

# זכרון יצחק

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

## PINCHAS 5786

### Opinions? Pro or Con?

RABBI BARUCH EPSTEIN (Chabad.org)

Here's a tough challenge if you're a columnist: write an article about opinions.

Not about your opinion on a particular subject, but about opinions as a whole, about having something to say about something/anything/everything.

It's a double-edged sword. If you think opinions are a good idea, then everyone can be a blogger and you're out of a vocation; write negatively about all the "judgmental, talk-too-much knuckleheads" out there, and you're cast as a judgmental, talk-too-much knucklehead.

With risks acknowledged, here goes.

This week's Torah reading, Pinchas, begins with Phinehas' noble lineage: He was "the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the Priest." But at the end of last week's reading, just a few verses earlier, the Torah had already stated that Phinehas was "the son of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest." Why the repetition now? And why the necessity to state who his grandfather was, when normally the Torah suffices with identifying a person by stating his name and that of his father?

Aaron the Priest was known as a loving, peaceful person: "a lover of peace, a pursuer of peace, one who loves the creatures and draws them close to Torah" (Ethics 1:12). By (again) identifying Phinehas as his grandson, the Torah intimates that Phinehas' heroic act of killing a Jewish prince in the act of cohabitation with a Moabite woman was motivated by his love for the Jewish people, who were being imperiled by the moral collapse all around them (hmmm, where have I heard that before – governors, presidents – but I digress). The Torah links Phinehas' act with his family tradition of love for the Jewish people.

This linkage was necessary because despite the clear justification of Phinehas' act, as well as the resulting cessation of the plague that killed 24,000 Jews, there were still critics. No one could reasonably argue that Phinehas had done wrong, so they did the next easiest thing: they criticized his motives. Everyone became Freud and pontificated upon Phinehas' subconscious motivation, the deep-seated rage he had as a result of his disturbed lineage.

They laid out a simple and convincing argument: Phinehas was a bloodthirsty hooligan seeking a legal outlet for his thuggery. He had inherited this from his maternal grandfather, Jethro, who, prior to his conversion to Judaism, had fattened cattle just to slaughter them in idolatrous ritual, a particularly cold-blooded behavior that undoubtedly scarred his progeny for all time.

And so the Torah assures us that Phinehas was motivated solely by his love for the Jewish people, a love he inherited from his paternal grandfather, Aaron, the lover and pursuer of peace.

Well, how were the people supposed to know which grandfather had influenced Phinehas? They had the right idea; he had in fact acted upon inborn impulses. It was a 50-50 shot as to which grandfather was the source of this action, and they guessed wrong. Oops. Was that so terrible?

In fact, they could contend that their presumption was the more logical one, as it is based on the principle that a son's soul has a special connection

to that of his mother, and a daughter to that of her father (See Hayom Yom 28 Iyar). And thus, if Phinehas acted on impulses he inherited from a grandfather, it is more likely that it was his maternal grandfather, Jethro, who influenced him. So what did they do wrong?

Herein lays the insight. Opinion can run in two directions. It can be developed through serious thought or it can be the salve for failure (a.k.a. sour grapes). Confronted with Phinehas' heroism, the people felt challenged: Why hadn't any of them stepped up as Phinehas had? Why hadn't they objected and acted with bravery?

And so the excuses began: "Me? I'm a lover, not a fighter." Torah's clarification intends not only to affirm Phinehas' legacy, but to quiet the critics, not because their "math" was wrong, but because they were wrong! They were wrong to criticize the motives of heroism as an excuse for their inaction. An opinion designed to excuse failure is the chatter of a "judgmental, talk too much knucklehead." All their bright ideas and clever deductions aside, they were out of line. Not for their opinion, but for having an opinion at all when they should have simply been grateful and awed.

So next time you think you think something—think again. Where is your opinion coming from?

That's my opinion!

### A Double-Edged Sword

RABBI NAFTALI REICH (Torah.org)

This past week I had the delight and privilege of participating in the bris of our newest grandson, born to my son Eli and Tzivie in Jerusalem. It was also an opportunity to bask for a few days in the unique luminance and inspiration that only radiates in 'Yerushalayim shel Zahav'.

One of the less comforting realities that hit me during this trip was the ever-widening gap that separates the secular and religious factions. Never before have the fundamental differences between the two groups appeared so irreconcilable. The rhetoric has gone well beyond the line of what might have been acceptable-even to hardened Sabras.

As a deeply religious Jew I strongly believe that the time-honored status quo must be maintained in order to preserve a sense of national peace and unity. But how can there be peace when such sharp differences separate the different camps? How can there be dialogue and respect when there is no room for compromise? Yet how can one respect those who seek to compromise our most cherished life values?

It is a question that all those engaged in outreach and kiruv must constantly grapple with. How can one reach out with warmth, respect and acceptance to Jews of all backgrounds and affiliations without compromising one's own core values and beliefs?

Perhaps an insight from the opening Chapter of this week's Torah portion will provide us with some guidance on this thorny issue. Society today extols the value of pluralism and multiculturalism. Liberals preach that all cultures are morally equal and therefore must be equally respected. Only then can world peace be achieved, or so the dogma goes.

Undoubtedly, peace requires that we respect each other's human rights, a key one affirming the right to practice what you believe. But a distinction must be drawn between respecting other individuals and respecting their life choices.

At the beginning of the Parsha, we find Pinchas zealously standing up to the wave of debauchery that had swept away sections of the Jewish people.

With a dagger he stabbed to death the two main perpetrators, Zimri and Kozbi, and succeeded in halting a Divine plague that was poised to strike the nation. For his courage and self-sacrifice, Pinchas was awarded by Hashem with an everlasting covenant of peace.

How striking! Pinchas' zealotry that outwardly appeared to be the antithesis of shalom, of accommodation, was in fact a life-sustaining force that elicited Hashem's covenant of eternal peace.

This is symbolized by the unusual way the word "peace," shalom, is written in the Torah at this juncture. The Mesoratic text (handed down from generation to generation all the way from Sinai) teaches us that the letter vav in this word is split in the middle. It is thus written almost like two yuds placed one on top of the other.

How strange. Why the deviation from the way the letter vav is customarily written, as one unbroken stroke?

The commentaries teach us that the letter vav, which is used as a prefix to mean "and," implies chibur, connectedness. Vav never stands alone; it is always attached as a prefix to another word.

In the same vein, the semantic definition of vav is "a hook" because it is the symbol of connectivity and uninterrupted flow. We mortals stand upright like the letter vav, reflecting our divine mission to connect heaven and earth, becoming the conduit of Hashem's bountiful goodness on this earth while reflecting His heavenly values in our day-to-day lives.

It would seem that peace, too, requires an uninterrupted flow of reciprocity and unqualified acceptance of one another. Yet true peace can also only be established by a separation denoting the boundaries and stark difference between holy and profane, true and false, light and darkness.

Advocating for social unity, pluralism and rainbow coalitions might provide the sensation and look of peaceful coexistence. It cannot build genuine and lasting harmony. The ultimate objective of each individual's allegiance is the preservation of their own personal liberties and freedom. It is only when we highlight the clear distinctions that define us that we can achieve true peace. By blurring evil and good we end up with a murky mess that drains life of authentic meaning and joy.

Only when we clearly separate ourselves from elements that disturb our Divine connection can we aspire to achieve a spiritual flow of connectivity that bonds us for eternity to our Creator.

### **Pinchas and the Copper Snake**

RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR (Ohr.edu)

"Therefore, I (Hashem) say, 'Behold! I am giving him (Pinchas) My covenant of peace'" (25:12)

The name Pinchas is related to the word nechoshet, which means copper. In the Torah, copper connotes resilience, judgment and healing. The altar was made of copper, signifying endurance and the capacity to withstand fire. And its ability to bring spiritual healing through the korbanot, the sacrifices. But the connection goes deeper.

In last week's Torah portion of Chukat, Hashem brought a plague of fiery serpents (nechashim serafim). Moshe was commanded by Hashem to construct a serpent of copper — a nachash nechoshet — and place it on a pole. Whoever looked upon it would be healed. (Bamidbar 21:9)

Why a serpent? Why copper?

Chazal, in Rosh Hashanah 29a, explain: "Was it the actually the serpent that killed or was it actually the serpent that gave life? Rather, when Israel looked upward and subjugated their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they were healed." The nachash nechoshet was not a magical cure, but a symbol to direct the heart to spiritual rectification.

Now, enter Pinchas. When Zimri publicly violated the sanctity of Israel, causing a Divine plague to erupt, Pinchas rose up with a spear and halted the sin — just as the nachash nechoshet halted the plague. Both involve symbols of judgment (nachash, nechoshet, a spear). And both lead not to destruction, but to healing.

But here's the irony: the nachash, the snake, is a Biblical symbol of sin, temptation and death — from the Garden of Eden onward. And yet, Hashem uses this very symbol as a conduit for healing. Likewise, Pinchas' act, which on the surface is violent and harsh — becomes the source of peace and Divine favor.

This teaches a powerful principle:

"From the wound itself comes the healing."

In our deeper Torah sources, the nachash represents din — strict judgment. But when judgment is wielded by someone l'shem shamayim, as was with Moshe or Pinchas, it becomes sweetened, transformed, into a vessel of rachamim (mercy).

Thus, Pinchas, like the copper snake, channels Divine judgment to restore

spiritual order — not for punishment, but for purification.

The Midrash and Zohar go further. Both the snake and Pinchas are agents of paradox. They bring healing through confrontation, peace through zeal, life through death. And because of this, Pinchas becomes Eliyahu, the one who brings ultimate peace; the one who "Returns the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to their fathers..." (Malachi 3:24)

### **Human Degradation**

RABBI SHRAGA SIMMONS (Aish.com)

This week's Parsha picks up the story of Moav's scheme to entice the Jewish people into immorality. Not only do the Moabite women seduce the Jewish men, but they also lure them into worshipping the Moabite national idol, "Baal Peor." As a result, a plague breaks out and 24,000 Jews die.

To understand the dynamics of this story, we need to look back in time 400 years to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. As the cities are being ravaged by rains of sulfur-and-fire, Avraham's nephew Lot escapes into the hills with his two daughters. The daughters look out upon the devastation, and presume they are the only survivors left on earth. That would make their father the only living male. So in order to propagate the human species, they initiate incestuous relations with their father. The two daughters get Lot drunk and ... nine months later, each gives birth to a baby boy. (Bereshit 19:30-38)

The younger daughter named her son "Ben-Ami," which means "son of my people." She felt uncomfortable about the incest, and modestly concealed the baby's lineage.

The older daughter also felt uncomfortable about the incest, but she dealt with it in the much different way. She figured that by presenting incest as a valid alternative lifestyle, that would totally justify her behavior and she'd have nothing to feel guilty about! In other words, "I can do whatever I want ... and who are you to tell me otherwise?!"

So she brazenly named her son "Moav," which means "from my father." She made "incest" the child's name!

In this week's Parsha, it is the descendants of this boy, Moav, who go on to entice the Jewish men to sexual immorality and worship of the idol Baal Peor.

What is unique about this idol? The Talmud (Sanhedrin 60b) describes various modes of idolatrous worship: Some are served by offering human sacrifice; others are served by tossing stones at the idol. But the method of serving Baal Peor is most unusual — it is worshipped through defecation.

What is the significance of this mode of worship?

The Talmud says that humans share three primary functions with animals: eating, procreation, and waste elimination.

The Jewish approach to life is to uplift the physical by connecting it to the spiritual. We sanctify the act of eating by consuming only kosher food. We sanctify the act of sex by doing so in the context of a loving, committed marital relationship. And we sanctify the act of waste elimination by saying a blessing to thank G-d for the miraculous functioning of the human body.

The G-dless society does quite the opposite: Eating is glorified as an act of physical indulgence, with prizes to the winner of the hot dog-eating contest. Sex is likewise glorified as physical indulgence, objectified in advertising, film, and across the internet.

Given this basic ideology, the fact that Moav glorified the physical act of defecation should not be such a surprise.

ONCE ON A VISIT TO ROME, I stopped by to see the ancient Coliseum, where a tour guide was speaking to a group of Americans. "This architectural and engineering marvel seated 50,000 people," he said. "The main event each day was gladiatorial combat. Sometimes man against man, sometimes man against beast. But always a fight to the death. The Coliseum could even be filled with water in order to stage mock naval battles. The smell of blood was so thick that the Coliseum featured giant fountains which sprayed perfume into the air."

At which point, a man wearing an Oakland Raiders hat and Mike Tyson t-shirt turned to his friend wearing a "Terminator" t-shirt and said, "Oh my — how barbaric!"

Our society is slipping further away and there is virtually no end to how bad it can get. When one entertainer pushes the envelope of acceptability, the next has to push it further. It becomes a competition — not for who can most uplift the human condition. But for who can be the most gross and extreme. That, too, is an endeavour which takes creativity, ingenuity and skill. And in the '90s, Madonna, Dennis Rodman, or Geraldo Rivera are all amply rewarded in society with fame and fortune.

Yet on the other hand, who's to say it's wrong? In a Godless society, one person's disgust is simply another's entertainment.

IN THIS WEEK'S PARSHA, the Moabite women are in the midst of seducing the Jewish men, and a plague breaks out. It is a physical manifestation of a social disease. So one Jew, Pinchas, stands up and thrusts his spear into an

offending couple. The plague stops. And God awards Pinchas the world's first Peace Prize.

God testifies that for that time and place, Pinchas' approach was correct. Today of course, a much more diplomatic approach is needed. But the need to react is there all the same.

What can we do? Be a role model. Stand up for what's right. Put your foot down in your school, your neighbourhood, and your own home. Be willing to say: "That behaviour is wrong and it is ruining lives."

What if a suicidal cult moved in next door. Would you object? Or is "everything okay for consenting adults?"

Decide which side of the fence you are on. And then do something about it.

## WHO ARE WE?

AVROHOM YAAKOV

In this week's parsha, the Torah recounts the census of Bnei Yisrael, beginning with the tribe of Reuven: "Reuven, Yisrael's firstborn; the descendants of Reuven are..." (Bamidbar 26:5). Rashi makes a striking comment: the Torah includes the Divine Name within the family names (for example, ha'Chanochi, ha'Pallu'i) to testify to the purity of Jewish lineage. This, Rashi explains, responds to a cynical accusation—that if the Egyptians controlled the Jewish men, they must also have compromised their families. Yet, as the Kli Yakar points out, why is this emphasized now, at the second census, rather than earlier, right after the Exodus when such claims would seemingly have been more relevant?

His answer is both sharp and sobering: it is precisely now—after the sin with the Midianite women—that such accusations gain traction. When Bnei Yisrael themselves stumble in matters of moral discipline, it creates an opening for critics to say, "Perhaps this is who they really are." Therefore, at this vulnerable moment, Hashem affirms their deeper identity by attaching His Name to them—declaring that their essence remains pure despite their failures.

This message resonates powerfully in today's cultural climate, especially in an era shaped by "cancel culture" and aspects of what is often called "wokeness." In many circles today, individuals are judged quickly and definitively based on a mistake—sometimes a single moment, taken out of context, becomes the defining feature of a person's identity. There is little room for growth, complexity, or return. A person can be "cancelled," their entire character reduced to their worst action.

The Kli Yakar's insight speaks directly into this reality. The Torah acknowledges that actions matter—mistakes have consequences, and behavior can either strengthen or weaken how others perceive us. Bnei Yisrael's actions with Midian created a disgrace that opened them to criticism. But at the same time, Hashem insists on a deeper truth: a person—or a people—cannot be reduced to their lowest moment. Identity is more profound than a single failure.

This creates a delicate balance.

On one hand, the Torah rejects the idea that we can ignore wrongdoing. Actions have meaning, and we are responsible for them. Moral integrity matters, and we must strive to live in a way that reflects our values. In this sense, there is an element of truth in modern calls for accountability—behavior should not be dismissed lightly.

On the other hand, the Torah equally rejects the harsh finality of cancellation. Growth, teshuvah, and redemption are fundamental principles of Torah life. Hashem Himself "refuses to cancel" His people, even when they falter. By attaching His Name to Bnei Yisrael at this moment, He affirms their worth and their capacity to rise again.

The lesson is twofold:

First, regarding how we see others: we must resist the instinct to define people solely by their failures. While accountability is necessary, it must be paired with compassion and the belief in growth. People are not static—they can learn, change, and rebuild.

Second, regarding how we see ourselves: we must take responsibility for our actions, recognizing that what we do shapes how our values are perceived. At the same time, we must not fall into despair or self-definition through failure. Our identity runs deeper—we carry a "Divine Name" within us, a *TIO* of goodness that no mistake can erase.

In a world that often swings between excuse and condemnation, the Torah offers a more balanced, elevated path: hold actions accountable, but never lose sight of the person behind them.

Ultimately, this parsha teaches that while we are judged by what we do, we are defined by something greater—and our task is to live in a way that reveals that inner truth to the world.

## Would You Do Anything For Your Child?

RABBI NAFTALI SILBERBERG (Chabad.org)

What is the legacy we are bequeathing to our children? Will their core values reflect our own? Will we receive nachas from them? What more can we do to encourage our children to proceed on the proper path? No parent is immune from these troublesome thoughts. This week's Torah portion offers some insight into this all-important issue.

The division of the Land of Israel amongst the Israelite families was imminent. Zelophehad's daughters approached Moshe with their grievance: "Our father died in the desert... as a consequence of his own sin, and he had no sons. Why should our father's name be eliminated from his family because he had no son? Give us a portion along with our father's brothers."

When Moshe conveyed their complaint to G-d, he was informed that they were indeed correct, and the daughters of Zelophehad received a portion in the Land together with the rest of their tribe.

Who was Zelophehad, the father of these courageous women? And what sin did he commit which cost him his life? The Talmud (Shabbos 96a) cites two opinions regarding his identity: Rabbi Akiva maintains that Zelophehad was the "mekoshesh," the individual who was executed for gathering wood in the public domain on Shabbat (Bamidbar 15:32-6) while Rabbi Judah ben Betaira contends that Zelophehad was a member of the "ma'apilim," the ill-fated group which tried to "go it alone" to Canaan after it was decreed that the generation would perish in the desert. This entire group was massacred by the Amalekites and Canaanites (14:40-5).

Interestingly, whether Zelophehad was the mekoshesh or one of the ma'apilim, he died for a noble cause. The Sages explain that – strange as this may sound – the mekoshesh desecrated the Shabbat "for the sake of Heaven." After the generation was condemned to spend the rest of their days in the desert, many Israelites mistakenly assumed that being banned from entering the Holy Land meant that they were no longer G-d's holy nation, and their mitzvot or transgressions were of no consequence anymore. To dispel this erroneous assumption, the mekoshesh deliberately committed a capital crime to demonstrate through his death that their actions were still significant. The mekoshesh died because of his love for his fellow Jews.

The ma'apilim died because of their love for the Holy Land. Their love was so intense that it blinded their senses causing them to disregard Moshe's stern admonition that their mission was not sanctioned by G-d and would not succeed.

"The apple doesn't fall far from the tree." Zelophehad's altruistic action struck a chord within his daughters. They, too, were consumed with a love for the Land of Israel, and were willing to do whatever necessary to realize their dream of owning a parcel of its holy soil. Note that the episodes involving the mekoshesh and the ma'apilim occurred in the second year after the Exodus, while Zelophehad's daughters registered their complaint approximately 38 years later. Many years after his death, Zelophehad's legacy was alive and well; his offspring continuing where he left off.

The lesson is plain: If we want our children to share our values, our values cannot remain in the realm of theory—they must be translated into actions. Only if we make the tough decisions demanded by our principles can we hope to have an impact on our children.

Do we love our children enough to be ourselves what we want them to be?

## Elevating Actions

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY (Torah.org)

This week, Moshe teaches us the laws of inheritance. He actually needs Heavenly guidance to teach the laws, as he forgot them. And even though inheritance focuses primarily on male transmission, the laws of inheritance were actually taught because of the request of five women who brought a legitimate complaint to Moshe. The Torah tells us: The daughters of Tzela'fchad, son of Hopher, son of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Manasseh, of the family of Manasseh son of Joseph drew near — and these are the names of his daughters – Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah and they stood before Moshe, before Elazar the Kohen, and before the leaders and the entire assembly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, saying "Our father died in the Wilderness, but he was not among the assembly that was gathering against Hashem in the assembly of Korach, but he died of his own sin; and he had no son. Why should the name of our father be omitted from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father's brothers. And Moshe brought their claim close to Hashem. (27:1-5)

Many commentators discuss the expression, And Moshe brought their claim close before Hashem. Noting the fact that Moshe was unable to answer on the spur of the moment, Rashi comments that this was payback of sorts for

Moshe's prior announcement (back in Parshas Yisro) to the Children of Israel to bring the small matters to lower judges, while he would adjudicate any difficult questions. In the case of Tzelafchad's daughters' query he was not able to answer on his own, rather he needed a Heavenly consultation. But the expression, and Moshe brought their claim before Hashem, seems to tell us more. It does not say, and Moshe asked Hashem what to do. In fact, the Torah uses an expression *vayakrev* which means he brought close. And in that vein, what does the Torah mean by saying that Moshe brought their claim close to Hashem.

*After the passing of the previous Satmar Rebbe, Rabbi Yoel Teitlebaum, his successor the Sigeter Rebbe, came to Monsey to pay his respects to my revered grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, who at the time was the oldest Rosh Yeshiva of the Lithuanian Yeshiva world. Along with the rebbe came a significant group of his Chassidim who clung to the newly appointed seer, and were very curious to experience this first encounter between the Chassidic leader and the renowned Lithuanian sage.*

*The Chassidim piled into the house and began pushing to the front of the table. My grandfather, who was accustomed to orderly conduct, asked that the Chassidim be seated as well. He mentioned that there were folding chairs in his basement.*

*One by one, each of the Chasidim brought up a chair from the basement, unfolded it, and sat down. After watching this scene repeat itself, Rav Yaakov could not contain himself.*

When somebody carries a chair from the basement and then sits on it, all he is is a shlepper. But if each of you would bring a chair for someone else, then you become elevated. Instead of shleppers you become ba'alei chessed, kindhearted men who are helping each other! With almost the same action, you are transformed from chair-haulers into holy people who sweat on behalf of their friend! Let us bring our actions away from ourselves and closer to Hashem!

One of the greatest attributes of a spiritual leader is to view the actions of his flock in a holy light. Rav Nachum Yisrael of Lipna explains that Moshe did not view the daughters of Tzelafchad's request as one of mere monetary or territorial request. Instead, he viewed it as a spiritual one. Thus, he brought their claim close to Hashem. Moshe took their actions not as selfish real estate related desires, but rather as a spiritual quest to have their father's inheritance perpetuated through a share in the Holy Land.

And none other than Hashem Himself confirmed his assumption! Hashem confirms the claim, The daughters of Tzelafchad's speak properly (ibid v. 7). The true sign of a Torah leader is to either see the spirituality in the actions of his flock, or to make the minor adjustments that will ensure that otherwise mundane actions become holy ones.

## **Moving On**

RABBI JAY KELMAN (TorahInMotion.org)

"And Moshe did as G-d had commanded and he took Yehoshua and stood him before Elazar Hakohen and before the people" (27:22). Moshe's role as leader is coming to an end. His fervent desire to enter the land of Israel is to be denied. "G-d said to Moshe, climb the Avarim Mountain where you will be able to see the land that I am giving to the Israelites" (27:12). Yet despite his personal disappointment it is he who approaches G-d asking that a new leader for the people be chosen.

Yet there is more than a tinge of sadness. Moshe, as fathers are wont to do, was hoping that his son would be appointed as his successor (see Rashi 27:15). Just as Aaron was blessed that his son Elazar was to succeed him as Kohen Gadol so too did Moshe expect his own son to succeed him. But such was not to be. The leadership would move outside of the family. Moshe being forced to anoint Yehoshua as he was standing next to his nephew Elazar must have been doubly painful, highlighting the contrast of his own sons and that of his nephew. No wonder Rashi (27:15) comments that Moshe demonstrated "the praise of the righteous who leave their desires and involve themselves in the needs of the community".

This failure of Moshe's son to be of leadership material could help explain the differing attitudes of the brothers towards their death. We see nary a word from Aaron about his impending demise, and for good reason. "They (Moshe, Aaron and Elazar) went up the Hor Mountain in the presence of the entire community. Moshe divested Aaron of his vestments and placed them on his son Elazar" (20:27-28). In light of the tragic deaths of Aarons two oldest sons, Aaron is comforted with the knowledge that his third son will be appointed his successor. Aaron could thus go to his death quietly and peacefully.

Moshe on the other hand argues repeatedly to be let into the land of Israel, going so far as to blame the Jewish people for his death in the desert; "G-d

also displayed anger at me because of you and He said: You too will not enter the land" (Devarim 1:37). He would not accept his fate and only stopped pleading to be allowed to enter the land after G-d got angry with him; "G-d said to me Enough! Do not speak to me anymore about this" (Devarim 3:26).

While no doubt Aaron would have liked, no less than his brother, to enter the land, he was blessed to see his children carrying on his legacy. Moshe on the other hand would see no such *nachat*. His death would mark the end of his line and that was a most painful reality, one he fought until the end.

It is not coincidental that Moshe's successor is chosen in parshat Pinchas. The contrast of the grandchildren of Moshe and Aaron could not be more stark. "Pinchas the son of Elazar the son of Aaron was the one who zealously took up My cause...I have given him My covenant of peace" (25:11-12). It was the actions of Aaron's grandson that saved thousands of lives, turning back G-d's anger at the rampant idolatry and sexual immorality displayed by the Jewish people. The mention of Pinchas's grandfather Aaron is quite unusual in Biblical identification where generally only the father is mentioned. Pinchas in his own unique way (one we should not emulate), is the heir to his grandfather's legacy, that of "a lover of peace and seeker of peace".

Moshe's grandsons are nowhere mentioned in the Chumash. They are tragically mentioned (see Rashi Shoftim 19:30) for their roles as "priests to the tribe of Dan" who were guardians of the "statue of Micha". Moshe would have nothing in common with his grandchildren. How sad!

Like many a great leader Moshe was not fully cognizant of his greatness - "and Moshe did not know that the skin of his face had become luminous when G-d had spoken to him" (Shemot 34:29). After all Moshe "knew G-d face to face" (Devarim 34:10) and his humility may have led him to downplay his uniqueness. Yet "no other prophet like Moshe has arisen in Israel". While Moshe's biological children may have been wanting, he was blessed with millions of children. "And you shall teach your children - these are your students". We, each and every member of the Jewish people, are the true children of Moshe. May we merit to bring honour to his legacy.

## **Not Moshe's' Son**

RABBI RON JAWARY (Aish.com)

"Moses placed his hands on Yehoshua" (27:22). One of the signs of a great leader is the ability to do what is best for his people, not what is best for himself or his family.

Rashi explains that as Moshe approached the end of his life, he hoped that one of his sons would succeed him as the leader of the Jewish nation. G-d, however, had different plans and told him that Yehoshua would be the next leader.

Interestingly, Moshe immediately accepted the decision and, rather than appointing Yehoshua with inner resentment and ill will, he showered Yehoshua with blessings, going far beyond what G-d had asked him to do. True leadership involves the recognition that it is less important who does the job than getting the job done properly.

# *News & Views*

## **UN helps spread false claims about terrorists labelled as journalists**

MIKE WAGENHEIM (JNS.org 29-6-26)

As the Committee to Protect Journalists conducts a full review of its database after Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad identified some people listed as slain journalists as members of their terror groups, Israel's U.N. ambassador Danny Danon said the misidentification of terrorists reflects a broader pattern of the United Nations accepting allegations against Israel without sufficient scrutiny.

"A claim is made against Israel. The U.N. repeats it, the world condemns it, then the truth comes out," Danon told the U.N. Security Council on Monday during its monthly meeting on the Israeli-Palestinian file. "No apology, no correction, no retraction. They move on. Israel will not."

Holding up a photograph of Mohammed Naser Abu Huwaidi, who was killed in Gaza in late 2023, Danon noted that Audrey Azoulay, director-general of the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, publicly condemned his death, identifying him as a journalist. Earlier this year, Palestinian Islamic Jihad listed Abu Huwaidi among its members killed during the war.

"UNESCO's condemnation was public. Its correction? Still missing," Danon said.

Danon also criticized New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani for saying in a speech last week that Israel had killed Al Jazeera journalist Ahmed Wishah. Citing previously released footage, Danon said Wishah was "armed in the streets of Gaza" and described him as "a sniper in Hamas' military wing." Israel has released video and photographs that it says show Wishah operating as a Hamas terrorist.

"This is the pattern," the Israeli envoy said. "Hamas makes a claim, the NGO ecosystem repeats it, a U.N. report rubber-stamps it, the world's media broadcasts it and Israel is condemned before the facts are even checked."

Danon also pointed to the October 2024 Israeli strike that killed Mohammed Abu Itiwi, an employee of the U.N. Relief and Works Agency. At the time, U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres referred to Abu Itiwi as "another one of our UNRWA colleagues."

"But who was that colleague?" Danon asked. "A Hamas Nukhba commander. A terrorist involved in the Oct. 7 massacre near Re'im. UNRWA worker or a terrorist? Again, you tell us."

### **The New Irrelevance of Objective Facts and Rational Thought**

ERIC LEVINE (GateStoneInstitute.org 25-6-26)

Two of my professors at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies in 1981, were P.J. Vatikiotis and Dr. Abbas Kelidar. They were among academia's greatest minds on the Middle East. Vatikiotis is considered by many to be one of the most important and influential thinkers and writers about Islam and the Arabs. No one was his equal when it came to Egypt.

My most important and informative interactions, however, were with my classmates from the U.K., Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, Libya, and Israel.

With the exception of some of the British students, the Israelis, and a woman from Iran whose family escaped just before the fall of the Shah, I was completely ostracized. These children of the 1980's Arab and Persian Middle East, assumed I was a spy. The only question was whether it was for the CIA or Mossad. They actually told me that was why they would not associate with me. What other possible reason could explain the presence of an American Jew at SOAS?

There was another reason, however: They feared being outed by their fellow students.

It was an open secret that the Iraqi and Iranian governments designated students from those countries to act as "monitors" to spy on their classmates. Inappropriate associations or public statements could result in a student's being recalled to Baghdad or Tehran.

Cavorting with an American Jew simply did not look good on one's permanent record.

The pressure to self-police one's speech and conduct was not limited to the students.

Dr. Kelidar was an opponent of Saddam Hussein. When I asked him why he did not speak out more publicly, he replied that he had a father in Baghdad, and worried that an "accident" might befall his father if he spoke up.

My biggest epiphany, however, came at the beginning of the school year, when an Iraqi and an Iranian student faced off for student body president, at the height of the Iran-Iraq War.

To say they despised one another is not doing their hatreds justice. They could not agree on the weather, the time of day, even the color of their shirts. There was one thing though about which they could agree: Israel was responsible for starting the war between their countries as well as its high death tolls.

They agreed that the Mossad had provided Saddam with false intelligence about Iran's ill-equipped and unprepared army. There was also agreement that the intelligence had convinced Hussein to attack Iran. Similarly, they both stated that Israeli intelligence had given the Iranians misleading intelligence about Iraq's war strategy.

What remained unexplained was why either government would listen to anything Israel said. Both considered Israel an enemy and both sought Israel's destruction.

It was at that moment I saw that to these people, objective facts and rational thought were irrelevant. They seemed driven solely by the blind hate at the core of their respective religious and political dogmas. They appeared to believe whatever they were told without question – no matter how bizarre and outrageous – because they wanted to believe it.

In short, my classmates and the cultures from which they came genuinely believed that Israelis and Jews around the world, were evil, calculating, and manipulative no matter how illogical and divorced from reality the accusation was.

I thought to myself how remarkable that I lived in a country where the free exchange of ideas was encouraged and facts, reason, and logic were valued tools of persuasion.

Today, sadly, American political discourse today looks more like the 1980 SOAS student body presidential election than the Lincoln-Douglass debates. At a small recent dinner, my wife and I were out to dinner with another couple when the conversation turned to the Middle East. We all lamented the lack of support for Israel among people 18-35 and agreed that it was in large part due to the failure of our schools to teach history.

At that moment, a woman at the next table who had apparently been listening to our conversation began shouting: "Don't discuss religion or politics. This is a democracy, don't discuss religion or politics." Of course, she totally missed the inherent illogic of her assertion. Apparently, she believed that since this is a democracy, she was free to tell us what we were allowed to discuss in a public setting. Our freedom of speech ended when she disagreed with us.

She accused us of being in the IDF, bombing hospitals, murdering children, and training dogs to copulate with prisoners. She then chimed in with, "How about a two-state solution?"

As we attempted to reason with her, she made sure to tell us that she was "an educated woman." Imagine if she were not.

Like my former Iraqi and Iranian classmates, she believed her blood libels because she wanted to believe them. She seemed prepared to accept these claims on blind faith.

This kind of talk, sadly, is what passes for political discourse today. Objective facts, rational thought, and mutual respect seem to be vestiges of the past.

The current Democratic Party's embrace of antisemites and anti-Israel rhetoric among candidates from coast to coast should come as no surprise. Those candidates are working hard across the country to win the votes of people like the lady at the next table. Perhaps, she is simply an older version of the keffiyeh-wearers who have been protesting on college campuses and in the streets of America's cities since the Hamas massacre on October 7, 2023.

Perhaps this woman's behavior explains why Democrats from all over the country are flocking to Maine to support a nazi-tattooed, avowed communist, who manhandles women, minimizes rape, texts sexual pictures of himself to women who are not his wife, brags about pleasuring himself in porta-potties, and espouses antisemitic tropes as if he is reciting the alphabet. Objective facts seem to mean nothing to these voters.

All that matters is rage.

It seems that there is nothing that this candidate for the US Senate, Graham Platner can do that would cause his party to reject his candidacy.

This willing blindness to objective facts and logical thought explains why Democratic Senate candidate Abdul As-Sayed leads in primary polls in Michigan. He has explicitly directed his staff not to comment on the death of the Ayatollah Khamanei or to be critical of the late cleric for fear of offending Michigan voters. He defends the antisemitic rhetoric of far-left streamer and influencer, Hasan Piker. He "struggles" with the question of whether the Jewish state of Israel has a right to exist.

Objective facts seem to mean nothing; fact-free tropes now seem to be the "opiates of the masses."

Supposed "moderates" such as Congressman Seth Moulton from Massachusetts will not take any money from AIPAC (a/k/a "The Jewish Lobby"), because it is too supportive of Israel.

Objective facts, rational thought, and the presumption of innocence appear to be luxuries some Americans and their elected officials have decided they cannot afford. There is no candidate too extreme or divorced from reality whom they will not endorse so long as they hate President Donald Trump, Israel, and the Jews. Among these Americans, with few notable exceptions, those hatreds alone make these candidates worthy of support.

There are leaders of both major parties who appear to reject objective facts and rational thought. Instead, they embrace, anger, hate, and, it seems, any narrative, no matter how false. That evidently, is their strategy to retake both houses of Congress and eventually the White House.

The far-right wing of the Republican Party is the mirror image of the irrational hate of the Democrats' far-left wing of the party.

It is like listening to my former Iraqi and Iranian classmates.

### **Once again, a supposedly damning UN Commission report on Israel lacks basic evidence**

GARY COHEN (Jewishnews.co.uk 26-6-26)

The UN is at it again. One more supposedly "independent" inquiry into Israel. This time the Commission Of Inquiry concludes that "the evidence

shows that Palestinian children have been deliberately targeted and killed by the Israeli security forces,” resulting in “genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.”

To borrow a phrase from the UN Secretary General, this report “did not appear in a vacuum”. It is simply the latest product of the UN’s permanent Commission of Inquiry into Israel, a unique, open-ended investigation created specifically for the Jewish state alone. Other conflicts, wars, dictatorships, crimes and atrocities can be investigated and concluded. Israel alone requires a commission with no end.

Yet, strip away the legalese, the diplomatic jargon and the accusation is simple enough. Israel is intentionally murdering Palestinian children. Or so the UN would have you believe.

That accusation has a name.

For centuries Jews have been accused of deliberately murdering Christian children to use their blood for religious rituals. The lie became known as the Blood Libel. It portrayed Jews as uniquely evil, barbaric and deserving of hatred. Today the accusation is directed not at scattered Jewish communities but at the Jewish state. The language has been updated. The Jewish state is now the Jew among the nations .

If you are going to accuse a liberal democracy, or any country for that matter, of intentionally murdering children, you better come with evidence. Credible, verifiable, independently corroborated evidence. Hard evidence that substantiates such serious accusations.

This report fails to do that across the board.

Instead, it substitutes allegation for evidence, inference for proof and conclusions for facts. Take almost any serious allegation in the report and the same question presents itself. Where is the evidence?

That’s the central weakness running through this report.

The report accuses Israel of intentionally targeting children. Fine. Where is the evidence? Children are dead. That is a fact. As terrible and tragic as that undoubtedly is, that children have been killed does not prove they were intentionally targeted.

Again, and again the report reaches conclusions without producing evidence capable of substantiating its claims.

One example illustrates the problem perfectly.

At the press conference launching the report, Commission Chair Justice Srinivasan Muralidhar told the world’s media that a breastfeeding baby had been shot through the head by an Israeli quadcopter, leaving the child permanently paralysed.

That’s a horrendous allegation, one of the worst alleged crimes mentioned in the report.

If you’re going to tell the world that an Israeli quadcopter deliberately shot a breastfeeding baby, you had better produce the evidence to support it. Where is the forensic evidence? Where is the evidence identifying the platform? Where is the evidence identifying the operator? Where is the evidence proving intent?

How did the Commission establish that it was an Israeli quadcopter that shot the infant? Did the commission identify the operator? How did it conclude the operator intentionally targeted a breastfeeding infant? What evidence established what the operator could actually see, or not? According to reports, the mother and baby were inside a tent. An accusation that grotesque deserves far more than the Commission simply telling us it has reached that conclusion.

The same problem runs through the Commission’s reliance on medical testimony.

The Commission relies heavily on doctors describing the injuries they treated. Their expertise as doctors is not in question. Their evidence proves that children were shot and killed. It does not prove who fired the shots, from where they were fired, what the shooter could see, whether Hamas fighters were operating nearby, whether there was crossfire or, most importantly, what the shooter’s intent was. Those are the very questions the Commission had to answer before accusing Israel of deliberately targeting children. Instead, it repeatedly moves from describing horrific injuries to concluding criminal intent without producing evidence that substantiates that leap.

The report identifies Israeli military units as the perpetrators of specific crimes. How were those units identified? What evidence links those units to those incidents? Where any operational records were examined? What, if any intelligence was relied upon? Is there any independent corroboration that exists? Again, such specific allegations demand more than conjecture.

Moreover, the Commission’s version of the battlefield bears little resemblance to reality and strips it of all context.

Reading it, you could easily conclude that hospitals simply treated patients, schools simply educated children and residential neighbourhoods simply housed civilians until Israel arrived. Hamas becomes almost incidental, when in reality Hamas built the battlefield. It spent years embedding itself inside civilian infrastructure, constructing an extensive tunnel network beneath urban areas and operating from civilian locations protected under the laws of armed conflict. Examining the IDF’s operations and their adherence to international law, questioning the level of civilian casualties are wholly legitimate. Pretending Hamas did not deliberately militarise civilian areas is not.

Context is not an inconvenience. It is the key to events.

Remove Hamas from the equation and every strike looks like an attack on civilians. Restore Hamas to the story and the legal and operational picture becomes immeasurably more complex. Any serious inquiry should wrestle with that complexity. This report appears determined to ignore it altogether.

Then there are the commissioners themselves.

The UN calls them independent.

Chris Sidoti has served on the Commission since its creation in 2021. In response to criticism of the Commission, he said accusations of antisemitism were being thrown around “like rice at a wedding.”

Miloon Kothari questioned why Israel should even remain a member of the United Nations and referred to the “Jewish lobby” controlling social media, remarks that prompted condemnation from numerous governments before he apologised.

Navi Pillay defended Kothari, saying his comments had been taken out of context. She chaired the Commission for almost four years and oversaw the earlier reports on which this report now relies, including one accusing Israel of genocide, with the same lack of hard evidence.

The current Chair, Justice Srinivasan Muralidhar, has inherited that Commission, that mandate and those earlier findings.

So how independent are they really? In reality, they are all long standing fixtures and integral players in the Human rights council and UN system.

Then there are the sources.

The number of footnotes grows. The amount of independent evidence doesn’t necessarily grow with it. The hundreds of footnotes are meant to convey a simple message. This report is backed by an overwhelming body of evidence.

Start following those footnotes and the picture becomes rather less impressive. A UN report cites an NGO report. The NGO report cites an earlier UN report. A later UN report then cites the NGO report as supporting evidence. Another NGO cites both. Before long, the same allegation has been spun around the system often enough, that it looks like multiple independent sources confirming the same fact. It isn’t! Time and time again, it’s the same allegation circulating through the same organisations until repetition is presented as corroboration.

It’s the evidential equivalent of making a photocopy of a photocopy of a photocopy, then claiming the last copy is the original document.

And what of the inconvenient truths, conveniently ignored as they would sit uneasily beside the report’s central accusation.

Throughout the war, Israel facilitated medical evacuations from Gaza under WHO arrangements, including the evacuation of wounded children and cancer patients for treatment abroad. In March 2025, for example, the UAE confirmed that 81 wounded people and cancer patients, around half of them children, were evacuated from Gaza for medical treatment.

Israel also coordinated the WHO and UNICEF polio vaccination campaign, which reached well over 600,000 children.

None of this answers every criticism of Israel’s conduct. None of it proves every military action was lawful. It does, however, sit very uneasily alongside the Commission’s allegation that Israel is pursuing a policy of intentionally murdering Palestinian children. States looking to murder children, or for that matter commit genocide, are not known to facilitate the evacuation of sick children, coordinate mass vaccination programmes or enable life-saving medical treatment for the very population they are supposedly trying to destroy.

If the United Nations is going to accuse the world’s only Jewish state of intentionally murdering children, it carries an equally heavy obligation to substantiate that accusation with evidence that can withstand the closest scrutiny.

In short, this report does not meet that standard. It presents conclusions with certainty, but too often leaves the question, where is the evidence?

This report should concern far more than those concerned with Israel and

the Palestinians.

It is the latest rotten product of a wholly compromised permanent UN Commission created for one country and one country alone. It accuses the world's only Jewish state of the gravest crimes imaginable, yet, repeatedly fails to produce evidence that substantiates accusations of such extraordinary gravity.

That is not a footnote. It goes to the heart of the report.

Justice is not served by lowering the evidential bar because the accused is Israel. It is not served by recycling allegations through the same institutional ecosystem until repetition is mistaken for corroboration. It is not served by expecting the world to accept the harshest conclusions without sufficient evidence.

This report fails on all accounts. It is one more hate-filled catalogue of unsubstantiated assertions, conjecture, falsehood and slander.

Just like its previous reports, the commission did not set out to investigate events in Gaza. It set out to confirm and justify its predetermined verdict and to continue the demonisation and delegitimization of the Jewish state.

Along with the double standards applied to Israel, the report makes a mockery of international law and justice. It confirms the wholly compromised and corrupt nature of the Human Rights Council and of the UN itself. It points to a virus of hatred infecting the world body, and ultimately brings into question the both the credibility and the very purpose of the UN.

### **Israel should rethink its approach to the United Nations**

ASHER FREDMAN, ADI SCHWARTZ (Jpost.com 30-6-26)

The UN Human Rights Council will soon adopt another set of resolutions targeting Israel and accusing the Jewish State of some of the most severe crimes known to the international community. These will join the nearly 75 resolutions and condemnations already adopted by UN bodies against Israel since Hamas began the October 7 massacre.

It may be tempting to dismiss these votes as mere rhetoric. In fact, however, such resolutions and the reports and investigations that undergird them do not remain confined to the halls of the UN.

They are increasingly used to fuel the use of legal systems against Israel and the IDF, promote corporate blacklists and arms embargoes, and advance efforts to convince future policymakers that Israel is uniquely evil.

The UN has become perhaps the central engine of the global campaign to delegitimize and demonize Israel. A recent Misgav Institute for National Security report that we co-authored mapped more than 30 UN bodies, entities, commissions, and mechanisms that contribute to this campaign.

Some of these UN bodies and mechanisms were created explicitly to advance the Palestinian narrative. Others operate under broad mandates involving women's rights, children, housing, or climate, yet repeatedly use their platforms and resources to condemn Israel and portray it as antithetical to universal values.

This is not a collection of disconnected bureaucratic failures. It is an integrated machine. One UN body converts a baseless allegation into a purported finding.

A second cites that finding in a resolution. A third uses it to justify a blacklist, boycott campaign, or legal measure. A fourth disseminates the accusation, now carrying the imprimatur of the United Nations, to governments, media outlets, and universities around the world.

That is how libels become policy.

It is important to note that the UN does not merely target Israel. It also undermines the vital interests of the United States and the entire free world.

Under the UN's one-country, one-vote system, democratic states are routinely outnumbered by blocs that include authoritarian governments, radical regimes, and countries dependent on Chinese economic and political support. For example, the "G77 and China" bloc includes 134 countries, which constitute nearly 70% of UN member states.

This gives Beijing enormous influence over numerous UN forums and votes that determine budgets, appointments, resolutions, investigative mechanisms, and institutional priorities.

China uses that influence to shield itself from scrutiny, promote its strategic interests, and undermine US positions on issues such as sanctions, migration, nuclear deterrence, and Taiwan.

THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION has begun to depart from the traditional American approach, which viewed US participation in the UN as vital to American global leadership. It increasingly recognizes that the United States should participate in and fund international organizations only when doing so serves American interests.

Israel should seize this opportunity to work with the United States, other

partners, and like-minded states to dismantle and defund the UN infrastructure that enables these anti-Israel and anti-Western campaigns. In parallel, it should encourage the creation of better alternatives for international coordination and cooperation.

Israel should urge the United States to lead a policy of maximum disengagement from UN bodies that undermine American and allied interests, and to end funding for institutions that advance anti-American agendas, promote economic and legal warfare against Israel, or provide platforms to regimes that violate human rights on a massive scale.

Countries unwilling to go so far as to support full defunding of the UN should at least make their funding conditional on deep reforms, including the cancellation of mandates and mechanisms that blatantly discriminate against Israel, whitewash terror, or undermine the interests of democracies and moderate states.

Countries opposed to the UN's vast institutionalized machinery of anti-Israel demonization can also reduce their funding in a manner proportional to the percentage of UN budgets dedicated to the delegitimization of the Jewish State.

Israel should also do all it can to bring about the rapid closure of UN bodies that support or enable terror. The UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), by providing salaries and material support to Hamas members and promoting the myth that Palestinians will "return" en masse to Israel, plays a central role in perpetuating the conflict. A key condition for creating a better future for Gaza must be the complete and total dismantlement of UNRWA.

Similarly, Israel should insist that, following the end of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon's (UNIFIL) mandate, no similar body be established in its place.

UNIFIL received billions of dollars while Hezbollah built one of the world's largest terrorist armies under its nose. Indeed, the recent US-facilitated Israel-Lebanon framework agreement, like the Abraham Accords before it, shows that American-led diplomatic initiatives can often produce far better outcomes than UN processes and paradigms.

The UN may have been created with worthy aspirations 80 years ago. But it has failed in its primary goal of preserving peace and security, has become a tool through which China and other American adversaries undermine Western interests, and has established itself as a principal legitimizer of the global campaign against Israel.

This is not merely a public-relations problem. It is a national security threat.

Israel, the United States, and other democratic allies should confront it accordingly: weaken the institutions that fuel delegitimization, deny them the resources to continue, and build more effective alternatives in their place.

### **We owe the Jews of the 1930s an apology**

STEVE ROSENBERG (JNS.org 26-6-26)

For most of my life, I looked back at the Jews of the 1930s with a question I could never quite answer: Why didn't they see it?

Why didn't they recognize what was unfolding around them? Why did so many continue believing that reason would ultimately prevail, that institutions would protect them, that the political rhetoric wasn't meant literally or that the hatred would eventually burn itself out?

Those questions become harder to ask with confidence when we look honestly at the world today.

Perhaps we owe the Jews of the 1930s an apology.

Perhaps they saw far more than we ever gave them credit for. Perhaps they understood exactly what was happening but found themselves trapped by institutions they trusted, political coalitions they had spent generations building and a natural human reluctance to believe that civilized societies could unravel as quickly as they eventually did.

That possibility should make every Jew stop and think.

History rarely repeats itself exactly, but it often rhymes with unsettling precision. The slogans change. The technology changes. The politics change. But human nature changes very little. Every generation convinces itself that it is more enlightened than the one before it; yet every generation eventually discovers that prejudice has an extraordinary ability to reinvent itself while insisting it is something entirely different.

Today's antisemitism rarely introduces itself honestly. It often disguises itself as activism, social justice, anti-colonialism, academic theory or political purity. It changes vocabulary without changing intent. Hatred has always been remarkably adaptable. It learns the language of the moment because it makes it easier to recruit people who would never knowingly associate themselves with antisemitism.

That is what makes this moment so dangerous.

There are candidates seeking public office who have been trafficking in antisemitic rhetoric or repeatedly associating themselves with those who

do. There are elected officials who cannot bring themselves to condemn antisemitism with the same clarity they demand on virtually every other form of hatred. There are universities where Jewish students increasingly question whether they can openly express their identity without becoming targets. There are institutions that seem more comfortable explaining antisemitism than confronting it.

None of this should feel normal.

Yet one of the most troubling aspects of this moment is not what antisemites are doing. History teaches us that antisemites will always exist.

The more difficult question is why so many Jews continue struggling to acknowledge what is directly in front of them. Too many remain emotionally invested in political movements, ideological coalitions or institutions that have changed dramatically while their own assumptions have not.

Loyalty is an admirable quality until it becomes blindness.

Many American Jews spent decades helping build institutions dedicated to civil rights, education, philanthropy and social progress. That history deserves respect. Their contributions helped strengthen American society in countless ways. The problem is that some of those same institutions no longer consistently return that loyalty. Coalitions evolve. Priorities change. New ideological frameworks emerge. Relationships that once felt reciprocal sometimes become transactional or disappear altogether.

Recognizing that reality is not betrayal. Pretending it isn't happening may be.

One of the hardest things for any individual or community to do is to admit that a strategy that once worked no longer does. Success creates habits. Habits become assumptions. Assumptions become doctrine. Eventually, people defend the strategy long after the conditions that made it successful have disappeared. That is not wisdom. It is inertia.

There is also a profound difference between tolerance and appeasement. Judaism has always valued dialogue, learning and engagement with people who see the world differently. Those values remain strengths. They become weakness only when dialogue replaces judgment or when engagement becomes an excuse to ignore conduct that should never be excused. Extending goodwill does not require suspending common sense.

The most painful lesson of Jewish history is not simply that antisemitism exists. The painful lesson is how often intelligent, accomplished, and well-intentioned people convince themselves that obvious warning signs were temporary, exaggerated or someone else's problem. Like every generation, we tell ourselves that this time is different.

None of this is an argument for fear. It is an argument for clarity. Jewish history should produce confidence, resilience and a willingness to see the world as it is, rather than as we wish it were. The Jewish people have survived because they adapted, learned, rebuilt and refused to surrender their identity, even when circumstances demanded extraordinary courage.

If we truly want to honor the Jews of the 1930s, then we should stop asking why they failed to recognize the danger and start asking whether we are willing to recognize our own. We should examine our assumptions with the same honesty that we expect when studying history. We should measure people and institutions by what they do, not merely by what they say about themselves.

Perhaps the apology we owe is not for judging the Jews of the 1930s too harshly. Perhaps it is for assuming we would have done better.

History has a way of humbling that kind of certainty. The question facing the Jewish community today is not whether we know enough about the past. The question is whether we are willing to learn from it while there is still time to do so.

# Kosher & Halacha Korner

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

## **A Day in the Life of a Foodservice Mashgiach**

RABBI YAKOV TEICHMAN (OKKosher.org)

When you sit down to enjoy a meal at a restaurant or pick up a quick bite from your favorite takeout spot, you likely consider the menu, the flavors, and perhaps the ambiance—but have you ever paused to think about what goes on behind the scenes to ensure your food is kosher? In today's fast-paced society, convenience is key, and ready-to-eat (RTE) meals have become the norm. Instead of buying individual ingredients to prepare a

salad at home, many opt for a pre-packaged salad bowl, complete with dressing and toppings. But what does it take to make that meal kosher?

Enter the unsung hero of kosher food service—the mashgiach. What exactly does a mashgiach do each day in a restaurant or commissary kitchen? Or is he merely *משגיח מן החלונות*—watching from the windows?

The mashgiach is often the first to arrive at a kosher restaurant, quite literally holding the keys to the operation. Without the mashgiach, the staff has absolutely no access to the kitchen or food storage! His punctuality ensures

that the staff can begin their work on time and that food preparation proceeds without delay. Upon arrival, the mashgiach checks that all areas which were locked overnight—such as refrigerators, freezers, stoves, gas lines, and outside storage units—are secure and in proper order. He then clocks in to both the ~ and the restaurant, confirming that he is present and on time for his shift. There are multiple crucial kashrus zones at a restaurant that are under the purview of the mashgiach—Bishul Yisroel, Pas Yisroel, ingredient receiving, outgoing deliveries, and produce inspection.

### BISHUL YISROEL

For most foods to be kosher, they must be Bishul Yisroel (cooked by a Jew). The exact foods that require Bishul Yisroel are extensive and beyond the scope of this article, but generally, they are foods that cannot be eaten raw and are fit to be served at a king's table.

One of the jobs of the mashgiach is to ensure these foods are Bishul Yisroel. There is a well-known machlokes between the Mechaber and Rema regarding the extent of the Jew's involvement in the cooking process. According to the Mechaber, the Jew must actually put the food on the fire. This is referred to as Bishul Beis Yosef and is the common practice among Sephardim. The Rema posits that it's enough for the Jew to turn on the fire, and this is the ruling followed by Ashkenazim. If food that requires Bishul Yisroel is not made with Jewish involvement, it is Halachically non-kosher, and keilim need to be kashered.

Most kosher certification agencies follow the Halachic rulings of the Rema, while offering the option to request Bishul Beis Yosef for those who require it. To ensure all food meets the required standard of Bishul Yisroel, one of the mashgiach's first responsibilities each day is to ignite all cooking equipment—stove burners, ovens, and soup kettles. He must be the one to initiate the cooking process.

Throughout the day, he also monitors these fires to ensure they remain lit. For instance, if a soup pot boils over and extinguishes the flame, it is the mashgiach—not the kitchen staff—who must reignite it. While employees are

trained never to turn on the flames themselves, the pressure of a busy lunch or dinner rush can lead to lapses. It's the mashgiach's job to maintain that boundary and uphold the standard.

Additionally, if a customer specifically requests Bishul Beis Yosef, the mashgiach must personally place that item—such as a burger—on the fire to fulfill the requirement.

### PAS YISROEL

Pas Yisroel—baked goods that are prepared with Jewish involvement—is slightly different from Bishul Yisroel. While non-Pas Yisroel does not make an item non-kosher, many individuals are machmir in this area and will only eat bread or baked goods that are Pas Yisroel.

To make baked goods Pas Yisroel, Halachic authorities agree that a Jew must ignite the flame used in the baking process. In restaurants, however, many baked goods and bread products are sourced from outside vendors. This

means the mashgiach must carefully verify that all such items are indeed Pas Yisroel. In commercial production, this often involves checking for a specific Pas Yisroel sticker or lot number on each delivered box. If even one box

out of a shipment is missing the sticker, the mashgiach must investigate—checking if the sticker simply fell off, got stuck to another box, or if the item came from a non-Pas Yisroel production run.

There is also a lesser-known Halacha that adds complexity: If a Jew owns the establishment, then the leniency of pas palter (baked goods made by a non-Jewish professional baker) may not apply. In such cases, if a non-Jewish employee lights the oven or places food like pizza into the oven (especially if there's no pilot light or it was off), the product could be considered non-kosher, just like with bishul akum. While there are certain leniencies outlined by Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l, these are applied only under specific circumstances and require consultation with a posek.

### INCOMING DELIVERIES

One of the fundamental principles of keeping kosher is starting with kosher ingredients. It sounds simple—but in a busy restaurant, this requires constant vigilance. Deliveries arrive in all forms: some are dropped off before dawn (as early as 5:00 AM), others show up during peak kitchen hours, and sometimes, if a key ingredient is missing, a staff member may run out to purchase it locally. In every case, the mashgiach must verify that each item meets the kosher standards of the establishment. Kosher supervision isn't just about ingredients—it's about awareness, timing, and preventing mix-ups before they happen.

#### OUTGOING DELIVERIES

The next step is to ensure the kosher consumer gets their food in a way that clearly shows that it is kosher. This means ensuring all deliveries are completely sealed with kosher tape when they leave the restaurant.

#### PRODUCE INSPECTION

Last but certainly not least is produce inspection, one of the most demanding and time-consuming responsibilities of the mashgiach. Checking fruits and vegetables for insects requires precision, patience, and unwavering attention to detail. It's not just about glancing at a head of lettuce; it's a careful, methodical process that ensures the produce meets the highest kosher standards. Many places even have two mashgichim, and one is exclusively responsible for checking produce early in the morning.

But the mashgiach doesn't have the luxury of focusing on just one task. While he's elbow-deep in leafy greens, a delivery of meat might arrive that needs immediate inspection. At the same time, a soup pot may boil over, requiring him to relight the flame. The cashier may be waiting for his signature to release a new order, and meanwhile, a customer who ordered a salad 20 minutes ago is growing impatient.

It goes without saying that the mashgiach is proactive and will prepare all the vegetables required for that day's service in the morning before service time, but sometimes the vegetable delivery is delayed or there is an unexpected order for another 100 salads.

#### MISCELLANEOUS

And then there are all the other things that keep a kosher restaurant running: cracking and checking eggs, ensuring there is proper separation and segregation between fish and meat, sprinkling salt on leftover eggs or cut onions at the end of the day, and, of course, properly sealing and locking down the kitchen before closing.

This juggling act is part of the daily reality in a kosher kitchen. Behind every kosher meal is a mashgiach working hard to ensure that every standard is upheld—quietly, diligently, and often under great pressure. So next time you are in a restaurant and see the mashgiach, smile at him and say thank you. A little acknowledgement goes a long way.

**Candles (Melb) Fri 3 July 2026, 19 Tammuz 5786 4:54p/5:56p**