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The Benefits of Anonymity

RABBI LEVI AVTZON (Chabad.org)

A few reasons why an author might choose to use a pseudonym:

- He's unsure whether the book will be successful, and doesn't want to risk ruining his name and reputation.
- The book divulges personal and sensitive information, and he doesn't want to walk down the street to meet the stares: "Oh, there goes the pathetic loser who was/did..."
- The work challenges some very powerful interests and the author would rather that they not know who he is...

Let me introduce you to a different anonymous writer: Moshe.

He's the one who transcribed the Torah, hence the name "Five Books of Moshe." Torah was his passion and love, his life and legacy. He spent 40 days and nights in heaven, learning Torah from G-d Himself.

Moshe was willing to say goodbye to his magnum opus, to erase his name from the history books

He wanted to be part of it with all his heart.

But he was willing to give it all up for something dearer to him than the Torah—the Jewish people. The same people who, since the beginning of his leadership, spat him in the face time after time: "Why did you take us out of Egypt?" "Do you want us to die in the desert?" "We are starving!"

Yet, when this ungrateful stiff-necked people sinned with the golden calf, and G-d decided to wipe them out, Moshe begged G-d to forgive His people. "And if You decide not to forgive them, please erase me from the book that You wrote!"

Moshe was willing to say goodbye to his magnum opus, to erase his name from the history books, because he was a leader. A true leader.

In the end G-d forgave the Jewish people. But in order to teach future generations the meaning of true leadership, Moshe's name is not found in an entire section of the Torah, the reading of Tetzaveh.

Ironically, it was his quest for anonymity that gave him his unparalleled place of honor in the annals of history.

BRIGHTER IS THE RESULT

RABBI LABEL LAM (Torah.org)

Now you shall command the Children of Israel that they should take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination, to kindle the lamp continuously. (Shemos 27:20)

Pressed: He presses the olives in a mortar and does not grind them with millstones so that there should not be any sediment. After he has obtained the first drop, he puts them into a mill and grinds them. The second oil is unfit for the Menorah but fit for meal offerings. (Rashi)

We say every night before reciting SHEMA, "Ki Heim Chayeinu" – "Because they (words of Torah) are our life..." Whatever we find in Torah has current relevance to our lives. So, we can legitimately ask, "What are we to learn from this detail, that the first drop exuded from the olive is designated for the Menorah?!"

Years back, I was leaving New Square one late afternoon after Davening Mincha and a young man, who I recognized, and who lived near my house, asked me for a ride. I asked him his name and when he told me an alarm bell went off in my mind. It was the very same last name as the Morah that taught my boys in Pre1A. I asked him if he is related and he told me that it is his mother. It was a week or so after Purim and so I took the opportunity in

our brief ride to share with him what an incredible merit his mother has. I told him that my oldest son read the Megillah on Purim with great proficiency many times and every word is to her credit because she is the one that taught him how to read Hebrew.

He, then, tried to deflect the credit back to me by postulating, "It probably comes from you!" There are a few things I am pretty good at but Kriah and public reading is not one of them. I swiftly begged away from the honor but an older memory suddenly awoke in my mind. A bunch of years ago my wife and I merited making a Shidduch- a match. A suggestion we made actually worked. The couple was married and we were delighted to have a hand in the happening. A few months later, we received a handsome check in the mail from the groom. I didn't know what to do with the money.

The fellow was a friend of mine and we were only trying to help. We were not looking to make a living as matchmakers. It's a good thing because we haven't been successful to make one since.

I went to one of my Rebbeim and presented the problem. He told me that I should accept the money. It was entirely appropriate for him to offer a finder's fee. He also said that it was the cleanest money that one can earn. In other deals there may be some under or over selling and the commission may be less deserved. "This was a deal from heaven and you were privileged to be the broker." The deal was clean and true and good and so is the money. Then he advised me to use the money to pay for my son's tuition. My oldest child was in first grade at the time. That's when they were teaching him to read. We set aside an account and paid tuition monthly from that fund that entire year.

Oddly, and amazingly, that child has become not only a competent Baal Koreh, but a virtuoso, like someone with perfect pitch, sensitive to every subtle deviation and nuanced change. He is a reader of the Torah in Shul each week. Did he get this talent from me?! Not me! Looking back, I believe, his interest and talent in this area can be attributed mostly to the purity of that fuel that can create a lasting flame.

That we are told to extract a single pure drop from each olive and the rest can happily go on to join other Mitzvos is an open endorsement for the importance and the preeminence of Torah study, symbolized by the light of the Temple Menorah. The first and the best are to be invested to support and promote this holy activity. The mind is the engine of each individual and the driving force of the nation. It needs the purest and most powerful form of fuel.

Shlomo HaMelech, the valedictorian or humanity, tells us in Mishlei, "MiKol Mishmor, Netzor Libecha, Ki Mimenu Totzeis Chaim" – "From all the things you watch, guard your mind, because from it founts life!" The more one feeds the mind Torah and not junk food for thought, and the more honest the money for the Yeshiva tuition is, the holier and brighter is the result!

A LONG POLE

RABBI YANKI TAUBER (Chabad.org)

Here's the problem: you're here, and you want to be there ("there" being someplace better, loftier, more spiritual than "here"). But you're not there, and won't be there for a good while, perhaps ever.

So, do you act as if you're already there? Or do you tell yourself that here's just fine, and who needs there anyway?

You can become a hypocrite, or you can come to terms with your limitations. But there's also a third way—the way of the Long Pole.

In the outer chamber of the heichal (sanctuary) in the Holy Temple stood the menorah—a five-foot-tall, seven-branched candelabra of pure gold. Every morning, a priest filled the menorah's seven lamps with the purest

olive oil; in the afternoon, he would climb a three-step staircase to kindle the menorah's lamps. The seven flames burned through the night, symbolizing the divine light which radiated from the Holy Temple to the world.

Actually, it did not have to be a priest (kohen) who lit the menorah—the law states that an ordinary layman can also perform this mitzvah. But there is also a law that restricts entry into the sanctuary to priests only: ordinary Israelites could venture no further than the azarah, the Temple courtyard. These two laws create a legal paradox: a layman can light the menorah; but the menorah's designated place is inside the sanctuary, and a layman cannot enter the sanctuary.

Technically, there are solutions: a layman can light the menorah by means of a long pole, or the menorah can be carried out to him by a kohen and then replaced in the sanctuary. But the inconsistency remains: if the Torah believes that an ordinary person should be able to light the menorah, why doesn't it place the menorah in a part of the Temple accessible to ordinary people? And if the sanctity of the menorah is such that it requires the higher holiness of the sanctuary, why does the Torah permit someone who cannot attain this level to light it?

This paradox, says the Lubavitcher Rebbe, is intentionally set up by the Torah in order to convey to us a most profound lesson: the lesson of the long pole.

The lesson of the long pole says that we should aspire to spiritual heights that lie beyond our reach. Not that we should presume to be what we are not—that would be like an ordinary person entering the sanctuary—but neither should we desist from our efforts to reach that place. Even when we know that we ourselves will never be “there,” we can still act upon that place, influence it, even illuminate it.

At times, this means that someone from that higher place reaches down to us. At times, it means that we contrive a way to reach beyond what we are at the present time. In either case, we are what Rabbi Sholom DovBer of Lubavitch calls a “lamplighter”: a person who carries a long pole with a flame at its end and goes from lamp to lamp to ignite them. No lamp is too lowly, and no lamp is too lofty, for the lamplighter and his pole.

THE HEART BEFORE THE FORCE

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY (Torah.org)

It takes a lot to build a Sanctuary in the desert. And it takes perhaps, even more to adorn the Kohanim (priests) who serve, in beautiful vestments that both symbolize deep spirituality while depicting splendor and glory. You need more than golden threads and fine tapestry. You need more than the ability to weave and design ornate garments. You need devotion, and you need heart. Not ordinary heart. Not the heart that pennant winners have or athletic coaches call for. You need a special type of heart. You need a heart filled with wisdom — Divine wisdom. That is why Hashem commands Moshe to gather “all the wise-hearted people whom I have invested with a spirit of wisdom” to make the priestly garments (28:1).

But the Torah is unclear. Were these select people Divinely ordained with a spirit of wisdom for this particular mission, or were intrinsic “wise-hearted” people imbued with an extra “spirit of wisdom”?

If the former is correct, then what did Hashem add? And if all their wisdom was divinely-gifted, then why didn't Hashem simply ask Moshe to “gather all the people in whom I have invested a spirit of wisdom”?

Rav Sholom Shwadron, the Magid of Jerusalem, of blessed memory, once told a story about the famed Dubno Magid, Rabbi Yaakov Kranz.

The Dubno Magid once spoke in a town and a few maskilim (members of the enlightenment movement) attended. After the talk one of the cynics, who was totally unaffected by the warm and inspiring message, approached the famed Magid. “The sages tell us,” began the skeptic, “that words from the heart, penetrate the heart.” Rabbi,” he snickered, “I assume that you spoke from your heart. Your words, however, have had no impact on me whatsoever! How can that be? Why didn't your words penetrate my heart?”

Rabbi Kranz smiled. In his usual fashion, he began with a parable. “A simpleton once went by the workplace of a blacksmith, who was holding a large bellows. After a few squeezes, the flames of the smith's fire danced with a rage. The man, who always found it difficult to start a fire in his own fireplace, marveled at the contraption. He immediately went and purchased the amazing invention. Entering his home, he smugly announced, “I just discovered how to make a raging fire with the simple squeeze of a lever!”

He set a few logs in the cold fireplace and began to push the two ends of the bellows together. Nothing happened. The logs lay cold and lifeless. Embarrassed, the man returned to the blacksmith and explained his predicament. “I want a refund!” he shouted. This blower doesn't work!”

“You yokel,” laughed the experienced blacksmith. “You were blowing on cold logs! You must start a small fire on your own! If you don't start with a spark, a fire will never erupt!”

The Magid turned toward the maskil and sadly shook his head sadly. “If there is no spark, the largest bellows will not make a fire.”

In telling Moshe whom to choose for the sacred task of designing the Mishkan, the Torah tells us how G-d invests. He wants people that were imbued with a ruach chachmah – a spirit of wisdom. But he prefaces the statement by telling us how one receives spiritual wisdom. The gift of spiritual wisdom does not go to just anyone. Hashem looks for those who have wisdom of heart. Those who understand what it means to be kind, compassionate, and loyal. Those who have the devotion to His will and the desire for more enlightenment get His ordination. The people who were imbued with Hashem's Divine spirit previously had a spark. And from that spark grew a force – a Divine force – that propelled wise hearts into a Divine spirit of wisdom.

Hashem tells us that we must begin the process on our own. If we supply the heart, He will supply the power to have deep, spiritual, even holy insight. He will supply the force. We must make sure, however, that we put the heart before the force.

THE TAPESTRY OF SOCIETY

AVROHOM YAAKOV

Following on from last week's Torah portion dealing with the construction of the utensils in the Mishkan, the Torah moves onto the fabrication of the clothes of the Kohen Gadol.

“And you shall speak to all who are wise hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aharon's garments to consecrate him...” (28:3)

Moshe is instructed to find the right people who will make Aharon's garments.

Malbim is bothered by the description of people being wise hearted since wisdom is association with the brain rather than the heart which is classically the seat of emotions. He also notes the seeming tautology – “wise hearted” and “filled with the spirit of wisdom”.

He concludes, “... a wise one is one who acts according to the laws of wisdom; yet he still has an inner war with his impulse. But one who is wise-hearted is one whose wisdom is acquired by his soul and fills all the chambers of his soul. And about this it states, "that I have filled him with a spirit of wisdom": It is an explanation of "to the wise-hearted" - one who has a spirit of wisdom that fills all of his heart, and there is no place found in his heart that is empty for desire, [an evil] impulse and thoughts that are counter to wisdom. And [it is] these wise-hearted ones that shall make Aharon's clothes to sanctify him; as they will understand to what these garments hint...”

This elevated wisdom that fills a person is required to make the clothes of the High Priest, the holiest of Jews, since these clothes were not merely to enhance the Kohen Gadol's image, but to provide continual atonement for various national misdeeds such as ego, murder, slander, judicial error and so forth. As a consequence, the creators of these garments needed to understand and imbue them with the correct powers.

Oznayim LaTorah views this statement as defining two categories of wise people – there are a) those who are wise of heart and b) filled with the spirit of wisdom. Both were necessary in the making of the Kosher Gadol's clothes.

Those of wise in heart were able to find the correct materials for the clothing. They were akin to supply chain people who could source the gold, silver and coloured threads and materials needed. And then there were those who were filled with the spirit of wisdom who took those materials cleverly sourced and fashioned them into vestments befitting a Kohen Gadol.

Both types were needed to complete the task. While some had the skills for the resourcing, other had abilities that lay with taking those materials and creating the appropriate end product. They complemented each other.

CIVILISATION functions only when everyone does their part. But not everyone can do everything – some are suited to be desk jockeys, some are better with manual tasks, some have green thumbs, while others are suited to management. Some are logical and some are creative.

It takes all different types to weave the tapestry of society into a beautiful picture.

To create the holy robes of the Kohen Gadol, no one person could do it all. But combining the skills of many, achieved the end result.

Knock Before You Enter

RABBI NAFTALI REICH (Torah.org)

Few sights were more spectacular than the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest, resplendent in full golden regalia, his vestments formed from the finest fabrics, precious metals and rare jewels. It was a vision of pure artistry and unimaginable beauty. And little wonder. What else would one expect from an ensemble designed down to its smallest detail by the Master of the

Universe Himself? But the beauty of the priestly vestments went beyond simple esthetics. They glowed with inner spiritual incandescence, each intricate detail laden with secret mystical significance, each element essential to the efficacy of the Kohen Gadol as the perfect conduit between the Jewish people and Hashem.

What was the purpose of all the individual features of the vestments mentioned in this week's portion? The Torah only spells out the purpose of one of them. The Kohen Gadol wore a four-cornered robe of blue wool whose hem was adorned with alternating golden pomegranates and bells. Why bells? Because "its sound should be heard when he enters the Sanctuary before Hashem." Apparently this is a very important feature of the robe, because the Torah metes out a severe punishment for the omission of the bells. Our Sages understood that the bells are meant to teach us basic decency and decorum, that we must not invade the privacy of others by injecting ourselves into their presence without warning. Proper etiquette is to knock on the door before entering. Just as the bells announced the Kohen Gadol's arrival in the Sanctuary so must we announce ourselves wherever we go and not barge in unexpectedly.

Nonetheless, the questions remain. Surely, Hashem knows perfectly well when the Kohen Gadol is approaching, regardless of whether or not he is preceded by the tinkling of bells. Why then does the Torah choose to teach us this lesson in this particular setting? Wouldn't it have been more appropriate to teach us this lesson in a more mundane setting involving ordinary people who can be caught unawares?

The commentators explain that the Torah is teaching us an additional lesson here, a lesson of critical importance. We might think that in the pursuit of high spiritual goals it is acceptable to bend the rules of simple decency a little bit. Not so, says the Torah. Even at the supernal moment when the Kohen Gadol enters the Holy of Holiest, the closest point of contact between a mortal and the Master of the Universe, he must still remember the rules of basic decency. He must wear bells upon the hem of his robe to announce his arrival.

A group of young scholars traveled to the distant academy of a great sage. They studied diligently before embarking on the journey and arrived with high hopes of being accepted as his disciples.

The sage welcomed each of them individually and spoke with him at length on a wide variety of topics. On the last day, all the young men were invited to join the sage at his table to share his bread and listen to his words of wisdom.

The young men entered the sage's house, hung up their coats and washed their hands before coming to the table. For several hours, they were transported to a world of transcendent wisdom and mysticism, and their hearts were set afire with the yearning to become part of this world.

The next day, the sage announced his decision. He accepted all the applicants, except for one. The rejected young man, who was quite a brilliant fellow, was devastated. With tears streaming down his face, he came to the sage and begged for an explanation.

"It is really quite simple," said the sage. "When you washed your hands before coming to my table you looked around for a towel but couldn't find one. Instead, you wiped your hands on a coat that belonged to one of your friends. Being in a hurry to hear words of wisdom does not exempt you from the rules of simple decency. If you were a true scholar, you would have understood this yourself. I'm very sorry, young man, but you have no place in my academy."

In our own lives, we often get caught up in our daily urgencies, and sometimes, this leads us to overlook the rules of simple decency and courtesy. If we are late for an appointment, we rationalize, then it is all right to elbow our way through a crowd or drive a little more aggressively than we normally would. Let us remember, therefore, that nothing was more important than the Kohen Gadol entering the Holy of Holies, and yet the rules of simple decency always took precedence.

The End of Art

RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR (Ohr.edu)

"... for beauty and splendor" (28:2)

Although AI is still very much in its infancy, it seems clear that the basic skills of drawing and painting, of music, and much more, are becoming redundant.

Why spend five years in art school when you can create a Turner or a Dutch Master with a few computer commands? Why labor over music theory when you can generate a Beethoven symphony with AI?

As technical skills in fields like music, art, and engineering become less relevant, the importance of language, the ability to communicate increases significantly. The major skill set for AI will be explaining to a computer what it is you want.

AI will be about words.

AI will require a sophistication of language, an understanding of exactly what it is you want, and the ability to define that in a way which leaves no

ambiguity.

The whole world is made up of words. You cannot see them. "For everything exists through Your word." Says the blessing. The word for 'thing' in Hebrew has the same word as the word for "word."

The Gemara in Bava Basra says that someone who never saw the Beit HaMikdash, the Holy Temple, that Herod built, never saw a beautiful building in his life. The 'davar Hashem,' the word of Hashem, was never more manifest than in the Beit HaMikdash. There were never garments as beautiful and splendid as the vestments of the Kohen. Each vestment was an expression of a unique spiritual reality. Each garment represented a 'word' of Hashem.

It's OK Not to Be Inspired (Right Now)

RABBI AHARON LOSCHAK (Chabad.org)

I recently had lunch with a team of highly experienced educators and writers. One member of the team, a relative newbie, was questioning some of the policies his team adheres to in their publications.

The team produces textbooks for teachers and students, and the language and style in the teachers' manuals they produce is very different from the style employed in the student textbook.

"It doesn't make sense!" he declared. "How can you have inconsistencies in the same set of books?!"

The other, long-tenured members in the room vehemently pushed back as I looked on in amusement. "You think we just came up with this yesterday?"

one shot back. "This policy is the product of much thought, feedback, and deliberation! We're not flying blind here!"

As I listened, I thought about that idea: Once you've gone through a legitimate process and come to a good conclusion, sometimes that's really all you need.

THE TZITZ

Parshat Tetzaveh details the eight garments the High Priest wore during his Temple service, including the "tzitz" — a golden plate engraved with the words "holy to G-d," worn on the forehead:¹

It shall be upon Aharon's forehead . . . It shall be upon his forehead constantly to make them favorable before G-d. (28:38)

Why is it so important to point out that this particular garment must always be worn, more than any of the other pieces of clothing? And what does it mean to be "constantly favorable before G-d?" What is it about the tzitz being constantly on the High Priest's forehead that carries favor before G-d?

DO I REALLY BELIEVE IN THIS STUFF?

According to the Chassidic masters, bearing the tzitz on the forehead is symbolic of the process every Jew must undergo to ensure that he or she is "constantly being favorable before G-d." In other words, the tzitz and its continuous presence on the forehead is a larger story about how to preserve a constant commitment to G-d.

To explain.

Judaism is not just a list of dos and don'ts. While it may seem that way, that's just lazy thinking. At its core, Judaism is about forging a relationship with G-d and bringing that relationship to bear in every aspect of one's life.

Now, relationships are never easy. It's hard enough to keep up with your social media account, so it's certainly no small feat to create a meaningful and ongoing relationship with G-d Himself. The good news is that a Jew is naturally inclined to be in that relationship, as he or she possesses a soul that is literally part of G-d³ and organically attracted to its G-dly source. (See Tanya ch 2 & 18)

The even better news is that Judaism is full of things to nurture that relationship. That's one of the reasons we pray, study Torah, and do holy things. These acts are not just "things we do" or cultural quirks from millennia ago, but the bread and butter of our relationship with G-d, the glue that brings us together.

Take prayer, for example. Say you do it properly: You take the time to study something inspirational, you reflect on it, and keep it in your mind and heart throughout your prayers. As you sway back and forth, you're inspired, and you come to a real, well-informed full-throttled commitment.

The not-so-good news is that sushi, ESPN, the daily news, and mortgage payments get in the way of that relationship. After you're done with prayers and you're at the office, in your car listening to a random podcast, or in the gym, all that deep thinking and passionate holy stuff is a distant memory.

Now you've got a real problem: You can't drop everything and go for an intense prayer or study session in the middle of your meeting or morning jog.

Is all lost? Are you to abandon G-d until you next have the time and are actually in the mood of plugging into your spiritual side?

WEAR ON YOUR FOREHEAD

This is where the tzitz comes in. If you recall, the Torah instructs that it be

worn constantly on the forehead. Not over the heart, but specifically on the forehead, where everyone can see it. The emphatic declaration, “Holy to G-d,” is worn on the outside, on a visible part of your body.

The message it imparts is that it’s OK not to engage in deep reflection at all hours of the day. But you need to carry to the conclusion, the bottom-line commitment, with you all day. Put that on your forehead, program a reminder on your phone, and you’re good to go. Then, you’ll be “constantly favorable before G-d.”

If someone challenges your relationship with G-d, or you question it yourself throughout the day, you don’t need to worry that a deep and passionate reply isn’t ready from the hip. “Oh no, do I really believe in this stuff? Does my relationship with G-d mean anything right now? And if it does, why am I feeling so desensitized and cynical about the whole thing?” you ask yourself.

These can be disturbing thoughts, and if you’re not fully in touch with the reality of the situation, they can threaten the bedrock of your religious relationship. But don’t worry: just because you’re not passionate about prayer right now doesn’t mean you’re no longer a believer.

Remember that your decision and your commitment is not primitive or ill-informed. You made it with great gusto and authenticity a few days ago when you were blown away by something you learned. Pretty soon, you’ll be back there—when you have the time and mindspace. You’re operating on the conclusion today—and that’s enough for now.

THE HUMAN RELATIONSHIP MIRROR

And so it is with our human relationships. Suppose you’re deeply connected with someone, in a long and committed relationship. The wisdom of the tzitz states that you don’t need to go into a deep romantic session every day, at every moment of the day. That is neither practical nor wise.

Of course, periodically, you absolutely should do just that. Dedicate time to engage in real moments of connection and commitment, when your feelings for each other aren’t just fleeting or the product of convenience or habit. Take the time to nurture and develop a real connection, and during those moments, recall and reestablish your firm, loving, and well-informed commitment.

And then, carry the conclusion of your commitment with you throughout the days, weeks, and months that follow. Wear it on your forehead constantly, so that you can easily recall it. “Why am I doing this?” you ask yourself. “Because I thought and felt about it many times, and this is real,” is your answer.

You’re operating on the conclusion today—and that’s great.

This essay is based on Torah Ohr, Tetzaveh 83c-4.

Purim Teaches Us How to Respond to Anti-Semitism

SLOVIE JUNGREIS-WOLFF (Aish.com)

As anti-Semitic incidents rise at an alarming rate, I am listening carefully to the message of Purim.

The Jewish people were frightened, faced with threat of annihilation. Haman’s hatred hung over the nation like a dark cloud. King Achashverosh told Haman “to do with as you see fit.” Letters were sent with permission to “destroy, to slay, and to exterminate all the Jews, from young to old, children and women...”

In such dire circumstances who could keep hope alive?

My mother, Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis, of blessed memory, described being deported from her home in Szeged, Hungary. She was a little girl when the Nazis awakened her from her sleep. My grandparents were given just a few moments to get ready and then they were thrown into the night. German shepherd dogs were barking. There was shouting and screaming. Terrified, my mother stood in the street holding in her arms her favorite doll for dear life, the only thing she was able to take with her.

The neighbors came and watched silently, gawking.

“You are a dirty Jew. Where you are going you won’t need any toys.”

My mother noticed her friend, Marta, the daughter of the non-Jewish caretaker of the synagogue. The two girls had always played together. Marta was standing there with her father. She approached my mother and for a moment my mother thought that at least this little friend was coming to say goodbye.

As Marta came close, she grabbed the doll.

My mother began to cry. “This doll is mine! Give me back my doll!”

“My father said I could take whatever I want. You can’t keep anything.”

Father and daughter looked at her, laughing. Then Marta’s father sneered, “You are a dirty Jew. And you need to learn the facts of life. Where you are going you won’t need any toys.”

He spat on the ground.

“But you don’t have to worry,” he added. “Marta will take care of all your things.”

My mother was deported to Bergen-Belsen.

How many times was the world ready to bid farewell to the Jews? How often have they vowed to throw us into the sea, to terrorize us, delegitimize our very breath and destroy our children?

My mother’s transport was halted in Linz. They were loaded off the cattle cars. Heads were shaved. Amidst the sobbing, my mother found herself herded into a shower. They later realized this was also a gas chamber. My mother felt as if life had come to an end. She no longer felt as if she was a human being. She could not bear to glance at her beautiful mother who was shorn of all her grace and dignity.

At that moment of suffocating darkness, something incredible occurred.

My mother put her hand into her pocket and discovered a crumpled piece of paper inside. She pulled it out and carefully unfolded its fragile ends. It was a page from a prayer book. My grandfather had secretly placed the holy paper inside as a message to his little girl. The words of the Shema filled my mother’s heart with hope. The message was clear: No matter what happens, no matter where life takes you, know that you never walk alone. My dear child you are part of the Jewish people. G-d is watching over you; never lose your faith.

The words of the Shema filled my mother’s heart with hope. No matter what happens, you never walk alone.

There are times we search for G-d’s hand and feel despair. We long for clear vision. We cannot understand what is happening. It feels as if the presence of G-d is concealed. But we must know that beneath all the confusion there is a Divine plan. G-d is guiding us. We will survive.

This is the message of Purim.

It is Queen Esther, herself, who calls out to us until today.

Esther is alluded to in the Torah with the Hebrew expression “hastir astir”- I, G-d, will hide My face. There are times of darkness when we feel that G-d’s face is hidden. In the Book of Esther, G-d’s name does not appear. We may not always see or be cognizant of G-d’s hand in our life, but we need to know that His presence is guiding us, to pierce the veil of nature and search for the light behind the clouds.

That terrible night when my mother was woken from her bed and cast off for deportation, Marta and her father likely believed that they were done with the Jews. The Nazis could never have fathomed that one day the Jewish people would walk through the streets of Jerusalem and wash the stones of the Western Wall with our tears.

That page of the Shema sustained not only my mother, but an entire generation of Jews. We cannot afford to give up on ourselves.

We are still here, continuing to tell our unique story.

Let us never give up hope. Instead, let us embrace the words of Queen In times of trouble, Queen Esther told us what we must do. She asked that we bond in unity, stop hurting one another, and join together in prayer. This is the time strengthen your Jewish pride.

As we contemplate the rising anti-Semitism that is spreading throughout the world, the hatred of the BDS movement and the threats to our land, we must take a moment to think. We have faced cruel enemies before. We have suffered through pogroms, inquisitions, crusades, Holocaust and murderous terror attacks. But we are still here, continuing to tell our unique story.

Let us never give up hope. Instead, let us embrace the words of Queen Esther: “Go, gather all the Jews.” Become one. Reach out to someone with kindness. Make a difference in the life of another, even if it’s just through a good word or a bright smile. Say a prayer and stand up for the Jewish people.

Together we can turn sorrow to gladness and darkness to light.

One Is More Than Many

RABBI JAY KELMAN (TorahinMotion.com)

"It was contemptible in his eyes to harm Mordechai alone; for they identified for him the people of Mordechai; Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Achashverosh, the people of Mordechai" (3:6).

The above sounds like what we would call today classic anti-Semitism. Blame all Jews for the actions of one, and take out that hatred on all. To anti-Semites of the world, the actions of Mordechai are typical of Jews who think they are above the law. And while I do not want to argue with this reading of Haman's motives, it could well be that there is another explanation for Haman's behaviour, one rooted more in psychology than a particular hatred of the Jewish people.

"In those days, Mordechai was sitting in the King's palace" (2:21). While the Megillah is unclear about the exact position of Mordechai—as it is, by its very nature, about almost everything—what is clear is that Mordechai held a prominent position in the king's court. This position of power "sitting in the king's palace" enabled him to get wind of the plot of Bigtan and Teresh to assassinate Achasverosh, setting the stage for his rise to even greater power down the road.

This attempted assassination caused Achashverosh to shuffle his "cabinet", focusing greater efforts on his own security. He thus appointed Haman to the newly created position of director of security. Perhaps he was impressed by the military stock from which Haman came, being a descendant of Aggag.

A close reading of the Megillah indicates that Haman, as Mordechai, already had a position in the king's court and that his new position was a promotion, one where he would become the second most powerful person in the kingdom. And yet Mordechai was unafraid to ignore the king's order. Having just saved the king's life, he felt secure in ignoring the order to bow to Haman.

Haman understood that killing Mordechai was out of the question. He would be risking his own life had he ordered the man who saved the king's life to be killed. And this was not easy for him to do. "When Haman saw Mordechai in the king's gate, that he did not stand up, nor move for him, Haman was filled with wrath against Mordechai"(6:9). And while Haman was at the height of his [perceived] power, having just returned from an exclusive party with the king and queen, Haman had little choice but to "restrain himself" lest his anger cost him his career, and possibly his life.

Yet if he couldn't kill Mordechai directly, he could kill him derech agav, indirectly, by killing all the Jews. It just so happened that Mordechai was Jewish, and as the king signed a decree to allow all Jews to be killed, Mordechai too would be killed. While this sounds almost preposterous—killing an entire nation in order to get at one person—it is, sadly, the way of the world. As perhaps the greatest mass murderer of all time noted, "The death of one child is a tragedy; the death of a million children, a statistic."

Sadly, this attitude is alive and well even today. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians were killed before the world lifted a finger to help. It took a picture of a body of a young boy washed up on the Mediterranean coast to spur at least some action. It is that picture, and that picture alone, which explains why 25,000 Syrian refugees were quickly brought to Canada.

Haman understood that the killing of Mordechai would not be tolerated, but that few would object to genocide of a people. Our Sages explain that, unlike other creatures, man was created alone, teaching that one who kills one person is as if he has killed an entire world (Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5). Yet for much of the world, the death of one is greater than the death of many. At the same time, our Sages teach the corollary—that one who saves one life is as if they have saved an entire world. It is the power and importance of the individual that is perhaps the most important message of the Megillah. One person nearly saw to the destruction of the Jewish people. And yet a couple of individuals working together were able to thwart that plan.

We live in a world where we often feel like there is little we can do to make a difference. Yet the Megillah teaches otherwise. As the Gemara discusses, it took many years for Purim to be accepted as a holiday. It took time for our Sages to realize the impact and importance of the story. The impact of our actions may not be felt for many years, but what we do makes a difference—even if only to one little world.

One Person Can Change the World

RABBI EFREM GOLDBERG (Aish.com)

In 1951, a 14-year-old Australian boy named James Harrison had major surgery to save his life, the removal of one of his lungs. He was alive, thanks in large part to a vast quantity of transfused blood he had received. He was hospitalized for three months but when he came out, he was determined to pay it forward by donating blood himself. The problem was Australia's laws required blood donors to be at least 18 years old. After turning 18, Harrison made good on his promise, and despite a fear of needles, he began to donate blood regularly.

At the time, doctors in Australia were struggling to figure out why thousands of births in the country were resulting in miscarriages, stillbirths or brain defects for the babies. In 1967, they discovered the babies were suffering from Haemolytic Disease of the Newborn, or HDN. The condition arises when a woman with an Rh negative blood type becomes pregnant with a baby who has Rh positive blood, and the incompatibility causes the mother's body to reject the fetus's red blood cells.

Doctors in Australia discovered that a very rare antibody in blood called Anti-D could be used to make a lifesaving medication that when given to mothers whose blood is at risk of developing HDN would keep the baby safe. Researchers scoured blood banks to see whose blood might contain this antibody and found a donor in New South Wales named James Harrison. Scientists asked him to participate in an experimental Anti-D program that turned out to be effective in saving these babies.

For more than 60 years, Harrison donated blood every single week and his plasma was used to make millions of Anti-D injections. Every ampoule of Anti-d ever made in Australia has a piece of James in it. Because about 17% of

pregnant women in Australia require the Anti-D injections, the Australian blood service estimates that Harrison has helped 2.4 million babies in the country.

After donating 1,100 times, at 81 years old, despite wanting to continue, James Harrison was forced to retire from donating blood. James Harrison, appropriately nicknamed "The man with the golden arm," passed away last month at the age of 88, one person who without exaggeration saved millions of lives.

Don't underestimate your power to positively impact the world when you simply care enough to step up instead of sitting back.

One person can make an enormous difference with the right word in the right moment and we never know which word and which moment.

Queen Esther didn't want to go to Achashverosh without being invited; she hesitated to reveal her true identity and wanted to continue to keep it a secret. Esther preferred the passive route, the spectator position.

But thanks to Mordechai's encouragement and power of persuasion, she mustered the courage and conviction to enter without invitation, to speak despite the risk. The result was one woman saved an entire nation. Purim highlights the power to go from passive to active, from bystander to bringing about redemption. Don't underestimate your power to positively impact the world when you simply care enough to step up instead of sitting back.

James Harrison saved millions of babies in Australia. Queen Esther, with one act of sacrifice and courage, saved the Jewish people.

To the world, you may be one person, but to one person, you may be what saves their world.

News & Views

A School Without Hate in Gaza

ELDER OF ZIYON (Elderoftziyon.blogspot.com 19-2-26)

The New York Times ran a remarkable front-page story this week about Dr. David Hasan, a Palestinian American neurosurgeon from Durham, North Carolina, who has built a growing network of free schools in Gaza called Academies of Hope. Nine thousand children — war orphans and displaced youngsters — are now attending classes in tent campuses across southern Gaza, receiving hot meals, medical care, and something extraordinary: a curriculum purged of antisemitism and hate.

Dr. Hasan deserves enormous praise. He went to Gaza on medical missions when most of the world was arguing about the conflict from the comfort of their living rooms. He watched a ten-year-old girl take charge of her younger siblings after their parents were killed. And rather than turn away, he built something. He raised money — largely from Jewish donors — hired teachers over WhatsApp, coordinated with Israeli authorities, and replaced lessons glorifying killers with lessons about tolerance, coexistence, and conflict resolution. A math problem that once compared the number of "martyrs" in the first and second intifadas now asks about soccer match attendance. A reading that praised Dalal Mughrabi — who led the 1978 coastal road massacre that killed 38 Israelis, 13 of them children — has been replaced with a reading about a pioneering Palestinian educator. An Islamic studies lesson about Jews trying to kill the Prophet has been replaced with one about the Prophet's expressions of respect for Jews.

The children love it. "No drones or bombs," one 12-year-old told the Times. "The best thing is sitting at a desk and seeing the teacher and the board, and holding a pencil again."

This raises an obvious question: why is this so rare?

The Palestinian Authority's curriculum — the one taught in both the West Bank and Gaza — has been criticized for decades by Israel, the United States, and the European Union for inculcating hatred and antisemitism. That criticism has been thoroughly documented and is not seriously disputed. Yet in all that time, with billions of dollars in international aid flowing to Palestinian educational institutions, no one — not the PA, not UNRWA, not Qatar, not the EU — has made systematic hate-removal a condition or even a priority. Dr. Hasan, a private individual with no background in humanitarian work, did it anyway, and the PA's education ministry reportedly threatened him for doing so without permission.

Think about that: the official custodians of Palestinian education threatened a man for teaching children not to hate.

Which brings us to the social media reaction. Some Gazans have questioned whether Dr. Hasan is "overly aligned with Israel" — because he works with Israeli donors, coordinates with Israeli authorities, and has stripped anti-Jewish content from the curriculum. Others, described as embittered by Hamas, have pushed back and said teaching tolerance is better than teaching children to sacrifice themselves.

Notice what the objectors are actually objecting to. It isn't the food. It isn't

the medical care. It isn't the fact that children are learning to read and write again. The complaint is that Jewish people are funding the schools and that hatred of Jews has been removed from the lessons. In other words: the mere participation of Jews in a humanitarian project is treated as a form of contamination. The removal of antisemitism from a classroom is treated as ideological subversion.

This tells you something important about the cultural environment in which these children are being raised — an environment so saturated with the premise that Jews are the enemy that any Jewish generosity is automatically suspect. It also tells you something about what "peace building" is actually up against. Dr. Hasan isn't just building tent classrooms; he's fighting an entire ecosystem of dehumanization that has been deliberately cultivated and institutionally maintained for decades.

That is precisely why what he is doing matters so much — and why the question of its rarity should be answered honestly. It is rare because powerful institutions — the PA, Hamas, the UN, and their international funders — have not wanted it. The hate in the curriculum was not an accident or an oversight. It was a policy. Dr. Hasan's schools prove that it was never a necessity.

Most of all, this is a damning indictment of UNRWA. A man managed to build a network of schools in months, with thousands of students and vetted teachers, that don't teach hate. UNRWA has spent decades arguing that such a thing is impossible in Gaza and that the lessons of hate they teach - which violate UN standards - are necessary (or they deny it.)

Dr. David Hasan's schools prove that all the excuses that justify antisemitism in Gaza are nonsense.

Palestinians in Gaza, PA want to murder all Israelis

DAVID ISAAC (JNS.org 21-2-26)

Former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, addressing the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations' 51st Annual Leadership Mission in Jerusalem on Tuesday, spoke of the strategic lessons of the Oct. 7 Hamas attack, the necessity of preventing Iran from going nuclear, and the emerging danger from Turkey and Qatar.

Bennett asserted that seven out of 10 Palestinian Arabs in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority want to murder all Israelis. He based that figure on the latest opinion polls in those areas, which showed 70% of the public support the Oct. 7, 2023, massacre. He noted that in the only democratic elections which took place in the P.A., in 2006, Hamas won 76 out of 132 parliamentary seats.

Bennett also cited anecdotal evidence. On Oct. 7, the first two waves of the attack were led by Hamas commandos, but the third wave consisted of "random people" who entered Israel and murdered Israelis. "There's not one recorded event of a righteous Gentile in Gaza," Bennett said.

Of the Iranian threat, Bennett said that the Islamic Republic had been severely damaged by the joint Israeli-American airstrikes in June of last year, but "the ballistic threat remains, and the evil regime remains."

Comparing the regime to the former Soviet Union—"rotten, old, disconnected, incompetent"—Bennett said the ayatollahs will eventually fall and Israel's strategy should be to do whatever it can to accelerate that collapse. In the meantime, it must prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons.

Bennett warned of a new threat emerging from Anatolia. "Turkey is the new Iran," he said. Together with Qatar, it is feeding the "Islamic Brotherhood monster," which "eventually might become as dangerous as the one created by Iran."

Turkey is building a Sunni axis composed of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and others, in an attempt to encircle Israel in a new "choke ring," he said. Describing Turkish President Recep Erdoğan as "sophisticated, dangerous," Bennett said Israel must not wait to counter the threat from Ankara, even as it still deals with Iran.

Bennett said his biggest concern is the internal threat, the divisions between Jews in Israel. The modern State of Israel is the third iteration of a sovereign Jewish state and the previous states were lost due to civil wars. "In the year leading up to Oct. 7, that horrible year of 2023, we saw Israeli society tear itself apart," he said, referring to the societal upheaval over the government's judicial reform plan.

Bennett, who intends to run for prime minister in the next election, which must be held by Oct. 27, said that if elected he would establish a State Commission of Inquiry "according to law" to investigate the events of Oct. 7; how and why Israel's government and security establishment "evaporated" in the first 24 hours of the attack.

Although Israel and the Israel Defense Forces recovered, the Oct. 7 attack exposed a deeper strategic failure; that Israel relied too much on defensive measures, creating a false sense of security, Bennett said. It forgot the lessons of the past, which called for taking the fight to the enemy.

To prevent future attacks, he said, Israel must abandon the passive approach, which he claimed it is falling back into, and return to a proactive strategy of confronting threats directly and decisively.

As an example of the defensive mindset that had taken root, Bennett related how in 2014, when Israel discovered 30 terror tunnels entering the country, he pushed strongly within the Security Cabinet to destroy them to prevent a major attack. He encountered resistance from senior leaders, including the IDF and Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet). He persisted until action was taken.

"Too many decision makers, not all, but many, failed to understand that beyond our borders, there's millions of people that want to kill us," Bennett said.

Speaking of the importance of the relationship between Diaspora Jews and Israel, Bennett said that after the Oct. 7, 2023, attack and outpouring of antisemitism that followed, Israelis and worldwide Jewry understood that they can rely only on each other for their survival. "The way I see it, Israel, the State of Israel belongs to every Jew in the world," he said.

Ending on a positive note, Bennett said Israel's young generation is exceptional, having fought in Gaza and shouldered responsibilities that most young men and women never do.

Israel is not only producing extraordinary children, but more of them, he said. While other countries fail to reproduce at the minimal rate, Israel has struck on the formula for success: "Lots of children, multiplied by amazing children equals an amazing 50 years for the State of Israel."

SCHRÖDINGER'S JEW: WHITE TODAY, OTHER TOMORROW

VARDA MEYERS EPSTEIN (ElderofZion.blogspot.com 18-2-26)

On February 15, 2026, readers of the New York Post encountered a story that captured a peculiar moment in contemporary identity politics: the Coalition of National Racial and Ethnic Psychological Associations (CONREPA) firmly opposed the creation of an Association of Jewish Psychologists as an official Ethnic Psychological Association within the American Psychological Association. Their reasoning was straightforward and revealing. Jews, they argued, are not underrepresented in the field—the majority of Jewish Americans identify as white, and Jewish psychologists of color already have representation in existing ethnic associations. Conflating religion, race, and ethnicity would blur the focus on racism and white supremacy as harms directed at people of color.

Just one day later, on February 16, The Algemeiner published a starkly different account. Beejhy Barhany, the Ethiopian-Israeli owner of Tsion Cafe in Harlem—a restaurant celebrating Ethiopian Jewish cuisine that had recently gone fully kosher and vegan—detailed years of escalating harassment that forced its closure on February 12. Swastikas scrawled on the building, threatening phone calls ("We're going to come and shoot you all"), and intensified attacks after October 7, 2023, when Barhany embraced her Jewish heritage more openly by making the restaurant kosher. The focus of the hostility was three-fold: Barhany's Jewish identity, her Israeli background, and the restaurant's kosher certification; her Ethiopian heritage and the color of her skin offered no insulation—meant absolutely nothing to them. "It became unbearable," she said, citing safety and mental health concerns after repeated, unaddressed complaints to authorities.

These two stories, separated by a mere 24 hours, form a chilling juxtaposition that exposes the fickle, convenience-driven way Jewish identity is racialized in today's discourse. Call it Schrödinger's Jew—a status that shifts depending on the observer's agenda. On one day, Jews are deemed "white" enough to be excluded from minority protections and coalitions, too privileged and overrepresented to warrant their own space in professional bodies addressing oppression. On the next, a black Jewish woman (Ethiopian-born, Israeli-raised) is marked as unmistakably "other" and Jewish—threatened, vandalized, and driven out of business precisely because of that Jewishness, her choice to make her restaurant kosher, and her cultural expression of heritage.

Jewish identity is fluid in the eyes of others: white and assimilated when it serves to block access or deny solidarity, alien and threatening when it manifests in visible traditions, pride, or connection to Israel. Historical echoes abound—Jews were racialized as non-white outsiders in early 20th-century America (facing discrimination, quotas, and violence like the lynching of Leo Frank), then granted conditional "whiteness" post-World War II through socioeconomic assimilation and suburban integration. That status, however, has always been revocable, especially amid rising antisemitism. Today, in progressive spaces, the label snaps back to "white" to justify exclusion from intersectional frameworks, even as real-world threats ignore skin color or background.

The timing of these articles—published one right after the other—serves as a mirror to this societal volatility. In academia and professional guilds, Jews are too white to be minorities. In the streets of Harlem, or online, or

anywhere hatred flares, Jewishness overrides any perceived racial assimilation, rendering even Jews of color targets. Barhany's experience highlights the harm embedded in such shifting perceptions. As indigenous rights activist Ryan Bellerose, a Métis from the Paddle Prairie Metis settlement in Alberta, Canada, and a Zionist, has long argued, Jews should reject this imposed "whiteness" framework altogether. He frames Jewish peoplehood through an indigenous lens: rooted in ancient ties to the land of Israel, shared history, culture, and continuity—not Western racial categories. Regarding the opposition of CONREPA to the formation of an association for Jewish psychiatrists, Bellerose put it succinctly: "If we accept that only a group has the right to decide who is a member of that group, then you gotta ask yourself if white people ever accepted Jews as white. The answer is clearly no."

Ryan is right (he usually is). By accepting conditional whiteness, Jews remain trapped in a binary that others control, always vulnerable to redefinition and exclusion.

The back-to-back headlines that were striking in their irony and juxtaposition, reveal a pattern where Jewish minority status is granted or revoked based upon convenience—denied when seeking inclusion, weaponized when expressing distinct identity. Until Jews reclaim a narrative beyond these shifting labels—as an indigenous people with a resilient, multifaceted identity—the threats, whether professional gatekeeping or death threats over a plate of injera, are likely to continue unchecked.

The “who is a Jew” question was settled well before those headlines existed, in biblical times, by G-d. Our Jewish identity is not predicated on the color of our skin and never was. And Jewish identity is not subject to reassignment, either by committee or mob. News cycles change quickly. The headlines will be forgotten, and the Chosen People will endure—as they always have.

The haters are jealous of us. Because they weren't chosen. But perhaps instead of being green with envy and seething with resentment, they should try to be more like us and less like themselves.

That would certainly go a long way toward making our world a better place.

Billions for Gaza, nothing for Israel

DAVID M. WEINBERG (JNS.org 22-2-26)

The Trump administration and the “international community” are revving up to raise funds for Gaza's rehabilitation, even under de facto Hamas rule. The talk is of \$70 to \$120 billion in funds to provide Palestinians in Gaza with “human dignity” and “humanitarian relief.”

At the inaugural meeting in Washington of his grandiose Board of Peace, on Feb. 19, U.S. President Donald Trump announced \$10 billion in U.S. funding for Gaza alongside \$7 billion more from other countries.

All this passion and concern would be admirable if it were not so counterproductive (at this point) and so one-sided.

The world at large still has said nothing at all about Hamas's use of women and children as human shields, hospitals as weapons depots, or United Nations schools as launchpads for rockets. It has said little at all about Hamas's violent seizure of humanitarian-aid shipments into Gaza or its targeting of Palestinians approaching aid centers operated by Western-backed humanitarian foundations.

The world seems incapable of admitting that Hamas's dictatorial and genocidal regime in Gaza is responsible for every bit of ruin suffered by Palestinians, and it has nothing but platitudes to offer about how this time it might be different.

But what really gets my goat is that nobody around the world is talking about raising even one penny for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Israel—of the country's southern and northern areas that have been depopulated and devastated by Hamas and Hezbollah attacks over the past two years, and even the past decade.

Not a penny for the battered people of Israel—war widows and orphans, terrorized civilians, traumatized soldiers and battered businesses.

Except for Jews abroad, nobody is prioritizing relief and aid for Israel.

Sure, with the war over, Western countries will now return to buy Israeli technology and weapons for their own benefit, and cooperate in science and the arts, too. But lavish sympathies and abundant budgets are reserved for the attacking Palestinians, not for the attacked Israelis.

Understand: The cumulative economic toll of the two-year-long conflict inflicted upon Israel by Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis and Iran is estimated at 352 billion shekels (\$112 billion), according to the Bank of Israel. This figure encompasses direct military spending, property compensation and broader civilian outlays. This calculates to a daily burden of about \$100 million on Israeli taxpayers.

Remember that this war has brought about the mass displacement of Israeli civilian communities. Approximately 200,000 Israelis remain displaced from

their homes in border communities near Gaza and Lebanon. The cost of evacuating northern residents alone topped \$2 billion. Israel has dedicated about 60 billion shekels (\$18 billion) to supporting displaced citizens and maintaining social services.

To rebuild the southern region (Gaza Envelope), the government has established the Tekuma (Revival) Directorate with an initial five-year budget of 19 billion shekels (\$5.3 billion) to rehabilitate and upgrade 47 communities and cities in the south.

Some 1.8 billion shekels have been devoted towards development in the regional councils of Ofakim, Netivot, Merhavim, Eshkol, Sha'ar HaNegev and Sdot Negev. The funds are earmarked for 24 municipalities that sustained damage during the war, but are not included in the budget for the western Negev Tekuma region.

To rehabilitate, secure and revive northern towns, Israel intends to invest 15 billion shekels (\$4 billion) over five years, with an initial NIS 200 million injection for immediate infrastructure restoration. Wildfire losses caused by Hezbollah rockets in the north are said to exceed \$100 million.

As for the destruction wrought by Iranian ballistic missiles, mainly in the center of the country, Israel faces \$10 billion in property compensation and rebuilding costs.

Then there are the workforce absences caused by the war. Reservist call-ups have cost the economy an estimated \$600 million per week in lost productivity. The Bank of Israel estimates that one month of reservist service equals roughly 38,000 shekels (\$12,100) in lost production per soldier.

As a result of the war, especially the heavy load of army reserve duty, more than 50,000 Israeli businesses have closed.

I won't elaborate here on Israel's direct military costs, but these amount to at least NIS 243 billion (\$77 billion) on ammunition, fuel and equipment. Israel likely spent more than \$1 billion on Arrow missile interceptions alone since the start of the multifront war.

And I won't elaborate on the cost of preparing for the next wars, which against Hezbollah and Iran may begin this month. The Israeli defense establishment has already decided that it needs a far more independent defense-industrial base as a hedge against any future boycotts or embargoes, like the one imposed by the Biden administration when it decided to suspend deliveries of 2,000-pound bombs.

The development of cutting-edge military technologies that allow Israel to stay a step ahead of its enemies, such as the Iron Beam laser, for which the state last year signed a \$500 million contract with defense contractors Elbit and Rafael, will further strain the public purse, even if the laser is ultimately able to dramatically reduce the cost of interceptions.

Israel's defense spending as a percentage of GDP, which stood at 4.5% in 2023, has risen to a whopping 8.8%—the second highest in the world, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Israel's Nagel Commission, headed by Brig. Gen. (Res.) Jacob Nagel believes that those numbers are only going to increase. The military budget is expected to nearly double, reaching as much as 500 billion shekels (\$159 billion) over the next decade.

On the fiscal/monetary levels, Israel has taken on an additional 19 billion shekels (\$6 billion) in debt servicing costs due to increased borrowing. Israel ran a budget deficit in 2025 of 6.9% of GDP. That is more than twice the level of Germany and higher than even France.

Israel has already begun cutting civilian ministry budgets by roughly \$5 billion, with a view toward bringing its budget deficits to below 3% over the next three years.

In short, the economic and fiscal burden that Israelis shoulder is enormous—and this does not take into account pain, trauma, post-trauma and other “medical” costs—nor the tribulations of 2,000 families with widows and orphans, nor 15,000 soldiers with varying degrees of injury, including many with long-term medical rehabilitation challenges.

But again, nobody around the world is talking about raising even one penny for the reconstruction of Israel and the rehabilitation of Israelis, never mind for their “human dignity.” Except for Jews abroad, nobody is prioritizing the rebuilding and strengthening of Israel.

Now, of course, Israel is a strong first-world country that has miraculously and smartly pulled through the war with incredible economic resilience. Israel does not run around the world with a cap in hand begging for handouts. And Israel has graciously received massive military assistance from the United States.

Nevertheless, there is something grossly perverse about the fact that the world sees only the suffering of the attackers, Palestinians, and not the suffering of the attacked, Israelis.

There is something truly wicked about the fact that the world rushes to plunk down billions for Gaza but not Kfar Aza; for Rafah (and of course Ramallah, as always) but not Rehovot; for Khan Yunis but not Kiryat

Shmona.

I'm just saying.

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

What's Cooking with the Temperature of the Wine?

RABBI BENZION CHANOWITZ (OKKosher.com)

We have discussed the prohibition of Yayin Nesech (wine touched by an idolater). Cooked, or mevushal, wine is not subject to the prohibition of Yayin Nesech, but there are various opinions as to what temperature halachically constitutes “cooking”. The main opinions and their sources will be presented in this installment.

The Gemara (Masechta Avodah Zara 30a), commenting on the Mishna 29b's statement that wine of a non-Jew is prohibited, says:

Shmuel and Avleit (Rashi: He was an idol worshipper.) were sitting together and they were served cooked wine. Avleit (concerned that he should not make the wine non-kosher) removed his hands (from the space near the wine). Shmuel then said to him (that it was not necessary for him to refrain from touching the wine since) the Rabbis taught that cooked wine is not subject to the prohibition of Yayin Nesech.

The Ran's¹ commentary on the Rif² quotes the Raavad in the name of Rav Hai Gaon³ that as soon as the wine boils it is considered cooked. He then quotes the Ramban⁴ that the wine is considered cooked when some wine (evaporates and) begins missing some of its quantity. The Ran (as well as the Rashba⁵) concludes that maybe there is no argument, as both criteria are the same, for when it boils, it also evaporates. The Rosh⁶ only brings the first opinion (as he probably did not see the second opinion) and he compares it to the laws of cooking on Shabbos where the criteria is “Yad Soledes Bo”, (a hand will be scalded [removed instinctively] in this water temperature). There are various opinions on the appropriate temperature for this criteria, ranging from 112-160°F.

(The Rosh then goes into a discussion as to whether the reason for this prohibition is to discourage social drinking and possible relationships between Jews and non-Jews, or if it is based on the laws of sacrifice in the Temple and the prohibitions of idol worship. There is also a lengthy discussion by many commentaries on this issue, as well as understanding why cooked wine is permitted. Some say because it degrades the wine, some say because it is unusual to cook it, and some say because the original source of the prohibition was only on uncooked wine. This article will not be able to clarify these questions, I am merely bringing them up to whet your appetite to continue researching, and gain insight into some of the later mentioned opinions.)

The opinions mentioned above are the basis of the Bais Yosef's⁷ decision in the Shulchan Oruch⁸: When is it considered cooked wine? When it boils on the fire. The Shach⁹, in Sifsei Cohen, his commentary on the Shulchan Oruch, then comments: When it lessens its quantity (evaporates), and he quotes this from the Rashba and the Ran.

In today's wine making industry the wine, or more precisely the grape juice, is pasteurized shortly after it is squeezed and fermentation is caused by the introduction of commercial yeast. Pasteurization at this stage helps ensure that each bottle of wine in the production will taste the same, giving a consistent experience to consumers.

In order for the grapes achieve optimum quality each year, specific levels of moisture, sunlight and temperature are required. If these are higher or lower than the ideal, the fruit will not reach optimum quality. Consequently, the quality of the wine suffers, as the acidity level or sweetness level (brix percentage) of the grapes was not optimal.

Hashem, in His unlimited kindness and wisdom, created grapes with the quality of carrying its own (ambient) yeast. This is sometimes called the grapes' bloom, or blush. This yeast is what causes the grape juice to ferment (and bubble), turning its sugar (sweetness) into alcohol. This should not be confused with the sweetness imparted in some wines. That sweet taste is what remains when the fermentation process is stopped before all of the sugar is converted into alcohol.

In the mid-19th century, a famous scientist, Mr. Louis Pasteur discovered that there were many living organism that could spoil or ferment the wine. In 1856, Pasteur was called to investigate why the wine of a local vintner was spoiling. He came up with the discovery that bacteria is a living organism and, therefore, if one would cook the grape juice to 60 – 100°C (140 – 212°F), it would kill all of the bacteria. Afterwards, if the vintner

wanted to ferment the wine, he would have to introduce new, cultured yeast in order to turn the juice into wine.

This idea of killing the bacteria (and introducing yeast) is widespread in the wine and dairy industries, as well as the production of other fermented products. It is also the foundation of food safety practiced in most companies today to help control the spread of unwanted bacteria and contribute greatly to the shelf life of products.

The standard procedure in the wine industry today is to pasteurize all of the grape juice to 165°F and then add yeast, ensuring that only healthy bacteria grows and that all of the wine has a uniform taste. (Even after heating it to 165°F some of the bacteria can possibly reawaken during fermentation; therefore, some scientists recommend heating it to 212°F.) Some smaller vintners do not pasteurize their juice and choose to monitor it carefully and add or change chemical additives as needed.

Due to the serious prohibition of Yayin Nesech it is clearly easier to use cooked wine, since the wine might be handled by non-Shomer Shabbos Jews and even by, l'havdil, non-Jews; however it is considered more mehudar by some to use uncooked wine for Kiddush and especially for the Pesach Seder.

Reb Moshe Feinstein concluded¹ that grape juice cooked to 165°F is considered cooked wine. He explains that Rav Hai Gaon's opinion that as soon as it is boiled it is considered cooking is similar to the laws of Shabbos where it is considered cooking at the temperature of Yad Soledes Bo. He further says that evaporating also starts at that time. Later on, in his fourth sefer on Even HaEzer, Reb Moshe adds a few words towards the end of siman 108 saying the juice must reach 175°F to be considered mevushal, but he does not explain why he changed the requirement from 165°F to 175°F.

The exact temperature that wine boils depends on the altitude, as well as the percent of alcohol in the wine. As noted, wine boils at a lower temperature than water and, therefore, a mixture with 12% alcohol would boil later than wine with 16% alcohol. Those who accept a lower temperature for mevushal would probably point to distilling where cooking starts at a lower temperature. It is well known that the Tzelemer Rov, OB" M, (who used to certify Kedem and Royal wines) opined that wine must be heated to 190°F in order to be considered mevushal. This policy has been adopted by Kedem and many other wineries. The OK requires a minimum temperature of 86°C (186.8°F).

The relatively recent innovations of ultra- and flash-pasteurization, where the juice is pasteurized at different heat levels for a few seconds and immediately cooled, helps minimize the degradation caused by pasteurization. Since pasteurization is done in a closed, pressurized system, no vapor can leak into the atmosphere and evaporate. The halachic question is whether this affects the Ramban's opinion that the liquid must lessen in quantity to be considered cooked.

The widespread use of ultra- and flash-pasteurization in closed loop pressurized systems throughout the wine industry has introduced a new set of questions as to whether the original intention of cooking the wine, outlined in the Gemara, has been preserved.

Rav Elyashiv, OB" M, questioned whether cooking wine is considered “an uncommon occurrence”, since one of the opinions permitting cooked wine was based on the fact that most wine at the time was uncooked. Since pasteurization is now the norm in the grape juice and wine industry, Rav Elyashiv questioned whether cooking could still be considered a heter to avoid Yayin Nesech.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, OB" M, questioned¹¹ whether the taste is changed during the cooking process. The heter for cooked wine, according to some opinions, is due to the inferior quality of the wine once it was cooked. Today, when the cooking does not noticeably degrade the wine, and some of the highest rated kosher wines are mevushal, the heter might not apply.

Rav Ben Tzion Abba Shaul argues¹² that the wine must evaporate in order to be considered mevushal. The lack of evaporation in a closed loop system could invalidate the heter.

Those that permit closed loop pasteurization would argue that when the pasteurization loop is sealed, it merely forces the evaporated gases to revert to liquid. The liquid really is cooked to the level of evaporation, yet the plumbing system and technology forces the evaporation to reincorporate into the mixture and revert to a liquid state. The OK does not allow a fully closed system; there must be a way for some steam to escape. As for the lack of degradation and current commonality of pasteurization, the original takana was made only to prohibit uncooked wine. It never stipulated that the decree would need to be altered if time and circumstances changed and cooking became common.

Some bottles of kosher wine bear the designation “mefustar” (pasteurized). Those who follow the p'sak of Rav Elyashiv, Rav Auerbach or

Rav Abba Shaul may not consider those wines to be mevushal according to halacha; however, Rav Ovadia Yosef, OB”M, argued¹³ that pasteurized wine is also considered mevushal.

Due to the serious prohibition of Yayin Nesech it is clearly easier to use cooked wine, since the wine might be handled by non-Shomer Shabbos Jews and even by, l’havdil, non-Jews; however it is considered more mehudar by some to use uncooked wine for Kiddush and especially for the Pesach Seder.

Our prophets tell us that wine is M’Sameach Elokim v’Anashim (it has the ability to bring much happiness to the Almighty as well as to people) if used properly. May we merit to experience much happiness and joy in our personal and family lives, as well as in our spiritual lives!

I hope this helped uncork some of the confusing opinions on kosher wine processing. This article is meant for educational purposes. As in all matters of Halacha, please consult with your local Orthodox rabbi to determine which opinions to follow.

CLARIFICATION: In my previous article, I explained that crushed grapes can be purchased from a non-Jew if the grapes and the wine have not been separated. Once the juice begins flowing, the juice can become Yayin Nesech and must be handled by a Shomer Shabbos Jew.

I was asked by some of the readers to clarify this further.

When we buy grapes in a retail store, we usually check first to make sure that the grapes are not crushed. If we are buying a case of grapes, they usually come in a wooden crate which protects the grapes from becoming crushed. Even if the grapes were crushed, it would still not pose a Halachic difficulty, as the liquid would drain out from the holes of the crate. There would not be any leftover juice.

When a large wine producer purchases grapes, they are usually delivered in totes or trucks. A tote is usually a 6’x6’x6’ plastic container, which does not have drainage holes, allowing the leaking juice to be used by the producer. Since all of the grapes are packed together in one container, and weigh about a half ton, the weight crushes the grapes and forces some of the liquid to come out. Of course, the same is true with a truckload of grapes.

Halachically, as long as the juice is mixed with the grapes and not separated at all, it is not considered wine. This is why the Mishna (Avodah Zara, Daf 55a) says that we are permitted to buy crushed grapes from a non-Jew.

As soon as the juice separates from the grapes it must be handled exclusively by a Shomer Shabbos Jew. The Gemara’s example is “piling it on a mound”. If all of the grapes (all of the solids) are piled high on the mound, leaving the liquid to flow nearby (even before it was sifted), this liquid is treated as wine.

Therefore, if the tote or truck is delivered by a non-Jew, it would be permissible (provided that it is handled properly in the field, as we will explain) since the grapes and juice have not separated. When the totes or truck are tipped in order to empty the grapes and juice into the processing machines, one may encounter a problem. When the tote or truck is tipped, naturally, the solids will pour out first. At the very end, there will be a few seconds where the container will only have the remnants of the liquid. At this second, the liquid can become Stam Yaynom, or non-kosher. Later, when this juice is poured on the grapes, the whole pile will become non-kosher. Therefore, only a Shomer Shabbos Jew should work the controls to tip the containers.

In addition, the mashgiach should make sure that the workers do not pour from one tote/truck to another at the field, as this can cause the same halachic problem. Lastly, the mashgiach must make sure that any grapes that are crushed and tested in the field are disposed of, as the juice is halachically considered wine. This can potentially cause all of the grapes to become non-kosher.

1. Rabbeinu Nissim (1320-1380) of Gerona, Spain.
2. Rabbi Yitzchok Alfasi (1013-1103). Lived in Algeria, Fez, and then Spain.
3. Headed the great Talmudic academy of Pumpedesia (now part of Baghdad, Iraq. Lived 939-1038.
4. The Nachmanides, Rabbi Moshe Ben Nachman (1194-1270) of Gerona, Spain.
5. Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderes (1235-1310) of Barcelona, Spain.
6. Rabbeinu Asher (1250-1327) of Cologne, Rome and then Toledo, Spain.
7. Rabbi Yosef Caro (1488-1575), author of the Shulchan Oruch, who lived in Spain, Portugal and Tzfas, Israel.
8. Yoreh Deah, Siman 123, S’if 3.
9. Reb Shabsi Cohen (1621-1662) of Lithuania, and then Moravia.
10. Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah, volume 3, siman 31.
11. Minchas Shlomo, volume 1, number 25.
12. Ohr L’Tzion
12. Yabia Omer, Yoreh Deah vol. 8/15.

Candles (Melb) Friday 27 February 2026, 11 Adar 5786 7.45pm/8.42pm