the Greek Orthodox religion and an aunt of hers had been buried nearby. Her wish was realised on 3 August 1988, when her remains were transferred to her final resting place.

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HIS INSTINCTIVE DEFENCE
OF A VULNERABLE JEWISH
BOY, AGAINST THE TIDE OF
THE CROWD, WOULD STAY
WITH HIM FOR LIFE.

It would be another four years before her connection to the land and people of Israel would come out in full.

Yad Vashem collects memories of survivors. It also honours the ‘righteous among the gentiles’, non-Jews who selflessly saved Jews from the Holocaust, often at great personal risk to themselves and their families. In 1992, a man named Michel Cohen reached out to Yad Vashem officials to tell the story of the righteous gentile who saved him, his mother and his sister. He was from Greece, where three-quarters of the pre-war 80 000-strong Jewish population had been killed. In what sounded like a story stranger than fiction, Cohen described how his family had been hidden and protected. Their saviour had been none other than a member of the Greek Royal family, Princess Alice.

From the inception of the State of Israel, the unresolved conflict with its Arab neighbours and Palestinians had deterred the Royal family from visiting. In October 1994, Prince Phillip became the first British Royal to visit. His destination was Yad Vashem, in a ceremony to honour his mother Princess Alice.

Prince Phillip described how she had never mentioned it to anyone. He described the story of his own witnessing of childhood persecution of that Jewish twelve-year-old. He then reflected on the fact that his mother had never mentioned anything about saving those young Jews: “I suspect that it never occurred to her that her action was in any way special. She was a person with a deep religious faith, and she would have considered it to be a perfectly natural human reaction to fellow beings in distress.”

For decades, the young Prince had been separated from his mother. But his own turning against the tide of his family, protecting a Jew where his own sisters had turned Nazi, echoed that moral compass of his mother.



On 17 April 2021, Prince Phillip was buried in St George’s Chapel in Windsor Castle. The site his mother had been buried 62 years earlier. Throughout his lifetime, he had stood loyally beside the Queen, together embodying the values of the British nation. The choice to stand up for the beaten Jewish boy, the choice to reject his Nazi family members, the choice to follow his mother’s moral compass. These are choices we take for granted today, but were deep challenges individually and nationally less than a century ago.

His life reminds us that the choice to follow decency and humanity in a world full of depravity is not easy. But its reward is eternal.



Rabbi Daniel Rowe is the Executive Director of Aish UK. He holds a BA in Philosophy from University College London and an MPhil in Philosophy from Birkbeck College. He studied for a decade in Israel in various Talmudic institutes. Rabbi Rowe is known for his ability to tackle difficult topics and has numerous videos and articles online. Rabbi Rowe has played an instrumental role in the creation and development of many organisations and initiatives such as the Forum for Jewish Leadership, the Aleinu Conference and Shabbat UK.



PASSING THE Buck(ingham)

AN INTERESTING CONNECTION
BETWEEN MEGXIT AND SHAVUOT.

by RABBI ELI BIRNBAUM

"I have been a waitress, an actress, a princess, a duchess and I've always just been Meghan... the most important title I will ever have is 'Mom'."

This, just one of innumerable 'mic-drop' moments in the course of Oprah's explosive exclusive with Meghan and Harry, flew somewhat quietly under a radar dominated by flak from allegations of institutional racism, mental health and family feuds.

But it got me thinking.

In life, the roles we play and the personas we adopt come to define us. Often, they come to define us whether we like it or not. Meghan's claim that she remained 'just Meghan' despite walking a path that can only be described as 'meteoric' seems spurious and, in all honesty, almost impossible to be true. The likelihood that Meghan the waitress experienced life identically to Meghan the duchess is comical.

But the second half of that quote intrigued me. It spoke not of a role or a persona, but of a calling. "The most important title

I will ever have is 'Mom'." Much has been said, written, shouted and Piers Morganed about the interview and, on a broader level, the never-seen-before decision to step back from royal duties and responsibilities. Indeed, *Collins English Dictionary* listed 'Megxit' in its 'top-10 words of 2020'. On 19 February, the 12-month 'cooling off' period came to an end, 'stepping back' became 'stepped back', a month later the Oprah interview was broadcast to rapt audiences across the world, and another month later Prince Phillip – Duke of Edinburgh and longest-serving consort in British history – died at the age of 99.

The timing couldn't have been worse. Within moments, social media's hordes of self-proclaimed experts were typing with great ferocity, comparing and contrasting Phillip's lifetime of humble service with the House of Sussex's perceived narcissistic desire to be the centre of attention without being the centre of attention.

What has all this got to do with Shavuot? Excellent question.

You see, for all the arguments for and against, Meghan's point about being a mom first and foremost keeps coming back to me. As life presents us with the roles and personas, duties and responsibilities that will eventually shape and define us, which do we abdicate and which do we coronate?

This theme dominates the festival of Shavuot. From the serious responsibility of trying not to consume *all* the cheesecake in one go, to the historical significance of the Jewish nation gathered at Mount Sinai (the one in the desert, not the hospital in New York – that's the one

you'll need for cheesecake poisoning) accepting the eternal duty of the 'chosen people'. If Pesach gives us the freedom we require to discover the roles and personas we can take on, Shavuot complements this with the purpose we require to truly own those roles.

Much of the festival's focus on responsibility is rooted in the undercurrent of the *Book of Ruth*. Ostensibly a classic romance providing the unlikely of rags-to-riches

happily-ever-afters, a closer reading of the text reveals that every one of its characters arrives quite abruptly at a fork in the road of responsibility, the choices they make in their next steps directly impacting the direction of the story.

"And it happened in the era of the Judges, that there was a famine in the land, and a man went from Bethlehem in Judah to live in the fields of Moab. He went with his wife and his two sons. The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name was Naomi, and his two sons were called Machlon and Kilyon. They came to the fields of Moab and there they remained. But Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died. And she was left with her two sons." (Ruth 1:1-3)

The sages puzzle over these introductory remarks and the disturbing juxtaposition between Elimelech eloping to Moab, a land to the east of the Jordan valley, and his untimely death. The causality between the two is explained in the harshest of terms: Elimelech was a member of the

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**AS LIFE PRESENTS US
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aristocracy, a fabulously wealthy and influential individual. As a grave famine ravaged his homeland, he was faced with a choice: shoulder the responsibility of sustaining his Israelite brethren in their hour of need, or pass the buck and sneak out the back door to settle in the more fertile Moabite plans. He chooses the latter, abdicating responsibility and coronating comfort instead.

Years pass, as do Machlon, Kilyon and the famine. Naomi returns to the land of Israel with her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah (not to be confused with Oprah). They are utterly impoverished, emotionally broken widows. As they trudge once more through the gates of Bethlehem, the locals react with astonishment: “The entire city stood aghast. ‘Is this really Naomi?’ they asked in wonder.” (Ruth 1:19)

Bethlehem’s residents stand at a similar fork in the road as Elimelech did all those years ago. Only this time, responsibility’s shoe is on the other foot. They can choose to have mercy on Naomi and Ruth, forgiving the family’s decision years ago to abandon them to a famine. Or they can allow themselves to be guided by the cold and vengeful hand of indifference. They choose the latter. Naomi and Ruth continue to live in dire poverty, demonstrated by the fact that Ruth is forced to venture out to the fields in search of the ‘gleanings’ given by the Torah to the poor during the harvest.

It is during one of these humiliating trips that she encounters a distant relative, a wealthy and powerful man by the name of Boaz. If chapter one of Ruth overflows with examples of people failing to take responsibility, chapter two starts to turn the tide. Instead of casting her out of his fields, Boaz welcomes Ruth and instructs his workers to provide her with special protection. Ruth gleanes in Boaz’s fields until the end of the harvest season, before returning to live with Naomi – apparently permanently. Naomi, however, has other plans...

Chapter three opens with Naomi standing at yet another fork in the road. She can continue to take advantage of her daughter-in-law’s youthful vigour and ability to provide her with sustenance. Or she can take responsibility for Ruth’s future, ensuring that it is one of happiness and security. She chooses the latter. “Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her: ‘My daughter, I must seek security for you, that it may go well with you.’” (Ruth 3:1)

With these words, Naomi selflessly begins paving the path of Ruth’s future – a future that cannot be spent forever tied to an elderly widow. Naomi advises Ruth to appeal to Boaz for his hand in marriage. Boaz agrees, but warns Ruth that a relative closer than he must be consulted first. It is now that Ruth’s ancestry proves to be a stumbling block. The second relative, a man kept anonymous in the story (the name given for him is literally ‘So and so’), is perfectly happy to redeem Elimelech’s ancestral lands and thereby provide lasting sustenance to Naomi after Ruth leaves to start an independent life. However, when he is informed that Ruth is in fact a Moabite convert, he balks. Boaz sees beyond any stigma. In a poetically beautiful circle, the first person in the story to answer responsibility’s call is also the last. Boaz marries Ruth, fathers Oved, who fathers Jesse, who fathers a son who will grow up to become King David.

Royalty, it would seem, can be found at the end of the road of responsibility.

Prince Phillip, for all his faux pas and foibles, understood this. Unwaveringly. Do Meghan and Harry? Time will tell. If Meghan was sincere in her commitment to place her responsibilities as a mother over her responsibilities as a duchess, she too will find that at the end of that road lies royalty. Not one filled with pomp and ceremony, crowns and titles, but royalty nonetheless.



Rabbi Eli Birnbaum studied in Talmudic College in Israel for six years before attaining Rabbinic Ordination after two years in the Jerusalem Kollel. During this time, Rabbi Birnbaum completed a BSc in Criminology & Social Psychology. Together with his wife Naomi, Rabbi Birnbaum moved back to London to take up a position in the JLE’s campus department, where he set up the infrastructure for regular Lunch & Learns across London’s major campuses, as well as creating the ‘Genesis+’ programme, aimed at older students and post-graduates. He now works as an Aish educator, primarily focused on the burgeoning Young Professional demographic.



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IF THEY'RE FREE, I'LL TAKE TEN PLEASE

AN ORTHODOX JEWISH JUDGE LOOKS BACK ON HIS
CAREER AND HOW THE TEN COMMANDMENTS IMPACTED
HIS PROFESSIONAL LIFE.

by **JUDGE SHLOMO KREIMAN**

Unlike the intricate preparations for Pesach or Sukkot, Shavuot – our upcoming festival of Divine revelation – comes wrapped in the relative simplicity of Torah and cheesecake. I'll share a secret, dear reader. It's my birthday. And a second secret – Torah and cheesecake are both vital parts of my life.

An alternative name of the event is *Zman Mattan Torateinu*, the season of the giving of our Torah. One of the focal episodes is the reading of the

Aseret HaDibrot, colloquially translated as the Ten Commandments. We stand in respectful silence in the synagogue as the Decalogue is read aloud, reminding us of what our ancestors experienced at Mount Sinai, but which we relive here and now as they are equally pertinent to us more than 3 000 years later. These ten foundations for a civilised society fall into two groups, the first five framing our relationship with God, and the other five facilitating the way we engage with fellow humankind.

Recently retired after 22 years as a judge in the secular courts and tribunals, I was in a privileged position to watch how some of those commandments played out in worldly situations. Although the tenets of the Torah do not directly apply in making those decisions, they formed an inescapable parallel in my mind as the evidence unwound and the oral testimony came flowing from the witnesses. As a 24/7 committed Jew, I found it impossible to side-line the values with which I am imbued when

weighing competing legal arguments and assessing the veracity of oral evidence.

To explain in more detail needs examples that occurred during my professional life. Those cited below are true cases which came before me over more than two decades on the Bench. They each offer a picture of some of the complex worlds that people inhabit and the web of fiction that they spin. All of them gave me an opportunity to reflect on the privileged status I enjoyed as, at the end of the working day, I could walk away with my own Torah lifestyle intact.

“Honour your father and your mother” is one of the better known of the Ten Commandments. Clearly establishing the ground rules for family life and mutuality of generational respect, what happens when such a basic precept falls by the wayside? Working in the Youth Court, the junior version of the Magistrates’ Courts for under-18s, sad matters arise when this question is all too obvious.

Jake was aged 14. He lived with his mother in a one-parent home. Mum went to work and did her best to keep the family unit afloat. She presumed that Jake went to school after she left in the mornings. Her son’s education was of a more informal nature, becoming involved in small-time local drug dealing. He worked out that if he were where mum expected him to be at any given time, life would be fine. He did not calculate on a summons for non-attendance at school, which landed on her doormat. An argument started between them that developed into a fight, the result of which mum ended up with a black eye, aggravated by cuts and bruises.

When Jake appeared in court on an allegation of common assault, he showed no remorse for his errant behaviour. From a pleasant schoolboy, he mutated into an aggressive teenager. Respect for the court was equally absent as that for his parent. To him, it was all a joke, even though he spent the previous night in the care of Social Services to avoid further risk to the victim. Episodes such as this are

far from frequent, but alas, not unusual. That we recoil from such conduct is a natural reaction, instilled from childhood and no doubt based on observance of parental honour.

“You shall not commit murder.” Probably the best-known of biblical prohibitions, without which there would be no semblance of good order. Associated with it is the offence of manslaughter, a lesser but equally horrific crime. Both require a physical action and, in addition, a composite mental element. What if one part of the definition was missing?

Two men were arrested. They lived at the same address, together with the girlfriend of one of them. All of them

were of Caribbean origin and fervent Christians. The males concluded that the female was possessed of an evil spirit and the way to exorcise it was by starvation. However, things went too far and the girl died. Several months later, concerned neighbours alerted the police, who obtained a search warrant and visited the home. They unsealed a room in which they found a partially decomposed body. The men said they kept it there, awaiting the revival of the

deceased as they believed she would return to life.

The gravamen of the issue for decision was their intent. Had the men wanted to end her life and had they formed that determination with the necessary malice aforethought? Or was it a plan with the best of intentions that went tragically wrong due to the recklessness of their actions? Cases such as these present a tough call for a judge.

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.” This is a historic expression which I prefer to interpret in a simple and basic modern idiom. *When giving evidence in court, don’t lie.* This seems a straightforward proposition, but is far from it. The temptation to embellish an immaculate truth can overtake a witness when the courtroom stage is open to their theatre, an audience hanging on every word. An opportunity to exact revenge on another, with possible

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— 69 —

**RECENTLY RETIRED AFTER
22 YEARS AS A JUDGE IN
THE SECULAR COURTS AND
TRIBUNALS, I WAS IN A
PRIVILEGED POSITION TO
WATCH HOW SOME OF THOSE
COMMANDMENTS PLAYED OUT
IN WORLDLY SITUATIONS.**

catastrophic consequences,
has a unique allure.

A car accident occurs.
There are no independent
witnesses. The driver of the
offending vehicle makes off.
The police arrive and, using
the information from the
vehicle number plate, trace
the registered keeper to a nearby address. When they arrive,
they find both husband – the registered keeper – and wife
at home. She volunteers herself as the culpable driver and
says that he was at home at all times. A charge of driving
without due care and attention was brought.

Both spouses attended court and gave their individual
evidence in the absence of the other. She said she was
driving on a winding country lane, out to collect one of her
young children. However, the time of the incident was after
8pm and past a normal bedtime. He told a different story
to the one he gave when first confronted by the police,
namely, that he walked to the local pub that night, had a few
drinks with friends and then returned home, to find his wife
and the car absent. None of the so-called “friends” arrived
to corroborate his account. I asked the prosecutor if he
had driving records for both husband and wife to offer as
documentary assistance, details which had, fortunately, been
researched. The wife held a licence with no penalty points.
The husband had so many points on his record that he was
on the brink of disqualification.

It took a few small sequential steps to work out that both
lied to protect the husband. Eager to avoid the loss of his
licence, they concocted an alternative version of events to
pervert the course of justice.

At first glance, the relevance
of the Ten Commandments
to our ordinary lives
appears remote. An
esoteric protocol
shrouded in history does
not automatically grab
us as a constant feature
to adopt and adapt into

the workplace. Reality is plainly different. In my own
experience, those guiding principles offer a mouth-watering
diet that adds spirit and spice. They give us an opportunity
to bring the qualities of Torah into the mundane and add
an element of spiritual value to all aspects of what we do.

Bringing a timeless call to successive generations, their
application is not limited to the refined life of the rabbi or
sage. On the contrary, I – and you – have a daily experience
to bring into play their vitality, to constantly rejuvenate their
meaning in contemporary situations and to add them as a
positive gloss in the way we respond to God and engage
with others.

From a personal standpoint, they offered me invaluable
professional support as I made decisions impacting on
the lives of those who appeared before me, whether in
courts or in tribunals. They helped me to look beyond the
parameters of the law itself and exercise a tolerance and
compassion, consistent with making a *Kiddush Hashem*.
May they do the same for you.

** Names and places have been changed for anonymity. Events are true.*



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FEATURE



Listen

The art of listening

A L E S S O N I N L O V E

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS REFERRED TO
LISTENING AS THE PRELUDE TO LOVE. WHY HAVE
SO MANY OF US FORGOTTEN HOW TO DO IT?

by SHIRA DRUION

— 69 —

**JUDAISM IS A RELIGION OF
LISTENING. THIS IS ONE
OF ITS MOST ORIGINAL
CONTRIBUTIONS TO
CIVILISATION.” RABBI LORD
JONATHAN SACKS**

Over the years, my various vocations have taught me to appreciate the beauty of being able to listen and, in turn, to be heard, and I have come to appreciate this very much. In fact, what I love most is to sit and listen to others share their stories and hear their compelling narratives.

I started off my career as a teacher, where being able to listen was imperative to successfully engage with a student. Much of what we need to know about others is not expressed in words, but rather understood through non-verbal cues. If we are not “listening” out for them, we miss them. I progressed onto drama teaching, journalism and outreach work, and today I am blessed to do all three, which makes for a kaleidoscope of colourful interactions. What I have learned from all three is that listening is probably the most important skill necessary to be able to succeed in all spheres of our lives and as human beings in a world where the ‘other’ is as important as the ‘self’.

In an article titled: “The Spirituality of Listening”, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks wrote: “Crowds are moved by great speakers, but lives are changed by great listeners. Whether between us and God or us and other people, listening is the prelude to love.” Indeed, this is a truism for life and carries special significance in relation to our bond with God, because when we share with God, we come to love and trust in Him.

I thought it would be appropriate to unpack the art of listening in time for Shavuot, a festival where our ability to listen was a prerequisite to our receiving of the Torah. This is evident in the words that have become the spiritual mantra of Jews across the globe: the *Shema*. This is a prayer that instructs the Jewish people to listen to the words God spoke to us at Sinai. The verse could have instructed us to see and stand witness to the actions of God just as easily as it commanded us to listen to them. From this, we can deduce that our ability to hear and, more importantly, to listen, is imperative to our connection with God. Rabbi Sacks elaborated on these words and shared a profound insight: “In the last month of his life, Moshe told the people, *Shema*: listen, heed, pay attention. Hear what I am saying. Hear what God is saying. Listen to what He wants from us. Judaism is a religion of listening, which is one of its most original contributions to civilisation.”

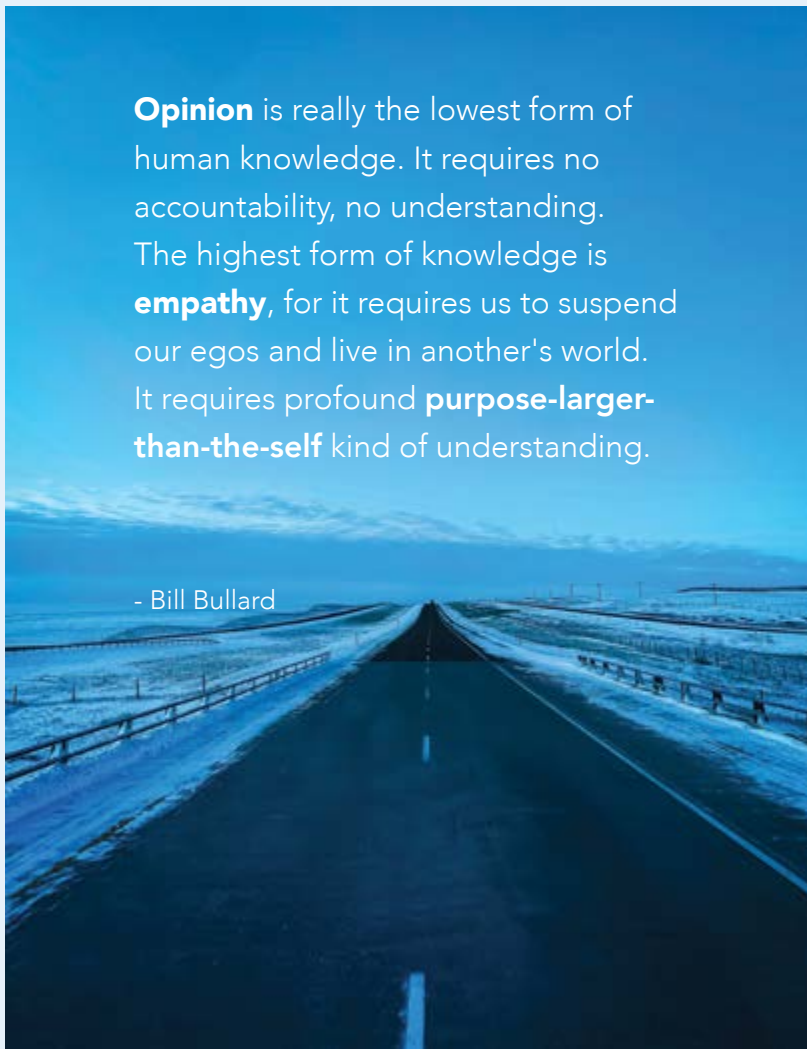
Rabbi Sacks expounded that the twin foundations on which Western civilisation was built were Ancient Greece and Ancient Israel. “Greece was a profoundly visual culture,” while “Judaism offered a radical alternative.” He unpacked

this by saying it might seem like a small difference, but is, in fact, a huge one. For the Greeks, the ideal form of knowledge involved detachment with object and subject as two disparate entities, while hearing or listening is an act of engagement that can create a relationship. “Jews and Judaism taught that we cannot see God, but we can hear Him and He hears us. It is through the word – speaking and listening – that we can have an intimate relationship with God as our parent, our partner, our sovereign, the One who loves us and whom we love. We cannot demonstrate God scientifically. We cannot prove God logically. These are Greek, not Jewish, modes of thought. I believe that from a Jewish perspective, trying to prove the existence of God logically or scientifically is a mistaken enterprise. God is not an object, but a subject. The Jewish mode is to relate to God in intimacy and love, as well as awe and reverence.”

A few years ago, I interviewed a former school headteacher who had enjoyed a successful career for over three decades. He was legendary among his alumni and so I asked him what he felt was the most determining factor in his success. His answer blew me away in its profound simplicity and the earnest humility with which he shared it. “To be honest, I don’t think my success was due to anything major on my part, but I listened to my students. When they spoke, I listened to what they were saying, I was quiet and I sincerely tried to hear what they were trying to communicate to me.” I think those words will stay with me always, because as an educator, I could resonate fully with what he was saying. I took his advice on board with more commitment to absorb what was being communicated to me, often unintentionally, by my students. Now, when my drama students are working in groups, I watch with wonder at the many nuances that come through when observing them with a sincere desire to better understand them. It is in these moments that I really start to make sense of who my students are with greater depth, sensitivity and empathy, the key to enriched relationships.

Opinion is really the lowest form of human knowledge. It requires no accountability, no understanding. The highest form of knowledge is **empathy**, for it requires us to suspend our egos and live in another's world. It requires profound **purpose-larger-than-the-self** kind of understanding.

- Bill Bullard



If one has the sincere desire to become a better listener, where to start? The inimitable Brené Brown, whose magnificent and trailblazing work in the field of shame and vulnerability has won worldwide acclaim, says: “When we work from a place, I believe, that says ‘I’m enough’, then we stop screaming and start listening, we’re kinder and gentler to the people around us, and we’re kinder and gentler to ourselves. Those who have a strong sense of love and belonging have the courage to be imperfect.”

It’s incredible to think how defining our relationship with ourselves will become in helping to determine how we will relate to others. There are so many ways to find that inner sanctum, and Judaism is essentially about creating that temple of stillness in order to connect with ourselves, others and, most importantly, God. So the skill of listening is imperative to our emotional, psychological and spiritual health and well-being.

What lies at the foundation of our ability to listen is our sense of self-worth. There are a multitude of ways to become more adequate people, and one of the benefits of this is deeper and more enriched relationships with those around us. When we heal ourselves, we create the space to allow others to really connect to us and vice versa. I cannot imagine a greater motivation than to invest in working to become more whole.

When we feel adequate, that deep sense of being worthy enables us to quieten our own noise and to listen to others, to really hear what they are communicating to us. Our self-esteem and how much space we take up in our relationships becomes the pattern that dictates our ability to make space for others and to hear them without prejudice.

Rabbi Sacks says it best: “In Judaism we believe that our relationship with God is an ongoing tutorial in our relationships with other people. How can we expect God to listen to us if we fail to listen to our spouse, our children, or those affected by our work? And how can we expect to encounter God if we have not learned to listen. On Mount Horeb, God taught Elijah that He was not in the whirlwind, the earthquake or the fire, but in the *kol demamah dakah*, the ‘still, small voice’ that I define as a voice you can only hear if you are listening.”

The greatest joy in our lives comes through deeply connecting to ourselves, God and those around us. Listening, however, is a skill that is acquired through practice and commitment, and the effort is most certainly worthwhile, as Rabbi Sacks writes: “There is something profoundly spiritual about listening.” This Shavuot, try and silence the noise and connect.

HOW TO LISTEN:

Author Joseph DeVito has divided the listening process into five stages: receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating and responding. Effective listening requires us to actively try to understand and display interest in the topic discussed. It can also include providing the speaker with feedback, or asking pertinent questions, so the speaker knows the message is being understood.

- Listen with your whole self. Maintain eye contact without staring or glaring. Smiling helps!
- Keep an open mind. Do not judge or mentally criticise what the speaker is telling you.
- Listen actively: Michael H Hoppe, in his book: *Active Listening: Improve Your Ability to Listen and Lead*, explains the advantages of active listening, indicating that it helps us better understand and make connections between ideas and information; change perspectives and challenge assumptions; and empathise and show respect or appreciation.
- Don't have an agenda and try to interject, just listen! Being able to listen without needing to respond is a virtuous trait.

Executive editor Shira Druion interviewed Emil Jackson, head of Child Psychotherapy at Tavistock Adolescent and Young Adult Department

1: How important are listening skills in relationships?

Listening is totally fundamental to any relationship. It is how we receive the other, and are received by the other. Without listening to each other, we are not really in a relationship of any meaning – at least not reciprocal. Listening to ourselves is also essential but something we often fail to do until it is too late. For example, many of us get all sorts of messages – whether in our minds or in our bodies – which we refuse or fear to listen to, afraid of what we might hear.

Sometimes, for example, we fail to listen to our anxiety, our hurt, our guilt, or what our physical pain may be telling us. Neglecting to listen to ourselves for too long almost always impacts adversely on the choices we make, how we treat ourselves and others and how we live our lives.

2: Do you think most people feel heard in their relationships?

In a good and healthy relationship, we would hope that most people feel heard, most of the time – at least about the things which matter. However, all of us know the hurt of not feeling heard, especially by those we love most.

None of us are perfect; we have all inadvertently hurt others by failing to hear what they most needed us to hear. Really hearing what is going on for someone else requires us to let go of what is going on for us, so that we can take them in and consider whatever they are saying – through their eyes rather than our own. It requires us to listen in order to understand rather than to reply. And it is listening to what the other person's narrative means to them, rather than filtering and self-referencing all that we hear through our own lens. Sadly, the way we often live our lives – rushing around, rarely pausing for thought, pursuing the next task or achievement – is often corrosive to our capacity to listen.

3: How can a person improve their listening skills? Are there practical steps people can take to improve their listening?

I am not sure about what practical steps we might take to improve our listening... If we are serious about wanting to improve our listening – we need to be prepared to receive whatever we might hear, whether we like it or not. Listening is an active process and takes energy – however empathetic and caring we might be. It is something we need to continue working on throughout life.

To improve our listening, we need space and time to slow down and notice what is going on inside of ourselves and others. This need only be a moment rather than hours – but often we don't even give ourselves those precious moments. It requires us to be able to step back from the details and to consider what is important – what really matters to us and to others.

It is, unfortunately, human to judge ourselves by our intentions but judge others by the way they make us feel. It takes work to let go of the way we feel to ensure that we judge others by their intentions, as we would want them to judge us. This then enables us to listen with greater generosity of heart and spirit.

4: How connected are vulnerability and listening?

This is a good and interesting question. Vulnerability and listening are closely connected. Whenever we listen to anyone – someone else or ourselves – we open ourselves to what we might hear, and to the uncertainty about what we might feel. This uncertainty can make us anxious. In fact, some of us keep talking, or moving, or doing – non-stop – precisely in order not to have to listen or to 'be'. The origin of the word 'vulnerable' comes from Latin and is about the ability to be wounded. When we open ourselves to listening and hearing – we open ourselves to potentially being wounded. But with this risk also comes the potential to open ourselves to truth, to growth and to love!



Shira Druion obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree in English, psychology and education. She then trained as a speech and drama teacher through the Trinity College of London. She is an experienced journalist, the former editor of YALLA magazine and the executive editor of Perspectives, the magazine of Aish UK. She has been an educator for many years, teaching students from nursery through to university, where she lectured on communication and writing skills. She now teaches English and runs her own drama company called Dramatix, where she teaches a broad age range of students. Druion is passionate about women's education. She gives a weekly *parsha shiur*, as well as other *shiurim*, and runs women's programmes in the community.

A woman with long, wavy brown hair is holding a silver crown adorned with blue and clear gemstones. She is wearing a white dress. The background is dark, and the scene is filled with falling gold confetti, creating a magical and celebratory atmosphere.

T H E
U N S U N G
HERO

by REBBETZIN LEAH MOSZKOWSKI

RUTH WAS A PERSON WHO SO COMPLETELY MASTERED THE ART OF KINDNESS.

The tale of Ruth is a quiet one. No seas are split, no battles are waged, and no earths are shattered. It is almost an embarrassing story, of human failings at their ugliest, of ancient Judea in a pitiful state, and of astonishing lust and selfishness. But out of this tale of degradation and misery, a quiet hero emerges, a sacrifice is made, a kindness is performed and history marches on. But let's pause for a moment to acquaint ourselves with the key player in this Biblical tale. Let us consider just who she was and what exactly she did.

Ruth was a Moabite princess in an era where kingship meant complete and tyrannical dictatorship. This was not the ribbon-cutting, dignified-waving, diplomat-entertaining kind of royalty. This was the beheadings-as-sport kind of monarchy. Where the fluttering of her eyelash would turn cities into playthings to be trampled on. Where she need only think it, and the Beethoven of ancient Levant would be as a tamed tiger at her feet awaiting her next command. Where the foremost tailors toiled bitterly to supply her dazzling endless luxuriant wardrobes, while the cooks died trying to please her palate. Where dainty princess feet need never alight on mortal man's earthly cobbles. Where muscle-bound human-mules conveyed her sacred royal figure whither she desired. Where the plumpest offerings of the finest vineyards were skinned and deposited with royal aplomb into her open mouth to be drained of their immature wines. Where garrisons quaked and fainted before her fateful word.

It is against this backdrop that we find our mourning widow, freshly anguished at the loss of her young husband. Perhaps, every time she looked at Naomi she saw the dead eyes of her once-beloved burning through her soul. She could have retreated into the bitter depths of the palace chambers, to be drowned by every comfort and depravity known to ancient Moabite man. A steely black widow, heart dripping with venom at her circumstances and trauma. Muse to every Greek tragedy, model to ancient Picasso.

But this is not the woman who holds her grieving mother-in-law's frail hand and gently guides her weary head onto

her shoulder. No, this is a woman who sees a suffering sister and puts herself to one side, quashes the incessant whiney voice of 'self', and embraces the 'other'. And the shy mastery and majesty of Ruth is only beginning. When Naomi announces that she is heading back to Judea, Ruth is right there at her elbow, carrying her flimsy knapsack, quietly, stubbornly refusing to stay put. She makes her stance very clear. "Where you go, I will go. Where you eat, I will eat. Where you rest, I will rest." This was Ruth stooping to Naomi's eyelevel, looking directly into her eyes and saying: "I'm here for you. I am sticking by you, no matter what." This was Ruth utterly negating her 'self', sacrificing her entire lifestyle, the wealth, the power, the security, the clothes, and relocating to a new country, which in itself was monumental in those times. People didn't simply pick up and move, least of all Moabite princesses. But someone who so completely mastered the art of kindness thinks of the 'other' first, not because she was unaware of healthy empathy boundaries, but because the need to bestow compassion and kindness dwarfed all other needs.

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SHIRA DRUION is a qualified speech and drama teacher. She is passionate about helping children develop their self esteem so their journey of life is happy, fun and creative. She is inspired by all drama has to offer and looks forward to building the online DRAMATIX community.

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This is kindness in its most distilled form, when it is done, not for a week of viral fame, not so that it may one day be repaid, not even to feel that warm tinge of benevolence deep in your ribcage – but truly, purely and deeply because it is the vital ingredient for humanity's existence. Societies who failed at cementing this cornerstone of existence were turned to salt. They were not just laid to ruin to be ruminated upon, but completely bleached off the face of this earth, because a society which doesn't recognise the intrinsic need for kindness is an impossible, utterly unsustainable society.

Today, in the times of the unmentionable 'C' word, amid the fearmongering and the horror and the distrust and the death, a quiet hero has arisen once again. She has spread her radiant roots far and wide, she has enveloped us in her gentle warmth and softly embraced our battered shoulders. This hero is kindness. She is not bound by gender or race or colour or country. She does not discriminate with age or fame or station. Quietly, courageously, ordinary people have been thrusting the cloak of 'self' deep into their closets and, in modest, pastel-coloured capes, they have added little rocks and trowels of cement to the pillar of kindness. The pillar that was left in the hands of all humanity to build, reinforce, protect and cherish.

If we were to harness a huge hunk of data harvesting technology, and scour through the flowering fields of humanity, we would find ourselves with an ever-expanding list: of meals delivered to the elderly; of balloons curbing tantrums; of people paying it forward at Starbucks; of generous tips; of heartfelt conversations; of smiles and little sticky notes; of 'care' emojis and quiet texts of support and comfort. These everyday acts, these everyday people, these unsung heroes, are, without exaggeration, keeping the world propped up. In a cumulative manner, each tiny act of kindness is added to the strut, the pillar, upon which the world leans.

We could conclude this gentle probe into the acts of our quiet hero with a feel-good flourish. We could paint a simplistic linear conclusion wherein doing acts of kindness brings reward our way, like in Ruth's case, where she got to be the progenitor of Jewish kings, an eternal lineage ultimately bearing the Messiah. But then we'd have to start over because that is not the message here. Mothering the Messiah wasn't a reward, it was an outcome and a necessity. The lineage of Jewish kings *could* only flourish and be sustained on a rock-solid foundation of kindness, for kindness isn't simply a nice extra taking the edge off an otherwise largely bitter human experience. Kindness is our essence, our core, our collective heartbeat.



After spending some years on the West Coast of America, Rebbetzin Leah Moszkowski now lives in Leeds together with her husband Ozer and daughter Tehillah. Together they run an Aish on Campus branch for the students at Leeds University. With a background in English literature and creative writing, Leah loves anything and everything to do with words.

THE LOST TRIBES OF ISRAEL

WHO ARE THEY AND WHERE ARE THEY TODAY?

by RABBI ARI KAYSER

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

Towards the end of the 9th century, the Jewish community of Kairouan, Tunisia, hosted an unexpected visitor. His story was worthy of a Hollywood movie, his claims sent shockwaves throughout the Jewish world, and his impact would be felt for more than a thousand years after. Eldad HaDani claimed to be from the biblical Tribe of Dan and his story begins with him leaving his land from 'beyond the rivers of Kush (Ethiopia)'.¹ Eldad travelled with a companion from the Tribe of Asher and after being shipwrecked, they washed ashore only to be taken captive by a tribe of cannibals who ate his companion and imprisoned Eldad to 'fatten him up'. This cannibalistic tribe were then vanquished by fire worshippers who took Eldad as their slave for four years, before ransoming him to a merchant from the Tribe of Issachar for 32 pieces of gold.

Eldad goes on to describe the location of all of the Lost Tribes of Israel, and they are spread far and wide. The tribe of Issachar lives in the mountains and sea coast of Persia; Zevulun are situated in the land from Armenia to the Euphrates; Reuben are behind the mountains of Paran; Ephraim and half of the tribe of Menashe are in the southern mountains of Arabia; and Shimon and the other half of Menashe are in the land of the Babylonians. His own tribe, that of Dan, settled in the land of Havila (Kush) shortly after the separation of the two Kingdoms of Israel and were later joined by the tribes of Naftali, Gad and Asher.

Needless to say, his fantastic story left the humble Jews of Kairouan puzzled and curious as to the authenticity of his tale. He claimed to speak only Hebrew and that his tribe was in possession of an Oral Tradition, or Talmud. Contrary to the Talmud we possess today, which states the opinions of hundreds of sages, his Talmud began every law in the exact same manner: "So we were taught from the mouth of Joshua, the son of Nun, who heard it from Moses our Teacher, who heard it from the mouth of God." They tested him on various matters of Jewish law and found some differences from their accepted practice, prompting them to seek council from the leading Jewish authority of the time, Rabbi Tzemach Gaon, the head of

the Academy of Sura (Babylon) to determine whether Eldad was a trickster or a genuine lost brother.

The response of Rabbi Tzemach was clear and had many ramifications for lost tribe seekers in the centuries to come. He said that indeed Eldad was correct and had heard of his accounts, and we are to forgive him if parts of his story sound too fantastical to be true, but it is likely down to the weariness of his travels and the difficulties he encountered along the way. As for the differences in *halacha*, of Jewish law, that can be put down to the fact that the Tribe of Dan left the land of Israel prior to the Assyrian conquest and the establishment of the Babylonian Talmud and many of their practices will resemble the Biblical practices of their time, when they split from the main body of the Jewish people.

A DIVIDED KINGDOM

How do there exist Lost Tribes of Israel in the first place? After the ancient Israelites entered into the Land of Canaan, they conquered the land and divided it up into 12 portions, one for every tribe. The tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Menashe chose to settle outside of the Land of Israel in the Transjordan area. The people established a judicial system whereby they were ruled by judges, before eventually requesting to be ruled by a king. The first king of Israel was Saul, followed by David, then by his son Solomon. Those three kings oversaw a unified (if not somewhat disjointed) rulership, but after their reign, it all went downhill.

King Solomon oversaw the building of the Temple in Jerusalem, which came at a heavy monetary cost to the nation. No expenses were spared in building the House of God, with raw materials being shipped in from every corner of the known world. The taxes he levied on his nation were very high and it seems, for the most part, the people were happy to contribute to the spiritual building project. When the building was complete and King Solomon died, his son Rechavam – rejecting the advice of the elder wisemen in favour of the young advisors – decided to keep the high taxes, ignoring the outrage of the people. It was this economic policy that caused a deep divide among the people and trouble soon followed.

¹ This encounter with Eldad produced three important documents. The first is an epistle composed by Eldad telling of his adventures, *Sefer Eldad*. The second is a query about this man sent by the Jews of Kairouan to the highest legal authority of the time, it includes his response. The third is a study of certain rituals described by Eldad and written by the Kairouanis, which exists independently and was probably written at a later point. See Benite, *The Ten Lost Tribes, A World History*, page 86.

A man by the name of Yeravam ben Nevat, who had served under King Solomon but began to have aspirations to overthrow him – which were discovered – and he fled to Egypt under the protection of the Pharaoh. After King Solomon's death, Yeravam returned to the holy land and had an encounter with the prophet Achiya HaShiloni, who prophesied that the kingdom would be split in two. Ten tribes would be given to Yeravam to form a new 'Kingdom of Israel' in the north of the country, and the remaining two tribes of Judah and Benjamin would become the 'Kingdom of Judah' in the south. Coming close to an all-out civil war, the nation divided and never recovered.

They existed as two independent states for around 200 years before the Assyrian Empire conquered the Northern Kingdom, deporting the ten tribes and assimilating them into their empire. The Assyrian conquest took a number of years and there were at least three separate deportations that took place, but alas the fate of these ten tribes was sealed and they became lost to antiquity. As for the Kingdom of Judah, they held off the pressure of the Assyrians until a new superpower of Babylon came and swept them away. The Temple was destroyed and the people of Judea were exiled into the Babylonian empire. The Jewish people we know today are descendants of the Kingdom of Judah,² meaning they belong to the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, as well as some from the tribe of Levi, who did not have their own portion of the land and were scattered in cities throughout both kingdoms.

A JOURNEY eastWARDS

So what happened to the ten tribes exiled into the Assyrian empire? The Bible, in three places, tells us the locations that the tribes were taken.³ "And the king of Assyria deported the Israelites to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, along the Habor [and] the River Gozan, and in the towns of Media." (II Kings 18:11) Another verse in I Chronicles 5:26 excludes the towns of Media and adds a different place called Hara. The exact locations of these cities or towns is disputed, but one thing is certain, they existed within

the Assyrian Empire, most likely to the east of the land of Israel. We even have evidence from the Talmud,⁴ which notes a discussion among the rabbis of Babylon about the location of these tribes, suggesting their whereabouts were known around a thousand years after their deportation.

With ruling empires changing hands from Assyrians to Babylonians to Persians, the opportunity for these tribes to move became a reality. Although many are likely to have stayed, such as the elderly and infirm, others began the journey that saw them cover a huge amount of ground. Each place they mapped out along the way was noted and word sent back to those left behind of where they had ventured. Every now and then they would settle there and form a community, which served as base for those travelling behind them to stop and settle before continuing the journey eastward.

Their first base was Afghanistan, directly east of Israel, where, according to some, four of the tribes of Israel established an independent state. This was likely in the region of the Hindu-Kush mountains and the surrounding area.⁵ According to Dr Avigdor Shachan, they wanted to reach Japan, and calculated two distinct routes of travel from Afghanistan. The shorter northern route would take them eastward from Afghanistan, by passing north of the Himalayas and travelling through the Pamir mountains via Chinese Turkestan and the Gobi Desert, towards the Korean Peninsula, which was a scheduled meeting point for later expeditions. The southern route would bypass the Himalayas on the south, via what is now Myanmar, towards the eastern coast of the continent and moving north towards the Korean Peninsula. This southern route was longer than the northern route but much easier to traverse.

Whether the tribes of Israel were as organised as Dr Shachan seems to suggest, or whether they were already somewhat assimilated, is up for debate. The Assyrian policy of deportations was precisely to assimilate their captives and expand their empire. Many academics suggest that the tribes are lost because they simply no longer exist; only their legend lives on in the hearts of those who seek them.

² Some suggest that prior to the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom, many people from the ten tribes fled south to their brethren in the Southern Kingdom and were mixed up among the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. See Otzar Midrashim, Midrashim on the Ten Lost Tribes, Introduction 2.


³ The inscriptions of the Assyrian King Sargon II also testify to the deportations of Israelites from Samaria and can be found in the British Museum.

⁴ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Yevamot 16b-17a

⁵ See Avigdor Shachan, In the Footsteps of the Ten Lost Tribes, page 45

⁶ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin 110b

⁷ See Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah 14b and Tractate Arakhin 33a, that the prophet Jeremiah went to return many of the lost tribes in his day



WILL THE LOST TRIBES ever RETURN?

The question of the continued existence of the Lost Tribes stems from two places: one is a religious argument and the other is anthropological. The Books of the Prophets prophesise about the ultimate return of the Lost Tribes in the End of Days.

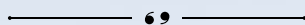
There is a disagreement among the sages of the Talmud as to whether the return of the tribes will indeed take place. The famous Rabbi Akiva is of the opinion that they will not return even during the Messianic Era, whereas Rabbi Eliezer suggests they will.⁶

The opinion of Rabbi Akiva seems problematic, especially given the prophecies which state explicitly that the Lost Tribes will return.

The Prophet Ezekiel says: And declare to them, “So says the Lord God: ‘Behold I will take the children of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side, and I will bring them to their land. And I will make them into one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel, and one king shall be to them all as a king; and they shall no longer be two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms anymore.’” (Ezekiel 37:21-22).

A number of commentators have come to reconcile Rabbi Akiva’s opinion with the words of the prophets, suggesting either that he was only referring to whether these tribes had a share in the World to Come or that, indeed, some of the tribes had already returned and that their descendants would not return.⁷

Aside from the religious belief that the tribes will return, there is anthropological reason to suggest why many groups across the globe have either been labelled candidates for being descended from the Lost Tribes or have self-identified as such. This is largely down to their uniquely Jewish practices and rituals, such as circumcision of male children at eight days from birth, ritual slaughter of animals, the ritual purification of women and levirate marriages – all of which are found in the most unlikely of places.



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COULD THE LOST TRIBES OF ISRAEL BE THE TALIBAN?

The Pashtuns of Afghanistan and Pakistan have many of these practices, including lighting candles on Friday night. They also wear their beards and sidelocks long (like *peyot*) and wear long shawls that resemble the Jewish *tallit*. Many of their tribal names sound incredibly Jewish too, such as Rubeni (Reuben), Shinwari (Shimon), Efridi (Ephraim), Ashuri (Asher), Daftani (Naftali), Jajani (Gad), Yusuf-Zai (sons of Joseph), Lewani (Levi) and so on.⁸ Many Pashtuns wear amulets containing a parchment inside written by the elder of the tribe, who is the only one who knows what is written in it and opening it is forbidden. One rabbi did manage to open such an amulet, and he found the verse of '*Shema Yisrael*' written inside in Ktav Ashurit.

In 1978, researcher Shalva Weil went to Kashmir, Pakistan with a delegation to look for these Lost Tribes. She met with Pashtun elders and enquired of their history. When one of them told her they were 'Yusuf-Zai', she asked 'who was Yusuf?' He answered 'ibn-Yakub' (the son of Jacob). When she probed further as to who Yakub was, he replied 'Israil', we are 'Bani-Israil', we are the children of Israel.⁹ In her article titled *The Israelite Connections of the Taliban*, Weil wrote: "Even today, many Pashtun agree that they are Israelites, even if they generally disassociate themselves with the modern State of Israel."¹⁰

WHERE ARE THEY?

Aside from the Biblical sources mentioned earlier, rabbinic sources locate the tribes in three primary places: Some were exiled to the Sambatyon River; another group was exiled to a land beyond the Sambatyon River; and the third group was swallowed in Rivlathah.¹¹

Perhaps the best-known legend connected to the Lost Tribes is that of the Sambatyon River. This mystical river, flowing with sand and stones, rages for six days of the week, resting only on the Sabbath, making it impossible to cross.¹² Tales of this incredible river have been told throughout history, with its purported location placed in many parts of the world.¹³ Placing the location of the Lost Tribes beyond this river has always kept them just beyond reach of those who seek them.

TRIBE-SEEKERS

Jewish travellers of the past thousand years have noted their existence, both through direct contact and through hearsay. One of the most important of those was Benjamin of Tudela, who set out on his journey between 1165 and 1167 and returned home in 1173. He travelled from Tudela, in the north of Spain, through Rome to Corfu across Greece to Constantinople, visiting the Archipelago, Rhodes and Cyprus on to Antioch.

⁸ Itzhak Ben-Zvi, the first President of Israel, dedicated a whole chapter to the Afghan tribe theory in his book, *The Exiled and the Redeemed*

⁹ Video lecture titled, "R&B: Dr. Shalva Weil on 'In Search of the Lost Ten Tribes'", presented at the Root and Branch Association lecture in the Orthodox Union Israel Center in Jerusalem in 2016.

¹⁰ Shalva Weil, *The Israelite Connections of the Taliban* – By Shalva Weil for ISN Insights. Africa News Analysis

¹¹ Pesikta Rabbati 31

¹² Targum Yonatan, Exodus 34:10 is likely the earliest Jewish source for the Sambatyon, along with the story of Eldad HaDani. The name Sambatyon is based on the word Shabbat, given that the river rests on Shabbat.

¹³ See Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin 55b, where Rabbi Akiva has a discussion with Turnus Rufus, governor of the Roman Empire, about whether the Rabbi could prove Shabbat was indeed the day of rest. Rabbi Akiva brings a 'proof' from the River Sambatyon which flows for six days of the week and rests of the Sabbath. Although a location of the river is not given, we can infer it was likely in the Near East. Nachmanides on Deuteronomy 32:26 located the Sambatyon as the Gozan River mentioned elsewhere in the Bible as the location of the Assyrian deportation of the Northern Tribes of Israel, such as in II Kings 17:6. Pliny the Elder, in *Naturalis Historia*, located the river in Judea. Josephus in his *Wars of the Jews* writes it was in Antiochia. Rabbi Shimon Tzvi Horowitz in his book *Kol Mevasser* has suggested it may be the Ganges river in India.

From Antioch, after a stay in Palestine, he proceeded to Damascus, Baghdad and Persia; across the Persian gulf, to India, Ceylon and perhaps China. He identified that in Nishapur, near the city of Meshed, Iran, there were four Lost Tribes living at the time¹⁴ among other places too.

Another important figure showed up in Rome in 1524, demanding an audience with Pope Clement VII, and identified himself as “prince David, son of King Solomon and brother of my older brother King Yosef, king of the tribes of Reuben and half of Menashe” or, in short, David Reuveni.¹⁵ He claimed to be part of a mighty kingdom of Israelites located in the biblical city of Habor, often associated with Khaybar in Arabia. He brought a message that his Israelite kingdom offered a military and political alliance with the Christian world against the Muslim Arabs and Turks. He got his audience with the Pope, who wrote him a letter of recommendation, which he took to Portugal to meet with King John III, whom he met in November of 1525.

Reuveni himself claimed to have a kingdom of 300 000 Israelites under his dominion and the king of Portugal had agreed to supply him with arms. After a number of months, however, Reuveni was asked to leave Portugal by the king, who likely distrusted his motives.¹⁶ Reuveni's fate was tragic. Having created quite an impression among the crypto-Jews of Portugal,¹⁷ messianic hopes were stirred, prompting many of them to sell their homes and make their journey to the promised land. He was eventually imprisoned along with one of his ardent followers Shlomo Molcho. Molcho was later burned at the stake and Reuveni likely died in prison.

In the 17th century another important figure by the name of Antonio Montezinos¹⁸ appeared on the scene. He went to Amsterdam after a trip to the New World claiming to have discovered one of the Lost Tribes of Israel in the Quito province of Ecuador. He gave his testimony to Rabbi Menashe Ben-Israel, who later published these

findings in his important book *Mikveh Israel (The Hope of Israel)*. Aside from being a rabbi, Ben-Israel was a notably influential person of his time. He was a diplomat, printer and publisher; proficient in seven languages; and his circle of friends included Rembrandt, who drew a portrait of him. His book played an important part in the readmission of the Jews to England, who were exiled in 1290. In 1655, he travelled to England to plead with Oliver Cromwell and, playing on the mood of messianic fervour in England at the time, argued that the Jews need to be “spread out to the ends of the earth” before the redemption could occur. He calculated England was indeed considered the ends of the earth and the last place in which Jews were still forbidden from settling. It worked, and although he didn't live to see it, the Jews were allowed to settle in England from 1664.

Not all tribe-seekers were Jews of course, and many of the theories that exist today are down to the writings of Christian missionaries who travelled the world to proselytise, many of whom were undercover tribe-seekers. Perhaps one of the most important of these was Joseph Wolff, a Jewish convert to Christianity who embarked on a number of expeditions to search for the Lost Tribes. Such was his dedication that one time, when he was enslaved in the Caucasus, he walked unclothed 900 kilometres through Central Asia looking for the tribes.¹⁹ He also spent time in Yemen where he encountered lost tribes.²⁰ He was certain that the Bene Israel of Bombay were descendants of the tribes, and convinced that lost tribes lived in China too.

At the turn of the 20th century there was an awakening of explorers in Jerusalem. Perhaps most notable was Rabbi Shimon Tzvi Horowitz, founding Rosh Yeshiva of the Kabbalistic Sha'ar HaShamayim in Jerusalem. Rabbi Horowitz's expedition to the Far East included stops in India, Nepal and China, and was filled with amazing tales and encounters with people who had information on the tribes.²¹

14 Elkan Nathan Adler, *Jewish Travelers in the Middle Ages* page 53

15 Nathan Elkan Adler, *Jewish Travellers in the Middle Ages*, page 251; see also Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The Ten Lost Tribes, A World History*, page 113.

16 Aaron Zeev Aescoly, *The Story of David Hareuveni: Based on the Oxford Manuscript*, Bialik Institute: Jerusalem 1993 (Hebrew)

17 Often referred to as *marranos* or *anusim*, these Jews were forced to convert to Christianity yet continued to practice Judaism in secret

18 Also known as Aharon HaLevi

19 Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The Ten Lost Tribes, A World History*, page 4

20 He claims to have spent six days with the Rechabites, descendants of Jonadab son of Rechab, a group also part of the lost-tribe-seekers search, as well as people from the tribe of Dan. See *Journal of the Rev. Joseph Wolff*, pp. 389

21 See Rabbi Horowitz's book *Kol Mevasser* (Hebrew)



On his return to Jerusalem, he petitioned the community to set up ‘information centres’ about the lost tribes to collate as much human knowledge as possible as to their whereabouts, and to fund future expeditions.

Another such figure who followed in Rabbi Horowitz’s footsteps was Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail, who travelled extensively to seek out our lost brothers. He identified the Shinlung tribe of Northeast India as the ‘Bnei Menashe’, children of the Tribe of Menashe, on account of their many Jewish practices and their historical ancestor ‘Manmasa’. Many Bnei Menashe have now completed a formal conversion to Judaism and returned to the Land of Israel.

WHO ARE THE TEN LOST TRIBES?

It is almost impossible to answer this question accurately as there have been hundreds of groups throughout the centuries who have been suggested as candidates. As one professor of history put it: “Political claims regarding the ten tribes status of various groups have been made since the early modern period, attaching themselves to real and imagined peoples from, literally, A-Z.”²²

Chronicling all of the groups would be a huge undertaking, but to give a sense of just how far this goes, here are some of the more popular claims. From the Pashtun people of Afghanistan,²³ the Bnei Menashe of Myanmar,²⁴ to the Lemba in Zimbabwe and South Africa,²⁵ to the Bene Israel of the western coast of India,²⁶ to the Native Americans,²⁷

22 Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The Ten Lost Tribes*, A World History, pages 5-6

23 Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail, *Shivtei Israel* (or in English, *The Tribes of Israel*). See also Itzhak Ben-Zvi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed*. See also Shalva Weil’s article *The Israelite Connections of the Taliban*

24 Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail, *Shivtei Israel*, and see also Hillel Halkin, *Across the Sabbath River: In Search of a Lost Tribe of Israel*

25 Tudor Parfitt, *Journey to the Vanished City*

26 Shirley Berry Isenberg, *India’s Bene Israel*

27 Menashe Ben-Israel, *Mikveh Israel* (or in English, *The Hope of Israel*)

28 Menachem Waldman, *The Jews of Ethiopia The Beta Israel Community*

29 Tudor Parfitt, *Black Jews in Africa and the Americas*

30 Ikuro Teshima, *The Ancient Jewish Diaspora in Japan: The Tribe of Hada – Their Religious and Cultural Influence*. See also Joseph Eidemberg, *The Japanese and the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel*. See also Tudor Parfitt, *The Thirteenth Gate*, chapter four

31 Richard Hewitt, *The Kyrgyz Epic of Manas*

PERHAPS THE BEST-KNOWN
 LEGEND CONNECTED TO
 THE LOST TRIBES IS THAT OF
 THE SAMBATYON RIVER. THIS
 MYSTICAL RIVER, FLOWING
 WITH SAND AND STONES,
 RAGES FOR SIX DAYS OF THE
 WEEK, RESTING ONLY ON
 THE SABBATH, MAKING IT
 IMPOSSIBLE TO CROSS

the Beta Israel of Ethiopia,²⁸ to the Igbo of Nigeria,²⁹ to the Shinto of Japan,³⁰ the Kyrgyz people,³¹ the Jews of Georgia and Bukhara;³² even the British³³ people have been identified as lost tribes and adherents to what is known as Anglo Israelism still exist today.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the best way to understand the fate and future of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel is to look to the words of one of the great rabbis of the 16th century, Rabbi Yehuda Loewe, more commonly known as the Maharal of Prague. He taught³⁴ that since God decreed that the exile of the tribes would not be overturned until the end of days, we could never discover their location by searching.

It seems they are not only lost to the Jewish people, but they are also lost to themselves, until the time comes when, as Isaiah proclaims: “And it shall come to pass on that day, a great shofar shall be sounded, and those lost in the land of Assyria and those exiled in the land of Egypt shall come and worship the Lord on the holy mount in Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 27:13)

³² Itzhak Ben-Zvi, *The Exiled and the Redeemed*

³³ David Baron, *The History of the Ten Lost Tribes: Anglo-Israelism Examined*

³⁴ Maharal of Prague, *Netzach Israel*, Chapter 34



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IN THEIR FOOTSTEPS

A R E S I L I E N T

nation

YOU AND I ARE HERE TODAY BECAUSE IN EACH
GENERATION, DESPITE THE CHALLENGES, OUR
PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS CHOSE TO FOLLOW
AND TO RELAY THE PATH OF RESILIENCE.

by RABBI NAFTALI SCHIFF

The world is frantically searching for a hitherto hidden formula that may successfully inoculate society with the resilience necessary to weather life's challenges.

I'd like to suggest that often in life when we find ourselves searching high and low, the key to our quest may be far closer than we think. Rabbi Noach Weinberg loved sharing with people a deep-seated Jewish tradition that informs us that every person is taught all the Torah in utero by an angel, only to be tapped on the philtrum at birth, which causes us to forget it all, and then we are charged with the challenge to discover truth for oneself. We may ask, why bother that "teacher angel" in the first place and why the tap on the upper lip of all places? To such questions he would jovially quip (while animatingly indicating with the wag of his index finger): "It's because reality is right here under your nose! You just need to place your finger on your lip, be quiet and listen!"

There is certainly a line across which deep-seated anxieties may pass, at which point professional help must clearly be sought. However, I think that as Jews we may possibly have deeply ingrained in our psyche and our shared history an unusually high level of built-in resilience. At this time, we are hearing much talk about the imperative to teach and nurture resilience for all, about how this life skill and trait has been paramount throughout this time of COVID-19 and shall be increasingly so in the "new normal" post-pandemic world. As a rabbi, educator and parent, I wholeheartedly applaud and agree with this sentiment. However, I would like to simply propose that both resilience and the concept of "new normal" have been integral to the life of the Jew from the outset and throughout our epic 3 500-year journey.

Even as we stand today at the festival of Shavuot, ready to revisit the receiving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, we are reminded of two famous teachings from the Talmud. Why was the Torah given at Sinai and not a higher, loftier mountain range? To teach us humility! What do we learn from the name "Sinai"? It's a play on the word *sina* – hatred. At this foundational moment in our history, we are, from

the outset, prepared, despite our grand mission and lofty destiny, to be humble and modest and to endure a journey that will involve withstanding the enmity of many nations.

We have just escaped the hellish slavery of Egypt where we witnessed 10 manifest miracles visited on our oppressors. We are suddenly confronted by a roaring sea in front of us and the thundering might of Pharaoh's fearsome chariots in hot pursuit. We experience the majesty of the splitting of the sea, hunger and worry as to the source of our sustenance in the desert, while simultaneously being summoned to bear the word of God to mankind! We'll spend 40 years wandering in the desert, where we experience 42 separate journeys. We'll face natural and human obstacles along the way towards the Promised Land, contend with the animosity of many nations, build a grand empire around the Temple, cope with its eventual sacking and devastating loss, and be exiled, with the terminal depletion of prophets, kings and associated glories. We'll return to our land only to be exiled again, this time to the four corners of the earth, enduring the worst forms of hatred, alienation and persecution in world history. Yet, despite all, we

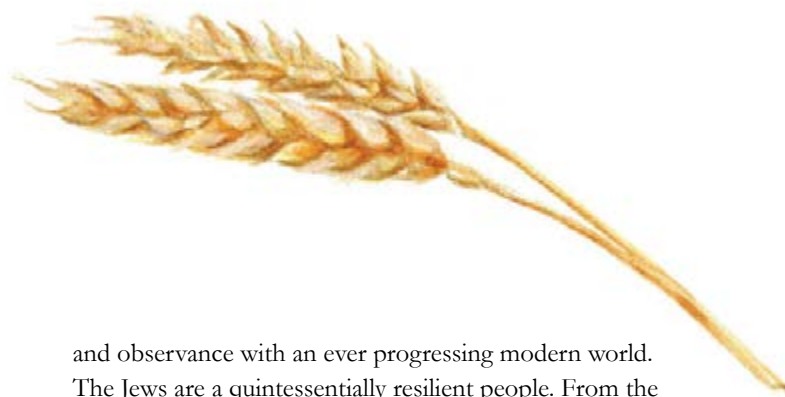
shall survive; we shall return; we shall rebuild. Even more incredible is that we knew of this journey from the start! The survival of the Jewish People is an inviolate reality, clearly written in the Book. The survival of you and I as members of that Nation is not. That is up to us. You and I are here today because in each generation, despite the challenges, our parents and grandparents chose to follow and to relay the path of – resilience! The choice to follow those footsteps is ours too.

Allow me to share a couple of small but poignant personal memories of my formative years that I believe speak to the current zeitgeist – one that revolves around this challenging quest to bolster resilience among our younger generation at this time in particular.

At our *chuppah* in Jerusalem over 30 years ago, the central tune that couched those special moments for us was to the words from the prophet Jeremiah: "*Lechteich acharai*

— — — — —

WE ARE A PEOPLE
PREPARED FOR LONG
NIGHTS
THAT PRECEDE THE DAY,
CHALLENGING JOURNEYS
THAT LEAD TO THE
PROMISED LAND.



bamidbar, be'ereetz lo zarua." These words nostalgically refer to the relationship between God and the Jewish People, those who, in their period of "courtship", were ready and willing based on faith alone to journey into the desert, to a land unsown. For a generation and spare, Jewish couples marched to their weddings so often to the refrain: "Sunrise, sunset..." from "Fiddler on the Roof". Every Friday night when we make Kiddush, we whisper the words: "And it was evening, and it was morning..." We are a people prepared for long nights that precede the day, challenging journeys that lead to the Promised Land. We are a family born in resilience. That is why you and I are still here. Sometimes, however, we're just so busy, we sadly don't stop to listen to our own tune.

In the *Haftarah* we read on the holiest of days, Rosh Hashanah, the same prophet Jeremiah refers to the Jews as a "People who are survivors of the sword".

These words are imprinted on my consciousness as a Jew, having been the refrain of one of the first tunes I learned, aged 10, as a member of the renowned Yigal Calek's London School of Jewish Song.

In my years singing as part of the choir, there was another composition that similarly springs to mind; this one set to the famous words of the eleventh of Maimonides' 13 Principles of Faith: "*Ani Maamin*", I Believe.

On many occasions, I heard Calek introduce the dramatic musical prelude at concerts with the words "...for generations, the Jewish People sang *Ani Maamin*, throughout the Holocaust, they sang an *Ani Maamin*, but this is a new *Ani Maamin* – one of hope! A march! Orchestra, take it away! Let's go!" And with a flourish, the thunder of wind instruments would burst forth and 20 young boys on stage would march on the spot and sing in unison to a new rendition of *Ani Maamin*! No longer a refrain of despair laced with longing; rather a fresh march of hope!

A new rendition doesn't cancel the old; no more than innovation challenges tradition. *Chidush*, the imperative to look at concepts and life's diverse circumstance with fresh thought and open eyes, is the fulcrum around which Jewish life and learning revolves, evolves and adapts. As we return the Sefer Torah to the ark communities the world over, we sing: "*Chadeish yameinu kekedem* – renew our days as of old!" Not a paradox; rather, perhaps, the classic Jewish phenomenon of constantly synthesising authentic tradition

and observance with an ever progressing modern world. The Jews are a quintessentially resilient people. From the beginning of time, we have been relentlessly propelled with drive, aspiration and hope for the fulfilment of a vibrant future. The quest to achieve has also made us the most obstinately persistent of nations to match.

Many today seem to confuse persistence with resilience. They are similar; however, certainly not one and the same.

Persistence is the ability to continue and stay the course, despite the obstacles. Resilience is the capacity to adapt to changing and often challenging circumstances.

Each demands a toughness and grit perhaps beyond the average. With varying degree, the Jewish People have indeed displayed both to an incredible measure.

We are described as a "stiff-necked (obstinate) people". Rabbi Dr Nachum Rabinovitch z'l, cited this accolade of obstinacy as the salient feature that leads to God forgiving even the most heinous of crimes of the Jews throughout history.

After all, who but a notoriously obstinate people would persist as Jews, clinging to the God of our faith and our core identity through thick and thin, despite the generational persecutions, trials and travails?

Holocaust survivors have become my greatest mentors in persistence. I have personally questioned hundreds about how they managed to keep going when all was but lost. "My mother/father willed me to go on, to bear witness, to survive as a Jew. '*Bleib a Yid*.' So I just kept going, one step at a time," sums up the universal answer. However, Holocaust survivors are not the first, neither shall they be the last to sing *Vehi Sheamda* at the Seder table, nor *Ani Maamin* as they marched forward.

A people that knows where it is headed will endure any journey.

The trait of resilience is perhaps slightly more nuanced than that of persistence, albeit no less prevalent among our people.

If resilience is predicated on a deep understanding and appreciation that life is full of challenges and that flexibility, optimism and willingness to change are the fundamental attitudes necessary to steer the course, then perhaps the



**A NEW RENDITION DOESN'T
CANCEL THE OLD; NO
MORE THAN INNOVATION
CHALLENGES TRADITION.**

“wandering Jew” wrote the manual on resilience, centuries ago. Haven’t we been schlepping the book around in our suitcases each time we were driven from Anatevka? Are

we not the people who adapted with dogged tenacity each time we moved on, or the regime changed, or the language, the dogma, the dictator, the culture, the Weltanschauung, the government or the borders of the day? This should come as no surprise, since resilience was received as an underlying theme in every chapter of the Holy Book, along with cheesecake at Mount Sinai!

The first commandment given to the Jewish people as they prepared to leave Egypt – charged with the mission to bring God’s word to mankind – was that of identifying the new moon.

A people whose journey follows the lunar cycle has built into their psyche the ups and downs, trials and tribulations of a fate that waxes and wanes with the vicissitudes of time.

Neither the dark of the night nor the resplendence of the sun blinds their collective vision. The hallmark of the Jew is the uncanny ability to constantly reinvent himself and his modus operandi, while maintaining a steadfast fidelity to his creed.

Notwithstanding Michael Dickson and Naomi Baum’s excellent new book, *Isresilience*, which beautifully highlights a whole range of contemporary Israelis who personify resilience, I would suggest it is precisely this trait that kept the Jew and Judaism as immortal as the creator Himself!

Resilience is not a modern Israeli creation, rather an embodiment of the people of Israel itself. The very name Yisrael implies survival alternately through, despite and, at times, because of that very struggle. At Sinai we are

referred to as *Bnei Yisrael*, a reminder of the nobility, the grandeur and the resilience inherent in the blessing that is our name.

In fact, it is the very confluence of persistence and resilience that perhaps can provide us with greatest insight. This Shavuot, Deliveroo will deliver our cheesecake, Amazon our books. We may have missed the IPO for both, however, each of our families received the Tradition at Sinai 3 000 years ago and have stock options in the Book! Our track record would indicate we have the grit, the resolve, the adaptability and the staying power to still be listed 100 years hence!

The prophet Isaiah (41,4) describes the Creator as “*korei badorot merosh*” – One who calls the generations from the start.

A people that knows its destiny from the beginning; a nation that appreciates there will be challenges every step of the way; parents who know to transform and transmit that arduous journey to an epic story on Seder night know too to empower, train and educate its children to transition that story to a song, adapting the score to harmonise with each dynamic movement.

Such a nation suckles both persistence and resilience with its mother’s milk. Such a people around Yom Hashoah and Yom Ha’atzmaut some eight decades later, sing with pride, exhilaration and harmony – an *Ani Maamin* that flows into *Am Yisrael Chai*! Such a people this Shavuot can sing a resounding *Chadesih yameinu kekedem – vebu yashmieinu berachamav sheinit le’einei kol chai. L’bana Haba’a biYerushalayim habenuyah!* With resilience and confidence – see you there!



Rabbi Naftali Schiff is the founder and chief executive of the Jewish Futures Trust. He is a graduate of an elite IDF combat unit, Yeshivat Hakotel, the London School of Economics and the Hebrew University. Rabbi Schiff is a former CEO of Aish and Jerusalem Fellowships, with over 30 years of experience in formal and informal education. He is the founder of each of the diverse and dynamic organisations that today make up the family of Jewish Future



JUSTICE FOR
Sarah Halimi

MASS PROTESTS HAVE FOLLOWED A RULING BY
FRANCE'S HIGHEST COURT THAT HAS SHOCKED
THE WORLD.

by RABBI MOSHE FRIEDMAN

I first heard about the Sarah Halimi killing in April of 2021, four years after the incident occurred and a few days after France's highest court upheld the ruling that her neighbour and killer, Kobili Traore, would not face trial. High on marijuana, Traore broke into her apartment, beat her for an hour while screaming "*Allahu Akbar*" and exclaiming "I killed the *Shaitan* [devil]," and then threw her out of her window. Despite what looked to be an obvious case of a horrific antisemitic murder, Traore was deemed to have been in a state of mental delirium at the time and was therefore exempted from facing any criminal charges. Since then, mass protests across the world have ensued, demanding justice for Halimi's family and for French Jews in general.

For all but the most hard-headed apologists, a clear miscarriage of justice has been committed here. The fact that Traore has been confined to indefinite involuntary psychiatric care provides little comfort to her family. This is a man who had repeatedly harassed her for months prior, and a sudden pot-induced psychotic attack allowed him to do what we can only surmise was his secret wish all along. Mainstream media outlets, Jewish media outlets and even social media outlets have been quick to point out that this murder is one of several high-profile antisemitic murders to have been carried out in France in the last couple of decades. And there is a growing sense that a staunchly secular government has been quick to sweep them under the rug, or at least downplay the religious tensions that have sparked them.

Yet after reading through the coverage of the case, I was bothered by a small question: What could possibly have been the justification for simply dismissing the trial? The thought seemed heretical. After all, what did it matter? Jews the world over have faced silence when asking the world to address antisemitic hate crimes. If Derek Chauvin's killing of George Floyd was universally condemned as racist, then a man reciting the Quran while savagely beating a Jewish woman, and later *admitting* that he targeted her because of

the *mezuzah* on her door, should be a no-brainer. But this wasn't a small oversight – it has gone through two appeals, including the French equivalent of the supreme court. We are not talking about the totalitarian regime of North Korea, or even the state-sponsored cover-ups of Putinist Russia. This is a Western country with a long history of the stable rule of law. There were attorneys on both sides. There were experts. And yet, there is virtually no mention of any argument in defence of the court's ruling.

Perhaps it is the very value of Jewish justice that led me to seek out the other side of the story. Not to vindicate the murderer, not to cause myself to doubt the need for protest, but instead to honour the memory of the deceased by making sure we know *exactly* what we are protesting for. True justice is a precision instrument. We do not use a person's murder as an excuse to champion our own pet causes. We find out what went wrong in this case in order to prevent future tragedies. Nobody should be permitted to carry out clear antisemitic atrocities such as this one and not be held accountable.

And so I began to investigate the specific cause of this injustice.

After exhausting all trustworthy news sources, I had to turn to Reddit, that most disreputable of lowest-common-denominator message boards, to find people even discussing possible defences for the French court's decision. Some claimed that despite Traore's exemption from facing trial, his indefinite stay in a psychiatric facility would be a far worse fate than prison, as he is likely to be heavily drugged, given minimal visitation rights and no set release date. Others refuted the claims that the French government was denying the antisemitic nature of the crime; to the contrary, the high court ruling this past April acknowledged that it was a "frenzied antisemitic act". The real issue, it seemed, was whether exemption from trial for mental delirium could apply to someone who had voluntarily taken drugs that ended up inducing the psychotic state.

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NO MATTER HOW WE
APPROACH IT, THE ONLY WAY
TO ENSURE THAT THERE WILL
NOT BE FUTURE TRAGEDIES
LIKE SARAH HALIMI'S IS
THE SLOW AND DELIBERATE
RESEARCH THAT CAN HELP
US UNCOVER PRECISELY
WHERE THE PROBLEM LIES,
AND HOW TO FIX IT.

Not content to rely on the imprecise ramblings of anonymous online pundits, I decided to contact a real live French lawyer. Paris-based attorney Michel Nassar was kind enough to offer his nuanced and careful perspective. He felt that the ruling had indeed set a bad precedent. “I don’t want this to be the easy way out of taking responsibility – to take a drug, commit a crime, and then blame it on the drug.” He was also sympathetic to the claim that this may make it easier for future offenders to commit antisemitic crimes. But he stopped short of criticising the law itself. “The law is clear. The law will set general rules and then it’s up to the judges and to the experts to work on it case by case. But in this situation, the law is clear. If you are mentally fit, you are responsible. If you are delusional, you are not responsible. We can know through science if someone is in a delusional state or under the influence of drugs.”

Perhaps, he said, it was a problem with the way the prosecutors had misapplied the law. As the attorney representing Halimi’s family has claimed, the judges should have made the distinction between someone who happens to be in a delusional state while committing a crime, versus someone who became delusional by engaging in dangerous drug consumption. But still, according to Nassar, it is unclear where, or even whether, a breakdown in justice occurred. “It is too soon to rule out if it was a good decision or not. I do not believe in changing the law based on one case, especially when we haven’t read the thousands of pages of legal documents explaining the court’s decision.”

Nassar is correct not to rush to judgment. But Jews have seen antisemitism before, and we’ve seen in various societies the same indifference to it. Protest was unquestionably called for. But what exactly are we protesting in the name of Sarah Halimi? Is it an unjust law, as French President Emmanuel Macron himself claimed after the High Court ruling? Is it an unjust application of

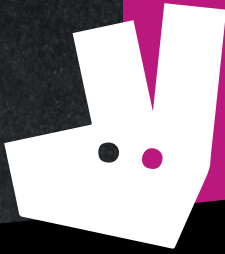
the law by all three courts that deemed Traore unfit for trial? Is it a precarious reliance on two expert psychiatric evaluations (one of which was conducted by a Jewish psychiatrist, by the way) that concluded Traore had indeed suffered a mental delirium as claimed? Or is it, as some media opinion pieces have claimed, a result of systemic French antisemitism. My search proved inconclusive. I, a London-based Jew, am on the outside of a complicated culture and multifaceted legal proceeding. Even someone keyed in like Nassar is waiting until he hears all of the facts of the case before deciding exactly what went wrong. This puts those who care in a difficult position – we know something needs to change, but we don’t quite have all the answers.

All of this does not negate the good that the recent protests have accomplished. The ruling has made international headlines, casting a spotlight on a country that can no longer afford to ignore its antisemitism. But now, in the midst of passion and power, we stand the true test of whether we can resist the temptation to create hasty demands. If the injustice occurred only at the procedural level, then calling for sweeping changes to the law itself might sound good on television but could create unwanted and unintended consequences. If it was a problem with the expert psychiatric diagnosis, then laying the blame solely at the feet of the court system would be misguided.

No matter how we approach it, the only way to ensure that there will not be future tragedies like Sarah Halimi’s is the slow and deliberate research that can help us uncover precisely where the problem lies, and how to fix it. It’s not dramatic, it’s not sensational, but it’s true justice. As Jews, we have learned through generations of persecution, that keeping our voices united in our desire for justice will ensure a safer and more just world not only for ourselves, but for all of humanity.



Rabbi Moshe Friedman grew up in Manhattan, New York, and received his BA in Politics, Philosophy and Economics at the University of Pennsylvania. He studied Jewish Thought and Talmudic Law for ten years in Israel, including several years at the Mir Yeshiva, and has passed Rabbinic Ordination examinations from the Israeli Rabbinate. In 2017, he moved to London with his wife and two children to take up the role of FJL UK Liaison, a role which includes regular campus visits and London-based educational programmes.



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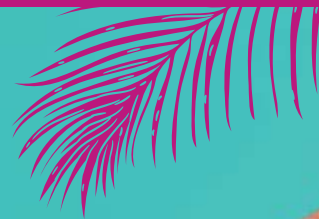


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ENTREPRENEURSHIP, JEWS AND FOOD!

by SHIRA DRUION

It's safe to say that Jews and food make for a winning combination and also form the lifeblood of a multibillion-pound industry. London has traditionally offered more conservative cuisine, but in recent years that has changed. Today there are a plethora of options for sumptuous restaurant meals, breakfast boxes and artisanal creations, which have been made possible through the innovation and passionate creativity of a buzzing group of Jewish entrepreneurs who have turned their love of food into lucrative business opportunities.

Executive editor Shira Druion interviewed four multi-talented foodie entrepreneurs about what makes them tick.

Natural foodie **CHARLOTTE CLIF** set up Charlotte's Sourdough from her home kitchen, where her passion lies in creating naturally fermented organic sourdough breads for a growing number of happy customers.

BEN TEACHER is founder of One Ashbourne, House Of Bamboo & CrepeShakesLondon. It is one of the only brands to have a meat and milk kosher licence. These brands deliver a fine dining experience to the kosher community and beyond.

Passionate about gift giving and making things look pretty, **JOELLA GOTHOLD** established Vanilla & Bow in February 2020. The idea was born in Israel to provide care packages and baked goods to family and friends living abroad. Over COVID, it has temporarily relocated to London and Joella is enjoying servicing the community here.

GABRIELLE KAYSER is the founder of Bijou Earth's Candy, taking the earth's natural sweetness and transforming it into delectable, bitesize and nutritious treats.

1 HOW DID YOU GET INTO THE FOOD BUSINESS?

Charlotte: It wasn't planned! I have a background in zoology and environmental conservation, and have always been interested in healthy, organic and sustainable living. After starting my family and being at home with the kids, I began fermenting foods for their health benefits and as a way of preserving produce grown in my city garden and eggs laid by my flock of chickens. Sourdough was a progression from there. I'd been gifting loaves to family and friends, who then begged me to start making and selling on a regular basis.

Ben: I got into the food business about 18 years ago when I was running and hosting bars and restaurants and clubs. I used to be very interested in how the food and drinks business worked and was interested in developing new concepts across the board by watching chefs, barmen, DJs very closely. Then four years ago, I saw a gap in the kosher market for fine dining in my local area of Temple Fortune/Hampstead Garden Suburb. There was no restaurant in the area and especially in the kosher market, and I was fed up with going to town to eat out. So I decided to create One Ashbourne, which has now evolved into three restaurants in my hub: One Ashbourne; my Asian fusion House of Bamboo; and my milky CrepesShakesLondon.

Joella: I am very passionate about food and how it brings people together. I also value the concept of gift giving, so starting a gifting food business seemed like a great blend.

Gabrielle: After I had two children born very premature with chronic health problems, I knew we had to make a drastic change to our lives and it meant looking at the foods we eat to try and heal them. I discovered a gut-healing protocol which demanded no processed foods, no sugar and no preservatives. So I had to literally make everything we were eating from scratch. That journey towards healing my children taught me a lot about the foods we put in our mouths and how many unhealthy ingredients they contain. I decided to take the experiences I had and create a business making sweet treats that are made with only pure and healthy ingredients. My children were my first customers and when even fussy children loved the food, I knew it was time to share it with others!

2 WHAT INSPIRES YOU TO KEEP GROWING AND IMPROVING?

Charlotte: Definitely the feedback I get from my customers. So many people seem to have gluten intolerances and reactions to eating regular bread. So when a customer tells you that she can eat my bread symptom free, after avoiding gluten for over 11 years, I'm spurred on to fly the flag for real, fully fermented sourdough bread.

Ben: I love seeing people's faces when trying new dishes and watching them enjoy having a great time either in the dining room at One Ashbourne, relishing an incredible dry aged steak, trying a new crepe or some new Asian fusion dish like a black cod.

Joella: I love my work and the creativity that goes into it. I am constantly looking for ways to introduce new products, put a new spin on things and take my business to the next level.

Gabrielle: So many of my customers talk to me about the hectic fast-paced lives they live and how they don't believe there is time to do it all and still eat healthy. While I know it can be hard, I know it's an investment which is totally worth it in the long term. Seeing their faces and hearing their feedback about Earth's Candy is what keeps me finding ways to make delicious food that will make your mind and body feel good.

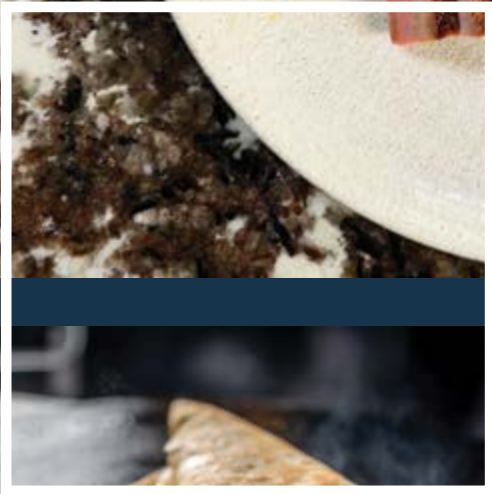
3 WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT IT?

Charlotte: Without sounding like an airhead, making sourdough feeds the soul as well as the body. It's very meditative and gratifying and also a continual learning curve that challenges the mind while being endlessly creative.

Joella: While I enjoy the baking side of things, I feel a thrill when I food style and photograph my products. I also take a lot of pride in the packaging stage and making things look pretty. I want my customers and anyone who receives something from V&B to have a luxury experience.

Gabrielle: I've always had a passion for food. My family is from an island called Djerba, off the coast of Tunisia, and I grew up with the most delicious blend of authentic North African cuisine. There is a love of dates and nuts, and I wanted to create something that blended my own heritage with a modern twist that was healthy and would satisfy that sweet tooth!

ONE ASHBOURNE



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STEAK, TRYING A NEW
CREPE OR SOME NEW
ASIAN FUSION DISH LIKE
A BLACK COD.

4 PLEASE SHARE SOME OF YOUR GREATEST FAILURES AND SUCCESSES.

Charlotte: My successes will always be happy customers who come back time and time again, with amazing feedback and encouragement. My failures would have been those same customers understanding when things haven't gone to plan. Like when the fuse blew on my fridge during the night, leading to over fermented and un-bakeable loaves, or when a really hot day led to the dough rising quicker than I could shape it.

Ben: My greatest success is opening the first fine dining restaurant in the market. I believe that it's made people step up their game and now the community has a much wider range of cuisines to choose from compared to four years ago. We are also now the only dedicated kosher creperie in the UK and I am so proud of this. I have also loved running three restaurants on one site because now people can come to us and choose from a variety of sumptuous options.

Joella: Greatest failures would be using regular flour instead of bread flour when attempting making my babkas. It's a no-go! Success would be adding my Signature Chocolate Babka to the menu, which is now our best-selling item.

Gabrielle: Earth's Candy was a business in the making for a long time... in my mind! But it wasn't until just over a year ago when I decided to dive in and make it happen. So I'd say my biggest success is getting it off the ground and I'm so pleased I did. My greatest failure has probably been not starting sooner. There are so many talented people in the food industry, and I wasn't sure if there was a market for what I wanted to do. Makes you realise that you have to believe in yourself!

5 WHAT HAS BEEN MOST CHALLENGING FOR YOU?

Charlotte: I work alone, so meeting demand has been the most challenging. I hate to disappoint and find it hard to say no. I have learnt the hard way and now have set myself limits.

Ben: The most challenging aspect of my job so far has been dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. I have had to think on my feet every day, thinking how to innovate with the brand to create grab & go concepts. This stimulus is what inspired Crepes & Shakes and House of Bamboo.

Gabrielle: I'm more of a creative person than a businesswoman and managing the technical side of the business was a challenge at first. I was giving away so much of my product because I wanted to make people happy! Thankfully I have now found the right balance by supporting organisations and charities with raffles and free giveaways, while also maintaining a strong business.

6 WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE DISHES ON THE MENU?

Charlotte: I make a huge variety of sourdough bread, rolls, focaccia, pizza dough and crackers, as well as seasonal goodies. I vary my menu according to what produce is in season or what *chag* might be coming up. My best-seller is definitely the malted grains with 5 seeds loaf, but sourdough focaccia on Friday is always a sell-out. Raisin and walnut, olive, cranberry and pecan, turmeric or sundried tomato loaves are also very popular. Additionally, I can make most things to order and have had some very strange requests!

Ben: I don't really have a favourite dish, although the black cod with an Asian twist is off the charts! My golden rule is that I don't put anything on the menu until I am fully happy with the taste and presentation. The creperie was born during the COVID-19 pandemic. I always wanted to create conceptual street food and COVID presented the perfect opportunity to grow the menu to include an assortment of crepes and new flavours of milkshakes, including my favourite milk chocolate with banana or our homemade Nutella, which is to die for!

Joella: My personal favourite is my artisanal biscotti because it is such a perfect blend of sweet and savoury.

Gabrielle: My favourite item on the menu is probably the Salted Date Caramels, a combination of sweet and chewy dates with an almond crunch, wrapped in dark chocolate. And if I am looking for a more indulgent treat, it would have to be the Caramel Biscuit Bars with an almond flour base, caramel tahini centre, topped with melted dark chocolate. Both are delicious and so filling that you only need one!

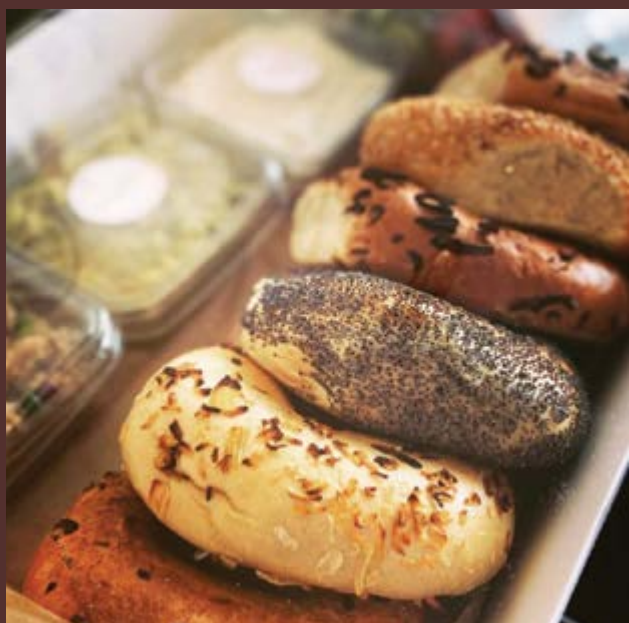




Vanilla & Bow

✉ order@vanillaandbow.com

@vanilla_and_bow



7 HOW DO YOU BALANCE HOME AND WORK LIFE?

Charlotte: This is the hardest part of my business and, I'm afraid to say, one I really struggle with. I work a full six days a week, and often more. With 5am starts and late finishes, it's not easy. I work really hard but it's a labour of love. I fit in what I can throughout the day, so while the dough is rising, I'll do the laundry and make dinner, or while its bench resting or mixing, I'll do the school run. Every second of the day counts!

Ben: I balance the two as best I can! I love spending time with my family and friends because it's particularly important during this challenging time.

Joella: Since V&B is a home business, the majority of my work is home-based. I have to constantly be mindful to put boundaries in place so I can ensure there is a clear separation. It's something I work on perfecting.

Gabrielle: It's never easy having a business and raising a family. The business has become part of the family and we all want to see it succeed, so keeping an open communication with the family is really important. We even get the kids involved in making the boxes so they feel part of the process.

8 WHAT ARE THE MOST EXCITING PARTS ABOUT THE JEWISH FOOD BUSINESS?

Charlotte: To be able to provide the kosher community with organic, fully fermented sourdough bread is very exciting. While we're spoilt for choice with great bakeries and their delicious goodies, I offer a different approach. My ingredients are chemical free, natural and nutritious. I'm thankfully beginning to see other like-minded foodies pop up on the kosher scene and I think there is a real shift in people wanting a more natural and wholesome option.

Ben: The most exciting thing about my job is that I have created food that people in the community have never tried before and the joy I get from watching their reaction is indescribable.



Shira Druon obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree in English, psychology and education. She then trained as a speech and drama teacher through the Trinity College of London. She is an experienced journalist, the former editor of YALLA magazine and the executive editor of Perspectives, the magazine of Aish UK. She has been an educator for many years, teaching students from nursery through to university, where she lectured on communication and writing skills. She now teaches English and runs her own drama company called Dramatix, where she teaches a broad age range of students. Druon is passionate about women's education. She gives a weekly *parsha shiur*, as well as other *shiurim*, and runs women's programmes in the community.

All of our food is now available for takeaway and dine outside options, and patrons can now order from our two takeaway shops:

1: www.goodeats.io/OneAshbourne

2: www.goodeats.io/housebamboo

Joella: It's a wonderful platform to connect with other foodie accounts and to get to know so many more wonderful people in the community that I wouldn't have had the opportunity otherwise!

Gabrielle: I'm really excited to see the kosher market open up to a healthier diet. I think it began when gluten-free became fashionable, but there is so much more to healthy eating and a healthy lifestyle, and it makes me happy to see more kosher options available on the supermarket shelves.

9 WHERE DO YOU TAKE INSPIRATION FROM?

Charlotte: Through Instagram, I have made some close friends in the sourdough baker community who are spread across the globe. It's been a great platform for sharing ideas and learning from each other and I'm just so happy to be able to bring some of that inspiration into the kosher world.

Ben: My inspiration comes from chefs around the world. I Love food and drink and that will never change.

To check out all menus & follow us or website:

1: www.oneashbourne.com/

2: www.housebamboo.co.uk/

To book a table either call us on 02087317575 or email us at catering@oneashbourne.com or book through our website.

Joella: My mother has real class from how she presents everything to making sure everything always looks beautiful. She has been my biggest inspiration.

Gabrielle: I wouldn't have started Earth's Candy had I not needed to address my children's health issues. And while maintaining a strong immune system is an ongoing journey, my children inspire me by their willingness to trust their bodies with the food they put in it.

Check out [@earths_candy](https://www.instagram.com/earths_candy) on Instagram for more



bijou
EARTH'S CANDY



IN THE WARS

THE ISRAEL-IRAN SHADOW WAR

WITH ISRAEL IN THE MIDDLE OF A POLITICAL CRISIS
AND IRAN DUE TO HOLD ITS PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION
IN JUNE, TENSIONS ARE RISING IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

by **DARREN COHEN**

*Disclaimer: The views expressed are that of the author and do not necessarily express the views of Aish UK.
This article was written on 18 April 2021 and is therefore reflective of events up to this date.*

Amid an increasingly explosive shadow war between Israel and Iran, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated on 12 April 2021 that he will “never allow Iran to obtain the nuclear capability to carry out its genocidal goal of eliminating Israel”. For Netanyahu, the battle Israel is waging against Iran across multiple fronts and regional arenas is a matter of existential importance. Iran, equally resolute in the righteousness of its mission, has remained undeterred by Israeli actions to thwart its nuclear programme and regional military adventurism. Tensions are again rising in the Middle East.

‘LITTLE SATAN’

For decades, Jerusalem and Tehran have been locked in a war of words. While Netanyahu accuses Iran of seeking Israel’s annihilation, the Islamic Republic has adopted a firm anti-Zionist stance since the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and its leaders have labelled the Jewish state a “cancerous” entity and “the Little Satan” alongside the US, the “Great Satan”. Particularly over recent years, this battle of ideologies has increasingly manifested in mutual hostilities perpetrated against the other’s strategic interests, which have recently escalated on several fronts.

GAME OF CHESS

The shadow war between Israel and Iran has become something of a game of chess. Iran deployed troops and militia fighters to Syria to establish a second front on Israel’s border, in addition to the entrenchment of the terror group, Hezbollah, in Lebanon. This is part of Tehran’s efforts to become the dominant Muslim actor in the Middle East and form a “Shiite Crescent” from Iran to Lebanon to cement its regional authority. As part of its “war between wars” doctrine, Israel has responded for several years by relentlessly striking Iran-linked targets throughout Syria. The shadow war has also impacted the Israeli Home Front, including strategic infrastructure. In April 2020, Israel National Cyber Directorate foiled a cyber-attack targeting the Israeli Water Authority, which was widely attributed to Iran.

Shortly after, in May, a cyber-attack was reported at Iran’s Shahid Rajaei Port, temporarily halting shipping traffic. This episode demonstrated that both parties are willing, and at least partially able, to target critical civilian infrastructure to strike a blow against its adversary.

ISRAEL’S ‘WAR BETWEEN WARS’

This is a military doctrine employed by Israel’s defence establishment that is aimed at proactively hindering its adversaries’ efforts to build up their military capabilities and assets through more advanced weaponry prior to the outbreak of an anticipated large-scale, declared operation. It is also aimed at bolstering Israel’s deterrence against its foes and demonstrating its ability to gain intelligence on, and thwart, their activities against Israeli interests while also exposing its foes’ clandestine military activities. The “war between wars” has primarily been waged by Israel in the Syrian arena against Iran over recent years and has entailed persistent strikes against Iran-linked targets.

EXPANSION TO NEW FRONTS THE WAR AT SEA

Over the past months, the hostilities have expanded to new fronts. Since February 2021, vessels linked to Israel and Iran have been hit in maritime zones throughout the Middle East, including the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. Most saliently, on 6 April, an Iranian ship, officially listed as a commercial vessel, was struck in the Red Sea by the explosion of a limpet mine. Reports later emerged stating that the ship was an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) surveillance base used for military purposes. This event served as a message from Israel to Iran of its ability to strike its interests throughout the region, including Iran’s efforts to covertly gather intelligence by disguising military operations as civilian ones.

IRAN’S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME

However, beyond any shadow of a doubt, the arena in which Israel-Iran tensions are both most vehemently contested and most volatile is Iran’s nuclear programme. Tehran has always insisted that its nuclear programme is solely for peaceful purposes, namely, for civilian nuclear energy production. Jerusalem fervently rejects this narrative as an act of deceit that hides Iran’s true goal of acquiring nuclear weapons.

In the best-case scenario, this capability would significantly hinder Israel's regional security by undermining its military edge and level of deterrence, and in the worst-case scenario pose an active threat to its existence amid a growing nuclear arms race. Israel points to Iranian enrichment of uranium beyond the amount required for civilian use and the existence of clandestine Iranian nuclear facilities, as well as Iran's belligerent rhetoric that has threatened Israel's existence. To this end, Israel has launched a series of covert operations to thwart Iran's nuclear capabilities and showcase its alleged hidden agenda to the international community.

In May 2018, Netanyahu publicly revealed that the Mossad, Israel's famed national security agency, had audaciously penetrated a facility in Tehran where Iran stored highly classified files pertaining to its alleged nuclear weapons programme, stole thousands of documents and smuggled them back into Israel. In November 2020, reports circulated of an equally daring and innovative operation.

Iran's chief nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, known in the Western intelligence circles as the "father" of Iran's nuclear weapons programme, was assassinated near Tehran. Multiple reports have emerged about the execution of the James Bond-style operation, including that it was carried out using a satellite-controlled machine gun using advanced artificial intelligence. All fingers point at Israel as being the only perpetrator with on-the-ground capabilities and a desire to eliminate an individual so instrumental to its archenemy's nuclear programme.

Most recently, in April 2021, a major incident was reported at Iran's underground nuclear facility in the city of Natanz, where it had just announced the launching of advanced centrifuges aimed at accelerating the uranium enrichment process. Western intelligence officials have stated that a large-scale explosion occurred at the facility that is said to have caused considerable damage to the power system that supplies the underground centrifuges at the nuclear plant. Iranian sources have since confirmed that the operation had a significant impact, but Iran's leaders remain defiant, as shown by the announcement days after the operation, that it has now enriched uranium up to 60 percent, bringing it ever closer to the weapons-grade level of 90 percent.

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REVIVAL OF THE IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL

All of these security incidents are occurring amid efforts by the international community to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). At the time of writing, although indirect talks have commenced between the parties as part of multilateral negotiations in Vienna that have facilitated the creation of two parallel working groups, the US and Iran are engaged in a stand-off. Iran is insisting that Washington immediately and irreversibly remove all US-imposed sanctions, including those unrelated to the JCPOA. Meanwhile, despite leaving the accord under former president, Donald Trump, in 2018, the US is demanding that Tehran first return to compliance with its commitments under the JCPOA, which it is currently violating by increasing its stockpile of uranium permitted under the agreement, enriching it to forbidden levels and limiting cooperation with International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors. Israel, alongside some of its newfound Sunni Arab allies in the Gulf, is increasingly concerned that sanctions against Iran will be removed without Tehran altering its perceived destabilising activities in turn. Thus, through its reported operations against Iran, Israel is also sending a message to Washington that it will not remain passive if it considers a renewed agreement to be contrary to its interests. Netanyahu reinforced this position at Israel's annual Yom Hashoah ceremony, stating: "A deal with Iran that threatens us with annihilation will not obligate us."



WHAT'S NEXT?

The situation is more likely to escalate further over the coming months at least, with both parties seeking to project strength and force. This is dictated by various factors. Israel is still in the middle of a political crisis and neither its incumbent leadership nor any political contenders will want to be perceived as weak on security by the Israeli electorate in the event of yet another election. Meanwhile, Iran will hold its presidential election this June. The more “moderate” and pragmatic camp, led by current President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, is under increasing scrutiny in Iran due to the perceived failure of diplomacy with the West. This is illustrated by the extensive sanctions that the US has imposed against Iran, despite Tehran’s stated willingness to curb its nuclear programme through the JCPOA.

This renders it more likely that a hardliner, potentially linked to the IRGC, will be elected this June. This is also because, despite a prolonged economic crisis, Iran has gradually begun to adapt itself to the US sanctions campaign and its economy has proven more resilient than previously thought, with 1.5 percent growth in 2020 despite the pandemic, and projected growth of 2.5 percent in 2021.

An Iranian presidential candidate who rises to power on the basis that Iran can flourish without the removal of Western sanctions will be averse to making any concessions. Time may be running out to strike a deal between the US and Iran, which will add to the urgency to reach an agreement among those individuals who support its revival.

This will also reinforce Israel’s determination to thwart Tehran. Iran is also showing no signs that it is willing to halt its financial and operational support for terrorist proxy groups throughout the Middle East that pose a direct threat to Israel’s interests.

Taken as a whole, expect more reports of audacious covert operations deep within Iran, more attacks at sea against Iranian and Israeli vessels, more Israeli strikes on Iran-linked targets in Syria, and possible militant attacks against Israelis abroad, similar to the March 2021 bombing near the Israeli Embassy in Delhi that is suspected to have been linked to Iran, as Tehran aims to bolster its position and project its defiance in an increasingly volatile region.



Darren Cohen, born and raised in Manchester, made aliyah to Israel in 2014 and served as a combat soldier in the IDF’s Nahal Brigade. He currently works as the regional director of intelligence of the Middle East and North Africa division at a private security firm. Cohen holds an MA in Conflict Resolution from Tel Aviv University, having completed his BA at King’s College London.

FINDING MIRACLES

T H E R E C A N B E

Miracles

DURING OUR BRIEF AND FLEETING YEARS ON EARTH,
WE SHOULD REALISE THAT WE DO NOT MERELY EXIST
FOR A SITUATION; THAT SITUATION EXISTS FOR US.

by RABBI ELI BIRNBAUM

I used to believe in coincidence. When I was young and life stretched out in front of me like a blank canvas of untold possibilities, my adolescent mind marvelled at the vastness of the great unknown and unknowable. But as I grew older, and hopefully a bit wiser, I began to notice that life's most cherished moments take on an entirely different significance with the understanding that they were meant to play themselves out in a certain way. From milestone events to something as inconsequential as a beautiful sunset, to live that moment with the belief that I am meant to be here, now, in this very instant, is exquisite to the point of being electrifying.

Mum taught me that there is no such thing as coincidence. She taught me that our only task during our brief and fleeting years on this earth is to realise that we do not merely exist for a situation; that situation exists for us. What we then choose to do in that situation becomes – by extension – our victory or vice, our success or shame.

Mum taught me this the hard way.

Perhaps the single greatest challenge presented by cancer is the sheer rollercoaster ride it takes you on over a course of months and sometimes years. The horrendously dark pitfalls of a bad diagnosis contrasted by the unrelenting hope brought by new treatments, new methods, new consultants. Up and down. Forwards and backwards. Belief and disbelief. The journey doesn't just defy faith in God; it slowly but surely erodes faith in all those around you and then, finally, it defies faith in self.

Not mum. From the day of her first diagnosis to the moment she drew her last breath, her journey was less a rollercoaster and more a relentless incline to a summit only she could see, her faith and hope increasing even as her health and strength faded.

She died on the seventh day of Pesach. By a distance her favourite festival, it was a day whose atmosphere she was desperate to breathe one last time. According to tradition, the seventh (and last, if you're in Israel) day of Pesach commemorates the great miracle at the Red Sea when the waters split and the Israelites crossed through on dry land, witnessing the final demise of their Egyptian overlords. It was a moment in time when the entire Jewish people joined together in grateful song in celebration of their redemption.

But all was not as simple as it now seems.

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**PERHAPS THE SINGLE
GREATEST CHALLENGE
PRESENTED BY
CANCER IS THE SHEER
ROLLERCOASTER RIDE IT
TAKES YOU ON OVER A
COURSE OF MONTHS AND
SOMETIMES YEARS.**

Pinned in by the water on one side and Pharaoh's enraged army on the other, the people momentarily give in to despair. “Was there a lack of graves in Egypt,” they asked Moses, “that you have taken us to the desert to die?” The commentaries puzzle over an intriguing question: Having just seen the cataclysm of the ten plagues first-hand, what were they so nervous about? Couldn't they taste the grand finale on the sea breeze?

Answers to this question vary. I'd like to suggest my own. Why? Because I think mum would have appreciated it. During the plagues, the Israelites remained almost entirely passive, standing gratefully but idly by as God meted out justice on Pharaoh and his retinue of taskmasters. Save for gathering Egypt's treasures during the plague of darkness at Moses' behest, they really didn't do all that much other than watch the drama unfold. In other words, they existed for the situation.

At the Red Sea, things changed entirely. Pay close attention to one of the most surprising exchanges in all of Scripture:

“And Moses replied to the people: ‘Stand firm and watch God's salvation that He will do for you!’”

“And God said to Moses: ‘Why do you cry out to me? Speak to the Israelites and let them journey forwards!’”

Moses expects the miracle at the sea to unfold in the same manner as the miracles in Egypt. God says otherwise. This time, the people cannot simply exist for the situation. The situation will exist for them. But to bring it into existence, they must embrace it. They must journey forwards. Only then will the sea split.

WHY DID THE WOMEN LEAVE EGYPT CARRYING MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS?

THE ANSWER IS SIMPLE: THESE RIGHTEOUS
WOMEN LEFT EGYPT EXPECTING THE SEA TO SPLIT.

Many, if not most, of the Israelites were unprepared for this switch in perspective. Not the women.

“And Miriam the prophetess, Aharon’s sister, took the tambourine in her hand and went out with all of the women [who also had] drums and tambourines.”

Here, the commentaries ask the obvious: Why did the women leave Egypt carrying musical instruments? Their answer is simple: These righteous women left Egypt expecting the sea to split. And because they left with that expectation, because they fully trusted that precisely the necessary situation would be brought into existence for them at precisely the right time and not a moment sooner, they came prepared. Prepared to embrace it. Prepared to sing.

Mum’s last online order, made just a few days before she was too weak to hold her phone, was for a tambourine. Through five years and more of ups and downs, steps forward and backward, moments of belief and disbelief, she never took her eyes off of that summit, never wavered from her faith that a situation may yet be brought into existence for her. And when that miraculous moment came, she wanted to be well prepared for its arrival.

She returned her soul shortly before daybreak on seventh day Pesach. The moment which, according to the Torah, the Israelites crossed over safely and the waters came crashing back down, drowning their adversaries.

And in that moment – because they embraced it, because they owned it, because they made it theirs, the people sang.

During the *shiva*, quite a few people expressed their regret that cancer had ‘beaten’ mum. I largely nodded along numbly. But as I reflect back on her life, I wonder if perhaps the exact opposite holds true. Even though she suffered greatly and left us at a relatively young age... still, I wonder. Perhaps she beat cancer. That nightmare of an illness, casting its shadow over the modern world with all its technology and knowledge. Cancer defies faith in God, faith in others and – most tragically – faith in self.

Mum defied cancer.

And as she struggled tall and proud up that relentless incline, striving for a summit only she could see and only she believed in, she took all of us with her. And we too glimpsed that summit, if only for a brief and fleeting moment. And we saw, stretched out in front of us the filled canvas of her life and ours. And even though that tambourine never made it out of the cellophane wrapping, we knew that mum had played it. She’d been playing it for years, we just couldn’t see or hear. And in that moment, because she had taught us how to embrace it and make it our own, we sang.



Rabbi Eli Birnbaum studied in Talmudic College in Israel for six years before attaining Rabbinic Ordination after two years in the Jerusalem Kollel. During this time, Rabbi Birnbaum completed a BSc in Criminology & Social Psychology. Together with his wife Naomi, Rabbi Birnbaum moved back to London to take up a position in the JLE’s campus department, where he set up the infrastructure for regular Lunch & Learns across London’s major campuses, as well as creating the ‘Genesis+’ programme, aimed at older students and post-graduates. He is now the Director of Education at Aish UK.



Beyond the money...
the journey starts here

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SCHOOL OF LIFE



L E S S O N S F R O M

My grandfather

by AVITAL MENAHEM

The author's grandfather, pictured bottom right, before the war

TOTAL COMMITMENT TO LIVING AS A JEW, THROUGH THE HOLOCAUST AND BEYOND.

Kapuvár, a small town in north-west Hungary, was home to my grandfather until the summer of 1944, when he was forced out – along with his parents, three of his five siblings and the entire Jewish community – to a ghetto in the neighbouring city of Sopron. After a few bewildering weeks in the makeshift ghetto, formerly an outdoor brick factory, my grandfather was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. He arrived shortly after his 14th birthday and his disclosure of this directly to the selecting officer (he was later told that it was Dr Josef Mengele) was most likely the reason my grandfather was selected to live.^[1] With many miracles along the way, my dear grandfather was liberated from Althamer, a small sub-camp of Birkenau, by the Russian army in January 1945.

Fast forward many years to when I was about seven or eight years old, when I first heard about the Holocaust. I remember the exact spot I was standing in my grandparents' dining room for a regular Shabbat lunch. There was some talk of these mysterious 'showers' which would produce a poisonous substance called 'gas' instead of water. My next memory is of my mother sharing that her grandparents had died 'up the chimneys of Auschwitz'. I must have been learning about the chimney sweepers in Victorian England, because I recall the mental image of my great-grandparents suffocating while they were cleaning chimneys. I was too young to piece all this information together and when I reflect on these fragments of memories, it reinforces the absurdity of the Holocaust, as the world lost total order.

I'd like to distil the four main lessons that I have learnt from my grandfather. After the war, he returned to his hometown and was reunited with his sister, who had also survived Auschwitz, and three brothers, one of whom had been imprisoned in Auschwitz alongside my grandfather, and the other two who had been conscripted to Hungarian Forced Labour. His brothers restored the town's *mikveh* (ritual bath) and in the same year, my grandfather's sister finally married her fiancé from pre-Auschwitz life. In the difficult years that followed, my grandfather's older brothers also married, as if to say that their six months of horror

had been but a mere interruption to their life.

However, in the immediate aftermath of the war, his surviving family focused their energy on rebuilding their parents' grocery business. Although my grandfather enjoyed contributing to the business, after only a short while, his brother pushed him to continue his Yeshiva studies as he felt that my grandfather was too young for business and his time was better spent learning.

My grandfather had lost his younger brother, his parents and much of his community had been murdered, yet less than a year after his arrival in Auschwitz, he had returned to his schooling while his brothers and sister also continued their own life trajectories. This is the first lesson that I take. There is only so much time that one can spend wallowing in self-pity, which my grandfather and every Holocaust survivor had, and still do have, every right to do. But it is a futile exercise and as my grandfather says: "One must rise after mourning." He wanted to rebuild his life and he felt that the only revenge after the Holocaust was to continue, undefeated and infinitely stronger.

When my grandfather speaks about his experience, he always tries to bring an element of humour to it. With hindsight, he can comment on the irony of his Soviet liberators asking the emaciated survivors for food, to which he shares his timeless response: "So I told them, 'Sorry, you have the wrong address,'" and he refuses to take himself so seriously, living with the awareness that he is not directing anything. This is the second lesson: don't take life too seriously. Look on the lighter side, laugh, and – crucially – relinquish control.

The third lesson might be controversial. In the blistering winter of 1944, my grandfather contracted typhus. He was nursed back to health by a Jewish doctor in the camp's hospital (if it can be called that). Once he had recovered his full health, he chose to stay in the hospital as conditions there were far better than in the main camp. He received extra rations, a bed of his own and it was warm. His time was spent assisting the doctor with taking blood samples and other medical tasks.

^[1] At some point in 1944, due to the labour shortage, children aged 14 and older were permitted to be registered at the camp. Prior to this, children of this age would have immediately been sent to the gas chambers. <http://auschwitz.org/en/history/fate-of-children/jewish-children> (accessed 27/02/20)



The author and her grandfather, image credit: Leivi Saltman

One day, he was asked by the Jewish doctor whether he would be willing to donate his blood to the German army since his blood had developed antibodies that could help the soldiers combat typhus. My grandfather was taken aback by this 'request' and asked whether he had a choice. "Officially, you do. But I would not recommend refusing," warned the doctor. So my grandfather rolled up his sleeve and donated his blood. This incident passed with little attention until a booted SS officer strode through the hospital barracks and called out for my grandfather. Presenting some sort of salami-wurst, he thanked my grandfather for his contribution to the welfare of German soldiers fighting on the frontline.

When my grandfather retells this part of his story, I still notice the subtle shake of his head with disbelief, as if to say that even to this day, he is still bewildered by how unbelievably wicked one can be, while still retaining some semblance of right and wrong and the importance of showing gratitude. He always makes sure to mention this point, along with the principle: 'Do not judge your fellow man until you have reached his place.' (*Ethics of the Fathers*, 2:4)

The gas chambers of Auschwitz ceased to operate in November 1944, until they were dismantled in January 1945. Before the cessation of gassing, however, the Nazis subjected the Jews to a relentless series of selections. It was clear that they could not win the war against the Allies, but they wanted to win the war against the Jews, so they maximised capacity and increased the number of selections. These selections were all timed around the High Holy Days in a cruel attempt to humiliate and dishearten the prisoners.

Before one such selection, my grandfather's brother, Moshe z'tl, counselled my grandfather that should he be selected,

there was a certain point at which he should recite the *Shema* prayer. When my grandfather retells this, the emotion in his voice is palpable, as he repeats what he answered his brother: "But I do not want to die *Al Kiddush HaShem*, I want to LIVE *Al Kiddush HaShem*." My grandfather had an innate understanding of a key belief in Judaism: We value life above all else.

The *Gemara* in *Brachot* 61b relates how Rabbi Akiva recited *Shema* at the time of his execution by the Romans: *As they were cruelly raking his flesh with iron combs, he was uttering the words of Shema indicating his acceptance of the yoke of Heaven. His students observed his behaviour and asked: "Our teacher, even now, as you suffer, you recite Shema?"*

He replied: "All my days I have been troubled by the verse [in the Shema] 'with all your soul', which I understand to mean that even if God takes your soul. I asked myself 'when will I have the opportunity to fulfil this verse? Now that it is here, shall I not fulfil it?'" He prolonged his uttering of the word 'One' until his soul left his body. A voice descended from heaven and pronounced: "Happy are you, Rabbi Akiva, that your soul left your body as you uttered 'One'."

Only when Rabbi Akiva was left with no choice did he accept the opportunity and sought to die *Al Kiddush HaShem*. It is only a *mitzvah* when forced on us. Even in the darkest moments, my grandfather deeply understood this and was committed to living his life as a Jew, rather than be murdered for it.

Despite the adversity he has faced throughout his life, my grandfather has consistently clung to his belief. This fact has always inspired me and taught me a more general lesson about the importance of having values and not compromising them when we encounter challenges.



Ever since Avital Menahem was a teenager, she has been interested in Holocaust education. Encouraged by her grandfather, she has pursued this and is involved in Generation2Generation (G2G), an organisation that trains people to deliver presentations to different groups about their Holocaust surviving relative. Menahem's day job is in Norwood's marketing team. She is interested in health and fitness and loves to read and write.



TWINNING PROJECT

Make your Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah more meaningful by twinning it with a young victim of the Holocaust who tragically was unable to celebrate this milestone in Jewish life.



The photo above is of twins, Izabel and Solly Marton who came from Romania, both died at Auschwitz. They must never be forgotten.

- Research details of the family of your 'twin'
- Research the community they came from
- Learn about their experiences during the Holocaust
- Receive a special certificate from Yad Vashem in Jerusalem

Yad Vashem UK Foundation offers a Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah Twinning programme to enrich your child's life cycle experience by memorialising a victim of the Holocaust who did not have the privilege of such a celebration.

Researchers at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem will endeavour to find a connection which your child could most relate to, perhaps a child with the same name, or someone who came from the same town or area where their family originated.

Family members are encouraged to use the Page of Testimony to learn as much as they can about the history of the child who they are commemorating. To facilitate this we send a study guide together with the Page of Testimony and certificate detailing a list of resources on various websites, and books easily found in most libraries.

Yad Vashem Jerusalem also offers a Twinning programme. This consists of a private guided tour which is tailored to your specific requirements and family and which takes the ages of the children, family history and the interests of the Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah child into account. This tour concludes with a visit to the Hall of Names where the Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah child is introduced to The Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names and is given a certificate acknowledging participation in the programme with the details of the Holocaust victim who they have chosen to commemorate.

FOR FURTHER DETAILS PLEASE CONTACT:

Yad Vashem UK Foundation
46 Albert Road
London NW4 2SG
Charity number: 1099659

Phone: 020 8187 9881
Email: office@yadvashem.org.uk

www.yadvashem.org.uk
www.guardianofthemory.org

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OF THE FATHERS*, THE WORLD STANDS ON THREE THINGS:
ONE OF THESE IS THE PILLAR OF LOVING-KINDNESS.

WE LOOK AT THREE ORGANISATIONS
MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE TIME
OF CORONA





JTEEN ENCOURAGES TEENS TO REACH OUT

TEENAGERS CAN CALL IN ANONYMOUSLY AND SPEAK TO TRAINED VOLUNTEER COUNSELLORS AND QUALIFIED THERAPISTS ABOUT THEIR EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES.

by SHIRA DRUION



COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on our world and left many in very challenging situations. But while the ropes were unravelling, the living angels in our community came together to ensure that nobody would be left alone. Here we showcase three magnificent organisations that have been at the helm of the community, namely Work Avenue, Jteen and GIFT. They deserve a round of applause for their heroic feats, which they accomplished against the odds.

Jacob Barr, psychotherapist, chats to Shira Druion about the new helpline for Jewish teenagers.

1 HOW DO YOU THINK THIS PANDEMIC HAS AFFECTED TEENAGERS?

I think it's fair to say that pretty much most people have been affected by coronavirus. Teens are a vulnerable age group due to the changes, stresses they face anyway, and thus the extra impact of the coronavirus has hit them very hard. The pressures and stress from being at home for an extended period of time, less socialising, coping with parents and siblings alongside changes in methods of learning and school, have meant that many teens have suffered enormously during COVID. The NHS has never seen a greater demand on those needing to access psychological health and especially among teens. The uncertainty that the world has been in for the past year has caused many of those who were trying to cope with mental health problems like anxiety and low mood to spiral out of control.

2 WHY DID YOU START JTEEN?

We planned on starting Jteen long before the coronavirus. As a psychotherapist seeing teens from across the community, I have always felt that too many teens are not reaching out for help, and even when they do, very often there is no help available. A few of us who saw the need reached out to John Cameron OBE (former head of NSPCC/Childline) to see if he felt that the existing services were being used by Jewish teens. He confirmed our suspicions that Childline was not seeing enough Jewish teens accessing their service compared to the rest of the population. So strong was his support for us to open our own community helpline that he has been instrumental in advising us and training our volunteer counsellors. Armed with renewed conviction, plans to set up a teen helpline began, and once COVID-19 broke out,

we accelerated the process so that we could be there at this vital time of need. We have some great people working at Jteen. Riki Greenberg has much experience in the charity sector and is Jteen's manager; and Ari Leaman, a social worker with over 20 years' experience working with teens, is our lead safeguarding officer. Jteen also has a great team of trustees, headed by my brother Avi Barr.

3 HOW DOES THE ORGANISATION SEEK TO HELP TEENAGERS?

We are there every night from 6pm-midnight. Teens (13-20) can text in, completely anonymously, as we can't see their number and won't ask for names. This is fundamental for a community service where there is still a lot of stigma around mental health. Our trained volunteer counsellors and qualified therapists are there to help the teens in whatever emotional challenges they face. We are not *just* a crisis helpline, we are an emotional well-being support service, so teens can message in with whatever is bothering them, no matter how big or small. We will offer non-judgmental support and help the teen figure out ways that they can feel better. Sometimes we will signpost them to a more appropriate resource or service. We even have the option of offering a few sessions of phone therapy with one of our Jteen therapists if necessary.

4 HAVE YOU FOUND THAT TEENS HAVE BEEN RESPONSIVE?

The interest and enthusiasm has been unbelievably positive. Teens have reached out when they are in their darkest places, knowing that there is a service that understands them, yet at the same time completely protects their privacy. Thus far, we have had over 300 contacts in just over three months. But there are still many teens who are reluctant and are uncomfortable sharing their emotional challenges with anyone. So our work has only just begun.

5 DID SOMETHING LIKE THIS EXIST PRIOR TO THIS?

There are other helplines available, like Childline, and schools more recently have tried to incorporate mental health programmes and awareness, but there are still far too many teenagers who struggle to reach out to parents or teachers. Jteen has therefore also launched Jteen Parents and will be having regular events with experts able to assist parents in coping with the various parental challenges they face, as well as to provide them with tools to help their teens overcome some of their mental health issues. Jteen Educate is another new programme, where our

aim is to engage teens directly within schools, so as to help them feel more confident in managing their own feelings and emotions.

6 HOW DOES A SUPPORT LINE HELP TEENAGERS TO DEAL WITH THEIR CHALLENGES?

A support line enables teens to share and express – completely anonymously and confidentially – what is causing them worry, distress or a low mood. Knowing that they will be receiving non-judgemental support from our trained volunteer counsellors and therapists can be, in itself, liberating for someone who has never been able to do that. It enables teens to process what are often confusing emotions. Our counsellors are trained to empower and explore with the teen different solutions and approaches for their problems. Sometimes they will be signposted to another service or resource that could help them effectively.

7 THE MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS IS AT A CRITICAL JUNCTION. DO YOU THINK WE ARE MAKING INROADS IN NORMALISING THE ISSUES, COMPARED TO WHEN THEY WERE MORE TABOO?

COVID-19 has only magnified what we have always known. Mental health is real and affects everyone, no matter what culture or upbringing. The world has taken great strides in recent years in reducing the taboo and celebrities have helped by being frank about their own emotional difficulties. However, within communities the challenge is greater. The need to “keep up with the Joneses” to maintain this pedigree status unfortunately means that so many issues are still being ignored and buried in the hope that they will just “go away”. As we all know, they don’t go away and instead only get worse. I was recently involved with a teen who was suffering from an eating disorder. She had to be admitted to hospital because her life was at risk. Most tragic was that I had advised the parents some years prior that their daughter had all the signs of an early-onset eating disorder, but they couldn’t come to terms with the fact that someone from their “picture perfect family” needed psychological help. So yes, we are making progress in breaking down the taboos, but there is still so much more we have to do as a community.

8 SINCE YOU HAVE NOW SEEN FIRST-HAND WHAT JEWISH TEENAGERS ARE STRUGGLING WITH, HAVE YOU BEEN SHOCKED AT ALL?

Our helpline is there for all teenagers, regardless of how big the issues are, and so many teens have asked for help dealing with friends and parents. From the data we have gathered, it is anxiety – which includes stress, panic and worry – that is affecting teens most. Perhaps most disturbingly are the incidences of self-harm among predominantly females, but also males. This is not a new phenomenon, but never has the issue been as widespread as today. Self-harm is not necessarily always a risk to life, but it is a serious issue if left untreated. I believe far more understanding and awareness is required within schools on this increasingly worrying trend, which is undoubtedly affecting many within our educational institutions.

POSITIVE TEEN FEEDBACK

“I was super nervous to message in, but you ended up being so accepting and understanding. Thank you so much for giving me so much time!”

“I really think Jteen and what you are all doing is amazing. Thank you for what you are doing for all us teenagers in the community. It gives me strength to know that there are Jewish people who care about what we are going through.”

SOME EXAMPLES OF TEXTS THAT JTEEN HAS RECEIVED

“I’ve been feeling really down this week and so overwhelmed, especially now that school is restarting. I have exams coming up and I just want to hide away from everything. What should I do?? Please help.”

“Hello. I feel so alone and rejected, please help me. My friends keep excluding me and don’t want to hang out with me at night. I don’t know how to deal with this, but I can’t carry on being by myself the whole time!”



Shira Druon obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree in English, psychology and education. She then trained as a speech and drama teacher through the Trinity College of London. She is an experienced journalist, the former editor of YALLA magazine and the executive editor of Perspectives, the magazine of Aish UK. She has been an educator for many years, teaching students from nursery through to university, where she lectured on communication and writing skills. She now teaches English and runs her own drama company called Dramatix, where she teaches a broad age range of students. Druon is passionate about women's education. She gives a weekly *parsha shiur*, as well as other *shiurim*, and runs women's programmes in the community.

GENERATING EMPLOYMENT, GROWING BUSINESS

WORK AVENUE GENERATING EMPLOYMENT, OR WAGE, AIMS TO TRAIN THOSE SEEKING WORK IN KEY DISCIPLINES TO MATCH THE AREAS IN WHICH SMALL BUSINESSES NEED HELP.

Work Avenue, the Jewish community's leading employment and business support organisation, has seen a demonstrable increase in the number of people reaching out to them, needing support to earn a living.

Many of the people who have approached Work Avenue in recent months have been casualties of the coronavirus pandemic. Jobs have been lost, people have been on furlough for many months and businesses have literally had to shut down overnight.

Work Avenue's experienced, caring and professional advisers work tirelessly with clients to help them get back into the world of work. A perennial problem was once again at the forefront of everyone's minds. Those wishing to change jobs or retrain for a new sector have little chance of entering the job market when vacancies are scarce and when they bring no experience with them.

Work Avenue knew that a solution to this problem was needed to cut through this cycle, and in the beginning of 2021, WAGE – Work Avenue's first ever social enterprise – was launched.

WAGE (which stands for Work Avenue Generating Employment) aims to both generate employment and grow businesses by training those seeking work in key disciplines to match the areas that small businesses require help in, so they too can grow and develop.

The first 75 WAGE members who have been accepted onto this exciting new programme have begun their heavily subsidised training courses in relevant sectors, including: bookkeeping, graphic design, IT/admin, digital marketing, web design, sales and customer service. Once trained and fully competent in their field, they will be offered crucial paid work experience in that field. They will be paired with an experienced mentor to guide and support them through. Businesses will be able to utilise this bank of fully trained WAGE members to work on individual projects in an affordable and timely way, with the knowledge that their mentor is there to oversee and add value to the work they produce.



Although many of the courses have started, there are still a few places available on those courses yet to start, namely IT/admin and customer service, which are set to commence in late May and June.

WAGE members have access to all of Work Avenue's employment advice and guidance, events and courses and all this, together with new skills and paid, relevant work experience, will see them succeed when searching for a permanent role. Additionally, the businesses that are being supported by WAGE can benefit from the full gamut of Work Avenue's business support services to help them grow and prosper too.

Jeremy Bohn, hired this year as the director of WAGE, said: "WAGE is a progression for Work Avenue and takes the advice and support we already give to the next level. By creating this micro-economy for both our business and employment clients, WAGE is generating a virtuous circle where everyone wins. The idea of a mentor system is something unique to WAGE and, as well as giving quality assurance to the business, it helps retain both the charity and community feel of the work we do. I welcome contact from experienced people who would like to give something back to the community in a mentoring capacity – they can email me on jeremy@theworkavenue.org.uk."



For businesses looking to find out more about how WAGE can help them grow, please visit www.theworkavenue.org.uk/wage

PULLING TOGETHER IN A PANDEMIC

Shira Joseph from Gift with food parcels for recipients



THE **GIFT** OF GIVING

GIFT VOLUNTEERS HAVE COMPLETED OVER 7 000
SHOPPING AND PRESCRIPTION REQUESTS FOR THOSE
UNABLE TO DO THEIR OWN SHOPPING DURING THE
COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

by SHIRA JOSEPH

PEOPLE WEREN'T JUST
OFFERING EMPTY
GESTURES OF HELP...
THEY WERE JUMPING AT
THE CHANCE TO HELP.

Thinking back to Sunday, 15 March 2020. There was a strange atmosphere in the air, the pandemic had been declared, a lockdown was imminent, and there were videos of empty shelves and panic buying being shared on social media.

That morning, I received a phone call from Kosher Kingdom explaining that they had received many enquiries from elderly people unable to do their own shopping. Would we, GIFT, be able to find volunteers to shop for them? I said 'of course' without knowing what was to come.

That afternoon at a bat mitzvah with Rabbi Sandor Milun, GIFT's managing director, and Keren Pinhas, we decided to create a WhatsApp group of volunteers willing to help with shopping requests for those shielding. We created the group and sent a message to our contacts. I was secretly hoping we'd have a minimum of 50 people join the group. The next moment we saw people joining non-stop. Within minutes, the first WhatsApp group was full. Within a few hours, we had over 1 000 people in our four groups ready to help those who needed it. Watching our community pulling together so quickly meant the feelings of uncertainty and fear that I'd experienced that morning were suddenly replaced with pride and awe.

The next day, the calls began... and it was relentless.

Elderly people who had no support system, so afraid of what was coming and how they would cope. When we told them we had people who could help, callers had a similar reaction – they were overwhelmed with emotion at the kindness of strangers. Every time we posted a request on the group, it was sorted within minutes. People weren't just offering empty gestures of help... they were jumping at the chance to help.

One call on the first day stood out for me. It came from a panicked elderly man in his 90s who normally visited the local greengrocers on Tuesdays, but was now shielding. "No problem," I reassured him, "we can find a volunteer to do this shop for you." He then started to cry and explained that there *was* a problem – he has dementia and doesn't know the names of the fruit and vegetables he needs.

We matched him up with an incredibly patient volunteer who played a game of 'guess the vegetable' with him, and the next day his shopping was dropped off outside his door.

The volunteer has been doing his shopping regularly since that day and the elderly man recently told me she is "like a granddaughter" to him.

Seeing these amazing friendships created and built during this pandemic has been such a light in the darkness. GIFT volunteers have completed over 7 000 shopping and prescription requests from the WhatsApp groups, but in reality, the kindness has gone so much further; regular befriending phone calls, weekly shops, one 99-year-old man has been getting regular Netflix recommendations from his volunteers!

A few days after lockdown was announced, we posted a request for someone to write cards to an elderly lady who was lonely. This became the inspiration and catalyst for the 'Cards of Care' initiative, which has seen over 12 000 cards written to those who are lonely. A request for a second-hand laptop turned into an amazing family opening their house to collect, restore and distribute quality second-hand technology, toys and bikes – amounting to £79 000 worth of items distributed.

Seeing the amazing couple who instigated the GIFT NHSOS project giving packages to the NHS or seeing over 500 teenagers and university students giving up an hour a week to tutor someone through the GIFT virtual tutoring project – these acts of giving have really stood out despite all the pain and challenges of the pandemic.

Unfortunately, the GIFT Foodbank has seen a 40% increase in new referrals. We know that there are many challenges that will lie ahead in the aftermath of COVID-19. However, just like all the things that have become the 'new normal': wearing masks, sanitising our hands, etc., if we make *giving* the 'new normal', we can make a lasting difference to the lives of so many.



Shira Joseph has been working at GIFT for almost seven years and is currently the high schools and volunteer manager. Joseph is extremely passionate about social action and Jewish education, having worked and volunteered for various schools and organisations. GIFT is the perfect platform to combine the two.



ESTHER TAYLOR'S

10 DESIGN

Commandments



THE FABULOUS ESTHER TAYLOR SHARES HER
ADVICE ON HOW TO CREATE BEAUTIFUL SPACES.



@esthertaylor design

When you see my work on Instagram, you may think it's easy to replicate. But it's not just the finishings or paint colours I choose. It's so much more than that.

Here are my ten design commandments. I use these to transform any size space into being Esther-Taylor-Design-level fabulous!

1 DEFINITIVE STYLE IS KEY

It is important to embrace new and current trends while still keeping it 'you'. Take the time to research different styles and design concepts; you can do this by looking through books, magazines, Instagram, Pinterest. There are so many avenues for you to explore, but once you have chosen an aesthetic, it is important to commit to it, otherwise you will find yourself drifting and becoming indecisive.

2 FOCAL POINT

Every project needs a starting point – what is the emphasis of that space? What are the key features you want to highlight and want the eye to be drawn to when entering the space?

3 BALANCE AND ALIGNMENT

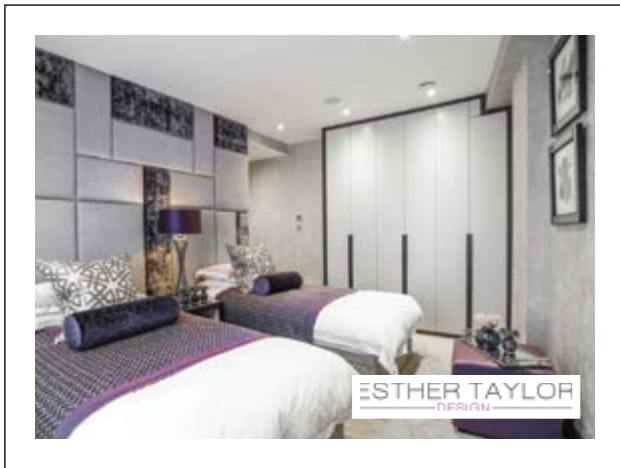
Balance and alignment are important for a space to look cohesive. This does not mean that everything has to be symmetrical – although the symmetrical aesthetic is a more simple way to create balance and some prefer this look. You can also achieve balance through an asymmetrical aesthetic – for example, this can be done by placing a shorter, wider object beside a taller one. Without balance, the viewer's eye cannot run through the space smoothly.

4 CONTRAST

Contrast is what makes a design truly pop. This is your chance to introduce bright and bold colours. If you are not one for colour and enjoy many shades of grey, contrast can still be achieved by playing with different hues and shades of one specific colour.

5 REPETITION

By starting with three main base colours or patterns, you will find that repeating elements of these patterns or colours is what really ties a design together. Just little pops of that same colour throughout a room – which, for example, can be achieved through soft furnishing such as cushions, throws and curtains, or even picked up in artwork and ornaments.





6 PERSPECTIVE

Playing with perspective is a really clever and fun way to enhance a space. The three lines of sight are: verticals, horizontals and diagonals. You might find that you want to emphasise one of these lines of sight throughout your design – horizontal lines tend to be more calming and restful, whereas vertical lines give an effect of grandeur and space. You can even use straight lines or curved lines to create different moods. Curved lines tend to be softer, calmer and more organic.

7 MOVEMENT

Movement is important to consider, as you want to design each space with a journey in mind. You have to think – what is the story that you want to create when someone enters the space? Where do you want their eyes to go first and where do you want them to end up?

8 WHITE SPACE

White space or negative space is something that a good designer takes into consideration. It is important to know where and when to stop, because sometimes less is more. Over-cluttering a space with objects and busy patterns or colour can create a chaotic environment, which is the opposite of what you are trying to achieve. Negative space can be used in really creative ways and it is always something to consider when planning and designing.

9 TOUCH IT

Physical samples are my best friend. It is so important to always make sure you look at physical samples rather than pictures – this way, you can be sure that all the colours, patterns and textures will work together and you are seeing an accurate representation of the product.



10 FUNCTION, FUNCTION, FUNCTION

The most important element of design is that whatever I design has to be functional and convenient for everyday life.

Designing The Ultimate Home Office

I have always worked out of a home office, as I've always found it is essential to striking that perfect work-life balance. I'm there for the kids when they come home from school, yet I'm able to finish the work day.

Because of the pandemic, everyone else is finally cottoning on to how useful a beautiful home office can be. I'm going to share my secrets for how to make it into the ultimate practical space that is enjoyable too.



Comfort and set-up

The first and probably most important point is to get yourself a comfortable chair – this is the foundation of being able to work comfortably and productively. It is worth spending a little extra on a chair that can provide you with comfort and good back support. If your work is heavily based on the computer, it is also worth investing in a large or second monitor just to make it that bit easier for you, rather than having to flick between different documents.

Another thing to consider is that if you suffer from back pain or prefer a more active lifestyle, you can go for a standing desk. These can usually be adjusted to any height for your convenience, and is a great way to give yourself a break from sitting in one spot all day long.

Colour

A work space doesn't have to be boring. You can still add in bright and happy colours to keep your mind active and brighten your mood. A great way to do this is with plants, flowers and candles – this creates a calming environment and separates your home from a boring office aesthetic. Remember, this is your home – you can work in the environment you choose.



Lighting and electric

It is important to factor in electrics and wiring. No one likes tangled up cables and no sockets where they need them, so if you are planning on building a home office (or any space), it is important to make sure you have enough sockets in convenient places. If you already have sockets positioned in a room that cannot be moved, then consider ways in which you can tie up your loose cables neatly – there are some inexpensive solutions on Amazon.

Try to get as much natural light as you can in your home, because, according to research, those who get more natural light sleep better than those who don't! Plus, natural light just feels so much better than artificial light, so make sure to position yourself in a well-lit room. Ambient lighting is essential for working in the evening when there is no or limited natural light. Try and go for 'warm' tone lighting rather than 'bright white', as the bright white can be a bit harsh on your eyes, especially when looking at a computer screen all day.

Get some office essentials for your desk, such as pens, pencils, highlighters, Post-it notes, a stapler, etc. You can find some nice desk tidy units which have compartments for all of your stationery; this also helps to keep it all in order. It is important to keep your home office neat, as a tidy area will help you to stay more productive and concentrate more on your work and daily tasks.



Born and raised in London, Esther Taylor attended the Chelsea School of Design, building on her passion. While Taylor's distinct style shines through each project, her adaptable approach enables her to work seamlessly across a wide spectrum of properties and developments, locally and across London.



@esthertaylordesign

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A large circular graphic containing a close-up image of a hand holding a smartphone. The hand is positioned as if about to interact with the screen. Overlaid on this image is the main title of the article in a large, white, sans-serif font.

Speaking into the next millennium

THE RISE OF CLUBHOUSE AND THE IMMUTABLE
SPIRIT OF HUMAN CONNECTION.

by YAAKOV LEHMAN

ANIMALS THAT DANCE

“They dance?”

My seven-year-old daughter began to digest the meaning of what her Abba just said.

“Really, the bees actually dance. That’s how they tell each other where the food’s at.”

She looked on curiously.

“Come, I’ll show you,” I beckoned, pulling up the requisite YouTube clip. “The waggle dance. It’s one of the most advanced forms of communication in the animal kingdom.”

This sweet moment of quarantine parenting allowed me to reflect on one of the genuine wonders of creation. Bees communicate the distance and direction of nectar through an elaborate dance ritual. Pretty impressive.

But nothing in comparison to the complexity found within another system of interspecies communication. Nothing in comparison whatsoever.

A NOVEL COMPLEXITY

Humans are unique among all other phenomena in the known universe. While the precise point of departure from all other living species is the subject of immense philosophical debate, one thing is clear:

We are big time schmoozers.

Anthropologists peg the inception of language as the most transformative technology shaping the trajectory of our species. Speech allowed humans to co-operate. It enabled them to co-ordinate action across both distance and time. This synergistic fusion of collective labour yielded seemingly magical results. Cities, agriculture and technology – all brought about by the novel introduction of language as a means of transferring information between the species.

This is all well and obvious to those equipped with a Torah lens of the world. As we know from Genesis, speech is the very creative act through which the universe was conceived. God speaks the world into being, animating physical reality

and its incumbent material essence through the ethereal power of the word.

“And God said let there be light.” And just like that, “there was light”.

“And God said it is good.” With this utterance, moral fabric is thus woven into the atmospheric substrate of planet Earth.

The capacity of humans to communicate through speech hearkens to our very purpose as humans, properly defined as those created in *Bitzelem Elokim* – in the image of God.

When our faculty of speech is healthy, we live up to our potential as nearly God-like autonomous moral agents, engendering system-wide improvements for all lifeforms inhabiting the universe. When our faculty of speech is weak, we inevitably fall short in our mission as beacons of progress. The light we are to shine onto the nations of the world is cast dim.

The Kabbalah speaks of these two levels of relationship as a “face-to-face” vis-a-vis “back-to-back” connection.

Mount Sinai is the quintessential face-to-face experience. Pharaoh – the etymological correspondent of the back of the neck (*Oreph*), is the archetypal motif of disconnection.

So, let’s be frank. How dim has it gotten?

TOWER OF TECHNO-BABBLE

When a young entrepreneur named Jack Dorsey typed out the words: “just setting up my twttr” in 2006, he could not have possibly understood the significance this short phrase would hold in the annals of human history (recently minted into the blockchain as an ‘NFT’, this first of all tweets recently sold for a \$2.9 million). Dorsey’s new micro-blogging platform Twitter would forever transform the way our species communicates with each other.

Twitter can list myriad virtues in its mere decade-and-a-half of existence. The litany includes spurning revolutions against egregious despots, knighting a new cadre of citizen journalists, and countless campaigns to hold individuals and businesses accountable for reprehensible actions.

So far, so good.

Yet Twitter simultaneously left a noxious stream of societal debasement in its wake. The primary mode of public expression for millions would hereby be confined to 180 characters (later raised to 240). This hyper-short form of communication is suited for cheap shots. Less so for intelligent discourse.

Even more destructive has been the backhanded dynamic of lateral communication. Imagine two people stake out divergent opinions on a given social topic (hey, it could happen). Instead of engaging in a productive dialogue, they now merely talk the proverbial smack by simply “re-tweeting” each other’s statements with requisite snark and circumstance. The non-parity of discourse provides great fodder for the ideological echo chambers represented by each parties’ followers. Again, less so for intelligent discourse.

Twitter’s woes are paralleled in similar issues native to competing media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Authenticity, nuance, vulnerability, shame and that most important reflexive aspect of speech – listening – are not rewarded on social media. In fact, it’s just the opposite.

The more polarising the rhetoric, the more engagement it gets. The “omniscient” algorithm takes note, serving the post to more and more people. Our neural circuitry floods the synaptic cleft with dopamine (our ‘feel-good’ neurotransmitter) with each ensuing like, view or share. And thus we have established a biotechnologically reinforced behavioural feedback loop. Toxic speech has gone nuclear.

FREE SPEECH NOW

At the outset of our once-in-a-century global pandemic, two Silicon Valley entrepreneurs stealthily launched a beta-version of their new app called Clubhouse. Billed as a “drop-in audio” social network, voice-only chat rooms would counter the prevailing *weltanschauung* of social media. Clubhouse would be hyper-focused on one singular functionality – facilitating live conversation. No posts, no messages, memes, pokes, likes, stories. Just unbridled speech.



And here’s the kicker. This speech would leave no trace. No recording, reposting or rehashing of any kind. This experience would be served live.

The app quickly became the go-to place for an A-list of cultural beacons. Venture capitalists, hip-hop artists and actors flocked to the app. The app’s founders wisely deployed an ‘invite only’ rollout strategy. This cultivated a palpably high degree of social capital on the platform; quality people, quality conversation, buttressed by an air of exclusivity. To this day, you can still only join the app after receiving an invite from an existing user.

Clubhouse is by no means perfect. It has suffered from the same misogyny, racism and antisemitism that has plagued the rest of the internet. Yet it clearly has offered its users a fresh experience in its decidedly contrarian approach to conventional social media. In staying resolute in its singular commitment to quality conversation, it has quenched a latent thirst for all of us entering the second decade of the 21st century: to meaningfully connect with fellow humans.

The art of the connection

The internet was long overdue for a change of pace. Clubhouse seized on this and built a killer product to make meaningful human connection easy and fun. Below are four characteristics of the platform that facilitate this lost art of human connection:

1. ACCESSIBILITY

One of the astounding things about Clubhouse is how decidedly low-tech it is. While Facebook was busy creating interactive virtual worlds with its ill-fated Oculus VR-enabled Spaces, the Clubhouse founders deftly deployed a technology that has been around for decades. We're essentially talking about a glorified conference call.

Yet this low-tech approach carries several advantages. For one, it reduces the barrier to entry. Compare joining a Clubhouse room to a platform like Zoom. Each Zoom call requires a harrowing checklist preparation. Is my background respectable? My lighting ample? My clothing exceeding the level of pyjama? By removing video from the equation, people are much more apt to jump aboard into a conversation.

2. AUTHENTICITY

Audio can't be faked or manipulated. While celebrities pay assistants to run their Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, they can't do that with Clubhouse. Each person's voice carries a unique identity print. It is a platform for real people expressing their real opinions. The conversations are decidedly unscripted.

Moreover, the air of serendipity creates a dynamic of mystery and intrigue. No one knows which way the conversation is going to go. Or if it is going to get tense. Or taken over by unsavoury actors (though the app has a zero-tolerance policy for harassment, this behaviour does still take place in real-time). Each and every experience on the app produces a novel and genuine encounter.

3. INTIMACY

Audio is a field of perception that elapses through time. As such, our brains are able to forge a much richer connection with the source of the sound. We perceive texture in voice. Our minds detect micro-expressions of excitement, hesitation, confidence and confusion.

CLUBHOUSE IS THE RESTORATION OF A MODICUM OF DIGNIFIED DIALOGUE.

Live long-form audio enables us to receive the information with far greater fidelity. Written articles, premeditated text messages and filter-heavy selfies don't provide us with a running contextual data the way speech does. We are let into a deeper level of expression. This is coupled with the fact that, unlike television (be it web or cable), people tend to consume audio content with their headphones on. Though subtle, headphones provide an added air of intimacy in conversation (think about your experience with podcasts).

4. INTERACTIVITY

What takes Clubhouse to a level even beyond podcasts is the ability to participate in a conversation. You might join a room featuring a bevy of domain experts in, say, US-China relations (as I did a few months ago). The celebrated dissident artist AI Wei Wei, *Washington Post* reporter Josh Rogin, and podcast host Saagar Enjeti were among the participants in the conversation. Clubhouse allows you not to just glean from the experts, but to interact with them. Simply press the "raise hand" button and you can be part of the conversation.

This dynamic unlocks a world of possibilities. You may gain insight into a long-held question. Alternatively, your question might trigger a divergence of opinion between titans on stage, leading to an hour of rich conversation. Your insight may even position you as a burgeoning thought leader, gain you hundreds of followers and invitations to moderate the next discussion.

Trending towards reality

The rise of Clubhouse represents a hopeful trend in what has been a rough patch for social media. The early optimism that accompanied these tech platforms in their early days had all but been washed away in the last half of the 2010s. Social media was just not paying the dividends that we initially bargained for. Or at least the risks were higher. Electoral meddling, the decay of well-being and the corporate abuses of big data have all been chronicled as repeated unintended side-effects.

Clearly, humans were aspiring to something greater with their technology. Clubhouse is the restoration of a modicum of dignified dialogue. The return to long-form conversation is a rejection of callous memes. It is the repudiation of 6.5-minute staged-for-TV debates between talking head pundits. It's a reminder that 30-second "stories" don't satisfy our thirst for a genuine connection with reality.

The rise of Clubhouse is but one palpable outcome born of a collective societal yearning emerging in the subconscious mind of millions of people across the globe.

So much of our recent experience with social media has been "back-to-back", just the way Pharaoh would have wanted it.

When the Jewish people received the Torah at Mount Sinai, the Creator of the world set the standard for what meaningful experience could be: direct, face-to-face connection.

All the plagues of Egypt, miracles at the sea and kindness in the desert were not sufficient. We needed the axial experience at Sinai to forge a direct, personal connection with the source of all life.

The postmodern cacophony of socially mediated "living" threatens to undermine our connection to what is real. Backhanded social media insults debase our dignity as species intelligent interlocutors capable of near-divine greatness. Incessant editing, filtering, cropping and cutting encourage us to mask our true selves. We run the existential risk of settling for less; settling for bondage under a cold and disconnected Pharaoh.

The arrival of Clubhouse on the scene should give us hope for humanity. Moreover, it can serve as a message for us to recalibrate our relationship to Judaism.

Meaningful Jewish connection

Clubhouse delivered much-needed human connection to millions through providing an accessible, authentic, intimate and interactive experience.

How often does our own Jewish practice fail to clear the bar on these axes?

This Shavuot, let's take a message from Clubhouse's playbook.

- Let's make our Jewish experience **accessible**.
If we feel blocked in a certain avenue, let's be creative and see how we can get our foot in the door. "The Torah's ways are those of tranquillity, its pathways are of peace."
- Let's make our Jewish experience **authentic**.
How can we remove the feeling of rote habit from our precious rituals? How can we toss aside the feelings of stale stagnation and reinvigorate our Judaism? As it says: "God desires the heart."
- Let's make our Jewish experience **intimate**.
We see from Mount Sinai that God desires a personalised, private connection with each of us as individuals. We all experienced God first-hand. How can we cultivate this intimate connection with the Divine, using the socio-genetic toolkit we have each been uniquely given?
- Let's make our Jewish experience **interactive**.
Judaism does not expect every person to enter the rabbinate. Yet Judaism does not expect any of its adherents to be passive spectators either! Jews have always been a highly literate people, because God desires us to be his partners in creating a better world.

Let's remember this Shavuot as the year that we stopped holding back. This is the year when we raise our hands and prepare to come up to the stage.

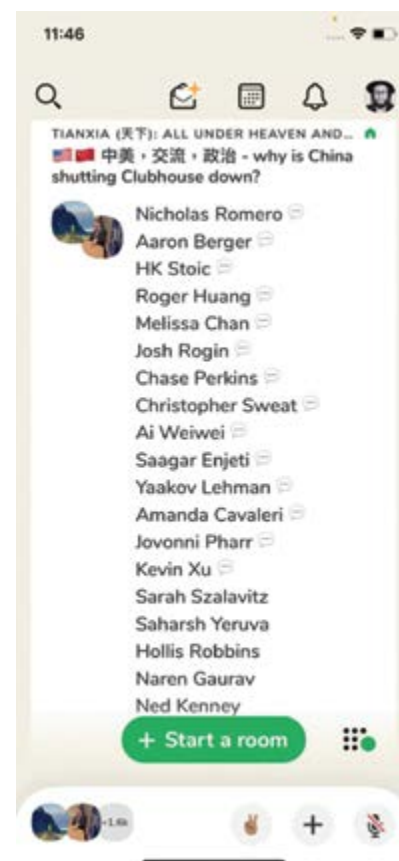
Definitions

TERM	DEFINITION
Club	An interest group that hosts various rooms
Room	A virtual space where conversations take place
Hallway	The scrolling, newsfeed-like list of live rooms
Moderator badge	Little “green bean” signifying permissions to call up audience members to the stage
Stage	The section of the room hosting pre-approved speakers
Audience	The section of the room for passive listeners
Hand raising	Click this button to signal to the moderators that you would like to join the stage
PTR	“Pull to refresh” – someone has changed their profile picture and wants to you see the update
Dropping gems	Clubhouse lingo for delivering a powerful idea to a room

Timeline

2020	
MARCH	<i>Launch into iOS store</i>
APRIL	<i>1 500 beta users</i>
MAY	<i>100 million valuation from A16Z</i>
JUNE	<i>Celebrities MC Hammer, Tiffany Haddish and Oprah join Clubhouse</i>
SEPTEMBER	<i>Yom Kippur antisemitism incident</i>
OCTOBER	<i>10 000 new downloads</i>
NOVEMBER	<i>25 000 total users</i>
DECEMBER	<i>600 000 users, Lion King</i>
2021	
JANUARY	<i>Valuation at \$1 billion</i>
FEBRUARY	<i>Elon Musk breaks Clubhouse, China bans Clubhouse</i>
MARCH	<i>13 000 000 users</i>
APRIL	<i>Valuation rumoured at \$4 billion</i>

App Screenshot

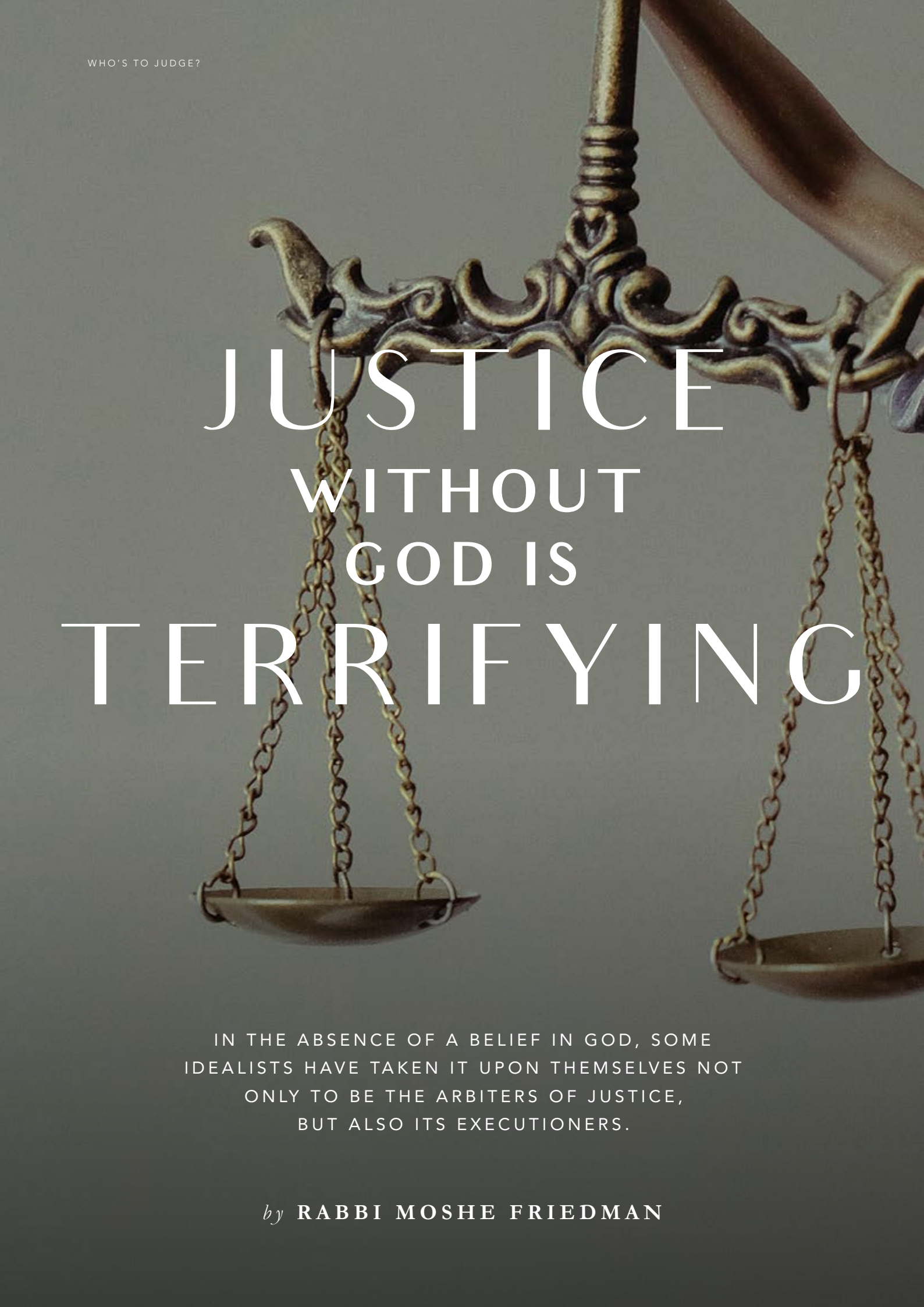


Yaakov Lehman on a Clubhouse talk



Yaakov Lehman is an Israel-based entrepreneur and educator. He has spent years working at the intersection of ancient wisdom and contemporary society, producing international conferences, music festivals and training seminars. Lehman holds an MSc from the London School of Economics and an MA from the University of Vienna.

WHO'S TO JUDGE?



JUSTICE WITHOUT GOD IS TERRIFYING

IN THE ABSENCE OF A BELIEF IN GOD, SOME
IDEALISTS HAVE TAKEN IT UPON THEMSELVES NOT
ONLY TO BE THE ARBITERS OF JUSTICE,
BUT ALSO ITS EXECUTIONERS.

by RABBI MOSHE FRIEDMAN

The social justice movement has gone Biblical. As an orthodox rabbi, I'm horrified.

Recently appointed *Teen Vogue* editor-in-chief Alexi McCammond is one of the latest targets of new-era activism. Despite her serious journalistic bona fides and being a woman of colour, McCammond is currently undergoing a reckoning for tweets that referenced Asian stereotypes, which she wrote 10 years ago as an undergraduate. What makes this example startling, although hardly unique, is that calls for her resignation undoubtedly have nothing to do with whether McCammond is currently a racist and therefore unfit for her job. Rather, the principle being employed here is a punitive justice, a payment for past sins. In other words, activists are demanding a justice historically known as an "eye for an eye". If you've hurt others, then you deserve to be punished in equal measure.

One of the cornerstones of my worldview is the divinity of the Jewish Bible known as the Torah. I know that God wrote the words *ayin tachat ayin* – an eye for an eye – when referring to punishment for personal injury. And yet I watch in terror as 21st century non-religious idealists attempt to revive such an unforgiving practice in the name of justice. The reason it scares me so much is because humans are frail, imperfect beings with gaps in knowledge and objectivity. And when we deem ourselves the arbiters of perfect justice, we inevitably make mistakes, likely leading to more injustice than had we done nothing at all.

In light of the above, it makes quite a lot of sense that orthodox Jews do not interpret "an eye for an eye" literally. The rabbinic tradition maintains a method of interpretation that itself is considered God-given, whereby logic and textual analysis require that we remove some Biblical verses from their literal understanding. "Eye for an eye" is understood to refer to monetary payment, both because of its literary context, as well as for the rationale that this policy will often not result in perfect justice. Suppose, posits the Talmud (the corpus of rabbinic tradition) that the culprit had already been blind in one eye – would it be fair to poke out the remaining eye in equal measure to the damage he or she caused? Suppose the culprit had only partially blinded the eye of the victim – how do we go about ensuring that the court will partially blind the culprit to the exact proportion as that of the victim? The rabbis concluded that God Himself could not have sanctioned the use of measure-for-measure punitive justice precisely *because* we humans are incapable of such precision.

Instead, the monetary payment is considered an atonement of sorts, accompanied both by a repentance through asking forgiveness from the victim and by inner soul-searching. Whether this fully rectifies the past sins of the culprit is left to God, who alone possesses the knowledge and sense of fairness to make these decisions.

But in the absence of such a belief, some idealists have taken it upon themselves not only to be the arbiters of justice, but also its executioners. As Shadi Hamid recently wrote in an article for the *Atlantic*: "If matters of good and evil are not to be resolved by an omniscient God in the future, then Americans will judge and render punishment now."

The result is that social justice dogma produces some rather odd beliefs. Consider the recent brouhaha over the dismissal of *New York Times* writer Donald McNeil over his use of the n-word. The *Times* based its decision on the newly minted moral code: "We do not tolerate racist language regardless of intent." In a world without God, we cannot rely on the "knower of men's thoughts" to determine who is guilty and who innocent. Rather, let's do away with the business altogether by judging behaviour purely on the limited information that human beings can perceive: external deeds.

In a similar vein, the woke ideology has now embraced the Kendi-ism: "When I see racial disparities, I see racism." I can understand the appeal of such a belief. It would be existentially terrifying to face the limitations of our grasp of the complex systems that determine social outcomes – the history, the unintended consequences, the culture, and *yes, also the racism*. If we can't get to the bottom of truth, then who can? When there is no God, perforce we must squash justice down to a bite-size concept that we humans can handle.

On the other hand, for those who relinquish the monopoly on justice and recognise that such dangerous power belongs in the hands of an omnipotent and omniscient Deity, we are now free to define human justice as a more malleable term. The forceful moral injunction set forth in Leviticus 19, "judge your neighbour fairly", is interpreted in the rabbinic tradition to mean that you should judge your neighbour on the side of merit, assuming first and foremost that he or she is innocent until proven guilty. And then there is the famous declaration from Deuteronomy that was emblazoned on the wall of Ruth Bader Ginsburg's chambers: "Justice, justice you shall pursue."



If a bully undergoes a deep transformation, fully feels the hurt of those he has victimised, vows not to commit further acts of aggression, pays for past monetary damage and apologises with heartfelt sincerity, do we still need to give him a wedgie for good measure?

The rabbis, never ones to let a good word go to waste, interpret the repetition of “justice” to refer to the times when a fair ruling requires a compromise from both sides.

One might be compelled to dismiss this perspective as “soft”. Sure, humans are fallible and so we cannot carry out true justice. But why call compromise and presumption of innocence by the name of justice? Let’s be honest: we are trying not to let our impotence ruin things even more by carrying out flawed justice, and then hoping God will pick up the pieces. I think there’s a flaw in this reasoning. “True” justice, *eye for an eye* justice, might be fair, but it’s also unforgiving. We would not last long in a universe that does not offer second chances. As such, it is an incomplete form of justice. If a bully undergoes a deep transformation, fully feels the hurt of those he has victimised, vows not to commit further acts of aggression, pays for past monetary damage and apologises with heartfelt sincerity, do we still need to give him a wedgie for good measure?

Herein lies the second deviation of the current social justice dogma from Divine justice. Without God, justice is absolute. It is unsympathetic. It is *scientific*. Like a math equation that needs to be balanced on both sides of the equal sign, the amount of hurt caused must equal the

amount of “justice” dispensed. That strategy may work in the sciences, but it’s disastrous in the humanities. A society that works along these lines will descend into never-ending retribution, score-keeping and impossible standards of moral purity.

The word “Torah” means instruction. It is not a sterile book of philosophy, nor is it a laundry list of marching orders. It is a guidebook for how to construct a Godly society. A crucial element of this ever-striving utopia is a system that rewards good and punishes evil. But as Adam and Eve learned, the knowledge of good and evil is a dangerous tool in the hands of those who abuse it (and eventually anyone who wields its power will abuse it). A self-aware society understands its propensity for bias, irrationality and plain ignorance. For this reason, justice on earth requires a built-in mechanism for a margin of error, including compromise, presumption of innocence and forgiveness. And if it still bothers you that under these conditions some people may get away with figurative or literal murder, then it helps to know that there is a Divine Judge who is also keeping score, more fairly and more compassionately than we ever could.



Rabbi Moshe Friedman grew up in Manhattan, New York, and received his BA in Politics, Philosophy and Economics at the University of Pennsylvania. He studied Jewish Thought and Talmudic Law for ten years in Israel, including several years at the Mir Yeshiva, and has passed Rabbinic Ordination examinations from the Israeli Rabbinat. In 2017, he moved to London with his wife and two children to take up the role of FJL UK Liaison, a role which includes regular campus visits and London-based educational programmes.

Social Justice for Jews

by Rabbi Moshe Friedman

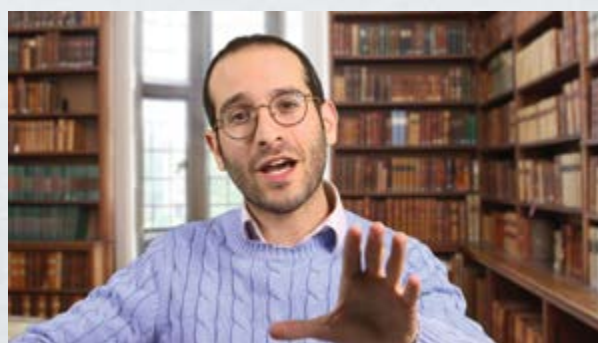
Principles of Jewish Social Justice

2.

As part
of history...
we must be
active in
causing progress



- Social Justice: A Jewish Invention?
VIDEO - 3 MIN
- Everyone is Created Equal
VIDEO - 5 MIN
- Do We Have to Act?
VIDEO - 4 MIN
- Progress: We Can Shape the Future
VIDEO - 5 MIN
- Identifying with Injustice



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RABBI REACTS



RABBI DANIEL ROWE
TACKLES AN ATHEIST'S CLAIMS.

In response to many questions we have received over the years about the existence of God, we have posed the following questions to Rabbi Daniel Rowe. Don't forget to check out his online course on this topic at www.aish.org.uk/course

Dear Rabbi Rowe

1 *There is no good rational reason to believe in God. In fact, it's no different to believing in tooth fairies...*

Rabbi Rowe: In the Jewish tradition, there are two broad traditions to knowledge of God. One is called *Emunah Peshuta*, direct awareness of God, and the second is the philosophical argument for God. For those whose relationship with God is direct, this question of existence of God would not even begin. So I would assume that you are asking for those looking for a philosophical access to the idea of God. To answer your question directly, if someone denies that tooth fairies or flying spaghetti monsters exist, then they do not need to posit the existence of anything else in order to explain the way that the world is. (The only fact that needs explaining is how coins end up under the pillows of little children who lose their teeth. But parents are a perfectly adequate explanation for that!) On the other hand, if someone wants to deny that our universe was created, they need to either say that it never started – which means that if you add up all the time it has existed, it would reach an infinite number, and that is not actually possible. Or it means admitting that the universe and all physical existence has a beginning, a point before which nothing physical existed. And then just say it created itself – that is saying the universe popped into existence from nothing, which is beyond absurd. So belief in a Creator (who is not physical) not only makes sense, to deny it is actually irrational.

2 *But don't you then get the question: Who created God?*

Yes, people will ask that question, but since any creator of space and time could not possibly be inside space and time, therefore the Creator doesn't have an age. It does not get older or younger. Things in time have ages. They start young and they get older. And they have a point before which they did not exist.

3 *If God does exist then which God? The Jewish one? The Christian one? The Muslim one?*

The faith of ancient Israel, the belief of One God who revealed Himself at Mount Sinai, turned out to be such a compelling concept that the entire Roman empire ended up adopting it. The most popular religions that humanity has ever had based themselves on the idea of One God. So the vast majority of humans today believe in God, though they may use different words or names to describe Him. Both Christianity and Islam believe that the people of Israel were chosen by God. The theology of other monotheistic faiths then revolves around the idea that God rejected Israel, because of the sins of Israel. That is where we diverge. In fact the Torah itself is emphatic that no matter how far we fall, God will never abandon us. No matter how deep or long our exile, God promises to return us to our homeland and to return to our full covenant with Him.

4 *One of the strongest arguments used by many thinkers throughout history to authenticate the idea of Torah (min haShomayim) is the national revelation argument. But some critics ask why God would reveal the Torah just a few centuries before there were recording devices. Would it not have been better for Him to ensure that there could be cameras there to capture the moment forever?*

I don't know what exactly recording devices would have captured. When God communicates, He does not need to send sound waves anywhere. He can put the ideas in people's heads directly, so it does not seem clear what exactly could have been recorded. (And even if there was a recording of a voice, surely someone who did not want to believe in it could find a natural explanation.) No recording could ever really capture the full experience strongly enough to make it indubitable. But as it happens, the best recording device out there is writing. In fact, not any old writing, but specifically alphabetic writing.

The archaeological record is clear: The first alphabet, called 'proto Sinaitic', emerges in the Sinai desert around 3½ millennia ago – just before the Exodus and revelation. The alphabet is key, not merely in the Kabbalistic and Talmudic traditions where there is deep meaning to each letter. It is key for an even more basic reason. The ancient world was driven by one overriding social moral and political concept: power.

The most powerful was the one they thought was favoured by the gods to rule. The weakest did not have the favour of the gods, they were meant to be ruled, even oppressed. The Torah's idea is radical and revolutionary, that a society is to be measured by how it treats its weakest members; that every child deserves to live, even if they are weak or disabled; that every child should have an education, not just the elites; that no human is above the law; and that the ideal dream for the world is one of peace between all humans. In a world governed completely by power, Torah is the book in which God shows His love for the slave, the widow, the orphan and the downtrodden. God is sovereign and no man can oppress another. These are totally radical ideas to the ancient world.

Above all, the greatest way that elites controlled society was by controlling all the writing. If the elites were the only people who could read and write, then only they had access to the wisdom and laws. Only they could run a large military or collect taxes. Complex language like hieroglyphs meant that only tiny numbers could access the most important knowledge. The alphabet changed all that. In under 30 symbols, you can construct any word. Every three-year-old can learn to read and write. So Torah has to be given to an alphabetic society. And the first place that the alphabet appears is in the Sinai Desert around a century or two before *Matan Torah*. The first writings we have are down a mine shaft, suggesting that it was the language of slaves. It may well have been the Israelite slaves. In either case, once the revelation and its content is captured in an alphabet, then it can be given to every citizen, it can be owned by every citizen, and the true meaning of the revelation that every individual is created in the image of God can be recorded and handed down to every generation thereafter.

5 *So many people have died in the name of God: would the world not be better off without it?*

Better off without what? Without God (*chv"sh*)? There would be no world! Better off without God revealing His Torah? The fact that people do bad things in the name of something good does not mean we should avoid connecting to that good. Huge amounts of people have been killed in the name of love, in the name of freedom, in the name of protecting

The Torah itself is emphatic that no matter how far we fall, God will never abandon us. No matter how deep or long our exile, God promises to return us to our homeland and to return to our full covenant with Him.

families or countries. None of that suggests we would be better off without any of those things. Now it may be arguable that the world might have been better off without certain radical sects of certain belief systems over history, but that is not a reason to suggest that the world would be better off without any religion, and certainly not Torah.

But as it happens, the basis of the claim is inaccurate anyway. In 2004, Charles Phillips and Alan Axelrod compiled the definitive 'Encyclopedia of Wars' chronicling every known war in human history, including well over 1 000 wars. It turns out that just 6.9 percent of those were religious wars. That means that 93 percent were fought for ordinary secular reasons, such as power, land, expansion of the empire, control of scarce resources and so on. In fact, when it comes to casualties, less than two percent of all humans killed in war were killed in religious wars. So yes, there have been some terrible things done by some religious people in the name of their belief system. But in the big picture, it is not the major cause of human suffering. In fact, the greatest killing ideologies in human history were communism and nationalism. The former was avowedly anti-religious. The latter was a secular substitute for religion.

Finally, all of this ignores the huge way in which religions in general, and especially those that emulate the Torah, have transformed the world for the good. The archaeological record suggests that almost all early civilisations practised infanticide (killing of children). The major reasons were disabilities and population control. The idea that every child has a right to live is first recorded in Torah and spread through other monotheistic faiths. The same could be said for peace as an ideal, the state's responsibility to its poorest citizens, social mobility, equality of the law for all citizens, limitation on the power of political rulers, the centrality of marriage and family, and education for all children. These were ideas first articulated in the sacred Biblical texts, elaborated on in the Jewish 'Oral Torah' and then spread to the world through various faiths and ideologies that were directly or indirectly inspired by Biblical texts.



Rabbi Daniel Rowe is the Executive Director of Aish UK. He holds a BA in Philosophy from University College London and an MPhil in Philosophy from Birkbeck College. He studied for a decade in Israel in various Talmudic institutes. Rabbi Rowe is known for his ability to tackle difficult topics and has numerous videos and articles online. Rabbi Rowe has played an instrumental role in the creation and development of many organisations and initiatives such as the Forum for Jewish Leadership, the Aleinu Conference and Shabbat UK.



Scan the QR code to watch one of Rabbi Rowe's videos

PERSPECTIVE

The impact of COVID-19 restrictions has been deeply felt by our staff and participants over the past year and it has stimulated us to create and deliver a new range of courses and interactive programmes for 6th formers, university students and young professionals across the UK.

Utilising online formats and, where possible, merging them with face-to-face encounters has allowed us to increase our reach massively without missing out on the opportunities to impact and support our participants wherever they may be.

Elevate

Elevate is a new forum for young Jews to discover and discuss keys to success and wellbeing through personal development. Featuring monthly online gatherings, including special guests, motivational speakers, interactive breakout sessions and Q&A panels. Elevate's dynamic approach to self-development combines novel Jewish insight with research to develop and improve relationships, career and personal development. **OVER 500 STUDENTS PARTICIPATED IN THIS INCREDIBLE PROGRAMME**, proving how effective and engaging our hybrid learning model can be.



Encounter

This online weekly series established our 'virtual edutainment experience' for campus students nationwide with discussions on today's most relevant topics. This exciting series includes fantastic guests, amazing games and great prizes that encouraged students to participate. **OVER 1 250 STUDENTS JOINED THE SERIES AND PARTICIPATED IN THE COURSES.**

Vibe

These mini-courses are run directly from King David Manchester school and have been **ATTENDED BY 132 STUDENTS OVER THE PAST TERM**. Utilising a range of creative and engaging methods to learn about Judaism, these courses include encounters with community leaders and local business people, encouraging students to create their own artwork, as well as learning about their Jewish traditions through food.



Wisdom

Wisdom is an online series for young professionals offering insightful courses on a broad range of topics ranging from Jewish history to Ulpan to contemporary ethical dilemmas. **500 STUDENTS PARTICIPATED ACROSS THESE EPISODES** and were challenged and engaged by Rabbi Eli Birnbaum's deep knowledge and sharp wit as they explored these topics together to better understand some of the main issues and narratives of Jewish thought.



Summer Internships in Israel

Set across eight weeks this summer, we are sending **50 STUDENTS TO LEARN, LIVE, IMMERSE AND EXPLORE** a variety of summer work experience options. Together with JInternships we assist applicants in getting an internship placement in a field of their choice with hundreds to choose from. Participants will be staying in the heart of the Jewish capital of the world and learn what life in Jerusalem is really like. This includes two weeks touring around, enjoying the breadth of Aish programming and learning, as well as connecting with others on the programme before beginning a six-week internship.



Maven

Over 10 courses are now available covering topics including 'Social Justice for Jews', 'The Existence of God' and 'The Modern Jewish Woman'. The courses are designed with interactive sessions, live online learning with Aish Educators as well as ongoing support throughout the course and effective post-course development with students. **OVER 300 STUDENTS HAVE PARTICIPATED SO FAR** and we look forward to offering even more courses in the coming months.



The past 6 months in numbers

785 000+	Video views on Facebook and YouTube
165 000+	People engaging with our online content
15 000	Participations in educational sessions
10 250	Subscribers to our weekly email
2 000	New followers online across all platforms
300+	Online course applications
50	Summer internship participants

www.aish.org.uk



Gluten Intolerance

R E A L O R I M A G I N E D ?

GLUTEN-FREE DIETS ARE SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED
FOR THE 1% OF THE POPULATION THAT DOES HAVE
COELIAC DISEASE AND THE 6% WITH NON-COELIAC
GLUTEN SENSITIVITY.

by DR MICHELLE BRAUDE



Dr Michelle Braude is the founder of The Food Effect, www.thefoodeffect.co.uk,
and author of The Food Effect Diet and The Food Effect Diet Vegan.

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‘Wheat makes you fat’ and ‘removing gluten from your diet will help you lose weight’ are two popular nutrition myths you may have heard – but there is absolutely no medical or scientific basis for this to be the case for the average healthy individual.

The world of health and fitness is awash with misinformation. I see so many clients who have been exposed to repeated misinformation, and have gone ‘gluten free’ for no real reason, with the result that they are then left with very restrictive diets and even a fear of certain foods, for no real health reason. (I am not referring to those who have a genuine intolerance to wheat or gluten, and might need to eliminate them accordingly.)

The myth that ‘wheat makes you fat’ is in part a result of the ‘clean-eating’ diet craze, which blames wheat for obesity and a host of other medical conditions, with people making unsubstantiated claims that cutting out gluten cured all their ailments. Yes, people who eat a lot of refined wheat flour in foods such as white bread, biscuits and pastries will indeed gain weight; and yes, if they cut out these refined foods and eat a more balanced diet (the type I prescribe to all my clients and advocate in both of my books) they’ll lose weight. But it’s not because of the wheat; it’s because they’ve improved their overall diet and meal balance, and cut out refined carbs and sugar.

There have been no scientific studies that support wheat as the culprit for our obesity epidemic, or that support a wheat-free diet for weight loss. The best thing you can do for weight loss is to replace refined white wheat (such as that in white bread, pastries, cakes, biscuits and muffins made with refined white flour) with whole grains (like whole-meal bread, oats, brown rice, quinoa, and whole-wheat or brown rice pasta), to increase your fibre intake so that you’ll feel fuller for longer,

have stable blood sugar levels and avoid cravings.

In terms of gluten, increasing diagnoses of Coeliac disease (a true gluten intolerance), due to heightened awareness and better screening, has put gluten in the spotlight in recent years. However, many people mistakenly think that a gluten-free diet is the key to weight loss. This couldn’t be further from the truth. People are blaming gluten for symptoms when it’s not the underlying cause. It’s trendy and cool, and many celebrities have endorsed gluten-free diets, so people jump on the bandwagon. Going on a gluten-free diet can be unnecessarily expensive, and will not guarantee better health or weight loss. There is no evidence to suggest that weight or fitness is improved in any way when following a gluten-free diet.

In fact, a recent study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* showed that the growing popularity of gluten-free diets, endorsed by high-profile celebrities, has been driven by fashion choices rather than diagnosed health problems. Researchers found that there has been no increase in the number of those suffering from Coeliac disease in the past six years, yet those on a gluten-free diet have risen threefold. The authors say that other reasons are also clearly driving the trend, including a misinformed public perception that gluten-free diets are healthier, and people are increasingly self-diagnosing themselves with ‘gluten sensitivity’ without having the typical symptoms of Coeliac disease. The study confirms that, unsurprisingly, the rising popularity of gluten-free diets is not accounted for by any increase in clinically proven cases of Coeliac disease. The huge number of ‘gluten-free foods’ now available on supermarket shelves is also helping to boost the numbers of those shunning wheat. Although only 1% of the UK population are estimated to be affected by Coeliac disease, 55% of the

market is made up of non-sufferers. More than half the UK population is now buying gluten-free products, so savvy marketing also plays a huge role in influencing food choices.

Gluten-free diets are specifically designed for the 1% of the population that does have Coeliac disease and the 6% with non-Coeliac gluten sensitivity. For these people, foods containing gluten, such as wheat, rye and barley, can lead to a host of symptoms including gastrointestinal problems, skin rashes and anaemia. For the rest of the population, however, gluten should not pose a problem. Whole-grain wheat, barley and rye are nutritional powerhouses; they are good sources of fibre, B vitamins, vitamin E, iron, magnesium and antioxidants – all of which are essential for healthy living and disease prevention.

Additionally, many gluten-free products are higher in calories and other unhealthy ingredients (such as sugar and palm oil) than their gluten-containing counterparts (as well as being much more expensive), but people are conned into thinking that anything with a ‘gluten-free’ label must be healthier and will help with weight loss, when this is nothing more than a myth.

My advice to everyone would be to stick to a healthy balanced whole-foods diet, with minimal highly processed foods, incorporating plenty of fresh vegetables, fruit, lean protein, unrefined carbohydrates and healthy fats (such as nuts, avocado, olive oil and nut butters). For those who do need to cut out or avoid gluten for medical reasons, I’d recommend steering clear of processed packaged “gluten-free” products (that are often filled with endless ingredients and junk) and follow the same dietary advice above. I have many gluten-free recipes in both of my books and here are a few that I hope you’ll enjoy!



Sweet potato protein pancakes

These pancakes are all natural, gluten, dairy and sugar free, and provide a filling, nutritious and delicious breakfast. The pancakes can be reheated in the oven.

MAKES 6 DECENT-SIZED PANCAKES, SERVES 2

- 1 large sweet potato (250g)
- 6 egg whites or 3 whole eggs, lightly beaten
- 2 tsp stevia
- Cinnamon and salt to taste
- Olive oil cooking spray or 1 tsp coconut oil
- Agave syrup, 0% Greek yoghurt and berries, to serve

METHOD

1. Cook the sweet potato in the microwave (8 minutes on high) or oven, until completely soft. **2.** Scoop out all the flesh into a bowl (discard the skin or eat it separately). **3.** Mash the flesh well with a fork. **4.** Add the beaten egg whites to the bowl, mixing them in lightly with a fork (any small remaining lumps don't matter). **5.** Mix the stevia (or sweetener of your choice), a generous shake of cinnamon and a pinch of salt into the batter. **6.** Use non-stick cooking spray or coconut oil to coat a non-stick skillet. **7.** Heat over a medium heat until hot. **8.** Once hot, drop $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of batter per pancake into the pan. **9.** Cook until the edges look firm, around 1 minute. **10.** Flip and cook on the other side until fully cooked, around 2 more minutes. **11.** Grease the skillet again with oil/spray between cooking batches of pancakes.

To serve, top with your desired toppings, such as agave syrup, natural yoghurt or Greek yoghurt mixed with vanilla, stevia and cinnamon.

Quinoa salad with avocado, mango and pomegranate

An incredibly versatile recipe, this salad can be served alongside grilled fish, chicken, tofu or veggie burgers, but is also substantial enough to make a delicious light lunch or dinner. Quinoa is packed with protein, so with the heart-healthy fibre-filled pistachio nuts, avocado and pomegranate seeds, this salad ticks all nutrition boxes.

SERVES 2 AS A MAIN COURSE, 4 AS A SIDE DISH

- 170g uncooked red quinoa (or regular white quinoa)
- 1 ripe avocado, diced
- 1 small ripe mango, peeled and diced
- 80g pomegranate seeds
- 20g pistachio nuts, shelled
- 4 spring onions, thinly sliced
- A few handfuls of spinach or salad leaves

DRESSING

- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 2 Tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 1 tsp sesame oil
- 2 tsp low sodium soy sauce

1. Cook the quinoa according to the packet instructions. **2.** Allow to cool slightly. **3.** Put all the salad ingredients in a large bowl. **4.** Whisk together the dressing ingredients. **5.** Add to the salad and toss well to coat.

Vegetable bolognese

A healthy, delicious vegetarian version of the classic favourite, spaghetti bolognese.

SERVES 4

- 300g (uncooked weight) whole-wheat or brown rice spaghetti (for gluten-free)
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, peeled and chopped
- 2 carrots, peeled and finely chopped
- 2 sticks of celery, sliced
- 300g tin cut green beans in water, drained and chopped
- 400g tin chopped tomatoes
- 2 Tbsp tomato puree
- 125g mushrooms, chopped
- ¼-½ tsp cayenne pepper
- Salt and pepper
- 10g fresh parsley, chopped

METHOD

1. Bring a large pot of water to the boil. **2.** Add a generous pinch of salt and stir. **3.** Add the spaghetti and cook according to the packet instructions. **4.** In the meantime, heat the olive oil in a saucepan. **5.** Add the chopped onion and fry over a low heat for 3-5 minutes, until softened and translucent but not browned. **6.** Add the carrots, celery and green beans. **7.** Stir in the chopped tomatoes, tomato puree, mushrooms and cayenne pepper. **8.** Add a generous pinch of salt and pepper to taste. **9.** Allow to simmer for 10 minutes. **10.** Stir through the fresh parsley. **11.** Drain the spaghetti when cooked, and divide between serving plates. **12.** Top each serving with a quarter of the bolognese sauce. **13.** Top with some freshly ground black pepper. Serve hot.





Flourless carrot cake

(gluten-free, dairy-free)

Carrot cake must be one of the most popular cakes for tea-time, as well as a personal favourite. This guilt-free version is made without flour or refined sugar, but it definitely does not compromise on flavour!

INGREDIENTS

- 3 large eggs
- 200g coconut palm sugar (or light brown sugar)
- 2 tsp vanilla essence
- 120ml melted coconut oil
- 200g ground almonds
- 100g desiccated coconut
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp nutmeg
- 50g grated carrot
- 100g pecan nuts or walnuts, roughly chopped

DAIRY-FREE ICING

- 150g unsalted cashew nuts, soaked in boiling water for 30 minutes, or overnight in cold water
- 60ml agave or maple syrup
- 2 Tbsp coconut oil
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- Pinch of sea salt

METHOD

1. First make the cake. **2.** Preheat the oven to 160°C. **3.** Beat the eggs, sugar, vanilla and oil until light and well combined. **4.** Add the ground almonds, coconut, cinnamon and nutmeg, and stir until just combined. **5.** Then add the grated carrot and chopped nuts, and mix until well combined. **6.** Line a 23cm spring-form tin with baking paper and spray the sides with non-stick baking spray or oil. **7.** Spoon the batter into the prepared pan. Bake for 45 minutes to 1 hour, until a toothpick inserted in the cake comes out clean. **8.** Allow the cake to cool in the tin for about 10 minutes, then loosen the edges with a knife and remove from the tin to cool. **9.** When totally cool, prepare the icing (see below) and spread thickly all over the cake.

10. To make the icing, drain and rinse the soaked cashew nuts. **11.** Combine all the ingredients in a high-speed blender or food processor, and blend until smooth and creamy. **12.** You may need to scrape the mixture down and pulse a few times to achieve the desired consistency. **13.** Remove from the blender and set aside. **14.** Spread over the carrot cake once it has completely cooled.

FOODS OF THE SEASON

I F I T ' S
SHAVUOT TIME

I T ' S
Cheesecake Time



EXPLAINING OUR FOODIE TRADITIONS
MAKES IT EASIER FOR US TO RELATE
TO OUR PAST.

by ILANA EPSTEIN

All recipe photos: Blake Ezra

The second recipe I ever wrote was a cheesecake – my other recipes are good, but nothing like my cheesecake. My family waits all year for it! I use a solid block of the best quality cream cheese and bake the cake very gently in a bain-marie, so it's soft, smooth and creamy, flavoured with vanilla and some lemon rind. However, Shavuot isn't just about cheesecake, it is about origin stories and traditions.

In celebrating Shavuot this year, I thought that, rather than focus on the biblical origins of the holiday, I would have a look at the socio-economic reasons for cheesy celebrations in Eastern Europe and the origin story of Ta'am.

The creamy cheesecakes and gooey blintzes we tuck into for Shavuot may seem a contrast to our usual meat-based festival menus we associate with Jewish celebrations. In fact, these dairy-based treats are not as much of an anomaly as we now find them.

One of the things we get wrong is that we think about Ashkenazi food being heavily meaty. That's just not true. Eastern European Jews living in the *shtetl* had no money – most couldn't afford meat. Brisket or pot roasts for those who could afford it would have been eaten on Rosh Hashanah or Pesach as a festive treat. The food we think of as the Ashkenazi menu is celebratory and probably out of reach for most of the people living in the *shtetls*.

A more usual Shabbat lunch would have been *lokshen* (noodle) pudding (*knugel*) – made with cheese; or a cholent made from just the meat bones or goose fat, bulked up with beans and vegetables. No matter what level of observance we are, for many of us, food is a major point of connection to our Judaism. It's the first thing people embrace with their faith – we'll eat Friday night dinner or festival foods long before we walk through the doors of a synagogue. If we ever leave Judaism behind, we will still identify with traditional foods like bagels, herring or chopped liver. These foods speak to us on a certain level because they are part of our cultural DNA.

Food works as a medium – to educate and engage with our Judaism. With that in mind, three years ago, I approached Rabbi Naftali Schiff, CEO of Jewish Futures (the platform organisation for a number of Jewish educational groups

such as Aish UK and GIFT), to set up a formal organisation – and Ta'am (Judaism on a Plate) was born.

It's a charity that educates and engages using food to communicate our millennia-old traditions.

Explaining foodie traditions makes it easier for us to relate to our past. If we talk about the history of Eastern European Jews, we tend to dwell on the horror, but the minute we start discussing the food they ate, we can put ourselves in those spaces. The more people know about this, the more we can share.

Like many Jewish festivals, Shavuot is tied into the seasons. Dairy foods would have run out over the winter, as even foods like milk had a season. Cows stop producing milk as their calves grow up and the milk supply doesn't return naturally until new calves are born in the Spring. Shavuot was a real celebration of the return of dairy foods, both in biblical times and in 19th century Eastern Europe.

As the glut of milk was produced, housewives would scramble to make use of every drop. Some was drunk straight, some was made into butter, with the butter milk reserved in cold storage for as long as possible. Much of the milk was turned into soft cheese. This curd cheese was used to fill blintzes, and to enhance *lokshen* puddings. And some was used as a filling for yeast cakes. And if you were fortunate enough to have produced an excess of curd cheese, it would be baked on a pastry base into a cheesecake, a luxury in a time and place where there were few luxuries to be found.

These cheesecakes that would have been the highlight of a Shavuot celebration were not the heavy New York-style cheesecake on a biscuit base we all think of as Jewish style. They would have eaten a lighter cake made from curd cheese baked on a pastry base. Only once Jews moved en masse to America did the recipe evolve into what we know as the 'New York Cheesecake'. And if we can follow a story, from the receiving of the bible at Mount Sinai to sitting in our modern homes today eating a slice of cheesecake, we can place ourselves within that story and prepare to write the next chapter – where will Judaism (with the aid of some cheesecake) take us next?



Scan this QR code to check out Ilana's online course

CHEESECAKE

The history of cheesecake is ancient, with the first known cheesecakes dating back to classical Greek times. Surprisingly, the cheesecake hasn't changed all that much, with the recipe staying the same for millennia. A combination of soft cheese, sweetened in ancient times with honey, nowadays more often with sugar, with the addition of eggs and flavouring. Often baked on top of a pastry base and served in celebration. The same principle has been applied to cheesecake throughout the ages.

That, though, doesn't really explain the dense and luscious New York Cheesecake. It was the introduction of block cream cheese, smooth and dense, that replaced the more common ricotta and curd cheeses that went into cheesecake. Cream cheese actually uses cream rather than milk in making the soft cheese, mass produced in America in 1872. It revolutionised cheesecake making forever! The American-style cream cheese is so smooth and creamy that cheesecakes made with it will (if cooked slowly) always yield a delicious cake.

Important note: All ingredients must be at room temperature before starting!

- 250g (1 cup) Lotus biscuits or digestives
- 75g (⅓ cup) butter, melted
- 680g (3 cups) American-style cream cheese
- 150g (¾ cup) caster sugar
- 20g (2 Tbsp) plain flour
- 1 tsp pure vanilla extract
- Finely-shredded peel of half a lemon (optional)
- 2 eggs
- 60ml (¼ cup) milk



RECIPE

1. Prepare your pans; line the outside of a 20cm (8-inch) springform tin with aluminium foil all the way up the sides of the pan to ensure that no water seeps into the tin. Have a larger tin with high sides that the springform can sit in to create a water bath ready.
2. Crush the biscuits in a food processor until they reach a fine-crumb consistency, add the melted butter to the biscuit crumbs and combine. Press the crumb/butter mixture into an 8-inch springform pan that has been lined with baking paper. Place crumb-filled pan into the fridge to "firm up".
3. Heat oven to 160° (320°). Boil a kettle full of water.
4. Meanwhile, while the crumb base is firming up, make the filling. In the large processor mixing bowl, or using a stand mixer or a handheld whisk, combine the American cream cheese, caster sugar, plain flour, vanilla extract and lemon peel (if using). Process or beat mixture until very smooth.
5. Once smooth, stop the machine and add in the eggs and the milk. Process until just combined. Using a spatula, mix all the ingredients together, scraping down the sides of the bowl, and set aside for one minute.
6. Retrieve the crumb base from the fridge and use some of the melted butter, leftover from the butter you used to bind the crumb base, to brush the inside rim of the pan from just above the crust until the top.
7. Pour cheesecake filling onto the cookie crumb layer. Place the cheesecake inside the larger tin. Fill the tin with just-boiled water from the kettle – the water should reach halfway up the aluminium foil-lined tin.
8. Bake at 160°C for about an hour, until the centre of the cake still jiggles, but the sides are set.
9. Turn off the oven, allow the cake to cool in the oven with the door ajar, for at least an hour. Cool completely before putting it into the fridge. Let the cake set in the fridge for at least 4 hours before serving.
10. Fresh cooled cheesecake can easily be frozen for up to one month. If serving from frozen, let the cake thaw for at least three hours before serving.



— 69 —

SHAVUOT ISN'T JUST
ABOUT CHEESECAKE,
IT IS ABOUT ORIGIN
STORIES AND
TRADITIONS.

BLINTZES



The blintze sounds like an extraordinary Ashkenazi dish with a name that could have only come from the old country. In truth, broken down to its very basic parts, a blintze is a thin crepe filled with pretty much any kind of filling, from cheese to potatoes to chopped liver. In a world where food was limited and ways of using food to celebrate was even further limited, the blintze encasing its delicious fillings was a herald of celebration. And come springtime and Shavuot, not only did the Jews celebrate the receiving of the Torah, two blintzes placed side by side in a vertical position are said to resemble a Torah scroll.

They were also a celebration of dairy foods, and the ultimate expression of a blintze, in my opinion, is the cheese blintze. The crepe itself is made with whole milk, fried in butter and filled with a mixture of cream cheese and farmers' cheese. Once the filling is fully encased, it is fried in some more butter, until crispy brown on the outside and deliciously melty on the inside. Try your blintzes served with blueberry compote for the ultimate treat!

BLINTZES

- 125g (1 cup) plain flour
- 120ml (½ cup) whole milk
- 120ml (½ cup) water
- 4 eggs
- 1 Tbsp oil
- Oil for frying

FILLING:

- 14g (4 oz) cream cheese
- 114g (4 oz) farmers' cheese (or ricotta)
- 1 egg yolk
- 4 Tbsp honey/agave syrup/maple syrup


RECIPE

1. For the blintze, put all the ingredients in an immersion blender (mixer will also work) and process until smooth.
2. To make the blintze pancake, heat a crepe pan over medium heat, add a drop of oil. Then pour in about 1/3 cup of batter and swirl around the pan to make an even coating. Fry until the top of the pancake is set, flip over and fry for 10 seconds on the second side. Remove to a plate and repeat with remaining batter. You should get about 12 pancakes.
3. For the filling, mix all ingredients together in a medium bowl until smooth.
4. To assemble: Place 1 very full tablespoon of filling in the bottom centre of the pancake. Fold in sides and roll up. Just before serving, heat a pan, and add a tablespoon of butter. Once melted, add the filled blintze seam side down and fry until golden and heated through. Flip over and fry the other side until golden.
5. Serve immediately with blueberry sauce and sour cream.





CHERRY SOUP



I always wonder if nature or nurture has an influence over our taste buds. I am yet to meet someone from Eastern Europe, specifically from the Carpathian Mountains, where my father's family comes from, who isn't obsessed with cherries. My father, his brother and all their children love cherries, and as summer sets in, cannot get enough of them – it's a bit of an addiction. Every

Shavuot growing up, the appetiser was cherry soup, a heady combination of cherries, red wine and cream, which my father would then top with additional sour cream.

There used to be a Jewish resort in the Catskill Mountains called Grossinger's. On the few occasions that my parents took us there for Shabbat, as the men prayed the Shabbat morning service, I would sneak into the dining room. Each place was set for a lavish Kiddish, and on each plate was a shot glass of cherry soup. I would reach our assigned table and down everyone's cherry soup, one glass at a time, and run out again before I got caught. Thankfully, by the time everyone was back in the dining room, new glasses had replaced the ones I had drunk, and no one except the long-suffering waiter knew of my misdemeanour.

With all of that said, a lesson to be learned from Grossinger's is that cherry soup is best served ice cold!

HUNGARIAN CHERRY SOUP

- 350g fresh, frozen or canned cherries
- 85ml (⅓ cup) water
- 65g (⅓ cup) granulated sugar
- 1 stick cinnamon
- 250ml (1 cup) dry red wine
- 85ml (⅓ cup) cream (any of your choosing)
- 85ml (⅓ cup) sour cream

RECIPE

1. Put pitted cherries, water, sugar, cinnamon and wine in a saucepan and bring to the boil. Reduce heat and simmer for about 20 minutes. Remove from heat.
2. In a small bowl, combine cream and sour cream and mix until smooth. Add to the soup. Place in the fridge and allow to cool completely before serving.
3. Serve soup in pre-chilled small drinking glasses.



SALMON WITH PRESERVED LEMON

This is one of those dishes that sounds like a patchke (Yiddish for messing with little things, getting busy when you just don't need to – don't you love Yiddish, one word can mean so much), but in truth, all the little steps amount to one delicious dish where every element works together in a celebration of spring with a hint of the Mediterranean and loads of lemony sunshine. If you could imagine sitting out on a sunny day overlooking the ocean, without a cloud in the sky, this is the dish you would be eating. And if you can't have the scenario, at the very least you can have the dish, making the patchkerie (the verb for the abovementioned patchke) totally worth it!

SALMON WITH PRESERVED LEMON AND ISRAELI COUSCOUS

- 4 preserved lemons, cut in quarters, pips and flesh discarded
- 3 thyme sprigs, leaves picked
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 4 Tbsp olive oil, divided
- 1kg fresh salmon fillet
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 200g Israeli couscous (petitim)
- 80g frozen green peas
- 200g fine green beans, trimmed and cut in half
- Large handful green olives, roughly chopped
- 25g fresh mint, roughly chopped
- 25g fresh parsley, roughly chopped
- Juice of 1 lemon

RECIPE

1. Preheat oven to 220°C (450°F).
2. In the food processor, process together the preserved lemon rind, thyme, garlic and 2 tablespoons of the olive oil, until you have a paste of sorts; set aside.
3. Line a large baking tray with aluminium foil, place the salmon fillet skin side down on the tray, cover the salmon with preserved lemon paste. Bake the salmon on the top tiers of the oven for 15-20 minutes (depending on the thickness of the fillet) until the salmon is just cooked through.
4. While the salmon cooks, prepare the rest of the salad ingredients: bring a large pot of salted water to the boil; once boiling, add the Israeli couscous and cook for 3 minutes, then add the peas and the beans and cook for a further 4 minutes. Drain the couscous, beans and peas, and, while still hot, add a tablespoon of olive oil and mix well to keep everything from sticking together.
5. To assemble the salad, place couscous mix in a large bowl, add the olives, mint and parsley and the lemon juice and toss together. Lay out the mix on a large platter and top with salmon that you have flaked off the skin. Serve hot or at room temperature.

NOTE:

This whole dish can be made a day ahead of time; just keep the cooked salmon whole until ready to use. Keep the couscous, peas and beans that have been coated in the olive oil in a separate container. Bring the salmon and couscous to room temperature, add the olives, herbs and lemon just before ready to serve.

SPINACH & FETA ROLLS

I tend to only make this recipe once a year for Shavuot – a celebration of the Children of Israel receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai. Many have the custom to eat dairy foods on the holiday for a huge variety of reasons. In many homes, Shavuot becomes an all-out celebration of dairy foods, and not being one to shy away from a celebration, I have my very

own Shavuot repertoire. No Shavuot would be complete without these ubiquitous Balkan rolls of spinach and feta. That said, every single year after I have made them and made a total fool of myself eating far more than I should, I ask myself, why only once a year? Don't be like me – make these and make them often!

SPINACH AND FETA ROLLS – OR PIE

Makes 30 small spinach rolls, or one large pie

- 3 large (850g approximately) onions, peeled and finely chopped
- 40g (3 Tbsp) good olive oil
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 900g (30 ounces) frozen chopped spinach, defrosted
- 7 eggs, beaten
- 80g (1 cup) freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- 20g (3 Tbsp) plain dry bread crumbs
- 250g (8 ounces) feta, cut into ½-inch cubes
- 65g (½ cup) pine nuts
- 225g (1 cup) salted butter, melted (if making pie, you will only need 75g (⅓ cup))
- 30 sheets (one package) phyllo dough, defrosted (if making pie, you will only need 6 sheets)

RECIPE

1. Pre-heat oven to 180°C (350°F).
2. In a large sauté pan, heat the olive oil over a medium heat. Once hot, add the onions and sauté until the onions are soft and golden brown, about 10 minutes. Season well with salt and pepper and set aside.
3. Squeeze out as much liquid as possible from the spinach. In a large bowl, combine the spinach, fried and seasoned onions, eggs, parmesan, bread crumbs, cubed feta and toasted pine nuts.

4. To prepare rolls, start by opening up the phyllo package and cover the sheets of dough (aside from the one you are working with), with a clean tea towel. Working with one sheet at a time, place the sheet down vertically. Brush the sheet with melted butter, place two tablespoons of spinach mixture at the very bottom centre of the sheet, fold the sides over the filling and roll up. Place the roll seam side down on a baking sheet that has been lined with baking paper, and brush the top with additional melted butter. Repeat with remaining phyllo sheets and spinach filling, place the rolls about ½ an inch apart on the baking tray; you may need a second tray.
5. Bake rolls for 20-25 minutes until golden brown and crispy on the outside.

For spinach and feta pie:

1. If you are short on time, you can use the filling to make a spinach pie. Make the filling as above, line a pie dish with 1 sheet of phyllo, place it in such a way that one short edge of the phyllo lines up with the inner edge of the pie dish and let the remaining length of the phyllo sheet hang out of the pie dish. Rotate the dish a sixth of the way and repeat with next sheet of phyllo, brushing between each with melted butter and letting the edges hang over the pan. By the time you are done, the pie dish should look like a child's drawing of sun rays. Pour the spinach mixture into the phyllo and neatly fold the edges of the phyllo up to seal in the filling. Brush the top of each layer with melted butter. Bake for 1 hour.
2. Can be made up to one day before serving. Keep in the fridge well wrapped. Heat gently before serving.



I think of a galette as a low-maintenance version of a quiche – just as delicious because of the flaky pastry and amazing filling, but no need to worry about a pie dish or custard. Because a galette is far drier than a quiche, it travels easily and tastes amazing at room temperature. This galette is filled with potatoes, onions and cheese, and though on an intellectual level I totally get that these are classic French flavours, I can't help but think that some French flavours taste a lot like classic Jewish flavours. What would an Ashkenazi Jewish kitchen be without potatoes and onions?

SERVES 6

POTATO & ONION GALETTE

Half of the recipe for flaky pie dough

FOR FILLING AND TOPPING:

- 4 Tbsp olive oil divided
- 450g (1 pound) roasting potatoes, washed (left unpeeled) and cut into ½ inch thick
- Flaky sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 large onion (340g/12 ounces), peeled and thinly sliced
- ½ tsp finely chopped fresh thyme
- 115g (4 ounces) Swiss cheese (Emmental works well), coarsely grated
- 1 egg, lightly beaten

RECIPE

1. Heat the oven to 200°C (400°).
2. Roast the potatoes: drizzle a roasting tin with 1 tablespoon olive oil, lay the sliced potatoes in a single layer on the oiled roasting tin, season the potato slices with salt and pepper, drizzle the top of the potatoes with half a tablespoon olive oil. Place in oven and roast for 20-25 minutes until fork tender. Take out of the oven and let cool completely.
3. Fry the onions: Heat a medium sauté pan over medium-high heat. Once hot, add 2 tablespoons of olive oil. When the oil starts simmering, add the onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft and lightly coloured, 8 to 10 minutes. Stir in the thyme, season with salt and pepper. Transfer to a plate and set aside to cool.
4. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Roll the dough into a large, thin round about 30cm (12 inches) in diameter and transfer it to the lined baking sheet. Chill for 1 hour.
5. To assemble and bake the Galette: In a medium bowl, place the cooled roast potatoes, cooled onions and cheese; combine, taste and adjust seasoning with salt and pepper. Mound the filling in the centre of the chilled tart shell, leaving a 3cm (1¼ inch) border at the edge. Fold that border up around the filling, pleating it to make a pretty, circular enclosure and leaving the centre open. Drizzle the filling with half a tablespoon olive oil and sprinkle lightly with salt and pepper. Lightly brush the pleated dough with the beaten egg to give it shine and help it brown in the oven.

FLAKY PIE DOUGH

Vodka is essential to the texture of the crust and imparts no flavour – do not substitute extra water. The alcohol is key to our recipe; if you don't have vodka on hand, you can use another 80 proof (40% alcohol) liquor.

This recipe can be used to make both sweet and savoury pies and tarts. You can make the dough ahead of time, wrap in plastic, and refrigerate for up to 2 days or freeze for 1 month. You can also save time by making the dough in the food processor.

MAKES 2 X 23CM (9 INCH) PIE SHELLS

FLAKY PIE DOUGH

- 355g (2¾ cups + 2 Tbsp) plain (all-purpose) flour
- ½ tsp kosher salt
- 12g (3 tsp) granulated sugar (omit for a savoury crust)
- 225 grams (1 cup) unsalted butter or vegan alternative, very cold, cut into ½-inch cubes
- 60ml (¼ cup) vodka
- 60ml (¼ cup) ice water

•

RECIPE

1. Place the flour and salt and sugar, if using, in a large mixing bowl. Using a pastry blender, two knives or your fingers, cut or rub the butter into the flour mixture until the butter pieces are the size of peas. Sprinkle vodka and ice water, alternating, one tablespoon at a time, over the flour mixture. Stir and fluff the flour mixture with a fork until shaggy clumps form.
2. Pick up the large clumps and squeeze to test for moisture. If clumps hold together, transfer them to a work surface and continue adding tablespoons of vodka and ice water and stirring with the fork.
3. Gather the clumps of dough together on the work surface and knead the dough gently 4 or 5 times. If dough falls apart, return it to the mixing bowl and sprinkle teaspoons of ice water and mix with a fork until dough holds together when squeezed.
4. Divide the dough into two equal portions, flatten the dough into a disk, cover in plastic wrap and refrigerate for 60 minutes before rolling out.

FOR FOOD PROCESSOR DIRECTIONS:

1. Place the flour, salt and sugar, if using, in the bowl of a food processor fitted with the blade attachment. Process a couple of times to distribute the salt and sugar (if using). Add the cubed butter and pulse 5-10 times for no more than a couple of seconds each time, to break up the butter and make into pea-sized lumps.
2. Add all the vodka to the processor and pulse another 2-5 times, to distribute evenly. Add the water one tablespoon at a time, pulsing between each addition. After the second tablespoon of water has been incorporated, test the dough. If the dough clumps together then it is ready; if it is still dry and falls apart easily, add another tablespoon water, pulse a couple of times and test again. Once dough clumps together easily, remove from the food processor onto the work surface. Knead dough gently 4-5 times until it holds together.
3. Divide the dough into two equal portions, flatten the dough into a disk, cover in plastic wrap and refrigerate for 60 minutes before rolling out.



PASHTIDA

Pashtida is an Israeli no-crust quiche that makes the best of the dairy products and fresh vegetables that are on offer wherever you are in Israel. Our version uses solid ricotta and a combination of courgettes (zucchini) and peas. The addition of pesto takes this from a simple traybake to something that your friends and family will request time and time again (at least mine do)!

** If you don't have self-raising flour, substitute it with 150g (1 cup + 2½ tablespoons) plain flour and 2 teaspoons baking powder. Be sure to mix the flour and baking powder well before adding to the rest of the ingredients.*



PASHTIDA – COURGETTE AND RICOTTA BAKE

- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 brown onion, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 450g courgette, grated
- 80g (1 cup) parmesan, finely grated
- 150g (1 cup + 3 Tbsp) self-raising flour, sifted
- Sea salt and cracked black pepper
- 6 eggs, lightly beaten
- 300g (1½ cups) ricotta, cut into 1cm cubes
- 180g (1½ cups) frozen peas, thawed and crushed
- 2 Tbsp store-bought pesto – or homemade pesto

RECIPE

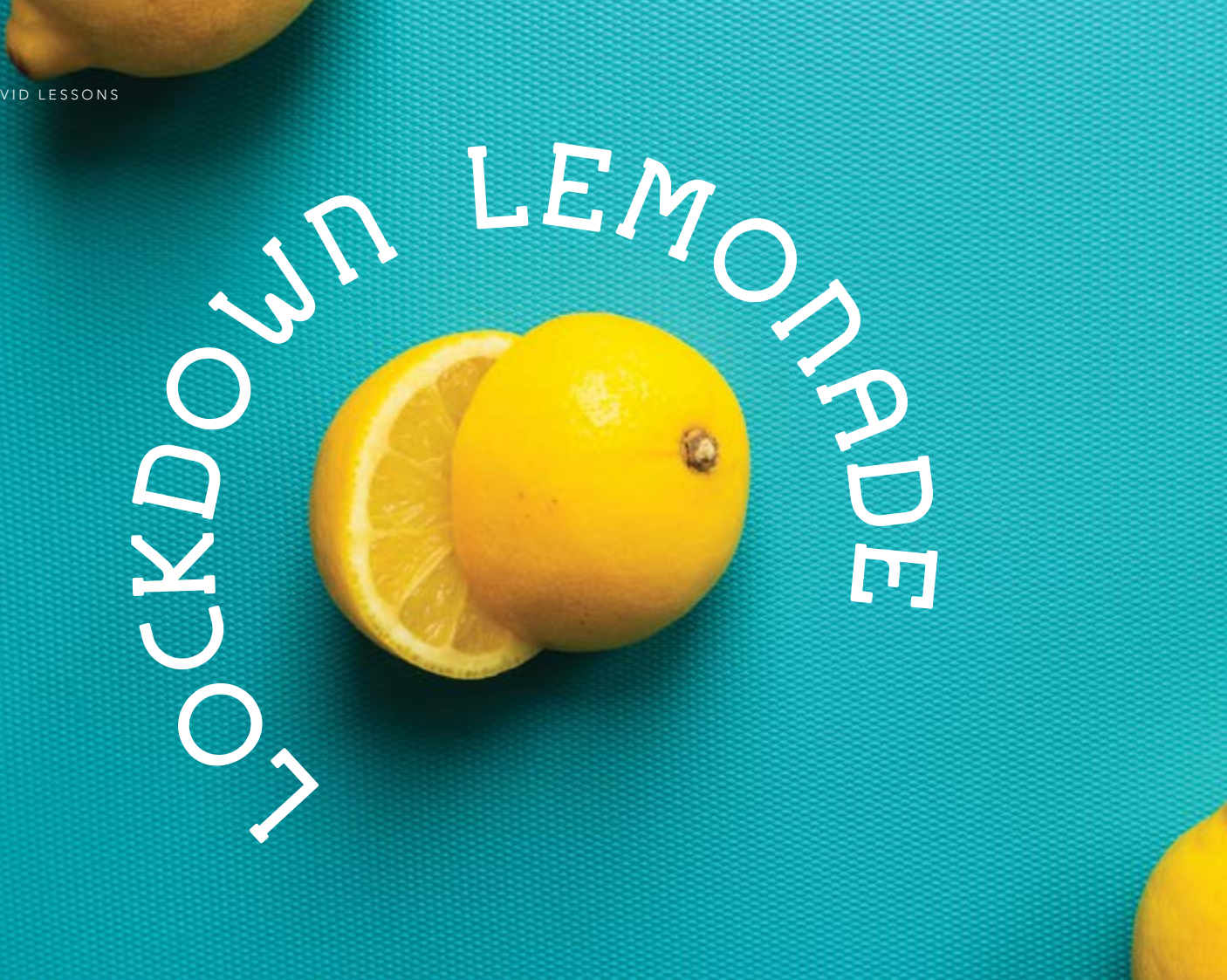
1. Preheat oven to 200°C (400°F). Heat the oil in a medium non-stick frying pan over high heat. Add the onion and garlic and cook for 3-4 minutes or until lightly golden.
2. In a large bowl, place the courgette, parmesan, flour, salt and pepper, onion and garlic, and mix to combine. Make a well in the centre, add the eggs and mix to combine.
3. Fold through the ricotta, peas and pesto and spoon into a lightly greased 20cm x 30cm tin lined with non-stick baking paper.
4. Bake for 25-30 minutes or until golden and a skewer inserted comes out clean. Allow to cool slightly and cut into slices to serve. Serves 8-10.



Ilana Epstein cannot look at a recipe without seeing hundreds, if not thousands of years of migration, resilience and Jewish pride in every ingredient. A product of her own migration journey across the Jewish globe, Epstein's Jewish food and lifestyle brand, Ta'am, always leaves a sweet aftertaste.



LOCKDOWN LEMONADE



TURNING A GENERAL SENSE OF GLOOM
INTO A FRESH AND POSITIVE EXPERIENCE.

by **SARA ELIAS**

In my pre-lockdown life, Sundays were always a bit of a struggle. Perhaps my expectations were unrealistic, but the visions of a really good, long walk or an afternoon spent learning a new skill almost never became a reality. In addition, there was always the standard round of birthday parties, homework, last-minute purchases before the week began... Before I knew it, Sunday was over with very little to show for itself, leaving me feeling very flat.

As lockdown began in March 2020, I rushed to make a daily schedule for my children. Well, I say for my children, but it was obviously much more for my benefit than theirs. I duly

printed it out in rainbow colours and stuck it on the fridge. I know full well why I created that schedule – because I was convinced that every day of lockdown would turn out to be an unbearable, aimless succession of Sundays. I needed structure. I needed a plan. I needed to keep every day as unlike Sunday as possible.

But lockdown did not become that unbearable succession of Sundays. Far from it. Like everyone else, we had our own challenges, fears and sadnesses, but we also managed to find some shining nuggets of joy among the gloom.

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THAT EVERY DAY OF
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Italy began to lock down a few weeks before we did (remember that?), and I distinctly remember an interview with an Italian man who talked about how they were making the best of it, especially the long, lazy lunches that no one had time for anymore (no, not even the Italians had time for long lunches in those distant, pre-COVID days). It seemed to me at the time such a quaint thing, so Italian... and yet, a few short weeks later our lunches were stretching lazily into mid-afternoon, even on a non-Shabbat day.

At some point, my husband and I started to reminisce about life before – before we met, before we had kids, before the children were old enough to have memories of their own. One night we recalled playing ‘Articulate’ with friends, and how I laughed so much, I fell off my chair. Instantly, the children decided to make it their mission to “make Mummy fall off her chair again”, and so we began to play ‘Articulate’ together.

Monopoly has also made an appearance, and we play on my husband’s ancient set. There is a saying: “The family that plays together, stays together” (and I don’t doubt that ‘pray’ can easily be substituted for ‘play’). I can see now that there is something incredibly therapeutic about trying to thrash each other in a board game while spending most of the time attempting to coexist amicably. Our children have now been fully, but safely, exposed to my ultra-competitive side, while my daughters have displayed an admirable ability to team up against their parents. My son, the youngest child, has been crowned the Tycoon, as he somehow manages to win every game. Not that we ever seem to get to the end of a game of Monopoly, but then, who does? Even for someone with my competitive streak, I can see that that is completely beside the point.

One of the very unexpected highlights has been the two sets of *Sedarim* held in COVID captivity. The irony of celebrating the great moment of our freedom from slavery while confined to our homes has escaped no one’s attention, and the prospect of the first Pesach in lockdown

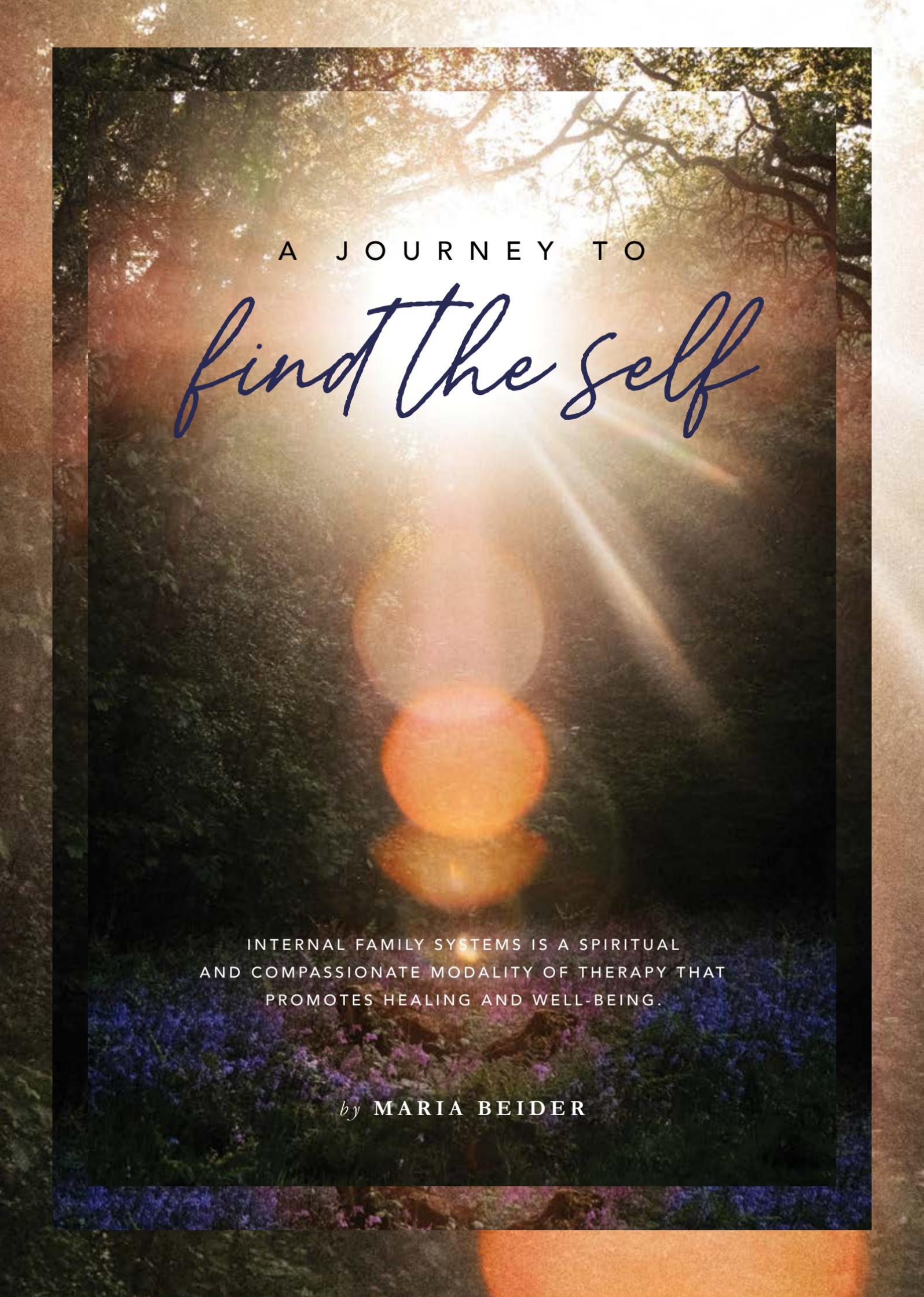
seemed almost unbearably sad. However, an interesting consequence has been the freedom to focus entirely on the children, which is, in fact, the entire point – we are explicitly commanded ‘*v’higadeta l’vincha*’ – and you shall tell your children. Lockdown allowed us to tailor the *Sedarim* precisely to them, with all the time in the world to answer their questions, listen to their insights, hear their pieces prepared at (home)school. While I relish the prospect of welcoming guests again to next year’s *Sedarim* (BH, BH), it has been liberating and illuminating to experience it in this very private way.

Of course, much as I love hearing my children’s voices, it has also been imperative to find ways to leave them behind without leaving the house. For me, this (occasionally emergency) procedure has involved my headphones and the discovery of several fantastic podcasts and audiobooks. Lockdown 1 will now forever be associated in my mind with Hilary Mantel’s epic *Wolf Hall trilogy*, which I listened to while cooking, doing the housework, or simply shutting out the household noise. It was pure escapism, transporting me completely to another time and another place. When I removed my headphones, I would feel slightly altered, better able to cope.

It feels almost heretical to admit that on occasion lockdown had its up-sides, but for many of us, it did. I recently heard a woman on the radio talking about how special this time had been for her family. This was not a family of means, yet she spoke of the joy of her husband being home every day, allowing them to experience together the minutiae of their small children growing and changing. She was already mourning a time they would never get back and that would (probably, hopefully) never come again.



Before becoming a mother, Sara Elias was a journalist, working mainly on a food magazine. Currently a governor at North West London Jewish Day School, she is an avid listener to radio, podcasts and *shiurim*.



A JOURNEY TO
find the self

INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEMS IS A SPIRITUAL
AND COMPASSIONATE MODALITY OF THERAPY THAT
PROMOTES HEALING AND WELL-BEING.

by MARIA BEIDER

As times remain fragile and full of uncertainty for much of the world, I would like to share with you a wonderful approach to life, which can be invaluable for those feeling fragmented and in search of peace of mind.

A few years ago, I came across a modality of therapy which spoke to my very soul. This therapy is spiritual, deep, kind, compassionate and yet it simultaneously promotes healing and well-being. The journey it takes you on is like a wake-up call that puts you back in touch with your inner self, your core, reaching parts of yourself that you may have forgotten about, been critical or judgmental of, shamed or exiled. It is cleansing and at the same time creates a sense of inner tranquillity. Like the *teshuvah* process in Judaism, it feels like an introspection and a return to a purer, more whole and integrated, self. This therapy that is taking the world by a storm is called Internal Family Systems (IFS).

Whether you are dealing with anxiety, anger, emotional dysregulation, depression or trauma, this modality can help you heal yourself. The key to this modality and way of life lies in our ability to access the “self” and get to know our different internal parts.

Our minds are complex and made up of many multiple parts, which work to protect us and manage our lives for us. Right now, I have a part that wants to take a nap and another part that wants to get this article finished, as well as distracting parts that tell me to stop writing and take care of dinner. Protector parts or managers include anxious, angry, perfectionist, critical, organised, guilty and impatient parts for a start. They are similar to defence mechanisms. Rather than trying to repress or get rid of such parts, IFS attempts to acknowledge, accept and befriend them, which is done by the client becoming curious about them, getting to know them and even having a conversation with them. A lot of the work in IFS is separating a part from the self and being able to get to know a part, while being in the ‘self’.

What is the self? Self is the inner spark found within every human, which I call the *nesbama* or soul. The self cannot be damaged. It is holy and knows how to heal. It is part of a bigger cosmic Self, which I would call God. Characteristics that are possessed by the self are known as the eight Cs, which include compassion, creativity, curiosity, calm, courage, clarity, confidence and connectedness. When the client is able to access the self, it will embody these characteristics. For example, it will be able to feel compassion towards the angry part and curious to understand it better too.

When a person experiences trauma or life gets too difficult to manage and they are functioning in survival mode, these parts often take on extreme roles. Extreme protector parts are known as firefighters. They will do whatever it takes to protect us even if they cause damage in the process. These parts include behaviours such as addiction, self-harm, rage or suicide. Instead of telling the client to stop drinking, in IFS, the therapist asks the client to get to know the drinking part and understand what it is trying to achieve. It is usually trying to help the client, in this case by numbing emotional pain through alcohol consumption. It has the client’s best interests at heart, it just does not realise that there are other ways to be helpful. Once the self is able to honour the firefighter, express gratitude, build a relationship with this extreme part and offer it some hope, it usually calms down, bringing more harmony to the inner system of the client. It often chooses to take on a different role when given a chance.

Other parts have been banished because they bring up too many memories or feelings that cause pain. Or they were taught that they were not socially acceptable during one’s earlier years. These are universal feelings which we call exiles and they hold the pain of rejection, abandonment, loneliness, isolation, shame and worthlessness. They have often been locked away by our protectors. Parts can also be somatic, such as an unexplained headache or backache.

What is more, with a trauma survivor, when the exiles get triggered, their protectors become even more extreme in order to prevent the exiles from escaping. Hence you may see self-harming, anorexic, dissociative or addictive parts within the same individual. Once the client has worked with their protector parts and has permission from them, they can go to the exiled part, which often takes the form of a vulnerable child part. With the therapist’s help, the client can bring himself or herself to do the necessary healing that needs to take place. Often the exile will share a painful story and the client will have the opportunity to witness that story with the therapist, sometimes even going back and changing the scene that caused so much discomfort or anguish or rescuing the child part and bringing her back to the present. It is deeply touching to be a part of this process in which the child part is seen finally, after many years, and nurtured by the client’s adult self. Often a reparative attachment takes place in which the adult self is able to provide love and care for the exile.

— 69 —

**WHEN A PERSON
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TAKE ON EXTREME ROLES.**

Sometimes these parts are carrying a big burden and look like parentified children. The therapist must work to help the client unburden them of whatever they are carrying around with them.

For example, a child part which has been frozen in time, could be unknowingly shouldering the burden of guilt, self-loathing or self-blame due to their parents' divorce. Furthermore, children who have been abused often find it easier to cope if they can preserve the image of their parents and it can remain intact and good. Therefore, they survive by denying or forgetting the abuse and ingesting the bad. As a result, they will need to fragment or exile parts of themselves in order to survive. Once the adult self can talk to the traumatised child part, and is able to relieve them of this difficult burden, they often become happy, carefree child-like parts that just want to play. It is awe-striking and very moving to watch this process take place within an individual.

Sometimes the client is carrying around a legacy burden, which is a burden they have inherited from their family, culture or education. It may be a belief or value that has been passed down through generations. These burdens are often easy to unload because they do not belong to the client.

As is evident, IFS is empowering for any individual who is seeking self-healing. The client is encouraged to self-soothe and heal traumatic wounds, with guidance from the therapist. There is a deep sensitivity in this way of working with a client. People feel tended to and they get to have all their

parts taken care of, while attaining mastery over their inner world.

During a recent training in which I participated, Richard Schwartz, founder of IFS, evoked the powerful image of the abandoned boys in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. Using this metaphor, he explained how our inner world of parts often looks like little children running around, fighting like warriors, or vulnerable and lost, resulting in internal anarchy. These parts are generally scared and at times desperately seeking adult leadership.

"In a moment the platform was full of arguing, gesticulating shadows. To Ralph, seated, this seemed like the breaking-up of sanity. Fear, beasts, no general agreement that the fire was all-important: and when one tried to get the thing straight the argument sheared off, bringing up fresh, unpleasant matter." (p 110)

The ultimate goal is to learn how to access the self and eventually lead from self both internally and in the external world too. Once the parts have been seen and liberated from their extreme roles, unburdened of their heavy loads, they can find their place until, eventually, there is inner harmony within the internal family system.



Originally a primary school teacher from London, Maria Beider lived in Israel with her husband and their five children for 14 years. During this time, she gained a master's degree in social work and subsequently practised as a psychotherapist at the Neve Family Institute, specialising in trauma. She is also trained in EMDR and IFS (Internal Family Systems). Beider and her family currently reside in Johannesburg, where she has opened a private practice and sees clients both in person and online. To make an appointment, please WhatsApp +972 52 607 0113 or email: mariabeider10@gmail.com

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