

[Click here to support Shaharit today!](#)

Passover Greetings from Eilon Schwartz...

Dear Friends,

Late at night, looking for some guidance for these trying times, I stumbled upon an extraordinary text by Martin Buber entitled "Hope for this Hour." It was a speech he had given at Carnegie Hall in New York in 1952, about the Cold War. It could have been written for Israel in its 75th anniversary year:

The human world is today, as never before, split into two camps, each of which understands the other as the embodiment of falsehood and itself as the embodiment of truth... Each side has assumed monopoly of the sunlight and has plunged its antagonist into night, and each side demands that you decide between day and night....

Neither I, nor Buber, argue for moral equivalence between the warring camps. The point is descriptive, not judging who is right, but pointing out that both sides see the world in black and white. The art of dialogue, the human ability to step out of one's own experience, and to be curious and empathetic about the experience of others, is the unheralded backbone of democracy. And yet it has become an endangered species. Without it, we retreat into our own worlds, and increasingly see others, different from us, with growing suspicion:

Nothing stands so much in the way of the rise of a Civilization of Dialogue as the demonic power which rules our world, the demonry of basic mistrust. What does it avail to induce the other to speak if basically one puts no faith in what he says? The meeting with him already takes place under the perspective of his

untrustworthiness. And this perspective is not incorrect, for his meeting with me takes place under a corresponding perspective.

In a world dangerously divided into two camps, "mine" is experiencing an unexpected resurgence because of the bad will of this present government, and indeed sees itself as the light against the darkness. The blatant racism and vile provocations of Itamar Ben-Gvir make that assessment easy. It is difficult to climb the wall of empathy and to find perspectives on the other side that we were blind to, and to learn from them. I do believe that this government's proposals, their content and no less importantly their tone, have done possibly irreparable damage to the fabric of Israeli democracy. They have accentuated our faultlines and exponentially heightened the levels of suspicion and mistrust.

There is a political price being paid for the government's actions. It crescendoed the night that Netanyahu fired Defense Minister Yoav Gallant. Many who do not feel at home among the liberal camp at the rallies nevertheless joined them in the streets. There are tectonic processes taking place.

And yet, whether or not there is a shift taking place between the camps, the divides will not go away, and all of us will still be here tomorrow. If we are to preserve our democracy in the long run, we must climb that wall of empathy. To those who question why we should seek dialogue and practice empathy with those who reject dialogue and refuse empathy with us, Buber responds, quoting Robert Hutchins, "It is no good saying that Civilization of the Dialogue cannot arise when the other party will not talk. We have to find the way to induce him to talk." Otherwise, we shall continue to spiral down into an ever more dangerous moment.

As it turns out, a growing number of Israelis see it that way, as well. The spiteful tenor of this government – a crass, mean-spirited relationship to the rest of Israeli society (when climbing the wall of empathy one learns that the "other" camp experienced left-leaning governments, through their perceived condescension and moral superiority, with a similar sense of alienation, anger and bitterness) – has led to shifts at least in the polls. But rather than enflaming the culture wars, the move from both sides is to the empathetic center, increasingly against the reforms – their content and their tone – but listening and building relationships and taking seriously the world as their political opponents see it.

Four sons sit with us at the seder table. One wise, one wicked, one simple, and

one who does not know how to ask the question. The wise and the wicked son speak in the second-person plural. “What are the laws that God has commanded *you?*”; the wise son asks. “What is the meaning of this for *you?*” asks the wicked son. For speaking of *them*, and not *us*, the wicked son is chastised. It is why he is considered wicked. But the wise son also speaks of them, rather than us. He is nevertheless considered wise. Who we consider wise and who we consider wicked is perhaps also influenced by our predeterminations.

Protests fill our streets, pushing back on a “reform” that seems far more like a dismantling of democracy. And simultaneously, our WhatsApp and email accounts are filled with calls for initiatives that are bringing people together to reach across the aisle, to climb that wall of empathy, and to see how the world looks like in others' shoes. It is the combination of these events that is our greatest hope. May our Pesach be blessed with curiosity, and not just judgment; humility, and not just righteousness; the softness of *Hesed* and not simply the harshness of *Din*.

Chag Aviv Sameach, Chag Herut Sameach,
Eilon



Share



Tweet



Forward

[Donate Now to Freedom and Democracy in Israel](#)

Shaharit Program Updates



Shaharit held a two-day training seminar on what a Common Good agenda looks like in local government for a select group of 60 local leaders. Against the national political atmosphere of sectorial division, we brought together a diverse mix of aspiring candidates for city council and mayoral offices — Jewish and Arab, Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, and Ethiopian; haredi, religious Zionist, and secular; right and left. Anyone looking for hope for the future of Israel in these difficult times need look no further than Shaharit. The seminar was “no less than enthralling,” reported participant Zohar Gvily.



Over 100 people from across the spectrum of Israeli society came out to Shaharit's joint event with Beit Prat in Tel Aviv in February — and stayed to talk well past midnight. In this moment of worrying political divides, Shaharit is proud to foster an eagerness to dive into complexity and have a real, open conversation to advance the common good.



The current cohort of senior Religious Zionist leaders in our leadership development program, run in partnership with Ne'emanei Torah Va'Avodah, recently visited the Arab town of Jaljulia. They met with local political, religious, and educational leaders to hear Arab Israeli perspectives and challenges. For many it was their first time inside a mosque, or having a more-than-superficial conversation across the Jewish-Arab divide.



Founding Director Eilon Schwartz delivered a featured presentation at a [forum](#) held by the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington on the relationship between American Jewry and Israel. “We must focus on relationships and need to expand our affections to include not only those with whom we agree, but also those with whom we have deep disagreements,” Eilon [told](#) the crowd. “If we are to sustain the bonds between the two communities, this is a critical starting point.”

Shaharit was among the first to identify the polarization of society as the existential threat to Israeli democracy. Our fears about the future are becoming our present reality.

This is a critical and challenging moment in Israel’s history.

This is the moment Shaharit was designed to confront.

We need your support now more than ever.

[Donate to Shaharit](#)

Copyright © 2022 - Shaharit - Creating Common Cause, All rights reserved.

Our mailing address is:

Carlebach 13, Tel Aviv-Yafo 6713217

Want to change how you receive these emails?

You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).