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Acharei-Kedoshim 5786

What the Whole Day is About

RABBI LABEL LAM (Torah.org)

For on this day, He shall affect atonement for you, to cleanse you. Before HASHEM, you shall be cleansed from all your sins. (Vayikra 16:30)

It was more than 30 something years ago and I was beginning a new chapter in life going out into the big city of New York to learn Torah with business people, millionaires and billionaires, men of industry. One thing began to concern me as I started. I knew there was a difference, back then, between having a TV or not having a TV. That was the challenge of that time. (Remember those days!?) I was one who had chosen to keep my focus away from worldly matters. However, I soon discovered that my trips to New York, the Big Apple were having an effect on my basic level of Kedusha. I was mentally and physically and emotionally exhausted from the traveling and having to refocus my attention at all times. I felt like I was living in the TV. It didn't matter whether I was the one who had or didn't have. The environment itself was toxic for me.

So, I came to ask Rabbi Ezriel Tauber ztl. what I should do. He didn't hesitate. He understood my dilemma right away. He too had worked there for many years. He insisted that I go to the Mikva every day. That meant getting up even earlier every day before catching the bus to the city. He told me that the Rambam waxes poetic and calls the Mikva "Mei Daas" – "waters of knowledge". It had wondrous powers. If it can take a gentile and make him into a Jew, with the proper intent, then what can it do for a Jew!? I started going regularly. It made a world of difference. I can't describe it. I felt like a hot knife slicing through butter as I went about my business in the big city milieu. The one or two times that I missed I detected the obvious difference. It was like the difference between night and day. Every day I would go and refocus and rededicate my energies to a new day. I can't see myself living any other way now.

That year went around and Yom Kippur arrived. On Yom Kippur, one of the five things that we don't do, besides not eating and drinking, is not bathing and not washing. On Yom Kippur immersion the Mikva is forbidden. Yom Kippur was going as Yom Kippur tends to go. I still don't know why they call it a "fast" day. It should be called a "slow" day. Anyway, we were nearing the end of a long and intense Yeshiva Davening. There was more one more leg to go. After Mincha and before Neila we took just a 20-minute break to prepare for the last push of Teshuva.

I approached Rabbi Tauber as he was resting in preparation for leading that last service. I told him that I miss the Mikva terribly on Yom Kippur. I thought I would get a nod of agreement or approval. After all, it was his great advice that was working so well for me. Instead, he gave me a look that shouts. He said, "You think you need the Mikva today? Then you don't know what the whole day is about!" I was shocked. Here, the whole day had almost passed and there was only a half hour yet to go and I don't know what the whole day is about. He explained, "You are in the Mikva on Yom Kippur". You are Tovelng (soaking and bathing) in Yud and Hey and Vuv and Hey, in the name of HASHEM."

The dirt is being removed by the most powerful and universal solvent, Teshuva, and HASHEM, Himself is washing us in his Mikva as the last Mishne is Yoma declares in the name of Rabbi Akiva; Rabbi Akiva said: 'How fortunate are you, Israel; before Whom are you purified, and Who purifies you? It is your Father in Heaven, as it is stated: "And I will sprinkle purifying water upon you, and you shall be purified" (Yechezkel 36:25). And it says: "The Mikva of Israel is HASHEM" (Yermiahu 17:13). Just as a Mikva purifies

the impure, so too, the Holy One, Blessed be He, purifies Israel.'

Now, I am grateful to know and to share with you what the whole day is about!

Day One

RABBI YANKI TAUBER (Chabad.org)

How many are we?

There's our animal self, which hungers and lusts and bares its fangs when its turf is challenged; our emotional self, which loves and fears, exults and agonizes; our intellectual self, which perceives and analyzes and contemplates the other selves with smug detachment; our spiritual self, which strives and yearns, worships and venerates. There's the self you were at the age of 8, and the self you're going to be at 80. There's the self I was last Tuesday, when I woke up in a foul mood, snapped at my kids, cowered before my boss, stabbed my co-workers in the back and hung up the phone on my mother-in-law; there's the self I'm going to be tomorrow, when I'll be loving to my family, respectful but firm with my boss, and kind, fair and considerate to everyone else.

How can we possibly imagine that in the conglomerate of cells, organs and limbs we call our "body", extending across the rises and furrows of the terrain we call "time", there resides a single and singular "I"?

But somehow we are convinced of this. We can't identify it or describe it, nor do our day-to-day lives reflect it. But we know that it's there. Which means that it is; otherwise, where would this knowledge spring from?

A single "I" means that our animal, emotional, intellectual and spiritual selves have a common source and a common goal. It means that all the moments of our lives are interlinked: what we are today and what we will do tomorrow is the sum and result of what we were and did yesterday and the day before. A single "I" means that the past is redeemable. A single "I" means that we can achieve harmony in our lives.

The Torah refers to the day of Yom Kippur as achat bashanah, "once a year." But the Hebrew words achat bashanah also translate as "the one of the year." Yom Kippur, explain the Chassidic masters, is the day that our intrinsic oneness rises to the surface.

For 364 days a year, the fragments of our life and personality lie dispersed throughout the chambers of our soul and strewn across the expanses of space and time. On Yom Kippur, we are empowered to unite them with their source and point them towards their goal.

Boundaries

KATIA BOLOTIN (Aish.com)

When boundaries become blurred, it's important to clarify them. Boundaries define what is and what is not acceptable or appropriate behavior in society. They express how we expect to be treated and determine how we treat others. Personal boundaries exemplify who we are and manifest our spiritual and moral personas. We don't have security alarms to signal when our boundaries have been crossed. Our own internal alert systems determine if and when our personal boundaries have been compromised or violated.

In a world of shifting values, stable boundaries are crucial for safe-guarding our collective and personal identities. But who is to determine what those boundaries should be?

Long before the idea of "setting boundaries" was in vogue, the Torah emphasized their pivotal role in safeguarding the Jewish People. In this week's Torah portion, specific boundaries were enumerated to maintain the sanctified identity of the nation. The statement "I am G-d, your G-d" begins and ends this section. These words succinctly reveal the Divine source from which humanity's boundaries emanate. Maintaining Israel's sanctity became

the cornerstone of Jewish family and communal life for all time. Therefore, the purpose of boundaries was, and is, to protect against corrupting influences.

The first of the Ten Commandments is: “I am G-d, your G-d.” With those few words, the Jewish People are called upon to raise themselves to a greater degree of moral adherence to the Almighty. Rashi explains that they eventually could become disconnected from Judaism through forbidden relations—breaches of boundaries. To avert this, the section delineating forbidden carnal relations concludes with a dire warning: “The people of the land who preceded you did all of those abominations and the land became defiled. Let not the land vomit you out for having defiled it, as it vomited out the nation that preceded you... I am G-d, your G-d.” The seriousness of these transgressions is underscored.

When you value your identity, necessary measures are enacted to ensure its protection. Boundaries serve this underlying purpose. They may begin with the seemingly mundane but extend to the sublime. Without them, our innate sanctity can be lost. A sanctified people is comprised of individuals and families of outstanding spiritual and moral worth. To maintain this status requires ongoing diligence. The ongoing threat to our collective spiritual identities is all too present and real. At the outset, G-d foresaw this. The Torah tells us proactively to respect G-d’s Divinely prescribed boundaries and to refrain from Divinely proscribed relations.

All humanity must act above its base instincts to produce a better version of the world we all share. Observing and safeguarding the boundaries G-d gave us enables everyone to protect what we value most: our personal space and inner worth. Following G-d’s commandments refines and elevates us to manifest outwardly the Divine image in which we were created. That is sanctity in action. Its relevance is enduring and its opportunities are boundless.

EXILE IS NOT PERMANENT

AVROHOM YAAKOV

Rounding out the admonition about illicit relationships, the Torah concludes “...so that the land not expel you when you defile it as it expelled the nations before you.” (18:28)

Torah Temimah cites the Talmud (Shabbos 33a) that uses this statement to prove that immoral relationships lead to exile.

Rashi explains from the Midrash (Sifra, 12:14) that “...this may be compared to the case of a prince (i. e. a sensitive, refined person) to whom one gives a disgusting thing to eat which he cannot retain on his stomach but vomits it out. Thus, the Land of Israel is unable to retain sinners on its soil.”

If that is the case, why indeed are the Jews the only people that have successfully settled the Land of Israel from ancient times. Our people have not always been on their best behaviour and should have shared the same fate as the earlier nations and even later peoples who were forced out or left?

The Dubna Magid answers via a parable.

A family took in foster children. After a while both the flesh and blood children and those being fostered misbehaved. The foster children were asked to leave. The biological children stayed – the connection with their parents was not breakable by the way the children acted.

The other nations living in Eretz Yisrael are like foster children. Mess up and they are evicted. Jews are like the biological children. The bond is too strong to be broken by doing the wrong thing.

The Torah does not deny Jewish exile but teaches that it is disciplinary rather than terminal.

The contemporary success of Jews in Eretz Yisrael in comparison to the surrounding nations who are ostensibly corrupt dictatorships is proof of the bond between the land and the Jewish people.

Restraint is Power

PROFESSOR NAFTALI LOEWENTHAL (Chabad.org)

Have you ever felt like losing your temper but at the last moment you managed to restrain yourself? Inner battles of this kind are often associated with traffic wardens and similar representatives of officialdom. Sometimes they are found in encounters on the domestic front as well...

The Parshah of Kedoshim starts with the idea that we should be holy. What exactly does this mean? The commenter Rashi explains that the term "holy" implies self-restraint. There are many temptations in life. To be holy means to have the ability to control one's immediate impulses.

Ramban makes the point that this self-restraint may sometimes take a person to a point beyond the simple letter of the law. Jewish law permits a person to eat kosher food: but should one be an out-and-out glutton? According to this view, even if the food is as kosher as could be, restraint is power; it shows that one is truly free as an individual, rather than just being just a slave of one's appetite.

Do you remember the story of Yaakov and Esav and the plate of lentils? One way of understanding that story is that Esav was ready to sell his birthright, the most precious thing in his life, for a plate of food. One response might

be: "How pathetic!" Others might feel sympathy with someone who is sometimes a slave to his senses. They might say that after all, this is our human situation. Nonetheless, many people would expect a person to aspire to be master of his or her own being: in control. A human being, yes. An animal — no.

Much of the Parshah is devoted to giving guidelines about this kind of self-mastery, in a number of different areas of life. Central is the theme of personal relationships. The keynote to these is the famous teaching "Love your neighbor as yourself" (19:18). Rabbi Akiva said that this is the great principle of the Torah; it relates to all other aspects of Jewish thought. The Parshah also instructs us not to take revenge, nor even to bear a grudge. This certainly needs self-control: in our actions, our words and even our thoughts.

Imagine such a person! Does he or she actually exist?

We can imagine a very simple, naive or even inspired kind of person, who never sees bad in anyone. Or we can imagine a person of power, who has acquired genuine inner self-mastery.

What is power? For a long time people thought that it means mastery over others. Now we realize, it is mastery over oneself.

Daily life presents us with many instances of the personal battles described in our Parshah: in relationships with our parents, in business dealing, in questions about giving charity, in the borders between men and women, and also regarding our behavior when we are genuinely in power over others, as judges. Thus the portion tells us to be fair in judgment to both rich and poor.

The portion presents the challenge of the power of restraint, building a world of goodness for the future, when the whole world will be filled with holiness.

Finding Time

RABBI LAZER GURKOW (Chabad.org)

Ever heard the quote “The more I learn about people, the more I like my dog”? It may not be the nicest thing to say, but the thought is all too common. Let’s face it, not all people are pleasant. Some people leave us wondering if we should continue making time for them or focus on things we enjoy.

The Torah (19:2) tells us to be holy, as G-d is holy.¹ Our sages (Tosafos Kiddushin 2b) explained that to be holy means to be separated.² But separate from what? Does the Torah want us to become recluses, separated from all annoying acquaintances and time-consuming distractions, or does the Torah want us to distance ourselves from our own feelings of annoyance that are rooted in selfishness?

The answer (from Rashi) can be found in the way the Torah introduces this injunction. G-d instructs Moshe to convey this directive to all the children of Israel—and our sages infer that it was to be delivered in the presence of the entire nation, men, women and children.

It would be ironic if Moshe were told to gather the nation just to tell them to disperse and separate themselves from each other. The gathering implies that G-d wants his children to integrate and interact with each other and with the world. Still, He doesn’t want us to become too invested in the whims of society, too caught up in meaningless folly. We must be holy, as G-d is holy—He is intimately involved in the workings of the world, but at the same time remains above it. And so must we be in the world, but not of the world.⁴

FINDING TIME

Reb Abba Ginzburg, a wealthy chassid from Minsk, complained to his Rebbe, Reb Shmuel, the fourth Rebbe of Lubavitch, that his vast business concerns left him with little time or headspace to pray properly and study Torah.

The Rebbe replied, ”Abba, you are a smart man. Is this the proper way to thank G-d for giving you the trials of the wealthy, who worry about growing richer, instead of the trials of the poor, who worry about putting bread on the table?”

Reb Abba left Rebbe’s room a broken man. Here he was, the wealthy owner of banks, real estate, factories and forests, and what did it all amount to if he couldn’t even appreciate the gift? He realized at once that if he could be so ungrateful, he was far from wealthy. In character, he was terribly poor. He, a man of flesh and blood, who was here today and would be gone tomorrow, couldn’t find time to thank the Creator and study His Torah!

Several days later, Reb Abba shared with the Rebbe that he had decided to dissolve his business, hire a teacher and devote himself to Torah study. To atone for his past ingratitude, he would leave half his wealth to charity in his will.

The Rebbe agreed with only part of his plan. Hiring a teacher and studying Torah every day was a great idea. Giving half his wealth to charity was also a good idea. But the Rebbe disagreed with the other two parts of the plan. “Don’t wait till after you die to give your money to charity,” the Rebbe advised. “Enjoy your mitzvah while you are still alive. And don’t throw away

your business.”

Reb Abba argued that if he should resume his business, he would revert to his old ways. He wouldn't find time to pray properly and would be too distracted to study Torah. The Rebbe replied, “There will be plenty of time. The time you spend with your business partners in idle chatter unrelated to actual business can be devoted to Torah and prayer.”

Reb Abba returned to Minsk and began to follow the Rebbe's advice. He cut back on the idle chatter and long business lunches and found plenty of time for Torah. Several months later, Reb Abba brought half his wealth to the Rebbe, who distributed it to charity on his behalf. (Igros Kodesh Rayatz, vol. 8, pg. 5)

SEPARATE, NOT SEPARATED

There is no need to separate ourselves from this world to be close to G-d. You find that you are too engrossed in gossip or deceit? Don't throw away your business or reject your friends. Just control your impulses. You find that you have no energy or time to attend minyan (prayer services) in the morning? Cut out the late-night television and get to bed early. You find that you are too distracted to study Torah? Utilize the time that you otherwise waste.

These days, you can download the entire Torah to a smartphone. When you're on line at the supermarket, in the waiting room before an appointment or in transit on the plane, you can pull out the phone and study Torah. You can listen to Torah lectures while driving. Finding time is no longer a challenge. Today, it is just an excuse.

You can be in the world and not of the world—close to people and G-d at the same time. If you feel that people are pulling you away from G-d, look inside. Are you blaming these friendships for your own resistance to Torah learning? What could you do to bring more Torah into your relationships? Our solutions are rarely other-based. They are almost always self-based.

The only things that separate us from G-d are our choices. We can choose to distance ourselves from G-d, but the Torah instructs us to choose differently. G-d focuses on our needs. It is only fitting and proper that we do the same in return.

Honorable Mentshen

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY (Torah.org)

This week the Torah tells us about loving every Jew. It adds a special verse exhorting us to be especially sensitive to a special type of Jew the convert. “When a proselyte dwells among you in your land, do not taunt him. The proselyte who dwells with you shall be like a native among you, and you shall love him like yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt — I am Hashem, your G-d” (19:33-34)

A person who converts has the status of a Jew. He is a full-fledged member of the community and every social, moral and ethical tenet applies to him. Though he may be exempt from particular laws concerning “kahal” (which would have implications in marital law), he is otherwise as equal as any Jew. And that's why this verse troubles me. After all, if the convert is a Jew, why do we need a special command telling us not to inflict any discomfort upon him? Hadn't the Torah told us in verse 18, “Love your neighbor as yourself?” Why implore born-Jews to be nice to the newcomers through a series of commands that seem to use a moral approach: “You were once a stranger, so you know how it feels?” A convert is a Jew. And a Jew is a Jew is a Jew! All rules apply!

When my grandfather Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, was dean of Mesivta Torah Voda'ath back in the 1950s, he developed a professional relationship with a psychotherapist who worked with some of the students. The doctor would often call Rabbi Kamenetzky to discuss his treatment of some of the students under his care. They also would have discussions on psychology and education. The doctor was a student of the famed psychotherapist, Dr. Sigmund Freud, and despite Freud's attitude toward religion, this particular doctor was always respectful and never attributed any of the students' problems to observance or religious commitment.

Years later, when Rav Yaakov was informed that the doctor had passed away, he felt it incumbent to attend his funeral. He assumed it would not be the type of service he was used to, and even understood that he, a frocked and bearded sage, would appear out of place among a medical community of his distinguished colleagues, assimilated German and Austrian psychotherapists and mental health professionals. However, Rav Yaakov's gratitude overruled his hesitation.

When entering the Riverside Chapel, Rav Yaakov was shocked to see that a distinguished Rav, a friend of his, was performing the funeral and that scores of Torah observant Jews were participating. After the service which was done in total compliance with halacha, Rav Yaakov approached his friend who had officiated.

How do you know the doctor? What connection do you have with him? “What do you mean,” answered the Rav. “Of course I knew him. The doctor davened in my shul three times a day!”

My grandfather had never discussed religion with the man, he just respected

him for his professionalism and abilities.

The Torah tells us that even though there is a universal command to love every Jew as yourself, an additional concept applies specifically to a convert. We must be kind to him as part of the overall moral obligation of a nation that also endured the trauma of being strangers. In addition to loving Jews as their inherent birthright, it is also imperative to display love to them when our moral obligation demands it. The Torah is teaching us not only to act with affection as born Jews but as honorable *mentshen*.

Save the Planet

RABBI JARED VIDERS (Aish.com)

"You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people; you shall love your fellow as yourself - I am Hashem." (19:18)

Rashi: "Rabbi Akiva said, "This is the great rule of the Torah."

THERE IS SUPPORT AMONGST our Sages that the command to "love your fellow as yourself" encompasses the entire Torah, all its dictates, mores and aspirations for the Jewish People and the human race at-large. Fine. Certainly sounds noble. Easily quotable. Frame it. Hang it in your office and we're good to go. Who could argue with "love your fellow?"

Rav Elchonon Wasserman zt'l, however, raised one point of contention. If you want to posit that the Torah's guidelines and commands regarding interpersonal relationships all fall within the ambit of "love your fellow," that is readily understandable. Giving tzedakah. Offering an interest-free loan. Hosting a guest. Returning a lost object and paying an employee in a timely fashion are all surely manifestations of someone interested in "loving his or her fellow." But that's only half the story.

What about hanging a mezuzah? Putting on tefillin? Shaking a lulav? What does my keeping Shabbos have to do with loving my neighbor? Where in the laws of keeping kosher do we find any echo whatsoever of "loving anyone" (other than the kosher butcher)?

Rav Elchonon responds along the following lines. Our performance of mitzvot creates a pipeline of blessing between G-d and our world. The more mitzvahs that are done, the more blessing - be it health, peace, prosperity, whatever the case may be - is showered upon the world. On the flip-side of the equation, when one transgresses the laws of the Torah and fails to adhere to its expectations, we jeopardize that pipeline and diminish the flow of goodness to the world.

From here stems the notion that a Jew can put on tefillin in Orlando and its positive ripple effects can be felt in London where a Jew out of work finally finds gainful employment. The keeping of Shabbos in L.A. can provide the spiritual 'tremors' that will bring a couple together beneath a chuppah in Johannesburg.

AT THE CLOSE OF A LONG day in the beis medrash (study hall), the desks were piled high with books and books, tomes and tractates and commentaries, that were pored over throughout the day. Towards evening someone entered and remarked about the apparent state of disarray, to which one of the Rabbis "in-charge" responded matter-of-factly, "Well what do you expect, we were curing diseases in here today."

One notion that seemingly every Jew is aware of teaches us that "one who saves a Jewish life is as if he saved the whole world." We often ponder that statement and start imagining how that might materialize - diving into a pool to save someone from drowning, bravely rescuing souls from a house ablaze, etc. Rarely, though do we have the breadth or scope to even envision saving the whole planet (except those who grew up watching Superman battle it out with arch enemy Lex Luther).

Along these lines, we find the Rambam (Laws of Teshuvah, 3:4) writes: "Accordingly, throughout the entire year, a person should always look at himself as equally balanced between merit and transgression and the world as equally balanced between merit and transgression...if he performs one mitzvah, he tips his balance and that of the entire world to the side of merit and brings deliverance and salvation to himself and others. This is implied by [the verse]] "A righteous man is the foundation of the world," i.e., he who acted righteously, tipped the balance of the entire world to merit and saved it." Imagine that. Saving the world. And how did you manage to do so? By leaping tall buildings in a single bound? Nope, by saying Shema. By running faster than a speeding bullet? No sir. Rather, by making Kiddush.

In this context, we can readily understand how the mitzvah of "love your fellow as yourself" does indeed encompass the entire Torah - from the precepts of justice and fairness that govern our inter-personal and societal interactions to the more esoteric notions of sha'atnez and tefillin that seemingly have no immediate bearing or impact on the world at-large.

Quite the contrary, every ounce of effort you exert in the fulfillment of G-d's Torah will undoubtedly result in positive repercussions on a global-scale - mouths will be fed, illnesses will be cured, lives will be enriched. The precise correlation remains way above our comprehension but our faith remains unshaken - the mitzvahs are our venue to bring goodness to the world at-large.

Egyptian Business

RABBI JAY KELMAN (TorahinMotion.org)

Why were we taken out of Egypt?

Concepts such as freedom, justice, equality, and the recognition of Divine Providence are the themes of the exodus, ideas that the Jewish people are mandated to live by and demonstrate to the world around us. Parshat Acharei Mot (see Vayikra 18:3) teaches that a sexual ethic based on holiness was one of the ways to differentiate Jewish and Egyptian society. And Rashi identifies the opening call of our parsha, Kedoshim tehiyu, as relating to sexual morality.

While I do not doubt that the above is true, the Torah's most direct reason for our removal from Egypt appears at the end of chapter 19. There, the Torah tells us to love strangers, because we were strangers in the land of Egypt. We are then told, "Do not falsify measurements, whether in length, weight or volume. You must have an honest balance, honest weights, honest dry measure and an honest liquid measure. I am the Lord who took you out of Egypt" (19:35-36). Rashi, with three simple but profound words, spells out the clear implication of the Torah's words: al m'nat ken, for this purpose. The reason G-d took us out of Egypt was to enable us to have honest balances, honest weights, honest dry measures and honest liquid measures. Matzah, the seder, and getting rid of chametz are not the key ways to commemorate the exodus. After all, they last only seven (or eight) days, and are apparently of secondary importance. Rather, we celebrate the exodus in a much more significant manner; we rid ourselves and our homes of unfair and shady business practices. Thus, the first of the Ten Commandments—"I am the Lord your G-d, who took you from the Land of Egypt"—means, first and foremost, that as free people we are not to economically oppress others.

The exodus from Egypt is the defining moment of Jewish history, in many ways even more so than Divine Revelation at Sinai. We are commanded to remember it each and every day (and night), and it forms the basis of so many of our mitzvot, from Shabbat and the holidays to shema, tefillin and mezuzah. Unfortunately, in commemorating the exodus, it is often the ritual side of Judaism on which we tend to focus. Somehow, modern man and many a Jew view money and economics as separate from the religious experience. Working, making a living - surely these are not also religious duties, we tell ourselves. These mundane aspects of life can even be antithetical to religion, G-dliness and spiritual growth; a necessary component of life, but completely divorced from religious observance. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Judaism sees work as religiously meaningful and Divinely mandated. Perhaps no less important than "resting" on the seventh day is the imperative "six days you shall work". Not only does the Torah have over 120 mitzvot dealing with the economic sphere, it is specifically in this area that we have the most opportunities to create a Kiddush Hashem, as we interact with people from all walks of life. The way we talk to our co-workers or competitors, the way we advertise, how we hire and fire, how much we charge, our compliance with government regulations, when we pay our bills, are all potential ways to grow closer to G-d as we put Judaism into practice where it really counts. It is the ultimate remembrance of the exodus.

The enslavement in Egypt began with unfair taxes, hard labour and backbreaking work, practices that Jewish law forbids. The clarion call of the Torah to a life of holiness demands that our monetary practices be the manifestation of freedom, justice, equality and above all, honesty. After all, it is for this reason that we were taken out of Egypt.

Eulogies for the Living

RABBI LEVI AVTZON (Chabad.org)

The funeral was in progress and the rabbi was talking at length about the good traits of the deceased. "What an honest man, what a loving husband, and a kind father. So generous, so loving, so kind..."

The widow leans over and whispers to one of her children, "Go up there and take a look in the coffin. See if that's your dad."

IT SEEMS THERE'S ALWAYS so much good to say about those who have departed - their accomplishments and good deeds, wisdom and grace, generosity and unconditional love.

But wasn't the deceased, like all others, a human being, a creature presented with challenges who likely made mistakes? Did you really think that he was so perfect yesterday? What of his failures and bad habits, his ego and lusts? What of the times he lost his temper?

Of this, you don't hear a word.

So you ask: Has this human being become an angel upon leaving this physical world?

There is a famous jest regarding the sequence of weekly Torah portions we are currently reading: Acharei Mot ("after the death"), Kedoshim ("holy ones"), and Emor ("say"). When read as a single sentence, it would roughly translate as: "After the death, say that he was holy."

Are we shutting our lips because we are frightened to start up with the spirits of the deceased, lest they visit in the middle of the night and whip us with sticks of fire?

I don't think so. It isn't the departed individual who changes; we change.

During the person's lifetime, we get lost in the details. But when death strikes, we have the chance to study the kaleidoscope, the bigger picture, with utmost clarity. And at that point, we discover - a bit too late - the beautiful life led by the deceased.

So, here is the question: Do people need to die in order for us to appreciate them? Do we, G-d forbid, need to lose someone before we can truly find him? Must "beloved husband, father and brother" be a postmortem adage, or can we announce it throughout his lifetime as well?

Let us make up while our family member is living, and not with their tombstone.

Let us forgive people, not spirits. Let's see the good in each other now.

News & Views

A New Axis of Alliance

FERN SIDMAN (TJVNews.com 18-4-26)

In a moment laden with symbolism, strategic calculation, and unmistakable personal rapport, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Argentine President Javier Milei stood together in Jerusalem on Sunday to inaugurate what may well prove to be one of the most consequential diplomatic initiatives of the decade. As reported on Sunday by Belaaz.com, the two leaders formally signed the "Isaac Accords," a sweeping framework designed to recalibrate Israel's engagement with Latin America and to establish a durable architecture of cooperation spanning economics, security, and technological innovation.

The ceremony, held in Jerusalem during Milei's fifth visit to the Israeli capital since assuming office, unfolded with a striking blend of gravitas and warmth. Observers noted the unusually intimate tone between the two leaders, whose embrace upon arrival signaled more than ceremonial courtesy. Netanyahu, ever attuned to rhetorical flourish, remarked upon the linguistic affinity between "Javier" and the Hebrew word "chaver," meaning friend—an anecdote that, while lighthearted, encapsulated the deeper political affinity underpinning the moment. Even their attire—coordinated in variations of blue and white—served as a subtle visual metaphor for the convergence of national identities and shared aspirations.

Yet beneath these gestures lay a far more consequential development. The Isaac Accords, as detailed in the Belaaz.com report, are not merely a bilateral agreement but an ambitious, multi-nation framework modeled in part on the earlier Abraham Accords. Whereas those agreements normalized relations between Israel and several Arab states, the Isaac Accords seek to extend Israel's diplomatic and economic reach into Latin America—a region whose relationship with the Jewish state has, in recent years, grown increasingly complex and, in some cases, adversarial.

The initiative's first phase is poised to engage countries such as Uruguay, Panama, and Costa Rica, with collaborative ventures envisioned across a wide spectrum of sectors. Agriculture, water technology, cyber defense, energy development, financial systems, and healthcare innovation are all identified as pillars of this emerging partnership. According to the information provided in the Belaaz.com report, a New York-based nonprofit, American Friends of the Isaac Accords, is already preparing for a second wave of expansion that could bring Brazil, Colombia, Chile, and El Salvador into the fold—contingent upon evolving political conditions and sustained financial backing.

This expansive vision unfolds against a backdrop of shifting geopolitical currents. Since the events of October 7 and the subsequent regional upheaval, several Latin American nations have distanced themselves from Israel, with some even severing diplomatic ties. In this context, Argentina's emphatic alignment with Israel under Milei represents a striking countercurrent. As the Belaaz.com report underscored, Buenos Aires is positioning itself as a central pillar of a pro-Israel bloc in the Western Hemisphere—a role that carries both opportunity and risk in equal measure. The formal signing ceremony was preceded by a private meeting between Netanyahu and Milei, during which the contours of the agreement were refined. The event itself drew an array of senior officials from both governments, as well as international observers, including the United States ambassador to Israel. The ambassador characterized the accords as a moment of profound historical significance, suggesting that the initiative could reshape not only bilateral relations but also broader geopolitical alignments across multiple continents.

Netanyahu, in his remarks, placed the accords within a wider strategic framework. He alluded to ongoing tensions with Iran and emphasized that the current phase of conflict and diplomacy remains fluid and

unpredictable. His comments, as relayed by Belaaz.com, reflected a dual narrative: one of cautious optimism about the potential for expanded alliances, and another of sober recognition that the regional security environment remains volatile.

For his part, Milei articulated a foreign policy vision deeply rooted in Argentina's own historical experiences. He invoked the memory of the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires and the 1994 attack on the AMIA Jewish community center—events that Argentine judicial authorities have linked to Iranian involvement. These tragedies, Milei suggested, continue to inform Argentina's contemporary strategic posture and its alignment with Israel and the United States. In framing the Isaac Accords as an extension of this historical trajectory, he imbued the agreement with a moral as well as geopolitical dimension.

Among the most tangible outcomes of the summit was the announcement of a direct air route connecting Tel Aviv and Buenos Aires—the longest route in the history of Israel's national airline. This development, confirmed during the joint press conference and highlighted by Belaaz.com, is emblematic of the broader effort to translate diplomatic goodwill into concrete economic and cultural exchange. The route, expected to commence operations later this year, will be supported by governmental mechanisms designed to ensure its viability even amid ongoing regional uncertainties.

Israeli officials emphasized that this new connection would facilitate not only tourism but also business collaboration and technological exchange. Finance and transportation authorities framed the initiative as part of a larger strategy to integrate Israel more deeply into global markets at a time when international connectivity is both a logistical necessity and a strategic imperative.

Beyond aviation, the accords encompass a series of detailed agreements aimed at institutionalizing cooperation across key domains. Foreign ministers from both nations signed memoranda of understanding establishing frameworks for counterterrorism collaboration and artificial intelligence development. These agreements, as described by Belaaz.com, include provisions for joint training, intelligence sharing, research initiatives, and the creation of specialized working groups tasked with implementing and overseeing these efforts.

Particularly noteworthy is the emphasis on technological collaboration. The partnership in artificial intelligence reflects a recognition that future geopolitical influence will increasingly be shaped by mastery of advanced technologies. By aligning their capabilities in this field, Israel and Argentina aim to position themselves at the forefront of innovation while simultaneously addressing pressing societal challenges.

Economic ties are also set to deepen through the establishment of a substantial credit line designed to support Israeli businesses operating in Argentina. This financial mechanism is intended to lower barriers to entry and to encourage sustained investment, thereby reinforcing the economic foundations of the broader partnership.

The accords also carry significant symbolic weight. Netanyahu's announcement that Milei would be invited to light a torch at Israel's Independence Day ceremony—a privilege traditionally reserved for distinguished Israeli citizens—signals an unprecedented level of recognition and respect. As noted in the Belaaz.com report, this gesture underscores the exceptional nature of the relationship that has emerged between the two leaders and their respective nations.

Milei's frequent visits to Jerusalem further reinforce this narrative. In an era when diplomatic engagements are often constrained by competing priorities, his repeated presence in the Israeli capital speaks to a deliberate and sustained commitment. The concurrent opening of Argentina's embassy in Jerusalem adds yet another layer of significance, aligning Argentina with a small but notable group of countries that have taken similar steps.

For analysts, the Isaac Accords represent both continuity and innovation. They build upon the precedent established by earlier normalization agreements while simultaneously extending the concept into new geographical and political terrain. The choice of name itself—evoking the biblical figure Isaac—suggests a deliberate effort to frame the initiative within a broader historical and cultural context, linking past narratives to contemporary strategic objectives.

At the same time, the accords raise important questions about the future trajectory of international alliances. Will other Latin American nations follow Argentina's lead, or will regional divisions deepen? Can economic and technological cooperation overcome ideological differences, or will political shifts undermine the initiative's momentum? These uncertainties underscore the inherently dynamic nature of diplomacy in the modern era.

What is beyond dispute, however, is the significance of the moment itself. As Belaaz.com has consistently emphasized, the signing of the Isaac Accords marks a pivotal juncture in Israel's engagement with the Western

Hemisphere. It reflects a strategic recalibration driven by both necessity and opportunity, as well as a recognition that the contours of global influence are increasingly fluid.

In the final analysis, the accords are as much about vision as they are about policy. They represent an attempt to reimagine the possibilities of international cooperation in a world defined by complexity and uncertainty. Whether this vision will ultimately be realized remains to be seen. But for now, the image of Netanyahu and Milei standing together in Jerusalem—united by shared purpose and mutual conviction—offers a compelling testament to the enduring power of diplomacy to shape the course of history.

The Miracle of Jewish Independence Today

RABBI STEVEN BURG (Aish.com22-4-26)

The word "Zionism" has been weaponized, twisted, and deliberately stripped of its meaning.

Zionism is the belief that the Jewish people, like every other people on earth, have the right to self-determination in their ancestral homeland. That's it. Nothing more. It contains no hatred of Arabs, no contempt for Palestinians, no designs on the rights of anyone else. Zionism is the simple, uncontroversial idea that Jews deserve what every other nation takes for granted: a place to call home.

The Jewish people are among the most persecuted in human history. We did not arrive in Israel to oppress anyone. We arrived because the world spent two thousand years making clear that without a homeland of our own, we were always one demagogue away from disaster. The Holocaust did not happen in a vacuum. It happened because there was nowhere to run.

That is what Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel's Independence Day, is really about. It's about the end of a 2,000-year prayer finally being answered. Am Yisrael Chai. The Jewish people live, and now they live on their own terms.

Jewish independence does not come at the expense of any other people's dignity. It comes as the culmination of millennia of persecution, turning into deliverance. When G-d made a covenant with Abraham, He did not promise us land so that we could subjugate others. He promised us a place where we could be who we are, live by our values, and bring light to the world. Israel, at 78 years old, is doing exactly that. It is imperfect, embattled, and extraordinary, but more than anything, it is alive, and it is vibrant.

What we are seeing right now should shake every person out of complacency and into wonder.

When the United States and Israel struck together against Iran in a coordinated military operation, something shifted in the world. A regime that has spent decades financing terror, arming every proxy militia from Lebanon to Yemen, murdering its own citizens by the tens of thousands in the streets when they dared to protest, that regime faced a reckoning. Israel stood shoulder to shoulder with the greatest military power on earth to bring an end to an existential threat to democracy and freedom.

Since October 7th, the worst day in Jewish life since the Holocaust, something has been unfolding that defies conventional military logic. One by one, Israel's enemies have been severely diminished. Hamas leadership, the architects of that murderous day and who have been attacking Israel since the day they were founded, have been eliminated with surgical precision. Hezbollah, which once commanded over 150,000 rockets and was considered the most powerful non-state military force in the world, has been brought to its knees with the Lebanese government in conversations about making peace with Israel. The Iranian command structure that funded and directed these terrorist groups and others has been struck at its heart. The Assad regime in Syria, a declared enemy and aggressor to Israel since its creation, and which for decades served as Iran's corridor to Hezbollah, has fallen.

None of this was supposed to be possible. Military analysts around the world would have told you three years ago that eliminating Hezbollah was a generational project. That the Iranian axis was too deeply entrenched to dismantle. That Israel, surrounded by enemies, would continue to spend decades in a grinding war of attrition.

Instead, we are witnessing miracles.

I do not use that word lightly. I use it with the knowledge that the Jewish people have a long history of confusing luck with G-d's hand in history. What is happening right now is not luck. Missiles that should have killed thousands were intercepted. Operations that should have taken years happened in weeks, or even days. Enemies that seemed invincible crumbled.

G-d told Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse." We are watching that promise play out on the world stage in our lifetimes.

For Jews in the Diaspora, this Israel Independence Day carries a meaning that goes beyond Israeli patriotism. It is a reason antisemites think twice. It is a reason a Jewish student on a hostile campus, a Jewish employee facing

discrimination, a Jewish family in a neighborhood where hatred has reared its head, knows that there is somewhere in the world where Jewish sovereignty is non-negotiable.

Zionism gave us that. And everything that has happened since October 7th has reminded us, at enormous cost and with enormous pain, that the miracle is ongoing.

The men and women of the IDF, the families of the hostages who never stopped fighting, the rabbis and teachers and volunteers who kept Jewish life burning through the darkest year in recent memory, they are all part of the same story that began with Abraham, continued through the Exodus, and found its modern chapter being written since 1948.

On this Yom Ha'atzmaut, we do not celebrate because everything is perfect. We celebrate because we are here. We celebrate because we are not alone in this world. We celebrate because the Almighty, who has never abandoned His people, is making that fact clearly visible and impossible to ignore.

Europe's Jew-Hate with a Vengeance

NILS A. HAUG (GateStoneliInstitute.org 22-4-26)

On October 7, 2023, the moral corruption of Western politicians, journalists, radical feminists, and social commentators was exposed in all its fullness. On that morning, thousands of Hamas's jihadists invaded Israel and murdered some 1,200 people and wounded thousands more, with many victims being raped or tortured. Defenseless civilians were slaughtered, including elderly men and women, and babies in their cribs. Hamas terrorists kidnapped 251 others and dragged them to Gaza's terror tunnels as hostages; 85 of them did not survive.

Possibly motivated by Jew-hate cloaked in self-righteous neo-Marxist "social justice," many in the West who sympathize with Islamic terrorists were, within hours, trying to justify Hamas's atrocities by blaming Israel. The allegations against Israel were that it was denying supposed rights of an invented Palestinian people that "does not exist," as admitted by senior PLO official Zoheir Mohsen in 1977 in the Dutch daily newspaper Trouw. They nevertheless repeat spurious claims to the Jews' ancestral land, on which Jews have lived continuously for nearly 4,000 years, explicitly named "Judea," and to the failure by Israel to implement what – according to the Palestinians themselves – would be a "two-state solution" dedicated to taking whatever land they can get and using it as a base from which to conquer the rest.

Whatever the best political solution might be for the Palestinians, nothing can justify Hamas's October 7 atrocities, which then backfired into the deaths of many Palestinian civilians. Hamas's jihad that day seems to have been an attempt to start eliminating Israel, and instead may end up, thanks to US President Donald J. Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, eliminating Hamas and its patron, the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Much of the international media has inexplicably accused Israel of being responsible for deaths that were caused by Hamas's use of Gazan civilians as human shields. The irrationality of this evaluation by Islamist sympathizers might be explained as just the latest installment of the West's extensive romance with hating Jews. This hatred, even apart from its Islamic component, also is now directed against the state of Israel. It appears, therefore, that much of Europe and other nations have for decades remained fertile ground, albeit sometimes dormant, for a modern-day revival of orgastic anti-Semitism.

Columnist Melanie Phillips noted on March 12 that Jews now have the dubious honor of being defamed by both sides of the political aisle, currently framing their grievances once again with updated, anti-Jewish blood libels:

"There's been growing concern in America over the increasingly mainstream belief that Israel drags it into foreign wars, a belief given rocket fuel by the war against Iran.

This belief not only ignores demonstrable reality—the thousands of Americans who have been killed by Iranian-backed terrorists or militias for almost half a century; the accelerated progress by Tehran towards nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles that could reach the United States; and the Iranian regime's implacable goal of destroying America (the 'Great Satan') as well as Israel (the 'Little Satan').

"It also channels the odious image of war-mongering Jews straight out of the ancient antisemitism playbook. It's an image reflecting the belief embedded in Western culture of the demonic, cunning Jews acting covertly in their own interests to put others in danger.

"This belief was formerly confined to cranks and nut jobs on the fringes of society. No longer. Mainstreamed by the Tucker Carlson faction, it's cutting a swath across the ranks of conservatively minded, mainly young Americans.

"Last week, Brian McGinnis, a veteran U.S. Marine, burst into a hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee in Washington, D.C., and yelled: 'America does not want to send its sons and daughters to war for Israel!'"

As Jews increasingly are vilified and attacked around the world, it forces an analogy with similar events that occurred more than 80 years ago. Germany's persecution of Jews burst into overt mass violence the night of November 9, 1938 with Kristallnacht when Hitler's Nazis murdered nearly 100 Jews, destroyed thousands of synagogues and Jewish-owned businesses, and sent 30,000 Jews to concentration camps.

The current situation is not that much different – only a question of degree – to the events that preceded the Shoah (Holocaust), during Germany's Third Reich. Countless examples exist, but consider just the atrocities committed on October 7, 2023 at Kibbutz Be'eri and also recent attacks such as the pogrom in Amsterdam and the jihadist murders in Sydney. Author Jonathan Tobin remarked that the Amsterdam pogrom was the "the inevitable consequence of a sinister red-green anti-Zionist alliance of leftists and Islamists in Europe."

Similarly, there seems little difference between the endemic propaganda of hatred against Jews and Israel spouting today from the microphones of the red-green alliance, with their multitudes of supporters, and the pernicious program created by Nazi Germany's Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels, who successfully cultivated Jew-hate in the Third Reich. Then and now, both cohorts have substantially succeeded in deploying the populace's anger against Jews.

In the instance of Goebbels, his venom eventually led not only to the mass slaughter of Jews but also to many of those regarded by the Nazis as "subhuman" (Untermensch). Insofar as the red-green alliance is concerned, the cancellation of Jewish academics, the boycott of Jewish artists, authors and businesses, and attacks on Jews, their schools and their places of worship, appear as renewed attempts to erase the Jewish presence and breathtaking accomplishments from Western society.

In 1942, David Ben-Gurion, Israel's future first prime minister, stated:

[I]f the world war ends... the Jews will have nowhere to return. Not a memory will remain of their homes, shops, and property."

Professor Paul Socken wrote last month:

"The philosopher Emil Fackenheim, survivor of the Holocaust, said that there are three stages of antisemitism: You cannot live among us as Jews; You cannot live among us; You cannot live. It's the gradual, insidious, filthy slime of hostility that slowly overtakes nations in their moral amnesia and blames 'those Jews.'"

In various forms and to various degrees, this process is now seen in the West, and increasingly in the US (such as here, here and here.)

Insofar as the Islamist agenda of killing Jews (and then Christians) is concerned, one recalls Amin al-Husseini, who served as the British-appointed Grand Mufti of Jerusalem from 1921 to 1937. Husseini met with Adolf Hitler in Berlin in November 1942, with the purpose of enlisting Germany's help in eliminating Jews from the Holy Land.

"The Führer confirmed [to Husseini] that the 'struggle against a Jewish homeland in Palestine' would be part of the struggle against the Jews. Hitler stated that: he would 'continue the struggle until the complete destruction of Jewish-Communist European empire'; and when the German army was in proximity to the Arab world, Germany would issue 'an assurance to the Arab world' that 'the hour of liberation was at hand.' It would then be al-Husayni's 'responsibility to unleash the Arab action that he has secretly prepared....' and that the only German 'goal at that time would be the annihilation of Jewry living in Arab space under the protection of British power.'"

That era's alliance of Islamists and Germany's National Socialists evokes a comparison to today's red-green coalition of a leftist-elite lobby and their Islamist partners.

It is evident that the West's leaders, by and large, have forgotten, never knew, or choose to ignore the horrific events of the Nazi-era – events which directly led to the shooting, gassing and starving to death of some six million Jews. The combination of mass propaganda, false or compliant reporting by journalists, and a gullible populace inclined – as many still are – to believe the worst of allegations against Jews led to widespread participation in, or complacency in the face of, strategically planned attacks on Jewish communities. The result was the Holocaust. There is invariably a grim consequence to constant vilification of minorities; the current slandering of Jews is no exception.

Despite Germany's shameful historic treatment of Jews, many people today seem indifferent to those historic atrocities. In mid-April 2026, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz had the callousness, audacity, and insensitivity to criticize Prime Minister Netanyahu for what Merz alleged to be Israel's "de facto annexation of the West Bank" – Israel's rightful heartland of Judea and Samaria. Israel's Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, a resident of Samaria himself, replied:

"On the eve of Holocaust Remembrance Day, the German Chancellor should bow his head and apologize a thousand times on behalf of Germany, rather than daring to preach morality to us on how to conduct ourselves against

the Nazis of our generation—who murdered, raped, slaughtered, and burned women, the elderly, and children in the most horrific massacre perpetrated against the Jewish people since the terrible Holocaust. We will not accept instructions from hypocritical leaders in Europe, a continent that is once again losing its conscience and its ability to distinguish between good and evil.

"Mr. Chancellor, The days when Germans dictated to Jews where they were permitted or forbidden to live are over and shall not return. You will not force us into ghettos again, certainly not in our own land."

"A People who no longer remembers," the Russian dissident and author Alexander Solzhenitsyn stated in 1976, "has lost its history and its soul." At Harvard, he remarked that the "striking feature of the modern West was a 'decline in courage,'" and, on another occasion:

"Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart—and through all human hearts."

Clearly, the animus against Jews has never dissipated; once again the danger has become acute.

Hope is to be found in the extraordinary resilience of the Jewish people – a peaceful, vibrant, productive and creative people who base their core identity on the Torah, from which flow the principles of Judeo-Christian morality. The ethical underlay of Western civilization is founded upon such precepts.

Despite facing continual expulsions, persecution, and pogroms in foreign lands, the Jewish people endure somehow. Since the establishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948, Jews have their own homeland back at last. Primarily aliens in other lands for centuries, they longed for return to Jerusalem, their capital. For two thousand years, their prayer every year at Passover has been "Next year in Jerusalem."

They never lost hope; that hope was rewarded in 1948. Although facing enemies who resent them and the return to their ancestral land, they have overcome all threats to their existence – and thrived. "Jews," said David Ben-Gurion, "are not sheep to be slaughtered, but a people who can hit back—as Jews did in the War of Independence." Their enemies are by now fully aware of this ability. The Jews are no longer helpless, no longer to be abused.

Even before they were rooted back into their promised land, their sanctuary, the gifted Jewish people, including Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud and Jonas Salk, among many others, have shown the world what they can do with freedom and opportunity. They transformed, in Israel, a tiny land of sand dunes, deserts and malarial swamps, into a prosperous, exciting, enormously successful technologically-advanced nation, with a military among the world's most powerful. Hugely, if grudgingly, respected but also, in some quarters, deeply resented and envied for their success, Israel's citizens are major innovators in fields including medicine, science, technology, agriculture, water conservation and desalination. It is no accident that the small number of Jews – just 0.2% of the world's population – constitute 22% of Nobel Prize winners: they are a brilliant people, to whom the world is deeply indebted.

Israel may stand pretty much alone against the haters of this world. Depending on the political climate at the time, it can be expected that international leaders will remain absent, even silent, for the most part when Israel's enemies once again attack it – as they surely will. As historic events reveal, Israel and Jewry at large cannot fully rely for protection on the West. "What have you done to us, you freedom-loving peoples, you guardians of justice, defenders of the high principles of democracy and of the brotherhood of man?" asked Ben-Gurion in 1944, against the West's apathy and silence during the Holocaust.

"What have you allowed to be perpetrated against a defenceless people while you stood aside and let it bleed to death, without offering help or succour, without calling on the fiends to stop, in the language of retribution which alone they would understand?"

"Many things will be forgiven," observed Israel's Prime Minister Golda Meir in 1973. "but one thing will not—weakness. The moment we are marked as weak—it is over."

Did not the Hebrew prophet Isaiah predict such an outcome 2,700 years ago?

No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and this is their vindication from me, declares the Lord.

Isaiah's prophecy has proven true and trustworthy for nearly three millennia. Israel and the Jewish people thrive – and will continue to thrive.

Selective Outrage: When Hezbollah Attacks

MAJID RAFIZADEH (GateStonelInstitute.org 18-4-26)

Once again, large segments of the international community, from the United Nations to key European governments, appear either unwilling or unable to confront the basic and uncomfortable reality that the latest

escalation in hostilities did not begin with Israel. It began with Hezbollah.

This silence — or at best, selective acknowledgment — when, without provocation, rockets were launched into Israel, stands in blazing contrast to the instant outrage when Israel responds. That imbalance is not just dishonest; it distorts the foundation of how conflicts like this are understood.

One must begin with the simple but critical fact that there was no active, large-scale conflict between Israel and Hezbollah at the time the current escalation began. Israel was, however, facing direct threats and attacks in a broader confrontation with Iran. It was precisely then — when Israel was under pressure — that Hezbollah chose to act. The timing reflects a calculated decision to open a second front against Israel with the clear intention of intensifying the strain on its defenses.

What would any other country do if it were under attack by an enemy, and suddenly faced missile barrages into its towns and cities? Would it just stare at the sky and watch?

Presumably no state — whether in Europe, Asia, or the Americas — would tolerate such a situation. The seeming expectation that Israel, smaller than the state of New Jersey (roughly 22,000 sq. km), should absorb such attacks without a decisive response is not only unrealistic; it is fundamentally inconsistent with how sovereignty and self-defense are globally understood.

Hezbollah is not just some independent force acting in isolation. It is, by its own admission, founded by, intertwined with, and dependent on the Islamic Republic of Iran.

"Hezbollah arose in the wake of Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution," according to Middle East expert Hussain Abdul-Hussain, "as part of an effort to establish an Islamic state in a Lebanon fractured by warring militias."

Hezbollah's weapons, funding, and strategic direction are explicitly linked to Tehran. Such a relationship transforms Hezbollah's actions from spontaneous, isolated incidents into components of a broader regional strategy. When Hezbollah acts, it is not just a local terrorist group making tactical decisions — it is an extension of a regional power's geopolitical agenda.

When considering ceasefires or diplomatic arrangements – for instance, Iran accepting a ceasefire while Hezbollah continued its attacks – the contrast exposes that any ceasefire failing to restrain Iran's most powerful proxy remains incomplete. It allows the conflict to persist through indirect means, through the back door, while maintaining the only pretence of de-escalation. Such agreements are pretty much worthless.

Israel's response, therefore, must be understood within that broader context.

Israel found itself faced with ongoing rocket fire from Lebanon and the presence of a heavily armed group on its border – in contravention of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which had unanimously required of Lebanon:

"three principles – no foreign forces, no weapons for nongovernmental militias, and no independent authority separate from the central government – as vital to a lasting Lebanese peace. Underlying these principles was the recognition that while the flow of arms to terrorist groups like Hizballah is the most immediate threat to stability in Lebanon, the true key to long-term peace is an empowered and capable central government in Beirut."

None of this, of course, took place. Instead, Hezbollah basically seized control of Lebanon, proceeding to cement domination over the military and the media, as well as having veto power over Lebanon's cabinet. Hezbollah positioned itself along Lebanon's short, 80 km border with Israel, and deployed approximately 150,000 rockets and missiles, aimed at Israel's towns and cities.

Israel, after being attacked, unsurprisingly acted to neutralize the threat. Critics sometimes focus on the scale of Israeli operations, but scale alone is not the only valid metric on which to base judgment. The relevant question is: Does a state have the right to defend itself against an armed group attacking it and openly seeking its elimination? By any conventional standard of international relations, the answer is yes.

Hezbollah's operational tactics, like those of Hamas and other terrorist groups, is to embed its military infrastructure within civilian areas — hiding weapons, command centers and operational assets in densely populated neighborhoods. This positioning deliberately creates a tragic and intended dilemma. With Hezbollah's military targets located in homes, hospitals and schools within civilian population centers, any efforts to neutralize them carry the tragic possibility of unavoidably harming civilians. It is a strategy deliberately designed to constrain Israel's responses and generate international backlash against it.

The use of military infrastructure within a civilian population violates international humanitarian law and constitutes a war crime when it intentionally places civilians at risk. Responsibility for these war crimes lies

squarely with Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza, which deliberately orchestrated them. Any resulting casualties cannot be judged outside this context.

Global reaction, however, disregarding who is actually responsible for these war crimes, as planned, follows a predictable and troubling pattern. Initial acts of aggression by Hezbollah of Hamas receive no attention or are framed ambiguously. When Israel responds, however, the narrative shifts dramatically and becomes a declaration of "It all started when he hit me back!" This call is followed by sympathy for the false grievance, widespread condemnation of Israel, which was attacked, and self-righteous, misplaced calls for its restraint. It is a pattern that reverses cause and effect, and focuses instead on the response while downplaying — or ignoring — the aggression. Such an approach does not contribute to peace; it slyly perpetuates getting the facts wrong. Possibly there are those who do not want the outcome of the conflict to align with the facts.

For nearly 80 years, tiny Israel has faced open and persistent threats to its existence from most of the 57 members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, working with the support of Russia and much of Europe. Recent attacks from Lebanon – opening a second front on Israel's north in addition to Hamas's on its south – is a condition that no country could tolerate. The expectation that Israel should allow itself to be defeated is not simply unrealistic, it is detached from the norms applied to all other nations. In 2024, Hezbollah violated its ceasefire with Israel and also attacked in 2025 at Iran's behest. Israel's response comports with what any sovereign state would do when confronted with attacks on its territory and civilian population.

If there is to be any meaningful discussion about stability in the Middle East, it needs to begin with an honest acknowledgment of these realities. Otherwise, international reactions will continue to mischaracterize the problem by criticizing responses while overlooking their causes – and contributing to the conflict rather than to its resolution.

The Soldier, an Old Woman and the Israeli Flag

RUCHAMA FEUERMAN (Aish.com)

The Six Day War had ended. The generals assembled the commanders and foot soldiers for a customary review and analysis of the battle. After the military questions had been asked, and the investigative committee was about to disperse, a commanding officer pointed to one of the soldiers. "Wait a minute. I have a question for you. Yes, you, the soldier who put up the flag on the Temple Mount."

The soldier nodded.

"Where did you get an Israeli flag, and why did you put it up?"

The soldier spread out his hands and smiled, a gesture that indicated that here was more than just a one sentence response. He told the following story:

The night before the Old City was liberated, a contingent of soldiers fighting near the Old City took cover in a shelter in a Jerusalem neighborhood. Hordes of children, mothers, old men and women packed inside the bunker alongside the soldiers. People looked frightened and bereft. The government had imposed a news black-out so that the Arab countries wouldn't be able to figure out their positions. And the news – originating from Jordan, Egypt and Syria – was enough to induce hysteria: calls from Saudi King Faisal for the total elimination of Israel, calls from every Arab country to push the fledgling country into the sea.

Things looked so bad, Israelis famously converted public parks into mass graves, in preparation for the expected casualties. (Israel's Chief of Staff, Yitzchak Rabin, had even suffered a nervous breakdown.)

As the soldier sat there in the bunker, hopeless and uncertain, he saw an old woman slowly make her way over to him. "Excuse me," she said, standing at his side. She held a satchel in her arms.

He lifted his eyes. "Yes, Doda. Tell me, what is it?"

"Tomorrow you'll go to the Old City and you'll go to the Kotel."

He shook his head at the absurdity. He said, "No, we won't." There were no army plans to liberate the Old City. First, they were fighting just to hold their positions. Also, overtaking the Old City would entail hand-to-hand combat which was greatly feared: Many people would die. Moreover, any bombardment of the Old City might demolish even more of the holy sites than had already been destroyed by the Jordanians. He tried to explain all of this.

The old woman looked at him, steady-eyed. "No, you will go," she said, not as if she were trying to convince him, but as if relaying simple facts.

He shrugged. An old woman's delusions. He wasn't going to argue with her. "When you go, please take this flag, and when you get to the Temple Mount, I want you to hang it up there."

Before he turned away, she said, "I have a favor to ask you." She reached into her satchel and took out an Israeli flag. From the way she touched it, it was clear the flag had some personal meaning for her. Had she made it? Perhaps it had been draped over a loved one's grave? But what was she

now saying? "When you go, please take this flag, and when you get to the Temple Mount, I want you to hang it up there." She held out the flag.

The soldier repeated, "We're not going into the Old City."

"You're going," she said. Again, she held out her arm.

A thought struck him. "I can't take it," he told her. "It's against army regulations."

"It'll be all right. Just take it."

"I'll get in trouble. You're only allowed to carry a few specified items."

Please," she said hoarsely. "Do me this favor."

He shrugged again. Why was he arguing with this old woman? Let him take the flag, let him make an old woman feel good. He could always get rid of it later.

The next day, the Israeli army, contrary to everyone's expectations, took the Old City. Sure enough, the soldier's unit ended up at the Temple Mount. As he and the other soldiers came close to the Western Wall, he suddenly remembered the flag and the old woman's words. Yes, he would do it, he would! He enlisted two buddies, and together they draped the flag over the grating on the upper left most side of the Kotel, and there they hoisted and hung the Israel flag.

The commanding officer conducting the investigation said to the soldier, "And what were you thinking when you put up that flag?"

The soldier said, "I was thinking that this was the answer to 2,000 years of Jewish suffering."

And so ends the story of the soldier, our hero.

But there's an unsung hero, too. What about the old woman who supplied the flag? One wishes the investigating officers had tracked her down. What did she have in mind as she entered a shelter with an Israeli flag in her satchel? And who was she, anyway? The only identifying feature is that she was old and carried a bag. But her advanced age already tells us plenty: that she knew something about Jewish history, probably having personally lived through it...World War I, Arab attacks, the Holocaust, the War of Independence, 1956. What hadn't she seen?

There, in Israel's darkest moment, outnumbered and surrounded by enemies, terrified that the next morning there will be no Israel, the old woman sees what no one else can see, what no one else is capable of conceiving. She insists on her vision, she practically browbeats the soldier into carrying out her plan. We'll never know how she knew, only that, like many Jewish women before her – the Matriarchs, the midwives in Egypt, the righteous women in the desert – she just knew. There are two kinds of prophecy. One that predicts the future, and one that makes the future.

Kosher & Halacha Korner

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NOLAD — CHANGING FORMS ON SHABBAT

RABBI CHAIM JACHTER (KolTorah.org)

Malca Jachter warms up chicken for Shabbat afternoon in a way that it cannot reach Yad Soledet Bo. However, there is still a potential for the sauce and chicken fat to turn to liquid when warming.

SQUEEZING WATER FROM ICE

The question depends on a Gemara, Shabbat 51b. The Gemara forbids squeezing water out of ice. The Rishonim debate why Chazal forbade it.

RASHI

Rashi explains that one is creating, Molid, something new, resembling Melachah.

RAMBAM AND RASHBA

The Rambam (Hilchot Shabbat 21:13) and Rashba believe it resembles squeezing fruits (Sechitat Peirot), which is forbidden on Shabbat and Yom Tov.

SEFER HATERUMAH

The Sefer HaTerumah (234-235) offers a surprising explanation: he focuses on the resultant entity in a new form, Nolah. In other words, when squeezing water out of ice, a new item is created, known as Nolah, which is forbidden on Shabbat and Yom Tov.

A NAFKA MINA - WARMING FAT

A Nafkah Minah between these explanations is when one warms congealed fat, transforming it from a solid to a liquid. Rashi and the Rambam/Rashba permit this since one is not actively generating a new form, unlike the Gemara's case of squeezing water out of ice. However, it is forbidden, according to the Sefer HaTerumah, which focuses on the resultant new form.

SHULCHAN ARUCH VS. THE RAMA

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 318:16) permits warming congealed fat

on Shabbat, clearly rejecting the Sefer HaTeruma.

However, the Rama records the Ashkenazic custom to consider the Sefer HaTeruma. Nonetheless, the Rama writes that we may be lenient in case of need.

Significantly, the Rama does not limit the exception to a place of great need (Tzorech Gadol). Instead, an ordinary need (Tzorech) justifies leniency.

One important clarification: The Sefer HaTerumah's stringency applies even when Bishul is not a concern, when Yad Soledet Bo will not be reached.

HEATING CHICKEN

Accordingly, Sepharadim do not follow the Sefer HaTerumah as noted by Rav Ben Zion Abba Shaul (Teshuvot Or L'Tziyon 2:32:3) and Rav Yitzchak Yosef (Yalkut Yosef, Orach Chaim 318:62). However, unless there is a need, Ashkenazim heed the Sefer HaTerumah.

Thus, warming chicken seems to pose a problem for Ashkenazic Jews, as the congealed fat and sauce will liquify after being placed on the fire.

RAV RIMON'S SOLUTION

Rav Yosef Tzvi Rimon cleverly suggests placing rice at the bottom of the pan to absorb the melting fat and sauce. He notes that the Gemara and Shulchan Aruch permit putting ice in a liquid, as the water that emerges from the ice will not be noticeable in the liquid into which it was placed. Similarly, the liquified fat and sauce will not be evident in the rice into which it is absorbed.

MALCA JACHTER'S SOLUTION

The chicken my wife prepares does not generate much liquid when warmed. Malca places only a little sauce on the chicken to limit the amount of liquid it generates. She also limits the amount of chicken she places in a pan to further reduce liquid generation. A tiny amount of liquid does form, but the Mishnah Berurah (318:105) codifies the Taz (Orach Chaim 318:21), who rules that the Sefer HaTerumah's Chumrah does not apply to an insignificant amount of liquid.

PSIK REISHA D'LO NICHIA LEI?

Perhaps we may permit liquifying fat or sauce, as it is a Psik Reish D'lo Nicha Lei (a side result about which one does not care), regarding a rabbinic prohibition. However, the classic Poskim do not seem to consider this point as a lenient consideration. Perhaps it is because Ashkenazic tradition is to be strict regarding a Psik Reish D'lo Nicha Lei, even in a rabbinic matter, absent need.

POSTSCRIPT - MAKING ICE ON SHABBAT

Twentieth-century Poskim debate whether the Sefer HaTerumah's Chumrah applies to making ice.

SEPHARADIM

Rav Ovadia Yosef (Halichot Olam 4:93) permits Sephardic Jews to make ice on Shabbat in all situations, as Sepharadim do not follow the Sefer HaTeruma's approach.

Rashi, Rambam, and the Rashba's concern do not apply since one is not actively generating the ice. In the Gemara's case, one actively squeezes water from the ice. Making ice, by contrast, involves placing water in the freezer, without directly turning the water into ice. However, it does pose a problem according to the Sefer HaTeruma, who focuses on the result.

However, since Sepharadim follow the Shulchan Aruch, they are not concerned for the Sefer HaTeruma.

ASHKENAZIM - SHEMIRAT SHABBAT KEHILCHATA VS. TESHUVOT TZITZ ELIEZER

On the other hand, the Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata (10:4 and footnote note 14) writes that Ashkenazim should avoid making ice unless there is a significant need. He believes that the Nolad concern applies to transforming water into ice as to transforming ice into water.

By contrast, Rav Eliezer Waldenburg (Teshuvot Tzitz Eliezer 6:34 and 8:12) even permits Ashkenazim to make ice on Shabbat. He rejects the analogy between changing water to ice and changing ice to water. The resultant water is in a permanent state at room temperature, unlike ice. Thus, Rav Waldenburg reasons that the consequent ice is not Nolad.

Since the Sefer HaTerumah is regarded as a Chumrah about a rabbinic prohibition, it would seem to be permitted in case of doubt. Rav Hershel Schachter told me (in 1988) that he agrees that making ice is allowed on Shabbat. Surprisingly, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik forbids making ice on Shabbat (as reported by Rav Schachter in his MiPeninei HaRav, page 79) because it is considered Boneh, or building. This ruling seems to be based on the Gemara (Shabbat 95a) forbidding making cheese on Shabbat because it is Boneh. Rav Ovadia Yosef rejects the analogy, noting that making cheese involves combining several ingredients to make a new product, cheese. However, making ice cubes does not include combining different items.

CONCLUSION

Sepharadim may undoubtedly make ice on Shabbat, and Ashkenazim may rely on the opinions that permit them to do so.

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