

שומרי משפט רבנים למען זכויות האדם, ע"ד  
Rabbis for Human Rights  
حَاخَامِيْن مِّنْ اَجَلِ حَقُوْقِ الْاِنْسَانِ



**In the Shadow of an Uprooted Olive Tree:  
Reflections on The Idea and on the Practice of a Judaism of Human Rights**

By Avi Dabush  
Executive Director, Rabbis for Human Rights (RHR)

I look back fondly on my visit with your community in early December. We are a month out of International Human Rights Day and now seems like a good time to reflect a bit on the work we do and why we do it. I've been privileged to serve as the Rabbis for Human Rights executive director since June. It is position that I came to after two decades of working in a variety of capacities in Israeli civil society. As a resident of the Gaza border city of Sderot, in Israel's south, a city that is rarely the center of Israel's attention unless rockets are falling, I am driven to ensure all voices in our region are heard and respected.

My visit with your community was inspiring in so many ways. Here in Israel we grapple with so many human rights challenges, but the problems are not ours alone Human rights issues present us, here in Israel, with so many challenges. But these challenges are not ours alone. They are universal challenges. But for us, when we look at the challenge through a Jewish lens our commitment is sharpened and reinforced. In Judaism every person is deserving of dignity simply because she or he was created in the Divine Image. "This is the record of Adam's line.— When God created human, God made human in the likeness of God" (Genesis 5:1). As Ben Azzai argues in his debate with Rabbi Akiva, this is this the most important principle in the entire Torah!

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel insists that Judaism is not only an intellectual endeavor. Judaism is rooted in time, in events and in action. We at RHR promote practical action in the field in order to bring about change. Whenever we stand side by side with Palestinian olive farmers whose rights are trampled, or Palestinian families facing home demolition, we live Heschel's principle. It is no less so in our daily work with Israelis, Arab and Jewish, who live with poverty and food insecurity, . and when we engage hundreds of young people in pre-military gap year programs on the natural connection between human rights and Judaism.

My visit with you was especially important because of our strong connection. We, you and us, understand the connection between Judaism and human rights; we know the importance of anchoring our practice in these principles. This is no small matter and certainly not one to be taken for granted. For this reason I invite you to continue this dialogue with us at RHR in Israel. Come and visit, if you can, and always know that we consider you part of our supportive community.

This Tu B'Shvat we will go out and plant olive trees in places in the West Bank where settlers burned and uprooted trees. We would be honored if you would join us and help to make this effort and other activities possible by being in [contact](#) with British Friends of RHR. Shabbat Shalom!

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