

מִקְצֵה 5786

Compliments of the Institute of Jewish Studies (founded by Yankel Rosenbaum HY"D) First Published Adar 5761 Vol 25.16

Printing in part sponsored by **NLZ Imports, Weis Printing**

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

miketz 5786

TRIAL BY TRIBULATION

RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR (Ohr.edu)

"It happened at the end of two years [to the day]" (41:1)

I just got back from a speaking trip to Denver. What a beautiful community! The Yeshiva there is like finding a glorious inn in the middle of a desert.

My journey there was somewhat interesting, to put it mildly. We made landfall in the US at Minneapolis. I had two hours and twenty minutes to clear immigration before my onward flight to Denver, and I thought that would be more than enough... The immigration officer happened to be a "rookie." This was clear because he constantly referred to another officer, who stood behind him with his arms folded. I stood in the line for an hour and three quarters and there were still plenty of people in front of me. I wasn't going to make the flight.

I started asking people if I could go ahead of them, and kindly they let me move up, until I met someone who refused. "I have a flight to catch," I said. "I have a business meeting," was his reply. Could it have had something to do with the fact that I was wearing a black hat and had a beard?

I started to feel a small surge of panic in my stomach, and then the other four lines that had been taking only US passports opened up and we started to move. I ran to the scanners and put all my stuff in trays. At the other side, I put everything back and made my way to the gate. I arrived there with exactly three minutes to spare. Hashem saves you in the blink of an eye!

I reached into my pocket to pull out my phone to show the lady my boarding pass. It wasn't there. I was sure I had put it in my inside jacket pocket. Maybe I put it in my coat? Maybe in my carry-on? It was then that I realized it was gone. I searched through everything again, and then rechecked a third time. It wasn't there.

"Sir. I'm sorry. We have to close the flight. Are you going to board?" So, there I was, faced with either missing the flight or permanently losing my phone. I chose to miss the flight. All I had in my pockets were my credit cards and the phone number of Rabbi Ahron Wasserman of Yeshivas Toras Chaim, but with no phone to call him on. As powerful as today's phones are, to that same degree do they leave you powerless when you lose them.

"I must have left it at the scanner," I thought to myself. As I walked out of the international area, a small passenger cart slowed down. I asked the driver, who looked to me like an Arab, if he could give me a ride back to International. "Sure thing," he smiled. "Put your cabin bag on the back of the cart."

And we zoomed off to International. Everyone there was very helpful. We searched through all the trays that had gone through the scanner. Nothing. It looked like someone had taken it.

"Maybe try round the corner at Central?"

I walked over to Central. "I'm sorry sir. Maybe if you come back in a couple of days to the lost and found..."

"A couple of days?! I have to deliver a lecture in Denver tomorrow." I walked back to International, very dejected. And then I realized. "This is a nisayon; I was being sent a test sent from Hashem! Let's see how much I really trust Hashem!"

One of the most difficult things about a test is to recognize that it's a test. It's all too easy to get carried away in the moment by worry and stress. We have to stop. Think. What's going on here? Everything is from Hashem. If my phone has been stolen, then that's exactly what was supposed to happen.

As I rounded the corner, one of the guys working the scanner called to me,

"Sir, is this your phone?" They found it!

And then I realized that I had left my carry-on bag on the back of the cart that had given me a ride back to International, and it was now located on the other side of the airport.

That wasn't such a problem. I got another driver to walkie-talkie his buddy, and the case was back with me in a few minutes.

I caught the next flight for Denver, a little more worn, but with a big, new insight into what a test from Hashem is.

"It happened at the end of two years [to the day]"

Because Yosef placed his trust in Chamberlain instead of Hashem, Yosef's prison sentence was increased by two years. Few things can be as claustrophobic as being incarcerated in jail. It's only human nature to want to get out of prison, to breathe the air of freedom, but each of us, on our own level, must rise to the occasion when we meet the inevitable trials and tribulations of our lives, whether they be as large as being locked up or whether it be the loss of a phone.

Wake Up Calls

RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN (Chabad.org)

Not everyone is lucky enough to get a wake-up call in life. Some people get theirs just in time. Others get it but don't hear it. Still others hear it loud and clear but refuse to take any notice.

Pharaoh got his in this week's Parshah when Yosef interpreted his dreams and advised him to appoint "a wise and discerning man" who would oversee a macro economic plan for the country. Yosef explained to the King of Egypt that because he experienced two dreams and woke up in between it was a sign from heaven to wake up and act immediately as the matter was of the utmost urgency. Pharaoh took the message to heart and the rest is history.

On the health and well-being level, a little cholesterol, climbing blood pressure or recurring bronchitis might be the not-so-subtle signs that it's time for a change of lifestyle. These are the medical wake up calls we receive in life. Do we really have to wait for a heart attack, G-d forbid, to stop smoking, or start eating less and exercising more? That's what wake-up calls are for, to help us get the message before it's too late.

Then there are the spiritual signs. I will never forget a friend who shared with me the story of his own red lights flashing and how a changed spiritual lifestyle literally saved his life. He was a workaholic driving himself to the brink. Had he carried on indefinitely he simply would not have survived. Then he decided to give Shabbat a try. What he had never previously appreciated about Shabbat was that it is a spiritually invigorating day of rest and spiritual serenity. And in discovering Shabbat, he rediscovered his humanity. (He also discovered he could play golf on Sundays instead of Saturdays.)

A short trigger film I once used at a Shabbaton weekend program depicted a series of professionals and artisans at work. As they became engrossed and immersed in their respective roles they each became so identified with their work that they lost their own identities. Monday through Friday, the carpenter's face dissolved into a hammer, the doctor took on the face of a stethoscope and the accountant's head started looking exactly like a calculator. Then on Shabbat they closed their offices and came home to celebrate the day of rest with their families; slowly but surely, their faces were remolded from their professions to their personalities. Total immersion in their work had dehumanized them. They had become machines. Now, thanks to Shabbat, they were human again. That short video left a lasting impression.

It's not easy to change ingrained habits. But Chanukah, which usually falls during this week's Parshah, carries with it a relevant message in this regard. Take one day at a time. One doesn't have to do it all at once. One light at a time is all it takes. On the first night we kindle a single Chanukah light, on the second night we kindle two lights, and on the third night three. We add a little light each day, and before long the menorah is complete and all eight Chanukah lights are burning bright.

It's ok to take one day at a time. It's not ok to go back to sleep after you get a wake up call. Whether it's your medical well being or your spiritual health, the occasional wake up call is a valuable sign from Above that it may be time to adjust our attitudes, lifestyles or priorities. Please G-d, each of us in our own lives will hear the call and act on the alarm bells with alacrity.

A Higher Calling

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY (Torah.org)

This week's parsha follows the miraculous rise of Yosef from the time he is pulled from the pit of an Egyptian jail and transformed to the viceroy of Egypt. The story of this rise is fascinating. And all it took was a Pharaoh and a dream!

Pharaoh wakes up one morning quite disturbed. He just finished dreaming about seven skinny cows that devoured seven succulent ones. He goes back to sleep and a variation of the dream is repeated again featuring a theme of mismatched consumption. In the second dream, seven lean stalks devour seven full-bodied ones. This time Pharaoh cannot go back to bed.

In frenzy, Pharaoh summons his sorcerers, wise men and magicians. Each offers his interpretation. The Torah tells us that, "none of them interpreted the dreams for Pharaoh" (41:8). The words "for Pharaoh" beg explanation. After all, to whom else were they trying to explain the dreams Nebuchadnezer? The Torah should have just said, "none of them were able to interpret the dreams."

Rashi explains that the magic men did in fact interpret the dreams; however, "not for Pharaoh." They may have had very creative interpretations, but none was fitting for Pharaoh. Pharaoh refused to buy into them as he felt that the interpretations were irrelevant. One magician claimed that the dreams symbolized seven daughters. Seven daughters would be born to Pharaoh, and seven would die. Another sorcerer claimed that the dreams represent both Pharaoh's military prowess and failure. Pharaoh would capture seven countries and seven countries would revolt. However, Pharaoh rejected those solutions. Rashi says that they did not even enter his ears. None of those dreams was applicable to Pharaoh. But why? Is there nothing more important to Pharaoh than his own family? Is there nothing more relevant to Pharaoh than his military acumen and victories. Why did Pharaoh reject those interpretations out of hand as irrelevant?

Reb Yaakov Kamenetzky had just received wonderful news that his dear colleague and friend, Reb Moshe Feinstein, had come home from the hospital. Reb Yaakov went to call the venerable sage and personally extend his good wishes. Reb Yaakov, who never had an attendant make calls for him, went to the telephone and dialed. The line was busy. A few minutes later, he tried again. The line was still busy. In fact, Reb Yaakov called repeatedly during the course of the next hour, but Rabbi Feinstein's line was constantly busy. "Perhaps," thought Reb Yaakov, "many people are calling to wish him well." One of his grandchildren who was present during the frustrating scenario asked Reb Yaakov a simple question.

"I don't understand," he asked. "Aren't there times that it is imperative that you speak to Reb Moshe? After all, you sit together on the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah (The Council of Torah Sages). What would happen if there were a matter of national significance that required immediate attention? Shouldn't Reb Moshe get a second telephone line?"

Reb Yaakov smiled. "Of course Reb Moshe has a special private line. And I, in fact, have the telephone number. But that line is to be used solely for matters relating to Klall Yisroel. I now wish to extend my good wishes to Reb Moshe on a personal level. And I can't use his special line for that. So I will dial and wait until his published number becomes available."

The Sifsei Chachomim explains the Rashi. Pharaoh understood that when he dreams, be it about cows or stalks, he dreams not on a personal vein. As ruler of an entire kingdom, his divine inspiration is not intended as a message regarding seven daughters or new military conquests. His dreams ring of messages for his entire nation.

The attitude of a leader is to understand that there are two telephones in his life. Even Pharaoh understood that the ring of a dream must focus on a larger picture the welfare of his people. For when it comes to the message on the Klall phone, a true leader understands that the message does not ring on his personal wall, but rather it rings with a message for the masses.

THE RIGHT LABEL

AVROHOM YAAKOV

Two years after Yosef interprets the Royal Butler's and late Royal Baker's dreams, Pharaoh dreams of fat and thin cows and full and emaciated wheat. He is so disturbed that he reaches out to his advisers who cannot provide a satisfactory explanation.

Hearing this, the Royal Butler suddenly remembers Yosef.

"I must make mention today of my offenses. Once Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and placed me in custody in the house of the prefect, together with the chief baker. We had dreams the same night, he and I, each of us a dream with a meaning of its own. A Hebrew youth was there with us, a servant of the prefect; and when we told him our dreams, he interpreted them for us, telling each of the meaning of his dream. And as he interpreted for us, so it came to pass: I was restored to my post, and the other was impaled." (41:9-13)

The butler describes Yosef as a Hebrew, a youth (even though Yosef was 30 years old at the time) and a servant.

Rashi comments "Cursed be the wicked for the favours they do are never really complete! He mentions him in disparaging language - a lad, unwise and unfitted for a high position, a Hebrew, who does not even know our language, a slave — and it is written in the laws of Egypt that a slave may neither become a ruler nor dress in princely robes."

Maslik L'David explains that if the butler wished to just identify Yosef, merely that he was a slave of the prefect would have sufficed. Adding further derogatory labels showed that the butler was a bad actor in these events.

Chizkuni suggests that "... he (the butler) wanted to protect himself against the accusation why he had not come forward before with the information he revealed now. This is why he explained that Yosef had two strikes against him; 1) youth, 2) status as slave."

SOCIETY PLACES GREAT importance on labels. People are categorised by the colour of their skin, their political leanings, their religion and their gender even if these attributes are of no relevance.

And then there are scenarios where the label is important to a situation and the label is not mentioned.

Case in point. This week we saw a terror attack directed at our community celebrating Channukah. As of this writing, 15 people were killed and dozens remain in hospital with serious injuries. Yet many in the media and politics chose to refer to the victims as people who happened to be in the area, rather than Jews celebrating a religious festival.

The omission of the label is important. It serves to delegitimise any claims that Jews have been targeted and allows authorities to claim that it was the lack of gun control that caused the attack. It is as if the guns had life of their own and the two shooters were just along for the ride.

So let us announce that Jews were targeted, gun control is largely irrelevant and no amount of deception can trick people into believing that the Government truly cares about the local Jewish community.

Clearly the Royal Butler in ancient Egypt understood.

Unsolicited Advice

RABBI DOVID GREEN (Torah.org)

I have a good friend whose son was at a decision making stage about five years ago. He needed to decide what he would do for a living. He's a very bright person and I knew he would find something and do well with it. He wasn't yet sure. I offered him some unsolicited advice. I told him that good things are probably just around the bend. It could be any moment that you will find it, but by its very nature of being around the bend you just don't see it yet. I thought I scored big points with him, and really helped to change his negative outlook. I was so proud of myself.

Since then, he has found a good job, established his own small business, and married a very nice young woman. When I emailed him to wish him mazal tov, and tell him that I knew all along that things would work out well for him, he responded that he remembers the day I gave him that "good advice". He said that he remembered thinking "why don't you just shut up?" At this later point he thanked me for the advice, that it actually had gotten him through some times of near despair.

In this week's parsha we find a similar idea. Yosef is arrested and imprisoned for something he is not guilty of. He spends 10 years in prison. He begs the soon-to-be freed butler to mention his name to Pharaoh, which he completely forgets to do. Another two years pass, and Pharaoh has a dream. He can't find an interpreter to explain the dream to his satisfaction. Then the butler remembers Yosef. Immediately the process begins, and before long Yosef is standing before Pharaoh about to begin a new chapter in his life as the prime minister of Egypt.

Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan HaKohein, of blessed memory, writes as follows. Everything has its time. As soon as something's time comes, G-d doesn't

wait another minute longer than designated. We see this from Yoseif. As soon as the divinely ordained time that he needed to be in prison ended, he was rushed out of prison. The Chofetz Chaim continues that when the time for the Messiah will come, it will happen with lightning speed, and finally the diaspora will come to its close.

We can derive strength and encouragement from this in our day to day lives as well. We must always keep in mind that nothing is forever. Difficult situations come to an end, and we sometimes even forget they ever happened. In every difficult situation we should try to keep in mind that the end of the trouble may be just around the bend. The knowledge that there is light at the end of the tunnel gives us the strength to go on.

There was once a Salesman from Deal N.J., whose business required him to travel around the country for several weeks at a time. He was an observant Jew, and he always tried to schedule his trips around stops for the Sabbath in places where kosher food was more readily available. This way he could stock up for the coming week. One of his usual stops for the Sabbath was in Memphis, Tennessee. On one of his trips to Birmingham, Alabama he contacted the president of a company which he was hoping to get an account with. His attempts in the previous years had been unsuccessful.

However, this particular year he was pleasantly surprised. The president wanted to meet with him, and he made an appointment for that day. Unfortunately, the president was in a meeting which took longer than he had expected, and the salesman was told to return the next morning, which was Friday. The same scene repeated itself the next morning, and the salesman needed to get to Memphis, pick up his food, and check into his hotel before sundown. He burst into the president's office and told him it was now or never. He received a small order, and left.

He made it to Memphis too late to get his food, but he decided to at least spend the Sabbath in the better hotel across the street. Embittered by the "mess" he'd gotten himself into he took a room and began to unpack. To his utter disbelief, he found in the closet of room a certified kosher meal enough to serve ten people. He even found wine! He couldn't imagine where it came from, but it had obviously been abandoned. He thanked G-d for the wonderful gift and enjoyed the Sabbath.

Some weeks later he was back home with some friends, and he overheard them speaking about their trip to Memphis, and how it had been cut short by a health problem. "What ever happened to all that food we brought in?" one of them said. The salesman interrupted "I know what happened to it." All eyes were now on him. "I ate it."

Food and Famine

RABBI JAY KELMAN (TorahinMortion.com)

One of the central motifs of the biblical narrative is food. Matzah, manna, mei merivah highlight the crucial role of food in shaping the course of Jewish history. The entire course of human destiny was changed due to Adam and Eve's eating from the eitz hada'at.

To a great extent our holiest days of the year, Shabbat and Yom Tov, centre on food. Even Yom Kippur is preceded by a Biblical mitzvah to eat. Our tradition sees food as a mechanism for spiritual growth. "For I am the Lord your G-d, and since I am holy you must make yourself holy" (Vayikra 11:44) is the summary verse concluding the laws of kashrut. The many laws requiring us to share our food with the "widow, orphan, poor, stranger and Levite" are the manifestation of that holiness.

Many of the major events in the lives of our patriarchs revolve around food and famine, with the results of those encounters helping to form the Jewish nation.

Soon after G-d told Avraham to move to Israel, famine struck and Avraham headed to Egypt, the food capital of the ancient world. Avraham returned to Israel soon thereafter but with "livestock, silver, and gold" (Bresheet 12:2). Apparently if the accumulation of wealth is one's basic desire, the best place to do so is outside the land of Israel. (The best place to do so within Israel proper might be in Sodom, where Lot, seeking even greater fortunes, settled.) While the Torah promises economic prosperity if we run a State according the dictates of Torah, Israel is primarily a spiritual home, not a material one.

Yitzchak, wanting to follow the ways of his father, also departed for Egypt when faced with famine. But G-d, knowing the difficulty Yitzchak—as one not schooled in the world of deception and corruption—might face away from his family and surroundings, instructed him to stay put. And immediately thereafter the Torah describes the great wealth that Yitzchak amassed in Israel. Israel is also a land where material blessings are possible. Much of Yaakov's life seemed to revolve around food. His troubles began when he purchased the birthright for a bowl of lentil soup. It was food that served as the mechanism by which Yosef achieved his political power and it was through food the family was reunited, ensuring the founding of Bnei Yisrael.

Yet each of the Avot faced a major crisis after finding food in the face of famine. Avraham and Lot parted ways as their differing perceptions of the role of wealth made life together impossible. Yitzchak's success generated envy, hatred and expulsion (Bresheet 26:19-21). And Yaakov's short trip to Egypt led to slavery, and the eventual assimilation of most of the Jewish people.

The Jewish people have faced much famine, both literally and figuratively, throughout our history. Yet we have survived, and at times even thrived, despite these difficult conditions. However, the blessings of wealth granted to our generation, far more than to any other in our long history, have proved to be equally difficult. For many, assimilation has been their fate. For others a sense of modesty has been lost. The materialistic drive that surrounds us at every turn has taken a heavy toll on our moral fibre.

The sense of despair that has befallen many as the economic turmoil continues seems to be a reflection of a loss of perspective. While in no way do I mean to minimize the impact on our community and the terrible losses suffered by those across the wealth spectrum, it is still money about which we are talking. And as important as money is, values are much more crucial. Jewish communities throughout history have survived and thrived in much more dire straits, and hopefully we can, too—without the dire straits.

With the possible exception of birchat haTorah the only Biblically mandated blessing is birchat hamazon, grace after meals, recited after eating. It is easy to recognize G-d before we eat, when we are in need; it is much more difficult to do so after one is sated.

As Yosef taught many years ago, the economic fortunes of the world have cycles of boom followed by bust. This, not unlike the laws of physics, is imbedded in nature; and we would do well to remember that. Wherever we find ourselves on the economic cycle, let us follow the advice of Yosef haTzadik: "It is not by my own power. G-d will provide an answer concerning Pharaoh's fortune" (41:15).

Victor, Not Victim

KATIA BOLOTIN (Aish.com)

Life is experienced in the moment. We live life going forward yet only understand it looking backward. Oftentimes, "the heat of the moment" renders one incapable of discerning its ultimate impact. In retrospect, our vantage points become expanded. The chain of events leading to the present moment come into sharper focus.

Finally, we recognize that the challenge or crisis we endured was really the springboard to actualize a greater good. Greater clarity awaits. Only after all the pieces of a puzzle are in place can we view the entire picture. Likewise, life's plot unfolds. We cannot know how a story will end while in the middle of the book. Neither can one know with certainty who will win the game at halftime. Such is the process called life.

The deeds of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs are a sign for their children. Many unsung heroes and heroines have made an indelible mark of positive difference. Their names and deeds are interwoven within the eternal fabric of time. While unknown to many, the merit of their actions resounds to this very day.

One such woman's name is mentioned briefly in this week's Torah portion. "Pharaoh called Yosef's name Tzafanas Panei'ach, and he gave him Osnas, the daughter of Potiphar, priest of Ohn, as a wife." Our Sages tell us that Osnas was the daughter born to Yosef's sister, Dinah, as the result of her having been raped by Shechem. From that violent incident came forth the holy soul of Osnas, who was destined to be the future wife of the righteous Yosef.

After Osnas's birth, her grandfather Yaakov had her sent to Egypt to be adopted. Before parting from her, Yaakov tied an amulet around Osnas's neck. These words were written upon the amulet in Hebrew: "Whoever cleaves to you cleaves to the seed of Yaakov."44 The commentator Chizkuni states that Osnas was adopted by the idolatrous Egyptian Potiphar, since he and his wife were childless.

Later, when Yosef became an Egyptian ruler, young women would gaze upon him, because he was very handsome.⁴⁵ They would toss gifts at Yosef, hoping that he would notice them. Osnas joined these women, removed the amulet from her neck, and tossed it to him. This is how Yosef became aware that Osnas was the granddaughter of Yaakov (and Yosef's niece). They eventually married.

Now we are midpoint in their life's narratives. Neither Osnas—a daughter conceived through a heinous act of rape—nor Yosef—betrayed, sold into slavery and unjustly jailed—could have imagined their future ascent. Who would foresee characters like these being capable of overcoming formidable "emotional baggage," let alone assuming such illustrious positions? As improbable as it would seem, their inner fortitude and resolve propelled them forward to exalted heights of spiritual achievement.

We admire Yosef and Osnas for not allowing themselves to stay "stuck" in

the traumas of their past. Instead, they transcended them. From where did this inner strength come? Yosef was aware of his role in a far greater unfolding story. He recognized G-d's providence in all that had transpired and, therefore, regarded the perpetrators who maligned him as carrying out their Divinely assigned roles.

Yosef was not embittered by his negative circumstances; rather, he saw them through a wider lens. Each experience contributed to a chain of events, eventually positioning Yosef to become the Egyptian leader, second in command to Pharaoh. Subsequently, Yosef fulfilled his purpose in preventing a famine. He recognized that in actuality he was sent by G-d and that his brothers played their roles in his descent to Egypt.

Furthermore, Yosef's marriage to Osnas vindicated him regarding the false accusations of Osnas's mother against his virtue. By allowing their marriage, her adoptive father (Potiphar) conceded to Yosef's proclaimed innocence. Osnas's birth and subsequent relocation to Egypt all led to her eventual union with Yosef.

Their marriage produced two exemplary sons—Ephraim and Menashe. Both were raised in exile, outside the pale of Jewish culture. Nevertheless, they fervently exemplified the best in Torah values. Their parents imbued within them a deep belief in the one G-d of Yisrael. Although born and bred in Egypt, the effects of that pagan, immoral culture did not permeate their values. We bless our sons on Friday night that they should grow up to be as Ephraim and Menashe—stauch in their identification as proud practicing Jews. Even while living in a host culture whose values oppose those of our Torah heritage, we can be empowered by their examples.

Like many of us, Osnas was raised in an environment not conducive to Torah values. Her adoptive mother mirrored and modeled the immoral values of Egyptian society. Her father was a pagan priest. Yet despite her upbringing, Osnas revealed and maintained her inner purity. Through her own efforts, Osnas became the suitable life partner for Yosef, who is extolled for his ability to overcome overwhelming temptation.

These are not just stories from a distant past; they provide timeless lessons for us today. The narrative of Yosef and Osnas must empower us now. For we too are not merely the products of our past nor of our families. Neither a positive nor a negative background guarantees the type of future one will have. Rather, the choices one makes of how to think about and regard one's life's experiences are the strongest indicators of one's future achievements. Success and fulfillment are predicated upon how we learn to think. Developing and maintaining a belief in one's own Divine purpose is paramount to recognizing that Divine providence guides our lives, emboldening us to work purposefully toward revealing and actualizing our own unique inner light.

Thank G-d For Forgetfulness

CHIEF RABBI EPHRAIM MIRVIS (Aish.com)

The 'Shesh Zechirot' are the six commandments of the Torah which call upon us to recall key biblical events of the past. Zechirah, 'remembrance', is very central to us. It is in the very same spirit that we have Mitzvot which are Zecher Lema'aseh Bereishit, 'to remember the creation of the earth', and of course, Zecher Letziat Mitzrayim, 'to remember our exodus from Egypt'.

Zechirah, Yizkor, that is so central to us - memories of the past. But you know sometimes, forgetfulness can also be a good thing. We learn it from this week's Parasha of Mikeitz. Yosef and Osnat are blessed with their very first child. Yosef calls him Menashe, which comes from a root which means 'to forget'. Yosef's rationale, Ki Nashani Elokim Et Kol Amali Ve'et Kol Beit Avi, 'it is because G-d has caused me to forget all of my toil and to forget my father's house'.

Surely this is an astonishing statement: Yosef, of all people, knew how important it was for him to preserve everything that he had learnt in his father's house, to be proud of his traditions and yet, here he is thanking G-d who has enabled him to forget it all?

Once, in a social context, I bumped into a man whom I knew had experienced a very painful bereavement and I said to him, "How are you doing? How are things going?" And his reply was "Thank G-d for forgetfulness!"

Of course, he had fond memories of the person who had passed away. Of course, he wanted to retain that person's precious legacy, but at the same time, he wanted to move on in life.

I recall reading many years ago that the person at that time who held the world record for the number of decimal points of 'pi' that he was able to remember - more than 30,000 - that very talented man, that brilliant individual had a very troubled life and that's because he remembered just about everything. So, he couldn't forget the challenging parts of his life, the traumas he had endured, the tragedies he had experienced.

That is exactly the point that Yosef made when he called Menashe by that

name. Yosef had grown up in a very troubled home, he was hated by his brothers to the extent that they even engaged in attempted fratricide. How was he going to put that behind him?

Now that he was in Egypt, now that he was blessed with his first son, now that he had a family at a time when he was leading Egyptian society, he said thank G-d that I could have forgotten all the pain that I endured in my father's house.

From Yosef we learn, how important it is always to remember the past, to cherish those experiences, personally and nationally, and to use them for the sake of the betterment of our future.

At the same time, sometimes like Yosef, we can declare, 'Thank G-d for forgetfulness'.

When All Else Fails, Pray!

RABBI ELISHA GREENBAUM (Chabad.org)

Famine stalked the land. The sons of Yaakov had traveled in desperation to Egypt in a quest to buy food. There, their long lost brother Yosef, masquerading as an Egyptian nobleman, staged an elaborate charade, accused the brothers of spying, threatened their lives and liberty, took one brother hostage and sent the others home to Canaan to locate proofs of their bona fides.

They returned to their father's home chastened and in a much worried mood. The second most powerful man in the world had accused them falsely, treated them harshly, and imprisoned their sibling. Even worse, they had no choice but to return.

Yosef had made it very clear that any chance they had to be allowed to purchase further stocks of food was predicated on their speedy return, accompanied, this time, by their youngest brother, Benjamin.

Yaakov was understandably displeased. At his advanced age who needs the tzoris? Would he be able to cope with the threatened loss of yet another son?

Like Jewish parents throughout history he prepared to respond to the threat. He huddled with his sons to discuss strategy, prepared an expensive bribe, and only then offered to pray on his sons' behalf.

HELP YOURSELF

Believers are often accused of forsaking all personal initiative in their passive acceptance of the vicissitudes of fate. Nothing could be further from the truth. Prayer, as a weapon, is available only to those who simultaneously engage themselves in overcoming all natural impediments. Only a fool sits back with folded hands while all hell breaks loose around him. A man of faith might rely on G-d, but he also believes that G-d helps those who help themselves.

The Maccabees, at the time of the Chanukah campaign, were convinced of the capacity of G-d to save, and entrusted their fate into His hands. Simultaneously, however, they armed themselves for conflict, initiated guerilla tactics and created a military channel for G-d's miraculous deliverance.

Yaakov too trusted in G-d. He was prepared to pray to G-d to ensure his sons' safe homecoming but knew that his initial responsibility was to do all within his power to arrange the circumstances of G-d's deliverance.

To sit and wait for the wheels of inertia to grind one down is laziness, not loyalty to G-d. Conversely, only a believer can truly dedicate himself to the task at hand, convinced of the inevitability of his efforts; as part of the Divine plan.

A Change of Heart

RABBI NAFTALI REICH (Torah.org)

There was no convincing the Egyptian viceroy. Yaakov's sons kept protesting that they had come to Egypt in all innocence to buy grain for their starving families, but the hostile viceroy would have none of it. They were evil spies, he insisted, and he had them arrested and thrown into the dungeon. Only one would be allowed to return home to bring evidence of their innocence, while the others would languish in prison.

Three days later, however, the viceroy apparently has a change of heart. As we read in this week's Torah portion, he has the brothers brought before him, and he tells them that, because he fears the Lord, he will modify his earlier decree. Instead of keeping them all incarcerated until their innocence is established, he will keep only one and allow the rest to return home with food for their hungry families.

After the viceroy makes his announcement, the Torah adds, "And so they did." But what was it that they did? The Torah does not specify. Instead, the Torah goes on to record their words of self-recrimination for having sold their brother Yosef into slavery. "We are indeed guilty of mistreating our brother," they say. "We saw his extreme distress when he pleaded with us, but we did not listen to him. That is why we are being subjected to this misfortune." But the mystery remains. What was it that they did as soon as the viceroy had spoken?

Let us consider for a moment. Twenty-two years have gone by since that fateful day when the brothers sold Yosef into slavery. Why do they finally acknowledge their guilt at this particular moment?

The commentators explain that the unexpected actions of the viceroy prompted them to reevaluate their own deeds so many years before. The viceroy ruled Egypt with the iron hand of an autocratic despot. He answered to no one except for Pharaoh, who gave him virtual carte blanche to do as he pleased. When he decrees that all the brothers would be locked up until they proved their innocence, it is inconceivable that he would suddenly have a change of heart. Why should he? Clearly, their fate is sealed.

And yet, wonder of wonders, the viceroy does indeed have a change of heart. What could this mean?

The brothers see in this a clear message from Heaven. A person must always keep an open mind and not feel locked into his original positions. No matter what, he must always maintain an objective perspective. If he thinks he may have made an error, he should correct it, though his ego may suffer somewhat. If even the arrogant and haughty viceroy had changed his mind of his own accord, surely Yaakov's sons could do no less.

Originally, they had agreed among themselves that Yosef deserved to die, or at least be sold into slavery, for his supposed transgressions. Once they had arrived at this decision, they had been immovable, and all Yosef's pleas for mercy had fallen on deaf ears. But now they took their example from the viceroy who had shown the courage to reexamine his earlier decision. "And so they did." They, too, reexamined their earlier actions and found them wanting.

A married couple sought the help of a great sage.

"My husband is insufferable," the wife complained.

"I'm only reacting to her nastiness," he retorted.

"Think carefully," said the sage. "When did this all begin?"

"About a week ago," said the wife, "I baked a very fancy cake, and he forgot to take it out of the oven. All that work for nothing!" "I didn't forget," protested her husband. "The message wasn't clear."

"Now wait a minute, young man," said the sage. "She did leave you a message, didn't she? But you couldn't admit that you made a mistake, so you defended yourself with all your might."

The husband nodded sheepishly.

"Well then," said the sage, "I think we can resolve all your problems. Just admit you were at fault and apologize. I'm sure she will forgive you."

In our own lives, we are constantly presented with situations that demand of us that we take a stand one way or the other. And once we have taken this stand, it sometimes takes on a life of its own. Once we have invested our honor and credibility in a particular position, we sometimes find ourselves going to great lengths to defend the indefensible. However, if we keep an open mind, if we are honest with ourselves and consider the possibility that we may have erred, we will discover that the ultimate honor always lies in embracing the truth and doing what is right.

WHY NOT CELEBRATE THE WAR VICTORY?

RABBI YISRAEL KANIEL

In his Ner Mitzvah, the Maharal, points out that the great miracle that we actually celebrate on Chanukah is the miracle of a few untrained Jews with primitive weapons defeating the mighty Greek nation and its forces. This miraculous conquest was a display of G-d's love for the Jewish people. Then, why do we focus on the miracle of the oil?

If we were to focus our celebration on our miraculous conquest, at some point in history we would have reduced G-d's role in this battle. We would have begun to celebrate the Jewish army's strength or capability or strategy. We would have forgotten that it all came from G-d.

Therefore, the Sages established the commemoration of the oil burning eight days – a secondary miracle – because that miracle objectively defied the laws of nature and will not change through the generations.

Once we focus on this miracle, we can then proceed to declare with confidence that G-d also won the battle with the Greeks for us in a similar miraculous manner.

News & Views

Religious freedom-fighters

RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN (JNS.org 15-12-25)

What a painful start to Chanukah. We are all devastated at the mass shooting on Sydney's Jewish community—on men, women and children who were ushering in the holiday with festivities on Bondi Beach, including a public menorah-lighting.

As the rabbi who initiated the public "Festival of Lights" with a giant menorah in Johannesburg in the late 1970s, I am personally affected by this

horrific hate crime perpetrated against our people at such an event. Our hearts go out to all the families of the victims, and our prayers are with the injured for complete and speedy recoveries.

The popular impression of the heroes of the Chanukah story—the Maccabees—is that they were a brave band of partisans fighting against the mighty Greek army. Perhaps they were even the historical originators of guerrilla warfare. Their victory over the vastly larger and superior military might of the enemy was entirely miraculous.

Yes, they were fearless fighters and courageous heroes, but they weren't exactly Navy SEALs, Green Berets or the paratroopers of the Israel Defense Forces. They were a small group of untrained priests with not even basic training, taking on an organized and well-equipped army. And they won. This had to be nothing short of miraculous.

That's why, according to some commentaries, we celebrate eight nights of Chanukah not only because of the miracle of the oil, which lasted a whole week beyond the capacity of the original one jug, but also for the military victory, which was extraordinary and a clear, unconcealed act of heavenly protection.

In many editions of the siddur, in the Al Hanissim prayer recited throughout Chanukah, we thank G-d "for the miracles, and for the salvation, and for the mighty deeds, and for the victories, and for the battles which you performed for our forefathers in those days at this time." The "battles," referring to the military victory, are mentioned explicitly.

Yet not all editions of the prayer book include "the battles." Why? Because the war was only a means to an end. The end was religious freedom.

The Greek Hellenization campaign had taken a huge toll on the spiritual state of the Jewish community at that time. Many were assimilating into Greek culture. James Michener's book, *The Source*, describes how Jewish athletes would perform in the Greek stadiums naked, even displaying the fact that they had "uncircumcised" themselves, quite a painful procedure apparently. Such was the degree of assimilation taking place.

And those Hellenist Jews enjoyed full, democratic rights. They suffered no discrimination. It was only the Jews—steadfast in their faith, refusing to give up their traditions and culture—who were oppressed by the Greeks.

The Greeks worshipped the body, not the soul. And it was the Jewish soul, our Torah values, which they attacked and tried to uproot and eradicate.

That's why Chanukah is different from Purim, where Haman was attempting to physically annihilate "every single Jewish man, woman and child."

Accordingly, we celebrate Haman's downfall with physical celebrations: a Purim feast, eating and drinking in merriment. As for the Chanukah story, the enemies' target was not our bodies, but our souls. And so, our celebrations are more spiritual. Yes, there are latkes and doughnuts, but the main celebrations are kindling the lights of the menorah and reciting Hallel, observances of a more spiritual nature.

The Greeks were not like Hitler or Hamas, who simply wanted to kill Jews, whether religious or not. In the Chanukah plot, Jews who were willing to assimilate into Greek culture and give up their faith could live quite comfortably and enjoy all their physical liberties.

So the Maccabees were not just brave fighters defending their people. They were religious freedom fighters. They led their brethren in insisting on their right to be different and to practice a minority faith. But the main miracle was spiritual, the miracle of the oil that lasted eight days. The military triumph was but a necessary prelude to the spiritual and religious freedom it brought about.

With the horrific terror attack in Sydney, the intifada has officially been globalized. We pray that there will finally be a strong and unequivocal response from the Australian government and, indeed, from leaders around the world. We pray that this is the end of such attacks—and not the beginning.

As we say in the second blessing recited when we kindle the chanukiyah, "Blessed are you, our G-d and King of the universe, who performed miracles for our forefathers in those days at this season." We need miracles not only in "those days" of old, but in "this season" of our lives and our people, in Israel and all over the world.

May we all be safe, sound and protected from harm. And, no matter what, may we continue to practice our faith proudly and even defiantly in the face of hate, terror and tyranny.

We need light now more than ever. We must fight the fire of terror with the fire of our faith. May the Chanukah lights continue to burn brightly in Bondi and the world over. Amen.

Hanukkah in the Shadow of Terror

RABBI EFREM GOLDBERG (Aish.com 14-12-25)

The light of Hanukkah this year is dimmed and diminished even before it is lit. The news of a horrific terror attack at a Hanukkah event at Bondi Beach in Australia has shaken us to the core. Eleven innocent people were

murdered at the time of this writing, among them the Chabad Rabbi, Rabbi Eli Schlanger. Australia has become a hotbed of antisemitism, met far too often with a grossly insufficient response by government and authorities. Hanukkah begins with a painful reminder that when our enemies march to the chant of “globalize the intifada,” they mean it. And they must be confronted.

It is far too soon to truly process or respond to such a heinous crime, but anyone with a sensitive soul cannot avoid the question that rises unbidden in the heart. How do we light candles, gather with family, sing songs of gratitude, spin the dreidel, and eat latkes in the shadow of such devastating loss and tragedy?

Two years ago, six holy hostages held captive by the evil Hamas terrorists gathered around a makeshift menorah fashioned from paper cups to light Hanukkah candles. In an act of cruelty meant to compound the suffering of the hostage families, their wicked captors recorded the moment on video. That footage was later discovered by the IDF in Gaza, shared privately with the families, and only recently released in time for Hanukkah this year.

The video shows each of the hostages thin, weakened, but still alive. Some even smile at the camera. Among them is Hersh Goldberg Polin, missing the lower half of his left arm, blown off by a grenade on October 7.

In the video, almost impossible to comprehend, the hostages can be heard singing the blessing of Shehechiyanu, thanking G-d for enabling them to reach that moment. Ultimately, all six, Hersh Goldberg Polin, Eden Yerushalmi, Ori Danino, Alex Lobanov, Carmel Gat, and Almog Sarusi, were brutally murdered by their captors in a tunnel in Rafah on August 29, 2024. Their bodies were discovered by Israeli troops two days later.

Released hostages later shared that when they encountered Hersh in captivity, he strengthened them with words of encouragement. He would quote the teaching made famous by Viktor Frankl, that those who have a why to live can bear almost any how. That belief empowered Frankl to survive the Holocaust. Though Hersh was ultimately murdered, it gave him the courage to live each day in captivity, and through it, he helped others survive and return home.

On that recently released video, as Hersh and the others light the menorah, he can be heard likening their circumstance to the Holocaust, saying, “There’s that picture of the Hanukkah with a Nazi flag above it.”

If six hostages held captive by the evil enemies of our time, tortured and starved, could nevertheless push back the darkness with the light of the menorah, then we too can find the will and the way to respond to darkness with light. If they could smile and sing Shehechiyanu in that moment, then we can not only say Shehechiyanu, but sing it and mean it, more grateful than ever to be alive and present in this moment.

LIGHT IN THE DARKEST OF PLACES

The Jews of Australia, and Jews around the world, are not the first to confront the challenge of lighting Hanukkah candles against a backdrop of darkness. One year ago, six hostages found a way to light in the darkest of places. Over eighty years before them, in the depths of Bergen Belsen, Jews also found a way to light and to sing Shehechiyanu.

In her Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust, Professor Yaffa Eliach shared the extraordinary story of Hanukkah in Bergen Belsen:

Hanukkah came to Bergen Belsen. It was time to kindle the Hanukkah lights. A jug of oil was not to be found. No candle was in sight. A menorah belonged to the distant past. Instead, a wooden clog, the shoe of one of the inmates, became a menorah. Strings pulled from a concentration camp uniform became wicks, and black camp shoe polish became oil.

Not far from heaps of bodies, living skeletons assembled to participate in the kindling of the Hanukkah lights. The Rabbi of Bluzhov lit the first light and chanted the first two blessings in his pleasant voice, the melody filled with sorrow and pain. When he was about to recite the third blessing, he stopped. He turned his head and looked around as if searching for something.

Then he turned back to the quivering lights and, in a strong, reassuring, comforting voice, recited the third blessing. “Blessed are You, Hashem our G-d, King of the Universe, who has kept us alive, preserved us, and enabled us to reach this season.”

Among those present was Mr. Zamietchkowski, one of the leaders of the Warsaw Bund, a sincere and thoughtful man with a passion for discussing faith and truth. When the ceremony concluded, he pushed his way to the Rabbi and said, “Spira, I understand your need to light Hanukkah candles in these wretched times. I can even understand the second blessing, ‘Who performed miracles for our fathers in days of old at this season.’ But the third blessing I cannot understand. How could you thank G-d for keeping us alive when hundreds of Jewish bodies lie in the shadows of the Hanukkah lights, when thousands of living skeletons walk this camp, and millions more are being massacred? For this you are thankful? This you call keeping us alive?”

“Zamietchkowski, you are one hundred percent right,” the Rabbi answered. “When I reached the third blessing, I too hesitated. I asked myself what to do.

I turned my head to ask the Rabbi of Zaner and other distinguished rabbis standing near me whether I could recite it. But as I turned, I saw behind me a large throng of living Jews. Their faces were filled with faith, devotion, and focus as they listened to the kindling of the Hanukkah lights.

“I said to myself that if G-d has such a nation, a people who at a time like this, when they see before them the bodies of their beloved fathers, brothers, and sons, when death lurks in every corner, still stand together listening with devotion to the blessing ‘Who performed miracles for our fathers in days of old at this season,’ then I am obligated to recite the third blessing.”

That night in Bergen Belsen, Mr. Zamietchkowski saw only what lay before him, death and unbearable suffering. The Rebbe saw that as well. But he also saw another layer of truth that was just as real. He saw a people who clung to faith and refused to surrender their spiritual dignity even in the most horrific circumstances.

Sadly, we have a long history of Hanukkah overlapping with tragedy and loss. But we also have a sacred tradition of finding faith despite circumstance, and of stubbornly insisting on bringing light even when surrounded by darkness.

THE NIGHT AUSTRALIA DIED

ROWAN DEAN (Spectator.com.au 14-12-25)

Australia died tonight.

An obscene number of people were shot down in cold blood celebrating a Jewish holiday on the iconic and wonderful Bondi Beach. Murdered, most likely, by religious fanatics. Murdered, possibly, by people who came, or whose parents came, to this country and imported a toxic, deadly, and poisonous ideology.

Nobody thought to stop them entering this country. Nobody thought to question their fitness to be new Australian citizens.

We have seen this story play out in Europe, in Britain, and in the United States.

Many people now have blood on their hands.

I include among them, in my opinion, the Foreign Minister of Australia, Penny Wong, for repeatedly inflaming anti-Israel sentiments on the national and international stage and giving comfort to the pro-Palestinian cause; the Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, for his absolute craven cowardice and constant pandering to the Islamic community and refusal to implement the antisemitism measures that have repeatedly been demanded; the Immigration Minister Tony Burke for flooding this country with people from communities around the world, including Gaza, where Jew hatred flows through their veins.

I also include among those who have blood on their hands every single person who has participated in a pro-Palestinian march, every university campus, every politician who marched over the Sydney Harbour Bridge in lockstep with Islamist fanatics, every single media commentator who has echoed some kind of sympathy for the Islamist, pro-Palestinian cause; every antisemite who has muttered under their breath obscenities about ‘the Jews’.

You all disgust me. You all brought this on despite all the warnings we repeatedly gave you for the last two years. You have destroyed this nation. Australia must now have a serious conversation about deporting Islamist lunatics and must immediately tighten our immigration policies to ensure that this can never happen again.

Australia died tonight. Can it ever be the same again?

Like the heroes of Bondi, we should all be tackling anti-Semites

IF YOU'RE FIT AND ABLE, DON'T RUN AND HIDE FROM THE ISLAMIST THREAT — FIGHT IT.

BRENDAN O'NEILL (Spiked-online.com 14-12-25)

Every January, on Australia Day, someone is named Australian of the Year. They can call off the search for the 2026 award. We have him already. His name is Ahmed al Ahmed. He's 43, a father of two and a shopkeeper. And today he stunned the world with an act of staggering heroism: he single-handedly tackled and disarmed one of the fascist filth who carried out the massacre of Jews at Bondi Beach in Sydney.

So much of the footage from the barbarism in Bondi is grim beyond belief. We've seen images of the dead, the injured, the traumatised — innocents subjected to extreme terror simply for being Jewish. And yet one clip from this atrocity gave the world a flash of hope amid the bloodshed. It showed Ahmed wrestling one of the Jew-haters for his rifle and in the process potentially saving scores of lives.

It is extraordinary footage. Ahmed creeps with great stealth between two parked cars towards one of the men who is firing at the Jews celebrating the first day of Hanukkah. He grabs him round the neck with his right arm and seizes his rifle with his left arm. A brief struggle ensues and Ahmed is victorious — he points the rifle at the disarmed anti-Semite, making it clear he will take a shot if the piece of pondscum makes any moves.

According to the Sydney Morning Herald, Ahmed himself was then shot. He sustained gunshot wounds in his upper arm and his hand. It's a risk he must have known he was taking when, with Herculean selflessness, he entered the line of fire between police and terrorists with the singular aim of stopping a killer. This is what we might call 'heroic mist' – that slightly reckless but completely human feeling that descends on us in moments of danger, when we elevate the greater good above our own safety.

There were other heroes, too. We've seen footage of Aussies tending to the wounded, breathing life back into the injured. Australian PM Anthony Albanese praised the 'courage of everyday Australians who, without hesitating, put themselves in danger in order to keep their fellow Australians safe'. Let us hope these Australians are commended and rewarded for taking such a valiant stand against the evil that visited the Jews of Sydney today.

These men and women speak to the true spirit of Australia. Australians are a people not known for sitting back in times of trouble. There survives there, even in the era of woke, a proletarian culture of defiance and valour. These heroes also remind us that terrorists can be defeated. They can be disarmed. They can be stripped of their power, just like that.

It won't always be possible, of course. But where it is, we should strike. Too much official guidance tells us to scarper. The advice of the UK's Counter Terrorism Policing is to 'Run, Hide and Tell'. That is, evade rather than confront, leg it rather than fight, protect yourself rather than your fellow citizens. Imagine if Mr Ahmed had thought like that today. More people would have died.

We live in a 'walk-on-by' society. Ours is an era in which the active citizen has been ruthlessly decommissioned by the deathless technocrats who rule over us. They don't even trust us to raise our kids properly, far less overpower the armed haters of humanity. The end result is that too many people look the other way when tyranny strikes – or worse, stand and film it. One thinks of the crowd that gathered round the Islamist killers of Lee Rigby, faithfully filming their deranged ranting. How much better for humanity it would have been if the crowd had forcefully subdued those hysterics and taken their cleavers.

Bravery finds a way, though. The human instinct to help is not so easily crushed. One thinks of the men who hurled beer glasses and chairs at the three radical Islamists who went on a stabbing spree in London Bridge in 2017. Or Ignacio Echeverría, the Spanish national who used his skateboard to beat one of those London Bridge terrorists (sadly, he was subsequently killed). And now Ahmed al Ahmed, the fortysomething conqueror of a modern-day Nazi.

'Don't be a have-a-go hero', we're so often told. It's advice we should resolutely ignore. Having a go is precisely what more of us should be doing. And not only in the heat of an all-out act of Jewphobic barbarism, but in everyday life, too. After all, the violent loathing that shook Sydney today did not emerge in a vacuum. This neo-fascist animus for the Jewish homeland and the Jewish people has been stewing for years. If more of us had 'had a go' earlier, perhaps we could have seen off, or at least tamed, this gravest menace in Western society.

Don't wait until it turns violent. 'Have a go' now. If you see someone carrying a placard calling Jews Nazis, get in their face. If you see a keffiyeh mob outside a synagogue, confront them. If you see a frothing Islamist or leftist harassing a Jew in public, put yourself between the scumbag and his victim. Don't run, hide and tell – stand, fight and tell them to f--- off. Enough is enough. Get out there.

EUROPEANS FINALLY WAKING UP TO HAMAS-ENABLING UNRWA SCAM

POST EDITORIAL BOARD (NYPost.com 10-12-25)

UNRWA is a sick parody of a relief organization.

It looks like the days are numbered for the terrorist-infested UN Relief and Works Agency, as UNRWA loses support from major European nations that have long backed it.

Cheers for Germany, Italy, Czechia and Hungary, joined by Bulgaria and Latvia last Friday in withholding support for the renewal of UNRWA's charter. Austria, Romania and Lithuania joined in on a separate resolution.

Close observers have always known that UNRWA — the special UN agency charged with caring for Palestinian refugees, and only Palestinian refugees — works hand-in-glove with Hamas in Gaza.

But then it turned out that UNRWA directly employed Hamas fighters who joined in the Oct. 7, 2022, terror assault on Israel; the course of the war exposed many more, deep Hamas-UNRWA ties.

Israel has since banned UNRWA from working in its territory, and Washington cut off aid to the agency early this year, following a temporary suspension under President Joe Biden.

Israel, citing non-payment of taxes, even took over a former UNRWA center

in East Jerusalem, raising the national standard in place of the flag of the United Nations.

Without Israel's cooperation, UNRWA's capacity to work in Gaza is next to zero, but that didn't stop more than 150 nations voting Friday to keep the agency rattling along.

Remember: Every other refugee population in the world is helped by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, which assists people displaced by war or persecution in resettlement and integration into their new homes; former refugees become residents and eventually citizens, losing their refugee status.

Only Palestinians, under UNRWA's "care," retain refugee status forever, even unto the third, fourth and fifth generations — and so perpetuating the eternal victimhood of the Palestinian people by shackling them to aid and legalizing their segregation inside neighboring nations long decades after their forebears arrived.

It's not even clear why Palestinians living in Gaza, which is considered Palestine, remain refugees.

Aren't they already home?

UNRWA is a sick parody of a relief organization. Mission creep is its mission. Let the major European nations waking up to the UNRWA's stark absurdity lead the way to the end of a supposed force for mercy that's become a tool for terror.

HAMAS'S STENOGRAPHERS OWN THEIR SHARE OF THE CARNAGE

SETH MANDEL (Commentary.com 11-12-25)

It's not enough to be horrified by Hamas. Any healthy society must also be horrified by anyone who shared Hamas propaganda throughout the war.

The legions of pro-Hamas lemmings marching throughout American and European cities have tricked us into lowering the civilizational bar. We tend to be sated with scraps—just denouncing Hamas has become some kind of achievement. But the scale of Hamas's depravity should leave its useful idiots tortured by their own conscience as well.

Because they ran interference for stuff like this:

"The father of Noa Marciano has spoken publicly for the first time, sharing harrowing details of his daughter's final moments in Gaza.

"Speaking to a small crowd, her father Avi claimed that Noa was murdered by a doctor in Shifa hospital, who injected air into her veins – and that the family found out about her death after they were sent a video of her murder via the social media network Telegram.

"Noa is begging for her life," he said of the video, adding that, by the end of the clip, 'she's sweating but there's no life to her body.'

Noa Marciano was taken alive from Nahal Oz on October 7, along with six other female soldiers. Hamas blamed her death on an Israeli airstrike, and media were happy to repeat the claim. Hamas filmed Marciano in a hostage video pleading with Israel to stop the airstrikes, then filmed Marciano's dead body.

What had actually happened, however, was that Hamas brought Marciano to Shifa Hospital alive and then executed her there in cold blood. Shifa was one of the hospitals that Israel said were being used by Hamas, sometimes to hold hostages, while the media pooh-poohed the claims. This is why "according to the Gaza Health Ministry" is insufficient, even if it's followed by "... which is controlled by Hamas." Once you know a claim or statement comes from Hamas, you cannot play the he-said-she-said game, as if dueling Israeli and Hamas claims have equal weight. Reciting Hamas talking points isn't "reporting."

That is especially true on subjects such as how a hostage died in Hamas captivity. The lie that IDF strikes killed the Bibas children persisted until the truth came to light: Palestinian terrorists brutally murdered the children with their own hands, then mutilated their bodies to hide the evidence.

There is also the problem of moral equivalence: When Israeli strikes did kill hostages that Hamas took and then used as human shields, the media presented it as if Hamas's hands were clean. "Some were killed by Hamas, some by Israeli fire, some their cause of death unknown," the New York Times put it in a May article. But if you start a war, take hostages, and then use those hostages as shields in the war you started, you are to blame for their fate. Hamas murdered Marciano; the only question was how.

Then there was this week's revelation that Hamas hoarded baby formula. Israel's claims that it was letting in plenty of aid? True. Accusations that Israel was starving Palestinian babies? False. But it does seem pretty clear that Hamas was trying to cause the death of innocent babies just so it could blame it on Israel.

No one should be surprised by this. But the libel that the Jews were deliberately murdering children had its intended effect: Jews all over the world were violently attacked, Western countries pulled support for the war effort to displace Hamas, European outrage torpedoed a cease-fire deal,

and Palestinian anti-Hamas activists were demonized.

“When countless other Palestinian activists and I from Gaza said this back in July, August, and September, we were villainized, attacked, threatened, and made into pariahs by the ‘pro-Palestine’ industrial complex and activist mafias, even though for Gazans, the evidence was so clearly apparent before our eyes,” wrote Gaza native and Atlantic Council fellow Ahmed Fouad Alkhatib

“Never allow yourself to be a useful idiot in Hamas’s propaganda,” Alkhatib added. “You can have compassion for the real suffering of the Palestinian civilians of Gaza, and demand Israeli action to facilitate aid entry into the coastal enclave, while still holding Hamas accountable for its part in causing a hunger and starvation crisis in the first place.”

Forget “compassion.” There’s no avoiding the grim reality that “the real suffering of the Palestinian civilians of Gaza” was the goal of Hamas and its Western loyalists all along.

ADVOCACY OR POLITICS? HOW HOSTAGE RALLIES EVOLVED INTO ANTI-GOVERNMENT HATE FESTS

JUDITH SEGALOFF (JNS.org 12-12-25)

Before the war, Israelis were no strangers to protest culture. Demonstrations over judicial reform, clashes over public prayer in Tel Aviv and anti-Haredi marches in Bnei Brak kept the country in a constant churn of political tension. Heated Knesset debates were routine, even unremarkable. Then came Oct. 7, 2023.

In the days immediately following the Hamas attacks, the divisions seemed to melt away. Massive volunteer efforts emerged overnight, and what had been a fractious society began operating with uncommon unity and compassion.

On Oct. 8, in the basement of Shelly Shem Tov, the mother of hostage Omer Shem Tov, families of the abducted gathered, joined by representatives from some 1,400 other families who supported them.

The meeting led to the creation of the Hostages and Missing Persons Forum (HMFF), a grassroots, volunteer-driven effort that soon expanded from Israel to more than 70 countries. Its leaders insisted the organization was non-political. But was it ever truly apolitical?

Almost immediately, the slogan “Bring Them Home Now” appeared on posters, shirts, banners and bumper stickers. Yet many Israelis felt the message implicitly shifted responsibility away from Hamas—the terrorist captors—and placed it squarely on the Israeli government.

While HMFF declared itself non-partisan, statements from some members told a different story.

Sagit Dinnar, whose husband was murdered on Oct. 7 and who herself was abducted and later released, became one of the group’s most outspoken voices. She frequently argued that the government’s strategy on hostage negotiations was shaped by political survival rather than security considerations, and she did not shy away from sharp criticism of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

In an April 2024 Reddit AMA titled “My family member is a hostage in Gaza. With Netanyahu in charge, I’m afraid he’ll never make it home,” Dinnar wrote, “Hamas is never going to give up enough hostages to make their destruction become a sweet pill to swallow,” effectively endorsing partial deals to save lives.

She accused the government of being “willing to pay any price, even at the cost of the lives of the hostages or the soldiers.”

Other families pushed back—and organized.

THE RISE OF THE TIKVA FORUM

In response to early HMFF pressure campaigns, Tzvika (Zvika) Mor, the father of abducted IDF soldier Eitan Mor, and several like-minded families began meeting informally and later established the Tikva Forum. Unlike HMFF activists who saw concessions as a moral obligation, Tikva members argued that negotiating with Hamas would endanger remaining captives and embolden future kidnappings.

“During wartime, and especially while negotiations are underway, demonstrations against the government harm the war effort,” Mor told JNS. “We saw Hamas release videos of abductees shortly before the weekly rallies. The rallies attacking the government served Hamas.”

The two groups’ approaches diverged sharply.

By March 2024, well before most hostages had been released, HMFF rallies began overlapping with the anti-overhaul “Kaplan” protests. The Begin-Kaplan intersection, renamed “Democracy Square” by demonstrators, hosted joint events in which hostage families and anti-government activists called both for a deal and for early elections.

Speakers at the combined rallies included families such as Einav Zangauer and those of hostage Noam Peri, who demanded urgent negotiations alongside criticism of the prime minister.

Kaplan-aligned groups such as Brothers and Sisters in Arms offered logistical

and financial support, blurring the boundaries between hostage advocacy and political mobilization.

Not all HMFF families participated, but the dominant faction embraced the collaboration. Tikva Forum leaders accused Kaplan activists of “exploiting” the trauma of the hostages’ families to topple the government.

POLITICAL PROTESTS RESUME

With the return of most hostages, HMFF declared its final weekly rally on Dec. 1. But protests continued in new forms. Days later, demonstrators gathered outside the Tel Aviv courthouse, accusing the government of prioritizing “political survival over justice.”

Kaplan activists demanded a state commission of inquiry into the Oct. 7 failures. Some bereaved families placed blame directly on Netanyahu, arguing that ongoing ceasefire violations by Hamas and military decisions by Israel had jeopardized their loved ones.

Meanwhile, left-wing groups still stage smaller protests against the war, while large Haredi demonstrations over draft exemptions shut down Jerusalem.

With national elections expected in 2026 and national trauma still raw, most analysts expect protests in Israel to grow—not diminish—in the coming year. When the final hostage flag comes down, they expect new banners, chants and barricades to rise in its place.

Do protests help or harm Israel? For Mor and the Tikva Forum, the answer is clear. “When demonstrations are held against the government to create pressure, terrorist organizations learn that they can use Israeli citizens against the government and for their own benefit,” he told JNS. “Protests give power to our enemies.”

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

Q&A

RABBI DONIEL NEUSTADT (Torah.org)

QUESTION: With so many women today in the work force, is it permitted for non-Jewish household help to cook kosher food in one’s kitchen if the cooking is done under the supervision of an observant Jew?

DISCUSSION: With the intention of limiting assimilation, the Rabbis decreed against eating certain types of perfectly kosher food which were cooked, baked or roasted by a non-Jew, even if a Jew supervised the entire process from beginning to end. This is the Rabbinical prohibition known as bishul akum.

QUESTION: Which types of foods are susceptible to the restrictions of bishul akum?

DISCUSSION: There are basically two criteria which define the type of food which is forbidden because of bishul akum:

1. The food must be “important” – that is, food that would be suitable fare for a dinner served to dignitaries. Thus most dishes of poultry, meat, potatoes, pasta, eggs or fish are included, as long as they are prepared in a manner in which important people are customarily served in a formal setting. Candies, potato chips,(1) pringles, beer, breakfast cereals, canned tuna salmon and sardines,(2) popcorn, etc. are not considered “important” foods no matter how skillfully and tastefully they are prepared.

2. Foods which are edible raw [under normal conditions(3)] are exempt from the prohibition of bishul akum, even if they were cooked. Thus most fruits and vegetables, cheeses, ice cream, water, milk and peanut butter, for example, are exempt from bishul akum, even if they were prepared in a manner fit for a king, since all of these foods are edible when in a raw state.(4)

QUESTION: We have established that “cooking” by a non-Jew renders the food bishul akum. Does that mean that a non-Jew may not participate in any phase of food preparation?

DISCUSSION: The only phase of food preparation that is forbidden to a non-Jew is to place the pot or pan on the stove or inside the oven. The non-Jew may cut, chop, grind, grate, mix, season, etc. He may also turn on the gas or electricity in the stove or oven, regulate the temperature throughout, stir or baste the food while it is cooking, and remove the food once it is cooked or baked. All this is permitted l’chatchilah, as long as the non-Jew is being supervised to ascertain that no kashruth laws are transgressed.(5)

QUESTION: If the non-Jew has already placed the food on the stove or into the oven but has not yet turned on the fire, can the food still qualify as bishul yisrael?

DISCUSSION: As long as the Jew turns on the fire, the food is considered bishul yisrael. But, l'chatchilah, this should only be relied upon in this exact case, where the food is already on the stove or in the oven and the fire is being lit after the food has been placed on the stove or in the oven.(6) In the reverse case, where first the Jew turned on the fire and then the non-Jew placed the food on the stove or in the oven, some poskim hold that this is not considered bishul yisrael. B'diavad, however, most poskim maintain that the food is not considered bishul akum and is permitted to be eaten.(7)

QUESTION: If the non-Jew has already turned on the fire and placed the pot or pan on the stove or inside the oven but the food is not yet completely cooked and ready to eat, can the food still be not considered bishul akum?

DISCUSSION: There yet remain three options for the food to be considered bishul yisrael:

1. Remove the pot or pan from the fire or the oven, hold it for a moment, and then replace it. This is permitted l'chatchilah.
2. Stir, mix or flip the food over while the pot or pan are still on the fire.
3. Regulate the temperature of the fire, either by raising it a bit to hasten the cooking, or by lowering it a bit to prevent burning or singeing. However, if the food is already completely cooked and ready to be eaten, it is too late to avail oneself of any of these three options. The food is considered bishul akum.

QUESTION: Is it permitted to purchase an item at a store with the intent of using it for a short period of time and then returning it for full credit?

DISCUSSION: The answer to this question will depend on the policy of the individual store or chain of stores. Some stores would never allow such a thing. It would be forbidden, therefore, to buy an item from such a store with the intent of using it and returning it, since doing so is geneivas da'as, misleading while engaging in deceptive behavior. Geneivas da'as applies equally to Jews and non-Jews.(8) Quite possibly, purchasing an item with the intention of using it briefly and then returning it may be considered theft as well, since the store incurs an actual loss when they are forced to repackage and restock the returned item.

But there are some mega stores and chains which may permit their associates to sell an item to a customer even if they are clearly aware that the customer intends to return the item after trying it out for a short period of time. Their market research shows that invariably, some customers change their minds and decide to keep the purchase even though initially they had no intention of do so. Other customers are forgetful or lazy and forget or fail to return the item within the time period allotted, thereby forfeiting a refund and remaining with only a due bill to be used in the store. More often than not, the store makes money on these customers as well, and even if the store is "outsquared" occasionally, in the long run it is profitable to allow this practice.

The only way to find out what the store policy is, is to ask. Until that information is obtained, it would be forbidden to purchase an item with the intent of using it briefly and then returning it. According to many poskim, geneivas da'as is forbidden min ha-Torah,(9) and needless to say, one must be particularly stringent with a Torah prohibition.

QUESTION: May an employee of a non-Jewish company participate in his company's holiday party?

DISCUSSION: It depends on the type of party the company is having. Many times, a company's holiday party has nothing to do with the celebration of the holiday; rather it is an employee appreciation party that happens to take place during the holiday season. There is no halachic objection to attending such a party, But obviously, if the intention of the party is to celebrate the actual holiday, it would be forbidden for a Jew to attend.

However, even if the party is not intended to celebrate a non- Jewish holiday, non-Jewish office parties are hardly the place for an observant Jew to be. The mode of dress, the type of language and the general lack of proper decorum at such affairs is completely alien and contrary to everything that yiddishkeit stands for. It is clear, therefore, that if for business reasons one must attend such a party, he or she must do so only when there is no other choice, and even then, he or she must come and go as quickly as possible. Lingering in such an environment can lead to serious transgression of many Torah laws.

FOOTNOTES:

1 Although potatoes can certainly be prepared for a formal presentation, when they are presented as potato chips or Pringles they are no longer fit to be served to dignitaries. A minority opinion disagrees and requires bishul yisrael for potato products like potato chips as well; see The Journal of Halachah and Contemporary Society, XLII, pgs. 46-69 for a complete review of this subject.

2 Although tuna and salmon are in themselves "important" foods that are served at a royal table, once they are canned they lose their status; this is the opinion of most poskim. A minority opinion, however, disagrees and requires bishul yisrael for canned fish products as well.

3 Y.D. 113:12 and 14, Taz 14 and Aruch ha-Shulchan 26.

4 Y.D. 113:1.

5 Y.D. 113:7.

6 Avnei Nezer Y.D. 96.

7 See Y.D. 113:7, Taz 6, Shach 12, Pri Chadash and Chochmas Adam 66:8.

8 C.M. 228:6.

9 See Ritva, Chullin 94b, Sefer Kovetz on Rambam Hilchos Dayos 2:6. See also Seforno, Vayikra 25:14 who writes that geneivas da'as is included in the prohibition against ona'as devarim.

Candles (Melb) Friday 19 December 2025, 30 Kislev 5786 8.23/9.29p