

PERSPECTIVES

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The magazine of
**jewish
futures**

Finding LIGHT *in the* DARKNESS

L'CHAIM - TO LIFE!

Celebrating 18 years
of JRoots

OCTOBER 7TH

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DEAR READERS,

I'd like to welcome you to our 19th edition of Perspectives Magazine the way I and the wonderful editors before me have - with jubilation and excitement. I have always written my note to you from the past into an unknown future, hopeful for you to read it in a time of greater joy than when I've sat down to write it. This time, the feeling is extreme. I hope by the time you read my words, we are celebrating, we are rejoicing and we are reunited with loved ones in health and true, lasting peace.

This year, we celebrate 18 years since the foundation of JRoots. In the wider world, there are material anniversaries: cotton, wood, silver, gold, platinum - great fun to celebrate, but perhaps devoid of deeper meaning. In Hebrew, letters and numbers are intertwined, carrying with them meaning and purpose. The Nazis dehumanised their prisoners in concentration camps by replacing their names with tattooed numbers. They did not fully succeed. 18 in Hebrew (יח) spells *chai* - life. Life is not just about survival, but the flourishing of spirit and identity that JRoots celebrates and nurtures through its mission.

I don't know what the world will look like mere weeks away, once you, dear Reader, turn these pages. For now, we have been faced with numbers - terrible numbers. It is our responsibility not to treat the victims and the fallen as numbers, but to face them, honour them and learn their names and faces to give them meaning and keep their memory alive.

After destruction, comes a surge of growth. Following the destruction of the Second

Temple in Jerusalem, the Yeshiva in Yavneh was established and the learning thrived. Within just a few short years after the Holocaust, the State of Israel was born and flourished. When a seed falls into the ground, it goes through a natural breakdown process necessary to give new life. (Perhaps it is no coincidence that we reflect in this edition in time for one of Judaism's lesser-known holidays, the new year for trees called Tu B'Shevat.) The process is cloaked in darkness, underground, when all hope seems lost - but in reality that seed is growing beneath the surface, only to pop out months later with a tiny sprout.

We have lived through unfathomable destruction on the 7th of October and through its aftermath, a searingly painful period of darkness (at the moment that I sit and write this, our nation is burying more soldiers - our children, our siblings, our husbands, our fathers). Just as we can look back at the destruction our nation has already withstood, from which it has been redeemed, so too do we hope, pray - and deep down, know - that from such terrible destruction will come the greatest, ultimate redemption.

Sasha Silber

Sasha Silber has a passion for creativity, demonstrated throughout her career as a professional concert pianist, vocal coach for opera singers and performance coach for Oscar-nominated actors in movies such as Star Wars - among other artistic endeavours. A native of New York, she has worked on three continents, speaks several languages and lives in Jerusalem with her fabulous husband Daniel and their adorable children.

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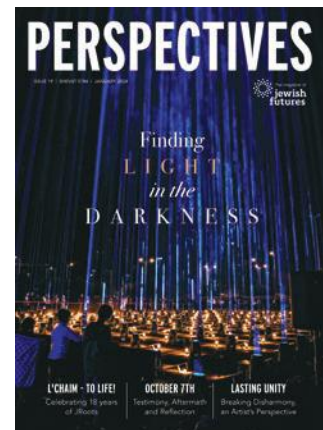
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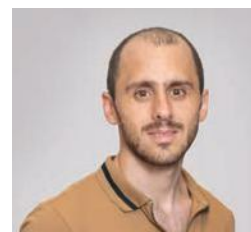
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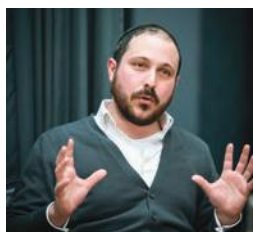
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Eli studied in Talmudic College in Israel, gained rabbinic ordination from the Jerusalem Kollel, and earned a BSc in Criminology & Social Psychology. After working at the Jewish Learning Exchange and Hasmonean High School, he joined Aish UK as Director of Young Professionals. Eli now leads community development at Stanmore & Canons Park.



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Gareth is a South African part-time writer and full-time husband and father of 3. He is co-founder of Yonda, a tax software business. He loves sports, reading, writing and eating. He's a dog lover who can be spotted walking the streets of London with his best mate Buddy the border collie.

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Adam lives in Israel and is co-editor of CAMERA UK. He's had op-eds published in numerous publications, addressing both anti-Israel bias and antisemitism. Last September, he gave a talk at the inaugural conference of the London Centre for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism.



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**RIVKA
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Rivka Magzimof, Eli's wife and mother of four, is deeply invested in Israel's growth. An Israeli native with a B.Ed in Education and Visual Communications and an EMBA from Bar Ilan University, she's the Operations and Education Director at Shelanu. Her 15-year experience with diaspora Jewish communities fuels her efforts to strengthen Jewish identity. Rivka is also a passionate artist, pianist and chef.



RABBI

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Rabbi Jack is the Director of Jewish Education for Hebrew Academy of Miami, coming from the world of outreach and teacher training. He holds a BA in physics and philosophy from the University of Pennsylvania, and a M.Ed from Harvard. He writes regularly for *theexpressionoflife.com*, and co-authored *Nurture their Nature: The Torah's Essential Guidance for Parents and Teachers*.



ADAM FOX

Adam Fox grew up in North London. He earned a BA in Film Production at Chapman University in California. For the next ten years, he freelanced as a director/editor in Los Angeles and London, producing primarily web-based commercial and corporate videos. Adam is now a video producer at Jewish Futures.



ARIELLA GOLDWICHT

Ariella studied in Parsons school of Design in NY and works as a freelance graphic artist and writer, living and raising her family in Jerusalem since 2005. Ariella is passionate about uniting the Jewish people in Israel, connecting seniors with the younger generation, hosting large Shabbat meals and building programming for lone soldiers are amongst some of Ariella's social initiatives.



MIMI HECHT

Mimi Hecht is a writer and entrepreneur from New York. She is the co-founder of modest clothing brand MIMU MAXI. She shares her thoughts on Jewish identity, motherhood and healing on her Instagram @mimihecht as well as her online newsletter, Inward. [@mimihecht](https://www.instagram.com/mimihecht) mimihecht.com



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Zak Jeffay is Director of Education at JRoots, formerly Bnei Akiva UK's Mazkir and JFS School's Head of Informal Jewish Education. With a history degree and a Masters in Jewish Education, he studied at Yad Vashem and Shem Olam Institute. He's led international trips to Poland, Germany, Italy and Ukraine. Originally from London, he now lives in Modiin, Israel with his family.



SHERRI MANDELL

Sherri Mandell is the co-founder of the Koby Mandell Foundation which runs healing groups and camps for Israeli children and families whose loved ones were murdered by terrorists. Her latest book is *The Kabbalah of Writing: Mystical Practices for Inspiration and Creativity*. She received a National Jewish Book Award for her spiritual memoir, *The Blessing of a Broken Heart*. [✉ sherrimandell@gmail.com](mailto:sherrimandell@gmail.com)



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With over 20 years of Torah teaching experience in England and Israel, Shani, now the Managing Director at Yeshivat Simchat Shlomo and a trained marriage coach, lives in Jerusalem with her husband Yochanan. He is a private therapist and marriage counsellor at Amudim Israel, aiding Jews in severe crises. Together, they specialise in delivering talks on relationships, specifically 'Marriage with Baggage.'



RABBI

NAFTALI SCHIFF

Rabbi Naftali Schiff is the founder & CEO of Jewish Futures, a family of educational organisations including JRoots, Gift, Aish, Chazak, Chazon and Shelanu. He read International Relations at the London School of Economics, gained rabbinic ordination from the Jerusalem Rabbinat, a Diploma of Education from the Israeli Ministry of Education and saw active service with the IDF Givati infantry unit.



TZVI SPERBER

Tzvi has over thirty years of experience in Jewish informal education. He served as the National Director of Bnei Akiva UK, Director of Education for United Israel Appeal of Canada and Head of Israeli Ministry of Tourism Tour Guide Course. Since 1992, he has guided and educated groups worldwide. In 2005, Tzvi co-founded JRoots with Rabbi Naftali Schiff, leading thousands on inspiring Jewish journeys. He is also the co-author of *Triumph and Tragedy*.



YISSCA WEISZ

Since studying English Literature at UCL, Yissca has contributed to different publications, including the *Observer* in New York, Jewish history magazine *Segula* in Israel, and *Valour Lifestyle* in London. With a keen eye for detail and sensitivity to the pulse around her, Yissca conveys on the page what is experienced within.



Our
hearts are
there until
they are
all *here*



As of the print date of
this edition, 129 hostages
remain in captivity in Gaza.

We hope that by the time
this edition is read, they
are all home of sound
body and mind.

We pray for all of them -
those still in captivity
and those who have
returned - for their
safety and healing.

יזכור

We Remember

Am Yisrael is reeling from the unfathomable scope of loss and tragedy since the 7th of October, 2023. As of the print date of this issue, the Jewish Futures family has personally lost two heroic soldiers in battle. We hope and pray that casualties to our soldiers and civilians will stop, and that good and light will prevail. May their memories be for a blessing.

Compiled by Daniel Verbov



Sgt. Binyamin Meir Airly, 21
101st Battalion, Paratroopers Brigade

Binyamin was tragically killed in an incident in northern Gaza, where an Israeli tank inadvertently blew up a house he was entering, having believed it to be cleared of Hamas terrorists.

His father Rob – who was on the first Aish Fellowships in 1993 – said, “Binyamin personified modesty... He was loved and respected by everyone who came across him. He was a leader, always wanting to be at the front.”

Binyamin shunned smartphones and material possessions. He was very careful not to speak badly about anyone and he was very particular about the *mitzvah* (commandment) of honouring parents. He also loved Israel, loved Torah and on his time off, he would volunteer on a farm, working as a shepherd and guarding the area.

Rob added: “In our family, we never said a bad word about *Klal Yisrael* (the Jewish people) or about different types of Jews, and we hope that as a people, we can carry on this tradition after this war. *Achdut* (unity) is the only way we can bring *Moshiach* (redemption) and defeat our enemies.

Binyamin lived in Bet Shemesh with his parents, Rob and Jen, and five siblings.



Sgt. Nathanel Young, 20
13th Battalion, Golani Infantry Brigade

Nathanel Young was killed on the Gaza border after helping to save many lives in Kibbutz Zikim during the October 7th Massacre.

Young, a former JFS pupil, made *aliyah* (immigrated to Israel) after school, joined the army and was living in the Bayit Shel Benji lone-soldier house in Raanana.

His brother Eliot said, “Nathanel always had strong Jewish pride. From a young age he was passionate about defending his country – it’s something he talked about a lot... He was also full of life, very giving and caring and loved his family and friends... Everyone I’ve spoken to who was a friend of Nathanel – their faces just light up when I say his name. That’s how he made people feel, he made people smile.”

Nathanel's parents, Chantel and Nicky have decided to fulfil their son's wishes and immigrate to Israel. “His deep love for the country and unwavering commitment to its defence instil in us a sense of immense pride amid our profound sorrow. From the warmth and support we felt from thousands at the funeral and during *shiva* (mourning period), we realised that Israel – the land Nathanel loved so much – would be our new home.”

This edition went to print on January 4th, 2023. We hope and pray that no other soldiers have fallen, or will ever fall again.

FEATURES



Journey & insight

Meet Olympic athlete AJ Edelman, experience history with a JRoots 18th anniversary spread featuring insights by survivors of atrocities and take a hard look at media bias. Escape into a photo essay showing light and kindness during these trying times, and settle in for a fascinating look at geopolitics today.

Léa Ouahba Kohen. Jerusalem, Israel. October, 2023

Champion of Conviction: AJ EDELMAN

In a world where integrity is often defeated by intimidation, AJ Edelman exemplifies dignified and unyielding faith

Sasha Silber

Born in Boston and raised in a modern Orthodox, Zionist environment, AJ's path to the podium did not begin with dreams of Olympic glory, but rather by studying mechanical engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and continuing on to earn an MBA from Yale University. Parallel to his academic pursuits, Edelman's sporting journey is unique. As a kid, he played baseball and ice hockey; his athletic aspirations took a significant turn when he was asked by Israel's national hockey team to play for them as he began his senior year at MIT (one of the oldest collegiate hockey programs in the country).

Realising he was the first Shabbat Observant player in the program's history and noting the lack of proudly Jewish representation in sport, Edelman decided to pursue skeleton. Edelman chose to represent Israel, a nation with a limited winter sports history. He made his Olympic debut in the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea, as Israel's first skeleton athlete, where he showcased his dedication and skill. Despite not winning a medal, Edelman's participation (as the first Orthodox Jewish athlete in the Winter Olympics) was a significant milestone for both his personal career and Israeli winter sports, marking him as a notable

figure in the realm of athletes who have switched disciplines to achieve their Olympic dreams.

In 2019, Edelman took a bold step by forming a bobsled team, despite facing significant financial challenges that continue to this day, with only about 5% of a season's expenses covered through fundraising. His commitment

intensified during the pandemic. Nearly 21 years after the Israeli Bobsled Federation's inception in 2002, Edelman's skeleton skills have carried over to his Bobsled endeavours, and his team now stands poised to make Olympic history in 2026. Looking forward, the team aims to secure enough funding to compete in the 2026 Olympic Games, an ambition that promises to enhance Edelman's legacy and solidify Israel's place in the winter sports landscape.

Beyond the icy track, AJ is a vocal advocate of the Jewish people, outspoken against antisemitism and in support of Israel, particularly relevant with its open global alarming resurgence following the massacre of October 7th.

I was lucky to catch AJ on the phone from Israel while he drove cross-country with his Israel Bobsled team for races.

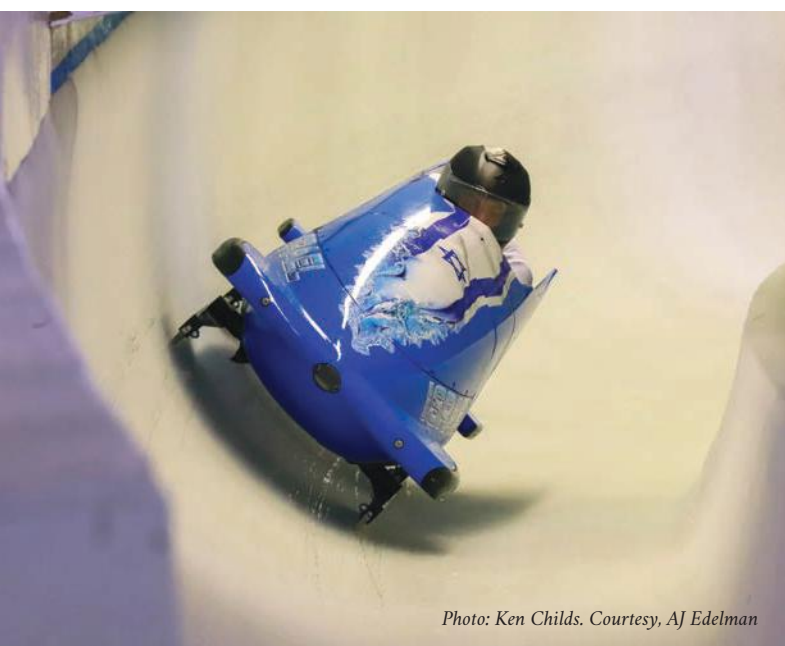


Photo: Ken Childs. Courtesy, AJ Edelman



Photo: Eric Schramm. Courtesy, AJ Edelman



Your journey has been both fascinating and inspiring. Could you tell us about your upbringing?

Everything always starts with my parents. They are the key to my upbringing. Everything that I have achieved, or even dream of achieving, is the result of their positive influence as good parents who exemplify what it means to not only live a life of *Torah Umada* (Torah and secular knowledge), but also as fundamentally good human beings. My parents gave us the tools to understand how we could reach for our goals while being proudly Jewish.

I never dreamed of the Olympics before starting my journey for Team Israel in 2014, but I had always envisioned being the first Jewish something. For the longest time,

that dream was to serve as the first Jewish president. (I believe that that dream is gone; I simply cannot imagine that someone so proudly Zionist, especially having represented Israel, could go far in US national politics.) My hope is that whatever I do for the remainder of my life will be in the service of our people and country. I identify first and foremost as an Israeli: I was born a Jew, but I chose Israel. Israel, in turn, gave me everything. It is my love, my passion and my pride - the reason I do what I do. Before every race run I say the words, "for myself, my people and my country."

You fell in love with Israel while on a highschool trip. Can you tell me about it?

It was the outbreak of the second Lebanon war. Prior to the war I was a lazy and

unmotivated student and son. My mum and dad, to their immense credit, sent me to Israel for the summer, thinking that something might be sparked within me. They were correct. Spending the summer in bomb shelters as a 15-year-old really changed my outlook on life. I wanted to accomplish something better than what I was on the path towards. For that gift that Israel gave me, I vowed to become Israeli. I believe that I will never be able to fully give back to Israel what it has blessed me with.

How do your beliefs influence your perspective as an athlete representing Israel on the international stage?

I am modern orthodox. The driving philosophy behind modern orthodoxy is

perhaps best summed up by Rav Soloveichik, who often pointed out Abraham saying that he was a *ger vetoshav* (an alien and a resident) amongst the gentiles. We are Jews. There is something different about us, and wonderfully special. But we live in a broader society that we have to operate in.

I believe that Jews and Israelis have the ability to always represent themselves as individuals, their people (the Nation of Israel), and their country, Israel. My sporting efforts have been wholly dedicated to the service of all three. I must represent myself proudly but never lose sight of the fact that every single time I step on the ice or interact with others I am carrying the people and country with me.

It's important in my view for a Jew to feel a responsibility for being Jewish. Being a Jew is one of those all or nothing kind of deals: believing that Judaism is divinely inspired requires the belief that Jews are chosen by God as a special people. There is a responsibility in that: representing our people is that responsibility. For better or worse, we are all ambassadors of our fellow Jews and Israelis. While I am proud to have the opportunity to be an ambassador every moment of the day, it's important to remember that this role isn't limited to public figures; every one of us shares in this responsibility.

Have you encountered any personal challenges or faced backlash, perhaps in the form of threats or negative repercussions as a result of being so proudly Jewish or Israeli?

Certainly - but I think that this is just part of being a Jew. There have always been challenges in our history in being Jewish where others are concerned. Rather than focusing on the negatives, I find it is much more important and productive to be proud of our identity. This pride is critical to our physical and spiritual survival as a nation. Much of the reason that hatred of the Jewish people festers and boils below the surface, gathering pressure like a volcano that erupts every so often, is that we have historically kept our heads down, preferring not to rock the boat, believing mistakenly that if we integrate and lessen our outward pride then we would be spared from this vitriol. This is a lie - an attractive but devastatingly harmful one. Problematically, I believe that this has generally been the modus operandi of Jewish leadership for thousands of years. The desperation to move up and hold the fragile Jewish position in society through means of being "quietly" Jewish.

It creates the impression that we are an "others" group that is foreign but tries to sneakily blend in, feeding into a very dangerous antisemitic trope. Jews will never be accepted into society as standard members of the majority. To white people we are not white (which is true, we are a Middle Eastern people) and, to minorities, we are part of a successful power structure, the symbol of success that is far from being obtained by others. And so what is the answer to this? To proudly proclaim that we are the Jewish people: we are our own entity, and we are proud of it.

Years ago I was told by Israeli security personnel to be as discreet as possible outside of competition venues. Instead, I went the

opposite route. I always travel with a jacket that has ISRAEL in huge letters, I made suits that say Israel in 3 different ways, and put a big painting of Samson breaking pillars on my helmet. This, to me, is the way we thrive as a people. Proudly and openly.

My hope is that Jewish leadership in particular can take lessons from this. It is far past the time for a change.

Has it gotten worse or evolved since the 7th of October?

I just think that the lessons have not been learned adequately. There's a lot of hand-



AJ Edelman joined MSNBC to discuss how four of his teammates joined the hundreds of thousands of other reservists in fighting for Israel against Hamas. October 14, 2023



Photo: Eric Schramm. Courtesy, AJ Edelman

wringing about the “sudden” explosion of antisemitism. This is neither sudden nor an explosion. What do you expect people feel when they continually spread libel about the Jewish state? Do we think they truly love Jews? Do we think that they are truly separating Israel from the people of Israel? In good conscience how can we possibly reconcile that position? It is filled with cognitive deceit. But we have a generation of people who have been told that it is socially acceptable to spread libel and the worst falsehoods about the Jews in the Middle East, and suddenly we are shocked when we find that they don't exactly care about our survival.

I feel like this moment is not a moment where it has gotten worse, but rather it is a moment in which we need to take a look in the mirror as a community and ask, “where have we failed?” People don't suddenly wake up one day with hate in their hearts. It festers and it grows and it ferments. This question needs to be asked: “If the people in positions of power in our community, our secular leaders, political leaders, entertainment leaders and celebrities are so shocked at what has been empirically true and easily

accessible, then where have we failed - and what are we going to do to change?”

So what do you feel actually needs to change, as you say, within the Jewish community, particularly in the diaspora, in order to empower more people to feel safe in expressing their identity and beliefs?

What needs to change in my view is the sense of what makes a Jew a Jew. I think we need to recognize that Israel is unseverable from the Jewish people. It is a core tenet of the faith that we long to return to Israel. We are there now. There is a state whether some like it politically or not, even in our own community. That is the reality that exists, a Jewish state that protects us, and it is high time that we fiercely and proudly protect and defend that state as it does us, because that is an integral part of our Jewish identity. The connection to the Homeland. Even if you are not a citizen and even if you do not live there, Israel is for you and you are for Israel.

There is a large part of a generation, the current young generation that has been fed a falsehood – that one of the highest callings of a Jew is to “fix the world.” *Tikkun Olam*. It has become the central focal point of their Judaism. What they have not been told, and this is quite critical, is that repairing the world starts with repairing our community. We cannot repair others before we are ourselves whole. “For me the world was created,” “saving a life is like saving the world,” etc. Judaism acknowledges that in many cases our worlds are our lives. We do not need to fix the worlds of 7 billion people before fixing the worlds of your neighbour. We need to focus inward and advocate on our own behalf before heading out to the streets to march for every single other cause to the exclusion of our own.

Do sports have anything to do with this?

Absolutely they do. I have dedicated my life to this belief.

I am mission-driven for my people and country. One of my most passionate beliefs is that a community that lacks an outlet for those to express and represent themselves is a community that will never achieve its potential. The Jewish community is overrepresented in every category except sport. Some might brush this off as unimportant, but in reality this is to me a tragedy.

I'll never forget one conversation I had just before our Olympic run in 2022 that cemented the need to ensure this change occurs: I called up the family of an NFL team and I asked if they wanted to be a part of something special – “for relatively nothing we can make history – this team will be talked about and inspire others for years. Let's do something amazing together.” They answered, “that's not what we do. Jewish sport isn't a priority the community should focus on, there are more important things to give to.”

To this day I wonder what child one of the 3 Druze/Arab Olympians or a couple of the Jewish bobsledders on that team would have inspired. Who would have been touched, motivated to start their own journeys? And which Olympic fan would have turned on their TV to see Team Israel compete, starting a lifelong fan-ship? For almost nothing. I have dedicated myself to changing this mentality. Jews have always done great things, including in sport. But we have almost written it off, it seems.

Sport has unique powers. It captivates and inspires our youth, and motivates and builds bridges in adults. Sport is a universal language that not only allows people both young and

Coaches and teammates, left to right: Maris Zvirins, Oskars Kibermanis, Ori Magnezi, AJ Edelman. Photo: Eric Schramm, December, 2023



Photo courtesy of AJ Edelman



old to mature and develop, but also normalises people. Sport is the only area I can think of in which a Jewish child might aspire to achieve proficiency and their parents would shut this down as “that’s not what we do” or “do you think you’re going to be a professional?”

We don’t ask a child dedicated to learning the piano “well do you think you’re going to be Mozart? Why bother? It’s not what we do.” Why is sport different? Arguably, sport provides an even greater pathway to self development, goal-planning, dealing with loss, fostering aspiration and providing tools that can be applied in a diverse range of applications. Sport is so important for our people and yet we treat it as a joke. This is to our detriment and it must change. I want to change it, and I will work tirelessly to do so.

It is my firm belief, something that I dream about and breathe on a daily basis, that increased Jewish participation in sport and competitive access for Jews is a central need for a community that is becoming more insular and losing its identity while it assimilates in other areas. Sport is a means that not many people think about of maintaining an identity, taking pride in a group setting while also showing respect and commanding respect from other groups. Jewish basketball

teams and baseball teams in the 20th century made serious inroads into communities where they played. Sports are not just a game. They are a means of developing oneself and adapting to loss, setting goals and interacting with others while maintaining your own identity. We really need to change this. I’m hoping that the efforts of Jared and myself will help get the ball rolling.

Is there anything you believe we can do to shift this perception of sports within the Jewish community?

Every Jew has something that they can uniquely contribute to their community, and to our people. For me I believe that my contribution is through sport. Our people and Homeland can benefit greatly from viewing sport as worthy of investment and I have dedicated the last 10 years to doing what I can to make a difference.

To that end, I joined Jared Firestone, Israel’s current national champion in the skeleton event and Olympic level talent for Israel, together with our best friends Jordana Balsam and Garrett Myer, to start a non-profit called Advancing Jewish Athletics. The goal is to

grow the organisation into one which changes the game when it comes to Jews and sports. We don’t want other athletes to suffer the same pitfalls that we have. Jared and I could be more than twice the athletes that we currently are if we didn’t have to wonder where our next meal might come from, and if we didn’t have to make a choice each year of sacrificing financial footing for representing our people. It is incredible to think that if we had only been able to raise a bit more money in 2022, our bobsled team would have probably qualified for the Olympics.

The Bobsled team is the most remarkable one that I know of. Entirely self-funded. Not a shekel from the government. It is a massive strain on the team. Yet I have to look in wonder at what has been accomplished by the boys in blue on the ice. Multiple medals. The Olympic standard in ‘22. Just remarkable. The success of BobTeam Edelman and Jared - and the entire Israel Bobsled and Skeleton Federation as a whole, which continues to field new athletes and interest - is a testament to how Jews and Israelis can accomplish amazing feats when up against the odds. But we don’t want this to be the issue going forward for other Jews. It should never be the case that representing Israel or our people must come

with great financial sacrifice. I hope to change the harmful belief that sports are any less desirable as an outlet or path than any other.

Jared and I take a percentage of our donations and give grants to other Jewish athletes. If anyone wants to learn more they can always message or visit advancingJewishathletics.org.

How does your mission translate into the specific goals and challenges of your bobsled team?

The bobsled team is my primary effort to show what can be accomplished when Jews and Israelis set their sights on athletic success. It is a team that hit Olympic standard in 2022, and if not for a fundraising shortfall would have seen a Jewish/Arab bobsled team competing for Israel. I am enormously proud of our efforts in 2022 but at the same time, cannot help but feel immense regret that if we had only been able to afford a new sled or a month more of training time, Israel would have had its olympic team.

The challenges of the team are unique to Israel. No other team in the world operates as we do, as we are the only team that not only receives not a shekel from our government, but raises on average only about 7% of our season's budget. The vast majority of my time in the offseason is spent looking for athletes and trying to make ends meet. Successful pilots generally focus on becoming better drivers and executing. But this is the spirit of Israel; if we have the challenge, we just overcome it, simple as that. It is my deep desire that the team's historic success despite being the least-funded and most logistically difficult to manage will inspire others to dig deep for their own dreams, as difficult as they are. That is what our team stands for. Should we ever find sufficient funding, you'll be seeing regular medals for the team, and the question won't be "how likely is it you will make the Olympics (an entirely funding-dependent question)," but "how high will you finish?"

Looking ahead to Milan 2026 and beyond, with your impressive background and diverse interests, where do you see yourself in the next 5, 10 years?

Until the final seconds of qualification in 2022, we believed that we were in those Games. Man plans and God laughs; I can only say that I hope He allows me to continue serving in good health.



Beyond the *Classroom*

Reflecting on eighteen years of JRoots Journeys:
nurturing Jewish continuity and ensuring vibrant Jewish futures

Rabbi Nafiali Schiff - CEO Jewish Futures. Co-Founder and Director, JRoots
Tzvi Sperber - Co-Founder and Director, JRoots

18 - יח - *chai* - is the number in Judaism that denotes life. This year, marking the 18th anniversary since the foundation JRoots, we are reflecting on what has made it such an incredible success. At a time when Jewish identity and support for Israel are being challenged, we feel stronger than ever that effective education is the key to continued and thriving Jewish life.

We are both personally - and as an organisation - passionately committed to enhancing engagement in Jewish life, in addition to nurturing communal collaboration and the development of partnerships.

For the first few years, after launching JRoots in 2006, we used to pinch ourselves each time post-programme evaluations were sent in from across the entire Jewish world with superlative feedback.

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"This was the most memorable experience of my life."

"I will go home, a proud Jew, and fight antisemitism and ignorance on campus."

"My sense of responsibility and aspiration as a teacher has been magnified tenfold by my journey with JRoots."

"The inspiration, knowledge and context provided by JRoots has given me the impetus to embrace a Jewish identity at home and work, replacing that which was previously an embarrassment and irrelevance."

"6 days in Poland with JRoots gave me more understanding and pride in being Jewish than the same number of years in the classroom."

To date, tens of thousands of Jews worldwide have participated on JRoots journeys. We made a conscious decision at the outset to always focus on Jewish life as well as death as the bedrock of our journeys. The main destination of our trips to date has been Poland, a place which is most commonly associated with the death of 6 million, despite its rich legacy of Jewish life. Other destinations include Eastern and Western Europe, Israel and Morocco.

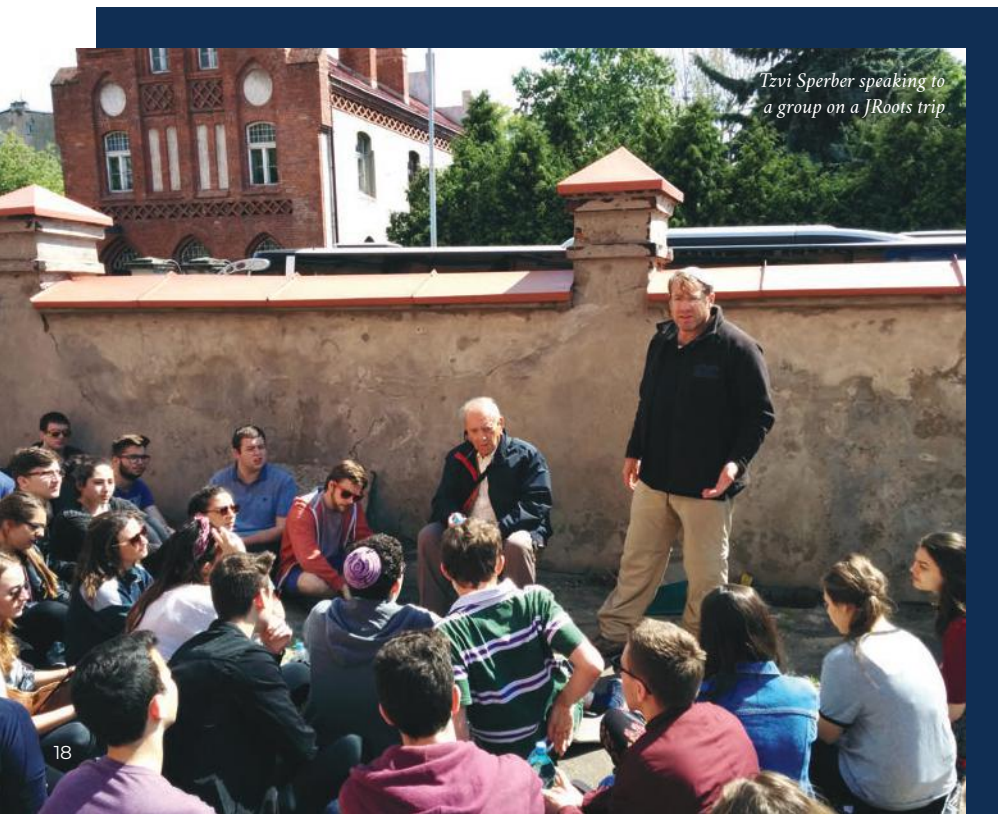
The overwhelmingly positive impact of our trips led us to a period of research, analysis and discussion as to why, amongst the myriad and diverse efforts of educational institutions, including the huge array of opportunities provided by each of our own sister organisations within Jewish Futures, JRoots journeys seem to be consistently met with such universally extraordinary feedback.

As we look back at the last 30-something years, some themes become abundantly clear - perhaps most importantly, the power of an educational journey. The classroom, although necessary, is not always the ideal learning environment for everyone; the atmosphere is mostly static, and the lessons are largely theoretical. It is all too easy for students to become distracted and detached from the subject matter, wondering, "What has this got to do with me? Why should I care?"

The two of us had relatively similar upbringings: we were born and bred in neighbouring London suburbs, our families were active members of their local Shuls (Kingsbury and Kenton, respectively), we attended the same high school and youth movement, and both spent time studying in Yeshiva and serving in the IDF. These experiences undoubtedly shaped us and have inspired us to do the work we do in connecting and inspiring Jews of all backgrounds with their heritage.

¹ *Devarim* 6:7 "B'shivtecha b'veitecha uv'lechtecha baderech, uv'shochbecha uv'kumecha"

² *Psalms* 34:12



Once, in a muddy field in Wales, the two of us were heads of a Bnei Akiva summer camp. There, ably-assisted by huge quantities of pens, paper, glue, string and unlimited creativity, we were able to create a small corner of Israel in a Welsh field. Every part of camp life was a learning experience, and both participants and leaders thrived in that environment.

We noticed a big difference upon leaving school and going to Yeshiva in Israel: unlike school, where the majority of time is spent in the classroom, here most of the study takes place in pairs, with a peer, in a large, open-plan study hall (*beit midrash*). The cacophony of noise, although initially distracting, actually becomes surprisingly soothing very quickly. The fact that students can get up, walk around and freely discuss ideas was incredibly liberating and satisfying; we absorb ideas and information naturally as active learners rather than passive recipients. Upon reflection so many years ago, we understood that this active engagement is the critical part of any successful educational programme, and it is how the Jewish people have been learning for thousands of years.

This idea is so critical to the Jewish future that it is mentioned in the *Shema* - our foundational prayer - itself. It enjoins parents to "teach your children when you sit in your home, when you walk on the way, when you lie down and when you rise up."¹

This is the ultimate immersive learning experience. Why, when referring to the fundamentals of education is there this repeated reference to **going out**? Each year, Jewish families gather around the *Seder* table



Tzvi Sperber leading a group visiting Belzec extermination camp

and relate our epic Exodus from Egypt and subsequent survival against all odds. We begin our story with the imperative to *zvei u'lmad* - go out and learn. This directive is actually reminiscent of the biblical verse that adorns the façade of the magnificent Yeshiva in Lublin, a remarkable place that we often visit on our journeys to Poland. Rabbi Meir Shapiro, the founder of the Yeshiva chose to message its mission and purpose with the verse² which starts off, "**go**, children and listen to me..." This seems somewhat counterintuitive; surely, we need people to come close in order to listen and learn?

Herein lies the cornerstone of JRoots' educational philosophy and informs so much of what we do. Put simply, the best way to appreciate something is with a living example

rather than a static theoretical one. Both our observation and insight inform us that we are told to **go and learn**, partly in order to get out of our comfort zone, explore new ideas and have new experiences, but primarily because immersive, lived and modelled experiences are shown to be the most effective form of education. It is also worth considering that the contemporary environment of virtual and augmented learning lends itself to people seeking a more real and palpable learning and living experience. The source of the rudimentary mandate to study from the *Shema* prayer, is³ through the lens of teaching. "[Discuss the building blocks of Judaism] **in the way** you live in your home, **in the way** you walk on the way, **in the way** you relax, in the way you rise up..." We believe this explains why the immersive JRoots educational travel experience.

Jewish educators are aware that the term 'Jewish History' is actually somewhat of a misnomer. Rabbi Sacks famously points out that the Torah doesn't actually have a word for 'history'; instead, it frequently uses the word *zikaron* - memory - as a way of forming our identity:

*"There is a profound difference between history and memory. History is 'his story' - an event that happened sometime else to someone else. Memory is 'my story' - something that happened to me and is part of who I am. History is information. Memory, by contrast, is part of identity. I can study the history of other peoples, cultures and civilisations. They deepen my knowledge and broaden my horizons. But they do not make a claim on me. They are the past as part. Memory is the past as present, as it lives on in me. Without memory there can be no identity."*⁴ He further adds that, "To be a Jew is to know that over and above history is the task of memory."⁵

Below: Rabbi Naftali Schiff speaking in front of barracks in Auschwitz 1, Poland



³ According to Maimonides, as stated in the first paragraph of the *Shema*, the prefix letter "beit" meaning "in," is constantly deployed to stress the imperative of situational teaching - by example of 'living Judaism.' The *Shema* prayer continues to explicitly list immersive experiences whereby the 'teacher' models, discusses and lives the ideals of Judaism.

⁴ The Chief Rabbi's Haggadah (Essays) p. 29 ⁵ Ibid p. 31

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Herein lies the cornerstone of JRoots' educational philosophy and informs so much of what we do. Put simply, the best way to appreciate something is with a living example rather than a static theoretical one.

We first piloted these ideas some thirty years ago with the Jerusalem Fellowships of Aish UK, highly successful educational programmes that broke the mould of Jewish Education in the UK. Students who often had antipathy, antagonism or apathy towards their Jewish identity had the opportunity to come to Jerusalem on a highly-subsidised summer trip. Unlike any previous Jewish education they may have had in school or elsewhere, here they were active learners enjoying an immersive experience. Questions of philosophy and identity were explored, discussed and debated in an open, respectful and non-judgmental environment. Our educators were highly engaging, open to questions and available for discussions around the clock, imparting ideas that were both practical and relevant. All of this took place in the magical Old City of Jerusalem, where the students were free to walk the streets, take in the sights, sounds and smells of this centre of Jewish life, thereby forging their own connection with it.

The Talmud⁶ draws a distinction between seeing and hearing, saying that they are simply incomparable; one cannot compare reading or

hearing about an historical event to actually standing on the ground where it took place, touching the very stones, breathing in the air and taking in the scenery whilst hearing an account of the events that happened there. Simply hearing events without that backdrop means that the mind needs to work far harder to appreciate and remember the lessons learnt.

We have spent the last thirty years developing and refining these ideas both in theory and practice, for Jews of all ages, backgrounds and across the Jewish spectrum. JRoots was established as an independent organisation, part of the family of Jewish Futures educational organisations, in order to facilitate today's generation of Jews with compelling Jewish journeys.

It is a tremendous privilege to be able to provide tried, tested and proven solutions to the challenges facing Jewish continuity. It is with a tremendous sense of pride and gratitude that we can say with confidence that the thousands of participants on JRoots journeys have emerged with an increased appreciation not only of the world that was, but also inspired and empowered to play their part in forging a brighter Jewish future.



Rabbi Naftali Schiff with the Hasmonean Boys School at a Hachnassat Sefer Torah at the site of the Plaszów concentration camp in Poland

18 YEARS BY THE NUMBERS



26569
participants

690
trips

10
full length survivor
documentaries

OVER 200
in-depth survivor
interviews

95%
of university students said
they are better equipped
to rebut Holocaust denial
on campus

10s
of short survivor
legacy clips

Partnering with
OVER 250
educational
organisations
worldwide

Average student
trip subsidy
£750

⁶Yevamot 65b

THE SURVIVORS

point of view



Auschwitz survivors at the 75th anniversary commemoration event, January 27, 2020

For over 20 years JRoots founder Rabbi Naftali Schiff has invested tremendous time and effort in personally interviewing over 200 Holocaust Survivors around the world. As we approach Holocaust Memorial Day 2024, it's essential to highlight the value of preserving the memories and lessons of the Holocaust.. The Legacy Live division of Jewish Futures has produced tens of short- and full-length documentaries, bringing eternal messages and life lessons from Survivors to current and future generations. Together with the Auschwitz Birkenau Memorial Foundation, JRoots was privileged to host the last large gathering of Survivors and their families to commemorate the 75th anniversary of liberation from Auschwitz. Many of these Survivors' legacies have been introduced to today's and future generations via JRoots' online presence

YOSEF LEWKOWICZ

Survivor: Auschwitz,
Ebensee, Mauthausen,
Plaszow, Melk, Amstetten

At only sixteen years old, Josef Lewkowicz became a number, prisoner 85314. Following the Nazi invasion of Poland, he and his father were separated from their family and herded to the Kraków-Plaszów concentration camp. Forced to carry out hard labour in brutal conditions, and to live under the constant threat of extreme violence and sudden death, before the war was over Josef would witness the unique horrors of six of the most notorious Nazi concentration camps, including Auschwitz, Mauthausen and Ebensee.

From salt mines to forced marches, summary executions to Amstetten, where prisoners were used as human shields in Allied bombing, Josef lived under the spectre of death for many years. When he was liberated from Ebensee at the end of the war, conditions were amongst the worst witnessed by allied forces.

With his freedom, Josef returned home to find that he was the only one left alive in an extended family of 150. Compelled by the need to do something to avenge that loss, he joined the Jewish police while still in a displaced persons' camp, and was recruited as an intelligence officer for the US Army who gave him a team to search for Nazis in hiding.

Whilst rounding up SS leaders, he played a critical role in identifying and bringing to justice his greatest tormentor, the Butcher of Plaszow, Amon Göth, played by Ralph Fiennes in Schindler's List. He then committed his life to helping the orphaned children of the Holocaust rebuild their lives.

Photo by Ezra Blake

Jewish Futures CEO and JRoots Director, Rabbi Naftali Schiff caught Yosef in Jerusalem over zoom from London in the months following the Massacre of October the 7th, turning to him for his unique insight as a survivor of the cruellest acts of humanity. This was their conversation:

RNS: We're now in the 60th day of the war in Gaza that began after the massacre on Simchat Torah on October the 7th. As a Holocaust survivor who went through numerous concentration camps, lost all of your family, and rebuilt your life in Israel, how do you feel about the current rise in antisemitism and the events in the world today?

YL: My biggest shock on October 7th was despite saying "never again," it's happening again in my lifetime. The world's reaction, or lack thereof, is also shocking. Jewish blood seems cheap to them.

RNS: After everything you went through in Auschwitz and other concentration camps, you saw the Nazis doing terrible things. What shocked you about what happened on October the 7th.

YL: I saw terrible things here on videos and photos. Terrible, terrible injustice. Just like the Nazis, destroying, invading part of the country, murdering... they butchered people, they raped, they maimed people, mutilated people... children... They kidnapped civilians to hold hostage and keep as bargaining chips.

RNS: Today it's easy to create fake news with fake videos. Some people see the footage, and still don't believe it. It's the same as those who simply deny the Holocaust. What do we say to those people?

YL: Once again there are deniers of the Holocaust, antisemitism for no reason whatsoever on college campuses, their intelligentsia, the professors - it is unbelievable. We have to see with our own eyes, to take photos, write, report, document and we need to talk. We have to never stop talking and we have to tell our story. We need to do a better job. But we cannot change some of the deniers. We could try to explain to them, but they won't listen to reason, they will not accept the truth. They have a slogan, "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free-" that means to erase the Jewish people again. Another Holocaust. It's terrible. But fortunately, now we have a state, and we have to fight for it.

RNS: I remember somebody asked you once, after the Holocaust, did you have an



Rabbi Naftali Schiff with Yosef Lewkowicz speaking to a group in Dąbrowa Tarnowska, Poland

opportunity to take revenge on Nazis? You had a gun. Did you go and kill? So today they're asking if we are taking revenge on Hamas, and why are we killing so many civilians?

YL: Firstly, I have not killed anyone for any reason. There are courts and there is justice: that's what I did. Today there is a war, not like it was with the Nazis. We have a state, we were attacked and we're fighting back. We want to hit the bad people that attacked us and brought terrible destruction on our people for no reason whatsoever, without warning. So when the Israelis go and they bombard and they kill some of those murderers, they first warn the people to vacate, to get out - they do not want to kill any civilians. The problem is that those murderers are among the civilians. We know now that they store their armaments in schools and in their mosques, in cribs, in ambulances. So they are murderers again when they put their people on the front line to be killed. That's their own doing, not ours. We don't want to kill a single civilian - we just want to kill those murderers. If we leave them, they'll be murdering again.

RNS: I remember when we were in Poland with a JRoots group a few years ago, singing together with you, "*Gam ki eilech b'gei tzalmavet*", the words from King David, "even now I'm in the valley of the shadow of death, I will not be afraid because I know you are with me." In the death camps you went through the most terrifying times. What advice do you have for a soldier on the front lines not to be afraid?

YL: We are doing the right job, and that God wants us to be just, to do justice. We are defending *emes*, the truth. We are fighting *sheker*, lies. And I would say, look to the future. This is a beautiful world, and it's worth living. Fight for your life. Don't give in. That's our way. Our enemies love death, right? We don't. We love life. Life is so much. All those years that I went through, all those 97 years, I had

a wonderful life. I brought up a beautiful family - my children, grandchildren and great grandchildren - a lot of joyous occasions, happiness. It's *kedai* (worth it) to live. So the young people that are defending our country, they defend it with love and with happiness because they know that they are fighting for life.

RNS: Let me ask you a very difficult question. What would you say to the parents who have lost a soldier fighting for the Jewish people in Israel today - parents, spouses, siblings and children who lost people. As a survivor, what would you say to parents if you had to go to a *shiva* (space of mourning) to try to bring comfort?

YL: They died for a cause. They didn't die for nothing. They died so that we should be able to live, to bring up children, grandchildren and great grandchildren - for our existence. We cannot bring them back. It's so very, very sad, very bitter, and not easy to say - but there is a pride in this. To them, their son or daughter gave up their life for the survival of the Jewish people. It is different from what had happened in the time of the Nazis. We fight for a very big cause: we cannot allow these murderers to get up and try to destroy us again and again.

RNS: Israel's national anthem is the *Hatikvah*, the Hope. How are you so optimistic and full of hope and energy?

YL: Hope is essential. Losing hope means losing everything. We must keep fighting for our right to live and not give into despair. I trust in God, and I hope God will give me more years. I still have a lot to do, students and organisations to speak to, to strengthen and encourage. There is a smart expression in German: *Geld verloren, nichts verloren. Mut verloren, alles verloren*. It means that if you lose money, you haven't lost much because you can make it back. But if you lose your mood, your courage, your perspective, your hope - all is lost.



ADI EFRAIT

Survivor: Kibbutz Be'eri, October 7th, 2023

Adi Efrat giving testimony to Rabbi Naftali Schiff in London

Content warning: This article contains descriptions of violence.

Adi Efrat, a 30-year resident of Kibbutz Be'eri, experienced the horrors of October 7th first-hand. In this exclusive interview with Rabbi Naftali Schiff, she recounts her ordeal, reflecting on her personal experience in the hands of terrorists for several hours, and the collective trauma endured by her community

Rabbi Ari Kayser

Adi is a descendant of Moroccan heritage whose parents made *aliyah* in 1956. Alongside her husband Avishai, an esteemed engineer from a family of Holocaust survivors, their two children and the numerous lone soldiers they have unofficially adopted, their life in Be'eri was built on community values and guided by principles of peace and equality to all. The thesis for Adi's master's degree, in fact, was on the relationships between Arabs and Israelis, the importance of which she has always believed in. "For me, people are people," she says. "I believe in mankind. I believe in goodness. And in good will. Many of those concepts are shattered now. I think being Jewish is holding the faith about the future and about mankind being good, about being kind to each other. But now it's shattered for me. I don't trust my own instincts."

Adi has played a pivotal role in managing

the Resilience Centre in Sderot, which uses the therapeutic power of animal companionship to heal the lingering wounds of terror attacks on southern Israel. Adi explains, "It was established as a response to the trauma that the people of Sderot have experienced from all the Qassam rocket attacks in this part of Israel. When people are exposed to trauma for so many years, it has an impact, and we try to prevent PTSD."

Rabbi Schiff asks Adi to take us through what happened that morning of October 7th. "We woke up to the sound of bombing. We have been bombed for 20 years, but this was different. This was very, very loud. Everybody went to the safe room like we are trained to do. What I found on my phone was lots of messages from my family and neighbours about terrorists outside their houses and orders from the kibbutz security team to stay inside the house.

"I was alone in my house. My son was travelling up north. That was good for me

to know. My daughter was in another home, another house in the kibbutz. My husband was in another house in the kibbutz. At first, I didn't think about being alone, because in the early hours I believed that everything was going to be okay. It's just another alarm, just another bombing."

The mood changed quickly when Adi and other family members opened the community WhatsApp group, "...I saw all of the messages: 'I have terrorists inside my house-' 'They're burning my house-' 'They're trying to get into the safe room-' 'Help, help-' Many messages like that."

"We went into survival mode. We only did what was necessary. We decided that we have to be quiet, not talking on the phone, just messaging. We didn't imagine it was so big, all over the kibbutz, so many of them, just swarming. We told each other we need to be in contact every five minutes. Tell us you're okay."

"At about 1:00 pm, I heard the terrorists outside my house. I heard them trying to knock down the door. And I WhatsApped my family, 'They're here, they're trying to enter the house,' I put the phone down, and in a matter of two minutes, they were inside my safe room. My heart was beating like crazy, and they told me, 'don't worry, we will not hurt you'. I didn't believe them because I knew terrible things had happened already in my kibbutz. They said, 'We want to go back home' and 'give us the key to your car.'"

Adi calmly tried to explain that they didn't have private cars in the kibbutz, but in the communal dining room there is a room with the keys for hundreds of cars. They took Adi out of the house to show them. As they left the house, there were gunshots, and they talked to their commanders, and were ordered to take Adi to another house where an elderly lady from the kibbutz lived with her caregiver. In the house, Adi realised the men in that house were trained militants, "The men that took me were civilians, they were wearing regular clothes, flip-flops on their feet. But inside this house of the old lady, they were militants, they looked different, they behaved differently. They were very strict with their orders, short sentences, holding Kalashnikovs..."

Rabbi Schiff pauses and asks Adi to describe the scene at the elderly lady's house. "It was surreal. The old lady was eating an apple, trying to understand what was happening, asking 'what do they want?' while her caregiver tried to tell her not to speak. The lady offered me an apple, but when I arrived there they handcuffed me from behind with zip ties. The caregiver was asking permission to give the old lady her medicine."

The men who brought Adi to that home had left, and the militants were watching over them. After a while, Adi heard a boy crying loudly, "Daddy, Daddy, I want my Daddy!" Adi recalled, "I have never heard a cry like that before. It tears into my heart. Then I see a terrorist holding up this child by the hand, he's dangling, not walking on his own. When he got near us he just threw him to the ground. The boy tried to run away, he was beside me. I couldn't use my hands because they were tied, but I tried to tell him, stay with us. I was afraid that if he ran, he would be shot."

A few minutes later another terrorist came in with the boy's mother and brother, both covered in blood. The brother was sweaty and dirty with blood running down his face, wounded in the forehead from shrapnel. The mother couldn't walk and collapsed next to Adi. On the floor, exhausted, she told Adi, "They shot my husband, and Mila is dead." Adi asked her, "Who is Mila?" The woman told her, "She's my baby." Adi recalls, "I couldn't comfort her. I couldn't hug her. I could only put my head on her shoulder and try to be sad with her."

The terrorists suddenly decided that Adi was to go with them to try to find a car. As they left, there were more gunshots that startled everyone. The terrorists grabbed Adi by the hand and started running with her. As they are running, they are joined by more terrorists, all running together to the same house. The house was burning. Adi got into a storage room, other terrorists are hiding at the entrance to the house with many weapons all over. Once in the

storage room, she hears heavy fighting from inside the house.

Adi recalls, "I guess IDF soldiers are approaching. And I am in this storage room. It's very small and I am trying to make myself very small in the corner, so the terrorists don't get angry with me for taking up their hiding space." She described the terrorists jumping in and out of this small room exchanging fire, worried they would shoot her at any moment. Adi says, "I'm praying not to be shot on the spot. All of them are armed. I'm trying to breathe, and I'm praying for them to be busy fighting and not think about me. I'm trying to protect myself from the gunfire."

As the fighting intensified, the terrorists retreated to the back of the house, leaving Adi alone in the small room. She began hearing Hebrew, confirming this was the IDF shooting at the terrorists. She called out and heard one of them say, "There is a civilian in here." Then the shooting restarted from both sides. "The shots stopped, and then after a while I heard the Hebrew louder, closer, very organised. The commander comes and tells me, 'You're safe

now.' He points to one of the soldiers and gives them the task of taking care of me."

Adi was taken to a safe place, and was warned as they were leaving the house not to look around as there were bodies all over the road. Although at that moment she didn't know the fate of her husband and children, they were later reunited.

Rabbi Schiff asks Adi about her hopes for the future of her community. Adi says, "I think I speak for our community when I say we want to go back to Be'eri. We want to live this way of life, the country way of life, agriculture, rebuild Be'eri, rebuild it in the same place. First, we need to feel safe. We need to know that those people that for many years said we want to destroy Israel don't exist anymore."

"I'm proud of being a Jew, being Israeli, and knowing that we are here to stay and they won't succeed in whatever they want to do to us. Seeing this wonderful Jewish community in Britain, I understood that Jews have a role everywhere. And maybe that's why they hate us, because the values that we hold are the light. It's a privilege, but it's a duty as well."



Adi Efrat's front porch and living room are completely burnt by Hamas terrorists in Be'eri, Israel.
Credit: Adi Efrat

LIVING HISTORY

Zak Jeffay



JRoots trip participants walk through Auschwitz, enrobed in Israeli flags. November, 2023

We are a people obsessed with our own history. Not a day goes by without mentioning the formative experience of leaving Egypt. We recall the moment of Creation every day. Our calendar is punctuated by feasts and fasts, each of which fall out at a specific time to mark a particular moment in the journey of the Jewish people.

One would expect those teaching Jewish history to make a compelling argument for its importance; how much more now than ever! For almost two decades, JRoots has been leading immersive Jewish journeys throughout the world knowing that a deep and meaningful connection to our past is the most surefire way of investing in our Jewish future.

Visiting the places where our history happened, whether in Israel, North Africa or Eastern Europe, there was a sense that we, educators and participants were standing at a vantage point looking back over history as a living textbook guiding us for the chapters yet to be written.

And while we knew deeply that the journey was not yet over, there was a sense of comfort in feeling that we were lucky enough to live in a very distinct chapter, maybe even in the sequel.

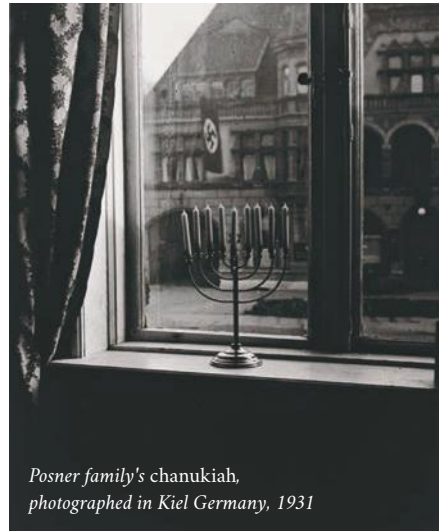
The events of October 7th and Israel's ensuing war against Hamas have fundamentally changed the way we view the world and ourselves in it. We no longer live as spectators of the past; we are actively living history. Our highs and our lows are as pronounced and as worthy of the history books as any generation that has come before us.

Today's destruction is just as catastrophic as that which time and again our ancestors experienced.

Today's heroes are just as brave and determined as the Maccabees who preceded them by millennia.

Today's acts of faith and kindness shine just as brightly as the acts of spiritual resistance we recount from the era of the Holocaust.

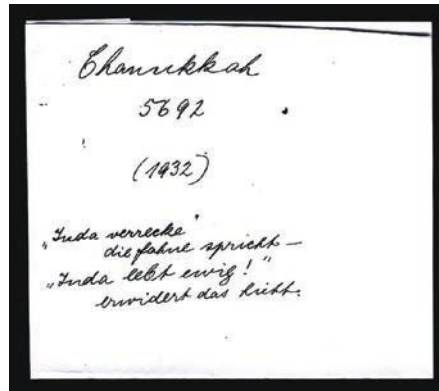
Our love of history is not a romanticised yearning for days gone by. In a sense, we are a people who have no history, rejecting the past as a concept. We live outside of the framework of people who simply remember things in the past. We gather around the Seder table every year, not simply to remember, but to experience that: "in each and every generation a person must see himself as if he personally left Egypt." Our Shabbat observance on the seventh day of the week mirrors that of the first week since the creation of the world: God rested, and so do we. The core of the Jewish tradition is both commemorative and experiential; at the very same time. We straddle time as simultaneous residents of biblical eras long ago, our present day and a future not yet imagined.



Posner family's chanukiah,
photographed in Kiel Germany, 1931

A striking illustration of this time-transcending experience is the story of the Posner *chanukiah*. In December, 1931, Rachel Posner took a photograph of her prepared *chanukiah* in front of the view from her window: Nazi Swastika flags hanging in the streets of her hometown - Kiel, Germany. Despite not yet being in power, it was clear to Rachel Posner what Hitler and his party stood for. After developing the photo, she inscribed the back with her reading of the moment:

"Death to Judah"
So the flag says
"Judah will live forever"
So the light answers



The back of the photograph from 1932.
Translation above.

Rachel understood at that moment that the people who light candles in the face of darkness will be the ones who endure. To her, that had always been the Jewish story; although she could not possibly imagine the destruction that the coming decades would herald, ultimately she was right.

The story of Rachel Posner's photo does not end there. Those members of the family who survived the Holocaust brought the *chanukiah* to Israel, ultimately placing it in Yad Vashem, The World Holocaust Remembrance Center, where it is on display for 357 days a year.



Posner family's chanukiah,
photographed on a tank in Gaza, 2023

For the eight days of Chanukah every year, it returns to the Posner family so that it may fulfil its purpose: to shine light in the face of darkness, not into the past, but in the present and for the future.

Chanukah of 2023 showed us that for the people who live outside of history there is never an end to the story. The *chanukiah* found its way with Rachel Posner's great grandson, Raziël Gilo to the battlefield in Gaza, where it once again fulfilled its annual function. (One can only imagine a conversation with the British Museum: "Oh, hello. We would like to borrow our family's artefact to have it accompany our child on a military exercise in active war.")

The reason that it seemed reasonable to take a museum artefact from Yad Vashem with a battalion of IDF soldiers to Gaza is because it was never really a museum artefact in the first place. The *chanukiah* never departed from its primary function, despite finding itself on a shelf in a glass cabinet for most of the year.

Our experience is not of having an awareness of Jewish history, but actually living it. Our journeys to places of Jewish heritage are powerful and life-affirming because they attune us to the baggage and luggage that we as a family have accumulated over the past three millennia. One may have thought that at a time of crisis people would avoid making openly Jewish journeys, on the contrary: during this turbulent period while we are collectively being tested, our desire to connect with generations of meaning and resilience is more pronounced than ever.

It is only by carrying all of our history with us that we are able to soar above the specific moment in which we currently exist. The heroism of today is only possible because of those who came before us.

We stand tall and face our enemies; though it may look like only we stand here, we are in fact the Jews of yesterday, today and tomorrow, an extended family whose desire to build will always outshine anyone's desire for destruction.

GUARDIANS of *Truth?*

Adam Levick

Content warning: This article contains descriptions of violence.

In his Wall St. Journal column (Why Hamas Atrocities Lead the Left to Hate Israel More, Oct. 20) the Israeli writer Shany Mor wrote that "many would think that an atrocity like Hamas's Oct. 7 massacre in Israel would lead opponents of the Jewish state to temper their attacks." Instead, he observed, "from college campuses to mainstream media outlets, elite left-wing circles have responded to the terror group's barbarism by intensifying their denunciations of Israel."

Mor argues that this behaviour is "an example of cognitive-dissonance reduction, the process by which people reconcile new information that contradicts their firmly held priors."

"Western activists for Palestinians," he added, "are dedicated to two nearly theological precepts: that Israel is evil, and that no Palestinian action is ever connected to any Palestinian outcome." Hamas's gruesome attack, he concluded, "poses a threat to this worldview, and the only way to resolve it is by heightening Israel's imagined malevolence. The terrorist atrocities don't trigger a recoiling from the cause in whose name they were carried out; they lead to an

even greater revulsion at the victim."

No British institution has demonstrated this pathology more than *The Guardian*, which, since the Oct. 7th ISIS-style massacre, torture and mutilation of over 1,200 Jews that included rape and the murder of children and even babies in cold blood and forced hundreds of thousands of Israeli citizens of those border communities from their homes, has published multiple pieces accusing not Hamas, but Israel, of ethnic cleansing.

On Oct. 14, Sara Helm's column in *The Guardian* was titled, Netanyahu told 1.1 million Palestinians they had 24 hours to evacuate. What is that if not ethnic cleansing?

On Oct. 16, Ken Roth's column at the outlet was titled, Israel appears to be on the verge of ethnic cleansing.

Both columns perversely argued that Israel's call on civilians in northern Gaza to move south to keep them away from harm's way - and to detract from Hamas's ability to use them as human shields - in the event of an IDF ground invasion is a form of "ethnic cleansing."

Also, on Oct. 16th, Chris McGreal, the journalist at the outlet with the most visceral animosity towards Israel and diaspora Jewish

supporters of the state, published a piece at the outlet titled, *The language being used to describe Palestinians is genocidal*. To say that his 'evidence for the Zionist's genocidal plan to commit genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza is non-existent would be an understatement. A third piece, published on Oct. 16 by BDS's Omar Barghouti, cited an anti-Zionist writer to allege that Gaza is "a textbook case of genocide."

On Oct. 17, *The Guardian* published an op-ed by Moustafa Bayoumi which demanded the we "stop the imminent ethnic cleansing of Gaza" and added that "We hear Israel present the situation as if it has no choice but genocide."

Also on Oct. 17, Nimer Sultany published a *Guardian* piece which claimed that as "UN experts warn of ethnic cleansing, and scholars warn of genocide, more demonstrations are needed to save civilian lives."

On Oct. 18th, *Guardian* columnist Owen Jones wrote a piece, charging that "UK stands "unequivocally" with Israel as it orders people in Gaza to flee their homes en masse, described by the Norwegian Refugee Council as "the war crime of forcible

Standing up for Palestine is also standing up to save the west from the worst of itself

Moustafa Bayoumi

display at Israel's Forensic
er Confirms Hamas'

**'What's our common language?'
Jewish and Palestinian thinkers on
where the left goes from here**

age being used to describe
ns is genocidal
Greal

Netanyahu told 1.1 million Palestinians they had 24 hours to evacuate. What is that if not ethnic cleansing?

Sarah Helm

**Evidence
Pathology
Atrocities**



OPINION | COMMENTARY [Follow](#)

Why Hamas Atrocities Lead the Left to Hate Israel More

'Cognitive-dissonance reduction' requires vilifying the victim to uphold one's prejudices.

AARON PORIS
11/06/2023

Israel's endgame is to push Palestinians into Egypt - and the west is cheering it on

Sharif Abdel Kouddous

ears to be
g in Gaza
Roth

Hamas official says group aims to repeat Oct. 7 onslaught many times to destroy Israel

Ghazi Hamad, of terror group's politburo, hails assault in which civilians were systematically murdered, saying 'there will be a second, a third, a fourth'; US official: 'Chilling'

By GIANLUCA PACCHIANI and MICHAEL BACHNER
1 November 2023, 9:41 pm | 26

Why I believe the
never been more i
Omar Barghouti

Protesters outside the Royal Society of Art in London, November 2023 (WFP)



transfer," while Francesca Albanese, the UN special rapporteur on the Palestinian territories, warns of "mass ethnic cleansing."

Also, on Oct. 18th, the outlet published an op-ed by Ellen Brotsky and Ariel Koren: *We're anti-Zionist Jews and we see genocide unfolding in Gaza*, which, in addition to accusing Israel of genocide, claimed that the Hamas attack was "the result of decades-long Israeli crimes and besiegement."

On Oct. 20, Sharif Abdel Kouddous, in a *Guardian* piece titled, Israel's endgame is to push Palestinians into Egypt – and the west is cheering it on, wrote that Israel "might be trying to drive them out of Gaza altogether," and positively cited a Gazan charging that is Israel is engaging in "ethnic cleansing and genocide all wrapped into one."

On Oct. 21, Ahmed Moor wrote in *The Guardian* that "Ethnic cleansing is likely a strategic objective for the Israelis in Gaza."

An Oct. 23 *Guardian* piece by Yugoslav-born writer Lana Bastašić included the observation that "Living in Germany, I see it as my human responsibility to call it out

for its one-sidedness, its hypocrisy and its acquiescence in the ethnic cleansing of Gaza."

That makes 11 pieces published by *Guardian* editors in the first two weeks after the Oct. 7 massacre accusing Israel of ethnic cleansing or genocide.

Since, they published an additional 14 additional pieces levelling that same accusation at Israel.

Yet, we're unable to find any content published at the outlet since Oct. 7 mentioning Hamas's genocidal charter, or any reference to recent threats by Hamas leaders that they will repeat the Oct. 7 massacre again, again and again until Israel is annihilated.

Additionally, while they've devoted some coverage to the Jewish victims of the Hamas massacre, most of the content on their Israel and Palestinian territories pages is devoted to Palestinian suffering, and Palestinian voices expressing extreme, incendiary anti-Israel rhetoric. This includes one piece by Dafna Baram published on Oct. 11 which referred to Gaza as a "concentration camp," antisemitic

language which *The Guardian* defended in response to our complaint, citing, as one example, the fact that Haaretz commentator Gideon Levy used the term in an op-ed.

Worse, the use of the term "concentration camp," was used by Baram in a way to, in effect, justify the slaughter.

"What we couldn't imagine, but always knew: that if you keep 2 million people in the largest concentration camp on Earth and bomb to death thousands of them on occasion, you create a volcano that is bound to erupt in your face one day, causing horrific atrocities in its wake."

As Mor suggested, the secular theology of anti-Israel advocacy demands that Palestinian action can never be connected to any Palestinian outcome. Mediaeval cruelty and barbarism inflicted upon Jewish babies by Palestinians must, according to their Precepts, have a Jewish 'root cause.'

However, in an effort to increase understanding as to the antisemitic barbarism that occurred on Oct. 7, the IDF began showing international journalists an

unedited video of some of the massacres from security cameras, mobile phones and Hamas body cameras.

Here's one extremely disturbing account of the video, by British journalist Andrew Neil.

“

Journalists in tears as the IDF shows them body cam footage of massacres by Hamas terrorists on Oct 7 with civilians and soldiers being shot, stabbed, tortured and burned merely because they were Jewish. Their corpses were bound, gagged and riddled with bullet holes and knife wounds. In one clip, a Hamas terrorist throws a grenade at a father and his son. The blast kills the father, while the young boy is

covered in his blood. The child is dragged inside and forced to sit next to his brother, whose eye is a bloody mess after being subjected to horrific torture. One of the boys sobs: 'Why am I alive?' Other footage shows IDF soldiers beheaded with their headless corpses left splayed in the streets, while a contingent of female soldiers were injured by a grenade then shot at point blank range. A Hamas gunman brags on the phone to his parents about 'killing 10 Jews.' He is using the phone of a Jewish woman who has just been murdered and boasts that he 'is a hero' after killing Israelis with his 'own hands.'

Here's another horrific description of the videos, as observed by a journalist at *The Atlantic*.

“

The videos show pure, predatory sadism; no effort to spare those who pose no threat; and an eagerness to kill nearly matched by eagerness to disfigure the bodies of the victims. In several clips, the Hamas killers fire shots into the heads of people who are already dead. They count corpses, taking their time, and then shoot them again. Some of the clips I had not previously seen simply show the victims in a state of terror as they wait to be murdered, or covered with bits of their friends and loved ones as they are loaded into trucks and brought to Gaza as hostages. There was no footage of rape, although there was footage of young women huddling in fear and then being executed in a leisurely manner.

But, *The Guardian* will not allow the story to be about the Jewish victims of such unimaginable Hamas cruelty, and the fact that the worst antisemitic attack in the world since the Holocaust was perpetrated by Palestinians - or that the pro-Palestinian demos in London shortly after the Oct. 7 massacre can accurately be described, as the CST's Dave Rich observed, as rallies to celebrate murder.

The media institution has invested too much in the Palestinian cause. They have spent too many years opining on the righteousness of the Palestinians and their UK supporters, that the conflict's root cause is Zionist malevolence and that Israel's fears of the threat posed by terror groups on its borders is exaggerated to adjust their reporting, yet alone abandon their faith in Palestinianism. Instead, they've doubled down.

Prior to Oct. 7, we didn't think, at this point, that there was any act of antisemitic malevolence that could truly shock us, bring us to despair and shake our very core.

Hamas proved us wrong.

We also likely wouldn't have thought that even *The Guardian*, when confronted with a modern-day pogrom where Jewish babies were murdered in their cribs, children tortured and killed in front of their parents, the young and old burned alive by antisemitic death squads, some of whom boasted of how many Jews they killed, and who then decapitated and mutilated corpses, would react by doubling down, publishing content inciting which, as Shany Mor wrote, incites "even greater revulsion at the victim".

We would have been wrong.



Above: Police are investigating the 'keep the world clean' poster. Photo from Social Media

THE LIGHT

in the darkness

A photo essay by Léa Ouahba Kohen

My journey in photography over the past eight years has encompassed various contexts: from weddings, to food and fashion - but most importantly, the reason I started in the first place - photojournalism. I've always worked independently - documenting the aftermath of terror attacks in Paris and photographing the protests in Israel.

On the 7th of October, along with the rest of our nation, I saw nothing but darkness. It took me a month to pick up my camera again, to regain my composure and start to view my camera as a weapon. I decided, on my own initiative, to document what was happening in and around the war to the best of my ability. I started with *chessed* (charity) projects for our soldiers and their volunteers, visiting bases in the north and the south of Israel, the emotional and mental support for victims and evacuees and ventured to places of tragedy including Kibbutz Be'eri, Kfar Aza and Re'im.

My aim has been to find the light within

scenes of the horror, the void, the total darkness - but how? It's easy to capture moments of light in events for our soldiers, the BBQs, meal distributions and donut giveaways... But amidst the rubble, the memories and hopes cruelly destroyed, in a place that was once filled with love and optimism now reduced to ruins and charred remnants of homes, how does one find the light? I couldn't figure it out; the photos, the images and the videos that I had seen haunted me no matter where I went. How can one find the light in all of this?

Then, one afternoon, while walking through Kibbutz Be'eri, I noticed two Shabbat candlesticks placed on the windowsill of a burned-down house. I understood at that moment that sometimes the light is buried, hidden beneath the overwhelming darkness. Without light, there would be no life, and therefore, no world - but all of that still exists, and the light is always there. We just need to dig deep to find it.

A pair of candlesticks rests on an intact windowsill of a burned-down house: the only ray of hope in the scene of horror







Facing page

Hands picking clementines: ready to catch the last fruit while helping farmers in evacuated areas of the south (Gaza envelope). The movement in the photo shows the people involved in helping one another, no matter what.

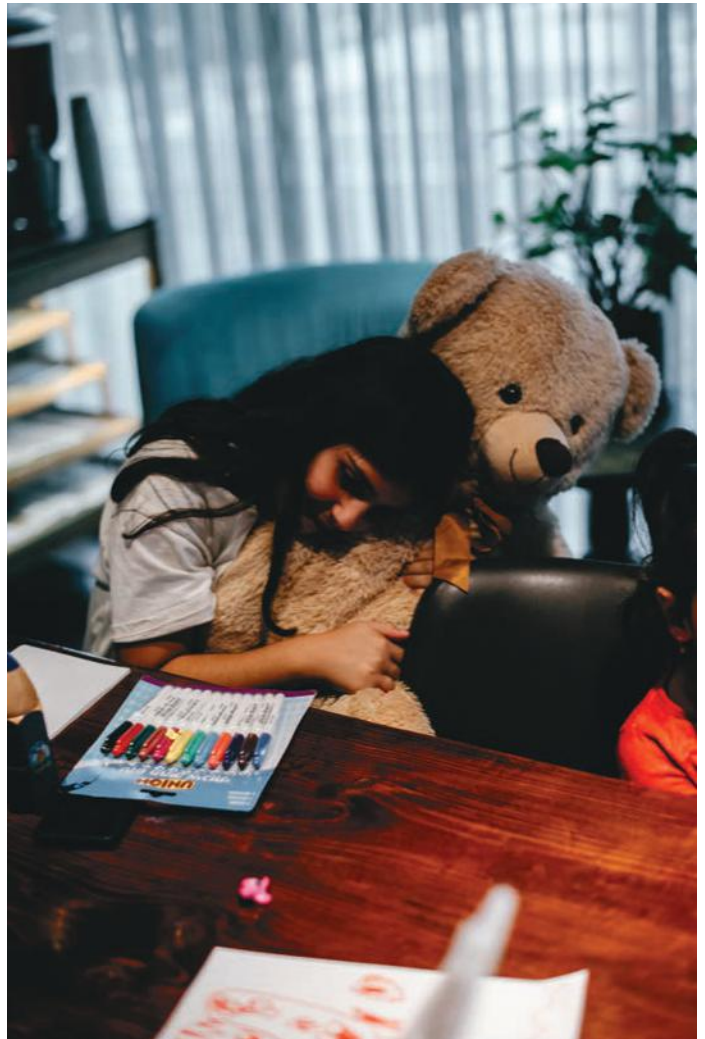
Left

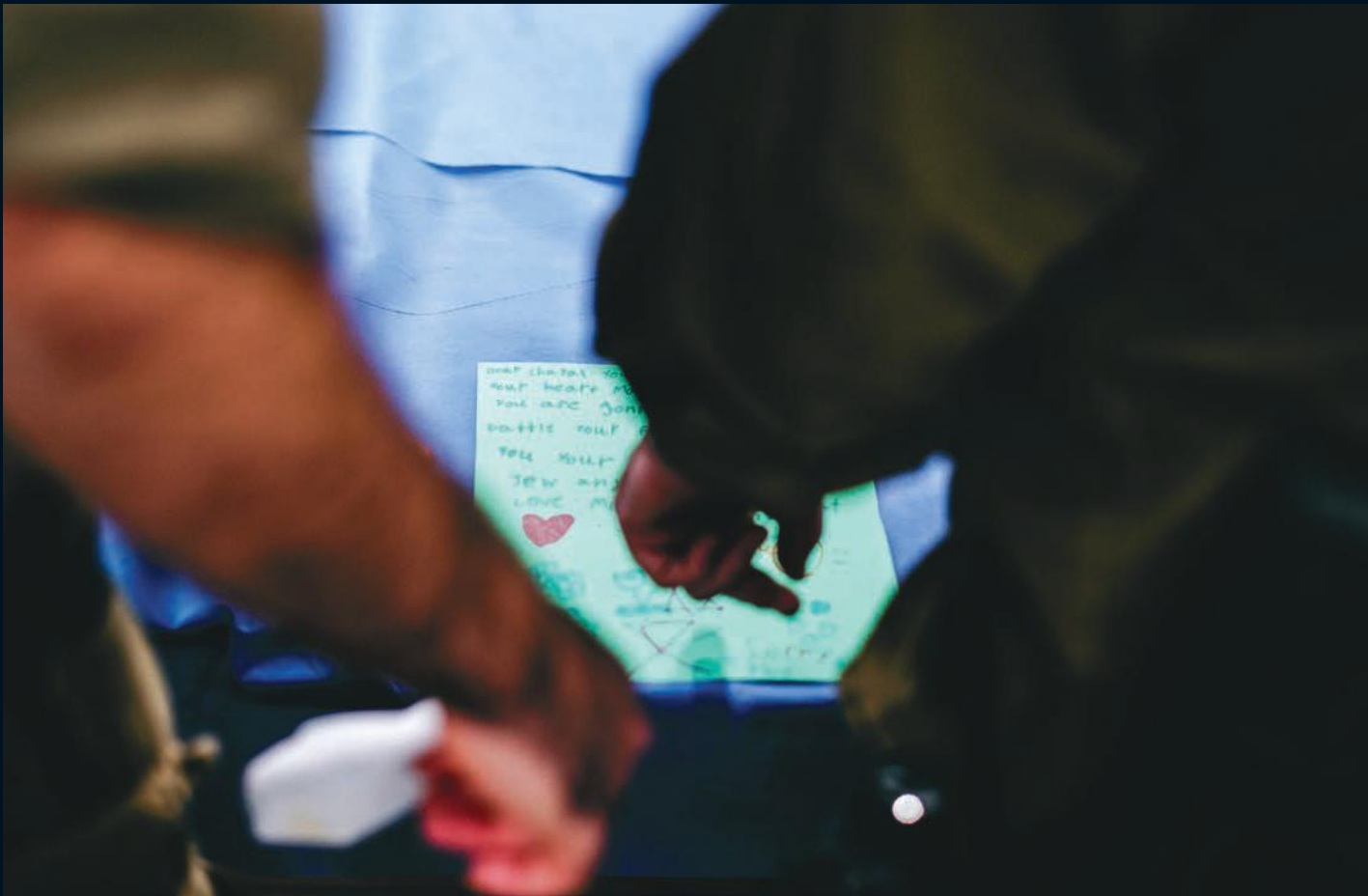
This chain of people has been working tirelessly every morning since the 8th of October to prepare and send sandwiches with fresh ingredients to IDF soldiers, in the memory of a fallen soldier. I selected this photo because I wanted to highlight the diversity of the group - people of all ages from all walks of life and communities. I wanted to capture the movement and energy in the room with the light at the end (reminding us that the way to redemption is to be all together). And I was especially touched that In the merit of one soldier, these sandwiches are nourishing so many more soldiers - a powerful cycle of love and kindness.

Below

There is a very special person named Arye Dobuler, who has created the 'Teddy Bear Tour' around hotels hosting displaced families from the south and the north in Jerusalem. He has acquired a whole range of sizes and styles of teddy bears to give emotional support to those who need it, as well as many other acts of kindness that he gathers locals to participate in in a group called Jerusalem Helping Others.

I selected these photos of the children from a kibbutz in the south with the teddy bears that day because of the darkness of the bear in the shadow countered by the gentle happy smile of the girl that catches the light. In the second photo, the girl with the big bear is older, but we all need cuddling in this hard time; love has no age.





Facing page, top

It was Chanukah time, light and warmth were everywhere. In this photo, soldiers on a break read letters of love, encouragement and support that had been sent from around the world. We see the hands of soldiers reading each one with the care that is being bestowed upon them.

Facing page, bottom left

Sweet connection. Donuts arrived by the thousands to every base in Israel over Channukah. People would hand them out delicately, with care - a warm attention in the coldest, darkest of places.

Facing page, bottom right

In an almost iconic photo, we see a combat soldier in raingear, armed with an automatic weapon, and wearing tzitzit - special tassels hanging from a four-cornered garment. The soldiers protecting us also need protection.



Above

These photos of soldiers, about to prepare to head back into combat in Gaza, are holding one another by the shoulder. Joy and unity always win, and always push away darkness.

Left (cover image)

Look up to the sky - follow the lights streaming up from each hostage into the black sky. It's a hard moment. Tears, strong emotions. A message to God, a reminder for all of Israel to not forget them, to pray and fight to bring them home.



About the photographer

Léa Ouahba Kohen was born in Paris and grew up in Yerres. At 18, she received her first camera and began to share her own vision of the world. She simultaneously completed graduate studies in child psychology, web design and photography courses in Canada. At last, Léa chose to go deep and develop her skills in the art of photography. Today, Léa is a sought-after photographer with her own business, managing teams for events, marketing, fashion and more worldwide, while based in Jerusalem, Israel.

Explore more of her art:

[@leawabphoto](https://www.instagram.com/leawabphoto)

leawabphotography.com



Break the Cycle

From the depths of war and personal tragedy, Sherri Mandell shares her vision of unity as essential for national survival and success

Sherri Mandell

Twenty-two years ago, my son Koby and his friend Yosef Ish Ran were murdered by Palestinian terrorists when they were 13 and 14. They cut school, went hiking near our home in Tekoa, and were met by terrorists who beat them to death with rocks.

We created a foundation in the boys' memory, the Koby Mandell Foundation, which works with victims of terror, running Camp

Koby and Yosef for bereaved children and other support groups. Subsequently, when I spoke around the world, and people asked me what they could do to help, I often said: "Koby loved being Jewish. Koby and Yosef were killed for being Jews. So the most important thing you can do, besides supporting our foundation, is to become more Jewish. Do that in the way you choose. You can become more connected to Israel or connect to prayer or

“

*A lack of unity
does not mean that
we are fractured,
but rather that we
are stronger, like
a rope of many
strands*

is disconcerting and depressing that it has taken a horrible war to move Israel beyond factionalism. All over Israel, people are joining together to help each other, to pick crops from farms, to pack lunches for soldiers, to help in any way possible. Each person has something to give to the war effort, to strengthen the Jewish people.

This war will end, and we will be victorious - but how can we ensure that we continue on in the spirit of unity? How do we ensure that our in-fighting does not damage and weaken us?

To build on the oneness we felt, we need to value that unity not only as a response to hardship but also as a response to ordinary life. The enemy exposed our vulnerability and cruelly exploited it, but that same vulnerability can also cause us to realise how much we need each other, how we are not whole without one another.

Even when it seems unlikely, we are all made in the image of God. Our Sages tell us that each of us is a letter in the Torah. And it is only when we come together that the Torah can be complete. In the Torah, Yosef (Joseph) is hated by his brothers, abandoned by them, and sold as a slave. Yet out of that hatred and hardship comes redemption - Yosef is able to protect the brothers from a famine, and the prophecy of exile and redemption is put into action.

Discord is woven into the fabric of Jewish life. It can be proof of our strength, a sign of vibrancy. We don't speak with one voice, like our enemies. We insist on a multiplicity of visions. A multiplicity of "Judaisms." A multiplicity of "Israeliness." A lack of unity does not mean that we are fractured, but rather that we are stronger, like a rope of many strands. It all depends on how we see our differences. Can we allow them to be a sign of our strength?

We don't have to like each other, but we have to honour and respect one another. When it seems that God is missing, or when we feel abandoned by God, we can still see God in each other. When God seems to fail us, people become God's representatives. That is what we are experiencing now: the profound goodness of the Jewish people. Remembering and honouring that goodness, the compassion we have for each other in extreme times, can enable us to conjure it in moments that are less fraught.

During the fractious days before the war, everyone - right and left - wrapped themselves in the Israeli flag because almost everybody in this country is a patriot. We all love this country. Assume that when we disagree, it is not from ill-will but from the passion to ensure that the Jewish nation stays strong.

learning or doing good for somebody else. But act more Jewish. Learn what it is to be Jewish. And don't take it for granted."

During this war, many of us realise that we can no longer take being Jewish for granted. We have a common enemy: Hamas and those who support Hamas's atrocities and propaganda. The enemy does not discriminate between us. All over the world, Jews are being attacked. In Israel, we have

lost too many of our loved ones - soldiers, civilians, women and children - to Hamas. It has been a bitter and terrible time; as I write this, we are still at war.

Yet one of the terrible gifts of this war has been the unity that Israelis feel, especially after a terrible year in Israel of bitter disagreements, mainly over the judicial reform package. And now, the country has been lifted out of that conflict by a bigger, deadly conflagration. It

The MIDDLE EAST *and beyond* POST-7TH OCTOBER

Darren Cohen



The Hamas terrorist organisation's assault on Israel on 7th October, and the war that has followed, have had a profound effect on the sense of security felt by Israelis and Jewish people worldwide. These monumental events have also reignited geopolitical rivalries and tensions in the Middle East and beyond.

We have entered a new era that is liable to have a prolonged impact on global alliances and stability.

The first actor we will explore is Hamas' great enabler: Iran. Tehran has provided Hamas with funding, arms, training, intelligence, diplomatic support and technical know-how - including in the months before the attack on Israel. Even if the jury is out on Iran's direct involvement in the Palestinian militant group's operation on 7th October, there is no doubt that its years-long support facilitated the attack. Hamas is a core member of Iran's so-called "Axis of Resistance," an alliance of

proxy forces in the Middle East that serves the Islamic Republic's strategic statecraft to spread its influence and export its revolution. Hamas fulfils a particularly salient role for Iran in the latter's efforts to build a ring of fire around Israel on all fronts. To this end, Iran bolsters Hamas' capabilities in Gaza, the West Bank, Israel and Lebanon.

This leads us to Iran's current posture and the strategic dilemma it faces. For many reasons, Hamas' operation was a blessing for Tehran. It exposed previously unimaginable Israeli intelligence and security vulnerabilities, strengthened the armed resistance narrative among the Palestinian people and returned the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the international agenda. The attack undermined Israel's long-desired and partially-achieved integration into the Middle East, which appeared increasingly likely to result in an historic Israel-Saudi Arabia normalisation deal. The attack also forced Israel to recalibrate its focus away from

Iran and toward a previously sidelined threat - Hamas. This temporary shift in resources pushes Israel further from Iran's borders in an operational sense and forces it to focus on its own backyard. Accordingly, the Iranian rhetoric during the past months has been relatively moderate and has emphasised the autonomy of the "resistance" organisations that it supports to allow it to maintain a stance of plausible deniability and guard itself against international censure.

However, herein lies Iran's dilemma. On the one hand, Tehran can afford to sit back and allow Hamas to engage in a fierce armed conflict with the IDF. This has a negligible direct impact on the Islamic Republic and has led to Israel's international isolation amidst the perception that the IDF is using indiscriminate force. However, the IDF's operation is aimed at eliminating Hamas in Gaza by destroying its military and governance capabilities. This poses a strategic challenge for the rulers in Tehran

Below: Ismail Haniyeh, left, the Senior Political Leader of Hamas, meets with Ali Khamenei, right, Supreme Leader of Iran in Tehran, Iran. November, 2023



and their resistance calculus. A significant part of Iran's ability to destabilise Israel's security is predicated on Hamas' survival as a formidable foe in Gaza. Without this asset, Iran's regional position is significantly weakened. This brings us to our next crucial actor - Hezbollah.

The Shiite Lebanese outfit, Iran's most established proxy, has been preparing for war with Israel since 2006. It has amassed an estimated 150,000 rockets as well as drone and precision-guided munition capabilities that can potentially overwhelm Israel's defence systems and wreak destruction and mass casualties in the Jewish state. Several days after Hamas' 7th October attack, Hezbollah entered the fray by allowing Palestinian terrorist factions to launch rocket/mortar assaults on northern Israel and soon claiming responsibility for drone, rocket and mortar attacks that have resulted in Israeli casualties. However, through both its leader Hassan Nasrallah's moderate rhetoric and the diplomacy it conveys through the limited use

of its vast force, Hezbollah has signalled that it is currently uninterested in a full-scale conflict with Israel and the hostilities have remained below the threshold of war.

The Lebanese group has multiple considerations and interests to consider, some of which ostensibly contradict each other. It seeks to lead the Iranian Axis of Resistance against Israel and project solidarity with the Palestinians by forcing a diversion of resources to the northern front while simultaneously remaining a Lebanese political and military organisation that defends Lebanese interests. Israel has proven through its words and actions in Gaza and Lebanon that a Hezbollah-initiated full-scale war would be a costly mistake that would bring about mass devastation to its northern neighbour. Hezbollah is fully aware of this and the opposition of large segments of the Lebanese non-Shiite population to a potentially catastrophic broadening of the currently limited hostilities. It must therefore display a degree of restraint to prevent Lebanon from becoming embroiled in the conflict, which curbs its efforts to fully support Hamas.

Moreover, Iran itself likely understands that unleashing Hezbollah's full might to try and save Hamas could result in an Israeli operation that strips both groups of their military capabilities and the ability to deter Israel. This, in turn, highlights Tehran's major interest in supporting terrorist proxies along Israel's border: deterrence. Tehran's long-term fear of

an Israeli strike against the former's nuclear sites is largely diminished by Hezbollah's vast arsenal of arms and well-equipped fighters ready to be unleashed against Israel. Herein, again, lies Iran's challenge - it can order Hezbollah to intervene in an attempt to save Hamas, but it may end up losing both. This may explain why another member of the "Axis of Resistance" has been more willing to utilise some of its major assets - the Houthis.

Hezbollah and Hamas are not the only members of the Iranian terror alliance. The grouping comprises factions in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. In Syria and Iraq, these groups have been issuing threatening rhetoric against Israel and the US while engaging in persistent kinetic action against US military positions in an attempt to soften Washington's staunch support for Israel. In Syria, Shiite militias have also conducted infrequent and ineffective rocket attacks on Israeli territory. However, the truly potent threat actor in this regional conflict has emerged from Yemen - the Houthis, *Ansar Allah* - the "Supporters of Allah".

The Iran-backed militia force controls vast swathes of Yemen's populated territory, including its capital Sanaa, and has emerged undefeated from a seven-year Saudi-led military campaign to oust it from power and reinstate the internationally-recognised government. The group possesses arms and military know-how that surpass most conventional militaries in the region, including long-range missiles and drones alongside thousands of motivated and undeterred fighters. In the months since 7th October, to exact a price from Israel for its operation in Gaza, the Houthis have attacked southern Israel's Eilat and conducted persistent assaults on commercial vessels in the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb Strait under the pretext that these ships are linked to or heading toward Israel. This amounts to a de-facto siege on Israel as certain shipping



Above: Hezbollah chief Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah met in Lebanon with Khalil al-Hayyeh, Hamas' deputy head in Gaza. November 22, 2023



President Vladimir Putin (Russia) meets with President Ebrahim Raisi (Iran) in Moscow on December 7, 2023. Credit: Sputnik

companies refuse to traverse these waters or charge a premium to dock at the Jewish state's ports. This is not just an Israeli problem. As long as the Houthis continue to operate with impunity, the global economy is likely to be affected, driving up inflation and causing supply shocks in Europe and beyond. Despite this relentless assault on international shipping, the US has urged Israel to refrain from retaliating and has desisted from employing force itself, likely due to a fear of triggering a broader and highly unpredictable all-out regional conflict. With that, on December 18 the US Pentagon announced the establishment of Operation Prosperity Guardian - a ten-nation coalition aimed at maritime security in the Red Sea. This was condemned by the Houthi movement, which insisted it will continue its attacks. At the time of writing, the US-led alliance appears to be adopting a primarily defensive posture against the Houthi threat. However, if either side escalates the situation, the increased militarisation of the strategic waters may intensify the conflict and destabilise additional US allies in the region.

This is a useful juncture to examine the role of the world's most powerful actors amidst this current era of instability. The US administration has from the outset demonstrated robust support for Israel in its darkest hour. President Joe Biden's "DON'T" speech [aimed at Iran and Hezbollah] was warmly received by the people of Israel. The US has been in constant consultation with the Jewish state's leaders throughout the war. Washington has deployed military assets to the region that helped deter Israel's foes, opposed anti-Israel resolutions at the UN, replenished Israeli weapons and ammunition, helped to facilitate a hostage release and shared critical intelligence.

However, as the war continues and US interests have been under attack globally, decision-makers in Washington have tried to demonstrate balance. This has included demands for Israel to allow more humanitarian

aid into Gaza, for the IDF to take more measures to protect the civilian population and pressure on Israel to present a "day-after" strategy for Gaza that excludes permanent Israeli occupation of the Strip. US support for Israel is not unconditional and the administration is certainly weary of isolating itself globally and undermining its interests in the region through perceived excessive support for Jerusalem. The same applies to other notable supporters of Israel in Europe, especially the UK.

This is an appropriate segway to explore the role of the opposing alliance of Russia-Iran-China. The Russian government has made its position clear by welcoming Hamas delegations to Moscow, condemning the IDF's operation in Gaza and collaborating militarily with Iran in a way that no doubt also supports Tehran's proxies. China's role is more nuanced. It maintains close ties with both Israel and Iran while seeking to leverage these strategic relations to emerge as an unlikely alternative power to the US. China however has failed to condemn Hamas for its barbaric attack on Israel and is more inclined to press for a ceasefire rather than the Palestinian terrorist group's elimination. The decline in global stability does

not serve China's expansionist economic travails and it therefore seeks a conclusion to the war to allow trade to continue as before. At the time of writing,¹ it appears that the hostilities in Gaza and beyond will not end in the near future.

This situation is likely to continue to rekindle dormant malign actors, including jihadist groups, and empower the agents of antisemitism and anti-Israel hatred regionwide. A return to the pre-7th October reality and the era of relative global stability is unlikely.

The forecast thus appears bleak. The Russia-Iran-China alliance is likely to become emboldened in some parts of the Middle East as the West - the US in particular - are perceived as defenders of Israel. This may be exacerbated further in the event of a victory for the highly unpredictable Donald Trump in the upcoming presidential elections. Meanwhile, the widespread condemnation of Israel's actions in the Arab and Muslim world is likely to pose a medium-term obstacle to the strengthening of ties between the Jewish state and moderate Sunni nations, including Saudi Arabia, which are attentive to public opinion. The Abraham Accords states, in addition to Egypt, Jordan and Turkey, are unlikely to sever ties with Israel over Gaza as Jerusalem is a strategic partner for these countries in several fields. Nevertheless, enthusiasm for deeper cooperation will likely remain tepid until the public backlash against Israel becomes a distant memory. Normalisation with Riyadh remains a distinct long-term possibility, despite the Gulf country's condemnation of Israel in recent months. However, this will likely be on hold until the political conditions allow it in the American, Palestinian, Israeli and Saudi arenas. Regardless, it seems unlikely that the Palestinian issue will be removed from the international agenda in the near future, which will continue to impact the sense of security and stability felt by Jews everywhere.



Houthi military helicopter flies over the Galaxy Leader cargo ship in the Red Sea, November 20, 2023. Photo: Houthi Military Media

¹ Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are that of the author and do not necessarily express the views of Jewish Futures. This article was written on 20 December, 2023 and is therefore reflective of events up to this date

JF ROUNDUP



Long- distance *relationship*

Despite the distance, our connection remains strong. Explore Jewish Futures' recent efforts in supporting the local community and Israel. Discover inspiring individual stories and meet Rivka Magzimof from Shelanu who juggles family life while her husband serves in the IDF reserve duty.

ONE PEOPLE, *One Heart*

Shira Joseph, Barry Colman, Jessica Finger

The massacre of October 7th has rattled the Jewish people in and outside of Israel, propelling individuals and communities into a state of action to do whatever possible to help. From early October, Jewish Futures has spearheaded many meaningful and impactful initiatives in London to provide support and solidarity to those affected in Israel

TASTEFUL IMPACT

The Tastes of the Shuk event, a collaboration between Ben's Vegan Kitchen, GIFT and Ta'amim, supported by the Tel Aviv Institute, successfully recreated the vibrant atmosphere of Jerusalem's celebrated open-air market, Shuk Machane Yehuda. Held at Jewish Futures in Hendon, the event, as Ben Rebeck put it, was about "being able to work alongside some great organisations and some great people to raise funds for a meaningful cause," bringing in upwards of £16,000. The evening featured an impactful talk by Israel advocate Hen Mazzig, who inspired the audience with messages of self-belief and justice, and was attended by Chefs Rob Gadzar and Talia Trup, foodie influencer @romykosher and Love Island star Eyal Booker. The night culminated in an auction, raffle and a musical set, concluding with singing the *Hatikva* - Israel's hopeful national anthem. Reflecting on the event's impact, Rebeck shared, "ever since October 7th, I have felt even more connected to my community... I'm trying to be someone that stands up and be a voice amongst the sea of anti-Israel sentiment and antisemitism."



Dan Matalon, Ta'amim



Sarah Isaac, Head Chef of the GIFT Giving Kitchen



Guest with Michelle Barnett MBE, Founding Director of GIFT



Rabbi Naftali Schiff, CEO Jewish Futures and Rabbi Sandor Milun, Managing Director, GIFT

Eyal Booker, Hen Mazzig,
Ben Rubeck



The team behind Tastes of the Shuk: (Left to right) Ileana Ereira, Elior Doani, Jeli Gottlieb, Shira Joseph, Sarah Isaac, Ben Rubeck, Dan Matalon, Rivkie Matalon, Romy Kosher, Moni Tivoni

ALL HANDS ON DECK

“Tzitzit! We need tzitzit!” When Barry Colman heard about Israel’s national *tzitzit* shortage, he rallied GIFT, taking on the ambitious task of organising the preparation of 1,000 sets of *tzitzit* that adhere to the specific requirement of tying them on khaki green garments. The campaign began with sourcing green t-shirts, acquiring *tzitzit* strings from across London, Manchester and Gateshead, their costs quickly covered by generous individuals.

Over 300 volunteers gathered in two locations, the new GIFT volunteering hub in London and the Whitefield Shul in Manchester, working tirelessly over two nights. People from diverse backgrounds and ages participated in this labour-intensive process, meticulously preparing the garments. Each t-shirt needed careful

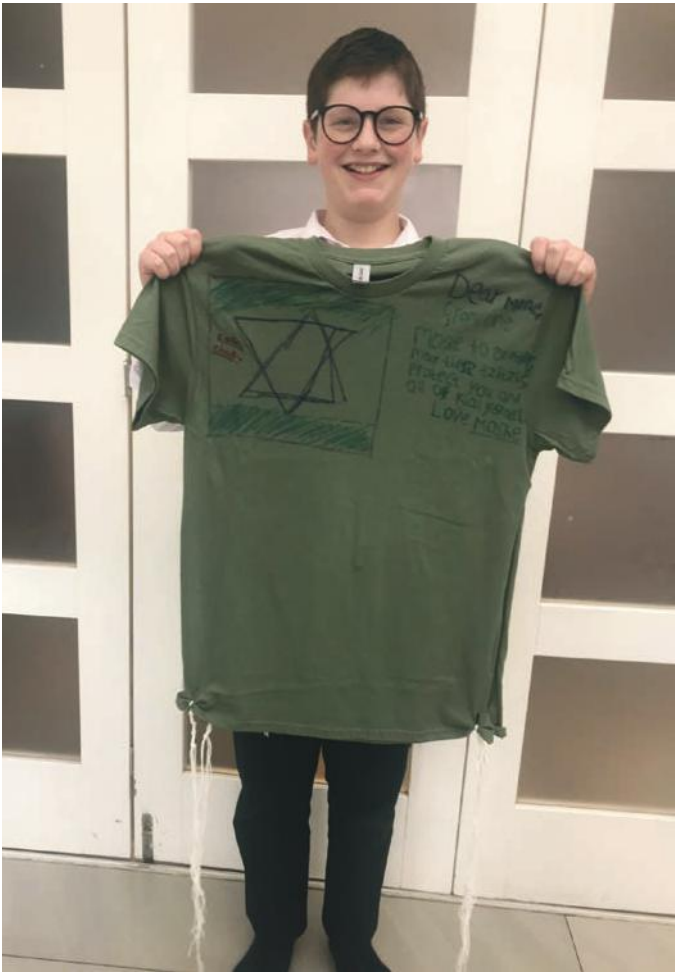
preparation with soldering irons, precision cutting and once ready, the strings could be woven through and tied. Beginners gathered around to learn from experienced peers. Some could make three sets in an hour, while others would learn and tie one corner in the same amount of time. The volunteers were unstoppable.

A 14 year old young man by the name of Moshe decided that he wanted to take sets home to prepare on his own (he had only learnt how to tie them that night). The following evening, he delivered 12 sets of completed *tzitzit*, and succeeded in sending a pair to his cousin, a *chayal* by the same name in Israel.

A final count of nearly 1000 sets were hand-prepared and delivered to Israel in suitcases that volunteers were willing to take with them to distribute across the country.



Men and boys of all ages tying tzitzit together late into the night for chayalim



LONDON

14 year old Moshe delivered 12 sets of completed tzitzit and sent a pair to his cousin in Israel.



ISRAEL

Moshe's cousin, also named Moshe, wearing his completed tzitzit in Israel.



Rabbi Daniel Rowe speaking to a group from Aish UK at Head Room Café

SPEAKING UP

Aish UK recently hosted an empowering Israel advocacy event called *Conversations on Israel: Knowing what to say about Israel and how to say it*, at the Head Room Café in London, drawing nearly 100 young professionals into a vital conversation about Israel. An impressive lineup of notable speakers including Rabbi Daniel Rowe from Aish, Michael Dickson from StandWithUs and Michal Oshman, author and former TikTok executive. Rabbi Rowe, known for his insightful perspectives, shared essential strategies and facts, arming attendees with the tools needed to effectively advocate for Israel. Michael Dickson emphasised the individual's power in the information war, urging the audience to champion truth and justice. Michal Oshman brought a unique angle to the discussion, focusing on the importance of finding purpose amidst challenges and creating light in dark times. A lively Q&A on the complex issues surrounding Israel concluded the evening.

“

I have seen how much we can achieve when we work together and I pray and hope that in the future we are able to unite as one without the need for a tragedy or persecution

Shira Joseph



Michal Oshman, TikTok and Facebook executive, speaks to an Aish UK group about Israel Advocacy

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Vital aid arrives in Israel



VITAL AID

In the days following October 7th, people started to reach out to GIFT's Shira Joseph, eager to transform their pain into action: "What can we do? How can we help?" The response was overwhelming. People from all walks of life that she had never met before were dropping off bags of items nonstop. Shira reached out to ElAl, and with their support set a goal of sending 10-15 bags of essential supplies to Israel. The community's response exceeded all expectations. In the hours before the completion of the drive, contributions surged to 50 bags, catching the attention of major news networks including Sky News, the BBC and ITV. As calls for further assistance continued, the CEO of a global delivery company, who wishes to remain anonymous, stepped in to offer a free shipping container, which led to a second wave of contributions and

ultimately the delivery of 200 bags of vital aid to Israel. Meanwhile, Shira and her team quickly coordinated with various organisations to determine the needs of displaced civilians in Israel. What initially seemed like a daunting task to fill a large container turned into an outpouring of support. "In just two days, over 3,000 people had contributed, sending aid, hand-writing cards and donating essential items to Israel, driven by a deep sense of connection to our brothers and sisters there. While everyone is immersed in all of the negative things that are happening in the world, I have been blessed to see the kindness and generosity from so many people. I have seen how much we can achieve when we work together and I pray and hope that in the future we are able to unite as one without the need for a tragedy or persecution."



Above: GIFT helps facilitate and gather impressive amounts of essential items to send to Israel

OUR CROWD

Shelanu's unwavering dedication and heartfelt passion has been the anchor and source of hope for Israelis feeling far from home in London at this time. Shelanu organised a very moving wedding for an Israeli couple whose lives were disrupted by conflict, a memorial ceremony at JW3, created safe spaces for community members with a support group led by a psychologist to guide and be present for them through this ongoing trauma and organised meet-ups for mums to give them strength and a space to talk while faced with the normal challenges of motherhood. Their efforts have gone beyond mere organised events, creating spaces for Israelis to openly share their stories that foster a sense of belonging and understanding.



SOULFUL ENGAGEMENT

It's been a difficult few months for our nation, and Eilecha has responded to the call of the hour with a flurry of events and programming aimed at strengthening, inspiring, and encouraging men and women of all ages. From a whirlwind Manchester tour encompassing 12 different events and a Yartzeit Seuda (memorial meal) honouring the memory of the Piaczner Rebbe, to a beautiful pre-Chanukah Soul Prep event in London, *kumzitz* (musical) events for The Mishmar Programme and Menorah and an electric musical *Hallel* (thanksgiving prayers) for Hasmonean year seven, we've been hard at work turning the challenge we currently face into a glorious opportunity for a more passionate and soulful engagement with Judaism.

Above: Rabbi Yaakov Klein and Eilecha participants

“

Auschwitz symbolises Jews being targeted for their identity. These pictures juxtapose past atrocities with current struggles, highlighting the continuous fight against antisemitism



BRIDGING PAST & PRESENT

Celebrating its 18th year, JRoots has been instrumental in connecting the Jewish community to its rich history, highlighting the relevance of these lessons today. Their trips to Poland have enriched understanding of Jewish history, emphasising the importance of recognizing and valuing the State of Israel for the younger generation. Recently, 200 Jewish students from London's JFS school on a JRoots-organised trip to Auschwitz, placed photos of nearly 200 Hamas-held hostages in Gaza on the camp's train tracks. This act symbolised the ongoing challenges faced by Jews globally. Zak Jeffay of JRoots reflected, "Auschwitz symbolises Jews being targeted for their identity. These pictures juxtapose past atrocities with current struggles, highlighting the continuous fight against antisemitism." Through such initiatives, JRoots fosters historical awareness and a deeper connection to Jewish identity.

FIVE WEEKS IN ISRAEL



JERUSALEM FELLOWSHIP

Intern. Explore. Discover.





CONNECTING

Aish UK's Unity Challah Bakes in Manchester and London brought together over 200 women - students, young professionals, mothers and daughters - in an auspicious evening of preparing the dough and hand-braiding challahs, connecting through prayer and sharing in a supportive environment. In London, over 120 women strengthened one another that evening, while in Manchester, the group focused on prayers for the Israel Defense Forces, connecting attendees personally with soldiers.

Founder and CEO Rabbi Naftali Schiff emphasised the growing need for connection and the role of Jewish Futures in "fostering a sense of family and resilience, describing these gatherings as more than events; they have been a haven where the community could unite in strength and solidarity."

Left: Women and girls from Aish Manchester and Aish YP's bake Challah together with Rebbetzin Miriam Gefen



LET THERE BE LIGHT

In a powerful display of unity and solidarity, over 500 people gathered for an evening of hope at the "Let There Be Light" *Havdalah* event, hosted by Jewish Futures. Held in support of Israel, this community-wide event illuminated the darkness that has befallen the world, emphasising the importance of shared goodness, togetherness, moral clarity, and the unwavering resolve to stand up for what is right. The event, hosted by Rabbi Naftali Schiff, included addresses from Nicky and Chantel Young, parents of Nethanel Young former JFS student and one of the brave soldiers who was killed on October 7th; Rivka Magzimof of Shelanu; Michelle Barnett of GIFT; Holocaust Survivor Manfred Goldberg; the Shalom Noam Primary School choir; and a musical *Havdalah* by Rabbi Yaakov Klein of Eilecha.

Right: Rabbi Yaakov Klein makes havdalah at the Let There Be Light event



My Heart *is in* THE EAST

Rivka Magzimof



*Rivka speaking at
Let There Be Light,
Havdala event.
October, 2023*

On the morning of October 7th, I sat in synagogue in festive prayer, when slowly rumours began to circulate about hundreds of casualties, injured people, and a war that had erupted in Israel - back home. My heart started pounding. The worry was overwhelming.

As time passed and the information became clearer, I began to understand that the situation in the Land was extremely difficult. A harsh reality unfolded before me; a scenario beyond my wildest imagination, something I had never even considered possible in the realms of my thoughts.

I am Israeli, born and raised in the land, having spent the majority of my life there. My parents were among those who founded a settlement in Gush Etzion called Carmei Tzur. My father took on the role of security officer for Gush Etzion, while my mother, a nurse, devoted her time to caring for patients in hospitals,

serving both Jewish and non-Jewish people alike. I was raised with a deep connection to the State of Israel and all its inhabitants, surrounded by people committed to service and ideology.

The overwhelming pain over the brutal murder and the loss of over 1400 people, souls, worlds - is indescribable. The thought that there are about 239 civilians, including infants, children, women and the elderly, who are kidnapped and held captive by Hamas in Gaza, keeps me up every single night, depriving me of sleep for over 6 weeks¹. Every day, I ask myself: What are they going through there? Who is taking care of them? Who is feeding them? Who covers them at night? Are they even alive? And when they are released from captivity, will they be able to live normal lives?

There are also immense worries and concerns; my whole family lives in Israel, most of them have been enlisted in the IDF since the beginning of the war. My brother-in-law is inside Gaza, providing medical treatment to wounded soldiers. My little brother is on the Gaza border in relentless combat, and my husband, Eli, is on reserve duty on a special and challenging mission on the northern border, facing a tough front against Hezbollah.

I remain here in London with our four children - a very painful and difficult reality, in an attempt to protect the children, doing our best to spare them from the

horrors and harsh stories of what is happening back home in Israel, to filter the information that reaches them and to continuously, gently help them understand why Dad had to go to war.

In the midst of a complex struggle between the immense personal pain and national pain I feel in every bone of my body, is an overwhelming reality that becomes more complicated with each passing day here in London (and around the world). Antisemitic incidents, hatred of Israel merged with the hatred of Jews, expressions of support for Hamas from all sides, our need to justify and explain Israel's response to the terrible war imposed on us, the need to support and respond to the Israeli community here, to support my friends whose husbands have been called up - each in their unique role, and the impossible question I am asked every day: "How are you?"

Below: Rivka's husband Eli, briefly released from reserve duty in Israel, made a special trip to London for their son's Bar Mitzvah—a beautiful moment during uncertain times



Carmei Tzur, Israel



“
*In times of crisis, the
outpouring of support
from the Jewish
community in London
for Israeli families like
mine is deeply moving*

How can I articulate everything that is going on with me? With all of us?

I am here in London, but my heart and my mind are in Israel, with my brothers and sisters, with my cousins, with my friends and with all of *Am Israel*.

It is written in the book of Jeremiah, "Israel is a scattered sheep," like a flock of sheep scattered everywhere. The sheep has a unique characteristic: when it receives a blow in a certain place, or even when it loses a single strand of wool, its entire body trembles and aches. Every part of it feels the blow. So it is with Israel: whether one person or thousands of our people are in distress and in such great pain, we all experience and share in this pain, unable to ignore it.

The outpouring of support from the community here in London for families of conscripts like mine, along with the Israeli

families who came here due to the war, deeply moves me. I recognise the powerful and genuine connection of diaspora Jews with the State of Israel, and in times of need, this great embrace gives us much needed strength.

The best way to cope and find strength in such a great difficulty is to be involved in good and positive action. To be try to be helpful toward others, to strengthen and assist whomever I can, to support those around me in every way: my community of fellow Israelis living here, my local Jewish community friends, my family and relatives who face an impossible reality back home: this is how I find strength to get up in the morning. The knowledge that I can do good in a meaningful way for someone is the only thing that allows me to function in this time of great darkness.

My message is not a declaration of weakness - quite the opposite. It's true that we are in distress and tremendous pain, but if you look at the big picture, Israel has never been in a better reality as a nation. We have a strong Jewish country, we have an army that can defend us, and though it is true that we have many enemies, slowly, even the nations of the world understand who and what the real enemy is.

Not too long ago, during another period of tremendous darkness and pain, we couldn't defend ourselves, we couldn't fight back to protect our children, to ensure a better future for all of us. Today's threatening reality forces

us to discover our unique strengths as a nation and to be united and strong for each other.

I pray that soon, when we get out of this difficult situation, we will remember that we are brothers, that the connection between us is so deep, remember that this country, which we sometimes criticise for the government leading it and the values that exist in it, is our true and only home as Jews. It is the place where we hope and pray, it is the thread that connects all of us, both in the land and beyond.

I pray with all my heart that we will see great miracles and mercy for all of the people of Israel, for the kidnapped, for the many wounded, and that every one of our soldiers will return home soon, in peace, healthy in body and soul. May all of this be for the sake of a quiet and safe future for our children and our brothers living in the Land.

¹This personal essay was submitted on November 20, 2023. Since then, approximately 100 hostages have been released or rescued. The sleepless nights still continue.

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 **WOHL LEGACY**

INTROSPECTION

The background of the page is a large, expressive painting. It depicts a perspective view down a tunnel or a path lined with stone walls. A bright, multi-colored rainbow arches over the path, its colors bleeding into the surrounding space. The walls and the area around the path are covered in thick, textured brushstrokes of various colors, including greens, yellows, reds, and blues, suggesting a lush, overgrown environment. The overall style is impressionistic and emotional.

Soulful *connection*

Explore insights inspired by the New Year for trees, embrace imperfection, tap into Shabbat, contemplate shared humanity and reflect on Oneness, with insights by writers and educators from the UK, South Africa, the US and Israel.

HIDDEN *Seeds*

Ariella Goldwicht



This past Sunday was difficult. It was a dark and cloudy afternoon, the type that threatens rain for hours. It kept me on the lookout as I dashed around the busy streets, to and from errands and school pickups, yet the clouds never delivered. They just hung low and heavy, mirroring the darkness in our hearts as we came off a particularly challenging weekend on the war front.

As we become accustomed to difficult news of all sorts, opening our phones after Shabbat has become more of a chore than a refuge. Of course loss to friendly fire tends to burn worse than any other; the sizzling pain could be felt on the Jerusalem streets the

following afternoon.

While the sun was nowhere to be seen for hours, it remarkably appeared right before sunset in the form of gorgeous streaks of pink and orange that painted the sky. The beauty of it all was so glaring that people stopped to take pictures, and subsequently flooded social media and WhatsApp statuses with the “no filters necessary” masterful design of the Jerusalem sunset.

Just as suddenly as the sun appeared to show off its glory, its light ebbed away in magnificent shades and then was gone.

It seems as if both light and darkness dance one in front of the other faster than our eyes

and our hearts can adjust to either. We are experiencing this continual roller coaster of deep sadness and then moments of hope and miracles. Our job as both individuals and as a nation is to not only notice the light, but to seek it out. The goodness, the potential is all around us, yet the volume of pain often seems greater.

This past Friday night in Jerusalem, as usual, we were greeted by the familiar bell that ushers us into the much needed serenity that only Shabbat can provide. Shortly following, the siren of an incoming missile blasted through the same loudspeaker, mocking the previous announcement of peace not an hour earlier.







The Jewish nation is a seed. The process of the seed is that it decomposes before any development begins, but this is indeed the integral beginning of the growth process. We will continue to grow and develop and rise out of shackles that our enemies place on us

Women and girls from the next door synagogue ran through our door to seek refuge in our homes' safe room, and the comfort of warm smiles and pleasantries held us over until the crowd felt comfortable returning to services.

Within moments of return, the prayers gained momentum and the women could be seen through the open door dancing and singing, eyes closed, holding hands in emotional fervour, reciting the eloquent songs of *Kabbalat Shabbat* - the prayers that welcome in the Sabbath. "God will give might to His people, God will bless His people with peace."

When it is difficult to find tranquillity and peace, when we have to run and hide and return again, we realise it is in our hands to blossom and defy the intentions of our enemies.

I have been blessed with many unique opportunities over the last heart wrenching weeks. Opportunities to witness the light and joy, the unity and togetherness that have dotted the otherwise black night.

As we drove off the main road toward an army base last week, the way became increasingly winding, pavement bumpy, street lights kilometres behind us. We travelled further off the grid into darkness.

As we arrived to give inspiration and a warm meal to our precious soldiers on base, the smoke of the BBQ, or *mangal* as we call it in Hebrew, preceded us at the security gate. The savoury smoke was the warm greeting in a sea of black sky. The inviting smile of the rabbi on base ushered us into the awaiting crowd. He likened the smoke of these inspirational barbecue experiences to that of the *ketoret*, the incense offering in the Holy Temple; the offering whose smoke rose directly to heaven. Darkness appears to engulf us at every turn, but the holiness, the potential to rise heavenward remains great.

As we find ourselves at the cusp of the holiday of Tu B'Shevat, The New Year of the Trees, the intensity of its deeper meaning resonates in a whole new way this year. It is true, the days are dark and cold. The branches

of the bare and fruitless trees appear as empty, outstretched arms devoid of loved ones. The lack of colour and vibrancy in nature feels like an empty colouring book, and no one provided us with a set of colours to fill it in. As we struggle through a dark and seemingly endless winter, it is precisely the time when we are instructed to celebrate the Festival of the Trees, the holiday that signifies growth and new beginnings.

I attended two meaningful events in the last two weeks that gave me insight as to why now, in the dead of winter, it is precisely the time for this Tu B'Shevat celebration:

The gathering of families with young children was upbeat and vivacious. The doors opened and a sea of gorgeous colourful balloons of all sizes, modelled in all shapes flew through the air as the outstretched arms grabbed the lot with smiles on their faces. The music was festive as fathers danced with their children and mothers looked on contently. Only this Chanukah celebration was different from many others. These fathers dancing with their beautiful children, only weeks earlier, sifted through the bodies of someone else's children, giving them their final respect. Every man in the crowd - and some of the women as well - belong to a unique and holy organisation called ZAKA, a civilian volunteer force in Israel with sole responsibility of dealing with incidents of unnatural death. When they close their eyes they see the horrors of the massacre, the blood and the carnage. When they open their eyes they have their very own families to attend to who need their love and affection. These men and women brought holiness to places most devoid of sanctity. They brought whatever goodness they could to the darkest corners of the earth at its bleakest hour.

The second event was also upbeat and cheerful. It was a gathering focused on gratitude. Out of the one hundred policemen from Southern Israeli units that were invited to take part in the event, seventy arrived injured. These upstanding first responders lost 59 of their fellow officers on October

7th. The crowd looked on in awe as our injured heroes arrived, many straight from the hospital for a short respite, bearing casts, braces and crutches. Despite the acute physical and emotional pain, they recited the *birkat hagomel*, the blessing recited when one has witnessed great miracles. There was not a dry eye in the room as we answered the following response: "May He who has bestowed beneficence upon you always bestow every beneficence upon you." This may seem counterintuitive to say to those who have endured such pain. However, precisely while we are suffering we must begin the process of acknowledging gratitude and miracles. This choice is the greatest force that we have to lift ourselves out of our pain and begin to rebuild.

Our enemies have tried to bury us deep under the ground, but we, my precious people, cannot be buried. The Jewish Nation is a seed. The process of the seed is that it decomposes before any development begins, but this is indeed the integral beginning of the growth process. We will continue to grow and develop and rise out of the shackles that our enemies place on us.

The commentaries explain that by the 15th of Shevat, the date of the holiday, the earth has become saturated with the rains of the new year, which in turn causes the sap to start rising in the trees. This is the first indication of the cycle of growth, whereby the trees will begin to bud and proceed to produce fruit. The holiday of the trees is teaching us that new potential and growth stems forth at the moments that seem the most cold and dark.

The winter spans from the month of Tevet until the month of Nissan. The 15th of Shevat is the midpoint between autumn and spring. Once half the winter has passed, its strength is weakened, the cold is not as intense and the budding process begins.

Yes, brokenhearted people whose tears can fill our reservoirs until the threat of drought becomes nonexistent, the budding has begun. The winter will come to an end and we will see the days of spring once again.



Other people's *pain*

Gareth Kobrin

Sometimes I walk into a room and catch my wife crying.

As every man knows, when you stumble upon a weeping female, the instinct is “*what did I do?*”

But I know Aimee, and I’d know if I did something wrong. I also know that she’s had her fair share of trials and has been sentenced to a life of silent suffering, so it’s not her own pain that draws tears.

If she’s crying, it means one thing: someone else is in pain.

I’ve never understood it. I can explain pain perfectly. If someone’s sad and you wanna know why, I’m your guy. But I don’t *feel* their pain.

I believed I was normal and accepted this *meshugas* (madness) as another one of my wife’s idiosyncrasies. What good comes from inflicting pain on yourself, simply because someone else is hurting?

How wrong I was...

Only one Adam

Simple anecdotes often serve as hard-hitting wakeup calls, and I remember the first time I even considered the power of rigorous empathy. Esther and Moshe have been married for 70 years. Esther’s arthritis flares up and – as always – Moshe accompanies his beloved to the doctor. When asked to describe her symptoms, Moshe responds, “*Our knees are sore.*”

I heard this cute story shortly after we were married, and it did get me thinking – but I’ve learned not to buy anything until I have a source.

Fast forward a couple of years, and things are getting heated at a Shabbat table while debating a sensitive topic involving abuse. Someone questions whether the young girl

“

Pain insists upon being attended to. And this pain was ours

was in any way responsible - what would be described as “victim blaming” in modern conversation - and Aimee explodes into a tirade of swear words. If my memory serves me, she even flung a silver spoon across the table, narrowly missing her opponent’s stunned face.

I drained my glass of scotch calmly and whispered to our Rabbinic host, “Sorry Rov. In her mind, she is the victim”. He smiled - in admiration - and quoted a verse from *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of our Fathers):

“Noseh be’ol chaveiro? (Who will acquire Torah?) One who carries their friend’s burden.”

The Hebrew word for Mankind is ‘Adam’. The first three letters of that word might offend this generation, so perhaps a more apt translation is *Humanity*. In Hebrew, *adam* has no plural form, which must mean that in essence, every human is part of the same whole. Even more so the Jewish people, who have managed to survive despite being shattered and scattered like shards of broken glass among the nations.

Nothing is more Jewish than feeling each other’s pain.

Out of chaos, comes order

On the morning of October 7th, I was one of the few in my community privy to the [heart]breaking news. I shared what little intel I had gathered. “There could be as many as 40 dead,” I whispered to friends at *shul*.

That evening, Rabbi Tatz addressed our congregation, his fateful topic that night was *Our Relationship with the Non-Jewish world*. He described how this was the time when the Jewish People celebrated the nations of the world by offering seventy separate sacrifices at the Temple, corresponding to the “seventy nations of the world” (Talmud Sukkah 55b). It was a breathtaking class, and I was one of the few who realised just how poignant it was.

News had spread that I was in the know, so later, in between *hakafot*, I reluctantly updated the death toll to “close to 100” and tried to wash away the looks of despair with whisky and song.

By morning that number had risen to 300,

and as the messenger, I had the displeasure of seeing everyone’s reactions again. We all tried not to think about it, to drown it out, but pain insists upon being attended to. And this pain was ours. I finally had an inkling of what my wife must feel when others suffer.

And yet, so much progress in the world happens when something really bad takes place. The logic sounds warped, but it’s true of almost all significant progress in our history.

In tragedy, the world splits into 3 groups: the victims, the survivors and the rest of us.

My cold and controversial take is this: we can and should mourn for the victims, but they are gone. We cannot and should not attempt to understand what survivors are feeling – neither those who were attacked, nor the family and friends of the dead. I assure you each of them will have a miraculous tale to tell, and in the years ahead they will all change our world for the better.

But what about those of us who were not *directly* affected, but who still feel the jarring pain? What can we do?

Carry the burden. And let it go.

I am writing this on the third day of the November ceasefire; thankfully 26 hostages have been released. I hope that by the time you read this, they are all home safely. But even now, in the aftermath of the massacre and with hundreds of souls still enslaved, the shock has worn off. Time softens the sharpest sorrows.

I’ve lost loved ones, and in the months (and even years) that follow, there can be a toxic sense of guilt when you catch yourself not feeling sad. But here’s a secret weapon I learned too early in my life:

You are not doing a disservice to that trauma by not carrying it with you every day.

As overwhelming as those days following October 7th were, there was also something electrifying about the unity created.

Most of our collective problems come from a lack of *achdut* (unity), so what can we do to ignite the fire again, but without a national tragedy? As always, the trick is childishly simple, while infinitely difficult to execute. The only way to incite unity is to tear down the walls between individuals. We can only be *One Jewish People* when Jewish people stop fighting with each other.

If you have an active *broigus* (feud) with another *yid*, reach out to them and make peace!

The best way I heard this was a *moshal* (parable) told over by Rabbi Walkin:

You have been training for 6 months for the London marathon. Hours spent pounding pavement will soon be rewarded, and you wake early Sunday morning, confident you’ll achieve your 4-hour goal.

On the way, you bump into your mate David. He’s visibly excited to see you, and says, “Oh thank heavens! You’re heading into central London right? Listen, would you mind dropping something at my gran’s apartment, she lives very close to the finishing line near Buckingham Palace.”

A strange request, but you want to help your friend.

“Sure, what is it?”

“Nothing much, it’s a 5kg bag of potatoes. She needs to make soup.”

Obviously, this is a ludicrous request, and you’d feel fully justified to turn Dave down.

But why? Why shouldn’t you help your friend? Because it’s hard enough to run the marathon without carrying a heavy load.

Life is difficult, why give yourself unnecessary burdens to schlep around with you? Our soldiers cannot cease fire on the front lines, so at least have the courage to extend an olive branch and make peace with a fellow Jew.

He hears *their* prayers

I heard an astonishing explanation of the name Yishmael. He was Abraham’s first-born son, and was blessed accordingly... What better reward than having one of God’s names, *Kel*, as part of your name?

Yishma-Kel means “God listened”, or “*will* listen.” There’s a reason they pray 5 times a day – because they know God hears them. The only way we can combat that is to pray louder. No Jew lives for himself in this world, and all we can do is raise our voices to the Heavens and beg for it all to be over.

The good news is that we are told that at the end of his life, Yishmael did *teshuva* (repentance) and lived amicably with his brother Isaac (Yitzchak). This means that peace is probable – even inevitable - in the end. As impossible as that future may seem, we must believe it can happen. The first step is harnessing each other’s power, and each other’s pain, to bang on the doors of *shamayim* (heaven).

Holocaust survivor Yisrael Meir Lau, who served as the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel from 1993 to 2003, said it best: “We’ve learned how to die together. Now let’s learn how to live together.”



Peace & Quiet

Sasha Silber



They say ignorance is bliss.

They do – I don't.

I need to plan, and then make
contingency plans.

I need to understand every step of
a procedure before it begins.

I need to keep my news alerts on.

I need to know what is happening to
my people.

At the same time, I think I have a gift:
I know when it's time to let go.

To stop reading, and just think positively.

To get on with it, and go with the flow.

To take a leap, and just try my best.
To shut off, and just trust.

It's a pretty good combination for someone
who spends six days planning and preparing
for letting go on the seventh.

I can remember a Shabbat way back in my
new Upper West Side apartment. I had come
back home after reading peacefully on a park
bench for hours that balmy afternoon. As the
sun began to set, I became mesmerised by
the shimmering spotlight of dust streaming
across the quickly darkening room. I suddenly
snapped out of it: I realised that the way my
apartment and its lights had been set up meant
I'd have to choose between spending time
in a lit bathroom or resting in a dark living
room until after nightfall. I remember actively
choosing to embrace it; I can still feel the
delicious quiet and stillness of that remaining
hour of rest before the noise and business
of the week would rush back, leaving me to
count down to the following Friday afternoon.

Elon Gold has a whole bit he does on our national obsession with time. Candles lit, matzahs baked, shoes changed and glass smashed, all within comically-specific timeframes. “We’re the only ones who have a calendar with minutes on it.”

Fridays in an observant Jewish home can be hectic (to put it gently). Menus are planned, groceries are purchased, food is carefully prepared, timers are set at specific intervals for lights and hot plates, shirts are ironed, laundry sorted, hair and makeup done and phones put away. Time, annoyingly, does not slow down for the sheer quantity of preparations that need to be done. On the contrary, it always feels as though it speeds up, the closer in time we get to candle lighting.

I can remember being blown away by the relentlessness of our dedication to time in Rama Burshtein’s *Fill the Void* when I saw it years ago at the Jerusalem Cinematheque. The first ten minutes of the film had the audience bombarded by the characters of the film having to tap into moment after moment of some of the greatest joy and some of the greatest pain possible in a lifetime: a birth, a new mother’s death, her *levaya* (funeral) and the baby’s *brit milah* (circumcision) which coincided with the *shiva* (seven days of mourning). It’s a plot that is far from impossible (though I certainly hope it never happens).

I hadn’t thought of that film for a while until recently.

October 7th, 2023 fell on a Saturday. Shabbat. *Simchat Torah*.

When a festival coincides with Shabbat, the blend of Shabbat and Festival activity we engage with, along with actions we refrain from, help observers tap into the incredible potential for the day. The potential for fully resting, while also engaging with the unbridled joy in this particular date, marking the renewed cycle of Torah learning for the year with wholehearted singing and dancing with Torah scrolls, the distribution of noisily-wrapped colourful packets of sweets to engage the little ones, and basking in this last jubilant day of a long cycle of High Holidays.

Here in Israel, we knew pretty quickly that a disaster was unfolding almost in real-time; sirens blared incessantly throughout the day, interrupting blessings over the Torah (thankfully, my six year old still managed to beautifully recite his for the first time before getting pelted by sweets); fathers, husbands and sons quickly exchanged goodbyes and ran out of prayer services, geared-up and drove down to their respective bases. By noon, the usually bustling sidewalks of Jerusalem were mostly empty of the festively-dressed, replaced

only by speeding cars taking soldiers and first responders wherever they needed to go.

As we walked a few blocks home from our festival meal that day, we ran into a friend of ours, a woman whose family boasts a rich history in this Land and State, who is not an identifiably-observant person. We greeted one another, *Shabbat Shalom, Chag Sameach...* to which she answered, “Indeed. I will try for these remaining few hours of Shabbat to feel its peace, and for these remaining few hours to feel the joy of the festival. I do not wish to hear any more news until then.”

There was something so simple, so powerful about her decision to stay connected to the potential of Shabbat and the festival, when so many others were busy passing around rumours and working themselves into a (merited) panic. I decided to take this woman’s wisdom with me. I thought back to the stillness of the sparkling dust dancing around my old Manhattan apartment as I savoured that last bit of the peacefulness of the day.

We made *Havdalah* on the evening of October 7th, ceremonially separating the conclusion of Shabbat and the festival from the week, a time when we usually wish one another a good and healthy winter. We put our children to bed, picked up our phones, and fell into a sleepless night of breaking news, searing pain coupled with some sort of paralysis I’d never experienced before: a deafening crescendo, like a high-pitched ringing, which then plunged into a profound, enveloping silence, mirroring our shock and disorientation.

That first week was hellish.¹ The numbers kept rising. Images and headlines flooded our screens. Sirens kept blaring. Comfort, food and sleep just felt wrong. We held our children with a new level of gratitude, smiling at them through damp sore eyes and tried to ‘maintain a level of normalcy’ (whoever invented that phrase??).

But that first week, I also recognized a tiny glimmer - maybe even just the reflection or shadow of a glimmer - of light. It was still overpowered by that thick mass of proliferating darkness, but if we tried hard enough to see it, if we squinted and tilted our heads back and forth, it was definitely there - and it usually came by way of a WhatsApp group or a shared spreadsheet.

As a kid, I never understood or really knew about community life. The idea of showing up with a meal to someone’s house sounded absurd and forced - like the person in the lacquered-lawn community who welcomes their new neighbour with an inedible casserole. That’s exactly how I pictured it. Obviously, fortunately, I’ve seen and experienced the tremendous potential and beauty of a group of people that sincerely just want to help one



another. I’ve been spoiled on the receiving end with endless family meals after births, surgery and through *shiva*: overwhelming and a literal godsend. It’s always satisfying to be able to quickly pull together a comforting meal and a bag of treats for someone who could really use it.

Since the 7th of October, community life has evolved. The IDF has an army defending us on the ground in Gaza, in terrorist hot spots all over Israel and on our northern border with Lebanon. There’s another army here. Every single person not in olive green since that initial shockwave of the blow dissipated has

¹ (I am grateful and fortunate to know that from the first day, my husband and my children have been home, safe. Most of our friends, their husbands and sons have been called up; most are in Gaza, some in the north or in other dangerous areas - putting their lives on the line to defend and protect all of us at home. Tragically, a family member of one of my dearest friends remains a hostage in Gaza at the time this article has gone to print).

“

We watched out the window as the sky showed off its pinks and purples, before slowly fading away into the dark night

Gaza envelope in order to attempt to keep the farms healthy and continue to supply the country with fresh produce. Seminary girls doing heaps upon heaps of laundry for individuals and families evacuated from terrorised communities. Mental health professionals volunteering around the clock to support anyone that needed it. Everyone going through their closets and cupboards to see what could be donated. And the shopping - the carts piled so high you could hardly see who was pushing it around the shops in a frenzy, getting necessities to the displaced and to the soldiers, marking off lists, delivering, and going back for more. A few weddings of soldiers and evacuated individuals were organised in hours, complete with beautifully catered food and fresh flowers to keep the spirits of the young couple high. Addresses of families to deliver to on a moment's notice. Phone numbers of people to call just for a few minutes of encouragement. Meals cooked and flowers delivered for wives in their ninth month of pregnancy, unsure of the next time they will see their husband serving in combat units deep in enemy territory. Lots and lots of small gestures. So many people, on duty. It was the only air to breathe, and serving in this quickly- (and well)-organised army became the way of survival through the thick darkness.

All the way until Shabbat.

I've already said: Fridays are hectic in an observant Jewish home. We were speeding around Jerusalem *ba'tafkid* going down the list almost straight until Shabbat. A platter of chicken roasted in the oven and a lovely pot of soup bubbled on the stove while we drove, emptying our car of bags and checking off lists around our neighbourhood purposefully. Exhilarating.

Then it was time to get myself and my family ready, rushing full speed ahead to get to that moment every week when I finally stop for a second before taking the light of my candles in with a deep breath that always gives me a bit of an inexplicable tingle. I could not wait to stand silently and appreciate my freedom and ability to light. I could not wait to sit with my guests that evening. And I looked forward to Shabbat

lunch, to sit outside in our garden in a show of defiance against the forces of evil hell-bent on our destruction, to proving them wrong, to sing together and share words of strength and meaning and inspiration and wisdom - to access the light of Shabbat, to tap into it and to share it.

That Shabbat I thought about Rama Burstein's film for the first time in some time. As we cycle through our calendar, we are meant to tap into times of extreme sorrow and other times of unimaginable joy - times and places far from the comfort of our sitting rooms and appliances. In a less extreme version of the film, eight months into a tumultuous pregnancy I stood up in the middle of *shiva* to sit at my Shabbat table, heartbroken over the loss of my mother, excited for my new baby coming just weeks later, devastated that they would not meet, and heart melting over my son's enthusiasm over cakes we had received for that Shabbat and joy that he could sit with me at the table for Shabbat. We don't deny emotions in our tradition. We don't deny time, we don't deny pain, we don't deny joy.

It all coexists. We are the ones with the power to build and maintain these walls that guard times and spaces of incredible potential. The non-negotiability of punctuality in our tradition reinforces them, helping us protect and honour the boundless hidden purpose and potential within the spaces they guard.

My six-year-old son turned his head up to me late that Shabbat afternoon, just a week after the massacre as his little brother built towers next to us. Unforgettably, simultaneously breaking and healing my shattered heart, he asked in his gentle way (verbatim): "Mommy, can we make Shabbat last longer, like til Tuesday or Wednesday this week? I love spending time with you when you're not on your phone and we can just, you know... talk, spend time together... sit on the couch together..." We watched out the window as the sky showed off its pinks and purples, before slowly fading away into the dark night, savouring that last hour of stillness and quiet, oblivious to anything that might have happened since lighting candles the day before, completely having let go of it all - even if just for the day.

been *ba'tafkid* - on duty: Wives and mothers keeping homes happy and 'normal' for children while their husbands fight our existential war. Children writing letters and covering notes with stickers and drawings to send to soldiers. A group of podiatrists (true story) driving to the Gaza and northern borders with boxes of antifungal cream and clean socks to soothe and heal thousands of soldiers' feet, constantly damp and cold as they sleep outdoors and in boots. Women and children - and American cowboys (also, true story) - taking over for the kidnapped and murdered foreign workers that used to farm the blooming land of the

Ask me for proof of our dead.
I will give you none.
I am a Jew.
I only have proof of life.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of connected loops and a final horizontal stroke.

Mimi Hecht

I can see it. Because I've seen it already. How, over time, we will heal. How we will honor and commemorate our brothers and sisters that were tortured and slaughtered and raped and burned alive. We will tighten our knuckles around all the evidence, safeguard and showcase it. We will compile and share the footage, edited in a way the public can stomach, that will replay on screens at museums. We will erect monuments. Survivors, and the heroes among them, will speak at schools. We will observe another Day of Remembrance, and call it something else. Israel will hear a siren, traffic will stop for silence.

Again.

But will it mean as much? The remembering?
We've held on so hard to our persecutions, so the world won't forget. But it already has been forgotten. And worse, not believed.

We *will* remember. Like all the persecutions and collective trauma etched in our bones. We *will* remember, and that is enough. But the proving? The presentations of evidence, as an edifice? It's time to let that go.

On streets all over the world, in marches on campuses in America, in every takedown of a hostage poster they label "propaganda," in the widespread cases for Israel's "hoax" on social media, we are coming face to face with holocaust-denial: but for a massacre that happened two weeks ago.

And in my bed at night, after I've regrettably engaged on social media with people calling Hamas "humanitarian" and thousands of comments applauding another's intricate breakdown of the "Israeli Occupation Massacre Hoax," my heart is racing, my legs are tingling and my soul doesn't feel safe in my body. This is what the enemy wanted. For me to be weak and walking dead. I take an anti-anxiety I keep as backup for when all my inner tools fail me and I just need relief. It's been a while. I fall asleep with resolve never again to engage or give them a drop of my sacred Jewish energy, never again will I try and remind anyone ever ever ever ever again, that we have been murdered.

If you will not accept our death, neither will I.

When they deny the existence of a Jew, what this really means is they cannot even let us die. We don't deserve to even die. We aren't worth a life, so we aren't given a death. It can't possibly be that there was a Jewish life and now there is a Jewish death. Even the Nazi's intricate recordings of murder, were numbers, not people.

They never killed Jews. This is what they've been saying all along.

We need to start believing it. How Jews live and live and only live.

(cont...)

It's so clear, how hatred of the Jew today is being enacted and chanted within a maddening contradiction they expect us not to notice: violence and death is justified as resistance, and yet when we are killed...it didn't happen? From the river to the sea," and when it's acted upon...we are liars?

Make it make sense.

Spoiler alert: it won't.

And if it doesn't make sense to you, and you feel your body start to give way at the mere thought of the existence of these denials, I implore you: let it go.

Do not engage. Do not try. It will feel like death. And you are a Jew, and you cannot die.

Here's something I'm learning. And it's going to sound absolutely crazy. But it's giving me comfort when, at night, while still mourning the violent deaths of my Jewish family and praying for those who've been taken, I have to breathe myself back into embodiment after all I've seen and heard.

Our enemies are right. Even when they murder us, they know we have not died.

They say, "prove to me you have died."

We have their GoPro footage, we have surveillance and firsthand accounts: horrifying documentation is extensive. And yet, we did not die. Didn't happen. It's miraculous.

We are miraculous.

They know it.

(They hate it.)

By their own admission, we must be wiped off the map. But when the blood and ashes of 1400 dead Jews scatter the South of Israel, it must be a lie. We show them death and they say to us,

"Oh please, that is a lie, you did not die, you are alive!"

And they are right.

6 million people murdered? How can it possibly be? It must be exaggerated.

They look at the Jew and say "False! It can't be! They are so alive!"

And they are right.

Even to our most vile and hate-filled enemies we don't die. We persist. Let us take a note from them. When they yell at us for crying victim, let us say "You are right. Victims we are not. We live."

We live in the smiles and dances of soldiers.

We live in every attempt for peace, even when literally and figuratively shot down.

We live even in funeral after funeral that lays a body in the ground, where there is prayer and faith and love.

We live in the millions of dollars of items for families and children, that

accumulated in the blink of an eye.

We live in the laughter to uplift, even during unspeakable horrors. And the tears shared, over a phone or over a shoulder, when we take in another account of children separated from their mothers.

We live in our music full of hope and fortitude and unity.

We live in the reality that it is impossible, and unreal, for the Jews to die.

We know what has happened.

But we must not live now, just to prove death.

We will not die a thousand more deaths by living in the evidence and confirmation of what's been brought upon us.

Our head held high as Jews is not defined by our persecution.

History tells us.

These past weeks tell us.

We are defined by living.

So never again, yes.

But let it mean something else.

Never again, yes.

To proving we have died.

Never again, yes.

To using our precious Jewish energy to trying to get you to see, believe, and hear us.

Never again, yes.

To creating a religion around the murder and hatred of the Jew.

Never again, yes.

To even believing for a second, in our death more than our life.

There is no "never again." But it's a relief, a comfort, a rallying cry! To say, simply "Again!" Again, again, again.. to living! We are here! Again! We choose life! Again! The nation of Israel lives! Again!

God gave us a manual for burying, mourning — and then uplifting the souls of — our dead. There is no page for proving and showcasing we died. Because a Jew never dies.

Our enemies know it.

It's our time to know it too.

Jewish life itself is not lost.

We live. We live. We live.

Ask me for proof of our dead.

I will give you none.

I am a Jew.

I only have proof of life.



MAKING PEACE

with the pieces

Shani Pollack

In my mind, it would be nice to have a world where everything fits into boxes. Each box would neatly stack itself on top of the other and leave just the right amount of space for the next box to fit in. The game of Tetris was always my favourite. Watching the boxes fall down with the potential to make a nice straight line was so gratifying and rewarding. I've been grappling with this for many years, but however much I'd like this world to fit in a box, I am fighting a losing battle as the world is round.

My personal life story has taken many twists and turns. We are a blended family living in Jerusalem. The output of running a Jewish home comprised or compromised by his, hers and ours (with twins thrown in for good luck) has added to what we like to call 'the juggle struggle.' Like all good jugglers, we paint on smiling faces and as my husband likes to say, 'we are managing our blessings' at our homemade circus. This live performance-art show entertains us night and day; meanwhile, my perfectionistic nature has been demoted

to functional. Either way, it's pretty obvious to anyone that knows me, or knows us, or knows his, or knows hers, or ours, that we are not an easy bunch to categorise and label. No boxes for us. My love for art and colour has poured into my life and my favourite toy, the kaleidoscope, has become a friendly pair of spectacles for how I see the world: light, vibrancy, expression, all falling into place somehow and mirroring one another. A lovely blend of splendour. To be honest, I actually thought of myself as a still life kinda girl,

sitting with my pencil as a child, being in tight control of how the masterpiece would end. However, the Masterplanner knows me better than I know myself and the black-and-white images on the pad have transformed with time into deeper, richer forms.

Forced to let go of the pencil, or better put, liberate myself from the illusion of perfectionism, I have embarked upon the path of becoming a professional human being. A wise teacher once told me, "Great people are not people who live their dreams, but live their reality." Things didn't exactly work out the way I dreamed. I mourned my black-and-white dream and buckled down, embracing that this might be the way in which God wishes for me to relate to Him. I remember waking up in the night during some dark hours with a sense of resolve and clarity. I reached for the paper and pen next to my bed and wrote down four words. In the morning I awoke to the words, "You can't fight God." I was not capable of solving or fixing all the problems; instead, acceptance and love would need to be fostered.

The word *lekabel* means both to accept and to receive in Hebrew. Once I can accept, then I am able to receive. Once the ego can be quietened and the truth held that there are places that I am lacking, we are able to work from our centred point. This centred point, the truth of who I am, is my vulnerability. By being authentic and real, realising I need others to fill the places where I lack, intimacy and love can be experienced. This radical acceptance - that my weaknesses may actually be my greatest assets - has been transformational.

To accept is to believe in the process. I accept that who I am and who you are is a work in progress. There's no way around it. It's not personal, it's natural. We have all been given a certain remit of limitations and choices to navigate our life by - and I love the saying - "don't judge me by the decisions I make, you don't know what choices I was given!" There's a process at play, and we would be wise to believe in the goodness of ourselves, of others and of God. We learn that God created the world through "ten utterances" to distinguish between the *rasha* (evil) and the *tzadik* (righteous). The *rasha* cynically criticises the process: why would God need to use ten sayings instead of just saying "World!" to the same effect? He would resort to the belief that God and His ways do not make sense, rejecting the whole thing: The all-or-nothing attitude.

Meanwhile, the *tzadik* is inquisitive: he is able to hold space and wonder, why would God want to build the world through 10 sayings? As my mother would say in the

name of her grandmother, "don't throw the baby out with the bathwater." We can have humility, allow for contradistinction and for there to be steps in our relationship with God, thereby allowing for elements of holding and accepting without relying solely on our limited minds.

Just as God created the world through a process, there is a more profound lesson of love, belief and acceptance at play. Our own world must be built through a process too. If we want to build our lives through healthy avenues, it can only be done by admittance, humility and acceptance of who we are at this stage in the process. By lowering our defence walls and ego, our humble, small voice can be heard and we can be open to receive.

Teachers learn more from their students than students from their teachers. One day, one of my lovely deep-thinking students shared with us that she had been looking at herself in the mirror for longer than usual. She stared at the image in the mirror and proceeded to say to herself, "we've been with each other for a long time... why aren't we best friends?"

Eemunah (faith) means holding on. There is a process underway like the winter months that

does not show us the integral work being done underground. Yet, we hold on and believe in ourselves and in others that intrinsically, the grey waters are just like the artist's brush that needs to be cleaned to reveal a new colour.

Bitachon (trust) is letting go. Believe in the process and then trust the process. We hold on during those confusing, darker months and believe in the process. Although we may all be limited by our processes in this world we can feel safe and secure in the knowledge that a divine plan is being held for us at the same time. My process, their process, His process is good and we can accept, receive and enjoy the love that comes our way in the mindful moment. We must allow ourselves to be vulnerable and receive the love whilst it is in process and believe in life being perfectly imperfect.

God works with the broken. Perhaps we should too. We just need a little bit of faith in ourselves, in each other, in the world. We need to be our own best friend. We can let go and surrender. We do not need to hold on so tight - like those bits of colour reflected in an ever-changing way, at peace with its pieces. Step out of the black and white, embrace the grey and then discover the colour.

“

My love for art and colour has poured into my life and my favourite toy, the kaleidoscope, has become a friendly pair of spectacles for how I see the world





THE BLIND SALUTE

Rabbi Eli Birnbaum

As a child, I was often mesmerised when the congregation reached the *Shema*. As people all around me covered their eyes with their right hands, I was always that kid who peaked between the gap in his fingers, just to ‘double check’ everyone was properly in sync. I even made a game of it, trying to ‘catch’ and make eye contact with someone on the other side of *shul* who wasn’t covering their eyes in that sacred blind salute.

‘I wonder what they’re thinking,’ my childish curiosity burned, ‘maybe some of them aren’t thinking about anything. Maybe some are thinking about God.’ And maybe, just maybe, some were wondering why a curious little boy still has his eyes covered long after everyone else had moved on. But I couldn’t help it. If curiosity killed the cat, what of it? Perhaps the cat’s next of kin should hire a good Jewish lawyer.

The custom to cover our eyes while reciting the first sentence of the *Shema* is an ancient one, dating back to the times of Rabbi Judah

the Prince – leader of the Jewish world after the failed Bar Kochba rebellion (132 CE) and redactor of the *Mishna* (central literature of the Oral Torah). Intriguingly, some commentators suggest that the practice prior to Rabbi Judah’s innovation was to gaze in all directions, thereby signifying an acceptance of God’s rule over all ‘corners’ of the physical realm. But then this practice shifted, drastically. Why?

As I left behind youthful days spent terrorising the good folk of Borehamwood and Elstree Synagogue with my sabbatical espionage and started to ponder the meaning of *Shema* from a more mature and contemplative vantage point, I found myself torn. Final moments spent with elderly or unwell loved ones and trips to Poland adorned with the traditional repertoire of inspirational *Shema*-based stories both seemed to point in one direction: *Shema* is the end point, the finishing line, the old friend that takes us by our weary and weathered arm and accompanies our encore as we shuffle off

this mortal coil. Cover eyes with right, exit stage left.

While powerful and indeed quite comforting, the image of *Shema* as one final affirmation of faith struck me as lacking. The words themselves point in multiple, often paradoxically different directions.

Shema opens with a call to action; an imperative to listen to and absorb a certain thing.

“Hear, O Israel!”

I’ve often wondered: is the second word a prerequisite for the first? Does a person need to identify with and align themselves to the values of being an Israelite before they are able to properly ‘hear’ what is being said?

I think there is a kernel of truth to this. Why else delay the communication of such an apparently crucial and integral prayer for a whole generation? I repeat: the generation of Israelites who left Egypt did not hear the *Shema*. Its first two paragraphs don’t appear in Scripture until their children – the generation



*As we pull onto the highway, what is our destination?
Which direction do we travel in? How fast do we travel?
Who do we take with us? True, we could answer these
questions by simply opening our eyes and observing the flow
of traffic – but can that perspective be trusted?*

who would inherit the land – are old enough to appreciate its meaning. If the Exodus generation was tasked with establishing a Jewish identity, the Promised Land generation seem to have been tasked with bringing that identity into reality. What does that reality look like?

“Hashem is our God.”

This idea is revolutionary. Not just the God of the *Shema*’s third paragraph (the only one that appears in the lifetime of the Exodus generation). That is the God of miracles, blockbuster showdowns with kings and seismic geopolitical interventions. But also: the God of its first two paragraphs. This is God as intricately involved in our day to day lives, overseeing the harvests and rainfall; caring for the educational values we establish in every household, cherishing a deep and personal relationship with every individual member of the Israelite corpus, no matter how seemingly insignificant they may be. And yet:

“Hashem is One.”

Not ‘one’ like you and I understand it. ‘One’ as in: ‘infinite and indivisible, not made of

any composite parts’. What does this oneness look like? Close your eyes and imagine a table. It is made of different wood panels, some metal fixtures and screws and a nicely varnished top. Now, delve a level deeper. See beyond the surface. See the wood panelling as a combination of 50% carbon, 42% oxygen, 6% hydrogen, 1% nitrogen and 1% various other elements. Last step: Undo all of that and imagine the table without any of those components yet still existing perfectly as a table. It isn’t possible, is it? The world around us and within us is made of composite parts. When you and I imagine ‘one’, what we picture is better described as a ‘union of things’ rather than ‘a thing’. God is therefore by definition beyond our comprehension, beyond what we can see and perceive in the outside world. Maybe that’s why we cover our eyes.

And herein lies a tantalising paradox. The God of absolute Oneness who is beyond the space time continuum and therefore beyond our power to comprehend, is nonetheless intricately involved in the space time continuum and wants nothing more than for

us to stretch as far as we humanly can to bridge the gap from composite finite to indivisible infinite. This process takes a lifetime. In fact, it takes countless lifetimes. In fact, it is where life itself happens. Our job as Jews is to teach the world how to live in the fissure between Divine intervention and Divine inscrutability.

Shema: Hear, those who identify with the values of the Israelite people, God is intricately involved and concerned with every aspect of our lives, and yet he remains inscrutable beyond our comprehension.

Shema isn’t merely a final affirmation of faith. It is the call to action to begin again now. It isn’t just the gaze in the rear-view mirror at journey’s end. It is the glance in the same mirror to make sure we are sure and steady before pulling out into the road of life.

But to do that, we must first rid ourselves of our preconceptions and perceptions of the outside road. As we pull onto the highway, what is our destination? Which direction do we travel in? How fast do we travel? Who do we take with us? True, we could answer these questions by simply opening our eyes and observing the flow of traffic – but can that perspective be trusted? Does it align with Jewish values? Does it strive to exist in the mystical nexus of the Unfathomable showing unfathomable love and care? Begin again now.

Before Rabbi Judah the Prince, the Temple stood, our homeland was secure. Looking here, there and everywhere while reciting the *Shema* made perfect sense. Godliness was here, there and truly everywhere. Up, up, down, down, right, left and all around. Then the Temple and Jerusalem were razed to the ground, and Bar Kochba’s failed uprising doused the fading embers of a spiritual renaissance. Darkness fell. God was no longer overtly ‘everywhere’. He had retreated to the Diaspora, into the heart of every single Jew who would let Him in.

And one by one, at the onset of that winding, magnificent journey into the great mystique of the unknown, those simple Jews took a moment to cover their eyes, block out the cacophony of noise and confusion from the outside, reaffirm their identity and commit again to bridge the gap between Humanity and its Creator.



WELLNESS

A full-page background image showing a person walking away from the viewer on a dirt path that winds through a field of tall, dry grass. In the distance, there are rolling hills under a vast sky filled with soft, white clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

Guidance *for growth*

Renowned experts in their fields share their expertise: understand how to clarify your purpose using practical tools directly sourced in Jewish wisdom with expert guidance, learn about how to create safe spaces for our children and discover relatable and effective methods to cope with anxiety and stress in any situation.

A *personal* CALLING

Rabbi Jack Cohen EdM

Rabbi Dr. Yosef Lynn



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Every person in the world was born with a unique set of gifts. Except they're not just gifts. They're unique debts that need to be paid... forward for the benefit of others

When the Yom Kippur War broke out, just over 50 years ago on October 6, 1973, Leonard Cohen, the Canadian singer-songwriter was living a fairly reclusive life on a Greek island, waiting for an epiphany.

Cohen had grown up in a traditional Jewish home and community in Montreal. His parents were quite involved in the Shaar Hashomayim Congregation. His paternal grandfather Lyon Cohen was the founding president of the Canadian Jewish Congress, and his mother's father was Rav Shlomo Zalman Klonitsky-Kline, a significant Talmud scholar, known by many as the "Prince of Hebrew Grammar," with whom young Leonard Cohen enjoyed regular Torah study sessions. As Cohen grew older, he grew estranged from his tradition. In his 30s, he got into Zen Buddhism, and even became a monk. He didn't, however, lose his deep affinity for

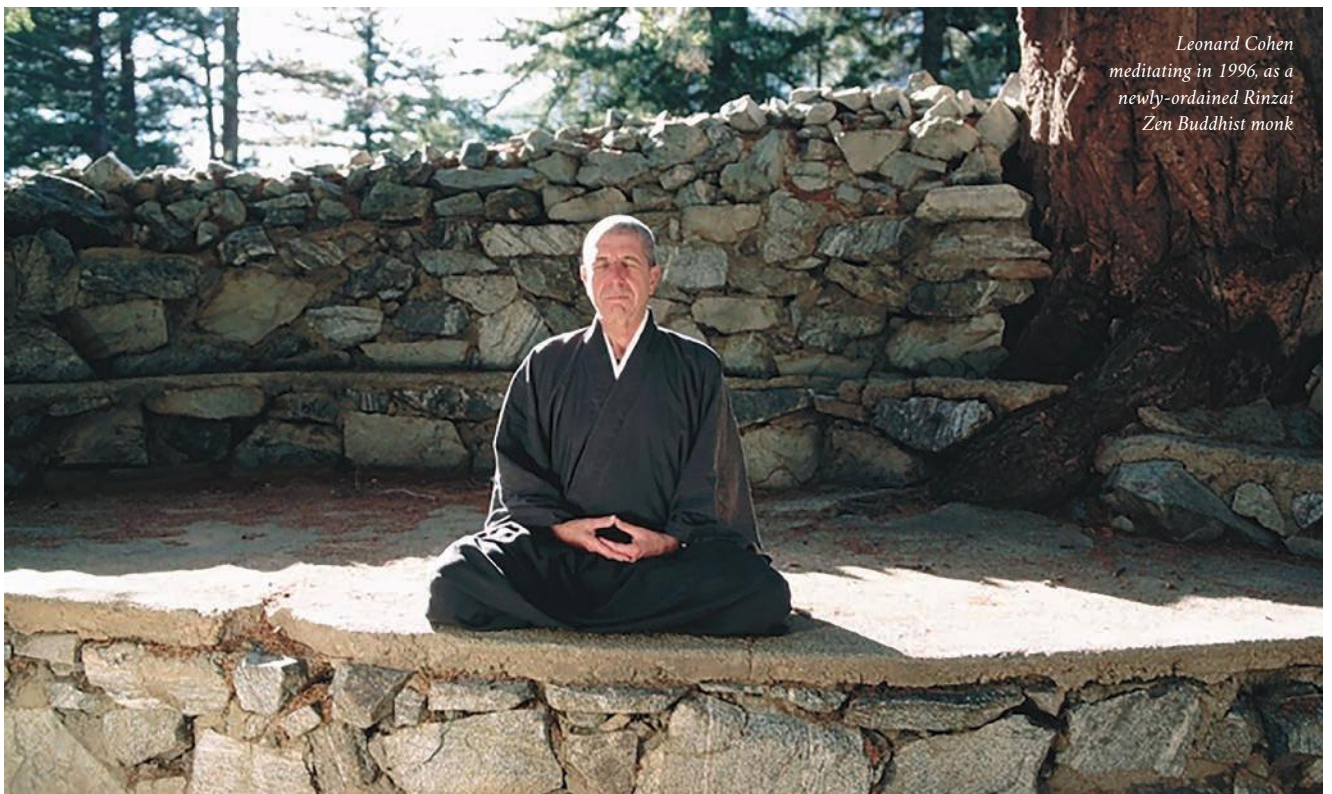
Jewish spirituality, nor his identity as an eternal member of the Jewish people.

In 1964, about a decade before the Yom Kippur War, he was asked to speak to the Montreal Jewish community about his relationship to Judaism. He didn't mince words in that speech, mourning what he perceived as the loss of the mission-driven "Judaism of the prophets," in exchange for what he saw as a stagnant, ritualised shell of what once was. We can only imagine that this remained the spiritual backdrop of his life ten years later still living on the Aegean Sea, waiting to be called upon "by the Infinite" to do something of true significance.

For Cohen, the surprise attack on Israel by Egyptian and Syrian forces on the holiest day of the year in 1973 was that calling. Without a plan, he got on a plane to Tel Aviv. Prior to the war, Cohen had voiced political views that could be categorised as "pro-

Arab," but he still felt that he had to "join his brothers in Israel." While he was waiting for his next "transmission from heaven" as to what he should do, he was spotted in the Pinati Café by three Israeli musicians. They invited him to join them in the Sinai desert to sing for Israeli soldiers. He agreed. This was the calling he was waiting for. They played impromptu concerts to inspire IDF troops, but it was Cohen who came away from the experience more inspired than anyone else. The following year, he came out with his first album in three years, *New Skin for the Old Ceremony*, clearly about his newly invigorated relationship with the Jewish spirit (take, for example, the song "Who By Fire," which was directly based on the Yom Kippur prayer, *Unetaneh Tokef*).

Leonard Cohen's experience as a disillusioned Jew in the Diaspora secretly awaiting his spiritual calling was unique in its particularities, but in many ways, the



*Leonard Cohen
meditating in 1996, as a
newly-ordained Rinzai
Zen Buddhist monk*

story of so many others.

It turns out that this is an old problem. In the 1740s, the Ramchal¹ was concerned about precisely the same problem: Jews just going through the motions. In his classic book, *Mesilat Yesharim* (the Path of the Just), he asks the all-important question: *what is your personal mission in this world?*

Every person in the world was born with a unique set of gifts. Except they're not just gifts. They're unique debts that need to be paid — not back — because God doesn't need them Himself — but *forward* — for the benefit of others. In order for an individual to feel connected to something bigger than *self*, he or she needs to see clearly and feel deeply what they should be *doing* with their gifts.

Once I've recognized the tools that have been placed in my hands, I then need to look around and ask: *what problems have I been uniquely positioned to fix in the unique environment in which I've been placed?*

One of the challenges we face in our modern world is the barrage of information. Where do we find the time today to take stock of our own gifts if we are constantly comparing ourselves to others? It also seems bizarrely easier to look for more exotic locations

to volunteer and “save the world” before contemplating what we can do with our gifts in local communities.

By the time Leonard Cohen was waiting on a Greek island to be directed towards *where* he could go to use these gifts, he at least knew that he had been given gifts of writing and singing. Most people, however, couldn't tell you what gifts they possess in the first place.

Here are a few practical exercises based on Jewish wisdom² which we've found to help people begin to orient themselves around their personal purpose.

1. Assess your assets

Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Paquda, an 11th century Andalusian sage, believed that people were wasting too much time and energy figuring out what they should be doing with their lives, when really it should be as intuitive as it is for animals. For example, seagulls don't need to explore seven industries before realising that they should fish for a living. They instinctively know they have the speed, vision and talons to catch fish - and enjoy their taste - naturally leading them to their role as fishers.

EXERCISE #1: Divide your adult and young adult life into chapters. Next, free-write,

reflecting on what you've done that you feel that you've done particularly well, and what you've most enjoyed doing. When you're done, go through what you've written and highlight the themes that begin to emerge. These are your tools and taste buds which will guide you like a seagull's ability and penchant for fishing leads it to fish.

2. Find your flow

They say, “if you do what you love, you'll never work a day in your life.” Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a prominent psychologist, coined the term “Flow” to describe the state of energised focus people achieve when engaging in tasks that align with their natural strengths. They'd work all day, but not feel drained at the end of it. In fact, they would feel euphoric and more energised than when they started. This state not only boosts productivity but also enhances wellbeing.

There is a deeper explanation: when you tap into your natural strengths, you're not draining your own batteries; instead, you're drawing from an Infinite Power Source that runs through you, called the “*Chaya* - חַיָּה,” which literally means “Lifesource.”

EXERCISE #2: As you go through your day, you do many tasks. Observe how various activities affect your focus and energy levels: some demand energy and leave you depleted, while others give you energy and leave you feeling great. Which is which? And if nothing you do in your average day gives you that *flow*, you'll have to survey past jobs or hobbies.

Ask yourself: why don't you do more of the things that get you into this state?

3. Poll your fan club

Three thousand years ago, King Solomon wrote a book of metaphors³ to transmit his wisdom in evocative, instructive and memorable ways. Here is one of them:

Just as gold and silver are purified to their essence through a smelting furnace, so too, we can get to the essence of a person through their praises. When metals are heated, the secondary elements in the metal melt away, and what is left is the primary metal. If you want to know what a person is really about

“*Seagulls don't need to explore seven industries before realising that they should fish for a living*”



“

*Once we hear our own
calling, we can help
others hear theirs*



— the purest stuff within them — you need to find what comes first to people’s minds when they think about them.

EXERCISE #3:

Ask your close friends and family members to describe your strengths. What parts of you do they consider your greatest strengths?

Make sure you ask in an open-ended, non-leading way. Don’t ask: “Do you think I’m smart?” Or “Would you say I’m good with people?” Ask instead: “What would you say are my strengths as a person?” Or “How would you describe me to others if you were trying to recommend me for a job or setting me up on a date?”

Pay attention to the *first* things they say as these are the things they most viscerally associate with you.

4. Who Are Your Heroes?

Rabbeinu Yonah of Girona interpreted King Solomon’s metaphor differently: Rather than asking what other people admire about you, ask yourself what you admire about others. What you value most in others reveal your own core values.

EXERCISE #4: Pick three people you most admire, and free-write whatever comes to

your mind as you reflect on what it is about them that you admire. Then, go through and highlight the themes that start to pop out to you.

Summarise the main themes you see, and write about them. The values you’re wired to see in others is a kind of x-ray vision you possess. You’re extra sensitive to these values in the world, and have a mission to bring these values in particular to their expression.

5. Pay it forward

The greatest superhero of the Torah is undoubtedly Moshe (Moses). His name was given to him by an Egyptian princess called Batya, who had mercy on him as he floated in a basket among the reeds along the Nile river (a result of his mother’s last-ditch effort to save his life from the Egyptian soldiers who were on strict orders to all execute male Jewish newborns). Batya named him Moshe - מֹשֶׁה because “*min-ha-mayim meshitihu* - מִן־הַמַּיִם מִשִּׁיתָהוּ” (he was [saved by being] drawn out of the water).

Rabbi Obadiah Sforno, the great Italian 16th century commentator, noticed that, according to the strict rules of grammar, he should have been called “Mishe,” not “Moshe.” The word

“*mishitihu* - מִשִּׁיתָהוּ” means “having been drawn from the water” in the passive voice. The long “o” vocalisation of “Moshe,” instead connotes an active “drawing out” as if to say Moshe is the one “drawing others out of water.” Why did she name him with this twist?

Sforno explains that Batya intuited that because this little baby’s life had been saved amidst the Egyptian holocaust of babies being slaughtered, his life would be dedicated to actively paying this forward to save others - which indeed he did.

EXERCISE #5: What have other people done for you in your life that you feel uniquely indebted to pay forward to others? Reflect on a specific life challenge you’ve faced. How has overcoming this experience equipped you with unique insights and empathy to understand and help others facing similar situations?

Especially during this time of war, so many of us feel compelled to do *something*, but many still don’t know *what* exactly they should be doing. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, but spending time figuring out how we can uniquely apply these lessons can help us lead purposeful and passionate lives - responses to our very unique callings.

¹ Italian Kabbalist and teacher Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto ²As recorded and explained in our book, *Nurture Their Nature: The Torah’s Essential Guidance for Parents and Teachers* (Rabbi Dr. Yosef Lynn, Rabbi Jack Cohen, EdM) ³Mishlei - משלי (Proverbs)



Creating Safe Spaces Starts With *Us*

Tools we never thought we needed

Rahel Bayar, Esq.

Every adult within the Jewish community has lived a lifetime since October 7, 2023. And for many, watching the horror and trauma unfold, and making sense of the kind of violence that has rocked us to our core, has led many to ask the question – what do we do with what we are seeing? How do we navigate this collective trauma together? And, how do we keep the next generation of children safe?

I am no stranger to the concept of trauma. As a sex crimes and child abuse prosecutor in New York, I spent many hours working with children and adults who had survived the most horrific experiences of their lives.

And, so many times, when parents and adults have witnessed trauma happen to those around them, there is a desire to want to do something. To be the helpers. To not sit idly by. To save those who can be saved – to have our voices heard, to make sure that a tragedy sharpens our moral compass, and our ability to speak for those who cannot.

In November, when Israel was preparing for the first set of hostages to be released, as Jews around the world held their collective breath, the IDF released instructions for how to interact with the child hostages. Many on social media noticed that the directives to the soldiers who would receive the child hostages

from the International Red Cross made clear that before touching a child the soldiers must first use their words. And, if a child hostage needed physical help or was unable to consent – to give verbal permission – the soldier must use their words to explain how and why they were helping and talk the injured child through what was happening.

In reading these directives, I was struck by how far we have come in understanding the meaning of consent, body boundaries, abuse, power, and the knowledge that in a moment of trauma, and even in an emergent situation – reminding another that they, even as a child, have ownership over their own body.

“

It is not our child's job to protect themselves, it is ours



It was a powerful moment for many reasons, but for those of us that write, speak and teach about creating safe spaces, and what it means to truly protect children, it was a moment to be memorialised.

As a prosecutor, and now as a consultant that works to create safe spaces on a global scale, it was a moment to be embraced. Parents and grownups in children's lives always ask – how do we create a safe space for our kids, students and family – without scaring them? How do we start conversations about abuse prevention without making kids and adults fear every person around them? How do we engage in changing the global conversation without creating distrust and fear?

This is how. By starting with simple directives that work to foster a sense of bodily autonomy.

From an early age, some of the most impactful abuse prevention tactics have nothing to do with mentioning the words abuse or sexual abuse. In fact, there are four things that every parent can do to give tools to their kids for their child's safety toolbox that empowers as opposed to instilling fear.

1 BOUNDARIES

The first is to teach our children that their bodies belong to them. That they are allowed to set their body boundaries and make choices about their body. Granted, it is important to remind them that there are always health and safety reasons why someone may need to break a body boundary – such as a doctor putting a cast on a broken bone, or a dentist checking your teeth or a parent changing a dirty diaper. And there are a myriad of ways to help our kids understand how to express their body boundaries, but it also means that even parents should be asking “may I give you a hug?” and, if the answer is no – respect and commend your child for voicing their needs. One of the most powerful ways to empower our kids is in how we respond if they tell us they don't want a hug.

2 ANATOMY

The second is to teach our children the correct anatomical names for all of their body parts, without shame or embarrassment. If we teach our children that they should be embarrassed to use the correct name for the parts of their body that are private, they will assume that if something does happen that makes them feel unsafe – they can't tell you about it, because it is something to be ashamed or embarrassed of.

3 THE RULES

The third is to remind the people around our children of what our safety rules are. To remind the grownups – we do not ask kids to keep secrets. Teaching children and adults that there is a difference between a secret and a surprise – that a surprise always ends, and a secret does not – is one way of empowering children and adults to keep to healthy boundaries and to identify those that cannot do that.

4 IT'S YOUR JOB

And the fourth is to remember – it is not our child's job to protect themselves, it is ours. The IDF did not give directives to the children to speak up if they didn't want to be touched. Instead, they told the adults, the protectors – this is how you must engage. YOU must be the one to use your words, to listen to their needs and to respect their boundaries.

Sometimes, as a community – we forget that it is our role to create safe spaces. In our homes, our synagogues, our schools and our communities. It is more important for adults to set the standard, set boundaries and policies and engage in impactful education so that we can be the protectors. Because whether a child has navigated the horror of a kidnapping and hostage taking, or whether our children have never known a moment of trauma – we are the people that can make their world safer, and that is a privilege we should not waste.



WHAT TO DO

*(when you
don't know
what to do)*



Train yourself to have a healthy stress-response

Dr. Ilyssa Bass, PhD

On Simchat Torah, when the first siren went off, I left my apartment with my five kids and brought them to our miklat (communal bomb shelter). No one seemed particularly nervous - just confused: "was that a siren?"

Between the first and second siren, we all had a little time to prepare. One neighbour dressed herself for the holiday head to toe: hair, heels, the works; one neighbour brought a stack of *Tehillim* (Psalms); I brought snacks and games. As the sirens kept coming, I almost obsessively kept bringing more and more food (canned corn, pickles, apple sauce...).

Why? Why in a moment of uncertainty, did I think canned corn was the appropriate response?

Because day in and day out, when chaos reigns in my home, I feed people.

And most of the time, it works.

I have well-paved, neural superhighways that respond to uncertainty with noodles.

This was not always my primary stress response. Growing up, when tensions ran high in the family, I had a way of finding my way to my room, to a book or homework or some other intellectual pursuit that exempted me from getting involved in whatever the family conflict was about. As an early mother, I remember feeling bereft that I never had time to read or write, while in truth, it was so much bigger than that: as a mom, an intellectual escape just didn't work when there was family tension. Though I wanted to flee, I had to stay, work things out and resolve the conflict.

If, as a child, you were a fighter (you got involved in family conflict and you felt like it worked), you entered early marriage and mothering as a fighter. If, like me, you avoided conflict, you came in as a flier and if you checked out/spaced out/numbed out when you were a child, you brought that stress response with you.

We all have a history. All families have conflict and all kids have some response that works (well enough) as a child, but doesn't work as an adult. Why? Because as adults, we hold a responsibility we did not have as children. I am a pillar in my home. I can't run to bed and jump into a book when my kids are screaming (as much as I would love to). It simply doesn't work.

Our kids give us the opportunity (over and over and over) to retrain our brains from our

adaptive childhood response to a mature adult response.

How do we change our response? Practice.

Use every glass of spilled milk, broken cookie, *kvetch*, mess and sibling bout to do something different, something that keeps our adult brain online and not sliding back into old fight, flight or freeze tendencies.

I once took an online “organise your home” course. The woman running it gave a fantastic tip: have a bin labelled, “stuff that doesn’t have a place yet,” then poof everything has a place! For me, someone who is not naturally organised, this was a game changer: now there is a place to put things I don’t know where to put!

I am suggesting the emotional equivalent: a plan for when you don’t have a plan - something to do when you don’t know what to do. Here are some examples of things that you can do that will help you shift from your automatic response back into your thinking brain, so you can decide what a helpful adult response might be:

Orienting

Look around the room from your right to your left, slowly, and notice 10 things you haven’t noticed about the room before, or count 12 blue objects. Count out loud or in your head, but keep track. The only part of your brain that can count, observe novelty or discriminate colour, is your prefrontal cortex (your “adult brain-” the part that is active when you think about your values, how you want to act, what might be helpful to do or say to your children). You may have to do it several times before you notice a shift, but when you do, you should notice that you can breathe deeper and your eyes have a normal gaze/focus. If they don’t, do it again. The intention is to let your body and brain know that you are right here, right now, in this room and there is no immediate threat that requires fight, flight or freeze.

Butterfly hug

This technique comes from a type of trauma therapy called EMDR (eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing). Cross your arms in front of your chest so that your right hand is on your upper left arm, and your left hand is on your upper right arm. Your arms form an X over your chest. Next, tap with your hands, alternating right - left - right - left. It is helpful if you pair it with something present-oriented like “I am here right now. Right now, at this moment/second, I am safe.”

Breathe in. Hold. LONG exhale

Breathe in for 10, hold for 5, exhale for 15 or longer. Again, counting is helpful in bringing the prefrontal cortex back online. The long,

slow, exhale is also a signal to the body that you do not need to be pumped full of adrenaline and cortisol (stress hormones). We do not exhale slowly or breathe in a controlled way in fight, flight or freeze. Breathe this way until you notice a shift; you can think more clearly, focus your eyes more easily and/or take a deep belly breath.

Choose one. Practise it every time you have an opportunity for choice, until it becomes your new stress response.

What do I say to my kids while I’m doing this? *“I need to calm down.”*

“You can do it with me if you want.”

Kids are not interested in neurobiology, but they are interested in calming down when tensions run high.

Now that you have a plan for when you don’t have a plan - what about chronic stress? Many of us live with stress that will last weeks, months or years. We are all living with a backdrop of chronic stress as the Jewish people.

Here is a quick summary of what we know from resilience research, the research on how people not only survive but thrive in life after and during prolonged stress.

People who are resilient:

Know they are not alone

They do not focus on “why do bad things always happen to me?” They acknowledge that whatever they are going through is something others go through as part of the human experience.

Choose where to put their attention

Resilient people consciously choose to see the good and have gratitude for it while they are experiencing prolonged stress. They are not in denial about their difficulty, but they also do not focus solely on the difficult experience.

Ask, “is what I am doing helping me or harming me?”

This is a particularly relevant question for all

of us as we choose how much and when to immerse ourselves in the news; will clicking on this article help me feel informed or will it flood me with more than I can handle right now?

Have support

The single most important predictor of resilience is support. One fascinating finding about stress is that it floods us with 3 hormones: adrenaline, cortisol and oxytocin. Adrenaline and cortisol are responsible for the energy and agitation we feel under stress; research has talked about the negative health consequences of long-term adrenaline and cortisol exposure for decades. Recently, researchers have found that oxytocin, the neurohormone of connection (women and babies secrete it when nursing) seems to reverse the negative health outcomes associated with other stress hormones. For example, adrenaline and cortisol constrict blood vessels, where oxytocin relaxes them. Practically, this means that reaching out for support and letting that support in is far more important to your long term health and resilience than how much stress you go through.

You can also support yourself to some extent by calling on self-compassion. You may lose it with your kids; you may calm yourself down and still not know what to do or say; you may cry in front of your kids, forget to make dinner or say things you regret to your husband.

Stress does not bring out the best in us. You can do your best to rewire your stress response and, I promise, you will still have times that stress overwhelms you. In those moments, self-compassion can be surprisingly powerful. Put your hand on your heart and say, out loud if you can, “this is so hard,” then leave space for whatever emotion that brings up, reach out for support if you need to. We all do the best we can. Sometimes that looks like grounding ourselves, sometimes that looks like focusing on gratitude and sometimes that looks like a can of corn...



An Artist's Perspective



Unity, 2023
Gaby Katten

With so much tragedy, my illustration aimed to acknowledge the good in people. My vision was to showcase the unity among individuals as they donated essential items like food, clothing and toys. Throughout my neighbourhood I witnessed donation centres quickly open up and overflow with boxes piled high with essential goods (depicted on the right side of my illustration). I observed restaurants transforming into meal

preparation hubs catering to soldiers and families who had been forced to flee their homes. While I was donating blood, I was amazed to witness a continuous line of over a thousand people, all eager to do the same. I saw ultra-orthodox men carrying stacks of pizza to offer to soldiers, alongside refugees who dedicated their time to organising donation boxes. These specific acts of kindness and generosity were the focal points of my illustration.

Gaby Katten is an illustrator from London, now based in Tel Aviv. She now runs Braceface Design, an illustration driven design studio. Her illustrations can be found on products, packaging, websites, adverts, clothing and editorials.

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bracefacedesign.com

FOOD



A sweet *double-feature*

First, an engaging Q&A with food & lifestyle author and entrepreneur, Elizabeth Leigh Mandelbaum - and stay for her recipes for indulgent and nourishing treats! Next, delve into the deeper meaning and beautiful customs to tap into the New Year for Trees, accompanied by a stunning recipe to impress your guests.

NUTRITIOUS & *delicious:* Elizabeth's holistic kitchen

Sasha Silber

Renowned food and lifestyle blogger, recipe developer and personal chef, Elizabeth Leigh Mandelbaum exemplifies 'Wellness Through Food.' Her skill in addressing diverse dietary needs with clean, organic ingredients stands out. Elizabeth's 'calm cooking' philosophy promotes a creative, comforting kitchen environment. She has turned dietary restrictions into culinary delights for her exclusive clientele. In the last year Elizabeth has released her first cookbook called PLATED, and founded her own brand called Leigh Leaf, the first organic ceremonial-grade kosher certified Matcha tea powder. From her Los Angeles home, I enjoyed a lovely phone conversation with Elizabeth, exploring her unique approach to food

This has been an exciting year, between your first cookbook and launching your first company! How did you get here?

I've always been passionate about health and wellness, but only really started to cook when I got married and was sort of forced into it. Surprisingly, I fell in love with cooking

as I began developing my own recipes. As my eldest child grew older, I found myself preparing three different breakfasts, lunches and dinners every day; my husband, daughter and I all had different dietary needs and tastes. While most people might find this frustrating and challenging, I actually found it incredibly rewarding. It opened my eyes to the unique needs of each individual body and the importance of nourishing those differences. Instead of forcing certain foods onto everyone because of societal norms and pressures, I learned to value the fact that each body requires and desires its own style of eating to flourish and thrive.

When I began to write down my recipes and share them on social media, I realised that my platform gained popularity because my recipes are flexible and adaptable, uniquely suitable to a wide variety of individual preferences and dietary needs, contrary to many traditional recipe developers, food bloggers and nutritionists out there.

Things happened pretty naturally: I began to write and share my recipes, which turned into a unique social media platform for flexible and adaptable recipes. Soon, I began receiving many requests to cook for people; I never imagined I would become

*Photo courtesy of
Elizabeth Leigh Mandelbaum*

a private chef! Over the next five years, collaborating with amazing families with diverse food restrictions, allergies, tastes and needs, I continued to share meal prep ideas and original recipes online - an incredibly fulfilling experience that enriched my culinary knowledge and experience.

What is your food philosophy?

I would actually call it a balanced lifestyle. I think that the world has been so consumed by the word "diet" for so many years, which has turned people away from living a sustainable, overall healthy lifestyle. There are so many famous diets that restrict people from eating certain foods or at certain times, encouraging





people to “just stick to it.” When following restrictive diets like this for prolonged periods, there is definitely a harmful effect on our overall mindset which may actually be really hard to come back from. A scary amount of eating disorders originate from restrictive dieting. Shifting our mindset to how to *nourish* our individual bodies is the exact opposite of all of that.

Every single person is created with their own unique digestive system, reproductive system, hair, skin, nails, and so on. How could there possibly be a one-size-fits-all “diet” or meal plan that helps everyone? To take it a step further, our bodies are always changing. I ate differently in highschool than I do now, and the foods I eat when pregnant or postpartum are even more different than

at other times - and that's beautiful. It is vital to be in tune with our bodies, and be able to know and feel and understand how the food we eat affects us.

Obviously, eating from the basic food groups is non-negotiable, but within those food groups there is so much space for individuality and balance. When I am pregnant, I love to eat raw and crunchy vegetables, helping me feel great and satisfying me with their tastes and textures. When I'm not pregnant, those same fresh and crunchy vegetables are harder for me to digest, hurting my stomach, so I opt for other ways of preparing them. No one will debate the nutritional benefits of raw, fresh vegetables, but a holistic approach to eating factors in the physical effect that each food



and food combinations have on the body. The same goes for meat, chicken, fish and dairy products. Though these foods are protein-packed and nutritious, sometimes I go weeks eating them regularly, while other times I go long stretches of time when they are not right for me.

The focus becomes nourishing positively rather than actively avoiding and restricting. This mindful mindset, listening to our bodies and understanding what each food does for us at any given time, is a key to feeling well and looking our best in a sustainable way for our bodies and souls.

Food plays such a major part in Jewish life in a constant flow of elaborate Shabbat meals and regal holiday feasts - and that's not including the amazing spreads at celebratory life events. Traditional Jewish foods are often heavier and less balanced than they necessarily need to be.

How do you balance that with your food philosophy?

I love Shabbat! Friday night dinner with delicious Challah is my favourite. People often say, "I'm good all week and then Shabbat comes and ruins it - all of the challah, meat and dessert throw me off!" This makes me so sad. It's who we are as Jews: we work hard all week and fully rest on Shabbat!

To the people who struggle, I suggest my approach: I eat clean and exercise regularly during the week. Shabbat is the day to indulge and enjoy it! There is a purpose to a Shabbat meal, it's a *mitzvah*, a way to connect. By enjoying each of the meals with the intention of honouring Shabbat, it will make a sustainably healthy lifestyle meaningful.

My Shabbat meals are balanced and healthy. I always use organic and clean ingredients (without additives or added sugar; personally, I do not use wheat flour), and everything is homemade. Take-out, packaged foods and pre-made sauces are filled with preservatives and sugars with almost no health benefits (only negatives). By cooking with whole, nutritious ingredients, everything is purposeful, nutritious and delicious, and helps us feel great.

The idea of *holistic* or *nutritious*, balanced food might seem intimidating, foreign and even unappetising for those unfamiliar. Can you break it down for us?

Holistic Health is actually the simplest and most maintainable way to eat because it's so customisable and personal. It is an approach to wellness and health in a natural way through food. There are so many nutrients in whole foods like vegetables, proteins, fruits, onions, garlic, etc.. and those nutrients can actually heal our bodies in ways that medicine cannot. I love to view food as medicine, with the potential to heal the body in more ways than we know. It's so important to have a daily intake of all essential vitamins and nutrients; getting them straight from their natural source (food) is the most effective way to absorb them, keeping us healthy and beautiful.

There's another aspect of a holistic lifestyle: it's not a diet plan that multiple people can follow, it's a way of treating your

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I see each dietary need as an opportunity to explore and innovate in the kitchen

Recipe ideas

Turn the page for three recipes from Elizabeth's new book!



Elizabeth Leigh Mandelbaum holds her cookbook, *PLATED*, by Artscroll Mesorah Publications



*Images from PLATED,
courtesy of Artscroll
Mesorah Publications*

body with care and respect, feeding it the food that it needs and loves. It also means that today one food works for you, but a year from now it doesn't. A food that works for one person does not necessarily work for someone else. That's the beauty of it! I eat differently in the summer than I do in the winter, because my body retains different amounts of water and heat, and the food I eat affects all of that.

One of the methods I use for 'checking in' when I'm feeling off is borrowed from something called mono-eating, sometimes once or twice a year for a couple days. I do it in order to test what each food or type of food affects my body, or in which combination. Once I've identified what foods are causing me issues and I replace them with other alternatives, I resume my usual balanced approach. This way of living promotes body awareness, which is so important for our health in general.

What are three ingredients you use on a daily basis and why?

A leafy green, a healthy fat and Matcha. Leafy greens are nutrient-dense and good for digestion (and delicious). Healthy fats like avocado and coconut are incredible to support fertility, hair and skin. Matcha is packed with antioxidants, fibre, magnesium and so many other essential nutrients.

I was actually a coffee drinker for 12 years, but during my journey with infertility, I switched to matcha after learning about it 2 years ago. The taste and the health benefits got me hooked. Since it was a challenge to find a fresh organic matcha that is kosher certified, I decided to create my own brand, Leigh Leaf, an organic fresh matcha straight from Japan. I love it served traditionally, but also finding ways to incorporate it into treats like smoothies, cookies and energy bites since its earthiness balances out sweetness really well.

Tell me more about treats and guilty pleasures. Is your way of living restrictive, or is there a way to be satisfied without overly complicated recipes with hard-to-find ingredients?

I love a good chocolate chip cookie or brownie! Rather than restricting myself from sweet cravings, I use simple whole ingredients to make these treats like almond flour, coconut flour and oat flour, sweetened with dates, coconut sugar and agave nectar. All of these ingredients are easily found in your local grocery or natural food store. The best way to enjoy sweets that are nourishing is to make them at home! This way, I know what is actually going into the recipe.

Your repertoire is not limited to sweet treats - can you tell me more about your new cookbook, PLATED?

As the name implies, we have filled the book with beautifully plated dishes, composed meals and healthy, simple recipes. Unlike other cookbooks with recipes sorted by sections of mains, sides, etc, having the reader stress about pairing proteins and side dishes on their own, we put time into curating balanced meals. For example, we offer a meal with recipes for a pecan-crusted chicken, with two side dishes: a sweet potato mash and broccolini served with an incredible sauce. By offering complete meals featuring a protein, carb and vegetable, and providing instructions on how to serve and present the meal by component, the home cook is a few instructions away from preparing a gorgeous and appetising meal for their families and guests.

All of the recipes require only simple and clean ingredients. To help the reader further, we put together a complete pantry and grocery list, recommended brands and suggestions for organising a kitchen to make entertaining and cooking easy and a pleasure.

Would you share a kitchen hack with our readers?

Keep your kitchen clean - it's daunting to have to cook in a messy space, but a joy in a clean one!



MATCHA *sugar cookies*

I love these Matcha Sugar Cookies because the savoury flavours of the Matcha really balance out the sweetness so perfectly. Matcha is such a healthy ingredient; it's so fun incorporating it into as many foods as possible - especially desserts!

Prep Time: 20 minutes

Yields: 18-24 cookies



INGREDIENTS

1 ½ cups (170 g) oat flour*
 1 cup (120 g) almond flour
 ½ tsp (2.5 g) baking soda
 ½ tsp (3 g) baking powder
 1 cup (200 g) organic coconut sugar
 or brown sugar
 1 large egg
 ¾ cup (180 ml) avocado oil
 1 tsp (5 g) Leigh Leaf Matcha powder

*(Gluten-free certified, if needed)

METHOD

- 1 Preheat the oven to 175°C.
- 2 In a mixing bowl, whisk together the dry ingredients (except the matcha powder).
- 3 Add in the wet ingredients and mix until well combined.
- 4 Sift in the matcha powder and gently fold it into the batter until evenly distributed.
- 5 Refrigerate the batter for about 10 minutes, covered.
- 6 Using an ice cream scoop or two tablespoons, portion out the dough balls onto a baking sheet lined with parchment paper.
- 7 Bake for 10-12 minutes, or until the edges are golden brown and the centres are still slightly tender.
- 8 Let the cookies cool on the baking sheet for a few minutes before gently transferring them to a wire rack to cool completely.
- 9 Enjoy!

PEANUT *truffles*

These Peanut Truffles are one of the very first recipes I ever developed! The recipe went viral, so we had to include it in my first cookbook, PLATED. They are so easy to make, and just as delicious. Store them in the freezer for a quick, grab-and-go clean and sweet treat

Gluten-free, vegan, raw

Prep time: 30 minutes

Yields: 18 Truffles

INGREDIENTS

1 cup (200 g) pitted dates
3 1/2 tbsp (50 g) natural peanut butter
1 1/2 tsp (8 ml) vanilla extract
1/3 cup (50 g) chocolate chips
1/2 tbsp (7.5 ml) coconut oil
1/2 cup (50 g) salted peanuts

METHOD

- 1 Blend the checked and pitted dates, peanut butter, and vanilla extract in a food processor for at least 5 minutes until the mixture is smooth and clump-free.
- 2 Scoop out a desired amount of the mixture and roll it into a small ball. Flatten the ball slightly to create a surface. Place a salted peanut in the centre and roll the mixture back into a ball with the peanut hidden inside.
- 3 Melt the chocolate chips and coconut oil together.
- 4 Dip each peanut truffle into the melted

chocolate, coating it evenly.*

- 5 Chop the remaining salted peanuts into small pieces and sprinkle them over the truffles while the chocolate is still melted.
- 6 Freeze the truffles in an even layer, spread apart, on a parchment-lined baking sheet or tupperware for at least 2 hours.
- 7 Store them in the freezer, and enjoy them frozen!

**Tip: use 2 forks to gently hold and dip the truffles into the melted chocolate for an even coat and clean hands!*



OATMEAL *cookies*

These naturally gluten-free oatmeal cookies have become an absolute staple in our home! Every Friday, I whip up two batches to enjoy over Shabbat, and by the time Sunday arrives, they're gone. These cookies are a simple, easy and healthier spin on the classic oatmeal cookie, loved by kids and adults

Gluten-free

Prep time: 20 minutes

Yields: 18-24 cookies

**(Gluten-free certified, if needed)*

All photos courtesy of Elizabeth Leigh Mandelbaum

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 cup (170 g) quick oats*
3/4 cup (85 g) oat flour*
1/3 cup (65 g) coconut sugar
1/3 tsp (1.5 g) baking soda
1/2 cup (120 ml) melted coconut oil
1 large egg
1/3 cup (50 g) chocolate chips

METHOD

- 1 Preheat the oven to 175°C.
- 2 In a mixing bowl, mix together the oats, oat flour, coconut sugar, and baking soda.
- 3 Add in the coconut oil and the egg.
- 4 Add in the chocolate chips. Mix, and refrigerate the batter, covered, for 5-8 minutes.
- 5 Prepare a baking sheet lined with parchment paper.
- 6 Using an ice cream scoop or two tablespoons, place individual cookie dough balls on the baking sheet. The cookies often spread, so place them on the sheet with at least 2 inches (5 cm) in between.
- 7 Bake for 11-13 minutes, or until the edges are golden brown.
- 8 Let the cookies cool on the baking sheet for a few minutes before transferring them to a wire rack to cool completely.



A TREE *in a field*

The Jewish connection with trees is deep-rooted. “Man is like a tree in a field,”¹ refers to the prohibition for an army to cut down fruit-bearing trees outside the walls of a city they are besieging, calling on mankind to treat trees with humanity; the lessons behind the verse are profound

Dan Matalon, Ta'amim

In collaboration with Rabbi Yaakov Klein, Eilecha

The Jewish connection with trees is deep-rooted. “Man is like a tree in a field,”¹ refers to the prohibition for an army to cut down fruit-bearing trees outside the walls of a city they are besieging, calling on mankind to treat trees with humanity; the lessons behind the verse are profound.

Trees are comprised of so many disparate parts, from trunk to branch, intricate leaves, beautiful flowers and blossoms, delicious fruit and thousands of seeds. And every seed of every fruit of every tree contains the potential for another tree, just as elaborate, just as awe-inspiring.

So it is with every human life. Within each of us is the potential for physical and spiritual greatness. Everything we can and will become is contained within us from the moment we are conceived. All of the potential for happiness, joy, kindness, peace of mind and every one of our achievements is there, an initial seed of innate endless possibility waiting to be manifested into different branches of functionality for each of the many roles we play on any given day.

As we grow and our lives become more multi-faceted, we aren't really changing our nature - we are growing into what we were destined to be already. Each of our relationships, our jobs, our friendships, our children - bud into new branches and bear new fruit, and each can be traced back

through the trunk to the core of that initial seed, to the essence within us.

This is the seed of holiness, the divine within us. Each new accomplishment or relationship is a manifestation of this divine essence, a reflection of the mission we were put into the world for - to reveal God's Oneness in the world. “Torah is a tree of life to those who grasp it.”²

The 18th Century Kabbalistic scholar, Moshe Chaim Luzzato (the Ramchal) explains in his book, *The Way of God*, that the higher spiritual realms are roots that manifest their influence through branches in the lower realms and are affected by human interaction with the world. Once we understand that unity and that essence of who we are, we can manifest that spirit for good through every aspect of ourselves, through every branch, leaf and twig, and produce wonderful fruit.

Tu B'Shevat, the Jewish New Year for Trees, provides the perfect opportunity to reflect on this profound idea. The festival falls not in spring, when the blossoms have bloomed, nor in the fruit-bearing summer months, but in midwinter, as the weather starts to turn warmer and the sap begins to rise within the trees. It is the point at which new growth begins. It is an ideal time for us to look inwards and reconnect with the commitments we made at Rosh Hashanah, to form new strategies for personal and spiritual growth.

The 16th Century Kabbalists of Tzfat³ conceived a Tu Bishvat *seder* to explore the philosophical ideas surrounding the day whilst enjoying the fruit of the tree, particularly those native to the Land of Israel. This *seder* also allows us the opportunity to develop our appreciation of the bountiful world around us, which we so often take for granted. This *seder* calls for the partaking of four cups of wine or grape juice (just as the Pesach *seder*), as well as each of the seven species of the Land of Israel named in the Torah, whole nuts and fruit of all varieties - those with edible seeds, with inedible pits and with peels.

Our team at Ta'amim have drawn inspiration from the Tu B'Shevat *seder* to create a beautifully moist blood orange, olive oil and almond cake, topped with fruit and a blood orange and cardamom syrup. Olives and figs are two of the seven species of the Land of Israel mentioned in the Torah, with figs also containing edible seeds. Almonds and oranges represent the nuts and peelable fruit elements, and we have added plums as our fruit with an inedible pit. You can feel free to add or substitute any other fruit you choose. Have fun with it and enjoy the celebration!

The cake is moist and delicious even without lashings of cream and fruit, and can be enjoyed as a simple and delicious dessert all year round. This recipe is kosher for Pesach, and a great option for Shavuot, too.

¹ Deuteronomy 20:19 ² Proverbs 3:18 ³ Rabbi Yitzchak Luria (“Ha’Ari”) and his disciples



BLOOD ORANGE & ALMOND CAKE

INGREDIENTS

200 g ground almonds
 1½ tsp baking powder
 4 eggs, separated into yolks and whites
 150 g caster sugar
 100 ml olive oil
 Zest of 1 blood orange*
 50 ml blood orange* juice (approx half an orange)

For the syrup:

100 ml blood orange juice*
 1 tbsp sugar
 ¼ tsp ground cardamom powder

For the topping (optional)

Whipping cream (dairy or non-dairy)
 Segments of fig, orange, plums or any other fruit of your choice

METHOD

- 1 Preheat your oven to 180°C / 160°C fan (Gas Mark 4 / 350°F).
- 2 Grease and line a 9-inch round baking tin with a little olive oil, baking paper and a little more oil.
- 3 Whisk together egg yolks, sugar, oil and juice until combined and a light sunshine yellow in colour.
- 4 Mix in the orange zest and baking powder.
- 5 Add almonds a little at a time and fold to combine.
- 6 Beat the egg whites into stiff peaks.
- 7 Gently fold the egg whites into the rest of the mixture until combined, taking care not to knock out too much air.
- 8 Transfer the mixture into the cake tin and bake for 45-50 mins. The cake should have slightly pulled away from the sides and be springy to the touch.
- 9 Leave the cake in the tin and place on a wire rack to cool.
Meanwhile, make your syrup.
- 10 Add 100 ml blood orange juice, 1 tbsp sugar and ¼ tsp ground cardamom powder to a pan. Heat until sugar has completely dissolved, stirring occasionally.
- 11 Set aside 25 ml for later.
- 12 Poke several holes in the top of the cake with a strand of uncooked spaghetti or a thin skewer.
- 13 Pour over 75 ml syrup and leave to cool and absorb.
- 14 Once completely cooled, remove from the tin and place on a serving dish.
- 15 Beat the whipped cream into stiff peaks and spread generously on the top of the cake.
- 16 Finish with arranged fruit segments, and serve.
- 17 When ready, drizzle the reserved syrup on top of the fruit and cream (optional).

*Untopped, the cake will keep in foil or an airtight container for up to 1 week.
 If topped with cream and fresh fruit, refrigerate and consume within 2-3 days.*

CULTURE



A bit of *escapism*

Escape to the beautiful Tunisian island of Djerba to learn about its rich Jewish history, pop into a tiny Jerusalem shop with a unique and moving story, connect through music (literally, there's a QR code!), check out this edition's gorgeous and meaningful Fashion Edit by Valour Magazine and stick around for a film review.



Exterior of the El Ghriba
synagogue, Djerba, Tunisia

DJERBA:

The Island of Priests



In the heart of the Mediterranean lies an enchanting island that has been home to a unique Jewish community since antiquity

Rabbi Ari Kayser

Djerba, Tunisia, is known as the Island of *Kohanim* (Jewish Priests), on account of its incredible origins. Legend has it that *Kohanim*, fleeing the destruction of the First Temple of King

Solomon in Jerusalem in 586 BCE, carried with them stones from the Temple and settled on the island.¹ They used those stones to lay the foundations of the beautiful El Ghriba synagogue, making it the oldest synagogue in continuous use in the world.

Interestingly, considering the high proportion of *Kohanim* in Djerba, it may be surprising to find no Levites living there. This dates back to the legend of when Ezra the Scribe requested to gather exiles, return to the Land of Israel and rebuild the Second Temple, very few Levites accepted his invitation. With a great lack in priestly assistants, he personally entreated the Levites of Djerba to heed his call,

to little effect. Ezra, bitterly distressed, cursed the Levites on the island, and within a year they all died. As a result, the *chachamim* (sages) of Djerba decreed that all Levites visiting the island must leave before one year has passed, lest they suffer the curse of Ezra too. Even today, the majority of the community of Jews from Djerba are *Kohanim*, a unique phenomenon in the Jewish world.

Migrations over the centuries augmented the original community, diversifying the population and recruiting with it not just new peoples, but new ideas too. The most consistent migrations were of fellow Jews of the Maghreb, followed later by Jews of Spain

¹ There are numerous theories as to the origins of this ancient community. One suggestion is that King David's general, Yoav ben Tzeruya, pursued the Philistine enemy all the way to the island (Nahum Slouschz, *Travels in North Africa*, p. 257). Another tale that supports the *Kohanim* fleeing Jerusalem theory suggests it was after the destruction of the Second Temple by Titus in 70 CE (Ken Blady, *From the Land of Lotus Eaters*, p. 336).

*Exterior of the El Ghriba
synagogue, Djerba, Tunisia
with the country's flag*



after their expulsion in 1492. In the 18th century a group of Italian Jewish merchants had arrived in Tunisia, mainly in the capital Tunis, and by the 19th century had established themselves in Djerba too. These Italian Jews (the *Grana*) were more affluent and Westernised; they viewed their coreligionists as backward and superstitious. They did not integrate with the indigenous Jewish population (the *Touansa*), who in turn viewed the new arrivals as having left the authentic ways of Judaism in exchange for modernity. By the midpoint of the 20th century, the Jews of Tunisia numbered 100,000 and constituted around 15% of the entire population.

The communities of Djerba historically were split in two: *Hara Kebira* (The Big Village) and *Hara Sghira* (The Little Village), known by the local community as Dighet. These two communities are organically connected but structurally opposed, with *Hara Sghira* symbolically connected to the East and *Hara Kebira* connected to migrations from the West.² The famous El Ghriba synagogue, located in *Hara Sghira*, was

once exclusively inhabited by the reclusive *Kohanim*, who separated themselves even from other Jews, in an attempt to live a life of piety and holiness. They had an acute sense of national mourning, ever-present even throughout the generations, as the priestly guardians of the destroyed Temples, they would not listen to music in their enclave, or even own musical instruments.

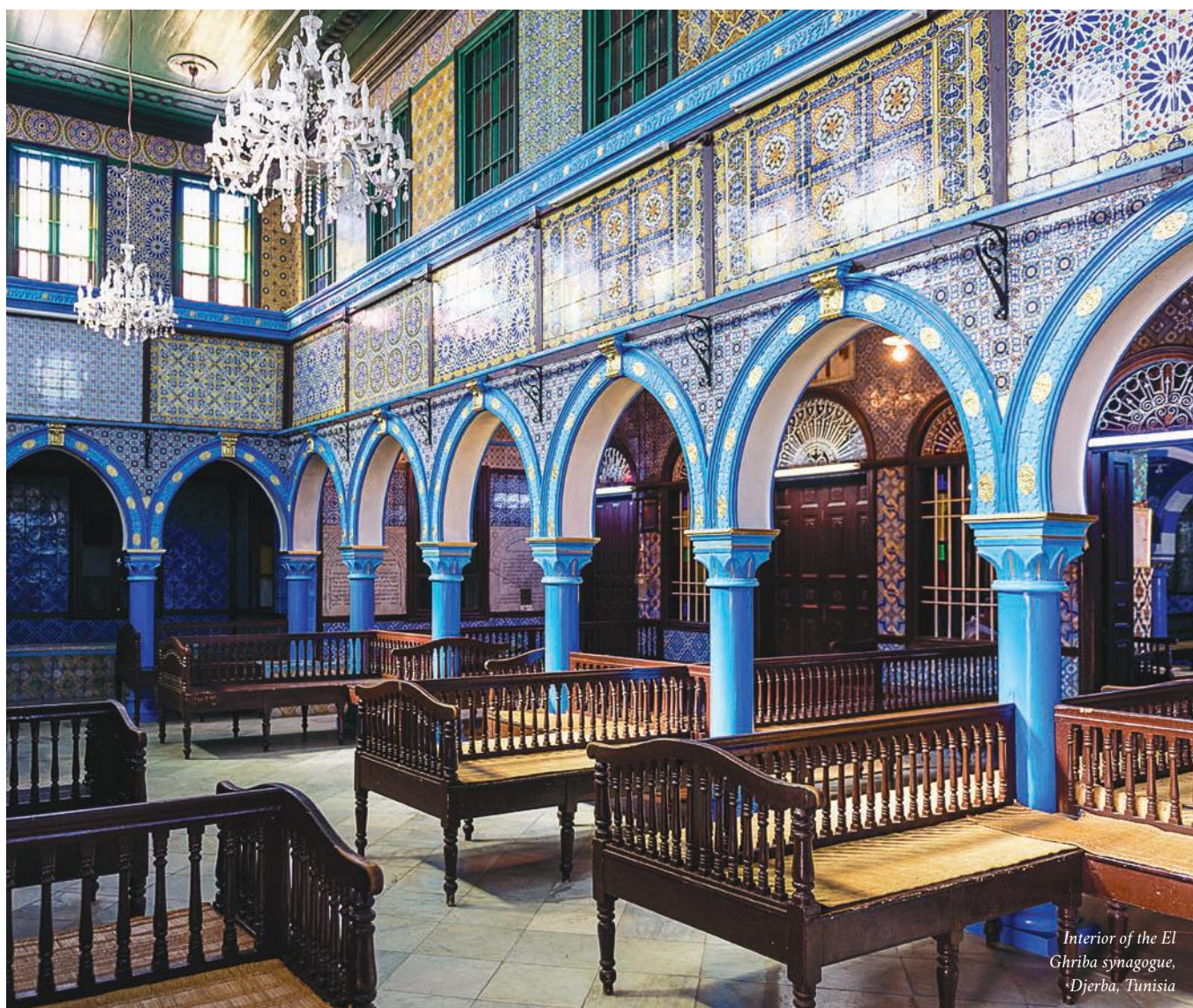
Although the El Ghriba synagogue has stood for centuries, it underwent numerous renovations, most recently in the 1920s and 1930s. The duality of the architecture – both Jewish and Tunisian – is reflective of the community's self-characterised identity. The whitewashed minimalist exterior would disguise it among many other buildings in Djerba. The interior would overwhelm the senses of any new visitor to the synagogue. Brightly coloured painted ceramic tiles line the walls between the *techelet* (blue) columns and supporting arches. At the centre of the prayer hall is the ornate wooden *bima* (raised platform where the Torah is read) encircled by twelve windows, one for each of the twelve

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They used those stones [from the Temple] to lay the foundations of the beautiful El Ghriba synagogue, making it the oldest synagogue in continuous use in the world

tribes of Israel.

A typical Jewish home in Djerba might be adorned with imagery of the fish, a symbol of fertility and a protection from *ayin hara* (the evil eye). Perhaps even more common is the symbol of the *hamsa*, believed to ward off evil, which has found its way into both Muslim and North African Jewish homes



Interior of the El Ghriba synagogue, Djerba, Tunisia

² Udovitch, Lucette Valensi, and David M. Pérez. *The Last Arab Jews* (1984).



El Ghriba festival

and jewellery.³ So ingrained in the culture is this symbolism of protection, first names for Jewish boys are often a corruption of the word *hamsa*, meaning five (Khamus, Khmiyes), or the word for fish (Quarus, Ouzifa). Homes and synagogues would be replete with old and worn *sefarim* (holy books) and, indeed, the *ahl al-kitab*, people of the book, had their own printing press too.

To announce the onset of Shabbat, one of the men would blow the *shofar* (ram's horn) from the flat rooftops, giving due warning to the community that the holy day is fast approaching. Families would rush to make final preparations of traditional couscous and meat dishes for the Friday night meal, and send their children to the communal ovens to bring their pots of *arisha* (meat stew to be eaten on Shabbat day) before the sun disappeared beyond the horizon.

In many ways, the life of the Jews of Djerba, despite the influx of new immigrants over centuries, has remained somewhat unchanged for close to two thousand years. It remained one of the last windows into the past of what Jewish life in Arab lands had looked like for so long.

That all changed in 1948 with the establishment of the State of Israel, which saw large emigration of Jews to their

biblical homeland, despite many Djerbans considering the island to be the antechamber of Jerusalem. Further waves of emigration were seen in 1956 when Tunisia gained independence from France, the Six Day War in 1967, the Yom Kippur War in 1973, the stoning of the Djerban Chief Rabbi's home during that time and the assassination of the prominent Rabbi Matzliah Mazuz in January 1971. Today, around 1,000 Jews remain in Djerba, with most Tunisian Jews now residing in Israel and France.

Expatriates still hold Djerba close to their hearts and make a yearly pilgrimage to the El Ghriba synagogue during Lag Ba'Omer, paying homage to the venerated sages Rabbi Meir Baal HaNess and Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. While this was once attended in the thousands by ex-Tunisian Jews hoping to reconnect to the traditions of their ancestors; a bombing at the synagogue in 2002, followed by the insecurity brought on by the Arab Spring in the early 2010s, and sporadic attacks as recent as May 2023, have left the pilgrimage almost non-existent.

One thing is certain, the enduring legacy of the Island of Priests lives on, carried by individuals to their newly adopted homelands, to be undoubtedly etched in the hearts and minds of generations to come.



Scholarly book printed in Djerba

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In many ways, the life of the Jews of Djerba, despite the influx of new immigrants over centuries, has remained somewhat unchanged for close to two thousand years



Rabbis of Djerba



Jewish bride and her mother



Fish charm as a symbol of protection



Jewish scholar learning in El Ghriba synagogue



Hamsas are used to protect from the evil eye

³ While the hamsa may have Islamic roots, it certainly has Jewish significance and acceptance in parts of the world. Chida (Rabbi David Yosef Azulay) mentions the hamsa in his book *Petach Einayim* and the Ben Ish Hai (Rabbi Yosef Hayyim of Baghdad) describes a wooden item shaped like a hand with five fingers used to protect from ayin hara (the evil eye). The Jewish symbolism of fish is traced back to the Talmud (Berachot 20a) which discussed how fish are impervious to the evil eye.

תיקון *Fixing*

"An artist creating against his will is like a caged bird singing a melancholy melody, yearning for the freedom of his true expression" *Unknown*

Sasha Silber

People walk purposefully up and down the sidewalks of Meah Shearim street in Jerusalem. While it's true that many shops have been renovated, many remain authentically dishevelled, but full of life. One wouldn't know about a little store named after its patriarch, Markovitz, without specifically being directed down its three little steps. Still, there is a constant stream of people buying prayer shawls and special velvet bags crafted to protect them, while others come and design intricately woven decorative cover for their synagogues' new Torah scroll, or special bags with their

son's hebrew name embroidered upcoming Bar Mitzvah for his new pair of *Tefillin* (Phylacteries - a set of small black leather boxes containing verses from the Torah that are worn by Jewish men during weekday morning prayers).

Perhaps unbeknownst to many of its customers, what truly makes this store special is not its mountains and racks of beautiful artisanal wares, but the reason they were created.

Naftali Meir Markovitz was born in a tiny Hungarian village where he grew up doodling and drawing in a public school. A drawing of a

horse caught his grade school teacher who made it a point to nurture his artistic inclinations even after switching to a local Jewish school, and eventually in the Satmar Yeshiva.

As a young man, his family sent him to the family of a girl seven years his junior named Bracha, whose family had long-haired Angora rabbits. The Markovitz family was interested in creating socks from this especially soft fur. Naftali found a way to optimise the machine for precision and efficiency; the young Bracha caught his eye.

When the horrors of the Holocaust reached Hungary in 1944, Markovitz and his family



*An original design,
hand-embroidered on a
velvet Matzah cover*



*Naftali Meir Markovitz's
national ID upon immigration
to Israel after the Holocaust,
courtesy Markovitz family*

were rounded up and sent, along with many other Jews, to the Budapest ghetto. During the few weeks they stayed there, he resourcefully found a way to construct an oven out of found bricks to warm the multiple families that had been crammed into a tiny room. Soon, they were divided - some sent directly to Auschwitz, and others like Markovitz, first to a series of labour camps.

There, he was forced along with other prisoners to do degrading work, cleaning toilets with their bare hands, and sadistically sent to scrub streets with toothbrushes. The prisoners craved just a moment's rest; it was common to complain about side pain in order to have their appendix removed (without anaesthesia) for one day's worth of otherwise unattainable 'relief'.

Word of Markovitz's artistic talent and artisanal skills reached the Nazis. He was assigned the task of designing roundabouts, landscaping trees and bushes into the shapes of swastikas and designing Nazi propaganda. It was at this dark moment that he vowed to himself that if he survived the war, he would dedicate any art or craft of his hands to a higher purpose, to try to 'repair' or 'fix' the harm he felt he was doing with his own hands under duress.

Markovitz's resourcefulness continued on in Auschwitz-Birkenau, the concentration camp famous for its crematoriums. He and a small group of prisoners in Crematorium IV rebelled upon learning of their imminent execution. The rebellion, driven by smuggled gunpowder, was suppressed by the Germans, resulting in numerous casualties. Subsequently, four Jewish women involved in providing explosives were tragically executed by the SS; Markovitz and several others were not caught. He ended up being among those who survived to witness the camp's liberation in January, 1945.

Bracha, one of the subjects of experiments by the sadistic "doctor" Josef Mengele, known as "the angel of death" also miraculously survived. They found one another in their home town from which they had been deported, soon married, and began to rebuild their life together. A second miracle - for those who are familiar with the incomprehensible cruelty of Mengele's experiments - was Bracha's incredible good fortune to bear children after surviving the war.

At first, Markovitz became a teacher in a *Cheider* (a small Jewish boy's school), using his artistic penchant to guide his students. He taught them to craft Chanukah *dreidels* from melted iron and hand-crafted costumes for Purim plays. He worked as much as he could in addition to his teaching to try to purchase machinery, but whenever he would finally manage to buy something (like a small steam

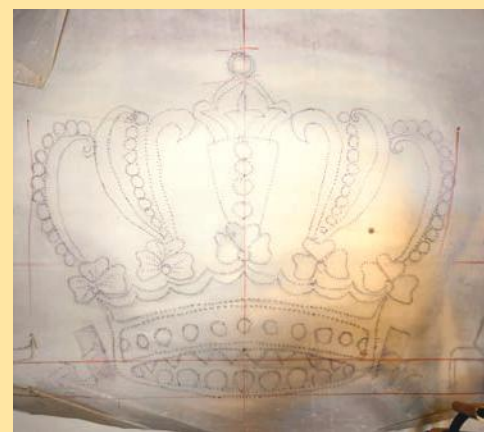


Meah Shearim, Jerusalem. Photo: Unknown

engine, or a small flour mill), the communists would confiscate it because of his religion. He stopped having faith in a Jewish future in Europe, and decided to bring his family to Israel.

Finally, Naftali Meir Markovitz and his family were in Israel, living freely as Jews. He opened his shop at 8 Meah Shearim Street in Jerusalem, where he designed, created and sold beautifully-embroidered tapestries and religious garments in order to make up

for - to 'fix' - the painful work his hands were forced to do during the war. To this day, one can walk into this humble shop to meet his grandchildren who now run the shop and see his hand-drawn embroidery samplers and designs that adorn *tallit* (prayer shawl) and *tefillin* (phylacteries) bags, Matzah covers for the *Seder* table, Challah covers for Shabbat, *parochet* (curtain) for the *Aron HaKodesh* (Torah Ark) and beautiful velvet Torah scroll covers in Israel and around the world.



Clockwise from top left: Photos from the shop, including a hand-drawn embroidery sampler for the national emblem of Israel with a Menorah and olive branches; an original design, hand-embroidered on a velvet talit bag, a hand-drawn embroidery sampler of a crown, Markovitz's original Singer sewing machine is used to this day



Eyal Golan
"Am Yisrael Chai"



Osher Cohen
"Tirkedi"



Roní Dalumi
"Tachzor"



Elíor Zandani
"There's No Room Here"

7.10: *A Playlist*

Dance and song were silenced, joy and merriment ruthlessly desecrated; on October 7th, 2023, Simchat Torah 5784, when a wave of brutality and evil swept through Israel, the music stopped

Yissca Weisz

Horrified, haunted, and with a lingering paralysis, I have found myself feeling the distance of the Diaspora, turning to Israeli and Jewish music in search of comfort and connection. Since the 'Black Sabbath,' tens of Israeli and Jewish musicians have released profound topical and emotional songs, putting words and melody to the inexpressible.

I've collected over one hundred tracks in a playlist called *7.10*, spanning the spectrum of emotion, drawing on physical loss, mental trauma, national pride and unity, spiritual questioning and developing faith. Listening to this music has made me feel simultaneously distant yet tethered, shattered and uplifted, in despair but unequivocally hopeful for the future of the Jewish people. The lyrics of these

songs, whether in the form of rap, trance, pop or prayer, ring deep in the ear, penetrating both heart and soul.

Where words end, music begins

Since the 7th, it's often felt impossible to answer the simple question: *How are you?* Various singers confess to a similar speechlessness. Bar Tzabari "doesn't know what to say," Ariel has "no words," and Elior Zandani feels a void as "There's no place here/ To really sing, to really dream." Narkis asks "what's in my heart today?" Words are elusive and inadequate in such a crisis.

Ishay Ribo and Moshe Peretz broke down in tears while singing for endless streams of funerals or memorial services, gut-wrenchingly physically unable to sing their own words. When words are what we need to be spoken and heard, they step up to the microphone, singing a tune of our Nation's broken heart.

Omer Adam's *Tirkod Lanetzach* (Dance Forever) is a mesmerising tribute to those dancing life-affirmers at the Nova festival. Osher Cohen's poignant *Tirkedi*, (Dance) similarly alludes to a better place - heaven, just somewhere safe - when he sings "...I'm sure you're dancing there."

Images are carved into our waking

memories and sleeping dreams; these sights have been transformed into haunting lyrics. Elior Zandani presents an intense fear with two simple words: *shem neherag*, discovering the "name of the one killed." This harsh reality of receiving dreaded news is void of emotion in his song, dissociating from bearing the weight of a person's entire world. Adir Getz grieves for those growing up "watching the news," and learning about war at school, in his poignant song *It's Not That Easy To Be A Child Here*. Roni Dalumi, together with The Idan Raichel Project, calls out, *Tachzor - Come Back* - a gently, if not eerily sung plea for everyone missed at home.

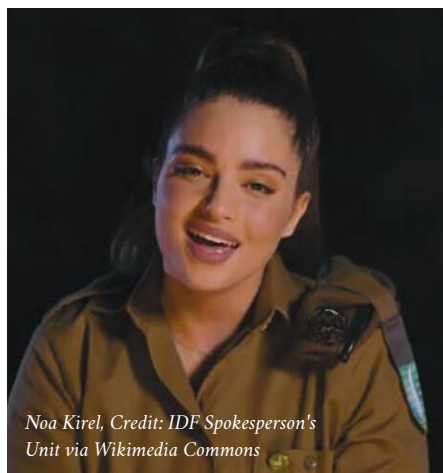
An *Or Rishon* film features Eurovision 2018 winner, Netta Barzilai singing an 80's song, *Come Back To Me, My Boy*, without any instrumental accompaniment. Her voice is supported only by the stomping of three leading Israeli drummers. Netta's powerful singing is reminiscent of a deep and bitter cry. This song, unrefined and emotive, reaches the soul in its purest form.

Return, again

Everyone in Israel is waiting for someone to come home from combat or service (or captivity); a father or husband, brother or sister, son or daughter, friend or neighbour. Singer Dudu Aharon focuses on those

“

When words are what we need to be spoken and heard, they step up to the microphone, singing a tune of our Nation's broken heart



Noa Kirel, Credit: IDF Spokesperson's Unit via Wikimedia Commons

who tragically do not get a happy-clappy homecoming, singing “heroes don’t come back.” Welcoming the troops home after battle is a custom which dates back millennia, including when “*David returned from killing the Philistine (Goliath)... the women of all the towns of Israel came out singing and dancing...with timbrels, shouting and sistrums.*”¹

Israeli superstar Eyal Golan’s new anthem *Am Yisrael Chai*, adds to the building excitement and anticipation for the day when

*Everyone will return home/
We will wait for them downstairs (or below)
...We will again go out to sing in the streets,*

- a beautiful vision of triumph and peace.

Music heals; as it says, “David would take the lyre and play it; King Saul would find relief and feel better.”² One of Israel’s top tracks at the moment is Yigal Oshri’s moving *To Come out of Depression*, insisting “singers are the doctors.” Originally released in August, it has become the soundtrack to trending reels of Israeli soldiers returning from war to reunite with their loved ones. Instant tear-jerkers, these long-awaited moments are all the more powerful when the run up to the long-awaited hug is timed perfectly with the crescendo:

*There will always be a small star to illuminate your way
[To] Yourself, the way home.*

Oshri recently released a new live acoustic version of the song, including the order by the Commanding Officer of the 162nd Division, BG Itzik Cohen, to eliminate Hamas, and a little girl’s voice, asking her “daddy [to] wake up, I love you.” Her daddy, Major Or, was in a

“*Music possesses the qualities of infinity, given its limitless potential*”



Udi Damari &
Ami Maimon's
Am HaNetzach

coma for four days having sustained severe injuries from an anti-tank missile fired in Gaza. Miraculously, he woke up upon hearing his daughter’s voice. The counterpoint of Oshri’s raw emotion, a child’s simple plea for life and the IDF’s call to action to protect the people of Israel breaks and rebuilds the heart all at once.

Searching, upwards

“Music is the language of the soul,” writes Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks. Hasidic tradition sees a *niggun* (wordless tune) as a means of spiritual connection. Even the Torah is referred to as *Shira...*³ (a song, forever), inspiring us to find a way to sing, even through history’s greatest challenges. We’ve been singing all along; Moses gave thanks to God after the splitting of the Red Sea, Miriam led the women in dance accompanied by tambourines, and King David composed the Book of Psalms - a collection of *mizmorim* (songs) - as a testament to his profound gratitude and acknowledgement of God’s guidance through his life’s tumultuous journey.

Religious and secular alike, people are searching for, turning to and connecting with God. Yaniv Adar begs “God, answer my prayers.” E-Z and Odeya’s *Choref 23*, (Winter ’23) asks existential questions and raises spiritual doubts; *where is God? Who even cares? I came to talk to Abba* (Daddy - more endearing than Av (father)). She asks Him to “make space,” tragically conjuring images of too many, brutally murdered, on their way up...

Project Unity for Israel’s song *Give Me A Moment*, reminds us to “regulate our breathing,” beseeching God to “have mercy on His People.”

Icon Rami Kleinstein sings a duet with his daughter Meshi, *Tefillot Hayeladim* (Children’s Prayers) - innocent requests like watching cartoons instead of news, or not seeing mummy cry. No longer possible to shelter our children, the sanctity of so many homes has been shattered to smithereens, burned to ashes.

Winning, together

In the wake of this tragedy, the unity and solidarity among the Jewish people has been palpable, with endless acts of kindness for complete strangers regardless of social, political or religious beliefs. Osher Biton sings of the nation being one, and Eyal Golan repeats this theme of togetherness, reassuring us that “not even one [person is] alone.” Omaney Israel have collaborated again, now chanting, we are “One People;” fittingly, I can pick out each distinct voice as it joins in the chorus. At every communal prayer or gathering, including the rallies in Washington

¹ Samuel I 18:6 ² Samuel 16:23 ³ Deuteronomy 31:19



Hanan Ben Ari
"Moledet"

and in London, we sing *Acheinu kol Beit Yisrael*, (We are all brothers, the House of Israel) - clearly demonstrating that what unites us is stronger than our differences.

Udi Damari & Ami Maimon came up with a song called *Am HaNetzach* (Eternal Nation) that makes me want to dance, even now. This upbeat track generates a surge of positivity and confidence. The word *Netzach* (eternity) connotes endurance and victory; perhaps it is the former quality, our genetic programming to survive, that propels the latter. Music possesses the qualities of infinity, given its limitless potential for being played and heard, with endless layers of meaning.

Every soldier's swearing-in ceremony concludes with Israel's national anthem, *HaTikvah* (The Hope), in which "the Jewish soul sings" of our age-old yearning "to be a free people in our land...of Zion." It is somewhat morose in its minor key, maybe because the joys and sufferings of the Jewish people of Israel go in tandem. A plane-full of Israelis sang it on their way home to Israel in the days following the massacre, and on a separate flight, cellist Amit Peled thanked Southwest Airlines for allowing him to perform the anthem midair. Moving videos of brave soldiers affixing an Israeli flag into the sand in Gaza are accompanied by their own singing of *HaTikvah*. As Sarit Hadad sings, *Od Nashir* (We Will Sing Again).

Home, coming home

Hanan Ben Ari's raw ode to our 'Homeland' (*Moledet*) opens with what sounds like a *Shofar*

(ram's horn), announcing Israel's state of war. In his heart-rending refrain, Ben Ari asserts he is singing an "old song," implying that there is no space for a "new" song in this current climate of crisis, rather summoning a tune familiar and integral to the people of Israel, simultaneously drawing from ancient prayers, Psalms and *HaTikvah*. The "Guardian" of Israel "does not sleep or slumber,"⁴ but "Someone fell asleep on guard duty." This grief, confusion and abandonment towards security forces - physical and spiritual - whose

promise is to protect, is soon reaffirmed by his devotion to the Land and its People, proclaiming, or perhaps praying,

*We will never break,
In peace and in distress,
In sweetness and in bitterness,
Only with you I sing.*

Through his play on words, Ben Ari invokes contradictory states of being as an inherent component of the experience of life in Israel, echoing Naomi Shemer's *Al Kol Eileh* (Over All These, 1980): "to retrieve the honey, the sting is almost inevitable." Both songs' layered meanings remind me of the song we sing each year on Seder night, *Vehi SheAmdah* (loosely: Standing Promise). Yet today we have established our own "Homeland." Ben Ari's voice cracks a little, as the song slows and concludes with a reference to Creation,

*Even in Hell,
You (Israel) are Paradise.*

Live, to life

Since the 7th, everyone with a voice and a car has been performing for the wounded, the survivors, the families, the evacuees, the soldiers - the country. Ishay Ribo, Amir Dadon, Noa Kirel, Lior Narkis, Yuval Dayan, Eli Schwebel, Solomon Brothers, Hanan Ben Ari, Shlomo Artzi, Berry Sakharov, Mordechai Shapiro, Zusha and so many others have been regulars, boosting morale before soldiers "go in" to enemy territory. The soldiers can be seen dancing with their whole being, hand in hand, shoulder to

shoulder in concentric circles, surrounded by our land, our horizon.

Ben Ari brought comfort to survivors and their families in hospitals (famously a pre-Kabbalat Shabbat concert at Ichilov), and spent time with an intimate circle of surviving 13th Battalion Golani warriors who had lost 41 comrades on the morning of the 7th. Seated in wheelchairs, having lost limbs in battle, it is distressing to witness grown men in tears as Ben Ari softly sings,

*I'm a world champion in falling/
And getting up like a champion.*

It is equally as inspiring to then see one such soldier stand up on his remaining leg to request the upbeat song, *Our Life Is Like Strawberries*. And what is more life-affirming than a wedding? Hanan Ben Ari found himself bringing joy and life - *Chai* - to a new couple at an impromptu wedding of two soldiers at an army base.

We are at a crossroads of the future of the Jewish people around the world. Thankfully, we have a poignant soundtrack to keep us connected, inspired and empowered.

Now
playing



Scan the QR code to listen to the
7.10 playlist:



⁴ Psalms 121

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The *fashion* edit

By Chaya Baumgarten, founder of Valour magazine

In collaboration with

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LIFESTYLE



Four unique outfits at the 'Together We Will Win' fashion exhibition in Azrieli Mall, Tel Aviv, symbolize Israel's unity, diversity and hope, featuring a unity-themed dress, an elegant skirt, a blend of tradition and innovative design.

As we go through these difficult times for the Jewish people, with a regular stream of challenging news, motivation might fade and excitement feels distant. With the cold and darkness of the winter months not doing much to lift the mood, it's easy to fall into a pattern of just going through the motions. We might even forget about the individual spark hidden away within

each of us that is simply waiting to be reignited.

Each one of us is a source of light to the world - light for ourselves, light that inspires others and a light that can make an impact on the world. We can stoke the flame that projects that light by embracing gratitude, setting intentions, staying mindful, pursuing growth, connecting with others and finding joy in moments of calm.

These might sound like huge, lofty goals that are inapplicable to the relentless pace of our lives, but the truth is, we can add purpose and intention through the mundane things we do every day: even through the choices we make in how we dress ourselves. There's a balance to strike when keeping a wardrobe fresh and exciting that does not necessarily mean out with the old, in with the new!

Oversized polo-neck jumper
£27.99,
H&M



Croc detail bag £50,
Ted Baker



Virgin wool
rib beanie
£294.46,
Nordstrom



Puffer jacket
£34.99, H&M

Jemima
cobalt blue
skirt
£89,
Wolf &
Badger



J'adior slingback
pump
£890, Dior



Petite
premium
batwing
dress £139,
Karen
Millen



Blue & WHITE

Home is where the heart is.
Style blue and white to stay
connected



Good luck
trainer £315,
Tory Burch

Mathilde polka
dot dress £379,
LK Bennett



Belted faux fur coat
£225, Cos

Cream cable
knit jumper
£50, River
Island



HUSH Florence
ruffle skirt, £99,
John Lewis



Flower power
leather earrings
£160,
Kate Spade



Jigsaw leather loafers
£105, John Lewis



Wool silk
pashmina
£60, Jigsaw



British made
Debbie jumper £79,
caraandthesky



Flared knitted skirt £95, Cos



Liberty green
velvet slippers
£179, LK Bennett



Florere
velvet midi
dress £178,
Reiss

Burst of COLOUR

Olsen green taffeta
skirt £229, LK Bennett



Brighten up! Illuminate your
winter with vivid hues

Chinti & Parker
midi skirt £295,
The Outnet



Top tip:
A little colour can
go a long way (*pop* is
the key here!)



Banane shearling
bum bag
£245, ba&sh



Russo
kitten heel
£175,
Jigsaw



Showtime
statement bracelet
£240, Kate Spade



Arabella bordeaux crinkle patent
ankle boots £399, LK Bennett



Rib-knit
polo neck
dress
£34.99,
H&M

Winter often sees us gravitating towards darker hues like black, grey and navy. By introducing just a pop of colour, we can add vibrancy and even elevate our mood. It might seem counterintuitive to wear white or light colours on gloomy days, but often, incorporating a light colour into an outfit reflects brightness on our faces, as well as to those who see you - a relief from cold and dark wintery monotony. A bright coloured scarf, a bold coloured sweater, or an unexpected coloured pair of shoes will help us energise ourselves and bring joy into the atmosphere.

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dress £88,
John
Lewis



Brooke metal
belt £145,
ba&sh

Ribbed
midi skirt
£515,
Tory
Burch



Leather knee-
high boots £549,
LK Bennett

Top tip:

Add a fresh trending
accessory or pair of
shoes as an accent, tying
together a whole
new look.



Mia knitted
midi dress
£228, Reiss



Charles & Keith
slingback court shoes
£69, John Lewis

Mix & MATCH

Combine classics with
current trends

Wool maxi
city coat
£385,
Jigsaw



Oversized wool-blend
pea coat £189.99, H&M



Sam Edelman Michaela
mary jane shoes £150,
John Lewis



Merry
dress black
£89,
Jovonna
London



Isabel
Marant
pleated maxi
skirt £930,
The Outnet

Sometimes, the answer to breaking out of autopilot mode is right in front of us - it might simply be in a new, unexpected combination. Fresh wardrobe energy can be as simple as putting together pieces from our own wardrobes that might feel funny or not occur to us at first, but often result in fresh and exciting looks.

We can have fun with surprising colour, pattern and texture combinations, bringing new life to staple pieces and lesser-worn items that we have had hanging in our closets for a while. Try mixing dressier pieces with streetwear, stepping out of our comfort zones and discovering exciting new combinations.

VALOUR

LIFESTYLE

WINTER 2023/24
ISSUE 11

Chassidic judge **RUCHIE FREIER**

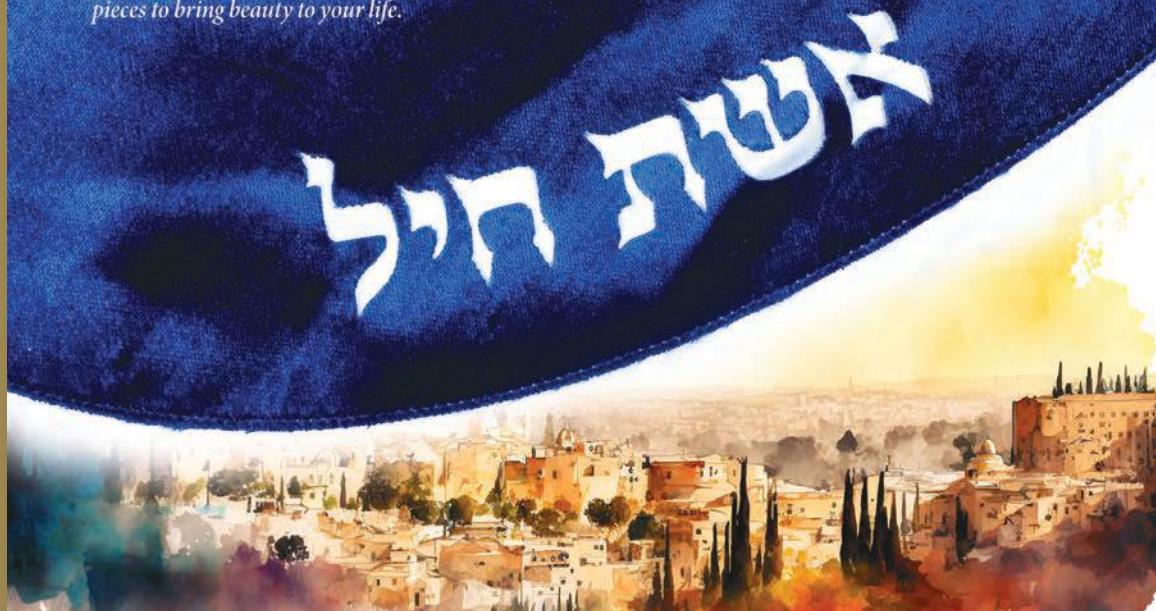
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Precious bloom statement Earrings £210, **Kate Spade**



Sparkly ribbed-knit shirt £85, **Cos**

Touch of GLAMOUR

Mango Sofi silver block heels £45.99, **John Lewis**



Bring sparkle and shine to your winter wardrobe

Retrofête metallic maxi skirt £414, **The Outnet**



Asymmetric hem dress £79.99, **Mango**



Louise gunmetal midi dress £329, **LK Bennett**



Velvet plisse dress £250, **Jigsaw**



Frill midi dress £175, **& Other Stories**



RIDLEY SCOTT left the Jews *out* of NAPOLEON!

(and why that's a good thing)

Adam Fox

Screen 4, Reel Cinema. As I sat in the dark, waiting to be transported to 18th Century France, I realised I was nervous. Ridley Scott, director of *Gladiator*, was tackling one of history's most revered and divisive characters. The lights went down. I checked for the third time that my phone was silent. I was still nervous. Not because Jews might be left out of history but for once, because we might be kept in.

That's right. Napoleon and the Jews have history. And it's complicated. When the French Revolution reshaped France, the situation for the Jews changed with it. The 1789 Declaration of the Rights of

Man and of the Citizen guaranteed them freedom of religion, and as the borders of the French Empire expanded across the globe, Commander Napoleon Bonaparte sought to liberate Jews along the way. This included rights to property, worship, certain occupations and to live outside ghettos. Fascinatingly, it was rumoured that Napoleon was said to have invited "all the Jews of Asia and Africa to re-establish ancient Jerusalem," a heavily debated account.

On the other side, many historians argue that Napoleon's key interest was to inspire mass assimilation. From an 1806 letter, "it is necessary to change the Jews. [...] they will cease to have Jewish interests and sentiments; their interests and sentiments will be French." In an 1808 letter he stated "I have not endeavoured to draw [Jews] into my realm. Far from that, I have avoided doing anything which could show any esteem for the most despicable of mankind."

Back on Screen 4, this was what I dreaded. So much opportunity for misrepresentation, especially at times like this. Throughout his career, Ridley Scott has always magnified the ugliest parts of humanity and history. How would Napoleon, and by extension his relationship with Jews,

be portrayed? Is it better to be depicted irresponsibly or erased from history?

Well, I shouldn't have worried. Not only are Jews never mentioned, as I sat in my seat for the next three hours, a feeling of calm washed over me and I realised something.

Ridley Scott's *Napoleon* is NOT history. It's claptrap. Hokum. Nonsense. Gibberish. Scott is completely disinterested in maintaining any air of historical accuracy. His film is a mess of violent battles, dodgy politics and boring relationship drama. Sometimes it's best to be bypassed.

When challenged by historians, Ridley Scott replied "Excuse me, mate were you there? No? Well, shut up then." - Both hilariously pompous, but also exposing a wide gulf between an indifferent storyteller and real history being plundered.

Walking back into the cold night air of modern day Borehamwood I thought, let those who truly care about history carry the responsibility of telling it. And let's not put too much stock in pop culture. Let's call a spade a spade. Or Napoleon a spade. Because his hat makes him look like a spade.

To be clear, Ridley Scott is well within his right to tell whatever story he wants! I'm just relieved we weren't anywhere near it.

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