

# “Acharei Ha’gaim”

## What does this phrase mean to you?



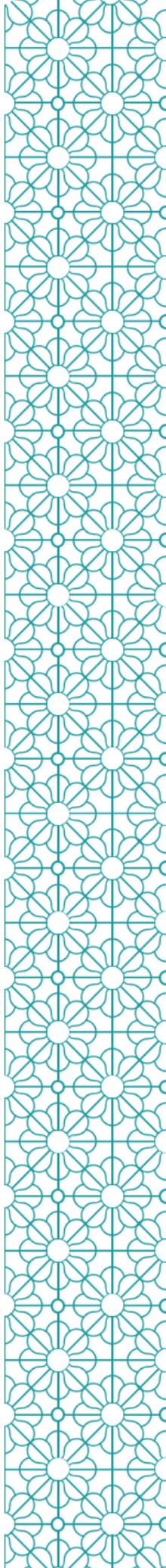
**Yerach Meiersdorf** serves as acting rabbi of the Noam Youth Movement; He is currently completing his rabbinical studies and will be ordained from Schechter December 2017.

A well-known and oft-quoted phrase in Israel is “Acharei Ha’gaim” or “After the Holidays”. The calendar year in Israel is full of holidays and vacation periods, and it is only after the period of the major Jewish holidays that everyday routine resumes. This phenomenon can be difficult, because of the pressure of such a long vacation period, but on the other hand may have an advantage by providing a buffer between the end of one year and the beginning of the next. Here in Israel, this period provides us with a time during which we can review the passing year and prepare at length and in depth for the upcoming one. The time before “After the Holidays” is an extraordinary opportunity for individual and collective soul-searching – what have we done up until now, if we are satisfied with our actions, and what our future actions will be. On Rosh Hashana and Yom Yippur we purify ourselves of individual sins and join the rest of the world in prayers, in an inner place, the synagogue. During Sukkot, we go outside into the sukkah (or go on trips in Israel or abroad) and discover an external place outside ourselves. It is only thus that we may prepare for a new year full of meaning and positive intentions. Happy “After the Holidays”!



**Sara Cohen** serves as regional rabbi in the Eilat region of southernmost Israel ,including her Masorti Kehillah at Kibbutz Ketura. She is currently completing her rabbinical studies and will be ordained from Schechter December 2017.

After the chagim I’ll work in the garden. After the chagim I’ll clean out under my bed. After the chagim I’ll start my exercise routine. “After the chagim” is a religiously and socially sanctioned postponement mechanism. How amazing! You don’t have to feel bad about procrastinating because the entire country does it. The banks, government offices, school principals. The problem is once we’ve actually arrived at “after the chagim” a whole lot of stuff has piled up from the pre-chagim “after the chagim” mantra period. But I was reminded this week, as we enter the “after the chagim” season of one of my favorite Israeli expressions: “moadim l’shigra,” a play on words of the chol hamoed greeting “moadim l’simcha.” There really is happiness to be found in the routine and the everyday. Just as in prayer, where we need both keva and kavannah, “moadim l’shigra” reminds us to try to instill some of the spiritual intensity, family togetherness, and communal intimacy of the high holidays into our everyday “after the chagim” lives .





**Nerya Knafo**, is the newly appointed director of the civil institute of the Masorti Movement - Jewish Pluralism Watch (JPW). he is a social activist on issues of peace, solidarity and democracy. On a personal note, he is a member of the Knafo, Abuhatzeira and Bardugo families of the Jewish leadership in Morocco and a leading activist with regard to the absorption of Sephardic Jewish values in Israeli society.

I once asked a brave combat soldier about the moment when he saved wounded soldiers under fire (an act for which he received a medal of honor): what went through his head at the time, and where did he find the courage? To my surprise, the combat soldier told me that he doesn't feel brave at all. The moment when the act took place was so packed with adrenalin, that it felt almost like an "out of body" experience, an involuntary moment beyond control. The real medal, he claimed, should have been given to his soldiers, who returned to guard the boring frontline of Har Dov after the conclusion of the war, where they had to look out onto a view of the snowy mountains for hours, from a freezing bunker, in exhausting rounds of seven-hour guard duty. That's what "after the holidays" means for me. Without the adrenalin of the Rosh Hashana prayers, without the spiritual intentions of Yom Kippur, without the outings and festive meals during the Sukkot holiday, and without the enormous enthusiasm of Simchat Torah – and with the routine and everyday work of soul searching, family unity, community work, and boring office work. In the period after the holidays, the quality of our worship of God, our real joy, our professional level, and our appreciation of nature and the flowers at the side of the road are all truly "put to the test". Shortly, the winter session of the Knesset, which is long, professional and for the most part boring and business-like - will commence, and my personal prayer is that we will be attentive to the small and boring moments as well as to the big and important ones. Wishing everyone a healthy winter and a blessed period of routine !



**Oded Peles** serves as acting rabbi in the Masorti congregations in Gilo, Jerusalem and Petach Tikva, and is the rabbinical intern of Kehilat Zion. He is currently studying at the Schechter Rabbinical Seminary.

O Soul that sighs!  
Sabbath appears - and rest will come  
Joy, happiness and delight  
It was Blessed and sanctified with manna  
When it descended to a nation who were not forsaken  
And the Sabbath revives the soul  
With a patch of grain that was hidden by God  
(From traditional Sabbath Piyut)

נֶפֶשׁ כִּי נִאָנְחָה  
בָּא שַׁבָּת בָּא מְנוּחָה  
גִּיל וְשִׂשׂוֹן וְשִׂמְחָה  
בְּרָכּוֹ וְקִדְשׁוֹ בְּמִן  
מְלֻרְדֵת לְעַם לֹא אֶלְמִן  
וְהַשַּׁבָּת / נֶפֶשׁ מְשִׁיבָת  
בְּפִיסַת בֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר טָמֵן  
(מתוך פיוט לשבת)

In Israel, a sigh of relief is heard on the day following the holidays of the month of Tishrei. I love the holidays very much, actually. I love the atmosphere which gently arises, drawn from magical melodies, fascinating customs and wonderful dishes. But in our home, the "Shabbat Bereishit" after the holidays serves as the opening signal for the special hymns and melodies of winter Sabbaths. Melodies of contentment and patience. An atmosphere containing the promise of more love and family time together at the Sabbath table. The aroma of nefesh m'shivat - "a soul revived".

