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vayera 5786

MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME

RABBI ELISHA GREENBAUM (Chabad.org)

It was while backpacking around Europe that I first appreciated that the spontaneous hospitality practiced among Jews, which I had hereto taken for granted, was in reality truly exceptional. The friend that we had been relying on to provide Shabbat accommodations in Paris was unexpectedly out of town. There were only a few hours till nightfall and we had no place to stay.

Weeknights we didn't mind roughing it in a hostel, but for Shabbat you really need a more salubrious standard of lodging.

To the surprise of the other backpackers in the train carriage who had overheard our conversation, we weren't worried. We ascertained the address of a nearby shul (synagogue) and headed over.

Within minutes we had received three separate offers of hospitality, and it was just a matter of determining with whom we wished to stay. Our eventual host gave us the keys to his house, described the layout of his kitchen in case we were hungry and urged us to hurry home to shower and prepare while he, totally unconcerned, stayed behind studying in shul.

In truth, I, too, was raised to consider such behavior totally natural. I remember many a Friday night in my youth being stationed in the back of the shul under strict instructions from my father that "anyone walking in looking as if they have no place to eat, you get to them and invite them first." Hospitality is ingrained to the extent that on the rare occasions when my parents had no one at the table outside of family, the table felt empty, almost as if one of the essential ingredients was missing.

We read in this week's parashah how our father Avraham interrupted a conversation with G-d in order to chase after three itinerant strangers and invite them home with him (Genesis 18:2). They turned out to be three angels in the guise of men, bearing prophecy of the impending birth to Avraham and Sarah of a son, Yitzchak.

Avraham, however, had no way of knowing this in advance. When he abandoned G-d to offer hospitality to what he had to assume were mortal men, he was demonstrating to us, his descendants, a clear set of priorities.

In fact, it is from this interlude with the angels that our sages derive many of the laws governing hospitality. Interestingly, of all the attention to his guests' comfort that Avraham displayed (he ran to invite them, he personally prepared their meals and served them, he was sensitive to their culturally specific needs, he provided lodging as well as food, etc.), it is the fact that he accompanied them on their way when they left that most excites rabbinical admiration. Why so? Why should the seemingly paltry action of walking them out be treated with such significance?

Have you ever been the recipient of generosity or kindness from someone who clearly resented having to make the effort? A begrudged consideration is sometimes more unpalatable to the receiver than having to do without altogether. Avraham could have contented himself with providing his visitors with food and lodging, thereby satisfying their physical needs; but would that have demonstrated pure hospitality Jewish style? It was with the simple, seemingly unnecessary act of honor of accompanying his guests that Avraham demonstrated his true priorities: an instinctive love for one's fellow and a true desire to help for no other reason than that it is the right thing, the G-dly thing to do.

When You Are About to Give Up

GITTY ADLER (Chabad.org)

"You do your bit, and G-d will do the rest."

Sometimes, you're trying so hard to do the right thing, and you can't see the fruit of your labor. You wonder if it's worth the effort, time and thought when the results are just not what you were expecting.

Suppose, for example, you are a school parent arranging a parent-teachers evening because you believe that it will benefit the school community. You've put hours of thought into it, planning all the details of the food, venue, program and invitations.

The special evening is scheduled in two days' time. You started a while ago, and at this point, you can count on one hand the parents and teachers who have sent you a response at all—some of these responses simply an "unable to attend."

"Why can't things just work out? Where is everyone?" You hope there won't be an embarrassing flop of an evening that you put so much into.

The clock keeps ticking, and you start hearing a nagging voice inside. "Why bother with this? Just cancel the whole thing!" Surely, if nobody else really cares for the evening, then there is no reason for you to go out of your way for it?

Here's some encouragement to stay positive, reaffirm your decision to go with your plans and believe that somehow G-d will make it all work out. Imagine this:

A 99-year-old man, Avraham, is recovering after his circumcision. It could have been the perfect time for him to relax and take it easy. Yet being the genuinely good person that he was, he was desperate to host guests, despite his pain and weakness.

G-d, loving and considerate as only a father can be, decided to set the sun's temperature to the max, so that no wanderer would dare brave a trek in the broiling desert. Avraham would then be spared the burden of hosting guests and have the opportunity to recover.

Avraham could have accepted G-d's favor, "Oh, thank you, G-d! How kind of You to let me rest!"

Instead, however, he was disappointed that nobody was around. Avraham loved hosting guests; it was part of his very being. Post circumcision or not, young or old, Avraham yearned for an opportunity to be kind to another person.

Determined as ever—and knowing the almost-impossible chances of a passerby venturing out in the blazing heat—he sat himself down outside his tent, waiting for guests.

"I will sit here until somebody comes."

And you know what G-d did? The same loving, considerate G-d who turned the sun on high for Avraham to rest now sent him angels to be his guests. Angels would survive the heat, and Avraham would be satisfied!

Avraham did his bit, and G-d did the rest.

Sometimes, doing our bit means having faith in the unimaginable. In the unlikely. And not just stopping there, at believing in our dreams. Sometimes, doing our bit means going out of our tent, our comfort zone, and demonstrating our determination to do all we can to turn that hope into our reality.

Still, if we truly believe in our mission and want to succeed, if we ignore all possible excuses that G-d has given us, maybe He will send some angels our way, too.

G-d can do anything. Let's do our bit.

Coercing Religious Observance

RABBI NAFTALI SILBERBERG (Chabad.org)

Avraham devised a unique method for sharing his monotheistic beliefs with the masses. He erected a tent in middle of the desert and any traveler who entered would be served a sumptuous meal which included bread, meat,

wines and other delicacies. When the guest was satiated and was ready to continue on his journey, Avraham would ask him to thank the Creator for the food he had just eaten. If the guest couldn't formulate a blessing on his own, Avraham would teach him to say: "Blessed be the Master of the World, whose food we have eaten."

Occasionally, a recalcitrant pagan would refuse Avraham's request. At this point, the Midrash says, Avraham would provide his guest with a bill for all the food which had been served: Pita – \$150. Soup de jour – \$300. Entrée – \$500. Beverage – \$100. In response to the miserable guest's protests, Avraham would patiently explain that in a free-market society prices are determined by supply and demand. Such outrageous food prices are justified in a desert, where such provisions are extremely scarce. "However," Avraham graciously concluded, "I will happily waive all charges if you consent to thank the A-mighty for the meal!"

Even the most ardent pagan was hard pressed to refuse such a proposal...

Though this story demonstrates our Patriarch's ingenuity and is a testament to his commitment to his mission of publicizing G-d's holy name amongst the population, it begs the question: what was Avraham accomplishing through extracting "forced blessings" from reluctant idol worshippers? The enlightened world has long eschewed employing coercive tactics to obtain verbal statements — realizing that declarations made under duress are utterly worthless. Why, then, did Avraham attach any value to blessings which were obviously uttered out of desperation?

Our sages tell us that "actions affect the heart." Avraham understood that the most effective way to influence a person, to nudge him in a spiritual direction, is actually getting him to do a mitzvah. Oftentimes, a person who lives in a spiritual void needs some prodding, and when the person is persuaded to do a mitzvah, the simple beauty of submitting to the authority of a Higher Being is highly addictive. For the person who is completely engrossed in mundane activities, the moment when he/she is given the opportunity to connect with G-d is a breath of fresh air. This is something which must be experienced — no amount of explanation can replace the feeling experienced when doing a mitzvah. Undoubtedly, every person is endowed with Free Choice, and can therefore choose to ignore the effect of the mitzvah, but inducing another Jew to actually do a mitzvah is the best weapon we have in our holy mission of bringing Jews closer to their Father in Heaven.

So, you can leave the thumb-screw at home, but we should always be gently prodding other Jews — be they friends, acquaintances, or family members — to do another mitzvah.

Doing is believing!

Meting Justice — Meeting Kindness

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY (Torah.org)

In what must be one of the greatest transitional scenes in the entire Biblical narrative, this week the Torah transposes us from the gracious home of Avraham in one scene and to the evil city of S'dom in the next. Avraham's home was one of kindness. It was a home where the master of the house would run to greet nomadic wanderers, and invite them into his abode only three days after a bris milah! It was a home in which Sora had opened a door in every direction, ensuring that there was an unrestricted invitation to any wayfarer, no matter which direction he or she came from.

The scene switches to S'dom, a city in which kindness and charity were unheard of. A city in which a damsel who committed the terrible crime of feeding a pauper, was smeared with honey and set out for the bees. Sdom was a city where visitors who had the audacity to ask for overnight lodging were treated to a special type of hospitality. They were placed in beds, and then, if they were too short for the beds, their limbs were tortuously stretched to fit the bed; if they were larger than the beds their limbs were chopped off.

How does the Torah make the transition from the world of kindness and charity to the world of evil? The Parsha tells us the story of three angels who visited Avraham. Each had a mission. Rashi tells us, "one to announce to Sarah the birth of a son, one to overthrow Sodom, and one to cure Avraham." You see, three were needed as one angel does not carry out two commissions. "Raphael," explains Rashi, "who healed Avraham went on to rescue Lot, as healing and saving may be one mission." And so the scene moves from Avraham in Eilonai Mamrei to Lot in S'dom, where the angels posing again as wayfarers were graciously invited. They saved the hospitable Lot and destroyed the rest of the city.

I have a simple question. Why did the angel who was sent to destroy S'dom make a stop at Avraham's home? Two angels could have gone to Avraham's home, one to heal Avraham and the other to inform Sora of the good news. The third could have gone directly to S'dom and waited there for the others to catch up. Why make a detour to Avraham?

Traditionally, young children who start learning Talmud, are introduced to Tractate Bava Metzia in general and the chapter Eilu M'tziyos in particular. The tractate deals with property law and emphasizes respect for other people's

possessions. Eilu M'tziyos stresses the laws of returning lost items and the responsibilities of a finder of those objects. Some wanted the boys to learn about the blessings, but Rav Moshe Feinstein insisted that the custom not be changed. He wanted to imbue the youngsters of the enormous responsibilities that they have to their fellow man. One cannot be a Jew only in shul where he can sway, pray, and recite blessings, but one must also be also be a Jew in the outside world, where the tests of honesty arise each day.

I heard the story of one of those youngsters, who found his way off the beaten yeshiva path. His college-years search for spirituality found him studying with a yogi in Bombay, India who railed against Western comforts and derided the culture of materialism. He preached peace, love, and harmony while decrying selfishness and greed. The young man was enamored with his master's vociferous objections to Western society, until he was together with him on a Bombay street. A wallet lay on the ground. There was cash and credit cards sticking out from it. It was clearly owned by an American tourist. The Yogi picked it up and put it in his sarong. "But it may belong to someone," protested his young charge. "It is a gift from the gods," he answered, "heaven meant it for us" The young man's protests fell on deaf ears.

At that moment, the words of his Rabbi back in fifth grade rang in his ears. "These are the items that must be announced for return; any item with an identifying sign"

He was stirred by truth of his traditions, and the purity of his past. He left the Yogi and the wallet, and eventually returned to a Torah life.

It is easy to rail against others. It is easy to talk about loose morals and unethical behavior. It's even easy to destroy Sdom. But Hashem did not let the angels do just that. He told them all to them first visit Avraham. He wanted them to see what kindness really means. See an old man run to greet total strangers. See a 90-year-old woman knead dough to bake you fresh bread. Meet the man who will plead for mercy on behalf of S'dom. And then, and only then can you mete the punishment that they truly deserve. Because without studying the good, we cannot understand the true flaws of the bad. Without watching Avraham commit true kindness, we should not watch the inhabitants of Sdom get their due.

THE LOST CAUSE SCENARIO

RABBI YANKI TAUBER (Chabad.org)

Much is made of Avraham's valiant efforts to save the wicked city of Sodom. We read how Avraham virtually went to battle with G-d on behalf of these very sinful people, contesting the divine decree that Sodom (and its four sister cities, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Zoar) be destroyed. "It behooves You not to do such," Avraham challenged, "to kill the righteous together with the wicked . . . Shall the Judge of the entire world not do justice?!" "If there be found fifty righteous people in the city," Avraham bargained, "would You not spare the place because of the fifty righteous ones who are in it?" "What if there be five less than fifty?" Avraham persisted. "What if there be forty? . . . Thirty?"

But something about the story doesn't add up. Why should the wicked people be spared "because of the righteous"? If there are some righteous people left in Sodom, G-d obviously doesn't have to "kill the righteous together with the wicked"—He can airlift them outta there before He wrecks the place. Indeed, G-d sent two angels to rescue Lot and his family, the only righteous people in Sodom, before overturning the city. So where's the injustice? What's the logic in Avraham's argument?

Also: every good salesman has more than one pitch up his sleeve; when one line of reasoning fails to elicit the desired response, the seasoned marketer will quickly shift to another tack. Yet Avraham (a pretty good salesman, actually) seems to have only this one argument to make. When it turns out that there's not even ten righteous folk in any of the cities, Avraham drops the case.

One of the explanations offered by the commentaries is that as long as there are righteous people in a place, there remains the possibility and hope that they will have a positive influence on their community. So it makes sense to spare the entire city because of the righteous people in it—it's not a lost cause yet. When Avraham learns, however, that there are no righteous people remaining in Sodom (or not enough righteous people to make a difference), he has nothing further to say on their behalf.

This suggests a deeper meaning to Avraham's argument. When Avraham says to G-d, "Do not destroy the city because of the righteous who are in it," he's not just speaking about Sodom as a city, but also about its individual sinners. The chassidic masters refer to the human being as a "city in miniature": each of us is a virtual metropolis populated by numerous organs and limbs, traits and faculties, drives and desires, thoughts and actions. Even a thoroughly wicked "city" is bound to have a few righteous "inhabitants"—a few remaining enclaves of purity, a few pinpoints of goodness. To destroy a person—even a most wicked person—is also to destroy the latent tzaddik within him, to reject not only his negative actuality but also his positive potential.

The question, however, is: does there remain enough potential goodness to

exert a positive influence on the “city” and perhaps effect a transformation? If this were the case, it would indeed be a grave injustice, unbecoming the Judge of the entire world, to “kill the righteous together with the wicked.” But what if we are dealing with a “lost cause”? What if we have before us a person or community in which the “tzaddik within” is so completely overwhelmed that one can see no possibility of it ever asserting itself? When there is no salvageable goodness remaining in the person, what can be said to protest the Divine decree?

Avraham, who in the course of his lifetime had converted many thousands to the ethos and morals of monotheism, was quite the expert at identifying and activating the “hidden tzaddik” in the most corrupt environments. But when confronted with an evil as impregnable as Sodom’s, even Avraham fell silent.

BUT MOSHE DID NOT. Four hundred years after Avraham approached G-d to plead on behalf of the wicked of Sodom, Moshe had a “lost cause scenario” of his own on his hands, when the Children of Israel sinned by worshipping a Golden Calf. What can be said in defense of a people who succumb to idolatry a mere forty days after experiencing the greatest Divine revelation of all time—a revelation bearing the message “I am the L-rd your G-d . . . you shall have no other gods before Me”?

The Divine anger seethed. Like his great-great-great-great-grandfather before him, Moshe stepped in to stave off a decree of annihilation.

But Moshe took a different approach. He didn’t say, “But there are many who didn’t sin.” He didn’t say, “Spare the wicked because of the righteous,” or “spare the wicked because of the potential for righteousness within them.” Instead he said: “Forgive them, G-d. If you won’t, blot me out of your Torah.”

Moshe demanded an unconditional forgiveness, a forgiveness without a “because.” If you are a G-d who forgives without cause, Moshe said, I’m prepared to be part of your Story. If not, edit me out; I’ll have no part in it. Avraham was a great lover of humanity. He loved his fellow man because he saw the potential for goodness in him or her, even when the rest of the person didn’t look that great. But Moshe’s love was greater: Moshe loved his people regardless of whether he could or could not discern the hidden tzaddik in their city.

And the amazing thing was, in the end Moshe did turn his errant people around. In the end, their supposedly irredeemable potential came to glorious light.

For such is the paradox of love. If you care for someone because you see in him a potential for improvement and wish to have a positive influence on him, that’s really great of you, but there will be times when you’ll find that potential inaccessible and your positive influence rebuffed. But if you care for him irrespective of whether you can see anything good in him, and regardless of whether you can reasonably hope to influence him in any way—if you love him even if he is a “lost cause”—then you will end up having a profound influence on his life.

REFINEMENT WITHOUT FEAR

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND (Aish.com)

The trouble began when Avraham introduced his wife Sarah to the people of Gerar as his sister. One thing led to another, and she was taken to the palace of Avimelech, king of Gerar, as a prospective new wife. Avimelech came very close to sinning with Sarah, but Hashem revealed her true identity to him.

Avimelech was upset. "You almost got me into terrible trouble," he said to Avraham. "You told me she was your sister when she was really your wife. Why didn't you tell me the truth? Why did you do this to me?"

"For I thought," said Avraham, "only there is no fear of the Lord in this place (Gen. 20:11)."

The word "only" in this verse seems to be out of place. What is it supposed to imply?

Rav Elchanan Wasserman raised this question when he addressed a group of rabbis in Germany during the 1930's. Then he shocked them with the Malbim's explanation.

"Your city is wonderful," Avraham was telling the people of Gerar, according to the Malbim's interpretation. "It is a place of culture and refinement, of exemplary citizens. There is only one thing wrong with it. The Lord is not feared in your city. And if the Lord is not feared, then all your other refinements and accomplishments are meaningless. If you are not governed by fear of the Lord but by your own human standards, there is no hope for you. You cannot be trusted not to kill a man with a desirable wife. Your civilized ways mean nothing. They will not be allowed to get in the way of your passions and ambitions, because you do not fear the Lord."

The implications of what Rav Elchanan was saying were clear. Germany was a civilized country, but there was no fear of the Lord. Therefore, it was a dangerous place. Anything could happen there.

"Not so," some of the German rabbis objected. "Germany is a land of laws, culture, civilization, high moral standing, science, technology. We are not

some backward backwater from the Middle Ages. Jews are not at risk here. We are protected by the law."

Germany was indeed a country of laws, but what were those laws? Rabbi Reuven Bulka of Ottawa, Canada, recalls attending cheder in Germany during Kristallnacht. One of the children ran into the classroom and informed the rebbi that his house was on fire. The rebbi immediately telephoned the fire department and reported the fire, but his pleas for assistance fell on deaf ears. He got through to the fire chief, but to no avail. "We are sorry," said the fire chief, "but we cannot put out the fire. It is against the law."

It was now against the law to put out fires in Jewish homes. Germany was still a land of laws. That had not changed. Only the laws had changed. All the culture and the civilization meant nothing. When there is no fear of G-d in a place, the laws mean nothing.

When Rav Yitzchak Hutner was learning in Slobodka, Rav Avraham Elya Kaplan came back to the yeshiva after spending some time in Germany. The Alter of Slobodka invited Rav Avraham Elya to convey to the yeshiva his impressions of the German people. What were they like?

"It seems to me that the Germans are a kind and refined people," he replied. "When you ask directions from someone, he will give you very precise instructions for getting there, and then he will say to you, 'Nicht wahr? Isn't that so?' Now, he knows that you have absolutely no idea about how to get there. In fact, that's why you're asking directions. He also knows perfectly well that he doesn't need nor can he expect any confirmation from you. And still he says in such a deferential tone, 'Nicht wahr?' I see this as a sign of refinement. The Germans are a refined people."

At this point, an argument broke out among the students of the Slobodka Yeshiva. Some argued, Rav Hutner among them, that we should seek to learn good traits only from the holy Torah, the repository of all desirable ethics and values, and not from the Germans or any other gentile communities. Besides, if they were not rooted in the Torah, it was quite possible that refined manners were no more than a superficial cloak for a dark interior.

"I disagree," declared one student. "A wise person learns from everyone. If we see something admirable among the gentiles, we should give credit where credit is due and adopt it for ourselves as well. I think the practice of saying nicht wahr is a sign of politeness, refinement and a very becoming modesty. We should learn from the virtues of the Germans."

Nearly 50 years later, Rav Hutner was saying a shiur (Torah class) in Yeshiva Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin when an old man walked in. He sat in the back and waited until the shiur was over. Then he approached Rav Hutner.

"You don't remember me, do you?" he said. "I am the student in Slobodka who argued with you about admiring the refined manners of the Germans."

"Ah, of course I remember you," said Rav Hutner. "Ah, it is good to see you again after all these years."

He reached out to take the old man's hand, but there was only a hook where the hand should have been. Rav Hutner's hand remained suspended in midair.

"I lost it in the concentration camps," the old man explained. "When the Nazi was sawing off my right hand, he kept saying, 'This is hurting you, nicht wahr? The pain is intense, nicht wahr? And even as I was screaming as if my lungs would burst, he was smiling all the time. Such a gentle, refined smile. Reb Yitzchak, you were right, and I was wrong.'"

When "there is no fear of the Lord in this place," when people live by their own rules, all the culture and refined manners mean nothing. It was true in Gerar. It was true in Germany. It is true everywhere.

THE PRAGMATIC PHILISTINE

AVROHOM YAAKOV

After the birth of Yitzchak, Avimelech, the King of the Philistines and his general paid Avrohom a visit, ostensibly to sign a treaty with him.

“At that time Avimelech and Phichol, chief of his troops, said to Avrohom, “G-d is with you in everything that you do.” (21:22)

Rashi, noting that they referred to G-d, explains, “... they said this (‘G-d is with you’) because they saw that he (Avrohom) had left the locality of Sodom safely, that he had fought against the (Four) Kings and that they had fallen into his hand, and that his wife (Sarah) had been remembered in his old age (and given birth to a child).” Rashi’s explanation is based on the Midrash (Bereshis Rabbah 54:2).

Maskil LeDavid notes that Avimelech visited only after Yitzchak was born because that was an obvious miracle. Escaping Sodom and defeating the kings could be explained as being natural, but the birth at such an advanced age indicated retrospectively that all the events were supernatural.

Chizkuni suggests a different reason for the timing of their visit. Once Sarah gave birth, “... the various kings in the region were now convinced and afraid that G-d would keep His promise to Avrohom to give the entire region to the descendants of Avrohom. As a result, Avimelech was prompted to seek an alliance with Avrohom that would put off such an event for several

generations, at least.”

Clearly, Avimelech was a consummate politician. His due diligence on Avrohom showed a person with supernatural power or at least protection and therefore someone to play nicely with and not someone to destroy because he was potentially too strong to control.

Contrast to leaders over of the past millennia who saw the success and benefit in having Avrohom’s descendants living peacefully among them and chose to oppress and expel them to their own detriment.

Jews were good for commerce. Jews were good for the economy and for health and science.

But guaranteed that at some stage they would be accused of ‘poisoning the wells’, stealing our jobs’, ‘setting up a worldwide cabal to control everyone’, ‘being selfish’, ‘being standoffish’ and countless other allegations which are without foundation and sheer nonsense.

In contrast to European and Middle Eastern beliefs, Asians view Jews as worthy of alignment. The Japanese in particular, who were introduced to the antisemitic Protocols in the 1920s, saw Jews as a model for success and imitation based on its lies.

Similarly, Korea views Jews favourably for shared values and Jewish durability over the millennia.

Perhaps Avimelech’s pragmatic approach to statecraft was a key reason why both Avrohom and his son continued to live in Philistine?

THE LITMUS TEST

RABBI BEREL WEIN (RabbiWein.com)

Sacrificing one’s own son was undoubtedly the supreme test of Avraham’s life and faith. When Avraham and Yitzchak come down from the mountain of Moriah, their lives and the destiny of the Jewish people were changed forever. The akeidah remains the central story of Jewish history and destiny. Its grim reminder of Jewish vulnerability has never departed from the people of Israel. Though we have survived the myriad periods of akeidah in our history, it has always been with great cost and almost always some sort of permanent trauma.

Why G-d demanded that test from Avraham and why it is continuously still demanded of the Jewish people is a question that has no real answer. It is however a situation that remains a stark fact of life and an ever-present reality, its inscrutability notwithstanding. We will see in later parshiyot of the Torah how strongly Yitzchak remains affected by his near-death experience. It governs his personality and makes him to us the most inscrutable of all the avot of the Jewish people. Surviving the akeidah takes an enormous toll on one’s soul and psyche. And as the rabbis teach us, the occurrences in the lives of the avot are harbingers of the future of their descendants, as the akeidah has certainly become an oft repeated theme in Jewish history. We should not be pessimistic about our present situation and our future. But we should certainly be realistic and wary as to what difficulties certainly face us now and later.

There are two witnesses to part of the akeidah drama – Yishmael and Eliezer. Their impressions of the event are not related to us by the Torah itself. Yishmael will remain the antagonist of Yitzchak and his descendents until our very own time. The descendents of Yishmael will even attempt to substitute their ancestor Yishmael for Yitzchak as the central character of the drama of the akeidah. However, the history of the descendents of Yishmael does not conform to the pattern of historical akeidot. Yishmael remains the aggressor in history and his character, as delineated in the Torah as being warlike and constantly dissatisfied, has been amply justified in human history. It is not the character of someone who has experienced an akeidah.

Yishmael is willing to be the hero of the akeidah but not to suffer its experience and trauma. Eliezer will play an important role in the life of Yitzchak. He is the person entrusted by Avraham to find the proper mate for Yitzchak and he performs his task flawlessly. But then he somehow disappears from the scene of biblical history and the story of the Jewish people. There is a lack of continuity in Eliezer and his descendents that does not allow him or them to remain any longer an integral part of the Jewish story. Thus, the two other participants in the akeidah story depart from the mountain of Moriah unchanged by the event. Apparently, immortality and eternity in Jewish history is gained only by experiencing the akeidah itself. Not necessarily a pleasant thought, but it is a proven reality. May the Lord test us with akeidot no longer.

Beyond The Call of Duty

RABBI NAFTALI REICH (Torah.org)

Each year as we begin reading the Torah anew, we gain fresh inspiration and insight into the transcendent actions of our patriarchs and matriarchs. Although the Torah only provides us with selective glimpses into their sublime lives, these flashes of insight illuminate our own pathway, for as our sages teach us, “maaseh avos siman labanim,” the deeds of our forefathers serve as a compass for their children.

The apex of Avraham’s devotion to Hashem is described in this week’s

Parsha when he successfully completed his tenth challenge—that of the akeida. The akeida, which has been incorporated into the beginning of our daily morning prayers, serves as our “mission statement” and a guiding source of inspiration for all generations.

There are many facets of Avraham’s and Yitzchok’s greatness that leap at us from even a cursory reading of the text of the Akeida. Perhaps one of the most powerful lessons is the message of total and absolute selflessness displayed by Avraham Avinu.

The parsha begins with Hashem commanding him to offer up his beloved son Yitzchok as a sacrifice. After performing the act with utmost devotion until he was commanded to halt and not to consummate the sacrifice of Yitzchak, Avraham remained unsatisfied. He was bothered that he had not fulfilled the letter of the Divine command. Although the angel that called out to him from Heaven crowned him with the highest praise—calling him a true G-d fearing person—Avraham felt a tinge of discontent.

His heart burned with an overflow of love to Hashem that needed expression. He poured all that dedication and devotion into the sacrifice of the ram which took the place of his son, and which subsequently prompted the angel to guarantee him and all his progeny a wealth of blessing.

Upon offering the ram up on the altar, Avraham called out to Hashem that this place, the future Temple Mount, should be secured for future generations as a place where all could connect intimately with their Divine source, and where Hashem would manifest His presence to His people.

Avraham sought no personal reward. He wanted only that his heartfelt deed connect heaven and earth, then and forever. It was at this moment that our place as G-d’s chosen nation was secured for eternity.

Among the many insights to be gained from this narrative, one practical lesson we can use to spur our personal growth is to realize that in applying our energies to our life mission and our most important relationships, we must reach as high as we can. Like our forefather Avraham, we should not be satisfied with carrying out our minimum obligations.

Only when we invest true love and genuine dedication in a relationship will we attain a lasting, genuine bond.

The story is told of a carpenter who was a master of his craft. He worked diligently for his company throughout his life, earning a wonderful reputation for his skill. Upon reaching retirement age, he informed his boss that he was ready to retire and draw upon his pension for his future salary. His boss implored him to carry out just one more project for him; to build an elegant mansion and to spare no expense in furnishing it. The boss then presented him with a vast sum of money with which to create a dream home.

The carpenter reluctantly acquiesced to his boss’s request but his heart was not really in his work. He would have preferred to start retirement as he had planned. His mind was constantly preoccupied with his vacation plans that he and his wife had carefully worked on. His usual expert work was below standard and in no way reflected his skills.

The wood he selected was of poor grade and the moldings were cheap and commonplace, not cut to perfection. At the conclusion of his work his boss appeared at the worksite for a tour of the home. As they began to tour the finished building together, the boss noted in disappointment the sloppy workmanship and the places where the builder had cut corners by substituting cheap inferior materials for those of better quality.

As they finished the tour, the boss turned to his worker and presented him with the keys to the house. “This home that you have built is a gift to you from the company,” he said, ” in recognition of all your years of devoted service.”

The carpenter was flabbergasted. Regret flooded through him as he realized the opportunity he had squandered. Had I only known that his house was meant for me, I would have done everything so differently, he thought. How could I have shortchanged myself so?

All too often we give to various charities and engage in worthy causes out of a sense of obligation. This may be praiseworthy but it will not secure us the ultimate blessing when we give of ourselves with genuine love and go beyond the call of duty.

Only then can we be assured that we are gracing our eternal home with accouterments and furnishings that reflect our true ability and worth and that we will enjoy for eternity.

News & Views

Hamas legal bid to have Australia remove terror designation

LAURENCE KARACSONY (Skynews.com.au 31-10-25)

Hamas has made the astonishing argument that Australia should remove the Palestinian militant group from its terror list claiming the designation is “unlawful”.

The interlocutory application lodged with the Federal Court was brought by

Indigenous activist Robbie Thorpe, Senator Lidia Thorpe's uncle.

The terror group responsible for the October 7 attacks on Israel in 2023 lodged the interlocutory application this month.

An estimated 1,200 people were killed that day with 251 taken hostage.

Hamas has argued for Australia to remove the Palestinian militant group from its terror list claiming the designation is "unlawful", with the case brought by Indigenous activist Robbie Thorpe, Senator Lidia Thorpe's uncle. Picture: AP Photo/Hatem Moussa

Hamas has argued for Australia to remove the Palestinian militant group from its terror list claiming the designation is "unlawful", with the case brought by Indigenous activist Robbie Thorpe, Senator Lidia Thorpe's uncle. Picture: AP Photo/Hatem Moussa

According to The Sydney Morning Herald, the documents were filed as part of a case brought by Mr Thorpe, who argued the designation limited freedom of political communication in Australia.

The application was lodged on October 15, five days after the US-backed ceasefire came into effect.

In the documents, Hamas demanded procedural fairness because it was an "interested party" and was the governing authority in Gaza.

The terror group argued the ongoing proscription had "impeded negotiations" and even exposed negotiators to assassination.

Hamas reasoned the terror proscription impeded the "maintenance of any ceasefire agreement" and that Israel could engage in "extrajudicial killing" of Hamas members and their families.

In article eight of the interlocutory orders, Hamas argued the proscription incites Israel to "commit genocide" against Palestine.

"The ongoing proscription purports to declare as unlawful the armed struggle of the Palestinian people for liberation from unlawful occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, contrary to international law," Hamas said in the application.

"Hamas was deprived of the opportunity to rebut the allegations made against Hamas, made against the late Ismail Haniyeh, and against the late Mohammed Deif."

Mr Thorpe told the Herald that Western countries should remove Hamas from their designated terrorist organisation lists.

"The government should take them off the list," he said.

"Australia is not in a position to judge what terrorism is."

While the Commonwealth is contesting the case against the Attorney-General, the interlocutory application, lodged by Mr Thorpe's lawyer, Daniel Taylor, was rejected by the Federal Court.

According to the outlet, Mr Taylor said the application was handed to him by Hamas' political bureau based in Doha, Qatar.

Mr Taylor said Hamas intended to file another application with the Federal Court and lodge a formal request to be removed from Australia's terror register.

Executive Council of Australian Jewry co-chief executive Alex Ryvchin told the publication the fact Australians would put their names to a document aimed at lifting Hamas' terror status should "shock and alarm us all".

Mr Ryvchin said since October 7 there had been "public expressions of support" for the terror group, and now there was a ceasefire and peace plan being implemented, there were "Australians doing Hamas' bidding".

Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke, who oversees the terror list, said in a July letter to Mr Thorpe's lawyer he was "satisfied" Hamas continues to prepare, plan, assist and foster terrorist activities.

"Examples of this conduct include that on 7 October 2023, Hamas-led militants conducted a series of coordinated terrorist attacks on Israel where a significant number of individuals were killed, including an Australian. In addition, a significant number of individuals were injured or taken hostage..." Mr Burke wrote.

Mr Thorpe said in October 2024 that Hamas and Hezbollah were exercising their "moral and legal duty of armed resistance to genocide", and that their terror designation is unconstitutional.

Senator Lidia Thorpe, who is not a party to the case, has been outspoken against Israel since it began its military campaign to dismantle the terror group in Gaza.

The Morrison government designated Hamas as a terror group in 2022 with Labor's support, joining many other nations, however the listing has been subject to debate due to the organisation having political and military wings.

WHAT IS HAMAS DOING AT A FIVE-STAR HOTEL IN CAIRO?

JAKE WALLIS SIMONS (Spectator.co.uk 29-10-25)

Imagine the horror of discovering that you have been rubbing shoulders with terrorists. No, I'm not talking about those gullible souls who join the Gaza marches in London, but about the British airline crew who had an unfortunate brush with Hamas at a five-star Marriott hotel in Cairo. Full marks to the Daily Mail, whose veteran photographer Mark Large snapped several of the 154 jihadis freed by Israel as they lived it up at the inexplicably

named Renaissance Cairo Mirage City.

What's a terrorist to do? You recruit suicide bombers, oversee a bus bombing or murder a police officer, get banged up, luck out with early release as part of an exchange for innocent Israeli hostages who had been kept in Hamas catacombs for two years, you're just enjoying the first luxury buffet you've had in years – then the British press turns up!

Frankly, it made me miss my time as a reporter on the road. The Marriott, we are told, boasts of being the 'preferred air crew hub hotel in Cairo', hosting six airlines regularly due to its proximity to the airport. Or perhaps that should now be 'boasted', as one imagines that its time catering to air crew has rather passed.

Cabin staff at the hotel, where rooms start at £200 per night, told the Mail that they were contemplating piling furniture in front of their bedroom doors just in case 7 October came knocking. And who can blame them?

Among the terrorists enjoying the Marriott's facilities were Mahmoud Issa, who founded Special Unit 101 of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, a Hamas kidnap unit, and had been in prison since 1993; Islamic State hijacker Izz al-Din al-Hamamrah; bus bomb mastermind Samir Abu Nima; kidnapper Ismail Hamdan; and Yousuf Dawud, who murdered a border police officer.

These monsters have now apparently been sent packing, leaving Marriott to (presumably) call in the crisis management bods as their customers desert them in droves. Chief foreign correspondent Andrew Jehring, Middle East correspondent Natalie Lisbona, snapper Mark Large: sterling job.

Aside from the sheer journalistic accomplishment, however, there is much to be said about this darkest of stories. Think about it from the point of view of the victims, or the families that survive them.

In the depths of their depravity, these Hamas banditos are cut from the same cloth as Jihadi John and the other head-choppers and Yazidi-incinerators of the Islamic State.

Imagine if you had lost a daughter at the hands of Salman Abedi in the Manchester Arena bombing – I covered that atrocity on the ground and remember the grieving families well – or a husband or father in the London Bridge attack.

Imagine that you had won the closure of seeing the men responsible for your personal tragedy brought to justice and placed behind bars. Then imagine the emotional wrench following 7 October, when your government finds itself forced to free those murderers in order to secure the release of your kidnapped countrymen who did nothing to deserve their fate.

This is bad enough. Now contemplate that these killers were put up at one of Egypt's finest hotels and left to ogle off-duty flight attendants and you'll experience some echo of the degradation and despair that the poor relatives have had to endure.

'We are hearing from many families a deep sense of pain and humiliation, as the very murderers who destroyed their lives enjoy five-star conditions,' said Moshe Saville of the charity OneFamily, which supports victims of terror.

'We expect the State of Israel and the international community to ensure that those who spilled the blood of innocent people are not rewarded, but held fully accountable for their actions.'

But the story does not even end there. Thanks to the Mail, the 154 grisly jihadis may have been hounded out of the Marriott, but where have they ended up?

Here might be a chance for our government to redeem itself

Why, at another luxury hotel, of course. This time it is Egyptian-owned and in a remote location, at least an hour from downtown Cairo, and not as popular with foreign tourists. But it is still pretty nice, especially if you happen to have been – quite deservedly – in prison for many years. The sprawling five-star resort at which the terrorists are now housed boasts an extensive outdoor swimming pool and a spa featuring Jacuzzis, saunas and steam rooms.

For the discerning jihadi, it also offers a fitness centre complete with tennis courts and two football pitches. There are three restaurants to choose from, as well as a range of bars and cafes. Rooms start at £200, rising to £1,400 for the most luxurious suite.

On the upside, security has been dramatically ramped up. The terrorist murderers are no longer allowed to leave the venue for day trips to the city centre and any visitors they receive are tightly controlled. But this has got to be poor compensation for those who lost their loved ones at the hands of these men.

Now, our own government has hardly distinguished itself in the realm of foreign policy of late, handing the strategically vital Chagos Islands to an ally of China and recognising a Palestinian State without demanding that Hamas free the hostages first, in the same way as those of a progressive persuasion might recognise a man claiming to be a woman.

But here might be a chance to redeem itself. How about putting pressure on the Egyptian authorities to house those Hamas killers in, say, a youth hostel or an open prison? Or better still, to turf them out on their ears (while

keeping them under surveillance)?

Britain already hands the Egyptians a shedload in aid, including such indulgences as a ‘portfolio’ worth over \$240 million in grants, investment and technical assistance to support ‘[a] green transition’. In whose pockets does that money end up?

Surely threatening to withhold such largesse might be a good way to ensure that the Hamas members are kept in something closer to the manner they deserve. In the meantime, I’m minded to ping an email to the newsdesk at the Mail’s main competitor, the Sun, and suggest that they dig out the address of the new hotel and get a photographer on the road sharpish.

TEN PREDICTIONS ABOUT ISRAEL’S WAR THAT FELL APART

GIL HOFFMAN (HonestReporting.com 23-10-25)

Israel’s founding prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, once quipped: “If an expert says it can’t be done, get another expert.”

While there are established facts no matter who says them, that wisdom has certainly been vindicated in the war that began with Hamas’s October 7, 2023, invasion of Israel.

Over the past two years, politicians, academics, journalists, and analysts – people routinely presented as “experts” – have issued dire predictions and sweeping moral judgments about Israel and its enemies. Again and again, they were wrong.

Here are ten examples.

1. The General Who Underestimated the IDF

Soon after October 7, a U.S. three-star Marine lieutenant general assigned to advise Israel warned against a ground invasion, predicting Israel would lose 20 soldiers a day. His projection – over 14,000 fatalities – proved vastly exaggerated. The 918 IDF soldiers killed remain a national tragedy, but the prediction of catastrophic losses was, like many others, baseless.

2. The Hezbollah “Victory” That Never Came

On October 4, 2024, Samer Jaber, a PhD researcher at Royal Holloway University, wrote on Al Jazeera: “Hezbollah has been dealt a heavy blow, but it can still win over Israel.” A year later, Hezbollah has been dismantled as a fighting force, and even Lebanon’s own government now regards it as an enemy.

3. The “World War III” Predictions

When Israel – and later the U.S. – struck Iran in June 2025, media outlets including The Independent and The New York Times warned of “catastrophic consequences” and “the start of World War III.” The Iranian ambassador to France declared such a scenario inevitable. Yet instead of triggering global war, the strikes crippled Iran’s terror network and, in the absence of one of its primary sponsors, forced Hamas to accept a ceasefire.

4. The UN’s “14,000 Babies” Claim

In May 2025, Tom Fletcher, the UN’s humanitarian chief, told BBC Radio 4 that “14,000 babies will die in the next 48 hours unless we can reach them.” His words were repeated uncritically by The New York Times, NBC, ABC, TIME, and The Guardian. The prediction never materialized – but the damage to Israel’s image did.

5. The Manufactured “Famine”

UNRWA head Philippe Lazzarini repeatedly warned of an “imminent famine” in Gaza. Yet under the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, famine can only be declared if three specific thresholds are crossed: 20 percent of households face extreme food shortages, 30 percent of children suffer acute malnutrition, and two or more people per 10,000 die of hunger each day. None of those conditions was met. For Gaza’s population, that would mean over 400 starvation deaths daily – a figure not claimed even by Hamas.

6. The “Genocide Scholars”

Omer Bartov, a professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Brown University, declared in The New York Times: “I’m a genocide scholar. I know it when I see it.” He first accused Israel of genocide in December 2024 – months before the war’s end. Yet Gaza’s population rose throughout the conflict as Israel consistently evacuated civilians from combat zones. Genocide requires intent to destroy; Israel’s intent was to protect. As HonestReporting board member Salo Aizenberg dryly noted, to become a member of the International Association of Genocide Scholars, “all you need is a credit card.”

7. The Misread ICJ Ruling

In May 2024, the International Court of Justice ordered Israel to halt any actions in Rafah that could bring about the destruction of the Palestinian people in whole or in part. But major outlets – BBC, CNN, NBC, Newsweek – misreported it as a blanket ban on Israel’s Rafah operation. The IDF proceeded, eliminated Hamas’s last stronghold, and the supposed “violation” never materialized.

8. The “Restrained” Hamas

On the eve of the October 7 attack, Israel’s own National Security Adviser, Tzachi Hanegbi, confidently described Hamas as “restrained.” Speaking privately on the afternoon of October 6, he noted that Hamas had stayed

out of Israel’s recent clashes with Islamic Jihad and was focused on sending more Gazan workers into Israel. Sixteen hours later, Hamas invaded.

Hanegbi – fired by Prime Minister Netanyahu this week – had also told Maariv in September 2023, “I don’t see our enemies raring to fight, not in Lebanon, not in Gaza, and not in Syria.”

9. Did Hamas Choose Stability Over Jihad?

Historian and former deputy minister Michael Oren wrote after Operation Shield and Arrow in May 2023 that Hamas had “chosen social and financial stability over jihad.” In reality, Hamas’s “restraint” was strategic deception – a prelude to October 7. The calm wasn’t peace; it was preparation.

10. The Prophet of Doom

In May 2025, New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman predicted Israel was “preparing to re-invade Gaza” and “advance annexation” in the West Bank. His headline read, “This Israeli Government Is Not Our Ally.” Six months later, President Trump declared the war over. There was no annexation, no mass expulsion – just another failed prophecy from the paper that rarely learns.

The Pattern: Expertise Without Accountability

From generals to journalists, UN officials to academics, the pattern is the same: overconfidence, distortion, and a lack of accountability when “expert” narratives collapse.

Ben-Gurion’s advice still stands: when an expert insists something can’t be done – or invents horrors that never were – it’s time to find another expert.

PALESTINIANS STILL PREFER HAMAS AND 'ARMED STRUGGLE'

KHALED ABU TOAMEH (GateStoneInstitute.org 30-10-25)

Those who thought that Hamas’s October 7, 2023 attack on Israel and the ensuing war in the Gaza Strip have made Palestinians change their minds about the terror group are in for a rude awakening.

More than half of Palestinians continue to support the atrocities committed by Hamas against Israelis and foreign nationals on October 7. Moreover, the terror group remains popular among a large number of Palestinians. Support for Hamas means support for the destruction of Israel through Jihad (holy war).

A poll published on October 28 by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research showed that 53% of the Palestinians think that Hamas’s decision to launch the October 7 attack was “correct.” A majority of 54% of Palestinians blame Israel for the current suffering of Gazans, while 24% blame the US. Only 14% blame Hamas.

These findings contradict claims by some Western media outlets that a growing number of Palestinians were disillusioned with Hamas because of the death and destruction it has brought on its people as a result of its October 7 attack.

Asked about their perception of Hamas two years after the Gaza war began, 18% of the Palestinians said their support for Hamas was big and it has not changed, while 19% said their support for the terror group increased a lot. Another 17% said their support for Hamas increased a little. By contrast, 16% said they did not support Hamas before the war and that their opposition to the terror group has not changed; 12% said their support decreased a little, and 10% said their support for Hamas has decreased a lot.

“The conclusion from these numbers is that the past two years have led to greater support for Hamas rather than the opposite,” according to the poll.

The poll showed that a vast majority of the Palestinians are still in denial over the crimes committed by Hamas on October 7. Asked if Hamas had committed the atrocities seen in the videos shown by international media displaying atrocities committed by Hamas members against Israeli civilians, 86% said the terror group did not commit such atrocities. Only 10% said Hamas did commit them.

As for the disarmament of Hamas, as stipulated in the second phase of US President Donald Trump’s plan for peace to end the Gaza war, the poll found that an overwhelming majority of 69% oppose the idea. Only 29% said they support disarming Hamas.

Regarding public satisfaction with the role played by various Palestinian actors during the Gaza war, the poll showed that satisfaction with Hamas’s performance has risen from 57% (in May 2025) to 60%.

A majority of Palestinians, the poll showed, are extremely supportive of Iran, Hezbollah, Qatar and the Houthis militia in Yemen, a terror group that fired dozens of missiles and suicide drones at Israel during the war. The highest satisfaction rate went to the Houthis (74%), followed by Hamas’s main sponsor Qatar (52%), Hezbollah (50%), and Iran (44%).

If elections for the presidency of the Palestinian Authority (PA) were held today, Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal would win 63% of the votes, as opposed to 27% for incumbent PA President Mahmoud Abbas.

The 89-year-old Abbas, who is in the 20th year of his four-year term in office, remains as unpopular as ever among his own people, who view him and his PA as incompetent and corrupt.

According to the poll, dissatisfaction with Abbas stands at 75%, while 80%

want him to resign.

Asked which political party they support, the largest percentage (35%) said they prefer Hamas, followed by Abbas's ruling Fatah faction (24%). Nine percent selected third parties, and 32% said they do not support any of them or do not know. Five months ago, 32% said they supported Hamas and 21% said they supported Fatah.

"These results mean that support for Hamas over the past five months has increased by three percentage points," the poll noted.

Another inconvenient finding: If parliamentary elections were held today, 44% of the Palestinians say they will vote for Hamas, 30% for Fatah, and 10% for third parties. The remaining respondents said they have not yet decided for whom to vote.

The number of Palestinians who believe that Hamas most deserves to represent and lead the Palestinians has risen from 40% five months ago to 41%.

Also unexpected is the ongoing Palestinian support for the "armed struggle" (terrorism) against Israel. The latest poll found that 41% of the Palestinians support the "armed struggle" as opposed to 36% who said they prefer negotiations.

The results of the poll demonstrate that a significant number of Palestinians continue to support the Jihadi group that murdered 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals and brought death and destruction on the two million residents of the Gaza Strip.

Those who are pushing for reforms and presidential and legislative elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip need to take into consideration that the future Palestinian government or state would be dominated by the same terrorists who brutally tortured and murdered hundreds of Israelis, including Arab citizens of Israel, on October 7, 2023.

The results of the poll also show the challenges facing the implementation of the Trump plan, especially disarming Hamas and deradicalizing Palestinian society. Most Palestinians are openly opposed to disarming Hamas – a situation that will make it effectively impossible for any Arab or foreign party to confiscate the terror group's weapons by force.

Any Palestinian or Arab leader who sees that most Palestinians oppose the disarmament of Hamas will think twice before he undertakes such a mission: he would not want to act against the wishes of the Arab street – such a move would be regarded as treason.

As for deradicalization, it is clear from the poll that Palestinians are moving in the opposite direction. This is mainly due to continued incitement against Israel in the Palestinian and Arab media, mosques, social media platforms and the rhetoric of Palestinian leaders and officials. Deradicalization requires brave leaders who will stand up and speak out about the need to stop poisoning the hearts and minds of young Palestinians. Many Palestinians are afraid to speak out for fear of being labeled as traitors or collaborators with Israel. We have seen how Palestinians who challenged Hamas were tortured and executed in public squares in the Gaza Strip as soon as the ceasefire went into effect.

Radical change in Palestinian society will come only when Palestinians rise up against destructive leaders who, over the past few decades, have been dragging them from one disaster to another.

UNICEF DATA SHOW THERE WAS NO FAMINE IN GAZA

MIKE WAGENHEIM (JNS.org 29-1-25)

Critics have long said that accusations of famine in Gaza have a gaping hole right in the middle: the staggering amount of emaciated, dead bodies, part and parcel of a famine, are simply nowhere to be found.

When the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, a United Nations-linked food-security agenda, determined in August that a famine was indeed ongoing in parts of Gaza, those behind the report said that the sheer devastation in Gaza did not allow for an accurate accounting of starvation-related deaths.

Instead, they said, they were using another key criterion for famine that generally goes hand in hand with malnutrition deaths, and that extrapolating on the former to determine the latter was taking place.

That key criterion, called mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC), appears to have never been met, according to data recently released by the Global Nutrition Center, which is staffed by UNICEF, the U.N.'s agency for children. The measurement serves as an easy and generally accepted way to gauge malnutrition. The IPC standards say that when 15% of children sampled show signs of malnutrition, it's indicative of a famine.

The IPC's August alert, determining that famine was already taking place, said there was a rapid rise in child malnutrition, based on a two-week data sample from mid-to-late July.

The newer information, released on Sept. 17 by the "State of Palestine" Nutrition Cluster, reveals that IPC-standard age-weighted MUAC data—as opposed to the unweighted data in the IPC's famine report—did not meet the IPC's own famine criteria.

And without MUAC data showing famine levels, it becomes impossible for

the IPC to extrapolate famine level deaths, said Mark Zlochins, a former artificial intelligence researcher who has spent months poring over data from Gaza.

"They said that because the malnutrition was rising so rapidly, they can reasonably infer that the mortality is also rising, and they're not just catching all the deaths that are actually occurring," Zlochins said of the IPC. "So they need both of those parts, both the crossing of this threshold, but also the very, very rapid crossing of this threshold. So once you see that it didn't happen, everything falls apart."

The difference between weighted and unweighted data can be substantial, as MUAC inherently classifies smaller, younger children as malnourished at much higher rates.

"Using unweighted averages without age adjustment inflates the results," Zlochins explained, pointing to UNRWA's own data showing the gap between the unweighted average and the age-adjusted estimate in July to be 3.4%. A weighted average would have brought it below the fame threshold.

"This is precisely why age-weighting is mandatory under IPC methodology, and why it was applied in every previous Nutrition Cluster and IPC output," Zlochins wrote.

The IPC's famine report cited few examples, though, of age weighting.

"As a result, the malnutrition rate estimates are strongly skewed upwards," Zlochins wrote.

THE GLOBAL NUTRITION CLUSTER'S Sept. 17 data release, though, shows the age-weighted MUAC-focused mean malnutrition rate in the Gaza City area to be approximately 14.8% in the second half of July before falling substantially in August back to rates previously seen in June.

That 14.8% measurement falls below the 15% necessary to meet famine criteria, and significantly below the 16.2% unweighted mean. At no point, according to the Palestinian Authority data, did the MUAC rate cross 15% before it began to decline substantially in August back toward the 10.5% to 11% rate it hit in June.

According to Zlochins, the updated data confirms that the IPC's determination was "based on fabricated data that misrepresented the raw, unweighted malnutrition statistics as if they were the properly age-weighted data required by IPC guidelines."

"It was always a hoax, and those hacks knew it all along," Zlochins wrote.

A U.N. World Food Program official told JNS in August that his agency was indeed relying on the MUAC rate in the IPC report to infer an ongoing famine.

Jean-Martin Bauer, director of food security and nutrition analysis service at the World Food Programme, told JNS that despite any evidence of malnutrition-related deaths on a scale typical under famine conditions, the reality of famine in Gaza City and surrounding areas was based on solid evidence, citing the IPC's usage of MUAC.

"The prevalence of malnutrition amongst children has tripled between May and July. When you have that exponential increase, it means that there's also an exponential increase in mortality risk," Bauer said at the time.

JNS asked Bauer how the United Nations and IPC went from mortality risks to determining that there had actually been a famine.

"The indicator we use for nutrition is mid-upper arm circumference, and it is very clear that there is a tight correlation between mid-upper arm circumference and mortality," he said. "That is indisputable. It's peer reviewed."

"That's why we feel confident that's a good indication of the problems taking place in Gaza," Bauer said.

Bauer said at the time that "no liberties were taken with any data here," adding that "there's evidence of collapsing health systems and treated illnesses, a surge in child disease, and all that is combined with widespread malnutrition."

Due to those factors and "exponential increase in child malnutrition in Gaza governorate and specifically in Gaza City," the report "concludes that the famine thresholds have been exceeded in the case of Gaza City," Bauer said. (JNS has asked the WFP for comment on the complete Nutrition Cluster data.)

MUAC-related data, however, were tenuous at best, critics say. The IPC relied on only two weeks' worth of data for July, as opposed to a full month, and even those two weeks barely broke the MUAC threshold for famine.

And now, with the full month of data having been published by UNICEF, along with an entire month of data from August, Zlochins said all of the previous criticism of the IPC's Gaza methodologies, including its questionable data collection, its overreliance on UNRWA's sampling, its inclusion of extreme outlying data and its questionable decision to rely on a two-week data subset—as opposed to a complete month—all become magnified.

"The malnutrition data is not only important by itself, but they also used it

to fill the gap in the mortality data. And their argument was basically not just that malnutrition crossed the 15% threshold, but there is a very strong upward trend,” Zlochin told JNS.

“They were talking about exponential growth; not just the 15% threshold being broken, but the additional claim that it was broken very rapidly and there was a very strong upward trend,” Zlochin said of the IPC’s claims.

But the updated UNICEF data, cross-checked against other sources, shows that the IPC employed questionable methods, such as taking MUAC data from a provider that showed lower malnutrition rates in the second half of July and moving that data to the first half.

“They drove the data for the second half higher, and artificially, they created a huge increase. They’ve spent a lot of effort to manufacture this appearance, as if the threshold wasn’t only crossed, but that it was crossed very rapidly,” he told JNS.

A new analysis from HonestReporting board member Salo Aizenberg corroborates Zlochin’s claims. “The IPC declaration of famine on Aug. 22 would have predicted about 10,000 starvation deaths through the Oct. 10 ceasefire,” Aizenberg wrote, basing his claims on IPC standards.

However, data from Hamas and the United Nations show that 192 malnutrition-related deaths occurred from the time of the famine claim until the ceasefire, including those with pre-existing conditions, reaching only 2% of the predicted total.

Why Turning Off My Phone for 25 Hours Changed Everything

ROBIN MEYERSON (Aish.com 2-11-25)

I used to work in the corporate world—fast-paced, always-on, and never off the grid. I was employed at a Fortune 200 company where I would regularly text my boss at 1 a.m. And yes, he’d respond. In that world, being constantly connected wasn’t just expected—it was celebrated. Hustle culture was the norm, and I was proud to keep up.

But somewhere in the back of my mind, a question was always simmering: Is this how it’s supposed to be? Is life really better when we’re never disconnected—even from work, even at 1 a.m.?

When I started becoming more observant of Shabbat, I was both inspired and terrified. Turning off my phone for 25 hours felt, at first, like stepping off a cliff. How could I afford to be unreachable in a world that demanded my constant attention?

Jewish wisdom knew what I didn’t: we are not meant to be available to the world 24/7.

But Jewish wisdom knew what I didn’t: we are not meant to be available to the world 24/7. We are meant to be available to our souls, our families, our God.

Over time, I began to feel the magic. Every Friday before sundown, my phone goes off—and I come alive. It’s not about “disconnecting”; it’s about reconnecting. As a driven, ambitious person, Shabbat gives me a divine pause button. And thank God for it.

Now, instead of everyone sitting at the table scrolling, we sit down to a family meal on Friday night and again on Shabbat day. We look each other in the eye. We talk about our week—what challenged us, what made us smile, and what we’re grateful for. No one’s distracted. No one’s doomscrolling. Just presence, laughter, and real conversation.

I’ve also seen firsthand the emotional toll constant phone use takes—especially on our kids. I’ve observed a huge difference between teens who put their phones away for Shabbat and those who don’t. The anxiety, the depression, the sneaking of phones under the table or in bedrooms—it all points to a deeper need for boundaries and rest. For 25 hours, Shabbat gives them (and us) permission to just be—no filters, no FOMO, no pressure to respond instantly.

The truth is, we’re all so busy during the week. But being busy doesn’t mean being fulfilled. Sometimes, the most radical thing we can do is stop. And Jewish tradition gives us that chance every single week. It’s not a luxury; it’s a lifeline.

If the idea of turning off your phone for 25 hours feels impossible—maybe that’s exactly why you should try it.

You might just find, like I did, that what you thought was a restriction is actually the biggest freedom you’ve ever known.

John Cena’s Pocket Watch and a Rabbi’s Two Pockets

BENJAMIN ELTERMAN (Aish.com 2-11-25)

In a recent talk show interview, wrestler-turned-actor John Cena shared that he carries a broken pocket watch.

Pointing to his wristwatch, he said, “This one tells time.” Then he held up the broken one. “This one tells perspective.”

On one side of the watch are the words: “Comparison is the thief of joy.” This helps him when he is feeling of low self-worth, reminding him that he is enough and worthy of love.

On the other: “Memento Mori,” Latin for “remember you must die.” This statement is for when his ego gets too big, reminding him that he is human

and above no one.

It’s a simple, effective way of keeping the ego in check and in balance. Two hundred years ago, a Polish rabbi offered nearly the same advice.

Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa taught:

Everyone must have two pockets, with a note in each pocket, so that he or she can reach into one or the other, depending on the need. When feeling lowly and depressed, discouraged or disconsolate, one should reach into the right pocket, and, there, find the words: “For my sake was the world created.” But when feeling high and mighty one should reach into the left pocket, and find the words: “I am but dust and ashes.”

Both Cena and R’ Bunim were trying to answer the same question:

How do you keep your self-worth steady when life keeps swinging between pride and insecurity?

JOY VS. PURPOSE

Cena’s first inscription, “Comparison is the thief of joy,” is a reminder not to measure yourself against others. There will always be someone richer, faster, or more accomplished. Even an Olympic gold medalist eventually slows down. So don’t waste your energy comparing yourself to others. Do what you do and do it the best you can.

R’ Bunim’s quote offers a different take, focusing not on joy, but purpose. “For my sake was the world created.” implies there is a reason you were brought into the world. You’re not just important, you’re essential. Living that purpose will lead to joy. In fact, the real meaning of the Hebrew word simcha refers to joy when you know you’re on the right path and living a life of purpose.

Cena’s watch reminds us not to lose joy through comparison while Rabbi Bunim’s pocket informs us how to find it.

DUST AND ASHES

On the other side of Cena’s watch is “Memento Mori.” It’s a powerful call to humility, a reminder that time is short and that none of us are invincible. We like to forget that we’re going to die. On some level, many of us don’t even believe it is true.

Judaism encourages facing your mortality. King Solomon wrote that if you have a choice between attending a wedding and a funeral, choose the funeral (Ecclesiastes, 7:2). Because by observing death, you get in touch with life.

R’ Bunim’s phrase “I am but dust and ashes” reminds us that the clock is ticking and none of us live forever. So get off the couch and stay focus on what really matters in life.

TWO SIDES OF THE SAME PAPER

R’ Bunim’s two statements, along with Cena’s double-sided watch, contain two essential reminders, one for confidence, one for humility. The point isn’t to switch between feeling proud and feeling humble. The ideal is to embrace both of them simultaneously, realizing you are dust and ashes, and at the same time the world was created for you. Know your worth without arrogance, and your smallness without despair.

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

SHABBOS — LIQUIDS

OU HALACHA YOMIS (OUKosher.org)

Q. It permissible to make seltzer water on Shabbos?

A. Seltzer is made by injecting CO₂ into water. When this is done, the water immediately begins bubbling. Are these bubbles included in the prohibition of molid (creating something new)? The Ben Ish Chai (Rav Poalim OC 1:18) writes that one may make seltzer on Shabbos. He writes that since one does not actively make the water bubble, but rather by adding the carbonating ingredients to the water, it will begin to bubble on its own, it is permitted. This is comparable to melting ice by placing it into water. Although one may not rub ice to make it melt, one may allow ice to melt on its own by placing it into water. The same can be said about bubbles. When one injects the CO₂ into the water, the bubbles will come out on their own. However other poskim such as Chelkas Yaakov (OC 134) were strict based on “uvda d’chol” (looks like a melacha). But the more common custom is to allow. This was also the ruling of Rav Ovadya Yosef zt”l (Yebia Omer OC 3:21), Shemiras Shabbos K’Hilchaso (11:36) and many other poskim.

Q. May one add sugar to tea and stir it so that it dissolves?

A. The Gemara (Shabbos 51b) states that one may not crush ice or snow on Shabbos to cause it to turn into water. Causing a solid such as ice to change into a liquid is forbidden on Shabbos. This is known as molid (creating something new). However, one may add ice to a drink and let it dissolve on

its own. The Mishnah Berurah (320:34) writes that some poskim even permit crushing ice after it is placed in the drink. This is because the melting ice mixes immediately into the drink and is not noticeable. However, the Mishnah Berurah (Shaar Hatziyun 318:146) cautions against doing this. What about sugar? When one adds sugar, instant coffee or any other powder to water, one must stir it to dissolve it properly. Is this permitted lichatchila? The Chayei Adam (14:11) writes that the prohibition of molid does not apply to sugar. One may dissolve sugar even by stirring it with one's hands, since dissolved sugar remains a food. Sugar does not melt and become a liquid, but rather it is a food that is dissolved in water. Igeros Moshe (OC 4:74: Lisha 1) writes as well that one may stir sugar, cocoa or other powders to help them dissolve.

Q. At the end of the Friday night seuda, I often have leftover soup. I would like to store the leftovers in the freezer so it will stay fresh. Is this permitted?

A. The Minchas Yitzchak (8:24) discusses this question. He writes that if there is a shortage of room in the refrigerator and if one does not put it in the freezer the food will spoil or will not be as fresh, then one may put the soup in the freezer even though it will turn into a block of ice. Although many poskim write that it is not proper to make ice on Shabbos, however when there is a pressing need they are lenient. Protecting the soup that it does not spoil and become wasted, qualifies as a valid need. This is also not a concern of hachanah (preparing on Shabbos for after Shabbos). Putting soup in the freezer does not prepare it for use during the week, but rather it protects it from becoming spoiled. This is permitted to be done on Shabbos.

Q. Is it permissible to spray whipped cream from a can on Shabbos?

A. Whipped cream when it is still inside the can is a liquid. As it is expelled from the can it foams up with gas and takes on a semi solid appearance. Is one permitted to cause this change in form, or is this included in the prohibition of molid (creating something new)? This is a matter of dispute among Poskim. Rav Belsky zt"l and many other poskim have said that this may not be done on Shabbos. Rav Belsky ruled that one may not even ask a non-Jew to spray whipped cream. However, Rav Schachter and others rule that even a Jew may spray whipped cream. Rav Schachter explained that if the whipped cream is left to sit around for a few minutes it will melt back into a liquid. Since the change is very temporary, it is not considered molid.

Q. May one make ices on Shabbos?

A. The Dovev Meisharim (siman 55) writes that changing water into ice is forbidden on Shabbos. Moreover, he writes that even if the water was placed in the freezer before Shabbos, if it freezes on Shabbos, the ice would still be forbidden because of muktza. The change in form from liquid to solid turns it into a new entity which is muktza. The Chelkas Yaakov (OC 128) and many other poskim disagree on both these points. Not only is ice that forms on Shabbos not muktza, but it is not clear that there is any prohibition to make ice. This is because one does not actually make ice. All one does is place water in a cold environment and the ice forms on its own. Although one may not chop ice with your hands to actively melt it into water, one may place ice in a bowl and let it melt on its own into water. The same should be allowed in reverse. Water should be allowed to freeze into ice on its own. The Chelkas Yaakov is unsure of this last point, and therefore recommends not making ice on Shabbos unless there is a pressing need.

Q. May one add an ice cube to hot soup to cool it down for a child?

A. In a previous halacha it was noted that one may add cold water to a hot bowl of soup. However, regarding an ice cube there is an additional issue. By placing the ice cube into the hot soup, one is melting the ice and changing it into water. Is one permitted to do this on Shabbos? Shulchan Aruch (OC 320:9) writes that one may not crush ice on Shabbos to create water. However, one may add ice to a cup of wine or water, and let it melt on its own. Similarly, adding ice to a hot beverage is not considered to be actively melting the ice. Furthermore, since the melting ice is not visible, it mixes with the soup, it is not viewed as though a new entity was created. The Mishnah Berurah (320:34) writes that there is even a basis to allow crushing or stirring the ice inside the soup to make it melt faster. However, elsewhere the Mishnah Berurah (Shaar Hatziyun 318:146) cautions against doing this. One may add ice to soup, but it would be best not to stir it around so as not to make it melt faster.

Candles (Melb) Friday 7 November 2025, 17 Marcheshvan 5786 7.43/8.45p