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Toldos 5786

LIVING FOR TOLDOS

RABBI LABEL LAM (Torah.org)

And these are the generations (Toldos) of Yitzchok the son of Avraham; Avraham begot Yitzchok. (25:19)

I walked into a noisy and raucous class this week and silently stood by the door. Immediately the students sat up and began to work quietly. After a short period of time, I sensed that this might be the teachable moment. I told them, "This is the week we learn about two brothers. One brother did his work quietly whether his father was in the room or not. The other brother, when his father was in the room, he acted like an angel, but the minute his father left the room, he went wild. We know their last names. One is Avinu and the other is HaRasha. I'm sure you can guess their first names."

I scanned the room, pivoted, and left. The second I was standing in the hallway the room went wild and I realized a very important lesson. The best way to teach is not just to give a speech. If I really want them to "get it" there is more for me to do. Just because I said it, that doesn't make it so.

My wife and I went to the Carlebach Shul in Manhattan a few years ago for a Shabbaton. It was Parshas Toldos. Shabbos morning the reader of the Torah was late in coming and so the Rabbi was stalling for time by peppering the crowd with brief but interesting Torah thoughts. It was not quite a speech and it was spontaneous so I was looking in a Sefer and listening with half an ear. Then he asked a question that tickled my interest slightly. How come Parshas Toldos is called, "Toldos"? It should rightfully be called "Yitzchok". The Parsha begins, "Eleh toldos Yitzchok... These are the generations of Yitzchok...". After all, Parshas Noach begins the same way, "Eleh toldos Noach... These are the generations of Noach" and the Parsha is titled "Noach". So, either both should be Toldos or one should be Noach and the other should be Yitzchok. Why then is one Noach and the other one Toldos!?

Again, I was tickled by the question. Then the Rabbi dropped a diamond, not a dime, but a diamond! My eyes were opened to a very valuable insight. Noach was a grand historical personality. "These are the generation of Noach, Noach...", but Noach produced Noach, alone! That's a great accomplishment.

He is titled a perfect Tzadik in his time. He was a man, the man of that generation, of his time. So, he is the focus of that Parsha and it is therefore appropriate to call it after him, Noach!

When it comes to the Avos, Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov, the story is different. They may be fascinating personalities and it is terribly interesting to learn about them and from them, but it's not about them. They didn't live for themselves. They were walking in wet cement and paving the way for us, for all future generations. It's not about them! It's about Toldos! Good Jewish parents don't live for themselves. They live for Toldos, but how so?!

And teach them to YOUR children to speak in them with your sitting in your house and with your going on the way and with your lying down and your rising up... (Devarim 11:19) The Chasam Sofer learns this verse which is scribed and scrolled and affixed to door after door throughout our homes, "And you should teach your children to speak in them" as an instruction in "how to"- accomplish that parental task. Children will learn mostly through observing the manner in which you sit in your house, go on your way, lie down and rise up. Those actions will speak volumes in volume. As one child told his parents, "Your actions are so loud I cannot hear what you are saying!" When both speech and action are congruous, though, then there can be a lasting educational impact.

One of the most valuable tools for teaching our own children and/or for

teaching students is through both repetitive practice and by modeling. The teacher/parent has to show the way it's done, and to be a living example of whatever lesson or behavior they would like to impart. I have had parents tell me proudly, "Rabbi, I push my kids!" I tell them, "Don't push them! Pull them! When someone honks his horn behind you, do you want to go faster or slower? When a car zips past you, though, it's hard to resist the temptation to speed up."

So, in many ways, it may be true that more than parents are raising children, children are raising parents. Just that consciousness transforms us from regular characters roaming on the planet into Avos, living for Toldos!

TURNING 40

RABBI JAY KELMAN (TorahinMotion.com)

"And Yitzchak was forty years old when he took Rivka, the daughter of Betuel the Aramean of Paddan-Aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean" (Brisheet 25:20). The only new piece of information in this verse is the fact that Yitzchak was 40 when he married. While we did not yet know that, we could have figured that out. The Torah details the death of Sarah at 127 and immediately follows with the detailed story of finding a wife for Yitzchak. Knowing that Sarah was 90 when Yitzchak was born and that Rivka brought Yitzchak comfort after the death of his mother, it is not hard to surmise that Yitzchak was approximately 40 when he married^[1].

But surmise or not why does the Torah tell us his age at marriage, something it does for no other Biblical figure save for Eisav^[2] – including his wife Rivka? One might simply answer that as the first "courtship" described in the Torah and moreover the first Jewish marriage – Abram and Sarai were not yet Jewish when they married – the Torah highlights its details, stressing the importance of marriage in Jewish life.

This follows the detailed description of the first Jewish funeral – Sarah being the first Jew to die – highlighting the importance of respect for the dead. As to why Rivka's age is not mentioned, such a question would have no relevance for the Biblical reader until modern times. In a patriarchal society it is the lives of men which are highlighted. How else to explain that in listing the many genealogical tables from Adam to Avraham it is the men who beget sons and it is the men who die^[3]. Hence our Rabbis take great note of the fact that the Torah tells that Sarah died at 127 – the only age given for the passing of a woman in the Torah – explaining the significance of the mention of her age at passing (see here for further elaboration).

Yet would we attach any less importance to marriage if this small detail had been left out? Apparently, there is much significance to the fact that Yitzchak married at 40. In Biblical numerology 40 is the number of transformation. The flood waters lasted for 40 days as a new world was created; Moshe spent 40 days on Mount Sinai becoming Moshe Rabbeinu; the slaves of Egypt became the nation of Israel after wandering for 40 years in the desert. Our Sages note a fetus in the first 40 days "is only water"^[4] before becoming an active fetus.

Yitzchak's marriage at 40 marks his transformation. The previous verse notes that "These are the Toldot of Yitzchak the son of Avraham, Avraham begot Yitzchak" (Brisheet 25:19) a seemingly totally superfluous verse. The verse may add nothing to our biographical knowledge, but it adds much to our understanding of Yitzchak.

Who was Yitzchak? He was – at least to the age of 40 – "the son of Avraham, to whom Avraham gave birth", a person of no initiative, no independence who is subject to the actions of others. He is taken to be sacrificed, a wife is chosen for him – even Rivka was asked if she agrees to the marriage, but not Yitzchak. He is nowhere to be found after the death of his mother and there is no reason to even think he was at the funeral.

Yet at the age of 40 all of a sudden it is he who takes a wife, it is Yitzchak – and according to Biblical text he alone – who prays for his barren wife.

While Avraham is alive until Eisav and Yaakov are 15, there is no mention of any interaction between grandparents and grandchildren. It is Yitzchak and Rivka who will raise the next generation[5].

At the same time, like his father before him, Yitzchak journeys towards Egypt during famine, and like his father claims his wife is his sister and digs the same wells his father dug.

The great challenge of generational change is how to follow the ways of the past while remaining relevant in the present so that one can build a great future. Parents and children struggle to find the right balance between tradition and modernity. Stray too far in one direction and run the risk of becoming irrelevant, stray too far the other way and run the risk of losing one's roots.

Yitzchak, the son of a great revolutionary, had to ensure Avraham's ideas would not fizzle out as had apparently happened to Chanoch, Noach and Malkitzedek before him. It was crucial that he be the son of Avraham. But Yitzchak needed to pass on the covenant to Yaakov. For that he needed to forge his own path, to properly nurture his children.

This is and was no easy task and one in which all make mistakes. As the children of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah we must put our best efforts into finding that balance so that we are faithful to our past while remaining relevant in the present.

Footnotes

[1] The fact that he mourned for three years is striking – the Talmud notes that [when a parent dies] “one forgets the dead from the heart after one year” and active mourning is no longer allowed. One thing we learn from this chronological detail is how close Yitzchak must have felt to his mother. For further discussion see here

[2] This is part of Eisav seeking to copy his father.

[3] The revolution of the Torah is how significant a role women play in the covenantal relationship between G-d and the Jewish people. Our matriarchs were of even greater significance than our patriarchs. It is, for example, Sarah who saw to it that Yitzchak would be heir to Avraham and it is Rachel who will herald the redemption.

[4] This can be of great practical significance regarding the laws of abortion which at times (but not all times) are allowed specifically during the first 40 days.

[5] Perhaps it is for this reason that the Torah informs us that Yitzchak was 60 when Eisav and Yaakov were born.

WHAT'S IN OUR JEWISH DNA?

RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN (JNS.org)

I once heard a particular story from a colleague in Johannesburg, who, like me, grew up in Brooklyn, N.Y. He said that his grandfather was once the victim of an attempted mugging on Shabbat. Calmly, he told his attackers that it was his Sabbath and that he had no money for them.

“Come back on Sunday,” he said. They left him in peace. It seems a generation ago, even the muggers had some respect.

How times have changed. And with it, our values.

Today, Israel may boast the most successful and courageous defense force in the world; nevertheless, Jews at heart remain a peace-loving people. We fight for Israel because our lives depend on it, and we dare not let down our guard. But if we had a choice, we would much rather be doing other things with our lives.

And I humbly submit that this peaceful, nonviolent nature is part and parcel of our Jewish DNA. It is genetic, inborn, innate. From where did we derive these characteristics? I believe that it is an inheritance and birthright transmitted down the generations from our earliest forebears. Our ancestors bequeathed us these qualities as part of our natural heredity, molded into our very genetic composition.

By nature, are we fighters or philosophers, trappers or thinkers? If we look at our Torah reading this week, Toldot, we read of the birth and early years of the twin sons of Yitzchak and Rebecca, two boys who could not have been more different. Yaakov and Esav are the ultimate, classical unidentical twins.

As it says in the portion, “And the boys grew up, and Esav was a trapper (and deceiver), a man of the field (a hunter), while Yaakov was honest and straightforward, a dweller in the tents (of Torah).”

Clearly, from the very beginning, Esav was a violent man who, according to commentary, not only hunted animals but also other people's wives. Yaakov was the polar opposite. He was a humble scholar with crime and violence the furthest things from his mind.

For generations, Jews have been blessing their children and grandchildren to emulate the ways of our patriarchs and matriarchs: Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, Ephraim and Menashe.

Can you even imagine a Jewish father blessing his child, “May you grow up to be like Esav?”

We don't aspire to have children who are violent hunters. A Jewish hunter is like a gentile shammash (a synagogue caretaker). How many Jewish boxing champions have we had? Compare that with the staggering number of Jewish Nobel Prize winners!

My question today is whether this is still so? Or are the societal values around us today affecting the mindsets of our younger generation?

In my own childhood, our mischievousness amounted to spraying the chazan with water when he finished reciting geshem, the annual prayer for rain. Or hiding the kohanim's shoes when they went up to recite the priestly

blessings in shul. In summer camp, we “raided” the kitchen when we were hungry at night. We weren't perfect, of course, but our misdemeanors were relatively minor.

And today?

A few years ago, I sadly confess, we experienced an act of deliberate vandalism at our own synagogue. Our own kids had sprayed red paint all over the walls (all that was missing was a swastika). Yes, kids will be kids, but such things were unheard of once upon a time.

Who are our children's heroes today? Who are their role models? The rabbis, scholars, intellectuals and Nobel Prize winners? Or are we living in a time when thugs are being elevated to the status of superheroes? Or when anyone worth valuing has to hold a weapon as opposed to a pen?

I cannot get my head around the fact that Luigi Mangione—who was indicted on 15 charges, including first-degree murder, and who is facing the death penalty for allegedly murdering United Healthcare CEO Brian Thompson in New York City—is being celebrated as a folk hero. Polls reveal that younger Americans are less inclined to view him negatively. To me, this is simply unbelievable! Am I really so old-fashioned?

Do our kids respect the “baddest, meanest and toughest?” Do they worship the Stallones, Schwarzeneggers and Stathams of the world? Have our favorite films become those titled “Rambo,” “The Terminator” and “The Beekeeper”?

I'm not so confident that a pair of muggers would respect Shabbat these days. But I pray that our own children do. Let's make sure the younger set's role models are the Yaakovs of Jewish history and not the Esavs of the world. And may we proudly continue nurturing the higher values embodied in our Jewish birthright and our noble and honorable national character.

THE STRUGGLE

RABBI BEREL WEIN (RabbiWein.com)

The frightening thing about the struggle between Eisav and Yaakov is its apparently doomed inevitability. While yet in the womb of their mother Rivkah, they already find themselves opposed to one another. They are not only two different personalities, physically, emotionally and intellectually, but they represent two diametrically opposed worldviews. The only question that remains is one of accommodating one another. If the Lord created them so differently, their freedom of choice in life is centered on how they will deal with one another. And in that respect, the question of accommodation – of the relationship between the Jewish people and the broader, more numerous and powerful non-Jewish world - remains alive and relevant until our very day.

Eisav varies and wavers in his attitude towards Yaakov. Hatred, jealousy, scapegoating frustration are all present in certain aspects of his behavior patterns towards Yaakov. And yet there is also a grudging admiration and attempts at reconciliation on the part of Eisav. Yaakov is portrayed as reactive towards Eisav with a more passive nature, patiently attempting to wait out the situation and hope that Eisav will calm down and reconcile himself to Yaakov's right of existence - in what Eisav considers to be his exclusive world.

And, the question arises – in reality, the question for all ages – is there room in the world, especially our rapidly shrinking world, for Yaakov and Eisav to coexist peacefully. One would hope so, though history belies this optimistic view of the rivalry between the brothers.

The Torah itself is pretty much noncommittal about the causes for the true source of Eisav's hatred of Yaakov. Even though Yaakov's purchase of the birthright and his subsequent preempting of his father's blessings are ostensibly the cause of Eisav's displeasure with Yaakov, these are only superficialities. The hatred was there from the beginning, from the moment of their conception, even though no incidents between them had occurred.

The Torah just seems to take for granted that this is the way it is going to be. And this accounts to a great degree for the almost traditional Jewish attitude of fatalism regarding the behavior of the non-Jewish world towards the Jews. Rabi Shimon ben Yochai stated in the Talmud that it is a given rule that Eisav hates Yaakov. However, there are other opinions in the Talmud that take a different tack and belie this inevitability of hatred and violence.

After the horrors of the Holocaust were revealed, Jews felt that perhaps Eisav had finally reformed and had seen the evil of the ways of hatred and bigotry. Almost seventy years later we are not so certain about this hopefully sanguine view of Eisav's reconciliation with Yaakov. Though we are certainly less accepting and passive about the situation now than we were a century ago, there are relatively few options left to us as how to deal with the matter.

We should minimize whatever frictions possible but realize that we are dealing with a millennia-old problem that cannot be just wished away or papered over. Faith and fortitude in our own self-worth are the strongest weapons in our arsenal to bring Eisav to reconciliation and harmony.

A TIME TO BE HONEST AND A TIME TO DECEIVE

AVROHOM YAAKOV

This week, we start with focusing on Yitzchak's sons, Esav and Yaakov.

“The boys grew. Esav became an expert who spent his time in the field,

hunting animals and birds. In contrast, Yaakov was a guileless man, and, went to live in the tents [to study Torah].” (25:27)

What does it mean ‘guileless’?

Rashi explains, “one who is not sharp at deceiving”.

However does Rashi (29:12) say that Yaakov told Roche that “he was her father’s brother ... that he meant: if he (Lavan) intends to practice deceit upon me then I am his brother (a match for him) in deception.”

So how does it work that Yaakov could match Lavan, the master of deceit, but yet was not shrewd at cheating?

The Midrash (Koheless Rabbah 7:16) states, “Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish says: Anyone who becomes compassionate when he should be cruel will ultimately become cruel when he should be compassionate.”

The Chozeh of Lublin therefore suggests that as someone who was devoid of guile, Yaakov mastered the appropriate times for being straightforward and the times when deception was called for. He understood that one cannot ‘cookie-cutter’ approach to life. Each scenario must be dealt with on its merits.

Apropos to this explanation, there was a wealthy Chassid of R’ Bunim of Peshischa who was so generous that he even gave away the clothes on his back. R Bunim explained to him that the Torah and halacha impose limits on how much charity one was permitted to give to teach that one needs to know when to give and when not to.

Being guileless does not mean being a simpleton or treating everything in exactly same way. Yaakov understood that being straightforward meant assessing each situation and taking the appropriate action, be it in Torah study or dealing with a Lavan.

To Dig a Well

RABBI YANKI TAUBER (Chabad.org)

To dig a well, you need persistence. Pick a spot and stick with it. Don’t stop boring when you hit a rocky stretch, and you won’t be able to take your work home with you.

To dig a well, you need humility. If you’re one of those creative types who needs to leave a personal imprint on everything he does, find another job. You’re not creating the product—you’re not even manufacturing it. It’s there beneath the surface, ready and waiting. You’re just there to remove the stuff that’s in the way, so that it can well up, fresh and bubbling, of its own accord.

To dig a well, you need faith. Faith that beneath the sand and rock, beneath the slime and grime and dust and dirt, awaits that fresh and bubbling water, waiting for you to cut a path to it. Faith that if you pick a spot and stick with it, set aside your pretensions and simply commit to doing what needs doing, you will eventually hit a vein of fluid life.

Avraham and Yitzchak had much in common, of course. Avraham was the first Jew, and Yitzchak was his heir as the torch-carrier of the creed and morals of monotheism in a pagan world. Each faced similar challenges in the course of his life (decades of childlessness, famine, wife-nabbing, hostile tyrants, renegade sons . . .). But they were also as different as two personalities can be.

Avraham was constantly on the move; Yitzchak stayed put. Avraham was G-d’s salesman, pitching his tent at the crossroads of caravan routes and inviting wayfarers in so that he could teach them and enlighten them. Yitzchak, on the other hand, was the silent, secluded type; he, too, had many disciples, but they were inspired by his piety and commitment rather than his charisma and activism. In the Kabbalah, Avraham personifies the attribute of chessed (benevolence, love), while Yitzchak embodies gevurah (rigor, awe, self-abnegation). In their daily lives, Avraham was a shepherd, Yitzchak a well-digger.

AS JEWS, WE ARE ABRAHAM’S CHILDREN. We traverse the world as G-d’s salesmen, bringing the word and way of G-d to its inhabitants. We care for it as G-d’s shepherds, commanded to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, educate the ignorant and redeem the oppressed. We transform it as G-d’s artists and artisans, charged to remake the human mind and heart, remake society, remake creation.

But even as we journey and explore, even as we preach and teach and give and transform, we are also the children of Yitzchak. We also appreciate that at the core of every individual and every creation lies a pool of pure, life-giving waters. We understand that we do not create goodness, or manufacture it, or even bestow it. The goodness is there; we only unearth it. We are only the well-diggers.

A DOSE OF HOLINESS

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND (Aish.com)

And he inhaled the scent of his garments, and he blessed him. (27:27)

Yitzchak lost his sight in his old age, but his sense of smell was just fine. Yaakov was counting on that. He put on Eisav's garments, brought Yitzchak delicacies and asked for the blessing. Yitzchak "inhaled the scent of his garments" and gave him the blessing. And the rest is history.

The Midrash offers a completely different homiletic interpretation of these words. The word used here for "his garments" is *begadav*. With alternate vowelization, it can be read as *bogdav*, which means his renegades. In other

words, when Yitzchak "inhaled the scent of his renegades," when he sensed prophetically the descendants of Yaakov who would become renegades to the Jewish people, he was inspired to give him the blessings. What exactly does this mean?

Let us consider the renegade the Midrash holds up as an example. His name was Yosef Meshisa, and he was an awful Jew. When the Romans mounted their assault on the Beis Hamikdash, the Holy Temple, this Yosef Meshisa served as their native guide. As a reward, the Roman officer gave him permission to take for himself any of the valuables he wanted. He went into the Heichal and took the golden menorah, but the Roman decided it was too extravagant a treasure for a mere commoner.

"Go back and take something else," the Roman told him.

"I cannot go back in," Yosef Meshisa replied.

"No, you must go back," said the Roman.

"But I simply cannot," said Yosef Meshisa. "Isn't it enough that I defiled the Lord's Temple once? Must I do it again?"

"Aha! What have we here all of a sudden?" said the Roman. "A pious man, no less. Well, I absolutely insist that you go back in."

But Yosef Meshisa would not budge from his resolution. The Roman beat and tortured him mercilessly, but still he refused to go back into the Heichal. In his agony, he cried out, "Woe is me, for I have angered my Creator!" Finally, he died.

What had transformed this renegade Jew into a holy martyr in a matter of minutes? One minute, he was prepared to loot the Beis Hamikdash and carry off the golden menorah, and the next, he allows himself to be tortured to death rather than violate the sanctity of the Heichal. What, asks the Ponovezher Rav, brought about this amazing change?

The answer is simple, says the Ponovezher Rav. Stepping into a holy place transformed him. He may have entered the Heichal with the worst of motives. But once there, he was exposed to the aura of holiness, and he emerged a changed man.

This, according to the Midrash, is what Yitzchak saw in Yaakov's future that convinced him to give him the blessings. He saw that even the lowest of the low among Yaakov's descendants, even the most despicable renegades such as Yosef Meshisa, would have such strong spiritual fortitude that they could be turned around by exposure to holiness. As low as they would fall, they would be one mere step from transformation into righteous people willing to die al kiddush Hashem. This was the lineage that was truly deserving of the blessings.

History has shown us that these kinds of transformations are not limited to the Inner Sanctum of the Beis Hamikdash. In the early 20th century, a Jew named Franz Rosenzweig told his story in a book entitled *The Star of Redemption*.

Franz was a successful author, a respected philosopher and a totally secular Jew. At one point, he was engaged to a gentile woman and was seriously considering baptism. It was during the First World War, and he served as a captain of cavalry in the German army on the Eastern front.

On the night of Yom Kippur, he found himself stationed in a small Polish town. As he made his rounds, he saw the light in the shul and heard the voices of the congregants, and out of curiosity, he stopped in to see what was going on. When he walked out a little while later, he writes, he was a religious Jew, a sincere baal teshuvah. He broke off his engagement to the gentile woman and led a life of observance from that point on.

In Germany of 1915, the idea of a baal teshuvah was virtually unheard of, unlike today when it such a common phenomenon. What brought about his incredible transformation? One thing: exposure to holiness. When he stepped into the shul and experienced the aura of Yom Kippur, he became a different person.

Such is the power of holiness, not just the holiness of the Shechinah in the Beis Hamikdash, but the holiness of just a handful of sincere Jews praying together in a small village shul. They too have the power to change a man forever.

Death Wish

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY (Torah.org)

Esav. He represents so much evil. We know him as the hunter, the ruthless marauder, murderer of Nimrod and stalker of Yaakov. Yet, believe it or not, he had some saving grace. He is even considered a paradigm of virtuous character at least in one aspect of his life honoring parents. The Torah tells us that Yitzchak loved Esav. And Esav loved him back. He respected his father and served him faithfully.

In fact, the Medrash and Zohar talk favorably about the power of Esav’s kibud av, honor of his father. They even deem it greater than that of his brother Yaakov’s. And so Yitzchak requested Esav to “go out to the field and hunt game for me, then make me delicacies such as I love, and I will eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die” (Bereshit 27:3-4).

Yitzchak wanted to confer the blessings to him. Esav won his father’s regard. And even when Esav found out that his brother, Yaakov beat him to the blessings, he did not yell at his father, in the method of modern filial impugnation, “How did you let him do that?!” All he did was “cry out an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, “Bless me too,

Father!” (ibid v.34).

Yitzchak finds some remaining blessing to bestow upon his older son, but the grudge does not evaporate. What troubles me is not the anger of defeat or the desire for revenge, rather the way Esav expressed it. “Now Esav harbored hatred toward Yaakov because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esav thought, “May the days of mourning for my father draw near, then I will kill my brother Yaakov.”

“May the days of mourning for my father draw near” Think about it. How did the love for a father turn into the eager anticipation of his death?

The seventh grade class of the posh Harrington Boy's School, nestled in the luxurious rolling hills of suburbia, was teeming with excitement. The winter had begun, and they were rapidly approaching the beginning of the holiday season. The children had been talking about their wishes and expectations for holiday presents and were telling the class what they were going to get.

Johnny had been promised that if he finished his piano lessons, he'd get a new 800-megahertz computer. Arthur had asked for a real drum set and was promised it on the condition he gets grades of 100 on two consecutive math tests.

Billy had not been so lucky. He had begged his dad for a Harley-Davidson motorcycle, to which his father replied, “Over my dead body!” He settled. If he would write a weekly letter to his uncle in Wichita, he would get a motorized scooter.

The day came and all the kids had the chance to share their expectations with their peers.

“When I get two hundreds in a row, I'm getting a real drum set!” shouted Arthur.

“When I finish piano lessons, I'm getting the latest computer!” exclaimed Johnny. And so it went. Each child announced his goal and the prize that awaited him upon accomplishment.

Finally, Billy swaggered up to the front of the class. “If I write my uncle I'm gonna get a scooter.” He quickly continued, “but that's nothing! 'Cause when my daddy dies, I'm getting a Harley-Davidson motorcycle!”

Passions overrule sanity. They even overtake years of love and commitment. When one is enraged, he can turn against his best friend, his closest ally, and even his own parents! Esav, who spent his first 63 years in undying adulation of his father, changed his focus in a burst of emotion. Now, instead of worrying about his father's fare, he awaited the day of his farewell. All in anticipation of the revenge he would take on Yaakov.

When passions perverse our priorities, and obsessions skew our vision, friends become foes and alliance becomes defiance. In the quest for paranoid revenge, everyone is an enemy even your own parents. But mostly your own self.

News & Views

UN Report Shows ‘Palestinians’ Fatter Than Israelis

DANIEL GREENFIELD (FrontPageMag.com 12-11-2025)

After two years of barraging social media with lies about a famine in Gaza, Hamas propaganda channels are now trying to cover up their obesity by claiming that Israel is making them fat.

One recent Hamas media story clamored that “they’re forcing us to gain weight”, and objected that supermarkets have “shelves overflowing with chocolate, soft drinks, and cigarettes”, along with unhealthy “flour and various types of cheese used in sweets and pizza, in addition to sugar and flour derivatives used in confectionery production.”

An Arab Muslim settler in Gaza who had previously justified the Hamas massacres complained, “I am compelled to consume carbohydrates, processed cheese, and manufactured meat.”

What some are calling the ‘Fatocide’ reflects the reality that there was never a famine in Gaza, but there was a very real obesity problem. Past reports had found high rates of obesity among children and adults in Gaza and a 2019 study found that almost half of adults over the age of 42 had Type 2 Diabetes. Another Gaza report citing Hamas Ministry of Health numbers claimed that 9.6% of the population in Gaza has diabetes and it's the cause of 11.2% deaths.

The ‘Fatocide’ is real and is claiming ‘Palestinian’ lives every day.

A study from a decade ago found that 1 out of every 5 adolescents in Gaza was overweight or obese. Now a new UNICEF study usefully compares obesity rates in Israel and in the so-called ‘Palestinian’ entity areas. If Israel were really starving, oppressing or denying materials to the terrorist occupied territories, then the Israelis should be fatter than the ‘Palestinians’.

And yet the UNICEF report found that in Israel, 23% of 5-9 year olds were fat, but 28% of children in the same age group in ‘Palestine’ were obese. 28% of children aged 10-14 in Israel were fat, but in ‘Palestine’, 33% of children were obese.

Among 15-19 year olds, 19% of Israeli teens were fat, but 32% of ‘Palestinian’ teens were. Notably, while the Israeli teens appeared to be getting in shape before going into the Israeli Army, their counterparts in the

terrorist-occupied territories stayed fat. But then again while you need to be in good shape to be in the infantry, not so much to be a suicide bomber.

While Hamas propagandists accused Israel of a ‘Fatocide’ by making them gain weight with pizza and soda, high obesity rates are actually common among Arab Muslims across the region. Indeed, the UNICEF report revealed that “obesity among school-aged children and adolescents in the Middle East and North Africa doubled since 2000, and is surpassing underweight rates”.

The Global Obesity Observatory (a project of the EU) ranks Israel as 101st in world obesity, but it's sandwiched between Egypt (15th), Jordan (24th), and Syria (36th). This is significant because there is actually no such thing as a ‘Palestinian’ or for that matter a Jordanian, Syrian or Egyptian. These were artificial barriers for the same Arab Muslim colonial population and the Arab Muslims who claim to be ‘Palestinians’ resemble the rest of their neighboring families.

Lebanon, in 60th place, reflects elements of its healthier Christian and secular population.

‘Palestine’ ranks 27th, demonstrating the closeness of its population to Jordan, 24th, since both are populated by the same group of Arab Muslim settlers before being split up by the British.

If ‘Palestine’ were a country, it would be the 27th fattest nation in the world.

And if the childhood obesity rates seem bad, the 38.5% adult obesity rate is even worse.

We were told that the Arab Muslim settlers in Gaza were saving food for their children, but the obesity rates show that the adults in the terrorist territories are fatter than the children.

The nearly 40% obesity rate not only puts ‘Palestine’ far ahead of Israel at 23%, but far ahead of much of the world which receives far less ‘humanitarian’ aid than the UN lavishes on the ‘Palestinians’. While many African nations have obesity rates in the single digits and suffer from actual hunger, fortunes were spent and lives were lost shipping food to Gaza that it didn't need.

Why is there a ‘Fatocide’? One reason is that there is an entire UN agency, UNRWA, dedicated to catering to cities full of Arab Muslims in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and parts of Israel, which, despite having existed for 70 years in some cases, are falsely described as “refugee camps”.

In one of the greatest welfare scams in the world, Arab Muslims living in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon are branded third generation and fourth generation “refugees” rather than immigrants.

And UNRWA is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the ‘Palestinian’ welfare state.

The Biden administration had dispatched \$1.2 billion in only a few years. The EU estimated its own outlay at around \$1.8 billion. Japan promised \$100 million. The UN is asking for \$4 billion for its ‘flash appeal’ for Gaza. Even a fraction of that could have saved actual lives in places with actual famines like Sudan, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Instead, the UN funded another ‘fatocide’. And it's not the first time.

Before faking a famine to bail out Islamic terrorists in Gaza, international agencies and propaganda outlets had faked a famine in Yemen to bail out the Houthi Jihadists. Even as the Houthis went to war against the United States in 2024, the Biden administration went on supplying hundreds of millions of dollars in aid: much of which was taken by the terrorists.

Despite the pictures of starving bony children (actually children with medical conditions) and claims that 85,000 children had starved to death, Yemen's population increased 30%.

Since the famine began, Yemen's population shot up from 30 million to 39 million.

While Yemen's child obesity rates don't top Israel's, except in the 5-9 range, at 27%, 21% and 15% respectively, they're well in excess of anything to be found in a country with an actual famine. Yemen's kids are significantly fatter than those of nearly every African country which have real food shortage problems, not NGO fatocides faked for the cameras. When the biggest problem for 1 in 4 children in the country is obesity, that's not a famine, it's a ‘fatocide’.

Over 60% of ‘Palestinian’ women are obese or overweight. 20% have diabetes. After blaming Israel for a famine that didn't exist, they're now blaming Israel for making them eat chocolate and pizza, drink soda and gorge themselves on all the free food being sent by their victims.

From the pizza place to the ice cream shop, Fatostine will be free. Just not calorie free.

Wikipedia's Antisemitism

DR. YVETTE ALT MILLER (Aish.com 16-11-25)

Wikipedia's co-founder, Jimmy Wales, has declared that an entry on his crowd-sourcing online encyclopedia site is so egregiously anti-Israel that it “fails to meet our high standards and needs immediate attention.” Despite his alarm, over a week has gone by without any change.

Wikipedia operates much like a traditional encyclopedia, providing detailed information about a dizzying array of facts. Its genius lies in allowing virtually anyone to create or edit an entry, add and hone information, and

provide new sources in the form of copious footnotes. According to Wikipedia itself, the site currently features over 7 million entries, and that number is expanding rapidly, by about 15,000 each month. Wikipedia's own guidelines demand that content be "neutral" and present both sides of contentious arguments.

Though adding to the site is open to anyone, Wikipedia editors like Wales can freeze certain pages if they believe they are being abused, contain falsehoods, or contain abusive language. In freezing his entry on the so-called "Gaza genocide," Wales noted it is a "particularly egregious example" of slander masquerading as fact and "requires immediate correction."

The "Gaza genocide" article begins by declaring that the "Gaza genocide is the ongoing, intentional, and systematic destruction of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip carried out by Israel..." It hews closely to the UN's definition of genocide, falsely alleging that Israel is engaging in each and every action categorized as genocide by the UN.

With nearly 500 footnotes – many from highly biased sources such as Al Jazeera and BBC Arabic, which a recent report found parroted Hamas propaganda – the entry is a tsunami of misinformation and hate. Filled with inaccuracies (for example, falsely asserting "Israel's occupation of the Gaza Strip began in 1967" without noting that Israel pulled out of Gaza - abandoning homes, communities, Jewish-owned farms, even uprooting Jewish burial grounds - in 2005), the entry is filled with slanderous claims that have been widely debunked (for instance that 70% of casualties in Gaza were civilians). The entry notes the widespread destruction of hospitals in Gaza, but nowhere says that Hamas battalions operated with impunity within them. It contains salacious claims that Israeli soldiers tortured and murdered civilians - including babies - with sadistic abandon - and cites Hamas (or news outlets that platform Hamas) as its "sources."

This slanderous entry remains unchanged. Worse, Wikipedia's "Gaza genocide" entry is just one of many troubling examples of entries that spread false and harmful slanders about Jews and Israel. A recent Anti-Defamation League (ADL) report found this is no accident: a group of over two dozen hostile editors seems to be engaging in coordinated efforts to make Wikipedia a place that is hostile to Israel and Jews and spreads hatred and lies about the Jewish state.

GROUP OF 30 ANTI-ISRAEL EDITORS

"ADL has found clear evidence that a group of at least 30 editors circumvent Wikipedia's policies in concert to introduce antisemitic narratives, anti-Israel bias, and misleading information," the ADL found in a landmark 2025 report. Examining editor activity over the past ten years, the ADL found that the 30 anti-Israel editors who are working in concert are more than twice as likely as other volunteer editors to alter Wikipedia entries, and are 18 times more likely to talk to each other in Wikipedia editorial forums than other groups of editors.

"The editors appeared to coordinate to change pages related to Israel, Palestine, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, downplaying Palestinian antisemitism, violence, and calls to destroy Israel while foregrounding criticism of Israel." ADL researchers found that these "bad-faith editors" increased their activity following Hamas' deadly October 7, 2023 attacks on Israel, including: "The systematic removal of citations to reputable sources and tandem voting (in discussion forums of Wikipedia editors) to keep content critical of Israel but remove coverage of Palestinian violence and terrorism."

The ADL found examples on Wikipedia's Arabic-language version of "biased and extremist content", including pro-Hamas content.

IRANIAN AND IRISH ANTI-ISRAEL FANATICS

These findings echo an earlier warning by tech writer Ashley Rindsberg, who noted in 2024 that two distinct groups of Wikipedia editors seemed determined to insert anti-Israel, pro-Hamas and pro-Iranian content throughout Wikipedia's platform. He puts the number of bad-faith actors at Wikipedia even higher, at about 40 total.

The first group of anti-Israel editors vandalizing Wikipedia's Israel and Jewish related entries appears to be Iranian. (Wikipedia editors use pseudonyms, though several of these one-word pseudonyms appear to be Iranian names). In early 2024, they were joined by a second, Irish-led group of editors. This second effort was led by Paul Biggar, an Irish tech executive who founded "Tech For Palestine" (TFP), a hard-core advocacy group dedicated to anti-Zionism, three months after Hamas' October 7 attack.

TFP recruited Wikipedia editors on the Discord messaging system. "In the channel, two group leaders, Samira and Samer, coordinated with other members to mass edit a number of (Israel-related) articles. The effort included recruiting volunteers, processing them through formal orientation, troubleshooting issues, and holding remote office hours to problem solve and ideate. The channel's welcome message posed a revealing question: 'Why Wikipedia? It is a widely accessed resource, and its content influences public perception.'" TFP's main point person for Wikipedia edits is a long-time Wikipedia contributor who goes by Ivana, and whose banner on Discord features a red triangle, used since October 7, 2023 as a symbol of Hamas.

Rindsberg notes that these groups' "efforts are remarkably successful. Type 'Zionism' into Wikipedia's search box and, aside from the main article on Zionism... the auto-fill returns: 'Zionism as settler colonialism,' 'Zionism in the Age of Dictators' (a book by a pro-Palestinian Trotskyite), 'Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims,' and 'Racism in Israel.' The aggregate effect of these efforts is a wholesale shift to the language of the Palestine-Israel topic online."

INSIDIOUS ANTI-JEWISH AND ANTI-ISRAEL SLANDERS

The result is that much of Wikipedia is now a cesspool of antisemitism and anti-Israel lies. The examples are too numerous to count. Here are just a few examples.

- Wikipedia now has an entry titled "Jewish Supremacy" which asserts it "is the belief that Jewish people are superior to non-Jews." (There are no comparable entries on "Arab Supremacy" or "Muslim Supremacy" - nor on Buddhist or Hindu Supremacy, despite widespread religious-based strife between Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar and Buddhists and Hindus in Sri Lanka and ongoing violence between Hindus and Muslims in India.)
- An entry on "Israeli Apartheid" falsely asserts that apartheid exists in Israel.
- The entry "Well poisoning" falsely states that Israel poisoned the wells of Arab communities during its 1948 War of Independence, and continues to do so today, echoing age-old antisemitic tropes that Jews poison the wells of non-Jews.
- An entry titled "Palestinian Genocide Accusation" falsely claims that "Since it's foundation in 1948, Israel has been accused of carrying out genocide against Palestinians..." (Shockingly, an entry detailing Hamas' genocidal attack on October 7, 2023 has a more nuanced title: "Allegations of genocide in October 7 attacks.")
- Wikipedia's entry "Al Ahli Arab Hospital Explosion" describes the October 17, 2023 explosion in the hospital, which was found to be the fault of a faulty missile that Palestinian Islamic Jihad was trying to launch into Israel, and which caused heavy casualties. Initial media reports around the world blamed Israel but subsequent analysis by American, British, Canadian, French, and Israeli intelligence services - and media analysis - found that the missile was fired from within Gaza. The entry falsely insinuates that Israel launched the missile, inaccurately claiming: "The cause of the explosion is contested."
- One particularly active Wikipedia editor, who goes by Iskandar323, has changed Wikipedia's entry on "Jews" to remove the "Land of Israel" from a description of how the Jewish people originated. He also altered the article's short summary, which appears on mobile versions. Instead of calling Jews an "Ethnoreligious group and nation from the Levant" to an "Ethnoreligious group and cultural community" with no mention of their origins in the Middle East.
- Iskandar323 has also removed descriptions of Hamas' 1988 founding charter, which calls for the murder of all Jews across the globe as well as the annihilation of Israel, in at least four articles, including Wikipedia's "Hamas" entry. (Instead, the "Hamas" entry states "the 1988 Hamas charter was widely described as antisemitic," without explaining why.)

"SWARMING" WIKIPEDIA

Anti-Israel editors can get away with making major changes to Wikipedia by making so many edits that the site's few professional editors cannot keep up. Rindsberg explains that to "expand his reach, Iskandar... goes on editing rampages.... Last August, he removed 22,000 characters from the article on Amnesty International that were critical of the organization, in one case wholesale deleting a 1,000-word long passage related to criticism of its stance on Israel. On the 'History of Israel' article, Iskandar deleted a paragraph critical of the Iranian government; removed an account of 16th century Jewish immigration to Israel; excised a mention of the Palestinian Mufti of Jerusalem's alliance with Hitler, and made dozens of similar edits - all in a matter of minutes."

Iskandar isn't the only editor to do this. He (or she) and dozens of other editors coordinate their anti-Israel tactics, overwhelming Wikipedia's ability to monitor its entries and ensure the vaunted neutrality that originally made Wikipedia a valuable site.

Spreading Harm

These myriad small, nearly undetectable, yet insidious changes leave us with a seriously degraded Wikipedia - and with antisemitism and anti-Zionism sentiment on the rise.

Wikipedia estimates that it has 500 million unique views each month. It's the first port of call for students, professionals, and casual browsers who want to look up items quickly and easily. That's what makes the present coordinated assault on Jews and Israel so dangerous. With antisemitism at an all-time high across much of the world, we desperately need independent, neutral sources of real information to help us educate ourselves and others. It's incredibly tragic and dangerous that Wikipedia is

being vandalized in this way.

Jimmy Wales is taking a sensible first step by freezing further editing of one inflammatory entry. Yet his actions are merely a drop in the ocean. With millions of entries on Wikipedia, and a dedicated force trying to insert anti-Jewish content, it will take a dedicated army of editors determined to uphold Wikipedia's standards of neutrality and high-quality information to undo the damage.

An Israeli Intelligence Officer's Search for G-d

YEHUDIS LITVAK (Aish.com 18-11-25)

Guy Itzhaki is not the kind of man who startles easily.

A decorated IDF intelligence officer with more than 27 years of service, he spent his career on the front lines of Israel's most shadowed threats. He fought in the Second Lebanon War, exposed Hezbollah tunnels along the northern border, tracked Iranian arms smuggling, and served for two years as assistant to then-Chief of Staff Benny Gantz. He lectured at the International Institute for Counterterrorism and even wrote a book on Hezbollah.

If anyone believed he had seen everything, it was Guy.

But on the morning of October 7th, 2023, something inexplicable jolted him awake at 6:30 a.m. There were no sirens, no alerts, no urgent calls—just a premonition that something was terribly wrong.

Only a few hours earlier, at around 3 a.m., Guy had received a cautious message from the army: intelligence teams were detecting unusual activity inside Gaza, but nothing conclusive. He had asked to be updated if the situation evolved and then went back to sleep. Now, with dawn barely breaking, his instincts told him he could not wait.

Guy understood that this was war—one unlike anything he had witnessed in his decades of service.

He called his deputy who sent an officer to the military headquarters. When the officer sent back images of white Hamas pickup trucks roaming freely through the streets of Sderot, Guy understood that this was war—one unlike anything he had witnessed in his decades of service.

Within an hour, the married father of four daughters was at military headquarters, watching live footage. “I read a lot of history books about the Yom Kippur War,” Guy said in an Aish.com interview, “But this was the first time in my life that I saw a scene from the Yom Kippur War. People were in shock. When you see these incidents on the screen, there are three options: one, that this is a nightmare and you're dreaming, two, that that you are seeing a major IDF training exercise, or three – we messed up!”

In those chaotic early hours, there was much confusion. The scale of the attack, the number of infiltrations, the fate of the border communities—everything was fragmented, contradictory, or unknown. Instinctively, Guy called his wife, Anat, who held her own sensitive role in the army as head of HR for the special operations division. Leaving their four daughters at home with careful instructions to enter the bomb shelter during sirens, she drove straight to her unit.

At the time, Guy served as Head of the Influence Department, a unit created a decade earlier to counter hostile narratives by exposing the truth of how Israel's enemies operate. His team's work was part intelligence, part media, and part psychological warfare—documenting evidence from the battlefield and using it to reveal Hamas's tactics to the world.

“For example,” Guy explained, “if you go inside a kindergarten in Gaza and inside, they have shells, or rifles, or hand grenades, or whatever, they will take pictures or videos of those things, and then we can use them online to show people this is how Hamas is using children as human shields.”

COLLECTING HORRIFIC DATA

Within this department existed a specialized reservist unit responsible for tactical influence operations: collecting physical and visual proof from combat zones—photographs, videos, seized equipment—that could be used to show the world what Israeli soldiers were witnessing firsthand.

Realizing the magnitude of what was unfolding, Guy immediately called the unit commander with a direct order: get to the south and gather everything. Every image, every recording, every discarded weapon or phone—anything that could help piece together the truth.

He had no idea at the time that this decision would turn his unit into the central data hub of the massacre.

Guy's team collected more than five terabytes of footage—raw, devastating material captured by terrorists' GoPro cameras, their phones, and security systems of the kibbutzim. Guy watched every single video.

Over the next four to five months, Guy's team collected more than five terabytes of footage—raw, unfiltered, devastating material captured by terrorists' GoPro cameras, their phones, and security systems in the attacked kibbutzim. His department organized the footage that was eventually shown to Prime Minister Netanyahu, President Biden, Secretary of Defense Austin, world leaders, diplomats, and major international media outlets.

And throughout this period, Guy personally watched every single video.

But the screens—horrific as they were—did not prepare him for the moment he decided to see the aftermath with his own eyes.

HELL ON EARTH

On October 9th, two days after the massacre, Guy, his assistant, and their driver drove to Kfar Aza and then to Kibbutz Be'eri. He had braced himself, he thought. He was a third-generation Holocaust survivor. He had stood inside Nazi death camps five times. He had spent his life studying the darkest corners of human cruelty.

“Nothing prepared me for what I saw.” Stepping into Kfar Aza, Guy felt the axis of his life tilt.

“It wasn't a death camp—that's not quite right. It was hell on earth.”

“It was...” He paused, searching for a word. “It wasn't a death camp—that's not quite right. It was hell on earth.”

Guy recalled, “On Monday morning, it was still burning. Houses were still burning. I remember walking in the streets of Kfar Aza and we have terrorists that are fighting against us in the row next to us. I remember walking inside houses and moving between one body and another. A body of a woman that lies on the washing machine, a body of a dog, a body of her husband, a body of a baby... Just bodies. I remember the road that goes there. I told my driver, ‘Listen, don't look to the side, just drive, straight, because you can see bodies after bodies after bodies.’ I was there a couple of hours, and then I went back.”

Back home that night, the dam broke. Guy burst into tears. “I'm not an emotional guy,” he says. “I'm not used to crying. I was at a point where I needed to break. I needed to release some of my feelings. And since then, I can't sleep at night. I have nightmares. For the first couple of months, I was constantly crying every night.”

The diagnosis came later— Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder—but Guy already knew something inside him had shattered.

His life would begin to change in ways he never anticipated.

TURNING TO G-D

Before the war, Guy had planned on retiring from the army, spending more time with his family, and working on civilian projects. In the six months after October 7th, Guy continued leading the Influence Department through the war's most intense period. But when his successor finally took over, he stepped away from the army for the first time in more than 25 years. He expected a smooth transition into civilian life—a chance to rest, reset, and spend time with his family.

Instead, he walked straight into the emptiness left behind by trauma.

“For the first time in my life, I came back home without my encrypted military phone, without any responsibility, and in the first couple of weeks, I was broken. I couldn't pull myself together. I was in wars before, I was in Gaza, in Lebanon, in the Judea and Samaria area. I was shot at, and I shot at the enemy. I lost friends. This was something else.”

Then, one day, something small but life-altering happened.

Guy opened his closet and sitting on a shelf was a simple bag containing the tallit and tefillin he had received as a wedding gift from his father-in-law. He had barely touched them in years. Guy didn't grow up religious; his wife, Anat, came from a more observant background, but their home life settled into a middle ground—kosher kitchen, Jewish holidays, but no Shabbat observance.

Guy hadn't put on tefillin in years but something drew him to the bag.

“I think G-d saw me at my lowest and helped me get up.”

He didn't know exactly why but he picked up the phone and called his brother-in-law, a rabbi, to ask how to put them on.

Looking back, Guy speaks of that moment with emotion: “I think G-d saw me at my lowest and helped me get up.”

What began as a single act—a quiet, uncertain reaching—became the first step in a spiritual return. As Guy puts it, he felt an urgent need to rebuild meaning. “This world is a corridor to the next,” he said. “As long as I'm in this corridor, I want to become a better person. I want values that are connected to our roots. And I want to let go of the evil I saw.”

So, he began putting on tefillin every morning.

The connection Guy experienced as he began praying and reciting Psalms daily enabled him to rise above his brokenness and slowly return to everyday life. At first, he prayed alone, at home. “I needed a place to myself, with myself, because when you are praying, that's the only time that I have to think, to breathe, to be with yourself.”

Eventually, Guy ventured to the local synagogue. He'd been there before, on Jewish holidays and at Bar Mitzvah celebrations, but he'd never felt connected to the services.

“It was the first time that I came to a synagogue with the feeling of really wanting to be there, to open my eyes and ears, to understand what I'm doing there, to understand how to communicate with myself and how to start a conversation between me and G-d.”

Though he was afraid that he'd be criticized for doing things “wrong,” Guy discovered that the synagogue was a warm and welcoming place. “I found a beautiful community,” he said. “I felt at home.”

In addition to praying, Guy also began reading classic Jewish texts, from Ecclesiastes and the Talmud to The Paths of the Just. “I was looking for the truth, and I found it inside the ancient Jewish books. And one step at a time, I feel I'm in a very different position.”

Guy reflected, “This was the first time in my life as a grown-up that I did

something for myself. Not for the military, not for the country, for myself. It helped me understand more about what I want to achieve, what I'm aiming for. It helped me become a better person, or aim to become a better person, and the only One that can say if I'm a better person or not is G-d.” As Guy learned and connected to Judaism more, he decided to begin keeping Shabbat. This was, and remains, a struggle in many ways. On a practical level, it is challenging for his family and extended family, because he can no longer attend a Friday night dinner that is not within a walking distance. It is also challenging emotionally, because quiet times are difficult for Guy. “When you have PTSD, bad thoughts are looking for a place to get to you.”

He cherishes the extra time with his family. And when they're not available, he leans on books, prayer, and reflection. Slowly, Shabbat is becoming not only a discipline, but a companion. “Shabbat is time for me to arrange my thoughts, to think more, to do less.”

BALANCING FAMILY AND SPIRITUALITY

Spiritual growth does not happen in isolation—it ripples through a family. His wife, Anat, who is processing her own trauma from the war, has been very supportive of Guy's journey.

“My wife is my best friend,” he said simply. And throughout this vulnerable new chapter, that friendship held fast.

“My wife asked me to take it one step at a time, and this is what I'm doing.” Still, Anat had concerns at first. She wondered how his newfound spirituality and observance would affect their home. “She asked me to take it one step at a time, and this is what I'm doing,” he says.

At first, Anat joined him in his explorations only to support him. But slowly, her own interest in Judaism began to grow. Their oldest daughter, now 18, also started expressing curiosity about her roots. Guy didn't push, didn't demand, didn't expect—they each came to the journey in their own way, at their own rhythm.

Whatever direction his family takes, he will embrace it with love. He knows that, no matter what, they are there for each other.

Through it all, Guy continues to build a spiritual life that sustains him. Today he prays three times a day, speaking to G-d throughout the day.

“I feel that we are talking, always,” he says. “I know He's listening. Even when I make mistakes.”

LIVING WITH THE TRAUMA

Guy's anxiety still surfaces in unexpected ways. He becomes tense when his daughters are out late, compulsively checking the clock until he hears the door. He avoids television entirely; even news clips or hostage stories can trigger overwhelming waves of emotion. Sleep still comes in fragments, broken by nightmares.

“There isn't an hour when I stop thinking about what I saw.”

“There isn't an hour when I stop thinking about what I saw,” he admitted. “There isn't a week that I'm not crying.”

Alongside the grief sits a heavy, inexplicable guilt. He wasn't part of the decision-making circle before October 7th, yet he feels personally responsible for what happened—an emotional burden many soldiers and intelligence officers share.

Through all of this, Guy returns again and again to the one place where the pain doesn't swallow him: his connection with G-d.

“Besides my wife and my girls,” he said, “this process with G-d is maybe the best thing I have. It's kept me alive, not physically, but mentally. It gave me meaning, gave answers to my questions. It's the main thing that helps me keep my head above the water.”

Guy says that before the war, he carried “tons of ego” from his years in the military, from the sense of command and capability that defined his life. But the trauma stripped that away. “I thought the story was about me,” he reflects. “Now I understand the story is about me and Him, and about becoming a better person in this world.”

CURRENT PROJECTS

Even as he continues to heal, Guy refuses to let trauma freeze him in place. Ambition still burns in him—not for recognition, but for purpose. “We need to live,” he says. “I want to do good. I want to succeed. I want to help.”

Today, Guy is channeling his decades of intelligence and security experience into new initiatives in Israel and North America. His focus spans security consulting, influence strategy, community protection, and emerging technologies. Above all, he is driven by the desire to strengthen and safeguard Jewish communities worldwide.

He speaks with urgency: “Right now, the Jewish community around the world is in a very weak position. The next ten years are going to be very hard for Jews.”

He wants to use technology and intelligence methods—tools he mastered in the military—to fight antisemitism and reshape public perception. For him, this isn't only strategy; it's personal restitution, a way to transform pain into impact.

To succeed, he believes Jewish communities must think more cohesively. “We need all Jewish communities in every country to unite,” he explained, “to build a shared narrative, a clear message, a coordinated influence strategy. We have to be determined, persuasive, and accurate.”

His vision is practical but bold: a new infrastructure for Jewish resilience, informed by the lessons—especially the failures—of October 7th. Preparedness, he says, begins with humility: “the right team, in the right place, who don't think they know everything.” With that, the IDF—and the Jewish world—can meet the challenges ahead.

Israeli scientists use gene therapy to stop ALS deterioration

DIANA BLETTER (TimesofIsrael.com 17-11-25)

In a groundbreaking study, researchers at Tel Aviv University, leading a large-scale international team of scientists, say they have identified an RNA molecule that can stop the nerve cell damage that causes paralysis in patients with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, ALS.

Now, they hope to use the discovery to help patients with the fatal illness. “When we added a specific RNA molecule to human cells and animal models for ALS, the nerve cells stopped degenerating and even regenerated,” said Prof. Eran Perlson from the Gray Faculty of Medical & Health Sciences and the Sagol School of Neuroscience at Tel Aviv University, speaking to The Times of Israel.

Their study, recently published in the peer-reviewed journal Nature Neuroscience, opens a new avenue for treating the disease.

“We wanted to get to the root of the matter of what causes ALS to enable the development of effective drugs for this incurable disease,” Perlson said. The team used mice that had been genetically modified to serve as a “biological stand-in” for the disease.

The research was led by Dr. Ariel Ionescu, Dr. Lior Ankol, and lab manager Tal Pery Gradus in collaboration with Dr. Amir Dori, Senior Neurologist and Head of the Neuromuscular Disease Unit at Sheba Medical Center. Additional participants included researchers from the Weizmann Institute of Science, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, and research institutions in France, Turkey, and Italy.

ABOUT ALS

ALS, sometimes called Lou Gehrig's disease, is a fatal neurodegenerative condition that affects motor neurons — the nerve cells that control muscle movement. Over time, the disease causes gradual paralysis of all muscles in the body.

Patients typically lose their ability to walk, speak, swallow, and breathe, often becoming completely paralyzed while their cognitive skills remain intact.

“Most patients die within three to five years of diagnosis, due to paralysis of the diaphragm muscles and respiratory failure,” said Perlson.

There are currently some 600 ALS patients in Israel, according to Efrat Carmi, CEO for IsrALS, the Israeli Research Association.

In ALS, the neuromuscular junctions, where nerve fibers meet muscle cells and transmit electrical signals from the brain to the muscles, are disrupted. Perlson stated that the molecular mechanisms underlying this damage had remained unknown until now.

The current study continues research from Perlson's lab about microRNAs, the small molecules that regulate the translation of proteins and play an important role in many other cellular processes.

In an earlier study, Perlson and his team found that a protein called TDP-43 formed toxic clusters at the tip of the nerve, where it meets the muscle.

In healthy bodies, the TDP-43 helps regulate how proteins are made in cells. But in ALS, it becomes unstable. To find out why this happens, the researchers studied tissues from ALS patients, mice that mimic having the disease, and human stem cell cultures.

Their experiments revealed that muscle cells produce tiny RNA molecules called microRNA-126.

The muscle cells then send them in tiny bubbles, called vesicles, across the small gap between nerve and muscle cells.

These microRNAs act like messengers that tell the nerve cells when to stop making TDP-43. Without the microRNA, TDP-43 continues to build up and becomes toxic.

“We discovered that in ALS, the muscle produces a smaller amount of microRNA-126,” said Ionescu. The decrease in this microRNA leads to an increase in the dangerous TDP-43.

The excessive TDP-43 then forms toxic clusters. These clumps attack the mitochondria, the essential molecules inside cells that turn food and oxygen into energy so the cell can work, move, and stay alive.

The damage is so great that it gradually destroys motor neurons, “leaving patients' muscles paralyzed,” Ionescu said.

However, when the researchers added extra microRNA-126 to tissues from ALS patients and to mice with the disease, the process reversed.

Zevik Melamed, the principal investigator at the Laboratory of Molecular and Translational Neuroscience at Hebrew University of Jerusalem's Faculty of Medicine, said the study “suggests that protecting communication between muscles and nerves might be just as important as targeting neurons directly.”

“This is a real shift in how we think about preventing paralysis in ALS,” Melamed, who was not involved in the study, told The Times of Israel in a written comment.

The study can be the basis for gene therapy for ALS, Perlson said. “The next step is taking it to clinical trials,” he said.

Kosher & Halacha Korner

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A Welcome Step Forward

RABBI YAIR HOFFMAN (VINnews.com 18-11-25)

The Orthodox Union’s recent announcement requiring kosher certification for all beers served at OU-supervised establishments and events, effective January 1, 2026, represents a significant and welcome development in the world of kashrus supervision. This policy shift, developed in coordination with the Star-K, OK, and several local kashrus agencies, acknowledges a crucial reality: the food and beverage industry has evolved dramatically, and our kashrus standards must evolve accordingly.

The OU’s reasoning is sound and straightforward. While traditional unflavored beers once consisted of simple, universally kosher ingredients—water, hops, barley, and yeast—the explosion of craft brewing has introduced a bewildering array of flavored varieties, diverse additives, and shared production equipment that can compromise kashrus status. What once could be assumed kosher can no longer be taken for granted.

This policy change deserves strong support, but it also raises an important question: should the very same logic be applied with even greater force to distilled spirits, particularly whiskey, scotch, bourbon, and other barrel-aged liquors? The kashrus concerns surrounding these spirits are not merely comparable to those affecting beer—they are substantially more severe.

THE BARREL PROBLEM: MORE SERIOUS THAN MOST REALIZE

For years, many kashrus agencies have maintained “approved lists” of scotch whiskeys and other spirits that, while not bearing formal certification, were deemed acceptable for consumption. These lists were compiled based on certain assumptions about production methods and the amounts of non-kosher wine absorbed into the wooden barrels used for aging. Unfortunately, recent mechanical engineering research and industry investigation have revealed that these assumptions were incorrect.

The fundamental issue centers on the oak casks used to age premium scotch whiskeys. The vast majority of Scotland’s most respected distilleries age their whiskeys in barrels that previously contained sherry or port wine—wines that are not kosher. These barrels, typically holding 220-250 liters, absorb far more wine into their wooden staves than was previously understood. Rather than the negligible “kdai klipa” (peelable amount) that many poskim assumed, actual measurements demonstrate that each barrel retains approximately twelve liters of absorbed non-kosher wine within its porous oak structure.

To put this in perspective: a 225-liter barrel containing twelve liters of absorbed non-kosher wine means that roughly 5.3% of the barrel’s contents derives from non-kosher wine. This is more than three times the 1.67% threshold (shishim, or one-sixtieth) required for bitul, nullification of a forbidden substance. Even according to the most lenient opinions that require only 16.6% (one-sixth) nullification for wine mixing with other liquids, the absorbed wine in these barrels cannot be considered nullified.

THE HALACHIC FRAMEWORK

There is a fundamental debate between the Shach (YD 98:13) and the Taz (YD 105:1) regarding the halachic concept of kavush, marination. If something is marinated in a non-kosher vessel, what is the formula for how much nullification is needed? Do we need sixty times the amount of the kosher food to the entire vessel, or do we need sixty times the amount of the “peel of the vessel”?

The Shach rules that it is against the entire vessel—even in regard to marination. The Taz rules that only sixty times the volume of the peel is required. Regarding non-kosher wine, however, the Shulchan Aruch (YD 135:13) rules that only sixty times the peel is required.

How does the Shach contend with this ruling? He states (YD 135:33) that the Shulchan Aruch’s ruling is only in regard to a doubt regarding how long the wine was in the barrel. Since non-kosher wine in the post-idolatry world is only a Rabbinic violation, when there is a doubt one may be lenient. But the Shach writes that if it is known with certainty that the wine was in the barrel for twenty-four hours or more, then even according to the Shulchan Aruch one would require sixty times the amount of the entire barrel. The Chochmas Adam (81:11) rules like the Shach and states that only l’tzorech gadol—for a great need—may one be lenient like the Taz’s view.

For some reason, however, many of the current kashrus agencies have been lenient (in terms of their approved lists) in accordance with the Taz and not the Shach. But even according to the lenient view, there is still a problem.

THE PROBLEM EVEN ACCORDING TO THE LENIENT VIEW

The Shulchan Aruch (YD 135:13) seems to write that only kdai klipa (a peelable amount of wood) of the wine absorbs into the barrel. But the assumption that this is an insignificant amount made by kashrus agencies is questionable. Kdai klipa is when the “peel” remains intact when taken off. When dealing with wood, it appears that the kdai klipa is much thicker than when dealing with metal, especially in cases where the previously absorbed wine can physically be seen coming out. The bliyos (absorptions) of wine would not be batel (nullified) into the whiskey, especially since the wine is placed in the barrels specifically to add taste.

According to an article in Applied Thermal Engineering Vol. XXV (pp. 709–718) published in 2005, depending upon the porosity of the wood, the “impregnation front” stops at between the first 4 and 5mm into the inner side in oak casks with 25mm thick staves. But it can and does also absorb further into the other 21 millimeters as well. The article provides mathematical calculations demonstrating how much absorbs into the wood—and it is quite significant.

Additional Complications

Many smaller distilleries engage in a practice called “sloshing”—adding a few bottles of wine into an empty barrel or bourbon barrel until the wine becomes impregnated into the barrel. While regulations prohibit adding more than 2.5 percent of an outside alcohol, after it gets absorbed the barrel appears empty, making detection impossible.

There is another halachic issue that has been employed as a leniency, but this too is questionable. The Shulchan Aruch (YD 134:5) writes that when non-kosher wine falls into water, the non-kosher wine is pogem the water (makes it taste bad) and one only requires bitul b’shishim—one-sixth and not one-sixtieth. Many authorities, such as the Shach (134:21; see also Nekudas HaKesef in Siman 114), are of the view that this applies only to water but not when dealing with another liquid where the wine actually enhances the flavor. Where the wine enhances the flavor, they write that one-sixtieth is required. This accords with the Ramah (YD 114:4) who requires shishim when wine is mixed with apple juice. The Taz (114:4) disagrees and states that we only need bitul in 16.6%. How does the Taz deal with the Ramah in 114:4? He writes that it is simply a quote of the Mordechai’s view.

Rav Moshe Feinstein zt”l (Igros Moshe YD Vol. I, Siman 62) ruled like the Taz, but said that a baal nefesh—someone concerned about his soul—should be stringent and follow the view that 1.67% is required. Rav Feinstein also discussed the possibility that the view of the Nekudas HaKesef may be stringent only when the other liquid is not sharp, but if it is sharp, then even the Nekudas HaKesef may be lenient up to 16.6 percent.

THE “IKRO KACH” DEBATE

There is a debate between the Rashba and the Noda BiYehuda of which most people are unaware. It pertains to the issue of bitul b’shishim, something becoming nullified in a sixty-to-one ratio.

The debate concerns “ikro kach”—an item that is normally part of the process of production. If this is the case, the concept of bitul of the non-kosher ingredient does not apply according to the Rashba. The Noda BiYehuda (Mahadura Tanina #56), however, permits it.

What is the practice? The custom is to follow the Rashba (see Bais Yoseph YD 134 and Magen Avraham OC 446) when we have a kosher infrastructure in place, but when we are new to an area, we follow the lenient view of the Noda BiYehuda (Melamed L’ho’il Vol. II #29).

Many people relied on the Noda BiYehuda’s view in the 1940s and 1950s. Nowadays, however, this view is generally not relied upon because the United States is considered an area where we have an infrastructure. (This question was posed to the gedolim of Europe by Rav Geffen of Atlanta, Georgia, in regard to Coca-Cola. I discussed the issue and the Melamed L’ho’il with Rav Yisroel Belsky zt”l in the late 1980s, who said even back then that America is considered as having an infrastructure.) Few people rely on the Noda BiYehuda’s view in the United States nowadays, except perhaps in regard to non-kosher wine casks.

THE INFRASTRUCTURE EXISTS

The debate until now centered around the kashrus of placing something non-kosher that is less than shishim. Here, however, there is more than shishim in the sherry casks. This fundamentally changes the calculation.

There are enough whiskeys and tequilas produced under reliable supervision that America can certainly be considered as having a kosher infrastructure for spirits. Numerous whiskeys, bourbons, and tequilas are produced under hashgachah from the Star-K, OU, OK, and other respected agencies.

The Star-K is notably vigilant regarding the provenance of oak casks and barrels, requiring full documentation as to origin. Distilleries producing bourbon finishes with tequila, fresh-fill Cabernet, or fresh-fill Pinot Noir all require rigorous supervision to ensure kashrus integrity.

Beyond Beer: A Comprehensive Approach

The OU’s new beer policy recognizes that we can no longer rely on assumptions when manufacturing processes have become complex and opaque. The same principle demands application to distilled spirits. While the OU, Star-K, and other agencies maintain that certain scotch whiskeys

remain on “approved” lists, the time appears to have come to reconsider these classifications in light of the engineering data regarding barrel absorption.

The discovery that sherry casks contain absorbed non-kosher wine exceeding the shishim threshold fundamentally changes the calculation. This is not a matter of stringency for its own sake or creating unnecessary restrictions. Rather, it is about accurately applying halacha to the facts as they actually exist now, not as they were once assumed to be.

Moreover, the kashrus community’s response to the OU’s beer announcement has been universally positive, with widespread recognition that modern production realities necessitate vigilance. If this reasoning is accepted for beer—where the kashrus concerns are primarily about additives and shared equipment—how much more so should it be applied to spirits, where the core production process itself involves prolonged aging in barrels that absorbed substantial quantities of non-kosher wine?

THE PATH FORWARD

The Orthodox Union and its partner agencies have demonstrated admirable leadership in addressing beer kashrus comprehensively. It would be beneficial if these organizations extended the same rigorous approach to all alcoholic beverages. The policy could be clear and straightforward: beginning on a specified date, only spirits bearing reliable kosher certification should be permitted at certified establishments and events.

Such a policy would benefit the community in multiple ways. First and foremost, it would ensure that kashrus standards reflect both halachic requirements and factual realities. Second, it would create market pressure encouraging more distilleries to seek proper supervision, thereby expanding consumer choice. Third, it would eliminate the confusion created by different agencies maintaining varying “approved” lists based on different assumptions and different levels of leniency.

The transition doesn’t have to be difficult. Major brands like Jim Beam, Wild Turkey, and numerous craft distillers already operate under hashgachah. The OU itself maintains a database of nearly 1,000 certified breweries for beer; similar resources exist for spirits. With adequate notice—perhaps implementing the policy by Pesach 2026—caterers, venues, and consumers would have ample time to adjust their purchasing and planning.

A QUESTION FOR OUR RABBONIM

A psak halacha for the community at large properly belongs to our poskim and kashrus agencies to decide not to internet articles nor on the other hand to pressures from wealthy baalei batim. True, we all love our whiskey sours (including this author- hope my wife and sister aren’t reading). However, given the engineering evidence regarding barrel absorption and the ready availability of certified alternatives, the question deserves serious reconsideration: Should we continue to rely on leniencies that were formulated based on factual assumptions that have proven incorrect?

The OU’s beer announcement represents a watershed moment in kashrus policy—an acknowledgment that changing realities demand updated standards. The logic is compelling, the precedent is established, and the infrastructure exists. The natural next step would be to extend this same rigorous approach across all categories of alcoholic beverages.

As we move forward into 2026 with heightened standards for beer, this presents an opportunity to comprehensively address kashrus concerns in all alcoholic products. The Orthodox Union, Star-K, OK, and their partner agencies have shown that coordinated action is possible. It would be beneficial if these organizations built upon the momentum of their beer initiative to provide the Torah-observant community with clear, rigorous, and consistent standards for all alcoholic beverages.

The question should be posed to our rabbonim, our poskim, and our kashrus agencies. But the engineering data and halachic considerations appear to point toward a clear conclusion: in an era when certified spirits are readily available, the time may have come to move beyond “approved” lists and embrace comprehensive certification as the standard.

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