



The Schechter Institutes, Inc.

# PESACH HAGGADAH SUPPLEMENT

2026



As we gather around the Seder table this year, The Schechter Institutes, Inc. offers this supplement as both a celebration of freedom and a reflection on its fragility. The rituals and words of the Haggadah call upon us not only to remember our journey from bondage to redemption, but to recognize the enduring responsibility to safeguard freedom in every generation. This year, that responsibility feels especially urgent as war continues to cast its shadow over communities in Ukraine and in Israel, where the yearning for safety, dignity, and peace is lived each day. At a time when so many mark the festival under the strain of uncertainty and loss, our Seder table becomes both a sanctuary and a statement: that even in the face of

hardship, we affirm the values of liberation, resilience, and hope, and we recommit ourselves to a future redeemed. May these heartfelt words of wisdom enrich your Seder experience this year.

And as always, may our closing declaration be fulfilled speedily: *L'shana haba'ah b'Yerushalayim!* Next Year in Jerusalem!

**With wishes for a Chag Kasher v'Sameah from your family at The Schechter Institutes, Inc.**

**Rabbi Matt Berkowitz,**  
President, The Schechter Institutes, Inc.

# KADESH

**Rabbi Matt Berkowitz, President, The Schechter Institutes, Inc.**

While most people make an immediate association between *kiddush* and the drinking of wine, its essence is not the act of drinking but rather the sanctification of the day.

This is true for both Shabbat and festivals. When one is a slave, their time is not their own. They are wholly subject to the whims and demands of others. In fact, in his very first commentary on Torah, Rashi, the great medieval commentator, points out that Torah should have rightly begun not with the creation of the world but rather with the first commandment given to the Israelites found in Exodus 12: "This month [of Nisan] will mark for you the beginning of the months; it will be the first of the months of the year for you." As the authors of *The Women's Seder Sourcebook* write, "Our ability to recite *kiddush*—to sanctify time—is itself an expression of our status as free men and women. Arguably, the most fundamental freedom denied a slave is the freedom to determine how time is structured and spent. Slavery is a timeless existence in which nothing interrupts one essential reality: The slave must acquiesce to her master's wishes and come when her master calls." (27) The Jewish calendar is a gift to the Israelites, and to their descendants, the Jewish people. Kadesh encourages us to count our days with love; to embrace these days as an expression of our freedom; and to treasure every moment.

**We rise for *Kadesh* and may we also rise to this challenge of treasuring time as the Seder begins!**



# URHATZ

**Rabbi Dr. Mimi Feigelson, *Mashpiah Ruhanit*, SRS**

*Urhatz* is never the same for me, ever since I sat... with myself... at my Seder during the height of the pandemic. Throughout the entire Seder, only two signs are connected by the conjunctive *Vav*, bound together by a single breath: *Kadesh u-Urhatz* / "Sanctify! and Wash!." From within the silence, I hear myself hum: *Beih ana rachitz* / In God I place my trust / security / assurance." My subconscious reads the word *Urhatz* in its' Aramaic form rather than the intended Hebrew. *Beih ana rachitz* is part of a prayer that is chanted in most Jewish communities and traditions around the globe, as we open the Holy Ark.

*Beih ana rachitz*– "In Him / Her / It do I trust." In God I place my refuge. This is what the Zohar requests that I utter. But then, and today, I ask: "How do I sanctify / "*Kadesh*" my life in a manner that actually grants me a sense of security / "*Urhatz*?" How do I find holiness, and sanctify my life, in a world as indecipherable and turbulent as ours, and still feel safe? And more so – "Who are the people, the communities, the groups and organizations that I work with, in

order to reinforce and strengthen real security – physical, emotional, and spiritual – for myself and for those around me? Who configures my "community of trust?" Who is my "*Urhatz*" family?"

**I invite you to join me, before you pour the waters of "*Urhatz*," and chant these three words – *Beih ana rachitz* – over and over. Choose a melody or congregational tradition that connects you to this experience of "*Urhatz*," a sensation of trust / security / assurance.**

As you sing, try to answer these questions for yourself. Feel free to add some of your own personal questions. Perhaps, as the waters of "*Urhatz*" run over your hands, you can share with each other the sources from which you draw your sense of safety. And if you feel secure enough with the people at your table, share your questions, even questions that may still stand open to resolution. Perhaps your answers will manifest as the night unfolds...perhaps Elijah the Prophet and Miriam the Prophetess will bring them when they arrive...Perhaps they will manifest during the year.



# KARPAS

**Prof. Ari Ackerman, President, SIJS**

*Karpas* is the first food we eat at the Seder and it entails dipping the vegetable into salt water and consuming it. Commentators explain that the eating of the vegetable at this stage is an attempt to increase our appetite in anticipation of the meal. Rav Kook elaborates on this reason in his commentary to the Haggadah (*Olat Ra'a'yah*, Volume 2, pp. 257-259). He explains that *karpas* should be understood as teaching us a fundamental lesson regarding the requisite attitude to food in particular and physical pleasure in general.

Often, we view food as something which should be indulged upon only to satisfy our appetites and from a religious standpoint it should be minimized as much as possible. But Rav Kook argues that the pleasure experienced by eating is sacred and a complete religious life does not require curtailing our engagement with the physical world. **Rather, we must elevate these pleasures through the moderate and mindful consumption in which physical pleasures serve as a bridge to spiritual pleasures. We therefore engage in an act of increasing our appetite before the sacred meal on the night of Passover.**



# YAHATZ

## Rabbi Prof. David Golinkin, President Emeritus

Why do we break the middle *matzah* in two and hide the larger piece?

Some give a **halakhic explanation**: to eat the two loaves of Shabbat and festivals, but also to remember “the bread of affliction” (Deut. 16:3).

Some give an **educational explanation**: that the children should hide or seek the *afikoman* and not fall asleep (based on *Pesachim 109a*).

This year, however, it’s worth emphasizing a **symbolic explanation**: The Jewish world is broken due to our outside enemies and to our internal divisions. May we draw inspiration from the Seder to overcome our enemies and heal our internal divisions.



# MAGID

**Dr. Gila Vachman, Lecturer in Midrash, SIJS**

The heart of the Seder night and its most important component is the Passover Haggadah. *Magid* is the moment when the Seder transforms from a religious ritual into an act of education and freedom.

In the time of the Temple, the actual Paschal sacrifice stood at the center of the evening, but after the Temple's destruction, we were left with just the story. So, instead of a family gathering around the roasted lamb, we gather around the Seder table and recount the Exodus from Egypt.

Unlike the prayer book, we do not recite from the Haggadah. We are required "to tell" its story: to create interpretation, to ask questions, and to engage in discussion. It is interesting to note that in Hebrew, verbs are also titles of leadership: a *moshel* (ruler) is one who tells *meshalim* (parables), an *amirah* (speech) is related to *amir* (a leader), *dibbur* (speech) to *dabar* (a leader/spokesperson), and *Haggadah* (telling) to *nagid* (a leader). This connection is not accidental—**true leadership is not measured by physical power, but by the ability to tell a story, to give meaning, and to inspire.**

**On this night, we are all *negidim* around the Seder table, leading the conversation between tradition and renewal.**



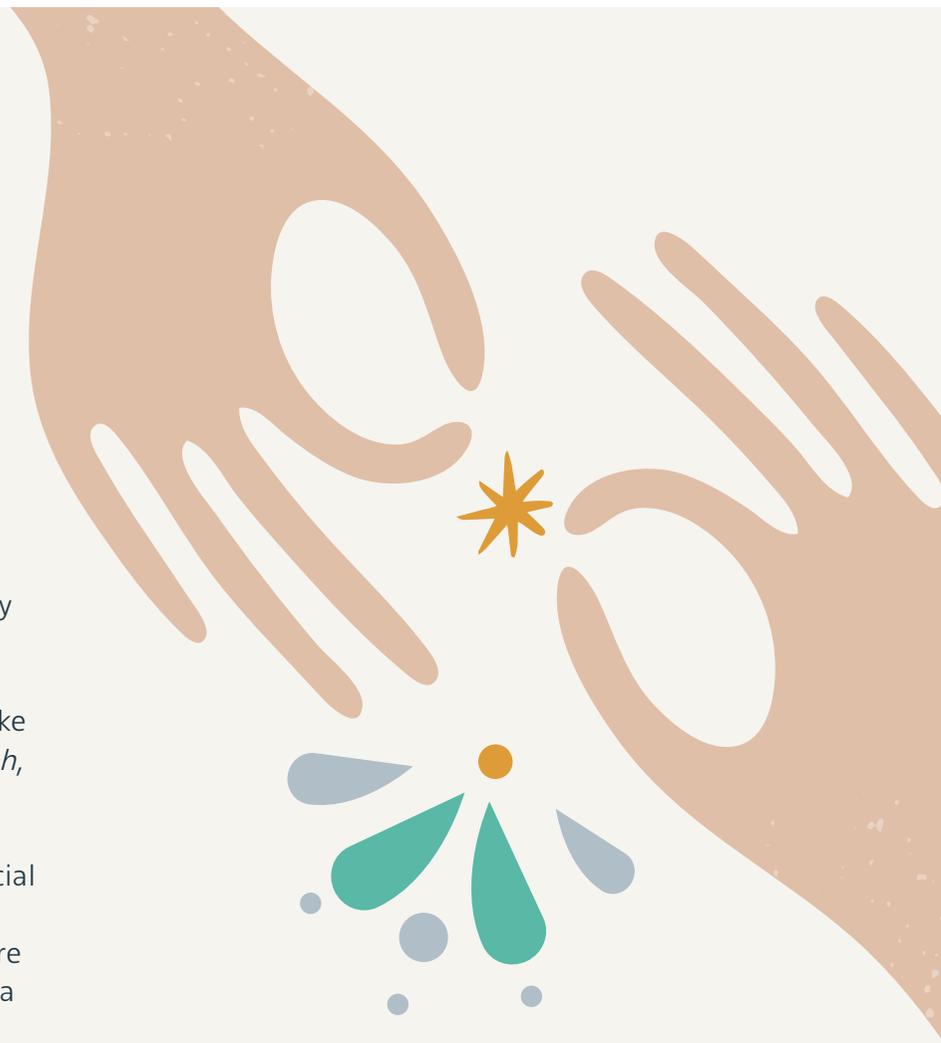
# RAHTZA

## Rabbi Arie Hasit, Associate Dean of SRS

The experience of the Passover Seder is the experience of doing things differently. Perhaps the most famous words of the evening are *ma nishtana halaila ha'zeh*, why is this night different than other nights? So much of what we do during the Seder is unique so that routine rituals stand out even more. Possibly, the most routine moment of the entire Seder night is *Rahtza*, the ritual washing of the hands. Just like every Shabbat and holiday meal, it is performed immediately following the *kiddush*, but preceding the blessing over the bread (unleavened, but bread nonetheless).

Our second ritual hand washing is the one that reminds us that even the most special and unique of events is still connected to our day-to-day lives – and a night that is filled with *differentness* still has elements of daily routine. This year, in Israel, we are approaching Passover in a period decidedly lacking in routine, a period of tension, a period of fear, a period of expectation and hope for a better future.

**But through all of it, we must remember the importance of routine. Even an act as simple as ritual handwashing reminds us that there is holiness in the most mundane of acts, and that routine can always be sacred.**



# MOTZI MATZAH

**Rabbi Irina Gritsevskaya, Executive Director, Midreshet Schechter**

This is the fifth Passover that our communities in Ukraine will celebrate under bombardment and the endless sound of sirens; still relying on generators made necessary by ongoing power and heating outages, all while navigating the collapse of the economic system.

In such a situation, it is important to appreciate the small glimmers of good that we still have: human connection, the Passover table with its warmth, love, and hot food—and yes, even a *kezayit* of *matzah* over which we can recite a heartfelt blessing of gratitude. The wars have taught me that nothing can be taken for granted, and as long as we are able to give thanks for what we have, there is hope.

In Ukraine, since the first Passover after the Russian invasion in 2022, there has been a custom to add contemporary lines to “Dayenu.” Here are a few,

straight from the heart of Ukraine—with some free adaptation:

If the skies are once again free, ***Dayenu!***

If there is more light than sirens, ***Dayenu!***

If our people have enough strength to help one another in these difficult times ***Dayenu!***

If our soldiers have enough courage and strength to defend our people in these terrible days, ***Dayenu!***

If, despite all circumstances, our people still hold a Passover Seder, ***Dayenu!***

If shelters were needed only for storing jams and wines, ***Dayenu!***

If all our friends from Israel and Ukraine could meet and speak only about where the hummus tastes better, ***Dayenu!***

What is your line for this holiday? Please send it through me to our friends in Ukraine—because if they receive an embrace from all of us, ***Dayenu!***



# MAROR

**Rabbi Prof. David Frankel, Associate Professor of Bible, SIJS**

According to the famous passage in the *Haggadah*, the reason that we eat *maror* at the Seder is to commemorate the suffering of our ancestors during their servitude in Egypt. The *Haggadah* cites as a proof-text for this connection the well-known verse from Exodus 1:14: “They embittered their lives (וימררו) (את חייהם) with harsh labor, with mortar and with bricks, and with all kinds of work in the field.”

The simple meaning of the *Haggadah* is that we should identify not only with the joyous moments of our past but also with the painful ones. Indeed, we could hardly re-experience the joy of the Exodus without first identifying with the pain of enslavement.

I would like, however, to suggest another possible meaning to this passage. The Bible generally maintains a distinction between people who are sad and suffering—for which words such as אבלים, בוכים, (criers, mourners) and the like are used—and people who are bitter and resentful, with an angry disposition, for which the term מרי נפש (those who are ‘bitter of soul’) is used. The verse in Exodus 1:14

therefore does not only tell us that the Israelites were suffering; it also suggests that their lives had been made bitter.

This may help explain why they lashed out at Moses and Aaron: “Let the Lord look upon you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, putting a sword in their hand to kill us” (Exodus 5:21). Pain and suffering can evoke sympathy and solidarity, but they can also lead to bitterness and resentment, which are ultimately self-destructive. I would therefore suggest that when we eat the *maror* on Seder night we reflect not only on the suffering of our ancestors and the empathy it should evoke, but also on the danger of allowing pain to turn into resentment.

**Both in our lives as individuals and in our collective life as a people, we must remember, today more than ever, that while pain and sadness are unavoidable, the way we channel them remains up to us, and makes all the difference in the world.**



# KORECH

**Dr Peri Sinclair, The Susan and Scott Shay TALI Director General**

The Seder revolves around *simanim*—symbols.

Yet its teaching lies not only in the symbols themselves, but also in the way they are arranged. We taste *maror* to remember the bitterness of slavery. We eat *matzah*, recalling both affliction and the haste of liberation. Each carries its own meaning.

Drawing on the verse “על מצות ומרורים יאכלוהו” (Exodus 12:8), Hillel taught that *matzah* and *maror* should be eaten together. In doing so, he offered more than a halakhic ruling; it’s a lesson in how meaning is constructed. Symbols matter, but so does the act of bringing them into relation with each other. Bitterness is not erased by redemption; it is remembered within it. Memory becomes an ethical anchor, reminding a free people of the vulnerability from which it was born. *Matzah* and *maror* do not cancel each other out; they deepen one another.

In some traditions everyone at the Seder assembles their own *korech*. The teaching is therefore tasted, not merely stated. In that small act we become participants in the tradition’s ongoing interpretive work—taking inherited symbols and creating a connection between them through our own moment in history.

**Perhaps this is the quiet wisdom of *korech*. Jewish continuity does not depend on the preservation of static rituals or the need to mold difference into uniformity. Rather, it rests on the ongoing work of interpretation: memory held alongside hope, tradition enriched by reinterpretation, and diverse voices of Jewish experience woven into a shared story.**



# SHULCHAN ORECH

**Dr. David Lester, Director, *Et Lidrosh* & Healing Program in the North, SIJS**

On Seder night, we recount and relive our people's journey from slavery to freedom. It is a night filled with answering one question and pondering another, sharing stories and ideas, drinking prescribed glasses of wine and singing traditional melodies. Suddenly, in the middle of *Hallel*, we break for the *Shulchan Orech* - the meal. Is the *Shulchan Orech* a break in the middle of the spiritual journey of Seder or is it an integral part of Seder night?

Perhaps the presence of the *Shulchan Orech* is placed in the middle of Seder in order to teach us that the transition from formal contemplation to sharing a meal is redemptive. Thinking, learning and sharing bring us closer together, as a family and as a community.

When describing the healing process of those recovering from trauma, the psychiatrist Judith Herman wrote that "establishing safety begins with control of the body." During times of worldwide upheaval and national turmoil, fear and anxiety impinge upon our ability to relax, recuperate and feel at ease. That is why meals are so important. Through food we take care of ourselves and nourish others. We reclaim control of our most basic needs and reestablish one dimension of our personal safety.

**On Seder night, when we arrive at the meal, something softens around the table. The familiar family context returns, conversation flows, and laughter enliven the atmosphere. Once again, rituals and the sharing of traditional stories have led us back to the dinner table and back to one another.**



# TZAFUN

**Prof. Moshe Benovitz, Talmud & Jewish Law, SIJS**

*Tzafun*, or literally "hidden away," is the end of the gastronomic part of the Seder. After all the courses have been served, a piece of *matzah* known as the *afikoman* is retrieved from its hiding place in a game of "hot and cold" played by parents and children. The *afikoman* is then eaten, ideally the last solid food consumed on the Seder night, although two cups of wine follow, and water may be drunk if one is thirsty. *Matzah* is the only food eaten nowadays in compliance with a biblical commandment, and we are to savor its taste until morning.

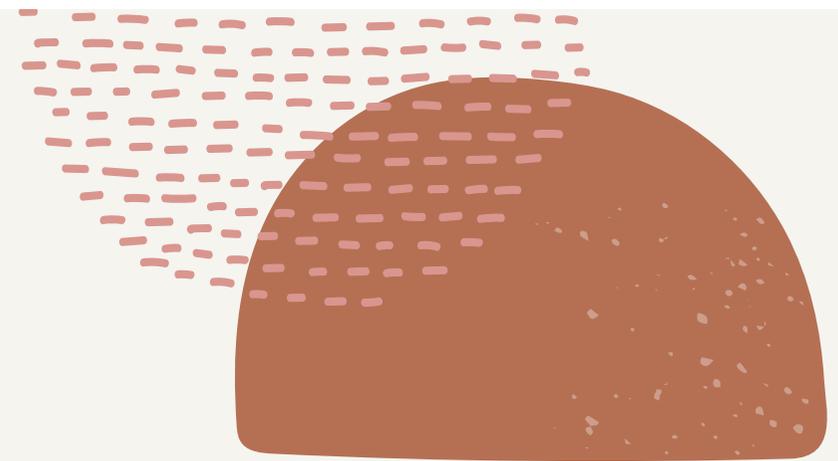
Both practices associated with the *afikoman* – the game, and the notion that it is the last food to be eaten on the Seder night – are mentioned in the Talmud. The earlier of the two is the game. The *tanna* Rabbi Eliezer says that we "snatch" (*hotfin*) *matzot* on Passover night so that the children do not fall asleep, and the *tanna* Rabbi Yehudah says we do so even if we ate very sparsely (*Bavli Pesachim 109a* and parallels). Some interpret this "snatching" as referring to

eating the *matzah* quickly. However, it makes little sense to say that even one who ate sparsely must eat the *matzah* quickly for his children's sake; a person who ate sparsely is least in need of such an injunction or reminder. Moreover, it is clear that the children must stay awake because of the Torah's insistence on discussing the Exodus with them (Exodus 12:26, 13:8). Eating the *matzah* quickly will ensure that the children do not fall asleep before eating the *matzah*, but it does not ensure their participation in the Seder discussion, which is crucial. The correct interpretation is thus that some sort of "snatch the *matzah*" game is to be played, *delaying* the eating of the *matzah* until the end of the Seder, and ensuring that the children stay awake throughout, as is customary to this day.

The notion that the last food to be eaten on the Seder night is *matzah* is a vestige of a law concerning the paschal sacrifice. The Mishnah says that in Temple times no dessert or after-party was to follow the eating of the paschal

lamb, which was accompanied by the *matzah* and bitter herbs (*Mishnah Pesachim 10:8*). Does this still apply to eating *matzah* today? The Babylonian *amora* Samuel is variously quoted as saying that it does and does not (*Bavli Pesachim 119b*). In accordance with the view that it does still apply, we eat *matzah* both at the beginning and the end of the Seder meal.

**Since the destruction of the Temple, there are only two biblical commandments that we fulfill on the Seder night: eating *matzah* and discussing the Exodus with our family. The ancient traditions that lie behind contemporary practice regarding the *afikoman* reflect the seriousness with which we take these two commandments: we ensure that our children are awake for the discussion by playing a game at the end, and we ensure that the taste of *matzah* remains with us after the Seder is over by eating it not only at the beginning of the meal, but also at the end.**



# BAREKH

**Shira Ackerman Simchovitch, Director of Early Childhood Education, TALI**

*"How Is This Barekh Different from All Other Years?"*

At the stage of *Barekh*, we pause after the meal and recite *birkat hamazon*, the blessing after eating. It is an ancient expression of gratitude - for the bread we have eaten, for the land, and for life itself. Usually, it is a quiet and natural moment, spoken from a place of fullness. But this year, in a time of war, these familiar words carry a deeper resonance.

Some celebrate the Seder far from home—in military bases, in gathering areas, or in places of service. Some tables have empty chairs, and some families are still waiting for the return of their loved ones. Precisely because of this, when we arrive at *Barekh*, the blessing is no longer only for the food before us. It becomes a blessing for life itself, for the possibility of gathering together, and for the hope that has not been lost.

Throughout history, *Haggadot* have been written and used even in times of war. During World War II, Seders were held in ghettos and prisoner-of-war camps, sometimes with small *Haggadot* printed in secret or rewritten from memory. Jewish soldiers

serving in the Allied armies also conducted Seders on the battlefield using special *Haggadot* sent to them. In the Land of Israel during the War of Independence, Seders were held on military bases and in *kibbutzim* under fire, and prayers were sometimes added to the Haggadah for the safety of the fighters and for the peace of the emerging state.

These *Haggadot* remind us that blessing is not only an expression of gratitude for what we have, but also an act of faith. The *birkat hamazon* itself does not end with food. It turns toward the future—asking for compassion, for peace, and for the rebuilding of Jerusalem. After we have eaten and are satisfied, we lift our eyes toward what still lies ahead.

And so, this year we ask: How is this *Barekh* different from all other years?

**This year we bless not only for the bread we have eaten, but also for the life that continues, for the hope we continue to hold, and for the day when all our people will once again be able to sit together around the table of freedom**



# HALLEL

## Rabbi Chaya Rowen Baker, Dean of The Schechter Rabbinical Seminary

*Hallel* on the Seder night is unique; it is only recited without a blessing on this one occasion and also divided - beginning before the second cup, and concluding after the meal and *birkat hamazon*. According to the Mishnah in Tractate Pesachim, while the Pesach offering was being eaten, there was an obligation to sing *Hallel*. The unique weaving of *Hallel* around the family meal on the Seder night seems to reenact that sacrificial moment, whose purpose is to fix in the memory of generations the flight from Egypt.

It is possible that the Israelites did not feel that they were in the midst of a miracle on the night of the Exodus from Egypt. In the very moment when a miracle transpires, one's vision is clouded by fear and uncertainty. There is no assurance that salvation will come; no promise of how the world will look like after the dust settles. It is unlikely that the Israelites were inclined to sing praise while fleeing Egypt. Amid the distress of coping, joy and praise—even for a miracle—require attention and intentional will.

Therefore, wrapping *Hallel* around the Passover meal is not a reenactment but a new creation, one that seeks to grant us an experience of miracles through a consciousness of praise and gratitude, despite the darkness of reality. Thus, it was in the Temple, and so it is with all of us around the Seder table.

Now it is close to midnight...

**We have eaten a festive meal, surrounded by the singing of Hallel. As we complete *Hallel*, let us try to imagine ourselves within the great miracle of the redemption from Egypt, offering praise for small and great miracles—for those that have occurred, for those that are happening now but are still unrecognized, and for those we long for.**



# NIRTZAH

**David Kekst, Chairman of the Board, Schechter Institutes, Inc.**

The commentary on this final section of *The Feast of Freedom Haggadah* notes that Israel is often compared to God's vineyard. We conclude this section of the Seder with the words: "Next year in Jerusalem" (in the Diaspora) or "Next year in a Rebuilt Jerusalem" (in Israel). How fortunate we are that since 1948, we don't have to wait until next year! Diaspora Jews can go tomorrow; and Israeli Jews are active participants in the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the State of Israel. But that privilege and those miracles have not come cheaply.

A famous saying in winemaking is: **"Struggling vines make the best wines."** Cutting edge winemaking techniques like to "stress" the vines by depriving them of abundant water so that the roots must dig deep and thereby flourish to make the best grapes possible for wine. **Perhaps God believes, like the winemakers, that flourishing requires challenge and struggle. Still, I hope that in the coming year, Israel and the Jewish People might experience a little less of both.**

