

שבת בשבת



Parshat Vayeishev

No 1653: 24 Kislev 5777 (December 24, 2016)



Dear Friend of Religious Zionism,

Chanukah is upon us and we are turning to you for your membership and support. There is a major revitalization of the Religious Zionist movement taking place around the world and we are making significant strides here in the United States.

Last week we had an RZA event in Teaneck featuring Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schacter. His presentation was entitled: "The Contemporary Significance of the State of Israel: Reshit Zemichat Geulatenu?" Last month we held our national conference in Lawrence, NY. Our keynote speaker was Wall Street Journal columnist Bret Stephens. We also had the privilege to hear from RIETS Rosh Yeshiva Rav Hershel Schachter and Rabbi Doron Perez from WorldMizrachi.

In January the RZA will once again sponsor winter-break missions to Israel for forty-five college students. These trips enable young men and women to reconnect with their Yeshivot and Midrashot in Israel while participating in special training sessions focused on educating and inspiring them in the area of Religious Zionism. The students have taken it upon themselves to run religious Zionist activities in the U.S. upon their return from Israel.

In the year ahead we are also focused on creating and developing RZA chapters in cities around the country. We will facilitate Shabbatonim, Melaveh Malkas and Religious Zionist activities in a host of communities. Additionally, this year marks the 50th anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem. We are planning a mega-celebration in Israel in partnership with World Mizrachi. By now you should have received information about the planned festivities (May 22-25). We hope that you will join for this once in a lifetime opportunity.

For more than 100 years, the Religious Zionists of America has been in the forefront of world Jewry, bringing the unique perspective of Religious Zionism to every social, political and cultural challenge to Israel and the Jewish people. The Religious Zionists of America shares your feelings, your concerns, your hopes and your views as a Jew committed to "The Land of Israel, for the People of Israel, according to the Torah of Israel".

It is a great honor for me to have been invited to serve as the director of Mizrahi HaPoel Mizrahi – the Religious Zionists of America. I am deeply committed to making Religious Zionism meaningful and relevant for the next generation of American Jews.

During this Chanukah season, please help the RZA-Mizrachi continue its vital work by donating generously today and be confident that together we can make a real difference for Jews, for Israel and for Torah. We look forward to your response.

Rabbi Gideon Shloush

Executive Vice President, RZA

WANT TO BECOME A MEMBER?

CLICK [HERE](#) TO JOIN OR DONATE TO THE RZA

We are in the process of collecting membership dues for 2017.

Please show your support and join as a member or renew your membership at this time.

Membership \$50.00

Pillar Membership \$180.00

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Rabbi Gideon Shloush Featured on W-ABC Radio



This past Sunday, December 18th Rabbi Gideon Shloush, National Director of the Religious Zionists of America - Mizrahi, was interviewed on W-ABC Radio. The interview ([found here](#)) is 15 minutes long and the topic of discussion is "Chanukah." The radio program, entitled "Religion on the Line," takes place every Sunday morning from 7:30 AM- 9:00 AM. It is co-hosted by Deacon McCormack and Rabbi Joseph Potasnik.

Parsha Vayeishev

Rabbi Daniel Rockoff

Rabbi of Congregation BIAV, Overland Park, KS

"Yaakov settled in the land of his forefathers sojourning, the land of Canaan." (37:1)

In contrast to his brother Esav who settled in Har Seir, Yaakov takes his rightful place as the heir to the land promised to Avraham and Yitzchak.

Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov had all worked hard and

contributed much to making it their own land. Through their efforts, they had established their presence in Chevron, Be'er Sheva, and Shechem, as well as areas in the Negev, through purchases, treaties, and religious establishments.

Yitzchak in fact never left the land of Canaan, by God's command, resisting the opportunity to go to Egypt in the face of famine.

Now Yaakov, who has himself already had to go in exile to escape Esav and live for decades with Lavan while he established his own wealth and family, is ready to settle in his homeland.

In contrast to the language of "va'yagar," which is a temporary dwelling, Yaakov wished to settle in the land, "va'yeshuv," in a permanent fashion.



Rashi quotes the Midrash Raba: "Yaakov sought to live in tranquility, but he was beset by the anguish of Yosef." The righteous wish to dwell in tranquility in this world, but God does not necessarily grant them their full due both in the next world, *olam haba*, and in this world, *olam hazeh*.

Rashi's comment about Yaakov's desire to live in peace is limited to the desire of a *tzadik* to live in peace in this world.

Yet we may ask: Was Yaakov's impulse really off the mark? Had not God promised Avraham and his descendants that the land would be theirs? This should not be only about Yaakov and his experience as a *tzadik*. The whole destiny of *Bnei Yisrael*, his children and budding nation, could and should have been established right then and there with their return to Eretz Canaan.

What went wrong?

Perhaps we can extend the message of the Midrash from the experience of an individual to the national level.

Yaakov settled in Canaan. He wished to live in tranquility, without any further cares or concerns. He had arrived and he had no intention of ever leaving.

In recent times our era has witnessed the incredible flowering of the State of Israel, Jerusalem, and the ingathering of millions of Jews from all around the world to this very same national homeland in which Yaakov settled. We are so blessed, so fortunate.

This blessing too came at great cost to our people, through centuries of struggles, exile, and oppression, and atrocities, *r'l*.

We are reminded with the opening words of our Parsha that in our days as well, we may seek to live in tranquility. Generations before us sacrificed so much and contributed so much to build what is now a flourishing country in our homeland.

As we approach Chanukah we celebrate the miraculous victory of the Hasmoneans that brought back autonomous reign and spiritual glory back to Israel in the Second Temple period. Sadly, and tragically, that period came to an end. It was an incredible light in the midst of our dark exile but it was not the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to our forefathers.

We must not take the current blessing of the State of Israel for granted. We must continue to contribute our own efforts and make our own sacrifices to make sure that this time around our people's dwelling in Israel is not a temporary achievement but rather a means to an everlasting fulfillment of God's promise to our forefathers.

Ya'akov was forced to leave, but even when he left, he knew he and his descendants would come back. While tranquility is not always in the cards for the whole process, with God's help this generation will experience the final return homeland and never have to know again a world without *Bnei Yisrael* in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Introducing the New RZA-Aryeh Fellowship!

The RZA-Aryeh Fellowship is a new initiative of the RZA-Mizrachi to strengthen the mission of Religious Zionism. Fifty college and graduate school students from around the country have been invited to spend their winter-break in Israel where they will be studying Torah and attending intensive seminars devoted to Religious Zionism education. Upon their return the Aryeh Fellows will focus on their year-long Manhigut (leadership) projects designed to bring the message of Religious Zionism back to communities across America. We are excited to profile a different “Aryeh Fellow” each week.

Meet Benjamin Matz



I was born and lived in Israel until I was six, when my family moved to Newton, Massachusetts. Upon graduation from Maimonides School, I spent a year and a half learning in Yeshivat Hesder Otniel in the southern hills of Chevron. In Yeshivat Otniel I was taught the Torah of Rav Kook and of many other past and present religious Zionist figures. I was

taught to appreciate the special Torah of the land of Israel which cannot be found in Chutz La'aretz. While studying in Israel, I was taught that the land of Israel is not just an external object which helps us fulfill more commandments, rather the land is an integral part of Judaism, just like the Torah is to the Jewish Religion.

Presently, I am a studying Judaic Studies and Psychology in Yeshiva University. I hope through the RZA fellowship I will be able to inspire and infuse those around me with a sense of Zionistic pride and a deep religious Zionistic connection to our homeland. I hope to make Aliyah in the foreseeable future and to finally return to the land of my birth, the homeland of the Jewish people.

Recharge Yom Iyun in Jerusalem

Please join us for a Yom Iyun at the World Mizrahi headquarters in Jerusalem on January 12th, 2017. Open to the general public, this Yom Iyun will explore all topics of Religious Zionism and feature exciting speakers. See program schedule below.





**The Mizrahi World Movement/RZA
Winter Break Yom Iyun on Leadership**

14 Tevet 5777 / 12 January 2017
54 King George Street Jerusalem

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| <p>09:00 Bagel breakfast</p> <p>09:30 Rav Doron Perez - CEO Mizrahi World Movement
> A Global Vision for Religious Zionism</p> <p>10:15 Brigadier General (res.) Effie Eitam
> Transformational Life Moments</p> <p>11:30 Rabanit Shani Taragin > Yosef and Yehuda - the First Religious-Zionist Leaders</p> <p>12:30 Lunch Speaker: Rav Yonatan Shulman - OU-JLIC
Mincha Sefarim sale</p> <p>13:45 "Stayin Alive" Comic Satire Show > Followed by a discussion with the audience led by StandWithUs Hilarious production by Mizrahi World Movement, with top Israeli comedians Noam Jacobson & Gady Weisbart, which exposes BDS's double standard, the skewed world media's coverage of Israel and the hypocrisy of the UN's anti-Israel resolutions</p> <p>StandWithUs</p> <p>15:45 Marc Rosenberg - Nefesh B'Nefesh > "My Heart is in the East but my Body is in the West" - How to Keep the Israel Flame Alive when in Chutz La'Aretz</p> <p></p> | <p>17:15 Special Bar Mitzvah dinner celebration for the son of IDF officer Eliraz Peretz Z"l
Inspirational address by one of Israel's heroic women, Mrs. Miriam Peretz (Eliraz Z"l's mother, and grandmother of Bar-Mitzvah boy) > Musical performance by world-famous musician Yonatan Raziel</p> <p>19:00 1967 - Religious Destiny vs. Political Reality. What will the next Fifty Years Hold?
> A Panel Discussion
Moderator: Rav Jeremy Gimpel - Founder, Land of Israel Network; Co-host, Israel Inspired radio & TV</p> <p>Rav Ari Abramowitz - Founder, Land of Israel Network; Co-host, Israel Inspired radio & TV</p> <p>Rav Yishai Fleisher - Spokesman, Hebron community; journalist & broadcaster, Land of Israel Network.</p> <p>20:15 Maariv, gifts for participants and concluding words</p> |
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Join us for Yom Yerushalyaim!

SPACES LIMITED



WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN US THIS YEAR IN JERUSALEM

FOR A MEGA-MISSION OF A LIFETIME
Be Front and Center, Celebrating 50 years of a reunited Jerusalem
over Yom Yerushalayim
MAY 22-25, 2017

Dear RZA-Mizrachi Friends,

We very much look forward to having you take part in our Mizrachi World Movement's "This Year in Jerusalem" Mega-Mission over Yom Yerushalayim. Our aim is to bring thousands of people (including rabbinic and community leaders) from hundreds of communities from across the global Jewish community to learn, experience and celebrate together at this momentous time in Jewish history.

Please see below a personal invitation from Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, one of the global leaders of the mission, inviting you to join him on this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

More details about the program can be found at the following link - www.mizrachi.org/YY50 - including the draft schedule, highlights, pricing options and booking procedure.

Please note the following:

1. There are 10 hotel options, with a price range depending on hotel choice. Each hotel package includes breakfast, lunch and dinner (excluding Wed evening). The hotel packages also include the entire 4 day program at discounted rates.
2. There is also an option for people who are not staying in hotels - if they have their own accommodation - to join for the 4 day program, at a cost of \$630 per person. It does not include hotel, breakfast and dinner, but does include transport from central meeting points to and from all the venues, lunch each day, and participation in the full program.
3. For those shuls/communities/groups who wish to bring missions and want to extend their trip either before or after our 4 day mission, that can also be arranged by contacting us at YY50@mizrachi.org, and we - together with our partners - will put together a tailor-made package for your group.

Looking forward to celebrating together – in Jerusalem – on this historic occasion.

With excitement and anticipation,

Rabbi Gideon Shloush
Mizrachi – Religious Zionists of America

Rav Doron Perez
Mizrachi World Movement

Click below to see our video!



A different kind of ambassador to Israel

By Stephen M. Flatow, RZA's Vice President of Government Relations

A Jewish ambassador to Israel who is more sympathetic to Israel than to the Palestinians, and who will respect the wishes of the Israeli public and government? Shocking!

I'm not being sarcastic. It really is shocking. Critics of Israel are so accustomed to Jewish ambassadors who harass and undermine the Israeli government, that the prospect of someone completely different has left them frothing at the mouth.

David Friedman, President-elect Trump's choice for ambassador to Israel, is completely unlike his predecessors. And that's what drives the critics of Israel crazy.

For many decades, the top tiers of the State Department and the diplomatic corps were closed to Jews. Everyone knew that their ranks were reserved for blue bloods and white shoes—people who came from the "right" segment of society and belonged to the "right" country clubs.

In the 1970s, though, a certain kind of Jew began to squeeze through the doors at Foggy Bottom. They had names like Daniel Kurtzer, Dennis Ross, Aaron Miller, and Martin Indyk. They were different than most Jews because they were stridently critical of Israel and were willing to devote themselves to forcing Israel to make one-sided concessions to the Arabs.

Indyk served as U.S. ambassador to Israel from 1995 to 1997 and again from 2000 to 2001. His haughty attitude was obvious from early on: he boasted to the Washington Post (2-24-97) that he saw his job in Israel as similar to "a circus master" who "cracks the whip" in order to "get [the animals] to move around in an orderly fashion."

Indyk's practice of interfering in Israel's internal affairs was notorious. In 1995, for example, he lobbied Knesset Members to oppose a law that would have reduced the chances of Israel surrendering the Golan Heights to Syria.

One shudders to think of the dangers Israel would face today if Indyk had his way and the Golan was in the hands of either the genocidal Assad regime or its genocidal ISIS opponents.

Indyk tried to pressure Israel's chief rabbi to oppose a housing project in a part of Jerusalem that Indyk wanted Israel to give up. He also tried to block the selection of a cabinet minister whom he thought was insufficiently dovish. Things got so bad that the chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee took the unprecedented step of publicly declaring: "Ambassador Indyk needs to be reminded that he is not the British High Commissioner."

The appointment of the second Jewish ambassador to Israel, Daniel Kurtzer, in 2001, did not improve matters. Kurtzer repeatedly pressured Israel to remove security checkpoints (lest Palestinian travelers be inconvenienced) and make one-sided concessions on settlement construction (while never asking the Palestinian Authority to limit its illegal construction). He denounced Israel's budgetary allocations—an extraordinary act of interference in Israel's internal affairs. Kurtzer even publicly called on the Israeli public to put pressure on the government to make more concessions.

When Israel responded to Yasir Arafat's sponsorship of terrorism in the autumn of 2002 by besieging Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah, Kurtzer rode to the rescue of the arch-terrorist by demanding that the Israeli government end the siege. This took place nine months after Israel had captured Arafat's ship, the *Karine A*, with its fifty tons of weapons—the episode that revealed Arafat had never changed his terrorist spots. Yet there was the Jewish U.S. ambassador to Israel, nine months later, trying to rescue the mass murderer.

The third Jewish ambassador to Israel, Dan Shapiro, has not been much better. In an interview with Israel Army Radio last year, Shapiro indicated that U.S. support for Israel at the United Nations and other international forums was conditional on Israel accepting moving towards creation of a Palestinian state. That kind of linkage was all too reminiscent of the Indyk "crack the whip" approach.

Earlier this year, Ambassador Shapiro falsely claimed that "Israeli vigilantism in the West Bank goes on unchecked," that "Israel has two standards of adherence to rule of law in the West Bank—one for Israelis and one for Palestinians," and that Israel's settlement policy "raises questions about Israeli intentions."

That was a thinly-veiled way of saying that Israel is not really interested in peace if it permits the construction of a kindergarten in Judea, Samaria, or many parts of Jerusalem. Shapiro's statements were so mean-spirited and inappropriate that Prime Minister Netanyahu himself issued a stinging rebuke: "The ambassador's statements, on the day when a mother of six who was murdered is buried, and on a day when a pregnant woman is stabbed - are unacceptable and wrong," the prime minister said.

So yes, David Friedman is going to be a very different kind of Jewish ambassador to Israel. Unlike his disreputable predecessors, Friedman will respect Israel's right to make its own decisions, instead of "cracking whips" and dictating to Israel how to behave. Friedman will be on the side of the exemplars of democracy and freedom in the Middle East, not the terrorists and the totalitarians. In short, Ambassador Friedman will work to strengthen ties between America and its loyal ally, Israel, instead of undermining them. What a difference!

POINT OF VIEW

Fixing the "Takanah Forum"

By Rabbi Yisrael Rozen, Dean of the Zomet Institute

"And his master's wife set her eyes on Yosef" [Bereishit 29:7]

My gaze today is towards the "Takanah Forum," which I have supported in this column and continue to support as a necessary element which should not be disparaged. Since I know some of its Torah-true members well, I can testify that there are no blemishes in them or their

work. Perhaps you already feel that I feel that this sentence must be tempered with the word "but." Well, I have three "buts" that I will discuss in this article.

Who is the Next Target?

The name of the forum, "Takanah," means to mend something, and also to make a decree. As many people understand, the forum handles complaints and rumors about harassment and beyond, where the accused are **people with responsible positions in religious education, or rabbis**, who have failed from a moral point of view. Woe is to us because of their lusts which constitute a tremendous educational failure as a result of an educational tragedy, which has led to improper/forbidden/shocking activity in sexual matters.

The forum is not meant to be a "morality police" of the religious sector, and if I am wrong let people connected with the forum correct me. Is there any possibility that it will initiate its own investigation of such people as Ofek Buchris or Yinon Magal "for the good of those involved" or in order to clear up problems with the religious sector in general, after hearing public reports of their wrongdoing? If I am wrong, I take this opportunity to warn them that the forum will not last much longer if they do attempt to take on "police" actions of this type. In their own manifest, the targets of the organization are defined as "**persons of authority and leadership in the religious community.**" But if they would listen to my advice I suggest that they do not try to take on a case of a religious hair stylist who has been accused of misusing his authority against a woman in his care. And they should also not get involved with any prominent religious lawyer who is accused of improper conduct by a clerk or of harassing her, or a religious police officer who is accused of starting up with his subordinates. **The police force exists for such matters, and if a woman refuses to file a formal complaint her case should not be moved over to the Takanah Forum.**

There is indeed a halachic source for establishing a "morality police." The Rambam writes, "The courts must appoint police officers on the holidays who will move around and search in gardens and orchards, and at the rivers, to prevent men and women from getting together to eat and drink, which might lead to sin" [Hilchot Yom Tov 6:21]. However, this is quite specific and limited: "The courts must appoint..." – it is not a volunteer action taken by people within the sector. I fully concur with the conclusions of Rabbi Yaacov Ariel (Techumin volume 31), "The Authority of the Takanah Forum," that the forum was established as a "court" by "The Educational Institutions of religious Zionism," and it is not an independent initiative.

And if someone will try to respond that the goal of the forum is not focused on educational institutions and rabbis but is rather "**to rescue oppressed women from their oppressors**" in general, I would say that if so its scope should not have anything at all to do with whether the accused are religious or not and whether they are connected to educational institutions. After all, **the danger of harm (including to religious women) is greater from nonreligious suspects than from religious ones!**

Individual Initiatives

Here is a second note on this subject. There are those who have taken on this work as individuals, becoming something of a "**private forum, open to gathering complaints.**" I can understand it when the rabbi of Tzefat and the surrounding area "cleans out the stables" in his own city and helps to send a "rabbi" who has committed offenses to prison. I find it hard to see where he gets the authority to ban a hospital rabbi in the north who sinned, when the people of Tzefat are in need of his services. **And I do not understand what status he has with respect to a prominent MK of the Bayit Yehudi Party.** As a well-known and powerful rabbi, perhaps he can persuade a victim to enter a complaint with the police, but that should be the end of his involvement in this case. **Does he have a net spread out all over the country**, with the power of the head of a court of appeals?

Amateur Hunters

And now for my third note on this subject, which is a consequence of the first two points, and is in fact more significant. This is for the members of the Takanah Forum, which indeed enjoys the trust of the community, which it needs as much as the air it breathes:

The members of the forum, and especially the leaders, must never get involved in these matters "in their spare time," outside of the formal meetings of the forum! The trust in their operation will suffer if they ever agree to provide "professional" services of

investigation and intimidation “outside of their regular working hours,” whether the one who needs the service is acting personally or for the good of a community. Such action would be diametrically opposed to the basic ethical stance which provides the justification for the existence of the forum. **As a result of such action, they would become obsessive and eager** characters who are mainly interested in criminals wherever they can be found.

Similarly, **they should never talk in the press about ongoing cases** of the forum, past or present, or about any cases being handled by other groups, as an “expert witness.” This is true even if the discussion is preceded by a disclaimer that it is being presented “as a private person.” **It makes the people look like amateur hunters**, and gives their activities within the forum the appearance of people who spend their time searching for blemishes. If they want to, let them retire from the Takanah Forum, and then they can open up their own office for investigations related to morality.

As Shabbat Approaches

“She is More Righteous than I” – Merit, Obligation, Challenge

By Esti Rosenberg, Head of the Midrasha for Women, Migdal Oz

Within the great drama of the selling of Yosef there is somewhat hidden an additional family drama, very meaningful although very short.

“And Yehuda descended from his brothers” [Bereishit 38:1]. Yehuda leaves his brothers. The Torah tells us that he married a daughter of a Canaanite man. Most of the commentaries assume in the wake of the Talmud that she was not a Canaanite in the strict sense but the daughter of a merchant. On one hand, Yehuda maintains the traditions of his ancestors but on the other hand he distances himself from his father and his brothers. Yehuda, who tried to block Yosef’s murder and instead suggested that he be sold, finds that he cannot cope with his father’s grief. “He went away since he could not tolerate his father’s unhappiness.” [Chizkuni]. And then the events of his own life bring the grief of a loss close to home. “The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him: You have no children and you are not familiar with the sadness that comes of having children, so you fooled your father... I swear that you will bury your sons and become familiar with this sorrow.” [Tanchuma]. Yehuda is alone with the torture of his lie to his father, and he returns again and again to the moment when he stood in front of Yaacov and they all said to their father, “See if you recognize, is this your son’s coat or not?” [Bereishit 37:32].

Years pass, and once again Yehuda is put to the test of possibly lying and distorting the truth – this time standing with Tamar. “The judgement to burn Tamar took place before Yehuda, and Yitzchak and Yaacov and all his brother sat there and watched him” [Shemot Rabba]. How easy it would have been to remain silent. His fathers supported him, he could have said that he lost his seal and his bracelets on the road, that it was all a false accusation, and he would have been believed. After all, they were all there, ready to cover up for him. The lies in the house of Yaacov could continue unabated. And then, Tamar uses a familiar refrain: “See if you recognize, whose seal and bracelets are these?” [38:25]. Yehuda returns to the moment when he said to his father, “See, if you recognize...” and he understands. The time has come for him to stand up with courage and admit his deeds, the strong one must admit his mistakes even when he can escape his guilt. The weak one is sometimes righteous, and the ability to apologize and take responsibility for an act is the proper way to behave. Lies and distortion in the house of Yaacov must become a thing of the past.

“Yehuda took responsibility and spoke the truth, and he said, ‘She is more righteous than I.’ And G-d chose him as the leader.”

Why was he given the task of the leader? The author of “Etz Yosef” asks this question about the passage in Midrash Rabba, and he replies, “It was because Yehuda’s love for himself did not prevent him from admitting the truth.” The next stage was for him to take responsibility for others when he faced Yaacov, and then later, when he faced Yosef.

“Yehuda admitted and was not ashamed. Therefore you receive a portion in the world to

come, and all your brothers are called by your name.” Yehuda, who knows how to admit the truth, gives the name “Jew” to the entire nation. They may commit a sin, but they can admit their mistakes. They might fail, but they take on responsibility for their deeds. The main thing is that they have learned to prefer standing up for truth and the righteousness of the weak as opposed to loving themselves.

Let us hope that this will be true for all the Jews.

A PARSHA INSIGHT

Transforming a Bitter Lemon into Sweet Lemonade

By Rabbi Asaf Harnoy, Post-Graduate Beit Midrash for Torah and Leadership, Jerusalem

Our life mission as Bnei Yisrael is to follow in the footsteps of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and to cling to Him (Devarim 11:22). Clinging to G-d and following in His path is listed in the counts of the mitzvot as a separate mitzva.

The sages realized the difficulty of this task – how can we cling to an abstract spiritual entity, which is impossible to describe, let alone to cling to Him? The sages answered this question by teaching us that in order to cling to G-d **we must behave like Him and perform deeds that are similar to His actions.** “Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, is merciful, so you should also show mercy...” [Sifri, Torah portion of Eikev].

This mitzva requires us to read and study this week’s Torah portion with our eyes wide open, in an attempt to learn as much as possible about the ways of the Holy One, Blessed be He, so that we can act in the same way and thus cling to Him.

By studying this week’s Torah portion we can learn about a very special trait in the way that G-d acts.

Bundles of Troubles

The Torah portion of Vayeishev is set in one of the most difficult times which were the lot of our forefathers. It describes a very tough chain of events – hatred among brothers, a desire to kill Yosef, and a “compromise” of merely throwing him into a pit. Vayeishev describes unimaginable sadness by a father for the loss of his son, while the brothers conceal the truth from their own father. In Vayeishev we hear about Yehuda, who was caught in a compromising situation when he went to visit a harlot. The Torah portion ends with a tremendously complicated situation in which Yosef finds himself, where he is in an Egyptian prison.

If we would stop reading at this point, without skipping ahead to the “happy ending” of the story in the Torah portion of Vayigash, we would see that **we are in one of the most complex, complicated, and terrifying moments in the lives of our forefathers.**

What was G-d Doing at that Point?

If we, with our miniscule minds, would try to imagine what the Holy One, Blessed be He, was doing at this time, we probably would assume that He – as it were – was unhappy and angry, and might even be having second thoughts about His choice of the children of Yaacov for greatness.

However, the picture that is presented to us by the Midrash is very far from this.

Amidst all the sadness, the gloomy outlook, and the pain in this week’s Torah portion, the Holy One, Blessed be He, is involved in one of the most wonderful, refreshing, and encouraging phenomena in the whole of creation – He sits and creates the light of the Mashiach!

“The tribes were busy with selling Yosef. Yosef was busy with his sackcloth and his fasting.

Reuven was busy with his sackcloth and his fasting. And Yaacov was busy with his sackcloth and his fasting. Yehuda was busy looking for a wife. And the Holy One, Blessed be He, was busy creating the light of the King, the Machiach..." [Midrash Rabba, Vayeishev, 85].

Even Cloudy Skies can Produce a Pleasant Light

This surprising description about creating the light of the Mashiach at such a harsh and dark moment can teach us about a novel way that G-d is revealed in the world. And we must learn to cling to this too.

There are many suggestions about the question of why G-d created this very precious light of the Mashiach specifically from within the black of night. The SHELAH writes about this at length in his book "Assarah Ma'amarot," and Ramchal devotes long chapters to it in his books "Daat Tevunot" and "Derech Hashem." **However, for us simple folks the message is clear and definite. Even during the greatest possible tragedies and even in places where it is impossible to see any light – we must make the effort to expose whatever light there is, we must even make an effort to create light from out of the darkness and to bring out sweetness from what starts out being bitter.**

The Chanukah Lamps

This trait of lighting up the darkness and the most difficult and complex situations is the very essence of the role played by the Chanukah lamps. This small flame which we are commanded to light **at night** and which is set in a **low place** (less than ten tefachim, a level to which the Shechina does not descend), is part of the only holiday which begins at the end of month, **when the moon is waning and darkness increases**. More than anything else, this teaches us that **even in the midst of the most absolute darkness it is possible to find a great light**.

WHEN THE CHILDREN OPEN THEIR HEARTS

A Revolution!

By Meirav Maggeni, Author of Content and Stories in Chemed, the Religious School System

"I don't have anything to wear!" I shouted one morning, standing next to the closet. And Imma said to me, "You're right. Thank G-d you keep growing, and your clothes don't fit you anymore. When you come home from school today, let's go shopping." That was exciting news. "Thank you very much," I said, and I gave her a big hug.

I came home after school full of enthusiasm about my new clothes. I called out, "Shalom, Imma!" But instead of my Imma, I heard a different voice that I knew very well. "Oh, my darling niece!" It was Aunt Tehilla, she jumped out and gave me a huge hug.

"Shlomi suddenly got a high fever, and your Imma had to take him to the doctor. But don't worry. Your wonderful mother asked me to come with you to shop. How was school today? Are you hungry?" And then she went on, without waiting for an answer. "It's so lucky that I finished work early today. Let's go eat something in a restaurant, and then we will go and buy my best niece some pretty clothing..."

Such a wonderful aunt! Tehilla really knows how to make a person feel good. I am lucky to have such a good aunt.

After a very tasty meal, with a lot of different kinds of dessert, we went into a clothing store. Smiling, Tehilla said to me, "Look at the clothing hanging here, and choose something."

On the racks there were a lot of skirts, indifferent colors and patterns. I picked up the prettiest ones and took them to the fitting room to try on. I came out and stood in front of a big mirror, happy with what I saw. From the corner of my eye, I could see Aunt Tehilla. Her smile had disappeared, and it looked like she wanted to tell me something, but she didn't quite know

how to say it.

I said, "Well, Aunt Tehilla, isn't this pretty?" And she answered, "My darling, it is pretty indeed. But that is not the main thing. Just look how short the skirt is!"

"That's silly. Everybody dresses like this today, it's the fashion! All of my friends have skirts like this. Aunt Tehilla, you are old-fashioned," I said, and I laughed.

But my aunt didn't laugh at all. She just looked at me in a way that was sad, and she sighed. The skirt was perfect for me. I really wanted to have it. I stood there in front of the mirror, and I didn't know what to do. Why was Aunt Tehilla making such a fuss over the length of a skirt? What had happened to her?

Suddenly, Aunt Tehilla stood up tall and said in an encouraging voice, "A revolution! You will lead a revolution!" She told me to put the skirt back on the rack and to come out to the street.

I was wondering: What kind of revolution was my aunt talking about? And what does this revolution have to do with me? We sat on a bench in the huge mall, and we both were very quiet. Then, suddenly, Aunt Tehilla said: "Look, just look around you! You are so right. Everybody is dressed according to the fashion – your classmates, the neighbors, your aunts, even everybody in the street. And do you know why? Somebody, probably a famous fashion designer, decided that this is the proper way to dress. And then just about everybody in the whole world becomes enthusiastic and dresses that way. But you listen to me, we belong to a special nation, the nation of G-d. How can we follow the habits of the other nations and not dress modestly? Our halachah has clear rules about how we should dress. My dear, do you remember what merits we had so that we were redeemed from Egypt?" Aunt Tehilla didn't wait for an answer, she just plunged on: "The women of Yisrael didn't let the Egyptian fashion designers confuse them. They didn't change their clothing, and they remained faithful to the modest style of dress that they inherited from their mothers. The people were redeemed because of the merits of the righteous women..."

Aunt Tehilla cut off the flow of words and she looked at me, waiting to hear if I had anything to say.

A group of giggling girls in short skirts passed us by. And then came a girl with a very long braid, wearing a very short skirt.

I thought of what Aunt Tehilla had said: "Somebody, probably a famous fashion designer, decided that this is the proper way to dress. And then just about everybody in the whole world becomes enthusiastic and dresses that way." Could I succeed in letting the halachah shape the form of my clothing? Will I have the courage to go around looking different from everybody else? And even if I can do it, can one little girl who is not yet 12 years old influence her friends to join her in a mission, to start a revolution?

And then I remembered the pretty skirt that I tried on in the store, which I had wanted to buy. And I didn't know what to think. I knew that as a first step I would have to make a revolution in my own head. Could I do this? It is possible that my actions can help bring the redemption a step closer?

What do you think, my readers? Please write to me...

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HOLY AND SECULAR

"I Swear"

By *Rabbi Amichai Gordin, Yeshivat Har Etzion*

I feel weariness in my soul. First I summarized the claims of the women MK's, Yachimovitz and Michaeli, about the matter of wearing short skirts in the Knesset. When I tried to boil it all down to the essence of the matter, I found that I had the following sentence, more or less: "We are definitely in favor of a dress code in the Knesset, and we understand that it is

needed. However, nobody is going to tell us what to do and how to dress.”

The next day I tried to summarize the claims of the students in Betzalel about the poster showing a noose together with a picture of Netanyahu. Surprisingly, almost the same sentence came out in the end: “We are very much opposed to incitement and a cry for violence. However, nobody is going to tell us what we can and cannot do and what we can write.”

Then, finally, I understood. People have many principles. But nothing is ever allowed to stand in the way of personal freedom. Freedom and self fulfillment stand ahead of everything and are way above everything else. We have made a new golden calf, and it goes by the name of self fulfillment. Nothing else matters.

As I said, I have become weary.

** * * * *

And then, just in time, Yedidia Meir wrote a column in Besheva that is relevant to this topic. He wrote, “Let’s talk a bit about true visual art. This should be a work that rocks you and sets you thinking. That is what happened to me with the new video clip by Yoni Ganot, ‘I Swear to You.’ Ganot wrote, ‘The first song I ever sang in front of an audience was Ner Leragli – a lamp at my feet (Tehillim 119:105). It was at a Siddur Party in the first grade in the Maalot School in Bnei Berak. This song has always made me think of the innocence of a forgotten childhood.’”

And Yedidia Meir continued, agreeing with Ganot: “There is a totality about the words written by King David... It is not merely a charming romantic song. It obligates you, as much as is possible. You might be a little boy who barely has a mind of his own, you have only just then learned to read and to pray, and you shout it out, you make a vow. You don’t say, ‘I affirm,’ you say, ‘I swear!’ I have taken an oath and I will do it, I will observe Your righteous rulings.”

With heartwarming candor, Yedidia tells about his feelings in the wake of the song. “Something about that song touched me very deeply. It brought back memories and aspirations. After I listened to it in an endless loop for a long time, I went to look at some of the reactions to the song. I was happy to discover that I was not the only one weeping in the darkness...”

** * * * *

I said to Yoni, “You have torn my heart out.” And my thoughts went back several decades. I remembered how the two of us sat on the benches of the Beit Midrash, listening in rapt attention to talks given by Rav Amital. And I was very sad. What a great pity it is that Rav Amital did not have the privilege of hearing Yoni.

I listened once again to the song, and suddenly intermingled with the voices of Yoni Ganot and Arik Sinai it was as if I also heard the gentle voice of Rav Amital, at a Chanukah party, telling us about the faithfulness of a rat and a pit.

** * * * *

I want to talk to you today about what is happening to some of the religious Zionist youths... This is a fascinating phenomenon, but it is frightening too. The key word is “hitchabrut” – feeling connected. The only thing that can link those youths to the Torah and the mitzvot is what they call hitchabrut.

Authority and obligation – two foundations without which it is hard to imagine a life according to the Torah – are no longer relevant... Just to use these words to these youths causes them to immediately leave the conversation. They are talking about being connected in a personal way.

There can be no doubt that this approach to Torah and the mitzvot stems from the cultural atmosphere that exists in the world today. Placing liberal individualism as the main foundation of culture and placing personal rights at the head of the value system have brought about an approach that people must be released from any obligations. Any obligation to a value or any specific object contradicts the concept

of freedom. Thus, any obligation – whether to the nation, to the country, to society, or to the family – has no place in this era of personal freedom.

Some of the youths have completely abandoned any obligation to the halacha. No obligation can ever be considered legitimate. The concept of authority leads these youths to suspect that it will drag in obligations, and therefore the very idea of obligations is rejected. And now that obligation has been removed from the lexicon, what is left? Only “hitchabrut” – a personal link to G-d.

However, criticism was not enough for Rav Amital. He demanded from us that we sharpen our definitions and replace the word “responsibility” with the word “faithfulness.”

He said, “Words have a dynamic trait of their own. Responsibility is a new word with associations of coercion, something that is not an integral part of me but is forced on me. In our sources the word that is used instead of responsibility is faithfulness. This expresses something which is close to a person. It is a word that implies something a person is proud of.”

Then, Rav Amital continued by telling the story of the rat and the pit (and how they took action to enforce a betrothal to which they were witnesses). He then went on to the remarkable demand that “a righteous person will live by his faith” [Chabakuk 2:4]. He explained that a righteous person is required not only to have faith in the Holy One, Blessed be He, but also to be faithful towards the Holy One, Blessed be He. (Source: “Bein Mechuyavut L’Hitchabrut.”)

How did you manage, Yoni, to compress this long and beautiful lesson into a song that takes only four minutes and ten seconds to play? “I have sworn, and I will keep the promise – to observe your righteous laws” [Tehillim 119:106].

For reactions and comments: benkodesh@gmail.com



This publication is distributed by the **RELIGIOUS ZIONISTS OF AMERICA – MIZRACHI** and by **THE ZOMET INSTITUTE OF ALON SHVUT**. It is an extract from Shabbat B’Shabbato, a weekly bulletin distributed in hundreds of synagogues in Israel and has been translated by Moshe Goldberg. If you are interested in sponsoring an issue of Shabbat B’Shabbato, contact the RZA Mizrachi office at **212.465.9234** or mizrachi@rza.org



THE SHABBAT B’SHABBATO IS PUBLISHED WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE CENTER FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS IN THE DIASPORA - WORLD ZIONIST ORGANIZATION, & THE LOUIS AND ETTA SCHIFF FOUNDATION



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