



Israel at 70

Israel as a Double Gift

Dr. Ari Berman, President, Yeshiva University



Our generation is blessed to witness the 70th birthday of the modern State of Israel. While the State of Israel is of profound importance to Jews everywhere, it holds unique resonance for us as religious Zionists, for it potentially signals the coming of a long-hoped-for redemption. Consequently, as we reflect upon the seven decades since Israel's birth, it is useful to clarify the way in which a modern nation-state like Israel can herald redemption.

Of the many foundational ideas that Biblical Israel has contributed to the history of civilization, perhaps the most ambitious is the concept of a collective redemption—the notion that not only should individuals strive for their ultimate betterment, but that society can and must move history forward together. Reflections on this theme are most concentrated in the Bible's prophetic literature. Broadly speaking, one finds therein two contrasting models for what redemption entails, the first represented in the book of Ezekiel, the second in the book of Isaiah.

Ezekiel, in chapter 37, envisions redemption as a project fundamentally benefitting the Jewish people. Although dispersed throughout the world, and oppressed throughout history, this paradigmatic minority will one day be revived. The climax of Ezekiel's best known eschatological prophecy—his vision of the valley of the dry bones—is God's promise to His people: "I will bring you back to the land of Israel" (37:12). For Ezekiel, the goal of the redemptive process is internally oriented.

Isaiah, by contrast, consistently articulates a redemptive vision that encompasses all of humanity. The prophet's anticipation of a peaceful future is not restricted to Israel's rescue and ingathering, but rather imagines nothing less than that "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (2:4). Isaiah's redemption is a project to be undertaken by all of humankind acting ethically in concert and striving together to build a brighter future.

There are elements in the modern State of Israel reflective of both the Ezekiel and Isaiah models. Israel today is certainly a project that benefits the Jewish people. At its most basic level, it is a reliable safe haven for Jews. Perhaps never in our history, and certainly at no point during our

arduous peregrinations through the Exile, have we ever had such a resolute bulwark against dire existential threats. In addition, Israel has seen a flourishing of Jewish culture, whether in the realms of literature, film or even the culinary arts. Even more significantly, Israel is home to an historically unprecedented blossoming of Torah study, whether in the proliferation of yeshivot and seminaries, or in the spread of public *batei midrash* [study halls] throughout the country. All these points reflect the profound transformation that Israel has wrought for Jews throughout the world. For the first time in centuries, Jews feel deeply that they have a home.

At the same time, Israel is a positive force impacting the entirety of humanity. It is a model of values and democracy in a world filled with challenges and potential dangers. In addition, through its worldwide humanitarian efforts, it demonstrates a deep concern for the vulnerable across human society. Israel is also an international hub for cutting-edge technological innovation, giving rise to fresh advances in computer science, medicine, communications and transportation. This innovation has benefitted all humankind and has spurred international partnerships in a diverse array of scientific and technological fields. The State of Israel has played, and continues to play, a vital role in improving human welfare on a massive scale.

Looking back, then, upon 70 years since the establishment of the State of Israel, we are proud that Israel represents both types of redemptive potential. It is, in fact, a double gift—it is a gift to the Jewish people and a gift to all of humanity. I am therefore pleased to present this issue of *YU Ideas*, containing several short essays and a podcast produced by thoughtful scholars from across our institution exploring the many ways in which the State of Israel has enriched both the Jewish people and the world at large.

An Immigrant's Perspective: Small Fortunes and Big Opportunities

Ilan Regenbaum '14SB, Deputy Commander, Israeli Air Force Innovation Department



As an immigrant, I am often asked why I decided to leave the comfort and stability of the United States and move to Israel, a country that has experienced multiple wars and economic hardships over its short 70-year history. Some of my reasons are quite typical, Zionism and my religious connection to the land being among them. However, many are surprised when I include economic opportunities in my list of reasons for making the move.

Considering that Israel was founded as a socialist state and has devalued its currency twice over its short history, economic opportunity may seem like a strange reason to give. You might even say that it is laughable and may quote the famous old joke about 1950s Israel that asks, “How do you make a small fortune in Israel? You move there with a large one.”

However, I would like to offer my own version of the above: “How do you make a small fortune in Israel? You sell your company to Intel for \$15 billion!”

That is no joke. The Jerusalem-based autonomous car technology company, Mobileye, was actually acquired by Intel last year for a reported \$15 billion, making it the biggest high-tech success story in Israel's history to-date. But it was not just a big purchase by Israeli standards. To put it into perspective, the 15 largest startup exits and acquisitions from New York over the past 6 years equal about \$15 billion combined! One Israeli high-tech company performed better than the entire New York startup ecosystem.

The success of Mobileye is completely disproportionate, as is much of what happens in Israel as a whole. A tiny country of around 8.5 million people acts like it is much bigger, listing the third largest number of companies on the NASDAQ after the United States and China, spending more on R&D than any other OECD member, receiving 16 percent of global cyber-security investments, and raising more venture capital investment per capita than any other country in the world.

But it is not just about startups and technology. Michael Eisenberg, a YU alumnus and successful startup investor in Israel, said in a Nefesh b' Nefesh panel last year that “there is going to be more economic opportunity [in Israel] over the next 30 years than in the United States,” and the numbers seem to point in that direction as well. From 1980 to 2016, Israel's GDP per capita grew about 6.6 times, while the US has seen its GDP grow only 4.5 times, and based on all the innovation coming out of Israel, I like to think that growth will continue well beyond the next 30 years.

Israel's economy may be growing, but that hardly makes it unique. So, then, what does, and why do I feel that Israel has such promise? Israel is a young and imperfect country that has many growing pains. But these growing pains lead to innovation when people view them as opportunities to make the country a better place. For example, were it not for Israelis being fed up with traffic and delayed buses, they would never have had the motivation to develop two of

the most widely used transportation apps worldwide, Waze and Moovit. If Israel had an abundance of fresh water and was not mostly desert, then we would never have seen the need to invent drip irrigation and become world leaders in desalination technology.

Attributing some of Israel's success to its problems may seem a bit backwards, but every country has its own unique challenges, and it all comes down to how it deals with them. Israel has its fair share of challenges, but those challenges have acted as motivations and have provided Israel with so many opportunities that have made Israel one of the happiest, most innovative and healthiest countries in the world, a country where motivated individuals have amazing opportunities to leave their marks.

Israeli Archaeology at 70

Dr. Jill Katz, Clinical Assistant Professor of Archaeology, Yeshiva University



Prior to 70 years ago, archaeology in the Land of Israel was mainly a foreign enterprise. European and American researchers dominated the field ideologically, financially and productively. With an eye on illuminating the “Holy Land” and on building museum collections back home, they focused on the largest and most impressive Biblical sites such as Hazor, Megiddo, Shechem, Gezer, Jericho, Lachish, Hebron and, of course, Jerusalem.

When the State of Israel was established, some subtle and not so subtle shifts occurred. First, Israel established an official Antiquities Authority (IAA), which regulated permits in such a way that promoted collaboration between Israeli and foreign scholars. This greatly strengthened the local archaeological community both in the field and in the academy. Israeli archaeologists learned about the Wheeler-Kenyon stratigraphic approach to excavation and, in turn, introduced their collaborators to a more expansive architectural approach. Today, the six major research universities in Israel each have robust archaeology departments and together train hundreds of undergraduate students and dozens of graduate students each year. In contrast, a top American university may train just a handful of archaeologists specializing in the Ancient Near East and even fewer specializing in Israel.

The IAA also mandated that all finds remain in the State of Israel. This augmented and strengthened collections at home by curtailing the outflow of artifacts abroad. Today, the Israel Museum boasts the pre-eminent collection of antiquities from the Land of Israel. In fact, when the Museum of the Bible recently opened in Washington DC, it featured two exhibits from Israeli collections: the first, a long-term loan from the IAA of Biblical era objects, and the second, a short-term exhibition from the Bible Lands Museum (Jerusalem) related to Khirbet Qeiyafa, a unique fortress site from the time of King David.

Archaeology in Israel today focuses on the entire span of history in the Land of Israel up until the Ottoman period. It is not unusual to read of Paleolithic tools or of ancient seeds that shed light on the origins of agriculture in the Fertile Crescent. Canaanite, Philistine and Israelite towns are all being uncovered and studied not in isolation but rather as part of a dynamic cultural negotiation between the different ethnicities. Some of the best examples of Greco-Roman urban planning and architecture can be found in Israel, whereas the variety of synagogues found in the Galilee and Golan attests to vibrant Jewish communal life during the time the Mishnah and Talmud were compiled. Islamic and Crusader sites also have their research specialists who interpret the finds within larger social, political, and religious trends.

With archaeological excavations covering every period of history, there really is something for everyone. Academics have the luxury of engaging in long-term projects—for example, the excavation I am working on at Tell es-Safi Gath has completed two decades of research and counting—yet many of the archaeological finds in Israel today are the result of what are known as salvage excavations. Any time a road or building is erected or expanded, there is a possibility of striking ancient remains. When this happens, construction is temporarily suspended to enable an archaeological crew, supervised by the IAA, to conduct a quick survey and excavation, if necessary. A few of the notable finds recently uncovered in this manner

include a Roman villa with a substantial mosaic floor found near the airport, one of the earliest houses of Christian prayer found on the grounds of a prison and tombs from the Macabbees near Modiin.

With so much excavation, it is no surprise that Israeli archaeologists are contributing the lion's share of research on the history of the Land of Israel. The flagship American conference on Biblical Archaeology, which just three decades ago was dominated by American Protestants, now showcases many Israeli scholars, both junior and senior from universities and from the IAA. The conference makes accommodation for Shabbat observance, and often Shabbat meals are informally organized. In addition to the actual fieldwork, Israel leads in new developments involving the intersection of archaeology and science, bringing together scholars in metallurgy, DNA, radiocarbon analysis, isotope analysis, botany and so forth. The Weizmann Institute has contributed scholars and resources to this fruitful collaboration.

While Israel may no longer be swearing in all soldiers at Masada, archaeology remains very much a part of the national consciousness. *Tiyyulim* [excursions] to archaeological sites are popular with both locals and visitors, and the chance to dig something up is readily accessible. We joke at Tell es-Safi/Gath that on Fridays we run a *kaytana* [summer camp for kids] as so many families join us on their day off. Despite its professionalism, archaeological fieldwork in Israel remains a volunteer enterprise—so pick up your trowel and join a dig!

Hebrew Literature at 70

Zafrira Lidovsky Cohen, Professor of Hebrew and Director of Hebrew Language and Literature, Yeshiva University



“Hebrew Literature” generally refers to all literary works written in Hebrew since biblical times.

Throughout ages of diaspora living, most literary works in Hebrew were dedicated to Judaism as a religion and a way of life, underscoring the virtues of G-d and keeping alive the faith in His promise of redemption in songs, prayers, and folktales.

Since the Enlightenment period in Europe in the 18th century, the establishment of Zionism in the end of the 19th century, and the beginning of the pioneering settlements of the Land of Israel in the early 20th century, Hebrew writers began to define Judaism in national terms, imagining the Jewish people returning to thrive in the land of their

ancient forefathers.

With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, 2,000 years of hopes and dreams turned into a reality, and the newly created country, with its extraordinary achievements as well as many challenges, became the front and center of most literary works.

During the first decade of Israel’s existence, prominent Israeli authors celebrated the collective effort that changed Jewish history and the evolution of a valiant new Jew, an invincible sabra [Jew born in Israel] wholly dedicated to fulfilling the national ethos in the fields and/or the battlefields.

Negating everything that smacks of diaspora living, Israeli literature of this era was fundamentally secular but at the same time anchored firmly in Jewish history and Jewish messianism. It was the last chapter of the long tale of a dispersed nation freed from the shackles of a shameful past and moving triumphantly into a glorious future.

But the collective narrative began to crack already in the mid-1950s with a young generation of writers expanding the Israeli experience beyond a single image and a shared story into a chorus of voices shading light on the meaning of being an Israeli: a female Israeli, not male; a Sephardic Israeli, not Ashkenazic; a man of emotions, not actions; a victim of the horrors of the Shoah, not a heroic soldier. During these years the latest chapter of Jewish history became more inclusive but remained dedicated to the national endeavor, a continuous effort to form a distinctive Israeli identity separate and apart from the traditional Jewish image.

The dominance of the national narrative met its first major challenge in the early 1960s. For the first time since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD, Jewish children came of age in an independent Jewish state. For them, Jewish history and the miracle of Israel’s establishment was no longer a personal experience, and the pressure to conform to national norms was perceived as stifling as religious norms appeared to the country’s founding fathers.

Spending their young years in mostly secular Hebrew speaking schools, Israeli children were introduced to world literatures from Shakespeare to Dostoyevsky and Flaubert. The variety of

human experiences these works expressed ignited a new wave of up-and-coming Hebrew writers looking inwards, setting the dark corners of the human mind free, and divulging the powers of innermost inhibited desires.

The Israeli collective experience came back to occupy the center stage of Hebrew literature after the wars of 1967 and 1973. The sense of national utopia that swept the country in 1967 turned into dystopia in 1973. The rise of Palestinian nationalism, the wave of terrorism of the 1980s, and the wars Israel fought every decade ever since resulted in the dominance of political poetics that continues to overshadow a growing number of innovative authors sporting a myriad of literary genres and themes.

Seventy years after the establishment of the State of Israel, more than 7,000 books are published in Israel each year—poetry, fiction and nonfiction, mostly by Israeli authors. Israeli readers are able to enjoy a multitude of high quality literary works in the Hebrew language fulfilling one of the many goals that Zionist visionaries sought for a progressive “Nation of the Book.”

The Israel Supreme Court, 70 Years On

Suzanne Last Stone, University Professor of Jewish Law and Contemporary Civilization, Professor of Law, and Director of the Center for Jewish Law and Contemporary Civilization, Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law



Twenty years ago, U.S. Supreme Court Justice William J. Brennan predicted that the world would look to Israel for guidance on “how to preserve simultaneously the liberties of its citizens and the security of its nation.” The decisions of the Israel Supreme Court, he intimated, would provide the seeds of “a world-wide jurisprudence of civil liberties that can withstand the turbulences of war and crisis.” Justice Brennan was prescient. The decisions of the Israel Supreme Court have become a global resource for thinking through how to fight terrorism within the limits of the law.

Today, the Israel Supreme Court is recognized as a trailblazer in many other legal areas as well, including intellectual property—an outgrowth of Israel’s remarkable contribution to technological innovation—and the interface of law and new reproductive technologies, where Jewish values surrounding the family and procreation contribute to Israel’s distinctive jurisprudence. Israel’s legal system also provides a unique context for thinking about the role of constitutional law in a multicultural society. Israel is a test case for some of the thorniest questions in constitutional law today about the public role of religion in a democratic state, about civic equality and national identity, and about individual rights and the cultural rights of groups.

Paradoxically, seventy years on, the Israel Supreme Court finds itself the object of near veneration abroad and increasingly sharp criticism at home. That criticism should be familiar to anyone who follows the conversation in the United States about judicial activism. We often debate whether it is anti-democratic to allow nine Justices who have not been elected through popular vote to articulate the constitutional values that govern us. Judges should apply the law—whether the statutes elected members of Congress pass or the Constitution “we the people” ratified—and not create the law, the argument goes.

This debate about judicial activism is now rampant in Israel as a result of dramatic changes in Israel’s legal culture. Israel originally borrowed the idea of parliamentary sovereignty from England and saw itself as a professional body devoted to formalism—to merely applying the law—in the style of the German system where many older members of the Israeli judiciary trained.

Over time, however, the legal culture became more and more Americanized, and judges began to engage in an open weighing of the competing values relevant to each case, in the style of their American counterparts. This culminated in Israel’s so-called “constitutional revolution.” Of course, Israel does not have a written Constitution, and various groups within Israeli society continue to draft proposed constitutions. But, in lieu of a Constitution, Israel passed a series of Basic Laws. On the heels of the enactment of two new Basic Laws addressing individual rights in 1992, then-Chief Justice Aharon Barak announced that this was a constitutional revolution. Barak held that these two Basic Laws added a constitutional layer to all the Basic Laws and that now the Court was empowered to review Knesset legislation and administrative decisions. And this has given rise to loud public debates about the Court’s legitimacy. The Israel Supreme

Court is sensitive to these criticisms, and today it is best to describe Israeli constitutionalism as in negotiation.

The debate in Israel is not solely about judicial activism and democracy; it could also be seen as a debate within Zionism. It is no accident that the 1992 Basic Laws that were held to entrench a quasi-constitution also announced the identity of the state. Both stipulate that their “purpose is to entrench in a Basic Law the values of a Jewish and democratic state.” If the people now have a constitution, they also have a constitutional identity, the exact meaning of which is also very much in negotiation not only in society and in the Knesset but also now on the Court.

I feel privileged to have a small role in disseminating the decisions of the Court. The largest obstacle to genuine global engagement with these decisions is their inaccessibility to a non-Hebrew reading audience. Cardozo Law School has committed itself to curing this problem. The Israel Supreme Court Translation Project, which I direct together with my colleague, Prof. Michael Herz, oversees the translation of the most significant decisions the Court renders each year. These translations, housed on our website *Versa*, not only enable legal scholars, jurists and historians to study the work of the Court privately, they make possible important public conversations. These conversations are occasionally academic, bringing together High Court Justices and legal scholars from many countries. Just as often, however, these conversations, featuring Justices of the Court, are addressed to the public, fostering a deeper understanding of Israeli society.

We just hosted the three retiring Justices—President Miriam Naor, Justice Elyakim Rubenstein and Justice Salim Joubran—who each allowed a seminal decision they had authored in their careers citing American constitutional law to be subjected to the lens of academic scrutiny. As I write, Justice Barak-Erez is visiting at Cardozo, meeting with faculty and students. And nothing could be more symbolic of the close relationship of the Court and Cardozo than the felicitous appointment to the Court this past month of Professor Alex Stein, our colleague at Cardozo for over fourteen years.

Social Work in Israel at 70

Debra Weiner, Field Placement Coordinator, Wurzweiler School of Social Work
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We recently celebrated Passover, the festival that commemorates the redemption of the Children of Israel from their slavery in Egypt to their freedom in the promised land. Passover marks the starting point of our forefathers' journey to Israel which in many ways continues today.

It is our custom to reenact the story of the Exodus through the reading of the Haggadah at the Seder table. By doing so, we fulfill the commandment to “tell your son” of our people’s liberation from slavery to freedom as it is written in the Book of Exodus: “And thou shalt tell thy son on that day, saying: It is because of that which the LORD did for me when I came forth out of Egypt.” [1]

The Haggadah begins with a brief review of the Exodus story:

“עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים” - “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt.”

What follows are two vignettes of Rabbis discussing the Haggadah. In one of these vignettes, Rabbi Elazar Ben Azaria states: —כבן שבעים שנהI am *like* a seventy-year-old man. [2] Rabbi Elazar Ben Azaria was actually 18 years old at the time—he was a man who became grey overnight and was revered by his elders.

As I read this passage by R’ Azaria, I could not help but think about the State of Israel, now approaching its own 70th birthday celebration. Israel has come a long way since its founding, but like Rabbi Azaria, its chronological age does not necessarily align with its developmental reality.

Rabbi Azaria, it seems, was a man ahead of his “time,” a mere lad who comported himself “as if” he was 70. Israel, on the other hand, is 70 in *years* but is still very young in terms of establishing the full gamut of societal institutions and policies to safeguard the long-term welfare of its most vulnerable citizens: the growing population of seniors over 65.

Israel emerged from the ashes of the holocaust to become a strong and vibrant nation. In 1948, just 4 percent of the population was over 65. [3] The country was young, vigorous and filled with hope for the future. Israel is now 70, and the immigrants who were so young, hopeful and energetic are part of the rapidly expanding population of over-65 seniors who now comprise 11.3% of the population. [4]

As social workers, we must be attuned to this shift in demographic reality. We welcome the opportunity to celebrate Israel’s 70th birthday and salute our nation’s multifaceted achievements. At the same time, we must raise the flag of caution on behalf of the growing population of aging seniors in our midst. Alex Benedyk, Research fellow for the Democratic Institute of Market Studies stated:

For decades, Israel has enjoyed an enviable reputation for healthcare, but the demographic reality propping up this reputation is about to collapse. Israel must directly confront the daunting reality of an aging population. Waiting until the

demographic shift has fully taken place and leaving patients without a hospital bed would be deeply regrettable. [5]

There are signs of progress. In recent years, Israel has implemented changes in the healthcare system that significantly upgrade and expand the services available to its population of seniors.

Israel's national welfare organization, Bituach Leumi, now provides counseling and advisory services for seniors over 65. Israel is fast becoming one of the world's leaders in providing care for those suffering with Alzheimer's. A social service organization called Melabev was founded in 1981 by Prof. Arnold Rosin and Leah Abramowitz. Melabev is Israel's pioneer service provider caring for those suffering from Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Melabev has helped to change public opinion and educate Israeli society about the treatment of Alzheimer's disease and the necessary approach to caring for the growing aged community in Israel. [6]

Wurzweiler School of Social Work Block Program students recently completed a year of internship at Melabev. Interns provide counselling to individuals and through group sessions, and they interact with the aged client as well as with family members and caretakers. This year, the student interns worked alongside the former dean of Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Dr. Sol Green, who is now an active volunteer at Melabev.

As we look forward to its 70th birthday, let us hope that Israel's achievements may be celebrated across the spectrum of human achievement. May we grow from a start-up nation into a nation that stands up for all its citizens regardless of age, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation. That would truly be a cause for celebration.

Happy 70th!

Endnotes

1. Exodus 13:8
2. Brachot Perek 1 Mishna 5
3. Jerusalem Post September 17, 2017
4. Jerusalem Post September 27, 2017
5. Jerusalem Post May 11, 2015
6. Melabev website: <https://www.melabev.org.il/en/about/>

Chasing a Torah Revolution: Ki Mitzion Tetzei Torah

Jacob Bernstein, Fellow, YU Israel Kollel



With a sense of youthful passion, the State of Israel turned twenty years old in 1968, looking to make further strides in its development as a nation among nations. As with many twenty-year-olds, her drive to make a difference and confidence in a better tomorrow led to the planting of seeds, ones whose fruit we still reap today.

... כי מציון תצא תורה ודבר ה' מירושלים...

(ישעיהו ב:ג)

... For Torah emerges from Zion, and the word of God from Jerusalem.

In his vision of the end of days, Yeshayahu describes a time when Torah will emerge from Jerusalem, spreading forth throughout the world. On the heels of '67, and the successful miracles of the Six-Day War, the decade between 1968 and 1978 showcases some of the most significant and revolutionary personalities in the Torah world, embodying the spirit of this prophecy. While by no means exhaustive, the following *olim* [immigrants] represent some of this decade's influence on Torah study; their impact reverberates today.

- Born in Riga, Latvia, **Dr. Nechama Leibowitz** immigrated to Israel after studying in Germany and changed the face of **Tanach Education** as she taught her method of study in countless institutions and through the publication of her famous *Gilyonot*. Dr. Leibowitz became a full professor at Tel Aviv University in 1968 and received the Israel Prize for Education 12 years earlier.
- Born in Paris, France, **Rav Dr. Aharon Lichtenstein** made *aliyah* [journey to Israel] after studying in the United States, and in 1971 began strengthening the Dati Leumi community and Hesder Movement through his position as **Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshivat Har Etzion**, after serving at Yeshiva University as a Rosh Yeshiva and as the inaugural Rosh Kollel and director of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary Caroline and Joseph S. Gruss Institute in Jerusalem.
- Born in Baghdad, Iraq, **Rav Ovadia Yosef** immigrated to Jerusalem at the age of four and “*hechezir atarah l'yoshnnah*—restored the past glory” to the Sephardic community, ultimately serving as the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv from 1968–1973 and Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel from 1973–1983.
- Born in Dublin, Ireland, **Rabbi Dr. Yehuda Cooperman** made *aliyah* after studying in Chicago and revolutionized advanced women's learning by opening **Michlalah** in 1964. Michlalah received accreditation to grant degrees to students from the Council of Higher Education of the State of Israel in 1978.

From Sephardim to Ashkenazim, Tanach to Gemara, Haredi to Dati Leumi, and from the “*arba kanfot ha'aretz*—four corners of the world,” these four remarkable individuals ascended to Israel

and helped bring about the Torah revolution that occurred from 1968–1978. Upon the footsteps of miracles, two of Isaiah’s prophecies were realized, as the “ingathering of the dispersed” (Isaiah 11:12) made their mark on the “Torah emanating from Zion” (Isaiah 2:3).

There is an additional Torah phenomenon that originated in this decade, one that has turned into something of an educational movement and mainstay in the Anglo-speaking Jewish community: *Shana Ba’Aretz* [year of study]. What many in the Yeshiva University community now take for granted—that students spend a “gap year” (or more) learning in Israel—was not commonplace before this Torah revolution.

“We created a new world,” said Rabbi Dr. Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff,[1] as he recalled the creation of BMT, Beit Midrash L’Torah, in 1969. Together with Rabbi Moshe “Whitey” Horowitz, and with inspiration from Moshe Kobrin, the first Anglo-targeted *Shana Ba’Aretz* program for young men was created, with a mission of “exporting Torah to the Anglo world.” The word of Hashem now had a new route by which to emerge from Jerusalem, influencing Anglo communities around the world as students returned home from studying there.

This contemporary idea to send teenagers to Jerusalem to study Torah has a historical basis, albeit not one of success. The Gemara (*Bava Batra 21a*) describes a time when Chazal instituted an educational system in Jerusalem to solve a crisis facing a vast number of children who did not have parents who could teach them Torah. The location was chosen, explains Tosafot,[2] so that the students would witness the Kohanim and their service in Jerusalem, which would inspire them to learn better. The Gemara itself invokes the verse “*ki miTzion teitzei Torah*” to support the idea that the new national educational platform should begin in Zion. Since Jerusalem was too far away to attract children without their parents accompanying them, Chazal instituted additional “schools,” which only attracted older students because they were already far from home.[3] Ultimately, Yehoshua ben Gamla, the Kohen Gadol, is credited with creating the first-ever localized Jewish educational system, which saved Torah from being lost from that generation.

In the late 60’s and early 70’s a new iteration of this story occurred and is still unfolding before our eyes, as great individuals have established a successful educational system that is far away from home, for children in their later teenage years, and in or around Jerusalem. Years ago, these very criteria made creating a schooling system almost impossible, and yet today they are commonplace components to many of the successful *Shana Ba’Aretz* programs. These programs originated for young women with Machon Gold, in 1958, and for young men with BMT, in 1969, and in the decade after the Six-Day War, the *Shana Ba’Aretz* Revolution began. Thousands of Anglo young men and women have come to Israel, attending one of countless *Shana Ba’Aretz* programs to learn and grow, and have benefited from “*avirah d’Eretz Yisrael.*”

In the 21st Mishna of *Pirkei Avot*, Shmuel HaKatan highlighted significant milestones throughout a lifetime, ones that can be apropos to the anniversary of Israel’s existence as well.

בן עשרים לרדוף בן שלשים לנח

A twenty-year-old chases and a thirty-year-old has attained strength.

It is not surprising to note how many “30-under-30” lists exist to feature those in this age range who chase after a better world with passion and a healthy sense of optimism that change is achievable. Perhaps Shmuel HaKatan’s quote can be developed a bit deeper, beyond recognizing common phenomena in the emerging adult population.

Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran (Rashbetz), a 15th-century Spanish halachic authority, expounds on Shmuel HaKatan's comments in his *Magen Avot*, a commentary on *Pirkei Avot*, ad loc.

The Rashbetz explains that a child who began his learning at the age of five will have completed the content of Mikrah, Mishna and Talmud (each over the course of five years) by the age of twenty. It is now the responsibility of this twenty-year-old to chase after these achievements, to fortify them internally. After all, what better way to prepare oneself in advance of “the strength of a thirty-year-old?”

The Torah revolution that occurred between 1968 and 1978 was the result of decisions that Jews from four corners of the earth made: to fortify the young, passionate state with an identity of Torah. They chased after the achievements of those who came before them to strengthen Eretz Yisrael, and in doing so they changed the world of Torah as well.

Endnotes

1 Thank you to Rabbi Dr. Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff for allowing me to interview him about his personal reflections about this time period.

2 Tosafot, *Bava Basra* 21a, d’’h “*Ki Mitzion*.”

3 See *Chiddushei Ritva*, *Bava Basra* 21a, d’’h “*v’Adayen Machnisin*.”

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