



"The world is judged in goodness"

"בטוב העולם נידון"

רבי עקיבא - Rabbi Akiva

Faces of the Israel Reform Movement:
A Collection of Inspiration and Stories for
the High Holidays

Elul and the High Holidays, 2023
חודש אלול וחגי תשרי, תשפ"ד





We are pleased to share this resource collection which was especially created as stories of the Israel Reform Movement’s programs and impact, for you to share with your congregations in your High Holiday sermons and programming.

It gives us great pride and strength to know that on the holiest of Jewish holidays, you have brought Israel and the IMPJ into your hearts and prayers, this year more than ever.

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Dear Friends,

There are so many reasons to be proud of our Israeli Reform Movement. Over the last decade our Rabbis and community leaders have vastly increased their impact on Israeli society in so many ways.

Now our movement is engaged in the fight to preserve Israel's democracy by playing an active role in the ongoing protests every week for the last six months under the banner "In the name of Judaism we will defend democracy." Across the generations, Israeli Reform Jews are engaged in the patriotic struggle for the Israel we believe in – a Jewish, democratic nation that insures the rights and freedoms of all its citizens. Now, more than ever, Israel needs Reform Judaism, and our Israeli Reform Movement needs our support and partnership.

This packet contains inspiring stories of our Israeli movement's work for you to share with your communities in the Diaspora. These profiles put a human face to the statistics that chronicle our growth. Thank you for all you have done, and for all you will yet do to redeem Zion through justice. Together, we will go from strength to strength in the new year.

L'shanah tovah,

Rabbi Arnie Gluck
Chair, Friends of the IMPJ



"סתיו יהודי בארץ אבותי..."
"Jewish autumn in the land of my ancestors..."

From the poem Jewish Autumn by Avraham Chalfii

Dear family, the leaders of Reform congregations in the Diaspora,

I am proud to share with you these inspiring stories from our movement as the month Elul and the holidays of Tishrei set in.

This past year has forced all of us to recalculate our route, reset some of our thoughts and actions, and take stock of ourselves – *cheshbon nefesh* – as individuals and as a society. We found ourselves, marching shoulder to shoulder in the streets of many Israeli cities, with cries of, "In the name of Judaism, we will defend democracy", and chants and whistles that sounded like a *shofar* in our ears, coming to bring down the walls of Jericho - or at least the walls of the coalition's opacity while it tried to pass more and more laws that weakened the system of checks and balances and wore away at the separation of authorities in the State of Israel.

In the beginning of Av, we cried out with screams and tears of pain as the vote in the Knesset on the cancellation of the reasonableness clause passed. And on the 9th of Av we gathered to mourn the destruction of the Temples alongside great anxiety for the future of the State of Israel and grief for the loss of unity and solidarity in Israeli society.

The month of Elul is a time of mercy and forgiveness and, immediately after that, the holidays in Tishrei come with excitement, renewal and spirits of hope and change.

Despite all the worries and exhaustion of a long, hot and sad summer, as autumn nears, a refreshing and encouraging wind begins to blow. And with it, a spirit that breathes hope into us and reminds us that we have strengthened ourselves in so many areas: we are the only Jewish organization among the pluralist organizations that joined the protest against the legal coup; we increased our presence in the Israeli public sphere as more and more Israeli men and women identify with our actions and values; we held online webinars with our friends around the world to tell our stories and strengthen our partnerships with you; we won historic rulings led by the Israel Religious Action Center; we renewed the face of our summer camp, Havaya, and used the campus of Sde Boker to hundreds of campers and counselors from our Noar Telem leadership track; we are opening our doors to another Bayit Bakehila independent residence for young adults living with disabilities in partnership with Kehillat Yozma, the Reform congregation in Modiin; we continued to grow our young adult movement, Tlamim, doubling their activities and recreational and cultural programs. >>



I am proud and excited to say that now, more than ever, our communities serve as a place of comfort, hope and refuge for many Israelis.

According to all the predictions, the year of 5784 will continue to be a dramatic year for Israeli society and for our Movement. With your help, we will continue to work on changing Israeli society for the better in the directions of strengthening democracy and liberal Judaism, out of a shared responsibility and commitment to our country, to its inhabitants, and to the Jewish people. What brings us together - our spiritual and moral values - inspires us to never lose hope.

Our wish is for a year of strength, encouragement, focus, and commitment to changing the face of Israeli society for the better for our country, congregations, members, rabbis, leaders and partners.

"תכלה שנה וקללותיה, תחל שנה וברכותיה"
"May the year and its curses end, May the year and its blessings begin"
Talmud Bavli

Yours in commitment and warm friendship,


Anna Kislanski
CEO, IMPJ



Dear Rabbis,

The High Holidays are a time for Cheshbon Nefesh (soul searching), and they are also a time of awakening and an invitation to rise up, as we see in the famous piyyut, "Ben Adam Ma Lecha Nirdam" (From the book of Jonah, when the ships captain says to Jonah: "How can you sleep?") and from the song "This is the Time to Awaken" by Hadag Nachash.

During the last seven months, an amazing awakening has swept over the liberal public in Israel. Opposite the political storm that has been sweeping the country since January 2023, so many people have come up from the depths of apathy to the streets and the squares, sounding a clear call against the danger that Israel is disintegrating.

Our feeling, in the Reform Movement, is a strong feeling of shared destiny with hundreds of thousands of Israeli men and women who have been filling the streets for months, calling for equality, tolerance, and love for humanity, in the face of the waves of incitement, hatred, and extremism. We have also been joined by many of our partners and friends from abroad who are sounding a loving and caring voice for a Jewish and Democratic Israel.

As people who have been working for so many years in the field of equality for liberal Judaism, for women, Arabs and LGBTQ+ people, the fact that we now have so many partners in raising the cry against injustice and injustice – men and women who are committed to making this country a better place – inspires us with hope and faith in our ability to change. >>

Orly Erez-Likhovski
Executive Director, IRAC



The Storm / Eli Eliyahu

Rise up, man, get up. Why are you asleep
In the bottom of the ship, as if nothing?
Can't you hear the sea
Is raging with no peace? Wake up, get up,
Rise up, someone must be to blame.
You pretend to be a poet,
Everything here's about to break up.
Get up! Quick, we have to pick straws.
We have to throw out
Someone.
Get up!

.....

Time to Wake Up / Hadag Nahash

It's time to wake up, the house is falling
apart
Let's come out of our holes together,
enough of hiding
Raise your hands, open your mouth
Against all of us there's no way they'll hold
on for long.

Human being, why do you slumber, come and present words of petition

Translation of the Sephardic Piyut, בן אדם מה לך נרדמים

Arise, it is time to awake
To look up, up
Don't stop dreaming when you're awake
It isn't just for the night, the night
Say what burdens your heart, come tell a
little
What are you afraid of, let go, don't forget
that you're a...
Human being, why do you slumber, come
and present words of petition
Pour out conversation, seek forgiveness,
from the Master of Masters
Arise, it is time to gaze upon
Your soul deep within, deep within
Sometimes it is better to just stop
In order to look ahead, ahead
Always remember that there's someone
who loves you, and don't forget
That's there a Father above you that keeps
you safe, only you because you're a...
Human being, why do you slumber, come
and present words of petition
Pour out conversation, seek forgiveness,
from the Master of Masters.

Faces of the Israel Reform Movement

In the name of Judaism we will protect democracy!

In spite of the situation and the complexity of Israeli reality, the Israeli Reform Movement continues to run programs, train leaders, expand congregations, and teach in schools, providing a vibrant, engaging and welcoming Judaism, guided by our shared values and driven by our shared vision.



Creating communities of caring and support: Keren B'Kavod integrates new immigrants from Ukraine in Jerusalem



Sasha is a single mother of two children ages 5 and 12 who was forced to leave her home in Ukraine following the outbreak of the war, and decided to make Aliyah to Israel. Today, she lives in Jerusalem with her children and has become an active member at the Reform congregation Kol HaNeshama in Jerusalem through her participation in empowerment and support programs by Keren B'Kavod.

Keren B'Kavod operates small support groups throughout Israel that empower women from weaker segments of Israeli society through a range of rehabilitative and therapeutic services. In Jerusalem, Keren BeKavod runs workshops for new immigrants from Ukraine, including Sasha and 15 other women, who meet every two weeks. From psychological

support to social services and legal advice, these women acquire invaluable skills and knowledge to overcome the trauma they experienced and advance in Israeli society.

"This workshop has changed my life. I have made friends with similar backgrounds to mine, and we are all supporting each other through this. We help each other and now know what we can ask for and what we can receive to help us and our children get ahead."

More than anything, Sasha added, were the relationships she developed with women from the Reform congregation Kol HaNeshama. "It was amazing to see how the whole Kol HaNeshama community has become engaged with supporting us outside of the program. We are hosted for Shabbat and holidays, we are looked after with activities to welcome and entertain our children, and we have a sense of community now."



Making the desert bloom with Israeli Reform Judaism: Kehillat Shaar Hanegev and regional rabbis



Shaar HaNegev, meaning 'gate to the Negev', is a regional community of the Israel Reform Movement that comprises ten kibbutzim and works in partnership with the regional council of the Negev and its diverse organizations. Together they lead Jewish and cultural programming and social action activities as part of strengthening Jewish identity and Reform Judaism in Israel's south.

Rabbi Yael Vurgan leads the regional congregation by pulling together residents, activists, volunteers, and partners to create a sense of community and purpose that transcends geographic distance. She leads services in various occasions each month, she holds life cycle events for residents (bar and bat mitzvahs, weddings, funerals, baby namings, etc) upon request, and works with partners of different populations across the south - from Bedouin to Christian Arab - in fostering a sense of unity and connection to the land.

Shaar HaNegev's kibbutzim and towns are also closest to the Gaza strip border and, having come under rocket fire attacks from Gaza

frequently over the past seven years, require an attentiveness to the particular consequences of this geopolitical reality on the residents of the region.

"Due to their proximity to the Gaza Strip, the residents of the Sha'ar HaNegev region have lived under constant threat to their safety for many years," shared Rabbi Vurgan. "But recently, the region has benefited from a period of demographic and social growth. I believe that the spiritual and cultural activities that I lead in the area contribute to the residents' emotional resilience and social strength. Kabbalat Shabbat services, for example, provide both comfort and hope - allowing us to sit together and share all those feelings and matters that make life worthy and good, to sing together the pains and small joys, and in return to ask for faith and peace."

"Regional congregations are a unique model that is almost hard for many traditional Jews with a main synagogue building to understand. Here, we are almost roving rabbis - pulling together our congregants from different towns and locations and building a real and new sense of community that extends beyond solid walls and into the hearts and minds of people, who then also travel back to their towns and share the news about our meaningful work."



From her school to her home: A family's spiritual journey to Judaism



Naomi is a ten-year-old girl from Petah Tikvah who goes to a public secular Israeli school. She and her family are relatively disconnected from Judaism. They do not celebrate most of the Jewish holidays nor do they belong to a Jewish community.

When the Israel Reform Movement came to Naomi's school to run a pluralistic education program, Naomi learned about a Judaism where she can have an active role in the services for the first time. She found herself enjoying learning about the history and

telling her family about the engaging activities she was participating in at school.

As a result, Naomi's family began lighting Shabbat candles and reciting Kiddush and exploring their Jewish identity and heritage with their extended family too.

"I didn't know that holidays and tradition could be so significant, it brought our family together and united us around the rituals and customs that Naomi was exposed to at school," says Naomi's mother.

But today, with the potential lack of funding from the Israeli government towards the movement's education, Naomi may no longer be able to receive the pluralistic Jewish education that she and her family benefited from until now.

"It is important to me and my classmates that the program continues and that we can learn to get to know the Jewish world more deeply," shares Naomi.



Weaving the true diversity of Israeli society into the tapestries of our lives: Bayit Bakehila, Kehillat Yozma, and Noar Telem



Bayit Bakehila (A Home in the Community) is a new initiative by the Israel Reform Movement to support independent residential living for young adults with cognitive disabilities. To date, the first such apartment, Beit Arbel, was launched in Modiin together with Kehillat Yozma, the Reform congregation of Modi'in, and provides an independent living framework for these young men, "Arbelistim" that engages them as active participants in every aspect of community life at Yozma - from joining and leading services and holiday

celebrations to spending weekends with volunteers on recreational and educational outings.

Recently, members of Yozma's vibrant branch of Noar Telem, the Reform Youth Movement, accompanied the Arbelistim on their spring break vacation to Eilat.

"More than anything, the feeling of equality and togetherness that the participants felt was palpable, empowering, and enjoyable for everyone" said Hila, Chairperson of Noar Telem branch at Yozma. "Arbelistim are an important part of our efforts to engage and include everyone in Israeli society and our weekly activities also include younger participants living with physical disabilities. We are excited to invite the Arbelistim to join us in our summer camp, Mahane Havaya, this year Sde Boker in the Negev, as part of our Shabbat for graduates of our youth movement and young adults engaged with the Reform Movement."

"It is important to us as Reform Youth to follow our vision of an inclusive and diverse Israeli community that welcomes all its members, including those of wide or limited abilities."



The ties that bind: The language of true peace and unity at Kehillat Shirat Hayam



Miriam Klimova grew up in Lviv, Ukraine and studied Judaism in Poland before moving to Israel in 2018. Miriam is currently a rabbinic student at Hebrew Union College - Jerusalem Institute of Religion in Jerusalem and she leads the Russian- and Ukrainian- speaking congregation, Shirat HaYam, Song of the Sea, in Haifa.

In addition to its ongoing communal life, now over a decade in operation, Shirat HaYam is home to recent arrivals from the war torn region of Ukraine and Russia, enabling a stable Jewish community and Jewish engagement to

tens of refugees and new immigrants building new lives in Israel.

“The members of our Shirat Hayam are young Russian-speaking families that possess a strong desire to create their own liberal Jewish identity. These people are eager to bring Jewish tradition into their homes, but not to renounce their language and the culture in which they grew up. In recent years, the community had become very active, had grown, and its future seemed completely unclouded. >>



"February 2022 brought about a terrible war and with it a new reality. We welcomed new arrivals to our community at an incredible rate. When a refugee from Ukraine would come to our community, she would speak to me in Ukrainian. Before the prayers, I would speak to her in her native language and would explain that we all supported Ukraine but that the community is made up of people who also came from Russia and Belarus, some 20 years ago and others a few weeks ago, but so that everyone could understand each other, we speak Russian. She was confused as language is a source of national pride and, especially with the war, the feelings between Ukrainians and Russians were tense. But once we all came together in prayer for peace

in the languages of Ukrainian and Russian, she knew that she had come to a place of welcoming and support for everyone. Here at Shirat Hayam, we are prepared to support in times of tragedy and share feelings in times of struggle and prosperity, and we give everyone a place."

"Our human values and our Jewish connection transcend war and difference and create a new home for growth, support, and togetherness as Jewish people in Israel."



In a new land, she found her home: Converting to Judaism in Israel with the Israel Reform Movement



Alejandra grew up in Columbia and married a Jewish-American man. They chose to immigrate to Israel and were looking for a community that would accept them and their two children without requiring labels. They found their home in Jerusalem at Kehillat Kol Haneshama, where they were welcomed with open arms.

After a period of time living in Israel, Alejandra sought to complete her connection with the Jewish people and become officially recognized as Jewish. She approached Rabbi Oded Mazor to learn with him about Judaism and prepare for conversion with the Beit Din.

At the Beit Din, with Rabbi Galia Sadan presiding as head of the Reform Rabbinical Council in Israel (Maram), Alejandra presented her life story and what she had gleaned from her studies and preparation with Rabbi Mazor. Alejandra was approved to complete her journey home to Judaism and into the nation of Israel.

The official certificate of conversion was granted to Alejandra during the ceremony in Tel Aviv. "When I returned to my community and congregation at Kol Haneshama in Jerusalem, I was able to celebrate with my new family, full of joy and hope. I feel like I have come home!"

About two months ago, close to the Shavuot holiday, Alejandra had an Aliyah laTorah - a blessing to read from the Torah for the first time. Rabbi Mazor said, "Congratulations Alejandra, for your brave choice to embark on this spiritual journey. I would like to mark the occasion with special blessings for you and your family." Alejandra and her family, from Columbia to Israel, in her new Jewish home at last.

"Becoming Jewish in Israel - joining my family and my new community - is a dream come true. Throughout this process I was able to discover my own identity and beliefs which I have come to match with Reform Judaism as a growing and open Judaism that creates a meaningful path for me to live my life and join in the sacred traditions that the Jewish people have been practicing for centuries."



The power of information: Young leaders at the IMPJ's Mechinot champion LGBTQ rights - and more - in Israel's political protests



Yali Levanon (17) was interviewed by Israeli newspaper, *Maariv*, as part of a feature of young adult leaders who are championing the protests. Below is a translation and excerpt from that interview. Private photo. To read the original article click [here](#).

Yali Levanon (17) is a student at the Israel Reform Movement's Pre-Army Preparatory School, Mechinat Telem. Since the protests began, over seven months ago, Yali and his classmates have been actively involved. "Before heading to the streets, we first learned about the issues at stake. Only after we understood what we would be protesting about did we decide to join. At Mechinat Telem, we

believe that in order to act, one must first learn and vice versa, as these are reciprocal relationships. This week we went through a three-day democracy seminar where we learned all the topics related to the current political situation, and on the third day we went out to demonstrate and protest. We strongly believe it is important for us as young adults to preserve Israel's democracy." >>



Maariv: What is motivating you to protest right now?

Yali: It is impossible to deny the threats that exist in Israel at the moment. We have an LGBTQ community in the preparatory school where I learn, and I am a part of it. What is happening in Israel is threatening and scary and that motivates us to stand up and protest. Even those who are not from the LGBTQ community are joining the protest to protect all members of Israeli society.

M: How does your protesting manifest itself?

Y: Our protest is expressed in signs that we prepare, in speeches we give at demonstrations. We put up posts and ads on social networks. We continue to initiate demonstrations and join them. On a daily basis, we distribute messages that are important to us to convey to our friends and communities regarding the protest and the political situation. We have a committee organized around activism that initiates protests and joins demonstrations, and we also make sure to talk about it regularly and consume all the new information related to the legal reform as it changes from minute to minute.

M: Do you think your activities will have an impact?

Y: Honestly, I don't know, and I also don't know if we are applying pressure or stoking the fire even more. In general, we are calling for dialogue but very specific dialogue. I think it is possible to wave flags and signs but there is a problem of communication between the left and the right, so there is the importance of information. We certainly believe in the messaging that we convey and stand up for. So I hope so! We cannot give up, the stakes are too high, and people's real lives - with all their rights - are being threatened.

In 2022, our pre-army pluralistic young-leadership Mechina program welcomed 80 young adults, our biggest cohort yet. More than 700 alumni have graduated from our Mechina program to date, and our follow up shows that 75% either work or volunteer in areas of leadership and civil society. Our young adult leadership programs and communities reach 1,300 participants each year, including outreach special programs on Jewish and Israeli holidays, the majority of whom come from non-Reform backgrounds and learn about Judaism through a progressive lens for the first time.



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