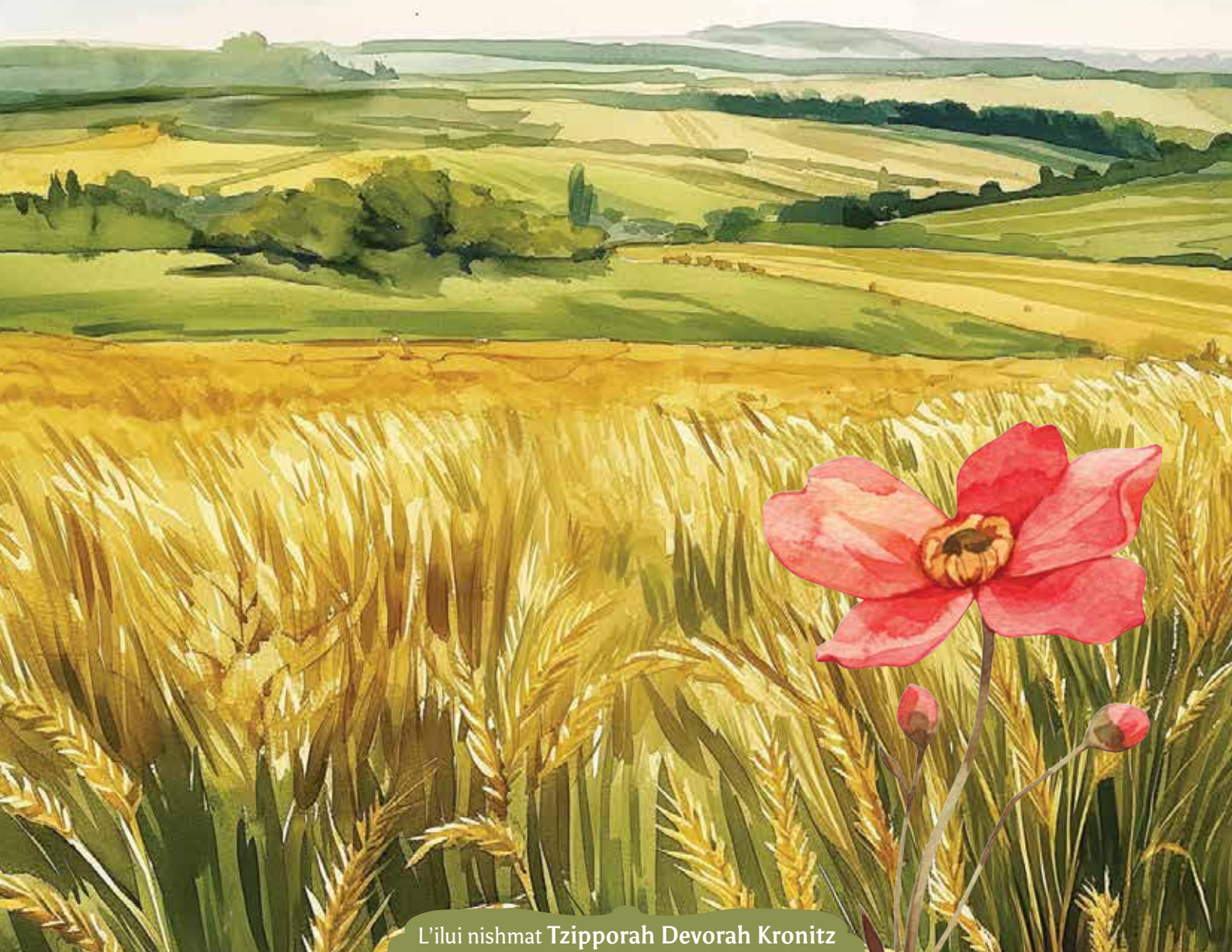


From Simchat Torah to the Giving of the Torah

Israeli learning, stemming from the times, for Shavuot 5784 (2024)



L'ilui nishmat Tziporah Devorah Kronitz
bat Yosef Halevi and Chana (Yoshpa) z"l



Bikkurei Bayit
First Fruits of the Home
Learning together on Shavuot

How can we receive the Torah during wartime?

Are we emotionally available to do so?

The Torah tells us that the giving of the Torah on Sinai took place just a few days after the war against Amalek, a war in which the weak were harmed.

Despite, and perhaps precisely because of the war, the nation is able to unite at the foot of the mountain “And Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain” (Exodus 19:2) as one man, with one heart, to receive the Torah.

It would seem that the power of internal cohesion is so great that it succeeds in making people forget the terrors of the war, and opens a fresh page in the history of our people.

Rabbi David Stav

Chairman of Tzohar

Hebrew Editor: **Yochi Nedvetski** English Editor: **Leora Jaffe Steinman**

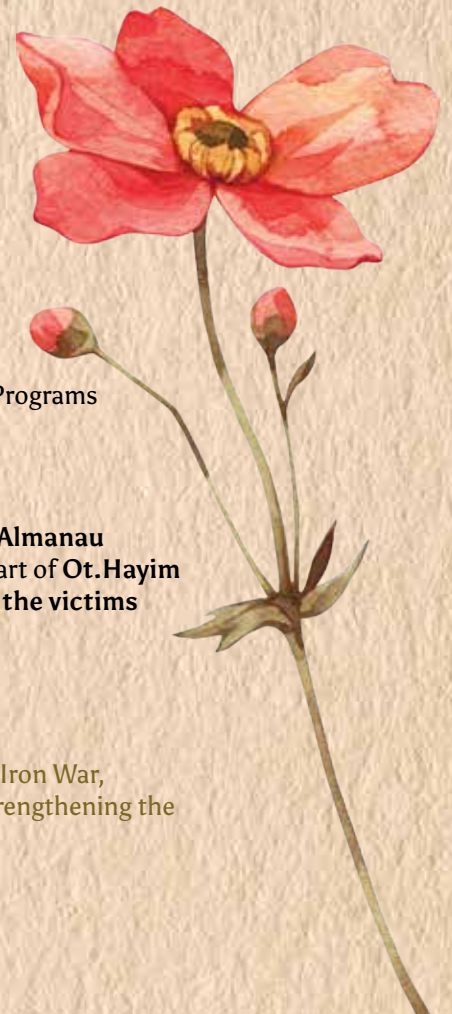
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The handwriting font in this booklet was created from the handwriting of **Almanau Emanuel Feleke**, Hy"d, a Duvdevan soldier who fell in battle in Gaza, as part of **Ot.Hayim Fonts – a commemorative initiative to remember the handwriting of the victims and fallen soldiers of the Swords of Iron War on October 7, 2023.**

The booklet is dedicated to the memory of those who fell in the Swords of Iron War, for the recovery of the wounded, for the return of the hostages, and for strengthening the entire Jewish nation!





From Simchat Torah to the Giving of the Torah

From this pain – we will grow, and from this well –
 we will draw sweet water once again
 From this pain – we will grow,
 and again drink new water from the fountain of our youth
 For that which will happen to us, will come to help us, you will yet see
 Because every trouble also contains the gate to truth
 And every tear on the water is a whispered prayer

(Lyrics: Aviv Bahar)

There is a famous Chassidic question, why Shavuot is called the Festival of the Giving of the Torah and not the Festival of Receiving of the Torah. The answer is that God gave the Torah to the Jewish people once, but receiving it takes place every day, every year, and in every generation.

This Shavuot we ask you to wake up and draw sweet water from the old well once again and find within it signs that tell the heart how to learn, how to act, and how to receive the Torah during wartime.

This year we asked ten writers to choose just one mitzvah from the Torah, and share with us why they chose that mitzvah – does the mitzvah have new significance or context? Was it clarified or expanded, or perhaps it presented a particular challenge during these times of war.

In this English booklet you can read the personal stories and thoughts of various Israeli men and women – soldiers, volunteers, activists, bereaved families, and families who long for their loved ones.

We thank each one of the writers for their contributions and for opening their hearts to us. We invite you to read, feel, and discover what new aspects the writer and you learned, or can learn, about the mitzvah, what personal memories each mitzvah brings up, and then share your thoughts with friends and family after reading the booklet.

This year we did not just count forty-nine days from Pesach to Shavuot, but rather two hundred and forty-nine days from Simchat Torah, and our hearts are still counting and waiting every day.

We pray that this learning will strengthen and nurture you, and bring you joy.

Because my joy
 Is my protest
 And that is the real strength

(Naomi Shemer)

Happy Shavuot!

Yochi Nedvetski

Content Manager, Tzohar, Shavuot 5784 (2024)

Hashavat Aveidah (Returning lost property)

“You shall not see your brother’s ox or his sheep wandering and hide yourself from them: you shall surely return them to your brother... So you shall do for any lost article of your brother which he loses and which you find, you shall not hide yourself”

Deuteronomy 22:1-3

Summary of the Mitzvah: It is a mitzvah to return lost property (an object, animal, etc.), of any value and which can be characterized and identified according to its appearance or where it was found, to its owner. If there are no identifying details, such as the case of money, there is no obligation to try and find the owner. This mitzvah includes the concept of “giving up hope” – if we assume the owner gave up hope of finding the item there is no obligation to return it.

It is a little strange to discover that of all the mitzvot, it is specifically returning lost property which is unique to Judaism. What about this seemingly simple matter turns it into such a special and important mitzvah?

The words of the verses, without my having been familiar with them, echoed within me and did not leave me, from the moment the catastrophe of October 7 happened to us.

I quickly found myself directing the Lahav 433 volunteer system, which was given the almost impossible mission of collecting all the objects from the areas of the disaster - along the corridor of death on Route 232, the routes where the Re'im festival participants had fled, and around the kibbutzim.

The next stage was to turn into detectives, to try and find clues as to whom the objects belonged to and to return them to the survivors and the families of those murdered.

In the police warehouse, we began the work of sorting and searching.

In the end we were able to return over 1,500 crates full of equipment to the survivors of the festival, another 1,600 crates to the families of those murdered, and we were still left with thousands of items of unidentified clothing and equipment.

Alongside the successes which were accompanied by moments of excitement, there were also moments of disappointment and pain, of bereaved families who tried to find a memento of their murdered children. A shirt, sunglasses, a cellphone, jewelry, or anything which had belonged to their loved one who was no more.

For three and a half months I worked around the clock, along with dozens of other volunteers, to try and return the lost articles to family members. It was then that I truly understood the deep significance of the mitzvah of returning lost property. It is not about the object, however valuable or sentimental it may be, but by returning the object family members can hold something which belonged to their loved ones, and which accompanied them during their final moments.

One time I found the bag which had belonged to N's boyfriend who was murdered at the festival. I brought the bag to her in the hospital, where she was recovering from her severe injury. Watching this young girl opening the bag of her beloved, smelling his clothes, and crying bitterly, illustrates the importance of this mitzvah in the best possible way. For these moments we fought for every article – which is essentially a remnant of an entire life which was ended.

Ravit Naor, journalist, pilot, and owner of a company offering specialized tours abroad.



Achilat Maror (Eating a Bitter Vegetable)

“In the second month, on the fourteenth day, in the afternoon they shall make it; they will eat it with matzot and maror”

Numbers 9:11

Summary of the Mitzvah: In the past, when the Korban Pesach (Passover sacrifice) was offered, they would eat it with maror (a bitter vegetable), hinting at the bitter slavery. Today, when we no longer have a Temple or offer sacrifices, it is a mitzvah to eat a bitter vegetable – usually lettuce – at the Seder, and make the blessing: “...Who has sanctified us with His commandments, and has commanded us to eat maror.”

There are so many sweet mitzvot in the Torah and you chose the bitter one? What were you thinking, Hadas?

You know, bitterness has a purpose; it does not stand alone. The mitzvah of maror also does not stand alone but instead accompanies the Korban Pesach - “You will eat it with matzot and maror.” The juxtaposition of Yom Hazikaron (the Memorial Day for Israel's Fallen Soldiers) leading into Yom Haatzma'ut (Independence Day) is the ultimate example of Israelism and the truest example of redemption. Rabbi Nachman says that when a person knows that everything he lives through is for his benefit, this is a taste of the World to Come. When someone sees that the bitterness in his life is important, it does not stand alone; it brings him great comfort. Bitterness itself is not good! But it can enable progress in a good direction. When someone feels that whatever happens to him – the bee's sting as well as its honey- has a purpose, he knows how to put the bitterness into perspective, he is ready for an authentic life of Torah. The bitterness remains bitter, and it seems it will always remain so. But we can find comfort, even now, knowing that the day will come when we will merit fulfilling “you will eat it with matzot and maror,” and know how to say that it was “for this.” It was worth it.

Many years ago I heard an idea which I really liked from Rabbi Baruch Harnik and I have remembered it ever since. The Sefat Emet writes: “The reason for eating maror is that what was bitter for them was a part of the process of Redemption.” Sometimes someone is in a terrible situation, and he does not even realize that he is living under difficult circumstances. When someone feels the bitterness, he understands that the reality surrounding him is abnormal and wrong, opening the door to change. Therefore, the Sefat Emet says that the fact that it was bitter for them – is in of itself part of the Redemption process.

The fact that the 7th of October pained us so much shows how much we have progressed since the times of the pogroms in Europe. The fact that an entire nation rose and cried out against this total evil, against this terrible maror, shows that we know that we do not belong in this reality. That we are truly already ready to be redeemed.

We were enslaved in Egypt for a reason, and we left Egypt and experienced this entire journey from Pesach to Shavuot for a reason. And along with this bitterness we stand here today and say once again to God we are following you, Master of the Universe (Ribono Shel Olam). With the bitter and the sweet.

Hadas Lowenstern, widow of Elisha Lowenstern Hy”d, student and teacher of Torah



V'ahavta Lere'acha Kamocho (And you shall love your neighbor as yourself)

“And you shall love your neighbor as yourself, I am the Lord”

Leviticus 19:18

Summary of the Mitzvah: To love every member of the Jewish people – an emotional state in which someone identifies with someone else, until he loves him as he loves himself, and thus his egocentric framework is breached.

Most of the mitzvot which a person encounters deal with matters between man and his fellow. The mitzvah of “loving your neighbor as yourself” is the basis for keeping these mitzvot.

And (what if) you love your neighbor as yourself

I will begin with the word “love” – What is love and what is the self-love about which I believe the verse is speaking? The verse assumes that a person loves himself and will also behave with that same love to his friend/ neighbor. But what about a person who does not have self-love? He does not love himself? How can he love someone else?

We learn from here that first of all a person needs to find self-love, love within himself for himself.

One of the things that I, as someone in the field of therapy, see among many people who I meet is mainly a lack of self-love which is expressed in being critical, judgmental towards themselves, and feeling anger and blame about things they did. People blame others for every big or little thing since they feel blame towards themselves.

To me, self-love happens when someone accepts themselves, and is not self-judgmental or self-critical, is forgiving of their own behavior, and stands up for themselves and their principles, out of free choice and because they are connected to themselves. And as a result – when a person has self-love – his behavior towards others will naturally also be true love without being judgmental or blaming the other person.

On the 7th of October my son, Yotam z”l was taken from his home in Kibbutz Kfar Aza and held hostage by murderers for 65 days. During this period, out of self-love, love for others, for my country, and for those working to bring Yotam back, I viewed them all with love, believing with complete faith that the entire Jewish nation, and even the leadership of the State, were acting with a true and sincere desire, and doing everything possible, to bring my son and the other hostages home.

From the 7th of October, I saw how much good there is in our country, good which we do not always notice, how much humanitarianism, good heartedness, connection, and love.

On the 15th of December, Yotam escaped from Hamas captivity, saving himself from the murderers, and after five days of fleeing with great bravery together with two of his fellow hostages, he was mistakenly identified as a terrorist and shot.

My reaction was to ask that the IDF soldiers come to us because we wanted to embrace them. We do not blame them, and we are not angry or judge them. We know they did not kill him deliberately. The soldiers accepted my invitation and came to the shiva. We hugged them, cried with them. Even with the great difficulty and pain of Yotam leaving us, we were not angry. We loved and we hugged.

We have love in our hearts for every soldier and every Jew because we can only be victorious over our enemies with love.

On that day we proved to ourselves how much we love each other. Let's keep that love going.

Iris Haim, mother of Yotam Haim z”l



Lo Ta'amod Al Dam Re'echa (You shall not stand by your neighbor's blood)

“You shall not stand by your neighbor's blood”

Leviticus 19:16

Summary of the Mitzvah: A person is obligated to save someone in danger, out of mutual responsibility. Is the rescuer obliged to risk his life? During times of peace, there are different opinions on whether or not a person need to put themselves at risk to save someone else. According to all opinions, during wartime, the obligation to endanger oneself emanates from the mitzvah to go to war, and therefore a soldier is even obligated to put himself in danger.

The secret code inside people's hearts

On the morning of the 7th of October, when most of the residents of Israel awoke to the sound of sirens, there were Israeli men and women, from the north and the south, from the east and the west, who left their homes to help and save the residents of the western Negev. Within a short amount of time, while we were all in our bomb shelters, they understood the great danger and distress facing their fellow Israelis. They did everything they could to reach the dangerous areas. They did not think about the danger, what awaited them on their journey, their faltering car, their naked hands, but they drove all the way, full of belief in their mission to save entire families.

What propelled those brave men and women was the secret code. The secret code inside people's hearts, the code which is activated in seconds and leads a person to endanger his life and save someone who he does not even know. Thanks to this code, entire families, young people partying, adults, and helpless babies were saved. This entire code is the fulfillment of the mitzvah of “You shall not stand by your neighbor's blood.” This is the mitzvah of the secret code, the mitzvah deep in people's hearts, the mitzvah which is activated with no prior warning, but at the same time is not a mitzvah which is fully understood or which occurs daily. This is a mitzvah for times of distress, a mitzvah based on mutual responsibility, a mitzvah which sanctifies the lives of others. The mitzvah led to the activation of the Israelis' secret code, and Israelis who operated with their bodies and souls to prevent destruction and loss. Therefore, I see this as the holiest mitzvah of all – the mitzvah which is the essence of our mutual responsibility, here in the State of Israel.

The mitzvah of “You shall not stand by your neighbor's blood” belongs to the entire Israeli society, in all its forms. This is the mitzvah which we clearly saw. It traverses sectors and communities, and belongs to all those Israeli men and women who hurried to protect their country on that cursed day. Let us not forget that on the 7th of October, there were those who observed this mitzvah literally and some are no longer alive. But we will remember that their bravery and greatness of spirit left us with lessons on growth, hope, and mutual responsibility – we hope that we will be worthy.

Haim Jelin, former head of the Eshkol Regional Council and a resident of Be'eri.



Tefillah (Prayer)

“To love the Lord, your God, and serve Him with all your heart”

Deuteronomy 11:13

Summary of the Mitzvah: They explained (Taanit 2a): “What is service of the heart? It is prayer.” The Torah does not discuss the obligation and details of prayer, but at a time of war or trouble, prayer is a Torah obligation. During the Second Temple period, the Beit Din (the Men of the Great Assembly) determined a uniform and fixed form for the daily prayers. Prayer is a mitzvah which requires general intent – to stand before God with fear and love – and having intention regarding what we say.

October 11, 2023 – the Northern Border. Dusk, all eyes are fixed on the south. It’s understandable. No one hears about attempts to invade from the north. Everything is ready. Voices are heard on the communication devices. We spotted many drones on their way from Lebanon. We’re waiting. In silence.

Several thoughts intermingle. About my wife and children who left their home in Kiryat Shemona, about the students in the yeshiva who I left in the middle of Simchat Torah, about my worried parents in Jerusalem. About myself, who, approaching my fifth decade of life, finds himself again in a khaki uniform, sleeping outside and eating battle rations. Full of pride that I am able to defend my people, my land, and my state.

My thoughts return back to the reality, the danger. And then... in one moment, they inform me on the communications device that the threat has passed. The tension dissipates. I look up to the sky and see that the sun is about to set. And with all my thoughts, feelings, and emotions – I climb up on the SPA (self-propelled artillery) and pray and cry. Emanating from tremendous faith that a Jew can also ask – “and we will never be ashamed because we trusted in You.”

Master of the Universe! So much sorrow, so much hardship. May we not be ashamed that we trust in You. The words of the prayer join with those of the many Jews during the darkest periods of history, who knew to stand and ask and cry.

This prayer bursts out of me and asks: Master of the Universe! You have such an incredible, good nation. Full of mitzvot, like a pomegranate's seeds, full of kindness and goodness and caring, a perception of Godliness which is broad and deep and infinite. And on the other side stands a cruel enemy. How much evil and small-mindedness and chutzpah to come and commit such atrocities in Your Name? Please, Master of the Universe (Ribono Shel Olam), may Your Name be declared for the good!

It has already been five months since that day. I have since been released from the army. Our family is still far from our home, trying to create some sort of routine. The children are in school, we are working. Even our prayers go back to routine – there’s a siddur and words, and we say them. And we try to concentrate on the meaning. But every so often the prayer of October 11th still returns, and I wish every prayer would be like that one.

Yishai Lewinger, lives in Kiryat Shemona and is a father of four (including a baby girl born just before the war). His family was evacuated to Gush Etzion. He is a rabbi in the Kiryat Shemona yeshiva, which was evacuated to Nehalim, and a fighter in the Artillery Corps, Reserves’ Battalion 508.



Hachnasat Orchim (Hospitality)

“Hachnasat orchim (hospitality) is greater than welcoming God’s Presence”

Shabbat 127b.

Summary of the Mitzvah: One of the prominent mitzvot among those between man and his fellow. It refers to hosting poor people who do not have food, or a rich person who is in a situation where he does not have a place to eat or sleep. The mitzvah of hospitality ends with walking out the guest. In this way the host shows his guest that it is hard for him that he is leaving, and the guest understands that his hosts were truly happy that he came.

Early morning, a hotel lobby.

“I have finished, everything’s in order.” “Thank you for everything, my dear! Come and sit with us and we will have some coffee.” I am still a little new in this setting, trying to keep up with things and get to know everyone. One person I met just a few minutes ago, he approached me with a smile and introduced himself. The other man, it turned out, is the hotel’s maintenance man. “You should know that he is an angel disguised as a person!” The friendly person called out to me and introduced us to each other. “He is around all day and looks for ways to help and what he needs to organize – all happily and with a smile.” The response was quick, “It’s my pleasure and I’m happy to do everything I can for you. Now you are the owners here.” There are such wonderful people around us.

I am still trying to get hold of myself and understand where I have come to. My task is to establish educational institutions for children and adolescents (0-18) who are staying at the hotel. Throughout the morning I meet a range of people: hotel employees, representatives from the local authorities and the various government ministries, volunteers, soldiers, and of course the evacuated residents for whom this is now their temporary ‘home.’ I quickly discover that this miserable and challenging reality has simultaneously turned us all into both “guests” and “owners.” It was hard to say who is being hosted by who, and for me this was a new and big revelation regarding the mitzvah of hospitality. Personally, I felt I was the guest of these heroes, and I just wanted to make things a bit easier and help with their educational needs. At the same time, there were also times that as part of my position people felt they were being hosted by me in the improvised meeting room in the lobby.

On the 7th of October we had the mitzvah of hachanasat orchim “forced” upon us with full force – almost 250,000 Israelis turned into refugees in their own country. Individuals, hotels and hostels, communities, vacation rental owners, civilian operation rooms, youth villages, youth movements and organizations, educational institutions, non-profits, the business and private sectors – everyone readied themselves to open up their homes and hearts. Perhaps we have already become used to this human and ethical abundance, but it is definitely worth stopping and thinking about.

The Jewish-French philosopher, Jacques Derrida, speaks about welcoming guests as the host waiving his power, and he emphasizes the importance of opening our homes to guests without preconditions or expectations of recognition or remuneration. This hospitality happens with complete openness and by accepting the ‘other’ exactly as he is.

The Jewish-French philosopher and educator, Emmanuel Levinas, writes that hachnasat orchim is an ethical situation in which the host opens his door and enables someone else to enter his world. In this way, the host accepts responsibility for the guest. According to Levinas, the connection with the ‘other’ begins with meeting them in person.



Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l also frequently discussed this issue in his writings. For example, he writes about the hospitality of our forefather, Abraham: "Abraham, father of monotheism, knew the paradoxical truth that to live the life of faith is to see the trace of God in the face of the stranger. It is easy to receive the Divine Presence when God appears as God. What is difficult is to sense the Divine Presence when it comes disguised as three anonymous passersby. That was Abraham's greatness. He knew that serving God and offering hospitality to strangers were not two things but one."

All these points together provide us with a roadmap to the civilized society we aspire and wish to live in. In recent years, we in Israeli society have gradually closed ourselves off in "echo chambers" and defended all the more forcefully our individual, societal, and political homes. Our societal, political, and leadership reality contains significant quantities of polarization, distance, violence, and ignorance.

Hachnasat orchim during this period led us to open up our homes and reminded us how much we are obligated to help and need one another, but also illuminated the mitzvah with new depth and meaning. I have no doubt that this important mitzvah, and its underlying values and meaning, are part of a great message to our generation.

I believe that it is not necessarily that the tikkun (improvement) takes place through our choice to bring guests into our homes and hearts, but also our willingness to host and be hosted in the deep and metaphorical sense of the word. We must give up our positions of power and exclusivity, and host and be hosted in the realms of faith and opinions with openness and acceptance, without preconditions. An in-person meeting is necessary to truly get to know each other and deepen the relationship. Doing acts of kindness for others is not a luxury, but rather the way to brighten our shared world.

I once heard a wonderful and topical explanation of the verse: "I will give peace in the land, and you will lie down with none to frighten you, and I will take the wild beasts from the land, and no sword will cross your land." "I will give peace" – in relation to the enemy. "And no sword will cross your land" – between yourselves!

Hospitality in general and the politics of hospitality in particular are, in my humble opinion, the keys to a better present and future – for us and our children. "It is not in the heavens!" It is in our own hands!

Adiel Bar Shalom, a Fellow of the Mandel School for Educational Leadership and a member of the national leadership of the Harivon Harevi'i (the Fourth Quarter) movement.

He participated in the establishment and operation of a civilian volunteer operations room in Yerucham, and established and managed educational institutions for the evacuees in a Jerusalem hotel.



Hakem Takim Imo (You shall pick up with him)

"You shall not see your brother's donkey or his fallen ox [under its load] on the road and ignore them. You shall pick up [the load] with him."

Deuteronomy 22:4

Summary of the Mitzvah: A person must help his friend reload a burden which has fallen off his animal. If after he removed the load from the animal and reloaded it, the animal again fell down under the weight of its burden, he must reload it again and again. For this reason, someone must accompany the animal's owner for over 3 kilometers (1.9 miles) in case he needs his help again.

I am on my way to military reserve duty in the north:

A young woman sitting behind me draws my attention to a restless young man walking between the seats of the bus.

"He's not with us," she tells me.

I look behind me and see him. Speaking to himself and to others. He puts his sweatshirt on and takes it off, and finally lies down across the back four seats of the bus. Pushing a woman into the corner.

"Brother," I turn to him. He does not move.

"Brother, is everything okay?" I ask again.

He turns himself towards me.

"What do you want?" he asks semi-aggressively.

"Can I help you?" I ask him.

"You think you can help me?!" he bursts out. "When you see half your unit blown into the air maybe you will be able to help me." He lies down on the seats again.

What in the world am I supposed to do in such a situation?

"We are okay," the female passengers signal to me.

I try for the last time, "Brother, if you need something, I'm here to help you..."

He was not able to take the hand we extended, but maybe within the distress, we hope, he at least felt that he was not invisible. During this war we have met lots of "brothers" "on the road" – falling, collapsing. They and their physical or metaphorical oxen and donkeys. Falling – physically, emotionally, financially, personally, nationally.

The Daat Mikra commentary writes about the mitzvah of Hakem Takim Imo:

"For the benefit [or purpose] of this mitzvah is that if he sets out on a journey by himself and ends up in trouble, he will not fear that he is alone, and not imagine that he is abandoned. But rather know that anyone he meets on his way, will help him. And this is an ordinance to make the world civilized!"

Many people were abandoned on that terrible day of Simchat Torah, but Israeli society recovered, firstly the people and then the institutions and systems of society. And eventually the larger establishments too.

Within the chaos, it ended up that both of us were called up for military reserve duty. Unplanned. Unexpected. Nati to the Northern Command and me to the Home Front Command. I was there from



the beginning, and Nati joined me after a difficult task in his civilian employment. Both of us saw, from both our civilian and military vantage points, how, despite everything, the large institutions made it a priority to pay attention to the individual citizens. At the Home Front Command, I serve with people from a variety of places: Bedouin and Druze, Haredi and secular, left-wingers and right-wingers, women and men, with every kind of perspective and belief. We work together, to pay attention, not to stop until we find a suitable solution. As part of our role as population officers, we must evaluate the civilian resilience according to various parameters. Resilience is also measured according to the level of concern for disadvantaged sectors, and whether there is social solidarity and responsibility.

In the verse in Deuteronomy, the identity of the owner of the donkey or ox is “your brother,” but in the similar mitzvah in Exodus the Torah goes one stage further and says, “If you see the donkey of someone you hate... You shall help him repeatedly” (Exodus 23:5).

If you will allow us to err with our commentary, the verse can be read as it is written with the letter “sin” – someone you know and hate [sonecha-sinah], a strong but deliberate word.

Or it can be read as the letter “shin” – shonecha, someone different from you.

And how much difference, which unfortunately almost reached the point of hatred, we all experienced before the war broke out.

Whichever way we read it, the Torah did not leave us the option of abandoning him in the field, not only not to ignore him, but more than that, to pick up the animal with him, to help him. To overcome the contradictory, difficult parts, and to look at him compassionately and individually. This is a call for compassion, mutual responsibility, and societal resilience.

When you see the heart of your neighbor
Collapsing from its burden
You cannot ignore it
You shall pick up with him

(Uriel Balmas, Otiot Porchot)

The commandment is simultaneously internal, national, and personal, in addition to it being Godly.

We have been given a national mission, to build a society which does not ignore, which does not “leave someone,” which says to a young man on the bus “I am here for you.”

Personally, my military reserve service exposed me to the fact that various population sectors have been ignored for years when it comes to education and infrastructure. And the internal echo of the mitzvah “You cannot ignore it” grew into a decision to change my place of work – perhaps to continue my military reserve duty as a civilian, to try and tangibly fulfill “You shall pick up [the load] with him.”

Racheli and Nati Brooks, Racheli is a population behavior officer in the Home Front Command and Nati is an operations officer in the Northern Command.



Chinuch (Education)

“And you shall teach them to your children”

Deuteronomy 11:19

Summary of the Mitzvah: It is a mitzvah to teach young children Torah, and the Sages added a mitzvah – to generally accustom children to observe the mitzvot. “Teach a child according to his way” is one of the well-known expressions in the context of this mitzvah. It means that education does not only address the student’s intellect but also his emotions.

As a school principal I happily share the responsibility for a girl’s education together with her parents. I try to not only teach habits, but also to discover the internal desire, spirit, and the image of God within each girl. To bring out the melodies, customs, and traditions of each girl’s home and then use these as a basis to speak about their desires and dreams, responsibility and commitment to the path she chooses. A person is a byproduct of where they were born, but I also believe that s/he is given the choice of which melodies s/he will continue to play.

I received a powerful reminder of this when the war broke out in October.

Together with my dear partners from Ulpait Bnei Akiva, I opened a school for the children who had been evacuated from their homes in Kiryat Shemona and Sderot to hotels in Tel Aviv.

We faced a very different type of education, an education for a very young child who is dealing with leaving their home, wandering, anxiety, pain, and sometimes loss. The concepts of a home and a family unit took on a different form for those who were displaced from their homes.

It is not unusual for us to use the concept of a home to describe the person themselves. For example, someone from a complex family background can be described as coming from a “broken home,” and likewise the concept of the “destruction of the Temple,” which is the destruction of the Jewish people, is called the “destruction of the House” in Hebrew. We do not mean a home of bricks and mortar, but rather a description of the state of the family or the nation. A home is associated with the people who live in it, a person’s mental state is seemingly reflected in the “walls of his home”.

And what happens when there is no physical home, street, or neighborhood? To what extent is the physical home reflected in the person?

With the technical and educational challenges of establishing a school within a school, I saw how young children and their parents were missing something. They had been through crisis and loss, and sought out the spiritual home, the spiritual assets created in the home, and the melodies they had absorbed. Missing the aromas, the songs, the conversations, and the closeness.

While they lacked a home, we attempted to recall, awaken, and communicate with the inner home – memories, customs, and values – in order to encourage spending time in the spiritual home, grasping onto their roots and playing forgotten songs rooted in the heart.

Chani Goldman, Principal of Ulpanit Bnei Akiva in Tel Aviv.

During the war, she worked with other partners to open a school for children evacuated from Northern and Southern Israel.



Kibbud Horim (Honoring your parents)

“Honor your father and mother as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that your days be lengthened and so that it will be good for you on the Land which the Lord your God gives you.”

Deuteronomy 5:16

Summary of the Mitzvah: A person must honor and fear his parents. Treat them with honor and love, not sit in their regular place, not contradict them, and more. And help and assist them, particularly in their old age with everything they need. Someone who honors his parents is open to receive their heritage, and is grateful, and in this way he can have gratitude to and faith in God.

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed explains in his book, Pninei Halachah:

Because there are two primary mitzvot in the Torah regarding parents and children. One is the mitzvah of honoring parents, which, due to its importance, is included in the Ten Commandments. And the second is the mitzvah to educate your children. It seems there is an important purpose in these mitzvot – to direct a person to connect with the passage of the generations, and not to withdraw into himself... The mitzvah of honoring parents links us to all the past generations. Whereas the second mitzvah, of educating children, connects the parents with all the future generations. The educational path they teach their children will connect them to the future, to their grandchildren and great-grandchildren and their descendants until the end of time. Through these two mitzvot, the Torah guides us to elevate our lives towards eternity, and to connect through our own individual lives to all the generations.

An additional primary value expressed in this mitzvah is gratitude – we are obliged to be grateful to our parents for the gift of life which they gave us.

The author of the Sefer Hahinukh, which enumerates the mitzvot of the Torah, views this mitzvah as the way to reinforce the trait of gratitude within us.

During the Creation, after the Holy One, Blessed be He, created light, He saw it was good, “And God saw the light that it was good” (Genesis 1:4). The seeing of good by God continues to appear on the third day, the fourth day, the fifth day, and the sixth day, of Creation.

To see the good in the world is the secret of Creation and the secret of the world’s existence. Seeing the good today connects us to God seeing the good during Creation.

One way of seeing the good in the world is by being grateful to one’s parents. The insistence on seeing the good, recognizing it, and being thankful for it, is in of itself fulfilling the mitzvah of honoring parents.

In conclusion, during these turbulent times, during which thousands of parents have lost a child, and thousands of children have lost one or both of their parents, we can understand that we can observe this mitzvah even in the difficult reality which we are experiencing. A son or daughter can honor their father or mother even if they are no longer living, and a son or daughter who passed away can, with their passing, honor their parents. One of the ways is by continuing to preserve the good things that came from their home, society, and the entire world.

In memory of our son, Ben Zussman of blessed memory, who honored us during his life and continued honoring us with his passing.

Tzvi and Sarit Zussman, parents of Ben Zussman, Hy”d



Mechiyat Amalek (Wiping out Amalek)

“It shall be when the Lord your God gives you rest from all your enemies in the Land that the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance to possess it, you shall wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heavens.”

Deuteronomy 25:19

Summary of the Mitzvah: We are commanded to remember and not forget how Amalek came and attacked us without any provocation or reason immediately after the Exodus from Egypt. We are also commanded to wipe out the descendants of Amalek and to fight the evil in the world with an uncompromising war.

Amalek is a people which expresses by its very existence the root of evil and hatred of the Jewish nation.

The incomprehensible acts during the murderous attack on Simchat Torah clarified for me a big question that I always had, and which I grappled with for many years.

The mitzvah of wiping out Amalek, the story of Saul and Agag (Samuel I 1:15), and more, create an uneasy dichotomy.

The Torah is an inseparable part of my life. From a young age, Torah creates within me compassion, sensitivity, and empathy. Protecting precious human life, in God’s image. We understand this in our postmodern view, as coaching our heart to be good.

And then, the mitzvah of wiping out Amalek hits us. Destroy! Without mercy! Men! Women! Children! Sheep! Imagine the blood! The cries! The pain! The sweet little children!

What shall we do now, Master of the Universe, with the heart which we nurtured and taught to love? Should we have mercy? What shall we do with all of this?

And here I get stuck. I do not know how to continue.

This year, with awe and trepidation, I open a new path within myself, not yet completely paved, to a new understanding. I understand that what we seemingly erred to think was the correct idea – is not. Perhaps the Torah does not want to educate us to be “good and loving” like in the movies of the West. The Torah is interested in creating something totally different. I am not yet sure what it is, and yet I am fairly certain that we need to cling to the rules as is and then the desired change will take place in our souls.

Perhaps here there is a mitzvah to be “cruel” according to our criteria. And in some way, it is this and precisely this which is right for our hearts. Perhaps in some hidden place, the heights of which we have not yet reached – it is even love?

It is difficult to accept. My entire body rebels. It is shocking. But...

Perhaps love has two extremes. Completely different but from the same root? A little like the word chessed (kindness) which always leaves me surprised when it describes the greatest abomination in the context of forbidden relationships (Leviticus 20:17).

And then there is the saying: “Everyone who becomes merciful to the cruel ones, ends up cruel to the merciful ones” (Rabbi Elazar, Midrash Tanchuma on Parshat Metzora) and this reinforces my understanding that there is something here which we do not yet really understand about the concept of mercy, about the concept of cruelty.

I feel there is a great secret here. I am satisfied this year with just the first buds of understanding.

Leah Marmorstein Yarchi, graphic artist, leader of the Ot.Hayim Fonts project – a commemorative initiative to remember the handwriting of the victims and fallen soldiers of the Swords of Iron War.





Tzohar in Numbers | 2024 - 5784

Ensuring the Jewish Future of the State of Israel

Holidays 220,000+

participants per year in our pre-Shabbat and major Jewish holiday programs all over the country have strengthened their bonds with our beloved traditions and practices.



Shorashim 150,000+

new immigrants and family members have had their Jewish identities verified allowing them to embrace their connection to our people and traditions.



Bar and Bat Mitzva 3,900+

boys and girls were accompanied on their paths to Jewish adulthood, with the participation of their families.



Jewish Weddings 160,000+

performed, allowing our brides and grooms to marry according to halacha and in a deeply meaningful and respectful manner.



Kashrut 330+

establishments were added under the Tzohar Kashrut name, ensuring that over 10 million more kosher meals were prepared in Israel last year alone.



HeskemAhava 5,000+

couples signed Tzohar's "pre-nuptial agreement" to bring greater respect and equality to Jewish marriage.



Center for Jewish Ethics 140,000+

Advanced the place of ethical practice in Jewish society through a variety of programs, publications and initiatives.



Bereavement Project 6,200+

mourners were accompanied through this challenging process by Tzohar rabbis.



Pastoral Training Programs 330+

Courses to help rabbis and their wives become better and more professional communal leaders.



Pidyon Haben

Helping new parents embrace this rare, yet special, ceremony with Tzohar's volunteer kohanim



Summer Conference 16,500+

Attendees (online and in-person) confronting critical issues facing Israeli and Jewish society



KidduShishi 42,500+

Creating events joining secular and religious communities to welcome Shabbat in a traditional and Israeli fashion



Tzohar Ad 120 600+

cases handled providing halachic and ethical support for families facing end-of-life dilemmas.



Volunteers 1,500+

Serving our wide array of programs and dedicating their time on behalf of a more united Jewish Israel.

