

ב"ה *Torah* **Tidbits**

ISSUE 1673

AUGUST 15TH 2026

ב' אלול תשפ"ו

שפטים - SHOFTIM

AVOT 1

UNITED
WE STAND



ו
ישראל



Simchat Shmuel
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Page 38



Climbing the Ladder of Redemption
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ולשמש או לירח דברים י"ז:ג'

YERUSHALAYIM SHABBAT SHOFTIM ZMANIM

CANDLES 6:48 PM • EARLY 6:00 PM • HAVDALA 8:02 PM • RABBEINU TAM 8:40 PM



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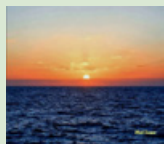
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To read **Rabbi Daniel Mann's** article
for this week please visit:
www.TorahTidbits.com > Individual Articles

IMPORTANT REMINDERS

📖 Beginning with the new month of Elul, we begin to recite
daily the psalm of L'david Hashem Ori and the Shofar is sounded.

COVER PHOTO Photographed by Moti Zemer



Last month I celebrated my 50th year since making Aliyah from Los Angeles to Jerusalem. No doubt the best decision I've ever made. From making Aliyah as a young single, I now am the proud father of 5 with 21 grandchildren!! Hodu LeHashem Ki Tov. I always love taking photos of our beautiful Aretz and especially to show everyone what Hashem has given us. MA RABU MAASECHA HASHEM!!

CANDLE LIGHTING AND HAVDALA TIMES



OTHER Z'MANIM



	SHOFTIM			KI TEITZEI		
	Candles	Early	Havdala	Candles	Early	Havdala
Yerushalayim/Maale Adumim	6:48	6:00	8:02	6:40	5:54	7:53
Aza Area (Netivot, Sderot et al)	7:06	6:03	8:04	6:58	5:56	7:56
Beit Shemesh/RBS	7:07	6:01	8:03	6:59	5:55	7:54
Gush Etzion	7:04	6:01	8:02	6:56	5:54	7:54
Raanana/Tel Mond/Herzliya/K.Saba	7:05	6:02	8:04	6:58	5:56	7:56
Modiin/Chashmonaim	7:04	6:01	8:03	6:57	5:55	7:54
Netanya	7:06	6:03	8:04	6:58	5:56	7:56
Be'er Sheva	7:04	6:02	8:02	6:57	5:55	7:54
Rehovot	7:05	6:02	8:04	6:58	5:56	7:55
Petach Tikva	6:48	6:02	8:04	6:40	5:56	7:55
Ginot Shomron	7:04	6:01	8:03	6:57	5:55	7:55
Haifa / Zichron	6:56	6:03	8:05	6:48	5:56	7:56
Gush Shiloh	7:04	6:00	8:02	6:56	5:54	7:54
Tel Aviv / Givat Shmuel	7:06	6:03	8:04	6:58	5:56	7:56
Givat Zeev	7:08	6:01	8:02	7:00	5:54	7:54
Chevron / Kiryat Arba	7:04	6:01	8:02	6:56	5:54	7:54
Ashkelon	7:06	6:03	8:04	6:58	5:57	7:56
Yad Binyamin	7:05	6:02	8:03	6:57	5:56	7:55
Tzfat / Bikat HaYarden	6:58	6:01	8:03	6:50	5:54	7:54
Golan	7:03	6:00	8:02	6:55	5:54	7:53
Nahariya/Maalot	6:55	6:02	8:05	6:48	5:56	7:56
Afula	7:04	6:01	8:03	6:57	5:55	7:55
Rabbeinu Tam (Jerusalem): Shoftim - 8:40 PM • Ki Teitzei - 8:31 PM						

All Times According to Myzmanim (20 mins before Sunset in most Cities;
40 mins in Yerushalayim and Petach Tikva; 30 mins in Tzfat, Nahariya, Maalot and Haifa)

Daf Yomi: Chulin 107

JERUSALEM

Ranges 11 days Wednesday - Shabbat
Aug. 12 - 22 | 29 Av - 9 Elul

Earliest Tallit and Tefillin	5:07-5:15
Sunrise	6:02-6:08
Sof Zman Kriat Shema	9:23-9:25
Magen Avraham	8:43-8:46
Sof Zman Tefila	10:30
(According to the Gra and Baal HaTanaya)	
Chatzot (Halachic Noon)	12:44-12:41
Mincha Gedola (Earliest Mincha)	1:17-1:14
Plag Mincha	6:02-5:53
Sunset (Including Elevation)	7:30-7:19



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DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

RABBI AVI BERMAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OU ISRAEL
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One of the great challenges of summer here in Israel, in pretty much every home with teenagers, is what will get them out of bed in the morning. School is out and there is nowhere to be at seven or eight in the morning. All over Israel, parents and teens struggle to make mornings productive ones.

Truth be told, even growing up, I never liked sleeping in. This helped me tremendously in consistently getting to *minyan* in the morning. I grew up as a teen in Har Nof, and there were minyanim until 10:30am. Now as an adult with teen kids, I can say that one of the great blessings of Givat Ze'ev is that the latest *minyan* is 8:00am; telling yourself you'll catch the next one is not an option here. So I go, and *Baruch Hashem*, my children go (almost always). They understand that getting up and doing good will benefit them so much more than staying in bed.

Before the advent of electricity, people would go to sleep when it got dark, and they'd wake up with the morning light. That's why our evening prayer optimally begins when it

gets dark, and our morning prayer optimally begins just as the sun rises. This is natural timing for our day.

While some worry about getting their kids to *minyan* on time, others are dealing with far more profound challenges. And therefore, one team at OU Israel keeps very different hours: the dedicated staff of our Yerushalayim-based Pearl & Harold Jacobs Zula Outreach Center. During the summer, they expand their year-round mission through Ohel Yehudi, the tent we build on the beaches of the Kinneret. Every summer thousands of Israeli religious teenagers flock to the Kinneret, pitch tents and spend days there. Some come just for an enjoyable outing, but others come for the party scene. Some teens are also exposed there, for the first time in their lives, to things they might not be ready to handle. Whether alcohol and other substances, or being preyed upon by others, because of our Ohel Yehudi, they know there is somewhere to go to get advice and receive help.

I went out there to visit this past week. Every visit there for me is a meaningful experience. Just this past week I went up North and spent from nine at night until the early hours of the morning in our Ohel Yehudi on Kursi Beach. I felt so connected to what was going on and seeing how much we were helping the teens there.

I sat down and listened to the Ohel Yehudi team, who filled me in on some of the complex and painful cases they are handling. These are exactly the kinds of scenarios they come prepared and trained for. They have

**May the Torah learned
from this issue of Torah Tidbits
be לע"נ my father**

משה בן צבי ז"ל
Moshe Goldstein ז"ל
on his 34th yearzeit, 3 Elul

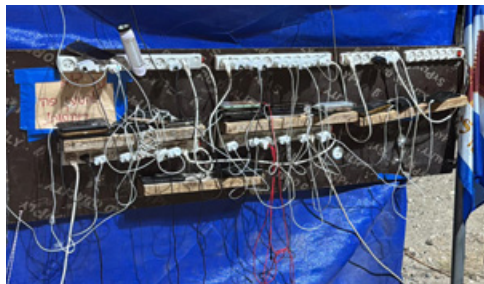
**Harriet Goldstein - Mark
Grandsons, great-grandchildren
and great-great-grandchildren**

social services on speed dial and they know when to call the police, because a number of the situations they encounter are beyond what a tent on a beach can hold. What is remarkable is that the vast majority of our team are volunteers. They come back week after week, working tirelessly to make sure these teens get what they need.

The moment that crystallized it all for me was standing there and looking at the charging stations. We bring up a truckload of equipment and build an entire tent, a kitchen, sleeping quarters for our staff. It becomes a small campus, and everyone flocks to it. They come because somebody is injured on the beach, or because somebody has had too much to drink, or because somebody lost their phone. And they come because they are going through something and they want to talk to an adult who can relate to them, who is there with them on the beach, who has come down and sat on the sand beside them and is giving them real attention, guidance and love.

But Ohel Yehudi also set up charging stations; if a beach goer's phone is running out of battery, they can leave their phone to charge. I stood there watching it pull in teens and giving them a space - an excuse - to feel safe and breathe. I said to myself, this is what it is all about. Not the outlet itself. It's what the charging station symbolizes. When a person is at home, there is a plug in nearly every corner. Nobody panics about a battery at home. You only start to worry when you are out in the field, hiking, walking through a city, and you suddenly notice how low you are running. Then you have to start thinking of where to plug in.

These teenagers are out in the field. Over the summer they are cut off from their teachers, their *madrichim*, their community, their



rabbi in *shul*. So they come to Ohel Yehudi not only to charge a phone but to recharge themselves. Some ask for emotional or professional

In loving memory of
Eliezer (Larry) Yellin ז"ל
 אליעזר בן חיים מנחם מנדל ז"ל
 on his third Yahrtzeit ח' אלול

May the Torah learned
 from this issue be in his merit
The Yellin and Weingarten families

help. Many simply sit on the low benches while someone pulls out a guitar or hand drum, and they sing, talk to an advisor, hear a *dvar Torah*, and receive the unconditional love and attention they need. They may go an entire day without any spiritual or social charge, but they know that when they come back to the beach, the OU will be there, twenty-four hours a day. Our team is there, women and men, bringing their own kids with them (it is the summer, after all), just to help others. And these kids see their parents' passion and they watch them come back to volunteer every single summer. That has a tremendous impact on them as well.

Baruch Hashem, we have raised the funds we need for this tent, some from OU Kashrut profits, the rest from private donors. But the real point is the good in saving lives. This team is there to protect them, and I thank *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* that we are in a position to watch over these youths, both our *olim* and native Israelis.

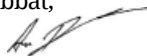
In this week's *parsha* we read of the *Egla Arufa*. The elders of the nearest city wash their hands and declare, "*Yadeinu lo shafchu et hadam hazeh*," our hands did not spill this blood (Devarim 21:7). Would it occur to us that the elders of the court are murderers? The *Mishna* explains they are declaring something else: that this man was not sent on his way without

food, or left to travel without an escort.

The question the *Egla Arufa* puts to us is whether we are watching the road, whether we are taking responsibility for our brothers and sisters who are out there without the safety of their own homes. On that beach, we can honestly look up to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* and say we went out to the field and provided food, escorting them, so that these boys and girls would not come to harm as much as we can.

With the right support we will continue for many more weeks and expand to other beaches. Thank you to all who have supported us until today, and to all who will begin from today. This is truly life-saving. We cannot do it alone. Please be our partners in saving the future of *Klal Yisrael*.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



Rabbi Avi Berman

Executive Director, OU Israel

<https://givechak.co.il/OUIsrael?ref=r3>

Please Note:

Advertising Deadlines over the Chagim

Issue #1674 (August 21-22) Ki Teitze

» Monday **AM** August 17th

Issue # 1675 (August 28-29) Ki Tavo

» Monday **AM** August 24th

Issue #1676 (September 4-5) Nitzavim, Vayeilech

» Thursday **AM** August 27th

Issue # 1677 (September 11-12) Rosh Hashana

» Thursday **AM** September 3rd

Issue #1678 (September 18-19)

Shabbat Haazinu-Shuva, YomKippur, all of Sukkot

» Wednesday **AM** September 9th

Issue #1679 (October 9-10) Bereshit

» Monday **AM** October 5th

Call or email Ita Rochel

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May the Torah learning
from this issue
be in memory of and לעילוי נשמת

Ze'ev Blumenthal ז"ל
and his daughter
Aviva א"ה

sadly missed
by *Judith Lipman*

Lenny Davidman

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Oh...Beyond Kashrut

Festival Liba 2026: Expanding the Zula's Safe Haven to Gan Hapaamon

Operating under the OU Israel's Zula umbrella, the July 2026 Festival Liba at Gan Hapaamon hosted **120 girls between the ages of 15 and 20.**

By bringing this specialized initiative out of its regular facility and into the expansive space of the Liberty Bell Park amphitheater, the event extended the Zula's signature mission of providing a safe, non-judgmental haven for teens. Tailored specifically to offer a spiritually focused and supportive environment for these young women, the festival blended communal warmth with an engaging, interactive program.

Between the vibrant "circular jams," local vendor booths, and a moving acoustic performance by Sinai Tor, the gathering perfectly encapsulated the Liba program's dedication to **connecting, healing, and elevating young souls** through music and unconditional love.



A SAFE HAVEN

Creating a non-judgmental, supportive space where teen girls can feel secure, accepted, and understood.



MUSIC & INSPIRATION

Uplifting music, circular jams, and meaningful performances that touch the heart and inspire the soul.



COMMUNITY & CONNECTION

Building bonds, encouraging friendships, and fostering a strong sense of belonging and unity.



HEALING & GROWTH

Empowering young women to grow spiritually, emotionally, and personally.

Each week, we highlight an OU Israel initiative that **empowers lives and communities** across our homeland. We assist English-speaking olim with their klita and provide Israel's most vulnerable teens with the support they need to rebuild trust, confidence, and a bright future.

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ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

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PARSHAT SHOFTIM

Parshat Shoftim has 41 mitzvot and is the 2nd of 3 parshiot that have a total of 170 mitzvot.

The 3 parshiot of Re'eh, Shoftim and Ki Teitzei are nation building; they express the vision of the society we are to build in the Land of Israel. It is not narrative; it is legislation.

And what type of society do we want to build?

Well, man was created in the image of G-d. The society we are to build is an expression of the image of G-d. What He is, we too are. Kind of. The society we build is a “G-d’s Image” society. Albeit with a dash of humility.

He is: One, Merciful, Judge, King, Revealer, All Powerful, All Knowing.

We began last week in Re’eh with His being One. First thing is monotheism and uprooting of idols. He is One, reflected here on earth. He is Merciful, Kind, Generous. We in our society will take care of the needy in canceling loans in Shemita and in the generosity inherent in

Maaser Sheni. Ethical monotheism is the first pillar in the “G-d’s Image” society.

Our parsha, Shoftim, is the building of national institutions: the judiciary, the executive and the legislature, including courts, the king, prophets and proper conduct of war. And their checks and balances.

He is Judge, King, Revealer to man and All Powerful. Our institutions of courts, monarchy, prophet express on earth His attributes; we, created in His Image, act on earth in the way He does.



1ST ALIYA (DEVARIM 16:18-17:13)

Courts: Establish courts and be vigilant in fairness; do not show favoritism or accept bribes for they blur good judgment. Do not plant a tree next to the altar, nor establish a stone monument, nor offer blemished sacrifices. If one is found to worship idols, examine the case carefully in court: guilt must be established through the testimony of witnesses. If established to be true, put that person to death and remove evil from your midst. Should a ruling be elusive, refer it to the higher court; its decision is binding. Do not deviate from its ruling.

Judiciary: The Torah has 2 parshiot that deal with law: Mishpatim and Shoftim. Mishpatim is substantive law, the substance of the law in all sorts of areas of conflict. Shoftim is procedural law; how justice is to be meted out.

Our pursuit of justice on earth is an expression of our image of G-d, the true Judge. We do what He does. However, there is an inherent danger in acting as He. We need to be careful to remember – we are but in His

May the Torah learning
from this issue of Torah Tidbits
לעילוי נשמת

our beloved husband, father,
grandfather and great-grandfather

RABBI I. FRED HOLLANDER ז”ל
on his yahrzeit
Rosh Chodesh Elul

Image. We are not the true Judge. He is.

Perhaps this is the motivation of the checks and balances we will see in each of these national institutions; reins on our overstep. The Torah emphasizes the rules of testimony and procedure. If you require two eye witnesses to convict, convictions are shrunk. This could be to impress upon man that although courts are necessary for society, judging our fellow man is not really our business. True Justice belongs but to G-d. Hence, your ability to convict is shrunken, lest you see yourself as the True Judge.



2ND ALIYA (17:14-20)

King: When settled in the Land, appoint a Jewish king. He may not accumulate excessive horses, nor too many wives, nor silver and gold. He shall have his own Torah with him at all times in order to avoid self-aggrandizement and to ensure allegiance to the mitzvot.

Executive Branch: In the same breath that we are told to appoint a king, the Torah saddles him with restrictions. Not too many horses, meaning military power. Not too many wives; sexual license is often the consequence of excess power. And limit possessions, another license of power. The tempering of the power of the king is to temper both his abuse of power and his inflated self-image.

Unbridled power of the king could easily leave little room for the King of Kings. You, man, are a little king. He is the real King. While the crown may sit on your head, know that above that head is the real King of Kings.



3RD ALIYA (18:1-5)

Kohen, Levi: The tribe of Levi, including kohanim, shall not have a portion in the Land of Israel for the holy service is their lot. The kohen, who serves G-d, shall be given portions of animals, produce

and shearing.

Alongside Judges and Kings, the judiciary and the executive are the religious leaders, Kohanim and Leviim. These religious leaders are supported by a type of tax on the people. But with limits. The power of the Judges to convict is limited. The power of the Kings is limited to avoid abuse. Religious leaders are also prone to abuse of power, using religious leverage to accumulate wealth. Hence, no land. Only these portions. It is not what is given to support the Kohanim and Leviim; it is what is not. Every society supports its religious leaders. But make sure the power that comes with high religious office is not abused. You get support; but only this, not more.

Religious leaders must serve G-d and the people; they are supported albeit with modesty.



4TH ALIYA (18:6-12)

The Levi is permitted to serve in the Temple whenever he chooses.

Sorcery: Avoid the practices of the people in the Land, such as child sacrifice, divination, omens, sorcery, communicating with the dead. Your allegiance is to G-d.

One of the attributes of the Divine is omniscience; He Knows all. Man has knowledge; but man's knowledge falls far short of the Divine. We, oh how we wish we could know more, see beyond our limitations, have access to the secrets of the world. It is tempting to run, in the pursuit of accessing the secrets of the world to sorcery and divination.

That's not for you. Stay away. The Torah requires powerful restraint. That is not our source of knowledge. As the next aliya outlines, our source of truth is G-d through the prophet.



5TH ALIYA (18:13-19:13)

Prophet: While the people in

the Land seek wisdom through magical techniques, you seek yours through G-d Himself. Because you said at Sinai that you did not want to hear His voice directly you have the Prophet to convey G-d's directives. Heed the words of the prophet, though not of the false prophet. The true prophet's predictions come true: not so for the false prophet. Prepare 3 cities on the east bank of the Jordan and 3 cities in the Land of Israel as refuge for the accidental murderer. He is not subject to the death penalty. Innocent blood ought not be spilled in the Land.

Our parsha has outlined the judiciary, the judges and the executive, the king. The legislature, the branch that creates the laws, is trickier; the source of our laws is G-d, related through the prophet. The prophet is a mere conduit. Unlike the judge and king who act in this world in the image of the true Judge and King, the prophet acts as the messenger to man to communicate the Divine legislation.



6TH ALIYA (19:14-20:9)

Do not encroach over the borders of your property. **Testimony:** One witness is insufficient in court. Conniving witnesses who intend harm through their testimony shall themselves receive the harm they intended. **War:** Do not be afraid of the enemy in war, for G-d champions your battles. A specially appointed kohen shall encourage the soldiers. In addition, he shall exempt some of the soldiers: those who have a new home, a

new vineyard, a betrothed wife, or are afraid. These shall not demoralize the other soldiers.

The protection of his people through the conduct of war is one of the primary functions of the executive, the King. As we say in Az Yashir, the song at the sea, "G-d is the conductor of battle". As He is a warrior, so too we, in our "G-d's Image" society need to fight wars. Some laws of war are outlined.

And in addressing the inherent danger of military men to assume military success is due to their great prowess, the kohen is instructed to be present in war. The kohen's presence reminds the soldiers that they are G-d's army. He fights their battles, while they fight down here on earth.



7TH ALIYA (20:10-21:9)

In approaching war, try peace first. But if refused, fight the war to the end, lest those who survive lead you astray. Do not destroy fruit trees while laying siege to a city. When a body is found dead in the field, the nearest city shall perform a ceremony declaring them not responsible for this death. The Land need be cleansed of innocent blood.

After the laws of war, the Torah circles back to one lone body found dead in the field. And the need to cleanse both the leadership and the land of this innocent blood.

This too is a kind of check and balance on the military. Oh, don't think we have a low regard for life. Loss of innocent life defiles the Land – and us. Embark on war with sobriety. While not pacifists who desist from all war, we will conduct a sober war. After all, we are creating a human society reflecting the image of G-d. But all mankind is in His image. Death in battle is sometimes necessary, but regrettable nonetheless. For all are created in His Image. ■

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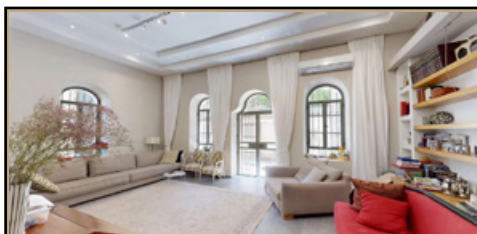
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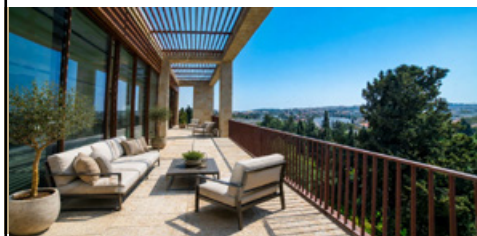
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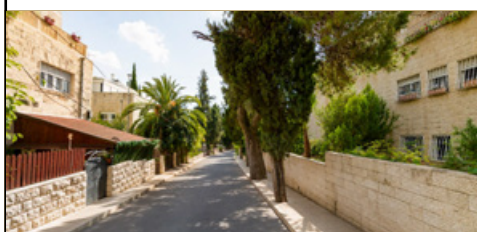
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A SHORT VORT

BY RABBI CHANOKH YERES
RAV, BEIT KNESSET BEIT YISRAEL, YEMIN MOSHE

ואמרת אשימה עלי מלך (יז:יד)

לבלתי רום לבבו מאחיו ולבלתי סור מן המצוה ימין ושמאל (יז:כ)

"And you shall say "I will set a king over me"" (17:14)

"That his heart be not lifted up above his brothers and that he turns not aside from the commandment, to the right or the left." (17:20)

While describing the intrinsic qualities of a king, why are the characteristics of strength and bravery not at the forefront? Why the need to emphasize where his heart lies towards his subjects? The Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman 1194-1270, Spain-Acco) points to the prohibition against arrogance. If the Torah alludes that even a king must restrain his feelings of conceit and haughtiness, how much more so, we who do not have such status and prestige. As king, one might assume the necessity of acting with prominence and eminence. Nevertheless, vanity and egotism are reprehensible qualities to G-d in all his people including a king. The lofty ideas of greatness and glorification are reserved only to G-d himself. As stated in the Book of Mishlei (16:5) "Every man that is proud in heart is an abomination to G-d." - Shabbat Shalom

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THE PERSON IN THE PARSHA

BY RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB
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“The Merits of a Guilty Conscience”

Earlier this week, I looked at my calendar. This calendar is sent to me every year. I cherish its colorful illustrations. They make me aware of the significance of the upcoming month. This time, I was taken aback. Wonder of wonders, Elul is here.

For as long as I can remember, the arrival of Elul has unsettled me. I sense the days of judgment drawing near. I turn inward and ask whether I am ready to “face the music.”

Over the years, I’ve learned much more about how to spiritually prepare for the *Yemei HaDin*, the Days of Awe. I’ve studied the process of *teshuva*, return and repentance. I eventually discovered that there is a wide range of approaches to the sacred process of *teshuva*.

Permit me to provide just a sample of

those who wrote extensively about *teshuva*. For starters, there is Maimonides, *Rambam*, whose comprehensive treatment of *Hilchos Teshuva* is unmatched to this very day. Also valuable are the works of other medieval sages, continuing through the generations to the Chassidic masters, to the proponents of the Mussar movement, to Rav Kook and his contemporaries, and to many in our own time.

Let’s begin with the disciples of Rabbi Yisroel Salanter, the nineteenth century founder of the Mussar movement. They each stressed different aspects of *teshuva*. One would have us appreciate our great human potential—Slobodka. Another preached impeccable ethical behavior—Kelm.

Personally, I’m fascinated with the most extreme and most demanding of these varied approaches, Nevardek. Here goes:

In this week’s Torah reading, *Shoftim* (*Bamidbar* 16:18-21-9), we learn about the *arei miklat*, the cities of refuge, where individuals who unintentionally killed another person may flee to avoid those who might wish to avenge the blood of the victim. The “murderer” could flee to one of the places of refuge, where he would remain safe. The key verse reads:

“This is the case [literally, ‘this is the word’] of the manslayer/*rotzeach* who may flee there and live...” (*Bamidbar* 19:4).

Rabbi Chaim Zeitchik, of blessed memory, a Holocaust survivor who lived to disseminate the teachings of the *Alter m’Navardek* (the “old man” or dean of the Nevardek school), cites the following Talmudic comment on this verse:

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“If a manslayer/*rotzeach* escapes to a city of refuge and is greeted by its inhabitants who wish to bestow honor upon him, he must protest and proclaim: ‘I am a manslayer!’ If they respond, ‘Nevertheless, we wish to honor you!’ then he must accept [‘this is the word’].” (*Talmud Bavli Makkot* 12b).

Rabbi Zeitchik then quotes another Talmudic passage:

“The citizens of Jerusalem wished to appoint Yehuda ben Tabai [in original text, Sabai] as the *Nasi*, the chieftain, of Jerusalem. He avoided this appointment by fleeing to Alexandria. They wrote: ‘From great Jerusalem to tiny Alexandria, how long will our bridegroom dwell with you while we sit here bereft of his presence?’” (*Talmud Yerushalmi Chagiga* chapter 3, paragraph 2).

Rabbi Zeitchik continues: “The people of Jerusalem offered him glorious honor, as if on a golden platter, yet he refused it. Why? Because he knew he could not withstand the temptations of glory and power.”

“What motivated such extreme piety?”, asks Rabbi Zeitchik. In response to his own question, the Rabbi encourages us to gain insight into Yehuda ben Tabai’s tortured soul by perusing a Talmudic passage which I will translate loosely in the interests of brevity:

Rabbi Yehuda ben Tabai proudly announced that, in his capacity as a qualified judge, he had ordered the execution of an *eid zomeim* (a witness who falsely accused another of murder but who was then discovered to have been nowhere near the murder he claimed to have witnessed) and that his order was carried out... To which Shimon ben Shetach retorted accusingly: “If so, you have spilled the blood of an innocent man!” Yielding to Shimon ben Shetach’s greater authority, Rabbi Yehuda ben Tabai agreed to never

again rule on any judicial procedure without first consulting Shimon ben Shetach. For the rest of his life, Rabbi Yehuda ben Tabai would frequently visit the grave of the man whose death he caused and beg aloud for forgiveness. (*Talmud Bavli Makkot* 5b).

In the above passage, Rabbi Zeitchik finds good reason for Yehuda ben Tabai’s resistance to public acclaim. He was forever burdened by feelings of guilt that he could not suppress. He suffered unrelenting remorse. He remained perennially haunted by his irrevocable judicial decision.

Consistent with the approach of his Nevardek mentors, Rabbi Zeitchik identifies with Rabbi Yehuda ben Tabai. Rather than try to overcome feelings of guilt, a technique which other approaches to *teshuva* would highly recommend, he strived to retain his guilty conscience for its own sake.

Rabbi Zeitchik promotes a *teshuva* framework consistent with his Nevardek background. He writes, “Rabbi Yehuda ben Tabai felt that he could not accept a public position of leadership because it would diminish his remembrance of the error in judgment that led to the wrongful death of another human being. A position of power would erase from his heart and from his conscience the ability to self-criticize. Public exposure would



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interfere with his ability to preserve his broken heart. A position of power would minimize and silence the inner voice that he wished to keep forever.

Should he accept the title of *Nasi* and achieve a lofty position with its material rewards, his conscience would weaken and ultimately vanish. He chose to reject glory lest it cool his goal of spiritual perfection and diminish his capacity to make demands of himself. Better to follow the Torah's insistence that the newly initiated inhabitant of the city of refuge must decline the honor offered to him and proclaim to all, "I am a manslayer, I am a *rotzeach*."

This may not be the appropriate model for everyone. But those who follow the path of Nevardek will benefit by adapting to a heavy dose of sincere introspection, discovering the powers of restraint that accompany a guilty conscience, and opening themselves up to painfully honest self-criticism. There is much to be said for this agenda for those who find it personally meaningful.

Let us all contemplate Rabbi Zeitchik's message. We are grateful to him for introducing to us one of the many paths to spiritual growth as we get closer to the Days of Awe. ■



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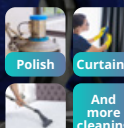
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Testing Prophecy

In his enumeration of the various leadership roles within the nation that would take shape after his death, Moses mentions not only the priest/judge and the king, but also the *prophet*:

"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him."

Moses would not be the last of the prophets. He would have successors. Historically this was so. From the days of Samuel to the Second Temple period each generation gave rise to men and women who spoke God's word with immense courage, unafraid to censure kings, criticise priests, or rebuke an entire generation for its lack of faith and moral integrity.

There was, however, an obvious question: How does one tell a true prophet from a false one? Unlike kings or priests, prophets did not derive authority from formal office. Their authority lay in their personality, their ability to give voice to the word of God, their self-evident inspiration. But precisely because a prophet has privileged access to the word

others cannot hear, the visions others cannot see, the real possibility existed of false prophets – like those of Baal in the days of King Ahab. Charismatic authority is inherently destabilising. What was there to prevent a fraudulent – or even a sincere but mistaken – figure, able to perform signs and wonders and move the people by the power of his words, from taking the nation in a wrong direction, misleading others and perhaps even himself?

There are several dimensions to this question. One in particular is touched upon in our Torah portion, namely the prophet's *ability to foretell the future*. This is how Moses puts it:

You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?" If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.

On the face of it, the test is simple: if what the prophet predicts comes to pass, he is a true prophet; if not, not. Clearly, though, it was not that simple.

The classic case is the Book of Jonah. Jonah is commanded by God to warn the people of Nineveh that their wickedness is about to bring disaster on them. Jonah attempts to flee, but fails – the famous story of the sea,

the storm, and the “great fish”. Eventually he goes to Nineveh and utters the words God has commanded him to say – “Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed” – the people repent and the city is spared. Jonah, however, is deeply dissatisfied:

But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the Lord, “O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and

abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

(Jonah 4:1-3)

Jonah’s complaint can be understood in two ways. First, he was distressed that God had forgiven the people. They were, after all, wicked. They deserved to be punished. Why then did a mere change of heart release them from the punishment that was their due?

Second, he had been made to look a fool. He had told them that in forty days the city would be destroyed. It was not. God’s mercy made nonsense of his prediction.

Jonah is wrong to be displeased: that much is clear. God says, in the rhetorical question with which the book concludes: “Should I not be concerned about that great city?” Should I not be merciful? Should I not forgive? What then becomes of the criterion Moses lays down for distinguishing between a true and false prophet: “If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken”? Jonah had proclaimed that the city would be destroyed in forty days. It wasn’t; yet the proclamation was true. He really did speak the word of God. How can this be so?

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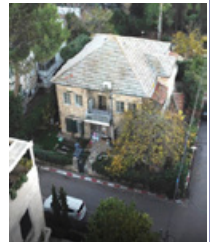
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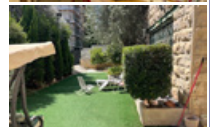
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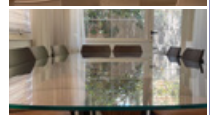
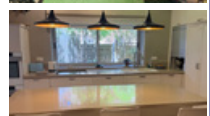
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Jeremiah had been prophesying national disaster. The people had drifted from their religious vocation, and the result would be defeat and exile. It was a difficult and demoralising message for people to hear. A false prophet arose, Hananiah son of Azzur, preaching the opposite. Babylon, Israel's enemy, would soon be defeated. Within two years the crisis would be over. Jeremiah knew that it was not so, and that Hananiah was telling the people what they *wanted* to hear, not what they *needed* to hear. He addressed the assembled people:

He said, "Amen! May the Lord do so! May the Lord fulfil the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the Lord's house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon. Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing, and in the hearing of all the people: From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war,

disaster, and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognised as one truly sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true."

Jeremiah makes a fundamental distinction between good news and bad. It is easy to prophesy disaster. If the prophecy comes true, then you have spoken the truth. If it does not, then you can say: God relented and forgave. A negative prophecy cannot be refuted – but a positive one can. If the good foreseen comes to pass, then the prophecy is true. If it does not, then you cannot say, 'God changed His mind' because God does not retract from a promise He has made of good, or peace, or return.

It is therefore only when the prophet offers a positive vision that he can be tested. That is why Jonah was wrong to believe he had failed when his negative prophecy – the destruction of Nineveh – failed to come true. This is how Maimonides puts it:

As to calamities predicted by a prophet, if, for example, he foretells the death of a certain individual or declares that in particular year there will be famine or war and so forth, the non-fulfilment of his forecast does not disprove his prophetic character. We are not to say, "See, he spoke and his prediction has not come to pass." For God is long-suffering and abounding in kindness and repents of evil. It may also be that those who were threatened repented and were therefore forgiven, as happened to the men of Nineveh. Possibly too, the execution of the sentence is only deferred, as in the case of Hezekiah. But if the prophet, in the name of God, assures good fortune, declaring that a particular event would come to pass, and the benefit promised has not been realised, he is unquestionably a false prophet, for no blessing decreed by the Almighty, even

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if promised conditionally, is ever revoked ... Hence we learn that only when he predicts good fortune can the prophet be tested.

(Yesodei ha-Torah 10:4)

Fundamental conclusions follow from this. A prophet is not an oracle: a prophecy is not a prediction. Precisely because Judaism believes in freewill, the human future can never be unfailingly predicted. People are capable of change. God forgives. As we say in our prayers on the High Holy Days: "Prayer (Tefillah), penitence (Teshuvah), and charity (Tzedakah) avert the evil decree." There is no decree that cannot be revoked. A prophet does not *foretell*. He *warns*. A prophet does not speak to predict future catastrophe but rather to avert it. *If a prediction comes true it has succeeded. If a prophecy comes true it has failed.*

The second consequence is no less far-reaching. The real test of prophecy is not bad news but good. Calamity, catastrophe, disaster prove nothing. Anyone can foretell these things without risking his reputation or authority. It is only by the realisation of a positive vision that prophecy is put to the test. So it was with Israel's prophets.

They were realists, not optimists. They warned of the dangers that lay ahead. But they were also, without exception, agents of hope. They could see beyond the catastrophe to the consolation. That is the test of a true prophet. ■

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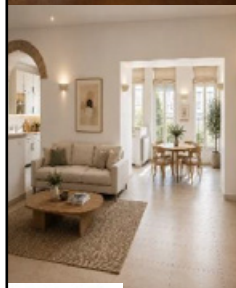
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“Shivti b’veit Hashem...”

This week, the month of Eul opened, a month that cries out to Israel to prepare for the Yamim Nora'im with their tefillot that focus on a return to Hashem and to His people. For this reason, we begin to recite the twenty-seventh perek in Tehillim, “L'David: Hashem Ori v'Yish'I" at the end of our tefillot. In that “*kapitl*”, David HaMelech bemoans the difficult state in which he finds himself at times, but he always finds that G-d is his support. As a result, he declares that there is but one thing he wishes: **“Shivti b’veit Hashem...”**

Rav Yigal Ariel turns to this week's haftarah (Yishayahu 51-52) whose message echoes the very same need that David expressed in Tehillim.

The earlier messages of comfort prophesied by Yishayahu were descriptions of future victories, successes and accomplishments that Hashem would perform to bring solace and consolation to the bereaved nation. But it was,

in fact, “Consolation Through Representation”, comfort through the words of the nevi'im. But in the opening words of this week's haftarah G-d calls out: **“Anochi, Anochi Hu Menachemchem” – “It is I Who Comforts You!!!”**

The Abudraham points to the repetition of “Anochi” as G-d's response to the earlier statement that Israel has no one to comfort them “Ein lah menachem...” [1: 3]. Hashem now responds that there **IS** someone who comforts - **“Anochi, Anochi”** - It is I, I, Who comforts you!!! Indeed, Rav Yigal Ariel adds that the original “inconsolable” statement referred only to mortals – but, as G-d declares now – it does not refer to the **IM**mortal One

Consider: after Iyov lost all of his children (and his possessions), his closest supporters attempted to comfort him and rationalize his suffering – but they failed. Yet, in the final chapters of Sefer Iyov, Hashem speaks to the bereaved protagonist from out of the whirlwind and, although He adds very little to what Iyov's friends had said, Iyov states:

לְשִׁמְעָאֲזֶן שְׁמַעְתִּיךָ וְעַתָּה עֵינֵי רְאִיתִי: עַל-כֵּן אֲנִי
וְנִחַמְתִּי עַל-עֶפְרָאֲפָר:

I heard You with my ears, ..., I therefore recant and am comforted

G-d had given no telling argument nor explanation – so why was Job comforted? Because when he heard G-d's words, when he was drawn close to his Maker, he was comforted!

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“Shivti b’veit Hashem...”

Iyov echoed the very same plea spoken by King David - “I wish only to dwell in Your House” - for being close to HaKadoch Baruch Hu brings comfort, consolation and peace.

And this is the first message that Hashem shares with us in this week’s haftarah.

Our Elul efforts to repent include a self-analysis to evaluate our behavior over the past year: Have we failed to treat our fellows properly, whether through negative speech or harmful actions, or even through heartless disregard of their difficulties; Have we been flippant in our observance of the mitzvot... or have we actually ignored some? Have we shown proper respect to HaKadosh Baruch Hu and His Torah or to the elderly, the poverty-stricken or the ailing? These are the issues we must face during this time – and they are most difficult to tackle.

The navi Yishayahu sends us a message in the words of G-d Himself that will help us contend with - and overcome - these problems. “**ANO-CHI, ANOCHI!**” Understanding that Hashem is behind us and, therefore, all we need is “**Shivti b’veit Hashem...**”, a desire, a yearning to dwell in His house, to bring ourselves closer to Him. Knowing that G-d is the essence and source of fundamental consolation for our troubles and worries, realizing that He yearns to be close to you as you yearn to be close to Him, will help us navigate through the difficult challenges of these weeks of repentance.

And how fortunate for us that Chazal gifted us with this haftarah and its crucial Elul message each and every year. We can hear Hashem’s message and, like Iyov, we can now: “recant and be comforted”. ■

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Shoftim Ve'Shotrim: Taking it Personally

As Chodesh Elul begins, *parashat Shoftim* directs us toward introspection, self-assessment, and spiritual growth. The opening mitzvah of the *parasha* establishes the framework for a just society:

שֹׁפְטִים וְשֹׁטְרִים תִּתֵּן לָךְ בְּכָל־שְׁעָרֶיךָ

*Judges and officers shall you appoint for yourself in all your gates.*¹

At first glance, this imperative appears to address the Jewish nation collectively. Establishing courts and systems of justice is a communal responsibility. Yet the Torah curiously uses the singular form: תתן לך - *you shall appoint for yourself*.

The *Ba'ale Musar* explain that embedded within this mitzvah is a profound personal message. Every individual must establish *judges and officers* within himself. Each person should establish an internal system

of honest evaluation and disciplined self-regulation. Elul is the season when each person must ask: *Am I living according to the values and potential that Hashem has given me?*

The sefer *Lehitaneig BeTa'anugim*² cites a Midrash concerning Yosef's revelation to his brothers:

לכשיבוא הקדוש ברוך הוא ויזכיר כל אחד ואחד לפי

מה שהוא

*In the future, when Hashem reproves each person, it will be according to who he is.*³

This phrase *according to who he is* (לפי), contains an essential foundation of *avodat Hashem*. Divine judgment is deeply personal. Hashem does not measure people against one another. Rather, every person is judged according to the unique abilities, strengths, struggles, and opportunities with which he was endowed.

A particular action may be considered insignificant for one person and extraordinary for another. One individual arriving five minutes late to shul may reflect carelessness; for someone else, simply coming to shul at all may represent a tremendous spiritual achievement. The same action can carry entirely different meaning depending on the individual.

The Torah commands:

2. Rav Y. Greenboim, *Lehitaneig BeTa'anugim*

3. *Bereshit Rabbah* 93:10

1. Devarim 16:18

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שפטים ושקרים תתן-לך - establish standards for *yourself*, according to *your* spiritual reality. This perspective carries enormous significance during Elul. Growth in *avodat Hashem* cannot be based on imitation alone. Spiritual aspirations must be authentic and appropriate to one's current level.

The mashgiach Rav Yerucham Levovitz once described how he observed the great Talmid Chacham Rav Yitzchak Blazer maintain a complete *Taanit Dibur* (undertaking not to speak) throughout the month of Elul, speaking only words of Torah and tefillah. Rav Yerucham initially wished to adopt the same practice himself. Yet after reflection, he concluded that such a conduct was not appropriate for his own spiritual level.

This insight is both subtle and critical. Sometimes a person adopts stringencies or practices that appear lofty, only to discover later that they are unsustainable or spiritually counterproductive. One who attempts to climb several rungs at once may ultimately fall from the ladder altogether.

Authentic growth requires honesty. We must neither underestimate ourselves nor attempt to become someone we are not. This idea appears again in the Midrash⁴ regarding Esav and Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel declared: *All my life I served my father, yet I did not attain even one hundredth of the honor Eisav showed his father.*

The Midrash describes how Eisav would wear distinguished garments when attending to Yitzchak, while Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel served his father in ordinary clothing. The obvious question arises: if he admired Eisav's conduct so greatly, why did he not imitate it?

The answer is that spiritual behavior must emerge organically from one's authentic level.

4. Bereshit Rabbah 65:16

A lofty external act detached from inner reality can become artificial rather than elevating. Growth must be genuine, measured, and integrated into the person one truly is.

A similar principle emerges from the Gemara⁵ regarding Mar Ukva. Mar Ukva remarked that compared to his father, he was *like vinegar compared to wine*, because his father waited twenty-four hours between meat and milk, whereas he himself waited only until the next meal. Yet despite his admiration, Mar Ukva did not adopt his father's practice, recognizing that one must serve Hashem in an authentic manner in accordance with where one is at in life.

This is the *avodah* of Elul. The goal is not merely to become more religious externally, nor to imitate the practices of others. Rather, Elul calls upon us to discover what Hashem genuinely asks of us - personally, honestly, and realistically.

Every individual possesses unique gateways into the soul. Each person has different strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and struggles. The command of placing judges at our gates - teaches that the work of self-judgment must penetrate every dimension of one's life and personality.

One of the greatest obstacles to spiritual

5. Chulin 105b

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growth is comparison. We often look sideways instead of inward. We measure ourselves against the accomplishments, or public image of others, forgetting that Hashem created every soul with a unique mission. Elul reminds us that authentic *avodat Hashem* begins not with imitation, but with truth.

Hashem does not ask us to become someone else. He asks us to become the fullest version of ourselves. The real question of Elul is therefore not: *"Why am I not like another person?"* Rather: *"Am I becoming who I am capable of being?"*

When a person serves Hashem with sincerity and self-awareness, every small act becomes infinitely precious. The gates of the soul begin to open, and the internal judges and officers guide a person toward clarity, growth, and closeness to Hashem.

May we merit during the days leading up to the *Yamim Noraim* to establish true *judges and officers* within ourselves, to recognize our unique mission, and to stand before Hashem not as imitations of others, but as the people we were created to become. ■

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With clarity and confidence, Reb Hersch declared, "My father was a simple tailor and as he was *niftar* when I was a child, I sadly do not have many memories of him. One thing I do remember is that he taught me a fundamental rule of tailoring: It's never too

late to fix what you've sewn. If you sew the wrong stitch, you can always take it out and start again."

When the Rhizner heard the words of his new *mechutan*, he began to cry, "Gevalt is your *yichus* great!".....

Our *sedra* lays out the mitzvot associated with anointing a king in Israel, and details the limitations placed on his personal life so that he will maintain perspective while ascending the royal throne. He is not to acquire too many horses, excessive gold and silver, nor a multitude of wives; he is commanded to write and carry with him a personal Sefer Torah, as a constant reminder "*l'vilti rum levavo m'echav* — so that his heart will not be haughty over his brothers" (17:15-20). Though specifically directed toward the King, this mitzvah is an important directive and reminder for all of us regarding a most basic and fundamental in our *avodas Hashem*: maintaining genuine humility, and cultivating a sincere, deep respect for one another.

This Shabbos marks the start of Chodesh Elul, our formal entry into the *Yemei HaTeshuva*, the auspicious days leading up to the New Year, when each of us in our own way is thinking about the 'garments' we need to fix.

On Rosh Chodesh Elul, a sign would hang at the entrance of the Beis Medrash in Kelm, Lithuania: *Achdus ha'avadim hi kiyum haMalchus* – "The Kingdom is upheld by the unity of the servants." This important reminder comes at a time when personal introspection and our own individual growth is at the forefront of our minds. It directs our focus and intention

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toward one another. While reaffirming Hashem as the center of our existence, we recognize that the ultimate coronation of HaKadosh Baruch Hu as our King is only possible when we are all together: *Vayehi b'Yeshurun Melech, b'hitaseif rashei am, yachad shivtei Yisrael* — “Then He became King in Jeshurun, when the heads of the People assembled, the tribes of Israel together” (Devarim, 33:5).

Dovid HaMelech's prayer in Sefer Tehillim (119:63), *Chaver ani l'chol asher yorucha* — “I am a friend to all who fear You” is seemingly not just a self-description expressing his yearning to be a ‘friend’ of all those who strive to live with awareness of Hashem, but is also a directive and plea. He is instructing us in how we ought to see others, and also pleading with us to be open to others' different opinions and ways. We actually have much in common. Regardless of where we are from, where we are up to and how we got to where we are, we are united in our longing for a deeper connection to the Ribbono shel Olam. There is an essential friendship among all who seek to live with a conscious awareness of God.

May this month be one of new beginnings for us all in deepening our appreciation and respect for one another, and in serving Hashem together, from all our unique vantage points and perspectives. May Hashem's Kingdom be upheld by the unity of His servants,

now and in the coming year!

.....
*Excerpt from **Baderech: Along the Path of the Torah**, forthcoming (Mosaica Press, Elul 5786) ■*

Rav Judah Mischel is executive director of Camp HASC, the Hebrew Academy for Special Children. He is the founder of Tzama Nafshi and the author of the “Baderech” series. Rav Judah lives in Ramat Beit Shemesh with his wife Ora and their family.

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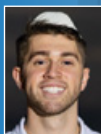
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SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR
DIRECTOR, TORAH INITIATIVES,
OU ISRAEL

Shoftim V'Shotrim Titein Lecha B'Chol Shaarecha- Judges and officers shall you place at all your gateways.

The **Netivot Shalom, the Slonimer Rebbe zy'a** offers a novel interpretation of our *pasuk*. Each *Rosh Chodesh* represents a new gateway, a new path to experience growth in our *Avodat HaShem*. So one might come to ask, what are the specific concepts and ideals we must work on during this month of *Elul*, during these days leading up to *Rosh HaShana*?

In *Likutei Torah*, **Rebbe Shneur Zalman M'Liadi, zy"a**, describes these days of *Elul* with the following parable. Throughout the year, a King sits in his royal palace and his many loyal subjects wait with trepidation for opportunities when the palace might be open for special occasions and celebrations, where the kingdom's constituents might catch a glimpse of or receive a brief word of encouragement from their beloved King. But during this month of *Elul*, the king departs from the palace and visits the fields. There in the fields, the King is accessible, clearly present, and approachable as he interacts and mingles among all those who are in the field.

The **Lubavitcher Rebbe zy'a**, elaborates further on this well known parable. Yes it may be true, that during these days of *Elul*, the *melech* is more clearly present among us, and

may seem more accessible to us. However, the Rebbe asks the question, if the King shows up in the fields, do his constituents continue to plow and work the land, do they continue uninterrupted with their regular conduct, or do they pause, and recognize and acknowledge that indeed the King has graced us with his presence right here among us in the fields? During these days of *Elul*, do we simply carry on with the status quo, with business as usual, or do we see these days as an opportunity to greet and show honor to our King, even as he meets us on our proverbial home turf?

Rebbe Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov, the Bnai Yissascher zy'a, suggests that the words *bchol shaarecha- all your gateways*. is alluding to the seven openings in a person's face- two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and our mouths. It is through these openings that most of our senses are manifest and activated. Our verse, explains the *Bnai Yissascher*, is teaching us the importance of safeguarding and protecting how we use each of our senses-what images we might look at, what type of speech we might choose to listen to, what foods we might smell and taste, how we use our capacity to speak-each of these senses can be used for great good, or can be misused for harm.

The **Chidushei HaRim, the first Gerrer Rebbe zy'a**, adds that the *pasuk* continues *Shoftim V'Shotrim Titein Lecha B'Chol Shaarecha-asher Hashem Elokecha Notein Lecha* - if one would only realize that all our capabilities and strength, all *bracha* that comes into our lives, is indeed a gift from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, then of course we will use those gifts to elevate



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Aliza Meira's Bat Mitzvah, this Shabbat



ourselves, and to elevate our surroundings.

Reb Simcha Bunim MiPischiska zy'a, sees our verse as a warning for each of us to be cautious and guarded in how we perceive others' actions, and to always judge our fellow favorably. If it appears to us that our friend or neighbor is engaged in some sort of inappropriate action or activity, we must take it as a sign that we need to reflect and look inward, and assess if all our own actions are up to par!

As we enter into this incredible month of **Ehul**, may each of us be blessed to embody these beautiful ideas, and reach great heights in our **Avodat Hashem**.

Chodesh Tov! ■

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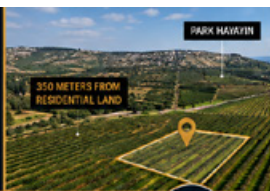


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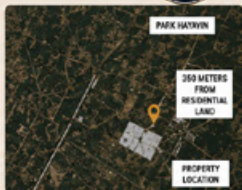
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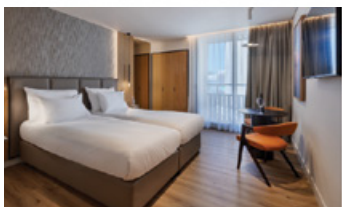
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Rav Zalman Nechemia Goldberg zt"l on Gelatin

This week, we celebrate Rosh Chodesh Elul, which is also the *yahrzeit* of my Rebbe and mentor, Hagaon Harav Zalman Nechemia Goldberg zt"l.

Not a day goes by without Am Yisrael feeling the absence of Rav Zalman Nechemia's presence. Beyond the thousands of in-depth shiurim he delivered, his extraordinary intellect and profound knowledge of Torah made him one of the greatest Torah scholars and halachic authorities of his generation.

Rav Zalman Nechemia was the epitome of a righteous Rav and leader. His incredible depth in Torah enabled him to become one of the most sought-after *dayanim* of his time and to serve as a halachic authority on some of the most difficult and complex questions of the last several generations.

Yet, despite having every reason to take pride in his accomplishments, Rav Zalman Nechemia was among the humblest of people. He never dismissed anyone. He would answer questions from anyone who approached him

and taught in dozens of *yeshivot* and *kollelim*, regardless of political affiliation, the number of participants, or their level of scholarship.

All of this stemmed from the Rav's remarkable *Yirat Shamayim* and genuine devotion to Torah. Rav Zalman Nechemia never sought political influence, recognition, or rabbinic honor. His greatness came from a completely different place. He saw himself as someone whose responsibility was to pass the wisdom of Torah and the way of life of mitzvot on to the next generation.

The following discussion on the halachic status of gelatin is one of the many important teachings of Rav Zalman Nechemia in the field of Kashrut.

GELATIN IN FOODS

Although there is a constant shift in food production away from animal-based ingredients, certain animal-derived ingredients remain fundamental to modern food manufacturing. One of the most common exam-

ples is gelatin.

Gelatin is a clear, flavorless protein used primarily as a gelling, stabilizing, and thickening agent. It is found in a wide variety of foods, including marshmallows, gummy candies, ice cream, yogurt, desserts, and many other products.

Gelatin is produced from collagen. Although collagen can also be derived from certain plant or fish sources, the overwhelming majority of conventional gelatin has



Rabbi Zalman
Nechemia Goldberg zt"l



historically been produced from the skin, bones, and connective tissues of animals, particularly cattle and pigs.

From a Kashrut perspective, this creates an obvious concern. If gelatin is produced from non-kosher animals, or from animals that were not slaughtered according to halacha, the source material itself is not kosher.

Gelatin has been used in culinary and food production for well over 100 years, and throughout the generations, many of the greatest halachic authorities have addressed the question of its kosher status.

THE SOURCE OF THE DISPUTE

Early forms of gelatin were produced from animal bones left over after the processing of meat. The halachic discussion therefore focused on the status of bones from non-kosher animals or from animals that had not been properly slaughtered.

On the one hand, there is an explicit discussion in the *Gemara* (*Chullin* 77b) indicating that while the meat of a non-kosher or improperly slaughtered animal is prohibited, certain parts of the animal, including its skin and bones, may not have the same status as the meat itself.

On the other hand, another discussion in the *Gemara* (*Chullin* 117b) appears to indicate that there is at least a rabbinic prohibition concerning the consumption of bones from a non-kosher source.

This leads to an important question: What type of bones are we discussing? Is there a difference between hard bones and soft bones? What about bones that contain edible

marrow? And does the halachic status change depending on whether the bones themselves are normally considered edible?

The Two Opinions

Responsa *Achiezer* (3:33), however, brings proof that there is a distinction between hard and soft bones. Hard bones have no prohibition in themselves. One indication of this is the *Gemara's* discussion regarding the nullification of non-kosher meat that becomes mixed with kosher food. The volume of the bones can be included in calculating the volume of the mixture, indicating that hard bones do not have the same status as prohibited food.

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Soft bones, however, may be subject to a rabbinic prohibition.

This understanding resolves the apparent contradiction between the different sources in the Talmud. Based on this approach, the *Achiezer* and other authorities permitted gelatin produced from hard bones. See also *Chazon Yechezkel, Zevachim* 5.

The *Pri Megadim* (YD 87:22), however, and other authorities understood the matter differently. According to their approach, both hard and soft bones are prohibited.

They understand the *Rambam* as ruling that bones, although not normally considered edible, are still part of the prohibited animal and therefore retain the prohibited status of the animal. Since bones are not ordinarily considered food, however, the prohibition may be only rabbinic in nature.

RAV ZALMAN NECHEMIA'S INSIGHT

Although many later authorities discuss the distinction between hard and soft bones, the *Shulchan Aruch* (YD 99:1) rules that bones from a non-kosher animal, or from an animal that was not properly slaughtered, may be included in the calculation when determining whether a mixture has become nullified.

At first glance, this would seem to indicate that the *Shulchan Aruch* considers bones to have a prohibited status, regardless of their source.

Rav Ovadia Yosef, in *Responsa Yabia Omer* (8:11), cites this ruling as evidence that the *Shulchan Aruch* would nevertheless permit gelatin produced from non-kosher animal bones.

Rav Zalman Nechemia, however, pointed out an apparent contradiction within the rulings of the *Shulchan Aruch*.

In *Yoreh Deah* 87:7, the *Shulchan Aruch* rules that when bones from meat are cooked

together with milk, there is a rabbinic prohibition against consuming the mixture because the bones themselves have a prohibited status.

How, then, can the *Shulchan Aruch* allow bones to be included in the calculation of a mixture in one context while treating those same bones as prohibited in another?

Rav Zalman Nechemia offered a unique insight to resolve this apparent contradiction.

He explained this through the halachic concept of *Achshevei*. *Achshevei* refers to a situation in which something that is ordinarily considered inedible, insignificant, or unfit for consumption is nevertheless intentionally treated as food by a particular person. By doing so, that person gives the item halachic significance.

A classic example is chametz on Pesach. If a person were to consume chametz that had become completely rotten and would normally be considered inedible, but that individual nevertheless considered it edible and ate it, the concept of *Achshevei* can give the item significance for that person and result in a prohibition of consuming it.

Rav Zalman Nechemia used this concept to explain the seemingly contradictory rulings of the *Shulchan Aruch*.

When discussing the inclusion of bones in the calculation of a mixture, the *Shulchan Aruch* is dealing with a situation in which the bones entered the mixture inadvertently. Since bones are not normally considered food, they can be included in the calculation and help determine whether the prohibited substance has been nullified.

In *Yoreh Deah* 87, however, the case is different. There, a person intentionally cooks the bones together with milk. Because the person specifically chooses to use the bones as part

of the food, the bones become *Achshevei*—they are being treated as food and therefore acquire halachic significance.

According to Rav Zalman Nechemia, this distinction creates a significant concern regarding gelatin.

Gelatin is not produced from animal bones accidentally or incidentally. The bones are specifically selected and processed for the purpose of producing an ingredient that will be used as food. The entire purpose of the manufacturing process is to extract the collagen and transform it into a usable food ingredient.

Therefore, the concept of *Achshevei* becomes highly relevant. Since the bones are intentionally being used to produce a food ingredient, they acquire the status of something significant and edible. According to this approach, gelatin produced from non-kosher bones would remain prohibited, even if the original bones themselves might otherwise have been considered inedible.

This provides an important insight into the halachic discussion surrounding gelatin and demonstrates how the practical realities of modern food production can affect the application of established halachic principles.

ON A PERSONAL NOTE

I had the tremendous *zechut* to have a special relationship with Rav Zalman Nechemia Goldberg. To me, he represented the ideal combination of a true Torah giant and a profoundly pious and humble individual.

His depth and genius in Torah were simply beyond comprehension. Yet, at the same time, his simplicity and genuine humility were apparent in his every action. Despite his extraordinary stature, he never made a person feel insignificant or unworthy of his time.

Rav Zalman Nechemia dedicated his life to

teaching authentic, in-depth Torah to anyone who wished to learn. His Torah was not merely about knowledge. He taught a way of thinking, a way of living, and a way of approaching the responsibility of a Torah Jew.

His teachings and his Torah perspective will continue to echo through generations. Although his physical presence is deeply missed by Am Yisrael, the Torah that he taught continues to live through his students and through everyone who was fortunate enough to learn from him.

May we be worthy of continuing his legacy for generations to come.

Zecher Tzaddik Livracha! ■

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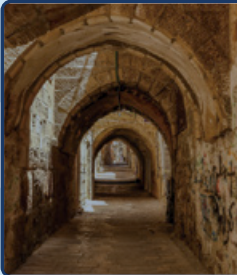
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“Tamim te’hiyeh im Hashem Elokecha— Be wholehearted with Hashem, your God.” (*Devarim* 18:13) Rashi: “Conduct yourself with Him with simplicity and depend on Him, and do not inquire of the future.” The Torah prohibits, as we see in the next verses, seeking out those who may predict one’s circumstances or fate.

Unlike the Rambam, who does not count this directive as one of the 613 mitzvot, the Ramban does count this as a mitzvah. He interprets this to mean that one must believe that Hashem is the source of all that happens, and we may only seek direction for the future from His true prophets. The Ramban further notes that even if such predictions come true, one must know that anything can change, as one’s personal situation is dependent on his relationship with Hashem.

Rav Yisrael Weintraub zt”l understands a fundamental principle from Ramban’s teaching. Even if one’s mazal is predicted in the stars, for example, teshuvah and tefillah can dramatically change the reality. Such is the way that Hashem designed this world. This mitzvah commands us to believe with certainty that our behavior and actions carry

significance and can impact our future story to the degree that we invest in our *avodat Hashem* and see ourselves as part of the cosmic Oneness.

A story is told that Rav Elya Lopian zt”l was asked to visit someone in Yerushalayim who was known to predict the future. Rav Lopian refused, stating that although right now this person may know what will happen, if one changes his course, then the outcome changes as well. “Teshuvah tefillah and tzedakah can offset a terrible decree,” empowers us to participate in the Divine scheme.



Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Hillel

Rav Yaakov Hillel strongly discourages soliciting advice from those who purport to tell one’s future by reading palms, mezuzot, or ketubot. He warns against putting one’s faith in *segulot* or *kamayyas* that have

no basis in Torah Judaism. Human nature is drawn toward a feeling of control—control of one’s circumstances and control of one’s destiny. Ironically, the only way to do this is by surrendering this desire and relying completely on Hashem and aligning oneself with His Will.

Other commentators find a different message within this verse. Chazal teach us that one who has what to eat today and is worried about what he will eat tomorrow is of limited faith. This applies to spiritual aspirations as well. If one dreams of building a Torah institution or investing in a Torah project, he should pursue it with the utmost confidence

that Hashem will help him achieve his vision regardless of his present situation. This too, is a manifestation of complete trust in Hashem, that He will help those who act on His behalf.

“*Tamim te'hiyeh*” requires that we believe Hashem is all powerful and can make anything happen. It also teaches us that nothing is “set in stone;” the more regulated we are with Divine Oneness, the more we aim to come close to Hashem, the more we can shift the course of events. ■

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Democracy in a Redeemed World

Parshat Shoftim portrays the political and judicial infrastructure of life in Eretz Yisrael. It describes a network of courts established to adjudicate legal disputes and administer justice. Alongside the conventional judicial system, the Kohanim maintained their own courts, presumably to oversee matters relating to the purity of the Mikdash and korbanot.

The Sanhedrin HaGedolah was far more than our highest court of judicial appeal. Especially before Torah sheba'al peh was committed to writing, it served as the conduit through which the masorah was transmitted. As the Rambam writes in Hilchot Mamrim 1:1:

בית דין הגדול שבירושלים הם עיקר תורה שבעל פה, והם עמודי ההוראה, ומהם חוק ומשפט יוצא לכל ישראל.



Rav Abraham
Isaac Kook zt"l

“The Great Court in Jerusalem is the foundation of the Oral Torah. They are the pillars of halachic instruction, and from them law and justice go forth to all Israel.”

Denying the authority of the Sanhedrin threatened the integrity and legitimacy of the Torah sheba'al peh. This is why a zaken mamre—a member of the Sanhedrin who openly defies its rulings—is punished so severely. His rebellion is more than a personal act of dissent. By rejecting the authority of the institution entrusted with transmitting the masorah, he undermines the foundation of Torah shebe'al peh.

APPOINTING A KING

After establishing the judicial framework of a Jewish state, the Torah turns to the institution of monarchy. The Torah appears to command the appointment of a king, and the Rambam indeed counts this as a positive mitzvah (Sefer HaMitzvot, Aseh 173; Hilchot Melachim 1:1). Yet the Torah carefully circumscribes the king's authority. He may not marry too many wives, acquire too many horses, or excessively amass silver and gold. These limitations are meant to preserve his humility despite the immense power vested in him.

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SHMUEL'S RESERVATIONS

Yet when the time actually arrives to appoint a king, Shmuel HaNavi is far less enthusiastic. He warns that a king may abuse his authority, conscript the nation's children for his own service, and seize their property for personal gain:

אֶת בְּנֵיהֶם יִקַּח, וְשָׂם לוֹ בַּמִּרְכָּבָתוֹ וּבַפָּרָשָׁיו, וְרָצוּ לִפְנֵי מִרְכָּבָתוֹ. וְלָשׁוּם לוֹ שָׂרֵי אֲלָפִים וְשָׂרֵי חֲמִשִּׁים, וְלִחְרֹשׁ חֲרִישׁוֹ וְלִקְצֹר קִצִּירוֹ, וְלַעֲשׂוֹת כְּלֵי מִלְחָמָתוֹ וְכָלֵי רֶכֶב. וְאֶת בְּנוֹתֵיהֶם יִקַּח לְרִקְחוֹת וּלְטִבְחוֹת וּלְאִפּוֹת. וְאֶת שְׂדוֹתֵיהֶם וְאֶת כְּרָמֵיהֶם וְזֵיתֵיהֶם, הַטֹּבִים יִקַּח וְנָתַן לַעֲבָדָיו.

“He will take your sons and assign them to his chariots and cavalry... He will take your daughters... He will take your best fields, vineyards, and olive groves and give them to his servants.” (I Samuel 8:11–14)

Hashem likewise expresses disappointment with the people's request:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל שְׁמוּאֵל, שָׁמַע בְּקוֹל הָעָם לְכָל אֲשֶׁר יֹאמְרוּ אֵלַיךְ, כִּי לֹא אֶתָּךְ מָצֵאוּ, כִּי אֹתִי מָצְאוּ מִמֶּלֶךְ עֲלֵיהֶם...

“Listen to the people... for it is not you whom they have rejected, but Me they have rejected from reigning over them.” (I Samuel 8:7–8)

Shmuel's response casts a shadow over what appears in Parshat Shoftim to be a mitzvah.

Most famously, the Abarbanel disagrees with the Rambam and based largely on the account in Shmuel I argues that appointing a king is not a mitzvah but merely a concession. The Torah is simply establishing the legal framework should we choose to create a monarchy.

Either way, Shmuel's pessimistic prediction proved all too accurate. The First Mikdash period was marred by wayward kings who embraced idolatry, persecuted the prophets,

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and murdered those who challenged their authority. With only a handful of exceptions, the monarchy was marked by corruption and spiritual decline, ultimately leading to the destruction of the First Mikdash.

The monarchy during the Second Temple period fared little better. The Hasmonean dynasty, despite its heroic beginnings, eventually became consumed by political rivalries, dynastic struggles, and violence. The reign of Alexander Yannai was especially turbulent, culminating in a bloody civil war that claimed thousands of Jewish lives. The history of Jewish monarchy is therefore far from an unbroken story of noble and righteous kings.

Nor was this pattern unique to Jewish history. Across much of human history, concentrating absolute power in the hands of a single ruler repeatedly bred corruption, oppression, and violence. Monarchs curtailed personal liberties, waged wars for their own glory, and diverted national wealth for personal ambition and luxury.

THE DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

With the rise of democracy in the eighteenth century, the political landscape changed dramatically. Power was no longer concentrated in the hands of a single ruler, and the rights of individuals were no longer dependent upon the caprice of an absolute monarch. Democracy promised a better world, one in which

citizens would enjoy equal protection under the law, choose their leaders through elections, and preserve human dignity through constitutional rights and personal freedoms. Though democracy emerged from Western political thought rather than Torah, it reflected a growing appreciation that every human being possesses inherent dignity because each person is created b'tzelem Elokim.

Democracy also unleashed human creativity and initiative. Together with the rise of capitalism, it created unprecedented opportunities for people to develop their abilities, build businesses, accumulate wealth, and improve their standard of living. The resulting advances in science, technology, medicine, and industry reshaped the modern world. Although poverty has by no means disappeared, much of the developed world has been spared the chronic starvation and extreme deprivation that plagued earlier centuries.

For the Jewish people, democracy transformed Jewish life. For the first time in centuries, we were granted freedom of worship and permitted to practice our religion without systematic discrimination or legal restriction. Those freedoms enabled the remarkable flourishing of Torah study, religious observance, and Jewish communal life.

Whether the Rambam or the Abarbanel was correct, history appears to have vindicated the Abarbanel. Humanity in general, and the Jewish people in particular, have fared far better under democratic systems than under monarchy.

DEMOCRACY AND REDEMPTION

This raises the broader question of how we view democracy as we return to Jewish sovereignty and begin the process of redemption. Now that we have reestablished a Jewish state in our homeland, how should we regard

democracy? We certainly do not view it as the final stage of Jewish political history. Each day we pray for the restoration of the Davidic monarchy:

אַתָּה צֶמַח דָּוִד עֶבְדְּךָ מְהֵרָה תִצְמַח, וְקִרְנֵנו תְּרוֹם בְּיִשׁוּעָתְךָ.

How, then, should we understand the rise of democracy within the unfolding process of Jewish redemption?

First, we should welcome the fact that, at this stage of history, we are able to build a state founded upon fairness, equality, and the rule of law. Rav Kook argued somewhat provocatively, that our return to Eretz Yisrael was delayed until humanity had developed a form of government that more closely reflected the Torah's ideals of ethical governance. Had we returned a thousand years earlier, we would almost certainly have restored a monarchy. Yet the prevailing models of monarchy were so corrupt and abusive that we would have struggled to build a Jewish state faithful to the Torah's moral vision.

Whether or not one fully accepts Rav Kook's historical thesis, his broader insight remains compelling. History itself had to mature before the process of redemption could resume. It is profoundly meaningful that we have been granted the opportunity to rebuild a Jewish state upon principles of justice, fairness, and equality.

We should cherish and value the democratic system, which has contributed so much to human welfare and has benefited the Jewish people so dramatically. We should appreciate the opportunity to rebuild Jewish sovereignty in a manner that upholds human dignity and protects basic rights and freedoms.

A JEWISH STATE AND A DEMOCRATIC STATE

At the same time, democracy is not our ultimate ideal. In recent decades we have

witnessed how political polarization can paralyze democratic institutions and fracture society. We have also seen the difficulty democracies often face in preserving a coherent national identity amid increasingly fragmented political cultures. Democracy remains the finest system of government humanity has developed thus far, but it is far from perfect. As we continue rebuilding Jewish sovereignty, we should cherish democracy and preserve it carefully, while never allowing it to displace the greater mission of building a Jewish state that reflects Torah values.

Even if democracy had no shortcomings, it would still not represent the culmination of Jewish political destiny. As we rebuild Jewish sovereignty, we should value democracy deeply without mistaking it for our ultimate political ideal.

We are often confronted with the question of whether Israel should be a Jewish state or a democratic state. In the overwhelming majority of cases, these two values can be reconciled. Yet our higher aspiration is to build a Jewish state infused with Jewish spirituality and, ultimately, religious purpose. Democracy, fairness, and the rule of law are the means through which we seek to achieve that goal, but they are not the goal itself.

THE MONARCHY OF REDEMPTION

The problem was never monarchy itself. It was entrusting unchecked political power to ordinary human beings. Democracy succeeds because it begins with a sober assessment of human nature and therefore disperses authority among multiple institutions. The monarchy of the future will succeed for the opposite reason. It will emerge in a redeemed world transformed by the unmistakable presence of Hashem.

The restored Davidic king will not resemble

the corrupt monarchs of history. His authority will be naturally restrained by his fear of Heaven and by a world in which the Divine Presence is manifest. Rather than directing attention to himself, he will serve as the earthly representative of Hashem's kingship.

Judaism has never viewed politics as an end in itself. Every political system is merely a vessel through which Hashem's presence becomes more visible in human history. Democracy protects the dignity of man because every person is created b'tzelem Elokim. The restored Davidic monarchy will reveal something even greater—that political authority itself exists only to reflect the kingship of Hashem.

וְהָיָה ה' לְמֶלֶךְ עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ; בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִהְיֶה ה' אֶחָד וְשֵׁמוֹ אֶחָד.

Until that day arrives, democracy remains the finest political system humanity has devised. We should cherish it, protect it, and strengthen it. Yet we also recognize that it is not the culmination of Jewish political destiny. It is the finest vessel history has yet produced for rebuilding Jewish sovereignty until the world is ready for the perfect kingship of Hashem. ■



Rabbi Moshe Taragin's latest sefer entitled: **Reclaiming Redemption, Vol. II: Faith, Identity, Peoplehood, and the Storms of War**, is available at: mtaraginbooks.com.

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Climbing the Ladder of Redemption

YESHAYAHU 51:12–52:12

What does it mean to wait for redemption? Is waiting an act of patience, or does it demand something from us?

Our Haftorah offers consolation to a nation that has endured exile and suffering. Hashem promises that the oppression will end, the captives will be released, and Yerushalayim will be restored. Yet embedded within these promises is a striking series of commands:

הַתְּעוֹרְרִי הַתְּעוֹרְרִי — Awaken, awaken.

עוֹרִי עוֹרִי — Arise, arise.

הַתְּנַעֲרִי מִפֶּחַר — Shake yourself free from the dust.

קוּמִי שְׁבִי יְרוּשָׁלַם — Rise and take your place, Yerushalayim.

הַתְּפַתְּחִי מִזְרָרְךָ — Release the bonds from your neck.

These phrases form a kind of ladder.

Yerushalayim moves from sleep to wakefulness, from the dust to an upright position, and from captivity to freedom. Redemption is not described as a single dramatic leap. It unfolds step by step.

But the Malbim adds a profound dimension to this progression. Earlier, in the previous perek, the Jewish people cry out: עוֹרִי עוֹרִי לְבָשִׁי, עוֹרִי עוֹרִי ה', *Awaken, awaken, arm of Hashem!* (Yeshayahu 51:9) We call upon Hashem to awaken, to reveal His strength, and to intervene in history. But in our Haftorah, Hashem turns those very words back toward us: עוֹרִי עוֹרִי לְבָשִׁי, עוֹרִי עוֹרִי, *Awaken, awaken; put on your strength, O Zion.* (Yeshayahu 52:1)

The Malbim explains Hashem's response: "You awaken; the matter depends upon you." We ask Hashem to awaken — and Hashem tells us to awaken. Hashem is, of course, the Redeemer. The Haftorah repeatedly assures us that He will comfort His people and restore Yerushalayim. But redemption does not leave us entirely passive. Hashem's promise calls for a human response. We must awaken, shake off the dust, rise, and release the bonds that hold us back.

Each rung of the ladder requires movement. First, we must awaken enough to recognize that change is possible. Then we must shake off the accumulated weight of disappointment, fear, and spiritual exhaustion. We must rise from the ground and begin to loosen the bonds that keep us tied to a galus identity.

These words are deeply familiar because they became part of the song with which we

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welcome Shabbos each week. *Lecha Dodi* does not merely describe a future redemption. It trains us to become ready for it. Every Friday night, we rehearse the movements of the Haftorah: awaken, shake off the dust, rise, and free ourselves from what holds us down. Before welcoming the Shabbos bride, we remind ourselves that renewal requires both Divine promise and human response. We do not merely wait for Shabbos to transform us; we prepare ourselves to receive it.

Perhaps this is also how we must wait for redemption. We pray for Hashem to awaken His strength, but we must be prepared to hear His answer: *אֵת עוֹרִי* — You awaken. Take the next step. Loosen one bond. Shake off some of the dust. Recover the strength that has always been yours.

Redemption begins with Hashem’s promise, but it advances when we begin to climb. ■

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Lifted Up: The Deeper Meaning of Morning Hand Washing

When the Kaliver Rebbetzin finally arrived at Bergen-Belsen after the six-week-long, torturous death march, she was barely alive. She was starving, weak, feverish, and her hand was badly infected from a terrible wound. One morning, she was rationed a small cup of black coffee. As she lifted the cup to her lips, she suddenly thought, "What am I doing? Is this going to be the last thing I do before I meet my Creator?" She desperately wanted to perform one more mitzvah before she died.

She hobbled over to an open window, held the coffee in one hand, and used the other to perform *Negel Vasser* (morning hand-washing), a mitzvah she had not been able to perform in months. As she washed her hands, she thought, "Father in Heaven, I want to come home to You as pure and untainted as You sent me down here." At that moment, something

incredible happened. She suddenly felt new strength and energy flowing through her body. Her infected hand began to heal, even though she had no medicine, no doctor, and no way to treat the wound. The Kaliver Rebbetzin knew that she had been given another chance at life.

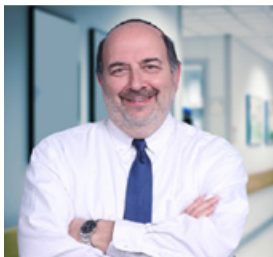
What was it about this particular mitzvah that made it so meaningful to her? And what is the deeper significance of *Netilat Yadayim*, the washing of our hands each morning?

One of the first brachot we recite each morning is *Al Netilat Yadayim*. As soon as we wake up, we wash our hands and recite this bracha before beginning our day. Often, we may be half-asleep, stumbling over to the sink without giving much thought to what we are doing. But if we take a moment to understand the deeper significance of this mitzvah, perhaps we can transform this simple morning ritual into a meaningful reminder of our purpose and carry that awareness with us throughout the day.

The Rishonim offer two primary reasons for this mitzvah.

The **Rosh** gives a practical, technical reason. While we sleep, our hands may have touched parts of the body that are normally covered. Before we daven or engage in matters of kedushah, our hands must therefore be washed. The **Zohar** adds that a רוח רעה (evil spirit)

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(a “spirit of impurity”) rests upon a person’s hands upon awakening, and Netilat Yadayim serves to remove it.

The **Rashba**, however, offers a more philosophical understanding. Every morning, Hashem grants us the gift of renewed life. We awaken as a בריה חדשה, a new creation. Each day is a fresh opportunity to dedicate ourselves to His service. Just as the Kohanim washed their hands and feet each morning before beginning the Avodah in the Beit HaMikdash, we begin our own daily Avodah by washing our hands and rededicating ourselves to serving Hashem.

This idea is reflected even in the name of the mitzvah. We recite the bracha על נטילת ידיים rather than על רחיצת ידיים. The root of the word netilah can be understood from Sefer Yeshayahu (63:9): וַיִּנָּשֵׂאם וַיְנַשֵּׂאם כָּל יְמֵי עוֹלָם — “Hashem lifted them up and carried them all the days of the world.” The Navi uses the word וַיִּנָּשֵׂאם to describe Hashem lifting and elevating Klal Yisrael. Chazal intentionally chose this same word for the mitzvah of washing our hands because its purpose is not merely physical cleansing. Through Netilat Yadayim, we symbolically lift up our hands, dedicating them to a higher purpose. Hashem elevates us from a purely physical existence to one of holiness and mission, and we respond by elevating our hands and all that they accomplish to His service.

Rav Shimshon Pincus, in *Nefesh Shimshon*, develops this idea beautifully. He explains that the first thing we say to Hashem each morning is, in essence: “*Ribbono Shel Olam, these hands are the central*

tools through which I act in this world. They enable me to fulfill my mission as one created בצלם אלוקים. Please help me sanctify them. Help me use them not to pursue my physical desires, but to accomplish Your will.”

As Rav Pincus writes:

מעשי ידי וכל מה שאני מקבל מהקב"ה וכל השפע לא נועד עבור התאוות... הכל נועד עבור 'נטילת ידיים'

Everything we receive from Hashem is not meant merely to satisfy our physical desires. It is all intended to be elevated and dedicated to His service.

Through Netilat Yadayim, we symbolically remove Tumaah and everything that distances us from Hashem. We lift up our hands, and our entire lives, to Kedusha. As Rav Pincus concludes: אנחנו וכל אשר לנו שייכים - We, and everything we possess, belong to Hashem and to a life of Kedushah.

How fitting that this is the very first bracha we recite each morning. Before we speak to



Al Netilat Yadayim

The **Rashba** teaches that each morning Hashem gives us renewed life, we awaken as a בריה חדשה, with a fresh opportunity to serve Him. Just as the Kohanim began their daily Avodah by washing their hands and feet, we begin our own daily Avodah with Netilat Yadayim.

Rav Shimshon Pincus explains that our hands are the tools through which we fulfill our mission as beings created בצלם אלוקים. By washing them each morning, we dedicate them, and all that we do, to Hashem.

Al Netilat Yadayim is therefore more than a morning ritual, it is a daily reminder to use our hands and our lives for Torah, mitzvot, and bringing kedushah into the world.



Cut and paste into your siddur

anyone else, before we begin our work or our responsibilities, we pause to remind ourselves why Hashem gave us these hands. They are not merely instruments with which to earn a living or care for our own needs. They are the tools through which we build Torah, perform mitzvot, help other people, and bring kedushah into the world.

And perhaps this is what made that moment so powerful for the Kaliver Rebbetzin. After months in which almost everything had been taken from her — her freedom, her possessions, her ability to live a normal Jewish life — she suddenly had the opportunity to perform one mitzvah. She lifted her hands, washed them, and dedicated them once again to Hashem.

Every morning, with the words על נטילת ידיים, we are given that same opportunity. We lift our hands, and with them, we recommit our entire lives to the service of Hashem. ■



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Avot 1:10: Rav Kook on Pirkei Avot The Magnificence of Work

**"Shemayah says: Love work..."
(Avot 1:10)**

Rashi explains that this mishnah emphasizes the importance of earning one's livelihood so that one does not become reliant on charity. One should therefore never regard any occupation as being "below one's dignity." The value of self-sufficiency and independence is held in the highest esteem by our sages.

Rav Kook, however, sees in this mishnah a far deeper message. Work is not merely a means of avoiding dependence on others. More profoundly, pursuing a profession is an integral part of discovering one's purpose in life, developing one's character, and cultivating one's spiritual well-being.

The profound significance of productive

labor is reflected in one of the Talmud's most remarkable statements:

"Greater is one who benefits from the toil of his own hands than one who possesses fear of Heaven (yirat Shamayim)." (Berachot 8a)

At first glance, this statement is astonishing. How can the Talmud place such extraordinary value on work, seemingly elevating it above even fear of Heaven?

Rav Kook explains that part of the answer lies in the concept of *nehama d'kisufa* (Aramaic: נהמא דכיסופא), commonly translated as the "Bread of Shame." This foundational idea in Jewish philosophy and Kabbalah describes the psychological and spiritual discomfort a person experiences when receiving unearned rewards or goodness without personal effort.

Human beings are created with an innate desire to earn rather than merely receive. We seek the dignity that comes from personal accomplishment and meaningful contribution. Therefore, Rav Kook explains that the Talmud praises the toil of one's own hands because a person naturally aspires to be self-sufficient rather than dependent upon the charity of others, even when those benefactors are fulfilling the heavenly mitzvah of giving *tzedakah*. (*Ein Ayah*, Berachot, piska 101.)

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Yet Rav Kook sees an even deeper dimension to this teaching. In his classic work *Ein Ayah*, he explains that the highest level a person can attain is the sense of accomplishment born from personal effort and achievement. Through disciplined effort, one experiences the satisfaction of self-actualization and the aspiration to attain greater *shelemut* (wholeness).

Consistent effort and honest labor cultivate self-respect and healthy self-esteem. More importantly, meaningful work becomes one of the primary avenues through which we fulfill our potential and bring forth our best selves. The essence of life lies in discovering one's unique mission and striving faithfully to fulfill it.

The benefits of meaningful work do not remain confined to one's professional life. A sense of accomplishment generates confidence, optimism, and purpose that naturally extend into other areas as well. The positive energy created through productive labor can deepen one's Torah study, enrich one's prayer, and inspire greater dedication to acts of kindness.

Fear of Heaven (*yirat Shamayim*) reflects a person's close relationship with God. Yet Rav Kook cautions that genuine fear of Heaven should never lead one to become overly reliant upon divine providence while neglecting the personal effort required to earn a livelihood and contribute productively to society.

Thus, "loving work" is far more than practical advice. It is a profound religious ideal. Through our labor, we not only sustain ourselves with dignity but also fulfill our God-given potential, refine our character, and become partners

with the Creator in perfecting His world.

ELEVATING A STREET CLEANER

Rav Aryeh Levin was renowned for extending the utmost honor to every individual, treating each person with exceptional dignity and recognizing their intrinsic worth. It was well known that the street cleaners of Jerusalem, whom Rav Aryeh encountered each day on his way to prayer, Torah study, and acts of kindness, could always count on receiving a warm greeting and a kind word from the saintly rabbi.

After Rav Aryeh passed away, one of the street cleaners who worked daily in the alleyways of his neighborhood was asked whether he had any memories of the "Tzaddik of Yerushalayim."

He replied that he vividly remembered Rav Aryeh warmly wishing him "Good morning" each day as he made his way to the synagogue.

He was then asked whether anything else about those encounters stood out in his memory.

"There was one morning in particular," the street cleaner recalled. "Rav Aryeh approached me and said, 'My dear friend, Reb Yehudah, I am envious of the important work you do each day.'

"I replied, 'How could you possibly be envious of me? You are a learned rabbi, while I am a simple street cleaner who sweeps up garbage and empties the bins each day.'

"Rav Aryeh stopped me and explained exactly what he meant. 'I am not sure you appreciate your true importance and merit. Trust me, your merits are greater than mine. You are cleaning the



Rabbi Aryeh Levin zt"l

sacred streets of Yerushalayim. You are helping perfect God's world. With your own hands, you make His creation cleaner and more beautiful. I am jealous of you!"

The street cleaner concluded with a moving reflection:

"When Rav Aryeh walked away, I stood there with my broom in one hand and my garbage can in the other. I felt something in my heart that I had never experienced before. For the first time in my life, I felt proud of my work, and, more importantly, proud of myself. I felt dignified and worthy."

This touching story beautifully illustrates Rav Aryeh Levin's profound wisdom. He understood that every honest occupation possesses inherent dignity because every person who labors faithfully contributes something of lasting value to God's world.

In this sense, Rav Aryeh gave a living

expression to Rav Kook's teaching. To "love work" is to recognize that our daily labor is not merely a way to earn a living. It is one of the primary ways we fulfill our unique mission, become partners with God in perfecting His world, and transform ordinary work into an act of sacred service. (*Derech Avot*, Sternberg, pp. 63–64.) ■



Rabbi Goldscheider's most recent OU Press Publication, "Torah United" on the weekly Parsha, can be ordered directly from Rabbi Goldscheider at aarong@ouisrael.org at a special price for Torah Tidbits readers.

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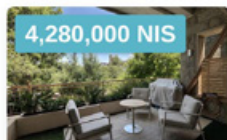
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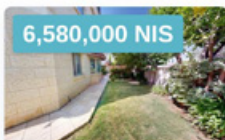


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מאיר יצחק בן יוסף אליהו הכהן ז"ל

Can I Set Up the Guy I Used to Date?

Naomi asks:

Hey, love your column! Weird question, but how can I contact someone I dated to set him up with a friend of mine? I feel so awkward, but I think it can be a match!

Aleeza answers:

The good news, this situation is usually far less awkward than we make it in our heads.

If you dated respectfully, and ended respectfully, there's nothing strange about reaching out. In fact, I'd consider it a compliment. You're essentially saying, "I don't think we're the right match, but I think highly enough of you that I'd introduce you to someone I care about."

That's a wonderful message to send.

If you're still feeling awkward, here are five ways to make it easier.

1. REMEMBER THAT YOU'RE OFFERING, NOT IMPOSING.

You're not asking him to marry your friend. You're simply asking whether he'd be open to hearing about someone you think could be a good fit. One introduction. That's all.

2. KEEP THE MESSAGE SHORT.

Don't over-explain or apologize for reaching out. A simple message works best: "Hi! I know this is a little unexpected, but someone came to mind that I think you might really enjoy meeting. If you're open, I'd love to tell you about her." That's it.

3. LEAVE THE PAST IN THE PAST.

There's no need to revisit your dating history together or explain why the two of you didn't work out. The conversation isn't about your relationship. It's about a possible new one.

4. CHECK YOUR MOTIVATION.

Ask yourself whether you're making the suggestion because you genuinely see compatibility or because you're trying to resolve unfinished feelings. If your only goal is to help two good people meet, you're on solid ground.

5. ACCEPT THAT "NO" IS A PERFECTLY GOOD ANSWER.

He may say yes. He may say no. He may already be dating someone. None of those responses make your outreach embarrassing. You offered an opportunity with kindness, and that's something to feel good about.

One of the things I love most about match-making is that it reminds us dating isn't just



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about finding our person. It's about building a community where introductions are normal, and people are looking out for one another.

So if your instinct is telling you they'd make a good match, embrace the awkwardness. Some of the best relationships begin because someone was willing to send one slightly uncomfortable text.

May Hashem give you the courage to make thoughtful introductions, and the joy of seeing your kindness become the beginning of someone's love story.

Blessings,
Aleeza. ■

♥

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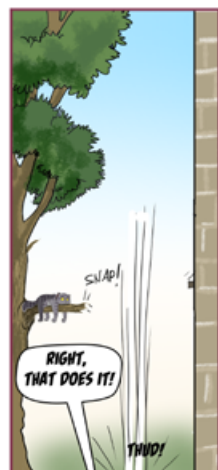
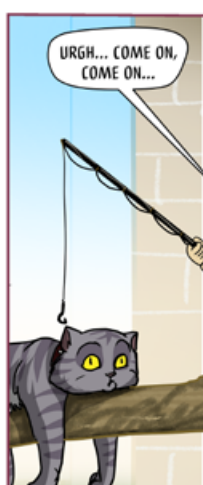
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THE POWER OF INFLUENCE

In this week's parsha, פרשת שופטים, Hashem commands Bnei Yisrael to destroy every single evil influence from other nations in order to prevent בני ישראל from adopting their sinful actions and behaviors.

The importance of removing evil influences on Bnei Yisrael is stated clearly in the pasuk
לִמְעַן אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִלְמְדוּ אֶתְכֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת כָּכָל תּוֹעֲבֹתָם
אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ לֵאלֹהֵיהֶם וְחָטְאוּתָם לָהּ אֲלֵכֶיכֶם:

Why does Hashem require complete destruction? Why can't Bnei Yisrael live beside them, each with their own beliefs and practices?

The Ramban states that even one עובד זרה living amongst them can influence the entire nation.

We learn from this just how powerful the people around us are. We can strive to do all the right things, but even a single negative influence in our environment can affect us

more than we realize.

The Ramchal, in Mesillat Yeshtarim, explains this idea of פרישות in depth. The thought that we can be surrounded by a certain atmosphere and not become part of that atmosphere is false. Often, the desires we have in life are a result of being surrounded by those things exactly.

Hashem is telling Bnei Yisrael to be very careful about who they allow to be their neighbors.

Today, most of us aren't surrounded by עבודה זרה, but we are surrounded by influences every single day. The friends we spend time with, the videos we watch, the music we listen to, and the people we choose to admire all shape the people we become. We often think we're strong enough not to be affected, but this commandment reminds us that our environment has an incredible impact on us, whether we realize it or not.

Our ultimate goal should be to surround ourselves with people who impact and uplift our lives, who push us to be kinder, more honest, and more connected to Torah and mitzvot.



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JUDGES AND OFFICERS

At the beginning of Parshat Shoftim, the Torah says:

שופטים ושוטרים תתן לך בכל שעריך - "You shall appoint judges and officers for yourself in all your gates"

At first, this command brings up a question. If we already have judges who decide what is right and wrong, why does the Torah need to add another role? What can officers contribute that judges cannot?

Rashi explains that the officers were responsible for carrying out the decisions of the judges. The judges determined the ruling, while the officers made sure that it was followed.

This teaches us a deeper idea about justice.

A correct decision is important, but it is only the beginning. Justice cannot remain only as an idea; it needs people who are willing to take responsibility and make sure it happens.

The Torah's message goes beyond the role of judges and officers. A community does not become better just because people know what is right. It improves when people are willing to stand behind those values and act on them.

The same idea applies to each of us. Many times, we know the right thing to do, but the challenge is following through. The Torah reminds us that having good values is important, but turning them into actions is what allows those values to truly make an impact. ■

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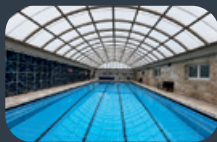
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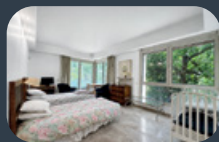
Swimming Pool



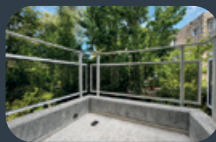
SWIMMING POOL



SWIMMING POOL



OVERSIZED MASTER BR



SUCCAH BALCONY

OVERVIEW

230 sqm+ on one level, this elegant 5-room apartment offers 3 bedroom en-suites, including a double-sized primary suite, plus a family room / study that may serve as a 4th bedroom. Spacious living and dining area, floor-to-ceiling windows, green views, separate kitchen, 2 balconies, 2 parking spaces, storage rooms and full accessibility. 24/7 concierge, swimming pool, gym, tenants room, security, Miklat

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The New Olga Beach, Hadera, Israel

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