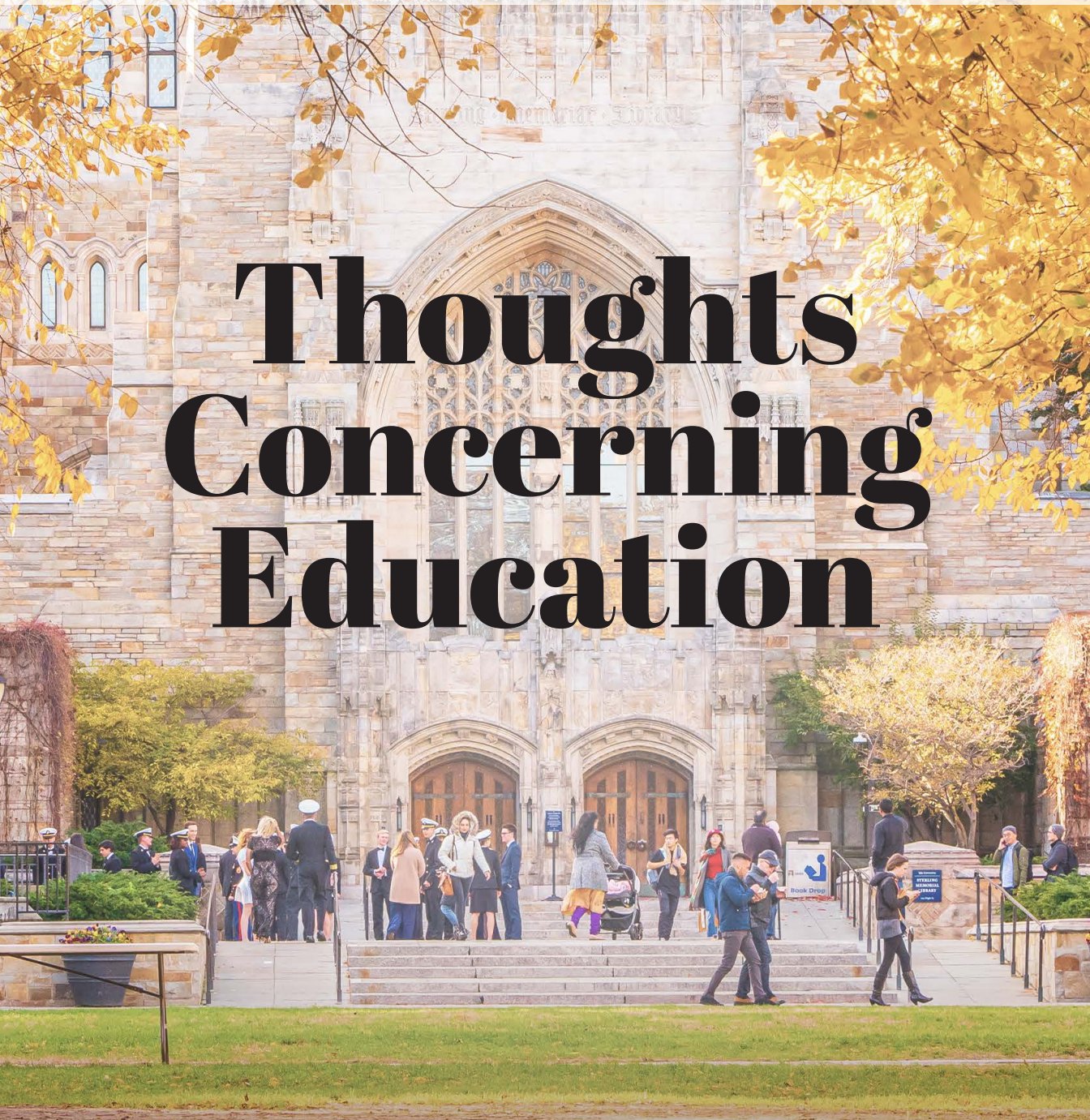
SOLOMON JOURNAL



Thoughts Concerning Education

Volume VI / SPRING 2025

SOLOMON JOURNAL

is a premiere outlet of young Jewish American journalism on serious, relevant topics. The journal brings together Tikvah's emphasis on lofty ideas with the impact of genuinely held beliefs, refined and articulated in a concrete way.

Solomon Journal is proudly Jewish, proudly Zionist, and proudly defends Western Civilization. We take positions on both current and perennial questions from this broad vantage point, acknowledging all the while that robust discussion and debate and not doctrinal purity are at the heart of the Jewish, Zionist, and Western traditions.

We believe that arguments matter but that they must be deployed in the service of the morally good and noble, not the deconstructive or subversive. At a time when the worlds of politics and culture are plagued by moral confusion and systemic doubt, we need to provide something more nurturing, something more bracing and clear.

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Letter from the Associate Dean

I'm pleased to present the Spring issue of the Solomon Journal—the second of three our wonderful Journal team will publish this year. I recently joined as a managing editor, and it has been tremendously gratifying to help bring this issue to fruition.

Like the Winter issue before it, this journal is the work of talented students and Tikvah staff members engaged with the most important questions at the heart of the Jewish, Zionist, and Western traditions. After many months of tireless work on this publication, we will soon bid farewell to Solomon Journal Director Kennedy Lee, who leaves us at the end of May. Thank you, Kennedy, for your passion and dedication to our students, who have gained so much from your mentorship throughout the 2024–2025 Solomon Fellowship.

This issue explores many important topics, including a symposium on the question of education—specifically, the qualities of a great teacher. Our writers reflected on Ms. Eva Brann's vision: an educator who delights in their craft, a "lover-in-chief" who is not only observed in this great activity of love but bears the tremendous responsibility "to beckon students into it."

As a former Tikvah student, I had the privilege of learning from many of Tikvah's great teachers, including Dr. Ruth Wisse, Dr. Leon Kass, Rabbi Dr. Meir Soloveichik, Rabbi Mark Gottlieb, Alan Rubenstein, and others. Now, as a member of the faculty, I've drawn on their wisdom to shape my own teaching—especially in the Solomon seminars I led this year. Editing this issue, I was moved by how our students grappled with the idea of a "great educator" and how they used classic texts to better understand the questions at the heart of Ms. Brann's declaration.

One symposium writer, Zachary Krohn, notes that "it is not the teacher's role as creator, but the student's role as such, that substantiates this loving relationship." As I've learned from teaching our Fellows, the moral and intellectual formation that takes place in the seminar room (both virtual and in-person) is as much a product of the teacher's making as the student's. As many of our Fellows approach graduation, gap years, and college, I wish them *Hatzlachah Rabbah*—great success—as they embark on their next chapters. May you continue to enjoy the love of your many teachers while becoming creators yourselves.

To our readers: I hope this Spring issue beckons you into the spirited and searching conversations that make the Solomon Fellowship so special. These essays showcase our students wrestling with the loving wisdom they've inherited from their parents, teachers, and communities—while offering us something of themselves in return.

Thank you for reading. We look forward to hearing your thoughts!

Cordially,
Sarah Baird
Associate Dean of the Solomon Fellowship and
Managing Editor of the Solomon Journal

Symposium

Eva Brann, former Tutor and Dean at St. John's College, and mentor to many, including Solomon Fellowship Director Alan Rubenstein, once said:

"Teaching is above all the controlled public display of delight. A teacher is a lover-in-chief prepared not only to be observed in the activity of love but to beckon students into it."

Do you agree with Ms. Brann? Is there anything about great teaching that she leaves out? What, in your eyes, makes a great teacher?

Learning as Creation: The Power of Jewish Education

By Zachary Krohn

It is no secret that education is one of the highest values of Judaism, and one can give many reasons for why that is the case. Education is the key to Jewish continuity. It is the key to a flourishing Jewish community and a free society. In the Jewish tradition, Torah learning is considered one of, if not the most important *mitzvah.* Tractate Shabbat 119b of the Babylonian Talmud goes so far as to declare: "Reish Lakish said in the name of Rabbi Yehuda Nesia: The world only exists because of the breath of schoolchildren."

Given the supreme importance accorded to education in Judaism, it behooves us to not only understand the origins of this concept, but to analyze its substance. What does a Jewish classroom look like? How should a Jewish teacher teach, and how should a Jewish student learn? Eva Brann, former dean and the longest-serving tutor at St. John's College, Annapolis, understood the act of teaching as "the controlled public display of delight" and the teacher as "a lover-in-chief prepared not only to be observed in the activity of love but to beckon students into it." I believe that the writings of Chazal, our Sages of blessed memory, are rich with insights into these questions, and can shed further light on Brann's vision.

An excellent gateway into this discussion can be found in the Talmud Sanhedrin (99b):

> Reish Lakish said: With regard to anyone who teaches Torah to the son of another, the verse ascribes him credit as though he formed that student…Rabbi Elazar says: It is as though he fashioned [*asa'an*] the words of Torah themselves…Rava says: It is as though he fashioned himself…

One of the first takeaways from this important excerpt is the Talmudic understanding of Torah learning, and by extension, education, as a creative act, first and foremost. Here, Torah is an ever-flowing stream, a giver-of-life each time it is taught anew. Regarding the teacher, the verb used here is *asiyah*—translated as "forming" or "fashioning." Clearly, the teacher has an enormous role to play in the development of—something. In the excerpt above, the Gemara records three opinions regarding exactly what the teacher is creating. According to Reish Lakish, the teacher forms the student. According to Rabbi Elazar, the teacher forms the words of Torah. And according to Rava, the teacher forms himself through the very act of teaching.

Reish Lakish's statement may be the easiest to understand. It is fairly obvious how a student benefits from the transmission of knowledge; indeed, the Binyan Yehoshua (a nineteenth-century Talmudic commentary by Rabbi Joshua

Falk of Lissa) writes that even a person reading a book could be "created" by its author. But in an ideal scenario, where there is face-to-face interaction between student and teacher, a deep bond between the two can form. In fact, Chazal often describe the teacher-student relationship as that of a father and a son. This would seem to support Brann's assertion that "the teacher is a lover-in-chief."

But the opinion of Reish Lakish only forms part of the discussion. It is Rabbi Elazar who challenges us to consider a more compelling aspect of teaching. Rabbi Elazar argues that anyone who teaches Torah to the son of another "is as though he fashioned [*asa'an*] the words of Torah themselves." If the teacher is engaged in the act of creating Torah, what role does the student play in this dynamic? Why does this "creation" require students?

To better evaluate Rabbi Elazar's argument, let us turn to the Mishnah in *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers) 6:6. The Mishnah presents forty-eight different ways in which a person acquires Torah knowledge; among them, "By attending to the sages, By critical give and take with friends, By fine argumentation with disciples." The contemporary commentator Rabbi Francis Nataf offers additional insight into this notion of "argumentation": "The reason is very clear," he writes. "The little ones sharpen the great ones, because they ask more, and then the scholar has to answer." Why have students? Because they deepen one's understanding of the material itself.

Given all that we have uncovered from Reish Lakish and Rabbi Elazar's statements, one question remains: What does Rava's statement add? What does it mean that the teacher "fashions himself"? Here we arrive at the Rambam, Maimonides, arguably one of the greatest Torah scholars in Jewish history. The Rambam writes in his Laws of Torah Learning, 5:12:

> Just as students are obligated to honor their teacher, a teacher is obligated to honor his students and encourage them. Our Sages

declared: "The honor of your students should be as dear to you as your own." A teacher should take care of his students and love them, because they are like sons who bring him pleasure.

It would seem from the Rambam's statement that the "pleasure" brought by students is the primary reason for the teacher's obligation to love them. One might suggest that pleasure from a student's success should not be the only reason for a teacher to love a student—even if a student is struggling, a teacher must love him. But the Rambam felt that Rava's statement, of the teacher's formation, and not Reish Lakish's, was the primary impetus for the teacher to love his students. This speaks to the preciousness of the student in the Jewish classroom; it is not the teacher's role as creator, but the student's role as such, that substantiates this loving relationship.

Let us now return to Eva Brann and her assertion that "teaching is above all the controlled public display of delight." As we've seen from the rabbinic sources, this delight is manifold. In one sense, the delight is a product of the mutual bond between the teacher and student, bound by the unbreakable glue of knowledge, itself cause for jubilation. In another sense, the deeper understanding of the material achieved through the students' inquisitiveness inspires profound contentment in the teacher. Indeed, at the fundamental level, the Talmud is presenting us not with two or three parallel understandings of education but one multi-layered image of the Jewish classroom. In this classroom there is affection. In this classroom there is freedom of thought. And perhaps most importantly of all, in this classroom there are questions.

All the parties who have the privilege to enter this classroom—the students, the teacher, and the Torah in particular—emerge transformed. Yes, in any classroom setting, the primary burden is on the teacher, the "lover-in-chief" to be "prepared not only to be observed in the activity of love but to beckon students into it." But as we have seen from our Sages, the importance of each individual learner cannot be overstated. So, no matter where in the room we happen to be sitting, we all have a crucial role to play in creating this Jewish classroom, thereby allowing ourselves to be created.

Zachary Krohn *lives in Teaneck, New Jersey and attends Torah Academy of Bergen County.*

My Tutors' Joy and the Joys of Tutoring: The Power of Non-Traditional Learning Methods

By Yardena Franklin

Since before I can remember, I have been going to shul with my dad, my very first tutor. Listening to the *davening* and *leyning* long before I could understand what they meant, I was a witness to my father and community's delight in daily prayer and communication with God. Officially, my informal Jewish education started at the age of five, when I started attending public school. My father taught me Chumash, reading the English translation of the *Stone Artscroll Chumash* with me every week. We would meander through the weekly *parsha*, stopping frequently to answer my barrage of questions. From the minutiae of Temple sacrifices to the Binding of Isaac and biblical relationships, I investigated and analyzed everything with my father's hand in mine.

As I grew older, the teachers changed; now my tutors ranged from a Yeshivat Drisha Kollel fellow, to a Gemara teacher, to my grandfather, a Modern Orthodox Rabbi. Their firsthand fascination and joy kept me enchanted, unable to tear my eyes and heart away. I learned with my tutors outside of school, excited to explore all I could about the world of the Torah and the Talmud. My Jewish learning was purely delightful, driven almost exclusively by my own motivation.

These teachers encouraged me to learn and develop my own relationship with Torah and God. As we covered new ground in the Gemara, I built up my weakest skills, breaking my teeth over *Aggadah*, a collection of stories and folklore with challenging Hebrew and complex narrative structures. I learned the structure of a Gemara, equipped with the tools to pursue knowledge on my own. My *chavruta*s, study partners, were

models, showing me a framework I could apply independently.

As the former St. John's tutor Eva Brann alludes to in her quote, "Teaching is above all the controlled public display of delight. A teacher is a lover-in-chief prepared not only to be observed in the activity of love but to beckon students into it," in my experience, good teachers are not only experts in their fields, but model their passion for their students to witness and be inspired from. It is simply not enough to disseminate information to students. In order for students to truly internalize their lessons, teachers must elicit active participation and care from their students.

This is why I believe tutoring and one-on-one learning most closely illustrate Eva Brann's description of teachers as the "lover-in-chief." In traditional classroom settings, with one teacher in front of a class of over twenty students, it is nearly impossible to give each student the time they deserve. This is particularly true in modern society, where many teachers are strained, often overworked and underpaid. It is idealistic to

believe that every student is receiving the proper level of care at the proper pace in this setting.

With the current state of traditional education, in order to effectively "beckon students into it," we should turn to alternate forms of education, such as one-on-one tutoring or small group instruction. With these methods, teachers have the space to develop personal relationships with students, and convey their passion in a way that can more effectively influence their students. It is simply not enough to be a "lover-in-chief" for its own sake; it is critical to share knowledge so that it has a meaningful influence on students' lives.

When working one-on-one, there is a unique opportunity to tailor education to students' interests and needs. As the Chinese proverb states, "Give a man a fish, he'll eat for a day; teach a man to fish, and he'll eat for a lifetime." So too in teaching, the content itself is nowhere near as meaningful as building healthy learning habits. In building such habits, teachers help their students become self-motivated and self-sufficient.

Moreover, Brann's quote necessitates the question: "What comes next?" As students, to whom do we look once we have been beckoned by the calls of delight in learning? Now, we are hooked, ready to explore on our own. My conception of the purest teacher is one who longs for a day when their students do not need them, for when the students have the knowledge, motivation, and skills needed to healthily explore on their own. Similarly, I believe teaching is always intended to be finite.

In the Jewish tradition, the concept of generational knowledge is the foundation of the Oral Torah and the structure of *makhloket*, debate, within the Talmud. In order to propose an alternate interpretation of an authoritative text, or reject another Rabbi's claim, one must cite authoritative texts or opinions held by previous generations of rabbinic leaders. These *makhloket*s are based on the authority of previous leaders, while leaving room for new, independent interpretation in later generations.

This framework of argumentation, which can be studied and learned, means the Jewish canon and the official *halakhic* practices of all times are living and breathing, continually updated and reckoned with. This living practice gives people space to be inspired. From key figures like Rabbi Akiva, who learned Torah for the first time at age 40 before becoming a Talmud *chakham*, to the relationship between students and teachers as laid out in the Talmud, learning is student-motivated and teacher-driven.

Judaism provides a blueprint for a healthy relationship with academic authority, one which intentionally challenges, but ultimately accepts and encourages wisdom. The Gemara in Rosh Hashanah 25a provides a perfect representation of this phenomenon. Discussing a disagreement as to the date of the beginning of the new month:

"When Rabbi Yehoshua heard that even Rabbi Dosa ben Horkinas maintained that they must submit to Rabban Gamliel's decision, he took his staff and his money in his hand, and went to Yavne to Rabban Gamliel on the day on which Yom Kippur occurred according to his own calculation. Upon seeing him, Rabban Gamliel stood up and kissed him on his head. He said to him: 'Come in peace, my teacher and my student. You are my teacher in wisdom, as Rabbi Yehoshua was wiser than anyone else in his generation, and you are my student, as you accepted my statement, despite your disagreement.'"

In this relationship, despite hearing the date calculations of his Rabbi, Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Yehoshua not only disagreed with his teacher, but had matured enough to both recognize his own position and defer to authority.

For Brann, there are two parts to teaching, the passion for one's field, and the ability to communicate that passion to one's students in a way that compels them to continue to learn. In my own life, I've also found it just as important to ask, "What next?"

Yardena Franklin *lives in Riverdale, New York and attends the Bronx High School of Science.*

Lessons from Under Devorah's Date Tree

By Rita Setton

If one were to choose Judaism's most prominent or distinguished teacher, Moshe Rabbeinu or Avraham Avinu instantly come to mind—and with good reason. During their lives, they actively spread Hashem's holy word to *Bnei Yisrael*, and in the Jewish tradition today their examples serve as beacons of Torah learning and teaching. Moshe would sit "from the morning to the evening" judging and teaching the nation, while, according to the biblical commentator Ibn Ezra, Avraham would fearlessly preach truth to Mesopotamian idolaters and convert them to Judaism.

One individual who likely does not come to mind when contemplating the most esteemed teachers in the Tanakh is Devorah the Prophetess. The fourth *shofetet* (judge) in Sefer Shoftim (The Book of Judges), Devorah is not extremely noteworthy in her own right; she would simply judge the people under a date tree in Ramah and teach them. So, what, exactly, makes Devorah the Prophetess so remarkable?

To understand Devorah's significance, we must first consider what makes an outstanding teacher. What are the characteristics of an exemplary educator? Is it simply the ability to impart knowledge to students? Or is there some enigmatic trait that only a formidable teacher can lay claim to?

When closely examining Devorah's story, one can glean an essential understanding of what makes such a great teacher. In the fourth chapter of Sefer Shoftim, Devorah commands her army general, Barak, to wage war on the Canaanite commander Sisera and his army:

וַתִּשְׁלַח וַתִּקְרָא לְבָרָק בֶּן־אֲבִינֹעַם מִקֶּדֶשׁ נַפְתָּלִי וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הֲלֹא צִוָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵךְ וּמָשַׁכְתָּ בְהַר תָּבוֹר וְלָקַחְתָּ עִמְּךָ עֲשֶׂרֶת אֲלָפִים אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי נַפְתָּלִי וּמִבְּנֵי זְבֻלוּן: וּמָשַׁכְתִּי אֵלֶיךָ אֶל־נַחַל קִישׁוֹן אֶת־סִיסְרָא שַׂר־צְבָא יָבִין וְאֶת־רִכְבּוֹ וְאֶת־הֲמוֹנוֹ וּנְתַתִּיהוּ בְיָדֶךָ:

She summoned Barak son of Abinoam, of Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, "The ETERNAL, the God of Israel, has commanded: Go, march up to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun. And I will draw Sisera, Jabin's army commander, with his chariots and his troops, toward you up to the Wadi Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hands." (Judges 4:6-7)

Barak, however, adamantly refused to do so unless Devorah, his teacher, went with him into battle:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ בָּרָק אִם־תֵּלְכִי עִמִּי וְהָלָכְתִּי וְאִם־לֹא תֵלְכִי עִמִּי לֹא אֵלֵךְ:

But Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, I will go; if not, I will not go." (Judges 4:8)

When Devorah agrees to go into battle with Barak, Barak's confidence seems to be almost magically revitalized, because Sefer Shoftim goes on to say that Barak did indeed wage war upon Sisera and his army, and despite being outnumbered, emerged victorious.

וּבָרָק רָדַף אַחֲרֵי הָרֶכֶב וְאַחֲרֵי הַמַּחֲנֶה עַד חֲרֹשֶׁת הַגּוֹיִם וַיִּפֹּל כָּל־מַחֲנֵה סִיסְרָא לְפִי־חָרֶב לֹא נִשְׁאַר עַד־אֶחָד:

Barak pursued the chariots and the soldiers as far as Harosheth-goiim. All of Sisera's soldiers fell by the sword; not one was left. (Judges 4:16)

There is a lesson to be learned here: When a general is going into a war, the first person they pick to accompany them is not typically their teacher. It is usually a battleground expert, a retired intelligence officer, or a strong warrior. Why would Barak decide that it was Devorah who should accompany him?

I recently overheard a fellow student, as he was approaching graduation, tell his English teacher that he felt he couldn't leave the school unless she toughened up on him in the weeks leading up to graduation. She wasn't just his English teacher; she was also a comforting presence and someone who instilled confidence in him. I see this situation paralleled in the story of Barak and Devorah. Barak needed Devorah in battle, not because of her expertise in strategy or her talent with a spear, but because of her ability to instill confidence in her students.

Despite being a well-respected general, Barak was still Devorah's student. It is clear from their story that to be an eminent teacher, it is not only expected but *required* to instill confidence even in the strongest students, to have pupils cling to and refuse to cleave themselves from their teacher. A teacher is, in essence, a leader. Moshe, Avraham, and Devorah did not only teach Jewish law, but they wisely and fearlessly led people despite adversaries like Korach, Sisera, and Nimrod who attempted—and failed—to overthrow them.

Avraham, Moshe, and Devorah all have the traits of exemplary teachers, but these leaders also demonstrated unwavering belief in Hashem. God is the ultimate guide and teacher, a constant and reassuring presence who has the most devoted pupils—*Am Yisrael*. He is always there; as His students, we just need to open our hearts.

Rita Setton *lives in Brooklyn, New York and attends Yeshiva of Flatbush.*

The Jewish Pursuit of Knowledge

By Moriah Schranz

There is a common stereotype that Jewish people are smart, or at least care deeply about their intellectual pursuits and development. While every stereotype is flawed, this particular typecast deserves our attention. Jews are over-represented among the great minds of the modern age, as demonstrated by the approximately twenty percent of Nobel Prize winners of Jewish origin, including household names such as Albert Einstein and J. Robert Oppenheimer. This is no coincidence.

While most of these notable geniuses were secular, many of them credited the role that Judaism played in their lives and successes. Einstein in particular believed that Judaism played a pivotal role in his cultural and ethical values. The ambition of the Jewish mind appears to be independent from strict religious practice, yet intrinsic to the Jewish people. What explains this?

One of the most significant Jewish texts, the Talmud, plays a central role in the Jewish intellectual tradition. Tractate Shabbat 127a reminds us that "the study of Torah is equal to all other *mitzvot* combined." Historically, Jews have stuck to the study of Torah, and by extension, to their ideals, even if it meant risking their lives. Throughout the Spanish Inquisition of the late fifteenth century, Jews continued to study secretly and did not let persecution stop them from educating their children and perpetuating their Jewish legacy.

The secret study and transmission of Torah predates the Inquisition; in antiquity, Jews fled the Greeks to protect their study of Torah, as described in the story of Chanukah. There were secret schools established in many of the ghettos throughout Nazi-occupied Europe. The historical pursuit of knowledge in dangerous times shows just how far Jews have been willing to go for the sake of learning. This impulse appears to have served us well as we entered the modern period.

The late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, a thought leader in both Torah and Western philosophy, highlighted the emphasis Judaism places on education and its pivotal role within the religion in his 2004 book, *From Optimism to Hope*:

> *"Long ago the Jewish people came to the conclusion that to defend a country you need an army. But to defend a civilization you need schools. The single most important social institution is the place where we hand on our values to the next generation—where we tell our children where we've come from, what ideals we fought for, and what we learned on the way. Schools are where we make children our partners in the long and open-ended task of making a more gracious world."*

Rabbi Sacks, a leader of twenty-first century Jewry, understood that we have an ongoing responsibility to perpetuate the Jewish intellectual tradition, and by strengthening our educational institutions we can ensure our future and the success of Jewish minds.

Today, many leading Jewish organizations place a strong emphasis on youth education. They make large financial investments to facilitate the intellectual development of future generations

of Jews. I witnessed this investment firsthand as a fellow at both the Tikvah Fund and the Shalom Hartman Institute. Through these organizations, I frequently find myself in Zoom classes with peers across the country, engaging with ideas and foundational texts of the Jewish and Western traditions.

In a recent class, we discussed Rabbi Sacks's *The Great Partnership* alongside *Republic*. In the midst of this discussion, I took a step back and realized how unique of a position I was in, having the opportunity to discuss one of the greatest philosophers of all time, in the company of my Jewish peers, whom I deeply admire. None of us had to be there, but we saw the intrinsic value in the learning we were doing in our free time. We were eager to discuss and debate, participating in the unbroken chain of Jewish intellectual activity.

Ultimately, this time-honored tradition of Jewish learning is rooted in the desire to seek knowledge, and to ask questions. *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers) teaches, "Who is wise? One who learns from every person." This mindset promotes a willingness, common among Jews, to hear each other out and grow from others. The emphasis on respectful debate may be one of the secrets to the success of Jews in modern society.

It is not easy to be a Jew. Judaism is a religion of many laws, and our people have faced countless persecutions. To truly understand the foundation of Judaism, it is necessary to ask questions, even when a clear answer eludes us. This is taught to us from a very early age. During the Passover Seder, it is tradition that the youngest person present recites the Four Questions, pondering the rituals observed during the holiday. Questions are encouraged in many areas of Judaism, especially from the youngest among us. I attribute our disproportionate intellectual achievements to this foundational, questioning attitude. It is this continuous Jewish pursuit of knowledge, despite the constant chaos of the world, that has helped Judaism remain a thriving religion and a source of inspiration to the world.

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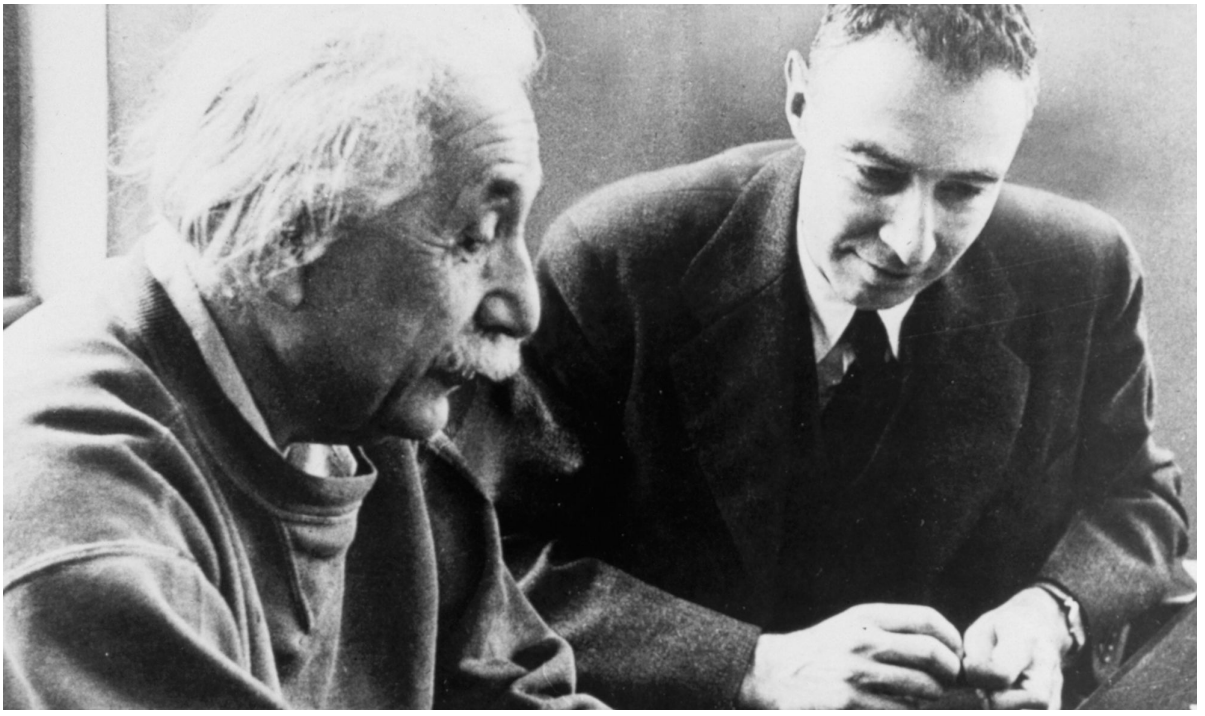

Proud Jews in Public School

By Chani Singer

Reading an article by Moriah Schranz, titled "The Out-of-Town Jew," in the last edition of the Solomon Journal, inspired me to tell a similar story about how, as an American Jew who attends public school, my relationship to Judaism shifted after October 7, 2023.

I have attended public school since I was in seventh grade. As an Orthodox Jew, my religion and connection to Israel have always been a core part of my identity, but they were not things I necessarily advertised about myself. Though I attend a very diverse magnet school in Dallas, I am one of only seven Jewish students at my school, and the only Orthodox Jewish student. After October 7, I felt completely suffocated by the constant discussions about the Middle East that were taking place at my school.

These public conversations, consisting mainly of criticism toward Israel, made me realize how foreign Judaism—as a religion, culture, and history—is to most people. All around me, people were making baseless claims about Israel's motives and its response to the October 7 attack. I felt extremely isolated and unsure of how to carry myself as a Jew in such a hostile environment. It felt like I was stuck with only two options: fight or flight.

At first, I chose flight. Like many others, I was surrounded by people at school who would make anti-Israel comments, wear pro-Palestinian merchandise, or post content on social media in support of Palestine. Though I am fortunate to have had limited direct exposure to anti-Semitism related to the war, I still encountered it a couple of times. About a month after the war broke out, in early November 2023, I noticed several posters hanging in the hallway of my school about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In a mandatory ninth grade

class at my school, AP Human Geography, there is a unit in which students learn about various global conflicts, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As a final project, students are assigned a conflict to research, create posters about, and display in the hallway for others to read.

I knew these posters were full of misinformation, but I had not examined them closely until I saw that students were stopping to read them. That is when I realized people were really using these posters to learn about world events. Horrified, I got up to see what others had been absorbing as truth. None of the posters mentioned the October 7 attack on Israel or any historical context about Gaza. On the timeline of one of the posters, in the segment labeled "2005–Present," the only event listed was Israel's "blockade" on Gaza and its impact on the Gazan economy. The information was completely skewed, if not outright inaccurate.

Another poster's timeline jumped from the "Six-Day War in 1967" to "Now," claiming that all Palestinians had been "closed into the Gaza Strip and West Bank" and that Israel was "bomb[ing] them constantly," with no mention of Israel's experience with terrorism and need for defense. Additionally, on the map displaying the territory, Gaza is drawn in the wrong location, only bordering Egypt, Israel, and without its coastline along the Mediterranean Sea. These posters overflowed with misinformation, and the narratives students were absorbing were completely erroneous. Though this was very troubling, I did not yet feel singled out.

Then, in February 2024, it became personal. It was the Monday after the Super Bowl and the hostage rescue in Rafah. Unprompted, my English teacher started talking about Israel, claiming that the Israeli government used the Super Bowl as a "distraction in the media to make moves on Gaza." In front of my entire AP English class, he went on a thirty-minute rant, saying that, though the Israeli government claims they are trying to take out Hamas because it is a terrorist organization, it's really just because they are brown.

My classmates listened intently as he continued making claim after claim about Jews in America, Jews in Israel, and the war. Some of my friends glanced at me, wondering if I was going to respond. I chose not to, realizing that my teacher was not trying to engage in a conversation, but wanted to express his own opinions and theories as facts. At that moment, I felt threatened and insecure as a Jew.

These two encounters with anti-Israel bias and anti-Semitism at school helped me recognize a common pattern many people follow when learning about a new topic. There are four clear stages of knowledge, confidence, and understanding that I would like to address.

At first, a person knows absolutely nothing about a topic, and therefore, does not feel comfortable discussing it. Then, we learn a little—just enough to scratch the surface. Maybe through browsing some Instagram pages, watching a few videos on TikTok, or reading a couple of articles. People in this stage often feel that, because they have spent some time learning, they know enough to confidently express their stance. Ironically, they are often the loudest.

The third stage is when a person learns some more and realizes the topic is far more complex than they initially thought. At this stage, people often feel hesitant to discuss the subject, recognizing their limited understanding. Finally, the last stage is when a person has dedicated significant time to educating themselves and others, allowing the person to accurately explain the topic and his or her views on it with nuance.

Many people remain stuck in the second stage, including the ninth grade students who made the posters, many of my peers reading the posters, and my English teacher.

These experiences helped me realize that although there are only a few Jewish students at my school, we need to have a voice. We deserve the opportunity to educate people about Judaism, our culture, and our shared connection to Israel. So in September 2024, my Jewish

peers and I started a Jewish Student Union. Every month, the board, composed of the seven Jewish students, works together to organize an event centered around an upcoming Jewish holiday or Jewish tradition. These events are open to anyone who wants to attend, and we typically have around 30 students participate. We have successfully created a space where people feel welcome to learn, ask questions, and explore the beauty of our culture in a space created by proud Jews.

As people learned more about Judaism, they began asking me more questions about Jewish practices. I received questions from classmates about *kashrut,* Shabbat, *halakha* (Jewish law), and the Jewish connection to Israel. Some did not know that Judaism is not just a religion, or what makes someone Jewish according to *halakha*. Most students didn't realize that Jews come from all different backgrounds. Almost no one knew that Jews make up only 0.2 percent of the world's population.

Some of these questions I could answer immediately, while others required further research. Regardless, every question strengthened my pride as a Jew. When I am prompted to learn more about my practices, I find deeper meaning in them. When I get to share my culture with others, I feel more fulfilled. As a religious Jew in a secular environment, I have not only strengthened my outward identity but also deepened my personal practice.

My Jewish pride has become my armor. Though I was initially hesitant to open up about my Judaism, doing so ultimately made my connection to it stronger.

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Why Family History Matters

By Samuel Fields

A couple with all of their possessions ran for dear life as the final call on the dock was made. Traveling to a port in Northern Europe was an arduous trek, but they made it. The woman is far along in her pregnancy, the man hoping to make enough money to send for his sisters, their husbands, and their children, so that they too can partake in freedom. After many days, they arrived in New York Harbor, passing the Statue of Liberty, as so many have done. It acts as a bastion of light and hope—hope that by immigrating, the greatest changes would come. This is a part of my story.

Stories are everything to us. They are how we catch up with people, and entertain or please others. They allow us to forge bonds and make connections. They are concepts that are not limited by any boundaries. And what is most fascinating about them? We all have one to share.

For a moment, think about the neighborhood you live in. From the shopkeeper down the block; to the businessman rushing home from work; to the student, drained from school; and even the people begging for help: they all have a story. It is a commonality that will never cease.

I suggest that the *most* valuable tale we can tell is that of our family history. How our family made it to where they are, what struggles and triumphs they endured; from the culture we inhabit to the jobs our parents have, the schools or camps we attend, or the subjects we like. This all boils down to the foundations of where we came from.

Firstly, let me tell you a little about my story. Maybe that will inspire you to want to share yours. The position of the Jewish people in Europe from the late nineteenth century through the Holocaust was multifaceted. Some enjoyed having professions such as tax collectors, bankers, and lawyers, while living assimilated lives. Others lived in *shtetls* which were plagued with pogroms. Year after year, humble villages would be ransacked with communities displaced or even destroyed.

That experience was what my family, the Dodells, faced. They lived in a humble *shtetl* called Toporov which was then in Poland, and now in Ukraine. My great-great-grandfather, Isak, set out with his wife to Vienna with the hopes of bringing his sisters and their families along later for a better life. Unfortunately this didn't go as planned. When they arrived in Vienna, World War I was brewing and Isak was going to be drafted into the Austro-Hungarian army. That was not a fight he wanted to be a part of.

This is when they quickly packed up with their young son Morris and fled northward to take a ship to the New World. They knew that doing this wouldn't be easy, especially because they had a little one on the way. After much toil, they finally made it to America.

Several years later, they had another child, Philip, who, thank God, still lives today at the age of 97. Morris and my great-grandmother Syliva *z"l* are no longer with us, but they merited to create amazing families and lives for themselves. Morris became the principal at a public elementary school in Brooklyn

and developed a distinguished reputation. His daughter Sue-Ellen became a lawyer after graduating from Columbia Law School. She worked for the New York City government for almost 50 years, and she has been leading a class action suit against the city for the past several years. My great-grandmother Sylvia got married in the early 1940s and had two children, including my grandmother Barbara. Barbara went on to get married in 1965, teaching in Puerto Rico for two years while my grandfather David was attending dentistry school. They would go on to have four children, including my father, and thirteen grandchildren.

On my mother's side, my grandmother is a fourth generation American, and my grandfather, Arthur *z"l* was a first generation American. He became one of the first doctors to be board-certified in both neurology and ophthalmology. He didn't even have to graduate college to be accepted into medical school. His career was extremely successful treating patients from all walks of life, even the Lubavitcher Rebbe!

My grandmother Carol and my grandfather gave birth to two wonderful children: my aunt, Robyn, who is a neurologist, and my mom, Ellen, who has been a Conservative Rabbi for the past 26 years.

I wanted to share my story because I know everyone is unique. In America, especially amongst American Jews, we often share one underlying narrative: we were all immigrants fleeing persecution and terror. Arriving on the shores with uncertainty became our destiny. We live our lives because of those who came before, and it would be shameful to forget their plight. Our comfort is only possible because of what they suffered, endured, and overcame. As Pirkei Avot Chapter 3 Mishnah 1 teaches, "Know from where you came, (and) where you are going."

When our children ask where we come from, it would be embarrassing to be dumbfounded. So, take a moment to research your family name, call your grandparents and ask your loved ones many questions. There may be much richness in the tale. Take genetic tests through Ancestry or other such sites. And the final step is to ensure all of your family history is documented so these stories never get lost in the folds of time.

Please remember that we are nothing without what has come before us. If we don't hold onto our past, those lives would have been in vain. And don't be afraid to share your stories with others. You may just light a spark in someone else's brain to go forth and bring their family tale back to life.

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Our Brother's Keeper

By Hinda Gross

I pray that, by the time this article is published, the bodies of our murdered brothers and sisters have been buried with dignity in our sacred land. I pray that the living hostages are reunited with their families and can begin the healing process. As I write this in spring 2025, I am praying our nation is looking out for each other, that we are supporting our army, and that our soldiers stay God-fearing, strong, clever, and enthusiastic.

At the beginning of the war, I was paired with hostages in whose merit I dedicate myself. One of the hostages that I've devoted my *mitzvot* and *tefillot* to is named Tsachi Idan. I am writing this a day after his body was among the four released in a political deal. Just as I have cried and prayed for Tsachi's return, I hope that my prayers will bring back every single soul who longs for home.

Hoping and praying help to heal us, but they do not fully repair the damage that our memories carry. Where do we find the blueprint to rebuild ourselves and recover the sanctity of our homeland? Can the answer be found in the natural world? Nature moves on; no matter how many times bark is ripped off a tree, it will grow back. So, when will this heartbreak cease? When will this brokenhearted emptiness, like nature, heal itself? The rainy season has come, because of it there are now fresh blossoms all around me. Still, I feel weak and hollow. I know that the moon will shine tonight, and in about a week it will begin to hide again. Such is the cycle of feeling and faith.

I see God's presence; I am angry. I blame Him, I forgive. I lose myself in the world and again, the moon and God seem hidden. I open up, like blossomed flowers, and then I find Him.

Maybe the vitality of the natural world manifests itself in the innocence and vitality of our youth. Maybe that too, is *Am Yisrael*'s redemption. In the nearby park, I see children running up and rolling down the hills. I see children racing down the slides, picking flowers to sniff and taste, and ripping grass out by the tiny fistful. They are free. The purity of our youth is a reminder of how much is on the line. We live as their examples. If we are not taking care of one another, and we harbor *sinat chinam* (baseless hatred) in our hearts, how will our youth respond?

By not loving each other, we are teaching the children of our nation that we do what the enemy does, but we do it from within. This problem of not caring for our brothers is internal, and it is exactly what is preventing us from healing. We must do our part in uniting, forgiving, and believing.

I beseech God to answer and teach me. How many more homes will be broken by the knock of the מערך הנפגעים, the IDF's Casualty Division, which will bring the news of their beloved's last breath? How many more demonstrations, *shiva* visits, and angry families will it take for us to mourn as one, with one broken heart, regardless of difference in customs, language, political leanings, and moral beliefs? How much more blood will be shed? One drop is too much. How many more days will the fathers, brothers, and sons of our nation scream out for the help of God, thirty meters deep in the rot of Jabalia?

Does God expect us to make peace with the murderers of His souls? The men who murdered a ten-month-old baby and his four-year-old brother? Just how many more times will the sight of a young ginger child cause me to cry?

Were the beautiful Bibas souls not tormented enough?

Kfir Bibas was born on my sixteenth birthday. He didn't even make it to his first. I am eighteen now, and only on February 20, 2025, did his remains reach home for a proper burial. We are taught by our tradition that the soul does not abandon the body until it is buried. His has been floating just above, in anguish. Finally, solace has been brought to him now that his body rests in the earth. How can we cope with such a tragedy? His brother Ariel was four years old. Four. Who will bring his case and that of his brother, Ariel, before the heavenly tribunal and testify?

One more hostage returned in a coffin is too much. One more murder is too much. In Bereishit, after Cain murdered his brother Abel, God rebuked him with the words,

מָה עָשִׂיתָ? קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ צֹעֲקִים אֵלַי מִן־הָאֲדָמָה׃

"*What have you done? The blood of your brother screams to me from the earth."*

I feel my brother's blood crying to me from deep within the earth. Cain refused the call, but I won't. When God gave Cain the opportunity to repent, he hid. Are we hiding from God too? The blood of my family is my blood. Their hurt is my hurt. Justice for them is justice for me. So how can I go on living, while I know they are crying?

I have learned through processing this war that alone, I am weak. The visionary scholar Elie Wiesel taught me in his work, *The Trial of God,* that to blame God for my pain hurts me too. He writes: *"*After all, Auschwitz was not something that came down ready-made from heaven. It was conceived by men, implemented by men, staffed by men. And their aim was to destroy not only us but You as well. Ought we not to think of Your pain, too? Watching Your children suffer at the hands of Your other children, haven't You also suffered?"

Wiesel continues, "Let us make up, Master of the Universe. In spite of everything that happened? Yes, in spite. Let us make up: for

the child in me, it is unbearable to be divorced from You so long." We must learn from Wiesel, to first return to God in order to rebuild and to heal. We must remember to relate to Him, and to see and recognize Him, especially during our times of hurt.

Around the world, many are speaking in silence, yet somehow the noise is ear-splitting. Today's Jewish youth have grown up through this; this narrative shapes our lives. Let the world not think any of us will keep our hearts shut or our words inside. We will be the living primary sources to get up on the stand and testify. We will also be the ones who will build, who will study, who will adapt, who will train, who will argue, who will cry, who will embrace, and who will not stop until our family is whole once more. We will do it together. There is no other option. Let our enemies fear the chutzpah of our youth.

The answer to how we can rebuild ourselves through our pain is Cain's last sentence before God rebukes him. When God sees Cain hiding from Him, He asks him the whereabouts of his brother Abel (whom he has just killed) and Cain's answer is as famous as can be.

הֲשֹׁמֵר אָחִי אָנֹכִי׃

"Am I my brother's keeper?"

The blueprint for how *Am Yisrael* must rebuild lies in changing the punctuation from Cain's question into a declarative statement. The way to rebuild and to move forward is to be our brother's keeper. We must take care of one another, advocate for each other, challenge, embrace, and encourage each other. The way to move forward and connect to God is to tell God that we are… אָנֹכִי, הֲשֹׁמֵר אָחִי—our brother's keeper—without question.

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Babel and Job: When Human Certainty Meets Divine Truth

By Benny Marmor

The narrative of the Tower of Babel only lasts nine verses and is sandwiched between two genealogies of the sons of Noah, yet it is one of the most famous and well-known stories in the Book of Genesis. Seemingly an afterthought to the story of creation and the flood, it is a story about humanity, united by a common language, deciding to build a tower to the sky in the land of Shinar—soon to be renamed Babylonia.

Why do the people embark on such a project? "Lest we be scattered abroad on the face of the whole earth," they declare. God disapproves, and descends to stop their work; as punishment, God disperses humanity and "babbles" their speech, providing us with the origin for Babylonia's name. The simplicity of the story is deceptive, and, despite its brevity, the story has inspired pages of commentary attempting to answer the question at the heart of the narrative: where exactly did humanity go wrong?

As stated above, this puzzling story only spans nine verses; of those nine verses, God only speaks in one of them. As such, this verse is central to understanding the mystery at the heart of the story.

וַיֹּאמֶר ה׳ הֵן עַם אֶחָד וְשָׂפָה אַחַת לְכֻלָּם וְזֶה הַחִלָּם לַעֲשׂוֹת
וְעַתָּה לֹא־יִבָּצֵר מֵהֶם כֹּל אֲשֶׁר יָזְמוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת׃

> *"And the LORD said: 'Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is what they begin to do; and now nothing will be withholden from them, which they purpose to do" (Genesis 11:6)*

God articulates three fundamental problems with humankind's behavior. First, that they are one people with one language; second, the inherent act of building the tower is problematic; and third, that "nothing will be withholden" from humankind, that there is nothing holding them back from that which they wish to do.

The Netziv, a nineteenth-century Torah commentator, highlights these elements of God's response and provides a powerful account of this *Dor Hapalagah* (Generation of the Dispersion). Drawing from Midrash, previous commentators, and his own unique approach to biblical text, the Netziv weaves together disparate interpretations to claim that the sin of the tower's builders was that of uniformity.

To the Netziv, "one people" and "one language" describe a totalitarian society intolerant of dissent, building a tower so dominating as to ensure that nobody wanders away to create an alternative community. The Netziv imagines a literal watchtower, enabling the tower's builders to spot nonconformists attempting to leave the land of Shinar. He describes how those caught with different views would actually be burned. The Netziv seemingly pulls this interpretation from other *Midrashim* that identify the leader of the builders as Nimrod, who is described in later midrashic stories as throwing the patriarch Abraham into a furnace when Abraham publicly challenged Babylonian polytheism and recognized one God.

With the Netziv's commentary on the motivations and dynamics of the people depicted in the Genesis narrative, we can attempt to better understand the last part of God's cryptic declaration. The Jewish Publication Society (JPS) Tanakh renders the phrase as "nothing will be withholden from them, which they purpose to do." However, this translation is ambiguous; is God alluding to the power of a common language or the strength of their new city? Additionally, the translation of the verb "יבצר" as "will be withholden" adds to the confusion. Why is the text phrased in this way?

The Hebrew root word "בצר" usually appears in the context of a fortress, but also to refer to famine; when used as a verb, it often appears in the context of cutting grapes or diminishing. As a verb, it appears with similar vowels in the Book of Jeremiah (51:53) with the meaning "to fortify." By reinterpreting the verb "יבצר" as "they will fortify," instead of "will be withholden," a clearer translation of the text emerges, one that reinforces the Netziv's idea:

> "And now, those who do not ascribe to the tower builders' ideology will not fortify themselves against the builders of the tower, no matter what the builders of the tower initiate to do."

If, according to the Netziv's translation, the dissenters are silenced, the continual exchange of ideas will cease. There will be no need for the "fortification" of one's ideas. Dissenting opinions that run counter to those of the ruling power become futile. No one will disagree, because with one language and a completed tower, no one can leave. A biblical totalitarian rule emerges, which necessitates divine intervention.

Like the story of the Tower of Babel, the Book

of Job deals with similar themes; both narratives explore the limits of human ingenuity when compared with an infinitely powerful God. The Book of Job describes the attempts at theodicy by Job and his friends as they try to make sense of the suffering inflicted on Job. God rebukes Job and his three friends, reminding them that He is outside the realm of human understanding. After God's rebuke, Job employs the same language as found in the Tower of Babel story, providing something of an apology while describing his own inadequacy and inability to fully comprehend God's vision for the world.

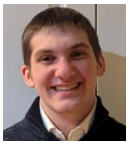
(ידעת) [יָדַעְתִּי] כִּי־כֹל תּוּכָל וְלֹא־יִבָּצֵר מִמְּךָ מְזִמָּה׃

> *"I know that Thou canst do everything, And that no purpose can be withholden from Thee" (Job 42:2)*

Pay attention to the striking parallels between this verse and the language from Genesis. Job 42:2 is the only other place in Tanakh where the roots "בצר" (withhold/fortify) and "זמם" (initiate) appear together. However, instead of the language being used by God to describe man (as in Genesis), here man is attempting to describe God. The Hebrew sentence structure and vowels on "יבצר" are identical in Genesis and in Job. Reinterpreting the Job verse to refer to fortification yields this result: "I know that you can do anything, and no one can fortify [themselves] from what you initiate."

Together, the stories of the Tower of Babel and the suffering of Job shed light on each other and speak to a parallel truth of human existence. The *Dor Hapalagah* in Genesis teaches us the importance of allowing difference to make its voice heard. No individual should impose their singular experience of the world on others. The Book of Job cautions us that humans are wise but fallible, and despite the importance of human agency, there is still God's ultimate truth that must be heeded.

Ultimately, both narratives advocate humility. Humility before our fellow humans means accepting that we cannot enforce a universal truth on everyone. Humility before God requires us to accept that despite the chaos of the world, there is a universal truth that lies beyond human comprehension. In a world where countless voices clamor for attention, it is reassuring to remember that, even if it is beyond our grasp, there does exist a singular truth that unites us all.



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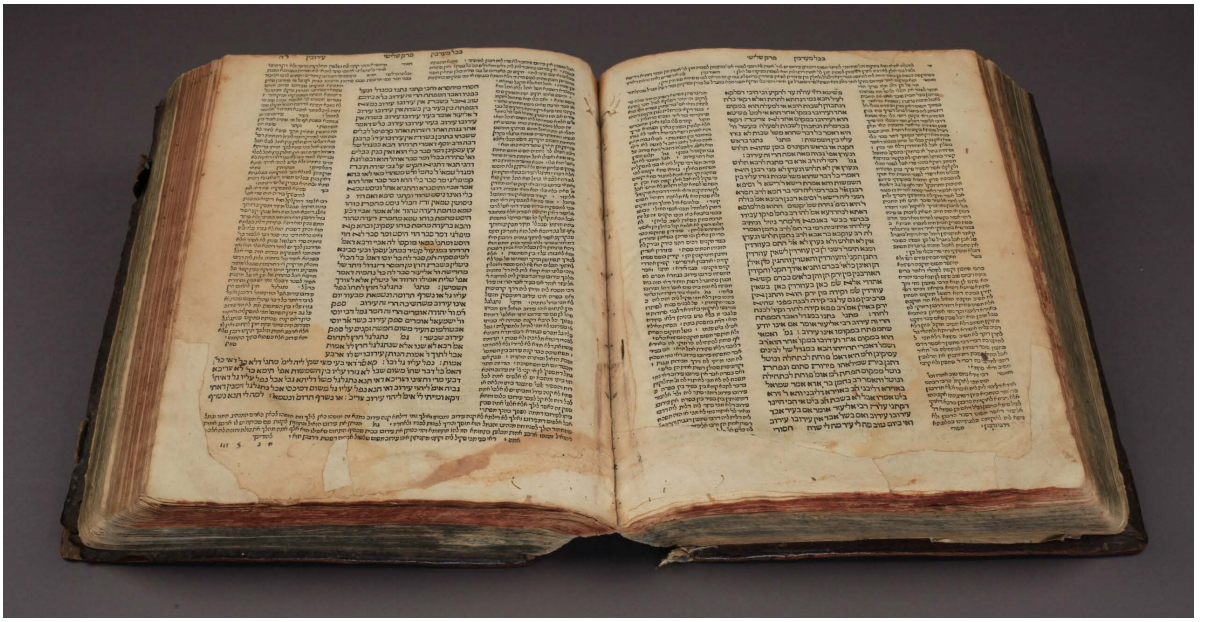
Who Wrote the Talmud Bavli?

By Eitan Yunger



Who wrote the Talmud Bavli? This question is more complicated than it seems. Many people have attempted to give a simple answer. The Geonim. The Savoraim. The Amoraim. Ravina and Rav Ashi. The Jewish tradition offers many answers, but they leave me unsatisfied. It's a question worth investigating in depth.

We should first understand what the Talmud Bavli—the Babylonian Talmud—is. The Talmud Bavli has two main components: the Mishnah and the Gemara. The Mishnah is a collection of Jewish laws (attributed to the Tannaim, the scholars of the immediate post-Second Temple period) and the Gemara is the commentary on the Mishnah, a series of debates, discussions, stories, and analyses that stretch over a period of several hundred years. The scholars of the Gemara are referred to as the Amoraim. The Gemara itself can be separated into three main categories: the *halakha* (law), the discussions to determine the *halakha*, and the *aggadah* (parables). Each of these categories are easily distinguishable from each other and serve different purposes.

To determine who wrote (or compiled) the Talmud Bavli, we should begin with a key source on this period: the *Iggeret* (letter of) Rav Sherira Gaon. Rav Sherira Gaon lived in tenth century Pumbedita (Babylonia), and learned and taught Torah at the same yeshiva as many of the Amoraim did hundreds of years before him. During his time there, the prominent Jewish community in Kairouan (modern day Tunisia) was facing heavy opposition from the Karites, who were Jews that did not believe

in the validity of the *Torah She-ba'al Peh* (the Oral Torah). The rabbi of Kairouan, Rav Yaakov bar Nissim, sent a letter to Rav Sherira Gaon in Babylonia asking him to detail the history of the Mishnah and Gemara to help his community maintain their faith in the Oral Torah.

In response to Rav Yaakov bar Nissim's request, Rav Sherira provided a lengthy history of the Tannaim and Amoraim, emphasizing the validity of the Mishnah and Gemara. Because Rav Sherira had lived (relatively) closer to the period of the Amoraim, and had learned in the Academy of Pumbedita, this *Iggeret* is the most important rabbinic text on that time period.

However, one key issue with the letter should be noted: two versions of Rav Sherira's *Iggeret* exist today. The French version of the letter was popular among Ashkenazi rabbis in Europe and promulgates the claim that the Mishnah was not written down by Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi (referred to simply as "Rebbi"), but rather that he organized the Oral Torah. Many great rabbinic commentators of Ashkenaz, including Rashi, Smag, and Ritva, endorsed this approach.

The other version of Rav Sherira's letter, the Spanish version, is written in a rare Greek script, and argues that Rebbi did in fact write the Mishnah. This is the view taken by the great Sephardic commentators, including the Rambam and Rabbi Shmuel HaNagid. For centuries, the Spanish version of Rav Sherira's *Iggeret* has been considered more authoritative because it was passed down for many centuries within the Sephardic community. (It is important to note, however, that many contemporary rabbis, scholars, and academics have claimed that the French version is more authentic.)

The *Iggeret* of Rav Sherira offers an important foundation but does not entirely resolve the question of the Gemara's authorship. The letter still leaves significant ambiguity. As such, several additional theories prevail.

Some claim that the Gemara was written by the Geonim, the rabbinic leaders in Babylonia from approximately the sixth to eleventh centuries. Why? Firstly, many of the earliest manuscripts we have of the Gemara are dated to the time of the Geonim. Secondly, subsequent rabbinic authorities, including the Rashbam (Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir) argued that Rav Achai of the Gemara was actually Rav Achai Gaon, who lived 300 years after the last Amoraim.

Not everyone accepts these theories; just because our earliest manuscripts are dated to the time of the Geonim does not mean that earlier manuscripts didn't exist. With regards to the identity of Rav Achai, many contemporary scholars suggest that he is of the last generation of Amoraim, since he is mentioned in that context in Rav Sherira Gaon's *Iggeret*.

Another common answer is that Ravina and Rav Ashi wrote the Gemara. The basis for this claim is found in the Gemara itself in tractate Bava Metzia (86a). In this excerpt, Ravina and Rav Ashi are referred as *"Sof Hora'ah,"* commonly understood to mean the "last of the Amoraim." They are believed to have assembled the *halakhot,* legal discussions, and the *aggadah.*

Historically, there was a significant increase in anti-Jewish decrees in Babylonia during Ravina and Rav Ashi's lifetime, so it would make sense that this pair would feel the urgency to assemble the Gemara in order that it would not be forgotten in the mounting upheaval. There are also several mentions of Ravina and Rav Ashi in the *Iggeret*; according to Rav Sherira, after Ravina passed away, *"Hora'ah* (the arrangement of Amoraic statements) ceased." But again, Rav Sherira is inconclusive on the question of the Gemara's ultimate authorship.

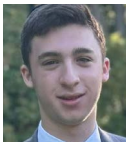
There is another prevailing claim: that the Savoraim wrote the Gemara. The Savoraim were the generation of rabbis in Babylonia who came immediately after the Amoraim, but before the generation of the Geonim. Not much is known about Savoraim (their period is considered to have lasted only 100 years), but we do know the identities of some of them from the *Iggeret*.

The word Savoraim means "explainers" because they were the first generation after the "*Sof Hora'ah"* to attempt to explain the *halakhot,* legal discussions, and *aggadah* of the Amoraim. Rav Sherira indicates in the *Iggeret* that while Ravina marked the end of *Hora'ah*, the Savoraim continued to develop the Gemara, often adding their own explanatory material. Rav Sherira cites several passages in the Gemara attributed directly to the Savoraim, potentially undermining the theory that Rav Ashi and Ravina finalized the entire text.

One prominent rabbi of the Savoraim, Rabbah Yosi, is even described as the *"Sof Hora'ah"* of *his* era, with Rav Sherira declaring that "the Talmud was completed" during his lifetime. Rav Yechezkel Sarna, in *Daliyot Yechezkel*, interprets this to mean that the final Savoraic commentaries were inserted into the Gemara during this period. Like the Geonim who would come after them, the Savoraim faced waves of severe persecution, giving them another strong motivation to preserve the *Torah She-ba'al Peh* in written form.

Ultimately, the question of the Gemara's authorship remains unresolved. To me, it seems most probable that the text of the Gemara was assembled at the end of the Amoraic era by Ravina and Rav Ashi, and then the Savoraim added explanatory notes in the text during the lifetime of Rabbah Yosi. Therefore, the final text of the Gemara was likely assembled by the Savoraim around 516 CE, which is approximately when Rabbah Yosi passed away.

This mystery of the Gemara's authorship reminds us of the complex layers of the Talmud Bavli itself, and the many generations of Jewish leaders who worked to preserve, explain, and transmit the Oral Torah. We too have the responsibility to continue this tradition of transmitting the Gemara to our own generation, and those who come after us.



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INTERVIEW

More Than Football

By Frankie Torkin

In my last interview for the Solomon Journal, I spoke with Generation Z (Gen Z) Americans who decided to make the leap to join the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Here, I highlight another member of Gen Z who has dedicated his early years to showing people around the world that any goal is possible, especially when leaning on core Jewish values. His name is Sam Salz. Sam walked into the doors of Texas A&M University having never played a game of organized football in his life. Sam worked for nine months straight to make the Division 1 football team. He is considered to be the only Orthodox Jewish Division 1 football player in history. Sam's story is a testament to the fact that any goal is possible with determination and the correct work ethic.

Give us some background please. Where did you go to high school and how was that Judaism-wise? How did that background get you to where you are today?

I went to Kohelet Yeshiva High School in Philadelphia. It was just a typical Modern Orthodox school. From there, a bunch of kids went to the IDF, a lot of kids went to Pitt [University of Pittsburgh], and then there were always some kids who went to the Ivies.

How did you land at Texas A&M and its Division 1 football team?

I liked Texas A&M. I liked the values of the school. It was different, something about it just stood out to me. They have very good kosher food, no anti-Semitism, and no BDS. There is a great Jewish community there—not huge—but very active. When I got to Texas I decided to pursue sports and the football team. There was something in me that was like, I'm going to do this. I'm going to do this. I'm going to go forward with it and see what happens along the way. I asked my friends—because you have to have good counsel, good advice—I asked them

what they thought about it. I was careful about who I selected. People who were negative, I never asked them about it. I asked people who were pragmatic, who I also knew would believe in me.

The way I made it on the team was almost never done before in college football history. I trained outside of the facility every day for nine months. I played my first game, my first snap, in November against New Mexico State. I've realized that the real reason why I tried this was that I wanted to inspire people. I wanted to show people that you can be successful and *shomer mitzvot,* especially on one of the biggest stages. On top of that, I wanted to show that you can go out and succeed, you can fulfill your purpose in life, even when people believe the odds are stacked against you. I wanted to inspire people through that.

What are some challenges related to your Judaism that came up during your journey?

When I was training to make it on the team, I would say that one of the challenges at that time was that it wasn't easy to get kosher meat in College Station. So it was harder to gain calories food wise. With that in mind, I had to eat a lot of beans and rice to get what I needed in terms of nutrients. Regarding Shabbat, I always understood what that was going to be, and that was part of the goal. If I could be successful not playing on Shabbat in college football, then people should be able to see that and think, "in my life, maybe I don't need to take the test if it's on Rosh Hashanah or a different holiday."

What do you seek to add to the world with these strong inspirational methods—on a Jewish level and beyond?

I would like people to realize that Shabbos, kosher, and their *yiddishkeit* are not going to hold them back. I would like to see people taking time to connect with God on a personal level. I would like to see people being proud of who they are and walking around openly without hiding the *yarmulkes* or whatever they may wear. I would like to see Jews being proud again, and Jewish kids being knowledgeable about Judaism. On a broader level, outside of the Jewish realm, I would like to see people going out and fulfilling their dreams and living a life that's unique to them—as opposed to being this kind of cookie-cutter person that people are often forced to be.

You've obviously accomplished an incredible goal in your life. What advice would you give to young Jews looking to accomplish a major goal of their own?

First and foremost, do it for a holy purpose. You elicit the help of God that way. Having the why is obviously very important. I would say, secondly, don't let the thought of a barrier keep you from breaking it. Sometimes we put up walls and we believe that these walls can't be broken. But the thing is, most people believe they can't be broken, but no one's ever tried to break them. If you really push and try to break it, you can.

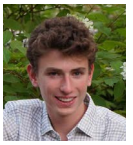
Can you elaborate on the idea of holy purpose? What does it actually mean to align with a holy purpose?

It's very simple. Every action a person does, and you'll see this across the sports world especially, must be with intent and with direction. And thus, when you go out to accomplish a goal, you must have a reason for why you want to accomplish it. Now, having a holy purpose for accomplishing a goal, that is the *ikar* because that's why we are created. To bring in a little bit of a hasidic concept, it's to make this a dwelling place for God in the lower world and utilizing our talents to do that. And thus, if you use your talents for vanity, it's one thing. But if you really want to succeed in a way that is meaningful to people, you have to do it for a holy purpose, and you elicit the help of God in accomplishing that goal. God has played the main role in my journey. I put in the work. I worked hard and ate, slept, and dreamt football.

But once you figure out your purpose—having a holy purpose—you can't stop because you remove yourself from the ground. You remove yourself from the limitations that you place on yourself. You say: I am with God. I'm with God and therefore I will succeed. I'm doing this for God. And thus the limitations that being human places on you, don't exist.

What do you see yourself doing beyond college football?

God willing, I'm obviously working to make it into the NFL. But beyond that, I want to be a motivational speaker. There is a lot that I could talk about. Whether it's, on the Jewish side, being the first *shomer* Shabbat Jew to play Division 1 football, I can talk about that. And then believing in yourself; believing in yourself succeeding; going out, working hard, making the most of every day, and just being obsessed with your goals and fighting until you accomplish them.



Frankie Torkin *lives in New York City and attends SAR Academy.*

Applying Halakhic Ethics to Twenty-First Century Science

By Marc Dweck

The rapid pace of scientific advancement has fundamentally transformed our world, presenting novel ethical challenges that demand careful consideration. As humanity pushes the boundaries of what's possible through genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, and groundbreaking medical procedures, it is paramount to find ways to apply timeless ethical principles to these unprecedented scenarios. *Halakha* (Jewish law) exemplifies how ancient wisdom can successfully adapt to and guide us through modern technological developments.

While many believe that ancient principles should be abandoned in favor of modern understanding, we—as Jews, a people of an ancient religion—fundamentally disagree. Our tradition demonstrates that timeless wisdom can provide crucial guidance in emerging contexts. Moreover, *halakha's* ability to evolve has always been tied to its sophisticated approach to emerging challenges, which can provide additional guidance for these ever-evolving technological times.

High school students now regularly engage with technologies that were once confined to advanced research laboratories—from genome sequencing to artificial intelligence programming. In many Jewish Day Schools, this scientific progress has been met with equally rigorous analysis in *halakha*. In my own experience, high school *halakha* curricula now combine traditional Jewish legal principles with contemporary scientific challenges, exploring complex topics like abortion, genetic testing, and the determination of death through a sophisticated *halakhic* lens. As science continues to venture into uncharted territories, these dynamic yet deeply rooted principles offer crucial insights for addressing the complex moral questions of our time.

A prime example of how students engage with these principles can be found in the study of medical ethics, particularly organ donation and transplantation. In a careful analysis of organ donation through a *halakhic* lens, students learn how to apply ancient wisdom to medical innovations. The following exploration of Jewish law's approach to organ donation illustrates the kind of sophisticated ethical reasoning that I've encountered in my course work, particularly in a class titled "Health and Halacha: Sources and Contemporary Conversations," taught by Rabbi Asher Bush.

Organ transplantation, while revolutionary in saving millions of lives, presents complex ethical challenges within Jewish law. The central question emerges: does the Jewish obligation to preserve life extend to mandatory living organ donation—a process where a healthy individual would donate a vital organ to save another person's life? It is a halakhic

precept and a tenant of common human decency to do anything in one's power to save another's life. But the question becomes more nuanced when we consider the potential risks involved in organ donation.

The foundational ruling here comes from the Radbaz (Rabbi David ben Zimra) in the early 1500s. Addressing a scenario where a tyrant ruler threatened to kill one person unless another person allowed their limb to be amputated, he determined that while making such a sacrifice is commendable, it is not obligatory. He notably characterized those who would risk their lives through such sacrifice as "pious, but foolish." This ruling provides the framework for modern organ donation ethics, establishing it as a praiseworthy but non-mandatory act when significant risk exists.

Though this applies to donations of organs (where there is substantial risk), other minimally invasive procedures such as blood and bone marrow donation—where risk is virtually nonexistent—raise other concerns. Is one obligated to donate if it will cause pain or substantial discomfort?

Rashi, commenting on a Gemara in Sanhedrin, rules that one must do anything short of putting themself in danger to save someone in peril, including, but not limited to, enduring physical or monetary strain. Contemporary Rabbis, led by Rav Hershel Schachter, have interpreted this ruling to apply only to a case where someone is in immediate danger and will die without the transplant. Therefore, one is only required to donate blood when they know it is needed to perform a lifesaving procedure. Similarly, though one is not required to get tested to see if they are a match for bone marrow donation, once they decide to do so they are required to donate.

The ethics surrounding organ donation have become more complex as the methods for determining brain death have evolved. Since the inception of the field, organ donation has been governed, for Jew and non-Jew alike, via the Dead Donor Rule, which prohibits the donation

of vital, non-regenerating organs from living donors.

The Dead Donor Rule faces reexamination as medical technology enables maintenance of bodily functions after complete brain failure. Modern technology such as extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) machines can now sustain heartbeat, circulation, and other physical functions even when the brain has irreversibly ceased all activity, creating a new category of potential donors whose status as "living" or "dead" remains ethically contested. The question of whether brain death constitutes true death—and whether it should determine a person's eligibility for organ donation—remains a contentious issue among contemporary scholars, including within the Jewish community, where the debate continues to evolve.

Jewish scholars universally accept the principle behind the Dead Donor Rule, preventing one from sacrificing themself to save another, with Rashi famously declaring "Who knows whose blood is redder?" (Sanhedrin 64a).

However, there exists no unified position among scholars on the status of brain death. While traditional sources reference respiration, heartbeat, and movement as determinants of death, these criteria reflect historical biological understanding rather than moral or *halakhic* principles.

The Rambam's commentary on post-mortem movement provides significant support for accepting brain death as true death. He argues that physical movement indicates life only when coordinated by a central source: the brain. Modern scholars have extended this reasoning to brain death, equating physiological "decapitation" (the severance of brain-body connection) with physical decapitation. Still, many have reservations adopting this approach, so the issue remains an ongoing debate.

This rigorous engagement between *halakha* and the modern medical landscape demonstrates the dynamic capacity of Jewish law to address unprecedented technological advances, establishing vital precedents that will shape religious and ethical responses for generations to come—from artificially developed organs to future biomedical innovations we have yet to imagine.

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What I Saw on the Hill: Rediscovering Patriotism as a Senate Page

By Holden Demain

This past fall, I joined twenty-eight other high school juniors from around the country to spend a semester serving as a United States Senate Page. It turned out to be one of the best experiences of my life. We woke up at 5:00 AM each day, went to school for four hours in the basement of our dorm building, and then headed out for a full day of work in the Senate.

The United States Senate Page Program dates back to Daniel Webster's appointment of the first Page in 1829. The program has evolved since then, but it still consists of teenagers preparing the Senate chamber for sessions, delivering legislative correspondence around the Capitol and Senate office buildings, and providing various forms of support to Senators during sessions. We fill cups of water, hold doors, and pass notes to United States Senators. The work might not be glamorous, but being present on the Senate floor gave us a unique glimpse into how the upper chamber of our democratic government really functions.

Yet today, most people do not find this as impressive as they once did. We are living in a time when political discourse is characterized by a pervasive lack of faith in our governmental institutions. According to a 2014 Pew study, only 22 percent of Americans trust the government to "do what is right," a historic low since this research began to be conducted. Perhaps even more ominous, in 2014, almost a third of American voters viewed the other party as a "threat to the nation's well-being." That number is expected to increase dramatically once the 2024 Pew numbers are released.

Furthermore, many Americans perceive an increasing politicization of criminal prosecutions, presidential pardons, and the judicial branch as a whole. This has been a cause for fear, and they worry that our country cannot withstand these partisan battles over the nature of our democratic institutions. Many Americans are afraid that American democracy could fall apart, and they question whether we can make it through these troubled times.

When I arrived on Capitol Hill, I was filled with naivete and excitement, like dewy-eyed Jefferson Smith from Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (a fantastic movie that I strongly recommend for those seeking to understand our political institutions). I loved the idea of politics and was giddy at the chance to see our polity operate. The Senate wasn't exactly what it is in the movies, and though my expectations didn't necessarily fit reality, I was inspired by what I saw there. Being a Page actually imbued me with a deep conviction in the future of our democracy.

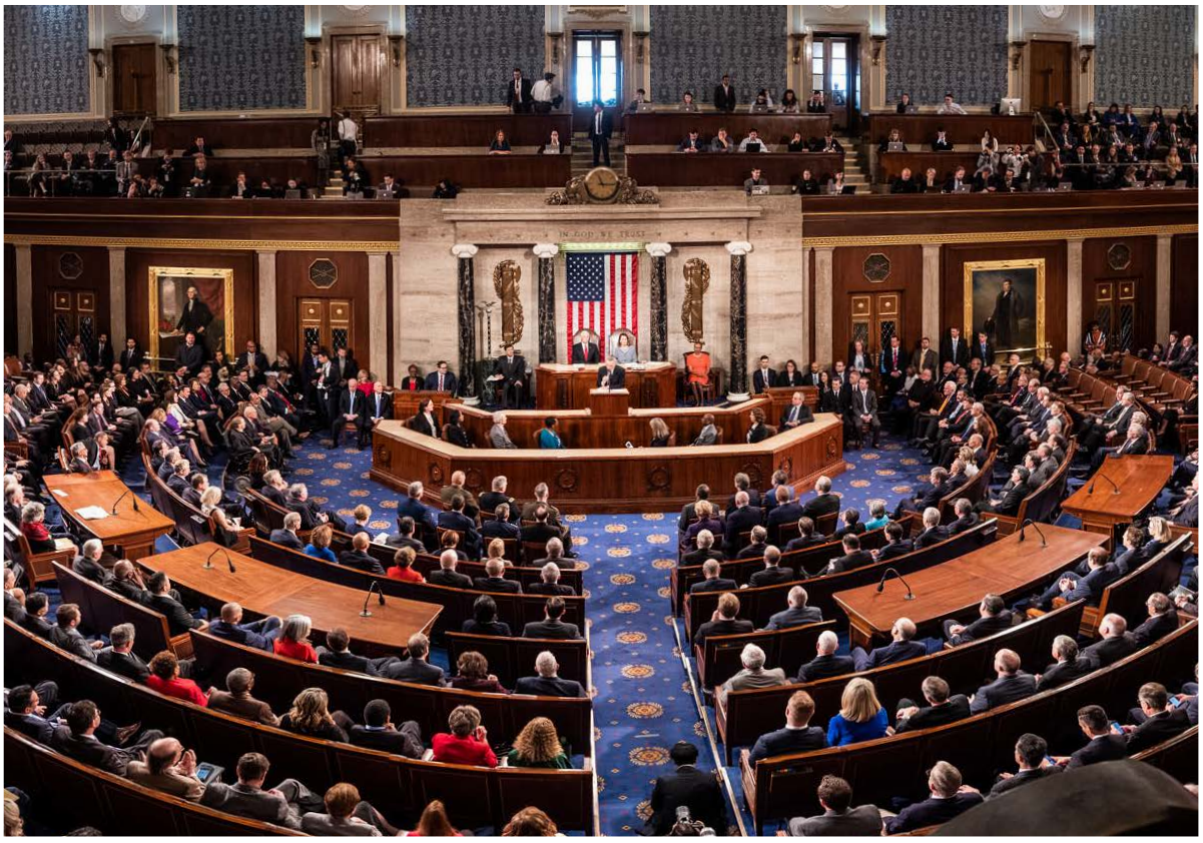
Most people don't see everything that happens on the Hill. Sitting on the rostrum on the Senate

floor, however, I had the privilege of listening to our nation's leaders talk to each other informally about everything from renting apartments in DC, the latest TV shows they were watching, their top restaurant recommendations, even which tie knots are best. Senators step across the aisle, both literally and figuratively, to chat and strengthen friendships with their colleagues on the other side. These personal connections aren't portrayed in the media, but the Pages notice them, and we appreciate their significance.

I was also struck by how much the Senators and their staff actually knew about the issues under discussion. Even though I disagreed with many of the speeches given, almost all of the speeches were based on facts and conveyed informed opinions. Whether a senator was arguing for or against a specific bill, they spoke eloquently and persuasively, with respect and understanding of the other side. This kind of intelligent debate is what makes the Senate the "world's greatest deliberative body," and people should pay attention to the fact that such debate still occurs.

Prior to serving as a Page, I didn't understand how power was distributed in the federal government. I still don't completely understand it, but it isn't because governmental power is an inscrutable mystery that only a select few oligarchs can master. Rather, it's because the United States government is a complicated beehive where each bee plays a specific, narrow role. There is no "secret cabal" running our government, simply because it would be too complicated to facilitate such a thing. For me, it was reassuring to realize that no one person, even the President, makes all the decisions for the American people. This distributed power is what the founders intended.

Today, there are copious complaints and criticisms levied against our democracy. Less



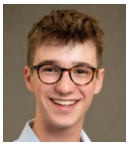
prevalent are optimistic, hopeful defenses of the state of our Union. I believe that much of the fear and apprehension that surrounds American democracy today is a self-fulfilling prophecy. The more clamor there exists about the state of American democratic life, the more fragile it seems. The solution to the problem begins with us.

The first step is for the American populace to pay attention to the constructive deliberation within the Senate rather than its most partisan moments. As Pages, we watched the passing of hundreds of bills by unanimous consent, a far more common occurrence than a partisan vote. Every Senator understands the gravity of the office which they are blessed with, and all of them are serious about improving the lives of their constituents. They all share a deep-seated sense of patriotism. We asked Senators Britt and Booker what all the Senators have in common. (I mean, there are 330 million Americans, but only 100 Senators. What separates them from the pack?) Both Senators, who are entrenched on opposite sides of the aisle, agreed that every one of the 100 shares a love of country. This was modeled by Booker and Britt, two Senators who worked so hard and gave such passionate speeches about the issues that mattered to them, who could also come together for the American people at the end of the day.

Next, we need to develop an appropriate American Studies curriculum for elementary, middle, and high school that, while acknowledging and reckoning with the complexity of our history, shows how profoundly and uniquely great American history has been. The Senate Page School taught me that the United States isn't perfect, but that we should love our country enough to be willing to work for change. In my study of American history, reading countless biographies, watching many documentaries, and of course, taking AP United States History, I've been amazed by what this country has been able to overcome. I'm amazed that America was able to agree on a revolutionary form of government for its citizens, fight a war that threatened to tear the country apart and emerge morally victorious, and defeat the greatest evils around the world. Our democracy has given us lightbulbs, the internet, baseball, and so much more. It takes commitment and work from all of us to continue our shared American story.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we must retain our compassion and respect for dissension. Alexis de Tocqueville, in his *Democracy in America,* warned against polarization. He implored Americans not to mischaracterize the views of others and not to become so emotionally invested in our leaders that we lose our "reasoned and tranquil sentiment."

What I saw in the Senate, though it may not look like it from the outside, was a bastion of bipartisanship. As a former Senate Page, I feel a renewed responsibility to carry the lessons I learned into family debates over dinner, conversations with friends, and in all spheres of political dialogue and education. I hope as a country, we extend this spirit of unity, kindness, and mutual respect that I saw in the Senate to all our fellow Americans, on both sides of the aisle.



Holden Demain *lives in Denver, Colorado and attends Denver Jewish Day School.*

Good Fences Make Good Nations: A Shared Policy in Both Judaism and Current American National Security

By Jack Yunis

According to most major polls, borders and immigration played one of the largest roles in President Donald Trump's victory in the 2024 elections. The concept of borders is an ancient one, and every war and treaty that establishes borders reinforces their role in defining a nation. This is precisely what President Trump meant when he famously said, "If you don't have borders, then you don't have a country."

Borders have also played a significant role in religion, culture, and literature. Robert Frost, one of the great poets of the twentieth century, wrote that "Good fences make good neighbors."

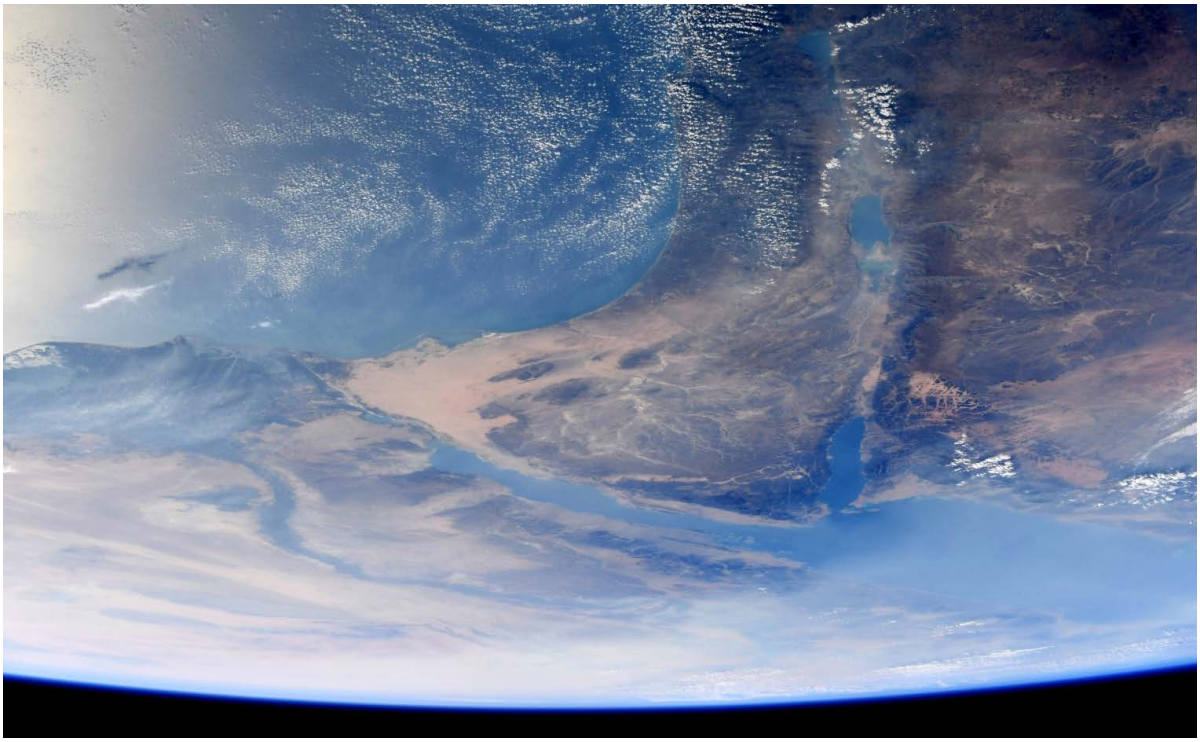
Here is an example of the importance of borders in the Torah:

> *"Command the children of Israel, and say unto them: When ye come into the land of Canaan, this shall be the land that shall fall unto you for an inheritance, even the land of Canaan according to the borders thereof." (Numbers 34:2)*

Indeed, the renewed focus on the integrity of the borders of the United States is entirely consistent with the Jewish concept of a nation state. The Torah's description of national borders is complex and links the duties of the individual Jew to collective national responsibilities. Starting from Abraham's journey to the geographic boundaries set by God for the children of Israel, the Torah presents borders not just as physical markers but also as defining elements of national identity and responsibility.

Rabbi Menachem Leibtag notes that in God's promises to Abraham, the land is described in very general terms, without any definite borders. For example, before Abraham famously departs his birthplace of Ur Kasdim, God tells him in Genesis 12:1, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land which I will show you." In a later prophecy in Genesis 13:15, God tells Abraham at Bet-El: "Raise your eyes and look out from where you are...for I give all the land which you see." Later, the promise to Abraham is much more specific. At the Covenant Between the Parts (*Brit Bein HaBetarim*), God tells Abraham:

"To your offspring I assign this land, from the river of Egypt [i.e. the Nile] to the river, the river Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18-20)



This version of the borders of the promised land is expansive, stretching from modern-day Egypt to modern-day Iraq and would also have included most of modern-day Syria and Jordan. Shortly thereafter, just before God commands Abraham to perform *brit milah*, God describes the boundaries of the land of Israel quite differently:

> *"And I shall establish My covenant between Me and you, and your descendants...and I assign the land in which you sojourn to you and your offspring to come, all the land of Canaan,...and I shall be for you a God" (Genesis 17:7-8)*

In this version, the borders of the promised land are much smaller. As with every instance of differing descriptions of the same entity in the Torah, the Torah is seeking to send a message, and in this case, about national borders and national obligations.

To understand the difference between these versions of the borders of the Land of Israel and the lessons this discrepancy teaches, it is important to review how the Torah develops the concept of what constitutes a nation, and what is required to be a citizen of a nation. In the text of the Covenant Between the Parts, God assures Abraham that his offspring will indeed conquer the Land, and indeed it will not happen until the distant future—four hundred years will pass, during which Abraham's offspring will endure slavery in Egypt.

Only afterward will the children of Israel gain their independence and conquer the "promised land." As Rabbi Leibtag notes, "this covenant reflects the historical/national aspect of *Am Yisrael's* relationship with God, for it emphasizes that Avraham's children will become a sovereign nation at the conclusion of a long historical process." By contrast, the text describing the *brit milah* emphasizes a more personal relationship between God and His people, specifically, at the level of the individual or the citizen. This ever present connection between God and the children of Israel is not necessarily related to any form of national sovereignty and exists independent of a nation state.

From the story of Abraham and the covenants into which he entered with God, it is plain to see the centrality of national borders in Judaism. It is for this reason that organized Jewish opposition to traditional national borders, as seen through organizations like the HIAS (formerly Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), which is vociferously opposed to the President's border policies, is so out of place, and moreover, that President Trump's insistence on restoration of strictly enforced national borders is entirely consistent with Jewish ideals.

During his first term as president, Trump said, "I will fulfill my sacred obligation to protect our country and defend the United States of America.…We will defend our borders, we will defend our country." The President's choice of words is interesting and perhaps deliberately chosen to emphasize the connection between national borders and his obligation as president to protect the American people; in other words, this is his covenant with the American people.

Far from being an abstract concept or idea in which anyone is permitted to enter and exit at will, nations have always been defined by borders. Borders imply an obligation of the nation to its citizens and vice versa. One theme that Trump repeatedly emphasized during his first term as president as well as in his 2024 campaign is the fundamentally unjust nature of open borders, and importantly, for legal immigrants. In a November 2018 speech, he said,

"Mass, uncontrolled immigration is especially unfair to the many wonderful, law-abiding immigrants already living here who followed the rules and waited their turn. Some have been waiting for many years. Some have been waiting for a long time. They've done everything perfectly.…But they have to come in on a merit basis, and they will come in on a merit basis."

Just as God established his covenant with Abraham, which heavily relied on His setting apart for Abraham a defined piece of land— the promised land—so too, the United States is a covenantal nation and has responsibilities to the citizens who adhere to the law of our nation. This requires just enforcement of clear laws against unchecked immigration.

Until recent years, clear policies towards border enforcement in the United States would not have been considered controversial. For example, in 1996 Democratic President Bill Clinton signed legislation further expanding border enforcement with the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, and famously stated, "We are a nation of immigrants …but we are also a nation of laws." The revival of strong border policies is not only a return to more reasonable policies of the recent past, but also, entirely consistent with some of the ancient ideas that are described in the Torah.

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Values and Interests: Examining Israeli Relations with Abraham Accords Countries Post-October 7

By Hannah Blugrind

Throughout its history, Israel has faced a tumultuous relationship with its Arab neighbors. From the outset, Israel fought against six Arab countries to establish its independence. Over time, however, many of those countries began establishing diplomatic relationships with Israel, primarily driven by the potential economic benefits. Despite these diplomatic advances, according to all major polls, the majority of Arabs in the Middle East continue to oppose the existence of the Jewish state.

Despite Israel's multi-front war precipitated by the October 7 attack by Hamas, several significant peace agreements and collaborations still exist between Israel and Middle Eastern countries. The most notable is the Abraham Accords, signed in 2020, normalizing relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco. To fully comprehend the effect of the Accords, we can look at quotes like those from former U.S. Representative Ted Deutch, who states that the Abraham Accords were incredibly unique, with "broad bipartisan support," providing a "transformative, positive lens through which we can all now look at what is sometimes a challenging region."

On the one year anniversary of the Accords, former Israeli Ambassador to the United States and United Nations, Gilad Erdan, commented on the significance of the agreement, stating that the countries chose "peace, progress, and prosperity" over their past differences, promoting a mutually beneficial economy, and changing the way Arabs and Jews perceive each other.

After October 7, the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan strove to balance condemning Israel for its actions, while simultaneously benefiting from their relationship with Israel. The UAE and Bahrain have cultivated robust economic and technological ties with Israel, including the UAE signing a free trade agreement with Israel in 2023, eliminating tariffs on 96 percent of goods. The Accords also enable these countries to collaborate on security and intelligence sharing to counter mutual threats, such as Iran. However, while these Arab nations quietly continue to deepen these ties with the Jewish state, they simultaneously issue public

condemnations of Israeli actions relating to the Palestinian territories.

For instance, UAE officials have openly criticized Israeli settlement expansion in the West Bank, despite collaborating on security matters with Jerusalem. Mohamed Issa Abushahab, Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations, emphasized the importance of stopping illegal practices and settler violence, which he described as having "reached unprecedented levels" and "threatened to fuel tensions." Tellingly, Abushahab describes Israeli civilians in Judea and Samaria as "settlers," reaffirming, at least rhetorically, his country's support for a two-state solution. Even more so, following clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinians around the Temple Mount in the spring of 2022, the UAE summoned Israel's ambassador, condemning the actions as a violation of international law while simultaneously maintaining economic agreements with Israel.

Despite normalization, public opinion, often referred to as the "Arab street," in Abraham Accords countries largely opposes deepening relations with Israel. A 2024 poll by the Arab Center in Washington, DC revealed that majorities in Bahrain and the UAE view Israel negatively. This creates a contrast between the economic interests of the government and the public opinion of the country, arguably reflecting the underlying opinions of the government as well. Leaders often reflect the dual nature of the country by publicly supporting Palestinians while quietly benefiting from normalization deals. In Bahrain, protests against normalization have erupted, demonstrating the domestic pressure on leaders

to appear supportive of Palestine while pursuing the economic advantages that come with relations with Israel.

Public condemnation of Israeli actions from the governments of Abraham Accords nations serves to placate domestic opposition while quietly allowing security and defense partnerships with Israel to flourish. Emirati and Bahraini relations with Israel are an investment in future security partnerships and economic development, yet the optics of normalization are still carefully managed to ensure the Palestinian issue remains publicly supported. By normalizing relations without requiring concessions on Palestine from the Israeli government, these countries weakened Palestinian diplomatic leverage while claiming to support the Palestinian cause.

Arab states entered relations with Israel without referencing conditions in the Arab Peace Initiative, the longstanding Arab plan for the "Palestinian question," undermining Palestinian demands. But these leaders argue that their normalization is beneficial for Palestinians and that the economic cooperation will trickle down. This proves without question that these countries don't proclaim support for Palestine out of a moral obligation; rather, they do it for their own self-interests, because real support for Palestine would not involve deepening economic and security ties with Israel.

Economic collaboration strengthens Israel's financial and technological sectors, bolstering the very state apparatus that Palestinians accuse of perpetuating occupation and inequality. By maintaining and even deepening economic relationships, countries like the UAE and Bahrain provide Israel with greater legitimacy and resources without requiring any meaningful concessions on Palestinian statehood, rights, or sovereignty.

If these nations were genuinely committed to the Palestinian cause they would use their economic leverage to pressure Israel into making tangible changes; instead, they separate their rhetorical support for Palestinians from their practical dealings with Israel, choosing material gain over moral solidarity. Their economic partnership directly contradicts the spirit of resistance and advocacy they claim to uphold in public forums like the United Nations.

Countries involved in the Abraham Accords display a delicate strategy, balancing material benefits—economic growth and security—with moral posturing through public condemnations of Israel. These contradictory stances reflect efforts to navigate domestic pressures, regional dynamics, and international expectations. This "playing both sides" approach exposes the complexities of Middle Eastern diplomacy and highlights how strategic interests often overshadow professed moral commitments.

Hannah Blugrind *lives in West Orange, New Jersey and attends Yeshivat Frisch.*

"Hatikvah"

By Adiel Ramirez

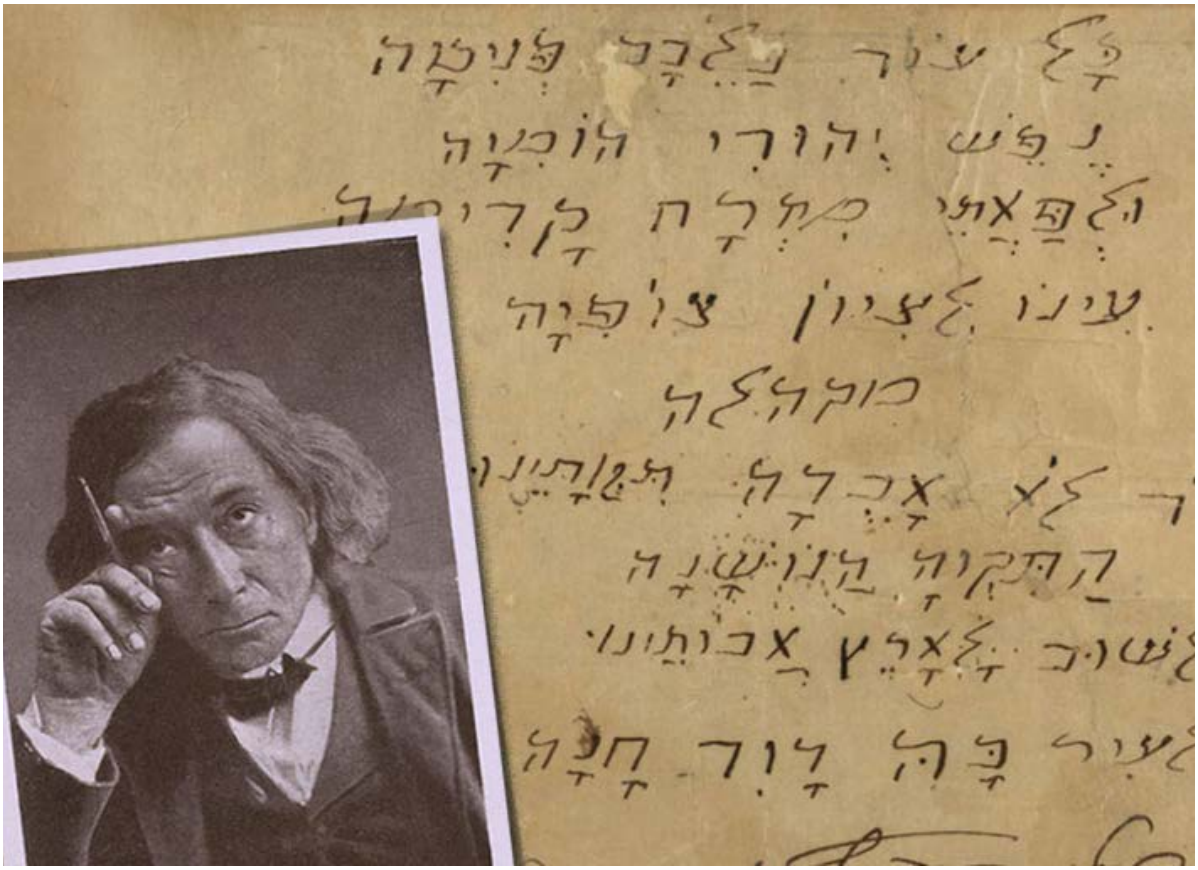
Over the past year and a half, Jews across the diaspora have worked to combat the current rise of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. From the March for Israel on the National Mall to Israeli music blasting from speakers at local rallies; from the Israel Day Parade to the yellow ribbons decorating lapels and backpacks, a message of joy, strength, and hope has prevailed against this hostile tide. Jewish hope drives the current moment, but it's not the first time. Israel's national anthem, "Hatikvah," means "The Hope," and the anthem's history and message have much to teach us today.

"Hatikvah" is the national anthem of the State of Israel, and it is a clear expression of Zionist aspirations. Zionism, the idea that Jews have a right to self-determination in our ancestral homeland, encompasses many things. It is a political identity, a historical narrative, a cultural and linguistic revolution, and a modern definition of the Jewish people as a nation. European romantic and nationalist movements of the 1800s inspired this political shift towards a modern Zionist understanding of *Am Yisrael*, as opposed to a purely religious understanding of Judaism.

But Jews have been defined by our peoplehood since it was promised to Avraham in the Torah. In the Book of Genesis, the Jews are referred to as both a *goy* or an *am*, two words that translate to nation or people. Secular proto-Zionists read religious, liturgical, and philosophical texts as historical proofs, gleaning Jewish nationhood from the *Brit Bein HaBetarim*—the founding covenant between God and Avraham—and classical commentaries. Also, the breadth and depth of biblical and rabbinic texts describing the Jewish longing for our homeland showed proto-Zionists that Jews have always thought of ourselves in this nationalistic way.

Taking cues from these religious works, proto-Zionists created a library of imagery and metaphors that signaled Zionist themes of hope, struggle, rebirth, and longing. These symbols contributed to the development of a Zionist literary culture of poetry, stories, and essays. By the late nineteenth century, the proto-Zionists had created a new Zionist vernacular by effectively secularizing religious writings, turning them into a cultural, historical Zionist heritage. "Hatikvah" was born out of this Zionist movement and artistic tradition.

That brings us to Naftali Herz Imber, born in 1856. He was an eccentric Austrian poet of national acclaim, who, in his early twenties, travelled to Palestine as an assistant to a British diplomat and lived there from 1882 to 1887. In Israel, Imber enjoyed traveling around the various *moshavim* (early settlements) and reading his poems to the First Aliyah pioneers whom he met there. He went on to compose the original poem "Tikvatenu," a nine-stanza exploration of Zionist hope, around 1878, and published it in his 1886 book *Barkai*. The book was published in Hebrew, when the language was still primarily used in literary contexts and not conversational ones. Imber's "Tikvatenu" was shared widely among the pioneers and soon became popular throughout Palestine and the Jewish Diaspora. The poem, influenced by the Zionist, nationalist, and romantic movements sweeping Europe in the late nineteenth century, contains themes of return, peoplehood, and national pride. Although some criticized it for its overly romantic tones, the poem carved out



a distinguished place in the emerging Zionist culture.

As it circulated, "Tikvatenu" underwent changes and adaptations, so much so that for a while, there was no definitive version of the poem. In the diaspora, the original poem, with its biblical references and messianic themes of hope, was prevalent. In the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine, however, the poem became more secularized and in line with Zionist themes of settlement and pioneering. The final version that is now Israel's national anthem is the result of much collaborative revision.

The original poem was laden with biblical allusions and messianic themes. Imber was raised in a traditional Jewish home, so he would have been familiar with the messianic texts of the Jewish tradition. Ezekiel 37:11-12 is the most obvious reference found in the poem. The Biblical text describes a prophecy of redemption and how the Jews will not recognize their salvation as it arrives:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי בֶּן־אָדָם הָעֲצָמוֹת הָאֵלֶּה כָּל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵמָּה הִנֵּה אֹמְרִים יָבְשׁוּ עַצְמוֹתֵינוּ וְאָבְדָה תִקְוָתֵנוּ נִגְזַרְנוּ לָנוּ׃

לָכֵן הִנָּבֵא וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה הִנֵּה אֲנִי פֹתֵחַ אֶת־קִבְרוֹתֵיכֶם וְהַעֲלֵיתִי אֶתְכֶם מִקִּבְרוֹתֵיכֶם עַמִּי וְהֵבֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל־אַדְמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל׃

> *And I was told, "O mortal, these bones are the whole House of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone; we are doomed.' Prophesy, therefore, and say to them: Thus said the Sovereign GOD: I am going to open your graves and lift you out of the graves, O My people, and bring you to the land of Israel." (37:11-12)*

In Imber's poem, however, this narrative is changed to, "Our hope is *not yet lost*." Imber turns Ezekiel's prophetic story of the Jewish denial of salvation on its head, instead

describing the Jewish people having hope when they are not yet saved.

Another biblical allusion in the original poem is found in Isaiah 29:1, where Jerusalem is described as "קִרְיַת חָנָּה דָוִד" or "the city where David encamped." According to the rabbinic tradition, the human Messiah will be a descendent of King David. By referencing King David in a poem about Jewish hope for returning to Israel, Imber evoked a longstanding Jewish messianic message. This particular line was later revised around 1905 by Yehuda Leib Matmon-Cohen, the founder of the historic Tel Aviv Gymnasia school. He changed the line from, "Our hope is not yet lost / The ancient hope / To return to the land of our fathers / The city where David encamped," to, "Our hope is not yet lost / The hope that is two thousand years old / To be a free nation in our land / The Land of Zion, Jerusalem."

This revision made the poem more appealing as an anthem for the political Zionist movement, whose longing for sovereignty was secular rather than religious. Although other biblical allusions to God were deleted or replaced from Imber's original poem, elements of religious language remained in what would become "Hatikvah," Israel's national anthem. More importantly, the biblical reference to Jerusalem—Zion—was kept in the anthem.

Jewish history darkened in the decades leading up to Israel's independence. As the Zionist movement fought the British Mandate in Palestine and the Jews faced near-annihilation in the Holocaust, the hope of Imber's poem endured. Five days after their liberation from the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, the freed Jewish prisoners gathered to sing "Hatikvah" during a Kabbalat Shabbat service. It was subsequently sung at the Tel Aviv Museum after the establishment of Israel in 1948 and continues to be recited today as an unofficial prayer in many diaspora congregations. "Hatikvah"'s combination of religious language and Zionist ideas, first articulated in Imber's "Tikvatenu," has made it an enduring musical symbol of Jewish strength, determination, and, most importantly, *tikvah* to this day.

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Finding Meaning

By Ami Gelman

Siddhartha, by Hermann Hesse, follows a dissatisfied son of a Brahmin in ancient India who is searching for spiritual enlightenment and an escape from the self. The young man, Siddhartha, is expected to follow in his father's footsteps, but he is secretly dissatisfied. His village's lifestyle of meditation and contemplation has not provided him with enlightenment, and he believes that he has learned all he can from his father and the village elders.

Siddhartha, along with his best friend Govinda, leaves the village and goes searching for the lifestyle that will bring them true peace and enlightenment. They find a band of traveling samanas who preach a lifestyle of rejecting the body and physical desires. The two young men join them, hoping to achieve enlightenment by rejecting the self. After steeping himself in the samanas' ways, Siddhartha is still dissatisfied. He decides to leave them and seek out Gotama the Buddha. Siddhartha has heard that Buddha attained total spiritual enlightenment, known as nirvana.

The traveling friends find Buddha's camp, but once again, Siddhartha is not satisfied. Govinda, however, joins Buddha, and Siddhartha leaves him, convinced that he cannot find enlightenment through religion. Siddhartha instead decides to immerse himself in the material world. He becomes an extremely successful merchant, takes up a lover, gambles, and drinks. This behavior continues until Siddhartha realizes that the material world is slowly killing him and not supplying the enlightenment he so desperately desires.

Siddhartha flees once again, eventually finding a ferryman by a river who takes him in.

The ferryman, Vasudeva, emits an inner peace that Siddhartha wishes to achieve. The ferryman says that he has gained peace through many years of studying the river. Siddhartha then studies the river for many years and begins to gain the enlightenment he has been chasing for so long. Siddhartha realizes that just as the river water flows into the ocean and is returned via rain, all forms of life are interconnected in an endless cycle. Siddhartha has gained enlightenment, and once he learns the river's lessons, Vasudeva announces that he is leaving and retires into the forest. Siddhartha is now the ferryman.

After years of searching, Siddhartha found enlightenment and inner peace. The novel ends with his childhood friend Govinda coming to the river and asking Siddhartha to help him gain inner peace. Siddhartha kisses Govinda on the forehead, and the interconnectedness of life is transmitted to Govinda. Finally, they have both gained the enlightenment they have searched for since their youth.

Siddhartha is a universal story about contentment and satisfaction. Hesse does an extraordinary job of allowing the reader to peer into the protagonist's mind to better understand his struggles and thoughts. Siddhartha, feeling lost, chooses the difficult path of searching for contentment instead of staying in his home, where he is comfortable, rich, and well-respected. This is similar to today, where many Americans, also feeling lost, are increasingly drawn to fringe or extreme movements. Such movements as the manosphere give their followers an identity and a feeling of community. However, they do not seek to lead their members to contentment or guide them to self-improvement. Rather, they shield them from the universal search for contentment and satisfaction by blaming life's problems solely on other people or systems and foregoing personal responsibility.

Siddhartha highlights the importance and necessity of self-reflection. Its themes of self-examination and the essence of contentment should resonate with any reader willing to sincerely explore them. Finding what makes us feel satisfied with our lives is not an easy process. The difficulty of the search and the fact that not everyone finds what they are looking for is what draws people to movements or dopamine hits instead. The challenge of the journey is too intimidating for some, and in the modern age, many people would much rather pour their energy into entertainment or an over-promising leader while avoiding working on themselves and finding true inner peace and satisfaction.

Siddhartha is a reminder that the old ways were not all bad. Searching for satisfaction in life, searching for the community, person, job, or cause that allows us to feel fulfilled and at peace with ourselves is a worthwhile task. However, like Siddhartha, who looked in many places before he found what allowed him to be at peace, we should be wary of people, movements, and causes that seek to distract us instead of offering true peace and satisfaction. In *Siddhartha,* Hesse makes it clear that the journey of self-discovery is worth it despite the difficulty, and that one should not shy away from the challenge.

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His Image

By Ilinca Pandelea

The soul is like a pot of honey, eternal in sweet divinity,
As the sun is born with holy gifts, a house of fruits—of possibility,
His Image and likeness dripping like nectar on our tongues,
Yet how can humans commit evil with the very same lungs?

Memoir

By Ilinca Pandelea

Gold sand drapes my marble skin
Sugared rays illuminate the star
Where has this soft feeling been
In a generational memoir?

Forced stitching on their clothes
A symbol of power
I see inside broken souls
burned to ash towers—
Their voices tell me
Claim what's ours!

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About TIKVAH

Tikvah is a think tank and educational institution focused on the foundational ideas of Jewish civilization, the great challenges facing the Jewish people and the State of Israel, and the political, moral, and economic traditions of Western civilization and American democracy.

Tikvah runs a wide range of programs in the United States, Israel, and around the world, including educational initiatives and fellowships, publications and websites, conferences, and policy research. Our main interest is challenging exceptional students—from middle school to high school, from gap year to college, from graduate students to emerging professionals-to become Jewish leaders and Jewish citizens. We seek to expose them to the most important ideas—in Jewish thought, Zionist history, political philosophy, economics, and strategy—and to inculcate a sense of responsibility for Jewish, Western, and American civilization. We also work closely with the alumni of our various programs, and we encourage our students to think about their time with us as the gateway to a larger *Tikvah* community. Learn more about the *Tikvah* community of ideas at www.tikvah.org.

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