

זכרון יצחק

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

Voero 5786

Current Pain Sometimes Mitigates Much Greater Pain Later

RABBI YISSOCHOR FRAND (Torah.org)

The beginning of Parshas Vaera is really a continuation of the end of Parshas Shemos. Parshas Shemos ends with Moshe Rabbeinu saying to the Ribono shel Olam "From the time I came before Pharaoh, he has made matters worse for this nation and You have not saved Your nation." (Shemos 5:23). The Ribono shel Olam's response to Moshe's complaint is at the beginning of Parshas Vaera: The Avos (Patriarchs) did not have such complaints (when things were apparently not going as I promised) and you complain about such matters.

The Medrash says, on the pasuk where Moshe complains that matters have been made worse, that the Ribono shel Olam responded to Moshe with a pasuk from Koheles: Tov achris davar m'reishiso. (Koheles 7:8) The literal interpretation of this pasuk is that the end of something is better than its beginning. However, the Sefas Emes interprets differently.

The Sefas Emes says that Moshe Rabbeinu was correct. "What You are doing to this generation of people is too much! You have caused too many bad things to happen to these people." The Sefas Emes concurs: The people did not deserve all these tzores (suffering). So why did the Ribono shel Olam do it? He did it because He knew that the tzores now would mitigate or erase future tzores. Therefore, in the larger picture, it was worth it for them to suffer now beyond what they deserved, in order to save future generations from even worse tzores.

We shared a similar thought several weeks ago: When Yosef met Binyomin, he started crying because of the Beis Hamikdash that would be destroyed in the future. At that time, we asked why Yosef was crying THEN about the Beis Hamikdash? He is finally reunited with his brother Binyomin after all these years. Why is he thinking about the Beis Hamikdash at specifically that moment? We mentioned an insight from the Sefas Emes along the same lines: If Yosef would have been able to hold out longer and put the shevatim (tribes) through greater pain and anguish, the Batei Hamikdash would not have been destroyed.

This means that the shevatim had been experiencing a kaparah (atonement) for what Klal Yisrael was destined to undergo in future generations. Had they suffered more now, then in the future, Jewish history would have been different. They would no longer have needed to endure the tzores that came to them in later generations. But since Yosef could not hold back any longer, their tzores at his hands was capped and the balance was held in abeyance for the times when the Batei Mikdash would be destroyed.

This is the way the Ribono shel Olam sometimes works. One generation needs to suffer or one person needs to suffer or one family needs to suffer to save them from far greater tzores. Even though the pain right now is terrible, it saves them from worse pain in the future. Sometimes a person needs to undergo a very painful operation but it saves him from future pain. If he does not undergo this medical procedure now, it is going to be much worse for him in the future. On a very basic level, this is the case with inoculations. A person receives a flu shot or a pneumonia vaccine. It hurts now, but that pain pales in comparison to what would be if someone would not receive the shot. This is a very simplistic example, but it is the reality:

The pain now sometimes precludes much greater pain.

This, the Sefas Emes explains, is the meaning of this pasuk in Koheles: Tov achris davar m'reishiso. The achris (end of the story) is sometimes better because of what happened earlier on. This is what the Ribono shel Olam says to Moshe Rabbeinu: You are right. I have dealt out too much punishment to this nation. They don't deserve it. But this is saving Klal Yisrael from terrible things in the future.

DO SOMETHING

AVROHOM YAAKOV

Moshe's first foray in attempting to free his people was spectacularly unsuccessful. Not only did Pharaoh turn him down, but he made life more difficult for the Jews as they now needed to make the bricks as well as meeting the same quota of bricks laid.

This led to Moshe questioning Hashem who promised him that things would work out and that Moshe should communicate the message of hope to his brethren.

To no avail.

"But they would not listen to Moshe because of [their] short spirit and hard labour." (6:9)

This statement is a little confusing – what exactly was the challenge? Short spirit or hard labour?

Noam Elimelech explains that there are people who are happy to get things over and done with quickly. They lack the patience and prefer to move onto the next event in their lives. They are of 'short spirit'. As the Yiddish describes it aptly – no 'zits fleish'. They only get through the basics, and only when things are easy.

Then there are others who only understand hard labour. Nothing is straightforward, nothing is simple. Every challenge requires a convoluted and complex solution. They need to almost 'kill' themselves. There is no easy way ever.

Neither of these types could accept Moshe – the first because he asked for too much and would require too much effort, and the latter because it couldn't be that simple and therefore it was not worth investing the effort.

So they did nothing and achieved nothing,

In reality, life's challenges are sometimes easily solved, sometimes a more complex solution is required and sometimes the obvious answer is the correct answer. In fact more often than not, the obvious is the way forward. But inaction is never a solution.

OF MORTALS AND SUPERHEROES

RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN (Chabad.org)

In Parshat Va'era, the Torah interrupts the storyline of the Egyptian bondage and G-d's promise of redemption and begins enumerating the genealogy of the 12 tribes. It starts with Reuben, Yaakov's eldest son, and his children, proceeds to the brothers born immediately after him, Simeon and Levi, and their descendants. When it reaches Moshe and Aharon, the great-grandchildren of Levi, suddenly the genealogical record stops. It never moves on to the fourth of Yaakov's sons, Yehuda.

Why?

Some, like Rashi (6:14), reason that the Torah only wanted to give us the ancestry of Moshe and Aharon, the descendants of Levi, but started from the beginning with the eldest son, Reuben. Rashi also suggests that since Yaakov had previously chastised Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, this was an attempt to sort of make it up to them and demonstrate their worthiness.

Why list Moshe and Aharon's genealogy in the first place? To remind us that as great as they were, they were still only human beings after all.

One could certainly be forgiven for thinking otherwise. Splitting the sea was no Purim prank. Receiving the Ten Commandments from G-d on the mountain was no mere Cecil B. DeMille production. To have believed that Moshe was a celestial being would not have been implausible.

But no, says the Torah. Moshe and Aharon were both sons of Amram and Yocheved. Amram was the son of Kehat who was the son of Levi, so Moshe was the great grandson of Levi, son of Yaakov. A mortal man born of mortal man and woman. A human being of flesh and blood, just like you and me.

They were neither gods nor demi-gods, and yet look at what incredible greatness they achieved!

Now, while we should not be suffering any delusions of grandeur and think we are the next Moshe or Aharon, we are encouraged to learn from their shining examples and aspire higher. Look how much they accomplished despite their very human shortcomings!

Can I emulate Moshe, the greatest prophet that ever lived? Who am I? If I thought myself equal to Moshe, I would be either supremely arrogant or completely nuts. And yet, there is an important message here: Do not sell yourself short. Never underestimate your own human potential or anyone else's for that matter. The titans of the Torah were human beings and so are we.

The classic book of Tanya sets out to explain how reaching our Jewish potential is eminently doable. Being a good Jew is actually "very near to you."

The author and founder of Chabad, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, shows us that while we all have our struggles and our demons, we also have the G-d-given strength to overcome them. Yes, we can reach for the sky. Yes, we can banish every improper thought from our minds the minute it tries to enter. We do, in fact, have the power to resist every urge or temptation. It is a philosophy predicated on a belief that we are all innately good and filled with enormous potential for doing good. Yes, we can aspire higher.

Our long-awaited Redeemer is also going to be a human born of father and mother. He is called "son of David" and must be a descendant of King David, literally.

Moshe and Aharon were heroic leaders, but they were not angels or superhuman. Without losing perspective or common sense, we should still trust ourselves to go for broke and achieve the "impossible."

Please G-d, we will.

BIG AND GREAT

RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR (Ohr.edu)

"This was the Aharon and Moshe to whom Hashem had said..." (6:26)

Imagine you're walking along the street with an attaché case containing ten million dollars. Being a charitable soul, you've decided that you want to build a yeshiva, and you're on your way to donate the money. Suddenly a masked man with a stocking over his face jumps up in front of you. He grabs the suitcase from you and shouts at you: "Speak one word of lashon hara (malicious gossip) right now or say goodbye to the money!"

So, what can you do? The Torah says that you have to give up all your money rather than willingly violate one Torah prohibition. You stand there and watch the masked man douse the suitcase with lighter fuel and toss a match on to it. The whole thing goes up in a short-lived but rather expensive bonfire.

A different scenario. Same attaché case, same ten million dollars. However, this time no masked bandit appears. You successfully donate the money and in due course there arises a beautiful yeshiva through your efforts.

Imagine walking into the Beit Midrash of that Yeshiva late one night! 400 students are learning there. Imagine how you feel when you go to bed that night!

So let me ask you a question. Why should you feel any less when you go to bed at night having not spoken one word of lashon hara that day?

"This was the Aharon and Moshe to whom Hashem had said..."

Rashi explains that in some places, the Torah mentions Moshe before Aharon, and in others, Aharon before Moshe. The reason is to teach us that Moshe and Aharon were considered equal.

How can that be? The Torah itself says that there will never be a prophet of the stature of Moshe. "Never again has there arisen in Yisrael a prophet like Moshe..." (Devarim 34:10)

Aharon must not have been on Moshe's level of prophecy but the Torah equates him with Moshe because Aharon utilized every gift that Hashem had given him to the maximum. Aharon actualized all his potential, all his unique gifts, and thus he was considered Moshe's equal.

We tend to think that we can only be great by doing big, recognizable things. Like building yeshivas or being famous. The truth is that even if Hashem never blesses us with the wherewithal to do big things, we can all be truly great.

Equal Partners

RABBI JAY KELMAN (TorahinMotion.com)

"As G-d prepares to unleash the plagues on Egypt and redeem the Jewish people from bondage the Torah begins by listing the genealogy of Yaakov. Reuven and Shimon's children are named with the Torah going into greater detail regarding the children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren (Aharon and Moshe) and great-great-grandchildren of Levi and then abruptly stops.

That the purpose of this genealogical table is to trace the lineage of Moshe and Aharon – who would be the ones to redeem the people – is evident by the Torah then stating, "That is Aharon and Moshe, to whom the Lord said, 'Take the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt with their legions'" (Shemot 6:26). Being a genealogical table, it makes perfect sense that Aharon as the older brother is mentioned first.

Yet in the very next verse the Torah tells us "It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt to free the Israelites from the Egyptians; these are the same Moshe and Aharon" this time placing Moshe first.

The Ibn Ezra explains that while Aharon was older, Moshe was the greater prophet, as G-d himself told Aharon (and Miriam) "If there be a prophet among you, I, G-d, will make Myself known to him in a vision; I will speak to him in a dream. This is not so with My servant Moshe; he is faithful throughout My household. With him I speak mouth to mouth" (Bamidbar 12:6-7). Hence once the brothers arrived at Pharaoh's palace Moshe is to be mentioned first. It was he who was the primary redeemer of the Jewish people.

A number of commentaries (see for example Haemek Davar of the Netziv) explain that in the eyes of the Jewish people it was Aharon who was much greater. He was *meurav em habroitz*, beloved by the people an *ohev shalom v'rodef shalom*, one who loved peace and pursued peace. Aharon lived with the people through their difficult years of slavery while Moshe was living comfortably in Midian – unknown to the vast majority of the Jewish people. Yet in the eyes of Pharaoh it was Moshe who was greater. It would be Moshe who would be the one bringing the plagues upon Pharaoh and the Egyptian people. Pharaoh most likely even knew Moshe – or at the very least knew of Moshe - as he had grown up in the Royal palace. Hence in the first verse, which references the Jewish people Aharon is mentioned first and in the latter verse which speaks of Pharaoh, Moshe is the one first mentioned.

In a seemingly shocking comment Rashi, quoting a Midrashic interpretation explains, "There are some passages where Scripture mentions Aharon before Moshe and other passages where it mentions Moshe before Aharon; this is done in order to indicate that they were equal like one". How can Rashi say this? Did Rashi not read the end of the Chumash where G-d declares, "And there was no other prophet who arose in Israel like Moshe, whom the Lord knew face to face", a similar idea He had declared to Aharon as noted above.

So fundamental is this idea that Rambam includes it in his 13 principles of faith, meaning that one who claims that there was a prophet equal to Moshe is – in the view of the Rambam – a heretic who loses their share in the world to come.

As is (or should be) well-known Midrashim are very often not meant to be interpreted literally. Moshe was different from his brother – or anyone else. Only he spoke face to face with G-d and it is Moshe whom G-d charged to lead the people out of Egypt and it was through Moshe that the Torah was given. But that means little in determining who might have been greater.

Greatness, from a Jewish perspective is based on doing the best we can, on reaching our potential. It is effort, not results, that determine greatness. While results do matter – and that is how we do and must determine success in earthly matters – how successful our efforts will be, depend on so many factors beyond our control, what some might call luck but is more appropriately called Divine assistance. Those who work harder tend to get "luckier" however our moral mandate is not necessarily to succeed but to try our best. That is all we can do, it is G-d who takes care of the rest. Moshe and Aharon (and Miriam too) did exactly that and hence they were equal in greatness.

No matter how great one may be one can only accomplish so much. Neither Aharon or Moshe could have redeemed the people without their brother. Truly, they were equal.

Great people are all too happy to let others be mentioned first. Yet the

Torah is talking to the average person for whom there is much to learn from Moshe and Aharon and Aharon and Moshe.

Element of Surprise

RABBI NOAH WEINBERG (Aish.com)

G-d said to Moshe and Aharon, saying, "When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Provide a wonder for yourselves,' you shall say to Aharon, 'Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh – it will become a snake.'" Moshe came with Aharon to Pharaoh and they did so, as Hashem had commanded; Aharon cast down his staff before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a snake. (Shemos 7:8-10)

The epic battle of wills begins. G-d tells Moshe and Aharon that Pharaoh is going to want to see a wonder, a miracle that verifies that G-d Almighty Himself in fact sent them. He wants to see something powerful, unique, and compelling. G-d tells them the game plan – you're going to throw your staff down and it will turn into a snake – and the Torah says that they came to Pharaoh and they "did as G-d commanded."

When the Torah says that they did as they were commanded, it is a statement of praise – "Look, they listened to G-d!" But what was so impressive that warrants commending them? G-d gives them a miracle to perform – wouldn't anyone do it? What's the big deal? Furthermore, the Torah praises their coming to Pharaoh. Strangely, it does not commend their actual performance of the miracle, which is written after this commendation. Isn't that what really deserves to be praised?

And what was the response to this miracle? Moshe and Aharon became the laughingstock of Egypt. Every Egyptian knew this simple parlor trick, even little children. As the Midrash says:

Pharaoh started to laugh at [Moshe and Aharon] and said to them, "This is the sign of your G-d? Don't you know that all magic is in my domain?" He immediately summoned schoolchildren and they also [threw down their staff, which turned into a snake]. Then he called his wife who also did it... as did the magicians of Egypt and four- and five-year-old boys. (Midrash Rabbah, Va'eira 9:6)

Pharaoh mocks them, saying that their little trick is like bringing coal to Newcastle. Imagine what Moshe and Aharon are thinking. Pharaoh is anxiously waiting to see what this G-d of the Jews is capable of doing, and this is the big miracle G-d wants us to perform? Throw the stick and it will become a snake? Imagine if G-d would tell you that He is sending you to MIT as a messenger of the Creator of the universe to show them that G-d indeed exists. When the team of professors asks you to perform a miracle to demonstrate G-d's power, the Almighty instructs you to take out a safety match and strike it. Lo and behold: fire!

Are you prepared to go before the panel of professors and make a fool of yourself? "Safety matches? That's a good one! This guy is certifiably crazy."

In a nutshell, that was the plan Moshe and Aharon had going in to confront Pharaoh. All G-d told them was to throw down the staff and it will turn into a snake. In their mind, that was the entire plan. They are standing in front of Pharaoh, who has called in everyone to take a look at these two fools.

This is why G-d praises them for going to Pharaoh: "Moshe came with Aharon to Pharaoh and they did so, as Hashem had commanded." They knew they were entering the lion's den completely unarmed. Yet they did not question the Almighty and did exactly as He requested.

CAUGHT OFF GUARD

Then G-d turns the table on Pharaoh and his followers; the entire spectacle was a setup. "And the staff of Aharon swallowed their staffs" (Shemos 7:12). After the snakes reverted to staffs, wooden sticks all over the floor, Aharon's staff devoured their staffs. That one was not in the Egyptian repertoire of magic tricks. It was unquestionably a miracle.

"Pharaoh strengthened his heart and he did not heed them, as Hashem had spoken" (ibid 7:13). Pharaoh had to strengthen his heart. That means he was scared out of his wits but he overcame his inner fear. The Midrash says he thought that if their staff could swallow up all those sticks, it could just as easily turn on his throne and wipe him out.

G-d's orchestration was genius. If Moshe and Aharon would have come before Pharaoh and immediately played their hand, casting the staff down and swallowing up their sticks, the impact would have been far less. Pharaoh was waiting to see a miracle; he had steeled himself. He was ready for it and would not have had to harden his heart. He would have been impressed, but not scared.

And who would have heard of the miracle? Only Pharaoh and a few of his ministers would have seen it, and they would have made sure it remained a state secret. The Egyptian populace would never have known about it. What happens instead? Pharaoh calls in everyone – the schoolchildren, the

wise men and magicians, his wife. It's on the front-page news! Everyone is in hysterics laughing at Moshe and Aharon.

The element of surprise is a key to an effective military strategy, as ancient Chinese general Sun Tzu writes in *The Art of War*, "Appear weak when you are strong, and strong when you are weak." So while everyone is laughing and their defenses are down, Hashem suddenly sends the entire Egyptian nation a chilling message that shocks them to their core: you are vulnerable, you can be devoured, and you are messing with the miraculous power of the G-d of the Jews. And Pharaoh and the Egyptians are shaken.

G-d had an exact plan and wanted to make sure the entire people heard His message. So if you ever find yourself questioning one of Hashem's directives, worried that you are going to look foolish, remember Moshe and Aharon and the staff that turned into a snake. Hashem knows exactly what He is doing. We just need to be patient sometimes in order to see it.

Don't Flog the Frog

RABBI NAFTALI REICH (Torah.org)

Frogs. Everywhere the Egyptians looked there were frogs. In the streets, in their homes, on their beds, even in their ovens. Billions of slimy frogs with bulging eyes, biting everything in sight and letting loose a cacophony of raucous croaks at an ear-shattering, mind-numbing decibel level. Egypt was prostrate and helpless.

Where did all these frogs come from? Did they descend on Egypt in swarms, like the predators and the locusts of later plagues? Our Sages tell us that they did not.

It all began with a single frog emerging from the river. The Egyptians struck the repulsive creature in an attempt to kill it, but to their shock, the frog split into two exact replicas of the first, like an ameba undergoing binary fission. The Egyptians then struck these two frogs, and they, too, executed an immediate two-for-one split. The Egyptians flogged the frogs again and again, but all they accomplished was a rapid geometric proliferation of slimy creatures that metastasized into an all-encompassing plague that gripped Egypt in a reptilian stranglehold.

Let us try and visualize this surreal scenario, Egyptians desperately striking at the frogs again and again only to see them multiply before their very eyes. We cannot help but marvel at the utterly bizarre behavior of the Egyptians. Why in the world would they continue to flog the frogs when each blow just exacerbated the situation? Couldn't they see that striking the frogs was counterproductive, to say the least? There can be only one explanation. They were not thinking rationally. With the painful memory of the blood plague still fresh in their minds, the Egyptians reacted to the onset of the promised second plague with anger and frustration bordering on panic. For all practical purposes, the stress caused them to take leave of their senses and lash out in a totally irrational manner. As the frogs multiplied, the demented frenzy of the Egyptians drove them to ever more violent reactions, which caused even more frogs to appear. They were caught in a downward spiral headed for disaster.

But the question still remains: Why indeed did Hashem choose to send the plague in this fashion? Why didn't he simply unleash a massive flood of frogs on Egypt as he would eventually do with the predators and the locusts?

The commentators explain that Hashem knew the Egyptians would react irrationally. In fact, this itself was one of the crucial messages of this early plague. The message was simple and straightforward. Just as it was futile and indeed irrational to flog the frogs, so would it be futile and irrational to defy the will of Hashem. Just as fear and revulsion could cause them to take leave of their senses and flog the frogs, so could their inflated egos cause them to scorn the divine retribution of the plagues and insist on keeping the Jewish people enslaved. It would be the height of madness to disobey the commands of Hashem. Hashem had give the Egyptians a warning within a warning, but they chose to disregard it.

A MERCHANT CAME to seek the advice of a great sage.

"My business is failing," he said. "I have tried everything, but the customers have stopped coming to my store. I don't know what to do." "Tell me what you have done thus far," said the sage.

"Well, I've spent a fortune on advertising. I've run numerous sales. I've renovated my store. The worse the situation became, the more money I spent on advertising and renovations. But nothing helps."

"I think I see the problem, my friend," said the sage. "You've been looking in the wrong direction. Drawing all the customers in the world to your store won't help if your product is inferior. Look inward. Improve your product, and your customers will return." In our own lives, things sometimes do not go our way, no matter how much or how often we try. Clearly, this is a message from Heaven. Sometimes, however, we refuse to acknowledge it

and stubbornly continue to bang our heads against brick walls, inflicting grievous damage on ourselves and our loved ones in the process. Only when wisdom prevails and our minds take control of our impulses can we recognize Hashem's hand and look inward for the causes of our misfortune. And when that happens, no matter how our problems are resolved, we will be forever enriched by our newfound closeness to Hashem.

Suspended Hailstones

RABBI YANKI TAUBER (Chabad.org)

You're walking down the street when suddenly — bam! — a hard object with sharp edges hits you smack in the middle of the forehead. You take a step back and, amazingly, the thing is still there, suspended in mid-air. It looks like what you would imagine a meteorite from outer space would look like: an asymmetrical chunk of ice and rock, glowing with heat on the inside, hard and cold on the outside.

You look around you. The lunchtime throng of sidewalk traffic flows on around you, mildly aware of the lone pedestrian obstructing their path (you), completely oblivious to the chunk of fire and ice hanging at forehead level in front of you. Apparently, you're the only one who has noticed it.

And then it hits you (this time inside your head): you've bumped into a piece of your past.

The seventh of the "ten plagues" to strike Egypt was the plague of hail, described in Shmos 9:22-35:

Moshe stretched out his rod towards heaven, and G-d rained hail upon the land of Egypt: there was hail, and fire flaring up within the hail, very grievous, such as there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation...

All of the plagues, from the Nile turning to blood to the midnight death of the Egyptian firstborn, had a miraculous element to them, designed to "let Egypt know that I am G-d" (ibid. 7:5). What's remarkable about the plague of hail is the supernatural way in which it ended.

As the Torah tells it, "Pharaoh sent and summoned Moshe and Aharon and said to them, 'I have sinned this time; G-d is the righteous one, and I and my people are the guilty ones...I will let you go.'" So "Moshe went away from Pharaoh, out of the city; and he spread out his hands to G-d; and the thunder ceased, and the hail and rain did not reach the ground." "Also those that were already in the air" explains Rashi in his commentary on the verse, "did not reach the ground."

What is the deeper significance of this strange phenomenon? The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that Pharaoh's suspended hailstones emphasize the underlying dynamics of sin, punishment and repentance.

When we talk about an evil deed being punished by G-d, many envision a supernal judge entering sins and failings into a cosmic accounts ledger, tallying up the debits, and meting out misfortunes as "retribution" or revenge. The truth runs deeper than that. According to the great Jewish thinkers, punishment is the result of sin rather than its retribution. When a person jumps out of a third storey window and breaks a leg, one might say that he was "punished" for his reckless deed; but it would be more precise to say that the Creator instituted certain laws of behavior in the physical world — such as the laws of gravity, kinetic energy, etc. — which "dictate" the broken-leg result of jumping out of a 3rd-storey window. By the same token, the Creator also instituted spiritual laws of behavior, which dictate that evil deeds bring misfortune upon their perpetrators.

So while Pharaoh's suspended hailstones may have violated the laws of physical nature, they were consistent with a more primary nature — the spiritual nature of creation which precedes and underlies its physical nature. The moment that Pharaoh repented his evil ways, expressing regret over his deeds ("I and my people are the guilty ones") and resolve regarding the future ("I will let you go") — the moment that the spiritual cause of the plague was no longer — the plague too, ceased. For a single hailstone to have moved even one millimeter closer to striking the land of Egypt would have violated the basic law of creation that the spiritual reality affects the physical reality, and not vice versa.

Nevertheless, the hailstones that were already in the air did not disappear. Pharaoh's repentance had the power to stop the future results of his behavior, but not to undo the past. By stopping the cause (his refusal to let the people of Israel go), he stopped its result (the plague of hail); but the hailstones which had resulted from his past deeds, he could not undo.

Life is a journey (or a river, a road, a rollercoaster — pick your cliché) in which we move on, leaving the past behind. But though we may have left it behind us, the past still exists. And as long as the past still exists, its results also remain in existence, hailstones suspended in midair.

There is, however, a deeper level of teshuvah (repentance) that can change the past. A teshuvah that draws on the timeless core of our souls to effect

such a radical change in our life's trajectory that it redefines the significance — and thus the results — of our past failings. No more hailstones to hit you on the forehead as you walk down street.

Hail to the Chief

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY (Torah.org)

Some people just never learn. For almost a year Pharaoh was literally plagued by every conceivable misfortune, yet he refused to let the Jewish people leave his land. Of course, he pleaded with Moshe during every plague to stop the great inconvenience, pain, and disaster that were befalling his country. He would even promise to let the Jews go, yet he never admitted guilt. He would beseech Moshe to stop the various plagues.

"Pray for me and remove the frogs! I will let you serve your G-d in the desert (Exodus 8:4)." Sometimes he would offer unrestricted freedom, only to renege when the plagues ceased. Never, except on one occasion, did Pharaoh admit that G-d was correct and he was corrupt.

That exception was the plague of hail. In fact, the plague of hail was so powerful that even Hashem Himself categorized it in a unique way. Moshe quoted Hashem to Pharaoh: "This time I shall send all my plagues against your heart, upon your servants, and your people so that you shall know that there is none like Me in the world" (Exodus 9:14). Why did Hashem consider the hail a more powerful act than His turning water into blood, or delivering pestilence, or wild animals or frogs? True, the hail did miraculously contain a fire ensconced in the ice, but all the plagues had miraculous attributes to them. Turning the Nile into blood is not an everyday occurrence either! What characteristic did the hail have to label it "all my plagues?"

Even more troubling is Pharaoh's response. After the plague strikes Egypt he calls Moshe and Ahron and he tells them "this time I have sinned, Hashem is righteous and I and my people are the wicked ones" (Exodus 9:27) What caused Pharaoh to utter those submissive words at this particular time? Didn't he already see blood, frogs, pestilence, boils, wild animals, and a host of different miraculous misfortunes that befell his people? What was so special about the fire and ice that fell from the heavens that charred even this man's cruel temper?

Radio commentator, Paul Harvey, relates the following story: William and his Aunt Caroline were constantly feuding. Actually, William was jealous of his aunt's popularity and social status in the New York of the late 1890's. Compared to her, he was considered a social outcast, and was never invited to any of her lavish parties. That would have been bad enough. Having to live next door to her was too much for William to bear. The sight of elegant carriages arriving and departing made him seethe. Yet he could do nothing. At least he did nothing until the family fortune was distributed and he received 100 million dollars. Then he knew what to do. He decided to rip down his mansion and build a monstrosity. It had 530 rooms, 350 baths, and a whopping 970 employees. It would be the grandest, most elegant guest house of it's kind. More carriages would pull up to his home in a day than to his aunt's mansion in a month! Her home would pale in comparison, and the tumult of it all would force her to move.

William was right. Aunt Caroline moved way north of the shadow of her nephew's hotel. And then she ripped down her old home. With the mere 50 million that she received, she too, decided to build a hotel on the site of her old mansion! It would be even more elegant, with nicer rooms and better service than her nephew's. Two adjacent, competing hotels would have been built right next to each other if not for the wisdom of William's own hotel manager. He got the two feuding relatives together and explained that hostility is not the way to success.

"If you two could just work together and adjoin the two hotels as one, it would become the most outstanding and influential accommodation on earth," he explained. They listened and followed his instructions. He even advised them to make sure that every opening between the structures could be sealed again in case of a renewed falling-out. But in the end, William Waldorf and his aunt, Caroline Astor decided to bury the hatchet and replace it with a hyphen. And the world's most luxurious accommodation was built — The Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.

There are many opposing forces in the world. However, when they work in tandem, they are the most powerful force possible. During this plague, fire and ice, two opposing forces in the world of nature disregarded their differences all in the service of the Supreme Commander. When Hashem announced that He will send all of His plagues, he was referring to conflicting forces that work harmoniously. After that, even Pharaoh was sensible enough, albeit for a short moment, to see his frailty and delusions. When even the worst of men see fire and ice dance together on one mission, there is nothing he can do but watch in amazement and admit,

“Hashem is the righteous one and I and my people are the wicked ones.” When opposing opinions gather for one objective – to do the will of Hashem – they are as unstoppable as the hail that brought Pharaoh to his knees.

News & Views

UK considers calling circumcision "child abuse."

ELDER OF ZIYON (ElderofZiyon.blogspot.com 11-1-26)

The Guardian reports:

Circumcision is to be classed as a potential form of child abuse under new guidance for prosecutors, amid concerns from judges and coroners about deaths and serious harms caused by the procedure.

A draft document by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) on “honour-based abuse, forced marriages, and harmful practices”, classes circumcision as a potential crime alongside breast flattening, virginity testing, hymenoplasty and exorcisms.

Wow, that's some company.

And what evidence do they bring to say that circumcisions are horrible?

According to the Office for National Statistics, since 2001 there have been seven deaths of boys under 18 where circumcision was a factor.

Seven deaths in 25 years is seven deaths too many. But without knowing the denominator, or comparing it to other procedures, how can we know how dangerous the practice really is?

We cannot, which is why The Guardian doesn't bother to ask basic question.

Like how many total circumcisions have been done in the UK in the same 25 years?

How does the death rate compare with that of other largely optional procedures that are regarded as generally safe?

Luckily, we have the answers to both.

In the UK, there are about 30,000 non-therapeutic circumcisions, which means over the 25 years, there was a rough fatality rate of about 1 in 100,000+ procedures.

Let's compare to tonsillectomies. In England, in hospitals, the mortality rate for tonsillectomies for children between 2008-2019 was 1 in 27,000, or roughly four times the death rate of circumcisions.

Not only that, but 7 out of 8 pediatric tonsillectomies were not medically necessary.

Did anyone call tonsillectomies "child abuse"? Of course not. They did what one would expect - the doctors studied the information and are now a lot more careful about the circumstances for when to recommend the procedure, and they learn how to do it safer.

Certainly circumcisions should be done by professionals, in an antiseptic environment, and ideally with easy access to medical personnel if there is a problem. That is what a responsible report would say. But a blanket labeling of the procedure as potential child abuse is not a sober description of facts, but a bigoted reaction - whether antisemitic, anti-Islamic or both. If some groups routinely do the procedure in unsafe circumstances, call that out, not the entire procedure.

The same people who claim to care so much about child abuse and bodily autonomy don't say a word about the number of children and babies who get infections from ear piercing (and it is not a small number, although rarely fatal.)

Bigotry is no less ugly when it masquerades behind caring about children. Arguably, it is worse.

MY AG announces shutdown of pro-Israel group

DANIEL GREENFIELD (Frontpagemag.com 14-1-26)

After 2 years of pro-Hamas riots that included multiple assaults on Jewish New Yorkers, streets being blocked off and synagogues terrorized, including a mob chanting “We support Hamas” outside a synagogue last week, New York's Attorney General Letitia James finally acted by... forcing the shutdown of Betar, a pro-Israel activist group, accusing it of “widespread persecution of Muslim, Arab, Palestinian(s).”

Attorney General Letitia James, an ally of Mamdani, claimed that Betar's activism is “driven by broad hostility and animus toward several protected groups, in violation of New York civil rights laws.”

Her evidence of this was that “members repeatedly referred to keffiyehs—traditional Palestinian scarves—as ‘rape rags’ and claimed that Muslims ‘hate America.’”

Betar publicly circulated content celebrating violence against Palestinians, including social media posts mocking civilian deaths, declaring hatred toward Gazans, and calling for further bloodshed.”

Whatever one thinks of these remarks by ‘members’ (which is not the same thing as the position of an organization), they're constitutionally protected, unlike the support for illegal terrorist organizations and the assaults on individuals and police officers by members of pro-Hamas groups.

AG James has refused to take action against any of the Muslim and leftist groups behind the violence and the riots but has shut down a Jewish group whose tone may have been confrontational that advocated fighting back against those groups.

Here's the specific text of James' ‘legal’ document. “For example, Betar members repeatedly referred to keffiyehs as “rape rags” in public and private.

Keffiyehs are a traditional Middle Eastern headscarf that has become identified with Palestinian identity.

One member stated on an internal Betar WhatsApp chat that all devout Muslims “hate America.” Echoing these sentiments, Betar's chairman wrote that they harass “Muslim terrorists.”

AG James obviously has a real problem with that last part.

The James press release claimed that “Betar threatened to place Jewish activists on lists to be shared with foreign authorities in an effort to bar them from travel and intimidate them into silence.”

By that she means that the names of terrorist supporters were passed on to Israeli law enforcement authorities. There's nothing illegal about that.

The only actual violence that AG James describes by Betar took place when Hamas supporters came to hold a hate rally at a synagogue.

Not that the James statement mentions that point. It's the equivalent of accusing a Black group of encouraging violence against a KKK rally at a Black church.

AG James does not address the fact that Hamas supporters routinely come with weapons and assault Jews outside synagogues and Jewish events. Nor has she gone after any of the Muslim groups behind it.

Instead, she's targeting Jews who have defended their community against assaults by the hate groups that James supports.

Their rhetoric and tactics may not have been nice or politically correct, but they did not do a fraction of the things that the allies of Mamdani and James have routinely done.

But this is nothing new for AG James, who had illegally gone after the NRA for political reasons. Now the Mamdani ally is targeting Jewish groups.

This is how New York turns into London.

Mamdani celebrated the move, which protects his Hamas allies from encountering Jewish self-defense during their attacks on synagogues in New York City. And this way he outsources the dirty work to others.

Jerusalem severs ties with 7 UN agencies, citing anti-Israel bias

TOI STAFF (TimesofIsrael.com 13-1-26)

Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar announced on Tuesday Israel's withdrawal from several United Nations agencies and associated organizations for reasons ranging from their alleged anti-Israel bias to “ineffective bureaucracy.”

The agencies Israel withdrew from, effective immediately, are the: Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women); UN Conference on Trade and Development; UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia; UN Alliance of Civilizations; UN Energy; and Global Forum on Migration and Development.

In a statement announcing the move, the Foreign Ministry said it was ceasing cooperation with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict after it added the IDF to a “blacklist” in its annual report on children in armed conflict, along with Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

“Israel is the only democratic country to be listed, alongside ISIS and Boko Haram,” it noted, adding that Israel already cut ties with the office in June 2024.

Similarly, it said, Sa'ar pulled Israel out of UN Women after it “deliberately ignored all cases of sexual violence committed against Israeli women on October 7, 2023.”

It cited “virulent anti-Israel reports” as the reason for withdrawing from both the UN Agency for Trade and Development and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, and says the Alliance of Civilizations is “used as a platform for attacks against Israel.”

Finally, it accused UN Energy of being a “wasteful organization,” reflective of the “excessive and inefficient bureaucracy of the UN,” and said that the Global Forum on Migration and Development “erodes the ability of

sovereign nations to enforce their own immigration laws.”

The ministry added that it will continue to examine Israel's ties with additional UN agencies.

Israel has long accused the global body of bias, with more resolutions against Jerusalem annually than against other countries combined.

Israel has been particularly critical of UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, even before Hamas's October 7, 2023, terror assault in southern Israel — accusing the agency of colluding with Hamas and teaching anti-Israel hatred, which UNRWA denies.

Israel has already banned UNRWA from operating in Israeli territory and has curtailed its activities in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, based on what it says are its entrenched ties to terror groups.

Israel has also provided evidence that UNRWA schools incited hatred of Israel and glorification of attacks against Israelis.

Additionally, Israel last year refused to renew visas for the heads of at least three United Nations agencies in Gaza.

Under the Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service adopted by the UN, staff are advised not to take sides or express their convictions publicly on controversial matters.

Last week, US President Donald Trump withdrew the United States from a total of 66 global organizations and treaties — roughly half affiliated with the United Nations — accusing them of acting “contrary to the interests of the United States.”

US leaders sign declaration of 'Loyalty to the Bible'

ISRAEL NATIONAL NEWS (Israelnn.com 13-1-26)

During the Jerusalem Prayer Breakfast conference held at President Trump's estate, a long list of American leaders signed a declaration recognizing the deep connection between the Jewish people and Judea and Samaria, “the Land of the Bible.” Among the signatories: JPB founder Albert Veksler, MK Ohad Tal, Head of the Binyamin Regional Council and Chairman of the Yesha Council Israel Gantz, and Head of the Samaria Regional Council Yossi Dagan.

Senior American leaders signed a declaration affirming their connection to the Land of the Bible at the "Jerusalem Prayer Breakfast" event, which took place today (Tuesday) at Mar-a-Lago in Florida. The event was organized by Albert Veksler, Director of the Jerusalem Prayer Breakfast, with the aim of connecting religious and political leaders through prayer.

The declaration constitutes a clear and unequivocal political statement by leaders in the United States who publicly stand alongside the State of Israel and hold that Judea and Samaria as an inseparable part of it. Among those who signed were Albert Veksler; MK Ohad Tal, Chairman of the Israel-U.S. Caucus in the Knesset; Head of the Binyamin Regional Council and Chairman of the Yesha Council, Israel Gantz; Head of the Samaria Regional Council, Yossi Dagan; and many other leaders.

The document states: "We, the undersigned, affirm the deep and eternal connection of the Jewish people to the Land of the Bible, Judea and Samaria, the beating heart of humanity's spiritual story."

The declaration further notes: “In these places - at Bethel and Shiloh, in Hebron and Shechem - the call for justice, covenant, and compassion was first heard. Here the prophets walked; here prayer, faith, and hope were born."

The conference, held at President Trump's estate and considered one of the flagship gatherings of pro-Israel American leadership, emphasized the moral and political alliance between the United States and Israel, and the commitment to standing clearly alongside Israel on the international stage.

The initiative joins a growing wave of international support for Judea and Samaria, which was expressed about a month ago at a large-scale event in Ancient Shiloh in the Binyamin region, attended by more than a thousand pastors, leaders, and influencers from the United States.

In the declaration, the signatories pledged: “We commit to preserving our connection to this Holy Land, strengthening our ties to it, and ensuring that the heritage born here will continue to illuminate the path of all humanity."

Yossi Dagan, Head of the Samaria Regional Council: "This declaration is a clear moral and political statement. Judea and Samaria are at the heart of the Jewish people's identity and an inseparable part of the State of Israel. Seeing American leaders openly stand with historical truth and justice provides important support to the people of Israel and to the struggle for our future. Standing together is a key to Israel's victory and to the victory of the United States."

Governor of Binyamin and Chairman of the Yesha Council - Yisrael Ganz: "The signing of the declaration sends a sharp and unambiguous message: Judea and Samaria are at the heart of the biblical story and an inseparable

part of the State of Israel. This is a political declaration by American leaders who openly stand with Israel, strengthening the values-based, historical alliance between our two countries."

MK Ohad Tal, Chairman of the Knesset Israel-U.S. Relations Caucus: “The success story of the State of Israel stems from its core from our connection to God and the Bible. Therefore, precisely from here - from the residence of the leader of the world's biggest superpower - we reaffirm and declare our shared commitment to the eternal covenant between the People of the Bible and the Land of the Bible. This is a moving and important day for Israel-U.S. relations."

Why do they march for Gaza, but not Iran?

JONATHAN S. TOBIN (JNS.org 14-1-26)

The silence from the chattering classes, Hollywood elites, and university students and faculty has been deafening. The same people who have been conducting mass demonstrations and virtue-signaling about their devotion to the cause of human rights and their abhorrence of civilian casualties when it came to the war in Gaza have been largely silent about what is happening in Iran.

That isn't because no one knows exactly what's going on.

Despite attempts by the Islamist regime to black out the internet and halt the flow of information about events inside the country, the scale of the conflict has grown so large that it has been impossible to cover up. Some 2,500 deaths have been confirmed by the U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency, though reports on mass killings of protesters by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps have raised the potential death toll to anywhere from 12,000 to 20,000.

While the liberal mainstream media was slow to pick up the story, it can no longer downplay it. While it has had to compete with its overwrought coverage of the controversy about the Trump administration's efforts to enforce immigration laws, the Iran protests have been the top story on The New York Times website for multiple days, and have also received extensive coverage in The Washington Post and on NPR. Even leftist human-rights groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have been posting about it.

APATHY ABOUT IRANIAN VICTIMS

But the statistics about casualties and images of military forces shooting peaceful protesters in cold blood haven't moved the audiences of these outlets in the way they normally do about another conflict in the Middle East. In fact, the same audience that turned out in the tens of thousands to protest the war in the Gaza Strip or to broadcast their identification with Palestinians has zero interest in the Iranian struggle for freedom or the many victims of the Islamist regime.

This apathy makes itself felt on a number of different levels.

No mass street protests, demonstrations or tent encampments can be found in U.S. cities or on college campuses dedicated to supporting Iranian protesters. The opinion columnists at major outlets who have been churning out articles falsely accusing Israel of “genocide” while parroting grossly inaccurate Palestinian casualty figures are mum about Iran. At the Golden Globes awards ceremony, actors and others in past years have shown off their support for the Palestinian war against Israel via lapel pins or biting words. At the event held this past weekend, the cause de jour was protests against the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE). Not a single person—either on stage or in the audience, as can be seen from the media coverage—was standing in solidarity with the people of Iran.

That's not surprising.

Concern about the way the Islamist theocracy oppresses the people of Iran has never been among its priorities. Or even a subject about which they were even minimally concerned.

The question is why—given everything heard from the crowd about how terrible it is for the innocent to be killed in conflict—they have nothing to say about Tehran? They're all very vocal about the backing of a “Free Palestine.” Not so much about a free Iran.

It's true that not as much attention has been paid to the conflict in Iran as there has been for the two-year war in Gaza; however, a good number of Iranians have been fighting against the mullahs since the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

Another reason may be that the State of Israel is supported by the United States. It's true that even when Washington was most sympathetic to Iran, and seeking to appease its government during the Barack Obama administration, and to a lesser extent, when Joe Biden was president, America didn't formally support the government of Iran.

If anything, the fight for freedom there ought to be generating a lot more foreign support than the Palestinian cause. After all, the Palestinians have rejected compromise, peace and a two-state solution to end the Arab-Israeli

conflict for nearly a century. And the recent war in Gaza wasn't an Israeli attempt to stifle democratic protests. It was a morally justified response to a cross-border invasion by Palestinian Arabs on Oct. 7, 2023, which resulted in an orgy of mass murder, rape, torture, kidnapping and wanton destruction.

The main impetus for those rallies, however, wasn't focused on ending ties between Washington and Jerusalem, though most of the protesters were surely in favor of that idea. Nor was the motivation for the protests simply a matter of backing a ceasefire in the fighting that followed the Oct. 7 massacre in Jewish communities in southern Israel. The ceasefire reached last October didn't really dampen the ardor of the anti-Israel crowd. It was also not a matter of genuine sympathy for victims; if that were the case, they wouldn't have been indifferent to the plight of Israeli hostages and would still be out advocating for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip.

Rather, as the chants of the pro-Hamas mobs made clear, it was their support for the desire of the Palestinians to see Israel eradicated ("From the river to the sea") and for violence against Jews wherever they lived ("Globalize the intifada") that lured them to join the cause.

Despite their loud proclamations that the anti-Israel protests were rooted in concern about human rights—something that would surely cause them to speak out about Iran—that just doesn't pass muster. Nobody who actually cares about human rights can support a cause that aims at the slaughter of an entire people, no matter where they live.

RACIALIST MYTHS

The reason for this can partly be explained by simple ideology. The indoctrination of a generation in the toxic ideas of critical race theory, intersectionality and settler-colonialism has led many young people to believe that all conflicts are essentially about race.

As such, they have come to believe that the world is divided into two groups perpetually at war with each other: oppressed "people of color" and their "white" oppressors. In that essentially Marxist formulation, Jews are, despite their history of persecution and the persistence of antisemitism, too Western and too successful to merit sympathy, and so must be defined as "white" oppressors. That makes the Palestinians the oppressed racial minority. They believe this myth, even though Jews and Arabs are the same race, and the majority of Israelis are people of color since they trace their origins to the Middle East and North Africa.

The struggle of Iranians to end the rule of tyrannical Islamist theocrats and their terrorist henchmen is irrelevant to this framework because neither side can be identified as "white." That makes it irrelevant at best, and at worst, a distraction from more interesting battles like the one against Israeli Jews.

It's equally true that those influenced by these ideas also can't identify with any struggle against a government that regards itself in conflict with the West, which the intersectional left considers to be irredeemably racist. As historian Niall Ferguson sagely pointed out in *The Free Press*, because the Iranian protests are an attempt at a "counterrevolution," rather than one against a pro-Western government, they are indifferent to it. In this way, the reactionary Iranian regime—which, like Hamas, oppresses women and considers gays to be worthy of the death penalty—gets a free pass.

That's as illogical as it is absurd since it leads people who would be hanged or thrown off rooftops in Gaza or Tehran to march with "Gays for Palestine" placards. Yet it does make sense to those who consider the West, the United States and Israel to be inherently evil, and their opponents, even when they are Islamist murderers, to be somehow sympathetic.

It's the same reason why far larger and bloodier conflicts, such as the decade-long Syrian civil war—when hundreds of thousands died, and millions were made homeless—never motivated anyone on the left to take to the streets demanding action to stop the fighting. The same was true for what is a real genocide going on in Sudan right now.

THE LEFT AND RIGHT UNITE IN THEIR ANTISEMITISM

Still, there's more to it than just that stale and intellectually vapid ideological construct. The "horseshoe" effect, in which the far left and the far right unite in their antisemitism, is at play when it comes to Iran as much as it is about Gaza.

Anti-Israel extremists on both the left and right are speaking out against any help for the protest movement in Iran. The likes of journalists Max Blumenthal, Glenn Greenwald and Ali Abunimah say they oppose the protests because the demonstrators' foreign sympathizers just want a pro-Israel government in Tehran. That misses the point. Of course, many people in the West would prefer a government that wasn't the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism. But apologists ignore the fact that one of the reasons why Iranians want to overthrow their Islamist tyrants is because the regime has squandered its country's resources in its frenzy to build a nuclear bomb to obliterate the Jewish state. And that's despite the fact that Israel and Iran have no real reason to be in conflict other than

because of the mullahs' antisemitic obsessions.

As seen in recent months, the obsessive hatred for Israel on the part of a certain segment of right-wing opinion also leads those who take this position to be supportive of anyone who claims to be an anti-Zionist, even if that leads them to back some of the most anti-American regimes and people in the world.

It's no accident that former Fox News host and current podcaster Tucker Carlson has been adamant about opposing American efforts to stop Iran from getting a nuclear weapon or efforts on the part of the Trump administration to support anti-regime protesters. The same is true of former Trump staffer turned extremist podcaster Steve Bannon and neo-Nazi "groyper" leader Nick Fuentes.

Though these people claim to be American patriots and believers in an "America First" or "America Only" foreign policy, they oppose efforts by the Trump administration to rein in and stop a regime that has killed Americans and views the United States as the "great Satan," regardless of its position on Israel.

The only thing that brings them into agreement with the left on Iran is the fact that the Tehran theocrats hate Israel.

There's no way to look at this issue that doesn't inevitably lead back to an age-old hatred.

As with other global struggles, antisemites on both ends of the political spectrum are never going to care about a conflict in which neither side is Jewish. As for Iran, its radical oppressors not only support efforts at Jewish genocide but spend enormous sums on terrorist groups and a nuclear program with which that evil objective could be accomplished—money its population never sees.

Under those circumstances, it is to be expected that the same crowd who write, rally and virtue-signal their anguish about Palestinians will be utterly indifferent to the plight of Iranian victims at the hands of Islamists. The explanation isn't merely ideology or hypocrisy. It can be summed up on one basis: Jew-hatred.

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

DUCHKA D'SAKINA

OU KOSHER (OUTorah.org)

QUESTION: What does "d'uchka d'sakina" (literally the pressure of a knife) refer to?

ANSWER: The Gemara (Chullin 111b) states that if one cut a radish with a fleishig knife, the radish will absorb a meaty taste. Therefore, this radish may not be served with dairy. Rashi (Chullin 112a) offers two explanations as to why the radish may not be eaten with meat.

1. Knives often have residue on them even when they appear clean. Due to the force of the knife cutting through the radish, some of that meaty residue will transfer to the surface of the radish.
2. Because radishes are spicy foods, the force of the knife cutting through the radish will transfer flavors that were previously absorbed in the knife into the radish itself.

Shulchan Aruch (YD 96) rules like both of these explanations of Rashi. Therefore, if one cut bread or other non-spicy vegetables with a fleishig knife, these items may not be served with dairy, unless one scrapes away wherever a cut was made. If one cut radishes, onions or other spicy foods with a fleishig knife, the spicy food must be considered fleishig. Since these items absorb the meaty flavor, it is not enough to simply scrape away the place where the cut was made.

QUESTION: I cut an onion with a fleishig knife. I cut it again with a pareve knife. Is the pareve knife still pareve?

ANSWER: The status of the knife depends on a disagreement between the Magen Avrohom (OC 451:31) and the Even Ha'ozar (YD 96:3). According to the Magen Avrohom, not only does a davar charif (spicy food) draw out a full measure of taste from the fleishig knife, but it will also transfer a full measure of taste from the spicy food into the pareve knife. According to this view, the pareve knife would now become fleishig. The Even Ha'ozar disagrees. He writes that although the spicy food draws out a full measure of taste from the fleishig knife and therefore becomes fleishig, nevertheless when it is cut again, it only gives off a secondary taste ("nat bar nat") and bedi'aved (after the fact) the knife remains pareve. Most poskim agree with

the Even Ha'ozet.

QUESTION: *I cut an onion with a fleishig knife. Then I cut it again with a milchig knife, what is the status of the onion?*

ANSWER: The onion is non-kosher and should not be eaten. This is because the onion absorbed the taste of dairy from the milchig knife and the taste of meat from the fleishig knife. Although the milk and meat were not cooked together, it is still Rabbinically forbidden to eat the onion, since this would be like eating milk and meat together. One may not cook the onion even to feed it to an animal. This is because if one cooks the onion, the taste of milk and meat that was absorbed in the onion would then be cooked together. It is a Torah prohibition to cook meat and milk together even if they are only absorbed tastes in an onion. According to most opinions, the milchig knife would need to be kashered as well. However, Sefer Davar Charif (p. 57) writes that in cases of significant loss, there is room to be more lenient regarding the knife. This is because there are poskim who maintain that *duchka d'sakina* (the pressure of the knife) will not extract any absorbed tastes out of a food. A rabbi should be consulted.

QUESTION: *I only have a fleishig knife, and I would like to use it to slice bread for a dairy meal. What should I do?*

ANSWER: Shulchan Aruch (YD 89:4) writes that one may not slice bread with a fleishig knife if one intends to eat the bread with dairy. This is because the meat residue that is assumed to be on the blade of the knife may transfer to the bread. The Taz (YD 89:6) writes that in this case, it is sufficient to take a towel and wipe the knife clean; since the knife is only being used to slice bread and is not coming into direct contact with cheese, the fleishig knife does not require abrasive cleaning (*ne'itza*). The Shach (YD 89:22) however writes that wiping the blade clean is insufficient even for slicing bread. The knife requires *ne'itza* (abrasive cleaning such as with steel wool). Most poskim agree with the Shach. Additionally, poskim write that even this should only be done if one has no other knife. Otherwise, the custom is to designate separate knives for fleishigs and milchigs and to only use a milchig knife when serving dairy. The Pri Megadim (Mishbetzos Zahav YD 89:6) writes that *bedi'eved* (after the fact) if one wiped the fleishig knife clean and already used it to slice bread, the bread may be served with dairy, as per the ruling of the Taz.

Duchka D'Sakina - Cutting Board

OU Kosher

QUESTION: *I cut an onion with a pareve knife on a clean fleishig cutting board. What is the status of the onion and the knife? [In other words, do the halachos of "duchka d'sakina" apply to a cutting board?]*

ANSWER: The Chochmas Adam (56:2) writes that the halachos of "duchka d'sakina" apply to a cutting board as well. He writes that he has heard that others are lenient, since the pressure from the cutting board is not similar to that of a knife, but he disagrees. Sefer Davar Charif (p. 13) writes that the opinion of Rav Elyashiv zt"l and most poskim is that *lechatchila* (before the fact) one should follow the ruling of the Chochmas Adam. However, *bedi'eved* (after the fact), the lenient opinion is the accepted ruling. Therefore, *lechatchila*, a pareve knife should be used with a pareve cutting board. If one accidentally cut an onion with a pareve knife on a fleishig cutting board, the pareve knife would remain pareve. However, the onion itself should be treated as fleishigs if this will not cause too much difficulty or loss.

QUESTION: *I used a kosher knife to cut through an onion, and I found that I also sliced through a large worm. Does my knife need kashering? Can I use the rest of the onion?*

ANSWER: If one slices through a spicy non-kosher food, the knife requires kashering. An onion is considered a *davar charif* (spicy food), but a worm is not. If one slices through an onion that contains a worm, how do we view this? The Maharil writes that the worm in this case has the status of a *davar charif*, and therefore the knife requires kashering. However, most poskim disagree with this conclusion. The Chochmas Adam (38:27) discusses this scenario and rules that the knife does not need kashering, but where the cut was made, the onion should be scraped away. Although he agrees that the onion-worm combination is considered spicy, still there is no need to kasher the knife, because the taste of the worm is *pagum* (repugnant). Even the strong spicy taste of the onion is incapable of improving the taste of a worm.

QUESTION: *I cut an onion with a fleishig knife that had not been used in more than 24 hours (aino ben yomo). When a utensil is not used for 24 hours, the absorbed taste becomes stale. Is the onion considered fleishig?*

ANSWER: The Gemara (Avoda Zara 39a) states that if one cut a *chiltis* (a very spicy vegetable) with a non-kosher knife, even if the knife had not been

used with non-kosher for more than 24 hours (*aino-ben-yomo*), the *chiltis* will become non-kosher. This is because the strong spicy taste of the *chiltis* has the ability to revive even stale tastes. The same applies to a fleishig knife. Even if the knife had not been used for 24 hours, the *chiltis* would become fleishig. While all agree that this halacha applies to a *chiltis*, Shulchan Aruch cites differing opinions as to whether this halacha applies to less spicy vegetables such as a radish. The Shach (Y.D. 96:6) writes that the accepted ruling is to extend this halacha to all *d'varim charifim* (e.g., even radishes and onions). Therefore, if someone cut an onion with a fleishig knife, even if the knife was cold and clean and had not been used in the past 24 hours (*aino ben yomo*), the onion would nevertheless become fleishig.

QUESTION: *I ate a salad that contained raw onions that were cut with a fleishig knife. Am I required to wait six hours?*

ANSWER: If a sharp or spicy food such as an onion is cut with a fleishig knife, it absorbs the full flavor of meat that is in the knife. The onion is not considered merely a *nosein ta'am bar nosein ta'am* of fleishig (a secondary flavor of meat) but rather it is considered to have a full measure of meat flavor—and if this onion was cooked with dairy, the onion would be forbidden. However, Rebbi Akiva Eiger (YD 89:3) writes that even so, one is not required to wait six hours after eating an onion that was cut with a fleishig knife. This type of food is not actual meat but would at most be similar to a *tavshil shel basar* (a food cooked with meat). Although the Rama (YD 89:3) writes that the *minhag* is to wait six hours after eating a *tavshil shel basar*, in this case, since there was no actual meat that came in contact with the onion, there is no *minhag* to require waiting. Though one may certainly not eat dairy together with this salad, after one finishes eating this salad, dairy foods may be consumed.

Visiting A Church Or A Mosque

RABBI DONIEL NEUSTADT (Torah.org)

Question: Is it permitted to visit or tour a church or a mosque?

Discussion: It is clearly prohibited to enter a house of *avodah zarah*. The Mishnah[1] prohibits one from even entering a city in which *avodah zarah* is present. Since it is impossible for us, who live in exile, to adhere to this prohibition, we are considered *anusim*—under duress—in this regard. Entering an actual house of *avodah zarah*, however, is clearly prohibited[2]. What remains to be clarified, however, is whether or not a church or a mosque is a house of *avodah zarah*. The poskim are not uniform in their classification of Christians as idol-worshippers. Although the Rambam rules unequivocally that Christians are idol-worshippers[3], other *Rishonim*[4] are more tentative. Their view is based on the assumption that non-Jews are considered idol-worshippers only if they totally reject the existence of G-d. Christianity, however, combines the belief in G-d with other idolatrous and alien beliefs. Such a theology is called *avodah zarah b'shituf* (in combination). Some poskim rule that *avodah zarah b'shituf* is not considered full-fledged *avodah zarah*[5], while others maintain that it is[6]. Moreover, there is a view[7] that gentiles nowadays cannot be considered idol-worshippers since they are merely following in the tradition of their parents (without actually worshipping idols).

Practically speaking, however, the vast majority of the poskim agree that Christianity is considered *avodah zarah* and a Jew is forbidden to enter a church[8]. The following reasons are offered:

Most poskim consider Christianity to be *avodah zarah*[9].

Even if *avodah zarah b'shituf* is permitted, it is only permitted for a non-Jew. For a Jew, however, there is no difference between *avodah zarah* and *avodah zarah b'shituf*[10]. For him, therefore, a church is considered a house of *avodah zarah*.

The view of the Ran (Sanhedrin 61b) is that the belief in any religion except Judaism constitutes *avodah zarah*. He says the following: "...even the Christian saints, and even the... leader of the Ishmaelites, even though their followers do not consider them gods, nevertheless, since they bow to them to acknowledge that they are human incarnation of their divinities, they all have the halachic status of *avodah zarah*..."

Even if present-day gentiles do not worship idols, nevertheless their churches are considered houses of idol worship, since all the services conducted therein are performed in the name of *avodah zarah*[11].

Regarding Islam, however, most poskim follow the opinion of the Rambam[12] that it is not considered *avodah zarah*[13]. Hence they do not expressly forbid entering a mosque[14]. Other poskim forbid entering a mosque as well[15]. All agree that unless there is a compelling reason to do so, mosques are off limits for any G-d-fearing Jew.

It goes without saying that the houses of worship of all other heathen religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. are considered *avodah zarah* and are off-limits at all times.

Question: Is one allowed to cut through the parking lot of a church?

Discussion: While church services are being held, it is clearly forbidden to enter the church's parking lot because it may seem to a bystander that one is entering the parking lot in order to enter the church.

When church services are not being held, it is permitted to cut through the church's parking lot. Although the poskim refer to a middas chasidus (an act of piety) not to enter a courtyard of a church, nevertheless, if the shortest route available is through the church's parking lot, it is permitted and the middas chasidus does not apply[16].

1. Avodah Zarah 11b.
2. Rambam, Peirush ha-Mishnayos, Avodah Zarah 1:3. Shach, Y.D. 149:1. See also Y.D. 150:1.
3. Hilchos Ma'achalos Asuros 11:7. The line in the Rambam referring to Christians was censored. It appears in its entirety, however, in the Frankel edition of the Rambam. See also Rambam Hilchos Avodah Zarah 9:4, and Hilchos Teshuvah 3:8 for a similar ruling.
4. Tosafos, Sanhedrin 63b in the name of Rabbeinu Tam; Meiri, Avodah Zarah 2a and 6b.
5. Rama, O.C. 156 according to Pischei Teshuvah, Y.D. 147:2; Mor u'Ketziyah 224; Sho'el u'Meishiv, Tanina 1:51; Seder Mishnah, Yesodei ha-Torah 1:7.
6. Noda b'Yehudah, Tanina, Y.D. 148; Sha'ar Efrayim 24, quoting the Chelkas Mechokek; Peri Megadim, Y.D. 65:45; Teshuvos Chasam Sofer, O.C. 84. See Mishnah Berurah 304:4.
7. See Shulchan Aruch, Y.D. 148:12 and Teshuvos Yehudah Ya'aleh, Y.D. 170.
8. Teshuvos Peri ha-Sadeh 2:4; Igros Moshe, Y.D. 3:129-6.
9. Minchas Elazar 1:53-3; Yechaveh Da'as 4:45. See entire list in Yayin Malchus, pgs. 234-237
10. Binyan Tziyon 1:63.
11. Darchei Teshuvah 150:2; Tzitz Eliezer 14:91, quoting Rav C. Palagi.
12. Hilchos Ma'achalos Assuros 11:7.
13. Y.D. 124:6 and Taz 4 and Shach 12. See Ben Ish Chai, Parashas Balak.
14. See Avnei Yashfei 1:153 who quotes Rav Y.S. Elyashiv as ruling that it is not prohibited to enter a mosque.
15. Tzitz Eliezer 14:91; 18:47, based on the previously-mentioned view of the Ran. See also Meiri, Avodah Zarah 57a who quotes Chachmei Sefarad as ruling that Islam is avodah zarah.
16. Entire paragraph based on Rama, Y.D. 149:2. See also Igros Moshe, Y.D. 3:129-6.

Candles (Melb) Friday 16 January 2026, 28 Teves 5786 8.26p/9.28p