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Devarim 5785

THE SECRET OF GREAT TEACHING

RABBI AVRAHAM KOVEL (Aish.com)

Imagine receiving the news that you have only weeks left to live. The people you led for decades - through rebellion and triumph, despair and deliverance - who you thought you'd lead on their final mission - must go on without you. Moshe faced this reality as he stood at the border of the Promised Land, banned from entering, blocked from fulfilling his greatest dream. Yet instead of withdrawing in disappointment or despair, Moshe dedicated his final days to preparing the Nation for their future.

These final teachings became the book of Devarim. Unlike the first four books, which were dictated verbatim by G-d with Moshe serving as a faithful scribe, the Talmud teaches that, in Devarim, Moshe assumes the role of narrator, conveying G-d's message through the lens of human experience.

Why this change? Why would G-d's perfect words need Moshe's interpretation? And if Moshe is simply retelling G-d's laws in his own words, why does Devarim repeat certain commandments while completely omitting others?

MAKING THE TIMELESS TIMELY

The answer to all three questions lies in a brilliant observation of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch. When discussing Jewish holidays, Moshe focuses exclusively on Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot—the pilgrimage festivals that would come into effect only when the nation would enter the land. In doing so, he omits Shabbat, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur, which could be observed anywhere.

This selectivity reveals Devarim's master class in education: A teacher doesn't just share knowledge; he anticipates which knowledge will matter most, making timeless wisdom immediately relevant for his students. Moshe applies this principle throughout Devarim, systematically addressing every challenge awaiting the nation as they conquer and settle the Land:

In matters of governance, to replace his direct oversight, he emphasized the laws that establish judicial systems (16:18-20) and military protocols (20:10-12). For spiritual integrity, to maintain divine connection when obvious miracles faded, he dedicated extensive passages to eliminating idolatry (7:1-6) while prescribing daily disciplines like the Shema (6:4-9). In economic and social life, to prepare them for permanent settlement after nomadic desert life, he outlined everything from tithing (14:22-29) to inheritance rights (21:15-17).²

Even the narrative sections follow this theme. When Moshe recounts the nation's desert travels, our Sages teach that his mention of specific locations subtly reminds them of past failures.³ His message carries both warning and hope: 'If you stumbled in the desert amid open miracles, prepare for greater challenges in the Land. Yet with proper awareness and preparation, you will succeed.'

THE ROLE OF A RABBI

No one in Jewish history carries the title "Rabeinu" (our Rabbi) except Moshe—not Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or any other towering figure. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik explains that Moshe earned this unique designation not for his perfect transmission in the first four books, but for his revolutionary role in Devarim: becoming the first person to translate eternal wisdom into practical guidance for a specific generation. This insight reframes our understanding of teaching itself. Information

transfer—even perfect information transfer—doesn't qualify someone as a rabbi. True rabbinic leadership requires the much more difficult art of translation: taking timeless truths and making them speak to immediate circumstances.

Consider the difference:

- A lecturer shares knowledge
- A teacher creates understanding
- A rabbi transforms lives

Moshe achieved this transformation by focusing not on what had been revealed, but on what his students would need to succeed in their unprecedented challenges ahead.

SPEAKING TO OUR GENERATION

We live in an era of information overload where ancient wisdom feels increasingly irrelevant to modern struggles. Young people abandon tradition not because it lacks truth, but because no one has translated that truth into language that speaks to their actual challenges—career anxiety, relationship confusion, purpose crisis, social media comparison. Those privileged to study Torah bear the responsibility to share it with others. But effective teaching requires following Moshe's example—carefully considering our audience's challenges and translating Torah's timeless wisdom into immediate guidance.

Whether you're a parent guiding children, a rabbi leading a community, or simply someone with wisdom to share, ask yourself:

What unique challenges does my audience face that previous generations didn't?

Which timeless principles will they need most for their specific journey?

How can I present ancient wisdom in language that speaks to their experience?

In following the insights we gain from these questions, we honor the selflessness of Moshe, who, rather than despairing, created something more lasting than any physical conquest: a template for making timeless truth relevant to every generation. Thousands of years later, we still turn to Devarim not just for its content, but for its method.

May we merit to follow in Moshe's footsteps, finding ways to align Torah's eternal truths with the unique challenges of our generation.

1. Megillah 31B
2. Rabbi Hirsch identifies six major categories: National Security and Diplomacy (chapters 20-21), Religious Infrastructure (eliminating idolatry 7:1-6, establishing worship centers 12:5-14), Civil Administration (judicial systems 16:18-21:9), Economic Framework (tithing 14:22-29, debt relief 15:1-11, business ethics 25:13-16), Family and Social Structure (inheritance 21:15-17, marriage/divorce 24:1-4), and Spiritual Maintenance (daily disciplines in chapters 6 and 11).
3. Rashi on Devarim 1:1 explains that the place names mentioned in the opening verse are not merely geographical locations but subtle reminders of Israel's past failures. According to Rashi, Moshe chose to reference their sins indirectly through place names rather than explicitly detailing their failures, out of respect for the nation's dignity.

CAN YOU TRAVEL BACK IN TIME? KIND OF...

RABBI AHARON LOSCHAK (Chabad.org)

Time travel has always fascinated humans. "What if I could go back in time and rewrite history?" and "What if I could see how things were back then and experience a totally different life?" are just some of the questions that capture our collective imagination. Full entertainment franchises are devoted to this fixation.

What if I told you that, in some ways, you really can travel back in time? OK, you won't be able to transport yourself onto 1776 American soil and help the Revolution (if that's what you want), but you most definitely can go back into the annals of your own life and rewrite the script.

The key to your time machine is right here, in your own mind.

PARSHAT DEVARIM begins with Moshe's farewell speech to the people:

These are the words which Moshe spoke to all Israel on that side of the Jordan in the desert. (1:1)

Why does the Torah name the location so vaguely, "on that side of the Jordan?" Just one verse earlier, at the conclusion of the book of Bamidbar, the Torah describes the same spot as, " . . . in the plains of Moab, by the Jordan at Jericho." (Bamidbar 36:13) Why omit the name now?

TWO DIFFERENT STORIES

The different names for the same location stem from a fundamental difference between the two books: Bamidbar, meaning "in the desert," is the story of the Jews' 40-year sojourn—their trials and tribulations, the lows and the highs. In that context, the final encampment within the desert deserves a unique name, as it is part of the desert story.

In contrast, Devarim pivots away from the desert and towards the Land of Israel. It is the story of how Moshe gathered the people and delivered his farewell speech just before bowing out. The entire thrust of the book is future-oriented, with eyes on the land.

For this reason, the location is no longer associated with the desert, but explicitly Israel-oriented—"on that side of the Jordan."

SUBLIMATING THE DESERT

There's a deeper layer here.

According to the Kabbalists, the journey into the desert was far more than just a punishment for misbehavior or due to the lack of a working GPS. Rather, it was a program for spiritual transformation.

You see, a desert is a desolate place—dry, arid, lifeless, home to harmful creatures, and too hot for human habitation.

In a spiritual sense, a desert represents an ungodly space, for G-d is the source of all life and vitality. The death and danger lurking in the desert are thus symbolic of the negative forces in this world that conceal G-d's expression and run counter to His will.

Dispatching the Jews to wander around the desert for 40 years was an effort to alleviate some of this negativity and introduce a bit more G-dliness into the world, specifically in the places where His presence is least comfortable.

In that context, the final location represents the final struggle, the last and most difficult layer of evil that had resisted all efforts up to that point. And so, it's named in Numbers, because that particular strand of evil and the tremendous effort expended to sublimate it is an integral part of the desert story.

But in the book of Devarim, our eyes are no longer focused on past efforts to combat evil. The perspective shifts towards the Promised Land, where evil no longer exists and there's only light, positivity, and purity. As such, the name of the specific brand of negativity disappears, forgotten forever. It is simply "on that side of the Jordan"—a slice of land on one side of Israel.

JUMP INTO THE TIME MACHINE OF YOUR OWN LIFE

This "rebrand" of one location that occurs over the span of two books brings us back to our time-travel discussion.

One of the most powerful tools we humans possess is the ability to rewrite our own past by reframing the story.

It could very well be that you suffered traumatic experiences throughout your life. Or perhaps you made egregious mistakes with long-lasting ramifications. Even if your life hasn't been that dramatic, there's always one event, something that happened to you, or by you, that you wish had never happened.

It could be a moral mistake, a religious mistake, a crushing life event, or all of the above. There's hardly anyone on the planet who has a perfect, painless, and mistake-free life.

But it happened already; it's part of history. What happens now is your choice. The story you tell yourself, the baggage you carry forward throughout your life, is yours to choose. You can remember the terrible parts, the pain, the loss, the hurt, and the feelings of remorse and regret. Or you can hyper analyze it and pick out the parts that don't hurt as much. If you look hard enough, there are surely some positive elements you can whittle away from the experience, something you learned or gained that became part of the foundation of your strong and meaningful life.

There's always something, some way to jump into the time machine and reconstruct. And when you do, you are ready to forge forward with a positive, hopeful bounce instead of sad, baggage-laden drudgery.

And the amazing thing is that it's not self-delusional or untrue at all. Memory is not an exact science. Try asking 10 people who attended the same wedding, "How was it?" and you're bound to get 10 different answers;

10 different versions of ostensibly the same event. That's how it works: everyone is just going back in time and picking and choosing what best fits their own self-narrative.

So, go ahead and make the choice for yourself. You can call your past traumas and failures a yucky, desert-name, "The Plains of Moab" or you can call it, "Right Next to Israel."

I trust you'll make the right choice.

This essay is based on Sefer Hasichot 5748 vol. 2, p. 566-571.

MOSHE THE TRANSLATOR

RABBI MENACHEM FELDMAN (Chabad.org)

The fifth of the Five Books of Moshe describes the final 37 days of Moshe's life. During this time, Moshe repeats many of the laws he has already taught, rebukes the people, and retells some of the major happenings of the previous 40 years.

Moshe also takes on a new role: translator. Until this point, Moshe had been the conveyor of the Torah, communicating the Divine wisdom to the Jewish people, but now he translated it into 70 languages for them. (see 1:5, Rashi) His audience, the Children of Israel about to enter the Promised Land, all spoke Hebrew and had no practical use for a translation in Egyptian, Babylonian, or Cantonese. Centuries later, when the translation of the Torah would become an important priority, would it not suffice for the great scholars of the time to translate it? Why did Moshe himself have to dedicate the last days of his life to this extensive task?

Language captures culture. It's not enough to translate the word; each language captures a unique perspective, a distinctive way of understanding the world, which is why translation is a tricky business. Moshe understood this. He knew that translating the Torah was not simply a pragmatic matter that could be left to future generations. G-d's infinite will and wisdom is relevant not just in Hebrew and not just to the people living in ancient Israel. The Torah is the ultimate truth, and applicable to all places, times, and cultures, and therefore can, and must, be translated into all languages by someone who deeply understands the nuances and sensitivities.

There is also a deep mystical significant to the translation. The goal of the Torah is to unite all people with the one G-d. The 70 languages, by contrast, are a source of division. Initially, all people spoke one language, leading to a deep sense of unity, which they tried to preserve by constructing the Tower of Babel (Bereshis 11:7-9) . G-d, however, disrupted their unity by confusing their language and forcing them to scatter across the earth.³ The act of translating the Torah, therefore, is an awesome spiritual undertaking—one so radical it had to be spearheaded by Moshe himself. The act of translation is the bridge which brings the unity of G-d into the diversity of existence. It is the thread that transforms diversity into harmony,⁴

As we read about the last precious days of Moshe's life, we take this message to heart. We understand that, yes, the message of the Torah is as true in ancient Hebrew as it is in modern English. We remind ourselves that we too must be translators of the Torah, carrying on the task of connecting the plurality of existence with the oneness of G-d, and revealing that the incredible diversity of the universe is an expression of the one G-d.

SPEAKING LOUDER

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY (Torah.org)

Moshe is saying his last good-byes to his beloved nation. He stands at Israel's border and reviews forty years of trials and tribulations, the good times and the bad, and how his nation Israel matured to become the inheritor of the Promised Land. The first verse in this week's portion alludes to the ensuing topics of discussion. The Golden Calf, the incident with the spies, and the time when Israel faltered at the idol Ba'al Pe'or are amongst the many issues that are re-examined.

But the Torah defines Moshe's rebuke by confining it to a specific time frame. The Torah tells us that only "after smiting Sichon, king of the Amorites, and (the giant) Og, king of Bashan, did Moshe begin explaining this Torah (rebuke) to them." (Devarim 1:4)

The fact that the Torah makes a point of stating that the reproofs occurred only after Moshe smote two powerful enemies has obvious connotations. Rashi explains: "if the Jews were to say, 'what has Moshe done for us? Has he brought us into the Land? How does he have the right to rebuke us?' Moshe thus waited until the defeat of the last two major enemies before rebuking the nation."

Perhaps Moshe wanted to tell us a bit more.

Reb Mendel Kaplan (1913-1985) was a Rebbe at the Talmudical Yeshiva of Philadelphia from 1965 until he passed away. In the later years, he would conduct an early morning class with a select group of students. He would study with them Daas Chachma U'Mussar, the magnum opus of his Rebbe, Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz, the Mashgiach of the Mirrer Yeshiva of Europe and later Shanghai. Each day the group would meet before Shacharis (morning prayers) and listen to their elderly Rebbe discuss deep philosophical issues

concerning the nature of man and the profound eternal struggle he faces. One night a heavy snow covered the streets of Philadelphia. As the boys trudged into the classroom they were dazzled by the view of the dawn breaking over the white blanket that softly covered the frozen ground. But an even more amazing sight beheld then inside the classroom. Rav Mendel was at sitting at his desk wearing his boots, gloves, and an overcoat that was as warm as his expression. "Today we will learn the real Mussar (ethics)," he smiled. "Don't take off your boots and coats." He closed the large tome on his desk and pointed to six shovels neatly stacked in the corner of the classroom. With that, he took a shovel, walked outside, and began to lead the boys in shoveling a path from the dormitories to the Bais Medrash where the entire school would soon conduct their morning prayers.

Moshe knew that for forty years he had admonished his nation on issues of faith, trust in Hashem, and belief in the prophets. He had put his honor on the line, as he constantly defended their misdeeds. He prayed for them as they battled with Amalek and prayed for them when G-d's wrath was upon them. But he had yet to do physical battle.

The call came. Moshe had to fight the most notorious and powerful rulers of the region, Sichon and Og. They were stronger and bigger and surely more aggressive than he was. His faith was on the line. He had to teach real Mussar. Only after conquering those two foes, showing his people that he too can get down in the trenches, did he begin to admonish the nation for forty years of various improprieties.

Sometimes, if you'd like your friend to become as pure as snow, you can't just talk about it. You have to shovel it.

A BLESSING ON YOUR HOUSE

AVROHOM YAAKOV

In the midst of reminding the people of how hard it was to manage them, Moshe switches gears and seemingly blesses them!

"I cannot bear you alone ... Hashem has multiplied you like the stars." (1:9-10)

This doesn't seem to make a lot of sense!

THE ORGANISATION that I work for has, through much hard work and devotion, experienced twenty-fold growth over the past two decades. We no longer operate locally, but are now international and as such have come under closer scrutiny from larger organisations who are unhappy about having to deal with another up and comer.

My colleagues have expressed concern that they are dealing with challenges that they never experienced when the operations were smaller.

Actually, these challenges are a good thing. If we were not growing, ruffling some feathers, kicking goals, then we would not be on the radar. The challenges are a sign of success.

IN MESHECH CHOCHMA, R' Meir Simcha Kohen of Dvinsk explains that even though a parent has many kids who do not always obey and know how to 'grind their parent's gears', they are still a blessing. Moshe too, realised that the people were like his children who could be painful, but were still a blessing. So Moshe blessed them with the same 'challenges.' To succeed, the same difficulties need to be experienced.

Unless a person is incredibly lucky, success is due to overcoming challenges.

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

RABBI SHRAGA SIMMONS (aish.com)

This week's Torah portion shows us how to properly give rebuke.

It's been 40 long, hot years in the desert. The era is drawing to a close with the Book of Devarim — Moshe's swan song, his final appeal to the Jewish people.

Much of this week's Parsha consists of Moshe rebuking the people for a variety of mistakes, including the Golden Calf, Korach's rebellion, the complaints about meat and water, and more.

Why did Moshe choose now — the final days before his death — to deliver 40 years worth of pent-up rebuke?

The Torah tells us:

"You shall rebuke your neighbor, but not do a sin in the process." (Leviticus 19:17)

Rebuke is fine, but not if the effect will be negative. If the other person will get defensive, angry, or not accept the criticism, then it is better left unsaid. Moshe evaluated that because he was in his final days, his criticism would be accepted by the people, because:

He wouldn't have to keep repeating the rebuke — i.e. "nagging."

He saved the people the embarrassment of having to face him in the future.

The people wouldn't feel a need to get defensive and rebel — e.g. "Oh, I'll show him!"

The people would pay close attention, knowing that Moshe's dying words are his most selective and important to hear.

If a person feels you have your own self-interest at heart — and not his — he won't listen to what you're saying.

Rebuke must clearly be for the benefit of the other person. He has to know that you care about him, are on his side, and want what's best for him.

That is why Moshe specifically delivers the rebuke after defeating Sichon and Og in battle (see Deut. 1:4). He had just reaffirmed his dedication to the people. So they knew that if Moshe had criticism, it was only coming from a place of love.

A LOOK AT THE ORIGINAL Hebrew clarifies this concept. The Torah says: "You should give toch'acha to your neighbor." Toch'acha is from the same word as hoch'acha, meaning "proof."

The Torah is telling us that the way to get our neighbor to change is not through harsh rebuke, argumentation, or clever persuasion. The only way to convince anyone of anything is by way of a clear and obvious proof. As the Talmud (Brachot 7a) says: "It is better for a person to realize the truth for himself, than to have it beaten into him with 100 lashes."

Remember the story of Joseph and his brothers? After being sold into slavery, and then rising to the position of prime minister, Joseph again meets up with his brothers when they come to Egypt searching for food. (The brothers don't recognize Joseph because he's aged and grown a beard.) Joseph gives them a hard time and threatens to take Benjamin hostage. Judah protests vehemently, saying that their father Jacob will be unable to survive the loss of a son.

At this point, Joseph reveals himself to his brothers by saying, "I am Joseph; is my father still alive?" (Genesis 45:3) This was Joseph's toch'acha: "You say that our father won't survive the loss of a son — but did you consider that when you tore me away from our father 22 years ago?!"

Nobody like to be told what to do. Therefore it is the act of self-realization which eliminates the defensive reaction... and produces effective toch'acha.

Joseph got the brothers to realize the internal contradiction of their own argument. Moshe, too, only hinted at the people's sins indirectly — e.g. referring to the incident of the Golden Calf by referring to the city Di Zahav ("enough gold").

Toch'acha is not harsh. Rather, toch'acha is the beauty of reality staring us squarely in the face.

THE MIDRASH (Tanna d'Bei Eliyahu) tells the story of Elijah the Prophet meeting up with a fisherman. "Do you study Torah?" Elijah asks. "No," replied the fisherman, "I'm just a simple man, not endowed with any measure of talent or intelligence."

"Tell me," said Elijah, "how do you prepare your fishing net?"

"Well," said the man, "It's actually quite complicated. First I have to select the proper gauge rope, and then I weave the net in a particular pattern to ensure the proper balance of strength and flexibility."

"How do you go about actually catching the fish?" inquired Elijah.

"Oh," said the man, "that involves many complex factors like water depth, temperature, speed of the current, season of the year, time of day, type of fish and location. I've spent years mastering these techniques, and I'm able to earn a good living from fishing."

"When you get to heaven," said Elijah, "you said you plan to testify that you didn't study Torah study because you're just a simple man, not endowed with any talent or intelligence. But your expertise as a fisherman refutes your very own claim!"

Did you ever hear someone say he doesn't have time to study wisdom, visit his mother, or do volunteer work? Yet what about all the hours of TV he watched?

This is toch'acha — incontrovertible proof.

OF COURSE, NOBODY likes to be on the receiving end.

But do you think you're perfect? Of course not! If you want to reach your potential, look for constructive criticism. Go ask for help to get rid of your mistakes. When a person is committed to reaching a goal, he'll accept incredible doses of nagging, harrassments and insults. Think of what an Olympic athlete willingly endures from coaches!

One of my favorite all-time stories is told about the Sfas Emes, a famous Torah commentator (19th century Poland). One time when he was about 12 years old, he had stayed awake all night learning Torah with a friend. When dawn broke, they prayed the morning service at the earliest time, and went to bed. A few hours later, the boys awoke and returned to the Yeshiva, where they encountered the grandfather of the Sfas Emes, the revered Rabbi Yitzhak Meir (known as the "Chiddushe HaRim"). Rabbi Yitzhak Meir did not know that his grandson had stayed awake all night studying, and proceeded to rebuke him for not having attended the regular morning service. The rebuke lasted a few minutes, throughout which the Sfas Emes stood and listened attentively, not uttering a word.

When the grandfather had left, the boy's friend expressed disbelief: "Why didn't you defend yourself against this unwarranted rebuke?!" "Because," replied the Sfas Emes, "it's not every day that I get such personalized feedback from my revered grandfather. And I wasn't about to miss such an opportunity!"

No doubt this is what King Solomon meant when he said, "Give toch'acha to a wise person - and he'll love you!" (Proverbs 9:8)

ONE FINAL POINT: Giving toch'acha is everyone's obligation. We mustn't ignore another person in need. That is why it is juxtaposed with the verse: "Don't stand by your brother's blood" (Leviticus 19:16).

If you really love someone, you can't stand to see him living a misguided life. Who gives you the most criticism? Those who love you the most - your parents. It's because they love you that they can't simply ignore you by saying, "He's wasting time but I don't care." Similarly, humanity is one. If one person hurts, we all feel it.

We must reach out and find a way to help. The Talmud (Shabbat 119) says that Jerusalem was destroyed because people didn't correct each other. Today, the Jewish people are haemorrhaging from assimilation. We have to make a pro-active effort to bring Jews closer to Torah. How?

By being better role models.

Giving toch'acha does not mean criticizing, throwing stones, or shouting louder than the next guy. Real toch'acha is demonstrating through action and deed. If secular Israelis do not appreciate the warmth and sanctity of Shabbat, it is because observant Jews are not keeping Shabbat in the right way. If Jews were truly projecting the beauty of Torah, then the truth would be obvious to all. No arguments, no conflicts. Indeed, the Talmud says that Moshe was able to instruct the people only because he exemplified what he preached.

The Sages ask: When the Messiah arrives, how will we know it's really him? The answer: It will be obvious. Of course, there are some technical qualifications, but his basic identity as the Messiah will be self-evident. He will speak words of Torah so sweet and clear, that no one will need to question his identity. It will be a pure outpouring of positive energy that overwhelms everything in its path. That is the beauty of true toch'acha.

TOOTH AND NAIL

RABBI NAFTALI REICH (Torah.org)

Moshe knew he had only days to live. Standing on the Plain of Moab near the banks of the Jordan River, he felt the spiritual tug of the Promised Land only a stone's throw away, but he knew he would never tread on its hallowed soil. He called together the Jewish people and prepared them for a future without his leadership.

As he reviewed all the turbulent events that took place from the time of the Exodus until their arrival on the threshold of the Promised Land, Moshe uttered a groan of lamentation. "Eichah?" he declared. "How can I bear it?"

The commentaries explain that as he contemplated the troubled past Moshe felt a sense of foreboding about the future. In his mind, he followed the sequence of events to their logical conclusion, and thus, he foresaw the destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem that would take place nearly a thousand years later. He foresaw the estrangement of the Jewish people from their Father in Heaven and their banishment from their homeland. In pain and grief, Moshe uttered the word eichah, which is also the eponymous first word of Lamentations, otherwise known as Eichah, the book which was to memorialize the national tragedy. Therefore, we traditionally read this verse in the chanting style unique to Lamentations.

What did Moshe see in the past and present that convinced him that a great national tragedy lay in the future? How did he discern the eventual breakdown in the relationship between the Jewish people and the Creator?

The commentators explain that contentiousness derives from a fundamental lack of faith. If a person has a deep and abiding faith in Hashem, he understands that nothing happens without Hashem's approval. Therefore, if he suffers at the hands of another person, he recognizes it as a test from Hashem. His first reaction is to look into himself and correct his inner laws. His second step is to deal with the situation gently, ethically and honorably, just as Hashem would want him to deal with it.

If a person lacks faith, however, he is not convinced that Hashem is behind the injustice he has suffered. On the contrary, he is convinced that he alone controls his destiny. Therefore, when he perceives an attack, he has no time or patience for conciliation and the niceties of ethical conduct. He is prepared to fight tooth and nail for his rights.

When Moshe considered the combative nature of the Jewish people, he realized that their faith was flawed. Sadly, he understood that these flaws would eventually widen into fissures and create a chasm between them and their Father in Heaven. This was clearly a road that headed for disaster.

A young soldier was assigned to a brigade commanded by a famous general. The soldier was excited about being in the general's brigade, but he came into serious conflict with his platoon sergeant.

Whenever the sergeant gave him an order, he would argue interminably and seek ways to extricate himself. The sergeant grew furious and punished the soldier every time he did not obey instantly.

Things went from bad to worse, until one day the soldier struck his sergeant in

anger.

The soldier was arrested and court-martialed. The general presided at his trial. "Young man," said the general, "you stand accused of gross insubordination against me."

"Oh no, sir," said the soldier. "You must be mistaken. I have nothing but respect and admiration for you. My problems are with the sergeant."

"I am afraid you are the one who is mistaken," said the general. "Who do you think gave the sergeant command of his platoon? It was me. Who do you think assigned you to his platoon? It was me. If you had brought your complaints to me, I would have listened. But if you strike the man I appointed, it is insubordination against me."

In our own lives, we find ourselves in highly litigious world. Everyone around us is concerned about his rights and prerogatives and is ready to go to war to defend them. It makes for stressful living conditions, because we always find ourselves contending with our neighbors and associates, with the insurance company, the phone company, even the grocer on the corner. And even when we win, we often find ourselves emotionally exhausted and frazzled. But if we could reach into ourselves for an extra measure of faith, we would recognize the vicissitudes of modern life as a test of our relationship with Hashem, and we would respond on a spiritual level. Instead of anxiety and stress, we would enjoy peace and serenity.

THINGS WERE CHANGING AT THE HOTEL METROPOLE

RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR (Ohr.edu)

"May Hashem, the G-d of your forefathers, add to you a thousand times yourselves, and bless you as He has spoken to you." (1:12)

Times were changing at the Hotel Metropole.

The new owner wanted to add at least one star to the scanty three-star rating that the hotel currently enjoyed.

Max was the porter at the entrance to the garage. He was one of the most popular members of the staff. He just had a way with people. The new owner came over to Max one day and said, "Max. I want you to carry on with your job – we love you here, but one small change. Whenever someone goes in or out, I want you to write it down in a book. Okay? Max said, "I'm so sorry, but I can't write."

"You can't write, Max?" "No, I'm really sorry. Does it make that much of a difference?" "Well, Max, I'm afraid it does. The insurance company won't insure us without it." Max looked very crestfallen. "I'm so sorry Max, but I can't keep you on if you can't write."

And so, after years at the Metropole, Max went back to his small apartment, dejected and depressed. He was in bed for a week or more, unable to escape his depression.

A note from the post office dropped through his letterbox. He needed to go to the big city to pick up a registered letter. As he was leaving, his neighbor asked him where he was going. When the neighbor heard that he was going to the city, he said, "Max, could you pick up some bits and pieces for me from the hardware store? I'll pay you a bit. It'll save me the journey." "Sure," said Max. Max went to the city, picked up his registered letter, which turned out to be a 50 cent fine for a late return of a library book, then picked up the supplies for his neighbor and went back home and back to bed.

The following week, his neighbor knocked on his door and asked if he was going to the city again that week. Max said that he hadn't planned to, but that he didn't mind going for him. The neighbor said, "Great, I'll give you something for your trouble." This time, a friend of the neighbor also wanted him to bring him some vegetables from the city, and so Max did that errand too. Within a couple of months, the word got around about Max, that he was making bi-weekly and then tri-weekly trips to the city.

He had a new job.

One day, he thought to himself, "You know, rather than going to the city three times a week, why don't I just buy a whole bunch of stuff and set up my own shop here?"

"Max's Emporium" took off like a rocket.

Ten years later, he was one of the most important citizens of the town. One day, there was a reception at the Metropole Hotel for the State Governor, and Max was naturally invited. The owner of the hotel didn't recognize the Max that he had fired all those years ago. As a distinguished guest, the owner of the Metropole invited Max to sign the guest register. Max, said, "You don't recognize me? I'm Max, the porter you fired. I still can't write." The owner of the hotel said, "Mr. Max, I'm so sorry." Max said, "I'm not. If I could write, I would still be sitting down there in the garage, checking cars in and out."

Everything Hashem does is for the good. Just sometimes it's difficult to see it. We're living in a time where it may seem quite difficult to see that everything Hashem is doing for the Jewish People is leading to a day of great light. But everything Hashem does is to test our faith in him. We hope

and pray that very soon we will see with our own eyes how all the pain and sorrow has led to the greatest joy.

News & Views

THE WORLDWIDE FRENZY AGAINST ISRAEL

MELANIE PHILLIPS (JNS.org 24-7-25)

Over the past few days, anti-Israel and anti-Jewish feeling has been ratcheted up into an absolute frenzy. Every few hours seems to bring a fresh outrage.

In London, a prominent Jewish broadcaster was chased down the street by a man screaming, “fascist Zionist scum.” A woman dining at a Jewish restaurant in the city was asked if she was a Jew and then had food thrown over her.

On the Greek island of Rhodes, a mob armed with knives attacked a group of Jewish teenagers. About 50 French Jewish children, returning from a summer camp in Spain, were thrown off a flight at Valencia airport after the children sang Hebrew songs, and their tour leader was arrested and thrown to the ground.

The BBC’s obsession with demonizing and delegitimizing Israel has reached pathological proportions. This week, it gave pride of place on its flagship radio show Today to ever-more twisted accusations and blood libels casting Israel as an evil and murderous state, including the claim by a British surgeon working in Gaza that the Israel Defense Forces were playing a game in shooting Gazan boys in the food queues by targeting a different part of their body every day.

The broadcasting behemoth could scarcely contain its excitement as reporters and interviewees joined in chorusing that “a reckoning was coming” with the imminent end of the war in Gaza, after which Israel’s “war crimes” would be revealed, and the case for declaring a Palestine state was therefore now overwhelming.

This propaganda onslaught consists of three major libels: that the IDF is deliberately killing Gazans queueing for food, that Israel is starving Gazans to death, and that “settler violence” against Arabs is increasing in the disputed territories of Judea and Samaria.

All three claims make to turn Israel from being the target and victim of genocidal attack into a murderous criminal entity that doesn’t deserve to survive. It’s a propaganda onslaught mounted by Hamas acting in concert with its allies in the United Nations and the entire global humanitarian establishment, pumped out through a media megaphone and parroted by politicians who are either malevolent or clueless.

A moment’s thought suggests that to accuse the IDF of deliberately killing Gazans queueing for food is absurd. Since the Israelis helped set up and are policing the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation in order to deliver food safely to these civilians, why should the IDF want to kill them?

Where they have killed some Gazans near the aid points, this has clearly been an unintended result of the soldiers firing into the air to warn off these possibly Hamas-infiltrated crowds if they look like they’re about to rush the Israeli troops.

It is Hamas that has been deliberately killing hundreds of Gazans to prevent them from gaining food from the American-Israeli-run aid points, because it’s been through stealing this aid for its own use that Hamas has remained in power.

In order to survive, it needs to have the aid distributed instead by its U.N. ally. That’s why, as part of ceasefire negotiations, Hamas is insisting that aid must be distributed by the world body and the Palestine Red Crescent Society.

This week, the media published distressing pictures of skeletal children as evidence of starvation in Gaza. But the adults in these pictures were all conspicuously well-fed. Is it likely that it’s only Gaza’s children who are being starved while the adults are not?

The Israelis say that these pictures, which have been regularly trotted out over the years with the false claim that they represent Israeli brutality, are actually of children suffering from wasting diseases or inherited medical conditions.

There may be increasing hunger in Gaza, but to blame Israel for this is grotesque. The World Health Organization’s director, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, has accused the Israelis of an aid blockade. This is totally untrue.

The IDF’s aid division, COGAT, says that recently, nearly 4,500 trucks entered the Strip with supplies, including flour for bakeries, and 2,500 tons of baby food and high-calorie special food for children.

The key point, however, is that 950 trucks have been stuck inside Gaza because the United Nations and its agencies are refusing to distribute the

food and other aid they are carrying. The GHF has implored the global agency to help distribute these supplies around the Strip, but the United Nations has refused.

That’s because it’s working hand-in-glove with Hamas, which is determined to cause deaths from starvation as a weapon of war, just as it’s used Gaza’s civilians as human shields and cannon fodder.

This hideous strategy rests on the infernal calculation that the more Gazans who die, the more the West will blame Israel. So the West’s baseless virtue-signaling against Israeli “starvation” will, in fact, become the Gazans’ death warrant.

Now, the Israel delegitimization machine has created another potent weapon in its arsenal: “settler violence.” This demonizes Jewish residents of Judea and Samaria with the charge that they attack and terrorize their Arab neighbors.

As ever, the opposite is mostly the case. True, a minority of “hilltop” Jewish youth have acted in revenge and committed unprovoked attacks against local Arabs—and they should be dealt with. But the vast majority of the violence in these territories is by local Arabs against Jewish residents, who suffer from such murderous attacks almost every day.

According to a report by the NGO Regavim, 90% of incidents that the United Nations has classified as “settler violence” were nothing of the kind. These cases included clashes between Arabs and the IDF; where Jews acted in self-defense against Arab attacks; or even peaceful activities by these Jews such as supervised visits to Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and to historic sites by hikers and tourists.

This week, it was revealed that the claim that “settlers” had torched the Byzantine church of St. George in Taybeh, near Ramallah, was a lie. U.S. Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee, who had toured the church and said “desecrating a church, mosque or synagogue is a crime against humanity and G-d,” walked that back and acknowledged that the church was undamaged—as was always entirely obvious from its intact stone walls. Yet this false claim, made by priests and activists, had ricocheted around the world.

Instead of setting the record straight to help Israel defeat these Islamist enemies of humanity and to protect Diaspora Jews from the hatred incited by this media onslaught, political leaders in Britain and Europe have been pouring more fuel onto the flames.

A statement by Britain’s foreign secretary, David Lammy, and the foreign ministers of 27 other countries accused Israel of “the inhumane killing of civilians, including children, seeking to meet their most basic needs of water and food,” denying “essential humanitarian assistance to the civilian population” and soaring rates of “settler violence.”

How can we explain this astounding descent from rationality into the sewers of lethal propaganda? How can it be that in Britain, factual evidence about the Gaza war is met with incredulity, “Zionist” has become a term of abuse, and antisemitism is now regarded as little more than a device for Jews to sanitize the “crimes” of Israel?

There are many reasons, including ideology, ignorance and wishful thinking. There is also the widespread belief that the U.N. and the humanitarian-rights establishment, which have the status of a secular religion, act with perfect integrity and are incapable of lying or doing evil.

But there are far darker impulses at work—the deep desire to prove that the Jews are bad, that they have a unique and destructive power over world events, that they can never be victims.

That’s why the acute threats to the world posed by Russia, China or Iran, the terrible atrocities against the Druze in Syria or the Christians in Africa, the famine and starvation in Sudan—all are dwarfed in the West by its overwhelming, unhinged, vicious obsession with tiny Israel, the focus of a civilizational disorder that is dragging down not the Jewish state but the West itself.

THE TRUTH BEHIND THE VIRAL GAZAN FAMINE PHOTO

DAVID COLLIER (David-Collier.com 27-7-25)

Unless you have been hiding under a rock all week, you would have seen the viral images of Mohammed, the child victim of the Gazan ‘famine’. The image used by most of these outlets was licensed to Anadolu, a Turkish state-run news agency headquartered in Ankara. The photos were taken by the Gaza-based photographer, Ahmed Jihad Ibrahim Al-arini, and uploaded to his Instagram account on 22nd July – a day before the Express splashed it across their front page. But in fact another Gazan based account, Saeed Mohammed had shared similar images even earlier.

The global frenzy began on 23 July 2025, when the Daily Express ran the image of Mohammed on its front page. The article uses the image of Mohammed to promote the narrative of a mass famine in Gaza.

Within hours, almost every major outlet was using the image to tell the same story. Sky News, CNN, The Guardian, Daily Mail, New York Times, and

The Times (UK) – they all ran with it, reinforcing the message: Gaza is gripped by mass starvation, and this image is the proof:

Except this image proves none of it. Wider and unpublished pictures show Mohammed's healthy brother Joud, who was born on 18 April 2022 and is 3 years old. Mohammed was born on 23 December 2023, just two months after October 7.

What we can see from the pictures is that both Mohammed's mother and his older brother, look healthy and are not suffering from any type of starvation that would be necessary to cause the thinness suffered by Mohammed. This is visible in multiple images we have in our possession. The published images in all the various news broadcasts and publications have either been deliberately cropped to remove the image of the healthy brother, blurred him into obscurity, or the journalists have only chosen to use photos in which the brother is not visible at all.

MUHAMMAD ZAKARIYA AYYOUB AL-MATOUQ /MUTAWWAQ (was born with serious genetic disorders. He has needed specialist medical supplements since birth. Like previous examples of the media using 'starving children' going back to summer 2024 – the image is of a child suffering underlying (and hidden) health issues.

A medical report issued in May 2025 by the Basma Association for Relief in Gaza states that Mohammed, has been diagnosed with cerebral palsy – a group of neurological disorders affecting movement, muscle tone, and posture. The report notes that Mohammed suffers from hypoxemia (low oxygen in the blood), possibly linked to a suspected genetic disorder inherited in an 'autosomal recessive pattern.'

There is no argument here. I have seen a copy of this report (but obviously won't produce in full here a child's medical diagnosis). It was signed by Dr Saeed Mohammed Al Nassan on 20th May 2025:

This revelation raises serious issues of media integrity. The Daily Express picked up a viral image circulating online and published it without verification or context – a textbook example of clickbait journalism, where emotional impact is prioritised over everything else.

The BBC – as per usual went a step further. The BBC *spoke* to his mother, Huda Yassin Al-Matouq / Mutawwaq – and produced a 64 second interview that somehow failed to disclose that Mohammed was a child born with genetic problems and complex medical dependencies. Even in the BBC video, the mother alludes to this – referencing a prolonged struggle, including physiotherapy sessions that had helped him stand. The curvature of the spine another key clue tying the child to a CP diagnosis. But the BBC narrator never addresses this – leaving the audience to believe the heartbreaking physical condition we are seeing is the result of widespread famine.

This is not journalism. This is the UK's state media deliberately pushing a deceptive narrative that only serves to benefit Hamas and create fake news. THE STORY BEING TOLD THROUGH LEGACY MEDIA OUTLETS such as the NYT is that Mohammed's father was killed while going out to collect food. Again, to underline the Gaza hunger tragedy narrative.

This has been reported without any attempt at verification. From the death certificate I can see the father Zakaria Ayoub Al-Matouq / Mutawwaq was killed on 28 October 2024:

From online sources it turns out that Mohammed's father, was killed in Jabalia, in what appears to be a targeted strike on 'al Qassabeeb' street.

We can also see that Hamas were attacking the IDF in precisely that spot at the time (posts from 26 & 27th October).

Between the 25th October and the 29th, Israel lost six soldiers in the area. In this Hamas footage, which shows wide angle views of part of the same 'street' on 26th October, it is not possible to see exactly where Mohammed's father would have been looking for food:

Whether or not he was armed, Mohammed's father died on a battlefield where Hamas was actively attacking Israeli forces. Whatever the truth about 'looking for food', Hamas bears responsibility for bringing the conflict to that street and the media ignored this context entirely.

DIGGING FOR THE TRUTH BEHIND images like this is not easy. We're dealing with a live war zone – real people, real pain, and tragic situations like Mohammed's. These kinds of personal tragedies happen in every war, in every era.

What is unique – and toxic – is how images of the tragic consequences of urban warfare are being weaponised to build false global narratives. In this case, the lie is of a Gaza gripped by mass famine and children dying from hunger.

And here's the bitter truth: I shouldn't have to do this. It shouldn't fall on me to call out the world's biggest media outlets for their failure to act like journalists. Why are almost all of them functioning as Hamas' useful idiots, amplifying propaganda with no effort to verify the facts? Is it really too much to expect them to do their jobs?

There's another layer of cynicism here. From everything I've learned,

Mohammed's mother is simply trying to find help for her child. She's not hiding the truth. She tells the full story to anyone who asks. Yet every journalist who has spoken to her has made the same cynical decision: ignore the medical reality, strip the context, and turn her child into a propaganda weapon. No one is trying to help. No one is interested in telling the truth. All they seem to ask is: "How can this image hurt Israel?" — and they build their coverage around that.

WHICH BRINGS US to the famine narrative.

Time and again, the most widely circulated images of 'starving children' in Gaza have turned out to involve children with serious underlying medical conditions. The images are heartbreaking, yes – but we must stay grounded. This is a war zone, and Hamas is actively using the civilian population as pawns in a global propaganda campaign.

Let's be clear: Hamas cannot afford to lose control over aid distribution – not if it intends to remain the ruling power in post-war Gaza. Channeling or controlling aid has always been one of the terrorist group's most reliable sources of income. That's why it has been essential for Hamas to discredit the US-Israeli GHF aid program and portray it as a failure. This has included an almost daily pantomime of unverified claims that hundreds have been killed in Israeli attacks while queuing for aid. Yet in the most documented conflict zone in history, credible video evidence remains conspicuously absent = despite claims of daily occurrences

Worse still, UN agencies and international NGOs operating in Gaza are riddled with staff affiliated with terrorist groups. Whenever Hamas comes under pressure, these agencies issue carefully timed statements and take actions that conveniently align with Hamas's strategic goals. Which are then amplified by the army of anti-Israel activists embedded in legacy media. We saw this during the 'All Eyes on Rafah' campaign in early 2024 when the IDF closed in on key leadership and hostages located there. The famine narrative is just the latest act in the play.

There is plenty of publicly available information showing that significant quantities of food are entering Gaza. But with local media firmly under the control of Hamas, none of this gets reported.

Instead of helping facilitate aid delivery, UN agencies have imposed impossible conditions, stalling convoys and leaving hundreds of trucks abandoned – their contents rotting just a short distance from those in need. At times, the UN has even insisted that Hamas be allowed to protect aid workers, effectively demanding that the terror group retain access to and control over humanitarian supplies. Only recently, under mounting international scrutiny, has the UN begun to slightly shift course.

Let's call this what it is: The UN, UNRWA and other NGOs are not prioritising the safety of Palestinian civilians or indeed getting aid to a population they maintain are in desperate and immediate need of food. Instead it seems, they are prioritising a political agenda that aligns with – and thus ensures – the survival of Hamas. They're not neutral. They're enablers

THE UN AID AGENCIES WON'T DELIVER AID – the journalists won't do their jobs.

In a propaganda war this calculated and brutal, it was vital that our media act as a check on the lies. Not just for Israel's sake, but for the Palestinian civilians caught in the middle.

When legacy media outlets become mouthpieces for radical Islamist groups — out of ideology, ignorance, or cowardice — it isn't just a journalistic collapse – it's a moral disgrace.

IRELAND'S ANTISEMITIC OBSESSION

OFIR DAYAN (IsraelHayom.com 20-7-25)

In recent years, antagonism toward Israel has practically become Ireland's national sport. Just in the past few months, Dublin has spearheaded initiatives against Israel alongside another problematic European partner, Spain. Those efforts have thus far failed, but Ireland remains undeterred.

In fact, Ireland first tried to advance the so-called "Control of Economic Activity (Occupied Territories)" bill back in 2018. But it failed due to legal hurdles – not minor ones, but major roadblocks stemming from a direct conflict with EU law, which states that only the EU itself can determine the trade policy of its member states.

As such, EU countries, including Ireland, cannot unilaterally decide to boycott certain countries or territories. The bill also risks violating Ireland's obligations under World Trade Organization rules, which prohibit discriminatory treatment of trade partners.

Beyond these legal issues, the bill has three additional implications – diplomatic, moral, and practical.

Diplomatically, the legislation has already created tensions with the most powerful country in the world, the US. Under American law, US companies – including those operating in Ireland – are barred from participating in boycotts not endorsed by Washington.

Such companies employ more than 10% of Ireland's workforce. If forced to

choose between violating US or Irish law, many may opt to relocate, delivering a blow to the Irish economy. US Senator Lindsey Graham, a prominent figure in Washington, has already warned that the US will not turn a blind eye to Irish attempts to boycott Israel. And Graham is not someone the Irish would be wise to antagonize.

Morally, Ireland's decision to single out Judea and Samaria while ignoring far more egregious regions around the world is shameful. Dublin is not leading any similar crusades against companies operating in China's Xinjiang region, where millions of Muslims are persecuted, tortured, and imprisoned in "reeducation" camps.

When pressed on the issue, Irish officials did not even suggest banning goods from that region, some of which are produced through forced labor, and merely said they had conveyed their views to their Chinese counterparts. For contrast, enlightened countries like the US, Canada, and the UK have imposed restrictions on imports from Xinjiang.

Practically speaking, this law would not only harm Jews living in Judea and Samaria, but also Palestinians. Many Palestinians work in factories and businesses in areas such as the Maaleh Adumim and Barkan industrial zones. What do Irish lawmakers think will happen if these companies are boycotted?

Logic dictates two likely outcomes: The first is a drop in sales, leading to layoffs, including among Palestinian employees. Alternatively, the companies may relocate elsewhere in Israel – as SodaStream did after facing boycotts over its operations in Judea and Samaria. But in those new locations, they would not be able to employ Palestinians, meaning those workers would suffer even more.

Europe's obsession with Israel, and especially with Judea and Samaria, stems from various motivations - including antisemitism and a desire among some Europeans to ease their conscience. But in some cases, it's also driven by sheer ignorance. That ignorance won't be remedied by disengaging from dialogue, as evidenced by the closure of the Israeli embassy in Ireland. Irish Jews have spoken out against the bill, but they need Israel's support – diplomatically, legally, and in the court of public opinion – to stop it.

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

WHY DO WE STILL MOURN THE DEATH OF YOSHIYAHU?

RABBI CHAIM JACHTER (KolTorah.org)

Every year on Tishah BeAv (until the arrival of Mashiach), a Kinah written by Rav Elazar HaKalir is recited mourning the tragic death of Yoshiyahu in battle at Megiddo. By reciting this Kinah, we honor Yirmiyahu's establishment of the practice of mourning Yoshiyahu's death for all generations (see Divrei HaYamim 2:35:25 with the commentary of Daat Mikra). In this essay, we will seek to explain why the death of Yoshiyahu was so traumatic, to the extent that it still haunts us until this very day and is deemed worthy of inclusion in the Tishah BeAv liturgy along with the mourning of other major disasters, such as the Churban Beit HaMikdash and the Crusades.

I would like to acknowledge the influence of Rav Yoel Bin Nun and Rav Hayyim Angel on this presentation, though I accept responsibility for any error. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of my TABC Talmidim, to whom I presented this Shiur in 5767 in our study of Sefer Divrei HaYamim during our Thursday evening voluntary Mishmar. I would also note the contributions of the many members of Congregation Rinat Yisrael who attended a Shiur I delivered on this topic on Shabbat Mevarechim Chodesh Menachem Av 5767.

BACKGROUND – THE PROPHECY CONCERNING YOSHIYAHU

Before we explore the life of Yoshiyahu, we should note some important pieces of information that help place this great man into his proper historical context. Yoshiyahu stands out as one whose actions were foretold approximately three hundred years before his birth. In Sefer Melachim (1:13:1-2), we read of anonymous prophet (whom Chazal, Sanhedrin 89b, identify as Iddo) who visits the wicked Yaravam ben Nevat, who had built illegitimate altars in Beit El and Dan for his Northern Kingdom of Israel in. The Navi informs the wicked king that a descendent of King David, named Yoshiyahu, will one day be born and will kill many priests who served on the illicit altars.

It is quite rare for an event to be foretold so far in advance - it is almost without parallel in Tanach. No other king's actions and name are so specifically given so far in advance, which testifies to the greatness of

Yoshiyahu. Interestingly, though, Yoshiyahu seems to have been entirely unaware of this prophecy (see Melachim 2:23:17). This expresses the dictum of Chazal, "Everything is foretold, yet the freedom of choice is given" (Avot 3:19), a theme that pervades Yoshiyahu's life.

BACKGROUND – YOSHIYAHU'S PREDECESSORS AND SUCCESSORS

Another vital piece of information is Yoshiyahu's predecessors and successors. Yoshiyahu is seventeenth in the line of descendants of King David who ruled Judea (leaving out Atalyah). Sefer Melachim rates the spiritual performance of each of the kings using David HaMelech as a benchmark. Only Asa (5), Chizkiyahu (14) and Yoshiyahu (17) were as good as David, and Asa is assessed less positively in Divrei HaYamim than he is in Sefer Melachim. Of all the other kings, Shlomo (2), Yehoshafat (6) and Yotam (12) were good, though they did not measure up to David; Yeho'ash (9), Amatziah (10) and Uzziyahu (11) started their reign as good kings but took a turn for the worse (as stated in Divrei HaYamim); and Rechavam (3), Aviyam (4), Yehoram (7), Achazyahu (8), Achaz (13), Menashe (15), and Amon (16) were bad kings. The rulers of the Northern Kingdom are regarded by Sefer Melachim as having ranged from bad to worse.

Thus, Yoshiyahu's predecessors had an uneven record, and Am Yisrael did not enjoy the benefit of a stable succession of kings who were dedicated to honoring the Torah in a manner comparable to David HaMelech. This highlights the greatness of those kings who chose to lead our nation in accordance with Torah ideals. We should also note that Yoshiyahu's four successors are all evaluated by Sefer Melachim as spiritual (as well as political) failures. Thus, of the last seven rulers of Judea, only Yoshiyahu was a Tzaddik, which stresses the outstanding nature of this great man.

MENASHEH – YOSHIYAHU'S GRANDFATHER

We must make special note of Yoshiyahu's grandfather, Menasheh. Despite being the son of the righteous Chizkiyahu, Menasheh engaged in wickedness in the extreme. This evil king is regarded as the worst of the monarchs described in Sefer Melachim. No other king, even among the evil Northern rulers (such as Basha), is described in such negative terms. He is described (Melachim 2:21:2-11) as having done evil in the eyes of Hashem, having imitated the evil practices of the Nochrim, having exceeded the evil of the Emori, and having sinned with the brazen intention of angering Hashem (LeHachis).

The Navi presents a stunning list of idolatrous practices in which he engaged: Molech, Ov, Yidoni, Baal, Asheirah, Onein, and Nichush. He even placed an idol in the Beit HaMikdash. It seems as if Menasheh looked in the Chumash for any and every form of Avodah Zarah and then engaged in that practice. To top it off, Menashe is described as having murdered so many innocent people that he filled the streets of Yerushalayim with blood from "mouth to mouth." It is reasonable to assume that he killed these people because they resisted his plans to make Judea awash with idolatry. To make matters worse, Menasheh ruled for fifty five years, the longest of any monarch in Sefer Melachim, allowing his lust for idolatry to seep into the hearts and minds of Am Yisrael. Shockingly, nothing bad happens to this unrepentant sinner (at least as recorded in Sefer Melachim).

YOSHIYAHU – THE EARLY YEARS

When Menasheh finally died, he was succeeded by his son Amon, who continued his father's evil practices but ruled for only two years before being assassinated. Sefer Melachim describes how Yoshiyahu succeeded his father at the tender age of eight. He was installed as the king, even though he obviously was unfit to rule at that age, because he was next in the Davidic line. The people of Judea, despite their spiritual shortcomings, zealously honored the Davidic line even after they assassinated a disliked king. Yoshiyahu is described in Sefer Melachim as beginning to take interest in repairing the Beit HaMikdash already at age twenty six. In Sefer Divrei HaYamim chapter thirty four, he is described as having begun to take an interest in the proper Torah way at age sixteen, and he began the process of purifying the Beit HaMikdash at age twenty. Incidentally, this shows that the teen years are a time that is ripe for youngsters to return to their Jewish roots. Interestingly, Rav Elazar HaKalir's Kinah for Yoshiyahu states that at age eight he sought Hashem on his own.

In total, the Jewish people had experienced seventy five years - fifty five of Menasheh, two of Amon, and eighteen more until Yoshiyahu matured and was fully committed to Hashem - of rule under monarchs that were, at the very least, not dedicated to Torah law. Despite this handicap, Yoshiyahu embarked on his program of national reformation (Teshuvah). The challenge of trying to affect such a sea change amongst Am Yisrael was enormous. Imagine if the United States had been under communist rule from 1900 until 1975, and in 1975 a president sought to restore democracy. Imagine further that America had not enjoyed a stable succession of leaders even before 1900 that were dedicated to the ideals of democracy. The challenge of affecting such change would require a Herculean effort, and it probably would need two or three generations for the American people to

internalize the need to return to the roots upon which the country was founded. Yoshiyahu faced similar formidable odds in his attempt to restore the ideals of David HaMelech's rule.

Undaunted by the enormity of the challenge, Yoshiyahu set out on his path to national Teshuvah. He encountered, however, a major setback at the early stages of his campaign. He discovered, in his efforts to purify the Beit HaMikdash, a Sefer Torah that was opened to the Tochachah (reprimand) of Sefer Devarim. As explained by the Midrash HaGadol (Devarim 27) and the Radak (Melachim 2:22:11), Yoshiyahu correctly saw this as a bad omen and sought the interpretation of a Navi. Chuldah the prophetess presented a crushing message. Her prophecy was that as a result of Am Yisrael's intense sinning, Hashem had resolved to destroy the Beit HaMikdash. She noted, however, that since Yoshiyahu had expressed remorse for the evil committed by his predecessors and his people, he would be spared from experiencing this awful event in his lifetime and that he would die a peaceful death.

REACTION TO CHULDAH'S PROPHECY

Sefer Melachim (2:23:1-24) records that Yoshiyahu did not accept this prophecy with equanimity. Instead, he reacted by embarking on a massive campaign of national spiritual renaissance. He gathered all of Am Yisrael and its leaders and demanded that the nation make a solemn commitment (Berit) to dedicate itself wholeheartedly to the service of Hashem. He committed himself to eliminating Avodah Zarah completely from Eretz Yisrael. The Navi records that he eliminated the Avodah Zarah of his grandfather Menashe as well as the misdirected places of worship (Bamot) of Yaravam and Shlomo HaMelech that had stood for hundreds of years that not even Yoshiyahu's righteous predecessors (other than Chizkiyahu) dared to disturb.

It is important to contrast Yoshiyahu's reaction with that of his great grandfather, Chizkiyahu. Although Chizkiyahu was a righteous king of first rank, when he was told by Yeshayahu that eventually the Beit HaMikdash would be destroyed by the Babylonians, he responded, "Well, at least there will be peace in my day" (Melachim 2:20:19). Yoshiyahu's contrastingly selfless reaction again marks him as an unparalleled Tzaddik among the descendants of David HaMelech. Indeed, Rav Hayyim Angel notes that Yoshiyahu is the only individual in Tanach who is described (Melachim 2:23:25) as having fulfilled the Torah's mandate to worship Hashem "with all of your heart, soul and resources" (Devarim 6:5), which also serves to emphasize the greatness of this amazing king. Indeed, Rav Elazar HaKalir even goes as far to compare Yoshiyahu's righteousness to that of Moshe Rabbeinu!

WAS TESHUVAH POSSIBLE AFTER CHULDAH'S PROPHECY?

We must ask, however, why Yoshiyahu even bothered to attempt to undo the decree. After all, the word of the prophetess represented G-d's immutable will. How could this possibly change? The answer appears to be (following the approach advocated by the Abarbanel) that an evil decree that can be reversed with Teshuvah. We see that after the Cheit HaEigel, Moshe Rabbeinu, through Teshuvah and Tefillah (as we discuss in an essay that appears at www.koltorah.org), was able to reverse the decree to destroy Am Yisrael. We see this in regard to the Cheit HaMerglim as well. Ashkenazic Jews express this idea on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur by stating, "Teshuvah, Tefillah, and Tzedakah can remove the evil of the decree." Indeed, on Yom Kippur we read (in Sefer Yonah) about how the Teshuvah of the people of Nineveh brought about the repeal of the decree that the city be destroyed. Yoshiyahu follows in Moshe Rabbeinu's footsteps in trying to rid Bnei Yisrael of idolatry and lead them back to a path of retaining Hashem's intense presence in their midst.

Am Yisrael at the time of Chuldah's prophecy can be compared to a football team that is, for example, ten points behind with five minutes left in the game and is standing at its own eighteen yard-line. Defeat still can be averted, but it will take a titanic effort in order to prevail.

YOSHIYAHU'S ACHIEVEMENTS

For a period of thirteen years, Yoshiyahu enjoyed great success as a ruler. He organized the most widespread observance of the Korban Pesach since the days of the Shoftim (Melachim 2:23:22). Yirmiyahu (22:15) describes Yoshiyahu's reign as a time when justice prevailed in Eretz Yisrael. Rav Yoel Bin Nun notes that an archaeological discovery seems to corroborate Yirmiyahu's evaluation. A shard of pottery ACLdated to Yoshiyahu's time describes a soldier who called to the attention of the authorities what he deemed unfair treatment (the destruction of his clothes) by his commanding officer. Only in a society where justice prevails would a soldier even dare to lodge such a complaint. In an unjust society, a soldier would not dare complain against a commanding officer, for he certainly would be punished for his complaint.

Sefer Divrei HaYamim (2:34:6-7 and 21) describes Yoshiyahu as impacting all of Eretz Yisrael, not merely Judea. This appears astonishing in light of the

fact that Yoshiyahu was a Judean king – what was he doing in the North? The answer lies in the historical events of the time of Yoshiyahu's reign (see Daat Mikra Divrei HaYamim p. 933). During that time, the Assyrian Empire that had controlled the Northern portion of Eretz Yisrael since the reign of Chizkiyahu was collapsing. Yoshiyahu appears to have seized the opportunity to expand the borders of his kingdom to include the former Northern kingdom.

Sefer Melachim (2:23:24), however, indicates the limitations of Yoshiyahu's Teshuvah campaign. It states that Yoshiyahu succeeded in eliminating the idolatry that "appeared" in Judea. This clearly implies that the Avodah Zarah that was not in plain view remained. Two Pesukim later, we are told that there was never a king who so sincerely returned to Hashem either before or after Yoshiyahu. This also seems to imply that only Yoshiyahu had returned but that the people had not wholeheartedly join him in his efforts. Indeed, Chazal (Ta'anit 22b; see Rav Elazar HaKalir's Kinah mourning Yoshiyahu) explain that during Yoshiyahu's time, many Jews covertly worshipped Avodah Zarah. They describe how people hid Avodah Zarah behind their doors in order to escape its detection by soldiers enforcing Yoshiyahu's rule. It seems that the soldiers were not particularly thorough in their searches, as they seemed to carry out royal decrees perfunctorily and without much enthusiasm. This also explains how Bnei Yisrael deserved the Churban not so long after Yoshiyahu's death. Yoshiyahu's reformation seems to have made little impact on people's hearts. They merely cooperated in the removal of public idolatry. Finally, this also explains why Yirmiyahu was castigating Am Yisrael even during Yoshiyahu's reformation (see Yirmiyahu 3:6-10 and 25:3). We should note that Rav Yehudah Amital and other religious opponents of expanding religious legislation in Israel cite the failure of Yoshiyahu's government to affect any meaningful change on the part of much of Am Yisrael in its commitment to Hashem and His Torah as precedent for their position.

THE TRAUMATIC DEATH OF YOSHIYAHU

Thirteen years after he began his reformation in earnest, Yoshiyahu was killed, at the age of thirty nine, by Paroh Necho's Egyptian army. This episode was so traumatic that Sefer Melachim (2:23:29) describes this tragedy in one cryptic Pasuk. It is almost as if the Navi does not want to record this event and therefore presents the story in the shortest and most obscure manner possible. The Pasuk informs us that when Paroh Necho of Egypt went to the Assyrian king on the Euphrates River, Yoshiyahu went towards Paroh Necho, whereupon Paroh Necho killed him. The Pasuk does not explain why Paroh was traveling to the Assyrian King, why Yoshiyahu went towards Paroh Necho, or why Paroh Necho killed Yoshiyahu.

Divrei HaYamim (2:35:20-23) provides us with a few more details but is also sparing in its presentation of this tragedy. It informs us that Paroh went to join the King of Assyria at Karkemish on the Euphrates. This is a well-known battle that we know from non-Jewish sources occurred in 609 B.C.E (see also Yirmiyahu chapter forty-six). The battle pitted the crumbling Assyrian Empire against the emerging Babylonian Empire. It seems that Paroh Necho joined the Assyrian forces in an attempt to prevent the Babylonian takeover of the region and to further Egyptian interests to expand their empire into the areas lost by the Assyrians.

Divrei HaYamim records that Paroh Necho sent Yoshiyahu a message not to confront him, as he did not intend to engage Yoshiyahu in battle. He sought merely to travel through Eretz Yisrael along the international trade route that cuts through the Jezreel Valley, the location of Megiddo. Yoshiyahu ignored the warnings, Divrei HaYamim tells us, and confronted Paroh Necho. Yoshiyahu disguised himself in battle but nevertheless fell to arrows shot by the Egyptian forces. It is of note that an arch-villain of Sefer Melachim, Achav, died under eerily similar circumstances (see Melachim 1:22:30-34 and Midrash VaYikra Rabbah 20:1).

ASSESSING THE EXTENT OF THE TRAGEDY

Yoshiyahu's death was a multidimensional tragedy. It seems that he was motivated to wage war to prevent Paroh Necho extending his sphere of influence in the Middle East and thereby impinging on the former's control of the northern portion of Eretz Yisrael. Unfortunately, Sefer Melachim records that after the death of Yoshiyahu, the Egyptians seized control of Eretz Yisrael, and the subsequent Judean "kings" were merely vassal kings controlled by Egypt. The Babylonians then overtook the Egyptians (Melachim 2:24:7) and grabbed control over Eretz Yisrael. Thus, the death of Yoshiyahu effectively marked the end of Jewish sovereign control of Eretz Yisrael, which was not regained until centuries later in the days of the Chashmonaim.

Accordingly, Yoshiyahu's death essentially is the beginning of the Churban. In fact, Rav Yoel Bin Nun suggests that Yirmiyahu's prophecy of seventy years of exile (Yirmiyahu 25:11) refers in part to the seventy years from Yoshiyahu's death until Koresh's proclamation permitting us to return to Yerushalayim to rebuild the Beit HaMikdash, which according to non-Jewish

sources occurred in 539 B.C.E (exactly 70 years after the battle of Karkemish). For further discussion of the fulfillment of the seventy years, see Daat Mikra to Divrei HaYamim 2:36:21 note 56.

A second dimension of the tragedy of Yoshiyahu's death is the fact that it contradicted the prophecy of Chuldah (mentioned last week) that Yoshiyahu would die in peace. The failure of this prophecy to materialize was certainly traumatic. We can explain this failure based on the teaching of Chazal (see Berachot 4a) that even positive prophecies can be reversed if we sin and do not continue to merit the promise. As we cited last week, "Everything is foreseen, yet freedom of choice is given" (Avot 3:19). Chazal (Taanit 22b) explain that Yoshiyahu's sin was his failure to consult with Yirmiyahu before heading to battle.

However, the most profound aspect of this tragedy is the fact that such an incredibly righteous king could die in battle. To make matters worse, he died in the very same manner as did Achav! In fact, Rav Yoel argues that it is for this reason that Am Yisrael ignored the impassioned pleas of Yirmiyahu and Yechezkeil to repent before the Churban. People most likely felt that serving Hashem did not pay. While Menashe served every sort of Avodah Zarah and reigned peacefully for fifty five years, Yoshiyahu, who destroyed the Avodah Zarah, was killed prematurely in battle at age thirty nine. Therefore, pleas for Teshuvah fell on deaf ears.

Furthermore, had Yoshiyahu not died and had lived until the age of sixty seven (as did his Menashe), his Teshuvah movement potentially could have remained in effect for another twenty eight years, totaling forty one years. In that amount of time, a new generation that did not know Menashe could have emerged and possibly been much more committed to Torah life than their parents' generation. Such a Teshuvah movement likely could have averted the Churban. Alas, this was not to be (see Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik's Reflections on the Tishah BeAv Kinot pp. 285-286 for a similar approach).

WHY DIDN'T YOSHIYAHU CONSULT YIRMIYAHU?

I would suggest that Yoshiyahu did not consult with Yirmiyahu (in addition to the consideration mentioned in Taanit 22b) because he would have received an answer that he did not want to hear. Yirmiyahu (see Yirmiyahu 2:18) followed in the footsteps of Yeshayahu (30:1-5) in maintaining consistently that Am Yisrael should stay out of any involvement with the superpowers. Rather, these two prophets felt, Am Yisrael should remain neutral and should be satisfied, as Yishayahu expresses it metaphorically, with "the waters of the Shiloach (a stream outside of Yerushalayim) that moves along slowly" (Yishayahu 8:6). Despite his mistake, Chazal (Taanit ad. loc.) tell us that Yoshiyahu repented and that his dying words were, "Hashem is righteous, as I have rebelled against His word" (Eichah 1:18).

CONCLUSION

The death of Yoshiyahu was an event of enormous disappointment for the spiritual and political aspirations of our people, and it merits our attention even today. We must also note, though, that we owe a great debt of gratitude to Yoshiyahu. Had he not done Teshuvah, Bnei Yisrael would have had to endure living for more than a century under the rule of eight consecutive evil kings. Had that happened, our fate might have been the oblivion that befell the ten Northern tribes who were ruled by evil kings for very long periods of time. Therefore, we must pay our respects to and acknowledge Yoshiyahu. Avi Levinson adds that the righteous Jewish leaders in exile, such as Yechezkeil and Daniel, likely were impacted positively by Yoshiyahu's Teshuvah movement. Without the thirteen years of Teshuvah, such great spiritual leaders would have been unlikely to emerge. Yoshiyahu must retain a significant place in the collective Jewish psyche since it was he who preserved the legacy of David HaMelech. Our spiritual survival, in the main, can be attributed to him (for further explanation for the mourning of Yoshiyahu on Tishah BeAv, see Rav Soloveitchik aforementioned work pp. 275-286).

Candles (Melb) Friday 1 August 2025, 8 Menachem Av 5785 5.15p/6.15p