

PERSPECTIVES

ISSUE 23 | ROSH HASHANAH 5786 | SEPTEMBER 2025

The magazine of
**jewish
futures**



HIGH HOLY DAYS

Micro-Resolutions &
Mindful Preparations

EXCLUSIVES

Rabbi Doron Perez,
Rachie Shnay & More

INTENTION

Direction, Conflict
& Connection



DAN ACCADIA

TIMELESS RESORT

Experience a New Chapter in Mediterranean Luxury

Dan Accadia Resort
unveils its breathtaking transformation.

Overlooking the stunning coastline of Herzliya, just 15 minutes from Tel Aviv, Dan Accadia Resort unveils a new era of luxury hospitality with our exquisitely renovated CHALET complex and comprehensive resort enhancements.

SHANA TOVA



FOR RESERVATION AND INFORMATION
1-800-223-7775 OR WWW.DANHOTELS.COM

E·DAN Members Club
MAKE EVERY MOMENT COUNT

Join E-DAN club for free and get 8% discount off



Experience
The Best

King David, Jerusalem | Dan Jerusalem | Dan Panorama Jerusalem | Dan Boutique Jerusalem | Dan Eilat | Dan Panorama Eilat
Neptune Eilat | Dan Tel Aviv | Dan Panorama Tel Aviv | Link hotel & hub TLV | Dan Accadia Resort | Dan Caesarea Resort
Dan Carmel Haifa | Dan Panorama Haifa | Ruth Safed | Mary's Well Nazareth | The Den Bengaluru



DEAR READERS,

Welcome to the 23rd edition of *Perspectives* for the High Holy Days, a season of reflection and renewal. Our theme this time is *kavana*: intention, direction and purpose—a word that doesn't just ask what we do, but how and why. Through these pages, we explore what it means to live and lead with clarity, conviction and a deep grounding in timeless values, acting with conscience and navigating complexity with integrity.

Following a thought-provoking exploration of *Core Values* by our CEO, Rabbi Naftali Schiff, this edition brings together interviews from boardrooms to battlefields: harnessing cutting-edge AI to benefit society and fusing ancient wisdom with clinical psychology to transform culture within the British military and police. You'll read a powerful conversation with Rabbi Doron Perez, who reflects on faith, pain and purpose—not only as a community leader but as the father of Capt. Daniel Perez hy"d, one of the 50 hostages still held by Hamas, either struggling to survive or cruelly denied the dignity of burial.

Since our last issue, Israel has prevailed through a twelve-day war with Iran while holding seven other fronts. In response, we include a historical reflection on the Jews of Iran—past, present and uncertain future—prompted by this summer's events. Meanwhile, the world continues to assail us with renewed ferocity, dressing ancient blood libels in modern language. In such times, remembering who we are is not a luxury; it's a necessity.

Our *High Holy Days* section offers a fresh and accessible deep dive into the very crux of our new year's prayers, and introduces simple, actionable "micro-resolutions" that make meaningful change feel both approachable and sustainable. French-Israeli chef Jonas Bismuth shares dazzling recipes rooted in tradition, at once playful, comforting and refined.

On a personal note, I'd like to take a moment

to express my heartfelt gratitude to you, our readers, for your support and generous feedback. This edition marks the end of my time as Executive Editor—a role I've been privileged to hold for the past seven editions.

I'm especially thankful to our Editor-in-Chief, Rabbi Ari Kayser, for his steady guidance, sharp editorial instinct and the thoughtful collaboration I've so appreciated throughout; to Kimberley Rumble Nugent, whose creative realisation as Art Director has brought these pages to life; and to Rabbi Naftali Schiff, whose clarity of purpose and unwavering commitment to a vibrant Jewish future are a true inspiration. To every contributor, collaborator and interviewee who entrusted me with their stories: thank you.

My editorial approach has always aimed to ensure that every reader feels invited, never excluded, through content that uplifts, engages and empowers. Living in Jerusalem, I feel a deep responsibility to help strengthen the bond between Israel and the Diaspora, to draw together readers from across communities and continents through words. I'm grateful for the trust placed in me to reflect who we are as a people: diverse, vibrant and rooted in shared values.

As I take on a new role, I carry everything I've learned here with me. The mission remains: to tell our story truthfully, creatively and with intention.

Wishing you and your families a sweet new year, filled with strength, renewal and clear purpose.

Sasha Silber

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this magazine, including all articles and imagery, are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Jewish Futures. Content is accurate as of 13th August 2025. This magazine is for educational and non-commercial use only. Any copyrighted material is included under fair dealing (UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988) for education, research, commentary, news reporting and criticism.

Executive Director

Rabbi Naftali Schiff

Editor-in-Chief

Rabbi Ari Kayser

Executive Editor

Sasha Silber

Art Director, Perspectives Magazine

Kimberley Rumble Nugent

Editorial Assistant

Bari Gold

Trustees

Edward Misrahi (Chair)
Rabbi Naftali Schiff (CEO)
Joanna Benarroch
David Hammelburger
Karen Harris
Edward Lee
David Morris
Debra Sobel
Saul Zneimer



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

To advertise with us or get in touch, contact us at info@jfutures.org

*Jewish Futures
379 Hendon Way
London
NW4 3LP
Registered Charity No. 1151066*

CONTENTS



FEATURES

Core Values 10
Rabbi Naftali Schiff

Interviews with:

Elie Rashbass 12

Rabbi Dr. Samuel Landau 14

Debra Sobel 16

Rabbi Doron Perez 18

Mark Adlestone 20

Rabbi Naftali Schiff and Sasha Silber

Not Only Black and White: The Psychology of Geopolitical Chess 22
Ariel David Assis

Designed With Mazel: Rachie Shnay 27
Melissa Sussman

JEWISH FUTURES

Snapshots 32
The Perspectives Editorial Team

INTROSPECTION

Eye Spy 40
Gareth Kobrin

Unstuck 43
Rabbi Dr. Effie Kleinberg

How Jews Win Wars: Jessica Mzhen (Plummer) on the High Notes of Jewish Living 46
Bari Gold

HIGH HOLY DAYS

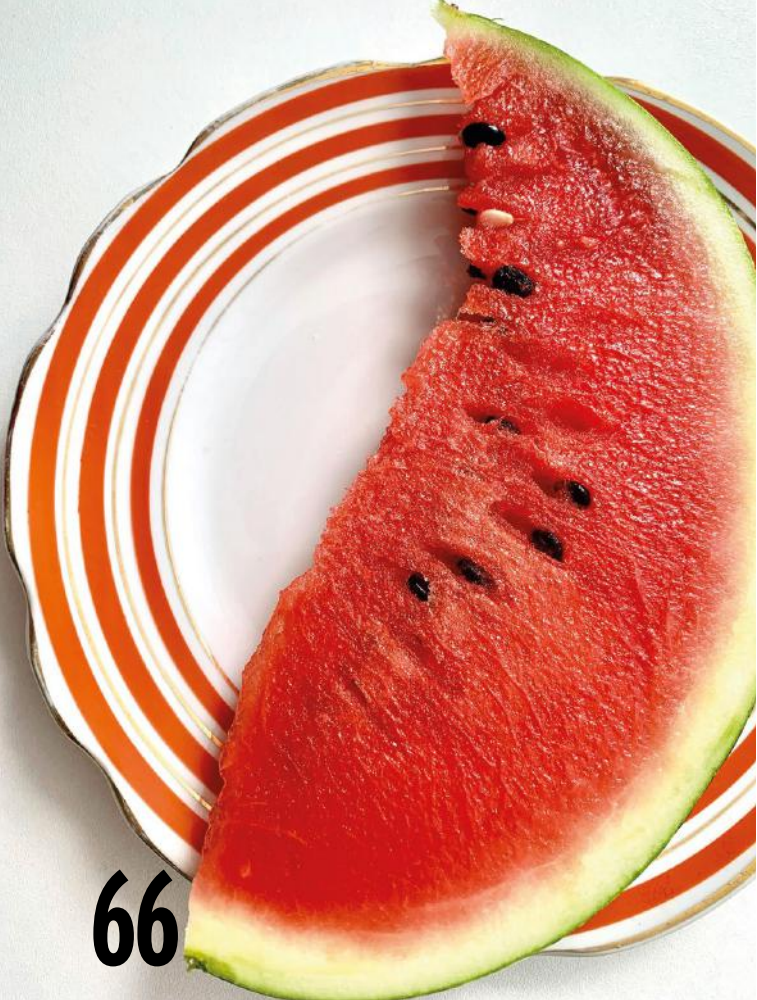
In the Silence After the Blast 50
Rabbi Yaakov Klein

Drawing the Bow 55
Rabbi Jonny Roodyn

Soul Stretch 58
Rabbi Avrohom Zeidman

Micro-Resolutions 60
The Perspectives Editorial Team





66

WELLNESS

Crossing the Bridge 62

Ruthie and Joel Portnoy

Fuel Your Fast 66

Annael Brown

FOOD

Mamie and Me: Chef Jonas Bismuth 70

Sasha Silber

Signs of Intention 74

Rivkie & Dan Matalon



Photo by Atara Whitman

89

CULTURE

Convergence: A Photo Essay 78

Atara Whitman

The Jews of Iran 85

Rabbi Ari Kayser

The Art of the Table 89

Yehudit Mermelstein

The Fashion Edit 92

Chaya Baumgarten

The Value of One 94

Abraham Hamra



70

Photo by Idan Chekroun

CONTRIBUTORS



ARIEL DAVID ASSIS

Ariel David Assis is a diplomacy lecturer and geopolitical forecaster, providing consulting and analysis to governments and investors. He specialised at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism Policy, Reichman University's School of Government. A Bar-Ilan Middle Eastern Studies graduate, he is a member of the Jewish Fellowship Coalition of the 'Reut' research group.

📧 @ariel_david_assis
✉ arieldavid596@gmail.com



CHAYA BAUMGARTEN

Chaya Baumgarten is the founder of *Valour Lifestyle Magazine*, launched in 2019 to elevate the fashion and lifestyle of Jewish women. With training from the London College of Style, she blends her expertise in fashion, marketing and branding to publish the only high-end women's Jewish magazine. *Valour Lifestyle* inspires and connects a global audience.

🌐 valourstyle.co.uk
📧 @valour_lifestyle



ANNAEL BROWN

Annael Brown is a registered dietitian and health coach who helps busy mothers ditch extreme diets and build healthy, realistic habits. She shares no-nonsense advice on her podcast *My Hectic Healthy Life* and online platform. Her approach blends nutrition, mindset and real life; perfection isn't the goal, sustainability is.

📧 @hectichealthylife
🌐 annaelbrownnutrition.com



BARI GOLD

Bari Gold is a writer, editor and educator from Miami. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Boston University, received the 2024 Shmuel Traum Prize for literary translation and is a Robert Pinsky Global Fellow. An editorial assistant and contributing writer at *Perspectives*, she strives to share a positive Jewish message through a creative lens.



RIVKIE & DAN MATALON

Rivkie and Dan have led Ta'amim since 2021, crafting exciting educational content with Jewish food at its heart. With a combined 25 years in creative fields, the pair are renowned for their flair, immersive events and envelope-pushing recipes. They live in London with their one-year-old daughter, who already shares their love of food and cooking.

📧 @wearetaamim
🌐 wearetaamim.com



YEHUDIT MERMELSTEIN

Yehudit Mermelstein is the founder of Jerusalem-based Violet and Rose Florals. Known for her elevated yet approachable style, she creates layered floral designs and seasonal tablescapes for events and the home. Her work blends texture, movement and warmth, bringing beauty and meaning to everyday spaces and special gatherings with thoughtful detail.

📧 @vrflorals
🌐 violetandroseflorals.com



RUTHIE & JOEL PORTNOY

Experienced relationship therapists, Ruthie and Joel Portnoy blend Imago Couples Therapy, relationship coaching and a warm approach. As co-founders of 2halvesofasoul, they offer support to all backgrounds. Based in Jerusalem, they help clients heal, reconnect and restore intimacy, bringing understanding and belief in conscious communication to transform relationships.

📧 @2halvesofasoul
🌐 2halvesofasoul.com



RABBI

JONNY ROODYN

Rabbi Jonny Roodyn, a City of London School and Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh graduate, holds an honours degree in Government from LSE. He studied at Mir Yeshiva and Jerusalem Kollel, receiving rabbinic ordination from Rav Yitzchak Berkovits. Rabbi of Finchley Federation Synagogue, he is part of the ShailaText team and a JRoots guide. He lives in Hendon with his wife Yael and their children.



ABRAHAM HAMRA

Abraham Hamra, a Damascus-born attorney and Syrian Jewish refugee, is a voice against antisemitism and anti-Israel misinformation. Fluent in Arabic and English, his viral videos reach millions. Confronting hate head-on, online and in person, he champions Jewish diversity, using legal logic and personal experience to challenge false narratives and empower Jewish pride.
 @abrahamhamra
 @HamraAbraham



RABBI
ARI KAYSER

Rabbi Ari Kayser is the Director of Media for Jewish Futures and Editor-in-Chief of *Perspectives Magazine*. Ari leads a talented team of creatives, produces impactful video content, and was instrumental in creating 'Maven', the online courses of Aish UK. Ari relishes the challenge of conveying authentic Jewish teachings in the language of the 21st century, particularly through immersive experiences and travel.



RABBI
YAAKOV KLEIN

Rabbi Yaakov Klein is an author, lecturer and musician who shares the light of Hasidic teachings and deep insights into the Torah. He leads Eilecha, a UK-based organisation fostering spiritual growth through books and courses. Based in London, Rabbi Klein inspires local and global communities alongside his wife Shira and their three children.



RABBI DR.
EFFIE KLEINBERG

Rabbi Dr. Effie Kleinberg serves as Senior Educator at Forum for Jewish Leadership, focusing on cultivating the next generation of ambitious future Jewish leaders. Rabbi Kleinberg studied at Yeshiva University and worked as an educational leader in North America before making Aliyah. He is the host of "Daf In-Sight", a podcast on the daily page of the Talmud.
 @jewish_leadership



GARETH KOBRIK

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



RABBI
NAFTALI SCHIFF

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



SASHA SILBER

After seven editions as Executive Editor of *Perspectives* during which two 2024 issues earned her a nomination for the BSME Editor's Editor award, Sasha Silber will become Digital Content Editor at JNS. A classical concert pianist and Hollywood performance coach on films including *Star Wars*, she is multilingual, has worked on three continents, and lives in Jerusalem with her family.



MELISSA SUSSMAN

Melissa Sussman is Head of Influencer Management and Brand Partnerships at Barzel Media. A force in Israeli advocacy since 2012, she launched a shop helping Ukrainian and Russian *olim* rebuild their lives. Post-October 7, she led digital campaigns raising \$750K+ for the Hostage Forum and spotlights changemakers navigating life after the attacks.
 @melissa_ashley_sussman



ATARA WHITMAN

Born and raised in Jerusalem to American parents, Atara Whitman observes both American and Israeli cultures from a unique perspective. She is a professional photographer, specializing in photographing families visiting Jerusalem and capturing urban Israeli scenes.
 israelphotographyby atara.com
 @atarawhitman



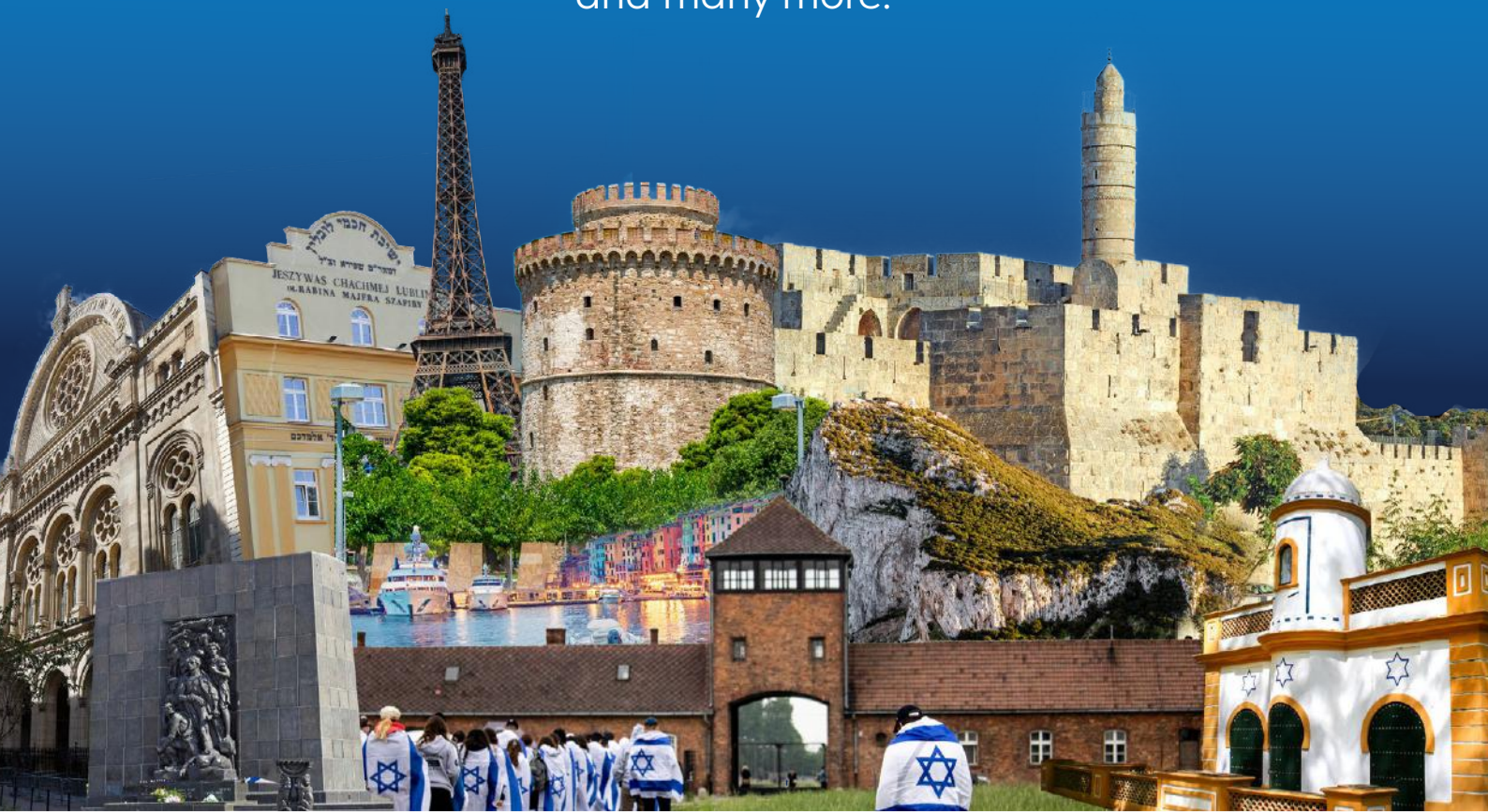
RABBI
AVROHOM ZEIDMAN

Rabbi Avrohom Zeidman designs, writes and presents curricula for the educational arm of GIFT, inspiring the next generation of givers. He researches Jewish approaches to altruism and leads innovative pedagogic programmes. Previously, he worked for Seed UK and the United Synagogue. He has taught at UK schools and universities and lives in London with his wife and seven children.

J»ROOTS

IMMERSIVE JEWISH JOURNEYS

Inspiring and educational all-inclusive Jewish Journeys to places of Jewish heritage, including Poland, France, Spain, Gibraltar, Greece, Italy, Eastern Europe, Israel, Morocco and many more.



**VISIT THE PAST. REFLECT ON THE PRESENT.
ENSURE THE FUTURE.**

Arrange your once-in-a-lifetime Jewish Journey today*

info@jroots.org

* Community, shul, school and private groups

www.jroots.org

Registered Charity No. 1136532

 **jewish
futures**
a member of the family



FEATURES

Meaning *in Motion*

Explore core values through a thought-provoking essay and candid conversations spanning boardrooms, battlefields and innovative AI applications in unexpected places. Decode current events through geopolitical forecasting, and meet the sunny creator of the Mazel Club as she turns Jewish-pride fashion into a global sensation.



Rabbi Naftali Schiff

Core *Values*

Rabbi Naftali Schiff

Core values. Two words that, in today's world, get tossed around with a certain corporate casualness. You'll find them emblazoned across coffee-room posters, nestled in sleek vision decks and posted proudly on websites alongside mission statements and aspirational taglines. But too often, that's where it ends—a box ticked, a slogan posted and a conversation forgotten.

Core values are not just the branding of an organisation I have the privilege of leading, they are the beating heart of all I aspire to be and achieve. Core values don't just decorate the walls of Jewish Futures; they shape our days. They're not a "nice-to-have"; they're the essence of who we are, what we do and what we aspire to become. In fact, I would go so far as to say that one of our key core values is that we aspire *to live by* our core values. If that sounds a little meta, that's because it is. At its root, it is simple and urgent: we believe that a values-driven life is a healthy life. At a time when so many people

feel adrift and disconnected from themselves, from each other, from purpose, from truth—we believe that building a generation of deeply-rooted, connected young Jews starts with embracing core values. Values shape not just what we believe, but who we are and how we behave; not just what we teach, but how we live; not just what we say we are, but what we actually become.

In the Jewish worldview, values are not cosmetic. They are not accessories. They are not PR. They are the consummation of a living Torah. They are the very tools by which we elevate the mundane, give structure to the spiritual and allow the transcendent to touch down in the daily. They are the pillars on which a life of integrity, of decency, of Torah, of goodness, of grit, courage and holiness are built. Yes, our "operating system" is Torah, but our user interface, the way we interact with the world, with ourselves, with others and with God, must be shaped and informed by a

framework of lived values. Without this, even a life filled with *mitzvot* (good deeds) and learning can, at times, feel unmoored. The form is there, but the function becomes blurred.

In *Pirkei Avot*, we are taught that ethical conduct precedes Torah. The Maharal (Rabbi Yehuda Loew) explains that it must precede—not in time, but in foundation. A human being needs *derech eretz*—a moral framework upon which the structure of Torah can be built. That's what we mean when we speak of core values: a framework upon which meaning can be built and lived, the crucible out of which appropriate intention and action can be forged.

We are living in a time of profound and paradoxical disconnection. Despite being constantly connected in the digital sense, many people today are deeply detached—spiritually, socially and emotionally. We scroll but don't reflect. We talk but don't listen. We consume more content than ever before, but often feel less content than ever before.

“

One of our key core values is that we aspire to live by our core values. If that sounds a little meta, that's because it is

Ironically, one can even carry a lot of Torah information and intellectual know-how, but be woefully detached from the Source and from people too, tragically failing to see the wood from the trees.

In this environment, what does it mean to educate? What does it mean to truly help to build a vibrant Jewish future? It means going beyond the transactional. Beyond teaching for knowledge alone. Beyond checking ritual boxes. It means shaping enriched lives and wholesome souls, not just training for motor or intellectual skills. This is the essence of what we do at Jewish Futures. We exist to educate towards a bedrock of core values. This is not a side project. Whether through Aish, JRoots, GIFT, FJL or Chazon, our core mission is not only to teach Jewish content, but to inspire people to become thoroughly decent people guided by Jewish values that shape how they relate to themselves, to others, to the Jewish People, to God and to the world at large.

We have all seen it: someone living an outwardly religious life, ticking all the right boxes, but missing the light that makes them shine, inside and out. Or someone deeply engaged in Jewish study or religious activity, but operating without intention, compassion or integrity. It's not that they lack Torah knowledge. It's that they may lack the values that bring the Torah alive. You can “do

Jewish” without “living Jewish”. But when we adopt, internalise and live deep-rooted Jewish values, then the *mitzvot* aren't just performed, they are transformed into a source of vitality and goodness for all.

That's what we're aiming for. It begins with awareness and intent, with an identification and clarification of a set of the values that matter most. Jewish Futures has articulated Ten Core Values, each one deeply rooted in Torah and Jewish tradition. Each one is aspirational yet practical. Each one is a tool for living.

Please do a little more than just read this article. I invite you to reflect, respond and recalibrate. Ask yourself: What are my core values? Those of my family? Have we articulated or shared them? Do they shape how I speak, how I listen, how we make decisions, how we treat others, how I treat myself? What kind of community could we build if we all lived by deep rooted values we actually believed in and wholeheartedly embraced? That's the dream. And that's the path we are tenderly and humbly walking at Jewish Futures.

In the pages that follow, we've invited a few remarkable individuals to share their views on the role of core values in guiding their professional lives and work. Their stories offer insight, inspiration and a glimpse into what it looks like to live with value-focused intention. >>>



Rabbi Naftali Schiff and Rabbi Noach Weinberg, 2006

Our Ten Core Values

AUTHENTICITY Striving to live and act with integrity. Living a Judaism that is thoroughly genuine, sincere and true in both theory and practice.

TORAT CHAYIM Studying, integrating and sharing Torah as the Creator's instruction manual for living; a vibrant, relevant and dynamic source of guidance for life in all its complexity.

RESPONSIBILITY Recognising that the many challenges facing the Jewish people are my problem. Answering the call to identify and implement solutions that will make a real difference. Being ready to shoulder the sacrifices necessary to do so.

ASPIRATION Never settling for mediocrity or half measures. Highly motivated to achieve the big visions that are incumbent upon a Jew. Constantly striving to grow and strive for greatness.

CARE Our focus on the big picture does not detract from the respect, care, kindness and attention that every individual deserves.

PASSION Approaching every opportunity with joy, energy and love. Teaching, creating and living with a contagious enthusiasm for our mission and a deep excitement for the privilege of making a difference.

BALANCE Wholeheartedly embracing the reality and richness that there exist multiple approaches to authentic Torah. We are committed to engaging in the delicate juggle of competing demands for time and focus, personal and communal.

TRUST Confidence in the justness of our mission as Jews and the Almighty's ability to deliver all allows us to live with and in the calmness and domain of *bitachon* (faithful trust). This enables resilience and perpetual drive, despite life's inevitable setbacks along the journey.

UNITY Actively working to negate the personal and corporate ego battles that can destroy individuals and organisations. Recognising that the strength of the Jewish People lies in its diversity and its shared destiny, and that togetherness does not imply sameness.

HUMILITY Operating from a healthy sense of knowing one's place. Not thinking less of one's self, but thinking of self, less. Living with awareness that all talents and successes are God-given.

Elie Rashbass

Embedding Values and Behaviours Into Everyday Interactions

A conversation between Rabbi Naftali Schiff, CEO of Jewish Futures and Elie Rashbass, CEO and Co-Founder, ScultureAI

What is ScultureAI?

Companies spend a lot of time thinking about the behaviours they want—usually tied to their core values or learning priorities—but beyond putting posters on the wall and running occasional workshops, organisations have limited tools available, if any, to really shift mindsets and change behaviours at scale. ScultureAI was created to solve that problem by stimulating behaviour change through AI-powered coaching in the flow of work itself. We do this by encoding AI models with a company’s core values, behaviours and development frameworks, and then integrating these models into their existing everyday workflows (like email or Slack). The coach then provides timely, personalised

and private nudges to support colleagues at the highest-impact opportunities to develop these behaviours. This increases their impact, supports their career, and leads to better performance and results.

You’ve lived in the “core values” space. Is this a modern fad or long-standing?

It’s been around a long time, but companies are (rightly) continuing to place increasingly high importance on them. Recent studies show a third of CEOs now see culture—the arena where values sit—as the single most important driver of financial performance.¹ Companies with the strongest cultures have nearly double the revenue growth of those with the weakest. It therefore isn’t surprising when CEOs like Daniel Ek of Spotify consider culture “the

most scalable thing done right” but also “the hardest thing”. Indra Nooyi, former CEO of PepsiCo, famously said that “You cannot deliver value unless you anchor the company’s values. Values make an unsinkable ship.” We could fill a whole article with quotes like this.

Give me your definitions: culture, values, behaviours—how do they interface?

Culture is the soul of the business—the way things get done. Values are the four or five themes that underpin that, for example, innovation, customer focus, collaboration, accountability, etc. Behaviours distil those into what it means for me day to day—and that differs by role. Take agility: for a manager it might mean being open to new ideas and motivating team members to think outside the box. Some firms focus more

Photos courtesy of Elie Rashbass



heavily on behaviours than values as that is what many people most easily relate to, rather than a big word without as obvious implications for their day-to-day work.

Are there “top” values most companies share?

Research shows that many companies pick from a common list, often including a value like integrity—but the same value can mean different things to different companies.² “Innovation” at Facebook famously started as “move fast and break things.” Elsewhere it’s more like “innovate, but only when you’re 99% sure it will work.” So while around a third of companies may include innovation as a core value, it plays out differently. Our job at ScultureAI is to ensure the AI models embed the behaviours the company is trying to inspire and develop.

You said that companies are thinking more about their core values. What does that mean in practice?

As I mentioned earlier, values aren’t new but they weren’t always as central or as important to company leadership. Enron, for example, had “integrity” as one of their values and it was probably also on the wall. I think we all know how that story ended. However, a lack of consistency between the stated values and reality is more common than you would think. Studies show no correlation between what companies say their values are and what their culture really is.³ The challenge for companies now is to make it real—to embed and activate the behaviours at scale. And research shows that embedding culture successfully increases performance by 35%, employee engagement by 63% and increases employees’ intent to stay by 25%.⁴ Now that companies are increasingly recognising the importance and benefits of embedding culture, what are they doing differently? As well as using tools like ScultureAI in the flow of work, companies are also now recruiting, promoting and remunerating colleagues based on their core values, as well as framing internal feedback around them. Some companies also look to make the values more exciting, for example running a competition to award a £100k development budget to the team that comes up with the best idea for a new product line, in order to really motivate innovative behaviours. It is great to see the shift from posters to practice, as culture is one of those few areas in life which aren’t zero-sum—everybody wins—employees, companies, shareholders and society as a whole.

When you say “performance”, you don’t just mean money?

That’s right—performance is any KPI (Key Performance Indicator). Whether you’re tracking something quantifiable or something qualitative like the determination of your team members, the principle is the same. We often focus on financial performance because that’s how CEOs tend to justify spending, but it is about much more than that and some of the clients we have worked with are non-profit companies.

Can you give me an example of an “in-the-moment” coaching nudge.

Sure. Someone drafts an email shutting down a new idea because it’s complex and there are too many practicalities to think about. Our coach steps in and encourages the colleague to reflect on whether it has to be either or—either practicality or innovation—or is there a way to balance both—perhaps with a pilot stage or a phased project? We are helping them think differently about what innovation means—it doesn’t have to be all or nothing. Another example could be a colleague responding to a request for an update saying, “I can’t update you—David’s on holiday.” If determination is a target behaviour, then they should be thinking about what they can do in the meantime, despite the obstacle of David being away, for example providing a preliminary update or asking other team members if they can help. Importantly, we don’t tell people what to do; we ask questions that shift how they think. That is the essence of coaching—helping others arrive at the answer themselves, thereby changing the way their brain is wired (a concept known as neuroplasticity) and creating lasting impact beyond just this interaction.

Tell me about the “forgetting curve”.

Studies show that up to seventy percent of learning is forgotten within a day, and even ninety percent within a week.⁵ Away-days inspire momentarily and then disappear. You



have to put learning where action happens if you want to close the learning-action gap and create change in the moment. That is what ScultureAI is all about.

Has building ScultureAI changed you at home?

Yes! Learning about human behaviour has lots of benefits. For example, as I mentioned before, you don’t usually change how people think by telling them what to do (although sometimes as a parent that remains an attractive option!). Rather, you ask a question to stimulate them arriving at their own conclusion. One small interaction flipped my daughter from somewhat indifferent to unbelievably determined about her upcoming piano exam, but not because I told her to, but because she wanted to, and I like to think a small part of that was the way I approached the conversation with her. Work is similar: tiny moments can have a big and lasting impact when they rewire the brain. We only look to coach a small number of interactions (i.e. one or two) per person each day, but they are often the ones that matter the most. And with an organisation with e.g. 10,000 colleagues, that could be millions of timely coaching sessions in the flow of work each year, which solves the problem organisations have always had—scaling and sustaining culture and behaviour change.

² Sull et al., “When It Comes to Culture, Does Your Company Walk the Talk?”, MIT Sloan Management Review, 2020

³ Ibid ⁴ Gartner, Top 5 Priorities for HR Leaders in 2025, 2024

⁵ Kohn, “Brain Science: The Forgetting Curve – the Dirty Secret of Corporate Training”, Learning Guild, 2014

Rabbi Dr. Samuel Landau

Changing Culture One Unit at a Time

Photos courtesy of Rabbi Dr. Samuel Landau



A conversation between Sasha Silber, Executive Editor of Perspectives magazine and Rabbi Dr Samuel Landau, Founder and Director, Someone Else's Eyes

How did a rabbi-clinical psychologist find himself reshaping culture inside the British Army and police?

My synagogue sent me to the Windsor Leadership Trust where leaders gathered from

across British society; charity, faith, business, the military and police, in a kind of leadership lab. I met a lieutenant colonel about to take over a battalion with serious cultural problems: a neo-Nazi jailed for stockpiling weapons, a sergeant blinded in an initiation rite—just a toxic place to work. He said, “Come talk to my people.” I said, “That’s a horrible idea.” Simply sticking me in a room with a bunch of soldiers of a very different background wasn’t going to help. I suggested, “Let me build something with your people—co-designed and evidence-

based—so it actually lands.”

It was the right idea at the right time. The Defence Secretary had just told the Chief of the General Staff that repeated cultural failings were bringing the Army into disrepute. The Army has codified values—CDRILS: Courage, Discipline, Respect, Integrity, Loyalty and Selflessness. But how do you live those values on a cold, wet Tuesday morning after no sleep?

I spent time living on camp, going out on military exercises, speaking to hundreds of soldiers and officers—building an assessment and formulation of Army culture the same way I would with a patient: not just listing symptoms, but asking why they’re there. Often the behaviour was useful once; maybe it still is, but it needs flexing. We co-designed the programme with soldiers and officers so it felt “green”, piloted and refined it, then trained their own people to deliver it—“train-the-trainer”—so the agents of change were internal, not external (through me).

The data was remarkable: fewer harmful behaviours; improved self-reported wellbeing, group engagement and psychological flexibility. In Army terms, deployability went up 9% and retention went up 6%, compared to units that didn’t do the programme. Crucially, the battalion scored better than ever on its live-fire validation exercise. Observers said nothing technical had changed—rather it was teamwork and culture. That was their lethal advantage. It’s not either/or. A cohesive, healthy, inclusive unit does its core task better.

When you walked in, how did you move those codified values off the poster and into people’s day-to-day behaviour?

A poster can’t see or value anyone. Values are imbibed through social learning—watching how your place actually operates—and through behaviours that resonate. But you also need intentionality. External acts can spark internal change only if you want that to happen. In Jewish life, blind *mitzvah* observance without the Torah’s values becomes rote; having values without habits is unrealised potential. It’s both.

So when do values actually show up—or fail?

Rabbi Dr Landau will be teaching "The Journeys of Joseph and Judah", fusing Torah ideas with psychological insights. For more info visit lsjs.ac.uk

Under pressure. My supervisor likes to say, “values are like a tea bag: they only really show themselves in hot water.” Under stress or temptation, values are easily lost. There’s a constant tension: system one vs system two, amygdala vs frontal cortex; *guf* (body) vs *neshama* (soul).

Two stories. First, Joseph. He’s been sold, rejected—his values are hanging by a thread. Potiphar’s wife is after him. It’s a festival day, the house is empty, and he “comes in to do his work”. The sages offer two readings: maybe he really came to work, or maybe he walked in ready to drop his values because he knew she was there. Things actually start—clothes are coming off—and then *vayema’en*—he refuses, he holds himself back. When we sing that word, we do so with a note (*shalsholet*) that only appears four times in the Torah, and always expressing real tension.

The same word, “*vayema’en*—he refuses”, appears in another earlier instance in the story; when his father Jacob refuses to be comforted over Joseph—they did not find Joseph’s body and Jacob had no closure. Rashi, the great commentator, suggests that you cannot be consoled over the death of someone that is still alive. Our sages say Joseph saw his father’s image at that later moment as he prepared to drop his values and sin with Potiphar’s wife. Instead, he held himself back. *If my father hasn’t given up on me, I’m not giving up on myself.*

And a police story: a single mum on our programme, struggling with her son. Driving home, she says something to him; he melts down. Normally she’d ignore him, hand him a device and keep driving. She thought, “What would Samuel do?” She pulled over, put her phone away: “Tell me everything you have to say.” He cried—his mum had never done that. It transformed their relationship.

Values live in choice moments. You have to remind yourself again and again. And you’re not alone—there’s always an Other who hasn’t given up on you—so we should not give up on ourselves.

Have you defined your own set of core values?

I would say the following. First, seeking light. “Wherever you look, there you’ll find Him.”¹ That orients everything—finding light in a declining synagogue, an army under scrutiny, a patient in crisis. Next, reciprocity of light. Empathy, mentalisation. “With You is the source of light; in Your light we see light.” Hold up a mirror—“I see your light”—and you help someone shine brighter. Third, leaning in. Moses sees the Egyptian beating the Israelite, looks around and sees no person.² Plenty were



Big group session with cadet instructors at Royal Military Academy Sandhurst



Small group leadership training with colour sergeants and captains

there; no one stood up. If something needs addressing and you can—or can grow the capacity—you lean in. Fourth, activating others. Maimonides says that the highest form of giving charity is enabling someone else to give. Rabbi Sacks spoke about creating communities of leaders, not followers. Everything I build is to make others self-sufficient—done well, with evidence. It’s not about my ego.

And finally, be the overflowing cup. Give from excess, not essence. Like the oxygen mask announcement: secure your own health, family, close team—then you can give well.

I’m struck by how your values sit in pairs—two about light, two about action for others—and then the “overflowing cup” that grounds them. They also reflect lived experience. How much have you been influenced by your personal background as a third-generation Holocaust survivor?

My father’s mother came on the Kindertransport. My grandmother brought family photos and a matzah cover—we framed it. My mother’s parents survived the camps. They were among the Windermere Children

from Theresienstadt; they met on the plane. He arrived with nothing, built nursing homes and a pharmacy—professionalism and giving back—and was very generous. I grew up thinking everyone’s grandparents were survivors. It pushed me to seek excellence, seek light and confront pain rather than avoid it. Avoidance becomes pathology—anxiety. On my wall are my grandfather’s yellow star and Buchenwald badge. My grandmother, flown in on RAF bombers, is proud that her grandson walks British Army and RAF bases to support their people.

How do soldiers react to a visibly Jewish rabbi on base?

One said, “I want to shake your hand—you’re the first Jew I’ve ever met, and I’m inspired by your faith.” Sometimes communication gets muddled. One lad thought I was there to convert him; I joked that my circumcision knife was in the car—he went white.

Stereotypes linger. A predecessor told me he was asked if he had horns under his *kippah*...

I met a soldier whose grandfather was in the SS. The next day he told the group his mates had said, “Did you see the Jew on base? Why didn’t you finish what grandpa started?” He brought that into the room—with me there—to confront it. That was brave. He chose a higher set of values than what was handed down. And that made all the difference.

¹ Likutei Moharan 56:3

² Pirkei Avot 2:5



Photo by Sarah Raanan

Debra Sobel

Purpose, Profit and the Power of Values

A conversation between Rabbi Naftali Schiff, CEO of Jewish Futures and Debra Sobel, Founder and Lead Consultant, The Purpose Hub

Your career has spanned over two decades working with some of the most recognised global names—Unilever, Vodafone Foundation, Experian, CGI and international law firms. You've helped them find and communicate their purpose. What does that actually mean?

It means helping organisations define who they are beyond what they sell. What do they stand for? What's the positive change they want to create in the world—for their people, the communities in which they operate and the environment. Purpose isn't a marketing slogan. It's the North Star that should guide strategy, decision-making, operations, culture, behaviour and action. I help organisations uncover that, articulate it in authentic and risk-free ways, and embed it into their DNA, alongside core values, to drive positive change.

That all sounds very noble, but what happens when profit gets in the way?

Purpose and profit are not mutually exclusive. In fact, when done right, purpose enhances profit and feeds into the triple bottom line. According to Deloitte, "Purpose driven companies grow three times faster than their competitors." When organisations anchor their strategy in a meaningful "why", they don't just do good, they also perform well across business metrics, capturing higher market share and enjoying stronger employee and customer satisfaction.

I've worked with leadership teams who've seen that aligning their business with values creates loyalty, improves employee well-being, attracts talent and resonates with clients and consumers. But it has to be real. Risk comes when it's performative or disconnected from the day-to-day reality of the business.

Let's talk embedding. A CEO might be on board with purpose. But how do you get the rest of the company to live it?

You listen. You engage. You collaborate. It's most successful when purpose is co-created. That means involving employees, customers and stakeholders. You define your purpose clearly, align leadership and management around it, and then communicate it continually in a way which makes it not only inspirational, but very practical and actionable.

You find the stories that bring it to life. You show people their role in living the purpose. When they see the impact—on mental wellness, on inclusion and belonging, on the climate, on their community, on the bottom line—they care. And when people care, they change.

Storytelling seems to be at the heart of your approach.

We are wired for stories. Data is incredibly important—hard stats and evidence help track progress and show outcomes, but data doesn't move hearts. Stories do. I've helped organisations tell the stories of young people whose lives were changed by education initiatives or of employees who have found belonging and empowerment through inclusive leadership. These narratives create emotional connection. They inspire behaviour change. They bring purpose from the head to the heart.

You've been doing this internationally—how do you keep it meaningful at scale?

By communicating universal messages that can be translated for local audiences; by taking cultural nuances into account; by providing regional stories and examples; and, importantly, by staying human.

That's the key. Whether you're speaking to the finance team in Mumbai, an Executive Board in London, engineers working off shore or a third party partner in Cape Town, the message must resonate. That's why communication—clear, authentic and human—is central to everything I do. You can't drive behaviour change, especially globally, without it.

Over three years ago, you joined Jewish Futures as a Trustee. You've called it one of, "the most purpose-driven organisations" you've worked with. What makes it different?

The difference is that at Jewish Futures, purpose isn't a strategy—it is the product. The ten core values are not marketing or PR—they are who we are. Most companies define values to support their business goals and ensure there is a culture aligned and driven to succeed. At Jewish Futures, the values are the oxygen. They shape everything: how we educate, how we interact with over 20,000 Jews each year in our programming, how we serve the Jewish people and who we are as Jews.

I remember when you first came on board. We had a debate about core values. You said we needed to ensure they're tangible and actionable—not just platitudes. But, we live and breathe them.

Yes. At first, I approached it like I would any client, asking: what values drive behaviour and desired outcomes? What makes the culture tick? But here's what I came to realise. Jewish Futures doesn't *adopt* values. It *lives* them. The ten values we talk about include "Authenticity"—striving to behave with integrity and live a Judaism that is thoroughly genuine, sincere and true in both theory and practice and "Balance"—embracing the reality and richness that multiple approaches exist to authentic Torah. These aren't aspirations. They're instructions for living. Both personally and professionally. And that changes everything.

You often say that when people live by values, everything else flows. That's a very Jewish idea.

It is. And when Jews live by core values, they connect to their Judaism in an authentic, deeply personal way—not by habit or obligation, but with intention and meaning. It becomes a lived experience and not something by rote.

How do you see core values playing more of a role in the future?

I think now more than ever, people are searching for purpose. In such a complex, uncertain world, we crave meaning. We want to know that the people and organisations around us stand for something deeper—something human, ethical and real. We don't just want values printed on posters—we want to see them in action. Values that guide behaviour, shape decisions, inspire kindness and create real impact.

That's why I love the work I do—helping organisations not just define purpose, but bring it to life through culture, leadership, communication and everyday behaviour.

And with Jewish Futures, it's even more personal. I want our core values to continue to anchor us and how we show up—not as abstract ideals, but as a way of life. When these values are truly lived, with authenticity and passion, that's when purpose becomes transformative. That's when it changes lives. In this case, Jewish lives.



Debra Sobel running a roundtable on communicating purpose at "This Can Happen"

Rabbi Doron Perez

Living The Nation of Israel's Mission

A conversation between Rabbi Naftali Schiff, CEO of Jewish Futures, and Rabbi Doron Perez—educator, community leader and Executive Chairman of World Mizrahi—on leadership, Zionism and turning personal tragedy since 7 October into resilience.

Where do core values begin?

First and foremost, as Jews we believe our values are divinely ordained. They come from revelation—above us, not from us—and that gives them objectivity; we all stand equal before something bigger than ourselves.

HaRav Abraham Isaac HaCohen Kook, known as HaRav Kook, who most deeply influenced me, insists those values must also “deeply connect to the human soul and spirit”. If they stay external, they feel coercive; you’re nullified before them. Swing to the other extreme—pure humanism—and you crown subjective feeling as the sole arbiter. So the task is a lifelong dance: absolute commitment to objective divine values, while ensuring they stir something visceral within. Extremism is taking either pole to the limit.

So how do we decide what’s “core”?

It’s a difficult question. Maimonides clarifies principles, yet he also says the most central value and its tiniest application are equally God’s word. Medieval thinkers tried to articulate these as well. *The Book of Principles*, for example, speaks of three shared religious fundamentals: belief in a providential God; that He reveals what He wants from us; and that there are consequences—reward and punishment—for right and wrong.

For our generation, I’m drawn to the basic principles of Mizrahi’s founders and Rav Kook: *Am Israel* (the Nation of Israel), *Torat Israel* (the Torah of Israel) and *Eretz Israel* (the Land of Israel). They correlate with the three pilgrimage festivals—Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot.

Pesach is the shared fate: we’re born as a people, a big family. The *Haggadah’s rasha* (wicked son) is called a heretic for separating from the nation. Shavuot is the mission—Torah turns fate into destiny. Without Torah, the nation is a body without a soul. Sukkot represents destiny, and destiny needs a



destination; that’s the Land of Israel. The story isn’t just soul and peoplehood—it’s anchored in a specific place. No other faith ties its mission to borders and a specific land. The Book of Numbers details borders because the land is bound up with Jewish destiny. God’s first message to Abraham already links peoplehood and place.

In our era, Rav Kook’s voice helped me see how people, Torah and land weave a single

tapestry of sanctifying God’s name. They speak to modern reality: renewed Jewish nationalism and the centrality of the land and State of Israel.

Why did that triad hit you so strongly?

I grew up with *Mussar*—a school of Jewish thought that teaches how to become the best individual I can be. Rav Kook introduced

Photo by KRifkind
Photography



a new school of thought centred around *klal Israel*: I'm part of a historic people, a covenantal family. Judaism isn't just "religion" as law; Torah is a guide to life. God tells Abraham to walk, to become a people connected to a place, before He spells out commandments. We are first a family that became a nation with a shared fate. A Jew who sins is still a Jew—you're born into this covenantal peoplehood. That was a revelation to me: it's not only "me and God"; it's me, God and *Am Israel*.

Are your personal values identical to those you teach as a movement leader? Has tragedy changed that?

There are universal human values—tragedy is universal, a mother is a mother—but I process through my Jewish core. My son Daniel hy"d fell as a Jew, defending his people on 7 October. Had it happened elsewhere, I'd still process it as a believing Jew, but without the same people-and-land dimension. I'm not trying to give *chizuk* (empowerment) more than I'm trying to be authentic. Because I was already living a communal life, that authenticity spills into the public square. So yes, *Am Israel*, *Torat Israel* and *Eretz Israel* would still anchor me—even without a title.

You speak to business leaders who pin "integrity" and "service" on office walls. Cynics say it's marketing. Has anything really changed?

I think something genuine is happening. Every enterprise must make money, but before turning a profit it has to deliver a real service that uplifts society. Ask first: "What good are we adding?"—then worry about the bottom line. If a company prioritises earnings over that benefit, it faces a moral challenge.

Mission statements help. They remind us why we exist and how we intend to act—integrity, dignity—whatever fits our character. Will we always live up to them? No. Life sits in the gap between the ideal and the real. Yet, like Rav Kook, we keep the standard visible so we can keep striving. Businesses should marry profit with purpose; otherwise they risk surviving materially while impoverishing the human spirit.

How do we stop values from becoming clichés on a wall, especially outside formal education?

There's no shortcut: real change comes through deep introspection and constant growth. Warren Bennis, one of leadership's pioneers, says a leader must keep growing; Jewish leadership begins with how you lead yourself. Politics, business, the army—each arena pressures values. Life is exactly where instinct collides with principle. The only antidote is ongoing learning and refinement. That's why Torah study is central: study that turns what you know into who you are. We live between ideal and real; our work is to keep narrowing that gap.

If you had to "shoot from the hip" and name a few micro values to sit alongside your three macro ones?

Completing the three—*Am Israel*, *Torat Israel*, *Eretz Israel*—I'd add: *Kiddush Hashem*—sanctifying God's name, being His best ambassador. Being a *mentsch*—decency, justice, what we call *derech eretz*: treat people the way you'd want to be treated. And finally, ongoing self-growth and self-perfection—be the best you can be, then contribute that to others.

Mark Adlestone

Leading with Integrity and Generosity



Photo by James Jebson

A conversation between Rabbi Naftali Schiff, CEO of Jewish Futures, and Mark Adlestone OBE DL, Beaverbrooks Chairman and values-driven leader for 40-plus years, on principled leadership, philanthropy and building a purpose-led family business.

You've chaired Beaverbrooks for more than a decade. Let's begin with the question every leader dreads: are leaders born or bred?

It lies somewhere in the middle. I never took formal leadership courses, yet I "stepped up when the need was there". Structured programmes help, but people rise when their community calls.

Your company is famous for "The Beaverbrooks Way". What are its core values?

Integrity, passion, caring, trust and fairness. They emerged from a six-month exercise in 1998 when we asked, what do we stand for? We'd sensed the values in our DNA, but never articulated them until then. We didn't invent them; we named what was already there.

How do you make sure those words are more than wallpaper?

We recruit based on our values. In training sessions, colleagues recognise one another by shared behaviours, even if they've never met. Store managers run monthly discussions, asking, "Are we being fair? Are we being caring?" If a department's atmosphere feels wrong, we step back and re-work the values together. Sometimes we even pause the trading agenda and go back to the Beaverbrooks Way until the atmosphere warms up.

How do you create space for disagreement without ego?

As chairman I've learnt to step back. My directors know disagreement is not personal. We debate robustly until we all feel comfortable, even if that means my initial view changes. You need an environment where colleagues can challenge the boss—and vice versa—without fear.

Do you ever just overrule?

I do hold an ace card—but years can pass without playing it. Independence of thought means letting strong views clash, listening properly, then deciding. If my initial view changes, so be it. That trust makes for better decisions. It also means I sleep at night because we've reached the decision together.

You once invited a rabbi to speak to your non-Jewish senior team about “spirituality in the workplace”. That was risky.

Consultants told me to avoid bringing religion to work, yet the talk was transformative. Even a colleague who described himself as “angry with God” found it meaningful. It showed how Jewish ideas on partnership, fairness and charity resonate universally. Afterwards people queued up saying, “I wish my priest could talk like that.”

Modesty is a Jewish virtue, but your advisers challenged you on it.

They said, “You want people queuing to join Beaverbrooks—you can’t be too modest.” I realised publicising our charitable work actually helps the charities we support. So I relaxed my personal instinct for quiet giving when the greater good required a louder voice. Being humble doesn’t mean being silent.

Speaking of giving, how many organisations does Beaverbrooks support now?

Last year we donated to 251 different charities chosen by our people—if you include all their individual salary-matched gifts it’s closer to 600 or 700. The money splits roughly 50-50 between Jewish and non-Jewish causes. 20% of our retained profits goes straight into the Beaverbrooks Charitable Trust, and we’ve been doing that since 2000.

What unites such breadth of philanthropy?

Our purpose is enriching lives—for customers, colleagues, suppliers and charities. Profit is essential, but it enables the giving. I believe everyone feels enriched by giving either money or time—or both. There’s a joy in it—it comes back to you.

You straddle business leadership and communal leadership. What’s different about leading a Jewish charity compared with Beaverbrooks?

In the business I can move quickly—I pray I’ll be there for a long time and I own it. In the community I don’t own anything. It’s

never about you as the leader; it’s about the organisation. When we merged two welfare bodies, I had 27 trustees around the table. We talked, communicated, listened and over time, that board came down to eight without a fallout. You have to bring people with you through good arguments and examples. I couldn’t just play an ace card. In business, if needed, I can. In the community, you just can’t—and that’s healthy.

At 100 years old, what do you hope people will say about Mark Adlestone?

With God’s help, I’d like to still be relevant at 100—involved in the business without getting under people’s feet and still able

to support good causes. Still useful, still contributing—just not in the way!

As a visible Jewish leader—and also serving as Deputy Lieutenant—what message do you want the wider world to hear?

Jews should be “a light unto the nations”. We’re critically observed, so I wear my Judaism proudly while integrating—not assimilating—into British society. Serving civically is part of that: contributing to the wider community protects a positive future for the next generation. It’s about being proudly Jewish and fully British at the same time.



Mark Adlestone running at this year’s annual Beaverbrooks 10k Fun Run which raised over £100,000 for Trinity Hospice



Mark Adlestone with the Beaverbrooks Charitable Trust Trustees, (L to R) Anna Blackburn, Paul Holly and Susie Nicholas

Not Only Black and White: *The Psychology of Geopolitical Chess*

Ariel David Assis

Extensive research literature has been written about the way we make decisions, from small and marginal decisions, to large and important decisions like taking a mortgage or buying a car. But how are the truly big decisions made, those that affect the lives of tens of millions of people? Decisions of states, presidents, prime ministers and highly influential international organisations? After all, not only are they much more tangled and complex, but war, recession, trade war between superpowers, an attack on Iran or normalisation in the Middle East— affect our lives much more than any everyday dilemma or an impulse purchase online.

From maritime trade routes to arms and technology races, from covert operations and intelligence to votes at the UN—what is the psychological infrastructure of the multi-dimensional chessboard of geopolitics?

The Game of Kings

With the outbreak of the Second Intifada (September 2000) which claimed the lives of 1,107 victims¹ and 8,022 wounded, the Israeli Prime Minister's Office sought a legal way to eliminate the heads of terrorist organisations.

The problem was that at that time, international law justified killing for defensive purposes and on the battlefield only

under "self-defence", but absolutely did not allow, for example, to eliminate a terrorist in his home by elite assassins or targeted missile fire. Therefore, the elimination of terrorist leaders could cause Israel serious diplomatic complications and even the imposition of international sanctions.

For this purpose, the Prime Minister turned to a first-rate lawyer (brought here anonymously), who drafted an unprecedented legal document containing five cumulative conditions which, when met, would define the elimination of a terrorist—even in his bed—as a legitimate defensive action under international law.

For example, the elimination order would only apply to commanders and/or fighters (and not to assistants or drivers, for example) so that the principle of self-defence would be fulfilled. In addition, the elimination must be carried out outside the sovereign territory of the eliminating state, otherwise the principle of proportionality ("application of the minimum necessary force") would not allow elimination, since it could have carried out arrest only. Also, additional legal definitions were added for terrorists such as "illegitimate threat constituting a clear and continuing danger" and additional similar conditions.²

If you ever wondered why many terrorists joined the silent majority while (specifically) abroad (Mahmoud al-Mabhouh, for example, somehow got entangled with his bed pillow at the Al-Bustan Rotana Hotel in Dubai, Fadi Mohammad al-Batsh encountered several bullets in Kuala Lumpur and more)—well, this is one of the reasons.

The publication of the precedent-setting document drew sharp international criticism. Interestingly, however, leading the opposition was Israel's closest ally, the United States. Targeted elimination outside the battlefield, the Americans claimed with feigned innocence, is not an act of defence, but rather a murder, likely to put the only democracy in the Middle East—Israel—under a heavy diplomatic and legal cloud.

Check: When the Kingdom is Under Threat

Fate would have it that a year after that public American disavowal, a dramatic turn occurred on the board: 19 terrorists (15 of them holding Saudi citizenship), brought the USA to its knees in the largest terrorist attack in American history: 11 September.

The then US President George W. Bush hurried to turn to the Israeli Prime Minister and demanded to urgently receive that same reviled legal document. Not only did the document suddenly become legally accepted but it almost gained the status of official international practice.

Quickly, legal opinions appeared such as one granting the president vague and almost unlimited authority to use "all necessary and appropriate force" against all those involved in the terrorist attack.

Proportional force gave way to "appropriate force", the definition of "commanders and/or fighters" was expanded to include all those involved in terrorism, intelligence surveillance became globally borderless in a disturbing manner (as revealed years later by the former NSA employee who fled to Russia, Edward

Snowden), and the president embarked on a cross-continental elimination campaign that stretched over more than a decade, extending from Europe to Indonesia, and from Somalia to Abbottabad. The "Patriot Act"—overriding almost everything under the secrecy of "national security"—was also enacted in Congress, and a new government programme was put into use: The Disposition Matrix, a contingency plan that allows—given a real risk to national security (which there's no way to verify)—to imprison, torture or eliminate any person posing a national threat (even American citizens!).

But where had all the sanctimonious condemnations of the previous year suddenly vanished to? What guiding principle explains this dramatic pivot on the geopolitical board?

The Queen's Gambit: Sacrifice in Service of Dominance

Because nations are made up of human beings, their decision-making process is therefore based on the human consideration system. You open a newspaper and read that, for example, "the French government announced that..."—but who exactly is "the French government" that decided thus? What is the rationale of its behaviour as a player in the arena? Like it or not, ultimately, we are talking about a forum of human beings. If we understand how people think, perhaps we can have a glimpse into the psychology of international relations and the thinking of states and organisations.

Putting States on the Psychologist's Couch

In my professional work over the years, I have written more than twenty-five

geopolitical trend forecasts (ranging from a pre-emptive Israeli incursion into Lebanon and tensions around Somaliland and Djibouti, to friction between Finland and Russia and influence operations in Balochistan and many more) that I predicted would occur during 2023–2025, some even written three to four years in advance.

To my own surprise, over 93% proved accurate.

To achieve this, beyond using models, vector extrapolation, pattern recognition and intelligence-indicator analysis, I had to understand: How do states think? What psychological principle governs the decisions of players on the geopolitical board? And how does all this influence nuclear policy, assassinations, international law and investment strategies?

After familiar political-science models failed to give me consistently good predictive results, I developed—among other analytic tools—a new model that yielded exceptional accuracy: the National Pyramid of Needs.

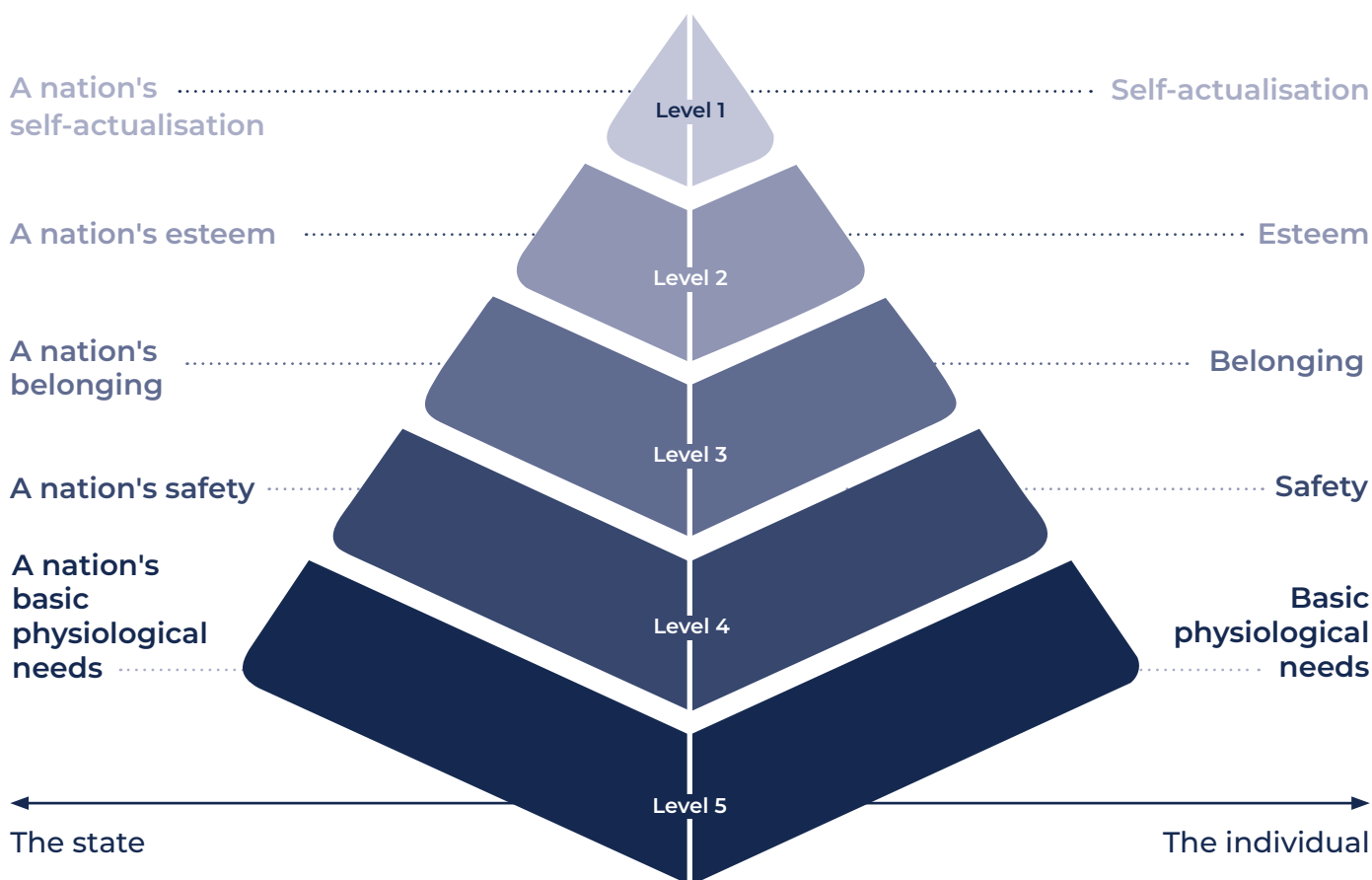
The National Pyramid of Needs Model

The celebrated Jewish psychologist Abraham Maslow, a leading theorist of the humanistic approach, formulated "Maslow's hierarchy of needs". According to him there is an ordered hierarchy by which every person makes decisions.

Just like a pyramid, the closer a need is to the base, the more essential it is; the closer it is to the apex, the less essential. For example, oxygen is more critical to life than a front door, and a door providing security is more important to us than the neighbours' opinion of its design, and so forth.



²Banka & Quinn, "Killing Norms Softly", *Security Studies* 27:4 (2018). George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (2010), 170. Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies* (2004), 204. John Yoo, "Assassination or Targeted Killings After 9/11", *NYLS Law Rev.* 56 (2011–12)



Maslow's stages are:

1. **Basic physiological needs** (oxygen, water, food, sleep, etc).
2. **Safety** (physical/economical/social).
3. **Belonging** (family/community).
4. **Esteem** (social recognition).
5. **Self-actualisation**

Given that nations are composed of people, they must inevitably have a human-like mode of thought with a parallel hierarchy of considerations:

- A nation's **basic needs** (stage 1) are called its **economy**.
- A nation's **personal safety** (2) is its **national security**.
- A nation's **social belonging** (3) is its **alliances** (treaties, international agreements, etc.—France, for example, “belongs socially” to the Schengen Treaty, the EU, the P5, and more).
- A nation's **social esteem** (4) is its **international status**.
- A nation's **self-actualisation** (5) is the apex of its fulfilment: economic and military dominance, becoming a great power and exporting its values to other nations as superpowers do.

Therefore, just as we as individuals would necessarily give up a relatively high stage (for example: attending a prestigious

event; belonging—stage 3) if it came at the expense of a more basic stage like food for our children (basic needs—stage 1), so, too, we can expect a state to forgo the composite need in favour of its basic needs. In other words, a state would most likely abstain from an international treaty if that treaty would harm its economy or security, and so on.

When you understand this, you get a deeper and more sober view of the international arena: In 2000, when that document did not touch American security and economy but only its values—social belonging and the like—it represented a confrontation between a stage 4 and a stage 3 need. Therefore, it was opposed comprehensively.

But after the terror attack on the World Trade Center, the document became the most important consideration in stages 1-2 (national security and economy), and therefore it became as foundational as a basic need, overriding any belonging or esteem need.

“The United States has no permanent friends or permanent enemies—only permanent interests.” Henry Kissinger

Who do you think said the following? “As far as I know we don't engage in assassinations and kidnappings and things of

that kind.” No, it was not Mother Theresa. It was, in fact, CIA Director Allen Dulles during the Cold War—nicknamed “the master of dark deeds”. To be fair, perhaps he really did not know (and pigs can fly).

In February 1976, however, the US Senate's Church Committee (established to examine alleged CIA assassination attempts against leaders such as South Vietnam's Ngo Dinh Diem and Cuba's Fidel Castro) issued its final recommendation: governmental assassinations must be prohibited.

Following that, President Gerald Ford signed Executive Order 11905 banning assassinations, especially geopolitical ones. When asked about this, then-CIA Director George H. W. Bush responded diplomatically and ambiguously: “The Agency operates under the laws of the United States, and we do not have a policy of assassinations.”

Of course...

Five years later, in December 1981, President Ronald Reagan reaffirmed the ban by signing another order (E.O. 12333) stating that “no person employed by or acting on behalf of the United States Government shall engage in, or conspire to engage in, assassination... nor shall any agency of the Intelligence Community participate... in activities forbidden by this Order.”

Yet in subsequent years the US government carried out numerous assassinations and attempts against terrorists and even heads of state. In 1986, for example, responding to a bombing at a Berlin nightclub frequented by US soldiers, the United States struck targets in Libya, including the country's leader, Muammar Gaddafi, who survived.

In 1998, the Clinton administration sought to use lethal force against al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and his aides. For that purpose, a special legal opinion was produced stating that the president may issue directives contrary to an executive order without public notification and that the assassination ban does not apply in cases of self-defence.

Checkmate

On 2 October 2018, Saudi dissident journalist Jamal Ahmad Khashoggi disappeared. It later emerged that shortly after entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul—where he had been summoned to deal with a personal

matter—he was brutally murdered inside. His body, it was reported, was dismembered and smuggled out in diplomatic luggage. The world's media raged: How could a journalist be killed merely for opposing the regime? What about freedom of expression?

The entire free world demanded a sharp condemnation from the torchbearer of liberty, the United States.

Of course the US has principles (stage 5), but it also had trade agreements worth over 110 billion dollars a year with Saudi Arabia, plus an even more important military interest: the ability to deploy air and naval forces in the Persian Gulf (stages 1–2) amid hints of a possible strike on Iran (which indeed occurred in 2025).

Given those circumstances, who was it preferable to anger—the Saudi royal family or the journalists' guild? According to the pyramid above, the answer is obvious: a stage-5 consideration (ethics, freedom of speech, values and the like) almost always gives way to

stage-1–2 considerations (economy, national security). Consequently, contrary to the expectations of innocent citizens worldwide, the president mumbled hesitantly and dismissed the allegations as untrustworthy.

In view of the United States' enduring policy of creative moves on the geopolitical chessboard, it is clear that when America objected to the Israeli memorandum, it was moral grandstanding—such is the nature of diplomacy, known to all nations.

For when international consequences are on the line, the board's squares sometimes shade into grey.

Thus we gain an intriguing view of the psychological foundation of the geopolitical chess game, enabling more effective identification of future trends.

Effective diplomacy is the ability to see the full set of considerations underlying the most complex policy decisions, and pull the right strings to advance your state's interests optimally based on its needs.

“

In the great chessboard of the world, the pieces are moved by interest, not by principle.

Winston Churchill



CUPPA Kindness

Know someone who'd enjoy a friendly chat over a cuppa and a bite to eat? Join our new, giving social club!



Thursdays
12:00 - 1:30pm

Contact services@jgift.org for more info



Designed With *Mazel*

Rachie Shnay

Melissa Sussman

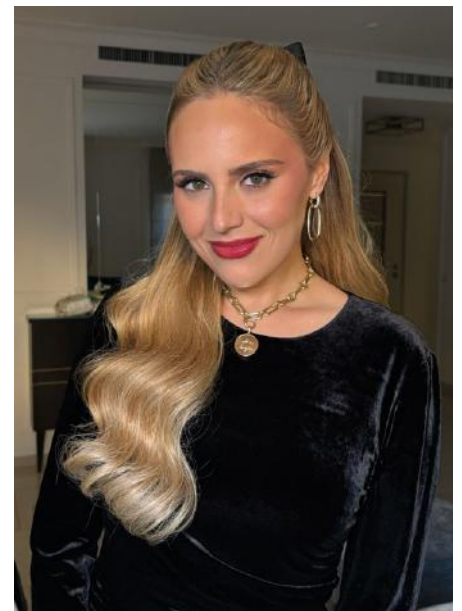
Rachie Shnay isn't just the founder of her eponymous fine jewellery company, but she is also the creator of The Mazel Collection which reimagines Jewish symbols as bold modern expressions of identity, pride and resilience. A grandchild of Holocaust survivors, she crafts delicately defiant Stars of David, Hebrew lettering, menorahs and other Jewish symbols, designed to elevate the material and reconnect Jews with their heritage and community.

Her pieces have been featured in major publications and worn on the Grammys' red carpet, recognised not only for their beauty but what they represent. At a time when surging antisemitism may scare some into hiding their visibly Jewish symbols, Rachie is empowering her customers and followers to wear their identity, beautifully.

This interview was conducted on June 24, 2025

Can you tell me a little bit about your background?

I was born and raised on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. My name itself is deeply tied to my business and mission: I am named after my great aunt, Rachel Shnay, who was murdered in a gas chamber in Belzec when she was six, and my middle name, Feige, is from my grandmother, a Holocaust survivor. I feel my name holds a dichotomy—victim and survivor—encapsulating my life's mission: honouring the past and our ancestors' sacrifices while fighting for our future through Jewish education, Holocaust remembrance, doing what I can to combat antisemitism and being proudly Jewish.





Rachie Shnay. If you scroll far enough, you can still find cake photos.

You've spoken a lot about *Mazel*. What does that word actually mean to you?

To me, *mazel* is the bridge between the material and the spiritual. It's not just "luck"—it's your soul's unique journey: your timing, your talents, your relationships, your health, even your challenges—all tailor-made for you. Some people might seem to have an 'easier' *Mazel*, but what really matters is how you respond to what you're given. That's where growth lives.

Were you planning on incorporating Jewish symbolism into your designs from day one?

Absolutely. I couldn't find Jewish jewellery that felt cool, elevated and modern. I loved the vintage pieces given to me by my grandmother, but I wanted to create something that was spiritual, beautiful and wearable in any space. I was inspired by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson's idea of taking the physical to elevate it into something spiritual. When I started the business, wearing a Star of David wasn't trendy; it was rare. When I launched the *Mazel* Ring, I had to order 15 units upfront which felt like a massive gamble, but I believed in it. Once a few women started wearing it, it spread like wildfire. Women who never thought they'd wear a Star of David suddenly said, "I never want to take it off!"

Loud, proud and unapologetically Jewish, I always say God is my PR. I've never hired anyone for publicity, so it is humbling to see customers and celebrities wearing my designs

Has your Jewish pride always been this strong?

Always. Not only did I grow up in a family with four Holocaust survivors, but we were always deeply connected to Judaism, Zionism and Israel. I brought my college friends to Shabbat dinners, went to rallies and lived in Israel. I was president of Chabad at the University of Michigan. Being visibly Jewish was never something I hesitated about. I've always loved to share my passion for learning Torah, for Israel and for being Jewish because it makes me happy and can bring them joy too.

Can you tell us what inspired you to start the *Mazel* Collection?

It wasn't part of the original plan. I dropped out of a master's program in occupational therapy because it felt too rigid for my creative side. I am a classic middle child: a free spirit that always loved business. First, I

went to culinary school and opened a kosher cake business. While making these huge, elaborate cakes, I casually began tutoring a friend's daughter in Jewish studies, teaching her Hebrew, Torah and its commandments. Word spread, and suddenly I was teaching tons of kids from secular private schools. I even named the tutoring business Gem, which turned out to be a funny bit of foreshadowing!

While baking during the day and studying Jewish education at night, it came to the point where my cake business needed to either grow or stop. Around then, my mum, who was in the jewellery business, suggested I think about that world. I resisted for a long time because I hated the massive markups in the industry. I knew how much things actually cost, and I tried to understand why fine jewellery couldn't be more accessible. When I finally took the plunge, I took a direct-to-consumer approach: real gold, real diamonds, without ridiculous markups—and I flipped my Instagram from Rachie Bakes to



Photos courtesy of Rachie Shnay

“
*Wearing a Star
 of David isn't just
 jewellery, it's a filter
 for the world; you
 see instantly who
 supports you and
 who doesn't*



and to find them featured in *Vogue*, *Forbes* and *Harper's Bazaar*.

Recently, I was moved when I heard that a Holocaust-survivor grandmother bought one for every daughter, daughter-in-law, granddaughter and great-granddaughter.

Did the war change anything for you?

Massively. After October 7th, I turned my phone on and saw an influx of orders coming in. People working at *Vogue*, at JP Morgan and elsewhere, messaged me saying, "I cannot walk into work without a Star of David around my neck." At a time when people felt helpless, they also felt the need to be visibly Jewish more than ever.

It became this non-verbal way to say: "I am Jewish. I am proud. I am not afraid." Wearing a Star of David isn't just jewellery, it's a filter for the world; you see instantly who supports you and who doesn't. I had people come up to me and say, "I love your necklace", and I didn't even know if they meant the design. They were signaling, "I see you. I support you."

Is there something in your Jewish identity that grounds your approach to being a female business owner?

I strongly believe that your *parnassah*—livelihood—is determined on Rosh Hashanah. That puts me at ease and helps me avoid stress about competition or plagiarism; what's meant for me will come to me. I try to focus on staying kind and keeping my good name. Since 7 October, we've donated over \$100,000 to widows, orphans, soldiers and hostage families in Israel. If you give with an open heart, God sends it back tenfold.

I love getting to travel the world, meeting Jewish women and talking about Jewish pride, resilience and identity. Whether I'm in London, Australia or back home, nothing compares to seeing someone across the world wearing their Judaism proudly and knowing this means something to them.

It sounds like you've built a community through your business!

Yes—I call it the Mazel Club! People meet strangers at airports or coffee shops because they're both wearing my pieces. It creates this instant connection. You're part of the tribe. You are seen. Especially for those outside Israel, it's become so much more than jewellery. It's about bringing people together, connecting and *belonging*.



GIFT

- MATCH FUND CAMPAIGN -



POWERED BY GIVING

28-29 SEPTEMBER 2025

Pick up your free GIFT 'gift bag' in your local kosher store. GIFT it forward today and keep spreading kindness.

Chag Sameach!



@giftcharity a member of the  **jewish futures** family

www.jgift.org | 020 8457 4429 | info@jgift.org

JEWISH FUTURES



Leading *the Charge*

Empowered teen labs, dynamic global volunteers and visionary, relatable mentors trade passive empathy for bold action, sketching a vibrant Jewish future driven by creativity, collaboration and courage. Find out what motivates Jewish youth. Get a sneak peak into what tomorrow's leaders are up to today.

SNAPSHOTS

The Perspectives Editorial Team

SHIRA JOSEPH

PROGRAMME DIRECTOR, GIFT

From Rebellion to *Responsibility*

If you met Shira Joseph as a teenager, you probably wouldn't have called her out as the future Programme Director of a major communal charity. "I had a great fake ID business at school", she laughs. "I loved fake designer goods. I was full of energy—but it was all completely misdirected."

That changed at 16 when a family friend nudged her towards volunteering at a care home for people with disabilities. In a quiet moment, feeding someone who couldn't feed himself, Shira felt something shift dramatically. "It was profoundly moving and the first time anyone told me I'd done something good. It completely changed me."

From drama school to stage management, her path eventually led to informal Jewish education—first at Hasmonean, and later at St. John's Wood synagogue. Then she discovered GIFT, the charity that felt like home. "A charity that changes lives through giving? It made sense in every way."

Over 11 years, Shira has done it all—from schools to student engagement, and now national programming. Her passion remains: helping people, especially energetic kids like her younger self, channel their energy into becoming givers and contributing meaningfully to the community.

A recent highlight? Hosting bereaved Israeli mothers and wives in the UK. "It gave people here a way to connect with Israel and each other during such a traumatic time."

GIFT itself is evolving too, launching impact studies to track how involvement in GIFT



positively shapes lives and developing an app to facilitate charitable giving. "We're not just encouraging good deeds", she says. "We're measuring real, lasting change."

It's a long way from counterfeit handbags. And Shira wouldn't have it any other way.



Shira Joseph

REBBETZIN ELISHEVA NEWMAN

SENIOR EDUCATOR, FJL

Making Jewish Life *Add Up*



Elisheva Newman doesn't teach maths anymore, but her degree in mathematics shaped everything about the way she now relates to the students she learns with and mentors. "When I was taught maths as a child, it was all about getting ticks on a worksheet", she says. "But a list of correct answers doesn't show understanding, it just shows repetition."

During her years leading the maths curriculum at Mathilda Marks-Kennedy School, Elisheva championed a different approach, one that focused on understanding over rote learning and asks—why not just what. "You can know $3 \times 3 = 9$, but can you draw it? Can you explain why multiplying by ten adds a zero? What does that zero represent?"

Today, as Senior UK Educator at the Forum for Jewish Leadership (FJL), Elisheva channels that same thinking into her work with UK university students. Alongside her husband Jonny, she designs and delivers high-impact summer programmes that combine elite internships with Jewish inspiration, communal hospitality and exposure to business leaders who live with both professional excellence and Jewish values.

She focuses on ways to make Jewish connection meaningful. Not by simply imparting knowledge, but by enabling students to ask questions and challenge concepts to foster a deeper understanding.

Whether teaching about Jewish dietary

laws or *Shabbat*, Elisheva invites students to explore Jewish ideas from all angles. "When we understand what lies beneath the surface, Jewish life becomes not just something we do, but something we live."

One student recently told her he stopped eating shellfish after her class on the deeper meaning of food. "That's the goal", she says. "Not to tell people what to do, but to help them care enough to ask questions."

Her integrated model and approach has proven transformative. With over thirty students in New York this summer through FJL and many more who joined UK-based alternatives, Elisheva is helping shape the next generation—not just to know their Judaism, but to truly *understand* it.



Above: Rebbetzin Elisheva Newman speaking at the FJL Alumni Dinner in New York

RABBI
YONI ABADI

DIRECTOR OF YOUNG PROFESSIONALS, AISH UK

Soul Over Status



Growing up in Johannesburg in a traditional Jewish family, Yoni Abadi lived what many would call 'the dream'. He was a star athlete in multiple sports, top of the country academically with eight distinctions, and surrounded by glitz—from high school leadership trips with global VIPs to spending summers in the US with his nightclub mogul uncle, partying with celebrities and being chauffeured in stretch limos.

“But something felt deeply lacking”, Yoni reflects. “I had all the excitement, the ambition, but not the meaning.”

That inner voice grew louder during his late teens. After a Birthright trip to Israel and a visit to a *yeshiva*, Yoni saw something he'd never encountered—young people learning with passion, thinking about purpose and finding joy in something real. Despite no close role models having ever done the same, he made the bold decision at 18 to spend some time immersed in Jewish studies. “I thought, I owe myself one year to find out what life is really about.”

That one year turned into nine. He studied in Israel and in South Africa, completing an online finance degree alongside. The shift was profound, but Yoni never wanted to lose himself in the process. “It was never about becoming someone else, but rather becoming the *best version* of myself. Jewish and *You-ish*.”

Now an educator for Aish UK, Yoni brings the same drive, authenticity and charisma that once made him the “cool party guy” to Young Professionals. From innovative mini-trips across Europe to the popular Pre-Shabbat Chill initiative and his *Soul Purpose* podcast, Yoni’s mission is clear: make deep Jewish ideas accessible, relevant and life-changing.

“I am still the same ambitious boy I always was”, he says. “But now it’s about making the *biggest impact* I can with the wisdom I’ve gained, and the life I’ve lived.”





Recording for an 'Unplugged Live' Kumzitz album with Hasmonean Boys



Rabbi Yaakov Klein

RABBI
YAAKOV KLEIN
CO-FOUNDER, EILECHA

↖ Souls on fire on Thursday nights at Eilecha

Awakening the *Soul* of a Generation

Raised in Far Rockaway, New York, Rabbi Yaakov Klein was never content with surface-level spirituality. Even as a teenager, he sensed something was missing—a disconnect between the external observance of Judaism and the deep, inner connection he longed for. “The what, how and when were there”, he reflects, “but the why—

the soul—was often lost.”

That search for depth led him through a difficult period of emotional and philosophical turmoil. At 17, while spending time learning in a *yeshiva* in Israel, he encountered the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov and early Hasidic masters. “It was like oxygen”, he says. “These ideas saved my life. They offered

clarity, passion and purpose—and I knew others were searching too.”

What began as a weekly newsletter on the Torah portion evolved into a prolific writing journey. Rabbi Klein has authored five books, including *Sparks from Berditchov* and *The Story of Our Lives*—an in-depth exploration of Rebbe Nachman’s “The Lost Princess.” The latter became the foundation of the *Lost Princess Initiative*, a global community of spiritual seekers reclaiming depth and consciousness within Judaism.

In 2022, after being introduced by his mentor, Rabbi Moshe Weinberger, Rabbi Klein co-founded Eilecha with Rabbi Naftali Schiff. Based in the UK under Jewish Futures, Eilecha is a movement of soulful renewal, offering classes, musical *Hallel* events, school programmes and spiritually-charged spaces like the beloved Thursday night “*Leil Shishi*”—a *shiur* (class) followed by singing and food.

“People of all ages are meeting God for the first time”, he says. “They’re rediscovering Shabbat, *tefillin* (phylacteries) and prayer—not as obligations, but as opportunities for connection.”

This is not a career for Rabbi Klein. It’s a mission. “I’m just getting started”, he says.

ZAK JEFFAY

EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR, JROOTS

Rooted in Small Town, Guiding *Global Journeys*



Guiding an inspiring Jewish journey in Poland

Zak Jeffay’s story begins in Gatley, South Manchester, a close-knit Jewish community “where everyone knows your name, your presence and even your absence when you don’t turn up to services in *shul*”. It was growing up here that he discovered what truly matters: “nothing compares to being in a smaller community... where your presence is essential.” That sense of belonging and purpose became the foundation of his life.

From his late teens to early twenties Zak carried that ethos into leadership, first as *Mazkir* (National Director) in Bnei Akiva UK, where he embraced responsibility and deeply Jewish, Zionist values. He understood that he had a seat at an important table, working alongside seasoned community leaders who were invested in shaping and giving to the next generation. Moving on to work in informal education at JFS further

fuelled his passion: within the first year, he had taken student groups to Poland, Prague and Ukraine with JRoots. There he got an important glimpse at the transformative power of immersive Jewish travel.

Zak remembers the first moments with the groups in Poland as life-changing: “A journey to Poland is in a completely different league.” For many, it’s “an emotional first encounter, connecting people to feeling part of that Jewish chain. When you go there, a place which has a thousand years of Jewish life pre-Holocaust, and you see what people invested into their Jewish communities there, it starts to widen the lens of what it means to be a Jew today.”

In 2013, a crucial shift: his family made *Aliyah* (immigrated to Israel). As he told his headteacher at JFS, “I have the best job in the world, but in the wrong country.” Israel offered Zak the chance to be “on the stage” of Jewish

history, not just a spectator. “For our family, it was obvious—that’s where we needed to be.”

Zak sees JRoots’ intentionally-immersive trips as essential opportunities that allow participants to ask the big questions, to think, to feel deeply. Walking through Poland, Rome, Prague or other places rich with Jewish history, participants realise they are part of a centuries-long chain. They connect not just with tragedy, but with the vibrancy of Jewish life—how Jews lived, loved, learned and died. These journeys frame identity: personally, nationally and religiously—and open hearts to resilience, history and spiritual roots. For him, guiding people on these journeys isn’t just work—it’s a privilege which enables reflections on who we are and where we’ve come from which inspires the ongoing Jewish story.



Holocaust survivor Leslie Kleinman leads a JRoots group from Aish UK out of Auschwitz





Rabbi Benny Blau
and Chazon



RABBI
BENNY BLAU

DIRECTOR/EDUCATOR FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS
DIVISION FOR CHAZON

Motivated, *not* AUTOMATED



Raised in northwest London by Israeli parents, Rabbi Benny Blau was always the adventurous type—curious, outgoing and unafraid of stepping beyond his comfort zone. That same spirit now drives his work at Chazon, dedicated to helping Haredi teens rediscover their connection to Judaism in a personal and meaningful way.

After years immersed in various *yeshivas* and completing his studies at the Jerusalem Kollel, Rabbi Blau returned to the UK four years ago with a mission: to inspire. “I’ve always wanted to be in a leadership role, to help the

klal (community)”, he explains. “Chazon was a natural fit.”

Today, Rabbi Blau leads camps, shabbatons and learning programmes that speak directly to the hearts of teens. He explains that these young people are brought up to learn Torah, to pray and to do *mitzvot* (fulfill biblical commandments), but some don’t feel a connection, affinity or understand what they’re actually doing or why. “We’re not here to make these young people ‘more religious’”, he says. “We’re here to inspire and educate them, give them different Jewish experiences

and help them truly connect.”

His approach is both educational and experiential. From heartfelt *chaburas* (group learning) to emotionally-charged trips to Poland, the impact is real, even if quiet. “In our world, change is often internal, not external,” he says. “But then you get a boy who tells you he’s never truly enjoyed Shabbat before he came on our *shabbaton* ... or another who voluntarily hands in a device with inappropriate content on it, and tells you he doesn’t want it back, because he no longer wants it in his life. That is *transformation*.”

For Rabbi Blau, it’s not just about knowledge—it’s about meaning. “Too many of us grew up learning Gemara without appreciating certain *mitzvot*, how they’re supposed to impact us, what we’re praying and why”, he reflects. “So, what we’re doing is crucial.”

With warmth, energy and a deep sense of purpose, Rabbi Blau is helping build a future where every Haredi teen feels inspired, connected and motivated—not automated and only living Judaism by rote.

As he puts it, “We want every teenager to experience a sincere relationship with their Judaism—something real, something lasting.”

MAVEN

BECOME A MAVEN

Practical Tips
Bespoke Mentoring
Earn Coins
Learn from Home

Visit aish.org.uk/courses to start
learning and earning today!

 @becomeamaven



INTROSPECTION



Find Your *Voice*

Reflect on Diaspora-Israel dynamics, contemplate stories inspired by released hostages and the Twelve-Day War with Iran, and meet a professional singer who harmoniously integrates her values with her craft. Get inspired by the purpose and meaning inherent in each of our lives and by the power within to choose, when things go seemingly awry, whether to give up or to lean in.

Eye Spy

Careth Kobrin

I am a big fan of spy stories—the genre where truth is more implausible than fiction. From James Bond’s laser-shooting Omega watch to the Mossad’s exploding beepers, I’m enthralled by the gadgets, misdirection, danger and moral ambiguity.

Is it any surprise that the story of the Jewish people entering into the land of Israel for the first time starts with 12 spies?

Moses sends a leader from each tribe to scout the land God had promised them. Their mission: observe the people and resources, and report back after 40 days.

We know what happened next. All 12 agreed it was rich and fruitful, coining the iconic description of a “land flowing with milk and honey”. That was the last time in history Jews unanimously agreed about anything.

Caleb and Joshua gave the thumbs up, but the other ten spooks spoke with fear of a land of giants and impenetrable cities. The people panicked and rebelled, refusing to make *Aliyah*. And so, that generation was condemned to wander the wilderness for 40 years, setting the stage for the complicated, often fraught relationship Jews would have with the Promised Land ever since.

Home / Land

Much like the 12 spies, I consider myself an observant Jew—I like to see what the rest of the nation is up to. Since 7 October, Jews around the world have been forced to confront difficult, often uncomfortable questions. Living in England, my wife has become increasingly alarmed by the political climate and cultural undercurrents here. On more than one occasion, she’s asked me whether we should consider leaving the country.

“We can’t bury our heads in the sand like the European Jews of the 1930’s.”

Once that seed is planted, it inevitably leads to a haunting follow-up: *if not here, then where?*

We are both South African, so a return to that homeland is always an option. But



for Jews in the diaspora, the obvious answer is Israel. And yet, I found myself unable to answer that question clearly: *Why don't I live in Israel?* That question has been sitting with me. Lately, I’ve been spending a lot of time thinking about it. I’ve also been asking others, people from very different backgrounds and life circumstances, the same question: *Why don't you live in Israel?*

Not to be political, religious or provocative. But to listen. To understand the wide range of deeply personal, complex and often contradictory answers it evokes.

I started to notice a pattern. However differently people spoke about Israel, their answers typically fell into just three categories:

OPTION 1: It means nothing to me. The fact that so many Jews live there makes it familiar, but I have no affinity to the land or desire to be there.

OPTION 2: I belong there. I yearn to be there. It is my true Homeland, but for (*fill in the blank*) reason, I can’t be there yet. Reasons range from financial to messianic.

OPTION 3: I love Israel. I support Israel. It feels like home. We go on holiday all the time and the hummus is great. But I don’t want—or need—to be there.*

***But if things ever get really bad for Jews in my*

country, I'm on the next El Al Flight.

I suspect most of you are in the third bucket with me, but I found it interesting how, regardless of their response, most people sounded *apologetic* about their answer.

I wonder—is there a *mitzvah* to live in Israel?

There appears to be a biblical source. “You shall possess the land and dwell in it, for to you have I given the land to possess it.”

¹ Nachmanides interprets this as a positive commandment, but Maimonides does not include settling the land in his list of the 613 *mitzvot*. The Talmud uses very dramatic language: “Anyone who lives in The Land of Israel is like one who has a God, and anyone who lives outside the Land is like one who has no God.”² but Rabbi Moshe Feinstein clearly states that living in the Diaspora is permitted.³

This is the eternal Jewish condition: to debate a question endlessly and arrive at two opposing answers—both of which are true. It’s no wonder almost exactly half the Jews alive today live in Israel.

The Promise of Return

Many of the people I posed the question to told me they prefer the English weather to the prospect of ballistic missiles raining down on their family. Jews have been aware of the dangers of the Land since the spies returned

from their mission over 3,000 years ago, terrified of the inhabitants and describing themselves as mere “grasshoppers” in comparison.

On the flip side, I have a colleague based in Tel Aviv who was literally joining sales meetings from his bomb shelter. He sees Jews being attacked across the west and asks, “how can you stay where you are? Come be safe with your people.”

One can’t help but think of the paradox we witnessed during the recent twelve-day war with Iran: Israeli citizens around the world scrambling to board “rescue flights” back to Israel. An impulse that defied cold logic—fleeing *towards* a war zone—but felt near universal and deeply relatable.

One opinion that shook me to the core pushed both fears to the extreme: “If all Jews live in the same place, a single nuclear strike could wipe out the entire nation.”

But modern Israel is also teaching Jews everywhere that fear need not define us. Many secular Jews expressed no particular religious connection, yet they radiated pride in the miraculous achievements of the IDF and the Mossad in the wake of the catastrophic failures of 7 October. The cutting-edge technology and audacious tactics will make our enemies think twice before starting with the Startup Nation.

Whatever your opinion, it’s worth remembering that our sages have been wrestling with this very question for thousands of years. The tension between Diaspora and Homeland is not new. Perhaps the most poignant expression comes from Isaiah’s prophecy—spoken over 2,700 years ago—that a day will come when “a great *shofar* will be blown”, and the Jewish people will return from exile.⁴

Still, some of us have no desire to return. Others simply have no means. I spoke with an elderly woman who had never visited Israel and seemed quietly resigned to the fact that she probably never would.

I can’t help but think about Moses’ farewell address to the people in Deuteronomy. Knowing he will not enter the Promised Land, he prepares his people for life after his death in their new home. We are warned of exile and tremendous suffering, but comforted by a vision of repentance and redemption: even if the people sin and are exiled, they are never beyond return.

Jacob or Judah

Each of us carries our own opinion—but what do we *really* know for certain about Israel? What can we draw from the few uncontested truths, the rare points of unanimous agreement, about the birth of the Jewish people and their connection to the Holy Land?

The name Israel comes from the book of

Genesis—it was given to our patriarch Jacob. After wrestling with an angel through the night, he receives a new name:

“Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.”⁵

The Hebrew name Yisra’el is often interpreted to mean “He who wrestles with God.”⁶ From that moment on, Jacob becomes the spiritual father not only of 12 sons, but of the nation that would bear his new name—the Children of Israel.

If we are called the Children of Israel, how did we come to refer to ourselves as Jews?

The term Jew is derived from Yehuda—Jacob’s fourth son and the founder of the tribe of Judah. Many years after the Twelve Tribes settled the land, the southern kingdom came to be known as the Kingdom of Judah. For various historic reasons, this name stuck and eventually, even after exile and diaspora, the descendants of all Israelites were referred to as Jews.

Israel was originally the spiritual name of the nation, and *Jew* is the ethnic and historical identity that emerged.

Growing up in South Africa, my generation was taught to identify essentially as Jews and never to be ashamed of it. We dabbled in Jewish religious practice to varying degrees of observance, but we all had an undeniable and intentional relationship with the ancient rituals. I have friends who consider themselves atheists but still recite the Friday night *kiddush*, won’t touch bacon and love Israel.

Our grandparents survived the Holocaust. They taught us that no matter where we made our home, there would always be those who wished us harm. And we should never feel the need to explain our way of life or justify our survival.

Yet somehow, when speaking about the Jews or Israel today, it is not irrational for world

leaders and social influencers to say, “I support their right to defend themselves.”

Remember the lesson of the Spies. “We were in our own eyes as grasshoppers, and so we were in their eyes.”⁷ The sages read this as a critique of self-perception: because they saw themselves as small and powerless, they assumed others saw them that way too.

This becomes a timeless lesson: when you diminish yourself, others will follow your lead. When you carry dignity and confidence, the world is more likely to reflect it back.

We are both Jews and Israelites—a nation with two names, and a people with at least two answers to every question. We don’t need to have all the answers, so long as we support one another and remain grounded in who we are. Whatever your connection to Judaism or to Israel, remember this: we do not need the world’s permission to exist.

Citizens of the Future

A few years ago on Shavuot, I had the privilege of hearing a magnificent class by Rabbi Daniel Rowe in which he introduced an unforgettable expression.

He described the Jewish people as “Citizens of the Future”.

The phrase stuck with me, because it captures something essential about Jewish identity across time. From the earliest moments of our story, Jews have lived with one eye on what is, and the other on what could be.

We don’t speak about “heaven”, but rather *Olam HaBah*, the World to Come.

This isn’t escapism—it’s a guiding light. Whether wandering the desert or praying in exile, we’ve always looked forward. It’s that stubborn hope for something better that binds us. Scattered across time and place, we’re still one people, united by a future we haven’t seen but never stopped chasing.



Greeting new immigrants in the arrivals hall of Ben Gurion Airport (social media)

⁴Isaiah 27:13 ⁵Genesis 32:29

⁶Rashi on Genesis 32:29 ⁷Numbers 13:33

Legacy Live



YOUR LIFE STORY

A life's story is more than just a collection of events and memories.
It encompasses values, beliefs and heritage.

At Legacy Live, we believe every story deserves to be captured and
preserved as a precious keepsake for future generations.

Our cinematic documentaries are expertly created by experienced
former BBC television professionals and journalists, who understand
the power of a life story and of passing on cherished lessons and values.

*"I wanted my grandchildren to understand the values
that have guided our family. The final
result was nothing short of a masterpiece."*

*"Without exception, all the family found it deeply
emotional to watch. They also learned many things
they hadn't known before. My granddaughter,
aged 9, even asked to watch it again!"*

EVERYONE HAS A STORY. WE CAN HELP YOU SHARE YOURS.

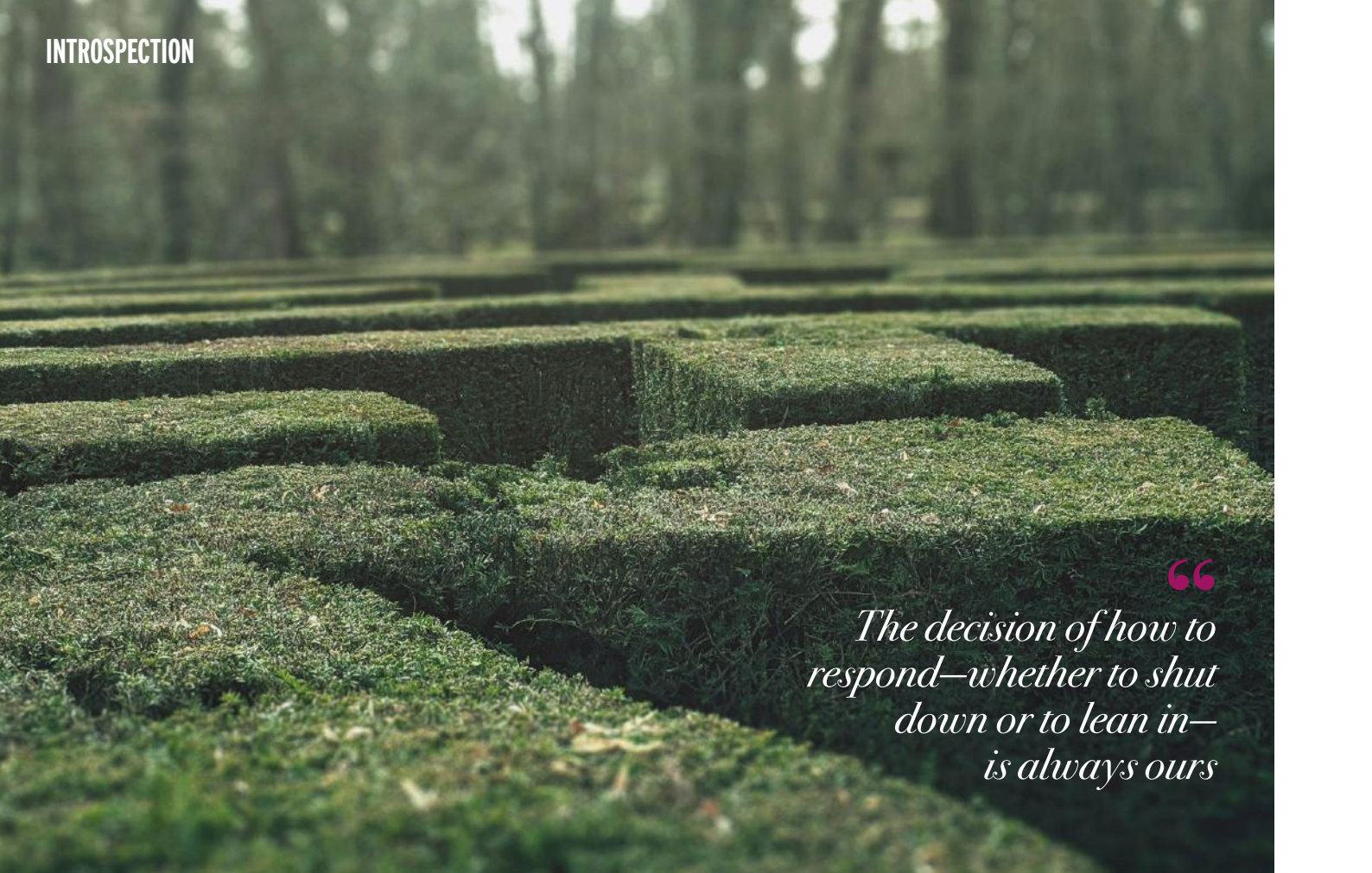
Contact Debra at info@legacy-live.com for more information

Unstuck

A Reflection on the Twelve-Day War with
Iran for the High Holidays Season

Rabbi Dr. Effie Kleinberg





“
*The decision of how to
 respond—whether to shut
 down or to lean in—
 is always ours*”

If you're like me, then Israel's Twelve-Day War with Iran, known as Operation Rising Lion, was overwhelming. The feeling was not just from the rockets or the headlines. It was the emotional exhaustion which was experienced on the streets, running with our children to the bomb shelter. It felt as if everything was happening too fast to process it.

In those hours, a quiet kind of paralysis set in. Life was suspended. Plans unraveled, thoughts spiraled and our sense of control began to slip away.

This time, it was a war. But it could just as easily have been something far more mundane—traffic, a cancelled flight or a meeting that never happened. The impact is often the same:

We feel stuck.

During those moments, something inside us shuts down, and we are unable to notice the miracles unfolding around us. So much happened during those weeks. New chapters of our history were being written, yet we struggled to take it in. Our focus was on safety, survival and on protecting our families. In those foggy days, night and day seemed to blur into one endless period of time, and we stopped believing that we could change the situation. We didn't have the emotional capacity to support others who may have needed our strength. Even in the days that followed, we wanted to celebrate the miraculous salvation and see the clear hand of

God—but we felt frozen.

We then wondered to ourselves, “Haven't we been here before?”

The Jewish people watched miracle upon miracle unfold when the plagues struck Egypt and the sea split before their eyes. One has to wonder—were they also too overwhelmed to notice the miracles then? Were they so busy packing, organising their families, worrying about when and how it would all happen, that they missed the significance of what was unfolding?

Even Moses instructed the people: “*You shall tell this story to your children and grandchildren.*” Could he have instructed this because the Jewish people were not fully present at that moment?

But despite the overwhelming nature of the moment, the Jewish people didn't retreat inward or shut down. They leaned in. They got unstuck, and they were fully present. Consumed with awe and love for their God who had protected them and destroyed their enemies with open miracles, they burst into a spontaneous song of gratitude.

That song, *Az Yashir* (The Song of the Sea), was so powerful, so heartfelt, that it earned its rightful place in our daily *Shacharit* (morning service) prayer, sung every morning since that miraculous day.

If our ancestors were able to lean in during the Exodus, amidst fear and uncertainty, then so can we. We have no excuse not to find the

strength now to embrace the situation and recognise the great miracles we have merited to witness in our own days, despite the terrifying moments of the war. We may not be able to control the events around us, but we are never without choice. The decision of how to respond—whether to shut down or to lean in—is always ours. That response is what lifts us out of paralysis. That response is how we become unstuck.

That same willingness to feel and be present is exactly what this season of the Jewish calendar calls on us to respond to. If we missed the opportunity to lean in and be fully present during the war, these weeks of Elul, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur offer us a second chance to pause and reflect.

This time of year can feel daunting. The responsibility of engaging in sincere introspection and the pressure to formulate a plan to improve and refine our lives can be paralyzing. But with the right mindset, this season can be experienced as a gift. Built-in to our year is a mandatory opportunity to wake up and lean into the possibility of growth and renewal. *We can become unstuck when we lean in.*

Maimonides explains that the goal of the *shofar* is to serve as a spiritual alarm clock.¹ It calls out to our souls: *Wake up you sleepy ones from your sleep and you who slumber, arise. Inspect your deeds, repent, remember your Creator.* Elul is that *shofar*. A month-long wake-up call.

¹Laws of Repentance (3:4) ²As told by Mrs. Miryam Swerdlov, *Here's My Story* (JEM) No. 121

A quiet but insistent nudge reminding us that we are not meant to live asleep. We are not meant to live stuck.

This past summer, during Operation Rising Lion, I was tasked with overseeing the safe evacuation of a group of young Jewish leaders of the FJL programme who were anxiously awaiting their return home from Israel.

There was fear in the air as sirens sent them running to shelters and induced a feeling of uncertainty. Everyone wanted to know: when are we getting out? As I worked behind the scenes to coordinate the logistics, I realised something deeper was unfolding.

These young Jews were being faced with a choice, a critical dilemma of how to translate the moment they were living through. They felt stuck. But in truth, they were exactly in the place they were meant to be. They were in Israel with their people, living through Jewish history in real time.

And that meant they had a choice: to throw up their hands until they would be evacuated, or to lean in with presence and purpose.

I told them: *"You are not stuck. You were meant to be here now. You were given the gift to experience, absorb and carry this moment back home to your family, friends and community."*

That shift from being stuck to becoming unstuck becomes possible through the same resilience that generations of Jews displayed before us during such moments.

In 1967, a group of women made their way home from a weekend of inspiration, finding themselves stranded in Detroit after a snowstorm canceled their flight home to New York. Frustrated, they called the Lubavitcher Rebbe's office to ask what to do.

The Rebbe's secretary listened and then returned with a message:

"The Rebbe doesn't understand the word 'stuck.'"

When the women tried to explain, the secretary clarified:

"The Rebbe knows what 'stuck' means. The Rebbe says that a Jew is never stuck."

The women got the message, and they immediately went from being stuck to unstuck. They began walking around the airport handing out Shabbat candles.² And because of that delay, new homes across America began lighting Shabbat candles.

The Rebbe taught those women and all of us that being "stuck" is simply the result of a person who has made the choice to stand in their spot and to wait for the situation to change. When one chooses to believe that there is always something that one can do, they will be able to respond and this enables their agency and power.

Among the ultimate role models of the Jewish people who embodied this deep courage to get unstuck over the past year and a half have been the hostages who not only survived the horrors of Hamas captivity, but also mustered the courage to share their testimony. These individuals have taught us that even when a person has every reason to feel stuck, helpless or paralysed, there is always something we can control: our response.

Two of these heroes who continue to inspire are Eli Sharabi and Sapir Cohen.

Eli, in his book *Hostage*, described a ritual he created in captivity:

"Even on these difficult days, we have a regular ritual... We sit down, the four of us, and think about something good that happened to us today... A good thing could be that a cruel guard we don't like didn't come today; that a day passed without humiliation; that we received a small fruit from one of the guards... Slowly, it affects our whole day. We find ourselves looking for the good things that we will be grateful for in the evening."³

Eli's testimony inspires because Eli did not control his freedom, but this did not stop him. His choice to search for meaning and points of positivity shifted the entire emotional landscape of the day and gave the hostages the strength to fight for their survival for another day.

Sapir Cohen was also kidnapped on 7 October and thankfully was released 55 days later during the first hostage-terrorist exchange deal. She described being abused, dragged into Gaza and held captive in the Hamas terror tunnels. Nevertheless, from the depths of that horror, she shared this:

"I tell myself that I'm a person of faith. If I'm here, maybe I'm supposed to be here... I remember the last wish I had. I understand that God has fulfilled it for me. He sent me to a place where I can do the most meaningful thing. I can help the other hostages... I transform from a person full of anxieties into a person full of courage and strength."⁴

Sapir taught us that when you see yourself as a victim, you lose the ability to respond let alone to help others in need. Sapir chose to see herself as an agent. That one shift from being stuck to leaning in and becoming unstuck is what unlocked the courage within her.

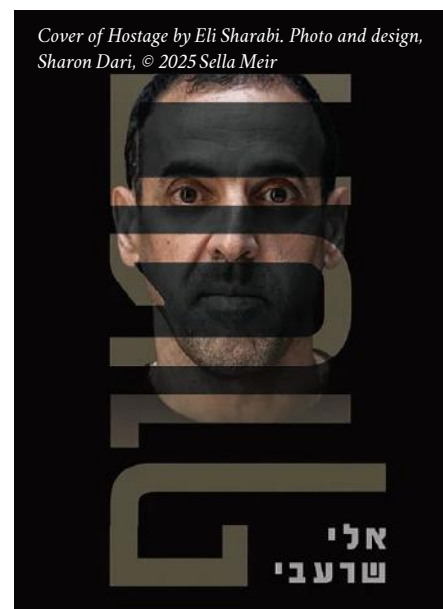
These stories remind us of what the Rebbe taught: A Jew is never stuck. Even when we are not in control of the situation, we always have the choice to respond. When we make that decision and lean in we get unstuck and can then begin to flourish.

This is the invitation of this time of year. These holy days on the calendar are not meant to overwhelm us; they are a Divine gift. A built-in opportunity to pause, reflect and recalibrate.

With the backdrop of this past summer on my mind, the questions I am asking myself this year are: *Will I embrace the opportunity to lean in, get unstuck and embrace a new year of growth ahead?*



Freed hostage Sapir Cohen at Jerusalem press conference. Photo by Avshalom Sassoni, Flash90



Cover of *Hostage* by Eli Sharabi. Photo and design, Sharon Dari, © 2025 Sella Meir

³Sharabi, Eli. *Hatuf (Hostage)*. Tel Aviv: Sella Meir, 2025

⁴Sapir Cohen, quoted in Judy Bluenstein-Levin, "Finding God in Gaza's Terror Tunnels," *Jewish Herald-Voice (Houston)* 29 May 2025

HOW JEWS WIN WARS

Jessica Mzhen (Plummer) on the
High Notes of Jewish Living

Bari Gold

When the Nation of Israel goes to war, God dispatches all different kinds of soldiers, each to their own battlefield. Some soldiers are sent to Gaza, Lebanon and Iran to carry out complex missions. Others are sent to university campuses wearing stars of David. God even sends soldiers to (cyber)space.

If the toughest soldiers go where the fighting is thickest, what can be said of our soldiers braving the internet? Home to rampant antisemitism and distortions of truth, social media's not just a propaganda machine, it's a war zone. This war is not overseas but on our screens and in our pockets. One has to

brace themselves for the worst on Instagram, TikTok and X. Thanks to the information superhighway, the potential for spiritual degradation—at the touch of a button, in the safety of our homes—is enormous.

And yet, Hasidic thought teaches that spiritual descent occurs for the sake of spiritual ascent. In this case, imagine the spiritual heights to be reached by the World Wide Web! The potential for instant access to globalised conflict is the potential for instant access to globalised unity. *Achdut*, unity, is arguably the most successful war strategy ever employed by the Jewish people.

The walls of Jericho fell only after we marched around them altogether in complete

synchronisation. Later on, our unified assemblage at Mizpah was a precursor to our success against the Philistines. All 12 tribes were present to anoint David as king, ushering in the longest era of peace, prosperity and nobility Jewish history has ever seen, “and when the builders laid the foundation of the Temple, they sang all together”.¹

This does not mean that national success is predicated on each of us singing the same note or performing the same function. No two soldiers are assigned the same task. Each of us has a unique purpose corresponding to a unique skill set. When an individual sings the notes they alone were meant to sing, they

“

When an individual sings the notes they alone were meant to sing, they become part of the national song

become part of the national song.

Such was the case, literally, for opera singer, content creator and educator Jessica Mzhen. With a bachelor's degree in musical theatre and a specialisation in opera under her belt, Jessica moved to England where she was determined to make it as a singer, drawn by, as she put it, “the trees, the rain and the monarchy”. Before she knew it, her career took off.

Jessica performed opera in various stage productions in Berlin and at black-tie events and exclusive member's clubs in London. As charmed as she was by the Victorian buildings and her newfound success, she couldn't shake the feeling something was missing. She suddenly felt as if she “needed to do something Jewish.”

Personal drive coupled with a series of divine interventions brought Jessica to Golders Green, a Jewish community in London. She was regularly invited to Shabbat and Festival meals despite not knowing anyone in the community prior to her arrival. It was in Golders Green that she began to ask the hard-hitting questions: Who wrote the prayers in the *siddur* (prayer book)? Why were we slaves in Egypt? What, if anything, do I need from a Jewish life? Most significantly, what, if anything, does a Jewish life need from *me*?

Jessica's search for answers carried her all the way to a seminary in Israel for women of various levels of observance who are interested in exploring Jewish wisdom. “It was everything I needed at the time to guide me on my Jewish journey. Still, the more I learned about Judaism, the more I felt as if I was being confronted with a crossroads between what I wanted out of my career and what I wanted out of my religious observance”, she said. It seemed impossible to be an opera singer and an observant Jew.

She soon found this couldn't be further from the truth. National harmony—*achdut*—exists when an individual is engaged in his or her own unique mission. Jessica wasn't being asked to sacrifice her gifts, but to fine tune them and use them with purpose for something beyond herself. In his book *Morality*, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks puts this concept into words with express and poignant clarity: “We should not ask ourselves what we want from life; we should ask ourselves What does life want from us. There's a difference between the call from within and the call from the outside. It's the difference between ambition and vocation.”

In other words, voice is not just something we have but something we hear. Perhaps this is what is meant by *Naase v'Nishma*—“We will do, and we will hear”—the emphatic and unanimous declaration spoken by the Jewish people at Mount Sinai as we accepted the yoke of Heaven for the first time. Each and every Jewish *neshama* (soul) has a calling, and

it can be heard as a response to one's own commitment to the Divine Will.

Years of voice lessons became meaningful in more ways than one as Jessica began to sing exclusively for female audiences. She was touched by the potent and pure electric charge that filled a room when women congregated to sing verses of praise to God. It wasn't long before she was introduced to composer and lyricist Dobra Weiniger, and the two began to collaborate on uplifting, inspiring and soulful songs for Jewish women.

At once delicate and powerful, ethereal and bold, Dobra's lyrics and Jessica's vocals contain as much emotion as they do devotion. Instead of remaining the thing that was holding her back, for Jessica, singing became a form of prayer. Inherent in her unique, God-given talents and abilities was the potential to connect with The Infinite.

No time of year is as opportune to actualise this potential as the Hebrew month of Elul. On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, each of us is given the chance to experience a level of connection, compassion and forgiveness beyond the scope of human understanding...but what does it really mean to stand before The One True Judge on Judgement Day? Jessica's most recent song, “Chances”, makes the experience all too real—“The King Of All Kings is so near. I hold my breath now and, with a tear, pray with all of my might for a year filled with life. I can always start over any time of the day. I can always start over and try again a different way.”

As if she set her life to music, Jessica has given her music a new life. With a renewed sense of direction and a broadened vision, she began to look for more ways to do her part with the gifts she was given. After 7 October, she noticed how fraught the internet was with antisemitism and began creating videos under the handle *JudaismwithJessica* to share her journey and insights on TikTok and Instagram. Her mission—what God dispatched her to her battlefield to do—was to celebrate meaningful Jewish living and help women like herself feel inspired and connected. *JudaismwithJessica* fights the good fight by creating *achdut*, the Jewish people's most powerful war strategy—the same strategy employed by the warriors of *Tanach*, The Hebrew Bible.

In *Ethics of our Fathers*, Ben Zoma says that a true warrior is one who conquers himself. In times like these, as our combat soldiers risk—and lose—their lives for our people, we do not diminish their courage; but perhaps we honour it when we remember that the battle for Jewish destiny is fought both on the front lines and within ourselves. If our oneness is rooted in our Jewishness, then Jews embracing Judaism shakes the world in ways no weapon ever could.

Tune In

Jessica Mzhen (Plummer)
Produced by Dobra Weiniger



'Chances'



'In the Blink of an Eye'

aish^{uk}

JOURNEY TO POLAND 2026

FROM
£199 +
55 Aish Coins

4 - 8 FEBRUARY 2026



Application deadline:
4 January 2026

a member
of the
**jewish
futures**
family

OLAMI MEMBER

HIGH HOLY DAYS



Unlock Your *Potential*

Harness the transformative power of the season. Translate ambitious goals into practical habits, improving mood, relationships and overall quality of life throughout the year. Learn what the Jewish new year is all about, and delve deeper into how best to spiritually elevate your High Holy Day experience.



In the S I L E N C E After the Blast

A Simple Voice Awakens

Rabbi Yaakov Klein

Content Warning: The content in this article may be distressing and includes a brief description of violence and loss. Reader discretion is advised.

LC News (“where the news never stops”) is generally not a radio station one turns to for inspiration. But one morning the radio was on in the car as I drove home from synagogue, and a segment caught my attention. It was part of a report on the 20th anniversary of the 2005 “7/7” terror attacks in London, in which 52 people were killed and 770 others injured. The anchor was interviewing a woman who tragically had both of her legs blown off in the attack, asking her what she could recall of that dark day.

She commented that it took only a few horrifying and chaotic seconds for a train full of “anonymous commuters” to become a family. A few moments earlier, they were total strangers, each wrapped up in their own world of beliefs, fears and prejudices, shutting out the world around them with headphones or some other form of socially-isolating behaviour. When their eyes met, they would quickly avert their gaze. They weren’t here for connection, they were temporarily in this place together only so they could get to a great many places permanently apart.

And then, darkness.

And then, pain.

And then, smoke and wreckage and precious, precious human beings whose

infinite value, despite the differences that divide us, become so readily apparent in moments that jolt us into contact with our collective human soul.

It should be evident to us that, in truth, every single train, bus, plane etc. is always only seconds away from all those strangers becoming family. That potential is constantly there. Yet it often takes tragedy to allow that utopian sense of oneness to emerge.

What is it that happens in a moment of tragedy? What was it that caused those strangers to suddenly feel like family?

Perhaps we may suggest that this was a spirit of “*teshuvah*”, return. Classically, *teshuvah* refers to our return to a stronger degree of Torah observance, climbing the spiritual ladder to grow closer to God. But Rav Avraham Yitchak HaKohen Kook, the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of pre-state Israel and one of the great spiritual visionaries of the modern era (1865-1935), taught that on a deeper level, *teshuvah* means to return to ourselves—to our true essence so often obscured by the various layers of our identity.

If we had asked any of the anonymous commuters riding the train that day, “Who are you?”, we likely would have gotten their name, their occupation, perhaps some background information about their upbringing. Indeed, this is the level of consciousness with which most of us operate, most of the time. But a moment of collective trauma, an experience

of coming face-to-face with one’s mortality, often has the effect of stripping away these external garments. Suddenly, we are all souls. Suddenly, there is no moment but *this moment*, no place but *this place*, no agenda but love, care and concern for the other souls around us. In one flash of awakening, we have experienced *teshuvah*, having the curtains of existence part totally enough for us to reconnect with our shining essence whose brilliant illumination causes all smallness to melt away.

In his explanatory comments on the *mitzvah* (commandment) of blowing *shofar* (the ram’s horn) on Rosh Hashanah, Maimonides famously writes:

*“It is as if [the shofar’s call] is saying: ‘Wake up, drowsy ones, from your sleep. You who slumber, arise! Inspect your deeds, repent, remember your Creator. Those who forget the truth in the vanities of time and throughout the entire year, who devote their energies to vanity and emptiness which will not benefit or save: Look to your souls. Improve your ways and your deeds and let every one of you abandon his negative path and thoughts.’”*¹

The piercing, primal cry of the *shofar*, so deeply embedded in our collective Jewish consciousness, provides an opportunity to penetrate the external layers of our identity—the “vanities of time” with which we become so preoccupied in our very noisy world—and discover the “silent, thin voice” of our simple essence. It is as if time stops, all is still. A sudden flash of realisation overwhelms

¹ *Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah 3:4*

“

Hearing the call isn't enough. What is expected of us in those special moments is to make a change, to do our best to "turn around"

us: I am not my appearance. I am not my occupation. I am not even anything I do or ever did. I am what I already am, what I always will be—an embodied spark of Godliness, endlessly holy, endlessly good, endlessly compassionate.

This is the essence of *teshuvah*—the opportunity to reflect on our true identity and go “back to basics”, reconnecting with our essential values and inner truth.

But these moments of return aren't limited to moments of crisis or ritual; sometimes they arrive in the quietest corners of everyday life.

On an Uber drive back from Heathrow Airport early one morning, my driver, a friendly middle-aged man, asked me where I had flown in from, and a conversation ensued. He told me he had come over from Ghana around 20 years ago, first without his wife and children, working to put himself through university, eventually bringing them over to the UK a few years later.

I asked him about life back in Ghana, about the culture, the traditions, the faith. He described a deeply religious community, a tribal culture where polygamous marriages meant many times more children than adults. His father had five wives, he said, and he grew up with tens of siblings. There was one football in the whole village, and it kept them completely content.

I mentioned that in so many pictures I have seen of villages like his, the people always seem so happy, despite the obvious material impoverishment. “Oh yes”, he replied. “It's absolutely true. The people are really happy. They have strong values, deep faith and delight in the simple things. Everyone looks out for each other, no one is ever alone.”

Soon, the conversation turned to the contrast between the lifestyle he described and our experience here in the West. “My children have grown up in a spiritually bankrupt culture”, he bemoaned. “Here it is all about materialism, individualism. People are cut off from nature, cut off from each other. Everyone is obsessed with physical pleasure and gratification, with increasing levels of



access and abundance. And yet, there is so much sadness here.”

“Do you regret it?” I asked. “Do you regret bringing your children over, in the hope of giving them a better life?”

A long moment passed in silence.

“Sometimes, yes”, he said. “Sometimes.”

In that long pause, my driver was traversing the distance between his children's external and internal identities, recalling the glory that lies beyond the surface of the layers we pile on in our sophisticated attempts to “get ahead”. Our sages teach, “Who is wealthy? He who is content with his lot.” *Teshuvah* wakes us up to the simple truths from which we often become so alienated along our journey

through the human experience.

While tragedy and the spiritual intensity of the *shofar* blast both serve as catalysts for this spiritual awakening, there are so many other opportunities throughout our lives when God is calling us home, calling us back to the simple truths of life we lose touch with over time. But hearing the call isn't enough. What is expected of us in those special moments is to make a change, to do our best to “turn around”.

I recall one autumn day when, visiting family, we sat in the dining room for lunch. This particular room had an open doorway leading to another room, and the wall on one side of the doorway was covered with a mirror. Amichai, our toddler, was playing



with some toys in front of the mirrored part of the wall with his back turned to the table, and when he looked up, he could see my reflection. I smiled and waved at him, and he—not understanding the mechanics of a mirror—leaned his head over (still facing away from me) to peer through the doorway of the next room. Not finding me there, he moved his head back to the wall and found my reflection again. Immediately, he again leaned over to look through the doorway into the empty side-room. Now thoroughly confused, he again looked into the mirror and saw my reflected face once more.

And then I called to him. "Amichai! I'm over here! Turn around!"

And he did.

And, overwhelmed with joy, he half-galloped over to me and I, no longer only a two-dimensional reflection, but my real self, held him tightly in my arms.

Throughout life, we often sense God's Presence mysteriously reflected across the varied terrains of time and space. Moving over to find Him, we peer through empty doorways into a void—He is nowhere to be found. We carry on for some time until we catch this reflection again; His Wink, His Smile, His Laughing Eyes. Again we look over into the next room, and again—nothing.

But there are moments when, hearing the Voice, we have the wisdom to "turn around".

Moments that shake us out of this pattern of reflection and void, that open up a whole new paradigm. Moments when, invited in, the Infinite One bursts into our lives in the fullness of His Being. And then, everything becomes clear. Then, we run straight into His open arms.

May we merit to hear that call, when it comes.

May we merit to remember that no matter how far we seem, we are never more than one turn away.

And may this experience of *teshuvah*, returning to our essential selves, help us anchor our awareness in the essential goodness, simplicity, innocence and holiness we carry in the essence of our shared humanity.



CST

Proud to support our community

From all of us at CST, we wish
you a happy and safe New Year

SCAN TO VISIT
CST.ORG.UK



**Report suspicious activity &
antisemitism to CST**

EMERGENCY National Emergency Number
(24-hr) **0800 032 3263**

NON-EMERGENCY

London **020 8457 9999**

Manchester **0161 792 6666**

Drawing the *Bow*

The Lost Art of Jewish Prayer

Rabbi Jonny Roodyn

On Rosh Hashanah morning, in one of London's largest synagogues, the *Chazan's* voice was barely audible above the chatter. As he began the repetition of the central *Mussaf* prayer, the cacophony of noise drowned out the sacred words. An exasperated honorary Officer interrupted the service to scold the crowd, saying, "The more you talk, the longer this will take."

The message, undoubtedly unintentional, was that prayer is a burden to endure, not a moment to embrace. That

it was delivered on one of our holiest days only made it sting more.

That experience is not isolated and reflects a broader discomfort with prayer across the Jewish world. While almost 75% of British Jews engage in some form of home-based ritual on Rosh Hashanah, only 57% attend synagogue at least once during the High Holy Days. Nearly half report that they find prayer to be "fairly" or "very unimportant". It is no surprise, then, that synagogue membership has declined by around 20% over the past quarter century.

For many people, particularly those attending out of habit, duty or a lingering sense of cultural loyalty, synagogue services feel long, inaccessible and emotionally flat. The liturgy of the High Holy Days, so different from the brevity of weekday services, or the relatively familiar Shabbat service can leave even regular attendees disoriented and disconnected.

Perhaps the real question isn't about how to get more people into synagogue, but rather, what would it take to help people learn how to pray?



An archer doesn't immediately aim at their target. They first establish their stance, draw back the bow, align their body, settle their breathing and only then, focus on the target

At its core, prayer is not just about saying the words. It is about setting an intention—*kavanah*—a direction, a focus and a readiness of the heart to be open.

It is no secret that we live in a world of distraction, where our attention is fragmented and the world of the spiritual feels inaccessible. The Jewish tradition offers an ancient though deeply resonant framework for reconnecting with the Divine; one that begins not with performance, but with preparation.

The Archer's Stance

Prayer, say the sages, is one of the three pillars upon which the world stands. In the *Shema* prayer itself, the Torah instructs us to “serve Him with all your heart”, which the Talmud understands as a reference to *tefilla*—prayer. In other words, prayer is not achieved through ritual, but through heartfelt connection. Not through recitation but through intention.

The Hasidic masters spoke about *hachanah le'tefillah*—preparation for prayer. Like a craftsman setting his tools or a performer tuning her instrument, the soul must first be readied. The Jewish tradition offers an unexpected metaphor for this process: the archer. An archer doesn't immediately aim at their target. They first establish their stance, draw back the bow, align their body, settle their breathing and only then, focus on the target. If you aim too early without setting yourself properly, you lose power, direction and control.

Authentic prayer works much the same

way. We often start by wanting to immediately “aim” for connection. But real intention cannot be rushed. It takes a moment of stillness. A pause. A breath. A decision to show up and be present in the moment.

Jewish law even recommends setting aside a fixed space for prayer, whether at home or at synagogue. The environment, the routine, the physical positioning, all help shape the emotional and spiritual posture. Then comes the drawing back: the early blessings of the service prime the heart by singing God's praises and referencing His hand in creation. The *Shema* is the moment we anchor ourselves, establishing not just God's existence, but His oneness and our place within that relationship.

Only then are we ready to release. We stand before the Almighty in the silent *Amida* prayer and speak directly, vulnerably and intentionally.

From Duty to Devotion

Prayer is a technology of the soul. It is not designed just to change our fate, but to change us. Through *teshuvah* (repentance), *tefilla* (prayer) and *tzedaka* (charity), the High Holy Days offer an opportunity to “undo the evil decree” on the Jewish people.

But we must arrive with more than the right text. We need the right mindset.

If the first time we open a *machzor* (high holy day prayer book) is on Rosh Hashanah, we are like soldiers entering the battlefield without the requisite training. And even if we know when to sit, stand, bow or kneel, choreography

alone does not create connection. The words only come alive when they are infused with intentionality—with *kavana*.

The word *kavana* means more than just focus. It comes from the root *kivun*, direction. Prayer is not about perfect Hebrew or polished pronunciation. It's about alignment. It is expressed through our ability to take our scattered pieces of self, our fears, hopes and yearnings, and turn them towards something higher.

Rediscovering the Sacred

Our tradition is not lacking in power. It is overflowing with it. The melodies, the metaphors, the images of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are ancient and electric. They speak of a world hanging in the balance and a Book of Life open before the King.

In a year marked by instability, pain and loss for the Jewish people, the State of Israel and the world at large, these images feel even more urgent. The need for connection, for clarity and for something enduring and eternal has never been more acute.

Prayer can allow us to rediscover that connection only as much as we allow it to. Connection begins with reclaiming intention and with choosing to see prayer not as an obligation but as an opportunity, a path to becoming more awake, attuned and alive.

When we pray with direction, with discipline and with patience, our words find their mark, not because we mastered the ritual, but because we learned how to aim with heart.



“

*It's not the grandeur
of one action that
shapes us, but the
repeated pattern
of doing good that
builds who we are*

Soul STRETCH

Rabbi Avrohom Zeidman

There's an experiment I once heard about that's always stayed with me. A group of hotel cleaners were asked a simple question: do you exercise? Most said no. Which makes sense. These women weren't going to the gym or doing yoga in the park. But when researchers pointed out just how physically demanding their daily work was, vacuuming rooms, scrubbing bathrooms,

changing sheets, they were surprised. The cleaners were told: your job *is* exercise. You're burning calories, building strength and meeting the official health guidelines just by doing your job.

Here's the twist. After being told that, even though they changed nothing in their behaviour—neither their diet, nor their work routine—their bodies changed. Over the

next four weeks, they lost weight, their blood pressure dropped and their health improved. All because they were made aware of what they were already doing.

Awareness changes everything.

That idea is at the heart of this piece: giving doesn't only help the person in need. It transforms the giver. But only if we are aware of what we're doing.

Giving changes us—but only if we're paying attention. That same principle, the power of awareness to transform action, doesn't just apply to physical health. It's just as true when it comes to the soul.

Maimonides says something remarkable about giving charity that's often misunderstood. If you have the ability to fully fund a cause, to bring about real change, then do it. Don't spread yourself thin. If you have £100 and there are 100 causes, each needing £100, don't give £1 to each and accomplish nothing. Pick one and help it fully.

But what if you don't have enough to make a real dent anywhere? Let's say you have £100 and every cause needs £1000. Either way, you won't solve any of them. What then?

Here's where Maimonides is crystal clear: divide your money. Give £10 to each. Why? Because there are two parts to giving: the receiver and the giver. Even if your money won't fix the world, you will be changed by giving it. The act of giving again and again habituates you to generosity. It reshapes your instincts. The more often you give, the more it becomes part of who you are. And the more often you give, the more you change. Not because you saved a life, but because you became someone who gives. As the teaching in *Ethics of the Fathers* suggests, the world is judged "with goodness, but in accordance with the quantity of positive deeds". This idea is echoed by many of our sages: it's not the grandeur of one action that shapes us, but the repeated pattern of doing good that builds who we are.

Giving forces you to turn outward. To notice others. To care. But this process goes far deeper when you become conscious of it. Just like the hotel cleaners. Nothing changed in their bodies until they realised what they were already doing.

In my work at GIFT, I try to awaken this awareness, helping people realise the desire to give is already within them. It's already there. It's wired into the soul. The only reason we sometimes resist it is because our more animalistic side covers it over. We feel the inconvenience of giving, not the gain. But when we do give, and we pay attention to the inner feeling, it's powerful. It's your soul lighting up, your essence coming to life.

Some people connect to their soul through music and stillness under the stars. That's a beautiful path. But giving, especially when it stretches you, can reach the same depth. It requires more awareness, but in a way it's more genuine. The connection comes not just from feeling, but from action.

Let's take it one step further. Why does giving feel so elevated? Why does it move us so deeply? Because when we give, we are



emulating God. He gives endlessly, without need, without gain. Every true act of altruism is rooted in the soul, because the soul itself is a spark of the Divine. To give is to mirror that Godliness.

That moment is worth paying attention to. Noticing it, naming it and allowing it to shape us is part of the growth process.

The Talmud tells the story of a Roman noble challenging Rabbi Akiva. "If your God loves the poor", he asked, "why did He create them? If poverty is divinely ordained, how dare you interfere with it?" Rabbi Akiva's answer is piercing: "poverty exists not because the system failed, but because the system needed us. God gave us an opportunity to become givers."

Giving is not a patch for a broken world. It's the gym for the soul. It's where we become who we're meant to be.

But only if we're awake enough to notice.

References

Crum & Langer, Mind-set Matters: Exercise and the Placebo Effect, *Psychological Science* 18:2 (2007).

Rambam, Mishneh Torah, *Laws of Gifts to the Poor* 10:7–8.

Pirkei Avot 3:15 – "The world is judged with goodness, but in accordance with the quantity of positive deeds."

Maimonides, *Commentary on Pirkei Avot* 3:15 – On the power of repeated actions over singular great ones.

Orchot Tzadikim, *Gate of Generosity* – "According to the quantity, not the greatness, of one's deeds."

Sefer HaChinuch, *Mitzvah* 16 – "A person is shaped by their actions, even without perfect intent."

Talmud Bavli, *Bava Batra* 10a – Rabbi Akiva's response to the Roman view of poverty.

Micro RESOLUTIONS

The Perspectives Editorial Team

The new year is an auspicious time to take stock, set goals and shake things up. Summer comes to a close and the leaves begin to change. Novelty sets in and brings with it a clean slate and hope for the future. For about two weeks, the whole world is waking up at 5am and learning how to make sourdough.

Then the novelty wears off. Time goes by in a blink, and before we know it, we've returned to baseline—sticking a

slice of wonderbread into the toaster and calling it a day. What should be a fresh start becomes a benchmark indicating all the ways we fell short the year before. One may feel compelled to ask: are my resolutions overrated?


Perhaps they're not overrated but overstated. We make such a big deal over our resolutions, often biting off more than we can chew. This year, instead of making a list of new year's resolutions, why not set

one small, easy, doable intention instead? For instance, instead of saying "I'm never going to use my phone at the family dinner table again", say, "on Sundays from 645pm to 7pm I'll put my phone on silent."

By making small, intentional changes, it is easier to be consistent, keep our promises and create real and lasting change. Here is a list of micro resolutions you can absolutely commit to and stick to to get you started:

Send one kind message to a friend or family member you haven't spoken to recently 

Smile at a stranger (even if it's awkward)

Hold back one critical comment you were about to say 


Hi! Introduce yourself to someone you frequently see but never speak to


Before unlocking your phone, lie there for ten seconds and think of one thing you're glad to wake up to today


Spend five seconds thinking "what's the right thing to do?" before acting

Choose to listen fully to one person without interrupting

Give someone else a compliment this week

Before sleep, name one good thing you did that day, even if tiny 

Say "thank you" to one person you often overlook (like a cashier or bus driver) 

Take one conscious deep breath when feeling stressed 

When you hear gossip, walk away or change the topic once this week

Close your phone for one minute before bed or after waking up

Eat one bite slower to be more mindful

An aerial photograph of a vibrant turquoise lake. In the center, a small, rocky island is covered in lush green trees and has a small wooden structure on it. Two kayakers in red gear are visible on the water, one near the island and another further out. The water's color transitions from deep blue to bright turquoise near the shorelines.

WELLNESS

On Easy Street

Strengthen relationships with intentional communication. Glide effortlessly through fasting with expert nutritional advice. Gain practical skills for caring for yourself and others, and enter into this holiday season with a sound mind, heart and body.

Crossing the BRIDGE

Intentional Communication for Thriving Relationships

Ruthie and Joel Portnoy



It is often said that communication is the key to a good marriage. This is strange because somehow, “Did you collect the dry cleaning today, darling?” rarely leads to deep emotional intimacy. In real life, most couples are not having long candlelit dialogues about their dreams and vulnerabilities every night. They are most likely navigating busy careers, noisy kitchens, bedtime chaos, WhatsApp misunderstandings and the occasional, “Why are you looking at me like that?” However, underneath the everyday noise, you’ll find a longing to feel seen, heard and understood. When that longing isn’t met, frustration builds. We talk, but we don’t

connect. We react, but we don’t reflect and respond with any level of accountability.

Intentional communication is a conscious choice to pause, attune and enter into conversation with presence and purpose. It means speaking and listening not just to express ourselves, but to truly meet each other emotionally, spiritually and relationally.

Crossing the bridge into one another’s world begins with small shifts in how we speak—grounding our words in deep spiritual values and practical tools that turn conflict into closeness and routine into renewal. Speaking and listening with purpose can transform our marriages and all our relationships into spaces

of genuine connection.

The reality is that not all talking is communicating. Many of us speak to unload, to defend, to win or simply to fill the silence. Intentional communication is different. It is a deliberate act of connection, choosing words carefully and listening in ways that build safety, empathy and clarity between two people. At its core, it involves two sacred commitments. First, speaking with purpose: expressing thoughts, needs or feelings and emotions clearly and compassionately. Second, listening with presence: receiving what is said without judgement, interruption or rushing to respond or defend. This doesn’t mean

“

Most conflict arises when we assume our island is the whole map or when we try to shout across the ocean instead of building a bridge

intentional communication becomes a quiet, almost spiritual space.

Create an image for yourself where you see every person living on their own emotional island. Your partner has their landscape shaped by past experiences, inner beliefs and unspoken hopes. You have yours. Most conflict arises when we assume our island is the whole map or when we try to shout across the ocean instead of building a bridge. It is a conscious decision to step into your partner's experience not to correct it, but to understand and validate it.

Here's what that could look like in real life:

Your spouse says "I feel like I'm doing everything around here."

Instead of replying "that's not true", you could say, "I can hear that you are really pressured today and feeling unappreciated. How about I make dinner tonight or order a takeaway and then we can talk about how I might be able to relieve some of that pressure?"

Your partner goes quiet in an argument and retreats into his or her shell. Instead of escalating the situation by demanding to be heard or to hear answers to your questions, you say "I see you shutting down. Would it be alright to take a breath or a 15- or 30- minute time-out and try again when we both feel safer?"

Your partner shares a challenge or disappointment. Instead of rushing to fix it you say "I understand that this is really weighing you down right now."

Crossing the bridge may often feel unnatural. It requires setting aside the human impulse to defend, explain or win. It demands that we listen not to reply, but to receive. This isn't passive, it is radically active. It is the discipline of choosing connection over control or estrangement. It is the quiet inner work of *bitul* (nullification)—a refined sense of self, making space for someone else's truth without feeling diminished by it. It reflects the Divine model. When Adam hides in the Garden, God begins not with blame but with a question: "Ayeka?"—"Where are you?" It is an invitation, not an accusation. In the same vein, couples would do well to be curious rather than accusatory. Those who learn to cross the bridge regularly can begin to create a new rhythm; one where both people feel seen, heard and safe. The world of "I" can become the world of "we".

It is one thing to want to communicate with intention. It is another to actually do it, especially when you're tired, irritated or trying to answer six messages while helping the children with homework!

becoming robotic. It means we slow down just enough to remember that there is a person on the other side of your sentence, someone with a different history, perspective and set of emotional triggers.

Intentional communication asks if I am speaking in a way that invites connection or causes defensiveness and estrangement. Am I listening to understand, or just waiting for my turn to reply? It is not about perfection. It is about being present. It is not about saying the "right thing". It is about saying the real thing, with kindness. It is not about agreement. It is about alignment; with truth and with empathy. When this is done well,



“

The magic is not in agreeing; it is in showing that you really care enough to understand

Here are five accessible tools to begin practising intentionality, even in life's messy moments:

1. Check Your Timing

Some conversations need space. If one of you is emotionally dysregulated, or simply unavailable, it is alright to pause. Try, "I want to give this conversation the attention it deserves. Can we come back to it later tonight, or when I have been to the gym?" Better still, it would be good to fix a time when your partner is likely to be emotionally and physically available. This is not avoidance, it is quite simply a useful strategy.

2. Use "I" Statements

Instead of: "You always ignore me", try, "I feel disconnected when I don't feel heard." This shifts the tone from blame to vulnerability and keeps the door open for further healthy dialogue.

3. The 'Imago Dialogue' Structure

This structured process slows things down and builds trust. Whilst it may initially feel a little clumsy and unnatural, it can soon become a very useful tool for enhanced communication.

Mirror. Repeat back some of what your partner said. This is also known as Active Listening. "So you're saying you felt alone at dinner when I was on my phone?"

Validate. Acknowledge their perspective. Go over the bridge into their world and reply "That makes sense. You wanted my presence, and you had put so much effort into making dinner tonight."

Empathise. Try to feel their feelings. "I imagine that felt frustrating or even hurtful."

The magic is not in agreeing; it is in showing that you really care enough to understand.

4. Try a Daily Check-In

Try to set aside five minutes a day or at least every other day. One partner asks: "Share with me one thing that is going on for you today." The other listens. No fixing. No advice. Just presence. Then switch roles. This tiny ritual builds trust, prevents resentments and reminds each other: I see you, I hear you and (hopefully) I feel you.

5. Shifting to Intentional Communication

INSTEAD OF...

"You never listen."

Interrupt or defend

Jump to solutions

Assume you know

Prove you're right

TRY...

"I feel unheard."

Mirror and pause before replying.

Stay with their feelings first.

Ask: "Can you help me understand?"

Focus on connection, not winning.





“

Building this bridge between two inner worlds doesn't promise perfect harmony, but it makes real connection possible

Ultimately, intentional communication is not about being perfect. It is about being present, and that is where the healing begins. You do not have to change everything overnight, and reflection can be a very powerful first step.

Some questions worth sitting with are:

When was the last time I listened without interrupting or judging?

What feelings do I have trouble expressing?

What do I avoid hearing?

Where did I learn to communicate?

Did I have good role models?

Do I prefer to be in the right, or to be loveable?

In moments of tension, what am I really trying to protect?

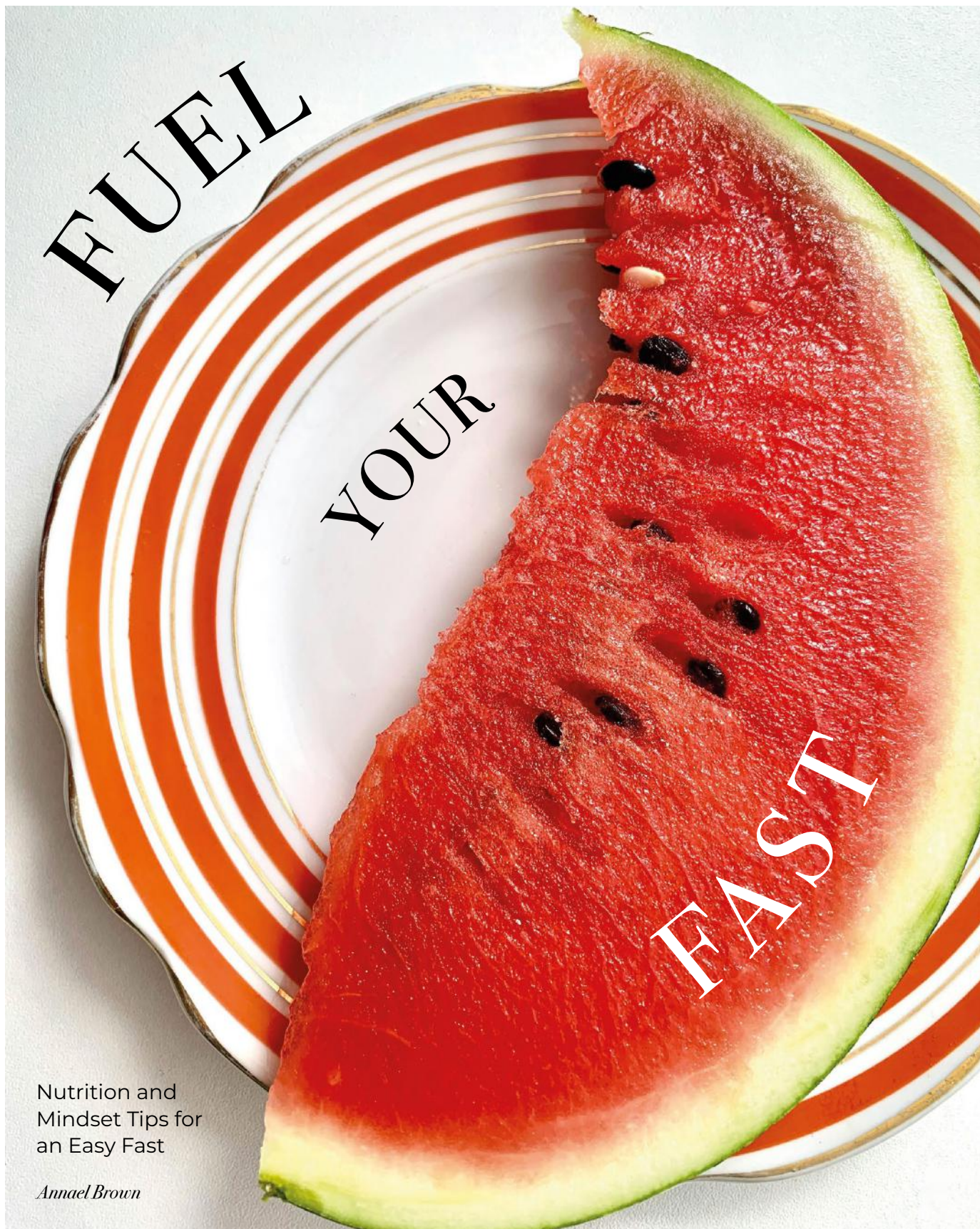
Do I give my partner the benefit of the doubt, or the burden of my assumptions?

What is it about my past that triggers me so easily and so often?

Simply asking is already changing. Tony Robbins famously says “The quality of your life is the quality of your relationships.” In other words, your primary relationship shapes everything else. Your emotional state, your work, your health, even your parenting. In the final analysis, relationships aren't built in the

grand moments. They are built in the quiet ones; the sigh at the end of the day, the way we respond to disappointment, the courage to say, “Are you available?” “Can we talk?”—even when it would be easier to stay silent.

Building this bridge between two inner worlds doesn't promise perfect harmony, but it makes real connection possible. When we pause, listen and speak with care, we are not just being “better partners”. We are becoming architects of our future destiny. As the *Mishnah* says: “No vessel holds blessing like peace.” Peace doesn't just happen. It is built word by word, moment by moment. So choose one tool. Ask one deeper question. Listen with one more breath of patience. You don't have to fix everything. Just begin by crossing the bridge.



Nutrition and
Mindset Tips for
an Easy Fast

Annael Brown

If you're someone who dreads fasting, you're not alone. I used to be what I considered a "terrible faster" — I'd get dizzy and light-headed early on in the fast, and even black out if I stood up too quickly. In hindsight, the way I was preparing myself for the fast nutrition-wise turned out to be not only useless, but actually counter-productive. But a

few years ago, while preparing for Tisha B'Av, I decided to apply what I knew as a nutritionist about how the body works—and honestly, it was the easiest fast I'd ever observed.

As it turns out, many people are unknowingly making very common mistakes in the day leading up to the fast, which can easily be avoided with the right nutrition. Going 25 hours

without food or water is no joke. Whether it is Yom Kippur, the ninth of the month of Av or any other fast day, what you eat and drink (or don't) in the lead-up can have a huge impact on how you feel during the actual fast.

So here it is—what not to do, what to do instead and a few things I wish someone had told me sooner.

Common Mistakes That Make Fasting Harder

1. OVEREATING THE DAY BEFORE

It makes sense in theory—if you're not going to eat for 25 hours, you should probably eat as much as possible, right? Actually, no.

The stomach is remarkably flexible and can stretch significantly beyond its resting size, typically the size of a fist when empty. When I say “stomach”, I mean the organ itself, not the midsection that expands after a meal and might inspire one to loosen the top button of a pair of trousers. Post meal, the stomach can stretch to hold up to two litres of food (and even more when overeating to the point of discomfort).

Ghrelin, the hunger hormone, is released in the stomach. A larger, overstretched stomach may trigger more hunger cues the next day. Have you ever woken up starving after having eaten a huge dinner the night before? This could be why.

2. CUTTING OUT SALT

You may have heard the advice to avoid salty foods before a fast. You cook for the last meal before the fast with hardly any salt or spices, all in the effort to avoid feeling thirsty during the fast. But if you're like me and have low blood pressure or have a tendency to get dizzy, this is a huge mistake.

Salt helps the body hold onto fluids and maintain blood pressure. Skip it, and you might feel way worse—especially if you are also drinking lots of water.

3. DRINKING TOO MUCH WATER

Hydration is important. But flooding the system with water, especially if cutting out salt, can flush out all sodium from the body to dangerously low levels. That's a recipe for headaches, dizziness and even hyponatremia, a serious electrolyte imbalance that can land you in the A&E!

4. AVOIDING CARBS

Even if you have been following a low-carb plan or cutting carbohydrates out of your diet altogether for health or weight goals, please read on. For general readers: the day before a fast is *not* the time to “go keto”.

Carbs are the body's fastest, most accessible source of energy. Glucose from carbs gets stored in the liver and muscles as glycogen, and once you're fasting, that's the first thing the body uses up. The body is limited in how much glucose it is able to store, and if those reserves are already low before the fast even begins, you'll crash sooner.

Think of marathon runners ‘bulking up’ on bread and pasta the day before a run; they do this to fill their glucose stores. No, you don't need to binge on bread and pasta before a fast, but do make sure to include carbs in your meals the day before the fast begins.

5. EXERCISING TOO HARD

The day before a fast isn't the time to push yourself with a high-intensity workout. That kind of exercise drains glucose stores—exactly the thing you're trying to reserve for the fast.

6. TOO MUCH COFFEE

Caffeine, the stimulant in coffee, is a diuretic—it makes you urinate more frequently, which can deplete hydration levels. I always advise patients to drink one to two glasses of water in the morning before enjoying their first cup of coffee. Overdoing it can also lead to a crash in energy, and if you're someone who relies on coffee to get through the day, that crash during a fast can be very difficult to endure, especially for individuals prone to headaches.

7. LACK OF SLEEP

Lack of sleep wreaks havoc across all of our bodies' systems—hunger cues, mood, energy, willpower. Fasting on poor and insufficient sleep feels ten times harder.

Make an effort to prioritise sleep in the days leading up to the fast. Even if it's just the night before the fast, it helps.

8. PROCESSED FOODS

Going into a fast, you want to have stable energy levels—not a rollercoaster of blood sugar spikes and crashes. Highly processed and sugary foods can leave you feeling terrible just a few hours in. If there were ever a time to eat real, whole foods and balanced meals, it's the day before a fast.

How to Prepare for a More Manageable Fast

BALANCED MEALS THROUGHOUT THE DAY

Instead of saving everything for one massive last meal before the fast, spread your nutrition goals across the day.

In each meal, aim to include:

- High quality protein (meat, chicken, fish, eggs, tofu)
- Complex carbs (rice, potatoes, whole grains)
- Fibre (vegetables, fruits)
- Healthy fats (avocado, olive oil, nuts)

HYDRATE STEADILY—NOT ALL AT ONCE

Similar to eating, don't save this one for the last possible hour. Aim for 8-12 cups (2-3 litres) of water spaced throughout the day. No need to avoid drinking with meals (another nutrition myth).

Remember to keep using salt in your food to help your body hold onto the water you're drinking.

BOOST YOUR ELECTROLYTES

Every year I buy a bottle (1 litre) of pure coconut water all for myself—it is rich in potassium and magnesium, and tastes great cold from the fridge. Another option is to make your own electrolyte water (no need to



buy expensive, sugary energy drinks):

- 1 litre water
- 1/8 tsp salt
- Juice of half a lemon
- 1 tsp pure honey

Other good snacks that are naturally rich in electrolytes include bananas, avocados, dates and almonds. (Tip: soak almonds in water for 6 hours before, up to 24 in the fridge, for optimal nutrient absorption and easy digestion).

SKIP INTENSE WORKOUTS

If you are trying to stay consistent with a workout routine, that's great—but opt for something light like a short walk or yoga. Save the intense workouts for another time; it is not worth burning through your energy stores early.

EAT ENOUGH FIBRE

Fibre-rich meals keep the body feeling fuller for longer. Fibre also helps stabilise blood sugar and prevent energy crashes. It's not just about snacking on celery all day; you want to include sources of fibre in your meals. Think roasted vegetables, lentils, salad, quinoa, etc. Pair fruits with fat for a well-balanced snack. My favourite combinations include sliced apples with peanut butter or dates with walnuts.

TAPER DOWN THE COFFEE

If you drink four cups a day, go down to three a few days before, then two and so on. The goal is to avoid a caffeine withdrawal crash mid-fast. If you only drink one cup a day, you're probably fine to keep that in.

ADDED BONUS

"Easy Fast" and "Kalitzom" are examples of herbal mineral tablets commonly used to prepare for fasting. They claim to suppress appetite and thirst, prevent cramps and headaches and generally make a fast feel better. They are sold in pharmacies across Israel and online, with multiple types, including tablets specifically made for expecting and nursing mothers.

Fasting doesn't have to feel awful, and I know what that's like! Preparing properly can make all the difference, allowing you to fully connect with the deeper meaning of the day. Whether you're fasting for Yom Kippur, Tisha B'Av or another reason entirely, making just a few smart adjustments and avoiding common pre-fast mistakes can transform your experience, making your fast much more manageable.



Pre-Fast Cheat Sheet Summary

A suggested shopping list for items to have on hand the day before the fast:

- Eggs, tuna, chicken (for protein)
- Rice, potatoes, whole grain bread (for carbs)
- Avocados, olive oil, nuts (healthy fats)
- Leafy greens, cucumbers, tomatoes, carrots (fibre)
- Bananas, dates, dried fruit (healthy snacks, fibre, potassium)
- Coconut water
- Salt and season your cooking as usual
- Herbal tea, or water with lemon squeezed into it to help keep you hydrated
- Natural supplements formulated for fast preparation such as "Easy Fast" and "Kalitzom" can be used for extra support. Please consult a medical professional.



FOOD

A close-up photograph of a person's hand dipping into a piece of honeycomb. The honeycomb is golden and glistening with honey, resting on a white plate. The background is a soft, out-of-focus outdoor setting. The person's hand is positioned as if they are about to take a bite, with some honey on their fingers.

Tasting *Tradition*

An up-and-coming chef delivers tastes of sunny home cooking. Intentionality transforms symbolic ingredients into dishes rich in flavour, meaning and festive flair for every holiday table. Get to know the meaning behind the foods we eat on Rosh Hashanah and connect to age-old traditions as they appear on our plates.

Mamie and Me: Chef Jonas Bismuth

Sasha Silber



There is an easy confidence in the way Jonas Bismuth talks about food: a chef who insists on simplicity yet refuses complacency. Born in Paris and living in Israel for roughly a decade, he traces his professional DNA to a family immersed in restaurants, catering and pâtisserie—a childhood spent in kitchens with quality produce that made high standards feel normal. An autodidact by design, he finished an economics and accounting degree at Bar-Ilan University in 2021 after his IDF service, before committing fully to the stove. He learned by practicing and by devouring books, masterclasses and

podcasts that sharpened his palate and craft.

Today Jonas works as a private chef, curating kosher dinner parties that range from intimate 12-seat tastings to expansive 70-guest celebrations. The brief is constant: build an experience around what is at its best right now, rather than forcing technique for its own sake. His culinary language is Mediterranean in the broadest sense—Israel, southern France, Italy, North Africa—sun cuisine that privileges clarity over clutter.

Seasonality ties every plate together. Wandering the market to “use what the season offers” remains his favourite spark.

Inspiration can come from a journey, a landscape, a memory or a cookbook—but the ingredient at its peak dictates the final arc. Ask him to list his building blocks and he reaches instinctively for lemon, olive oil and fresh herbs—versatile, bright and sun-warmed. Acid is lifted by zest; herbaceous oil even finds its way into desserts; herbs deliver either gentle lift or a bold green punch.

He accredits his technique to his grandmother, Chantal, who was once a professional cook and pâtissière and ran both a Moroccan and a Provençal restaurant. She is the living reference point whose torch

he carries. As a child he would leave school and head straight to her kitchen, absorbing brigade rhythms from a workstation vantage that fused affection and apprenticeship. Her *tortilla de pomme de terre* and *tarte tatin* remain his purest edible nostalgia. In his evolving brand language, *Mamie*, Chantal is not a sentimental footnote but an operational compass: consultation before innovation, respect before riff.

That restraint shows in the way he protects traditional recipes from needless embellishment—an instinct reinforced by Chantal’s gently stern advice when he is tempted to “add a touch” to dishes that have worked for generations. “It drives her mad when I fiddle with a gratin or throw in spices that don’t belong”, he laughs. She also drilled into him that water is a “magic ingredient” we chronically underestimate—vital for cooking grains properly and finishing sauces with silk rather than weight.

The *Mamie* venture formalises that lineage. It is the bridge from memory to model: a dining experience and creative platform where Chantal’s classics meet Jonas’s modern sensibility, all within the frame of kashrut. When he creates a dish, kosher practice is simply assumed—less a constraint than a framework that pushes him to be more

inventive with texture and acidity.

Digital storytelling has amplified his voice. His improvisational YouTube mini-series *Azy Chucho*, created with filmmaker Simon Bismuth, came together on a whim: one phone call, an open brainstorm and suddenly a format—one place, one recipe, totally improvised—capturing the daily life of a chef and his cameraman. A second season is a dream he still hopes to realise.

Beyond private tables, Jonas has exported his cuisine internationally—Paris, Tel Aviv, Saint-Martin, Los Angeles—and expanded into consulting, fusing sharp culinary expertise with avant-garde art direction to deliver turnkey concepts across hospitality and entertainment. SHORESH, his current signature platform, champions simple, authentic, seasonal cooking rooted in place and narrative.

Most recently, he has stepped into Abyss Studio, a new venture that merges culinary craft with immersive visual storytelling and brand strategy. In short: taste meets concept, plating meets production—an ecosystem where menus, spaces and media are designed with the same precision as a dish.

What propels him, though, is still the full cycle: conceiving a menu, selecting produce, disappearing into the quiet focus of prep,



riding the adrenaline of service, receiving a client’s joy—and then resetting to begin again.

For this feature, Jonas shares two festival-friendly dishes from the *Mamie* menu—perfect on any festival table. One is a bright, savoury centrepiece; the other, a stunning dessert finished with a touch of honey. >>>



Haraymé *Salmon*

Judeo-Tunisian Fish in Spiced Tomato Sauce
Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

Olive oil
4 garlic cloves, crushed
1 tsp paprika
1 tsp ground cumin
Pinch of chilli flakes
Salt & black pepper
2 tbsp tomato paste
Juice of 1 lemon
~250 ml water
1 large bunch coriander, chopped
4 salmon fillets
Optional garnishes: tahini, green chili oil

METHOD

- Bloom spices:** In a wide pan, toast paprika, cumin and chilli flakes dry for 30 seconds.
- Aromatics:** Add garlic and a generous splash of olive oil; sauté gently to a light colour.
- Tomato base:** Stir in tomato paste; cook a few minutes to caramelize slightly.
- Acid & liquid:** Add lemon juice; reduce briefly. Season, then pour in water for a loose, spoonable sauce.
- Herbs:** Fold in lots of chopped coriander; simmer ~20 min, adding water if it thickens too much.
- Poach fish:** Nestle salmon into the sauce; cover and poach on low ~8 min, until just opaque (less if it will be reheated on the hot plate).
- Finish:** Drizzle with tahini and green chili oil before serving.



Briwate

Honey–Almond Triangles
Makes 20 pieces

INGREDIENTS

Brick pastry sheets (*feuilles de brick*)

Almond filling

100 g ground almonds
50 g caster sugar
½ tbsp (≈7.5 ml) orange-blossom water
1 egg white

Neutral oil, like sunflower, for frying

Honey syrup

250 ml water
500 g sugar
1 tsp honey
2 lemon slices
Splash of water, to adjust texture

Optional garnish: finely-ground pistachios

METHOD

- Cut & seal mix:** Cut each brick sheet into 3 long strips, about 10 cm wide. Mix a little flour with water to make a paste for sealing the triangles.
- Almond paste:** Blend the ground almonds, sugar, egg white and orange-blossom water to a smooth paste.
- Syrup:** In a heavy saucepan, add sugar, then pour in the water. Add lemon slices; simmer gently until reduced and lightly golden (≈30 min). Stir in honey and a little extra water; bring back to the boil and reduce 15–20 min. The syrup will thicken as it cools.
- Shape:** Place a spoon of almond paste at one end of each strip and fold over to form neat triangles. Seal the edge with the flour paste.
- Fry:** Deep-fry at 180 °C until evenly golden. Drain on kitchen paper.
- Finish:** Pour cold syrup over hot briwate (or vice versa). Sprinkle with ground pistachios. Serve immediately.



Signs of *Intention*

Infusing the New Year with Flavour and Meaning

Rivkie and Dan Matalon

Each Rosh Hashanah is an opportunity to pause, take stock and step forward with resolve and purpose into a new year. It is a season for connection: with God, as we pray for a sweet and good year ahead; with loved ones, as we gather around festive tables laden with meaning; and with ourselves, as we reflect on where we've been and who we hope to become.

At this poignant threshold, like so many significant moments in the Jewish calendar, we elevate the occasion through the somewhat less poignant act of eating. However, as with so many things in Jewish life, what appears ordinary is quietly extraordinary. On Rosh Hashanah, our foods become vessels of intention; sweetness carries significance, taste transforms into prayer and we begin our festive meals with symbolic foods.

These meaningful morsels are known as *simanim*, meaning 'signs', 'omens' or 'symbols', and they've graced Jewish tables for centuries. Referred to in the Talmud, the *simanim* invite us to speak our hopes aloud and infuse the year's beginning with purpose. Where Rosh Hashanah once included sacrificial offerings in the Temple, today we offer words, prayers and intentions in their place. The *simanim* give us a way to express our wishes with our whole selves: body, mouth and mind aligned in blessing. With each bite, we utter a *Yehi Ratzon* ("May it be Your will")—a short blessing, asking for Divine kindness in the year to come. What results is a ritual we feel with all our senses.

The *simanim* as we know them today trace their roots to the teachings of Abaye, a Talmudic sage who encouraged the use of symbolic foods at the start of the year. These included leeks, beets, dates and gourds—each tied to a hopeful play on words.¹ Over time, these small acts of intention took root in Jewish

homes across the world. They hold space for both joy and sorrow, for laughter and longing, for past and future—all within a single bite.

Some communities, particularly those of Sephardi and Mizrahi heritage, developed what might be called a *Simanim Seder*—an ordered, multi-course ritual meal complete with liturgy, family participation and a variety of symbolic dishes. A Persian Jewish table might feature spinach and quince; Syrian Jews might include pumpkin. In Iraqi homes, black-eyed peas (*lubiya*) are a mainstay, possibly due to a case of mistaken identity. Food historian Gil Marks notes that in the Middle Ages, the Arabic word *lubiya* was confused with the Aramaic *rubiya*, meaning fenugreek. *Rubiya*, in turn, shares a root with the Hebrew word *yirbu*, meaning 'increase' or 'multiply', making it a fitting *siman* for abundance.

Ashkenazi households have typically taken a more modest approach; apples dipped in honey are the best-known custom, alongside carrots (whose Yiddish name, *mehren*, is a homophone with the word for 'increase'). While fewer *simanim* might appear, the point remains intact: to greet the new year not just with sweetness, but with mindfulness.

Each symbolic food becomes a miniature prayer. We don't just hope silently; we articulate. We taste. We chew with awareness. In this way, the *simanim* become a spiritual practice grounded in the everyday. They root us in the moment, even as they carry us forward into the unknown.

It is a reminder that authentic connection and meaningful prayer is not reserved for the synagogue or the scroll. It can live in a spoonful of pomegranate seeds, in the shared laughter over a pun, (I've heard of people eating raisins and celery, hoping for 'a raise in salary'), or in the pause before a bite.

While many of the *simanim* are accompanied by light-hearted prayers for a sweet year, or an increase in our merits, some contain a striking gravity. Over leeks, we say: "May it be Your will that our enemies be cut off." Over beets: "May our adversaries be removed." Over dates: "May those who hate us be consumed." These are not casual wishes. They are ancient words voiced anew, echoing the fears and longings of generations.

In truth, these are words that we have struggled to relate to in the past, when existential threats hadn't been so present, when the words seemed distant and abstract. But in the wake of the past two years' pain, these blessings feel particularly relevant. Eating a date while praying for the downfall of terrorist kidnapers, murderers and regimes bent on our destruction is both earnest and understandable. There is something deeply empowering about giving voice to our hopes, no matter how fragile, through a ritual so accessible and human.

What's striking is how universal this custom has become, despite the differences in language, culture and cuisine. Whether it's a Moroccan platter laden with fried delicacies or a quiet meal with apple slices and honey cake, Jews the world over gather around their tables to engage in this shared expression of our deepest yearnings. It is a reminder that we are a people united not only by texts or land, but by the rhythms of our rituals, the way we infuse life with meaning through the simplest of acts. We whisper with prayerful intention, taste sweetness and trust that even the smallest signs can ripple outward into something vast.

So, whether your table holds two *simanim* or 20, may each one reflect not just what you hope for, but who you are becoming.

Wishing you a year of sweetness, of strength, and of deeply felt connection.

The Simanim

APPLE & HONEY



POMEGRANATE



GOURD



DATES



HEADS



**BEETROOT/
SWISS CHARD**



LEEK/CABBAGE



FISH



BLACK EYED BEANS



**CARROTS/
FENUGREEK**



MIAMI & BAHAMAS



2 - 8 NOVEMBER 2025

a member
of the
jewish
futures
family

OLAMI MEMBER

CULTURE

A New *Lens*

Jerusalem dazzles in an ethereal Sukkot photo essay, Iranian-Jewish heritage connects with contemporary headlines, Valour showcases three inspiring autumn mood boards, and an unlikely hero proves every voice can shatter silence and challenge hatred. Take a look to experience Jewish life through the lens of a camera, current events, artistic license and a unifying message.

Convergence

A Photo Essay

Atara Whitman



The Jewish people pray in the direction and intention of Jerusalem, no matter where one stands in the world.

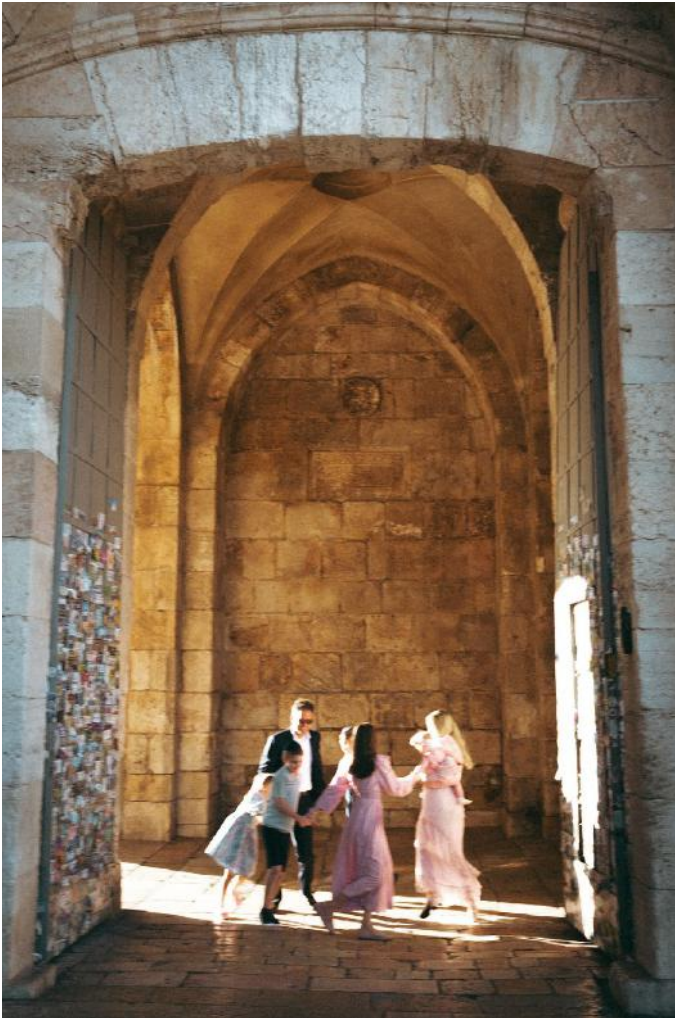
The Hebrew word *kavana* is often translated as "intention", and comes from the same root

word as *kivun*, meaning direction.

It is written in the *Midrash* that God loved Jerusalem so profoundly that He built a Jerusalem in heaven to keep close to him. From all corners of the earth, our prayers are directed

with *kavana* towards Jerusalem, and are then reflected onto God's Jerusalem in the sky.

I often reflect on the thin veil between the physical and spiritual realms and the barriers between them.



Photos by Atara Whitman



The Torah, the holiest of physical objects, is written on parchment and adorned with jewels and silver and gold crowns.

Our souls reside in our physical bodies, and even after they return to heaven, they remain connected to this world—anchored, in some way, to the place of burial.

It seems as though the barrier of bringing our prayers from the physical world to the spiritual one is Jerusalem.

The *Amidah* prayer, whispered without sound, contains no audible expression for angels to carry. Instead, its words ascend directly—pure and unfiltered—to the celestial Jerusalem. Beyond the limits of sound, space or body, our prayers transcend.

Straight to the Jerusalem in the sky.

Photos by Atara Whitman



Sukkot is a sacred time, but in Jerusalem, it feels different—elevated. As if the city itself is cloaked in light. In holiness. In presence.

The *schach*, or roof, of the *sukkah* symbolises the *Shechinah*, the Divine Presence. By building a *sukkah*, we create a dwelling place for the *Shechinah* here on earth—

so that,
for a brief moment,
the earthly and heavenly Jerusalems

become one.





Photos by Atara Whitman

2025 / 5786

UK Registered Charity no. 1151066

Take a
soulful flight
through the
High Holy
Days



#NoAutopilot

fly holydays™

Where the journey matters even more than the destination

discover more at

[jfutures.org / flyholydays](http://jfutures.org/flyholydays)



Add more meaning to your Holydays with our Return Journey Instructions Card, available now





Throughout the Achaemenid, Parthian and Sasanian empires, Jews lived for the most part in relative peace. Though they were steeped in Persian society and culture, they maintained distinct religious traditions. They migrated to major cities such as Susa (likely Shushan of the Purim story), Isfahan, Hamadan and Nishapur, engaging in trade and agriculture. Perhaps the greatest sign of their integration was their involvement in local government administration and, under the Parthian rule, the Jews began to experience an even higher level of autonomy. The *Reish Galuta* (Exilarch) in Babylon, who was traditionally a descendant of King David, was officially recognised by the imperial court and served as the political and spiritual leader of the Jewish community, much like a Chief Rabbi today. Jewish communities governed their own legal affairs and operated independently-run institutions, including early rabbinic academies.

The Sasanian Empire, which replaced the Parthians in the 3rd century CE, was ruled by Zoroastrian Persians who governed a multiethnic empire that included significant Jewish and Christian populations. In its early stages Jewish life flourished. The Talmudic academies of Sura, Pumbedita and Nehardea emerged as major centres of Jewish learning. It was in this period that the Babylonian Talmud was compiled, an achievement that would shape Jewish law, life and identity, across the world to this day.

However, as Zoroastrianism became more aggressively enforced as the state religion, particularly under the rule of Yazdegerd II and Peroz I, Jews began to face growing restrictions and persecution. Bans on building new synagogues, reports of forced conversions and pressure to abandon Shabbat observance tested Jewish resolve but never broke it.

The balance of power changed in the seventh century with the Muslim conquest of Persia. Jews, along with Christians and Zoroastrians, were classified as *dhimmi*:

The Jews of *Iran*

Rabbi Ari Kayser

Tucked away on a quiet backstreet only a two-minute walk away from Imam Khomeini Square in central Hamadan lie the tombs of Mordechai and Esther. The ancient yet unassuming stone structure consisting of an outer and inner chamber, surmounted by a dome once covered in blue tiles, is still considered the most significant pilgrimage site in Iran for both Jews and Christians alike. The tomb was chronicled in the 12th century by the intrepid Jewish traveller, Benjamin of Tudela, who on his visit to the city, described the tomb as being located in front of the synagogue and the community numbering 50,000 people. Jews of this city recall the importance of this place and the cautious

celebrations they engaged in, particularly around the festival of Purim, which details the story of the Jews' deliverance from their enemy Haman at the hands of Queen Esther and Mordechai. All of this, though, comes centuries after the first chapters of Jewish life in Persia.

After the Babylonians destroyed the First Temple in Jerusalem, Jews were exiled to Babylon. Soon after, the Babylonian Empire was conquered by the Persian leader Cyrus the Great, who allowed Jews to return to their ancestral homeland and rebuild their Temple. Led by Zerubavel, many Jews returned to the Land of Israel to begin the rebuilding project. However, many opted to remain and settle Persian lands.



Bottom right: Jean Fouquet, *Court scene from Les Antiquités Judaïques*, c.1470



protected but subordinate. They could worship with restrictions, were required to pay the *jizya* tax, barred from certain professions and could not testify against Muslims in court.

Still, Jewish life continued. Records discovered in the Cairo Geniza testify to significant trade and business of Persian Jews with their brothers in various parts of the world. One such document, now held in the Cambridge University Library, is a letter written in Judeo-Persian by a merchant named Yehuda. Dated to the late 10th or early 11th century and composed in Jerusalem, the letter is addressed to his mother and brother Tanhum in Basra, detailing trade in textiles, pearls and Torah scrolls. Written in Persian but using Hebrew script, the letter gives an insight into the life of a diasporic Persian Jew still networking with people across the Islamic world.

As Shi'a Islam became the state religion during the Safavid dynasty, Jews were treated as ritually impure and subjected to segregation and humiliation. Later, in 1839, in the city of Mashhad, a mob attacked the Jewish quarter, and the entire community were forcibly converted to Islam. They became known as the *Jadid al-Islam*, or 'New Muslims', but continued to practice Judaism in secret. These crypto-Jews would observe Shabbat from behind closed doors. "Children grew up in confusion and fear, learning Torah by the glimmer of oil lamps. The

faithful women, wrapped in cloaks, smuggled scrolls and wine for Kiddush", recalled Rabbi Shlomo Mashiach, a Mashhadi Jew and their community leader in Jerusalem.

The Qajar period brought with it both poverty and discrimination. Jews lived on the margins of society, confined to live in *mahalleh* (separate quarters), where they suffered legal and social discrimination and frequent harassment. Deemed ritually impure, they were forbidden from walking in the rain, lest their impurity 'wash off' on Muslims, and in a move seen across the world and across centuries, forced to wear identifying clothing to label them as Jews. In another similar move reminiscent of anti-Jewish, Christian Europe, the 19th and early 20th centuries saw a wave of blood libels and violent pogroms sparked by false accusations of ritual murder. This culminated in the 1910 Shiraz pogrom, where 12 Jews were murdered, more than 100 homes and shops ransacked and sacred texts desecrated. This horrific period for the Jews did however lay the framework for a pioneering Jewish organisation in France to come and fill.

Founded in Paris in 1860, the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) was a Jewish organisation committed to the emancipation and education of Jews across the Islamic world. They sought to equip Jewish children with modern knowledge, French language

skills and vocational training, believing those tools would help Jews assert themselves in hostile environments. Using diplomatic channels and leveraging the influence of European powers like France and Britain (who were increasingly present in Persia at the time), along with the deteriorating conditions of the Jews, the AIU opened its first school in Tehran in 1898. This was followed by schools in many other cities and they quickly became an island of hope amid the squalor of the *mehalleh*.

In some places, the AIU offered protection and documented the antisemitic violence to European governments, trying to pressure Persian officials to restrain themselves.

Just a few decades later, the fall of the Qajars and the rise of Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1925, paved the way for an unprecedented era of prosperity for the Jews. Under his rule, and later that of his son, Mohammad Reza Shah, the country experienced an impressive modernisation and abolished many of the legal and social restrictions placed on minorities. Jews owned businesses, taught at universities and worked in government—and the population grew.

By the 1950s, the Jewish population reached 100,000. Tehran became Iran's new centre of Jewish life, and Jews now lived side by side with Muslims. Antisemitism became socially and legally unacceptable. Jews contributed greatly to culture—Jewish musicians, poets,

Above: Group portrait of Jewish students from the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) school in Tehran, Iran. Early 20th century

writers and academics all having the freedom to express themselves. Throughout the Pahlavi period, Iran maintained close ties with Israel. El Al and Iran Air operated several flights a week between the two countries. Families could now send their children to study in Jerusalem, invest in Israeli businesses and connect in a real way with their ancestral homeland. Iranian Jews were proud that they could be modern, successful, Iranian and Jewish—all at the same time.

But the dream would not last.

In 1979 the Islamic Revolution changed everything. The Shah's authoritarian rule created economic discontent as the oil-fueled economic boom was unevenly distributed and inflation surged. His notorious secret police crushed any political dissent, and the secularisation and the spread of Western values posed a threat to the powerful Shia clerical establishment. It wasn't long before an uprising led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini brought the country to a turning point. The Shah's monarchy collapsed, and Ayatollah Khomeini emerged as Supreme Leader of the new Islamic Republic, uniting religious and political power in a new theocratic state.

For Iran's Jews, the revolution brought fear and uncertainty. The Ayatollah initially declared that Jews as a religious minority would be protected, but huge suspicion regarding their allegiances remained. Soon after the Islamic Revolution, Habib Elghanian, a prominent Jewish businessman, philanthropist and president of the Tehran Jewish Society who served as the symbolic

head of the Iranian Jewish community, was executed. He was sentenced to death on charges of "Zionist collaboration", of maintaining ties with Israel, and of being "friends with the enemies of God". Elghanian's murder by firing squad on 9 May 1979 sent shockwaves across the community and, within months, thousands of Jews began to flee.

The population of Jews in Iran dwindled rapidly, dropping within a few years to around 25,000. For those who remained, expressions of support for Israel were outlawed and life was now lived under surveillance. Judaism was a protected religion, but Zionism was equated with treason. Today, the Jewish population of Iran is uncertain; at the time of writing, the World Population Review lists the figure at 9,100.

Despite living under harsh Islamic rule, Jewish life continues. Numerous active synagogues operate in Tehran, as well as other cities across the country. Kosher food is available, and Jewish schools function under state guidelines. Food remains a deep

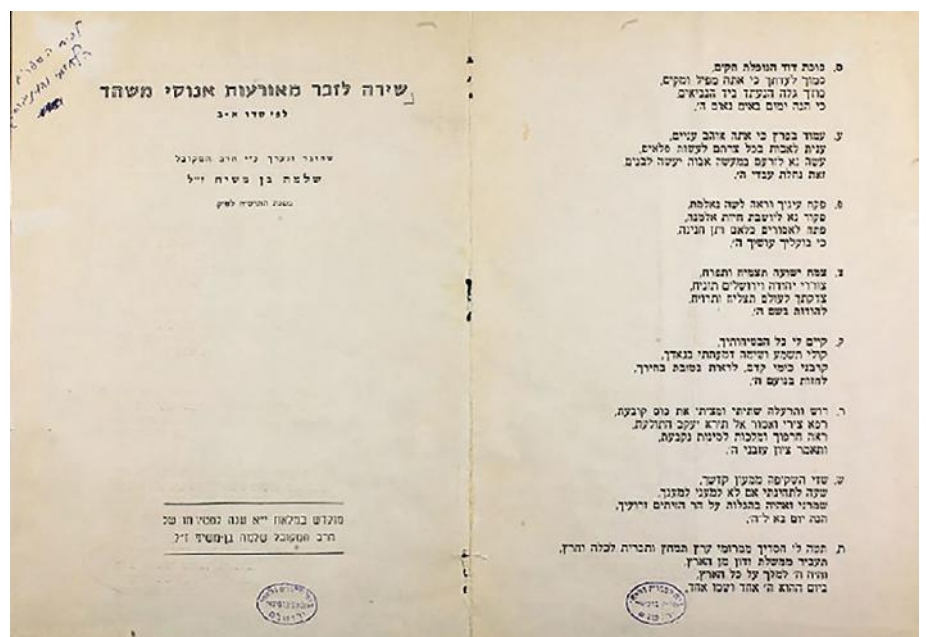
expression of Iranian Jewish identity and dishes such as *gondi*, chickpea flour dumplings made with chicken and spices like cardamom, are an authentic cuisine.

Living as a Jew in Iran is precarious. Iran's leaders routinely call for the destruction of Israel and the state's media traffics antisemitic tropes. Following the brutal massacre by Iranian-funded proxy Hamas on 7 October 2023, where over 1,200 Israelis were murdered and 251 people were mercilessly taken hostage, Jews across the world have been living with a mixed sense of trauma, mourning, determination and pride. The recent 12-Day War in June 2025, with Israel and Iran in direct military engagement, has left the Jews of Iran in a state of extreme anxiety. Jewish leaders were compelled to issue public denunciations of Israel, and Jews continue to live under a cloud of suspicion.

For now, life goes on, cautiously and quietly. Whether this ancient community can endure in this current climate remains an open and painful question.



Israeli air defense system fires to intercept missiles during an Iranian attack over Tel Aviv, Israel, early Wednesday 18 June 2025. Photo by Léo Corrêa/AP



Bottom left: Judeo-Persian letter from Yehuda in Jerusalem to his family in Basra, c. 10th–11th century. Found in the Cairo Geniza (T-S 18J3.16, Cambridge University Library). Bottom right: A poem commemorating the forced conversion of the Jews of Mashhad. From the National Library of Israel collections



GIFT
Give It Forward Today

GIFT
Give It Forward Today

JOIN YOUNG GIFT TO PACK
**HONEY
COOKIES**
FOR ROSH HASHANAH

**WEDS
10 SEPT**

18:30PM

BOOK NOW



Central London location
£10PP

a member
of the
**jewish
futures**
family

The Art of *the Table*

Yehudit Mermelstein



The High Holy Days incite excitement, trepidation, menu planning and lots of shopping. You may also be thinking of your beautiful table where family and guests gather and enjoy each other's company, conversation and delicious food.

Designing and setting a table does not need to be a complicated process or require a large budget. A few thoughtful choices and layering techniques can be your go-to formula for elevating your table when hosting throughout the year.

Start with the Foundation

I like to start with the tablecloth. It dictates the mood I am trying to evoke, as well as the floral choices I will make. I like to buy fabrics locally, and have a seamstress finish up the edges.

A solid colour or subtle print can create the perfect backdrop to allow for the rest of the elements to shine. I love to work with velvet or linen. Here, I used a sage green velvet and added a lovely lace tablecloth that I gathered to use as a runner. By layering the fabrics, I am adding texture and colour for the eye to enjoy.

Build with Purposeful Layers

Next, I build upward, thinking of each layer as a point of interest. From chargers and china to napkins and glassware—each element is carefully selected and placed to create a beautifully-set table. This is not to imply that you need to buy new things each time! I purchased elegant linen napkins many years ago that I use over and over. I keep my eyes open for special ribbons in different colours and textures to use as napkin rings for when I want to update my table without investing much at all.

Top tip:

Vary the heights of your flowers and choose different textures



“

The most memorable tables are not necessarily the most elaborate. They are the ones that feel thoughtful and welcoming

You might notice that I did not use any napkin rings in this table setting, but rather placed the napkins underneath the plates so they would not distract from the rest of the elements on the table. When you layer, do so with intention, not distraction. We don't want the elements on the table to have to compete for your attention. A good rule of thumb: if something feels too overwhelming to the eye, distracting and detracting from other elements, remove it from the table.

Another way to add visual interest to the table setting is by adding nontraditional elements, such as fruit or other decorative objects. This can be a great way to bring the season into your home and table. For Rosh Hashanah, think about adding fresh figs and branches of fresh dates—native fruit of the Land of Israel. Adding candlelight can instantly add warmth and festivity as well as height, which is a beautiful way to add dimension to the table, drawing the eye upward.

Create Movement With Flowers

Lastly, but easily my favourite part of the tablescape are the flowers. My rule here is to vary the heights of the flowers and choose different textures. To achieve this is pretty simple—I like to start with one grounding centre arrangement, then build out from there using bud vases, perhaps a single flower arrangement and even a plant.

We want our eyes to dance around the table, taking in the variety of flowers and elements. There is no need to be formulaic and create two perfect sides; it is lovely to include different kinds of arrangements on either side, as long as you create balance and harmony. Equally as important is making use of the negative space on the table to allow the eye to rest in between the flowers and elements.

The most memorable tables are not necessarily the most elaborate. They are the ones that feel thoughtful and welcoming. The simple formula of choosing a foundation, layering, making use of elements and varying the heights of your flowers is sure to enable an unforgettable table setting.



*Yehudit Mermelstein.
Photo by Atara Whitman*



The *Fashion* Edit

Chaya Baumgarten, founder of Valour magazine

In collaboration with **VALOUR**
LIFESTYLE

These three mood boards celebrate individuality and identity. Curated by *Valour Lifestyle*—the international platform dedicated to Jewish women—they inspire vibrant expressions of Jewish life without prescribing a particular style.

The first is a striking blue-and-white moodboard, evoking our deep connection to Israel and highlighting strength and unity.

The second sparks creativity through playful textures, inviting a mix-and-match approach—from structured shirts to flowing skirts. Just as no two styles are alike, each of us carries a unique individuality worth celebrating.

Lastly, the earthy tones of the third mood board ground us in nature, embracing the warmth of organic browns and natural materials.

Together, these boards form a joyful exploration of identity, creativity and our meaningful connection with Israel, highlighting the world around us.

Products featured:

Blue and White

Denim Button Front A Line Midi Skirt £99

Karen Millen

Madeline Cotton Round Placemat, £12

Anthropologie

The Star of David Spheres Bracelet, £75 **Jane**

Pleated Midi Skirt, £29.99 **Zara**

The AD120 Bold Ring £75 **Jane**

Boss & Confidence Women's Healer's Bracelets (set of 2), £226 **The Healer's Collection**

Patterned Flowing Maxi Dress, £449 **Maje**

Texture

Faux Hair Throw Blanket, £78 **Anthropologie**

Cotton Stripe Belted Maxi Skirt, £119

Karen Millen

Sam Edelman Aria Flower Heeled Sandals, £115

Anthropologie

Lydia Millen Floral Shirt Dress, £159

Karen Millen

Ganni Floral Print Shirt, £215 **The Outnet**

Sequined Feather Skirt, £229 **Zara**

Flower Mountain Yamano 3 Suede Trainers, £200 **Anthropologie**

Embroidered Waist Dress, £69.99 **Zara**

Earth

Shoulder Bag, £27.99 **H&M**

Dara Cotton Blend Collared Top, £140 **Reiss**

Square-Toe Mule Heels, £120 **Anthropologie**

ME+EM Wrap Maxi Skirt, £195 **Harrods**

Mae Linen Blend Shirt Dress, £219 **Boden**

Knee-High Western Boots, £445

Russel & Bromley

London Landmarks Silk Scarf, £370 **Burberry**

Double Twist Earrings, £35 **Boden**



BLUE & WHITE

Strength and unity

Creative and playful

TEXTURE



EARTH

Grounded in nature





The Value of *One*

Abraham Hamra

In this fight against antisemitism and against the constant libelling of Israel, it is easy to feel overwhelmed and isolated. For almost two years, we have carried the agony of our hostages—held captive in unimaginable conditions—and advocated for their release. We have scarcely had any space to properly grieve the thousands of innocent civilians and soldiers killed on 7 October and since. We spend sleepless nights glued to our phones, worried about our Israeli brothers and sisters living under the threat of rockets. We keep praying for our brave IDF

soldiers who risk their lives with courage and morality to protect our people. Meanwhile, antisemitism is surging, as if we've stepped into the dark days of the 1930s.

Instead of support—from the world, from friends and figures we admired—many openly celebrated these horrors. Some celebrities even tried to justify sexual assaults on women simply because they were Jewish or in Israel. Old friends severed ties over our stand for justice.

I, for one, could never have imagined I would be actively fighting the same form of antisemitism my family thought we had left

behind when we left Syria 31 years ago. Jews were forbidden to emigrate from Syria from 1948 until 1992. We were trapped as political hostages until the United States reached a treaty with Syria freeing its Jews. We came to America to find a better future, in the land of the “free and equal”. We found that better life and started building it. We moved on. I became a husband and then a father to four beautiful children. I became an attorney and a law firm owner: “The American Dream”. Now the same type of antisemitism that led to our displacement from Syria is “trending” in the west, threatening to destroy all that we had accomplished since we last escaped it.

At times it feels like the walls are closing in and darkness has engulfed everything around us. Yet amid this struggle, we must pause to recognise the positive. This pain hasn't broken us; it seems to have injected us, as a nation, with a “unity steroid”, forging bonds that strengthen our collective spirit and drive us to stand together—stronger and more united than ever.

Since 7 October our common goals have bound us together as never before. I have met Jews I never knew existed: Ethiopian Jews, Ashkenazi Jews, Sephardi Jews, Chinese Jews and others—each bringing unique traditions, inherited over thousands of years of Diaspora, standing up for our shared ancestral homeland, the Land of Israel. Each encounter has enriched my understanding of our diverse, resilient tribe. This unity is our greatest asset.

Amid continued heartbreak, I look at our community—Jews and allies standing shoulder to shoulder—and feel inspired. Our love for one another shines in small acts, like sharing a story or donating to shared causes, and in bold ones, like global campaigns countering misinformation and speaking out. That love, coupled with our commitment to standing firm against antisemitism, is the light that will overtake the darkness.

Let's embrace our unity and not shy away from dialogue. Engage with those who disagree, listen openly and speak truth fearlessly. Stand unapologetically against Jew hatred, stand with Israel and our IDF and unite in our purpose to educate, defeat evil and see our hostages freed. Learn more about Jewish history. Each one of us brings a uniqueness the world can't do without. Our unity is not one of uniformity but of shared purpose and resilient love. No matter who you are, you have the power to lighten the darkness, as Anne Frank said, “look at how a single candle can both defy and define the darkness.” You're part of a diverse, resilient nation. Let that inspire you to keep fighting, keep connecting and keep building a brighter future. Let's keep our light shining, together.

Photo courtesy of Abraham Hamra

Ujia scholarships available for TLV programme. T&Cs apply.

FJL

THE SUMMER INTERNSHIPS



TEL AVIV NEW YORK

JUNE - JULY 2026

JULY 2026



APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN!



Forum for Jewish Leadership offers summer internship programmes living in New York or Tel Aviv, combining top-tier professional development, exclusive networking, inspiring Shabbat dinners & leadership sessions with dynamic speakers & educators

www.jewish-leadership.com



BEAVERBROOKS

Proudly Supporting
Jewish Futures



Explore at beaverbrooks.co.uk
Experience in stores nationwide
Speak to a consultant on 0800 169 2329

