PERSPECTIVES

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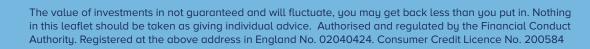
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WELCONE

DEAR READERS,

Welcome to our first Jewish Futures publication. Under the leadership of Rabbi Naftali Schiff we are delighted to be expanding PERSPECTIVES magazine to encompass the other organisations that come under the Jewish Futures banner. I invite you to read through the wonderful content we have compiled for your enjoyment and hope it inspires your chag.

The theme of our Shavuot magazine is Malchut, Kingship. Shavuot is the festival where we celebrate the majesty of Torah, the gift of religious royalty where we pledge our allegiance to God and His mitzvot. Torah is a commitment that demands of us to live our lives as the 'chosen people', tasked with upholding a pristine level of morality. I am writing this editorial while burning the midnight oil on a trip to New York. These past few days I have had the great privilege of attending an Olami summit with nearly thirteen hundred Jews from all over the world who came together to celebrate our holy heritage and Jewish destiny. The experience ignited a fiery commitment to continuing to bring the values of Torah to the Jewish people.

The Torah has ensured that since the days of Sinai, the Jewish people have upheld a life of morality. While other nations have pillaged, murdered and been promiscuous, the Jewish people have, at a national level, for the most part, sustained a level of morality that has been unmatched. This is reflective of the Godly spark embedded in the soul of the Jew and why Hitler infamously wrote that, "conscience is a Jewish invention. I freed Germany from the stupid and degrading fallacies of conscience, morality... We will train young people before whom the whole world will tremble. I want young people capable of violence; imperious, relentless, cruel." Reading this bone chilling vision, one would naturally think that Hitler would have failed dismally in his murderous endeavours. Instead, not only did he not fail but he succeeded with aplomb.

The Torah is a most worthy insurance policy for humanity. The bible continues to be the bestselling book on the global market and the Jewish people continue to honour God in their commitment to His version of morality. Torah is not a life of religious fanaticism but rather a life of reflecting God's vision for the world. His manifesto is clear

in black and white and Shavuot is the celebration of this vision.

A few weeks ago, I gave a class to students at Imperial College. One very bright young man put up his hand and politely asked me to define spirituality. I shared with him that there are many potential answers to this question but that I thought authentic spirituality could be defined as endeavouring to look at the world in the way God does, and that Torah is as close as we can get to understanding what the world looks like through God's glasses.

We have just celebrated the Queen's Jubilee, a celebration of a remarkable monarch who has been stellar from the day she stepped onto the throne. Let us remember that although not blue-blooded royalty, we too are "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" as described in Exodus 19:6. Just like the Queen, who has excelled in her commitment to a life of service, we too, have been born into a life of service to God and His world, and it is our great privilege and honour to make sure that we honour this legacy. It is our golden trademark and the mark of our blessed nation. It is also the reason I chose to use this spectacular blue colour for the cover. I recently visited the Tate Modern for an afternoon of browsing beautiful art. A bold and breathtaking blue canvas caught my eye, painted in this intense ultramarine blue that was developed by artist Yves Klein. He explains that the colour was inspired when he looked at the sky on a beautiful, sunny day in the South of France. Klein Blue is a showstopper and is certainly reflective of the royal blue threads we carry in our DNA.

This Shavuot, take some time to think about what the Torah means to you, imbibe its energy and commit to its vision. It is a sanctified book that will bring out the best in you and allow you to manifest your greatest potential.

On behalf of Rabbi Naftali Schiff, Rabbi Ari Kayser and the entire Jewish Futures team, we wish you a Chag Sameach!

WARMEST,



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FRESH!



The Crown Jewels and the Royal Diamonds That Adorn Each of Our Homes

RABBI NAFTALI SCHIFF REFLECTS ON THE ROYAL VALUES OF HOME AND FAMILY EXEMPLIFIED BY LADY J - THE 'QUEEN' OF ANGLO JEWRY.

From time immemorial, human beings have been fascinated by the power, lustre and grandeur of royalty with all its associated regalia, both real and imaginary. I fondly recall being contacted by a prominent Jerusalem Rabbi when he heard of an impending trip I was to make, to visit my family in London some 40 years ago. He wanted to encourage me to visit the Crown Jewels whilst there, in order to gain a deeper insight into the majesty and power of the Almighty.

Just the other day I had the pleasure of accompanying a group of JRoots educators to explore the intriguing Jewish story interwoven with other narratives at the Tower of London. The historic relationship of the Jews of England with the Tower, and with royalty in general, is quite complex. Both carry many lessons and insights that are of relevance to young and old today.

It is one thing to talk about or see photos of the crown, and quite another to actually behold its splendour. The day before our visit, the Imperial State Crown itself had been present in all its glory at the state opening of parliament, albeit placed upon a cushion on an empty throne due to Her Majesty's absence. Such is the royal tradition that the very presence of the crown is legally mandated as a prerequisite heralding the opening of parliament. I was captivated by its opulence and beauty, and most poignantly, the traditions it conveys.

Our age-old prayers often refer to 'Keter', the Divine crown, alongside images of a myriad of celestial hosts partnering with humankind, coming together in ultimate reverence towards the King of Kings.

I was reminded of how, at the giving of the Torah, the Midrash describes how each Jew was presented with two 'crowns': one for *naaseh* – 'we shall do', and one for *nishmah* – 'we shall listen'. This honour marked the renowned declaration of the Jewish people, who exclaimed those famous words in unison over 3200 years ago as they were offered the opportunity and millennial responsibility of receiving God's Torah. I beheld the sparkling splendour of the centuries-old Crown Jewels at the Tower of London and considered the pomp of the Diamond Jubilee and the numerous issues that surround the notion of royalty, nobility, responsibility and their relevance today. My mind was transported to thinking further about our own ideas about noble bearing and how we express it, even if crowns are an image of the distant past.



The person who immediately came to mind was Lady Jakobovits a"h, who's yahrzeit is around this time of year and who is still referred to by some as the 'Queen of Anglo Jewry'. As the 'First Lady' of former Chief Rabbi Lord Immanuel Jakobovits zt"l and the daughter of the renowned Rabbi Munk, she possessed a vivacious, chic and charismatic persona, had an enormous communal following in her own right and was affectionately referred to by her beloved subjects as Lady J. Noteworthy perhaps, was Lady J's renowned ability to spontaneously drop all royal affectations in order to relate personally to the human being with whom she was speaking at any time and in any circumstance.

In the production of a film and book by that name a few years back, her opinion on the subject of royal parenting was referred to by many interviewees with whom I met. Lady J would love to reminisce about the Jakobovits' memorable stay at Windsor Castle and the private time she spent intimately talking about family values and upbringing, together with Her Royal Highness Queen Elizabeth. One gentleman of aristocratic Anglo Jewish bearing affectionately commented that Lady J was imbued with "noblesse oblige" - a deep commitment to serve the Jewish community - a value and modus operandi she and her husband successfully bequeathed to each of their six children.

Having spent many a 'kitchen summit' in the company of Lady J while producing the book of the film about her life and values, I am mindful of the sage wisdom she would possibly have shared with us today. Lady J offered advice to all on an equal footing. Pretence was not her way. The values and advice she shared openly, free from airs and graces.





She possessed a vivacious, chic and charismatic persona, had an enormous communal following in her own right and was affectionately referred to by her beloved subjects as Lady J

She was someone who treated every person appropriately - as a precious jewel in the crown of the King of Kings. She recognised the preciousness inherent in every single human being and treated them with the respect commensurate with that worth. This is something that she expressed palpably in her own parenting, bringing up a wonderful family who were fully cognisant of their innate significance and the responsibility that comes with it.

Lady J clearly felt the upbringing and traditions she had received in her home were as worthy and relevant to Kings and Queens as much as to the man/woman in the street. To her we were all royalty, carrying the sacred task of polishing the diamond princesses and princes with whom we have each been entrusted. Pasted on the fridge in the modest palace that was her family home, Lady J had prominently displayed 'The 10 Commandments of a Successful Marriage': Respect, Patience, Tolerance, Trust, Spouse Priority, Sharing, Love, Giving, Praising, Saying "Sorry". To her, this set of 10 commandments was the way of polishing jewels in the crown.

Constantly working on 'Shalom Bayit', harmony in the home, prioritisation of spouse was a core focus. Lady J felt that successful parenting and the instilling of values in children was primarily achieved in the home and only reinforced by schools, external experiences and formal education.

Perhaps, as we mark the historic moment of the Diamond Jubilee and behold the majesty of the golden State Coach escorted in all its pomp and splendour, we can take a moment to consider our own royal traditions and calling too. Jewish tradition believes that our souls emanate from the throne of the Almighty Creator itself and that each of us represents a shining diamond in the holy crown. Our prayers are replete with references to the courtiers of Royalty and the might and power of Its eminence, and indeed the potential of every single one of us to nurture a deep and genuine relationship that actually becomes a partnership with the Source of all blessing, power and royalty itself.

In Jewish tradition, our Sovereign is constantly described both as a Parent and a King. Our service and loyalty combine love with awe, familiarity with reverence. Each Shabbat and every festival we welcome nobility around our table and adorn our homes with diamonds. The Torah mandates that our royalty carry a portable Sefer Torah at all times, to ensure that ceremony and majesty do not ruin the humility that must necessarily accompany genuine nobility and stature, so that they may endure.

Perhaps the gift of additional national holidays this year can provide an opportunity for us to harness the concept of royalty for ourselves. Perhaps this is a time to consider the pedagogy of a royal household. Possibly this is a time to instil into each and every child the awareness that they are priceless and invaluable to the Jewish People and the



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

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SEFIRAT HACOMER

THE JOURNEY FROM PESACH TO SHAVUOT

DEVORA LEVY SHARES SOME DEEP INSIGHTS
INTO THE PERSONAL JOURNEY OF GROWTH THAT
ACCOMPANIES THE CLIMB TOWARDS SINAI

tarting from the second day of Passover, all the way until Shavuot, it is customary to count the Omer. We are counting our way upwards for forty nine days, towards holiness, ascending a spiritual ladder until we are ready to receive the Torah from God on Shavuot.

Historically this was the period between the Exodus from Egypt and the receiving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. When God redeemed us from Egypt, it was a gift coming from a place of total kindness; as we were very impure spiritually and unworthy of being redeemed. (This time period is also one of mourning for the twenty four thousand students of the famous sage, Rabbi Akiva. The Talmud tells us that they died from the plague of diphtheria because they did not show enough honour to one another.)

We then had to undergo a forty nine day spiritual journey in order to prepare ourselves to receive the Torah. And we can go through that journey today too, as the same spiritual energy is available at this time, every year!

The holidays of Pesach and Shavuot are intertwined. There are seven weeks between them. Shavuot is the only holiday where such intense preparation is mandated. Because of the seven week preparation, the holiday is referred to as 'Shavuot,' meaning 'Weeks'. Each week represents a different "middah" or characteristic of God, called the sefirot. The word sefirah can refer to counting but is also related to the verb le'saper, which means to 'express' or 'communicate'. This implies that the function of a sefirah is to express a certain attribute. The sefirot are like ten 'garments' through which God reveals Himself to the world, and each day (if you wish to take it even deeper), has an even more specific spiritual characteristic within that week.

Rabbi Shimshon Pinkus of blessed memory said that the time of the Omer is like one long holiday. Pesach is when we were 'born' as a nation. It is when we started the process of our relationship with God. We started the process as a concept, in our minds, and during this period, we are bringing it down into actuality, into our physical lives and bodies. He says that we are taking our nefesh, our lower soul and through the journey of the sefira, transforming it into a higher reality. He describes the nefesh as the 'life blood', and it is interesting to note that there are several associations between Pesach and blood. The first plague was blood. Pharaoh also bathed in Jewish blood. He built Egypt on our life blood. Blood is life. The life blood can now start filtering down into the Jewish people.

At Mount Sinai we started living. Torah is called Torat Chaim - living Torah. Torah is life. These are days that we absorb life. We wouldn't be able to experience Shavuot without them, we would

come to Shavuot without life. These are also delicate days. When one is in the middle of a blood transfusion, he is fragile. That's why the students of Rabbi Akiva died during this time, just from a slight deviation, and many other tragedies happened to our people over the years during this time too. We are vulnerable, because we are in the process of absorbing life, for the whole year.

Counting each day, and working on the particular middah or the Sefira, of the week or day is a practical process where we can grow as individuals, in our relationship with God and with each other and to try absorb and integrate the lofty feelings that we discovered on Pesach, making it a part of who we are.

The Sefirot are not only about working on our own middot (character traits), but on a deeper level, are about tapping into that particular middah of God, the particular 'garment' that is permeating the world at that time and then opening up a pipeline for this middah, tapping into it and bringing more of it into the world and into our lives.

In 'The Book of our Heritage', Rabbi Eliyahu Ki Tov says: "Each of the seven attributes are related to the others. If there is no strength, then there is no loving-kindness. Each attribute has a light of its own that shines forth from its combination with the others."

Here is a description of each of the seven middot, each one being the 'theme' of each of the seven weeks between the holidays of Pesach and Shavuot:

1. CHESED - LOVING KINDNESS

The first week is the week of Chesed: loving-kindness. This involves loving, and giving of oneself with an open heart. It is the first middah. And each day is a combination of that and the subsequent middot.

Loving-kindness is the beginning of everything. All healthy relationships have to start with love. When a child is conceived, Chesed represents the male energy, the beginning of the relationship. So as we start this week's journey towards a relationship with God and towards holiness, we begin with love.

Chesed was the middah of our first forefather Avraham whose main work was spreading love, extending hospitality and kindness to all, and teaching the world about God, our loving Father in heaven. Chesed is represented by the right arm, the stronger arm.

Our predominant focus during this week should be on giving, expanding and looking for opportunities to love and connect to others. It is the time to try to develop and nurture this very important character trait.

2. GEVURAH - RESTRAINT

The second week is the week of Gevurah. Gevurah means strength, discipline, judgement, boundaries and restraint.

Gevurah is represented by the left arm.

Gevura or Din (judgement) is the trait of Yitzchak Avinu, our forefather Isaac. The first week focused on giving and letting the love just flow without limit; during this week, we balance things in the opposite direction and learn how to hold back, how to show strength, using our judgement and self-control.

Chesed is kabbalistically a masculine trait - the ability to expand and create. Gevurah, in comparison, is a feminine trait knowing how to channel that energy, absorb it and redirect it.

In Ethics of our Fathers it says; "Who is the mighty one? He who subdues his evil inclination." This is what strength is - the ability to hold back energy and to control ourselves.

3. TIFERET - HARMONY

The third week is the middah of Tiferet: beauty, empathy, harmony and truth.

It is represented by the torso, the heart centre.

Tiferet is the perfect combination of the previous two middot. It is the time when we try to find our balance; to discover truth by knowing when to show kindness and when to hold back; to have compassion for ourselves and for others and to try to find inner peace.

It is the characteristic of Yaakov Avinu, our forefather Jacob. Yaakov combined the first two traits of love and judgement to perfection, two opposites coming together in a perfect balance. He was described in the Torah as an 'Ish tam', a perfect and whole person.



4. NETZACH - VICTORY

The Fourth week is Netzach: victory, ambition, eternity and assertiveness.

It is represented by the right leg.

Netzach is both victory and eternity. Perhaps the deeper connection between the two is that when we are victorious in its truest sense, we have an effect on the world forever.

Netzach is a very assertive and proactive trait - related to the word me'natzeach, meaning to "conquer" or "overcome. It's on the right side, the side of Chesed, so it's masculine, but it's interesting because it looks more like Gevurah - strength, on the surface. Yet it comes from a place of broadening and conquering, and like chesed, giving out energy.

The courage of Netzach doesn't come from Gevurah as in, 'holding back' but in 'I care enough to make a difference', a lasting difference. It's a very powerful trait.

Moshe Rabbeinu, Moses our beloved leader, represents eternity. He represents our eternal Torah. Moshe was so very humble, yet he represents this trait. He pushed himself to go forward when he could rather have taken the quiet position. He was our fearless leader and so courageously devoted.



"Both Chesed and Netzach are proactive traits. They are intertwined, but Netzach is more about actual doing, in the physical, where Chesed is more internal."

He 'argued' with God for our cause. He was willing to give his very life for Torah and davened until God said 'enough'.

Netzach. The right leg. Pushing forward. Creating eternal moments.

We are moving ahead, reaching the middle of the omer count this week!

It is a powerful and challenging week. A week to start seeing practical progress. This is where we want to start setting concrete goals and courageously face those areas from which we would naturally like to hide.

Both Chesed and Netzach are proactive traits. They are intertwined, but Netzach is more about actual doing, in the physical, where Chesed is more internal.

5. HOD - GLORY

The fifth week is the trait of Hod: humility, gratitude, surrender, submission, acknowledging.

It is represented by the left leg.

Ahron Hakohen depicted this middah. He was known to always pursue peace, bringing peace between people and was never jealous of his younger brother Moshe who took the position of leadership.

God in His kindness allows us, who are infinitely small compared to Him to praise Him, thank Him and have a relationship with Him.

When we thank God, it opens up channels for more good. When we're feeling down but then start noticing the good in our life, by being humble and appreciative, it brings so much light and peace into the world.

Gratitude truly is a source of blessing, and the gift of being 'Yehudim', Jews, comes from the root hod. This is who we are. That's why it says that when we feel grateful and thank God; we should follow it by a request because the gates of blessings are open!

6. YESOD - LOYALTY

Week six is Yesod: bonding, communication, holiness, foundation and loyalty.

The week of Yesod is the final step in our chain before we reach Malchut, Royalty, and acceptance of the Torah.

Yesod is the middah of Yosef Hatzaddik, Joseph, who was always completely loyal, pure and attached to God even in the most trying of situations. It's about close interpersonal relationships and a deep loyalty to God.

The part of the body that represents this sixth sefira is the reproductive organ. Taking physical pleasure and transforming it into spiritual pleasure is what holiness is all about in Judaism. It's very much about the combination of the physical and spiritual. And it's very much about relationships.

Yesod is the combination of Netzach and Hod: the balance of being proactive and allowing space for others, receiving, resulting in a beautiful balance called foundation. This is the ability to connect and to have a relationship; the give and take, the ability to combine physicality and spirituality.

Yesod is not about 'me'. It's all about the other. It's about connection and loyalty. It's a time to make relationships a priority in our lives.

7. MALCHUT - ROYALTY

The final week, week seven, is Malchut: leadership, royalty, being regal, kingship, confidence, selflessness.

Malchut is represented by the head.

Malchut is really a reflection of all the traits. It's compared to the moon which doesn't have its own light but reflects that of others, creating its own unique glow. It is the ultimate feminine trait.

David Hamelech, King David, represents kingship. David did not become king because of his might or his wisdom, nor did he inherit the crown. God chose him. That's what makes a true king. One who simply mirrors and reflects the glory of God. We are not great because of our own merit. We are simply a chelek (part) of God, glorious because we are His.

Real Malchut is absolute humility. Total acceptance of God's sovereignty. This is the main trait we need in order to accept the Torah. We recognise that nothing is ours, but that we simply reflect all the middot of God. To quote Rabbi Yaakov Haber: "Malchut is different from the other sefirot because it focuses not on one aspect but on the totality. Kabbalists explain that the first six sefirot are masculine, providing sparks of energy (in the context of Malchut) but Malchut is feminine and allows all the other sefirot to develop. The first six give while malchut receives."

We are trying to reflect royalty this week; to be dignified, great, open, gracious and accepting, because we are daughters and sons of the great King of the world.

The final day, day forty nine is called Malchut shebemalchut -royalty within royalty.

We can allow the feeling of God's presence to completely fill us up. Imagine the whole world shining with His Glory. "Ein od Milvado". "There is nothing but Him".

As it says in Divrei Hayamim;

"And David blessed God in front of the entire congregation and David said: Blessed are you God. Yours is Greatness (Gedula, Chesed), Strength (Gevura), Beauty (Tiferet), Eternity (Netzach) and Splendor (Hod). Yours is Heaven and earth (Yesod). Yours is Sovereignty (Malchut) and You are uplifted above all... who am I and who is my nation?...for all is from You and that which we give you is from Your hand."

The holy Zohar says that the day of Shavuot is the highest day of the entire year. After having navigated our spiritual journey of the Omer, we are like newborn infants, totally clean and pure. (One of the reasons that we eat milk products on Shavuot is to symbolise that we are white and clean and also free of sin like babies who only consume milk.)

Rabbi Levy Yitzhak of Berditchev says that standing at Har Sinai is compared to standing under the chuppah, the wedding canopy. It is like B'nei Yisrael, the child of Israel, stood under the chuppah with God. Chazal says that on the day of one's wedding, the bride and groom are forgiven for all their sins and their past is cleansed of all their transgressions. Similarly, every year when Shavuot comes around, we are cleansed of all our sins, wrongdoings and negative energies.

Shavuot is also a time to daven; to pray for physical and spiritual healing because God healed the Jewish people before giving them the Torah. The lame started walking and the blind started seeing and so this amazing physical and spiritual healing energy is available to us right now too.

We can pray that we should be great receivers, that we should be able to connect to Torah. It says that each Jew represents a letter in the Torah. We all have our own unique place, our own unique 'portion of Torah' to accept. We pray that God will help us all on our unique journey, to discover our special place in Torah.

Just as on Rosh Hashana we receive physical blessings for the whole year, now is the time when we receive our spiritual sustenance for the year. We did our work during the Omer, counting towards holiness and trying to perfect ourselves. But now it is time to let go, to practice humility and to simply bask in the light, delight and glorious presence of our True King. To allow Him to fill our days with inspiration, help from above and a feeling of closeness to Him.



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WHY DO JEWS TRANSCEND HISTORY?

RABBI DR BENJI LEVY EXPLORES HOW
THE JEWISH NATION HAS MANAGED TO PERSEVERE
SURVIVE AND THRIVE - AGAINST ALL ODDS

"

ur nation is only a nation by virtue of its Torah"

– Saadya Gaon

The astonishing survival, energy, and creativity of the Jewish people across millennia has mystified the masses. Modern luminaries such as Mark Twain and Winston Churchill have eloquently expressed their wonderment at the seemingly endless capacity for perseverance and regeneration that characterises the Jewish nation. What is the secret formula that enables us to survive almost anything, emerging victorious and even optimistic?

Through our preservation of our heritage, our heritage preserves us. The relationship between the Jewish nation and the Torah is utterly unique, without precedent or parallel. Jewish scholars and laypeople alike have spent countless centuries obsessing over every letter, every word, and even gaps between the words. It has served as our lighthouse through stormy times, our inspirational muse during periods of joy, and our consistent anchor during eras of turbulence. Regardless of events in the outside world, the Jews can always turn to our text, engaging with the celebrated ideas and personalities that live on through

our great story. Empires rise and fall; civilisations conquer the world and fade into dust; plagues, wars, and revolutions ravage the landscape – and Jews still pore over their beloved pages, attempting to tease out the lessons in every section. This private dialogue with infinity and constant communion with a superior plane of reality has preserved an enduring sense of Jewish pride, identity, and purpose, regardless of the circumstances. There were Torah study groups in Auschwitz, just as there are Torah study groups in the corner offices of London today.

Although some scholars may spend entire careers poring over the works of a Shakespeare, a Dante, or a Dostoyevsky, they will always find themselves confronted by the limitations, the simple mortality of the human author. It is precisely this point that sets the Torah apart. As a reflection of the Divine, the Torah is completely inexhaustible, containing infinite layers of meaning. Millennia of commentaries and super-commentaries have analysed, excavated, and parsed every component of the Torah, squeezing every possible meaning from these tantalising texts. Yet – as any Torah scholar worth his or her salt will tell you – we have barely scratched the surface: every new reading yields further questions, further explanations, further advances



"Every person, regardless of physical, emotional, psychological or spiritual disposition can discover and rediscover endless treasures in this unparalleled trove of textual treasure."

Torah is both timeless and timely. Every person, regardless of physical, emotional, psychological, or spiritual disposition, can discover and rediscover endless treasures in this unparalleled trove of textual treasure.

This includes us. Having spent many years studying with some of the finest scholars and expositors of our generation, I am convinced that the Torah speaks directly to us, perhaps more so than ever before. Our current generation – those whose lives will span the bulk of the twenty-first century – display a desperate need for spiritual content and contentment. Although our lives are being made progressively easier, safer, longer, and more leisurely by the relentless advance of science and technology, many feel an inner emptiness, an absence of objective meaning that would imbue our existence with true direction and purpose. Many try desperately to fill it with anything, from sports teams to TV shows to protest movements to recreational drugs. While some may find temporary relief through some of these endeavours, they are all symptomatic of a greater cause: people are crying out for something beyond themselves, a greater truth or cause that will anchor their lives. But nothing temporal will ever be able to bridge the void in the human soul that reaches beyond. This sits at the heart of Shavout and why celebrate the greatest gift we ever received – the Torah.

or frustrations in our understanding. The hope of producing the final word, the conclusive explanation, of even the smallest element of the Torah is a fanciful dream. We can never hope to obtain finality; all we can strive for is to be part of the conversation.

It is truly astonishing that Jews across myriad cultures and eras have all sought, and discovered, profound spiritual inspiration and moral instruction through the study of the same text. Could it be possible that Jews residing in the Rome of the Caesars, the Baghdad of the Caliphs, and the Paris of Napoleon all believed that the Torah was talking directly to them, that it was prescribing a way of life that informed and enriched their own unique situation? Amazingly, the answer is a resounding yes. The





HEROES FOR LIFE

by PETER SUGARMAN

A BAND OF EX IDF SOLDIERS IS MAKING AN INCREDIBLE IMPACT HELPING CHILDREN IN SOME OF THE WORLD'S POOREST COMMUNITIES - AND SHIFTING NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS ISRAEL AND ITS MILITARY

ould you give more than a passing glance at a newspaper photo of a young boy clutching an Israeli flag? Maybe not, unless perhaps the child was accompanied by a niqab-wearing mother.

The Jerusalem Post article I read in late 2016 about Israeli backpackers teaching in the slums of Bombay and Rio de Janeiro inspired me to track down and later support the subject of the story. I hope you feel the same way.

Within a day of reaching out to him, Gili Cohen met up with me to discuss how and why he was intent on building a humanitarian powerhouse that would display Israel in a completely new light to millions of people around the world. Gili is a former Duvdevan commando officer. He is also the founder, with two friends from his military service days, of an Israeli charity which harnesses the energy and enthusiasm of former IDF soldiers to help children in some of the world's poorest communities.

Gili was motivated to set up Heroes for Life after he returned from travelling in the Far East as part of the traditional postservice extended holiday so beloved of Israelis.

"Like so many Israelis, I left for Thailand immediately after military service. I'd served in Gaza, lost some very dear friends and I just needed to unwind," Gili explained. "On the beaches of Koh Samui, I saw thousands of IDF veterans partying, and I had a light-bulb moment. Since they were travelling anyway, could I perhaps persuade all these talented, enthusiastic young men and women to begin their backpacking journeys with two weeks' teaching and volunteering in local schools?" Returning home to Modi'in, he set up a Facebook group to ask that question ... and was overwhelmed by the response.

Nine years later Heroes for Life has run programmes in twenty-five countries across Africa, Asia and South and Central America. In addition to teaching, participants are involved in renovating the schools and orphanages where the projects are sited.

Importantly, Heroes for Life, does not hide its IDF roots. Identifying as Israeli soldiers does increase the need for security, "but we are proud of who we are and want the world to know that Jewish soldiers are caring humans too," explains Gili.

Each delegation includes around thirty members, and in almost all the countries, there are several team members who are native language speakers. "We are very fortunate that Olim, or their children, have been enthusiastic volunteers, so there is always someone on hand to interpret" -Amharic in Ethiopia, Spanish



"Nine years later, Heroes for Life has run programmes in twenty-five countries across Africa, Asia and South and Central America."

across South and Central America, as well as English for East and South Africa.

Before setting off overseas, and after their return, participants are expected to spend time volunteering in Israel. "We have so many young people who want to join us," Gili explains, "so we have the pick of the crop. We have always run programmes in Israel, for example renovating the homes of holocaust survivors, but during 2020 and 2021 we really stepped up our missions inside the country."

Twenty-two-year-old Ofir Shalgy went with Heroes for Life to Khayelitsha, a deprived township on the outskirts of Cape Town, South Africa. In the mornings she taught 11-year-olds maths, English and Geography, and in the afternoons her group helped to repair community buildings. "We looked like little aliens; I'm blond with blue eyes," she recalls with a laugh. "For the children, it didn't matter what colour we are; they were just happy we were there; meanwhile the adults were in shock that people from Israel came to volunteer in their neighbourhood."

Guy Suskin was a little older when he volunteered to work in Guatemala, heading off in his summer break from his sports psychology degree studies. "It was one of the best things I've done in my life," he explained. "While my Spanish isn't so good, soccer is a universal language."

















Another brainwave of Gili's was to dedicate each delegation in memory of an IDF soldier who lost their life during their years of military service. Frequently, before heading off from Israel, the delegation will make a trip to visit the deceased's relatives.

"Tamar was the first religious woman to become a combat navigator, flying F-16s over Gaza," Anat Ariel, Tamar's mother, told me. "She was such a hero, losing her own life while saving the life of two of her friends during a three-week vacation in Nepal." Heroes For Life's Nepal programme is now named Team Tamar. "We met the teams before they left the country, and we followed their progress [on social media]. We were very emotional, sad, happy and proud of Tamar. What a wonderful memorial; what a wonderful commemoration."

Captain Tal Nachman's life, lost in a friendly fire incident in 2014, was the inspiration for his friend Lior Tabib to volunteer in the favelas (slums) of Rio in 2018. "I knew Tal for nine years," Lior said. "Before he decided to extend his army service, we agreed that we would travel together. I signed up because I wanted to do something meaningful on my trip, something different, something for Tal. To me, volunteering is an opportunity to do good with no thought of payment - just as Tal would have done. I am sure if he were alive, we would be doing this together."

Delegations spend Shabbat with the local Jewish community, forging closer links between Israel and the diaspora. Naftali Bennett, former Education Minister, now of course Prime Minister, sees this as a win-win. "Our [IDF] fighters go out round the word providing help to those in need; that's a *Kiddush Hashem* and a true *Tikkun Olam*, but they also have the opportunity to meet [and make friends with] their fellow Jews."

Heroes for Life participants pay for their airfare, which would otherwise be by far the organisations' largest expense. Donors cover the balance: "accommodation is basic, but we need to pay for security, as well as food, and the costs of the team leader, always someone who has previously travelled on a paying basis," Gili tells me. Meanwhile, the charity's central costs have all been met by a very generous philanthropist. Anyone giving to us can be assured that their donations make a huge and direct impact on children's lives."

"To me, volunteering is an opportunity to do good with no thought of payment - just as Tal would have done. I am sure if he were alive, we would be doing this together."

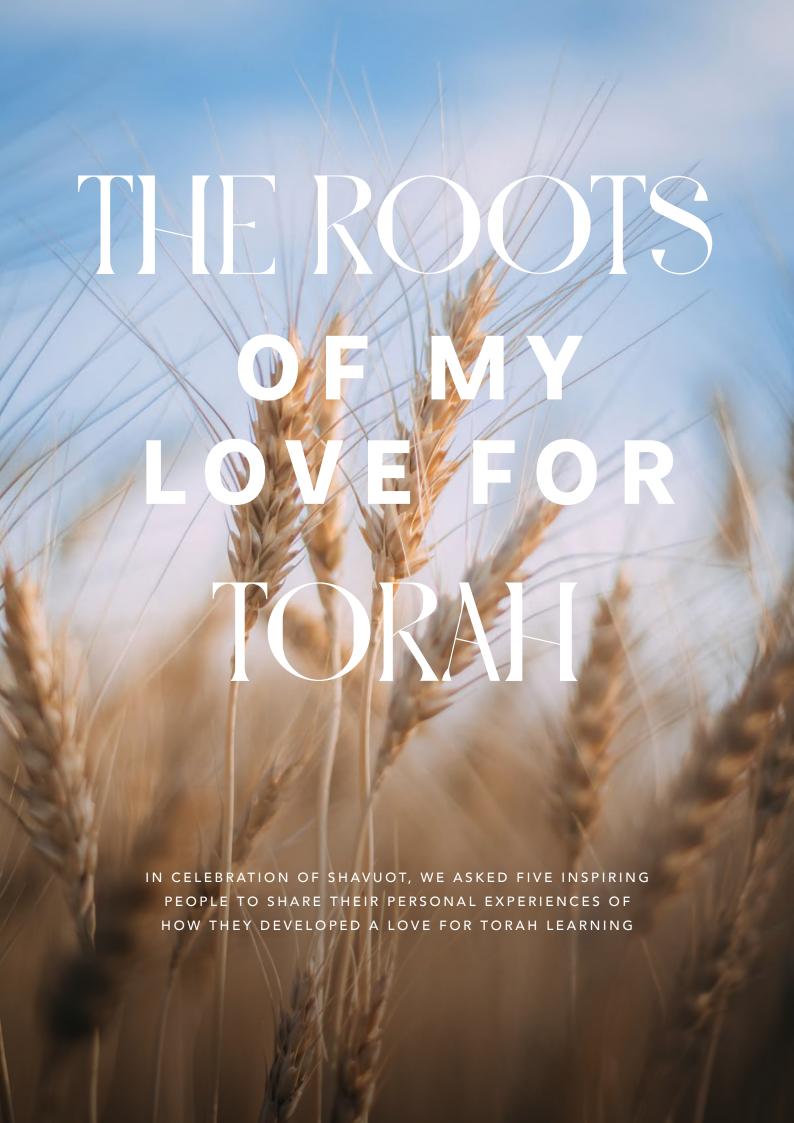
And of course, they are simultaneously demonstrating that Israel, Jews and the IDF all care about the wider world.

"It's been fantastic for the image of Israel and the IDF," says General Eliezer Shkedi, former Commander of the Israeli Air Force and CEO of EL Al, now Chairman of Heroes for Life. "The Israeli government spends millions on "Hasbora" (disseminating positive information about Israel to combat all the negative stereotypes and tropes which aim to delegitimise the country) "and meanwhile, Heroes for Life generates scores of positive press articles and TV interviews." There have been presentations to the United Nations, as well as meetings with foreign leaders, such as Jair Messias Bolsonaro, President of Brazil, and now proud owner of a personalised Heroes for Life T-shirt!

The Government couldn't be more delighted. "Thank you for being honorary ambassadors for the entire Israeli society. I have no doubt that as long as we keep on this path and cherish the spirit of giving, we will stand strong against all the challenges ahead of us" wrote Reuven Rivlin, Israel's former President in a glowing letter sent to General Shkedi.

If you would like to learn more about Heroes For Life, or donate, please visit their website hfl.org.il/en or their YouTube channel https://bit.ly/3k6XU0L





orah learning is the vital life-force of the Jewish people and forms the bedrock of our ethos. Shavuot is the celebration of our eternal gift, our hand delivered manifesto gifted by God himself. We have collated a beautiful collection of vignettes that share a very personal view on how each writer came to love Torah learning; which is always a dynamic and very real road. We hope they inspire in you a desire to grow and develop in your Jewish journey.

RABBI DOVID

My first visit to Comerica Park was on a warm summer evening in June of 2014. It was practically my first live experience with Major League Baseball and the iconic stadium of the Detroit Tigers. We had been gifted tickets right behind home plate, just a few feet away from the action, and we could almost stretch out our hands and touch the players. Back in 2014, the Detroit Tigers were a mediocre team with an all-star designated hitter in the shape of Miguel Cabrera, who is one of only seven players in Major League Baseball history to record 500 home runs and 3000 hits to go along with his 11 all-star titles and dozens of other accolades.

Despite not being a huge fan of the sport, I couldn't help but get carried away with the crowd on the wave of stardom as Miguel Cabrera stepped up to the plate for the first time that night. The crowd roared, fell silent and the intense feeling of loaded expectation settled on the stadium together with a distinct sense of being in the presence of greatness. It was palpable. Even a complete baseball novice could appreciate this was someone who lived and breathed the sport and was at the top of their game. The lack of knowledge of the game and who exactly Miguel Cabrera was or what he had achieved couldn't shake off that feeling, at least until I got home.

Eight years earlier I had a similar but much more profound experience that struck a much deeper chord in me, and this time it refused to leave. I walked into the Mir Yeshiva in Brooklyn as a new student and came face to face with the head of the yeshiva, Rabbi Shmuel Berenbaum.

Originally founded in the early 1800s in the town of Mir in Belarus, the Mir Yeshiva was, and still is, one of the premier institutes of higher Torah learning in the world. When Nazi Germany invaded Belarus, the yeshiva fled east through Siberia and resettled in Shanghai where it remained throughout the Second World War. After the war the yeshivah relocated to Brooklyn, where Rabbi Shmuel Birnbaum assumed the mantle of leadership in 1964.

"The excitement and vibrancy he had for life and Torah learning filled him with such meaning it penetrated my very being and pulled me into his world."

Rabbi Berenbaum was born in Poland in 1920 and studied at the Baranovich Yeshiva under the legendary Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman and was already in his mid-eighties when I met him for the first time, but his vibrancy and passion for life and Torah learning were so sharp it stopped me in my tracks. It was clear this was someone who had something real. I had been in the presence of greatness before, but not like this. There was nothing in his world that mattered other than the study of Torah, but in such a real and deep way that everyone around him felt it and was drawn to it as well. The excitement and vibrancy he had for life and Torah learning filled him with such meaning it penetrated my very being and pulled me into his world. I was not exactly sure what Torah learning was, but it was something I wanted a part of. Perhaps more importantly, he made it clear that what he had and what we wanted was ours for the taking - all we needed to do was put in the effort. That was the day I started to love Torah learning and the journey continues.

I keep the legacy of Rabbi Birnbaum with me and remind myself of the two things I saw in him that epitomised who he was and what he stood for when I teach. Teaching Torah needs to be so alive and vibrant that the students who I teach must feel that by default and must be left without any doubt that Torah is attainable to all if we only put in the effort.



Rabbi Dovid Lichtig holds a B.A. in Business
Management from Wayne State University and an
MBA in Business Administration from Missouri State
University. He has studied in various top Talmudic
institutions across the world and has received rabbinic
ordination in both the United States and Israel. He
spent a decade in Detroit, Michigan as the NCSY
Associate Regional Director where he was responsible

for staff management, programme development and providing strategic vision to the Central East region of NCSY. In 2019, Dovid and his family returned to the UK to take the position of Managing Director and in 2022, Deputy CEO of Aish UK

SHIRA DRUION

I was privileged to grow up in a home that was committed to Torah values. My parents did not come from religious homes, but of their own volition both chose the Torah path as the way of life that they felt was most aligned to the truth. They both love to learn Torah and have a deep appreciation for it, not only because it is so intellectually stimulating, but because of the behaviour that is the hopeful outcome of a life of Torah learning. Torah should make a mensch out of you, and this resonates for them profoundly.

So, although my childhood was loads of fun and in some ways carefree, I always had a serious side to me that was committed to Torah growth and learning. I read countless biographies of great rabbis and many of Rabbi Paysach Kohn's books which instilled in me a deep reverence and love for Torah and how it impacts the soul. When I read the stories of Torah greats, it would inspire within me a deep desire to live my life according to those same values. I was always moved by the magnanimity of characters. They were the most developed people, pristine in the way they interacted with the world. Torah had demanded of them to become great, and they had risen to those lofty heights. Today, it is no different and the great leaders of our generation continue to exhibit these same sparks of the divine.

This being said, admittedly my high school years were not the most enjoyable Torah learning years of my life. I found many of the lessons uninspiring, with the exception of one or two dynamic teachers, and I felt bored in many of the lessons. When I got to seminary, three tracks were offered. The rabbi placed me in the intermediate track because South Africans are generally not nearly as skilled in textual learning as the American girls, and I was way behind my American contemporaries. But after two weeks, I knocked on his door and explained that I didn't feel I was being intellectually stimulated enough and that I would rather work hard and break my teeth over the texts than feel like I was underachieving. He agreed and I spent the next three months pouring over countless source sheets. I recall how out of my depths I felt in those first few weeks, but I kept at it because the conceptual side was captivating and lit my soul in a way it had not been alight before. Each lesson offered pearls of wisdom and piercing insights and the Torah came alive for me in a way that I had never felt before, with each teacher offering a unique brilliance in how they taught the material.

In Rabbi Benji Levy's article in this magazine, he writes about the difference between Torah and other bodies of knowledge. He writes that Torah is like a wellspring that has no end. Anyone who has had the privilege of learning Torah will attest to the fact that when you plummet its depths, therein lies a chest of treasures that is so vast and rich that the greatest minds have celebrated its wisdom with a humility that travels in tandem with understanding that one can never fully get a handle on Torah; there is always more to learn and discover.

When I returned from seminary I started teaching almost immediately and it was in my years as a teacher that my relationship with Torah became even more developed, because I had to be enamoured enough with it that I could successfully transmit that love to my students. Torah is not something you can share if it doesn't resonate with you. I recall how I looked at Torah as the first psychology textbook ever written. It discusses personal issues, existential issues, sibling rivalry, marital strife, fertility issues, rebellious children, intermarriage and jealousy. It is filled with the stories of humanity.

I clearly recall when I had this realisation. I was teaching in Johannesburg at King David Victory Park at the time, and it dawned on me that my concerns about how to make the classes relevant to my students were unfounded because the narratives were as relatable as ever. Aish has afforded me the great privilege of going into many schools across London and when I stand in front of the classes and look at the faces of students I am reminded of this startling realisation. The relevance of Torah is timeless.

My love of Torah has only grown deeper through the years of learning and teaching. I now listen to Rabbi Shlomo Farhi's daily Torah classes. His ability to translate the Torah's wisdom into modern 21st century life is simply sublime, and every shiur reminds me of how blessed we are to be a part of such a holy nation where we constantly strive to be bigger and better human beings and Jews.



Shira Druion obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree in English, psychology and education and then qualified as a speech and drama teacher through the Trinity College of London. She is an experienced journalist, the former editor of YALLA magazine and the executive editor of Perspectives, the magazine of Aish UK. She has been an

educator for many years, teaching students from nursery age through to university, where she lectured on communication and writing skills. She currently co-runs the Aish schools department, teaches at Hasmonean Girls School, tutors English and runs her own drama company called Dramatix, where she teaches a broad age range of students. Shira is passionate about women's education and runs women's programmes in the community.

RABBI ZVI GEFEN

Gateshead Yeshiva is where it all began. Surprisingly it wasn't what I studied but who I studied from that inspired my love for Torah.

It was there that I met great Torah scholars, including the head of the yeshiva, Rabbi Avrohom Gurwitz. What struck me wasn't his breadth of knowledge nor his classes, but it was the way he lived his life that made the biggest impression on me. At that point, he had been teaching every day for over 40 years. He was the head of the yeshiva, author of many books and he took calls from around the world, yet despite his fame, he remained a most humble and gentle giant of a man. He was so approachable, and he respected every question that came his way and made time for every student who needed him.

When I later took my Jewish education further and went to study in Israel under Rav Yitzvhak Berkovits, this lesson was highlighted by yet another Torah great. Here was a great halachic teacher, with thousands of students around the world, who slept very little and had his day planned to almost the minute. But again, what stood out for me was the smile that would never leave his face. During his classes, when people pushed him on certain topics, he never lost his patience and always retained his equilibrium. Even his tone remained the same. Although his time was so valuable, he would spend time picking the most beautiful bunch of flowers for his wife for Shabbat.

When I was younger, I was taught that the study of the Divine wisdom of Torah has the power to refine a person to become more sensitive, kind, loving, patient and giving. These two great Torah leaders are amongst others I have met in my life, all of whom have only made me want to continue studying and to allow Torah to transform me to reach my potential.

They taught me that to be a Rabbi, isn't just about the acquisition of a body of knowledge but about how you develop as a human being. The most important thing is to become as evolved as possible, because we all have endless potential for greatness.

Today as an educator, I too hope that when we meet students we are able to show them how the Torah can be a guidebook for self-development, how it can help you to be a better spouse, a kinder and more selfless person and how it is still relevant to all of our lives in 2022.



When I was younger, I was taught that the study of the Divine wisdom of Torah has the power to refine a person to become more sensitive, kind, loving, patient and giving.

We celebrate Shavuot because it's the day we realised we received access to Divine information, that God gave us a book that contains His light, that has the ability to guide us in the most turbulent of times and is a moral code deeper than anything man-made. The values of Torah have changed the moral landscape of the world, and that is a real cause for celebration.



Rabbi Zvi Gefen hails from London and received Rabbinic ordination in Jerusalem under the prestigious programme led by Rabbi Yitzchak Berkowits. In 2014, Rabbi Zvi and his family moved to Whitefield, Manchester, where their home has become a hub of learning and socialising for teens, young professionals and families. He is the Director of the Aish Manchester Branch, teaching in schools, campuses and within

the wider community, featuring as a guest speaker and leading groups of students on trips to Poland.

JANE TOBIN GREEN

Not long ago, my 18-year-old daughter announced that she really didn't feel Jewish. "What do you mean?" I enquired, with an ever-so-slightly shrill overtone. "How can you not feel Jewish? All your friends are Jewish! You keep Shabbat! You go to JFS! You're so proud to be Jewish! It doesn't make sense. How can you not feel Jewish?"

Unhelpfully, her answer was, "I dunno. I just don't."

While we're conditioned to expect our teens to push boundaries, I really was curious to understand what she meant. Did she have a point? Did she really not feel Jewish? As we do, I took a deep breath and realised that if she didn't have the capacity to justify and support her own statement, I would need to unpick it for her. I began to enjoy myself, playing around with some pretty open-ended questions: How does one not feel Jewish? When

don't we feel Jewish? Is there such a thing as a Jewish feeling? Could one actually be so immersed in a Jewish life that the Jewish bit is no longer noticeable? Did my daughter feel too acclimatised, too comfortable, too passive? Surrounded by Jewish friends and never having to think about her differences, it was all too easy. Living in North West London in 2022, for the most part, being actively observant is not very difficult. The festivals come and go, and we try to do our best. For many, feeling Jewish is a lifestyle thing that can be dipped into and out of, supported by our affectionately named 'wavy lines' that wax and wane according to our mood or our capacity for Jewish engagement.

Unpacking Torah conundrums is part of our birthright as Jewish people, and it is our special way of reminding ourselves who we are in time and space. It's certainly not the easiest part of the deal, but it's ours and it is there for us when we are ready.



Jane Tobin Green is an Alexander Technique Teacher based in Primrose Hill. Among other things, she is really proud to be a gabbayit (a female gabbay) at South Hampstead synagogue.

"Unpacking Torah conundrums is part of our birthright as Jewish people, and it is our special way of reminding ourselves who we are in time and space."

I began to think back to the root-moments of my own Jewish journey. Do you know when you began to feel Jewish? I do. I know exactly when I began to feel Jewish. It wasn't at my bat mitzvah, and it wasn't at my wedding. It was one random morning, but it was a fierce and defining moment: the moment when I took ownership of my own metaphorical treasure box that had sat for years, really quite forlorn and neglected, in my head and my heart. It was the moment when my responsibility to Torah-learning literally bubbled to the surface of my consciousness. When I forged my own commitment with the links that lead all the way back to Sinai.

I remember the feeling of peering in, literally peering into the dark depths of my heritage and realising that I had a lot, a lot, of work to do. This is when I felt Jewish. And, still today, many years later, doing this work is when I feel most Jewish. When I'm learning. When I'm working at it. When I get to question something, to share an idea, to explain or to disagree, to learn something and revisit it, over and over again. This for me is Torah learning, and the multiple moments of rebirth that come with a little bit of struggle and tension. Don't get me wrong. I'm not some kind of Torah scholar. Learning for me is resonating with a podcast, a shiur or even my rabbi's Shabbat sermon.

RABBI YEHUDA DAVIS

I was brought up in a religious family and spent my days learning Torah. Saying that I hated it would be a lie, but I definitely did not love it. I was told repeatedly by my rabbis and teachers that Torah is the most enjoyable thing, and when practiced correctly, can be more pleasurable than any other pleasure in the world. This never resonated with me. I always assumed that they were exaggerating and had gone a bit over the top with their exaltations.

I finished school at the age of 17 after completing my G.C.S.E. and A Levels and left to go to yeshivah. In yeshivah I spent all day learning Torah, from nine in the morning until ten at night, with a few breaks in between. It was okay - I was working hard and learning interesting things, but it was still not something I loved. During holiday time I would hardly learn any Torah, as I felt like I was doing more than enough learning during term time.

One day during yeshivah, I decided I wanted to learn something different. I picked up a book called Kovetz Shiurim, written by Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman who was murdered during the holocaust in Lithuania, and was a student of the great Chofetz Chaim. In his book, Wasserman delves deeply into complicated topics by taking an idea or concept, ripping it apart by asking many different questions, and then piecing it back together resulting in extreme clarity. Whilst studying this book, I was in my own world, completely losing track of time and of where I was. I was totally focused on the questions and answers, with nothing else in the world making a difference to me.





Mussar teaches us to use our lives and personal experiences as a foundation for understanding the true teachings of the Torah

After finishing, I looked at the time, and realised that I had been studying overtime. I had not gone out for lunch with the other students, and I had a feeling of intense achievement and satisfaction. I was happy, at peace, and finally knew why the study of Torah could be more enjoyable than anything else in the world. The feeling stayed with me for a few days, and I still look back at it fondly. This does not happen to me every day, or even every week, but it happens from time to time, and now that I know it's possible, I realise that and if I were to devote more time to Torah learning, without distractions, this enjoyment could become a regular thing. That day, seven years ago, was the first time I loved learning Torah.

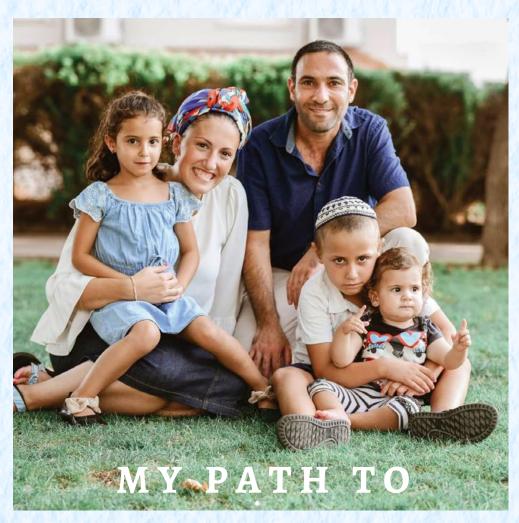
After getting married and moving to a Kollel (yeshivah for married people), I learnt something that changed my life. Up until then I had always associated Torah learning with studying Talmud or Mishnah only, but at the Kollel my whole perspective was changed.

This Kollel was based on the Mussar movement, which was started by Rabbi Yisroel Salanter in the 19th century. Mussar teaches us to use our lives and personal experiences as a foundation for understanding the true teachings of the Torah. It is all about character-building, about learning to become a better person and about understanding how we function as human beings. This method of learning can be applied to any part of the Torah's teachings.

After learning and understanding this, my perspective of Torah was completely transformed. I am learning Torah every second of my life, as everything that happens to me, if used correctly, can be considered Torah learning. This requires conscious reflection on the things that happen in my life and the application of the Torah lessons I have learnt to my life experiences. I love life, I love learning, and I love experiences, which means I love learning Torah.

I still enjoy learning Talmud and Mishnah and look forward to having the kind of experience I had in yeshivah. But I also love using everyday life to learn Torah and think it's important for people to recognise that as we grow older, we need to reconsider our understanding of things and realise that it is possible to look at things differently as we mature.

Loving Torah for me is now twofold: it's sitting down and studying, and it's also life's experiences. They are both enjoyable and lovable, and I cannot recommend enough for everyone to delve into them and try enjoying them too. Torah learning can indeed be the most enjoyable experience in the world. But remember that even when you are not sitting down and studying Talmud or Mishnah, it is still possible to learn Torah, simply from what we are doing each day.



Motherhood

by TALY GELLER

THE TORAH PROVIDES ALL THE GUIDANCE WE NEED TO BECOME CONNECTED, LOVING MOTHERS

hen I became a mother 8 years ago it was a huge shock. Being the youngest member of my family, I never really knew what a baby was. It would have been so helpful to know a little bit about parenting beforehand!

I didn't know the rights from the wrongs, or how to raise or educate a child. I was, to be honest, completely clueless. When my son was born, I was overwhelmed with questions and

doubts. Is it ok that he always wants to be in my arms? Is it normal that he cries this much? Should I make him share his toys if he doesn't want to? I was always uncertain about what my role as a mother was.

I was born in Spain to a traditional Jewish family. My parents got divorced when I was three, and my dream was always to build a loving, resilient and healthy home - but how?

I was privileged to become religious at the age of 24, and at 25 I got married. Before getting married I learnt about marriage and relations according to the Torah, which gave me meaning and an understanding of the true purpose of the union between a man and a woman. This gave me hope and direction. I remember thinking: "It really is possible to do this!"

There are so many parenting methods out there. Every method is a philosophy, and behind every philosophy stands a psychology.

"חכמה בגוים תאמין, תורה בגוים אל תאמין" איכה

This means that we should accept that the non-Jewish world has brilliant wisdom but that it does not have Torah. The difference between 'Chochma' (Wisdom) and Torah, is that 'Chochma' refers to scientific knowledge and Torah refers to Jewish values and self-improvement. One is therefore not encouraged to use secular methodology for purposes of self-development, as what we need is provided to us in the Torah.

I studied motherhood according to the Torah with Rebbetzin Dina Rapp for a period of two years, which gave me a clear path to motherhood, imbued with much Bracha and connection with my children. I now run courses on motherhood according to the Torah to help to guide others to become connected, compassionate, loving mothers.

After taking my course, one mother commented, "All the various methods on parenting have not instilled confidence (in my role as a mother) because I don't know what to follow. But this course isn't just a recent trend on parenting. This is truth. It's our Torah, and it touched me deeply and resonated with me! It gave me confidence and direction."

There are six principles of motherhood according to the Torah:

EMUNAH (FAITH) IN OUR HOME. Getting married and having children all starts with God, therefore, I know and understand that my family was sent for me in order to perfect myself and become the best version of who I can be; and to grow and become a bigger person. This also means that I am the best mother for my children, because God chose me for this role.

SELF-ESTEEM AND SECURITY IN LIFE. The essence of the Jewish child (and person) is good, and the bad is circumstantial. By giving our children love, attention and time, they will learn to love themselves and their lives and to have faith in God.

EDUCATING THE CHILD ACCORDING TO HIS

PERSONALITY. Shlomo Hamelech teaches us in his book of 'Mishlei' that if we educate our child according to who he is; by getting to know what he likes, what motivates him and what doesn't and teaching him values and behaviours through this connection and understanding, then those values will last for all his life. But if you force him against his will, then as soon as you no longer have power over him, he will leave those values behind, as he was complying out of fear and not out of his own will and connection.

"LISTEN, MY SON, TO THE MORALS OF YOUR FATHER, AND DO NOT ABANDON THE TORAH OF YOUR MOTHER."

Thus continues Shlomo Hamelech in his book of Mishlei. The "Torah of the mother" refers to the way the mother translates the father's values into life – through her actions and through who she is. The father teaches values with words and the mother shows her children how to live those values through her being. The Genius of Vilna explains this further: "The father is like the written Torah and the mother is like the oral Torah." The Mother explains in detail how to implement the values of the father just like the oral Torah explains in detail how to implement the laws of the Torah.

TORAH AND MIDOT. We want to educate a child that will study and be involved with Torah and will work on his personality. This makes a Jew complete. That is good in the eyes of God, and good and honest in the eyes of people.

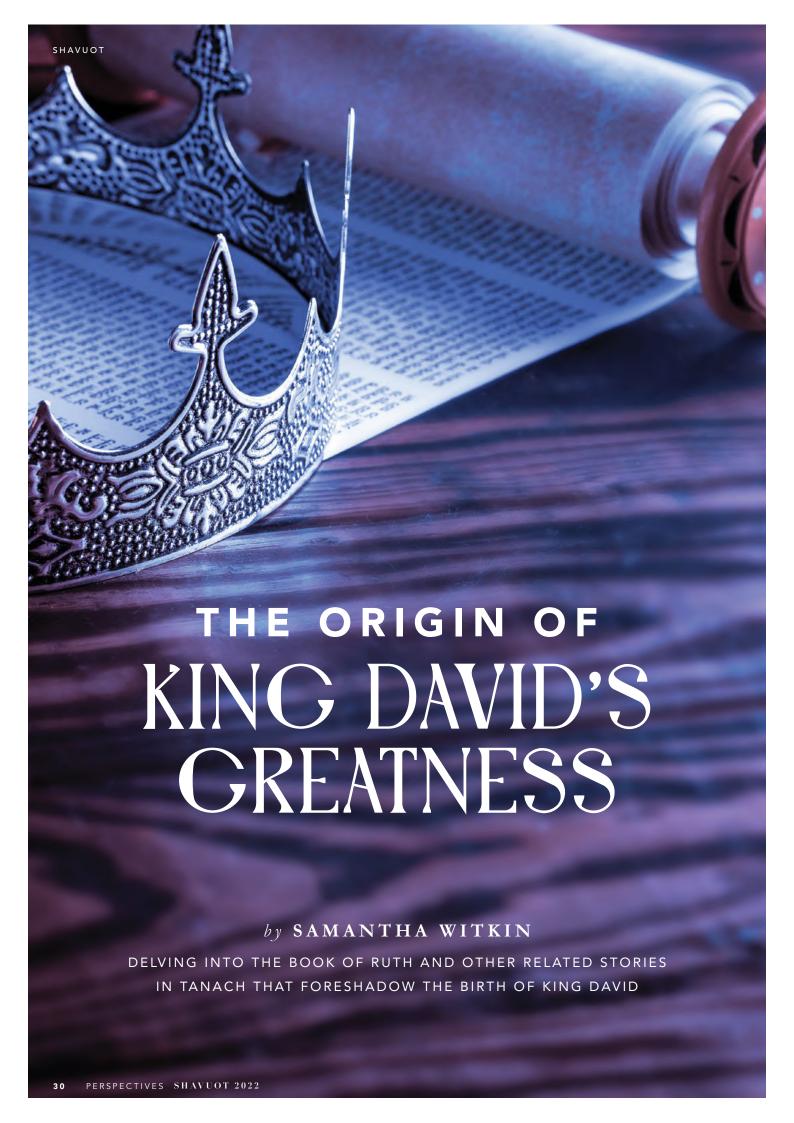
THE EXPERIENCE AND ATMOSPHERE OF THE HOUSE.

What does our child perceive in our home? What are the things we get angry about? What makes us happy? The environment of our home determines much of what the child will take with him as he grows. In order to grow in a healthy way, a child needs a warm and calming energy in his home.

These principles give us a framework within which we can walk the path to Motherhood.



Taly Geller Studied Communications at IDC Herzliya. She worked in PR for various bars and clubs in Tel Aviv. Over the past 10 years, Taly made a spiritual change followed by a career change. She studied Jewish coaching and today teaches about motherhood and relations according to the Torah to Jewish women all over the world. Taly loves to inspire growth through Jewish knowledge and has been coaching one-on-one on all topics relating to Couples, Motherhood, Emunah and Midot. In addition, Taly is the Director of Resource Development in the UK and in the US of Panim el Panim, an organisation that connects Israeli youth to their Jewish roots, from high school through their army service and university years. To learn more, visit Taly's Instagram page: mypathtomothrhood or email her at: gellertaly@gmail.com



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s a child, Shavuot was one of my favourite holidays. Apart from the excitement of dairy desserts, I delighted in hearing the fairy-tale ending of the story of Ruth and the unveiling of King David's roots. However, as I grew up and explored more challenging texts in Tanach, I became intrigued by the genealogy of King David. It struck me that the book of Ruth is so much more than a romantic tale about a heroic widow who converts to Judaism and is saved by the pious and kind judge Boaz. On closer examination, I discovered that the book of Ruth is in fact the last of a group of three interconnected stories in Tanach that foreshadow the birth of King David, Israel's seminal king and ultimate redeemer. One would expect that King David's lineage would be illustrious, but this is not the case. Why?

The significance of King David's genealogy is alluded to in the final chapter of the book of Ruth, where we are told that out of the marriage of Ruth the Moabite to Boaz, a descendant of Perez, Oved is conceived, who is King David's grandfather. A few verses earlier, it is revealed that Perez, Boaz's ancestor is one of the twin sons born to Tamar and Judah (Bereishit 38). So, who are Tamar and Judah?

During the long narrative in Bereishit about the sale of Joseph and his journey to Egypt, there is a brief interlude where we catch a glimpse into the private life of Judah, Jacob's fourth son (Gen 38). Judah marries a Canaanite woman and has three sons. His first son marries a woman called Tamar and dies. Then his second son marries Tamar, and he also dies. On both occasions she is left childless. According to the legalities at that time (known as yibbum or the levirate marriage), Judah is supposed to give Tamar his remaining son to marry so they can have a child to perpetuate the name of the deceased brothers. However, he deliberately withholds him from Tamar, rendering her a childless widow. Tamar then disguises herself as a harlot on the road that Judah is travelling, and from their union she conceives Perez, Boaz and King David's progenitor.

Ruth the Moabite's ancestry can also be traced to Bereishit (Gen 19). Following the destruction of Sdom, the daughters of Lot (Avraham's nephew), seemingly afraid that the world is coming to an end, inebriate their father in order to 'maintain life' through him. The child born to Lot's eldest daughter is Moab (literally 'from father'). Many years later, when the Israelites are journeying in the desert towards the Land of Israel, the Moabites refuse to give them assistance and even go so far as to hire the prophet Bilaam to curse the Israelites. Consequently, Moab is a nation that the Israelites are not permitted to intermarry.

One would expect that King David's lineage would be illustrious, but this is not the case.

In the book of Ruth, the nuances of these preceding texts in Bereishit about Tamar and Judah and Moab / Lot's daughters play out. The book of Ruth begins by introducing Elimelech, who together with his wife Naomi and two sons Machlon and Chilion, leave Bethlehem during a famine to settle in the land of Moab. After Elimelech's death, his sons marry Moabite women, one of whom is Ruth. The sons also die, and Ruth enthusiastically accompanies her mother-in-law Naomi on her return to the land of Judah. Ruth has been left childless and is also eager to support her impoverished mother-in-law, Naomi. She coincidentally finds work in the fields of a distant relative of her husband's family: the wealthy landowner and judge, Boaz. On Naomi's instruction, Ruth boldly dresses up and approaches Boaz in the middle of the night on the threshing floor where he is sleeping during the harvest season. When Boaz wakes, she asks him to spread his skirt over her and redeem her according to the laws of the levirate marriage (yibbum). Like Lot's daughters and Tamar before her, Ruth identifies the nearest relative to her deceased husband, who she believes will ensure the continuation of life through her.

The late Biblical academic Harold Fisch called these three interlinked texts the "Ruth Corpus" and focused on their structure, highlighting many similarities. Each story, he observed, began with a family split:

In the story of Lot's daughters, Lot separates from his uncle Avraham to settle in the land of Sdom.

In the story of Tamar, Judah leaves his brothers after their sale of Joseph and marries a Canaanite.

In the story of Ruth, Elimelech's family leave the people and land of Israel to go to settle in Moab.

Then a disaster follows:

In the story of Lot's daughters, there is the destruction of the city of Sdom.

In the story of Tamar, Tamar's first two husbands, Judah's elder two sons, die.

In the story of Ruth, there is the death of Elimelech and his two

In each story the only hope of preserving life is through the female protagonists identifying and brazenly approaching the nearest kinsman who can ensure that preservation. There are still more parallels in all three texts. However, what is striking to me is that the guardians of the genealogy of King David are women, one of whom is a Moabite, and that subversive measures are adopted by them in their objective to bring forth life.

The Midrash and traditional commentaries impose a sense of moral obligation on all these women to explain the motivation behind their actions. The Chatam Sofer (19th century Slovakia) suggests that Lot's daughters were aware of their historic mission to bring two exemplary souls into the world – one of which was Ruth (the other was Naamah who married King Solomon; King Rechobaam's mother). He deems that they had been spared from the destruction of Sdom for this very purpose.

So too, Tamar is depicted by the Midrash as a heroine who restores justice and transforms the moral character of Judah. The text speaks of Judah "descending" as a consequence of his separation from his brothers and his marriage to a Canaanite woman. Judah later "descends" further by withholding his third son from his widowed and childless daughter-in-law, Tamar. In fact, Yehuda publicly admits that "Tamar is more righteous" than he is, on discovering that he is the one responsible for Tamar's unexplained conception.

Ruth is customarily renowned for her virtue of Chesed (loving kindness) and for her uncompromising cleaving to Naomi and thus her rejection of her Moabite origins. Her actions and characteristics are understood to resemble those of Avraham, which is a high accolade. Like Avraham, she rejects her origins and family and acts with outstanding compassion towards her mother-in-law, Naomi. The text depicts Boaz as recognising

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Whilst their conduct, to a lesser or greater degree, may be questionable, they were emboldened by a higher purpose of continuing life.

Ruth's qualities instantaneously, readily taking her under his wing after noticing Ruth gleaning in his field on her return from Moab. Boaz declares (2:11), "I have been told of all that you did for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband, how you left your father and mother and the land of your birth and came to a people you had not known before."

The Midrash and Rabbinic commentaries focus on the sense of purpose that embodied the actions of Lot's daughters, Tamar and Ruth. Whilst their conduct, to a lesser or greater degree, may be questionable, they were emboldened by a higher purpose of continuing life. This resembles other women in the Torah who appear to be guided by a sense of mission and a vision of a bigger picture. For instance, Sarah, who banishes Hagar and Ishmael to safeguard Isaac's integrity; Rebecca who encourages Jacob to disguise himself to trick his father into giving him the blessing of the first born and Miriam who directs the salvation of her younger brother Moshe.

These women all appear to recognise that deliverance comes from God when humans act with faith but ingenuity. Ruth is the supreme exemplar, demonstrating the most extraordinary faith in leaving the comfort of her origins (the Midrash claims she was royalty); following Naomi in her return to a foreign land and heeding her advice to approach Boaz. Ruth readily risks her reputation in an unfamiliar society and is willing to marry an older stranger to perpetuate her deceased husband and his family's name.

In my attempt to reconcile the more questionable nature of the actions of these women who form King David's ancestry, I investigated more contemporary opinions. Tamar Frankiel, an American religious academic, makes a convincing argument that the benevolent actions of the protagonists Ruth and Boaz serve as a tikkun (correction) for the subversive actions of their predecessors, paving the path for King David and eventually the Mashiach. Frankiel refers to the Kabbalistic ideas of Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (C18th) to help her reconcile the dubious actions of King David's forebears. He writes:

"It is known to all who have been given understanding that the soul of David was clothed in the shell of Moab and that it was freed from Moab through Ruth." Scripture (Job) says: "Who could withdraw purity from impurity? These were the intentions of the inscrutable wisdom of the Creator in guiding his world... Every act of God travels through byways, often in complex, crooked ones..."



These redemptive actions are what are needed to pave the way for King David.

According to the mystics, God intends good to come from bad; that great souls need to be redeemed from the impure shells within which they are encased. This is the tikkun that will eventually bring perfection to the world and Mashiach. The actions of both Ruth and Boaz, steeped in Chesed and humility, according to this understanding, created a tikkun that drew the good that was trapped in the shells of the souls of the predecessors. They created the channels for good to emerge and for redemption to take place; initially in the form of their great grandchild King David, and eventually in the form of the ultimate redeemer, Mashiach.

It is interesting that variations of the word Goel (redeemer) appear 20 times in the book of Ruth. For instance, Boaz willingly redeems the land that belongs to Naomi and Elimelech's deceased family; Ruth is redeemed from her widowed and childless state by Boaz, and Naomi is said to be redeemed through the birth of her grandson (4:14). These redemptive actions are what are needed to pave the way for King David.

Whilst these traditional and contemporary responses do not adequately answer the puzzling question as to why King David's genealogy is tainted, they suggest a few important ideas to contemplate. Firstly, that spiritual connection or growth does not always come through obvious channels of virtue and righteousness. As King David wrote in the book of Psalms 118 – אָבן מְאָטוֹ הַבּוֹיִים הָּיִתְּה בְּיִאִים בְּיִתְּה בְּיִתְּיִם בְּיִתְּה בְּיתְּה בְּיִתְּה בְיִתְּה בְּיִתְּה בְּיִּתְּה בְּיִּתְּה בְּיִּתְּה בְּיִּתְּיִּתְּה בְּיִיּבְּיִּתְּיִיּבְּיִתְּה בְּיִּתְּהְיִּתְּיִּהְיִּתְּיִּתְּיִּתְיִּתְּיִּתְּיִּתְּיִּתְּיִּתְּיִּתְּיִּתְּיִּתְּיִּתְּיִיּבְּיִּתְּיִּיְתְּיִּתְּיִּתְּיִּתְּיִּתְּיִּתְּיִּתְּיִּתְּיִּבְּיִּתְיִּיְתְּיִּתְּיִּתְּיִּיְתְּיִּתְּיִּתְּיִּתְּיִּתְּיִּיְתְּיִּיְתְּיִּיְתְּיִּיּתְיִּיְתְּיִּיּתְּיִיּתְּיִּיּתְּיִּיְתְּיִּיְתְּיִּיְתְּיִּיְתְּיִיּבְּיִּתְּיִּיְתְּיִבּיְתְּיִיּתְיִּיְיִיּיִּיְתְיִּיְּיִּתְיִּיְּתְּיִיּיִּיְתְיִיּיִּיְּתְיִּיּתְיִיּיִּיִּתְיִּיּתְיִיּיִּיְיִּתְיִּיּתְיִּיּתְיִּיּתְיִּיּתְיִּיּיִּתְיִ

Perhaps we are supposed to be left with a question, or at least the knowledge, that not only do we not have all the answers, but we are not privy to see the bigger picture; that whilst the law is there to guide us, it is not there to prescribe to us, and that human creativity and sensitivity is an essential element in bringing God into this world.



Born in London, Samantha Witkin began her career as an employment lawyer and later completed a masters in Jewish studies. After she got married, she moved to New York where she completed a teacher training course at the Jewish Theological Seminary and spent a year studying at the former Drisha Institute for women. Samantha has a keen interest in women and Tanach and she enjoys writing and teaching adults and bat mitzvah girls. She also has a passion for health and alternative medicine and is studying to become a health coach. Samantha is married with four children and lives in London with her family.



by ZAK JEFFAY

THE LEGEND OF SAUL KATZENELLENBOGEN, AND HOW HE CAME TO WEAR THE CROWN OF POLAND (FOR A DAY!)

hey say that you can't tell the story of the Jews without Poland, and you can't tell the story of Poland without the Jews. Far too often we imagine that story to be one of water drawers and cheder teachers, tailors and innkeepers but surely our story never reached the royal palaces!

The tale of a Jew called Saul stumbling headfirst into Poland's throne in the sixteenth century all begins with a nobleman, Mikolaj Radziwill, en route to visit the Pope as part of his religious awakening. His mission was to correct his wayward lifestyle, and this needed some religious guidance. The Pope called on him to cast off the clothes of nobility and to experience life as a beggar in a bid to put his past misdeeds behind him.

Not renowned for his long-term thinking, by the end of his period of wandering he found himself lost and penniless in the city of Padua with no way of regaining his noble status. While on the search for a charitable soul who may believe his unbelievable predicament, he met the Rabbi of the city, Rabbi Samuel Yehuda Katznellenbogen. The Rabbi not only believed his tale of riches to rags but, guided by the Jewish concept of charity that one should help a destitute person regain their previous stature, he assisted Mikolaj to rebuild himself.

When Mikolaj was finally ready to return to his homeland, he offered to repay the Rabbi's charity when he returned to Poland. Rabbi Katznellenbogen declined the offer but said that he should send some funds to his son Saul who was a student in the town of Brisk, which was then in Poland. Mikolaj returned home and made it his mission to search out the young Saul Katznellenbogen and to honour him as repayment for the kindness he had received from his father.

He found in Saul a wise young man driven by good morals and values and brought him into his noble circles. Saul began to work in trade and business, eventually running the salt mines outside of Krakow owned by the Polish kings.

In 1587, King Stephen Bathory died with no legitimate heir, and his death was followed by a bitter battle between factions contesting who should be king and clashes over the established system of electing the new king. As the uncertainty over the future of the throne grew and the nobles who were sequestered to look for a solution gave no sign of consensus, it was decided that someone should fill the throne temporarily. However, no side would allow even a temporary candidate from the other side to sit on the throne. It was at this point that the now respectable nobleman, Mikolaj Radziwill stepped forward and proposed a trustworthy candidate who was affiliated to neither side and who would never intend to occupy the throne more than temporarily. Mikolaj suggested Saul Katznellenbogen, and deep within the ridiculousness of the idea lay the kernel of its success.

The nobles agreed and the Jewish King of Poland was crowned. He took the opportunity to improve the lot of the Jews but the motivation of an outsider king caused the nobles to finally reach an agreement, and by the end of the day King Sigismund III Vasa was chosen and the crown swiftly passed from the head of King Saul to the head of King Sigismund. Saul became known as Saul Wahl (chosen in German and much easier to pronounce than Katznellenbogen) - the Jewish king for the day.

The story raises many questions, most obviously, 'is it really true?'. While the characters of the story existed and are researchable, unfortunately there isn't much in the way of documentary evidence of the day of kingship. However, the power of a story is sometimes to be found not in the story but in what stands behind the story. What can account for the popularity of a story of a Jewish king of Poland which was told predominantly in Polish circles?

The national myths and legends that we tell usually come to answer a question or to fill a void. For close to a millennium, Jews lived in Poland and in particular during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the Jewish community grew and flourished. While elsewhere European noblemen were expelling their Jews, Poland opened its doors and there was unparalleled success. How could one explain the secret of this national anomaly? Surely there was no logical explanation. It must have been the twenty-four hours during which a Jew wore the crown of Poland's kings.



10 Signs You May be Ready to Step into a LEADERSHIP ROLE

REBBETZIN ILANA EPSTEIN DRAWS ON THE BOOK OF RUTH TO HIGHLIGHT VALUABLE LESSONS ABOUT LEADERSHIP

he closing word of the Book of Ruth is a name – David. Many commentators (if not all) who venture into the analysis of the Book of Ruth, will tell you that one of the reasons the Book of Ruth is important is that it sets out King David's bloodline. The Davidic line has incredibly kind and giving roots in its origin story, informing us that the identity of Jewish kingship is not sown in the field of battle, but rather forged in acts of loving kindness.

I want to take this lesson a step forward and make it even more contemporary; suggesting that it is not just kingship that stems from loving kindness, but leadership itself.

In the book 'Unleashed', by Frances Frei and Anne Morriss, it is emphasised that to be a great leader you must have the capacity to empower everyone around you. Leadership, the authors say, is not about you, it is about those who you lead.

Let's look at the signs that you may be ready to step into a leadership role and compare them to Ruth's leadership. Do not worry if these ten signs don't all match you at present. They are not just educational, but hopefully aspirational as well.

YOU ARE CURIOUS ABOUT WHAT OTHERS ARE THINKING, FEELING AND DOING.

Ruth is so curious and loving of Naomi that although she is urged repeatedly not to return to Bethlehem with the grieving Naomi, she is determined to do so - not just because of her curiosity but also by the need to be integrated into Naomi's life.

2. YOU ASK LOADS OF QUESTIONS OF THOSE AROUND YOU, ABOUT THEM.

Ruth's first act of kindness is following her mother-in-law back to her home. The second is that she asks how she can go about finding sustenance for them both. Can she go out and glean in the fields? She is not only a stranger in a strange land, but she is a descendent of an enemy of Israel. From the narrative, it is evident that people knew who she was and where she had come from. And yet she fulfilled her duty and searched out answers to the challenges she and Naomi were facing.

3. YOU HAVE A GENUINE INTEREST IN THE IDEAS OF OTHERS, INCLUDING THOSE THAT HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU.

Naomi is the one who wants to return to Bethlehem, and while Naomi will be comforted amongst her people, Ruth will not. Ruth's 'stranger status' should have been enough to convince her that her life would be difficult, and yet all she is concerned about is Naomi; it is Naomi's interests and needs that are her immediate concern.

4. YOU HAVE EVICTED YOUR LOUD INNER CRITIC, WHO IS A MAJOR DISTRACTION FROM THE PRACTICE OF LEADERSHIP.

As the Children of Israel wandered the desert after the Exodus, they looked for a safe place to cross the Jordan. The Moabites took advantage of the bedraggled nation - they did not offer

them bread and water and they attacked them when they were down. From that point forward, the Moabites become our enemy. And yet Ruth - who was not just a stranger, but a hated stranger, and one with no resources and no status to speak of (she is an orphan and is widowed) - puts her inner and much-deserved self-consciousness aside and focuses on the challenge at hand: how to look after her small family unit.

POTENTIAL OF PEOPLE AROUND YOU ARE YOUR GREATEST ASSETS.

Ruth is aware that Naomi and Boaz are her greatest allies and that, without them, her life and our narrative does not progress.

6. IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING MORE CRISES THAN YOUR PEERS, NOW IS NOT THE BEST TIME TO STEP INTO A LEADERSHIP ROLE.

In a political light, one would say that Ruth's suffering is equal to Naomi's: both have been widowed, both are childless, both have been embittered by the complicated narrative called life. And yet though Naomi complains loudly and asks to be called 'Mara' – bitter – we hear no word of complaint from Ruth. In Ruth's mind, the only person in crisis here is Naomi.

7. YOU HAVE FAITH THAT TOMORROW CAN BE A BETTER DAY THAN TODAY. YOU KNOW THAT DESPAIR IS THE OPPOSITE OF LEADERSHIP.

While Naomi despairs of the future and feels she has nothing left to give, Ruth, on the other hand, wakes up every morning and does what needs to be done. In what can only be described as back-breaking work, she gleans during both the barley and wheat harvest, never despairing, always grateful and thankful.

8. YOU FEEL THE WORLD IS FILLED WITH WONDER AND UNLIMITED POSSIBILITIES.

Only someone who has faith in the wonder inherent in our world, follows her mother-in-law into an unknown land, gleans the remains of a harvest and believes that there is the possibility of a future filled with love and kindness rather than pain and loss.

"Ruth tells us that to lead you must empower others to greatness. You must build trust with those around you."

YOU KNOW YOUR OWN POWER AND THUS CAN HELP OTHERS FIND THEIRS.

Ruth knows who she is and where she comes from. It is her belief in herself that has her follow Naomi's instructions and approach Boaz, and her belief in her own self-worth that has her proposing to Boaz and asking that he not only redeem the family's prosperity but marry her as well.

10. YOU LIFT PEOPLE UP, AND ARE BRILLIANT AT SHARING THE LIMELIGHT

In Ruth's final act of leadership that is not about herself, the baby that she conceives that is born from her union with Boaz, she shares with Naomi, and it is Naomi who acts as foster mother to the baby Obed. In every act that Ruth fulfils, she lifts people up, always happy to share the limelight. She shares it so well that the Book of Ruth could have easily been called the Book of Naomi.

True leadership is needed now more than ever. What does it take to be a leader? Ruth tells us that to lead you must empower others to greatness. You must build trust with those around you. Ruth's entire existence is about building trust, and her method of trust-building is through acts of loving kindness. Her example is so powerful that those around her start following her lead.

In a world where the powerful rule and the meek serve, Ruth shows us a different way of leadership. Strength comes from belief in the potential of others; in empowering everyone. This Shavuot, review the list above and ask yourself: "How many of these aspects do I embody, and what can I do to ensure that I am leading, as Ruth did, by empowering others?"





by MIRA LAUBER

AN EXPERIENCED SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPIST PROVIDES SOME VALUABLE INSIGHTS INTO THE CURRENT PROVISIONS FOR NEURODIVERSE CHILDREN AND THOSE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN THE MAINSTREAM SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT IN THE UK

WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY?

The term neurodiversity has entered mainstream culture in recent years. Google it, and many definitions pop up. The unifying concept is that despite being born with the same brain and nervous system as other humans, not everyone is the same. There is variation in the ways we think, learn and behave there is diversity.

Judy Singer, a Sociologist with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), first wrote about this in the 1990's*. Her view is that neurodiversity is a political, not a scientific term. Singer hoped that the Neurodiversity Movement would become a self-advocacy movement representing the interests of neurological minorities who, until this point had been viewed by society as individuals with deficits.

Fast forward to 2022 and there has been some success. Individuals with diagnoses like ADHD (Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder) can share this information with less fear of judgement. Potential employers are aware of the advantages of having an individual with ADHD on their team (hyper-focus, creativity, resilience, spontaneity).

In the field of child development in the UK, the medical model remains dominant. This model sees children undergoing assessments that look at the presence / absence of specific difficulties and/or behaviours. Diagnoses that follow include ASD and ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyscalculia and Dyspraxia.

There is often some overlap between disorders with features of one co-occurring in another. Difficulties range from mild to moderate through to severe, meaning that one child's presentation will be different to any others. Many children will never reach a threshold for a specific diagnosis but will

present with features of one or more of these conditions and require support. Happily, this is something that has been formally recognised in the government's recently updated SEN (Special Educational Needs) legislation (Green Paper on SEN, March 2022).

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS PROVISION IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

The SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) Code of Practice is the statutory guidance issued by the Department for Education. The law protects the rights of children and young people with SEND in education and ensures that they have access to learning in an appropriate and inclusive environment.

Most children in the UK with mild to moderate SEND attend mainstream schools. The onus is on the school to support them in a manner consistent with the ethos set out in the Code of Practice.

If your child has been identified as having SEN, the school's SENCo (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) will be your point person. The role of the SENCo is challenging and requires a great deal of knowledge and expertise, empathy and organisation skills. The impact of SENCo input is magnified significantly in schools where the Senior Leadership Team view good SEN management as integral to the success of the school and support the SENCo accordingly.

Several of the major changes outlined in the Government's recent White Paper for Schools and Green Paper for SEN (both March 2022) acknowledge the weighty demands that have been placed on schools in recent years in relation to managing children with SEN. Also highlighted is the connection between special educational needs, emotional and mental health needs. This recognition will ensure greater links between health and education sectors are developed in the coming years leading to better all-round care for children and young people with SEN.

Presently, maintained schools can purchase packages of care from local services via their Learning Trusts (Local Authorities). Typically, these include access to services including Educational Psychology (EP), Occupational Therapy (OT), Speech and Language Therapy (SLT), Physiotherapy and sometimes Specialist Teachers. CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) continues to be a specialist service supporting those with severe and some moderate mental health needs. Mild to moderate social and emotional mental health needs will be supported by local Mental Health Support Teams which are currently being set up across the UK in response to the Governments 2018 Green Paper on mental health services for children. Every school will also have a designated Mental Health Lead who will provide strategic oversight of the whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing and liaise with the school's Mental Health Support Team.

Within the framework of the Code of Practice, not every child with SEN requires specialist level support. Many difficulties can be managed at a school level, provided teachers, LSAs (Learning Support Assistants) and TAs (Teaching Assistants) are trained and supported appropriately and provided with the right resources. This is an important part of a SENCo's role.

Evidence-based interventions created to provide support at a whole school/ whole class level are available as are grouplevel resources. The role of computer programmes and apps in supporting neurodiverse children is developing. These employ a multi-media approach that is well suited to SEN learning styles. Additionally, they require little adult supervision time, making them a cost-effective option.

NEURODIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM

So, how does a neurodiverse child typically present in a mainstream classroom? As explained, no two neurodiverse individuals will be identical in their presentation. Here are some examples of profiles of difficulty that professionals working in SEN encounter. Beneath them are examples of typical management plans.

"The role of computer programmes and apps in supporting neurodiverse children is developing."

PROFILE 1

SA is a ten year old who struggles with maintaining friendships. He is described as quite "black and white" in his thinking and staff say he "has no filter". SA does not like unplanned changes in his school day. He finds it hard to stay calm when things do not go his way and sometimes has outbursts. SA's processing skills are slow and he needs extra time to respond to questions. He is behind his peers academically and the gap is widening. SA finds it hard to cope with activities that have several steps. He often loses his pencil case and homework, as well as his school coat and bag.

School Level Support:

- Social skills group twice weekly run by trained LSA.
- Classroom-level support to include: differentiation of curriculum, verbal instructions to be supported with written / pictorial information, use of classroom-level visual timetable, individual task planners, checklists and memory support strategies.

Specialist Level Support:

- Referral to SLT for an assessment of social communication skills and to support the development of verbal reasoning skills and emotional regulation.
- Referral to Educational Psychologist to be considered if SA continues to struggle with his learning despite support.



KJ is a six-year-old who has struggled learning to read. Her spelling is described as poor and so is her attention span. She often moves around in her chair and constantly fiddles with whatever she can find, which disrupts her peers' learning. KJ is good at numeracy but her handwriting skills are developing more slowly than her peers. She is a well-liked member of the class and is usually busy with friends at break time.

School Level Support:

- Phonics group run by a teacher twice a week.
- Handwriting support three times a week using a published OT programme, run by a trained LSA.
- Classroom-level reinforcement of targets for literacy and writing by teacher and TA.

Specialist Level Support:

- OT assessment to see if a sensory diet is required (to support the need to move and poor attention skills).
- If limited progress is made in reading and spelling following phonics support, referral to a specialist teacher for a specific learning disability assessment (dyslexia).

As Judy Singer rightly points out, neurodiversity, resulting in abilities or disabilities, should be respected and facilitated. Many mainstream schools strive to do this but remain a challenging environment for neurodiverse children to navigate.

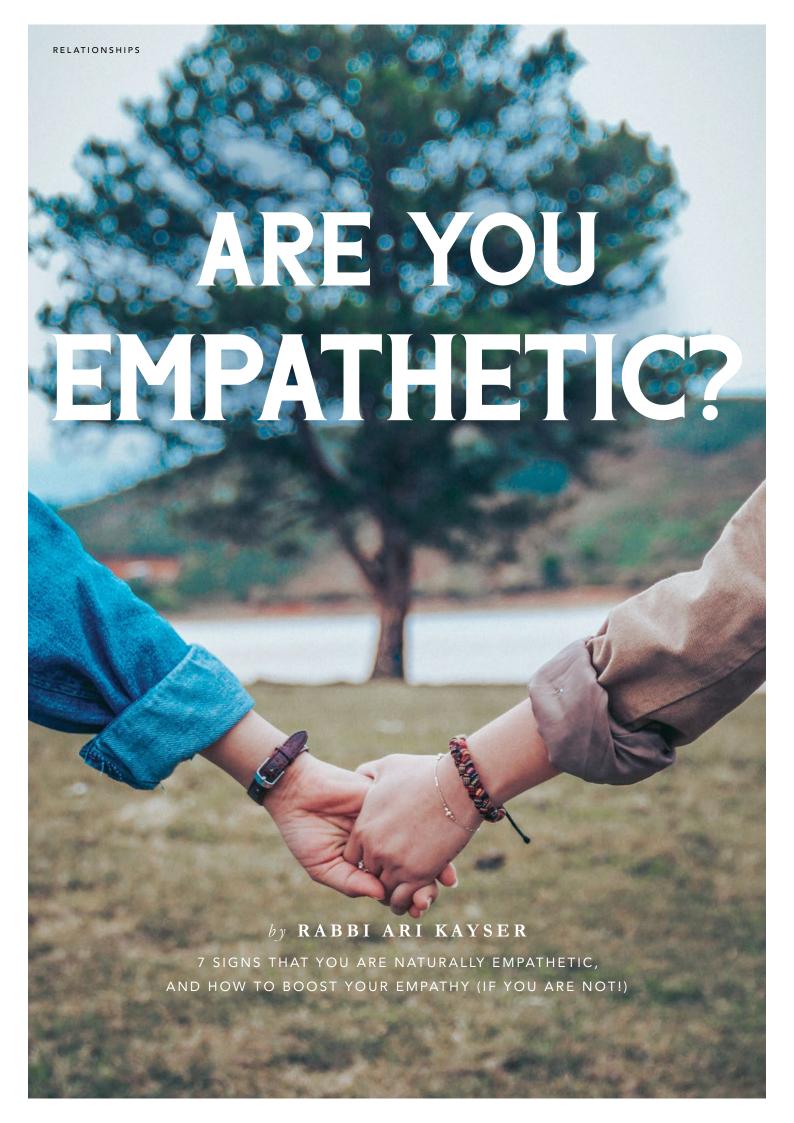
The recommendations made in the White Paper for Education and the Green Paper for SEN (both March 2022) are certainly a step in the right direction towards increasing support, resources and provision for those who can benefit from it. Let's hope it's enough.

Reference:

*https://neurodiversity2.blogspot.com/p/what.html



Mira Lauber is an experienced Speech and Language Therapist who leads the Children's Speech and Language Therapy Clinics team for the Homerton University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. As part of this role, she also works in orthodox Jewish Schools in Hackney. Mira has recently started an independent speech and language therapy practice based in Hendon. She specialises in the management of children and young people with neurodiverse profiles in mainstream schools. Mira is the SEND Director at the Independent Jewish Day School in North West London.



id anyone ever tell you that you 'get them'? Has a stranger ever approached you to share their life story with you within minutes of meeting them? Have you been told you are a good listener?

If the answer to the questions above are 'yes', it is likely that you are an empathetic person by nature. The Oxford dictionary defines empathy as "The ability to understand and share the feelings of another".

If these traits do not resonate with you, don't worry, empathy can be learned too. To connect with someone else, you have to connect with a part of yourself which knows what the other is feeling. It is also a fundamental principle in Jewish thought, as we shall see.

Here are seven signs that you are an empathic person:1

- 1. You feel other people's feelings (and often take them as your own)
- 2. You know how to listen (you don't interrupt people and allow them to talk)
- 3. You repel negativity (you are sensitive to the feelings of others, so negativity rubs you the wrong way)
- 4. You are the one people come to (they trust you, even if they don't know you. Why? Because you feel their feelings, they see themselves within you, and it is not a stretch for them to reveal their true selves to you)
- 5. You put others first (an empathic person is a giver, not a taker. You give of your time, a listening ear, and your emotional availability. People who put themselves first are takers, who essentially overlook those around them)
- You need your space (as you tend to shoulder the feelings and problems of others, the burden often weighs down too hard, and you need the escape to restore a sense of balance)
- 7. You are intuitive (you just know stuff. It's like a sixth sense. You understand people, from all that happens between the lines).

One of the underlying themes of empathy is that you make space for others. Not interrupting, or putting yourself forward into the conversation, or offering a solution; simply listening - allowing this time to be about them and creating a space for someone you care about to share.

At the very core of Jewish values is understanding the plight of the other. Why is caring for another, and putting yourself in their shoes axiomatic to the Torah worldview? Rabbi Akiva taught us2 that the verse3 "Love your fellow as yourself" is a "fundamental principle of the Torah". How are we supposed to know what bothers the other person? The clue is in the verse; love him like *yourself*. Learn from yourself. That which you know in your heart. Hillel the Elder was asked to explain the entirety of the Torah while standing on one foot, and he famously said4 "That which is hateful to you, do not do to others. That is the whole Torah, the rest is explanation". The whole Torah? Those are bold words. At the epicentre of Jewish values, the principle which everything else is explaining, is a description of how to relate to others. The psychological inference behind this statement is that one should be acting toward another with empathy.

THE WHOLE TORAH ON ONE FOOT

Let's backtrack a moment to understand the origins of *why* we should be thinking so carefully of others. Rewind to the very beginning. God created mankind "in His image". Every man. Every woman. Every single one. Every person, whether you like them or not, is important. They have value. They have purpose. They are an essential part of the plan. That is echoed in the Talmud's description that each person is likened to a world unto himself. If you save a life, it is like saving the world. How severe it is to think that if you destroy a life, it is like you have destroyed the world.

Think for a moment what it might take to destroy someone's life? We get so upset over seemingly small things! If we only knew how our words or actions so profoundly affect people, we may choose to be more deliberate with them. Sadly, people have even taken their own lives over a horrible comment or being publicly shamed.

These are seven key qualities of behaviour that the author has chosen to identify as empathetic. There are, of course, many more characteristics of empathy.

² Sifra 2:12

³ Leviticus 19:18

⁴ Shabbat 31a 5 Genesis 1:27

⁶ Sanhedrin 37a

So, what does it take to destroy a person's life? The Torah includes the way we treat others, and now we can understand why. There are so many examples of this, such as "Embarrassing someone in public is akin to murder", or "Better to throw oneself into a furnace rather than embarrass another". That is the extent to which we must be mindful of other people's feelings. That is the extent to which we must think to ourselves: are the words I am about to say, or actions I am about to do, going to hurt this "world of a human being" in front of me?

Empathy is a key principle in many religions and systems, but why must we, as Jews, embody and teach these principles?

Jewish nationhood had humble beginnings: "Slaves in a land not their own". The Jewish people were borne out of persecution. That is the very reason why we must be the forebears of this teaching. "You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, since you were strangers in the land of Egypt." You know the feelings of the stranger. Of the outcast. Of the unloved. And you know how much it hurts. Coded into the very DNA of the Jew, is to be sensitive to the wellbeing of others. And the definition of "other" includes any group, any society, and any creed. Every single person was created in God's image. No exceptions. This idea extends even beyond humankind, and the mystics would not even cut a blade of grass, as "the whole world is filled with His glory". We are urged to become sensitised to all aspects of creation.

The path of empathy is about expanding your identification of self to others. It's about seeing the interconnectedness of the world around you. The human mind must grapple with the knowledge that all people are uniquely different and, at the same time, have the understanding that we are all one.

So why is this the *whole* Torah? The Torah seems on the surface to be a set of commands and rituals. Do this. Don't do that. However, there is something much deeper taking place between the lines. The Zohar (2, 82b) calls the commandments "613 directives" for how to effectively live a fulfilled, meaningful life, with an experience of connection to God. Think of a close relationship you have.

"Coded into the very DNA of the Jew, is to be sensitive to the wellbeing of others."

There are many boxes you may need to tick in order to be on good terms, such as taking out the rubbish or making dinner or arranging a family vacation. But those are all done in order to facilitate the *relationship* that is taking place between those various actions. If you do all you are meant to do, but don't give time and attention to the one you love, your action will be in vain. If you washed the dishes and cleaned the floors but didn't ask your partner how they are feeling or how their day was, you may have just missed the point.

Our mission in life is to build a relationship with God. The Torah and the commandments are there to facilitate the building of that relationship. And if the purpose is to build a relationship, then we can begin to understand why the empathetic disposition is so fundamental that Hillel can refer to it as the whole Torah. "That which is hateful to you, do not do to others" encourages a person to think beyond themselves. It encourages us to see beyond our body, feelings, thoughts, needs, and desires, and to step into the shoes of another. It encourages us to see others as an extension of ourselves. That allows us to engage in a meaningful bi-directional relationship.

A great example of this is the study of Talmud, which encourages a person to step out of their own paradigm. One has to understand both sides of the argument as being entirely true, encouraging the learner to step into the shoes of another and see the world through their perspective. Even the Torah legal system, or *Halacha*, emphasises a person's obligations, as opposed to his rights.

The ability to step outside of our immediate self, and expand our own identification to others, is a prerequisite for attaining any meaningful relationship. How much more so, our relationship to God. That is why caring for others and being aware of their feelings is at the centre of Jewish values.

⁷ Bava Metzia 58b

⁸ Bava Metzia 59a

⁹ Man is categorized as an *olam katan*, a world in microcosm (Tanchuma, Pekudei 3).

¹⁰ Exodus 23:9





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FIVE PRACTICAL WAYS TO BOOST YOUR EMPATHY

To achieve this, we must first understand how our brains work. Science once believed that the brain's wiring was fixed, and that the neural pathways forged in childhood were unchangeable. Discoveries in the last decade have shown that our brain's neural circuitry is malleable and can be rewired with a little training. That means our tendency for empathy is not fixed. Through the practice of putting ourselves in someone else's shoes, we can reinforce the neural networks that allow us to "Love your fellow as yourself" and to embody "That which is hateful to you, do not do to others". In other words, we can retrain the brain to learn new habits, and shed old ones.

5 PRACTICAL WAYS TO BOOST YOUR EMPATHY¹¹

1. AN EMPATHY MEDITATION12

- Think of someone you care about. Once you have a picture of them in your mind's eye, tell yourself: "This person has had moments of happiness, just like me. They have had difficult moments, just like me. They seek love and attention, just like me. They have had to deal with many difficult things in life, just like me. They seek love and fulfilment in their relationships, just like me."
- Now repeat this same process with someone you don't know very well, an acquaintance, or someone you met at the store, or in a different circle of friends.
- Now repeat this with someone you have had a conflict with.
- These tools are in no way definitive, and were gathered from a number of Torah sources including Mishna Avot 5:7; Maimonides Hilchot De'ot 6:3; as well as secular sources such as Ellen Hendriksen PhD, Savvy Psychologist; and Christopher Bergland, The Athlete's Way www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-athletes-way/201310/the-neuroscience-empathy
- 12 Heard from Clinton Libbey, Certified instructor of Search Inside Yourself, Google's mindfulness based emotional intelligence leadership program

2. LOVE YOURSELF

- The command to love another as oneself is a seemingly difficult task but is also the assertion of Maimonides.
 Even those who disagree, ¹³ assert that one is to show love to others by wanting good things to happen to them.
- In order to "Love your neighbour as yourself", you
 must first love yourself. Learning to love oneself is not
 as easy as it may sound and is therefore listed here as a
 prerequisite to loving others.

3. ACTIVE LISTENING

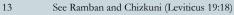
- Empathy requires that we cultivate the trait of active listening. Most people are thinking about how they are going to respond while the other person is still speaking. Active listening means being totally focused on what the other person is saying.
- Do not interrupt even if you really want to!¹⁴
- Be a mirror. Paraphrase what they say, or their concerns, to show them you understand what they are saying or feeling.

4. VALIDATE

- In order to empathise with someone, you must make them feel validated.
- Use phrases that are compassionate, non-judgemental, and show that you understand their perspective.

5. VOLUNTEER

 Getting involved in a cause can help a person to understand the plight of someone else. It reinforces the empathetic wiring of the brain while making a contribution to reduce the suffering of someone less fortunate.



¹⁴ Mishna Avot 5:7







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MALCHUT AND THE ESSENCE OF jewish futures

by RABBI NAFTALI SCHIFF

WHAT IS 'MALCHUT' AND HOW DO THE ORGANISATIONS OF JEWISH FUTURES EMBODY THIS CONCEPT?

very Yom Tov comes with its unique associations and Shavuot is no different. Whether it's through the beautiful flowers that add colour and panache to our homes and shuls, or the delicious milky treats, or even taking time to study Torah, Shavuot is a time to enjoy and appreciate the joy and beauty of being Jewish. Being that it is a time to celebrate the gift of Torah wisdom and education, it is also an opportunity to share some explanations about how we do that at Jewish Futures.

On Shavuot we recall and relive the giving of the Torah, the day when we accepted Hashem as our Sovereign in a dramatic, memorable and never-to-be-repeated event. The Jewish People stood together as one united people and pledged their allegiance to the timeless wisdom, meaning and relevance of the Torah. Our celebration of Shavuot this year is enhanced by

the concurrent celebration of Her Majesty's platinum jubilee, marking seventy years since her coronation, giving us an important opportunity to express our appreciation.

The idea of *malchut*, sovereignty, is a key concept in Judaism, and having a sovereign offers a glimpse into what this concept means. *Malchut* is an all-encompassing idea, with the sovereign being the embodiment of the cultural identity of the entire nation. A successful sovereign stands above petty politics and serves as a stabilising and unifying force in a way that no one else can. Perhaps this is why King David, the most famous of all Jewish kings (whose birth and death we commemorate on Shavuot), is referred to as *yefeh einayim* - one with beautiful eyes. The Zohar explains that this means that his eyes had different colours, reflecting the different strands within the nation.

This would also explain why our capital city, since the time of King David, has been Yerushalayim, a city described as being *kelilat yofi*, a city with all-encompassing beauty; a city with seventy names representative of multiple paths of connection around one focal point. The very word Yerushalayim is a composite of *yireh* and *shalem* - to see completely. The spiritual clarity that is unique to the Holy City is the ability to see the full picture. Yerushalayim was not divided up amongst the various Tribes of Israel. Rather, as the Talmud explains, it is a city *she chubrah la yachdan*, joined together, engendering connection between all Jews turning them into friends.

Perhaps most importantly and remarkably, the Zohar explains that *malchut* is nothing in and of itself. It is a characteristic that doesn't do anything, but rather enables everything else to happen. In kabbalistic terms and in Chassidic thought it represents the internal, inner mode. It is the axis or focal point at the centre of the six directions. Thus, Shabbat is referred to as a *malkah*, queen. Whereas the masculine quality is characterised by a flurry of activity, *malchut* and the feminine represent the state of being.

For this reason, King David, the personification of human royalty, describes himself as "poor and needy". Even though King David hailed from a wealthy and distinguished family, nevertheless, he considered himself poor. Just as a pauper has nothing of his own, but relies on the generosity of others, so too, King David realised that his whole grandeur was really an undeserved gift from his Creator and that he was 'merely' His representative.

Jewish Futures is informed and powered by ideas such as these to create meaningful connections for all Jews regardless of their background. We are acutely aware that there is no 'one size fits all' solution to the issue of Jewish continuity and celebrate the fact that there are multiple paths of connection.

The Jewish people, *Klal Yisrael*, is made up of different cultures, styles and outlooks, and our range of organisations are specifically designed to appeal to them all.

"We are acutely aware that there is no 'one size fits all' solution to the issue of Jewish continuity and celebrate the fact that there are multiple paths of connection."

Our core messages, however, remain constant and consistent and they form the bedrock of the education of all Jewish Futures organisations and their activities:

- An inclusive, non-judgemental approach based upon respect for the personal journey of every Jew.
- The imperative to love every Jew and to see ourselves as being part of one family.
- Appreciation of the centrality of Torah in Jewish life.
- Connection and involvement with Israel as an integral part of being Jewish today.
- Aspiration that living a vibrant Jewish life will be an important element of one's personal life journey.
- Commitment to playing one's role as a member of the Jewish community, shouldering responsibility for ensuring bright Jewish Futures.

In essence, Jewish Futures sees itself as a facilitator to ensure that these core messages are understood and appreciated by a critical mass of young Jews regardless of their background. In doing so we draw on over thirty years of experience in the field to ensure that they will all have vibrant Jewish futures. It is this concept of *Malchut* that both informs and inspires us as an organisation to be as broad and inclusive as possible to enable everyone to find their own unique place in the Jewish People.



GOVERNMENT and the MONARCHY

RABBI JONNY ROODYN DELVES INTO THE JEWISH PERSPECTIVE ON THE IDEAL FORM OF GOVERNMENT AND THE ROLE OF THE MONARCHY

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s a Rabbi with a degree in Government, the question of whether monarchy, democracy or theocracy is the Torah's ideal form of government is one that I find fascinating and intriguing. This becomes all the more relevant as we mark the Queen's jubilee, something that will be a source of celebration for some and consternation for others.

It goes without saying that since we live in a liberal democracy, our monarchy is limited in scope and power and bears almost no relation to the unlimited powers of many ancient kings. However, an anniversary is a point of inflection and reflection and therefore it is worth taking the time to explore the Torah's perspective on this topical issue.

A close reading of the pertinent verses in the Torah seems to leave things wide open.

When you come to the land Hashem, your G-d, is giving you, and you possess it and live therein, and you say, "I will set a king over myself, like all the nations around me," you shall set a king over you, one whom Hashem, your G-d, chooses; from among your brothers, you shall surely set a king over yourself; you shall not appoint a foreigner over yourself, one who is not your brother." (Devarim 17:14-15)

On the one hand, the commandment to appoint a monarch only seems to come as a response to the nation's request, implying that had they not requested a monarch, someone else would have ruled. On the other hand, the commandment to "surely set a king over yourself" would imply that there is a mitzvah to do so.

This issue is debated in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 20b):

And so would Rabbi Yehuda say: Three mitzvot were commanded to the Jewish people upon their entrance into Eretz Yisrael, which apply only in Eretz Yisrael: They were commanded to establish a king for themselves, and to cut off the seed of Amalek in war and to build the Temple, in Jerusalem.

Rabbi Nehorai says: This biblical passage about appointing a king was stated only in response to the Jewish people's complaint, as it is stated: "When you come unto the land... and shall say: I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me."

Mamonides (Laws of Kings 1:1) codifies the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda and rejects Rabbi Nehorai, saying "Israel was enjoined It goes without saying that since we live in a liberal democracy, our monarchy is limited in scope and power and bears almost no relation to the unlimited powers of many ancient kings.

with three Commandments upon entering the Land: (with the first one being) to appoint a king, as it says, 'you shall set a king over yourselves'. Clearly his opinion is that this is an operative clause and the fact that the Torah contextualises the mitzvah to appoint a monarch as a response to the nation's request is secondary and not definitive.

The implication of Maimoides' approach is that there is an inherent or intrinsic value in having a monarch. Perhaps this is because a virtuous human king provides us with an important model of how to relate to the King of kings. It is important to note that the Torah was unique in its time in placing restrictions on the conduct of kings, namely how much wealth they could amass and how many wives they could marry (see Devarim 17:16-17). Such ideas would have been totally unheard of in the ancient world and certainly served as a safeguard in ensuring that the king would remain level-headed and faithful to the Torah.

Rabbi Aharon Halevi of Barcelona in his Sefer Hachinuch (mitzvah 71) weighs in on the discussion. He says that the root of the commandment is that it is because it is impossible to have a functional society without their making one of them head over the others, to do his command and fulfil his decrees. This is because the opinions of people are different and they will never all agree to one opinion - to do one thing from among the many things. And from this, the result will be idleness and a cessation of actions. And therefore, they need to accept the opinion of one of them - whether it is good or whether it is bad - so that they will

be successful and be involved in the business of the world, sometimes finding great benefit from his will and counsel and sometimes [finding] the opposite. And all of this is better than disagreement which causes complete idleness.

The Sefer Hachinuch seems to imply that there is nothing inherently valuable about a monarch, rather it is necessary to have a strong form of government to ensure that society functions and flourishes. In fact, the Abarbanel (who himself lived through the expulsion from Spain and experienced the perils of monarchy first hand under king Ferdinand and queen Isabella) notes that there is no specific mitzvah to appoint a king. He explains that the commandment to appoint a monarch has to be understood in the context. In fact, the Torah was prophetically referring to an event that would take place hundreds of years later, long after the Jews had conquered the Land of Israel. The Abarbanel says that during that time, the Jews asked for a monarch, not because they needed one to help them conquer the land, because it was already under their control, rather because they wished to be 'like all the nations'. It is as a response to this request that the Torah says, when an event like this happens, you may not just appoint anyone you wish, rather only someone who has been appointed by God. He explains that monarchy is not at all desirable, however if requested by popular demand, it has to take place in the manner laid down by the Torah.

The Abarbanel then draws on his own bitter experiences saying that as a general rule, people fare far better under a limited government that is beholden to a constitution even if the monarch is a head of state, than simply living as subjects to a monarch who has unfettered power.

Interestingly, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Berlin in his Haamek Davar to Devarim 17:14, says that being that the Torah is eternal, it has to apply to all times and all places, and it would be impossible for the Torah to legislate one form of government. Some societies function well with democratically elected officials and others flourish under string monarchies. Being that affairs of state invariably involve matters of life and death, whether due to economic policies or decisions to go to war, they would fall under the category of *pikuach nefesh* and would take precedence

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People fare far better under a limited government that is beholden to a constitution even if the monarch is a head of state, than simply living as subjects to a monarch who has unfettered power.

over the mitzvah to appoint a specific form of government anyway. He therefore explains that the mitzvah to appoint a king comes as a result of the people seeing that neighbouring societies are flourishing under their monarchs, rather than being seen as something negative.

Whilst it is evident that there are multiple approaches to this thorny issue, what does emerge is that the monarchy is not a value in and of itself. Rather the role of a king or queen is to concern themselves with the physical and spiritual wellbeing of their subjects. They therefore never enjoy unlimited power and are subject to the Torah's laws, resulting in their being tried in a court of law if the need would ever arise.

Perhaps the most important ideas that emerge from this brief discussion is the very real concern that absolute power has the ability to corrupt absolutely and the need for very real safeguards against that. At the same time, with privilege comes responsibility, and that the ultimate goal is for the king to be a focal point for the nation, inspiring and enabling them to strive for greatness.



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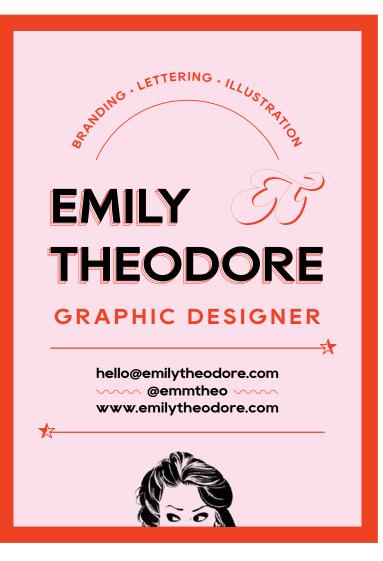
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CROWN



GARETH KOBRIN EXPLORES THE RITUAL OF HONOURING THE MONARCHY IN THE CONTEXT OF SHAVUOT

he late Princess Margaret was notoriously chatty, but on this occasion she was speechless. She was davening at Maidenhead shul in 1990 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the great synagogue and was stunned when the chairman read a prayer for the good health and wise counsel of the Queen.

She found the words to ask the Rebbetzin if they were just trying to impress her, who explained that the prayer was recited every Shabbat in every synagogue in Britain. She famously remarked: "How lovely - they don't do that for us in church; I'll tell my sister!"

In honour of the Queen's Jubilee, I thought we'd examine this curious custom, which is symptomatic of the distinct relationship that Jews have with ruling monarchs. It dates back to the Babylonian conquest in 586BC, when Jews first went into exile and had to live under a foreign ruler. The elders wrote to Jeremiah – still in the land of Israel – asking how they should behave.

"Seek the peace of the city in which you live ... for in its peace is your peace" is how the prophet responded (Jeremiah 29:7), and Jews have been praying for local kings and queens ever since.

One must appreciate the beauty of the tradition, which teaches two profound lessons and applies today more than ever - to minorities, refugees (and even South Africans) in foreign lands. Firstly, there is a responsibility to work for the wellbeing of the society in which you find yourself; it may not be your original home, but you should try to make it your new one. Second, respectful conduct is for self-interest too: when society is

unstable, it is the minorities that will suffer most.

Those who are different will be branded dangerous and subject to discrimination, if not persecution.

Her Majesty Elizabeth II gets a particularly lyrical little blessing before *mussaf*:

May the supreme King of kings

in His mercy preserve the Queen in life,

guard her

and deliver her from all trouble and sorrow.

It's no coincidence she has made it to 96 and counting!

Speaking of counting, since the Queen's jubilee weekend coincides with Shavuot, there must be a connection between the *omer* and the ritual of honouring Her Majesty...

I am writing this in the third week of the *omer* during parsha *Kedoshim*, whose opening chapter contains what rabbis have called the "holiness code". Previous weeks dealt with how the elite of the nation – the priests and prophets – achieve holiness, but the poetic decree to "love the neighbour and the stranger" is the first and only time in the Torah where the entire people are included in a command concerning holiness. The Sages say that Moshe declared this message to a gathering of the entire nation – so it is the people as a whole who are commanded to be holy, not just an elite, such as the Priests.

This may sound obvious nowadays, but it is a radical and progressive idea. It is the first time in history that a leader dispelled the notion that some people are superior to others and daringly declared that no matter who you are, you can be holy. Not only the leaders, priests and prophets – but every single one of us is given a toolkit to achieve godliness.

Despite this democratisation of holiness – it is accessible to every one of us – it is still necessary to honour those of higher rank. I was in Cape Town for Pesach, so I visited my childhood shul on the 8th day. Towards the end of shacharit the *gabbai* welcomed me and said, "You look like a Kohen, are you a Kohen?" This was the religious equivalent of a common compliment dished by Jewish women in South Africa: "Doll, you look *divine*?"

Alas, I am a mere commoner, but the very thought of being considered *priestly* made me feel good. In our tradition, we respect and revere royalty, ministry and intellectual accomplishment and there is nothing wrong with ceremonial admiration. This lesson is evident in *Kedoshim*, which lists 51 mitzvot to achieve holiness but starts with "every man shall fear his mother and father". Earlier in the Torah we are told to honour our parents, but when it comes to achieving holiness, the instruction is to be in awe of them.

The Rambam interprets this to mean that a Jew is to act towards a parent as if afraid of being punished. This sounds harsh, but he parallels it to a king: throughout history, people have been thrilled to be in the presence of royalty in spite of the king's immense power over them. When invited to have tea with the queen, the taste of the scones with jam and clotted cream isn't ruined by the fact that she could have your head on a plate.

The core component of holiness appears to be a balance between awe and appreciation. The Hebrew word for fear, between awe and appreciation. The Hebrew word for fear, and Yirah, is related to the word הארו Roeh, which means 'to see'. Fear is inextricably bound to the idea that one sees and



The core component of holiness appears to be a balance between awe and appreciation.

anticipates the long-term consequences of one's actions. This is one of the few mitzvot whose reward is explicit: we should honour our father and mother "so that it will lengthen your days". Long life is an apt reward, *Midah Keneged Midah* (measure for measure), for one who shows appreciation for life by venerating our creators who gave life in the first instance.

These ideas permeate Shavuot: the celebration of kingship juxtaposed with the accessibility of Torah. We read *Megillat Ruth*, the book penned by the prophet Shmuel to delineate the lineage of King David, who was born and died on Shavuot. And yet Ruth is read to dispel the misconception that *yichus* - pedigree - is a prerequisite to excel in Torah study or become esteemed among the Jewish community. Ruth was a convert, and although she lacked Jewish yichus, she rose to the highest heights and merited to become *Ima Shel Malchut* — the Mother of Royalty.

Average men and women are given a recipe for elevation, but this doesn't mean being born with royal blood is an excuse for apathy. Of the king, the Torah says that he must write his own Sefer Torah which "must always be with him, and he shall read from it all the days of his life" (Deut. 17: 19). Joshua, Moses' successor, is commanded: "Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night". Without constant study, even the most pedigreed person lacks direction and depth.

Queen Elizabeth herself said it best: work is the rent you pay for the room you occupy on earth. Shavuot is the time we rejoice in being the *Chosen People*, so it is important that we are grateful for this status but appreciate the effort that is required to earn it.



GOLDERS GREEN

PIZAZA

EDGWARE HENDON

BRING ON THE CHIES SE

SHAVUOT: OUR FAVOURITE PIZZA PARTY





Rebecca Goldberg studied interior design at Chelsea and Camberwell College. She has worked as an interior designer and decorator for the past twenty years with a focus on residential projects. Recently, she has branched out to offer a more boutique service which includes consultations on niche projects, such as individual rooms as well as adding the finishing touches to a home. Rebecca has a special interest in the finer details such as trimmings and accessories, adding a luxurious elegance into all of her creations. Rebecca is married and lives in North West London with her family. She can be contacted @rebecca@stamprop.com



Photo Credit for tablescapes: Aimee Kobrin











BLUE AND YELLOW

Here I tried to create a captivating and fresh look for a summer outdoor landscape. The striking blue and white table setting creates an eye catching contrast to the marigold tones and the unexpected yellow colour.

> Photo Credit for tablescapes: Aimee Kobrin

ONE SMALL ACT OF KINDNESS, ONE GIANT LEAP FOR HUMANITY

NICCI MENASHE DESCRIBES HOW THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY STARTED TO PRACTICE THE ESSENTIAL VALUES OF THE TORAH DURING LOCKDOWN, AS ONE ACT OF KINDNESS GAVE RISE TO ANOTHER.

I was born in England, on the 5th of September 1972, the day of the horrific Munich massacres. I grew up in South Africa during the beginning of the end of the brutal apartheid era. My teenage and later years were consumed with obsessively reading constant accounts of antisemitism or child abuse, the general flagrant disregard of positions of trust or countless acts of violence, pain and bullying. The stories of sorrow in the local newspapers and magazines seemed to get sadder and sadder as the years went by.

Today, painful behaviour from people in pain seems to have permeated the earth's crust. Daily acts of violence and hate, murder and mayhem, cruelty and crises constantly rip through pockets of humanity, leaving chaos and anxiety in its wake. So many people in our world today feel fearful or aggressive, vulnerable and victimised, uncertain and alone. Trauma, loss, and anxiety from painful events threaten to take control of our lives, and unless we urgently reverse out of this destructive pathway to pain, a heartless tsunami of hurt will be waiting for us on the way and will mercilessly flood our souls.

It seems as if the deep wounds of history can never fully heal before the band aid is ripped off again somewhere in the world, causing the wound to re-open and weep its ugly contents upon those sections of humanity who are unlucky enough to be caught up in that conflict.

What will it take for all this pain to finally be healed, once and for all?

It is said that "The ways of the Torah are ways of pleasantness".

The tools which we need to help guide us back to a path of peace and pleasantness on the planet are hidden in an ageold guidebook, which has been handed down through the generations, but which is being taught by an archaic educational system in a way that our future generations will never be able to fully comprehend.

The Torah is a beautiful book, and we are the people of the book, so the intellectual concepts are there. However, it is abundantly clear that we do not live in a very light or loving world, so that must mean that the opportunity for illuminating us,



our children, and therefore the future world, has evaded us every time we step into a classroom or lecture theatre.

Perhaps the real secret of a true education (that has fallen through deep cracks into the dark abyss of a very old system) is not to be found within the four walls of a classroom. Perhaps our task has progressed to a further level, inside the classroom of life, and we now need to take the information that we have learned about in books at school and convert it into action for the world.

When we say, "God is one", what does that mean? What are the implications of that line that we have repeated in our prayers for as far back as we can remember, and why does that line not affect the way we think when we talk to other people at home, at school, in restaurants, in the streets and in our cars?

When we say we love God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our possessions, what does that mean? How big is our heart? How much love is there for us to give?

We have been taught to "Love our neighbour", but did we ever learn what the word 'neighbour' encompasses? Have we learned to love all those we share something in common with?

Why have these lessons from the Torah not been put into a proper curriculum, along with practical exercises that teach us to entrench these values into the way we relate to everyone in the classroom and beyond the school gate?

What is stopping us from positively impacting everyone we meet in the world?

For over 2000 years, we have been in exile, and have not had the opportunity to thrive. We have just been surviving.

On the 24th of March 2020, we were all instructed to lock ourselves into our homes and log into the outside world from within. We were able to shed our egos and find time to dedicate a portion of our day to practising some part of Torah in action.

Although we were physically locked up, spiritually, we were given freedom in the classroom of life to really open our minds and become as creative as possible.

The desperate cries for help from the outside world, together with the power of the internet and the evolution of technology made us a creative global village, and this enabled us not only to survive, but also to start to thrive as we experimented with practically living the Torah.

One initiative that stands out, began with a simple WhatsApp request from a person who had run out of food in South Africa.

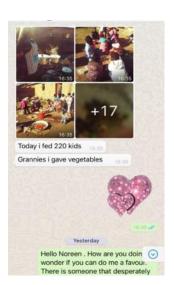
What followed very clearly ushered in the inner peace and external healing that we were all craving.

We found that by partnering needy African families with overseas donors, thereby facilitating the purchase and distribution of food vouchers through a simple credit card micro-donation, someone on one side of a continent could be the immediate answer to a far-away desperate cry for help.

Most importantly, we learned that good really is that which 'pulls humanity together.'* We saw how effective it was when humanity worked together as one united force for the purposes of good.









We watched in awe as those recipients who had benefited from the act of kindness of a stranger no longer saw their own pain, but instead focused on the love and kindness that they had received. All who had received a food voucher embraced that love, and in turn, actively sought to pass the love forward by helping people in their own communities who needed some extra love to lift them out of their pain at that time.

Inspiring stories of hope for humanity started to illuminate our WhatsApp groups and the original donors felt as if their souls had been fed when another hungry family ate. The ripple effect of what could happen when Hashem's teachings of kindness and mercy were made known on earth was incredible. We witnessed how a recipient's perspective would be transformed by these simple and effortless acts of kindness, and miraculously, how they in turn would become empowered to help someone else in the darkness.

The sixth Mishna in the sixth Perek of Pirkei Avot says that we must be learning, in order to be doing, so we now need to 'practise what we preach' and convert the beautiful slogans, thoughts and theories into action and live the Torah every day. "We witnessed how a recipient's perspective would be transformed by these simple and effortless acts of kindness, and miraculously, how they in turn would become empowered to help someone else in the darkness."

It is abundantly clear that we, together with our children (who represent a hopeful future) desperately need to take the wisdom from the world of theory in the Torah and other books and convert it into very practical exercises of action, so that we can all grow to become deeply loving human beings, and thereby heal the world from all the pain and sorrow so we can finally tread on that pathway to pleasantness.



DIVCORCE THE HARDEST

WORD

SARAH DAVID SHARES HER THOUGHTS ON NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES OF DIVORCE

orry doesn't seem to be the hardest word...Divorce does."

The word 'divorce' seems to give people the heebie jeebies, and after going through my own divorce and eight years of helping others navigate theirs, it's clear to me why. There is a pervasive view that divorce implodes your life, impacts your children (apparently forever) and divides friends and family – especially in a close-knit community.

The real kicker is the widely accepted idea that divorce ruins your life forever and that your family will never recover from it. It's not surprising that amicable divorces are few and far between. We enter into the process thinking that our life is over and that it's going to be a deeply traumatic experience, and so, nine times out of ten, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

While divorce certainly messes with our life plans, as do many other circumstances that life throws at us, we have somehow been conditioned to think that it needs to be a journey of trauma, loss and devastation; that it must be someone's *fault* because something hasn't worked out the way we thought it would; and that our children will forever be impacted by our decision to get divorced.

I'd like to consider a different perspective, based on my own experience. I would like to propose that divorce is neither bad, nor good. It is just a chapter of life and if we don't get too lost in that chapter, we can move onto the next one and then the next, unscathed. Which, if you ask anyone making the decision to end their marriage will tell you, is exactly what they want. It just appears on the outside that this is out of our control.

In my mind, the real reason that divorce has been placed way up there on the stress-o-meter, just below the death of a spouse, is because we get stuck in the chapter titled 'Divorce'. We get caught in a cycle of fear and insecurity about the future, as we somehow believe that we have any control over what life throws at us! So, just as we start to turn the page, something happens and we start focusing on the last page again. This is an incredibly overwhelming cycle to get stuck in and, objectively, a very challenging emotional experience. I rode that rollercoaster many times myself - so I am very aware of how much clarity you need to be able to really turn the page and start writing the next chapter of your life.

In my experience, most people begin the journey of separating fully committed to maintaining an amicable relationship with the other party. There's usually talk of sharing assets and children equally, with hopes of stable co-parenting. There is almost *always* a shared desire to put aside the differences that arose in the marriage to create consistency and a loving environment for the children.

But more often than not, that stage doesn't last long. What I tend to come across are well-meaning friends and family members or lawyers looking for more billable hours who do not need to deal with the consequences of their advice. Alternatively, I find people so entrenched in upset, hurt, anger and distrust that they can't see the price they are paying for carrying those feelings beyond the marriage.

As for me, I was lucky - I had very helpful people around me, holding me and helping me stay focused on my children's needs. This made everything so much easier. Very early on, my wisest friend told me that all children ever need is stability, consistency and love, and I resonated with that. I had a deep knowing that whatever craziness was going on, if I could give my kids those three things, they would be absolutely fine.

It is to the credit of my children's father that he was always, and remains, a consistent, stable, loving and dedicated presence in their lives, which made this even easier.

When push really came to shove, it wasn't about what I wanted, or what I felt was right or wrong. It was about the kids, and sometimes that wasn't in my best interest at all. Sometimes it felt unfair or like a loss. But it wasn't part of the decision making process - I chalked whatever it was up to a casualty of divorce and at some point I would let it go and come to peace with it. I knew it was best for their stability that there was space for both of us to parent and respect each other's parenting, even if it was different to what we thought was right. Just to be clear, I am in no way insinuating that I was able to do this every single time, just that it was always my aim. I knew that at some point I would reap the benefits of my 'sacrifice' and I can see now that I am reaping in abundance.

Sometimes it didn't look so pretty on the outside, especially for the first 2 years. I would run from the feeling of losing full

control of my kids' lives because I hated it. It felt unmanageable - like I didn't know who I was anymore, whilst at the same time experiencing this intoxicating sense of freedom. When I looked to the future I had no idea what I saw and that was scary, so, in ways that were not particularly helpful to me, I took myself away from life because reality didn't meet the expectation I had created.

I always believed that you *could*, under the right circumstances, have an amicable divorce. I thought that this only applied to divorces where both spouses wanted the best for the children and were able to put their feelings and egos aside to always put the kids first. But as time went on and I experienced different scenarios of divorce, I saw that my original perspective was not an absolute.

I saw families where there was a tug of war going on about what was best for the children. I saw the tension build as people, overwhelmed with insecurity about the future, held on tightly to their desire to make their opponent suffer, or feel how they felt. I watched as kind, caring parents dug their heels into the ground, fully positioned on what they genuinely thought was best for the children, not noticing the role that their egos were playing. It felt like people were holding onto their end of the rope as if their happiness and life depended on it. The problem with a game like this is that often the parents are so focused on holding tightly to the rope, that they expend all their time and energy just trying to win an inch. They make a mess of the ground around them and it becomes unstable to walk on. Often people would be at war for so long that their assets would become depleted and their lives around them would crumble whilst they were trying to 'win'. I would start to put them in the box, in my head, of divorces that couldn't be amicable. But then, like magic, one side would gain clarity on a specific area and would be more able to let go of the rope, or even just loosen the tension and things would settle. After I saw it once, I started seeing it everywhere and I knew that this belief I had wasn't true.

So, here's what I see.

Divorce is totally neutral - the reason it has the reputation it does is purely because people are so focused on the tug of war that everything else becomes a casualty of it. This is not to say that anyone does this consciously. It is just a natural consequence of looking in the wrong direction. Usually people arrive at divorce having been in this conflict for a long while. But people recover from war.

All we have to do is realise we've picked up the rope and the ground is becoming sludgy around us. The trick is that we can just put it down whenever we want to, and start rebuilding on our side of the line. It doesn't matter what anyone else does, because if we aren't holding that rope, it's no longer a game to play.

You can't control whether the other person continues to wave the rope around in the air, or if they shout and scream to try and draw us back into the game. There is a line in the middle that they cannot cross. It doesn't matter if people are shouting from the side lines to try and distract us.

There is so much hope and growth that can come from divorce, and although I wouldn't choose it for anyone, when I look back on the past eight years, I am proud. I have been humbled in a way that changed me for ever. I have learned to navigate challenges with more grace and have seen how much that has benefitted me and those who matter to me. I now appreciate the freedom of letting go of what I think life is supposed to look like. But I think my biggest lessons have always come from a fall - that stage when you pick yourself up, brush yourself off and take your first step forward. I have learned that those falls don't matter; that it's what comes after that matters. Sometimes that involves forgiveness, sometimes it involves owning my actions during the fall, but, the quicker I get over my ego and stand up, the easier it is, the better I do and to be really honest, the better I feel!

There is no doubt that divorce is an upheaval. But from everything I have seen, it doesn't deserve its reputation. Kids are not damaged because of divorce. Kids are damaged because they become a casualty of two people who believe that they, at some point, must win this game. But no-one ever does. Life isn't a game to win. All we can do is put down the rope and start rebuilding with love.



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THE GIVING KITCHEN

by MICHELLE BARNETT

THE GIVING KITCHEN, WHICH EMERGED DURING COVID,
CONTINUES TO FEED NEEDY AND VULNERABLE MEMBERS OF OUR
COMMUNITY AS IT CELEBRATES ITS ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

very Wednesday for the past year, dedicated volunteers of all ages come along to the Jewish Futures HQ, home to GIFT Charity. There they wash, peel, chop, cook, pack and deliver hundreds of meals. The trays of food are diligently filled with tasty portions of nutritious, colourful and flavoursome food and portions of soup, as they form a production line outside the kitchen.

The Giving Kitchen was borne out of Covid, when there was a dire need to support hundreds of vulnerable people who were old, ill, or suffering from severe mental health issues, and therefore physically unable to prepare their own meals. Many charities were closing their doors and GIFT was inundated with requests for help. Consequently, many of the charity's volunteers suddenly stepped up to give their time and money to cook meals from their own homes. The problem was that there was no quality control for health and safety, nor a way to ensure that the food was strictly kosher.

Social entrepreneur, Lauren Fried discovered GIFT after doing a cross communal honey cake bake. "I told the charity, if ever you wanted a food related project, to get in touch." And so, with a growing meal crisis on their hands, GIFT excitedly turned to Lauren, who agreed to spearhead The Giving Kitchen.

Working closely with GIFT Founding Director Michelle Barnett and Community Engagement Coordinator Roxanne Stross, the team sprang into action providing meals from the charity's industrial kitchen, which was a resounding success.

"Food builds bridges, it has the power to transform," says Lauren. "It has been a privilege to be involved in creating The Giving Kitchen' and to see the incredible benefits of this initiative – both for the recipients and for the volunteers. After a successful pilot, we began the weekly cooking sessions and one year on, we are delighted to be expanding to two sessions a week, distributing over 300 meals per week to the most vulnerable in our community, and engaging almost 100 volunteers weekly in meaningful giving. With plans to develop a program for Young GIFT, and to roll out TGK Experience, we are excited for what lies ahead."

The programme fits in with GIFT's mission to "inspire and enable lifelong giving," self-evident in its mantra to "Give It Forward Today". For volunteer Miriam Ibgi, the project is very close to her heart. Despite being involved in a life-changing traffic accident seven years ago, she was not deterred from preparing a batch of thirty meals for people in need in her small kitchen during lockdown. Before her accident she was a driver for GIFT. Now she shows up each week to manage the packing. After all the help she received following her accident she now has the chance to pay it forward. "After my accident I needed so much care and attention; Now this is a way of being able to give back to the community and feel rewarded."

The menus are creatively put together by Sarah Isaac, who started as a volunteer and has now become the head chef. The mother of eight is well placed to decide what meals work best after she trials them at home with her hungry brood of









children, seven of whom are growing boys. "I felt I had time and it was a charity very close to my heart, and I love food," offers Sarah. We care about the people we are cooking for. We want them to have a delicious home-cooked meal. We put our effort and love into it."

Sometimes the menu is decided for them, when a mass food item is donated. For instance, when the charity received a donation of vegan mince, it was chilli con carne for dinner that week.

Roxanne, who lives and breathes the Giving Kitchen, brings in the volunteers, ensuring both they and the recipient families are lovingly taken care of. She explains, "This first anniversary of our Giving Kitchen is so exciting. From its conception in volunteers' kitchens, it has evolved to become very professional, with 5-star hygiene and Kashrut certification. I feel so very proud of the whole initiative. The volunteers are like family and the atmosphere is so warm and welcoming. I am so excited to see what the future holds for us with our expansion. Our recipient families are so grateful. One told me only today how she feels we saved her life when her son's care home closed down during COVID and she became a 24-hour carer. She told me she literally wouldn't have coped without the meals we provided."

GIFT plans for the Giving Kitchen to create a young professional project, Bnei Mitzvah cooking sessions, a mother and daughter workshop, alongside nutritional and vocational training. The plan is for The Giving Kitchen to become a drop-in centre - a communal hub - which will enable the vulnerable to come in and socialise, without stigma. "I want them to integrate back into the community instead of feeling alienated and alone," Lauren explains. "After all, food nourishes people nutritionally and soulfully."

In the meantime, it's all hands-on-deck for the weekly Cooka-thon. The results have been very well received. As one recipient put it: "Not only are the meals so helpful, plentiful and tasty; but we love seeing the volunteers as we are housebound and have little contact with the outside world. We have had Meals on Wheels in the past, but the meals from The Giving Kitchen are on a different level, so delicious and beautifully presented. I am an elderly disabled man and my wife has serious dementia. Thank you GIFT for changing our lives."

For more information contact Givingkitchen@jgift.org or www.Jgift.org



Michelle studied for a year at Brovender's Seminary in Jerusalem before gaining an undergraduate degree in Psychology from Manchester, an MA in Social Work from Brunel University and an MA in Psychotherapy and Counselling from Regents College. Inspired by Rabbi Naftali Schiff's vision and the volume of wasted food in supermarkets and restaurants, Michelle started GIFT from her kitchen table in 2004. 18 years later, GIFT's army of volunteers have supported hundreds of families in need across the community, and the name Michelle Barnett has become synonymous with giving. Michelle is married to Danny, who has supported her in dedicating so much of her time to GIFT, and has three talented children, who are all imbued with a sense of giving.





THE GIVING EXPERIENCE

A bespoke team building experience that incorporates cooking for disadvantaged people through The Giving Kitchen. (2-4hr)



LUNCH & LEARN

A GIFT educator will come to your workplace to give a lunchtime talk on the 'The Philosophy of Philanthropy'. (1hr)



SUPERMARKET CHALLENGE

Take on the challenge to do a supermarket shop with **only** £10. Buy enough food for a family of 3 for a week during your facilitated visit. (1.5hr)



TEAM PACKING

Bring your team to the GIFT Hub in NW4 where you will help us pack support parcels for some of the rapidly increasing number of needy households. (1.5hr)



HOMELESS PACKS

Run a pack-a-thon in your office to make care packages for the homeless (option to distribute these yourself). Short talk on 'Aspects of Giving' included. (1hr)

Contact us to discuss prices and availability.

Combination packages of any of the above can also be arranged.

UKRANIAN TRUCK DRIVER SAVES THE DAY

by RABBI SANDOR MILUN

GIFT WAS ABLE TO DELIVER MANY TONS OF SUPPLIES TO JEWISH
COMMUNITIES IN UKRAINE WITH THE HELP OF A SPECIAL MAN

hortly after the war in Ukraine broke out, and we realised the enormity of the issue as the pleas for assistance became cries for urgent help, I received a WhatsApp message from a former Ukrainian student living in the UK, who suggested we collaborate. She said she knew of a Ukrainian truck driver who was sending much needed supplies into Ukraine, at a critical time when everyone else was stopping at the Polish and Moldovan borders.

It so happened that we were in touch with a Rabbi and Rebbetzin who were still in Lviv in North-West Ukraine and were overwhelmed by displaced Jews who were being forced from the South and East of the country. I decided to contact the truck driver, Mihail. It turned out that he was the owner of a trucking company and was working with several Ukrainians who were willing to drive supplies into the country.

At first, although I introduced myself as 'Natalya's friend', he was extremely cagey, almost bordering on rude. He gave one-word answers, was very cold, and at least once he told me he was not interested. He kept telling me that they deliver to "Lviv town council building. Nowhere else!"

My goal was to assist the Rabbi's community and to arrange delivery directly to him, but I was hesitant to reveal that it was a rabbi in case he was not interested. When I told Mihail I needed the supplies delivered to a special community, he once again threatened not to deliver anything.

By the Wednesday before the 'scheduled' truck's Friday departure, we had gathered nearly 12 tons of supplies. I was en route to Romania to see another group of Jews who had escaped from Odessa. I was sitting in the minivan and knew I would be travelling the whole day and that I had to finalise the deal.

I called Mihail who, after neglecting my calls for two days, finally answered. I had a trump card – I had procured two tons of rice and pasta from a Jewish supplier. The supplier was happy for me to offer one ton to Mihail. I once again requested that he drop part of the truck's cargo at a different address. He was reluctant, and I threw out the Ace of diamonds: "I will give you one ton for your people. Just make the delivery for me." Then he dropped the bombshell, "They are not my people, I am Jew from Odessa. I know you are a rabbi; you want to send it to Jewish community. Ok, we'll do it."

Thankfully he kept his word: the Jews of Lviv received a massive delivery and we organised a full 22-ton truck for the Jews of Odessa pre-Pesach with my friend, Mihail, coordinating the delivery and giving me daily updates. It took nearly two weeks of back-and-forth hard negotiations for him to finally smile through the phone, a small grin that I felt upon my cheek — "You people are good people, thank you for helping."

It's our pleasure Mihail.



Born and raised in South Africa, Rabbi Sandor Milun graduated with a degree in accounting and economics. Sandor moved to Israel in 2001, and 6 years later he joined the Jewish Experience of Madison (JEM) in 2007 as program director. He lived on campus with 5000 Jewish students for 3 years, after which he moved to London and took a role in JLE's campus department. In 2014 Sandor became JLE's Campus Director. Sandor's vision is to engage with youth in our community to ensure positive change through social action. In March 2019 he joined the GIFT team and now serves as Managing Director of GIFT.













by DAVID WOLFOWSKI

AFTER THE WAR IN UKRAINE BEGAN,
600 REFUGEES ARRIVED IN BERLIN
EVERY HOUR. DAVID WOLFOWSKI GIVES
A MOVING ACCOUNT OF WHAT HE
EXPERIENCED.

wo months ago, there was chaos in Berlin's main train station. People poured out of the trains and headed to the reception centre, which had been created as an initiative of the people, without the support of the state. Food, hygiene products, information and SIM cards were made available to the hundreds of refugees who were arriving daily, provided by dedicated German citizens. I acted as a translator and helped to guide and assist people. Each person had a different plan and a different destination in mind. While some wanted to stay in Berlin, or had friends or family elsewhere in Germany, for others, this was only the beginning of their journey. Often people were distraught, which is not surprising after a week of traveling without a break.

My parents, who had grown up in Ukraine, were ready to open their doors immediately after hearing from Ukrainian friends and acquaintances. So, until a month ago, our house in the small town of Gardelegen functioned as a hotel with seven refugees from Ukraine as our guests.

But it wasn't only people of Ukrainian origin who stepped up to help. At Berlin's main train station, there were countless people ready and waiting to take in individuals or even entire families. I can still picture it clearly: how people held up their cardboard signs as if they were waiting in the airport arrivals terminal, but instead of the names of hotels their signs announced the number of people they were able to take in. The response of our citizens was unbelievable.

Naturally, there was also a wonderful response from Jewish communities in German cities. Because 90% of all Jews in Germany have their roots in the former Soviet Union, there was a great deal of interest in helping Ukrainian refugees. The Jewish community in Berlin immediately provided free apartments for entire families and hotels were provided for Jewish Ukrainian refugees. These housing options have obviously been



"At Berlin's main train station, there were countless people ready and waiting to take in individuals or even entire families."

provided on a short-term basis, until the bureaucratic process is completed, and the German state places the refugees into permanent apartments.

It takes one's breath away to hear what some of the refugees have experienced. I spoke to some distraught mothers who are afraid for their sons and husbands. People are very grateful for all the help they have received and feel very safe in Germany. Through my participation as an interpreter, I have noticed how ambitious and motivated people are to find jobs, and how they want to avoid living on the money they receive from the state as soon as possible. However, many of them would prefer to return to Ukraine at some point as they cannot comprehend life somewhere else. While this is frightening to hear, I cannot imagine what it must be like to leave your everyday life behind and to flee to another country because of a war.

In spite of all the fear and negativity, the commitment and involvement that I saw from Jewish organisations, the German state, and local communities was truly uplifting and gives me a sense of hope for the future.



NEWS :: FROM





Aish UK raised an incredible £2.5 million in 36 hours in their Charity Extra campaign on 8-9 May. The tireless efforts of 171 fundraising teams, together with a group of generous benefactors who committed to double every donation received, enabled Aish UK to reach its unbelievable target of £2.2 million and then to proceed to raise an extra £300,000 in the bonus round. 4520 individual donations were made during the campaign, including a very generous single donation of £30,000 which was also doubled by the matchers.

Rabbi Naftali Schiff, CEO of Aish UK said; "Over the last three decades tens of thousands of lives in this country have been impacted by the work of Aish UK. As we look to the future, this campaign will enable Aish UK to double the in-person Jewish connections we form across schools, campuses and communities nationwide. Thank you to every single person who generously supported this campaign, thereby ensuring Aish UK can continue our work creating connections."



Ta'am relaunched in March 2022, with fresh branding, a new look website and original video content and series including 'Ready, Steady, Shuk', featuring food influencer @romykosher, and 'Ta'am Bitesize', featuring educators from across the JF family. Over Pesach, Ta'am distributed over 5,000 'Ten Plagues Immersive Seder Menus', created printable meal planners and shopping lists that were downloaded hundreds of times, and collaborated with KLBD and The US to produce a Kosher for Passover Mayonnaise video which was viewed almost 9,000 times and reached audiences around the world.

Chelkeinu is a vibrant space for women to learn Torah together. With a track in Tanach and another in Halacha, Rebbetzins, educators and women in the community enjoy the camaraderie, the engagement and the inspiration of coming to study together with world-class educators.







JRoots have been running an incredible Ukraine Campaign. They are supplying over 100 people with a place to sleep and hot meals every night and have been providing refugees with different types of assistance to help them to make decisions for their future. The two JRoots day-care centres are also offering a reprieve to the children from the traumatic journey that they have experienced.

Since the beginning of the war, along with the help of partners in Krakow, JRoots have sent over 550 tons of food and medical supplies into Ukraine. This does not include all the food and supplies that we have delivered to the refugee centres that are operating across Poland. You can support the JRoots Ukraine Campaign at jroots. org/donate





The Israeli community in London joined together to connect and rock at a special concert by leading Israeli musician, Avraham Tal. More than 400 Israelis attended, including the Israeli Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Tzipi Hotovely. Before the concert, Tal and his band joined the community for a festive Friday night dinner, hosted by Ari and Aliza Rotenberg – Directors of Shelanu. During the evening, community members shared stories about how Shelanu has directly impacted their Jewish lives and has helped them to maintain their connection with Israel.

Shelanu also hosted a Yom Ha'atzmaut party in a park in Finchley to celebrate the 74th Anniversary of Israel's independence. The Yom Ha'atzmaut Fun Day was Shelanu's largest event to date, catering to 650 people of all ages. Shelanu entertained the crowd with bouncy castles, an impressive helter skelter slide, sumo wrestling inflatables, balloon modelling, a DJ, a

BBQ, candyfloss and popcorn. Ari Rotenberg, Director of Shelanu, said: "Yom Ha'atzmaut is one of the key dates in every Israeli's calendar, and the last two years we have been unable to host such a large-scale event. To be able to celebrate with 650 people was truly amazing."



In a world in which speech and communication are far too often a platform for divisiveness, the goal of The Clean Speech Project is to promote positive speech and the avoidance of negative speech, sharing Jewish wisdom to upgrade the way we communicate with each other.



This week, GIFT's Giving Kitchen marked its 1st birthday, an opportunity for its donors and volunteers to come together and celebrate an inspiring and successful community initiative, where hundreds of meals are delivered on a weekly basis to the most vulnerable in our community. The meals are flavoursome, delicious, plentiful and nutritious. Rabbi Saul Kelly recently described them as 'a

Simcha in a box!'. GIFT has plans for the Giving Kitchen to expand and to become a communal hub. More details can be found in the article on 'The Giving Kitchen' in this magazine.





RDS SAY MORE ABO

THE CLEAN SPEECH PROJECT

Students volunteering to repurpose wheelchairs for Ukrainian refugees



FJL is hosting its largest summer of programmes ever. 75 students from Canada, Australia, USA and UK will be in Israel this summer for FJL's flagship Tel Aviv Programme.







Netzach is offering Leadership Development courses with European Rabbis from 15 different countries, focused on Community Building, Digital Media Tools, Marketing and Educational Training.

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CONNECTING WITH THE TORAH ON SHAVUOT

by DAVID GREEN

My favourite aspects of the Torah are learning Tanach, especially learning the Parasha. I'm so lucky to have some amazing teachers at my school, and also outside. What I love about Torah is that it's not just about learning the story but also about the different interpretations and different ways you can view that story. I love how the Torah is so fluid – and helps people to respect their Judaism in so many different ways. It can give many sorts of different things to us all. I find it incredible that the Torah seems to be the exact opposite of how you would set out a science experiment. In a science experiment, you would expect one or two outcomes, but in the Torah, the outcomes and possibilities for discussion are infinite.

To connect to Shavuot, which is in all of our minds right now (especially the little slice of cheesecake!), it is our responsibility as Jewish people today to be a link in the chain which started at the journey to Sinai thousands of years ago. We must not break that link in the chain, especially while Maschiach is so close to coming!



David Green is eight years old and goes to North West London Jewish Day School. He loves cats, football and learning gemara with his amazing teacher, Dovi.

LIVING THE SINAI EXPERIENCE

by ETHAN WOOLFE

40 days gone. Was Moshe coming back? A fluorescent sun shone across the desert sand, turning it to an amber-like colour. The land was flat and barren. A screaming hawk flew overhead. Like us, it was being scorched and blazed by the sun. Beads of sweat streamed down my face as we all turned to Sinai. Was Moshe ever returning? I questioned.

Walls of heat shrouded me as I realised there was only one option.

The jewellery started to be gathered, Aaron had demanded it. I placed all of my gold and silver into the pile. Were we really too oblivious to see through Moshe's lies? There's no God. No 'so called' leader above humankind. The process had started. The ornaments and jewellery began being melted down. The calf was almost ready to be formed.

Eventually, a pool of gold lay before my eyes. It was time to have a 'real' God. As it was poured into the mould, a shiver ran up and down my spine. My eyes were glued to the stunning figure. Our calf, our God, stood miraculously before me. As everyone knelt, we began to sing, dance and pray. What a time to be alive.

All of a sudden, an ear-piercing shatter filled the air. Everyone turned their heads to be facing an infuriated and perturbed Moshe trembling with the two Luchot Habrit smashed around him. Gasps broke the deafening silence as Moshe was enraged. Aaron trembled in fear.

Moshe now proceeded to burn the calf to a powder. Once the powder was gathered, he scattered it onto the lake's surface, forcing us to drink it. I coughed and choked as my throat became more and more hoarse. After what felt like ages of drinking the water, Aaron finally decided to own up for his sins and mistakes. God decreed a punishment for us all to wander for 40 years, not allowed to enter the Promised Land. Pain and sorrow is all we felt. We had sinned. G-d is real. We should learn to love and cherish him.

Moshe once again ascended the mountain for another 40-day journey for the two Luchot Habrit. Anticipation filled the air as the days ticked by, until there was only one day to go.

Excitement coursed through my veins. From slavery to freedom. We are going to be God's people. Incredible. The night was still young, but I had decided to rest early for the big day tomorrow.

I awoke, with a wide smile on my face. I overslept. As my eyes opened with a blur, I heard muttering from the floor of Mount Sinai, Moshe was soon returning.

80 days but it will still be worth it. We have repented for our sins. But now we shall receive the 10 Commandments. Approaching in the distance, a small figure appeared to be coming down the Mountain, which now had the most beautiful of flowers and plants growing from it. The figure came closer and began to get clearer. Moshe has returned.

We cheered and prayed as the two Luchot Habrit were almost blinding to look at. It read:

- Do not have any other gods.
- 2. Do not make or worship idols.
- 3. Do not disrespect or misuse God's name.
- 4. Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.
- 5. Honour your mother and father.
- 6. Do not commit murder.
- 7. Do not commit adultery.
- 8. Do not steal.
- 9. Do not tell lies
- 10. Do not be envious of others.

We are finally a people. We finally have a home.





ALLEGRA CRYSTAL REFLECTS
ON WHAT IT IS LIKE TO BE A JEWISH
TEENAGER IN THE UK

I'm proud to say that I am one of the tens of thousands of Jewish teenagers in London. I belong to St John's wood Synagogue and am so grateful for the community I'm a part of. I've been fortunate to volunteer a lot. This may be donating my time to package bags for GIFT or even a conversation with someone alone in an elderly home. This has made a huge impact on my life as it has taught me so many values and lessons which I will take with me for the rest of my life.

As I have been in Jewish schools all my life, I've been lucky enough to learn lessons from the weekly Torah portion to better understand pieces of the Talmud and understand the festivals like Pesach and Shavuot. I try to go to shul every week as I enjoy it a lot. It is not only a chance to meet new friends and have yummy kiddush but connecting to God is such an important part of my week. For as long as I can remember, every Friday night, my mum and older sister Maya have lit the Shabbat candles. Connecting to God like this is so special to me.

Over the last two weeks, we have celebrated Yom Hashoah, Yom Ha'atzmaut and Yom Hazikaron. I enjoyed learning about these three events deeply. At my school (Immanuel College) an army veteran came to speak to us. Although his story was very sad it was also very





touching. It taught me a very important lesson of gratitude and appreciation. Along with packing bags for GIFT, helping the community, and visiting old age homes, these key events have shaped me into the Jewish teenager I am today.

I'm quite aware that although we are a large community in London, it's not all picture-perfect. We were all terrified last year when convoys of anti-Semitic activists drove past central London (very near to my home and synagogue), but we are supported by amazing organisations that teach us how to handle these situations and keep us safe.

Another big part of my life is celebrating Bar/Bat Mitzvahs. Along with celebrating my own bat mitzvah, as I'm thirteen years old, most of my Sunday nights and Saturday mornings are spent with friends having their bar mitzvahs and bat mitzvahs. From speaking to my non- Jewish friends, I have realised how unique our community is, and the fact that we have a celebration to mark our happiness and change to adulthood is incredibly special.



13-year-old Allegra Sara Crystal Misrahi was born in London to a Spanish mum (Pamela) and Canadian dad (David). She attends Immanuel College, and recently celebrated her Bat Mitzvah at St John's Wood and Saatchi Synagogue, where she also attends CTIVESeks Section 1982 and Activities. Allegra loves languages, maths and history. She loves playing tennis and dancing. Her favourite pastimes are travelling and hanging out with her friends. She's never seen too far from her beloved sister Maya.







LONDON

225 Golders Green Rd, 0208 209 0900

Sunday 10AH-10PH / Monday 8AH-7PH

Say-Wednesday 8AH-10PH / Thursday 8AH-11PH / Friday 8AH-4PH

MANCHESTER - PRESTWICH 49 Bury New Road, 0161 773 6900 Sunday-Thursday 7.30AM-10.00PM Friday 7.30AM - 6.00PM

MANCHESTER - SALFORD
21 Leicester Road, 0161 792 6263
Sunday 8AM-2PM / Monday-Tuesday 8AM-6PM
Wednesday-Thursday 8AM-8PM / Friday 8AM-2:00P

DESTINATIONSWITH JROOTS



POLAND





"ON THE EVE OF WORLD WAR II, CLOSE TO THREE AND A HALF MILLION JEWS LIVED IN POLAND" Poland was home to Jews for almost a thousand years and produced some of the greatest Jewish scholars, tzadikim, philosophers, scientists and artists. On the eve of World War II, close to three and a half million Jews lived in Poland.

A JRoots Journey to Poland looks at a thousand years of life as well as the tragic end of one of the world's greatest Jewish communities. We visit synagogues and cemeteries to meet the giants of Polish Jewry, the Chassidic courts of Galicia as well as the cultural centers. Not only do we discover the rich life and heritage of Jews in Poland, we will also come face-to-face with the evil destruction of European Jewry during the Holocaust. We will pay tribute to victims of the Holocaust while visiting the ghettoes, concentration and death camps. We will find together the sparks of light from the darkness and affirm that despite all we have been through - 'Am Yisrael Chai' - 'the Jewish People Live'

One of Europe's most beautiful cities, Prague has a Jewish story like no other. From the sixteenth century onwards, Prague became one of the most important Jewish centers in the world. Known for its beautifully preserved synagogues and cemeteries as well as great Jewish leaders such as the Maharal and Noda B'Yehuda, the Jewish story in Prague is waiting to be explored.

We will learn the story of the Jews during the Holocaust and visit Terezin (Thereisanstadt), one of the Nazis most infamous ghettoes. We will pay tribute to the victims of the Shoah as well as recalling the testimonies of extreme bravery and heroism in the midst of evil. Jewish heritage in Prague remains important to Jews throughout the world.

You will also have an opportunity to explore the famous Prague Castle and world renowned Old Town.

PRAGUE

"PRAGUE BECAME
ONE OF THE MOST
IMPORTANT
JEWISH CENTRES
IN THE WORLD"





MOROCCO



"A HERITAGE THAT SHOULD NOT BE FORGOTTEN"



The Jewish presence in Morocco dates back to the 1st century with Jews arriving in the wake of the Roman destruction of the Second Temple and subsequent dispersion. A JRoots Journey to Morocco tells the story of Moroccan Jewry with its rich and beautiful culture.

Built at the crossroads between Europe and Africa, between Berber and Arab, a home that Jews had to abandon with almost nothing but the clothes on their backs. Whilst there are over one million Moroccan Jews living in Israel, very few remain in Morocco today.

We will have the privilege of meeting and hearing from those who make up the current Jewish community of Casablanca. In Fez and Marrakech, we will immerse ourselves in North African culture while visiting two of the most

dynamic souks in the world. We will travel to the base of the Atlas Mountains and be regaled by the breathtaking beauty of snow-capped mountains whose base rests in the entrance to the world's vastest desert, the Sahara.

A JRoots Journey to Morocco is a rite of passage to learn with us the life of our fellow Jews and about a community that thrived among some of the most challenging of circumstances and of a heritage that should not be forgotten.

The homeland of the Jewish people. Where it all started and where the future lies. There is no better place to engage in the story of the Jewish people than in their eternal home; Israel.

Coming to Israel with JRoots will be a chance to see Israel through different eyes whether it's your first time or you are a regular visitor. From meeting top level politicians and decision-makers to seeing the ancient holy sites through modern eyes, Israel with JRoots will give you a meaningful and deep insight into the Jewish story in the Jewish homeland.

ISRAEL



Jews thrived in Budapest for almost a millennia. This beautiful city is a treasure trove of Jewish heritage. A visit to Budapest with JRoots will uncover many hidden signs of the rich Jewish life which existed before the Holocaust.

The old Jewish quarter still contains Europe's largest synagogue, the Dohany Street Synagogue.

We will explore together the unique story of Budapest's Jews during the Holocaust and will visit the famous Memorial of the Shoes on the side of the River Danube.

We will also follow the story of bravery by those who risked their lives to save Jews, in particular, the story of Raoul Wallenberg.

BUDAPEST



"THE OLD JEWISH
QUARTER STILL
CONTAINS EUROPE'S
LARGEST SYNAGOGUE"



From the Golden Age of Discovery to the Inquisition, Portuguese Jewry went from the heights of wealth and success to the depths of anguish and despair. The history of Portuguese Jewry is like that of many other places, where success and sadness go hand in hand.

Walking along Lisbon's streets, remnants can be found of Portugal's rich Jewish life. In remote mountain villages sparks of Jewish Portugal glimmer through the ages, a place where the last remaining Marrano communities can still be found practicing Jewish rituals behind closed doors - the fear of persecution still looms. JRoots Journeys to Portugal brings you face-to-face with the descendants of 'Hidden Jews', and in touch with the tangible marks the Inquisition has left on the country.

PORTUGAL

"PORTUGUESE JEWRY WENT FROM THE HEIGHTS OF WEALTH AND SUCCESS TO THE DEPTHS OF ANGUISH AND DESPAIR"





On the eve of World War II the capital of Lithuania, Vilna was the home to over 110 synagogues, 10 major yeshivas and nearly 100,000 Jews whose number represented 45% of the city's population. A census taken in 2005 numbers the Jews of Vilna at just over 2,000.

A Journey to Lithuania with JRoots opens a window into a lost world. A world that was the beating heart of Jewish life and scholarship which existed from the Eighth Century onwards. The famed Yeshivas of Lithuania are first recorded in the c. 1540s but would have been around for centuries before. Religious observance today owes greatly to the Lithuanian yeshivas and in particular to Rabbi Elijah Kramer (1720–1797), the Vilna Gaon, who lived in Lithuania's greatest city, Vilnius (Vilna).

We will visit the city and walk the streets that the Vilna Gaon would have walked over 200 years ago as well as his final resting place. We will also encounter the heart-breaking story of the Holocaust as it unfolded in the various ghettoes across Lithuania, and the harrowing killing fields. You will get a sense of the community and beauty of Lithuania's Jews before taking time to mourn and commemorate its tragic destruction.

LITHUANIA

"A WORLD THAT WAS THE BEATING HEART OF JEWISH LIFE AND SCHOLARSHIP"





SPAIN & GIBRALTAR



Spanish Jews once constituted one of the largest and most prosperous Jewish communities in the world. Spain was the unquestioned leader of world Jewry: Torah was studied and taught in great depth. Hebrew was used for the first time for secular poetry; and for the only time between Biblical times and the origins of the modern state of Israel, a Jew (Shmuel haNagid) commanded a Jewish army. This period ended definitively with the anti-Jewish riots of 1391 and the Alhambra Decree of 1492, resulting with the majority of Jews in Spain converted to Catholicism and those remaining were forced into exile.

A JRoots Journey takes you back to this enchanting, lost world as well as the contemporary community of Gibraltar, with its flourishing Jewish life. Visit the ancient synagogues, walk in the footsteps of the last Jews of Spain and discover the remarkable story of the Marrano, Crypto Jews.

"SPAIN WAS THE
UNQUESTIONED LEADER
OF WORLD JEWRY"

BERLIN





"ONE OF THE MOST
SPECTACULAR ASPECTS
OF BERLIN IS THE REVIVAL
OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY"

During the time of the Second Temple, Judah the Maccabee — hero of the Chanukah story — sent a delegation to Rome to petition on behalf of Judea and the Jews. From that point until today, Jews have lived uninterrupted in Italy for over 2,000 years. Jews have left their indelible mark on the Italian topography from Sicily all the way to Turin.

JRoots will help you tailor make your Italian trip, be it focused on one city or several. There is a rich Jewish heritage particular to many areas in Italy. Visit the Italian Jerusalem in the tiny Tuscan village of Pitigliano, the Roman Colosseum built in the shadows of the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, and the first ever ghetto in Venice. From the arch of Titus to the Escolas of the Venetian ghetto, feel yourself immersed in a culture which has informed much of modern Judaism today.

In 1743, a fourteen-year-old Moses Mendelssohn entered Berlin through the gate reserved for cattle and Jews. Though Jews had lived on and off in Berlin from the 13th century onwards, Moses Mendelssohn's entry to the city ushered in an age of modernity, secularism, science, and art; and at the forefront of all these movements were the Jews who called Berlin home.

The JRoots heritage trip to Berlin delves into the medieval, renaissance, enlightenment, and modern period of the city and the oftentimes difficult relationship between the Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors. We also deal with the difficult period of the Nazi era, from the burning of books and Kristallnacht to the Wannsee Conference and the ultimate decimation of the community. We will also learn about the communist era and a democratic city marooned in the heart of East Germany.

One of the most spectacular aspects of Berlin is the revival of the Jewish community and the reopening of synagogues and cultural centers. Each heritage tour to Berlin is evocative, insightful and inspirational.

ITALY



"JEWS HAVE LIVED UNINTERRUPTED IN ITALY FOR OVER 2,000 YEARS"



SHABBAT EXPERIENCE



SUGGESTED LOCATIONS
FOR THE JROOTS SHABBAT
EXPERIENCE:

GIBRALTAR
PRAGUE
BUDAPEST
AMSTERDAM
LONDON
PORTO
PARIS

OUR JROOTS IMMERSIVE HERITAGE TRIPS ARE ABOUT YOU AND YOUR COMMUNITY, GROUP OR FAMILY.

For Jews, nothing can be more bonding than spending Shabbat together, be it in the beginning of the trip, to create a bond that will ensure a cohesive journey. In the middle of a trip to take individuals and make them into a group. Or at the end of a trip to solidify bonds and to ensure a continued relationship between the participants as a group as well as with the group leader.

Many of our locations can be tailored to create a wonderful Shabbat atmosphere, you won't just visit a place of Jewish relevance and importance, but you will be immersed in the way Jews once lived and practiced in the same environment. You will experience an uplifting Shabbat service filled with prayer, song and dance, eat traditional Shabbat meals, hear from renowned speakers, both local and international and take a walking tour of the city.

Our Shabbat experience can be a stand-alone trip, it can be bookended by Friday and Sunday touring in the same location, or it can be part of a more extended trip.





THE CHEESECAKE FESTIVAL: TA'AM RECIPES FOR SHAVUOT

WHAT IS TA'AM?

Ta'am, meaning 'taste' in Hebrew, is so much more than just the positive or negative sensation of something hitting our taste buds. It also means 'reason' or 'discernment' and offers a profound statement about how we relate to our senses. In Judaism, taste is so much more than the hedonistic connection between flavour and happiness. Ta'am asks us to dive deeper, to question. Why is this delicious? And how did it get here onto my plate?

In Judaism, it isn't enough to simply eat without thinking. We are asked to say thank you, not just to the cook, but also to the Creator, both before and after we eat; to acknowledge that we are partners in this creation. As cooks, we know how wonderful it is to take a raw ingredient and use it to make a delicious dish. Judaism asks us to pause and recognise that this is a partnership between us and God, and in that moment of stirring, frying, baking, serving, we too get to play a small part in creation. At Ta'am we share the joy of our collective culinary history and at the same time a deep sense of being part of the bigger picture.

LET'S TALK ABOUT THE 'CHEESECAKE FESTIVAL'

Shavuot, widely known as the 'Cheesecake festival', plays a pivotal role in the story of the Jewish people. More than the baked goods and dairy products that fill the bakery shelves at this time of year, Shavuot commemorates the Children of Israel receiving the Torah at the base of Mount Sinai, making this festival a central part of Jewish life to this very day.

Receiving the Torah resulted in a mixture of euphoria and confusion for the Children of Israel. There were many new rules and regulations to adhere to, but ultimately there was great joy and celebration as there was now a blueprint for how best to serve God, who brought us out of Egypt and freed us from servitude. Despite all the new rules, from that very first moment, the Children of Israel embraced the Torah.

SO WHY DAIRY?

Receiving the Torah on Shavuot directly correlates with gaining the laws of Kashrut, and of separating meat and milk. Tradition tells us that the Torah was received on Shabbat. Faced with restrictions relating to butchering meat in a kosher fashion, as well as the many rules about keeping Shabbat, the Children of Israel understood that they would have to wait until the end of Shabbat before taking an animal for their festive meal. This is one of the myriad reasons that many have adopted the tradition of eating dairy on Shavuot.

But the Jewish connection to dairy goes beyond Mount Sinai. While in modern times, a festive meal might involve chicken soup and brisket, historically Jews were poor and were rarely (if ever) part of the gentry or nobility. This meant that Jewish foods were simple and large cuts of meat were certainly not on the menu. However, most families (Ashkenazi, Sephardi and Mizrachi alike) did have a milking animal, which provided the primary source of protein for the family. Subsequently, they would make soft or curd cheeses each week and would serve these cheeses creatively, in a variety of ways - as a filling for pasta and pastry, on top of a slice of black bread or combined with stewed fruit or fresh vegetables.

SO WHERE DID CHEESECAKE COME FROM?

Shavuot is both a historical holiday and an agricultural one. The festival falls in the springtime, when animals give birth and milk yield is high, so historically, dairy production went into overdrive during this period, with farmers producing plenty of cheese, butter, sour milk and cream. To use up the excess cheese, ingenious cooks started using cheese in cakes, adding a touch of flour for stability, eggs as a setting agent, honey for sweetness and a pastry case as a base to hold the mixture together. In fact, the first time we hear of cheesecakes is in Ancient Greece. Still just as delicious, the basic cheesecake recipe has not changed much over millennia.



To add some flair to your cheesecakes this Shavuot, why not try adding your own twist. We've taken a traditional 'New York style' baked cheesecake recipe and added some fruity additions to give a nod to the harvest festival, as well as a tasty chocolate cheesecake (because all cakes are better with chocolate).

The mixture fills a single 23cm (9") springform tin as one whole cake or fills eight mini 10cm (4"), round spring forms, to produce a series of smaller cakes - a fun way to try several different fillings.

INGREDIENTS

For the base

- 170g (6oz / ³/₄ cup) butter, plus extra for greasing tin(s)
- 280g (10oz / 3 cups) digestive biscuits, made into fine
- 1½ tbsp golden caster sugar

For the cheesecake filling

- 1kg (2.2lb / 4 cups) full-fat soft cheese (can use cream cheese)
- 250g (9oz / 1 cup) golden caster sugar
- 3 tbsp plain flour
- 1½ tsp vanilla extract
- Finely grated zest of 1 lemon (about 2 tsp)
- 1½ tsp lemon juice
- 3 large eggs, plus 1 yolk
- 200ml (0.85 cups) carton sour cream

METHOD

- Preheat your oven to 180°C (160°C Fan / 350°F / Gas Mark 4)
- Line the base of a springform tin: Either one 23cm or eight x 10cm springform tins (available in packs of four you can bake one, four or all eight at the same time).

Base

- Crush 280g (5oz / 1½ cups) biscuits
- Melt 170g (3oz) of butter in a medium-sized pan and stir in the biscuits. Stir in 1 tbsp of golden caster sugar until it is combined and well coated.
- Carefully press the mixture into the bottom of your cake tin(s) and bake in the oven for 10 minutes. Remove and leave to cool (inside the tins) on a wire rack.
- Increase the temperature of the oven to 200°C (180°C Fan / 390°F / Gas Mark 6).

Cheesecake filling

- In a mixer (you can use a large bowl with an electric whisk) beat 1kg (2.2lb / 4 cups) of full fat, soft cheese on a low speed until creamy. This should only take a couple of minutes.
- Slowly beat in 250g (9oz / 1 cup) of caster sugar (keeping the mixer on low). Then add in 3 tbsp of plain flour, and a pinch of salt. Scrape the sides of to combine the mixture and whisk until fully combined.
- To this mixture, add 1.5tsp vanilla extract, the zest of a small lemon and 1.5 tsp lemon juice
- Whisk in, one at a time, 3 large eggs and 1 egg yolk. Scrape the sides of the bowl intermittently. Whisk until well combined.
- Stir in 200ml (0.85 cups) of sour cream. Whisk to blend, but don't overdo it. It should be light and fluffy at the end.
- Grease the sides of the springform tin(s). Pour the batter
 into your tin(s). Add your toppings according to the next
 step or bake without additions for a plain baked cheesecake.
- Increase the temperature of the oven to 200°C (180°C Fan / 390°F / Gas Mark 6).



OPTIONAL ADDITIONS

Blueberries (depending on cake tin size):

- Pour the cake mixture into the tin and then decorate the top with blueberries. You can be relatively generous, but don't overfill.
- They will naturally sit on the top. Bake.

Strawberry swirl:

- Wash and roughly chop 12-15 strawberries.
- Heat in a saucepan with a teaspoon of golden sugar and cook on medium heat until soft and jammy.
- Strain through a fine metal sieve, pushing the mixture through with the back of a spoon.
- Allow to cool (can be chilled in fridge)
- Once cold, drop teaspoons of the mixture onto the top of the cake and swirl with a cocktail stick into desired pattern.
 Bake. Keep the leftover coulis to drizzle on the cheesecake before serving.

Chocolate:

- Pour your batter into your cake tin(s)
- In a bain-marie (water bath), break up 100g (3½ oz) of chocolate and half a cup of double cream. Mix until the chocolate is melted. Do not allow to cool. Drop small amounts of the chocolate mixture into the pre-poured batter. It will drop below the surface, so swirl with a cocktail stick. Bake.
- Bake on 200°C (180°C Fan / 390°F / Gas Mark 6) fan for 20 minutes (small tins) or 30 minutes (larger tin) and check. Unlike with brownies, a cocktail stick won't come out clean, but you will be able to see if there is little in terms of significant wobble. Smaller plain or chocolate cakes should be ready after 20 minutes, while the blueberry cheesecake may need another 5 to 10 minutes due to the increased liquid.
- Remove and place on a wire rack to cool





Remind everyone that Shavuot is all about the receiving of the Torah with our cream cheese-filled puff pastry scrolls. With a traditional ricotta and double cream filling, serve as a pair for the Two Tablets. The colourful sprinkles reflect the beautiful flowers that are thought to have covered Mount Sinai.

INGREDIENTS

- Pre-bought puff pastry roll
- 100g (3½ oz) cooking chocolate
- Sprinkles
- 425ml (1½ cups) Double cream
- 250g tub (1 cup) Ricotta

Equipment

- Metal Cannoli Form Tubes
- Electric Whisk

METHOD

- Unroll defrosted pre-bought puff pastry. Remember you don't have to use the whole roll for this - you can reserve some for another dish (a cheese or vegetable strudel works well for leftover pastry)
- Using a knife, slice 2-3 cm (1") wide strips from the roll, ensuring to keep to an even number to form your Torah scrolls. Slice as many sets as desired.
- Preheat your oven to 180°C (160°C Fan / 350°F / Gas Mark 4)
- Using a pastry brush, brush a Cannoli form tube with oil.
- Gently, with a rolling pin, roll out a strip of the cut pastry, adding some width and length.
- Then, starting from the top of the cylinder, wrap the pastry
 around the metal tube, gently overlapping the pastry to create
 a coiled effect. Be careful not to go over the edge of either
 end, as this can make the tube hard to remove once baked
- Place on a greaseproof papered baking tray.

- Repeat the above process with as many cannoli tubes as you have or as required.
- Egg-wash the pastry tubes and place in the centre of your preheated oven for 20 minutes, or until golden brown.
- Remove from the oven and let it cool.
- Gently pick up each pastry coil, which will now have formed a tube and softly twist the metal cannoli tube to remove.
- Repeat the above until you have as many tubes as desired.

Filling

- Into a bowl, pour in the double cream and 2 tbsp icing sugar.
 Whisk until thick and fluffy.
- Separately, beat the ricotta until smooth and then fold into the whipped cream mixture.
- Ideally, place cream filling into a piping bag and pipe into each pastry scroll. Alternatively, you can use a knife if required.

Topping

- Pour sprinkles into a bowl.
- Over a bain-marie, melt 150g of baking chocolate and stir in ½ cup of double cream. Combine until smooth.
- Remove chocolate from heat, but do not allow to cool.
- Dip each end of the pastry scrolls into the chocolate, then into the sprinkles and place on a wire rack to set.
- If you'd like to make a set of Torah scrolls, you can use a
 drop of chocolate between two similarly sized scrolls to
 'glue' them together and allow to cool. Otherwise, we suggest
 simply serving in pairs.
- Store in the fridge in an airtight container (as the filling is dairy).
- If preparing in advance, for best results, store the pastry scrolls in an airtight container at room temperature and the cream cheese filling in the fridge, and compile on the day of serving.
- For a savoury alternative, try out our delicious Spinach and Feta pastry rolls: wearetaam.com/spinach-and-feta-rolls

EASY SHAVUOT RECIPES FOR KIDS

by ZAHAVA KAHEN

I ALWAYS LOOK FORWARD TO
SHAVUOT. MY SON IS ALLERGIC TO
EGGS AND DAIRY, SO I GIVE MYSELF
A LITTLE BIT OF LEEWAY TO INDULGE
AND MAKE SOME THINGS THAT HE
CAN'T NORMALLY EAT AS A TREAT
FOR THE REST OF THE FAMILY.

HAR SINAI CUPCAKES



- 2 cups flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 3/4 cup sugar
- · Pinch of salt
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup milk or non-dairy alternative
- ½ cup oil
- 2 tablespoons sprinkles

FROSTING

- ½ cup butter or non-dairy alternative, softened
- 3 cups icing sugar
- 2 tablespoons milk or dairy alternative
- Green food colouring
- · Kifkaf chocolate
- Flower sprinkles

METHOD

- Preheat oven to 180°
- Prepare cupcake tin with 12 cupcake cases.
- In a large bowl, mix all the dry ingredients together. Then add the remaining ingredients and mix well.
- Pour evenly into the cupcake tin.
- Bake for 20-25 minutes and then leave to cool.

- Meanwhile you can make the frosting. In a mixing bowl,
 - Meanwhile you can make the frosting. In a mixing bowl, add all the ingredients and mix until the consistency is smooth and creamy. Add green food colouring to the desired colour. I usually add just a couple of drops.
 - When the cupcakes are cooled, you can begin with the frosting. Either use a star tip to pipe some lovely 'tufts of grass' or simply spread the frosting over each cupcake with a spoon (it's just as tasty!)
 - The next step is to create a 'luchot' cupcake that resembles the Tablets received on Har Sinai. Unwrap the chocolate bar with its two fingers. Cut off the top of the fingers so that they resemble the luchot, and pop them on top of one of your cupcakes (and then eat the remainder of the chocolate!) Sprinkle your 'luchot' cupcake with flower sprinkles, or regular sprinkles if you don't have any. You can also add sprinkles to the other cupcakes.
 - As an alternative, you can put chocolate chips into the batter before baking. You can also use this recipe to make a cake instead of cupcakes, which should be baked in a 9" round tin for 30-35 minutes.



SHMEAZY LASAGNE

INGREDIENTS

- 1 box lasagne sheets (500g)
- 1 large jar marinara sauce (680g)
- 3 cartons cottage cheese (600g)
- 3 large eggs
- 1 cup grated cheddar cheese
- Extra cheese for topping
- Salt and pepper to taste

METHOD

- Preheat oven to 180°
- In a bowl mix together the cottage cheese, eggs, cheddar cheese and salt and pepper. Set aside.
- Now it's time to start layering. In a 9"x13" pan, spoon out some marinara sauce so that it covers the bottom of the pan. Then layer the uncooked lasagne sheets, spoon over some more marinara sauce and spread it out. Top this with some of the cheese mixture. Repeat the process until you get to the last layer of lasagne sheets. For the topping, spread out a layer of marinara sauce, and then sprinkle the cheddar cheese over the top.
- Place in the oven and bake for 40 minutes.



Zahava Kahen was born in New York, but spent her early years in Rio de Janeiro, Hong Kong and finally London. She is mother to 4 children and is married to a local GP. Zahava's love of Torah and creativity was nurtured through her years at Hasmonean, Machon Gold and London College of Fashion. Zahava is always looking for ways to share her love of Torah with children and young adults. With ventures such as Parsha Parcels and Home S'Cool newsletter, she has consistently engaged with and connected young people with their heritage through food, art, games and crafts. You can find Zahava on Instagram @cooking.to.eat

SEASONALLY BOLD, Seasonally fresh!



by CAROLINE AVITAL

NEW STYLE SASHIMI SALMON

INGREDIENTS

- 500g sushi grade salmon
- 2 tablespoons garlic (minced)
- 1 two-inch piece fresh ginger, minced
- 2 tablespoons white toasted sesame seeds
- 4 tablespoons soy sauce
- 4 tablespoons yuzu juice
- 12 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 4 tablespoons sesame oil
- · Chives and micro leaves for garnish

METHOD

- Slice the fish into equally thin slices.
- Fan out the salmon in a circle over a dinner plate
- Scatter some minced garlic and ginger on top of the fish.
- Sprinkle with the toasted white sesame seeds.
- To prepare the dressing: combine the olive oil with the rest of the ingredients in a mixing bowl and pour over the fish.
- Use the chives and micro leaves for garnish.
- Serve and enjoy.

BEETROOT CARPACCIO

INGREDIENTS

- 2 large red cooked beetroot
- 2 large yellow cooked beetroot
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon grain mustard
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon maple syrup
- 1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar
- ½ teaspoon sea salt flakes
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- Edamame beans
- Jalapeno pepper, finely chopped
- Micro leaves for garnish

METHOD

- Using a julienne slicer, carefully cut the red beetroot, then arrange on a serving dish.
- Using a sharp knife, slice the yellow beetroot and place in the centre.
- To prepare the dressing: place all of the ingredients in a glass jar, shake, and cover with a lid.
- Store in refrigerator until ready to serve, then drizzle over the dish.





GRILLED WHOLE ARTICHOKE HALVES

INGREDIENTS

- 4 large artichokes
- 1 lemon
- Kosher salt
- 1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 3 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- Freshly ground black pepper

METHOD

- Place a large pot containing the artichokes over mediumhigh heat, add in a small handful kosher salt and two lemon halves, and bring to a boil.
- Lower heat to medium and cook, covered, until stems are knife-tender, for about 15 minutes.
- Drain and cool.
- Meanwhile, in a small saucepan over medium-low heat.
- Heat oil and garlic until garlic turns lightly golden.
- Remove from heat immediately and pour over the grilled artichokes.
- Sprinkle with salt and a dash of lemon juice before serving.



Born in London, Caroline Avital (nee Sade) grew up in a family of restauranteurs. Her late father was the famous owner of Solly's restaurant. You could say good food runs in her blood. Caroline has a BA in Architecture and has a natural artistic and creative flare. She is married and is the proud mother of two gorgeous boys. One of her greatest passions is to travel and explore new cuisines and tastes from around the world. She spends her weekends developing interesting recipes and testing out exciting dishes with her family and friends.

ORANGE SPONGE CAKE

INGREDIENTS

ORANGE CAKE

- 125g butter, softened
- ½ cup milk
- 1/4 cup orange juice
- 2 eggs
- ³/₄ cup caster sugar
- 1 ½ cups self-raising flour, sifted
- 1 tbs orange zest, finely grated

ORANGE ICING

- 1/3 cup butter softened
- 1 ½ cups icing sugar, sifted
- 2 tbs orange juice (to taste)
- ½ tsp orange zest, finely grated

METHOD

- Combine all cake ingredients and beat thoroughly for three minutes.
- Pour mixture into a greased 20cm x 30cm loaf or 20cm ring tin. Bake in the centre of a 180°C oven for 30-40 minutes.
- Once the cake is ready, turn onto a wire rack and allow to cool.

ICING:

- For the icing, place butter in a saucepan over a low heat.
- Add icing sugar, orange juice and zest.
- Stir until you have a soft icing.
- Allow to cool slightly, then drizzle over cake allowing it to drip down the sides.



A DEGREE OF INDIVIDUALIS

by MARIA BEIDER

PARENTS HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE
TO PLAY IN ASSISTING YOUNG ADULTS
TO INDIVIDUATE AND DEVELOP THEIR
OWN VOICES

Then a young adult decides to go off to university, the focus appears to be on choosing a subject or two that they will study in meticulous detail for three years or more until they attain an Honours degree and may be deemed somewhat of an authority on the matter. Underneath this façade, however, there seems to be something deeper afoot. The college years can be magical for many reasons but particularly because they present an intense opportunity to explore identity and beliefs, and gain a degree in individuation.

In Erickson's classic psychosocial stages of development, adolescence is described as a time of resolving the crisis between identity versus role confusion. 'Emerging adulthood' (ages 18 to 25) is another psychosocial stage that was added by Arnett for those who are too old to be adolescents but are not yet fully-fledged adults. Going to university is a transition time that falls precisely between the two stages described above, so both crises are relevant here.

The years of emerging adulthood are the start of a lifelong journey of self-discovery defined by the process of differentiation from one's family and upbringing. It is a special time of exploration, self-expression, defining your worldview and identity fulfilment, however it is also a time of instability, and for religious Jewish teens, there is the added challenge of integrating one's Judaism into the mix.

I recently worked with a 16-year-old religious girl who was struggling with certain issues. In our first session I was curious to get to know her, so I asked her what she would like to tell me about herself. She struggled to share anything of a personal nature. Of course, she was probably nervous coming to see a therapist for the first time, so I tried to make it easier for her by asking her if she wanted to talk about her hobbies, friends, academic interests, books or music she liked, or how she would describe herself. Her response to each of these suggestions was to shrug, or look at me blankly, as if I had just asked her whether she had ever visited Mars. While she was able to tell me what her family do together and talk about her siblings, nieces and nephews, she seemed to have very little sense of her own individual identity.

Surprisingly, this young girl's responses were not atypical for her age group. Many teens have not yet developed their own sense of self and only view themselves as part of the family unit. Perhaps they are not permitted to develop their own voices until they leave home because their homes are too rigid. Alternatively, it may be that schools are not encouraging these students to think and develop their own ideas. Either way, university (or indeed yeshiva or seminary) is an amazing gift of time for finding out who you are, developing a unique voice and differentiating from your family. It is the first opportunity for young adults to move away from their 'scripted' lives, although sometimes too much freedom can be daunting.

In our current 'lockdown' era, with so many religious youths living at home during their university years, differentiation may be more challenging for young adults. As parents we must encourage our young adults to express their individuality in preparation for leaving the nest, even if they are still living under our roof. If we do not encourage our children to think for themselves in a safe, nurturing and open environment, there is a real danger that they may fall into the trap of having their lives thought out for them. And then before you know it, they are dating and married without having discovered who they are and how to make autonomous decisions.

Conversely, there are young adults who reject their parents' values and messages, choosing to do things drastically differently. It is important to recognise the difference between 'teenage moments', and serious rebellion that develops from a place of anger and from feeling unseen or misunderstood. Teenage behaviour usually includes some kind of risk-taking*, which can be a normative way to find one's unique voice. Sometimes a person may feel the need to experiment with fashion statements, vegetarianism or social justice causes because life has been scripted up until now. Often experimenting will include pushing back against the older generation's ways of doing things. This may mean leaning to the opposite end of the spectrum in order to eventually swing back to a so-called central position and find equilibrium, however unnerving that may be for parents! These unexpected behaviours are all part and parcel of working out one's identity, even if they leave parents scratching their heads. However, an angry or confused teen who feels misunderstood, unseen, unlovable and does not trust their parents, will look for ways to express their pain through extreme risk taking or unsafe actions.

Practically speaking, the more communication and discussion we have with our teens about their choices and actions, the less likely they will feel the need to rebel so extremely, and the more likely they will be to seek out our advice and help. Rigid boundaries can be dangerous. Too much tension in the spring will cause it to break. Does it have to be wound so tightly? As parents we can choose to relax the tension in that spring. We need to be flexible with teens and young adults. In fact, the spring needs constant tweaking every few months or so. Ultimately, we want our children to develop the capacity to take 'moderate' risks or have a few 'teen moments' as opposed to acting out extreme 'at risk' behaviour. Our job is to be there to guide them to navigate the stormy waters of this life stage, and sometimes that may mean taking a more liberal view of things.

A beautiful example I want to share of broad-minded, or should I say 'broad-shouldered' parenting is the case of someone I know, who decided to accompany her teenage daughter who was going to get a second ear piercing. The teenage girl in question would

have made this fashion statement anyway, and no doubt or would have done something more extreme if she had been forbidden from getting the piercing. The message her mother gave her was as follows: "Even though we do not approve of this way of expressing yourself, we love you and we want a relationship with you. Above all we want you to feel loved, safe, seen and validated."

This particular mother understood the importance of an unconditionally loving context for this child. She felt the importance of applying flexibility and expanding her normal parameters rather than risk losing the connection she had with her daughter. Moreover, she was able to show her that she could see things from a teenage perspective in a non-judgmental way. Often parents forget what it was like to be that age. Were you always straight down the line? Did you ever deviate from the line drawn by your parents and teachers? And how narrow was that line, by the way? This story may not reflect the right approach for every teen out there, and in each individual case there are nuances, factors to consider; as well as times to be flexible and times to adhere to strict boundaries.

According to Rabbi YY Jacobson, parents must ask themselves if they have an agenda. What is the conflict about? Is it about the 'holy' image that the parent wants to project to the outside world? Are we helping the child by gently guiding them on their own path to individuation? Does the child feel their parents' trust, or does he feel angry, judged and misunderstood? Furthermore, if the teen has no clear direction, they will be confused and unable to develop their own opinion and voice.

Ultimately, there must be open channels of communication. For teens and young adults to move from a place of dependence to independence, there must be a good relationship and tender guidance from parents. The goal for the young adult is to arrive at *interdependence* successfully, which means to be able to separate yet stay connected. If we prepare our teens whilst they are still at school, help them to discover their unique voice and a healthy sense of self within a secure framework, we will be able to send them out confidently into the world to attain that degree of individuality.

* On a chemical level it is interesting to pay attention to adolescent brain development which continues into the mid-twenties. During late adolescence there is an increase in the activity of the neural circuits utilising *dopamine*, a neurotransmitter. An enhanced dopamine release can cause one to gravitate towards thrilling, exhilarating experiences and take more risks.



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