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Chayei Sarah 5784

SARAH – MOTHER OF ALL MATRIARCHS

RABBI BEREL WEIN (Torah.org)

Our matriarchs of Israel were very strong personalities and were formidable women. The life experiences of our mother Sarah are an excellent example of this assessment of character and behavior. From the Torah narrative we are informed early on that she is infertile, unable to conceive and give birth naturally. Nevertheless, we do not hear despair from her. She is willing to bring another woman into her house and to share her husband, so to speak, with that woman in the hope that this would somehow facilitate her own becoming pregnant.

Having Hagar in her home and watching her arrogant behavior forces her to chastise Avraham's attitude towards this complex relationship. She takes action to bring Hagar in line and thus preserve the primacy of her relationship to Avraham. Having escaped from the clutches of the Pharaoh and being aware of the dangers facing a beautiful woman in a cruel and violent society, she nonetheless continues her life's mission of advancing monotheism and morality in a surrounding society that condones evil and violent paganism.

She is wondrously shocked, almost to disbelief, when informed by a stranger who appears as a Bedouin Arab that she will conceive and bear a son to Avraham. At that moment she realizes that she will not only become an "ordinary" mother but rather the matriarchal figure that will preside over an eternal people that will influence all future societies.

To protect and safeguard that eternity, she is forced to expel Yishmael from her home. She does not flinch at performing this distasteful task. In this respect, she is stronger than Avraham... and Heaven, so to speak, backs up her position. She is the woman of iron that acts to guarantee the future survival of the Jewish people.

Sarah serves as the paradigm for the matriarchs that follow her in the Torah narrative of the book of Bereshith. Rivka is certainly the strong force in the house of Yitzchak who recognizes the darkness of Eisav in comparison to the heavenly potential of Yaakov. She shows strength in having to do family triage, so to speak, and knowingly to accept the consequences of such a painful and agonizing decision. The ability and strength that she exhibits, in switching her husband's blessings from the older son to the younger one, is indicative of the certainty of commitment and clarity of vision that so characterized all of the matriarchs of the people of Israel.

Sarah lived on in Rivka and her life's decisions. The same thing is true regarding Rachel and Leah who are more aware of the nefarious and dangerous ways of their father Lavan than is their husband Yaakov. It is they who finally force Yaakov to heed the Heavenly voice that directs him to leave Aram and return home to the Land of Israel.

Again it is the strength of character and will that decides the ultimate issue, and it is that decision that tips the scales of eternity in favor of Jewish survival. If Chava is recorded as being the mother of all living things, it is Sarah who is the mother of the loving, vibrant and eternal people of Israel.

THE BEST CHOLENT IN THE WORLD

RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR (Ohr.edu)

"Sarah's lifetime was..." (23:1)

A few years ago, on Shabbat afternoon, I was asked to speak to group of young boys and girls who were about to go into the IDF. To prepare them better for their leadership roles, they join what are known as mechinot k'dam tzva'i. Part of their preparation is to come into contact with sections of Israeli society they would not normally meet.

This particular Shabbat, they were being hosted by Orthodox families in our area. They were all intelligent and articulate, the crème de la crème of Israeli secular society. For the most part, they had never had an in-depth encounter with someone Orthodox. I emphasized to them that as a Jew I have an obligation to love and respect every Jew as my brother and sister, and that Orthodox Jews care and love their secular neighbors, even though this may not be immediately apparent. The gulf between the two worlds is not easy to bridge, but that afternoon I felt I made some headway.

Towards the end of my presentation, one of the young ladies accused me of not being a typical Orthodox person.

"You don't seem judgmental to me," she said. "At lunch, my hostess made me feel like 'an empty wagon.'"

I'm not sure if she realized it, but that phrase "an empty wagon" was part of an historical argument between the Chazon Ish and the then Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben Gurion. Ben Gurion went to Bnei Brak to try and reach a compromise about yeshiva students serving in the army. He asked the Chazon Ish how the two communities could find a way to live together and the Chazon Ish responded, by quoting from the Gemara in Sanhedrin: "If two wagons meet each other while on the ascent to Bet-Horon, how then should they act? If one is laden and the other empty, the empty wagon should give way to the former."

The Chazon Ish said that the Torah observant Jew is like a wagon laden with the tradition and customs of centuries, and the secular community should give way to it.

Sometimes, in our sincere desire to bring our Jewish brothers and sisters close to Yiddishkeit, we might possibly come off as somewhat condescending. No real relationship can start with an agenda. However intense my desire to bring those who are far away, close to the Shechina, if I treat my fellow Jew as a mitzvah waiting to be done, if I treat him or her like an Etrog, I will end up with a lemon.

In this week's Torah portion, the two greatest outreach workers in history pass from the world's stage. Avraham and Sarah. In Parshat Lech Lecha, the Torah speaks of 'the souls they (Avraham and Sarah) made in Charan.' Rashi explains that these were the converts whom Avraham and Sarah brought under the wings of the Divine Presence. Avraham and Sarah brought them to a belief in Hashem. How is it then that Noach spent one hundred and twenty years, while building the ark, trying to make the people repent, and not a single one did?

When I was young, I remember a fellow walking up and down Oxford Street in the center of London, wearing a placard that read, "Repent while ye can! The end of the world is nigh!" The rush of commuters past him testified to his singular lack of success. Noach spent 120 years building an ark, the equivalent of a placard proclaiming the end of the world. Avraham and Sarah opened up a hostel which served the best cholent in the world. Kindness isn't kindness unless it's unstinting and unconditional.

DO YOU OWN WHAT YOU HAVE?

RABBI AHARON LOSCHAK (Chabad.org)

I vividly remember the moment I passed my driving test, back when I was a teenager.

It was during a break from yeshivah, I believe over the Passover holiday, and I quickly took the permit test. After successfully getting through that, I dutifully carried out the minimum hours of driver's training before going to the DMV and taking my official live driving test to get the license. The neighborhood was quiet and spacious, so suffice it to say that the test was very easy.

In a few minutes, I was officially licensed to operate a vehicle in the State of California.

My mother had driven me to the DMV for the test and was waiting for me in the parking lot. I emerged from the building, giddy with excitement and with a stupid grin on my face. I approached my mother, and she asked, "Nu, did you pass?"

"Yep, I sure did!" I replied with confidence.

"Oh no!" she blurted out.

"Ma!" I shot back, "Why are you saying that?"

"Because you don't know how to drive!"

It's a funny anecdote I recall all the time (and laugh about with my mother), both for its quintessential Jewish mother vibes, but more importantly, because it's truly a valuable life lesson.

AVRAHAM'S CURIOUS SHOPPING HABITS

In this week's parshah, we read of a grieving Avraham mourning the death of his wife, Sarah. He searches for a suitable burial site for his soulmate of many years, and settles on the plot of land that would eventually become the famed Cave of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs in the city of Hebron.

The land belonged to a certain individual named Efron the Hittite. Avraham approached Efron and offered a sizable sum of money to purchase the property. Efron, who talked a big game, declared:

No, my lord, listen to me. I have given you the field, and the cave that is in it, I have given it to you. Before the eyes of the sons of my people, I have given it to you; bury your dead. (23:11)

In a surprising move, Avraham won't have any of it and insists on paying retail:

But, if only you would listen to me. I am giving the money for the field; take [it] from me, and I will bury my dead there. (23:13)

Efron quickly turns out to be like the rest of them, and gleefully responds, "Great! Between me and you, what's 400 shekel?"—an astronomical amount of money in those days. But Avraham doesn't flinch, and hands over the money.

The rest is history. You can even visit the cave today.

It's very puzzling: if Efron offered to give it to him, why did Avraham insist on paying full price? Even if you argue that Avraham didn't want a handout, why did he have to go to the opposite extreme and insist on giving so much money? A nominal sum could have sufficed.

OWN IT

Avraham appreciated a simple yet sometimes difficult truth: if you want to make something truly yours, you must pay for it. Full price.

This land belonged to Efron. It was Hittite property, and emphatically not part of the Avrahamic family. Avraham wanted to bury his wife, his partner with whom he had founded and promoted a glorious and revolutionary way of life. To be a fitting and honorable host to such a legacy, this eternal monument needed to bear the majestic stamp of those interred inside without traces of anything or anyone else.

So Avraham paid the premium. He knew that if he accepted the gift, it would never truly and wholly be the legacy and heritage of the Jewish people. In some small way, there would still be a figurative plaque on the west wall stating, "Donated by Efron the Hittite." And that would not do for his wife and the movement to G-d they had initiated.

"No donor plaques in my burial hall!" Avraham resolved. And so, he opened his purse and bought the plot at a premium, no questions asked. It was now his and the Jewish people's forever.

PAY RETAIL

And so it is in life. If you want to really own something, you must pay for it.

Payment isn't always in cash. Like my mother taught me then, payment also means hard work, investment, and time. Don't think you can sail into the DMV after driving with your older cousin for two hours and expect to be a "driver." That I got away with it when I was younger was a missed opportunity; had I failed, I certainly would have been compelled to actually learn how to drive, and that would have ultimately made me "own" my driving skills so much more (spoiler: I think I've got it by now).

It's like that with so many things. Certain people are naturally gifted with a generous amount of smarts; they coast through school without breaking a sweat. They ace their tests, get good report cards, and don't even really bother listening in class.

Are they better off? Have they positioned themselves better in life? I wager not, for they have not "earned" or "owned" their progress, at least not in the fullest sense of the word. Too much of what they've achieved bears the mark of "someone else"; it may not be Efron, but it's certainly not them. To own it and proudly fly that flag requires plain old hard work.

Think about it this way: Are you naturally good at something? If yes, here's the real question: are you challenging yourself in that area? Or are you being lazy and letting yourself get away with what's convenient because you know you're good at it and whatever you spit out will be "good enough"?

If you're a naturally gifted writer, ask yourself, "When was the last time I really challenged myself to write something extraordinary?" If you're a born artist who can paint in her sleep, challenge yourself to paint something you've never tried before, to work hard, tear it up, and then try again. If you're a great speaker, don't just pull out a TED talk you have on file; sweat a little and come up with something new!

Be like Avraham, and pay retail. Trust me, it's the Jewish thing to do.

This essay is based on Likutei Sichot vol. 10, p. 60-64.

AVRAHAM'S VERY HARD DAY

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND (Aish.com)

According to tradition (Avos 5:3), G-d put Avraham to the test ten times, and he passed them all with flying colors. It is generally accepted that the ten tests were progressively harder, that once he proved himself in a lesser test, Hashem presented him with a more difficult test until he proved himself to have the highest level of faith. It is also generally accepted that the tenth and most difficult test was the Akeidah. After all, what could be more challenging than to be commanded to sacrifice the treasured child born to him in his old age?

Rabbeinu Yonah in Avos (ibid.), however, lists the Akeidah as the ninth test. What was the tenth? When Avraham could not find a place to bury Sarah, he was forced to buy a plot from Ephron for an exorbitant sum.

The question springs out from the pages. True, it must have been exceedingly frustrating for Avraham to be forced to pay anything at all, let alone an exorbitant sum, for land Hashem had promised him as an everlasting birthright. True, it must have been difficult to deal with this frustration in his bereavement over the death of his wife Sarah. But still, is this at all comparable to the test of the Akeidah? Does this even begin to come close to being asked to sacrifice a son on the altar?

There is tendency among people to look forward to the golden years of retirement. They work very hard. They struggle to be successful, to build a reputation for themselves and to provide their families with a good standard of living. Then there comes a point in a person's life when he steps back and surveys all he has accomplished, and he says, "Enough! I've done all that could be expected of me and more. It's time to stop, to ease up on the pace, to sit back and enjoy life. After all, I've earned it!" And indeed, he has. There is no reason he should not enjoy his golden years of retirement. But in the realm of spirituality, it is not so. There is never a point when a person can sit back and say, "I've done enough!" In the realm of spirituality, a person either moves up or he moves down; he never remains in one spot. If he "retires," he immediately goes into decline. The struggle for spiritual growth does not end until a person draws his very last breath.

When Avraham came back from the Akeidah, he had reached a level of achievement so exalted that the Jewish people throughout history are sustained by its merit. It undoubtedly took every last ounce of spiritual courage and fortitude he could muster to withstand such a horrific ordeal. And he did it! Avraham found those hidden reservoirs of strength and faith, and he showed himself ready to sacrifice his son if Hashem so commanded. And in the end, everything had worked out for the best. He had proved himself, and his son's life had been spared. Avraham returned home with a sense of boundless relief, ready to share his experience with his wife. One can imagine his shock when he found her dead, and his frustration when he encountered so many difficulties in bringing her to eternal rest.

Avraham could easily have raised his voice in righteous indignation and complained. "Enough already! How much do I have to go through? Isn't it enough that I have just gone through the ordeal of the Akeidah? Do I have to go through this as well? I have put in so many years of effort. I have glorified Hashem's Name in so many places for so many years. I have made so much kiddush Hashem. Don't I deserve a little respite to sit back and

enjoy the golden years of my life?"

This was a very subtle test, the ultimate test, and Avraham could easily have reacted instinctively, as most people would. But he did not. He realized that he had one more important lesson to teach the world. By his example, he could demonstrate that there is no retirement from his service, that being a faithful servant of G-d is literally the work of a lifetime. There is no retirement. But the years are certainly golden.

Rav Eliahu Dessler, in *Michtav m'Eliahu*, offer a different explanation. He sees in this tenth and final test the demonstration of two of the most critical aspects of Avraham's personality.

Consider the situation. Avraham finds himself forced to conduct business dealings with the wily and duplicitous Ephron. He is exceedingly frustrated both by his own circumstances and by Ephron's opportunistic behavior. How does he conduct himself?

Imagine you set out to purchase a used car, or perhaps we should say a pre-owned car, and you run into the proverbial used-car salesman. He is wearing a loud checked suit and a fluorescent smile, and he bombards you with an incessant stream of high-pressure sales pitch. He turns a deaf ear to your stated preferences in price and model and does his best to persuade to buy the high-priced clunker that you absolutely do not want. After five minutes, you are gnashing your teeth and clenching your fists.

How do you speak to this man? Do you treat him with the respect and deference due any human being formed in the image of the Lord, the tzelem Elokim? Or do you respond to his crudeness with a crudeness of your own? Do you allow external frustrations get the better of you?

And how about internal frustrations?

I was recently at a supermarket, and I asked the person bagging my groceries not to make the bags too heavy.

"If you don't like the way I do it," he barked at me, "do it yourself!"

I was taken aback, to say the least. "Excuse me," I said. "Did I say something nasty to you? Why did I deserve such a response?"

The man gave me a sheepish grin. "Sorry. I had a hard day."

I guess that explains it all. He had a hard day, which gives him the right to give me a hard time, I suppose.

Having a "hard day" is obviously not a justification for rude behavior. But how about something that goes beyond your ordinary "hard day"? Imagine you have just come off an overseas flight. You have spent a solid hour watching the luggage circulate around the carousel until you have each piece memorized down to its smallest details, but your own luggage seems to have disappeared into thin air. You go to the ticket office to report your loss. Are you justified in snapping at the agent because of what you are going through?

Let us take this a little further. You are in the hospital attending a relative who is in serious condition, perhaps even in mortal danger. A doctor or nurse or some other hospital functionary gives you a hard time, and you respond with a sharp retort. Does your anxiety about the health of your relative justify such behavior?

Now let us consider Avraham's circumstances. He has just come back from the Akeidah, where he narrowly escaped slaughtering his own son. Can you imagine his mental and emotional state? Then he comes home to discover that Sarah, his wife of a century, has died and that he has to go through some difficult negotiations in order to secure a burial plot for her. I suppose one could safely say that Avraham was having a rather "hard day." To top it all off, he must contend with Ephron, who may not have been wearing a checked suit but was certainly no better than the sleaziest used-car salesman.

This was Avraham's test. He could have played hardball with Ephron. He could have wiped the floor with him. But he didn't. He treated him with the respect and deference due every human being. Just because he was having a hard day, he did not have to make Ephron suffer.

On the night Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach's rebbetzin died, he was standing in the hall of the hospital trying to deal with his profound grief. A student of his, whose wife had just given birth, was also in the hospital at the time. The student noticed Rav Shlomo Zalman in the hallway, and he ran over to give him the wonderful news. He was so excited that it did not even occur to him to ask what his rosh yeshivah was doing in the hospital at that time of the night.

Rav Shlomo Zalman gave the student his warmest blessing and graced him with his famous smile, so full of love and sheer joy. The student walked away with his heart singing, completely unaware that his rosh yeshivah had been told just a few minutes earlier that his wife had passed away.

Following the example of his forefather Avraham, Rav Shlomo Zalman saw no reason to diminish his student's joy in the very least just because he himself was suffering.

REMAINING FOCUSED

RABBI NAFTALI SILBERBERG (Chabad.org)

Yitzchak was forbidden to leave the Holy Land, because he was consecrated to G-d when Avraham offered him as a sacrifice on Mt. Moriah. Avraham, however, wasn't willing to consider a Canaanite girl for Yitzchak, so he sent his faithful servant Eliezer to his own hometown of Aram Naharaim (modern-day northern Syria) to find a suitable girl for Yitzchak. Eliezer successfully discharged this mission and returned to Canaan with Rebecca.

The Torah relates the entire account of Eliezer's mission in great detail, repeating entire segments of the story several times. Generally speaking, the Torah is "stingy" with words; many laws of the Torah are derived from a seemingly superfluous word, or even an extra letter. The Midrash therefore concludes that "beautiful are the words of the servants of the Patriarchs more than the Torah of their children."

What is so special about the "words of the servants of the Patriarchs"? What is the lesson the Torah wants us to derive from Eliezer's mission?

One characteristic of Eliezer's mission which is quite blatant is his tremendous focus. When he arrived in Aram Naharaim, he didn't first go around town to see the local attractions. In fact, he didn't even check in to the local Hilton to rest from his journey. Instead, he went straight to work, immediately starting the search for Yitzchak's future wife. Even after he found Rebecca and deemed her worthy for his master's son, he still didn't allow himself to relax. When he was invited to Rebecca's home, and the entire family sat down to eat, he proclaimed, "I will not eat until I have spoken my words . . . I am Avraham's servant . . ."

Because he was so focused on his duty, constantly aware that he was merely an envoy of Avraham, he realized that he had all of Avraham's miraculous powers at his disposal. Therefore, instead of hiring a private investigator to find the best and most virtuous girl in town, he went to the well and beseeched G-d for a sign from heaven which would identify the right maiden. And he succeeded. When Rebecca's family requested that she be given several months to prepare herself for marriage—a seemingly reasonable demand—Eliezer responded: "Do not delay me . . . Send me away, and I will go to my master." And he got his way. He didn't feel compelled to comply with societal norms or standards; he knew that his mission would succeed even if he were asking for the impossible.

We, too, are emissaries. We were sent to this world by the Almighty to create a marriage, to bring together two opposites—Creator and creation. We can and will accomplish this task, because we go not with our own powers, but with the G-dly powers which G-d invested within us in order to accomplish this feat. We can transform ourselves, our families and acquaintances, and indeed all of creation into spiritual entities, suitable to be G-d's bride. We must, however, always remain focused on the mission. We must always have proper priorities, always remembering what is really important in life.

This is the lesson we learn from Eliezer, a lesson the Torah deems worthy of repeating several times.

THE PURSUIT OF OBJECTIVITY

RABBI JARED VIDERS (Aish.com)

Hard-wired into each of our psyches is a set of particular biases that lurks in the background (conscious or subconscious) and threatens to quietly hijack our decision-making processes.

Some people's entire lives are cued up in terms of dollars and cents. Such people, for instance, read a menu from right to left and order food based on the list price.

Others' decisions are motivated by concerns for efficiency and effective time management. I heard of one fellow who refused to date anyone who lived on the south shore because it meant battling traffic on the Van Wyck Expressway.

In the Parsha, we find that Eliezer has been sent by Avraham Avinu to find a suitable wife for Yitzchak. En route, Eliezer concocts a brilliant strategy whereby he'll be able to identify an appropriate spouse to become the next Matriarch of the Jewish people. "And [Eliezer] said, 'Hashem ... may You so arrange it for me this day ... Let it be that the young woman to whom I shall say, 'please tip over your pitcher so I may drink' and who replies, 'Drink and I will even water your camels,' she will" be the One that You have designated to be a wife for Yitzchak. (24:12-14).

Question: Why did Eliezer need to implement such a litmus test to facilitate his search? After all, Eliezer was the "chief of staff" to Avraham Avinu - the epitome of kindness - and, as a result, had probably witnessed hundreds if not thousands of acts of generosity over the years. Why not just wait by the well, observe what transpires and when some local woman conducts herself in accord with such ideals of generosity and selflessness, Eliezer will readily realize such character traits and that'll be the one? What advantage was Eliezer seeking to create vis-à-vis this Divinely-inspired gauge?

Perhaps the answer lies in Eliezer's cognizance of his own bias and his sincere desire to neutralize that bias so as not to warp his own perceptions of objective reality. Eliezer had a daughter himself, whom he would desire nothing more than to marry her off to Yitzchak Avinu. So long as that possibility percolated through his mind, perhaps Eliezer's capacity to discern positive attributes in others would be warped and manipulated so as to comport with his own interests. Only by imposing an objective structure - i.e., if x, y and z transpire, I'll know that she is the one - was Eliezer assured that objective reality and not his perception thereof would carry the day.

Perhaps that explains why Eliezer injects the notion of "truth" into his narrative. "Blessed is Hashem ... Who has not withheld His kindness and truth from my master." (24:27)

For Eliezer truly sought more than just kindness (for that might be subjective and open to interpretation) but sought such kindness through the prism of truth whereby the biases that we each harbor could be filtered the spectrum of truth. While biases are part and parcel of the human condition, it behooves one to find a modicum of objectivity when it comes to decision-making lest personal biases derail our desire of truth.

SOUL TRUSTEE

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY (Torah.org)

When Avraham seeks a wife for his son Yitzchak, he called no one other than his trusted loyal servant, Eliezer. Eliezer was one of the primary soldiers, aiding Avraham during his battle to rescue Lot. Eliezer was considered by Avraham to be his heir apparent until Hashem informed him of the forthcoming birth of Yitzchak. Eliezer was nicknamed the one who drew and watered from his master's Torah. Simply put, the Torah constantly informs us that Eliezer was Avraham's right-hand-man.

Before sending Eliezer, the Torah tells us that "Avraham told his servant, the elder of his household, who was in complete charge of every one of Avraham's possessions, to swear that he would not take a girl from Canaan for Yitzchak. Eliezer swore in the name of Hashem, the Master of the heaven and the earth" (cf. 24:3).

Avraham instructed his most trusted aid to get the proper shidach (mate) for Yitzchak. He was to go back to Avraham's hometown. The girl had to come from the right family. She must have been raised in the proper environment. And Avraham warned Eliezer that Yitzchak was not to leave the Land of Canaan. His charge was forceful. He made his trusted servant swear. He used strong language. "Be careful – watch out! Lest you bring my son there!" (24:6)

The Torah's reiteration of Eliezer's domestic position in this context is perplexing. Isn't the juxtaposition – the glorifying of Eliezer's position as "the elder of his household, who was in complete charge of every one of Avraham's possessions" "contradictory with the severe scrutiny and pressure that Avraham placed on him in reference to Yitzchak's matrimonial requirements? If Avraham trusted Eliezer for his entire worldly possessions, why did he make him swear in this instance? And if he had to swear in regard to Yitzchak, then why define him here as "the elder of his household, who was in complete charge of every one of Avraham's possessions"? Isn't the fact that he had to swear, obvious evidence that he, in fact, was not in charge?

Rabbi Yisrael Lipkin of Salant, the founder of the mussar movement, once stayed at an inn. The inn was quite crowded and the innkeeper realized that he was low on meat. Seeing a distinguished and pious-looking Jew with a beard, the innkeeper approached Reb Yisrael.

"Are you perhaps a shochet? You see, I am running low on meat and I must slaughter a cow." Reb Yisrael was taken aback. "I would love to help," he stammered, "but unfortunately I am not a ritual slaughterer."

The next morning Rabbi Lipkin approached the innkeeper. "I have a tremendous business opportunity. If you were to invest a few hundred rubles with me, I can guarantee a nice return."

The man looked quizzically at the rabbi. "Reb Yid," he stammered. "I hardly know you! How do you expect me to invest with you? Give me a few

references, and as many days, and let me check out the deal in its entirety. Then we can meet and I'll make my decision."

"Aha!" Exclaimed the great mussar luminary. "Just yesterday, you were about to trust me with the ritual slaughter of your cow. You were going to feed you guests with that meat based on the appearance of my frock and beard. Nevertheless, you would not invest a few rubles on those same grounds. Shouldn't one treat his spiritual skepticism on the same level as his financial uncertainties?"

The Be'er Mayim Chayim explains: the Torah specifically states, in the context of Avraham's admonitions, that Eliezer "was the elder of Avraham's household, who was in complete charge of every one of Avraham's possessions."

When buying stocks and bonds, when investing in real estate, when purchasing appliances or furniture, Eliezer had free reign. Yet when it came to Yitzchak's future that esteem was not enough. Avraham made Eliezer swear in the name of Hashem that he would bring a suitable wife for Yitzchak. Avraham's concern for spirituality and his future were by no means on the same level as those he had for his mundane needs. True, Eliezer was in complete charge of every one of Avraham's possessions. But when it came to Avraham's future, when it came to spiritual decisions, even Eliezer was suspect. For when it comes to your spiritual needs, your sole trustee can never become your soul trustee.

BE A WINDOW NOT A PANE

RABBI LABEL LAM (Torah.org)

And [food] was set before him to eat, but he said, "I will not eat until I have spoken my words." And he said, "Speak. "And he said, "I am a servant of Avraham!" (Breishis 24:33-34)

This is one of the most remarkable accounts in the entire Torah. Rashi says it all when the Torah begins to record Eliezer's repetition of the narrative we just read about. "Rabbi Acha said: The ordinary conversation of the servants of the Patriarchs is more beloved before the Omnipresent than the Torah of their sons, for the section dealing with Eliezer is repeated in the Torah, whereas many fundamentals of the Torah were given only through allusions." Yes, Eliezer gets more airtime in the Torah than almost anybody else. How is that possible? Why is that so? What are we to learn from the fact that this man whom Avraham deemed unworthy to have his daughter marry Yitzchok, is still so revered in the Torah?! Eliezer was from a cursed lineage. He would have been voted in his high school class least likely to be featured in the Holy Torah and yet here he is dominating the stage. What is this all about!? What do we learn!?

One important factor here is revealed by the fact that Eliezer's name is not mentioned even once in the entire episode. He only refers to himself as the servant of Avraham. This is the summary of his identity. He is not playing the role of himself. He is not acting as the authentic man expressing his raw feelings and doing what he pleases. Just the opposite is true.

He has totally quieted and subdued his ego and sublimated his own wishes to his master, Avraham. He is a messenger and a loyal extension of Avraham. It is as if we are watching and listening to Avraham. He has made himself into a vessel to accomplish only what Avraham wants. Eliezer himself is almost non-existent and by choice he has rendered his own personal agenda worthless in comparison to Avraham's mission. He is such a big hero because he has made himself into a zero!

Years ago, I was asked to be a master of ceremonies – MC at a Yeshiva Dinner. It's not my flavor or style at all and neither am I comfortable as a guest speaker at these types of gatherings. I would rather be eating chicken and listening to other people and even write a check just to avoid that stage. In this case I could not say "no" and so under duress I agreed.

I reviewed and studied my role as the MC and in my opening marks I declared, "The job of the MC is to be a window and not a pane, to allow the light of the main featured speakers to shine through. I'm not sure I succeeded but at least I understood where there was room for me to fail. What is most memorable and helpful to me is that definition of that definition of an MC. Be a window and not a pane/pain!

That's what it means to be an Eved – a Servant, and an Eved HASHEM a Servant of HASHEM. Reb Yeruchem Levovitz writes in one of his Mussar Essays on Pesach that the measure of a Jew, the truest indicator of his greatness, is how big of an Eved HASHEM he is. The Jewish People did not exit Mitzraim to become free. That is less than half the story. We became available to become servants of HASHEM.

Eliezer was from that segment of Noach's children that was cursed that they would be servants. It's not a pure curse and a punishment. It's a

recommendation for a cure. They would need guidance and coaching to shape them from without. Left to their own devices they would tend to self-destructive and antisocial behaviors. With proper training and an infusion of strong moral values they can be polished and formed into disciplined, marine-like soldiers and reliable citizens. Without a regimen, in the absence of a serious system of training, they will likely disassemble and backslide into disrepair and despair.

Not only does he require that structure, a teacher, a community, a Torah, a G-d, we the Jewish People need it even more so. Without it, we are at great risk and so is the world around us. That is also evident! With those features in place, our substance has true form. We stand a chance of being a blessing as Avraham was promised. It's not a birthright as much as it is a birth opportunity.

How do we do this? Simple as a dimple! The Ramchal writes in Derech Etz Chaim that a person should take some time each day to contemplate what Avraham and Moshe and Dovid did to attract the attention of HASHEM. What did Eliezer do? He made himself a zero. He did his job. He made himself into a window to allow the light of Avraham to shine through and so our job is to become a window, to polish that window, and to allow the light of HASHEM to shine through us to the whole world. Be a window not a pane!

CALLING OUT THE ANTI SEMITIC JEWS

AVROHOM YAAKOV

After Sarah's passing, Avrohom married Hagar who had adopted the name Keturah. They had a number of sons.

"To the sons of the concubines (Hagar) that Avraham had, Avraham gave gifts. He sent them away from Yitzchak, his son, while he [Avraham] was still alive. [He sent them] eastward to the Land of the East. (25:6)"

What were the gifts? Rashi citing the Talmud (Sanherdin 91a) explains "... that he transmitted to them 'impure names'."

The Riva cites Rabbenu Yaakov, one of the Baalei Tosefos, that Avrohom taught them to use different names when worshipping idols rather than invoking the name of Hashem.

This concept was found in the early history of religions that were offshoots of Judaism where tradition has it that the Rabbinic leadership organized for the Sabbath to be moved from Saturday to Sunday, for example, so that there was a clear demarcation between Yiddishkeit and the other religion.

In our day, there are people who call themselves Jews, and use their perceived status to sow confusion among those who actually support Jews. When so-called 'Jews' march and protest in solidarity with those who wish to literally eradicate the Jewish people, this undermines the case against child killers, rapists and barbarians.

Like Avrohom who took steps to distance his secondary offspring from the Jewish people and the Sages millennia later who moved Christianity away from Judaism, we have an obligation to call out those 'Jews' who are either pretenders or self-haters.

News, Views & Opinion

HAMAS TRIED TO SEND FIGHTERS TO EGYPT IN AMBULANCES FOR WOUNDED GAZANS — US OFFICIAL

JACOB MAGID (TimesofIsrael.com 4-11-23)

Hamas tried to sneak its fighters out of the Gaza Strip in ambulances that evacuated dozens of wounded Palestinians to Egypt earlier this week, a senior Biden administration official said Friday.

Hamas had compiled a list of the seriously wounded that it wanted to evacuate from Gaza for treatment in Egypt, along with thousands of foreign nationals looking to flee the enclave.

The list was then vetted by Egypt and the United States, which found that a third of the names on it were of Hamas fighters, the administration official said, adding that the list was rejected and none of the 76 wounded Palestinians who were ultimately evacuated in ambulances out of Gaza were members of the terror group.

Meanwhile, two senior Israeli officials told The Times of Israel that Israeli inspectors earlier this week uncovered, hidden in an aid truck, several oxygen concentrators meant to aerate the tunnels operated by terror organizations in Gaza.

"These weren't for use in the hospitals, but below them. That's why they were smuggled among boxes of cookies," one of the senior Israeli officials said, adding that the entire truck in which the oxygen concentrators were

found was barred from entering Gaza.

Neither official provided a photo of the oxygen concentrators in question and they did not disclose which organization was responsible for sending the truck.

Since Egypt opened its Rafah crossing into Gaza 11 days ago, several hundred trucks filled with humanitarian aid have been able to enter Gaza following inspections by both Egyptian and Israeli authorities.

The trucks first enter Egypt where they undergo an initial round of inspections. They then are driven into Israel through the Nitzana crossing where they are inspected by Israel's COGAT military liaison before being sent back to Egypt and driven into Gaza through the Rafah crossing, a second Israeli official told The Times of Israel, saying the format was agreed upon after extensive talks between Israel, Egypt and the United States.

A convoy of trucks carrying humanitarian aid enters the Gaza Strip from Egypt via the Rafah border crossing on October 21, 2023. (Eyad BABA / AFP) Israel has thus far rejected growing calls to allow in fuel, expressing concerns that Hamas will divert it to power its tunnels. IDF Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi said Thursday that Israel would allow fuel to enter Gaza via the Rafah crossing should it determine that hospitals have run out of fuel.

Shortly after Halevi's comments, the Prime Minister's Office issued a terse statement noting only that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "has not approved the entry of fuel into Gaza."

ISRAELI BATTLE PLANS 'SIGNIFICANTLY REFINED'

The senior Biden administration official also said Friday that Israel "significantly refined" its original military plan for its war against Hamas following talks with the US.

Pressed on whether Washington is having discussions with Israel about the growing numbers of civilian casualties, the senior official insisted that the US is "asking hard questions and constantly asking and ensuring there's clarity about the objectives [they're] seeking."

"They have significantly refined what originally was their plan," the official said in a phone briefing with reporters on condition of anonymity.

The senior official said that calling for a ceasefire after the October 7 onslaught by Hamas, in which terrorists killed some 1,400 people and took at least 240 hostages, would not be the right policy for the US to take.

A ceasefire "depends on the Israelis feeling secure and ensuring something like this cannot happen again," the official said.

A "pause," on the other hand, would allow for safe passage of civilians and for more flow of aid into Gaza.

The official noted that 100 trucks entered Gaza on Thursday and said the US "looks to see that significantly ramped up over the coming over the coming days."

The official also revealed that Israel agreed to a humanitarian pause on October 20 to secure the release of two American hostages from Hamas captivity.

The administration official explained that negotiators needed to receive assurances from Israel and Hamas that the hostages would be able to travel safely for what was "not a short distance" to reach the border from where they were being held in Gaza.

"There was a time period for that, and it went... like clockwork to get them out," the official said in reference to what they refer to as a "trial humanitarian pause."

The senior administration official said a much longer humanitarian pause will be required if a deal is struck to bring about the release of 240 hostages.

A "framework to get the hostages out of Gaza... is very much ongoing," the official said, without providing further details.

BIDEN ADMIN WARNS ISRAEL AGAINST CUTTING OFF HAMAS INTERNET

DANIEL GREENFIELD (Frontpagemag.com 2-11-23)

After telling us for weeks that everyone in Gaza was dead or about to die of thirst, apparently the biggest problem in Hamastan, apart from exploding weapons caches in the kitchen, is losing internet access.

Hamas uses the internet for money, it's financed partly by cryptocurrency from terror sympathizers, propaganda and communications. The Biden administration however insists that internet access is a human right.

US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller cautions Israel against again cutting internet access for Palestinians in Gaza.

Israel cut communications into the Strip on Friday as it launched the first stage of its ground incursion, switching it back on the next day following pressure from Washington. Then this morning, phone and internet went down again for several hours.

Miller notes that the US government has been contacting its citizens via email about securing their exit from Gaza, so it expects that internet access remain available

Apart from everything wrong with that, Miller just made any U.S. citizens into hostages once again to ensure that Hamas gets to keep its internet access.

.The State Department spokesperson says he recognizes Israel has to make certain operational decisions as it advances its military campaign. “But as a general principle, internet access needs to remain viable for people of Gaza.”

What general principle is that exactly? Did we make sure that ISIS retained internet access so it could post the latest and greatest beheading videos, and collect bitcoin tips?

Is there anything else Israel needs to do for Hamas? DoorDash delivery? Positive Yelp reviews?

This isn't how you fight wars and it sure as hell isn't how you win them.

IDF SHOWS HAMAS ROCKETS NEXT TO CHILDREN'S POOL, PLAYGROUND

JEWISH NEWS SYNDICATE (JNS.org 5-11-23)

The Israel Defense Forces on Sunday shared video evidence of Hamas rocket launchers placed next to a children's swimming pool and a playground in the northern Gaza Strip.

Israel has long decried the terrorist group's practice of committing war crimes by deliberately placing rocket launchers near and in civilian sites such as hospitals, schools, mosques and United Nations buildings.

One of the videos circulated by the IDF on its social media channels shows four rocket launching barrels in a residential neighborhood of the city of Beit Hanoun, some 16 feet from a children's swimming pool and around 65 to 100 feet from residential buildings.

“All of this is in the heart of a residential neighborhood,” a soldier explains.

The IDF also provided video and pictures of rocket launchers positioned within a children's playground and amusement park compound.

“This is further proof of the Hamas terror organization's constant use of the civilian population as a human shield for terror purposes,” the IDF said in a statement.

Hamas has fired more than 8,000 rockets at Israeli civilians since Oct. 7, when thousands of its terrorists invaded the western Negev, murdering 1,400 persons, wounding over 5,000 others and taking more than 200 hostages back to Gaza.

@WHO AND @MSF STILL YET TO CONDEMN HAMAS

ELDER OF ZIYON (ElderofZiyon.blogspot.com 6-11-23)

The World Health Organization condemned Israeli airstrikes at terrorists who were using hospitals and ambulances for cover.

WHO condemns the attacks on 3 November near Al-Shifa Hospital, Al-Quds Hospital, and the Indonesian Hospital in Gaza City and North Gaza governorates.

Two further attacks were reported on the same day at Al-Quds Hospital, resulting in at least 21 injuries. An additional attack was reported near the Indonesian Hospital.

Attacks on health care, including the targeting of hospitals and restricting the delivery of essential aid such as medical supplies, fuel, and water, may amount to violations of International Humanitarian Law.

They have not said a negative word about Hamas' use of hospitals and ambulances for military purposes nor about Hamas using medical staff and patients as human shields.

What about Hamas' attacks on medical facilities in Israel on October 7?

Ten Magen Dovid Adom workers were murdered, including at least two who were slaughtered while trying to save others' lives - Aharon Chaimov, who was murdered in his ambulance while trying to help the injured in Ofakim, and Amit Mann, who spent her final six hours treating the injured at the clinic in Kibbutz Be'eri before the clinic itself was attacked and she was murdered.

Several ambulances were attacked, some deliberately to ensure that they could not be used to save lives. Hamas even published its own video of an attack on an ambulance with a drone.

And the World Health Organization has not said a word of condemnation of Hamas for directly and proudly attacking medical workers, ambulances and facilities.

And it isn't only WHO. Doctors Without Borders (MSF) have also been completely silent about Hamas' attacks on Israeli medical personnel and

facilities, and have also not said a word about Hamas' use of hospitals and ambulances for military purposes.

While both WHO and MSF have issued brief condemnations of the October 7 attacks, they have not condemned Hamas for its deliberate attacks on medics and medical facilities.

Bias isn't only obvious from what people and organizations say. Sometimes their silence is what proves their bigotry.

AFTER THE TERRORISTS CAME THE RIFF-RAFF

PESACH BENSON (JNS.org 2-11-23)

Israeli soldiers continue to discover enormous piles of household and personal items that Hamas terrorists looted on Oct. 7 from homes they attacked, then ransacked, in the western Negev.

Found in open areas between the Israeli communities and the Gaza border were suitcases stuffed with stolen clothing, agricultural equipment, toys, eyeglasses, electrical equipment, even wall posters.

Piles of stolen goods were also found in large garbage dumpsters, which would have been towed by tractors or bulldozers.

“The thing that broke me most was to see who came after the terrorists,” said Adele Raemer, a resident of Kibbutz Nirim who spent hours hiding in a safe room during the rampage.

“After the terrorists came the riff-raff. Gazans of all ages, all sizes and shapes, and they came into our community and rampaged, destroyed and stole everything they could. They just took stuff. If they wanted something, they stole it, just out of meanness, out of hate and evil,” she said.

“All along, I was telling people I truly believed that most Gazans are good, most Gazans just want the same things we do, to put food on the table, have good health and clothing for their children,” Raemer said. “After I saw what happened on Oct. 7—aside from the Hamas terrorists—all the looters that came in and rampaged through the kibbutz, I'm not so sure anymore. Where were all the good Gazans on Oct. 7?”

Video footage of the Oct. 7 attacks circulating on social media shows Palestinian civilians and children accompanying the terrorists and stealing items such as television sets and bicycles.

Some of the videos were Israeli security footage; others were filmed by the terrorists, who wore GoPro body cameras to capture them murdering men, women and children.

NO CEASEFIRE, HAMAS DOESN'T GET A 'DO-OVER' TO COMMIT GENOCIDE AGAIN

GARY WILLIG (Israelnn.com 1-11-23)

In a speech before the international media on Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed not to accept a ceasefire in the current war until Hamas is utterly defeated, defying the cries for a ceasefire from the United Nations, anti-Israel demonstrators, and far-left politicians from around the world.

"Calls for a ceasefire are calls for Israel to surrender to Hamas, to surrender to terrorism, to surrender to barbarism," Netanyahu said.

In this, the Prime Minister could not be more correct.

Israel has been forced to fight many wars and battles in its 75 years against enemies whose goals were the complete annihilation of the Jewish State. And almost every time, whenever Israel had or gained the upper hand, the UN, the US, and the international community imposed a ceasefire which merely ended that round of fighting rather than contributed to peace in any meaningful way.

During Israel's War of Independence of 1948-1949, when the newborn Jewish State was invaded by the armies of five nations, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, an 'armistice' was ultimately declared, with not a single Arab nation agreeing to make peace with or accept the existence of the State of Israel.

During the Suez Crisis of 1956, the Eisenhower Administration sided with Egypt and the Soviet Union against not only Israel, but against Great Britain and France. The ceasefire Britain declared under intense American pressure caused former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to declare in astonishment: "I cannot understand why our troops were halted. To go so far and not go on was madness."

During the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel's immediate successes in the war and the crushing losses Egypt, Syria, and Jordan suffered led to faster efforts to impose a ceasefire and resulted in the war lasting less than a week. Despite their losses, the Arab states issued the famous Three Noes of Khartoum: No with Israel, No negotiation with Israel, No recognition of Israel.

Israel's then-Foreign Minister Abba Eban called the Six Day War "the first

war in history which has ended with the victors suing for peace and the vanquished calling for unconditional surrender.”

In 1973, after the Egyptian and Syrian armies achieved stunning early successes by launching a surprise attack against Israel on Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Hebrew calendar, the efforts to impose a ceasefire by the United Nations again ramped up specifically after Israel had turned the tide and had begun to win the war. When the ceasefire was declared, the IDF had Egypt’s Third Army completely encircled and was just 62 miles from Cairo, but Egypt was rescued at the last minute by a UN and US-brokered ceasefire.

In 2006, the Bush Administration provided a few weeks of covert to Israel before allowing a ceasefire to be imposed to save Hezbollah after the Iranian-controlled Lebanese terrorist organization murdered and kidnapped two IDF soldiers in an unprovoked cross-border raid and launched thousands of rockets at northern Israel.

And in 2009, 2012, 2014, and 2021, Israel never even tried to eliminate the threats posed by Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza, knowing full-well that the UN, western Europe, and even the US would not let these conflicts end in any way other than a ceasefire which protected these genocidal terrorist organizations.

The pattern is clear and consistent. Israel’s enemies have never been allowed to lose in a manner which would force them to give up on their dreams and goals of wiping Israel off the face of the earth and slaughtering all of its Jewish inhabitants.

If these forces lose after picking a fight with Israel, they are always given a chance for a ‘do-over’ to rebuild their strength and try to wipe out the Jews another time.

When the enemies were Egypt and Syria, the excuse was that Cold War tensions took priority, and any regional crisis that had the potential to lead to war between the US and Russia had to be dealt with as quickly as possible even if it meant prolonging the Arab-Israeli conflict and allowing Arab leaders to continue to plot to destroy the Jewish State.

In modern times, the excuse is the suffering of the residents of Gaza or Lebanon who are caught in the middle whenever the terrorists who control their lives launch wars to kill as many Jews as possible.

Everyone knows that Hamas has never respected the very concept of a ‘humanitarian ceasefire.’ It was during just such a ceasefire that the terrorist organization launched an attack in which IDF soldier Hadar Goldin was murdered and his body taken captive. In violation of all international law and norms, Hamas has held the bodies of Hadar and fellow soldier Oron Shaul in Gaza for nearly a full decade.

Those who cry for ceasefires now don’t care about Hadar Goldin or Oron Shaul or Hamas’ violations of previous ceasefires. They never have. If they did, they would have done something, anything, to hold Hamas accountable for those war crimes and exploitations of ceasefires.

Even still, had this been a raid comparable to the attack Hamas committed in 2006 in which Gilad Shalit was kidnapped, had the terrorists ‘merely’ launched thousands of rockets at Israeli civilians the way they have for the past 18 years since the Disengagement from Gaza, Israel would likely have already agreed to a ceasefire.

This time is different.

Over 1,400 people, the vast majority of whom were civilians, were mercilessly butchered in the worst mass murder of Jews since the Nazi Holocaust.

Agreeing to a ceasefire now, agreeing to give Hamas yet another ‘do-over,’ is agreeing to allow them to commit massacres just like this over and over again.

Agreeing to a ceasefire now tells the world that it is ok to wipe out families, to commit mass rape, to take hundreds of innocent people hostage, to gun down hundreds at a peace rave, to cut open the bellies of pregnant women, to burn babies alive, shoot them in the head, and cut off their heads, as long as the victims are Jews.

Agreeing to a ceasefire now tells Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Ayatollahs in Iran that there is no consequence for murdering as many Israelis and Jews as they want, inviting them and all of Iran’s terrorist proxies to launch more large-scale attacks against Israel’s civilian population, since they will always get a ‘do-over’ for their next attempted genocide.

Agreeing to a ceasefire now tells all those antisemites who have crawled out of the gutter since October 7, the crowds chanting “gas the Jews” in Sydney, Australia, the bloodthirsty students at Cooper Union College who trapped their Jewish peers in the university library while banging on the

doors and yelling antisemitic slogans, and the pogromists who gathered to find and attack Jews at the airport in Dagestan, Russia, that it is open season on Jews anywhere and everywhere.

And agreeing to a ceasefire now tells the citizens of Israel, whether they be Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Druze, or from any other religion, that their lives are cheap, that the opinions of the Secretary General of the United Nations, of antisemities who pretend to be humanitarians like Ken Roth, and of the crowds who cheer for the modern-day Nazis matter more than the lives of Israeli babies. It would break the central covenant at the heart of every democratic country – that the government will do everything in its power to defend and protect the safety and security of its citizens. And it would break the promise Israel’s existence is meant to fulfill – Never Again.

This was always the goal. The Soviets always rescued their client Arab states from the jaws of defeat in order to give them another go at destroying Israel. Now, so many of those thousands who march in demand of a ceasefire while accusing Israel of genocide want Hamas to survive precisely so that it can kill thousands and even millions more Jews. That is why they cheer Hamas’ act of genocide, calling it “exhilarating” and “resistance.” That is why they chant “From the river to the sea,” a call for the murder of millions of Jews between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

This time, there must be no do-overs. This time, those who seek to finish the job the Nazis started must be stopped for good. For the sake of the people of Israel, of innocent Jews everywhere, and of the entire civilized world, Hamas must be defeated once and for all.

Anything less than that, any ‘ceasefire,’ is nothing less than an endorsement of another Holocaust.

WE MUST DEMAND THE WORLD ANSWER TO HISTORY

JEFF SEIDEL (JNS.org 1-11-23)

The year is 1939. Jewish businesses are looted, Stars of David are scrawled on the doors of Jewish homes, pogroms ensue, calls of “death to the Jews” are normalized, Jews are terrified. The year is also 2023.

The world has been watching as the new war in the Middle East unfolds. For many of us, the scenes are all too familiar. Growing up, our parents and grandparents told us the stories; we watched the movies; and we listened to the testimony of survivors. They always told us “never again.” But somewhere along the line, those words lost their meaning, because something like it is happening again right before our eyes.

In pre-World War II Europe, many Jews were stunned by the rapid transformation of society. The horrifying stories of concentration camps and mass exterminations seemed too terrible to believe. Back then, information traveled much slower; there were no smart phones and social media. Denial was easier. But today, in the age of instant news and on-demand documentation, it is unfathomable how the atrocities of Oct. 7, when shown, can be denied. Yet people are denying them.

The blatant disregard, denial and even justification of over 1,400 murders, rapes, beheadings and kidnappings of Jews are not just oversights. They are an erasure; an attempt to rewrite history and reality.

The rise of the Nazi Party was not an overnight occurrence. It was the culmination of systemic antisemitism interlaced with vicious propaganda. Fast-forward to today, and we see how the world reacts when Jews are targeted and terrorized. Like the Nazis did their own people, Hamas has successfully convinced so-called “progressives” that Hamas is the victim and its atrocious acts were justified.

It’s shocking just how swiftly the narrative has been altered. If you were to describe the devastation that occurred at one of the kibbutzim on Oct. 7 without revealing its location or the identity of the perpetrator, many would be appalled and disgusted. They would demand justice. But as soon as the tragedy is framed within the context of the Israel-Hamas conflict, the reaction is flipped. Terrorists become “freedom fighters.” Murder, rape and kidnapping are relabeled “resistance.” This bias is self-evidently racist, rooted in the darkest heart of antisemitism.

With its conspiracy of silence, selective outrage and blatant hypocrisy, this bias is particularly pronounced on college campuses—including Harvard, Columbia, Cornell, UPenn, UC Berkeley, Tulane and many more—which have become breeding grounds of antisemitism. While free speech and protest are fundamental rights, the line must be drawn at incitement and violence. These institutions appear unwilling to draw this line, which only indicts them further.

If we take a closer look at the demonstrations taking place across the country, there is a clear contrast between the pro- and anti-Israel sides.

The latter is aggressive, nasty, racist and often violent. It howls “death to

the Jews” and “globalize the intifada.” It beats up innocent people carrying Israeli flags and threatens Jewish students outside their dorms.

Then there is the other side. This side sings songs of hope and peace. It mourns the loss of life and prays for the kidnapped. It doesn’t call for anyone’s destruction and doesn’t engage in violence.

We must ask how colleges and universities ostensibly devoted to discourse and progress can allow such violence to take place. Do the faculty and administration feel no responsibility to live up to their supposed values, let alone protect their own students?

Throughout this whole nightmare, however, one fact has become increasingly evident: This issue is not about land disputes. It’s about a hatred of Jews and the debased desire to destroy an entire country. It’s a battle of good vs. evil.

To the college students grappling with these issues: Combatting this hatred requires a nuanced approach. Engage in meaningful dialogue, even if it’s uncomfortable. Take time to understand the historical context. Don’t shy away from challenging biased or baseless claims. Remember, there is still a big difference between 1939 and today. The State of Israel exists, we now have an army to protect us and we are not afraid to speak out.

Furthermore, the faculties at these institutions must finally justify the esteem they demand for themselves. Unless they wish to go down in history as cowards and hypocrites, they cannot continue to turn a blind eye to discrimination and hatred on their campuses, even if they attempt to do so in the name of free speech. An academic institution’s role extends beyond education. It also involves nurturing responsible, empathetic human beings. Thus, the enabling of racist violence by those who should know better is not just damaging to students but to society as a whole.

History provides us with invaluable lessons. Ignoring them or, worse, denying them is a dangerous path. The world has witnessed the horrors that can arise from unchecked hate and prejudice. The Israel-Hamas war and the appalling reactions to it are a testament to the fact that this hatred must be eradicated once and for all.

WHY ARE THE OCTOBER 7 ATROCITIES BEING DENIED?

CAROLINE B. GLICK (JNS.org 1-11-23)

On its face, Holocaust denial makes no sense. The physical evidence of the genocide exists. The testimony of survivors and of Nazis and their collaborators exists. And they are all irrefutable.

Beyond that, the Nazis were proud of the fact that they killed 6 million Jews. By denying the Holocaust, contemporary Nazis and Nazi fans seem to be demeaning their heroes. Why would they do that?

The mystery of Holocaust denial is no mere puzzlement from a distant past. Understanding its purpose is essential as we contend with our present predicament. Immediately after word got out about Hamas’s sadistic slaughter of more than 1,400 Israeli men, women and children on Oct. 7, Hamas’s supporters worldwide launched a concerted effort to deny that anything had happened.

Just as neo-Nazis both celebrate the Holocaust and deny it, so do those who rapturously greeted the stories of slaughtered and decapitated Jewish babies and men, and raped and dismembered Jewish women and girls, insist that Hamas didn’t commit any of those crimes.

A notable aspect of the atrocities is that Hamas’s mass murderers didn’t try to hide them. Instead, they broadcast them worldwide as they carried them out. Armed with Go Pro cameras and the cellphones of their victims, the Palestinian terrorists in southern Israel filmed the rape, dismemberment, torture and execution of their victims on their victims’ own phones, posting them in their victims’ family WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages as they carried them out. They did the same with their own social-media platforms. No one needed researchers to comb through Hamas archives. The directions for the slaughter were found in documents that the terrorists carried with them into Israel.

So why are supporters of Hamas tearing down posters of kidnapped Israeli children, women and men being held hostage in the Gaza Strip? They celebrate the hostage-taking on their social-media postings. Why are they insisting to their fellow students on campuses or subway riders in New York and Johannesburg that there are no hostages in Gaza, and this is all a Zionist conspiracy? A gas-lighting?

To understand what is happening and what it represents, we need to look at the most popular and powerful form of Holocaust denial today. As Izabella Tabarovsky meticulously demonstrated in a Tablet magazine article last January, this form of Holocaust denial was coined by the Soviets. It was popularized by a Palestinian terrorist of some repute: Palestinian Authority

chairman and Palestinian Liberation Organization chief Mahmoud Abbas.

In 1982, Abbas wrote a doctoral dissertation at the KGB’s Institute of Oriental Studies, which he later turned into a bestselling book. His thesis, titled “The Relationship Between Zionists and Nazis, 1933-1945,” is the basis for Holocaust education in Palestinian schools.

Abbas claimed that the Zionists were Nazis. He insisted that just as the Nazis defined themselves as Aryan racial supremacists, the Zionists defined themselves as Jewish racial supremacists. Abbas claimed that the Holocaust was a collaborative effort between the Nazis and the Zionist leadership in the land of Israel. David Ben-Gurion, he wrote, had agents in Europe who collaborated with the Nazis. Their goal, Abbas said, was to support the genocide of European Jewry in order to win international sympathy for the Zionist effort to establish a Jewish supremacist state in the land of Israel, aka “Palestine.”

As Tabarovsky explained, the allure of Abbas’s claims for Palestinian Jew-haters and Soviets alike is clear. First, it enables them to avoid accounting for the role they played in the murder of 6 million Jews. It was the Palestinian Arab leader Haj Amin al-Husseini—not Ben-Gurion or any other Jew, Zionist or not—who collaborated with Hitler to annihilate the Jews in Europe and throughout the world. And it was the Soviet Union,—not the Zionist leadership—that signed a non-aggression pact with the Nazis. By insisting that it was the Jews who collaborated with their own destruction, both the Soviets and the Palestinians were able to project their own culpability onto their enemy: the Jews. They were also able to deny the Jews moral legitimacy as victims.

After all, if the Jews did it to themselves, then no one else had anything to own up to. And more importantly, the Jews’ alleged venality meant that the Nazis were right. The Jews are evil and deserve to be wiped off the map.

Sifting through the ashes

The same malevolent, genocide-supportive rationale guides Hamas’s supporters worldwide today.

Over the past several days, more and more information has come out about how the victims of Hamas’s atrocities were murdered and tortured with a sadism that was inconceivable until Oct. 7. And as that information is disseminated, Hamas supporters’ efforts to demonize those disseminating the information have expanded exponentially.

Consider just one example. Over the weekend, Eli Beer, the head of United Hatzalah rescue organization, told an American Jewish audience the story of a baby from Kfar Aza. The baby, he said, was placed in an oven and burned alive. It was later reported that the baby’s father was shot and left to bleed to death as his wife was gang-raped and executed, and his baby burned alive.

I posted the story on my X-platform (formerly Twitter) account. Within hours, the post went viral. By Wednesday morning, it had been viewed by more than 2.5 million people. Thousands had reposted, and thousands more had responded.

By Monday afternoon, I realized that most of the reposts and comments were supportive of Hamas. Many made jokes about the atrocity. But most of the posts were sheer denials that the crime even took place. Posters demonized me as a “Zionist Nazi” who propagates lies. Some pro-Hamas posters created memes declaring me a liar.

Once I understood what was happening, I asked multiple people for confirmations, which I received directly and indirectly from the Israel Defense Forces, the Israeli government, the American government, ZAKA (the body retrieval society, and in this case, body parts) and other sources. I also learned that the case that Beer revealed was not a lone event. Several bodies of babies were found with grill marks, indicating they had been burned alive in ovens.

Professor Chen Kugel, head of the Israel National Institute of Forensic Medicine, oversees the process of identifying the bodies of the victims. In media appearances since Oct. 7, Kugel has repeatedly described the corpses of victims who were burned alive. They can be distinguished from victims whose bodies were burned after they were executed by the presence of soot in their lungs. The soot indicates that they were breathing while they were burning.

The process of identifying the victims is protracted because Hamas directed its murderers to burn the bodies of their victims. Kugel and others have described the remains of many of the bodies as what can be seen from a crematorium. Avigail Gimpel, a volunteer at the Jewish burial society Chevra Kadisha who prepared dozens of victims’ bodies for burial, shared that several of the bodies she and her colleagues received were balls of charcoal.

Archaeologists from the Israel Antiquities Authority have been brought in to sift through the ashes of burned-out homes to separate the human remains from burned furniture and walls.

Despite the mounting forensic and testimonial evidence, the denials continue and expand. When seen in the context of Palestinian Holocaust denial, they can be understood to serve three related goals.

First, the denials enable people who are accustomed to supporting the Palestinians, but who like to be seen as truthful, to feel comfortable casting doubt on the truth. For example, Eric Levitz, a progressive writer for New York magazine published the following on X on Oct. 22:

“Last night I asserted that this report [related to the slaughter of October 7] indicated that babies were beheaded. This was an overstatement. I should have said that the report established that babies were found headless, a fact that lends plausibility to claims of beheading, but which does not prove them.”

This week, the Yale Daily News published a similarly depraved correction of an opinion column that related to the fact that Hamas terrorists beheaded and raped their victims. The Yale student paper insisted the allegations had not been substantiated.

The second purpose of Hamas supporters’ denial is to criminalize Israel. If Hamas isn’t guilty, then obviously Israel is. Abbas accused the Jews of responsibility for the Holocaust in order to reject the moral legitimacy of the State of Israel. He did it as well to avoid contending with Palestinian culpability for the genocide despite Hussein’s role in blocking Jewish emigration to pre-state Israel and his direct role in carrying out the Holocaust. Just so, Hamas supporters are now accusing Israel of killing its own people or fabricating their victimization at the hands of the terrorist organization in order to build a case that Israel is the villain of this story. This enables Jew-haters worldwide to feel comfortable expressing their own loathing of the Jews. If the Jews are the villains, then it is moral to hate them. It is moral to stand with Hamas. And it is immoral to support the Jews and the State of Israel.

Finally, once truth is cast into doubt and Israel is castigated as the villain, the denials of Hamas’s crimes facilitate the continuation and expansion of those crimes. Hamas’s declared goal, like Abbas’s Fatah Party, is the elimination of the Jewish state. That is, its goal is to enact another Holocaust. With Israel castigated as a liar and the villain, the next step is to wipe it out.

To Jews and their supporters, Hamas apologists now terrorizing Jews on college campuses and in cities throughout the United States and Europe, and running rampant on social-media platforms seem crazy. How can they deny the undeniable fact of Hamas culpability?

But Hamas’s boosters are not delusional. They know exactly what they are doing.

They are waging a psychological war against Western governments and publics. Their purpose is to gaslight hundreds of millions of people, to cause them to question their own grip on reality and intimidate them into silence. At the same time, they seek to embolden their allies and fellow travelers to stand openly with Hamas by showing they have nothing to lose from doing so.

If they are successful, their efforts will produce an international climate conducive to the achievement of their common goal of eradicating the Jewish people and the Jewish state. If they are partially successful, Israel’s war effort will be undermined, and assaults on Jews worldwide will increase.

ANY EXCUSE TO ATTACK ISRAEL

NGO MONITOR (NGOMonitor.org 1-11-23)

Amnesty International is among the most active NGOs that systematically promote demonization of Israel, BDS, and antisemitism – under the facade of universal human rights. In recent years, this bias and discrimination has been reflected in its “apartheid” campaign, extensive efforts to exclude antisemitism as a human rights concern, and undermining the implementation of the International Holocaust Remembrance Association (IHRA) definition to combat hatred of Jews.

In the wake of the barbaric Hamas massacre of 1,500 Israelis and the kidnapping of more than 200, Amnesty has exploited these events to amplify demonization and delegitimization of the Jewish state. As with previous rounds of conflict with Palestinian terror groups, Amnesty has disproportionately focused on allegations of Israeli wrongdoing, as opposed to an intensive campaign regarding the murder, torture, rape, hostage-taking, and dismembering corpses that represent one of the most egregious human rights atrocities in the past 30 years.

IN MULTIPLE STATEMENTS, Amnesty emphasizes “the root causes” of the conflict, in particular “Israel’s system of apartheid imposed on all Palestinians.” Amnesty does not identify “root causes” on the part of any other actor, including Palestinians and terror groups. Amnesty’s publications and statements by its officials as part of its ongoing apartheid campaign make it clear that the NGO sees Israel’s existence as a Jewish state as the “root cause” and believes that it should not exist as such. (For details, see NGO Monitor’s reports “False Knowledge as Power: Deconstructing Definitions of Apartheid that Delegitimise the Jewish State,” “Neo-Orientalism: Deconstructing claims of apartheid in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict,” and “Amnesty International’s Cruel Assault on Israel: Systematic Lies, Errors, Omissions & Double Standards in Amnesty’s Apartheid Report.”)

In a statement issued on October 7 (Israel/OPT: Civilians on both sides paying the price of unprecedented escalation in hostilities between Israel and Gaza as death toll mounts), as the Hamas massacre of Israelis was taking place, Amnesty asserts that “The root causes of these repeated cycles of violence must be addressed as a matter of urgency.” It specifies the objective of “ending Israel’s 16-year-long illegal blockade on Gaza, and all other aspects of Israel’s system of apartheid imposed on all Palestinians.”

Similarly, in an October 26 statement demanding an “immediate ceasefire” (Israel/OPT: Urgent call for an immediate ceasefire by all parties to end unprecedented civilian suffering), “Amnesty International also reiterates its calls for... The root causes of the conflict to be addressed, including through dismantling Israel’s system of apartheid against all Palestinians.”

In another instance (Damning evidence of war crimes as Israeli attacks wipe out entire families in Gaza, October 20), Amnesty recommends that the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court “Urgently expedite its ongoing investigation in the situation of Palestine, examining alleged crimes by all parties,” adding that this should include “the crime against humanity of apartheid against Palestinians.”

Perhaps the most absurd example appears in a statement ostensibly dealing with violations by Hamas (Israel: Palestinian armed groups must be held accountable for deliberate civilian killings, abductions and indiscriminate attacks, October 12). Amnesty pivots away from Hamas to the “wider context of the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories,” stating, “Civilians will continue to pay a heavy price until Israel dismantles its system of apartheid against Palestinians, including ending its illegal blockade on Gaza.” It also alleges, “Israeli forces have committed in Gaza (as well as in the West Bank and Israel) acts prohibited by the Statute of the International Criminal Court and the Apartheid Convention, as part of a widespread and systemic attack against the civilian population with the aim of maintaining a system of oppression and domination over Palestinians, thereby constituting the crime against humanity of apartheid.”

THIS LAST EXAMPLE illustrates Amnesty’s deep-seated animosity towards Israel: the NGO appears unwilling to issue a single statement that focuses solely on Palestinian crimes and does not also target Israel. In the statement about Hamas, Amnesty Secretary General Agnes Callamard refers to “Israel’s well-documented record of war crimes,” “Israeli forces’ retaliatory attacks pummel Gaza,” a “civilian bloodbath in Gaza,” and “collective punishment.” Amnesty also condemns Israel’s “16-year-long illegal blockade on Gaza” and “unlawful attacks.”

A particularly gratuitous and one-sided insinuation, which appears in two statements, relates to “inciting violence and tensions.” Amnesty writes, “The Israeli government must refrain from inciting violence and tensions in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, especially around religious sites.” There is no parallel call directed toward Palestinian leaders, even though antisemitism and anti-Israel incitement is endemic in Palestinian society.

Another egregious swipe at Israel occurs in “Israel/OPT: Urgent call for an immediate ceasefire by all parties to end unprecedented civilian suffering” (October 26). Seemingly unable to simply demand that “Hamas and all other armed groups [] release unconditionally and immediately all civilian hostages,” Amnesty also immorally equates the kidnapping of innocent civilians, including babies and the elderly, being held incommunicado by Hamas in Gaza, with Palestinians arrested and convicted for terror offenses, including murder, by adding, “Israel [must] release all Palestinians who are arbitrarily detained.”

Finally, in a statement concerning protests in Europe (Europe: Right to protest must be protected during latest escalations in Israel/OPT, October

20), Amnesty opens by claiming that “The devastating consequences of Israel’s bombing and illegal blockade on Gaza are understandably compelling many people in Europe to protest for the rights of Palestinians.” Amnesty refers laconically to authorities’ concerns about “certain chants” and “signs,” without mentioning that many of the anti-Israel demonstrations in Europe (and around the world) have featured blatant antisemitism, incitement, threats, and calls for the destruction of Israel. Amnesty similarly erasing the alarming rise in antisemitic violence globally following the October 7 massacre.

PREOCCUPATION WITH BDS AND LAWFARE

For decades, Amnesty has pursued an agenda of targeting Israel, Israelis, and companies that do business in Israel with internationally-imposed sanctions and prosecution. Amnesty exploits the 2023 war in Gaza as another opportunity to advance these anti-Israel tactics.

Amnesty repeats its demand for “a comprehensive arms embargo” against Israel. (Bizarrely, the call for an embargo against “Palestinian armed groups” is not addressed to Iran and like-minded terror-supporters, but rather as: “The international community and particularly Israel’s allies...should also call on states supplying Palestinian armed groups to refrain from doing so.”)

As mentioned above, Amnesty also seeks the intervention of the International Criminal Court.

The centrality of Amnesty’s lawfare efforts is highlighted in its response to “reports of a total communications blackout in the occupied Gaza Strip” (Israel/OPT: Civilians in Gaza at unprecedented risk as Israel imposes communication black-out during bombardment and expanding ground attacks, October 27). According to an Amnesty official, the loss of internet and telephone in Gaza is a problem because “human rights organizations have found it increasingly challenging to document violations due to the intensity of Israel’s attacks and restrictions on communications. This communications blackout means that it will be even more difficult to obtain critical information and evidence about human rights violations and war crimes being committed against Palestinian civilians in Gaza.”

DISPROPORTIONATE SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY

Amnesty’s social media follows the same discriminatory patterns as their publications. From October 7 to October 30, Amnesty International’s main account tweeted 23 times about the war: 13 tweets exclusively focused on Gazan suffering and allegations of Israeli violations, and 5 tweets called for a ceasefire. Only 2 tweets mentioned Israeli hostages, as part of a broader thread. Similarly, the Amnesty MENA Twitter/X account tweeted 15 times about the war: 10 tweets focused exclusively on Gazan suffering, allegations of Israeli wrongdoing, and pro-Palestinian protests; only one tweet mentioned Israeli hostages, as part of a broader thread, but did not demand their release. Neither account posted a single tweet or thread exclusively focusing on Israeli victims of Hamas’ atrocities or unqualifiedly condemning the massacre.

Agnes Callamard, Secretary General of Amnesty, tweeted 29 times about the war during that time period: 19 tweets focused exclusively on Gazan suffering, allegations of Israeli wrongdoing, and pro-Palestinian protests; 6 tweets called for a ceasefire; only one tweet mentioned Israeli hostages, as part of a broader thread, but did not demand their release.

Amnesty International-UK Campaigns Manager Kristyan Benedict, who has a long history of rank antisemitism, has been prolific on social media, tweeting 170 times about the war since October 7: 157 tweets focused exclusively on Gazan suffering and allegations of Israeli violations; criticism of Israel, the US, the UK, the EU, Germany and France; and pro-Palestinian protests. Seven tweets called for a ceasefire. Only 2 tweets mentioned Israeli hostages, although neither demanded their release. Out of 170 tweets, only a single tweet called Hamas out for committing war crimes.

WE’RE NOT ALL COMPLICIT—BUT OBAMA SURE IS

ABE GREENWALD (Commentary.org 5-11-23)

Barack Obama hasn’t commented on many serious matters since he left the White House. So when he interrupts his showbiz and cocktail duties to speak up, it’s a sign that he actually cares about something going on in the world. He didn’t have much newsworthy to say about the pandemic, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the crisis at our Southern border, or the state of our economy. But he’s now got a message that he needs to get out. Obama is concerned that we don’t forget about supposed Israeli cruelty to Palestinians just because Hamas massacred nearly 1,500 innocents in Israel. In a recent appearance on the Pod Save America podcast, Obama said that in order to resolve the conflict, “it will require an admission of complexity.”

We must face, he says, “what may seem contradictory ideas.” Namely, “what Hamas did was horrific, and there is no justification for it. And what is also true is that the occupation, and what’s happening to Palestinians, is unbearable.”

Ignorance as “complexity.” Vintage Obama. Ideological banality delivered as omniscient revelation of the true nuanced path. And the applause came roaring through—once he mentioned the “occupation.” Never mind that Israel doesn’t occupy Gaza and pulled out in 2005.

Obama speaks in stentorian generalities because details expose truth. And in this case, the truth is simple: It’s Hamas’s fault. All of it, the terrorism, the Palestinian trauma, the current war, and the deaths to come.

There’s nothing contradictory about the slaughter of Jews and the suffering of Palestinians. Hamas is responsible for both, keeping their own people in generational misery to justify an exterminationist war on Jews. Palestinian oppression hasn’t been “unbearable” to decades of Palestinian leaders (including Hamas); it’s the goal they’ve fought for every time Israel has tried to give Palestinians their own state.

Why? Because they’d rather kill Jews than be free. How’s that for nuance?

Hamas hungers for innocent deaths in Gaza. Each instance gets customarily multiplied by the “Gaza Ministry of Health,” travels at light speed to major news outlets, and is wielded by Hamas’s most effective foot soldiers—the Western activists who fight the only war that Hamas can actually win: the war of information. So Hamas prohibits the safe passage of civilians, bases its operations in hospitals and schools, and waits impatiently for the bloodshed.

Meanwhile Israel absorbs operational setbacks and the loss of Jewish life just to minimize civilian deaths. At last count, 24 Israeli soldiers have been killed in current ground operations. If this were the “genocide” of activist fantasy, Israel would wipe out the Gaza Strip by air in the course a weekend with no casualties on its own side.

But Obama doesn’t do details. He’s fancies himself a big idea kinda guy. And his big idea is that we’re all to blame. “You have to admit that nobody’s hands are clean,” he said, “that all of us are complicit to some degree.” Then he wondered aloud, “What could I have done during my presidency to move this forward? As hard as I’ve tried—I’ve got the scars to prove it. But there’s a part of me that’s still saying, well, was there something else I could have done?”

Self-congratulation as self-doubt is also vintage Obama.

It’s big of him to shoulder the blame along with the rest of us. And in repayment for his generosity, I offer a few words to help him out in his soul searching on this issue: President Obama, perhaps you shouldn’t have chosen as the crowning goal of your foreign policy the enrichment and legitimization of Iran, Hamas’s chief benefactor. As big ideas go, that one might have been a little premature. Similarly, you might have eased up at one point on your eight-year-long, historically unprecedented effort to weaken the vital bonds between the U.S. and its democratic ally Israel. “When there is no daylight [between the U.S. and Israel],” you said, “Israel just sits on the sidelines, and that erodes our credibility with the Arab states.” Maybe that big idea, too, was a little rash. It might have been unwise, for example, to break American precedent and abstain from an anti-Semitic vote at the UN condemning Israeli settlements. And during the last hours of your presidency, you may have been remiss in quietly releasing \$221 million in aid to the Palestinians. And you didn’t really need to...sorry—details.

DON’T FALL FOR THE ISLAMOPHOBIA SCAM!

JONATHAN S. TOBIN (JNS.org 2-11-23)

What’s the federal government doing in response to a massive surge in antisemitism on American streets and college campuses since the Oct. 7 atrocities on Israel by Hamas terrorists? It’s getting serious about stopping Islamophobia.

The announcement that President Joe Biden has assigned Vice President Kamala Harris to work on developing “the first-ever U.S. national strategy to counter Islamophobia” can be dismissed as nothing more than a political gesture. It’s clearly intended to counter the bitter criticism he has received from his party’s left-wing intersectional base that is deeply upset about the president’s support for Israel.

As The New York Times has reported, the Democratic Party is splintering over the administration’s stand in support of Israel’s efforts to eliminate the Hamas terrorists running the Gaza Strip. Not even his efforts to delay the Israeli offensive or his insistence that it allow humanitarian aid to enter the terrorist-run enclave that effectively resupplies Hamas has been enough to

dampen the criticism that is placing his re-election campaign in jeopardy. While his pro-Israel stand has shored up his support with centrist Democrats and independents, his party's intersectional wing is, unlike most Americans, hostile to Israel. The only way for him to conciliate them is to double down on the administration's embrace of the ideology of racial and ethnic grievance that is the driving force of liberal Democrat activism in the 21st century.

THE MYTH OF AN ANTI-MUSLIM BACKLASH

The nation has been shocked by the brazen Jew-hatred on display in the pro-Hamas demonstrations in many cities, in academia and in the widespread increase in anti-Jewish incidents. But even as the administration acknowledges this dismal reality, it is also buttressing a false narrative about hatred for Muslims.

Prejudice against any group is deplorable, and where there are incidents of bias against Muslims or Arabs, they should be vigorously condemned. Yet as FBI statistics for the past two decades have shown, there is little or no empirical evidence to back up the claims that Muslims faced a backlash of prejudice after the 9/11 attacks.

Throughout this period, it has been the Jews, who constitute a small fraction of the population, who have been the targets for the vast majority of religious hate crimes. That continues to this day with a real backlash. Paradoxically, the worst mass slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust—the barbarous Oct. 7 attacks that resulted in the deaths of 1,400 men, women and children, the wounding of thousands and the kidnapping of as many as 230 civilians—has created a surge of sympathy for Hamas and their jihad to eliminate the one Jewish state on the planet and to slaughter its Jewish population.

The evidence of burgeoning Jew-hatred on American streets and college campuses comes in many forms. It's not just demonstrations and speeches where mobs chant their support for the destruction of Israel and their contempt for Jewish victims. It also means acts of intimidation and violence against individuals or those who publicly express their opposition to Palestinian terrorism.

The most ubiquitous evidence of this hostility to Jews has been the frequent incidents in which people are tearing down posters showing the images of Israelis who are being held as hostages in Gaza. As another Times article made clear, those who commit these acts of vandalism believe that it is wrong to highlight Jewish victims since it distracts from their efforts to flip the discussion about the war Hamas launched into one about Palestinian suffering. According to the Times, the posters are viewed as “anti-Islamic war propaganda.”

The fact that so many people are carrying out this anti-social act—who, after all, would think of tearing down a poster for a missing cat or dog, let alone one about a child abducted by terrorists—speaks to something truly insidious in our culture. While there have been no reports of police tearing down the posters—as they have done in British cities such as London and Manchester, presumably to soothe the hurt feelings of Muslims who are offended by them—the contempt that these Muslim and leftist vandals feel for Jewish victims is raw, unadulterated antisemitism.

But as counter-intuitive to the facts as it may be, it actually makes a great deal of sense that an administration that has embraced the intersectional worldview of critical race theory, like Biden's has, would attempt to flip the script from this blatant antisemitism to one about alleged Islamophobia.

To those who have embraced the woke catechism of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), the only legitimate forms of diversity or inclusion involve those races or groups designated as victims. From that point of view, it doesn't matter that incidents of Jew-hatred overwhelmingly outnumber those few reported incidents of anti-Muslim prejudice. Since Jews and Israel are falsely labeled as possessors of “white privilege” and oppressors—and Arabs and Muslims are “people of color” and victims—only the latter really count.

The administration's willingness to impose DEI policies that reject equality in favor of racialized quotas rendered their much-ballyhooed plan to combat antisemitism meaningless. And that betrayal is only underlined by the pivot to Islamophobia in the midst of the greatest crisis to face American Jewry in living memory.

If young people on college campuses, as well as thugs on the streets of all backgrounds, are tearing down posters of Jewish victims, it is because they have been indoctrinated to believe that Jews have no right to live in freedom in their own land or to defend themselves. In the upside-down world of intersectionality, it is the terrorists and their supporters who

deserve sympathy—not those they attack or the forces seeking to stop the murderers from striking again.

That's the reason why the administration believes that it must play the Islamophobia card.

The one story that backs up this decision is the murder of a 6-year-old Palestinian-American child by his family's landlord, reportedly because of anti-Muslim prejudice. This murder was shocking and tragic. But that incident—likely motivated, like so many mass shootings including those at synagogues, by mental illness as much as bias—does not demonstrate a national problem. More to the point, those crying out about Islamophobia are, in almost every case, the same people and groups who are guilty of promoting antisemitism.

AN UNRELIABLE SOURCE

The Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) is the source most often cited for the claim that there is a surge in Islamophobia. To say that it is not to be trusted on the subject is an understatement. Founded in the 1990s as a fundraising group for Hamas in the United States, it has since rebranded itself as a so-called civil-rights organization. But it has been consistently guilty of promoting Jew-hatred and has sought to silence groups that called attention to their incitement by falsely labeling them as Islamophobes. That continues to this day when it reacted to the Oct. 7 atrocities by refusing to condemn Hamas and, instead, blaming Israel for the attacks.

Once one strips away the veneer of concern for a religious minority, CAIR demonstrates that most of what is called Islamophobia involves those calling out groups like its own and others that champion efforts to destroy Israel or to target Jews and Israelis via illegal BDS discrimination campaigns, for their open antisemitism.

As we have seen in the last month, Muslims and Arabs are not the ones being attacked by Jews or, for the most part, by anyone else. Instead, they are the ones who are targeting Jews—and as the videos of the pro-Hamas demonstrations and the poster incidents show, they think they are right, even proud, to display their Jew-hatred.

It is no consolation to recognize that Biden's Islamophobia initiative will be no more serious than his administration's efforts to combat antisemitism, or that he has assigned the least respected and most ineffective member of his team in Harris to lead it.

Nevertheless, putting the government's imprimatur on what is nothing more than an effort to create a false moral equivalency between a surge in antisemitism and the belief of those fueling that hate that they are the real victims is deeply troubling. Criticism of the antisemitism spewing forth from the Muslim and Arab sources—and those who back up their hatred—is not a form of prejudice. The Islamophobia scam means legitimizing those supporting the eradication of the one Jewish state on the planet and the murder of its Jewish population. Rather than helping to curb prejudice, the Biden administration is encouraging it.



THE PAINFUL, PAINSTAKING WORK OF ISRAEL'S BURIAL SOCIETIES

MENACHEM POSNER (Chabad.org 29-10-23)

Menachem Levy says he is “used to death.” A member of Tel Aviv's chevra kadisha (“sacred society”), he is among a relatively small number of experts in Israel responsible for preparing tens of thousands of bodies each year for Jewish burial. Yet, he says, nothing he has ever seen prepared him for the

jarring scenes he encountered in Israel's south, where he joined with volunteers, led by ZAKA, in collecting the bodies and body parts of victims of Hamas brutality for burial.

"There are no words to describe what I've seen," he tells Chabad.org. "These are things I have never seen before and hope never to see again."

Levy says that the extreme way in which the people had died means that there are times when it becomes extremely challenging to positively identify the victims. In some instances, there is no DNA, no teeth to match with dental records and precious few other ways of determining who the bodies were.

Identifying the dead is extremely important for several reasons. In addition to giving the families left behind closure, it also allows a spouse to remarry. In the event that a woman's husband cannot be definitively determined to be dead, she can become an agunah, a "living widow" who cannot remarry because her husband may be alive, but also cannot divorce because her husband cannot be found. This has been a tragic theme in Jewish history when people are taken into captivity during wartime, as with the hostages in Gaza.

COPING WITH AN UNPRECEDENTED NUMBERS OF VICTIMS

Much of the work of identifying the remains takes place at the Shura Army Base near Ramle. The base houses a large new processing center designed to care for the bodies of victims of terror attacks and natural disasters. The center is large, but never could the planners have foreseen a national disaster of this scope.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Noiman was among the soldiers tasked with unloading the trucks and assisting the doctors who harvested DNA samples, often by clipping a fingernail when possible.

"Truck after truck of bodies. Floor to ceiling, bodies. Each one a human, a loved one, a life," says Noiman, who normally serves as a Chabad emissary to Maccabim-Re'ut. "The most jarring thing was the sheer number. I felt like I was reliving a scene from the Holocaust—piles of dead Jews everywhere." Noiman says that many of the bodies he processed bore witness to the violent way in which the murders had happened: There were gunshot wounds, burns, dismemberments, stabbings and more.

Inevitably, there were also bodies of terrorists mixed in, which were placed in another area to be dealt with separately.

As soon as a body is identified, members of the military are tasked with the excruciating duty of knocking on doors to notify their loved ones and then transferring the bodies to the chevra kadisha for burial.

A new section of the Yarkonim municipal cemetery in Petach Tikvah for Jewish victims of Hamas terror. - Photo by Gili Yaari /Flash90

A new section of the Yarkonim municipal cemetery in Petach Tikvah for Jewish victims of Hamas terror.

A UNIQUE PROCESS FOR 'KEDOSHIM'

Levy says that the chevra kadisha procedure for terror victims is unique. Following the age-old tradition regarding those who were killed for being Jewish, known as kedoshim ("holy ones"), the body is not washed and clothed in white linen as usual.

Instead, it is buried "as is"—bloodied and in the torn, soiled clothing in which the person had been killed, bearing witness to the cruelty that had been done.

And in this case, since the remains sometimes consist of just a skeleton or disconnected body parts, they are often placed in simple wooden coffins. This is in contrast with the longstanding tradition of the Holy Land, where the dead are placed directly into the earth.

Levy says that he and members of sister burial societies across Israel have been working nonstop, performing funeral after funeral.

At times, entire families are buried at once, with extended family members unable to leave their homes in the south or having reported to active duty. At other times, the internment in cemeteries in the country's central region is only temporary, as the family hopes to re-inter their relatives in cemeteries closer to their homes, which are currently under evacuation orders.

SEEMINGLY UNENDING BURIAL AND MOURNING

Following the funerals, families commence the seven-day shiva mourning period, when they receive visitors and host prayer services in the merit of the souls of their departed loved ones.

Many families are "sitting" shiva for more than one relative. An example would be Rachel Vaknin, who was informed of the death of her son, Osher, an organizer of the Supernova rave music festival, "billed as a journey of love and peace," near Kibbutz Re'im, just three miles from the Gaza Strip.

Three days into Osher's shiva, word came that the remains of Osher's twin brother, Michael, had been identified.

This meant that Vaknin sat 10 consecutive days of shiva.

"We saw every type of Jew searching for the same address, looking confused in unfamiliar surroundings, focused on a goal," says Nechama Dina Hendel, co-director of Chabad of Baka in Jerusalem, who visited the Vaknin home. "I recognized the look of conviction in each of their faces, which was surely mirrored in mine. We all wanted to be there for a Jew in need; a sister we had never met was in unfathomable pain."

Three weeks into the ordeal of collecting remains, identifying victims and performing heart-breaking funerals has sometimes taken its toll. It has recently been reported on social media that Motti Botzkin, a ZAKA volunteer, suffered a stress-induced heart attack after 16 days on the field and is currently in critical condition in a hospital.

Yet the Jewish spirit remains strong, says Noiman. "We are like Noah after the flood, surrounded by devastation but ready to rebuild, confident in G-d's assurance of a brighter future. May it be now with the coming of Moshiach."

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

CONFLICT: INDIVIDUAL VS. CONGREGATIONAL CUSTOMS

RABBI DONIEL NEUSTADT (Torah.org)

DAVENING WAS INSTITUTED BY OUR FATHERS (Berachos 26b)

Which customs should one follow when davening in a shul where the nusach and customs are different from his own? While many people are faced with this issue only occasionally, others must contend with it on a daily basis. Often, the only available [or the most accessible] shul is one that davens a different nusach from one's own. It is difficult and uncomfortable for a person who is accustomed to daven in a certain way to suddenly daven in a nusach with which he is unfamiliar. In addition, it is a general rule that one should not deviate from the customs handed down to him by his parents and grandparents. But the halachah may require one to daven according to the nusach of the congregation where he finds himself regardless of personal considerations. Let us, therefore, examine the sources before resolving these conflicting demands.

A terse command in Parashas Re'eh(1), Lo sisgodedu, is interpreted by the Sages as Lo sa'asu agudos agudos, do not splinter off into separate groups that perform mitzvos and serve Hashem in different, somewhat conflicting ways. The Talmud discusses the nature of this prohibition. Abaye maintains that Lo sisgodedu applies when two different batei dinim in one city issue conflicting rulings. This makes the one Torah that was received at Sinai appear as if it were "two Torahs"(2) and causes confusion and discord³. Rava, however, does not object to different batei dinim – even in the same city – issuing contradictory rulings, since it is within the very nature of the Torah that different rulings will be rendered by different schools of thought, as Beis Shamai and Beis Hillel did for many years. In Rava's opinion, the prohibition of Lo sisgodedu is meant to discourage one beis din from rendering a split decision. For the reasons stated above, the Torah did not want different factions of one beis din to issue conflicting opinions, giving people a choice of which ruling to follow.

We find in halachic literature that Lo sisgodedu applies even to deviations from mere custom, not only from prohibitions and rulings of a beis din. Rama(4), for instance, rules that during the Sefirah mourning period observed between Pesach and Shevuous, all members of a community should follow the same custom and observe the mourning restrictions during the same time period. Chayei Adam(5) rules that that in a minyan reciting Tachanun, the practice of nefilas apayim should be done in a uniform manner, all using either the right or the left arm. This application of Lo sisgodedu is hotly debated by the poskim. Many are of the opinion that it does not apply in these situations at all. They base their reasoning on some of the following arguments: Lo sisgodedu applies only when a scholar instructs his followers to deviate from local custom(6); it applies only to prohibitions, not to mere customs(7); minor differences, such as different nuschaos, are not significant enough to invoke Lo sisgodedu(8); it concerns only different actions, not different words(9). But other poskim take a more stringent approach; in their view any deviation from the accepted custom, as minor as it may seem, may constitute Lo sisgodedu(10). While the Mishnah Berurah does not discuss the particular question of nuschaos, his

rulings on related issues⁽¹¹⁾ point to a stringent view on this subject. In pre-war Europe, Lo sigodedu was much more of an issue than it is today. Most communities, especially in the small towns and villages, had only one Rav and one local custom, and individuals who practiced their own customs while disregarding local practice may have possibly transgressed Lo sigodedu. But nowadays when there are many shuls and Rabbis in every city each following ancestral tradition, the situation is similar to the case of two batei dinim in one city where Lo sigodedu does not apply⁽¹²⁾ [according to Rava's opinion⁽¹³⁾]. Still, it is possible that within the confines of a single congregation, e.g., when an individual davens in a nusach which is different from that of the congregation's, Lo sigodedu may still apply. But even in situations where the Biblical prohibition of Lo sigodedu does not apply, we still find⁽¹⁴⁾ an additional exhortation – this one established by Rabbinical edict – which calls for uniformity within the same congregation: Le'olam al yeshaneh adam mi-pnei ha-machlokes – One should never deviate [from local custom] because it leads to discord. As the Vilna Gaon warned⁽¹⁵⁾: “Differences in customs lead to differences of the hearts.” Practicing different customs, even minor ones, could lead to strife and discord. Harav M. Feinstein was asked numerous times for his opinion on this matter. For reasons which are not completely clear, he did not always give the same response. Basically, though, he was unsure if the Biblical prohibition of Lo sigodedu applied to the question of different nuschaos – but the Rabbinical edict against deviating from local custom was definitely relevant. Usually, he advised that the local custom be strictly upheld, unless the individual could keep his practiced undetected by others in the shul. The following is a digest of the guidelines that Harav Feinstein offered on this subject and its specific applications [see footnotes for the opinions of some other poskim]:

Any part of davening, e.g., Shemoneh Esrei, which is normally recited in an undertone may be recited in one's own nusach⁽¹⁶⁾.

Preferably, Pesukei d'Zimrah and Birchos Kerias Shema should be recited according to the nusach of the minyan, since they are sometimes recited out loud. If, however, it is difficult for one to change from his own nusach, they may be recited in one's own nusach provided that they are said in an undertone⁽¹⁷⁾.

Kedushah or any other part of davening which requires a minyan should be recited according to the nusach of the minyan, even if it is recited in an undertone⁽¹⁸⁾.

Viduy and the Thirteen Midos should be recited with the congregation before Tachanun, even if one's own custom is not to do so⁽¹⁹⁾.

One may recite Viduy in an undertone in a shul that does not recite Viduy, but one may not strike his chest as he usually does. The Thirteen Midos cannot be recited, since a minyan is required to recite them⁽²⁰⁾.

A sheliach tzibbur must always daven according to the nusach of the tzibbur, even while reciting his own silent Shemoneh Esrei⁽²¹⁾.

On Pesach night, one should recite Hallel with the tzibbur even if his custom is not to do so; he may not leave shul to avoid reciting Hallel. If he can avoid reciting the blessing without it being noticeable he should do so; otherwise he should recite the blessing as well⁽²²⁾.

One who follows the view of the poskim that yire'u eineinu is not recited at the nightly Ma'ariv, need not recite it with the congregation if the people around him will not notice his omission⁽²³⁾.

If the officers and members of a shul do not mind, there is no halachic objection to having men who put on tefillin on Chol ha-Moed and men who do not, daven in the same shul⁽²⁴⁾.

FOOTNOTES

1 Devarim 14:1.

2 Rashi, Sukah 44a; Yevamos 13b.

3 Rambam, Avodah Zarah, 12:14.

4 O.C. 493:2. See Magen Avraham 6 and Pri Megadim for an elaboration.

5 32:33, quoted by Mishnah Berurah 131:6.

6 Keren Orah, Yavamos 13b [see also Tosfos Rid, ibid.]; Da'as Torah O.C. 493:3.

7 See Meishiv Davar 17.

8 See Eishel Avraham O.C. 51; Teshuvos u'Vacharta b'Chayim O.C. 24; Kaf ha-Chayim 661:2 (concerning different customs in a sukkah). See also Aruch ha-Shulchan 651:22 (concerning different customs of shaking the lulav).

9 Salmas Chayim 22-23.

10 Pe'as ha-Shulchan 3:14. See also Chayei Adam 32:33 mentioned above.

11 See 31:8; 131:6; 493:16; 624:16; 661:2.

12 See Sha'arei Teshuvah 693:1; Beir Halachah 468:4; Igros Moshe O.C. 1:159; E.H. 1:59; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Yom Tov Sheini K'hilchaso, pg. 179).

13 Generally, the halachah is like Rava when he disagrees with Abbaye. The ruling of the Rambam concerning this issue, however, is unclear and subject to much debate by the later commentators.

14 Pesachim 51b, and quoted in O.C. 468:4. See Avnei Nezer O.C. 424:7

15 Ma'asei Rav, She'iltos, 90.

16 Igros Moshe O.C. 2:23. This is also the opinion of most poskim with the exception of the Pe'as ha-Shulchan who rules that one should always daven according to the nusach of the tzibbur. Harav S.Z. Auerbach writes that it is not our practice to do so (Yom Tov Sheini K'hilchaso, pg. 180).

17 Igros Moshe O.C. 2:23. [In other Responsa, however, Harav Feinstein required that Pesukei d'Zimrah and Birchos Kerias Shema be said according to the nusach of the tzibbur; see O.C. 2:104.] Harav S.Y. Elyashiv is quoted (Tefillah K'hilchaso, pg. 92) as permitting these tefillos to be recited according to one's own nusach.

18 Igros Moshe O.C. 2:23. This is also the opinion of other poskim, see Meishiv Davar 17 and Minchas Yitzchak 7:1. [In a later ruling (O.C. 5:35-5), however, Harav Feinstein writes that this not required.]

19 Igros Moshe O.C. 3:89.

20 Igros Moshe O.C. 4:34. 138).

21 Igros Moshe O.C. 2:29. Other poskim disagree; see Shoel u'Meishiv 3 1-247 and Sheorim Metzuyanim B'halachah 26:3. Harav S.Y. Elyashiv is quoted (Yom Tov Sheini K'hilchaso, pg. 131; Avnei Yashfei 1:14) as ruling like this view.

22 Igros Moshe O.C. 2:94. It is reported, however, that the Brisker Rav left the shul when the congregation said Hallel (Hagadas Mo'adim u'Zemanim).

23 Igros Moshe Y.D. 3:96-8. If, however, he generally omits yire'u eineinu only on Motzaei Shabbos, then he must recite it along with the tzibbur; ibid.

24 Igros Moshe O.C. 5:24-5.

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