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Introduction from the Director

“My heart is in the East, and I am at the edge of the West.” These emotive words — written by Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, the renowned Spanish rabbi, poet, and philosopher, roughly one thousand years ago — capture what we have been feeling since Simchas Torah 5784. There hasn’t been a day or a night when we have not been thinking, feeling, or crying about the tragic events that our brothers and sisters are experiencing in the Land of Israel. In that light, we present the Pesach Journal of The Rabbinical Council of Greater Washington, Volume 12.1.

This issue opens with essays focused on the war in Israel. Because it is being fought thousands of miles away, far from our community, we are often unable to feel the pain that so many of our brothers and sisters endure. We have therefore asked local rabbis to share their personal reflections on the tragedy of October Seventh and the war in Gaza. The articles share familial connections to what is occurring on the frontlines, a real boots-on-the-ground relationship to the war, and in-depth analysis of a deeper issue the war presents. It is our hope that these insights will sensitize and inspire us to redouble our efforts, through *tefillah*, *Talmud Torah*, and *chesed* to bring merit to our soldiers, those on the front lines, and the citizens of *Eretz Yisrael*.

We continue with a section dedicated to Kashrus: Pesach and Year-Round. There you will find an examination of contemporary Pesach-related *kashrus* issues; an important reminder from the Capitol K regarding its supermarket produce policy; and Chametz after Pesach 5784.

The Journal remembers two Greater Washington rabbis with enlightening articles about Rabbi Gedaliah Silverstone and Rabbi Herzl Kranz, each of whom was a powerful force in the Washington rabbinate in his era and who contributed significantly to the Orthodox landscape of our city. There is much that we all can emulate in their lives and their work.

Finally, we learn about the activities of the Mayberg Foundation and the Golden Network, two remarkable organizations whose incredible efforts are having a lasting impact on the Greater Washington community and beyond. We thank them for their significant and meaningful work.

My sincere thanks and *hakaras hatov* to Mrs. Mindy Tolchinsky for her unwavering dedication and steadfast commitment to editing the Journal. Her careful eye, skilled pen, and wise wordsmithing can be found on every page of the Journal you are holding.

Most importantly, thank you to Rabbi Yosef Singer for his indefatigable leadership — day in and day out — of the myriad responsibilities of the Vaad HaRabanim.

May this Pesach bring personal and national redemption for you, your family, and *Klal Yisrael*, and may we merit to fulfill the words, *L’shanah HaBa’ah B’Yerushalayim*: Next year in Jerusalem!

Chag Kasher v’Sameach,

Rabbi Moshe Walter

Message from the President: Ahavas Yisrael

Given the horrific events of October 7th and the painful, ongoing aftermath, I feel compelled to address the issue in some way. At the same time, I am uneasy writing about the topic in a journal whose pages contain contributions from those who have lost loved ones during this conflict, have relatives or friends taken hostage, have children or siblings serving in the IDF, or have had the opportunity to visit Israel and provide support and comfort to those who have experienced the destruction firsthand. I am humbled by their sacrifice and commitment; I share my thoughts with the utmost respect and deference.

The war against Hamas is more than a war against terrorists. It is more than a war whose stakes include the right of the State of Israel to exist or the right of Israel to defend itself. It is a war of cosmic proportions which pits good against evil, truth against falsehood. It is global in its scope: Jews everywhere feel isolated and threatened by the re-emergence of overt, virulent antisemitism.

This war is part and parcel of the continuing *Galus Edom* (the Edomite or “Roman” Exile) and *Galus Yishmael* (the Exile of *Yishmael*), about which *Pirkei d’Rebbe Eliezer* (chapter 32) states:

Why is he named *Yishmael*? Because in the future, HaKadosh Baruch Hu will listen to the heart wrenching cries of His nation (Israel) as a result of what *Yishmael* will do in the land (of Israel) at the end of days. Therefore, he is called *Yishmael* — because Hashem (*Keil*) will listen (*Yishma*) and answer them.

In truth, we are all engaged in a personal struggle: trying to cope with this bewildering turn of events, appreciate the deeper implications, and see the bigger picture — while attempting, in our own way, to awaken Divine mercy and hasten the *geulah shleimah*.

Rav Chaim of Volozhin *zt”l* writes:

No Jew should ever say, “What am I and what power do my deeds have to accomplish anything in this world?” Rather, every deed, word, and even thought, impacts the “Upper Worlds.” (*Nefesh HaChaim, Shaar I: Chapter 4*)

In that spirit, I have focused on strengthening my commitment to *Ahavas Yisrael* (loving all Jews), *Shemiras Shabbos* (observing Shabbos), and *Iyun Tefillah* (contemplation of prayer). Perhaps most importantly, I have been concentrating on reaffirming our sacred trust in HaKadosh Baruch Hu: that, despite all the suffering, His love for the Jewish people is boundless and eternal and that this world that He created is ultimately an *olam chesed yibaneh* — a world built on kindness. In these pages, I will focus on *Ahavas Yisrael* and Hashem’s everlasting love for His nation, *Am Yisrael*.

AHAVAS YISRAEL

In *Tehillim* we read:

ה' שִׁמְרָךְ ; ה' צִלָּךְ, עַל יַד יְמִינֶךָ.

Hashem is your protector;

Hashem is the shadow (shade) upon your right arm. (121:5)

The *Nefesh HaChaim* learns that *tzilchah* can mean a shadow or, figuratively, a mirror. This signifies that Hashem mirrors our actions and *hashkafos* (worldview). If we are positive, then Hashem will mirror that positivity and structure reality so it justifies and strengthens those positive feelings.

In his introduction to the *Beis HaLevi* on *Ahavas Yisrael*, the Baal Shem Tov observes that this paradigm operates in the case of *Ahavas Yisrael* as well:

Hashem acts to us the way we act to others. Thus, when Jews are kind to one another, Hashem is kind to us. When there is baseless hatred between us, as in the case of the second *Beis HaMikdash*, Hashem withdraws from us and leaves us defenseless.

This explains the observation of the *Chachamim* in the *Gemara Yerushalmi (Peah 1:1)*: Despite the fact that King Achav was a *rasha gamur* (completely wicked), he was victorious in war and suffered no casualties — because there was unity and brotherhood in his kingdom. This is in direct contrast to *David HaMelech* who, despite the fact that he was a great *tzadik*, lost battles and suffered casualties because his kingdom was plagued by *lashon hora* (negative speech about others) and *motzi sheim ra* (slander and defamation of others).

In the immediate aftermath of Oct 7th, Telshe Rosh HaYeshiva Rabbi Dovid Goldberg *shlit"l* related the following story, highlighting the awesome power of forgiveness:

During the Six Day War, the basement in the Mirrer Yeshiva served as a bomb shelter for the neighborhood. Bombs would often land nearby. Once, there was a direct hit. It caused an explosion. Many of those in the basement thought that they would imminently die. Many cried out, "Shema Yisrael..."

There was a woman in the basement whose husband had abandoned her twenty years earlier, without giving her a "get" (a Jewish divorce). As a result, she was forbidden to remarry. Her life during that time had been very difficult. Now, her voice was louder than the others. She called out to Hashem that, although she had suffered terribly because of her husband, she now forgave him! Then she implored Hashem to forgive the Jewish People accordingly. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, the Mirrer Rosh HaYeshiva was also in the bomb shelter. He had heard the woman's cries. He

later said that **he was certain that her prayer had saved all of them!** She had overlooked the terrible wrong that had been done to her. That saved all of them.¹

The message here is that forgiveness fosters *shalom* and *shalom* is the *kli ha'machzik berachah*, the vessel that holds Hashem's blessings. Rabbi Goldberg suggested that, in this period of great crisis, we should try to follow the example of this righteous woman and be *moser nefesh* (self-sacrificing) to forgive even those people who have hurt us badly. This is not to suggest, *chas v'shalom*, that people should remain in abusive relationships and/or make themselves vulnerable to more serious hurt. It means that we should relinquish the hatred and resentment that eat at our souls and move forward with our lives. In so doing, we make the case that Hashem should forgive the Jewish people accordingly and save us from harm.

HASHEM'S INFINITE AND ENDURING LOVE FOR HIS NATION, AM YISRAEL

Recently, I was fortunate to hear a beautiful song entitled, "An Everlasting Love," performed by Shlomo and Eitan Katz. As the title suggests, the lyrics speak of Hashem's undying affection for the Jewish people. I had to play the song over and over again to remind myself that, despite the terrible suffering of *acheinu kol beis Yisrael*, we remain His *am segulah* — chosen people — and His *mamleches kohanim* — kingdom of priests — and are still very much beloved by Him. In the face of pervasive antisemitism and the terrible accusations born of it, the *pesukim* on which the song's lyrics are based provided great comfort to me. Significantly, the song's first verse comes from *Sefer Yirmiyahu*, which chronicles the horrors associated with the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*:

וְאַהֲבַת עוֹלָם אֶהְבֵּתִיךָ, עַל כֵּן מִשְׁכַּחְתִּיךָ חֶסֶד.

...An everlasting love I have loved you,
thus I have drawn you with my kindness. (Yirmiyahu 31:2)

כִּי הַהָרִים יִמוּשׁוּ, וְהַגְּבָעוֹת תִּמְוֹטֶינָהּ, וְחֶסְדִּי מֵאַתָּה לֹא יִמוּשׁ...

The mountains will crumble and the hillsides will fade away
but My kindness shall not be removed from you... (Yeshayahu 54:10)

Perhaps when the *Beis HaMikdash* is rebuilt and *nevuah* (prophecy) has been restored, we may come to understand the reasons Hashem allowed so many terrible tragedies to befall His beloved children. Perhaps we will also merit to see how and why this suffering played a role in His divine plan. Until that time, we can only (constructively) speculate and utilize those speculations to help us become better people.

Years ago, I heard a story from Rabbi Pesach Krohn, about Rebbetzin Chana Wagschal of Gateshead, which helps me "constructively speculate." She was teaching a women's *shiur* in *Nach* and came across the following *pasuk* in *Malachi* (3:3).

¹ (*Tishah B'Av*, compiled by Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer and Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, Artscroll).

וַיֵּשֶׁב מִצָּרַף וּמִטֵּהָר כְּסָף...

He (Hashem) sits and refines and purifies silver...

Rebbetzin Wagschal wanted to better understand the silversmith metaphor, so she arranged for her class to visit a silversmith at work. The smith explained that, when he receives a sample of raw silver, it is laced with impurities that can only be removed by subjecting the sample to intense heat, the hottest part of the flame. The heating process must be monitored very carefully because if the silver is heated for too short a time, impurities remain; too long a time, and it is ruined. He was asked how he knows precisely when to remove the silver from the heat. He answered, "It is simple. When I can see my reflection in the sample."

So it is with HaKadosh Baruch Hu. He sits and refines both the *middos* and *yiras shamayim* (fear of G-d) of His people by subjecting them to great stress. When He sees His reflection in us, the development of the Jewish people will be complete — and on that day,

...הִיְהִי ה' אֶחָד וְשֵׁמוֹ אֶחָד.

...G-d will be One and His Name will be One.

With heartfelt wishes for a *Chag Kasher v'Sameach*,

Rabbi Yosef Singer

On Having a Son in the IDF — in Combat in Gaza

*Rebbetzin Sara Bluming
Chabad of Potomac*

Rabbi Mendel and Rebbetzin Sara Bluming's son, Yossi, serves in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Here, Rebbetzin Bluming shares her reflections on their experience since Simchas Torah.

Having a son in the army means living on a roller coaster of emotions. Allow us to take you on our ride and give you a glimpse into the hearts of a mother and a father whose son is an IDF staff sergeant serving during this difficult time. We transport you back to that first painful week after Simchas Torah...

Friday was a heavy day. A very heavy day. It was the end of an incredibly difficult week for all of us, and I was exhausted from the mental effort of constantly pushing away the negative and scary thoughts that threatened to hijack my mind. I had spent all week trying to focus on only positive thoughts instead: of Israel in its glory, with thousands of Jews joyously singing at the Kotel, safe and surrounded by Hashem's protective clouds.

It was hard work, but by Thursday I had gotten to a good place. I was feeling super positive, strong in my trust in Hashem, and committed to doing whatever I could to help Israel on the spiritual front.

Then, on Friday morning, Yossi called on WhatsApp. Our 21-year-old son Yossi is a staff sergeant in the IDF in *Tzanchanim* (Paratroopers Brigade). Yossi shared some of the heart wrenching realities with which he'd been dealing and how complicated a mission this was for Israel. He spoke of the stench of death and the horrifically dismembered bodies of our precious brothers and sisters in the communities near Gaza. He told us that he had completed those missions and was now stationed in an army base down south, training and preparing to enter Gaza. As I looked at his tired but determined face on the video call, my heart broke for his lost innocence — for the horrific scenes he had witnessed with his own eyes that were now seared into his memory. Please Hashem, I prayed, help our soldiers heal from the trauma they are experiencing.

I called out to all our children, "Guys, it's Yossi! Come say hi!" We were all so excited to see him for the first time since the Simchas Torah attack. We spontaneously started dancing and singing to the tune of *Anachnu Ma'aminim Bnei Ma'aminim* — we are believers, the sons of believers — and *Mi Shema'amin Lo Mifached* — one who believes in Hashem does not fear. We danced and cheered him on and told him how proud we were of him, how brave he was, and how much we loved him. We encouraged him with the words of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who repeatedly declared that being an IDF soldier ready to endanger one's own life for the protection of Hashem's Land and People is the greatest merit that a person can possibly have. We reminded him that the Rebbe would say that each IDF soldier is a *giluy elokus limatah*, an unconcealed

expression of G-d's protective presence in this world. We blew kisses to each other and wished each other "Good Shabbos" before saying goodbye.

And then I broke down and cried.

All the positive thoughts, all the mental energy used to push away those negative thoughts — all went out the window. I cried tears of happiness on seeing my son's precious face. I cried tears of fear and panic that he would need to go into Gaza, and I cried tears of pain for our people who have to live through a glimpse of the Holocaust in 2023.

It was hard for me to breathe the rest of the day. My chest was so tight that it felt like it might explode.

As if I wasn't struggling enough with my internal emotions, our adorable granddaughter was visiting for Shabbos. And every time I looked at her, my heart broke over and over again. All I could think about were those precious babies...

The rest of the day went by in a blur, as my mind took me to the most dangerous places. Knowing that my son would be entering Gaza put me in a state of panic and, try as I might, I could not battle the overwhelming images — and all the what-ifs — that crept into my mind.

As Shabbos approached, I lit the Shabbos candles. Through my tears, I prayed to Hashem to please protect Yossi and his fellow soldiers; to please show us miracles and save the hostages; to please send complete healing to all the injured. I begged Hashem to please end this madness and bring *Mashiach*, whom we so desperately need.

We decided as a family to go to shul for *Kabalas Shabbos*, in the merit of all the soldiers who would be unable to go to shul because they were busy doing the holy work of protecting our people. As I walked to shul on Friday night, my tears would not stop flowing. I had held it together so well all week, but now the intense pain, the worry, and the fear felt like they might shatter my heart into millions of pieces.

Kabalas Shabbos was cathartic. The singing, the sense of community, and the spirit of Shabbos helped ease the heaviness I was feeling. And then came the dancing. We danced and danced to the tune of *Al Tirah*, the prayer that assures us that Hashem is with us and we should not fear. I danced away the pain and made room for the joy of Shabbos.

The remainder of Shabbos was magical and therapeutic. We set a beautiful Shabbos dinner with our finest dishes. On Shabbos morning, my girls got dressed in their nicest and fanciest Shabbos clothing. We were ready for *Mashiach*. I worked very hard to shut the door to the overwhelming scary thoughts, to not allow them to even enter my mind. I chose happy and positive visuals to focus on instead.

Ever since that first Shabbos, I have created a bubble for myself. I have worked hard to fill my space with only positive energy. I have tapped into my inherent trust in Hashem and held on to it tightly. I continue to be fueled and driven by this war to do whatever I can to end it: helping women experience the *mikvah* for the first time; affixing *mezuzos* on the doors of those who do not yet have them and *tefillin* on the arm of every Jewish man; reaching out and supporting other fellow army moms; and being more mindful when I daven. I am determined to push forward and get to our goal, *Mashiach*.

Fast forward to two weeks later: Monday, October 30. We woke up to find this text from Yossi:

"Be strong! There is no room for fear in the heart of a Jew. I will speak to you all *B'ezrat Hashem* very soon."

Yossi had entered Gaza — the lion's den — and, once again, I found myself in the depths of tears, worry, and pain.

Sending a son into a war zone for an indefinite period of time, not knowing when you will hear from him next — it could be weeks or months — is not meant for a mother's heart. I kept thinking about the text that a friend had sent me: "It doesn't get easier, but we get stronger." It resonated so deeply. It certainly does not get easier, and right then I needed to work on getting stronger. As much as I believed in Hashem, as much as I couldn't be prouder of my hero son, the intense heaviness and pain that sat on my chest just wouldn't go away. Neither would the tears. For the first time since the war had started, I stopped fighting and allowed myself to just cry. I allowed myself to hold space for all the intense emotions I was feeling simultaneously. I realized that as strong as I thought I was, I needed to dig deeper and find the strength within myself to ride this wave and come out even stronger.

A few years ago, I taught *Sha'ar Habitachon*. It is an intense and powerful study on trusting and believing in G-d. As an end-of-study memento and to remind the participants of what we had learned, I designed a magnet with "*Bitachon* Meditations," a combination of some of the foundational concepts from *Sha'ar Habitachon*. These meditations had helped me stay anchored during some very difficult challenges over the past few years, and these same meditations are helping me get to that place of strength I aspire to reach now. I read them daily, sometimes twice, and maybe even three times if I need it. I breathe them in, I try to internalize them. I know they are true, I just need to feel them to be true. I will get there. It doesn't get easier, but I am getting stronger.

Those were very difficult and intense days, but I slowly climbed up, up to a place of strength and trust in Hashem. Throughout the vicissitudes of this roller coaster ride, the Torah's words have guided me, uplifted me, and carried me — empowering me to have a lot more ups than downs.

Fast forward to several weeks later: our son was out of Gaza.

One day Yossi received a call from the IDF to speak to 1500 soldiers who were emerging that day from Gaza for a short break. He was asked to address them because many of them were from his greater *Tzanchanim* Brigade. He shared with them a message that is so critical as we approach Pesach:

He explained that millions of Jewish souls look down upon them each and every day. The souls of those who perished in Egyptian slavery, during the Holocaust, in the pogroms, during the Spanish Inquisition, in the Soviet gulags, and throughout our bloodstained history: they all look to our soldiers fighting today and say, "*Ashreichem!* How lucky are you to have an opportunity that we were not afforded! You are so fortunate to be able to stand between a Jew and a Holocaust. You are so fortunate to be Hashem's arms and legs in this world to defeat the enemies who seek our demise." He then turned to the blood-stained, sweaty, and exhausted soldiers gathered there and said, "Yes, we are all exhausted; the war is dangerous and treacherous. Our bodies and minds have been pushed beyond their limits and we wonder if we can go on much more. But we cannot stop — because *we are the ones with the unprecedented merit and responsibility to stand between our innocent brethren and the murderous haters of our People.* Hence it is forbidden that we stop before we fully and properly complete our mission. Before we wipe out the last of our enemies. Before we bring back those who were captured. We do it not only for ourselves — but for all generations before us, who look down upon us from Above. They are with us together in this war, and for them we will push forward stronger than ever, proudly, with our heads held high."

Rabbi Mendel Bluming adds:

At the Pesach Seder, I always wondered: Why, 2000 years ago, did our Sages write in *Vehi She'amdah* that "in every generation they stand up to annihilate us?" Why were they so pessimistic? Could they not imagine a generation in which no one would stand up to annihilate the Jewish people, a time of tolerance and goodness that would prevail and that would be peaceful?

In retrospect, they were painfully right...You don't have to look far to see people who call for the annihilation of Jews very openly, even in 2024.

The final sentence of *Vehi She'amdah* says, "Hashem saves us from their hands." One of the lessons of this past Simchas Torah is that we are powerless without Hashem's protection —even at the height of our security and technological prowess, we can only be a conduit for G-d's protection. We alone cannot secure our people and its future. It is only through our reliance on Hashem that our forces can go forward to do this holy work.

We won't sugarcoat it. The fear is deep — and yet, our pride and faith in Hashem is absolute: He will carry us through this period to a time of peace and goodness for all humanity, with the arrival of *Mashiach*, speedily in our days.

Until that day, how can there be a holier mission than standing up bravely, serving as Hashem's ambassadors to protect His people from those who seek to annihilate us once again? May Hashem protect them all and bring them home safely.

Looking Toward the Mountains: When Family in Israel is in the Line of Fire

Rabbi Yosef Postelnek
Assistant Rabbi, Young Israel Shomrai Emunah

Walking up the driveway to my front door on Motza'ei Simchas Torah, I don't want to turn on my phone. But, at the same time, I so badly want to know what's going on and if everyone is OK. *They must be OK*, I tell myself. *Nothing happened to my family*, I convince myself. *I'll make havdalah and then turn on my phone to find out what happened in Israel.*

I swing open the door and walk into the house. My wife and mother-in-law are standing around the table with phones open. My wife looks up and I know whatever she's about to tell me is bad news. Whatever she's about to say in the next ten seconds isn't something I want to hear. *Please don't tell me*, I think. "Tell me," I say. *Just don't let it be my family.*

My family...Over the past seven years, four out of my five siblings — two with their families and two right out of yeshiva or seminary — made Aliyah. Two years ago, my parents and grandmother followed suit. Spread out across different communities, they all call Israel home. And then there's my youngest sister, visiting Israel for Sukkos; my sister-in-law, currently learning in seminary in Yerushalayim; and my many second cousins, some born and raised there and others who have made Aliyah in recent years. Everyone is in Israel.

So all I can think is, *please, just not my family*. To my wife I ask again, "What happened? How bad?"

"Your cousin. You have a cousin, Dovid, right?", she begins. "He was killed at the festival." Mind racing and heart breaking, I sink into a kitchen chair. Still processing, I wonder, "And everyone else!?" "They're OK" is the response. It takes sifting through a couple hundred WhatsApp messages to see how the rest of my family is doing, to read of their experiences over the past forty-eight hours, and to confirm that they are truly OK.

The rest of that night and week are a blur, but there are clear, painful moments that stand out in my mind. My cousin's *levayah* — with *hespeidim* that are more screaming than words. His girlfriend, a festival survivor, transported by ambulance to attend the funeral on a gurney. *Shacharis* of *Isru Chag* in Silver Spring: when the *baal tefillah's* voice breaks and he cries as he reads the words "*Melech meimis u'mechayeh*" — the King Who causes death and restores life. No, I'll never forget that *tefillah*.

—

While my immediate family is OK, the term “OK” is, after all, subjective, very much tied to individual experiences. If our assessment is limited to a superficial check of vital signs, then we will have overlooked the toll that this war has taken on every person.

This is my attempt to capture a few of those moments — highlighted as vignettes, from within my own family, from the perspective of someone so close, but so far — in the hope that these memories will speak to others.

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Mountains and hills flash in the background as I video-call my mother while she drives somewhere in Beit Shemesh. She relates that my sister and brother-in-law and their four children (all under the age of four!) are now living with her, my father, and my grandmother in their three-bedroom apartment.

Located on a small *yishuv* called Givat Washington, twelve minutes outside Ashdod, my sister and her family had spent most of Simchas Torah running to and hiding in their local *miklat* (bomb shelter). But since they don’t have a *miklat* in their apartment, they had to run for cover several yards away: less than a minute to grab four children and get to safety. Even worse and more frightening: Due to the ongoing concern of terrorist infiltration, they were instructed to lock their doors and remain inside. As my sister later related to me, they could do all the right things — hide behind locked doors or run to find shelter — but the terror was so real, so present, that all sense of safety and security had been lost. So, minutes after *havdalah* on Motza’ei Yom Tov, while not officially evacuated by the IDF, they grabbed whatever they could fit in their car and made their way to Beit Shemesh, leaving the constant sirens and threat behind.

Even once out of the range of the daily sirens, anxiety and worry remain high. *Grab the children.* That’s what runs through my sister’s mind. *Where are the children?* If they go to the playground and the siren goes off, will she have enough time to take them to safety? What if she’s not with them? What if there’s another infiltration? How does someone look at their children and wonder if they’ll be able to get to safety in time?

My spiraling thoughts are suddenly interrupted by my son upstairs screaming for my help. “I’m really sorry, Mommy; kids are yelling — I’ve got to run. Call you back soon!” I jump off the phone and up the stairs. Everyone is OK; just a child who needs help in the bathroom. The striking contrast between my running and my sister’s is hard to ignore.

—

A week or two after Simchas Torah, I find myself walking through the aisles of Trader Joe’s, stopping at the fully stocked shelf of seltzer bottles. *What will it be, orange or mixed-berry?* I’m suddenly struck by how normal this is. How am I picking which seltzer to purchase when my siblings are sitting in shelters? How am I dressing my children for school while my nieces and nephews can’t even go outside to play? Perhaps even more unsettling, everyone in this store is

shopping and going about their daily life as if nothing's wrong, as if nothing has changed. Does anyone care??

Forcing myself to take a breath, I keep moving. I finish shopping and check out, mixed-berry seltzer in hand.

On the way out, my attention is drawn to a single "Kidnapped" flyer secured to the telephone pole outside the shopping center. Someone cares.

—

My brother is notified of his *miluim*, reserve duty. The good news is that he's not going directly to the front, at least not in the first wave entering *Aza* (Gaza). Instead, he'll be stationed in the Gush (Gush Etzion) as protection for the local communities. "So, it's good," I conclude after sharing the news with my wife. "He won't be the first one in." Looking at me, she remarks, "But someone else's brother will be."

I logically understand that I would never find out about the loss of a relative, *chas v'shalom*, through social media or the news. But it doesn't stop me from pausing — briefly holding my breath before reading the lists of soldiers injured or killed in battle, just davening that I won't see a name I recognize— nor from feeling a moment of relief when familiar names don't appear. But my wife's words echo in my mind: *It's still someone else's brother.*

—

My brother will enter *Aza* soon. "You should know," he tells me, "Everyone here [in the army] feels the need for *tefillos* and wants you to be praying for them and their safety." "But Ezra," I wonder, "*Heim lo datiyim* [they're not observant]." "*Lo datiyim, aval heim ma'aminim*" [they may not be observant, but they believe], my brother responds.

Before the video call ends, I catch a glimpse of the mountains and hills of Yehuda. I look to those mountains, the words of *Dovid Ha'Melech* coming to mind (*Tehillim* 121:1):

אֲשָׂא עֵינַי אֶל הַהָרִים, מֵאֵן יָבֵא עֲזָרִי...

...I lift my eyes unto the mountains, from whence shall my help come?

Esa einai el he'harim: I pray for my brother's safety, that Hashem should help and protect him and all the other soldiers.

—

He's now in *Aza*. I like to envision him safe — perhaps in a staging area or in transport. And even if in battle, secured behind a wall or concealed in a room, loading his rifle away from the shooting.

But I'm far from Aza; I'm folding laundry in my basement, listening to Erev Shabbos music. The song switches to *Bring Back our Boys*:

*A father hopes, a mother trusts, a nation unites...
Hashem, our only hope is You.
Esa einai el he'harim. I lift my eyes up to the heights.
Mei'ayin yavo ezri.*

Our boys — my brother, my cousins; other brothers, sons, fathers, and husbands whom I've never met. Bring them home, Hashem! Bring them back, Hashem! *Esa einai el he'harim*. My eyes are rivers, looking toward the mountains again: The mountains of Beit Shemesh. The mountains of the Gush. The mountains that frame the Kineret. I'm looking up to You, Hashem; *our only hope is You!*

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With all the heaviness, the experience is not without humor. Speaking to my mother, she tells me, "Grandma went running today." "Really?" I reply skeptically; "Grandma took up exercise?" "Well," she explains, "Not quite. She was out for a short walk when the siren went off; she doesn't run, but she ran then!" We have a good laugh, but only because Grandma is OK. Yet, even laced with humor, I can't ignore how frightening it was for my mother who, when the siren went off, couldn't find my grandmother and refused to enter the shelter without her.

Like so many other Jewish mothers, my mother carries the weight of her family on her shoulders. With a son at war, caring for her children and grandchildren, worrying for her mother out on a stroll as a siren sounds — she davens for and carries everyone. All with love, strength, and *emunah* as large, as strong, and as steadfast as a mountain.

—

Across the mountains and ocean, those of us in America are far away from Israel, distant from our family and friends. Our experiences are markedly different from those living in Israel. But that physical distance is crossed in the form of *tefillos*, *tzedakah*, Torah and *mitzvos*; the emotional divide is reduced by all our care and concern for *acheinu Beis Yisrael* (our brethren). Our feet may be planted in America, but our hearts and our minds are in Israel.

Following *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, Hashem tells us,

וְאֵשָׁא אֶתְכֶם עַל כַּנְּפֵי נְשָׁרִים, וְאַבֵּא אֶתְכֶם אֵלַי...

...I lifted you on wings of eagles, and I brought you to me (Shemos 19:4).

Providing a deeper understanding of the *pasuk*, *Targum Yonasan* reveals something extraordinary: "I lifted you on clouds, [carrying you] like on wings of eagles from [the city of]

Raamses, and I brought you to the [future] location of the *Beis Ha'Mikdash* to bring the *Korban Pesach*." On that first night of Pesach, it didn't suffice for us to bring and eat the *Korban Pesach* in *Mitzrayim*. Instead, Hashem transported us to *Eretz Yisrael* and took us to the holiest of places, far from the limitations, pain, and filth of *Mitzrayim*.

The *Nesivos Shalom (Pesach: Ma'amar 5)* explains one way to understand this: Hashem didn't physically transport us but, rather, showed us a new reality, exposing us to how high and how holy a Jew can be. No matter where we find ourselves, we have the opportunity to transcend the physical limitations of space and ascend the mountain — connecting to Him, to *Eretz Yisroel*, and to the entire Jewish nation.

Once again, thousands of years later, in *Nissan 5784*, many of us find ourselves physically distant from Israel. But we are, in the deepest of ways, emotionally and spiritually connected to our family and friends in Israel.

Esa einei el he'harim. I daven for Hashem to lift us up, in both body and spirit; to protect us like an eagle shields its young; to bring everyone home safely; and to carry us back home to *Eretz Yisrael* as we experience the final and complete *Geulah*.

Reacting to the Downfall of Our Enemies: To Be Happy or Not?

Rabbi Moshe Walter
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War is painful, heartbreaking, and agonizing. We have shed tears, cried uncontrollably, and lost sleep because of the losses and tragedies that *Klal Yisrael* has suffered over the past months. At the same time, we have been following the downfall of Hamas battalions, the deaths of Hamas terrorists and commanders, and the elimination of their leaders. The proper response to such news is not as intuitive, nor as simple, as one might think.

What is the appropriate emotional response? How does the Torah teach us to react to the downfall of our enemies? What do *Chazal* say? How have Jews responded to similar circumstances over the millennia?

Because we have been attacked and physically threatened since the birth of our nation — through exiles, pogroms, massacres, and wars — these questions are not new. Let us examine these issues by looking to the Torah, *Chazal*, and *halachic* authorities for direction: Is the appropriate reaction to the downfall and death of our enemy joy, celebration, commemoration — or none of the above?

PESACH

In a celebrated piece in his *Meshech Chochmah*, R. Meir Simchah of Dvinsk (1843–1926, Latvia) addresses a number of these questions. Prior to the tenth plague — when the Jews were still in Egypt — G-d commanded the Jewish people to celebrate the holiday of Pesach (*Shemos* 12:1 and 12:16):

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אַהֲרֹן בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר:

וּבַיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן, מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ, וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׂבִיעִי, מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם: כָּל-מְלָאכָה לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה בָהֶם אֵד אֲשֶׁר יֵאָכֵל לְכָל נַפְשׁ, הוּא לְבַדּוֹ יַעֲשֶׂה לָכֶם.

G-d said to Moshe and Aaron in the land of Egypt:

You shall celebrate a holiday on the first day, and a holiday on the seventh day; no work should be done; only what every person is to eat is what may be prepared for you.

The *Meshech Chochmah* asks: Why did G-d command the Jewish people to observe the holiday of Pesach, celebrating our freedom from Egypt, while we were still slaves in Egypt? The tenth plague had not yet occurred, we were not yet redeemed, and we were still far from crossing the *Yam Suf*. How was this the appropriate time for the nascent Jewish nation to observe the holiday of Pesach?

The Torah, the *Meshech Chochmah* explains, specifically commanded us regarding Pesach at this juncture to teach us about the perfection of Hashem's commandments. While all nations of the world establish and celebrate holidays on the days that they are victorious over their enemies, we do not celebrate the downfall of our enemies. As the *pasuk* in *Mishlei* states,

בְּנֶפֶל (אוֹיְבֶיךָ) [אוֹיְבֶיךָ] אַל תִּשְׂמַח...

Do not rejoice in the downfall of your enemy... (Mishlei 24:17)

It is for this reason that the holiday of Pesach was established for posterity *before* the downfall of the Egyptian empire. It demonstrates that our holiday does not celebrate the downfall of our enemy; it rejoices in our newfound freedom to serve G-d without duress or persecution.¹

Indeed, the *Yalkut Shimoni* makes this very point. The word *simchah* (joy) is mentioned three times in the Torah with reference to the holiday of Sukkos and once regarding the holiday of Shavous. Regarding Pesach, however, the term is absent. Why?

The *Yalkut Shimoni* responds that because the Egyptians died on Pesach, it would be inappropriate to use the word *simchah* in this context.² While there is certainly significant joy on the holiday of Pesach, the Torah is clearly teaching that the joy of Pesach is a celebration of our nation's emancipation and freedom from Egypt — but not glorification of the downfall, destruction, and death of the Egyptians. Furthermore, joy is not the appropriate emotional response to the death and downfall of our enemy, even when the Jewish people are the direct beneficiaries of this downfall.

SHIRAS HA'YAM

The *Meshech Chochmah* further clarifies that the seventh day of Pesach, a holiday which commemorates the day on which the Egyptians drowned in the *Yam Suf*, similarly does not celebrate their deaths. After all, as the *pasuk* clearly states, the Jews were commanded to keep the seventh day well before the Egyptians drowned. Thus, the holidays on the first and seventh days of Pesach are identical in that they were both established well before the downfall and death of the Egyptians. Our celebration of the holiday of Pesach most certainly does not focus on the destruction of the Egyptian empire.

This point is further elucidated by the *Gemara*:

At the time that the Egyptians were drowning in the sea, the angels desired to recite a song before G-d. However, G-d said to them: "My handiwork (the Egyptians) is drowning in the sea, and you are reciting a song before Me?" (Sanhedrin 39b).

The *Gemara* teaches that G-d is not gladdened by the downfall of the wicked; He therefore prohibited the angels from singing to this effect.

¹ *Meshech Chochmah, Shemos 12:15.*

² *Yalkut Shimoni, Emor 654.*

Important *halachos* emerge, grounded in this *Gemara*:

- A full *Hallel*, which is the ultimate expression of joy and thanks to Hashem, is not recited on the seventh day of Pesach for this reason.³
- The phrase, *zman simchaseinu* (the time of our happiness), which is added to the *Shemoneh Esrei* of Sukkos, is not added to the *Shemoneh Esrei* of Pesach. Instead, we recite the words *zman cheiruseinu* (the time of our freedom) in the Pesach *Shemoneh Esrei*.⁴

CHANUKAH AND PURIM

Taking this concept one step further, the *Meshech Chochmah* explains that, throughout our history, the Jewish nation has never celebrated a holiday focused on the downfall of an enemy as such. The two primary examples of this are Chanukah and Purim.

Chanukah commemorates two miracles: the miraculous military victory of a small and untrained Jewish army over the mighty Greek forces and the miracle of finding a solitary, pure jug of oil — in a temple defiled by the Greek army — which ultimately lasted for eight days. Although Chanukah commemorates both of these miracles, the holiday focuses more on the miracle of the oil than on the military victory of the Maccabees over the Greeks. The military victory was actually the vehicle to achieve the rededication of the *Beis HaMikdash* and the divine service therein — and *that* is what Chanukah celebrates. The only *mitzvah* on Chanukah is to light the *menorah*, established specifically to celebrate the miracle of the oil, not the miraculous military victory.

Moreover, Chanukah begins on the twenty-fifth day of *Kislev*, after the war was complete — to highlight the miracle of the jug of oil that miraculously burned for eight days and not to stress the military victory. Once again, a Jewish holiday was established to celebrate religious freedom following significant persecution, not to celebrate the downfall of an enemy through a decisive military campaign.

The same is true for Purim. *Megillas Esther* records neither a celebration nor the establishment of a holiday upon the death of Haman and the hanging of his ten sons. Rather, the *megillah* documents the establishment of the Purim holiday on the day the nation “rested.”⁵

Furthermore, no *berachah* is recited on the reading of *Parshas Zachor* on the Shabbos prior to Purim, because we do not rejoice in the downfall of our enemies.⁶ Yet again, a Jewish holiday focuses on relief from a death sentence, while no celebration is exhibited for the downfall of the enemy.

³ *Beis Yosef*, O.C. 490:4.

⁴ *Sefer Maharil Minhagim*, *Seder Tefillos Shel Pesach* 5 and *Chok Yaakov*, *Orach Chaim* 490:9. The *Maharil* and *Chok Yaakov* both cite the *Sefer Minhagim* of R. Avraham Klausner, who writes that some say that *zman simchaseinu* should be said on the latter days of Pesach to celebrate the drowning of the Egyptians. This will be discussed at greater length later in this article.

⁵ *Esther* 9:22. See *Manos Halevi* of R. Shlomo Alkabetz ad loc. who makes this point as well.

⁶ *Kaf HaChaim* O.C. 685:29. See *Teshuvos Maharam Schick* O.C. 336 for a similar explanation.

WHEN THE WICKED PERISH, THERE ARE SHOUTS OF JOY

As we noted, the *Meshech Chochmah's* approach is supported by the *pasuk* in *Mishlei*, "Do not rejoice in the downfall of your enemy." Earlier in *Mishlei*, however, we read:

וּבְאֵבֶד רְשָׁעִים רִנָּה...

...when the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy. (*Mishlei* 11:10)

This *pasuk* serves as the backbone for an alternative approach, found in the following sources, which highlights and celebrates the downfall of an enemy of the Jewish people:

1. While G-d prohibited the angels from singing, the same cannot be said for the Jewish nation, who responded to the splitting of the *Yam Suf* by singing a song of praise and thanksgiving to Hashem, known as *Shiras HaYam* (the Song of the Sea). Although G-d prohibited the angels from singing, Moshe and Miriam led the Jewish people in singing *Shiras HaYam*. It would appear that song, music, and celebration constituted an appropriate reaction to the downfall of the Egyptian empire.⁷
2. The *Gemara* (*Shabbos* 21b) asks: "What is Chanukah?" The *Gemara* answers:

The Sages taught (Megillas Ta'anis): On the twenty-fifth of Kislev, the days of Chanukah are eight. One may not eulogize on them, and one may not fast on them. When the Greeks entered the Sanctuary, they defiled all the oils that were in the Sanctuary. When the Hasmonean monarchy overcame them, they searched and found only one cruse of oil with the seal of the High Priest, undisturbed by the Greeks. At that moment, there was sufficient oil there to light the menorah for only one day, yet a miracle occurred, and they lit the menorah from it for eight days. The next year, the Sages established those days as holidays with recitation of Hallel and special thanksgiving in prayer and blessings.

The Talmudic account of the Chanukah miracle indicates that the Chanukah holiday was established both because of the military victory and the miracle of the retrieval of the flask of oil. Indeed, according to the *Maharal*, the *Gemara* says that the military victory was really the primary miracle for which the Chanukah holiday was established. But, continues the *Maharal*, if only that victory had occurred, it would not have been viewed as a miracle. It would have been seen as the result of the military prowess and might of the *Chashmonaim*. Therefore, the miracle of the flask of oil occurred to demonstrate that both the miracle of the oil as well as the military victory were sent from Hashem. Thus, the basis for the holiday of Chanukah and its annual celebrations is *both* miracles.⁸

3. The *Gemara* recounts:

⁷ Moreover, *Shiras HaYam* is the highlight of the conclusion of the daily *pesukei d'zimra* and serves as the *keriyas hatorah* on the seventh day of Pesach, indicating its centrality in our daily and seasonal service of Hashem.

⁸ *Maharal, Ner Mitzvah* ad loc.

*Haman said to Mordechai: "Mount the horse and ride." Mordechai said to him: "I am unable, as my strength has waned from the days of fasting that I observed." Haman then stooped down before him, and Mordechai ascended on him. As he was ascending the horse, Mordechai gave Haman a kick. Haman said to him: "Is it not written for you: 'Do not rejoice when your enemy falls?'" Mordechai said to him: "This statement applies only to Jews, but regarding you it is written: 'And you shall tread upon their high places.'"*⁹

From this account, it is quite clear that rejoicing in the downfall of an enemy is appropriate.

4. The *berachah* following the reading of *Megillas Esther* states:

Blessed are you, Hashem, Who fights our battle, judges our claim, avenges our wrong, Who brings just retribution upon all enemies of our souls and exacts vengeance for us from our foes. Blessed are You, Hashem, who exacts vengeance for His people Israel from all their foes, the G-d who brings salvation.

The language of this *berachah* certainly speaks to joy, happiness, and satisfaction in the revenge upon and downfall of the enemy.

5. The *Mishnah Berurah*¹⁰ states: "The *sefarim* write that it is good to make a special dish at the meal on the second day of Pesach to commemorate the special meal of Esther, because it was on that day that Haman was hanged." This additional dish highlights the celebration of the death of an enemy who wished to annihilate Jewish men, women, and children.
6. In *Megillas Ta'anis*¹¹ we learn that a holiday was established on the seventh day of *Kislev* to celebrate the death of Herod, the terribly wicked king. Thus, we indeed recognize and celebrate the death of an evil and wicked oppressor of the Jewish nation.
7. Similarly, *Megillas Ta'anis* reports that a holiday was established on the second day of *Shevat* to celebrate the death of Yannai, another terribly wicked king.¹²
8. The *Shulchan Aruch*¹³ rules,

All those who dissociate themselves from the practices of the community, who have cast off the yoke of the precepts from their neck and are not included within the community of Israel in the observance thereof, in respecting the festivals, nor in attending synagogues and study houses, but

⁹ *Megillah* 16a, based on *Mishlei* 24:17 and *Devarim* 33:28.

¹⁰ 490:2.

¹¹ Chapter nine, *Chodesh Kislev*.

¹² Chapter eleven, *Chodesh Shevat*.

¹³ Y.D. 345:5.

are as freemen for themselves, like the people of other nations who have not accepted G-d; and likewise, those who are apostates and informers; for all these, one does not observe aninus or mourning rites. Rather, their brethren and other relatives put on white clothes; wrap themselves in white; and eat, drink, and rejoice.

The *Shach*¹⁴ explains that the basis for rejoicing upon the demise of these groups of people is the verse in *Mishlei*, “When the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy.”¹⁵ Here, *halachah* unequivocally mandates that joy is the appropriate way to celebrate the death of this group of evildoers.

THE NATURE OF JEWISH HOLIDAYS

We seem to find that Jewish celebrations are built upon both *pesukim*: “Do not rejoice in the downfall of your enemy” and “When the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy.”

To understand this dichotomy, we must first address the fundamental question of how to reconcile the apparent contradiction between these two verses.¹⁶

The following two approaches reconcile the contradiction and clarify the nature of the institution of a Jewish holiday.

A careful analysis of the totality of Jewish holidays reveals that their establishment was not initiated to focus on the downfall of an enemy (as we have shown), but primarily to thank and praise G-d for our redemption, salvation, freedom, and deliverance from an enemy or warring nation.

Shiras HaYam is not a triumphant song celebrating the drowning and death of the enemy alone; it is a poetic song praising G-d for saving His nation and thanking Him for using His mighty hand to reunite and reconnect with *Klal Yisrael* in a clear way.¹⁷

¹⁴ Y.D. 345:9.

¹⁵ See *Chazon Ovadia, Aveilus 1* (“*al mi misablim*”) and *Tziyunei Halachah (Hilchos Aveilus 11, “hapeturim mei’aveilus”* pp. 206-209), where R. Ovadia Yosef and R. Yosef Shalom Elyashiv rule independently that this rule is not applicable in most situations today because of the halachic concept of *tinok shenishba* — that a Jew cannot be deemed a wicked sinner if he or she lacks a proper Jewish education. See both sources for exceptions, explanations, and practical applications of this *halachah*. See also *Teshuvos Tzitz Eliezer* 13:94.

¹⁶ *Tana D’bei Eliyahu Rabbah*, at the end of *parshah* 18, raises this contradiction and distinguishes between two types of Jews who experience a downfall: a Torah scholar, about whose downfall one should not rejoice, and an evildoer, about whose downfall one should rejoice. See *Maharsham (Da’as Torah* Y.D. 345:5), who supports the resolution of the *Tana D’bei Eliyahu* based upon the ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch* Y.D. 345:5, who posits that celebration of the death of a Jewish sinner is in order. See *Rashbatz (Avos* 4:19), who distinguishes between the downfall of a Jewish enemy, when we should not rejoice, and the death of a non-Jewish enemy, when we should rejoice. This resolution is supported by the *Gemara* in *Megillah*, where Mordechai explains this distinction to Haman. The *Maharsham* ad loc. notes that this Talmudic anecdote presents a contradiction to the ruling in the *Shulchan Aruch*. See also *Emes V’emunah* by R. Tal Chaimowitz 1:1 for an extensive discussion of this issue.

¹⁷ This is clear from the text of *Shiras HaYam* and is the way the *Rishonim* understand the *pesukim* and general theme. See *Peh Kadosh* of R. Yitzchak Volozhin (*Parshas Beshalach, Shemos* 15:1-2) for an alternative explanation as to why G-d prohibited the angels from singing a song upon the death of the Egyptians, while the Jewish nation

The holidays of Chanukah and Purim, which express elements of joy regarding the victory of the Jewish nation against a dangerous and deadly enemy, do not focus on that alone. Instead, they showcase the military victory as the vehicle for bringing about the spiritual renewal that allowed our ancestors to serve Hashem. Furthermore, the holidays which were established singularly upon the deaths of King Herod and King Yannai were not upheld for posterity — as a Jewish holiday is not established to celebrate the death of an enemy alone. However, if one wishes to add a delicacy to the Pesach meal to commemorate the death of Haman that is certainly fine, as it is being done as part of the greater goal of the holiday to celebrate Jewish freedom.

Thus, we find that there is indeed joy in the downfall of a wicked enemy, but the focus of that joy must be measured. While holidays are indeed established upon the downfall of an enemy, the focus of the holiday is not celebrating the death of the oppressor alone; it is coupled with a focus upon the freedom and the future which have been granted.

As such, the two verses can be understood to work in tandem. Do not rejoice in the downfall of your enemy alone, but rejoice when the wicked perish — as their downfall allows the Jewish nation to serve G-d in peace and freedom.

Not only is this appropriate regarding the establishment of a national Jewish holiday, but it is apt as well when considering how one should react on a personal level to the downfall of an enemy of the Jewish people. The death of our enemy is not cause for celebration in and of itself; it is in fact a celebration of newfound freedom, of safety, and of salvation from a looming physical threat. The joy and song should be a combination of praise and thanks to G-d for the resolution of a dreadful situation, along with a renewed dedication and commitment to serve Hashem without the duress and oppression of the enemy.

NATIONAL RESPONSE VS. INDIVIDUAL RESPONSE

The second approach to reconcile the contradictory *pesukim* in *Mishlei* is that, on a national level, we never celebrate the downfall of an enemy alone. Accordingly, Jewish holidays do not heavily focus on rejoicing in the enemy's death. On an individual level, however, it depends upon the intent of that individual: if one understands that the death of an enemy is a means to greater connection to and service of Hashem, then one rejoices. If, however, one is only able to see the death of the enemy as an end in and of itself, there is no reason to celebrate.¹⁸

This explains why Pesach, Chanukah, and Purim do not purely focus on rejoicing in the downfall of an enemy; that is not the way of the Jewish people as a nation. For this reason, the holidays celebrating the deaths of Kings Herod and Yannai were never established for posterity on a national level. If, however, one individually wishes to add a delicacy to the Pesach meal to commemorate Haman's death, one may do so. Additionally, one whose wicked relative dies does not practice the ordinary rules of mourning because, privately, one may rejoice in the death of a

erupted in song and were not stopped. See also *Maharsha, Sanhedrin* 39b s.v *umi chadi*, based upon the language of the *Gemara* ad loc. "at the time" and *Teshuvos Chavas Yair* 225 for another resolution of this issue.

¹⁸ See *Shemos* 18:19 and commentaries of *Rashi, Rabbag, and Seforno*, who take *Yisro* to task for not being joyous upon the death of the Egyptians. *Yisro*, a righteous individual, should have expressed greater joy and happiness upon hearing of the downfall of the Egyptian empire.

sinner. It is for this reason as well that Mordechai kicked Haman and reveled in his downfall, as such behavior befits an elevated person *on an individual level*.

Further proof of this distinction can be seen from Shmuel HaKatan, who ruled unequivocally, “Do not rejoice in the downfall of your enemy.”¹⁹ Yet the very same Shmuel HaKatan authored the nineteenth blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*, which calls for the speedy death of heretics and evildoers! The *Gemara* explains:

*The Sages taught: Shimon HaPakuli arranged the eighteen blessings (Shemoneh Esrei) before R. Gamliel, the nasi of the Sanhedrin in Yavneh. Due to prevailing circumstances, there was a need to institute a new blessing directed against the heretics. R. Gamliel said to the Sages: Is there any person who knows to institute the blessing of the heretics? Shmuel HaKatan stood up and instituted it.*²⁰

We must ask the obvious: How could it be that the very same Shmuel HaKatan — who taught, ruled according to, and preached the verse, “Do not rejoice in the downfall of your enemy” — is the author of the blessing of heretics, which appeals to G-d that all heretics, enemies, and evildoers be “swiftly destroyed, cut off, and demolished?”

The answer is found in the very words of the *Gemara*, which recounts that R. Gamliel asked, “Is there any person who knows to institute the blessing of the heretics?”

Why couldn't R. Gamliel, the *nasi* of the *Sanhedrin* in *Yavneh*, author this blessing himself? What is the meaning of R. Gamliel's carefully articulated words, “Is there any person who knows to institute the blessing of the heretics?” Why did only Shmuel HaKatan step forward?

The answer is that the blessing of the heretics would become a *berachah* that the entire Jewish people would recite. Because this *berachah* was to become part of the corpus of national prayer, it could only be written by someone like Shmuel HaKatan — who never rejoiced in the downfall of the enemy — as on a national level, we do not express joy upon an enemy's downfall. This blessing required an author whose pure heart and splendid soul lived the teaching to not rejoice in the downfall of an enemy: the correct approach for the Jewish nation.²¹

Not even R. Gamliel or his colleagues were up to this task; hence R. Gamliel's question, “Is there any person who knows to institute the blessing of the heretics?” Indeed, it was only Shmuel HaKatan who could stand up and say that he was authorized to do so.²² From here we learn that the correct approach on a national level is not to be happy upon the downfall of an enemy.

We can now reconcile the two verses in *Mishlei*. For the Jewish nation, the *halachah* is, “Do not rejoice in the downfall of your enemy.” *Shlomo HaMelech* is speaking here to all Jews, as is

¹⁹ *Avos* 4:19. See *Rashi*, *Rabbeinu Yonah*, and *Rambam* ad loc., who explain that although this verse was authored by *Shlomo HaMelech*, the *Mishnah* attributes it to Shmuel HaKatan, who lived, preached, taught, and regularly recounted this verse as the proper course of action.

²⁰ *Berachos* 28b.

²¹ See *Pnei Yehoshua*, *Berachos* 28b.

²² See *Ohr Hachamah* of R. Zundel Krzyzer to *Avos* 4:19 and *Heyudos Aharon* of R. Efraim Kirshenbaum to *Avos* 4:19, who raise this suggestion. *Heyudos Aharon* cites earlier sources who explain as such.

codified by Shmuel HaKatan in the *Mishnah*. For the individual, however, the *halachah* is, “When the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy” — “shouts” are heard from the few individuals who understand how to celebrate such events properly and privately.

This is exactly the reason a holiday is not established only to celebrate the downfall of an enemy of the Jewish people: the Jewish nation does not revel in the downfall of our enemies. However, an individual who truly appreciates that the downfall of the enemy serves a higher purpose may certainly be joyous.²³

OUR REACTION AND RESPONSE TODAY

The *Meshech Chochmah* concludes:

And during these years, many new enemies and nemeses have emerged. These enemies conjure thoughts and concoct plans about how they will wipe the Jewish nation from the face of the earth. Therefore, throughout our history, we have always focused on being joyous when we have been saved from the enemy and those who wish to annihilate us. The focus has never been on revenge; our objective and focus have always been on appreciating our newfound freedom to serve Hashem.²⁴

The contemporary perspective and doctrine which the *Meshech Chochmah* provides is founded on the way Torah leadership has traditionally guided the Jewish nation when emerging victorious from the threat of annihilation from our enemies: we are to be joyous and celebrate our newfound freedom to serve Hashem when the challenge our enemies present is gone.

These words, penned by the *Meshech Chochmah* approximately one hundred years ago, echo eerily as we live through one of the most challenging periods that the Jewish nation has faced in modern history. May we soon merit to celebrate the holiday of all holidays in the *Beis HaMikdash* in *Yerushalayim* — serving Hashem with great joy upon the arrival of *Mashiach* — when we will be able to serve Him without pain or fear of any enemy or oppressor.

²³ Rabbeinu Yonah (*Mishlei* 11:10) writes that everyone should be happy when the wicked are destroyed. However, he qualifies this in his commentary to *Mishlei* 24:17 and explains that one's joy in the downfall of an enemy depends on one's intentions when doing so. Having the required mindset is difficult for most and, thus, only a limited number of righteous people are able to reach the level of rejoicing in the downfall of an enemy.

²⁴ *Meshech Chochmah* *ibid*.

Our Recent Mission to Israel: Refracted Through the Prism of a Sapphire Brick

*Rabbi Brahm Weinberg
Kemp Mill Synagogue*

This past January, I had the immense privilege, along with my wife Elana, to lead the KMS Solidarity Mission to Israel. The thirty-three participants on our trip experienced Israel at a unique moment in time: we saw that Israel was as strong as it was vulnerable; as united as it was attacked; as hopeful as it was bereaved; and as sunny, beautiful, and bright as it was charred and filled with rubble. In Yerushalayim, Tel Aviv, Sderot, Kfar Aza, Reim, Ofakim, Tzeelim, and Gush Etzion, we saw a snapshot of Israel that none of us will ever forget. None of the stories we had heard, none of the YouTube clips we had watched, and none of the FaceTime or phone conversations we had with friends and family in Israel prior to the mission compared to being there and seeing it firsthand.

For three absolutely packed and exhausting days we volunteered, we cooked, we served, we visited wounded soldiers, we listened to the pain of bereaved families, and we heard the plight of the hostages' families and the crisis of the evacuees from the South and the North. We visited the sites of the worst attacks on October 7th, whose ruins tell the tale of that horrific day. We gave Israelis a chance to tell their stories in a cathartic way, we donated to various causes, we helped the economy, and we showed that we cared. We boosted the morale of the heroic soldiers of the IDF — giving them cards and bracelets made by kids in Kemp Mill, making them a delicious barbecue, dancing with them, and telling them how much we admired them. We spent time with true heroes.

We saw evidence of atrocities and of heroism so that we can now bear witness. We witnessed the incredible strength of the Jewish people: the resolve of IDF soldiers to fight until the State is safe, the resilience of the people of Israel whose lives are forever altered, the courage of bereaved families to go on living, the unity of all segments of our nation...and so much more.

We learned so much. We experienced so much. We grew so much. All of that was astounding. All of that was crucial. All of that was what we *intended* to do.

All of that would have been enough. But it turns out that we discovered one additional quality of our people that was *not* as evident from afar, a quality that is captured by one of the unique symbols that depicts the slavery and freedom of the Pesach story.

Towards the end of *Parashat Mishpatim*, the Torah tells us that Moshe, Aharon, and the seventy elders beheld a vision of Hashem as they ascended *Har Sinai*:

וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל; וַתַּחַת רַגְלָיו כְּמַעֲשֵׂה לְבַנֵּת הַסַּפִּיר וּכְעָצֶם הַשָּׁמַיִם לְטָהָר.

And they saw the G-d of Israel: Under His feet there was the likeness of a 'livnat hasappir' ('livna' of sapphire), like the essence of the sky in all its purity (Shemot 24:10).

There is a very similar *pasuk*, in the *Ma'aseh Merkavah* section of *Sefer Yechezkel*, which describes Yechezkel seeing almost the same image — with a few added details and slightly clearer language:

וּמִמַּעַל לָרְקִיעַ אֲשֶׁר עַל רֹאשׁוֹ, כְּמַרְאֵה אֶבֶן סַפִּיר דְמוֹת כֶּסֶא;
וְעַל דְמוֹת הַכֶּסֶא, דְמוֹת כְּמַרְאֵה אָדָם עָלָיו מְלַמְעָלָה.

*Above the expanse over their heads was the semblance of a throne,
in appearance like an 'even sappir' (stone of sapphire);
and on top, upon this semblance of a throne,
there was the semblance of a human form (Yechezkel 1:26).*

Yechezkel saw that above the animal images there was a sky; above the sky was a sapphire stone; and above the sapphire stone was a throne where a human-like form representative of Hashem was sitting. The descriptions of Hashem by Yechezkel and Moshe are so similar that the Ramban (Rabbeinu Moshe ben Nachman. Spain, 1194–1270) surmises that both were, in fact, seeing the *same* image of Hashem and that the *pasuk* in *Yechezkel* helps to round out the *pasuk* in *Mishpatim*.

The description of Hashem and His throne is *very* hard to comprehend because it is so esoteric! The Torah is telling us that if we *were*, for a moment, to imagine this impossible, anthropomorphized view of Hashem — as if He were sitting on a throne in the Heavens — what we *would* see is that His throne is firmly planted atop something that is like a sapphire stone.

While Yechezkel uses the clear and accurate term of 'even' (stone) to describe the sapphire, the Torah uses the ambiguous and challenging word 'livnat.' Rabbeinu Bechaye (Bachya ben Asher. Spain, 1255–1340) explains (24:10) that the word 'livnat' is either related to the word *lavan* (white) or to the word *leveyna* (brick). If it means white, then the *pasuk* is telling us that under Hashem's throne they saw the whiteness of sapphire. If it means brick, then we are being told that under Hashem's throne they saw a (blue) sapphire-colored brick.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (Germany, 1808–1888) explains that 'livnat' *must* be a brick, and not the color white. Firstly, 'lavan,' — the color white in the Torah — is a masculine word and, therefore, in our *pasuk* it would have said 'leven hasappir' (masculine, the *lavan* of...) not 'livnat hasappir' (feminine, the *livna* of...). Secondly, 'livnat hasappir' is prefaced by the word 'k'ma'aseh,' which denotes that it is something that is shaped, formed, or made — which is not a word that would be associated with a color. Lastly, we know that the sapphire stone is blue,

because the *Gemara* (*Chulin* 89a) says that the sky is the color of the sapphire stone and, since we know the sky is blue, we can deduce that the sapphire is blue as well. It must be, reasons Rav Hirsch, that *'livnat hasappir'* means a sapphire-colored brick.

Why would there be a brick under the throne of Hashem and why does its color matter? Rashi, based on the *Talmud Yerushalmi* (*Sukkah* 6:3), explains the symbolism of the blue brick:

היא היתה לפניו בשעת השעבוד, לזכר צרתן של ישראל
שהיו משעבדים במעשה לבנים (ויקרא רבה):

*This had been before Him during the period of Egyptian slavery
as a symbol of Israel's woes
for they were subjected to do brick-work (24:10).*

The brick represents the bricks of slavery that the Jewish people were forced to make in Egypt. Its placement under Hashem's throne represents Hashem's empathy for them in the time of their greatest need. The brick was in front of Hashem *all* the time, reminding Him of their suffering and reminding us that Hashem is with us in our suffering — *'imo anochi b'tzara'* (*Tehillim* 91:15) — even when we have trouble sensing His presence. The throne with the brick under it was shown to the Jewish people at *Har Sinai* so that, as they embarked on their journey of an eternal relationship with Hashem, they would know that He would be there with them even in the bad times that might arise in the future.

The color of the brick was blue like a sapphire because, as Rashi explains further:

משנגאלו היה אור וחדנה לפניו:

*This implies that as soon as they (the Israelites) were delivered
there was radiance and rejoicing before Him (24:10).*

Once they were redeemed, the brick of slavery — which had been sullied and colored brown like the mud or red like the blood spilled in Egypt — became shiny and radiant like a sapphire and clear and crisp like the purity of the sky, symbolizing the great light, happiness, and relief of freedom.

The sapphire brick represents the full journey of Jewish history: the slavery *and* the transition to freedom undergone by the Jewish people. Furthermore, the fact that it was right under Hashem's throne — right in front of Him, right there inherently connected to Him and his stature — meant that the Jewish people were on his mind *all* the time and that He would be with them in all circumstances. At *Matan Torah*, the Jewish people could see the *'livnat hasappir'* and that it changed colors; they could finally appreciate in fullness how Hashem was there for them in both the bad times and the good. They reached a level of *emunah* (faith) they had never reached before.

This was the type of *emunah* we witnessed all over Israel. We met people, observant and secular, whose belief in the presence of Hashem and His miracles was so strong despite all they had been through. We met people who had endured so much suffering and so many small triumphs, who had seen the sullied brick and the bright blue one and who somehow understood that Hashem was there the whole time alongside them. As they shared their stories of October 7th and of the war in Gaza, they could not stop referring to the *Yad Hashem* — “the hand of Hashem” — and the closeness they felt to Him.

Even without speaking to people directly, we could see this *emunah* playing itself out in real time. As we approached a checkpoint on the highway from Gush Etzion to Yerushalayim, we passed some IDF soldiers on duty and I noticed that one was wearing *tzitzit*. I assumed this was an observant soldier, perhaps a yeshiva boy in the Hesder program. However, as our car approached him, I noticed that this soldier was not wearing a *kippah* and was covered in tattoos. What a sight! A “secular,” bare-headed soldier was fulfilling a *mitzvah* at every moment of the day — the very *mitzvah* that is meant to remind us of the constant presence of Hashem.

Similarly, I was riding the bus one morning when I become aware of a man standing next to me. He was not wearing a *kippah*, not carrying a *tallit* or *tefillin* bag, not wearing *tzitzit* — not visibly observant in any way. I was quite amazed at how engrossed he was in his phone for the entire ride. He was not wearing airpods, so I knew he was not watching a show or podcast. I could tell by his scrolling that he was not playing video games. I imagined that he was reading something and found myself curious about what could be so captivating that he didn’t look up even once. As I was getting off the bus, I got up the *chutzpah* to sneak a peek at his screen...and saw that it was opened to *Tehillim*. I, the rabbi, had spent the bus ride spacing out and people-watching. This “secular” Israeli had spent the bus ride saying *Tehillim* for *Am Yisrael* with a *kavanah* (concentration) I had never seen before.

Their *emunah*, their faith during the darkest moments of tragedy and loss during this war, as well as during the more victorious moments of salvation, truly embodied the symbolism of the sapphire brick that was right before Hashem during the slavery *and* the freedom. Each one of the people I had encountered was living the story of Jewish history — the story of the brick that was soaked red with blood and tears and blue with radiance and hope — and each one of these people could just sense in their gut that Hashem was there for them the entire time.

The symbol of the sapphire brick and its connection to our trip run even deeper.

The plain reading of Rashi would indicate that ‘*livnat hasappir*’ was a brick that *changed* colors and appearance to reflect the experiences of the Jewish people at different stages and times during our history. Nonetheless, Rav Avraham Yehuda Farbstein (Rosh Yeshiva, Chevron Yeshiva, 1917–1997) suggests, based on a *midrash*, that perhaps the stone *didn’t* change colors at all but simply *appeared* differently to the Jewish people at various stages of the story. The very *same* metaphorical brick appeared to us humans *differently* during slavery than it did during freedom. This interpretation is one that I find intriguing, because it speaks to such an important human truth: The way we see things can often be driven by the lens we bring to the table. Two people

can look at the exact same thing and see it in radically different ways. Additionally, the *same* person can look at the exact *same* thing and see it in dramatically different ways at various moments in his or her life. This is something that was captured for me in a conversation with an Israeli vintner on the first day of our trip.

After meeting with families of hostages and visiting wounded soldiers in the hospital, we visited the Ella Valley Winery near Beit Shemesh and met with its CEO, Yariv Shimron. At first, trip participants were curious about the decision to spend time at a wine tasting on such a serious and emotional trip. Ostensibly, we explained, we were going to a winery that had been shut down for three months as most of its employees and its CEO were off fighting the war. We were going to support this Israeli vintner economically and emotionally. But after hearing Yariv's story, we realized that we were there to witness a remarkable quality possessed by average Israelis during this war: the ability to see the very same Israel and the very same *people* of Israel in a whole new way after October 7th — leading them to unify with each other and to reinvigorate their basic belief in our homeland.

Yariv had volunteered for many years on search and rescue teams in Israel. His specific task was investigative research: putting together as many details as possible regarding any given case so that the team could make an educated assessment about where to begin their search and achieve maximal success. As Yariv explained, in most cases the information is out there. Someone knows something. There are clues. It takes skill and persistence to put the pieces together and connect the dots so that a story begins to emerge.

On October 7th, Yariv was no longer in the army reserves due to his age, but was called upon to assemble a team to locate the thousands of people who were in hospitals across the country, unidentified. In the panic of October 7th, people were admitted to hospitals before anyone even had a chance to record their name or do any intake. Their panicked families and friends knew they were wounded but had no idea where to find them.

Two days later, his team was done — they had identified every hospitalized patient in Israel. But Yariv's job was not done. On October 11th, he was called upon again to be part of a twenty-person investigative research team; this time the task was to find out what had happened to all the people reported missing since October 7th. They were given a list of 6,000 missing people. The team leader assumed that, after years of research, there would still be hundreds unaccounted for. Yet, by the end of December, just ten days before we met Yariv, the team had only eleven unaccounted-for people left on their list! In truth, they had relative certainty about what had happened to nine of those eleven, but didn't have enough proof to make an official declaration.

Yariv's work was nothing short of heroic. In some cases, his work saved lives; in other cases, it at least brought knowledge and closure to so many families. This vintner — who so loved the land and was so proud of the grapes that the Land of Israel could produce — loved its people even more and cared for them like they were his own.

This perspective was not a “given” for Yariv. In a private moment after the presentation, he shared an incredible piece of his personal story with me. Yariv told me that, before October 7th, he and his wife had become sick of the infighting in Israel. They were fed up with the politics and the people and had decided to move to Greece in search of an easier life. After October 7th, Yariv returned to Israel, vowed that he would never leave his true home, and could no longer fathom living anywhere else in the world.

The very same Israel that Yariv saw before the war — the very same brick that looked sullied and blood-soaked from slavery — looked entirely different after October 7th. It looked blue and bright and hopeful, despite all that it had endured. That ability to see things differently at various moments of life is what Hashem was teaching us when He gave us a glimpse of the *‘livnat hasappir’* at *Har Sinai*. By showing *Bnai Yisrael* that the very same brick that was the symbol of their slavery could be the symbol of their hope, radiance, and redemption, Hashem instilled within the Jewish nation the ability to see the beauty and radiance of our people and our land even during moments and times that they seem damaged and clouded. That ability to see things with a different perspective is what has allowed Yariv — and what is allowing all of Israel today — to have hope even in the darkest times. It is what has allowed us to see Hashem’s presence right alongside us at all stages of our history. It is what has enabled us to partner with Hashem to push forward with bravery and strength — to move the modern story of Jewish history from slavery to freedom, from anguish to joy, from mourning to celebration, from darkness to light, and from oppression to redemption.

As they say in Israel:

באנו לחזק, ויצאנו מחוזקים.

We came to strengthen, and we left strengthened.

We returned home filled with tears over the atrocities we had heard about and over the sights we had seen but, at the very same time, strengthened in our faith in *Am Yisrael* and in its bright future. We returned strengthened by the unity of our people. We returned strengthened by the resilience and courage of average Israelis. We returned strengthened in our hope and in our optimism. We returned strengthened in our *tefillot*. We returned strengthened in our resolve to ensure that the hostages are freed **now** and that Israel vanquishes the evil Hamas regime, very soon and in our day.

Now it is our responsibility to share these stories with you as we bear witness, with the hope that you, too, will weave these stories into the eternal Pesach story of our people until the day when we reach the Final Redemption.

Magid for a New Generation: *Tatteh, Ich Vil dir Fraigen de Fir Kashes!*

*Rabbi Tzvi Rosen
Kashrus Administrator, Star-K Kosher Certification
Editor, Kashrus Kurrents*

Pesach today is markedly different from the Yom Tov that our *bubbies* and *zaydies* once celebrated. What are four *kashes* (questions) we might ask that would never have crossed their minds? What differentiates Pesach in our time from that of generations past?

Today, when the young child says to the father, *Tatteh, Ich Vil dir Fraigen de Fir Kashes* (“Father, I would like to ask you the Four Questions”), could the child perhaps be referring to these Four Questions?

In past generations, we did not know how to deal with gluten intolerance; today we have gluten alternatives.

In past generations, the only wines we had for the Seder were Malaga and Concord; today, at our Sedarim, we have award-winning wine selections.

In past generations, the only dessert options available for Pesach were macaroons and matzah meal cake mixes; today, we have a tremendous array of baked goodies.

In past generations, the only Kosher l’Pesach schnapps we had was Hungarian Slivovitz; today, we have tequila and arak.

ANSWERING THE FIRST KASHA:

In past generations, we did not know how to deal with gluten intolerance; today we have gluten alternatives.

Today, many kosher consumers are faced with profound dietary challenges, among them gluten intolerance. What is gluten intolerance and how do we meet this challenge?

Gluten is a protein found in grains and is composed of two parts — gliadin and glutenin. Gluten is present in the endosperm, the white powdery portion of wheat, barley, rye, and spelt. These comprise four of the five *chameishes minei dagan*, the Torah’s five cereal grains that can be made into bread and matzah.

What is the purpose of gluten? When flour is mixed with warm water and yeast under proper conditions, the leavening process begins and the dough starts to rise. How does this happen?

Through the wonders of the *Ribono Shel Olam's* creation, once flour — the white sifted endosperm — mixes with water, the germination process begins and the starches in the flour are converted into sugars. When yeast is added to the dough, the yeast reacts with the water and begins to feed on the sugar in the dough. This reaction releases carbon dioxide and causes the dough to rise.

How is the gas contained in the dough, so it does not escape? This is the work of gluten! The gluten creates a protein network that traps the gas and allows the dough to rise. When dough is kneaded and re-kneaded, the yeast molecules work harder to grow, multiply, and release more carbon dioxide, which is then contained by the gluten network. It is the gluten that contains the gas and allows the dough to rise. This is what is known as *chometz*.

Even if the gluten is not unleashed, gluten protein is still present in the grain. Wheat matzah, of course, does not allow the gluten network to develop, but the protein is still present and could affect someone with a gluten sensitivity. One alternative is spelt matzah. Spelt has lower gluten content and it is much gentler on the digestive system.

What about the fifth species of the *chameishes minei dagan*, which we identify as oats? Of the five cereal grains, oats are the only grain that does not contain gluten. Oats contain a legume-like protein called *avenalin*, which is more like a soy protein. Even though oats do not resemble the other four cereal grain species, oats have been included by our *mesorah* (tradition) and identified as *shiboles shu'al*.

We are fortunate that matzah bakeries bake oat matzos prior to the regular matzah baking in a gluten-free environment. This gives the gluten-sensitive consumer the opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of *achilas matzah* without any compromise.

ANSWERING THE SECOND KASHA:

In generations past, the only wines we had for the Seder were Malaga and Concord; today, at our Sedarim, we have award-winning wine selections.

Growing up in Washington DC, the Pesach wine on our *Seder* table was thick, heavy Malaga. That —or perhaps Concord — was standard fare at most *Seder* tables back then. My father, Sam Rosen z"l, was chairman of the Hebrew Academy Wine Campaign (succeeding Mr. Stanley Billauer z"l). We (armies of Hebrew Academy students) delivered bottles of Shapiro wine to local Jewish residents for the Academy fundraiser in the '50s and '60s. Who ever heard of Zinfandel, Chardonnay, or Riesling in those days?

As the kosher wine industry has flourished and the palate of the kosher consumer has grown more sophisticated, Malaga has given way to Cabernet Sauvignon. Lower East Side production of the old standards has been "passed over" by a host of international vintners who have introduced award-winning wines with reliable kosher certification into the marketplace and into our wine glasses. The *Arba Kosos* (the "Four Cups") will never look the same.

ANSWERING THE THIRD KASHA:

In past generations, the only dessert options available for Pesach were macaroons and matzah meal cake mixes; today, we have a tremendous array of baked goodies.

Pesach was always synonymous with sacrifice. I'm not referring to the *Korban Pesach* (Pascal Lamb), but rather to the lack of availability of mainstream products with reliable kosher certification.

Who would have dreamt that a chometz cereal plant would undergo kosherization to produce *Kosher l'Pesach* "Fruit Loops" or lasagna noodles? Who could imagine that pizza, that quintessential chometz staple, could be produced *Kosher l'Pesach*? Or that an entire gluten-free industry would emerge with a complete line of cakes, pastries, and cookies both gluten-free *and Kosher l'Pesach*, to address the growing demands of Pesach- and gluten-free-observant consumers? *Kosher l'Pesach* and gluten-free products have joined forces to create cakes and pastries that defy the imagination. The Passover shelves in our supermarkets have come a very long way.

ANSWERING THE FOURTH KASHA:

In past generations, the only Kosher l'Pesach schnapps we had was Hungarian Slivovitz; today, we have tequila and arak.

Has liquor production really changed? No, it hasn't. But the new players are realizing the value of kosher certification and are entering the *Kosher l'Pesach* marketplace.

Hashem has provided man with the keys and the ingenuity to unlock some of nature's most amazing secrets. In general, the definition of alcoholic beverages is beverages that contain ethyl alcohol derived from grains, fruits, vegetables, or plants. Another name for alcoholic beverages is *spirits*. These natural ingredients are converted into "liquid spirits" utilizing two processes: *fermentation* and *distillation*.

Fermentation is a chemical phenomenon in which an agent — in this case, *yeast* — converts the sugar found in grains, fruits, vegetables, or plants into natural carbon dioxide and ethyl alcohol. After fermentation, the fermented liquid is distilled to concentrate the alcohol.

Distillation is a process that separates two substances through heating, in this case water and alcohol. The alcoholic vapor is then captured and condensed, producing ethyl alcohol.

What is the source of *Kosher l'Pesach* yeast? In the case of Slivovitz, it is a wild yeast found directly on the skins of plums. The plums are crushed into a sugary plum mash, the natural yeast ferments

the mash, and the dedicated still distills the fermented liquid into Slivovitz. The entire process is dedicated to Slivovitz production only and does not pose any *Kosher l'Pesach* issues.

Alcohol production today is vastly more sophisticated than ever before, and has made *Kosher l'Pesach* liquor and liqueur widely accessible to the *Kosher l'Pesach* consumer. Yeasts are grown and propagated on *Kosher l'Pesach* molasses. Ethyl alcohol for liqueurs is produced from cane or beet sugar. Tequila is produced from the agave plant and certified *Kosher l'Pesach* when under reliable kosher supervision.

GROWTH IN KOSHER L'PESACH PRODUCTS

As globality in kosher production brings international sources ever closer, *Kosher l' Pesach* availability continues to expand.

Today, we are unquestionably blessed with an enormous selection of *Kosher l'Pesach* options which address the tastes and preferences of every kosher consumer — options our grandparents could never have begun to fathom. As a born and bred Washingtonian, I take particular pride in the Vaad HaRabanim, which constantly strives to raise the *kashrus* standards of the Washington *kehillah* and does its utmost to facilitate a *Chag Kasher v'Same'ach* for all.

Capitol K Supermarket Vegetable Policy

The Capitol K kashrus arm of the Rabbinical Council of Greater Washington certifies that all prepared and packaged food that is sold in local kosher supermarkets is under the supervision of the Capitol K. Consumers can therefore comfortably shop for these items in Capitol K-certified supermarkets, knowing that everything sold in these stores follows Capitol K standards.

Fruits and vegetables, however, belong to a unique category. Although all fruits and vegetables are kosher, many are infested with insects and require washing and checking before they can be consumed. They are kosher — but not always ready to eat.

It has been the long-standing policy of the Capitol K to allow all produce to be sold in stores bearing Capitol K certification. This is because checking all produce before sale is not practical, and prohibiting the sale of potentially infested produce would greatly limit the variety of fruits and vegetables that could be sold — a heavy burden on both the proprietor and the consumer. As a rule, therefore, one should not assume that fruits and vegetables sold in our stores are insect-free unless explicitly stated otherwise.

What does this mean for the consumer?

FRESH PRODUCE

The Capitol K does not certify the insect infestation status of the fresh produce sold in our stores. However, some stores do offer a limited selection of checked produce under our supervision. These items are all displayed together in a designated area and are individually labeled as “checked produce” with a Capitol K sticker. These items may be consumed without further checking.

For information on how to check specific fruits and vegetables, please visit star-k.org/checking. (For more information about this topic, please also see [Vaad Journal Volume 10.2, September 2022: Vegetable Checking for Today's Kosher Consumer](#) by Rabbi Dovid Stern.)

BAGGED OR OTHER PRE-PACKAGED FRESH VEGETABLES

The same policy applies to bagged or other pre-packaged fresh vegetables. The Capitol K does not certify their insect-free status — even if the packaging states that it is “triple-washed” or there is an alternate certification on the package.

Sometimes the store *mashgiach* will check batches of bagged vegetables and certify them as insect-free. As with fresh produce, those bags will be in a distinct, marked area and will have a Capitol K sticker on each bag that indicates that the bag is from a checked batch. As to the acceptability of any particular *hechsher*, consumers are encouraged to consult their own rabbinic authority as there are varied standards and halachic opinions in this regard.

FROZEN PRODUCE

Similarly, the Capitol K ensures only that frozen produce is kosher — not that it is insect-free. There are many products with other *hechsherim* certifying them as insect free. There are also

various halachic opinions regarding the use of frozen produce. Once again, consumers are urged to consult their own Rabbi for guidance regarding all these issues.

As a public service, the Capitol K has placed signs in the frozen foods sections of certified supermarkets with a list of frozen fruits and vegetables that have infestation issues.

PREPARED FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

The deli sections of Capitol K-certified supermarkets offer a wide variety of prepared vegetables, salads, and other foods that contain produce ingredients. These are all under the strict supervision of the Capitol K; all contents have been checked with the highest level of supervision as per the standards of the Capitol K.

Chametz After Pesach 2024

It is rabbinically prohibited to purchase *chametz* after Pesach from a Jew who maintained *chametz* in his possession over the course of Pesach. This is referred to in rabbinic literature as *Chametz She'avar Alav HaPesach*. A product is defined as *chametz* if it consists of any of the five major grains, including wheat, barley, oat, rye, or spelt, in a significant concentration.

There is no prohibition to purchase *chametz* from a non-Jew who was in possession of *chametz* over Pesach.

There is no prohibition to purchase items which are not *chametz* from a Jewish-owned business that did not sell their *chametz* over Pesach.

- ***Chametz* may be purchased from all Capitol K establishments and caterers one hour after Pesach 2024.**
- ***Chametz* may be purchased from the following stores in the Greater Washington area after Pesach 2024:**

7-Eleven	Rite Aid*
Aldi*	Royal Farms*
BJ's*	Safeway
Costco*	Save-A-Lot*
CVS*	Sam's Club*
Food Lion*	Shoppers Food & Pharmacy*
Giant	Snider's
Harris Teeter*	Streets Market
H Mart	Target
Lidl*	Trader Joe's*
MOM's Organic Market	Walgreens*
Montgomery County Liquor & Wine	Walmart*
Petco*	Wegmans*
PetSmart*	Whole Foods Market

*One may purchase *chametz* after Pesach 2024 at this store throughout the United States.

Rabbi Chaim Herzel Kranz z"l: A Humble Life of Anonymous Devotion to the Klal

Remembered by his Grandchildren



This season was a challenging one for our family. Our grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Herzel Kranz *zt"l*, Senior Rabbi and Founder of the Silver Spring Jewish Center, passed away at the age of ninety-three, leaving his children — Arye Kranz, Adina Greiniman, Esther Pinter, Chaya Zaks Kranz, and over one hundred thirty descendants — without their patriarch. Two years ago we lost our matriarch, his devoted wife, Rebbetzin Miram Tzivya (Heller) Kranz *a"h*. For our family and the Kemp Mill community, this marks the end of an era.

Rabbi Kranz had many public accomplishments: founding the first *mikvah*¹ and the first synagogue (Silver Spring Jewish Center – SSJC) in the now frum community of Kemp Mill; establishing the Silver Spring Learning Center – SSLC, Hebrew Day Institute, Hebrew Day School - HDS, Leo Bernstein Jewish Academy – LBJA, and Camp Ahava; and serving as president of the Hebrew Sheltering Home (a *Shomer Shabbos* Jewish homeless shelter) for over fifty years. Beyond the community, he received the Jabotinsky medal for “distinguished service to the State of Israel and the Jewish People,” made kosher food accessible in Maryland state prisons, and risked his life for Soviet Jewry.

We would like to share some of his lesser known accomplishments. They cannot all be captured in one article, but one can learn tremendously from even a glimpse into his fascinating life.

¹ Mikvah Taharah Ahavas Yisrael

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Rabbi Kranz grew up during the Great Depression, with very little money, on a farm in Monticello, New York. He rose early each morning to tend to the farm — including driving a tractor at age twelve. The habit of rising early each morning stuck with him throughout his life.

Little Herzel and his brothers were called “the Kranz boys of Maplewood.” Sadly, their father Baruch Aryeh Leib (Louis) passed away, leaving behind his widow Hannah Tzirel and five young children. While not yet a *bar mitzvah*, Herzel had to take responsibility — doing odd jobs to help the family survive, as a newspaper boy, a bus driver, and a salesman. While he had no father on earth, he felt the protection of his Father in Heaven, encouraging him to grow and push further.

His courageous mother was a devout *isha chashuva* (woman of distinction), committed to raising her boys in a traditional Jewish home. With no *yeshivos* nearby, the boys had to attend public school in a one-room schoolhouse. Hannah Tzirel was determined to give her children a proper Jewish education. Despite public criticism — and with tremendous sacrifice — she achieved her dream of sending her boys to *yeshiva*. With *siyata dishmaya* (help from Above), all descendants from those boys are *bnei Torah*.²

In the *zechus* of his mother, Rabbi Kranz attended Yeshiva Torah Vodaath in Brooklyn, NY and Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland, OH. One of Zaidy’s contemporaries, who was a young *bochur* at the time, recounted that Zaidy looked after him like a father at Telshe (and so started the theme of Rabbi Kranz’s life: caring for the vulnerable). Zaidy studied under the great Rosh HaYeshiva, his *rebbe*, Rav Elya Meir Bloch *zt”l*, whom he respected and admired for being an *ish emes* (a man of truth). Although Rav Bloch died early, Rabbi Kranz spoke fondly of his *rebbe* and how he inspired him to spread Torah. One of Rabbi Kranz’s grandsons is named after him.

The Rabbi and Rebbetzin met at a singles Shabbaton (yes, you heard that right) in upstate New York. Bubby noticed the black lines of Zaidy’s *tzitzis* through his white shirt and understood that he was religious. They soon married. While Bubby had some savings, Zaidy had little to offer financially. For that generation, it was utterly humiliating for the *kallah* to have more money than the *chosson*. But Zaidy was bold and optimistic. They settled in Silver Spring, Maryland.

THE QUIET FORCE BEHIND THE KEMP MILL COMMUNITY

There were tens of thousands of Jews in Greater Washington who were completely disconnected from their faith. This bothered Zaidy deeply. Assimilation hurt him to the core. He observed that “(Kemp Mill) was a community of Jews, but not a Jewish community.” There was no Torah

² The complete story is featured in *Visions of Greatness* by Rabbi Yosef Weiss.

learning, no kosher grocery store, no Jewish infrastructure. It was a spiritual wasteland. How could he build up the community and bring people closer to Yiddishkeit?

Rabbi Kranz envisioned a synagogue that would also serve as a community center — where Jews could gather for religious, educational, and social events. There weren't enough men for a *minyan*, but he famously asserted, "If we build it, they will come." It's important to acknowledge how bold that was: building an Orthodox synagogue without the promise of a *minyan*! He dreamed big: one day, he believed, Kemp Mill would become a thriving Jewish community.

With tremendous *hashgacha pratis*, without access to any wealth or connections, without a congregation to sponsor it — and without the benefit of even a high school education — Rabbi Kranz obtained a beautiful piece of land and constructed his vision in 1967: Silver Spring Jewish Center – Ahavas Yisrael; "Ahavas Yisrael" because he wanted it to be a place of love for every Jew. He gave sermons advocating Torah, *mitzvos*, and *Eretz Yisrael*. It became a hub of Jewish life, incorporating what Rabbi Kranz knew to be the most vital part of a Jewish community: a *mikvah*. Today, with the Rabbi's blessing and leadership, the SSJC also houses a *kollel* and a *beis medrash*.

Zaidy's boldness stemmed from the *pasuk* in *Pirkei Avos* that he often quoted (2:16):

הוּא הִזָּה אוֹמֵר, לֹא עָלֶיךָ הַמְלָאכָה לְגִמֹּר, וְלֹא אַתָּה בֶּן חוֹרִין לְבָטֹל מִמְּנָה.

He [Rabbi Tarfon] used to say:

It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it.

Rabbi Kranz believed that even if success seems out of reach, you must still try. Throughout his career, he envisioned ideas that appeared doomed to failure: building a *mikvah* without a congregation that would use it (let alone sponsor it) or helping Jewish outcasts rejected from society. Time and time again, public pressure to back down left him undeterred. He never strayed from the path that he believed was right, no matter how uncertain the result.

One time he was called upon by Rav Moshe Feinstein z"tl to save six Jewish Russian girls who had been imprisoned. There were policies and regulations set in place that prevented him from saving them, but Zaidy still tried. "My job is to do my *hishtadlus* (exert effort)," he would say. "Only Hashem determines the outcome." A true *ish emes*, he didn't bend to the establishment. This refreshing leadership style kept him solely focused on *avodas Hashem* (fulfilling Hashem's will) without the distraction of public opinion. In many cases, he was able to circumvent policies and was blessed with tremendous success — including the release of those six Jewish Russian girls.

Zaidy continued his *hishtadlus* to perpetuate the infrastructure of the community, often via *matan b'seiser* (anonymous giving). Today's local Kemp Mill mailman, bus driver, or grocery store cashier³ may once have been an immigrant sitting in Rabbi Kranz's iconic office at the lowest

³Throughout this article, details have been changed to protect privacy.

point in their life — no money, no job, no place to live. Many had to live in the Hebrew Sheltering Home and Zaidy gave them *tzedakah*, finding them employment as contributing members of the community.

When young couples moved to Kemp Mill, Zaidy often served as the secret guarantor for their mortgages. Many have raised well-established families whose next generations have settled in the community as well. Over and over again, he was the anonymous, unnamed figure who helped kickstart Kemp Mill, together with Bubby, because he genuinely wanted Yiddishkeit to thrive in the community.

One example: As Kemp Mill flourished, a group of *bnei Torah* looked for a place for *yeshiva* graduates in the next stage of life to *daven*. They approached Rabbi Kranz to purchase part of SSJC's property, doubtful that he would oblige. It was ludicrous for any rabbi — even for a hefty sum — to allow a competing *shul* to build on his property. But Zaidy believed these *bnei Torah* were sincere, that the *shul* would become a *makom Torah* in Kemp Mill, and that he could invest the money into the school to further Jewish education. He sold it to them at a reasonable price, warmly allowing them to use the playground and parking lot at no cost. That *shul* is Ohr HaTorah. Zaidy had demonstrated his genuine commitment to growing Yiddishkeit in Kemp Mill, without concern for his own honor.

MIDDOS

In addition to being the spiritual leader for so many, Rabbi Kranz's career evolved into advocacy for *Am Yisrael*. This brought him to places that rabbis generally don't frequent, but he remained an *ish emes* through it all, unwavering in his mission. He attended stylish events in Washington, DC alongside glamorous dignitaries, celebrities, and politicians — wearing his humble suit and sporting a hearty "Kranz boy of Maplewood" smile. He didn't waver at the distractions but remained laser-focused on his mission: locating the person of influence in the crowd who hadn't been answering his calls, pressuring him in person to help the Jew for whom Zaidy was advocating.

Zaidy did not care for frivolous luxuries, using every moment to serve Hashem. He was *same'ach b'chelko* (content with his lot), wearing the same yellow *kippah* and canvas shoes on *Yom Kippur* each year. We later realized that they weren't supposed to be yellow — they were actually white. They had turned yellow after over 50 years of wear!

Something as simple as cold water genuinely brought him immense pleasure. "A *mechayeh*," he would enthusiastically say. "*Mechayei meisim* (reviving the dead)." He was thrilled to eat leftover herring from the kiddush. Once, while in the hospital, he was handed a warmed blanket. He remarked "What a *mechayeh*. This place (Suburban Hospital) is better than a hotel. A hot blanket, I couldn't believe it. WOW!" He was a humble man, always satisfied with his lot.

Consistency was Zaidy's essence, and this contributed to his *middah* of *hashkamas beis midrash shacharis v'arvis* (rising early — for *shacharis* —and staying late — for *maariv* — in *shul*). The *Chumash* (*Devarim* 11:21) states:

...לְמַעַן יִרְבוּ יְמֵיכֶם, וְיָמֵי בְנֵיכֶם עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע ה' לְאֲבוֹתֵיכֶם לָתֵת לָהֶם...
...that your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children,
upon the land which Hashem swore unto your fathers to give them...

The *Gemara* in *Berachos* asks: We know that “*al ha'adamah*” (upon the land) refers to the Land of Israel. So one can only have a long life in *Eretz Yisrael*. How, then, can Jews in the diaspora merit a long life? The *Gemara* answers: They start and end their day going to *shul*.

Why does that merit you long life? Rav Yonason Eibschutz answers: Starting and ending the day at *shul* is as if you're in *Eretz Yisrael*.

The *Shulchan Aruch* states (*Orach Chayim* 1:1):

וְתִגְבֵר כְּאֵרִי לְעִמּוּד בְּבוֹקֵר לְעִבּוֹדֵת בּוֹרְאוֹ שְׂיִהָא הוּא מְעוֹרֵר הַשָּׁחַר.
One should strengthen himself like a lion to get up in the morning to serve his Creator,
so that it is he who awakens the dawn.

Get up and daven! This was Zaidy's legacy. A farm boy at his core, every morning — even if it was winter or if he was not feeling well — he woke up before 6:00 am (in his younger years, 4:30 am). The time to leave for *shul* was 6:45, but he was waiting by the door for his granddaughter to drive him at 6:40, even just before his passing!

On his way to *minyán*, he turned on the heat in the SSLC and LBJA classrooms to make it warm when the children arrived. If he noticed a piece of trash, he bent down to pick it up. He even stomped down the garbage in the commercial dumpster with his foot, as if in his own kitchen. “This is the responsibility of a *ba'al habayis* (homeowner),” he stated. This was not an institution; this was a home for every Jew. His recognition that all Jews needed to feel “at home” there predated the *kiruv* movement. Zaidy was “Chabad before Chabad.”⁴

After *shul*, he returned to eat the breakfast his rebbetzin had prepared for him⁵. It was the same every morning: coffee, salad, and a *chavitah* (omelet). On *Rosh Chodesh*, he washed for bread so he could say *Ya'ale V'Yavo*, always benching from a siddur. He was a man of routine, and his daily schedule gave him stability in this world of ups-and-downs. After breakfast, the phone calls poured in from around the world.

⁴ Coined by Rabbi Kranz's son, Rabbi Arye Kranz.

⁵ When she fell ill, his granddaughters prepared his food.

A parade of people from all walks of life contacted Zaidy — a victim of antisemitism, an *agunah* (a woman who cannot remarry because her husband is missing or will not grant her a divorce), a Jew in prison, even a famous Israeli pop star. He helped people even when they held starkly different political or religious views from him. A Jew in need was a Jew in need. Every person had a family at home. Every person could do *teshuvah* (repent). He helped them all.

There are countless stories. Once, a recently divorced convert was left with four young children to raise on her own, living in a single room in Washington, DC. Her sole possessions were a stroller, a siddur, and Shabbos candlesticks. The situation was dire. She went from rabbi to rabbi asking for help — a job, anything.

Finally she discovered the Silver Spring Jewish Center. She was advised there that Rabbi Kranz was at the Israeli Embassy, engaged in a political matter — so she trekked up a hill on a hot summer's day, children in tow, to look for him. As she surveyed the crowd, no one paid attention to her. But then a gentleman left the embassy, came across the street, and asked her if she needed help. It was Rabbi Kranz. *He* was the one who found *her*! Seeing a woman alone on a hot day with young children, of course Rabbi Kranz would notice her: she was a human being.

He immediately sprang into action. Together with his rebbetzin, they connected her with local charities, hosted her for Shabbos, and taught her Torah. The children attended HDS/SSLC free of charge until she could pay — while she worked at the SSJC part-time, fulfilling the Rambam's dictum of the highest form of *tzedakah*⁶. "The entire Kranz family adopted us and helped us stand tall," she later wrote. This is one of many stories of the incredible, quiet, and unlimited *chesed* of Rabbi and Rebbetzin Kranz. Zaidy acted like a father to so many — always with dignified confidentiality.

FULL CIRCLE

Rabbi Kranz started his life as a humble, impoverished orphan, but was blessed with being able to pay it forward. Here was a boy with no father who ultimately became a father to so many — from a *bachur* at Telshe Yeshiva to immigrants arriving in Kemp Mill. A boy whose mother fought tirelessly for him to attend *yeshiva* — who ultimately brought Torah education to countless Jewish children. A young man who came from nothing and whose *kallah* had more money than him (and even that wasn't much), who acted as the guarantor for people's mortgages and gave tremendous amounts of *tzedakah*. A *yeshiva bachur* whose *rebbe* was an *ish emes* — who ultimately was remembered for being an *ish emes* himself, ignoring public opinion so he could focus on serving Hashem, not breaking under pressure. A Rabbi who arrived at a spiritual wasteland — where now the sound of Torah is heard, from dawn until well after nightfall, emanating from the very *shul* that he built in that wasteland. A young boy who rose early in the morning to tend to the farm who, for his entire life, even in his elderly years and in the freezing

⁶ Finding someone employment is the highest form of *tzedakah*, according to the Rambam (*Matanos L'Aniyim* 10:7).

cold, was the first of ten for the *minyan*, waking early to go to *shul* as if in *Eretz Yisrael* — who ultimately had the merit to be buried in *Yerushalayim*, near the *Kotel*.

Yehi Zichro Baruch. Zaidy: we will miss you. Rabbi Kranz: so will the entire community.

HaRav Gedaliah Silverstone z"l: "Rabbi of Washington"

Shlomo D. Katz¹

When we gather to recall the holy souls of our forebearers, we ask, "Yizkor / May G-d remember the soul of so-and-so." We can imagine the voice of our Father in Heaven responding, "Yes! Yes! I do remember your fathers — how they sacrificed for their faith, and how they were careful about the Torah and kept minor Mitzvos as carefully as major Mitzvos. Even a Minhag (custom) was like a Halachah (law) to them! Yes, I do remember them," G-d says.

*"But let me ask you," G-d continues. "Do **you** remember your holy fathers — how they observed Shabbos, whereas your children transgress Shabbos publicly; how they bequeathed you two pairs of Tefilin (Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam), but you do not put on Tefilin at all; and how they were even strict about Chodosh (eating the new crop of grain before Pesach), while you don't even keep kosher? (Masok Mi'dvash, Vol. I #7)²*

With these pain-filled words, Rabbi Gedaliah Silverstone z"l bemoaned the state of Orthodox Jewry in Washington, DC in his *Yizkor* sermon on the last day of *Pesach* 5677 (1917). In that same address, Rabbi Silverstone contrasted the lasting inspiration a person would get when he was *Oleh La'regel* — made the festival pilgrimage to the *Bels HaMikdash* in Jerusalem — with the complete lack of inspiration available in Washington's *shuls*, where members likewise showed up only three times a year, but where prominent leaders flouted the Torah's laws.

What Rabbi Silverstone experienced in Washington on that *Pesach* was probably the reality in most American communities 107 years ago. What makes our subject's story unusually memorable, however, is that he published more than 30 volumes of his sermons during his three decades here, giving us a window on his experiences, frustrations, and hopes. As we shall see, Rabbi Silverstone's sermons paint a bleak picture of Torah observance in Washington in his time, yet it seems he never gave up hope that a brighter Jewish future was possible in this city.

BIOGRAPHICAL HIGHLIGHTS

Rabbi Silverstone was born in Jasionówka, Russia — near present-day Bialystok, Poland — in 1871 or 1872. As an infant, he moved to Sackat — near Kaunas (Kovno), Lithuania — when his father, Rav Yeshayahu Meir Zylbersztejn, became rabbi there. The future Rabbi Silverstone studied in

¹ The author is grateful to Mrs. Gail Karp, Rabbi Silverstone's great-granddaughter, for the wealth of biographical material she provided for this article, including a short autobiography by Rabbi Silverstone.

² Many of Rabbi Silverstone's published works are available for free at www.HebrewBooks.org. All quotations from those works are translated or paraphrased by this author.

the local *cheder* until the age of ten. “I did not see much progress in my studies,” Rabbi Silverstone later recalled.

At age 12, young Gedaliah transferred to the yeshiva in Raseiniai. After five years there, he studied for two years at the Telshe Yeshiva, under Rav Eliezer Gordon and the latter’s son, Rav Mordechai.

At age 19, when the future Rabbi Silverstone was at risk of being drafted into the Russian Army, his family moved to England, where the elder Rav Zylbersztein became a rabbi in Liverpool.³ For the next 18 months, the young scholar studied independently in a *Bais Medrash* in Manchester, England, eventually receiving *semichah* (rabbinical ordination).

In December 1892, Rabbi Silverstone married Golda Rivka Baker of Liverpool. In 1900, he returned briefly to Russia to study under his uncle, Rav Chaim Tzvi Braude, and to obtain *semichah* from him as well.

Beginning in 1901, Rabbi Silverstone served as rabbi of the Belfast Hebrew Congregation, serving the immigrant community. In 1902, he was a delegate to the Sixth Zionist Congress held in Basel, Switzerland.

In 1905, Rabbi Silverstone traveled to the U.S. to sell two *seforim* (Torah volumes) he had published — *Pirchei Aviv* on Tractate *Berachos* and *Yeshuah Gedolah* on Tractates *Chullin* and *Arachin*. Years later, he reflected on these works in the introduction to one of his collections of sermons:

Many of the rabbis who know me in the United States and in England will wonder why I am engaging in the realm of Aggadah (the non-legal portions of the Talmud, i.e., publishing sermons) when I am already experienced in writing learned Talmud commentaries that received the approbations of leading elder scholars. Though G-d has given me the ability to question, answer, and dissect, as I learned to do in the Telshe Yeshiva, I know there are few people in America who will learn such books — indeed, fewer every day. Moreover, those who would learn them have no money to buy them. (Beis Meir, Vol. III, Introduction)

After eight months in the United States, Rabbi Silverstone returned to Belfast. Unable to support his large family with the pay that community offered, he decided to return to America.

“RABBI OF WASHINGTON”

A one-paragraph item in the January 15, 1907 edition of *The Washington Post* reported, under the headline, “Hebrews Elect Head Rabbi,” that “the three local Orthodox Hebrew congregations” elected “old school” Rabbi Silverstone of Belfast as their “head rabbi.” The three *shuls* in the “Combined Congregations,” as the consortium was known, were Adas Israel (founded

³ In England, the family changed its name to Silverstone.

in 1869 and still Orthodox in the early 1900s), Ohev Sholom (1886), and Talmud Torah (1889). As the spiritual leader of the newly created Combined Congregations (a forerunner of the Vaad HaRabanim), Rabbi Silverstone is sometimes referred to as Washington's "first Chief Rabbi." Notably, he would declare 20 years later, when the Combined Congregations had grown to more than a dozen *shuls*: "There is no Chief Rabbi in Washington."



On January 20, 1907, Rabbi Silverstone was inducted as rabbi of Ohev Sholom in a day-long gala event. The next day's *Evening Star* and *Washington Herald* both reported:

Dr. ⁴ Silverstone is to have particular supervision over the kosher meat order in this city, as prescribed by Mosaic law. There are other matters pertaining to the observance of the ancient Yiddish faith that will come under the supervision of the new head rabbi, who is a Hebrew scholar of the old school.

The new "head rabbi" got right to work on his very first night in office, as the newspapers further reported the day after his induction:

A meeting of the kosher meat slaughterers took place at the Ohave Sholem Synagogue last night, Rabbi Silverstone taking a prominent part.

Kashrus supervision would continue to be a major part of Rabbi Silverstone's responsibilities, as would trying to convince his congregants to keep kosher. In 1926, he testified before a U.S. House Sub-Committee about a bill intended to strengthen *kashrus* supervision in DC. A few years later, in a sermon typical of many of his speeches, he commented on the verse (*Shemos* 1:1), "These are the names of the Children of Israel who were coming to Egypt; with Yaakov, each man and his household came":

⁴ It is not clear whether Rabbi Silverstone actually held a Ph.D.

When Yaakov's children were forced to leave their land and live in another, they brought their 'houses' with them, with their existing holiness and kashrus standards. In that merit, Hashem had mercy on them. We should learn from them so that Hashem will have mercy on us as well. (Derushim Le'haggid #4).

Beginning in 1911, Rabbi Silverstone served as rabbi of the newly-founded Keshet Israel Congregation in Georgetown, while continuing as rabbi of Ohev Sholom, then located at 5th and I Streets, NW. (At the time, the Silverstone family lived at 925 4th Street, NW — almost one hour's walk from Keshet Israel.)

One of Rabbi Silverstone's greatest concerns was the education of Washington's Jewish children. He helped open a *Talmud Torah* in June 1910 with three teachers and sixty students, but it closed a year later due to lack of funding. In November 1913, Rabbi Silverstone spoke at a meeting to raise money for the "Jewish Free School," but that effort apparently failed as well. Speaking at *Selichos* in approximately 1921, Rabbi Silverstone asked, "How can we beseech *Hashem* to answer us in the merit of 'tinokos shel bais rabban' (children studying Torah) when we do not have any such children?" (*Darchi Ba'kodesh* #2)

Parents' responsibility for their children's Jewish education was a regular theme in Rabbi Silverstone's sermons and writings. In his commentary to *Pirkei Avos*, he writes:

Bringing a child into the Covenant of Avraham means more than giving him a Bris Milah. It means teaching him to observe the whole Torah, as we read (Bereishis 18:19), "For I have loved him (Avraham), because he commands his children and his household after him to keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice . . ." This is why at a Bris, after the father recites, "Who sanctified us through his mitzvos and commanded us to bring him into the Covenant of our forefather Avraham," the assembled immediately respond, "Just as he entered the Covenant, so may he enter Torah, marriage, and good deeds." (Lev Avos 3:15)

In his 1910 *Haggadah* commentary, *Korban Pesach*, Rabbi Silverstone writes:

Regarding the education of children, I have said that it is impossible under any circumstances to implant Torah and emunah (faith) in the hearts of children unless they see their parents implanting the same in their own hearts. As the children see in their parents, so shall the children do.

And in his *Shabbos HaGadol Derashah* in 1934, Rabbi Silverstone commented sadly:

The Rasha (wicked son) asks, "What is this service to you?" At least he sees his parents conducting a Seder! Today, children have no one to ask because they do not see their parents engaging in any form

of divine service. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Korban Pesach [1935 edition], p.21)

The elderly were also a concern of Rabbi Silverstone, and he participated in fundraising for a Jewish old age home. Later, he served as a director of the Hebrew Home for the Aged.

Rabbi Silverstone's influence was not limited to Washington Jewry. For example, he served as vice president of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis and reportedly helped establish the Hebrew Sanitarium of Denver. On November 8, 1926, he participated in a delegation that met with U.S. President Calvin Coolidge to discuss religious concerns. In 1935, Rabbi Silverstone addressed a conference of rabbis from the southeastern United States devoted to "the problems of smaller Jewish communities and the education of Jewish youth."

ALIYAH, RETURN TO WASHINGTON, AND ALIYAH AGAIN

Rabbi Silverstone was an ardent Zionist in both word and deed. In a sermon in approximately 1912, on the verses (*Tehilim* 137:5-6), "If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill. Let my tongue adhere to my palate if I fail to recall you," Rabbi Silverstone said:

There are some who have the financial means to invest in the rebuilding of the Land. Of them, the verse says, 'Let my right hand forget its skill' if I do not use those skills to rebuild Jerusalem. Others have no money, but they have the ability to motivate others through their words. Of them, the verse says, 'Let my tongue adhere to my palate if I fail to recall you.' (*Beis Meir*, Vol. III #4)

In 1921, Rabbi Silverstone visited *Eretz Yisrael* for the first time. Upon his return, he again called on Jews of means to invest in rebuilding the Land. "For 2,000 years the Jews have dreamt and wept," he said. "The time has come to act." In the introduction to his work *Darchi Ba'kodesh*, he recorded: "I have committed to return there, G-d willing, for ever since my visit last year, my thoughts from morning until night are about Jerusalem and *Eretz Yisrael*."

In 1923, Rabbi Silverstone returned to Israel with the intention of settling there. An official farewell ceremony was held in July of that year, at which Rabbi J.T. Loeb (rabbi of several local congregations, including Southeast Hebrew) bemoaned the community's impending loss of Rabbi Silverstone's "saintly appearance; his gentle qualities befitting a true leader; and his magnificent flow of Yiddish oratory, quick wit, and wisdom."

Upon leaving Washington, Rabbi Silverstone did not travel directly to *Eretz Yisrael*. Rather, he stopped in Europe as an emissary of the Selective Immigrant Aid Society to make a "study of the immigration question," a subject on which he later testified before a U.S. Senate committee. When he finally arrived in Israel, his *aliyah* was short-lived, as Mrs. Silverstone's health problems forced the couple to return to Washington. Soon thereafter, he was appointed rabbi of Tifereth Israel, then an Orthodox congregation. In 1932, Rabbi Silverstone recorded that the *Mishnah* study group at that *shul* was in its fourth cycle.

In 1936, Rabbi Silverstone made *aliyah* for the second time, this time for good. He passed away in *Yerushalayim* on the night of July 22, 1944, 3 Av 5704; he was eulogized by Chief Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Herzog and buried on *Har Ha'zeitim*.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Torah study and *halachic* observance in Washington were in such a sorry state in Rabbi Silverstone's time that he commented ruefully at the dedication of a new burial ground: "Washington deserves a beautiful cemetery. After all, here great *halachic* authorities such as the *Chayei Adam*,⁵ Rabbi Akiva Eiger,⁶ the *Malbim*,⁷ the *Taz*,⁸ and the *Shach*⁹ are all dead and buried." (*Drushim Le'hagid* #11)

One might think, based on this and other remarks quoted above, that Rabbi Silverstone had given up hope regarding his congregants. But this was not so. To the contrary, late in his career, Rabbi Silverstone commented on the verses (*Vayikra* 19:3-4), "Every man — your father and mother you shall revere and My Sabbaths you shall observe — I am *Hashem*, your *Elokim*. Do not turn to the idols, and molten gods you shall not make for yourselves — I am *Hashem*, your *Elokim*":

Even when we fall so low that *Hashem* must remind us to honor our parents, keep Shabbos, and not worship idols, He still declares: "I am *Hashem*, your *Elokim*!" (*Lev Avos*, p.9)

And these were not merely words; Rabbi Silverstone truly believed in people's ability to improve. Thus, he testified before the DC Parole Board in 1934 on behalf of a young Jewish man who had been given a ten-year sentence for carrying a concealed weapon. Despite not knowing the young man personally, the rabbi offered to take the parolee into his home if he was released, confident that he "will go straight."

After *Pesach*, Jewish communities around the world will study *Pirkei Avos* every Shabbos afternoon. Traditionally, that study is prefaced with a *Mishnah* from Tractate *Sanhedrin*: "All Israel has a share in the World to Come, as it is said (*Yeshayah* 60:21), 'And your people are all *Tzaddikim*. . .'"

Why do we begin in this way? Rabbi Silverstone answers:

Our Sages say, "If one wants to be a Chassid (pious beyond the letter of the law), let him fulfill the words of Pirkei Avos." A Jew might say, "Then why should I study Avos? I am so far from being a Chassid! I am happy to be a 'regular Jew.'" Therefore we introduce Pirkei Avos with this statement, declaring that this study is for every Jew because all Jews are already Tzaddikim! From where we

⁵ Rav Avraham Danzig, 1748–1820.

⁶ 1761–1838.

⁷ R' Meir Leibush Weiser, 1809–1879.

⁸ R' David Halevi, 1586–1667.

⁹ R' Shabsai HaKohen, 1621–1662.

*already stand, becoming extra pious is the very next step. (Lev Avos,
p.9)*

Apparently, 25 years in Washington, DC had not soured Rabbi Silverstone on the potential of Washington's Jews. Thankfully, history has proven him right.¹⁰

¹⁰ Due to space constraints, most citations have been omitted. An annotated version is available by contacting the author at shlomodkatz@gmail.com.

The Mayberg Foundation: Connected Judaism for the Generations

Manette and Louis Mayberg

Each year, Jewish families around the world gather at the Seder table to retell the story of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. This year, these words will take on an especially poignant and personal meaning:

אֱלֹהִים שְׁבָכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ,
וְהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְצִילֵנוּ מִיָּדָם.

*In each generation, they stand [against] us to destroy us,
but the Holy One, blessed be He, rescues us from their hand.*

This year, we were reminded of this *pasuk* over long, agonizing days, weeks, and months. In response, we davened, we rallied, and we united in profound ways. We asserted our identities, and we doubled down on our dedication to Jewish life and Jewish learning.

Creating greater, more effective opportunities for access to Jewish learning and living Jewish wisdom and values remains our personal and philanthropic priority since we embarked on our own Jewish journey 34 years ago. After a year of participating in weekly *parashah shiurim* with the newly situated Aish HaTorah DC, we attended a life-transforming Aish Discovery weekend. We experienced new and undeniable truths — and realized that we could not ignore the depths of Jewish insight and wisdom we had just started to uncover. We began to attend Shabbos services weekly and discovered that a whole world of Jewish community was there just waiting to embrace us and help us to move along a new life trajectory.

Those experiences directly shaped our *hashkofos* and inspired our vision for the future of the Jewish people. It informed how we raised our family and inspired us to get involved in our community — both through philanthropic support and personal leadership — on behalf of numerous Jewish outreach and educational initiatives.

MEET THE MAYBERGS

We thank Hashem every day for giving us resources to share — our time, energy, material assets, and our commitment to Torah and *mitzvos* — with the communal organizations that sustain and advance Jewish life.

Here's a little background of our professional and communal work:

Manette is a co-founder — along with seven other women — of Momentum, formerly known as the Jewish Women's Renaissance Project (JWRP). Momentum is a global movement focused on the most significant family influencer: the Jewish mother. Today, Manette chairs Momentum's

Institutional Advancement Committee and is a member of both its Executive Committee and Board of Directors. Manette also conceived of and developed the annual Shalva Celebrity Chef Dinner, which she and Louis host annually. In addition, Manette is a national senior vice president of the Orthodox Union and sits on the Berman Hebrew Academy Executive Committee. Several years after Momentum's founding, Manette expanded her hands-on philanthropic work to the Mayberg Foundation. She serves as the Foundation's trustee along with Louis, and has founded three of the Foundation's important operating programs.

Louis' professional career spans more than 40 years in the financial services and investment industries. Currently, he is CEO of CyLogic Inc., a cloud computing infrastructure and end point protection provider. He is a co-founder and principal of ProShares and ProFunds, Exchange Traded Funds and Mutual Funds, where he served as president. As chairman of the private investment firm Maulao, Louis collaborates on the overall direction of the firm and its investments.

Outside the corporate boardroom, Louis dedicates countless hours to a variety of organizations, including Aish Hatorah, where he's a member of the Amutah and Vaad. Recently he stepped down from a ten-plus year tenure as Hillel board chair at his alma mater, George Washington University. Louis also spent three years as president of the Yeshiva of Greater Washington. In addition to his considerable work in the Jewish community, Louis has led numerous civic and social benefit initiatives, including more than a decade working on inner-city urban renewal projects to help low-income working families purchase affordable homes.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

We established the Mayberg Foundation in the early 2000s to actualize our dream of proliferating Jewish wisdom and values in the contemporary world. Our foundation's hybrid approach supports many worthwhile organizations through grants, while also incubating emerging initiatives — which we refer to as operating programs. Thanks to fifteen staff members who share our commitment to entrepreneurial philanthropy, foundational Judaism, connectedness of all Jews, and collective effort, we have professionalized our approach to giving so we can maximize our impact on the Jewish community.

Through our own Torah learning and communal work, we have arrived at an essential conclusion: The key to ensuring a vibrant, authentic, and meaningful Jewish future is to instill and cultivate Jewish values, literacy, practice, and belief in Jews of all backgrounds. Our philanthropic work is firmly rooted in both foundational Jewish principles and inclusiveness of diverse perspectives — a challenging yet critical balance to maintain.

The importance of the connectedness of all Jews became acutely apparent over the past few months — now, more than ever before, we need to value, appreciate, and engage *all* Jews. No matter our differences, every *neshama* is worth connecting to our *mesorah*. We are enormously proud of the expansive opportunities for intellectual, spiritual, and emotional connection that many of our beneficiaries and operating programs provide.

Aish, to whom we have enormous *hakaras hatov* for the gift of Yiddishkeit it has provided us, is a powerhouse of Jewish learning and engagement. With hubs in more than 130 cities in eleven countries on six continents and an explosive online presence, Aish continues to evolve and grow to help millions of Jews looking to connect to their Jewish heritage.

Momentum, founded in 2008, empowers and inspires women to make changes in themselves, their families, their communities — and, by extension, the world — by providing them with access to our rich Jewish heritage. Their signature “Year of Growth” kicks off with an eight-day experience in Israel. It is a unique immersive experience that connects women to their Jewish legacy and to their home in Israel, teaches the importance of taking responsibility, and conveys by modeling the value of “Unity without Uniformity.” To date, Momentum has engaged more than 22,000 participants from 34 countries in partnership with more than 378 partner organizations. Those efforts have impacted more than 40,000 children...and that impact is only growing.

GROWTH FOR CHANGE

Our metamorphosis from a grant-making foundation to a hybrid one with its own operating programs was set in motion thirteen years ago by our desire to transform the Jewish educational landscape. We launched the Jewish Education Innovation Challenge (JEIC) to facilitate and contribute to a national conversation that reimagines what Jewish learning looks like in our *yeshivos* and day schools.

JEIC convenes educators, funders, influencers, and consumers to catalyze lasting school culture change through innovation, experimentation, and collaboration. Together, we consider innovative ways to help our students develop their connection to G-d and intrinsically motivated practice in their Judaism. By personalizing our children’s learning, they can internalize and apply the Torah’s beautiful wisdom, values, and sensitivities throughout their lives. By creating more opportunities for self-expression and choice in classroom environments, we can help them live more authentic and deeply committed Jewish lives.

Our second operating program, MyZuzah, launched in 2018 following a friend’s accident in our home. Our beloved team member, Nelly, stepped through a doorway and leaned on a railing. The railing broke and Nelly fell; she survived but was badly injured. We had our *mezuzos* inspected afterwards and discovered that the one on that room’s door frame had one word that was broken: the Hebrew word for “your gates.” We checked Nelly’s *mezuzah* at home. The same word was broken there too.

Through that process, we discovered the power of the *mezuzah*. It is a timeless link to our heritage with a mystical quality that connects, unites, and protects the Jewish people — one that we are especially mindful of as we read the Haggadah at the Seder, as mentioned above. MyZuzah staff members work with partner organizations around the world to put a kosher, fair

trade *mezuzah* on the front door of every Jewish home. To date, we are 15,000 *mezuzos* closer to that goal.

Since October 7th, MyZuzah staff witnessed a sharp increase in requests for our *mezuzos* — both from individuals and partner organizations. As one of our partners expressed, “I’m seeing [so much] excitement around *mezuzos* right now as a symbol of Jewish pride and protection during these times.”

As we were building the pipeline to procure and distribute *klafim* (the parchment on which the words of the *mezuzah* are inscribed), we came to a startling conclusion: there was no mechanism or agency for supervising the entire process of writing, checking, and selling *STa”M* (*Sifrei Kodesh, Tefillin, and Mezuzos*). We developed a revolutionary approach to *STa”M* certification that trains and certifies all partners in the *STa”M* process: the *sofer* (scribe), the *magiah* (checker), the materials used to make *STa”M* articles, and the articles themselves. And so, our newest operating program, STAMP – The *STa”M* Project, grew out of MyZuzah.

To date, STAMP has trained 35 *magihim* through its comprehensive training course — the first course ever established to ensure fully qualified and supervised *magihim*. Another twenty are signed up for the third round of the training course. STAMP has also certified 76 *sofrim*, 1,623 *mezuzos*, and 57 *parshios*. Seven *rabanim* are on staff, not only to teach and supervise the *magihim* and *sofrim*, but also to develop a series of educational workshops to help community members make informed *STa”M* purchases.

STAMP exemplifies our entrepreneurial approach to philanthropy: partnering with organizations to leverage our collective resources in the service of connecting and educating Jews around the need for transparent and reliable *STa”M* certification. As Rabbi Moshe Hauer, executive vice president of the Orthodox Union and a member of STAMP’s rabbinical board, said, “Through its deliberate and thoughtful work, STAMP has begun to create a positive transformation in the *STa”M* marketplace. We are pleased that through the efforts of our Kashrus personnel, we are able to participate in STAMP’s efforts of education and oversight, elevating the standards of Kashrus and transparency and enhancing consumer confidence.”

LOOKING FORWARD

As we sing in **הָא לְחֵמָא עֲנִיָא**:

כָּל דְּכָפִין יִיתִי וְיִיכַל, כָּל דְּצָרִיךְ יִיתִי וְיִפְסַח.
הַשְׁתָּא הָכָא, לְשָׁנָה הַבְּאָה בְּאַרְעָא דְּיִשְׂרָאֵל.
הַשְׁתָּא עַבְדִּי, לְשָׁנָה הַבְּאָה בְּנֵי חוֹרִין.

*Anyone who is famished should come and eat,
anyone who is in need should come and partake of the Pesach sacrifice.
Now we are here, next year we will be in the land of Israel;
this year we are slaves, next year we will be free people.*

We all open our homes and invite other Jews to sit at our Seder table — regardless of their background or level of Jewish observance. May we take this lesson to heart and welcome all Jews who have not yet found their place at our inclusive communal table so we can embark on our journey towards freedom — together.

Wishing our entire community a Chag Kasher v'Sameach!

The Golden Network: Friendship, Learning, Connection

Rabbi Shmuel Leigh, Director

Our community is fortunate to have many great organizations and institutions collectively offering services to address a wide array of physical and spiritual needs. For the elderly, however, services provided have traditionally focused primarily on their physical, rather than their spiritual, needs. While this is both understandable and important, seniors are no less in need of spiritual fulfillment than anyone else. In fact, at this later stage of life, many are in need of — and thirsting for — spirituality even *more* than their younger counterparts. Addressing this critical need has been the exclusive focus of The Golden Network (TGN) since its inception in 2011.

THE GENESIS OF THE GOLDEN NETWORK

While studying at the Greater Washington Community Kollel, I identified a lack of opportunities for learning and social interaction for retirees and seniors. Some of my *chavrusos* at the Kollel were semi-retired or soon to be retired, and they wondered how they could use their retirement years to grow in both learning and spirituality.

I began to think about the needs of all segments of our senior population. Could we provide the homebound with companionship? Would they appreciate learning made available to them in their own homes? Were there enough existing classes and programs to adequately serve our active retirees — or was there a need for more? What about the residents of senior facilities across our area? Many of our Jewish brothers and sisters were in non-Jewish facilities; they also needed to connect to their heritage. What resources could we provide them in those environments? It soon became clear that there was a serious lack of programming and services focused on the varied spiritual needs of the elderly demographic across our community.

I met with local Rabbis and community leaders, who unanimously agreed that there was a great need for these senior-focused services. And so, with the encouragement and blessing of the Greater Washington community leadership, The Golden Network was born in September 2011.

THE EARLY DAYS

I found it overwhelming to decide where to start. With a few hundred facilities across the area — including nursing homes; assisted living facilities; memory care and skilled nursing facilities; independent living and senior communities — who would be our target audience? I first needed to become acquainted with the different venues, learn how to connect with the residents, and work with the staff.

Over time, we decided to focus primarily on serving assisted living facilities, as their staff was the most accessible and the residents were generally excited about our programming. We began to schedule programs at these facilities, sometimes as often as weekly.

It took some effort to gauge the needs and interests of each audience because of the wide disparity in health and cognitive levels among the participants. *Baruch Hashem*, our team has learned to navigate these challenges and does well adjusting to and reaching a broad array of participants. Our goals for each program are to bring the residents out of their rooms to be with others and to enlighten them with a thought or concept that they can further contemplate and explore. Many of our class participants have commented that we “really got them thinking.”

I also realized early on that we needed to incorporate music into our programs. Most people appreciate music and sometimes there is no other way to connect with them. Many local professionals with musical talent have performed for our seniors; I learned to play the guitar for this specific purpose. Many seniors have mentioned that they recall the melodies or words of Jewish songs that we sing — and it may be the first time they have heard those songs in decades.

We have offered hundreds of classes and performances at over forty locations in Baltimore, Chevy Chase, Kensington, Potomac, Rockville, Silver Spring, Washington DC, and Wheaton. Since TGN’s founding, the breadth and reach of our programming has grown significantly, testifying to the extent to which this population is in need of, and desirous of, the services we provide.

VISITATION AND COMPANIONSHIP

➤ *Who are our volunteers?*

Over the years, the number of men and women volunteering to visit with seniors has continued to grow. Today, we have over thirty volunteers, who collectively provide visits to more than seventy seniors. Our volunteers recognize that signing up to visit someone is not a one-time *chesed*: it involves connecting with the person on an ongoing basis to build a real and meaningful relationship. Accordingly, some of our volunteers visit multiple people, while others prefer to connect with just one person.

In addition to our many adult volunteers, we partner with local schools to arrange middle and high school student visits to community seniors. These visits are meaningful for both the students and those they are visiting. I extend a note of special thanks to Rabbi Abba Florans (guidance counselor for the Yeshiva of Greater Washington and Director of Kulam), who currently helps coordinate these student visits.

➤ *What types of visits do we provide?*

Our visits are individualized for each person. Some people enjoy textual study, while others want to discuss the *parashah* or another particular topic. Others may simply want to walk in the park or go out to eat. Some seniors may have philosophical questions while others don’t want to learn and simply want companionship and friendship. Those who are ill and can no longer communicate often appreciate the company and the music that we provide.

Some people request visits on their own, while others are referred to us. We assess each request to determine how we can best serve the individual. There is no “one size fits all.” Whenever possible, I try to meet the person initially to get a better sense of their needs. Do they need someone to call them once a month or visit once a week? Do they want to learn, *shmooz*, or sing? Are they easygoing or difficult to be with? What is their medical condition? Will it be easy to recruit someone to visit them? Sometimes the family is more eager for the visits than the people themselves. In other cases, they may want more than we can offer. Each case is unique. It may be easy to set up daily one-on-one learning for one person while, for another, it may be almost impossible to find someone to visit them monthly. While an initial assessment is essential, people's situations can change quickly — so we continue to closely monitor each situation over time.

Although residents in a facility may be less lonely than those living alone at home, they still tend to experience a degree of loneliness and alienation. Those who reside in a non-Jewish facility typically lack any form of connection to their Yiddishkeit. The daughter of one man in a non-Jewish facility called me, distressed, when she learned that the staff had taken a picture of her father, a 100-year old observant Jew, wearing a Santa hat. They didn't know any better and mistakenly thought he would like it. She pleaded with me to offer some visits to her father. Thankfully, we found an old friend of his to visit him; two other volunteers visit him as well.

Besides providing meaning and fulfillment, our visits enhance people's physical and emotional health: friendship, caring, and connection are all vital for a person to live and thrive. In some cases, we have learned that the person being visited canceled or rescheduled a medical appointment that conflicted with their scheduled visit time. They often explain that the visit is also a form of “medicine” for them, so they considered it at least as — if not more — important than appointments with their doctor. Anyone who has had the privilege of making one of these visits can testify to the impact it can have on a person.

When needed, we also offer moral support and warmth at the end of life to seniors and their families.

All TGN visits are provided free of charge to retirees and seniors of all ages.

➤ *What does a successful home visit entail?*

The success of a home visit is not always based on the outcome but, rather, on the mindset of the visitor. Let's say that you showed up to visit, but the person was sleeping (and didn't want you to wake them) or you sensed that it was not a good time to visit. The right response would obviously be to leave. If I were to ask, “Was this a successful visit?” the answer would absolutely be: YES! This is true even if you traveled thirty minutes each way to see this person. Why? Because you showed them that you cared and did not want to intrude at a bad time.

When visiting, one should think: *I am here for this person. What can I do to make them happy?* Then, during the visit, reassess and monitor. Perhaps they want to do something else or have

gotten tired. Ultimately, it's not about what is best for the visitor: it's about what is best for the person being visited.

One common mistake people make is not visiting a lonely friend, neighbor, or family member because they feel that they don't have adequate time to visit. *Visits don't need to be long.* In fact, a long visit sometimes results in unintentionally overstaying your welcome. Even just saying a quick hello, or offering a Good Shabbos greeting, or bringing a small treat can have a tremendously positive impact — without sacrificing much time. A short visit is almost always better than no visit at all.

It's normal to have difficulty reaching the person whom you wish to visit. You may try calling or messaging and not get through. If you think your companionship is appreciated, don't be discouraged if it's hard to connect. It is difficult for some seniors to juggle medical appointments and other household or physical stresses. If you continue to reach out, you will ultimately be there for them when they are most in need of your support and friendship.

One thing I find particularly distressing is the number of homebound people who receive very few or no visitors. Some of these seniors have been active in the community for decades and did so much for others in their younger years — yet now find themselves feeling lonely and abandoned. Perhaps people are uncomfortable visiting after being out of touch for so long. If the person has memory loss, it can feel awkward to connect. Don't underestimate the positive impact that a short visit or phone call can have. These people are our friends and neighbors — and should not be left alone.

Do not wait to be called upon to reach out to or visit someone. Simply look around your neighborhood to find people who would appreciate your friendship. Use your best judgment on how and when to approach them. You would be surprised how many respond positively to offers of companionship.

CLASSES AND PROGRAMS

We initially offered classes at local shuls and continued until the pandemic — when we switched to Zoom. Classes offered have included: *Parashas Hashavuah* (Rabbi Barry Greengart), *Tools for Talmud Study* (Rabbi Chaim Goldstein), *Tefillah* (Mrs. Esther Dziadek), and *Mishnah* (Rabbi Raphael Malka). I have also offered classes on *Mishnah Berurah* and *Sha'ar HaBechinah*.

➤ Lunch & Learn

Before the pandemic, TGN offered many classes and programs at a JCC Satellite Lunch Program (hosted by Young Israel Shomrai Emunah and Har Tzeon-Agudath Achim). Although that specific program did not continue after the pandemic, TGN now offers its own Lunch & Learn program at Young Israel Shomrai Emunah and Kemp Mill Synagogue. More recently, we began a Lunch & Learn program in Baltimore at Bnai Jacob Shaarei Zion. The presentations at these programs vary widely. We've had many local *Rabanim* speak, as well as professionals in the medical and mental

health fields. Participants have also shared from their own experiences and have spoken on engaging topics.

➤ *Men's Traveling Chaburah (MTC)*

MTC is a men's learning group that meets at different homes, allowing each participant to host the class in his own home. This is of particular benefit to those who have difficulty getting out to enjoy classes. The small group setting also allows participants to more comfortably interject and share their thoughts.

➤ *Buddy Network*

We all know how terrible it feels to be lonely and isolated. These feelings are that much more exacerbated when people are stuck at home because of inclement weather or other reasons. TGN's Buddy Network is a comforting resource for those who are lonely, assuring them that they have someone to look out for them at these times. Several people have taken advantage of this program; even those who have not still find it reassuring to know this program is available to them if and when they need it.

➤ *Sefer Torah*

Last year, we had a unique opportunity: A generous sponsor had a Sefer Torah written and left many letters unwritten so our members could complete them. The *sofer*, accompanied by others, traveled to many homes and facilities to make this unique — and, for many, once in a lifetime — *mitzvah* available to them. The *simcha* and emotions from all who participated were palpable. We are deeply indebted to the sponsor who made this possible.

➤ *Shalach Manos*

Each Purim, we deliver hundreds of *Shalach Manos* packages to seniors. Aside from enjoying the contents, our recipients are deeply moved by the fact that someone remembers and cares about them. For many seniors, this is the only *Shalach Manos* they receive.

➤ *Baltimore Programs*

Two years ago, we were asked to visit someone in Baltimore who was unable to communicate as a result of a stroke. The family observed that he seemed responsive to music — that he would begin to smile and even get emotional when it was played for him. We initially hired someone to visit him but, once we witnessed the impact music had on him, I and others began volunteering to visit him. This brought TGN to Baltimore, and we began learning of others who needed visits there. TGN has initiated other programs in Baltimore as well.

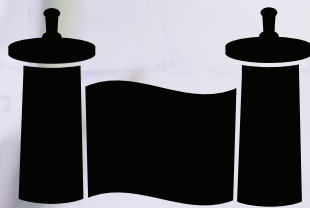
THANK YOU!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who enable TGN to serve the community, either through volunteering or providing financial support. Your dedication and partnership is extremely meaningful and most appreciated. May Hashem repay you for your kindness.

I specifically would like to thank Rabbi Moshe Walter for his invaluable guidance and support and for encouraging me to write this article. I extend my appreciation as well to the Vaad HaRabanim of Greater Washington for producing this Journal and, through it, making this article possible.

TGN's mission is to offer friendship, learning, and connection to Jewish seniors of all affiliations. A particularly beautiful outcome of our program has been the many long-lasting and mutually-cherished friendships that have developed between many of our seniors and the members of our community who participate in and volunteer for TGN programs.

Please visit our website to view our schedule: goldennetwork.org/events. For more information or to get involved, I may be reached at (301) 732-1773 or director@goldennnetwork.org.



VAAD HARABANIM
THE RABBINICAL COUNCIL
of GREATER WASHINGTON



Vaad HaRabanim of Greater Washington
The Rabbinical Council of Greater Washington

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The Vaad HaRabanim of Greater Washington is an organization of Orthodox rabbis that provides the Greater Washington Jewish community with critical services such as *kashrus* supervision, a *beis din* for the administration of Jewish divorce, a *beis din* for arbitration of financial disputes, and a *beis din* for conversion. In addition, the Vaad, also known as the Rabbinical Council, acts as a rabbinic resource and supports vital communal service organizations, such as the *Chevra Kadisha*, *Bikur Cholim*, *Yad Yehuda* and the *Mikvah Emunah* Society. Members of the Vaad HaRabanim are dedicated to serving the broader Jewish community in whatever way possible and appreciate the opportunity to do so.