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Say That Again, Please

RABBI ELISHA GREENBAUM (Chabad.org)

Speak to the kohanim and say to them... (21:1)

Tautological? Why the double expression "speak and say"—would you have expected Moshe to mime G-d's instructions? Can't you just imagine the scene—600,000 people standing around the desert all engaged in a giant game of Charades while Moshe stands in the middle, holding up three fingers and pantomiming, in Biblical Hebrew, directives for priestly behavior.

Obviously there must be a more profound implication to this double expression.

Rashi, greatest of commentators, explains that G-d is teaching a subtle but most significant point: It is not sufficient to merely instruct the people on how to act. Rather, one must ensure that they too will hand on these self-same instructions to the next generation. Speak, and say: You speak to them in such ways that they, in turn, will say to their children.

How many great philosophical systems have disappeared, how many revivalist movements have petered out because insufficient attention was accorded to initiating the young into the beauty and purpose of their elders' existence. The only way to safely ensure the propagation of a way of life is to train the next generation while young, thus inoculating them against the doubts that will inevitably arise.

The Jewish nation was born at the Exodus from Egypt. Just as a child is thrust suddenly into the world, naked and squalling, so too were we plunked in the desert, unready for freedom, naked of mitzvot and still suffering with our slave-mentality. Just as a newborn child is physically and mentally unready for independent living, relying on others for protection and training, so too did this new-found nation need to undergo a process of maturation.

Over the following seven weeks we underwent a process of life-education, training to live and think as free men. We replicate this journey every year over the sefira period, an annual seven-week long passage of spiritual rectification. Each day is a new stage in our emotional and intellectual journey to freedom, eagerly counting the days till we attain the Torah at Sinai.

To ensure survival, it is not enough to merely bring children into this world. One needs to guide and nurture the young until they are self-sufficient, capable of independent thought and imbued with the capability to make their own decisions. True education is when the instructor succeeds in transmitting such love and devotion that even later, when left to his own devices, the student chooses of his own will to follow that path, and teach those lessons to his own children.

Upgrading Your Mission

KATIA BOLOTIN (Aish.com)

Typically, during difficult times, we'll likely think: Why is this happening to me? Let's upgrade our thought process. Rather than think, "Why is this happening to me?" ask yourself, "Why is this happening for me?" Viewing life's challenges as happening for you can help to develop a positive paradigm shift. We can't control all that occurs in our lives, but we can control our reactions to those occurrences.

This week's Torah portion enumerates the various physical impairments that disqualify a Kohen from performing certain functions in the Mishkan or the Holy Temple.¹⁴⁴ From today's perspective, these verses might suggest discrimination. Before making inaccurate assumptions, however, let's clarify the significance of these verses. Learning more will enhance and broaden our understanding. Toward the end of this parashah appears the statement "An eye for an eye."¹⁴⁵ Literally taken, this verse sounds extremely harsh; however, it is to be understood as the appropriate monetary compensation for an injury or loss. We'd be wrong to assume that someone wearing a mask and bloodied gloves is a murderer rather than a life-saving surgeon. It would be equally erroneous to make unsubstantiated conclusions regarding any verse in the Torah without a full understanding of its context. The Written Torah is elucidated by the Oral Torah, which also was given and explained to Moshe on Har Sinai. A full understanding of the Written Torah is only possible in conjunction with the teachings of the Oral Torah. Both were received at Har Sinai and were meant to work in conjunction with each other.

To better understand those verses and the Torah's view of physical impairment, let's compare the Torah perspective with that of other societies throughout history. The Torah was the first written document to stress the inherent dignity of every human being. Regardless of one's gender, race, or physical condition, the Torah embraces every person as being made in the image of G-d. This was, and is, in stark contrast to the practices and attitudes of other "civilized" societies.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle stated, "There must be a law that no imperfect or maimed child be brought up." He advocated the pervasive killing of crippled children as "critical to the functioning of society." Infanticide, to prevent resources from being "wasted" on weak or disabled offspring, was widely practiced throughout the world. Even in our modern society, it was not till 1990 that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was enacted. With this backdrop, we can begin to examine the circumstances involving the "disqualified Kohen."

Let's begin with the familiar idiom "A blessing in disguise." This alludes to that which appears to be awful or a punishment of some kind, but that is actually the opposite. Judaism maintains that there is a reason for everything and that all of G-d's actions have an ultimate greater purpose. Yet we are not always able to comprehend that G-d's actions are for our benefit. Continued Torah study provides us with our spiritual corrective lenses. Without that continued study, we may not perceive or uncover the underlying good. Viewing life through spiritually attuned lenses heightens our perceptions and clarifies our vision.

Throughout our personal struggles, we become aware that our greatest strengths and inner fortitude come from striving to transform our shortcomings. Navigating life's obstacles with faith and maintaining a positive attitude are the hallmarks of inner greatness. Our struggles don't define us, but our responses to them surely can.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe clarified these concepts when he addressed disabled Israeli soldiers and athletes. The Rebbe stated, "The term 'handicapped' should not be used for anyone. To the contrary, he or she is someone special and exceptional, created by the Creator, with special powers above and beyond the capacity of an ordinary individual. They should, therefore, be called what they truly are: 'exceptional.'"

In another address, the Rebbe stated that the term "disabled" should be replaced with "distinguished." This emphasizes that when a person

encounters difficulty, their hidden abilities are aroused to reveal themselves and become activated. His or her mission is to increase light, sanctity, and spirituality in the world. They are G-d's envoys to bring His commandments to all the people.

This Chassidic insight can help to guide us. The way to identify the correction we need to make and our mission in this world is to determine which things come hardest to us. This is the sign G-d has given us for knowing where we must devote our energies. Thereby, the way that we deal with difficulties and the mental attitudes they develop can serve to refine our souls in ways that we cannot fathom. Our challenging circumstances can ultimately become the greatest blessings that G-d could have bestowed upon us.

Let's contemplate the story about two renowned Chassidic teachers. The brothers Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk and Rebbe Zusha of Anipoli were arrested unjustly and placed in a lockup with unsavory inmates. In the middle of their shared cell was an open bucket that served as a toilet. Rebbe Elimelech began to cry; his brother asked what was troubling him. Elimelech replied that, worse than being unfairly jailed, they couldn't pray or discuss Torah in the presence of the pail of excrement.

Reb Zusha responded, "Now that we are in this situation, G-d's will and G-d's command is that we do not pray. Since we are doing G-d's will, we need to be happy about it." The two brothers were so inspired by this idea that they began to dance around the pot with joy and happiness. The other prisoners began to jeer. The commotion alerted the guards, who asked the other stunned inmates to explain all the commotion. They couldn't, but thought that somehow it was connected to the chamber pot in the middle of the room.

Immediately, the guards removed the bucket, and the brothers could then learn Torah and pray once more.

Only G-d knows the reasons why any individual is placed in a seemingly unfair situation. Ultimately, not performing a desired mitzvah when it should not be performed is a fulfillment of G-d's will.

It's interesting to note that the Kohanim that were disqualified from certain services in the sanctuary dwelled within the community, serving the daily religious needs of the people. They were embraced by society as a part of normative life. One of the important functions of the Kohen was to care for the metzora. Such an individual was sent out of the camp until the Kohen declared that the malady had passed. One was a spiritual malady that needed spiritual correction and the other was something he was born with that he just had to live with. If the Kohen himself had his own imperfection, just imagine the heightened empathy he could share with the isolated sufferer.

These Kohanim served society, modeling a powerful lesson. Physical imperfections do not impair an individual—emotionally, intellectually, or spiritually. While dealing with our own challenges, each of us can serve as sacred vessels to others in need of comfort and support.

Delving even deeper, the third Lubavitcher Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek, taught that G-d chooses certain sensitive souls to have physical impairments so that they will not develop a delusional veneer of perfection. Among these were the Kohanim who were physically blemished. Their souls were as perfect as could be. They were chosen as "shluchim"—G-d's emissaries—to bring hope to souls who viewed themselves as outcasts or defective.

In a world where G-d's will, not man's, defines perfection, the impaired Kohen serves a role that, in many ways, was even more meaningful than performing the service in G-d's sanctuary. It is the Kohen who transforms the imperfections of daily life into a dwelling place for G-d. These special Kohanim's mission is to be out there in the "real world," embracing the broken souls and hearts. They bring G-d's light into places that are cracked and shattered. Thereby, the flaws, which make us human, draw us closer to G-d.

Toward the end of the Torah portion, G-d tells Moshe to instruct all the people to bring pure, pressed olive oil. This was used for lighting the Ner Tamid, the perpetual light. Likewise, we each contain a pure soul that burns constantly within us. May we strive to see ourselves and one another not as blemished or unacceptable, but as stamped in the Divine image—capable, at any moment and in any place, of rising to holiness. It's all happening for you.

And that is the unblemished truth.

It Means NO!

RABBI LABEL LAM (Torah.org)

HASHEM said to Moshe: Speak to the kohanim, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: (LO – LAMED-ALEPH) Do not let anyone defile himself for a dead person

among his people. (Vayikra 21:1)

The Cohanim are told "LO"- do not become contaminated by dead bodies! What does "NO" mean?

Original Hebrew is a Holy Language. Although western letters and characters are ideographic, that is they are merely signals or triggers for certain sounds, their shapes and the names of letters are arbitrary. The eastern languages are pictographic. The word for a house is a picture of a house but how to pronounce it is a matter of oral tradition. In Loshon HaKodesh, the Holy Language, each letter has a pronunciation but the names of the letters mean something, and the shapes are telling too. The first time a letter is used not as a prefix in Chumash is also an indication of the meaning of the letter.

Imagine you are looking at a periodic table of elements while reading this short paragraph from Sefer Yetzira; "Twenty-Two Foundation Letters. He engraved them, He carved them. He permuted them, He weighed them. He transformed them, and with them, He depicted all that was formed and all that would be formed".

The letter LAMED is not an arbitrary sound and the shape of the letter has a pictorial quality as well. The name of the letter LAMED means to learn. LAMED is the silhouette of someone who is sitting and learning. Draw a line from the foot to the knee and then from the knee to the back and all the way up the back to the head and you will have written the letter LAMED. LAMED as a prefix means, "to" or "for", because when one learns, they gain both direction and purpose. ALEF means to teach, to be a general, Elef is 1,000. It is the largest numeral word in Tora. It is a silent letter – a Silent Teacher! In Chumash ALEF is used first as the beginning letter of ELOCHIM. ELOCHIM is plural and yet Alef is ONE. It is the unity in the multiplicity. Alef is made up of two YUDS which are 10 each and a VUV which is 6 which adds up to HASHEM's name – 26. "HASHEM Hu HaELOCHIM".

Together they combine to spell the simple word LO -NO! NO does not mean that you want to do something and somebody tells you not to. NO! "LO" means that one is seeking direction, living with purpose and he meets the supreme authority, HASHEM! He experiences an unyielding wall of ultimate reality. Cecil B. DeMille who made the movie the Ten Commandments famously said, "You cannot break the law. You can only break yourself against the law!"

In Loshon HaKodesh, the chemistry set with which HASHEM created the world, the word for table is Shulchan. A Shulchan does not mean a flat surface. Shulchan defines the ideal function of a table. The root of Shulchan is – send. It is a mailbox of sorts from which gifts are launched and received. HASHEM takes ultimate spirituality and miraculously creates various delicious foods for our table and we then reconvert those material goodies back to spirituality. We return the Ruchnios and then HASHEM delivers more Gashmios. Mashiv means to return and HaRuach refers to Ruchnios – spirituality. Morid is to bring down and Gesheim refers to Gashmies – physical matter. HASHEM made and constantly makes the world Yesh M'Ayin, something from nothing. Our task in this world is defined by this phrase Mashiv HaRuach v' Morid HaGesheim. We take the material stuff of this world which is really dense Ruchnius and by eating and drinking, and through making Brochos, and through learning Torah and Davening, and serving HASHEM, and even by refraining from the forbidden, we convert this physicality back into Ruchnios – Mashiv HaRuach. We return the material stuff back to HASHEM by revealing the ultimate spirituality within. Since we are making the ideal use of this world, HASHEM then brings down and delivers to us more Gashmies, material matter to work with, – U'Morid HaGesheim.

We are like nuclear power plants. We produce light that travels forever. In the latter part of the 20th century, we discovered what happens when we split open the smallest particles. How much light awaits us in Olam Haba! So, when the Torah tells us "LO", it means NO!

SHOULD WE LOOK FOR CHALLENGES?

AVROHOM YAAKOV

Among the various sacrifices brought by individuals is the Todah, the thanksgiving offering.

"When you sacrifice a thanksgiving offering to Hashem, that it be favourably accepted for you, you shall sacrifice it." (22:29)

A thanksgiving sacrifice is brought when a person was in danger and was saved. The Talmud (Brachos 54b) tells us there are four scenarios for bringing a Todah. Someone who was ill, someone who was imprisoned, someone who travelled through a desert or someone who sailed overseas. The obvious question is why is there a need for the person to be put in danger so that they can thank Hashem? Don't let the person fall into a dangerous situation in the first place. Wouldn't that be preferable?

The Ksav Sofer suggests that sometimes smaller troubles happen to a person to reduce a more severe punishment. Then Hashem saves the person from the minor problem to alert the person that something worse was in the offing and that through Hashem's kindness he is safe. The thanksgiving is therefore for the opportunity Hashem provides us to avoid more serious punishment. Most of us would prefer to go through life without troubles. Noone seeks out problems just to be amused.

However, if we understand that a challenge is for our benefit, then we would welcome them and perhaps even seek them out.

The Talmud (Avodah Zarah 3a) notes that G-d does not make tyrannical and unreasonable demands of His creatures. The Midrash (Shmos Rabba 34:1) explains that "G-d does not make matters difficult for His creatures; He expects each person to perform according to his capacity."

Challenges have a twofold purpose – to indicate when we are going off the rails, and to force us to stretch and use the abilities that we have or grow those talents so that we can handle more things.

Therefore, we owe G-d gratitude for challenges.

Mitzvah-Watch

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY (Torah.org)

Observation does not necessarily mean participation – at least in an etymological or grammatical sense. My dealings with Jews who do not keep Torah law have led me to hear one quip, "of course Rabbi, I am an observant Jew. If someone performs a mitzvah in my presence, I observe a mitzvah!"

Of course, in our vernacular, when one is called an observant Jew, he does much more than watch! He or she participates in mitzvah performance; watching is not enough.

So that is why I was troubled this week, when I noticed a particularly expressive exhortation to mitzvah performance u'shmartem es mitzvotai, v'aseesem osum — watch the mitzvos and do them" (22:31).

What does "watch mitzvos" mean? If one does a mitzvah, he is surely doing more than watching them. Why then does the Torah tell us to watch the mitzvos in addition to performing them?

This past winter, in honor of 7 Adar, a day designated to honor the yahrzeit of Moshe Rabbeinu, it was decided to give recognition to the community Chevra Kadish (burial society). Rabbi Paysach Krohn addressed a large gathering at Brooklyn's Bais HaChaim Chapel. His inspiring talk, (which I highly recommend) concerned the delicate issues of death, dignity, and decorum. He related the following story: (I may have skewed some details and invite my Dutch readers to correct my embellishments!)

Rabbi Yehuda Laib Lewis is the Rav of a beautiful kehilla in Amsterdam. As in every kehilla, the community has a Chevra Kadisha which tends to the needs of the dead and dying, insures a dignified burial for the deceased, and helps the mourners through the process of bereavement.

Membership is a privilege and only outstanding members of the kehilla are selected. There is one group of people who, no matter how outstanding they are considered in the community, are never asked to serve as part of the Chevra. You see, kohanim (priests) are not allowed to come in contact with a dead body, so burying the dead is one mitzvah that they rarely perform!

It so happened that Rabbi Lewis's community purchased a plot of land to consecrate a new cemetery for the kehilla. The kohanim, as well as other members of the community participated in this great mitzvah and designated the first plot that was to be used. Not long after the purchase, a member of the kehilla passed away. He would be the first to be buried in the new cemetery. The next day the friends and mourners arrived with the deceased at the cemetery. Shovels in hand, they approached the grave to begin burying the inaugural plot for the deceased.

They were shocked to see that the plot had been dug!

After burying the man, they found out the true story. Moshe Cohen, a member of the community and a kohen, wanted to participate in the great mitzvah of burying the dead, all his life. However, there are very few limits to the restriction of a kohen coming in contact with a dead person. But when Mr. Cohen heard that there was a new cemetery being consecrated and that there was no one interred in it, he saw the opportunity that he had watched and waited for. And the first one buried in the new cemetery had his grave ready and waiting, dug by none other than Moshe Cohen!

The Chasam Sofer reminds us of another time the Torah uses the word watch. The Torah tells us of Yosef's dreams of glory and that his father Yaakov, "watched the incident" Rashi explains that watched means waited in anticipation of fulfillment.

The Chasam Sofer explains that the Torah in this week's parsha tells us to do more than perform mitzvos. It tells us to watch for them. It exhorts us to

anticipate their fulfillment. It teaches us to wait for the opportunities that arise, ready and able to perform when opportunity knocks!

Rabbi Akiva, his body raked by burning iron combs, told his students, "all my life I waited for the mitzvah to give one's soul for the Almighty. I wondered, 'when would it come to my hands so that I may fulfill it?'"

The Torah tells us this week, Watch for the mitzvos and then observe them! It is not enough to be a Jewish observer, rather one must be a Jewish anticipator as well!

Ambassadors Wanted

RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN (Chabad.org)

There was a time when Jewish people's faith in the one G-d of Israel was challenged on a regular basis. During the Crusades, for example, many thousands of Jews were forced to choose between the cross and the sword: to either deny their Judaism and embrace the dominant faith, or die. Countless Jews gave their lives al kiddush Hashem — "in sanctification of the name of G-d." They became martyrs for their faith and heroes for eternity.

Thankfully, today it doesn't often happen that we have to make that choice. The late Daniel Pearl, may G-d avenge his blood, was one notable exception. Tragically, we still have far too many martyrs nowadays; Jews who are blown apart by maniacal suicide bombers for no other reason than that they are Jewish. But they weren't asked to make a choice. They didn't choose martyrdom. It was forced upon them.

The commandments to sanctify the name of G-d and never to desecrate it are found in this week's parshah (22:32). Generally, today, the concept of kiddush Hashem, sanctifying the name of G-d, is observed not by dying as Jews but by living as Jews. How does a Jew give G-d a good name? When he or she behaves as a good Jew should. When other people see a Jew behaving honestly and uprightly that gives Jews and Judaism a good reputation. And ultimately it all goes back to Torah, the word of G-d. G-d Himself gets the credit for the noble behavior of His people.

Some classic scenarios would be returning money if you were given incorrect change in your favor or calling attention to the fact that a client overpaid you. Although it is only right to do these things, the fact is that others might have kept quiet about it. When a Jew acts with honor he brings honor to his faith and his G-d.

Sadly, it also works in the reverse. Jewish people accused of being slumlords do not give Jews, or the G-d of Israel, a good name—especially when there may be some grounds for the accusation.

Albert Einstein is reputed to have once stated, "If my theories prove correct, the Germans will claim me as a German, the French will say I am theirs and the Americans will call me their own. If my theories are incorrect, they will all say I am a Jew."

How proud are we when one of our own does something especially noteworthy like winning a Nobel Prize or performing a valiant humanitarian act. Conversely, how ashamed are we if there is a moral or financial scandal involving one of our own.

I once protested to the general manager of a radio station in our community because I felt he was giving far too much exposure to Jews and Judaism in relation to our numbers and, unfortunately, the publicity wasn't always flattering. At first he denied it. But when I presented him with statistical proof, his plain and honest answer was "Jews are news."

Fair or not, the fact of life is that Jews are scrutinized far more carefully than others. Like it or not, every Jew is representing his faith, his people and his G-d. Ultimately, how we act will bring fame or infamy upon all of us. May we all be successful ambassadors.

Holidays Became a Painful Reminder of What Could Have Been

RABBI YISSOCHOR FRAND (Torah.org)

We are all familiar with the following pasuk because it is part of the Torah reading of every Yom Tov: "Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: Hashem's appointed festivals that you are to designate as holy convocations – these are My appointed festivals." (Vayira 23:1) This introduces the "moadim," beginning with Shabbos, then Pesach, then Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Succos. The Ribono shel Olam gave us a wonderful present called Yom Tov.

And yet, Klal Yisrael abused that gift until the Ribono shel Olam had to say – as He does so movingly in the Haftorah we read on the Shabbos before Tisha B'Av – "My Soul detests your new moons and your appointed times, they have become a burden upon Me... " (Yeshaya 1:14) Our starting point was Parshas Emor, where the Ribono shel Olam designated the festivals as "My time with you". A "moed" is an appointment, a meeting time. The

Yomim Tovim started out as a time to rendezvous with the Shechina. However, it turned into that which we find in the first perek of Yeshaya: “I can’t stand your Yomim Tovim. Stay away, they are burdensome for Me.”

The Dubno Maggid gave a parable to explain how this transpired:

There was once a wealthy man who had several children that all became very ill. The man found the best doctor available and insisted the doctor come live with him to treat his children. The doctor put some kind of medication together which the children had to drink as their treatment, and they all got better. Some time went by and they had a recurrence of the illness.

The wealthy man figured, if it worked one time, I will bring the doctor back a second time. He brought the doctor back. The doctor made the same medicine but the children refused to take it because it was too bitter. Their conditions deteriorated. The doctor saw that they were not taking their medication. There was nothing more that he could do, so he left. As time went by, whenever the doctor would meet this wealthy man, he would get a scowl from him. The father was upset with the doctor.

The doctor protested: “What do you want from me? I prepared the medicine. It worked the first time. The second time, the children refused to take the medicine. What do you want from me? It is not my fault!”

The man said, “Yes, I know it is not your fault; but every time I see you, I am reminded ‘if they would only take that medicine’. You remind me of what they could do and how they could get better, but they don’t get better. So every time I see you, I get into a bad mood because you remind me of the opportunity and ability that they would have, if they would only take the medicine.”

The Dubno Maggid explains that this is the meaning of that pasuk in Yeshaya: “I gave you the Yomim Tovim. This is our special time together. Eleh hem moa’doi. These are the times that a person has the ability to be with the Ribono shel Olam. He doesn’t go to work. He doesn’t need to rush. He is able to get closer to the Ribono shel Olam, to daven better, to be better, to come to Yerushalayim, to bring korbonos. And yet, they don’t take advantage of this opportunity.

The moadim are like the doctor. Just like every time the father saw the doctor, it put him in a bad mood because his children were not taking advantage of the tremendous opportunity, so too, Hashem says “Your new moons and appointed times, My soul despises.” I can’t stand it because these Yomim Tovim could be so wonderful and so enhancing and it is right there for you – and yet you don’t take advantage.

The Seforno actually says this whole idea in just a few words. On this pasuk of Eleh hem mo’adoi (Vayikra 23:1), the Seforno writes as follows:

These are the moadim that I want, however Klal Yisrael is supposed to make the Moadim into mikraei kodesh – times imbued with sanctity. We are supposed to daven better, learn better, enjoy, be with our families, all these things. But we don’t do that. The days are treated like week days in which they engage solely in pleasures of the moment and strictly in mundane human pleasures. They do not become moa’doi (My Meeting times, as it says in Parshas Emor), but rather strictly moadeichem (Your Meeting times, as it says in the first perek of Yeshaya). Your idea of a Yom Tov is just a feeding fest. That is something “My Soul detests.”

Numbers

RABBI YANKI TAUBER (Chabad.org)

Numbers are funny things. On the one hand, they seem utterly devoid of meaning: think of the sterility of bureaucracies ("Go to Window #14 and fill out form #3062") or the banality of an address like "25 20th Street." On the other hand, consider how numbers are used when we say things like, "Eighteen years' experience in the business"; "A \$450,000 home"; or "This is our child. She's three."

Counting something makes it real to us: only when we have assigned it a quantity can we understand what it means to us and how we can use it. Imagine that you are given a chest full of gold coins. You thank your benefactor and take it home. As soon as the door is securely bolted, what's the first thing you do? Count them, of course. Sure, it feels great to be able to say, "I'm a rich man." But if you want to do something with your riches, you have to know: How much?

"And you shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the Shabbat, from the day on which you bring the Omer offering, seven complete weeks they shall be; until the morrow of the seventh week, you shall count fifty days... And you shall proclaim that very day a holy festival" (Leviticus 23:15-21)

The people of Israel departed Egypt on the 15th of Nissan, celebrated ever since as the first day of Passover. Seven weeks later, on the 6th of Sivan—marked on our calendar as the festival of Shavuot—we assembled at the foot of Mount Sinai and received the Torah from G-d.

Every year, we retrace this journey with a 49-day "Counting of the Omer." Beginning on the second night of Passover, we count the days and weeks. "Today is one day to the Omer," we proclaim on the first night of the count. "Today is two days to the Omer," "Today is seven days, which are one week to the Omer", "Today is twenty-six days, which are three weeks and five days day to the Omer," and so on, until: "Today is forty-nine days, which are seven weeks to the Omer." The fiftieth day is Shavuot.

The Kabbalists explain that we each possess seven powers of the heart—love, awe, beauty, ambition, humility, bonding and regality—and that each of these seven powers includes elements of all seven. These are represented by the seven weeks and forty-nine days of the Omer count.

Every Passover, we are granted a treasure chest containing the greatest gift ever given to man—the gift of freedom. It is also a completely useless gift. What is freedom? What can be done with it? Nothing, unless we open the treasure chest and count its contents.

So on the second day of Passover, after we've taken home our treasure, we start counting. We count seven times seven, because the gift of freedom has been given to each of the seven powers and forty-nine dimensions of our soul. Indeed, what use is a capacity for love, if it is a slave to external influences and internal neurosis? Of what value is ambition, if we are its pawn rather than its master?

Each evening for the next seven weeks, we open our treasure chest and count another coin. We count our loving love, intimidating love, beautiful love, ambitious love, humble love, bonding love and regal love. We assign a number to the regality of our awe ("Today is fourteen days, which are two weeks to the Omer") and to the beauty of our humility ("Today is thirty-one days, which are four weeks and three days to the Omer").

We count them all—and then we present ourselves at Mount Sinai.

Law and Justice

RABBI JAY KELMAN (TorahinMotion.org)

Sefer Vayikra has but two stories, that of the tragic deaths of Nadav and Avihu and the tragic death of the blasphemer, which we read this week. While few would argue that the death of Nadav and Avihu was a great tragedy, many would likely push back on calling the death of this unidentified blasphemer a tragedy.

Surely, one who curses G-d is worthy of death, a sin so severe it is one of the sheva mitzvot bnai Noach, seven basic laws that Jewish teaching expect all of humanity to abide by. Yet as we try to unpack the tragic series of events that led to the cursing of G-d it becomes evident that mistake after mistake led to this tragedy. It did not have to be this way but sadly, the warning signs were missed leading to the tragic sin and punishment.

“The son of an Israelite woman went out – he was the son of an Egyptian man – among Bnei Yisroel. They argued in the encampment—the son of the Israelite woman, and the Israelite man. And the son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the Name and cursed; and they brought him unto Moshe. And his mother’s name was Shelomit, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan” (Vayikra 24: 10-11).

This cryptic story consists of but two verses[1] and to use a rabbinic expression, “ha’ikar chaser min hasefer, the main part is missing from the book”. There is no context to this story, following after the Torah discusses the 12 loaves of bread that were baked every week in the Temple. While the protagonist’s mother – and grandmother! – and tribe are named, and we are told his father was an Egyptian, the main character himself is anonymous. We have no idea what the dispute was about nor anything about the co-disputant save for the fact that he was Jewish – presumably (though not necessarily) on “both sides”. We are left scratching our head as to why this dispute led one to cursing G-d. Had it led to murder we could, as horrible as that might be, understand such and hence understand why one might receive a death penalty.

Let us try to unravel the story as best we can[2]. The blasphemer’s mother’s name was Shelomit – a woman of peace, who was the daughter of Dibri, a woman of speech[3]. It thus appears there is some issue about what was said to someone, something that caused the peace to end. He was the son of an Egyptian, Rashi unexpectedly noting that it was the son of the Egyptian who Moshe had killed many years earlier who was hitting a Jewish slave.

The link between these two stories can be seen from the opening word Vayetze, he went out, a word very much out of place here. As Rashi asks, from where did he go? The story of Moshe killing the father begins in the exact same way, Vayetze Moshe, and Moshe went out to his brothers (Shemot 2:11). Furthermore, Rashi notes that Moshe killed the Egyptian through speech by use of the Ineffable name of G-d, helping to explain why the blasphemer’s grandmother, Dibri, the one who speaks, is named.

We can now begin to understand why this person might have cursed G-d. Moshe had killed his father and with Moshe being the representative of G-d, he took out his anger on G-d. Why did, and how could, G-d choose someone who murdered my father to be the lawgiver of the Jewish people[4]? Yet it is not just what Moshe did as a young lad discovering his Jewish roots. Rashi explains Vayetze, the blasphemer came from the Beit Din, the court of Moshe, having lost his case. As Rashi explains, he pitched his tent with the tribe of Dan, the tribe of his mother. The tribe of Dan said what are you doing here to which he explained that he is a member of the tribe. They then quoted the verse “Every man [of the children of Israel shall encamp] by his own standard, that bears the signs of their father’s house”! While Judaism may be conferred by the mother, the status of one’s tribe is determined by one’s father.

Feeling this was unjust he went to Moshe for help. Moshe however ruled like the people of Dan – with strict justice – the meaning of the word Dan. At that point Vayetze, he stormed out of court and cursed G-d.

It is easy to read this story and have no pity on this person. He got what he deserved – how dare he curse G-d. Easy but insufficient. Here is a person whose father was killed, being raised by a single mother[5]. He comes to live with his mother’s side of the family and is rejected. He then goes to Moshe, the man of strict justice, who could tolerate no wrong, who killed his father because he was hitting a Hebrew and he is turned away given no other place to turn. How could Moshe not find a place for him? How could Moshe, torn from his family, raised as an Egyptian yet now a Jew not have mercy on this product of a mixed marriage?

The law, din, may have been followed to the letter. However, justice was not carried out[6]. What a tragic story it truly is.

FOOTNOTES

[1] The rest of the “story” details his punishment and the laws of blasphemy.

[2] So much of the Torah is purposely ambiguous (this story more than most), allowing, encouraging and demanding different understandings each according to one’s time and place.

[3] As we have often discussed names in the Torah may – or may not – be the actual name of the person. It is hard for example to believe that someone – especially a leader of the Jewish people would name their children Machlon and Kilyon, sickness and destruction (Rut 1:). Rather names reflect ideas revealing important details of the person. At times they are evident – or at least hoped for at birth – and hence the Torah gives us their actual birthname. But when we first hear of the name after birth – for example Moshe – the name may have little in common with the name given by the parents.

[4] While most commentaries justify Moshe’s actions one can appreciate why the victim’s son might feel differently. At the same time, Nechama Leibowitz zt”l quotes the Midrash Petirat Moshe, the Midrash on the death of Moshe which describes Moshe pleading with G-d to remain alive, arguing as to why he should be allowed to enter the Land of Israel. G-d’s final argument – to which there is no response from Moshe – is as follows. Said the Blessed Holy One: “Did I order you to kill the Egyptian?” Replied Moshe: “You killed all the firstborn of Egypt, yet I am to die because of a single Egyptian?” Said to him the Blessed Holy One: “Are you comparable to me, killing and giving life? Can you give life as I do?”

[5] It is noteworthy that while her mother’s name is mentioned there is no mention of a husband indicating she never remarried. Had she done so the blasphemer might have been able to pitch his tent with his stepfather. have

[6] Yitro in advising Moshe how to set up a properly functioning court system told Moshe “You shalt teach them the statutes and the laws, and shalt show them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do”. The Talmud (Bava Metzia 30b) interprets the phrase asher ya’ahsoon, that they must do to refer to acting Lifnim Meshurat Hadin, beyond the strict justice of the law. It appears Moshe did not yet know that Talmudic exegeses.

News & Views

Sydney benefit concert for Bondi terror victims scrapped after Greek choir objects to singing with Jews

ANNABEL SINCLAIR (JewishNews.co.uk 28-4-26)

A fundraising concert planned in support of victims of the Bondi Beach terror attack has been cancelled after members of a Greek choir reportedly refused to perform alongside a Jewish choral group.

The event, titled Concert for Hope and Unity, had been due to take place at Sydney Town Hall on 28 June and was expected to bring together the Australian Hellenic Choir and the Sydney Jewish Choral Society for a joint performance.

According to reporting by The Australian, the concert was called off after a vote during rehearsals last week found that more than half of the Hellenic choir objected to appearing on stage with the Jewish group.

Some choir members reportedly raised political objections, while others expressed fears over potential security risks linked to the event.

The concert had been organised as a fundraiser for victims of the December terror attack at a Hanukkah celebration on Sydney’s Bondi Beach.

Sydney Jewish Choral Society chair Anne Spira said the cancellation had left members deeply upset.

“The result is, like many other Jews in the arts since 7 October, 2023, we have been cancelled,” she told The Australian. “We have been de-platformed, and it is deeply upsetting for us and the broader Jewish community, who have been the target of anti-Jewish racism in this country for two and a half years.”

Spira also reportedly made a submission to Australia’s Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion, which was established following rising concern over antisemitism after the Bondi attack.

One unnamed choir member told the newspaper: “It’s not hard to imagine how we’re all feeling.”

Australian Hellenic Choir president James Tsolakis acknowledged tensions within parts of the local Greek community.

“There’s a bit of antisemitism in the Greek community; I didn’t realise the extent of it,” he said. “The Jewish people are all into it, I’m into it, but the Greek choir was a bit anti doing it because of the political climate.”

Australian Hellenic Choir president James Tsolakis acknowledged tensions within parts of the local Greek community. “There’s a bit of antisemitism in the Greek community; I didn’t realise the extent of it,” he said.

He added: “Unfortunately, we have a lot of people in the community blaming the Jewish community for what’s happening in Israel, Palestine... that’s not correct.”

“You want to hate (Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu? Hate Netanyahu, but what have the Jewish people done to you? The whole antisemitism thing has got to be wound back.”

Tsolakis said concerns about the wider climate in Australia and fears surrounding the event had influenced members’ decisions.

The cancelled performance was expected to include a joint rendition of The Ballad of Mauthausen, a work centred on the relationship between a Greek prisoner of war and a Jewish prisoner in the Nazi concentration camp at Mauthausen.

The two choirs had previously performed together in 2022.

Organisers had reportedly anticipated a crowd of around 2,000 people, while local government funding of 15,000 Australian dollars had recently been approved for the event.

Despite the cancellation, organisers are said to be exploring future collaborations, including a possible performance in Canberra next year.

Australia’s Jewish community has faced a sharp rise in antisemitic incidents since the Hamas attacks on Israel on 7 October 2023.

According to the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, 1,654 antisemitic incidents were recorded between October 2024 and September 2025 – roughly five times the annual average documented in the decade before the Hamas attacks.

Jewish institutions across Australia have been targeted in recent years, including synagogue attacks, arson incidents and threats against Jewish healthcare workers and community organisations.

Recording reveals Qatar promised to 'look after' ICC prosecutor Khan if he pursued Netanyahu

TOBIAS HOLCMAN (Jpost.com 28-4-26)

Qatar promised to "look after" the International Criminal Court Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan if he indicted Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the case for war crimes and crimes against humanity due to the war in Gaza, The Wall Street Journal reported on Monday.

According to the WSJ report, which cited a witness and an audio recording, Qatar was pushing for the investigation in order to "look after" Khan, after the sexual assault allegations that were brought up against him.

The investigation mentions an earlier report by The Guardian where two private investigation firms, Highgate and Elicius Intelligence, were working in the hopes of discrediting Khan’s alleged assault victim.

The report also mentions that the recording, which centers on two investigators discussing Khan’s case and a "client country," was submitted to the FBI to request an inquiry and is known to several Members of Congress.

Netanyahu addressed the report with a statement saying, "The ICC is a corrupt and morally bankrupt institution that should be closed. It was clear from Day 1 that there was no merit to the absurd accusations against the State of Israel and Prime Minister Netanyahu. Israel waged a just war by just means against a terrorist organization that slaughtered our people."

In the recording mentioned in the report, which The Jerusalem Post couldn't verify, one of the investigators said, "I spoke to the client about it [referring to suspicions about links between Khan and Qatar]. They weren't surprised that it had leaked that they were wrapping their arms around him."

"It's not that long that they wrapped their arms around him," another investigator pointed out in the recording, according to the WSJ. "It's all in the context of issuing the warrant. That was basically the deal. He was like, 'I want to issue the warrant, but I'm terrified to do it.' And they said, 'If you do it, then we'll look after you.'"

The WSJ contacted both private investigation firms for comment, with Elicius not replying to the request while Highgate said in a statement that it only worked in a file in defense of the ICC, denying any state or government entity involvement.

Additionally, Khan's lawyer said that neither the prosecutor nor his team had any involvement in such an intelligence operation. "Our client was not offered or given (and would not have sought or accepted) any 'promise' by any state (whether Qatar or any other) to 'look after' him if he applied for the arrest warrants," read his statement.

Additionally, the WSJ's witness suggested that the private investigators targeted two Americans: Tom Lynch, the senior ICC official who first reported the assault allegation, and Sen. Lindsey Graham.

ICC votes to advance disciplinary measures against Khan

Earlier in April, the ICC member states voted to pursue disciplinary proceedings against Khan after receiving reports regarding sexual assault allegations against him, Reuters reported, citing two sources.

In the vote done by a core group of member states, 15 voted in favor, two abstained, and four voted against moving forward with the process, said the sources, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The prosecutor's office said it would not comment on the continuation of the proceedings, as it was an ongoing process.

The International Criminal Court has been thrust into crisis by the investigations into Khan - its most prominent official - as well as by US sanctions over the court's actions, including arrest warrants for Israeli officials for alleged war crimes.

The Arab World: Where Peace Is a Crime

ELDER OF ZIYON (ElderofZiyob.blogspot.com 27-4-26)

When Donald Trump said recently that he had never heard of Lebanon's law banning contact with Israelis — and called it "crazy" — he was, for once, understating the problem. Khaled Abu Toameh's survey of Arab anti-normalization laws reveals something more systemic than a single quirky statute: a regional architecture of coercion designed to make ordinary human contact between Arabs and Jews literally criminal.

Lebanon's law, rooted in its 1955 Boycott Law and reinforced by the penal code, prohibits all economic, professional, cultural, and social relations between Lebanese nationals and Israeli citizens. Violators face prison terms of three to ten years with hard labor, plus fines and professional bans. The Lebanese president cannot attend a White House meeting with the Israeli prime minister without technically violating his own country's law.

Well, that is not quite true. It is possible for Israeli Maronite Christians to visit Lebanon through a circuitous route even though they are Israeli citizens. Lebanon's laws are aimed at Israeli Jews, not Israelis altogether. And Lebanon is the moderate case.

Iraq's parliament passed a law in 2022 — the "Criminalizing Normalization and Establishment of Relations with the Zionist Entity" — carrying life imprisonment or the death penalty for violations, including "supporting Zionist ideas via social media." One man was sentenced to life imprisonment for posting content supportive of Israel on Facebook, with Hebrew-language books and newspapers found in his home treated as additional evidence against him. Kuwait has comparable legislation backed by religious rulings that treat normalization as treason; a television personality recently received three years in prison for publicly calling for normal relations with Israel. Even Egypt, which has maintained a formal peace treaty with Israel for over forty years, retains a 1975 law authorizing the revocation of citizenship from anyone "qualified as Zionist" — a provision used to strip citizenship from Egyptians who marry Israelis.

The pattern across all these laws is identical: the offense is contact. What is being criminalized is the experience of encountering Jewish Israelis as human beings in ordinary life — as business partners, neighbors, fellow shoppers, or spouses. The laws do not target contact with Israeli Arab citizens, who live under the same government and carry the same passports. The operative category is Jewish Israelis and the method is dehumanization. The entire apparatus exists to prevent the moment when

an Arab looks at a Jewish Israeli and sees a person.

Nowhere is this more visible than among the Palestinians, and nowhere has it been documented for longer.

The Palestinian case requires understanding what Oslo actually was. When Yasser Arafat signed the Oslo Accords in 1993 and formally recognized Israel's right to exist, the Western world exhaled. What it missed was that Arafat had already told his own audience what he was doing. In a speech broadcast on Jordanian television shortly before the signing, he invoked the PLO's 1974 Ten Point Program — the "phased plan" — by name, describing the agreement as a step toward establishing a national authority on whatever land could be obtained as a stage toward the ultimate liberation of all Palestinian territory. The phased plan, which has never been rescinded, describes each territorial acquisition as advancing the balance of power toward Israel's elimination. Oslo, in other words, was announced by its own architect as a tactic in a longer campaign, on the day he signed it.

This framing persisted in Palestinian leadership discourse through the Oslo years and beyond. A senior member of the Fatah Central Committee, speaking on official Syrian television in 2013 — two decades after Oslo — explained the logic with refreshing clarity: "The inspiring idea cannot be achieved all at once. In stages." Mahmoud Abbas, the man the international community designated as the moderate alternative to Hamas, has on his own presidential website a book he wrote titled "Zionism: Beginning and End," reprinted as recently as 2011, whose final paragraph declares that "both the Jews and us are its victims" and promises that "we and the Jews will guarantee its destruction." This is the two-state solution's chief Palestinian advocate.

The structural proof, however, lies not in speeches but in what the Palestinian Authority built during the Oslo period — and kept building, and continued building right up to October 7. A genuine peace process requires, at minimum, preparing a population to accept the legitimacy of the other side's existence. Israel did this. Israeli textbooks taught the Oslo framework. Israeli political leaders made the public case for Palestinian statehood. Throughout the 1990s, Israeli society debated, agonized, and in significant measure accepted the premise that a Palestinian state was both necessary and legitimate.

The Palestinian Authority built the opposite. Palestinian Media Watch has documented, for decades, a sustained PA campaign presenting Jews through a lens drawn from classical antisemitic tradition: treacherous by nature, corrupting in their influence, enemies of G-d and humanity. Children's television showed Jews as subhuman. Textbooks erased Jewish history from the land and named schools after terrorists who murdered civilians. The PA's "pay-for-slay" program — salary payments to imprisoned terrorists and to the families of those killed carrying out attacks — formalized the honor structure: killing Jews was a career path with a pension. Official PA media celebrated terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians. Maps in PA-produced educational materials showed no Israel at all.

The anti-normalization enforcement ran in perfect parallel. In 2010, when Israeli entrepreneur Rami Levy opened supermarkets in mixed areas where Palestinians and Israelis could shop side by side at prices significantly lower than Palestinian markets, Fatah organized a boycott, took photographs of Palestinian customers, and recorded their license plates as a deterrent. When Levy opened a new mixed mall in Atarot in January 2019 — a \$54 million project in which 35 percent of the stores were Palestinian-owned, built specifically to serve the 230,000 Arab residents of northern Jerusalem who had no comparable shopping facility nearby — Fatah declared that any Palestinian who shopped there was committing "a betrayal of the homeland." The mall opened with 100 percent occupancy, applied immediately for a permit to add a third floor to meet excess tenant demand, and Palestinians shopped there anyway, in large numbers, because their families needed affordable groceries more than they needed ideological compliance. The enforcement failed on the ground. What it succeeded in was signaling, at the leadership level, that ordinary human commerce between Jews and Arabs — commerce actively desired by the Arab population it was meant to deter — was to be treated as treason.

Arab leaders are fearful that if their people see Israeli Jews as normal people, they may lose control of the dehumanization narrative that they use to keep the people in check. If they truly thought Zionism was a corrupt political philosophy, they would combat it ideologically; it is only fear that makes them want to criminalize any contact with Israeli Jews.

Abu Toameh ends his piece with a line worth taking at face value: where peace is illegal, peace is impossible. The Palestinian Authority proved the corollary. Where a people is systematically conditioned, from childhood, to regard Jews as subhuman enemies whose elimination is both politically necessary and religiously meritorious, no diplomatic agreement signed by

their leaders will produce peace — because the agreement was never the point. The phased plan said so explicitly. The textbooks said so daily. The parking lot surveillance at the Rami Levy supermarket said so in the only language that leaves no ambiguity: they were so afraid of Palestinians seeing Jews as human beings that they photographed license plates to stop it.

Israel and US won in Iran, and the critics refuse to admit it

YARON SCHWARTZ (Jpost.com 26-4-26)

The moment the first Israeli and American jets hit their targets in Iran, two different realities emerged: one unfolding on the battlefield, and another constructed in news studios and political circles.

Understanding the gap between these two realities is essential to understanding what has actually been achieved by the United States and Israel.

Let's start with the objective facts, because the critics won't.

A country of 92 million people spent decades preparing for this confrontation – to no avail. Iran couldn't mount a real response. Israel and the US moved through Iranian airspace like they owned it. They hit what they wanted, when they wanted. The enemy talked big for years, but when the moment of truth came, they were totally vulnerable.

For Israel, the casualty figures also tell the real story. Every pundit who predicted a massacre looks foolish now. Israeli losses were less than a tiny fraction of the lowest estimates. Not one Israeli plane went down.

The damage on Israel's home front was minimal, and far below the doomsday numbers the experts kept repeating. Every single dark prediction was wrong.

By any honest measure, this is the most successful military campaign Israel has ever conducted. In fact, it may be the most successful campaign of its kind in modern history. But if you listen to the noise, you would think it was a disaster.

The criticism directed at the Israeli government and against the Trump administration – both in Israel and in the United States – contains not an ounce of objectivity. It is politics, top to bottom.

These critics aren't trying to help the war effort; they're trying to sink the people in charge. They can't admit it's a win because that would mean their rivals, US President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, succeeded.

It's a cold trade. A win for the nation is a loss for their party, so they refuse to see or acknowledge it.

CRITICISM OF THE MEDIA

This isn't just annoying; it's reckless. When you push nothing but gloom, and pretend we're losing, you're helping the enemy. Tehran can't win a dogfight, so they're counting on the critics to win the PR war. Some of these critics know exactly what they're doing. Their script practically matches the Iranian talking points.

The manufactured hysteria around “war goals” perfectly illustrates this dynamic. Asking for a checklist wasn't about clarity; it was a trap that would enable the critics to point out one goal or mission that didn't happen and call the whole thing a failure.

The point of war is simple: You hit the enemy hard, destroy its capacity to fight back effectively, and make sure the enemy can't hurt you for as long as possible. Putting that in fancy language doesn't help anyone but the enemy. America and Israel's success is unprecedented, albeit there are still some boxes to check. As US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth and Netanyahu said, “That can happen by agreement or by military action – but it will be achieved. We are ready at a moment's notice.”

What this war actually accomplished is remarkable. What it exposed – about the enemy's vulnerabilities and about the cynicism of Israel's and America's domestic critics – is equally remarkable.

A win is a win, and the war in Iran is a big one. It's time to stop pretending otherwise.

International Law Can't Stop Tyrannical Regimes

GERALD M. STEINBERG (GateStonelInstitute.org 29-4-26)

Grandiose declarations by Western politicians claiming preventive force against murderous regimes is somehow illegal have become de rigueur. The leaders of Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Norway and most European countries have weighed in with parallel and often identical statements on the essential importance of obeying international law while waging war against Iran and its terror proxies, such as Hezbollah.

Such statements are a revealing snapshot of the shallow and dangerous Western discourse on war, law, and justice. Much of this is thanks to NGO personalities like Kenneth Roth, former head of Human Rights Watch, who

have transformed rational conversation on human rights and the use of force in self-defense into ideological weapons. Roth and his chorus, including morally blind academics claiming legal expertise, promote an imaginary "rules-based international order" that paralyzes democracies while protecting despotic dictators and terrorist tyrants.

Even in New Zealand, the issues have been given a prominence far beyond their merit. According to Helen Clark, the former prime minister, "international law has been breached" by US-Israeli strikes on the Islamic Republic of Iran, a regime whose mottos are "death to America" and "death to Israel." Opposition leader Chris Hipkins followed Clark's lead, pontificating that "adherence to international law shouldn't be a matter of discretion." The current PM, Christopher Luxon was more careful, acknowledging a lack of necessary information.

Clark is a Ken Roth groupie, and her foundation brought this false prophet of human rights to New Zealand in February. The foundation's literature lauded Roth as a "leading global advocate for human rights," sentiments echoed by the Amnesty International branch in New Zealand. But in reality, rather than furthering humanitarianism, Roth, Clark and their cult have erased Iran's vicious terror war and denied justice to its many victims.

Under their absurd version of international law, preventive and preemptive strikes – like those carried out by the US and Israel – would be prohibited except against what they refer to as immediate, obvious, and universally acknowledged threats. In this form of unilateral disarmament reminiscent of European pacifists of the 1920s and 1930s, nothing can be done to restrain the world's malicious dictators and warmongering aggressors before they begin mass slaughter. The legal facade and its related institutions such as the United Nations and the International Criminal Court are painfully removed from the strategic, diplomatic and military realities of the 21st century.

In particular, those who condemn the strikes against Iran by claiming the mantle of international law erase more than four decades in which the Islamic Republic of Iran waged a murderous campaign against the United States and Israel. The Tehran regime's leaders were clear from the beginning: Washington is the "Great Satan," Israel is the "Little Satan." Countering and ideally destroying both is central to the regime's theology.

In weaponizing these slogans, Iran built a network of proxy forces – Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, the Houthis in Yemen and Shiite militias across Iraq. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) created a military machine with thousands of ballistic missiles and drones to attack Israeli population centers and block vital shipping lanes, and armed terror cells that carried out heinous slaughter from Jerusalem to Bulgaria to Buenos Aires. The so-called "international community," including powerful NGO leaders like Ken Roth, politicians such as Helen Clark, and United Nations agencies tasked with guarding international stability and justice, turned a blind eye, and hypocritically condemned counterstrikes.

The nuclear dimension of Iran's aggressive ambitions makes stopping the threat of mass destruction from Iran more urgent still. The uranium enrichment program, ballistic missile development, and openly genocidal zeal toward Israel created a uniquely volatile combination. A regime that blatantly calls for the elimination of another state and works to implement that objective cannot plausibly expect its neighbors to view the nuclear project as legitimate civilian energy production.

By ignoring this reality, Western politicians and pundits in the international law chorus are indulging in dangerous fictions. Until a nuclear missile aimed by a rival at Tel Aviv, Brussels, New York – even Wellington or Auckland – is on the launchpad, they will have the world believe that preventive action is wrong. In this way, they ask democracies to welcome near-catastrophe before being permitted to act in self-defense.

In reality, no legitimate legal system, including international law, can expect victims to ignore visible and credible threats of annihilation. Article 51 of the United Nations Charter recognizes the inherent right of self-defense, and does not demand national suicide. Moreover, it does not ask countries to allow slow-moving assaults like the Iranian one against the US and Israel. From the Caroline affair of the 19th century to the strategic doctrines of the Cold War, states have recognized that a government facing an overwhelming and accelerating threat may – indeed, must – act to defend its citizens before they are attacked. This is the essence of justice.

In contrast, when a terror regime builds missiles, arms proxy militias, and advances toward nuclear capability while proclaiming its desire to destroy its neighbors, inaction is suicidal.

Whether in London, Ottawa, Berlin, or even Wellington, no plausible interpretation of international law requires democracies to wait passively for such catastrophic threats to become real.

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

Ein Bishul Achar Bishul

RABBI CHAIM JACHTER (KolTorah.org)

A crucial rule permitting us to enjoy hot food on Shabbat is the principle of Ein Bishul Achar Bishul (literally, “there is no cooking after cooking”). There are several crucial debates concerning this central idea.

LIQUIDS

The Rishonim debate whether Ein Bishul Achar Bishul applies only to solids or even to liquids. The Biur Halachah (318:4 s.v. Yeish) notes that the Rambam, Rashba, and Ran adopt the lenient position that Ein Bishul Achar Bishul applies even to liquids. However, Rashi, Rabbeinu Yonah, the Rosh, and the Tur are stringent and believe that Ein Bishul Achar Bishul applies only to solids. The Acharonim (see Pri Megadim Eishel Avraham 254:1 and Eglei Tal Ofeh 8:11) explain that the stringent view believes that the effect of the cooking of a liquid is nullified after it has cooled down (Azil Lei Bishulei). By contrast, solids retain the impact of cooking even after the food has cooled. The lenient opinion believes that Ein Bishul Achar Bishul applies even when its reason is irrelevant.

Many Yemenite Jews follow the Rambam and will reheat liquid (such as the famed Yemenite soup) on Shabbat. Sepharadim follow Rav Yosef Karo, who codifies the strict view (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 318:4 and 15). According to Rav Karo, one may not reheat liquids that have fallen below Yad Soledet Bo. The Rama (O.C. 318:15), however, cites the lenient view. The Rama records the Ashkenazic practice to follow the lenient opinion if the liquid “has not completely cooled.” Acharonim debate how to understand the Rama’s phrase, “not completely cooled down.” The Eglei Tal (Ofeh 8) explains that it refers to liquid that is less than Yad Soledet Bo but is still sufficiently hot that people regard it as a hot drink. The Chazon Ish (O.C. 37:13) indicates that the Rama is lenient if the liquid is not entirely cooled.

Acharonim also debate the reasoning behind the compromise. At first glance, the compromise appears difficult since reheating a liquid that fell below Yad Soledet Bo constitutes Bishul according to the strict opinion. On the other hand, the lenient opinion permits reheating a liquid even if it has completely cooled down. The Halacha appears to attach no significance to the liquid not having been completely cooled down.

The Chazon Ish (ibid.) explains that the Rama fundamentally accepts the lenient view as the normative position. However, there is concern that if an item is completely cooled down, it will be difficult to distinguish between the cooled liquid and liquid that has never been heated. The common practice seeks to avoid this potential confusion.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (cited by Rav Mordechai Willig, Beit Yitzchak 21:181), on the other hand, suggests that the Rama fundamentally accepts the stringent opinion as the normative position. Rav Soloveitchik explains that the strict view believes that when a liquid cools down, no impact remains from the cooking (Azil Lei Bishulei). Accordingly, as long as the liquid has not completely cooled down, some of the original cooking effect remains, and one is not considered to be cooking.

DEFINING LIQUIDS AND SOLIDS

Acharonim have debated the definition of liquid and solid in this context for centuries. Some Acharonim (the Bach, Vilna Gaon, and Mishna Berura) believe that a food must be free of any liquid to qualify as a solid. Other Acharonim (including the Taz, Pri Megadim, and the Kaf Hachaim) believe that if the majority of an item is solid, it is classified as a solid (the opinions are summarized by Rav Shimon Eider, Halachos of Shabbos, p. 259 footnote 114).

Rav Yosef Adler ZT”L cites Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, who offers the following practical guidelines. If the food is eaten with a fork, it is solid, and if it is eaten with a spoon, it is liquid. Rav Ovadia Yosef (Teshuvot Yechaveh Daat 2:45) also follows the lenient view. On the other hand, Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe 4:74:Bishul:7), Rav Ben Zion Abba Sha’ul (Teshuvot Ohr L’Tzion 2:30:13), and Rav Shalom Messas (Teshuvot Tevu’ot Shemesh Orach Chaim 66) are strict. Rav Mordechai Willig advises following the strict view.

Rav Eider (ibid.) defends the lenient view based on the Chazon Ish’s understanding of the Rama. The concern of confusing cooled-down liquid with another is not relevant if the liquid is mixed in a majority of food.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION – TEA REFILLS

An interesting question arises regarding refilling a cup of tea or coffee. Some Poskim (Rav Aharon Kotler and others, cited in Halachos of Shabbos, p. 295, note 423) require wiping the remaining few drops of completely cooled water on the cup’s bottom. Many authorities, though, are lenient. The Chazon Ish (ibid. note 424) rules leniently, arguing that we fundamentally accept that Ein Bishul Achar Bishul applies to liquids. The Ashkenazic custom to follow the strict view if the liquid has entirely cooled down, argues the Chazon Ish, does not apply if one merely reheats a minute amount of water and does not care about reheating the few drops.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe O.C. 4:74:Bishul:19) argues that one may be lenient because of multiple doubts (S’feik S’feika). One lenient consideration is that many Rishonim permit reheating liquids. The second lenient consideration is that one is not concerned about reheating such a minuscule amount of water. This is a situation of a פסיק רישיה דלא ניחא ליה (an unintended side effect) and is permitted by some Rishonim (most notably the Aruch). The combination of these two lenient opinions allows for a lenient ruling. This ruling also applies to returning a ladle to a Kli Rishon if it has a few drops of previously cooked liquid that have cooled completely.

However, Rav Mordechai Willig (Cooking and Warming Food on Shabbat, p.26) follows the strict view, keeping with Rav Soloveitchik’s understanding of the Rama’s compromise.

COOKED SUGAR, COOKED SALT, AND INSTANT COFFEE

The Mishnah Berurah (318:71) notes that if salt was cooked during its processing, we may even place it on food in a Kli Rishon if the Kli Rishon was removed from the fire. The Mishnah Berurah says that the same applies to sugar that was cooked during its processing. He notes, however, that Rav Akiva Eiger (at the end of O.C. 253; and see Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata 1:note 138) questions this ruling. Rav Akiva Eiger believes that a solid item designated to be melted and turned into a liquid may have the status of a liquid. Accordingly, the Ein Bishul Achar Bishul rule does not apply even to cooked salt and sugar. The Mishnah Berurah concludes that it is best to avoid placing salt and sugar in a Kli Rishon. He permits relying on the lenient opinions regarding a Kli Sheini.

Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata (1:49) notes the many applications of this rule. They include instant coffee, instant tea, soup bouillon, powdered milk, and powdered cocoa. The Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata follows the Mishnah Berurah and recommends avoiding placing any of these items in a Kli Rishon. However, Rav Ovadia Yosef (Teshuvot Yechaveh Da’at 2:44) endorses the lenient view as it is supported by leading Poskim such as Rav Zvi Pesach Frank and Rav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg.

COOKING AFTER BAKING

The Beit Yosef (318 s.v. V’katav Harav Eliezer Mi’Metz) cites a celebrated dispute concerning Ein Bishul Achar Bishul’s scope. He cites the Sefer Yere’im who limits it to identical processes such as cooking after cooking, baking after baking, or roasting after roasting. However, he forbids dissimilar processes, such as cooking after baking or roasting after cooking. The Beit Yosef, though, quotes the Raavya who adopts an expansive view of Ein Bishul Achar Bishul. He rules that it applies even to dissimilar processes, such as cooking after baking. A ramification of this dispute is whether one may place bread in very hot (Yad Soledet Bo) soup.

In the Beit Yosef, Rav Yosef Karo cites the many Talmudic texts cited by both the Yereim and the Raavya as proof for their respective opinions. In the Shulchan Aruch (318:5), Rav Karo mentions both the Yere’im and the Ra’avya (Yesh Mi SheOmer and Yesh Matirim) without explicitly endorsing either opinion.

SEPHARDIC PRACTICE

Rav Ovadia Yosef (Livyat Chein 318:49) believes that Rav Karo accepts the lenient opinion since he presents it second. Rav Ovadia notes that when Rav Karo presents both opinions as “there are those who say and those who say”, the second view is primary (since he gives it the last word). Moreover, Rav Ovadia notes that Rav Karo presents the Yere’im’s view as Yesh Mi SheOmer in the singular and the Ra’avyah’s opinion in the plural Yesh Matirim, signaling that the Ra’avyah has greater support. Nonetheless, Rav Ben Zion Abba Sha’ul (Teshuvot Ohr L’Tzion 2:30:6) favors stringency, since a Torah prohibition is at stake.

ASHKENAZIC PRACTICE

However, the Rama records the Ashkenazic custom to refrain from placing bread in Yad Soledet Bo soup even in a Kli Sheini since there would be cooking after baking. Interestingly, the Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata (1:61) permits placing fried soup croutons or fried noodles into Yad Soledet Bo soup, since deep frying is the Halachic equivalent of cooking (Sanhedrin 4b with Rashi d”h Derech Bishul and Mishnah Berurah 451:65).

The Mishnah Berurah (318:47) rules leniently if the soup is in a Kli Shelishi. He believes that the possibility that cooking does not occur in a Kli Shelishi, in addition to the Ra’avyah’s view, support a lenient ruling. Thus, he permits placing Challah in very hot soup, if the soup is in a Kli Shelishi.

LADLE STATUS

This Mishnah Berurah combines the possibility that a ladle is a Kli Sheini with the Ra’avyah’s leniency. Poskim debate whether a ladle used to remove hot food from a Kli Rishon is regarded as a Kli Rishon or a Kli Sheni. The Maharil (cited by the Taz, Yoreh Deah 92:30) views a ladle as a Kli Sheni. The Taz (ibid.) sharply challenges the Maharil’s view, arguing that since the ladle was immersed in a Kli Rishon, it assumes the status of a Kli Rishon. The Mishnah Berurah has seemingly contradictory indications regarding this question (compare 318:45 with 253:84 and 318:87). We may resolve the contradiction by saying that the Mishnah Berurah rules leniently regarding a ladle in combination with the Ra’avyah’s lenient view.

The Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata (1:59 with footnote 180) regards a ladle as a Kli Sheini in this context, provided that the ladle was not immersed for a “long period” in the hot pot. A ladle becomes a Kli Rishon if it remains in the hot pot for a significant amount of time. The Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata does not define what he regards as a “long period.”

Mishnah Berurah 318:87 and Yalkut Yosef Orach Chaim 318:87 support the standard of the ladle being a Kli Rishon if it was immersed in the Kli Rishon until steam rises from the ladle’s contents. Rav Willig (Cooking and Warming Food on Shabbat, pp. 76-77) supports this standard.

WARMING CHALLAH ON A BLECH

Rav Shmuel Fuerst permits placing Challah on a pot to warm on Shabbat as long as it does not change color or become crispy. Although there is considerable debate about whether one can make toast on Shabbat, it is permissible to warm up the bread without the intention to make toast.

My wife Malca advises wrapping the Challah in one layer of aluminum foil so that the heat will not dry out the bread and prevent it from becoming meaty.

CONCLUSION

The best way to avoid this question seems to be to wait to dip the Challah until the soup has cooled below Yad Soledet Bo. Recall from our prior articles that we may regard Yad Soledet Bo as 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Thus, the soup remains enjoyable even at a temperature lower than Yad Soledet Bo.

Similarly, a practical way to avoid the dispute regarding solids containing some liquid is to reheat such items in a way that they will not reach 120 degrees Fahrenheit.

Candles (Melb) Fri 1 May 2026, 15 Iyar 5786 5.15pm/6.13pm