



שמאל אמוני (*Smol Emuni*) is a diverse group of religious Israeli Jews who are bringing their faith to the public discourse in an effort to counteract the right's uninhibited use of religion. Their [inaugural conference in January](#) attracted a surprisingly high number of participants who wished to wrest the moniker of “religious” away from dangerous groups that would leverage tradition to do harm to other human beings. As they say, “we are left because we are faithful.”

One of their great successes has been the way they bring people with varying opinions and viewpoints to the table. Oftentimes Jewish texts are the key to helping folks come together and have valuable conversations about what sort of action they should see in their lives. They debate whether these texts, and the lessons contained within apply solely to themselves as individuals, to a larger subset of Jewish community, or to an entire nation.

As we approach the High Holidays, Israel is very much on our minds—and our congregants’. They want to hear from us as their clergy—a message that looks the current danger straight in the eye without also giving up hope. To that end, here are two texts—either for learning sessions or preaching—brought to us by *Smol Emuni* leaders Limor Yaakov Safrai and Mikhael Manekin.

#### Limor taught: Excerpt from Moshe Unna’s *HaChinuch B’chayeinu*<sup>1</sup>

Regarding the homeland. This foundational concept has a very important place in education as a psychological motivator.. A spiritual connection must be developed between the child and the homeland. An innate love of the homeland must be rooted within a person. Alongside this, we must also show the child their homeland with all its special problematics. The child needs to know that the Land of Israel is the homeland to two peoples. They need to understand that our neighboring people are also connected to their homeland and they should not be seen as enemies or competitors.

מולדת. מקומו של היסוד הזה בחינוך כגורם פסיכולוגי חשוב מאוד. יש לפתח קשר נפשי בין הילד ובין המולדת. חשובה אהבה המולדת והשתרשותו של האדם בתוכה. יחד עם זה יש להעמיד לפני הילד את מולדתנו לאור הפרובלמטיקה המיוחדת שלה. הילד צריך לדעת שארץ ישראל היא מולדת לשני עמים. הוא צריך להבין את העם השכן הקשור גם הוא למולדתו ולא לראות בו אויב ומתחרה.

- The early religious Zionist kibbutz movement saw itself as a creative force, seeking to build a more perfect society and to unearth new facets of Torah that could only be revealed in the context of Jewish sovereignty. Though that movement has gone politically far to the right today, perhaps we too can tap into their original sense of creativity and renewal.
- While the Land should connect with us deeply, we shouldn’t view it as owned by humans. Embracing the *chazon nevi'im* (vision of the prophets) informs us to understand that the Divine is the landlord, and we must be righteous stewards during our time in it.

<sup>1</sup> [החינוך בחיינו](#), “[The Education of Our Lives](#)” was written in 1945 by Moshe Unna. Among his many accomplishments, Unna would be elected to the *Knesset* from 1949-1969, serving as a minister representing religious parties.

**Mikhael taught: Eliyahu de Vidas' *Reshit Chochmah - Teshuva 4:4*<sup>2</sup>**

And the fast is necessary for the one returning/doing teshuva, because—in eating—the heart becomes proud and comes to rebel, as we extracted from *Shaar Kedusha*, chapter 15, that no person rebels except through eating and drinking. This is as was said (Deuteronomy 11:15-16) “I will also provide grass in the fields for your cattle—and thus you shall eat your fill; take care not to be lured away to serve other gods and bow to them,” and also [at the Golden Calf] “the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up *letzachek*<sup>3</sup>” (Exodus 22:6), and so on. And the main point of fasting is submission, as King David said in the psalm of repentance (Psalms 51:19) “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.”

והצום מצטרך אל השב, כי באכילה הלב מתגאה ויבא למרוד, וכמו שהעתקנו בשער הקדושה פרק טו, שאין אדם מורד אלא מתוך אכילה ושתיה, כאומרו (דברים יא, טו-טז) "ונתתי עשב בשדך לבהמתך ואכלת ושבעת; השמר לך פן יפתה לבבכם וסרתם ועבדתם אלהים אחרים והשתחיתם להם, וישב העם לאכול ושתו ויקומו לצחק (שמות לב, ו), וכיוצא הרבה. ועיקר התענית הוא ההכנעה, כמו שאמר דוד המלך ע"ה במזמור התשובה (תהלים נא, יט) זבחי אלהים רוח נשברה.

- While spiritual texts are sometimes viewed as esoteric and lofty, they can also directly speak directly to our social and political behavior. In this instance, the fast is meant to be a physical reminder of the pain of others; if we are forever “full,” we will be in a place of comfort that immunizes us to seeing and alleviating the suffering of other people.
- American Jews should support our Israeli counterparts who demonstrate in the streets as they speak out against the dangers of a government drunk on its own power and filled up with the hubris of perceived impunity.
- The fast means to remind us that we should understand our role in the universe, especially in relation to the Creator of all things, and not be unmoved by atrocities committed by our coreligionists. We should not, under any circumstance, seek to make other human beings submissive to us, for they are not our subordinates in the eyes of the Almighty.

<sup>2</sup> ["Beginning of Wisdom"](#) ראשית חכמה was written in the 16th century by Eliyahu de Vidas. He was a kabbalistic disciple of a disciple of Moses ben Jacob Cordovero who lived in Ottoman Palestine.

<sup>3</sup> From the root “to laugh,” in context means a number of behaviors: to dance, to be unbound, to be licentious, to act out.