

A serene sunset scene with the sun low on the horizon, casting a long, bright reflection on the water. The sky is a gradient of orange and blue. Silhouettes of trees and buildings are visible along the horizon.

# Koom Lech

# קום לד

**In Memory of Shmuel Huber**



קום לד



# Koom Lech

‘Arise. Go!’

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A compilation of short essays

**In Memory of Shmuel Huber**

**Cover photography by Joshua Riesel**

Proudly supported by Moriah College

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# Editorial

***By Nathan Orenstein***

Yom Kippur, historically is a time of great unification. Be it the days where God would determine whether the Kohen Gadol would live or die depending on the state of the nation's actions, to today where the most attended day of the year at shuls around the world and across denominations is Yom Kippur.

We are taught that we have the ability to change almost anything that has happened over the course of the last year or even the course of our lives. Many fables and stories throughout the traditional literature describe stories of last minute repentance. From when Moses pleaded with God not to destroy the nation after the incident with the Golden Calf (or any other time in the desert where God was just over the Israelites' antics and complaints) to the story after which this book is named. The book of Jonah describes the repentance of a whole city and their subsequent forgiveness.

The notion of changing fate is something that interests me. But not necessarily in the more self-centred interpretation of having your sins absolved. I always found the notion of repenting for something you most likely will willingly do again the next week let alone year, a little flawed. I however would love to look at taking upon the role of Jonah, or at least what he was meant to do. The role of being the changer of someone's fate. The idea that excites me is what frightened Jonah so much he tried running from God, a being that doesn't have form. Jonah ran from the responsibility of helping others, **קום לך** God told Jonah. Arise! Go! As if to say "wake up and look at the people around you!"

The words that were spoken then to Jonah for me are the most relevant of the story. Jonah was gifted, but didn't really use his talent and abilities for any good purpose unless literally thrown out of a whale into the situation. We have the ability to learn so much from Jonah. Today we are thankfully surrounded by gifts and by privileges, however if we don't look around us and see how we can use those for people who don't have them then we are missing the point.

At Hineni we try to take these gifts that we were given and at the very least pass them onto our chanichim (participants). We educate about social issues giving them the tools to make a change even if we cannot, we teach about Judaism so that our chanichim can find a meaning in the community to which they belong. But it is not enough to educate and empower, especially not within such a small sample size of the population. It is our responsibility, along with yours as an active member of the Australian Jewish community to לקום לך in your own way.

This publication is a compilation of short essays written by members of the extended Hineni family, be it chanichim, madrichim or communal leaders such as rabbi's and teachers, who are all striving to better themselves and the people around them. I am grateful to all those who contributed or sponsored this journal, and hope that you find an article that resonates with you in a nuanced way over the fast.

Gmar V'chatima Tova.

*Nathan is the current Federal Rosh Chinuch (head of education) of Hineni. He is a member of Shichvat Nir and participated on the Hineni shnat program in 2012. He was previously State Rosh Tochniot Haaretz (head of Israel Programs) in Melbourne and currently leads year 8.*

This article has been sponsored by the Orenstein family, proudly supporting  
Hineni Youth & Welfare

# Message from the Israeli Ambassador

*Shmuel Ben Shmuel*



August 2015

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## Message to Hineni from Ambassador Ben-Shmuel

It is an honour to extend to Hineni my deepest gratitude and respect on account of its dedicated work within Australia's resolute Zionist community. It is particularly special for me to congratulate Hineni on this, its fortieth year.

This year has presented the State of Israel and her citizens with its range of trials and tribulations. Nevertheless, there have also been rich opportunities and after the formation of a new government the Israeli people continue to thrive and grow. I know that I and countless others throughout Israel continue to draw deep strength from the love and support of the Diaspora,

While our region continues to be shaken by instability and violent extremism, Israel stands resolute as a sanctuary of democracy, freedom and stability.

Despite what might seem like an uncertain future, I am confident given the passion and dedication of youth movements such as Hineni that Israel's future will be a bright and prosperous one in the hands of the next generation.

Hineni's efforts to engage Australia's Jewish Zionist youth continues to strengthen the communities across this country. Time and time again Hineni has reaffirmed its role as a premier education and leadership institution.

I commend your fine work and wish you b'hatzlacha for the future ahead! May the next forty years be just as prosperous.

H.E. Shmuel Ben Shmuel  
Ambassador of Israel to Australia



# A message on behalf of Moriah College

***By Rabbi Benji Levy***

Chag Sameach Chaverim,

At this special time of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, the idea to reflect on the year that was and prepare for the coming year is often difficult. We need inspiration to think outside of the square and this is the purpose of the pages that follow. This journal of Jewish ideas provides a compilation of contemplations around important issues from chanichim, madrichim and leaders of our community. This year the theme is called Koom lech, in light of the call to responsibility that Hashem gives Jonah, highlighting the eternal call that we should all reflect on.

Hineni is a unique youth movement for many reasons beyond its Modern Orthodox and pluralist Zionist ideology. It's relationship with one of the leading Synagogues of the Southern Hemisphere, Central Synagogue, allows it to engage with people that wouldn't usually have exposure to the beauty of a youth movement, the fact that it was born in Australia means it's one of a kind and has grown from the grass-roots towards Israel rather than the reverse and finally, it is truly for the youth, by the youth, engaging the leaders of our future – something that our community needs more today than ever before!

Moriah College is proud to be sponsoring this wonderful initiative and we hope that you are able to take a page from this book, assisting you to find timely meaning in the context of our timeless heritage.

Shana Tova,

Rabbi Benji Levy

Dean of Jewish Life & Learning



**Moriah College**  
בית ספר הר המוריה

# Teshuva: Return to what?

*By Roy Steinman*

The Yamim Noraim are days of truth. They are also days of change. If we cannot be true to each other, we are at least expected to be true to ourselves. The fact that we have these days of change is testimony to the fact that being human means that we are not perfect. It means we are fallible. We lie, we cheat; we hurt, we judge; we scorn, we spread rumours, we blaspheme, we steal. We disguise, we break and we hurt. The sound of the shofar is supposed to wake us from our moral and spiritual apathy. It calls us to put the balance back into our lives.

What an awesome concept it is to stand before the Aron Hakodesh and ask Hashem for His forgiveness – for His justice. It is during this time that we feel most vulnerable – naked and alone. Just like Adam in Gan Eden - but unlike Adam, we are expected to take responsibility for our actions, and not to hide – for where is there that we can hide from G-d? Hashem asks Adam “Ayeka”? On Rosh Hashanah and again on Yom Kippur, the same question is asked of us. Our answer should be an answer of humility and contrition, for who is there amongst us who has no need for Divine forgiveness? Who is there amongst us who can afford to feel that his relationship with Hashem is perfectly restored? And who is there amongst us who cannot see the brokenness and tragedy of a world gone mad and not feel responsible for some of its “brokenness” in some way?

Of course, we have to recognise that we are indeed part of the problem. This means we have to recognise what we have done that is wrong: we have hurt someone somehow; we have broken our promises; we have failed to meet expectations; we have destroyed relationships; we have failed to face up to responsibilities; we have cheated our destiny. The beauty of our Judaism is that, while it accepts the transience and the fragility of life, it also extols the value of

moral, ethical and personal change. And the Yamim Noraaim are days of “change”.

We should never forget that as the Jewish people reached the highest pinnacle of their spirituality at Sinai, they plummeted to the greatest depth, not long after that, with Chet Ha-Eigel, the sin of the golden calf. Tragedy though it was, it taught us a most valuable lesson. We cannot rely on miracles and dramatic Spielberg-like effects to keep us close to Hashem. Even hearing the very voice of G-d calling out the words of the Asseret HaDibrot did nothing to prevent our ancestors from plummeting to this low level of sin. And even they were worthy of Teshuva.

The highest level of Teshuva is called Tikkun: “completion”, “fixing”, “making whole” and “healing”. It lies beyond the correction of sinful deeds and is reached when the change and correction penetrates the very essence of the sins once committed. In this way, our sages teach us that Teshuva and Tikkun create the condition in which a person’s transgressions actually become their merits. This is achieved when we can use the knowledge of our sins of the past and transform them into such an extraordinary **thirst for good** that they become a Divine force in our lives and in the world at large. In this way, even the most sinful of us has the potential to bring great healing to a fragmented world.

Teshuva indeed means “a return”. This presupposes that there was a time when we were on the right path, in connection with, and in total synergy with Hashem Himself. The very concept of Teshuva implies that we have moved away from this original point of reference. By changing ourselves, and returning ourselves to our former spiritual purity, we reset our moral compass. When our compass is reset and our “Spiritual True North” re-established, we are able to measure the distance of our departure from where it is we once stood or need to be returning to. That means that if we are to take the notion of “Teshuva” seriously, we would have to analyse each and every aspect of our lives and measure what it is we do, what it is we say, what it is we think and what it is we practise, in the context of our “True Spiritual North”, in other words, our relationship with Hashem and, therefore, with ourselves as well.

What we see on the outside needs to be reality on the inside. For example, while it is noble in itself to maintain a scrupulous watch over our *kashrut*, it is as important to measure carefully what comes **out** of our mouths and the impact that that will have on all those who hear our words. While it is important to be meticulous about the *mitzvot* we commit to, it is equally important to measure our actions just as carefully, so as to ensure that we impact all those around us, and indeed our environment, positively and creatively. By changing our essential nature, we change our spiritual DNA, as it were. By doing this, the original judgement that was decreed against us in our former, pre-Teshuva state-of-being, is rendered invalid. It is only then that we can stand naked and without pretensions before Hashem and in our newly acquired spirituality, await a different judgement. Therefore, the power of Teshuva is able to move us out of the searching spotlight that was originally ordained for us as we were “in our previous state” before we made the spiritual return. In this way, even the most sinful of us has the potential to bring great healing to a fragmented world. It is this concept that makes the Yamim Noraim potentially so holy and so necessary.

Being Jewish means we have to choose to live life with a paradox. This paradox is made all the more prevalent during this time of moral choice. The essential paradox about being Jewish is that most of us did not choose to become Jewish. Being born Jewish means that we have to first accept our destiny as Jews, and **then** choose it. In other words, it is because I was born a Jew that I can and must then choose to be one.

It is my prayerful hope that we all achieve a measure of Teshuva in our lives and by doing so, reconnect with those from whom we have been estranged; reconnect with our history and our destiny; our culture and more importantly, with Hashem Himself.

Shana Tova u metukah

*Mr Roy Steinman is the Principal at Melbourne's Leibler Yavneh College where many of our chanichim study. He Joined the school in 2007 after being principal of Moriah College for 10 years. Mr Steinman is still active in the classroom to quench his thirst for education and educating his students.*

# Stop Running Jonah!

*By Rabbi Alon Meltzer*

In the 1994 film *Forrest Gump*, the title character, played by Tom Hanks, has a very well thought out solution to dealing with any trouble, trial, or tribulation. Whenever something negative comes around he just starts running – many times he runs into success, others he runs into misery, sometimes he just keeps running.

You might think that running away from a problem, is the right thing to do. If it can bring success great, if it can get you away from trouble, even better. It is the classical human condition; fight or flight. How many of us stand up and say we are going to fight? How many of us look the other way and just take up flight.

Judaism doesn't really appreciate this model – we are not a people that is meant to just run away from the struggles presented to us. Just go back to the very beginning of our history and see Abraham, how he confronts even the most serious tests with the utmost faith in the Almighty, or to Moses, our greatest prophet and teacher, who unwillingly accepts the mantle of leadership, a task that will stay with him for over 40 years. We are meant to stand our ground – ensuring that Hashem, our people, our country, and our faith are preserved no matter what the challenge.

It is therefore problematic that our Yom Kippur hero, Jonah, is the archetypal character of the flight model. Jonah did not ask for the task of delivering the message of the Lord to Ninveh, in the similar vein that Moses, our greatest prophet, did not ask to be tasked with leading the Jewish people from Pharaoh's servitude to freedom and the yoke of heaven. Jonah ran from his task, and from that point everything goes wrong. He gave up on his most primary task, and while the wake-up calls that God puts in front of him spurs him to action, at the end he sidelines himself, humanity, and God.

One might be surprised to see the Midrash and commentators show Jonah in a positive light. David Goldstein believes that this portrayal is a rabbinic ploy in which to bring people closer to the Torah, creating a deep love of characters that will encourage lay-people to engage more emotionally with God, the text and our national destiny<sup>1</sup>. The Midrash of Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer stresses that Jonah was extremely successful, that each and every time he brought the word of God – whether to Jews or non-Jews – he was successful in persuading them to turn their actions around<sup>2</sup>.

But ultimately Jonah ran from his responsibility – sure he succeeded in the short term, but if we look towards the end of the story, Jonah ends up miserable and lacking faith and direction. In his book *The Prophets*, Abraham, Joshua Heschel, describes the feelings of Jonah towards the end of the saga of Ninveh vs. God. “The prophet was now alone, angry with man and displeased with God; man is wicked, and God unreliable.”<sup>3</sup>

The period from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur are meant to be days of action, change, and growth – they are meant to be days where we fight for our very existence in the Kingdom of the Almighty. Rabbi Dovid Miller the Mashgiach Ruchani of Yeshiva University and director of YU's Gruss Institute in Jerusalem, once shared a beautiful story.

In the good ole days of Europe, when the first of Elul came around, the mood of the shtetl changed considerably. A heavy air set in, and people moved around in a different way, conducted business in a different way, were careful of the way they spoke, and the way they acted. It was as if during that time the King had really entered the field<sup>4</sup>. But then Europe was destroyed, and the Jewish

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<sup>1</sup> (Goldstein London)

<sup>2</sup> (Friedlander 1916)

<sup>3</sup> (Heschel 1962, p 67)

<sup>4</sup> The Baal HaTanya explains that the revelation during the month of Elul is similar to a king who is traveling in the countryside- all are

communities of old, who had created a society that was deeply connected to its spiritual side, were vanquished, suddenly the period of Elul to Rosh Hashanah lacked meaning. There wasn't a feeling of change, and growth and action – people just kept on running, kept on doing the daily grind<sup>5</sup>.

We are meant to be a people that is a light unto the nations, and there are meant to be a group within the nation, that in turn is meant to be a light for us all. Traditionally that was meant to be the Cohanim and the Leviim, the teachers and spiritual guides. Over time that was replaced by the Rabbis and formal educators. However, now, especially in Australia, we must include our madrichim and shlichim – who ensure the success of our thriving collection of Youth Movements.

Forrest Gump ran away, Jonah ran away, and honestly society is running away to – unwilling to confront the challenges of the world, especially the Jewish world, head on.

We have to ask ourselves the question, as we look deep into our souls and the fabric of our lives, are we going to run away, or are we going to confront the issues, and fight?

*Rabbi Alon Meltzer is the Rabbi of the ACT Jewish Community. He was granted smicha from Yeshiva University in New York after growing up in Auckland, New Zealand. Rabbi Alon is an avid supporter of Jewish life and engagement across the spectrum of community members.*

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permitted access to approach him – though one does so in the proper manner.

<sup>5</sup> Sichat Mussar, 2012

# The Outsider in Judaism: “Every blow counts”

*By Rabbi Genende*

Google the word “outsider” and you will be amazed at just how many people consider themselves outsiders, excluded, not part of the group. JK Rowling writes: “I always felt an outsider”, Joan Rivers: “I’m in nobody’s circle, I’ve always been an outsider” which would explain her capacity to be as withering about herself as she was about others. Who else could have said: “I’ve had so much plastic surgery, when I die they will donate my body to Tupperware.” But then even Rupert Murdoch has something to say on the subject: “I’ve always straddled a weird line – there’s a lot of mainstream stuff that I love. At the same time, I still feel like an outsider. I am a catalyst for change. You can’t be an outsider and be successful over 30 years without leaving a certain amount of scar tissue around the place.”

The truth is it’s hard to go through life without feeling like an outsider at some point, an interloper at another’s simcha or time of grief; excluded from a particular group and their in- jokes. We are solitary in our being, even if social in our longing.

As Jews we are acutely aware of our outsider status. It has been the source of our strength, our capacity to stand up for justice and rightness to be the conscience of a cold world, to afflict the comfortable even as we comforted the afflicted. It was this radical spirit that gave Avraham the courage to challenge the Mesopotamian Empire with his ideas of righteousness and compassion. In fact he defined Jews as the classic outsiders ;he is the first to be known as an Ivri , a Hebrew ,one who comes from the other side עבר הירדן It was this self-same subversive spirit that energised Moses to give up his comfort and security and confront an unjust Egyptian empire.



We produced a Moses and a Marx, a Rabbi Akiva and a Spinoza. Yosef Caro's Code of Jewish Law and Sigmund Freud's Code of the Unruly Human psyche. Being an outsider gives you perspective; it stimulates curiosity and creativity.

But if it's been the source of our strength, it also has been the cause of so much hostility and envy. We are resented for our intellectual acumen – those clever Jews. We are envied for our mutual support and unity – those insular Jews. We are begrudged because of their guilt of what they have done to us – those pathetic victims. We are despised for giving the world a God and conscience – those tribal Jews. We are disapproved of because of our financial success - those rich Jews. And we are especially hated for our strength – those arrogant Israelis. During the last few months the anti-Israel invective has been especially intense, the thin-line between anti-Zionism and anti-Jewish hostility so harshly exposed. We needed few reminders of our pariah status.

Yet for all this, we have been the most celebrated insiders, producing some of the world's most distinguished poets and prophets, novelists and Nobel Prize winners, leaders and scientists, philanthropists and politicians. We have often defined what it is to be an insider even while carrying an uncertain ambivalence – Are we really accepted? What do they say about us behind our backs? We are often like Disraeli who defined himself as the blank page between the Old and New Testaments.

In Orthodoxy far too many of our wives, mothers and sisters are disenfranchised because they are women – Modern Orthodoxy needs to ensure that women have positions of real and effective leadership and involvement. Israel is leading the revolution in this respect with women studying Torah and Halacha at the same level as their male counterparts. We will still need to find the courage to give these women position of leadership in our shules, Batei Din and religious schools. We also need to support all Jewish women against our own Taliban who won't sit next to a woman on a bus or plane and whose attitudes to women are often degrading and dismissive.

Far too many of our community are excluded because they have married non-Jews. Of course we want our kids to marry Jewish but if they haven't we need to reach out to them with compassion and love and bring them back home by making conversion more accessible, by telling them that we need them.

Far too many of our young feel alienated and we need to offer them, not the ice-bucket challenge, but a honey-bucket one. They don't have to be doused with the icy response of how "you are killing your grandparents" and "what about the Shoah". Instead let's drench them in the sweet reality of being part of an incredible people who were always clear-eyed in their perception of evil, undeterred in their confrontation of injustice, breathtaking in their intellectual ability and who have so much to offer the Gen Y generation and the world around them.

Far too many feel disempowered and unwelcomed because they are gay. Traditional Judaism needs to redouble its efforts to include its LGBTI children, to ensure they don't go down the path of depression and suicide. And let's not forget to welcome those we sometimes neglect –the disabled and the abused ,the migrant and the visitor .And lets use this empathy to reach out to our fellow Muslim Australians under pressure –especially the woman .The burka isn't the problem, it's the bogan and of course it's the mad-eyed mullahs and their perversion of religion and morality.

The Halacha stated that when it comes to blowing shofar, "kol hakolot kasher" – every sound counts regardless of how weak of insipid it is; and so very Jew counts regardless of how far they have distanced themselves from the community. The Halacha also tells us that even if you are outside of the shule, perhaps just passing by when the shofar is being sounded, if you simply listen you have fulfilled the mitzvah. You don't have to be inside the shule to be part of the family. You still belong.

And that is why at Caulfield Shule as much as we want people to come to shule and enjoy our magnificent services, we are creating multiple activities and entry

points different, AND Hineni is one of those great and welcoming entrees into Judaism and our Shul. Inclusivity is in.

During the Yamim Noraim time we welcome back all Jews, we invite back our estranged family members, we open the doors to the alienated as well as the affiliated, the cynical and the serious, the tired and the untroubled, the devoted and the devil... to be part of and contribute to our community in their own best way.

*Rabbi Ralph Genende is the senior rabbi at Melbourne's Caulfield Hebrew Congregation. He joined the synagogue after serving as a rabbi in Auckland, New Zealand and as the college rabbi at Mount Scopus Memorial College. Rabbi Genende continues to provide Hineni with wisdom, warmth and an open door.*

# Learning, changing, moving

*By Aaron Kalman*

Yom Kippur is a special day for Jews around the world, regardless of their upbringing, life style or background. For thousands of years this day has been filled with the sound of prayers sung to special tunes, the sight of a *Talit* being worn at night and the feeling of close-knit communities coming together while every man and woman thinks about the year they've had.

From the prayer of the *Chazan* before *Kol Nidrei* to the sound of the shofar signaling the end of the festival, every Jew can go to Synagogue in Mexico, France or Russia and feel at home. This is true about Yom Kippur, and it's true about every festival in the Hebrew calendar – being one people, one religion, means being able to connect to our traditions with communities of the same faith.

When we came to Australia nearly two years ago we experienced this welcoming hug from the Jewish community here. While shule was slightly different to what I was used to from my childhood in Jerusalem and life in Givat Shmuel, the words of the prayer were the same. And, when the holidays arrived, the traditions were very similar.

But, the move to Sydney also brought with it change and challenge. Ironically, the holidays during which shule felt like home were also the days that highlighted the differences felt between Australia and Israel: the days on which Israel shuts down and people have time off work are school, work and business days for those living in Sydney and Melbourne; the feeling of preparations with sales and special deals at the shops was non existent before Purim or Chanukah; and not all the cars in the streets had Israeli flags hanging from the window before Yom Ha'Atzmaut. And above all these differences stood the feeling on Yom Kippur.

As someone who grew up in Jerusalem, Yom Kippur was never only the *Talit*, shofar and sounds of prayer. This special day had also been the day there were no cars on the streets, that one day a year when the arguments between observant and secular wasn't about the relevance of the day – just about whether it should be spent in shule or on a bike on the city's empty roads.

And, as an Israeli, Yom Kippur is also the memorial day for a national trauma, a collective wound referred to as “the Yom Kippur war.” It's a day when, sometime in Mussaf, you'd look at your watch and realize that it was almost 2:00pm – the time Egyptian and Syrian forces, in 1973, caught your army by surprise; it's the day on which hundreds of Israeli soldiers lost their lives; it's not only a religious, but a national day.

Of all the possible biblical stories to choose from, our rabbis ordered that the story of Jonah the prophet be read on Yom Kippur. Most people would say it's the story of a man who goes to warn the population of an entire city that they shall all be killed if they don't change their ways, and a story about how those people listen to the prophet and are forgiven by god.

Others would argue with this description, challenging it. Personally, I'd say our rabbis made a very interesting choice, seeing as the book of Jonah is all of the above – but it talks about the repentance of non-Jews and a prophet who takes issue with Hashem allowing people who had sinned to avoid punishment.

So why, according to my reading of the story, did our sages decide that it was this story that should be read out loud and publically on Yom Kippur? I think the answer is in the small details that are overlooked by many.

The book of Jonah has a number of stories of repentance and *Teshuvah*; not only the people of Ninve make amends with god. The first story of prayer to Hashem takes place on the boat, as Jonah is trying to flee god's command. The sailors pray for their lives, and for the lives of their (problematic) passenger. The second story is that of Jonah's return to the task and his coming to terms with god's rule of the world. In other words, Jonah isn't only the teacher and prophet – he's also the student and sinner who needs to learn how to repent.

Even before our wedding Shachar and I knew we wanted to go on *Shlichut* and help build bridges between Israel and a Jewish community. We came with ideas and plans about ways to bring a taste of our Israel to the communities at The Central Synagogue, Hineni, and wider Sydney. Some of those ideas worked, others failed, and yet more haven't even been tried... However, upon our arrival I learned that, like Jonah, sometimes the messenger has to learn from the people he's meant to serve.

There are ways in which Jonah is a leader, and there are ways in which he is led. And this is probably the greatest lesson we could learn on Yom Kippur – no one is perfect, everyone has to strive to be a better person. On Yom Kippur our rabbis have us reading a story about an individual who learns from his own mistakes before helping others correct their ways; this is an incredible thing to do on such a holy day.

This year on Yom Kippur we'll be back home, in Israel, knowing that Hineni continues to supply leaders to the Australian Jewish community. And, when you conclude the services with the age-old statement "Next year in Jerusalem," know that we'll be waiting for you.

*Aaron was the Shaliach of Hineni and Central Synagogue along with his wife, Shachar from 2013 until recently ending his shlichut in August 2015. He was active in the Israeli scouts and served as a commander in the IDF's paratrooper regiment. Aaron studied at Yeshivat Ma'ale Gilboa and before joining us in Sydney worked as the breaking news editor at the Times of Israel.*

# Embracing Yom Kippur as a chance for reflections about life and Hineni

***By Lauren Gam***

During Mincha on Yom Kippur we read from *Sefer Yona*. While the story of a man being swallowed by a giant fish seems quite farfetched, there are a number of more relatable messages to be drawn from the story, and I will explore how some of these relate to Hineni. God called upon Yonah the prophet to send a message to the people of Ninveh, and in response, “Jonah arose to flee from Tarshish from before God” (Yonah 1:3). So why did Yonah flee? And what did he flee from?

Throughout the Bible there are numerous images of leaders, especially prophets, who fail to influence people during their lifetime. So the idea of the frustrated prophet, unable to deal with the corrupt people who embitter his life is a core Biblical motif. According to a midrash in Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer, Yonah’s flight derived from his sensitivity to public opinion. God had previously sent Yonah to restore the border of Israel and his words were fulfilled (Kings 2 14:25). On a second occasion, God sent Jonah to prophesise that Jerusalem would be destroyed, but God showed mercy and did not destroy the city, and so the people called him a ‘lying prophet’.

Jonah understood that it was unlikely for a leader to be popular once they had acted like a leader. As Tony Blair says, “The art of leadership is saying no, not yes. It is very easy to say yes”. The type of leadership that is required by a prophet is almost always met by contempt, ungratefulness and alienation from the people.

However the way we view leadership at Hineni is quite different! Firstly, our leaders do not get consumed by giant marine life. But more notably, there is not one leader that stands out from the rest of the pack - we lead together. As Aristotle said, “ the whole is greater than the sum of its parts,” clearly seen when we look at the wonderful things that Hineni has achieved since its inception in 1975. In the past 40 years, hundreds of leaders have come out of Hineni more well-rounded, better educated, opinionated and with a spirit for kef, and this can be attributed to the

values of leadership that get passed down from madrichim to chanichim in the movement.

Once Yonah realises that he cannot escape from God and from his duties as a leader, he reveals who he is, and is thrown (as requested) off the boat on which he was trying to flee. Now this is where it gets cool... God sends a giant fish to swallow Yonah, and he resides in its belly for three days and three nights. Yonah uses this time to reflect, and ultimately through prayer he repents for his mistake and promises to do as God originally asked of him. And with that, God “spoke unto the fish and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land”.

In just three days with some powerful reflection Yonah could alter his perspective and attitude, and make a decision that would not only affect his life, but those of the 120,000 people who lived in Ninveh. This year at Hineni has involved a lot of introspection and reflection on the way we do things. For a movement with such a quick turnover of leadership, it is important for us to stop and take a step back to assess the way we are doing things and why. Hineni began as a small youth group for the Central Synagogue, and has since progressed into something much more widespread, and much larger. Hineni has big branches in both Sydney and Melbourne, with over 250 attendees across the country at our winter camps this July. To anyone reading and therefore supporting this publication, you are contributing in some way to the continual growth of this fantastic organisation – and for that, we thank you!

One of the most important lessons of Yom Kippur is that it's never too late to reflect and make positive change in our lives. So on behalf of the Hineni family, I'd like to wish you all a meaningful and reflective Yom Kippur. May the coming year be filled with health, happiness, peace and love. I look forward to the continual growth of Hineni with the wonderful support of the community.

Gmar V'chatima Tova!

*Lauren is the current Federal Rosh of Hineni. She is a member of shichvat Ofek and participated in the Hineni shnat program in 2013. She currently leads year 7 and is an integral part of both Hineni Sydney and Federal Hineni.*



# The vision for Israel

**By Guy Sussman**

“I will make you a light unto the nations, so my salvation will reach the ends of the earth” – Isaiah (49:6)

Being an “Or LaGoyim” – a light unto the nations, is a concept that the Jewish people wear with pride. Judaism teaches us that G-d bestowed us with a responsibility to exemplify G-d’s commandments and be an example to the non-Jews around us. The Jewish people have maintained this obligation as we passed through over 2000 years in the *galut* (exile) and still preserve it to this day. In the diaspora ‘Or LaGoyim’ is treated as a leading Jewish value with Jewish youth being made aware of its significance from the beginning of their Jewish education. No place epitomises the importance of this idea in Judaism more than the Jewish state. This phrase is continuously proclaimed by the secular Israeli government with Prime Minister Netanyahu recently stating Israel “always aspires to serve as a ‘Light unto the nations.’” Wherever we look in the Jewish world we see how being a ‘light unto the nations’ is an undisputed value that is held very closely by the Jewish people.

But does “Or LaGoyim” go against the essential tenets of Zionism?

We rarely hear the negation of this concept in relation to Israel, but it is impossible to overlook the conflict that lies before us. Zionism, a movement that enabled the Jewish people to be a ‘nation like any other nation’ opposes the idea of being a ‘light unto the nations.’

The historic debate about the nature of the Jewish people and their relation to the outside world continues to define, many of the characteristics presently seen in Diaspora Jewry and the State of Israel. This debate characterized the early Zionist pioneers literature about how best to cure the Jews misfortunes.

Max Nordau one of the earliest Zionist thinkers believed that the Jews were uniquely different to the rest of humanity, which fitted perfectly inline with traditional Jewish belief. However Nordau saw our difference as the cause of hardship rather than the key to our success. He said Zionism has a “sole purpose: the desire to normalise a people.” This perception of Zionism, which is echoed by

Herzl, sees its only role to stamp out our uniqueness and make the Jewish nation like all other nations. Depicting a backwards image of the Jewish people being guided by the light of all other nations.

This idea of 'Jewish normalisation' doesn't stop with the early Zionist thinkers; we see its continuation through the architect of the state and the first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion. Who famously stated, "When Israel has prostitutes and thieves, we'll be a state like any other." It is astonishing to see to what an extent there was desire among the Israeli elite to be a 'normal nation,' despite all the negative characteristics that is an intrinsic part of such a nation.

Ben Gurion's vision for Israel may seem incomprehensible to us as we question why he would dream of Israel being mediocre among nations. However Ben Gurion's vision is very reasonable when re-evaluating the reasons that pushed forward the Zionist movement.

Similar Herzl's relationship to the Dreyfus Affair, many Jews turned to Zionism due anti-Semitism. Leon Pinsker, a secular Zionist fleeing Russian persecution believed that the Jews received no equality in the intercourse among nations because they did not hold sovereignty and thus were not secured by treaties and international laws. The Jewish people needed to develop and possess the distinctive national characteristics that all other nations share such as central representation, a homeland, a flag, a unified language and even prostitutes and thieves to join the "ranks of other nations" and be granted equal respect. This belief forms the ideological base of Israel as envisioned by the Declaration of Independence - "This right is the natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign state."

We can now see the two opposing visions for the State of Israel. On one side we have being a 'light unto the nations' while on the other we have being a 'nation like all other nations.' These opposing prophecies tell us more than how we should relate to the outside non-Jewish world, but rather how to structure and fit into our Jewish world.

As active Jewish Zionists we cannot negate either of these views despite their conflict of interests. We cannot reject early Zionists opinions towards the normalisation of the Jewish people because it was vital to the establishment of our state and our equal standing among other nations. Similarly we cannot ignore our religious commandment exemplified by the words of Rav Kook, and disregard our 'choseness' with distinct characteristics that differentiate us from other nations.

Israel's national poet, Hayim Nahman Bialik was able demonstrate how these two values work in tandem. At the opening of the Hebrew University in 1925 he explained that after 3000 years of exile and the constant longing to return to our homeland, "providence willed that the fate of the Jewish people be associated with that of every civilised nation." This circumstance has developed in us Jews "more than in any other people a sense of moral responsibility toward, and concern for, the future of civilization." He continues to state how in the future this doctrine of responsibility for the fate of humanity could spread to all the people.

Today in Israel we see how both visions have come into fruition. Israel is a nation that has all the distinctive elements of all sovereign states from an army to McDonalds. We also see the distinct uniqueness of Israel from the Socialist Kibbutz movement to the Start up Revolution that currently exists. We can only truly be a light, when we establish equal respect amongst the Jewish people and the rest of humanity and only then will this 'doctrine of responsibility for the fate of humanity' be spread.

*Guy Sussman is a member of Shichvat Oz and participated in Hineni's Shnat program in 2014. Guy is currently the state Rosh Chinuch (head of education) in NSW. He also ran the Sydney 2015 winter camp and is a Madrich of year 7.*

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The logo for Or Chadash, featuring a stylized sun or light source behind the text "Or Chadash".

Or Chadash

# The 'Yatom, Almanah and Ger' in today's society?

*By Charlotte Eizenberg*

As night falls across the North Caulfield sky and its surroundings families begin to prepare for the fast. Some scoff down roast chicken whilst others enjoy some tasteful tofu, wise Bubbas and Zeydas teach their grandchildren about the magic tummy filling properties of bananas but majority rush to brush teeth and hope for the best. Yom Kippur is a time of forgiveness, realization and atonement. Although during this time we should be reflecting on our family and ourselves its important not to forget about the "other" in our community. With the hustle and bustle of our modern lives sometimes it's hard to concentrate on others but the more we are conscious of others and care for them the more enhanced and elevated our lives and the lives of those around us will be. As Jewish people we have an obligation to care for the widow the orphan and the stranger. "He brings about justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the stranger by giving him food and clothing. Therefore, show your love for the stranger" (Deut. 10:17-19). As many flock the synagogues of Melbourne ready for their spiritual fix, others across Melbourne experience a different type of fast.

In Australia alone there are 105,237 people experiencing homelessness with 17% of them being under the age of 12. Many reading this may be wondering what they can do; homelessness does not have a simple answer and it won't simply end with getting people jobs or building houses. There are a number of investments and commitments required. These all start with the Australian government. But there are many things we can do to make life easier for others. There are various shelters and organizations across Melbourne that supply food and care for people experience homelessness or other difficulties. It's no lie that we Jews eat huge amounts of food and that food is a key part of our religion, even the act of not eating symbolizes so much. Something that horrifies me is the

amount of food that is wasted. This year post Pesach as I glared at the left over boxes of matzah stacked around my kitchen along with tubs of apple sauce that no one in my household was going to eat I realized that there were others who would appreciate those foods more. Using the power of Facebook I rallied up food from around the community, discovering that given the chance people can be unbelievably generous. People from around the community began dropping off their matzah at my house. It was amazing. After a few weeks I dropped the food off at a shelter and that was that. I felt good due to the sheer love you feel through giving but what really made me feel good was that when I ate my lunch that day I knew that there were more people in Melbourne who were not worried about when their next meal would be.

Sometimes in the world we live in it can be overwhelming and draining to discover the amount of causes that require our attention, some like to start small and focus and their community whilst others prefer to tackle the world's problems on a larger scale. Jews have this magical ability to care and console when someone is down, whether it's a death in the family, illness or financial struggles. I have experienced first hand the soothing abilities of kugel, cake and a heartfelt card. I commend our community for these capabilities but urge it discover its many other uses. Although we are incredibly charitable already with organizations like Standup and Jewish Aid, I believe that this is not enough and that we can always do more. We need to find selflessness in ourselves and teach it in our families and remind kids what being Jewish means. If we are a light among the nations we need to shine. We need to bring light into the lives of those in the darkest of times. Simple acts of kindness generate huge impacts. The time is now; the ability to sin and do wrong is all around us but so is the ability to do good. It's okay to fail but don't sit back in your seat next Yom Kippur simply to remember those thoughts and vows you made about helping others. It's time to acknowledge what we haven't achieved, ask G-d for forgiveness. A common misconception is that the translation of tzedakah is charity when in fact it is translated to righteousness. Giving tzedakah is an act of justice and our duty as Jewish people. We are commanded to give at least 10 percent of our income to tzedakah. It is our obligation to bring justice to the world and attempt to fix what is broken and unjust. Although this task may sound cumbersome it doesn't have to be, we all have the ability to help others and create balance in our

society. You can begin through small acts, naturally you will witness the remarkable chain created through small acts and understand your amazing ability. Look out for the stranger, widow and orphan in our society. They are presented in many different ways and it's our job to make them feel comfortable and help them without judgment.

The fast on Yom Kippur is significant symbolizing the time of Moshiach where hunger, starvation and strife are obliterated from humanity. Take this time to reflect on why we strive towards this messianic time. Avoiding the consumption of food is meant to heighten us more spiritually during Yom Kippur much like angels, although difficult it can be a really special time even though it can be disheartening to try and find that type of connection post Yom Kippur. Use this fasting time to reflect on what you lack throughout the year, for me I want to enhance my life through giving more time and Tzedakah. I believe this will provide me with a different type of nourishment I find unfulfilled through food. You might find this article to be a nice thought but forget about it by the time you break the fast, when you bite into your break fast meal remember your obligation, remember your ability and don't forget what the food you are eating means. Hold onto the spirituality you felt throughout Yom Kippur but remember you can find it in other ways. As you head back into normal life remember you have a mission. Your first mission is asking someone if they are ok. Mean it. Your second mission is what I will leave you with: invite someone home from shul to your break fast meal and discover the true magic of food. If you are a stranger looking for kindness give this article to someone else and ask what he or she will be doing to break the fast. After all kindness is always better together.

*Charlotte is a chanich of Melbourne Hineni and is a member of Sihchvat Barak (year 12). She is heavily involved in the organisation and running of Melbourne's Hineni Youth Minyan and is regularly vocal on issues regarding social justice. Charlotte attends Leibler Yavneh College in Melbourne.*

# What is individuality, and what does it mean to be individualistic in modern life?

*By Jason Glass*

For many years, we as humanity have struggled to comprehend what it means to be an individual. Do we have to wear different clothes, or act in a certain way? Does every facet of our life have to be original, or is there some leniency surrounding the aspects of our life that have to be unique in order to be considered an *‘individual’*?

As most of you could have guessed, there are no official guidelines or criteria that we need to meet in order to be *‘individuals’*. I’ve checked. In many ways, being an individual is the easiest task any of us can achieve. To quote the late Graham Chapman, *“You are all individuals<sup>6</sup>.”* Every single person on earth is unique, biologically, spiritually, philosophically and ideologically.

So if we are all – by definition – individuals, why are we perpetually tormented by the elusive concept of individuality? Believe it or not, there’s no easy answer. But I can try sharing some of my thoughts with you.

It will come as no surprise to you that people like to fit in. We do. We like to feel loved, to feel needed, and to *belong*. And whilst we don’t like to admit it, almost all of us – to some extent – conform to our social climates, in the insatiable pursuit of social affirmation. But that’s not always a bad thing. We can gain confidence or discover parts of ourselves we never knew existed. Society as we know it could not function without conformity. Last time I checked, no judge would pardon manslaughter as a result of driving on the right side of the road (and by that I mean the wrong side) on the grounds of *‘individuality.’* Conversely,

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<sup>6</sup> If you didn’t recognise this quote, you are in urgent need of a viewing of *‘Monty Python’s Life of Brian’*

conformity can also result in cult indoctrination, substance abuse and plenty of other similarly distasteful activities. But, I digress. Humans, the social creatures we are, have an inherent desire to be accepted, and far too often, we compromise our fundamental beliefs, characteristics and qualities in an attempt to satisfy this desire. And herein lies our problem. Many of us live with the misconception that we can't fit in various social groups because we are different, because we are *individuals*, even though more often than not, it's these differences that make us all the more interesting to those around us. Think about it. When you're with a group of people, it's the person with the story, the person with something new to say who's always the most captivating.

It's also worth mentioning the ongoing transformation of Western Culture, as individuality is not just accepted, but even encouraged. Over the last few years we've seen the rise of pop-stars like Lady Gaga – who is largely known for her eccentric costumes and stage persona, as well as her music, "*Born This Way*" – we've seen the increase in popularity of indie (or independent) movies<sup>7</sup>, music<sup>8</sup> and games<sup>9</sup>, not to mention the latest obsession with 'hipster' culture. Not only is society finally recognising the necessity for individuality, but encouraging it, allowing individuality to thrive.

Obviously (and unfortunately), this is not yet universally applicable. In some schools, bullies target the strange kid, and in some workplaces, conformity is key

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<sup>7</sup> Events like Sundance, Tribeca and Sydney film festivals are rapidly growing in size and frequency, as well as the increasing popularity of independently produced films on the mainstream circuit.

<sup>8</sup> Through the more recent introductions of social medias such as YouTube, Spotify and SoundCloud, more and more 'indie' musicians are found everyday, and able to share their music with the world

<sup>9</sup> The amount of available resources for programmers and software developers has – because of the internet – increased to the point where almost anyone can teach themselves to code and make an iPhone app, as well as the ease for their distribution through 'Steam' (a service dedicated to online purchase and download of games)



for a promotion, but it's nice to know that pop culture is embracing the individual.

Now let's throw some controversy in the mix. *What does it mean to be an individual within a Jewish (or religious) framework?* Good question. Some would argue that Jewish individuality is an oxymoron. Surely if – by Halachah<sup>10</sup> – to be Jewish, you are required eat the same foods, say the same prayers, share the same beliefs, and so on, that it is impossible to be an individual within this framework? Well yes, at least on a superficial level. But on a deeper, more intrinsic level, I believe this to be false.

Judaism – like all religions – is based on various interpretations of a religious text. A majority of our laws, rituals and customs descend from sentiment, from ideas devised by Jewish elders and Rabbi's that have been passed down and practiced through each generation before us. And there are no 'wrong' interpretations, nor is one better than the other. Belief in the Bible as the literal word of Hashem is no more or less valid then belief of the Bible as a series of metaphors and anecdotes that outline morality in a profoundly beautiful way.

So ultimately it comes down to you. You are the leader of your own mind, the captain of your spiritual vessel. Don't let anyone tell you what to belief, or to make the decisions for you. Follow where your faith takes you, and find the right balance of conformity and individuality for your own life. And just because something is right for you, that does not make it objectively right, or right for the person beside you. In the words of Henry David Thoreau, *"If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music he hears, however measured far away."* If someone has different beliefs to you, celebrate these differences, and rejoice in the beauty of the religion that has brought us and kept us together for thousands of years.

*Jason is a member of Shichvat Barak (year 12) in Hineni Sydney. He is constantly a passionate contributor in programs and currently attends Moriah College in Sydney.*

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<sup>10</sup> הלכה – Jewish Law/practice

# Judaism, Jonah and some Dramatime

**By Andrea Lipshutz**

*“Story reminds us that connectedness to the world does not always mean some have more and some have less, but that we all have stories and that is what brings us together.” - Pam Allyn*

One of the earliest memories I have is dressing up as Malkat Esther on Purim, listening to the story, screaming as we heard Haman’s name. I made shields for the Maccabees, ploughed fields with Ruth and listened year after year as Moshe freed the Jews from slavery in Egypt. These stories have shaped not only my Jewish identity, but the Jewish life, culture and meaning of every young Jew. Storytelling is a large part of Jewish culture and tradition, ingrained into us as a people. Not only stories of Avraham, Moshe and David but also distant memories of the golden age and of the Shtetl. This, therefore, has become part of our collective testimony as Jews, these stories run through our veins and are part of our DNA. Each year, we travel with Jonah into the pit of the whale’s stomach and listen to his story. But why?

Storytelling and drama date back thousands of years ago with the sharing of stories by word of mouth and then later through documentation. These stories began as a means to express people’s inner thoughts, feelings and opinions. Storytelling allows for the human psyche to ascribe control over the world, for people to see the patterns where there is chaos and meaning where there is randomness. Greek Mythology, for example, was used as a means to explain the environment in which humankind lived, the natural phenomena they witnessed and the passing of time through the days, months, and seasons. It explained the inexplicable, where humanity had arisen from, where it was going after death, and gave advice on the best way to lead a happy life. Lastly, Greek Mythology served as a way to connect the mundane world to the transcendent world, a means of linking the Greeks past and present to meaning. Greek Mythology only marks one example of the relatedness between religion and story telling. In the Medieval Era, the influence of theatre and drama had long disappeared from society and was rather replaced by Christianity. Soon, however, emerged tropes, which were biblical verses sung in tune. As the years went on, these tropes were transformed into short plays and ultimately, these were moved out of the church and onto the stage. For hundreds of years to follow

this, theatre developed from this form of religious storytelling, plays recounting the stories of creation and the prophets, of mankind's moral dilemmas and of conversations with values such as death, greed and love. This interwoven nature between religion and storytelling shows the ideas, messages and morals this form of expression can have on these stories.

In Judaism, storytelling is used to elevate faith, inspire action and lastly to impart *mussar haskel*, ethical understanding. These stories within the Jewish tradition are powerful, motivational, inspirational, educational tool to tell the happenings, lives and meanings of the Jewish people. More than this, collective memory has shaped our Jewish identity with legends passed down from generation to generation. This memory is not just formed by stories of our great-great-great-great-great-great grandparents but by the performance of the tunes of songs during Kabbalat Shabbat, the honey cakes rising in the oven on Rosh Hashana and the costumes that adorn each child on Purim. These all add to the rich theatricality of Judaism, the performance, the narratives and the drama. Midrashim, for instance, are stories taught by the sages that provide intrinsic analysis into passages from the Tanach. These stories, however, go beyond the simplicity of interpretation but rather go beyond the simple distillation of religious, legal or moral teachings. They fill in the gaps and build on existing stories in order to provide deeper insight and understanding into the psyche and ethos of the biblical characters. These allegories allow for illuminations of the history of Jewish thought and process as well as providing a way to understand the mysteries of the Tanach and of God's word. Moreover, storytelling in Judaism can be looked at through the lens of *Hassidut* as it emphasises the sacred nature of the stories about the prophets and the *tzaddikim*. Within Hassidut exists a theology of storytelling, a method and a process in asking what stories can lend to us as intellectual, engaged, Jewish people. Hassidim view Jewish storytelling as a mitzvah, a purely spiritual practice requiring reflection. The Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hassidism said that telling stories praising the *tzadikim* and the noble deeds of the common Jews is akin to studying the Torah and further the equivalent of praising god. Many Hassidic thinkers praised and promoted storytelling because they appreciated its inspirational power. A person hearing a religious teaching may be impressed by its truth, but a tale about someone actually fulfilling the teaching can motivate the listener to action. Additionally, Hassidic tradition teaches that all stories contain a lesson for a person's religious and moral

behaviour on many different levels. Lastly, Hassidism related to the theatre in these narratives, in expressing these stories in alive and engaging ways in order for the listener to conjure a living picture and visualise himself in the action, as the protagonist of the story fulfilling these messages themselves. Story-telling and drama have rich histories and meanings within Judaism lending meaning to each character, narrative or holiday.

On Yom Kippur, we hear the tale of Jonah. Kabbalah puts it perfectly. “This has got to be a metaphor, because I have never boarded a seafaring vessel bound for Tarshish to escape prophecy, gotten caught in a storm, had the crew throw me overboard and been swallowed by a fish.” Correct. So why does this story emerge on Yom Kippur, the day of days, the holiest of holy? Like all stories in Judaism, the story of Jonah aims to compel us to find meaning between its words, messages we can attribute to our daily life. Many believe we tell Jonah’s story because it models repentance and God’s forgiveness. The Zohar, the Kabbalistic text, claims that the story of Jonah is the perfect allegory for our lives. We are Jonah and his story is one of the soul’s journey on earth. Thus, on Yom Kippur, as we examine our lives and consider our purpose in this world, we remember the historical Jonah whose real-life narrative symbolizes our spiritual odyssey. In addition to this, the story of Jonah shows us that like Jonah we can run away from our problems but we can never hide. We run, we are swallowed up and we are spit out. We have times when the responsibility of the world is thrust upon our shoulders and we have times when we feel very much alone. Sometimes, just like Jonah, we feel that life is too much for us. We struggle under the pressures of school, university, Hineni, societal constructs, family, so we run away to Netflix or scrolling a stranger’s Instagram feed or baking some delicious treats for no apparent reason. We hide and put off our issues until we get swallowed by our own metaphorical whale. We try and find meaning in our small world, a way to reflect in order to illuminate our problems, a light amongst the darkness found in the belly of the whale. It is this critical, personal analysis and reflection that Jonah was undertaking and what Yom Kippur forces us to acknowledge. In this time, Jonah was forced to confront his fears, his loneliness, his mistakes, and his God. Yom Kippur compels personal introspection but emphasises the belief that you cannot give yourself to others, to your religion, to your belief or ideology without know who you are. And this self-acknowledgment and actualisation cannot eventuate without a chance for you to dream, feel, believe, explore, wonder and fear. Yom Kippur

stresses that we are not alone, that another year has passed and we made it out alive and we can do it again with the support of our inner selves, the people around us and of God. Storytelling on Yom Kippur shows the most profound message, as it is a day about focussing on our selves and us as a member of the Jewish nation. Jonah's story leaves with the setting of the sun as we can emerge with the morals that emanate from his chapter, messages of a more positive, confident, active member of our wider society.

Storytelling and drama within Judaism serve to acquaint ourselves with who we really are and who we strive to be. These morals and messages reflected within the pages of each book and within each sentence of each oral testimony force us to think about the impact that we as individuals, as a movement and as a collective can have on our world. Narratives frame our Jewish traditions and practices for this purpose, to continually remind ourselves of who we are and what Judaism means to us.

*Andrea is a member of Shichvat Ofek and participated in the Hineni shnat program in 2013. She is currently a madricha of shichvat Barak (year 12) and is also the head of Hineni's Israel program. Andrea's drive and energy are what inspires her chanichim to continuously better themselves*

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# Blind Faith in G-d has no place in Judaism

***By Eitan Meyerowitz***

It undermines every single mitzvah and Jewish action we do. True faith in G-d is found in the search of one.

Okay, before you completely disregard me as a heretic let me explain myself, I grew up in Leibler Yavneh College, a religious, modern orthodox school. In my three years of kinder (yes I had to do an extra year, the girls played with me as if I was a doll, it's a touchy subject), I learned two things:

- 1) you can't always be 'abba' at the mock Shabbat table and
- 2) "hashem is here, hashem is there, hashem is truly everywhere."

From the outset it was drummed in to me that I believed in G-d, and that everyone around me believed in G-d as well. From then on G-d became a character in my life, he began as a white ball of light, evolved to a man in the sky and eventually lost all human features and I treated G-d as a giant ear, someone always listening but never responding.

I thought living a Jewish life was completely based on the belief in G-d and everything else was an extension of that core belief. So you can imagine it came as quite a shock when I met my first Jew who didn't believe in G-d. It came as more of a horror as I started to move further on into my schooling and entered the youth movement sphere and I realised I was surrounded by 'non-believers'.

Suddenly belief in G-d was not a given but rather some value that some people believed in and others did not, the same way some people like sport and others (me) do not. At one point in my eyes, only indoctrinated people believed in G-d, the type of people who believed things just because that was what was taught to them.

I began to question my own belief in G-d, I asked myself the hard questions like 'do I believe in G-d because Morah Peninah does, or because it's a truth that I know?' and 'does the G-d I believe in have a sense of humour or is that a stupid question?' I knew that if the answers to these questions produced an undesirable answer, one that

disproved the existence of a G-d, a large chunk of my life would be changed, and that scared me.

The way I see it, there are two ways one can come to understand G-d. Either like me they grew up *with* G-d and have been taught how to relate to G-d not if they relate to G-d at all. Or they could grow up without G-d and later in life come to an understanding of G-d. They grow up aware of the idea of G-d but an active belief as something for religious (or crazy) people. Later in life they come to understand G-d, whether it be through a spiritual experience, a sudden epiphany, or based on an evaluation of the world, its current state and how it came to be, and they decide that G-d does in fact exist.

I think the people in the latter category have a much deeper connection to G-d than any of us in the first. Their belief in G-d is based on some sort of logic, or inner feeling; they are not afraid of the question '*does G-d exist?*' because their belief in G-d is a result of asking that very question.

The problem with those who grew up with G-d is not that they have no connection to G-d, many claim that they too have a spiritual feeling that tells them that G-d is true, the problem with these 'spiritual feelings' is that they may be ersatz (Thankyou to *a series of unfortunate events* for teaching me that word) ones. Growing up with teachers parents and peers preaching a deep connection to G-d, one that 'you will understand one day' if you don't today. Teachings like this make us suppress any questions about the belief in G-d and when we come to an age when we truly can articulate our questions, we are so set in our ways, that fear of change prevents us from considering all possible answers, including the answers that movements like atheism provides.

And why question our belief in G-d when it might result in a lack of belief? The belief in G-d provides so much for us, it gives us an element of spirituality, a life that is deeper than the materialistic, physical one we see non-believer's leading, so why go down a path that may end with a rejection of G-d?

Despite this, questioning our belief in G-d and viewing our relationship with the omnipresent one as a journey rather than a destination, makes our beliefs much stronger and real. There are two questions to be asked: Does G-d exist? And if so what does that mean?

Before I questioned my belief in G-d, I could strongly affirm, yes I know that G-d is real but I would be stumped where you to ask me what that means. I'm not saying that I can now, that post-questioning G-d for a few years, I have realised what he is and where to find him, no that would be unintelligible, but I do now understand how I relate to G-d and what my relationship with him is (excuse the references to he, I know it's very simplistic language but to be honest, it's just easier).

It's funny because you'd think I'd emerge from such a process of searching for G-d with a deep, complex understanding and relationship. But the opposite occurred, I almost simplified my relationship to G-d, I don't worry so much any-more about what he looks like, and if he enjoys humour or not, now I just have an open dialogue with him. When I'm angry I turn to him, to shout and when I'm happy I turn to him to give thanks. This simplistic relationship scared me at first, I believed that everyone around me connected to a more complex but truer version of G-d, and therefore I was essentially talking to the walls of my bedroom, or the pages of a siddur. Up until a few weeks ago, I knew two things:

One that it was important to question G-d, and two that I needed a hell of a lot more questioning before I even came to a glimmer of understanding. Then on a Zionist seminar, one of the madrichim said something to me that shifted my paradigm on the issue "simple isn't shallow" he said. You know when someone says something to you, and it completely changes how you view something? "simple isn't shallow" was one of those something's. Now I am fully confident in the validity of my current relationship with G-d, I am not able to articulate what I think G-d is, but I am able to articulate what my relationship with him. And maybe in a few years it will change, but that's something I'm not worried about, in fact it's something that excites me, because of my lack of blind faith, and my faith being a result of a search for meaning, my relationship with G-d will always have some element of truth within it, at least from my part.

I grew up knowing that G-d exists, but honestly when I said to my peers "I know G-d exists", it was me parroting my teachers, not an expression of inner clarity about the truth of G-d. I then began a journey of introspection, and search for a truer version of G-d. Throughout the process, I never once denied the existence of G-d, and to me the fact that I never lost faith, proves the validity of my faith, because if such a faith can survive the level of scrutiny I put it through, then there must be some element of



truth behind it. Theodore Schick Jr brings the idea that it is immoral to believe in something without reason “Everybody's entitled to their own opinion' goes the platitude, meaning that everybody has the right to believe whatever they want. But is that really true? Are there no limits on what is permissible to believe? Or, as in the case of actions, are some beliefs immoral? Surprisingly, perhaps, many have argued that just as we have a moral duty not to perform certain sorts of actions, so we have a moral duty not to have certain sorts of beliefs.”

While I may not 100% agree with him, he brings up an interesting point, using his logic it follows that doing Jewish acts based on a belief in G-d, one that is based upon blind faith and no further introspection, is immoral because there is no sustainable basis for the actions.

Theodore aside, I believe that by entering into a process of moral introspection that searches for G-d and questions our fundamental beliefs, we make the beliefs we have not only stronger but also richer and more valid.

During Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, I'm going to be chatting away with G-d, because I know have the ability to understand my relationship with him and am able to act upon that. Find how you relate to G-d, so that you may truly understand what it means to be standing before him.

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# The importance of group Prayer in Judaism

***By Ariana Aufgang***

Why is it that we feel the need to pray with others? Does God listen more when we pray as a collective? Does it force us to look at ourselves and truly reflect and question what we have done? Are we judging our actions by comparing ourselves to others? Or is it merely because we are standing together as the Jewish people united in our aims and our beliefs?

It is interesting to look back on the times the Jewish people have united in prayer and what the outcomes have been. Two examples I am going to draw from are the story of Nineveh and Megillat Esther.

The story of Nineveh is one that highlights the impact of an entire people's repentance. When Jonah came to the people of Nineveh and explained God's intention to destroy them, the immediate response was to unite in fast and pray for forgiveness. The people of Nineveh did not want to accept their fate and begged mercy of God through repentance. "And God saw their deeds, that they repented from their evil way; and God relented concerning the evil he said he would bring upon them, and did not do it" (Yona 3.10). This provides the perfect example of the power of numbers. Just as it is significantly faster to sweep a room with an entire broom rather than a single strand, so to is prayer not only heard but also processed to a much greater extent the more people and passion are involved. The greater the response, the greater the impact, and it is the response from the people of Nineveh that cause God to rethink his decision. If so many people are wanting to repent for their actions and ask forgiveness then God's aims have been achieved. He has forced them to rethink how and why they act and change to avoid destruction. Fear is a powerful tool in this story, and it is the fear in the people of Nineveh that saves them in the end.

In comparison, Esther takes a slightly different approach which results in a very similar outcome. "Go assemble all the Jews that are to be found in Shushan, and fast for me; ... thus I will come to the king though it is unlawful; and if I perish, I perish"(Esther 4.12). Esther was prepared to risk her life for the chance of saving the Jewish people and was able to gain support and strengthen her cause. The unification with Esther is what made such a huge impact on the situation and truly highlights the significance of what she was fighting for. King Achashverosh recognized this and Esther's actions combined with those of the Jewish people caused him to retain his prior decision.

It is quite fitting that we as modern day Jews conclude our month of repentance (Elul), and the following days of reflection (Aseret Y'mei Teshuva) with the story of Yona. After uniting in Slichot we begin the New Year with a story that reminds us how important it is to support and stick by each other. Yona is read in the afternoon of Yom Kippur, it is read with enough time for people to reflect on its messages and take action for themselves. From this we learn that it's not just about the quantity of prayer, but more the quality, and how genuine and passionate not just one person but the entire kehila (community) can be. Anyone that has been to Shule for Neillah would remember, and every year will continue to be reminded of the incredible atmosphere. Everyone is solely focused on prayer and that feeling of unification is unmissable. This unification whether looking at prayer or solidarity is why we are still here today and able to make as much of an impact as we do.

*Ariana is a member of shichvat Ofek and participated in Hineni's shnat program in 2013. She is currently Rosh (head) of Hineni Melbourne after serving as Melbourne gizbar (treasurer) last year.*

# The Madatory Mantra: Shifting the Paradigm of Prayer

***By Benji Prawer***

Prayer is certainly one of the harder concepts to accept wholly and to practise rigorously and with full intent. Most of us are perpetrators of talking during prayer or staring blankly at our siddurim nodding off to sleep as we fall victim to our lack of sleep. Almost all of us can admit to having prayed without the proper intention or correct mindset and many people can admit to having no connection to prayer whatsoever and yet, a considerable majority if not everyone can see value in prayer and recognize its importance (whether it be religious, spiritual etc.) in day to day life.

The main school of thought when it comes to prayer is that the intention is everything. It is the essence of prayer and without it you may as well go outside and stealthily pick at the Kiddush (guilty as charged). It is also taught that a prayer said without intention is in vain and is transgressing on the commandment to not say Hashem's name in vain. The paradigm in which prayer has been framed for so many years to so many people has alienated those who lack connection, those yet to find it and those who will not pray in vain. I would like to shift this paradigm to a more holistic and spiritual view of prayer whilst maintaining its rigorous implementation and perhaps even amplifying the internal effects of prayer.

The first thing to establish is that prayer is in no way supposed to be spiritual. You are not required to feel connected to God, yourself or at all through prayer. In fact it is a requirement and "has no unique ... status in a Judaic way of life. Like every other mitzvah, prayer should be regarded as one of the prescribed mitzvot that define the uniqueness of Judaism" (Yeshayahu Leibowitz). Prayer is a requirement. A mitzvah. A commitment to God and to the religion. This is an integral principle of the new prayer paradigm: an understanding that regardless

of connection, prayer is a requirement of each and every Jew three times a day. One does not need to mean the prayer, but simply to recite it. Leibowitz continues to remove spirituality from the equation as he asserts that “human needs ... spiritual, ethical or otherwise, are irrelevant to the prayer moment” rendering prayers like “Shma Kolenu” (hear our voices), Prayer for IDF etc. superfluous.

It seems bland and unromantic, entirely counter-productive to making prayer more spiritual and easier to understand. Leibowitz however has unintentionally alluded to another aspect of prayer that is less spoken about – repetition. Prayer on a universal scale and particularly among spiritual communities has always been focused on creating connection to the ethereal and oneself through repetition (sometimes known as a mantra). In stating that prayer is a requirement and not anthropocentric, Leibowitz has created an emphasis and a framework in which repetition is ritual creating a so-called “mandatory mantra”.

I was first introduced to the idea of a “religious” mantra context in an alternative minyan offered by Yavneh College in which we sat in a circle of silence and darkness repeating a series of three or four words from Psalms for over 20 minutes. I would not describe myself as being spiritual but this experience certainly was powerful, the words evolved from their inherent meaning to an idea, a framework, opening doors both connected and unconnected to the meaning of the words. I soon became more aware of the prevalence of mantras. On a recent trip to Turkey my knowledge of Islam and in particular Salat (prayer) was expanded, revealing that repetition (mantra) is a core part of the process of prayer in which the same sentences and paragraphs can be repeated over 20 times a day.

Thusly, the first half of the new paradigm has been established: **prayer must now be thought of as a mandatory mantra which fulfills the requirement of thanking and praising God.**

In general, people may find it difficult to view Jewish prayer services as an effective mantra as it is often perceived as arduous and too lengthy to feel any

sort of tangible repetition (aside from the Amida and Shema this is legitimate). Therefore, the second half of the new paradigm must be articulated. Whilst it is slightly contradictory to the Leibowitz's view of what prayer should be it must exist in perfect disharmony, creating a holistic, relatable and healthy perception and practice of prayer. Prayer should exist as a premature giving of thanks and acknowledgement of health and happiness. In year 12 my Gemara teacher (who I disagreed with on almost every single point) told me that "there's no atheist in a foxhole". Just as no one ever expressed thanks for functional arms until they're broken, so too people really only begin to appreciate their world when it is altered. Prayer, and in particular morning blessings, are designed to allow us to use God as a "front" to truly get in touch with ourselves and become grateful for what we have.

The final half of the paradigm may be expressed as follows: **the very function of prayer is to be thankful for things that one cannot wholly and truly express at that moment.**

Therefore, when combined, this paradigm presents the perfect framework for prayer: academic spirituality. This outline emphasizes prayer as a mandatory practice which through its rigorous implementation trains the individual to be thankful for life regardless of the situation as well as fulfilling the mitzvah of prayer. Academic spirituality seems to be a contradictory idea, but when we begin to understand ourselves as complex beings comprised of a myriad of inconsistencies it fits perfectly.

Wishing you a meaningful and happy new year from Israel.

*Benji is a member of shichvat Lavi. He is currently in Israel participating in Hineni's shnat program. Benji has been continuously active be it in Melbourne or in Israel in both the political and social arena.*

# Ethiopian Jews and Israel Journeys

*By Raelle Freinkel and Daniel Coppel*

For the Jews of Ethiopia, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef was a life changing individual. Rabbi Ovadia Yosef against the odds was able to convince the Israeli Ministry of Absorption that the Beta Israel was descendants of the tribe of Dan and it was necessary to bring them to Israel. This was the first time a western country had taken African citizens not for slavery but to save them from a civil war. Between 1981 and 1991 multiple rescue missions including Operation Moses and Operation Solomon carried out by the Mossad saved one-hundred and twenty thousand Jews from another potential genocide. This was the greatest journey Beta Israel would ever encounter. Though this journey was never easy, it was incredibly difficult for Ethiopian Jews to integrate and acculturate into Israeli society. Coming from close to primitive living into a first world country there was much insensitivity towards their situation and cultural differences. As months turned to years Ethiopian Jews started finding their feet and place in society, this allowed them to share their culture, beliefs and traditions with the greater Jewish community. Kess Hadane, a leader in the Jewish community stated in an interview "When we came to Israel, the rabbinate told us that there are a few things we "forgot," that we didn't have a chance to learn in Ethiopia. We didn't like that way of talking to us. I don't feel that I have to add anything to my Jewish practice. . . . There is not even one Ethiopian synagogue in Bet Shemesh, where there are more than a hundred families." This statement displays the struggle that has been experienced by Beta Israel in their Aliyah and the inequalities they had to deal with. But, this will not forever be the case, as we move through time Israeli society is showing becoming more progressive and accepting towards immigrants particularly Beta Israel. This will continue to close the gap in society and further unify Jews from across the world.

It is not just the Ethiopian Jews, however. The Jews of the former Soviet Union had their talismanic leader as well, who convinced the world that the Jews of the

USSR needed to be freed from their oppression. Jacob Birnbaum taught the world, and inspired it to push for Soviet Jewish freedom. Once the Soviet Union broke up, Jews from the USSR started flooding into Israel. In 1989, the first Jews from Russia arrived, and since then, over a million Jews have emigrated from Russia to Israel. These Russian Jews tended to gravitate together in enclaves after they made Aliyah, and to this day, some of those enclaves are still present, and isolated. Ashdod, Ashkelon and Eilat all have Russian as a predominant language. The Law of Return had to be edited to allow for the fact that many Russian Jews were either not, or were not sure about being halachically Jewish. This has created a huge bridge between Russians and Israeli society as they are often not accepted, or not allowed to make Aliyah. This difficulty is still being handled today, and the fact that the Jewish Agency for Israel is headed by Natan Sharansky, a Russian Jew himself speaks volumes to the integration of some Russian Jews into the community. However, the journey for Russian Jews still continues as Israeli society moves forward and becomes more tolerant of Jewish immigrants.

Yemenite Jews were chased out of their lands as well. Operation Magic Carpet was one of the greatest journeys of Israel's brief history, and it remains one of the most important and influential. For a long time, many Yemenite Jews found that their traditions, and practices isolated them from the rest of Israeli society. As a result, many abandoned their heritage, and their practices.

As we are now in the time of judgement, it is upon us to show decency to all Jews around us, particularly those less fortunate than us. It is also a time to remember that life is not just about the destination, it is not just about arrival. Hineni's ideology talks about Aliyah Nimshechet. It is not just about Aliyah, but it is also about your actions once you make that journey. The dugma ishit that is aspired to isn't simply to be making Aliyah, or being modern orthodox/politically active/ pluralist Zionist. It is about fulfilling the basic pillars of the ideology, and striving for further, striving for greater excellence. It isn't enough just to be a madrich at Hineni, its important to take the chanichim on a journey and inspire them.



It is about the fact that the journey never ends, even after you reach your destination. It is not enough simply to at some point in the journey of life do something worth while. It is important that we do not forget our destination, and that we “Koom Lech” and do something in the world.

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# The power of the Journey: where Halacha meets Harry Potter

*By Lauren Kalisch*

If one were to analyse any well known story simply by reading its conclusion, final sentence, paragraph or even page, the whole story would both lose its meaning and be completely taken out of its original context. Take Harry Potter for instance. The final sentence of the seventh novel reads: “All was well.”

This is comical.

All was not well in the previous 4223 pages of JK Rowlings septology and I wasn’t aware that those three words encapsulated every part of Harrys’ plight for survival, Voldemorts pursuit for immortality and most importantly the emotional turmoil each reader was put through upon learning of Hedwig’s death. It is examples like these that reinforce the idea that in order to completely understand and appreciate a story it must be looked at holistically, in its entirety. Each one of those 4223 pages is part of the Harry Potter journey that ultimately led to its end point on page 4224, and it is the journey itself that should be the primary focus.

This analogy can be further applied to Halacha (Jewish Law). I say this because it is an easy task to look at Mitzvot as they are, a final sentence or a final ruling. However it is the evolutionary journey of rabbinic interpretation, extrapolation and codification that gives us true insight into the legal innovation behind the Mitzvot, and it is only through exploration of this process that we gain this required contextual and holistic understanding of the mitzvot themselves.

Sacred texts namely, the Mishna and the Gemara - which are the written forms of the Oral Torah and combined together make the Talmud – as well as other esteemed works by Jewish commentators at that time, are all literature that can instil within us a fundamental appreciation for the source of modern Jewish practice as well as provide us with invaluable Jewish knowledge. The study of Halacha explores the technicalities of the Mitzvot and their nuances through challenging, enlightening, rigorous and sometimes seemingly semantic discussion. This evolutionary journey

demonstrates that Halacha is not just a code of optional or non-optional laws, but rather a combination of perspectives and diversity that attempts to set a pragmatic and stable path for every Jew. Yes today we lack the authority of those Rabbis whose varied opinions formed the Talmud, however what remains is that same diversity among the voice of the Jewish people. In this sense, the diverse nature of the Talmud can be seen as a microcosm for the Jews of today, where each Jew has a unique and different voice.

Many of those voices including mine have difficulty integrating elements of this pragmatic and stable path into the modern lifestyle that we wish to lead. This dichotomy can be a deterrent for some who become overwhelmed by the dilemmas with which they are faced with on a day-to-day basis. Yet in the same way that 'all was well' does not tell you anywhere near enough about Harry Potter to be able to make an informed decision as to whether you're interested in reading it, the world of Halacha stretches far beyond the practical do's and don'ts of living an observant lifestyle. Halacha is a world that you decide to be a part of - a journey you wish to embark on and a series of choices that you make. It is a perpetual uphill climb of research, critical analysis, discussion, exploration, resentment, confusion, passion, rejection, repentance, and everything in between. In my opinion the choices that you make in the midst of the mess carry far less weight than the journey of making those choices. There is a reason the word Halacha is translated to mean 'the path one walks!' The emphasis does not lie with the end of the path nor its product; the emphasis lies with this ever-continuing journey itself.

*Lauren is a member of shichvat Ofek and participated in Hineni's shnat program in 2013. She is currently Rosh Chinuch (head of education) of Melbourne Hineni and is Rosh of the upcoming junior summer camp in Melbourne. Lauren is a passionate Madricha of Shichvat Nachshon (year 11) and is constantly inspiring Chanichim and Madrichim alike with her commitment to education.*

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# To Become Jewish

***By Benjamin Ezzes***

'Presto' is not a word that one could apply to the process of Jewish conversion.

It is, by its very nature, an intentionally protracted ordeal. A *beit din* is mandated by Jewish law to refuse the applicant three times to test their true intention, attempting to convince the potential convert that Judaism just isn't for them. They must warn them that the Jewish people have been persecuted throughout history, and that they are joining a troubled nation. It is a process that tests one's true conviction, intention, and willingness to undergo a fundamental change of belief.

So what can we, who are already initiated, learn from the process of *giyur*? Where is the point of transition that defines someone as Jewish, and what must the process leading up to that point look like? And how can we bring that root of identity into our High Holidays, a moment when the world itself is transcribed, for death or life?

To answer this question, one must take a brief look into the history of conversion in Judaism.

By virtue of this publication's theme, one must refer to the story of Yonah. In the second verse of the self-named Book of Yonah, G-d comes to the prophet and asks him to reform the city of Nineveh. As soon as G-d finishes speaking, Yonah is gone. He foolishly flees by sea and is caught by G-d who, to Yonah's surprise, is ubiquitous even over boats. The sea is tossed into a fierce storm, and the crew realise that Yonah is a Jew, growing suddenly very afraid. Though they've spent the storm praying each to their own deity, they see Yonah's as the source of the disaster. When they throw Yonah into the sea, and the storm stops, the Tanach tells us that: 'Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly; and they offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.' These vows, Rashi tells us, were in fact vows of conversion to Judaism, after seeing the great awe of G-d's might.

This idea of the revelation and conversion is not absent within Judaism. While today conversion is a more monitored process, often with a set of prescribed educational outcomes, countless examples exist within classical Jewish

literature of non-Jews converted in an instant who become great scholars in their generation. These narratives form a significant trope which survives to this day: the redemption narrative.

Though in modern times these chiefly concern people who are already Jewish coming back to full faith through a 'Eureka' experience, the genre is easily correlated with the more antiquated notion of gentiles undergoing similar revolutionary paradigm shifts and realising the 'error of their ways'. It works because it's a 'feel-good' story – something that gives one confidence in their beliefs. As a result, the notion of the ba'al teshuvah and the convert are closely linked. Both embody the desire to further a relationship with the divine.

So the crucial question remains: how does one prepare a conversion curriculum that furthers a relationship with the divine? How can one possibly construct such an individual, personal experience?

The answer is not obvious to me, and is one of the major challenges of comprehensive conversion. There is always criticism to be made of the conventional pedagogical approach, but there are some elements that should be included in the act of assuming Jewish identity. Knowledge of the Hebrew language, of the prayers, of observances minor and major is often included in curriculums formed by batei din all over the world; but truly, how many average Jews in those communities know all of the content? How many Jews, born and raised Jewish, can tell a rabbi what the bracha is for seeing lightning? Any attempt at comprehensive ideological conversion is, at its heart, a question of how to form Jewish identity, and what constitutes a 'completion' of that identity.

That is not to say that the idea of conversion is doomed to inadequacy. Rather, I believe that we must come to view conversion as part of an ongoing Jewish journey, rather than a binary transition. The crisis of Jewish identity has existed throughout Jewish history, and the journey to resonate with that identity has consumed Jewish thought. The simple act of conversion, from non-Jew to Jew, constitutes only a single part of that quest towards fully resonating with Jewish identity. So then if we redefine conversion to preclude the notion of being a completely observant Jew, with purest motivations, what are we left with? What is the basest form of Jewish identity?

In my research for this article, I came across conversion custom of the Karaites, a sect of Jews who believe only in the integrity of the Tanach and its commentaries, and reject the authority of the Oral Law. Thus, their conversion is of a very antiquated form. The conversion process takes place after a period of study totalling fifteen years, far longer than is expected for even the most Orthodox rabbinates of mainstream Jewry. The act of conversion itself is far simpler; converts recite the vow that Ruth took when accompanying her mother-in-law Naomi:

*“Do not ask me to leave you, and to return from following after you; for where you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your G-d my G-d. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried; thus may the LORD do to me – and more – if anything but death parts us.” (Ruth 1:16-17)*

Ruth, the paradigmatic convert from whom the Messianic line will issue, puts it into better words than any other. At its base, Judaism isn't necessarily about one's knowledge of the religion, or what level of observance one adheres to. To become Jewish is to, quite literally, join the Jewish people. To convert is to accept the common destiny and the collective memory of the entire nation, one you were not born into, but one that enraptures you and inspires you.

Jewish ideology is centred on the community; whereas other religions often endorse isolation and hermitism for prayer, our prayer must be in groups. It is this aspect of the collective that we must take into the High Holidays, where we as a nation are judged, as our Sages say, both as a single sheep passing through the gate and as an entire flock. It is only through accepting this common destiny that we can hope to pray for a happy, healthy new year for all.

*Ben is a member of shichvat Lavi and currently leads year 10 in Sydney. He constantly shares words of wisdom on Judaism and life at the Sydney Hineni Youth minyan.*

# Shepherds and Jewish Leaders

***By Nicole Flax***

What makes a leader great? What skills and experiences do we have to cultivate in order to liken ourselves to history's most respected leaders?

In today's personality-obsessed world, you'd be forgiven for thinking that confidence and status are all-important in leadership. The ideal leader is frequently described as charismatic, dynamic and engaging. Political figures are eternalized by carefully crafted, captivating orations, and are chastised for any minor blunders in speech. Celebrity role models flaunt their expensive clothes, lavish houses, and networks of powerful friends. Graduates attend job interviews with the phrase "It's not *what* you know, it's *who* you know," at the back of their minds.

However, it is interesting to explore the fact that our Jewish leaders had entirely different values to the prominent figures of our current time.

The Tanach tells us that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Rachel, Joseph, Moses and King David were all shepherds. This was not a coveted or prestigious profession, but was actually scorned by other nations. In Parashat VaYiggash, we are told that 'Shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians', and when Joseph tells Pharaoh that his family are shepherds, they are sentenced to live in the isolated and largely uninhabited region of Goshen.

Why would our ancestors choose such a disrespected profession? And how, after living such a humble life, could they rise to such prominent positions of leadership?

One explanation, given by Rav Kook, the first chief Rabbi of pre-state Israel, is that shepherding involves a lifestyle of isolation. Immune to the distractions and temptations of society, the shepherd is free to engage in spiritual introspection,

allowing them to move closer towards Hashem. Rav Kook explains that the more solitude and *hitbodedut* (self-reflective prayer) that one engages in, the more their soul will truly reveal itself.

Even when the shepherds are in the wilderness, their actions are not immune to Hashem's judgment. The Midrash tells us that once Moses was shepherding his father-in-law's sheep, when one of them ran away. Moses ran after the sheep until it stopped to drink at a body of water. Moses could have chastised the sheep for fleeing, or left the sheep to fend for itself. Instead, he compassionately exclaimed, "If only I had known that you thirsted for water. You must be exhausted from running". He then scooped up the animal and carried it back to the flock. Seeing this, Hashem said "If this is how he cares for the sheep of man, he is definitely fit to shepherd mine". Thus, shepherding acts as Hashem's leadership test. While leaders may have the tendency to only cater towards the constituency that supports them, the ideal Jewish leader is one who has compassion for all members of society, even those who may be vulnerable or difficult to accommodate.

It is more than his shepherding background that makes Moses an atypical leader. The book of numbers describes him as "very meek, more so than any man on Earth". When Hashem told Moses of his role as liberator of the Jewish people, Moses believed that his lack of oratory skills would be a major obstacle. "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh?" he pleaded. "I have never been a man of words. I am slow of speech and slow of tongue". Yet, with the help of his brother Aaron, Moses was able to lead the Jews out of Egypt and sustain them in the desert for forty years. His most important task, bringing the Torah down from Mount Sinai, was achieved only through a solitary journey in search of wisdom. We need look no further than Moses' life to see the irrelevance of traditional leadership stereotypes, and the importance of introspection in shaping a leader.

The month of Elul is a time of self-reflection. The shofar, which we blow throughout the month, is said to represent an alarm, reminding us to seriously consider our past actions and repent for our sins. This contemplative period culminates in Yom Kippur. Unlike other holidays, which are centered on lengthy



discussions and unifying festive meals with family and friends, Yom Kippur takes us on a personal journey. We put our bodies and minds to the test as we deprive ourselves of food and water, and much of the shule service consists of silent prayer, as we reflect upon our actions over the past year.

These high holidays, I invite you to embrace your inner shepherd. Remember that Hashem does not judge us on our eloquence, confidence, influential relationships, or career success. He judges us on the essence of our character – our thoughts and actions. Take some time to be alone, and engage in *hitbodedut*. Consider whether, like Moses, you have shown compassion for the vulnerable members of society. By learning from our Jewish leaders, we can take further steps to ensure that we are sealed in the book of life.

Shana Tova and G'mar Chatimah Tova!

*Nicole is a member of shichvat Ofek and is currently the Rosh (head) of Sydney Hineni. She previously was the Rosh of last year's federal summer camp – Camp Techincolour. Nicole is a source of inspiration for her Madrichim showing great commitment and work ethic at all times.*

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# Burden of bestowed responsibility

*By Sasha Aronson*

It is for certain that throughout our lifetimes we are faced with numerous choices that call into question the very essence of who we are, pushing us well beyond our boundaries of comfort or familiarity. Every day, we are required to make decisions, be them trivial or life changing, that mould and transform us and by doing so we allow ourselves to be brought to the forefront of our very own, very personal and perhaps even very confronting self-growth, both as people and as Jews.

However, despite that all these choices are presented to us, they do not always feel as though they come so kindly. Our lives and our legacy as a people both demonstrate that the choices optioned to us can feel burdensome, confronting, debilitating – they are simply not as free as we wish them to feel and perhaps we would rather not encounter them at all. These difficult ‘stuck between a rock and a hard place’ milestones are best exemplified when it comes time to take steps forward as leaders, be it conductors in our own worlds or in our nation, where the responsibility to rise up and take charge is thrust upon us and is not self-elected.

Leadership in Judaism is not a rarity. It is an aspiration that best embodies our people – to be a ‘light unto the nations’. It has long been a part of our design and subsequently, so has the burden of undesired responsibility that accompanies it. Moses himself complains to G-d of the weight of the burden given to him, likening carrying the Jewish people to his own ruin. In addition to this, Moses confides in G-d his worries that the Israelites will not follow or believe in him. What is a leader of a nation who himself possesses little self-belief? Noah is also criticised in his own story. The wicked of Noah’s generation needed a righteous leader, and whilst Noah was righteous he possessed little leadership skill. He

lacked Godly belief and even sought evidence of G-d's will by waiting for the flood waters to rise to his knees before ascending onto the ark.

To some degrees both Moses and Noah lacked the ability to take on the tasks presented to them; however of course as evidence of our ever-surviving nation, both rose to the very large occasion and committed themselves to the good of the Jewish people; whether they had originally chosen the burden of leadership or not. They, along with their modern day contemporaries, act as inspiration within our own lives when faced with choices we do not wish or believe we are able to make.

'Burdens' carry the implications of weight and hardship; seemingly brought into our lives to break us or strip us down to our utmost vulnerability and weakness. Lack of choice is possibly the harshest of these burdens. It is not a tangible or fixable thing but rather, simply a situation we are forced to persevere through, prepared for it or not. However, whilst we may feel we are not always given a choice or are only presented with one that is very challenging, it is undeniable that great things can occur when we are pushed to our limits. We are directed to one of two paths – to let the burden of choice overwhelm us and encourage our insecurities or to rise above and fight for a newer, diviner purpose.

The choice to lead should not be viewed as forced, but as bestowed. It is rather an honour instead of a burden, keeping in mind that the opportunity would not have been created for us if we were not capable of committing to overcoming its complexities and our insecurities. Moses and Noah, two of our greatest leaders, mutually struggled with the leadership given to them; however they remain synonymous with the success of the Jewish people. And whilst lack of choice can be frightening, it also encourages us to persevere through personal, hard times that we did not think we had the capability to overcome. It also strengthens our resolve, an inherent trait of our Jewish legacy.

Anne Frank said that "the final forming of a person's character lies in their own hands", and this could not be truer than when we are presented with difficult choices. These difficult choices, and how we overcome them, have and will

continue to define us as individuals and as part of the wider Jewish community. Our ability to choose should not weight us, but liberate us.

*Sasha is a member of shichvat Deganya. She has been heavily involved in all aspects of Hineni since joining in 2012 and is currently member without portfolio on the Sydney Hineni executive. She assisted in the running of Sydney's 2015 winter camp and was previously the head of Kiruv (outreach) in Sydney Hineni.*

This article has been sponsored by the World of Whisky, proudly supporting  
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# What is Hineni

Hineni Youth & Welfare is a Modern Orthodox, Politically Active and Zionist youth movement that educates within a politically non-partisan framework. Hineni strives to create well-educated, critically thinking, empathetic and worldly youth who possess strong and proud Jewish and Zionist identities. Hineni is an outreach movement welcoming participants of all Jewish backgrounds. Hineni espouses mutual respect for all Jews, nurtures each participant's unique sense of individuality and in doing so, strives to produce the future leaders of the Jewish people and wider community.

Hineni runs bi-annual camps during which Madrichim (leaders) provide Chanichim (participants) with a fun and educational experience, utilising an informal teaching format, in a relaxed environment. Our camps serve to strengthen both the Jewish and wider community through promoting involvement and activism. Our Chanichim create lifelong positive Jewish experiences that ensure they remain engaged with and active within the community. It is a place where education and fun are mutually inclusive.

Hineni also conducts youth leadership and developmental programs, securing the future of the Jewish community through creating strong and active leaders. We send a group of enthusiastic school-leaving youth to Israel each year on an educational, leadership year course. Many Hineni leaders have gone on to take significant roles within the community, whether in Synagogues, community organisations, governmental organisations and abroad. Hineni's role in the community is not only limited to educational aims. Hineni provides a support network for community members, facilitating their participation in Jewish ceremonies, rites and activities. It promotes goodwill within and between the Jewish and non-Jewish communities, raises money and volunteers for charitable organisations, supports Jewish community events and in general promotes activism within the community

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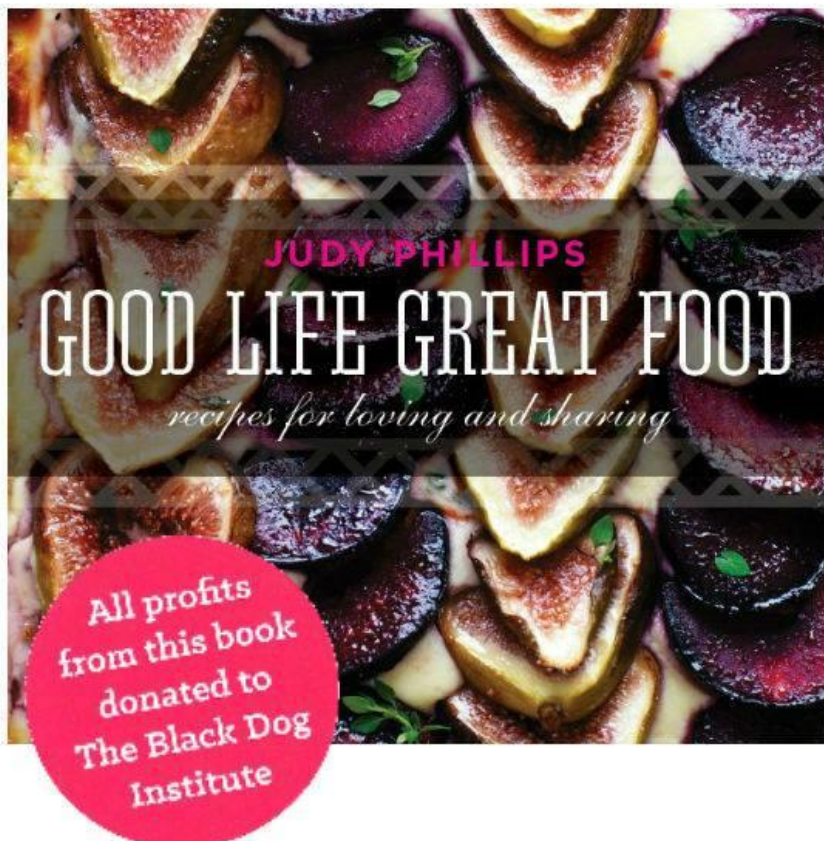
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