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Shoftim 5784

LIFE'S MOST IMPORTANT THING

RABBI SHRAGA SIMMONS (Aish.com)

Every person has one thing that he is living for. Let's call it a "personal bottom line." For some it is money, for others prestige, for others pursuit of pleasure. Now let's imagine that you're faced with a situation where you are about to lose everything – your job, your house, your car, even your health and your family (G-d forbid). But ... you are given the choice to hold onto one thing, only one thing. What would it be?

THIS WEEK WE BEGIN the month of Elul. In many respects, this is the most important time of the Jewish year. As the month which immediately precedes the High Holidays, Elul is a crucial period of preparation.

To get started, let's first ask the question: What is Rosh Hashana all about anyway?

Imagine that you are a scientific researcher who is funded through a philanthropic foundation. Each year, you are required to appear before the Board of Directors and present a summation of your achievements during the past year. How much money the board grants you for the coming year will be based on how well you utilized last year's grant – and how solid is your plan for the coming year. Of course, if you've squandered past resources and are unprepared for the future, your chance of receiving additional grant money is slim.

So, too, on Rosh Hashana. Ever since the creation of Adam and Eve, Rosh Hashana has been the day when every human being (so to speak) is created anew. We stand before our Creator and say: "This is how I have utilized my resources, and this is my plan for the future."

THIS IS INDEED SERIOUS BUSINESS. Life is not to be taken for granted. Life is a precious gift from Above. It is delicate and tenuous and can be taken away at any moment.

The story is told of a sculptor who was commissioned to design a bronze statue of a horse for the town square. After many months of work, he produced a sculpture with perfect detail – showing every sinew and hair follicle. It was truly a masterpiece! However, when the statue was proudly placed in the town square, everyone walked by and completely ignored it! The sculptor was very disappointed to find all his hard work going unappreciated. Finally a friend said: "I think the problem is that the horse is so perfect that people think it's real! But if you would make a crack, then people will notice it as a work of art."

The point of this story, explains the Chasan Sofer, is that our lives are full of blessings. Our eyes alone are worth many millions of dollars! But we mustn't take our "funding" for granted!

A person's relationship with G-d is similar to that of a parent to a child. For example, what happens when a child asks for a cookie? The parent is glad to give one. But if the child would show a lack of appreciation (like refusing to say "thank you," or throwing the food on the floor), do you think the parent will give the child another cookie? No way!

Now imagine that the child takes the cookie, and says something to the effect of: "Thank you so much. This cookie is sweet and fresh and delicious. I really appreciate your efforts to get me this cookie." What will the parent say when the child looks up gingerly and asks for a second cookie? "It's my pleasure!"

This Rosh Hashana, will we be able to stand before G-d with confidence? Only if we have first done significant soul searching – who we are and where we are headed. Because if we don't have such clarity, then how can we expect G-d (the Board of Directors) to grant us another year of life?!

THERE ARE A FEW SPECIAL customs that Jews perform during Elul, to help awaken us to the task ahead. One is the daily recitation of Psalm 27. There, King David exclaims:

"One thing I ask ... is to dwell in the house of G-d all the days of my life."

King David tells us a tremendous insight: If I was stripped bare and could only choose one thing, it would be You, G-d. That's the bottom line. A relationship with G-d supercedes all else, for He is the source of everything. No if's, and's, or but's.

Coming to this realization is what Elul is all about.

Not long ago I was sitting and learning Torah in a synagogue near my home. This synagogue is located in the basement of a large apartment building. (In Israel, the basement of every building is a bomb shelter.)

So I'm sitting in this bomb-shelter-turned-synagogue, and I'm thinking that if ever (G-d forbid) there should be a war, this bomb shelter would be a good place to be stranded. There's Torah books, scholarly rabbis and holiness permeating the walls. I could gladly spend weeks here!

Then I recalled a time in my life when I was keeping less mitzvot. I had gone out one evening with some friends to hear music at a local tavern. As we were leaving to go home, we discovered that the winds were howling at 100 kilometers an hour and a meter of snow had just fallen. It was a full-fledged blizzard! The streets were shut down and the entire city had come to a grinding halt. Nobody was going anywhere. We were stranded. Snowbound.

I spent the next 48 hours in the tavern with a group of strangers, and I recall at the time considering myself fortunate to be stranded there and not elsewhere. There was so much to keep us entertained: Video games, a pool table, a superb sound system, etc. How grateful I was not to have been stranded in the dentist's office or a gas station!

So recently, when I imagined being stranded in my synagogue bomb shelter, that snowstorm came to mind. Tavern versus Synagogue. The qualitative difference is astounding. Could there be any question? King David's words rang like a bell: "One thing I ask is to dwell in the house of G-d..."

Policing the Gates

Another special custom for the month of Elul is to blow the Shofar every morning in the synagogue. The Shofar sound is literally an alarm clock designed to arouse us from our spiritual slumber. The Shofar brings clarity, alertness, and focus.

The reason we lose touch and make mistakes is that we don't take the time every day to reconnect with our deepest desires and essence. Therefore, the solution is obvious: Spend time alone everyday to ask: "Am I on track? Am I focused? Am I pursuing goals which will make the greatest overall difference in my life and in the world?"

This week's Parsha begins:

"You shall appoint judges and police for yourself in all your gates." (16:18)

The commentators explain this verse metaphorically: You should set guards at "your gates" – i.e. at the openings of your body. Guard your ears from gossip. Guard your mouth from falsehood. Guard your eyes from straying after frivolity.

Elul is the time to construct a sincere, realistic model of where we've fallen short in the past and how we expect to change in the future. May this be a meaningful time of growth for us all.

IS JUSTICE FOR ALL?

RABBI MENACHEM FELDMAN (Chabad.org)

This week's Torah portion begins with Moses' eloquent cry to the Jewish people to establish courts and to pursue justice:

You shall set up judges and law-enforcement officials for yourself in all your cities that the L-rd, your G-d, is giving you for your tribes, and they shall judge the people [with] righteous judgment.

You shall not pervert justice, you shall not show favoritism, and you shall not take a bribe, for bribery blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts just words.

Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may live and possess the land that the L-rd, your G-d, is giving you. (16:18-20)

All agree that justice is important, but justice is elusive. Even in this great country, in the 21st century, there are serious questions whether our criminal justice system has a long way to go to ensure that every individual can expect equal access to justice.

One scholar recently made this argument in an op-ed piece:

Our justice system has become inaccessible to millions of poor people and so every day, we violate the "equal justice under law" motto engraved on the front of the grand United States Supreme Court. Americans who cannot afford legal help routinely forfeit basic rights as a result. Because the law does not enforce itself, veterans seeking benefits the nation has guaranteed, victims of domestic violence needing legal protection, and tenants and homeowners pursuing their rights since the financial disaster all need advisors and guides through the law and its agencies and courts. (Martha Minow, "We Must Ensure Everyone Has Access to Equal Justice." The Boston Globe, 23 October 2014.)

Writers often save the most powerful point for last. The last sentence is your chance to emphasize your point and to shape the impression your reader will take away.

The last section of this week's Torah portion highlights the true test of justice. That final section describes the law of an unidentified murder victim lying in the field. The victim is not a prominent member of society who travels with an entourage. He is not a celebrity who is well known. The true test of justice is whether society will care about this crime. Whether society values the most vulnerable, lonely, least respected, unknown members of society.

How do we respond when an unknown victim is found slain? Do we ignore the case because there is no one to lobby for justice? On the contrary, the Torah demands that the most prominent members of society come down to the crime scene to investigate, to declare that they did not ignore the plight of this person, and to force the story into the headlines:

If a slain person be found in the land which the L-rd, your G-d, is giving you to possess, lying in the field, [and] it is not known who slew him . . (21:1)

The Torah commands the members of the supreme court of Israel to drop everything they are doing, and that they—not their assistants or surrogates—should show up at the crime scene:

Then your elders and judges shall go forth, and they shall measure to the cities around the corpse. (21:3)

In the pre-mass media world, the surest way to create news, which in turn may encourage a possible witness to the crime to come forward, is for the members of the court to come and draw attention to the crime. They then proceed to perform an unusual ritual. Its purpose is to turn people's attention to the terrible crime committed against someone they never heard of:

And it will be [that from] the city closest to the corpse, the elders of that city shall take a calf with which work has never been done, [and] that has never drawn a yoke. And the elders of that city shall bring the calf down to a rugged valley, which cannot be worked and cannot be sown, and there in the valley, they shall decapitate the calf. (21:3-5)

The valley "cannot be worked and cannot be sown," which means that there is a valuable piece of real estate that cannot be used until the case is solved. That serves two purposes: the fallow valley does not allow the murder to be forgotten, and the owner of the valley has a financial incentive to keep the pressure on the authorities to investigate the case. (see Mereh Nevuchim 3:40)

The Torah understands that the test of justice is not "at your gates"; it's not how we treat the prominent members of society. Rather, the test of justice

is whether the "elders and judges" will leave their ivory tower, leave the city, and search for justice for the unknown stranger.

BRANCHES OF THE JUDICIARY

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY (Torah.org)

Juxtapositions. The Talmud analyzes them and expounds upon them. After all, every word of the Torah is as important as the next, and the positioning of each law in the Heavenly ordained book bears a great symbolism if not halachic (legal) implication.

Perhaps that is the reason that our sages expounded upon a very interesting juxtaposition in this week's portion.

This week's parsha is named Shoftim – Judges. That is exactly what it begins dealing with. It commands us to appoint judges. They should be honest, upright and unwavering. It prohibits taking any form of bribery as it attests that even the most brilliant and pious of souls will be blinded and perverted by bribes. Conspicuously placed next to those laws is the prohibition of the planting of the asheira tree. The asheira tree appeared as any other tree, but it had another purpose. It was worshipped as an idol.

Those two sections adjoin. The sages comment that there is a stark comparison. "Anyone who appoints an unworthy justice is as if he planted the asheirah tree in his midst."

The obvious question is: though both acts are terribly wrong, there must be a greater reason other than the fact that they both are wrong and immoral. What is the connection?

There was a period in the 1970's when a group of rogues were smuggling valuables in Tefillin (phylacteries) and other religious articles that would usually evade inspection; thus the thieves assumed their scheme would be successful. Often they would send these religious articles with unsuspecting pious Jews and asked to deliver them to certain locations near their final destinations.

When United States customs officials got wind of this scheme they asked a few observant agents to help crack the ring. In addition to preserving the sanctity of the religious items, the customs authority felt that Jewish religious agents would best be able to mete out knowing accomplices from unsuspecting participants who had been duped into thinking they were actually performing a mitzvah.

The Jewish custom agent in charge of the operation decided to confer with my grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky on this matter. Though his advice on how to break the ring remains confidential, he told me how he explained how the severity of the crime was compounded by its use of religious items.

"Smuggling diamonds in Tefillin," he explained, "is equivalent to raising a white flag, approaching the enemy lines as if to surrender and then lobbing a grenade. That soldier has not only perpetrated a fraud on his battalion and the enemy; he has betrayed a symbol of civilization.

With one devious act, he has destroyed a trusted symbol for eternity – forever endangering the lives of countless soldiers for years to come.

"These thieves, by taking a sacrosanct symbol and using it as a vehicle for a crime have destroyed the eternal sanctity and symbolism of a sacred object. Their evil actions may cause irreparable damage to countless honest religious people. Those rogues must be stopped, by any means possible," he exclaimed.

Rabbi Chaim Soleveitchik explained the comparison of the asheirah tree to the corrupt judge. An asheirah tree is a very deceiving object. It is as beautiful as any other tree in the world. However, man has turned its aesthetic beauty into a vehicle for blasphemy. "A judge," Rabbi Chaim Soleveitchik explains, "has all those attributes. He may have an honest appearance, even a regal demeanor. In fact, he could have a long kapote and a flowing beard. His very image exudes traits that personify honesty, integrity, and morality. However if he is inherently dishonest he no better than a lovely tree whose sole purpose is to promote a heretical ritual of idolatry."

They both may look pretty and could be used as a vehicle to promote G-d's glory but in this case, they are not. In fact, quite the opposite. Those formerly beautiful objects now bring disgrace to the Creator.

And so, the Torah tells us this week that trees may have outer beauty, but cannot be classified unequivocally as being an ever-sounding testimony to Hashem's glory. Likewise a judge whose demeanor may be noble, may be a source of deception who will bring disgrace on an entire nation. After all, as the saying almost goes, "you cannot book a judge by his cover!"

THERE IS SO MUCH MORE WE DON'T KNOW

RABBI LABEL LAM (Torah.org)

And you shall come to the Leviim/Kohanim and to the judge who will be in

those days, and you shall inquire, and they will tell you the words of judgment... you shall observe to do according to all they instruct you. According to the law they instruct you and according to the judgment they say to you, you shall do; you shall not divert from the word they tell you, either right or left. (Devarim 17:9-11)

Either right or left: Even if this judge tells you that right is left, and that left is right. How much more so, if he tells you that right is right, and left is left! — Rashi

The Torah tells us explicitly that one should seek out advice and life solutions with the help of scholars who are saturated with Torah knowledge and values. We lack both the knowledge and objectivity to make the correct decision in many matters. One of my teachers told me recently that Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Greenwald zl. had said, “There is nothing more dangerous than someone who does not have a Rebbe.” If we are driving in life without a GPS then it is easy to get lost and stuck. Again, the Torah emphasizes the need to nullify one’s own way of perceiving the matter to the decision of Daas Torah, even if they tell you left is right and right is left, to do as they say. Don’t take their opinion lightly.

As the Butler told Pharaoh, “Es Chatai Ani Mazkir HaYom” – “I am mentioning my sin today.” Here I am pontificating as if from an ivory tower but I had to learn this lesson the hard way. When my wife and I were just married a few months later our car broke down. We needed a new one. Not a brand new one. That was beyond our means. We went on a search for a solid and reliable used car. I don’t remember how we came upon this dealer, an elderly man in a nearby neighborhood, but he showed us a car that was more than 10 years old but only had 50,000 miles. He told us it was driven by a little old lady on Sundays. I asked him if I could test-drive it but he said that he could not allow anyone else to drive it on the road because of insurance reasons and so he took my wife and I on the local roads, racing and then stopping abruptly. We told him we would think about it for 24 hours. In the meantime, I decided to consult with one of my Rebbeim, someone steeped in Torah wisdom and rich with worldly experience.

He asked me right away, “Did you test drive the car?” I told him, “No! The man said that he couldn’t but he drove us around and it felt good!” He immediately responded emphatically, “He didn’t let you drive it!? I have a Rashi in Chumash! Don’t buy it!” 24 hours passed and we didn’t see any other good options that were affordable and we bought the car. I picked up the car and started driving to Westchester County to my mother’s house to meet up with my wife so we could drive back together in our “new” vehicle.

As I was driving, right away, I sensed something wrong.

While on the highway it felt like I was dragging a dead deer underneath. Then I looked at the odometer to check the mileage and something remarkable, maybe miraculous, probably criminal was happening. The numbers were going backwards. The mileage was becoming less. The car was getting younger. When I got to my mother’s house, I noticed that the numbers themselves were all scarred and uneven. Someone had obviously removed the cover and tampered with the mileage using a screwdriver.

We came back to Monsey and I went to my Rebbe to ask what I should do. He said to me with wonderment, “You bought the car!? You’re the second one this week who didn’t listen. Let this be a lesson! Rebbeshe Gelt! (The cost of the lesson)

I had a friend who looked like a DA and I asked him to see if he could negotiate an undoing of the sale for me with the old man and he was successful. I got my money back but I learned a lesson. Years later I bumped into that Rashi my Rebbe mentioned. It’s on the verse, “And the matter pleased me; so, I took twelve men from you, one man for each tribe”. (Devarim 1:23)

Rashi explains with a parable. Moshe agreed to send the spies because like someone who is looking to sell his donkey will allow the purchaser to ride it under all conditions then perhaps, they will trust that he is not hiding anything and they will buy it without even testing it. The implication is that if he doesn’t let them test ride the donkey then there is reason to suspect he is hiding something.

Knowing that Rashi does not, now, a Rebbe make. There is so much more we don’t know.

ESCAPING DOSTOEVSKY’S POLAR BEAR

RABBI AHARON LOSCHAK (Chabad.org)

“Try to pose for yourself this task: not to think of a polar bear, and you will see that the cursed thing will come to mind every minute.”

Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote that in 1863. Daniel Wegner (1948-2013), a psychology professor at Harvard University, tested it out over a century

later with a simple experiment: He asked participants to verbalize their stream of consciousness for five minutes, while trying not to think of a white bear. If a white bear came to mind, he told them, they should ring a bell. Despite the explicit instructions to avoid it, the participants thought of a white bear more than once per minute, on average.

Over the next decade, Wegner developed his theory of “ironic processes” to explain why it’s so hard to tamp down unwanted thoughts. He found evidence that when we try not to think of something, one part of our mind does avoid the forbidden thought, but another part “checks in” every so often to make sure the thought is not coming up—ironically, bringing it to mind.¹

“FEAR NOT!”

A significant portion of Parshat Shoftim is concerned with matters of national importance to the Jews once they have entered the land. There are various civil laws, guidelines for the future monarchy, and among other things, instructions for waging war. One detail is about the “Kohen Appointed for War,” whose role was to give a rousing, motivational speech, rallying the troops psychologically and spiritually preparing them for battle. The Torah instructs him to proclaim the following:

“Hear, O Israel, today you are approaching the battle against your enemies. Let your hearts not be faint; you shall not be afraid, and you shall not be alarmed, and you shall not be terrified because of them.”²

Try to picture a Bronze Age battlefield: clashing swords, clanging shields, flying spears, thunderous hoof beats. Imagine the blood and the gore, the battle cries, and the screams of the vanquished and dying. War was (and still is!) a terrible, terrifying thing.

Thinking about it that way, this pre-battle pep talk doesn’t make much sense. “Don’t be afraid!” Is that really all he had to say? How could he brazenly get up there and wave his magic wand over the people and say, “Fear not!” Fear, especially in the face of a terrifying war, is a natural emotion; you can’t just magically turn it on or off. So what is the Torah expecting from these hapless soldiers quaking in their boots?³

If the Torah told us that soldiers should fight despite feeling afraid, that would be understandable. But to expect someone not to feel fear at all—how is that even possible?

RABBI SHLOMO FREIDES was a renowned Chabad Chasid during the first half of the 19th century.⁴ In the late 1820s, he sent a letter to the third Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, known as the Tzemach Tzedek, expressing worry about his declining health. He related that he felt powerless, his only resort to pray that G-d remove his mental anguish. The Tzemach Tzedek wrote a fascinating response, first criticizing Rabbi Shlomo’s sole reliance on prayer, and then providing practical techniques to overcome his mental struggles.

Here’s what the Rebbe explained.

The Kabbalistic masters explain that every human soul comprises 10 unique attributes, or functions, which we use to explore and interact with the world around us.

The functions are broadly divided into two categories—cognitive facilities and emotional capacities. The soul expresses her cognitive and mental capacity in the human mind, whereas her breadth and depth of emotion is realized in the heart.

By default, the soul operates in a linear way—consciousness flows from the intellect into the emotions. In simple words, how we understand something shapes the way we feel about it.

The mind develops an idea, understands it, and then gauges how it feels about it. The heart comes marching in closely thereafter, developing a corresponding emotional response. You first hear about the wonders of a certain person, you get to know them, you start realizing how terrific they are, and before you know it, you develop feelings for them. You now like them.

Or, you hear about a social ill, you start reading about how rampant it has become, you begin to understand how devastating it is, and before long, you’re repulsed and angry about the situation. You just went through the process of mind to heart, cognition to emotion.

Being aware of the process that produces your negative feelings provides a method of taming them, and that is to simply pull the rug out from under those feelings. If thought is the fuel that both generates and maintains your feelings, the best thing to do is to stop the flow—stop thinking about it!

To those soldiers frightened at the clashing cymbals and clanging swords of war, the first and most basic instruction was: don’t think about it.

PULL OUT THE RUG AND FIND A REPLACEMENT

But as Dostoevsky so keenly observed, it's virtually impossible to stop thinking about something. So what was a terrified soldier supposed to do? What are we supposed to do when besieged with thoughts of anxiety and fear?

Here's where we introduce something called the "Blue Dolphin." If it's impossible to not think about a white polar bear, why not try thinking about a blue dolphin instead? In other words, forget about not thinking about something; that will never work. But you can try to think about something else, and set the entire emotional process in a different direction.

This is what the Rebbe explained in that letter to his anxious chassid, and it's something me, you, and everyone else can trot out in our lives right now.

Who doesn't experience fear, anxiety, anger, hurt, pain, jealousy, frustration, or some other negative feeling I missed out? We all do. It's part of the human experience.

Now, you can spend your entire life trying to root out the cause of all those negative feelings, and there's definitely merit to that. Some matters do require excavation, whether it's on your own or with professional help. There's a time and place for that.

But it's not the prescribed method for every negative feeling you may have. Sometimes, you can whip out your blue dolphin, pink cow, or even your toddler-on-a-scooter-juggling-three-balls-and-eating-avocado-toast (if that's your thing). Whatever works for you. If you have a Torah thought, something you know by heart that you can easily pull up—even better. As you can probably guess, that's what the Rebbe prescribed to his follower—and it's not a bad idea for you either.

Remember: you're in the driver's seat of your feelings. Grab onto the steering wheel and choose which direction you want to go.

This essay is based on Igrot Kodesh of the Tzemach Tzedek, p. 19-21.

NO MIDDLE GROUND

AVROHOM YAAKOV

At the end of this week's parsha, Moshe goes into detail on how wars should be conducted and he focuses on the scenario when laying siege to a city.

"When you approach a city to wage war against it, you shall propose peace to it. And it will be, if it responds to you with peace, and it opens up to you, then it will be, [that] all the people found therein shall become tributary to you, and they shall serve you. But if it does not make peace with you, and it wages war against you, you shall besiege it," (20:10-12)

On the words "But if it does make no peace with you, and it wages war against you", Rashi comments that "the Torah is informing you that if it does not make peace with you, then, if you let it be and go away, [this city] will ultimately wage war against you."

Basically peace and war are two sides of the coin – you have one or the other. There is nothing in between.

We like to think that there are always scenarios where compromise is possible. Solutions that are neither black nor white, but shades of grey. Not everyone gets what they want but everyone wins – sort of.

Therefore the Torah clarifies that unless peace as defined by the Torah is achieved, then you will go to war. The enemy will rebel. It is inevitable.

It is either Peace on the Torah's terms or you will need to fight and conquer the enemy. There is no middle ground.

PACKAGING

RABBI YANKI TAUBER (Chabad.org)

I have a friend who will not buy avocados on principle. "Fifty percent of the weight is the seed," he explains. He loves purchasing apples, grapes and bananas, but avocados and mangos are out. Peaches and dates are borderline — he'll buy them on occasion, with deep misgivings.

My friend has a point - the whole fruit business is a scam. Trees need to procreate; that's why they grow seeds. But trees are not very mobile, leaving them with the problem of how to get their seeds planted a reasonable distance away (if both you and your offspring are immobile, you can't throw them out of the house at age 35). One way would be to tap a passing bird, animal or human on the shoulder and say: "Excuse me, sir, can you please take these seeds and drop them off some distance away, preferably some place with good soil, sunshine and an abundant water supply?" But most passersby would probably mumble something about a doctor's appointment and slink away. So the tree packages its seeds in colorful, tasty and nutritional pulp, and markets it as "fruit."

"Man is a tree of the field" (Deuteronomy 20:19).

We resemble the tree in numerous ways: in our ceaseless "upward" striving, in our need for "roots", in the way that our lives fork and "branch" off in different directions, among others. Chief amongst them, of course, is the way that everything we are and do is focused on the generation of seed.

Man is a spiritual being, which means that we not only reproduce physically — by giving birth to children — but also spiritually: we replicate ourselves by seeding our ideas, feelings and convictions in the minds and hearts of others. And here, says the Lubavitcher Rebbe, we find an interesting parallel between the way that the fruit tree dispatches its seeds and the way that we disseminate our thoughts and experiences.

The fruit tree's vehicle of reproduction consists of two basic components:

- 1) the seed, into which the tree distills its very self - its characteristics, its nature, its quintessential treeness;
- 2) the "packaging" that makes it attractive and palatable to its carriers and consumers.

Both are necessary. Without the packaging, the seed wouldn't get very far, or would do so only with great difficulty. On the other hand, if a tree were to produce a most luscious and attractive fruit but neglect to include a seed, nothing would happen. There would be no shortage of consumers, but no progeny.

When we seek to "reproduce" spiritually by communicating our thoughts and feelings to others, we, too, package our seeds. We envelop them in intellectual sophistication, steep them in emotional sauce, dress them in colorful words and images. If we didn't, our message might not get very far (my avocado-shunning friend, for one, would not display much interest). But the important thing to remember is that there must be a "seed" in there. If the fruit of our mind doesn't encase a piece of our soul, what's the point?

EVERY LIFE IS PRECIOUS

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND (Aish.com)

A murder victim is found in a field out in the open country between two cities. There are no witnesses and no clues to the identity of his assailant. The Torah demands an exact measurement to determine the closest city. The elders of that city have to declare, "We were not derelict in our responsibilities to this traveler. Our hands did not spill this innocent blood." Then they go through a process of atonement called the eglah arufah, the decapitated calf.

These laws seem to be incongruously wedged in between two chapters that talk about going out to war. What is it doing there?

Rav Yaakov Yitzchak Ruderman, my Rosh Yeshivah, explains that the Torah is teaching us a lesson. In times of war, life becomes incredibly cheap. People are dying left and right, men, women, children, soldiers, civilians. Life somehow loses its value.

Therefore, right in the middle of the discussion of war, the Torah interrupts to present the laws of eglah arufah, laws that underscore the extreme preciousness of each individual life. An entire city must bring atonement for the loss of one unidentified person who may or may not have passed through unnoticed.

The Shemen Hatov suggests that this may be why Yaakov learned the laws of eglah arufah with Yosef on their last day together. Perhaps Yaakov's soul felt intuitively that Yosef would become the leader of a huge and powerful nation, that he would have the power of life and death over millions and millions of people. Therefore, it was important to teach him about eglah arufah to impress on him the importance of every single human life.

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik, the rav of Brisk, once called a special meeting in the shul. "My dear friends, we have a serious problem. The Czar's police have arrested a young Jewish boy."

"What did he do?" asked a congregant.

"He burned the Czar in effigy."

The man slapped his forehead in frustration.

"Regardless of what he has done," Rav Chaim continued, "the boy is in danger. We must get him out immediately. It is a question of money. Just money."

"How much money?"

Rav Chaim mentioned the sum. It was an exorbitant amount, and people gasped audibly.

"We are faced with a great mitzvah," said Rav Chaim. "This is true pidyon shevuyim, ransoming captives."

"Who is the boy?" one man wanted to know. "Is he a yeshivah boy?"

"No," said Rav Chaim.

"Is he a member of our shul? Is he someone we know?"

“No.”
 “Is he religious?”
 “I’m afraid not. At least not yet.”
 One of the men threw up his hands in frustration. “How will we raise money for a boy like that? And such a large sum!”
 “I don’t know,” Reb Chaim said, “but somehow it must be done. I am not coming to shul on Yom Kippur until the money is collected.”
 Time passed, and only a small amount of money was raised.
 Yom Kippur came. It was time for Kol Nidrei, and Rav Chaim still had not come to shul. The elders of the community went to his house.
 “I told you,” he said. “I am not coming until you raise the money. It doesn’t matter if the boy is religious or not. A Jewish soul is a Jewish soul!”
 The community raised the money to ransom the boy.
 Every life is precious.

News, Views & Opinion

NO RED CROSS VISITS TO NUKHBA TERRORISTS WITHOUT HOSTAGE CHECKS

YAKI ADAMKER (Jpost.com 31-8-24)

Eleven government ministers joined Minister Orit Strock's call on Thursday not to allow visits by representatives of the Red Cross to the Nukhba terrorists imprisoned in Israel.

The Red Cross would visit the terrorists without having visited the hostages held in Gaza and providing them with medication first.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the political and security cabinet were presented with the call, which they were expected to discuss on Thursday night.

Earlier this week, the High Court of Justice issued a conditional order according to which the state must explain why visits by the Red Cross's representatives to Israeli prisons should be prevented. The ministers demand that this position be the state's answer to the High Court.

Minister Orit Strock led the call and was joined by Amichai Eliyahu, Uriel Busso, Yitzhak Goldknopf, Miki Zohar, Amichai Chikli, Idit Silman, Ya’acov Margi, Ofir Sofer, and May Golan.

LAST APRIL, politicians and various organizations strongly criticized the decision of the War Cabinet to authorize visits to Nukhba prisoners.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu proposed approving the visits, which was supported by most cabinet ministers, as opposed to ministers Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, who opposed it.

Ben-Gvir commented on the decision, saying, "These visits harm deterrence and negotiations with Hamas, raise the morale of the terrorists, may lead to prison riots, and beyond that, it is a violation of Israeli sovereignty, and an opening for international intervention in other issues in the future. No country that respects its sovereignty and security would allow this to happen."

Smotrich, who did not directly address the approval of the visits, criticized the Mossad and the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) after the cabinet discussion, saying that there are those in Israel who "repeatedly humiliate Israel and erode its positions and only make Sinwar harden his positions and push away the chance of returning the hostages."

"The time has come for the Mossad and the Shin Bet to return to doing what they were trained to do - to eliminate the leaders of Hamas all over the world and not in negotiations that are conducted irresponsibly that harm Israel's security."

POLLS: ISRAELIS PUT PHILADELPHI CORRIDOR ABOVE HOSTAGE DEAL

DAVID ISAAC (JNS.org 3-9-24)

Two new polls reveal that a majority of Israelis support maintaining control of the Philadelphia Corridor, the 8.7-mile-long strip of land extending the length of the Egypt-Gaza border, even at the expense of a hostage deal with Hamas.

Forty-nine percent of Jewish Israelis agreed with the statement, “Israel must not relinquish control of the Philadelphia Corridor even at the expense of a hostage deal,” according to the most recent poll, conducted on Sept. 1 just hours after news broke of the murder of six Israeli hostages by Hamas.

Forty-three percent of those surveyed supported the statement, “Israel should give up control of the Philadelphia Corridor to enable a hostage deal.”

The poll was conducted by The Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI), an Israel-based think tank.

The second survey, conducted by polling firm Direct Polls on July 24, asked, “Do you agree with the statement that ‘Israel needs to control in a permanent way the Philadelphia Corridor in order to prevent weapons smuggling from Egypt to terror organizations in the Gaza Strip?’”

Seventy-nine percent agreed or agreed “very strongly” with the statement. Six percent didn’t agree or “completely didn’t agree.” Sixteen percent had no position.

The survey was carried out for a new group called “Gaza Forever.” It describes itself as a “movement for the humanitarian evacuation of all residents of Gaza to the nations of the world.”

According to a statement on the group’s website, “In an evacuation-compensation process, all residents of Gaza who desire it will be evacuated to a better home in another country.”

Following the news of the six hostages’ murders, large-scale protests took place across Israel on Monday, blocking roads in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. The protests continued on Tuesday.

The protesters hold the Netanyahu government responsible for the failure to reach a deal with Hamas to free the hostages.

The Histadrut, Israel’s labor federation, held a general strike on Monday, joining with the protesters in holding the government responsible.

“A deal is not progressing due to political considerations and that cannot be accepted. The abandonment of the hostages, of the displaced, of the collapsing economy must be stopped,” Histadrut Chairman Arnon Bar-David said on Sunday, announcing the strike.

However, Israel’s National Labor Court ordered the strike cut short, ruling it was politically motivated and therefore illegal.

Many local government authorities had refused to join the strike, including those of Jerusalem, Ashdod, Netanya, Ramla, Dimona, Sderot, Holon, Petah Tikva, Safed, all townships in Judea and Samaria, and others.

The polls suggest that the demonstrators, though a large and vocal minority, do not represent most Israelis.

JPPI noted in the summary of its poll: “The survey proved that the position of the government is in line with the prevailing sentiment among its supporters, and a plurality of the Jewish public.”

Israel’s Security Cabinet voted on Sept. 29 to support Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s position that Israel must maintain a military presence along the Philadelphia Corridor indefinitely. Only Defense Minister Yoav Gallant voted against.

Addressing the nation on Monday night, Netanyahu called the corridor “the oxygen and the arming of Hamas.”

“The axis of evil needs the Philadelphia Corridor; for this reason, we need the Philadelphia Corridor,” he added.

If Israel gives up control of the border area as Hamas has demanded during the ongoing ceasefire talks, the remaining captives could be smuggled out to Egypt and from there to Iran or Yemen, said Netanyahu.

He went on to say that he had been “absolutely shocked” that Gallant had voted against the Cabinet decision.

NOT ONE PERSON FOUND UNDER THE RUBBLE IN GAZA FOR FOUR MONTHS

ELDER OF ZIYON (elderofziyon.blogspot.com 1-9-24)

One of the many bogus statistics we've been following from Gaza is the number of missing people buried under rubble.

As we've noted, between November and May, Hamas regularly reported - and the UN regularly repeated - 7,000 missing people under the rubble in Gaza. Then, suddenly, on May 3, that number jumped to 10,000 people missing.

Does anyone have the names of these missing people? Do we know what methodology was used to estimate their numbers?

Of course not. Because Hamas made them all up. And that's good enough for the UN.

Right now, the number of supposedly missing people has remained steady at exactly 10,000 for four months. The UN keeps publishing that number, crediting the Gaza Government Media Office, which is Hamas.

So not one person has been discovered under the rubble since May? Or maybe some have been discovered, but are equaled out with the number newly buried?

The number is fiction, like all of Hamas numbers. But NGOs and the UN need to publish the highest, most absurd numbers because that gives the sense of urgency that they demand for their anti-Israel political purposes.

ISRAEL'S UNHINGED POLITICAL LEFT: A DEADLY DELUSION

AVI ABELOW (Jpost.com 2-9-24)

Early Sunday morning, we learned the tragic news that Hamas had murdered six more of our hostages. And sadly, true to form, Israel's most radical left is focused on undermining the Netanyahu government rather than directing their outrage at Hamas while demanding harsh retaliation—such as executing Hamas leaders in Israeli prisons, seizing more territory in Gaza, or cutting off aid.

Opposition leader Yair Lapid has blamed Netanyahu for the death of the six hostages. By using a national tragedy as a lever to continue the relentless campaign to topple the Netanyahu government, Lapid and his fellow leaders are essentially incentivizing Hamas to continue killing our captives.

This is a dangerous game, the aim of which is to destabilize our government. Hamas would benefit from a government more prone to appeasement than our current War Cabinet—making this a triple win for Hamas.

Israelis all share the same goal: freeing our captives and saving those who are still alive. However, we cannot overlook the fact that we are dealing with an enemy adept at psychological warfare, which uses our compassion against us. Netanyahu and his government stand firm against a triple threat that creates immense pressure from the international community, Hamas and the reckless political left, refusing to compromise the safety of all 9.5 million Israelis.

It's crucial to remember that Netanyahu has accepted every deal proposed by the Biden administration and that Hamas has consistently turned down every deal. U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken confirmed this several weeks ago when he said:

“Israel accepts the bridging hostage proposal. Hamas must also do so.” Hamas eventually said no, again.

And yet, Israel's opposition leaders continue to spread false news and blame the Netanyahu government for the captives' plight rather than Hamas, which only emboldens Israel's enemies, encouraging them to continue their aggression. This only encourages Hamas to continue to use the hostages as a means to weaken Israeli society.

Those who suggest Israel capitulate to Hamas's demands and then return to defeat them later in Gaza are ignoring the harsh reality of international pressure. After over 1,200 innocent Israelis were killed on Oct. 7, the world pushed for Israel to withdraw. The idea that we could return after making a significant concession and face no further international backlash is unrealistic.

The only viable solution to protect our captives—and ensure the safety of all Israelis—is to destroy Hamas, follow a strategic plan that includes deporting terror supporters and resettle Gaza with Jewish communities.

Anyone advocating for “days of rage” to topple the Israeli government rather than focus on destroying Hamas is only aiding our enemies and endangering all Israelis.

Instead of waking up to a public protest movement against Hamas, the political left has launched a ferocious campaign to drive Israelis into the streets, disrupt private life and topple the Netanyahu government.

The once rational, security-minded political left in Israel has been hijacked by an unhinged, dangerous Marxist ideology that distorts compassion and morality into a weapon against our national security. This delusion has become a critical threat to our survival, steering public consciousness away from confronting the grim realities of our ongoing terror war against a genocidal enemy.

For decades, this ideological blind spot has not only perpetuated but exacerbated the terror campaign waged against us by radical Islamic groups, of which Hamas is only one.

The terror war against Israel is not just a series of isolated attacks; it is a systematic, well-coordinated campaign fueled by hostile entities. Hamas in Gaza has been at the forefront of this assault, launching thousands of rockets at Israeli civilians and instigating unprecedented violence. The Palestinian Authority, pushed as a moderate peace partner, uses 17% of its budget, funded by international aid, to reward terrorists for killing innocent Jews in terror attacks. It plays a central role in perpetuating an environment of hostility, incitement and terror against Israel. Behind these organizations are the financial backers—namely, Iran and Qatar—providing the necessary resources for their operations.

By prioritizing ideological battles over security concerns, the left effectively weakens Israel's position both domestically and internationally. This not only emboldens our enemies but also confuses the public discourse. When

the focus is diverted from addressing terrorism to critiquing the Israeli government's policies, it creates a false equivalence between aggressor and defender that feeds into the agenda of our enemies—and even allies—around the world.

It is crucial for the survival of our nation that we adopt a realistic approach to the threats we face. This means acknowledging the full extent of the terror war against us and supporting government policies that effectively address these dangers. A society can not let compassion be weaponized to undermine our security and endanger our lives.

This is exemplified by the 2011 Gilad Shalit deal, which was also pushed by the political left and the media, with a deliberate campaign to turn the public against Netanyahu. He succumbed, agreeing to the release of over 1,100 Hamas terrorists from Israeli jails in exchange for one IDF captive.

It is known throughout the country (to those that choose to admit the truth) that many of those released terrorists subsequently went on to murder Jews, including during the Oct. 7 massacre. His opponents blame Netanyahu for agreeing to that deal, while at the same time being the chief voices demanding that he repeat the mistake.

Israelis and Jews worldwide must wake up to the dangerous manipulation of Israel's political left and not be swayed by its arguments, cloaked as “compassion,” that foment internal division and endanger our lives and national security.

It is a matter of life and death. While disagreement and debate are hallmarks of a healthy democracy, we cannot allow an extreme-left ideology to continue to mobilize the mainstream. It is imperative that we unite to confront the real enemy and existential threats our nation faces.

The political left in Israel must return to a more rational security approach, one that prioritizes the safety of Israeli citizens and the effective countering of terrorist threats. Despite the enormous pain and divisive tactics of the left's political leadership, we as a people are not broken and will continue to fight until we stop our enemies. As the Tikvah organization for families of captives in Gaza publicized on Sunday, “The people of Israel are alive, and despite the great pain, they have not broken and will continue to fight the murderers until the last of the kidnapped are returned and Hamas is destroyed.”

HOROWITZ, SOROS: THE JEWISH SPONSORS OF PALESTINIAN ACTIVISM

DAVID BEN-BASAT (Jpost.com 1-9-24)

The October 7 massacre was a catalyst that led radical left-wing groups in the United States and Europe to emerge from obscurity, spreading their venomous, vitriolic antisemitic hatred of Israel and Jews under the guise of “enlightenment and fighting against injustice and discrimination.” Unfortunately, some Jews are significantly contributing to spreading these lies and distorting the truth.

Antisemitic poison is disseminated via pro-Palestinian groups and nonprofit organizations. A few months ago, the New York Jewish Week published an article about pro-Palestinian organizations and their sources of funding. One of these organizations is led by an Orthodox Jew named Howard Horowitz, who once lived in Israel and collaborated with left-wing organizations there. He claims to be embarked upon tikkun olam (repairing the world). These groups protest global warming and, of course, Israel.

Tracking all the sources of funding is difficult, as some of these groups are funded through a small, lesser-known organization in Westchester led by Horowitz. He chairs the Westchester Peoples Action Coalition (WESPAC). While he initially condemned the October 7 massacre and claimed to support non-violent protests, his stance quickly shifted to supporting pro-Palestinian organizations.

Horowitz wrote to New York Jewish Week that the financial sponsorship aligns with WESPAC's mission to support “those who would otherwise be the unrecognized victims of war, injustice, and environmental degradation.” He said that the group's peace and justice mission “aligns with ours” and that “their principles of non-violence align with ours.

WESPAC's office is in White Plains, and its roots are in the anti-Vietnam War protests and the Civil Rights Movement (CRM), said Horowitz, who joined the group in the 1970s, after living in Jerusalem and on a kibbutz. Living among secular Israelis was a change for Horowitz – who grew up in an Orthodox family in New York – leading to another shift in his views. He became disillusioned with Israel, which was moving toward a right-wing ideology at the time – especially regarding its policy toward Palestinians.

“My Zionist faith was broken by the historical facts,” Horowitz explained, noting that his opposition to Israel has continued since its establishment,

following the UN vote recommending the partition of the land into separate Jewish and Palestinian states.

“The partition plan robbed the Palestinian population of their homes, livelihoods, and land,” he wrote. Using the term “Nakba,” that Palestinians use to refer to the establishment of Israel, he added, “It was the Nakba.”

Horowitz’s pro-Palestinian stance is echoed by WESPAC’s executive Director, Nada Khader, who has Palestinian roots and relatives in the West Bank and Israel. According to reports, WESPAC has long campaigned in support of Palestinians and the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel.

One of the main channels through which WESPAC supports pro-Palestinian activities is via financial sponsorships.

IN A 2022 REPORT, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) stated that WESPAC provided sponsorship to 15 groups related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – more than for any other cause. It is unclear how many groups it sponsors, overall. In 2021, the last year for which financial information is publicly available, WESPAC spent \$750,000 on donations and grants; and held assets of \$1.05 million. Its revenues include money that WESPAC receives through its financial sponsorships.

Doug White, a philanthropy advisor, and author of five books on nonprofit organizations, explains that financial sponsorship leaves “many legal gray areas,” as the organizations involved are not required to disclose their relationships and transactions. “There really isn’t a statutory way to track the money that ends up in the hands of these Palestinian groups,” White said. “As a result, you rely on good practices.”

ANOTHER GROUP, the “US Campaign for Palestinian Rights” (USCPR), is funded by Jewish billionaire George Soros.

Soros and his organization pay funds to radical, anti-Israel organizations that fuel hatred and encourage protests on campuses across the US. They are funded and organized by branches of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), supported by Soros and other anti-Israel organizations.

Over the past 20 years, SJP has successfully built a dense network of about 200 chapters across American academia. Comprised of local students, these operate as modern guerrilla groups to promote pro-Palestinian causes.

Another organization is Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), founded by American Jew Noam Chomsky. In an interview with journalist Ran Edelist some 10 years ago, Chomsky said, “I didn’t think Israel would become a Judeo-Nazi state, but something similar is happening now.”

His radical organization supports boycotting Israel, backs military draft refusal, calls Israel a fascist state, and views itself as advocating for peace and social justice. One of the sources of funding for terrorist organizations is advertisements on their websites, without the advertisers being aware. Algorithms developed by Internet giants direct advertisements to sites of hate and terror organizations with millions of followers.

The Jewish-Arab conflict over the Land of Israel began with the end of Ottoman occupation in 1917 and the beginning of British occupation in 1918. The Palestinian Arab National Movement began to grow, viewing the land as Arab territory. Then, as now, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is primarily ideological and religious – and it began long before the state of Israel’s establishment in 1948.

Anyone who thinks that a Palestinian state will solve the conflict is mistaken and guilty of self-deception.

SINWAR’S ISRAELI ACCOMPLICES

CAROLINE B. GLICK (JNS.org 1-9-24)

On Oct. 7, Hamas terrorists snatched Hersh Goldberg-Polin, 23, Carmel Gat, 39, Eden Yerushalmi, 24, Almog Sarusi, 26, Alex Lobanov, 32, and Ori Danino, 25 from the Supernova Music Festival and their homes along the border with Gaza along with 250 other innocents and held them as hostages.

As we know from hostages rescued alive since, Hamas tortures the Israeli captives as a matter of course. They are raped. They are beaten. They are starved. And they are humiliated and psychologically tortured day in and day out.

And many of them have also been executed.

Hamas executed Hersh, Carmel, Eden, Almog, Alex and Ori, apparently quite recently. And the IDF brought their bodies home on Saturday night.

Rather than respond to the heartbreaking news with condemnations of Hamas and demands that Israel fight to victory; rather than call for Israel to execute an equal or larger number of Hamas terrorists who participated in the Oct. 7 atrocities who are currently in Israeli jails, Israel’s opposition leaders in the Knesset have joined the anarchist groups in blaming Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for Hamas’s murder of the six.

As one, Benny Gantz, Yair Lapid, Yair Golan and their underlings have joined the leftist groups that have been using mass riots, political violence and general mayhem since 2019 in an effort to oust Netanyahu from power, and have called on Israelis to take to the streets in response to the executions and bring down the government through violence.

The behavior of the likes of Lapid, Gantz, Golan; of 90% of Israel’s media organs and the rest of the left’s representatives, raises the question: Have they lost their minds?

Hamas took the hostages on Oct. 7 because its calculating leader Yahya Sinwar rightly identified hostages as Israel’s soft underbelly. In 1985, Israel freed 1,150 terrorists from Israeli jails in exchange for three Israeli hostages held in Syria by Ahmed Jibril’s Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command. Among those freed was Ahmed Yassin, who founded Hamas two and a half years later.

Yassin and his fellow terrorists freed in the deal used their freedom to transform terrorism from a tactical nuisance into a strategic threat to the existence of Israel, leading waves of terror campaigns for the next two decades.

The Jibril deal taught Israel’s enemies that Israeli hostages are their ace in the hole. Oct. 7 was born in October 2011, when Israel freed 1,027 terrorists, including Sinwar, for IDF Sgt. Gilad Shalit, whom Hamas terrorists had held hostage since June 2006.

Sinwar’s war strategy has been the same since the outset of the war: To use international pressure and domestic political unrest to compel Israel to capitulate to his demands. If he and Hamas are able to survive, Hamas wins. Obviously, the hostages are a key means of accomplishing his goal. To understand how he uses them, consider the hostage videos.

Freed hostages attest that while in Hamas captivity, they were videoed constantly. They were forced to say whatever texts Hamas propagandists told them to say, over and over again.

Given Hamas’s apparently endless supply of hostage videos, why has Sinwar released so few?

The answer of course, is that Sinwar views them as a tool. The texts of nearly every single video have been nearly identical. The hostages blame Netanyahu for their suffering and demand that the government bow to Hamas’s demands or else Hamas will kill them.

All the agency is on Israel. Hamas merely responds to the actions of the government. Whether the hostages live or die is Israel’s decision, not Hamas’s. In other words, the sole purpose of the videos is to destabilize the government by inducing the public to believe that it is the government—not Hamas—that is effectively holding the hostages captive. This brings us to the recent execution of the six. Apparently, their captors saw that IDF units were closing in on their position. They could have seized the hostages and run somewhere else. But they executed them. Why?

Consider recent events.

For the past several months, responding to the joint demand of the left and the Biden-Harris administration, Netanyahu has been sending Israeli hostage negotiators to Qatar and Egypt to try to reach a deal with Hamas for the freeing of around 20 of the 101 hostages—dead and alive—Hamas holds in Gaza.

Israel has accepted in principle two exceedingly problematic deals presented by President Joe Biden, the first in May and the second last month. The offers require Israel to release hundreds of Hamas terrorists, including murderers, in exchange for around 20 hostages. They also require Israel to accept a ceasefire for at least six weeks and the removal of most of its forces from Gaza. The deals involve several stages.

Israel’s position is that after the first stage, it will be free to renew military operations. Although the Biden-Harris administration has paid lip service to this demand, it is apparent that it views the deal as a means to achieve a permanent ceasefire. And as the days till the presidential election on Nov. 5 tick by, the administration will use all the leverage the U.S. has on Israel to compel Israel not to renew hostilities. In other words, regardless of what the deal’s text says, agreeing to Stage 1 means agreeing to an end to the war with Hamas intact, that is, with Hamas victory.

While Israel’s position has changed over the course of the talks, Hamas’s has stayed constant. It demands a total cessation of Israel’s military campaign against Hamas, and the total withdrawal of all IDF units from all of Gaza, including the border with Egypt. Reportedly, there are thousands of fully armed Hamas terrorists in Sinai waiting for the ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal from the border to enter Gaza and to in short order rebuild Hamas’s regime and its devastated forces.

Since May, and with greater determination and urgency in recent weeks, Netanyahu has stated repeatedly that although he is willing to make massive, painful concessions to free even a small number of hostages, he is not willing to remove IDF units from the Gaza-Egypt border. In light of the U.S. position, his stance makes sense. The only way for Israel not to lose is to keep Hamas cut off from its outside supporters. A JNS/Direct Polls survey from July showed that some 60% of Israelis support that position.

On the other hand, in acts of gross insubordination and strategic lunacy, IDF Chief of General Staff Lt. Gen. Herzl Halevi, Shin Bet Director Ronen Bar, Mossad Director David Barnea and other top officials have let it be known through their media mouthpieces that they oppose Netanyahu's position. Halevi, Bar and others refuse to acknowledge the administration's actual policy and insist that Israel can afford to leave the Gaza-Egypt border for six weeks. And returning will be an easy matter.

The generals' position is supported by Defense Minister Yoav Gallant. Gallant fully abandoned his voters in Likud and began serving as a mouthpiece for the left and the Biden-Harris administration in the Security Cabinet immediately after returning from his weeklong visit to Washington in June.

The discourse in Israel isn't simply removed from reality because it is based on a false presentation of the U.S. position by the security brass. The entire domestic debate is taking place while Hamas isn't even participating in the negotiations. For the generals, for Gallant and their comrades in the Knesset, the media and on the streets, the only one responsible for anything is Netanyahu.

In other words, Gallant, the generals, the left's political leaders and the rioters in the streets are all playing the roles Sinwar assigned them.

This reality played out starkly during Thursday night's Security Cabinet meeting.

From leaks of the supposedly secret deliberations that can be traced directly to Gallant, we learned that Gallant presented his fellow ministers with an ultimatum that might as well have been written by Sinwar. Gallant said that if they don't agree to withdraw from the Gaza-Egypt border (temporarily), the hostages will be killed.

Netanyahu reportedly exploded at Gallant and explained that there is no such thing as a temporary withdrawal from the border zone, because of the actual U.S. position opposing a reinstatement of hostilities. Gallant responded to this dose of reality with a total meltdown. He said that Netanyahu was effectively calling for the hostages to be murdered.

Netanyahu responded by presenting a draft Security Cabinet decision to reject any concessions on Israel's control over the Gaza-Egypt border in any hostage talks. It passed with one nay vote—Gallant's.

Then on Saturday night, the news began percolating that the hostages were executed and the IDF retrieved the bodies.

As Tal Gilboa, whose nephew Guy Gilboa-Dalal remains hostage in Gaza, wrote on her X account on Sunday morning, "If the formula is 'dead hostages = shutting down the country,' ... what would you do if you were Sinwar?"

Gallant responded to the news of their executions by publishing a statement on X demanding that the Security Cabinet reconvene and cancel its decision on the Gaza-Egypt border from Thursday night.

Towards noon on Sunday, Netanyahu issued his first response to the news that the hostages had been executed. He explained that Hamas stopped carrying out serious negotiations with Israel last December. Sinwar rejected the U.S. ceasefire for hostages deals in May and August—both of which Israel accepted. Netanyahu concluded by noting that the execution of the six hostages makes clear, yet again, that Hamas doesn't want a deal. Given past experience, in all likelihood the left's current calls for mass riots will indeed lead to unrest. But they won't bring down the government. All the same, as Gilboa inferred, they will place the rest of the hostages in even greater peril.

Israel needs to win this terrible war. It has no choice. Just as the Jibril deal paved the way for 20 years of escalating terror warfare against Israel, and just as Oct. 7 was born with the Shalit deal, so events far more terrible than that one-day holocaust will happen if we dare to play by Sinwar's rules. It is shocking, and frankly unforgivable, that Israel's left, led to his disgrace by Gallant, insists on doing so.

HAMAS IS EXECUTING HOSTAGES. "HUMAN RIGHTS" GROUPS ARE SILENT

ELDER OF ZIYON (elderofziyon.blogspot.com 2-9-24)

Forensics experts have determined that Hamas executed six Israeli

hostages late last week.

These six - Hersch Goldberg-Polin, Eden Yerushalmi, Ori Danino, Alex Lobanov, Carmel Gat, and Almog Sarusi - were alive a few days ago. Hamas murdered them.

All of them were shot multiple times from close range.

They weren't killed in battle. They weren't killed from airstrikes. They were deliberately executed by Hamas.

Their kidnappings were a war crime. Their being taken hostage with the intent to trade them for murderers was a war crime. Their ten months of imprisonment were a crime against humanity. Their executions were a heinous crime against humanity.

And as of this writing, not a word of condemnation has been tweeted by Amnesty or Human Rights Watch or Oxfam or the UN Human Rights Council.

These are groups who are keen to condemn Jews marching with flags in Jerusalem, or Jews praying in their holiest spot, or Jews renting out houses as Airbnbs on the "wrong" side of an arbitrary line. Yet when Jews are summarily executed by Palestinians, they are suddenly struck mute.

So you know how they claim to care about international law? How they say they care about morality? How they pretend to care about human rights?

They don't give a damn about any of them. They only condemn things that align with their politics, and Palestinians murdering Jews is not something they consider abhorrent or immoral. They sort of admire them.

Sometimes, in order to appear even handed, they will write a report about undeniable and egregious violations of international law by Palestinian terror groups. One in perhaps 30 reports will mention rocket attacks by Hamas or rapes of Israelis. But those are the exceptions that prove the rule: they support Palestinian "resistance" in all its forms, but are forced to sometimes pretend to be consistent and issue half hearted condemnations while invariably at the same time also condemning Israel.

But there is no immediate, reflexive horror at Hamas being proven to do the most heinous war crimes that exist. They remain silent in the face of human rights and international law violations, when Israeli Jews are the victims.

They are the worst hypocrites on Earth. Their silence proves that their incessant condemnations of Israel are merely political and worthless. Because if they cannot immediately condemn Hamas executions of Jewish hostages, they are against human rights for people they also hate.

And those people are proud nationalistic Jews.

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 or visit www.kosher.org.au

MARIT AYIN IN CONTEMPORARY KASHRUT CONTEXTS

RABBI CHAIM JACHTER (KolTorah.org)

The Torah expects us to guard our reputations zealously. The Mishna (Shekalim 3:2) states: "One must be clean in the public perception just as he must do regarding Hashem. The Torah states (BeMidbar 32:22), "And you must be clean before Hashem and Yisrael." Mishlei (3:4) teaches, "You shall appear appealing and intelligent in the eyes of Hashem and people."

It is told that the Chafetz Chaim realized that it is prohibited to speak Lashon Hara against oneself after disparaging himself to a traveler he met on a train, who did not know he was the Chafetz Chaim. The traveler became irate and upset at the Chafetz Chaim and even struck and cursed him! When the traveler visited the Chafetz Chaim and discovered he hit the holy sage, he apologized profusely. The Chafetz Chaim told him not to worry since he taught him that speaking Lashon Hara about oneself is forbidden, something the Chafetz Chaim did not include in his works on Lashon Hara.

Rav Hershel Schachter cites Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik that the Halachot concerning cheshad, the prohibition to arouse suspicion about oneself, is rooted in the prohibition to speak Lashon Hara about oneself. One does not own his reputation since it belongs to Hashem. We must protect our good name just as we must preserve our health.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe O.C. 2:40) defines cheshad as casting aspersions on oneself and marit ayin as misleading others to incorrectly think something is permissible. Rav Shlomo Kluger (Teshuvot U'vacharta BaChaim 68), Teshuvot Chessed L'Avraham (1:21) and Rav Asher Weiss (Teshuvot Minchat Asher 1:65) agree.

KASHRUT APPLICATIONS: Although fish blood is permitted, the Chazal forbid consuming it unless pieces of fish scales are mixed to clarify it is fish

blood (Keritut 21b). Similarly, the Rama requires placing (Y.D. 87:3) almonds on the table when eating almond milk with animal meat. The Shach (Y.D. 87:6) clarifies that almonds are necessary even when having almond milk with poultry. The Chochmat Adam (40:3) and Aruch HaShulchan (Y.D. 87:16) follow the Shach.

IMITATION DAIRY, MEAT, AND NON-KOSHER FOODS: Today, various fake meat, cheese, and non-kosher products abound. Fake crab is very common in sushi, fake cheese is placed in burgers, and soy-based burgers are eaten with cheese. Must we display some packaging to avoid concern for marit ayin and cheshad?

While Rav Asher Weiss (Teshuvot Minchat Asher 1:66) writes that it is preferable to do so, OU Kosher does not make such a requirement. The common practice reflects the OU's policy.

The Mishna (Kilayim 9:2) forbids mixing silk and wool because people confuse silk with linen. However, the Rosh (Niddah 9:7) writes that this concern is no longer relevant since silk was common in his times. The Shulchan Aruch (Y.D. 298:1) codifies the Rosh with no dissent.

How can the Rosh and the Shulchan Aruch overturn a Mishnah? The answer is that Marit Ayin and cCheshad are not ironclad. They change with time. What was prohibited in the time of the Mishnah because of marit ayin is no longer banned centuries later. The Halacha has not been altered, but the reality has changed.

Rav Ovadia Yosef (Teshuvot Yechaveh Da'at 3:59) applies the Rosh and Shulchan Aruch to pareve milk and ice cream. No packaging display is required. He notes that people use matza meal even though it appears like flour. Rav Asher Weiss notes that sheitels do not raise marit ayin concerns that the married woman is not covering her hair. Neither does a man shaving with an electric shaver does not raise suspicions he uses a razor. Matza meal, shavers, and sheitels are so common they pose no concern for marit ayin.

Rav Asher Weiss surmises that almond milk was not common in the Rama's era, and thus, he required placing almonds on the table. Today, no one raises a fuss with fake crab meat in sushi since it is so common. The same applies to the plethora of pareve items whose widespread market availability is well-known.

Rav Ovadia adds that the Tiferet Yisrael (Kalkalet Shabbat, 34) writes that marit ayin only poses a problem when it appears more likely he is doing something forbidden than a permitted activity.

EATING AT NON-KOSHER RESTAURANTS: Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe O.C. 2:40) writes that one should not enter a restaurant absent exceptional need (such as extraordinary hunger or restroom urgency) due to marit ayin and cheshad. However, Rav Moshe's talmid Rav Moshe Heinemann rules one may buy and eat kosher food and drinks in cafeterias, coffee shops, and food courts at airports and rest stops. He notes that no suspicion is aroused since religious people commonly purchase kosher food in these locations. He compares such purchases to buying products at supermarkets selling kosher and non-kosher items.

BUSINESS MEETINGS IN NON-KOSHER RESTAURANTS: Rav Asher Weiss (Teshuvot Minchat Asher 1:67) similarly permits attending a meeting held in a non-kosher restaurant since conducting business in such establishments is common. Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky (cited in Emet L'Yaakov C.M. 425:5) agrees.

Rav Hershel Schachter permits, in these circumstances, ordering a drink and uncut fruit as well (<https://oukosher.org/halacha-yomis/required-attend-business-meeting-non-kosher-restaurant-avoid-issue-marit-ayin/>). Presumably he allows eating food from a kosher certified food provider shipped to the non-kosher place if proper steps are taken to maintain the food's kosher status (seals, special silverware, etc.).

The Rabbanim who permit attending a business meeting in a non-kosher restaurant do not contradict Rav Moshe's forbidding entering a non-kosher restaurant. Only when necessary do these Rabbanim permit entering a non-kosher place, such as for a business meeting. There is no reason to wear a cap instead of a kippa in such circumstances since one engages in permissible activity. Rav Asher Weiss does not mention a preference to avoid "appearing Orthodox" in such circumstances.

PLACES WITH QUESTIONABLE KASHRUT CERTIFICATION: Rav Weiss cautions, however, that one must avoid restaurants with subpar kosher supervision. A religious Jew entering such establishments misleads the underinformed to think it is permissible to eat there. The same applies to "kosher style" and vegan eateries, which some people wrongly perceive as

acceptable. In such cases, the concern for cheshad is great, and one must zealously avoid entering such establishments.

CONCLUSION: Today, kashrut marit ayin is uncommon, but concern for cheshad is perhaps greater than ever. The proliferation of sub-standard kashrut certifiers should make us keenly aware of the need to avoid misleading others.

Candle lighting (Melbourne) Shoftim 6-9-24 4 Ellul 5784, 5:45pm/6:43pm