

RABBI ARIEH FRIEDNER

COMMON GROUND

UNLOCKING THE SECRET
OF JEWISH UNITY





Common Ground
Unlocking the Secret of Jewish Unity

Rabbi Ariele Friedner

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and Ashirus LLC in honor of Rabbi Ariele and in
thanks to Hashem for bringing us together.

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RABBI MORRIS WEINBERGER



קהילת אש קודש דוודמיר

הרב משה וויינבערגער
קרא ראשון

ב"ה

ר"ח שבט תשס"ד

"אהבת לראך כמוך" – רבי עקיבא אומר "זה כלל גדול בתורה." בן עזאי אומר "זה ספר תולדות אדם" –
"זה כלל גדול בתורה." (ספרא קדושים ד')

The sefer you are holding is an extraordinary work of love by an exceptional Talmid Chochom who is deeply in love with Am Yisroel. My dear friend, R. Arie'el Tzvi Friedner, has invited us to join him on his remarkable journey of self-discovery and a life of passionate avodas Hashem. "Common Ground" is at once a very personal journal and a wellspring of wisdom and guidance for our generation that is desperately in search of meaning, direction, and a "deeper and kinder relationship with one another." It is an educational, inspirational, and searingly honest manual for self-growth and Ahavas Yisroel.

הרב משה וויינבערגער

ארי'אל צבי פרידנער

RAV BINA'S HASKAMA TRANSLATION

To the honorable Rabbi Arie Friedner *shlita*,

I was most delighted to see your important work, "Common Ground". The topic that you are writing on is very close to my heart, and one of the necessary components for unity is the ability to recognize the unique aptitudes of others and to express gratitude to others. I grew up in a home where Rav Yerucham *zt"l*, the famous mashgiach of Mir, was a central feature of the house. Before any action undertaken by my father *zt"l*, his first consideration was: "What would Rav Yerucham *zt"l* say about this?" One of the things that my father *zt"l* was particular about was the obligation to be grateful. In his eyes this was on par with the commandment, "I am Hashem your God" (see *Seforno* *ibid*). He instilled into our heads and hearts the importance of gratitude, and told us that although Rav Yerucham *zt"l* would travel all over, he refused to sleep in other people's houses. He explained his custom by saying that if he slept in another person's house, he and his descendants would be obligated to show gratitude to that family for all generations, and that there was no way to be certain that his future descendants would develop this character trait fully. Let us see the language of Rabbi Chaim Vital *zy"a* in his *Sha'arei Kedusha* (*Chelek* 1, *Sha'ar* 2): "One's character traits are rooted in the lower part of the soul called the *nefesh hayesodit*, which is made-up of 4 components: inanimate, growing, living, and speaking. Each of these components contains both good and evil; as a result, this aspect of the soul contains both positive and negative character traits which are the foundation and root of the upper intellectual soul, upon which hang the 613 commandments of the Torah. This is why the character traits are not included in the 613 commandments, for they are essentially preparations for the fulfillment or neglect of the 613 commandments, seeing as the intellectual soul cannot fulfill the commandments through the 613 limbs of the body except through the means of the *nefesh ha'yasodit*, which is attached to the body itself. Accordingly, evil character traits are more difficult than transgressions themselves etc. Understand this, for, because they are the root and foundation, they are not counted among the 613 commandments that depend upon the intellectual soul. It turns out that one must be more careful about negative character traits than the performance of commandments whether positive or negative, for one who possesses positive character traits will easily fulfill all of the commandments." See the opening to *Meseches Avos* with the commentary of the *Meiri* (Chapter 1, *Mishna* 1, *d"h* *ve'lo amru*, and in Chapter 3, *Mishna* 16, *d"h* *vehu sheyarchik mimenu*), as well as *Noam Elimelech* (*Likkutei Shoshana* p. 449 *d"h* *ner mitzvah veTorah ohr*).

To conclude, it is a great joy and delight for me that you are writing on the important topic of the unity of the Jewish people. I remember that as a student in yeshiva you worked a great deal on your character development and you succeeded in this. You have merited to marry and to build a *bayit ne'eman b'Yisrael* together with your great wife *shetichyehi*, and to raise children in the ways of Torah and fear of heaven. My blessing is that you continue to rise in your level of Torah study and fear of heaven, and continue your great work for the sake of the Jewish people.

With Torah blessings,
Aharon Bina, Across from the Holy of Holies

RAV GROSSMAN'S HASKAMA TRANSLATION

Rav Dovid Grossman's Michtav Bracha

“Abundant peace to those who love Your Torah”
(*Tehillim* 119:165).

I have hereby come to recognize and appreciate the honorable and exceedingly decorated one, whose name is exalted, worthy of praise and acclaim, abundant in deeds, Torah study, charity, and kindness, Rav Arie'el Tzvi Friedner *shlit"a*, whose heart has been stirred to expound well, in order to arouse and reinforce our brothers', the Children of Israel, to strengthen themselves in love, brotherhood, and friendship—to become like one man with one heart. He has invested the best of his talents and drive to gather precious pearls, blossoms, and flowers from the statements of our Sages, stories and accounts regarding the exaltedness of the trait *ahavas Yisrael* (love of one's fellow Jew). He has called this work, “the fruit of his labors,” by a wonderful title, [“Common Ground”].

He trusts, with the help of Heaven, that his luminous book will fortify hearts to strengthen, with increased vigor, this *mitzvah*, which is essential for the survival of the Jewish People. And, thus, we pray and request, “Bless us our Father, all of us together as one.” May it be His will that his honor's wellsprings spread forth to give drink to those who are thirsty for Your kindness, in bodily health, exalted light, and everything good.

with Torah blessings,
HaRav Yitzchak Dovid Grossman

מכתב ברכה

ידידי רב אריה שליט'א,

למרות שלא קראתי כל הספר, ואיני ראוי לכתוב הסכמה לדבריך, אני רוצה לשתף אותך בהרגשות שלי כשקראתי חלקים מספרך היקר. כתוב בפסוק במשלי (כג:טו) בְּנֵי אִם־חֲכָם לִבָּךְ יִשְׁמַח לִבִּי גַם־אֲנִי: הספר שכתבת מלא דברים שהם בבחינת חכמת לבך--תרתי משמע - (א) פשוטו כמשמעו דבריך מלא חכמה בהדרכה איך לעלות בסולם של עבודת השם. .

(ב) זכית לשתף אחרים בחכמת לבך. מאז שהכרתי אותך בגיל צעיר היתה לבך מלאה באהבת התורה ואהבת ישראל. זכית לא רק לעלות במידות אלא זכית גם לבטא ולכתוב חכמת לבך. זה לא עבודה פשוטה וקלה. יש הרבה אנשים שלבם מלאים באהבת תורה ואהבת ישראל שלא מצליחים להביע ולבטא את זה בצורה נכונה.

שלמה המלך ממשיך ואומר (טז) וְתַעֲלֶזְנָה כְּלִיּוֹתַי בְּדַבֵּר שְׁפָתַיךָ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל: אבא או רב מגיע לדרגא של עליזה כשבן או תלמיד מביע ומבטא את חכמת לבו, בדבר שפתו מישרים. זכיתי לעלוז כשראיתי איך אתה מביע חכמת לבך בצורת מישרים-- שהספר נכתב ישר וברור, ומושך הלב לאהבת השם אהבת התורה ואהבת ישראל.

אני מסיים עם ברכה שתמשיך לעלות באהבת תורה ויראת שמים ואהבת ישראל ותשפוך מעיינותיך חוצה ותמשיך לדבר בשפתיך מישרים לאלתר חיים טובים ולשלום.

ידידך,

חיים נתן נטע אייזענשטיין

RAV EISENSTEIN'S HASKAMA TRANSLATION

Michtav Beracha —

Yedidi Rav Aryeh *shlit"z*,

Although I haven't read the entire manuscript and I feel unworthy of writing a formal approbation to your work, I want to convey to you my feelings upon reading parts of your precious sefer.

It is written in the verse in *Mishlei* (23:15), "My son, if your heart is wise; I too will be made glad." The sefer you have written is brimming with words that attest to the wisdom of your heart in two fundamental ways:

- 1) Literally, your words are filled with wisdom and advice for climbing the ladder of avodas Hashem (the service of G-d).
- 2) You have merited sharing the wisdom of your heart with others.

Ever since I met you at a young age, your heart was full of love for Torah and love for the Jewish People. You have succeeded not only at elevating your own character, but to express and transcribe the wisdom of your heart as well. This is no simple task. There are many people whose hearts are full of love of Torah and love of the Jewish People, but who fail to express and convey it correctly.

Shlomo HaMelech goes on to say "I will rejoice with all my heart when your lips speak upright things." A father or a teacher achieves a state of "rejoicing" when his son or student conveys the wisdom of his heart in an upright manner. Ineed I have merited to rejoice in seeing how you convey the wisdom of your heart in an upright manner—that your sefer is written honestly and clearly, and pulls the heart toward love of Hashem, love of Torah, and love of the Jewish People.

I conclude with a blessing that you will continue to advance in your love of Torah, your reverence for the Almighty, and your love of the Jewish People. May your wellsprings pour forth, may you continue to speak with upright lips, and may you be granted a life of good and peace.

your friend,
Chaim Eisenstein

Young Israel of Greater Cleveland

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Naphtali Burnstein

Rabbi

בס"ד

September 26, 2024

To Whom It May Concern:

Arieh Friedner and his wife, Elissa, are valued friends. They are very involved in our community, having been a great influence on the many individuals and families that have come in contact with them. Their care, love and devotion for Jews of all types is a sterling lesson in *bein adam l'chavairo*.

Arieh has undertaken to present a masterful work entitled "Common Ground." From what I have seen, it is obvious that it will be a great guide for those wanting to be proud Jews. It will help us all find the tools of how to love each and every Jew, and how to grow ourselves each and every day. Taking the lessons offered in this work to heart will elevate people both in their *bein adam l'makom* and their *bein adam l'chavairo*.

I wish Arieh and his family continued good health, nachas and continued aliyah in their lives of Avodas Hakodesh.

Rabbi Naphtali Burnstein

Rabbi Naphtali Burnstein

AFFILIATED WITH NATIONAL COUNCIL OF YOUNG ISRAEL



THE THREE PILLARS DEDICATION

I AM PROUD TO BE A JEW

Dedicated by Jennifer and Grant Dinner

I LOVE EVERY JEW

Dedicated by Arie'h Tzvi Friedner

I WILL TRY TO GROW EVERY DAY

Dedicated by Ilan and DL Friedner



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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

The Medrash explains that due to Haman's criticism that the Jewish People were "scattered and separate among the nations"¹ they never had more difficult days.² Indeed, at this time, the decree of their total destruction loomed over their heads. Clearly, for Haman's claim to have had such devastating consequences that Hashem would allow His children to be in danger of being destroyed, it must have been true to some extent. It can therefore be understood that the Jewish People's "scattered and separate" status was not a physical description of their standing, but a spiritual one; specifically, that to some degree, they did not get along with each other and did not act as a unified nation. For this reason, the Medrash continues, Esther, who understood the true nature of the situation, immediately summoned the Jewish People to "Go, gather all the Jews..."³ For, only by bringing the Jews together, would their salvation be guaranteed.⁴

1. *Esther* 3:8.

2. *Medrash Tehillim* 22:5.

3. *Esther* 4:16.

4. Rav Hutner explains that the unity formed as a result during this time served as a continuation and extension of the Jewish People's perfect unity when they received the Torah at Mount Sinai (*Pachad Yitzchak, Purim* 31).

We see from here the enormous danger the Jewish People face when we are scattered and separate. Equally, we see the tremendous miracles that Hashem does for us when we unite. Another Medrash explains that so great is peace and unity among the Jewish People that even when we are very far from following the path of Hashem, He still affords us tremendous protection, despite our personal and religious shortcomings.⁵

Common Ground, written by my dear friend Rabbi Arie Friedner is a deep, meaningful, and inspirational exploration of Jewish unity at its core. It was written after the onset of the devastating attack on the Jewish People on Simchas Torah, and its goal is simple — to restore true unity among the Jewish People. The book emphasizes three fundamental principles as the secret to Jewish unity: Jewish pride, *ahavas Yisrael*, and a strong desire for personal growth.

I can think of no one better to have written such a book than Rabbi Friedner —someone who embodies these qualities to such an exceptional degree. His passion for the Jewish People and his dedication in seeking the “solution” to our disunity is inspiring. Indeed, the insights contained in this book are tried and tested to cultivate within oneself a love for our fellow Jew, an inner pride, gratitude for being Jewish, and a desire to become a greater person.

It is my fervent *tefillah* that Rabbi Friedner’s dreams are realized with this book; and may the Jewish People come together once again with a love for Hashem, His Torah, and each other.

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick
ADIR PRESS

5. The Medrash relates that even when the nation is serving idols, if there is peace among them, Hashem will afford them full protection (Yalkut Shimoni, Nasso, תשי"א).

IN LOVING MEMORY OF KIM PENN

By Taylor Lavin and Brittany Penn

Our mom, Kim Penn, had a special way of making everyone feel like they were her best friend—whether they were her friends, the local butcher, our teachers, or the grocery sushi chef. Unfortunately, we lost our mom far too young, over a decade ago. Our mom loved and cherished our dad and us, and that we know without question. She imparted within us so many qualities that made the four of us the people and family that we are today. She taught us the importance of family, the importance of caring, the importance of sharing and showing up for each other, and the importance of being a Jew.

The two most important things to our mom (after us and our dad, of course) were children and Judaism. She was proud of keeping a Jewish home and committed to raising children who understood, embraced, and valued their Jewish heritage. As we walked to synagogue together as a family and saw her recite the Shema each night before bed during her treatment, she showed us how she valued and took comfort in her identity as a Jew. For these memories

and so many more that lift our spirits and warm our hearts, we are eternally grateful every day.

She would have loved the goal of this book, to motivate all Jews to connect with their Judaism and encourage all Jews to love other Jews, regardless of their Jewish identity. We are glad to be able to share her values and commitment to Judaism with you.

DECLARATION OF INTENT

כתב הרב מבוטשאטש זי"ע בכל יום בבקר יאמר זאת:
הריני מכון מעתה על כל פֿרט ופֿרט ממעשֵׁי ודבורי ומחשבותי שֶׁל כל היום
עד למחר בעת הזאת, לְשֵׁם יְחוד קוֹדֶשׁא בְּרִידָהּ הוּא וּשְׂכִינְתָּהּ בְּשֵׁם כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל
לְהַכְרִיעַ אֶת עַצְמִי
וְאֶת כָּל עַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְאֶת כָּל הָעוֹלָם
לְכַף זְכוּת:

The Rav from Buczacz, Rabbi Avraham David Wahrman,
may his merits protect us, wrote that one should say every
morning:

I hereby establish my intent from this very moment that
every nuance of my actions, my speech and my thoughts
for the entire day, until tomorrow at this time, will be for
the explicit purpose of demonstrating the unity and one-
ness of God in the name of all the Jewish people through:

Judging myself,
all the Jewish people
and the entire world,
toward the side of merit.



PREQUEL

We are responsible for the lives of forty Jewish teens.

Their safety. Their spiritual futures. We could change their lives forever...

This thought tortured me for months before the summer of 2012. It would be my first summer as a Bus Director for “The Jerusalem Journey” (TJJ), a premier program bringing Jewish teens from North America to Israel for four weeks.

Studies and basic observation show that more than any other age-group, teenagers are impacted greatly by their experiences. A month-long trip to anywhere in the world might be the one of the most influential experiences of a sixteen-year-old’s life. But a trip away from their families in a spiritually charged place like Israel has even higher stakes.

The purpose of the trip was to connect them with their Jewish Land, their Jewish people, and their Jewish identities. The task was daunting. Many of them had little to no Jewish educational background. How was I to make the most of this delicate opportunity? How could I empower them to live their lives as caring and passionate Jews after four weeks?

Our educational team had so much Jewish knowledge they wanted to impart to these teens. But we knew that if we didn't set aside a small number of most important messages, it might become too much to stick to in the long term. But there are so many important lessons. How could we possibly choose some to focus on less, so as to highlight others more strongly?

Under the pressure of the opportunity, our vision became clear. If we wanted to help young Jews connect to the deepest part of their Jewish identity, our messaging had to come from the deepest part of ourselves. As our Sages teach us, "Words that come from the heart, enter the heart." To make a lasting impact on the hearts of others, we had to first make sure we connected to our own.

The trip that summer and our approach to Jewish connection impacted many young Jewish minds and hearts in a very meaningful way. It led to many future summers and countless other experiences that continued to help Jewish teens think more deeply about their Jewish selves.

But it also became one of the most spiritually liberating experiences of my own life.

If we didn't believe what we were going to teach with the deepest part of who we were, then we wouldn't have the potential to impact the deepest part of the teens we hoped to inspire. This led myself and my team to dig deep and bring more light to the world than we thought we could.

The foundations we discovered in ourselves are the foundations of Judaism itself, and the years I've spent sharing and observing those messages have led to this book.

In writing, I have tried to share these ideas in a way that can share joy and inspiration. I do not know that any of these ideas are truly novel. They are all a part of the beautiful tradition of Torah that has been handed down to me,

and that I have eagerly grabbed in turn. Countless incredible teachers, scholars, authors, and speakers that I have merited to be near have shaped the ideas in this book.

Many of these ideas ring true to me so deeply that I may not properly remember who told me them the first time around and I may not have been able to give them due credit. When I do quote others, it's possible I have misquoted or misrepresented them. If there are mistakes, they are my own and not of those who I attempt to represent.

An aerial photograph of a stone wall, likely the West Bank Wall, with a gate. The wall is made of large, light-colored stone blocks. There are some small trees and bushes along the wall. The title "INTRODUCTION: MAKING UNITY PERMANENT" is overlaid on the image.

INTRODUCTION: MAKING UNITY PERMANENT

On October 7, 2023, Hamas terrorists broke through the security fence to Israel and conducted the most heinous atrocities to the Jewish people since the Holocaust. Not one day had witnessed more Jewish blood spilled to the earth since the death camps of Europe eighty years earlier. Hundreds more men, women, children, and elderly were captured and taken hostage by the cowardly beasts.

Then the Jewish community began to fight back.

As hundreds of millions of dollars streamed in for emergency aid from Jews across the world, the IDF sent hundreds of thousands of troops to prepare for battle on the front lines. And the soldiers, religious and non-religious alike, put on yarmulkes. Boys learning in *yeshivos* which strongly reject the idea of their students fighting in the army began to tie tzitzis¹ for soldiers. Non-kosher stores began the process

1. Fringes for four-cornered garments, a Biblical commandment.

of making their cooking utensils kosher so that they would be able to supply food to anyone who needed.

The government in Israel, whose various factions had been completely at odds with each other, specifically about religious issues, joined forces to form an emergency Unity Government. And the world of Jewry began to pray. Together. Somehow, this one act of evil and hatred by the hands of Hamas contained within it a spark that could jumpstart our nation to a place we hadn't been able to reach on our own. It was just as the Talmud tells us about Purim (*Megillah* 14a):

”וַיִּסַּר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת טַבַּעְתּוֹ”, אָמַר רַבִּי אֲבָא בַר כְּהֵנָא: גְּדוּלָּה הִסְרַת טַבַּעַת יוֹתֵר מֵאַרְבָּעִים וּשְׁמוֹנֶה נְבִיאִים וְשִׁבְעַת נְבִיאֹת שְׁנַתְּנָבְאוּ לָהֶן לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, שְׂכוּלָן לֹא הִחְזִירוּם לְמוּטָב, וְאֵילוּ הִסְרַת טַבַּעַת הִחְזִירָתָן לְמוּטָב.

“And the king [Achashverosh] removed his ring [from his hand]” (Esther 3:10). Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said: The removal of [Achashverosh's] ring [for the sealing of Haman's decree] was more effective than the forty-eight prophets and the seven prophetesses who prophesied on behalf of the Jewish people. As, they (the prophets, etc.) were all unable to return [the Jewish people] to the right way, but the removal of [Achashverosh's] ring returned them to the right way.

This spirit of unity and redemption was triggered by the horrible pain of loss from those who want to kill us all and drive us into the sea forever.

But as we have been forced to wonder over the years, why does it have to take such terrible tragedies to bring us together? Why can we not come together as one people on

our own? Do we need to be slaughtered to remember that we have a deep-rooted love for each other?

There is a good side to an emotional reaction. Our emotions have direct access to inspire change. Things that the Jewish people didn't know they could accomplish in our lifetime happened seemingly overnight. But there is a downside of changes that are inspired by emotions. They often do not last. When the original trigger moves further away in our rearview mirror, the energy to act upon that event dissipates along with it.

In contrast, a mindful and intentional decision can be difficult to conjure, but it contains the seeds for lasting change.

The power and purpose of an emotional stir is to galvanize change. The power of a truthful idea is to make sure the inspired change has legs to stand on for the long haul.

This book is the truthful idea for how we can make the change toward unity. Permanently.

This book is for anyone who feels less than complete if there are other Jews not included in their own heart. For those who want to believe in Jewish unity but struggle to find the language to explain what it really means.

This book is for all those out there who have been inspired by Judaism but have not yet been able to resolve certain parts of their lives with what seem to be Judaism's core. These are the Jews who want to be a more connected member of the Jewish people but are still incomplete with something they perhaps can't quite put their finger on.

This book is for any Jew who wants to remind him or herself how to love others and not use religion as an excuse to stay apart. For those who want to see other Jews as being as just as meaningful a piece to the whole of Judaism as they are, but haven't yet figured out how true it really is.

May your interest in reading this book be a *brachah* (blessing) that you find enough space in your heart to get closer to Judaism, together with all of the Jewish people.



MY TEFILLAH

FINDING THE LOST UNITY

I'll never forget the chazzan (cantor) from my hometown synagogue, Sons of Israel, in Cherry Hill, NJ, Rabbi Isaac Horowitz. I'll never forget his strong, yet agile voice. He could maintain the beauty of a melody even when projecting his *niggunim* to the back of the room. He could bring his voice to a still and soft hymn and still be heard perfectly.

One of my favorite parts of his prayers was when Chaz-zan Horowitz would pick up the normal tune and add an extra beat of energy, even if just for a few words. When he would do this, my heart would pick up its ears and listen for the deeper message he was trying to convey. One of those moments from the *Mussaf* prayer has remained so strong in my mind that I can hear his voice sing them every time I see them in the siddur in front of me.

וְקָרַב פְּזוּרֵינוּ מִבֵּין הַגּוֹיִם וְנִפְּוֹצוֹתֵינוּ כִּנְס מִרְכְּתֵי אֶרֶץ

*Draw in our scattered ones from among the nations,
and our dispersed ones, gather in from the ends of
the earth.*

This line has been a constant reminder to me that even when I'm in the confines of my own synagogue that feels like home, there are still Jews scattered and disconnected around the world. And until all the Jewish people is gathered together there is still work that needs to be done. If we are not united as a whole, there is still something missing in our very identity as a Jewish people.

But there is complexity in the drawing together of a splintered nation. To draw our people together, we must first diagnose the depth of our dispersal. A closer look at this line of prayer suggests that there are two elements of the closeness for which we pray.

1. **Draw in** our **scattered** ones from among the nations.
2. And our **dispersed** ones, **gather in** from the ends of the earth.

What is the difference between drawing in and gathering in? Between the scattered and the dispersed?

An answer can be found in the writings of the Piaetzne Rebbe, Rav Klonymous Kalman Shapiro. In 1939, the Piaetzne Rebbe sat in the Warsaw Ghetto with throngs of Jews pushed together from all across Poland. Removed from their homes, stripped of their possessions and their dignity, the Jews of the ghetto were fighting a battle of survival on every level.

Rav Shapiro wrote in his glorious work, *Aish Kodesh* (*Toldos*, 1939), that to be exiled from where one belongs is

an incredibly difficult experience. But so long as the extent of one's torment is simply a physical exile, one can still take solace in the fact that they still recognize their original location. They may not be physically where they belong, but they still have a home. They can still conjure up the thoughts of that place. They can even still belong there.

However, there is a deeper and darker sort of exile. It is possible to be lost from that original place and be left without the ability to recognize where one truly belongs. This person, with no memories of home, no longer belongs anywhere. How can one remain hopeful when the difficulties, pain, and suffering of life cause one to forget where they strive to return? "When anguish increases like at this time... like that cannot even be described, a person will internally lose recognition with themselves until they lose their identity entirely." This is the pain of being truly astray.

The Rebbe therefore explains that there are two parts to our future Redemption. There are Jews who have been dispersed throughout the four corners of the earth and they will one day be "gathered" and brought together to the place they have been calling home. There are also Jews who have lost their sense of where home is—and of who they are. These are the "scattered ones among the nations," and they, too, will become recognizable to themselves once again.

Today, thankfully, the physical exile is not as extreme as it has been in previous times.² In Israel too, there are more Jews living there today than there have been in thousands of years. However, we remain spread out and lost.

2. The Piazzetzne, in *Aish Kodesh*, made a similar comment when comparing the suffering of his time with the Egyptian Exile, but withdrew that a year later, feeling that the atrocities of the Nazis had surpassed anything that Egyptians had done. In the same vein, I wrote this line before October 7, 2023, and their aftermath. Who knows what we can continue to say about even our physical safety?

We remain seated in distinct sub-communities, each one further, both in distance and mindset, from the other. As individuals, can we truly say we are lost if we cannot find each other? We are not in one land, nor are we on the same page about the necessity of that requirement. We are not of one mind, either. Many of us do not even think it is possible to be so, *chas v'shalom*.

God above, how can we find ourselves as one people if we do not even know what we are looking for?

The tradition is that when a Jewish child begins to learn Talmud in school, they open with the section of that discusses the laws of returning lost objects (*Bava Metzia* 21b). We learn about the requirement of returning items to their owners, how to determine verifiable signs of ownership, and how to decide if a particular item may have been considered hopelessly lost by its owners. It is certainly an interesting subject, and perhaps that is one reason we start learning this subject with our young developing minds.

Or perhaps there is a deeper reason.

There are two general requirements that would activate the responsibility to return a lost item. The first is that the item must possess a distinguishable sign to verify ownership, and the second is a reasonable expectation that the owner would believe they might be able to retrieve it. Distinguishable signs include having left it in a particular place or having a specific mark on the object itself.

But there is an exception to this rule. A Torah scholar can be trusted to say that he recognizes the object as his own even with a lack of a distinguishable mark (*Bava Metzia* 23b). He is said to have *t'vius ayin*—an eye that recognizes his own.

This is the message that we must learn as soon as we begin to learn at all. *There is a way that even something indistinguishable is never lost.* We learn these sections of Talmud early

on with a melody that we hope will stick with us forever, as the tunes of our childhood surely stay with us as we grow old.

To all of us who have at least a part of ourselves that sometimes feels irreconcilably lost, there is still hope. If a Torah scholar can look at an object lost to the world and be trusted to say, “Yes, that is mine,” then there will surely be a day when God Himself will look at us and says, “Yes, you, with no signs at all. You are mine, too.”

You can feel exiled, and you can feel lost, but there is always hope. Let this seep into our souls so that we know to never give up. We can never give up on ourselves. We can never give up on each other.

There is absolutely no despair.

The Piazetzne Rebbe concludes:

אָבֵל הַגִּמְרָא אוֹמֶרֶת (קְדוּשֵׁין דָּף ב') בְּעַל אֲבֵדָה מְחֹזֵר אַחֵר
אֲבֵדָתוֹ, כִּי כְּשֶׁנֶּאֱבָדָה הָאֲבֵדָה לֹא נִרְאָה וְלֹא נִכְרַת מְחֹזֵר בְּעַל
הָאֲבֵדָה אַחֲרָיו לְמִצָּאָהּ לְהַגְבִּיחָהּ וּלְהַבִּיאָהּ אֵלָיו. וְהֵלֵא הַקֵּב"ה הוּא
בְּעַל הָאֲבֵדָה שְׁלֵנוֹ? לָכֵן בְּרַךְ יִצְחָק אֶת יַעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ, יְמֵן, וְלֹא רַק
בְּשִׁעָה שְׂאִישׁ הַיִּשְׂרָאֵלִי נִרְאָה וְנִכְרַת, רַק גַּם עַל הָאוֹבְדִים לֹא נִרְאָה
וְלֹא נִכְרַת וְיִחְזֹר וְיְמֵן, בְּעַל הָאֲבֵדָה יִחְזֹר עָלֵינוּ לְמִצּוֹא אוֹתָנוּ וְלְתֵן
לָנוּ כ"ט וְלְהַשִּׁיבֵנוּ אֵלָיו יְיָ וּלְגַאֲלָנוּ גְּאֻלָּה וּפְדוּת גּוֹפְנוּ וְנַפְשֵׁנוּ
בְּרַחֲמִים רַבִּים וְיִשׁוּעוֹת טוֹבוֹת.

But the Talmud says, “The owner of a lost object will pursue his lost object” (*Kiddushin* 2b) because when an object is lost, not to be seen or recognized, the owner will pursue after it to find it and bring it back to himself. And is the Holy One Blessed be He not the Owner of our state of being lost?... the Owner will therefore pursue us to find us and give us only good, and to return us to Him, to redeem us completely and to relieve our bodies and souls with great mercy and wonderful salvation.



THE CASE FOR UNITY

Dedicated by Rachel and Raffi Glickman in honor of the staff and TJers of Bus 5 2012 and 2013 who taught us the true meaning of Passionate Judaism! And to our dear friends and mentors Rabbi Arie and Elissa Friedner — we treasure your friendship and wisdom. May your dedication to klal Yisrael continue to be a zchus for your children and families.



DEPTH OF UNITY

JUDAISM ON ONE FOOT

“Rabbi,” a student once asked me, “I don’t understand. I was taught that the core lesson of the Torah is to ‘not do unto others as you would not want done to you.’ Come on. There are so many other rules of Judaism—how can that be the main lesson?”

The quote is from the response of the great Sage, Hillel, to an individual who desired to convert. The would-be convert had challenged Hillel to sum up the entire philosophy of Judaism “while standing on one foot.”

“Do not do unto others as you would not want done to you. The rest is commentary; go and learn it,” replied Hillel (*Shabbos* 31a).

Many are perturbed so deeply by this teaching of Hillel that they shrug it off as an exaggeration. Sure. No one would

question the significance of treating other people properly. But is it the *core* lesson of Judaism? Are we truly to see the rest of Torah as mere commentary to this idea?

There was a time that I connected very much to this question. But many experiences along my journey helped shape a better understanding.

THE MOUNTAIN OF LOVE

One such experience was while I was studying in Israel during my gap year before college. In the later months of that year abroad, I was made aware of a sort of festival that occurs on the Jewish holiday of Lag B'Omer. Set on the northern Israeli mountain of Meron, the event is the annual celebration of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai—the Rashbi—who is buried on that mountain.

On a neighboring mountain sits the holy city of Tzfas, whose name comes from the word “*litzfos*—to gaze.” Indeed, the city of Tzfas was built to house the myriad of followers who felt the constant need to gaze over at Meron to stay connected to the saintly Rashbi.

The Talmud explains (*Shabbos* 33b) that the Rashbi spent many years in a cave with his son studying Torah and praying as they hid from Roman persecution. The levels of spirituality that the pair achieved during their seclusion surpassed anything they could have achieved had they been part of normal civilization. The Rashbi would go on to author the Zohar, which would include mystical revelations of the Torah and empower much of the excitement in Judaism

to this day. Rebbi Shimon bar Yochai was responsible for unlocking the deepest secrets of the Torah—and Meron was where everyone was going to celebrate his revelations.

Intrigued, my friends and I went to great lengths to be a part of this unique experience. The number of buses that arrived from all over Israel were so great that we had to descend and walk another twenty minutes just to get toward the entrance. But we were not prepared for what we saw when we made it to the top of the mountain. Tens of thousands of Jews were dancing around blazing firepits. People everywhere were giving out free food and drink. There was music blasting from every direction. Book peddlers were capitalizing on the foot traffic of Jews who were interested in their mystically inclined works.

The holiness was palpable. I could instinctively feel that something about Meron on that day held a key to the deepest parts of Judaism.

Needing a break from the waves of beards and hats, I began to walk away from the crowds. From the edge of a hill amidst the darkness, someone called out my name. “Who knows me here?” I thought. I walked over and saw a friend from Cherry Hill! This was not a person I expected to see in Israel—and certainly not in Meron on Lag B’Omer.

He showed me that he had a tent pitched there on the side of the hill with his friends. As I peeked down the slope of the hill, my eyes widened. There were dozens of tents weaving through the trees. They had their own little bonfires, too. But unlike the wooden logs and oil burning behind us, their small hand-held bonfires were burning little piles of their own greenery. “Oh,” I realized... “That’s what they’re doing here!”

Flashing lights suddenly caught my eye from the bottom of the hill. As I leaned in to see more closely, I could hear Israeli dance music straight from the bars in Tel Aviv.

In that moment, the holiness of the place grabbed me. On that mountain there were fully outfitted chassidim, growth-oriented Americans, hillside hippies, and even modern Israeli techno lovers. How could it be that all these different people come together in any one place? And why was this the place?

It wasn't an accident. It was the very same depths of Torah revealed by the Rashbi that showed one of the deepest truths of the Jewish people: at our core, we are all intrinsically connected to each other.

THE ORIGINAL PREREQUISITE

It is with this in mind that Rashi points out to us that the Jewish people were unified when we received the Torah. The Torah does not say that the “Jewish people encamped—*vayachanu*” at the foot of Mount Sinai, but rather, “**He** camped—*vayichan*” (*Shemos* 19:2). Rashi explains the usage of the singular verb: “Like one person; with one heart.”³

3. The Lubavitcher Rebbe and others write that this concept explains a confusing part of the song, “*Dayeinu*,” from the Haggadah for Pesach. “*Dayeinu*—It Would Have Been Enough,” is a song that expresses our gratitude to God, not just for the redemption overall, but for every single step along the way. Hence, “If He [God] had brought us out of Egypt, and not brought about judgments to [the Egyptians]—it would have been enough!” It certainly would have! However, one line doesn't seem to fit. “If He had brought us to Mount Sinai, and not given us the Torah—it would have been enough!” What value is there in going to a

Unity wasn't just a nice way to usher in the era of Torah as a guide for the Jewish people; it was an intrinsic necessity. Without the unity of the Jews, the Torah cannot be completely absorbed into our people. The Kli Yakar points this out clearly:

וְנִרְאָה שְׁכָל זֶה רֵאִיָּה שֶׁלֹּא הָיוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל רְאוּיִן לְקַבֵּל הַתּוֹרָה עַד
אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה שְׁלוֹם בֵּינֵיהֶם

And it seems that all of this is proving to us that the Jewish people are not worthy of receiving the Torah until there is peace among them.⁴

As it turns out, focusing on our relationships with others isn't a mere footnote in the Torah, nor is it just another mitzvah. It is the prerequisite for everything. Without peace between the Jewish people, the rest of the Torah concepts have no legs to stand on.

The rest is commentary. And like commentary without its original source, Torah without unity is lacking the full picture that it's trying to project.

This is no small statement. But it gets even bigger. The Zohar, the primary text of Jewish mysticism, written by Reb-bi Shimon bar Yochai, teaches us that the Torah's truest introduction was not at Mount Sinai at all. It preempted that event. It preempted the Jews and Mount Sinai itself.

random mountain if that mountain did not become the place of receiving the Torah? The answer is that it was no ordinary encampment at Mount Sinai. It was the place we achieved complete unity!

4. Continued: "All of the paths of Torah are paths of peace. And the result of separation of hearts, where one forbids something and another permits it, is that the Torah becomes two [distinct] Torahs. That is why the [previous] verse specifies that that it was in 'the third month on this day that they came to the Sinai wilderness.' It is teaching that this month [of Sivan], which has the astrological sign of twins, is instructing us about attachment and love, that together [the Jews] should be perfectly connected to each other like twins."

The Torah was the very blueprint that God used to create the very world we live in.

קוֹדֶשׁא בְּרִיד הוּא אֶסְתַּכַּל בְּאוֹרֵי־תָא, וּבָרָא עֲלֵמָא.

The Holy One, Blessed be He, gazed into the Torah and created the world (Zohar 2:161).

As the Midrash describes: “The architect does not build an edifice from his own knowledge, but rather he has scrolls and books in order to know how to make rooms and doorways. So too, God gazed into the Torah and created the world” (*Bereishis Rabbah* 1).

What does the Midrash mean when it says that the architect uses the scrolls and not his own knowledge? Does the architect himself not design the very blueprint he uses to build the rooms and doorways? Is this anything different from using his own knowledge?

Perhaps we can say that while knowledge may be hidden in the mind of the architect, the blueprint is available for all to see—and even to hold himself accountable to assure that everything that he creates follows the plan.

The Baal Shem Tov brings to light the nature of Torah as a blueprint designed with the Jewish people, themselves. “What is the Torah? It is the souls of the Jewish people. Because ‘ישראל, Yisrael—the Jewish people’ is an acronym for ‘יש ששים רבוא אותיות לתורה, yesh shishim ribo osios laTorah—there are six hundred thousand letters in the Torah’” (*Keter Shem Tov* 2:28).⁵

5. A challenge that arises from this concept is that we seem to be making an exact parallel between non-exact accountings. There are only 304,800 letters in the Torah, not 600,000. And as far as souls are concerned, there are many more than 600,000 Jews!

Many answers have been given to resolve this problem. Regarding the letters in the Torah, one answer is that many letters in the Torah are made up of more

This number 600,000 represents both the letters in the Torah and the souls of the Jewish people.⁶ Just as a Torah becomes invalid for use if it is missing even one letter,⁷ so too is the Jewish people inherently incomplete if every Jew is not somehow included.

This was God's core desire that He laid out when He created the universe. He looked in the Torah and found the 600,000 souls there on whom the Creation would depend. Like an architect with a precious goal, who constantly checks his plans to make sure that his masterpiece is built to plan, so did God write the blueprint for a masterpiece that would include all the Jewish people in harmony.

The universe itself is an extension of that blueprint of 600,000 unified Jewish souls and letters of the Torah. The entire world is imbued with the constant potential for us to reach out to one another and become a truly connected people.

than one letter. An “*alef*,” for example, is made up of a “*vav*” and two “*yuds*.” Another answer, from Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi, is that the counting of letters includes many vowels that are enunciated but not written down.

Regarding the number of Jewish souls, one answer is that 600,000 is the number of “root” Jewish souls, each one comprising many other individual souls. A more intricate grasp of this mystical concept is outside the scope of this work, but can be found in “*Sha’ar Hagilgulim*—The Gate of Reincarnation,” by Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, the Arizal.

6. According to the Moroccan mystic, Rabbeinu Yaakov Abuchatzzeira, “The Jewish people did not leave Egypt until they numbered six hundred thousand, in order that each soul would be ‘supported’ by one letter in the Torah” (*Pituchei Chotam, Ki Tisa*).

7. See *Mishnah Berurah, Orach Chaim* 143. In *Parashas Ki Tisa*, the Torah writes, “When you take a census of the Jewish people...” The *Pri Tzaddik* explains, in *Parashas Shekalim*, “If even one letter is missing from the Torah it would be invalid, even if it were missing the point of the *yud* (the smallest letter). This is why each Jew was counted.”

This is the core of Torah. This is the depth of the mystic teachings brought to clarity through the Rashbi. This is everything on one foot. Now, we must go and learn it.



DEFINITIONS AND DIVISIONS

GETTING THE WRONG MESSAGE

When I was in middle school, I visited the local Orthodox synagogue with my friends on a class trip. Most of my classmates were non-Orthodox Jews at Harry B. Kellman Academy. The class of less than thirty students sat quietly and listened to the rabbi as he explained the outlook of Orthodox Judaism: “We believe that God gave us the Torah. We believe that Moses was taught the laws that we have to follow.” This lecture was one part of a series from community leaders from around Cherry Hill, NJ.

If my memory serves correctly, I was sitting in the front row, on the right side. But I can’t be too sure. That’s also

where I sat every Shabbos (Sabbath), so in any case that viewpoint has been etched into my memory. Only one of my classmates besides myself had membership at that Orthodox synagogue—or, for that matter, at any Orthodox synagogue. Most of the rest belonged to Reform, Conservative, or Reconstructionist synagogues. Some certainly didn't attend synagogue at all.

The intent of the teacher who put this series together was probably to help the students grasp the complexity of the Jewish world. It seems that she wanted us to have the knowledge to find our place within Judaism and ultimately live meaningful Jewish lives. Perhaps, she just wanted us to be aware of the vibrant and meaningful tapestry of Jewish perspectives. Either way, it was a valiant effort.

But I don't think the teacher who put the program together intended the message I took away from it. According to what I heard, Orthodox Judaism was the branch of Judaism that is least willing to modernize their practice when the world changes. Reform Judaism is completely comfortable changing with the world's latest trends, while Conservative Judaism is somewhere in the middle.

Yes, a middle-school level oversimplification. Perhaps some of my takeaways were completely wrong. But sadly, there was a much more subtle and disastrous perception about the Jewish people that started to build within me from those conversations.

The ominous reality that I began to construct was that the Jewish people are not all part of "one group." Not at all. We are different groups of people who do not all believe the same thing. We are not one.

It didn't seem sad at the time—it was just my perception of the Jewish reality. In time, I would learn that those

perceptions of disunity may be closer to reality than they should be.

DANGER OF DEFINITIONS

Definitions create divisions and barriers. This is not a destructive concept. Being able to define something and put it in a box allows us to engage with the world in a productive way.

If you were to step onto a basketball court and discover a basketball and soccer ball, it might help you to know which ball was intended for which sport. A basketball has better grip for your hands to dribble it and shoot it at the hoop ten feet in the air. A soccer ball is lighter and has more give for your feet to kick. I've never tried playing soccer with a basketball, but I've tried playing basketball with a soccer ball—and it doesn't work very well.

The stakes for this division are not very high. The barriers created by defining a ball for its sport are limited to which balls are left in the equipment room when others are used. When you're done playing, they can all go back together.

But sometimes the barriers created by divisions are much stronger.

In Israel, a basketball court might be used more often for soccer than for basketball. That's why it wasn't so surprising to see a group of Israelis playing soccer when my friends and I arrived at Gan Pa'am on one Saturday night with basketballs under our arms. This was a problem—with only two

courts left to share between the basketball players instead of three, that meant longer to wait for our turn.

We might have had more patience, but they were Arab Israelis—not Jews.

There was civility for a while, but eventually, the differences between who we were impacted our inability to overlook the differences in the sports that we were playing. A fight broke out. What looked like fifteen Arabs became fifty as their friends joined from other parts of the park. With dozens of Jews and Arabs pushing and yelling at each other, my friends and I decided it was time to leave.

Why were we not able to take turns patiently that night as we had on previous nights? Was it because they were Arab? Was it because they were playing soccer on a court designed for basketball? What if it had been Jews using that court for soccer? Would we have had all the patience we needed despite not having enough space for everyone who wanted to play basketball?

Definitions always create barriers... by definition. And sometimes those barriers are there for good reason. But sometimes they lead to unfortunate outcomes. The question we must ask ourselves is what barriers are created within the Jewish community by the definitions we hold onto?

BREAKING OUT OF ADJECTIVAL JUDAISM

In *One People?*, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, sets a course toward Jewish unity by attempting to understand the source of our disunity. In outlining our conflicts and their causes,

he describes how the modern urge for unique self-expression has influenced the way we define ourselves as Jews (pp. 21-22):

The most striking manifestation of what has changed is that it is no longer possible to be a Jew tout court. The noun, to convey anything at all, now needs to be qualified by an adjective, perhaps several. There are Orthodox, Reform, Conservative, Liberal, Reconstructionist, and secular Jews. There are Israeli and Diaspora Jews, Zionists and non-Zionists. Each label is further subdivided. Zionists are religious or secular. Religious Zionists are messianic or pragmatic. And so on. Jewish existence has become adjectival existence. There is no longer a common content to being a Jew as such, whether in behavior or belief.

Today, more than ever, Jews who identify as Jewish at all do so mostly within their adjective of choice. These definitions have become distinctions that put all of us in enough of a silo to take away from feeling connected to the whole. We have devolved into a society that has taken the energy of individualism and mistakenly used it to construct boundaries between one another.

When I heard those speeches in my youth from leaders around the community, these distinctions and barriers were planted in my mind. I began to expect that these divisions were significant enough to make us part of separate groups. Then, as I grew older, I watched our sub-communities interact with each other—or not interact with each other—and

evolve on their separate paths. Those early considerations became solidified. It became clear: we really are different.⁸

If we are taught that our own outlook of Judaism is true and our beliefs and convictions are crafted through that outlook, then of course everyone else has to be wrong. How can we both be right? How can we both live on the same side of barriers of truth?

For this question to be answered, we must look for, in the words of Rabbi Sacks, the “common content to being to a Jew as such.” We need to find a definition of Judaism that is true enough that the barriers we erect surround all of us together and do not separate us. We need to somehow find common ground.

HOW PLEASANT TO BE TOGETHER

But how do we create unity within a group of so many voices and differences of opinion? One thing is clear—we are not going to be able to remove our much-loved adjectives that we have attached to the word “Jew.” Our self-definitions are too dear to us to rip off like a band-aid.

The first step is determination to find our common ground. Unity means many things, but at the core, it is an

8. My outlook on Judaism at that time was that there were two groups of Jews. On the one hand, there were Jews like me. I called these “Normal Jews.” This type of Jew values their Judaism and perhaps has some ritual and cultural practice that they adhere to but remain completely in charge of all their life decisions. The other type of Jew was the “Extreme Jew.” This included all types of Orthodox Jews, all of whom had gone too far in letting an old religion take over their lives.

understanding that you and I are together in a shared vision. Dovid Hamelech (King David) wrote in *Tehillim* (Psalms, Chap. 133), “How good and how pleasant it is that brothers dwell together.” More precisely, the verse translates as, “How good and how pleasant is it that brothers dwell (*sheves achim*) and, moreover, they are together (*gam yachad*).”

It is not enough that you and I are both Jews, both brothers. We must be brothers *and also* see each other as being a part of the same unit. If you and I cannot have a shared vision, how can we even begin?

You may consider yourself Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, or anything like that. But in truth, those are the names of denominations, movements, and synagogues. Are you a synagogue? No. You are a Jew.

So, you may keep your adjective if you must—but open up your heart to a deeper reality. There is something about these different Jews that is shared with every other Jew. That is what we must be determined to find. And we must start by caring to find it.



PASSIONATE JUDAISM

STARTING SOMEWHERE

“So, you don’t believe that he was the Messiah. But my family does. Can’t that just be two different ways of seeing Judaism?”

I felt bad for Daniel. He didn’t deserve to feel sad about what I was sharing with him about Judaism and how what he had been brought up to believe wasn’t true. But after knowing him for a couple of years, I felt comfortable softly sharing why there has to be some framework for Judaism.

I shared with him the following parable: Imagine getting on a basketball court in the middle of a game. Imagine taking the ball that’s passed to you and kicking it into the

stands. As fun as it may be, no one would call that a “basketball move.” But why not? Isn’t it something you can do with a basketball? Isn’t one of the main goals of basketball to have fun? And yet, if a professional would try this during a game, the other team would be rewarded the ball, and he would probably be kicked out of the game. More importantly, anyone who enjoys or appreciates any sport can tell you that the rules surrounding the game create the game itself. The beauty of any sport is that there is a particular way to play within the confines of the rules that mold it.

If Judaism exists in any serious way, it must have some sort of definition. It must have rules. Otherwise, it is nothing. A sport without rules is not a sport at all.

That doesn’t mean that it can’t be fun to go to recess as a kid with dozens of kids running around and throwing all sorts of sports equipment. But there’s a reason why that kind of activity doesn’t evolve into a sports league for adults.⁹

To galvanize our people, we need a working definition. Unity cannot be created out of chaos. Yet, this definition must be broad enough to include more variance in Jewish connection than we have recently thought possible. As Seymour Kapelowitz told me when he was the Director of the Jewish Education Center of Cleveland, “One should keep his mind as open as a parachute.” Open enough to allow one to land safely on the ground. But closed enough to not allow the air escape through the canopy and leave one spiraling out of control.

9. Indeed, the rules of Judaism are not arbitrary, like the rules of football or some other sport. The outline of Judaism is intrinsic—but there is significance first in considering the value of rules even in an arbitrary context.

INESCAPABLE SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality must be at the heart of Judaism. This means that our approach must include something of a Divine spark if it is to be a religion that can include all Jewish people. This must be the case because our physical world does not contain a true unifying element. Unity without spirituality simply doesn't exist.

While many Jews can attest to shared values of charity, social justice, the dignity of every individual, and so on, these cannot be the center point of our unified vision if they are not Divinely inspired. This is because unity, at its core, is something that can only exist when it is anchored in pure spirituality.

Let us illustrate the concept with an analysis of one of the paramount stories in the Torah about our great-grandfather Avraham. We are told that Avraham is eagerly hoping to find guests that he can greet into his tent (*Bereishis* 18:1). Three guests cross his gaze, and he ushers them in to pamper them with delicacies.

These three desert guests turn out to be angels, sent to Avraham to fulfill three specific tasks. One of them was sent to cure Avraham from his recent circumcision just days prior. A second angel was to inform him that he would soon father a child with his wife Sarah despite their old age, and the third was sent to journey on and overturn the city of Sodom (Rashi).

After Avraham is healed and receives the message of his eventual son, the Torah relates that two of the angels continued toward Sodom (19:1). But where did the third one go? The Midrash explains that angels can only exist

for one task. Once that task is fulfilled, they no longer have an existence.¹⁰

One way to understand this is that an angel—by definition—is a mission. Once a mission has been completed, it has no active continuance; it exists only as a memory. So, when one angel fulfilled its mission by informing Sarah about her impending motherhood, it subsequently disappeared.

But why do angels operate in this fashion? What does this mean? Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan writes a profound insight into the limitations of physicality in *Jerusalem: The Eye of the Universe* (p. 82):

In the physical realm, there is a concept of physical space; while in the spiritual, this concept is totally absent. All that exists in the spiritual realm is conceptual space. Two things that are similar are said to be close, while things that are different are said to be far from one another. While in the physical world it is possible to push two different things together, this is impossible in the spiritual realm... therefore, if an angel had two missions, by definition it would become two angels. On the other hand, if two angels had the same mission, there could be no physical space separating them, and, by definition, they would be a single angel.

10. One might think that only one angel should have continued toward Sodom, since the other two angels had already completed their missions of healing Avraham and telling him of his eventual son. Rav Amos Luban teaches that healing Avraham and saving Lot from the destruction of Sodom were both part of one unified larger mission: to save and heal the Jewish people themselves. Lot would eventually father Moav, the progenitor of the nation that would carry the same name. From Moav would emerge the Jewish convert, Ruth, the ancestor of Dovid Hamelech, who will eventually lead to Mashiach.

According to Rabbi Kaplan, the only way to true unity is to bring things to the conceptual center point. Therefore, our mission in this physical world is to bridge the gap of our distinctions and create unity by focusing specifically on our spiritual anchors. Because spirituality is the source of unity itself.¹¹

THE THREE PILLARS

The ground rules are set. To reach unity, we need real common ground. That common ground needs to have a framework, and that framework must be founded in spirituality. At the same time, we cannot remove the need for every individual to have their own authentic relationship with God and with Judaism.

This framework is called Passionate Judaism.

Passionate Judaism is a new adjective that has space enough for everyone. You don't have to change who you are to be a Passionate Jew. Passionate Judaism includes just

11. The Holy *Shlah* writes that all unity in physical terms is only a parable for true unity which takes place on a spiritual plane. You and I, for example, can never truly share a piece of cake. Because once we split the piece of cake in half, we are actually enjoying our own unique and separate pieces of cake. That's almost sharing; but not truly. It is just enough unity for us to understand that a deeper unity can exist if only we can reach for it.

Perhaps this explains a small anomaly in the Hebrew language. "Three apples" in Hebrew is "*shloshah tapuchim*" and "two apples" is "*shnei tapuchim*," but "one apple" is "*tapuach echad*." The center of attention with any number of apples may be the apples, but the center of attention with one apple is the concept of oneness itself.

three core pillars that can apply to every single Jew and are malleable enough for every person to be who they truly are.

Pillar 1: I am proud to be a Jew.

Pillar 2: I love every Jew.

Pillar 3: I will try to grow every day.

At the center, of course, is love. How could we be unified without loving each other? But, as you will see, it is difficult to truly love other people and their Jewishness if you are not intimately aware of the depth of the potential for the love that exists for you right now as you are. This is what it means to be proud to be a Jew; it means to find the endlessly fulfilling connection to your own Jewish self—and the uniqueness of your individuality.

As for the third pillar, you may notice that the mandate for continuous growth calls only for “trying.” That’s because growth is not easy—and is not even always necessary. But striving to grow is necessary. When you are empowered with the knowledge and understanding of where growth fits into the overall picture, you will be better suited to create your own path and understand the path of others.

On the other hand, as for loving every Jew—do, or do not; there is no trying. How to make that a reality is not easy, but it is achievable. And it’s oh, so crucial. For us to be unified, there is simply no other way.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This model of Passionate Judaism is a comprehensive approach to what Judaism could look like for everyone. Unless this is your true starting point in Judaism, not everything that you read in this book is going to be a complete novelty to you.

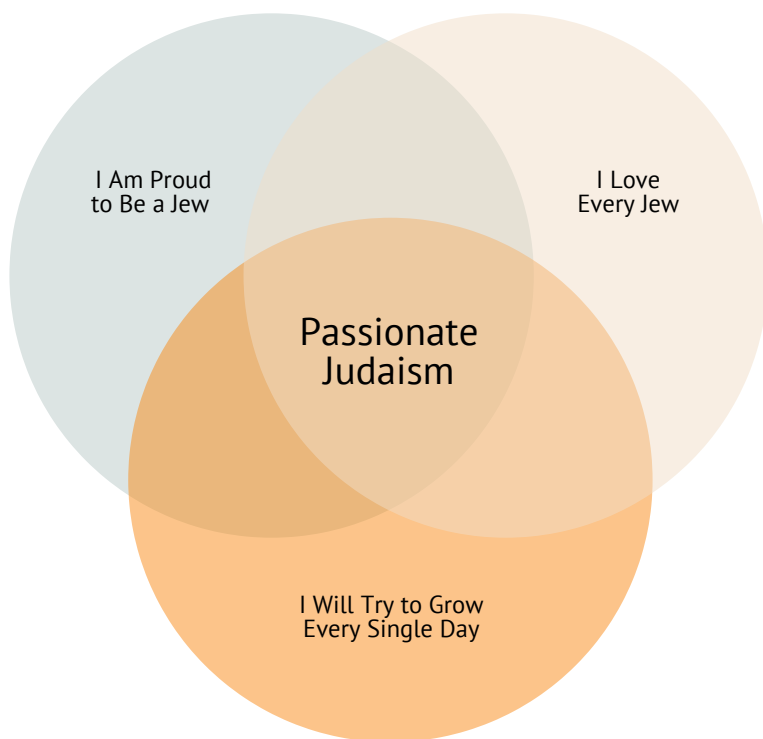
To get the most out of this book, make a short list in your mind of a few different kinds of Jewish people in your life:


1. Someone with whom you don't agree.
2. Someone with whom you don't get along.
3. Someone that relies on you to learn more.

Some chapters that you read may help you see something differently that makes your own personal connection Judaism seem more meaningful. Other chapters might cause you to consider that someone on your list is more connected to Judaism than you might originally have considered. And other chapters may simply give you a different type of language you can use to communicate things you already wanted to share.

In other words, read this book with all the Jewish people in your heart.

At the end of each chapter, a poetic summary will wrap up its core message. This will serve as a reminder of what to take with you, and how it all weaves together.





PILLAR 1:

I AM PROUD TO BE A JEW

*Dedicated by Jennifer and Grant Dinner in honor of Elissa
and Arie Friedner's boundless inspiration. And in the merit
of the proud Jews massacred on Simchas Torah, 5784.*

IF EVERY DAY COUNTS, *So should every Jew.*

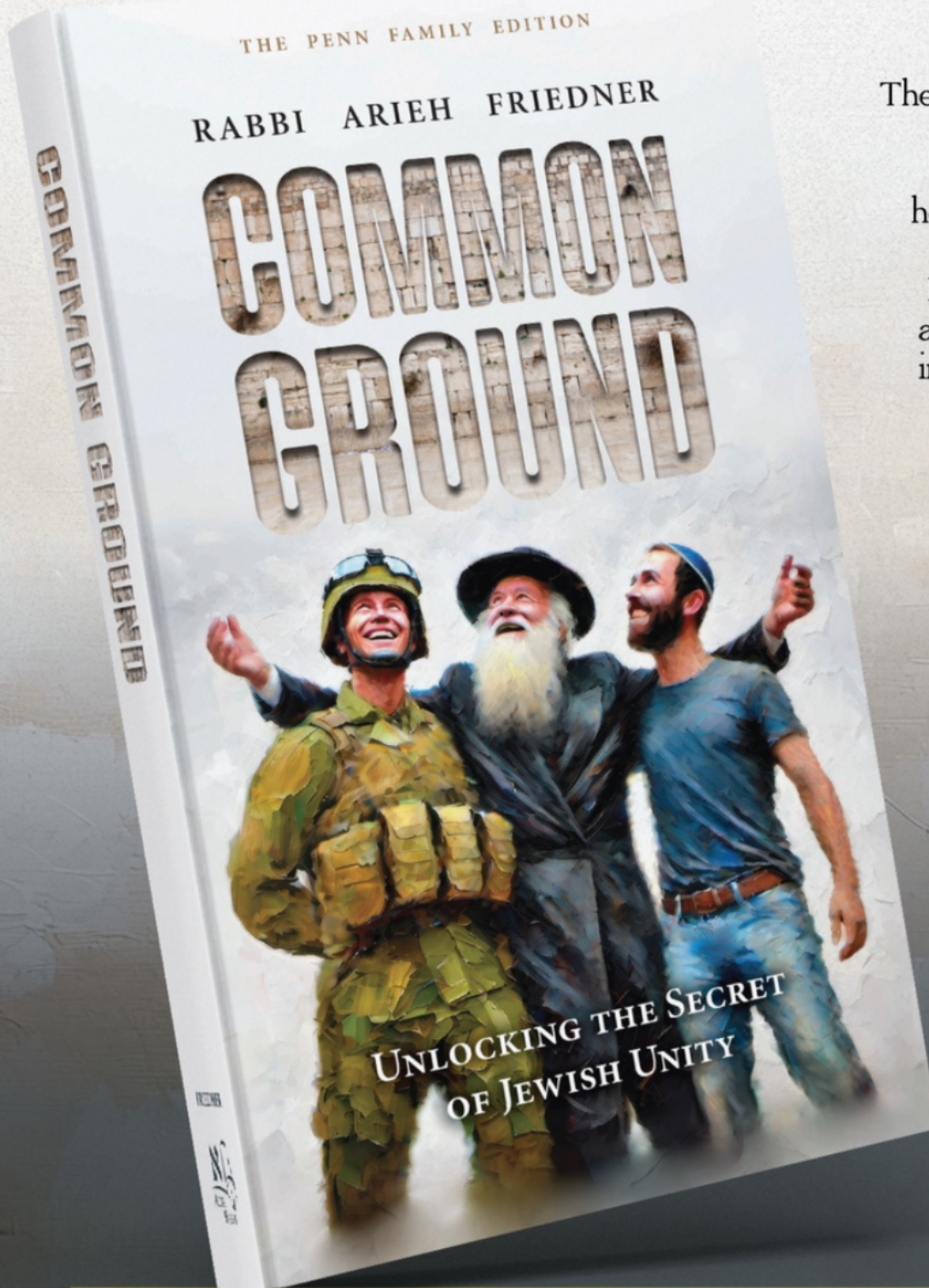
SEFIRAS
HAOMER
5785

The days of Sefira remind us of the power—and the consequences—of how we treat each other.

Common Ground by Rabbi Ariele Friedner is an eye-opening journey into the heart of Jewish unity: why we need it, what holds us back, and how we can build it for generations to come.

*Before
Lag BaOmer.
Before
Shavuot.*

Let's commit to something greater - together.



FIND COMMON GROUND. WWW.COMMONGROUNDMISSION.COM