

PERSPECTIVES

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The magazine of  **jewish
futures**

Jewish Futures is a family of diverse educational organisations working together to ensure a vibrant Jewish future



our story

PESACH

TIPS & SPARKS FOR
MINIMUM EFFORT / MAXIMUM IMPACT

CLAUDIA RODEN

MEMORIES AND FLAVOURS
FROM HER CHILDHOOD IN EGYPT

EMMANUEL MORENO

THE UNTOLD STORIES OF
ISRAEL'S GREATEST FALLEN HERO

THE MOST HATED MAN

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
WITH HILLEL NEUER

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MENDY PORTNOY... AND MORE!



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DEAR READERS,



Welcome to our seventeenth issue of Perspectives Magazine! I am grateful for the creative and meaningful opportunity to come on as Editor for this Pesach edition, themed *Our Story*. As someone who has been involved in various storytelling mediums — from my own performances as a classical concert pianist, to coaching others on stage and movie sets — working together with our fabulous team at Jewish Futures has opened a unique opportunity to combine my creative drive with content that is meaningful to me.

My late mother was emphatic about the importance of learning from the life experiences of the great people who came before us — the intention behind the decisions they made, what greatness meant to them, the mistakes they made along the way, and the steps they took to achieve success. So when I joined the team and heard that our theme for the Pesach edition is, fittingly, *Story*, I knew I wanted to spend time with inspiring individuals who make a real impact on the world in order to collect and share their stories.

These stories come from exclusive interviews with individuals including Hillel Neuer, “the most hated man at the United Nations,” an incredible initiative by METIV called Peace of Mind that helps IDF veterans overcome post traumatic stress through the medium of storytelling, the twenty-year-old food media phenomenon Eitan Bernath, and in celebration of thirty incredible years of Aish UK, our very own founder and CEO of Jewish Futures and Aish UK, Rabbi Naftali Schiff, shares personal stories of inspiration and aspiration.

Our Editor-in-Chief Rabbi Ari Kayser shares his recent experience with Aish YP’s in India, revealing its unique Jewish

history — the richness of his writing will transport you to nearly hear, smell, and taste it! Our exciting technology section features an update on the incredible 3D technology revolutionising the future of Holocaust education, as well as a fascinating look at the AI technology that has taken the world by storm.

It isn’t Pesach without the food! Get to know the iconic Claudia Roden and her decadent Orange and Almond Cake, explore the beauty in simplicity of recipes and solutions to creating delicious meals while creating memories with recipes by Rebbetzin Ilana Epstein photographed by the inimitable Blake Ezra. Bring the magazine with you to the table and use our collection of inspiring articles to spark lively discourse and introspection.

Last but certainly not least — I felt compelled to share the few powerful stories of the great fallen hero of Israel, Emmanuel Yehuda Moreno. I will forever cherish the evening that I spent with his parents, savouring details of their son’s humility, faithfulness and courage that I have the honour to share with you, in order for you to carry them with you and share them widely.

I hope the pages that follow will bring inspiration and conversation to your homes and gatherings, and inspire you to access your unique potential to make your own impact on the world.

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SASHA SILBER

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

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UNTOLD STORIES

Emmanuel Moreno
Protector of Israel

SASHA SILBER

"Ilan and Sylvia Moreno hold a wooden sculpture representing their fallen son, Emmanuel Moreno z"l. His parents explained the significance of the piece: 'Emmanuel made his mark on the ground, but his thoughts were always rising to the sky...'"

Photo by Sasha Silber



I can remember the first time I heard about Emmanuel Yehuda Moreno, of blessed memory. At first, I heard of his humility and faithfulness, and only then did I hear the known bits about the unimaginable scope of his (mostly classified) tremendous contributions to the security of the Jewish people, both in Israel and in the Diaspora.

Recently, I had the unique privilege of spending an evening with his parents, Ilan and Sylvia Moreno, during which they graciously shared stories they have collected about their son following his untimely death. You see, Emmanuel never spoke about himself. The stories they shared over the course of the evening came from his unit comrades, commanders, and strangers who had experienced a special encounter with him.

The Moreno family's cosy living room is adorned with a brass Moroccan lantern with a touch of red stained glass. On a beautifully-carved wooden table, trays of fresh strawberries and cakes were arranged with care. The Morenos did not once check their clock. They took turns speaking, adoringly sharing glimpses into their son's uniqueness with pride, but always making sure to remind me that "Emmanuel would never have let us talk about him," or "...but we didn't hear this from him!"

Ilan and Sylvia Moreno are North African immigrants who met in France - Ilan had come from Morocco to study in a Jewish school, and Sylvia emigrated with her family from Tunisia - were married, and started their family. "When the Six-Day War broke out, that was it - we knew we had to make Aliyah (move to Israel). France was no longer our home." It took a few years, but the growing Moreno family came to Israel when Emmanuel was just one year old.

Emmanuel grew up in Jerusalem, immersed in Jewish learning and a love of the Land encouraged by his family, school, and participation in the Bnei Akiva youth movement. He was notably far from the first in his family to make history for the State of Israel and the Jewish People: when he was just five years old, his grandmother Ninette Moreno was one of



Emmanuel Moreno z"l (center), together with 2 soldiers from Sayeret Matkal.

the passengers on Air France Flight 139 that was hijacked by Palestinian terrorists and taken captive to Entebbe, Uganda. Ilan, her son, explained that it was her attention to detail, stubbornness, and creativity (not to mention courage), that provided the Mossad with accurate plans of the Entebbe Airport that ultimately led to the safe return of the Israeli hostages to Israel in what is known as Operation Entebbe.

As time passed, Emmanuel watched as each of his three older brothers served in combat units of the Israel Defense Forces (all five Moreno brothers served in Elite Combat Units; their actions in the IDF are classified, with the exception of the glimpses permitted to be shared in this article).

Emmanuel never saw himself as remarkable, even when he was accepted into the elite Sayeret Matkal (General Staff Reconnaissance Unit - Israel's Special Forces) unit. He always dreamt of joining the Golani Brigade (military infantry brigade), where he believed the true heroes were. He would often express his admiration for their willingness to put themselves in harm's way every day, not just in carefully planned special missions.

When it was his turn to go through army selection exams, he was recruited into the elite Sayeret Matkal.

Emmanuel insisted on pushing off his service by a year in order to learn advanced Jewish studies in Yeshiva (Bnei David in Eli). With mother's pride, Sylvia recounted, "Emmanuel must have done well on his tests, because he was granted an exception that allowed him to learn that year before beginning his army service and bypass the standard re-testing process that usually follows to start serving straight away."

Ilan jumped in. "Though Emmanuel was happy to be part of a great group of boys serving in Sayeret Matkal, his heart remained with the Golani. Once, when he was marching through with the rest of the Sayeret Matkal, his commander stopped and gently reprimanded him, 'What's going on? What's all this?' Emmanuel had somehow procured black boots and was wearing his shirt tucked in. 'I'm Golani!' he insisted. They went back and forth, and eventually found a compromise: he changed into the reddish-brown boots of the Elite forces, but was allowed to continue to tuck in his shirt."

I had assumed that Emmanuel was very athletic to qualify for this elite unit. His parents laughed, "if there was anything he could do to avoid moving, that's what he did! But when it was necessary, there was no one faster or stronger - he did what was needed." When his unit did a famous 'week on the run' training, they were told to split up and get from point A to point B (across the country) without getting caught. Laughing, his parents explained that the soldiers had to do this without money, phones, or any other resources. The squad had to check in every evening at a specific time and location; his commanders were always surprised that Emmanuel was always exactly on time and could not understand how he was able to accomplish this. "All means were acceptable, including stealing food. That week, his friends told us, Emmanuel hardly ate anything because for him, stealing was not an option. Instead, he figured out a way to track the commanders' jeep and snuck onto it from time to time, so he definitely used less energy than everyone else - and he didn't look too skinny when he got back!"

As the years went by, Emmanuel went through special training sessions, the specifics of which are classified. While some Moroccan and Tunisian Jews do have knowledge of Arabic, the Morenos did not grow up with the language in their home. Though they never heard Emmanuel speak Arabic, they understood from context, stories from his colleagues, and the changes in his appearance, that not only had he mastered the language, but also over 20 dialects, customs, intonations, and anything else one can imagine. (It is said that Emmanuel was extremely learned in Koran, and used this knowledge in his infiltrative missions.)

Perhaps because of the nature of his missions, Emmanuel never stopped learning about his own roots. His father



Photography: Amit Agronov

reiterated "he always had a book with him. On missions outside of Israel, he would be taken by helicopter. The whole way there he would be learning - Torah, Talmud, the laws of Shabbat, Tanya - and when he would meet the helicopter weeks later at a precise location hundreds of kilometres away that Emmanuel insisted on, baffling the pilot, he would pick up learning wherever he left off, without wasting a minute's time."

He spent prolonged periods of time away from home on missions in enemy territory, alone. Sylvia mentioned several times that evening, "you would think this kind of James Bond character would always have weapons or gadgets, and want to come home to simply rest during his free time. Instead, every single time that Emmanuel would come home, without exception, he would walk straight into the kitchen to start tidying up, washing and drying dishes - and then continue over to iron his family's clothes and fold laundry that was not his. This did not change once he was married to his wife Maya, even when he

came home tired after a difficult mission. He always washed the floors, helped around the house, and spent time with his three children - he loved his little family so much!"

There are only two small stories of Emmanuel's missions that have been cleared for publication. In addition to what was published in the press, Mr. and Mrs. Moreno revealed details from those missions that spoke of Emmanuel's incredible humility and values:

"Emmanuel was involved in a mission to rescue the kidnapped Israeli taxi driver Eliyahu Gorel after five days of captivity in a pit in Ramallah," Ilan recalled. "It was Emmanuel and another soldier from their unit that took the lead on this case. When they finally had arrived at the pit at the moment of action, he made a tactical decision to go down into the pit to save the hostage instead of allowing his comrade to go. Emmanuel sensed that his friend was disappointed and truly wanted to be the one to save the hostage, but did not say anything at the time. We heard during the Shiva for Emmanuel from the friend:

"Months after the rescue mission, I heard a knock at the door,' he began, 'and when I opened it, Emmanuel was uncharacteristically dressed in his finest uniformed look. I was confused and even a bit worried. Emmanuel explained why he had come: he had been troubled by what happened during the Gorel rescue mission. He explained that he had simply acted in a calculated way to rescue Gorel as quickly and safely as possible, but clearly he was so sensitive to how I felt, even though I did not show it. He came that day in uniform to sincerely ask for my forgiveness for having taken away the opportunity to go first and receive the honour.'"





Emmanuel Moreno z"l (left), together with his squad from Sayeret Matkal.

Ilán continued on to chronicle Emmanuel's role in the famous mission to capture Amal terrorist Mustafa Dirani: "Friends from Emmanuel's unit told me the story: Israel had been tracking the captive Israeli Air Force Navigator Ron Arad. At some point, in spite of enormous efforts, Israel lost track of Arad. After years of failed peace talks and attempts to locate Arad, Sayeret Matkal took over.

"Emmanuel was in charge of many months of planning, reconnaissance missions, orchestrating the mission, practising over and over with the team, and finally executing. Emmanuel decided that the night of the mission to capture Dirani from Lebanon (in a village near the Syrian border) to interrogate him would specifically be on the night of Rammadan without the light of the moon, after the conclusion of the first night meal, before the second meal was to begin (usually around 4 or 5 in the morning). It is a time when everyone sleeps very deeply.

"Helicopters brought approximately thirty commando soldiers a few kilometres away from the village. Emmanuel and three soldiers were to penetrate Dirani's home from one side, while another team of four soldiers were to enter from the side to eliminate all of the guards. During training, the variable was that the two teams didn't know who would arrive at Dirani's bedside first. During the operation, things went so smoothly that both teams

Dirani woke as they entered the room and reached for a gun from behind his pillow; his wife jumped from the bed, undressed, screaming. Instead of the obvious choice and protocol to neutralise anyone screaming and about to compromise the operation, Emmanuel found a robe in the room, and quickly covered her up, even taking a few moments to speak with her, calming her down."

**"THESE ARE THE STORIES
THAT INTEREST US – THE REST,
WE WILL NEVER KNOW..."**

arrived simultaneously in front of Dirani's room from either side of the same hallway. Emmanuel smiled, and with a grand hand gesture, whispered "Bekhavad!" ("go ahead, do the honours!") to the other team commander.

Sylvia interjected, "this was a profound understanding of their culture and respect for modesty." Ilán continued, "This is one of the stories that I truly enjoy telling because it speaks to the kind of choices Emanuel made, reflective of his values.

He could have neutralised her, but instead, he just calmed her down in a human way. To this day, when planning and executing missions, commanders will ask 'should we do an Emmanuel?'"

"His friends from his unit told us later on," Sylvia proudly recalled, "that they had received a hero's welcome upon their return to Israel with the captured terrorist. As the Ramatkal (Commander-in-Chief of the Israel Defense Forces), together with other commanders and ministers lined up to shake the hands of the team, Emmanuel was nowhere to be found. It turned out that he went over to the nearest synagogue directly upon landing in order to participate in prayer services - it happened to be Shabbat."

In all of the stories that the Morenos shared with me that evening, the stories of his relationship with Judaism, of his values and his faith, were never those of preaching. He lived with his convictions, and just as he did on the field, he was a true leader of faith by simply doing what he knew to be right, quietly, with no

fuss, and without wasting a moment's time. "These are the stories that interest us - the rest, we will never know..." Ilan trailed off. "He and his entire unit knew that they were risking their lives. He lived with total faithfulness and saw everything as part of a bigger picture - Hashgacha (Divine Providence). He didn't see himself as a hero or as anyone particularly extraordinary - in fact, a friend from his unit told us some time ago that they would think about what they would do once they retired. They decided they would become security guards for a movie theatre!", the Morenos laughed.

Emmanuel Yehuda Moreno was only 35 years old when he was assassinated. It happened just after the ceasefire had technically begun at the end of the Second Lebanon War; an operation went south and the fighters were exposed. Photographs of Emmanuel's face are still under strict censorship - they have been removed from the internet and home photo albums, and the idea of publicising them is up for discussion from time to time. Sylvia explained, "he was responsible for

"EMMANUEL WAS THE BEST SOLDIER IN THE WORLD," HIS SQUAD COMMANDER SAYS. "WHY? THE IDF IS THE WORLD'S BEST ARMY, SAYERET MATKAL IS THE TOP UNIT IN THE IDF, OUR SQUAD IS THE BEST ONE IN THE UNIT, AND HE WAS THE BEST SOLDIER IN THE SQUAD."

so many missions under such deep cover that our enemies have no idea about, setting up infrastructures and groups in the entire region that could cause serious threat to the safety of the People of Israel, here and abroad, if discovered."

Spending the evening hearing these and more stories about this giant of a man - this hero of Israel - I was struck by how Emmanuel's humility and simplicity were not at all contradictory to the greatness of his deeds and strength of character. It is precisely his modesty and unassuming nature that made him even greater.



A photograph of Claudia Roden, an older woman with dark hair, smiling and sitting at a dark wooden table. She is wearing a blue button-down shirt and a colorful, patterned scarf. Behind her is a large, ornate rug with a complex geometric and floral pattern in blue, orange, and white. The lighting is warm and focused on her.

CLAUDIA RODEN

THE STORY OF A PEOPLE

REBBETZIN ILANA EPSTEIN

Claudia Roden has been one of my heroes for many years. I remember picking up her cookbook “The Book of Jewish Food” years ago and being transported by her stories and recipes to distant, yet familiar worlds. Her food stories brought the whole Jewish world into my home. The rituals, ceremonies, customs, and flavours of Jewish kitchens floated off the page, and onto my kitchen counter.

A good cook is one who lets the ingredients speak for themselves: a bit of oil, salt, and a squeeze of lemon can make a dish sing. But in Claudia’s world, she insists on more. The distinct combination of ingredients, method, and the ‘how and when’ of a dish needs to be known. Once we understand its background, the dish isn’t just going to sing, it’s going to share its own unique story with us.

It is not about the ingredients, but about the people who developed these dishes, and the lives they led. Even more so when it comes to Jewish dishes. Each one describes an entire world; a journey of a family, a community, always harkening back to its roots, traditions, ceremonies, and rituals.

Claudia Roden was born in Egypt and lived one of the most unique existences a Jew can live: a Jew living on the banks of the River Nile, thousands of years after the Jews were liberated from Egypt. Never was the strangeness of this existence more apparent than when the family celebrated Passover. How did the story of Exodus sound to a Jew living in Egypt in the 20th century?

In an interview with Claudia, she shared some of her favourite memories and stories, and of course recipes that connect her to her past and to the Passover story.

Claudia described how, for days before Pesach, her family and the community prepared for the festival. On a small village further up the Nile from Cairo called Mit Ghamr workers would be brought in to make matzah. The workers spent the week before Pesach in the village. They were given special clothing that was properly washed so as not to inadvertently transfer *chametz* from their clothing to the matzah. The matzah they prepared was formed into large circular sheets and distributed to the whole community.

In Claudia's home, her brothers and her father would set out trestle tables to host as many family members as possible for the seder, but with the family numbering in the hundreds, not everyone would be able to participate. Those who were not at the seder were visited during the holiday.

On seder night, the men and boys chanted in Hebrew with Spanish modulation and Arab tunes. The Egyptian national anthem was the tune for one of the Seder songs. Her father read the Haggadah and relived the Children of Israel's escape from slavery in Egypt with great passion. As children, sitting further down the table, Claudia shared that "[We] felt sometimes like the Jews who were left behind in the Exodus."

"The special Seder foods were on a very large tray, not a seder plate. Everyone ate from the tray: whole shoulder of lamb, lettuce and everyone had a hamin (long simmered) egg. The charoset was made from dates and raisins boiled together. We always saw the Nile silt just outside — we didn't have a dam on the Nile at that point so it was dark brown like the charoset. As a child we couldn't believe the pyramids were built with the Nile silt we saw outside of our window and we were mimicking it with our charoset!"

"I was the eldest female child. My job was to hold a bowl while my father was pouring the wine to enumerate the plagues into it. Once done, I had to close my eyes and run with my eyes closed to flush the contents down the lavatory.

"It took me a long time to wonder why there was an orange cake in Syria — Muslim and Syrian dishes don't use oranges"

"The Arabic and Hebrew words [for the plagues] were very similar. The servants were hearing our words and laughing in the kitchen.

"This changed when the situation began to sour after the first war with Israel in 1948.

"[The telling of the Passover story] became far more dramatic and tense. The exodus became ominous and we were shouting: 'Next year in Jerusalem' with a passion, and the plagues felt like implications against the Muslims.

"During Passover week we visited every member of the family. At each home, we sat in large circles and were treated to coffee and sherbet, rose water, almond milk, peaches, and small almond treats."

Claudia shared some of the childhood dishes she remembered most from her Egyptian Seder, including food particular to Sephardi Jews, such as broad beans and roasted lamb with apricot sauce for Seder night. Three of

Claudia's grandparents came to Egypt from Syria and brought with them rice dumplings called *kobeba hamda* poached in a lemony chicken soup that had leeks and courgettes in it to remind them of the complaint the Children of Israel made in the desert; that in Egypt, they had leeks and courgettes. [Numbers 11:5]

Claudia modestly shared that she always enjoys an orange almond cake. In truth, Claudia is known worldwide for her famous Passover cake, which has borne many replicas.

"What is interesting to me about this orange almond cake recipe given to me by Iris Galante — a sister-in-law to my grandmother — is that Iris, who had come from Aleppo in Syria to Egypt, brought the recipe with her. It took me a long time to wonder why was there an orange cake in Syria — Muslim and Syrian dishes don't use oranges. What was the origin? I followed the origin of my own family. They were originally from Spain. They had gone to Portugal to escape the Spanish Inquisition and there they were forced to convert and were welcomed as Marranos to Livorno. When it was no longer a great mercantile city, they went to Aleppo, and there they were known as *sinyorim*. They brought with them dishes we think of as being Syrian, but they come from Spain."

Speaking to Claudia was inspirational. In her late eighties, she is still enthusiastic and excited about the work she does. She has just published the 25th-anniversary edition of 'The Book of Jewish Food' and is in the middle of writing yet another cookbook, this one filled with recipes and stories from so many people she has met on her travels and culinary adventures.

She left me feeling buoyant and excited, not only to cook but to ask others about their treasured family recipes, who their families are, where they came from, and their stories. In Claudia's words:

"When you follow a recipe, you can follow the ancestry of the people who made the food and it becomes the story, not of a cake but the story of a family. The story of a people."

CLAUDIA RODEN'S

GÂTEAU À L'ORANGE

ORANGE & ALMOND CAKE

This quintessential Claudia Roden recipe has been imitated and endlessly adapted by chefs and home cooks around the world. It is classic in its simplicity of preparation, yet magical in its complexity of flavour.

Reprinted with permission from *The Book of Jewish Food* by Claudia Roden

YOU WILL NEED

- 2 oranges
- 6 eggs
- 250g (2¼ cups) sugar
- 2 tablespoons orange blossom water*
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 250g (9oz) blanched almonds, coarsely ground

**If you can't find Kosher for Passover orange blossom water, substitute with 1 tablespoon vanilla extract*

METHOD

1. Wash the oranges and boil them whole for 1 ½ hours, or until they are very soft
2. Beat the eggs with sugar
3. Add the orange blossom water, baking powder, and almonds, and mix well
4. Cut open the oranges, remove the seeds, and purée in a food processor

5. Mix thoroughly with the egg and almond mixture, and pour into a 23 cm (9") oiled non-stick cake tin with a removable base, lined* with baking paper, dusted with matzo meal (or flour during the year).
6. Bake in a preheated 375°F/ 190°C/ gas 5 oven for 1 hour
7. Let it cool before turning out



***NOTES:** The temperatures above are for a static heat (non-fan) oven; if using a fan, lower the temperature by 20°C / 70°F. Only line the bottom, but not the sides, of the baking tin with baking paper. Do grease the whole pan. For a more delicate crumb, use finely ground almonds or almond flour. Look for thin-skinned small oranges.

aish uk @30

**Interview with CEO
of Jewish Futures and
Aish UK, Rabbi
Naftali Schiff**

BY RABBI ARI KAYSER

**AISH IS CELEBRATING ITS
30TH YEAR IN THE UK.**

Naftali Schiff has personally stewarded the organisation for much of that period and as such, has quite a unique perspective having been at the forefront of many innovative, informal and outreach Jewish initiatives for a whole generation.



WAS THIS CAREER ALWAYS YOUR INTENTION? TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND AND HOW THIS CAME ABOUT.

I was born and raised in a traditional orthodox home in Kingsbury, London, and attended Hasmonean Grammar School. Family, community and school were major influences in my younger years, in addition to formative years under the tutelage of Yigal Calek with Pirchei London Choir and early leadership training from age 14 as a *madrich* in the local Bnei Akiva. Looking back, I guess I was never one to just conform and go with the flow. I was more interested in challenging the status quo where things didn't make sense to me and motivated to make changes and getting things done when needed. I did fine academically but was probably a thorn in the side of most teachers until arriving in Yeshiva! I sat my A-levels a year early and was finally elated to have the opportunity to leave the constricts of school and spend time studying in Yeshivat HaKotel where I fell in love with Yerushalayim (Jerusalem), and discovered a new depth, beauty and relevance in immersive Torah study. I saw active service in Lebanon and Gaza in the Givati unit of the Israeli Army before returning to London to study International Relations at the London School of Economics. After graduating, I made *aliyah* (moved to Israel), studied to become a Rabbi, getting married and starting a family in the process. We began building our life and family in our home in the Old City, literally two minutes from the Kotel (Western Wall). My wife completed her PhD in the Human Genetics department of Hadassah hospital. We were living the millennial dream of the Jewish People returning home.



Rabbi Naftali Schiff with Israeli
Prime Minister Shimon Peres

WHAT HAPPENED? WHEN DID YOU BECOME INSPIRED TO TAKE ON A LEADERSHIP ROLE?

As a teenager, I was a *madrich* (counsellor) in the Bnei Akiva youth group as well as running the Hasmonean Israel Society. With Yigal Calek's choir, I learned how to express and share a deeper, more spiritual part of myself with others, and not to be afraid of a crowd! These roles demanded responsibility, perseverance, and a fair amount of courage and determination, and showed me what we can actually achieve despite obstacles if we really believe in an ideal and focus our energies to succeed. Youth groups then were much more idealistic and empowering than today. In particular, they stressed the power that young people have to make a difference, to challenge the status quo and craft a brighter future for the Jewish People.



WHO WERE THE BIGGEST INFLUENCES ON YOUR LIFE?

My father was the quintessential *mentsch*, teaching me honesty and integrity. The truth be told, he didn't actually teach it, he lived it. He was an *ish yashar*, an upright man, who taught by example and never preached. I subconsciously observed my parents who were unpretentious, honest, upright, decent people, and proud, communally-involved Jews. My parents didn't preach Judaism to us; they lived it. My mother was a voracious reader, curious about everything — a collector and curator of knowledge across an incredibly wide spectrum of interest. Together they imbued me with a strong set of Jewish values that underpin all that I do.

My most influential teachers were probably Rav Yeshayahu Hadari zt"l, whose love for deep and thoughtful Torah study, connection, and respect for all types of Jews, and the magic of being part of the first generation to return to Yerushalayim. Later, Rav Noach Weinberg zt"l, Founder of Aish HaTorah; he impressed upon me that everything in our power must be attempted to save a post-Holocaust, yet tragically fast-assimilating Jewish generation. He taught me that Torah is not a set of restrictions, but rather the Creator's Instructions for Living and, as such, relevant for every time, place, and generation. He opened my eyes to the plight of perhaps the majority of world Jewry who were increasingly slipping away from meaningful Jewish connection and channelled my latent idealism to shoulder responsibility and leadership. He instilled in us an appreciation that we should not have self-imposed ceilings to aspiration when it comes to reaching out to our brothers and sisters. If the Almighty wants them to come home, we must just plug into that will; do our best, He'll do the rest! He insisted we always remember that as human beings we are limited, however to the extent that we work with humility and unity to ensure a vibrant future for Jews, the Almighty would inevitably bring success.

Thank God, over the last 30 years Aish has seen tremendous success. I think it is all down to this understanding. It's simply not about me or us, it's about doing the right thing, together, and as much as possible, in collaboration with others. It's about caring deeply enough about the confusion, the alienation of the world in which we live, the disconnection, and being willing to burn the midnight oil to find relevant, workable solutions.

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**It's simply not about me or us,
it's about doing the right thing,
together, and as much as possible
in collaboration with others.**



WHY DO YOU LIVE IN THE UK?

To borrow a phrase from the mediaeval Spanish poet Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, "Although I am in the West, my heart is very much in the East." Despite having been in the UK for 23 years, our family home, the only property we own in the world, is in the heart of the Old City of Yerushalayim, the focal point of Jews everywhere; we very much long to go back there, one day. However, after directing the Jerusalem Fellowships for seven years from Israel, we relocated to London in order to help Rabbi Shaul Rosenblatt so that we could ensure that Aish UK would make as great an impact as possible. We initially came with our three young children for just two years, and were blessed with twins soon after our arrival. Those two years have extended to over twenty-three, and our three older children now have families of their own.

The reason we decided to stay, despite personal attachments and dreams elsewhere, is quite simple: Jewish communities the world over face similar challenges of disaffection and drift of our younger generation. Once we saw the impact and success of the freshness of thought, approach and action Aish UK was beginning to have on a small scale, responsibility clearly dictated we had an opportunity to scale the results and success we were seeing all over, in order to truly impact the trajectory of the country where we were born. The British Jewish community has a place on the stage of world Jewry. It is big enough that progress and freshness of approach in the UK has significant ripple effects across the entire Diaspora, and at the same time the UK Jewish population is compact enough that it is reachable and lends itself to creativity and a form of start-up culture of creativity, entrepreneurship, and excitement. Perhaps it began as a form of self-justification for not remaining in Israel, however, over the years, we came to view the UK as a pedagogical laboratory, small enough that real innovation and change is attainable, yet influential enough that it's successful educational structures can be duplicated with great success in larger concentrations of Jewish communities elsewhere.



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Over 20% of UK Jewish marriages in the mainstream of the community in the last 20 years are Aish Alumni.

WHAT ARE SOME OF AISH UK'S GREATEST SUCCESSSES?

Firstly, any success is certainly not the domain of Aish or any one organisation. The last 30 years have seen a sea change in the breadth and depth of Jewish engagement opportunities available to young British Jews today. Secondly, we have always sought and pursued collaborations throughout this 30-year journey. From providing explanatory services during the High Holidays in many United Synagogues, to engaging with JSocs nationwide providing regular Jewish education in schools, both Jewish and mainstream, we have seen how effective our partnerships can be. Perhaps one of the greatest representations of this is the creation of the Rabbinic Conference, Aleinu, a partnership between Aish, JLE, and Seed, along with the United Synagogue, attended this year by over 200 rabbis, rebbetzins, and Jewish educators from across the country. It is fair to say, the mainstay of much of our work today is very much in partnership with others.

Desktop research shows over 20% of UK Jewish marriages in the mainstream of the community over the last 20 years have been Aish alumni. A huge number of these would most likely not have formed part of our success story without innovative Aish educational and social opportunities, and experiences that managed to attract, educate, and empower this generation. Thousands of British Jews have taken their place as upright members of the community. Hundreds of lay and professional leaders have been inspired by the educational ethos and sense of Jewish responsibility engendered by Aish over this period. The statistical studies that led to the personification of British Jews as an “endangered species” in the early 90’s, and Rabbi Sacks challenge on entering office “Will we have Jewish grandchildren?” seems to have abated. According to most contemporary studies, there is at least a stabilisation of levels of outflow from the community that threatened its total demise just 30 years ago.

Success does not belong to any single organisation; however, Aish has certainly played a crucial role in stabilising intermarriage figures in this country, and has been at the forefront of numerous cutting-edge, educational initiatives that have significantly shifted the needle on Jewish engagement as a whole. Despite the successes, there is so much left to do, and I am excited about what the future will bring.

Rabbi Naftali Schiff, Chief Rabbi Lord Jakobovits, Rabbi Neach Weinberger, 1994



Rabbi Naftali Schiff with Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, 1995



Rabbi Naftali Schiff, Rabbi Daniel Rowe and Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, 2018



WHY WAS THE JERUSALEM FELLOWSHIPS SO SUCCESSFUL?

The fellowships were a highly subsidised, three-week immersive experience offering a full range of opportunities to engage with. Set in the magical Old City of Jerusalem, a stone's throw away from the Kotel, the fellowships had access to some of the best educators in the Jewish world. As the programme grew in size, scale, and prestige, we were able to gain access to top Israeli politicians including the Prime Minister and President, and once even managed to arrange a talk with the late Margaret Thatcher! The cutting edge, relevant, and exciting educational sessions were matched by epic trips, tours, and numerous surprises. Our *madrichim* and *madrichot* were amazing role models. They were young people who could seamlessly combine a passionate Jewish life with their own professional development and career pathways. Many of them formed lifelong friendships with the participants, sharing life cycle events as they built their own Jewish homes. I think it was the sheer range of impactful experiences set against a ton of fun that impacted thousands and thousands of young Jews in such a positive way.



Aish Fellowship in Washington DC, 2002



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I believe that the most valuable thing we have to offer is *chibbur* — connection. Connection to other Jews, connection to our families and connection to our heritage.



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My primary aim is to identify the potential leaders of tomorrow, attract them to shoulder responsibility with vigour and passion, and give them everything I can.

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IS THE GREATEST THING AISH CAN OFFER YOUNG JEWS TODAY?

We live in a world where everything is available with just a click or a swipe. Our young people are being bombarded with messages, information, and entertainment day and night, and life can be very confusing for them. The one thing that the digital world can't provide, however, is authentic communication. People need to be able to look each other in the eye and discuss real things; they need to be able to talk about values. Young Jews are by and large well-educated and often very intelligent, however they are increasingly unsure of what role their Jewish identity ought to play in the world today. I believe that the most valuable thing we have to offer is chibbur, connection. Connection to other Jews, connection to our families, and connection to our heritage. If COVID taught us anything, it's that technology is no replacement for in-person connection, and that immersive educational experiences are irreplaceable.

Aish continues to offer immersive educational experiences to 16-30 year olds in the form of trips all over the world - from Poland to Israel, India to Costa Rica, South Africa, Spain, USA, Morocco, and more! Our schools team has created programmes designed to get students thinking about their next step in life. Our campuses offer a home away from home for Jewish students across the UK, including the more remote campuses in the North, and Scotland. Our Young Professionals team offers fantastic educational and social experiences for young Jews in London, giving them a chance to meet others in an inclusive and exciting setting. We have also created an Online Team within Aish UK producing video content for all levels of Jewish engagement - from short, fun clips, to podcasts, and Maven, our online courses. There truly is something for everyone.

WHAT IS YOUR GOAL FOR THE NEXT DECADE @AISH?

The Jewish People are a quintessentially resilient collective. We must not stagnate. Every teacher and every parent must adapt to changing circumstances, whilst maintaining our core Jewish values and way of life. We must find new ways to engage our younger generation. The new frontiers will be discovered and created by leaders who probably weren't alive 30 years ago. My primary aim is to identify the potential leaders of tomorrow, attract them to shoulder responsibility with vigour and passion, and give them everything I can to ensure a vibrant, vitalised and united Jewish community - including the runway to finish the job! In order to achieve this, we need to remind ourselves that we are the People of the Book; as such, education is paramount. I am committed to finding the resources necessary to attract the best people to carry this vision forward, to train them, to drive them to great aspirations, and to get out of their way! Oh - and to complete perhaps the most visionary capital project in the contemporary UK Jewish community, Our Story, a 40k square-foot place of connection and multiple opportunities of Jewish engagement! Build it we shall; build it, and they shall come; build it, and they shall write their own chapters in the epic drama of Our Story — 3,500 years young!



TRIBUTE TO RABBI DAVID GEFFEN

RABBI SHAUL ROSENBLATT

Rabbi David Geffen was a uniquely great human being. I have never met anyone quite like him. Those of you who knew him will understand exactly what I mean.

I came to the UK in 1992, a little boy with a dream of setting up a branch of Aish. It was a slow and painful process, gradually building a small group of committed students (some of whom remain stalwart supporters of Aish UK today). That all changed when I met David. He asked to meet because he had an idea. A summer fellowship programme for UK students. I thought it was too soon. We weren't ready. I was nervous. But he was adamant and insistent.

HIS ENTHUSIASM WAS INFECTIOUS. I SIMPLY COULDN'T SAY NO. HIS CERTAINTY, HIS TRUST IN GOD, HIS COMMITMENT, HIS CAN-DO ATTITUDE MADE HIM INTO A BULLDOZER. A BULLDOZER FOR TRUTH. A BULLDOZER FOR THE JEWISH PEOPLE. A JOYOUS, SWEET, GENUINE, LOVING, KIND-HEARTED, DARLING BULLDOZER.

That year we had fifty students on our first Fellowships programme, eighty the year after, and a hundred and twenty the year after that. He dragged me kicking and screaming to the success that Aish UK achieved. Aish UK simply would not have happened without him. He brought us such incredible vision; he cared about human beings, each and every one, as much as anyone I've ever known, and he was such a wonderfully creative thinker.

If I were to make lists of human qualities and grade people in those qualities, David would have undoubtedly come out on the top in at least three of my lists.

Firstly, love. No one loved like David Geffen loved. He did not display love, he did not live love, he simply was love. God wanted to personify the quality of love in human form, and so He created David Geffen. To know him was to be loved by him. The moment that you met him, he loved you. And you knew it. And it wasn't just a warm and fuzzy feeling, it was deep, passionate and intense. He swept you off your feet.

Secondly, I never knew someone as brave as David Geffen. He was totally and utterly fearless when it came to doing the right thing. He didn't care what anyone thought, what anyone said, how difficult it was, the personal sacrifices involved. If God wanted it, nothing, but nothing was going to stop David from doing it.

And thirdly, genuineness. No one wore his heart on his sleeve like David Geffen. What you saw was what you got. He was pure and straightforward, not a bad bone in his body. His sole desire was to be of service – to other people, the Jewish Nation, to humanity as a whole, and, ultimately, to his beloved Creator.

Put those three qualities together and here's what you get: a man who would walk up to a stranger in the street, look them in the eye and tell them that he loved them – and they would believe him. That was David Geffen.

His contribution to the Jewish People has been immense. He has left us in his prime, loving life as much as ever. I can only think that God desired another precious soul in Heaven and so He brought him home. If anyone I have known is sitting with our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, it is David Geffen. Heaven must have expanded to accommodate his great soul.

TRIBUTE TO SHARON SHENKER *(NEE GOLD)*

RABBI NAFTALI SCHIFF



1977- 2023 (AGED 44 YEARS)

AISH JERUSALEM FELLOWSHIPS ALUMNUS 1996

It's the summer of 1997. As I picture the scene at the Old City Jerusalem final banquet of the Aish Jerusalem Fellowships, the two words "Sharon Gold" stand out in my mind as they were yelled out in unison by over 100 students. Actually, it was more than a cry. It was a spontaneous chant, uttered by the whole cohort - all at once of "Sharon Gold! Sharon Gold!" as the students rose from their seats and gave her a standing ovation in recognition of the fact that, as the first employed student recruiter for the summer Aish Jerusalem Fellowships programme, Sharon had just provided each of them with the momentous summer of a lifetime!

Sharon's own student ticket the year before had won the student raffle drawn at the Faversham public house on Leeds Uni campus and as a result, she joined the cohort of Aish Jerusalem Fellowships in the summer of '96.

Many years later, Sharon of course became Rebbetzen Shenker, after having married Motti - and what an incredible shining example of integrity, authenticity, devotion and love was the union and family they built together. May Rav Motti and each of their five kids be imbued with Sharon's strength, sense of purpose, and straightforward acceptance of the stark reality of life's unforeseen twists and turns.

It's been nearly 30 years now and there have been hundreds of Fellowships programmes and trips, and tens of bold student recruiters. All incredible, yet none quite like Sharon! For Sharon, the unveiling of the Jewish story, and the reality of the life offered by traditional Judaism was crystal clear. It was like turning on the light in a dark

room. She embraced a fully committed Jewish life with signature candour, sincerity, and piercing authenticity. There was no drama. Never any fanfare or pretence. This trait of forthright honesty and straightforward, uncomplicated embracing of a new all-encompassing reality was truly Sharon's hallmark throughout a short, yet fully embraced life well-lived. Whether as young Rabbinic leaders in Mill Hill United Synagogue, Outreach Directors at Aish LA, as Momentum leader and therapist, or contending with constant pain and terminal illness - no matter what came Sharon's way, she confronted it head-on without complication.

TRUTH IS SIMPLE. HUMANS OFTEN COMPLICATE THINGS UNNECESSARILY. SHARON, YOUR PURITY OF NESHAMA (SOUL), YOUR UNPRETENTIOUSNESS, YOUR HUMILITY, STRENGTH, FOCUS OF PURPOSE, LOYALTY AND BELIEF SHALL BE A BEACON FOR US FOREVER.

Through tears, I can only end these few inadequate words with the rallying cry:

May this beautiful soul find its resting place amongst the greatest of our people on high, and may dear Rav Motti and the children somehow find comfort in the eternal light your neshama brought into this world - a light that shall shine on in each one of you together with thousands that it illuminated, forever. May we all embrace the beauty and profundity inherent in simplicity in your honour.



A LIGHT UNTO THE NATIONS

AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH HILLEL NEUER

SASHA SILBER

Hillel Neuer is “the most hated man at the United Nations” for his unwavering dedication to truth and justice, “feared and dreaded” by the representatives of the world’s dictatorships. The Canadian-born international lawyer and writer is the Executive Director of UN Watch, a human rights NGO in Geneva, Switzerland that monitors the performance of the United Nations and promotes human rights for all. It works with civil society, dissidents and victims to focus international attention on urgent human rights situations worldwide, and combats racism, antisemitism and anti-Israel prejudice at the UN.

I had the privilege of sitting down with Mr. Neuer to explore the source of his unshakeable conviction that empowers him to tirelessly advocate for human rights and fight injustice, despite the odds...

What is the focus of your work?

Our work is to monitor the UN and ensure that it lives up to its founding principles of promoting and protecting human rights. We have a special focus on combating antisemitism and anti-Israel prejudice at the UN, which is sadly systematic and relentless. Its obsession with demonising the Jewish state is pathological. Almost every day there is some statement - and now with social media, some tweet - by a UN expert that is unfairly singling out Israel, distorting what is happening on the ground, in breach of various UN principles such as impartiality, objectivity, non-selectivity, and often violating the terms of the mandate of the given UN official.

For example, we go after abusive UN officials like John Ziegler, the former UN expert on hunger and the right to food, who spent an inordinate amount of time attacking Israel and America while ignoring the needs of most of the world’s hungry people. This is just one example of the kind of abuse of mandate that we aim to expose.

We also have something to say about what the UN should be doing, which is to give a voice to the voiceless, to victims of some of the worst

What is your strategy?

The members of the UNHRC are often the dictatorships who get elected year after year; the current members of the council include China, Cuba, Eritrea, Qatar, Pakistan - and the list goes on. Actually, 70% of the world’s top human rights body — 70% of its members — are not democracies. They’re either full-on dictatorships or some other form of non-democracy. So we turn the tables and use the extraordinary forum of the UN, whether it’s the General Assembly in New York or the Human Rights Council in Geneva, to bring in high-profile figures including former political leaders and dissidents to testify because the world is there. We had the late Lord Trimble and Colonel Richard Kemp come to speak, as well as dissidents like the son of Hamas and a Chinese pop singer from Hong Kong who China tried to shut down. When we bring people to speak - certainly when they’re victims of dictatorships - often, those dictatorships interrupt them. As we have major international media outlets including the BBC and CNN covering the speeches when they get interrupted, the clash itself becomes a media story. Even though the dictators have the vote, we actually are able to use it against them. Ultimately, we strive to use the UN forum to champion and maximise the opportunities it offers.



Tibetan dissident Golog Jigme with Hillel Neuer.
10th Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy.
February 20th, 2018.

I grew up with my parents and grandparents deeply committed to Israel and the Jewish people, and went to a school with the same ideology. The Holocaust had a personal impact on my family - my grandparents were fortunate to have escaped and immigrated to Canada in the 1930s, but sadly, their families were killed.

When I was a kid, we used to march in Canada to free Soviet Jews, singing in the freezing cold of Montreal near the consulate of the Soviet Union, “One! Two! Three! Four! Open up

"The lessons of Judaism, in so many laws, are the essence of human rights activism."

dictatorships. We’ve been very active for about two decades in bringing victims of the world’s worst dictatorships from Russia, China, Cuba, Venezuela, Zimbabwe, and Iran, to testify in front of international assemblies, whether at the UN or other human rights global conferences, some of which we organise. We bring in the international media, and give the victims a global platform.

What pivotal moments and key figures have fueled your unwavering commitment to Israel and inspired your involvement in politics? How did these experiences shape your perspective and empower you to stand up for Israel’s rights in the face of opposition and adversity?

the iron door! Five! Six! Seven! Eight! Let our people emigrate!” [I grew up with] the dramas of Natan Sharansky (then known as Anatoly Sharansky), who was in prison, and the wars and peace treaties in Israel.

When I was ten or eleven years old, there wasn’t much to do on Shabbat afternoons since we didn’t watch TV. My friends and I would act out

skits of political dramas, like the assassination of John F Kennedy, or dramas from Canadian Politics like when Quebec tried to separate - a big drama in Canada. So we would do research from the encyclopaedias, prepare several scenes, and force our parents to watch.

I was always very into politics. I was into law. I was into Israel. When I went to college in Montreal, there were a lot of radical students identifying with the extreme left that were very hostile on Israel; this was before the woke movement, so you could call it proto-woke. So I began to be active politically on campus and edited a pro-Israel magazine called Dateline Middle East. In law school I had a teacher named Irwin Cotler, one of the world's most prominent human rights lawyers. He is a Jewish leader, someone who is on the international stage, fighting antisemitism and defending Israel - someone who I've always looked up to as a mentor to me in many ways.

Is there an inherent connection between the values that you grew up with and your sense of motivation and responsibility?

The Judaism that I learned begins with saying "do not be indifferent" through laws that seem perhaps mundane. The first lesson of Talmud I

learned in sixth grade was about lost objects. If you find something on the street that someone lost, a piece of clothing or whatever it is, what is your obligation as the finder? You are obliged to return it. It's a mundane thing in regular society. Finders keepers, losers weepers - that's what most people think. Judaism says, no, someone lost something, you have to find that person, and you have to give it back. The essence of this thing is that you're not indifferent.

The Torah teaches that if someone was killed or died outside of the city, the nearest town has to give a sacrifice and has to say that we weren't responsible. Maybe someone was killed by a criminal or an animal, or perhaps that person came to town and was walking through and no one helped him or her. Maybe somehow the town failed to act responsibly and appropriately. Maybe somehow they bear responsibility for what happened to this person. The lessons of Judaism in so many laws are the essence of human rights activism. It's the opposite of indifference.

We have to care. It's the opposite of turning the other way. It's taking responsibility for the other. That virtue, the principle of not being indifferent, of being active and caring about what happens to others, is a central part of

Judaism. It's found in laws that are very clear about taking care of the stranger, giving charity, and looking out for the widow and the orphan. It is the essence of Judaism.

What challenges do you face when advocating for Israel on the international stage, and how do you measure success in this battle for legitimacy?

To give an example, every year the General Assembly in New York adopts 1 resolution criticising Iran, 1 on Syria, 1 on North Korea, 15 on Israel, 0 on Cuba, 0 on Saudi Arabia, 0 on Venezuela, 0 on China - and the list goes on. These 15 on Israel typically get passed by majorities of the 193 countries - sometimes they pass with 150 countries voting "yes" - huge majorities. So if you're going in fighting anti-Israel prejudice, you're going in with the knowledge that in 99% of the cases, you're going to lose the votes. So then you ask, how do you measure success? What really matters is who votes "no". If the vote was 150:15, but the 15 included the United States, Canada, Australia, the UK, Germany, and so on, then when people look at the vote, the numbers may tell one story - 150:15 - but the identity of the specific countries who voted "no" tells you something else. If some of the leading



democracies voted “no” in the opposition, then - wait a minute - maybe the moral majority is not with the numerical majority, but rather the moral weight. Ultimately, this is a battle of legitimacy. The UN is being used to strip Israel of its legitimacy as the international body that is seen to grant legitimacy: if the numbers are there, the motion passes. Israel is condemned. But if Britain votes “no”, Canada votes “no”, the Netherlands votes “no” - that’s often our test for measuring success.

We have a special resource called the UN Watch Database www.unwatch.org/database - an incredible tool that lists every resolution adopted at the UN. It shows what resolutions are the same, so it’s a very detailed analysis that gives those who are trying to fight this bigotry the information and tools needed.

Do you have hope for a better future?

In Judaism, it is taught that you should have two pieces of paper, one in each pocket. You reach into one pocket, and the first piece of paper says you go from dust and dust. You start from nothing and you end up in the earth as nothing. You can’t achieve anything, so you should be incredibly modest. That’s to put you in your place, which is good for one’s ego and so forth: very depressing. If you’re at the UN

”

The world was created for you. You can do things, you can make a difference.

and taking the position that we do, fighting for equal treatment of Israel facing this kind of institutionalised bigotry and discrimination, institutionalised antisemitism, you feel like you’re nothing and you can achieve nothing. (This doesn’t mean Israel can’t be criticised. It should be held to account. Every country is only improved by legitimate, constructive criticism. But when it’s demonised, delegitimised, and scapegoated, treated as the ‘Jew among the nations’, that’s wrong.)

Judaism then teaches you to put your hand in the second pocket and open up the other piece of paper that says, the world was created for you. You can do things, you can make a difference. We see that even if we lose the votes,

we can tell the truth. So when we manage to get our 90 seconds, and we say words of truth, and those words of truth are picked up - like when we brought the son of Hamas to speak, and the video was seen millions of times on YouTube and Facebook - or when I spoke and I said, “Algeria, where are your Jews?” seen 10 million times on various platforms; I have met people around the world who were inspired by that. They saw me standing up at the UN, facing these dictatorships, speaking the truth, and it gave them strength and courage. The support we get from thousands of people around the world, those who make a donation on our website, those who give messages of support on social media, those who sign our petitions - all of those demonstrations of support act like wind in our sails.

That gives me hope, keeps us going, and we will not give up.







The Jews of Kerala:

RABBI ARI KAYSER

THE 2,000 YEAR OLD STORY OF JEWS IN INDIA

Nestled on the backwaters of the Arabian Sea, in India's southwestern state of Kerala, lies Jew Town in the city of Cochin. Home to an ancient port city along the Malabar Coast, Kerala was an important stop on the ancient Spice Route – connecting the West and the East. A world leader in the production of spices, particularly black pepper, it saw numerous Jewish migrations over the centuries and became a place where Jews found tolerance and acceptance among their Hindu neighbours. In stark contrast to their brothers and sisters living in Christendom and Dar Al-Islam, the Jews of India were allowed to live in peace, free to practise their religion.

Throughout the centuries, the Jews of Malabar were visited by rabbis and scholars, as well as those seeking asylum from persecution in other lands. These waves of immigrants provided the Malabari Jews not only with greater numbers, but also with holy books and information on Jewish matters from around the world. The independence of the Jews of that region was so rare, one historian commented, "While there have been other Jewish autonomous zones in the postexilic period, the nearly millennium-long independent principality that existed on the Malabar Coast, where the Jews were ruled by a succession of Jewish chieftains, is a unique and extraordinary occurrence in the Diasporic experience."¹

One traveller who observed this first hand was the 14th century rabbi, Rabbeinu Nissim of Girona, who described his experiences while visiting the city of Anjuvannam (known by the Jews as Shingly) on the Malabar Coast in a poem²:

I TRAVELLED FROM SPAIN

I HAD HEARD OF THE CITY OF SHINGLY

I LONGED TO SEE A KING OF ISRAEL

I SAW HIM WITH MY OWN EYES



Aish young professionals at the Taj Mahal

On a recent trip to India with Aish Young Professionals, I too saw with my own eyes the fantastic history of Jewish communities, with their handful of Jews who remained in a land that provided their people with a place of tolerance for so long. As I got off the plane in Kerala, I sensed a more relaxed atmosphere than that of Mumbai, a bustling nonstop city filled with more people than it can accommodate. The hot and sticky midnight air didn't deter the locals from going about their business as every passer-by asked to help with our luggage in exchange for a few Rupees. I couldn't help but imagine what a Jewish-Indian city looked like centuries ago, before the internet enabled us to so easily search and find what we are looking for, and before the interconnectedness of humanity was so apparent.



Paradesi synagogue, Jew Town, Cochin



Ari with Elias Josephai in the Kadavumbhagam synagogue, Ernakulam

The first Jewish inhabitants of Kerala are believed to have been sailors who set sail over 2,500 years ago on the ships of King Solomon in search of gold, ivory, teak, sandalwood, silk, pearls, monkeys, parrots, exotic peacocks and of course, ambrosial Indian spices³.

There are differing opinions among scholars as to the date of arrival of the Jews in India. Some have suggested the close resemblance of the Tamil words for ape and peacock and their Hebrew equivalents supports the view dating to the time of King Solomon. Another theory is that the Jews of Kerala were descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes who had been taken into captivity by King Shalmaneser of Assyria, eventually escaping and making their way to India. Others suggest the Jews of India are offspring from the Jews taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. Others, still, say the first colonisation of Jews in Cranganore, on the Malabar Coast, was a result of the exodus of Jews from Persia in the fifth century during the reign of King Kobad.

The tradition of the Cochin Jews, however, maintains that soon after the destruction of the Second Temple in the first century, ten thousand Jews were graciously received by the then Hindu Ruler and were allowed to settle in different parts of the country of which the majority made their home in Cranganore⁴.

Today, the Malabari Jews have dwindled in numbers and 20-30 remain, mostly in

Ernakulam, Kochi. Walking through the famous Broadway Market is like a dream for the senses.

Clothing stalls featuring every colour of the rainbow, the sounds of motorcycle horns beeping as they swerve in and out of oncoming pedestrians oblivious to the hazards surrounding them, and the cacophony of smells, a mix of chickpeas, onions, potatoes, chutney, masala, and of course, the spices.

Tucked away unassumingly in the bazaar is a shop called Cochin Blossoms: Aquarium Fish, Plants and Accessories. Passers-by would not be remiss if they were to overlook the small print underneath Kadavumbagam Synagogue: the oldest active synagogue in the Commonwealth, since 1200 CE.

Walking in through the alleyway and into the shop tending to all your aquatic needs, you would not expect to find what lies beyond the backdoor of the shop. The synagogue, replete with golden bima, colourful hanging lanterns, and walls covered with golden fabric, was immaculate.

One person who exemplifies what the Jews of Cochin represent is Elias Josephai, warmly known as 'Babu' who leads the community both in his spectacular restoration of the Kadavumbagam synagogue of Ernakulam and in caring for any Jewish matters whenever they may arise. When speaking to our group

of young professionals on Friday night, as we led the services to make a rare *minyan*, he told us, "I cry in my heart every Shabbat and Yom Tov when the Synagogue is left empty of prayer." Another man present commented to me that Elias goes to the synagogue every Shabbat and prays alone in its empty chambers. He has also done important work in documenting the history of the Malabari Jews; many of the recorded histories of the Jews in India are conflicting in their narratives.



Lamp post with Star of David on Synagogue Lane, Jew Town, Cochin



There exists another distinct community of Jews in Cochin: the Paradesi⁵ Jews who had come from Spain, likely after the Spanish Expulsion of 1492 or soon after. Their community was an amalgam of Jews from Spain, the Netherlands, Germany, Syria, and Iraq. These Jews, also known as the 'White Jews' due to their fairer complexion, built the famous Paradesi Synagogue of Jew Town in Cochin in 1568. Tucked away at the top of Synagogue Lane, this beautiful structure shares a wall with the Mattancherry Palace of the Raja of Cochin. The proximity of the local ruler to the Jewish sanctuary is no coincidence. The Jewish community's tradition is that the town of Mattancherry was a gift to them from the Raja, hence the name, derived from the Hebrew 'matana' (gift) and the Malayalam 'cheri' (land). Attached to the synagogue is a clock tower with four faces. The clock tower does more than simply tell the time; it is a symbol of how the Jews of Cochin were integrated within their surroundings, attested by the fact one face is inscribed in Hebrew, another in Malayalam, and a third in English.

A sign of their continued integration was felt when then Prime Minister of India,

Indira Gandhi delivered a powerful speech celebrating 400 years of the community on 15 December 1968. She said, "Secularism in India does not mean animosity towards religion. It implies equal respect for all religions...It is a matter of pride for us in India that all the great religions in the world are respected in our country.

I offer my good wishes and say 'Mazal Tov' (good luck) to all our Jewish citizens on the occasion of this quatercentenary celebration of the Cochin Synagogue." The synagogue was raised to national recognition when the government honoured the community by issuing a commemorative stamp featuring an image of the inside of the synagogue.

Today, Synagogue Lane has become a tourist attraction of Kerala, filled with shops bearing Stars of David and Hebrew inscriptions greeting people with the word 'Shalom'. Halfway down the street one can find the shop of Sarah Cohen, dubbed by many as 'The Last Jew of Cochin'. Sarah was a lively lady who loved to speak to any and everyone who strolled past her embroidery shop. She would tell them stories about the community and sing

songs from the Cochin prayer books. Her beautifully handcrafted challah covers and kippot are legendary, and many came to meet her and purchase her wares. Today, the shop continues to be run by her close aide Thaha Ibrahim and his wife Jasmine. As Muslims, one may have thought this to be an unlikely friendship, but Sarah Cohen saw past any differences and Thaha became like a son to her. When I stepped into the shop I was greeted with a big smile and when I showed interest in the life of Sarah Cohen, Thaha's eyes widened and began to pull out old newspaper clippings of them together; he then showed me into the back room where I found the simple bed and candlesticks she would use.

For our group of professionals from the UK, this was an amazing journey together. Aside from the colourful and bustling markets in Jaipur and the iconic visit to the Taj Mahal, we came and went with a sense of purpose. To learn about the heritage of an ancient community almost-forgotten, to visit many of the synagogues which exist mostly as heritage sites, and to be able to bring some of that Jewish spark back to life in those places, was truly unforgettable.



¹ Jewish Communities in Exotic Places, Blady, p230

² This poem, titled 'Nomar Shira' (Let us sing a song) is recorded in Cochin song books and chanted by the community on the second day of the festival of Shavuot, Who Are the Jews of India? Katz.

³ On Heart, Two Worlds: The Story of the Jews of Kochi, Prof Dr KS Mathew

⁴ Kerala and Her Jews, S S Koder.

⁵ Paradesi means 'foreigners' in Malayalam, the language of Kerala.

Jaipur, "The Pink City", Rajasthan



Ari with Thaha Ibrahim in the shop of Sarah Cohen, the last Jew of Kerala



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63

Per Programmes

2,908

Unique Participants

6.8 million

Social Media Engagements



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5,050

In-Person Events / Programmes / Activities

5,300

Unique Volunteers and Participants

52,800

Social Media Engagements (not Views)



Netzach

Channeling Jewish Futures' vast and dynamic experience into practical leadership models and strategies to provide quality training empowering tomorrow's leaders.

30

In-Person Events / Programmes / Activities

145

Unique Participants





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YPs and Media**

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across the UK**

3,494

In-Person Events /
Programmes / Activities

35,304

Unique Participants

3.3 million

Social Media Views
& Engagements



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school to young adults**

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1,300+

In-Person Events /
Programmes / Activities

1,000+

Unique Participants

2,800+

Social Media Views
& Engagements



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learning programme
& monthly events**

83

In-Person Events /
Programmes / Activities

150

Unique Participants

150

Social Media Views
& Engagements





Eilecha

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5 days of inspirational programming across 2 cities, 5 schools and 16 community events

50
In-Person Events / Programmes / Activities

3,000+
Participation

3,000+
Social Media Views & Engagements



Ta'amim

Inviting Jews to savour their Jewish story via culinary traditions, customs, memories and connections.

Re-Launched in March 2022 with new look and new content

8,500 recipe booklets distributed nationwide

4
In-Person Events / Programmes / Activities

309
Unique Participants
331,570
Social Media Views & Engagements



FJL

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600
In-Person Events / Programmes / Activities

150
Unique Participants

1,000
Social Media Engagements





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and communities for Israelis
of all ages in the Diaspora.

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**Celebrations of all the
Jewish & Israeli Festivals**

**Women's and Men's
learning sessions**

Mother and Baby groups

317

**In-Person Events /
Programmes / Activities**

1,137

Unique Participants

10,030

**Social Media Views
& Engagements**



Time4Torah

Creating structured learning
programmes that help
people across the world learn
and retain their Torah with
absolute clarity.

762

Episodes across 4 channels

126,145

Social Media Impressions

2022 TOTALS



12,057

Programmes / Activities

17,286

Unique Participants

10.6 million+

**Social Media Views/
Engagements**

LAW OF THE LAND:

A LOOK AT ISRAEL'S JUDICIAL REFORM

DARREN COHEN



Tens of thousands of Israelis protest against plans by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government to overhaul the judicial system, in Tel Aviv, March 4, 2023. AP/Tsafrir Abayov

Prior to the April 2019 Israeli election, then “New Right” party leaders Naftali Bennett and Ayelet Shaked campaigned on the slogan “Shaked will win over the High Court; Bennett will defeat Hamas”. Such was their level of antipathy towards the country’s highest court of appeal that Israel’s future short-lived prime minister and interior minister (2021-2022), then considered staunch leaders of the political right, equated victory over the Supreme Court to defeating Hamas - an organisation devoted to the Jewish state’s annihilation. Shaked and Bennett, two experienced political strategists, knew what mobilised their political base. It was thus both striking and insightful that they were convinced this message would translate into electoral success.

Regardless of the overall failure of the New Right campaign at that election, the first of an astonishing five during a prolonged

political crisis, this sentiment continues to resonate widely with ideologically conservative Israelis. Many on the right have long felt that despite constituting the electoral majority and voting their leaders into power, they were persistently thwarted when it came to actually implementing right-wing policies. In other words, as activist and author Erez Tadmor titled his widely read 2017 book, *Why Do You Vote Right and Get Left?*, the answer for many right-wing ideologues lies with the leftist (and, for some, majority Ashkenazi) elite’s continued control of the corridors of power; namely, the media, the education system, and most importantly, the judicial system.

In terms of the judicial system, the right claims that since the so-called “judicial revolution” led by former Supreme Court Chief Justice Aharon Barak in 1992, the court has taken on an “activist” role. This transformation of Israeli governance has its roots in the Knesset’s passing of two

quasi-constitutional Basic Laws, known as “Human Dignity and Freedom” and “Freedom of Occupation”, which enshrined a wide range of human rights. These laws had wide-ranging implications for Israel’s governance system and expanded the court’s power by enabling it to strike down Knesset legislation deemed to be in violation of human rights. As part of its judicial review, the Court also invoked the vague concept of “reasonableness” as justification for the annulment of laws, another controversial component of Israel’s legal system. Right-leaning politicians and conservative activists consider the Court to be engaging in a persistent act of undemocratic overreach that fractures Israel’s delicate balance of power.

The right’s perception that Israel suffers from a profound democratic deficit, in which the judiciary stymies a democratically-elected right-wing leadership, could be remedied by shifting the balance of power back to the legislative

branch of government and away from unelected left-leaning judges. Fast forward to 2023, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's sixth and most right-wing government to date, consists of a coalition of ultra-Orthodox and far-right parties, as well as his own Likud. Most members of the government are deeply suspicious of the Supreme Court and the wider legal system, having long called for its reform. Just days after the government's inauguration, Justice Minister Yariv Levin announced his wide-ranging overhaul of Israel's judicial system.

Upon unveiling his programme, which he labelled a reform and some opponents referred to as a "judicial revolution" (itself interesting, given that the Right claims Aharon Barak launched a judicial revolution, thus making it a counter-revolution?) or even a "regime coup", Levin reiterated his long-standing grievances against the Right. "We go to the polls, vote, elect, and time after time, people we didn't elect choose for us...that is not democracy," he charged. Levin unveiled a drastic and radical multi-phased reform programme in four main areas of the judicial system. This includes restricting the Supreme Court's ability to strike down laws through an "override clause" that enables the Knesset to re-legislate laws with a simple majority of 61; granting the government control over the selection of judges; halting the Supreme Court's ability to cite "reasonableness" as a test of legislation and government decisions, and allowing government ministers to appoint their own legal advisers. Each component of the reform is intended to address the perceived excessive power placed in the hands of judges and legal officials.

The very fact that this was one of the government's first major policy announcements is an indication of its priorities. Despite campaigning primarily on restoring stability and a sense of security to the people of Israel, as well as tackling a prolonged cost of living and housing crisis, the coalition has set its sights first and foremost on wresting control from the grips of the judges. As the democratically elected majority, the coalition government insists that its program is legitimate, but the centre-left opposition argues that it has no mandate to systematically change Israel's governance system.

This critique was the mere tip of the iceberg. The opposition immediately drew attention to the allegedly dubious timing of the overhaul. This was launched while the head of government himself, Netanyahu, is still fighting various allegations of corruption at his ongoing trial. The opposition claim that the Judicial Reform programme, disguised as an attempt to restore democracy, is in fact a ploy to salvage Israel's Prime Minister and his allies from their legal troubles. Even some supporters of the government feel uneasy about the timing of the announcement of the legislative drive. As if to bolster both sides' arguments, Netanyahu was later forbidden by Israel's Attorney General (who was appointed by the previous government) from involvement in the legal reforms, which she argued would constitute a conflict of interest. The right used this argument to support their position, while the opposition claimed it was evidence of the illegitimacy of a Prime Minister facing charges of bribery, fraud, and breach of trust while drastically reforming the legal system.



Shaked will win over the High Court;
"Bennett will defeat Hamas"



Israeli gather in front of the Knesset in Jerusalem
to protest judicial reform on February 13, 2023.
Mostafa Alkharouf/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images.



The coalition has set its sights first and foremost on wresting control from the grips of the judges

The more substantial arguments floated by the opposition parties are that the judicial overhaul would essentially amount to a power grab by the government and undermine the Supreme Court, despite it only having overruled 20 laws out of around 1,300. By drastically reducing the influence of the internationally respected Supreme Court and other legal officials, removing the few checks and balances on the executive branch of government's power, and granting the coalition the ability to simply handpick all judges, the government was leading Israel into a dangerous undemocratic abyss that would have dire consequences for its fundamental character. The critics argue that Israel would become a democracy in name only, limited to elections. The rights of minorities would be violated by an uninhibited majority in a country lacking a Bill of Rights, a constitution, a second chamber, a constituency-based system, or a real separation between the executive and legislative branches (given the executive has a built-in majority in the parliament), unlike other countries. The opposition, somewhat exaggerating according to the Right, claims that if the reforms are passed, they will estrange Israel from the family of democratic countries, drive away investors, irrevocably harm Jerusalem's international relations, and could prompt a brain drain of more liberal Israelis.

Interestingly, both sides of the debate claim that they are acting in the name of democracy. The discourse and charged political atmosphere have already given rise to widespread protests and civil society activity, primarily by the government's detractors. This has included nationwide protests of over a hundred thousand people; limited strike action by Israel's lucrative technology sector; international condemnation, including by strategic allies; and particularly worryingly, the decision by certain venture capital funds and corporations to divest from Israel.

Around 80,000 people gathered in Tel Aviv to protest Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's judicial reform plans on Jan. 14, calling the move undemocratic. Reuters



At the time of writing, although no laws have yet been passed, the debate is continuing, and the government is pressing ahead with its legislative programme unrestrained. The opposition is split between those who accept that the current system is indeed fraught with flaws and are willing to entertain the idea of compromise, and those who refuse to even consider voting with a government they deem to be advancing the violation of the principle of equality before the law. In an impassioned speech, President Isaac Herzog warned that Israel is "on the verge of constitutional and social collapse", and presented a five-point plan to serve as the basis for negotiations. Despite holding a largely ceremonial position, Herzog felt obliged to play a more active role in the political discourse. He placed broad agreement between the coalition and the opposition at the heart of his proposal and urged all parties to the debate to "lower the flames" and engage in constructive dialogue.

It remains to be seen which elements of Levin's grand plan will eventually come into force. It is feasible that the proposed overhaul

deliberately took a maximalist form; perhaps, as its proponents calculated, that significant backlash would require concessions amid negotiations. A diluted version of the reforms may be the result. Regardless of the outcome, the charged political atmosphere, polarisation, and hostile rhetoric are unlikely to dissipate in the near future. Israeli society, immersed in a long-term national conflict, is always a tense place. However, the country currently feels more tribalistic, angrier, and more polarised than it has for many years. The stakes are extremely high for Israel's democratic governance and the coming period, irrespective of which side "wins", will be a trying time for Israelis and Jews globally as the debate roars on.

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

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ISRAEL IS IN A HURRY

RABBI DR EFFIE KLEINBERG

A JEW IS MEANT TO LIVE WITH THE BELIEF THAT HISTORY CAN UNFOLD AND CHANGE IN A MOMENTS NOTICE, EVEN IF IT TAKES THOUSANDS OF YEARS

I finally cracked the code, or at the very least some of the enigma of life in Israel. A question that has been nagging at me ever since I first visited here was:

Why are Israelis in such a hurry?

Whether they are driving on the road, shopping at the grocery store, on the phone in conversation, or even most recently, racing to build alliances and peace agreements throughout the Middle East, Israelis seem to always be living life in the fast lane. Building off of the Abraham Accords which were signed back in 2020, Israel continues to deepen its security and economic relationship with countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Israel is speedily building a peace-alliance with her Muslim neighbours, a reality which only a few short years ago would have been a laughable satire. In just a few weeks, Israel will be marking her 75th Independence Day and Memorial Day for the Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Actions of Terrorism with public ceremonies of mourning and gatherings of celebration. Eighty years ago, a State of Israel was beyond anyone's wildest imagination, let alone the celebration of three quarters of a century for the Jewish State.

Part of this is surely tied to the intensity of life in Israel which includes army service and a precarious security situation, but I think we can peel away some of these layers and reach into the core of what is really happening here.

THE REAL PASSOVER DETECTIVES AMONG US WILL RECALL THAT WE DESCRIBE HOW THE JEWISH PEOPLE WERE HURRIED OUT OF EGYPT ON THAT FATEFUL NIGHT, WHEN WE BARELY HAD ENOUGH TIME TO PACK OUR BAGS, TIE OUR SHOES, AND PREPARE FOOD RATIONS.

On May 10, 1948, Golda Meir, then serving as the head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, travelled to Amman, Transjordan, for a secret meeting with King Abdullah I. Disguised as an Arab woman, Meir urged the king not to join the other Arab nations in attacking Israel when Independence was to be declared. Abdullah requested that Israel not be in such a rush to declare

independence, to which Meir famously responded, "We have been waiting for 2,000 years. Is that hurrying?"

It was with Golda Meir's response and Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion's declaration of Israel's independence four days later on May 14, 1948, that gave birth to a 'culture of hurry' that every tourist and citizen experiences when walking the streets of Jerusalem or Tel Aviv.

Israel is in a hurry.

I believe this culture of being in a hurry goes deeper as part of the DNA of the Jewish people. We find in the Passover Haggadah, the introductory words to the entire narrative section where we retell the story of the Exodus read: *bivhilo yatzanu mimitzrayim*— we left Egypt in a rush. The real Passover detectives among us will recall that we describe how the Jewish people were hurried out of Egypt on that fateful night, when we barely had enough time to pack our bags, tie our shoes, and prepare food rations. From that moment on came the annual ritual of eating matzah on Passover, the bread that was baked in a rush as we were chased out of the collapsing and crumbling empire of Egypt.

To be in a hurry is to live life with urgency, and it is this urgency that defines Jewish living and perhaps is the secret to the 'culture of hurry' that one experiences while visiting or living in Israel.

Jews pray daily for the coming of Mashiach (Messiah) with the words: *Ani Ma'amin Be'Emunah Sheleima, B'viyat HaMashiach* – I believe with full conviction in the coming of Mashiach. The next part is the key: *V'af al pi sheyitmameyha, im kol zeh achakeh lo* – And even though he may tarry, despite this I will await his arrival.

This prayer is not mere lip service to help keep our spirits up and infuse optimism in times of darkness. Though it is undeniable that generations of Jews have told stories of individuals who sang and repeated these words in the bleakest of times throughout

Jewish history, there is another point here that is part of the second half of the prayer. A Jew is meant to live with the belief that history can unfold and change at a moment's notice; even if it takes thousands of years, we still wait, because we have seen our hopes and dreams all but vanish only to then reappear in the blink of an eye so many times in the past, we anticipate this reality in the future as well.

At the same time, the Jewish people did not just wait in the past, and we will not idly wait now or in the future either. With the charge of Golda Meir, we are in a hurry. To declare independence, to build a flourishing economy and country, to bring Jews home from the four corners of the earth, and to share our know-how, values, and innovations with others to make this a safer and more stable world to live in – **Israel is in a hurry.**

Next time you visit Israel (hopefully soon!) and experience the hustle and bustle of a Friday afternoon at Mahane Yehuda or the whirring traffic on Rothschild Boulevard, appreciate the 'culture of hurry', a beautiful reflection of the urgency of the people and State of Israel. In Israel, life is lived with urgency because there is so much to do, and no, we will not apologise for being in such a rush! The world has benefited from this frenetic culture and will continue to do so, so long as the Jewish people continue to believe and live with urgency, with hopes for a better and greater tomorrow for all of humanity.

Happy 75th Birthday, Israel!



Photo credit Yoav Aziz, Unsplashd

FROM HISTORY

RABBI NAFTALI SCHIFF

*WHY ARE SOME STORIES DIFFERENT FROM OTHERS?
WHAT DIFFERENTIATES THIS STORY FROM THAT?*

Why are some stories different from others? What differentiates this story from that?

Which major event occurred in 1066? What happened in 1492? What about 1939?

These dates have been drilled into us, most likely due to their importance and their ubiquitous nature, so most of us probably know the answer.

But who remembers which battle took place in 1805? And what was invented in 1895? Who fought in the War of the Roses? And when exactly was the Russo-Japanese war?

Most of us don't have a head for dry facts and figures and possibly found history, with its information overload, pretty boring and irrelevant in school. If history is a niche study then why does the Torah place such an emphasis on its importance and how are we meant to make it exciting and relevant? The Torah tells us clearly that on Seder Night we have a responsibility of *vehigata levincha*, 'and you shall relate it (the story of the Exodus) to your child' and *Ima'an tesaper* 'that you

should tell the story'. Dry facts have to be made exciting and more importantly, shown to be relevant to today.

To paraphrase Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z"l, Seder night is not about history, it's a night to reflect on our story. Everyone loves a good story. Stories have been used from time immemorial to capture the hearts and minds of listeners. There is nothing that grabs our attention like a good story and they are the ideal vehicle for sharing values, creating an emotional connection with the facts and concepts being relayed.

Perhaps this is why the Torah, the Almighty's one-time written communication with mankind is written as one long story, starting with the creation of the universe and concluding with the death of Moses. The more we delve into the Torah, the more we realise that these are not stories after all, rather universally relevant instructions for living.

There is no greater time to delve into the Jewish story than Pesach, when families and friends gather together to retell our origin story. We do so at a beautifully set dinner table, rich in symbolism, with strange, yet familiar food items, customs, and tunes. The scene is meticulously

¹1805 - Battle of Trafalgar, 1895—Brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière invent a portable motion-picture camera. The Wars of the Roses were fought between the houses of Lancaster and York for the English throne. The Russo-Japanese War was fought between the Empire of Japan and the Russian Empire during 1904 and 1905.





TO OUR STORY



choreographed, in order to connect to something deeper - transcendent yet accessible to all.

Seder night is an opportunity to contemplate the Almighty's involvement in the world through the medium of the account of the Exodus. We read the pertinent verses with their Rabbinic explanations and interpretations in order to build up a picture in our mind's eye as to what it must have been like to be part of the liberation story. This is, as Rabbi Sacks so succinctly put it, the result of the fact that "Philosophy teaches truth-as-system, the Bible teaches truth-as-story."

Greatly encouraged by Rabbi Sacks, I have personally invested thousands of hours over the past twenty years recording eyewitness accounts from over 200 Holocaust survivors worldwide. Each of these stories, and the life lessons they carry, have become embedded in me, that I may become a faithful link in the chain of Jewish consciousness and in turn pass on their relevance and portent to future generations, so that they too may become relayers of our story.

The first mitzvah given to the Jewish People whilst still on Egyptian soil, was

the instruction to establish a calendar. Our first step to freedom was the ability to become masters over time. A slave has no need to keep track of time because every day resembles the one that precedes it and the one that will follow it, with nothing to break the monotony.

The Pesach story is nothing short of miraculous; we recall the liberation of our ancestors with 'signs and wonders.' We marvel at the ten plagues with all of their attendant details and try to fathom how they could be outdone by the splitting of the Red Sea. We recall these supernatural events, things that seem so outlandish, specifically in order to retain them, because if these things happened on a regular basis there would be no need to maintain their memory.

On Seder night God takes centre stage, yet Moses doesn't get a mention. Pesach is considered the first of the festivals in the Jewish calendar, making the final festival in the annual cycle Purim. On Purim we read another story of Divine providence and intervention - the Megillah (Book of Esther). This time it is all about the key players, Mordechai and Esther, with God's name being strikingly absent. We perceive the providential Hand guiding

events, but now it is up to us to dig deep into the narrative to find God when He appears to be missing. Rabbi Sacks takes this idea further saying, 'The story of the Hebrew Bible as a whole, extending across a thousand years in real time, is of the progressive withdrawal of Divine intervention and the transfer of responsibility to human beings.'

On Seder Night, we celebrate God kickstarting Jewish history. He is palpably present, He intervenes and subverts the natural order to the point where some commentators understand that the ten plagues are essentially undoing the ten utterances through which He created the world. For the ancient Egyptians who were obsessed with the natural order of the world, there could be no greater tragedy; the entire world as they knew it, understood it, and tried to manipulate it, had fallen apart in front of their eyes. Moreover, Egypt was fixated on power, with Pharaoh, the symbol of strength and might, being the one to determine the parameters of right and wrong. He saw himself as a divine being, one who had superhuman qualities as expressed by his professed ability to withstand the call of nature.

The only way that this system could be undone was through miraculous means; through outside intervention. Not simply replacing one despotic regime with another, but rather through presenting an entirely new world order, one that will no longer need Divine intervention, but rather where the burden of responsibility is shouldered by mankind.

In a short, seven-week period, the People of Israel found themselves at the foot of Mount Sinai and it was at that point that they accepted the calling of being a 'Kingdom of priests and a holy nation'. This mission, explains the 16th century Italian commentator Rabbi Ovadia Seforno, was to lead by example, teaching and uniting all of humanity under the banner of Divine service, because all human beings are beloved by God.

It is at this point that the world experiences Divine intervention in its most intense form with the revelation at Sinai, where close to three million people heard God's voice and internalised its message. Remarkably, the Torah is emphatic that an event such as this will never happen again.

"For ask now regarding the early days that were before you, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and from one end of the heavens to the other end of the heavens, whether there was anything like this great thing, or was the likes of it heard? Did ever a people hear God's voice speaking out of the midst of the fire as you have heard, and live? Or has any god performed miracles to come and take him a nation from the midst of a[nother] nation, with trials, with signs, and with wonders, and with war and with a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great awesome deeds, as all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? You have been shown, in order to know that the Lord He is God; there is none else besides Him." (Deuteronomy 4:32-35)

Our story is one that keeps this memory alive, not only because of its unique occurrence and the fact that we know that it will never happen again, but also because of the importance and relevance of its message.

If morals and ethics are determined by man alone, then we risk a return to Pharaohs' man-made morality where might makes right.

Conversely, were we to live in a world where Divine intervention would take place on an ongoing basis, humankind would lose its most important asset, the ability to make free will decisions and meaningful choices. We would simply behave like pre-programmed robots.

This tension is the essence of the Jewish story, one which was sparked by overt miracles and maintained by covert ones. The survival of the Jewish People is, according to the 18th century German scholar, Rabbi Yaakov Emden, even greater than the story of the Exodus. Yet this miracle, one that is very much part of our experience, is one that is concealed by the natural world. This is our story, the story of each of our families going back thousands of years, traversing almost every country on the globe.

Just as the Jewish People can be best defined as a family, rather than as a race or religion, so too our history can be best expressed as our story. That is why so many Jewish families around the world, regardless of their level of observance, gather together on Seder night to share our story. Stories attract attention, they join the dots of isolated episodes and

perhaps most importantly, they draw people in. Stories are far more memorable than dry facts, and as such, are indeed the most effective way of communicating values.

Through telling our story as a narrative that encompasses past, present, and future, we invite our children to write their own chapter in it. The past suddenly becomes alive and relevant as they see a common thread that connects us all. The future is theirs to build and its foundations are the choices that they make today.

That is why the new flagship Jewish Futures building will be called 'Our Story'. Its name implies what it is - an open invitation to Jews from all backgrounds to engage in Jewish life, explore their heritage, and most importantly, to choose their role on the stage of Jewish history and destiny, in order to add their own chapter to our epic story.

L'chaim! To life! Here's to our children becoming storytellers; writing their own narrative; shouldering their unique role, playing their part in the ongoing epic tale that is Our Story!



ILLUMINATING

THE HAGGADAH:

The Sarajevo Haggadah's Journey Through Time

REBBETZIN ILANA EPSTEIN



One day in 1894, the Cohen boy walked into his Hebrew school classroom in Sarajevo, with a small book tucked under his arm. Reports don't indicate his emotional state or the look in his eyes, but one can't help but picture a small, sad little boy. He had just lost his father Yosef, and was looking to sell a small illuminated Haggadah - one of his family's few heirlooms - in order to help the struggling household make ends meet.

This Haggadah was purchased by the National Library and Museum of Bosnia for \$7,000 in today's money. Proclaimed a movable national monument by Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2003, even UNESCO recognised the power of the story that this small folio has to tell, and registered the Sarajevo Haggadah as documentary heritage on the Memory of the World Register in 2017.

The Haggadah retells the story of light and hope forged in the darkest of moments. The destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 CE presented an unprecedented challenge in ensuring future generations keep their traditions while being dispersed among the nations. The Sages, in their wisdom, knew that the most powerful way to transmit our traditions, practices, and culture was through consistent and uninterrupted storytelling. They took our most seminal moment of peoplehood and created an experiential story-telling ceremony. Through every obstacle, families and communities come together once a year to tell the story of their peoplehood. This tradition continues to this day.

It is the story of the Exodus. The story of a slave nation led to freedom that would serve as the barometer for the world. As the Jews became further and further dispersed, a need for unity and consistency in telling our story became evident. Around 220 CE, the Mishna (Oral Torah) included a very brief set of instructions on how to conduct a Passover Seder. Around 800 CE, a partial Haggadah - like small notes - appeared as part of a siddur (prayer book). A Haggadah from this same time period matching this description is currently at the Washington Museum.

In 860 CE, in response to a request from Spain, the head of the Sura Academy in Babylonia wrote an outline of the Seder that became the core of all traditional Seders. It included commentary, rulings and stories prescribed first by Talmudic scholars, and then later by the Geonim.

The Seder looms large in the collective practice of Judaism and has for many generations. The Haggadah became almost as necessary as wine and matzah in conducting a Seder. From the 1200s, small Haggadot - separate from regular prayer books - began to appear in Germany and Spain as separate manuscripts, handwritten in the absence of printing presses.

Despite their small size, Haggadot held great importance as the cornerstone of one of the most significant nights in the Jewish calendar. Consequently, they were one of the first Jewish books to be illuminated. This practice of decorating manuscripts was influenced by the adornment of Christian and Muslim texts, and



Top: Detail of the Maror (bitter herbs) page of the Sarajevo Haggadah

it was allowed in books like a siddur (prayer book) and a machzor (Holiday prayer book), but prohibited in a Torah scroll. Nowhere was it more fitting than in a Haggadah.

One of the imperatives in retelling the Exodus story is that “in every generation, every member [of the Jewish nation] must see themselves as if they [themselves] have left Egypt”. That is, not just to hear, but to actively use our imagination to relive the journey from slavery to freedom and experience the miracles anew. How much easier then, with the addition of images and commentary on the text, to picture ourselves shoulder to shoulder with our ancestors, liberated, and heading towards the Promised Land.

What is it about the Sarajevo Haggadah that makes it so remarkable that UNESCO has given it the same status as (ironically)

Egypt's Pyramids in its documentary heritage category?

After its creation in the 1320s in Catalonia, then a centre for Jewish scholarship in Spain, the Haggadah was probably in constant use until the Expulsion of 1492. To have even survived the 14th and 15th centuries was miraculous; for any Jew who had converted - and we know that approximately 100,000 Jews did - and was found with any Hebrew book, would face the Inquisition, the book eradicated along with them. Families took great risks in saving these books. A book recounting the story of our triumph and the defeat of a cruel regime, one imagines, would be the kind of book that a Jew would want to hold onto in these moments of fear.

We come across the book again in northern Italy, 1609. Like many Jews who were expelled

from Spain in 1492, the Haggadah finds itself under the jurisdiction of the Pope. Jews living in Northern Italy in the 16th century were segregated into ghettos. Not only were they told where to live, what to wear and what jobs they were limited to, but they were also told what they could and could not read. All books were suspected of heretical writing; any book written in Hebrew was confiscated and often burnt.

On the last page of the Sarajevo Haggadah, we find that a priest had looked through the Haggadah. It passed inspection and it was saved from the flames in 1609.

We next encounter the Haggadah in the hands of the Cohen boy. Many Jews had left Northern Italy due to challenging conditions, with some leaving for economic reasons while others sought religious tolerance. They may

have crossed the Adriatic Sea to Split and then made their way inland to the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo.

Jews in Sarajevo found religious tolerance; the community, though never very large, lived undisturbed until World War II. In 1940, there were approximately 14,000 Jews living in Yugoslavia, of which 10,000 lived in Sarajevo.

On the day that the Cohen boy brought the Haggadah into school, looking to sell it, Yugoslavia was under the control of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Once purchased, the book was sent to Vienna to be restored. Sadly, the restoration job was botched, the original cover replaced with cheap cardboard, and the pages cut down from their original size to fit the new binding. The Haggadah languished in Vienna, forgotten in storage, until 1913, when the Sarajevo Museum asked for its return.

After WWI, the Haggadah went on prominent and permanent display in the Museum. During the Nazi occupation, it was a very high ranking Nazi official who was surprisingly tasked with retrieving and destroying the Haggadah. Some speculate that the period when Hitler lived and tried to get into art school in Vienna coincided with the Haggadah residing in Vienna and some scholarly articles were written about it. He would have been aware of its existence and its prominent place in the Museum in Sarajevo.

When the high ranking Nazi official came into the museum and demanded the Haggadah, the brave librarian Dervis Korkut hid the Haggadah in the waistband of his trousers. He told the Nazi Major General Johann 'Hans' Fortner that a different German official had removed the Haggadah just days before. He then had an imam hide the Haggadah in a mountain village amongst old Islamic books. Dervis Korkut didn't just hide the book; he and his wife also hid two Jewish women during the war, saving their lives.

After World War II, the Haggadah survived along with only 20% of the pre-war Jewish population of Yugoslavia. The Haggadah returned to the museum once more, miraculously survived two theft attempts, and the destruction of the whole museum and library during the Serbian-Croatian conflict.

Is this a simple storybook? Why should we care? Do pretty pictures and finely drawn manuscripts actually make any difference? In times of tremendous struggle from expulsion to imprisonment, from genocide to war, what does a small book have over epic and life-altering struggles?

Books are our constant companions - silent witnesses, unintended participants, and guardians of our story, none more so than a Haggadah.

From its inception, it tells the story of our survival:

First in its purpose - retelling the story of the Exodus. Then in its forerunner, the very first Haggadot; used once we were banished from our homeland and our temples destroyed, our traditional worship reimagined. At a moment of peace and prosperity, this one Haggadah captures the vibrancy of a world now vanished. As the Jews escaped yet again and dispersed throughout the world, the Haggadah takes one of the many routes to safety but not freedom. It is witness to the continued suffering of its owners, hidden among other



books, made to impersonate, put on display and then miraculously saved from destruction. Avoiding the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' while many of its contemporaries and colleagues on the everlasting shelf of the Jewish canon met a fiery end, re-bound in a mismatched cover, cut down to fit someone else's vision of smallness and now made into a protected UNESCO silent witness.

Does the trajectory of the Haggadah mimic the trajectory of the Jews? Is this our present and our future? Are we to be relegated to silent witnesses, housed in a glass box, or are we to be as we were intended from our inception: as a light unto the nations, not held back by glass or brick or limitations imposed on us by others?

Our story is an everlasting one. Every year, as we sit at our Seder tables telling the story of our past, we reinforce the message of our future.

Am Yisrael Chai.

This Page: 1. Detail of the Sarajevo Haggadah, manuscript on parchment, Spain, 14th Century. The National Museum, Sarajevo. 2. Dervis M Korkut helped save Jewish lives and Sarajevo Haggadah from the Nazis during WWII.

Opposite Page: And Miriam took a timbrel in her hand. (Exodus 15:20). Sarajevo Haggadah, manuscript on parchment, Spain, 14th Century. The National Museum, Sarajevo.





THE TALE OF TWO LEADERS: ELIJAH & MOSES

REBBETZIN SHALVIE FRIEDMAN

One would imagine that the main character of the Haggadah - a book retelling the Passover story - would be Moses. After all, he was the prophet who negotiated with Pharaoh and orchestrated the exodus from Egypt. Yet, he is conspicuously absent on Seder night. Instead, the text refers to another Jewish leader who seems to have nothing to do with the Passover story, Elijah the prophet.

Moses and Elijah have a lot in common; both are known for being leaders of the Jewish people, performing miracles, fearlessly standing up to the wicked enemies of their time, and being symbols of redemption. On closer analysis, though, one finds that their personalities diverge greatly.

We first encounter an adult Moses, when he chooses to defend his Jewish brother who is being beaten by an Egyptian taskmaster. Faced with the cruelty of the taskmaster, Moses, "Looks here and there and sees that there is no man" (Exodus 2:12). In this self-defining moment Moses looks around to see

who is responding to the suffering of another; is there "a man", someone who holds himself accountable for the pain of this slave? When he sees that there is not, he realises that it is his role to defend the weak and helpless.

**"GOOD LEADERS
CREATE FOLLOWERS,
GREAT LEADERS
CREATE LEADERS."**

**- CHIEF RABBI LORD
JONATHAN SACKS Z'L**

Pharaoh hears about this, and seeks to kill Moses who escapes to Midian. When he arrives at the well in Midian, he chases away shepherds who are bullying the seven daughters of Jethro. Once again, Moses identifies as a person who stands up for those who are being mistreated.

Moses truly steps into the shoes of "leader" when he encounters God at the burning bush. Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev (a Hassidic master of the 19th century, known for his seminal work, the Kedushat Levi) explains that God chose Moses because of how he responds when he sees the burning bush. Unlike what one might expect from a spiritual leader, Moses is not deeply engrossed in the spiritual realms. Instead he is intrigued by the anomaly of something mundane and physical, a bush that is burning and not consumed. God sees true leadership qualities in this man who has sensitivity towards even the most material of problems.

Almost 600 years later, Elijah is a prophet to the Jews living in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Elijah is a ferocious visionary. In his desperation to get the Jews to repent and cease worshipping idols, he causes a drought to fall on the land of Israel. It is a drought which causes suffering and even death to the people, but still, they do not repent. God sends a raven to sustain Elijah. The sages explain that the raven is a selfish and cruel breed of bird. God



attempts to highlight for Elijah that if a mere raven can have mercy and feed the hungry, then he, Elijah, is lacking in basic empathy for human suffering.

After three years of intense drought in Israel, God decides to bring rain, even though Elijah has promised none. What a contrast with Moses! In the desert when God says he wants to destroy the Jews after the golden calf, Moses beseeches God to save them. It is Moses who constrains God's attribute of justice and instead brings about His attribute of mercy. Here with Elijah on the other hand, God is the one who is intervening to provide salvation to the Jews, despite Elijah's strict sense of justice. Interestingly, there is only one place in the biblical canon where the word Pesach appears as a verb, not as the name of the festival of Passover. It is here, in the depths of Elijah's frustration with the fickle idol-worshipping Jews of his generation. He sees them worshipping different gods all the time and he cynically asks them, "How much longer will you pass over between two opinions" (Kings 18:21).

"OUR GREATEST ROLE MODELS ARE THE ONES WHO DON'T WANT TO TAKE CENTRE STAGE"

We are confronted with Elijah's guarded nature when he is contrasted with his disciple, Elisha. Elijah is one of the few characters in the Bible whom we don't know who his parents are. He is Elijah the Tishbite, but the ever-vulnerable parent/child relationship seems to elude him. When he goes to appoint Elisha, Elisha asks, "Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye, and I will follow you" (Kings 19:20).

How can it be that Elijah gets a prime position in the seder, and not only does Moses not get his own cup of wine, but he doesn't even get a mention?

Like Elijah, bold, courageous and idealistic people have their ten minutes of fame. They take centre stage with their full-personalities and impressive presentation. They are important features of Jewish history. Sometimes we need justice-warriors to move us to action. Our nation's story would not be the same without the appearance of strong and dramatic frontal leaders. However, they are not the ones who have the deepest and most long-lasting impact on the world.

Our greatest role models are the ones who don't want to take centre stage. They concern themselves, instead, with the needs of each individual person.

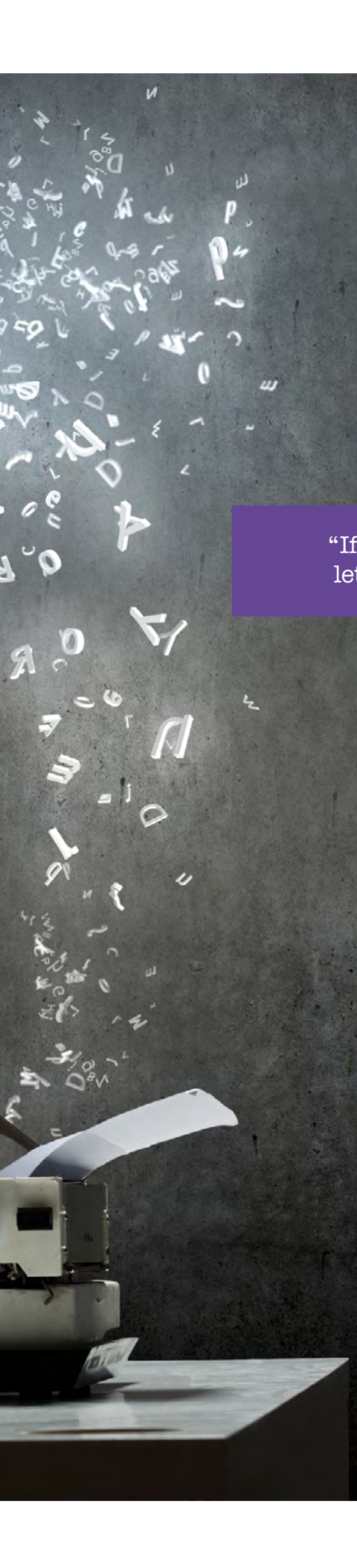
In the words of the late Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, "Good leaders create followers, great leaders create leaders." To successfully lead the Jewish people, one needs to realise that one leads a nation of leaders. It is for that reason that the greatest celebration of Moses is the celebration not of the man himself, but of the eternal nation that he cultivated.

Breaking the Script

THE IMPORTANCE OF SURPRISE AND
DISCUSSION ON SEDER NIGHT

RABBI JONNY ROODYN





Psychologists define surprise as an emotion that occurs when our expectations about the world are disrupted. It is a vital tool for creating any kind of memorable experience and an essential part of telling a great story. As Chip Heath explains in his bestselling book *The Power of Moments*, "We have scripts about how things are going to unfold. We have a restaurant script for greeting, seating with the menus, and ordering the food. We can go on and list all the components of that event that normally happen. What it takes to get people's attention when you're out with them is to break that script. Have

Why would that be? If the purpose of Seder night is to remember and recall, let's just mention the facts and get to the food already!

Ancient Egypt wasn't simply a geographical location, it represented an idea. It was a place that was totally devoid of *emunah*), to the point where Pharaoh could exclaim, 'Who is God, that I should hearken to His voice?' It was a spiritual vacuum, a black hole devoid of holiness to the extent that redemption could only come once the Jewish People themselves were able to internalise this concept of *emunah*. Often poorly-translated as

"If the purpose of Seder night is to remember and recall, let's just mention the facts and get to the food already!"

an unexpected appetiser that shows up or have a second dessert that the house just gives you. Those would be things that would break our script of the normal restaurant encounter, and it would be memorable. Very often, to be memorable means breaking the script." At the Seder, we start with Kiddush and hand washing like any other Shabbat or festival meal, after which we diverge from the usual order to dip the karpas, a small piece of pretty much any vegetable, whose sole purpose is to provoke and stimulate conversation.

Passionate discussion, respectful arguments, and healthy disagreements are very much part of our tradition. For many families, the high point of the Jewish year is the Seder, a time when we can be unashamedly Jewish in thought, action, and speech. By the time we take our first bite of Matzah, we have spent a lot of time talking. In fact, the word Pesach can be taken to mean *peh sach*, literally meaning 'talking mouth', and the very book we read from is called the Haggadah, which literally means 'narration'.

So, we talk, talk, and talk some more while the Haggadah itself gives examples of Rabbis who were up all night in discussion. It tells us that the more we discuss the Exodus story, the more praiseworthy we are.

'faith', *emunah* has many connotations. *Emunah* implies faithfulness to that which we know to be true. It is the ability to connect - or perhaps reconnect - to our values.

The Chassidic master, Rabbi Sholom Noach Berezovsky writes in his magnum opus, the *Nesivos Shalom*, that Pesach, or to be more specific, Seder Night, is a Rosh Hashanah of sorts. It is a new year for *emunah*, the point in the year when we 'fill up our tanks' with enough spiritual fuel to carry us through the next twelve months. It is an opportunity for us to engage those around us, together, exploring our timeless values through the medium of the Pesach story.

The values that power Jewish Futures organisations, which engage thousands of young Jews each week, are beautifully expressed through the Pesach story and can be used as messages and discussion points to enhance your own Seder. When it comes to discussions, it's not as much about finding the 'right' answer or approach; rather, it's far more about drawing attention to these ideas and discussing them openly and honestly. Simply raising the issues and putting them on the table is invaluable in creating an open and meaningful connection with our Judaism.



1

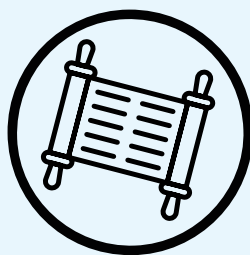
Integrity

Despite being raised in the lap of luxury in the security of Pharaoh's palace, upon reaching maturity, Moses goes out to his brothers to feel their pain. He connects with his true identity, rather than his assumed one. On the other hand, Pharaoh pretends to be a god when he is a mere mortal. When he sees his people suffering during the plague of blood, he enjoys 'diplomatic immunity' and ignores the suffering of his people¹.

We strive to live with integrity, authentically living a Judaism that is piercingly genuine, sincere, and true in both theory and practice.

- What makes a good leader?
- How does one develop a sense of honesty and integrity?
- Why do many leaders seem to struggle with this?

¹ Midrash Hagadol



2

Relevance

The stated agenda of the Seder night is to relate the story to the point that each and every one of us can see ourselves as actually having left Egypt. The Haggadah actually goes on to say, 'Not only our fathers did the Holy One, blessed be He redeem, but He also redeemed us with them...' This doesn't just mean that we ought to view ourselves as part of the bigger picture of Jewish history, but also that we all leave our own personal 'Egypt' each and every year.

The Torah is the Almighty's instruction manual for living, and it is an immense privilege to learn and share this vital wisdom. We strive to draw relevant, practical life lessons from everything we learn and teach. The way that we relate to Torah is that the Almighty is speaking to us through the words and concepts contained within it.

- What does freedom mean to you? Is freedom simply the ability to do whatever you want whenever you want? To what extent do we have to consider the feelings, wants and desires of others when making choices in life.
- What is the greatest free-will decision that a person can make?



3

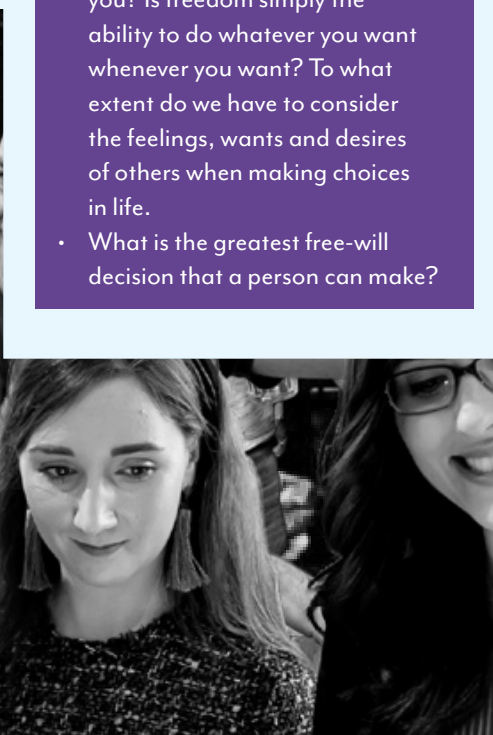
Responsibility

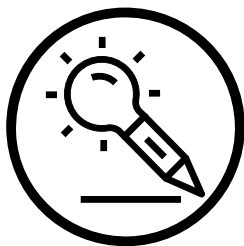
When Moses was at the burning bush, he engaged the Almighty in dialogue, giving excuse after excuse why not to be the one to face up to Pharaoh. 'Who am I?' 'What shall I say?' 'They won't believe in me,' 'I have a speech impediment.' Eventually, after running out of excuses, Moses still asks God to send someone else. At this point God 'gets angry' and tells Moses that it's his responsibility and he cannot shirk it off².

We recognise and feel the pain of the existential challenges to Jewish commitment and continuity that the Jewish People face today.

- Why do you think that the Jewish People were redeemed from Egypt?
- What does being Jewish mean to you?
- Which key Jewish concepts would you most like to pass on to future generations?

² Exodus chapters 3-4





4

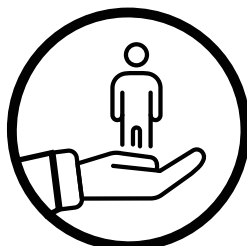
Aspiration

The Jews were slaves in the greatest prison camp in the ancient world. There was no way out of their predicament. The people had all but lost hope of a brighter future as it seemed impossible. Nonetheless, armed with a Divinely mandated sense of mission and purpose, Moses was able to stand up to the most powerful despot the world had ever seen and demand the unthinkable: nation liberation for the Children of Israel³.

We are highly motivated to achieve greatness in all that we do. We constantly strive to grow as individuals and as an organisation. We actively innovate and constantly look for better and more effective solutions to the challenges that we are mandated to solve.

- What is the Jewish People's greatest contribution to the world?
- What is the greatest contribution that you can make and why?
- What is holding you back from doing so?

³ Exodus 5:1



5

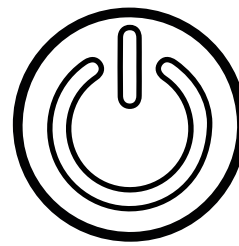
Care

The Rabbis relate⁴ that when Moses was a shepherd in Midian, he was given a leadership test by the Almighty. One day he noticed one scrawny little sheep went missing. He searched high and low until he found it standing next to a stream of water, he picked it up on his shoulders and returned it to the flock. It was only then that God appeared to him at the burning bush.

Our focus on the big picture does not take away from the respect, care and attention that every individual deserves. Our values begin at home and reach out in concentric circles to every single person we come into contact with.

- Who do you care most about and why?
- Is it possible to care about someone you have never met? If so, what makes you care about them?

⁴ Shemot Rabbah 2:2



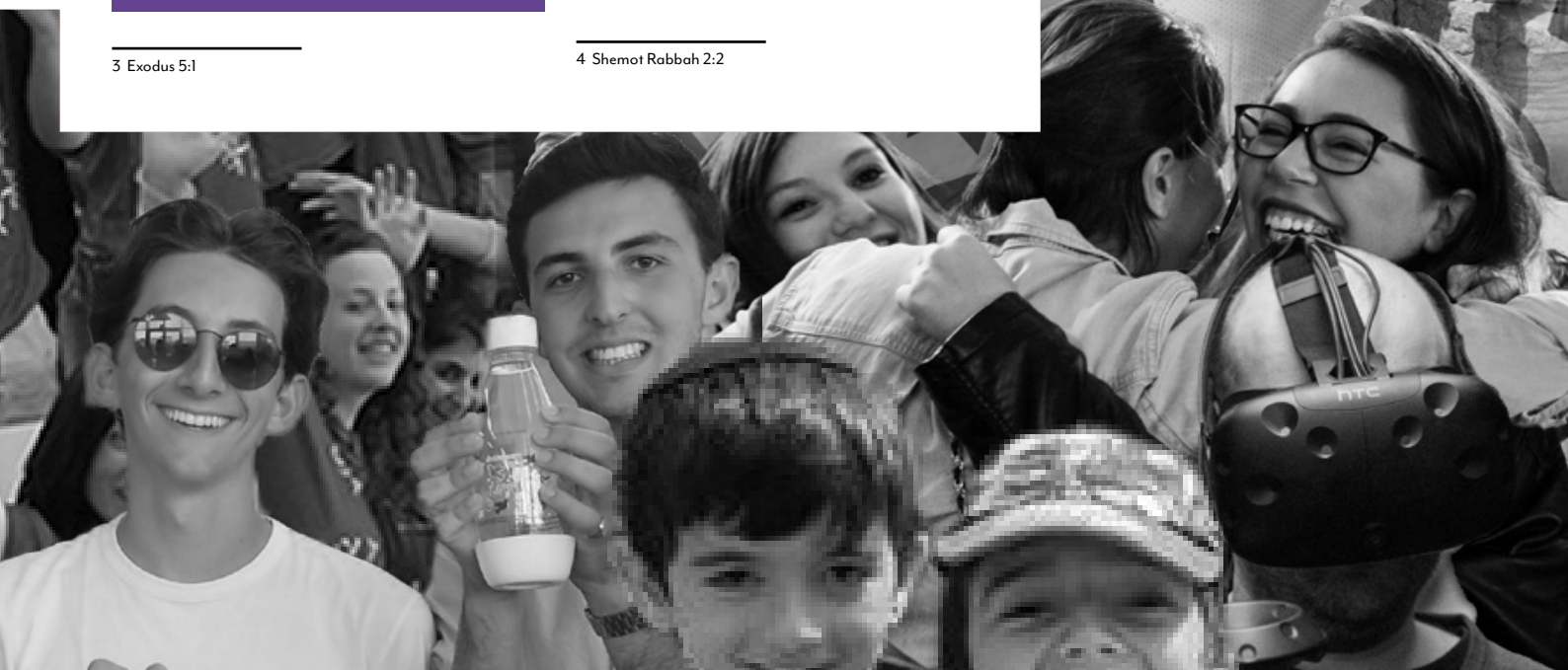
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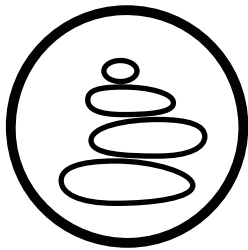
Passion

On Seder night, we don't just talk about freedom, we sing songs expressing it with energy and pride. These songs, peppered throughout the Seder, reflect our past and present as well as our yearning for a brighter future.

We are passionate in our love for Hashem, Torah and the Jewish People. We are filled with a palpable sense of joy at the immense privilege of being able to connect Jews with their heritage. Our passion drives us and inspires those around us to do likewise.

- Which is your favourite Seder song and why? Discuss the meaning behind it and the lesson it teaches you.





7
Balance

The Jews in Egypt were defined by their dress, language, names and choice of marriage partners¹. They had a distinct ethnic identity long before they received any mitzvot. The giving of the Torah enabled them to add values and religious expression to that identity.

We strive for a healthy integration of Jewish values in every aspect of our lives, be they personal, family, work and community.

¹ Shir Hashirim Rabbah 4:24 (this medrash is found in numerous places with subtle variations, but the idea is common to all).

- How does your Judaism express itself?
- How 'Jewish' should Jews be in a public space?



8
Confidence

Despite the fact that they had endured decades of back breaking, soul destroying labour, the Jewish People never gave up hope of being redeemed from Egypt. The Pesach story is full of courageous and confident acts. Yocheved and Miriam, in a fearless act of civil disobedience, defied Pharaoh's decrees to murder the new-born boys on the birthing stool² and Moses had the confidence to face up to Pharaoh even when he had been abandoned by the rest of the Jewish leadership³.

We operate with confidence in the justness of our cause and God's ability to deliver. This enables us to be resilient and carry on moving forward towards the goal despite any setbacks that may occur.

² Exodus 1:17
³ Exodus 1:17

- Give an example of a challenge you have overcome.
- How did you feel when you did so?
- How did that affect your confidence?





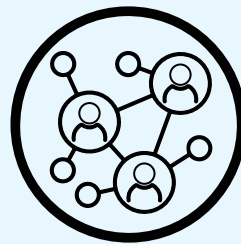
10

Humility

Matzah is seen as the symbol of humility, unlike bread which is made up of numerous ingredients and takes its time to rise. It is a simple item made purely of flour and water and baked as quickly as possible, giving it no time to become inflated.

We live and work with humility, making space for others, and treating them with respect.

- Can humility and self confidence exist side by side?
- Who is the most humble person you have ever met?



9

Unity

During the ongoing negotiations, Pharaoh, buckling under the pressure of the plagues, made an offer to Moses to allow the men to leave Egypt. Moses rejected the offer, saying it's all or nothing. Either we go as one unit, men and women, old and young or we don't go at all. When the time of redemption finally came, the Jewish people marched out of Egypt as one, ultimately reaching Mount Sinai as 'one people with one heart'⁴.

We actively work to negate the personal and corporate ego battles that can so often destroy organisations focussing on common goals rather than differences.

⁴ Rashi Exodus 19:2

- What do you think truly unites the Jewish People today?
- What is the greatest challenge to Jewish unity and why?



THE MEANING OF PASSOVER

MICHAL OSHMAN

Head of Culture, TikTok Europe & Former Leadership Expert, Facebook

**WHAT WOULD
YOU DO IF
YOU WEREN'T
AFRAID?**

Discover a life filled with purpose and joy
through the secrets of Jewish wisdom

An excerpt from *'What would you do if you weren't afraid?'* by Michal Oshman

Although I am Jewish by birth, for many years I wasn't aware of the deeper meanings of Jewish life and therefore I hadn't ever considered the meaning of Jewish holidays, in this case, Passover. However, ten years ago, as I was going through a difficult time. I remembered what a Jewish friend had said to me years ago when I asked her what Passover meant to her. She'd explained that Passover is the time of year when you remind yourself that although you're no longer enslaved in Egypt, you are still enslaving yourself to damaging things. You will always have 'your Egypt'. 'It's a reminder that you can get out of Egypt, but you can't get Egypt out of yourself,' she added. At the time I had wondered what she meant, but now I started to understand the significance of the story. Egypt doesn't just mean a physical country. It symbolises any place where you are not free, where you are chained to something.

In Hebrew the word for Egypt is mitzrayim, which means 'boundaries' or 'narrow straits'. I realised that the story of the Israelites' escape from Egypt isn't 'just' a historical story about liberation from slavery. It's a story that is lived every single day. It's the human story of liberating ourselves from narrowness, from our own personal restrictions, our own self-slavery. The fact that many of us are privileged enough to have physical freedoms to do whatever we want, whenever we want (within legal boundaries, of course), doesn't mean we are truly free. We can have internal chains – thoughts and self-beliefs – that keep us trapped, limited. What 'Egypt', what mitzrayim, was I chaining myself to? What was I enslaved to that was making me feel so anxious? And how on earth could I set myself free?

Michal's book *'What you do if you weren't afraid?'* was published by and is copyright to Dorling Kindersley Limited - A Penguin Random House company.

Photography: Galia Verthime Sherf.

VALOUR LIFESTYLE X PERSPECTIVES

Fashion Edit

Photography: Hadassa Stimmler

As Jewish women, we possess a wealth of talent, inspiration, and wisdom to offer the world. Valour Lifestyle is a platform created to unite women from all backgrounds and walks of life, encouraging them to discover and develop their unique potential. Each woman contributes her individual strengths and talents to form a beautiful fabric of the Jewish people.

Women have an innate appreciation for beauty, which holds significant value in Judaism. Our matriarch Sarah was celebrated for her external beauty, a reflection of her inner purity and holiness. Therefore, striving for beauty is not contradictory to Jewish values; it is a way to honour the godliness within us. We are all uniquely

beautiful, and by embracing our individuality, we align our physical and spiritual selves. Dressing to highlight our inner beauty using the guidelines of modesty is a way to boost our confidence and empower us to face the world.

Valour Lifestyle offers relatable content on health, beauty, fashion, and more, providing women with tools to best express their inner beauty. Join us on this journey of self-discovery and growth, and together, we will create a beautiful, inclusive community.

valourlifestyle.co.uk

The choices we make about how we dress reveals not only our personal style, but also who we are as individuals. Fashion is a form of self-expression, and by dressing in a certain way, we are able to communicate our own unique message to the world. Of course, there are many different interpretations of what different styles of clothing say about a person, but overall, fashion is a powerful tool that can be used to convey our individuality, personality, profession, level of confidence, and so much more.

What you wear and how you present yourself is the first method that you use to reveal yourself to the world. It can also allow you to speak through your clothes based on the outfit you choose for different occasions.

The Journal of Experimental Psychology says that the colour, comfort, fit and style of our clothes can directly affect our confidence levels. More than 96 per cent of people report a change in their emotional state with a change in their style of dressing.

From left to right: Striped shirt dress, £249.99, Lauren Ralph Lauren @ Zalando; Light blue shirt dress, £349.99, Polo Ralph Lauren @ Zalando; Denim jacket, £99, Whistles @ Selfridges; Dark floral shirt dress, £27.99, Stradivarius; Denim shoes, £98, Oliver Bonas; Denim espadrilles, £179, LK Bennett; Collared floral dress, £55.99, Reserved; Blue skirt, £224.99, Weekend MaxMara @ Zalando; Mid-blue shirt dress, £95, Selected; Denim shirt dress, £89, Warehouse; White & blue floral shirt dress, £120, &OtherStories; Blue ruffled dress, £49.99, H&M; Bag, £309, Sandro; Earrings, £32, Boden



Wearing colours can have a major impact on our mood, enhance communication, build confidence, and can even give you a physical boost. Colour is also a powerful tool for communication, and one of the ways we self-identify. The colour of our clothing serves as a signal to others, letting them in on who we are. Moreover, when we get dressed each morning, we're telling ourselves who we aim to be and how we hope to feel.

Happier people were found to care about dressing well, while people going through trauma, understandably, were found to under-play their clothing choices. By changing the way they dress, the same people were able to improve their mental state for the day.



From left to right: Earrings, £165, Swarovski; Shirt, £169, Whistles; Printed skirt, £79, Aligne; Block colour dress, £59.99, Triumph @ Zalando; Orange heels, £45.99, Mango @ John Lewis & Partners; Watermelon pink skirt, £110, Boden; Yellow dress, £79.99, Mango; Red & pink dress, £154.99, Never Fully Dressed @ Zalando; Green & white skirt, £69, Cos; Floral dress, £129, Never Fully Dressed; Green white polka dot dress, £295, Me+Em; Necklace, £25.99, Zara; Parrot pumps, £130, Boden

While your clothes surely don't define you, they can still be a great feel-good factor and a way of self-expression. Make the world your runway.

From left to right: White/black asymmetric dress, £279, Iro @ The Outnet; Green/purple print dress, £195, Jigsaw; White heels, £99, Moda in Pelle; Leopard print dress, £399, Pinko; Block heel buckled shoes, £345, Russell & Bromley; Earrings, £87, Etta Gray @ Wolf & Badger Printed skirt, £165, Ted Baker; Black & white collared dress, £95, BA&SH @ The Outnet; Bag, £55, Oliver Bonas; White square toed shoes, £65, Charles & Keith at John Lewis & Partners; Gingham ruched dress, £248, Shrimps @ The Outnet; Printed belted dress, £225, Ted Baker; Top, £119, Claudie Pierlot at The Outnet

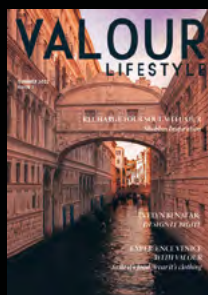


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COLLABORATING WITH WOMEN WORLDWIDE



MUSIC MAN: MENDY PORTNOY

SASHA SILBER

MENDY PORTNOY IS A MUSIC PRODUCER, PIANIST, AND ONE-HALF OF MUSICAL DUO THE PORTNOY BROTHERS. TOGETHER WITH HIS BROTHER SRULI, MENDY HAS RELEASED TWO SUCCESSFUL ALBUMS, INCLUDING THEIR LATEST OFFERING "NO COMPLAINTS," RECORDED IN THE MUSIC CAPITAL OF NASHVILLE.

THEY HAVE PERFORMED FOR AUDIENCES AROUND THE WORLD IN ISRAEL, NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA, SOUTH AFRICA, SPAIN, AND ITALY. OVER THE YEARS, THEY HAVE SHARED THE STAGE WITH NUMEROUS RENOWNED MUSICIANS AND PERFORMED FOR DIGNITARIES INCLUDING THE PRESIDENT OF ISRAEL. MENDY PORTNOY'S PASSION FOR MUSIC IS EVIDENT IN HIS CRAFT, AND HIS DEDICATION TO HIS ART CONTINUES TO EARN HIM ACCOLADES AND A GROWING GLOBAL FAN BASE.



TELL ME ABOUT YOUR LIFE IN MUSIC.

I'm originally from Manchester, and now I live in.... New Jersey! I'm number seven out of nine siblings. All of us, in one way or another, are pretty musical. Our dad spent thirty five years as a community rabbi, but before that, he was actually an orchestra conductor. He grew up performing as a child soloist with The London School of Jewish Song and studied at the Royal College of Music in London. In our home, music was always in the air. Thinking back to my childhood, if my dad was the Chazan (precentor) in shul, as kids, we would go up on the bima (synagogue platform) and stand next to him, singing and harmonising. I think there's clearly something genetic about it, because I see my nieces and nephews all sing or find their way to the piano or guitar, and learn how to play as well.

My brother Sruli and I are closest in age, and grew up in the same bedroom. He was having piano lessons at one point and I got quite jealous, so I started guitar lessons. At some point, I decided that I was going to scrap the guitar to teach myself to play the piano and be better than him. When that happened, he started playing the guitar and we basically did a full switch, which is where we're at nowadays. We have always played music together and performed together. Slowly but surely, that evolved into a career. We have performed at events all around the world and have recorded two studio albums together. I will always consider him my closest musical partner and the other half of my musical soul - we have a special chemistry.

THE NICHE THAT YOU AND SRULI HAVE CARVED OUT FOR YOURSELVES HAS A STRONG BASE IN JEWISH EVENTS. BEYOND PERFORMING IN JEWISH CONTEXTS, DO YOU EXPERIENCE A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MUSIC AND JUDAISM?

I have a deep fascination with the question, 'What is Jewish music?' The idea of exploring this topic in depth, perhaps in the form of a podcast or documentary, is something I'd love to do one day. I'm curious to know what makes music Jewish - is it the

melody, the lyrics, or the person singing it? It would be interesting to explore why, for example, Bob Dylan or Leonard Cohen's music is not considered "Jewish Music". Or maybe it is - who knows.

Music is a central theme in Judaism, and it's the way I connect to Judaism. When I go into a shul (synagogue) where there is no singing, it's very hard for me to feel any real connection, and it becomes genuinely hard for me to be there. A couple of years ago I had an idea to put together a musical Hallel (Psalms of praise and thanksgiving) for the entire community. I wanted to bring in a group of incredible musicians for 500 people to sing Hallel together with a band. I imagine it would be such an elevated experience. The bottom line is that music provides a soundtrack for everything: if you watch a movie and there's no music, you won't experience the sad bits as sad, and the happy bits won't feel happy. It applies to anything. It's the same with religion.

LET'S SWITCH GEARS: YOU BEGAN AS A PERFORMER, AND HAVE BEEN BUSY WITH INCREDIBLE PROJECTS AS A MUSIC PRODUCER.

I've definitely evolved to a place where professionally I spend most of my time producing. First and foremost, I would probably still say I'm a pianist, which is weird for me to say because I don't have any training. I write music as well. I have found this place where I am able to stay in the industry that I love, while still having some sense of stability. It allows me to be

around as my kids are growing up. When I was performing regularly, leaving the house at 5 p.m. and getting back at 2 a.m. for concerts or weddings - not to mention touring - that's a lot more difficult. Now I get to put my kids to sleep and hang out with them every morning when they wake up (too early most of the time) - and I get to make music for a living! I feel where I'm at right now is a middle ground. There's something magical about taking other people's dreams and ideas and bringing them to life.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE MUSIC THAT YOU PRODUCE FOR YOUR ARTISTS? IS IT THEIRS OR IS IT YOURS?

It's ultimately theirs, but I'm helping them package it in a way that the world can best receive it. It all starts with the person's song. If a song doesn't move you with the person just singing it with an acoustic guitar, it doesn't matter how many levels of production are added, the chances are it still won't move you afterwards.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF THAT PROCESS?

I have a thing I like to do now. When I finish producing a song, I'll take 30 seconds of the chorus as the person initially sent it to me, like a voice note from their phone, and then play back the final version. It's a really nice thing to do because it really shows the journey that it's been on. I also enjoy when weeks or months later, once the track or album is released, the artist forwards me some of the feedback. To know that I have helped that person take what was just an idea in their head, and now it's this thing that's either on YouTube or Spotify, out in the world, is a cool feeling.

WHAT ARE THE FRUSTRATING PARTS OF THE PROCESS?

Things come up sometimes, but you work through them. Of course there are artists who are more difficult to work with - there's no doubt about that. When you are a producer, you are also a therapist, a doctor, and plenty of other things - you name it. At the end of the day, when the end goal is to create a song, it's hard for that to be frustrating. It's the best thing in the world.





DOES YOUR FAMILY HAVE A FAVOURITE SONG THAT YOU'VE PRODUCED?

My family knows everything I've ever worked on backwards because up until recently, I've worked from a home studio. When I'm working, sometimes I can have a four bar loop playing over and over again. By the time I've finished a song, they all know it pretty well, to say the least. They have lots of favourites; sometimes my kids come in and they give me a thumbs up or thumbs down - that's how I gauge how well I'm doing.

WHAT ELSE IS IN THE PIPELINE?

Most of my time right now is dedicated to the work that I'm doing with Thank You Hashem, which is a movement - a way of life - whose main goal is to uplift and inspire Jews throughout the world through various forms of content - music, social media, podcasts, music videos, sweatshirts, bumper stickers... The whole premise is just saying, before anything, before we deal with all the details of life, let's stop, look at what we have, and say thank you. When we start from thank you, it's hard to go wrong. When I started working with them, it was just me and one other person actively involved on a daily basis. As of this year, we now have a team of seven people working full time. We hope to start being active in the live events space in the near future so we can bring some of the same energy we've been putting out online into real life experiences.

I still have a bunch of projects I'm working on, including an album of covers of Shabbat songs that my brother and I grew up on - it's kind of a slow-cooking project where we release one track every couple of months. Every now and again we still gig. There's nothing I enjoy more than gigging with Sruli - it's the best thing in the world - which honestly makes it difficult to do with anyone else. I'm also working on my own solo piano music, trying to push that a little bit, having just finished recording an album. I'm probably going to do a few more albums this year, maybe three or four, each one with a different theme. They're very quick to do because they are improvised. I basically pick the theme, book a studio, and sit down to record it. Building my own studio is a big project this year. Trying to be a better husband and father is a constant project that's always going on.

YOU BROUGHT IT UP WHEN YOU SAID "THE BEST THING IN THE WORLD IS TO GIG" — CAN YOU SHARE SOME OF THE ARTISTS YOU'VE ENJOYED COLLABORATING WITH RECENTLY?

Avraham Fried, Zushe, Alex Clare, Mordechai Shapiro - everyone has their own flavour and it's great to tap into each one.

OK SO THEN LET'S FLIP IT: WHO ARE YOUR BIGGEST MUSICAL INFLUENCES OUTSIDE OF JEWISH MUSIC?

The Beatles, Stevie Wonder - he's a huge influence. Keith Jarrett. I love gospel and soul music.

WHO'S YOUR DREAM COLLAB — LIVING OR DEAD?

I'd love to give Stevie Wonder a hug and thank him, but I don't think that's

considered a collaboration. My dream collaboration actually involves me as a producer - I have this idea to create an album with a hasidic singer and create a yiddish gospel album. At the end of the day, it's all just boxes that we've created that can very easily disappear - we're all taking the same 12 notes.

WHAT'S YOUR MOTTO?

Life is short, even if you have a long one. Perfect is the enemy of done. I know musicians personally who have taken ten years to do an album, and I get that they want it to be perfect, but what does that mean? The Piano album that I just released had tons of mistakes in it and wasn't perfect, but to me that is where I was at that moment - and then I moved on.





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Behind the Feed

THE TOTALLY KOSHER FOOD INFLUENCER TAKING INSTAGRAM BY STORM

CHANIE APFELBAUM, RENOWNED FOOD WRITER AND PHOTOGRAPHER, IS A VETERAN INSTAGRAM CREATOR AND A PIONEER ON THE PLATFORM'S FOOD SCENE. CLOCKING IN CLOSE TO 100K FOLLOWERS ON THE META-OWNED PLATFORM AT THE TIME OF OUR CHAT IN LATE FEBRUARY, HER "BUSY IN BROOKLYN" PAGE FEATURES ORIGINAL CONTENT - AN ECLECTIC RANGE OF RECIPES THAT SHE HAS DEVELOPED, COOKED, AND PHOTOGRAPHED BEAUTIFULLY (AS FEATURED IN HER FIRST COOKBOOK "MILLENNIAL KOSHER", AS WELL AS HER BRAND NEW COOKBOOK CALLED "TOTALLY KOSHER").

SASHA SILBER

I was intrigued to hear about how Busy in Brooklyn, a name that has become synonymous with Chanie, approaches the public aspect of her work as a Kosher food influencer. As soon as we began our video call, I was nearly thrown off by the degree of her authenticity: the person whose stories and recipes I regularly enjoy on Instagram was in fact exactly the same person as the person on the other end of the call - no pretences, no gimmicks.

How did you become a social media influencer?

Everyone tells a story all the time. How we interpret that story, depending on what we see, is individually different. The same is true for social media. Over the years, I've learned that there is no book to buy that teaches you how to be an influencer. I started on Instagram in its early days, actually having been invited to take over the @instagram account to create stories before Passover. These days, there are so many more kosher influencers and content creators. I'm constantly learning how to navigate this platform, asking myself how much I want to share while staying true to myself. With people watching me over the years while going through so many changes in my life, I have felt the need to explain some things, and I sometimes get stuck in my head, thinking maybe they're

judging me for this or that. It definitely gets to me a little bit.

How you decide what to share about your personal life on Instagram?

I share personal experiences that have taught me life lessons or are currently helping me grow through struggles. If I think my story could resonate with others and be of help, I'm all for sharing it. I know there are so many people out there going through similar things, but often nobody wants to talk about it.

...like going through a divorce while in the public eye?

Yes. At first, I felt like I was hiding something that was a huge part of my life. It was really hard for me, and it was during the year of COVID which made it even tougher. I was able to blame a lot on COVID and the world, which was helpful in a twisted way. I can't fake it to the world and smile while I'm dying inside. So on days when I'm not feeling it, I might be quiet or show something else without talking to the camera. I don't have a choice when I have an agreement to cook, film, or shoot an advertisement (never something I don't believe in or something I'm against). On sadder days, I might not say anything, instead I'll just post words. It happens, and I have found my way of

working around it. There were days when I felt like I couldn't do anything and maybe didn't even post at all; I told myself that Instagram is going to be a reflection of my life, not the other way around. I don't fake anything or produce content that's not authentic.

I first had to come to terms with the divorce myself before I could be open about it publicly, which I did. When I finally just said it, I felt so free. It is such a big part of my life that I think normalising it for myself helped normalise it for everyone else watching. At first, I would meet a new person and felt like I had to say it. Now, I don't - it's just something about me without defining me, like everything else. I wrote two cookbooks, I'm divorced, and I have brown hair. It takes time, but by owning it and having that confidence, I realised it could help other people watching that are going through the same thing. It's just a part of life that happens.

Your children appear in your new beautiful cookbook *Totally Kosher*, and we occasionally see them pop in and out of your stories. Are you intentional about limiting their visibility?

First of all, there is a lot of weird stuff that goes on on the internet for people that share their kids regularly - really freaky

stuff. As it is, even the small amount that I share makes me feel uneasy. For example, my fourteen-year-old daughter gets recognized; literally, she will be sitting somewhere and someone will come up and ask “are you Busy in Brooklyn’s daughter?” - it makes me feel uncomfortable. Obviously, this is such a big part of my life that I do sometimes show my kids - but it is not planned and I consciously hold back. You won’t find pictures of them on my feed that people could screenshot; I am cautious from a safety and privacy perspective.

There are bloggers and creators whose kids are featured and intentionally all over their feed. I wonder, are those kids going to grow up resenting having to do this when they were little? Kids don’t really understand what this is: my son thinks it’s fun and wants to come on, but he isn’t old enough to understand. This is my job, not something they should be pressured into.

Have you had any regrets about the content you’ve shared?

Once in a while, I do a Q&A session in my stories. When I put up a normal question box versus an anonymous question box, I get very different responses. I remember one time in the summer, we had a very meaningful Q&A, and people loved it. But the next day, I felt sad because people shared very private and painful things with me. Others said very inappropriate and judgmental things that they would never have openly said to me. It affects me even though I try to stay confident. Every time I do these sessions, I debate whether or not I should do it again, but then I remember how many people these Q&A’s have helped, including myself. I struggle with this. At the end of the day, it’s a balance between keeping my platform focused on what I do - food - while connecting with my audience. To me, it’s kind of like growing a community, and I love that about it. Being able to share and help each other is amazing.

You’ve clearly evolved on a personal level through your experience on social media. Would you say the same about your food?

It’s constantly evolving! As an influencer, I have to hop on board the trends and try them. Every time I see a trend, I think about how I can put my own spin on it and make it me? That’s my whole schtick. I always say my recipes are non-Googleable. If you can Google it, I don’t want to do it.



A favourite recipe from the book is called Pad Chai, a reimagining of a classic Pad Thai that is infused with middle-eastern ingredients.

You'll see that when looking through my cookbooks. Even if you're constantly on social media or even simply enjoy food, it could get static, old and boring over time. As a creative and a recipe developer, I need to be open to learning from others and constantly growing. If not, there's a risk of becoming stagnant.

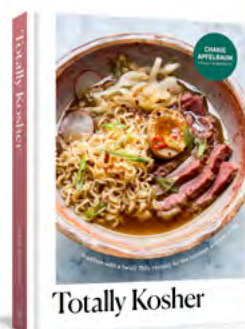
We gather and celebrate around food, which can sometimes get repetitive. Something about thinking outside the box, trying new ingredients and flavours takes the monotony out of it. I want food to be exciting for people. My style and palette have undoubtedly evolved. My new cookbook, *Totally Kosher* is definitely more refined and elevated, with fewer processed ingredients. A favourite recipe from the book is called Pad Chai, a reimagining of a classic Pad Thai that is infused with middle-eastern ingredients including Silan (date syrup) and Harissa (North African red chilli paste).

I can't wait to try that, and everything else from your new book! You've mentioned the community aspect of your platform; can you expand on that?

I grew up very open-minded and accepting of all types of Jews joining us for meals, and I've always been against putting people in boxes with labels. I see my following as one big Jewish family, regardless of our differences in our backgrounds or levels of observance. On one hand, I am a Kosher blogger and a spokesperson for Kosher food. At the same time, there are so many laws - sometimes people turn to me with questions! I don't make decisions for anyone and redirect them to their Rabbi. I feel like a mother that loves everyone unconditionally; ultimately, I want people to be accepting of others.

You spend a lot of time on your phone for work. How do you detox from it?

Shabbat!



Totally Kosher: Tradition with a Twist is available for pre-order. Release Date: 21st March 2023



Chanie Apfelbaum is a food blogger, recipe developer and food photographer who blogs about her cooking adventures at www.buysinbrooklyn.com. Her first cookbook is *Millennial Kosher: Recipes for the Modern Palate*.

Pesach in Colour

PHOTOS BY
BLAKE EZRA



My early childhood was spent in Caracas, Venezuela, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. They are years I think about with so much joy and love; they shaped my childhood, and the way I think about food. Some of my favourite memories are of my mother preparing Pesach in places where the Jewish community was strong, but small. The food items for Pesach were all imported as nothing was produced in these far-flung outposts of Jewish life. Only the basics were imported: Matzah, wine, Matzah meal, potato starch, oil, some spices, tomato paste, and a few sweets. It made us appreciate what it meant to make Pesach. We made everything including mayonnaise and ketchup.

We saw each dish at its elemental level and learned what makes some things kosher for Pesach and others not. We incorporated

family favourites such as my grandmother's egg noodles, my other grandmother's meatballs and potatoes, and my mother's matzah muffins, together with the flavours around us. Fresh fruit, vegetables, proteins and of course, potatoes. Once my family moved back to America, we used the same principles we had learnt in South America; we didn't shop for the processed 'not-for-Pesach equivalent', think kosher for Pesach versions of croutons and cereal. We stuck to bold, fresh flavours, made the most of seasonal produce, and kept it simple.

In the following pages, I share recipes that I love that are both effortless and elegant. They taste delicious, yet are so simple and easy to prepare that you will be making them year round, and not just reserving them for Pesach.

REBBETZIN ILANA EPSTEIN





LETTUCE

This, along with a very similar tomato salad, is the kind of dish for which I always have the ingredients in my fridge. It can be prepared in minutes, and looks and tastes amazing. Not every recipe, especially a salad, needs to be a production — sometimes simple is delicious. This isn't so much a recipe as it is a suggestion for a super simple salad that works every time. You can adjust the quantities to suit your preferences.

Mix together one or more of the following: Romaine lettuce, romaine hearts, bibb lettuce, lambs lettuce, rocket and/or watercress. Add finely shaved fennel (best done with a mandoline, but if you don't have one a sharp knife will also work) plus thinly sliced radishes. Dress with the best olive oil you can find, fresh lemon juice, flaky sea salt and ground pepper. Top with optional toasted, roughly chopped walnuts.

You can prepare the lettuce, fennel and radish up to 4 hours ahead of time, making sure to cover them well. Dress and add the walnuts (if using) just before serving.

BRAISED

COURGETTES



Courgettes (zucchini) are an undervalued vegetable, as they are brilliant at carrying flavour and make a perfect Pesach side dish. The method here is to braise the courgette in a combination of oil and water to develop a deeper flavour while retaining its shape.

- 6 thin courgettes , quartered lengthwise and cut crosswise into 2" pieces
- ¼ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup water
- 3 garlic cloves, sliced thin
- Salt and pepper
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes

- 1.** In a 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat, bring the courgette, oil, water, garlic, 1 teaspoon salt, ¼ teaspoon pepper, and red pepper flakes to a boil.
- 2.** Reduce heat to medium, cover, and simmer for about 8 minutes, stirring with a rubber spatula every 2 minutes, until the courgette is fork-tender.

POTATOES

How do you avoid leathery or undercooked potatoes? Steam them first! Although roast meats are usually not served at seder in most Ashkenazi homes, roast vegetables are acceptable. With this recipe, you can make the most of your oven while the stove top is busy with all kinds of things, from soups to Matzah balls.

- 2kg of unpeeled red potatoes, cut into $\frac{3}{4}$ inch wedges
- 6 tablespoons of olive oil
- 2 teaspoons of thyme leaves
- 2 banana shallots (the long ones), finely chopped
- 2 cloves of garlic, minced
- Salt and pepper

1. Preheat the oven to 220°C/ 450°F. Line an extra large rimmed baking sheet with aluminium foil
2. In a large bowl, toss together all the ingredients, except for the salt and pepper. Season with salt and pepper
3. Arrange the potatoes in a single layer on the prepared baking sheet. Cover tightly with foil and cook for 30 minutes
4. Remove the foil cover and keep on cooking for another 20-25 minutes until the potatoes are cooked through, stirring them a couple of times
5. Check for seasoning just before serving and adjust with extra salt and pepper if needed



ROASTED CARROTS

Oven-roasted carrots are delicious, but they can start to wilt before they are cooked through. To solve this, steam them first to get a jump start on the cooking, leaving the roasting until the very end. A touch of honey adds sweetness to an otherwise savoury dish.

- 1kg carrots, peeled and cut on the bias into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch ovals
- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh rosemary
- Salt and pepper
- 2 tablespoons honey

1. Preheat the oven to 220°C/ 450°F. Line an extra-large rimmed baking sheet with aluminium foil.
2. In a large bowl, toss all the ingredients except the honey together. Season with salt and pepper.
3. Arrange the carrots in a single layer on the prepared baking sheet. Cover tightly with foil and cook for 30 minutes.
4. Remove the foil cover and continue cooking for another 15-25 minutes until the carrots are cooked through, stirring them a couple of times.
5. Drizzle the honey directly onto the carrots in the tray, give it a stir and put it back in the oven for two minutes.
6. Check for seasoning just before serving and adjust with extra salt and pepper if needed.



BRAISED CHICKEN

WITH TOMATO & BASIL

Braising is an old-fashioned and amazing cooking technique that requires a two-step process for best results. Browning the chicken on both sides will help develop masses of flavour, both in the browned meat and the flavorful fat left behind that is then incorporated into the dish. I always use a meat thermometer, it keeps me from overcooking the meat.

- 2 chickens cut into 10 pieces, leave the skin on
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 onions, finely chopped
- 4 tablespoons tomato paste
- 6 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1 tablespoon potato starch
- 2 tablespoons water
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 1 ¼ cup chicken stock
- ¼ cup chopped fresh basil, divided
- 2 teaspoons red wine vinegar

1. Heat oil in a Dutch oven (or a heavy-bottomed large pot) over medium-high heat until just smoking. In batches, sprinkle the chicken pieces with salt and pepper. Place chicken pieces skin side down in the pot, and cook until skin is well browned on both sides, 5 to 8 minutes, (reduce heat if pot begins to scorch). Transfer chicken to a plate, then reduce heat to medium.
2. Add onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in tomato paste, garlic, oregano, and pepper flakes and cook until fragrant, for about 30 seconds. In a small bowl mix together the potato starch and two tablespoons of cold water. Stir in the potato starch mixture and cook, stirring constantly, for 1 minute. Stir in wine and chicken stock, scraping up any browned bits.
3. Place thighs and drumsticks skin side up in the pot, and bring to simmer over medium heat. Cover and cook for 8 minutes. (The sauce will have the consistency of thick gravy but will thin as chicken cooks.) Add breast pieces and wings. Lower the heat and cover the pot and cook for 20 minutes until the chicken is cooked through. Use a meat thermometer to check if the chicken is done (white meat: 71°C/ 160°F; dark meat: 80°C/ 175°F).
4. Transfer the chicken to a serving dish. Stir the vinegar and three-quarters of the basil into the sauce. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Pour the sauce over the chicken. Sprinkle the remaining basil over chicken and serve.



AUNT EUDICE'S BRISKET

Some of my most abiding Pesach memories come from the one we spent with my Aunt and Uncle in their home in Efrat. This is my aunt's classic brisket recipe that I have adapted over the years. Though the recipe has changed a bit, the principle has remained the same. It's a minimum effort recipe that needs loads of time in the oven, but delivers both in flavour and quantity.

- 2-3kg (about 5 lbs) fresh brisket (In the UK make sure you are buying fresh, not pickled brisket)
- 6 medium onions, peeled and finely sliced
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- 4 tablespoons ketchup
- Coarse ground pepper
- Coarse salt
- 500ml (about 2 cups) orange juice
- 500ml (about 2 cups) sweet red wine

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F).
2. Lay half the onions at the bottom of a large roasting tin. Rub both sides of the brisket with the garlic, ketchup and a generous amount of salt and pepper. Place the brisket on top of the bed of onions. Cover the top of the brisket with the remaining onions. Pour the orange juice and the wine into the tin, and cover the brisket tightly.
3. Place in the oven and cook for 3.5-4 hours until very soft. A way to check if it is done, is insert a fork into the brisket. When it pulls out with no resistance, you know it is done.
4. Take out of the oven and allow to cool before slicing. The colder the brisket is, the easier it will be to slice.
5. Reheat before serving.
6. The cooked brisket can be kept in the fridge for up to 3 days; if making it ahead of time, slice and then freeze.





OLD-FASHIONED ALMOND MACAROONS

Macaroons have always been a mainstay of the sweet Pesach kitchen. These are not to be confused with *macarons*, the delicate French pastry. These simple cookies, unlike their French cousins, require very little work but are equally moreish!

- 225g ground almonds
- 200g caster sugar, plus extra for sprinkling
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 3 medium free-range egg whites
- 30 whole blanched almonds

1. In a large mixing bowl, mix the ground almonds and sugar, then add the vanilla extract.
2. In a separate bowl, beat the egg whites with an electric mixer on a slow speed until frothy.
3. Add the egg whites to the almonds and sugar, 1 tablespoon at a time, mixing after each spoonful. Keep going until the mixture is soft but not runny; you may not need to use all the egg white.
4. Roll the mixture into walnut-sized balls and space them a few centimetres apart on baking paper-lined trays. Press down on the balls to flatten them slightly. Press a blanched almond into the top of each one, then leave them to sit for 10-15 minutes.
5. Heat the oven to 190°C/170°C fan, 375°F/350°F fan.
6. Bake for 15-20 minutes until pale golden brown. The macaroons should still feel soft to the touch but they'll continue to harden as they cool. Leave on the baking sheet for at least 10 minutes before transferring to a cooling rack to cool completely.

STRAWBERRY & RHUBARB COMPOTE

This compote makes the most of the abundant rhubarb available in northern Europe in the spring. By adding the uncooked strawberries to the cooked rhubarb, we make the most of both ingredients before marrying them to create this refreshing dessert.

- 500g (1 pound) strawberries, hulled and chopped (3 cups)
- 100g (½ cup) sugar, divided
- Juice of half a lemon
- 500g (1 pound) forced rhubarb, sliced ½ cm (¼-inch) thick
- Pinch of salt

1. Toss strawberries with 50g (¼ cup sugar) and lemon juice in a medium bowl.
2. Transfer strawberries and sugar mix into a fine-mesh strainer set over a medium saucepan (off the heat) and let stand, stirring occasionally, for 30 minutes. Do not wash the bowl. You will see a couple of tablespoons of strawberry juice at the bottom of the pan.
3. Return strawberries to the original bowl.
4. Add rhubarb, remaining 50g (¼ cup) sugar and salt to strawberry juices in the pan and bring to boil over medium heat. Reduce heat to low and cook, stirring occasionally, until rhubarb is soft and liquid has thickened, about 6 to 8 minutes.
5. Stir strawberries into the pan and remove from heat. Transfer compote to bowl and let cool in the fridge for a couple of hours, or up to a week before serving.



MINIMUM EFFORT MAXIMUM IMPACT

ZAHAVA KAHEN

MAKING A PESACH SEDER CAN SEEM VERY DAUNTING. THE VERY FIRST YEAR THAT I WASN'T WITH MY PARENTS FOR PESACH FELT BEYOND IMPOSSIBLE! HOW WAS I GOING TO CLEAN THE HOUSE, GET THE KITCHEN READY, COOK EVERYTHING, AND KEEP MY KIDS ENTERTAINED, ALL WHILE MAINTAINING TRADITIONS FROM BOTH SIDES OF OUR FAMILY?!

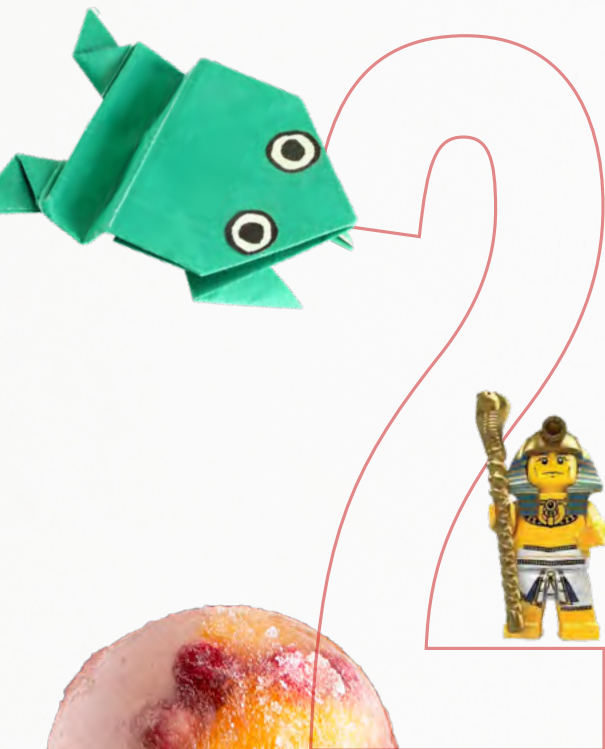
THANKFULLY, EVERY YEAR SINCE THAT FIRST ONE HAS ONLY GOTTEN BETTER. THERE HAS BEEN A LOT OF TRIAL AND ERROR, BUT I HAVE PICKED UP TIPS AND TRICKS ALONG THE WAY THAT HAVE HELPED PESACH BECOME A HOLIDAY THAT I TRULY LOOK FORWARD TO.





TOP 10 TIPS

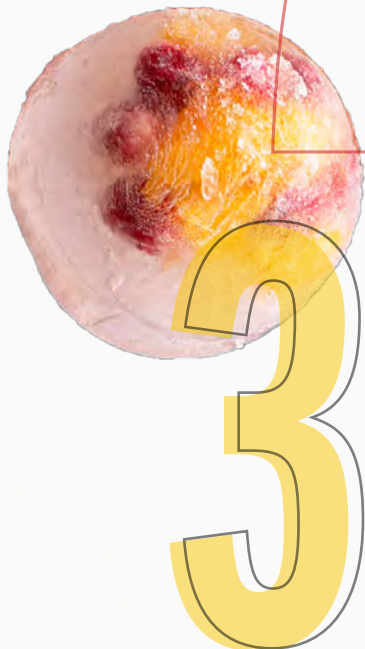
1 SEDER PLATE *This does not have to be a fancy silver platter you buy in a Judaica shop. I bought a big beautiful (and inexpensive) platter from IKEA. Not only was it large enough to fit all of the elements, but it gave my table an extra elegance. Feel free to think out of the box for the seder plate!*



Pesach is all about getting the kids involved. Ask them to set the table with blue napkins for every cup to represent the sea splitting, have them colour scenes from the seder (Pesach colouring pages are easily available all over the internet). Have your guests each choose a Lego, Playmobil or magnet person as their own, to place somewhere down the centre of the table, so they do as is commanded and 'see themselves as if they are leaving Egypt'. Add some jumping frogs to the table. It looks adorable and also keeps the kids busy during the meal when they might start to feel a bit sleepy.



DECOR



FUN FOOD

Every year I try to make plague-themed treats. At this point during the meal, the little ones (sometimes even the big ones) are nodding off. I wake them up by throwing mini marshmallows - hail - at them. Try out Ta'amim's hail ice balls - not only are they a fun treat, but also great pre-seder activity. Strawberry jelly with a fish sweet stuck in it is gruesome and silly. Chocolate frogs even have the adults salivating!



4



SOPHY WEISS PHOTOGRAPHY

FOOD FOOD

At this point of the seder, it often feels as if we suspend the Pesach story to eat; keep your family and guests immersed in the experiential element of Seder with delicious foods that will remind them of the plagues and keep the conversation going. Try out recipes from Ta'amim's 10 Plagues Immersive Seder menu, such as the creamy mashed potatoes with caramelised mushroom and onion "lice". Be inspired by the holiday and the Pesach story to create your own food traditions, and experiment with fun ways to engage everyone through the whole seder - not just the beginning.



SCAN HERE FOR
TA'AMIM RECIPES



GETTING EVERYONE INVOLVED

So many resources are available today that can make getting everyone at the table involved an absolute doddle! Games, quizzes, poems... This is also a good job for the kids. They can prepare everything before the Seder and present it to the family; beautiful colouring-in pages could be hung up around the house, and they can prepare a collection of questions to quiz the table on. Have a look at sedernight.org for amazing resources including the Maggid map that will walk you through the 40 steps of maggid with great questions, discussion points, and fun facts.



FOOD

6

TRADITIONS

Traditions - What are your family traditions? Who hides the Afikoman? My grandmother always made charoset out of dates, walnuts and sweet red wine - it isn't Pesach for me unless it's at our table. My husband's family has the tradition to 'whip' each other with leeks while singing Dayeinu. One year I forgot to buy them and we had to make do with some very limp spring onions! They make our eyes water and the room smells very strongly of onion for part of the Seder - but it certainly gives everyone a boost of energy!



7

SAVING

You may not realise it, but there is so much that you can buy from your local grocery store before setting foot inside a kosher shop (which you will obviously need to do). I'm talking about all the fruit and veg - and if you check out the kosher lists coming out, there will be even more products that you can buy anywhere that are kosher for Pesach. I think part of the stress of Pesach is how much we end up spending; this will ease that burden.



SCAN HERE
FOR KLB
GUIDE



SCAN HERE
FOR SKA
GUIDE



SPENDING

We do have to talk about spending. Some things are worth the money to just make Pesach easier. It might be getting new toys for the kids to keep them busy over a three-day Yom Tov, or getting yourself plenty of books and magazines. Maybe buy some ready-made food to give yourself a break, or like me, get yourself your own stash of chocolate (hidden from the kids).



9 GADGETS

For years I managed with just two very basic gadgets - a handheld blender, and a handheld mixer. The blender was and still is being used 15 years later to make my smooth silky soups and homemade mayonnaise. I use my mixer to make all of my cakes and baked goods. While it's annoying to stand there and hold it as I'm so used to my stand-mixer, somehow it doesn't feel like Pesach without it. You don't need anything too fancy to make a gorgeous Pesach!



10

ORGANISATION

A little bit goes a long way. I love writing lists! Just the act of writing the list already makes me feel like I have accomplished something. For Pesach, I always make a few lists. Have a look at the new Ta'amim booklet (available for free in all major London Kosher stores) In it they have included masses of recipe ideas for each meal. Menu planning has been made easy by including blank menu planning pages, along with a list of the equipment and basic ingredients that one may need to make pesach. Have a look at the booklet and at the list of tips above - then start making a few lists of your own!

- Rooms to be cleaned
- Shopping for food and equipment
- Menus
- Seder night preparation
- Seder night running order
- Outings

Wishing you a happy and stress-free Pesach, filled with joy, family, and friends - where the holiday is a holiday and not a burden and something to anticipate and not dread. When it comes to the idea of Minimum Effort, Maximum Impact, a little bit of planning goes a long way. And remember: when we get together for Pesach, it is about time being spent together, and celebrating our freedom.



SCAN HERE TO
PLAN YOUR
PESACH





PEACE OF MIND:

FOR THEM AND US

RABBI DANIEL EPSTEIN

SOME EXPERIENCES STAY AND INSPIRE. SOME EXPERIENCES STAY AND HAUNT, COMING BACK AGAIN AND AGAIN. IN THE IDF, A PROGRAMME EXISTS TO HELP WAR VETERANS TO A PLACE OF PEACE AND RESOLUTION REGARDING THEIR ARMY SERVICE, TO GIVE THEM BACK THEIR PEACE OF MIND.

Fifteen years after they were drafted into an elite combat unit in the Israel Defence Forces, a group of seventeen soldiers in “Ben’s Unit” got on a plane and flew to London for a unique programme of talking therapies in January of this year. This particular group was hosted by the Western Marble Arch Synagogue community and spent a full week with host families.

Many of them, including one who flew in from Dallas, Texas, had not really seen each other for many years - some of them from the day they concluded their army service. Each of the former soldiers had moved onto a next phase in life; with partners, starting families themselves, raising children and building careers.

But for many of them, the experiences of their time in the IDF—specifically wartime combat in the 2006 Second Lebanon War—had not left them, and they continue to carry their traumas and fears, in varying degrees, into their ongoing lives, affecting their relationships, their interactions with others and, ultimately, their mental health fifteen years later.

They arrived in London, excited to be in a

different city, as this is a key part of the process. Away from Israel, away from the constant reminders and triggers that can regress them into unresolved memories and experiences, they breathe a new air. They are introduced to their host families and immediately build a rapport that helps provide support during an intense week of forty hours of talking and sharing.

Within a few hours on the first day, the initial bravado and machismo of the team quickly gives way to small insights into various challenges experienced by some members. This seems to open the floodgates of emotions, as for some, the last time they were intensely close to each other might have been on the battlefield, dealing with injuries or “shell shock”. They may not have been able to process the trauma they were experiencing, and often, after a difficult event, they just needed to “keep going”. As a result, they may be carrying these untreated and unresolved moments for years, or even decades.

Speaking to the veterans across the week, the change in their spirit was palpable. A calm seemed to replace the nervousness and guarded nature of their first days. Very quickly,

certainly by the end of the week, a realisation and a genuine sense of relief and lifting of a proverbial weight from their shoulders, rendered them lighter and more alive than they had been in a long time.

This special programme is called “Peace of Mind”, a flagship project of METIV, the Herzog Israel Center for the Treatment of Psychotrauma. Founded in 1989 by Dr. Danny Brom, METIV is a world-renowned innovator in the research and treatment of the wide-ranging effects of trauma. Israel’s painful history has made its people, especially its children, particularly vulnerable to the multiple dimensions of psychological trauma.

METIV focuses on a wide range of trauma, from terrorist attacks to bereavement, and all forms of violence, including partner abuse. As an affiliate of Herzog Hospital’s Latner Institute in Jerusalem, METIV benefits from a 115-year reputation for supporting those in need, from the days when the historic hospital supported women suffering from peripartum depression and the veterans of both world wars.

Alon Weltman has been METIV’s Clinical



'The Room Where It Happened' - Beit Midrash, Marble Arch Synagogue, Central London

Director for over fifteen years. He has seen the programme grow from its earliest incarnation to the powerful and often transformative experience that it is today, thanks to constant refinement.

"I don't need to tell you of the powerful idea of Pesach and its connection to Peace of Mind;" begins Weltman, "for many veterans, it's been at least ten years since their army service, and many of them only find true freedom after going through this programme."

"Imagine completing thirty-two months of mandatory conscription – for the elite combat or commando units, it can be even longer – and leaving the Army in principle, but not leaving the Army in emotional terms."

Weltman continues to explain a haunting scenario: A veteran carried with him the conviction that he had killed his own unit commander in a battle situation with exchange of live fire. Despite the post-event analysis concluding that no one on the team was responsible for the tragic death of his commander, he had been burdened with guilt for over a decade. He had never shared this with anyone and was shouldering this weight alone.

It was only through the Peace of Mind sessions that he felt he could share this profound confession. Immediately, the entire team recreated the scenario in their therapy session and, as a group, as a close knit team, they shared testimony of that event, which proved that it could not have been the soldier who had felt responsible.

The catharsis of that moment was profound and quite overwhelming for the whole team, especially the veteran in question, and the entire session lifted a crushing burden from the

veteran, bringing the whole team much closer together.

One of the ways to protect the soldiers during training is to suppress emotions and, in a sense, disconnect them somewhat from the world around them. It is a form of self-preservation; but the "disconnects" mount up and leave the soldier "out on the battlefield" in some way. Some manage to lock these memories and experiences in a virtual box and move on, but for many, the state of disconnect affects many aspects of their lives in subtle ways.

Knowing that our community of Western Marble Arch provided the framework, the love and support for this process was a humbling experience.

It transpired that the therapy sessions took place in the *Beit Midrash* (Torah study hall) of our Synagogue. Even though most of the veterans were secular, they felt that the sessions were *Avodat Kodesh* (holy work). I believe that enabling someone to come closer to themselves, and find inner peace and calm to face the world outside, is the greatest *Avodat Kodesh* there is.



THE PEACE OF MIND PROJECT, TAKING PLACE AS IT DOES IN A DIASPORA JEWISH COMMUNITY, GIVES THE VETERANS BACK A REAL-LIFE CONNECTION ON MULTIPLE LEVELS:

VALUE AND WORTH – the communities are honoured to host the IDF veterans, who they see as guardians of Israel in the truest sense. Their warmth of welcome and outpouring of love for these near-strangers creates a bond of connection and validation for their Service.

SENSE OF MISSION – in day-to-day activities as a combat soldier, it is difficult to gain perspective and a sense of overall mission. The connection with a Jewish community reinforces how important the IDF is to the strength, confidence and sense of pride of Diaspora communities. This can often be one of the first times that the veterans experience this.

STRENGTH AND SUPPORT – the reassurance needed to open up their most closely guarded emotions and unreconciled experiences is helped by knowing that there are families and entire communities that are excited to host them and are proud of who they are and what they have done to strengthen the Jewish Nation. This is a powerful element of the trip and the therapy process.

PEOPLE WHO UNDERSTAND ME – similar to the experience of Holocaust survivors, the veterans cannot really share what they went through with anyone. They can tell stories and weave a narrative, but their true emotions are often hidden. By sitting together in a room with the team who shared the experience with them, the camaraderie and unspoken understanding of a shared experience further enables them to open up and begin a path back to themselves.

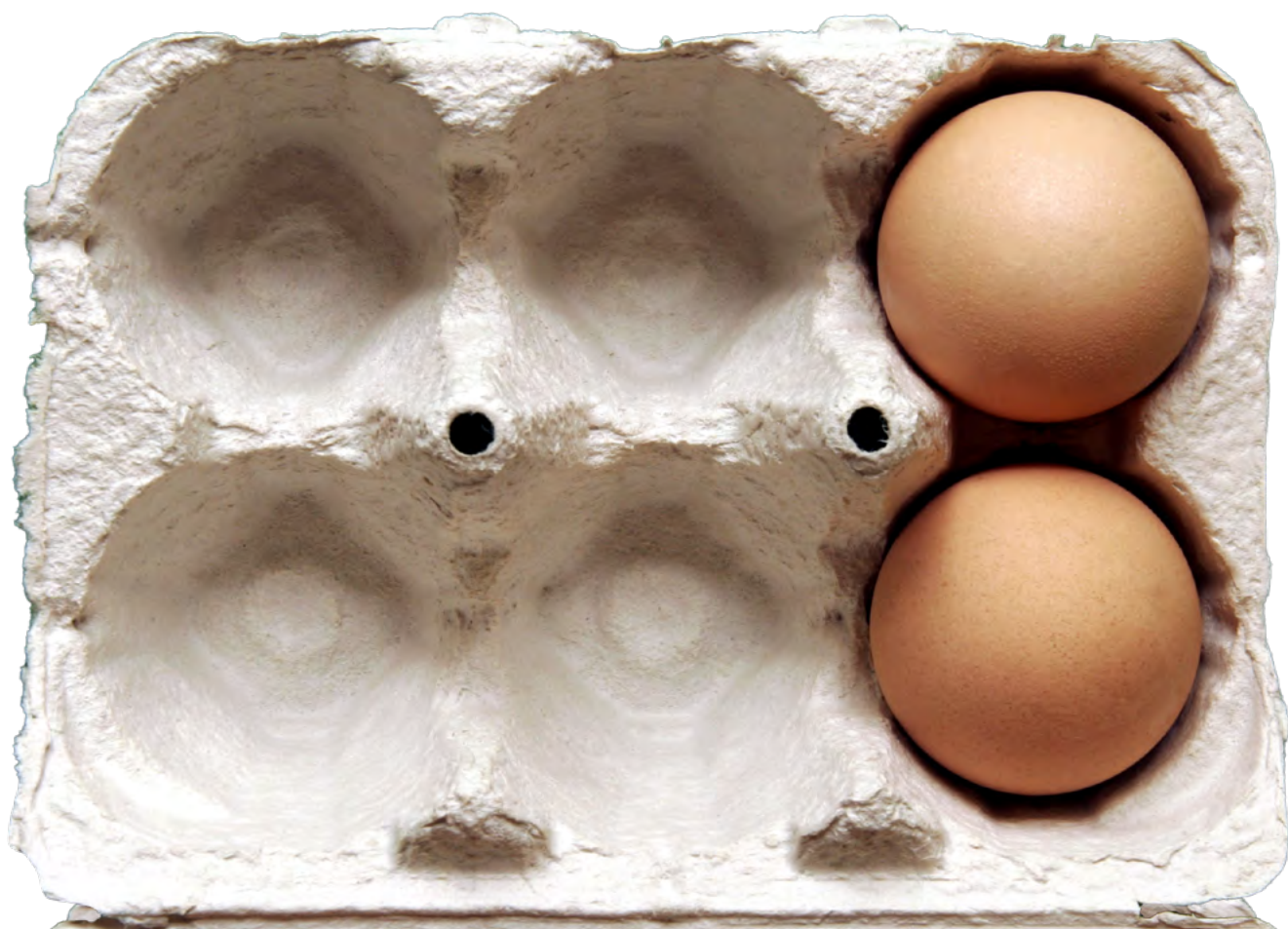
To find out more about the programme and how your community could host a group of IDF veterans, please write to Yehuda Lapian in Israel (Yehuda@metiv.org) or to Josh Graham in London (grahamj1l@googlemail.com).

LEVELLING UP YOUR FINANCIAL HEALTH FOR PESACH AND BEYOND

RABBI BENJI LANDAU (MESILA)

PESACH IS A TIME OF COLLECTIVE REBIRTH OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE - AN OPPORTUNITY FOR REJUVENATION AS A COMMUNITY AND SPIRITUAL RENEWAL FOR INDIVIDUALS. FOR MANY OF US IT'S PROBABLY ONE OF THE MOST STRESSFUL AND COSTLY TIMES OF THE YEAR. THE MATZAH, WINE, MEAT, FISH, CLEANING HELP - AND OF COURSE THE EGGS! - ALL ADD HUGE EXPENSES TO THE SEASON.

FOR THOSE OF US WHO ARE SELF-EMPLOYED OR WORK IN BUSINESSES THAT HAVE REDUCED INCOME DURING YOM TOV (HOLIDAY) PERIODS, THE FINANCIAL REALITY OF PESACH CAN BE ESPECIALLY CHALLENGING. ALTHOUGH THIS TIME OF YEAR IS SUPPOSED TO MAKE US FEEL LIBERATED, THERE IS A GENUINE RISK OF BECOMING OVERWHELMED.



With some planning and decision-making, we can improve our chances of achieving financial tranquillity for this special Yom Tov, year after year. Here are some tips from Mesila for getting ready for Pesach:

THE BIG PICTURE

We are well aware of recurring yearly events including summer holidays, family celebrations, the High Holidays, Purim - and Pesach. Since few of us earn more in line with those pricier months, these special expenditures should be viewed in the context of an annual budget rather than a monthly one. Each month, we must allocate a portion of our resources to those annual needs, before spending on immediate wants. The only way to achieve this is to be aware, be prepared, and be proactive!

CREATE AN ANNUAL BUDGET

To take this to the next level, set aside a small amount into a special fund every month throughout the year to cover the cost of these big-spending events. Even if you don't amass the entire budget, having that lump sum available will undoubtedly be massively helpful when preparing for these events. One easy way to achieve this is by setting up a standing order into a separate account.

GET ORGANISED

When it comes to preparing for Pesach, there are many expenses that can't be avoided. However, with a little effort, you can avoid overspending. Start by making a list of everything you bought this year, including groceries, dry goods, fruits and vegetables, matzah, cleaning supplies, paper goods, and so on. After Pesach, go through the list and mark whether the quantities were accurate or not, and by how much. This way, you can ensure that you don't overbuy expensive items like matzah, or get stuck with boxes of macaroons that no one will touch once they can sink their teeth into a bagel again next year.

MEAL PREP

Meal prepping is an excellent way to maximise your spending and reduce food waste by planning and preparing meals in advance. This holds especially true for Pesach preparations. Take inventory of everything in your freezer and cupboards in the weeks leading up to Pesach. By doing so, you can plan meals that will use up items you might have otherwise thrown out or had to burn on Erev Pesach. This will reduce food waste and limit the need for expensive meals out in the week or so before Yom Tov!



RELAX

One of the keys to keeping big event spending in check is by ensuring that everyone in the family maintains their peace of mind. When people are frazzled, they tend to make impulse purchases and spend much more money than they would if they were not under stress.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

For many of those who earn reasonably well, it might still be a struggle to cover Pesach expenditures, despite best efforts. If that's the case then it's going to be necessary to be a bit more strategic. As with everything in life, it's all about choices. For everything we purchase, we have to be willing to forgo on other options. The only way to do that is by establishing financial priorities. For some, a luxury summer holiday is non-negotiable. Others need to have a more relaxed year-long lifestyle, so eating out or driving luxury cars might be a need for them. It's simply a matter of identifying your spending priorities. The challenge we face is to ensure that we don't allocate our resources according to other people's priorities. This is harder than it seems for three reasons:

- 1 With a seemingly never-ending supply of new and improved products, more easily available to purchase than ever, our hard-earned cash is always in demand.
- 2 The availability and ease of access to credit is almost unprecedented - we are constantly offered credit from banks and other financial institutions.
- 3 A perceived need to conform to societal expectations.

When these phenomena converge, we might find ourselves spending money we don't have, buying things we don't need, in order to impress people we don't know!

The same applies with preparing for Pesach; first, establish what will make Yom Tov special for you and your family. Let's be clear that that does not mean that you or your family should feel deprived. It does, however, require you to do without some things. So make a list of what's negotiable and what's non-negotiable. Cutting back on the number of guests you invite will certainly bring down the cost of making Pesach. Some will feel that a meal without guests isn't a Yom Tov meal. Others might decide to serve a more basic menu, while others still feel that unless there's a choice of different meats at every meal, it detracts from the occasion.

TEAM EFFORT

Involve your family in the decision-making process. For example, would they prefer extra cleaning help or new Yom Tov clothes? Would the children rather receive presents in exchange for finding the afikomen (hidden piece of matzah), or go on a family outing over Chol Hamoed? Encourage your family to share their thoughts and preferences to help make Pesach planning a collaborative effort.

Life is more hectic than ever; work, crazy schedules, cooking, shopping, cleaning, and family. It's hard enough getting through an average week, let alone preparing for what's coming. The earlier we start thinking about major financial events like Pesach, the more we can do to ensure it's an enjoyable experience. There's no doubt that the right attitude goes a long way. Making sure to enjoy Yom Tov and allowing that joy to spread around the family will help to generate a spirit of true freedom.

DEMYSTIFYING FINANCIAL STABILITY

Financial stability is the ability to handle your finances in a way that contributes positively to other areas of your life. If you are financially stable, then your finances should enhance – not detract from – your health, your relationships, your quality of life, your peace of mind, and your Judaism.

The best way to gain control of your finances is by becoming fully aware of what's coming in and what's going out. Here's our three-point plan to capture a snapshot of your finances.

1 DETERMINE INCOME

This includes wages, side jobs, investments, benefits and everything else. Also include any income that only comes in annually.

2 TRACK EXPENSES

Record everything your family spends - use bank statements and similar information to find it all. Stay on top of your daily expenses by recording your cash purchases or using one of the many free budgeting apps available; some high street banks even offer their own programs. Don't forget annual expenditure; things you spend money on, once a year, like Pesach.

3 COMPARE THE FIGURES

Conduct a financial analysis to establish your average monthly surplus or shortfall. If you have a shortfall, start working on ideas to close the gap either by enhancing income or streamlining expenses.



JUDAISM IN THE AGE OF AI:

OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS AND
PATHWAYS TO REDEMPTION

RABBI YAAKOV LEHMAN



Never before in the grand history of technological innovation have the stakes of a technological release been so high. A decade ago, predictive human-like intelligence was a sci-fi pipedream harboured by a negligible nook of the computer science community. This pipedream transformed into a rapidly spawning set of commercially deployable intelligence services set to change it all.

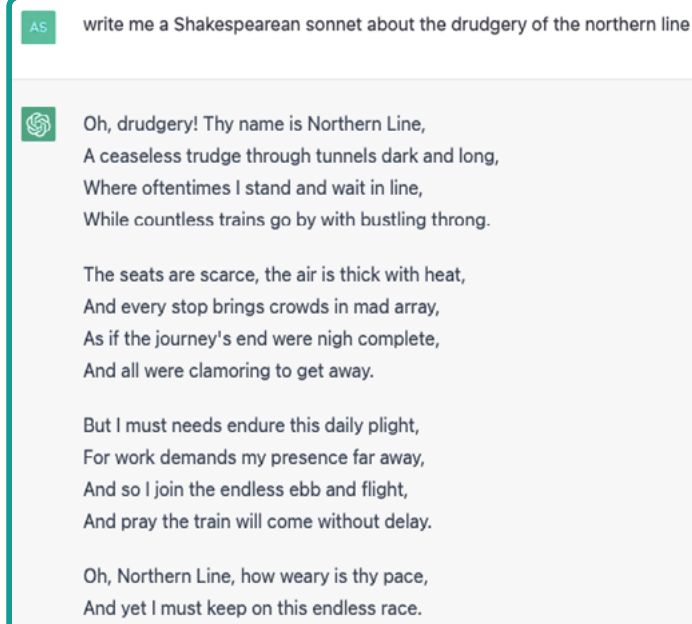
Neither myself nor the industry's most illustrious proponents and critics can predict where these technologies will take us, at least not beyond the minuscule timeframe of dozens of months or several years. This is the nature of exponential technologies: as the rate of change accelerates, the sequential outcomes blast beyond our window of perception. What is clear is that we are collectively experiencing the rapid dawning of a novel and divergent epoch of the grand gameplay of human civilization.

What insight does Jewish wisdom have into these transformations? How will the emergent ways people work and create affect our Jewish lives? Let's map out the field of engagement for the curious (and active!) players among us. Game on!

Opportunities

In November 2022, the Silicon Valley-based company Open AI released ChatGPT 3.5 to the world. This consumer-friendly artificial intelligence ("AI") chat tool is part of a rapidly-expanding genus of "large language models" occupying a central position in wider AI taxonomy. Scientists train these models on massive datasets (the entire internet) to uncover the patterns of statistical probability that make the world go round.

ChatGPT is essentially a superpowered auto-complete. As you type your search query



into Google, it predicts the next string of characters in the sequence based on statistical probability. Thus, a search of "why is the northern line" produces the following results:

ChatGPT utilises the same mechanisms to answer natural language queries though with blow-away gusto:

AI models like ChatGPT are set to disrupt nearly every facet of our modern lives. Their value lies in seeing patterns, illuminated by billions of data points, that are outside the vision of ordinary mortals. It helps the world's top neuro-surgeons become even more incisive in their craft. It helps designers push the boundaries of creative output. It solves complicated logistical quagmires in weddings, warehouses and warfare alike.

One can draw a parallel between the deployment of AI in our society and that of electricity at the turn of the 19th century. Prior to electricity, hammers were wielded by hands, carriages were pulled by horses, and mills were activated by local streams

Electricity brought an abundant, dependable and toil-free energy source to each of these labours, forever transforming their industries, giving birth to ground drills, automobiles and assembly lines in the process.

Where electricity provided brawn, AI will provide brains. Each industry will be plugged into a grid of abundant and highly-affordable intelligence. The transformations will stretch far beyond the palette of our imagination. AI will make our lives easier, our efforts more effective and our intentions more accurate.

It may also do a whole lot more than we bargained for.

Threats

There are two broad categories of bad scenarios for artificial intelligence: distortion of truth and existential threat.

On the distortion of truth front, one central shortcoming of ChatGPT-like models is the bias of data. In 2016, Microsoft famously had to pull its early AI bot "Tay" off Twitter after a mere 16 hours, due to its rapid transformation into a foul-mouthed bigot (having itself been trained on Twitter data). If the bot is trained to survey academic literature to propose a policy, it will be subject to the implicit biases of the academics who authored those papers.

AI bots are, no-doubt, subject to the involuntary shortcomings of the information they are trained on. Sometimes they are misleading, other times just plain wrong (a phenomenon known as machine 'hallucination').

What about more insidious threats to truth?

What about when malicious actors are able to utilise AI to “tip the scales” ever so slightly for manipulative purposes?

This is a major threat to civilization. Factual manipulation, including highly convincing “deep fake” videos, will blur the lines between truth and falsehood. This will not only misguide our capacity to make accurate assessments of the world, but also further stoke internecine culture wars that tear us apart amidst the fog of deception.

Sultry as these truth-attacking scenarios are, they are not even the most acute threat facing human society in the Age of AI. The existential threat artificial machines pose to humans is a long-running historical motif that has migrated from sci-fi literature to the philosophy of computer science. Oxford University philosophy of computer science professor Nick Bostrom, in his 2014 book “Superintelligence”, detailed the comprehensive survey of the pathways to arrive at a superintelligence and the dangers of it.

Compared with the “narrow AI” displayed by ChatGPT, a super-intelligent machine will possess broadly applied intelligence that greatly exceeds humans in all domains.

with rampant sci-hyperbole, it will be helpful for us to better understand what we are talking about.

Intelligence

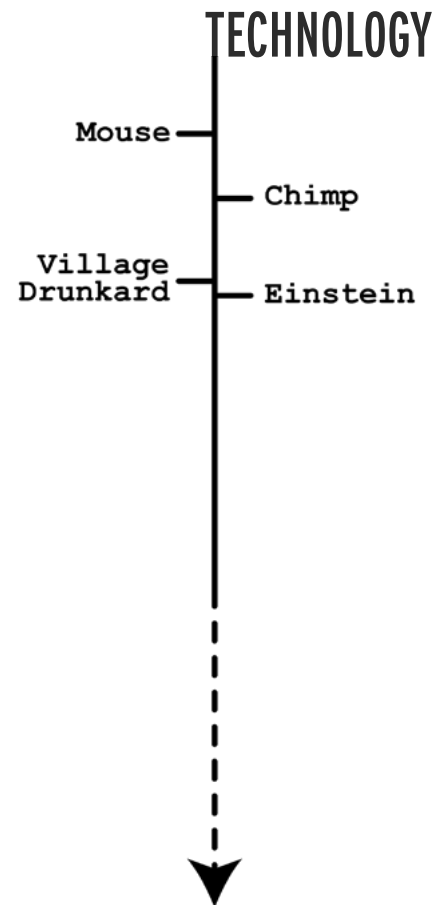
[in-tel-li-gence] noun. the ability to acquire and apply knowledge and skills.

Intelligence is found at varying levels of scale and application. A humble dormouse traversing the researcher’s maze demonstrates a meaningful degree of applied knowledge and skills.

An actively foraging chimpanzee, navigating the apish tribulations of inaccessible food, stalking predators and a highly nuanced troop hierarchy, displays levels of intelligence magnitudes above that of a mouse.

Yet, a run-of-the-mill Village Drunkard operates at leaps and bounds above the chimpanzee. In fact, the differential of intelligence between Village Drunkard and Einstein is practically negligible when assessing intelligence on the scale of Mouse - Chimp - Human.

What can we possibly know about a theoretical



**“Where electricity provided brawn,
AI will provide brains.”**

Among his chief concerns is the emergence of a “Singleton” - an AI that is so powerful it automatically shuts down every other attempt to challenge its supremacy. This means the first successful attempt to create “superintelligence” will ultimately be the last.

Another risk presented by Bostrom is called “instrumental convergence” as exemplified by the ‘paperclip maximizer’ thought experiment. In Bostrom’s own words:

“Suppose we have an AI whose only goal is to make as many paper clips as possible. The AI will realise quickly that it would be much better if there were no humans because humans might decide to switch it off. Because if humans do so, there would be fewer paper clips. Also, human bodies contain a lot of atoms that could be made into paper clips. The future that the AI would be trying to gear towards would be one in which there were a lot of paper clips but no humans.”

Instrumental convergence, Singletons, and the Obfuscation of Truth are but a small handful of potential threats posed by these technologies. We know very little about the impact of narrow AI (like ChatGPT), nor the end game for big existential questions like a SuperIntelligent AI.

However, before we scare ourselves into despair

intelligence that would eclipse humans the way the chimp eclipsed the mouse?

Intelligence x Judaism

The closest approximation to “intelligence” in our most ancient and holiest of tongues is *Sechel*.

Sechel refers to varying levels of rational cognitive competency. *Sechel* powers our ability to reason, to compute, to predict.

Does a large language model like GPT possess *sechel*? In my estimation, the answer could very well be “yes, perhaps, in a limited capacity.”

However, from a Torah perspective, *sechel* is a necessary though insufficient condition for authentic gameplay in this world.

Though humans do have *sechel* as a defining element of our species, *sechel* is pronouncedly not what makes us human. *Sechel* is not the root layer of our consciousness.

Our understanding of humanity is illuminated by the seminal Torah precept of “Humans Being Created in the Image of God”. The mystics expound that the human is a lower dimensional projection of a higher dimensional spiritual ontology known as the 10 *Sephirot*.



The Sephirot

"The Name"	מורה	State of Consciousness	How we relate
Crown of the Yud	כתר	Intangible	Inaccessible source of life
Yud	חכמה	Values	Highest level governing values of life
Heh	בינה	Mind	Contemplation and conceptual expressions of life
Vav	ז"א	Emotion	Experiential intimacy of contemplative and sensory life
Heh	נוק	Body	Sensory biological structure of life

These ten archetypal characters in the cosmic drama not only mirror the human form, but offer us a window into the deep systems structures that constitute reality. They are the way a transcendent divinity (that's God) expresses itself to a limited and finite set of time, space, and souls (that's us).

As a general rule, sechel is found in and around the area of *Bina* [understanding]

and listening to a song. When you listen to a piece of lovely music, it could take four minutes to make it to the end. Only then have you heard the song. Anything less, you've heard "part of that song", as information within elapses over the substrate of time.

Contrast the musical experience with the visual gestalt of stepping around the corner and viewing a well-mounted piece of artwork.

that is intimately connected to the Creator of All Worlds. It is this subliminal portal to infinity that resides at the absolute core of our being, called the *Keter*, or crown.

This intangible part of ourselves is where we accept that, despite our greatest efforts in the world, all outcomes are out of our hands. Our "crown" is our capacity to surrender to forces (really, The Force) greater than ourselves. This is the highest level of our soul potential; to connect back with the Source vivifying our consciousness at the deepest layer of our biological soul stack. This is what makes us human.

The capacity of advanced statistical models to accumulate and crunch data may resemble limited forms of human intelligence, though it is far outside the spectrum of what makes us fully conscious and human.

Artificial intelligence? Perhaps. Artificial consciousness? Unlikely.

Applied mastery over the physical world - colloquially known as technology - has been with us since the inception of civilization

(3) (though these models are exceedingly complex and shifting into various forms and interrelationships.)

While artificial intelligence may display levels of cognitive processing and application similar to our understanding of *sechel* (as located in *bina*), these models will not achieve higher states of human consciousness known as *Chochma* [wisdom] (2) and *Keter* [crown] (1), which are cognitive faculties that reside above *Bina*.

Our relationship with our own *Chochma* and *Keter* is a tenuous one, namely, because the vast majority of our waking consciousness is spent in *Bina*, our "left brain" *sechel*-generating faculty.

We spend most of our time reasoning, computing and predicting. These are the cognitive tools we use to function in the world and realise desired outcomes.

However, there are parts of our soul that we are barely acquainted with. The level of *Chochma* corresponds with a dimension of our soul that exists outside of our standard linear cognitive processing. This state of our soul's existence remains suspended in a non-local unity, it's an integrated hyper-intelligent part of ourselves that exists outside of time.

The difference between *Chochma* (read: right brain) and *Bina* (read: left brain) is expressed in the difference between looking at a painting

The second you lay your eyes on the piece, you have access to all the information contained in the piece. Its identity is immediate and for everyone to see, not constrained within bars of time like its auditory cousin, although you could spend a lifetime looking at and dissecting that one vision. Yet the nature of vision - and *Chochma* - is that it exists in a rarefied state beyond the grasp of limited *sechel*, our left brain.

Even though this key part of ourselves is fuzzy and difficult to grasp (using our *sechel*), it is constantly feeding the "big picture" of our life. Our identity. Our soul. In the parlance of our limited linguistic tools, a close approximation of the role of *Chochma* in our lives might be "operational values".

Yet these higher-level, "operational values" are not the end of our soul chain. The Kabbalists describe an even higher level, an aspect of us

Pathways to Redemption

The Talmud teaches that fire was gifted to Adam following the first Shabbat. It was to become a priceless tool in the hands of its possessor, meant to be purposed for pushing the productive frontier of human society. The dictates of free will, however, meant that once humans had access to the technology, they could use it for any number of nefarious purposes.

Applied mastery over the physical world - colloquially known as technology - has been with us since the inception of civilization. In that early-stage human epoch, fire ruled as the dominant technological driver of society's advancement. Now, we are entering a new era of history where artificial intelligence will be

Rabbi Chiya Bar Yosef in Talmud

In the future Eretz Yisrael will produce cakes [*geluskaot*] and fine wool clothing [*meilat*] that will grow from the ground, as it is stated: "Let abundant [*pissat*] grain [*bar*] be in the land" (Psalms 72:16).

Ketubot 111b

the dominant force.

The impact of technology in the grand arc (and likewise grande finale) of the human project was not overlooked by our sages. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, in his monumental Kabbalistic sourcebook *The Zohar* (1:116b-117a) written two thousand years ago, writes that technology will play a major role in ushering in the Great Shabbat known as the messianic era. Starting in the year 1840, two great forces will begin advancing human society forward at an exponential rate. One force, referred to as the higher wisdom, will be exemplified by the profusion of spiritual thinking. The other force, lower wisdom, refers to a surge of technological mastery during this same era. These two forces together will quickly herald the messianic era, “like a Jewish family preparing for Shabbat on Friday.”

Though we cannot be sure of the Creator’s precise intentions as each new set of technology emerges in the world, we can observe many parallels between the prophetic future that we have carried for millennia, and the disruptive technologies emerging today.

Referring to the Messianic era, Maimonides (*Kings and Wars*, 12:5) writes, “In that age, there will be neither famine nor war, neither envy nor competition, for good things will flow in abundance and all the delights will be as freely available as dust. The occupation of the entire world will be solely to know God... “The world will be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the ocean bed” (*Isaiah* 11:9).”

Chief proponents of Artificial Intelligence have a parallel wish list of technological promise soon to be delivered by AI:

- **Material Abundance**
- **Universal Knowledge**
- **World Peace**
- **Human Longevity**

Will technology and spirituality converge at the end of days to usher in the Great Shabbat as envisaged by our prophets and sages? Inevitably yes, in one way or another. Our technology tools are so embedded in our modern lives that their impact cannot be avoided.

Will our messianic era be a technological one, dominated by Superspiritual/Superintelligent AI beings?

What I do hold to be true is the following: Artificial Intelligence will force every human being to deeply reflect on the meaning of being human. As derivative “copycat” intelligences propagate across our day-to-day field of engagement, we will be challenged to understand what distinguishes authentic

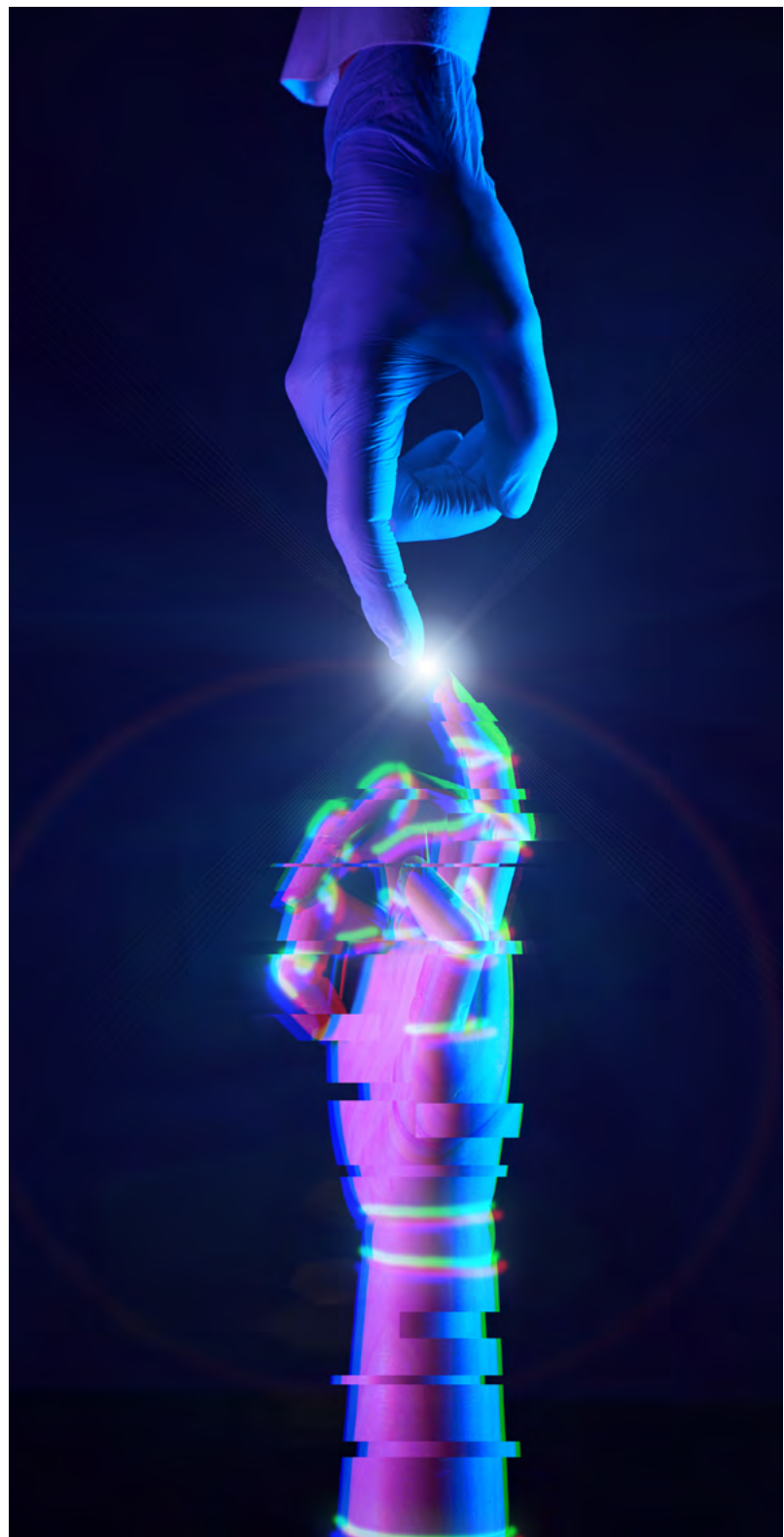
humanity from its artificial pastiche versions.

What is a soul? What is moral agency? What is human empathy? What is genuine creativity? What is the value of life?

These questions get to the core of our experience and *raison d’etre* as human beings. The past unbridled exuberance of 180 years of technological explosion allowed our collective grasp on these questions to grow fallow. The AI era will certainly relocate these age-old dilemmas to the forefront of our social discourse.

Moreover, it may be that this intuitively-grasped sense of our very own selves is in fact the ultimate redemption we have all been awaiting.

Artificial Intelligence will force every human being to deeply reflect on the meaning of being human.





TAKING OUR STORY INTO THE FUTURE

JONATHAN KALMUS

2D SCREENS WILL SOON BECOME THE BLACK AND WHITE MOVIES OF THE PAST. I AM CONVINCED THAT 3D WILL BE THE WAY WE WATCH MOST MOVIES IN THE NEAR FUTURE. THIS IS WHY I'VE BEEN WORKING, TOGETHER WITH A TEAM AT JROOTS, TO RECORD HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS IN TRUE 3D.

Let me elaborate. This isn't some fake 3D with funny-coloured cardboard glasses or a 3D gaming box with a VR headset. We are working to ensure true life-like Holocaust survivors, indiscernible from real humans who can sit and talk to you in your living room, teach in your children's classroom and walk together with you in Auschwitz to explain the Holocaust to future generations who will never meet survivors as we have. We have a long way to go, but we have started recording an initial eleven hours of 3D testimony. We must do more.

Scene. The biggest global news story last week was that the last living Holocaust survivor has just died. Heads of states are travelling to Israel for the funeral, many putting aside political difficulties to show their respects. Social media is alight with condemnation of Israel as Nazis, sparking anti-Israel protests in major cities.

Far-right groups have travelled to Auschwitz to celebrate the end of "Holocaust propaganda and lies". Police failed to stop thousands of neo-Nazis breaking through Auschwitz-Birkenau's barbed wire fences to spray-paint "a new dawn of freedom for humanity" all over the concentration camp. News channels are covering a top Harvard professor leading a thousand historians in writing to the UN to restate the Holocaust as undeniable history which, however, should now be "contextualised" to take its rightful back seat as any other historical happening in favour of more "modern" and "relevant" genocides.

International Holocaust Memorial Day has been renamed Genocide Day; now there are no Holocaust survivors to interview or speak. End Scene.

There is only one part of this possible future world that I've concocted which is a certainty: in the next two decades, the last Holocaust survivor will, unfortunately, die. Earlier than that, the last survivor able to speak will be forever silent from frailty. The other parts aren't beyond our



Survivor Dov Landau holds his camp trousers from Buchenwald concentration camp in the 3D capture ring



Survivor Dov Landau represented by millions of 3D dots in the first stage of building a 3D digital human

imagination. I wonder: does this new world leave you uneasy or concerned about what life will look like when that day comes?

The question is one that I think about all the time. I've been privileged to make feature-length documentaries about several Holocaust survivors for JRoots. I also manage their video testimony

library of over 200 survivors. In many cases, we are the world's sole custodians of the only interview and lasting memory some survivors ever gave. Rabbi Naftali Schiff, who conducted most of the interviews, uniquely drew Jewish life lessons from these precious people, leaving future generations with wellsprings of wisdom on many life themes. Our 3D testimony uniquely records similar Jewish wisdom from survivors. I wonder how to ensure this precious resource remains relevant and usable for generations in the post-survivor world.

New Virtual Reality is becoming something incredible that might help. I think it's worthwhile explaining what I mean, because hype about the Metaverse has weirded everyone out - some unreal 3D game-world to work, socialise and replace ourselves with cartoon-like avatars. This isn't the incredible I'm talking about.

Mixed Reality, (MR) can insert into our real world super-accurate digital people you can speak to and objects you can feel and touch, eventually indiscernible from real things. You can rebuild entire buildings and walk around them.

It is vital for Holocaust education to be in this space.

To understand why, let's compare it to black and white movies. Leading movie columnist and advocate John Farr said this about the greatest movies ever made:

"...it's a sobering thought that some younger people might reject any film not made in colour (with the possible exception of Schindler's List)..."

Of 155,000 movie titles currently available on Netflix, only 9,000 are black and white. Most of those are hardly watched, and none of the 10 most streamed movies ever are B&W. Even Schindler's List is popular, but is left far behind. Put simply, colour films with CGI, special effects and cool camera shots are more engaging.

So in the not-distant-future when the actors perform and the action happens in front of us in 3D so that we can step into a movie, dodge the T-Rex and the bullets, fly on the plane, get up close to the stars - anything 2D we see will then just seem so one-dimensional, so black and white.

**WILL PEOPLE SEE
HOLOCAUST FOOTAGE?
YES. WILL PEOPLE WATCH
A SURVIVOR TESTIMONY?
YES, BUT IT WILL FEEL SO
DISTANT AND UNREAL
- A REAL PROBLEM FOR
HOLOCAUST EDUCATION.**

I will try to give this another dimension: Why keep the Holocaust alive? Is that uneasy feeling about a world without survivors just paranoia about the unknown? I see something else.

To my mind, and more importantly, to experts and serious thinkers, the Holocaust has a unique place in the human experience that is critical to avoid further human catastrophes, and to build a better, fairer, and safer world. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance says "...the Holocaust provides an essential opportunity to inspire critical thinking, societal awareness and personal growth. The Holocaust, a watershed event in world history, spanned geographic boundaries, affected all segments of societies...and underlines that genocide is a process which can be challenged or perhaps stopped."

Perhaps the most important Holocaust historian, Sir Martin Gilbert, quoting a Holocaust survivor confirms that those who saved Jews "is the story of people who... 'ignored the law, opposed popular opinion, and dared to do what was right,'" concluding with the Talmudic dictum that "he who saves a single life, saves the entire world."



Jonathan Kalmus with Auschwitz and Buchenwald survivor
Dov Landau in the 3D capture ring



“HE WHO SAVES A SINGLE LIFE, SAVES THE ENTIRE WORLD”

Holocaust survivors, to my mind, have saved the entire world and continue to do so...just. Their heart-wrenching collective memory of how wrong we can go has kept the world sharply focused on creating and maintaining universal human rights, which didn't exist before WWII. Survivors have been our early-warning system to ward off racism and make progress on equal opportunities. They have successfully challenged us to be real about collective responsibility. Perhaps every time we witness, and hopefully participate in an international appeal for blankets, money, food, medicine, justice, or care - whether war, earthquake, famine, or

tyrant - I wonder if it is the direct result of a moral voice from within, gifted to us by Holocaust survivors. They bravely moved us to dare to do what's right.

Can Holocaust education really last, even in the form of 3D super-real digital people?

I take inspiration from another place: the Jewish festival of Passover. Its central text, the ancient Haggadah that we read at our Seder Night meals, is named after the biblical commandment to “tell” (*l'hagid*) our children about gaining freedom from Egypt. The first written Jewish legal text,

the Mishnah, says boldly: “Every Jew is obligated to perceive himself as if he personally experienced the freedom of leaving Egypt.”

There's something big in this. It suggests that every generation - not just the precious generation of survivors who gained freedom - can attune themselves to the values of freedom learned from history - but only if we make the experience real. Mixed Reality and future technologies, as they come, will allow us to use the secret hidden in this ancient Jewish text: if we “see for ourselves”, step into the experience, we can secure our future.

The splitting of the Red Sea has to be one of the most iconic scenes in the Torah. The heart-pounding drama is visceral; a nation of crippled slaves stands on the verge of redemption, so maddeningly close to freedom, and yet - their path is blocked by an impassable obstacle, the rolling waves of a sea that stretches endlessly to meet the horizon. With the Egyptian army in hot pursuit, the faint din of their cavalry beginning to reverberate across the desert plain, time is quickly running out. But then, at the very last moment, God commands Moses to urge the nation forward, into the sea! Moses raises his staff and the most momentous miracle in history begins to unfold: incredibly, impossibly, the sea divides before the Jewish nation, rising to form two mighty walls of water on either side of a dry path that lies between them. Awed by this unnatural experience, overwhelmed by this expression of Divine Love and the disclosure of a Creator Whose creation is His to manipulate at will,

a more embodied approach to the plight and salvation of the Jewish people, mining the depth of this tale for its relevance to our lives, today.

Generally speaking, our sages teach that the Egyptian exile, our servitude in “Mitzrayim”, is the prototype of all subsequent servitude – both national as well as personal, including our personal struggles, challenges, and obstacles – which is captured in a related word, “Meitzarim” (constraints). All of us experience some inner Pharaoh, who restricts our self-realisation; an inner force that constantly holds us back from achieving the best, most evolved, version of ourselves. While the shackles of Egypt and forced labour may be far removed from our experience today, the feeling of “stuckness” – an echo of the Egyptian servitude – is unfortunately very common. “Why do I always do that?” “I can’t believe I said that again!” “It’s as if I’m stuck in this cycle.” “I can’t break free!” – these are

Stuck, like the Jewish nation, between a rock and hard place, we often find ourselves on the verge of despair.

We know the end of the story. With a cosmic shudder, there comes a moment when the sea splits before us. There is a way to freedom. There is a path to Sinai for us all. But what if, beyond this obvious metaphor for hope, this episode actually holds the key to triggering our miracle? What if there was some way of analysing this passage that would avail us a technique for causing the Red Sea of our challenges to split in our very own lives?

It is with this in mind that Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berdichev, a great 18th century Hasidic master, asks us to focus in on the mindset of the first Jews who entered the ocean, led by Nachshon the son of Aminadav, in the moments before its splitting. Ostensibly, there were two thoughts those Jews could have considered. One possibility is that they had

FUTURISTIC MELODY

The Secret of “The Song of the Sea” RABBI YAAKOV KLEIN

the Jewish nation marches into the depth of the sea, leaving the terror of Egypt behind at last and looking forward, with tear-filled eyes, toward their shining destiny at Sinai.

The spiritual masters of our tradition teach that, as the primordial blueprint from which the world was created, the Torah’s narratives shed brilliant light into the ultimate nature of reality and the often-confounding complexity of the human experience. When read as an archetypal emotional drama of the most personal kind, each biblical tale, with all of its nuances and interpretations, holds tremendous personal relevance. Certainly, the episode of the Splitting of the Sea is no exception. In this article, I would like to present

sentiments we are all familiar with, to one degree or another. We all want to grow, to develop, to transcend the limitations of our lower impulses. But the struggle is real. It’s not so easy to change! When we take a moment to reflect on those patterns of behaviour we so deeply long to escape, the Jewish nation’s experience on the banks of the Red Sea doesn’t seem all that distant anymore. We, too, yearn for freedom. We, too, long for redemption. And yet, despite our best efforts at transcendence, we, too, often feel sandwiched between the demons of shame sneaking up behind us and the impassable anxiety of inevitable failure, pursued too intensely by the darkness of the past, to break onto the brilliant light of a meaningful future.

no sense that the sea would split and believed they were being commanded to sacrifice their lives to honour God’s name. If this were the case, they would have entered the sea in horror, certain they were marching to their watery grave.

But there is a second option. It is possible that the Jews leapt into the sea with a sense of calm and even joy – certain that a miracle was about to unfold. The Berditchever Rav maintains that this was, indeed, the case. He finds proof for this in the strange terminology used to present the jubilant song sung by the Jewish nation upon having traversed the path through the sea: “Az yashir”, meaning “Then, they sang.” Grammatically, the tenses



of these two words seem to be in conflict; “az” connotes some time in the past, and “yashir” connotes singing in the future. The Hasidic master explains that the Torah intends to reveal the mindset of the Jews as they walked up to their necks into the raging sea: “Az” – Then, even before the sea split, “yashir”, their hearts were already filled with the song of their future salvation, their absolute faith that God would perform a miracle on their behalf. Nachshon’s composure was one of total calm and trust that something spectacular was about to unfold.

But it goes deeper: it was this very confidence, this expression of staunch faith (emunah), that itself served as a catalyst for the miracle.

When God saw the emunah with which the Jewish nation were walking into the ocean, the notes of a futuristic melody already playing on their lips, He was moved to split the sea.

Returning to the realm of our own attempts at escaping the bondage of the inner Pharaoh and his army of challenge, the message here is profound. Ordinarily, a Jew’s attempt at improving his situation is powered by two forces; practical efforts (hishtadlut), and prayer (tefillah). Based on what we have learned, the Berditchever Rav suggests a third force, counterintuitive as it may seem: start thanking God for having given you what you need already now, before He has given it. When we move forward with faith that our

attainment of the freedom we so desperately yearn for is a matter of “when”, not “if”, and express our emunah in God’s Love for us and His concern for our needs, this itself can serve as the catalyst that triggers the process of our salvation, causing the proverbial Red Sea of the impassible obstacles we face in whatever facet of life to divide before us, revealing a path to the shining horizon of redemption. May we always experience the clarity and have the ability to apply the wisdom of “Az yashir” to begin dancing to the melody that echoes down the mountain of a not-too-distant future, thus bringing about awesome miracles in our lives and availing us every kind of redemption along this journey to self-realisation.

MEET EITAN

SASHA SILBER

Eitan Bernath is a celebrity chef, social media influencer, TV personality, and entrepreneur with ten million followers across his social media accounts. He is the president and CEO of Eitan Productions, a regular contributor to major food publications, and the Principal Culinary Contributor for The Drew Barrymore Show on CBS. Bernath's first cookbook, *Eitan Eats the World: New Comfort Classics to Cook Right Now*, was published in May 2022, and he was recently appointed a High Level Supporter to the United Nations World Food Programme.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT FOOD?

I've been obsessed with food for as long as I can remember, and I think it runs in my family. Some of my favourite memories are centred around food. I have this one vivid memory of my grandpa using a ladle to drum on a pot of chicken soup to scare a raccoon away from our Sukkah! Food has always been a central part of my life, bringing people together - and obviously being delicious.

HAS YOUR PASSION FOR COOKING EVOLVED NOW THAT IT'S YOUR PROFESSION?

Over the years, I've found different ways to make sure that it also stays a hobby. Sometimes, after a long day in the kitchen filming, the last thing I want to do is cook dinner, since it's very different from when I'm just having fun cooking. Keeping the right balance definitely comes in waves.

WHAT'S THE MOST EXCITING THING THAT'S HAPPENED TO YOU SO FAR?

I was invited to come to the White House for their Chanukah Party and Menorah Lighting. It's actually happened twice, but the first time in 2021 was most meaningful. That year, The Anti-defamation League reported a massive spike in antisemitic hate crimes and incidents in the US, so to be standing in the White House, the most powerful building on earth, with the President and Vice President of the United States, celebrating our fight against Jew hatred and persecution was such a pivotal moment for me. I felt proud of the work I had done to earn that invitation and to be representing Jews at the event.

YOU SPEAK UP AGAINST HATEFUL AND IGNORANT ANTISEMITIC / ANTI-ZIONIST COMMENTS ON YOUR ONLINE PLATFORMS WITH ELEGANCE AND WISDOM BEYOND YOUR YEARS. HAVE YOU EVER EXPERIENCED IT IN PERSON?

Unfortunately, antisemitism isn't just an online problem. In the past year or two, the world has seen how rampant it is, parallel to its growth online. I have had uncomfortable experiences, so I do take precautions. While I believe it's important not to give in to bigotry and hate, personal safety is important.



Photo by Mark Weinberg

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE JEWISH HOLIDAY?

I absolutely adore Pesach! For me, it's not only about the religious significance, but also the memories that flood back from the Seder. There's something uniquely ritualistic about the Seder that sets it apart from other holidays in Judaism. From my grandpa breaking the Matzah, to us wearing onion goggles while grating the Maror (horseradish), everything felt special and intentional. My grandpa played tricks on us during the Seder, hiding things from the Seder plate. These moments make Pesach incredibly nostalgic for me... and the food! Pesach presents a unique culinary challenge because of all the dietary restrictions - all the more exciting to get creative in the kitchen... and I absolutely love Shmurah Matzah!

WHAT'S A WINNING DISH THAT YOU MAKE FOR PESACH?

I love using natural Kosher ingredients, instead of relying on artificial substitutes. Take Pavlovas - they're great anytime of year, especially Pesach. Making meringue is easy - use potato starch instead of cornstarch. Top with non-dairy whipped cream with any fruit or chocolate you like.

IS THERE A FOOD TREND YOU JUST COULDN'T GET BEHIND?

Table top nachos. It's way more food than anyone needs, and cooking makes enough of a mess in itself.

NAME AN INGREDIENT YOU LOVE TO COOK WITH BUT CAN'T STAND TO EAT ON ITS OWN.

Easy: Raisins. I would never eat a raisin on its own, but without a question, I would eat them as a component of a big salad or in a cinnamon raisin bagel.

IF YOU COULD CHOOSE ANYONE PAST OR PRESENT TO COOK FOR, WHO WOULD IT BE, AND WHAT WOULD YOU COOK?

I lost my Grandpa Larry - I would love to cook for him one more time, and make something that he loved but I don't. He really loved poppy seed Hamantaschen, which I don't, but I would make it for him. He loved chopped liver, which is another thing I don't like, but he did. I would also ask my dad for one other food item that he liked that I don't - maybe I could learn to like it through him.

SHARE A BLOOPER FROM COOKING AND FILMING IN YOUR FAMILY KITCHEN?

My parents were extremely patient with me - much more patient than I think I will ever be as a parent. The funniest (although my parents probably didn't find it funny) moment was when I was a teenager, obsessed with making candy, I wanted to make a huge batch of caramel to bring to my class. I filled up a whole pot with the ingredients and started boiling it. Caramel bubbles, and you should generally never fill a pot to the top - I didn't know that at the time, and the caramel bubbled over and spilled all over the stove top. It was a huge mess that took me days to clean properly.

WHAT VALUE DO YOU TAKE EVERYWHERE?

Tzedaka (charity). Actively caring for others - it's something that I always try to keep in mind. I feel blessed with what I have in this world, and I believe that it's not just for me; whether it's through financial donations to causes that matter to me or using my platform to support others and their causes, I try to be mindful of how I can help. I think it's so easy to forget about how many people don't know where their next meal will come from, especially when we don't have to worry about it ourselves.

WHAT'S ONE PIECE OF ADVICE YOU HAVE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION?

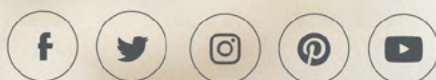
Confidence, without taking it to the point of arrogance, is key. Often, the things that hold us back are worries about what others will think and hinder us from trying new things and pursuing our goals. Confidence in who you are and knowing that other people's opinions don't affect you is important in every facet of life.

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