



# Beit Hillel

**Attentive Spiritual Leadership**

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*Page 2 Beit Hillel on the Tumultuous Events of Summer 2014 / Page 3 A Wake-Up Call For Israeli Society / Page 4 P'sak Halacha and All its Implications - The Path of Beit Hillel / Page 5 What Is Religious Zionism? Results Of Comprehensive Survey Regarding Religious Zionist Community / Page 8 Meaningful Military and National Service for Women / Page 11 Torah Perspectives and Halachic Decisions Regarding People with Disabilities / Page 14 Women Dancing with a Sefer Torah on Simchat Torah / Page 15 News from Beit Hillel*



We lovingly dedicate this edition to the memories of Naftali Fraenkel, Gil-Ad Schaer and Eyal Yifrach, HY"D. The Schaers and Fraenkels are active members of the Beit Hillel family, and together with the Yifrachs, allowed all of Am Yisrael to feel as if their boys were ours, as well. Throughout the 18-day ordeal and beyond, the families acted with a level of grace and dignity that elevated the spirits of a demoralized nation when it needed it most. The multitudes of people who visited during the shiv'ah commented that although they went to provide strength to the families, they left feeling that they had been strengthened by the families. These remarkable occurrences are a tribute to the quality of character possessed by each of the parents, and a Kiddush Shem Shamayim that will, B'ezrat Hashem, be a zechut for the neshamot tehorot of our three precious boys.

**ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.**

## BEIT HILLEL ON THE TUMULTUOUS EVENTS OF THE EARLY SUMMER

This summer, Israeli society has experienced several tumultuous events. The tragic murders of teenagers Eyal Yifrach, Gil-Ad Schaer and Naftali Fraenkel H"YD, made a deep impact on all of Israeli society, generating a sense of unity and solidarity that we haven't experienced in many years. All of this is due to the noble and dignified leadership of the families. Two of the families, the Shaers and Fraenkels, are members of Beit Hillel, which intensified the pain we already felt with everyone else. During the Shiv'ah, while the graves were still fresh, we received the horrifying news that a group of Jews murdered an Arab teen in revenge. Then, just three days later, the endless barrage of Hamas rocket attacks on Israeli cities and towns all over the country led to Operation Protective Edge.

As this publication went to print, the IDF was implementing Operation Protective Edge, intended to decimate Hamas' terrorist infrastructure. We ask Hashem to bless our brave chyalim in this vitally important mission to ensure that all Israeli citizens can live in peace and security.

Throughout this time, Beit Hillel has provided spiritual guidance and encouragement, conveying messages of hope and inspiration.

In the midst of the kidnapping crisis, we noted: "It is upon each of us to 'enlist' in the national effort, to increase the good and the light on behalf of the families, on behalf of the kidnapped boys, and on behalf of all of the Jewish People. This might take the form of prayer, crying out to Heaven, acts of chesed, helping each other and increasing 'ahavat

chinam'. This is not a time for sectarianism, parochialism, and divisiveness, but rather a time of solidarity, brotherhood and sisterhood."

After the devastating news of the discovery of the boys' bodies, when there was a palpable sense of unity among world Jewry, we wrote: "...we must do something now, before we regress to our normal routines. We must bring together all segments of the society: religious and secular, haredi (ultra-Orthodox) and traditional, olim and long-time citizens, and enter into a serious dialogue about our common fate and destiny. We must not for one moment let go of this sense of solidarity."

After the Israeli Police's announcement that several Jews had confessed to murdering an Arab, we asked how this violent element in Israeli society had been allowed to grow and fester, concluding: "This struggle against violence in Israeli society should be led not only by security forces and the judicial system, but also – and mainly – by spiritual and social leaders, for whom the primary value of yashrut, uprightness, is a guiding principle."

These statements appeared in op-eds published in the widely-read news sources Jerusalem Post, YNET and Yisrael Hayom.



# WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO US? A WAKE-UP CALL FOR ISRAELI SOCIETY

*The struggle against violence in Israeli society needs to be led by spiritual and social leaders*

Rabbi Ronen Neuwirth, Executive Director of Beit Hillel ; Rabbi of Congregation Ohel Ari Ra'anana



Upon hearing the devastating report confirming that a group of young Jewish men had murdered Mohammed Abu Khdeir, I felt as if someone had plunged a knife into my heart. I could not manage to shake off my feelings of sadness and depression about the poor child who was murdered, and about the fact that it was Jews who murdered the boy and maliciously

set him on fire. They did what our worst adversaries had done to us. I write these words with a certain degree of caution, assuming the information we have is correct, but in any case, this news shattered the faith I had placed in every Jew.

Why, I have been asked, did this incident impact me more than the instances of Jews committing murder against other Jews that we hear on the news all too frequently? What made this so distressing to me was that, in contrast to criminal killings on the news, this murder was perpetrated by religious Jews acting in the name of Judaism. This evil corruption of Jewish and Israeli values brings to mind a story that I vividly remember from my youth that involved a Holocaust survivor whose entire family had been killed. He asked his rabbi, a fellow survivor, "Where is God's chosen nation? How could God's chosen nation be sentenced to die in so many terrible and unusual ways?" His rabbi replied: "That is exactly what our being chosen is all about. The very fact that no Jew ever murdered a non-Jew simply for being a non-Jew proves that we are God's chosen people."

Last week, that ethos was shattered, as the killers tarnished the memory of Jewish martyrs from across the generations who sanctified God's name, killed simply because they were Jews. This value was corrupted by some evildoers who cruelly murdered a helpless boy and burned his body simply because he was an Arab. How could this happen?

Where did these wild thorns spring up?

One prominent sin in our nation's history is described in the story of Achan, who violated the ban on taking loot from the city of Jericho. After that sin, the Jewish people suffered a defeat during the battle of Ai. When Yehoshua tried to understand the reason for the defeat, God told him: "Israel has sinned; they have transgressed My covenant that I commanded them by taking of the spoils..." How did "Israel sin"? After all, it was only one person that sinned. Why does God pin the blame on the entire nation? The answer is hinted to in the Talmud: "This shows you that there is not a family containing a tax thief, in which they are not all tax thieves; or containing a robber, in which they are not all robbers; because they protect him." (Shevuot 39a)

After such a heinous sin is committed, all of society needs to take a close look at itself, since it certainly appears that the general atmosphere had given these wild thorns legitimacy to carry out their heinous acts. No sin ever occurs in a vacuum.

Following the discovery of the bodies of our kidnapped boys, calls for revenge expressed over social media and other forms of mass communication, which were supported by a number of spiritual leaders and prominent educators, created an awful atmosphere that motivated those cowards to murder Mohammed Abu Khdeir. It was for good reason that the sage Avtalyon said: "Sages, be careful with your words, lest they bring about the obligation of exile, and you become exiled to a place of vile waters, and the students who will follow you will drink from them and consequently die, resulting in the desecration of the Name of Heaven." (Avot 1:11)

In Parashat Balak, which was read the week of the murder, we learn of Bilam's blessings to the Jewish People. In one of those blessings, Bilam speaks of the nation's forefathers: "Let my soul perish like the upright ["yesharim"]." In his well-known preface to the Book of Genesis, the Natziv of Volozhin asks why the forefathers of the nation of Israel were called yesharim and not tzaddikim (righteous) or hasidim (pious). He explains:

The Holy One, Blessed Be He, is yashar, and He tolerates only those who are upright in relation to God and in the ways of the world, such as those who do not act crookedly, even if it is for the sake of Heaven, which could lead to the destruction of Creation. And this was the merit of the forefathers, who, in addition to being righteous and pious, were people who loved God's creations to the fullest extent. That is to say, they were involved with the nations of the world, even the worst of idol-worshippers. Everywhere they went, they did so with love, and concerned themselves with others' welfare. Such kind behavior was the very purpose of Creation. Just as we saw how Avraham prostrated himself on the ground to pray for Sodom, even though he so despised them and their king because of their wickedness...nevertheless, he desired their continued existence!

Uprightness (yashrut) is an essential character trait for the Jewish people. It is a trait that leads one to dealing kindly with any and every human being, and desiring the well-being of a fellow man, especially when that human being is an innocent child who had never hurt anyone. The spirit of the Jewish nation was severely harmed after Mohammed's ruthless killers trampled on the trait of uprightness.

We, as a society, must repudiate and rid ourselves of incidents like "price tag" attacks and other acts of violence that tarnish Israeli society and imperil our future here. We cannot express any form of understanding or justification for these types of acts. Granting legitimacy to acts of revenge and verbal violence plants the seeds of violence and the next murder. Even though these incidents are marginal, and do not reflect the character of the overwhelming majority of Israeli society, they endanger our future presence here, in the State of Israel, and it behooves us to combat this phenomenon in any way we can. This struggle against violence in Israeli society should be led not only by security forces and the judicial system, but also – and mainly – by spiritual and social leaders, for whom the primary value of yashrut is a guiding principle.

A Message for Israeli Society



## P'sak Halacha and All its Implications: The Path of Beit Hillel

Rabbanit Dr. Pnina Neuwirth



The Gemara (Baba Batra 7b) tells the story of a highly respected hassid whom Eliyahu HaNavi regularly visited. However, once the hassid installed a fence around his home, Eliyahu stopped visiting him. Rashi, explaining the implied criticism

of the hassid, notes that "he ceased to deal with the poor, whose voices were no longer heard." The installation of the gate distanced the needy from the threshold of the hassid's home, rendering him no longer able to hear them and give them tzedaka. But Rashi also writes that the hassid's motivation for installing the fence was ostensibly good: to prevent strangers from peering into his private space, i.e. to strengthen the trait of modesty in himself and in his household. So, given his positive intentions, why did Eliyahu stop visiting him?

*The message of Beit Hillel is one of honesty and balance, of stringency or leniency whenever each is appropriate*

seem good, but due to its negative consequences, he must abstain from it. And if he were to nevertheless go ahead and take that act, he will be a sinner and not a hassid."

At times, excessive stringency exacts a spiritual price in another matter. Because of this, even if, in the short run, it may seem that the installation of a "fence" is desirable because it creates a distance from the influences of the street on the home, one must ascertain whether it will also lead to a distancing from the house and a violation of the commandment, וְיָחַי אִתְּךָ עַמְּךָ, "that he may live with you" (Vayikra 25:36).

In summary, the decision of whether to adopt halachic stringencies must be examined as to the propriety of its motivations and repercussions. "We thus learn that one who prepares to attain true piety must weigh all his actions by their results and by the ensuing circumstances, according to the time, the society, the subject and the place."

While it is true that the fence greatly enhanced the value of modesty in the hassid's household and helped keep out outside influences, it is doubtful that it was truly an act of hesed. The opposite is true. For the sake of devoutness, the fence distanced the poor from the threshold of the home. In the name of humra (stringency), the hassid ceased to hear the cry of the indigent.

In Mesillat Yesharim, Ramhal discusses the human tendency to adopt stringencies and restrictions beyond the law, including the fence installed by the hassid. While it is true that the desire to be stringent may very well be positive, each stringency that a person takes upon himself or herself must be weighed seriously, as it is possible that the rigorousness may not result entirely from positive motivations.

Ramhal writes that a person who wants to take on stringencies above and beyond the law, must meet several pre-conditions: "And truly, a person may not succeed in this path without three things: 1. His heart must be the most honest of all hearts in knowing that his position comes only from a desire to serve God, and for no other reason. 2. He must seriously weigh his actions and try to improve them in accordance with his goal. 3. Finally, he must hope to G-d for success in the effort, that it might be said of him, אשרי אדם עז לו בך...לא ימנע טוב להולכים בתמים "Happy is the man whose strength is in You... no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly." (Tehillim 84)

Furthermore, writes Ramhal, the repercussions of the hassid's decision to be stringent must be weighed. "Thus, what you must understand is that one may not look at acts of piety merely on the surface, but rather one must consider their consequences, for there are times when the act itself may

We are not always aware of the far-reaching implications of being overly stringent. Particularly, in our era, in which so many search for their Jewish identities, being overly stringent in various matters is liable to build walls in places where it is preferable to build bridges. The message of Beit Hillel is one of honesty and balance, of stringency or leniency whenever each is appropriate. We try to follow the path of Beit Hillel, whose adherents were modest and considerate, always prefacing their opinion by mentioning the opinion of Beit Shammai.

Having respect and appreciation for other voices, Beit Hillel expresses an important religious Zionist voice, a multidimensional message that supports religious devotion, on the one hand, and steadfast support for the State of Israel and its institutions, on the other. This journal deals with a variety of subjects, and the halachic and hashkafic discussion in each of these areas is, of course, conducted with an emphasis on the importance of following halacha. At the same time, we bear in mind not just the legal, but also the social ramifications of the piskei halacha (halachic rulings), out of a desire to remain devoted to G-d's commandments. In the words of Ramhal, "And this will open our eyes so that we may see on which path will dwell light with truth and faith to do what is right in the eyes of G-d."

Mazal Tov to Rabbanit Dr. Pnina Neuwirth, a founding member of Beit Hillel, on her appointment to serve as a judge in the Tel Aviv Magistrate Court. Prior to her appointment to the bench, Pnina taught law at Bar Ilan University and Sapir College (Sderot). She is one of the most sought-after speakers in the Religious Zionist community.

# What is Religious Zionism?

## A summary of the comprehensive survey conducted in the Religious Zionist community

This past winter, we commissioned the most comprehensive survey ever conducted among the Religious Zionist community, in order to track trends in various areas such as attitudes towards culture and modernity, women's status, attitudes towards rabbis and the chief rabbinate and towards the state and its institutions, the state of religious education and other subjects currently under discussion in Israeli society. **The purpose of the survey was to get a close-up view of the Religious Zionist community, and to determine the degree of uniformity and diversity regarding these issues.**

We received responses from a total of 3,416 people living in Israel. In order to test the methodological quality of the survey, reliability tests were performed for various items and additional statistical procedures (such as factor analysis for the internal validity of findings). Items that were found to be unreliable or anomalous were removed from the final analysis of the findings.

It is important to note that the purpose of the survey was not to measure the scope of all of the segments within the Religious Zionist sector, but rather to allow thousands of members of this public to express their opinions. The survey gives, for the first time, a clear picture of patterns of thinking and behavior of each of the segments of Religious Zionism, since there has never been a survey conducted in which hundreds from each sub-sector answered question about their views.

The results of the survey show significant differences between the positions and ideas of the three main segments of the Religious Zionist community (according to the self-identification of those surveyed) – Hardali (Haredi Leumi / Ultra-Orthodox Nationalist - 251 surveyed), Dati (Religious – 1747 surveyed), Dati Moderni (Modern Orthodox – 798 surveyed).

Approximately 14% of those surveyed (490 respondents) preferred not to categorize themselves according to the categories offered, but rather described themselves with various nuances, such as, "Between two worlds," "Ba'alat Tshuva (a returnee to Judaism) affiliated with no specific movement," "In the process of figuring it out," and even "A student of Rav Tau." Amongst those identifying as Dati, we identified approximately one quarter of the respondents (24.7%, 431 respondents), who are characterized (according to their own report) with behavior patterns and attitudes similar to that of those who comprise the Hardali sector. At the same time, approximately one third of those surveyed who categorize themselves as Dati (34.7%, 606 respondents) have behavior patterns and attitudes similar to the Modern Orthodox sector.

### Summary of Results

**Attitude toward rabbis and the chief rabbinate:** We found an overall sense of disillusionment with the rabbinic establishment. A majority of the religious public from all segments feels that the Chief Rabbinate does not represent its values and that it is necessary to improve the quality of religious services in the state. Only 6% of the Modern Orthodox sector and 20% of the Dati sector identify with the chief rabbinate, and even amongst the Hardali sector, only 37% do so.

As for the attitude of the public toward rabbis, we found a sense of irrelevance among the respondents from all segments. Only 5% of the Modern Orthodox thought that rabbis understand their world. Among the Dati sector, only 20% feel that rabbis understand their world and even among the Hardali sector, only about half think that rabbis understand their world. It appears that as age increases, the sense of rabbinic irrelevance increases. Among youth aged 18-25, approximately one quarter of those surveyed felt that the rabbinic leadership is relevant to the

needs of the public, as opposed to only 15% of those aged 56 and up.

**Women's status in the religious world:** There are vast differences between the attitude towards women's status in the Hardali world and the Modern Orthodox world. Yet, despite the fact that the majority of respondents from the Modern Orthodox world clearly support the advancement of women's status in the community and in the world of Torah and mitzvot in general, most of them still prefer not to change the present situation regarding the roles of women in prayer services in the synagogue. On the other hand, most of the Hardali sector thinks that the advancement of women's status damages the social and family fabric.

**Issues of Agunot, marriage and divorce:** There is a consensus among all segments that the problem of agunot is not being dealt with adequately by the rabbinic establishment. Only 7-18% of the Dati and Modern Orthodox sector feel that this problem is being treated effectively by the rabbinic establishment, as opposed to 40% of the Hardali public. Among the female public, only 12% feel that the issue of agunot is being dealt with properly. Similar findings that express disillusionment with the rabbinic establishment were recorded with regard to the process of marriage and divorce in the state.

**Adherence to Halacha:** Among the Hardali sector, we found a high level of adherence to halacha in daily life. In comparison, the Dati sector was found to have a moderate level and the Modern Orthodox sector expressed less fidelity to halacha. These differences are noticeable in issues such as prayer with a minyan, fidelity to the laws of kashrut, learning Torah on a regular basis, and attitudes toward modesty in dress. Still, the vast majority of all segments said that they would choose to be religious or to belong to the religious movement if they were given a choice.

**Education:** Regarding educational approaches, there were large gaps between the segments in their opinions regarding openness of education and the need for gender separation in the schools. The Modern Orthodox believe that religious education has become extremist in recent years, while Hardalim disagree.

**Army Service:** Regarding serving in the IDF, significant gaps between segments were found regarding attitudes toward all issues discussed: refusing an order, length of service and the drafting of women and of Haredim. Approximately 70% of the Modern Orthodox believe that religious young women should serve in the army, as opposed to only 30% of the Hardali sector.

**Attitude toward culture, modernity and society:** Large gaps exist between positions of the segments regarding general culture, relations between the religious and secular public, and relations with non-Jews who live in Israel. The differences are clearly seen in questions such as those relating to having a television in the house, attending cultural and sports events, and living in a secular environment.

**Religion and state:** Despite the fact that according to all respondents from all segments, the state can be Jewish and democratic, in the instance of conflict between the two values, the majority of the Hardali sector thinks that the laws of halacha supersede the laws of the state. The Modern Orthodox sector believes that civil law supersedes, and the Dati sector is split in half in its stance. The vast majority of the Hardali sector is opposed to the separation of religion and state and to civil marriage, as is the majority of the Dati sector. In comparison, among the Modern Religious sector, approximately one third of those surveyed support separation of religion and state and civil marriage.

**Jewish Renewal:** There is an open-ness among the Dati and Modern

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Orthodox segments towards the phenomenon of Jewish renewal in Israel, as opposed to the Hardali sector, which opposes such an orientation. However, the vast majority of respondents among all segments of the religious Zionist public oppose the official recognition by the state of non-Orthodox movements.

**Political opinions:** Regarding political viewpoints, the majority of respondents expressed positions with a right wing slant, although there are considerable differences between the Hardali sector, which is not open to territorial compromise, and the Modern Orthodox sector, of which one third are willing to consider such compromise.

**Social justice:** There was a consensus among all segments. There were no significant differences between the segments regarding issues dealing with social justice, and there is broad agreement regarding its importance as a Jewish value.

## Findings regarding different groups within the respondent population

Regarding the various age groups, we found that the older the respondents were, the greater their commitment towards ritual practices, and the more moderate their positions. For example, they were more likely to say that they pray shacharit in a minyan on a regular basis, spend regular time learning Torah, declare more love and commitment to the Land of Israel and The State of Israel, tend more to agree that religious education has become more extremist recently, believe that one must study "Tanach b'gova einayim" (an approach to Bible study in which biblical figures classically viewed in an idealized manner are seen rather as regular people), and agree that Haredim must serve in the army.

Men who served three or more years in the army are less likely to pray in a minyan and study Torah on a regular basis each week. Similarly, they exhibit more liberal opinions and a greater desire to integrate into general society, and are more open to general culture. On the other hand, men who studied four years or more in post-high school yeshivot declare a greater observance of mitzvot and less willingness to integrate into society-at-large. It must be noted that there was a correlation between those categorizing themselves as Hardalim and the number of years of study in a yeshiva as well as the number of years of army service.

Women who expressed a greater openness to integrating into society-at-large also expressed a greater interest in halacha and Torah study. We also found a correlation between self-identification and expressed positions. For instance, there was a positive correlation between women who categorize themselves as Modern Orthodox and the percentage who serve in the IDF. It is important to clarify that the distribution of women between the different segments corresponds to the distribution of men and therefore the differences in approaches are gender-dependent differences.

In many matters, we found clear differences between men and women: women express more liberal attitudes than men regarding relationships between religious and secular and between segments in Judaism. Additionally, we found that women are more likely to support open and modern education, such as the study of "Tanach b'gova einayim." They also oppose the increasing of Jewish studies hours at the expense of general studies in the schools. Regarding the issue of Agunot, marriage and divorce as dealt with by the rabbinic establishment, women express less satisfaction than men. Also, women agree more than men that the advancement of women's status in society positively influences family values and wholeness.

## Summary

The results of the survey demonstrate a sense of irrelevance among the religious public towards the rabbinic world. At the same time, we see that those more involved in society-at-large sometimes find it difficult to find a way to integrate ideally the world of halacha and societal values, which at times leads to a lack of motivation to follow halacha. These results obligate the Religious Zionist rabbinate in all segments to work towards restoring the feeling of trust in rabbis and in the rabbinic establishment and to help the public close the gaps that apparently exist between the values of Torah and of those of society-at-large.

The results show the urgent need for developing and strengthening a relevant religious leadership for the various communities throughout Israel. There is a great importance in positioning halacha as relevant to life and increasing the allegiance to halacha among the Zionist Religious public in all its hues.





QUESTION	MODERN	DATI	HARDAL
Commitment to observing halacha is an integral part of my identity.	56.4%	80.1%	95.8%
I pray Shacharit in a minyan. (Men only)	35.9%	58.4%	85.5%
Halacha is too rigid.	33.1%	19.3%	6.1%
Would I have chosen to be religious?	72.1%	86.5%	95.2%
I pray at least once per day. (Women only)	37.9%	50.7%	82.6%
I set aside time for Torah study.	39.1%	52.1%	73.3%
It is permissible to eat at a coffee shop only if it has a valid kashrut certification.	53.2%	76.3%	92.5%
Wearing modest attire is a vital component of a religious woman's performance of mitzvot.	27.1%	55.5%	81.2%
There is value in young women learning Gemara.	75.9%	49.4%	22.9%
It is appropriate for women to take on leadership roles in synagogue tefilot.	45.0%	21.4%	4.8%
It is acceptable to walk out of a state ceremony that includes singing by women.	5.2%	11.6%	46.5%
People should be married by age 22.	5.6%	14.8%	40.1%
Women should have leadership roles in their communities.	79.3%	59.9%	24.3%
Advancing the role of women in society has a positive effect on family values.	68.8%	49.0%	23.9%
The State of Israel must provide humanitarian assistance to anyone seeking refuge within it.	27.2%	11.3%	6.4%
Non-Jews who live in Israel should be granted equal rights.	53.1%	31.5%	13.1%
Women should serve in the IDF.	47.1%	26.0%	2.4%
Every Jewish Israeli man must serve in the IDF for at least 3 years.	41.3%	29.7%	12.5%
It is legitimate for a soldier to refuse an order to evict settlers.	27.1%	40.5%	66.2%
Haredi men must serve in the IDF.	67.0%	53.4%	28.5%
A person can be a traditional Jew without performing mitzvot.	30.5%	23.4%	14.3%
The Reform and Conservative movements should be given equal standing alongside Orthodoxy in Israel.	27.3%	8.1%	2.8%
Religious Jewish education has become more extreme in recent years.	67.9%	42.1%	18.3%
I support separate-gender education at a young age.	21.2%	28.9%	67.3%
Judaic studies in religious high schools should be intensified, and secular studies (History / Literature / Art / Science) should be reduced.	7.5%	15.6%	41.8%
Tanach should be taught in light of historical and archeological findings, in addition to classical rabbinic interpretations.	82.7%	66.4%	37.1%
I support co-ed youth movements.	74.9%	44.5%	6.4%
Equal rights is a Jewish value.	59.0%	50.4%	35.9%
Religious Jews should play a role in struggles over social issues.	78.6%	76.2%	68.9%
Social justice is a top religious value.	71.8%	67.8%	57.8%
Religious Jews must isolate themselves from secular society.	3.5%	6.3%	22.7%
Facebook is an important and useful tool.	49.4%	34.5%	15.5%
Religious and secular people should maintain close friendships with one another.	86.5%	78.3%	59.8%
Attending sporting events and / or entertainment (e.g. concerts and movies) is a regular part of my life.	68.1%	45.8%	13.5%
A religious home should not contain a television.	8.4%	24.8%	70.9%
Rabbinic leadership today plays a relevant role in meeting the needs of society.	8.4%	24.7%	45.4%
My rabbi plays an important role in shaping my lifestyle.	18.0%	31.8%	63.1%
The rabbinic establishment is actively dealing with bureaucratic problems in the marriage process.	11.5%	27.5%	47.7%
The rabbinic establishment is properly handling bureaucratic problems in the divorce process.	6.2%	16.1%	41.4%
Today's rabbinic leadership understands my world.	5.4%	21.4%	49.1%
Agunot are treated properly by the rabbinic establishment.	7.4%	18.2%	41.1%
The Chief Rabbinate of Israel represents the values I believe in.	6.4%	19.2%	37.3%
The separation of religion and state would improve life in Israel.	34.5%	14.1%	10.5%
The State of Israel can be both Jewish and democratic.	75.0%	72.8%	52.6%
Israeli couples should be given the option of civil marriage.	42.6%	18.8%	7.0%
In the event of a conflict between halacha and civil law, preference should be given to halacha.	21.1%	45.1%	79.3%
I identify with the political ideology of the Right.	43.9%	69.6%	78.9%
Evacuating a small number of Jewish settlements and retaining large settlement blocs is an adequate political solution.	36.5%	16.4%	6.1%
The views of Religious Zionist politicians have become more extreme in recent years.	43.9%	25.1%	16.9%

# Meaningful Military and National Service for Women

## A Position Paper

### Rosh Beit Midrash for Halacha - Rabbi Dr. Amit Kula

**Members, Beit Midrash for Halacha** - Rabbi Yehoshua Amaro, Rabbi Yitzhak Ajzner, Rabbi Yitzhak Ben-David, Rabbi Chaim Borgansky, Rabbi David Brofsky, Rabbanit Adv. Yardená Cope-Yosef, Rabbi Benny de la Fuente, Rabbanit Tehilla Elitzur, Rabbi Dr. Gavriel Hazut, Rabbi Avi Kadish, Rabbanit Rachel Keren, Rabbi Zvi Koren, Rabbi Meir Nehorai, Rabbi Ronen Neuwirth, Rabbanit Miriam Reisler, Rabbi Yehuda Rock, Rabbi Shmuel Slotki, Rabbi Ohad Taharlev, Rabbi Avraham Walfish, Rabbi Daniel Wolf

#### INTRODUCTION

What is the purpose of this paper? Its first goal is to sketch a picture of the halachic (legal) approaches to military service for women based on passages from the Talmud and responsa literature across the generations. A full and balanced description of the legal issues is intended, among other things, to present the reader with the various perspectives, and the possible methods for resolving the issue.

Our goal is to encourage young women who consider themselves graduates of a Religious Zionist education to view participation in Sherut Leumi (National Service) or the Israel Defense Forces (Tzahal) as suitable paths for contributing to their people and land. This challenge is particularly crucial considering that the wide ranging needs of Israeli society and the many demands of the army require devoted participants within both of the aforementioned frameworks.

Our goal is to provide a halachic basis to those young women who elect to fulfill their service to the country via the army. This document aims to outline a halachic path which proves that such a decision does not violate Jewish law. Not only is it possible to serve in the army, but such an endeavor is an important and valuable mitzvah.

Our goal is to present halachic and religious principles to those seeking guidance towards choosing their service. Furthermore, this presentation is intended as counsel for women during this period of their lives. As a result, we hope this approach will simultaneously strengthen both our nation and our young women's devotion to God.

#### THE POSITION OF BEIT HILLEL

**Background:** In the early years of the state, the question of women's participation in military service was the subject of controversy within Israeli society. The position of the Chief Rabbinate in those days was that the state must avoid mandatory conscription of women into the army. This original stand has remained unchanged. The compromise that was achieved whereby women of religious backgrounds were permitted to declare their religious convictions and be excused from the army, provided a solution for many years, and has managed to maintain the status quo. Development of the Sherut Leumi program afforded many women, especially those who identified as Religious Zionists, the opportunity to devote themselves to the state as civilians, while preserving their halachic lifestyle.

At the same time, Israeli society has continued to develop and evolve. Past arrangements do not adequately meet the new conditions of our culture. Change has also taken place within the Religious Zionist camp. Various processes over the past years, including significant changes within the military itself, have created an army environment that need not conflict with the demands of a religious lifestyle.

The general atmosphere in the army today is unrecognizable compared to what it was at the establishment of the state. This is particularly so with regard to attitudes towards women, harassment of female soldiers, and the abuse of power by officers. In the early decades of the army, an environment of excessive leniency reigned in situations of misconduct against women. The situation today is the polar opposite of what it once was. In the recent past, senior officers as well as civilian officials have been prosecuted for such crimes, and exploitation and harassment are no longer treated as forgivable offenses. Young women serving in the army enjoy far greater legal protection than in the past, and are aware of avenues of redress should the need arise. The Israel Defense Forces is a secure institution for women, even more than are many work environments in the greater Israeli society.

In light of this, thousands of female graduates from the Religious Zionist educational system choose to fulfill their national obligation within the military framework.

#### Therefore:

1. Beit Hillel sees great religious and national value in the meaningful active service of every woman in the State of Israel. We strongly approve of enlistment in the army or participation in Sherut Leumi on behalf of the Jewish people and the State of Israel for a significant period of time and for the performance of invaluable work.

2. Beit Hillel encourages bolstering the Sherut Leumi framework, which remains a suitable option for a large percentage of young national-religious women.

3. We call upon all young women to seriously consider the various opportunities available to contribute to the State of Israel and Israeli society and to choose wisely based on their personalities and abilities. Such a decision should be based on the religious and spiritual nature of each Sherut Leumi option. This concern should also relate to one's choice of the army.

4. We recommend that those women choosing to pursue army service make use of experienced advisers to guide them towards units that are appropriate for women in general, and for religious women in particular. Such counsel should be sought at the early stages of planning, i.e. in 11th and 12th grades. We call upon the schools and other educational institutions to familiarize their students with the opportunities available to them in the form of military options suitable for religious women. The prohibition that some institutions place on students meeting with knowledgeable advisers prevents critical information from reaching many individuals who in any event plan on enlisting in the army. As a result of this ignorance these young adults might suffer the consequence of joining units less appropriate to the needs of observant women; they may be unfamiliar with the privileges available to them as religious soldiers in the IDF.

5. We recommend that the community of young women join the framework of midrashoth (Torah institutions) before their enlistment in the army or participation in Sherut Leumi. This step is particularly critical for women who will eventually serve in non-observant environments, as is the case for most army situations and some Sherut Leumi placements. In tandem with study in a midrasha we suggest that the young religious woman who chooses army service enter the army as a member of a gar'in (social nucleus) which accompanies the soldiers during their service. In all cases, we suggest that religious women deciding on army service choose



one of the branches offered to them, such as the education corps, military intelligence, the air force, the computer services directorate and others, which in our opinion are appropriate units for religious women. During Sherut Leumi, as well, it is imperative that women are provided with meaningful guidance. Such guidance can strengthen the spiritual convictions of religious women, and can provide swift and appropriate responses to difficulties that arise during their term of duty.

6. The changes that are taking place in the nature of the army itself and in the numbers of religious women who are enlisting must reverberate in the realm of halachic rulings. We hope that this in turn will affect the phenomenon of women in the army. We call upon male and female rabbinic figures and educators to extend their support and spiritual guidance to women who choose military service, to prepare these candidates properly, and to establish a variety of additional midrashot. The latter will provide spiritual preparation for the conscripts in the months prior to enlistment; such schools should recognize the range of backgrounds of the national-religious graduates.

7. We call upon the security services and the army to make all options available to enlisted women. As a consequence of regular communication, the army's sensitivity to the values and halachic commitment of religious women will assure them, their educators and their rabbis that their faith in the army is well-placed. This will further strengthen the army and enhance national cohesion.

8. Consideration should also be extended to permit women who are not graduates of religious institutions to serve in the Sherut Leumi, if such an avenue is conducive to their lifestyles and abilities.

## Military Service for Women: A Summary of the Halachic Issues

With Divine assistance, the State of Israel – the embodiment of Jewish aspirations throughout two millennia – stands as a reality. It serves as an anchor for national survival as well as a challenge for the vision of the Jewish people within the land and in the Diaspora. The state found itself in mortal danger from its very beginning, due to the difficulties it faced at its foundation, and the security threats represented by the enemies surrounding it.

Preserving the existence of the state and its residents constitutes a mitzvah of paramount significance. Such an enterprise fulfills the obligations to save lives, to rescue individuals facing danger, and to exercise acts of righteousness by shouldering the burden of national need (Rav Aharon Lichtenstein). Defense of the state and the land is defined as a milhemet mitzvah (halachically-mandated war) (Rav Yitzhak Halevi Herzog, Rav Shaul Yisraeli and others) and as 'rescuing Israel from trouble' (Rambam).

Fighting for Israel has even been understood as a fulfillment of the commandment to settle the land that God bequeathed to our ancestors (Ramban). This obligation is not only operative when repelling direct attacks against the citizenry, but also in terms of embarking on attacks against our enemies, and carrying out routine security measures (Rav Herzog and Rav Shlomo Goren). The State has the authority to conscript citizens to protect its security, while the people have a responsibility to enlist and to fulfill these mitzvot (based on Rav Avraham Yitzhak Hakohen Kook).

Women, too, are required to share this obligation and to participate in the challenges of a milhemet mitzvah (Rambam). Although halachic authorities debate the degree and nature of military service for women (Radvaz), this does not negate the fact that the mainstream approach has been to view women as full partners in the efforts to secure the nation (Minhat Hinuch, Meshech Hochma, Tiferet Yisrael, and Rav Shmuel Strashun). Traditional interpretation sees volunteerism within the Sherut Leumi, or different types of military service, as acceptable routes towards fulfilling this obligation.

The role of women to bring life into the world, in addition to a range of societal norms, has led to the belief that "it is not within the nature of women to wage war" (Kiddushin 2a). However, besides the changes that have taken place in recent

generations, traditional understandings of womanhood cannot abrogate the obligation women have to participate in saving lives and in fighting melhamot mitzvah. Even the argument claiming that weapons rest within the domain of men and as such are forbidden to women under the prohibition of k'li gever (men's garments) cannot override the obligation to participate in security of the nation.

This is so for two reasons: Firstly, the halachic authorities do not state explicitly that weapons fall under the rubric of k'li gever. Secondly, under such a prohibition, weapons would only be outlawed to women as ornaments, not as instruments of defense (Rav Herzog, Rav Levine).

Consequently, military service for women is not only permitted, it in fact provides the opportunity to fulfill a large number of mitzvot. According to many rabbis, this is true as well for participation in Sherut Leumi. The latter is tantamount to fighting in a milhemet mitzvah since it provides support in the national struggle of repelling existential threats (Rav Zvi Yehuda Hakohen Kook, Rav Yisraeli and others).

The Torah teaches that Israel's success in its wars depends on the purity of its camp (Devarim 23). The Jewish army is committed to moral and spiritual conventions in order to merit divine assistance. For this reason, a central value in military and Sherut Leumi must be modesty in concert with a high degree of spirituality. One's choice of service must therefore take into account the ability of the conscript to maintain her spiritual standing.

In this way, it is possible to understand the gap between the Chief Rabbinate's clear rulings forbidding women's conscription in the army, and the personal positions of the chief rabbis (Rav Isser Yehuda Unterman, Rav Goren). The rabbinate strove to avoid comprehensive conscription of women into the army (Rav Herzog, Rav Yisraeli), while the rabbis would not prevent resolute young women from serving their people and land under the framework of the military.

Young women today are faced with a wide variety of options for fulfilling their obligations and privileges for serving their people and land – within the army and Sherut Leumi frameworks. The needs of the populace and the individual's abilities and skills should be among the factors one considers when choosing her path. Similarly, the candidate must keep in mind the role her service will play within her overall fealty to God's commandments.

## Critical considerations in guiding women towards meaningful service

### 1. Introduction: choosing a meaningful service

With regard to many halachic issues, decisive rulings exist forbidding or demanding particular actions. Still, in numerous situations, no clear halachic ruling stands to direct one's behavior, and the individual is faced with multiple choices. In such cases one must make a determination based on spiritual and personal considerations. An intelligent decision made for the purpose of serving God is part and parcel of man's worship of the Almighty.

Beit Hillel's halachic analysis is that there exists no halachic prohibition against women serving in the IDF. Therefore all women have the viable option of joining the military, just as they do participating in Sherut Leumi. Women who serve in the army or in Sherut Leumi exercise the values of partnership with the community at large, strengthening national security, and bolstering society. One should treat with gravity the question of which path to take since valid arguments can be made on behalf of each route. Because there is no single consensus that governs every circumstance, the decision ultimately devolves upon each individual woman. The role of parents, rabbis and educators is to encourage meaningful service on behalf of the Jewish people. These advisers must assist each young woman in embarking on the best possible avenue for her.

### 2. Presenting the factors

In order to assist parents, rabbis, educators and the young women

themselves, in addressing the question in a comprehensive manner, we now present the range of factors upon which this decision depends. To make the correct choice and give each factor due consideration, one must familiarize oneself with the realities of the army and Sherut Leumi. Parents and teachers who lack knowledge in these areas can refer the candidates to other advisers who possess greater expertise.

**a. The value of service** Both the army and Sherut Leumi provide opportunities for meaningful service in many important roles. Service is an expression of participation in societal responsibility, a contribution to the community and a sanctification of God's name. Enlistment in the army and Sherut Leumi allow the individual to realize two values of supreme importance. Under the framework of Sherut Leumi there exist many situations for advancing social justice, while the military provides the chance to aid in national security. Any decision thereby strengthens the value which the particular service stands for.

**b. Directing candidates towards their ideal contributions** The broad range of possibilities ensures that each individual can find the route by which she can maximize her contribution. This point should stand at the center of any decision. Every woman has her own personal skills and abilities. A greater compatibility between the candidate's personality and the requirements of the service will naturally yield a more satisfying contribution for the individual. One should therefore familiarize oneself with the service under consideration through on-site visits and consultation with people who have had experience in that particular area. It is a poor idea to merely enlist in the army and trust in the system's placement; such a path neglects the possibility of examining one's options and finding the best way to contribute to the country.

**c. Educating towards complexity, religious identity and sanctification of God's name** Israeli society comprises multiple and varied sectors devoted to protecting and developing the state. It is our duty to equip our students to deal with the religious and moral challenges this phenomenon poses. Still, an individual committed to contributing to the nation and society must be able to maintain her level of spirituality, and not sacrifice her personal beliefs, halachic observance or ethical behavior during the experience. It is further hoped that such a woman will find the strength to flourish in her faith and adherence to Torah, and succeed in personal growth as well.

Many locations and roles create challenges for the woman of faith precluding her from selecting those areas of service. It is appropriate for these observant women to join a group of like minded individuals and thereby form a homogenous group for collective service. On the other hand, some women find the challenges of working in a more diverse environment to be a positive experience which can enhance their religious growth. In these situations, the observant woman serves as an example to others as she promotes a religious lifestyle. All women should seriously consider this dichotomy and balance the options with their personalities and strengths.

**d. Unity and uniqueness** Unity within Am Yisrael being of paramount importance, it is therefore desirable, in the absence of some qualifying circumstance, to remain a part of society and to serve alongside the rest of the populace. Nevertheless, we recognize the unique nature of Religious Zionism within Israeli culture: time must be set aside for learning Torah; tasks should be chosen due to their ideological value; consideration should be given to the appropriate age for marriage, in contrast to attitudes within the general public.

**e. Preparation and study of Torah** Preparation should be undertaken before any type of service – either military or Sherut Leumi. The suggested form of this preparation is the study

of Torah within the various midrashot. In addition to the value of engaging in Torah study at all points in one's life, in this period in particular, a focus on Torah values will serve as a foundation for personal growth and as training for coping with challenges yet to come. Our experience has proven that a year of such study is quite worthwhile for those who have chosen it.

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**f. Guidance** Every woman serving in the army or Sherut Leumi must find a way to remain in contact with a figure or institution to act as a spiritual adviser on her behalf. This can be the high school or midrasha where she has studied or the rav or rabbanit of her community. Other individuals who accompany the women through their Sherut Leumi, or who function within the military rabbinate can similarly serve in this capacity.

These factors serve as the basis for the decision making process facing all women prior to their service. Consideration of these issues will assist the candidate in determining the nature of the service that is best for her, and which will maximize her contribution to the nation and the state.

### 3. The role of the high schools

**a. Education and the clash of values** The process of education affords a dialogue between the teacher and the student. While the teacher presents his set of values and beliefs to his students, he must at the same time be sensitive to the individuality of those students.

Efforts to establish a single approach that dismisses all other possible avenues, tends to engender resentment, if not rebellion. The dangers of such a conflict are many. Students will end up choosing their own path without consulting their teachers, occasionally disregarding what is in fact the best choice for them. Therefore, if a student leans towards a type of service contrary to the position of her teachers, these very educators must strive to help the candidate find the best option within the category of the student's field. This, despite the fact that the teacher might have advised a different selection altogether.

**b. Responsibility** The educational institution is responsible for creating a process whereby each of its students will choose the type of service best suited for her. A critical step in this process involves providing thorough information on all possible areas of service available to the students.

**c. Open channels of communication** In order to achieve these goals, the educational institutions must maintain contact with all the relevant bodies: the Sherut Leumi organizations and other establishments dedicated to directing religious women towards the army and which accompany the soldiers throughout their military service.

**d. Preparation for service** Preparation of students for their upcoming service is part of a high school's responsibility. Suitable candidates should be encouraged to study Torah in midrashot, but even those women who choose a different direction require appropriate preparation. It is therefore imperative that the educational institutions undertake this important task.

Selection of meaningful service combined with personal growth and development is the first step towards a life of responsibility and contribution to society and the state. We wish you success and God's assistance!

**To see the full list of halachic sources cited in this p'sak halacha, please visit:**  
<http://goo.gl/NZS2yW>

# Torah Perspectives and Halachic Decisions Regarding People with Disabilities

Rosh Beit Midrash for Hashkafa - Rabbi Zvi Koren

Members, Beit Midrash for Hashkafa - Rabbi Yitzhak Ajzner, Rabbanit Devorah Evron, Rabbi Yehuda Gilad, Rabbi Shmuel Klitsner, Rabbanit Oshra Koren, Rabbanit Batya Krauss, Rabbanit Rachel Levmore, Rabbi Ronen Neuwirth, Rabbi Aviad Sanders, Rabbanit Na'ama Sat

*This article was written soon after the passing of Professor Reuven Feuerstein z"l, who developed unique methods of treatment for those with disabilities, believed in the capacity of people to overcome their physical limitations, and substantially contributed to the integration into society of tens of thousands of people with disabilities around the world. Several months ago, members of Beit Hillel had the honor of hearing Professor Feuerstein speak about the subject addressed in this article, and some of his comments are included here. The article is dedicated to his memory, with gratitude for his contribution to tikkun olam (improving our world).*

## Abstract

The principle of equality is a fundamental one in modern society and includes the demand for equality for people with disabilities. Yet, the Torah forbids a kohen with a physical defect from serving in the Mikdash (Sanctuary). Does this prohibition inform us about the general outlook of the Torah towards the disabled, a perspective that limits their place in society and in observing the commandments?

Various sources in the Written and Oral Torah state that Creation was deliberately done in an incomplete manner, and that the role of humanity is to participate with G-d in completing Creation in all realms, including (and especially) the social-ethical and scientific.

Just as in the past, social and scientific developments brought about certain changes in the halachic standing of those with disabilities, so today, we must be machmir (strict) regarding the dignity of such persons, conducting halachic inquiries into related issues, and bringing about in our community and society an inclusive attitude towards and treatment of those with disabilities.

## Introduction

The question of the attitude towards those with disabilities is one of the most challenging in the world of Torah and halacha today. The ideal of equality and the requirement to integrate people with disabilities into the community are basic values in modern society, whose ethical sensitivity to social values is higher than ever before. Furthermore, technological and medical developments, including treatment methods that have been developed throughout the years, help the disabled to overcome difficulties and stumbling blocks that they were unable to in the past.

However, when examining the stance of the Torah and halacha towards these matters, we find a seemingly demeaning stance towards disabilities. The Torah devotes full passages towards describing the prohibition of ba'alei mumim (those with physical defects) to serve in the Mikdash. "Speak to Aharon and say, 'Any of your descendants who have a blemish may not approach to offer bread to his G-d.'" (Vayikra 21:17)

Moreover, the Torah describes the service of those with defects in the Beit Hamikdash as chilul ha-kodesh (profanation of the holy). "Only he should not come near the parochet (curtain) or the mizbe'ach (altar), for he has a blemish and he must not profane my holy places." (Vayikra 21:23)

Halacha prohibits those with disabilities from serving in various capacities such as shlich tzibbur (cantor), and there are people with physical or cognitive disabilities who are not even required to fulfill mitzvot, such as those with severe hearing or cognitive impairments.

**In light of today's changing ethics and technological and medical reality, will the outlook of halacha towards people with disabilities also change? Does the Torah have anything unique to say on this matter that might contribute toward the building of a more just and ethical society?**

## 1. Development of natural ethics

According to the theory of Rav Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook, the development of natural ethics is an integral part of the process of geula (redemption) and tikkun olam (improving our world). These ideas appear in many places in the writings of Rav Kook, including his essay, Vision of Vegetarianism and Peace. So, for instance, on the commandment of kisui ha-dam (covering the blood), Rav Kook writes that the purpose of the mitzva is to demonstrate shame regarding the unethical status of mankind, which leads us to slaughter animals for the purpose of consumption. "...kisui ha-dam of animals and fowl is like a divine protest against the license to kill animals that is given based on the damaged soul of man, for 'the inclination of the heart of man is bad from his youth' (Breishit 8:21)... Since man has no internal opposition to killing animals out of feelings of goodness or justice, the Torah requires us to cover the blood, thus hiding your shame and the weakness of your ethics. Although man has not yet reached a level of tenderness that might lead him to feel that it is not appropriate to take the life of a living and feeling creature merely because of his needs and appetites, a practical step towards this exalted ethic was given."

According to Rav Kook, in the future, world ethics will be so exalted that we will not be able to kill animals even for sacrifices in the Beit Hamikdash. "Indeed, when mankind reaches a more exalted plane, when the ethical downfall of man, which had caused the need for loathing between man and beast, is healed, then nature will be blessed with a plethora of ethics and goodness...man will be filled with strength and fortitude, until he will no longer need the consumption of meat in order to strengthen his body. Ethics will be so lofty that animals will also relate to man in a positive manner; this is the apex of a refined culture. Thus Chazal (our Sages) said that all sacrifices will be nullified in the days to come (Tanchuma, Emor 19)."

From these words, we learn that if the attitude towards living sacrifices will change in the future Beit Hamikdash in the light of the development of natural ethics, it is certainly possible that attitudes towards people with disabilities can also change.



The fact that the issue of people with disabilities has become more acute today than ever, is not necessarily a result of the fact that there are more instances of people with disabilities, but rather because of the high ethical sensitivity of our society. If we believe that we live in an era of reishit tzmichat geulateinu (the beginning of the redemption), the ethical aspect of the redemption must be expressed more substantially through Torah, Mussar (ethics) and p'sak halacha (halachic ruling), especially in this sensitive area.

## 2. Humanity's participation in the improvement of Creation

The Midrash tells of a discussion between Rabbi Akiva and Turnus Rufus: the evil Turnus Rufus asked Rabbi Akiva: Which deeds are more pleasant, those of G-d or those of humankind? Rabbi Akiva answered: Those of humankind. Turnus Rufus asked: Can a human create anything like Heaven and earth? Rabbi Akiva answered: Don't tell me of things that are beyond the realm of humans, but only of things that are within the human realm. So Turnus Rufus asked: Why are you circumcised? Rabbi Akiva answered: I knew you would ask me that, which is why I said that humanity's deeds are more pleasant than those of G-d. Rabbi Akiva brought him stalks of grain and cakes and said to him: These are made by G-d and those by humans – are they not pleasant? He brought him stalks of flax and vessels from Beit Shean and said to him: These are made by G-d and those by humans – are they not pleasant? Turnus Rufus said: But if G-d wants circumcision, why doesn't the newborn emerge already circumcised from the womb? Rabbi Akiva responded: And why does his umbilical cord come out with him, with the child hanging by his stomach, until the mother cuts it?

The idolatrous Roman worldview, as expressed by Turnus Rufus, is that of a natural world, a world that accepts nature as is: whatever nature gives, that is what is. Therefore, if a child is born uncircumcised, it should be forbidden to circumcise him, as he was not born that way. The roots of this outlook lie in an idolatrous understanding of the world, according to which nature is divine, therefore man may not do anything against nature's verdict.

Rabbi Akiva vehemently opposes that worldview, contending that nature is not the end all and be all. G-d is not nature; perhaps His Presence in manifest in nature, but is not identical to it. Humanity has the power to change and improve nature, to raise it to a higher level. Humanity is not subservient to nature. Humanity meets G-d through nature, but humanity has a key role in this meeting – it has the obligation to elevate nature in a manner in which it can meet G-d.

It is important to emphasize that the Roman worldview was not passive; it is enough to see the remains of the monumental buildings that they left in Eretz Yisrael to realize this. Yet, despite the advancements and industry that the Romans developed, they did not believe in humanity's ability to change a given reality and elevate it. Humanity, from their viewpoint, is only a subject in the kingdom of nature, and not the opposite. This idolatrous outlook contends that humanity stands against divine nature, whose creation is completed and can no longer be renewed or changed.

According to Jewish philosophy, humanity is not merely a subject in the kingdom of nature, but a full participant in the kingdom of Creation. Judaism does not look at the world as a natural world, but rather as a created world not yet complete, a world in which G-d has left for man the task of development, improvement, and, chiefly, elevation, so that each person can meet "The master of the world who reigned before any creature was created."

Rav Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik writes, "In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth' – G-d did the beginning, but the completion is a task for humanity." (Y'nei Zikaron, p. 88)

We are asked to improve and elevate the world and life in it. Every innovation made in the world requires us to see how it affects us and how it helps the world to become elevated in preparation for our meeting with G-d.

So it is with our attitude towards people with disabilities. We know more today about this subject than ever before. The quality of life for those with disabilities is significantly better than in previous generations. And our attitude toward them is much improved from what it was decades ago. We understand that people with disabilities were created in G-d's image just like any other person, and that they are worthy of being equal participants and even leaders in our society, as seen in the words of Rabbi Yosef Bechor Shor on G-d's words to Moshe, "Who has made man's mouth?" (Shmot 4:11), "That is to say, that if I wanted to, I could make you talk properly, but I don't want to, and it is to My honor that a man who has no mouth and no tongue will do My bidding, and will fulfill my wishes, and will thereby achieve a great thing."

## 3. Improvement of Creation from an ethical and social standpoint

Chazal relate another discussion between Rabbi Akiva and Turnus Rufus: "And this is the question asked by the evil Turnus Rufus of Rabbi Akiva: If your G-d is a lover of the poor, why doesn't He provide them with sustenance? Rabbi Akiva answered: So that we will be saved from Gehinom by caring for the poor. Turnus Rufus said: On the contrary, this should condemn you to Gehinom! I propose an allegory: To what is this scenario comparable? To an earthly king who, angry at his servant, imprisons him, commanding that he be neither fed nor given drink. If someone were to nevertheless give him food and drink, would the king not get angry at the giver? And you (the Jewish People) are called servants, as it is said, "For B'nei Yisrael are my servants."

Rabbi Akiva said: I propose a different allegory: To what is this scenario comparable? To an earthly king who, angry at his son, imprisons him, commanding that he be neither fed nor given drink. If someone were to nevertheless give him food and drink, would the king not send the giver a present? And we are also called sons, as it is written, "You are sons to your G-d." (Bava Batra 10a)

There are two emphases in this narrative. First, Rabbi Akiva teaches us that we can also learn the proper attitude towards G-d's creations from outside the context of the mitzvot of the Torah. Natural ethics must also be part of what arouses us to act in the repair of Creation. Sometimes natural ethics require us to answer a new ethical demand that will give pleasure to the Ruler of the Universe. That is because we are not only servants of G-d, but also the sons of our Heavenly Father. Therefore it is incumbent upon us to lovingly care for all of G-d's children, especially the most vulnerable in our society.

Second, we are not speaking here of the material improvement of Creation, but of social justice. This narrative's message is not that G-d creates a person lacking in order to serve as a means to enable others to escape Gehinom. The point is to describe a basic principle of a civilized society that is sensitive, giving, and attempts to narrow the gaps extant within it.

Thus, one must pay attention to the unique needs of all people. At times, relating equally to all, while ignoring the limitations and special needs of certain people, actually delays the repair of society. We must attempt to find a balance between fundamental equality between all and between paying attention to the uniqueness of each person.

## 4. Improvement of Creation through science and medicine

The development of technology and medicine also plays a significant role in tikkun olam. Prophecies of redemption deal with medicine that will reach the world as part of the process of tikkun, as Chazal comment: "We see that ten things will be renewed by G-d in the future... G-d will decree that even a sick man be given healing from the sun, as it is said (Malachi 3:20), "But to you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in its wings" (Shmot Rabba 15). Similar ideas appear in the Zohar (Parshat Miketz 113: 2, free translation) – "And in the future, G-d will reveal the light of the sun and shine on the People of Israel, as it is written: 'But to you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in its wings, and in this sun all will be healed, since when the People of

We must promote a process of change in society regarding people with disabilities, thus creating an atmosphere in which it will be routine for people to be with those who are different, and to exhaust every halachic avenue in order to integrate people with disabilities into the community in an equitable manner.

Israel will arise from the earth, there will be disabled and blind among them, and G-d will shine upon them from that sun in order to heal them."

The medicine itself that will reach the world and bring healing is not necessarily miraculous, but rather may be natural, as in the scientific advancements developed by humankind. As Rav Kook explains, the curses of the earth will be nullified as a result of the scientific developments of humanity, which come as the result of Divine enlightenment that descends to earth in each generation. (Orot HaKodesh 2, pg. 563)

If, in the past, people with disabilities were widely considered a burden on society, in the generation of the redemption, it will be considered a privilege of society to be able to give such people tools to overcome their limitations and be integrated into it. We have merited, in our generation, a person who brought to mankind the light of G-d in this area, Professor Reuven Feuerstein z"l, through whose theories and philosophy tens of thousands of people with disabilities throughout the world have been able to overcome their limitations and become integrated into society.

That the Torah seems to view those with disabilities as inferior is not its final word on the matter. The Torah presents a point of departure according to which we live in a damaged world that has defects and limitations. The role of mankind is to advance and develop Creation, to correct its defects and deficiencies, and thereby to complete it, as Chazal said, **"...which G-d created to do. It is not written 'will do', but 'to do'":** G-d gave man the power to do" (Midrash Aggada [Buber] to Breishit 2:3). It is incumbent upon humanity to act to minimize the social gaps between one another, to help those with disabilities to overcome their limitations, and thus to bring about tikkun olam.

## 5. Integration of people with disabilities into the community

As noted above, people with certain disabilities seem to be prevented from serving in specific religious capacities, such as kohanim performing birkat kohanim (priestly blessing) (Megilla 24b). Rambam writes, "A kohen who has a defect in his face, hands or feet, such as crooked or twisted fingers...should not perform birkat kohanim because people will stare at them...distracting people during the blessing" (Hilchot Tefila u'Nesiat Kappaim 15:2).

The Gemara in Megilla cites examples of instances in which kohanim with defects did ascend the dachan (the platform where the priestly blessing is performed), and notes that the reason was that they were considered well-known in their city, and therefore their defect was not considered notable. Thus, continues Rambam, "One whose saliva dripped onto his beard while he was speaking or the blind in one eye should not participate in birkat kohanim. But if he was known in his city and all were used to seeing him... he is permitted to do so, as people wouldn't stare at him..."

Radbaz, in his discussion of a visually-impaired kohen ascending the dachan, clarifies the halacha, concluding, "...as this condition is common in this country, and does not arouse surprise...one should permit it, as the public will not stare."

**This p'sak halacha leads to a fascinating conclusion: if society does not consider a person with disabilities as odd, neither does halacha. If society adapts to accept those with disabilities and works to integrate them, the attitude of halacha towards them also evolves.**

Another example is that of whether a person with disabilities may serve as a shlich tzibbur. Maharshal cites the p'sak

halacha of Maharam (Dfus Krimona 249): "...It is obvious that he is worthy to do so. In fact, it is preferable, for G-d wants to use broken vessels...as it is said, 'a broken heart G-d will not despise' (Tehilim 51:19)." Maharshal continues: "...and I will go a step further and state that even levi'im whose work is in song in Shilo and the Mishkan...are not disqualified unless the issue is with their voice... and so with a shlich tzibbur." (Yam Shel Shlomo, Hulin 1:48)

Therefore, one must be stringent in preserving the dignity of all people and allow a person with physical disabilities to serve as shlich tzibbur.

From a values standpoint, we can learn from these halachot to strive for a situation in which it is routinely accepted that people with disabilities are an integral part of the community. As this process becomes more widespread in a community, those in the community will see it as commonplace, and it will cease to draw attention. Thus we will affect the halachic standing of people with disabilities, and will contribute toward the advancement of society and the world.

## 6. Finding the hidden treasure in people with disabilities

In order to bring a society to a more equitable and ethical level, the majority of the society must evolve in how it relates to those with disabilities.

In response to the development of sign language in the late 19th century, poskim (halachic decisors) addressed the question of the halachic status of a hearing-impaired person who had learned to use this mode of communication. Rav Azriel Hildesheimer cites differing opinions, and concludes, fascinatingly: "...And it seems, in my humble opinion, that the heart of the matter depends on the question of whether the intellectual ability of the hearing-impaired person is completely defective, or whether it is normal and he is a hidden treasure." (Responsa of Rav Azriel Hildesheimer Part 2, Even Haezer, Miluim 58).

In our day, it is difficult to imagine that there was once uncertainty about this issue. Now, all poskim agree that hearing-impaired people have only a physical disability, and are of normal intelligence in every way. Yet we must remember that for Rav Hildesheimer and his generation, the possibility that a hearing-impaired person might learn and function as everyone else was most surprising!

Rav Hildesheimer had to think creatively, since for many centuries, "conventional wisdom" maintained that since there was no way to teach a hearing-impaired person, he or she was not intelligent. Rav Hildesheimer's ability to think "out of the box" in his generation was a crucial stage in the recognition of a new reality for hearing-impaired people.

**The question with which we are faced is: What is the "out of the box" thinking that is necessary in our generation in order to answer halachic questions in social-ethical matters regarding attitudes toward people with disabilities?**

## Summary

As servants of G-d, we must participate with Him in the act of Creation and continue to improve the world, including advancing the integration of and equality between people with disabilities and the rest of society. We must promote a process of change in society regarding people with disabilities, thus creating an atmosphere in which it will be routine for people to be with those who are different, and to exhaust every halachic avenue in order to integrate people with disabilities into the community in an equitable manner.

This article is intended to be the first stage in a process that will lay the groundwork for dealing with those with disabilities within the framework of halacha. In the future, we plan to discuss, B'ezrat Hashem, practical, halachic and social issues related to this important matter.

# Women Dancing with a Torah Scroll

## Background

Last year, Beit Hillel's Batei Midrash for Halacha and Hashkafa addressed the issue of inclusiveness in our communities, and suggested ways to make synagogues more welcome to groups such as women, the disabled and the elderly, which are, unfortunately, marginalized from synagogue life in different.

One result of that discussion was the publication of a ruling permitting women to dance with Sifrei Torah on Simchat Torah. The p'sak halacha was by no means groundbreaking - individual poskim had ruled similarly in the past - but for a number of reasons, it resonated with a large number of people. The article below, written by Emily Amroussi in Yisrael Hayom, Israel's most widely-read newspaper, explains the significance and impact of our p'sak halacha in a wide variety of communities throughout Israel.

This anecdote is an excellent example of Beit Hillel's communal leadership: identifying a problem or need, outlining suggested solutions; crafting a p'sak halacha to solve it; and disseminating the p'sak via social media, creating a widespread public discourse.

In the tractate Brachot, Rabbi Yehuda ben Betaira's view is mentioned, namely, that the Torah can be compared to fire: just as fire does not absorb impurity (tum'a), similarly the words of the Torah do not absorb impurity. Accordingly, the Rambam ruled in the Laws of Tefillin and Mezuzot and Torah Scrolls (10, 8):

"All those who are impure – even menstrual women...are permitted to hold a Torah scroll, and to read it, for the words of Torah do not absorb impurity."

The Shulchan Aruch also rules this way in the Laws of Torah scrolls (Yoreh De'ah, 282, 9).

Consequently, there is absolutely no reason that a woman may not touch a Torah scroll, even if she is menstrually impure, even during the days on which she observes blood (namely, during the actual menstruation).

Even though there is no source in halacha that restricts a menstrual woman from attending the synagogue, a number of medieval scholars (Rishonim) mention various customs according to which women were strict upon themselves. They would, for example, refrain from entering a synagogue while menstrually impure (Ra'avia 1, Brachot 68), and abstained from touching a Torah scroll during the actual menstruation (Or Zaru'a vol. 1, Laws of Menstruation 360), and they praised these women's customs. In contrast to this, the author of Sefer Ha'Agur (ch. 1, 388) writes that the women in his country are accustomed to enter the synagogue, to pray and to respond to the holiest sections of the prayers, and only refrain from looking at the Torah scroll during the raising of the Torah (Hagbaha) if they are actually menstrual.

The Rama (Orach Chaim ch. 88, sec. 1) mentions both these customs, but writes that the accepted opinion as far as practical halacha is concerned, is that a woman should conduct herself as usual during menstruation, even though the custom in his area was to be strict about the mentioned customs. Nevertheless, he also quotes the responsum of Terumat Hadeshen (פסקים וכתבים, ch. 132) that states that even in a place where the custom is to be strict, "on the Days of Awe (Yamim Hanora'im), when many gather together to go to synagogue, they may go to synagogue like all other women, for it would cause them great distress if everyone gathers together, while they stay outside."

The Mishna Berura (same place, comment 7) testifies that in his time, the custom changed, and women always came to synagogue even during their menstrual period, during all days of the year. Nonetheless, he rules that they should not look at the Torah scroll while it is being raised to show the people (Hagbaha).

From this survey it is clear that, as far as the law is concerned, it is permissible for women to touch a Torah scroll and to dance with it, while the actual practice depends upon custom. In the past, women expressed their respect and honor for the Torah by staying far away while they were menstrual. Today, these customs are no longer practiced in many communities, and in our days many women show their love for the Torah by regularly coming to synagogue, learning Torah, and expressing a

sincere and pure desire to cleave to the Torah, including holding the Torah scroll and dancing with it on Simchat Torah. It therefore seems that there is no reason to forbid women from holding a Torah scroll, and in fact one should encourage women who choose this way to express their love for Torah.

This is also how Rabbi Nahum Eliezer Rabinowitz ruled in his responsa שו"ת נחום (ch. 40): "In my humble opinion it would seem that if the community wishes to please its women on Simchat Torah, and accordingly they declare that in the women's gallery, one of the important women will hold a Torah scroll, while others dance around her in an honorable and refined manner, clearly this is a positive development, a constructive step with no prohibition at all, for it was never forbidden for women to hold a Torah scroll. And perhaps even the men might learn from them how to behave with appropriate respect." And he adds at the end of his piece: "However, all this is on condition that there is agreement among the community, and agreement with the rabbi of the community."

Therefore, in a community in which there are male and female members who are interested in women dancing with a Torah scroll, it is advisable for the community to enter a dialogue, led by the rabbi of the community, and to initiate a constructive process on this matter.

## "This is not a trend; it's a revolution!"

Emily Amroussi, columnist, Yisrael Hayom

When I was in my early twenties, I also tried. I asked that they pass the Sefer Torah to the women's section, so that we would be able to dance with it, to be part of the holiday whose essence is dancing with the Torah in the synagogue. From the other side of the mechitza came their refusal. This was not women's territory, they said. I left the shul and went home to look through a different book, any best-seller I could find. From then on I never participated in Simchat Torah prayers other than to glance at the men celebrating. I had no reason to be there.

And suddenly, like lava bursting from a volcano, on this past Simchat Torah the barriers fell. At the same time and without any prior coordination, dozens of Orthodox synagogues and communities underwent a leap of thousands of years. In Shoham and in Beit Shemesh, in Efrat and in Modi'in, in religious kibbutzim and in settlements. Rabbis said that there really isn't any halachic problem, and for the first time, as if it had always been this way, men unaffectedly passed over the large and heavy Torah scrolls to the other side of the mechitza.

In the Jerusalem synagogue Korzin, the men went outside and made room for the women in the men's section, so that they should have enough room to dance. In Modi'in, at the mass dancing at the end of the holiday (the "Second Hakafo") in the plaza of the Cultural Center, the Sifrei Torah were raised up with enthusiasm among the head scarves and the skirts. In the Sephardic synagogues of Pisgat Ze'ev, the Torah scrolls floated joyously from hand to hand to the other side of the mechitza. In the city of Rehovot, crowded circles of religious women moved around the Sifrei Torah. So it was in the settlements of Tekoa and Gush Etzion, Nehusha in the Jerusalem Corridor, Eli'av in East Lachish, Lavi in the Lower Galilee, and the list goes on.

What happened? Perhaps one can credit this change to the stubbornness and patience of a few trailblazers who have been struggling for years. Perhaps it is due to Facebook, through which influential and active religious feminist groups have been established. Or perhaps it is the result of the halachic ruling that the organization of the rabbis of Beit Hillel publicized in the middle of the summer.

"There is no halachic reason to forbid it," says Rav Ronen Neuwirth, Executive Director of Beit Hillel. "The Gemara declares that a Sefer Torah is impervious to ritual impurity (tum'a). One should permit women to dance with a Sefer Torah. This will strengthen many women's connection to mitzvot and creating a feeling of genuine involvement. You see that men hold the Sefer Torah during the dancing, as if they are holding up a trophy with triumph, while the women hold it like they are holding a baby. It is a different approach, emanating from different natures, but the desire to cleave to the Torah is common to all."

Generation after generation conducted themselves differently, and you come along and breach the wall?

Rav Neuwirth: "Throughout all the generations, women did not carry Sifrei Torah on Simchat Torah, but they also did not go out to work, they did not hold positions as CEOs, and they did not learn Torah. Simchat Torah must be a festival for everyone. The fact that it has caught on in so many places, including less innovative communities, shows that it is appropriate."



## BEIT HILLEL BECOMES A PARTNER IN TZAV GIYUR

As a means of addressing the urgent need to improve the broken system of conversion in Israel, Beit Hillel will be a senior member organization of Tzav Giyur (literally: "conversion order"), a new coalition, established to promote conversion in Israel. The coalition, headed by Beit Morashah, is comprised of Am Shalem, Emunah, Harry O. Triguboff Institute, Institute for Zionist Strategies (IZS), Israel Democracy Institute (IDI), ITIM, Mifalot HaTziyonut HaDatit, Ne'emanet Torah Va'Avodah, Ohr Torah Stone Institutions, and the Religious Kibbutz Movement. The coalition is promoting solutions to the crisis by all halachic means.

In Israel today are more than 300,000 citizens who over the past several decades immigrated to Israel under the terms of the Law of Return – most of them from the Former Soviet Union – who are not halachically Jewish. Now, their children and grandchildren, born and raised in Israel, bearing Israeli names, going through the public school system, speaking Hebrew, serving in the army, and completely integrated into Israeli society, identify completely as Israelis. It is inevitable that they will eventually meet and fall in love with Jewish Israelis. But since they are not halachically Jewish, they would be unable to marry without a conversion.

The existing conversion system, which operates within the frameworks of the Chief Rabbinate and the IDF Rabbinate, converts approximately 2,000 people each year. At the same time, approximately 4,000 children are born into this halachically non-Jewish but fully Israeli

segment of the population each year, magnifying the problem each year. The system as it exists has proven unable or unwilling to raise the number of converts each year.

Some claim that there is a low level of motivation on the part of this segment of the population to convert. Others claim that the unduly onerous requirements demanded by the rabbinic courts are the main cause of this low level of motivation to convert.

Whatever the case may be, we find ourselves in an increasingly untenable situation of the specter of widespread intermarriage in Israel. The status quo is a ticking time bomb that endangers the Jewish character of Israeli society. With each passing year, the numbers only increase, making action an urgent necessity.

A play on tzav giyur, Hebrew for "draft notice," Tzav Giyur (literally: "conversion order") has been established to advance dramatic reforms that will address the crisis of conversion in Israel. Guided by the conviction that it is both necessary and possible to broaden the scope of conversion according to halacha in a manner that is welcoming and accepting, this coalition of Zionist organizations will promote legislation, encourage educational programs and preparatory programs for conversion, provide emotional support for converts within the community, increase public awareness of the need to resolve the issue of conversion, and work toward cultivating a welcoming approach to conversion in Israel.

## SHABBAT YISRAELIT UPDATE

Last October, more than 6,000 secular and religious families in 50 cities and towns across Israel spent Shabbat dinner at each other's home as part of the "Shabbat Yisraelit" initiative created by Beit Hillel. Unprecedented in Israel in terms of size and scope, the initiative garnered significant media attention and attracted the participation of government officials and celebrities.

Due to its great success, Beit Hillel's leadership decided to expand the initiative from a once-per-year event to a year-round, ongoing project. While the Shabbat dinner component will remain as the flagship event, the project is slated to be significantly more ambitious, bringing together a broad coalition of secular and religious organizations to influence the character of Shabbat in the public sphere, through partnership and consensus among both the religious and secular communities.

The coalition – comprised of organizations from social movements and Jewish renewal, secular yeshivot, and organizations involved in legislation in the area of religion and state – has met several times this year to craft a joint vision and to discuss the challenges, risks, and opportunities in relation to where Israeli society is today regarding Shabbat.

Substantively, there will be several elements of the year-round project: Kabbalat Shabbat services in cities all over the country; various themed campaigns ("Shabbat Without Screens", "#Shabbat" hashtag, etc.), each of which will be accompanied by intensive public relations; creation of a Facebook app and smartphone app; town hall sessions in cities and towns throughout the country; the composition of a "social covenant" regarding Shabbat by the coalition partners, to be signed by 100,000 citizens and presented to the Knesset along with proposed legislation based on coalition consensus.

## BEIT HILLEL PUBLIC COUNCIL CONFERENCE

The second annual Beit Hillel Public Council Conference was held in early June at the Poriyah Guest House, near Tiberias. The conference was attended rabbanim, rabbaniyot, businessmen, public figures and members of Beit Hillel's Public Council.

Throughout the day, in-depth discussions were held about the future direction of Beit Hillel in light of the needs of Israeli society. There were lively round table discussions regarding the core issues addressed by Beit Hillel, including culture and society; Diaspora Jewry; Shabbat in Israel; legislation on religion and state; the status of women in society; conversion; Agunot and Get refusal; religious - secular relations; responding to developments in science and technology; clothing and modesty; the Jewish renewal movement; and more.

In addition, the conference included experiential tours of different areas of the North, in order to provide informal opportunities for interaction between members of the council with the rabbanim and rabbaniyot.

The conference's significance is its role in setting Beit Hillel's strategic agenda for the coming year; the priorities set at last year's conference have been systematically implemented over the course of the past year.



***Beit Hillel, a spiritual leadership organization comprised of more than 200 male and female scholars, is the leading voice of Centrist Orthodox Religious Zionism in Israel. Founded in 2012, Beit Hillel aspires to guide the Religious Zionist community and Israeli society overall in a moderate, inclusive and religiously-tolerant direction. Our core values are commitment to Halacha and democracy; promoting unity among all segments of Israeli society; advocating for women's empowerment; and supporting broad and open-minded education***

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