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Matos-Massey 5784

DISTRESSED WOOD

RABBI YITZI HURWITZ (Chabad.org)

At the start of this week's parshah, Matot, we are introduced to the laws of annulment of vows. At that point, the tribes of Israel, usually called shevatim, are instead called matot.

Why the different word? What connection does it have to annulment of vows?

Though the two words shevet and mateh are alike in meaning—roughly translated as “stick” or “staff”—they have fundamental differences.

Shevet refers to a branch still attached or recently detached from the tree; it is still wet inside. A mateh, however, has been separated for a while, and has had time to dry and harden.

A craftsman who wishes to create something of quality needs to be aware of the moisture content of the wood they plan to use. The conditions the wood was subjected to will have an effect on its quality.

For example, reclaimed wood (decades-old wood that has been used in construction, etc.) is sought after because it has qualities not found in new lumber.

Next, the craftsman will use his tools to saw, drill, chisel or sand the wood, bringing out its true natural beauty and function.

Back to vows. Why would a person take a vow? Perhaps he or she has a weakness that brings this person to commit a sin. Taking a vow of abstinence is helpful because of the fear of breaking that vow. However, the vow doesn't change the person; for someone to annul this kind of vow seems counterproductive.

That's where the wise man comes in. The job of the wise man who does the annulment is to help the one who took the vow work on himself to become stronger—to bring out strength from deep within to overcome the weakness. The vow is then unnecessary and can be annulled.

Each of us is a mateh. G-d puts us through all kinds of trials—some happy and some painful, some pure joy and some that involve suffering. However, we know that it is G-d, the Ultimate Craftsman, who is putting us through these conditions, and that He helps us overcome any obstacles He puts before us. We know that He will bring out our greatest potential.

The same is true of the Jewish nation. G-d has put us through all kinds of difficult conditions. Though we don't know why, we do know that he has a plan, and that what He does is good.

By now, we are an ancient piece of wood. We have been through so much that we are truly magnificent.

NO CHOICE

AVROHOM YAAKOV

This week the Torah resumes the narrative after Pinchas' take down of the rebellion against Moshe.

Implementing the suggestion of Bilaam, the Midianites seduced Jewish men into worshipping Pe'or and a plague broke out killing 24,000 Jews.

Meanwhile the Prince of the Tribe of Shimon brought a Midianite woman (who happened to be a Princess) before Moshe and had his way with her, challenging Moshe's authority.

Pinchas executed both the Prince and the woman, freezing the rebellion

and the plague in their tracks.

G-d now commands Moshe (31:2) to raise an army to inflict payback on the Midianites.

But why were the Midianites singled out for punishment when it was Moav who involved Bilaam in the first place? Surely Moav needed a lesson?

Rashi explains that the Moavites became involved because they were terrified of the advancing Israelites who had taken out the giants Sichon and Og and absorbed their kingdoms. Sichon and Og were paid to defend Moav from invaders like the Israelites. So it was understandable that Moav would be afraid.

But the Midianites were enraged over a dispute which was not theirs. They were not on the radar and yet staged an attack that compromised the sanctity of the Jewish people leading to thousands of deaths.

The parallels to the contemporary world are hard to ignore.

The Jewish state, far from threatening others, contributes massively to world society. Its people wish to live quietly. The Government tries every which way to find a way to a peaceful coexistence. They even dismiss warning signs of an impending mass terror attack because they simply wish that such plans would not be true.

And yet countries near and far attack physically, economically and culturally at any opportunity while having the chutzpah to claim that as instigators who almost always fail, they are the victims.

Unfortunately, just like at the time of Moshe, there is only one solution.

PRIORITIES

RABBI SHRAGA SIMMONS (Aish.com)

In this week's parsha, the Jewish people are in final preparations for entering the Land of Israel. Two of the tribes, Reuven and Gad have been blessed with such an abundance of flocks and herds, that they anticipate not having enough grazing land in Israel. So they propose the following: Instead of taking our regular portion of land within Israel proper, we'll instead stay here on the Eastern side of the Jordan River.

Moshe's reaction to this request? He lambastes them! Why? Moshe wasn't upset that they were choosing to stay outside Israel – actually they were helping to gather sparks of kabbalistic holiness from around the world. Rather, Moshe was upset because when making their request, Reuven and Gad blatantly disregard the needs of their children – and mention their cattle only. (Numbers 32:4)

The leaders of Reuven and Gad get the hint. Somewhat. In 32:16, they approach Moshe again and restate their request. This time they mention their children – but only after first speaking of their cattle. Moshe again is not happy at their lack of priority for putting business ahead of family.

Finally, they seem get the idea. In 32:26, they put everything in the proper order – family first, business second.

WE'VE ALL MET PEOPLE who are working overtime to "give their kids something extra" – while ruining that very relationship by not spending enough time with the kids!

Imagine the case of Mr. Schwartz, an investment banker in a major Wall Street financial firm. He spends most of his days trying to reach his lifelong goal of earning \$10 million. He and his wife have three children.

One day, a wealthy philanthropist named Mr. Cohen, who unfortunately has no children, decides to make Schwartz a very generous offer. Cohen says, "You're spending your whole life to make \$10 million dollars, right? But your

kids are growing up without a father. You're off to work before they get up, and home long after they've gone to sleep. On weekends, you're at the club entertaining business clients. So I'll give you the biggest shortcut of your financial career. I'm willing to offer you \$10 million dollars in exchange for the rights to adopt one of your children. He will have the best of everything. The only condition is that you will never be able to see or hear from him again."

What does Schwartz say? Ten million dollars certainly gets his attention! But even he realizes that there are things in life you can't put a price tag on. Schwartz stares Cohen right between the eyes and announces: "No deal."

Ten million dollars. "Money can't buy you love." (Somebody should write a song about that.)

NOW IMAGINE THE SCENE. Schwartz has just shut the door on a cool 10 million. He rushes home where his kids are playing on the living room floor. What do you think he does when he sees them?

With tears in his eyes, he runs over and gives them each a big hug and kiss.

"You darling creatures are worth more than all the money in the universe!"

Then he stops and realizes: "Where have I been all their lives? I have something at home that's worth more to me than all the money in the world – and I'm working so hard I barely spend one hour a week with them!"

So what does Schwartz do? He calls the office, announces he's taking a two-week vacation, and sends the maids, nannies and babysitters away. He's going to spend two blissful weeks with his kids.

After struggling for an hour to get the stroller open, Schwartz finally makes it to the park. He and the kids are having a grand time. But then comes dinner, bath and story time. After enduring food fights, floods in the bathtub and endless readings of "Babar Goes to the Circus," Schwartz flops down on the couch, turns to his wife and says, "Perhaps I was a bit hasty about that vacation. You know I have a lot of responsibilities at work..."

Schwartz is making a big mistake. More than presents, children need your presence.

THE TORAH TELLS US TO RECITE the "Shema" prayer twice each day. It says: "And you shall love the Lord your G-d, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your resources."

Typically the Torah presents a series as a progression from easiest to hardest: Love G-d emotionally ("heart"), and even be willing to give up your life if necessary ("soul"), and even be willing to spend your money, too!

Yet if this is a progression, are there really people who consider money more important than life itself?!

And the answer is yes. The Talmud speaks about someone who walks across a thorny field, and picks up his pants in order to avoid getting them ripped. Of course, the person's legs get all cut up and scratched – but at least the pants are saved!

One time I had to stay overnight in Nevada, where gambling is legal and every hotel has a casino. I went up to my hotel room and wanted to open the window to get some fresh air. But the window wouldn't open more than a crack. I thought it was stuck. So I pushed harder and harder. Finally I asked: "What is the problem with this window?"

I was told that the windows in this hotel are specially designed not to open more than a crack. This way, people who have lost money gambling won't be tempted to jump out the window and kill themselves.

Priorities.

IN OUR PARSHA, AFTER traveling through the desert for 40 years and enduring countless trials and tribulations, the Jewish people are now standing across the Jordan, ready to enter the Promised Land. It is one of the defining moments in all of Jewish history.

But Reuven and Gad say they'd rather take good grazing land than enter Israel!

They had come so far, but they only went halfway. They were distracted by material goals when it really counted.

The Talmud says that when Reuven and Gad later saw the rich life in the Land of Israel, they regretted their decision. But the story has an even sadder ending: When Assyrian King Sanchereb exiled the Jewish people during the time of the First Temple, the first tribes to be conquered and sent away were, you guessed it, Reuven and Gad.

It happens to all of us from time to time. Objectively, we can know our priorities. But sometimes we get distracted.

May we have the strength and clarity to connect our heart to our mind – and to act upon that which we intellectually know to be right.

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY (Torah.org)

During the presidential run of 1992, candidate Bill Clinton published a book entitled Putting People First. He had it right. He just wasn't the first one to write the book. This week we'll explore how Moshe — very subtly — taught his nation that people, especially the children, come first.

The Jews were camped on the bank of the Jordan River, about to enter the land of Israel. Representatives of the tribes of Gad and Reuben approached Moshe with a very brazen request. Numbers 32:3-5: "We don't want to enter Israel," they exclaimed. "The land here is very suited for our cattle, and it would be quite beneficial if we were to remain here." Moshe, recalling the calamity of the ten spies who dissuaded an entire nation from entering Israel, reacted in shock. "Do you remember what happened 40 years ago? Do you want to, once again, demoralize your brothers and sisters as did the spies? Do you remember that your parents and an entire generation perished in the dessert due to that sin?" Moshe then recounted, in full detail, the misfortune of that fateful event. "And now," he concluded, "you have risen in place of your fathers to rekindle the burning wrath of G-d?" The representatives, sat quietly through the denunciation and then spoke. "No, Moshe," they exclaimed. "It was never our intent just to remain here. We'll build stables for our livestock and homes for our children. Then we will join our brethren in the fight for Israel. Only after all is conquered will we return home and settle." Moshe, obviously pacified by the quick and obviously well prepared response, reviewed the stipulations. "OK," he countered, "you shall arm yourself for battle, cross the Jordan and fight with your brothers until Hashem drives out the enemy. Once the Land is conquered and settled, you can come back here and this land will be a heritage for you." After Moshe reiterated all the prerequisites involved in the deal, he warns them. "If you transgress your commitment you will bear a terrible sin before Hashem." Then, in what is seemingly out of place he adds the following. "Build cities for your children and pens for your livestock, and thus you shall observe the words that left your mouth." Two questions bother me: Why is Moshe adding his comments on the domestic portion of their request? Isn't his only concern that the tribes should join their brothers in the conquest of the land of Israel?

Rashi notes that Moshe switches the order of the request. The tribes said they will "build stables for our livestock and homes for our children." Moshe switches the order and tells them "build cities for your children and pens for your livestock." Why is this followed by the words, "thus you shall observe the words that left your mouth."? Didn't he already warn them of the consequence of retraction?

Henry Hirsch, the president of the Welbilt Co., one of America's leading oven and major appliance manufacturers, had another labor of love. He was the president of one of America's premier Torah institutions, Yeshiva Torah Voda'ath. At a board meeting, at which many of the yeshiva's prominent lay leaders were present, the school's cook prepared a beautiful supper in honor of the eminent supporters. As one of the students was serving the executives, Mr. Hirsch looked at the delicious meal. "Excuse me," he asked the young scholar. "What are they serving you in the main dining hall?" The boy looked sheepishly at Mr. Hirsch and stammered, " I think we're having egg salad sandwiches."

The renowned philanthropist turned to the executive board and the representatives of the Yeshiva administration. "We are all here for the sake of the Yeshiva boys, I think it is they who should be eating this chicken dinner. Let's send it to them and we'll have the egg salad instead."

Moshe was pleased with the offer to fight. However, he noted a major problem in the honorable plans of the tribes of Gad and Reuben. They prefaced their commitment with a very suspect phrase. "We will build pens for our livestock and then we will build cities for our children." Moshe listens, reviews their offer and is doubtful. People who put monetary values before humans tend to worry about finances before family. And people who put money first often change their position, when their holdings are at stake. Thus Moshe reiterates their pledge with one major amendment. He says to them, "build cities for your children and then pens for your livestock; thus you shall keep the word that left your mouth." If the children come first, then he will trust them. He knows and believes their values are in order and they will uphold their pledge. A major provision in the deal was not only a military commitment, but a philosophy that will guide the Jews for centuries. Put the people first!

A SLIP OF THE TONGUE

RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR (ohr.edu)

They approached him (Moshe) and said, ‘Pens for the flock shall we build here for our livestock, and cities for our small children.’ (32:16)

How often it is that we reveal our shortcomings to others, while we ourselves stay blissfully ignorant of our true selves! A slip of the tongue often speaks louder than a blasting loudspeaker.

The tribes of Reuven and Gad were blessed with large flocks. Recognizing that the terrain on the east bank of the Jordan was ideal for cattle grazing, they petitioned Moshe for this to be their share of the Land.

The Midrash says that their request to Moshe betrayed a materialistic orientation. In the order of their priorities ‘pens for the flock’ preceded ‘cities for our small children.’ Moshe, in his response, subtly corrected their priorities; “Build for yourselves cities for your small children and pens for your flocks...” (32:24)

It seems that Moshe’s subtle rebuke had its effect, for they replied, “Our small children, our wives, our livestock and all our animals will be there in the cities of Gilead.” (32:26)

Nevertheless, this Midrash seems difficult to understand. How could it be that Reuven and Gad, two of the tribes, two of the progenitors of the holy nation of Yisrael, could have been more concerned with their possessions than their children, as it appears from this order?

We should never make the mistake of relating our failings to the perceived failings of our Forefathers. Their smallest sin in our hands would appear like a jewel of mitzvah. On their level, the children of Reuven and Gad were considered overly materialistic, but if they were walking around today, they would seem so spiritual as to be scarcely part of the planet.

MONEY AND THE KIDS

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND (Aish.com)

The Jewish People reached the plains of Moav, the jumping-off point for the invasion of Canaan, which was imminent. But the tribes of Gad and Reuven, rich in livestock, preferred the lush pasturelands of the Trans-Jordan to shares in Eretz Yisrael proper. They asked Moshe for permission to take their share in the Trans-Jordan.

Moshe berated them for letting the others fight to conquer Canaan while they settled down in their ranches. Furthermore, their reluctance to cross would have a demoralizing effect on the others, just as the report of the Meraglim had demoralized the people thirty-eight years earlier.

“This is what we want to do,” they said to Moshe. “We want to build sheep pens for our livestock here and towns for our children. Then we will go quickly at the head of the army and fight until the land is conquered and apportioned. Only then will we return to our homes.”

“All right,” said Moshe (32:24), “build towns for your children and pens for your sheep. And make sure you keep your word.”

Notice that Moshe reversed the order of their priorities. They wanted to “build sheep pens for our livestock here and towns for our children.” First let us take care of the livestock. Let us make sure we have pens in which to keep them so they don’t wander off into the hills and get lost or stolen. Cows and sheep are valuable assets, and we have to take good care of them. Then they spoke about building “towns for our children.” Then we will provide our children with a place to live while we are at war.

Oh no, Moshe replied. You have it backwards. First of all, “build towns for your children.” Make sure you have attended to the needs of your children. Afterwards, you can also build “pens for your sheep.” First you take care of your children, then you worry about your cattle.

The Midrash sums up the exchange with the verse (Koheles 10:2), “The heart of the wise man is on his right, and the heart of the fool is on his left.”

Moshe’s heart was on the right. He had his priorities right. Their hearts were on the left. They gave precedence to secondary considerations. They were more worried about their money than their children.

When we look at this incident, we say to ourselves, “How foolish can people be? How warped can their values be? How can anyone put the welfare of his cattle before the welfare of his children?”

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident, something bizarre that happened thousands of years ago. It is an everyday phenomenon. People become focused on their livelihood, on developing a business, on advancing professionally, on building a practice, and their kids get lost in the shuffle. They don’t realize that they are making the exact same mistake as the tribes of Gad and Reuven. But it is true. It happens all too often.

Rashi writes (32:24) that the tribes of Gad and Reuven did not return home to the Trans-Jordan until after the seven years of conquest and the seven years of apportionment. They remained in Eretz Yisrael for a full fourteen years. Those little children they left behind ¾ let’s assume they were 3 or 4

years old ¾ how old were they when their fathers returned home? Teenagers! Practically adults. The Midrash tells us that their fathers were shocked to find that their sons had long hair, that they were indistinguishable from their pagan neighbors.

This is what happens when parents give priority to their wealth over their children.

The Ksav Sofer raises a question with the latter part of Moshe’s words. After helping the tribes of Gad and Reuven get their priorities straight, he told them, “Make sure you keep your word.” Why was this necessary?

The answer, says the Ksav Sofer, is that Moshe knew with whom he was dealing. People who could even think of protecting their money before they protect their children cannot be trusted. They are so intent on their wealth that they can do anything. Therefore, Moshe had to exhort them to keep their word.

Rav Tzaddok Hakohein explains that the desire for money is greater than any other material drive, since it is the only one that is insatiable. There is a limit to how much a person can eat, to how many times he can commit adultery, but there is no limit to how much money he can accumulate. The quest for wealth can become more obsessive than any other quest. All too often, the children are the price of the wealth.

TRAVELING FROM SHABBOS TO SHABBOS

RABBI LABEL LAM (Torah.org)

These are the journeys of the Children of Israel who left the Land of Egypt in their legions, under the charge of Moshe and Aaron. Moshe recorded their starting points for their journeys according to the word of the word of HASHEM, and these were their journeys with their starting points. They journeyed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day following the Passover sacrifice, the children of Israel left triumphantly before the eyes of all the Egyptians. And the Egyptians were busy burying because HASHEM had struck down their firstborn and had wrought vengeance against their deities. The children of Israel journeyed from Rameses and camped in Succos. They journeyed from Succos and camped in Esam, at the edge of the desert. (Bamidbar 33:1-6)

There is a question that has haunted me for a while regarding the Torah’s description of the 42 journeys of the Children of Israel in the desert over the course of 40 years. Why, in each case, does the Torah tell us where they exited from first and then where they encamped? Just tell us where they went to and we know automatically it was from the last place they settled down. When Yaakov left Be’er Sheva on his way to Charan, Rashi is compelled, based on that question, to tell us that when a Tzadik leaves a place the impression of his absence is felt. Why is Rashi silent on these multiple accounts of the Children of Israel traveling from A to B and then from B to C?!

The Ksav HaKabbalah writes: “The departures. We learn from this that the names of these places that are mentioned here are not the actual names that they had before. They are in fact the names that were given them as a result of the events that took place when Yisrael camped there. That, in my opinion, is what was meant when Scripture says: “Moshe recorded their departures for their journeys.” He recorded all of the events that befell them on all of their journeys. That is in of itself why he mentioned afterwards the names of their encampments, because the names themselves describe the events that took place.

It seems that each place was, like when the Jewish People left Egypt, an event, an experience worth noting as a new launching point, like “survivors”! These were not just horizontal journeys or an arbitrary list of starting and stopping points but a life journal of experiences and graduations building up to crescendo, entering Eretz HaKodesh. This is a holy quest like none before or after. The Jewish People are a “Mamlachas Kohanim v’Goy Kadosh... A Kingdom of Priests (servants of HASHEM) and a Holy Nation” by design.

What does it mean to be HOLY? It is easy to be thrown and distracted by that hard to define word. Maybe we can understand it best by studying the opposite. When we make Havdala at the conclusion of Shabbos, each week we make a Brocho, “HaMavdil Bein Kodesh L’Chol – Who separates between Holy and Profane”. I don’t know what profane or secular means but “Chol” is literally sand in Hebrew. How can that explain HOLY and how to turn Chol into Kodesh, sand into diamonds?

Hold in your hand a pile of sand and study it briefly. There is no top or bottom, or middle. It is a loose collection of particles. There is no rhyme or reason. It has no shape or form of its own. Nothing grows from sand. It lacks the magic of soil which gives birth to life and has a future. Sand – Chol

represents a life of experiences that, no matter how pleasant and exciting they may have been, are essentially vacuous and empty, sound and fury signifying nothing. There is no theme and connectivity one to another and of no ultimate meaning or value.

However, if one is living a life where, for example, Shabbos is a centerpiece of existence, then everything is building up to and leading to Shabbos Kodesh. All of our work and our shopping too are organized around and leading towards Shabbos. Shabbos Kodesh is a golden thread that holds all the pearls and diamonds of our daily deeds together like a beautiful necklace, a rich piece of Jewelry.

Everything we do connects us to HASHEM. Every breath we take and every move we make is made HOLY and is ultimately meaningful on our weekly march from one Shabbos to another Shabbos and we are becoming HOLIER people, camping and traveling from Shabbos to Shabbos!

PERSONAL TRAGEDIES

RABBI NAFTALI REICH (Torah.org)

Two men commit identical crimes. Both are convicted and sentenced. One remains in confinement for twenty-five years, while the other goes free after six months. How is this possible?

In this week's Torah portion, we read that a person who commits accidental homicide is exiled for the rest of his life to one of the designated cities of refuge. However, when the High Priest dies all the accidental killers in exile at the time go free – regardless of whether they had been there for six months or twenty-five years. As a result, two men can commit identical acts of accidental homicide and serve widely different sentences. Where is the fairness in this system? And why indeed should the death of the High Priest result in amnesty for all exiled killers?

Furthermore, the Talmud tells us that the High Priest's mother, fearful that the exiled killers would pray for her son's untimely death, used to visit them in their places of exile and bring them food and other small gifts. But why would an old woman bringing cookies and chocolate dissuade a cooped-up killer from praying for the death of the High Priest and his early release from exile?

The commentators explain that the sentence of exile is not intended as a punishment but as the beginning of the process of rehabilitation. Accidental homicides which result in exile are due to a significant degree of negligence, of thoughtlessness and insensitivity. Had the accidental killer genuinely appreciated the sanctity of human life, he would have been extremely careful while swinging that hammer, and the accidental death would most probably never have been occurred. It is this cavalier attitude that the exile is intended to correct.

In these cities of refuge, populated for the most part by Levites, the exiled killer came into contact with people who lived not for themselves but for their Creator and their people, devoting themselves to study and prayer and to teaching, inspiring and helping others. In this environment, he learned to be sensitive and unselfish, to think about other before he thought about himself. In this environment, he also gained profound admiration and attachment to the High Priest, the peacemaker of the Jewish people, the loving father figure who tended to their spiritual needs and ailments, the ultimate Levite role model. He began to feel a personal connection to the High Priest, whether or not they had actually ever met, and learning from his example, he began to develop those positive character traits he had been missing before.

Therefore, when the High Priest died, the exiled killers who had become so attached to him were devastated. Each of them, in his own way, felt he had suffered a deep personal tragedy. This catharsis sealed forever the bond between the erstwhile killers and the saintly High Priest, thereby completing the process of their expiation. After mourning the death of the High Priest, the exiles were fully rehabilitated.

The High Priest's mother, however, was concerned that the exiled killers would not relate to her son in a direct personal way but rather as an abstract symbol in distant Jerusalem, and therefore, they might pray for his death. Therefore, she brought them food and small gifts. Let them meet the High Priest's mother and enjoy her cookies and chocolates. Let them see him as real flesh-and-blood human being. Let them relate to him as a living, breathing father. It was important for their own rehabilitation, and at the same time, it would protect her son from malicious prayers.

A great sage once came to a town and was told by the townspeople to avoid a certain reputed informer.

Sure enough, the man approached the sage and began to question him. The sage, however, did not beat a hasty retreat. Instead, he asked the man his

name, inquired about his welfare and his family and drew him into a long conversation.

In the course of the sage's stay in the town, he was visited often by the informer, and each time, he was received warmly. By the time the sage left, the man had made a complete turnaround in his life.

"How did you accomplish it?" someone asked the sage as he was leaving.

"What did you tell him that changed him so completely?"

"Why, nothing," said the sage. "Because I treated him as a person, he related to me as person. And why would he want to hurt another person?"

In our own lives, we sometimes hurt and offend others with meaning to, and we excuse ourselves by saying it was all unintentional. But in the Torah system of values, lack of intention does not exonerate us, only lack of control does. If these hurts and offenses could have been avoided, we must bear responsibility for them. If, however, we learn from the example of the High Priest and from the exemplary people we meet in the course of our lives, we can refine our own characters and ultimately enrich ourselves and the people around us..

THE PRAYERS OF THE HIGH PRIEST

PROFESSOR NAFTALI LOEWENTHAL (Chabad.org)

What is the function of spiritual leadership? To inspire, to guide? To have vision for the future? Yes, all of that. But this week's Torah reading adds a further dimension: to feel a sense of connection with every individual, to pray on their behalf, to seek to connect them with the divine, and to protect them both physically and spiritually.

The Torah describes the sad case of a person who accidentally—but negligently—brought about someone's death. This is a tragic event, and the Torah text uses the term "murderer" for the one who caused the accident, despite the fact that it was not planned as a crime and was not the result of personal hatred.

This serious action needs atonement, and the Torah instructs that in the Land of Israel six cities of refuge should be established. The accidental murderer has to flee to one of these cities, and remain there for the rest of his life. Only through this can he gain atonement for the tragedy he caused.

The Torah adds an interesting point. If the high priest passes away, the accidental murderer is permitted to leave the city of refuge and return home. (35:25)

One explanation of this is that the passing of the righteous atones for the sins of the generation. The fact that the high priest, the spiritual leader of the generation, has left the world attains atonement for many people, including the accidental murderer, and he is then able to return home (see Makkos 11b).

Rashi gives a different explanation. He says that the high priest should have been praying for the benefit of his generation in a way which would have prevented such negligent accidents from taking place. This means that the fact that the accident occurred indicates a flaw in the spiritual service of the high priest himself. He should have been concerned for the spiritual wellbeing of every person. That concern, expressed through his intense power of prayer, would have prevented the accident.

When the high priest passes away, atonement is achieved for his error in not praying for the weaker members of his generation, and this also affects the accidental murderer. He, too, is now atoned for his blunder and can go home.

This demonstrates the nature of Jewish leadership. The high priest was an exalted figure, living in the atmosphere of the sacred Temple. Yet he should be concerned for every individual in the Jewish people, including those who are liable to fall into dangerous and harmful behavior. He cannot think that his sanctity protects him. On the contrary, it gives him a tremendous responsibility to be concerned for everyone.

This, of course, applies to each of us. We cannot think that we are separate from those who are more challenged in spiritual or moral terms. The whole Jewish people is one; further, the Jew has to be concerned about the spiritual wellbeing of everyone in society.

Through this kind of concern on the part of every member of the Jewish people, with leaders on every level who express this ideal, we will be able to bring the world to the next stage of history, the ultimate redemption.

TRIBALISM

RABBI YANKI TAUBER (Chabad.org)

Tribe, tribal, tribalism... The word has a nice primitive ring to it, and words with nice-primitive rings are very much in style these days. We're all celebrating our tribal identities, researching our tribes' histories and

incorporating a tribal ritual or two in our lives.

But styles come and go, so it's safe to assume that within a half-decade or so tribalism will be as passé as the Marlboro Man. (Remember when he was cool?) We need a more timeless frame of reference.

Looking at the Torah (which is as timeless as it gets), we get a mixed message.

On the one hand, Torah seems to be quite pro-tribal from the get-go. From the beginning, Jacob's twelve sons are slated to father the twelve tribes of Israel. On his deathbed, Jacob blesses each one individually, imparting to each the qualities and gifts that will define his tribe's distinct role within the people of Israel; Moshe does the same when blessing the twelve tribes two centuries later, on the eve of the people's entry into the Holy Land. In their travels through the desert, each tribe had its own leader or "prince," its own encampment in its designated place around the Tabernacle, its own color and flag, its own representative stone on the ceremonial breastplate worn by the High Priest. The Midrash even tells us that when the Sea of Reeds split for the Children of Israel it provided twelve different openings, so that each tribe could travel its own designated path.

But the most significant delineator of tribal identity is what happened when the people of Israel entered the Holy Land. The land was divided into twelve territories, and each tribe was allotted the portion that suited its particular vocation as shepherds, vintners, seafaring merchants, soldiers, scholars, olive growers, and so on.

The extent to which the Torah goes to preserve the integrity of the tribal territories is evidenced by an incident recorded in this week's Parshah, in the closing verses of the Book of Numbers. Several chapters back (in Numbers 27) we read about the daughters of Tzelafchad, who approached Moshe with a petition to receive their father's portion in the Holy Land. Under biblical law, only sons inherited the ancestral estate. Tzelafchad had five daughters but no sons; the result, argued the five daughters, would be that their father's legacy would be lost! G-d accepted their petition, and instructed Moshe that Tzelafchad's estate be given to his daughters.

But following this ruling, another group of people approached Moshe with their own petition. These were the tribal heads of Menasseh, Tzelafchad's tribe. Their argument went like this: if Tzelafchad's portion is given to his daughters, what will happen if they marry men from another tribe? Their children, whose tribal identity will follow that of their fathers', will inherit the Tzelafchad estate. We will then have Reubenite or Shimonite estates within the boundaries of the Menasseh territory, making a mishmash of our tribal homeland!

To this petition, G-d responded with a rather practical solution: let Tzelafchad's daughters marry men from the tribe of Menasseh. Indeed, this became an across-the-board rule: any daughter who inherits land must marry only within her father's tribe, so that "no inheritance will be transferred from one tribe to another tribe, for each person of the tribes of the children of Israel shall cleave to his own inheritance" (Numbers 36:9).

What all this seems to indicate is that although the Jewish people are enjoined to be a "one people in the land" and to regard themselves "as one man, with one heart," this does not preclude the existence of distinct tribal identities within the Jewish nation. In fact, many today see the various communities within the Jewish people—Ashkenazic and Sephardic, Chassidic and non-Chassidic, etc.—as modern-day equivalents of the biblical "Tribes of Israel," and point to the biblical precedent as indication that the differences in customs, philosophy and lifestyle amongst these communities are legitimate, indeed desirable, expressions of the multi-tribal nature of the Jewish people.

There is, however, a sequel to the daughters-of-Tzelachad story and the tribal identity crisis they provoked. We are told that the rule that a daughter who inherits tribal lands should marry only within her father's tribe was only instituted for the first generation of Jews who settled the land under Joshua. Once the apportionment of the land was completed (a process which took fourteen years) and each tribe and family was securely settled on its territory and its family estate, the inter-tribal marriage ban was lifted. Apparently, at this point a little bit of tribal mishmash could be tolerated.

Furthermore, the day on which "the tribes of Israel where permitted to marry into each other" was proclaimed a national holiday. In fact, this holiday—the 15th of Av—is declared by the Mishnah to be one of the two greatest days of the year! (the other being none other than Yom Kippur). There are a number of reasons given as to the specialty of Av 15th, but this is one of them. In other words, the merging of tribes is not only tolerable, but something to be celebrated.

So what are we to make of all this? Is tribalism good or bad for the soul? How are we to weigh our loyalty to family, community and "tribe" against our role as a partner in the mission and destiny of the entirety of the Jewish people?

I'm not quite sure what it is, but there's a message here somewhere.

News, Views & Opinion

A STINGING BLOW DESIGNED TO AVOID WAR

YAAKOV LAPPIN (JNS.org 31-7-24)

The assassination in Beirut on Tuesday of Fuad Shukr, aka Sayyid Muhsan, Hezbollah's chief of staff and most senior military commander, represents a strategic blow to the terrorist organization.

This targeted strike, carried out by Israeli Air Force in Hezbollah's Dahiya hub, highlights both Jerusalem's advanced intelligence and firepower capabilities. However, the critical question remains: Will Hezbollah now escalate the situation into a full-scale conflict—one that Israel is clearly seeking to avoid?

As a close adviser to Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah and a member of Hezbollah's Jihad Council, Shukr played a pivotal role in directing Hezbollah's military operations. He was responsible for orchestrating numerous attacks against Israel, including the July 27 rocket strike on Majdal Shams, which killed 12 children. Shukr's elimination is a clear message from Israel that it will not tolerate such heinous acts. It is also a message to Nasrallah, who attempted to deter Israel from striking in Beirut, that if Israeli red lines are crossed, nowhere in Lebanon is the terror group immune.

Since joining the organization in 1985, Shukr held several senior positions, ultimately rising to lead Hezbollah's Strategic Unit. This unit is responsible for managing Hezbollah's advanced weaponry, including precision-guided missiles, cruise missiles, anti-ship missiles, long-range rockets and UAVs. His foundational role made him a crucial figure in planning and executing terror attacks against Israel.

The Jihad Council, in which Shukr was prominent, is responsible for all of Hezbollah's military and security activities and is subordinate to the Shura Council, the terror group's supreme decision-making body, according to the Alma Center, which specializes in the Lebanese and Syrian arenas. The Jihad Council is the general staff of Hezbollah's army, and is composed mostly of senior military officials, and is under the direct supervision of Nasrallah.

In the 1990s, Shukr fought against the Israel Defense Forces and South Lebanese Army in southern Lebanon. In 2000, he played a direct role in the abduction and murder of three IDF soldiers who were on patrol near Mount Dov. Since then he planned and implemented many attacks on Israeli civilians.

Despite the elimination of such a high-profile target in Lebanon, Israel wished to remain focused on the Gaza Strip, where the IDF continues to fight against Hamas, which still holds 115 hostages. IDF Spokesperson Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said on Wednesday morning that the military remains committed to creating conditions for their return and to dismantling Hamas. Although the IDF Home Front Command issued no immediate changes to its instructions following the Beirut strike, the IDF emphasized the need for public vigilance and the ongoing assessment of the situation. Israel's air defense systems are robust but not impervious, and the need for public awareness and preparedness is clear, according to the military.

Ultimately, Hezbollah's use of a Falaq-type Iranian rocket in Saturday's deadly rocket attack on the Golan Heights marked a severe escalation, necessitating a formidable Israeli response. The targeted elimination of Shukr was that response, although it will not fundamentally change the security situation in northern Israel.

Only a full-scale war, which would likely last months and see Israel hit with many thousands of rockets, mortars, drones and precision guided missiles, as well as an aggressive Israeli ground maneuver in Southern Lebanon, would accomplish that.

In such a scenario, the IAF would need to strike at least 3,000 targets a day in Lebanon—an unprecedented Israeli use of airpower. And Iran could well become directly involved, placing Washington in a strategic dilemma.

In such a conflict, the Iran and Syria fronts would likely be fully activated, posing additional challenges. Tens of thousands of Shi'ite militia members, under the command of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), are already operating in Syria, as is Hezbollah. These forces would likely launch ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and UAVs at Israel, further complicating

such a war scenario.

Israel is in continuous dialogue with the United States and CENTCOM, Hagari confirmed in his statement on Wednesday.

While Israel aims to avoid a broader conflict, it is fully prepared for one, according to Hagari. Yet the decision to escalate now rests with Hezbollah and Nasrallah.

One way or the other, the residents of northern Israel, some 60,000 of whom remain displaced since Oct. 8 due to ongoing Hezbollah attacks, cannot remain in limbo forever.

Looking ahead, there are two main possibilities. The first is that Hezbollah in its response to the Beirut strike sparks a war. The second is that it chooses to respond but stays beneath the threshold of war, and then returns to regularly firing on the north as part of its strategy to force Israel into surrender in Gaza.

Should a ceasefire be reached with Hamas in Gaza, leading Hezbollah to enter into an informal truce. However, this would only delay a war, not prevent one.

Israel's elimination of Shukr was a calculated attempt by Israel to deliver a stinging blow to Hezbollah while maintaining Gaza as its primary focus. Nasrallah's next steps will determine whether or not Lebanon becomes the new primary front in the fateful conflict between Israel and Iranian-backed jihadist armies.

WHO WAS ISMAIL HANIYEH?

BARUCH YEDID (JewishPress.com 31-7-24)

In the early hours of Wednesday morning, a missile strike attributed to Israel struck a Tehran guest house killing Ismail Haniyeh, the head of Hamas's politburo and number one leader. Haniyeh's assassination came hours after Israel claimed responsibility for a Beirut airstrike that killed Fuad Shahr, the highest-ranking Hezbollah figure killed since October 7.

Although Israel has not confirmed responsibility, Israelis praised the assassination.

"Eliminating the heads of the snake is an action that supports the existential need to defeat our enemies and strengthen Israel's deterrence power," Hila Baruch Lilian, a Sderot resident told The Press Service of Israel.

Lilian who is also a representative of the Otef Israel Forum of residents of communities surrounding Gaza, added, "As residents of [Gaza border communities], we support this offensive spirit, and call on the military and government leaders to continue with this strength relentlessly, until the captives are returned and security is restored to our borders."

THE 61-YEAR-OLD HANIYEH was raised in the Shati refugee camp when Gaza was administered by Egypt. He died with an estimated \$4 billion personal fortune [which he couldn't take with him].

During his youth, he worked in Israel as a plasterer. He became active with Hamas when it was founded in 1987, being involved with the "Islamic Wall," Hamas's student initiative at Islamic University in Gaza City. Haniyeh was jailed several times in Israel, but his activities continued, leading to his deportation along with 415 other Hamas figures to Lebanon in 1992. Haniyeh and the deportees returned to Gaza more than one year later.

Haniyeh's big break came in 1997 when he was appointed personal assistant to Hamas founder and spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. During the Second Intifada from 2000-2005, more than 1,000 Israelis were killed in suicide bombings, shootings and stabbing attacks. Since launching its first Qassem rocket in 2001 at Kibbutz Saad, Hamas has fired thousands of rockets at Israel.

By 2005, Haniyeh was at the forefront of Hamas's political efforts. In 2006, Hamas's "Change and Reform" list won 44% of the seats in elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council.

In 2006-2007, he served as Palestinian Authority Prime Minister under Mahmoud Abbas, but Western countries boycotted him. In 2007, Hamas violently seized control of the Gaza Strip and Haniyeh became Hamas's "Prime Minister" of Gaza, a title he held until 2014. In 2017, he was elected leader of Hamas's politburo, replacing Khaled Mashaal as the terror group's top leader.

In his later years, Haniyeh based himself in Qatar and Turkey. Egypt — angered by Haniyeh attending the Tehran funeral of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commander Qassem Soleimani in 2020 — refused to allow him to return to Gaza.

Haniyeh's leadership was weakened by divisions within Hamas's Qatar and Iran camps. Haniyeh's deputy, Saleh Arouri actively moved Hamas into Iran's orbit and also established a Hamas presence in southern Lebanon.

Although Haniyeh was the face of Hamas for Qatari-mediated ceasefire

talks, he continued embracing Iran, Hezbollah and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and his rhetoric remained inflammatory. Discussing the war with Al Jazeera on October 26, Haniyeh praised the deaths of PA Arab civilians.

"As I said, and I repeat every time, the blood of the children, women, and elderly — I do not say that it shouts out to you, but rather we need this blood so that it will ignite within us the spirit of revolution, so that it will arouse within us persistence, so that it will arouse within us defiance and advance," Haniyeh said.

Haniyeh's influence over Hamas collapsed with the October 7 attacks, which entrenched Yahya Sinwar and Arouri. Hamas leaders inside and outside the Strip disagreed on ceasefire efforts and Hamas's role in post-war Gaza.

Haniyeh's three sons were killed in an Israeli airstrike in Gaza in April.

At least 1,200 people were killed, and 252 Israelis and foreigners were taken hostage in Hamas's attacks on Israeli communities near the Gaza border on October 7. Of the 115 remaining hostages, 39 have been declared dead. Hamas has also been holding captive two Israeli civilians since 2014 and 2015, and the bodies of two soldiers killed in 2014.

US OPPOSES KNESSET BILL TO USE PA TAX REVENUES FOR OCT. 7 TERRORISTS' LEGAL DEFENSE

AKIVA VAN KONINGSVELD (JNS.org 29-7-24)

Knesset Constitution, Law and Justice Committee Chairman MK Simcha Rothman

The State Department on Monday denounced proposed Israeli legislation that would use tax revenue collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority to defray the legal expenses of Hamas terrorists captured on Oct. 7.

"We have been clear that the Palestinian Authority's clearance revenues belong to the P.A. and should be transferred in full," said a State Department spokesperson.

"Effective counterterrorism policy upholds the rule of law while respecting human rights," the statement continued.

The Knesset Constitution, Law and Justice Committee on July 15 advanced an amendment to the Public Defender's Office Bill stipulating that legal fees for those charged with terrorism be deducted from funds intended for the P.A.

Those charged with or suspected of nationalistically motivated crime, and who are not citizens or residents, would not be eligible for state funding with regard to legal representation under the amendment.

The bill passed in first reading with the support of committee chair Simcha Rothman (Religious Zionist Party), Avraham Betzalel (Shas Party) and Matan Kahana (National Unity Party). Labor Party Knesset member Gilad Kariv was present but refrained from voting, according to the Knesset website.

Under agreements signed in the 1990s, Israel's Finance Ministry collects taxes and customs duties on behalf of the P.A. Ramallah earmarks an estimated 275 million shekels, or \$73 million, for Gaza each month.

"The Palestinian Authority receives money from the State of Israel based on tax revenues, some of it connected to Judea and Samaria and some of it connected to the Gaza Strip," Rothman explained to JNS on Sunday.

"You cannot get the benefits of receiving the taxes for Gaza but not be responsible for the atrocities that came from Gaza," he continued. "For that reason and many more, the P.A. should be held accountable for what happened on Oct. 7."

Ramallah also pays monthly "salaries" to captured Oct. 7 terrorists under its "pay-for-slay" policy, and its police officers have been involved in acts of terror in Judea and Samaria, Rothman told JNS.

"This ... should come with some price tag, and that's the offer on the table right now," he concluded.

Some 3,000 terrorists, from Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Fatah, along with unaffiliated Gazans, infiltrated the Jewish state on Oct. 7. Israeli security forces killed approximately 1,000 of the terrorists and captured many others.

Roughly 1,200 Israelis were murdered on Oct. 7, with thousands more wounded and over 250 others abducted. One hundred and fifteen hostages, both living and dead, remain captive in the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli government has already allocated around a million shekels (approx. \$275,000) to the legal defense by private attorneys of terrorists who invaded Israel on Oct. 7, the Israel Courts Administration revealed earlier this month.

The government body said the initial funding would go toward paying 79 private attorneys who agreed to represent the terrorists, including suspected members of Hamas's Nukhba Force, which led the mass infiltration and massacre.

HEZBOLLAH MASSACRES CHILDREN AND WASHINGTON POST BLAMES ISRAEL

SEAN DURNS (Camera.org 29-7-24)

Hezbollah massacred a dozen children and teenagers in the Druze village of Majdal Shams in northern Israel. But the Washington Post knows who to blame—and it's not the Iranian-backed terror group. Rather, the once venerable newspaper chose to train their fire on the Jewish state.

On July 27, 2024, Hezbollah launched missiles into Israel, murdering twelve children and wounding more than forty people. Many of those murdered were kids playing a soccer game. Footage of their tiny, dismembered bodies circulated on social media shortly afterwards. Hezbollah initially claimed the attack, only to deny it later.

Hezbollah has been launching missiles into Israel since Hamas perpetrated the Oct. 7, 2023 massacre. Hezbollah, which de facto rules Lebanon, is Iran's foremost terror proxy. Hezbollah, like its master in Tehran, calls for Israel's destruction.

As CAMERA has documented, Hezbollah is a formidable foe. The terrorist organization maintains a global presence and has an estimated 150,000 missiles, many of them precision guided. Indeed, Hezbollah's capabilities led then-U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage to call them the "A Team" of terror groups, with more munitions than many European nations. The Biden administration, the United Nations, and others have discouraged Israel launching a full-scale campaign against Hezbollah, variously arguing that they seek to prevent a "wider, regional war" and that Jerusalem should focus on its military campaign in the south, against Hamas and other Gaza-based Iranian proxies. Thus far, the Israeli military has only launched low-level retaliatory strikes in response.

But that "wider, regional war" is already here, with Iranian-backed terror groups attacking Israel from Yemen, the Red Sea, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. The attack on Majdal Shams has sparked widespread outrage, including in Israel and among the Druze community.

As JNS reporter Neta Bar observed, "For Syrian Druze, the residents of Majdal Shams are relatives, countrymen and coreligionists, and any harm to them is a direct attack on all Syrian Druze." Bar's dispatch, entitled "Syrian Druze fed up with fence-sitting after Majdal Shams massacre," offered a detailed look the community's response to the attack, highlighting both their perspective and a look at relevant history.

The Washington Post, however, chose to focus, not on Hezbollah's mass murder of children playing soccer, but on Israel's response. The Post's July 29th front-page, above-the-fold, story, "Israel hits targets in Lebanon" featured a whopping six bylines but very little common sense. Indeed, the dispatch was datelined as "Majdal Shams, Golan Heights"—implying that the Golan Heights is not part of Israel.

The Post's story was accompanied by a photograph of Alma Ayman Fakher Eldin, an eleven-year-old girl who was slain on the soccer field. Underneath the picture, however, the Post wrote: "Relatives on Sunday mourn Alma Ayman Fakher Edlin, one of 12 victims of a strike on a soccer field in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. While Israel and the United States blame Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed militant group denies connection to the attack [emphasis added]." To echo and give undue credit to Hezbollah's claims is risible.

Indeed, as the analyst Eitan Fischberger pointed out on July 27th—more than 24 hours before the Post's story—Al Mayadeen, Hezbollah affiliated media, took credit for the attack on Mount Hermon, where Majdal Shams is located. At 6:49pm Israeli time, shortly after the missiles slaughtered children playing soccer, Al Mayadeen tweeted "We bombed the Hermon Brigade headquarters in the 'Ma'ale Golani' barracks with 'Katyusha rockets.'" As Fischberger noted on X, Majdal Shams is right next to Maale Golani. Katyusha rockets are famously inaccurate, and indiscriminate attacks have long been part of Hezbollah's repertoire.

The Post's front-page coverage—fixating on Israel's low-level response instead of the human tragedy at Majdal Shams and the outrage of the Druze community—is hardly unusual. Regrettably, it's part of a pattern, both among legacy media writ large, and at the Post itself.

Since October 7th, the newspaper has variously referred to the mass rapes perpetrated by Hamas as merely "alleged," echoed antisemitic claims that Israel "harvests" Palestinian organs, inaccurately portrayed the Jewish state as responsible for murdering babies, and regurgitated, sometimes word-for-word, propaganda from Hamas, a U.S. designated terrorist group. The Post even knowingly employs a reporter, Hajar Harb, who celebrated October 7th on social media. As CAMERA has pointed out, groups like

Hamas and Hezbollah are able to murder children thanks to their mouthpieces in the Western press, the Washington Post foremost among them.

GAZA HEALTH MINISTRY DECLARES POLIO "EPIDEMIC" WITHOUT A SINGLE CASE

ELDER OF ZIYON (ElderofZiyon.blogspot.com 30-7-24)

From Al Jazeera:

Gaza's health ministry has declared a polio epidemic across the Palestinian enclave, blaming Israel's devastating military offensive for the spread of the deadly virus.

In a statement on Telegram, the ministry on Monday said the situation "poses a health threat to the residents of Gaza and neighbouring countries" – the latest sign of a worsening public health emergency caused by Israel's genocidal war since October.

Calling the epidemic a "setback" to the global polio eradication programme, the ministry called for an "immediate intervention to end the [Israeli] aggression and find radical solutions" to lack of potable water and personal hygiene, damaged sewage networks and removal of tonnes of rubbish and solid waste.

This must be the first time in history an epidemic was declared without a single case of the disease.

NGOs discovered the poliovirus in areas of Gaza in samples taken over a month ago, and they have been looking for specific cases since then.

So far, they have not found any.

But the Gaza health ministry saw an opportunity to politicize this news to demand Israel stop attacking its Hamas bosses. The declaration they issued demands an end to the "brutal Israeli aggression" yet does not demand an increase in vaccines.

To be sure, the discovery of the virus in wastewater is not something to take lightly. At first I thought that it could have come from aid workers who took the polio vaccine before entering Gaza, which sheds the weakened virus in their waste. Indeed, the type of polio discovered is a vaccine-derived poliovirus type 2. But type-2 polio has not been part of vaccines since 2015 when the wild type of type-2 polio was declared eradicated.

99% of Palestinian children were immunized in 2022, and 89% in 2023. Young children who have not finished the series of vaccines are at risk. It appears that it is possible that the virus was spread from Egypt, where the polio virus was detected last year (although no evidence of an outbreak there, either, that I can find) and it may have entered Gaza before October.

It is important to note that most forms of polio that spread today are the weakened types that originated from oral vaccines taken before 2015 that have not mutated into something deadly. Over 95% of those with the virus do not exhibit any symptoms at all (75%) or only exhibit mild symptoms that appear like any other virus. Ironically, sometimes the spread of these weakened viruses cause a community to have passive resistance to more dangerous forms of polio even without immunization. In other words, the existence of the virus is not at all evidence of an epidemic or outbreak.

Make no mistake, this is still a serious finding and requires a serious response. Israel is working with international organizations to bring millions of vaccines into Gaza. It is also vaccinating its own soldiers out of caution.

But when the health ministry declares an "epidemic," it is not a serious response. There is no epidemic. It is anti-Israel propaganda and an attempt to allow Hamas to win the war.

HEZBOLLAH HAS EXPOSED THE WEST'S FATAL COWARDICE

RICHARD KEMP (Richard-Kemp.com 30-7-24)

The massacre this weekend of 12 children playing football in a Hezbollah missile attack is a heartbreaking reminder of why we should be doing everything possible to support Israel. The Iranian-made rocket that exploded in Majdal Shams was one of over 150,000 missiles supplied by Tehran to its terrorist army in Lebanon. Since the October 7 attacks by Hamas, Hezbollah has been firing missiles and drones into northern Israel almost daily.

Lebanon and Gaza are the two most active arenas of a seven-front war, armed and directed from Tehran and intended to strangle Israel. I was in Tel Aviv a few days ago when a drone launched by Iran's Houthi proxies in Yemen exploded in the city, killing one and injuring others. I was in Jerusalem in April when hundreds of missiles and drones were fired at that city and other locations in Israel by Iran itself.

The RAF, with counterparts from the US, France and Arab countries, helped

defend against that bombardment. Although Israel has strong armed forces, it is not all-powerful and relies heavily on assistance from allies. But right now its most important backer, the US, is withholding supplies of some vital munitions, a matter Benjamin Netanyahu spoke of in his address to the US Congress last week. He echoed Churchill's appeal to America in the Second World War: "Give us the tools faster and we will finish the job faster."

The UK, too, supplies Israel with critical equipment in a trade from which British defence benefits substantially. But now, in its hour of need, Labour is considering an arms embargo.

Such moves are strategically illiterate and damaging to our national interests. As we plan to undermine Israel's defences, Iran, backed by Russia and China, is sending advanced weaponry to Jerusalem's enemies. Like Ukraine, Israel is on the front line of an increasingly hot war against the West perpetuated by our enemies. Tehran has sent thousands of drones to Russia for its onslaught against Ukraine.

As Iranian terrorist contagion has infected Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen, it threatens to contaminate Egypt, too. Before this war, Cairo was already in dire economic straits. Now it has been pushed further towards the brink by Tehran's proxies attacking cargo vessels in the Red Sea, which have diverted significant volumes of shipping away from the Suez Canal, denying Egypt vital revenue.

Even though instability in Egypt would have catastrophic consequences, timorous US and UK military action against the Houthis has had almost no effect. For its part, Israel has shown the way with a devastating air strike against Hudaydah Port in Yemen in response to the Tel Aviv drone attack.

This is not a matter of retaliation but of deterrence. A strong Israel benefits us all. Jordan is also in Iran's sights, with Tehran actively seeking to destabilise the country using its militias in Syria and Iraq. Jerusalem plays a key role in bolstering Jordan against Iran, so any weakening of Israel will harm our wider interests in the region.

Assuming that the strategic importance of backing Israel is still understood in Labour's Whitehall, it seems to be trumped by anti-Israel propaganda that paints the Jewish state as illegitimate. This false narrative is also being stoked by institutions such as the International Criminal Court, whose prosecutor wants to issue arrest warrants against Netanyahu and Israeli defence minister Yoav Gallant. The Tory government recognised the gross injustice of this and applied to make formal objections to the court. Labour has now, shamefully, withdrawn them.

The political warfare campaign against Israel includes lies such as that it is an apartheid state. In reality, Israel is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious democracy, where minorities are far better treated than anywhere else in the Middle East. Arabs are represented everywhere, including in the Supreme Court and the Knesset, and many have joined the fight against Hamas.

The other day, I was briefed by a Druze colonel in Gaza, a member of the same community that was torn apart by Hezbollah's attack on Majdal Shams. He is responsible for co-ordinating humanitarian aid to the population in Gaza. Denial of aid is the central element of the ICC's case against Netanyahu and Gallant. Yet I and the group of former generals from Nato countries who accompanied me had never before seen such monumental efforts to get aid into a combat zone by an army fighting an active war.

The Government must see through the lies that are impairing its decision-making and fully support Israel in this fight. Like it or not, it is a fight for the West as well.

AMERICANS ARE THREE TIMES AS LIKELY TO DIE OF MALNUTRITION AS GAZANS

ELDER OF ZIYON (ElderofZiyon.blogspot.com 26-7-24)

According to the Hamas media office, 34 people have died so far from malnutrition in Gaza since October 7. At an annual rate, that is about 2 people per 100,000 population.

In 2022, in the United States, 20,500 people died from malnutrition. That is 6 deaths per 100,000 population.

In 2018, the US death rate from malnutrition was significantly lower - 9,300. That is still roughly double Gaza's death rate per hundred thousand.

Now, how many articles have you seen about US deaths by starvation? And how many have you seen about Gaza?

This is what people in a real famine look like.

Are you starting to get the impression that the news media is not reporting the facts as they are, but the facts as they want them to be?

Is the US on the brink of famine? Of course not. And neither is Gaza.

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

SHOPPING DURING THE NINE DAYS

RABBI DONIEL NEUSTADT (Torah.org)

The first nine days of the month of Av, known as the Nine Days, is a period of time established by the Rabbis to mourn the destruction of the two Batei Mikdash. To make us feel the aveilus, there are certain activities which are prohibited during this period. Since the Talmud tells us that only one who has properly mourned the Temple's destruction will merit seeing its rebuilding, it is important to become more knowledgeable about the exact nature of the prohibitions of the Nine Days. One of them, the injunction against "buying new items," is reviewed here.

Question: Is it permitted to go shopping during the Nine Days?

Discussion: There are two types of items which are forbidden to be bought during the Nine Days: 1) Items which the consumer buys to give him pleasure or joy (as opposed to items which the consumer needs for daily living). 2) Apparel (clothing). As each group has its own rules and regulations, we will discuss each one separately.

IN ORDER TO DIMINISH THE LEVEL of simchah during this sad time, the Rabbis forbade buying items that mainly serve to give the owner joy or pleasure. Thus it is forbidden, for example, to purchase silver dishes, jewelry, fancy china, home decor items, or a car that is used mainly for pleasure travel. 1 But it is permitted to purchase standard household items that are needed, even if they are major purchases such as an air conditioner, a set of dishes, a cell phone, a health-related appliance, or a car that is used mainly for business or every-day household needs. 2 [If the business item being bought would normally require the recital of shehecheyanu, the shehecheyanu is said after Tishah b'Av. 3] Only actual buying is prohibited—shopping without buying is permitted. Window or comparison shopping is permitted. 4 Returns are permitted. Exchanges may be prohibited. 5

If delaying the purchase will cause a monetary loss, or if the item will not be available for purchase after Tishah b'Av, it is permitted to buy the item during the Nine Days. 6 If possible, it is recommended to merely put down a deposit and take delivery of the item after Tishah b'Av. 7

It is permitted to buy items for the purpose of performing a mitzvah, e.g., buying tefillin or seforim that are needed at the time. 8 Similarly, a bachelor who is getting married after Tishah b'Av may shop during the Nine Days if need be. 9

THE SECOND CATEGORY OF items that may not be purchased—or worn—during the Nine Days is clothing or shoes, even if they are intended for use after the Nine Days. 10 Both expensive and inexpensive items, even trivial articles of clothing such as a pair of socks, a belt, a yarmulke, or a kerchief, are included. 11 A new tallis or a tallis katan may also not be purchased. 12 Linen and towels are considered "clothing" and are prohibited to be purchased as well. 13

In the following cases it is permitted to shop for clothing during the Nine Days:

- If one has no clean shirt for Shabbos and washing or cleaning a shirt is not option, he may [buy and] wear a new shirt. 14
- A bachelor who is getting married after Tishah b'Av may buy whatever he needs for the wedding during the Nine Days. 15
- One who does not have appropriate shoes to wear on Tishah b'Av may buy them during the Nine Days. 16
- Although it is permitted to wash clothing for infants, toddlers and small children who constantly soil their clothes, 17 one is allowed to purchase new baby's and children's clothes rather than do their laundry. 18
- If delaying the purchase will cause a monetary loss, or if the item will not be available for purchase after Tishah b'Av, some poskim permit buying the item during the Nine Days, 19 while others are more stringent. 20 If a substantial loss is involved, a deposit should be made and delivery taken after Tishah b'Av.
- It is permitted to [buy and] wear new clothes for the purpose of a shidduch. 21
- People in the clothing business may purchase stock during the Nine Days. 22
- The prohibition against shopping during the Nine Days begins with sunset of Rosh Chodesh Av and ends at midday of the tenth day of Av. When

Tishah b’Av falls on a Thursday, it is permitted to shop for Shabbos needs on Thursday night.

Question: Which types of clothing are included in the prohibition against wearing freshly laundered clothes in the Nine Days?

Discussion: Shulchan Aruch rules that all freshly laundered (or dry-cleaned) clothes and linens (such as towels, sheets and tablecloths), may not be worn or used during the Nine Days.²³ It has become customary, therefore, that freshly laundered clothes are worn for a short while²⁴ before the onset of the Nine Days, so that the clothes are no longer considered “freshly laundered.”

Contemporary authorities debate whether or not garments that are constantly being changed because of perspiration — like socks and undergarments — must also be worn briefly before the Nine Days. Some poskim hold that they must,²⁵ while others hold that such garments are not included in the prohibition of wearing freshly laundered clothes and one need not prepare them before the Nine Days begin.²⁶ The widespread custom in the United States follows the second opinion.

Question: In practical terms, how should one conduct himself with regard to the Nine Days’ prohibition against full-body bathing?

Discussion: One of the Nine Days’ restrictions is the prohibition against bathing and showering.²⁷ Nowadays, people find it most uncomfortable to observe this restriction, since we are all accustomed to bathing or showering daily, unlike in earlier times when people bathed much less frequently. It is important to distinguish between the two reasons why people bathe: 1) for reasons of hygiene and cleanliness; 2) for pleasure; the hot water soothes them, the cold water cools them — it is a pleasurable experience. It is safe to assume that most people bathe or shower for both reasons — for cleanliness and for pleasure. It is clearly forbidden to bathe or shower during the Nine Days for pleasure. Thus it is forbidden to take a hot bath, a long, hot, relaxing shower, or to go swimming in a lake or a pool. The primary purpose of these activities is the pleasure derived from them. But one who became dirty or sweaty and must take a shower in order to rid himself of the odor, dirt or sweat, may take a short, cold or lukewarm shower. If he requires soap or shampoo in order to remove the dirt or sweat, that is permitted as well. If the dirt or sweat cannot be removed unless hot water is used, hot water may be used for those areas where it is needed.²⁸

One who needs to take a hot shower or bath or go swimming for medical reasons is permitted to do so.

1. O.C. 551:2, Mishnah Berurah 11 and Sha’ar ha-Tziyun 13; Aruch ha-Shulchan 551:20; Kaf ha-Chayim 551:21, 23; Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:80. See also Nitei Gavriel, pg. 51, quoting the Rav of Pappa.
2. See Koveitz Halachos L’yimei Bein Hametzarim, pg. 125; Halichos v’Hanhagos, pg. 5, quoting Rav Y.S. Elyashiv; Kol ha-Torah, vol. 56, pg. 48, quoting Rav B. Rackove; Vayevareich Dovid 1:69. See also Teshuvos Levushei Mordechai 3:185-4.
3. Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:80.
4. Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:84-1.
5. Since the shopper is getting a new item in exchange for the old one, it may be considered as if he is buying the item anew. If the new item requires a shehecheyanu, the exchange may definitely not take place during the Nine Days; see Moadei Yeshurun, pg. 152, note 31.
6. Peri Megadim 551:7; Mishnah Berurah 551:11,13; Kaf haChayim 551:21, 23; Igros Moshe, EH. 4:84-1.
7. Kinyan Torah 1:109-5.
8. Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:80.
9. Mishnah Berurah 551:46. Other poskim disagree with this leniency; see Kaf ha-Chayim 551:30, 33 and 101.
10. Rama, O.C. 551:7 and Mishnah Berurah 45 and 49.
11. Mishnah Berurah 551:45-46; Rav C. Kanievsky, quoted in Nechamas Yisrael 13:3.
12. Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:80.
13. Nitei Gavriel 31:9.
14. Beirur Halachah 551:6, s.v. keilim, as explained by Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:80.
15. Mishnah Berurah 551:14 and 46. Other poskim disagree with this leniency; see Kaf ha-Chayim 551:30, 33 and 101.
16. Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:80.
17. Rama, O.C. 551:14.
18. Mishnas Yaakov (quoted in Piskei Teshuvos 551:27 and in Nechamas Yisrael 13:7). See Emes l’Yaakov, O.C. 551, note 513, who suggests that buying might be preferable to doing laundry.
19. Kinyan Torah 1:109-5; Koveitz Halachos (Rav S. Kamenetsky), pg. 178.
20. Emes l’Yaakov, O.C. 551, note 509, who questions if it is permitted to buy apparel on sale during the Nine Days.
21. Orchos Rabbeinu, vol. 2, pg. 132, quoting Chazon Ish.
22. Mishnah Berurah 551:11.
23. O.C. 551:3.
24. There are several views — ranging from several days to several minutes — as to how long a garment should be worn in order for it be considered no longer fresh. In actual practice, the garment should be worn long enough so that it loses that special crispness and freshness that one associates with freshly laundered or dry cleaned clothes.
25. Kaf ha-Chayim 551:91; Orchos Rabbeinu, vol. 2, pg. 130; Minchas Yitzchak 10:44; Harav C. Kanievsky, quoted in Nechamas Yisrael 19:7.
26. Aruch ha-Shulchan, Y.D. 389:6 (concerning shivah); Gesher ha-Chayim 21:10 (concerning shivah); Salmas Chayim 4:4; Harav M. Feinstein (oral ruling, quoted in Rivevos Efrayim 1:377 and 3:340, Moadei Yeshurun, pg. 134 and Kitzur Hilchos Bein ha-Metzarim, pg. 9); Kinyan Torah 1:109; mi-Beis Levi, vol. 13, pg. 26.

27.O.C. 551:16.

28.Entire Discussion based on Aruch ha-Shulchan 551:37; Harav Y.C. Sonnenfeld (Salmas Chayim 4:20; Toras Chayim, pg. 83); Igros Moshe, E.H. 4:84-4; Emes l’Yaakov, O.C. 551, note 14; She’arim Metzuyanin b’Halachah 122:12; Shevet ha-Levi 7:77.

Candle lighting (Melbourne) Matos-Massey 2-8-24, 28 Tammuz 5784, 5.16pm/6.16pm