Haggadah thoughts to Ponder 5784

**You have chosen us from among all the other nations**- Why is the “chosen nation” status so important that we lead with it on all Yamim Tovim? And what gives us that status anyway? Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohein Kook explained that when we joined up with Hashem it was not just that we chose to listen to Hashem but also that we chose ourselves as well. A nation that chooses to see its potential learns to believe in itself and if it does not know its potential then it does not know itself and will forget itself as well. **Rav Moshe Tzuriel[[1]](#footnote-1)** added that when it came to choosing Am Yisrael as the continuation of His creation after Adam Harishon sinned, it was not based on the actions we did per se but rather because He chose us for better or for worse. This was true even in Mitzrayim when we were on the lowest level of Tumah and notwithstanding He still chose us. The same can be said for our situation today – no matter how bad and bleak it may seem, He still chooses us and always has whether we understand fully why immediately or need to look a bit deeper at ourselves too.

**L"Shana Haba’ah B’Ara D’Yisrael/The 4 questions** – what’s up with the whole question and answer part of the Seder. Indeed, we are instructed that the story needs to be told in a series of questions and answers. Why are questions and answers so important to the Seder story? **Rav Dr. Shalom Gold[[2]](#footnote-2)** explained that one of the egregious errors of the spies was that when they observed the land of Israel, they did not probe that which they saw, sufficiently and properly. The ongoing search for truth in life requires us to ask the proper questions. Questions allow us to not get swept up with the party line and simply swallow a story as a given. Rav Gold , K’Darko, added that while he meets people who ask their Rav all sort of questions, rarely does he find them asking their Rav about whether one ought to live in Eretz Yisrael. He suggested that we ought to ask our real questions, especially on Seder night as we tell the story of how we got here and figure out how we can go further – to Eretz Yisrael.

**Until their students came to them and said “Our Rabbis it is time for Kriyas Shema of the morning”** – It is interesting to contrast the rabbis described here with Pharaoh’s response at the first Pesach when he went to sleep and got up in the middle of the night. (Shemos 12:30). Rav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi [[3]](#footnote-3)explains that פרעה understood what was going to happen but chose to go to sleep anyway. He refused to do anything about his situation. Sleep was not an acceptance. He went to sleep to hide from his reality. Rav Baruch Mordechai adds that it is incredible to him that sleep is often an excuse for missing קריאת שמע which is a more פרעה  type of behavior that denies the reality of Hashem’s sovereignty over the world at large and over each individual specifically as dictated in the very Shema that is being ignored.

**Baruch Sh’Nasan Torah L’Amo Yisrael** – Many of the commentators on the Haggadah note that this paragraph is a pseudo-Birkas Hatorah for the obligation to highlight the unique Torah experience of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim is above that of regular Talmud torah. What then, do we highlight when we bless Hashem for giving us the Torah? An insight from **Rav Meir Hershkowitz[[4]](#footnote-4).** might shed some light. At a particular dinner for his Yeshiva, he greeted one of his Talmidim who was a Rsoh Yeshiva and proudly told Rav Meir that he (the Talmid turned Rosh Yeshiva) was teaching the third perek of Bava Basra with the notes from the Shiurim of Rav Meir – in essence “Rav Meir’s Torah.” My Torah?” Rav Meir asked in astonishment. “It’s not my Torah, it’s the Eibeshter’s Torah. The pasuk in Tehillim says, ‘Kol haneshamah tehallel Kah,’ and Chazal say in the Midrash, ‘Al kol neshimah v’neshimah, tehallel Kah.’ We must thank Hashem for each and every breath He gives us! So how can I take credit for any Torah I say if it’s all coming from Hashem?” There is no other night and lesson of Torah learning where this is more apparent than in the “torah” of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim where it becomes abundantly clear that we owe our everything, including our privlige of learning Torah to Hashem and His having shared His prized possession with us.

**Knegged Arba Banim Dibra Torah – Rav Shimon Alster[[5]](#footnote-5)** noted that it is the parents who set a tone in the home as to what is important in life and what is not. He mentioned the story of a person who hosted a Bobver Rebbetzin and apologized for the “mess” which consisted of piles of Seforim that were on the table. The Rebbetzin commented that “Seforim are never a mess.” In our lives, Rav Alster added, how we set a tone makes a difference on how our kids will take the lead. Therefore, one should not approach a Shabbos or Yom Tov meal with a half-prepared “Vort” but rather with preparation from opening a real Sefer – It sets a tone about the seriousness of the Torah in life.

**Rasha Mah Hu Omer** – Ever wonder why we even bother listening to a Rasha? After all, if he is not interested, why do we bother to listen if his whole goal is to be oppositional to the process? **Rav Gershon Edelstein [[6]](#footnote-6)** believed that listening, as a parent in particular, makes a HUGE difference to a child no matter where s/he is holding. At the time of his passing, it was reported that Rav Edelstein encouraged a father to take a stroll with his son on Shabbat, even if the son would be breaking Shabbat by smoking a cigarette. Rabbi Edelstein told the father to continue these walks, build your relationship with him, and have fun with him. “You are not his rabbi; be his caring father who loves him no matter what he does.” There were thousands of Jews who are no longer observant who attended Rabbi Edelstein’s funeral, in appreciation for keeping their family together. Maybe that’s how you blunt the teeth of a sharp argument from the Rasha – with love and listening.

**At Pisach Lo**- Rav Zevulun Charlop[[7]](#footnote-7) noted that it is interesting that we note the idea of “At” being in the feminine while Pisach is in the masculine. How do we make sense of the contradiction? He explained by telling a story told about Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev how one Rosh Hashana in his synagogue the shofar blasts would not ascend to heaven, and the Rebbe was profoundly troubled. It was then, that unexpectedly, a non-descript Jewish peasant, unknown to the Rebbi or to the regular worshippers, entered the shul. And, incredibly, it wasn't long after his coming, that the sounds of the shofar and the prayers of the *daveners*which, until then hung oppressively immobile in the Shtieble, suddenly began to move up and out reaching towards their Heavenly destination. Turns out that the peasant didn’t know how to Daven and, had been repeating the *Alef Beis,*over and over again, asking G-d to work the letters into the right words and sentences. The Rebbe then proclaimed to the congregation: Know that the prayers of all of us and the *Tekios*and *Teruos*of the shofar are soaring on the wings of this peasant's *Alef-Beis!* Well, seems that when the story was told by a certain Stolin-Karlin Chossid in Lvov, a certain woman cried out that the people there didn’t even know the Aleph Bet. The Chossid put the Tallis over his head and he got the people to say all of the letters out loud together. By the time he got to *tof, 2,500*roaring voices had turned the repetition of the *alef-bet*into one of the most moving prayers he had ever heard. Rabbi Charlop added that when it comes to the Sheh Ayno Yodaiyah Lishol, the Son Who Doesn't Even Know How To Ask. He doesn't know where to begin. Even the Alef-Beis is strange to him. Here the Hagaddah advises us, AT P'SACH LO, You, meaning his parents or teachers, open his mouth and his mind, stimulate him to ask the right questions and teach him how to assimilate the answers of who he is and what Passover means. Rav Charlop explained that with the story of Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchiv and
the *Alef-Beis* the *AT*here which is comprised of the *Aleph,*the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and the *Tof*the last letter of the alphabet, may not refer to the second person feminine you after all, but to the *Aleph Beis*itself AT *P'SACH Lo*With the one Who Doesn't Even Know How to Ask, You begin with the *AT*the alphabet, you start teaching him/her from *Aleph to Tof!*

**I gave Eisav Har Seir** – Why do we mention Eisav at the Seder and not Yishmael? Rav Ahron Schechter ztl. suggested that there were important people who affected Jewish life who were descendants of Eisav. The Emperor Antoninus (Antonius) for instance, was an impactful descendant of Rivka who positively impacted Jewish and world destiny. There is no equivalent in the descendants of Hagar. Why? **Rav Aharon Schechter**[[8]](#footnote-8) suggested that this is built on the idea of “Garesh Es HaAmah Hazos” where Sarah insisted that Hagar and her descendants be totally separated from Jewish and thus, world destiny. Therefore Yishmael cannot be at the Seder.

**Before V’He She’amda: Chief Rabbi Dovid Lau** implored Jews worldwide to daven for the hostages in Israel at this point in the Seder. He composed the following Tefillah (See word before Shabbos Tazria 5784)

 יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלִּפְנֵי אָבִינוּ שֶׁבַּשָּׁמַיִם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצִיא אֶת עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִתַּחַת סִבְלוֹת מִצְרַיִם הוּא יְבָרֵךְ וְיִנְצֹר אֶת אַחֵינוּ וְאַחְיוֹתֵינוּ הַחֲטוּפִים הָאֲסוּרִים בְּכַבְלֵי בַּרְזֶל, יְחַזֵּק נַפְשָׁם וֶאֱמוּנָתָם, יִשְׁמְרֵם מִכָּל נֶגַע וּמַחֲלָה, יַחְמֹל עַל בָּנָיו וּבְנוֹתָיו הַמְּצַפִּים לִישׁוּעָתוֹ, יְבַטֵּל מֵעֲלֵיהֶם כָּל גְּזֵרוֹת אַכְזָרִיּוֹת. בְּחַסְדּוֹ הַגָּדוֹל יָחִישׁ פְּדוּתָם וְיֵצְאוּ מְהֵרָה מֵאֲפֵלָה לְאוֹרָה וּמִבּוֹר הַשְּׁבִי לְחֵרוּת עוֹלָם וְיָשׁוּבוּ לְשָׁלוֹם אֶל מִשְׁפְּחוֹתֵיהֶם וְאֶל בָּתֵּיהֶם".

"אָנָּא, נֶטַע אַחֲוָה שָׁלוֹם וְרֵעוּת בְּלֵב כֻּלָּם, הָסֵר קִנְאָה וְשִׂנְאַת חִנָּם וּפְרֹס עָלֵינוּ סֻכַּת שְׁלוֹמֶךָ וְנִזְכֶּה בְּקָרוֹב לוֹמַר לְפָנֶיךָ שִׁירָה חֲדָשָׁה".

It should be the will of our Father in Heaven who took his nation Israel out of the yoke of Egypt, He should bless and save our brothers and sisters the hostages who are held in iron chains, strengthen their souls and faith, protect them from all harm (*Nega can be spiritual like Tzoraas or physical*) and sickness, have mercy on his sons and daughters who look for his salvation, annul all cruel decrees. With His great kindness, he shall send their redemption and speedily take them from darkness to light and from the abyss of captivity to eternal freedom, and return them safely to their families and homes.

"Please, plant brotherhood, peace, and friendship in everyone's hearts. Remove jealousy and baseless hatred, and spread over us the shelter of Your peace, and we should soon merit to sing before you a new song

**V’He She’Amda (or 4 Kosos)(Or Dam V’Eish V’Timros Ashan) -** The Yirushalmi notes that there are 4 cups that parallel the 4 languages of Freedom but the Rabbanan note that they parallel the 4 cups of Poraniyos (pain and suffering) that Hashem will ultimately pay back to the nations of the world who tortured us. The Pnei Moshe notes that the Rabbanan are not arguing with the first opinion but rather adding to it. Hence, we pour off wine at the point of mentioning the Makos as we see this is part of the punishment of the Mitzriiyim and do not rejoice at the downfall of our enemies. But we also pour wine off at the time of recitation of Dam V’Eish V’Timros Ashan which references a later time. Why are we mentioning (and being distressed somewhat) by the future that has not happened as yet? **Rav Mattisyahu Salomon[[9]](#footnote-9)** suggested that there is a connection between the cups of the past and the cups of the future. Indeed the Midrash notes that there were 4 redemptions IN Egypt even PRIOR to leaving it. (The Midrash commentary Matnos Kehuna identifies a. Avodas Perech, b. Throwing the male babies into the nile c. Shechting the babies for Pharaoh’s health and d. not giving the Jews straw for the bricks). Each of these redemptions helped the Jew sense the redemption along the way – just as we will when the Geulah of the future will come too. Hence, we lift the cup for V’He She’amda. Normally we do not do that but we lift the cup here to show us and strengthen us even in the Galus that there are Emunah inspiring moments and experiences of life that we need to raise our cup to toast Hashem with, and strengthen ourselves in the process until we get to the ultimate Geulah.

**Bnei Yisrael were Mitzuyanim there** – Pirkei d’Rav Eliezer notes that the Jewish people stood out in Mitzrayim insofar as they didn’t change their names, dress or language**. Rav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi**[[10]](#footnote-10) asked why it was that these things were the basis for the merit to leave Egypt. After all, don’t we find the Malachim stupefied as to why Hashem would save them over the Egyptians if both camps contained idol worshippers? To put it in Rav Ezrachi’s words “you wear a Shtreimel and that’s good enough?” Rav Ezrachi explains that there is a difference between actions (Maasim) of a person and his or her essence (Mahus). While beaten down in slavery, it is not likely that the Jewish people would be able to express their own identities in action. Any sense of public liberty and freedom had been taken away from them. However, when they were among their own, there was no one who dared speak in a foreign language. None named their children Ramses or Pharaoh. In that regard they remained distinguished and that essence of distinction is the basis for Geulah.

**Rechush Gadol** - **Rav Zevulun Charlop**[[11]](#footnote-11) used to highlight the importance not only of the Yetzias Mitzrayim to his grandchildren but also the importance of the Rechush Gadol (which he told his grandchildren they could hunt for on the second days of the Chag as well!) Rav Charlop noted that the Rechush Gadol came in two stages. The first stage occurred when the Egyptians, in a miraculous turnabout, sent the Bnei Yisroel away with expensive farewell mementos that they had ostensibly borrowed. The second stage, when the Bnei Yisroel picked up from the Red Sea shores on Shvi'i shel Pesach, a week after the initial Exodus, the gorgeous armor of their drowned, Egyptian pursuers. This armor surpassed by far the wealth they had collected in Egypt, and in fact, Moshe had to coerce Bnei Yisroel to depart from their Red Sea riches (Shemos 15:22). There are two explanations for the need for coercion here: Rashi says that Moshe literally had to tear them away from the Red Sea because they were so engrossed in accumulating the expensive remnants of the Egyptian cavalry. The Zohar, however, understands that the Jews did not want to depart form the Red Sea because never before had they sensed so vividly and unmistakably – the presence of the Shechinah. Rav Charlop quoted his grandfather Rav Yaakov Moshe ztl who saw no contradiction between these views. He noted that there are two tests of faith – nisayon ha'oni, the test of affliction, and nisayon ha'osher , the test of affluence. When dark times hit, it is often difficult to recognize Hashem's Presence and believe fully in His ultimate guiding hand. However, even a more difficult test is the test of affluence: to believe in Hashem and heed His Word in times of well being and ease. A person's recognition of Hashem even in affluent times can be an even more sublime vision than in a time of adversity. Bnei Yisroel's powerful awareness of Hashem came precisely because of their preoccupation with the riches at the sea. And this is what Chazal mean when they say: "What the plainest maidservant saw at the Red Sea was not seen even by Ezekiel in his marvelous conjuring of the chariot.""We are expected," Rav Charlop would explain to us, "To feel the Shechinah when we are flushed with Rechush Gadol, and indeed, it is possible for us to reach higher peaks of Yedias Hashem in wealth than in poorness.

**And with the signs refers to the Mateh** – **Rav Elimelech Wasserman HY”D**[[12]](#footnote-12) noted that in the olden days people would go to Tzaddikim to perform all sorts of signs in order to help them through life challenges – including finding mates or livelihoods or a solution to childbirth issues etc. The signs were successful since the goal was that the signs would also inspire the people to remain on the “Derech” meaning Derech Hashem. However, unfortunately people took the easy way out, choose Emunah and ran without any real commitment to a new path in life. In other words, they chose cheap belief without Avodah. There, today the signs and segulos need proper Avoda with them. This is what Chazal (See Sefer Kesser Shem Tov) mean when they say that in the time of Moshiach the signs will be Battel and the only source of salvation will be by way of Avodah.

**I will pass through Mitzrayim tonight personally and not through a Malach** – Why did we need Hashem to be directly involved in specifically THAT Makkah? And why did Bnei Yisrael need to be involved in the Makkah (by separating themselves via placing the blood on the doorposts and the lintel) – didn’t Hashem show that He could separate between Bnei Yisrael and the Mitzryiim when he did so in Makas Dever? Citing Nesivos Shalom, **Dovid Schwartz[[13]](#footnote-13) *Hashem Yinkom Damo*** explained that there were 2 aspects to the Makkos. The first, was Hashem’s need to redeem Bnei Yisrael from slavery. The second was to make them (us?) into His chosen people. Makkas Bechoros had both intentions included in it. With this plague, God chooses Israel as Am Hashem, and lifted us from the forty-nine degrees of impurity effectuating his fulfillment of the promise he made the avos. To meet that need, Hashem brings this Makkah himself. However, it was not enough for a Jew to be passive at that moment. In order to demonstrate that the individual Jew in Mitzrayim wanted to join Hashem in His desire to create an Am HaNichar, Each one of the Jews needed to participate in some way through some action that s/he was on board. Hence, the need to place the blood on the doorpost. Dovid Hy”d added that The great lesson for us in this is that we now understand that in order to be full and meaningful partners as a part of God’s people, it is by no means enough for us to rest and preserve the commandments like a servant who simply follows the will of a master. Rather, it is upon us to push ourselves to accomplish God’s will proactively, for the purpose of fulfilling our mission of being a proactive and creative people, as our lives in this world should not be like a leaf that is blown about by the wind. A thought process that drives one to think that the essence of being Jewish is only about preserving the Torah and its commandments and that this exempts one from constant striving for the betterment of society pushes us away from our central purpose: to be the kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

**And on the sea – Rav Shimon Alster[[14]](#footnote-14)** noted that the Gemara notes 3 versions about how Bnei Yisrael sang Shirah at the sea. One version says Moshe sang the Shirah and the people listened “Shomeiya K’Oneh,” one says it was responsive – that Moshe sang and then the people sang the refrain and the third opinion is that they all got such an inspiration from Moshe and from the events that they had witnessed that they all sang together with ruach HaKodesh. Rav Alster noted that this Gemara highlights 3 distinct leadership styles – sometimes leaders do the work for us and we merely listen. Sometimes they lead us from the front and tell us what to say and do. However, a third style is leadership when a leader takes us into a circle and leads by example encouraging others to join with him. Rav Alster explained that a Jewish home needs to be a circle – where parents get everyone involved and participate accordingly.

**Rabbanan Gamliel, Pesach Matzo U’Maror** – While today we do not offer the Korban Pesach, why would we not fulfill the obligation of Seder night if we did not mention it? **Rav Gershon Neuman**[[15]](#footnote-15) offered a great insight based on a Midrash in Eicha Rabba that notes that Hashem satiated me with bitterness referring to Pesach and connects to Tisha B’Av. The midrash notes that utilizing the numerical A”T Bash system the day of the week of Seder night is also the day of the week of Tisha B’Av. What is the point? Rav Gershon Neuman explained that part of the obligation of tell Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayimn on Seder night is the obligation to complete the Galus. Part of that completion involves preparing for a post-Galus Pesach. Post Galus Pesach involves the Korban Pesach. So if one remembers to include the Korban Pesach in his story-telling on Pesach night, he is involved in bringing the Galus process to completion. If we do not, so the night of Pesach will mark a continued observance of Galus -- a night predictive of Tisha B’Av. The end of Galus involves a preparation and yearning for Geulah.

**He took us from slavery to freedom** – What type of Freedom do we celebrate on Pesach? **Rabbi Raymond Apple**[[16]](#footnote-16) noted that freedom in the Torah is identified with many words including Dror (which appears on the liberty bell) and appears also in context of a listing of birds in the Torah – the swallow. In context of the bird the Talmud comments that just as the swallow is free to soar and live wherever it wants so too freedom is the liberty to do the same. Rabbi Apple added that freedom is the ability to live and play as one wishes. In other words, freedom is the ability and right to be oneself and uphold one’s own ethos. Of course, that is not real freedom if one wants to be able to live under Hashem’s Torah. So if that is the case how does one live within his or her own ethos? Rabbi Apple explained that leaving nothing to God is arrogant: leaving too much to Him is abdication.

**Ad Heina Azarunu Rachameicha V’Lo Azavunu Chasadeicha (fro Nishmas recited in Hallel Hagadol)** – We mention 2 ideas – Rachamim and Chassadim of Hashem. **Rav Gershon Edelstein[[17]](#footnote-17)** noted that Rachamim refers to Hashem’s helping of someone in dire straits while Chasdei Hashem are when Hashem helps us even when the straits are not dire. Sometimes we get to enjoy Hashem’s Chessed when we might not merit just his Rachamim too. To all that we note that Hashem’s Rachamim have helped us until now and His Chessed has not left us. We add to this recognition that we hope that Hashem should (please ) not leave us forever (LaNetzach). Rav Edelstein noted in the name of the Gra that whatever kindness we have received until now has been due to His Chessed and Rachamim and we hope that despite that we do not deserve it, we hope the Rachamim and Chessed will continue as it has thus far. Hence the need for the Tefillah – and the prayer that it not cease LsaNetzach – in Olam Hazeh but certainly and more importantly for Olam HaBa.

1. Rav Moshe Tzuriel, former Mashgiach Ruchani at Yeshivat Shaalvim for 19 years was a walking encyclopedia of Torah thought. His scholarship, especially in areas of Machshava and Jewish philosophy where he authored over 49 seforim is breathless in depth and breadth. While he was relatively unknown to most people, he had a tremendous impact on his talmidim and their families. Upon retirement, he moved to Bnei Brak where he passed in 5784. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Rabbi Dr. Sholom Gold, was been in the vanguard of building communities both in the Diaspora and Israel.

As a young man in 1959, he came to Toronto to establish the Ner Israel Yeshiva, where he also built and developed Congregation Bnei Torah in Willowdale, a northern suburb of Toronto. Becoming Rabbi of Young Israel of West Hempstead NY in 1971, he built one of the first Eruvin in North America, which quickly became a model world-wide. Under his leadership the local mikveh was built as West Hempstead was developing into one of the most vibrant religious communities in the NY area. Since making aliya in 1982, he built and served as the Rav of Kehilat Zichron Yoseph in Har Nof, and in 1984 founded the Avrom Silver Jerusalem College for Adults, which merged with the Israel Center in 2002, where Rabbi Gold taught Torah to hundreds of his talmidim for decades. His love of and devotion to Eretz Yisrael accompanied him throughout his entire life. Rabbi Gold has been at the forefront of the struggle for Eretz Yisrael. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Rav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Rosh Yeshiva of Ateres Yisrael in Bayit V’Gan was a prolific Rebbe, a fiery and inspiring teacher and speaker and a phenomenal writer on a host of Jewish subjects. A member of the famed Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah in Israel, his opinion carried a tremendous amount of weight in the Israeli Chareidi community. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Rav Meir Hershkowitz was the humble, unassuming Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshiva Beis Binyamin of Stamford. Born and raised on the lower east side, he was a musmach of RJJ and went to learn with Rav Aharon Kotler ztl. with whom, he enjoyed a special relationship. Rav Meir was selected to be the Chozer of RV Aharon’s shiur where he helped others grasp the genius of Rav Aharon. At the same time, he was recognized as an incredible Talmid Chacham in his own right. Still, his humility was legendary and he seemed to have all the time for anyone who needed it. He opened Stamford with Rav Simcha Shustal in 1976 and it remains a Torah center (today in Monsey) for both Chassidish and Litvishe Talmidim. His austere living was other-worldly. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Rav Shimon Alster was the Rosh Yeshiva of Cliffwood Yeshiva, Rav of Torah U’Tefillah in Flatbush and former Maggid Shiur of Mesivta of Long Beach. He would naturally connect with people on their level. The deep power of that connection emanated from his vast storehouse of Torah, developed over years steeped in his own connections to Gedolei Torah spanning generations, both in person and through their seforim or hanhagos, which he was able to direct and transmit to each person. He passed in 5784 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Rav Yerachmiel Gershon Edelstein was the Rosh Hayeshiva of the Ponevezh Yeshiva, Nasi of the Vaad Hayeshivos, and the spiritual leader of the Degel HaTorah party in Israel. He was widely considered to be a Gadol Hador by the Litvish community. Soviet born, his mother obtained forged birth certificates for her sons stating that they were three years younger so they would not have to attend a school run by Yevsektzia, the extremely anti-semitic branch of the Communist Party. When his mother was ill with typhus, he and his younger brother, Yaakov, were sent to stay with his aunt, Rivka Tzvia Paz, in the city of Klimovich (Klimavichy), where they studied Torah secretly. There they received the news of their mother's death. The 2 boys emigrated to Israel with their father who raised the 2 pearls and taught them Torah. Rav Gershon entered Ponevezh and never left. His responsibilities and influence over the Yeshiva grew and his impact, through his calm demeanor and keen insight left a lasting imprint on thousands who looked to him for Torah knowledge, guidance and support. He passed in 5783. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Rav Zevulun Charlop was the Menahel and Dean at RIETS and the venerated Rav of the Young Israel of Mosholu Parkway. A dynamic speaker and thinker, posek, Lamdan and Baal Machshava, he was revered by students at RIETS who also felt his strong love for them, for Torah and for Eretz Yisrael. Every Talmid who met with him or connected with him on any matter knew their Rebbe was watching out for them and their best interests. He passed in 5784. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Rav Aharon Moshe Schechter was the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin. A devoted Talmid of its famed Rosh Yeshiva Rav Yitzchak Hutner, he joined the Nesius (pesidium) of Agudah in America upon the passing of his Rosh Yeshiva and later joined the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah. A strong personality, his dedication to his positions was legendary. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Rav Mattisyahu Chaim Salomon was the dynamic and inspiring Mashgiach Ruchani of Beth Medrash Govoha of Lakewood where his influence on the personal and communal lives of his students and the Jewish people at large was incredibly impactful. Prior to comingto Lakewood, Rav Mattisyahu was the Mashgiach of the Gateshead Yeshiva for 30 years. Many of his incredible insights are published in the various Seforim entitled Matanas Chaim. He passed in 5784. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Rav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Rosh Yeshiva of Ateres Yisrael in Bayit V’Gan was a prolific Rebbe, a fiery and inspiring teacher and speaker and a phenomenal writer on a host of Jewish subjects. A member of the famed Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah in Israel, his opinion carried a tremendous amount of weight in the Israeli Chareidi community. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Rav Zevulun Charlop was the Menahel and Dean at RIETS and the venerated Rav of the Young Israel of Mosholu Parkway. A dynamic speaker and thinker, posek, Lamdan and Baal Machshava, he was revered by students at RIETS who also felt his strong love for them, for Torah and for Eretz Yisrael. Every Talmid who met with him or connected with him on any matter knew their Rebbe was watching out for them and their best interests. He passed in 5784. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Rav Elimelech Wasserman was a Belzer Chossid who learned in Vhiznitz-Haifa and later upon marriage learned for Dayanus in Machon Harry Fischel where he was ordained as a Dayan was a respected member of the Ashdod Beis Din. A relatively unknown scholar outside of the Dayanus circles, his humility was apparent however his scholarship and understanding of case law were apparent in the decisions he provided to cases before the Beis Din who brilliance and sensitivity were both on full display. He was murdered by Hamas terrorists while waiting for a bus to Ashdod in Yirushalayim in 5784. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. One of the too many Korbanot of the war against Hamas of 5784, Dovid Schwartz was a Boger of Yeshivat Har Etzion who gave his life for the Medinah, the Am and the Aretz. He was known as a warm individual whose heart radiated happiness and goodness.He displayed quiet, understated leadership that was never aggressive or controlling. He always assumed responsibility, organizing group events or scheduling changes. He was a truth-seeker, possessing deep personal convictions, but always eager to receive helpful input from his teachers. Raised Dati Le’Umi, he was constantly seeking religious inspiration from multiple sources including Chassidic courts. He was a beloved husband, who composed a Sefer L’Dovid Barchi Nafshi in honor of his wedding, and a devoted friend especially with his chavrusa and fellow officer Yakir Hexter HY”D with whom he fell in battle. No words can thank them and all those that fell protecting Israel and all who stand for humanity. יהי זכרם ברוך [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Rav Shimon Alster was the Rosh Yeshiva of Cliffwood Yeshiva, Rav of Torah U’Tefillah in Flatbush and former Maggid Shiur of Mesivta of Long Beach. He would naturally connect with people on their level. The deep power of that connection emanated from his vast storehouse of Torah, developed over years steeped in his own connections to Gedolei Torah spanning generations, both in person and through their seforim or hanhagos, which he was able to direct and transmit to each person. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Rav Gershon Neuman was the Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshiva Zichron Leyma in Union, NJ. A former Maggid shiur in south Fallsburg Yeshiva and Rav of Khal Shaarei Tefillah in Boro Park, Rav Neuman was known as a Lamdan and a posek. Most importantly, he was known as a Rebbe and father to hundreds of Talmidim who revered him for his love for them. He passed on the fifth night of Chanukah 5784. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. **Rabbi Raymond Apple served for 32 years as the chief minister of the Great Synagogue, Sydney, Australia’s oldest and most prestigious congregation. He was Australia’s highest profile rabbi and held many public roles. After retiring and moving to Israel, he passed away in 5784.** [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Rav Yerachmiel Gershon Edelstein was the Rosh Hayeshiva of the Ponevezh Yeshiva, Nasi of the Vaad Hayeshivos, and the spiritual leader of the Degel HaTorah party in Israel. He was widely considered to be a Gadol Hador by the Litvish community. Soviet born, his mother obtained forged birth certificates for her sons stating that they were three years younger so they would not have to attend a school run by Yevsektzia, the extremely anti-semitic branch of the Communist Party. When his mother was ill with typhus, he and his younger brother, Yaakov, were sent to stay with his aunt, Rivka Tzvia Paz, in the city of Klimovich (Klimavichy), where they studied Torah secretly. There they received the news of their mother's death. The 2 boys emigrated to Israel with their father who raised the 2 pearls and taught them Torah. Rav Gershon entered Ponevezh and never left. His responsibilities and influence over the Yeshiva grew and his impact, through his calm demeanor and keen insight left a lasting imprint on thousands who looked to him for Torah knowledge, guidance and support. He passed in 5783 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)