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BY ALANNA PEPPER, LMSW &
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INSIDE THE SYSTEM
EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT

49 STEPS: THE CLIMB
BETWEEN PEŞACH & SINAI
BY RABBI DR. HILLEL BRODER

WASHINGTON

Jewish Journal

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Silver from the Spring
The Profound Principle Of The Torah

Nathan Witztum

We find that there is a big emphasis on working on our *bein adam l'chaveiro*, our interpersonal relationships, during the period of Sefiras Ha'Omer. There is a *minhag* to learn the six chapters of Pirkei Avos, which deal primarily with *middos* and interacting with others, on the six *shabbos* between Pesach and Shavuos. We also read Parshas Kedoshim during this period, which contains the bulk of the more fundamental *mitzvos bein adam l'chaveiro*, including their crown jewel, *v'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocho*, loving your fellow as yourself. And perhaps most starkly, Rashi teaches us that immediately prior to Matan Torah, B'nei Yisrael were "*k'ish echad b'lev echad* – like one person with one heart." Evidently, Sefiras Ha'Omer is a time primed for growth and improvement in the area of *bein adam l'chaveiro*.

The question is: why? Why would the lead up to Shavuos constitute a time period during which it's necessary to work on the aspect of *bein adam l'chaveiro*? Shavuos is the day in history when Hashem gave us the Torah on Har Sinai. What do interpersonal relationships have to do with the giving of the Torah?

Invariably, Shavuos falls after Parshas Bamidbar, when the Jewish People are counted. It is said that the word 'Yisrael' is an acronym for "*Yesh shishim ribo osiyos l'Torah* – There are 600,000 letters in the Torah." Now, there aren't actually 600,000 letters in the Torah. Not even by a longshot. So what exactly are we supposed to learn from this? The idea is that there were approximately 600,000 Jews in the count, and hence, there is a letter in the Torah corresponding to every Jew.

The holiday of Shavuos is referred to by Chazal as "*zman matan toraseinu* – the time of the giving of our Torah." We actually employ a similar phrase throughout the year – "*v'sein chelkeinu b'sorasecha* – grant us our portion in Your Torah." On Shavuos, we as a nation were collectively gifted the Torah. But in addition, every Jew was granted their own unique portion, a distinctive "letter" in the Torah that is theirs and theirs alone. This is what the 600,000 letters symbolize. Yes, everyone in principle received the same Torah. We all have the same Tanach and Gemara and Mishnah Berurah. But every person connects to the Torah in a different way. Everyone finds the particular areas of Torah that animate them. And it is in that one-of-a-kind combination that a person can find their special "letter", their *chelek* in Torah which has been gifted to them. When a person is *mechadesh* Torah, they are truly bringing out their letter of Torah to its full potential.

Thinking about this more deeply, we see that this must be the case. The Zohar teaches:

Hashem] looked into the Torah and created the world]
אסתכל בה באורייתא וברא עלמא

The source for everything in the world is in the Torah. Consequently, if the Torah is the blueprint for the world, and every Jew is unique, then we must all have a unique portion, a unique "letter" in the Torah. By attaching ourselves to our *chelek* in Torah and bringing it to fruition, we are connecting

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15.

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REBBE SHIMON'S EYES: FOR THE LOVE OF THE LOWLY

Rabbi Moshe Tzvi Weinberg
Mashpia, Congregation Beth Abraham; Mashgiach, RIETS

There is a remarkable teaching from Rav Aharon of Karlin, zy"ta, regarding the holy tanna, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. "Anyone who has emunah in Rashbi draws strength from Rashbi. Just as Hashem Yitbarach is God for all, so too, Rashbi is for all – even the lowest [of Jews]" (Bet Aharon, Lag BaOmer).

It seems that it was not always this way. Rebbe Shimon underwent a most wondrous personal transformation in his mysterious cave (Shabbat 33b). For twelve years, he hid from the Roman oppressors who sought his capture. Twelve years, alone with his beloved son Rav Elazar and the Torah thoughts that filled their minds and hearts. Detached from the ebb and flow of mundane life, Rebbe Shimon's spirit soared, bordering on the angelic. Upon leaving the cave at the instruction of Eliyahu HaNavi, Rebbe Shimon struggled to relate to "regular" people working to earn a simple livelihood plowing and planting in their fields. Infuriated by the triviality of it all, Rebbe Shimon lamented: "These people are forsaking the pursuit of life in the World to Come and occupying themselves instead with the concerns of this transitory existence!" So pained were Rebbe Shimon and Rav Elazar by the lowliness of a society that had become strangely unfamiliar, that they incinerated all that passed before their

fiery gaze. Rebbe Shimon's holiness had made him scornful of human beings being human.

And yet, it is precisely at this point that the inner transformation of Rebbe Shimon truly begins. A heavenly voice rang out from above: "Have you emerged from seclusion to destroy My world? Return to your cave!" Twelve months later Rebbe Shimon and Rav Elazar emerge once again. For Rav Elazar, the world remained a sorry disappointment; but the eyes of Rebbe Shimon had grown softer. What Rav Elazar's burning vision continued to harm, Rebbe Shimon's would heal; all the while comforting his sacred son with words of encouragement and explanation: "It is sufficient for the world with us alone; we need not hold others to our standard of devotion and diligence." Rebbe Shimon had now become "Rashbi for all – even the lowest [of Jews]."

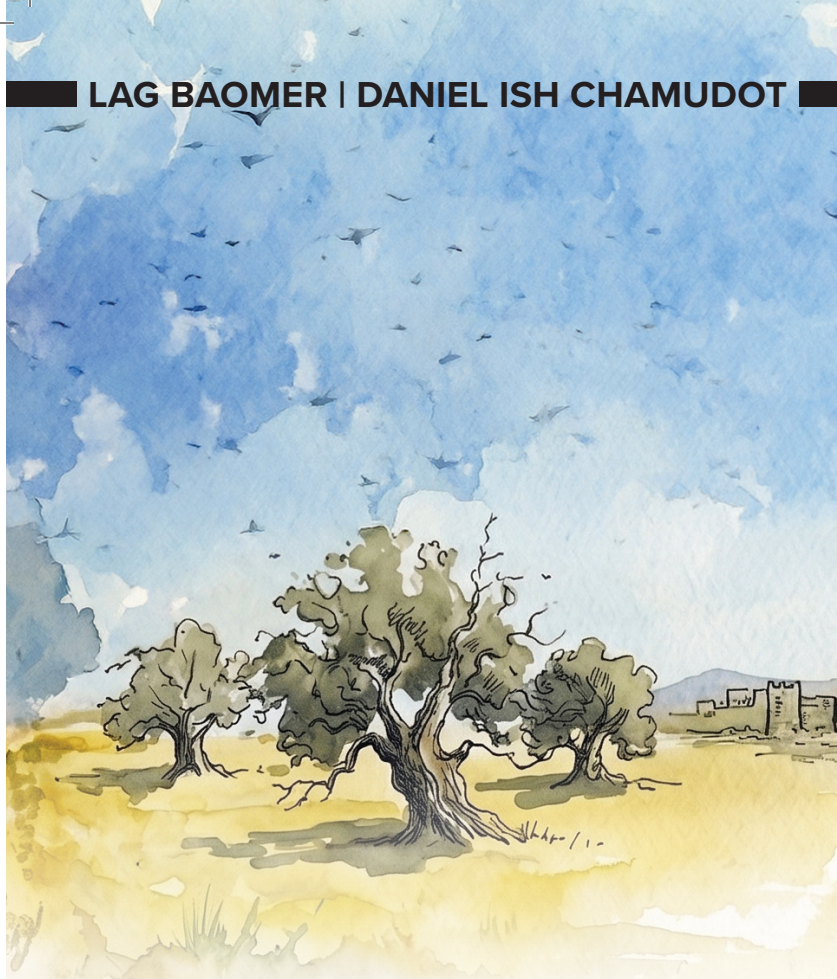
Chazal speak of a spiritual decline with the passage of time. "If the earlier generations were like angels, we are like humans. But if they were like humans, then we are like donkeys" (Shabbat 112b). We therefore wonder: would the gentle and loving eyes of Rebbe Shimon still see the good in Jews like ourselves some 1,800 years later?

Perhaps the gemara, in its conclusion,

alludes to this very question.

As night began to fall on Friday afternoon, Rebbe Shimon and his son saw a certain old man who was clutching two bundles of hadasim [myrtles], running home for Shabbat as twilight descended. They said to him: "Of what use are these bundles?" The old man replied, "They are in honor of Shabbat." "But certainly one bundle would suffice?" they responded to him. The old man again replied, "One is for zachor and one is for shamor," and with that, they parted ways. Undoubtedly filled with feelings of love and joy, Rebbe Shimon said to his son: "Look how cherished the mitzvot are to the Jewish people!" At that time they were appeased (emphasis added).

Not by chance does Rebbe Shimon encounter an elderly Jew precisely on Erev Shabbat. The world of the future is depicted as a "yom shekulo Shabbat" (Mishnah Tamid 7:4). As such, the period before the end of days – often referred to as the ikvata d'Mashicha – is aptly compared to Erev Shabbat. The Baal HaTanya suggested in his day that we were already living in the "footsteps of Mashiach." The Chafetz Chaim continued, in his time, to emphasize that truth as well. Undoubtedly, nearly one hundred years later, we are that much closer to the arrival of that exalted



time. As such, we can refer to ourselves not only as ikvata d'Mashicha Jews but as "Erev Shabbat" Jews. We can relate (all too well) to the old man running home to make Shabbat. We likewise try to make our final preparations, often a bit harried, for that great period of geulah that lies just around the corner. It seems as if we are running behind schedule, yet we trust that we will arrive at just the right time. And it is precisely this simple Erev Shabbat Jew who received the warm smile and recognition of both Rebbe Shimon and his son who "were appeased" by his wholesome and sincere efforts. Let us daven and hope that "Rashbi is for all" – even Jews like ourselves, moments before geulah.



In the early hours of Friday morning, April 30th, 2021, the Jewish world went from rejoicing to mourning. Along with 44 other souls, Donny Morris, z"l, left this world while dancing at the grave of the saintly Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in Meron, on Lag Ba'Omer.

The search for answers and meaning is characteristic of our generation. After this tragedy, many of us were left asking why. We were at a loss for what to do next – how were we to deal with this special life cut so short?

Throughout history, the Torah has been a companion to Jews searching and hurting. In these pages, the talmidim and rabbanim of Yeshivat Sha'alvim – alongside noted rabbis and teachers – use the Torah and Moadim to echo Donny's voice. Donny's impact on thousands continues to be felt. He not only inspired his family and friends who loved him in life, but is now being introduced to countless others. Rich with insights in the weekly parsha and ben adam l'chavero from Donny's friends and teachers, Daniel Ish Chamudot seeks to guide its readers in glimpsing how Donny lived his life, and to discover how his voice reverberates in the way we learn the Torah.



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49 STEPS: COUNTING AND RECOUNTING THE SEFIROT

Unlocking the Sefirot of the Omer



Rabbi Dr. Hillel Broder
Head of School, Berman Hebrew Academy

It is a curious, perhaps historic oddity to note the contemporary cultural and textual prominence of the *sefirot* – alternately defined as divine essences, attributes, or emanations – within the ritual engagement of *sefirot ha'omer*. Indeed, if the ubiquitous Artscroll siddur (Ashkenaz, Hebrew/English) is a standard bearer for the norms of traditional practice, then this curiosity is well founded: while the Artscroll siddur contains very little esoteric *kabalistic* content (sure, *Lecha Dodi* was written by a Safed kabalist), it includes – with no explanation or translation – the internally recursive count through the lower seven *sefirot* (*chesed, gevura, tiferet, netzach, hod, yesod, malchut*), totaling seven counts of seven, alongside the 49-day count of *sefirot ha'omer*.

Any student of R. Chaim Vital's *Pri Etz Chaim* is well aware as to how various iterations and combinations of the ten *sefirot* are easily mapped onto a number of Jewish texts, rituals, and commandments. Yet, while talk and use of *sefirot* in the contemporary milieu is marginalized to either Chasidic or new-age circles, *sefirot ha'omer* seems to generate not only an open acknowledgement but an open integration and exploration of the *sefirot* within the tradition and ritual.

Besides for Artscroll's inclusion of the recursive count, there has been a recent explosion of self-help books and online collectives devoted to sharing wisdom and applications of each day's unique iteration. Ten years ago, I was so moved

by the celebrated place of the *sefirot* during *sefirot ha'omer* that I tweeted a corresponding poem each day, which I later self-published as a collection. I have since found multiple works of aphorisms, psychology, and yes, even poetry, each of which offers a response to this 49-day *sefirotic* count.

In what follows, I will attempt to answer this curious historical question by way of both a theological and psychological argument: namely, that the *sefirot* offer a personally signifying function not only for a repetitive, sequential ritual exercise, but for sequencing an experience of creation, redemption, and revelation in language between the holidays of redemption and revelation, Pesach and Shavuot.

If slavery entails the loss of language, if it demands the forced assumption of a language other than one's own, then redemption is also the release of one's tongue from bondage--through the discovery of a language that *is*, finally, one's own. This is the midrashic and Zoharic reading of the Seder's enactment of liberation, according to R. Aryeh Leib Alter of Gur, in his work *Sefat Emet*:

ד' כוסות נגד ד' לשונות של גאולה. כי כתב בזה"ק כי הדיבור הי' בגלות ויש ה' מוצאות הפה. ונגד שינים הוא אכילת מצה. ונגד הד' אחרים. הכוסות. שכל הבחי' הנ"ל היו בגלות שלא היו יכולים להוציא הדיבור לפני ה' כראוי. וכ' אנכי ה' כו' המעלך מארץ מצרים הרחב פירך ואמלאהו. ובוודאי הוא הרחבת פה בשבחים והודאות. ולכן תקנו הרבה שבחים בליל פסח כמ"ש ז"ל פה סח כיון שהדיבור יצא לחירות הי' רק כדי להלל ולהודות:

The four "languages" of redemption marked by four celebratory cups of wine at the *Seder* are not only various descriptors of stages of redemption – they are, as well, performances of liberated language through a proliferation of liberated speech acts and rituals. Thus, the well known midrashic pun on the spoken word of "Pesach" as "*Peh-Sach*" – the mouth that speaks – thematizes the holiday of Passover through the spoken and heard articulation of its title.

The use of *sefirot*, in relation to the liberation of speech, lies in recovering their proper translation as "iterations" or "articulations." Though the term *sefirot* has been alternately translated as divine spheres or emanations, perhaps the most accurate translation is sourced in a line from one of the earliest sources to discuss its nomenclature and system – *Sefer HaBahir*:

ואמאי קרי ליה ספירות, משום דכתיב (תהלים י"ט ב) השמים מספרים כבוד אל"

And why are they called "*sefirot*?" Because it is written "the heavens tell of God's honor." (Psalms 19:2)

Here, the noun form of *sefirot* is related etymologically to the verb form of telling, articulating – in other words, according to the *Bahir*, the *sefirot* themselves are articulations that speak of God's honor.

The etymological association among *sefirot* as articulations, the *mitzvah* on Passover of recounting the Exodus (*sipur yetziat mitzrayim*), and the daily *mitzvah* from Pesach to Shavuot of counting the *Omer* (*sefirot ha'omer*) seems relevant



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here: articulations are layered on top of a counting that begins with a recounting, a retelling. The counting of the *Omer*, then, might very well be a form of articulation, a method of becoming in and liberation of and through language, sourced first in the commandment of telling one's children – and one's self – of the Exodus miracles.

Counting freely, in other words, is a form of recounting – of what was, and what's to come. In this vein, *Sefat Emet* quotes his grandfather, the first Gerrer Rebbe (known as the *Chidushei HaRim*) who reads the sequences of totaled tens across Jewish history as the controlling paradigm for creation, hiddenness, becoming, and revelation – and all in language:

א"ז מו"ר צלה"ה הגיד כי מה שהי' צורך לעשר מכות. להסיר הקליפה והסתר מעשרה מאמרות לעשותן עשרת הדברות עכ"ז ד"ל.

Here, in a pithy formulation that recurs throughout Chasidic thought, the ten plagues undo the hiddenness of God's creation of the world – formed through the ten utterances referenced in *Mishna Avot 5:1* – in order to make possible the articulation of the ten commandments. While the world was created through ten utterances, then, they were hidden and embedded in exile, only to be revealed in the ten commandments, with the appearance and then telling of the ten plagues serving as a catalyst.

If creation, redemption, and revelation are all a birth of articulation – of language hidden, liberated, and revealed – then the initial recounting of the Seder night – through a newly born, liberated speech, builds progressively into a linguistic system of liberation by way of the *sefirot*, the articulations themselves. In R. Chaim Vital's words:

ועתה נבאר סוד העומר, והענין, כי הלא כבר בארנו כי כל המוחין האלו, הם לצורך שעה, ליום א' דפסח לבד, כדי שיוכלו ישראל ליגאל, אך אחר יום א', נסתלק כל מה שנכנס לגמרי בקדמותו, וחזר למדרגה תלת בתלת, לכן לא יש הלל גמור, רק ביום א' לבד. אמנם מליל ב', שאז מתחיל ספירת העומר, כונתינו הוא, לחזור ולהמשיך אותן המוחין שנכנסו ליל פסח ראשון, אך אי אפשר להחזירו, אם לא ע"י זמן, והוא מפסח עד עצרת, כמ"ש.

Thus, the sequence of movements through the *Sefirot*, according to *Pri Etz Chaim*, is a systematic 49-day progression through and complete articulation of what was initially perceived in an instant during Seder night.

In the *sefirotic* system, each articulation moves progressively through stages of becoming, with the final stage of *malchut* one of fully realized manifestation and presence. While the ten *sefirot* are generally mapped onto the ten articulations of creation, the lower seven and top three are typically divided, with the lower seven acting as more dynamic and relevant elements to the operations of the world, the text of the Torah, and the human psyche, and the top three related to God's transcendent, hidden, and sometimes cognitive functions. Thus, as both the seven days of creation and the 49 days of *Sefirat Ha'omer* step through stages of human experience, they operate as cycles of seven *sefirot*.

A second principle of the *sefirotic* system is that each *sefira* contains all others. Kabbalistic traditions are divided on the nature of the *sefirot* themselves – are they *atzmut* or *keilim*, are they sites of essential, divine immanence, or are they instruments for cultivating divine human characteristics. However, most traditions converge regarding the containment of all *sefirot* within each *sefira*, ad infinitum. Fractal-like, each *sefira* does not only operate dialectically with its opposite; even more – each *sefira* is equipped to receive the light of all others, as each already contains all others, including its opposites. In R. Shlomo Alkebetz's words,

"You must know, when the Kabbalists said that each of the Sefirot is composed of ten, do not suppose that every aspect found in one attribute, yet originating in another, belongs only to the attribute where it is found, separate and cut off from all the other Sefirot, heaven forbid. Rather, each and every aspect is embodied in all of them." (*Brit HaLevi 41a*)

Thus, the movement through the lower seven *sefirot* of *chesed* (love, kindness), *gevurah* (restraint, strength), *tiferet* (splendor, harmony), *netzach* (eternity, victory), *hod* (humility, gratitude), *yesod* (foundation, potentiality), and *malchut* (presence, manifestation) is one of becoming in relation to all others both internally and externally – all are wholly realized in and of themselves, and each builds on the next over the course of the 49-day count.

Practically speaking, how might one journey through the recursive *sefirotic* count of seven sevens – from *chesed* of *chesed* to *malchut* of *malchut*? Typical challenges that I've encountered include perceived redundancy (e.g. *chesed* of *chesed*), paradox (e.g. *chesed* of *gevura*), or obscurity (e.g. *tiferet* of *netzach*). Perhaps a few questions might prompt some reflection:

- How might the day's *sefirotic* relation be rendered as embodied by a complex Biblical figure, exemplified through rabbinic wisdom, or addressed in a *midrashic* homily?
- How does the day's *sefirotic* relation capture a paradox that maintains a productive tension – one that generates spiritual life as a dialectic, and even if unresolved?
- How does the day's *sefirotic* relation offer a complete and independent way of being – spiritually, devotionally, and personally?

As I wrote above, my own prompting around the *sefirot* moved me to compose a short, tweet-length poem each day: long enough to capture a fleeting sentiment, and short enough to demand precision. As I set out to write this poem (and all of the others, later revised into a bigger project), I thought about all of the associations I had with the gift of love – how was love itself a gift, how was such a gift exemplified through the kindness underlying the creation of the world, and how certain Biblical figures perform that gift as paradigms of compassion. In writing each reflection as a poem, my own compositional challenge was interweaving and layering all of those

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8.

with the source of our very existence!

The person in history who perhaps best understood, and even personified this idea, was Rabbi Akiva. In Menachos 29b, the Gemara relates that Moshe Rabbeinu could not fathom some of the Torah that Rabbi Akiva would later expound. The explanation is that this was Rabbi Akiva's unique portion of Torah. Not even Moshe Rabbeinu could access that *chelek* that was set aside for Rabbi Akiva to develop centuries later.

We can now begin to understand why improving our *bein adam l'chaveiro* is a necessary prerequisite for Matan Torah. If every Jew has a special "letter" in the Torah, then it behooves us to treat our fellow Jew with the appropriate respect and esteem. Comprehending the idea of the Zohar, we recognize that there is a letter in the Torah that was written to create this person! Our fellow Jew only exists because there is an irreplaceable part of the Torah which is their source of existence! Therefore, when we fail in the realm of *bein adam l'chaveiro*, we are also implicitly denigrating the Torah and accusing it of having a deficiency, *chas v'shalom*. In order to truly appreciate and deserve the Torah, we are obligated to value our fellow Jew who represents a part of the Torah.

This is the deeper meaning of what Rabbi Akiva meant when he commented on the mitzvah of *v'avavta l'rei'acha kamocho* by saying, "*zeh klal gadol b'Torah* – this is a profound principle of the Torah." It is a foundational tenet of the Torah itself to love your fellow as yourself. By acknowledging someone else's potential to bond with the Torah in a unique way, we recognize the completeness and perfection of the Torah itself.

This is why it was specifically during the period of Sefirah that Rabbi Akiva's students died. The Gemara gives the reason as "*lo nahagu kavod zeh bazeh* – they did not treat each other with respect." Besides failing on the basic level of *v'avavta l'rei'acha kamocho* which we must show to every Jew, these *talmidim* were actively connecting with their own portions in Torah and realizing the potential latent in each of their letters. Hence, their failure demonstrated their complete inability to understand what the Torah is really about and its infinite nature. For this reason, their sin was of such magnitude that it dictated that they not be the bearers of Torah for the next generation, for they didn't appreciate what the Torah is!

As mentioned, there is a custom to learn Pirkei Avos between Pesach and Shavuos. Remarkably, the first five chapters deal almost exclusively with how we should relate to others. Yet, the sixth and final chapter is entirely devoted to the study of Torah, and more specifically, the acquisition of Torah. The takeaway is obvious. In order to acquire Torah, which is what we are hoping to do on Shavuos, we must learn to respect someone else's *chelek*; that they were also given a part of the Torah. In order to truly appreciate the Torah and our connection to it, we must recognize that it is infinite and everyone has a unique portion of it. Only then are we capable of receiving our *chelek* on Shavuos.

Nathan Witztum is a teacher at the Melvin J. Berman Hebrew Academy, where he educates and inspires the next generation of students in the Greater Washington community. Known for his thoughtful approach and depth of knowledge, Nathan brings both intellectual rigor and genuine warmth into the classroom, helping students connect meaningfully to their learning and to their Jewish identity.

elements so that they complemented one another, too. Here's my revised poem for *chesed of chesed*:

being alone is enough

better a world created, truth cast aside

a waiter, Abraham, Rebecca rising,

ready with love's gift.

And here's my final poem in the 49 day count, corresponding to *malchut of malchut*

מלכותך מלכות כל עולמים

traveling time Sinai, an empty center:

a king in the field calling from Eden— never ceasing,

Listen!

אָנֹכִי

I'm sure that there are so many other ways out there to personalize this sequential journey from redemption to revelation – and so I leave you with the challenge to find your own way.

Best wishes for a *nesiah tova*.

This article draws on material from Daf Aleph, a resource dedicated to the core ideas of Judaism and Jewish philosophy. Visit: dafaleph.com



Rabbi Dr. Hillel Broder, Head of School at Berman Hebrew Academy since July 2023, has rapidly become a transformative force in the Greater Washington Jewish community. In a short time, his leadership has energized a new sense of vision, depth, and purpose—impacting not only his students, but families and the broader community at large.

A former Principal at DRS Yeshiva High School for Boys and educator at SAR and Yeshiva University High School for Boys, he has also taught as an adjunct professor at Fordham University. He holds a Ph.D. in English literature from the CUNY Graduate Center, along with degrees from Queens College and Yeshiva University, and received semicha from Rabbi Ari Enkin.

A scholar, educator, and poet, Rabbi Dr. Broder is the author of numerous academic works and two volumes of poetry—bringing together intellectual rigor and spiritual insight in a way that continues to elevate and shape the community he serves.

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Second Chances



JOSH SEIDEMANN

The Chumash records an encounter that offers a lesson about second chances. In Bamidbar (9:6 *et seq.*), a group approaches Moses with an unusual request: Disqualified from offering a Paschal lamb (according to some commentators, they were transporting Joseph's disinterred remains), they ask, "Why should we be left out?" Moses turns to G-d for guidance, and His answer is one of comfort, redemption, and inclusion: Within the month, there will be Pesach Sheini, a second Pesach - a second chance. It is a surprising outcome, as Jewish law usually takes an easier yet no less compassionate view: *אונס רחמנא פטריה* - where an unavoidable circumstance prevents fulfillment of a mitzvah, the Merciful One exempts the obligation. But here, the Merciful One offers a second chance.

Roman Vishniac (1897-1990) was a Russian-American photographer best known for his photographs of Central and Eastern European Jewish communities on the eve of the Holocaust. Vishniac captured 16,000 images during several trips to communities including Bratislava, Kraków, Warsaw, and Łódź. All but 2,000 of his pictures were confiscated and lost. His photos include indelible images of scholars and tradesmen, schoolboys and young women - all on the brink of unanticipated disaster. They included Nat Gutman, a bank cashier fired for being a Jew; Henryk Schwartz, who lost most of his family but survived; and a community of Carpathian Jews - "woodcutters, log carriers, and raftsmen." Vishniac remembers, "As I shared a meal with the workers, I listened to one of the men comment on the *Merkava*, the mystical

concept of the celestial chariot . . . Another discussed Jewish Gnosticism . . . Later, an admirer of Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk showed how to move a five-hundred-pound log to the sawmill using wooden sticks."

I own three volumes of Vishniac's photographs. One, *Children of a Vanished World*, features photos of children alongside lyrics of Yiddish folk songs. In my house, these books rest horizontally on a shelf, and I treat them like Bibles: no other book is placed atop them.



We rarely eat out on Shabbos or holidays, but we were invited for lunch on October 7, 2023. As we walked past one of the shuls, a friend slid up to me and whispered, "Israel is at war." I imagined a limited border incursion. I could not have been more wrong. News and images of Hamas's brutality were not long following: The murderers used GoPros to post their massacres on social media. Killings. Torture. Rape. Mutilation. Burnings. Suddenly Vishniac's books, particularly his images of children fatally unaware of what awaited them, were no longer records of an unrecurrent history.

In the days immediately following, there were great global outpourings of sympathy for Israel - mostly. And I saw multiple social media postings warning "Never Again is Now!" I thought it was hyperbole. Overreaction. Yes, October 7 was shocking. Proportionally, it was worse than 9/11: if the rates of murder and kidnapping were applied proportionally to the United States, it would amount to 40,000 killed and 8,000 kidnapped.



Rahel (1933-1941) and Valeska (1937-1941) Freund

But did I really believe it heralded a new Holocaust? We would be battle-tested, yes, but we would survive.



Pesach Sheini is unique among time-bound mitzvos. A person who for good or lesser reasons misses shofar on Rosh HaShanna is compelled to wait until the following year. Chanukah candles are lit for eight nights, but not nine or more. The *Sefer HaChinuch*, a 13th-century Spanish exploration of the Torah's commandments, offers insight that justifies the motivation of the men who confronted Moses and why they were offered a second chance. The author characterizes the Passover sacrifice as a "strong and clear signal" of the miracles G-d wrought at the Exodus: Who split the sea. Who provided manna. Who sustained Israel in the desert for 40 years. The author declares this "a firm pillar of our faith" - *הוא העמוד החזק* - *באמונתנו* - and that no accident or incident



Elias Freund (d.1941, Terezin)



Freund family c.1940

should prevent a person from meriting engagement with it על כן היה מרצונו ברוך הוא לזכות במצוה זו הנכבדה כל איש מישראל, ואל יעכביהו אונס וריחוק מקום מעשותו. And that is what sets Pesach (and Pesach Sheini) apart – it is not simply a ritual of memory but rather a living reflection of our founding moments from which no one should be excluded.



As the child and grandchild of Jews who through G-d's kindness escaped Nazi Germany, and as the great-grandchild and cousin once removed of fathers and mothers and sons and daughters who perished in Lublin, Riga, Auschwitz, and Terezín, I often scanned U.S. newspaper headlines from the 1930s and 1940s. As a kid discovering microfiche, I would spin reels and ask myself, "Who knew what, and when? What were the signs?" I knew what my parents in Germany had seen: My mother, a kindergartener when the Gestapo harassed her mother daily

over the whereabouts of my grandfather, who had managed to escape; my father, who on Kristallnacht watched the neighborhood shul burn while German firemen calmly hosed down adjacent buildings so those structures would not catch an errant spark. I knew what my parents knew. But what did others know, and what did others do?



On October 9, a friend in Israel made an unknowingly prescient observation in an ordinary Facebook conversation. He called October 7, "The great unraveling." He was right. In the first three months following October 7, antisemitic attacks in England increased more than 600%; in France, nearly 1,000%; in the United States, nearly 360%. Two-and-a-half years later, the trend continues with attacks on synagogues in Canada; torching of Jewish ambulances in England; a

mass Chanukah shooting in Australia; and an attack on a Jewish preschool in Michigan. In the aftermath of Michigan, there was unironic relief that armed guards killed the terrorist, because it is matter of fact now that Jewish schools, houses of worship, and community centers require armed security.



Rashi, the 11th century commentator, explains that Pesach Sheini was destined to be given; G-d knew the answer before the question was asked. But G-d waited until the people who asked for it stepped forward – because טובה באה על ידי זכאי, good things come about through the virtuous. The second chance was waiting, only for someone to earn it.

To earn. To work. To be rewarded for that work. The prophet Jeremiah recalls G-d's response to Rachel's tears on the road to Bethlehem: "Restrain your voice from

weeping and your eyes from tears, for you will be rewarded for your deeds, שֹׁכֵר לַפְעוּלְתֶךָ... וְשָׁבוּ בָנִים לְגִבּוֹלָם, your children will return to their land" (Jeremiah 31:14-16).

R. David Stavsky (d. 2004) cites a *midrash* that explains G-d withheld mercy until Rachel cried, and asks: What is the שֹׁכֵר לַפְעוּלְתֶךָ to which Jeremiah refers? Rabbi Stavsky explains a Talmudic teaching in Shabbos (31a) that enumerates the questions we will be asked as we pass from this world to the next. Among them is צְפִיית לִישׁוּעָה – "Did you hope for redemption"? That work is as important as the other listed tasks that include honesty in business and setting aside time for Torah study. And the reward for the hope of redemption - וְיִשׁ - תקוה לאחרייתך - is טובה באה על ידי זכאי "your children will return to their land." But that hope must be active. The prophet's use of פְּעוּלְתֶךָ, from פָּעַל - to do, to work, to act - demands it.

To be sure, redemption is included among the 13 Articles of Faith. Like the "second chance" Pesach Sheini, it is a foregone conclusion. But like the first Pesach Sheini, G-d holds it in reserve, waiting for the right people at the right time. As Rashi encourages, טובה באה על ידי זכאי, good things come about through those who merit it. And as Rabbi Stavsky reminds, the שֹׁכֵר לַפְעוּלְתֶךָ requires work.

How that work manifests derives from each actor. And the collective impact of those efforts will be reflected in tomorrow's headlines that future children will review. And with G-d's mercy, that work, שֹׁכֵר לַפְעוּלְתֶךָ, will leave today's headlines as the last of their kind.

טובה באה על ידי זכאי. Our second chance is waiting.



Josh Seidemann is a senior telecom attorney with broad experience across private practice, government, and national trade associations. He specializes in emerging technologies and Federal regulatory policy shaping rural U.S. markets, and has worked extensively with public and private sector organizations to advance telehealth, distance education, and rural economic development. In addition to his legal and policy work, he is a recognized thought leader who publishes regularly in trade and academic outlets on the intersection of technology and industry.



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HANOACH TELLER

There are certain moments when a person says something—and it lands differently, not because of how it's said, but because of who is saying it.

That was Rabbi Yehuda Kelemer.

In West Hempstead, as the longtime Mara D'Asra of Young Israel of West Hempstead, he was known as a serious talmid chacham, with a broad command of Shas and a clear, grounded way of teaching Torah. But what people felt even more was his consistency. He showed up—for people, for simchos, for the everyday moments that matter.

That consistency didn't stop, even after the accident.

In December 2016, on Hempstead Avenue just outside his shul, Rabbi Kelemer was struck in a hit-and-run and seriously injured. Recovery was slow. Walking wasn't simple. A walker became part of his daily reality, and even routine movement required effort.

But he came back—step by step.

By January 2018, he was still in the middle of that process. And on a winter morning that most people would have stayed home, there was a bar mitzvah at Eitz Chaim.

Yitzy Gross's bar mitzvah.

The weather was rough. Ice covered the sidewalks, the temperature was low, and the wind made it worse. It wasn't a day to be walking distances—certainly not with a walker, certainly not while still recovering.

He went anyway.

Nearly two miles. Slowly, carefully, without making a scene about it.

And when he walked in, there was no announcement, no sense that anything unusual had just happened. He sat down, composed, present, exactly where he felt he needed to be.

When he spoke, he turned directly to Yitzy.

He didn't speak long, but he spoke clearly.

He told him that becoming a bar mitzvah is not about a day—it's about what comes after. About waking up the next morning and the morning after that, and continuing. About showing up to davening, to learning, to the small responsibilities that don't get attention but define a person.

He told him that Torah isn't something you carry when it's easy. It's something you carry consistently. Even when you're tired. Even when it's inconvenient. Even when no one is watching.

He spoke about taking things seriously in a steady way—not in big bursts, but in regular, reliable effort. About building a life where Torah becomes part of your routine, not just your milestones.

There was no drama in how he said it. No raised voice. No performance.

Just clarity.

And sitting there, speaking about consistency, was a man who had just walked nearly two miles on icy streets, with a walker, still recovering from an accident that had once left him in a hospital bed.

He didn't point that out.

He didn't need to.

Rabbi Kelemer knew Shas. That was clear. But what gave his words weight was that he lived them. The same consistency he was describing to a bar mitzvah boy was the consistency he expected from himself.

He showed up.

And that's what he told Yitzy, in simple terms:

That this is what a Torah life looks like—not just knowing what's right, but doing it, steadily, again and again.

Even when it's hard.

Especially then.



Rabbi Yehuda Kelemer

רבי זצ"ל, longtime spiritual leader of a Long Island community, embodied a rare kind of leadership—one where deep intellectual discipline met real-life responsibility. Known for his mastery of classical texts, he stood out even more for how naturally that knowledge shaped his actions. As reflected in *If Not Higher*, his influence came not from visibility or charisma, but from consistency, presence, and a quiet commitment to others. He didn't just teach ideas—he lived them, showing what it means when thought and action are fully aligned.



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Five Years Later, the Mountain Still Speaks

Lag BaOmer (the 33rd day of the Omer count, marking the *yahrzeit* of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai) in Meron, five years after the deadliest civilian tragedy in Israel's history—remembering the 45 souls whose absence still echoes.

Five years have passed, but the events of that night remain unusually difficult to place in time.

Lag BaOmer—the thirty-third day of the Omer, long associated with bonfires, song, and pilgrimage to the tomb of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in Meron—has always carried a sense of release. For many, it marks a pause in a period of restraint, a night defined by movement, gathering, and collective joy. That is precisely why what occurred there on April 30, 2021, continues to resist easy categorization.

In the early hours of that morning, a densely packed passageway became the site of a fatal crowd crush. Within minutes, celebration gave way to confusion, then to irreversible loss. Forty-five people were killed, making it the deadliest civilian disaster in Israel's history. There was no external attack, no act of terror—only a convergence of conditions that proved devastating under pressure.

The immediate aftermath unfolded with a speed that felt both urgent and insufficient. Emergency responders and volunteers worked in close quarters, attempting to reach those trapped in conditions that were difficult to navigate and even harder to assess in real time. What had been a gathering defined by scale became, in those moments, a space defined by limitation—of movement, of visibility, of time.

In the hours that followed, the focus shifted from rescue to identification. Hospitals received the injured. Families began searching for information, often relying on fragmented reports and partial confirmations. For some, clarity came quickly. For others, it arrived only after long stretches of uncertainty that remain difficult to describe even years later.

Five years on, Lag BaOmer in Meron continues—but not unchanged.

Infrastructure has been reworked. Crowd control measures have been redefined. The physical space reflects lessons learned. But the more lasting shift is less visible. Meron is no longer experienced only as a site of celebration. It has also become a place of memory, where presence carries an added awareness of what occurred there.

The 45 who lost their lives that night shouldn't be reduced to a number.

They came from different places, different kinds of homes, different points in life. Some were fathers, some were still boys. There were תלמידים (students), teachers, newlyweds, and children who hadn't yet had the chance to grow up. They came from ירושלים (Jerusalem), בני ברק (Bnei Brak), בית שמש (Beit Shemesh), מודיעין עילית (Modi'in Illit), and beyond—each one with a life that was full, specific, and completely their own.

What connects them now isn't just how they died. It's the responsibility to remember them properly—with care, with honesty, and without turning them into something abstract.

What follows isn't really a list.

It's just an attempt—however limited—to say their names one by one, and to hold onto the fact that each one was a person, not a number.

Menachem Asher Zakbach (24), Modi'in Illit — A yeshiva student, young husband and father, survived by his pregnant wife and one-year-old child. His funeral began at his parents' home in Bnei Brak, a detail that quietly shows the closeness of the family world he left behind.

Simcha Bunim Diskind (23), Beit Shemesh — A young father of two from Beit Shemesh, remembered as part of a family still in its earliest and most demanding years, where every ordinary day depends on presence, routine, and responsibility.

Rabbi Shraga Gestetner (33/35), Monsey / Montreal — A Skverer chassid, singer, composer, husband and father of five, born in Montreal and later living in Monsey. He had stepped back from music to focus on family, and his Jerusalem *levayah* drew hundreds after officials asked locals to attend because his family was abroad.

Shimon Matalon (37/38), Beitar Illit — A father of eleven from Beitar Illit and a rebbi in Talmud Torah Chanichei Hayeshivos, remembered through the large family and classroom presence he left behind, both built on the steady work of daily responsibility.

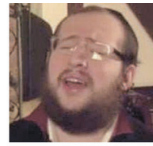
Yedidya Hayut (13), Bnei Brak — A child from Bnei Brak who came to Meron



Shimon Matalon
37, Beitar Illit



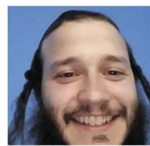
Hanoch Slod
52, Ashdod



Shraga Gestetner
35, Montreal, Canada



Menachem Asher Hacoheh
24, Modi'in Ilit



Eliezer Tzvi Yuzef
26, Monroe, New York



Yehonatan Hevroni
27, Givat Shmuel



Avraham Daniel Amnon
21, Argentina



Yishai Mualem
16, Rechesim



Brothers Yehoshua and Moshe Engeldard
9 and 14, Jerusalem



Haim Seler
24, Jerusalem



Moshe Ben Shalom
20, Bnei Brak



Menachem Kanobolitz
22, New York



Elkana Shiloh
28, Jerusalem



David Kraus
33, Beit Shemesh



Yosef Amran Tauber
United States



Israel Elnakwa
24, Beit Shemesh



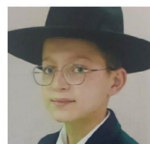
Yehuda Lieb Rubin
27, Beit Shemesh



Eliezer Goldberg
37, Beitar Illit



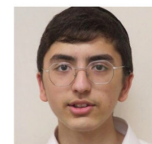
Nachman Kirschenbaum
15, Beit Shemesh



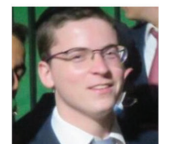
Moshe Levy
14, Bnei Brak



Haim Rak
14, Bnei Brak



Yosef Mastorov
17, Ramle



Shlomo Zalman Leibovitz
19, Safed



Eliahu Cohen
16, Beitar Illit



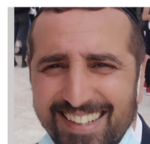
Yaakov Elhanan Strakovski
20, Elad



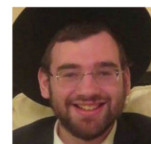
Simcha Bonim Diskind
23, Beit Shemesh



Yedidya Fogel
22, Jerusalem



Chen Doron
41, Holon



Moshe Bergman
24, Jerusalem



Shmuel Klagsbald
43, Beitar Illit



Eliezer Gefner
52, Jerusalem



Yosef Yehuda Levy
17, Rechesim



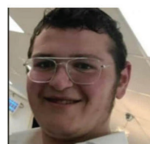
Elazar Yitzchak Koltai
13, Jerusalem



Brothers Moshe Mordechai and Yosef David Elhadad
12 and 18, Safed



Dov Steinmetz
21, Montreal, Canada



Moshe Tzarfati
65, Jerusalem



Ariel Achdut
21, Jerusalem



Mordechai Paketeh
24, Jerusalem



Ariel Tzadik
56, Jerusalem



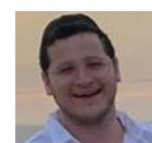
Yedidya Hayut
13, Bnei Brak



Donny Morris
19, New Jersey



Yosef Greenbaum
22, Haifa



Yosef Kahn
Ohio, United States

with his family. After his passing, his father spoke publicly about Jewish unity, turning a private family loss into a message that reached far beyond their home.

David Krauss (33), Beit Shemesh – A Toldos Aharon chassid from Beit Shemesh, survived by his wife and nine children. His life is remembered most clearly through the large home he helped build, and the daily fatherly presence suddenly missing from it.

Rabbi Moshe Bergman (24), Jerusalem / Manchester – Originally from Manchester, England, Rabbi

Bergman was learning in the Mir Yeshiva in Jerusalem, part of the world of young men who leave home to grow in Torah, discipline, and serious learning.

Chaim Rock (19), Beit Shemesh – A yeshiva student from Beit Shemesh learning in Mir-Brachfeld, part of the familiar path of boys building their lives through סדר (structured learning), friendships, and steady daily growth.

Rabbi Yisrael Alnakvah (24), Beit Shemesh – A young father of two from Beit Shemesh, part of a growing family built around routine and responsibility, one of many young homes suddenly left

without their center.

Eliyahu Cohen (16), Beitar Illit – A Breslov chassid and yeshiva student from Beitar Illit, part of a generation drawn to Meron each year, still early enough in life that much of his story remained unwritten.

Rabbi Chanoch Slod (52), Ashdod – A Gur chassid from Ashdod, a father and grandfather who came as part of a lifelong connection to Meron, carrying years of family, community, and quiet religious devotion.

Rabbi Elazar Mordechai Goldberg (37), Beitar Illit – A father of four and

a melamed (teacher) in Talmud Torah, remembered both in his home and classroom, where daily presence shaped children through consistency and care.

Moshe Ben-Shalom (20), Bnei Brak – A Ponovezh yeshiva student, part of one of the most demanding worlds of Torah learning, where structure, discipline, and long hours define the rhythm of everyday life.

Yedidya Fogel (22), Jerusalem / Givat Shmuel – A yeshiva student connected to Givat Shmuel and the broader מרכז, in the stage of life where identity, direction, and long-term purpose are still being formed.

Rabbi Yonatan Hebroni (35), Givat Shmuel – A father of three daughters, part of a young family, his absence felt most deeply in the private rhythms of home life rather than in public recognition.

Moshe Mordechai Elhadad (12), Jerusalem – One of two brothers lost from the same family, a child who came to Meron with excitement and anticipation, part of a night meant for joy.

Yosef David Elhadad (18), Jerusalem – The older brother, taken together with Moshe Mordechai, leaving their family to carry both losses, a reality that cannot be measured in words or time.

Moshe Natan Neta Englard (14), Jerusalem – One of two Englard brothers from a Bobover chassidic family, part of a close-knit ירושלים community shaped by family, school, and shared daily life.

Yehoshua Englard (9), Jerusalem – The youngest victim, taken alongside his older brother, a child whose life was defined by family, school, and the early years that never had time to unfold.

Chaim Ozer Seler (24), Jerusalem – A young father whose daughter had been born just two weeks earlier, leaving behind a family at the very beginning of a new and fragile chapter.

Yehuda Leib Rubin (27), Beit Shemesh – A father of three from Beit Shemesh, remembered through the ordinary, sacred responsibility of family life, where daily presence, small routines, and quiet reliability are what truly hold a home together.

Shmuel Tzvi Klagsbald (43), Beitar Illit – A תורה בן connected to Maor

Einayim, survived by eight children, his life shaped by learning, family, and quiet consistency, where commitment was measured not in moments but in steady, daily dedication.

Yosef Amram Tauber (19), Monsey, New York – A Brisk yeshiva student who had recently arrived in Israel, entering a serious stage of learning that connected his American home to Jerusalem, a transition that marked the beginning of a more defined path.

Daniel “Donny” Morris (19), Teaneck, New Jersey – A Sha’alvim student from New Jersey, remembered across the American Orthodox community as a beloved young man, whose warmth, presence, and friendships extended far beyond where he lived. After his passing, a sefer titled Daniel Ish Chamudot was published in his memory—a Parsha-based work focused on בין אדם לחבֵר, reflecting the way he lived and how others experienced him.

Moshe Levy (14), Bnei Brak – A young boy from Bnei Brak, still in the years of school, family, and the quiet early formation of who a person becomes, where life is simple, structured, and just beginning to take shape.

Yosef Yehuda Levy (17), Rechasim – A young man from northern Israel, growing within the steady structure of yeshiva life and daily learning, part of a system where progress is slow, consistent, and built over time.

Nachman Kirshbaum (15), Beit Shemesh – A teenager whose life was still ahead of him, part of a generation defined more by promise than by biography, where so much of what could have been was still waiting to unfold.

Rabbi Ariel Tzadik (57), Jerusalem – One of the older victims, representing a life already rich with years, family, community, and accumulated commitment, where decades of routine, responsibility, and connection shaped those around him.

Rabbi Eliezer Tzvi Joseph (26), Kiryas Joel, New York – A Satmar chassid and father of four, a young American father whose life centered on family, routine, and daily responsibility, where presence itself was the foundation of everything he built.

Avraham Daniel Ambon (21), Argentina

– A yeshiva student from Argentina learning in Jerusalem, reflecting how far Meron’s reach extended across the Jewish world, bringing together individuals from distant places through shared purpose and tradition.

Dov “Dubi” Steinmetz (21), Montreal – A Canadian yeshiva student in Jerusalem, one of many young men who came to Israel for Torah, growth, and direction, shaping identity through learning, discipline, and the early steps of adulthood.

Yishai Mualem (17), Rechasim – A young man from Rechasim who came together with his friend Yosef Yehuda Levy, both taken from the same northern community, their shared presence that night now remembered together.

Yosef Mastorov (18), Ramla – A yeshiva student from Ramla, one of the younger participants who traveled north for Lag BaOmer, part of a generation whose lives were structured around learning, routine, and steady personal growth.

Yosef Greenbaum (22), Haifa – A young man from Haifa, one of the few victims from outside the central charedi communities, his presence at Meron reflecting the broader reach of the gathering across different parts of Israeli society.

Elazar Yitzchak “Azi” Koltai (13), Jerusalem / Passaic – Born in Passaic, New Jersey, before his family moved to Israel, Azi was a young boy growing up in Jerusalem within a family that still maintained strong ties to its American roots. He came to Meron with relatives for Lag BaOmer, part of a tradition many families share each year. His life, still in its early stages, reflected both the closeness of family and the quiet rhythm of school, home, and community that defined his world.

Menachem Knoblowitz (22), Borough Park, Brooklyn – A young man from Brooklyn who was engaged to be married, with a wedding already being planned and a new home on the horizon. He had traveled to Meron as part of a longstanding tradition, like many others his age. His life stood at the point where preparation turns into responsibility—moving from being part of a family to building one of his own, a transition that never had the chance to begin.

Elkana Shiloh (28), Jerusalem – A Jerusalem resident who came to Meron as part of the annual pilgrimage, remembered among the young adults whose lives were already taking shape within work, community, and daily responsibility.

Elazar Gafner (52), Jerusalem – A Dzikov-Vizhnitz chassid from Jerusalem, part of a community defined by longstanding ties and tradition, representing a generation that returned to Meron year after year as part of a lifelong connection.

Yossi (Yosef) Kohn (Cleveland, Ohio) – A Mir Yerushalayim student from Cleveland, Yossi had come to Israel to immerse himself in full-time Torah learning, part of a well-worn path for American yeshiva students seeking growth in Jerusalem. He was known among friends for his warmth and easygoing nature, someone who formed close relationships quickly and naturally. His presence at Meron that night connected not only to those around him, but to a wider community back home in Cleveland that followed the news from afar and felt the loss deeply.

Shlomo Zalman Leibowitz (19), Safed (Tzfat) – A yeshiva student from Tzfat, living in close proximity to Meron, for whom the mountain and its traditions were part of familiar religious life rather than a distant destination.

Rabbi Moshe Tzarfati (65), Jerusalem – A father of four and grandfather of twenty-five, among the eldest victims, representing a lifetime of family, Torah, and community built over decades of steady presence.

Ariel Achdut (20), Jerusalem – A Jerusalem yeshiva student studying in Tel Aviv, moving between different environments of learning and life, still in the stage of shaping direction, identity, and long-term purpose.

Chen Doron (41), Holon – A resident of Holon, one of the few victims not from a charedi background, he came to Meron as part of a wider Israeli presence, reflecting how the gathering drew Jews from across communities, not just one world.

Mordechai Yoel Fakata (24), Williamsburg / Satmar community

– A Satmar chassid from Williamsburg and father of two young children, part of a close-knit chassidic community built around family, chassidus, and daily structure, leaving behind a young home that depended on him.

Yaakov Elchanan Starkovsky (20), Elad – A yeshiva student from Elad learning in Jerusalem, part of the cycle of young men balancing study, discipline, and growth, still in the years where direction, identity, and long-term purpose are being formed.

Five years later, Meron looks the same—the fires, the crowds, the songs—but it isn't. Something quieter stays with it now, something carried more than spoken. The 45 didn't come to be remembered; they came to celebrate. The fact that we remember them instead is not something we resolve—it's something we carry. May their memories be a blessing, and may the way we remember them bring more care, more responsibility, and more awareness into the moments we share together.

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BELLEVUE UNIVERSITY **YIEP** YESHIVA INITIATIVES EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Spring Inspired Trends

Aviva Waxman

After the long (very long) winter, spring is finally here. I think for many people spring is the best of times, weather is great and we have a bit of time until the hectic summer. As we enjoy the wonderful weather let us delve into some 2026 spring style trends.

Finding spring inspired trends is actually really easy today as the trending styles are actually straight out of spring vibes: light neutral colors, airy and breezy fabrics, and natural wood tones.

The neutral paint pallet is keeping up with the style cycles surprising well. Although the neutral colors have transitioned from greys to beige and whites, neutrals are still the most popular paint colors. We are seeing a lot of beige tones and for large open spaces an all-white home is also becoming increasingly

popular. For fabrics including curtains, throws, and accent pillows the organic light fabrics are the way to go. Linen, rough cottons, and raw look wool, are the textures we are seeing most. I am also seeing a lot of accent pillows with stunning woven nature scenes.

Last, we can't discuss 2026 trends without discussing the natural wood rage. We are seeing wood flooring, wood wall paneling on walls and ceiling, natural wood artwork, natural wood accent and coffee tables and so on and so on. The light natural wood tones are the most popular wood tones but we are seeing anywhere from medium walnut colored

wood to a greyish natural drift wood all the way till white washed wood. Just 3 weeks ago I visited a cabinet showroom with a client and the rep showed us the newest color 2 cabinet lines debuted for 2026 and it was a very soft white washed wood cabinet door.

As we embrace the season and begin thinking of updating our home, enjoy these easy spring inspired design ideas to bring this season to our home all year long.

Aviva Waxman is the owner of Sheva Interiors, an interior design firm covering Maryland and DC. Aviva loves to work with her clients to bring out their style in a contemporary and You-nique way. She can be reached at shevainteriors@gmail.com or 4432725879.

West Elm Custom Size Sheer European Flax Linen Curtains - Natural Flax

42" W 29" L
\$49.00



Arhaus Nature Scene Lento Pillows

20"x20"
\$209.00 each



Wayfair Abstract Wood Console Table For Entryway Statement Piece - Stand Out Narrow Console Table For Sofa, Foyer, Or Hallway Table Decor

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Pottery Barn Textured Basketweave Knit Throw

Color: Terracotta
50"x60"
\$99 \$48.97



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COUNTING UPWARD: SEFIRAH, GROWTH, AND PARENTING WITH INTENTION

*By Alanna Pepper, LMSW, and
Rabbi Dr. Avichai Pepper, Ed.D.*

There is something deeply consequential about the days of Sefirah. Historically, this period carries a complex emotional tone. On one hand, it is filled with anticipation and quiet joy as we count toward the moment of receiving the Torah. On the other hand, it is marked by tragedy and loss, leaving a subtle imprint of pain on these days.

Yet despite this duality, our Rabbis teach us a powerful principle: מעלין בקודש ואין מורידים, in matters of holiness, we always ascend; we do not descend. And so, we count upward.

This upward counting is not merely technical. It reflects a mindset, a commitment to growth, even when the journey is complicated. After leaving Mitzrayim, the Jewish people were not yet a fully formed nation. The days of Sefirah became a process of transformation and a gradual building toward closeness with Hashem. This idea is emphasized by the Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 306), who explains that we count from a longing and anticipation for Torah, demonstrating an inner progression toward that goal. We count both days and weeks, marking not only the passage of time but the development of both quantity and quality within ourselves.

By the time we reach Shavuot, we

celebrate having arrived at a level where we can receive the Torah. It is interesting to note that one of the traditions of this day is to eat dairy (Mishnah Berurah 494:12). Among the many explanations offered, Rabbi Meir Horowitz of Dzikov in Sefer Imrei Noam, reflects a deeply human truth: the Bnei Yisrael, even at this moment of great spiritual achievement, were still like children and needed to be nurtured like a mother nurtures a child. This nurture does not end but is constant and unconditional to the child throughout their life. Growth does not eliminate our need for care; it reframes it.

This perspective offers a powerful lens for parenting.

Like the days of Sefirah, parenting is a journey of incremental growth. When we are with our children every day, it can be difficult to notice change. Growth often feels invisible, hidden within the routine of daily life. But if we adopt the mindset of Sefirah, of counting and paying attention to each small step, we begin to see it.

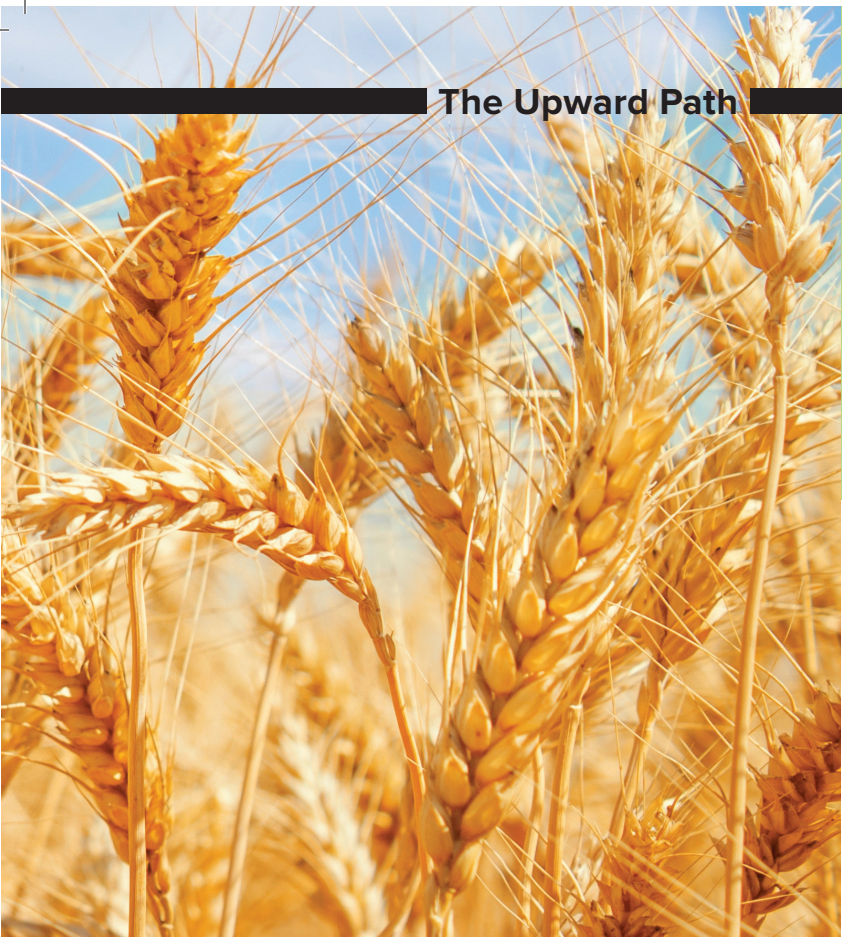
A child's development is rarely dramatic. It is built in small moments: a slightly more thoughtful response, a bit more patience, a quiet act of responsibility. These are the "days" we are counting. When we take the time to notice even

1% growth, we validate our children's progress and reinforce their upward trajectory.

At the same time, Sefirah is not only about counting, it is also about reflection. Each day carries its own character, its own opportunity for introspection and refinement. So too in parenting, growth is not linear or automatic. It requires us to continually adjust, to redirect, and to meet our children where they are, not where they were, and not where we wish they would already be.

Sometimes that means celebrating progress. Sometimes it means recalibrating expectations. And sometimes it means recognizing that, like the Jewish people in the desert, our children are still becoming. Take a moment each day and find something, a small nuance, and give a bit of positive feedback. Say "I noticed..." and let the child feel the love, support, and nurture.

When this process is approached with warmth and intentionality, something powerful happens. Our children not only grow, but they become aware of their growth. They begin to see themselves as capable of change, as individuals moving forward rather than standing still. This mindset fuels motivation, resilience, and a deeper connection between parent and child.



Mental Health



ADAM SRAGG
ADULT PRIMARY CARE
NURSE PRACTITIONER

Sefirah teaches us that growth is sacred, that it happens step by step, and that even in periods of complexity, we move upward.

As parents, if we learn to count the small but meaningful steps in our children's lives, we help guide them along that same upward path. A path of a growth mindset, and the excitement of the adventure of an upward trajectory.



Alanna Pepper, LMSW is a dedicated therapist at Shalom Tikvah, a nonprofit clinic committed to supporting the Jewish communities of Maryland. With a deep passion for guiding individuals and families toward healing, she brings a wealth of expertise to her practice. Alanna holds a Master's degree in Counseling

from Liberty University and a Master's in Social Work from Yeshiva University's Wurzweiler School of Social Work. Her extensive background spans over two decades in education, equipping her with a unique and insightful perspective in social work, parent coaching, and community engagement. Her compassionate approach, combined with her breadth of knowledge, makes her a trusted advocate for those seeking support and transformation. She is also a volunteer at Chail Lifeline Crisis Services Mid-Atlantic.



Rabbi Avichai Pepper, Ed.D is a seasoned educator with a rich academic and professional background. A graduate of the New England Rabbinical College in Providence, RI, he has devoted his life to teaching Torah and to Jewish communal growth. Rabbi Pepper holds a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Liberty University, alongside a master's degree in educational leadership from Bellevue University and a master's degree in counseling from Liberty University. Currently serving as the Director of Educational Advancement and Community Relations at the Yeshiva of Greater Washington as well as an educational coach and presenter at Lomdei, Rabbi Dr. Pepper leverages almost 30 years of dedicated service in Jewish education and community development. In addition, he also serves on the Chai Lifeline Crisis Services team supporting school and community in trying times.

In a primary care setting, practitioners should be familiar with managing multiple mental health conditions. We manage mental health conditions, including anxiety, depression, adult attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), alcohol use disorder, and bipolar disorder.

The most common symptoms of anxiety are nervousness, fatigue, poor concentration, irritability, and muscle tension. The diagnostic tool for anxiety is called the GAD-7 screening. Anxiety can present in a chronic or acute state. In chronic and daily anxiety, a maintenance medication like Lexapro or Prozac is helpful. Most primary care practitioners will start with Lexapro, but there are other options if it is ineffective. In acute/situational anxiety, there are other options like Hydroxyzine, Buspirone, Propranolol, and Xanax. I find that Buspirone has minimal side effects, is helpful for many situations, and is also highly effective for postpartum anxiety.

Symptoms of depression are low mood, loss of interest, reduced energy, sleep disturbance, and excessive guilt. The diagnostic tool used for depression is the PHQ-9 Questionnaire. A great daily medication for depression is called Pristiq, due to its minimal side effects, and it is also highly effective for perimenopausal or menopausal symptoms.

For adult ADHD, there are multiple screening tools that can be used. I use the Adult ADHD questionnaire for starting treatment. Symptoms for ADHD usually include difficulty focusing on tasks, frequent forgetfulness, impulsivity, and difficulty with time management. The most commonly prescribed medication is Adderall, but other options include Strattera or Wellbutrin. It is important to monitor for alcohol use disorder, which is the inability to control alcohol consumption. I find that Naltrexone is highly effective, but it must start on a low dose, as it may cause fatigue. Naltrexone has also been helpful for controlling food triggers and helping with weight management.

Bipolar disorder is another important condition that can be managed very well with a psychiatrist, however the primary care practitioner may be involved with medication management. It is important that these topics are addressed because untreated mental health may lead to poor relationships and difficulty making lifestyle changes. I also recommend visiting psychologytoday.com, as it is a great resource to find a talk therapist who can help an individual with supportive strategies for mental health management.

Adam Sragg is a nurse practitioner. After working in surgical nursing for multiple years, he earned a master's degree from Simmons University's family nurse practitioner program, allowing him to focus more on preventative medicine. Adam has worked as an adult primary care nurse practitioner for over four years with a diverse patient population.

Adam has done clinical work at a variety of local hospitals including Holy Cross Hospital, Adventist Healthcare White Oak Medical Center, Medstar Montgomery Medical Center, Children's National Hospital, and other local primary care facilities.

His nurse practitioner position gives him the opportunity to maintain his nursing passion and act as the patient's advocate in a provider role. His main goal is to provide focused and individual patient care with an emphasis on education, compassion, concern, and encouragement. Adam has experience with helping children and adults of physical and mental disabilities in reaching their health goals.

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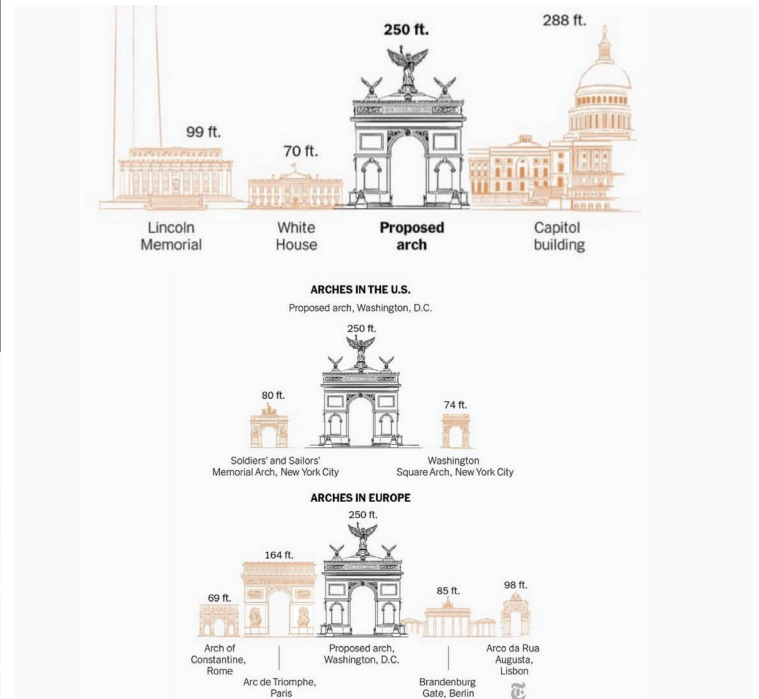
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THE BRIEFING

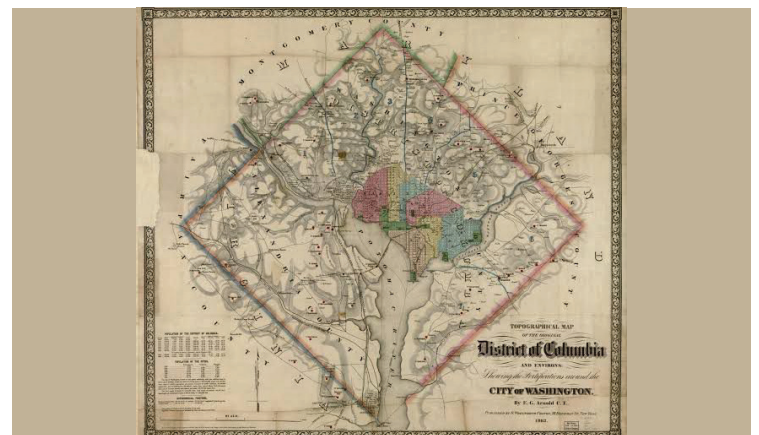
An Arch for a New Era

President Trump announced plans for a 250-foot triumphal arch in Washington—and no, it's not subtle. In a city built on statements, this one doesn't whisper. It says America is back to building big, thinking big, and owning it. Some will roll their eyes, others will love it—but nobody ignores it. Because monuments don't create meaning—they reveal it, and if this thing rises over D.C., the real question isn't how it looks—it's what it says.



Make D.C. Square Again?

A Georgia congressman is floating a bold idea: expand Washington by bringing Arlington and Alexandria back into the District—restoring something closer to its original shape. It sounds simple on paper, but it cuts straight into questions of power, identity, and control. Who owns the capital? Who shapes it? And what happens when lines drawn centuries ago start to feel... negotiable?



The \$1.65 Billion Bet That Built the Internet

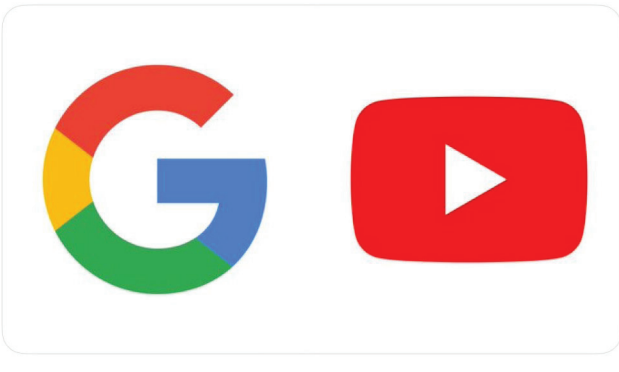
In 2006, Google bought YouTube for \$1.65 billion—a number that felt massive at the time. Today, it pulls in over \$50 billion a year. Not bad for a site that started with grainy videos and zero guarantees. It wasn't just a smart acquisition—it was a belief that attention would become the most valuable currency on earth. Turns out, they were right. The real question is: when something looks overpriced today, are we underestimating what it becomes tomorrow?



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HUGE: Google bought YouTube for \$1.65 billion in 2006 and now, it generates over \$50 billion revenue every year.



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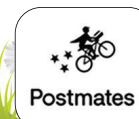
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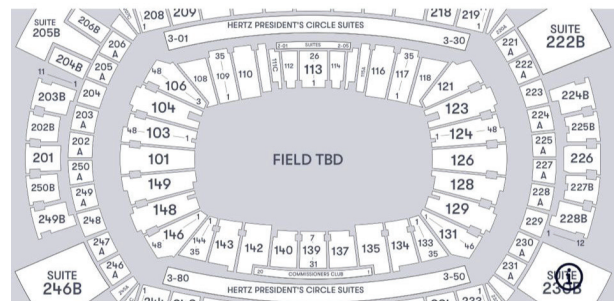
THE BRIEFING

A Siyum for Everyone—or Just a Few?

Tickets for the upcoming Siyum HaShas are climbing—fast. What's meant to be one of the most unifying, inspiring gatherings in the Torah world is starting to feel out of reach for many families. From \$500+ seats to several thousand dollars on the floor, the numbers are raising real concern across the community. This isn't just another event—it's a once-in-years moment of shared pride, siyum, and connection. The hope? That prices come down, access opens up, and the experience reflects what it's supposed to be: Klal Yisrael together. Because when something belongs to everyone... what happens if not everyone can be there?

14th Global Siyum Hashas of Daf Yomi (Time TBD)

MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, NJ
Date: Sun, Jun 6, 2027 | Time: TBD



No image available	200 LEVEL Row TBD 1–6 tickets Last Ticket in Section	Fees Incl. \$578 ea
No image available	100 LEVEL Row TBD 1–6 tickets Last Ticket in Section	Fees Incl. \$770 ea
No image available	FLOOR LEVEL Row TBD 1–6 tickets Last Ticket in Section	Fees Incl. \$3,849 ea

Rebbe In The Times

Rav Shalom Landau Shlita, the Rivnitzer Rav in Williamsburg and brother of philanthropist Yoeli Landau — whose TikTok videos on Shalom Bayis, wealth and Jewish ethics have gone viral — was featured in The New York Times last week.



You've Probably Noticed the Sidewalks

If you've been driving around lately, you've probably noticed it—new sidewalks everywhere. Your block, nearby streets, even neighboring towns. It's not random. Montgomery County is investing nearly \$10 million into improving walkability and safety. It looks great—but it also raises a bigger question: when priorities get poured into concrete, what direction are we really heading?



The MoCoShow (MCS) @TheMoCoShow

X.com

Montgomery County Investing Nearly \$10 Million in Sidewalk Construction

Click below for full article.

mocoshow.com/2026/04/24/126...



Taking Traffic Off the Ground

Dubai just completed its first flying taxi station, with service expected by year's end. It looks like the future—but we've seen "the future" before. Big ideas, big promises, and a long road from headline to everyday reality. Dubai tends to deliver, but even here, this isn't guaranteed. The real question: is this the start of something real—or just another vision that never quite leaves the ground?

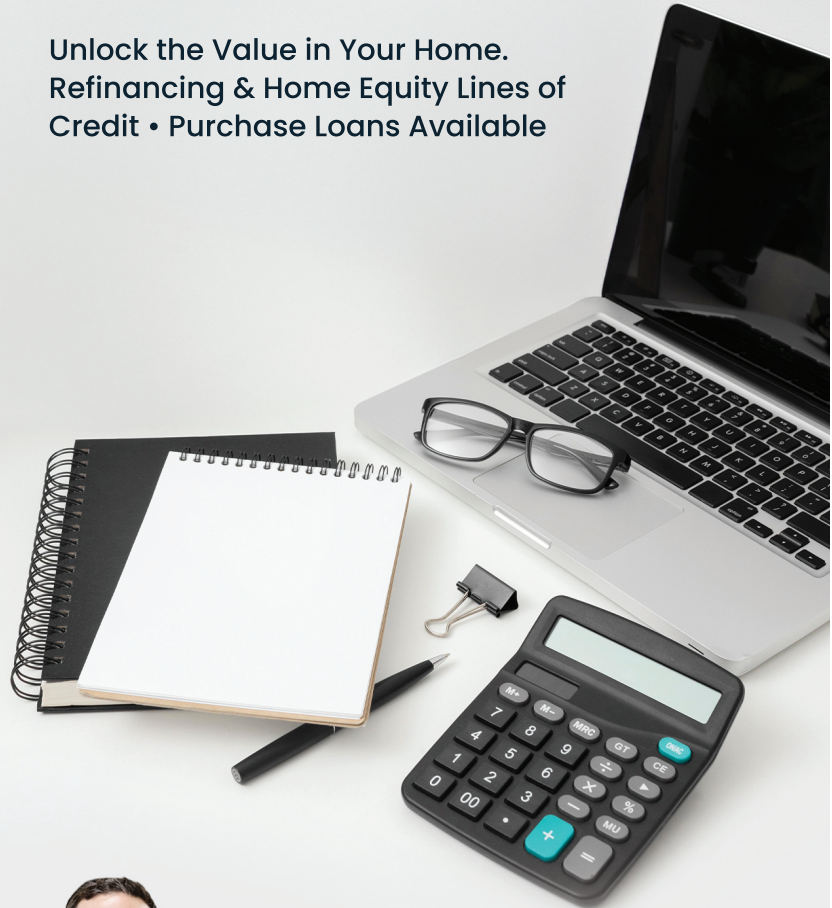


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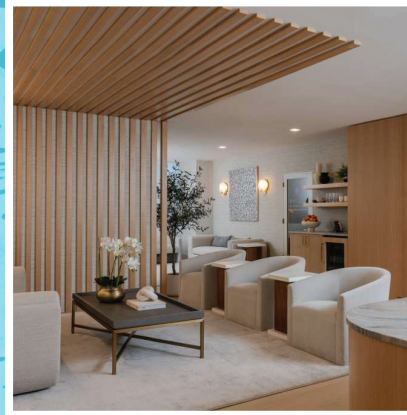
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ASK THE DENTIST

YOUR SMILE, SIMPLIFIED

Dr. Espina Markogiannakis



Thoughts on whitening strips?

They can be effective for mild surface stains, but they're not one-size-fits-all. Overuse can lead to sensitivity, and they won't address deeper discoloration. Professional whitening is safer, more controlled, and more predictable.

What toothbrush do you personally use—and why?

I use a high-quality electric toothbrush—specifically one with a pressure sensor and timer. It delivers a consistently thorough clean without being too aggressive on enamel or gums, which is key for long-term oral health. My favorite is the OralB io.

Favorite toothpaste?

A fluoride toothpaste with enamel-strengthening properties. I tend to recommend ones that are simple, effective, and not overly abrasive—especially for long-term use.

Is an electric toothbrush actually worth it?

Yes—absolutely. Most patients see a noticeable improvement in plaque removal and gum health when they switch. It takes the guesswork out of brushing and ensures you're doing it effectively every time.

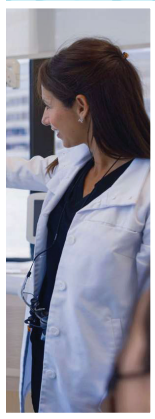
What floss do you use?

A soft, shred-resistant floss that glides easily - personally I love cocofloss. The best floss is the one you'll use daily—comfort matters more than brand.



Does coffee really stain your teeth?

Yes—it's one of the biggest culprits. Coffee contains pigments that adhere to enamel over time. Rinsing with water after drinking and maintaining regular cleanings can help minimize staining.



How often should you replace your toothbrush?

Every 3 months—or sooner if the bristles look frayed. A worn toothbrush doesn't clean effectively.



#1 tip for parents brushing a toddler's teeth?

Position is everything. Sit them in your lap, tilt their head back slightly, and treat it like a quick, gentle routine—not a negotiation. Consistency builds cooperation over time.

Favorite mouthwash?

An alcohol-free, fluoride-containing mouthwash. It supports enamel strength without drying out the mouth. I love ACT and Listerine.

Thoughts on kids' "training toothpastes"?

They're helpful for introducing brushing, but many lack sufficient fluoride. By around age 2-3, I prefer transitioning to a proper fluoride toothpaste for real cavity protection.

Is mouthwash necessary or just extra?

It's an enhancement—not a substitute. If you're brushing and flossing well, mouthwash is a bonus layer of protection, not a requirement.

What's one habit that will save people thousands in dental work?

Daily flossing. It's the simplest, most overlooked habit—and it prevents the kind of decay and gum disease that lead to major, costly treatments.

If you had to give ONE daily rule for perfect teeth—what is it?

Brush thoroughly twice a day and clean between your teeth once daily. If you do those two things consistently, you're ahead of 90% of people.

Dr. Despina Markogiannakis is the owner of Smiles of Chevy Chase and a top-rated dentist in the D.C. region. Recognized by Washingtonian, Potomac, and Bethesda magazines, she specializes in restorative, cosmetic, general, and implant dentistry with a reputation for expertise, compassion, and trust.

ADVICE ISN'T ENOUGH

Rabbi Dr Yossi Ives and Devora Krasnianki
Founders of datewell.org

The shidduch ended. Again. This had been happening to Zeldy for years.

She met genuinely wonderful, interesting men who, both on paper and in real life, were pretty much what she was looking for. And still, something in her didn't settle, so she ended it. Every time. And now, it had just happened again.

This time, it was Nachum. They had gone out ten times, and Zeldy couldn't point to anything significant that was wrong. Nachum had been ready to move forward for a while already, but he was patient, giving her the space and time she said she needed. Still, Zeldy felt the dating was stagnant, and it had reached the point where a decision needed to be made: either move forward or step away.

She couldn't decide. On one hand, there was no clear reason to end it—he really was what she had said she was looking for. And yet, she couldn't give the green light, because she didn't feel at peace with it.

In her confusion and distress, Zeldy found herself speaking to almost anyone who would listen. If advice was what she wanted, advice was what she got. Plenty of it. All well-meaning, yet not truly helpful. The message was always the same: it sounded like an amazing shidduch, and she should go ahead. As for her discomfort? That would fade after marriage. How did they know? To them, it was obvious.

Her rebbetzin offered a different kind of guidance: take a two-week break, and then see how she felt. Zeldy decided to

follow that direction.

Those two weeks were not easy. And at the end of them, she was no closer to a decision. She still wasn't ready to say yes, so it became a no. Not because of anything specific, but because she had come to recognize that more time or more dating wasn't going to change anything.

She accepted the suggestion of a two-week break because it offered some immediate relief from the pressure. It felt like solid, thoughtful advice from a wise woman, the kind of guidance she knew others had followed, and for the moment, the decision was off her shoulders.

But the relief didn't last. As the two-week mark approached, the pressure only intensified until it was unbearable.

In the end, instead of resolving the question, she found herself needing to escape the pressure itself. She ended her agony the only way she could—by ending the shidduch.

The Power of the Right Question

The real reason all the advice failed is that it was advice. What Zeldy needed wasn't more input. She needed insight.

The most helpful thing she could have been given—and the one thing she didn't get—was a single, pointed question: *Why is this happening?* Is there some underlying struggle she experiences during dating that's driving this pattern?

She didn't need to be told what to do; she needed help understanding what was really going on.

Before her next shidduch, Zeldy reached out for advice again. This time, the coach approached things differently—not by telling her what to do, but by helping her uncover what was really happening inside her.

Slowly, a clearer picture emerged of how dating felt for her. A part of her felt like a little child, utterly unprepared for marriage. That childlike part panicked at the thought of marriage, and understandably so.

Whereas before she had only received reassurance, now she had self-understanding. With that clarity, and the right guidance, she regained a sense of control and could see a way forward—one that took into account the complexity and nuance of her personality and life experiences.

Shidduch Crisis

Zeldy's story, sadly, is not unique. Tens of thousands of our wonderful young men and women are finding dating difficult. They spend years in shidduchim, navigating the dating scene, only to experience repeated frustration, hurt, and disappointment. What was once a relatively rare challenge has now become common. Numerous shidduch initiatives have been launched, yet the problem continues to grow. Clearly, what has been done so far isn't enough. We need to be smarter about this, and we need to be honest and open about it.

Having researched, written, taught, and coached in the dating sphere for many years, we are convinced that many singles are being held back by internal barriers and inner struggles. For some,

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SO-ME: WHAT IS YOUR DATING STYLE

(from datewell.org)

it's a persistent pattern of choosing incompatible partners. For others, it's difficulty forming an emotional connection. Some have complex personalities that leave them conflicted about what they truly want. Others are unaware of how fear or anxiety controls them, making dating unnerving.

Rarely are those affected aware of these underlying issues, and even more rarely do they understand *why* they feel stuck. Almost never do they know what would be an effective way to navigate these inner struggles. Instead, they are likely to assume they simply haven't met the right person yet—and so they continue through years of unproductive, often painful dating.

Knowledge is Power

It doesn't have to be this way. Once they figure out what's really holding them back, it's usually possible to work with it or around it. Most of the time, the issue is minor, and just being aware of it is already a huge step forward. With the right insights and tools, someone struggling with these inner challenges can greatly increase their chances of success.

We also need to remember something important: not everyone experiences dating the same way. For most, shidduchim feel fairly straightforward. But for a substantial minority, it's harder; there's a lot of internal pushback. And when that happens, it's easy to assume the problem lies in the person they're dating.

The truth is, most of the time, that's not what's going on. The difficulty isn't the person. It's their dating process itself. That's why, even after many dating opportunities, things still haven't worked out. Switching the person they date doesn't usually fix it, because the real obstacle isn't the partner; it's something inside them that hasn't been addressed yet.

When a shidduch isn't coming together, ask yourself: **"Why is this happening?"** Take a moment to look back at past experiences and notice any patterns, even loose ones. Ask: **"Is there something I need to notice about myself?"** What feels like repeated frustration or random difficulty may not just be about the other person or the situation. It can reveal habits, tendencies, or reactions that keep resurfacing. Simply noticing these patterns is the first step toward understanding yourself more deeply and approaching your dating journey with greater clarity.

For those who want guidance on how to do this, we've gathered game-changing insights and reflections at datewell.org. These aren't "rules" or quick fixes; they're tools to help you think more clearly about your dating journey.

Rabbi Dr. Yossi Ives is an expert of dating. He is a qualified life coach and author of several books on relationships and coaching psychology, including *Shidduch Success*. He is the director of Tag International Development, a humanitarian organization, and is rav of a community in Pomona, New York.

Devora Krasnianki is founder of Adai Ad, an educational project aiming to improve people's dating and marriage. She is an author and speaker, dating mentor and coach, and has featured on numerous podcasts.

To help those who struggle with dating and aren't sure why, DateWell created **"That's So Me!"**—a lighthearted, engaging way to uncover what's really happening beneath the surface of your shidduch journey. It features twenty characters, each representing a different personality and approach to dating.

The goal isn't to give answers or tell you what to do. Instead, it helps you better understand yourself and your dating style, while offering insights and tools to navigate your shidduch journey more thoughtfully and successfully.

Chaim has been dating for a couple of years and has had a number of shidduchim. Quite a few went on for a while, and looked for a time to have real potential. In the end, though, Chaim felt unable to continue. Most of the shidduchim ended because Chaim felt stressed, uneasy, and very stuck. But why, after so many promising starts, did things fall down?

Chaim went onto DateWell's "That's so me!" hoping to get some insight. At first, he came across Anxious Abigail and found parts of her story familiar—the stress, the emotional drain, the sense of overwhelm. "Maybe that's me," he thought. "I do get really anxious when I date." But something didn't sit right. "I'm not usually an anxious person," he realized. While some of it resonated, it didn't quite capture the full picture—so he kept looking.

Chaim was drawn to Commitment-Phobic Connie. "That sounds a lot like me," he thought. "Dating feels easier at the beginning, but I tend to pull away after a few dates. Maybe this is me?" he wondered. But again, he wasn't sure, as he didn't experience the kind of panic that often comes with this type, nor the typical strong sense that something was wrong.

When Chaim met Indecisive Izzy, the penny dropped. "That's so spot on. It describes me to a tee," he said. "I get stuck for no clear reason. I make endless pros and cons lists, talk everything through with people... and still don't move forward." What really hit home was the part about how the indecisive type sometimes sabotages the relationship just to avoid making a decision, and then feels relief when it ends. "That's exactly what's happened to me so many times," Chaim realized.

That realization brought a wave of relief. "Clearly, I'm not the only one experiencing this," Chaim said. He felt seen and understood. "It seems what I've been going through is a real thing."

Encouraged by the clarity, Chaim clicked through to explore more. He found helpful content that explained how indecision can show up in dating, along with some initial tools for moving past the constant paralysis. Inspired by this new insight, he sought advice from a coach about how to avoid his indecision from calling the shots.

There are currently 20 "so-me" characters, covering the vast majority of people who are prone to getting stuck in shidduchim. Check out Ambivalent Avram, Complex Kayla, Guarded Gavi, and the other types, and see if you find yourself exclaiming: "That's so me!"

Visit <https://datewell.org/so-me/> to see for yourself.

You can reach the authors at yossi@datewell.org and devora@datewell.org

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