

# "FROM THE FRUIT OF THE LAND..."

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TEN ISRAELI SPIRITUAL LEADERS REFLECT  
ON THE BUDDING OPPORTUNITIES  
FOR ISRAELI JUDAISM TODAY



We invite you to use these reflections as thoughts  
for the introduction to the Prayer for  
the State of Israel with your community.



**THE HONEY  
FOUNDATION**  
FOR ISRAEL

Leading a revolution in Israeli Judaism...  
for the benefit of Jews everywhere.

*We believe in grassroots, Israeli-led disruption.*

We invest in spiritual leaders who harness the energy of entrepreneurship along with the power of Judaism to create an Israeli society that is more open, connected and reflective of our Jewish values.

*We believe this moment calls for Jewish innovation and reimagining.*

Our investments empower new models of rabbinic work for the building of communities of meaning.



Erev Rosh HaShanah 5783

## American Jews need a new story about Israel.

A story that is positive and inspiring, transcending politics and breaking through demoralizing narratives.

We need more opportunities to see how our future is bound up in the renaissance in Jewish culture occurring in Israel today.

We need to learn more about the inspiring work of Israeli spiritual entrepreneurs building diverse Jewish communities across the country, from Tel Aviv radiating out to the periphery.

The Honey Foundation for Israel has gathered ten of its Honey Fellows, Israeli spiritual communal leaders who represent a wide spectrum of Jewish expressions, to offer inspiring testimony about the opportunities for Israeli Judaism and to reflect on the new sense of Israeli-ness percolating in Israeli society today.

As we approach the New Year of 5783 and Israel's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, we have asked these leaders to share some of their thoughts on what this new Israeli identity is, why it's emerging now and the opportunities it presents for their work building Jewish communities that can inspire and connect.

These reflections are powerful because they tap into our own needs and hopes for Judaism and community building.

More than simply conveying the exciting possibilities for Jewish spiritual creativity and communal vitality, these stories help establish a new language for connection between Israeli and American Jews.

Perhaps for the first time in the history of the State, Israel and American Jewish communities are focused on the same existential question: Can we harness the transformative gifts of the Jewish tradition in order to create Jewish communities that allow for deep connection and human flourishing?

These short reflections from Israeli spiritual leaders on the ground



remind us that our great joint Jewish project transcends politics, geography and any sort of denominational affiliation.

Increasingly, American rabbis need a way into a productive, inspiring and non-divisive conversation about Israel. Much is happening in our world and there are many reasons to turn inward. But we need to find a way to keep Israel on the agenda of American Jewish communities.

We invite you to select from the reflections below and to share these passages with your congregations as a way to introduce the Prayer for the State of Israel. Often this prayer is preceded by a perfunctory introduction that reduces the moment in the service to dry liturgy; instead, we hope that the thoughts and images presented here make Israel and Israelis more real and more relatable, and bring to life the stories of these living Jewish communities grappling with similar issues to our own.

In offering this wider lens, the Honey Foundation hopes that more American Jews will understand the global nature of the Jewish project, connect to the hopes and dreams of their Israeli counterparts, and see themselves and their communities in this larger narrative of Jewish spiritual renaissance.

The Honey Foundation for Israel expresses its great appreciation to Steve Stulman and the Julius Stulman Foundation for their generous support of this project.

Wishing us all a healthy, peaceful and connected 5783.

**The Honey Foundation for Israel**

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# TRUTH SPRINGS FROM THE EARTH!

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*“Stronghold and Redeemer of the people Israel: Bless the State of Israel, [that it may be] the beginning of our redemption. Shield it with Your love; spread over it the shelter of your peace. Guide its leaders and advisors with your light and your truth. Help them with Your good counsel.”*

*- Prayer for the State of Israel*

Many amongst us, both Israeli and American Jews, feel that we are living through an acute leadership crisis that threatens the continued well-being of our two communities. This is why, I believe, that many people – myself included – when they say the Prayer for the State of Israel pay particular attention to the sentence: “Guide its leaders and advisors with Your light and Your truth. Help them with Your good counsel.” Why specifically this sentence?

Because Israeli society is experiencing a leadership crisis – a crisis that is not only tearing Israeli society up from the inside but that is also creating a crisis of disillusionment. We have transitioned from an era of inspiring public servants to a moment of aspiring leaders devoid of vision.

A new generation feels stuck going around and around in a whirlpool of repeated election campaigns, experiencing profound disappointment in our present political leadership and representatives. A cynical cycle of elections – our fifth in three years! Today, more than ever, we need “Your light and Your truth” – to guide Israeli society along the path of “Your good counsel.”



But the great blessing of this moment is that this capable and inspiring leadership already exists in Israel today! It's emerging from the grassroots of our society.

Over the last decade, a new generation of leadership has begun to come of age. Local communities, small organizations, and religious and spiritual entrepreneurial initiatives have produced a young and dynamic leadership pipeline that seeks to offer Israel a new vision forward. These budding leaders – coming from the inner city and small towns, the center and periphery – hope to offer Israeli society a broader version of what it means to be Israeli and Jewish today. An offering of nuanced diversity, coming in fifty shades of gray; different shades of what it means to be secular and religious and traditional. An unambivalent embrace of a contemporary palate of diverse Jewish identities all seeking to create greater community by harnessing our shared Jewish cultural heritage. Open to creating new Jewish possibilities: new texts, new prayers and rituals, fresh congregations.

All of these exciting elements come together, giving expression to a new vision, a new ethos of Israeli society and its Jewish culture.

This new sense of Israeliness is percolating just under the surface, challenging an outdated version of Israeli identity based on rigid dichotomies like religious and secular, modern and traditional.

This new Israeli identity is being ushered in by this emerging generation of cultural and spiritual leaders who prize the values of democracy, humanism and equality while they simultaneously are committed to being open to inspiration from the Jewish tradition.

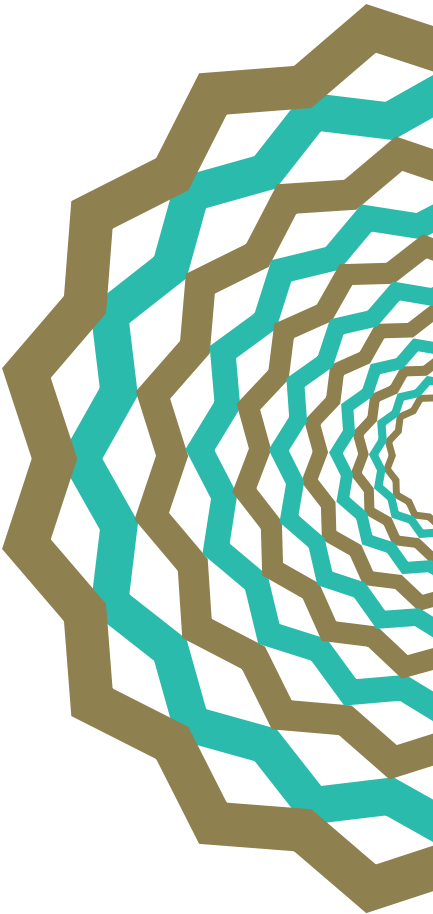
So – despite any arguments to the contrary – the promise of an Israeli future in the Promised Land is assured. And our future also promises a renewed conversation with our family members across the ocean, Jewish communities that are a source of inspiration and creativity for new Israeli communities.

I feel deeply that despite our differences and at times our disagreements – both Israeli and American Jewish communities are wrestling with similar questions and challenges. The only real question open before us is whether we will face this future together or alone.

Let’s hear the recital of the Prayer for the State of Israel as an invitation to work towards the flourishing of our shared Jewish culture together.



**Dr. Ariel Levinson** is the co-founder and director of the Jerusalem Secular Yeshiva.  
Honey Fellow 2022





# TAKING OWNERSHIP OF MY JEWISH IDENTITY: JUDAISM AS SLIPPERS

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In Israeli society, over the years, the options to engage authentically with Jewish identity had been limited. For years and for most parts of Israeli society, the primary and most accessible way to pursue Judaism was simply the Orthodox path.

Today thanks to the commitment and struggle of liberal streams of Judaism, and the enormous steps taken towards Jewish renewal, there is a palpable sense that the winds in Israeli society are changing direction.

Given these changes, my primary role as a Reform rabbi is to return to people a sense of ownership of their Judaism. I hope to allow people to feel more at home in their Judaism. I want to help people do away with the feeling that they are "visitors" in their own "home."

I want everyone to feel that the very fact of being Jewish confers both the privilege and the responsibility to take personal and communal ownership of their Judaism – of our language, tradition, culture, literature and all aspects of Jewish creativity. It's critical that we move people away from relating to their Judaism as if it were in a museum. People must feel that they can "touch," feel, renew, and create from within Judaism.

Judaism is your home and it should feel as comfortable and inviting as a pair of comfy slippers!

Judaism belongs to all of us and the responsibility falls on all of us to understand what our Judaism might mean for us at this moment.

Particularly here in Israel, we must take from the past and innovate for the present out of a commitment for the future. My role as a rabbi is to encourage authentic engagement with Jewish, Israeli and Zionist conversations.

The Reform Community of Shoham was built on these very principles. And already for the past eight years we have been opening doors for people to experience their Jewish and Israeli identities. Every year we are excited to see more and more people respond to our call – "Come as you are!"

Israelis who enter through our doors seek a personal connection to Judaism and to Israeli culture, wanting relevance, and also a full embrace of the totality of who they are in the world.

Secular people come to us, those who want to learn in a place that has an expansive understanding of the Jewish library, where the poet Rachel's work can be found alongside the Talmud and Zionist thinkers. A place where women's voices are amplified and included in the conversations; where women who have been accustomed to standing on the margins, behind a mechitza, now occupy center stage on our bimah; where grandmothers can experience the emotions of holding the Torah for the first time in their lives; where traditional men can pray for the first time together with their whole family; where members of the LGBTQ community can find a religious home inviting them in with the fullness of their identity; where social justice work is understood as part of one's Jewish identity; where couples and individuals who seek a meaningful and relevant ceremony for a lifecycle moment like a wedding or bat mitzvah or, God forbid, a funeral can find a guide that crafts the ceremony with them.

The liberal, egalitarian, pluralistic voice that our community in Shoham projects is significant. Our message also reaches those who do not support our version of Judaism yet they support us as being part of the mosaic of our town. Even when a loud and fanatical group desired to expel us from Shoham, the vast majority of the community of Shoham did not remain indifferent. They stood up and spoke up on our behalf and in this way things did not deteriorate further. At the end of the day, these radical groups understood that they did not have a sympathetic audience in Shoham and they abandoned their protests.

But the greatest testament to our significant contribution in our town is that we are the first and remain the only Reform community in Israel that – without having to go to court – received land and a building from the municipality for the purpose of establishing a Reform synagogue.

We remain the only Reform synagogue to have received this from the Government but we will not be the last.



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**Rabbi Rinat Safania Schwartz** is the rabbi of Kehilat Ve'ahavta, the first egalitarian community in Shoham.

Honey Fellow 2022

# "TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE": THE GREAT STRUCTURE OF ISRAELI JUDAISM

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*"We are now standing in the Land of Israel at a moment of its initial construction. We are engaged in the collection of sand and grout for the mixing of the foundation and its supportive framework. We are not ready to consider the interior, the furniture for the 'house'. All our significant efforts are focused on making sure the foundation is strong and wide and will be able to accommodate and support those who come into the building... Since the days of the return of the Jews from Babylonian exile in order to build the Second Temple, such a building project has not existed in Jewish history. We have no time to think about a deep spiritual life. The only thing that justifies our generation, that gives our lives meaning, that gives our existence value – is the construction of this 'building'.*

*But we know there will be days in the future when many Jews will return to this land. And what is discussed nowadays with disdain, whether because of the hard work or exhaustion, will become a great foundation for the soul for those who come after us."*

*- Beryl Katznelson in his eulogy given in Mandate  
Palestine (1933) for the Hebrew poet Hayim Nachman Bialik*

**The time has come:** The State of Israel is our house and Israeli Judaism is the interior of that "house;" its creation is the task of our generation. Beryl Katznelson knew well that after the generation of pioneers and builders there would come the generation whose mission and soul's desire would be to renew the heart of the house.

**The time has come:** because the mission of defending the State from external threats, which has occupied and consumed us, has also blurred over our domestic challenges. In recent years, and especially during the time of the pandemic, these domestic challenges have stood out more and more.

**The time has come:** because the tensions embedded in Israeli society are political dynamite. The bifurcation of "Israeli" and "Jewish" has further polarized the extreme positions in society: In order to garner political capital, politicians drive us to pick a side, despite the fact that the majority of Jewish Israelis want unity.

**The time has come:** because there is an explicit call for the creation of a (Jewish – Israeli) identity that shares common denominators, in which the work of establishing these common denominators is an intentional, and not incidental, goal. For too long, the absence of a shared socio-cultural language has caused us damage and harm.

**The time has come:** because hope is a political instrument. In our time, fear is so often used as a tool for ideological recruitment; it is only by confronting fear with an expansive hope that we can achieve a better society that rests on a foundation of positivity, not negativity.

The uniting of Judaism and *Israeli-ness* brings together two cultures. One with a long history that has a deep religious component and an ability to exist without physical territory; and the other nascent, founded in a revolution in Jewish consciousness and in the Jewish condition. This young culture is rooted in a geographical location, a population majority, and political sovereignty – all of which it maintains and thanks to which it exists.

Israeli Judaism is not simply content with depicting the condition of pluralism already on the ground. Rather, it aspires to celebrate the various traditions and practices that nourish Jews within Israel. The power of these forms of identity flows from the people who hold them proudly without any need for outside approval.

Israeli Judaism is a call for the creation of something both old and new, built on the foundation of these practices and emerging from a generative conversation between the present and the past.

The "dash" that connects Jewish with Israeli is a typographical representation of this creative space between these two entities.

And it is important to remember that Jewish and Israeli identities are complementary but not identical. The term Jewish-Israeli fundamentally describes a political and cultural reality. But this term also emphasizes the fact that there are Jews who are not Israelis – our brothers and sisters across the globe. And, of course, there are Israelis who are not Jewish – Muslims, Christians and Druze who are pieces of the fabric of

Israeli society.

As part of this new project of Israeli Judaism and as Israeli Jews, we must strive to establish positive relationships with Israelis who are not Jewish, building on the foundation of shared citizenship and equality which derive from our democracy and no less from our Judaism and Jewish memory.

This awareness also sharpens the need to cultivate the connections we have with world Jewry, building on our inherent sense of familial solidarity.

Israeli Judaism is being built hour by hour, day by day, out of the intensity of life. The introspective process of the month of Tishrei gives us a powerful opportunity to truly see the greatness and immense creativity of Israeli Judaism, as well as the flaws that need repair. And this is also an appropriate opportunity to bless its existence, since with these High Holidays our tradition reminds us that existence itself is a blessing and in fact a precondition for all growth.



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**Rabbi Dr. Rani Jaeger** is the co-founder and rabbi of Beit Tefilah Israeli, the Israeli Prayer House, in the heart of Tel Aviv.  
Honey Fellow 2022

# BETWEEN DONETSK, UKRAINE AND RAMAT GAN, ISRAEL

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I was born in the Eastern Ukraine. More specifically in the city of Donetsk which unfortunately has become a familiar name to many. My former hometown stands at the center of the fighting between Russia and Ukraine.

Today, I serve as the rabbi of a congregation in Ramat Gan – just outside of Tel Aviv.

And as I stand before my congregation – a community that is composed of mostly immigrants like me from the former Soviet Union – the Prayer for the State of Israel evokes a lot of personal feelings.

I thank God for the privilege I and so many in our community have had to realize a dream that so many Jews over time were only able to dream. We have had the blessing of making this dream a reality. We have the honor of building this country and being formed together with our nation.

Our community serves as a bridge for these immigrants, for these new Israelis – between their former lives and the world of Jewish tradition and Israeli culture. A bridge that allows for a smooth and meaningful connection between these different places without sacrificing parts of our identity.

We believe deeply that communal life such as ours offers the best means for successful and meaningful integration into this new society. Despite not having been born in the Land of Israel our children are being raised and educated here as proud and free Jews. And we are with them on every step of this journey.

During these terribly difficult and trying times when war has come to our old homes and communities, we have the opportunity to live out both Zionism and the mitzvah of loving the stranger. Both call on us to offer aid and support, attending to the material and spiritual needs of our friends and families and to all the immigrants and refugees who wish to enter our land. Without investigating the status of their Jewish identities for the Law of Return (Was their father Jewish? Was their mother Jewish? A grandparent?). Our Zionism demands something different.



Ever since the outbreak of war in the Ukraine we conclude our prayers with a special request for peace and love for all of God’s creation. In the words of the Prophet Isaiah we pray – “Nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war anymore.” And our community and the sense of mutual responsibility we feel for one another, inspire in us hope and peace.



**Rabbi Gregory Kotlyar** is the rabbi of Shirat HaGan, a Reform, Russian-speaking community in Ramat Gan.

Honey Fellow 2022

# NOT GIVING UP ON HOPE AND NOT GIVING UP ON OURSELVES

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Prayer is a complex activity encompassing many things: It allows us to give thanks for what is; it offers us an opportunity to request what needs to be; and it is a reminder of our role in helping to bridge this gap between the reality in front of us and the hopes in our hearts.

When we offer prayers to God our words remind us of the partnership we have with the Divine in this work of creating a more perfect world.

At moments of exhaustion or when we feel like we are losing hope, the Prayer for the State of Israel serves as a window that allows us to look out on what can yet be.

When I offer the Prayer for the State of Israel in our community in Haifa, this prayer moves me not to give up on the dream of peace. With the recitation of Prayer for the State of Israel, I recommit to the promise of bringing peace and well-being to all the inhabitants of this land without discrimination regarding religion, race, or gender. I try to derive strength from these words that express so much hope in order to bridge the gap between reality and the dream.

I look out at the young soldiers in the congregation and wish them health and strength so that they may fulfill their missions in the most appropriate way. I look out at all the social activists who are working or volunteering in order to create a better society. I wish them courage and resilience so that they might transcend feelings of frustration and continue to work for the betterment of society each day anew.

There are so many reasons to rejoice and feel pride. And there is so much more for us to fix and improve.

Without a doubt we have been fortunate because we stand on the shoulders of giants – the men and women who founded the State and fought for its existence. For these men and women Zionism was their religion. It gave meaning to their lives, it provided values and even mitzvot!

Today, a new generation of Israelis are searching for and creating a framework that will integrate Israeli-ness and our Judaism. With creativity

and courage, we are formulating an Israeli Jewish language that integrates these two worlds and confronts the challenges of sovereignty and life in a Jewish and democratic state. More and more Israelis are ready to take renewed responsibility for their Jewish identities, not leaving it to others to define Jewishness for them.

I find it so exciting to see young people from different political, social and ethnic backgrounds reimagining new possibilities for an egalitarian, open, moral and positive Israeli Jewish life.

All this creativity, the joy of a renewed engagement with the depths of Jewish culture, navigating faith and the choice not to blindly give in to God or the Self while also not giving up on God or ourselves – energizes us as we contemplate the future of the Jewish State and our culture.

As long as we still offer the Prayer for the State of Israel, we express our commitment to continue working towards the dream.

While a great sea separates American and Israeli Jewry, we share the same sky. Our tunes might be a little different during services; our spoken language is certainly different, but our animating values are more similar than what one might imagine at first glance.

I wish to invite you – my brothers and sisters across the ocean – to come and get to know us on a personal level. Not by means of screens or other interpreters. We will not always agree, but when we sit down and talk with sincerity, we will see just how similar we are. How we strive to embrace our core values in the face of a global culture of consumerism, racism and nationalisms. How much meaning and strength we derive from our history; how much commitment and hope we need to muster to face our future. My sisters and brothers across the sea, you are dear to us. We relate to you with love and we empathize with your struggles and challenges. How much strength we might be able to impart to one another if only we joined forces and became true and open partners.



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**Rabbi Naama Dafni Kellen** is the co-rabbi of Kehilat Or Hadash, a Reform community in Haifa.

Honey Fellow 2022

## GOD TALK

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With much trepidation, but not without a smile, I say, "OK, we're done with the easy conversation. Let's now talk about... God!"

"The easy conversation" is the first part of a powerful workshop for parents of our B'nai Mitzvah kids. The whole evening is a spiritual preparation for one magical moment in the Bar Mitzvah ceremony: passing the Torah "down" from the grandparents to the parents, and from the parents to the child (while this gesture is common in North American synagogues, it is rare in Israel!)

I ask the parents, "Imagine standing on one foot! Now tell me, what is the essence of the Torah that you have been passing down to your child these past 13 years?" For secular parents, who are most of our constituents, this is not an easy question to answer. But they do, and I love their answers! I often quote a passage from Torah, or from our Sages that echoes what they said, to gently show them that they are more connected to Torah than they thought.

And then we move on to the second conversation. Both conversations are accompanied by inspiring texts, both modern and ancient, as well as songs that we all sing together.

"You've just shared the Torah that you teach your children. Now I want to ask you..." - and here I warn them that I am about to ask a question that no one ever dared ask them - "tell us about the God of your parents." At first they are stunned. My parents? What do you mean, they were atheists... Or, God was never mentioned in my home, etc...

But then I explain: the God that I am referring to is not the old man in white garb watching over us from his fluffy cloud. I am asking about your parents' most sublime values - values that were beyond words, values that ruled over the household where you grew up: the God of hard labor, the God of justice, the God of playing fair, the God of "don't be lazy", the God of "what will the neighbors say", even the God of atheism - i.e., the God of "there is no God"!

And then they get it. And boy, what a deep and powerful conversation ensues.

God talk has returned to Conservative synagogues in America somewhere

in the 90's (after being shunned for a century or so, in the name of modernity and rationalism). That's not been the case in Israel!

For many staunch secular Israelis God talk signals danger: proselytizing, indoctrination, religious fanaticism, and extremism.

"Ma La'asot?" (what can I do?), I tell them... "Talking about God is one of my favorite topics."

For years I have been teaching a Jewish Psychology course (which I studied at Tel Aviv University), in which God is brought back into the discourse, be it in a therapeutic setting, at shul, in my coaching practice, or part of a friendly chat.

Life is so much richer, deeper, and more meaningful, when God is allowed to enter, regardless of one's own particular view and understanding of God (be it the God of Albert Einstein and Spinoza, or the God of Abraham Heschel, or the God of Martin Luther King, Jr., or the God We Trust on the one dollar bill...) For me, by the way, God is the source from which everything flows. Everything!

I admit, I am on a mission. My entire rabbinic career has been devoted to reaching out to secular Israelis, encouraging them to view Judaism, with its rich wisdom, as their rightful inheritance. Part of this inheritance is God. You can regard yourself as secular and still foster a deep relationship with the Divine. You will be richer for it.

And since I am writing this essay to a North American audience, I would like to add that among my many sources of inspiration in this endeavor are the beautiful writings of William James, one of the founders of American psychology and the American philosophical stream of Pragmatism (see his essay on "The Will to Believe" and "The Varieties of Religious Experience".)

The High Holidays are approaching. There are many topics clergy can focus on during this period. All are important and valuable, but given the ever-growing complexity in our world today, and the challenges we in Israel face, faith and our relationship with God seem to me absolutely vital.

And if God talk is not your thing, that's fine. Nevertheless let me part with the blessing, "May the Force be with you."



**Rabbi Elisha Wolfin** is the founder and rabbi of Kehilat Ve'ahavta, a Masorti community in Zichron Yaakov.

Honey Fellow 2022



# FOR THE SAKE OF MY SIBLINGS AND FRIENDS

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In the space between Tisha B'av, the Jewish people's national day of mourning, and Rosh HaShanah – the birth of the New Year

I think to myself how these days hold within them all of the last two years  
And perhaps all of life.

Between days of destruction, mourning, brokenness and void;

To days of renewed hope, communion, love

Between these and those

Most of us stand – swaying, vulnerable, exposed, yearning.

Days that are like the inside of a shofar

A dark canal, full of bumps, is the only way through,

from deep down can rise the voices,

the intentions, the heavens that are waiting to be revealed.

How to walk through this canal, how to live this life

Together.

Against the sealed contemporary individualistic decree

Despite the discomfort,

Despite the embarrassment,

For the sake of

Love.

How much deep attention is required, courage of heart and spirit.

Not to give up on even those who have already given up

How, even as we walk crowded, exhausted, pressed against each other  
in that same canal of life, we will make space within our hearts

for those who are water, for those who are fire

for she who clings onto life, for he who fears it ;

for the mother holding her newborn, for the dying, for one who once  
again walks alone.

How to live with all our heart and all our soul and all our might

A full life

Where one that is banished be not an outcast from us

for if one is forgotten, we are all incomplete  
whether knowingly, whether unknowingly.

At the end of the funeral of the mother of a dear member of our "Beit Israel" community, on the very day of Tisha B'av,  
stood the crowd on both sides of the road, comforting the mourners as they walked through the path we created.

The father-grandfather rose from his wheelchair, slowly taking steps, supported by his cane, with his daughters and family behind him.

May we live our life just like that:

With our family, with our community, with our brothers and sisters overseas

being a protective wall for one another

being the path that shows the way

being the cane for the other to lean on.

being thirsty from heat, weak from fasting, and still full of patience for the slow pace of the noble elderly man.

May the hands which are extended to him as comfort offer him, in that moment, a possibility for hope.

May these hands, may this beating heart, be the Torah that goes forth from Zion.

A Torah of friendship, a Torah of courage to believe,

May we be not students of Torah but people of Torah

Friends to one another

In the daily gestures of life,

And in the depths of our fears.

May the word of God go forth from the earthly Jerusalem of down below  
And carry the Torah of life on the wings of the Shechinah  
May it reach the four corners of the Earth  
And give us the strength  
To dare,  
To dare boldly, to dare in silence, to dare in chaos,  
To dare  
To love.

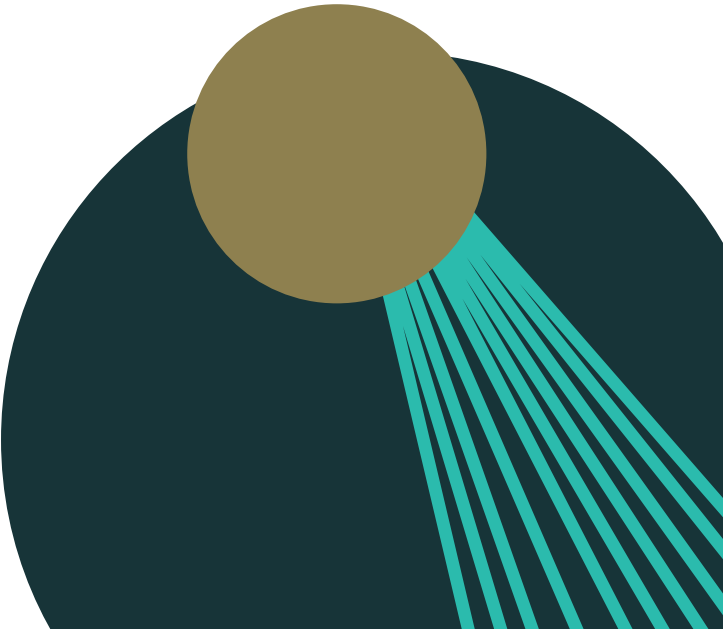
As Av ends, Elul will arrive,  
We will gather all the deeds, with compassion, with kindness and with mercy  
We will stand at the gates of Tishrei with joy and trepidation  
And we will pass through them only so:  
Together



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**Rabba Iris Bondi** is the spiritual leader of the Beit Israel community in Gilo, Jerusalem.

Honey Fellow 2022



# "...FROM THE ENDS OF THE WORLD, FROM THERE GOD WILL GATHER YOU..."

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Gathered from the four corners of the country and the world, Kibbutz Hannaton is home for 100 families of 'path seekers', who choose to live together not despite their different backgrounds and Jewish identities, but because they wish to build a pluralistic (non-affiliated, non-denominational) community.

We at Hannaton are building a new and unique model of communal living, where members are free to be themselves and live however they choose, and at the same time are committed to a shared vision of Jewish life. Each of us may interpret this shared vision in a (slightly) different manner. That "there is more than one way to be Jewish" is not a slogan, but our way of life. Our children grow up knowing that they can choose to be whomever they want to be, Jewishly and in other ways. We hope that growing up in this colorful community will imbue them with many options, connections, and paths to Judaism.

Hannaton can exemplify Israel's pioneering, dynamic spirit. Our house of prayer is a tent for communal meeting. An egalitarian synagogue that defies simple definition. Each person chooses what siddur to pray from, the hazzan chooses what niggunim (melodies) tunes to use when leading the singing, and what version (nusah) of the words to say. And people (usually) answer "Amen!" All are welcome to share their voices in our synagogue. We have specially themed Shabbatot throughout the year to mark special events in our lives.

Does this sound confusing, full of potential for "balagan" (messiness)? Indeed!!

But somehow, with a lot of good will, and with deep respect for one another and everyone's desire to live Judaism however they believe, it works well.

It's one thing to live together, in close proximity (very close... it's a kibbutz!),

but it takes work to “draw our hearts together.” We all experience extreme voices in society at large, attempting to draw us to polar options, preaching that Judaism is either/or, all or nothing. Fortunately, in Hannaton, our daily life experiences make inclusivity and acceptance the norm. Our Jewish life is one of many colors, different types are welcomed here. We choose to be in constant dialogue with deep components of our identity, seeing this process as no less important than the bottom line.

We choose to stand together, firm yet flexible, rather than run and hide in opposite corners; not forming walls that are too high; always enabling more families to join in, and add their flavor to the community.

As a Galilee-based community, we live in a region where the playing-field is at its most leveled position between Jews and Palestinians. There is an Arab majority in the area, and daily interaction is the norm. This gives us the opportunity, as individuals and as a community, to live a life based on equality and justice for all.

As all communities, we have our challenges, such as maintaining the intimacy of a small group even as we grow to be a larger community.

Ensuring that joint decision-making doesn’t come at the expense of depth, and professional considerations.

Finding the balance between the needs of young families, older couples and one person households. Making certain that all feel at home in our communal settings and activities.

We are ‘path-seekers’, different from one another but committed to our joint endeavor. We continue to walk this path asking questions, being ourselves, accepting one another, as we take this journey, the joint journey that brought us from the four corners of the country and of the world.



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**Rabbi Shira Levine** is the Spiritual Leader of Kibbutz Hannaton, a community of shared vision of Jewish life and learning in northern Israel.

Honey Fellow 2022

# MANY POINTS OF LIGHT

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*Rabbi Hanina used to say: Pray for the welfare of the government,  
for were it not for the awe it inspires,  
human beings would swallow one another alive.*

*-Pirkei Avot 3:2*

Whenever I travel to Jewish communities throughout the world, I love perusing local prayer books. I particularly love looking at the different versions of the prayer for the government. I close my eyes and imagine ancient Jewish communities in small villages throughout Europe, North Africa and other regions that once were home to our people. I see before me families, sages, children praying for a life of peace and security.

I imagine the sense of gratitude these communities experienced for historical moments and for particular political leaders who granted them opportunities to live as Jews and to express their Jewish identities.

I imagine a king or certain Caesar who saw the Jewish people as loyal citizens of the state who could positively contribute to public life in the kingdom. We always were a minority living alongside a majority in countries often made up of diverse cultures. But we became experts on how best to preserve our particular identity amongst the host culture.

I also know well, there were many times when it was difficult to pray for the wellbeing of certain kings or leaders because they were less than kind to our people. But we tried to find the good.

Recently, we have returned home. We have our own country. We are now responsible for our own government.

A formative dynamic was established with the meeting of two Jewish groups in the last century: The ideological confrontation of the Old Yishuv-- representing the traditional religious establishment--and the modern Zionist movement. A persistent struggle began between them over the religious texture of public space in the Land of Israel.

Not too many generations later, my friends and I fundamentally don't understand the cause for disagreement. There is sufficient public Jewish space for all in our society. Space to encourage and receive, and also to give.

When I return from my travels and come home to Israel and my



community, we also pray for peace and wellbeing. But our prayers are not for a specific person – not for a king, or a president or a prime minister.

The State of Israel today is under Jewish sovereignty and our prayers are directed to the State. The Prayer for the State of Israel speaks of a process that is and must continue to unfold.

When I offer the prayer for the State of Israel, I pray for something that is so much larger than any particular political group, or any one leader.

I intensely feel within me the chain of generations of Jews over thousands of years that set their hopes on this holy land.

I feel deeply that when we say the words in the Prayer for the State of Israel “the beginnings of our redemption” – we are only at the beginning! We have only begun realizing some sense of redemption, where there is peace and respect for all of the inhabitants of the Land. We are only now beginning to build the communities we need.

Little by little. Like the light breaking forth from the dawn.

And when I offer words, I know the limits of words. I know that their true realization is in the doing – when we go out and distribute food to those in need. When we sing and pray together as diverse citizens and even religions. When we help create an ethos where the State helps us carry our pain and burdens. When we create the space for encounters that create true community.

In Israel today there is a tremendous revival of spiritual searching and discourse. The verse in our Torah – “And you will cling to the Lord your God – all of you today” (Deuteronomy 3:4) – is experiencing new meaning! The thirst is real. And even when this search takes the path through ancient traditions that are not Jewish, this quest returns people to the spiritual language embedded in their soul. For me and the people in my community, this return is always to Jewish language deep within our beings.

In a neighborhood in Jerusalem called Ein Kerem, a group of people came together and chose, slowly and with love, to forge themselves into a community. This did not just emerge. But with intention and work, we created this independent Jewish community that seeks spiritual conversations, that wants to talk about God and find closeness to the Ultimate and to one another. This is a community that is committed to human beings and that is located within the joyous traditions of Judaism.

It represents a point of light, similar to many points of light over the map of Israel.

Today, I have a new challenge. In the heart of Jerusalem, on the seam between the Old City and the New City, between the different Jewish religious movements – there exist people who are searching for Jewish frameworks to give expression to their prayers. There is such a thirst for Torah!

Some are Israelis who want to combine literature and traditionalism.

Some come from no Jewish background.

There are those who were formerly Hasidic but no longer find a home in that community. Yet they don't want to throw their Judaism away! Rather, they want to open a new Jewish chapter in their lives that will be animated by more than Jewish law.

We have young people returning from their travels in the East after the army desiring to give Jewish language to their spiritual search.

All these individual strands, woven together into one tapestry.

The secret of the flourishing of the Jewish people is its ability to construct communities of meaning, whether outside or inside the Land of Israel. These connected communities allow us to do more than to preserve our Jewish identities: they help us give fuller expression to our humanity.

At the moments when we are inspired to sing and dance together, and also at the times when we have no more strength, the words of the Prayer for Our Government can remind us of Jewish communities in the past, of the eternal Jewish project of building communities of meaning, and of our capacity to build the communities we need for the future.



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**Rabba Nava B. Meiersdorf** is the co-founder of Kehilat Ein Karem, an egalitarian community in the Ein Karem neighborhood of Jerusalem and co-rabbi of the Community Spiritual Lab at the Fuchsberg Jerusalem Center.

Honey Fellow 2022

# LIKE A GAME OF HIDE AND SEEK

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*"Between the luxury towers and the  
absorption center for new immigrants,  
between foreign workers and the wheat fields,  
Like primroses among the rocks  
The beautiful faces of the land are hiding"*

*-Ariel Horowitz, contemporary Israeli singer and songwriter*

Our great challenge is not to despair at the size of the gap that exists between the world we desire and the world that is in front of us.

And without a question part of the Jewish task of our lifetime is to work to bridge this gap. It is to transform our present into a more perfect future.

The name of our community, Kehilat Chiburim, translates as a Community of Connections. We are located in Hatzor HaGlilit, a small town in the north of Israel that is on the social as well as geographic periphery of the State.

At the center of our mission as a community is the work of moving Israeli society closer to the place that our ancestors dreamed of and had in their prayers. A society centered on justice and truth, driven by kindness and giving towards the common good. Every act we take towards this goal is a commitment to the vision of our ancestors and an expression of our love for Zion.

But our vision as a community is not fixated on the ultimate goal to the exclusion of other aspirations.

Our vision has breadth as well as depth.

Our community strives to see the "beautiful faces" in front of us now, as we travel the path to a redeemed world in the future. To support and nourish one another as we do the work of trying to bridge the gap between our dreams and our current reality. The horizon may be beautiful, but no more beautiful than the people yet to be seen all around us.

We feel that our community is a community of Connections, like in a game of hide and seek, discovering again and again the beautiful faces of this land.

*"Between sleeping on the street and stabbings in the club,  
And what is usually read in the newspaper,  
Like primroses among the rocks  
The beautiful faces of the land are hiding"  
(Ariel Horowitz)*

Israeli society is a place of fractured groups with wide distances of separation between sectors – religious, secular, the-religiously-in-between, people from the East and from the West, people who live in towers and people who struggle economically.

In our small community in the north, we strive to create a place where everyone is seen: religious, secular, and mostly those in between. A meeting place where we don't talk about our differences; we simply connect.

Connections – not through a single meeting, rather connections woven through living with one another over an extended period of time. Where we search for and embrace the commonality we share.

The space in-between. The places where people hide. Where we are now.

We are creating a space for people of different backgrounds and different convictions. A space where people who would never find themselves sitting together can simply be – without arguments, without ideological or theological discussions of principle. Without fights about what a redeemed world actually looks like.

Rather, we focus on connections in the now.

And as we discover more and more beautiful faces of the people and families all around us, the beautiful face of our country is revealed.

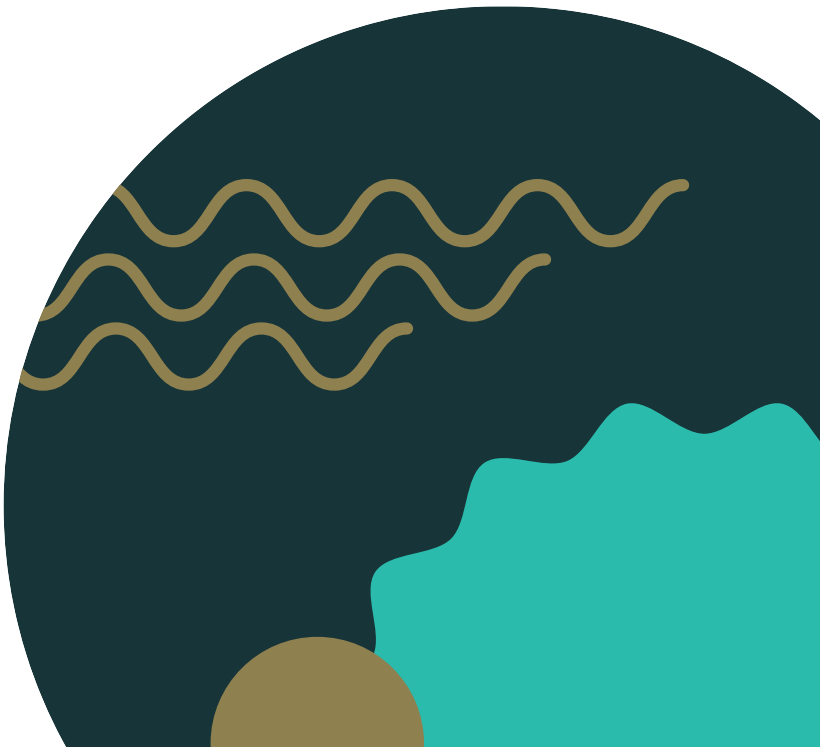
Our national anthem is called "The Hope" (HaTikvah). For us this is not abstract. For us our communal unity is so unique, so powerful that it itself inspires hope viscerally in our lives.

One of the members of the community, after evening prayers on Shabbat recently said to us: "What is happening here is redemption!" And that says it all. What is happening with us, in our small corner of northern Israel, we pray will happen all over Israeli society, throughout the entire Jewish people, and with God's help, in the world as a whole.



**Shaked** and **Dvir Alexander** are the founders and spiritual leaders of the mixed religious-secular community, Kehilat Chiburim in the northern town Hatzor HaGlilit.

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