



Compliments of the Institute of Jewish Studies (founded by [Yankel Rosenbaum](#) HY"D) First Published Adar 5761 Vol 24.31
 Printing in part sponsored by **NLZ Imports, D&A Werdiger, Weis Printing** – email: zichron-yaakov@hotmail.com
 (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)

Tazriya-Metzora 5785

THE LAST CREATION

RABBI LAZER GURKOW (Chabad.org)

This week's Parshah enumerates the laws of ritual impurity as they pertain to human beings. The Midrash notes that the previous Parshah enumerated laws of ritual impurity as they pertain to animals. The Midrash thus posits that man's laws were enumerated after that of the animal for the same reason that man was created after the animal.

Two reasons are offered for this:

1. It is fitting that the king enters the banquet hall only after the tables are fully set. Man, the king of all creation, appropriately entered existence only after the stage of creation was fully set.
2. Should we grow haughty we are to be remember that we were preceded, in creation, by the most insignificant of insects.

At first glance these reasons appear contradictory. The first reason posits that man is king and most superior creature, while the second reason suggests that man is inferior to all other creatures.

BEST AND WORST

In truth, both reasons are correct, for man is an amalgam of body and soul. The soul is a fragment of the Creator while the body is a part of creation. The soul is lofty and transcendent while the body is inferior and mundane. We cannot take credit for our spirituality for the spirit flows from our soul, which is granted from on high. We can however take credit for our self-discipline and refined characters, for that is the fruit of our own labor.

A child is by nature untamed, drawn to self-appeasement and selfish pleasure. Without instruction and discipline, the child stands at odds with the rigorous laws of our Torah. Even the lowly insect looks down on the untamed human and boasts a superior quality, for the insect cannot and would not defy its Creator's will.

Yet we humans are able to cast our unshaped characters in the mold of the divine, and when we do, we stand at the apex of morality and achievement, at the peak of creation's pyramid. When we master ourselves we are superior to all.

REFLECTION

This thought reminds us of the Mishnah's dictum, "Who is mighty? He who masters himself" (Ethics 4 1).

AN ETERNAL COVENANT

RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR (Ohr.edu)

"And on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised..." (12:3)

Saturday morning, 8 o'clock. The rest of the world is making its way to work through a gray London morning, but at a synagogue in an up-market part of North-West London, men in suits and ladies in hats are turning up to Synagogue Shabbat services. The people range from the fully Shabbat observant, to those whose connection to Judaism is a distant childhood memory.

And without realizing it, they are attesting to the accuracy of our Sages' words, "Every mitzvah for which the Jewish People have sacrificed their lives during periods of state persecution – including circumcision – is still

observed by them." Also, "Every mitzvah that the Jews accepted upon themselves with joy, such as circumcision, endures." Although to the Western secular mind, brit milah may seem like mutilation, it endures when many other mitzvahs have fallen by the wayside.

After a boy has been brought into the covenant of Avraham Avinu, of Abraham, we bless him and say, "In the same way that he has entered into the brit, so should he enter into Torah, and to chupa, to marriage and good deeds!" This blessing is unique. At no other beginning in the life of a Jew do we give such a blessing. We don't say when a boy puts on tefillin for the first time, "Just as you have put on tefillin, may you enter marriage and good deeds." Why is brit milah unique?

Because it is indelible and cannot be removed. Similarly, we bless the child that his attachment to Torah, to his wife and to good deeds should be an inextricable part of him.

SKIN DEEP

RABBI NAFTALI REICH (Torsh.org)

It first appears on the skin as a sickly white lesion, and then it begins to spread. It looks like leprosy, but it is not. The Torah in this week's portion identifies as tzoraas, a strange phenomenon that appeared when the Holy Temple existed. These lesions were not life threatening, yet the Torah views them with utmost seriousness. The afflicted person was put under priestly observation, and if his condition deteriorated, he was quarantined. What is the significance of the tzoraas lesions?

Our Sages tells us that these lesions afflicted those who spoke malicious gossip and slander. They caused innocent people to be estranged from their friends and neighbors. Therefore, they themselves must suffer the isolation of quarantine. The questions, however, still remain. Why does the quarantine have to result from skin lesions rather than some other affliction?

The answer goes to the root of the mentality of malicious talk. Why do some people have a tendency to see only the worst in others? Because they themselves have those selfsame weaknesses and shortcomings. "Those who find failings in others," our Sages tell us, "are surely guilty of the same failings." People who engage in slander are not willing to accept others at face value. They are always driven to dig down underneath to find the negative undercurrents in others, because they themselves are so thoroughly negative.

The skin is the perfect metaphor for the positive approach to the perception of others. Take a look at a handsome person and imagine him for a moment as a skeleton entwined in ligaments, nerves and bloody tissue. Suddenly, he is not so handsome any more. But to make people more appealing to each other, Hashem covered all their internal systems with a layer of beautiful skin. As a result, those who look at people as they appear find them appealing, but those who dwell on what goes on underneath find them repulsive. The slanderer sees only the weaknesses of others because his own weaknesses are so prominent. He seeks to expose others because he himself is so thoroughly exposed. Therefore, his skin, the organ of concealment, is afflicted, and he is quarantined.

A weary traveler was trudging along a dusty road, thinking about where he could spend the night. Far off in the distance, he saw the towering walls of a city, and he wondered if this would be a good place to seek hospitality.

As he approached the city, he saw a sage sitting under a tree.

"Tell me, good sir," said the traveler. "Do you know this city?"

"Indeed I do," said the sage.

"Then perhaps you could tell me what kind of people live here?"

"I certainly can," said the sage. "But first tell me what kind of people live in your own city."

"My own city?" said the traveler, his eyes shifting back over his shoulder. "It is an evil place. The people are nasty. They watch you all the time with suspicious eyes, and they whisper about you behind your back. Stay away if you know what's good for you."

"Well, I am afraid you are out of luck, my friend," said the sage.

"Unfortunately, you will find exactly the same kind of people here."

A short while later, a second traveler approached the city. He too saw the sage under the tree and decided to inquire about the inhabitants.

"I will be glad to tell you," said the sage. "But first tell me what kind of people live in your own city."

"My own city?" said the second traveler. "It is such a wonderful place. The people are kind and considerate. They are always eager to help each other in any way they can."

"I'm happy to tell you, my young friend," said the sage, "that you have come to the right place. Those are just the kind of people you will find here. I think you will find this city a most compatible place."

In our own lives, we almost continuously find ourselves in a position of being able to judge other people, to find fault in what they do or to look at them in a positive light. The Torah instructs us never to think evil of others and certainly never to verbalize such negative thoughts. The key is to focus on improving ourselves, to purify and perfect our own thoughts and motivations. If we do so, we will undoubtedly recognize the same noble sentiments in others, and we will find the world a most compatible place indeed.

CHANGING THE EYE

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND (Aish.com)

When a tzaraas lesion remains on a garment after all the instructions of the Kohein have been followed, he examines it one last time. If it "has not changed appearance," the garment is burned. The exact Hebrew language is "lo hafach hanega es eino," which translates literally as "the lesion has not changed its eye." Although the meaning is clear, we cannot help but wonder why the Torah chose such an unusual form of expression.

The affliction of tzaraas is spiritual rather than medical in nature. The Talmud discerns (Arachin 16a) seven different causes for tzaraas, the most famous of which is lashon hara, improper speech. The other six are not as well known. One of them is tzarus ayin, which translates literally as "narrowness of the eye." It refers to mean-spiritedness, a tendency to see the negative and overlook the positive in everything. It is a singular lack of generosity in all things, a constricted view of the world and everything in it. If this affliction of the spirit caused the lesion on the garment, then the therapy is to transform the trait of tzar ayin into tov ayin, literally "a person with a good eye." Instead of being a sour-faced, mean-spirited curmudgeon, he must become a smiling, generous, expansive, optimistic, warm and friendly person. Then the lesion will fade away. If he does not change, the lesion remains on the garment, and it must be incinerated.

This is what the Torah means, explains the Chiddushei Harim, by the words "lo hafach hanega es eino, the lesion has not changed its eye." The owner of the garment has not changed his narrowness of the eye into goodness of the eye; he has not transformed himself from a mean-spirited person into a kind and generous man. Therefore, the garment is burned.

The Chiddushei Harim concludes with a classic chassidishe vort, an interpretation in the Chassidic style. The Hebrew word for lesion or affliction is nega. The opposite of affliction is pleasure, which is oneg in Hebrew. Both words are constructed of the same three letters. Nega is spelled nun, gimmel, ayin. Oneg is spelled ayin, nun, gimmel. The only difference is in the placement of the ayin. Move it from the back to the front, and affliction is transformed into pleasure. The Torah is telling us that "the lesion has not changed its eye (ayin)." He is the same narrowed-eyed person he was before. Therefore, the nega was not transformed into oneg.

THE POWER OF SPEECH

RABBI SHRAGA SIMMONS (Aish.com)

One man spread a rumor about another. He later felt regret, and went to the rabbi to ask how to make amends. "Go to the store and buy a bag of seeds," said the rabbi, "then go to a big open field and scatter the seeds into the wind. Do so and report back to me in a week."

The man did as he was told, and came back the next week to find out what

to do next. "Now," said the rabbi, "go back to the field and pick up all the seeds."

"But," protested the man, "those seeds have scattered far and wide! I'll never find them all. Many have even already taken root!"

"Exactly," explained the rabbi. "Now you understand. When we speak badly about another person, the effect is far and wide. And it is damage that can never be fully undone."

One of the most difficult sections of the Torah to understand is this week's parsha which discusses Tzarat, a skin disease commonly mis-translated as "leprosy."

In truth, Tzarat is a physical manifestation of a spiritual deficiency. The Talmud (Arachin 16) says that Tzarat comes specifically as a consequence of "Loshon Hara" — negative speech about another person. For example, we see that when Moshe's sister Miriam spoke Loshon Hara, she contracted Tzarat (Bamidbar, chapter 12).

What is the connection between speaking badly — gossiping about another — and contracting this skin disease?

TO BUILD OR TO DESTROY

Speech is the tool of creation. Through it we can build individuals and the world. We can praise, encourage, and give others confidence. By making others feel important, we build them up, as if to say, "Your existence is necessary." This is life-giving and life-affirming.

One of the great American rabbis of the past generation, Rabbi Shlomo Freifeld zt"l, was known to have brought a neighbor back to Torah observance simply by caring enough to say "good morning."

On the other hand, speech can also be used to destroy. Words like "you're worthless" wipes out a person's self-esteem. As King Solomon says, "Life and death are in the hands of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21). The Talmud (Arachin 15b) explains that negative speech is even worse than a sword — since it kills many people, even at great distance.

Remember the expression "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me"? This was clearly not said by a Jew!

Beyond the individual destruction, we have all seen the power of gossip — a vicious rumor — to tear apart relationships, families, and even entire communities.

Of course, just as the Torah prohibits speaking Loshon Hara, we are prohibited from even listening to it. (Which makes sense — if I can't listen, then you can't speak it!) By listening to negative talk we fuel the viciousness and become desensitized to its effect on others.

From here we can understand a section of this week's parsha, Vayikra 13:45-46. The Torah says that when someone has been diagnosed as having Tzarat, they must go outside the boundaries of the city and shout "Contaminated!" to anyone who approaches. The punishment is measure-for-measure: If you promote divisiveness amongst others, then you will also suffer the divisiveness of separation from community.

LIMITS OF LOSHON HARA

Many people make the mistake of thinking that the Torah prohibition of negative speech is limited only to saying falsity and untruth. But this is not so. Lying falls under a separate prohibition, expressed in Exodus 20:13, 23:7. Loshon Hara, meanwhile, is the prohibition against saying anything negative or derogatory about another person — even when it's true!

Often, Loshon Hara will couch itself in a cloak of rationalizations. It doesn't even matter whether the words are spoken implicitly or implied. If the message can be construed negatively, then it is a violation of Loshon Hara.

Be aware of potential Loshon Hara situations and stop them before they start. For instance, reunions are particularly rife with gossip: "Oh, did you hear about so-and-so..."

The Talmud says that the human body was constructed to help a person refrain from Loshon Hara. The teeth and lips serve as "gates" to regulate what emerges from our mouth, while the tongue lies in a horizontal resting position. Furthermore, while humans have two eyes, two ears and two nostrils — we have only one mouth as a reminder to minimize chatter. And, says the Talmud, for what purpose did G-d create ear lobes? So that if we find ourselves in a situation where Loshon Hara is being spoken, we can conveniently turn the lobes upwards as ear plugs!

Here are some commonly-spoken forms of Loshon Hara to watch out for:

1. "But it's true!"
2. "But I didn't even mention his name!"
3. "I wouldn't care if someone said the same thing about me."
4. "Everyone knows about it already, anyway."
5. "He wouldn't mind."

6. "I'd say it even to his face."
7. "Just kidding!"
8. "There he goes again..."
9. (Saying nothing...but rolling your eyes!)
10. "People from that city are so..."
11. "It's all in the name of business competition!"
12. "This may be Loshon Hara, but..."
13. "C'mon, you can tell me..."
14. All these qualify as Loshon Hara.

There is one exception to this rule, however. We may speak or listen to negative information if we are absolutely sure it is for the constructive purpose of preventing future damage. But before you go ahead and use this exemption, make sure the following conditions apply:

1. The information must be objectively true, not a matter of taste or opinion.
2. You must have first-hand information, not hearsay.
3. You must first give the perpetrator a chance to respond to the allegations.
4. You can have no ulterior motive or personal gain from what you say.
5. You must avoid mentioning names whenever possible.
6. Why Do People Gossip?
7. What would motivate one person to speak badly about another?

Low self-esteem. When a person feels down about himself, there are two ways to feel better – either 1) make the effort to work and build oneself up (this is a lot of hard work!), or 2) put others down. The reasoning being, if I can lower others, then I don't look so bad by comparison! But that's the easy way, the "quick high." And is that the kind of person you want to be?

The media has built an empire around knocking down big targets — like movie stars, politicians and business leaders. For the average person who may see himself languishing in mediocrity, it is a source of aggravation to see others' success in life! So, knock them down — and problem solved!

This may explain as well some basis for anti-Semitism. The nation that holds itself to a higher standard is a constant reminder of the human potential for sanctity and morality. Why is the world so eager to point out every misstep taken by Israel? Because by eliminating respect for that higher standard, the obligation to strive for that standard likewise falls away.

The first step in avoiding Loshon Hara is to recognize our own faults and commit to improving on them. When I accept that I alone am responsible for my inadequacies, then I will similarly be less critical and more tolerant of others.

If you find yourself getting "down" about yourself or others, try focusing away from the faults and instead on the virtues. It will lift you out of your negativity.

The Torah says: Feeling down? Don't take the easy way out. Work hard and improve yourself.

JUDGE OTHERS FAVORABLY

So what happens if we inadvertently hear Loshon Hara? The Talmud says that we should not automatically accept it as being true. Rather, the rule is "innocent until proven guilty."

There is a famous story about the great Talmudic sage the Rashash (Rabbi Shmuel Shtrashun, 19th century Vilna) who had a fund to lend money to poor people. One day while the rabbi was studying Talmud, the local tailor came in to repay his loan of 10,000 rubles. The rabbi was so engrossed in his learning, that he stuck the money in the book and forgot about it.

A week later, the rabbi was reviewing his loan ledger and noticed that the 10,000 ruble loan was never paid. So he called the tailor and asked him to pay it. "But I paid you back last week," said the tailor. "Okay, then where's your receipt?" said the rabbi, who truly had no recollection of being paid back. "You were studying and I didn't want to disturb you," replied the tailor.

Soon enough word got out that the tailor and the rabbi were involved in a financial dispute. "The nerve of this man to pit his word against the rabbi!" they all said. The tailor's reputation was ruined, and he was shunned by the community.

About a year later, the rabbi was reviewing a section of Talmud and came across an envelope containing 10,000 rubles. Then he realized what had happened! He immediately called the tailor and apologized. "But your apology doesn't help me," he said sadly. "My reputation is ruined forever!"

"Don't worry," said the rabbi. "I'll make a public announcement in the synagogue, letting everyone know that it was I who had made the mistake." "But that won't help," said the tailor. "They'll think you're just saying it because you feel sorry for me."

The rabbi thought long and hard until he came up with a solution. "You have a daughter and I have a son," he said. "Let's arrange for them to be married. In that way, everyone will be assured that you are fully trustworthy, for otherwise I would never agree to this match." And with that, the harm was repaired.

But it's not always so easy...

SPEECH AND THE PROCESS OF REDEMPTION

The Talmud asks: Why was the Holy Temple destroyed? Because people spoke Loshon Hara about each other. Thus, says the Chafetz Chaim (the 20th century codifier of the laws of Loshon Hara), refraining from gossip is the single most effective way to reverse the damage and bring about the redemption!

There is no better time to undertake this challenge than today. We find ourselves in the season of redemption. Passover celebrates our emergence from slavery unto freedom. Also at this time we count the Omer, on the way toward receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai. Now is the time to break the dissention and divisiveness which plague our people.

Two rabbis in Jerusalem have written user-friendly guides outlining the parameters of Loshon Hara. They are both excellent sources for further study: "Guard Your Tongue" by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, and "Chafetz Chaim — A Lesson A Day" by Rabbi Yitzchak Berkowitz. In addition, many cities offer pre-recorded telephone classes dealing with Loshon Hara.

Imagine how the world would change ... if all humanity jumped on this bandwagon?!

HUMILITY WITH A HINT OF EGO

AVROHOM YAAKOV

As part of the purification process of a person afflicted with tsora'as, the Torah tells us that "... the kohein shall command to take for the person undergoing purification two live, pure [kosher] birds, cedar wood, crimson thread and hyssop." (14:4)

Rashi comments "What is his cure that he may be healed? He should lower himself from his arrogance like a worm and like a hyssop."

There are a number of questions that this instruction raises.

Why not come out directly say that a person should debase himself? Why the roundabout instruction?

And why include cedar wood, the mightiest of all the trees and therefore indicative of ego and haughtiness if the intention is to teach the person humility?

The Apta Rov explains that in some aspects, ego is important. When it comes to Torah observance, a person needs to have an ego, not to allow the nay sayers to negatively impact on us. Jewish pride – particularly in times such as we are experiencing at this juncture of time – is vital. Therefore, mixed in with the humility of the hyssop is cedar wood.

The Sfas Emes notes that if the Torah had instructed openly that humility was required, no doubt it would have become a mitzvah and people would show pride in fulfilling the mitzvah to be humble. "Ich bin gornisht!" ("I am nothing") would become a badge of honour and an inherent contradiction to humility.

Therefore, it was not possible to explicitly command humility.

The truly humble person does not virtue signal nor bend over backwards all the time. They know when to bend and when to stick to your guns.

THE TREASURE BEHIND THE WALL

RABBI MENACHEM FELDMAN (Chabad.org)

The two portions of Tazria and Metzora are perhaps the most difficult and technical in the book of Vayikra.

The first portion, Tazria, describes the laws of impurity caused by tzaraat, a form of leprosy that afflicts human flesh and garments. Tzaraat is a malady that came upon a person as a consequence of slandering or gossiping about another person, as well as other sins.

The next portion, Metzora, describes the process of purification from this leprosy. Only after discussing the purification of the body and garments does the Torah introduce a third type of leprosy, one that afflicts the walls of a home. This is immediately followed by the laws of purification for the home.

Why, when talking about the leprosy that afflicts the person and the garments, are the affliction and its purification taught in two separate portions? This is not the case when discussing the topic of leprosy of the home—the purification process is taught immediately after, and in the same

portion as, the affliction.

Anyone looking at life objectively can appreciate that a setback can be an opportunity for growth. Challenge has the potential to bring out the best in the human soul.

But that is theoretical.

When we experience an actual struggle in life, our perspective may be very different. We do not feel anything positive or constructive in our moment of despair and pain. Pain hurts. It does not build.

Eventually, when we find the courage and strength to pick ourselves up and overcome the challenge, we feel as though we have reached a new state of being. Only after we are removed from the painful situation are we capable of looking back and realizing that the person we have become is very much a result of the previous challenge that we tried so hard to escape.

This is the reason that the affliction of tzaraat and its purification are written in two separate portions. From the human perspective, the purification is a new beginning; it is an escape from the impurity, not its culmination.

Things are very different from G-d's perspective. The purpose of the challenge is to lead a person to greater heights. But we humans are not always capable of seeing it that way.

In describing the tzaraat that afflicted the home, the Torah says: "When you come to the land of Canaan, which I am giving you as a possession, and I place an affliction of tzaraat upon a house in the land of your possession." The Midrash teaches that from the words of the verse we learn that G-d Himself placed the affliction of tzaraat on the house, so it was in fact a blessing. For when the Israelites removed the afflicted stones from their homes, they discovered treasures that the native Canaanites had hidden within the walls.

The tzaraat of the home was taught to us from G-d's perspective. Every affliction is just a facade, begging to be pulled away so we can discover a great treasure. By telling us the laws of the home's purification immediately after the affliction, the Torah asks us to keep G-d's perspective in mind. This will give us the strength to transform challenge to treasure.¹

Based on Likkutei Sichot, vol. 27, Metzora II.

GOLD IN THEM THAR WALLS

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY (Torah.org)

This week, in reading both Tazria and Metzora, we combine portions that deal with the physio-spiritual plague of tzora'as. Tzora'as is a discoloration that appears in varying forms on human skin, on hair, clothing, and even on the walls of one's home. The afflicted individual must endure a complicated process of purification in order to rejoin the community. The Talmud explains that tzoraas is a divine punishment for the sins of slander and gossip. In fact, the Talmud in Arachin 16b comments that the reason that the afflicted is sent out of the camp was because "he separated friends and families through his words, and deserves to be separated from his community."

Rashi and the Ramban explain that the first form of tzora'as does not begin on the person. Hashem in His mercy first strikes at inanimate objects — one's possessions. The discoloration first appears on the walls of a home, forcing the affected stones to be removed and destroyed. If that event does not succeed as a wake-up-call, and the person continues his malevolent activities, then his clothing is affected. If that fails, eventually the flesh is transformed and white lesions appear, forcing the afflicted to leave the Jewish camp until the plague subsides and the Kohen declares him acceptable to return.

Rashi tells us that the first stage of tzora'as — the home — is actually a blessing in disguise. Tzora'as on a home can indeed bring fortune to the affected. As the Israelites were approaching the Land of Canaan, the inhabitants, figuring that one day they would re-conquer the land, hid all their gold and silver inside the walls of their homes. When one dislodged the afflicted stones of his home he would find the hidden treasures that were left by the fleeing Canaanites.

It is troubling. Why should the first warning of tzora'as reek of triumph? What message is Hashem sending to the first offender by rewarding his misdeeds with a cache of gold? What spiritual import is gained from the materialistic discovery?

After the end of World War II, the brilliant and flamboyant Torah sage, Rabbi Eliezer Silver visited and aided thousands of survivors in displaced persons camps in Germany and Poland who were waiting to find permanent homes. One day, as he was handing out Siddurim (prayerbooks) and other Torah paraphernalia, a Jewish man flatly refused to accept any.

"After the way I saw Jews act in the camp, I don't want to have any connection

with religion!"

Rabbi Silver asked him to explain what exactly had turned him off from Jewish practice.

"I saw a Jew who had a Siddur, yet he only allowed it to be used by the inmates in exchange for their daily bread ration. Imagine," he sneered, "a Jew selling the right to daven for bread!"

"And how many customers did this man get?" inquired Rabbi Silver.

"Far too many!" snapped the man.

Rabbi Silver put his hand around the gentlemen and gently explained. "Why are you looking at the bad Jew who sold the right to pray? Why don't you look at the many good Jews who were willing to forego their rations and starve, just in order to pray? Isn't that the lesson you should take with you?"

Perhaps Hashem in His compassion is sending much more to the gossip than a get-rich-quick scheme. He shows the first-time slanderer to look a little deeper at life. On the outside he may see a dirty wall of a former Canaanite home. Dig a little deeper and you will find gold in them thar walls. Next time you look at a person only superficially — think. Dig deeper. There is definitely gold beneath the surface. Sometimes you have to break down your walls to find the gold you never thought it existed.

News & Views

BIDEN'S ANTISEMITISM GURU BLAMES JEWS FOR ANTISEMITISM

DANIEL GREENFIELD (April 24, 2025 / JNS)

The Biden administration refused to actually stop the assaults and harassment of Jews, but it did boast of creating an antisemitism policy. The policy amounted to nothing. Now that the Trump administration is actually fighting antisemitism, the "architect" of Biden's antisemitism policy has popped up to warn that fighting antisemitism will cause antisemitism ... and to blame Jews for antisemitism.

In an interview with Politico, Alex Pascal, an Obama and Biden vet, claims that pulling money from colleges that fail to follow civil rights law and deal with antisemitism will, in Politico's words, "backfire and fuel antisemitism." (Obviously that would not be the case if it were gay rights or anti-black racism at issue here.)

"By directly linking billions of dollars of federal research funding to ostensibly combating antisemitism, I think it plays very much into long-standing tropes about Jews wielding financial leverage to pursue their so-called interests," Pascal argues.

Never mind that it's the Trump administration, not Jews, doing this.

But suggesting that fighting antisemitism will play into financial tropes about Jews is the equivalent of the guy looking at inkblots and complaining that they're all dirty.

Pascal pulls out the old leftist tropes of collective solidarity.

"We need to be very vigilant about the erosion of the rule of law and our civil liberties," said Pascal, "because that is the best defense against antisemitism, not the protection of the strongmen."

How did those work out under Biden?

Pascal also argues that deporting the terrorist supporters assaulting and terrorizing Jews on college campuses are "also making life more dangerous for Jewish people on college campuses."

He doesn't explain how.

The rest is equally dishonest hand waving.

"The Biden strategy differed in several fundamental ways. First and foremost, the animating feature of President Biden's strategy was the recognition that a strong democracy that safeguards our fundamental rights and the equal protection of the law and values America's diversity is the very best defense we have against antisemitism and other forms of hate. Secondly, the Biden approach was collaborative, not divisive. It was built on finding common ground and unity among targeted groups and building inclusion for Jews on campus and more broadly in society. It was not the divisive approach of this current administration, using threats and intimidation," Pascal argues.

The federal government using "intimidation" is fine for every other group. But the Biden admin had a much better plan of promoting "diversity" to fight antisemitism. When diversity is the source of antisemitism, as even ADL polls, before they erased them, demonstrated.

Jews did not receive equal protection from antisemitism under Biden. The administration did nothing about it. Talking about common ground and unity can't cover that up.

Pascal then gets around to arguing that Israel is causing antisemitism. "When Israel feels a completely free hand, and frankly, the encouragement

of its greatest benefactor, to pursue extreme policies, that is going to boomerang in a very bad way on American Jews here in the United States,” he said.

The theme from Pascal is that when Jews stand up against Islamic terrorism in Israel or America, there will be more antisemitism. So it’s really their fault. This used to be the argument we would hear in Europe in the oughts. Now lefties are mainstreaming it in America.

“Unfair and unjustified as it is, Israel’s actions have incited attacks on Jews worldwide,” Pascal claimed in a Forward op-ed.

This is what liberals have to offer on antisemitism. Rather than fighting antisemitism, they blame Jews for causing it.

ANTI-ZIONIST GROUP TARGETS BEN-GVIR, CHABAD HEADQUARTERS

VITA FELLIG (April 25, 2025 / JNS)

Hundreds of people, including anti-Israel, anti-Zionist protesters, gathered outside 770 Eastern Parkway, the world headquarters of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, N.Y., on Thursday night to demonstrate the presence of Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israel’s national security minister, who was attending a Jewish celebration there.

The New York City Police Department told JNS that it responded to an unscheduled demonstration at around 9:30 p.m., which lasted for about two hours.

“In total, six individuals were taken into custody,” the NYPD said. “Five of the individuals were issued criminal court summonses, and one was arrested.”

Oscar Vidal, 28, from Bayonne, N.J., was arrested and charged with second-degree assault, third-degree assault and criminal mischief, according to the NYPD.

The protest was organized by the self-described anti-Zionist group Within Our Lifetime (WOL).

Rabbi Yaacov Behrman, a community leader in Crown Heights, condemned the protests in a statement on Thursday.

“What happened tonight in Crown Heights was outrageous and deeply disturbing,” he stated. “A group of antisemitic protesters gathered at the intersection of Eastern Parkway and Kingston Avenue—the very heart of this heavily populated Jewish neighborhood—spewing hateful, inflammatory rhetoric at innocent passersby, myself included.”

The anti-Israel protesters shouted, “We don’t want Zionists here” and “Resistance is justified,” according to Behrman.

“How dare you come into my neighborhood, where I’ve lived for over 40 years, and tell me I don’t belong?” he asked rhetorically. “I absolutely belong here. My family, my neighbors and my community belong here.”

Behrman said the protest used Ben-Gvir, who was attending a siyum—the completion of a cycle of Torah study—as a pretext to target Jews.

“Let’s be clear: This was not about free speech or a peaceful demonstration,” he stated. “This was an antisemitic, Hamas-supporting rally. It was meant to intimidate, to provoke and to spread fear.”

Nerdeen Kiswani, founder of WOL, said in a statement on Thursday that the Palestinian protesters in Brooklyn gathered to “demand baby-killer Itamar Ben-Gvir get the hell out of NYC.”

“Palestinian protesters in Brooklyn are being attacked by racist Zionist Lubavitchers while NYPD and Shomrim stand by and do nothing,” she stated. “Protesters are bleeding, chased, blocked from leaving 770 Eastern Parkway—eggs thrown, people beaten in plain view.”

“This is a pogrom,” she added, using the term that refers to an organized massacre against Jewish people in Russia and Eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Sholom, 23 (he did not share his last name), who lives in Crown Heights, told JNS that the NYPD did not do a sufficient job protecting Jewish residents.

“I think the real error was that the police had no right to let them protest right in front of a house of worship,” he said. “It’s illegal to go in front of houses of worship and protest. It’s a sacred space. Whether it’s a synagogue, mosque or church, it is against the laws of America.”

Even though Ben-Gvir is known to be a controversial politician, the Crown Heights resident said that targeting him is antisemitic.

“It’s not possible when you’re holding flags of Hamas, which are flags that went in and killed every Jewish person they were able to find, whether they’re religious or not, and then say, ‘I’m anti-Zionist and not anti-Jewish people,’” he said. “Zionism is Judaism. Judaism is Zionism. Ben-Gvir is a part of the Jewish nation and stands for the Jewish nation. There is no

separation.”

REFORM JUDAISM’S SHOCKING DEFENSE OF HAMA

TJVNEWS (theJewishVoice.com 17-4-25)

In a stunning turn of events, the Reform movement has aligned itself with Hamas sympathizers, defending those who advocate for the murder of Jews.

Reporter Daniel Greenfield pointed out that former J Street press secretary, Amy Spitalnick, who now heads the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA), proudly orchestrated a coalition of left-wing Jewish organizations, including the Union for Reform Judaism, the Rabbinical Assembly of Conservative Judaism, and Reconstructionist groups. This coalition has gone so far as to support campus Hamas advocates who have openly incited violence against Jewish students.

The controversial letter issued by these organizations claims that Jewish safety is intrinsically tied to the “safety of others,” absurdly including the safety of individuals calling for the death of Jews. The letter further asserts that escalating federal actions targeting antisemitism are nothing more than a guise for stripping students’ rights, including due process and the threat of deportation. The groups argue that these measures could jeopardize billions in academic research and funding.

Despite their clear alignment with Hamas-supporting factions, these groups assert they “reject any policies or actions that foment or take advantage of antisemitism.” By echoing leftist talking points that accuse Jews of “weaponizing” antisemitism, they have abandoned any semblance of solidarity with their own community.

As Greenfield emphasized, the Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist movements have betrayed Jewish students by standing alongside those who have assaulted them—both physically and ideologically—on college campuses. This betrayal represents a monumental failure, not only in their religious duties but in their very identity as Jewish organizations. By siding with those who support antisemitic violence, they have irreparably discredited themselves.

This shocking alliance with Hamas supporters, including notorious figures like Mahmoud Khalil and Momoudo Taal, signals the ultimate betrayal. Amy Spitalnick’s prideful acknowledgment that these groups are unified in this stance marks the moment when Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist Judaism sold out their own people for the sake of leftist politics.

Only Orthodox Jewish organizations have stood firm in their defense of American Jews, refusing to sign the letter and thereby preserving their commitment to the safety and well-being of the Jewish community. The rest of the Jewish denominations have irrevocably abandoned this cause, revealing the dangerous and tragic consequences of their actions.

There is no coming back from this. The betrayal is undeniable, and these movements will be remembered for their decision to side with antisemitic violence, leaving Jewish students and communities vulnerable in their wake.

A SILENCE THAT SCREAMS

JEN AIRLEY (Aish.com 28-4-25)

Jen Airley’s son Binyamin was killed fighting in Gaza on Saturday, November 18th, 2023. May his memory be a blessing.

Israel’s national day of remembrance, a sacred pause to commemorate all those who gave their lives defending our land, our people, and our future — and all the innocents who fell victim to terror simply because they were Jews in their homeland.

As the siren wails across the country, we stand in a moment of silence — a silence that screams louder than any words.

In that moment, life halts. Cars stop in the middle of the highways. Shoppers freeze in place.

Children, soldiers, workers, leaders — all stand unmoving, heads bowed, hearts wide open. And though we are silent, our minds race in a thousand directions at once.

Grief fills the air — grief for shattered families, broken dreams, and futures that will never unfold.

The ache of sons and daughters who will not come home, of parents who will forever set an extra place at the table, of friends who will never again hear the sound of a familiar laugh.

And yet, alongside the grief, pride rises — the fierce, burning pride of a nation built by heroes.

The pride of being part of Am Yisrael, a nation whose sons and daughters have always stood ready to give everything for something greater than themselves.

Pride in soldiers whose courage and spirit embody the noblest dreams of our ancestors. At that moment, gratitude swells in the heart.

Gratitude for their bravery, for their sacrifices, for their role modeling of what it means to live and die with meaning.

Gratitude for every young man and woman who carried on their shoulders the destiny of our people, even at the cost of their own lives.

It is also a minute of prayer.

A prayer whispered in the silence, almost instinctively:

A prayer for peace. A prayer for safety.

A prayer for true unity — not only during sirens and funerals, but in the everyday life. A prayer that we should never need to add more names to the list of fallen.

It is a time of reflection — of realizing that the flourishing of Israel, the vibrancy of our cities, our fields, our homes, has been watered with the blood and tears of our finest.

Every stone in this country is built upon sacrifice. Our soldiers are no ordinary fighters. They are the living descendants of King David's greatest students — warriors of both body and spirit.

They are honest leaders, the bravest of fighters, loyal friends, skilled protectors, singers and dancers, recognizing that they are but G-d's messengers.

In unity.

Every soldier I speak with says the same: no one on the field cares what the other observes or doesn't, what they believe or don't, what they wear or not. It's irrelevant. They are brothers and will risk their lives for each other.

King David taught his soldiers that a Jewish warrior fights with a sword in one hand and a harp in the other — knowing that strength and spirit must always walk hand in hand.

We remember our Binyamin every single day. His absence is a permanent, gaping hole in our hearts.

We remember our Binyamin who was killed fighting in Gaza every single day. His absence is a permanent, gaping hole in our hearts.

But Yom HaZikaron is different. It is a national day of mourning — a day when we are part of something bigger than our personal grief.

We stand shoulder to shoulder with a family — families of heroes — a family that is heartbreakingly too large.

On this day, standing by Binyamin's grave on Mount Hertzl, tears will be streaming down our faces — but our heads will be held high. Humbled and honored to be the parents of this 21-year-old warrior who told us, even before war erupted, "If I have to give my life for the Land of Israel, that is what I will do."

He said it not with fear but with calm conviction, with love and pride. He knew what he was fighting for.

He knew that some things are worth everything.

As the siren wails, I often find myself breaking down in tears begging G-d silently, "Please, let this be the last time. Let the siren become the shofar of Redemption."

Enough is enough.

No more spilled blood and shattered hearts! Let the fighting stop and peace reign!

In my heart, there is an image that holds me together.

I picture G-d — like a parent standing at the edge of an airport terminal — arms wide open, waiting.

Waiting for me. Waiting for us.

Waiting for His children to run back into His embrace. He is waiting for us.

Yes, we are broken and we are tired. We are so lost in grief that we can barely lift our heads.

On Yom HaZikaron, we stand still — but our souls move.

I pray we are drawn closer to G-d, to each other, and to the collective memory that binds us together forever as Am Yisrael, the Jewish Nation.

May the memory of our fallen be blessed. May their sacrifices be a merit for us.

And may the next siren we hear soon be the sound of the great shofar that heralds the final Redemption, when tears will be wiped away and mourning will be no more, and with full conviction we run into G-d's arms and we embrace each other forever.

THE TOP 7 LIES ABOUT ISRAEL AND IDF OPERATIONS IN GAZA

JOHN SPENCER & ARSEN OSTROVSKY (X.com 30-4-25)

In an era of weaponized disinformation, few militaries have been more vilified — or more wrongly accused — than the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Israel's war against Hamas has been distorted beyond recognition by

activists, media outlets, and even some international institutions.

It is time to confront the truth head-on. Here are the seven most pervasive lies — and the reality they seek to obscure.

1. Lie: Israel is committing genocide in Gaza.

Genocide is the most serious crime under international law, defined by the 1948 Genocide Convention as acts committed with "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group." Crucially, genocide requires specific intent — not simply that civilian deaths occur during war, but that they are intended as part of a broader plan to exterminate a people. This specific intent — known in legal terms as *dolus specialis* — sets a uniquely high bar that distinguishes genocide from even the most destructive military actions.

The acts that could constitute genocide under the 1948 Genocide Convention include killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm; deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the group's physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births; and forcibly transferring children to another group. Crucially, however, these acts only amount to genocide when committed with the specific intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group as such.

None of Israel's actions meet this threshold. Israel targets Hamas — an armed terrorist entity that initiated the war with mass atrocities on October 7. The IDF issues evacuation warnings, facilitates humanitarian aid, and restricts military operations to lawful targets. There is no Israeli policy, order, or pattern of action that suggests an attempt to destroy the Palestinian people.

Even the International Court of Justice (ICJ), despite accepting a politically driven genocide claim for preliminary hearings, has not ruled that Israel is committing genocide — nor has any credible international body. Israel's conduct is the very opposite of genocide: it is a defensive war waged under the binding requirements of international law.

2. Lie: Israel intentionally targets civilians in Gaza.

Under international humanitarian law, the presence of civilian casualties in war — while tragic — does not equate to a war crime unless civilians are directly and intentionally targeted.

The IDF is one of the only militaries in history to systematically exceed the legal obligations to protect civilians. Israel's methods include:

- Advance warnings through leaflets, SMS texts, phone calls, providing their military maps to civilians, and even “roof-knock” warning munitions before strikes.
- Establishing humanitarian evacuation corridors.
- Constant aerial surveillance to abort missions if civilians are detected near targets.
- Use of precision-guided munitions to minimize explosive radius.
- Use of “call out” tactics to surround areas or buildings, call all personnel out, and then using facial recognition to identify Hamas militants within the crowds.
- Frequent cancellation of planned attacks when civilian presence is deemed too high — even at significant operational cost. In fact, Israel routinely refrains from striking legitimate military targets because of the potential for civilian casualties.

As documented in multiple cases during the current conflict, Israeli forces have walked away from critical high-value targets — senior Hamas commanders — simply because women and children were nearby. No army in the world holds fire to the degree Israel does in the face of an enemy that embeds itself inside a civilian population.

3. Lie: The civilian-to-combatant ratio in Gaza proves Israel is committing war crimes.

One of the most dangerous and misleading claims is that civilian casualty figures alone prove Israel is committing war crimes. This is a fundamental distortion of international humanitarian law (IHL). Under the law of armed conflict, the legality of an attack is not judged by its outcome — such as the number of civilians killed — but by what commanders knew or reasonably could have known at the time of the attack. The legal test is proportionality: whether the expected incidental harm to civilians was excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated.

War crimes are not assessed by after-the-fact body counts. They are judged by intent, the information available at the time, and whether all feasible precautions were taken to minimize civilian harm. Armchair statistics about civilian deaths, especially in an urban warzone, tell us nothing about the real-time decisions, legal standards, and battlefield conditions that define lawful conduct.

Moreover, the civilian casualty figures cited in the media are deeply unreliable. The so-called “Gaza Health Ministry,” run by Hamas, has a long track record of publishing inflated and unverifiable numbers. Independent reviews have shown that its counts include combatants among civilian tallies, double-count deaths, and list names that cannot be independently confirmed. In many cases, their reports have even included civilians killed by Hamas’s own misfired rockets. These are not neutral casualty assessments — they are information warfare, used by a terrorist organization engaged in a global campaign to delegitimize Israel.

Even if it were somehow possible to determine the exact ratio of civilians to combatants killed — which it is not in the midst of a dynamic urban war — the claim would still be legally and morally meaningless. Hamas fighters deliberately operate without uniforms or insignia and embed themselves within civilian areas. They store weapons in schools, launch attacks from hospitals, and use ambulances to transport fighters. Many fighters are indistinguishable from civilians, including minors recruited or coerced into service. It is legally incorrect to treat all women or anyone under 18 as civilians. Hamas trains and deploys child soldiers, blurring lines even further. As I have shown in my research, even if we compared the entirety of Gaza to a single urban battle — such as the Battle of Mosul (2016–2017), where U.S. and Iraqi forces fought ISIS in a densely populated city — Gaza’s civilian casualty ratio would be comparable or even lower. But this entire framework is wrong. Civilian-to-combatant ratios without context are not how wars, military operations, or individual strikes are judged — legally, morally, or ethically. What matters under the law is whether a commander took all feasible precautions, targeted a legitimate military objective, and ensured the expected civilian harm was not excessive in relation to the anticipated military advantage.

To demonstrate the absurdity of this casualty-based framework, consider the Korean War (1950–1953), during which an estimated 2 million civilians died. Over a 37-month conflict, this averages more than 54,000 civilian deaths per month. Using those figures — without context, cause, or operational detail — to make moral or legal judgments about the conduct of that war would be nonsensical. And yet, that is exactly the logic being applied to Israel.

This is not, and cannot be, how war is judged. If raw casualty ratios were the sole metric of legality, no democracy could ever defend itself against an enemy that fights from within a civilian population. That is not justice — it is surrender by legal distortion.

4. Lie: Israel is starving Gaza’s population.

The accusation that Israel uses starvation as a weapon is flatly contradicted by facts on the ground — and by the sheer scale of humanitarian aid Israel facilitates even during wartime.

Since October 7, according to COGAT (the Israeli government body coordinating humanitarian operations), almost 100,000 trucks have entered Gaza carrying 1.75 million tons of aid, including humanitarian supplies, medicine and food, at a volume that in some periods has exceeded pre-war levels. In addition, Israel has also facilitated the supply of water and fuel, and even enabled the construction of numerous field hospitals.

The real cause of humanitarian suffering in Gaza is Hamas, which systematically hijacks and weaponizes aid for its fighters, attacks crossing points, and manipulates civilians as human shields.

Israel’s commitment to facilitating aid, even while its soldiers are under fire, is unparalleled in the history of warfare.

5. Lie: Israel indiscriminately attacks hospitals and schools.

International law protects hospitals, schools, and religious sites — but that protection is not absolute. If these facilities are used for military purposes — such as storing weapons, housing fighters, or command operations — they lose protected status.

Hamas has repeatedly, and systematically, turned Gaza’s hospitals into fortified military compounds and terrorist staging grounds, a grave violation of international humanitarian law.

At Al-Shifa Hospital, the IDF released evidence of a Hamas command center and underground tunnel network. At Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, Israeli forces uncovered weapons, hostage-holding rooms, and operational centers. Similar violations were documented at Indonesian Hospital, Rantisi Hospital, and others.

Schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) have been used as rocket launching sites and weapons depots. In every instance, the IDF sought to verify intelligence, issue warnings, and minimize harm to civilians and medical personnel.

The outrage should not be directed at Israel for targeting legitimate military threats — but at Hamas, for systematically destroying the distinction between civilian and military space.

6. Lie: Israel is illegally occupying Gaza.

The assertion that Israel occupies Gaza is a misrepresentation of the current geopolitical reality. In 2005, Israel unilaterally disengaged from the Gaza Strip, evacuating all Israeli civilians and military personnel, and dismantling its settlements. Since then, Hamas has maintained de facto control over Gaza, exercising both political and military authority.

While Israel enforces a legitimate border control before October 7th and then a security cordon around Gaza after October 7th to prevent weapons smuggling and materials that could be used for terrorist activities or military operations, this measure is a lawful exercise of its right to self-defense, not an act of occupation. The blockade is implemented in coordination with Egypt and is subject to international scrutiny to ensure humanitarian needs are met.

Claims of occupation often overlook the fact that Hamas, recognized as a terrorist organization by many countries, governs Gaza and is responsible for the well-being of its residents. Israel’s military operations in Gaza are responses to ongoing security threats, including rocket attacks and tunnel infiltrations, and are conducted with the aim of neutralizing these threats while minimizing harm to civilians.

In summary, the characterization of Israel as an occupying power in Gaza is inconsistent with the facts on the ground and the legal definitions under international law.

7. Lie: Israel violates Hamas prisoners’ rights under the Geneva Conventions. The 3rd Geneva Convention defines Prisoners of War (POWs) as combatants who meet four key conditions: being part of a recognized armed force, carrying arms openly, wearing a fixed distinctive sign recognizable at a distance, and conducting operations in accordance with the laws of war.

Hamas meet none of these standards. They hide among civilians, wear no uniforms, and routinely commit war crimes by targeting Israeli civilians, while shielding behind Palestinian ones, and embedding their combat operations within hospitals, schools, Mosques and residential areas.

While Hamas fighters are not entitled to POW protections under the 3rd Geneva Convention, they are still protected under Common Article 3, which Israel upholds by treating detainees humanely.

Hamas, by contrast, continues to violate every basic principle of humanitarian law, including holding Israeli civilians and soldiers hostage under brutal conditions.

Conclusion:

Israel today is not only fighting a terrorist regime that has weaponized civilians — it is fighting a second war: a war against lies. From false claims of genocide, to manipulated casualty statistics, to the cynical misuse of humanitarian law, nearly every accusation leveled against Israel and the IDF distorts reality, ignores law, and inverts morality.

In Gaza, Israel faces a battlefield unlike any other in modern history: a dense, fortified, civilian-dominated urban environment deliberately and methodically turned into a human shield by Hamas. Yet despite these impossible conditions, Israel has conducted its campaign with a level of restraint, precision, and adherence to law that is virtually unmatched in modern warfare. It has taken more precautions to protect civilians than the law requires — often at great operational risk to its own forces.

But facts alone are not enough. They must be defended — clearly, forcefully, and repeatedly — against the tide of weaponized disinformation. The IDF’s conduct is not a violation of international law; it is a defense of it. It is not a stain on the laws of war; it is a case study in how democratic nations must fight even when facing enemies who recognize no law, no morality, and no distinction between civilians and soldiers.

In a just world, Israel’s efforts would be recognized for what they are: the very definition of lawful and moral warfare. In the world we live in, however, defending these truths is not optional — it is essential.

THE RABBI AND THE PROFESSOR

RABBI ARI KAHN (Aish.com)

Many years ago when I was a relatively young yeshiva student I had the opportunity to study with one of the great rabbis of the previous generation. His name was Rabbi Yisroel Zeev Gustman and he may have been one of the greatest rabbis of the 20th century. He was certainly the greatest "unknown" rabbi: While he fastidiously avoided the limelight and was therefore unfamiliar to the general public, he was well known to connoisseurs of Torah learning.

His meteoric rise from child prodigy to the exalted position of religious judge in the Rabbinical Court of Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski at around the age of 20 was the stuff of legend – but nonetheless fact. Many years later, I heard Rav Gustman's own modest version of the events leading to this appointment: A singular (brilliant) insight which he shared with his fellow students was later repeated to the visiting Rav Chaim Ozer, who invited the young student to repeat this same insight the following day in his office in Vilna. Unbeknownst to Rav Gustman, the insight clinched an argument in a complex case that had been debated among the judges in Rav Chaim Ozer's court – and allowed a woman to remarry.

One of the judges adjudicating the case in question, Rabbi Meir Bassin, made inquiries about this young man, and soon a marriage was arranged with his daughter Sarah. When Rabbi Bassin passed away before the wedding, Rabbi Gustman was tapped to take his place as rabbi of Shnipishok and to take his seat on the court. Although Rav Gustman claimed that he was simply "in the right place at the right time," it was clear that Rav Bassin and Rav Chaim Ozer had seen greatness in this young man. Rav Gustman escaped, though not unscathed. He hid among corpses and in a pig pen. Somehow, he survived.

While a long, productive career on the outskirts of Vilna could have been anticipated, Jewish life in and around Vilna was obliterated by World War II. Rav Gustman escaped, though not unscathed. He hid among corpses. He hid in caves. He hid in a pig pen. Somehow, he survived.

For me, Rav Gustman was the living link to the Jewish world destroyed by the Nazis. I never had to wonder what a Rav in Vilna before the war looked like, for I had seen Rav Gustman, 35 years after the war. At the head of a small yeshiva in the Rechavia section of Jerusalem, Rav Gustman taught a small group of loyal students six days a week. But on Thursdays at noon, the study hall would fill to capacity: Rabbis, intellectuals, religious court judges, a Supreme Court justice and various professors would join along with any and all who sought a high-level Talmud shiur (class) that offered a taste of what had been nearly destroyed. When Rav Gustman gave shiur, Vilna was once again alive and vibrant.

One of the regular participants was a professor at the Hebrew University, Robert J. (Yisrael) Aumann. Once a promising yeshiva student, he had eventually decided to pursue a career in academia, but made his weekly participation in Rav Gustman's shiur part of his schedule, along with many other more or less illustrious residents of Rechavia and Jerusalem.

The year was 1982. Once again, Israel was at war. Soldiers were mobilized, reserve units activated. Among those called to duty was a Reserves soldier, a university student who made his living as a high school teacher: Shlomo Aumann, Professor Yisrael Aumann's son. On the eve of the 19th of Sivan, in particularly fierce combat, Shlomo fell in battle.

Rav Gustman mobilized his yeshiva: All of his students joined him in performing the mitzvah of burying the dead. At the cemetery, Rav Gustman was agitated: He surveyed the rows of graves of the young men, soldiers who died defending the Land. On the way back from the cemetery, Rav Gustman turned to another passenger in the car and said, "They are all holy." Another passenger questioned the rabbi: "Even the non-religious soldiers?" Rav Gustman replied: "Every single one of them." He then turned to the driver and said, "Take me to Professor Aumann's home."

The family had just returned from the cemetery and would now begin the week of shiva – mourning for their son, brother, husband and father. (Shlomo was married and had one child. His widow, Shlomit, gave birth to their second daughter shortly after he was killed.)

Rav Gustman entered and asked to sit next to Professor Aumann, who said: "Rabbi, I so appreciate your coming to the cemetery, but now is time for you to return to your Yeshiva." Rav Gustman spoke, first in Yiddish and then in Hebrew, so that all those assembled would understand:

"I am sure that you don't know this, but I had a son named Meir. He was a beautiful child. He was taken from my arms and executed. I escaped. I later bartered my child's shoes so that we would have food, but I was never able to eat the food – I gave it away to others. My Meir is a kadosh – he is holy – he and all the six million who perished are holy."

Rav Gustman then added: "I will tell you what is transpiring now in the World of Truth in Gan Eden – in Heaven. My Meir is welcoming your Shlomo into the minyan and is saying to him 'I died because I am a Jew – but I wasn't able to save anyone else. But you – Shlomo, you died defending the Jewish People and the Land of Israel.' My Meir is a kadosh, he is holy – but your Shlomo is a Shaliach Zibbur – a Cantor in that holy, heavenly minyan."

Rav Gustman continued: "I never had the opportunity to sit shiva for my Meir; let me sit here with you just a little longer."

Professor Aumann replied, "I thought I could never be comforted, but Rabbi, you have comforted me."

Rav Gustman did not allow his painful memories to control his life. He found solace in his students, his daughter his grandchildren, and in every Jewish child. He and his wife would attend an annual parade (on Yom Yerushalayim) where children would march on Jerusalem in song and dance. A rabbi who happened upon them one year asked the Rabbi why he spent his valuable time in such a frivolous activity. Rav Gustman explained, "We who saw a generation of children die, will take pleasure in a generation of children who sing and dance in these streets."

A student once implored Rav Gustman to share his memories of the ghetto and the war more publicly and more frequently. He asked him to tell people about his son, about his son's shoes, to which the Rav replied, "I can't, but I think about those shoes every day of my life. I see them every night before I go to sleep."

On the 28th of Sivan 5751 (1991), Rav Gustman passed away. Thousands marched through the streets of Jerusalem accompanying Rav Gustman on his final journey. As night fell on the 29th of Sivan, 9 years after Shlomo Aumann fell in battle, Rav Gustman was buried on the Mount of Olives. I am sure that upon entering Heaven he was reunited with his wife, his teachers and his son Meir. I am also sure that Shlomo Aumann and all the other holy soldiers who died defending the People and the Land of Israel were there to greet this extraordinary Rabbi.

On December 10th 2005, Professor Robert J. Aumann was awarded the Nobel Prize in economics. I am sure he took with him to Stockholm memories of his late wife Esther, and his son Shlomo. I suspect he also took memories of his Rabbi, Rav Gustman.

May it be the will of G-d that the People of Israel sanctify His Name by living lives of holiness which will serve as a light to the nations – and may no more children, soldiers or yeshiva students ever need to join that holy minyan in Heaven.

Postscript:

The last time I saw Rav Gustman, I was walking in the Meah Shearim/Geulah section of Jerusalem with my wife and oldest son who was being pushed in a stroller. It was Friday morning and we saw the Rosh Yeshiva, we said hello, wished him "Good Shabbes." Then I did something I rarely do: I asked him to bless my son. Rav Gustman looked at the toddler, smiled and said "May he be a boy like all the other boys."

At first, my wife and I were stunned; what kind of blessing was this? We expected a blessing that the boy grow to be a zaddik – a righteous man – or that he be a Talmid Chacham – a Torah scholar. But no, he blessed him that he should be "like all the boys."

It took many years for this beautiful blessing to make sense to us. The blessing was that he should have a normal childhood, that he have a normal life, that he have his health... Looking back, I realize what a tremendous blessing Rav Gustman gave, and why.

Today, that son – Matityahu, and our second son Hillel, are soldiers in combat units in the Israeli Defense Forces. Brave, strong, motivated and idealistic, they are wonderful soldiers, wonderful Jews. I pray that they return home safely along with all their comrades, and live normal lives – "just like all the boys."

HUMAN-RIGHTS BODIES CORRUPT HUMAN RIGHTS TO VILIFY ISRAEL

PETER BERKOWITZ (RealClearPolitics.com 27-4-25)

The United States has a special interest in safeguarding the integrity of human rights because America is founded on the rights inherent in all persons, and the nation's political traditions revolve around them. Ordinary Americans as well as Washington policymakers, therefore, should condemn prominent human-rights organizations' abuse of human rights to defame Israel and to legitimate jihadists' efforts to destroy the Jewish state. Correcting the record about the Middle East's only rights-protecting democracy and the Islamist forces sworn to its elimination is crucial to restoring the good name of human rights.

The Declaration of Independence holds that it is self-evidently true that human beings are endowed with "unalienable rights" – the 18th-century term for human rights. The Constitution aims to secure them. Much of the nation's history revolves around the struggle to ensure that all Americans enjoy the rights that are theirs in virtue of their humanity. While the Constitution does not grant government a roving mandate to protect human rights around the world, it does invigorate the nation's interest in serving as a beacon of freedom for those who suffer under authoritarian

regimes and in cooperating with countries that share America's understanding of the dignity of the person.

Dictatorships reject human rights, which place individual freedom ahead of dictators' ambitions and decrees. Dictatorships' aversion to human rights is as characteristic of the Iranian Ayatollahs' Islamist theocracy as it is of Putin's imperial Russian and of the Chinese Communist Party's synthesis of Marxism-Leninism and traditional Chinese nationalism.

In the 21st century, powerful human-rights organizations have played into dictators' hands by politicizing human rights. While persisting in affirming human-rights' universality, these organizations equate them with a tendentious version of the progressive agenda. They wield human rights as a propaganda tool, inflating the claims of favored groups and disparaging the claims of the disfavored. The politicization of human rights sends the pernicious message to those who differ with the progressive left's political priorities that human rights are a sham and should be expelled from respectable political discourse.

Nowhere do human-rights organizations more crudely politicize human rights than in the case of Israel.

The problem begins with the United Nations' betrayal of its principles. The preamble to the UN Charter proclaims "faith in fundamental human rights," and Article 1 asserts "the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples." Yet in 1975, the UN General Assembly disgraced itself by adopting Resolution 3379, which states that Zionism – the national movement of the Jewish people – "is a form of racism and racial discrimination." In 1991, UN General Assembly Resolution 46/86 revoked Resolution 3379, but the 2001 UN World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa, reaffirmed the equation of Zionism with racism. More recently, the United Nations Human Rights Council gives wildly disproportionate time and energy to denouncing Israel: The UNHRC dedicates a permanent agenda item at each session only to Israel; it passes numerous condemnatory resolutions of Israel every year while ignoring egregious human-rights violations in many other countries; and it devotes more special sessions and commissions of inquiry to Israel than to any other country.

In recent years, the dogma of settler colonialism has intensified human-rights organizations' enmity toward Israel. According to this university-manufactured theory, Israel's establishment subordinated and displaced indigenous peoples of the Middle East. And with the support of the United States – allegedly the world's largest and most insidious settler-colonialist power, having stolen a continent-spanning territory from its rightful native-American owners – the Jewish state supposedly persists in oppressing Palestinians. Never mind that the Jewish people's claim on their ancestral homeland goes back around three thousand years, more than 1,500 years before the 7th-century birth of Islam.

In addition to decrying Israel's existence, the settler-colonialism dogma fuels beliefs at odds with human rights' universality and the dignity of persons. Those resisting Israel, in the settler-colonialism view, have the right to use any-and-all means to reclaim their land. And, maintain subscribers to the settler-colonialism creed, Israel's exercise of the most elemental of human rights, the right of self-defense, violates its enemies' rights to perpetrate atrocities against the Jewish state.

In "The Double Standard in the Human-Rights World," Michael Powell, an Atlantic staff writer, provides numerous examples of how leading human-rights organizations – including Amnesty International, Doctors Without Borders, and Human Rights Watch – corrupt human rights to vilify Israel.

In 2024, the U.K. chapter of Amnesty International – the world's largest human-rights organization – went out of its way to promote a Palestinian demonstration in London commemorating the one-year anniversary of Iran-backed Hamas' slaughter of some 1,200 Israelis, mostly civilians, and kidnapping of approximately 250, mostly civilians. On the occasion, Amnesty International featured on its website a pro-Palestinian video indicating that Israel's establishment in 1948 justified Hamas' massacre in 2023.

This "marked an astonishing shift for one of the world's most prominent human-rights organizations," writes Powell. "Amnesty's handbook declares that it is 'independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion. It does not support or oppose any government or political system, nor does it necessarily support the views of the victims whose rights it seeks to protect.'" At its 1961 founding, "Amnesty's goal was to serve as an advocate for victims and prisoners of conscience, and to stand apart from the polarized politics of the Cold War," according to Powell. "The same ethos influenced the founders of Human Rights Watch

and Doctors Without Borders."

Now, however, prestigious human-rights organizations do the polarizing. "As the cultural and political left has come to dominate the human-rights community, young staffers with passionate ideological commitments have helped rewrite the agendas of the best-known organizations," Powell explains. "Critical theories of social justice, built on binaries that categorize Palestinians as oppressed and Israel as the oppressor, now dominate many conversations about the Jewish state, which a constellation of groups casts as uniquely illegitimate – a regressive, racist ethnic 'Western' state in an Arab sea."

Dr. Rasha Khoury illustrates human-rights organizations' subordination to ideology. Born and raised in East Jerusalem, Khoury, president of the board of Doctors Without Borders USA, asserted on the organization's digital bulletin board just over a month after the Hamas massacre that she and her colleagues "must decolonize our minds." To overlook Israel's "unhinged bombardment and massacre of Palestinians in Gaza" was "to affirm the colonizer's world view, one rooted in white supremacist logic."

Danielle Haas served as a senior editor at Human Rights Watch from 2010 to 2023. She maintains that HRW, too, has abandoned human rights for partisanship. "The trend is to substitute ideology and personal belief for the principles of the human-rights movement," she told Powell.

The issue, however, is not a certain slippage, the intrusion of bias into the defense of human rights. Rather, human-rights organizations exploit their power and expertise to propagate extreme political positions masquerading as human-rights imperatives. "Amnesty, Human Rights Watch, and Doctors Without Borders have all accused Israel of crimes against humanity and acts of genocide," states Powell. "Some human-rights leaders have openly questioned Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state."

These human-rights organizations' attacks on Israel tend to suppress such basic international-laws-of-war principles as the prohibition on combats' embedding themselves within their own urban areas to use civilians and civilian infrastructure as shields. The organizations also ignore that these reprehensible tactics give Hamas presumptive moral and legal responsibility for the collateral death and destruction that result from Israel's exercising its right of self-defense – this involves minimizing harm to civilians and civilian objects – to eliminate threats to its territorial integrity and political sovereignty.

"A former top executive with a well-known human-rights organization" – to whom Powell granted anonymity "to avoid further alienating former colleagues" – acknowledged that "Hamas has an obligation under international law not to use human shields and to distinguish between military and civilian targets. Yet, stressed the former senior human-rights figure, "if you bring this up internally, it's framed as a distraction, an Israeli talking point."

At a 2022 Washington luncheon, Amnesty International USA Director Paul O'Brien bluntly stated, "We are opposed to the idea – and this, I think, is an existential part of the debate – that Israel should be preserved as a state for the Jewish people." O'Brien eventually "expressed regret for his remarks" and withdrew his opposition to the very existence of the nation-state of the Jewish people. His error, it seems, was to accidentally or ill-advisedly share his organization's extreme anti-Israel views.

Critics of Amnesty International, Doctors Without Borders, and Human Rights Watch must not be blinded by indignation.

The propensity of influential human-rights organizations to justify or gloss over Hamas' barbaric Oct. 7 massacre and unlawful and immoral use of Gaza's civilian population as human shields while denying the Jewish state's right to defend itself discredits the organizations. It does not discredit human rights.

By safeguarding human rights' good name against those who would turn them into a license to defame Israel and promote jihad against the Middle East's only rights-protecting democracy, the United States vindicates the principles on which American freedom rests.

Kosher & Halacha Kerner

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

DOES AN ELEVATOR REQUIRE A MEZUZAH?

RABBI YIRMIYAHU KAGANOFF (RabbiKaganoff.com)

Many people will smile when they see this question. Others will frown. And everyone will gain from reading this article — since this question provides an opportunity to discuss many aspects of the laws of mezuzah.

Let us start from the very beginning:

“I live in an apartment building in New York. My building does not have a mezuzah; why should my elevator?”

The questioner is, of course, correct. Assuming that his building has both Jewish and non-Jewish residents, most authorities contend that there is no requirement to install a mezuzah (Rema, Yoreh Deah 286:1; quoting Mordechai). The commentaries provide two reasons why no mezuzah is required in this instance, some explaining that the Torah never required a mezuzah on a building unless all its residents are obligated in the mitzvah (Taz, Yoreh Deah 286:2). Others absolve these buildings from mezuzah out of concern that suspicious non-Jewish residents may think the Jew is hexing them with the mezuzah (Shach, Yoreh Deah 286:6). Although some recognized authorities contend that one must place a mezuzah even in a building shared by non-Jewish residents (Aruch HaShulchan, quoting Rashba and several others), the accepted practice is not to.

EXCLUSIVELY JEWISH

However, a building with exclusively Jewish residents must have a mezuzah on every entrance to the building, as well as on any other doorways inside the building, even if some of the residents are not yet observant. This is true notwithstanding that no one lives in the hallway or foyer. This halacha requires some explanation:

When the Torah teaches (in this week’s parsha) about the mitzvah of mezuzah, it requires placing it on the side posts (mezuzos) of one’s house and one’s gates. A house is predominantly used for residence, while a gate is not, yet the Torah requires placing a mezuzah on the gates of a Jewish city, or on the gates leading to a Jewish house, because they are entrances to the house (Yoma 11a). Thus, if one enters one’s property through a full gateway, meaning that it has a lintel and side posts, one should place a mezuzah on that entrance. This is true regardless as to how many such “gateways” one enters before one reaches the house (Rambam, Hilchos Mezuzah 6:8). Even a revolving door requires a mezuzah if it has doorposts and a lintel.

Similarly, the hallway doors of a building whose residents are all Jewish require mezuzos. Although the hallways are not suitable for dwelling, they function as entrances to the apartments, and therefore qualify as “gateways.”

MULTIPLE GATEWAYS

Sometimes the entrance to a residence includes a gateway to a building’s outside premises, then a gateway to a courtyard, followed by another series of doors leading into the building vestibule. If all the tenants of the building are Jewish, one must install a mezuzah on each entryway, as I explained above.

KEEP RIGHT

The Gemara teaches that one places the mezuzah on the right doorpost entering the house (Yoma 11a). Placing the mezuzah on the wrong side invalidates the mitzvah, and reciting a beracha before affixing such a mezuzah is, unfortunately, a beracha levatalah (a beracha recited in vain). Thus, it is very important to determine whether a doorway is considered an entrance to one room, or the entrance to the other, since this is the paramount consideration in determining which side post is graced with a mezuzah.

WHO IS RIGHT?

Regarding an internal house door connecting two rooms, it is usually clear whether the doorway is primarily an entrance to one room or to the other. However, there are instances when it is unclear whether the doorway is considered an entrance or an exit — what does one do in such an instance? This question is sometimes relevant when one has a doorway connecting a living room to a dining room. Since each situation may be somewhat different, I leave this shaylah for one to ask one’s rav.

STAIRCASES

If one lives in an apartment building with only Jewish inhabitants, the doors to the stairwells also require mezuzos, just like the entrances do, since they lead to residences (see Chovas HaDor, page 45). This halacha can be directly derived from a case in the Gemara, which describes a two-family house in which an inside stairway connects the two apartments. The Gemara requires mezuzos on the entrances to the stairwells from each of the apartments (Menachos 34a as explained by Rashi). Although no one resides on the stairway, one must still install a mezuzah on its entrance since the stairwell functions as a “gateway” to a residence.

WHICH IS THE RIGHT SIDE OF A STAIRWELL?

Regarding the placement of a mezuzah on the doorway of an apartment building’s stairwell, we are faced with an interesting predicament – on

which side post of the doorway does one place the mezuzah? Is the doorway serving to enter the stairwell, obligating one to place the mezuzah on the right side entering the stairwell, or is it an entrance to the floor, obligating one to place the mezuzah on the right side exiting the stairwell? The answer to this question may at first seem strange. On the ground level, one should place the mezuzah on the right side entering the stairwell, because this is the method of entering the building. However, on the other floors one should place the mezuzah on the right side entering the floor because that doorway functions primarily as an entrance to the apartments on that floor! (Chovas HaDor, page 45). Thus, we have an anomalous situation of placing one mezuzah on the right side entering the stairway and placing others on the opposite side.

IS AN ELEVATOR DIFFERENT?

Having established that the stairwell of an all-Jewish building requires mezuzos, does the elevator of such a building require mezuzos? Do we consider the elevator doorways as “gateways” to the upper apartments of the building, just as a stairway is? Perhaps the elevators are even more of an entranceway to those apartments since people use them more frequently than the stairs! Several responsa discuss this question.

(Bear in mind that many elevators have two doorways, the stationary door that is part of the building, and the door of the elevator “cage” or platform. For purposes of this article, I will refer to the “stationary doorway” and the “platform doorway.”)

EARLIEST TESHUVAH

Although people presumably asked this shaylah decades earlier, the earliest responsum I discovered on this subject is a 5724 (1964) inquiry by the Helmitzer Rebbe (of New York) to Dayan Yitzchak Weiss, then Av Beis Din of Manchester, England, and later Av Beis Din of the Eidah HaChareidis of Yerushalayim (Shu”t Minchas Yitzchak 4:93). In this teshuvah, Dayan Weiss questions whether an elevator requires a mezuzah since it constantly moves and cannot be considered a residence. He compares an elevator to a moving residence, regarding which we find a debate whether it requires a mezuzah. Rav Avraham Dovid of Butchatch, usually called “the Butchatcher,” rules that a moving residence requires a mezuzah. According to this opinion, someone who lives in a van or truck requires a mezuzah on the door, even if he constantly drives it to new locations (Daas Kedoshim 286:1)!

The Mikdash Me’at disagrees, contending that a moving residence is considered a temporary dwelling and never requires a mezuzah. In a different responsum, Dayan Weiss deliberates whether a mobile home requires a mezuzah since people often reside in them, whereas using a bus or automobile as a residence is considered temporary and does not require a mezuzah (Shu”t Minchas Yitzchak 2:82; see also Chovas HaDor pg. 37).

Dayan Weiss initially compares an elevator to this dispute between the Mikdash Me’at and the Butchacher, since an elevator is constantly moving. However, he then suggests that an elevator might require a mezuzah even according to the Mikdash Me’at, because even though the elevator moves, it is part of a residence that does not move. He compares this to the following case, which requires some explanation:

SMALL HOUSE

The Gemara rules that a house smaller than four amos squared, approximately seven feet by seven feet, does not require a mezuzah (Sukkah 3a). A space this tiny is too small to qualify as a proper residence, even for people living in impoverished circumstances. The Torah requires a mezuzah only on a doorway to a house fit to live in.

What if a room is smaller than four amos squared, but is perfectly serviceable for its function as part of a house, such as a walk-in pantry that connects to the kitchen? This room is smaller than four amos squared, and one could argue that, as such, it is absolved from mezuzah. On the other hand, one could argue that it functions perfectly well for residential use since it is part of a house that is four amos squared.

Indeed, the authorities dispute the halachic status of this pantry. Some poskim contend that this room requires a mezuzah, notwithstanding its size, since it suffices for its household purpose (Chamudei Daniel, quoted by Pischei Teshuvah, Yoreh Deah 286:11). This approach contends that although a house smaller than four amos squared is too tiny to be a domicile on its own, a room suitable for its intended use that is part of a house is not excluded from mezuzah. Dayan Weiss accepts the position of the Chamudei Daniel as the primary halachic opinion (Minchas Yitzchak 1:8).

Other authorities dispute this conclusion, contending that a room this small is excluded from the requirement of mezuzah (Daas Kedoshim 286:19). In their opinion, affixing such a mezuzah is unnecessary and reciting a beracha

beforehand is a beracha levatalah, a beracha recited in vain. (Some authorities disagree with the Chamudei Daniel's position but still require a mezuzah on the right hand side reentering the kitchen as an entrance to the kitchen.)

HOW IS A PANTRY LIKE AN ELEVATOR?

Dayan Weiss explains that the underlying principle of the Chamudei Daniel's position is that any part of a residence that has a domestic function requires a mezuzah. He reasons that just as the Chamudei Daniel required a mezuzah on a small pantry since it is suitable for its specific use and it is part of a residence, an apartment building elevator also requires a mezuzah since it too is suitable for its intended use and is part of a residence. He therefore concludes that the elevator platform door requires a mezuzah, although without a beracha, out of deference for the authorities who reject Chamudei Daniel's line of reasoning. (Obviously, one should be careful to affix the mezuzah in a place where it will not be smashed each time the door closes.)

WHAT ABOUT THE ELEVATOR'S STATIONARY DOORWAY?

Does the stationary doorway entering the elevator also require a mezuzah? If it does, then one must install a mezuzah not only on the doorway of the elevator platform, but in addition on the stationary doorway of every floor! Dayan Weiss concludes that these doorways do not require mezuzos, since they are functional only when the elevator cage is opposite them, and at that moment the mezuzah servicing the platform door does double duty, fulfilling the requirement for both the platform as well as the stationary doorway. This last concept, that one mezuzah services all the elevator doors in the building, is by no means obvious, as we will soon see.

A DIFFERING APPROACH

Rav Yaakov Blau, then a Dayan of the Eidah HaChareidis, reaches a different conclusion regarding whether an elevator requires a mezuzah. He contends that the modern elevator is comparable to the case of the Gemara requiring mezuzos on the doors leading to a stairwell. Rav Blau maintains that an elevator is identical to a stairwell except that one substitutes an elevator platform for a stationary stairway (Chovas Hador, page 44). He reasons that since the primary entrance to an apartment on the upper story of a building is through the elevator, the stationary doorways leading to the elevator are therefore "gateways" to the upper apartments, no different from the stairwells, and are definitely obligated to have mezuzos.

Having concluded that the "stationary doorway" of each elevator floor requires a mezuzah, Rav Blau then addresses the question concerning which direction the mezuzah should face. Do we place the mezuzah on the stationary doorway entering the elevator or exiting it? He concludes that since the elevator's main function is to transport people to the upper floors, the doorway on the ground floor requires a mezuzah on the right side entering the elevator, and the other floors require one on the right side exiting the elevator.

Why are the mezuzos on different sides? Since the function of the stairs and elevator are as means to access the upper stories, one should place the mezuzah on the right side as one walks in their direction.

On the other hand, whereas Dayan Weiss contends that the platform doorway requires a mezuzah because it is part of a residence, Rav Blau rules that the platform doorway does not require a mezuzah since its function is exclusively as a moving passageway.

Thus, although both Dayan Weiss and Rav Blau require mezuzos on an elevator, they completely disagree which doorway requires a mezuzah, Dayan Weiss requiring one on the platform doorway, but not the stationary doorways, and Rav Blau concluding just the opposite, that the stationary doorways require mezuzos, but not the platform doorway. (By the way, the Helmitzer Rebbe, who asked Dayan Weiss originally, held the same way as Rav Blau.)

Indeed, since these are two independent disputes, someone could conclude that the platform doorway and the stationary doorways both require mezuzos. If one accepts Dayan Weiss's premise that the elevator requires a mezuzah because it is part of a stationary permanent residence, and one disputes his contention that the mezuzah on the platform suffices for the stationary doorway, one would conclude that both the platform doorway and the stationary doorways require mezuzos.

AN OPPOSITE APPROACH

On the other hand, one could reach the exact opposite conclusion and not require a mezuzah on any of the elevator doorways. Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach (Minchas Shlomoh 2:97:23) conjectures that the elevator should be treated differently from a stairwell because the elevator is not suitable for residential use at all but only for transportation. Further, he absolves the

stationary door of the building from mezuzah because it can never be used independently of the elevator. Thus, its use is also considered non-residential.

Rav Shelomoh Zalman presents another reason to absolve the stationary door from mezuzah — as soon as the elevator changes floors, the stationary doorway becomes useless, and it therefore should not be compared to a stairwell.

In his written responsum on the subject, Rav Shelomoh Zalman concludes that it is preferable to install a mezuzah without a beracha on the right side of the stationary doorway entering the elevator on the entrance level of the building since this is the main entrance and exit into the building. The reason for his differentiation between the ground floor and the others is unclear; I have been told orally that he did not really feel that there was any necessity even for the ground floor mezuzah.

In practical terms, many follow the lenient opinions that do not require a mezuzah on either the platform doorway or the stationary doorway. Residents of a building with only Jewish inhabitants should agree to jointly ask a rav whether they are required to install a mezuzah on the doorway.

CONCLUSION

Just as a properly functioning elevator lifts us to great heights, so the properly fulfilled mitzvah of mezuzah takes us far higher. We touch the mezuzah whenever we enter or exit a building to remind ourselves of Hashem's constant presence, and it is a physical and spiritual protective shield. Whenever passing it, we should remind ourselves of Hashem's constant protection.

Many people will smile when they see this question. Others will frown. And everyone will gain from reading this article — since this question provides an opportunity to discuss many aspects of the laws of mezuzah.

Let us start from the very beginning:

"I live in an apartment building in New York. My building does not have a mezuzah; why should my elevator?"

The questioner is, of course, correct. Assuming that his building has both Jewish and non-Jewish residents, most authorities contend that there is no requirement to install a mezuzah (Rama, Yoreh Deah 286:1; quoting Mordechai). The commentaries provide two reasons why no mezuzah is required in this instance, some explaining that the Torah never required a mezuzah on a building unless all its residents are obligated in the mitzvah (Taz, 286:2). Others absolve these buildings from mezuzah out of concern that suspicious non-Jewish residents may think the Jew is hexing them with the mezuzah (Shach 286:6). Although some recognized authorities contend that one must place a mezuzah even in a building shared by non-Jewish residents (Aruch HaShulchan, quoting Rashba and several others), the accepted practice is not to do so.

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However, a building with exclusively Jewish residents must have a mezuzah on every entrance to the building, as well as on any other doorways inside the building, even if some of the residents are not yet observant. This is true, notwithstanding the fact that no one lives in the hallway or foyer. This halacha requires some explanation:

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Similarly, the hallway doors of a building whose residents are all Jewish require mezuzos. Although the hallways are not suitable for dwelling, they function as entrances to the apartments, and therefore qualify as "gateways."

MULTIPLE GATEWAYS

Sometimes, the entrance to a residence includes a gateway to a building's outside premises, then a gateway to a courtyard, followed by another series of doors leading into the building vestibule. If all the tenants of the building are Jewish, one must install a mezuzah on each entryway, as I explained above.

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WHO IS RIGHT?

Regarding an internal house door connecting one room to a second, it is usually clear to which room it serves primarily as an entrance. However, there are instances when it is unclear whether the doorway is considered an entrance or an exit: what does one do in such an instance? This question often presents itself when there is a doorway connecting a living room to a dining room. Since there can be differing details in each such situation, I leave this shaylah for one to ask his or her rav.

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If one lives in an apartment building with only Jewish inhabitants, the doors to the stairwells also require mezuzos, just as the entrances do, since they lead to residences (see Chovas HaDor, page 45). This halacha can be directly derived from a case in the Gemara, which describes a two family house in which an inside stairway connects the two apartments. The Gemara requires mezuzos on the entrances to the stairwells from each of the apartments (Menachos 34a as explained by Rashi). Although no one resides on the stairway, one must still install a mezuzah on its entrance, since the stairwell functions as a “gateway” to a residence.

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What if a room is smaller than four amos squared, but is perfectly serviceable for its function as part of a house, such as a walk-in pantry that connects to the kitchen? This room is smaller than four amos squared, and one could argue that, as such, it is absolved from mezuzah. On the other hand, one could argue that it functions perfectly well for residential use, since it is part of a house that is more than four amos squared.

Indeed, the authorities dispute concerning the halachic status of this pantry. Some poskim contend that this room requires a mezuzah, notwithstanding its size, since it suffices for its household purpose (Chamudei Daniel, quoted by Pischei Teshuvah 286:11). This approach contends that although a house smaller than four amos squared is too tiny to be a domicile on its own, a room suitable for its intended use that is part of a house is not excluded from mezuzah. Dayan Weiss accepts the position of the Chamudei Daniel as the primary halachic opinion (Shu’t Minchas Yitzchak 1:8).

Other authorities dispute this conclusion, contending that a room this small is excluded from the requirement of mezuzah (Daas Kedoshim 286:19). In their opinion, affixing such a mezuzah is unnecessary, and reciting a bracha beforehand is a bracha levatalah, a bracha recited in vain. (Some authorities disagree with the Chamudei Daniel’s position, but still require a mezuzah on the right hand side reentering the kitchen as an entrance to the kitchen.)

HOW IS A PANTRY LIKE AN ELEVATOR?

Dayan Weiss explains that the underlying principle of the Chamudei Daniel’s position is that any part of a residence that has a domestic function requires a mezuzah. He reasons that just as the Chamudei Daniel required a mezuzah on a small pantry, since it is suitable for its specific use and it is part of a residence, an apartment building elevator also requires a mezuzah, since it, too, is suitable for its intended use and is part of a residence. He therefore concludes that the elevator platform door requires affixing a mezuzah, although without a bracha, out of deference to the authorities who reject Chamudei Daniel’s line of reasoning. (Obviously, one should be careful to affix the mezuzah in a place where it will not be crushed by the door as it closes.)

WHAT ABOUT THE ELEVATOR’S STATIONARY DOORWAY?

Does the stationary doorway entering the elevator also require a mezuzah? If it does, then one must install a mezuzah not only on the doorway of the elevator platform, but in addition on the stationary doorway of every floor! Dayan Weiss concludes that these doorways do not require mezuzos, since they are functional only when the elevator cage is opposite them, and at that moment the mezuzah servicing the platform door does double duty, fulfilling the requirement for both the platform as well as the stationary doorway. This last concept, that one mezuzah services all the elevator doors in the building, is by no means obvious, as we will soon see.

A DIFFERING APPROACH

Rav Yaakov Blau, currently a Dayan of the Eidah HaChareidis, reaches a different conclusion regarding whether an elevator requires a mezuzah. He contends that the modern elevator is comparable to the case of the Gemara requiring mezuzos on the doors leading to a stairwell. Rav Blau maintains that an elevator is identical to a stairwell, except that one substitutes an elevator platform for a stationary stairway (Chovas Hador, page 44). He reasons that since the primary entrance to an apartment on the upper story of a building is through the elevator, the stationary doorways leading to the elevator are therefore “gateways” to the upper apartments, no different from the stairwells, and are definitely obligated to have mezuzos.

Having concluded that the “stationary doorway” of each elevator floor requires a mezuzah, Rav Blau then addresses the question concerning which direction the mezuzah should face. Do we place the mezuzah on the stationary doorway entering the elevator or exiting it? He concludes that since the elevator’s main function is to transport people to the upper floors, the doorway on the entrance floor requires a mezuzah on the right side entering the elevator, and the other floors require one on the right side

exiting the elevator.

Why are the mezuzos on different sides? Since the function of the stairs and elevator are as means to access the upper stories, one should place the mezuzah on the right side as one walks in their direction.

On the other hand, whereas Dayan Weiss contends that the platform doorway requires a mezuzah because it is part of a residence, Rav Blau rules that the platform doorway does not require a mezuzah, since its function is exclusively as a moving passageway.

Thus, although both Dayan Weiss and Rav Blau require mezuzos on an elevator, they completely disagree which doorway requires a mezuzah, Dayan Weiss requiring one on the platform doorway, but not the stationary doorways, and Rav Blau concluding just the opposite, that the stationary doorways require mezuzos, but not the platform doorway. (By the way, the Helmitzer Rebbe, who asked Dayan Weiss originally, held the same way as the Chovas HaDor.)

Indeed, since these are two independent disputes, someone could conclude that the platform doorway and the stationary doorways both require mezuzos. If one accepts Dayan Weiss's premise that the elevator requires a mezuzah because it is part of a stationary, permanent residence, and one disputes with his contention that the mezuzah on the platform suffices for the stationary doorway, one would conclude that both the platform doorway and the stationary doorways require mezuzos.

AN OPPOSITE APPROACH

On the other hand, one could reach the exact opposite conclusion and not require a mezuzah on any of the elevator doorways, as we will see. Rav Shlomoh Zalman Auerbach zt"l (Minchas Shlomoh 2:97:23) conjectures that the elevator should be treated differently from a stairwell, because the elevator is not suitable for residential use at all, but only for transportation. Further, he absolves the stationary door of the building from mezuzah, because it can never be used independently of the elevator. Thus, its use is also considered non-residential.

Rav Shlomoh Zalman presents another reason to absolve the stationary door from mezuzah — since as soon as the elevator changes floors, the stationary doorway becomes useless, and it therefore should not be compared to a stairwell.

In his written responsum on the subject, Rav Shlomoh Zalman concludes that it is preferable to install a mezuzah without a bracha on the right side of the stationary doorway entering the elevator on the entrance level of the building, since this is the main entrance and exit into the building. The reason for his differentiation between the ground floor elevator and the other elevators is unclear, and I have been told orally that he did not really feel that there was any necessity even for the ground floor mezuzah.

In practical terms, many follow the lenient opinions that do not require a mezuzah on either the platform doorway or the stationary doorway. Residents of a building with only Jewish inhabitants should agree to jointly ask a rav whether or not they are required to install a mezuzah on the doorway.

CONCLUSION

Just as a properly functioning elevator lifts us to great heights, so the properly fulfilled mitzvah of mezuzah takes us far higher. We touch the mezuzah whenever we enter or exit a building to remind ourselves of Hashem's constant presence, and it is a physical and spiritual protective shield. Whenever passing it, we should remind ourselves of Hashem's constant protection.

Candles (Melb) Friday 2/5/25 5 lyar 5785 5.14p/6.11p