בס"ד

גכרון יעקב

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Bolok 5785

THE STUNNING MIRACLE

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND (Aish.com)

Bilam was not an ordinary person. He was a famous wizard, a man who wielded extraordinary power with his tongue. Those he blessed were blessed, and those he cursed were cursed. He did not command armies and navies, but he was more powerful than generals and admirals. His one word could lay waste an entire country.

Balak, king of Moav, summons this famous and powerful wizard to employ his power against the Jewish people. Bilam is fully aware that Hashem does not approve, but he goes nonetheless. Along the way, his donkey stops and refuses to take another step. Bilam strikes the donkey, and suddenly, miraculously, the donkey opens its mouth and speaks.

Never in the history of the world has such a thing happened. A talking donkey? A donkey holding a conversation with a man? Impossible. And yet, there it was, happening right in front of him. Did this stunning miracle give pause to Bilam? Did it make him rethink his travel plans?

Imagine yourself driving on the highway, and suddenly, your car stops. You pump the gas pedal again and again, and the car says to you, "Enough already! Can't you see that I don't want to go there?" What would you do? Would you keep trying to get the car started? Or would you sit back and reconsider your trip? There is little doubt that all of us would be shaken to our very roots in such a situation. But Bilam, the wise and extraordinary Bilam, the famous wizard Bilam, was nonchalant about it.

Sforno compares the amazing miracle of Hashem's allowing the donkey to speak to the verse (Tehillim 51:17), "O G-d, open my lips and let my mouth speak Your praises." In other words, human speech is also a miracle. The ability to communicate, to express, to articulate is no less a miracle than a donkey speaking. This should have been clear to Bilam.

Bilam should have said to himself, "My strength is my speech. Who gave me that power? Hashem. And the same G-d Who can give me the power of speech just gave the power of speech to a donkey! Just as a talking donkey is a miracle, a human being talking is also a miracle. This must be a Divine message to me, a sign that I should not use my power of speech in a manner that Hashem does not approve. I should turn back and abandon this evil journey."

Yet for some reason, all of this went right by Bilam. He never stopped to consider the significance of what he had just seen and the ramifications of what he intended to do. For all his skill and wisdom, he missed the clearest of all messages. He was stricken with a strange myopia.

What lesson does this hold for us? It is that if it can happen to Bilam it can happen to every one of us! If Bilam can be blinded, we can also be blinded. When a person is driven by some personal motive, whether it is money or power or whatever else, he becomes blinded to reality. He only sees what he wants to see. He sees those things that will advance his purpose and is impervious to all else.

There are none so blind as those who will not see.

TAKE THE BLAME

RABBI AHARON LOSCHAK (Chabad.org)

I was talking with a friend—we'll call him Mendel—the other day, and he asked me if I'd heard of any job opportunities lately. I know he's into computer programming and nothing immediately came to mind.

I thought about it a little more and remembered that a mutual acquaintance, let's call him Yaakov, works with 3D renderings. "It's not really the same thing," I told myself. "It's a long shot, so why bother mentioning it?"

But, hey, who knows? So I mentioned it to Mendel, and gave him Yaakov's number.

Long story short, Mendel did indeed follow up on my suggestion. He connected with Yaakov, and to everyone's pleasant surprise he was able to arrange a job for Mendel in the field of virtual reality. I'm still not sure exactly how the two are related, but if it got Mendel a job, I'm happy.

Often, we think that a casual suggestion won't go anywhere, but it's still always worth trying. Sometimes, it can make all the difference.

PARSHAT BALAK BEGINS with the Moabite king, Balak, who is nervous about the oncoming Israelites:

Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. Moab became terrified of the people, for they were numerous, and Moab became disgusted because of the children of Israel. (22:2-3)

Having witnessed what happened to those who previously stood in the way of G-d's people, Balak frantically looked for a way to stem the Jewish threat. He understood that conventional methods such as war wouldn't work, so he figured he would beat the Jews at their own game.

This is where the main character of the story comes in—Balaam. The Bible's most famous non-Jewish prophet, Balaam regularly communicated with G-d. Most importantly, Balak knew that Balaam alone would be the biggest threat to the Jews. He could curse them with G-d's name and cut the Jewish bloom at its spiritual source.

It's a long story, but in short, it was an epic failure. Balaam ended up blessing the Jews, and all's well that ends well.

The curious thing is that the parshah is named "Balak." Much ink has been spilled over why we would name an entire parshah in the Torah after a villain, but we're not going to talk about that today. Instead, we're going to ask an arguably simpler question: Why name the parshah after the secondary character? After all, Balaam is the main protagonist, both in stature and in screen time. If you read the verses, the entire story revolves around him.

Balak was, at best, a supporting character. While he may have deserved an Oscar for his role, why did he get the "Parshah Name" prize over Balaam, the main actor?

THE SHORT ANSWER is that Balak came up with the idea, so he gets the credit, or, in this case, the blame. Yes, it was Balaam who possessed the power to actually do the damage, but it was Balak's idea.

Balaam was far greater in stature than Balak. He was the only person in the entire world with the unique power to go toe-to-toe with the Jewish people, while Balak was just a schnook grasping at straws to save his own skin.

And yet, the parshah is still named Balak. Because ultimately, credit and/or blame really does go to the originator of the idea, regardless of how sophisticated the person implementing it may or may not be.

THE LESSON FOR US is obvious: If Balak gets an entire parshah in the Torah because of one diabolical idea, then certainly we should be able to rack up serious credit for giving good ideas and advice to others.

To add one more layer to the lesson, the dynamics between Balak and Balaam are very telling. Think about it: As argued above, Balak was a schnook relative to Balaam, yet he's the one we remember.

The same applies to us. Not everyone was born to be an activist, a leader, or a bigshot. In fact, most of us are just "regular" people. You know, ordinary

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

folks with families, jobs, homes, who try their best to mind their own business. Maybe one out of a hundred will be a bigshot CEO, an influencer, therapist, celebrity, or whatever other position might put you in the steering wheel of others' lives.

But for the rest of us, our lives are just that: ours.

And so, when the opportunity presents itself to give advice or voice an idea that may be helpful to others, you shy away. You tell yourself, "Who am I to say anything? I'm sure they'll figure it out on their own, or they're consulting smarter and more sophisticated people than me." With that, you let it go.

Or perhaps you have a great idea for your community shul or school, or a great plan that would make the carpool scheduling easier for everyone. But you hold back, figuring that you'll leave it to the "smarter" and "bigger" people. "No one's going to take me seriously anyway."

Take a cue from Balak. He paled in comparison to Balaam. And yet, because he came up with the plan, he's the one we blame.

Who knows? If you speak up, you may just get the credit.

This essay is based on Sichot Kodesh 5733, vol. 2, p. 282.

THE BOOGIE MEN

AVROHOM YAAKOV

"Bolok saw all that Yisroel had done to the Emorites. (22:2)"

Bolok, the stand in king of Moav, incited Moav against the Jews because of what the Jews did to the Emorites.

Recall that the Jews offered the Emorites to peacefully move through their country on the way to the land of Canaan. They did not want trouble and were happy to purchase supplies from the Emorite people.

The Emorite response was to declare war on the Jews and attack – not even deigning to respond.

Yet who did Bolok claim was the aggressor? The Jews.

R' Mordechai HaCohen notes that this is the way of the Jew haters. They magnify any Jewish actions – no matter how justified – as aggression, yet they forget what was done to the Jews.

We see it in our time – who is responsible for the Gaza wars? Always the Jews, even though they have never started a war in Gaza and even pulled out leaving existing industries for the new occupiers to use (or destroy, which inevitably happened).

Or the recently concluded 12-day war. The Iranians were of course *totally* innocent of threatening Israel – "just you wait until we finish the nuclear bomb in a few weeks" wasn't *really* a threat – or supporting terror proxies in the areas surrounding Israel. It was really the Jews who broke the peace. No harm was meant by Iran arming terrorists or threatening a nuclear holocaust.

The Sfas Emes has a different take on what Bolok was terrified of.

The word for 'done' in Hebrew, also implies 'fixed'. Bolok saw that the Jews had elevated even the land of the Emorites, and he was afraid that the Jews would elevate the rest of the world. This is the fear of the students of Bolok in every generation. They are afraid that indeed the world would become a better place if Jewish values took hold and that frightened them.

A Bolok can only thrive where there is corruption, chaos and no fear of Heaven. Their rule is maintained because they prevent the Jewish influence of morality, humanity, belief in G-d.

The true way to permanently defeat a Bolok is through elevating the world.

THE BLESSEDNESS CONTINUES

RABBI LABEL LAM (Torah.org)

And Hashem said to Bilaam, "Do not go with them, do not curse the nation (Israel) because he is blessed." (Bamidbar 22:12)

Bilaam is cautioned by not other than the HaKadosh Baruch Hu Himself not to curse the people of Israel because they are blessed. Can you have a more-clear warning than that?! Yet, foolishly he went! He is not the only person to ignore explicit instructions and open signals that it is not advisable to curse the Jewish People.

Wherever I go here, now, in your Jerusalem, I'm reminded of a joke that a young man told me recently, "What is the national bird of Israel? Answer: The crane!" There is building and building going on everywhere. And wherever the Jewish people go things tend to improve and grow. Whichever neighborhood, and whichever city, and any country that we have visited in our long history, all the boats in the harbor predictably go up as our blessing travels with us. And so it is that from whichever the place we were chased, our absence is is felt.

This is an observable phenomenon. When I was a kid the two states that a presidential candidate needed to secure the electoral college were New York and California. They were the most populous and prosperous states and the also where the majority of American Jews lived. The two super-powers during that Cold War era were Russia and the United States. Those were again the two major centers of Jewish population. Later, when Jews began to exit from Russia it became a weakened and feeble version of its former self. Now, Israel is seen as a super-power and a dominant force militarily and economically in spite of its relative petite size, because a majority of the Jewish people reside here in Israel. Our blessedness is recognizable in location after location, large and small.

Maybe some people remember that during the Yom Kippur war in 1973, there was an oil embargo, oil prices sky-rocketed and bumper stickers began to appear reading, "We don't want Jews! We want oil!". A gentile named William Ikon wrote a letter to the editor of the Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph that was subsequently published in 250 dailies throughout America. He wrote the following:

"Jews go home, G-d forbid that you should think that these remarks made by a few sick people expresses the opinion of all the people of America and you would pack your belongings and go. Jews go home. We do not want Jews. We want oil. But before you leave, could you do us a favor?! Could you leave behind the vaccine formula of Dr. Jonas Salk before you go?! You would not want our children to be paralyzed by polio. Will you leave behind the capability you have shown government, in politics, your influential prowess, your good literature and your tasty food.

"Please have pity on us. Remember it was from you that we learned the secret of how to develop great men as Einstein and Steinmetz and many others who are of great help to us. We owe you a lot for the atomic bomb, research satellites and perhaps we owe you our very existence. Instead of observing from the depths of our graves how Hitler old but glad passes through our streets relaxed in one of our Cadillacs if he would have succeeded to reach the A-bomb and not us.

On your way out Jews, could you do me one more favor? Could you pass by my house and take me with you? I'm not sure I could live a secure life in a land in which you are not found. If at any time you will have to leave, love will leave with you. Democracy will leave with you and essentially everything will leave with you. G-d will leave with you. If you pass by my house, please slow down and honk, because I'm going with you."

Bilaam was not the first to fail to heed to this Divine warning and neither was he the last. We know all to well. To anyone with clear eyes the words delivered to Bilaam resonate even still, as the blessedness continues.

FRUITS OF PASSION

RABBI NAFTALI REICH (Torah.org)

This week's Torah portion revolves around the saga of the evil prophet Bilam who was commissioned by Balak, king of Moav, to curse the nation of Israel. The Torah describes Bilam's repeated futile attempts to curse the Jews and the subsequent blessings that flowed involuntarily from his lips.

When Bilam initially asked permission from Hashem to accompany Balak's messengers, Hashem instructed him not to acquiesce. "Do not curse the people for they are blessed," Bilam was told. However, after Balak sent a second, more prestigious group of messengers, and Bilam again asked Hashem for permission to go, Hashem permitted him to travel to Balak, to carry out the king's dark mission.

Immediately afterwards, the Torah tells us that Hashem's wrath was directed at Bilam 'ki holech hu'; "for he was going [with the messengers]."

The commentaries all ask the obvious question: If Bilam was given permission to go with the emissaries, why was Hashem angry at him for doing so? The commentaries explain that Hashem's wrath was directed at Bilam because he had flaunted Hashem's true intent, which was that Bilam should accompany the delegation and follow Hashem's instructions upon arrival. 'Kum lech itam'; you may accompany them," the posuk says. But instead of merely traveling with the delegation, Bilam joined them with great gusto, as the Torah hints with the words, 'vayelech im sarei Moav. He was impressed with the status of these ministers-senior officials of Moav-and embraced their mission.

Bilam relished the thought of being able to curse the Jewish people and was determined to take full advantage of the opportunity to topple them from their exalted state. In retaliation, Hashem sent an angel to block Bilam's way and to strike him. In a spectacular miracle, Bilam's donkey opened its mouth and reprimanded him, humiliating the arrogant Bilam.

The commentaries observe that if demonstrating passion and excitement to commit a sin provokes Hashem's fierce anger, applying this same passion and enthusiasm to the performance of mitzvos must surely elicit a dynamic response of an opposite nature-an outpouring of Divine favor and grace that cements our bond with Him. The strength of that connection is entirely dependent on the spirit and love that we invest into performance of His mitzvos.

The noted educator, Rabbi Shmuel Dishon, conducts a highly successful outreach camp in Russia during the summer months. A few years ago, a Bosnian girl approached the camp directors and expressed her desire to embrace the Jewish religion. After being repeatedly rebuffed by the camp's administrative staff, she begged to be able to speak to the camp director,

Rabbi Dishon. When Rabbi Dishon arrived from the United States, he invited her into his office and asked her why she would want to become Jewish. She outlined her spiritual aspirations and expressed her deep desire to share in the Jewish people's destiny. Rabbi Dishon tried to dissuade her. 'You realize", he told her, "that if G-d forbid another despot like Hitler tried to destroy the Jews, you too would be targeted."

"That is a small price to pay for an eternal connection to the Divine," she replied. "But you could gain a passport to the world to come by upholding the seven Noachide laws," Rabbi Dishon responded.

"True, I could keep the Noachide laws but the sanctity and intimate connection with Hashem cannot be acquired through the Seven Noachide laws," the young woman said. "I am not interested in simply expanding my portfolio. I want to be truly one with Hashem."

Bilam recognized that the true source of the Jewish people's unique connection with Hashem was not simply their observance of His commandments but rather the love, devotion and zealousness with which they performed His mitzvos. It is the level of that commitment to devote one's life to carrying out His will with love that defines the quality and depth of our connection with our Creator in Heaven.

HUMAN DIGNITY

RABBI YEHUDA APPEL (Aish.com)

A recent study was undertaken to see how parents interact with their children. The study found that for every positive comment a parent makes to a child, there are on average 19 negative remarks. Of course, any teacher or office manager will tell you that people are far more productive in a positive than in a negative environment. Yet, somehow, this realization gets lost in the commute from work to home.

A friend recently told me how his 10-year-old son had been acting in a difficult manner. After some painful self-examination, my friend realized that he'd been constantly chiding the boy. So he decided to change tactics; he began to focus on praising his son, and speaking about him in front of others as "my little tzaddik."

The result? Overnight this child became a totally different person! Given his new title of "tzaddik," he gladly assumed the role.

This approach was pivotal to the moral development (mussar) methods of the famous European Yeshiva, Slobodka. Instead of focusing on what the students "were," the rabbis would focus on what the person "could become." The result was that the greatest Torah luminaries emerged from the Slobodka study hall.

This concept finds illustration in this week's Torah portion. A Moabite chieftain named Balak - fearful of Israelite attack -summons a non-Jewish spiritualist named Bilaam to curse the Jewish People.

The Torah reports how Bilaam saddled up his donkey and embarked on a journey to curse the Jews.

On the way, an angel came to block the way. Initially, only the donkey - not Bilaam himself - noticed the angel.

Subsequently, when Bilaam realized the angel's presence, he acknowledged the humiliating reality that a donkey is more spiritually perceptive than he is!

But we must return to a more basic question. Why was Bilaam's military strategy a curse rather than bows and arrows? Because Bilaam reasoned that since the power of the Jewish People is in their mouth (i.e. through study of Torah), the best way to counteract that power was with the mouth - a curse!

There is much discussion in the commentaries as to the true nature of Bilaam. In the view of some he was a prophet, in the view of others a charlatan. Some say he was an astrologer, others a liar. Whatever the case may be, however, one thing is clear - he was a very evil man. For a high enough wage he was willing to curse an entire people.

At the completion of this episode, G-d smites the donkey. This, at first glance, appears counterproductive. Wouldn't G-d want to keep the donkey around as a reminder of this incredible incident?

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, the late dean of the Mir Yeshiva, explained that G-d was being solicitous of Bilaam's honor. How embarrassing it would be for Bilaam to have a constant reminder of his downfall. To preserve Bilaam's honor, the donkey needed to be killed.

It is amazing that G-d would go to such great lengths to preserve the honor of a wicked character. Yet the Almighty wants to teach us a valuable lesson: If we need to be concerned about the dignity of Bilaam, then how much more so should we be sensitive to the dignity of our friends and neighbors. And, Rabbi Shmuelevitz adds, we must not forget to honor the higher nature within ourselves.

May the lesson of our Parsha inspire us to act in an exalted, dignified, and truly human way!

THE LANGUAGE OF ANIMALS

RABBI DR. MORDECHAI SCHIFFMAN (Aish.com)

"The human being is the only animal that…" This sentence, Dr. Daniel Gilbert from Harvard University argues, is one which every psychologist at some point in their career attempts to finish based on their own line of research. Most attempts to finish the sentence are challenged by later psychologists looking for their own way to finish the sentence. For example, many used to argue that "The human being is the only animal that can use language," but were forced to retract when chimpanzees were taught to communicate using hand signs. While research with animals using language has its share of controversy, there seems to be ample evidence that chimps, gorillas, bonobos, dolphins, border collies, and African gray parrots can all acquire the ability to communicate using some form of language.

When Bilaam went with the servants of Moav to go to Balak, G-d, angry that Bilaam went with them, placed an angel on the road to prevent them from passing. While Bilaam was unable to see the sword-wielding angel, his donkey noticed it and veered off the path. Bilaam, frustrated with his animal's behavior, hit it with his stick. The angel repositioned himself in front of the procession and the donkey, trying to avoid the angel again, pressed against a wall, squeezing Bilaam's foot. Bilaam responded by hitting his donkey for the second time. The donkey, still confronted by the angel in front of her and nowhere to veer off to, laid down on the ground with Bilaam on top of her. Bilaam, in his anger, hit the donkey, once again.

At that point, a strange story became even more bizarre. G-d opened the donkey's mouth and a conversation ensued between Bilaam and his donkey. The donkey, hurt after being hit three times, asked for an explanation. Bilaam, unphased by a talking donkey, responded by claiming that the donkey had made a mockery of him, and that if he had a sword, he would have actually killed her. Pleading her case, the donkey asked Bilaam to consider all the years they have been together and whether this was a regular pattern of her behavior. Bilaam acknowledged that it was not, and at that point, G-d uncovered his eyes and revealed the angel to him. The angel rebuked Bilaam for hitting his donkey three times and explained that the donkey actually saved his life by avoiding the angel.

How are we to understand a talking donkey? The most prevalent explanation is to chalk it up to a Divine miracle. The Mishna in Ethics of the Fathers (5:6) lists the talking donkey as one of the ten miracles that G-d embedded into creation during twilight of the first Shabbat. A textual problem with such an explanation is that even though talking donkeys is within the purview of G-d's abilities, it presumably wasn't in the realm of expected for Bilaam and his Moabite escorts. The fact that they seem to just take the talking donkey in stride, presents a problem. Another possibility is to follow the Rambam's view that anytime anybody in Tanach encountered an angel, it perforce happened in the context of a dream state. If so, the whole episode, including the donkey talking, took place in Bilaam's mind.

A third possibility is presented by Rabbi Shmuel David Luzzato (19th century, Italy). Rabbi Luzzato pointed out that if you look carefully within the text, it never writes that the donkey speaks (d-v-r). He argued that in reality the donkey did not express a full, well-articulated statement. Rather, the donkey brayed and bellowed as a response to getting hit, as if to say, "why are you hitting me?" Bilaam responded to the donkey's cries by saying that she humiliated him, the same as any pet owner may converse with his or her pet. Animals may not be able to talk using speech to formulate sentences in the way we do, but they can use forms of language to communicate.

Perhaps, embedded in this strange interaction, is a veiled critique of Bilaam's broader behavior. One of Bilaam's flaws was his inability to hear, understand, and intuit what G-d really wanted from him. He couldn't pick up on the subtle cues and listen to the true essence of what was expected of him. It was a case of motivated listening, hearing what he wanted to hear and interacting accordingly. Bilaam's initial impetuous and violent behavior toward his donkey reflected this inability to attend to the not fully articulated feelings of the other.

In contrast, midrashim are abound describing the empathy and care that great Jewish leaders such as Moshe and David exhibited as shepherds towards their flock. How one listens and responds to those who are more vulnerable and unable to fully communicate is a litmus test for their true character. A test that Bilaam failed, and one we can aspire to pass - if we listen carefully.

TAKE IT FROM TRUMAN

RABBI YAAKOV MENKEN (Torah.org)

The Medrash tells us that Bilaam was a prophet, that Hashem, G-d, spoke with him. No one, however, came closer to Hashem thanks to hearing Bilaam's prophecy. All the Jewish prophets, and of course Moshe himself, caused people to turn to Hashem, but Bilaam was an utter failure in this regard. He knew Hashem was real, because Bilaam was a prophet, he spoke with Hashem and Hashem spoke back to him. But Bilaam was unable to get

anyone else to abandon idolatry and follow Hashem.
On the contrary, Balak, king of Moav, used Bilaam as a tool! "Come, I need you to curse the Jews for me, in the name of Hashem." And then Balak went right back to worshiping his idols. So what was the difference?
Of course, we can blame the audience. The Children of Israel witnessed the revelation of the Divine Presence at Sinai. All of them, to that extent, were prophets themselves, while Bilaam was a prophet to people steeped in idolatry. But there was a fundamental difference between Bilaam and Moshe which we cannot overlook. Bilaam cannot redirect all the blame to others.
Bilaam, as we see, wanted the glory. Even to Hashem, Bilaam bragged about the fact that Balak, King of Moav, needed him and had sent representatives to him. And when Balak refused to take no for an answer, and sent a larger delegation of higher-ranking princes, Bilaam didn't simply say no meant no—he, like Balak, hoped Hashem would reconsider, so he could do a mission for King Balak himself.
Moshe was just the opposite: the Torah describes him as "more humble than any man" [Numbers 12:3]. He was uninterested in honor, and had to be forced into leadership by Hashem himself.
In fact, twice in this reading (23:4 and 16), the Torah says that Hashem "happened upon" Bilaam, speaking to him as if they happened to meet. But Hashem called to Moshe, indicating a direct address, with respect and endearment.
In Hebrew, the word for "happened upon," Vayakar, and "called," Vayikra, differ only in the letter Aleph at the end of the latter. And the Medrash says it was Moshe's deliberate choice to minimize the letter Aleph in the word Vayikra, appearing as the first word (and the name of) the third book of the Torah (Vayikra), when Hashem called to Moshe.
The Sages teach that "one who runs after honor, honor flees from him, but one who flees from honor, honor pursues him" (see Talmud Eruvin 13b). Bilaam and Moshe are examples of this concept. Moshe, who was very humble, was successful where Bilaam the bragger was not.
This is a lesson we can apply in many ways, throughout our lives. Take it from Harry S. Truman, the humble man who became President, and who returned to his home in Independence, Missouri afterwards: "it is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit!"

I'M KADOSH

RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR (Ohr.edu)
"How good are your tents, O Yaakov, your dwelling places, O Yisrael!" (24:5)
My friend Rabbi Leib Kelemen once described a bus journey with his son from Yerushalyim to Netanya. Nearing the outskirts of Netanya, his nine-year old son, whose name was Kadosh, needed to use the bathroom. Rabbi Kelemen ran up to the bus driver and asked him if he could stop for his son to relieve himself, but the bus driver just shrugged. Going back to his son, Rabbi Kelemen told him he would have to wait.
The minutes passed, and the son was shifting in his seat trying to control his urge as it grew stronger. Finally, they reached the bus station in Netanya, and none too soon! They jumped down from the bus and sprinted to the rest rooms, which were closed for repairs!
They rushed out onto the street and ran. Suddenly, they passed a pub. Rabbi Kelemen looked inside, and so indeed did his son. He said "Okay! Let's go in here!" Looking through the glass at the denizens of the pub, a motley bunch of boozers, his son said, "But Daddy, what is this place?" "It's a pub." "What's a pub?" his son asked. So, Rabbi Kelemen explained what a pub is. "It's a Beit Marzeach." "But Daddy," said the little boy, "I can't go in here. I'm Kadosh!"
Nearly forty years ago, I remember walking out of a so-called "art film" feeling that I needed to take a shower. I wasn't religious at the time, but the pintele yid inside me was revolted by what the secular world trumpets as "significant art." If we would only realize that our souls are hewn from the holiest place in existence. If we would truly understand that even though our feet are walking on the sidewalk, our souls reach up to the highest places in existence. If we know how noble we are, how royal we are, and how lowly and empty are the baubles of the secular world, we would then surely all turn away and say, "I can't look at that – I'm Kadosh!"

WAS MOSHE IN A FORBIDDEN MARRIAGE?

RABBI YOSSI IVES (Chabad.org)
To question the legitimacy of someone's marriage is to cut right to the bone. That is what happened when a leader of the Tribe of Simeon – a man we later discover went by the name of Zimri ben Salu – faced off against Moshe over his assertion that he had a right to marry a Midianite woman. This is what happened:
"An Israelite man came [we find out his identity later] and brought the Midianite woman to his brethren, before the eyes of Moshe and before the eyes of the entire congregation of the children of Israel..." (25:6)
What was this all about? Rashi explains:
"[Zimri and his friends] said to Moshe, "Moshe, is this [woman] forbidden or is she permitted [for marriage]? If you say it is forbidden, who permitted for you the daughter of Jethro [who was likewise a Midianite]?"
There is, however, one huge difference. Moshe married his wife Zipporah – indeed a Midianite whom he met at the well, having fled Egypt as a young man – decades before Sinai. At that time, there was no Jewish People or Jewish Law in the real sense that Jewish identity and Torah law came into being after the Revelation at Sinai. Moshe's wife would have "converted" to Judaism at the Sinai Revelation (see Rashi to Talmud, Sanhedrin 82a). Thus, Zipporah was not a Midianite but a Jew. By contrast, the woman brought before Moshe had not joined the Jewish faith, and was thus indeed a Midianite.
There is no comparison at all.
IT IS PERPLEXING that someone of Zimri's caliber, leader of a tribe, would be capable of making such a ridiculous comparison. Equally surprising is the fact that no one seems to have pointed this out to Zimri and his friends.
Moreover, neither the Torah nor the vast canonical texts (such as the Talmud and Midrash) offer this obvious defense against such an absurd and offensive attack. The argument that Moshe had married outside of the faith was subject to the easiest of rebuttals, so why did no one offer that justification and contradict the clearly unfair comparison between Moshe and Zimri?
It must be, the Rebbe suggests, that the story is not as we have always thought it to be. The line of criticism that Moshe married out of the faith is so absurd that it must mean this is not actually the fault they found in Moshe's marriage. What, then, was the confrontation about?
THE REBBE OFFERS a novel answer. Moshe had the status of a Kohen, and a Kohen is not allowed to marry a convert (Talmud, Kiddushin 78a). This is because the sacred role of the Kohen meant that he could only marry someone whose purity could be ascertained. A convert had a previous life outside of the Jewish faith, and the culture from which she hailed could not be assumed to have had the appropriate moral values (Mishneh Torah, Issurei Bi'ah 18:3). That is the law, and it applies equally to any convert.
They could not find fault in Moshe's marriage on the basis of Zipporah being a gentile, because she had converted. But that is exactly what they were criticizing: that Moshe had married a convert. Moshe had served as the High Priest during the inauguration of the Tabernacle, as the Torah describes in detail. Moreover, there is a debate in the Talmud (Zevachim 102a) about whether Moshe had the status of a Kohen, and according to the great Talmudic sage Rav, "Moshe was a high priest" from the moment he was appointed to inaugurate the Tabernacle "for the rest of his life." (See Rashi to Zevachim 102a)
Zimri's point was that Moshe was in an invalid relationship, as a Kohen to a convert, and therefore had no business objecting to his choice of partner. If Moshe's marriage was in violation of the priestly rules, it would indeed seem hypocritical for him to object to someone else violating the rule against intermarriage. Given that in both cases the women were Midianite just added spice to his barb, even if the exact issue was different in each case.
IN REALITY, the objection to Moshe's marriage was incorrect. Kohen or not, Moshe was already married to his wife when he assumed the priestly role – which changes the situation entirely. Moshe had not chosen his wife after he was given the priestly status; he had been married to her for decades by that time. Indeed, the Mishnah – the earliest Jewish code of law – rules that, "If a Kohen betroths a widow (which he is ordinarily permitted to do), but is then appointed as Kohen Gadol (High Priest, who may not marry a widow), he may proceed to marry her."
Thus, since Moshe was already married to Zipporah there was no issue with him staying married to her, even after he attained the status of a kohen. Zimri had his facts wrong and was using an incorrect understanding of the law to justify his own transgressions. Moshe was not in a problematic marriage, while what Zimri was seeking to do was most certainly problematic.
WE ARE LEFT with a serious question: If, indeed, Moshe was entirely justified in his marriage, why didn't he defend himself? By not arguing in his own defense, it almost seems as if he concedes his guilt.
The answer has an important lesson for us all: Sometimes the best policy is to say nothing at all. Moshe could have easily defended himself, but since he was directly implicated, the correct thing to do was to keep silent. The integrity of the Torah requires that its teachers have no personal bias. If Moshe had given the ruling that he was allowed to be married to his wife because he was already married when he became a kohen, this would have had the appearance of a self-serving ruling.
Had Moshe been accused of making halachic decisions that affected him directly, the integrity of all of Judaism would have been called into question.

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

Thus, Moshe took the insult and remained silent. Better his honor be attacked but the trustworthiness of Torah be protected.

King Shlomo (Mishlei 26:5. See Talmud, Shabbat, 30b) instructs, "Do not answer a fool according to his foolishness."10 Zimri's whole purpose was to justify his own wrongdoing; he had no interest in an honest discussion. Under those circumstances, it was best to forego the argument, for it was not based on a desire for truth. Not every attack deserves a response, not every insult needs a rebuttal.

In the end, Zimri created a public provocation, which led to Pinchas meting out swift vengeance. For this act, Pinchas was awarded by the Almighty "My covenant of peace." (25:12) And Moshe was ultimately vindicated, his silence notwithstanding.

Adapted from Likkutei Sichot, vol. 18, Parshat Balak III.

News & Views

BOB VYLAN PRESENTED HATRED AS VIRTUE AND THE CROWD WAS SEDUCED

RABBI SIR EPHRAIM MIRVIS (theTimes.com 6-7-25)

There are moments in history when the veil is pulled back — when we glimpse not just a lapse in judgment, but a rupture in the moral fabric of our society. Glastonbury 2025 was such a moment.

When I responded to the appalling events at the Somerset festival last weekend by referring to them as "vile Jew hatred", I was giving voice to what many in the Jewish community have known for a long time. That the kind of rhetoric heard in the punk duo Bob Vylan's chant of "Death, death to the IDF" — the Israel Defence Forces — though clothed in the guise of justice and liberation, is no more than thinly veiled anti-Jewish hatred.

However, it has been disturbing to read the responses of many last week who were unwilling to accept this characterisation, and unable to distinguish between reasoned criticism on the one hand, and outright antisemitic incitement on the other.

It could not be clearer to Jews that what we saw on that stage, and in that crowd, was the same old ancient prejudice, but surprisingly, it seems there is a need to explain how and why.

It was broadcast for the world to see: a crowd of thousands, voices raised in unison, chanting "Death, death to the IDF". Cheering. Euphoria. Celebration. And then the voice from the stage, a voice of influence, declared that he was no pacifist. That violence is sometimes the only language "people" understand. That he had once worked for a "Zionist", whom he characterised in terms I don't wish to republish here. And it was all met, not with shame, disapproval or even silence, but with a thunderous ovation.

Herein lies the problem: when hatred presents itself as virtue, it becomes seductive. It offers the thrill of righteous outrage against the establishment, which can pass unchecked by the conscience of an otherwise decent person. And so, we saw thousands swept up by hateful zeal, chanting for the death of strangers.

Do we ever find such behaviour directed at any other nation, people or military, regardless of how controversial they are thought to be? One would simply never find such casual bloodlust directed towards the soldiers of any other state, let alone find it greeted by such a response from a crowd. This was not a call for a change of policy. It was not a cry for peace. It was pure hate.

When the term "Zionist" becomes a slur — a synonym for exploiter, tyrant, puppetmaster — we are no longer speaking about geopolitics. We are seeing the revival of ancient prejudices in modern form. Just look at how the term is sometimes used: "my Zionist boss"; "the Zionist lobby"; "Zionist media". These are the same tropes that have been used for centuries alongside the word "Jew."

War is unbearable. It always is. No decent person can be unmoved by the horrific suffering of innocent civilians. But that feeling does not confer a licence to incitement.

As the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism puts it: "Criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be considered antisemitic." There is no suggestion, from any quarter, that a person lamenting the loss of innocent lives, just as one might do in the context of any other conflict, is antisemitic. But what one must never do — what no ethical society should tolerate — is to chant for death. Not of civilians and not of the soldiers called to serve their country. Not of anyone.

Israel has a conscript army. Every 18-year-old is called to serve — Jews, Christians, Muslims — and serve they do. Because they know that the country faces enemies whose stated intention is to wipe out the Jewish state and all its inhabitants. Consequently, without such service by the population at large on behalf of the entire country, Israel would not exist. And so, calling for "Death to the IDF" is a call to kill the vast majority of the population of Israel. It is effectively a call for the death of the world's only Jewish state. What could be more hateful to Jews than that?

Heaping vulgar insults upon one's former boss because they are a Zionist is antisemitism. Not because one cannot criticise the views of a former colleague, but because it attacks who they are and invokes the classic trope of malign Jewish power.

The most important lesson emerging from this awful episode is not about Glastonbury or the BBC. It is about the moral test that our society faces. A test of whether ordinary people — musicians, television producers, fans, viewers at home — can resist the comfort of slogans and the thrill of joining in with the crowd, to instead see clearly that calling for the death of others is not righteousness. It is hatred. And it corrodes us all.

The historic test is before us. We must not fail it.

WORLD'S JEWISH POPULATION STILL NOT RECOVERED FROM THE HOLOCAUST

CARL CAMPANILE (NYPost.com 7-7-25)

The world's Jewish population has yet to recover from the Holocaust that wiped out more than a third of its members, a stunning new analysis shows.

There were an estimated 16.6 million Jews alive in 1939 before the Holocaust killed more than 6 million of them.

By comparison, there are about 14.8 million Jews alive today, according to the Pew Research Center.

The Jewish population did increase by 6.2%, going from 13.91 million to 14.8 million, between 2010 and 2020, figures show.

But globally, the overall non-Jewish population jumped 12.3%, from 7 billion to 7.87 billion, during that same time frame, the study said.

"During this time, the rest of the world's population grew about twice as quickly," Pew noted.

Jews account for a tiny 0.2% of the global population.

There were an estimated 16.6 million Jews alive in 1939 before the Holocaust killed more than 6 million of them.

The study's findings come at a vulnerable time for Jews, who are battling a rise in antisemitism triggered by the Israeli-Hamas war in Gaza.

"Have Jews made up for the loss of people killed in the Holocaust? The answer is no," said Jonathan Sarna, a professor of American Jewish history at Brandeis University.

"It takes a long time to replace a third of the population. It still hasn't happened. It's a reminder of how many people we lost in the Holocaust," he said.

The study's findings come at a vulnerable time for Jews, who are battling a rise in antisemitism triggered by the Israeli-Hamas war in Gaza.

Pew acknowledged that precisely estimating the size of the world's Jewish population is difficult. Its estimates in Israel are based on the Israeli Ministry of Interior's population register of Jews. Outside of Israel, the definition of Jewishness is based on self-identification with Judaism as a religion.

The overwhelming number of the world's Jews live in Israel/the Middle East/North Africa (6.8 million) and North America (6.1 million), mostly in the United States, the study says.

The Jewish population jumped by nearly 18% in and around Israel but just 0.6% in North America in the previous decade.

"Have Jews made up for the loss of people killed in the Holocaust? The answer is no," said Jonathan Sarna, a professor of American Jewish history at Brandeis University.

But it dropped by 8% in Europe, from 1.39 million in 2010 to 1.28 million in 2020, and 37% in sub-Saharan Africa, from 80,000 to 50,000, for the same period.

The population increased by 2% in the Asia-Pacific region, rising from 180,000 to 190,000.

"Between 2010 and 2020, the Middle East and North Africa surpassed North America to become the geographic region with the largest Jewish population," Pew said. "This is primarily because Israel added over 1 million Jews to its population between 2010 and 2020, compared with an increase of just 30,000 in the U.S."

The overwhelming number of the world's Jews live in Israel/the Middle East/North Africa (6.8 million) and North America (6.1 million), mostly in the United States, the study says.

Israel and the United States are the only countries with millions of Jewish residents, with 85% of Jews worldwide living in one of the two countries combined.

Sarna said the Jewish birth rate is lower in many Western societies as it is for non-Jews, with the exception of Orthodox Jews who marry younger and have larger families.

WORLDWIDE DIPLOMATIC ISOLATION IS BETTER THAN MORE DEAD JEWS

JONATHAN S. TOBIN (JNS.org 8-7-25)

Even Israel's most severe and unfair critics have to acknowledge two things. One is that since the Hamas-led Palestinian Arab terrorist attacks in southern Israeli communities on Oct. 7, 2023, the strategic situation in the Middle East has been substantially altered in favor of the Jewish state. The other is that although Israel has become extremely unpopular around the globe and even lost favor with many Americans as a result of the war with Hamas in Gaza post-Oct. 7, most Israelis value their security over the opinions of spectators to their struggles.

This is hard for Western liberals and leftists to understand. And yet, it points to a profound truth about the dilemma of Jewish life in the 21st century—and every one of them throughout the last two millennia. The choice facing Israel and the Jewish people is clear: If they refuse to let themselves be slaughtered and their state demolished, then they're going to be mightily judged by a double standard applied to no other nation or people on the planet.

PARIAH STATUS

Though the Zionist movement and contemporary Israelis have, for entirely understandable and often correct reasons, always downplayed the cost of victory amid the fight for survival in terms of international opinion. No matter how unfair the charges, the branding of this nation of fewer than 10 million as a pariah state is no small matter.

Nevertheless, the puzzlement about the fact that Israelis prefer to be live pariahs rather than a fondly remembered people to be memorialized is nothing more than just the latest example of what author Dara Horn memorably pointed out in her 2021 collection of essays, People Love Dead Jews.

Largely due to biased coverage of the post-Oct. 7 war on the part of the international media as well as mainstream U.S. outlets like The New York Times and CNN, many, if not most, people on the political left in Europe and America have started to believe the pro-Hamas propaganda about Israel being guilty of "genocide" in Gaza. They are also apparently astounded by the indifference of its citizens to the fact that a great many of the supposedly enlightened and educated people in the West think that they are very bad. And they similarly dismiss friends of Israel who dispute these false charges.

The Times attempted to explain this conundrum with a "news analysis" titled, "The Cost of Victory: Israel Overpowered Its Foes, but Deepened Its Isolation," by White House correspondent Michael Shear. The article seeks to contrast the growing hostility to the Jewish state with a fairly solid consensus inside Israel about the necessity to defeat and remove Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon and Iran's nuclear threat.

A SECURE FUTURE

But buried in the 12th paragraph is a statement presented as something of a great insight into the thinking of an Israeli people, depicted as largely clueless about their image abroad. After summarizing how disliked the Jewish state has become and the way a bipartisan pro-Israel consensus in the United States has collapsed, the piece puts forward the following conclusion, a rare instance of the paper reporting something unquestionably true about the conflict in the Middle East: "Many Israelis welcome the prospect of a future in which they are no longer surrounded by well-armed enemies determined to do them harm, even if it means being viewed negatively by the rest of the world."

What rational citizen of any country would think differently?

The self-evident answer is none. But somehow, Israelis are portrayed as an insular and heartless people because they support removing existential threats in the form of genocidal Islamist terrorist movements such as Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis and their Iranian paymasters.

A SURGE OF ANTISEMITISM

The Times goes on to argue that the cost of the defeat of those foes in the last 21 months cannot be worth the price of global opprobrium, in addition to the bitter feelings of Palestinian Arabs and their supporters, who are disappointed that the conflict has turned against them after having committed the largest slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust.

The newspaper is right that Israel's victories in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria and Iran have come at a cost—and by that, they don't mean the nearly 900 soldiers in the Israel Defense Forces who have fallen in the battle for their nation's survival. There is no question that the vituperation against Israel and Zionism, as well as open antisemitism, has surged since Oct. 7. This took the form of pro-Hamas mobs who took over the streets of cities around the world and on North American college campuses.

In Europe, examples of mass outbursts of anti-Israel invective are no longer confined to political forms or the press. They have become routine happenings at cultural events that have nothing to do with the debate about the Middle East, such as the Glastonbury music festival in England, where, along with one of the performing bands, crowds recently chanted "Death to the IDF!" Similar vitriol was apparent at the annual running of the bulls at Pamplona, Spain, where a huge banner proclaiming "destroy" Israel was unfurled while organizers allowed activists to take over the ceremony.

Such histrionics aside, the effort to diplomatically sanction and economically isolate does hurt Israel, as well as makes it more difficult for its citizens to travel or do business abroad. The status as an international pariah, coupled with the hostility of organizations like the United Nations, and that coming from European and American left-wingers, remains a problem. Still, perhaps only readers of the Times would consider it such a terrible fate that it ought to prompt Israelis to reassess their nation's successful struggle for survival and security.

In his 1989 book, From Beirut to Jerusalem, Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman memorably wrote that Israel could best be described as "Yad Vashem with an air force." He did not mean this reference to Israel's national Holocaust museum and memorial as a compliment.

Friedman viewed the Jewish state's concern for its security in a region where its neighbors had been working toward its annihilation from the moment of its modern-day establishment in 1948 as the obsession of a nation of delusional paranoids.

In the decades since, Friedman has posed as a foreign-policy expert while events proved him wrong over and over again. Like most of his readers, he considers the fact that the Palestinian Arabs have rejected peace offers and far-reaching Israeli concessions, such as those ceded in the 1993 Oslo Accords, the 2000 Camp David agreement, the 2005 withdrawal from Gaza and other negotiations, as meaningless.

And that is the point that the Times analysis of the cost-benefit ratio of Israeli victory in exchange for calumnies and isolation misses.

LAND FOR TERROR

All of these peace offers and territorial concessions have been disasters. Israel didn't—as its once dominant left-wing political parties proclaimed—exchange "land for peace." What they've done is to trade land for terrorism.

That is not only because efforts to make peace didn't succeed. Rather, it's that every tangible concession has been used by the Palestinians and the terror groups that they have chosen to lead them to continue their century-old war against the presence of Jews in their ancient homeland.

The extremism and violence that plagued Israel in the 1990s after allowing the Palestine Liberation Organization to set itself up as an autonomous government in Judea, Samaria and Gaza would have been impossible without Oslo. The same is true of the Second Intifada, which followed the Jewish state's offer of an independent Palestinian state in 2000 that cost more than 1,000 Israeli lives.

The incessant rocket fire on Israel from southern Gaza since Hamas turned it into a terrorist fortress in 2007—and then the horrors of Oct. 7—could not have happened if not for former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's 2005 decision to withdraw every Israeli soldier, settler and settlement as part of a disastrous effort to advance the peace process.

To Israelis and their supporters, the recitation of the history of these failed peace efforts is old news. Few bother even to cite it as they fend off fallacious charges of genocide and apartheid that so many foreign observers have swallowed hook, line and sinker.

If Israelis are indifferent to international public opinion, it is not just because the Zionist ethos has created a spirit that saw the accomplishments of the Jews as more important than what the world thought of them. It's because, unlike their critics, they know that they've taken risks for peace and paid for them not only in bad press clippings but in oceans of blood.

IGNORANCE OR IDEOLOGY

It's possible that a great many otherwise decent people simply don't know the history of the conflict. But the real problem today is that under the influence of indoctrination in the toxic left-wing myths of critical race theory, intersectionality and settler-colonialism, a great many others don't care about the facts. They believe that Israelis and Jews are "white" oppressors who are always in the wrong, and the Palestinians are "people of color" who are always in the right. There is no convincing them of the truth under any circumstances.

Unlike most populations, who have no conception or sense of their own mortality as a group, Israelis and Jews understand what it means to be faced not only with fanatics who seek their deaths but the very real possibility that they may succeed. The Thomas Friedmans of the world can mock the idea that a Holocaust that happened 80 years ago should influence the policies of a country that has become a regional superpower with a First World economy.

But the mass murder, torture, rape, kidnapping and wanton destruction

that took place on Oct. 7 was Hamas putting its genocidal ideology into action. The killing of 1,200 Israelis—the worst mass slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust—and the kidnapping into Gaza of 250 others was just the trailer for what the Palestinian Arabs intend for the rest of Israel. If Iran invested massive resources over decades into an effort to build a nuclear weapon that has hopefully been thwarted by last month's American and Israeli airstrikes, it was because it wants a bomb with which it can inflict a new Holocaust on the Jews.

Any discussion of the cost that Israel is being made to pay for its successful efforts to degrade and eliminate the threats against its population from Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran cannot ignore the alternative to military success and the attendant casualties suffered by civilians in Gaza being used as human shields.

Yet that is exactly what Western liberals and leftists are doing.

Israelis will continue to debate the best way to protect their security, as well as whether their leaders and the military have succeeded in achieving their objectives. Anyone who thinks that they should choose policies that put their lives at risk to avoid being falsely accused of genocide knows nothing of Jewish history or the reality of the Middle East. The Jews need a state and the ability to defend themselves far more than the good opinion of the multitudes that didn't wait until the bodies of the Oct. 7 victims were buried to start sympathizing with the murderers. Remember: The IDF didn't start operations in Gaza until three weeks later, long after the first mass rallies spewed chants of "Free Palestine," "From the river to the sea" and "Globalize the intifada."

There have already been enough dead Jews. It's time for decent people to understand that the willingness of living ones to defend themselves is something not only to be understood, but to be supported.

THE JUDGE-EMPEROR: THE GLOBAL COUP OF THE COURTS

DRIEU GODEFRIDI (GateStoneInstitute.org 8-7-25)

"The judges of the nation are only the mouth that pronounces the words of the law, inanimate beings who can neither moderate its force nor its rigor."
— Montesquieu, The Spirit of the Laws (1748), Book XI, Chapter VI

From Israel to the United States, via Europe, the judicial coup d'état has become permanent. In the West, it is not the executive that threatens the separation of powers. It is faceless judges lacking democratic legitimacy who legislate on the pretext of judging. Here are four salient examples of this judicial imperialism -- which have become a judicial tyranny -- and a proposed American solution.

ISRAEL

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Israeli Supreme Court introduced three innovations that revolutionized Israel's legal and political landscape. First, it abolished the "standing" requirement, allowing anyone to challenge any government decision before the Supreme Court simply because they disagreed with it, even if they were not personally affected by it. This is unique in the Western world. Second, the Court removed the restriction on justiciability, placing all government and administrative actions (including foreign affairs, military actions and the budget) under its control — an extraordinary measure. Third, the Court took on the power to assess the "reasonableness" of government decisions, thus giving itself a political veto over the elected government's choices.

These innovations did not simply increase the power of Israel's Supreme Court into a "super-court." They have gradually established it as the ultimate arbiter of all questions, not only legal but also political. Any Israeli citizen -- and any NGO, even one funded from abroad -- has the right to ask the Supreme Court to overturn any democratic decision. The Supreme Court will grant this annulment if it deems the decision "unreasonable" or that the law is in conflict with a "Basic Law." There is no decision of the Israeli government and parliament that cannot be overturned by unelected judges.

FRANCE

Leading in all the presidential polls, Marine Le Pen, leader of the National Rally party, has been sentenced to a five-year ban from holding public office with provisional execution -- a rare occurrence -- for assigning assistants paid by the European Parliament to French national tasks. Le Pen and her supporters described the decision as political, and an attack on democracy. They argued, accurately, that the judges were essentially preventing the French people from voting for Le Pen. The accusation of "government by judges" was immediately relayed, and rightly so, by figures such as Éric Zemmour and Guillaume Bigot, who denounced a judiciary seeking to influence the political course by penalizing a major opposition figure.

In January 2017, when François Fillon, former Prime Minister and presidential candidate of the Republicans party, was the favorite in the polls, the weekly newspaper Le Canard Enchaîné revealed that his wife, Penelope Fillon, had benefited from fictitious employment as a parliamentary assistant between 1998 and 2013, as well as a literary adviser to the magazine Revue des Deux Mondes. It is estimated that she received more than €1 million without any proof of actual work done. The very next day, the National Financial Prosecutor's Office opened a preliminary investigation, followed by an indictment of François Fillon for "misappropriation of public funds", "complicity and concealment of misuse of corporate assets", and "failure to comply with reporting obligations". Do Fillon's practices seem abusive? They do. But they have been common practice for decades in France and elsewhere in Europe, and only Fillon has been judged while a candidate, then stigmatized and for years dragged through the mud.

In 2024, the Constitutional Council censured several provisions of the Immigration Act, adopted under political pressure to tighten the conditions for entry and residence in France. This censure provoked the anger of politicians, notably then Minister of the Interior Gérald Darmanin. He spoke of a "government of judges", criticizing the Constitutional Council's intervention, which was perceived as thwarting the will of Parliament and the government, in the name of general principles.

There is effectively no longer a single "right-wing" measure that can be adopted in any field by Parliament or the government without being struck down by the Constitutional Council or the courts. When the left loses at the ballot box, it is certain to win in the courts. In France, the judge reigns and the people no longer seem to have sovereignty over anything.

EUROPE

In Europe, the open-borders jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights obliges states to bring to Europe any illegal immigrant intercepted in the Mediterranean Sea, even ten meters from the African coast, whether a sovereign government wishes to welcome them or not.

Here are two recent examples of extreme judicial imperialism in the field of migration:

A Malian immigrant in France, claiming to be an unaccompanied minor (UAM), had his status as a minor challenged by the French authorities after a bone scan. He was placed in a detention center and threatened with deportation. The ECHR in 2024 ruled against France for violating Article 8 (right to privacy) of the European Convention on Human Rights, finding that the age assessment was not sufficiently rigorous and that the detention was disproportionate.

A Congolese immigrant in the United Kingdom, convicted of sexually assaulting his stepdaughter, challenged his expulsion by invoking his "right to family life." The UK immigration tribunal ruled that his expulsion would violate Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, holding that family ties took precedence over a criminal conviction.

The torrents of universal rules and requirements deriving from articles of the European Convention on Human Rights (e.g. privacy, dignity), and the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights are probably the worst modern example of tyrannical judicial imperialism. The anarchy of immigration in Europe is entirely of its making. Since the rulings of the imperial European Court of Human Rights are deemed to be the "official interpretation" of the text of the European Convention on Human Rights, they are imposed on all European states (except Russia, Belarus and Vatican City) as supreme law, which no parliamentary majority can overturn. So much for "democracy."

AMERICAN HOPE

For 40 years, the United States has been similarly engaged in a process of judicial usurpation of democratic sovereignty. Not only has the Supreme Court validated extremist policies, particularly racist policies (affirmative action) -- recently disavowed by the Court -- but for years it has been federal district court judges who, via national injunctions, have been preventing the president and Congress from pursuing the policies for which they were elected. These injunctions were not issued because the policies violated the Constitution; rather, they reflected the judges' own political views and an effort to supersede America's "separation of powers" – the legislative, the executive and the judicial.

On June 27, 2025, however, the Supreme Court issued a landmark ruling in Trump v CASA, Inc. by a vote of 6 to 3, limiting the power of federal district courts to issue nationwide injunctions. From now on, these injunctions, which block nationwide federal executive policies, will apply only to specific plaintiffs, and not to the entire policy nationwide. More than 600 federal district court judges in the US had been blocking executive orders from the president. The US Supreme Court decided last week that the district court judges had jurisdiction over specific cases and plaintiffs in their districts -- not across the nation.

The Supreme Court decision aims to reduce judicial overreach and restore the balance of power between the executive and judicial branches. The majority, led by Justice Amy Coney Barrett, held that national injunctions exceeded the prerogatives of the courts. This ruling will make it easier to

implement the policies for which Trump was elected, particularly on immigration.
Let us also not forget the costly two-year spectacle, before the 2016 presidential election, of the deliberate framing of then-presidential candidate Donald J. Trump, accusing him of colluding with Russia. Trump's accusers, it turned out, knew all along that their claims were false. Before the 2020 presidential election, 51 former intelligence officials deliberately lied in claiming that Hunter Biden's laptop was fraudulent, when they and the FBI knew it was real. That fraud may well have redirected that election.
The role of the judges is to enforce the law in the face of the disputes brought before them. Any attempt to legislate in place of democratic bodies is dictatorial, and a negation of national sovereignty, as well as the separation of powers.

WHY NIXON HELPED ISRAEL IN 1973: A PROMISE TO HIS MOTHER

LLOYD MASEL (Isreallycool.com 4-7-26)
Let's think back to 6 October 1973.
The day when the Egyptian and Syrian armies launched a surprise attack on Israel to eliminate the State and reclaim the territory for the Arab tribes.
On this sacred day of Yom Kippur when residents, solemnly in prayer, were alarmed with the unexpected sirens of war.
Prime Minister Golda Meir was in a state of shock.
Israel, with less than 200 tanks facing an enemy with 1400 tanks was totally ill-equipped to counter an onslaught of this magnitude.
The Prime Minister acted promptly and phoned Richard Nixon, President of the United States in the middle of night for immediate assistance.
Nixon responded with urgency, despite opposition from Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger and Deputy Director of the CIA, Vernon Walters who both warned about the cost to America in supporting Israel.
This warning became a reality when Saudi Arabia placed an embargo on the supply of oil to America and caused a steep escalation in the price of oil.
But Nixon was determined to help Israel:
"Get the stuff they need and send it off now. Now!
Operation Nickel Grass was up and running without further ado.
Planeload after planeload flew out of America carrying some 22,000 tons of much-needed munitions and materials.
Later a further 90,000 tons were dispatched by sea.
The outcome of the Yom Kippur War left Israel victorious, but deeply scarred.
Prime Minister Golda Meir resigned, claiming her inability to adequately protect the country she led was a failure in her leadership.
It was an honourable decision.
WHY DID NIXON AGREE?
Although the Jewish community of America contributed greatly to building the economy of America over many years, Richard Nixon was no lover of the Jews, perhaps for political reasons, but when Golda Meir phoned him that night, he acted without a second thought.
It took him back to his childhood days and his mother, Hannah Nixon, who was a devout believer in the Christian faith.
Yet, when Richard was just a boy she loved to tell him stories and read passages from the Old Testament.
Clearly, she admired the heroes of the bible, their bravery and how miracles saved the Jewish nation time after number, often despite overwhelming odds.
Hannah Nixon had a vision for her son:
"Richard, someday you're going to be in a position when you can help save the Jewish people. And when that day comes, you must do everything in your power."
Nixon never forgot the words of wisdom and encouragement from his mother. The day had arrived and he was now in a position when he could help the Jewish people.
Golda Meir summed it up so meaningfully:
"For generations to come, all will be told of the miracle of the immense planes from the United States bringing in the material that meant life to our people."
As the Jewish people love to quip:
"We don't pray for miracles. We expect them."
OPERATION NICKEL GRASS!
A strange name for a mighty undertaking where thousands of lives were at risk, but its origin dates back to the days of the old Korean War when the American fighter pilots concocted a bar-room ballad.
"Throw a nickel on the grass, save a pilot's ass."
The legend claims that when a pilot leaves on a dangerous mission he must throw a nickel on the grass before take-off.
Should he not return from battle one of his buddies would have the nickel to phone his loved ones with the sad news.

Kosher & Halacha Korner

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THE 17TH DAY OF TAMMUZ

RABBI DONIEL NEUSTADT (Torah.org)
The three-week period known as Bein ha-Metzarim, the time of year when we mourn the destruction of the two Batei Mikdash, begins with a fast day on the 17th day of Tammuz, and ends with a fast day, on the ninth day of Av.
Let us review the laws of the day known as Shivah Assar b'Tamuz – the 17th Day of Tammuz.
In most places the fast begins 72 minutes before sunrise (alos amud ha-shachar)(1) and ends 50 minutes after sunset (tzeis ha-kochavim)(2). Sunrise and sunset times are calculated by various government agencies and are readily available to the general public.
Food and drink may be consumed any time(3) during the night of the 17th(4) – but only if one remains awake all night. Once a person retires for the evening, the fast begins, because people do not normally eat until breakfast the following morning – which is well past alos amud ha-shachar. Retiring the evening before, therefore, is tantamount to starting the fast.
Consequently: Unless one explicitly states(5) before going to sleep that he plans to wake up early to eat before the fast begins, he may not eat in the morning upon awakening, even before alos amud ha-shachar. For him, the fast has already begun(6).
One who normally drinks coffee, juice, etc., in the morning upon arising, does not need to stipulate that he will drink this morning as well. One who normally does not drink anything in the morning should stipulate before retiring that he is planning to get up in the morning to drink. B'dieved, if he failed to do so, he may drink nevertheless(7). "Going to sleep" means deep sleep, whether in a bed or not. Napping or dozing does not mean that the individual has finished eating and begun the fast(8).
Although, as stated, it is permitted to eat before alos amud ha-shachar [if one intended to do so the evening before the fast], one who eats then must contend with another halachic issue – the strict prohibition against eating before davening Shacharis(9). The rules are as follows: According to the Zohar(10), one who wakes up at any time during the night [after midnight] may not eat before davening – even though the time of davening is several hours off. Although there are special individuals who abide by the Zohar(11), the basic halachah is not as stated in the Zohar and the prohibition does not begin until the earliest time for davening, which is alos amud ha-shachar(12).
As stated, it is permitted to eat until alos amud ha-shachar. However, one who did not begin to eat until he was within half an hour of alos amud ha-shachar must do one of the following(13): Limit his food intake: Eat fruit (any amount)(14), eat any shehakol type of food but without being kovei'a seudah (eating a regular, scheduled meal)(15), or eat less than 2.2 fl. oz. of bread, cake, cereal, etc.(16) All drinks,- except intoxicating beverages,- are permitted in any amount(17). Eat any kind and any amount of food, but appoint another person to remind him to recite Kerias Shema and Shemoneh Esrei(18). Once alos amud ha-shachar arrives, it is questionable if it is permitted to go back to sleep before davening. If he does go back to sleep, he should appoint another person to wake him up for davening(19). An alarm clock is not sufficient for this purpose(20).
FAST DAY ACTIVITIES
Although it is permitted to bathe on a fast day, it has become customary not to take a hot shower or bath(21). It is also proper for adults to refrain from swimming(22), unless it is needed for a medical condition or to cool off on a hot day.
The poskim differ as to whether it is permitted to rinse one's mouth with water on the 17th of Tammuz(23). Some permit rinsing the front part of the mouth, taking care that no water enters the throat area(24), while other poskim allow this only when in distress (tza'ar)(25). According to the second view, then, one may not schedule a fast-day visit to a dentist [which will require him to rinse his mouth] unless he is in pain(26).
Medications prescribed by a doctor may be taken on the 17th of Tammuz. One who has difficulty swallowing pills without water may drink the amount of water required to swallow them. There is no need to ruin the taste of the water before drinking it(27).
When suffering from a severe headache, etc., aspirin or Tylenol, etc., may be taken. The poskim, however, do not permit taking those medications with water, unless the water is first made to have a bad taste(28).
DAVENING ON A FAST DAY:
During the reading of the Torah on a fast day, the custom is that certain verses are read aloud by the congregation. The individual who is called up for that aliyah should not read the verses aloud with the congregation. Instead, he should wait until the reader says them aloud and read along with him(29).
One who mistakenly ate on a fast day must resume and complete the

fast(30), and he may recite aneinu at Minchah(31). One who is not fasting altogether should not say aneinu(32). A minor who is not fasting need not say aneinu [for the purpose of chinuch](33).

One who is davening Shemoneh Esrei together with the sheliach tzibur should not say aneinu as a separate blessing like the sheliach tzibur does; he should say it as it is said in private recitation, in Shema koleinu(34).

At the Minchah service, Avinu malkeinu is recited,- even when one is davening without a minyan(35).

FOOTOTES:

1 Beiur Halachah 89:1 quoting Rambam. [While some calendars list alos amud ha-shachar as 50 minutes before sunrise, there is no halachic basis for this calculation.] The custom in Israel is to calculate alos amud ha-shachar as 90 minutes before sunrise. In England and in other countries, alos may be much earlier; see Minchas Yitzchak 9:9.

2 Igros Moshe O.C. 4:62.

3 Some authorities maintain that it is improper to eat more than one normally does on the night before the fast, since that defeats the purpose of fasting (Eliyahu Rabbah 563:1). This stringency is quoted by some poskim but omitted by the Mishnah Berurah and many others (see Be'er Heitev 568:22; Aishel Avraham Tanina, ibid.; Elef ha-Magen 602:6; Kaf ha-Chayim 563:11; Igros Moshe O.C. 3:88; b'Tzeil ha-Chochmah 2:48).

4 A ba'al nefesh should begin the fast before nightfall of the 17th; Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 550:9. See also Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 565:8.

5 It is preferable to do so verbally, but it is valid as long as one had the condition in mind.

6 O.C. 564:1. One who did not know this halachah and ate in the morning without having made the stipulation the night before, may still recite aneinu (Shevet ha-Kehasi 1:180).

7 Mishnah Berurah 564:6 and Aruch ha-Shulchan 564:2 based on Rama, ibid. See, however, Mateh Efrayim 206:6, who is more stringent.

8 Mishnah Berurah 564:3.

9 O.C. 89:3. According to the Minchas Chinuch (#248), this may be a Biblical prohibition.

10 Quoted by the Magen Avraham 89:14 and by all the latter poskim.

11 Aruch ha-Shulchan 89:26.

12 Consensus of all the poskim; see Mishnah Berurah 89:28; Aruch ha-Shulchan 89:26; Yalkut Yosef, pg. 147.

13 Women are exempt from the following rules (Harav S.Z. Auerbach, written responsum published in Lev Avraham, vol. 2, pg. 20).

14 Based on Mishnah Berurah 232:34 and 286:9.

15 Based on Mishnah Berurah 639:15.

16 Mishnah Berurah 89:27.

17 Based on Mishnah Berurah 232:35.

18 Based on Mishnah Berurah 235:18. See also 89:34.

19 See Siddur ha-Gra, pg. 88, quoting Harav Y.L. Diskin and Binyan Olam 1. See Siyach Halachah, pg. 149.

20 Harav S.Z. Auerbach, quoted in Shevus Yitzchak, vol. 2, pg. 287.

21 Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 550:8; Aruch ha-Shulchan 550:3.

22 Be'er Moshe 3:77; Harav M. Feinstein (oral ruling quoted in Mo'adei Yeshurun, pg. 108). Minors, however, may swim; Nitei Gavriel, pg. 34 quoting Puppa Rav.

23 O.C. 567:3.

24 Aruch ha-Shulchan 567:3 This seems to be the view of Be'er Heitev 567:5 and Da'as Torah 567:3 as well. See also Magen Avraham, who allows rinsing the mouth as long as less than 3.3 fl. oz. of water are used at a time.

25 Mishnah Berurah 567:11 following the view of the Chayei Adam. Kaf ha-Chayim 567:13-14 also rules stringently.

26 Nishmas Avraham O.C., pg. 290.

27 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Nishmas Avraham, vol. 5, pg. 46). This is permitted on Tishah b'Av as well, ibid.; Harav M. Stern (Debreciner Rav, written responsum in Nitei Gavriel, Bein ha-Metzarim, pg. 30).

28 See Nishmas Avraham O.C., pg. 282, concerning Tishah b'Av.

29 Mishnah Berurah 566:3.

30 Ibid. 549:3.

31 Ibid. 568:3. See Shevet ha-Levi 5:60.

32 Beiur Halachah 565:1.

33 Shevet ha-Levi 8:131.

34 Ibid. 565:1.

35 Sha'arei Teshuvah O.C. 584:2 quoting Shevus Yaakov and Kitzur Shalah; Harav M. Feinstein (oral ruling quoted in Mo'adei Yeshurun, pg. 112). See, however, Da'as Torah 584:1 who states that some do not recite Avinu malkeinu when praying without a minyan.

Candles (Melb) Friday 11 July 2025, 16 Tammuz 5785 4.59p/6.00p