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 (In memory of Moshe Yehuda ben Avrohom Yaakov, Mala Mindel bas Meir, Moshe Tzvi ben Yitzchok Aharon, Gittel bas Sinai,  
 Nechemia ben Menachem Mendel, Yaakov ben Menachem Mendel)

## Mishpotim 5784

### DOWN-TO-EARTH SPIRITUALITY

RABBI SHRAGA SIMMONS (Aish.com)

Last week's Parsha told of the dramatic giving of the Torah to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai. It was a spiritual trip so powerful that every Jew literally had an out-of-body experience. The ultimate "wow!"

This week's follow-up, Mishpatim, is one of the longest Torah portions, containing an exhaustive list of over 50 separate mitzvot. Included are laws regarding kidnapping, personal injury and property damage, occult practices, helping the poor and vulnerable, returning lost objects, and alleviating the suffering of animals.

The juxtaposition between the two Parshas is striking: After the spiritual high of Mount Sinai, why would G-d "bring us down" (so to speak) with all these details of daily life? It's like being all heated up and then thrown into a cold shower. The two Parshas, it seems, are 180 degrees apart.

Actually, they're two sides of the same coin. The spiritual high of Sinai is gratifying, but it doesn't solve one problem of the world in which we live. Spirituality is not achieved by meditating alone on a mountaintop or by learning in an out-of-the-way monastery. Jewish spirituality comes through grappling with the mundane world in a way that uplifts and elevates.

Jews don't retreat from life, we elevate it. On Friday night, we raise the cup of wine – not to get drunk – but to make Kiddush and sanctify the Sabbath day. Spirituality, says Judaism, is to be found in the kitchen, the office, and yes, even the bedroom.

### FLASH OF INSPIRATION

If that's true, why do we need Mount Sinai in the first place?

Because a powerful spiritual experience is what jump-starts our engines. We've all had such a moment of insight – whether at a Discovery Seminar, or standing atop Masada. But that feeling lasts only a short time.

Maimonides explains this metaphorically:

Imagine you're lost at night, trudging knee-deep in mud through a dark and vicious rainstorm. Suddenly a single flash of lightning appears, illuminating the road ahead. It is the only light you may see for miles. This single flash must guide you through the night.

So too, says Maimonides, one burst of inspiration may need to last for years.

The many practical, everyday scenarios described in this week's parsha send a very clear message: To maximize a moment of insight, we must concretize it, allowing the spiritual insight to take root in the reality of our physical world.

Thus after being commanded in last week's parsha "Thou shall not steal," this week's parsha describes how to prosecute a thief. The lofty level of yesterday is no guarantee we'll retain that level tomorrow. Only through the laws of daily life can we hope to transform ourselves and our world.

### LETTER VS. SPIRIT

Modern society professes ideals of justice and compassion. Yet to what extent do these ideals find expression in everyday life? Do we always 'walk the walk'?

The key is legislation. By legislating Mitzvot like returning lost objects and caring for the widow and orphan, the Torah builds a framework for profound personal transformation.

This raises the whole issue of "letter of the law" versus "spirit of the law." "Letter of the law" is performing an act because it is prescribed by the Torah. "Spirit of the law" is performing an act because of an inner emotional sense.

Charity is one example. The Torah commands us to give 10% of our income to charity (the letter of the law), which is intended to develop within us feelings of compassion for others (the spirit of the law).

We should ideally have both. But given the choice of one or the other, which is more crucial?

Let's examine the following case from Dennis Prager:

*Two Jews (of equal wealth) are each approached by a poor woman who needs money for her daughter's cancer surgery. One of these Jews, upon hearing the woman's plight, feels a deep sense of compassion, and amidst tears, gives the woman a dollar. The other Jew isn't nearly as moved, in fact he was in a hurry and couldn't talk to the woman. But because he observes the Jewish law requiring 10 percent of income go to charity, he gives the woman \$100.*

Who is the "better Jew?"

Judaism would love you to give 10% of your income from the heart. It suspects, however, that in a large majority of cases, were we to wait for people's hearts to prompt them to give away thousands of dollars annually, we would be waiting a very long time. Judaism says: Give 10% – and if your heart catches up, terrific. In the meantime, a lot of good had been done.

The lesson of all this? "Doing" is more important than "feeling." This is one of the great lessons that Jews could teach in the post-'60s world which celebrates feelings. "How do you feel about it?" is not the Jewish question. "What do you do about it?" is the Jewish question.

### INTERNALIZED LESSONS

The Talmud says that G-d approached all the nations of the world and offered them the Torah. Only the Jewish people said "Na'aseh v'Nishma" – we are committed to fulfilling the mitzvot, and also strive to understand their deeper meaning.

Of course, we must strive to do mitzvot with emotional passion and practical, spiritual and intellectual understanding. But in terms of priority, a lack of understanding will not prevent our commitment to fulfilling them.

Another example is daily prayer. People say, "Why can't I just pray on those occasions when I'm inspired?" The answer is that, oftentimes, standing up to pray is exactly the catalyst needed to get inspired. It is a pro-active approach of putting oneself in a framework which nurtures and develops inspiration – rather than waiting for the inspiration to come to you.

The opening line of this week's Parsha is Aileh hamishpatim asher tasim lefneyhem – which can be translated as "these are the laws which you should place inside of them." The Zohar explains that the ideals of Sinai must be internalized and absorbed into our very bones. Whenever we have a moment of insight and clarity, we must channel that energy into a concrete act of renewal and repair.

That, the Torah tells us, is how we bring the heights of Sinai... down to earth.

### THE THING IS NOT A PLAY

RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR (Ohr.edu)

"And these are the ordinances that you should place before them:" (21:1)

An actor-manager was a leading actor who set up his own permanent theatrical company and managed the business, sometimes taking over a

theater to perform select plays in which he usually starred. It was a method of theatrical production used consistently since the 16th century, particularly common in 19th-century Britain and the United States. One of the last great actor-managers was Sir Donald Wolfitt. There's an apocryphal story about Sir Donald, that in one particular classical play he had to read a long excerpt from a scroll that was presented to him by a page boy. Wolfitt never bothered to actually learn the speech, instead reading it out every night. One night, someone persuaded the page boy to bring to the stage a blank scroll. With great gravitas, Wolfitt unwound the scroll, saw that it was blank, handed it back to the page boy, saying, "Here. You read it." An audience would never guess the shenanigans and cover-ups that actors perpetrate to keep the show going. As the saying goes, "The show must go on!"

How would an actor feel if every member in the audience had a script and a little flashlight to monitor every line he said? Well, that's exactly what a ba'al koreh – someone who reads the Torah for the congregation – must feel. Everyone in "the audience" is following his every line, listening carefully to make sure there is not even the slightest deviation.

Of course, the difference is that the Torah is reality. The Zohar HaKadosh says that "The Holy One looked into the Torah and created the world." Just as the world is immutable, so is the Torah. It's not as Hamlet said, "The play's the thing." Rather, "The thing (i.e. the Torah) is not a play."

### GILDED BONDAGE

RABBI NAFTALI REICH (Torah.org)

This is where it was all leading. The miraculous ten plagues. The triumphant Shmot from Egypt. The incredible parting of the sea. The spectacular revelation of the Divine Presence on Mount Sinai. The declaration of the Ten Commandments. Everything was pointing toward the acceptance of the Torah by the Jewish people. And now it had all come to pass. It was time to get down to the business of learning what the vast Torah was all about.

So what were the first laws Moshe taught the Jewish people in the desert encampments? Did they describe the observance of the Sabbath day? The celebration of the festivals? The guidelines for kosher food? Not at all. Moshe begins by telling the people about a Jewish thief who is sold into bondage in a Jewish home for six years so that his victim can be repaid. What is so critical about these laws that they are given such high priority?

Let us take a closer look at this Jewish bondsman. What if after six years, when his term of bondage expires, he decides to stay on? After all, the Torah instructs the Jewish master to share all the comforts of home with his Jewish bondsman. What if the bondsman finds this situation secure and pleasant and doesn't want to leave? The Torah tells us he must be brought to the doorpost. Then his ear, which heard Hashem say, "The Jewish people are My servants," not servants of servants, must be drilled through with an awl.

Why does the Torah prescribe such a harsh punishment for this bondsman who chooses to remain in his master's house?

The commentators explain that the attitude of the bondsman who chooses to remain in his master's house is antithetical to the very essence of the Shmot from Egypt. Clearly, he views the redemption from Egyptian bondage in purely physical terms. In Egypt, the Jewish people suffered material privation and dreadful working conditions, but now they could enjoy the fruits of their own labor and live in relative comfort. If the Jewish master's house provided material comfort and security, then it was perfectly acceptable to live in this sort of gilded bondage.

But that was not the primary purpose of the Shmot. Hashem had not wrenched them free from the grasp of the Egyptians simply to give them the creature comforts of life. He brought them forth to spiritual freedom, to a state of personal liberation in which each individual would have unlimited opportunities to rise to the highest levels of spiritual achievement. He brought the Jewish people forth from Egypt so that they could connect with their Creator, so that the divine spark within each of them would flare into a splendid spiritual flame.

A bondsman, under constant obligation to his master, cannot undertake this spiritual journey. Therefore, if he chooses to remain, he is choosing the material over the spiritual, completely missing the message of the Shmot. In response, his ear is drilled, symbolizing the penetration beyond the superficial to the essence within. The bondsman must learn the deeper meaning of the Shmot and the role of "My servants." Being the servant of Hashem does not connote physical bondage but rather spiritual freedom. This is the essence of the Shmot.

A successful businessman met an old schoolmate in a train station. The man

was gaunt and unshaven, and his clothing was threadbare. The small satchel in his hand obviously held all his earthly belongings. "What happened to you, my friend?" asked the businessman. "We all thought you were on the road to success."

"I have successfully found freedom. I am a travelling preacher." "Freedom? You call this freedom?"

"Yes, I do," said the preacher. "Tell me, are you free?"

"Me?" said the businessman. "Of course, I am free."

"You are mistaken," said the preacher. "You are a prisoner of your large house with its large mortgage, your business, your employees, your customers, your bills, your investments, everything. You cannot make a move without giving accountings in every direction. I, on the other hand, am free to do whatever my spirit moves me to do."

In our own lives, we all value and cherish the opportunities available to us in the democratic and affluent society in which we live. But let us not confuse material success with freedom. If the price of our material success is the stultification of our spirits than we have only achieved a gilded bondage and cheated ourselves of the unlimited rewards which only true spiritual freedom so richly provides.

### AWL IN FOR FREEDOM

RABBI BEREL WEIN (Torah.org)

The Torah prescribes that a Jewish servant who wishes to remain permanently in servitude – he loves his master's home and his family – is given a permanent mark, a hole in his ear, as an everlasting reminder of his choice. Rashi explains, based on the Talmud, that the ear that heard on Sinai that the Jewish people are G-d's servants and not to be servants to other humans is to be drilled with an awl as a stark reminder of his poor choice in life.

The Talmud taught us that a truly free person is someone whose guide in life is Torah. The choice of servitude over freedom is anti-Jewish and anti-Torah in its very makeup. In the ancient world and even in later times, slaves were branded so that all could see that they were the chattel of their owner.

The Torah's instruction to bore a hole in the ear of the Jewish servant was to remind everyone of just the opposite idea. That this slave belonged to no other human but rather was to be a servant of G-d – that was the message of the drilled ear. Freedom and independence mean that we bow to no one but to our Creator alone.

Having other masters in life is a rejection of the Jewish mission and Judaism's true understanding of life's purpose. Jews have often in our long history been made to serve in involuntary servitude and slavery. But voluntarily giving up one's freedom of action and behavior is abhorrent to Jewish ideals and tradition.

The ancient world, as well as much of the later worlds, was built upon the institution of slavery, forced labor and involuntary servitude. In our time governments that preached equality and nobility enslaved others simply because they suspected them of having different ideas.

The mocking slogan at the entrance to Auschwitz "Work makes one free" symbolized the ultimate form of slavery and murder. The Gulag was the place where millions succumbed doing useless work. The great White Sea Canal of Stalin was literally a canal that led to nowhere while myriads of people died in the process of building it, often only with their bare hands.

The Jewish people were coming forth from Egypt after centuries of slavery. One would have thought that having themselves experienced that type of servitude they would not wish to inflict it upon others. However Midrash teaches us that even in Egypt there were Jews who somehow owned other Jews as slaves. It would take millennia for Jews to be completely weaned from the practice of slavery.

Such is the dark side of human nature and behavior. But the process of drilling the ear of one who wishes to remain a permanent slave reminds the Jewish society of the inherent wrong in the deprivation of people's freedom. Only G-d has the right to ask us to be His servants. And those who truly serve G-d have no interest in depriving others of their freedom. The message of freedom that was heard on Sinai should reverberate in all of our ears constantly.

### NOT MY JOB

RABBI YANKI TAUBER (Chabad.org)

I cannot claim to have predicted the collapse of the Soviet Union upon my return from a five-week stint in that country in 1987. But neither did I come away with the impression that the system functioned very well. A case in

point was an incident that occurred shortly before my arrival in Moscow. A car parked in the yard of the Chabad shul was broken into, and valuable equipment was stolen. When the caretaker/watchman was confronted with this blatant failure to do his job, he shrugged, “My job is to make sure that everything’s okay. When something’s not okay—that’s not my job!” That incident reminded me of a story which the Lubavitcher Rebbe would often tell about his predecessor and namesake, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (1789–1866). The wife of Rabbi Menachem Mendel’s youngest son had fallen ill, and the doctors were unanimous in their opinion that there was no hope of recovery. When Rabbi Menachem Mendel was informed of the doctors’ verdict, he noted that the Talmud raises the question, “From where do we know that a physician is allowed to heal?” and answers that this is derived from the verse (Shmot 21:19), “And heal shall he heal.” “But nowhere,” concluded Rabbi Menachem Mendel, “has a physician been given the right or the ability to determine that a human being is incurable.”

The Talmud’s query is a very real question for the believer. If a person is stricken with illness only because G-d has determined that he should be ill, what use is there in summoning the doctor? It’s not only a question of “how do you dare to interfere with G-d’s will?”—it’s also a matter of “how can you think that anything you do will make a difference?” The answer given by the Talmud is that, indeed, the physician is permitted to “interfere” only because G-d allows—nay, commands—the physician to interfere, and the physician’s efforts make a difference only because G-d desires that the physician’s efforts should make a difference.

Which led Rabbi Menachem Mendel to conclude that the physician’s authority and influence are strictly limited to the function that the Torah has given him. Namely, to heal. Anything beyond that is not his job.

While illness and healing provide a dramatic illustration of this principle, chassidic teaching applies it to all areas of life: earning a livelihood, helping the needy, etc. We have the ability, the right and the duty to make a difference because—and only because—G-d has empowered us to make a difference. But this authority has its limits. When we reach these limits—i.e., when we have truly done everything that is within our knowledge and capacity to do—what happens beyond that is beyond our domain.

This is why the concept of “despair” is given no credence in Chassidism. It is generally assumed that there exist two types of people: fatalists and activists. The fatalist maintains that things are the way they are, and that nothing that anyone does really makes a difference. So there is reason neither for exultation nor for despair (though some would say that the fatalist’s state is one of perpetual despair). The activist, on the other hand, believes himself to be the master of his fate, so he exults over his achievements and despairs when things do not go the way he’s planned, believing the latter to be the result of his failure to make happen what he wanted to have happened.

The Jew is neither, and both. He’s a fatalist, in the sense that he believes that whatever transpires is the direct result of G-d’s will that it should transpire. But he’s also an activist: he believes that there is much he can do and must do, and that what he does makes a difference.

So that Russian watchman did have a valid point. To make things right—that’s our job, and the joy and fulfillment we experience in our successes are real and true. But when we reach the limits of what we can do, that’s not failure. It simply means that we have done our job, and now it’s up to G-d to do His.

## UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

RABBI BETZALEL BASSMAN (Chabad.org)

A close friend of mine is an addict. He had tried medication, therapy and much more. Nothing worked. He lost his family and his health. He almost lost his life—a number of times. He finally found recovery through a 12-step program. In his words, “I found G-d. Since then, my life has never been better.”

In this week’s Torah portion we discuss the laws of a muad, an animal with an established track record of violence. This distinction is earned by having perpetrated a destructive act three consecutive times.

(Once an animal is an established muad, the owner has to pay the full price of the damage caused—as opposed to a tam, an ordinary animal, for which he must cover half of the loss.)

Once established as a muad, can an animal become tamed, or does it keep its muad status forever?

The answer is that even animals can “repent” and revert to tam status. The sages of the Talmud<sup>1</sup> offer a number of methods through which the animal’s

slate can be wiped clean. One way is for it to be purchased by a new owner. When “under new management,” we once again assume that it is tame, and is no longer viewed as a menace.<sup>2</sup>

The Rebbe<sup>3</sup> explains that we each have an inner animal, known in chassidic parlance as the animal soul. Left untended, it can become “wild.” How can we bring it under control? There are a number of steps that a person must take to subdue his baser side. And, like the case of the unruly and destructive animal, chief among them is that he must transfer ownership—in this case, by bringing it under G-d’s control and submitting himself to His will.

How does that work?

My friend, the addict, explained that the key to recovery was realizing he was powerless—G-d is in control. Once he had relinquished control to a higher power, he was able to begin recovery.

1. Bava Kamma 40b.
2. Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein (1829–1908) and others posit that the new status is due to the assumption that the new owner may be a better guardian (Aruch Hashulchan, Choshen Mishpat 389:18). As understood by the Rebbe, Maimonides (1135–1204) and Rabbi Menachem Meiri (1249–1306) seem to say that it’s the animal who changes. Rashi and others offer alternative explanations (see Likkutei Sichot, vol. 36, pp. 102–106).
3. Likutei Sichot, *ibid.*, pp. 106–108.

## HOLY PEOPLE

RABBI LABEL LAM (Torah.org)

*And you shall be holy people to Me... (22:30)*

What does it mean to be holy? How do we practically do this?

The Kotztker Rebbe commented on the verse, “And you shall be holy people to Me... (22:30) “HASHEM has plenty of holy angels but what he desires most is “Holy People”. What does it mean to be a Holy People?! How is that done?

I remember one of my Rebbeim telling us that when the Chofetz Chaim would lick a stamp to put on an envelope he would have in mind that the letter might just merit someone the Mitzvah of Tzedaka and the possibility to participate in supporting the Torah learning in Yeshiva, which will lead to an amplification of Kovos Shemaim – The Honor of Heaven.

For most everyone else we can presume that the natural and default mindset and ulterior motivations are “Kina, Taiva, and Kavod HaMotzei es HaAdam Min HaOlam – the jealousy, desire, and glory seeking that take a man out of the world.”

What is Holy? What is Holy living? Maybe we can learn from the opposite of Holy. At the conclusion of Shabbos Kodesh we declare during Havdala, “Boruch HaMavdil Bein Kodesh L’Chol” –“Blessed is He Who separates between the Holy and the Chol?” What is Chol? Some translate it as profane, whatever that means. Literally Chol means sand. What is there about – Chol-sand that stands in stark juxtaposition to Holy?

Pick up a handful of sand and study it ever so briefly. It is a loose collection of little pebbles. That fistful of sand has no meaningful organization. There is no top and no bottom. There is no beginning or end. It represents a life of disconnected experiences that have neither rhyme nor reason, no profound unifying theme or meaningful connection. It’s a loose collection of life experiences, albeit exciting and even thrilling, but in the final analysis, “sound and fury signifying nothing”.

In contradistinction, what then is Holy? Holy is when there is a connection between all those loose pebble. All of our life’s experiences are like a string of pearls on a single golden thread.

The only day in Torah life that actually has a name is Shabbos. We count every day each day only as it relates to and leads us closer to Shabbos. Shabbos is a Holy day. We are commanded to “Remember the Day of Shabbos” not only on Shabbos but even on the days of the week.

We are working for and cooking for and preparing for and waiting for and anxiously anticipating Shabbos. That gives the possibility that every part of every day is infused with the Holiness of Shabbos. That is one giant beautiful golden thread and there are many more too.

So, Holiness is not just when we are doing seemingly Holy and spiritual activities but even the ordinary and mundane is made extraordinary and sublime with a single thought as we had described by the Chofetz Chaim.

A Rebbe of mine told us that when writing a check, it is important to write in the “memo” section on the lower left hand side of the check something that explains or justifies why this check is being written. What is the purpose of this purchase?

Does it connect with something that adds Kovod Shemaim? Does it connect with Shabbos Kodesh? Does it bring you closer to HASHEM? Does it further HASHEM's plan for the world? If so, then great! If not, then think again! Why am I expending my finite time and limited resources on this?

If we can just assign or consciously have in mind some ultimate meaning for whatever we are doing, whether it is eating, or drinking, or sleeping, or even breathing. That simple but profound thought then breathes holiness into our otherwise banal lives and we are transformed into that which HASHEM desires more than His many armies of Holy Angels. We are capable of living in this world the life of a Holy People.

## SWIMMING AGAINST THE CURRENT

RABBI MOSHE PERETZ GILDEN (Torah.org)

Following the revelation at Sinai of last week's parsha, the Torah now starts a presentation of civil and tort law. True to the maxim that the Torah's holiness is as manifest in the scrupulous adherence to its business laws as it is in pious observance of its rituals, the Torah opens with the laws of financial obligations, property damage and the integrity of the judicial process.

From the discussion of civil court procedure our sages exegetically derive the rule probably most central to Jewish, and now western, legal systems: "yielding to the majority" (Shemos 23:2), the concept that the legal truth is determined by a majority of voices, even if not unanimous. Some note the peculiarity of the Jewish people, as members of societies throughout the world, who never quite seem to blend in. We maintain unique facets of dress, different laws and customs, our own language. Why do we not follow our own dictum and concede to the majority; why do we not just "go with the flow"?

The famed Ba'al Shem of Michelstadt was renowned for his genius even as a youth. The boy's fame spread quickly and the local Duke became aware of the child prodigy. Inviting the lad to his sprawling home, with its maze of hallways and countless rooms, the Duke excused his staff and cleared out the palace to leave the guest to his own means to find the intended meeting room. As the bewildered nine year old came to realize there was no one about to assist him in finding the Duke's reception room, he deduced that the sole room to have the curtain drawn over the window must be the intended room, and was, indeed, the room in which he found the Duke waiting for him. The Duke, intrigued, asked him what he would have done if the servants had been there to assist. "I would have followed the recommendation of the majority of them." The Duke, focusing his stare on the boy, challenged, "Is it not true that you have a legal tradition to follow the majority? You know that you Jews are a very small minority. Why do you continue your unique practices?"

The boy, stunned by the power and implication of such an overwhelming question, recovered quickly and with great conviction offered a brilliant response. "My Lord, I now know without a doubt that this is the room in which you receive your guests. If now the ENTIRE staff of the castle would point me in a different direction I would not follow. The rule of following the majority is relevant only when one is unsure of the truth, when there is an unresolved doubt. Where there is no doubt, because the truth has previously been indisputably determined, the greatest multitudes of people cannot, with their opinions, change the truth. Sir, the convictions of my forefathers are the indisputable truth; thus, I do not need, nor would it be appropriate, to follow the opinions and beliefs of the masses."

Our sages have compared the Children of Israel to a school of fish, whose healthy members naturally swim against the current. It is not that we search out a current to swim against; rather, the nature of the world is that it perpetually presents goals and ideals in conflict with the Torah. The deception of the masses is irrelevant in light of a clear truth. We must maintain the strength to swim against the current.

## GROWTH INVESTMENT

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY (Torah.org)

In a portion replete with commands and laws that detail hundreds of the most diverse aspects of Jewish life, our sages look carefully at the juxtapositions of those commands, garnering even more wisdom and moral guidance from the holy words of the Torah.

That is why they explicated the very interesting placement of two commands that seem as diverse as ends of the spectrum. One verse tells us about the laws of a treifah animal, "People of holiness shall you be to Me; you shall not eat flesh of an animal that was torn in the field; to the dog shall you throw it" (22:30). The next verse tells us about carrying a false or

evil reports, "Do not accept a false report, do not extend your hand with the wicked to be a venal witness" (23:1).

The two seem quite disjointed; yet the Talmud in Pesachim 118 quotes Rav Shaishes in the name of Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah who connects the two. "Whoever speaks or accepts gossip (lashon horah) is worthy to be thrown to the dogs, as it is written 'to the dog shall you throw it' and immediately afterwards it is written, 'do not accept a false report.'"

At first the connection, albeit homiletic, is difficult to understand. What does throwing non-kosher meat to a dog have to do with a gossip? The two seem totally unconnected. According to the Mechilta, the meat given to the dogs is a payback for their reticence on the night of the Egyptian exodus. That night, despite the cries and wails of the Egyptians as their first-born were smitten, the dogs were still. "Against all the Children of Israel, no dog shall whet its tongue, against neither man nor beast, so that you shall know that Hashem will have differentiated between Egypt and Israel" (Shmot 11:7). Therefore they are rewarded with the meat that a Jew must refrain from eating. How is their reward of reticence a lesson for Jews who slander?

*I recently read of a man who was going on vacation to one of the islands south of the United States. He wanted a room for himself and his pet dog, and asked if the establishment, a hotel in Kingston, Jamaica, would allow an animal. A few weeks later he received his reply:*

*Dear Sir,*

*I've been in the hotel business for forty years and never had to eject a disorderly dog. Never has a dog set a mattress on fire while smoking in bed. Never has a dog stolen a towel or sneaked an unpaid guest into his room. Never has a dog acted disorderly, drunk or otherwise. Your dog is welcome. If he can vouch for you, you can come along as well.*

*Thank You*

The Chafetz Chaim explains that the Talmud is making an amazingly profound comparison.

The reason dogs were rewarded was because their nature is to yelp and bark at tragedy. Despite their instinct, they went against their nature and held back. They followed the command of the Almighty and held their tongues. The Torah rewarded their reserve with the spoils of our control treif meat.

But when humans, who are supposed to control their desires and their tongues, lose control, there is no better method to learn how to mend the folly of their ways than through the very animals who mastered self-control in most trying times.

How fitting is it that the two verses, one that rewards the canine for constraint be juxtaposed next to one which upbraids their mortal masters who unfortunately lose perspective all too often. We are the masters of our animals, but more so must be the masters of our desires! Often, however, when our dogs get their just rewards it is not only time for us to appreciate their constraint. Instead of just teaching our dogs new tricks, we can learn a lesson as well.

## HOW TO SOLVE A PROBLEM PROPERLY

AVROHOM YAAKOV

When entering the land of Canaan, G-d made the following promise to the Jewish people.

"I will not drive them (the Canaanites) away from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the beasts of the field outnumber you. I will drive them out from before you little by little, until you have increased and can occupy the land." (23:29-30)

Rashi explains that it would be counterproductive to remove all the inhabitants at once since there were too few Jews to take their place. The land would become desolate if stripped of the natives too quickly.

We live in a world of unintended consequences.

Decisions are made on the spur of the moment to further a short term agenda.

There are so many recent real-world examples it would be almost impossible to limit ourselves to just a few.

Suffice to say that recent decisions, supposedly taken to make the world a safer place for ourselves and future generations, appear to have had the opposite effect with economic mayhem, food shortages in First World countries, fostering racism and the starting of wars, the general reduction in the standard of living and the list goes on being the outcomes.

The purported cures to the world's ills are worse than the illnesses themselves.

And in a micro sense, the same applies with the family unit, the workplace

and the community.

G-d's promise to the Jewish people is that while actions need to be taken to secure the land, those actions will take into account that they have continuity and are not more destructive than the issues that they are resolving.

## EATING AT MOUNT SINAI

ROBERT M. SCHWARTZ (Chabad.org)

*Against the great men of the Children of Israel, He did not stretch out His hand; they gazed at G-d, and they ate and drank. (24:10–11)*

Everyone knows that the abridged version of Jewish history reads, “They tried to kill us, we won, let’s eat.” So it would seem commendable that the elders of Israel ate and drank while gazing at G-d on Mount Sinai. But most commentators don’t see it this way.

Before Moshe ascended Mount Sinai to receive the first set of tablets, G-d requested that he, Aaron, Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu, and 70 of the elders of Israel approach the mountain. There, “they saw the G-d of Israel,” and as the verse above indicates, the elders celebrated the occasion with food and drink.

According to some commentators, it was highly improper for the elders to eat and drink in G-d’s presence. The view that they were worthy of punishment seems to be supported by the Torah’s statement that “He did not stretch out His hand against them.” But other opinions maintain that there was nothing wrong in celebrating with feasting, that in fact this was commendable behavior.

Each of these contradictory opinions has associated problems. If it was commendable to eat, why does the Torah note that G-d did not raise His hand against them to destroy them? If it was sinful to eat, how is it possible that after 49 days of refining their characters, and immediately after experiencing the holiest event imaginable, the 70 most elevated figures of the Jewish people would rush into impulsive behavior?

Furthermore, if it was improper to eat in celebration of receiving the Torah, why do we commemorate the experience today by feasting on cheesecake and other fine foods?

YES, THE ELDERS SINNED BY FEASTING

Rashi and Rambam argue that the behavior of the elders was improper because they ate and drank inappropriately during this sublime occasion, or alternatively, because they attempted to obtain spiritual truths that exceeded their capabilities. In either case, they deserved to be punished, but G-d refrained from punishing them in order not to ruin the joy of the occasion.

This opinion sticks closest to the obvious meaning of the text, because it explains why the Torah mentions that G-d did not raise His hand against them, even though they deserved to be punished.

But as noted earlier, the idea that the notables of Israel sinned so quickly after 49 days of character refinement is disappointing and difficult to comprehend. And of course, this opinion is inconsistent with the pervasive Jewish practice of celebrating every memorable event with feasting.

NO, THEY DIDN’T SIN, BECAUSE THEY DIDN’T FEAST PHYSICALLY

Another view, as Rashi himself notes, is that of Onkelos, who translates the Torah text: “And they saw the glory of G-d, and they rejoiced in their sacrifices, which were accepted graciously, as if they ate and drank” (italics added).

The view that the elders did not physically consume food, but feasted spiritually on the splendor of the divine vision, was first mentioned in the Zohar in the name of Rabbi Yose, and is also held by Ibn Ezra and Ohr HaChaim. The latter sage observed that the visual experience provided the kind of satisfaction that ordinary people derive from consuming physical food and drink. The elders experienced what might be called “mystical satiation.”

The problem with this view is that the text states very clearly that they did eat and drink, and there is no compelling textual evidence that it was only spiritual consumption.

NO, THEY DIDN’T SIN, EVEN THOUGH THEY ACTUALLY DID EAT AND DRINK

In stark contrast to these views, Ramban states that the nobles physically ate and drank, because it is an obligation to rejoice over receiving the Torah. Ramban supports his interpretation with multiple sources, including the verse in which G-d commanded the people that after writing all of the words of the Torah on stones, “you shall slaughter peace-offerings and eat there, and you shall be glad before G-d, your G-d” (Deuteronomy 27:7).

Ramban concludes that if writing the Torah on stones was an occasion properly celebrated by eating and drinking, how much more so was the

actual receiving of the Torah!

Why mention that G-d did not stretch out his hand against them?

If we accept the view that it was commendable to feast, how can we explain the insertion of this puzzling verse: “Against the nobles of the Children of Israel, He did not send forth His hand . . .”?

In the Zohar, Rabbi Yehudah provides a hint that leads to an explanation. Rabbi Yehudah agreed that the elders did nothing wrong in consuming actual food and drink, because, through the enjoyment of the food, they were uplifted to G-d.

Through the enjoyment of the food, they were uplifted to G-d.

But we can go a step further. When the Torah was given at Mt. Sinai, a unique transformation occurred. Prior to Sinai, the physical and spiritual realms were separate and distinct. People could experience G-dliness, but physical reality remained mundane and could not be elevated or penetrated by spiritual energy. Once the Torah was received, it provided a means to uplift physical reality by bringing out the G-dly, spiritual energy concealed within it.

THE TORAH IS FOR THE BODY MORE THAN THE SOUL

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, of righteous memory, provides a powerful illustration of this concept. We have the custom to stay up studying Torah on the first night of Shavuot. We refrain from sleep to make amends for the fact that the Jews went to sleep the night before they received the Torah.

The Rebbe explains that the Jews slept, not out of a lack of enthusiasm for what was about to happen, but out of a genuine desire that their souls reach a more spiritual level and gain greater insight into the Torah than was possible while they were awake.

The Torah’s purpose, however, is to bring the spiritual down to the physical, to engage, elevate and refine the physical. Therefore, the proper preparation was not to raise the soul higher at the expense of the body by sleeping, but to remain awake and present in the physical realm.

With this in mind, we can see that the giving of the Torah had to be celebrated with physical feasting. Even though the Torah was a spiritual gift, its purpose was to fuse the spiritual and the physical. The defining point of the event would be missed unless physical eating occurred.

HOLY EATING AT SINAI: THE PROTOTYPE FOR JEWISH CELEBRATIONS

Returning now to Sinai, we can see that, consistent with Ramban and Rabbi Yehudah, it was not only proper, but obligatory, that the elders ate and drank to celebrate receiving the Torah. But their feast was a spiritual one: They ate the peace offerings, sanctified food that was eaten with spiritual concentration.

There is still a final reason why eating and drinking was not only proper but necessary. Receiving the Torah was such an intense spiritual experience that were it not anchored to physicality, those present would likely have yearned so deeply for G-d that their souls would have left their bodies.

The Rebbe illustrates this idea with the image of a flickering candle flame that constantly strives upwards. So too the soul: were it not for the wick that connects it to the base of the candle, the body, the soul would depart and ascend. If they had not integrated their spiritual experience with physicality by eating and drinking, it is likely that the souls of the elders would have left their bodies.

EAT AND ENJOY, WITH HOLINESS

We can now resolve the seeming contradiction that even though the elders acted appropriately, we needed to learn that G-d did not “stretch out His hand” against them. This verse points to the distinction between eating in G-d’s presence before receiving the Torah, when it would have been a purely physical act and therefore sinful, and eating after receiving the Torah, when the physical world was pervaded with G-dliness, and the eating and drinking could be done in a holy way. The elders engaged in holy eating.

What is the message for us today? This important and perplexing verse reminds us that when we feast on Shavuot and other holidays, we should take care not to forget the spiritual side of our celebration. Focusing on food only to satisfy our physical appetite is an improper way to commemorate receiving the Torah. But eating cheesecake with the intention of liberating the “sparks” of holiness within it is praiseworthy.

So, really, the most accurate summary of Jewish history should read: “They tried to kill us, we won, let’s eat—with holiness.”

*News, Views & Opinion*

**FOUND IN KFAR AZA: A NOTE FROM THE TERRORISTS**

ARUTZ SHEVA (Israelnn.com 3-2-24)



Omri Ronen returned to this weekend to his grandmother's home in Kfar Aza, for the first time since the Hamas massacre on October 7, 2023.

His grandmother was among those murdered in the massacre.

In a post on X, Ronen wrote, "During the visit and the searches, we found a letter the terrorists wrote in her planner, which remained in the living room and which told the whole story."

The handwritten note read, "The Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades passed through here and stamped out the occupying Zionists. You will die and you will not remain here."

Ronen noted, "The terrorists' goal was to hurt our honor and try to humiliate us. They wanted to murder and slaughter as many Israelis as possible. To cause us not to want to return and settle the magical towns of the border region."

"Our response to Hamas must continue to be crushing. We must return all of the hostages now and eliminate this terror organization – however long it takes. We need to get even with all of its commanders, supporters, and accomplices. We must destroy and stop all of the means, sources of funding, and infrastructure which they have.

"At the same time, we must build all of the border towns, expand them, develop and cultivate them. As quickly as possible. And if little me can send a strong and clear message to all those who seek our destruction, the worst of our enemies: There is no one prouder than us to be Israelis, Zionists and fighters, people. We will remain in our land forever. And we will do it with strength and might that cannot be imagined. We will build our homes and families here, despite this, and we will continue to build a thriving, beautiful, and developed country here.

## IDF FINDS KHAN YUNIS DUNGEON WHERE HOSTAGES WERE HELD

JC REPORTER (TheJC.com 7-2-24)

Israel Defense Forces soldiers operating in the heart of Khan Yunis in southern Gaza discovered a large tunnel, one where Hamas had held a around a dozen hostages, the military revealed on Wednesday.

Troops from the IDF's 98th Division, working alongside combat engineers from the elite Yahalom unit, located the approximately 1,000-yard-long tunnel while exploring an underground labyrinth composed of numerous branches.

On January 21, the IDF announced that the 98th Division unearthed and destroyed a nearby tunnel branch of similar size. There, some 20 hostages had been kept in a central chamber that included five prison cells.

The newly-discovered tunnel likewise contained a chamber that included barred prison cells, as well as bathrooms and a space used by Hamas guards. The IDF noted that three of the approximately 12 hostages who were kept in the newly discovered Khan Yunis tunnel have since "returned to Israel."

As part of the operation, 98th Division and Yahalom troops "fought in the tunnel against terrorists, broke through the blast doors and neutralized explosives," the military said, adding that forces also seized weapons and documents related to Hamas operations.

The tunnel cost "millions of shekels" to construct, according to the IDF. Behind the concrete walls, soldiers found sacks belonging to the U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

According to official figures, 136 hostages remain in Gaza. At least 32 of the remaining captives are confirmed to have died, The New York Times reported earlier this week, citing Israeli military officials.

Hamas abducted more than 240 people during its bloody rampage across the northwestern Negev, in which some 1,200 people were murdered and thousands more wounded.

One hundred five hostages, mostly women and children, were released last year as part of a ceasefire deal that Hamas broke when it refused to hand over the last group of captives.

Last month, the Times reported that Hamas's tunnel network was more extensive than previously thought, with new assessments indicating it has upwards of 5,700 entry shafts.

Following intensive combat in Khan Yunis during recent weeks, Israel now believes Hamas built between 350 and 450 miles of subterranean infrastructure, up from a previous estimate of 250 miles.

The IDF has damaged or rendered inoperable some 20% to 40% of Hamas's tunnel infrastructure in Gaza, according to a Wall Street Journal report published on January 28 that cited Israeli and U.S. officials.

## AMID GAZA OFFENSIVE, IDF SEIZES DOCS PROVING IRAN-HAMAS LINKS

JNS (JNS.org 7-2-24)

Israeli forces seized cash and financial documents from an underground compound in Khan Yunis showing direct Iranian financial support for Hamas, the Israel Defense Forces disclosed on Tuesday night.

"We found official documents from 2020 detailing the funds transferred by Iran to Hamas between the years 2014 and 2020 and to [Hamas leader in Gaza Yahyah] Sinwar. More than \$150 million were transferred from Iran to Hamas," said IDF Spokesperson Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari.

The intelligence indicated a "direct connection from Iran to Hamas—and more so to Yahya Sinwar," he added.

The IDF released photos of envelopes of U.S. dollars, Israeli shekels and Jordanian dinars intended for Sinwar, who masterminded the Oct. 7 massacre.

"In the same subterranean space, we also found a safe with banknotes and bags containing more than 20 million shekels in cash. These amounts join tens of millions of shekels we located during the war in Hamas tunnels," said Hagari.

"This is a recurring phenomenon—large sums of cash, kept in organized compounds underground for the personal use of senior Hamas officials. Hamas leaders invested the money in their personal survival and that of their families," he added. "This is another example of how Iran exports terror across the Middle East. The terror that Iran exports and produces is a global problem."

Hagari said the intelligence would be shared with international partners.

Cash confiscated from Gaza terror groups such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad is transferred to the Israeli Defense Ministry's finance division, where it is counted and then deposited in Israeli state coffers.

On Wednesday, the IDF said troops from the Paratroopers Brigade had killed dozens of terrorists in Khan Yunis over the past 24 hours.

In parallel, IDF troops operating in western Khan Yunis encountered three armed terrorists who launched anti-tank missiles at them. The troops killed the terrorists along with several others in close-quarters combat. Soldiers also conducted targeted raids on a terror compound, killing a number of terrorists and locating weapons and tunnel shafts.

Also on Wednesday, the Binyamin Regional Council confirmed reports that a soldier had died from a fungal infection contracted after being seriously wounded in Gaza.

The soldier was identified as Staff Sgt. (res.) Hanan Drori, 26, a resident of Psagot in Samaria.

Drori, survived by his parents and three siblings, was planning to get engaged upon being discharged from the military.

More than 220 IDF soldiers have been killed in action in Gaza since the launch of the ground offensive in late October.

## OPEN JEW-HATRED IS BECOMING COMMON. AND THAT MAKES IT EVEN MORE POPULAR

ELDER OF ZIYON (ElderofZiyon.blogspot.com 7-2-24)

Australia:

*Victoria Police are pursuing a protection order for a Jewish couple who received a photograph of their five-year-old son from an anti-Zionist activist with the threatening message "I know where you live".*

*The couple seeking the protection order runs a gift shop in Melbourne's northern suburbs, which has been forced to close by an antisemitic campaign that started after the Hamas massacre on October 7. They do not want to be identified and are leaving the area out of fear for their own and their child's safety.*

*The shop has been graffitied with "No Jews" messages in the form of Stars of David with crosses through them. Regular custom has disappeared in a general boycott.*

Berlin:

*A 30-year-old Jewish student was brutally assaulted and hospitalized with facial fractures by a 23-year-old pro-Palestinian student in Berlin this past weekend.*

Sweden:

*A duo of Iranian agents were arrested in Stockholm on suspicion of targeting Jews in the Swedish capital, local media Sverige Radio reported on Tuesday morning.*

Long Island:

*A self-described Palestinian migrant from northern Africa stole a pro-Israel flag*

*from a Long Island porch — then pummeled the homeowner who tried to stop him in a wild caught-on-video attack, officials said.*

New York City:

*An antisemitic flier depicting a skunk in the white and blue of the Israeli flag and a Star of David has surfaced on Columbia University's campus, sparking outrage among the Jewish community.*

*The skunk depiction has been likened to Nazi propaganda posters used during World War II — which dehumanized the Jewish community and compared them to vermin.*

New Jersey:

*A New Jersey man admitted to a series of violent hate crimes, for driving his car into a group of people and stabbing one because they were Jewish.*

Chicago:

*At least 50 vehicles in Lincoln Park, a neighborhood with a significant Jewish population, were targeted by antisemitic flyers.*

Racist incidents usually prompt horror and a backlash. Antisemitic incidents cause more antisemitic incidents.

After all, the current tsunami of antisemitism started with the biggest mass slaughter of Jews in nearly eight decades. The Hamas pogrom didn't marginalize or shame the antisemites - it emboldened them.

Notice that these incidents span all flavors of antisemitism - from the Left, the Right, Muslims and the Black community. Hamas attacks on Jews don't only encourage other Muslim Jew-haters to publicly spread their bile, but it also inspires the "progressives" and the other antisemites. Their talking points have all merged to become virtually indistinguishable: even the most woke self-described anti-racist and avowed enemy of antisemitism has no problem with chants of "Khaybar, Khaybar, ya Yahud" by Arabs who attend their rallies, and far-right proud antisemites will parrot the anti-Zionist talking points of the Left.

And mainstream anti-Israel reporting - reporting that thoroughly misrepresents and perverts Israeli actions to defeat a depraved Islamist terrorist group - adds more fuel to the fire.

Antisemitism snowballs. And it is still near the top of the mountain.

## **YOU CAN'T CELEBRATE TERRORISM AND THEN CRY 'ISLAMOPHOBIA' WHEN PEOPLE NOTICE**

ZACHARY FARIA (WashintonExaminer.com 6-2-24)

Muslim activists who take the side of Palestinian terrorists and then cry about Islamophobia when people notice have no one to blame but themselves and their dishonest bait-and-switch.

The outrage this time comes from Dearborn, Michigan, which was described in the headline of a Wall Street Journal opinion piece as "America's Jihad Capital." Dearborn is an Arab American-majority suburb of Detroit, and so, naturally, this brought condemnations from several corners of liberal media and politicians. Dearborn's mayor called the piece "bigoted" and "Islamophobic," and President Joe Biden condemned the piece and said it could lead to "anti-Arab hate."

The problem, though, is that beyond the inflammatory headline, all the piece does is describe events in Dearborn. For example, it describes hundreds of people gathering in Dearborn shortly after the Oct. 7 massacre to celebrate the attack. It lists several other similar events and protests and highlights several community leaders who cheered the attacks. Mayor Abdullah Hammoud described Israel killing the terrorists that slaughtered 1,200 civilians as "tyrants murdering our families."

The Wall Street Journal piece did not do anything groundbreaking or shocking. It simply reported on events in Dearborn and observed what some of us had warned about already: Muslim activists were tying their identities to the terrorists who slaughtered Israeli (and American) civilians. That extends to Hammoud, who rejected a meeting with Biden because Biden isn't condemning the Jews for fighting the terrorists who hate that they exist. The Washington Post detailed just last week how Dearborn residents wanted to punish Biden for his tepid support of Israel in the face of an existential terrorist threat.

In other words, the best way to not be labeled "America's Jihad Capital" is to not be willing to go to the mat for terrorists who want to erase Israel off the map and who defy ceasefire agreements and reject the ceasefire proposals that Israel has made. You do not get to be sympathetic to terrorists, whether intentionally or through your own biases and mind-numbing ignorance, and then cry foul when someone notices that your community is sympathetic to terrorists.

It is not "Islamophobia" or bigotry to notice that a lot of people in one city, including the mayor and prominent city leaders, are siding with Hamas

terrorists and falsely accusing the victims of a terrorist massacre of war crimes. The takeaway should not be how "Islamophobic" people are for noticing terrorist apologia. It should be how alarming it is that so many people are siding with terrorists over people whom the terrorists want to slaughter.

## **ISRAELI 'PUBLIC RELATIONS' WILL NOT SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF THE WORLD'S MORAL BANKRUPTCY**

IRWIN J. MANSdorf (JNS.org 30-1-24)

If anyone still believed that Israel's problem is just "public relations," they should review the proceedings of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) hearing on South Africa's spurious "genocide" charge against the Jewish state.

Opinions differ as to whether the ICJ hearing was a "victory" for Israel or not. After all, there was no demand that Israel cease its war against Hamas. But the very idea that Israel is possibly committing genocide should be enough to demonstrate that it is the basic values that people hold and not any explanation that Israel can present that foster moral judgement or the lack of it. On this issue, by agreeing to even hear South Africa's "case," the ICJ failed miserably. There was nothing that any Israeli "public relations" could have done about it.

The ICJ's failure was multifaceted. First, it took seriously a charge that was simply ludicrous and absurd, as any reasonable person would recognize. Yet here were judges, who are supposed to represent right vs. wrong, failing to exercise not only proper legal judgement but also simple common sense. The fact that judges who were trained in Western democracies were part of this farce is even more disturbing. So was the fact that the treaty creating the ICJ was formulated in the wake of a genocide against the Jews of yesterday, but failed to protect Jews from a party that wishes no less for the Jews of today.

There are those who argue that Israel simply needs to "tell the truth" about its struggle, but it is inconceivable that these judges were not fully aware of the truth. They simply did not care. After all, what could we have told these judges that they didn't already know?

Moreover, the inconsistency and hypocrisy of the legal reasoning involved were blatant. The legal contortions engaged in by ICJ President Joan E. Donoghue in order to explain why genocide was even a possibility were not evident when, in 2017, she dissented from the majority opinion of the court to opine that the forced expulsion by the United Kingdom (at the behest of the United States) of the Chagossians from the Chagos Archipelago in 1968—an act that many today would consider ethnic cleansing—was not illegal. One standard for some, another standard for others.

No amount of "public relations" could "explain" anything to a judicial body that is supposed to be impartial but consists of justices who lack the moral clarity to separate good from evil. Israel may have to honor the decisions of the ICJ, but that does not mean those decisions should be respected.

It is ironic that a country that was recently obsessed with issues related to the need for an independent judiciary has become the subject of a supposedly "independent" panel that issued an interim order described as a "blood libel" by Israeli President Isaac Herzog. In a ridiculous move, the ICJ accused Herzog, a consensus figure in Israel known for his moderation and mild-mannered personality, of engaging in "incitement" by using language that any rational person would consider appropriate after the type of attack perpetrated by Hamas.

We are dealing here with a distorted value system, not a lack of information. It is senseless to believe that, after experiencing the atrocities of Hamas, Israel would have to "explain" anything. It is futile to continue trying to convince people with debased moral standards that beheading, rape, kidnapping and random murder are wrong. Of course, the ICJ judges would say that those actions are terrible, but they fail to act on that belief, creating a reality in which the victim and not the oppressor is in the dock.

The ICJ farce may not mark the death of hasbara, but it proved that it is on life support. Morality is not something that can be sold like a hamburger at McDonalds. It is something that comes from one's culture, social experiences and ability to show fortitude in the face of corrupt pressure.

Rather than investing energy and resources into convincing others, we would be better served by continuing our fight to be a "light unto the nations" and doing what is right. As for those who see Hamas as an entity deserving of protection, let their moral failings serve as a model for evil.

To anyone with a good heart and a logical mind, this is something that does not need to be explained.

## ISRAEL'S WAR ON HAMAS IS THE LEAST DEADLY WAR IN THE REGION

DANIEL GREENFIELD (GateStoneInstitute.org 4-2-24)

The Associated Press recently made headlines by falsely claiming that the Israeli campaign against Hamas "sits among the deadliest and most destructive in recent history" and was even worse than "the Allied bombing of Germany in World War II".

The Washington Post argued that "Israel has waged one of this century's most destructive wars in Gaza" while The Wall Street Journal contended that it was "generating destruction comparable in scale to the most devastating urban warfare in the modern record."

That's all the more impressive since, even accepting the Hamas casualty figures (tainted and inflated numbers in which there are no terrorists, only civilians, and fighting age men are really children) as the media does, this is still probably one of the least violent conflicts in the region.

In 2016, the Washington Post described the Syrian Civil War, with a possible 250,000 deaths, as "the most destructive conflict in the region". In 2020, the UN had called the Yemeni Civil War, with 150,000 deaths, "the most destructive conflict since the end of the Cold War".

And then there's the current phase of the war in Sudan (which the media is currently uninterested in) in which 15,000 people have been killed over the course of last year, as part of a larger conflict that may have claimed as many as 2 million lives.

The Tigray War in Ethiopia over the last three years (which you may have missed because the media chose not to hysterically cover every single bomb dropped and protesters stayed home knitting instead of blocking traffic) may have cost the lives of between 80,000 to 600,000 people.

(El Pais, Spain's newspaper, which did report on Ethiopia's civil war, described it as "the deadliest of the 21st century" and then had to pivot to argue later that Israel was worse in, "25,000 deaths in Gaza: Why the destruction of this war exceeds that of other major conflicts".)

In reality, every significant war and civil war in the region had a much higher death toll than the Hamas war: including the Iraq-Iran War with an estimated 500,000 to 2 million deaths. And in nearby Africa, the Congo War has been blamed for 6 million deaths since 1996.

How does the media justify arguing that 25,000 is more than 2 million?

There are plenty of statistical gimmicks available to anyone who wants to argue that  $2 + 2$  is really 5. Media "analyses" that claim that Israel's campaign against Hamas is the deadliest and most destructive, and might even be worse than WWII, adjust their claims accordingly.

As the author of every dubious research study knows, to get the results you want, you manipulate your parameters. Media analyses selectively compare Israel's campaign to battles, rather than wars, they narrowly focus on very specific timetables, they try to estimate per capita rather than gross figures. But drawing a circle around a particular area and going per capita works both ways. The Hamas attack of Oct 7 killed 10% of the population of Kibbutz Be'eri making it far worse per capita than anything in Israel's response to those atrocities.

But statistical fudging is all in where the line is drawn to achieve a particular agenda.

For example, the New York Times declares that, "Gaza Deaths Surpass Any Arab Loss in Wars With Israel in Past 40 Years". Of course the last major Arab-Israeli war took place 50 years ago.

The 40 year figure is based on the Lebanon War, but the actual numbers for that war vary wildly from the thousands according to Israel, 10,000 according to the CIA, 18,000 according to Lebanon and 30,000 according to Arafat and the PLO.

While the media at the time emphasized the highest estimates, in order to criticize the Israeli campaign against the PLO, they now use lower estimates to attack the Gaza campaign.

Similarly, the AP cites its own claim that battles against ISIS in the Iraqi city of Mosul "killed around 10,000 civilians" to indict Israel. Some Iraqi estimates however peg it as high as 40,000. PBS headlined its coverage by warning that "the human toll of the battle for Mosul may never be known."

The New York Times, after using the shaky Lebanon numbers to prop up the shaky Gaza numbers, admits that "as in Gaza today, researchers say the number killed in Lebanon may never be known with confidence because of the fog of war, even four decades later."

That much is true.

The Times cites its own claim that, "numbering the dead correctly is virtually impossible".

That's why the death toll for everything from the Syrian and Yemeni civil wars to the mass deaths in Sudan and the Iran-Iraq War are broad estimates with vast differences between them.

Aeschylus, the Greek playwright, warned that truth is the first casualty of war. And accurate casualty counts are the first and final casualty of every conflict.

The Lancet, the British medical journal, once courted controversy with its claims that the Iraq War had killed, first 98,000 Iraqis and then over half a million, or 2.5% of the country. By 2007, a British data company claimed that 1 million Iraqis had been killed. These claims were quickly debunked and the claims are in the rearview mirror now that the debate over the war is over.

During the Iraq War it was politically convenient to inflate the death toll just as it's now politically convenient to deflate the death toll while unthinkingly accepting casualty figures from a terrorist group whose main hope of survival lies in inflating civilian deaths while minimizing its own casualties.

The most troubling thing about the universal acceptance of the Hamas numbers is just that.

Estimated death tolls in the Syrian Civil War have varied wildly from the low six figures to over 600,000. Different organizations with different agendas have produced very different sets of numbers. And while many of those may be unreliable, there is at least a healthy debate.

When it comes to Gaza, the media cites no figures other than those of Hamas. And it insists at the same time that most of Gaza has been destroyed, its medical centers pulverized and its government shattered, and that this same system can not only be trusted, but is also somehow capable of producing infallible statistics that don't exist in any other regional conflict.

The numbers for the Iran-Iraq War vary by 1.5 million, those of the Syrian Civil War and Tigray War by half a million, and yet somehow Gaza is the place where the numbers never vary and where a terrorist group got it just right. That's something even America can't do.

On September 11, 2023, DNA testing identified two more victims of the original 9/11 attacks. After 20 years, 1,000 human remains are still unknown. The exact number of deaths from when Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico in 2017 is still being debated and it took months to nail down the death toll from the Maui wildfires. And yet somehow the medical experts at Hamas can produce better numbers in a shorter timespan in a war zone than we can while at peace.

Casualty figures have always been the subject of propaganda and the most obvious symptom of propaganda is the lack of meaningful debate. Why does every regional war, including the Iraq War, have a wide range of estimated deaths, but not in Gaza? Because there is no dissent.

There is no dissent in Gaza or in the media which publishes absurd claims that a few months of fighting have somehow been more brutal than WWII or regional conflicts which claimed millions.

How many died in Gaza? The real answer is that, like the other wars, nobody knows.

After the fighting there will be studies that will pump up the estimated total even higher by using excess death statistics. Surveys of empty houses, heat maps or satellite images will be used to estimate even higher losses without regard as to whether they reflect deaths or evacuations. Local research based on anecdotal accounts and statistical legerdemain will be used to bake a variety of faulty figures into a far more grandiose number than the current 25,000. Expect claims that will go as high as the low six figures to be reported on and treated as fact and history.

Techniques like these account for the wide range of reported deaths from other conflicts. And then we can expect debates over the X curve and the correct readings of genealogical records. The end results will be deeply dubious but there will at least be some room for debate. There is little point in even debating the current numbers coming out of an arm of a terrorist organization.

But what the debates will reveal is that, agenda or no agenda, we don't really know. Wars and natural disasters are messy. People disappear, some uproot themselves and some it will turn out never existed but were a mistake in the records of an unreliable part of the world.

Palestinian Authority and Hamas numbers, including population figures and birth rates, have reflected political agendas, rather than reality. As have those of UNRWA, the UN agency dedicated to serving the "Palestinians" but locally staffed by Hamas, so there will be plenty of bad numbers to drown out the good ones.

"There are three kinds of lies: Lies, Damned Lies, and Statistics," Prime



Minister Benjamin Disraeli once reportedly quipped. The media's coverage has offered plenty of all three.

But numbers in war mainly matter when it comes to outcomes of victory or defeat. The obsession with numbers in conflicts is an unhealthy distraction from the real issues.

The moral calculus between the Allies and the Nazis in WWII did not change based on how many German civilians were killed in the bombings and artillery shelling on the road to Berlin. The morality of the American Civil War was not measured in civilian deaths, and neither is any other.

A nation is actively evil when it sets out to exterminate a civilian population. Whether it is WWII or the Hamas war: only one of the two sides was engaged in a total war of extermination.

The morality of a war is not measured in civilian casualties, but in deliberate civilian killings.

On October 7 and in the months since, Hamas has engaged in the deliberate killings of civilians. Israel has not. The number games are meant to be a distraction from that simple fact.

Morality is defined by intent, not statistics.

## **BIDEN'S 'TWO-STATE SOLUTION' - REWARD PALESTINIAN TERRORISM, DESTROY ISRAEL**

BASSAM TAWIL (GateStoneInstitute.org 5-2-24)

In the span of two days, both the US administration and the British government came out with similar statements that they are considering recognizing a Palestinian state. The statements send a message to the Iran-backed Hamas terrorist group and other Palestinians that the Americans and British want to give them a prize for the October 7 attack on Israel in which 1,200 Israelis were murdered, decapitated, raped, tortured and burned alive.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has asked the State Department to conduct a review and present policy options on possible US and international recognition of a Palestinian state after the current Israel-Hamas war, the American Axios media outlet reported on January 31. According to the report:

"The Biden administration is linking possible normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia to the creation of a pathway for the establishment of a Palestinian state as part of its post-war strategy. This initiative is based on the administration's efforts prior to Oct. 7 to negotiate a mega-deal with Saudi Arabia that included a peace agreement between the kingdom and Israel."

Hours after the Axios report surfaced, UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron regrettably announced that his country could officially recognize a Palestinian state after a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip without waiting for the outcome of talks between Israel and the Palestinians on a two-state solution. "What we need is do is to give the Palestinian people a horizon towards a better future, the future of having a state of their own," Cameron said.

The declared policy, however, of the US and Britain, ever since the painstakingly negotiated the 1993-95 Oslo Accords, has been that a two-state solution should come as part of a negotiated settlement between Israel and the Palestinians. If the Oslo Accords are so cavalierly abrogated, what do any international agreements mean, and why would any country sign one in the future?

To many, this appears to be yet another lawless decision by Biden to advance his chances for reelection without any thought to the outcome for the people on whom these decisions are being inflicted. The plan appears to many in the same vein as claiming that illegal migrants are ostensibly legal in order to flood the US with future voters for the Democratic Party and to create an extremely undemocratic, authoritarian one-party government in America – all in the name of "democracy."

The Axios report also indicates a change in US government policy. The US government had previously stated that it remains committed to a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and believes that Israelis and Palestinians alike deserve equal measures of freedom, security and prosperity.

In 2021, the UK government also clarified that it is committed to the objective of a sovereign, prosperous and peaceful Palestinian state through a negotiated peace agreement. Cameron's remarks suggest that Britain is now ready to recognize a Palestinian state without waiting for a negotiated Israeli-Palestinian agreement.

This turnabout in US and British policy aims to create facts on the ground by establishing a terrorist genocidal Arab state on Israel's doorstep, on either

side of Israel, and encourage the Palestinians not to resume peace negotiations with Israel.

Can the Biden administration and the British government guarantee that Iran and its Palestinian proxies will not use this new Palestinian state as a launching pad to attack Israel and murder Jews? No. It is clear that we are looking at another Afghanistan: all promises from the Taliban, and no delivery.

There was a Hamas-led potential Palestinian state in the Gaza Strip before October 7. Instead of using the billions upon billions of dollars that were given it by the international community to build a "Singapore in the Mediterranean," that "state" built hundreds of kilometers of terror tunnels, initiated war against Israel, and has continued to attack Israel for more than four months after its terrorists bulldozed over its border with Israel.

The Biden administration and the British government are now saying that they nevertheless want to copy-paste the Hamas-led state and import it to the West Bank and to the heart of Jerusalem. Do they see that this would mean bringing Iran and its terror proxies right to the hilltops overlooking Ben Gurion Airport, Tel Aviv and other Israeli cities in a country smaller than New Jersey?

No country, including Saudi Arabia, would be able to prevent a Palestinian state at this time from turning into another terror state. Some Arab states, such as Qatar, have shown no interest in preventing the Gaza Strip from turning into a Hamas terror enclave.

The assumption that normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia in return for the establishment of another failed and corrupt Arab state would bring peace, security and stability to the Middle East is a deadly fantasy.

Why should any Palestinian leader return to the negotiating table with Israel when the Americans and British are already offering them a state on a platter, unilaterally and unconditionally? By making such statements, the US and Britain are sending a message to the Palestinians that they can continue to carry out terrorist attacks against Israel and do not need to renounce terrorism, dismantle the multiple armed groups in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, recognize Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people or do anything at all. The Americans and British are evidently no longer demanding that the Palestinians halt their homicidal incitement against Israel and Jews, or even stop paying financial rewards to Palestinian terrorists who murder Jews.

One month before the Hamas carnage, Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas justified the Holocaust when he told leaders of his ruling Fatah faction:

"They say that Hitler killed the Jews because they were Jews and that Europe hated the Jews because they were Jews. Not true. It was clearly explained that [the Europeans] fought [the Jews] because of their social role, and not their religion. The [Europeans] fought against these people because of their role in society, which had to do with usury, money and so on and so forth. This was not about semitism and antisemitism."

The Americans and the British are also ignoring the fact that most Palestinians are opposed to the idea of a two-state solution because they want a Palestinian state to replace Israel, not have a state next to it. A public opinion poll published by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in December 2023 showed that 64% of the Palestinians oppose the idea of a two-state solution. Another 69% of the Palestinians said they support a return to "confrontations and armed intifada" (terrorism) against Israel.

The US administration and the British government are also ignoring that the Palestinian leadership has refused to resume the peace negotiations with Israel and turned down every Israeli offer for a settlement that could have given them a state many years ago. Perhaps they have refused to negotiate precisely in the hope of receiving such a silver-platter resolution, in which they not be required to make any concessions whatsoever.

In 2014, Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations were suspended after the Palestinian Authority concluded yet another "unity agreement" with Hamas, a US and European Union-designated Iran-backed terrorist organization.

The agreement called for the establishment of a "unity" Palestinian government. "Israel will not negotiate with a Palestinian government backed by Hamas, a terrorist organization that calls for Israel's destruction," Israel's security cabinet announced then. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated:

"Instead of choosing peace, Abu Mazen [Abbas] formed an alliance with a murderous terrorist organization that calls for the destruction of Israel. The agreement between Abu Mazen and Hamas was signed even as Israel is making efforts to advance the negotiations with the Palestinians. Abu

Mazen has refused to even discuss recognizing Israel as the national state of the Jewish people. Whoever chooses the terrorism of Hamas does not want peace."

Abbas's PA continues to see Hamas as a legitimate player in the Palestinian arena. On January 27, Palestinian Authority presidential spokesperson Nabil Abu Rudaineh revealed that the PA was planning to "hold contacts with Hamas" to discuss ways of achieving Palestinian "unity."

PA Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said on December 10, 2023 that "Hamas is part of the Palestinian political fabric, and when Israel says it is determined to eliminate it, it is impossible and unacceptable."

Another senior PA official, Jibril Rajoub, said on December 14, 2023:

"Our contacts with the Hamas movement have not ceased, and we look forward to work with our brothers in Hamas to formulate a [joint] political and organizational policy to achieve the unity of the [Palestinian] cause, and the unity of leadership and decision-making."

It is no wonder then that the PA has until now refused to condemn Hamas's October 7 atrocities. It is not because the PA is afraid of Hamas. Instead, it is because Abbas and his cohorts consider Hamas an integral and indispensable part of Palestinian society, as well as a future partner in a Palestinian government.

Abbas has, over the past decade, repeatedly voiced opposition to recognizing Israel as a Jewish state. Saying he withstood international pressure in the past to recognize Israel as a Jewish state, Abbas said: "They [the international community] are pressing and saying, 'No peace without the Jewish state.' There is no way. We will not accept."

Abbas has since turned down Israeli offers to resume the peace talks and insisted that Israel accept unconditionally, and without negotiations, the creation of an independent Palestinian state on the entire West Bank, Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem.

During the botched Camp David summit in 2000, PLO leader and PA President Yasser Arafat rejected an offer from Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and US President Bill Clinton for the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state on some 92% of the West Bank and 100% of the Gaza Strip, as well as the establishment of the Palestinian capital in east Jerusalem.

An enraged Clinton banged on the table and said to Arafat: "You are leading your people and the region to a catastrophe."

Commenting on Arafat's rejection of the offer, Barak said:

"He [Arafat] did not negotiate in good faith; indeed, he did not negotiate at all. He just kept saying no to every offer, never making any counterproposals of his own..."

"What they [Arafat and his colleagues] want is a Palestinian state in all of Palestine. What we see as self-evident, [the need for] two states for two peoples, they reject. Israel is too strong at the moment to defeat, so they formally recognise it [referring to Arafat's 1993 letter to Israeli PM Yitzhak Rabin, claiming that the PLO recognizes Israel]. But their game plan is to establish a Palestinian state while always leaving an opening for further 'legitimate' demands down the road. They will exploit the tolerance and democracy of Israel first to turn it into a 'state for all its citizens'... Then they will push for a binational state and then demography and attrition will lead to a state with a Muslim majority and a Jewish minority. This would not necessarily involve kicking out all the Jews. But it would mean the destruction of Israel as a Jewish state. This, I believe, is their vision...."

Clinton and Barak were right. The Palestinians are not interested in a two-state solution. As Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal explained on January 18, 2024:

"The West says that October 7 has opened up prospects for a political vision, so they have returned to talk about their old commodity, which is the two-state solution. The 1967 borders represent 21% of Palestine, which is practically one fifth of its land, so this cannot be accepted. Our Palestinian project, which has a quasi-Palestinian national consensus, is that our right in Palestine from the [Mediterranean] sea to the [Jordan] river cannot be waived."

Those who are promoting the idea of creating a Palestinian terror state next to Israel – in addition to again capitulating to terrorists and rewarding terrorism – are paving the way for more October 7-like massacres. They are essentially asking Israel to commit suicide at a time when its soldiers are fighting to eradicate Hamas and ensure that the Gaza Strip will no longer serve Hamas, or its terror master Iran, as a base for murdering Jews, Americans or anyone else in the West.

## MORE THAN HALF OF ISRAELIS OPPOSE PALESTINIAN STATE FOR SAUDI TIES

JEWISH NEWS SYNDICATE (JNS.org 6-2-24)

More than half of the Israeli public opposes the creation of a Palestinian state as part of a deal that would end the war against Hamas and normalize relations between Jerusalem and Riyadh, according to a new poll.

"Do you support or oppose the notion that as part of a deal to end the war—which will include long-term military quiet, guarantees from the United States, and an agreement with Arab states such as Saudi Arabia—Israel should agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state?" asked the January 2024 Israeli Voice Index, conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute's Viterbi Family Center for Public Opinion and Policy Research.

Fifty-one percent of Israelis opposed this proposal, compared to 36% expressing support.

A breakdown by nationality reveals that a majority of Jewish Israelis are opposed to the idea (59%, versus 29% who are in favor), while among Arab Israelis the picture is reversed (69% support and only 10% opposed).

Jewish Israelis are fairly split on whether the primary aim of the war should be toppling Hamas or bringing home the hostages, with 42% expressing support for the former and 47% for the latter. Among Arab Israelis, 69% said freeing the hostages should be the main goal, versus a small minority (8%) who prioritized eliminating Hamas. A sizeable 23% of Arab Israeli respondents said they don't know.

Only 39% of Israelis said that the State of Israel was successfully ensuring their security, a rate similar to that in 2022 but representing a sharp decline from 76% in 2020 and 56% in 2021.

The pollsters questioned a representative sample of 619 Jewish and 153 Arab Israelis aged 18 and over on Jan. 28-30. The margin of error for the entire sample is  $\pm 3.59\%$  at a confidence level of 95%.

A November IDI survey found that only one in five right-wing Israeli Jews backs a two-state solution in exchange for American war support, whereas 75% of left-wing Israeli Jews support pursuing a two-state solution in return for U.S. assistance. Forty-five percent of Israeli Jews in the center agreed with this policy.

Overall, a slight majority (52%) of Israeli Jews opposed pursuing a two-state solution after the war in exchange for U.S. financial aid, while a majority (55%) of Israeli Arabs were in favor of it.

It remains unclear why the two-state solution question was connected to ending the war and Saudi normalization, and previously to the Biden administration and American assistance, and not asked as a standalone or follow-up question, which might have yielded different results.

In December, an IDI poll found that a majority of Jewish Israelis believe that antisemitism is driving international criticism of the Gaza war.

Asked about the mass demonstrations and public outcry against Israel's military campaign against Hamas, 62% of Jewish residents said it was due to hatred of Israel and antisemitism, compared to 7.5% who said it was due to civilian casualties and destruction in Gaza and 22% who said both are equal drivers.

In contrast, only 10.5% of Arab Israelis believe that the protests abroad are due to antisemitism, while 52% believe that they are because of the devastation in Gaza and 11% said both equally.

At the time, about two-thirds of Israelis thought that the goal of toppling Hamas in Gaza was achievable, while only 35.5% believed it was possible to bring back all of the hostages.

**"GIVE US THE AMOUNT WE DEMAND OR WE WON'T ACCEPT ANY MONEY FROM YOU! AND THEN WE'LL CRY ABOUT HAVING NO MONEY!"**

ELDER OF ZIYON (ElderofZiyon.blogspot.com 6-2-24)

From the Jerusalem Post:

*The Palestinian Authority said on Tuesday it will pay public sector workers 60% of their December salaries this week as it grapples with the long running fallout of Israel's refusal to transfer tax funds earmarked for Gaza.*

*Funding to the Palestinian Authority, the body that exercises limited governance in the occupied West Bank, has been severely restricted by the months-long dispute over transferring tax revenues Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinians.*

*Under interim peace accords signed in the early 1990s, Israel collects taxes on the Palestinians' behalf and typically transfers them to the PA monthly on the approval of the finance minister.*

However, transfers have been stalled since October, when Smotrich withheld around 600 million shekels (\$164.51 million) of the total 1 billion shekels due for transfer, prompting the Palestinian Authority, which says Gaza is an integral part of Palestinian territory, to refuse to accept any funds.

"We cannot accept conditions on our money. We will remain committed to the prisoners and martyrs and to our people in the Gaza Strip, not out of favor, but by virtue of our national, religious, and moral responsibility," Shtayyeh said.

It makes no sense for Israel to pay money that will go to Hamas, which is where all the Gaza money goes, directly or not.

But notice that Israel still is willing to pay the PA over \$100 million a month - and the PA refuses it. Because, they say, they want to continue to pay terrorists ("prisoners and martyrs.")

And then the PA whines about having no money!

One other paragraph is most interesting:

*Funding from international donors has also been squeezed, falling from 30% of the \$6 billion annual budget to around 1%, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said.*

That's a drop from \$1.8 billion annually to \$60 million.

Notice that they don't complain about that drastic cut of funding nearly as much as about Israel's much more modest cut.

And notice that this means that the world is not nearly as pro-Palestinian as it pretends to be.

Because being anti-Israel is not the same as being pro-Palestinian.

## **WITH EVERY ATTACK, THERE'S ALWAYS A LITTLE BIT OF "THE JEWS DESERVED IT"**

ELDER OF ZIYON (ElderofZiyon.blogspot.com 2-2-24)

On October 3, 1980, a PFLP terrorist placed explosives outside a synagogue in Paris. The explosion killed four people outside the synagogue and injured over forty worshipers inside.

The Prime Minister of France at the time, Raymond Barre, was especially outraged - at the deaths of non-Jews. He said to French television station TF1, "This odious attack was aimed at hitting Israelites going to the synagogue but hit innocent French people who crossed the Copernic street."

Barre didn't consider Jews to be "innocent French people."

We're seeing a lot of that kind of thinking. Usually a little more subtle, but when Jews or Israelis are murdered by Arabs, there is always a little bit of "well, Palestinians are understandably upset at Jews" in the reactions and coverage.

If the Houthis would take Egypt's advice and only attack ships that have clear links to Israel, the world would shrug.

Because attacking Jews is normal. It is expected. And, to too many, it is deserved.

There is one epithet that was reflexively associated with Israel by modern antisemites over most of the past fifty years: "occupation." Never mind that Arabs attacked Jews before 1967, the "occupation" had turned into the evil that must be fought. Israel-haters could pretend that they had nothing against a Jewish state, but only the "occupation." Give up the land and there would be peace!

Have you noticed that the word has disappeared in the current anti-Israel discourse? It's been replaced with "genocide." There is no longer a pretense that Israel should exist in any form.

One reason is because the October 7 pogrom was not against "settlers." Previously, the Israel haters could pretend that they are against terror attacks on innocent civilians inside the Green Line, or that such attacks were rare and not supported by Palestinians in general.

But they cannot say that this time. So they have changed their entire discourse from being against "occupation" to being against Israel altogether, just to exonerate Hamas.

And they are emboldened because they were so successful with the "occupation" lie, and then with the "apartheid" libel.

Their success is partially due to the world's thinking that the Jews deserve it.

Think about it:

\* Hamas attacks Israel first

\* Hezbollah attacks Israel first

\* Iranian backed Syrian groups attack Israel first

\* The Houthis shoot rockets at Israel first

And Israel is still framed as the aggressor.

The Jews are always presumed guilty, even in the mainstream discourse,

even if only a little.

## **HOW THE JEWS CHANGED THE WORLD**

RABBI EPHRAIM SHORE (Aish.com)

"The Jews started it all - and by "it" I mean so many of the things we care about, the underlying values that make all of us, Jew and gentile, believer and atheist, tick. Without the Jews, we would see the world through different eyes, hear with different ears, even feel with different feelings. And we would set a different course for our lives... Their worldview has become so much a part of us that at this point it might as well have been written into our cells as a genetic code."

--- Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews*

The number of fundamental ideas and values the Jewish People have given to the world is truly remarkable. And it's also remarkable how most people don't realize this.

We simply forget that these concepts and ideals were once not the way of the world. In fact, they were not only revolutionary but often at complete odds with conventional wisdom of the times. As Paul Johnson wrote in *The History of the Jews*, "All the great conceptual discoveries of the intellect seem obvious and inescapable once they have been revealed, but it requires a special genius to formulate them for the first time. The Jews had this gift."

1. Sabbath Day: The Romans ridiculed the Jews for their idleness but we have none but the Jews to thank for our weekend. Until the Jewish invention of Sabbath, every day, every month, every year was the same. We introduced the concept of taking out time to focus on the higher things in life and enjoying being and not just doing. Christians adapted the Jewish Shabbat to Sunday in the 2nd and 3rd centuries.

2. Peace on Earth: In a world that revered the warrior above all others, survival of the fittest was the highest value. If you could get it, you took it. The cost in human life was irrelevant. Judaism introduced the altruistic concept that peace amongst men was preferable to my tribe's enrichment.

As the prophet Isaiah wrote, "The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the goat; the calf and young lion and fatling will be together, and a little child will lead them" (11:6).

And "They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore" (2:4).

3. Universal Literacy and Education: In a world where literacy was a luxury enjoyed by the vast minority, the People of the Book taught that the pursuit of wisdom and learning was the highest pursuit and the right and obligation of every child and adult. No Jewish community existed without a school. Even the Greeks and Romans came nowhere near creating a written culture, 2 and the medieval world saw even greater drops in literacy. The Church, ancient Greece and the United States not only discouraged literacy for some (e.g. Blacks, slaves, non-clergy), but it took until 1918 for every US state to require students to complete elementary school. 3 It took India until 2009 to adopt what the Jewish nation has been practicing for 3,500 years.

4. Sabbatical Year: The idea for academics and some professionals (20% of UK companies now have a career break policy, and many more joining the trend! 4) to take a year off every seven years to focus on academic advancement, comes directly from the Torah. Judaism requires every farmer to take the entire seventh year off from work to focus on studying, self-improvement and inspiration. One can imagine the impact of that intellectual focus on the entire nation.

5. Justice for All: In a world where women, children, the poor, immigrants and other vulnerable members of society were systematically abused, the Jewish legal system was the first to protect the rights of the underdog and the helpless. As the Torah states, "You shall not wrong or oppress a foreigner, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse the widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry" (Exodus 22:21-23).

Jewish law ensured that every man and woman has the right to a fair trial, is innocent before proven guilty, and allows for no prejudice towards the rich or powerful.

6. Monotheism: Judaism revolutionized the concept of God; from a belief in multiple deities and idols that require our sacrifice (even humans), are created in the image of Man and can be bribed and manipulated, to recognizing the One Infinite, loving, altruistic Creator who is the unifying source of the entire universe, who needs nothing from mankind, and is equally available to every human being.

7. Infinite Value of Every Human Life: In a world of human sacrifice, murder

of children (particularly baby girls), and wanton war and killing to further material gains, Judaism taught that every life is holy, created in the image of God, and of infinite value – even the old, the mentally or physically handicapped and the sick. If you think that is obvious, consider the practice of human sacrifice that was central to most South American civilizations until the Spanish Christians conquered them just 500 years ago.

8. The Right to Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness: While the founding fathers of America may have found “these truths to be self-evident”, in fact it was far from self-evident unless you were highly influenced by Jewish values (otherwise the Declaration of Independence in 1776 would not have been so revolutionary!). Many societies up to modern times have sought to limit individuality in the name of service to the state or religion or feudal lord (Communism, Nazism, many religions and all totalitarian regimes). But 3,000 years before 1776, Judaism introduced to the world that every human has the right, and obligation, to aspire to reaching his/her goals, personal fulfillment and potential.

9. Limited Governmental Powers: It took until the Magna Carta in medieval England for the first small limitations on the power of the ruler to be instituted. Until then despots of all kinds could and would take advantage of their citizens monetarily, militarily and judicially for their own gain. The king was omnipotent. The Torah was the first system to place limits on the powers of the monarch. His powers were overseen by an independent judicial branch of government (Sanhedrin/Supreme Court), thousands of years before the rest of the world was ready to adopt these ideas. And the Jewish king carried with him a Torah scroll, reminding him that he too is subjugated to all of its laws.

10. Tzedaka and Tikkun Olam: In a world where the idea of giving away one’s property to others was seen as both bizarre and foolhardy, Judaism taught that we are obligated to donate 10-20% (tithe) of what we earn to make the world a better place. Judaism was trend-setting by millennium when it required us to lend money to our fellow man with no interest, to return lost objects, to refrain from verbal abuse and gossip, not to take revenge or bear a grudge, to protect animals from suffering, and to demand that we love every human being regardless of race, religion or color. "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18) was introduced 2,000 years before Christianity.

11. Sexism: Judaism taught that men and women are equal in the eyes of God (in fact the first “Man” was not actually a man but an androgynous male/female being which was then separated into two). From the earliest times women have held important leadership positions in the Jewish world. Our matriarchs were considered even greater than their husbands in prophecy and other areas. Judaism forbade sexual harassment of any kind. Way ahead of its time, a woman’s rights to sexual and emotional intimacy were enshrined by the first Jewish marriage contracts (ketuba). Men are obligated to honor their wives even more than themselves. Women in Judaism enjoyed more rights than in most of Western civilization. For example, it took until 1900 for all US states to allow women to buy, sell and own property or to write her own will and contracts.

Without the Jewish nation, the world as we know it would simply not exist. Paul Johnson summed it up beautifully: "To them (the Jews) we owe the idea of equality before the law, both divine and human; of the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person; of the individual conscience and so of personal redemption; of the collective conscience and so of social responsibility; of peace as an abstract ideal and love as the foundation of justice, and many other items which constitute the basic moral furniture of the human mind. Without the Jews, it might have been a much emptier place."

And while the world was busy absorbing Jewish inventions into their culture, they were simultaneously persecuting and not infrequently attempting to destroy us. How strange that one of humanity’s most positive contributors has been singled out for more hate than any other. Cahill observed this phenomenon: “Our history is replete with examples of those who have refused to see what the Jews are really about, who – through intellectual blindness, racial chauvinism, xenophobia, or just plain evil – have been unable to give this oddball tribe, this raggle-taggle band, this race of wanderers who are the progenitors of the Western world, their due.”

Let’s keep in mind the words of American President John Adams who said, "I will insist that the Hebrews have done more to civilize man than any other nation. If I were an atheist, and believed in blind eternal fate, I should still believe that chance had ordered the Jews to be the most essential instrument for civilizing the nations."

1. "Sabbath." Cross, F. L., ed. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. New York: Oxford University Press. 2005

2. Ancient Literacy, 1991 William V. Harris

3. Graham, P.A. 1974). Community and Class in American Education, 1865–1918. New York: Wiley

4. Confederation of British Industry survey, 2005

## *Kosher & Halacha Korner*

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

### **HAVDALAH OVER THE TELEPHONE**

RABBI DONIEL NEUSTADT (Torah.org)

*Question: Can one fulfill his obligation to hear Havdalah by listening to the words recited over a telephone, a microphone or a loudspeaker?*

*Discussion:* In order to be motzi another person with Havdalah (or any other blessing or mitzvah), the listener must hear the words directly from the mouth of the speaker. But is a voice heard over the telephone considered as if one is hearing the speaker’s actual voice? In the early days of voice amplifying technology, when the science was not well understood, some halachic authorities were of the opinion that the amplified sound was the speaker’s actual voice, only amplified. 1

Accordingly, one who hears Havdalah recited over the telephone is yotzei. But today, it is universally agreed that the listener is not hearing the speaker’s actual voice but rather an electronically generated version of his voice. [Both the telephone and the microphone “transform” sound waves in the air, the spoken words, into an electrical current within the instrument, and ultimately back into sound waves. Those sound waves are then heard by the audience.] In that case, one cannot fulfill his obligation to hear Havdalah by listening over the telephone or microphone according to the vast majority of poskim, and even b’divavad, the Havdalah would have to be repeated. 2

Still, a minority view among the poskim suggests that even if we assume that the voice heard over the telephone is not the actual voice of the speaker, perhaps one is nevertheless yotzei since the voice is still generated by the power of the speaker’s voice and the Havdalah is heard at the exact same time that it is being recited. 3

The poskim who suggest this approach stress that they remain undecided as to whether or not their argument should be relied upon, and therefore, it is only under extenuating circumstances—when no other possibility exists—that one may fulfill his obligation of hearing Havdalah over a microphone or telephone. 4

In practice, therefore, it is clear that when there is another option, voice amplifiers should not be used for fulfilling a mitzvah or listening to a berachah. 5 For example, a woman who is home alone and has no one to make Havdalah for her should rather recite Havdalah herself<sup>6</sup> than listen to it being recited by someone else over the telephone.

Even if she cannot or will not drink wine, grape juice, or beer, it is preferable that she recite Havdalah over coffee, 7 tea (with or without milk), 8 or milk alone<sup>9</sup> (and, according to some poskim, 10 undiluted grapefruit, orange or apple juice as well) than listen to Havdalah recited over the phone. ■<sup>11</sup> If one finds himself in a situation where he cannot recite Havdalah and his only possibility of being yotzei is to hear it over the phone,, e.g., he is in a hospital and there is no one who can come until Tuesday evening<sup>12</sup> to make Havdalah for him, he may have to rely on the poskim who permit listening to Havdalah over the telephone. 13 But if someone could come and recite Havdalah for him before Tuesday evening, the correct procedure is to wait until then for Havdalah to be recited. 14

If he is weak, he may eat before hearing Havdalah. If he expects to hear Havdalah before chatzos on Sunday and he does not feel weak, he should refrain from eating until then. 15

A related issue is whether or not it is permitted to answer Amen, etc. to a blessing or Kaddish heard over a microphone or telephone, or during a live telecast transmitted by satellite.

Some poskim<sup>16</sup> permit this and do not consider answering Amen, etc., to be l’vatalah (“for naught”), since they remain undecided about the halachic status of amplified sound waves, as explained above.

Some poskim<sup>17</sup> permit answering Amen based on the ancient precedent set in the great synagogue in Alexandria. 18 There, most of the worshippers could not hear the actual blessings being recited due to the vast size of the building, but were nevertheless permitted to answer Amen when signaled to do so by the waving of a flag. In our case as well, the Amen is being

answered in response to the recital of a blessing – even though halachically the blessing it is not being “heard.”

Rav S.Z. Auerbach, though, rejects this comparison and rules that it is prohibited to answer Amen upon hearing a blessing in this manner. 19 He agrees, however, that one who is in the same room as the speaker—even though he hears the speaker’s voice only over a microphone, etc.—is permitted to answer Amen, as was the case in Alexandria where everyone was inside the Shul and part of the congregation that was davening. 20

Sources:

- 1) Minchas Elazar 2:72; Minchas Aharon 18 (quoted in Tzitz Eliezer 8:11).
- 2) Da’as Torah, O.C. 689:2; Gilyonei ha-Shas, Berachos 25a; Eretz Tzvi 1:23; Kol Mevaser 2:25; Mishpatei Uziel 1:5; 1:21; Rav Y.E. Henkin (Gevuros Eliyahu, O.C. 98:8); Minchas Yitzchak 1:37, 3:38; She’arim Metzuyanim b’Halachah 129:25; 193:6; Minchas Shelomo 1:9; Ashrei ha-Ish, O.C. 2:13-15; Kinyan Torah 1:75; Yechaveh Da’as 3:54; Moadim u’Zemanim 6:105. See also Teshuvos P’eas Sadcha 1:126 who quotes a similar ruling from Rav C. Soloveitchik.
- 3) Rav T. P. Frank (Mikraei Kodesh, Purim 11 and in Minchas Yitzchak 2:113); Igros Moshe, O.C. 2:108; O.C. 4:126. [See, however, Igros Moshe, E.H. 3:33 and O.C. 4:84.]. See also Minchas Shelomo 1:9 quoting an oral conversation with the Chazon Ish.
- 4) Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:91-4 (and oral ruling quoted in Kol ha-Torah, vol. 54, pg. 18); Tzitz Eliezer 8:11. See also Shevet ha-Levi 5:84.
- 5) Rav Auerbach makes it clear that the same ruling applies to hearing-impaired individuals who cannot hear without a hearing aid. Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:85 is hesitant about comparing hearing aid to a microphone.
- 6) Women are obligated to recite Havdalah and may recite it themselves. Although there is a well-established custom that women do not drink the wine from the Havdalah kos, this custom is discounted when a woman must fulfill her obligation of Havdalah; Mishnah Berurah 296:35; Aruch ha-Shulchan 296:5.
- 7) Instant or brewed (Rav S.Z. Auerbach, Shemiras Shabbos K’hilchasah 60, note 18).
- 8) The tea or coffee should be cool enough that one may drink at least 1.6 fl. oz. of it within 3-4 minutes.
- 9) Aruch ha-Shulchan 272:14; Igros Moshe, O.C. 2:75.
- 10) Tzitz Eliezer 8:16; Shemiras Shabbos K’hilchasah 60:5.
- 11) If a woman refuses to recite Havdalah on her own and there is no one available to recite it for her, her husband (or another man or woman) may repeat it for her, even if he has already fulfilled his obligation; see Mishnah Berurah 296:36; Aruch ha-Shulchan 296:5; Da’as Torah 296:8; Ben Ish Chai, Vayeitzei 22. The blessing over the candle, though, should be omitted, in the opinion of several poskim.
- 12) O.C. 299:5.
- 13) Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:91-4; Tzitz Eliezer 8:11.
- 14) In this case, one should definitely not listen to Havdalah over the phone, since then it may not be repeated for him when the visitor comes.
- 15) Mishnah Berurah 296:19, 21. Rav Y.S. Elyashiv, too, rules that it is preferable to eat before Havdalah than to listen to it over the telephone (Ashrei ha-Ish, O.C. 2:13-1).
- 16) Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:91-4.
- 17) Yechaveh Da’as 3:54.
- 18) See Succah 51b and Tosafos, ibid.
- 19) See Ashrei ha-Ish, O.C. 1:10-14 for a concurring opinion.
- 20) See Minchas Shelomo 1:9 and Halichos Shelomo 1:22-15.

**Mishpotim (Melb) 9/2/24, 1 Adar 1 5784: 8:08pm/9:07pm**