



Reflection and Resilience of the Soul

השבון נפש והיום נפש



Hineni Yom Kippur Publication
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The Editor's Letter -

Amy Kaplinski Shapiro - Federal Head of Education



Having been in the movement for over a decade, part of shichvah Nesher and a participant of the Hineni Shnat program in 2018, Amy is about to conclude her Hineni experience to fulfill her dreams of becoming a registered nurse. Amy will complete her studies at the end of 2021 and will begin fulltime work

Upon reflection about the things that matter most in life, what struck me most upon going through the Machzor for Yom Kippur were the seven words which immediately follow the stirring Unetaneh Tokef prayer. These words describe the formula not only for how the severity of Hashem's decisions about our fate in the new year can be repealed, but also provide a formula for living life as a compassionate mensch with a priority of making a difference to the lives of others.

The words וּתְשׁוּבָה וּתְפִלָּה וְצְדָקָה מַעֲבִירִין אֶת רַע הַגְּזֵרָה perhaps provide the very essence of how one should live and the way in which to retain resilience when facing life's challenges. The English translation of the above words repentance, prayer and charity when applied to our daily lives can sustain us and others as we try to grapple with the complexities of our existence. Repentance is a call to recognise the imperfections in ourselves and to realise that we do make mistakes both intentionally and unintentionally in our interactions with others. The Ten Days of Repentance beginning on Rosh Hashana and ending on Yom Kippur provide us with an opportunity to right the wrongs we may have performed against others in order to make a difference to other peoples lives.

Politely apologizing to those dear to us and to those with whom we interact each day for perhaps an unkind word and being grateful to others provide us with how even the smallest acts of repentance and being truly sincere in our apologies can make a huge difference to the life of another person and to ourselves. It goes without saying that prayer provides us with an opportunity to reflect on our lives, contemplate the future and the importance of shifting our lives from a "me" to a "you" emphasis. This provides an opportunity to consider the way in which we may be able to enrich the lives and make a difference to those individuals around us.

Finally, the concept of charity implies the importance of considering the welfare of others. As the Chofetz Chayim used to say, one should always be aware of the need to provide for others even before one's self.

With reference to the above, as my Hineni journey comes to an end after over a decade, I recognise the highly positive difference that this youth movement makes in the lives of hundreds of children from all walks of life. I reflect on the difference I hope I have made in my interactions and in my service to those I have come into contact with during this period.

Thank you to all the writers who contributed to this publication. A huge thank you to Shaked Golzan and Tyla Aronson for a beautiful artwork. A huge thank you to Sasha Fink and the Federal Mazkerut who were fundamental to making this journal happen.

I hope you find this journal meaningful during the Yamim Noraim and that it provides you with inspiration as we face new challenges in 5782.

Sydney Report

Bailey Joffe & Aaron Klimt

5781 - what a year it has been! 5781 has seen over 200 chanichim and 40 madrichim immerse themselves in Jewish culture, Jewish learning and Jewish friendships at Hineni Sydney.

חשבון נפש וחוסן נפש - Reflections and resilience of the soul

The Hineni family has been faced with many challenges over the past years from bush fires to a global pandemic, however, we have never been stronger. The challenges have allowed us to flourish and become more resilient in the ever changing world, welcoming new madrichim and chanichim while reflecting on our purpose as a Jewish youth movement.

The beauty of Hineni lies in its ability to unite school children from all walks of life over the shared bond of Judaism. Hineni ensures that all chanichim despite their level of religiosity are able to experience an authentic and enriching modern orthodox experience.

The past year has been one of significant change to Hineni Sydney. Specifically, we have been able to grow from a mad body of 8 madrichim to 40 madrichim in under a year. We have successfully expanded and evolved into a thriving community of new and old madrichim. The transition has been extremely successful for Hineni Sydney with all positions and roles within the movement being filled by the inspiring and refreshing young madrichim.

We host weekly programs and activities for chanichim from year 2-6 as well as fun holiday adventures. For our senior chanichim (Year 7-12) we host regular Youth Minyan services on Friday nights. The highlight of the year is our Summer and Winter camps with chanichim participating in a range of enriching Jewish programs and exciting activities from canoeing to the flying fox.

5781 has seen the Hineni Family reach new heights. With the easing of restrictions towards the beginning of 2021, we were fortunate enough to run our first camp in over a year. On our combined Junior and Senior Summer Camp we saw over 170 chanichim ranging from years 2-12. It was an amazing way to start the year. In April, Hineni Sydney was fortunate enough to run our annual Junior Adventure Camp which was a fun holiday adventure to Taronga Zoo and Timezone. This Junior Adventure Camp was the most successful we have ever had with 86 chanichim participating over the action packed weekend. It was amazing to finally see all our wonderful chanichim after such a long time.

Hineni Sydney would not be able to grow as successfully as we have without the amazing madrichim (leaders) who continuously volunteer their free time each week to come to meetings, write programs and come up with fun, new ideas to make the experience the best it possibly can be for our chanichim. We would love to thank all of the hard-working and dedicated madrichim as well as those who have helped build Hineni Sydney to where it is today. We would also like to thank the Central Synagogue. We are extremely grateful for the continued support and encouragement we have received over the past years. We love being a part of The Central community and are honoured to be the official Youth Movement of The Central Synagogue.

We would like to take this opportunity to welcome our new Youth Director, Tzuri Avila, who has previously worked as a Rabbi in Southern Sydney Synagogue and lived in Israel for several years. Tzuri has quickly become part of the Hineni family and has been influential in the progress of Hineni Sydney.

The dedication of our amazing team and the support from the Jewish community has allowed the movement to continue to grow and helps everyone involved to become proud members of the Jewish community, meeting lifelong friends and having a lot of fun along the way.



Melbourne Report

Jaimie Braun & Avigal Weizman



It's been a whirlwind of a year so far, but we've taken every challenge and opportunity in our stride! Semester one was one of incredible growth, as we saw senior Shabbat meetings attract 40 plus chanichim a week, and the biggest winter camp ever! Our highlights of semester one was through the chaggim. We started the semester with an incredible welcome back Purim carnival for Juniors, complete with Michloach Manot, mask decorating and a ruach off. On pesach, Seniors had their biggest shabbat program where mads delivered inspiring and thought provoking 'ted talks' about contemporary topics related to pesach. Three and a half weeks later, Lag Baomer rolled around, and this was definitely a lag baomer to remember! As over 100 chanichim, madrichim, ex-bogrim, parents and friends gathered at Hineni, we exchanged old merch, caught up with friends, ate fairy floss, and chanted ruach so loud we could be heard all over Caulfield. Shavuot came next and our Juniors made delicious cheesecakes, while our seniors participated in Hineni Melbourne's most successful Tikkun leil ever, with over 200 guests throughout the night. We heard from influential speakers and had a moving panel about how youth relate to religion in our time. Throughout the year we've also had monthly Kabbalat Shabbatot organised by our year 11 and 12 chanichim, with uplifting tefilah, dancing and divrei torah. Winter camp "Machane Chalutz" was an incredible way to finish the semester with so many friendships formed and memories to be savoured for life. We feel so lucky that we were able to have a camp with close to 100 chanichim just between lockdowns.

In Semester 2, we faced the challenge of trying to adapt to lockdown. We are very proud to have been consistently providing weekly engagement for our chanichim, with zoom programs for Juniors and Seniors every week. Our incredible mads have gone above and beyond for their chanichim, as they organised special deliveries, study sessions and check-ins throughout lockdown. In the Junior movement, we are working with engaging the chanichim outside of zoom, through park scavenger hunts and challenges to do at home. One plus side of being online is that we've been able to seamlessly do mad meetings with Sydney and getting to know the Sydney madrichim

We are so excited to see what the rest of the year will bring, and can't wait for our upcoming events (after lockdown) including Junior Adventure camp and Summer Camps!

Reflections on the (Exhausting) year that was

Rabbi Levi Wolff - Chief Minister of The Central Synagogue Sydney

Dear Madrichim and Chanichim,
This has been a year like no other. Has this year knocked you down or saved your life?
There's been a lot of sport-talk lately. During Denmark's first soccer game within Euro 2020, a talented young midfielder did something alarming: he died! This is not a tragic tale to add to Covid calamities. Quite the opposite. The skilful Christian Eriksen collapsed and as the team doctor put it, he was "gone" only briefly suffering a cardiac arrest. Soon after he was in a stable condition.
This professional soccer star could not recall what had happened. Instead of being resentful, he was grateful it occurred mid-match, when medical experts could immediately respond and not when he was driving or sleeping.

Reflecting on the episode, Eriksen said, "It puts in perspective the value of each day, because we all go through our lives – we're all guilty of it. When you live through something like I did, it hits you square in the eyes that you really have to value each day. Do we say 'I love you' enough? Do we hug enough? Do we do the things with our family and friends that have value to them? Or do we just 'live'?"

Eriksen's cardiac arrest didn't kill him ... it saved his life!

As I processed this soulful story, I ruminated that what Eriksen endured physically, this year so many have encountered on an emotional and spiritual level. Many have been knocked down but not - to use a boxing analogy – out for the count! Our routines have altered; our comfort zones curtailed. Yet if we make an sincere Cheshbon Hanefesh of this past year, we can learn an enormous amount about ourselves, our family, and our individual character



In life, we sometimes fall, even collapse. There can be disappointments, health scares, relationship distress or even a temporary crisis of faith. We can wallow and see ourselves as victims or we can embrace the challenges, distil life lessons and come back stronger. Onwards and upwards.

In years to come, our children will interview us and ask: "Was 2021 the worst of times for you or the best of times?" The answer depends on the prism through which we view the world.

I have personally witnessed so much ongoing communal support and caring chessed initiatives this year, each designed to buoy us all.

Eriksen emerged enlightened and in many so have we.

As wearying as this pervasive pandemic is, this has also been a year infused with blessings – true sustenance now and always. Amen!

Patience, Plodding, Perseverance

Rabbi Ralph Genede - OAM - Senior Rabbi of Caulfield Hebrew Congregation

We know that the devil is often in the detail, but sometimes so is the divine. It was one small detail, one word, that caught my eye in the Torah reading about a month ago. Moses is recalling his 40-day stint on Mount Sinai when he received the 10 Commandments and Torah:

"I remained on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights; I ate no bread and drink no water" (Deuteronomy 9:9).

The Hebrew word being used here literally means "I sat", but as Rashi the key commentator highlights this was no ordinary sitting. This was not the sitting of relaxation; this was a sitting of righteous resilience. In other words, Moses was not a passive recipient of God's words but a passionate and active listener, fully engaged in the experience. It was no short encounter, no quick sprint, but a gruelling, demanding engagement, a long distance (albeit stationary) "race" or journey. Moses neither ate nor drank but remained stoic, patient, persistent and enduring. All these qualities are encapsulated in that one simple Hebrew word -Vaeshev; I sat; I remained; I was there.

This little word caught my eye, tore at my heart and challenged my brain because it so accurately reflects our contemporary condition. If there is one quality that we so need during these uncertain times, this period of regular and extended lockdown and pain, this long struggle to gain immunity from the Corona tyrant, its endurance or persistence. We talk of the impact of long Covid but there's also the impact of the long wait for freedom. We know how devastating this waiting game is; its huge financial cost; its unimaginable strain on relationships; its erosion of mental health; its unknown toll on the lives of the young. It's challenge to the leadership and chanichim of Hineni

Perhaps we can draw some strength and direction from the man who sat with such stoicism on Sinai. He never denied the strain of living with the pressures of his job, he articulated his frustration and weariness. .

He may have come from the land of the Nile, but he was never in denial! At one of his lowest moments, he cries out to God: "I alone cannot carry this entire nation, for it is too heavy for me! And if this is how You deal with me then kill me now..." (Numbers 11:14-15). Acknowledgement of our recognition of the situation may well be the first step of persistence. Acknowledgement of our collective vulnerability and our individual fragility during this pandemic can be a source of strength rather than a failure of character. It can be especially helpful if it encourages us to seek support and give help to others.

This could also be one of the most fundamental lessons that we can learn from the courageous athletes who have recently spoken about their struggle to maintain their mental wellbeing. Naomi Osaka who recently withdrew from the French Open to attend to her mental health put it best when she said: It's OK not to be OK. Admissions like this and the one from Michael Phelps who admitted he struggles with depression and was suicidal after his fourth Olympics have prompted the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to directly address mental health issues. Dr Naresh Rao of the U.S Olympics medical team makes a telling, if surprising, comment: "If you look at the percentages of people who have mental health illness in general, it ranges from 40% to 50%. Throw in the pandemic and the fact that many of these athletes are teenagers or young adults, and you start to see the percentage could go up to as high as 70%."



The Torah and the Talmud have long recognised the harm and even devastation that can be caused by mental illness. The Talmud (Brachot 5b) for example, recounts the depression of the famed Rabbi Elazar. His teacher goes to visit him and finds him lying in a darkened room that is a reflection of his dark spirit. He finds him crying and tries to comfort him hearing his poignant and possibly suicidal thoughts. He also expresses his existential angst: "I am crying for this beauty of yours which will decay into dust at death". Strikingly, it is only when his teacher Rabbi Yohanan reaches out in empathy, recognises that all his trite comments about suffering (eg 'let me tell you just how much pain I've had in my life'; in other words why are you whinging) are actually unhelpful and sits down and weeps with him, gives him his hand and lifts him up, that he begins to recover. It's the heartfelt touch of others that often allow us to carry on, to remain strong and stoic in the place we find ourselves. This is what brings light into the world, lightness to a heavy heart.

Patience, Plodding, Perseverance

Continued

When I was a teenager, friends used to write messages and sign their names in each other's "autograph" books. One of the notes I still remember read: "Patience, plodding, perseverance produces perfection". While I don't believe in seeking perfection, I do embrace the sentiment that these traits produce personality and character. They help shape our attitudes and remind us that we are not defined by fate alone or what happens to us. We can shape our own destinies even in the face of a pandemic. Rav Soloveichik would say, we the Jewish people are governed by two covenants - the covenant of fate, the things that we cannot control, and the covenant of destiny, the things we can shape and control. We are not mere 'underlings of a destiny that shapes our ends rough hew them how we will'.

There are no shortcuts to becoming a mensch, no quick silver bullets to success. It takes dogged perseverance, tenacity and practised patience. There are no instant solutions to this pandemic. It will take our collective collaboration, compassion and endurance, it will demand our personal ongoing steadfastness, willingness to accept support and unceasing caring, to get us through this. May Hashem strengthen and empower us – Chazak Ve Ematz.

As I leave Caulfield Shule, I am proud to count among my most satisfying achievements, the move of Hineni to Caulfield Shule. Over the years, we have worked closely together and I have always endeavoured to support your fabulous contribution to the youth of Melbourne. Hineni is a strong and vital force with a unique and youthful voice for and for an enlightened Modern Orthodoxy in our community. Even though I will no longer be with you at your geographical centre, I will continue to support and strengthen the important role you play! Chazak Ve Ematz Hineni.

Rabbi Ralph

Pain + Reflection = Progress

Tzuri Avila - Central Synagogue Youth Director and Hineni Shaliach

Dear Hineni family,

It has been such a pleasure to join Hineni. The warmth, the passion and the talent amongst each and every one I have worked with has been inspiring and uplifting. I feel honored to be a part of such an impressive team

As we prepare for the new year, I look over the Torah reading of the Akeida (Binding of Isaac). This portion has always been a difficult one for me to read and connect with. It seems like everyone involved in the story ends up without completing their plan. G-d's request for Avraham to bind Isaac doesn't eventuate even after Abraham agrees to offer his son as a sacrifice and Yitzchak does not become the sacrifice..

So what is the message in this portion and what can we take from this story unfolding in such a way?

One interesting fact is that everyone involved in the portion faced a challenge they did not want. Hashem did not want to request for Avraham to sacrifice Yitzchak. Avraham did not want to sacrifice Yitzchak, and Yitzchak did not want to become a sacrifice.



Pain + Reflection = Progress

Continued

Just like in this Torah reading we too might face challenges we never want. So how do we overcome them? And how did our Patriarchs and matriarch overcome their challenges?
I believe the answer is with reflection.

Avraham reflected. I need to overcome my emotions so therefore, Hineni - here I am. This is an incredibly difficult request that I'm being asked to perform but I am here. I'm showing up.

Yitzchak reflected. My elders are giving me guidance even though it differs from what I think I need, nevertheless I will comply because they know what is best for me. I'm asking for guidance from the right individuals.

Hashem reflected. I see my children have put in the effort and that is all I need to see. My children are here and present. They are asking for guidance, following the Torah, and being willing and ready to perform.

A challenging experience can leave us with pain. Pain alone is not sufficient to help us progress to where we need to be. However if we incorporate the process of reflection, the two together will allow us to make progress. Pain + Reflection = Progress.

Today it feels as if collectively, as well as personally we have been met with great challenges. Our world is a challenging place right now and we may feel we do not know how to overcome our dire circumstances. Let us remember to reflect. Be present, ask for guidance and be willing to progress. If we can take a moment to reflect on our scenarios during these High Holidays, Hashem will see our willingness and readiness to be the best that we can be.

Ketivah V'Chatima Tova - May we all be written and signed in the book of health, life, and an abundance of success in all of our endeavours.

Shana Tova,
Tzuri and Fiona Avila

The Hugging Tree

Sasha Fink

After almost two years of a global pandemic, the need for resilience has never been greater in this weird reality that we live in. From motivational infographics to self-help books, the message of resilience and reflection has never been more encouraged.

When I was younger, I was taught resilience by the story of The Hugging Tree. The Hugging Tree tells the story of a little tree growing alone on a cliff, by a vast and mighty sea. Through thundering storms and the cold of winter, the tree holds fast. Sustained by the natural world and the kindness and compassion of one little boy, eventually the tree grows until it can hold and shelter others. The resilience of the Hugging Tree calls to mind the potential in all of us: to thrive, despite times of struggle and difficulty. To nurture the little spark of hope and resolve. To develop and to grow, just where we are.

This story of The Hugging Tree provides an interesting insight into approaching resilience and in turn self-reflection. Out of any chag, Yom Kippur seems to provide an ideal opportunity for us to practice these skills demonstrated by the Hugging Tree.

Yom Kippur is centred around two concepts; atonement and purification. Atonement being repairing relationships or wrongdoings from the past and purification, requiring us to look within and to fix ourselves to not make the same mistakes.

The Sage, Resh Lakish explains that atonement is forward-looking, while purification is inward, unpacking ourselves to transform for the better. Rabbi Dr Lebens discusses these concepts of Yom Kippur and challenges the commonly held notion of the individuality of Yom Kippur. While reflection is a deep and individualised process, in order to effectively atone and reach our goals on Yom Kippur, we need guidance, compassion and kindness from those around us. While the Hugging Tree was able to survive the natural turmoils of their surroundings, without the support of the little boy, they would not have been able to grow.

Yom Kippur clearly requires us to begin a journey of individual reflection, however, this process goes hand in hand with resilience, the ability to recover from difficulties and move on. Rabbi Jonathon Sacks delves into these ideas by questioning the strangeness surrounding the prayers on Rosh Hashanah. Rosh Hashanah marks the beginning of the Ten Days of Penitence and thus, one would think that we would start penitence with penitence, like confessing sins, deep reflection and heartfelt apologies. However, Rosh Hashanah prayers do not touch the idea of teshuvah. We are exclusively celebrating the birthday of the world! We are relishing in the new year which is filled with opportunities for growth and change.

Rabbi Sacks suggests that this is Judaism's way of teaching us the deep connection between resilience and reflection. That we, as Jewish people are not stunted by challenges but look forward to development and growth. Once we have thought about the future and our responsibilities in creating it, then we are ready for Yom Kippur, where we can properly remember the past and create sustainable structures for our future. Judaism teaches us that resilience is about facing challenging realities, embracing alternative options, and walking forward together – patiently and courageously.

These past two years have been challenging for everyone. Spending another round of yomim noraim inside feels daunting and draining. However, at Hineni, if we have learnt anything from these experiences it is that we must be builders. We must weather the storm of lockdowns and border closures in order to power through to provide shelter for our community, just like the Hugging Tree. Further, just as the Hugging Tree would not have been able to achieve this alone, Hineni is merely an idea without the community, shul, madrichim and chanichim surrounding us and sustaining us, enabling us to be resilient during these deeply challenging times.

Yom Kippur begins with the famous communal prayer of Kol Nidrei. Kol Nidrei consists of a declaration which outlines our collective commitment to engage in the act of teshuvah. A central component of this prayer is its collective nature. This Yom Kippur, once again, feels lonely and to embody these skills of resilience and grapple with these concepts of Yom Kippur is an onerous task. However, as a community, supporting each other, striving to build for our future and not be stuck in the challenges and turmoils of the current climate of the world, we may be able to find new meaning and connection this Yom Kippur.



Sasha is the current Federal Rosh of Hineni Youth and Welfare and is studying Arts/Education at Monash University. Sasha is passionate about Jewish and Zionist education and this culminates in her work at Mt Scopus as part of the Jewish Informal Education and Student development team. Sasha is a part of Shevet Nesher and is currently completing her third year as a madricha at Hineni.

What we can learn from talking to strangers

Ariel Golvan

Dear Hineni

Last time I wrote for the publication I was on a flight, returning home from Israel. I am grateful to be writing this article in transit once again - this time on my way from Darwin to Perth. It's strange to be on a plane during this pandemic. Usually, I am quite excited to get to know strangers I meet on planes. Of course, it's not the same today. Talking to strangers was once a given and has now become uncertainty in a COVID world.

Society would not function if we couldn't effectively communicate with people that we were meeting for the first time. Malcom Gladwell's new book 'Talking to Strangers', discusses 2 important historical examples of how interactions with strangers have shaped the course of human history.

He first details the meeting between the Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortes and the King of the Aztec Empire, Moctezuma, when two completely alien cultures met for the first time. To make things even more difficult they communicated through 4 languages! Cortes spoke Spanish to a Spanish priest, Geronimo De Aguilar. Aguilar had previously been taken captive by the Maya. During his imprisonment he learned the native Chontal Maya language. Aguilar then translated Cortes' words to an Aztec woman who understood Chontal Maya. She then translated the Chontal Maya to Moctezuma. I know there is a lot going on here. But let's just say they couldn't understand the nuances of each other's cultures. This meeting then led to what we know was one of the most brutal imperialistic conquests. So, this begs the question - what if they had spoken the same language or had even just taken the time to learn about their cultural differences?

In the second example Gladwell explains that even though the CIA believed they were the strongest intelligence organisation in the world, somehow, Castro (the president of Cuba) deceived them. The CIA were not able to determine which one of their staff were actually "double agents" working for the Cubans. These double agents were so influential that they even held positions of high office in the pentagon's defence intelligence agency. One such agent, Anna Montes, was labelled "The Queen of Cuba", by her CIA colleagues for her fantastic insights into what was happening in Havana. She worked from 1985 to 2001 handing over top secrets to the Cubans. She was considered a model employee and was able to go undetected for so long. Why? Because no one suspected a stranger that came to work every day, did a satisfactory job and stayed quiet. She was non-descript and shy. She wasn't James Bond. She was an introvert who kept to herself.

Gladwell emphasise the importance of interacting with strangers. To interact we must put aside our stereotypes, empathise, understand each other and be honest. Part of that interaction is done without words and just by the facial cues that we give to each other. These are incredibly important in understanding human behaviour. Unfortunately, masks rob this simple method of communication from us.



Ariel Golvan was a madrich in Hineni from 2015-2017. Having finished a degree in mechanical engineering and science he is starting a career as a risk graduate with the NAB.

Masks are here to stay.

Knowing this, it becomes our responsibility to overcome that barrier and try to reach the people beyond the mask. We need to understand who strangers are rather than simply fitting them into the box we think they belong in. Perhaps, if the CIA had tried harder to move past their stereotypes of Anna Montes, they may have understood her more.

While traveling around remote parts of Australia I noticed the warmth at which complete strangers greeted one another. A standard interaction with a stranger would go something like:

Stranger - "G'day, how are you?"

Ariel - "I'm doing great, how are you?"

Stranger - "Not bad, I hope you have a lovely day."

Ariel - "That's very kind of you. I hope you do too."

At first, I found these long-drawn-out greetings tedious but upon reflection I can now understand the benefit. These greetings create a trusting relationship between you and a stranger. It's a way of building on that smile or nod you give people on the street. Humans crave these kinds of connections. They feed our soul and generate positivity. It's the beauty of walking down Hawthorn Road on a Shabbat afternoon saying "Shabbat Shalom" to passers-by. The same reason it feels good to nod at a complete stranger or wave to another car as you pass them on an isolated highway. Without human connection, we become weak. Our unique advantage is the way in which we are able to build relationships quickly and trust others. It makes us a more resilient species. As we move into the next Jewish year masked up, let's not lose this trust in each other. I hope that we can all move beyond the mask, reach out to others and remember the importance of interacting with strangers.

Here is Where I am

Liat Grossman

In the Torah, the word “Hineni (הנני)” – meaning “Here I am” – is used 8 times. But, there are ongoing questions about why the Torah does not simply use the more simple Hebrew word “poh (פה)” – meaning “I’m here” instead. Religious figures argue there is a distinct difference between the two - whilst “I’m here” is meant to signify that one is physically present, the phrase “Hineni” is said to be much more divinely valuable, highlighting that one is emotionally and spiritually present.



So, when God calls on Abraham to sacrifice Isaac in Akedat Yitzchak – Abraham’s response is not “I’m here”, but rather “Here I am”. He acknowledges the full spiritual and emotional ramifications of what he is about to do, bestowing himself upon God and his commands. Abraham knew that he could only act meaningfully if he – and his soul - were in an appropriate emotional and spiritual state to do so as well as being physically where God wanted him to be.

Liat is one of the Roshim for the upcoming Sydney Junior Summer camp at the end of this year. She has been part of Hineni since year 6 and has been on every camp since!

Abraham’s use of the term “Hineni” comes after God asks him “Where are you?”. God asks the same question to Adam, and Moshe throughout the Torah. But it seems bizarre that God – who would evidently have known exactly where each of these prominent religious figures were physically – would ask such a question. I’d argue that God asks this not because he wants to know where these characters are physically, but wants to know their spiritual state, their moral state, and their emotional state. He wants them to be sure of not just where they are physically, but why they are there, and what events brought them to be in that position at that time. God undoubtedly expresses the values of self-awareness and self-reflection throughout the use of this phrase.

This year (and last) has been one of tremendous unforeseen circumstances. And each individual person has had to overcome challenges that leave them certainly more resilient than they were before – I know I am. But to be physically resilient, we must also be emotionally resilient. Like Yitzchak, we shouldn’t just be physically present somewhere, but emotionally and spiritually cognisant of our surroundings too. We don’t just say “I’m here” – but “Hineni – Here I am”. We emphasise that here is where we are, because here is where we are meant to be. We know exactly where we are, even if we don’t necessarily know why.

There is a reason it is “Here I am”, and not “Here you are”, or “Here we are”. We need to be certain of ourselves before allowing others to join us on our journey. We need to personally reflect on our goals, our motivations, and our individual identities to allow us to become resilient and capable people within our wider communities.

I like to, perhaps naïvely, think that everything happens for a reason. And so, I use my emotional and spiritual awareness in order to reflect on myself and my surroundings, and ultimately to be grateful for the path that led me where I am today. After all, here is where I am.

It's all in your head

Keila Van Der Plaats

"On Rosh Hashanah it is inscribed, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed." (From the Musaf prayer for Rosh Hashana).

"It's all in your head," accurately describes the perception of the individual reality. Pain only has significance due to being detected by your brain, when you stub your toe and cry out in pain – it is only because your brain has chosen to react to the situation. Everything we experience, our emotions and thoughts, relates to the universe in our heads – every action we do, is evaluated first in your mind before it becomes an action. Neurologists have even been able to evoke external responses by stimulating certain areas of your brain.

This is also true to time – while being intangible, time has a body, a brain, and a mind. Humankind has 'developed' time as a string of segments in which we all live.

A minute is followed by a minute, Friday follows Thursday. Festival days – Shabbat, Yom Kippur, Sukkot – all following their preordained place in the sequence of the year, separated by ordinary days. This creates a superficial perception of time in purely physical terms – classified by their spatial juxtaposition to one another.

Time is complex, a concept whose faculties interact – every millennium, decade and second of it – to ensure that our world operates like a multifaceted body. Only we, these finite creatures that cannot possibly experience time in its whole, regard the past as such because we passed through it and the future as yet to be because we haven't experienced it.

Time constitutes the working of an integral organism, working as distinct components of the universal time-body – the days of the weeks of the months of the years. Each part has its 'head', the neurological centre which controls the stimuli that is experienced by the 'body'.

So, we must learn to be sensitive to the structure of time – upon entering the 'head', we assign a quality to stimulate time towards a certain experience. Through this we can transcend the timeline of our lives, whether they lie in our past, present, or future.

Rosh Hashana is commonly known as the "Head of the Year", and on this day we recommit to our mission of life. We spend the following ten days soul searching and undertaking resolutions to ensure that these 'neurological' days of the year become effectively stimulated. This process concludes at Yom Kippur.

Hindsight is the concept of understanding an event after its occurrence, this perception allows for reflection on one's actions. The Yamim Noraim and the ten days of Repentance is such a time, where we are required to acknowledge the past and prepare ourselves mentally for the future. It is all in your head – on Rosh Hashanah, our every experience, thought and deed resonate through time.



Keila is currently majoring in History & Literature, and will be specialising in Education. Keila has been part of Hineni since 2011 and is currently the Federal Rosh Limudei Kodesh of Hineni.

The Resilience of the Jewish Faith

Shayna Fleiser

My great-grandmother, Ida, said she had lived three different lives. In 1934, she along with her family left Pushalot, a small town in North-Eastern Lithuania where two-thirds of the 1,200 residents were Jewish (now the Jewish population of Pushalot is zero) and made their way to South Africa. It was a chance to restart their lives away from the encroachingly violent persecution they would experience if they had stayed there. Then again in 2004, at the age of 84, she moved to Sydney, which she claimed was her "third life." Over two centuries, three continents and various states of political and social unrest, she became an embodiment of the "wandering Jew", always holding onto her Yiddishkeit, no matter where she went.

Judaism can be thought of like a suitcase of faith that contains guides on how to live, laws, rules and traditions that the Jews carried with them after being dispersed around the world. For thousands of years, Jews have been pushed from place to place, disconnected from each other, but still, the Jewish religion remains intact. The resilience of Judaism stems from the ability of adherents to stay centred in their faith. Through all climates, cold, hot and political, the essence of what it means to be a Jew has not changed for centuries. We still say the same prayers every morning, study texts of sage Rabbis and celebrate Shabbat.

Today, in our global society and political climate, it can be hard to stay grounded in Judaism. Just this year, during the conflict between Israel and Hamas, we felt our identities as Jews under threat. As I scrolled through defamation of Israel and Jews in the media, every false, anti-Semitic post was met with a surge of patriotic Zionism.

In times when we feel lost within tragedy or disappointment, we must turn to our religion to ground us. Even though this year we may not have large family Shabbat dinners, or Rosh Hashana lunches, it is important to still light the Shabbat candles and find meaning in the resilience of Judaism as so many before us have. Just like my great-grandmother, we must continue to carry the suitcase of Judaism where ever we might go to ensure that the light of the Shabbat candles never flicker and remain strong, bright and resilient against the forces that might try to blow them out.



*Shayna is a Year 11 Madatz
Shayna has been attending Hineni
since 2014*

Tragedy to Triumph

Romy Freinkel

Resilience and Reflection.

- 26th October 2019, first report of the bush fires which burn't 5.3 million hectares of NSW land.
- 31st December 2019, First cases of 'atypical viral pneumonia of unknown cause' reported by Wuhan officials.
- 25th January 2020, first Australian cases reported.
- 11th March 2020, the WHO declares COVID-19 a pandemic.
- Mid March 2020, Australia enters it's first lockdown.

Resilience. 1 word, 10 letters and 3 syllables. Meaning: the ability to mentally or emotionally cope with crisis or to return to a pre-crisis status quickly. Reflection. 1 word, 10 letters and 3 syllables. Meaning: serious thought or consideration. These two words, 'resilience and reflection', have impacted around 7.67 billion people across the world through COVID-19 and everyday life and events.



*Romy is currently a Madatz in Hineni.
Currently she is online learning and about
to finish her 3rd term of year 11. She is about
to embark on her final school adventure.
Year 12.*

A perfect example of resilience and reflection is Noam Gershony. Noam Gershony was a former IDF Pilot who is now a Paralympic Gold Medalist. His life can be divided into two; before the Second Lebanon War and after. On July 20 2006, Noam's partner, Major Ron Kochba was in a tragic helicopter crash and fell 600ft without parachutes. Unfortunately, the crash instantly killed Ron. Although, against all odds, Noam survived the crash. Noam suffered severe injuries throughout his body including broken bones, fractures. He was left unconscious in the hospital for one week and bedridden for two months due to back injuries. His right leg was broken and his left leg was left paralysed. Here, Noam faced the choice, to let his crisis dictate the way he has to live his life forever or choose resilience and reflection.

Noam chose to write a new story for himself. Despite a pessimistic prognosis from his doctors, Noam turned the crisis into a mission. He underwent intensive rehabilitation for 18 months, where he learned to walk on his own with crutches. Although Noam could walk with crutches and his wounds had healed, he could not be a pilot again. He joined Biet Halochem, and rediscovered tennis. Noam began competing in various wheelchair tennis competitions and in 2012 was part of Israel's delegation for the Paralympics in London. Noam went on to win a gold medal in the singles and bronze in the doubles.

Here, we see an example of a Paralympian, an IDF soldier, an individual who despite tragedy did not focus on the fast, but pushed forward. Through these challenging moments, I challenge us all to consider. Consider ourselves, our family and our world with resilience and reflection.

A life well lived

Aria Klein



Aria was part of the tzevet Barak family and among her many hineni accomplishments was Sgan Melbourne in 2019. She now works as a midwife and nurse, inspired from her few years as Hineni camp medic.

I'm guessing that most Jewish people when hearing the word "resilience" immediately think of their family affected by the Shoah. So when challenged to write for this journal, I called my Pa to explore his mother Margit's (Gita) resilience.

Pa explained that Gita was extremely traumatised and really suffered from having to leave her mother and family behind in Vienna when she escaped to Australia. She made multiple and persistent attempts to get her mum to Australia before the war but to no avail. Eventually she learned of her deportation and death at Auschwitz. The trauma affected many aspects of her life from her marriage, and even intruded her cognition once she developed dementia. Pa explained that psychologically, she was not resilient. But in telling her story, he shared her incredible successes too, describing these aspects of her life as showing great strength. According to Pa, most people would have described Gita as resilient because that's what they saw. It seems that to Pa, Gita managed to deploy resilience as a tool when needed, but it was not a fundamental attribute she possessed.

This made me think: is resilience a tool we pull out of our toolkit when needed, or is it something we are born with, an innate capacity for resilience?

I see a lot of babies being born (this isn't a weird fetish, I'm a midwife). They are born natural fighters, with their resilience battery fully charged. Babies independently breathe without ever doing it before, can find their way to food, adjust their skin to adapt to air, fight devastating medical conditions, and are incredibly durable to withstand fumbling new parents. When babies learn to walk, they fall down, but they get up again. They have that innate fight and drive to keep going. This suggests to me that we're hardwired for resilience. We were born with the capacity to spring back, rebound and overcome adversity.

But somewhere along the way, our resilience battery depletes and our fighting muscles and mind weaken. The more we experience life in all its joy and pain, the more we witness fear, failure, consequences, or develop that inner voice that says "I am no good", the more we reduce our inner strength to be resilient. Wrestling with fear and adverse events seems to limit and weaken our ability to exercise our congenital resilience; we're no longer that unknowingly unintentionally resilient baby. We know too much.

The real test of resilience, it seems, is not to be destroyed by these experiences, but to consciously awaken our dormant ability by exercising, maintaining and challenging our resilience muscle. We do have a choice, and like every other type of exercise, it is hard, intentional work.

So what can we do? We can avoid, and hide, and sidestep, or we can choose life. We can exercise our muscle. A Jewish proverb said, "I ask not for a lighter burden, but for broader shoulders". Well everyone, it's shoulder day at the life gym today.

In Parashat Nitzavim, we have just read וּבַחֲרֶתְךָ בְּחַיִּים "choose life". In this sentence, we are encouraged to not only choose life over death but to live a meaningful life. We are asked this on Yom Kippur so we can question if we are living a life well-lived. Are we fighting for life despite our past? What do we need to change to truly choose life in the year ahead? How can we exercise our resilience muscle?

Gita chose life - she built up a business, contributed to the Jewish community, created artwork, made sure her beloved only child was well educated and spoiled her grandsons, despite the gaping hole in her heart and the traumas she encountered.

May we all write ourselves into the book of life well-lived.

Hindsight in 2021

Leah Hain



*Leah Hain is part of Shichva Nesher
Leah is studying a Bachelor of Arts majoring in both
Criminology and Children's Literature at Deakin.
A dedicated Madricha to the junior movement
throughout her time, Leah went on Hineni Shnat in 2018,
was Rosh Winter camp in 2019, and was Junior Mentor in
2020.*

They say that hindsight is 2020 however it is now 2021. This means that it is even more important to reflect on our past, which is something that I feel many have done over the many lockdowns.

I recently went through the photo albums of myself that my parents made for me as well as a bunch of loose photos collected from family events and trips.

I came to realise that although not all the photos had me smiling in them, they were still memories and moments which created who I have become today. Among all the arguments, tantrums, work and struggles, I have had an incredible life.

Now this is not me saying that I have done all I want to in life, but as we come upon the (subjectively) best time of the year, I find myself trying to move away from the everyday drivel that we know as COVID-life in lockdown and more towards taking this time where the world is not moving to improve on myself.

My first reflection on myself is that I have gained more control over my own emotions throughout these lockdowns. Understanding when others need space or even silence to pretend you aren't there. This skill will be something I can take with me when life from the past becomes our future again. Where we can all see each other's faces completely.

Part of this has been a change of mindset to see the world at its most basic and to appreciate the little things. Everyday I try to find something to laugh at. Everyday I try to send a message to at least one friend. Everyday I get dressed in what makes me happy, even if that happiness comes from trackies and a dressing gown.

We have all shown resilience throughout these past years, but during this time, while we are with family, we should all take the time and reflect on our own capabilities from last year to now. Mental health aside, I feel that we have all learnt and grown even closer with the ones we love and those that love us through the plague that, in an age of technology, has thrown us together and forced us to spend time as a family, supporting our community and supporting each other.

Looking back on my childhood I realise that fun and happiness comes from the most unlikely places. All you need to do is look within.

Personal Prayer in a time of disconnection

Peninah Silverstein

This year has been hard, for many reasons but practically hard because we have had to navigate a new age of connection over distance. Yes we've had zoom that has provided us with shule services and online games nights or Netflix parties. But many of us still feel a deep loss of connection, missing being with other people, hanging out, being in friends' presence.

What I have missed is the connection to Judaism. Yes, we can do challah baking on zoom or make Sukkah decorations together, or even do an early Kabbalat shabbat sitting in our own homes. However, it's not the same, and we know it. I would like to present the meditative practices I have tried to use to connect to spirituality, to myself, to the present and even more so to Hashem. On Shnat, I had the privilege of coming across a beautiful way to pray. It's not just about praising Hashem, it's about connecting to the people around you, to the earth and to yourself. This action is through song, singing out to the world.

I have always loved singing during Kabbalat Shabbat. I remember being so excited for Shabbat on camp where I'd be able to sing my heart out and get up and dance after every song. This fired my everlasting passion for Shabbat. One Shabbat in Israel, I went to a shule called Nava Tehila. This is a shule started by a woman from America who merely brought her guitar and sang. She created a community of people who were passionate about singing out to Hashem, joining in energy and happiness to sing loud and proud.

When I went to this shule service I could feel the energy. People packed outside speaking with friends, young children running around the elderly, all waiting to get in when it started. Concentric circles of chairs were set up around the middle where a group sat singing loud, playing all sorts of instruments, guitars, violins, saxophones, and they created this magical atmosphere. Everyone filed in and took seats, people stood behind the seats, people even stood outside where the windows were open to let the music out. Hundreds of people singing created the most beautiful sound. It was an experience to remember.

When I returned home from Shnat, this particular shule service resonated with me. I wanted to connect with people the same way I had there, and I was lucky enough to find there was something here. A group of friends had started their own Nava Tehila in Melbourne, very small and intimate but still with just as much kavanah (intention), ruach (spirit) and connection as I had experienced in Israel. They have now changed their name to Havaya and I'm now a leader in this space. Before Covid, we would meet once a month to bring in Shabbat together.

The experience of Covid forced me to develop this spiritual connection with myself. Through meditation, song and movement, I try to replicate that energy within myself. This process is ever evolving and growing.

Elul, the last month of the Jewish calendar, is a time for reflection, for deepening our practices, for exploring the ways we can evolve and become better friends, siblings, children and keepers of our soul. When thinking about the notion of resilience of the soul, I instantly thought of the importance of prayer. While traditional prayer has been a constant struggle for me to practice regularly, I've learnt through these past few months of meditative prayer. This has become a pillar that holds up my spirituality, that grounds me to the earth and to nature and to the people around me.

I'm going to share with you the meditative practice I have been using. It is a five word prayer that Moshe used when praying for his sister, Miriam, to be healed from tzara'at. These words show us that you don't need a whole siddur to talk to Hashem.

אֵל נָא רַפָּא נָא לָהּ - el na refa na lah
"Please, God, heal her"

Prayer is hard, and feeling connected with others is hard. However, I hope to encourage the Hineni community to challenge themselves to make prayer more meaningful. You may begin to feel connected to your whole being and this way, you can bring connection back to your life in this time.



Peninah is completing her honours in interior architecture with a focus on environmental activism. Peninah developed her passion for social and political activism that she practices in her everyday life from her years at Hineni, all the way from year 3 to shnat

Cheshbon hanefesh on a desert island



Ruby Peer

During the month of Elul we are encouraged to go through a meticulous process of cheshbon hanefesh (accounting of the soul), reflecting on our behaviour from the past year, judging our actions and seeing where we can improve. The idea is to refine our character in pursuit of being a better person for ourselves and those around us.

With this in mind, let's consider the following scenario.

A person lives alone on a desert island. From morning till night, they interact with no one. They eat, sleep and work all alone.

Does this person need to do cheshbon nefesh?

Upon first glance, you might say no. After all, they are living by themselves! What does it matter if they've done some good stuff and some bad? What does it matter if their character isn't refined or if they have given up on introspection?

I want to suggest something different: cheshbon nefesh is even more important for this lone islander than it is for people living busy, 'normal' lives. Let me explain why.

A busy person interacts with many people on a daily basis and in these interactions receives subtle cues on how they should act. When we say a questionable joke, an uncomfortable response tells us that maybe it wasn't so funny. When we make a judgemental comment, a raised eyebrow in response makes us think twice. When we lose our temper at school or work we can tell from the look on people's faces that we have lost our cool.

We as humans are social beings. We learn how to act through observation and pick up on social cues by being surrounded by others. In this way, being in society almost acts like a check and balance against ourselves. Be too intense and people will tell you to calm down. Be rude and people won't want to be your friend. Or be kind and people get drawn to you.

It seems like the more we interact with others, the more chances we have to reflect on our own actions and use that information to be better. (That is of course if we listen to those cues).

The person living on the desert island has none of this. Bad behaviour can go unchecked. They could go for days being ungrateful and unpleasant without any direct or indirect cues telling them to stop.

And on the flip side, they aren't surrounded by others doing good. It would be hard for this person to remember to be grateful, kind and caring when they have no grateful, kind and caring role models around them. Being forced to sit with themselves and reflect might be the only opportunity this person has to take stock of who they have become and how they act. Without the safety net of human interaction, becoming a better person is in their hands and if they don't sit down and work on it, it probably won't happen.

This Elul, we are arguably more like the islander. Deep into lockdown with heavy restrictions imposed on our lives, the amount of human interaction we have is less than usual. Unlike a regular year where we would spend all day at school or work, go on camps, go on holidays and have many rewarding and challenging experiences, we spend a lot more time by ourselves and with close friends and family.

The more isolated we are, the more vulnerable we are to let ourselves go unchecked and to become distant from who we want to be. The opportunities we have for our flaws to be noticed by others is limited and so too are the opportunities to let our best qualities shine. Without the social information, we usually rely on, how we progress spiritually, emotionally and personally is up to us more than ever. Let's harness the power of cheshbon nefesh as a tool for self-improvement and not let temporary isolation stand in our way of being our best selves.