

ZEH HAYOM

THE VOICE OF BNEI AKIVA UK

SHABBAT LASHEM



THE HUMAN PRIVILEGE OF CHOICE

RINA SHAYA
SHEVET MORASHA

In *parashat Acharei Mot*, the *halakhot* of the scapegoat service are commanded. It says:

**וַנִּתֵּן אֶהָרֹן עַל־שְׁנֵי הַשְּׂעִירִים גְּדֹלוֹת גּוֹרָל אֶחָד
לָהּ וְגּוֹרָל אֶחָד לְעֹזֶאֱזֵל:**

“And Aharon shall place two lots upon the goats, one for God and one for *azazel* (*Vayikra* 16:8).”

It seems strange that a sacrifice should be decided by the outcome of the casting of lots. Wouldn't it fit better amongst the other highly-regulated sacrifices if there were strict laws about which goat would meet which end? Surely the outcome should not be dependent on a random human choice alone?

The Seforno quotes a verse from *Mishlei* to offer an answer to this:

בְּחִיק יוֹטֵל אֶת־הַגּוֹרָל וּמֵה' כָּל־מִשְׁפָּטוֹ

“The lot is cast in the lap, but from God comes all judgement (*Mishlei* 16:33).”

The Seforno explains that in any case where a lot is cast by a person of great faith, it is to serve only as a confirmation of Hashem's predestined plans. He says that one who presumes that the lot itself has cast the decision is making a serious error.

The decision in this case is entirely in the realm of Hashem; man takes no part in which goat

will be destined for God and which for *azazel*. Though it may appear to be a man-made decision, the decision was known in Heaven far before it was known on Earth. But is this not antithetical to values of free will and personal responsibility? If the decision of which goat would serve each purpose was out of human control, when does man begin to take responsibility?

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch writes that this responsibility exists within us, in every given moment. At the point of every decision, one must decide whether they will be ‘for Hashem’ or ‘for *azazel*’; will they turn to the Temple, or to the wilderness? Circumstance, resources and ability may be out of our own control, but the ability to choose to do the right thing is sacred. Whilst the ‘lots’ of circumstance may be cast in Heaven, the choice to be ‘for Hashem’ or ‘for *azazel*’ is firmly on Earth within each individual.

As Rav Hirsch writes, ‘The entire dignity and worth of a person lies in the ability to sin, the possibility afforded to them to disobey the will of God. This is their ethical advantage. Choice.’ The ability to choose right over wrong is a uniquely human privilege, to choose to help when one could equally have ignored, to give where one could have taken or to be honest where one could have lied.

Perhaps it can seem as though our environments have predetermined our responses; that to make ethical choices is beyond us. The ritual of the *azazel* serves as a reminder that the ability to break free of this and to grow is not in huge, life-changing moments, but rather in the quiet ability to do right over wrong, every day, in the face of any number of small challenges.

**RINA IS IN SHEVET MORASHA AND WAS SCANIT OF
GIMMEL WINTER 5783**

London	In 20:04 Out 21:14	Leeds	In 20:19 Out 21:36	Birmingham	In 20:16 Out 21:30
Manchester	In 20:20 Out 21:37	Nottingham	In 20:14 Out 21:30	Liverpool	In 20:23 Out 21:39
Thaxted	In 20:05 Out 21:18	Brighton	In 20:04 Out 21:15	Bristol	In 20:15 Out 21:28
Cambridge	In 20:07 Out 21:20	Oxford	In 20:11 Out 21:24	Jerusalem	In 18:41 Out 19:57

SHALIACH'S CORNER: TORAT ERETZ YISRAEL

THE NACHSHON OF OUR TIMES – RAV AVICHAH GOODMAN



It is so important to realise the amazing time in which we have the privilege to live. The events that have occurred over the last few decades are of biblical proportion, and their meaning to our lives, both personal and general, is massive. It is

therefore odd, to say the least, that some of our greatest rabbis didn't want to live in our time, and would rather not experience the events that we are. One of those, for example, is Rabbi Yochanan, as we are told in the Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 98b), who wished that *mashiach* would come after his days, so that he wouldn't need to live through this time. Why was that?

In the words of the Gemara:

אמר ר' יוחנן: פמליא של מועלה ופמליא של מטה, בשעה שאמור הקדוש ברוך הוא- הללו מעשה ידי והללו מעשה ידי, היאך אמבד אלו מפני אלו

Rabbi Yochanan thus gives an interesting answer. In our time, Hashem will be like one who is crippled in pain. This is because He must make a choice between *Am Yisrael* and our enemies, but He doesn't know whom to choose because both groups are created by Him.

To help us understand, Rav Papa brings a *mashal*:

היט ונפל תורא, ואזיל ושדי ליה סוסיא באורייה

If a farmer's ox is ill, the farmer temporarily brings in a horse to replace it. By the time the ox is well again, the farmer has become attached to the horse, and has a really hard time letting go of it.

The same with *geula*: we are the ox, and we became ill, so we had to leave the barn, *Eretz Yisrael*. While we were gone, Hashem put someone else there, and now that we are coming back, those others need to leave. They might even be claiming that the barn really is theirs, and that only makes it harder. The result is that Hashem 'can't make a decision' between *Am Yisrael* and those who claim that *Eretz Yisrael* belongs to them, because both are creations of His.

This phrase that the gemara uses, 'both sides are Hashem's creations' is one that also appears in another place. It is the phrase Hashem uses to stop the angels singing *hallel* when the Egyptian army

drowned in the sea. Hashem challenges them, 'My creations are drowning in the sea and you wish to sing *hallel*?!' Let's examine the role that role *Am Yisrael* played in that story. We all know the famous story, as brought in the Midrash. *Am Yisrael* split into four groups: some said let's drop ourselves to the sea and die, some said let's go back to Egypt, others said let's fight and the last group said let's *daven*. Moshe didn't approve of any of these, so we were left waiting, until Nachshon jumped into the sea. Hashem 'couldn't', so-to-speak, intervene in such a case, when a decision needed to be made between two creations of His, so it had to be done by us. After we started, then Hashem joined in and finished the job for us.

This can help us understand what Rabbi Yochanan was worried about regarding our times. Rabbi

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Yochanan knew about the 'struggle' that Hashem would have, and he was not sure that in our days we would have our modern day 'Nachshon'. Just like before the sea, *Am Yisrael* needed someone to be one of the *chalutzim* ('pioneers') and not wait for miracles to appear. It isn't easy to be a 'Nachshon'; in fact, it's very hard, and it could be dangerous too – the original one almost drowned.

Today, as we celebrate 75 years of *Medinat Yisrael*, we can turn around

to Rabbi Yochanan and say, 'We can celebrate so many Nachshons!' Our *chalutzim* who went to Israel when it was the last place on earth one would want to live. Our *chalutzim* who are settling in Yehudah & Shomron even though every time you leave your house you can't be sure you will return. *Chalutzim* who make *aliya* from comfortable places and go straight into the complex battle between the two creations of Hashem. *Chalutzim* that teach Torah, especially the sources of Torah that educate us about *geula* and the meaning of our special era. *Chalutzim* that established *yeshivot* and *midrashot*, army units, hospitals, cities, and everything else that makes *Medinat Yisrael* the miracle that it is.

They were the answer to Rabbi Yochanan's fear. Now it is our turn. Now it is our time to take the leap. Kadima Bnei Akiva!

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TORAH FROM AROUND THE WORLD

RAV TZVI HIRSCH KALISCHER | YOM HA'ATZMAUT SPECIAL

Settle down for the 8-hour, 2 a.m. bus ride from Meknes to Marrakech! Once we arrive at the *gare routière*, head towards the Marrakesh Menara Airport [RAK] for a flight to Milan Bergamo [BGY], where we catch a connecting flight to Poznan [POZ]. After landing, we need the 159 bus to Poznan Main Station, thereupon to board an intercity train to Toruń Miasto. Once in Toruń, it's a short 15-minute walk to the corner of Szeroka and Staromiejski Street. For

what is to the untrained eye a simple bag and suitcase shop beneath a fountain pen distributor, was once in fact the house where lived Rav Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer...

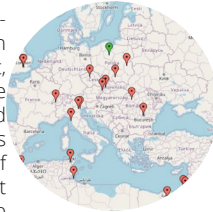
Rav Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer was born in 1795 in Prussia – specifically in Lissa, in the larger area of Posen. Those of you historians of European rabbinic studies reading this should have already realised the two men of great stature in whose vicinity Rav Kalischer is thus placed: Rabbi Ya'akov of Lissa (author of the *Chavot Da'at* and *Netivot HaMishpat*) and Rabbi Akiva Eiger. Indeed, Rav Kalischer studied under those two rabbis, along with his friend Rabbi Eliyahu Guttmacher, whose views on Zionism and the resettlement of the land of Israel would later accord with Kalischer's. In fact, the two religious *kibbutzim* south of Beit Shean of Tirat Zvi and Sde Eliyahu are named for these two rabbis. Unfortunately, not much else is known of Rav Kalischer's early life.

Growing up through the turn of the 19th century, the eastern European Jewish world was in upheaval. The factors of the enlightenment, stirrings of Jewish nationalist sentiment and the emancipation of Jewish citizens all culminated in great divisions and discord among various Jewish factions. Unsurprisingly, as a student of Rabbi Akiva Eiger, Rav Kalischer was a steadfast supporter of the Orthodox movement, and he authored a halakhic work, *Moznaim LaTorah*, on *Choshen Mishpat* of the *Shulchan Arukh*. Nonetheless, he read many philosophical works, including those of Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Isaac Reggio and Moses Mendelssohn – to the latter he gave the appellation 'the great man, crown of the *chakhamim*'. Similarly, when it came to proto-Zionism, Rav Kalischer broke with the trend of the Orthodox camp and its strong opposition. In the late 1830s, he sent letters to Baron Amschel Rothschild and Sir Moses Montefiore to secure money to help purchase areas of the land of Israel in order to restore the land to Jewish control. He wrote to them about how imperative it is to act now, and not wait for miraculous intervention on God's part to restore the land to us. He publicised his views in the Hebrew magazines *HaMaggid* and *HaLevanon*, setting out his aims of building up the land, setting up an agricultural school to train Jews how to work the land, and to essentially form an 'army' of Jews who would protect the farmers. He also travelled across Europe himself to raise money for those settling the land. Due to his efforts, Chaim Lorje set up the *Chevrat Yishuv Eretz Yisrael*, the first society of its kind supporting the settlement of the land of Israel. He corresponded with many of the leading figures of European Judaism at the time, including Rabbi Hirsch, Azriel Hildesheimer and Yitzchak Elchonon Spektor. Amongst many *haskamot* (approbations) he obtained for his efforts, he received a letter

from the Malbim praising his efforts of *yishuv ha'aretz* (see *Shabbat Lashem Vayelekh*) in which the Malbim wrote that the settlement of the land comes before the arrival of the messiah.

Many of Rav Kalischer's ideas are set out in his *magnum opus* entitled '*Derishat Zion*', 'seeking Zion', published in 1862. Towards the start, he launches an attack against those who would claim that a return to Zion is halakhically proscribed. They refer to a statement of Rav Yehuda, that 'anyone who ascends from Babylon to Israel transgresses a positive commandment, as the verse says (*Yirmiyah 27:22*): "They shall be brought to Babylon, and there shall they be until the day on which I [God] remember them" (*Ketubot 110b*). Rav Kalischer refers to people who adopt this approach in his time as those who are 'scraping the bottom of the barrel to destroy the holy path,' possessed of 'erring spirit' and producing a 'claim of the [evil] inclination.' He argues that Rav Yehuda's pronouncement was limited in time (first exile) and place (Babylon) and cannot overrule the positive commandment of settling the land of Israel.

Perhaps most surprising is Rav Kalischer's call for the reinstatement of *korbanot* atop the temple mount. He engaged in a lengthy discourse with Rabbi Akiva Eiger on the permissibility of such a proposition, in an attempt to attain his authorisation for it. The issues at hand were wide-ranging and complex, demonstrating the incredible erudition of these men in areas of *halakha* commonly consigned to the confines of the theoretical. What were the exact dimensions of the altar? Where would it need to be located? Can offerings be brought without a *kohen gadol*? Do the offerings need to be procured through the communal funds of the entire Jewish people? Eventually, when Rabbi Eiger could no longer refute the proofs of Rav Kalischer due to his health and old age, he asked that Rav Kalischer write to his son-in-law, the Chatam Sofer (*SL Bereishit*) in order to continue the discussion. Ultimately, the Chatam Sofer agreed that, external restrictions imposed on Jews performing religious service on the temple mount notwithstanding, it was permitted to offer the *korban Pesach*, but not the other *korbanot* as they needed to be sourced from the funds of the whole Jewish people. Rav Kalischer maintained that in fact all *korbanot* could be offered, as funds procured from even a small portion of the Jewish people would halakhically suffice.



ZEH HAYOM CENTREPIECE - MICHAL BENJAMIN

LIKE DREAMERS



שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת בְּשׁוּב הַאֶתֶּ
שְׂיִבַת צִיּוֹן הָיִינוּ כְּחֹלְמִים: אָז
יִמְלֵא שְׂחֹק פִּינוּ, וּלְשׁוֹנֵנוּ רִנָּה

"A Song of Ascents. When God brings about the return to Zion, we were like dreamers.

Then our mouths will be filled with laughter, and our tongues with joyous song." (*Tehillim* 126:1-2)

Upon reading these famous *pesukim*, regarding our return to our homeland, the tenses seem somewhat inconsistent. One would assume that this *perek* is regarding our future return to the land of Israel, describing the future redemption whereby *יִמְלֵא שְׂחֹק פִּינוּ* - 'our mouths will be filled with laughter.' However just a line earlier, the *perek* speaks of a seemingly past event; instead of stating 'we will be like dreamers,' the *pasuk* reads *הָיִינוּ כְּחֹלְמִים* — 'we were like dreamers.' This grammatical inconsistency led Rav Kook *zt"l* to ask a seemingly obvious question: Has this taken place in the past or are we dreaming of a future event?

To answer this question, Rav Kook suggests that we need to explore the link between dreams and redemption. Within *Tanakh* there seems to be a recurring theme, whereby dreams serve as a vehicle to redemption. As a result of interpreting various dreams, Yosef rose up the ranks in Egypt, subsequently redeeming his family from famine. Similarly, Daniel redeemed himself from captivity through the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar.

The Gemara in *Shabbat* 31a states that when a soul is brought to judgement, one of the questions asked is 'Did you await redemption?' The simple fact that we are judged on this signifies the importance of awaiting redemption, and as a matter of fact this is where our rabbis source the obligation to *daven* for our nation's return and redemption towards the land of Israel.

Throughout thousands of years of Jewish history, we have been longingly awaiting our redemption. Be it from the lamenting cries of the rabbis and prophetic laughs of Rabbi Akiva over the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash* (*Makkot* 24b)

to Rachel's tears longing for her children to return home (*Yirmiyah* 31), a prophecy the fulfillment of which we remind ourselves every time someone makes Aliyah, proudly singing the very words with which Rachel was once comforted now coming true: *וְשָׁבוּ בְּנֵים לְגְבוּלָם* - 'Your children shall return to their country.' The Jewish people have been constantly yearning for their redemption. As Rav Kook eloquently states: 'The value of anticipating redemption lies in its power to help bring it to fruition,' and we today have the *zechut* to see the fruition of redemption, our *reishit tzemichat geulateinu* with the actualisation of *kibbutz galuyyot*, with over 6.5 million Jews from all four corners of the world now living in Israel, a reality that simply would not have been achieved without both our individual and national yearning for redemption.

It now seems clear why the *pasuk* states *הָיִינוּ כְּחֹלְמִים* in the past tense. The phraseology is referring to our past dreams of redemption during our long years of exile. It is not simply a description of the euphoric feeling of redemption, rather an ode to the circumstances and means by which this redemption took place. Just like our ancestors Yosef and Daniel, who used the power of their dreams for redemption, so too the dreams of Rachel, Rabbi Akiva and all of *Am Yisrael* are now coming true, fulfilling our national redemption.

With this in mind, we can now read the *pasuk* in a slightly different light:

בְּשׁוּב הַאֶתֶּ-שְׂיִבַת צִיּוֹן — 'God will bring about the return to Zion' — because, throughout the ages, *הָיִינוּ כְּחֹלְמִים* — 'we were like dreamers.' Our dreams and faith in Hashem's promised redemption enabled our return to the Land of Israel.

Now, celebrating 75 years into our redemption journey, it is up to us to continue in the ways of our ancestors, to continue dreaming, and continue yearning for our complete redemption, which we have the *zechut* to be living through today.

Yom Atzmaut Sameach!

MICHAL IS IN SHEVET OROT AND IS THE ROSH NIVCHERET OF BNEI AKIVA



TORAH FROM AROUND THE WORLD

RAV YEHUDA ALKALAI | YOM HA'ATZMAUT SPECIAL

Back up to Poznan Airport [POZ] and we catch a flight down to Warsaw Chopin Airport [WAW] on LOT Polish Airlines, for a connecting flight to Belgrade Nikola Tesla [BEG]. Once off the plane, from the Robni Terminal we catch the 607 bus to Malinjak, change for the 601 to Železnička Stanica Tošin Bunar then change again for the 45 to KBC Zemun. We can now take a pleasant stroll through Zemunski Park, and come out onto Rabina Alkalaja street (10

points for guessing whom that's named after).

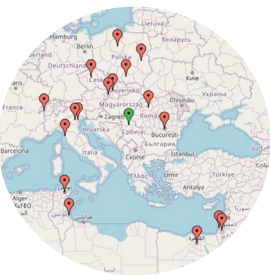
Rav Yehudah ben Shelomo Chai Alkalai (1798 – 1878) was born in (scream for me) Sarajevo, at that time in the Ottoman Empire. His father was a *shaliach tzibbur* and a teacher of young children, both roles that Rav Alkalai would later fill as well. Among his teachers can be counted Rabbi Eliezer Papo, author of the *Pele Yoetz*. Rav Alkalai was a critical catalyst of early European Zionism, and his writings found sympathies among the early nationalists stirrings prevalent in the proto-Zionist movement. Towards the end of his life, he made aliyah with his wife and was buried on the Mount of Olives.

From the very start, Rav Alkalai's literary output was supportive of the Jewish return to Israel. His first work, *Darkhei Noam*, written in Ladino, contained a guide to Hebrew reading and grammar, and he emphasised the need to have a national language of the Jewish people that could be spoken by all the Jews who should be coming together, returning to Zion. Likewise, he called for a unified *nosach hatefilla* that could be shared by all Jews as they return from the diaspora.

Rav Alkalai knew that these ideas would be perceived as radical, and consequently sent manuscripts of them to the rabbis of the Old Yishuv in Jerusalem, who did not even deign to reply to him. Later in his life, the Jerusalem rabbis would attack his proto-Zionist writings but they would do so in the most vague of terms, not addressing any of the main arguments actually advanced by Rav Alkalai. It has more recently been discovered that Theodore Herzl's grandfather, Shimon Leib Herzl, was in fact an attendee of Rav Alkalai's synagogue, and that he read one of the first copies of his works that supported the return to Zion. It is therefore quite possible that Rav Alkalai exerted significant influence over the Zionist founder's own position.

It is important to note that a key aspect of Rav Alkalai's Zionist writings were heavily influenced by the *kabbala*. A common practise of many kabbalists (and in fact others) was called *chishuv hakeitz*, or calculating the end of days. Essentially, this involves taking statements from a range of sources, including aggadic portions of *gemara* and sometimes passages of the *Zohar*, to work out by what time God 'must' send the

messiah. A common motif within *chishuv hakeitz* is that since a thousand years is like a day to God (*Tehillim* 90:4), and the world was created in six days, all things – including the messiah – must be 'created' by the end of the Jewish year 6000. According to many Jews at the time, Rav Alkalai included, the Jewish year 5600, known by the Hebrew acronym *Tar*, represent the final stage of the redemption process before the year 6000. Adherents to this suggestion were consequently known as '*tarnikim*'. The Jewish year 5600 coincided with the Damascus Affair of 1840, a violent blood libel in which Jews were tortured until they 'confessed' to the murder of a Christian priest and his Muslim servant, after which the local population attacked the Jews and burned *sifrei Torah*. Such an event led to an outpouring of messianic fervour, as it was seen by some as the 'birth pangs of the messiah.' However, when nothing new materialised following this, many *tarnikim* were left despondent – this is where Rav Alkalai stepped in.



Rav Alkalai transformed the approach many were taking towards the eventual redemption. He emphasised the **natural** form of the *geula*, and wrote that the year 5600 would be the **start** of the messianic process, that can only be realised by our human efforts (*itaruta diletata*, for those of you kabbalistically-inclined), not relying on God to miraculously return the land of Israel to us. Just as Cyrus had authorised the first return to Zion, so too the European kings must intervene and allow the Jews to return to the land of Israel. Rav Alkalai wrote about how many of the events of his time could, via kabbalistic interpretation, be viewed through a messianic lens. Critically, however, he warned about what would happen should this call to natural *geula* be ignored. Presciently, he wrote that the year 1840 begins a 100-year process (1840-1939), during which we must strive to bring the *geula*. Should this not occur, and the Jewish people 'remain in slumber' not returning to the land, then after 1939 there will be 'an outpouring of wrath' against the Jewish people, for shunning God's call to return to the land, and the Jews will be forced back into the land of Israel. (A similar discourse would be given by Rav Kook 80 years later, in his famous *ma'amar* of the *shofarot* delivered at the *Hurva* on Rosh Hashana of 1932.)

SHALIACH'S CORNER: UNDERSTANDING OUR ROOTS

RABBI AKIVA PART 6 - 'TO BE A FREE PEOPLE IN OUR LAND'



Rabbi Akiva said: Make your Shabbat like an ordinary weekday [i.e. don't buy expensive food] so that you are not beholden to other people. This means that if one is unable to honour *Shabbat*

without financial help from others, it is better for them to save money and eat their Shabbat meals as they would on a weekday rather than rely on other people (*Pesachim* 112a).

Every day, he would bring a bundle of sticks, half of which he would sell to support himself and half he would use for kindling. His neighbours came and said to him: Akiva, you are choking us with all this smoke. Sell it all to us instead, and then buy oil with the money, and study by the light of a candle. He said to them: 'But I take care of many of my needs with it. I study [by its light]. I warm myself [by its fire]. And then I can [make it into a bed and] sleep on it' (*Avot D'Rabbi Natan* 6:2).

Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai stated: 'Akiva my teacher used to preach: "There appeared a star [*kokhav*] out of Ya'akov" (*Bemidbar* 24:17) – read rather: "there appeared *Kokhba* out of Yaakov!'. When Rabbi Akiva saw Bar Kokhba he said "this is the King *mashiach*!"

Despite his tremendous standing amongst the sages of his generation, Rabbi Akiva lived much of his life in great poverty. In part, this was due to his overwhelming commitment to Torah study and teaching, which took up most of his time. But it was more than just that. For Rabbi Akiva surely could have requested from his community, or from his wealthy father-in-law to support him in his learning and his communal role.

But this was not his way. For Rabbi Akiva had the strongly-held belief in the virtue of being self-reliant. 'Better to live off the toil of my own hands, than by the good graces of another.' As he teaches, this is so important a religious value, that it overrides even the very important *mitzva*

of *kevod* and *oneg shabbat*! Over and above his general halakhik rulings – when it came to his personal life, he went so far as to prefer the physical items that he collected himself, rather than trade them for the handywork of others. But is this really a religious value? What is the significance of this *midda*?

One of the guiding principles in Jewish Ethics is *imitatio dei*, that we are supposed to act like Hashem and imitate His character. Though not discussed as often, this principle extends to Hashem's role as the creator and provider of all. Hashem is reliant upon no-one and nothing. He is independent of all, with no need for support, provisions, or the influence and favours provided

by another. We don't give this point much consideration because it is so obvious (indeed, definitional) when talking about Hashem. But it is worthy of discussion in the realm of our moral character development. Just as Hashem is kind, we must be kind; just as Hashem is merciful, we must be merciful; just as Hashem is independent, we must be independent as well.

In order to act in this world, in order to fulfil our purpose, we

cannot be beholden to the goodwill of others, which may in turn incline us to act in their best interests, instead of according to what is right and good. And this is what Rabbi Akiva saw in the figure of Bar Kokhba – not only a man who was capable, self-sufficient and independent – but someone who could bring the entire nation to a state of independence as well. Rabbi Akiva reminds us that the festivals of the month of *Iyar*, of which we are in the midst, are a celebration of our transformation from a people dependent on the favours and good graces of our host nations during our exile, into a free and sovereign state, with the capability to provide for itself, and the autonomy to chart its own course to become a true **אור לגויים**.

"ONE OF THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES IN JEWISH ETHICS IS IMITATIO DEI, THAT WE ARE SUPPOSED TO ACT LIKE HASHEM AND IMITATE HIS CHARACTER... JUST AS HASHEM IS INDEPENDENT, WE MUST BE INDEPENDENT AS WELL."

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MY ALIYAH EXPERIENCE - AARON SEITLER

FOR THE JOURNEY



'Yehi Ratzon mil'

'Louder! Louder! We can't hear!'

'Okay, I'll be louder.'

I drew breath. Hopelessly nauseous, I tried competing with the deafening sound of the engines once again. How many times had I said *Tefillat HaDerekh* before?

Hundreds?

This time however, I had a different version: '...that we may parachute in peace, that You may save us from common and uncommon winds; from all manner of mishaps in the air and upon landing...' Compiled by Rav Shlomo Goren zt"l, it is a rubric for every Israeli paratrooper, religious or otherwise, prior to departing their aircraft.

Truth be told, my Aliyah flight landed on 1st June 2021. Spiritually however, things only began to click when I got out the plane a second time... a good few hundred or thousand feet higher.

Only then did I begin to think more deeply about modern Israel's significance in the Jewish people's journey. The journey that began at Mt. Sinai, and almost petered out when the Romans exiled us in the 1st Century. Rav Kook explains that our then-nation fell head over heels for the Ancient Near East's idolatrous and materialistic way of life. Enjoyable as that may have been, God saw little reason for His people to retain a cohesive polity if they had lost sight of the Divine Mission. 'Floating through the air', our stateless centuries in Galut granted scope to rediscover a sense of authentic *Avodat Hashem* and the moral good (*Orot* p.52). Our respite put us on track to make a second bid for sovereignty. After all, as the Maharal writes, every nation needs a country, let alone *Am Yisrael*. Persecuted and isolated, our way of life could not, and would not, remain the affair of the private individual. Or the lone family. Or the single shul. Or even a sole community.

It might start with the ethical businessman in Canary Wharf, or the couple enjoying their *matza* together at a Broughton Park *seder*. But it can only end in a nation of Jews setting the pace of national life to the rhythm of the Torah, from agriculture to political legislation; economic development and, of course, military activity. Since the state's establishment, Israel has commemorated eleven *Shemita* years, the Knesset has debated and passed scores of legislative items in relation to country-wide observance of Shabbat and *chaggim*, whilst dozens of pamphlets and *sefarim* continue to be published in guiding the service of the religious soldier.

At long last, the Jewish people's ultimate purpose – eschewed by our forebears and entrusted to the abstract for two millennia – is finally re-materialising. Asking for God's safe passage whilst hurtling towards the land that He promised us, strapped to a gun and 10 kilos of ammunition to defend against the enemies of His people, I felt a part of that renewed mission: rejuvenating Judaism as a national aspiration. Three times a day, we declare in Aleinu, 'to perfect the world with the reign of God.' As a group of scattered and disparate individuals, this might have seemed an exaggerated ambition.

But as a Jewish state that increasingly facilitates Torah ideals in the facets of public life, we stand a chance of, as Rabbi Mordechai Greenburg puts it, 'taking humanity out of its misconception'.

Of course, there is a long way to go. I admit that as a Bnei Akiva *madrish* making funny *peulot* with paper and staples about odious behaviour in the Knesset, or peddling our political impasse over pizza in UCL's Israel society, things seemed so much less intractable. After a year in the I.D.F, I've come away with a slightly more informed view about our shortcomings.

AARON IS IN SHEVET NE'EMAN AND MADE ALIYAH IN JUNE 2021. HE IS A PARATROOPER IN THE IDF.

"IT MIGHT START WITH THE ETHICAL BUSINESSMAN IN CANARY WHARF, OR THE COUPLE ENJOYING THEIR MATZA TOGETHER AT A BROUGHTON PARK SEDER. BUT IT CAN ONLY END IN A NATION OF JEWS SETTING THE PACE OF NATIONAL LIFE TO THE RHYTHM OF THE TORAH,"

WHAT'S GOING ON?

- Bnei Akiva's annual **Yom Ha'atzmaut** service at Kinloss took place on Tuesday night! It was a powerful display of Anglo-Jewry's **support for Israel**, and you can read a full report of it in next week's Shabbat Lashem. For now, check out the picture below!

- **Birmingham SBM** continues this **Monday 1st May!** Join us at the usual location.

- **Manchester SBM** continues this **Monday 1st May** at the **Manchester Bayit!**

- **Lishmah** for bogrot and sixth-form women starts again this **Tuesday 2nd May!** Join this **dynamic makom torah** for women!

- **London SBM** continues next **Thursday 4th May** from 7pm at Kinloss! Make sure to sign up so that we can order enough food.

- **Summer Machane** applications are still open! Visit bauk.org/camps to sign up.

- **Tafkidim** for **Summer Machane** are still open! Visit bauk.org/tafkid to sign up.

- **Mazkirut Applications** for **Technical Director** and **Israel & Communities Worker** are still open, email mazkir@bauk.org for more information.

- To give any **comments** or **suggestions** to Bnei Akiva, please visit bauk.org/feedback.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ANY OF THESE EVENTS, PLEASE CONTACT BEN AT CHINUCH@BAUK.ORG



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