בס"ד

לכרון יעקב

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BAMIDBAR 5786

The Power of Faith

RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR (ohr.edu)

"…in the desert…"

At the beginning of the founding of the State of Israel, living here was like living in a desert.

This is a story I heard from my mechutan, Rabbi Michoel Bachar:

When my parents arrived in Eretz Yisrael, they settled near Binyamina. This was about 75 years ago. It was a difficult time in Eretz Yisrael. It was after the war. My father, who fought for the British, was wounded in the war. It was the time of the tzena – there was almost nothing to eat. My father bought a donkey and a plow and hired himself out. Him and the donkey. Furrow after furrow. It was very hard work.

My mother learned to sew and worked as a seamstress - and that's how they make a living. It wasn't a high standard of life but enough for them to be able to survive.

And that's how the years passed. Slowly they saved some money and decided that they would plant a vineyard. The soil was heavy and ideal for growing grapes. This is a part of Eretz Yisrael where the vines of the Land of Israel grow well.

My father went to one of his army friends and bought seedlings from him, and planted his own vineyard. According to halacha, you have to wait 4 years before you can enjoy the fruits of the vine. For the first three years, the grapes are Orlah and forbidden to have benefit from them, and then they are Kerem Revai.

As the vines developed, he hoisted them onto trellises, and separated the seedlings so each and every seedling would have its own space to grow. Then he stuck poles in the ground, and cross beams through which he threaded thick wire for the vineyard to grow. And the vines grew thick, covering the wires and even the poles.

We waited.

In the fourth year, the grapes looked really luscious. He couldn't wait to harvest them. One morning, he woke up to see that all the grapes had fallen off the vines and were lying on the ground. He was heartbroken. He went to mother and she said, "Don't worry! The vines were probably too young and not strong enough. We've waited four years - we can wait five."

The next year came, and exactly the same thing happened.

Father said, "Mother, this isn't working. Let's move." She said, "No. It must be that the vines weren't strong enough yet. We'll wait another year. Don't worry. Don't panic. It's not easy but," she pointed to Heaven, "it's going to be fine."

The following year, the harvest season was approaching, and my father went out to the vineyard. Again, all the grapes had fallen from the vine.

My father said to my mother, "What now? What are we going to do?"

She said, "Go and speak to an agricultural expert, and see what he says."

My father brought in a specialist. He walked around the vineyard, looking at everything. He took away some samples. About a week later, he came back and said to my father, "You're going to have to pull up the entire vineyard."

"But why?" exclaimed my father. The agronomist explained that this was an unusual type of vine which was not hermaphroditic. Most grapevines contain both male and female parts within the same flower, but these vines don't have the female parts. Just before as they ripen, they fall from the trees. "It's not a vineyard." He said.

My father went to my mother and told her. "Uproot the vineyard?" she said. "Seven years we've waited for this vineyard. Seven years. It's not possible that HaKadosh Baruch Hu would do such a thing to us. What will we do? We will wait. We believe in Him. We will wait."

The area in which we lived had many springs. Not more than a half a year had passed when it was announced that Mekorot, the Israeli Water Authority was going to channel all these springs into a large reservoir near Pardes Chana. They were going to build a large overland aqueduct through the area. All of the local farmers wanted the aqueduct to pass through their land because they would receive very generous compensation.

My father wanted to go and argue and put in a claim for his land, but my mother said, "You're not built for that." She pointed her finger to Heaven. "Let's wait and see."

Mekorot took many parts of our neighbors' property, but when it came to my parents, they wanted the whole thing. Every single square inch.

They gave us an enormous sum of money. And with that, my father bought a tractor and forty dunam of land – nearly ten acres. That's about the size of five city blocks.

That's the power of faith. That's the power of trusting in Hashem.

The Wilderness Within

RABBI NAFTALI REICH (Torah.org)

Was it an accident of geography that a barren wilderness lay between Egypt and the Promised Land? Was it an accident of geography that the Torah was given to the Jewish people on a rocky mountain in a parched and desolate land? Would history have taken a different course had they encountered wooded mountains and verdant pastures when they emerged from bondage in Egypt?

This week's Torah reading seems to indicate that there is a significant connection. The commentators observe that the reading begins with the words "And Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Sinai wilderness." Why was it necessary for the Torah to tell us the obvious, that the Torah was transmitted in the wilderness? These words, explain the commentators, contain a powerful implied message. In order for a person to make himself a receptacle for the Torah, he must first render himself a wilderness. In other words, he must distance himself from the concerns and pressures of society and live a more insular life.

What exactly does this mean? Are we meant to seek the wisdom of Torah in pristine corner of the world, far from the sounds and smells of civilization? Can't the Torah be discovered in the synagogues and study halls of great urban centers where millions of Jewish people live? Of course it can. The Torah is identifying the mental rather than the geographic locales in which Torah can be found.

The Hebrew word for wilderness, midbar, reveals a certain ambivalence. On the one hand, it refers to a remote and isolated place. At the same time, however, it is closely related to the word medaber, one who speaks or communicates, which is quite the opposite of isolation.

A person who learns Torah has to function on two levels. He must focus on becoming a medaber, a person who interacts with others and communicates to them the values and ideals of the eternal Torah. But first he must fortify himself and become a midbar, a person insulated against the pernicious influences and peer pressures of society, a person who stands on his principles and refuses to compromise in order to curry favor with others.

This document contains words of Torah and should be treated with respect. See Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 85:2

The Torah does not seek to make people into hermits and monastics. Rather, the paradigm of a true Torah Jew is one who brings the light of Torah to society with a sincere smile on his face and tempered steel in his heart, a gregarious recluse.

An idealistic young man came to seek the advice of a great sage. "I want to change the world," he said. "I want to make it a better place. Where exactly should I concentrate my efforts?"

The sage smiled. "You remind a little of myself when I was young," he said. "At first, I wanted to change the world, but I discovered that I could not. Then I decided I would at least change my community, but I discovered that I could not. Then I decided that perhaps I could at least change my family, but that too was beyond my ability. Finally, I realized I should at least try to change myself, and that has been a lifetime struggle. But I believe that if I had started with changing myself I might have been able to do something for the world as well."

In our own lives, there is practically no spot n the developed world where we are not blanketed by an aura of decadence and corruption that seeks to penetrate our very souls. So what are we to do? Are we to abandon our homes and careers and go off to a desert island? Not at all. But we must always be acutely aware of the spiritual dangers that lurk everywhere we turn. We must imbue ourselves with the spirit of Torah until it become like an impenetrable suit of armor. Only when we are thus fortified can we venture forth to bring the message of the Torah to society at large.

You Count!

RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN (Chabad.org)

I still remember Mr. Seligman, my English teacher back in high school, acting out a scene we were studying from George Eliot's Silas Marner. With power and passion, he dramatized how the poor man would lovingly count his gold pieces as the shiny coins slipped through his fingers.

The image comes to mind this week as we read Bamidbar, the first portion in the Book of Numbers, in which G-d instructs Moshe to count the Israelites. Just like old Silas, G-d counts that which is most precious to Him.

Sometimes I wonder if we ourselves realize how treasured we are in G-d's eyes.

In any census, every individual counts once, no more and no less. Moshe Rabeinu, Moshe Dayan, or Moshe Chaim Goldberg; Maimonides or Mendelsohn; Rabbi Shmulewitz or Mr Shlemiel—great or ordinary, we all count equally. And the Jewish nation counts on us, every one of us.

THE COSMIC MISSION

A little old Jew, wearing thick glasses and pushing a walker, hobbles into the NASA Recruitment Office in Cape Canaveral. The receptionist asks how she can help him. The man says, "It's about your advertisement where you say you're looking for astronauts for the next space mission."

"Yes?" says the woman, rather perplexed. "We are looking for young people who are qualified pilots, in excellent physical condition, with perfect eyesight."

"Well," says the old man, "I just wanted you to know that on me you shouldn't rely."

How many of us say, "Don't rely on me," or, "Don't count on me"? But we all count. And, yes, we do count on you.

I remember hearing the Rebbe use the astronaut metaphor to illustrate the keen sense of responsibility every Jew should feel about our own historic, national mission.

What if an astronaut on board a spacecraft would decide to do his own thing? Despite the amount of time, money, and resources invested in his training, instead of following mission control's meticulous plan, today he will take a break, play it cool and relax. Obviously, this would be a disaster in the making, with the potential to compromise the entire project.

Well, explained the Rebbe, we Jews have invested centuries, indeed millennia, into the project of Jewish continuity. We have educated and nurtured generations of young people to fulfil their role as dedicated members of our people and to be committed to our national mission. And now? A Jew with such an awesome heritage and huge responsibility will simply walk away from the project and "do his own thing?!" Surely this would be no less of a disaster than that of our reckless astronaut.

Whether we are considering our marriage choices, what kind of home we wish to establish, or how we will educate our own children, we all should appreciate that every single one of us counts. And the Jewish people are counting on us.

WHEN PUSH COMES TO SHOVE

Here in South Africa, we used to have many small Jewish communities scattered across the country. Today, the vast majority of these have declined and disintegrated as the younger generations came to the big cities to study, work, and find suitable marriage partners. But a fascinating thing about those smaller communities was the dedication of ordinary people to maintaining the communal infrastructure. And it wasn't only about keeping up the shul or the minyan. I knew people who were not necessarily 'religious,' but they headed the town's chevra kadisha (burial society). They would personally participate in doing the taharas, preparing the deceased for a traditional Jewish burial.

That is dedication.

Clearly, people living in those small towns were more committed because they knew that if not for them, there might be no one else to do the job. With fewer people available, they felt a deeper sense of responsibility. Interestingly, when those same people moved to the bigger cities, they often no longer had that same degree of involvement in communal affairs.

Rav Yisroel Salanter, father of the Mussar movement, once said, "Every Jew should feel as if he or she is the last Jew on earth." And if they won't do what needs to be done, there would be no one else to do it.

Over the years, I've made the point to many a bar mitzvah boy, "You count! And you, yes you, are personally responsible for the future of the Jewish people!"

I know it's a bit of a guilt trip, but imagine if every Jew felt that way.

A Cut Amongst the Rest

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY (Torah.org)

This week's portion begins Sefer Bamidbar, telling the story of the major events that occurred during the forty-year trek though the Midbar towards the land of Israel. In secular terms the book is called Numbers, probably because of the first command in this third Book of the Pentateuch, "count the Jewish people," thus the name Numbers.

The Hebrew words for count are either s'ooh , which also means lift up, and p'kod, which can also mean appoint. Thus, when the Torah commands, "s'ooh es rosh kol adas Yisrael, count the heads all the assembly of Israel (1:2), it is telling Moshe to uplift them as well.

It was not merely a matter of numbers, explains Rebbe Rav Shmuel of Sochatchov: counting the nation was not only a means of enumerating them, but also of appointing a special dignity to each and every one who was counted. Every individual was important, there were no communal estimates, and the appointment actually lifted them.

But one of the tribes was not counted with the rest. Regarding the tribe of Levi, which was designated as the spiritual leader of the Jewish people, Moshe was told, "But you shall not count (p'kod) the tribe of Levi; and their heads you shall not lift (v'es rosham lo sisah) among the Children of Israel" (Numbers 1:49).

The questions are simple. Why is there a double expression prohibiting a count "do not count and do not lift their heads"? In addition, why does the Torah add the words, "amongst the children of Israel"? True, they were counted separately, and so the Torah should rather state, "And the tribe of Levi shall be enumerated separately." Can there be a deeper intonation with the expression, "Do not lift their head amongst the Children of Israel"?

Rav Eliyahu Chaim Meisels, the Rav of Lodz, would raise money for the poor widows and orphans of his city. During one particularly freezing winter, he went to visit one of the prominent members of his community, Reb Isaac, a banker who served as the president of the community council.

Bundled in a coat and scarf, the Rabbi approached the banker's mansion and knocked on the door.

The valet who answered the door was shocked to see the great Rabbi Meisels standing outside in the bitter cold. He immediately asked him to enter the home where he said there would be a hot tea waiting.

Rabbi Meisels refused. "It is not necessary. Please tell Reb Isaac to see me by the door."

The banker heard that the Rav was waiting near the portal and rushed in his evening jacket to greet him. Upon seeing the Rabbi standing in the frigid weather, he exclaimed. "Rebbe, please step inside. I have the fireplace raging, and my butler will prepare a hot tea for you! There is no need for you to wait outside!"

"That's alright," countered Reb Eliyahu Chaim. "It won't be long, and all I need could be accomplished by talking right here. I'm sure you won't mind. Anyway, why should I dirty your home with my snow-covered boots?"

By this time, Reb Isaac was in a dilemma. The frigid air was blowing into his house. He did not want to close the door and talk outside in the cold, and yet the Rabbi did not want to enter!

"Please, Rabbi, I don't know about you, but I am freezing," cried the banker. "I don't mind if your boots are wet! Just come on in!"

But the Rabbi did not budge, He began talking about the plight of some the unfortunate members of the community as the bankers teeth chattered in response.

"Please, Rebbe, just tell me what you need! I'll give anything you want, just come inside!"

With that, Reb Elya Chaim relented. He entered the man's home and followed

him to the den, where a blazing fire heated the room. Then he began: "I need firewood for 50 families this winter." The banker smiled. "No problem, I commit to supplying the wood. Just one question. You know I give tzedoka, so why did you make me stand outside?"

"Reb Isaac," smiled Reb Eliyahu Chaim. "I know you give, but I wanted to make sure you understood what these poor people are going through. I knew that five minutes in the freezing cold would give you a different perspective than my initial asking while basking in the warmth of your fireplace."

The Chasam Sofer explains that because Levi was a special tribe of teachers and leaders it could be possible they would be aloof. Thus, though they were counted separately, they could not be above the crowd. Therefore, the Torah's command was stated in clear terms, "their heads you shall not lift (v'es rosham lo sisah) among the Children of Israel". Leadership may put you in a class by yourself, but remember, says the Torah, you must not feel that you are above the folk. You cannot bask in warmth while you are oblivious to those who suffer in the cold. Your head can not be "lifted" from among the children of Israel.

HOW TO KNOW WHEN TO GIVE UP

RABBI ELIEZER SHEMTOV (Chabad.org)

What do you do when your efforts don't yield visible results? Do you keep going or do you give up?

Is perseverance always a virtue? Might it sometimes be a form of vanity—an unwillingness to admit failure?

As with so many such questions, the answer is: it depends.

It depends on why you are doing what you are doing. Are you doing it to showcase your personal greatness or out of dedication to something greater than yourself?

A man named Morris once visited his friend who was in charge of evaluating recruits for the Israeli army. He was invited to observe a fitness test and watched a group of young men running under the hot Israeli sun. After a while, one of them collapsed and had to be carried off the track by medics.

"That one definitely won't be given an important assignment," Morris remarked.

"You couldn't be more wrong," his friend replied. "He'll be among the most valued."

"But he was the first to fall! What use does the army have for someone that weak?"

"It's simple. In our army, what we value most is commitment. That young man gave every last drop he had. The physical weakness we can address through training; unconditional dedication like that can't be taught."

We live in a world that prizes the individual, personal rights, and personal interests above all. And this is not entirely wrong. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 38a) affirms that each human being is irreplaceable. "No two people are alike," our sages say.1 But does it end there? What about the value of community? How do we reconcile the value of independence with the value of belonging — and the dependence that comes with it?

To answer this, we must first ask: Does belonging to a community diminish or enlarge me? Weaken or strengthen me?

In this week's Torah portion, Bamidbar, G-d commands Moshe to take a census. Two data points were to be recorded: names and numbers. In other words, how many people composed each family and tribe.

A name expresses individual identity; a number, by contrast, disregards individuality and emphasizes belonging to a collective. The Torah teaches that both are equally important and, in fact, mutually reinforcing.

When individuality is expressed within a community, it is elevated and strengthened by being part of something greater. And the community is strengthened when it honors the unique contribution of each person. It is hard to put it more elegantly than Hillel (Avos 1:14) did: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I?"

To return to the original question about perseverance: if you are persisting at something for personal reasons and seeing no results, continued effort may well be a form of pride and unwillingness to admit failure. But if you are persisting at something whose value extends beyond yourself, perseverance in the face of every discouragement is a sign of genuine strength and nobility.

I am reminded of a conflict I witnessed between a couple.

"Why do you dedicate so much time to work and never make time for me?" the wife complained.

"Because I prefer to dedicate myself to something where I know how to succeed, rather than trying again and again at something I always fail at," the husband replied.

What do you think, dear reader? If a husband who tries again and again to satisfy his wife and repeatedly fails refuses to give up and keeps trying, is that admirable or deplorable?

The answer, once again, is: it depends. If he insists on trying yet again his own way, it is an expression of ego, and, according to the formula attributed to Einstein, the very definition of insanity: doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. But if he adjusts and tries according to what his wife asks of him, that is a sign of genuine nobility. This may in fact be implicit in the Talmudic principle (Yevamos 62b) that spells out marital priorities clearly: to love one's wife as oneself, and to honor her more than oneself.

WHO IS REALLY DOING THE PROTECTING?

AVROHOM YAAKOV

The Torah (1:53) states: "And the Leviim shall encamp around the Mishkan of the testimony, so that there be no anger upon the congregation of Israel; and the Leviim shall guard the guarding of the Mishkan."

Earlier in the chapter, we learn that the Leviim were counted from one month old. This raises an obvious question, what kind of guarding can a one-month-old child possibly do?

Avnei Azel answers that this itself is the Torah's message. The guarding of the Mishkan was not physical protection rooted in human capability, but a spiritual reality ensured by Hashem Himself. The presence of the Leviim—even infants—was sufficient because the true protection came from Above. The Leviim were not defenders in the military sense; they were conduits through which divine protection flowed.

This idea is echoed by Rashi, who notes that the Leviim encamped as a buffer so that improper access would not cause divine wrath. The danger was not an external enemy but spiritual misalignment—coming too close to holiness without permission. Similarly, the Ramban emphasizes that the Leviim functioned as guardians of sacred order. Their very positioning maintained the boundary necessary for the Shechinah to dwell among Israel.

The Sforno adds a key layer: the Leviim guarded Israel from themselves. The threat was not invasion, but violation—mistaking access to power for readiness for holiness. Protection, then, is not always about strength; sometimes it is about restraint, obedience, and recognizing limits.

The Netziv (Ha'amek Davar) highlights that the Leviim's role was continuous, not reactive. This was not an emergency defence but a permanent reminder that Israel's survival depends on spiritual alignment more than tactical prowess.

Human effort—whether military, economic, or political—is necessary. The Torah does not reject strategy or preparation. But it warns against believing that security is produced solely by human strength. When a society places exclusive faith in force while neglecting moral clarity, unity, and humility before Hashem, its defenses are fundamentally unstable.

The image of a one-month-old Levi "guarding" the Mishkan reminds us: real protection flows from recognizing Who ultimately safeguards us—and ordering our lives accordingly. When ethical purpose and divine awareness encircle a nation, even the smallest among us become part of its greatest defence.

Under Pressure

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND (Aish.com)

According to the Midrash, Moshe was concerned about the flag system Hashem had told him to institute. He was afraid it would bring trouble and lead to "divisions and disputes among the tribes." He was afraid that if he told this tribe to travel on the west, they would insist on traveling on the east, that those he sent to the north would clamor for the southern flank. Whatever he did would not be good enough. The tribes would bicker and fight with each other as they jockeyed for position, and strife would reign in the Jewish encampment.

But Hashem reassured him that all would go well. Yaakov had already established the pattern of the travel formations by assigning specific positions to his sons when he gave instructions for his funeral procession from Egypt to Canaan. The positions around Yaakov's coffin were the same as those around the Mishkan. Therefore, the people were already accustomed to their assigned positions.

But questions still remain. Why would the people be willing to accept formations based on funeral formations hundreds of years in the past? How would the pattern of Yaakov's funeral procession prevent dissension and strife in the travel formation in the desert?

Rav Mordechai Rogov explains that human nature is very sensitive to the environment. When things are going well in society, when peace and prosperity reign in the land, people are more inclined to be civil, even genteel to each other. But when the going gets tough, the veneer of politeness thins very quickly. Nerves fray. Tempers grow short. Before you know it, all civility is gone, and people are at each other's throats.

Moshe was concerned that the Jewish people would not react well to the rigors of traveling through the desert, a place rife with feral animals and ringed by hostile nations. Despite the protection of the Cloud Pillars, they

would feel apprehensive. This would lead them to discard their civil manners and jockey for better positions. It's one thing to be civil in ordinary times and quite another in times of war and famine.

You don't need to worry, Hashem assured Moshe. The death of Yaakov was also a crisis for the fledgling Jewish nations. It could easily have led to bickering and dissension among the brothers. Under pressure of the situation, they could have jostled for positions around the coffin. But Yaakov gave them specific instructions about their positions around his coffin, and by following those instructions, they learned to get along in times of crisis. This lesson sank deep into their consciousness and became part of the national character. Therefore, Moshe, you don't have to worry that the Jewish people will break down and fight among themselves. They have been conditioned to keep to a higher standard. Not only now but also throughout history, throughout the worst pogroms and inquisitions and massacres, the Jewish spirit will retain its refinement and nobility. You don't have to worry, Moshe.

We have all heard many stories about the conduct of Jews during the Holocaust, the quiet heroism, the indomitable spirit. There is one simple story I heard not long ago. It is not especially dramatic, but it illustrates the point of the Midrash very sharply.

Many Holocaust memoirs devote an inordinate amount of attention to bread, because at the time, bread consumed all their thinking hours. To a concentration-camp inmate, a piece of bread was life itself. Each inmate was given a piece of bread once a day, and he had to decide what to do with it. What should he do? Should he eat the bread right away or should he perhaps nibble at it all day? Should he save it until he is very tired and hungry at the end of the day so that he would not have to go to sleep on an empty stomach? Difficult questions. Weighty questions.

A Jew in a concentration camp was summoned to the commandant's office. This could mean only one thing. His time was up.

Every Jew was aware that the moment of death could come at any time, and this Jew was no different. He sighed and said Vidui, making peace with his Maker. Then he exchanged his clothes with the other inmates. He gave his shoes to a man whose feet were swaddled in rags. He gave his coat to one friend. And the precious piece of bread in his pocket, the piece of life he was saving all day, what was the point in wasting a good piece of bread when he had maybe minutes to live? He gave the bread to another friend and set out for the commandant's office.

Wonder of wonders, the commandant needed something trivial and had no intention of killing him, at least at that particular time. As the man walked back to his barracks, he felt certain he would get his clothing back, but what about the bread? The friend to whom he had given it could easily say he had already eaten it.

In the barracks, the first person to greet him was that friend. "You're alive!" he shouted ecstatically. "They didn't kill you. Here, take back your piece of bread. You must eat it; it is yours. Oh, thank Heaven, you are still among the living, not among the dead."

Where does a Jew get the strength to behave like an angel when he is being treated like an animal? It dates back to Yaakov's funeral procession from Egypt to Canaan, when his sons learned to conduct themselves on the highest levels of humanity in the midst of terrible tragedy.

A HEAVY PRICE

RABBI JAY KELMAN (TorahinMotion.org)

In order to be effective, leaders must be sensitive to the feelings and concerns of the general populace. It is not only fact, but also perception that matters. Leaders must have higher ethical standards, and they must also be seen by the public in this light. Any perception (especially if it's true!) that they are above the law renders their moral leadership compromised.

An example of such concerns may be seen in the introduction to the special census of the Levites. Instead of just counting those above the age of 30 days, for some unclear reason the Torah feels the need to tell us that "Nadav and Avihu died before G-d when they offered unauthorized fire to G-d in the Sinai desert" (Bamidbar 3:4). Their tragic death had already been detailed in sefer Vayikra, and its mention here seems out of place.

It was the sin of the golden calf that led to the appointment of the Levi'im as the spiritual leaders of the Jewish people. What had previously been the domain of the eldest would now become the duty and privilege of the tribe of Levi, who had not worshipped foreign gods. However, if the eldest children lost their birthright due to their involvement in the sin of the golden calf, then surely Aharon had lost his right to continue on in the priesthood. It was Aharon, more than anyone, who was responsible for the building of the golden calf. It was his directive to "take the rings off the ears of your wives and children, bring them to me" (Shemot 32:2), that led to this terrible sin. While his motives may have been pure--like those of many who worshipped the calf--and while he may have hoped that Moshe would return in the interim, obviating the need for a "replacement", G-d was not impressed with his methods.

"G-d expressed great anger towards Aharon to destroy him, and I [Moshe] prayed also for Aharon at that time" (Devarim 9:20). Our Sages assert that Moshe's prayers were half successful. Without Moshe's intervention, Elazar and Itamar, Aharon's two younger sons, would have shared the fate of their brothers, and Aharon would have been "destroyed".

In a brilliant insight, the Meshech Chochmah explains that it was Aharon's role in the saga of the golden calf that caused the Torah to record the death of Nadav and Avihu precisely here. The people were right: the ringleaders get killed, the elders lose their birthright, and Aharon gets off with no punishment? How unjust! When a major mishap occurs, it is the leaders and not the rank and file who must be held accountable, and who often must depart from the scene.

As it is about to describe the duties of the Levites, the Torah must answer the legitimate gripes of the people. Thus, it makes mention of the death of Aharon's two sons. One should not think that Aharon got off easy; his suffering was the most painful of all. Yes, he may have been guilty of misjudgment, but he paid a very heavy price. No doubt Aharon would have done anything to trade his priesthood for his two sons.

As the lover of peace and the pursuer of peace, it was Aharon who was most qualified for the priesthood. While he would have to pay a price for his mistake, as all leaders must, demoting him from the priesthood would have been counterproductive.

We live in an era in which we often feel powerless in the face of a leader's corruption; yet ironically, we are often unwilling to forgive mistakes of many years ago, mistakes that have little or no bearing on our leaders' current positions and moral standing.

Our leaders must first and foremost have moral authority. But they, too, are entitled to make some mistakes. Let us pray that we have the wisdom and courage to know which mistakes are part and parcel of the human condition, and which render our leaders unfit for continued leadership.

Is It Too Late to Change?

RABBI AHARON LOSCHAK (Chabad.org)

"But this is how I've been my entire life!"

How many times have you heard that, or maybe even said it yourself? Chances are, many.

And that's exactly what a friend told me the other day, recounting his experience with his therapist.

As children of Holocaust survivors, his parents didn't often tell him the three precious words, "I love you," and for him, that's just how life worked: parents obviously love their children, and that's that. No need for speeches.

His therapist didn't agree. "Tell them you love them, and tell them often" he was told. And it was then that he pushed back, "But I'm already 40 years old and never did it that way, how do you expect me to change it now?"

Good question.

SPECIAL LEVITE COUNT

This week's parshah is the first in the books of Numbers, and my oh my, is there a lot of counting. The nation is counted and we are given a detailed record of the tallies, tribe by tribe. The general population amounted to a grand total of 603,550 adult males.

Then, towards the end of the parshah, G-d appears to Moshe and Aharon and tells them to tally up the male members of the tribe of Levi, ages 30-50 only—i.e., those eligible to serve in the Temple:

Make a count of the sons of Kehot from among the children of Levi . . . From the age of thirty until the age of fifty, all who enter the service, to do work in the Tent of Meeting. (4:2-3)

Why was this count necessary?

Transforming the Landscape

In a fascinating essay on the parshah, the Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of Chabad chassidism, sets out to explain the purpose of our ancestors' long and arduous journey in the desert. After all, if the idea was because G-d wanted to punish them by not allowing them to immediately enter the Promised Land, couldn't He have let them hang out in the Bahamas instead? Or at least some nice vacation spot along the Red Sea and let them do a little scuba diving until they were ready? What was the point of wandering?

The Alter Rebbe explains that there was far more at play here. A desert is a desolate place, a dry, arid, and lifeless expanse, too hot for human habitation. By and large, only harmful creatures spend time in a desert.

In a spiritual sense, a desert represents an ungodly space, for G-d is the source of all life and vitality. The death and danger lurking in the desert is thus symbolic of the negative forces that conceal G-d's expression and run counter to His will.

Dispatching the people to wander around the desert for 40 years served to

alleviate some of this negativity and introduce a bit more G-dliness into the world, specifically in the places where He's least comfortable.

In this respect, the Levites had a uniquely important role, for they carried the Tabernacle and its holy articles as the people journeyed about. The act of transporting holy objects to a very unholy place was particularly poignant in this effort to transform a spiritual wasteland into a holy garden.

An Extra Boost

Building on the Alter Rebbe's ideas, we can well understand why the Levites needed a special counting. You see, this whole business of counting wasn't about knowing how many members were in the tribe. G-d isn't an accountant, and anyway, don't you think G-d already knows the numbers? Rather, the purpose of counting the people was, to borrow from contemporary language, "to make them count."

In other words, when you count something, you show that you take notice, that you care about it enough to figure out how many there are. Each component is no longer just part of one big blob, rather an individual entity quantifiably unique from everyone and everything else.

And that's why the Levites needed a special count of their own. As the vanguard of this effort to transform their unholy environment, they needed special empowerment. Leading the way with the holy articles on their shoulders, the Levites were given an extra boost from G-d with a counting of their own.

You Can Turn This Around

What does this have to do with you and me?

A lot.

Think about your life for a moment and the patterns you've repeated for ten, twenty, or maybe even fifty years. If you're honest about it, not all of them are particularly holy or positive. Some of them may look more like a desert than a garden. The more you think about it, the more you realize that a pattern has settled in, and "This is just the way I do things. This is who I am."

Next come the feelings of despair. "Who am I to turn things around at this point? How can I really create change when I'm already over the hill?" They always told you that "You can't teach an old dog new tricks," so you think to yourself, "Listen, it is what it is, this is who I am, so let's stop being so grandiose and thinking that I'm going to magically change at this point."

Well, if going to your therapist and finally learning how to be emotionally present for your kids at age 40 seems daunting to you, or if changing your weekend routine to go to shul at 50 years old seems like a crazy thought, think about the Levites. At age 30, they were thrown into a desert and told to change the landscape.

And here's the encouraging part: just prior to being thrown into the ring, G-d counted them, sending them off with special powers.

He's doing the same with you. You can do it.

This essay is based on Likkutei Sichot vol. 13, p. 16-19.

News & Views

How Shabbat became part of Trump's 250th US anniversary celebration

LINDA ARGALGI SADACKA (Jpost.com 10-5-26)

At the precise moment influential Jewish voices were publicly debating whether Shabbat itself had become obsolete, the US president did something almost politically unimaginable: he formally inserted Shabbat into America's 250th anniversary celebration.

In an official White House proclamation recognizing Jewish American Heritage Month, US President Donald Trump called on Americans to celebrate their "faith and freedom" and "especially on Shabbat to celebrate our 250th year."

Not innovation. Not activism. Not identity politics.

Shabbat.

The symbolism of that moment was extraordinary. At one of the most culturally fragmented moments in modern American life, the White House unexpectedly elevated one of Judaism's oldest civilizational institutions as part of a national milestone celebration.

Orthodox Jews spent decades fighting to preserve Shabbat from secular erosion. Few imagined they would one day hear an American president publicly elevate it during a national anniversary celebration.

And yet that is precisely what happened.

Only weeks earlier, parts of modern Jewish discourse were openly questioning whether traditional structures like Shabbat still belonged in contemporary life. While some dismissed those conversations as internet provocation, they revealed a deeper tension quietly unfolding inside modern Jewish identity itself.

Increasingly, many Jews are eager to embrace Jewish symbolism while distancing themselves from the religious civilization that gave those symbols meaning in the first place.

Since October 7, Jewish identity has surged visibly across public life. Influencers, celebrities, activists, and public figures proudly wear Magen David necklaces, wave Israeli flags, post hostage graphics, and publicly defend Jews against rising antisemitism.

In many ways, that visible Jewish pride has been important and admirable.

Yet at the very same time, many openly broadcast lifestyles fundamentally detached from the structures that preserved Jewish continuity across generations. Public Jewish pride increasingly coexists alongside open disregard for Shabbat, kashrut, covenantal obligation, and the religious framework that historically sustained Jewish civilization itself.

That contradiction matters.

Because Judaism was never built solely on symbolism. It was built on transmitted obligations, discipline, memory, continuity, and covenant.

WORLD STILL SEES JEWS AS A COLLECTIVE

October 7 forced many Jews to rediscover an uncomfortable reality: the world still sees Jews collectively, whether individual Jews personally embrace Judaism or not. But once that awakening occurs, another question inevitably follows: what exactly is the substance of the identity now being defended so passionately?

A Jewish star without Judaism eventually becomes jewellery.

A map of Israel without Torah eventually becomes geography.

And a civilization detached from the practices that sustained it eventually becomes spiritually fragile.

That is precisely why the America 250 proclamation resonated so deeply with many Jews across the spectrum.

The US president was not celebrating vague ethnicity or generic multiculturalism. He publicly elevated a distinctly Jewish institution that preserved Jewish continuity for thousands of years: Shabbat itself.

That distinction matters because the modern Jewish crisis is not fundamentally about visibility. Jews today are often highly visible. The deeper crisis is whether Jewish identity can remain rooted once it is reduced primarily to politics, aesthetics, slogans, and performance.

For years, many Jewish institutions operated under the assumption that Judaism would survive by becoming less demanding, less distinct, and more interchangeable with contemporary culture. Ritual became optional. Obligation became uncomfortable. Identity increasingly shifted from covenant toward aesthetics and politics.

But the current cultural moment suggests many Jews are not starving for less Judaism. They are starving for more permanence.

The uncomfortable truth is that modern Jewish culture increasingly celebrates Jewish visibility while resisting Jewish restraint. Jewish identity is proudly displayed, politically defended, and aesthetically marketed, yet the covenantal structures that preserved Jewish civilization are often treated as optional, outdated, or burdensome.

But civilizations are not preserved through aesthetics alone.

Every enduring civilization requires structures strong enough to outlive comfort, trend cycles, political movements, and social media performance. Judaism was no exception.

The Jewish people survived exile, persecution, pogroms, forced conversion, terrorism, and genocide because Jewish civilization maintained structures powerful enough to preserve identity across generations.

Shabbat stood at the center of that framework.

For thousands of years, Jews stepped away every single week from commerce, distraction, public pressure, and endless labor in order to reconnect with family, prayer, learning, and community. That weekly return to covenant became one of the central mechanisms of Jewish continuity itself.

That is why the White House proclamation struck such a nerve. Not because Americans suddenly became religious overnight. And not because a national movement spontaneously materialized on its own.

What happened instead was culturally revealing.

The moment Shabbat was publicly elevated within the America 250 conversation, many Jews reacted with genuine surprise and emotion. The proclamation spread rapidly through Jewish communal spaces, where people openly expressed disbelief that a sitting American president had formally inserted Shabbat into a national anniversary celebration.

Recognizing the deeper symbolic significance of the moment, I helped launch the independent grassroots "250 Shabbat" initiative designed to transform a fleeting headline into actual participation.

The goal was simple: encourage Jews from all backgrounds to reconnect, even in small ways, with the institution that preserved Jewish continuity for thousands of years.

The response revealed something many Jewish leaders still fail to understand.

People are increasingly exhausted by performative identity without substance beneath it.

The deeper irony is that while parts of modern Jewish culture increasingly treat Shabbat as expendable, broader society may be beginning to recognize its necessity again.

Because the question confronting modern Jewish life is not whether the Jewish people will survive. The Jewish people always survive.

The real question is whether Jews themselves still recognize the eternal foundation that made that survival possible in the first place.

Israel, US decry reported plan to indict mohels in Belgium

CANAAN LIDOR (JNS.org 6-5-26)

Belgian prosecutors reportedly decided on Wednesday to indict three Jewish circumcisers for unlawfully conducting the procedure, prompting condemnations by Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar and the U.S. Ambassador to Belgium.

"The prosecution of these religious figures (mohels), one of whom is American, is WRONG and won't be tolerated," Bill White, the U.S. Ambassador in Brussels, wrote on X. "Belgium will be thought of now as antisemitic by the world. Until this is resolved—there is no way around it," he added.

White was responding to a post on X by Sa'ar, who wrote that with the decision to prosecute the mohels, "Belgium joins a short and shameful list, together with Ireland, of countries that use criminal law to prosecute Jews for practicing Judaism. This is a scarlet letter on Belgian society."

The controversy over circumcision is unfolding amid other tensions in the diplomatic relations between the United States and Israel and Belgium, where the government includes left-wing parties with hostile attitudes to U.S. President Donald Trump's administration and the Jewish state.

Last year, Belgium joined South Africa's disputed genocide lawsuit against Israel at the International Court of Justice. In February, Conner Rousseau, chairman of the Flemish Vooruit Party, which is part of the federal ruling coalition, posted a video that juxtaposed Trump and Adolf Hitler.

Neither the federal prosecutor's office nor that of the Flemish Region, the Belgian state where Antwerp is situated, announced the indictments. They did not reply in time for publication to a JNS query requesting more information on the subject. However, a government source confirmed to JNS on Wednesday that the political echelon had been informed of a decision to indict.

Belgian Foreign Minister Maxime Prévot wrote back to Sa'ar on X: "Enough with these caricatures." In Belgium, he added, "the judiciary is independent and makes its decisions—whether one agrees with them or not—free from any political influence" and noted that the case against the mohels had been initiated "by representatives of the Jewish community themselves."

Prévot repeated the same message to White, adding, "I urge you to exercise greater restraint and to view your role in its proper context. It is inappropriate to publicly criticize a country and tarnish its image simply because you disagree with judicial proceedings. I have already told you this. Would you consider it acceptable for our ambassador in Washington to do the same?"

There should 'never have been such an investigation'

The three circumcisers, or mohels, from Antwerp were first investigated last year based on complaints lodged against them by Moshe Aryeh Friedman, an anti-Zionist activist who has lobbied authorities to limit several Jewish customs, including the one that enables Haredi schools to separate girls and boys at state-recognized Jewish schools. The mainstream Jewish community of Antwerp, which is largely Haredi, shuns Friedman.

The Jewish Information and Documentation Center (JID), a Belgian-Jewish advocacy group, disputed Prévot's characterization of what initiated the legal process against the mohels.

"This is simply not true: This was not initiated by 'the Jewish representatives themselves,' but by someone who denies the Holocaust, was invited to a Holocaust denial conference by former Iranian president [Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad, and calls himself Jewish but is not supported by any Jew in the world," JID wrote on X. Friedman has rejected allegations that he has denied the Holocaust. He attended an Iranian foreign ministry two-day conference in 2006 titled "Review of the Holocaust: Global Vision." It featured Holocaust denial and distortion.

Sa'ar replied to Prévot, telling him his remarks "miss the point." There should "never have been such an investigation had the issue of brit milah been regulated like in other European countries that respect Jewish religious freedom," he wrote. "Especially so in a country with one of the oldest Jewish communities in Europe. Had Belgium had a strategic plan to fight antisemitism and foster Jewish life, you might have known this. Alas, it doesn't."

According to Belgian law, all surgical procedures must be performed by a certified surgeon, which most mohels are not. However, authorities had not previously banned the Jewish circumcision, brit milah, which is performed on eight-day-old boys, and is the first initiation of a Jewish male into the faith. Brit milah is widely seen as a fundamental rite, and many consider the ability to perform it a prerequisite to the existence of a viable Jewish community.

Belgium is among several European countries that have recently outlawed shechita (the ritual slaughter of animals to make the meat kosher) and its Islamic counterpart, dabhiha or zabiha. These religious slaughter methods, which require animals to be conscious at the time of killing, are criticized by animal-rights advocates as inhumane.

A similar controversy is playing out over the nonmedical circumcision of boys. However, unlike slaughter without stunning, this practice has not been banned in any European country.

In 2012, a court in Cologne, Germany, briefly banned the practice, but the ban was overturned through legislation amid an outcry over the verdict.

Dispossession by Another Name

AVNER AMICHAI (GateStoneInstitute.org 8-5-26)

Europe has a long history, from medieval expulsions to the Holocaust, of dispossessing, murdering, and expelling Jews. Today, this same impulse continues under the language of diplomacy and "international law," now targeting the Jewish people's biblical heartland by, once again, trying to force a genocidally hostile (here and here, article 7) so-called "two-state solution" on the Jewish state.

The so-called "Global Alliance for the implementation of the Two-State Solution" -- co-chaired by the EU, Saudi Arabia, and Norway, with active European partners including the increasingly Israel-critical Netherlands[1], and openly Israel-hostile states such as Belgium, Ireland, Spain, and France -- is not a peace project. It is a coordinated campaign of diplomatic pressure, financial subversion, and ideological warfare aimed at making Jewish life in Judea and Samaria impossible and at eventually making those areas free of Jews, or "Judenrein".

While Alliance ministers issue lofty declarations about "peace," European taxpayers' hard-earned money is busy building illegal facts on the ground that destroy any real hope for peace. Surveys by the Israeli organization Regavim, dedicated to the rule of law and clean government in Israel's land-use policy, have documented more than 103,000 illegal Palestinian structures in Area C of Judea and Samaria (the so-called 'West Bank'). That zone, according to the Oslo Accords that Europe itself signed as a witness, is under full Israeli control, including exclusive authority over land-use planning, building permits, and related civil matters.[2]. The illegal Palestinian "facts on the ground" include strategic outposts, homes, roads, schools, and solar farms are deliberately placed to fragment and splinter the Jewish homeland. The EU has poured hundreds of millions of euros into these illegal projects, often with EU flags flying as a mockery. This has been going on for decades.

The Netherlands and other member states actively participate. That intrusion is not aid. It is land theft by proxy. This systematic encroachment follows the blueprint of the Fayyad Plan (2009), in which then PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad openly declared the goal of unilaterally creating a de facto Palestinian state by building "facts on the ground" in Area C of Judea and Samaria, bypassing negotiations with Israel. Europe has effectively become the financier of Fayyad's unilateral strategy, turning illegal construction into a weapon of territorial conquest.

EU foreign affairs chief Kaja Kallas boasted on April 20, 2026, that "Europe is the biggest supporter of the Palestinian people", the largest donor and main backer of the Palestinian Authority, funding police, justice, governance, and border management. She is right. Europe bankrolls the entire apparatus at industrial scale.

The complicity runs even deeper. Europe is not merely funding illegal outposts. It is actively training and equipping the Palestinian Authority's security forces into a 65,000-strong shadow army. European advisors run programs at the Jericho military academy, while EU funds cover salaries, equipment, and "professionalization." These are forces Regavim has repeatedly exposed as "officers by day, terrorists by night" -- a war machine capable of launching October 7-type massacres, but potentially on a much larger scale, from the hills of Judea and Samaria directly into Israel's population centers on the coastal plain.

What else does this European investment produce? A Palestinian Authority

that indoctrinates its children for the next war, a 'final-solution'-by-proxy that the Europeans themselves failed to fully accomplish. Despite repeated promises to European donors, the PA's textbooks remain filled with antisemitism and jihad. The European Parliament has condemned them for the seventh consecutive year, but, as reported by the award-winning journalist and Gatestone Senior Fellow Khaled Abu Toameh, there is no enforcement by the European Commission and its bureaucrats, or even conditions demanded with any seriousness. The current curriculum still celebrates the 1978 coastal road massacre (38 Israelis murdered, including 13 children) as heroism, uses maps that erase Israel, teaches -- despite massive archaeological, biblical and documented evidence to the contrary -- that Jews are foreign colonizers with no history here, and not only glorifies but pays sizeable stipends-for-life to the terrorists who spill Jewish blood, or to their families. These pay-for-slay payments amounted to at least $325 million in 2025, with more than 6,000 new recipients found just in the first months of 2026.

Post-October 7, pushing a Palestinian state onto the strategic highlands of Judea and Samaria -- the cradle of Jewish civilization, where our kings ruled, prophets spoke, and our identity was forged -- is not a peace plan. It is an invitation to slaughter. The hills overlooking Tel Aviv would become launchpads for the PLO, Hamas, Iran and other genocidal actors. Yet Europe demands Israeli concessions while ignoring Palestinian rejectionism, pay-for-slay policies, and its startlingly explicit goal of destroying the Jewish state.

It is hard to ignore the cruel irony that once again Europe's Jews, who have lived there for generations, are once again fleeing in growing numbers, driven out by surging antisemitism that European governments and the EU have chosen not to seriously confront. People are being murdered, synagogues are attacked, streets are not safe, and Jewish schools need guards. Even so, it is clear that the worst is still to come.

The very same political actors who cannot or will not protect their Jews now seem to be working aggressively to prevent them from finding security in their ancestral homeland, in Judea and Samaria. Europe exports its "Jewish problem" while demanding that Israel surrender the one place where those Jews could truly return home. This is a haunting echo of former British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's other great historic disaster, the notorious 1939 British White Paper, which bypassed earlier international commitments to the Jews in then-Palestine, as it was called for all its citizens before Israeli independence in 1948, in favor of having an Arab-majority nation within 10 years with supposed "protection" for the Jewish minority. One can imagine how that would have worked out.

Regavim has a clear message for European governments and their Global Alliance: Stop funding the theft of our homeland. Stop financing classrooms that teach Jewish murder is heroic. Stop arming a terror army preparing the next October 7. Stop pretending that more than 3,000 years of Jewish history can be erased by EU euros and diplomatic declarations. And stop blocking the return of Jews to the land that has always been theirs.

The Land of Israel belongs to the People of Israel. Regavim and other organizations will keep exposing every illegal outpost, every euro, and every lie. We will not be robbed again.

ARE WE THERE YET?

SARA LEHMANN (Israelnn.com 10-5-26)

A couple months ago, my husband and I took our usual walk in Brooklyn near the salt marshes. It is a quiet spot and the walk is both soothing and invigorating.

Not that day. Going our regular route, we spotted three huge stones that mark the path's midway with stark black graffiti that spelled out, "Free Palestine".

The vandalism didn't only deface the stones; it defaced our cherished retreat. I called the park office to complain and said that as a Jewish person this slogan is intimidating. The park ranger didn't seem overly sympathetic and told me to call 311.

A few weeks later, my husband and I found ourselves on the Upper West Side, walking up Broadway in the high 90's. An unkempt black man with a dog started following us and muttering "Israel, Israel". He walked closer and closer, until he was invading our personal space, and his voice grew increasingly louder and more menacing.

We fled into the first open storefront we could find, which was a Carvel ice cream shop. The man yelled after us, "When you finish your ice cream, go and kill people."

The pervasiveness of Jew hatred is such that even a homeless looking man is now well versed in the genocide myth. Anecdotal evidence by Orthodox Jewish friends who ride the NYC Subway proves that ours was not a one-off incident.

Sadly, antisemitism has become so rampant that this time we didn't even think to report the incident. We were just happy not to have been physically harmed.

But as violence increases globally against Jews, especially identifiable ones, Jews need to start assessing how much is too much. Practically each day brings another report of an assault against Jews and some of them are deadly. While one antisemitic attack is one too many, the profusion of attacks over time seems to have caused many Jews to become inured to them.

Normalizing antisemitism doesn't just normalize it for the haters or for the general public. It risks normalizing it for the victims. Jews are tolerating what shouldn't be tolerated.

What is the tipping point? There has to come a moment when we don't bemoan another report of antisemitism and then move on to the next news story.

The threat of becoming jaded towards antisemitic crimes is as dangerous as the crimes themselves. As antisemitic incidents and rhetoric become more severe and more frequent, we raise our threshold of tolerance and lower our bar of offense.

However, becoming blasé only invites more of the same and worse.

The recent knifing attacks in London followed a long spate of deadly attacks and near misses, including attacks on synagogues, Jewish schools and businesses, and the torching of Hatzolah ambulances. The UK Home Secretary raised the terrorism threat level raised to 'severe' following the Golders Green stabbings, and the government vowed, once again, to do more to protect the Jews.

Too little, too late. British Jews, like all Jews, are sick of hearing from their elected officials that their "thoughts and prayers are with the Jewish community." After years of platitudes instead of practical measures to protect Jewish citizens, there is little faith things will change.

Following the stabbings, Israeli Immigration Minister Ofir Sofer said that "the safety and security of the Jewish community in the UK continues to decline. The recent attack is a grave and deeply unsettling event, reflecting a surge in antisemitism alongside a protracted inadequacy in the response from the British authorities."

This same tale can be said for most of Europe. Australia and Canada are not much better. A week ago, B'nai Brith Canada's League for Human Rights released a report showing that, on average, the increase in antisemitic attacks over the past year represented 18.6 incidents a day.

Jew hatred in America is not lagging far behind. In the span of just one week at the end of April, an Orthodox Jewish man leaving a shul in Los Angeles was nearly choked to death by a black man yelling "Free Palestine". Antisemitic taunts against Orthodox Jewish children playing in parks in Skokie, IL escalated into physical altercations.

In NYC, several shuls and private homes in the Queens were vandalized overnight with swastikas and antisemitic graffiti two days ago. At a community meeting at the Park Slope Food Coop over a proposed boycott of Israeli goods, a member declared, "Jewish supremacism is a problem in this country." And a violent mob of protestors descended on Park East Synagogue in Manhattan, yet again, at an Israel real estate event.

Living in NYC under an antisemitic mayor, married to an antisemitic wife, has particularly diminished expectations of what should be considered Jew hatred and how much of it should be endured. This itself is a lowering of standards that no other ethnic minority in the city would abide. It is also a frightening foreshadowing of a Democratic party overrun with proudly antisemitic politicians.

Rather than condemn the violent protestors in front of Park East Synagogue, Mamdani released an official statement condemning the pro-Israel event. While he couldn't withhold police protection, he said he was "deeply opposed" to the gathering.

This past March, Mamdani met with a select group of Orthodox Jewish leaders to discuss safety and concerns regarding antisemitism. Some of the participants had even inexplicably endorsed him for mayor. The very next day, Mamdani used his St. Patrick's Day breakfast speech at Gracie Mansion to accuse Israel of "genocide". He went on to veto a bill that would have created buffer zones to block protests directly in front of educational institutions - sorely needed safety plan to protect local yeshivas from harassment.

Only several years ago, one such antisemitic act would have provoked sustained national outrage. Now, these acts are so numerous that one cannot even count them, let alone sufficiently lament them.

So, what do we do? I do not know of any one sure solution.

Jews are increasingly arming themselves in states where they are able to do so, one positive step in self-defense. And many are moving from blue states to red states. However, there is no guarantee that the crazies on the right will remain a tiny fringe within the Republican Party.

Fortunately, we are grateful to Hashem to have a Jewish State. Many of us

living outside the State of Israel harbor a sense of security, a sort of insurance policy, knowing that if it ever gets bad enough, we can move there. The real question is what is bad enough.

Bad enough should be no longer accepting antisemitic hate that is growing incrementally worse. Bad enough should be refusing complacency with the status quo and rejecting one new norm of Jew hatred after another.

Jews are citizens like anyone else. We vote, pay taxes, and more than contribute to society. We should demand government officials provide the same security that is afforded to all other citizens. Certainly, Jews should not have to beg for that protection or pander to Jew hating politicians to provide it.

I regret not having reported the antisemitic harassment that my husband and I were subjected to on the Upper West Side. Even if it would have just been added to the growing roster of crimes against Jews that barely elicit a ho hum.

The Unthinkable: A Nuclear Iran

LAWRENCE KADISH (GateStoneInstitute.org 7-5-26)

It is time to think about the unthinkable.

For the sake of argument, let us consider a world where Donald J. Trump did not win the presidential election that returned him to the Oval Office in 2025 and, instead, Kamala Harris won that contest.

Given her progressive ideology, it is inconceivable that Harris would or could confront Iran's race to create a Middle East empire under their control, much less exert any American influence to restrain Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons placed atop intermediate- and long-range ballistic missiles.

And that is where the nightmare emerges. Iran's intermediate-range ballistic missiles, such as the ones it launched in March at the joint US-UK military base on Diego Garcia, can already reach Rome, Athens and all of Eastern Europe. Imagine the following: Iran confirms a successful intercontinental ballistic missile test, its warhead capable of reaching all of Western Europe and the UK. Suddenly the strategic guardrails that have governed peace and security since the Cold War are gone.

However, having nuclear weapons and using them are two profoundly different issues.

So in our nightmare scenario, let us then consider the thinking of Iranian leadership that believes infidels reign in those targeted cities. Accordingly, it's time to go from threat to strike because they know a Harris Administration would be paralyzed when they do so. Not so the Israelis. So, while Tehran has sworn to destroy "the Zionist entity," they are not suicidal. That leaves them plenty of other targets in which a nuclear strike will tell the world Iran now owns the Middle East on its terms.

Let us assume they decide Athens will make a heart-stopping example of Iran's intent to change the international calculus through the use of nuclear weapons. Will that trigger a nuclear response from NATO? Would the Harris Administration have the moral courage to engage in a nuclear exchange, having seen Athens enveloped in a nuclear fireball?

Saudi Arabia, which has long signaled its intention to match any Iranian nuclear weapons capability, would likely reveal that it has atomic weapons hidden but is now prepared to strike. Egypt and the UAE would not be far behind.

For southern Europe, the loss of Athens in a mushroom cloud would be immense. Nations such as Spain and Italy are accustomed to thinking of these kinds of existential threats as remnants from the Cold War era. Where is the Harris Administration? Having never considered a preemptive military strike against Iran's nuclear infrastructure, it is left with few options, even if it had the wisdom and will to engage in any of them.

The most sobering lesson from this hypothetical scenario is that Trump did become president once more and recognized that Iran's drive for nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them could not be left to future administrations. It is a present emergency on our doorstep that exists today.

In time, history will record that Trump had the vision and the courage to commit our military to stopping Iran, and by doing so, protected our nation and all democracies from an unthinkable threat.

When one thinks about the unthinkable, one begins to appreciate that this conflict is not about oil. It's about survival.

Kosher & Halacha Korner

The following article may be at variance to local Kashrus Agencies. When in doubt, contact your local reputable Agency. In Australia, direct any questions to info@kosher.org.au or visit www.kosher.org.au

Shehiyah

RABBI CHAIM JACHTER (KolTorah.org)

Chazal forbade placing food on the fire before Shabbat begins (Shehiyah) lest one stir the coals to make the food cook faster (Shabbat 18b). The Gemara (Shabbat 36b) records a great controversy between the Chachamim and Chananiah regarding its scope. The Chachamim forbid Shehiyah unless the food is cooked entirely, and any further cooking will detract from its quality (Mitztamek VeRa Lo). Chananiah limits the decree to where the food is not cooked to the extent that it is marginally edible (Ma'achal Ben Drosai).

The Rishonim vigorously debate whether the Halachah follows the Chachamim or Chananiah. The Rif, Rambam, and Ramban follow the Chachamim, whereas Rashi, Tosafot, and the Baal HaMaor support Chananiah. Rav Yosef Karo (Shulchan Aruch O.C. 253:1) codifies the Chachamim as the primary view. This ruling is hardly surprising, as the major Sefardic Rishonim follow the Chachamim. The Rama (ibid.), on the other hand, notes the long-standing Ashkenazic custom to follow Chananiah.

ASHKENAZIC PRACTICE

Interestingly, the Bi'ur Halachah (253:1 d"h VeNahagu) writes that it is preferable to follow the Chachamim. He notes that the Beit Yosef cites the Rosh (Shabbat 3:1), who seems to reluctantly tolerate the Ashkenazic practice of following Chananiah. The Rosh writes that "since there are many opinions on this matter and the Jewish People are highly committed to observing the Mitzvah] to enjoy Shabbat, and they will not adhere to the stringent view, let them follow their custom to follow Chananiah."

The Chazon Ish (O.C. 37:3) interprets the Rosh in a significantly different manner. The Chazon Ish understands the Rosh as initially positing that, since this is a complex dispute, one should be strict and avoid attempting to resolve it. However, since one will often detract from Oneg Shabbat by avoiding the disagreement, one's reaction will be that he wishes to follow the basic Halachah and not be strict. Indeed, the people have the right to do so because this is a matter of rabbinic law, and they are the descendants of those who followed the lenient view based on their Rabbis' ruling. Thus, the Chazon Ish concludes that one may adhere to the Ashkenazic tradition to follow Chananiah without reservation. This seems to be the Rama's intent, as he does not add a preference for stringency (contrast, for example, with the Rama to O.C. 253:2). The Chazon Ish is well-accepted. However, Dayan Yaakov Yechezkel Posen (Kittzur Hilchot Shabbat p. 51) and Shmirat Shabbat KeHilchata (1:63) prefer accommodating the Chachamim, following the Bi'ur Halacha.

SEPHARDIC PRACTICE

Rav Mordechai Eliyahu (Teshuvot Ma'amar Mordechai 254:7) understands the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 253:1) to be ruling as the Rif, Rambam, and Ramban, who follow the Chachamim. Indeed, the Shulchan Aruch presents Chananiah only as the secondary view.

Surprisingly, though, Yalkut Yosef (Orach Chaim 253:1) writes that Sepharadim customarily follow Chananiah. He believes that the Shulchan Aruch in Orach Chaim 254:4 changes his mind and codifies Chananiah. He concedes, though, that it is best also to have the food on a Blech to satisfy the stricter view.

DOES A BLECH HELP? SHULCHAN ARUCH VS. RAV AKIVA EIGER

The Shulchan Aruch (ibid.) indicates that this dispute pertains only if the food is placed on a fire not covered by a Blech. Shehiyah is prohibited due to the concern that one may come to stir the coals. However, a Blech remedies this concern. Thus, Shehiyah should be permitted if a Blech covers the fire. Nevertheless, Rav Akiva Eiger (ibid. s.v. Oh Nitbashel) posits that Chananiah does not permit Shehiyah if the food is not cooked to the point of Ma'achal Ben Drosai, even if there is a Blech. The Mishnah Berurah (254:50) follows the Shulchan Aruch. He merely notes the view of Rav Akiva Eiger (Bi'ur Halachah 253:1 s.v. Ve'im). For a response to Rav Akiva Eiger's concern, see Rav Mordechai Willig's Am Mordechai, Shabbat p. 39.

The Shulchan Aruch and the Mishnah Berurah are well-accepted (as noted by Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Teshuvot Minchat Shlomo 2:12 and Teshuvot Yabia Omer 6: Orach Chaim 32:1), but Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (cited by Rav Hershel Schachter in Beit Yitzchak 28:18) reports that Jews in pre-war Galicia customarily followed Rav Akiva Eiger. My highly respected cousin, the Lower East Side's Rav Yosef Singer (who served as a Rav in pre-war Galicia), confirms the authenticity of Rav Soloveitchik's report. My fellow "Galicianers" should consult with their rabbis as to whether our Galician heritage still binds us to our ancestral practice. Rav Mordechai

Willig (who is also a Galicianer) told me that we may follow current practices.

KIDRAH CHAITA

The Gemara (Shabbat 18b) and Shulchan Aruch (253:1) permit Shehiyah if raw meat is placed in the pot immediately before Shabbat, as there is no concern for stirring the coals. Food will not be ready for the Friday night meal, no matter how much it is stirred, since it takes a very long time to cook. Moreover, the food will be ready for the Shabbat afternoon meal, even if it will not be stirred. The Mishnah Berurah and Aruch Hashulchan (253:8-9) do not express any reservations about relying on this rule.

Nevertheless, Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin (Kitvei Harav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin 2:19; who lived in New York in the mid-twentieth century) insisted that we may no longer rely on the Kidrah Chaita approach. Among his concerns was that modern ovens are significantly more efficient than those used in pre-modern times. Rav Henkin notes that raw meat cooks relatively quickly in modern ovens. Hence, he argues that the concern that one may come to stir the coals (or adjust the flame) is relevant today even if raw meat has been added to a dish.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (cited by Rav Hershel Schachter, Nefesh HaRav pp. 156-157) agrees. However, Rav Moshe Feinstein (cited by Rav Shimon Eider, Halachos of Shabbos, p. 336, note 783), Dayan Yaakov Yechezkel Posen (Kittzur Hilchot Shabbat, p. 51-52), and Rav Pinchas Teitz (reported by his son Rav Elazar Mayer Teitz) believe that we still may rely on the Kidrah Chaita. Rav Schachter (The Laws of Cooking and Warming Food on Shabbat, p. 184) and Rav Willig (The Laws of Cooking and Warming Food on Shabbat, p. 126) follow the stricter approach.

However, Rav Simcha Bunim Cohen (the Shabbos Kitchen, p. 56) and Rav Mordechai Willig ("The Laws of Cooking and Warming Food on Shabbat, p. 126) believe that the Kidra Chaita rule has reemerged with the advent of the crockpot. Since crockpots cook their contents slowly, the Kidra Chaita rule has reemerged as relevant regarding them.

CONCLUSION

Many are not familiar with the Halachot of Shehiyah, which is a shame, especially since they are easy to implement. One needs only be alert to this issue and plan to satisfy its requirements.

POSTSCRIPT – PLACING WATER IN THE URNS LONG BEFORE SHABBAT

It is important to follow Rav Moshe Feinstein's ruling (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe 4:74 Bishul 29) and place water in the urn long before Shabbat, for the water to reach Yad Soldet Bo (160-180 degrees Fahrenheit in this case) before Shabbat starts.

Candles (Melb) Fri 15 May 2026, 29 Iyar 5786 5.01pm/6.00pm