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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)

NOACH 5787

Preservation or Transformation?

RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCALIR (ohr.edu)

"... Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations... (6:9)

Parshat Noach opens in a world unraveling at the seams: "And the earth was corrupt before G-d, and the earth was filled with violence" (Bereishit 6:11). In this collapsing moral landscape, one figure stands alone: "Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noach walked with G-d."

But what does it mean to be "righteous in his generations"? Rashi famously brings two opinions: One, that Noach was truly righteous—even more so had he lived in the time of Avraham; the other, that his righteousness was relative only to his generation, a pale shadow next to what could have been. These two views stem not from differing historical assessments, but from two paradigms of spiritual growth. Noach is tamim, wholesome. He walks with G-d. But Avraham walks before G-d (Bereishit 17:1)—Avraham is a trailblazer, a force that reshapes history. Noach preserves. Avraham transforms.

And yet, Noach's preservation is not passivity. Noach took refuge in the Ark – the teivah. In the Baal Shem Tov's teaching, teivah also means "word." The Ark is not only a physical refuge but a spiritual one: a world constructed of holy speech, of prayer and Torah. When chaos reigns outside, a Jew builds a sanctuary of meaning through these tools.

Noach's greatness lies in his ability to build this teivah—to shape a world insulated from a flood not only of water, but of cynicism, violence, and nihilism. He may not change the world outside, but he ensures that inside, truth survives.

The Maharal notes that Noach is told bo el hateivah—"come into the ark." Not lech, go, but bo, come. G-d is already there. The floodwaters, in their destructive fury, are also agents of divine renewal. The teivah becomes a womb—a place not of exile, but gestation. Inside, the seeds of a new world are nurtured.

This is the blueprint for Jewish survival. In every generation, there are floods—cultural, spiritual, physical—that threaten to erase identity. The response is not escape, but construction. One builds a teivah from words: the words of Torah, the words of tefillah, the sanctified words exchanged in a Jewish home.

The root of Noach's name is noach—rest, serenity. He embodies the tranquil soul untouched by chaos. He is the silent tzaddik. Avraham goes outward; Noach goes inward. The Torah gives space for both paths.

But perhaps the tragedy is that Noach, for all his righteousness, does not pray for his generation. He builds, but he does not bridge. Avraham pleads for Sodom. Noach, silent, survives—but alone.

Thus, Parshat Noach is a mirror: Will we be Noach, building arks of personal holiness, safe but isolated? Or will we also be Avraham, transforming the flood into a path toward redemption?

In a world still turbulent, the teivah remains a call—to speak, to sanctify, to build. But also to open its doors.

Sons of Noach

RABBI YANKI TAUBER (Chabad.org)

"Noach was a righteous man in his generation." (6:9)

Rashi: There are those amongst our sages who interpret this verse as praise: [If he was righteous in his wicked generation,] how much more wise would he have been in a generation of righteous people! And there are those who

interpret it as condemnation: In comparison to his generation he was righteous, but had he lived in Avraham's generation, he would not have been considered someone exceptional.

Everything about Noach can be seen in a positive light, and in a negative light.

Noach built the famous lifeboat that saved him and seven other humans (his wife, his three children and their wives) from the Great Flood. So, you can thank him for saving humanity, or you can criticize him (as the Zohar does) for not saving the rest of his generation.

The Torah tells us that Noach did not enter the ark until the very last minute, when the rains were already falling. You can laud his optimism, or you can point out (as Rashi does) that he was a "small believer" in G-d's words.

The Torah also relates that even after the waters of the Flood had receded and the earth had dried, Noach still would not leave the ark until G-d expressly commanded him to. You can call him timid, or you can admire (as do our sages) his obedience: G-d had commanded him to enter the ark, so in the ark he remained until G-d told him to come out.

The first thing Noach did to develop the newly barren earth he found upon emerging from the ark was plant a vineyard, make wine and get drunk. You can be dismayed by his fickleness, or applaud his determination to infuse some joy and merriment into a desolate world.

Noach lived 950 years—enough time to do everything wrong and everything right.

We are all descendants of Noach. Noach is a descendant of Adam, so we're all sons of Adam, too. But the term used by the Talmud and halachah (Torah law) for humanity as a whole is b'nei noach ("Sons of Noach"). The seven universal laws of morality that are binding upon every human being (prohibiting idolatry, blasphemy, murder, theft, adultery and incest, and cruelty to animals; and mandating the establishment of courts of justice) are called "The Seven Noachide Laws"—even though six of them were actually commanded to Adam.

Adam was the first man. Noach was the first human being.

Compounded Interest

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY (Torah.org)

We all know the story of the flood. The world was bad – very bad. Hashem was enraged. He decided to destroy the whole world except for a tiny righteous family, the Noachs.

But what was the actual bad that did the world in? After all, something had to have gone mighty awry for the Almighty to destroy his handiwork and begin anew.

And so, the Torah tells us, "Now the earth had become corrupt before G-d; and the earth had become filled with robbery. And G-d saw the earth and behold it was perverse, for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth. G-d said to Noach, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with robbery through them; and behold, I am about to destroy them from the earth" (6:11-13).

It seems that there were two main crimes, corruption and robbery. Robbery is self-explanatory, and the commentaries explain corruption as lewdness and licentiousness in addition to idolatry. In fact, it was so bad that "all flesh had corrupted its way"; not only did mankind cavort in adulterous behavior, even cattle, beasts, and fowl did not consort with their own species" (Rashi ibid.) But what sealed their fate? There seems to be two defining offenses. The Torah introduces Hashem's words to Noach with the statement, "And G-d saw the earth and behold it was perverse, for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth." Yet what he tells Noach is "The end of all flesh has

come before Me, for the earth is filled with robbery.” So what was it that brought the Almighty to the fateful decision, robbery or perversion?

Rashi declares in one verse, “wherever you find lewdness and idolatry, punishment of an indiscriminate character comes upon the world, killing good and bad alike.” Yet, later, when the Torah states the sin of robbery, Rashi explains that “their fate was sealed only on account of their sin of robbery.”

How did these two very different evils forge together to force the end of the world? In addition, what lesson can we take from it?

According to the “What It’s Worth” department of a popular news broadcast, this story actually occurred. In the late 1980s a robber walked into a bank in Oceanside, California, with a gun and a note. He strode up to the teller that looked the easiest target a woman in her fifties with a gentle, grandmotherly appearance. He handed her the note that demanded the money. “Give me all your money or I will blow your ... head off” or something to that affect.

She reached for the cash drawer to oblige. Then she looked back down at the note and her teeth clenched. She squeezed her hands into tight fists and turned red. Suddenly, in flash she pulled out the metal drawer entirely. She did not give it to him instead she flung it at him.

The she bashed him over the head with it. She hit him once, and again, and again. She began yelling at him in a rage. The money was flying all over the bank. The patrons ran for cover. The dazed thief retreated in fear. Then he ran. Police nearby caught him hiding under a nearby bush.

And then they figured out what spurred the heroics of the grandmotherly teller. She was chasing him out of the bank screaming, “Don’t you ever use such a foul word again!”

Many commentaries explain a difference between judgment and wrath. They are separate issues. Judgment was meted because of the sin of thievery. But that merits judgment, and payback. Perhaps there could have been repentance. Maybe only certain acts would have been judged. It is strong enough to warrant strict judgment. But to a point. Thievery alone, even wanton brazenness is not enough to destroy a world. Alone, it would not have produced such wrath. But when the desire to gain someone else’s property is compounded with the arrogance of lewd licentiousness, depraved morality, and debasing the norms of civilization, then the judgment is meted with wrath.

Often people sin. They even steal. Those crimes have to be dealt with even judged strongly. But when unprovoked vices become integrated with the selfishness of theft and greed, then a wake-up call is imperative. Even if it can ruin your entire world.

To Make the World a Better Place

RABBI LABEL LAM (Torah.org)

You shall make a skylight for the ark, and to a cubit you shall finish it to the top, and the entrance of the ark you shall place in its side; you shall make it with bottom, second story, and third story. (Breishis 6:16)

bottom [compartments], second-story, and third-story. three stories, one above the other; the upper compartments were for people, the middle ones for [animal] dwellings, and the bottom ones for waste matter. — Rashi

That Noach’s Ark had three floors, one for people, and one for animals, and another for garbage is pretty generic and banal information that every child is aware of. Yet, there lurks a wondrous question within that probably most of us have never considered.

I was desperately looking for a way to motivate a certain class of 7th grade boys to keep their class neat and clean. It’s no secret that students think and learn better in a tidy workspace. I tried straight talk and appointing monitors, but one went nowhere and the other spilled over to a new kind of chaos. I called on a young Rabbi, a colleague, a principal who is a master in educational matters to help me solve this chronic problem. He said he would come into the class and we could work it out together. He entered that class, and he started a dialogue with me whereby the boys were able to eavesdrop on our conversation.

He asked if I remember a certain unfortunate incident that happened in another school where we worked together. It’s hard to even say it out loud, because it was so below the dignity of the institution, or any standards of normalcy. I cannot even spell out the details here. Suffice it to say that it had to do with garbage and a window. Yes, there was a victim below who was upset and rightfully so. My colleague asked me if I remember what we did. I remember being too disturbed to talk to him at the time.

He told me in front of the class, that he spoke with that boy. “I asked him how many floors were on Noach’s Teva and he told me three. I asked him what the levels were for and he said the people, the animals, the garbage.

I asked him why there was a necessity for a floor just for garbage. It’s one entire floor out of three. After a year of holding onto garbage it must have been smelly and uncomfortable. Why did they not just throw everything into the waters outside. It certainly would not have disturbed or damaged

the world. It was a big ocean outside and everything would be swallowed up and disappeared in time. Why not just throw everything out and make it much more comfortable for the people and the animals!?”

The boy did not have an answer. I told him all of humanity was on that Ark. All future peoples would come from whoever exited that place. There’s a chance that if that became the habit, the widespread custom to throw garbage out the window, then what would the world around look like today?! So, they suffered with the garbage, just so as not to become people who throw junk all about them whenever and wherever they please.” That little anecdote made a profound impression and the class neaten up from then on. It was a powerful lesson.

I have a sign in my office that says “How do I know if I’m doing the right thing? Simply ask yourself if everybody would do like I am doing would it be a better class, a better school, a better world? If the answer is yes, keep up the great work, but if the answer is no then stop and make a better choice. I tell kids “You don’t have to answer me. You have to answer for yourself.” I can see young boys shaking their head no as they reflect on each of these questions.

Years back we went on a picnic with my family and the family of a close friend of mine. Afterwards we asked the kids to pick up some of the trash that blew away from our spot and he sent his children on a wider circuit. I told him that the stuff over there is not from us. He responded that Rabbi Avigdor Miller said, “We should leave a place even better.” That is what he was teaching his children. Not only should we not soil or spoil the world around us, or even just keep it as clean, we should rather try wherever we are to make the world a better place

The Longest Building Project in History

AVROHOM YAAKOV

Imagine being given a project in the year 1906 and being told: "Keep working on it every day. It will not be finished until 2026."

No retirement plan. No progress reports. No encouraging emails. No likes on social media. No one telling you, "Great job, almost there!"

Just another day, another plank.

That was Noach.

The Torah describes him as a righteous man, yet after commanding him to build the ark, the Torah still tells us:

"And Noach did; according to all that G-d had commanded him, so he did." (6:22)

Rashi explains that this refers to the building of the ark.

At first glance, the verse seems unnecessary. Of course he did! The Torah has already called him a tzaddik (6:9). Why would we think otherwise?

Perhaps because being righteous and being consistent are not necessarily the same thing.

Many people have lofty ideals. Many begin great projects. Very few continue them when the excitement disappears.

For 120 years Noach built an ark in the middle of a civilization that thought he was crazy. Every morning he woke up to the same questions, the same mockery, the same pressure.

"Still building?"

"Still expecting this flood?"

"Maybe it's time to move on?"

Yet the Torah testifies that Noach kept going.

That may be the greatest miracle associated with Noach - not that he survived the flood, but that he survived 120 years of public opinion.

A person can withstand one difficult day. A strong person can withstand a difficult year. But 120 years? That borders on the superhuman.

To appreciate Noach's achievement, compare it to other episodes in Jewish history.

The generation of the wilderness witnessed the Ten Plagues. They saw the splitting of the Sea. They ate manna from Heaven and drank water from Miriam's well. Yet repeatedly they complained and longed to return to Egypt.

Noach, by contrast, had only a promise. No miracles. No cheering section. No visible progress toward redemption.

Just a command from Hashem and a hammer.

And he kept building.

The contrast is even sharper in our own age.

We live in a world of instant gratification.

If a website takes more than three seconds to load, we become impatient.

We can hardly wait for the microwave to heat our dinner.

If a package takes more than a day to arrive, we wonder what went wrong.

If a WhatsApp message isn't answered within a few minutes, we start imagining scenarios.

We lose interest in news stories within twenty-four hours. We barely remember what outraged us last week.

Yet Noach held onto a Divine mission for 120 years.

That is astonishing.

Perhaps that is why the Torah emphasizes not merely that Noach was a tzaddik, but that he did exactly as G-d commanded.

The world often celebrates dramatic moments. Judaism celebrates faithful persistence.

A good marriage is built plank by plank.

Children are raised plank by plank.

Communities are built plank by plank.

A meaningful spiritual life is built plank by plank.

Noach teaches us that greatness is not only found in heroic acts. Greatness is showing up again tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that, long after everyone else has lost interest.

The flood came and went.

The mockers disappeared.

The ark remained.

And so did the legacy of the man who never stopped building.

Noach and the lion

RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN (JNS.org)

So you thought you knew the famous biblical story of Noach and the ark, right? Well, there is a little-known vignette most people don't know about and is not in the story we usually tell our children.

Noach was responsible for feeding every animal: the elephants, giraffes, birds, snakes, monkeys, and, of course, the lions. Each had its own diet, needs and timetable. There were no refrigerators, no automated feeding systems and no animal-welfare department to call when things got out of hand.

Noach and his family had to do it all themselves.

Bereshit 7:23 tells us how everything in the world was wiped out. "All existence on earth was blotted out—humans, cattle, creeping things and birds of the sky ... only Noach and those with him in the ark survived." In the Hebrew original, the words are *ach Noach*, "only" Noach (survived).

Rashi, quoting the Midrash, explains that the Hebrew word *ach* ("only") is a limiting word, meaning that something was lacking. Noach was left somewhat diminished from all his huge workload. One opinion is that he was coughing and spitting blood from the ordeal. Others say that the lion once struck Noach because he was late in bringing him his food, leaving him injured and limping.

Think about it. Here was a man who had devoted himself to saving the world, doing a mitzvah of the highest order.

And what was his reward? A *klop* from the king of beasts!

You would think that if anyone deserved a little appreciation, it was Noach. But the lion was unsympathetic.

THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE draws a powerful lesson that resonates today: What do you do when you are doing the right thing, for the right reasons, and life gives you a smack anyway?

It's easy to speak about faith and dedication when everything is going well. It's much harder when you are exhausted, unappreciated and nursing a wound.

There is the parent who sacrifices everything to give a child a Jewish education, only to see that child reject the values they were raised with.

There is the volunteer who gives up evenings and weekends to keep a communal institution up and running, only to be criticized by the very people who benefit from such work.

There is the person who tries to make peace in a family, only to end up with both sides blaming them.

And there is the person who quietly helps others, but when they themselves need help, nobody seems to notice.

Eventually, they question: Why bother?

I've seen people who dedicated decades of their lives to doing good for the community and, in the end, when they were mistreated, became disillusioned and even regretted all their good work. How sad!

That is when we must remember Noach.

He could have said, "Dear Lord, I built the ark, saved the animals, and worked day and night. And now the lion attacks me?! Do I deserve this? I'm finished!"

But he did not say that. He carried on doing his work faithfully, and in the end, rebuilt our world.

Responsibility must be stronger than our need for applause or even recognition.

The Rebbe's message is not that life will always be fair, that good people will always be appreciated or that every kindness will be rewarded with

gratitude. If appreciation is our only motivation, then we will inevitably be disappointed.

The deeper message is that our responsibility must be stronger than our need for applause or even recognition.

We do not do good to be thanked. We do not support our community only because everyone agrees with our decisions. We do these things because they are right, because we have a neshama and because we each have our own G-d-given responsibilities in this world.

Of course, there are times when we must speak up, set boundaries or ask for help. Dedication doesn't mean accepting abuse or neglecting our own well-being. But there is a difference between addressing a problem and allowing it to destroy our purpose.

The lion may have hurt Noach, but it didn't make him stop his work. Perhaps this is the significance of the word *ach* ("only"). The word can mean "but" or "nevertheless." It introduces a difficulty, a qualification, a disappointment.

Life is full of *ach* moments.

I wanted to help, but I was hurt. I tried to do the right thing, but nobody appreciated it. I gave my best, but I failed.

The question is whether that "but" will end our story or strengthen our determination.

Yes, I was hurt, but I have a purpose. Yes, I was disappointed, but I can still do good.

That is not weakness. That is spiritual strength.

Noach's work was not glamorous. He was doing the ordinary, repetitive, exhausting work of a zookeeper.

Much of the greatest work in Jewish life is exactly like that: communal workers serving their people, a parent preparing another Shabbat meal, a grandparent teaching a grandchild a bracha, a volunteer making another phone call or someone visiting the sick when nobody else has the time.

The world is sustained by people who keep showing up.

So, should you happen to get smacked by the lion of life, take a breath. Tend to the wound. Get the help you need. And then, return to the work that matters because your mission is bigger than the lion.

May G-d give us the courage to keep doing what is right, the wisdom to know when we need help and the strength not to let disappointment turn us into disappointed, bitter people.

Wine and Window Washers

RABBI NAFTALI REICH (Torah.org)

The world is devastated, every last vestige of civilization washed away by the Great Flood. There are no people, no buildings, no roads, no crops, no cultivated land, only a great wooden ark perched incongruously on a mountaintop.

The door to the ark slowly swings open, and Noach steps out onto dry land for the first time in forty days. He looks about him at the endless expanse of ruination, and he realizes he must begin the work of reconstruction immediately. What does he do? The Torah relates, "And Noach, man of the earth, demeaned himself and planted a vineyard; he drank of the wine and became drunk." One thing led to another. Noach's son Ham took advantage of his father's inebriated condition and acted disgracefully toward him, thereby giving rise to the curse of Ham and his son Canaan.

The point of this entire episode is clearly to give the historical background for the depravity that would characterize Canaanite society, the nemesis of the Jewish people, for thousands of years. Why then wasn't it sufficient to tell us simply that Noach became drunk? Why does the Torah find it necessary to tell us that he obtained wine for his cups by planting a vineyard? And what if he had had a barrel stored away on the ark? Would the situation have been any different?

Furthermore, the Torah seems to imply that Noach debased himself by the very act of planting a vineyard, even before he drank the wine and became drunk? Why did planting a vineyard debase him?

The commentators explain that a person is a complex mass of interests, biases and drives that often obscure the true nature of his soul, very often even from himself. Going off in all directions, some good and some not so good, pursuing this, that and the other, he presents a confusing, multi-hued image. Which of those manifestations represent the real identity that lies within? It is difficult to determine. But there are some defining moments when he does not find it necessary to posture for other people and he is able to focus completely on his own interest. It is moments like these that the true nature of his essence becomes manifest.

Noach spent forty tempestuous days in the close confines of the ark, and now for the first time, he once again sets foot on terra firma. As he looks around at the vast wasteland, where is his head? What thoughts and issues occupy his mind? What is the first thing he does? He plants a vineyard. So that is his true nature! That is what lies closest to his heart. And so by the

very act of planting a vineyard Noach had already debased himself, long before he actually became drunk. And this debasement of his inner core, this lack of self-respect, triggered the awful disrespect of his son Ham.

A young man once came to a great sage and asked to become his disciple. "Please step into the synagogue for a moment," said the sage.

A few moments later, the young man returned.

"What did you see there?" asked the sage.

"I saw a foul-smelling window washer," he replied.

"I see," said the sage. "I'm afraid I cannot accept you."

"But why?" the young man protested. "Is it my fault that the fellow hasn't had a bath in a month."

"My dear young friend," said the sage, "a high-minded man would have seen the beautiful ark, the holy books piled on the tables, the flickering eternal flame. Only a mean-spirited person would focus immediately on the foul smells emanating from the window washer."

In our own lives, we are constantly dealing with the complexities and ambiguities of contemporary society. Very little is clearly black and white, and we often find ourselves making all sorts of compromises and accommodations. But we should always ask ourselves what we are deep inside. Where are our minds? Where are our hearts? As long as we are essentially spiritual and altruistic, as long as the values and ideals of the Torah are the focus of our lives, we will always find ourselves uplifted and enriched, regardless of the environment in which we find ourselves.

Children's Math

RABBI SHIMON POSNER (Chabad.org)

How long since you had to look inside a math book? Because here's a question that might have got by you:

A down payment on a home costs \$5,000.

Housing one brain-damaged man for a year costs \$20,000.

How many families lose homes to mental retardation?

This extra-credit teaser comes from a Nazi-endorsed schoolbook (currency adjusted). It was the first step in curing society of the unneeded. Shortly after, with the country now ready, beautiful killings ("euthanasia" in Latin) began.

It is comforting to think that Nazis were demons rather than humans. But following their defeat you couldn't find an anti-Semite west of the Elbe. When questioned by Allied troops the mayors around Dachau professed no hard feelings to the Jews. They were not demons; they were people who legalized euthanasia.

Euthanasia makes sense. The animal kingdom, Greek culture and Darwinism all lend their credence. The only one withholding credence is a pesky verse in our parshah forbidding murder and suicide, "for in the image of G-d I have created you." An absurd abstraction in the face of home ownership.

What is this "image" of an allegedly formless being?

Who are you to tell me how to spend my money?

How to run our affairs?

You're nothing but a stranger amongst us.

Do you know the suffering of caring for this person?

Must we foot your bill? Who asked you anyway?

Many if not most Jews of Germany did not see themselves as bearers of any message. Regardless, the messenger with a bad message must be liquidated.

It seems so foreign: jackboots and German shepherds, J's on Jewish stores, marches in the night.

It is so foreign, so unreal, so out of our context, so un-American.

True, it is also the very opposite of what this country was built upon. But...

Nothing ever happens in a vacuum.

Always an abstract, vague undercurrent feeds into, and later evolves into, bold statements and policies. Just after this verse about the murder-image thing, follows the verse to be fruitful and multiply. The verse is repetitive and the juxtaposition so stark that the Talmud equates the lack of procreation with murder and spilling blood. Both at some level deny the G-dliness, the holiness, the sacredness of the human soul and form.

The juxtaposition is so stark that the Talmud equates the lack of procreation with murder and spilling blood... Both at some level deny the G-dliness, the holiness, the sacredness of the human soul and form

Logic it makes. If human image is divine then it must be furthered and multiplied. If it is not multiplied, then the sanctity is diminished — and on some level — questioned.

The highest birthrate in the world, I am told, was in the Jewish Displaced Persons Camps of Europe following the war — a courageous and bold revocation and retort to the Final Solution.

My father was once challenged by a woman, "But I want my girls to have the good things in life, dance classes and party dresses. You can't give them these things when you have too many kids."

"Would your kids prefer," asked my father, "to have one sister and four party dresses or two sisters and two party dresses?"

I have heard it said that having children could tie up free money.

To not have a child because of financial considerations?

Should we do the math?

Wrong Time for Building Legacies

RABBI LEVI AVTZON (Chabad.org)

Reality has just been turned upside down, the waters of the flood have erased all life off the face of the globe, and humanity has to start all over again.

This is not some apocalyptic terror film, but the story of the world after the Great Flood. Noach and his family were the only living people in the world, while every other person who had been living just one year earlier—including their neighbors, friends, enemies and everyone else—was gone.

When the flood gates closed, the waters settled, and the people emerged from the floating box, they quickly went ahead to rebuild civilization, having children, building homes, accumulating wealth, and just getting back to routine.

Why not, they thought, build a huge tower that will reach the sky?

Not too long afterwards, they hit upon a wonderful idea. Why not, they thought, build a huge tower that will reach the sky? After all, we have the technology and the manpower! Let us build a legacy for ourselves! Let the future world know about how awesome we were!

The vote was unanimous to build the tower, and the people of Babel set out to make their dream a reality. Things started out smoothly, and they were making headway, when G-d decided to put a stop to the project. He mixed up their languages, dispersed them all over the world, and (according to the Meam Loez) turned some of them into apes (oh, so we are related . . .).

And you ask, what was the big deal? Why did G-d react so angrily to such a harmless cause? Where did these visionaries go wrong? Could there be something wrong in wanting to build a legacy?

Yes! There was something very wrong.

Think about it, friends. The world had been destroyed, and now the society needed a lot of help. Children needed schools, places of worship needed to be built, traumas had yet to be settled . . . and all these people could think about was their legacy!

Who has time for building legacies when there is a hungry man next door? Was there nothing more important than building a tower, so that four thousand years later, when a scientist would excavate a site somewhere in Mesopotamia and find remains of a big tower, he or she would write in the history books that this was a strong and advanced nation?

How could they think of a legacy for the future, when the present needed so much help? And, for heaven's sake, if they desperately desired to make a legacy, then at least they should have made something worthwhile! Why not open the world's first hospital, make a beautiful house of worship, or build a school? Why, oh why, erect a pointless, unneeded tower?

And that question lingers for all time . . .

Based on a talk of the Rebbe, published in Likkutei Sichot, vol. 3.

News & Views

UN panel member admits he, colleagues accused Israel of 'genocide' without verifying facts independently

MIKE WAGENHEIM (JNS.org 13-10-26)

Chris Sidoti, a member of the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Israel and the Palestinians, admitted last week that the U.N. panel reported that Israel intended to commit “genocide” in Gaza even though the commission never collected direct evidence to that effect.

The Australian jurist made the statement during a public debate with American military law expert Brian Cox at Caulfield Hebrew Congregation, an Orthodox synagogue in Melbourne.

Proving genocidal intent is “a very, very high test,” which is “higher than the criminal standard of beyond reasonable doubt,” Sidoti said at the event. The U.N. panel member told attendees that “if we accept that the goal of the Israeli authorities in Gaza has been the destruction of Hamas, that does not preclude the possibility of genocide being the strategy by which their goal is going to be attained.”

Even if Israel aimed to destroy Hamas, it could still be using “genocide” as a strategy to that end, he claimed.

The U.N. panel's conclusion that Israel was guilty of “genocide”—a charge

which the Jewish state has repeatedly denied—was based on evidence on “reasonable grounds,” which is “not a high standard,” Sidoti said.

“We are not a court,” he told attendees. “We are not even prosecutors. We are an investigative body.”

The Genocide Convention requires specific intent, or *dolus specialis* in Latin, to destroy a group at least in part for a finding of genocide.

Navi Pillay, an anti-Israel activist and former chair of the commission who won a Nobel Prize last week, told a German newspaper that the panel “essentially worked like a court” with “all the instruments of the separation of powers.”

“Every fact was verified by us,” she told the paper.

The U.N. panel has said the International Court of Justice, the principal judicial arm of the global body which is based in The Hague, “put all States on notice of the plausibility of the State of Israel committing genocide.”

Cox played an audio clip of a former president of the court, Joan Donoghue, who said in a television interview that the court, which she led at the time, never ruled that the claim of “genocide” against Israel was plausible.

“Our paragraph is entirely consistent with then-President Donoghue’s comments,” Sidoti told attendees.

Sidoti said at the event that the panel does “not come to conclusions unless we ourselves have conducted an investigation.”

An audience member suggested otherwise.

The attendee noted that the U.N. panel claimed that 83% of Gazans killed in the war were civilians, which the commission took as evidence that Israel targets Palestinian civilians “deliberately.”

The 83% statistic has been debunked widely. The audience member asked Sidoti whether the commission independently verified it.

“No. We didn’t, because we don’t have that information,” Sidoti said. “We literally don’t know, nor does the IDF know.”

Lions vs. cowards in the face of global jihad

JAMES SINKINSON (JNS.org 11-10-26)

When the flydubai flight to Tel Aviv suddenly took a perilous nose dive, the Israeli plumber who led the struggle to yank the plane’s terrorist pilot from its cockpit said that he and his fellow passengers attacked “like lions” to abort the suicide mission, saving 174, mostly Israelis, from certain death.

Tellingly, at last month’s U.N. General Assembly (UNGA), Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu used a similar metaphor to describe Israel’s role generally in fighting Middle East terrorists. He said Israelis “fought like lions” in a seven-front war to defeat terrorists like the Houthis, Hezbollah, Hamas, Syrian rebels, West Bank terror groups, Iraqi militias and Iran.

In his speech, Netanyahu also contrasted Israel’s brave behavior with that of some 100 “moral cowards” who walked out of his UNGA presentation and with those nations that over years and decades have sat on their hands instead of fighting the West’s jihadi enemies.

Most other United Nations members who spoke at the New York event did nothing to dispel aspersions that they—and the world body generally—lack principles, resolve and courage. Indeed, their speeches largely focused not on the world’s greatest problems, but as usual on one of the world’s smallest nations—Israel—and one of its most inconsequential problems (i.e., the Palestinians).

By contrast, U.S. President Donald Trump, in his UNGA address, accused its members of being effete posers who speak nobly of peace, progress, stability and other abstract goals, but who are paralyzed when it comes to acting forcefully against shared enemies, especially when actions involve risk.

Trump might have added that the world body, which represents some 193 nations, barely touched on the world’s most pressing problems. Absent from the majority of speeches were commitments to resolve such immediate challenges as Russia’s imperialist war on Ukraine, Iran’s quest for nuclear weapons and Islamic hegemony, or China’s threatening gestures toward conquering Taiwan.

Likewise, absent were U.N.-member presentations that addressed longer-term global threats

Since a majority of U.N. members are autocracies, it was unsurprising not to hear passionate calls to liberate suffering masses through democratization. Nor did anyone seriously address looming challenges like global jihad, AI technology revolution and data centers, globally plummeting fertility, immigration crises or worldwide energy shortages.

While Trump did not use the term “cowards,” he might well have, pointedly calling out U.N. members for ignoring the world’s most imminent threats.

Foremost among the dangers on Trump’s mind, of course, was Iran. While the president affected no false modesty in extolling his (and America’s) initiative and success in forcefully thwarting Iran, he faulted other nations—and previous U.S. presidents—for neglecting to subdue the Islamic Republic. He also criticized the United Nations for its bloated bureaucracy and the International Criminal Court as a travesty of justice. Finally, he warned of the dangers of uncontrolled immigration, terror

organizations, and autocratic perils threatening America’s backyard, the Western Hemisphere.

Overall, Trump described a singular nation, the United States, acting boldly and decisively to address and solve pressing problems—implying that other member states were endangering themselves and the world order with their passivity and irresoluteness. While some critics accuse Trump of rogue unilateralism, others see the United States as providing leadership in addressing and resolving many of the world’s most troubling (and deadly) challenges.

As if to support Trump’s and Netanyahu’s accusations of timidity and hollow self-righteousness, the U.N.’s chief executive and most other UNGA speakers dominated the event’s messaging with condemnations and complaints ... about the tiny dot on the world map that is Israel. The Jewish state’s alleged crimes and misdemeanors on the world stage were persistently lamented—genocide, occupation and settlements, starvation, forced displacement and “ethnic cleansing.”

None of the presentations sympathized with the fact that the Gaza war was started when Islamist fanatics committed a genocidal massacre, nor was Israel thanked by any speakers for almost single-handedly decapitating the Middle East’s jihadi terror infrastructure.

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres disingenuously claimed Israel’s “onslaught” of killing and ruin was “unlike anything” he had seen. Guterres apparently has forgotten Sudan’s civil war, in which 10 million to 12 million have been displaced and 200,000 to 300,000 have been killed—dwarfing Gaza’s death toll of about 75,000. Guterres was also apparently sleeping during Ethiopia’s apocalyptic Tigray war (2020-22), which saw 300,000 battle-related deaths in 2021-22 alone. Finally, he must have forgotten the Russia-Ukraine war, which has raged for nearly four years and killed upwards of 400,000.

While member speakers spared no words in cataloging Israel’s fictitious “war crimes,” not a single one mentioned the political, economic and social catastrophe that is today’s Muslim Middle East and North Africa (nor did they praise its only democracy, Israel).

Foremost among the lies leveled at Israel, Netanyahu repudiated U.N. members’ genocide allegations, which he called “the biggest lie of the century.” He disproved that lie, listing the myriad steps Israel took to protect and support Gaza civilians, including strike warnings, evacuations, vaccinations and millions of tons of food aid, reiterating that Israel’s army is “the most moral in the world.”

In short, recent events in the Middle East—in the sky above it, and on the ground and sea all around it—Americans and Israelis have behaved bravely and responsibly to defeat Iran and its terrorist proxies, the neighborhood’s despicable bullies. Rather than thanks, those hypocrites who profit equally from U.S. and Israeli good deeds, especially Western nations, respond with harsh criticism. The United Kingdom and the Netherlands are now even levying sanctions against products and crops from Israeli communities in Judea and Samaria.

Even worse, many of those Western nations, especially Western Europeans, have placidly sown the seeds of global jihad through uncontrolled immigration of Islamist populations. They are only beginning to reap the whirlwind of their own national destruction. (France’s population now has nearly 7 million Muslims, and for thanks, its streets are now daily ablaze with rampaging violence.) European nations have behaved as foolishly and arrogantly in protecting their own societies as they have in ignoring the dangers on the ground in the Islamist Middle East.

While Israel and the United States draw outsized condemnations from the international community, their values and courage to act in the face of clear and present dangers will help them stand proud, prosperous and secure as weaker nations falter and succumb.

A ‘peace prize’ for the vilification of Israel

RUTHIE BLUM (JNS.org 9-10-26)

There are bad decisions and disgraceful ones. And then there’s the awarding of the 2026 Nobel Peace Prize to Navi Pillay.

The choice is hardly out of character for an award whose history has repeatedly shown that its name guarantees nothing about its recipients’ merit. Indeed, this isn’t an aberration for the Norwegian committee. But it’s an especially egregious example of a familiar pattern: an international establishment congratulating itself for advancing peace while rewarding people whose records make a mockery of the concept.

Pillay, who chaired the United Nations Commission of Inquiry that accused Israel of committing genocide in Gaza, has become a symbol of the double standards permeating the global system. The woman now being feted in the name of peace presided over a more aptly dubbed “inquisition” whose whole purpose was to brand the Jewish state with a bloody—blood libelous—stain. Like an irremovable tattoo.

The term “genocide” has a specific legal definition, including the requirement to establish intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a protected

national, ethnic, racial or religious group. It's laughable to suggest that Israel's behavior even remotely fits that description, as it took great pains to avoid civilian casualties and flooded Gaza with humanitarian aid.

That Hamas kept stealing the food and medicine, and prevented anyone other than its goons from entering the hundreds of miles of tunnels, was never of interest to Pillay and her ilk. Nor did they ever note that the population in Gaza has grown in the past three years. Some genocide.

Though her commission's report wasn't a judicial verdict, the force of its accusation was unmistakable, and Pillay was gleefully instrumental in promoting the lie for pernicious purposes. Which we now see has paid off, big-time.

This was hardly the first time her commission helped fuel the campaign to portray Israel as uniquely depraved. Pillay, a former U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights (2008-2014), was appointed to her latest post in 2021. That was when the "Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory" was established by the U.N. Human Rights Council to concoct a report to vilify Israel.

And, boy, did she ever come through for her anti-Israel colleagues, producing a mendacious paper on Israeli "crimes" in Gaza. Its allegations reinforced a false narrative depicting Israel not as a country at war with sadistic barbarians—thousands of whom breached the border on Oct. 7, 2023 to rape, maim and slaughter 1,200 innocent Israelis, and abduct 251 others—but as a sexually abusive state.

Nothing new about the turpitude of the U.N.'s endless attempts to demonize Israel. So, Pillay's having been selected to head the commission wasn't surprising.

Ditto for her winning an award transformed long ago into a vehicle for leftist virtue-signaling. In his 1895 will, Swedish scientist/businessman Alfred Nobel, inventor of dynamite, bequeathed most of his immense fortune to establishing prizes in science, literature and peace.

The latter was intended to recognize efforts toward fraternity among nations. Its subsequent history, however, has repeatedly exposed the gulf between those ideals and the eponymous committee's selections. Rather than consistently rewarding meaningful contributions to peace, the prize has served as a platform for globalist ideology involving the inversion of right and wrong.

Pillay epitomizes this moral rot. Her new laureate status is less an honor than a mark of Cain.

To add to this blot, her prize was announced on Oct. 9, two days after Israel marked the third anniversary of the worst atrocities committed against Jews since the Holocaust. The timing highlights the perversity of the prize and its recipient.

Seven Reasons for Hope on October 8

RABBI RAPHAEL SHORE (Aish.com 8-10-26)

Here's something you probably won't hear this week: I believe the Jewish people are in a stronger place today than we have been in generations. Three years after the worst day in Jewish life since the Holocaust, that may sound strange, even jarring. But let's step back from the headlines, look at the whole picture, and see what you think.

October 7 was a catastrophe. Families were slaughtered in their homes, hostages were dragged into Gaza, soldiers fell, whole communities were uprooted, and tens of thousands of Israelis still carry wounds, some visible and some not. Outside Israel, Jews took a second blow: an explosion of antisemitism and, maybe more painful still, a sense of betrayal when the people and institutions that many Jews believed shared their basic values suddenly couldn't or wouldn't apply those values when the victims were Jews.

I don't want to minimize any of that. But an anniversary is also a moment to step back, to look at where we were heading before the attack, where we are heading now, and where we stand in the long sweep of Jewish history.

1. THE STRATEGIC MAP HAS BEEN TRANSFORMED

On October 6, 2023, Iran had spent two decades and billions of dollars building a ring of fire around Israel: Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, militias in Syria and Iraq, the Houthis in Yemen, and behind them all, Iran's own arsenal of thousands of ballistic missiles and attack drones that could reach Israel. Hezbollah alone had stockpiled well over 100,000 missiles and rockets and trained elite units to cross the border. This wasn't a loose collection of hostile groups. It was a plan, built patiently over years, to surround the Jewish state and eventually break it.

Three years later, the map looks different. Hamas has been devastated militarily. Hezbollah has been badly weakened, and much of its senior leadership, Nasrallah included, is dead. The Assad regime, Iran's land bridge to Hezbollah, is gone. Iran itself has been hit directly, its military infrastructure damaged and its reach across the region dramatically reduced.

The danger isn't over, but on October 8, 2023, almost no one would have predicted that a system Iran spent decades and fortunes building could be

taken apart this quickly.

2. OUR EYES HAVE BEEN OPENED

For decades, much of Israeli policy, beginning with the Oslo era, rested on the hope that money, diplomacy, deterrence or concessions would gradually moderate enemies whose own words and actions often said otherwise. October 7 made that impossible to keep believing. Pursuing peace was never the mistake; it was letting hope blind us to warning signs that were anything but subtle.

The West delivered its own shock. Jews watched parts of a self-described liberal world express sympathy for Hamas or march alongside people celebrating it. Hamas is a brutal terrorist regime that stands against democracy, women's and LGBTQ rights, freedom of speech and press, most of the cherished Western values. For many Jews, seeing that contradiction pointed to something deeper than a disagreement over Israeli policy. Israel makes mistakes, like every country, but the obsession, the double standards and the singling out of the one Jewish state became much harder to explain away. To a lot of Jews paying attention, what was being sold as anti-Zionism looked more like something very old in new clothes: Jew-hatred, updated for the moral vocabulary of the moment.

These realizations hurt, but they are also clarifying: it's better to see reality clearly than to be comforted by a falsehood.

3. WE HAVE WITNESSED THINGS THAT ARE DIFFICULT NOT TO CALL MIRACLES

Spend time with Israeli soldiers since October 7 and you hear the stories. A soldier moves seconds before the spot where he was standing is hit. A unit takes a wrong turn and misses an ambush. Someone shows up at exactly the moment another person needs him. Any single story can be written off as coincidence. Taken together, they are much harder to dismiss. Then there are the larger events: the pager operation against Hezbollah, Israel's defenses holding against massive Iranian missile and drone barrages, and an air force that kept up a staggering pace across several fronts at once.

Nor were the miracles only military. Israel kept functioning while hundreds of thousands of reservists left offices, factories, startups and family businesses to serve for months at a time. Many companies were badly hurt, and some never recovered. Yet the economy absorbed the shock, held together and returned to growth. And then there is Flight 1037, whose timing and extraordinary chain of mechanical and human improbabilities made the story feel less like ordinary coincidence and more like a Divine wink.

We don't know why some people are saved and others are not, but Jewish history has always taught us to recognize both tragedy and providence.

4. ISRAEL ANSWERED THE QUESTION OF WHETHER IT COULD STILL FIGHT
Before October 7, Israel was arguably more divided than at any time in living memory. The judicial reform fight had split the country down the middle. Reservists, even pilots, were threatening not to serve. Israelis themselves wondered whether the social fabric was too frayed to hold in a real crisis. Hamas watched all of it and drew its conclusions.

Then October 7 came, and Hamas got its answer. Reservists did not stay home; in many units, turnout topped 100 percent, because men who hadn't even been summoned showed up anyway. All over the world, Israelis rushed to airports, and observers could hardly believe what they were seeing. Usually when a war breaks out, the planes fill up with people trying to get out. Governments organize evacuation flights, and in those first days, foreign governments were sending planes to bring their citizens home. But on the same routes, Israel was running an evacuation in reverse. Tens of thousands of Israelis abroad, on business trips, on vacation, backpacking after the army, fought for seats on flights into a war zone. They were racing toward the danger, to put on a uniform or help however they could. A society that had spent months screaming at itself showed that when the Jewish home is attacked, its sons and daughters still come running, even from the other side of the world.

5. WE REDISCOVERED THAT WE REALLY ARE ONE PEOPLE

Don't judge Jewish unity by the newspapers. Strife is news; love usually isn't. The political fights are real, and so are the religious-secular tensions and the arguments over the government, the war and the hostages. But underneath them is something deeper. The vast majority of Jews share a deep and renewed sense of peoplehood, common values and common destiny. We are family, even when we're furious with each other.

October 7 brought that instinct right to the surface. Israelis opened their homes to strangers. Volunteers drove south while terrorists were still on the roads. Jews around the world raised money, shipped equipment, housed displaced families and stood at the funerals of people they had never met. The media will always cover our arguments, but the deeper, lived Jewish reality is brotherhood, responsibility and love.

6. WE ARE RECOVERING OUR MORAL SELF-CONFIDENCE

For too long, many Jews measured Jewish legitimacy by outside approval. Are we being reasonable enough? What will the media say? Will our friends

still like us? October 7 showed where that leads.

If people can watch Jews being murdered and immediately demand that Jews explain themselves, something has gone badly wrong with the moral compass of the crowd. And when an army that goes to extraordinary lengths to limit civilian casualties is described as uniquely criminal, while ‘genocide,’ a word born in the shadow of the Holocaust, is turned against Jews fighting an enemy that openly seeks their destruction, we have no business setting our compass by theirs.

Nobody is claiming Israel is always right, but the world’s approval can’t be the yardstick for whether it is. A healthier Jewish posture is taking shape: hear the criticism, examine ourselves honestly, but don’t start from the assumption that whoever is accusing us holds the moral high ground. Moral self-confidence means knowing who we are and what we stand for without waiting for anyone’s permission. Some will call that arrogance, but I think it’s closer to maturity.

7. OCTOBER 7 CREATED "OCTOBER 8 JEWS"

Something remarkable happened after the attack. The effort to frighten Jews away from their identity often did the opposite. People who rarely thought about being Jewish started wearing Stars of David. Students who had steered clear of Jewish organizations walked through their doors. Jews went to rallies, visited Israel, opened Jewish books and asked questions they had never asked before. The world was telling them, in effect, you are Jews. Many answered: then I want to know what that means. Pressure can crush a thin identity, but it can also send people digging for what lies underneath.

The digging goes deeper than identity. Something is stirring inside the Jewish people, especially in Israel. Part of it shows up as observance: soldiers wearing tzitzit who never wore them before, fuller Shabbat tables, packed Torah classes. But it goes beyond observance. Jews are asking basic questions about who we are, what binds us, and what the Jewish people’s purpose is beyond survival.

Years ago, the late Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote about the emergence of a generation with an "undamaged, uncomplicated" Jewish identity, drawn to Judaism not mainly by persecution or Holocaust memory but by its spiritual depth and moral seriousness. October 7 may have sped that process up. For generations we tried to keep Jews Jewish by reminding them what had been done to Jews. The awakening happening now asks a different question: What is so precious here that people would give their lives for it, and how do I live for it?

THE BIGGER PICTURE

None of this makes October 7 good. Nothing could.

Our enemies wanted October 7 to be the beginning of the end of the Jewish state. Three years later, Israel is still here, much of the military machine built to destroy it has been badly damaged, and the Jewish people have found reserves of courage, solidarity and faith that many of us weren’t sure we still had.

It’s easy to get swallowed by the headlines: the antisemitism, the infighting, the real problems in front of us. Jewish history asks us to look wider. Set against the long road from exile to sovereignty, from dispersion to ingathering, from powerlessness to the ability to defend ourselves, this moment looks very different. The larger story of the Jewish people is one of spiritual determination and resilience.

The prophets spoke of an ingathering of exiles and a land that would bloom when its children returned. For most of Jewish history, those words sounded like distant promises. We are living inside them. We can’t know exactly where we stand on the prophetic timeline, but the overall direction is hard to miss.

October 7 reminded us how vulnerable we still are. October 8 may be reminding us how strong we have become, where Jewish history is heading, and who we can still become.

Einstein’s Passionate Plea for Jewish Solidarity

ISRAEL MIZRAHI (JewishPress.com 11-10-26)

A letter I was able to obtain recently reverberated with me greatly, in light of the current environment for the Jews in the Diaspora and the world. This remarkable 1939 letter reveals Albert Einstein’s passionate appeal for Jewish solidarity as European Jews confronted an increasingly desperate search for safety.

On June 10, 1939, less than three months before Nazi Germany invaded Poland and plunged Europe into the Second World War, Albert Einstein sat at his home in Princeton, N.J., and composed a deeply moving letter to Irving Lubetkin, a Jewish activist involved in assisting refugees fleeing Nazi persecution. Typed on Einstein’s personal blind-embossed letterhead and signed simply “A. Einstein,” the letter offers a remarkable glimpse into the concern that occupied one of the world’s most famous Jews during a period when the fate of European Jewry was rapidly becoming more precarious, while also providing a powerful expression of the principle that Einstein believed had helped the Jewish people endure centuries of persecution: the

obligation of Jews to stand together and help one another in times of crisis. Einstein wrote to Lubetkin in recognition of his humanitarian work “on behalf of the refugees during Dedication Week,” praising his efforts at a moment when Jewish refugees escaping Nazi Germany and the territories under its influence were desperately seeking countries willing to receive them. Although the full dimensions of the catastrophe that awaited European Jewry could not yet have been known in June 1939, the danger was already unmistakable, and Einstein understood that the Jewish community faced a profound test of its willingness and ability to come to the assistance of its persecuted brethren.

“The power of resistance which has enabled the Jewish people to survive for thousands of years has been based to a large extent on traditions of mutual helpfulness,” Einstein wrote, placing the refugee crisis within the much longer sweep of Jewish history. “In these years of affliction our readiness to help one another is being put to an especially severe test. May we stand this test as well as did our fathers before us.”

Those words acquire an extraordinary poignancy when viewed from the perspective of what followed, because the letter was written at the very threshold of one of the darkest periods in Jewish history. Within weeks, the German invasion of Poland would begin the Second World War, and the persecution of European Jews would eventually develop into the systematic annihilation of six million Jewish men, women and children. In the summer of 1939, however, there was still an opportunity to save lives, and Jewish activists, communal organizations and individuals in the United States and elsewhere were struggling to find ways to help refugees escape the increasingly dangerous conditions in Europe.

Einstein was among the most prominent people lending his voice to that effort, using a reputation that extended far beyond the Jewish community to draw attention to the plight of Jewish refugees and to encourage those who were attempting to assist them. During the late 1930s, he wrote letters on behalf of refugees, signed affidavits and offered his support to people and organizations engaged in rescue and relief efforts, demonstrating that his concern for the Jewish people extended well beyond sympathy or private identification and into the realm of public action.

The timing of his letter to Lubetkin is particularly significant because just two weeks earlier, Einstein had delivered the inaugural address at the opening of the Jewish Palestine Pavilion at the New York World’s Fair, where he spoke before an enormous audience estimated at approximately 100,000 people. In an era before television and social media could instantly amplify a public figure’s words around the world, Einstein’s appearance provided an extraordinary platform from which to address the concerns of the Jewish people, and he used that opportunity to urge his listeners to “fight with all [their] might.”

That public appeal and the private letter to Lubetkin reveal the same underlying conviction: that Jewish survival depended not only upon the courage of individuals but upon the willingness of Jews to recognize their shared responsibility toward one another, particularly when their fellow Jews were facing persecution and displacement. Einstein understood that the refugee crisis was not simply a humanitarian problem affecting distant strangers, but a Jewish crisis that demanded a collective response from Jews who were fortunate enough to live in relative safety.

“We have no other means of self-defense than our solidarity and our knowledge that the cause for which we are suffering is a momentous and sacred cause,” Einstein wrote, expressing in remarkably direct terms the philosophy that runs throughout the letter. For him, solidarity was not merely an expression of Jewish sentiment; it represented a practical means of confronting persecution at a time when Jews possessed few other avenues through which they could protect their endangered brethren.

He then offered Lubetkin a deeply personal expression of appreciation for the work he was undertaking, writing that it “must be a source of deep gratification” to know that he was making such an important contribution toward “rescuing our persecuted fellow-Jews from their calamitous peril and leading them toward a better future.” The language is striking not only because of its emotional force, but because Einstein deliberately identifies himself with both Lubetkin and the refugees as part of a single Jewish collective, referring to the victims not as “the refugees” or “those Jews,” but as “our persecuted fellow-Jews.”

That sense of collective responsibility was especially significant during the refugee crisis of the late 1930s, when Jews fleeing Nazi persecution confronted formidable obstacles in their search for refuge. Countries that might have offered safety-imposed immigration restrictions, while the number of people seeking escape from Europe continued to rise, leaving activists such as Lubetkin attempting to navigate an increasingly desperate situation in which every successful intervention could potentially mean the difference between a refugee reaching safety and being trapped in a continent moving toward war.

Einstein’s letter therefore provides more than an intimate glimpse into the

humanitarian concerns of a celebrated historical figure; it captures a Jewish world standing on the precipice of catastrophe, at a moment when the need for rescue was becoming increasingly urgent and when individuals involved in refugee work required both practical assistance and moral encouragement. Einstein's decision to write directly to Lubetkin, and his choice to emphasize the ancient Jewish tradition of mutual aid, demonstrate how deeply he viewed the refugee crisis through the lens of Jewish history and collective responsibility.

For Einstein, the story of Jewish survival was inseparable from the willingness of one Jew to help another, a tradition that he believed had enabled the Jewish people to withstand repeated periods of persecution throughout the ages. His appeal to Lubetkin to "stand this test" as the Jews' fathers had done before them was therefore both a compliment to the activist's work and a challenge to the broader Jewish community to rise to the circumstances confronting it.

The letter also serves as a reminder that Einstein's relationship with the Jewish people was far more consequential than his popular image as a brilliant physicist might suggest. Although his scientific achievements made him one of the most recognizable figures in the world, he also became an influential Jewish public figure whose words carried enormous weight on questions involving Jewish security, refugee relief, Palestine and the future of the Jewish people. At a time when Jews in Europe were increasingly stripped of their homes, rights and security, Einstein used whatever influence he possessed to call attention to their plight and encourage others to act on their behalf.

Seen today, more than eight decades after it was written, the June 10, 1939 letter possesses an almost haunting quality because its author was writing at a moment when history was moving rapidly toward a catastrophe whose dimensions he could not yet have known. Einstein could not foresee the full extent of the Holocaust, nor could he possibly have known how many of the refugees whose plight concerned him would ultimately find safety and how many would not, but he clearly understood that Jewish lives were in danger and that those who had the ability to help could not simply stand by. What makes the document particularly resonant is that Einstein did not present Jewish solidarity as a matter of convenience or even simply as an admirable virtue; he described it as a fundamental source of the Jewish people's ability to survive. In his understanding, the strength that had carried the Jewish people through thousands of years of dispersion and persecution was rooted in traditions of mutual assistance, and the refugee crisis of 1939 represented another moment in which that tradition would be tested.

The letter to Irving Lubetkin thus stands as both a historical document and a personal testimony, preserving the voice of Albert Einstein at a critical moment in Jewish history and showing how one of the twentieth century's most famous Jews sought to use his influence on behalf of refugees whose lives were threatened by Nazi persecution. Written only weeks before the outbreak of war and only a few years before the full horror of the Holocaust would become known, Einstein's message remains remarkably clear: when Jews are threatened, their strength lies in their solidarity, their willingness to assume responsibility for one another, and their determination to ensure that those in danger are not left to face their fate alone.

More than eighty years later, those words give the letter a significance that extends far beyond its original recipient, transforming what might otherwise be viewed as a piece of correspondence between a celebrated scientist and a Jewish activist into a window onto one of the most consequential moments in modern Jewish history, when the ancient Jewish tradition of mutual aid was being called upon to meet an unprecedented challenge.

Talmud explains that the adjustment consisted of building a balcony over the men's section so that the women could witness the festivities of Simchas beis ha-shoeivah. Had they stood where they normally did, the mingling of the crowds and the festive holiday air would have led to kalus rosh, excessive frivolity. The Talmud attests that the need for a balcony was so pressing that its construction was approved even though it is generally prohibited to expand or modify the original structure of the Beis ha-Mikdash. The Biblical source for the separation of men and women, says the Talmud, is found in the verse in Zechariah in which the prophet foretells the eulogy of Mashiach ben Yosef, where men and women will be seated separately. If separate seating is required even at so solemn an affair as a eulogy, how much more so must separate seating be required on a joyous occasion!

Following the example set by our Sages in the Beis ha-Mikdash, the age-old tradition has been to make a clear division and a separation between the main sanctuary and the women's section. Some shuls built a balcony, like the Beis ha-Mikdash had, while others constructed a thick wall that completely separated the two sections. This arrangement was so taken for granted, so undisputed, that it is not even explicitly cited in the Shulchan Aruch as a requirement(2). About a hundred years ago, when some shuls in Germany and Hungary began to question the need for a mechitzah, all the leading rabbis(3) strictly prohibited davening in any shul that lowered or removed the traditional separation between the two sections.

With the mass immigration of Jews to the United States in the late 1800's, many modern synagogues did not insist upon a mechitzah that completely blocked off the women's section. First Reform and Conservative temples, and then even more traditional ones, began to gradually lower or remove the barrier which separated the men from the women. The following questions were then posed to the venerable poskim in the U.S.: Is this practice justified? Is a mechitzah halachically required? How high does a mechitzah have to be?

REASON FOR THE BALCONY IN THE BEIS HA-MIKDASH:

In order to answer these questions correctly, we must first examine what, exactly, was the purpose of the balcony in the Beis ha-Mikdash. We explained earlier that a balcony was constructed to prevent kalus rosh, excessive frivolity. The Talmud does not, however, elaborate on how the separation was effective in guaranteeing that kalus rosh did not prevail. There are two possible ways to understand this:

* Kalus rosh prevails when the men can freely gaze at the women. It interferes with their concentration and profanes the sanctity of the Beis ha-Mikdash. By seating the women on a balcony over the men's section, the men can no longer view the women(4). To accomplish this purpose, the balcony was constructed in one of two ways: 1) The men's section was directly underneath the balcony, hidden from the women's line of vision. The women were nevertheless able to see a small clearing in the middle of the men's section where the few dancers would perform(5). (The majority of the men did not actively participate in the festivities; they were merely spectators(6).) 2) The balcony was built above the sides of the men's section, but it was enclosed with a curtain or a one-way mirror. This permitted the women to watch the men from above but completely blocked the men's view of the women(7).

* Kalus rosh prevails when men and women are free to mix socially with one another. By use of a balcony and physically separating women from "mixing" with the men, the proper decorum and sanctity of the Beis ha-Mikdash was duly preserved(8). According to this understanding, then, the balcony did not completely block the men's view. Rather, it separated the two sections and prevented the men and women from communicating or interacting with each other in any way.

The question, then, as it applies to present day mechitzos, is as follows: Do we follow the first interpretation and require a mechitzah that completely blocks the men's view, or is it sufficient to have a mechitzah that divides the two sections in a way that prevents frivolity?

The two views of the poskim:

There are two schools of thought among contemporary authorities as to the practical halachah. Many poskim(9) hold that the purpose of the mechitzah is that the men should not be able to view the women.

Accordingly:

* The mechitzah must be high enough to completely block the entire women's section.

* The mechitzah must be made entirely from an opaque material. Glass, flowers and decorative wood slats are not acceptable for any part of the mechitzah.

* Even a balcony must be completely encircled by a curtain, etc.

As stated previously, this practice was universally accepted, wherever Jews davened. The women's section, whether in the balcony or at the back of the shul, was totally separated from the men's. Such a separation was a

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Mechitzah In Shul: Why And How?

RABBI DONIEL NEUSTADT (Torah.org)

The halachah that requires men to be separated from women while davening in shul has its origins in the procedure followed in the Beis ha-Mikdash. Our Sages in the Mishnah(1) report that a major "adjustment" was made in the Beis ha-Mikdash during the festive holiday of Succos. The

fundamental feature of shul architecture, as basic as positioning the amud at the front of the shul and a bimah in the middle. It was and still is part of the standard model for a Jewish place of worship.

Harav M. Feinstein⁽¹⁰⁾, however, after establishing that the basic requirement for separating men and women during prayer services is a Biblical obligation, holds that the basic halachah follows the second approach that we mentioned earlier. Although he agrees that it is commendable and praiseworthy to maintain the age-old traditional mechitzah, he nevertheless rules that the widespread practice of many shuls to lower the mechitzah somewhat is permitted according to the basic halachah. As long as the mechitzah is high enough to effectively block out any communication or interaction between the men's and women's sections, it is a halachically valid mechitzah. Accordingly:

* The minimum height for a mechitzah is shoulder-high, which the Talmud⁽¹¹⁾ calculates to be 17 to 18 tefachim high. Allowing for a difference of opinion concerning the exact size of a tefach, Harav Feinstein rules that a 66-inch mechitzah is permitted⁽¹²⁾, while in extenuating circumstances 60 inches will suffice⁽¹³⁾. Any mechitzah lower than that, however, is not considered a mechitzah at all.

* A balcony does not need to be encircled with a partition or a curtain. It is preferable and recommended, however, to do so if possible⁽¹⁴⁾.

* Although, technically, the upper part of the mechitzah may be made out of glass since it serves as a physical barrier between the sections, it is self-defeating and inadequate to use glass, as many women, unfortunately, come to shul improperly dressed and /or with their hair not covered properly⁽¹⁵⁾.

* A mechitzah which has sizable gaps towards the top is not acceptable since it does not effectively guard against kalus rosh⁽¹⁶⁾. A mechitzah which has tiny openings in the lattice work is permitted⁽¹⁷⁾.

* The mechitzah must reach the required height (60") in both the men's and women's sections. Raising the floor of the women's section – which in effect lowers the height of the mechitzah – defeats the purpose of the mechitzah⁽¹⁸⁾.

FOOTNOTES:

1 Succah 51a.

2 Tzitz Eliezer 7:8.

3 Led by R' Shlomo Ganzfried, author of Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, and M'haram Ash, disciple of Chasam Sofer, and countersigned by the Divrei Chayim. The proclamation is published in Lev ha-Ivri. See also Chasam Sofer 5:190, M'haram Shick 79 and Zichron Yehudah 1:62 who also voiced strong objections to any tampering with the traditional mechitzah.

4 Rambam (commentary to the Mishnah Succah 5:2)

5 Tosfos Yom Tov (commentary to the Mishnah Succah 5:2).

6 Rambam Hilchos Lulav 8:14.

7 Piskei Rid Succah 51; Meiri Midos 2:5; Korban Eidah (Yerushalmi Succah 5:2) as explained in Divrei Yoel 1:10.

8 Rambam Hilchos Lulav 8:12 and Hilchos Beis ha-Bechirah 5:9; Meiri Succah 51a; Tiferes Yisrael Succah 5:6; Aruch ha-Shulchan ha-Asid 11.

9 M'haram Shik 77; Divrei Yoel (Satmar Rav); Harav E. M. Bloch (Taharas Yom Tov, vol. 6); Shevet ha-Levi 1:29.

10 Igros Moshe O.C. 1:39 and in various other responsa; Seridei Eish 2:14. See also ruling of Harav E.E. Henkin (quoted in Teshuvos Bnei Banim, pg. 12).

11 Shabbos 92a.

12 Igros Moshe O.C. 4:31.

13 Ibid. O.C. 3:23; 3:24; 4:30; 4:31.

14 Ibid. O.C. 1:42.

15 Ibid. O.C. 1:43; 3:23.

16 Ibid. O.C. 4:29.

17 Ibid. O.C. 4:32.

18 Ibid. O.C. 3:23; 3:24; 4:31.

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