

Doresh Tzion

Perspectives from our Roshei Yeshiva
and Rabbeim in Response to
October 7th and its Aftermath

Adar I 5784 • February 2024

A project of:



Yeshiva University

UNDERGRADUATE TORAH STUDIES PROGRAM

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Editor In Chief:

Dovid Wartelsky



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A project of:

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ספר זה מוקדש לעילוי נשמת
עטרה בת מרן הרה"ג יוסף דוב הלוי ע"ה
הלכה לעולמה ג' אדר תשפ"ג

In honor of Rav Twersky
And
L'ilui nishmas
Atarah bas Harav Yosef Dov
And
Yosef Malachi Geudalia and Ben Zussman
Yonatan "YoYo" Mark



L'ilui nishmas
Atarah bas Harav Yosef Dov
And
In honor of Rav Twersky *shlita*
Jonathan and Mindy Neiss and Family



Dedicated as a gesture of gratitude to
Rav Mayer Twersky
From a *Talmid*

לעילוי נשמת עטרה בת מרן הרב יוסף דוב הלוי

And with unending gratitude to our Rebbi, Rav
Mayer Twersky *shlita*, for his sage advice,
Torah-true guidance, and fearless leadership. Our
family and the entire community are forever
indebted.

With heartfelt prayers for the safety and victory of
Klal Yisrael,

Michael and Patti Steinmetz
and
Jonah, Shoshana,
Shmuel, Shulamis, Malkiel, and Yosef Dov
Steinmetz



In honor of Rabbi Steinmetz and the *Avrechei*
HaKollel of the Jack and Gitta Nagel YU Kollel in
Los Angeles, CA

Daniel and Annie Nagel

Dedicated

In honor of and with appreciation for Rav
Twersky's guidance and leadership, especially in
challenging times.

And

In honor of our father's twelfth *yahrtzeit*, Dr.
Noah Susman *z"l*.

With hopes and prayers for better times for the
Jewish people in *Eretz Yisrael* and across the
world.

Ruth and Seth Berkowitz

With appreciation to our Rabbeim, the Roshei
Yeshiva and *marbitzei Torah* of the Yeshiva, for
their words of *hisorirus*, *hadracha* and *chizuk*
during these difficult times.

יה"ר שבעל הישועות יהפוך מספדינו למחול ויקוים
בקשת שמחה לארציך וששון לעירך והשיבה שופטינו
כבראשונה

The Goldenhersheshes

לע"נ
אמי מורתי
הריני כפרת משכבה

דינה
בת ר' דוד חי הכהן ז"ל
פינשאווער

עסקה בצרכי ציבור באמונה
להרים איכות החיים לאלפי
תלמידים ותלמידות בישיבה

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In Tribute: Dr. Atarah Twersky *a”h*

עטרה בת מרן הרה"ג יוסף דוב הלוי
הלכה לעולמה ג' אדר תשפ"ג

It is our *zechus* to dedicate this *sefer* as an *ilui neshamah* for Dr. Atarah Twersky, *a”h*, as we approach her first *yahrtzkeit*. A truly humble person, she never called attention to her illustrious family background or her significant personal accomplishments, and instead consistently directed the spotlight towards others.

When speaking in Yeshiva about her father, the Rav *zatzal*, Dr. Twersky focused her remarks on her father’s deep *emunah*, characterizing him as an *ish emunah*. *Ish lifi mahalalo* (*Mishlei* 27:21), every word she said about her father’s *emunah* could have been said about her own. Those who saw her in the aftermath of her son’s death *al kiddush Hashem* witnessed *emunah* personified.

Dr. Twersky was the epitome of *tovas sechel* (*Shmuel I* 25:3): a woman of wisdom, depth and penetrating perspective. She lived a life of *chessed*, caring to the neediest and opening her home to generations of guests. The dichotomy between heart and mind was fully resolved in her personality, as the two melded in a *Toras chessed*: *chedesd* done with wisdom, and wisdom dispensed as an expression of *chedesd*. The many people who sought her advice, which was often delivered with her characteristic humor, benefited from this unique combination.

The Rav *zatzal* explained that in addition to the *mesorah* transmitted by fathers, there is also a *mesorah* of the mothers— *Toras Imecha* (*Mishlei* 1:8). He pointed to his own mother as well as the Talner Rebbetzin, Dr. Twersky’s mother-in-law, as *ba’alos mesorah*, master teachers of the experience of Torah. His daughter, Dr. Atarah Twersky, embodied this tradition that the Rav described. She understood all facets of life through the prism of *mesorah*, and she devoted her life to transmit it and translate it to American Jewry.

Dr. Twersky’s wisdom, *chessed*, and commitment to *mesorah* had a unique expression in the role she played in the Rav’s life. Throughout her whole life, *lo masha yadah mitoch yado* (cf. *Kesubos* 27b): her hand did not leave his. Upon her mother’s a”h passing, she and her husband, Rabbi Dr. Yitzchak Twersky zy”a, welcomed the Rav into their house. Over the next decades, they supported and cared for the Rav, prioritizing his needs over any of their own involvements. During these years, they lovingly invested every effort to insure that he could continue his *avodas hakodesh*. Our Yeshiva, and the broader Torah world, remain forever indebted to them for the indispensable role they played in the Rav’s life and teaching

With Dr. Twersky’s passing, we have lost one of the links in the chain of the *shalsheles hakaballah* of *Toras Imecha*. Those who knew Dr. Twersky miss her abiding *emunah*; her deep religious and national consciousness and commitment; and her unique ability to understand and interpret the challenges of today through the prism of *mesorah*. This volume attempts to heighten our commitment to these ideals; we hope that it is an *ilui neshamah* for—and a fitting tribute to—*Atarah bas Maran Harav Hagaon Yosef Dov Halevi a”h*.

Foreword

Welcome to our second annual Dor L’Dor program, a day in which we share a glimpse of the daily *limud batorah* experience of our *talmidim* with their fathers and grandfathers. Our goal is not only to give our extended YU family a taste of what our *talmidim* experience, but more importantly, to model the foundational principle of *mesorah*, the transmission of Torah from generation to generation.

This year our hearts and minds are focused on the tragic events of October 7th and the continuing *tzarah* that *Klal Yisrael* faces. *Baruch Hashem*, our Roshei Yeshiva and Rabbeim offer our *talmidim* many words of *chizuk* to guide them *hashkafically* during this challenging time. Rabbi Herschel Hartz, administrator of Yeshiva programming, suggested that we put some of these *divrei hadracha* into print so that our broader YU community may also gain inspiration from our Rabbeim’s sage guidance. With only a few short weeks until the Dor L’Dor program, we galvanized our students into a full court press. Watching our amazing students transcribe, edit, format, and lay out this *kunteres* has been nothing less than breathtaking. *Baruch Hashem* we have the most talented, dedicated, bright and *mentschlich* students one could ever hope to have. Our students, your children, are incredible. May we all continue to see nachas from them. We are pleased to share this *kunteres* with our dear YU family at the Dor L’Dor program.

The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (11a) records a fascinating story. While giving shiur, Rebbi, who was very sensitive, was disturbed by a

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strong garlic odor permeating the room. Publicly, he asked that the person who was the source of the odor to please leave the room. In order to protect the actual culprit from embarrassment, Rabbi Chiya, who was not the perpetrator, immediately stood up and left the *Beis Midrash*. At that point, all the *talmidim* exited the shiur as well.

The Gemara asks, “Where did Rabbi Chiya learn to act in such a fashion, to be willing to potentially embarrass himself in order to protect another’s honor?” The Gemara answers that he learned this behavior from Rabbi Meir, who had in turn learned it from Shmuel Hakatan. The Gemara continues to go back, generation by generation, until reaching Yehoshua bin Nun, who learned this from the *Ribbono Shel Olam*. The Maharsha (*ad loc.*) asks why the Gemara listed each generation going back in time. Why not simply say we learn this conduct from Yehoshua, who was taught the lesson by Hashem? After all, this is the original source. The Maharsha, as understood by the Chiddushei Halev, answers that the Gemara is teaching us a critical concept. We cannot learn *Mesorah* if we overlook intervening generations and just jump back to the original source. If we did so, we may misunderstand and misinterpret the stories and examples of the *gedolim* of yesteryear. The proper way to receive the *Mesorah* is from the current *gedolim*, who in turn learned from those immediately preceding them. This is how our true *Mesorah* has been maintained and passed down throughout the years.

In that spirit we, turn to our generation’s *gedolim* to help us understand the current challenges we are facing and to gain *chizuk* from their lessons and their strength. We are proud and pleased to share these lessons with you at the Dor L’Dor program, which

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celebrates the transmission of the *mesorah* from one generation to the next. We thank all the students who worked hard to bring this publication to print. We hope you will enjoy your day of learning in Yeshiva with your loved ones, and that you gain direction and strength from the words of our Yeshiva's *gedolim*, contained within the *kunteres*.

May we share *yeshuos* and *nechamos* very soon with *bi'as goel tzedek, b'meheira b'yameinu, amen!*

Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky, Dean
Rabbi Elisha Bacon, Assistant Dean
Undergraduate Torah Studies, Yeshiva University

Introduction

As I (DW) sat in a *Beis Midrash* in my hometown editing an article for the *kunteres* before you, an old friend I had not seen for many years walked in the door. I began schmoozing with him, and he asked me what I was working on. I responded that I was editing an article for a pamphlet of the *Divrei Torah* of the Rabbeim of YU in response to the situation in Israel. I showed him the article I was working on, and as he read it, he paused and said, “all of us were shaken after October 7th, but am I truly a different person three months later?” Or am I the same person I was before”? He continued to elaborate that October 7th had been a “*potch*” from Hashem, a clear wakeup call for us to change and do better, but if we hadn’t heeded the call, how many more “*potches*” would Hashem be forced to give?

The Gemara in *Yoma* (69b) recounts a very intriguing story. The Gemara says that the *anshei knesses bagedolah* davened for the *Yetzer Hara* for *avodah zarah* to be destroyed. Hashem answered their prayer, and a form of a fiery lion emerged from the *Heichal* of the *Beis Hamikdash*. Sensing that this was an auspicious time, they continued and davened for the *Yetzer Hara* for *arayos* to go away as well. The Gemara notes that their *tefilla* was answered and, during the three day period in which the *Yetzer Hara* was imprisoned, not a single egg was laid in the entire land of Israel. After realizing that destroying the desire to have illicit relations also destroyed the ability to procreate, the *Chachamim* set the *Yetzer Hara* free, but gouged its eyes out, so as to at least somewhat limit its power. The Gra (*Perush* to *Seder Olam*

Rabbah, 30) notes that as a result of the *Yetzer Hara* for *avoda zarah* being eliminated, *nevuah* was lost as well— when one end of the spectrum is neutralized, a parallel opposite section of the spectrum has to be eliminated as well. In this way, balance is maintained.

A different but related brief story is recounted in the Gemara in *Sukkah* (52a). The Gemara recounts that Abayei followed an unmarried man and woman that were heading into the forest to prevent them from violating any prohibitions of illicit relations. They traveled through the forest without even the slightest hint of wrongdoing. After they departed, Abayei remarked to himself that if he had been in that situation, he surely would have sinned. As he sat wallowing in despair, a wise man approached him and comforted him by stating *kol hagadol me'chavero, yitzro gadol heimenu*, that the greater the person, the greater their evil inclination.

Furthermore, the Gemara in *Chagigah* (15a) notes that in the infamous conversation between Rabbi Meir and *Acher*, *Acher* asked Rabbi Meir what Shlomo Hamelech intended when he wrote “*zeh le'umas zeh asah ha'Elokim*” (*Koheles* 7:14). Rabbi Meir responded that everything that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created in this world was created with an opposite— the mountains have valleys, and the seas have rivers. Rabbi Akiva then extends this point to the *Olam Hamachshava* as well— Hashem created *tzadikim* and *reshaim*, *Gebennom* and *Gan Eden*. He concludes that each person has within him a piece of *Gan Eden* and a piece of *Gebennom*, and that it is up to each person to choose their destiny.

It is clear from all of the above that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* built

Isaac Newton's famed principle of every action having an equal and opposite reaction directly into the natural world. However, this principle is not limited to a given individual's *avodas Hashem*, but applies to all situations and all circumstances in our world— the greater the potential for evil, the greater the potential for good.

It is lost on few of us that the current conflict in *Eretz Yisrael* comes on the heels of one of the most traumatic periods in Israeli civil history. Over the past year and a half, the state of Israel and its citizens were torn asunder by a deep conflict of values; truly repulsive videos circulated the internet and social media of Israeli yelling at fellow Israeli, Jew at fellow Jew, and brother at fellow brother. Some even threw around the term *milchemet achim*, or civil war, as thousands of IDF veterans threatened not to report for reserve duty, and possibly to resist the implementation of law.

However, all that changed on October 7th. In equal proportion to the deep feelings of animosity—perhaps even hatred—that had coursed through Israeli society just a few months earlier, *Am Yisrael* congealed into a single united, invincible mass. One need only open their WhatsApp to view endless videos of boundless *chesed* that have been done by strangers for strangers— in Israel, meals were cooked, laundry was done, and goodies were provided, while stateside, bags were sent, *Tebillim* was said, and missions were coordinated. The darker the situation may have seemed months ago, the greater the potential for light and good in the present and future.

As we sit over a hundred days into this horrible war, we must ask ourselves— are we the same people we were when this war began?

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How have we grown in our *avodas Hashem*? Is our *Davening* better? Our learning? Our *Chessed*? Did we each grow in any significant long-term way from the awful “*potch*” Hashem delivered on October 7th, or have we not, and in effect have just set ourselves up for another one, *Rachmana Litzlan*? The potential to do good is so great! The potential to grow as a result of this situation is nearly limitless! Are we taking advantage? Will we?

The Operation Torah Shield Board

Davi Hazan, Bentzy Klarfeld, and Dovid Wartelsky

Shvat, 5784

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, we acknowledge *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, the *Gozer Umikayeim* and *Dayan Emes*, to whom we owe our entire existence. As He is the *Seichel Hane'elam mi'kol ra'ayon*, we acknowledge that all that is going on in the world is part of His master plan, and we thank Him for having given and continuing to give us the opportunity to live and grow as a result, even if we cannot understand.

Second, much thanks goes to Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman, President and Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva University, for all he did to make the initial Operation Torah Shield 3 mission a reality, all he continues to do for Operation Torah Shield's continued impact projects, and all he has done and continues to do for *Klal Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael* at large. We wish him continued strength and success in his crucial work, alongside our deep gratitude.

Third, we wish to thank Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky, Dean of Undergraduate Torah Studies, and Rabbi Elisha Bacon, Assistant Dean, for their general hard work on behalf of the Yeshiva as well as all of their assistance in the execution of this project in particular– this *kunteres* was initiated by Rabbi Kalinsky, and it was Rabbi Bacon's efforts that made it a reality. Additional thanks goes to Rabbi Herschel Hartz, administrator of yeshiva programming or Undergraduate Torah Studies, for all he does in general, and for originally conceiving of this project. Thank you.

Next, we wish to thank all of our transcribers, who worked

Acknowledgments

very hard to convert the recorded *Shiurim*, *Sichos Mussar* and *Hashkafa* Talks of our Rabbeim into written form. They are (listed alphabetically by last name): Carrie Beylus, Sam Bendheim, Ephraim Crystal, Moshe Giloni, Yinon Gurvich, Romi Harczstark, Daniel Hirsch, David Kleiman, Yonatan Kosowsky, Aaron Lubat, Josh Makovsky, Moshe Maltz, Jared Mark, Noah Meimoun, Harry Meiser, and Ethan Penstein. An additional thank you goes to our editors, who converted the raw transcriptions into readable form. They are (listed alphabetically by last name): Ephraim Klein, Yonatan Kosowsky, Yonatan Kurz, Eli Novick, and Uriel Sussman.

A brief note about the transcriptions presented in this volume: please note that **we have attempted to maintain the flavor of the speeches as they were delivered as much as possible**. As a result, the language and structure of many of the write-ups is not as polished as a standard text article would normally be. This does not reflect an inferior quality of our Rabbeim's words—*chas v'shalom*—but rather our attempt to encapsulate the feeling of sitting at the live *Sicha* as much as possible. Similarly, any and all mistakes made during the process of transcribing the words of our Rabbeim from recorded speech to final printed form are solely the fault of the transcribers and editors, and not—*chalilah*—the Rabbeim. Please note that all the original recordings of the Shiurim transcribed in this volume can be found on YUTorah (and, in the PDF version, are linked to the titles of the essays). Please also note that a couple of the transcripts were not reviewed by the original speaker; this has been indicated in a footnote to the author/speaker's name of each relevant article. Finally, note that ellipses within the texts of the edited transcriptions (...) reflect the

Acknowledgments

speaker's natural pauses in the course of their speech, not omitted material.

Furthermore, much *hakaras hatov* goes to Operation Torah Shield's in-house graphic designer and typesetter, Amanda Poupko, who worked tirelessly at all hours of the day and night to bring the raw drafts of this project into the beautifully formatted printed version before you. Thanks also goes to Rob Shur for designing the beautiful cover and to Rabbi Aviyam Levinson for providing a final lookover with his expert eye.

A tremendous amount of *hakaras hatov* also goes to Rabbi Ari Rockoff, David Mitzner Community Dean for Values and Leadership at Yeshiva University/RIETS. Rabbi Rockoff has been a dear friend of Operation Torah Shield 3 and its Board of Directors from the outset, and—to put it frankly—Operation Torah Shield 3 and all its continuing impact projects would not have happened without him. In addition, as it pertains to the pamphlet before you, we wish to specially thank Rabbi Rockoff from his position as director of RIETS Press for assisting us in the production of this volume.

Additional thanks goes to the TorahWeb fondation, and its director, Professor Judah Diamant, for graciously allowing us to reprint many articles that were originally published on their website. All articles that were originally published on TorahWeb are indicated as such, with a link to the original published article in the footnote. Please note that minor transliteration changes may have been made, and that all changes between the originally published articles and the articles as presented here have been cleared with the original authors. May

Acknowledgments

Hashem continue to give Prof. Diamant the strength to spread the Torah of our Rabbeim as far and wide as possible.

Finally, our thanks goes to our Rabbeim. It is their light and example that we turn to for guidance when confronted with a crisis, especially one that rocks our foundations as Simchas Torah 5784 did. The *chachmei hamesorah* that we are privileged to interact with on a daily basis in Yeshiva have a profound impact on the way we learn and the way we live. Their words presented here are no exception, and we thank them for all their investment in us—the *talmidim*—and for guiding us through this difficult period and all others with the proper Torah perspective.

The Operation Torah Shield Board

Davi Hazan, Bentzy Klarfeld, and Dovid Wartelsky
Shvat, 5784

Doresh Tzion

Preliminary Reflections on the *Simchas Torah* Attack in *Eretz* *Yisrael*

Rabbi Elchanan Adler

Adapted from a Shiur, Oct. 10, 2023

We are in an *eis tzarah*. It is incredibly hard to process what we've heard and seen. We all search for *chizuk*, everyone in his own way. I struggle as you do. I will share some thoughts that have been going through my mind. If it will help, then we can be *michazeik* each other - "*az nidberu yirei Hashem ish el rei'eihu vayakshev Hashem vayishma*" (*Malachi* 3:16).

"*Nehepach li'eivel mi'choleinu*". A *Yom Tov*, a *Zman Simchaseinu*—a *Simchas Torah*!—was transformed into tragedy. Many of us here were faced with the dilemma of how to deal with *Hakafos*. Every *kehillah* found a *mahalach* for themselves. Where I was, the decision was to be *misameiach* with the *Torah*. It was not an easy thing. We sang "*Acheinu*" in between *Hakafos*, but it was an expression of *simchas hatorah*. Other shuls toned down *Hakafos*. I kept thinking of a *pasuk* that we read on *Shabbos Chol Hamoed* in *Koheles* (11:2): "*ten chelek li'shiva, vi'gam li'shmona*". The *Midrash* in *Koheles* explains that "*shiva*" are the seven days of *Sukkos* and "*shmona*" is *Shemini Atzeres*; and the *pasuk* ends: "*ki lo seida ma ra'ah yihiyeh al ha'aretz*", you don't know what's hitting you, you don't know what's coming...

Where I was, there was a massive *atzeres tefillah* at the end of the day; a number of shuls came together, and 500 people assembled for half an hour before *maariv* and said *Tehillim*. It was a tremendous *chizuk* for us. But at that point, we still didn't know that much—only fragments of information—but we knew it was terrible. Then, of course, the news began to sink in for us in *chutz la'aretz* after *yom tov*, and the extent of the *tzarah* is still hard to process. The number of people who were killed in such a short time—now the total is over 900!—and then all of those who were injured, and then the captives, well over 100... And more than that, the sense of total cruelty, the *achzariyus*, the literally subhuman atrocities... The *pasuk* says in the *tochechah* (*Devarim* 28:50): “*goy az panim asher lo yisa panim lizakein vi'naar lo yachon*”. The Torah predicts that people will act like animals, with no sense of respect for the elderly or for the young. “*b'goy naval achisem*” says the *pasuk* in *Ha'azinu* (*Devarim* 32:21)—a perverted nation, a subhuman nation...

It has been mentioned—in secular sources as well—that this was Israel's equivalent of 9/11. Here in America, 9/11 was a transformative day. There was a searing sense of a void; everyone felt violated... all Americans felt “how could this be?”; We were attacked!” That's what it was for Israel. It's a different world now. There was a pre-9/11 world and there is a post-9/11 world. Similarly, there was a world before the attack of Simchas Torah 5784, and there is a world of post-Simchas Torah 5784. This is not just another tragedy. Every tragedy is terrible—the *pasuk* (*Shemos* 19:21) says “*v'nafal mimenu rav*”, that every individual who succumbs to terror is already a lot—but this is different; it's the equivalent of over 30,000 Americans dying.

It's very frightening, it's very paralyzing, and in that alone we feel a sense of shock, numbness, and brokenness. I'll tell you what makes it even harder for us: when we see to what extent *sin'as Yisrael* is so present and palpable—not just in those who perpetrated the crimes and the terrible, horrendous acts of terror, but even how the “enlightened world”—bodies of the UN!—have a hard time truly acknowledging the nature of this brutality for what it is. There is such a lack of morality, it's mind-boggling. Yesterday and today, I listened to the non-Jewish news—just for a few minutes—to hear the way they're speaking about it. There are already rallies in support of “Palestine”; it's mind-boggling! How would these same people feel if they were violated? If they were attacked? They can't relate. I'm not a psychologist or sociologist, but I think it's clear that they have a perverted sense of morality. It's always been there, and this is just bringing it to the fore. As far as the world is concerned, when it's Jewish blood, it's not as important. There's no other way to explain it. Obviously, that makes the *tza'ar* even greater.

At least if you feel like the world understands, it makes it easier to cope. I think the Prime Minister of England did make it very clear in his statement; he said that he is not equating one side with the other—“I'm on Israel's side”. When you see something like this occur and you're thinking clearly, you should have the courage to say that. But it's hard for people to say it. People have been indoctrinated with a sense of what they think is enlightenment. They just can't see what is obvious. I'm not going to try to understand it, but it's something that, to the extent that you hear, doesn't make any sense. And it's going to come out in the next few days that the world will be putting more

pressure on the State of Israel not to go too far. It doesn't make any sense! You don't have to try to explain it. That makes it even harder—when we feel we're not understood.

Where does this leave us? Rav Neuberger spoke earlier about being *nosei b'ol*. It has to start with that. We have to feel the pain that *acheinu bnei Yisrael* are in, even though we don't have it in front of us in the same way. But we also have to be careful when we look at and hear reports not to get to the point that we can't function. Some of the stuff out there is very graphic. I try not to look at the things that are too graphic because I am afraid that it's going to create the opposite effect, that instead of being *nosei b'ol*, I'll become completely paralyzed. We have to be *nosei b'ol*—we have to hear about the cruelty, we have to hear about the acts of terrorism and what we can feel inspired by, and we have to feel the pain of what's happening right now, but not to the extent that makes it impossible to function.

Being *nosei b'ol* has to be expressed in our *tefillah*. We have to *daven* for the *chayalim*. I'm sure many of you know of people who were called up. I do. I have family members—cousins—who were called up. A *talmid* in our Yeshiva was called up over *Simchas Torah*. He went back to *Eretz Yisrael*. You also may know people who know other people who were called up. We have to feel the burden and *daven* for them. *Daven* specifically if you know the names of the *chayalim*—you can have them in mind—for *shemira*. *Daven* for the *shevuyim*—we don't know what's going to happen in the end; who will be saved, who won't be saved... It requires our *tefillah*.

We ask ourselves: how could this have happened? The

politicians will consider this question in terms of the failure of the intelligence– “How could they have missed this?” But for us, that’s the wrong question to ask. There will be an investigation; there will be whatever there will be *al pi derech hateva*. Obviously, the Israeli intelligence shouldn’t have missed it, but it’s not the right question for us. It happened because “*im Hashem lo yishmor ir, shav shakad shomer*” (*Tehillim* 127:1)– it says in *Tehillim* that if Hashem doesn’t provide *shemira*, then whatever the *shomer* does or doesn’t do won’t matter. That’s what we know and that’s what we believe. Obviously, a *midas hadin* was unleashed; Hashem was *mastir panim* and this happened. So now the question is something else: “*ma zos asa Hashem lanu*” (acc. *Bereishis* 42:28)? Why did Hashem not protect us? That’s the question to ask.

However, we can’t give a full and definitive answer to this question. We’re not *Nevi’im*. If there was a *Navi* today, he would be able to say definitively that it was because of this or because of that, but we don’t have that. But, in our history, this is not new. As much as it’s painful for us–and we have to feel the pain–this is not the first time that Jewish blood has been spilled. Go back to the *gezeiros* of the Crusades, how the marauders would come through communities and slaughter men, women and children– we read about it in the *Kinos*; there were the *gezeiros* of the Cossacks in *Tach V’tat* (5408 and 5409, 1648 and 1649 CE); there was the Kishinev pogrom in 1903; in *Eretz Yisrael* before the State of Israel was declared, there was the massacre in *Chevron* in *Tarpat* (5689 from creation, 1929 CE)... Then as now, the perpetrators acted as “*pere adam*” (acc. *Bereishis* 16:12). They didn’t need much of an excuse to slaughter Jews. There was the first Intifada

right after Oslo, and right after that there was the second Intifada. The *Shoah* and the cruelty of the Nazis stands out, of course... But nowadays, we're not used to it, we're not expecting it anymore. We have our own State and our own army that protects us. But the reality is that this is Jewish history.

As such, we have to look at the past and see how *gedolei Yisrael* responded to *tzaros* like this. Truthfully, it goes back to *Tanach*. In the beginning of *Sefer Shoftim*, there were other nations in Eretz Yisrael. *Klal Yisrael* had abandoned the *mitzvos* and Hashem handed them over to this nation and to that nation as a punishment. There is a clear sense that you get from reading the *pesukim* in *Tanach* that there is a notion of *schar va'onesh*— when *Klal Yisrael* behaves, things are better; when *Klal Yisrael* leave the *derech Hashem*, they're given over to the enemies. That's how Hashem operates in the world. The idea is that these kinds of *tzaros* are a part of our history, and the answer to what caused it is that there was some kind of a lack, something that allowed the *midas badin* to manifest itself.

However, we have to be careful. *Chazal* can tell us that an *onesh* happened because of this or that *aveira* in a definitive way. A *Navi* can say that something happened because of this or because of that. However, we don't have *Nevi'im*. So if a Rabbi makes a pronouncement, how can he say "I know"? How can he say for sure? But still we can try. Something needs to be fixed, and we do find—going back to *Tach V'tat*, to the Crusades— that when confronted with an *eis tzarah* the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* try to offer a response, despite the fact that they did not have *nevuah*. So even in our days, we can think

about what might have led to the terrible events that occurred.

We also need to realize that the *midas hadin*—the *hashgachas Hakadosh Baruch Hu*—is complex. It's not necessarily that a particular *aveira* triggered everything. We have a concept of *zeh v'zeh gorev* in *halachah*, that there can be all kinds of *tzirufim* – this plus that plus that – which allows for an accumulation. For example, there were those who had even contradictory perspectives as to why the Holocaust happened— one perspective claimed that it was because we weren't going to *Eretz Yisrael*, that we didn't love *Tzion* enough, but another perspective said it was because of the Zionists. Some say that we shouldn't even speculate about its cause, as it is in a category all by itself. Who is to know? Clearly there were different approaches. So, even if you're going to try to look at lapses that could have contributed to a tragedy, you can never know for sure that it's because of a particular thing; you can only conjecture that maybe it was a contributing factor.

For our situation, rather than say that it happened because of this or that particular lapse, I would say as follows: there are things that force *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to take away his *shemira*, and if Hashem isn't being a *shomer*, we become vulnerable to tragedies, *rachmana l'tzlan*. What could have happened here that may have contributed to our losing the Divine *shemira*? I think it isn't about each particular individual, but rather about a toxic political reality that existed in *Eretz Yisrael* just before this attack. For many months leading up to this, the country was torn apart in a way that it hadn't been since the founding of the State. The *achdus* of the country completely unraveled in the

wake of the campaign to reform the judicial system, leading to intense hatred directed toward the religious and vice versa. It's not a big *chidush* to think in these terms. And, again, I am not saying that this is definitive.

There's an incredible comment of the *Meshech Chochmah* in *parshas Beshalach* on the *pasuk* of "*v'hamayim lahem chomah mi'yeminam u'mi'smolam*" (*Shemos* 14:29). The *Mechilta* points out that the word "*chomah*" here is missing a *vav*, unlike the first time this phrase comes up earlier in the *parshah* (14:22), spelling the word *cheimah*, or anger. The *Meshech Chochmah* comes to explain why there was such a *kitrug* by the *Yam Suf*. He points out that there are *aveiros* which are very *chamur* in and of themselves, such as *avodah zarah*, *gilui arayos*, and *shfichus damim*, and there are *aveiros* which are in the realm of *midos* and lack of *derech eretz*, such as *rechilus*, *gezel*, et cetera. For those *aveiros* there's no *malkos*, and no *misas Beis Din*, so *lechora* they're less *chamur*. He writes that when it comes to a *yachid*, the hierarchy is that the *aveiros* like *avodah zara* and *arayos* are most severe and *aveiros* of *lashon hara*, *rechilus*, *gezel*, etc. are less severe, so the *onesh* is less. However, by a *tzibbur* it's the opposite— when it comes to *avodah zarah*, *gilui arayos* and the like, Hashem may look the other way, so to speak. But when can He not look the other way? When will He remove his *shemira*? If there's a problem of *nimusiyyus* (things relating to basic decency *Ed.*), such as *lashon hara* and *machlokes*. He brings a *raaya* from a famous *Yerushalmi*. The *Yerushalmi* records that in the times of Dovid Hamelech, the generation was filled with great *tzadikim*, but there were times when they lost in war. This was because there was rampant *lashon hara* despite their *tzidkus*. However,

the other extreme was the generation of Achav. Achav was a terrible *rasha* of a King, and the people were *ovdei avodah zarah*-- but there was *achdus*, and that's why they would wage war and win, unlike Dovid. Despite the fact that in Dovid's time the people were on a higher level in terms of *shemiras hamitzvos*, they didn't always win in battle because of the *lashon hara* and disunity.

The *tikkun* that is needed, the takeaway message-- and everyone could be contributing to this in whatever way they can--is to counter the issue which took away the *shemira* before this attack. We need to promote *achdus*. Right now, we have *achdus*. Unfortunately, it often takes something like this to bring us together. We need to do more to encourage all efforts of *achdus*, so there shouldn't be a divide between the religious and irreligious--the *chilonim* and the *dati'im* and the *charedim*--or anyone else. There needs to be a way to maintain *achdus*, because that's ultimately our *shemira*.

So where can we start? There's a *bracha* in *Shemoneh Esrei* in which we ask for *shalom* for *Klal Yisrael*-- the *bracha* of *Sim Shalom/Shalom Rav*. This is a *bracha* that we should all have more *kavanah* in. Obviously we should also have more *kavanah* when we say everything, as every *bracha* has its value and relevance, but I would suggest that we give special attention to the *bracha* for *shalom*. We all need to recognize the importance of *shalom*.

That is one very important starting point, and together with being *nosei b'ol*-- to *daven* for a *yeshuah* for *Klal Yisrael*. We don't know how things will play out, but it's not going to go away in a day or in a few weeks; it's going to be many months. This is going to be a

different 5784 than we all expected and anticipated.

We should also realize that this war is a form of *bi'ur hara*, destroying an enemy that is a personification of evil. This terror group can't exist, they shouldn't exist. Yes, there are going to be innocent civilians that will be harmed. This is unfortunate, but it is what happens in war. I was speaking to someone yesterday, who told me that when there were negotiations twenty years ago, he would have been prepared to give up even *Har Habayis* to achieve peace, because *Mashiach* will come and we'll get it back then. However, he said that that's only if there's a real genuine desire for peace on the other side. This is a person in *chinuch*—a very fine person, a *talmid chacham*!—but now, he told me, it's clear what we are dealing with. It's important not to get swayed by how the media will obsess over the terrible civilian toll. We need to change the whole perspective.

Finally, we should be *michazeik* ourselves in the *midah* of *bitachon* in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and we should give *chizuk* to the soldiers and all those who are living in a state of despair and uncertainty. We can't know the relationship between this and the unfolding of the *geulah ha'asida*; R' Schachter mentioned something about *Gog U'magog*, but we don't have a *Navi*, so we don't know for certain, but clearly, there is a connection. Rav Elchanan Wasserman wrote about the rise of antisemitism before World War II in his *sefer Kovetz Maamarim*. He noted that it was just like by *Mitzrayim*, that things got worse before they got better. And this was the *chevlei Mashiach* that he was speaking about back then, and now we have it again. Clearly, we are rapidly approaching the point of *yimos*

haMashiach. Nobody can say for sure exactly how it will play out, but the Gemara (acc. *Sanhedrin* 98b) tells us about how a person should act in the time of *chevlei Mashiach*: *yaasok batorah uv'gemilus chasadim*. So, that is our *avodah*. We can't get too caught up in the details of the ongoing war for the sake of "*hock*"; that's a part of human nature, but we have to be constructive in how we relate to the news. We should be aware and informed so we know what to *daven* for, but not to take in information as just another comment or insight; it has to be for the sake of enhancing our *avodas Hashem*.

Baruch Hashem, we have the *zechus* of Torah. Even those *Yeshivos* in *Eretz Yisrael* who are not enlisting in the army have started the *zman* already. We believe that Torah is literally "*Ki heim chayeinu*", so we need to be *michazeik* ourselves in Torah. For *gemilus chasadim*, we need to be *michazeik* those in *Eretz Yisrael* who need *chizuk*. There will be many opportunities to do so going forward. While we do so, we also have to know how to balance this with our regular routines, as we still have our regular schedule. That is a challenge. You're not going to suddenly check out of what you're doing right here, unless you are actually enlisted. The day to day has to be what we do, but always with a sense of *libi bamizrach*, to always feel the connection to what's going on in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Hashgacha in the Face of Amalek

Rabbi Mayer Twersky¹

Adapted from Divrei Chizuk, Oct. 11, 2023

The terrible suffering, *rachmana litzlan*, that has been, and to a degree continues to be, inflicted upon *acheinu Bnei Yisrael*, asks for reflection on so many different levels, with so many different foci. Given the current slot and venue, *tafasta merubah lo tafasta*, so we'll try *b'ezras Hashem bli neder* to focus on one aspect.

When I was first reading about what happened in *Eretz Yisrael*, I saw that some of the survivors were comparing it to the Holocaust. And in my first round of reading, where all I saw were statistics—horrrifying statistics—I didn't understand why they were drawing that comparison. With the second round of reading, which wasn't limited to statistics, but already included descriptions of what was inflicted and how it was done, the unspeakable savagery, I began to understand the comparison to the Holocaust. And in my third round of reading, I now think that the savagery displayed by the Amalek of 5784—obviously not in terms of numbers and quantity, but in terms of the savagery—actually exceeds many of the Holocaust accounts that one reads. And the question which some of you very sincerely are asking, others perhaps are on the receiving end of the question. We understand that the perpetrators are Amalek, that they chose to abuse their *bechira chofshis*, to extinguish the humanity within themselves, to extinguish

¹ Note: this adapted transcript was not reviewed by the speaker

the *tzelem Elokim* within themselves, and transform themselves into monsters—we understand that. The question is: How does *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* allow it to happen? I'd like not to *answer* the question, but to provide perspective on the question.

When this question, known as the question of theodicy, arises, it's crucial to first understand how thinking about this should be approached. And one cannot—it's wrong and will yield wrong results—if a person begins with a question of "how this could happen". The question one needs to begin with is from within: Given our conception of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and the belief system which surrounds it, can we—should we—expect to understand all *darchei bahashgacha*? Can we—should we—expect that all *darchei bahashgacha* will be comprehensible to us?

So, *mashal l'mah hadavar domeh*: Imagine you have parents that adopt the following policy: Because they don't want their baby to ever be frustrated by their actions, they'll only do what the baby—the newborn, the neonate, the three-month-old, the six-month-old, the toddler—can understand and appreciate. But if the baby won't be able to understand it or appreciate it, they won't do it. What emerges is that a baby is not going to understand why the guy in the white coat is sticking him with needles at his periodic visits, so they won't give him any inoculations. Our reaction to that is: that's not compassion, that's cruelty; that the parents limit themselves in their parenting in looking out for the welfare of their child, that they limit themselves to the infantile—literally infantile!—understanding of the baby, is child abuse! How can it be? There can't be an expectation that we, with our puny, finite intellect, are going to understand the *darchei Hashem*. *Hakadosh*

Baruch Hu is infinite; He is omniscient, and we're finite and have a puny intellect. So take the *maschal* and multiply it by a factor of infinity. So there clearly is no expectation that we can or will ever understand all *darchei bahashgacha*, because that would mean that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is exercising *hashgacha* in a way that's limited and constrained by our futile understanding.

Now, a little bit of an *omek* to maybe—a little bit—deepen our understanding of this point. Again let's begin with a *maschal*. Let's say you have someone who has some disability, *rachmana litzlan*, that he can only see the world in two dimensions. When he looks at a person, he sees a cutout, a paper cutout figure. He only sees the world in two dimensions. If he wants to analyze, he can only analyze the world in two dimensions. Others who are not limited by this disability, they see the world in three dimensions. So it's not only the case that the one who sees, experiences, and—therefore—analyzes the world in three dimensions sees more, but that individual sees a different reality. It's not just a question of *kamos*, and maybe not even *aichus*, but it's an entirely different reality. To see something in two dimensions or to see it in three dimensions is not to see more of it, it's not even just to see qualitatively differently, it's an entirely different reality.

If one wanted to oversimplify the Rambam's teachings about *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, one would reduce it to the following: we have the tendency to think of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* as—I don't mean this facetiously, it's not a time for humor and it's not intended to be humorous—we think of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* as a superman. What does that mean? We think that “well we're mortal, and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s more, he's immortal. And we know only so much, and

Hakadosh Baruch Hu is omniscient; He knows everything. But basically we think of Him in human categories, but since He surpasses us, He's superhuman. The Rambam says no, that's fundamentally wrong; *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* existence is entirely different, *sui generis*, and has nothing in common with our existence—“*ein amitaso ke'amitas echad mehem*” (*Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah* 1:3). Everything about *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is entirely different—entirely different from us—and the same way the Rambam says that the reality of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has got nothing in common with our reality—*ein amitaso*—so too when we speak of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's yedi'ah*, it has nothing in common with our *yedi'ah*. And that's what the *Navi* means when he, speaking in the voice of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, says “*Ki lo machshevosai machshevoseichem*” (*Yeshayahu* 55:8). So when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* “sees” the world, he sees a different reality. Again back to our *mashal l'mah badavar domeh*—obviously any *mashal* whenever you're talking about *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* by definition the *mashal* is inadequate, but nonetheless helpful—to that one person whose experiences, and analyzes the world in two dimensions, and another person who sees, experiences, and analyzes, the world in three dimensions.

So the answer to our first question of “can we, should we expect to understand all *darchei habashgacha*”, is obviously and very compellingly: no, of course not. Of course that's *min ha'nimna*; of course there have to be mysteries of divine providence. Yes, there are some *parshiyos pesuchos* in the *sugya* of *hashgacha*, but obviously there are going to be *parshiyos setumos*. It couldn't be otherwise. It's ludicrous to think that it would be otherwise.

There's another element of perspective on the question—again, we're not looking to answer the question, we're looking to have a perspective on the question. Let's again begin with a *mashal*. Let's say you have an adult and he's looking back on his childhood, and he's looking back on how his parents engaged in parenting. And the objective track record is that his parents were wonderful parents, always, even in terms of his subjective experience—always nurturing, always doing what was best for him. Once, when he was eleven years old, they disciplined him very harshly. Neither then nor subsequently could he ever make sense of why they acted that way. It just... it doesn't add up. It didn't add up when he was eleven and experienced it, and even now when he's twenty one, thirty one, forty one and looking back with an adult perspective, it still doesn't add up. So if he's going to reflect on his parents and their parenting, obviously he can't have tunnel vision and hone in on that experience—that Monday evening when he was eleven years old—and draw inferences and conclusions from that to characterize how his parents parented. Without ignoring it, without denying it, honesty requires that if he wants to have an accurate perception, he needs a panoramic vision. He has to reflect on his entire childhood. When he does so, that episode remains a *parshah setumah*. He still doesn't understand it; maybe he never will. But he knows—*davar ha'lamed mei'inyano*—in conjunction with the first *yesod* that obviously there have to be things in *hashgacha* that we won't understand. There has to be; it has to be that way; it can't be otherwise.

But given what we do understand, there is a pattern. There's a pattern of our miraculous existence, there's a pattern of incredible *chassadim al gabei chassadim*. Who's life here hasn't been changed by

the *bracha* of being able to spend time in *Medinas Yisrael*? The reason you were able to spend time in *Eretz Yisrael* is because there's a *Medinas Yisrael*. So yes, there's an indescribably, excruciatingly painful episode which defies our understanding. We don't understand it, we're not going to understand it. But it doesn't shake a person's *emunah* because a person knows going in that he can't— shouldn't, that it's absurd to think he'll understand everything, and that there is a broader context in which a person needs to think. That's the basis for *Tziduk Hadin*. That's how a person when it's literally applicable *rachmana litzlan*, when a person has to make the *bracha* of *Dayan Haemes*, that's the mindset which allows for it, and that's what we need to be aware of as we reflect upon the current *matzav* in *Eretz Yisrael*.

War Against Hashem

Rabbi Mayer Twersky²

Adapted from a Thursday Night Vaad, Oct. 12, 2023

The Rambam writes in *Hilchos Melachim* (7:15):

ומאחר שיכנס בקשרי המלחמה ישען על מקוה ישראל ומושיעו בעת
צרה וידע שעל יחוד השם הוא עושה מלחמה

The Rambam tells us that what's contested in the *milchamah* is not territory, not land; what's being contested is *Yichud Hashem*. He follows up several lines later:

וכל הנלחם בכל לבו בלא פחד ותהיה כוונתו לקדש את השם בלבד

It's a context of *kiddush Hashem*.

What the Rambam says here reflects a historical framework that he elaborates on in *Iggeres Teiman*, which was written when there was a *shmad* against the Jews in *Teiman*, and the Rambam wrote an *Iggeres* to be *mechazek* them. So maybe we'll just read a few lines together:

זו היא תורת ה' האמתית הנתונה לנו על ידי אדון כל הנביאים
הראשונים והאחרונים, אשר הבדילנו ה' בה מכל בני העולם כאמרו
"רק באבתיך חשק ה' לאהבה אותם ויבחר בזרעם אחריהם בכס מכל
העמים כיום הזה" ולא היה זה בעבור שהיינו ראויים אליו רק מחסדו
ה' עלינו, בגלל מה שקדם לאבותינו מידיעתו ועבודתו וכאשר יחדנו
במצוותיה וחקיה, ונגלתה מעלתנו על זולתנו בסדריה ועניניה, כאמרו
יתעלה, מזכיר חסדיו לנו ומי גוי גדול אשר לו חקים ומשפטים צדיקים

² Note: this adapted transcript was not reviewed by the speaker

ככל התורה הזאת אשר אנכי נתן לפניכם היום. התקוממו כל האמות
עלינו בעבורה על צד קנאה ורשע

There's been a constant provocation to arouse enmity and hatred towards us, and, in reality, and here let's pay very, very careful attention *Rabbosai*:

ונחלצו מלכי הארץ להלחם בנו בגללה על דרך חמס ופשע רוצים
לחלק על ה',

Their true desire in rejecting *bechiras Yisrael* is really waging war with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*; in their war against *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, they target us. The Rambam continues:

ולא היה זמן מאז עד עתה,

There isn't, there hasn't been a hiatus since *Matan Torah* until the mid-12th century and, again, that's only the cutoff point because that's what the Rambam is talking about, but he would update it if he were here today;

שלא שם כל מלך עז, או איש רשע מתגבר, ראשית כל כונותיו ואחרית
מצוותיו, לסתר תורתנו ולנתץ דתנו בכח הזרוע ותגברת החרב

There isn't any powerful *melech oved avodah zarah*, without exception, who has not tried to annul the Torah, to try to overturn our religion by force...

That's what's reflected in *Hilchos Melachim*, when the Rambam says "*yeidah she'al Yichud Hashem hu oseh milchamah*", because the hatred for us is rebellion against *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*; the hatred for us is a challenge to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s sovereignty over the world, to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*'s prerogative of *bechira*. It's a

rejection of *Yichud Hashem*. The Rambam warns: don't be misled by how it's packaged, how it's camouflaged. It's got nothing to do with Al Aqsa, it's got nothing to do with territory; they weren't interested in Al Aqsa mosque when it was under the British and under the Turkish, they didn't discover it until it was under Jewish sovereignty. *Retzonam l'hilachem ba'Hashem*, they're waging war against Hashem. That's what he says *le'balachah* in *Hilchos Melachim*— that a *chayal* should know that he's engaged in an act of *kiddush Hashem*.

The *emes* is that this historical scheme of the Rambam is the focus of the *kapitel* we've been saying this week (*Tehillim* 83, *pesukim* 1-4 cited here *Ed.*):

שיר מזמור לאסף א-להים אל דמי לך אל תחרש ואל תשקט א-ל כי
הנה אויביך יהמיון ומשנאיך נשאו ראש על עמך יערימו סוד ויתעצו
על צפוניך

"*Oivecha*", "*Elokim al dami lach*," "*oivecha*," "*misanecha*"... how is their enmity towards *You*, how is their hatred towards *You* expressed? "*Al amcha yarimu sod*," they're plotting against *Your* people. It's a *merivah* against *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. That's what it is, that's what it always has been, and that's what it continues to be.

Every *chayal* who has been killed, has been killed *al kiddush Hashem* because the *milchamah* is *al Yichud Hashem*. It's got nothing to do with land, nothing to do with anything else- it's about *malchus shamayim*. And for that matter, this is true even regarding those killed in the *pigu'im*, or the civilians who have been massacred. Every Jew living in *Eretz Yisrael* knows that there's a target on his or her back—every Jew knows that—a target drawn by Hamas, Hezbollah,

Jihadists, and they are *moser nefesh* to live there with that awareness. And if that willingness to be *moser nefesh* results in actual *mesiras nefesh*, they also died *al kiddush Hashem*, because by staking our claim that *Eretz Yisrael* was also given to us as part of *bechiras Yisrael*, they too are standing up for *Yichud Hashem*.

The knowledge that those who were killed—and killed with savagery that matches and arguably surpasses that of the Nazis, *yemach shemam*—died *al kiddush Hashem* in no way diminishes the grief, the pain, or the tragedy even one iota, for two reasons. First of all, on a human level, there are *shkulim* (bereaved): the ones who were massacred on *Shemini Atzeres*, overwhelmingly young people, it means that there are parents who are *shkulim*. Some of those killed were young parents, which means that there are children who are orphaned. The Torah recognizes that we're human and validates the human reaction— that's what *bechi* is about in the context of *aveilus*; the knowledge that those killed were killed *al kiddush Hashem*, doesn't diminish the grief, the pain, or the suffering. That's first on the human level.

But it's also true on a religious level. While, unquestionably, they died *al kiddush Hashem*, the fact that *nishpach damam ka'mayim*—and, in some cases, because of the brutality and the savagery, it's literally true that *ein koveir*—the fact that Jews were subjected to that fate is also a *chillul Hashem*. They themselves were *mekayeim* the *mitzvah* of *kiddush Hashem*, but the fact that that happened at all is a *chillul Hashem*. So religiously as well, the awareness that they're all *mekadshei Sheim Shamayim* doesn't lessen the grief, the anguish, the pain, because such an occurrence is itself a *chillul Hashem*.

In terms of our reaction and our *avodah*, maybe one thing which is suggested by this perspective is—not to the exclusion of so many other things that we should and need to be doing—that maybe we should be particularly conscious and sensitive in our behavior in looking to make a *kiddush Hashem*. A *kiddush Hashem* shouldn't have to be a *kiddush Hashem* whose flip side is *chillul Hashem*; *kiddush Hashem* shouldn't have to be with the loss of precious souls of our brothers and sisters. And maybe that's something that we should be—obviously we should always be—focused on, maybe with a heightened sensitivity; maybe part of our reaction and our *avodah* is that, through our behavior, through our conduct, through our interaction—especially *klapei chutz*—that we elicit a reaction of *ashrei aviv she'limdo Torah, ashrei rabo she'limdo Torah*; of *Yisrael asher becha espa'er*.

Abavas Hashem Through Tribulations and Torah

Rabbi Mordechai Willig

Adapted from a Sichas Mussar, Oct. 16, 2023

The *Midrash Tanchuma* at the beginning of *parshas Noach* (*Noach* 3) says that Hashem gave us *Torah She'biksav* and *Torah She'ba'al Peh*. The *Torah She'ba'al Peh*—which is what everyone seemed to be learning here when I walked in—is only for an individual who is not looking for comfort in this world, but is *meimis atzmo aleha*:

לא תמצא תורה שבעל פה אצל מי שיבקש ענג העולם, תאוה וכבוד
וגדלה בעולם הזה, אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה

Furthermore, the *bris* we have with Hashem is based on *Torah She'ba'al Peh*:

לא כרת הקדוש ברוך הוא ברית עם ישראל אלא על התורה שבעל פה

Torah She'ba'al Peh is difficult; it's like *chosbech*:

היא משולה לחשך, שנאמר: העם ההלכים בחשך ראו אור גדול
(ישעיה ט, א), אלו בעלי התלמוד שראו אור גדול, שהקדוש ברוך הוא
מאיר עיניהם באסור והתר, בטמא ובטהור. ולעתיד לבא, ואהביו
כצאת השמש בגברתו

Sometimes, it is difficult to break your head to figure out what the *Gemara* means— it's ! But at the end of the day, the *navi* says “*ba'am ha'holchim ba'chosbech ra'u or gadol*” (*Yeshaya* 9:1), that those that walk in darkness will see a great light; . Says the *Midrash*— *eilu*

Ba'alei HaTalmud she'ra'u or gadol. Each and every one of you is a *Ba'al Talmud* that will see an *or gadol*. Says the *Midrash, Hakadosh Baruch Hu me'ir einihem be'isur vi'heter, ba'tamei u'vatahor*— in this world, Hashem will enlighten them in *halachah*, and *u'le'asid lavo, v'ohavav k'tzeis hashemesh b'gvuraso*. Those who learn Torah—You!—are called those who love Hashem.

But, the *Midrash* goes on— as we know, we didn't accept the Torah until Hashem forced us to:

ולא קבלו ישראל את התורה עד שכפה עליהם הקדוש ברוך הוא את
ההר כגיגית

But we must ask— Is this about the *Torah she'bi'ksav*? Had we not already said *naaseh v'nishma* (*Shemos* 24:7)?

והלא משעה שאמר להם מקבלין אתם את התורה, ענו כלם ואמרו
נעשה ונשמע, מפני שאין בה יגיעה וצער והיא מעט!

Says the *Midrash*— *Ein bah yegi'ah ve'tzaar*; it's not so hard to study the Bible; It's not so big. But *Torah She'ba'al Peh*? You have to be very careful to keep the laws properly:

אלא אמר להן על התורה שבעל פה, שיש בה דקדוקי מצות קלות
וחמורות, והיא עזה כמות וקשה כשאול קנאתה, לפי שאין לומד אותה
אלא מי שאוהב הקדוש ברוך הוא בכל לבו ובכל נפשו ובכל מאדו,
שנאמר: ואהבת את ה' אלהיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאדך

Torah She'ba'al Peh is very hard! *Ein lomed osah elah mi she'ohev Hakadosh Baruch Hu bechol libo uv'chol nafsho u'vchol me'odo*, only those who love Hashem with all heart and all their soul and all their *me'od*—their everything—can learn Torah.

However, the question is: how do we know that this *pasuk*

from *krias shema* means *Talmud*? The *Midrash* continues:

ומנין אתה למד שאין אהבה זו אלא לשון תלמוד, ראה מה כתיב
אחריו, והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצוך היום על לבבך (דברים ו,
ז). ואי זה, זה תלמוד שהוא על הלב. הוי אומר, ושננתם לבניך, זו
תלמוד שצריך שנון

The next *pasuk* says “*asher anochi metzavecha hayom al levavecha*” (*ad loc.* 6:6). What is this? The *Midrash* says: *Talmud, she’hu al halev, bevei omer ve’shinantam l’vanecha, zo talmud she’tzarich shinun*. It doesn’t come right away; you have to go over and over and over it again until it’s sharp. *Al tigamgeim* (*Kiddushin* 30a), the Gemara demands; you can’t hesitate, can’t stutter... you must say it clearly. This requires very hard work.

The *Midrash* continues:

ללמדך, שפרשה ראשונה שבקריאת שמע אין בה פרוש מתן שכרה
בעולם הזה כמו שכתוב בפרשה שניה, והיה אם שמע תשמעו וגו’
ונתתי מטר ארצכם, זה מתן שכר עוסקי מצות (תורה שבכתב) שאין
עוסקין בתלמוד. ובפרשה שניה כתיב בה, בכל לבבכם ובכל נפשכם
(דברים ו, יג), ולא כתב בכל מאדכם

The first *parshah* of *Krias Shema* makes clear that there’s no reward in this world. However, the second *parshah* tells a different story. *Metar artzechem zeh matan s’char oskei mitzvos*, and there’s a different *girsah* of *zeh Torah she’bi’ksav*; the second *parshah* omits the word “*me’odchem*”; it reads “*b’chol levavchem u’v’chol nafsbechem*”, and that’s it. The *Midrash* notes:

ללמדך, שכל מי שאוהב עשר ותענוג, אינו יכול ללמד תורה שבעל
פה, לפי שיש בה צער גדול ונדוד שנה, ויש מבלה ומנבל עצמו עליה.

This means that if you like *osher v'ta'anug*, it's going to be hard for you to learn *Torah She'ba'al Peh*. There's *tza'ar venidud sheina*. Therefore, the *s'char* is ultimately, really, in *Olam Haba*, the *or gadol*. As the Midrash continues:

לפיכך מתן שכרה לעולם הבא, שנאמר: העם ההלכים בחשך ראו אור גדול

It's very important to understand what this really means. Rashi already comments on the *pasuk* that we just quoted:

בכל נפשך: אפילו הוא נוטל את נפשך

We know what this means: to die *al kiddush Hashem*. Rashi continues:

ובכל מאדך: בכל ממונך

With all your money. This is why it's found in the first *parshah* and not in the second *parshah*. In the first *parshah*, you're not busy with *metar artzechem be'ito*, the material pursuits of this world. In fact, according to Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai (acc. *Berachos* 35b), it's not called *osin retzono shel Makom*; Hashem prefers individuals who are fully immersed in their Torah and not concerned so much about money. However, in the second *parshah*, you're going to get your harvest, you're interested in your money— which there's nothing wrong with. He loves Hashem with all his heart, with all his soul, and keeps all the *mitzvos*, but he's missing the money aspect. He's interested in money; it's not a crime, but not the ultimate level.

Rashi continues:

דבר אחר: "ובכל מאדך" - בכל מדה ומדה שמווד לך, בין במדה טובה בין במדת פרענות

You have to love Hashem when things are good or things are bad, *tovah* or *pur'anus*.

וכן בודד הוא אומר כוס ישועות אשא צרה וגיון אמצא ובשם ה' אקרא

In both cases—either *kos yeshuos esah* or *tzarah veyagon emtza*—*Sheim Hashem ekra*. What does this mean? Furthermore, this is only in the first *parshah* and not in the second *parshah*. Why? Individuals who are not as steeped in *limud Torah She'ba'al Peh* as you are sometimes find themselves unable to express *ahavas Hashem* in difficult times. And who can blame them? The average individual, even if he is a good Jew and he keeps the *mitzvos* and loves Hashem with all his heart and even with all his soul—ready to die *al kiddush Hashem*!—but when things are *pur'anus*, it's difficult for that individual to fulfill the *ahava* of *bechol me'odecha*, not only in the first interpretation of Rashi – that he's interested in more money, but it's difficult for him to achieve the level of the second interpretation of Rashi, that of *ahavas Hashem* in these difficult circumstances of *pur'anus*.

But all the *talmidim* here—notwithstanding that they're involved in other pursuits—are all “first-*parshah yidden*,” in my view; people who are working hard in *ameilus batorah* late at night, working so hard to understand *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* Torah, are first-*parshah yidden*. And therefore, as the *Bnei Torah* that you are, it's important to try to reach this level of *ahavas Hashem* even at a time of *pur'anus*. Again, it is not easy.

I mentioned Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai; he said that second-*parshah yidden* are not *osin retzono shel Makom*. However, the

Gemara (*et. al.*) continues that according to Rabbi Yishmael, even second-*parshah yidden* in fact *are* considered *osin retzono shel makom*, and only that Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai is a higher level.

As you are familiar, I'm sure, it's quoted in the *Bei'ur Halachah* (156) that "*harbeh asu k'Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai ve'lo alsa beyadan*" – it is not for the mass of the population. However, individuals who are in this *Beis Midrash* who want to devote their lives to learn Torah, to teach Torah, and to be leaders of Torah communities – it's the highest possible level. Entering *klei kodesh* – those who were thinking about it, in light of the past events, should think about it more carefully; perhaps you can do it as well. Be from that elite for whom it is *alsa beyadan*! In today's world, a person can be a *Rav* and a *Rebbi* and still have some measure of economic security. I know many *Rabbeim*; none that I know is sleeping on the floor or surviving on bread and water. This is the *chizuk* of this *tekufah* which is unique to *Bnei Torah* such as yourselves.

But I want to take it one step further. We talk about the war effort; everyone is trying to do such good things, to do *tzedakah va'chessed* and to *daven*, and this is a hundred percent correct. But as *Bnei Torah*, you have a unique contribution to make. The *Yalkut Shimoni* says on the very famous *pasuk* of "*hakol kol Yaakov vehayadayim yidei Esav*" (*Bereishis* 27:22):

בשעה שיעקב מצפצף בקולו אם מצוי בבתי כנסיות ובבתי מדרשות
אין ידי עשו שולטות

You're all familiar with the fact that Yishmael and Esav are one – not only that Yishmael was Esav's father-in-law, but, as many of

the *ba'alei machshava* say, the *Malchus* of Edom includes Yishmael! The travails of Yishmael were predicted a long time ago. *Chazal* emphasize that the “*pere adam*” that is Yishmael—sub-humans!—would inflict a horrible toll on *Am Yisrael*; Edom is Esav is Amalek is the Nazis. We’re hit from both ends. It’s really all one *Malchus*. So, if we want to see to it that *ein yidei Esav sholtos*, there’s only one way: when *kol kol Yaakov bi'batei keneisiyos uv'vatei Midrashos*. Walking in here and seeing – *baruch Hashem*, a full *Beis Midrash*! – this is our war effort! This is what we should do! Obviously, we have to *daven* too, but *davening* is for everybody. But for *Bnei Torah*, there’s an additional aspect of *kol kol Yaakov bi'batei keneisiyos uv'vatei midrashos*, the *kol Yaakov* of learning over and above *davening*.

There’s a remarkable Ramban with which I wish to conclude. The Ramban is found in the *hasagos* on the *Sefer Hamitzvos* in his critique of the Rambam. The Rambam says that there’s a *mitzvah de'oraisa* to *daven* every single day (*Asei* 5). However, the Ramban disagrees; he says no. It’s true, it says *leovdo bechol livavchem* (*Devarim* 11:13), but the Ramban says that that doesn’t mean you have to *daven* every single day. But if it’s not a *mitzvah* every day, when should it be a *mitzvah*? What, once a year? Once in your life? No... Says the Ramban:

אינו חובה כלל; מדת חסד הבורא יתברך עלינו ששומע ועונה בכל
קראנו אליו

Yes, it’s a *chessed*, it’s an opportunity to cry out to Hashem who listens to our prayers, but it’s not an obligation. So what is the meaning of *leovdo bechol levavchem*? Says the Ramban:

שתהיה כל עבודתנו לא-ל יתעלה בכל לבבנו כלומר בכוונה רצויה
שלימה לשמו

You shouldn't do the *mitzvos be'lo kavanah*. And he quotes the *pasuk* we just quoted of *ve'ahavta es Hashem elokecha bechol levavecha*, to love Hashem *bechol lev va'lev*, even if it means endangering our lives, *benafsheinu u'v'mamoneinu* – we have to give up our money – not to do an *aveira*. And so the Ramban continues:

וזה שדרשו בספרי ולעבדו זה תלמוד דבר אחר זו תפלה אסמכתא היא
– דרבנן

But there's a second *psbat* in the *Sifrei* that the Ramban brings:
או לומר שמכלל העבודה שנלמוד תורתו ושנתפלל אליו בעת הצרות
ותהיינה עינינו ולבנו אליו לבדו

The Ramban, who denies a *mitzvah de'oraisa* of davening every day, concedes that when it's a time of *tzarah*, there's a *mitzvas asei de'oraisa* to daven and to learn! *Vi'sihyena eineinu vi'libeinu eilav livado!*

We know our *yeshua* comes from Hashem. As it says in the *pasuk*:

וכי תבאו מלחמה בארצכם על הצר הצורר אתכם והרעותם בחצוצרות
ונוכרתם לפני ה' א-להיכם

Says the Rambam in the *koseres* of *Hilchos Ta'anios*:

מצות עשה וכו' לצעוק לפני ה' בכל עת צרה גדולה שתבוא על הציבור

But this does not only mean *tefilla*! As we said earlier, *zeh baTalmud*! So, *Bnei Torah* such as yourselves cannot be content with a couple of extra *perakim* of *Tehillim* as the rest of the world can be, but for *Bnei Torah*, it's learning as well. And one could say based on the words of the *Yalkut Shimoni* that both of these activities must be

strengthened— the *tefillah*; the crying out and expressing our love to Hashem even in difficult times of *pur'anus*, as *Rashi* taught us, as well as *le'ovdo zeh haTalmud*, opening up our hearts in prayer and our minds in Torah. Because learning Torah, the *kolo shel Yaakov mitzafzef* in this *Beis Midrash* and every *Beis Midrash* throughout the world, can achieve *ein yidei Esav*—and *Yishmael!*—*sholtos*.

I'm sure that you are aware of all the prognostications and the predictions of what's going to happen. Let me tell you one thing: no one knows what's going to happen; only *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* knows what's going to happen. But that's to whom we pray. We *daven* to Hashem—we have *Emunah*—that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* controls everything. Yes, we have to do our *hishtadlus*—with the army, with the citizenry, in Israel and throughout the world, absolutely!—but at the end of the day, the *Ribbono Shel Olam* will decide how this crisis will come to an end. We don't know how; we don't know when; we don't know what. It comes down to the *Ribbono Shel Olam*.

In *shul* this past *Shabbos*, we sat together, sang a few songs, and one of them, with which I want to end, is the very first *Ani Ma'amin*. That's what it's all about really:

אני מאמין באמונה שלמה שהבורא יתברך שמו הוא בורא ומנהיג לכל
הברואים

She'haBorei Yisbarach Shemo— the Torah tells us, *Bereishis bara Elokim*; he is the *Borei*;

U'manbig— He didn't leave the world *hefker*; He continues to guide the world, to lead the world;

Lechol ha'beruim— Every creature, every member of *Klal Yisrael*, and even the non-Jews.

והוא לבדו עשה ועושה ויעשה לכל המעשים

What happened last *Shabbos*—explaining how it happened, this way, that way, the other way—ultimately, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* declared that it had to happen for whatever reasons. Perhaps we should do *teshuvah*, as the Rambam writes in *Hilchos Ta'aniyos*, that if there's a crisis, you must do *teshuvah*. The situation we have before us right now, this enigma, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* created it. *Ve'yaaseh lechol hama'asim*. Whatever will happen in the coming days, weeks—we don't know how long this is going to continue—comes directly from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, who continues to be the *Manhig es kol ha'olam*. We have to be *maamin be'emunah shileima*—it strengthens our *tefillah*, and yes, in this wonderful *Beis Midrash*, it strengthens our Torah as well. *Ul'avdo*, writes the Ramban, means in an *eis tzarah*, and, as *Chazal* tell us, if we will strengthen our Torah and our *tefillah*, *ein yidei Esav sholtos*.

Israel at War 5784: Three Fronts

Rabbi Itamar Rosensweig

Adapted from a Shiur, Oct. 24, 2023

I believe I speak for most of us when I say that for the last couple of weeks we have not been able to think about anything other than the terrible attack on our brothers and sisters in Israel and the looming darkness that lies ahead.

Will Durant remarked that barbarism, like the jungle, never dies out, it only retreats behind the barriers that civilization has thrown up against it and waits there always to reclaim that to which civilization has temporarily laid claim. That is what we all saw on October 7th: pure evil and barbarism asserting itself from behind the walls to try to destroy the civilization that we, the Jewish people, have built, not just over the last century, but over the last four millennia.

I cannot speak for others, but for me, personally, I watch the video clips of the heinous evil that Hamas perpetrated, and I look at the pictures. The video clips, the pictures, are very dark. They keep you up at night. But in my opinion, that is the only way to understand the type of evil that is being perpetrated against the Jewish people in our day: “*zachor es asher asah licha Amalek*” (*Devarim* 25:17). If you look at the images of the men, women, and children who were burnt alive in the South of Israel, it is worse than the most graphic imagery in *Eichah* or *Yirmiyahu*.

I was born in 1989. There has not been such a devastating attack against Jews in my lifetime. The newspapers report that this is the worst attack against Jews since the Holocaust. But there is something deeper and more tragic about the October 7th attack. The fact that it was an attack against Jews living in the sovereign homeland of the Jewish people in *Eretz Yisrael* makes it more urgent and more egregious than what was perpetrated against our people in Eastern Europe.

Lest you think this *eis tzara*—this sense of urgency or crisis—is behind us, pay careful attention to the northern border of Israel with Hezbollah. Pay close attention to the violence in Yehudah and Shomron, where two million Arabs have the potential to rise up, not just against the *yishuvim* there, but also against the *merkaz*—the center—of Israel. Pay careful attention to the warnings that come out of Iran and Yemen.

The United States has sent two aircraft carrier strike groups to the Middle East for a reason. There is a real sense that darkness lies on the horizon, darkness that has the power not only to end thousands of Jewish of lives, but to undermine the very existence of the modern State of Israel.

The Two-Pronged Response: *Eis Tzara* and *Milchemes Mitzvah*

What are we to do in this moment of crisis? Today I will articulate the two principles of *halachah* that I believe should guide our response. The first is that of *milchemes mitzvah*, waging war against our enemy to protect our people and our homeland. The second is that of *darkei hateshuvah*, the theological obligations of

repentance and prayer that are triggered by an *eis tzara* (time of distress).

I want to emphasize that each of these principles is separate from the other, and we are charged to respond by implementing both of them. We do not satisfy our obligation of *milchemes mitzvah* by engaging in *darkei hateshuvah*, just as we do not fulfill *darkei hateshuvah* by waging a *milchemes mitzvah*.

I'll begin with *darkei hateshuvah*. I won't develop this principle at great length today because we have already heard much about the importance of religious improvement here at Yeshiva in the aftermath of October 7th. I will devote more time developing the principle of *milchemes mitzvah* because that has been absent from the yeshiva's messaging. The focus on *darkei hateshuvah* has eclipsed the importance of *milchemes mitzvah*.

As I said, one prong of the Jewish response to an *eis tzarah* is *darkei hateshuva*, which the Rambam codifies in the first chapter of *Hilchos Ta'anuyos*. There is an obligation to introspect and repent, to call out in *tefillah*, to cry to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that we should be saved, and to sound the *chatzotzros* and the *shofar* as we *daven*. Some *Rishonim* (Ramban *hasagos* to *Sefer Hamitzvos*, *asei* 5) believe that the *tefillah* of an *eis tzara* is the only type of *tefillah* mandated by the Torah.

The other principle, *milchemes mitzvah*, is equally, if not more important. The Rambam codifies the laws of *milchemes mitzvah* in the fifth chapter of *Hilchos Melachim U'Milchamoseihem*. He explains

that when an oppressor comes and attacks the Jewish people, we are charged by the Torah to wage war against that enemy and to fight them. This is the category of *milchemes mitzvah* triggered by “*ezras Yisrael m’yad tzar sheba aleihem*” (5:1).

We do not need to learn the entire *sugya* now. It does not matter for us today whether the Rambam’s *makor* is the *Bavli* in *Eruvin*, the *Bavli* in *Sotah* or the *Yerushalmi*. What is important—and I believe uncontroversial and obvious—is that the horrific attack of October 7th—the most horrific attack against Jews in our lifetime, the most horrendous attack against the Jewish people in the Land of Israel since the creation of the State, triggers the *halachah* of *milchemes mitzvah* of *ezras Yisrael m’yad tzar sheba aleihem*.

A *milchemes mitzvah* is a Torah-mandated war. This not only means that the Torah obligates us to wage such a war, but that one who participates in it is performing a *mitzvah*. The Rambam writes in his commentary on the Mishnah (*Sotah* 8:7), based on the Gemara in *Sotah* (44b), that the *din* of “*osek bamitzvah patur min hamitzvah*” applies to someone engaged in a *milchemes mitzvah*. If you have been called up to fight, you are *patur* from *krias shema* and *tefillah*—whatever you need to be exempt from—because you are involved in the *mitzvah* of *milchamah*. In my opinion, this also applies to people who provide logistical support in the rear, *mesapekim mayim umazon* (providing food and water to soldiers, *op. cit.* 43a), contributing to the war effort. They too are engaged in *milchemes mitzvah*.

If you think this law of *milchemes mitzvah* obligates Jews living

in Israel to participate in the war effort but not Jews in America, you have confused your Judaism with the political entity that governs the State of Israel. The category of *milchemes mitzvah* is not a special *din* for citizens of the State of Israel. Nor is it a special *din* for soldiers that have enlisted with the IDF. The Gemara in *Sotah* (ibid.) teaches us that for a *milchemes mitzvah*, in contrast with a *milchemes reshut*, “*hakol yotzin, afilu chasan mechedro vekallah meichupasah*—every single member of the Jewish people is responsible to participate in the war effort. This obligates American Jewry, Israeli Jewry, and European Jewry with equal force.

I commend you if you are coming to *seder* fifteen minutes early. It is great if you are *davening* with more *kavanah*. It is great if you are adding some *Tehillim* to your *davening*. But that is only one part of the two-pronged response. It pertains exclusively to *darkei hateshuvah*, in other words, to *Hilchos Ta'aniyos*. It does not satisfy, in any way, the obligation of participating in the *milchemes mitzvah*.

I know that most of us cannot pilot F-35 warplanes or maneuver Merkava tanks or chamber an M16. At the end of my remarks today, I will share how you can participate in this *milchemes mitzvah* even if you are not trained to fight on the front lines. I believe it is incumbent upon every Jew to participate in this *milchemes mitzvah* in some meaningful way.

I know that many of you are involved in other important pursuits. The *Keren Orach* writes in *Sotah* (ibid.) that the *din* of *milchemes mitzvah* binds every member of the Jewish people such that even *talmidei chachamim* are obligated to fight, to leave behind their

talmud Torah and take up arms in the *milchemes mitzvah*. This should impress upon each of you how important it is to get involved.

Three Fronts

Let us take a moment to understand the *milchemes mitzvah* that we are engaged in. When I reflect on what's happening, I discern three different fronts in the war that Israel is fighting. I do not mean three geographical fronts: a war in Gaza, a war in *Yehudah v'Shomron*, and a war in the North. What I mean, rather, is that there are three dimensions to the *milchamah*.

I want to illustrate these three dimensions by speaking about my family's history, my familial connection to the Land of Israel and to the State of Israel. Of course we all have a personal connection to Israel. We all read the *pesukim* in *Bereishis*, and Israel is a major part of Jewish life in the twenty-first century. But I want to describe, just for a moment, the centrality of Israel to me, and how it animates the DNA inside me.

My maternal grandfather, Rabbi David Eliach, was born in Yerushalayim in 1922 under the British Mandate as a seventh generation Yerushalmi—his family had lived there for six generations. They had emigrated from Poland in the early 1800s shortly after the *talmidim* of the Gra started settling in Israel. Many *Chassidim* came around the 1840s. His father's side had come from Karlin-Stolin. On his mother's side from Lelov. They moved to Israel simply because that was the aspiration of Jews over the centuries. They came as *Chassidim* who wanted to settle the land of their forefathers. They appreciated the theological significance of living in the land of the *Shechinah* and of

performing *mitzvos* in *Eretz Yisrael*. There was also an element of preparing for *yimos haMashiach* because they knew that Jewry was destined to return to the Jewish homeland.

My maternal grandmother, Yaffa Eliach, had a very different story. She was born in 1935 in Eishyshok, a Lithuanian *shtetl* in Eastern Europe that was occupied by Poland in the inter-war years. The Germans invaded the *shtetl* in 1941, and on Rosh Hashanah of that year, the Nazi *einsatzgruppen* rounded up and executed the Jews of Eishyshok. They murdered more than four thousand Jews that day. My grandmother and her immediate family fled. They hid in fields and barns. Miraculously, they survived the war in hiding.

After the war, they returned to the *shtetl*, to their home, but the Poles who had taken over the Jewish homes and businesses were displeased, to put it mildly, that the Jews had returned to reclaim their property and businesses. They launched a pogrom and went house to house attacking the beleaguered Jewish families who had survived the war and just returned. My grandmother was hiding in an attic closet with her family when the Poles arrived at her house. The Poles found the closet, dragged out my grandmother's mother and baby brother, and shot them as my grandmother looked on in horror from the deeper recesses of the closet.

So while the Nazis murdered her entire community during the war and destroyed her town, it was the Poles, after the war, displeased by the idea of Jews returning to reclaim their property, who killed her mother and baby brother.

There is a third layer of tragedy in my grandmother's story. Her father, having witnessed the murder of his wife and infant son, organized with other men of the town to smuggle weapons into the *shtetl*. They wanted to be able to protect their families should there be another pogrom. If you know the history of Poland, the Soviets occupied and controlled Poland after the war. The Soviets did not want Jews fighting with Poles under their watch, and they were not going to allow a Jewish resistance. They arrested my great grandfather and sent him to a Siberian labor camp, where he remained imprisoned until 1957.

My grandmother was nine years old when her mother was killed and her father taken away. The Nazis destroyed her town at the beginning of the war. The Poles murdered her mother immediately after the war. And the Soviets took her father away to Siberia because Jews were not allowed to defend themselves.

Effectively orphaned from her father and mother, she came to Israel as a refugee in 1946, two years before the establishment of the State. Her world and her family had been destroyed. Israel gave her a new life. Israel protected her and provided for her. Israel offered her an education with which she could rebuild her life, and a safe world to do that in, and she met my grandfather there.

She was born Shayna. Shayna, in Yiddish, means beautiful. But when she settled in Israel she changed her name to Yaffa, Hebrew for beautiful. My mother once told me that growing up, she thought her mother was Israeli. She didn't grasp that her mother had lived a whole portion of her life in Eastern Europe. That's because Israel had adopted

her and allowed her to recreate her life after the destruction and darkness of the Shoah.

I. The Battle for Eretz Yisrael

To me, these different aspects of my family story frame the central elements of the importance of the Land of Israel and the State of Israel. On my grandfather's side, it is the aspiration of pious Jews over the generations to return to *Eretz Yisrael*, to settle it and to witness the restoration of Jewish sovereignty in the land that was promised to our forefathers.

Throughout the Torah we read of the obligation to conquer and settle *Eretz Yisrael*. In Bamidbar 33, for instance, we read “*vehorashtem es ha'aretz veyashavtem bah, ki lachem nasati es ha'aretz lareshes osah*” (v. 53). It is the destiny and the duty of the Jewish people to return, to live, and to defend the borders of *Eretz Yisrael*. The Ramban, on the spot and in his *hasagos* to *Sefer Hamitzvos* (*Shikchas Ha'asin* 4), writes that it is a *mitzvas asei* for all generations, even during *galus*, for Jews—not just Jews who live in Israel, but Jews across the globe—to settle the land, to establish Jewish sovereignty there, and to defend its borders. We are warned, Ramban writes in *Sefer Hamitzvos*, not to let any other nation control or establish sovereignty in the land. He adds, “*vizu hi shebachamim korim osah milchemes mitzvah.*” (loc. cit.) This means that defending the Jewish settlement of *Eretz Yisrael* and ensuring Jewish sovereignty of the land constitutes a *milchemes mitzvah*. It is the duty of Jewry not to let any other nation control the land of Israel.

Over the last two weeks I have watched the mobs on Penn's

campus rally in support of Hamas's attack, and I have listened to their bone-chilling chants: "There is only one solution, Intifada, Revolution!" "Where people are occupied, resistance is justified!" "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free!" Hamas and their sympathizers seek to drive the Jewish people out of our homeland. We are fighting to defend our claim to *Eretz Yisrael* and our right to settle it. *Vehorashtem es ha'aretz veyashavtem bah!*

II. The Battle to Rescue our Brothers and Sisters

There is a second front, a second dimension of the war. It manifests a different principle of *halachah*. In *parshas Kedoshim* we are commanded "*lo sa'amod al dam re'echa*" (*Vayikra* 19:16). When our brothers and sisters are in danger, there is an obligation upon all of us to come to their defense, to aid them. "If you see your friend drowning in a river, or attacked by wild animals, or assaulted by militants, you are commanded to save him" (*Sanhedrin* 73a).

Since October 7th, the Jewish people have been terrorized by Palestinian militants. The terrorists brutally invaded the tranquil *yishuvim* and *kibbutzim* in Southern Israel. They have launched, and continue to launch, thousands of rockets at cities across Israel, threatening the entire population of the Jewish state. Hezbollah's Radwan force is crouched on the Northern Border ready to invade the Golan, every day firing RPG's and rockets into the cities in the North. 200,000 Israelis have been forced to flee their homes and communities because of the danger. Some two hundred Israelis are being terrorized underground in Hamas tunnels, held as hostages and Human shields.

We—Jewry—must defend our nation from those who seek to

destroy us. We must provide refuge and safety to all Jews, to save them from their persecutors. We must fight to defend the lives of our people, so that “Israel may dwell in safety” (*Devarim* 33:28).

There is no institution, no entity in the world, that has done more to protect Jews across the globe than the modern State of Israel. Israel provided refuge to the survivors of the Shoah, like my grandmother. Israel rescued the Jewish communities of the Arab and Muslim countries. And Israel promises to provide refuge to any Jew in need of protection. We must support Israel in this war so that it can continue to protect the Jewish people from those who seek our annihilation. This is the second front of the *milchemes mitzvah*. *Lo sa'amod al dam re'echa!*

For me, this is the dimension of my grandmother's story. Jews lived for generations in Eastern Europe. My grandmother's *shtetl* was around for eight hundred years before the war. It was a vibrant Jewish community. It was an intellectual center of *litvishe talmud Torah*. But Jews had no way of protecting themselves. This is the three-layered tragedy of my grandmother's early life. Her town was destroyed by the Nazis at the beginning of the war. Her mother was murdered by the Poles after the war. And her father was imprisoned by the Soviets who would not allow Jews to defend themselves from their enemies.

III. The Battle Against Evil

Let me turn to the third dimension of the war, as I see it. This war is not just to defend Jewish sovereignty in *Eretz Yisrael*, of *vehorashtem es ha'aretz veyashavtem bah*. It is not just a war to save Jewish lives, of *lo sa'amod al dam re'echa*. President Biden was correct

when he said that this is a war against evil. As in Middle-earth, evil forces have stirred, the likes of which this century has not known. The images of the massacre—the violation of women and the mutilation of their bodies, the burning of children, the sadism of the Hamas militants reveling in the desecration of human life and dignity—should sear your mind. Evil incarnate stirs on our borders.

Throughout *Sefer Devarim* we are charged to root out evil and to eradicate it, “*uviarta hara mikirbecha* (e.g. *Devarim* 17:7, 21:21).” This is not just an obligation incumbent upon the *Melech* or the *shoftim*. “*Yad haedim tehiyeh bo barishonah*” (*Devarim* 17:7). We cannot allow evil to gain a foothold. We have a moral and legal obligation imposed on us by the Torah to eradicate evil.

In *parshas Noach*, the Torah tells us, “*vatishacheis ha’aretz lifnei haElokim, vatimalei ha’aretz chamas*” (*Bereishis* 6:11). Evil dominated the world, and the very purpose of creation was undercut. In *parshas Vayeira*, we learn that Sodom and Amora were destroyed because they were so evil that they were no longer worthy of existence. There is no reason for the world to continue to exist if it is dominated by evil (*Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah* 3:2); “*vayomer Elokim ketz kol basar ba lefanai, ki mal’ah ha’aretz chamas lifneihem*” (*Bereishis* 6:13).

After the *mabul*, Hashem enters into a covenant with Noach. The responsibility to root out evil is assigned to Noach and his descendents. It is on this basis that Hashem agrees to forbear from destroying the world. Thus Hashem commits “never again will I destroy all life” (*Bereishis* 8:21), at the same time that he charges Noach and his descendants, “*shofech dam ba’adam, ba’adam damo yishafech*,

ki betzelem Elokim asah es ha'adam" (Bereishis 9:6).

There are two important conclusions we can derive from this verse. The first, Radak notes, is that when a human being commits murder, it is not just that he deserves to die, but that humankind is responsible to punish him, to mete out justice by executing him. "One who sheds the blood of man; by man shall his blood be shed." We are charged with extinguishing evil. In doing so, we protect the dignity of humanity. The *pasuk* reflects that we are charged to do this– "*ki betzelem Elokim asah es ha'adam*".

Radak derives a second lesson: A murderer negates his *tzelem Elokim*. One who can violate such a fundamental law of nature is not an agent animated by the divine image. "*Hu bishchis tzalmo techilah, v'avar al mitzvas haKel.*" The perpetrator corrupted his own *tzelem Elokim*, "*vehinei in tzelem Elokim la'over.*"

The Torah declares in *parshas Netzavim* (Devarim 30:15) "*re'eh nasati lifanechah hayom es bachaim ve'es hatov ve'es hamaves ve'es hara.*" Human beings are endowed with *bechirah*. When you have *bechirah*, you can choose how you are going to live. You can choose *chaim* and *tov* or you can choose *maves* and *ra*. Each individual can choose to exercise and nurture their *tzelem Elokim*. Or they can choose to negate and destroy it. The Torah implores us: "*uvacharta bachaim*" (ad cit.).

In Israel's war against Hamas, the battle against evil is also a battle against *maves* and *sheker*. Israel and Hamas have opposite value systems. On the one side, we have a society that cherishes life, seeks

truths, and promotes justice. This is what the Jewish people have always stood for, and this is what Israel strives for today. On the other side, Hamas champions death, propagates lies, and promotes terror. Watch the coverage of the explosion at the Al Ahli Arab hospital in Gaza city. The Palestinians claimed that Israel bombed the hospital and that 500 civilians were killed in the blast. The Arab world declared days of outrage and protest against Israel. Every Western country has affirmed Israel's attestation that the blast was caused by a failed Palestinian rocket, and it turns out that the death toll is somewhere near 50. Yet the Arab world continues to blame Israel based on Hamas' lies.

There are, then, three dimensions of this *milchemes mitzvah*. The first stems from our special connection to Eretz Yisra'el. Even if no Jews were in danger, there is a *mitzvas asei*, a duty upon each Jew, to establish sovereignty in the land of Israel. The second stems from our responsibility to assist fellow Jews, regardless of where they live. *lo sa'amod al dam re'echa-ezras Yisrael m'yad tzar sheba aleihem*—applies anywhere in the world. It was equally true in Shushan, and in Eastern Europe, and in Germany during the Christian Crusades, but *al ahas kama vekama*, in the land of Israel. The third stems from our responsibility to build a world worthy of existence, a moral world of *chaim* and *tov*. This last dimension, I believe, is incumbent not only on the Jewish people, but upon every decent citizen of the world.

Will Your Brothers Go out to War while You Stay Here?

I want to highlight the different ways that we can participate in this *milchemes mitzvah*. I will reiterate that there is no doubt in my mind that if ever there was an obligation upon us to participate in a

milchemes mitzvah, the time is now. Surely the worst attack against Jews of this *yovel*—perhaps the worst attack against Jews in Israel since the *churban habayis*—is a *milchemes mitzvah* of *ezras Yisrael m'yad tzar sheba aleihem*. I believe that each of the three elements I delineated constitutes a sufficient call to action, *al achas kama vekama* when all three of them—*vehorashtem es ha'aretz veyashavtem, lo sa'amod al dam re'echa*, and *uviarta hara mikirbecha*—converge on the battlefield before us.

I mentioned that I believe this obligation is incumbent upon all of Jewry. Chazal teach us that the *urim vetumim* would light up for the *Kohen Gadol*. I think you can look at *pesukim* in the Torah, and you'll find that certain *pesukim* “light up” to guide our generation. Scanning the *parshiyos* of *Bereishis* these past two weeks, I noticed that certain *pesukim* are illuminated. “Our brothers’ blood cries out from the soil” (*Bereishis* 4:20); “Shall our sisters be treated like whores?” (*Bereishis* 34:25)...

The *pasuk* that shines brightest to me now is in *parshas Matos*: “*ha'acheichem yavo'u lamilchamah va'atem tesihvu po?*” (*Bamidbar* 32:6). We, American Jewry, are like *bnei Gad*, *bnei Reuven*, and *chatzi shevet Menasheh*. Most of *Bnei Yisrael* have gone to dwell in the land of Israel. We saw the *Ever Hayarden* and chose to settle there. That is fine, for now—or more likely it is not fine for now, history will tell us—but we must remember that when *bnei Gad* and *bnei Reuven* wanted to settle *Ever Hayarden*, Moshe demanded of them: “Will your brothers go out to war while you stay here?” And the *shevatim* committed, “*lo nashuv el beiteinu ad hisnachal Bnei Yisrael ish es nachalaso*” (*Bamidbar* 32:18). This is the famous *tnai* of *bnei Gad* and *bnei Reuven*.

It is a revealing, poignant fact that most of you in this room know more about the *Choshen Mishpat din* of *tnai bnei Gad ubnei Reuven* than you know about the actual substance of the commitment. *Lo nashuv el beiteinu ad hisnachal Bnei Yisrael ish es nachalaso*. Moshe Rabbeinu warns them, “*ve'im lo sa'asun kein, hinei chatasem laHashem, ude'u chataschem asher timtza eschem*” (*Bamidbar* 32:23). The duty of *milchemes mitzvah* is incumbent upon the entire *Bnei Yisrael*. It has nothing to do with whether you live in the current borders of Israel or if you have Israeli citizenship: the call to action is *ha'acheichem yavo'u lamilchamah*, will your brothers and sisters go out to war, *va'atem tesihvu po?*

Now, as I said earlier, most of you probably could not fight for Israel if you wanted to. Of course, if you are trained and the IDF wants you, you should go. Most of you, however, are not trained to maneuver Merkava tanks, and the Israeli army would not want you. But even if we cannot participate on the front lines, we can participate in the rear. Rashi (*Devarim* 24:5) explains that even those exempt from fighting on the front lines are obligated to provide water and food to the soldiers and to help maintain the roads and fix military equipment.

The Radvaz (*Hilchos Melachim* 7:4) makes this point in a different way. He cites the Gemara in *Sotah* (ad loc.) that everyone is obligated to participate in a *milchemes mitzvah*, *afilu chasan mechedro vekallah meichupasah*. But he argues that women are not obligated to fight on the front lines because *kol kevudah bas melech penimah* (*Tehillim* 45:14)—whether women are actually exempt from serving on the front lines appears to be a debate amongst the *Rishonim*—even so, women are obligated to support the war effort from the rear by

providing food and water to the soldiers and by fixing munitions—*mesapkos mayim umazon*. Clearly there is a way to participate in the war effort from the rear. What does this mean for all of us?

Support Israel Financially

It is probably not a good use of your talents to get on a plane and wander the streets of Israel dropping off more socks and underwear for Israeli troops, or dropping off more food than soldiers can consume.

There are three things that everyone here can do to participate. One is to contribute financially. Any amount is important. There are people who have been displaced from their homes. Businesses are shut down as their workers are called up to fight. Hospitals have needs and are preparing to treat an influx of wounded soldiers. Children have been orphaned by the attacks and families have lost their primary earner. Many of the victims will require trauma support and therapy for years.

Even if you can't give much now, give something, and commit to giving more in the future. I have given my month's salary away to support needs in Israel, and I have pledged to give more. The outpouring of financial support from the American Jewish community is extraordinary, truly without limits. I'm inspired by my neighbors' and community members' financial commitment to support Israel. Some of them have been writing \$100,000 checks to institutions in Israel in need.

Support Israel Politically

There is a second way to participate. *Chazal* say that *tzedakah* is *b'mamono* but *gemilus chassadim* is *b'gufo* (Sukkah 49b). Don't just write a check, get involved personally. This is a moment of destiny for American Jewry. David French, who was deployed with the U.S. Army in Iraq, wrote in the New York Times that while the United States is an independent military and economic superpower, Israel is a dependent power ("What It Would Mean to Treat Hamas Like ISIS" [October 12, 2023]). This means that while the United States can wage war on its own time schedule and at the rate that it wants, Israel is ultimately a dependent power. Israel cannot fight a war without the backing of the United States, financially or geopolitically. The reasons for this are complex, and we need not get into them now. It is sufficient to appreciate French's observation that "In every major conflict since its war for independence, Israel has had to race to accomplish its military objectives before international pressure forced a cease-fire." So practically it seems that Israel will be constrained by the timetable permitted by the United States and the European Union. Already this week we have seen the influence exerted by America and Secretary Blinken over Israel's war cabinet.

This is a moment of destiny for American Jewry. We must rally the United States government to support Israel. Each of us is an equal constituent in this democracy. One person, one vote. And each of us must let our representatives in government know that we want the United States to stand by Israel, and how important it is for the U.S. to do so. This includes the United States granting Israel the time it needs to defeat Hamas, supporting Israel at the United Nations Security

Council, and providing Israel with the financial assistance and military armaments that it needs to defeat Hamas and Hezbollah, rescue the hostages, and to restore safety and security to its borders.

Perhaps the most important thing you can do in this arena is to tell your Representatives in Congress, and tell the White House, that you want them to continue to support Israel. Your voice matters. Attend rallies to show the government and the world that American Jewry supports Israel. Advocate for Israel in the court of public opinion—write an op-ed, post on your LinkedIn—so that the government understands that Americans want them to support Israel.

Whatever amount of *tzedakah* any of us will give to Israel, collectively or individually, will pale in comparison to the huge amount of financial and military aid that the United States government can and should give to Israel. Congress is drafting a bill that would provide Israel with \$15 billion in aid. This includes vital armaments for Israel's fighter jets and tanks. Ensuring that this aid package gets approved is perhaps more consequential for the war than flying to Israel to distribute stuff to soldiers or even than adding one more American *machalnik* to the front lines. The United States has also sent two aircraft carrier strike groups to the Middle East to deter Iran and Hezbollah from joining the war. Directing America, today the world's greatest superpower, of which we are equal constituents, to continue to support Israel—diplomatically, militarily, and financially—is a critical way we can participate in the war effort. It is for moments like this, I believe, that our ancestors arrived on these shores.

Support Israel in the Marketplace of Ideas

I want to mention one last area where we can make a difference. We all feel the winds of change. Pro-Hamas supporters march in Times Square, at Columbia and Harvard, in Los Angeles and Philadelphia. Antisemitism—the oldest hatred of Jews—and anti-zionism—the contemporary agenda of our adversaries to delegitimize the Jewish people’s right to national self-determination in their homeland—are now permissioned by elite universities and in the halls of Congress.

We are lucky that the President of the United States is a longtime friend of Israel. But Joe Biden is an aberration in the present political order, especially amongst the new Democrats. This means that the unequivocal support that Biden is giving to Israel, both militarily and financially, is fortuitous *hashgacha*. He ran to Israel’s aid without batting an eyelash. It is not clear that this type of support will exist in thirty or forty years. This will depend on the underlying values and ideas that animate Western society, on the *zeitgeist* and *weltanschauung* of the West.

We see this shift occurring on college campuses, we see antisemitism gaining a stronger foothold in New York City, in the United States, and in Congress. The rise in antisemitism and the decline in support for Israel move in lockstep with the shifting values of Western society. Some of this has to do with ideologies of power structures: oppressor/oppressed, colonial/indigenous, minority/majority, occupation/resistance. The marketplace of ideas today is such that ordinary Americans now openly support Hamas’s violence and brutality—the intentional murder of innocent Israelis, the

rape of Jewish women, and the burning of Jewish infants. The moral confusion is so dense—the fog so thick—that these people cannot discern between good and evil.

When I look at my peers on college campuses, at Penn, at Columbia, when I listen to world leaders, it seems that they are unable to distinguish between *or* and *choshech*. It boggles the mind. Many universities are more than happy to condemn Israel in the same breath that they condemn Hamas.

Three times a day we declare in our *tefillos*—“*ata chonen le’adam da’as, umelamed le’enosh bina*”—that *Hashem* grants mankind knowledge. Chazal teach that knowledge manifests in the power of discernment, in the ability to distinguish. In the *havdalah* of *Shemoneh Esrei*, in “*ata chonen le’adam da’as*”, we say “*hamavdil bein kodesh lechol, bein or lechoshech, bein Yisrael la’amim.*” Knowledge and understanding lies in the power to discern, between light and dark, between *kodesh* and *chol*, between good and evil. One of the first *berachos* we make in the morning is *hanosein lasechvi vinah lehavchin bein yom uvein laylah*—He gives the heart the knowledge to distinguish between day and night. In the very beginning of *Bereishis* (c.f. 1:4), we read, “*vayavdel Elokim bein ha’or uvein hachoshech; vayar Elokim es ha’or ki tov.*” That is the power to distinguish between *tohu vavohu vechoshech al p’nei tehom*, and *or* and *tov*, good and right.

I think many people, even within the Jewish community, are sometimes persuaded by counter-narratives that seek to blur the distinction between *tov* and *ra*.

It is our responsibility, in the sense of *lehavdil bein ha'or uvein hachoshech*, to clarify, defend, and reinforce the principles of justice and right that lie at the center of our moral worldview, and to make sure that these ideas take hold and resonate in the marketplace of ideas. We should make the best case for Israel before the international community and to our fellow Americans.

I think that is an important front in the present war, and all of you can be involved in it. *Lo bashamayim hi*. One member of my community, J.J. Kimche, wrote an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal criticizing Harvard's response to the attacks and its refusal to support its Jewish students ("Harvard Shrugs at Jew-Hatred" (October 10, 2023). All of you can be involved in similar projects. It is really not a difficult thing to do; it is *beficha uvil'avvcha la'asoso*. If you have an internship, or a job, and your employer or colleagues are indifferent to the ascendant antisemitism or anti-Zionism, you should speak up. It is your responsibility to serve as an agent of moral clarity.

It is not just Jews who are obligated to do this; it is incumbent on every person endowed with the dignity of humanity. If you are following the backlash against America's elite universities, you'll notice that it is not just Torah observant Jews who are declaring "I will no longer support universities that are unable to condemn Hamas as evil." It is also non-Jews, like the Huntsman family. Jon Huntsman Jr., who served as a U.S. ambassador under both Democratic and Republican presidents, wrote this to Penn:

"Penn has become deeply adrift in ways that make it almost unrecognizable. Moral relativism has fueled the university's race to the

bottom.... The University's silence in the face of reprehensible and historic Hamas evil against the people of Israel (when the only response should be outright condemnation) is a new low. Silence is antisemitism, and antisemitism is hate, the very thing higher ed was built to obviate. Consequently, Huntsman Foundation will close its checkbook on all future giving to Penn."

If these institutions of higher learning are unable to distinguish between good and evil, they are complicit in propagating a world of *hishchis kol basar es darko al ha'aretz*. It is our responsibility to correct the marketplace of ideas, to reinforce and advance the immutable moral principles that lie at the heart of our worldview.

I do not recall if I mentioned this to my *shiur*, but I believe that each time we do not defend our principles, or speak up to support Israel's right to exist, or its right to defend itself, in the communities that we circulate within, we normalize antisemitism and the anti-Israel ideology that has become more entrenched and permitted in the United States.

Years ago, when I graduated from Yeshiva University and began my philosophy studies at Columbia, I was sitting in class and the professor began discussing the problem of evil. She said, "most of us don't encounter evil face to face, but there are Palestinians languishing in Israeli prisons who suffer every day from the evil perpetrated against them." I was so caught off guard. I was not expecting it. I didn't know what to say. Was I supposed to defend Israel here, in a classroom full of philosophy students at Columbia? Should I stand up and protest and declare that it was a despicable thing for her to say? Should I shut my

laptop and walk out? I did not. I sat there; I was wearing a *yarmulka*, and she got away with saying it.

And when I look back to that moment, I believe I violated the prohibition, which the Rambam codifies (*Devarim* 20:3; *Hilchos Melachim* 7:15), of *al yerach levavchem*. In *milchamah*, it is *assur* to be intimidated, to be afraid. The Rambam says that someone who is afraid, and does not have the courage to fight, or in this case to speak up, *kol demei Yisrael teluyim betzavaro*—the blood of all of Jewry is on his neck. When we don't have the courage to speak up, when we fail, we permit and normalize, little by little, this type of rhetoric and allow it to take root. We allow the world to congregate against *acheinu Bnei Yisrael*. The result is that at critical moments, like now, the world will not support Israel. This is why in each instance *kol demei Yisrael teluyim betzavaro*. The Rambam says, “*ve'im lo asah milchamah b'chol libo u'vechol nafsho, harei zeh k'mi sheshafach demei hakol*.” Each time you consider whether to speak up, know that the fate of Jewry hangs on your neck.

I want to conclude with the following two thoughts. I believe this mindset of being involved in the *milchemes mitzvah* is so important, that if I were the Chief Rabbi of the United States, I would make a *takanah* that we should all wear Israel's olive-green fatigues so long as the *milchamah* is being waged, just like Volodymyr Zelensky wears Ukraine's fatigues when he represents them overseas, to show that they are a nation at war. That is the mindset of *milchemes mitzvah*, the condition of Jewry right now.

For the last couple of weeks, most of us have had nothing but

tears. When I sit alone in my study, and my mind's eye is drawn, inevitably, to the hostages held underground, to the terror of the victims murdered on October 7th, to the trauma of the survivors, to the young soldiers who will die defending Israel, to the forces of darkness that gather in Lebanon and Iran—when I consider the difficult path ahead and my eyes tear—I am somewhat consoled by the words of Tehillim (126:5), “*hazor'im bedim'ah berinah yiktzoru.*” That which we sow in tears, we will harvest in joy. The last few weeks have been *zor'im bedim'ah*. And as darkness looms on the horizon, we will continue to be *zor'im bedim'ah*. But soon, hopefully soon, we will witness *berinah yiktzoru*. That which we invest with our tears and with our blood, we will harvest in joy.

My grandmother, whom I mentioned earlier—whose town was destroyed by the Nazis, whose mother was murdered by the Poles, and whose father was taken from her by the Soviets—wrote about the dignity and triumph of the human spirit even in the darkest moments of the sho'ah. I have two copies of her book, *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust*, each with an inscription from her. In one, she inscribed, “*me'at or mehachosbech bagadol*”—a little light from the vast darkness. In the second, she inscribed, “*me'at or docheh harbech chosbech*”—not just “a little light from the vast darkness,” but “a little light has the power to dispel great darkness.” That is what we are fighting for right now. We pray, every morning, *or chadash al tzion ta'ir, venizkeh kulanu b'meheirah le'oro*. May we merit to win this war—*ki Hashem Elokeichem holeich imachem lehilacheim lachem*—and build a civilization whose radiant light dispels the darkness, *or chadash al tzion ta'ir venizkeh kulanu b'meheirah le'oro*.

Resistance and Persistence in Times of Trouble

Rabbi Mordechai Becher

Adapted from a Sichas Mussar, Oct. 31, 2023

The Gemara in Kiddushin (32a) says that Rav Huna, wanting to test his son Rabba for his *kibbud av v'em*, walked over to his son and tore his silk garment to see whether he would become angry at his father. The Gemara proceeds to ask: if his son got angry, would Rav Huna not have violated *lifnei iver lo siten michshol*? The Gemara answers that Rav Huna had relinquished his *kavod*. Rav Yisrael Salanater is perplexed by this: he could understand how a father can be *mochel* on his *kavod*, but getting angry is in and of itself an *aveira*, and a father cannot forgive the *issur* of *ka'as*! Rav Shlomo Fisher answers that we learn a great principle from this story: normal human emotion is usually not an *aveira*, and an angry response by Rabba would not have been a transgression. Another proof of this idea is found in the *Sefer Hachinuch* (338) about *lo sikom*, explaining that if someone is verbally abusing you, it is not considered to be *nekamah* to respond. While it is true that it is a *midas chassidus* to not respond, according to *halachah* it is not feasible for a person to be a stone and not respond, and thus, normal human response cannot be deemed an *aveira*.

The Gemara says *lo nitnah Torah lemalachei hashareis* (*Berachos* 25b, *Yoma* 30a, *Kiddushin* 54a, *Meilah* 14b). Why is this relevant? People have approached me feeling guilty about their

emotions in the case of this war. They're scared and they want to have *bitachon*, but if someone feels scared, that is a normal human response, and likewise, if a person feels anger and hatred, that is a normal human response. We are allowed to have these types of emotional responses. Certainly, we should try to work on our *bitachon*, but at the end of the day, to be human is not an *aveira*, and ultimately, we must have a reconciliation with ourselves and our emotional response.

There are also practical responses. In *Bamidbar*, when the Torah says to wage war against Midyan, the Torah uses the phrase "*elef lamateh*" three times (*Bamidbar* 31:4-6). The *Midrash Rabbah* explains that this phrase is said three times because it wasn't just one thousand people per tribe; it was three thousand per tribe, as the *Midrash* says one thousand people were involved in logistics, one thousand were involved in combat, and one thousand were engaged in *tefillah*. In that sense, we can all be considered part of that army. We learn, *daven*, and say *Tehillim*, and all of that is part of our *hishtadlus*. We are not uninvolved; we are part of the one thousand who were learning and *davening*.

Although the October 7th attack seems unprecedented to us, it is not unprecedented in Jewish history— people have tried to eliminate us many times. One prime example of this is Purim. Rav Soloveitchik inferred that although Sancheriv mixed up all the nations, Amalek is not only genealogical, but also ideological, and is defined as any nation that desires to destroy *Klal Yisrael*. Indeed, the response of *Klal Yisrael* here is important to look at, for it is here that we see these same three parallels. There was *tefillah* (i.e. fasting), and Mordechai taught the Jewish people Torah. We also know that the Jews fought back and

killed 30,000 Persians. The third area that *Klal Yisrael* fought against Amalek was “*mishbloach manos ish lerei’ethu*” – since the threat was to physically annihilate us, the response was to physically sustain each other. The *mishbloach manos* is not merely about sustaining; it is about the encouragement of friendship and unity, strengthening each other psychologically and emotionally. The third idea is the concept of *tzelem Elokim*. The *reshaim* who attacked us destroyed their own *tzelem Elokim*, and tried to destroy ours as well, but we do not succumb to that – we have to go in the opposite direction.

The third response is an intellectual one. Hamas’ viciousness is not the least bit surprising, but what is more bothersome is the support we have seen from the various religious and political factions. What would have to be the bar Hamas would have to pass to be condemned by these groups? Nothing. Hamas has done everything evil imaginable. What motivates these disparate groups to see Israel and the Jews destroyed? The Gemara in *Megillah* (3a) talking about Daniel says his friends were scared since they did not see the vision he saw, and asks why they were scared, answering that even though they did not see it, their subconscious saw it, and there are times when a person is not consciously aware of why they are scared.

There is something about *Klal Yisrael* and the return to our land that scares these factions. Arnold Toynbee called the Jews “a fossil remnant,” and in the eyes of Christians, the Jews are frozen – but we seem to be thawing out. Israel and Torah are flourishing, undermining their understanding of why the Jews are in exile. The Vatican rationalized our return in 1948 by saying the Jews had yet to reclaim Jerusalem, yet in 1967 we reclaimed that too; the fossils have come to

life. In Islam, it's just as scary to see us at home and is a contradiction to their belief, and to an atheist, we should not exist either. We are unaware of our own fossilization and for them, it's troubling.

Rav Moshe Shapiro used to ask what “*Hashem la'mabul yashav*” (*Tehillim* 29:10) means, and explained that when the *geulah* comes it will be like a *mabul*, and it will wipe away their understanding of civilization like a *mabul*. What all these groups detect is a *mabul* coming, but for us, it is comforting, as we know it is the footsteps of the *Mashiach*. The truth is we all know that the *geulah* is inevitable and it will come, but for them it is terrifying. If one were to see velociraptor footsteps in the wet sand, they would start to get scared. These groups are seeing fossils coming back to life, which should give us hope as well as an understanding that we are on the trajectory towards the future and our hope in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that we are on the path to *geulah*, *b'meheirah b'yameinu*.

Perspectives on Encountering and Responding to Evil in the World

Rabbi Michael Rosensweig

Adapted from a Hashkafa Talk, Nov. 7, 2023

The tragic and harrowing massacre that took place on Shemini Atzeres and the subsequent war for existential survival and in the name of elemental *tzelem elokim*, the core value of human sanctity of life that it engendered, has completely dominated our national and personal focus, and rightfully so. Of course, like all other important events that transpire and that we encounter and are exposed to, the greater the significance, the more it requires a proper, if multidimensional *halachic* perspective or response. This is particularly true regarding the unspeakable evil that was perpetuated by Hamas, which has been further exacerbated by additional disturbing and confusing developments since. This includes the insidious press coverage, the extremely cynical use of pictures and captions, and persistent narratives for moral equivalency between the victim and the criminal initiator. There has also been an unleashing of a torrent of rabid antisemitism, both manifest in venomous rhetoric, heinous acts, and the threat of violence. And thirdly, the exposure of an almost unimaginable moral bankruptcy of the bastions of American culture, on the most hallowed of college campuses whose leadership can barely condemn an act of unequivocal and unspeakable evil, and whose student mobs advocate for barbaric Hamas, requiring not simply objectionable apologetics, but reflecting real advocacy in a frenzy of ignorance and violence.

So let me begin, briefly, by trying to identify the evil that we confront. Sadly, in the long history of the Jewish people, we have frequently—even ubiquitously—encountered injustice and persecution, going back to the very beginning of our history from the stories of Lavan and Esav and a little bit of Yishmael. But it's important to discern and distinguish between the various enemies and opponents that we have encountered throughout the ages. In the interest of time, I am going to limit my focus just to the history that we read in *Chamisha Chumshei Torah*. When Mitzrayim and Moav and Edom initiated their hostility and conflict—each existential threats to *Klal Yisrael*—they were not perceived by *Chazal*—nor were they treated by *Am Yisrael* and the *Ribono Shel Olam*—as completely irredeemable, as there are rationalizations for their enmity. But there is a certain group that we do encounter in *Chamisha Chumshei Torah* that is perceived as more egregiously evil. That is the *dor hamabul*, which needed to be utterly destroyed, literally—the entire world needed to be destroyed; the story of Sodom, which we read in last week's *parshah*; the story and *halachos* of Amalek (which we read in *Beshalach* and *Ki Seitzei*); and—to a lesser extent—Midyan. These are additional examples of this as well.

While *lo sesa'ev Mitzri ve'Edomi* (Devarim 23:8) applies, there is some sort of redeeming value in all of these countries and cultures. Midyan is singled out for a more intense response, and the cultures of the *mabul* world, of Sodom, and of Amalek are cultures that the *Ribono Shel Olam* determined needed to be utterly eradicated. The issue here—just to be clear—is not to suggest that our present enemies are Sodom or Amalek or the *dor hamabul*. While each of them was explicitly determined by the *Ribono Shel Olam* to constitute

irredeemable cultural and societies, there are still common themes and principles that identify rhetoric, cultures, and actual conduct as destructive, even if we are not talking about actual Amalek, Sodom, *dor hamabul* or Midyan. The principles that single them out can still be relevant and important, particularly with respect to adopting a zero-tolerance posture with respect to such cultures.

It is a fascinating phenomenon that when we read the *pesbuto shel mikra* about the *mabul* and Sodom and Amalek, and even—to a lesser extent—about Midyan, what is strikingly absent is an extensive explanation that the Torah would have provided to justify or explain the severe consequences of these cultures' actions and behavior. Instead, what we encounter is a broad depiction with a total lack of specificity. If you look at the *mabul* for example, all we are told is that we are dealing with a culture that is corrupt— a rather broad perspective.

But more than that, we find this phenomenon applied also to the other categories/cultures that are mentioned. When it comes to Sodom, for example, we are told that Lot chooses to abandon Avraham Avinu and to live in Sodom, and that Sodom is an evil culture. But again, without any kind of specificity. It says “*anshei Sodom ra'im v'chataim la'Hashem me'od*” (Beresihis 13:13). And then later on again, when the actual decree is applied to Sodom, we are told of the reaction to Sodom and Amorah as part of the justification of its destruction; one could not imagine or want anything much more general or generic than this.

When it comes to the attack of Amalek (*Shemos* 17:15), they

fight in Refidim, and the Torah describes “*asher karecha baderech*” (Devarim 27:) and “*hanechshalim*”; still no indication of a particular crime. Even with Midyan we encounter very little information. We know that Midyan is singled out because of the role in the undermining of *Klal Yisrael*, but we are not told explicitly what the difference is between Midyan and Moav; if anything, the latter seems to be more aggressive; all we are told is “*tzror es haMidyanim*” (*Bamidbar* 25:17). They apparently have all sorts of schemes and machinations, yet despite the double use of the word *tzror* and *nachaleihem* regarding the *d’var Peor*, we are totally lacking in specific information once again, and the question is why.

But I think the answer is quite simple. There is a certain profundity in a simple and stark depiction of evil: the abandonment of *tzelem elokim* and the absence of redeemable values. In a way, by not specifying, the Torah is telling us very powerfully that this is exactly the issue. Their culture exceeded their actions and their crimes, and whatever they did highlighted and underscored a culture that basically completely devalued human life and displayed no regard for any kind of morality or positive culture. Therefore, in a very simple and stark way, *raba*, *kavdah*, *ra*, *chataim*, *karecha baderech* – the Torah is telling us that these are cultures whose existence really threatened the rest of the civilized world.

This is further reflected by decisions that were made by these cultures against their own well-being, and against the human instinct of gain and self-interest, even survival. All of this was overridden by the ideology of hate. We are told by *Chazal* that while Moav was the initial

opponent of *Klal Yisrael*, they were motivated by fear; they panicked and they truly believed that if *Klal Yisrael* were successful they had no future, but Midyan did not have this perspective. Basically, their involvement was diabolical and consistent with culture simply of being destructive; while Moav was motivated, albeit unjustly, Midyan had no motivation whatsoever. That is, of course, how *Chazal* understands the war in Refidim initiated by Amalek which has no history, context, or cause. And, of course, this is the understanding of *asher karecha baderech*.

Moreover, the evil perpetrated by these cultures was not rogue or from extremists. On the contrary, this was the government. This was the agenda and the ideology of this culture. Much the same, sadly, as we are experiencing in our time. Hamas leaders have even said that if they can do this every single day, this will be their ultimate purpose and goal. There is no sense that there is some rogue faction or some misreading of a military operation for butchering children and infants as cruelly, viciously, and barbarically as possible. On the contrary, they are very unapologetic, and there is a bit of honesty in all of that. This is how the *Akeidas Yitzchak* (*sha'ar* 20) understands the culture of Sodom, arguing that there were laws there on the books based on the understanding of *Chazal* against *hachnasas orchim* which also included other acts of savagery and butchery. Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch goes further in describing what took place eventually with Lot, explaining that the pasuk says *terem yishkavu ve'anshei Sodom nasabu al habayis* (Bereshis 19:4). Whenever you have a double “*anshei*,” says Rav Hirsch, that is referring to the governing clique. This was not the rabble that was out of hand; these were the leaders of the government,

the rulers of Sodom, and the architects of its ideology and agenda.

Moreover, *mina'ar v'ad zakein kol ha'am mikatzeh* (ibid.). Even children at the youngest of age were ingrained in this kind of corrupt education. This is another element that unfortunately resonates in our time as well. We know that some of the enemies of Israel educate their children (whether in math or literature) by using vicious examples of killing and maiming Jews. But that is exactly what the culture of Sodom was, and it is no wonder that even the bystanders (meaning the non-combatants) applauded the work of the government. Obviously, after decades and decades and decades of a persistent ideology, the impact becomes almost ingrained. Indeed, targeting innocents *kol hanechsholim* (as the Abarbanel [*Devarim* 21:10] explains) of Amalek exemplifies this attack, as well as the cynical shielding of combatants by using their own innocents. It all highlights this culture of targeting the vulnerable in both senses, a hallmark of people who have absolutely no regard for their own population.

Golda Meir, the former prime minister of Israel, was known to have formulated some very interesting insights over the years. One of them was: "I have given instructions that I be informed every time one of our own soldiers is killed. Even if it's in the middle of the night. When Nassar (president of Egypt back in the day) is to be awakened in the middle of the night if an Egyptian soldier is killed, then there will be peace." This is a very profound encapsulation of exactly what we are speaking about, and indeed, Midyan were willing to sacrifice the integrity of their daughter population to corrupt Klal Yisrael, of whom they basically had no benefit engaging in any kind of struggle.

The Radak in *Noach* (*Bereshis* 9:6 s.v. *ki b'tzelem elokim*) comments on the repeated assertion in that *parshah* of *tzelem elokim*. Of course, *tzelem elokim*'s initial formation in the Torah is in the context of the creation of man, and in the aftermath of the Mabul, the Torah needed to repeat it once again, but here it is articulated in the context of murder. In *Bereshis*, the *tzelem elokim* is associated with conquest, while in *Noach*, in the aftermath of the *mabul*, it is a *tzelem elokim* misconstrued and gone wrong, so the Torah repeats *tzelem elokim* as the foundation for the new world but in the context of prohibiting murder. But the Radak understood it very profoundly as having a double meaning. On the one hand, it means the obvious loss of the victim, and when you take a life, you take an *olam malei* (see *Sanhedrin* 4a) and when you do that, you have destroyed *tzelem elokim*. That obviously constitutes an extremely egregious sin and violation of any kind of culture. At the same time, there is a double meaning: when a person takes another life, especially deliberately and voluntarily, he is deserving of the death penalty because he has diminished and somewhat forfeited his own *tzelem elokim* in the process. Sadly, that is the common denominator of these cultures, and our experience when you have a culture that regards life so cavalierly, even the lives of its own population.

Finally, as a feature of complete corruption and dishonesty, the "*chamas*" (*Bereishis* 6:11) of the *mabul* implies that it literally seeped into the ground itself. *Chamas* became part of the physical environment of the society. The *chamas*, meaning the *gezel* and all, is but a reflection (not a cause) and exemplification of this idea, of being *raim v'chataim* and being *nechshalim*, being *nishchatim*. We find this

in Sodom. The *bachnasas orchim* that Lot is involved in is a great example of how even an ideal or value that seems to be incorruptible in the context of a purely corrupt society can become grotesque. So Lot who has retained a measure of Avraham's values but has chosen to live in Sodom, an irredeemable society, even his *bachnasas orchim* becomes something egregious and objectionable.

When we encounter such cultures, there can be no compromise and no mercy. An ideology of hatred is something that threatens any other existence. *Chazal* say this with regards to Amalek. The principle extends not only to the particular dynamic of Amalek itself. *Kol hamerachem al haachzar sofo lehisachzer al harachmanim* (*Yalkut Shimoni, Shmuel I, 121*)– one who is compassionate out of sincerity to someone vicious becomes someone who is corrupted even by his seemingly idealistic but totally unacceptable choice. A parent's compassion when misplaced can be grotesque. Gandhi's pacifism, which on the surface was very admirable, was applied to the Nazi resistance and became obscene, tainted, and tarnished. An otherwise admirable ideology of dignity and humanity became corrupted. This statement of *Chazal* refers to Shaul Hamelech, who claimed that his compassion justified him not fulfilling the *tzivui Hashem* of wiping out Amalek. *Chazal* perceived the deeper truth– this principle of *kol hamerachem al haachzar sofo lehisachzer al harachmanim*, which ultimately was revealed in his barbaric conduct against Nov, *Ir Hakohanim*.

The principle is clear: we have zero tolerance for any intrinsic or dehumanizing evil. An unambiguous and aggressive posture to

eradicate this threat is not an exception to the principle of *chessed*, but rather is a *kiyum* in *chessed* itself. The Rambam counts *zachor* (*asei* 189) and *mechiyas Amalek* (*asei* 188) in his *minyan hamitzvos* despite the fact the *bilbul ha'amim* makes it unlikely or even impossible that there would ever be a full implementation of the *mitzvos* of Amalek. Moreover, the Rambam switches the order: while in the *Pesukim* its *zachor* (*Devarim* 25:17) and *timcheh* (*ad loc.* v. 19), but the Rambam flips it around. I think the Rambam is trying to tell us that on some level, even more than the *timcheh* is the *zachor*. It's important to understand and internalize the principle behind *mechiyas Amalek* and the *zachor* behind it. The idea that you cannot compromise and concede anything to that which destroys *tzelem elokim*. The linchpin principle of *kol hamerachem al ha'achzar* is something that exists even if you cannot practically implement the details of Amalek, and in that respect, the *mechiyas Amalek* is simply an aspect of *zechiras Amalek*.

It is fascinating that Avraham Avinu being informed about what was about to take place in Sodom is in the context of listing his credentials of *tzedakah* and *mishpat*. The Torah tells us that Hashem decides to share this plan with Avraham Avinu and explains that Avraham is meritorious in every way, that he represents the best in mankind. Why are all these *pesukim* the proper preamble to this information that Hashem is going to share with Avraham?

My son-in-law Asher Finkelstein pointed out to me that the Ran's commentary on the *parshah* in *Vayera* somewhat addresses this issue. He basically suggests that since Avraham Avinu is an advocate for *chessed*, it's important that he understand that there is room for such

advocacy within reason, and *l'dorei doros* to understand the parameters of this relationship of *chessed* and *din*. But I always thought that one could take this further. That is, Hashem felt that it was important that Avraham be included in this discussion precisely because he represented the *amud hachessed*. Even the harsh decision at the end of destroying Sodom is actually a *kiyum* in authentic *chessed* itself.

Of course, the exploration of Avraham Avinu, which should not be perceived as a challenge or debate (this is the same Avraham Avinu who responds with alacrity to the *akedah*), but as the ultimate manifestation of being a *yarei elokim* and *obev es Hashem*. His role in discussing the parameters of Sodom's destruction is not to challenge and debate. It's a *halachically* reasonable exploration of the parameters and what constitutes complete irredeemability, what is acceptable collateral damage (an issue that we are all familiar with), and in the end, *vayashev limkomo*: after advocating and determining that indeed there is room for some flexibility, Avraham Avinu accepts Hashem's clarification and determination and returns; there is no change in relationship between Hashem and Avraham.

Ideally, we would first examine the posture that is articulated by Bruriah, the aspiration of *yitamu chataim min ha'aretz...al tikri chotim elah chata'im* found in a famous Gemara in *Berachos* (10a). The Gemara discusses the status of a group of nasty characters who were very aggressive and were threatening Rabbi Meir. He responded by praying that they should be neutralized and punished by death. Bruriah avered and posited based on the aforementioned interpretation of the *pasuk* that one should Daven so they should be *chozrim*

b'teshuva. Rabbi Meir accepted her insight and they did so and they did teshuva accordingly. Thus, Rabbi Meir accepted Bruriah's perspective that first and foremost, whenever one encounters troubling phenomena, we should seek redemption rather than retribution, and try to understand the character of the sinner and nature of the sin. If it's possible to separate the *gavra* and the *ma'aseh aveira* then indeed, *yitamu chataim* and not *chotim*. However, it's important to note that the word *chataim* is actually an ambiguous term. It doesn't only mean sins. The Maharsha notes that the word *chataim* also means perpetrators of the *cheit* and it conveys the *chotim*, whose conduct is intentional and incorrigible. It becomes essential to assess which application is accurate and appropriate in different circumstances. The Tzlach (*Berachos* ad loc.) notes that the pasuk is interpreted in the initial manner of Rabbi Meir. The Gemara records that Dovid Hamelech lived in five different worlds, each of which enabled him to say *shira*. Among the experiences that triggered *shira* is the phenomenon of *ra'ah bemapalasam shel rashaim v'amar shira*. The Tzlach comments that this passage seems to contradict Bruriah's normative interpretation. The solution, of course, is that there is a range. Sometimes, alas, we truly encounter *chotim* as opposed to *Chataim*— the persona of the sinner is irredeemable. In other circumstances, all that is necessary is to neutralize the *chataim*. It is crucial to determine the accurate normative response and the proper *halachic* policy.

Israel has more than exhausted the possibility of *yitamu chataim* with respect to some of its neighbors. In some cases, it has fortuitously found *chataim v'lo chotim* and been able to achieve

genuine accommodation with former rivals and even enemies. However, in some conflicts and with some rivals—truly implacable enemies—where enmity and evil is so ingrained and part of the culture that it overrides any other humane value (reflected by action, rhetoric, educational focus, etc.), coexistence is not possible. Sadly, when it is truly *reshaim* and *chotim*, when our existential survival is at risk, there can only be one response: *yitamu*.

When evil defines the *gavra* or a national ideology and culture, more forceful and decisive steps need to be taken. Sadly, that is the situation we currently confront. There is a fantasy, a mythical narrative, embraced by some of the more extreme liberal supporters of Hamas that either this (October 7th *Ed.*) was a rogue mission or that the documented atrocities have been exaggerated or invented. Even more responsible journalistic outlets consistently mischaracterize the nature of the conflict. The New York Times, which deserves criticism for its biased coverage, consistently depicts Hamas' barbaric attack as "the Hamas-led raid that left 1,500 people killed". They enthusiastically weigh the possibility that Israel's defense constitutes "war crimes". Every headline and caption is designed to promote a narrative of Palestinian victimization and a disproportionate Israeli response. This anti-Israel agenda is particularly outrageous considering that this unprovoked attack assaulted the very concept of *tzelem elokim*, and constituted an unapologetic manifestation of an ideology advocating and promoting Jewish annihilation or genocide. The right of self-preservation is universally acknowledged, and the fundamental distinction between the victim and the aggressor is commonly understood in international law, except apparently as applied to Israel

and the Jewish people.

The notion that proportionality is defined by an equal number of deaths—and if one side loses 1,500 people, equality is reached once the other side accumulates 1,500 casualties—without consideration of who initiated hostilities, is absurd. The equation of the intentional targeting of innocents and their brutal murder, with unintended, unfortunate civilian collateral damage in response and self-defense, is obscene. These offensive narratives are particularly objectionable in light of the fact that the doctrine of *taharas haneshek* (purity of arms *Ed.*) practiced by *Tzahal* has always been a prime factor in their combat policy, sadly adding to military casualties, and occasionally pursued to the determinant of more unequivocal military success. This policy is pursued despite the fact that knowledge of this acutely humane military doctrine is cynically exploited by enemies that aggressively employ human shields. The notion of proportionality that does not account for a prevailing hostage crisis and both immediate and future considerations of security is acutely egregious.

The *halachah* recognizes legitimate vengeance and certainly the validity of punishment of unspeakable evil crimes. The term and concept of *nekamah* with respect to implacable enemies is found in the Torah, *Tehillim*, *Megillas Esther*, and other places in *Tanach* in response to extreme evil. *Gemulo yashuv b'rosho* (c.f. *Bava Metzia* 101b) is articulated in these contexts. Absent the guidance of prophecy, however, we may put that perspective completely aside, and limit our focus exclusively to reasonable self-preservation. The absurdity of any moral equivalence between those who initiated hostilities, perpetrated

barbaric acts on innocents, celebrated those “achievements” and the victims of the unprovoked assault, whose short and long-term security has been jeopardized, is compelling indeed. We speak of justice, not vengeance.

Moreover, a quantitative gauge of proportionality is deeply offensive, as it trivializes and dehumanizes human loss, value, and sanctity. It’s truly antithetical to the tradition of “*vachai bahem*” (*Vayikra* 18:5) which places a premium on each individual life. It is totally incompatible with the idea that a *mekayem nefesh achas* and a *meabeid nefesh achas* is actually perpetrating something on an *olam malei*. It’s more than ironic that self-styled liberals have at least implicitly adopted the perspective that quantity should define proportionality.

Identifying and confronting evil includes spotlighting and combating the egregious distortions driven by broad antisemitism, and further fueled by the drive to be consonant with prevailing political culture and correctness, including the contemporary narrative surrounding so-called colonialism and oppression. These forces have fostered a political and cultural herd mentality that produces intellectual sloth, ignorance of facts and history, alongside intentional perversion of truth. It’s important to call out these toxic herds, as the significance of their uncritical, wide acceptance transcends mere laziness and ignorance. The danger of these ideologies become particularly acute when the stakes are so high and emotions are frenzied. We have sadly witnessed how rapidly cultural battles have engendered dangerous situations; how intellectual sloth and

superficiality, a small crime, has transmuted into vicious rhetoric and actual violence.

The story of Megilas Esther features Haman as the prime villain. His depiction as “*tzar viyev*” (*Esther* 7:6) synchronizes perfectly with the classic *Pesukim* in *Bamidbar* (10:9), that defines the challenge of an unprovoked attack perpetrated without rational motivation by an implacable enemy simply bound for destruction:

וכִּי־תָבֹאוּ מִלְחָמָה בְּאַרְצְכֶם עַל־יְהִצֵּר הַצָּר אֶתְכֶם וְהָרַעַתְם בַּחֲצֹצְרֹת
וְנוֹכַרְתֶּם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְנוֹשַׁעְתֶּם מֵאִיְבֵיכֶם

Haman, a faithful descendent of Amalek, classically embodies the irrational hater, the author of a program of genocide. But it is also important to note that fickle, ignorant Achashverosh, an indifferent collaborator—unaware and uninterested in the details of the enormous evil he’s enabling and sanctioning—in some respects rivals Haman’s wickedness. Though his crimes are fundamentally different than Haman the instigator, the lazy indifference to the fate of a whole nation is equally disturbing and pernicious. His easy gullibility with so much at stake is shocking, and ultimately equally destructive. His capacity to flexibly oscillate between policy extremes based on personal ego or superficial political expediency and intellectual currents, indicts his callous character as it underscores his entirely unprincipled and irresponsible leadership posture. Even as we focus on the immediate existential dangers posed by our direct attackers, we must be vigilant with respect to the more subtle but equally insidious forces and currents that intentionally—or by lazy ignorance or political and intellectual and social expediency—support distortions that fuel a

climate of hate and imperil standards of justice and morality.

This war is truly a *milchemes mitzvah*, mandating maximal participation. Those not serving on the front line must find constructive ways to partake in this campaign for survival, justice, and the concept of *kedushas bachaim* that defines our national character and purpose. In addition to the indispensable role of *tefillah* and *talmud Torah*, which also fortify our *emunah* and embody the values we are fighting to preserve, it is important that we undertake a vigorous effort in the area of *hasbarah* (lit. explanation, in context of Israeli foreign policy, used to mean diplomatic defense of Israel *Ed.*). It is vital as individuals and a community that we cultivate the resources to combat distortions—intentional or ignorant—and that we promote the facts of the conflict and the justice of our cause. This formidable task is even more challenging as the moral bankruptcy of the perceived bastions of cultural and intellectual attainment in this country have been exposed. It is deeply disappointing to experience the vicious rhetoric and even the more “diplomatic” posturing and equivocating that has emerged from the most hallowed educational institutions of this country. It painfully reinforces the historic truth, again demonstrated in recent times in Nazi Germany, that there is no guarantee of a correlation between moral consistency and responsibility and cultural devotion or intellectual achievement. Notwithstanding our sense of isolation and even abandonment by expected allies, we need to redouble our efforts in effective *hasbara* and political activism. It is painfully evident that “*eileh varechev v’eileh basusim vaanachnu b’sheim Hashem Elokeinu nazkir*” (*Tehillim* 20:8), that “*ein lanu al mi libishaein elah al avinu shebashamyim*” (*Sotah*

49b), but we still need to exercise maximal *hishtadlus*, our “*bitachon* plus” approach evokes the stirring message of the *Kohen Mashuach Milchama* (*Devarim* 20), paradigmatically personified by Pinchas, the classic symbol of necessary Kanaus for the sake of *bris shalom* (see *Haemek Davar*, *Bamidbar* 25:12)

Although we are a people that places the highest premium on compassion—*rachmanim bnei rachmanim* (c.f. *Yevamos* 79a)—war requires focused commitment and needs to be prosecuted unapologetically and aggressively. Rashi in *Devarim* (20:1), invoking the *Midrash* (ad loc.), emphasizes the double use of “*oyeiv*” to highlight this theme:

יהיו בעיניך כאויבים, אל תרחם עליהם כי לא ירחמו עליך

At the same time, because *Klal Yisrael*’s wars are motivated and dedicated to the goals of authentic *chessed* and *kedushah*, these very principles need to figure prominently even in the midst of battle. As noted, *Tzahal*’s *taharat haneshek* magnificently embodies this ideal notwithstanding international blood libel. The extraordinary effort to apply *chessed* even in the face of *achzariyus*—barbarism—is rooted in our very origins. Avraham Avinu vigorously explored minimizing the destruction of Sodom, notwithstanding his own defining commitment to *chessed*. It is fascinating that when the Torah conveys that Lot went to Sodom, the Ramban (c.f. *Bereishis* 13:11) notes that Avraham would not set foot into that venue perceiving any contact with it to be defiling. It must have offended him to his core that these corrupt civilizations existed, and yet while he certainly does not advocate, he does investigate if any collateral damage could be minimized.

Moreover, redoubling our attachment and commitment to concepts and manifestations of *kedushah* is a critical requirement in a war context. The *parshah* in *Devarim* (23:10-15) focuses on the principle of “*v’haya machaneichah kadosh*”. The Ramban elaborates on the difficulty and importance of maintaining an environment conducive to the presence of the Shechinah. He notes that in a time of increased adrenaline and anxiety, the sensibility of *kedushah* is particularly vulnerable, even as the presence of *Ribbono Shel Olam* Shechinah is even more indispensable.

כי ה' א-להיך מתהלך בקרב מחנך להצילך ולתת איביך לפניך והיה
מחנך קדוש

We engage in battle precisely to preserve our Torah values, so that we may achieve our destiny as a *mamleches kohanim v’goy kadosh* (*Shemos* 19:6); ensuring an appropriate ethos of *kedushah* even in the throes of war is a priority, as it encapsulates our very purpose. Certainly, attaching ourselves to *tefillah* and *talmud Torah* with a greater level of intensity during this period further reinforces this theme in addition to the meaningful *zechuyos* it produces.

Finally, one should not underestimate the impact—indeed the trauma—of taking a human life, a necessary but tragic legacy of war. When Yaakov Avinu encountered Esav in *parshas Vayishlach* (*Bereshis* 32:8), the Torah says:

ויירא יעקב מאד ויצר לו

Rashi (s.v. *vayira vayetzer*), cites the midrash:

ויירא שמא יהרג, ויצר לו אם יהרג הוא את אחרים

There's a fascinating discussion in the *mefarshei Rashi* and *Midrash* about whether Yaakov was concerned whether he would need to kill innocents or whether his concern was for those who did not legally qualify as *rodef*, thus making himself accountable for murder. However, it is compelling that his distress focused on the enormous gravity of being forced—even justifiably—to terminate any *tzelem Elokim*. One who is sensitive to the sanctity of every life experiences devastation even when a life is forfeit due to self-preservation. The *halachah* ubiquitously registers this theme—a *Kohen* that takes a life is excluded from *Birchas Kohanim*; Dovid HaMelech was disqualified from building the *Beis Hamikdash* because, though justified, his military campaigns compromised his candidacy for that idealistic task; The *mizbeach* cannot be hewed with an iron tool. All these are manifestations of this principle.

Though there is some confusion in the variants of the *midrashim* of the order of Yaakov's two concerns, it is noteworthy that the Taz (*Divrei Dovid ad loc.*) forcefully dismisses any idea that the dread of taking a guilty life would take priority over legitimate self defense. As important as "*vayetzer lo- shema yaharog*" is, "*vayira-shema yeihareig*" is ultimately decisive. This is a crucial principle in any existential struggle and reinforces the need to battle aggressively. At the same time, the factor of "*shema yaharog*" remains very significant. It should further sensitize us to the toll that is exacted in war and deepen our appreciation of the sacrifices made by those whose service and bravery preserves our cherished heritage. It should also inspire us to

distance ourselves from violence that compromises *tzelem Elokim* when that option is available.

I quoted Golda Meir earlier, but perhaps her most famous quote was the following: “When peace comes, we will perhaps in time be able to forgive the Arabs for killing our own sons, but it will be harder for us to forgive them for having forced us to kill their sons.” It’s a very powerful statement. She also said, “I am also grateful that I live in a country whose people have learned how to go on living in a sea of hatred without hating those who want to destroy them and without abandoning their own vision of peace. To have learned this is a great art, the prescription for which is not written down anywhere. It is part of our way of life in Israel.” I would just have added: “it is the mission and meaning of *tzelem elokim*, it is the principle of living a life of *kedushah*.”

Let me conclude with the *tefillah* that we should emerge victorious in this existential struggle in the merit of our absolute faith in the *Ribbono Shel Olam* in tandem with our *hishtadlus*—the multidimensional actions that we need to take to support *acheinu Beis Yisrael*. With unity in *Klal Yisrael*, hopefully we will meet the multiple challenges entailed in the comprehensive Torah perspective on justified combat that is inspired by the vision of *tzelem elokim* of “*v’haya machaneichah kadosh*” (*Devarim* 23:15). May we merit the manifestation of Ibn Ezra’s interpretation of the *pesukim* in *Beha’alosecha* that describe the *chatzotzros* (*Bamidbar* 9:10). The *parshah* begins describing the tragedy of war:

וכי תבאו מלחמה בארצכם על הצר הצרר אתכם והרעתם בחצצרות
ונוכרתם לפני יהוה אלהיכם ונושעתם מאיביכם

However, this is immediately followed by a joyous manifestation of those very same *chatzotzros*:

וביום שמחתכם ובמועדיכם ובראשי חדשיכם ותקעתם בחצצרת על
עלתיכם ועל זבחי שלמיכם והיו לכם לזכרון לפני א-להיכם אני ה'
א-להיכם

The first verse uncannily describes the threat we are experiencing— a war on our own soil; an unprovoked stealth attack perpetrated by a relentless *hatzar hatzorer* and *oyeiv*, an evil enemy bent on annihilating our nation. Yet, this dire circumstance expressed by the cry of the *chatzotzros* gives way to ecstatic celebration conveyed by the very same *chatzotzros*. Ibn Ezra (s.v. *u'vyom simchaschem u'vemoadeichem*) explains that inevitably (and hopefully rapidly) our crisis is transformed into an affirmation of *simcha* and sanctity:

ששבתם מארץ אויב או נצחתם האויב הבא עליכם. וקבעתם יום
שמחה כימי פורים ושבעת ימי חזקי"ה (ס"א חנוכה) שמחה.

Kein yehi ratzon b'meheira.

The Indispensability of *Eretz Yisrael* to Our National Identity

Rabbi Michael Rosensweig

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Parshas Chayei Sarah details with striking specificity the negotiation for and acquisition of *Me'aras Hamachpelah*, the legacy *kever* (burial place) initially of Sarah and eventually of the rest of the *avos* and *imahos* (except Rachel). The *Midrash* emphasizes the surprisingly expansive presentation of these developments- “*kama dayos mishtafos* (how many inkwells were spilled *Ed.*), *kamah kulmesin mishtabrin kedai lichtov bnei Cheis*”, (*Bereishis Rabbah* 58:2), noting that the apparently gratuitous phrase “*bnei Cheis*” alone recurs ten times, suggestively paralleling the omni-significant ten commandments, “*v’asarah pa’amim kasuv bnei Cheis, asarah keneged aseres hadibros*”! While this *Midrash* attributes the aspirational association to the vital importance of assisting a *tzaddik* of Avraham’s magnitude in even his most apparently mundane endeavors- “*lelamdecha shekol mi shemevarer mikcho shel tzaddik ke’ilu mekayem aseres hadibros*” - others (see, e.g. *Chidushei Hagrim, Bereishis* 23:19), recognizing that this was the first formal stake in *Eretz Yisrael* and undoubtedly inspired by Avraham’s recurring use of the term “*achuzas kever*” (23:5, 10, 20) project that this equation reflects the singular

³https://torahweb.org/torah/2023/parshah/rros_chayey.html

stature, and monumental role of *Eretz Yisrael* in Jewish life and law.

This perspective on *Me'aras Hamachpelah* is encapsulated by Ibn Ezra (*Bereishis* 23:19) who notes that the successful transaction immediately established the property as a legacy purchase for all future descendants- "*u'meaz niskayem hasadeh le'achuzas kever*". He elaborates that the entire *parshah* conveys *Eretz Yisrael's* inimitable status that impacts not only the living, but the deceased, as well- "*lehodia maalas Eretz Yisrael al kol ha'aratzos le'chaim ulemeidim*"! Ibn Ezra adds that this acquisition fulfilled Hashem's commitment to Avraham that he would be awarded "*nachalah*" (heritage-legacy). [See also Ibn Ezra (*Bereishis* 33:9) when Yaakov purchased in Shechem- "*lehodia ki ma'alalah gedolah yesh be'Eretz Yisrael umi sheyesh lo chelek bo chashuv k'chelek Olam Haba*". It is interesting to compare this formulation with his comments above. As Chidushei Hagrim notes, Ramban does not dispute this application, perhaps as it is focused on the living.]

It is curious that even as Ramban (23:19) magnifies the Torah's repeated location of Chevron in "*Eretz Canaan*" in the very beginning (23:2) and conclusion (23:19) of this episode to credit the fact that Avraham and Sarah dwelled primarily in *Eretz Yisrael*, specifically that the "*tzadeikes*" merited burial there, and that the burial plot of "*avoseinu hakedoshim*" is deserving of special attention and respect, he takes issue with Ibn Ezra's dual contention that there was particular significance to the extension of *Eretz Yisrael's* role to the deceased and that this constituted an important expression of "*nachalah*" ("*ki mah ma'alalah la'aretz bazei, ki lo yolichenah el eretz acheret le-kavrah, u'devar Hashem le-Avraham al kol ha'aretz hayah, venitkayam rak*

bezaro”). Although Ramban is certainly one of the most articulate and impassioned advocates of an outsized role of *Eretz Yisrael* in all facets of Jewish life, he was puzzled by the Ibn Ezra’s expansive view regarding the purchase of *Me’aras Hamachpelah*. [It is ironic if understandable that the formulation in Chidushei Hagrim, alluded to previously, is inspired by Ramban’s consistent and pervasive doctrine articulated in Vayikra (18:25) and throughout all his writings, notwithstanding his Ibn Ezra critique in this context.]

Upon reflection, Ibn Ezra’s position which roots the national legacy status of *Eretz Yisrael* in all generations in a transaction that honors the lives of spiritual giants, founders of the nation, by accentuating the impact and transcendence of their existence and contributions, that promotes national history, and that specifically crystalizes the incalculable impact and transcendent role of the *avos* and *imahos*, is profound and compelling. *Ma’aseh avos siman labanim* (the history of our forefathers and foremothers is a guidepost to all Jewish generations), a theme particularly embraced by Ramban, establishes that *halachic* values are timeless, and that the personas, policies, and perspectives of our forefathers are an indispensable relevant treasure in every generation, a critical component in the ongoing destiny of *Klal Yisrael*. The “*achuzas kever*” initiated “*lareshes achuzah*” (*Vayikra* 25:46).

It was not merely nostalgia that impelled Yaakov to insist (*Bereishis* 49:30) not merely “*al tikbereni bemitzrayim*” (47:29), but “*kivru osi el avosai el hame’arah asher bisdei Efron haChitti*.” The fact that Yaakov repeats, seemingly gratuitously, the history of the transaction and its description (49:31-33) - “*bamearah asher bisedeh*

hamachpelah asher al penei mamrei biEretz Cana'an asher kanah Avraham es hasadeh meieis Efron ha-Chitti la'achuzas kaver" - reinforces this analysis. In his final words, Yaakov-Yisrael updates the history of this "*achuzas kaver*" - "*shamah kavru es Avraham...*" - noting that it has become the physical locus of the *avos* and *imabos*, the initial stake in the national homeland, as it was designed to be. As the *bechir haavos* departs the physical world his last bequest reflects his acute awareness of the link between the national homeland and the legacy of its inimitable paradigmatic forefathers. It was reciprocally crucial that taking title in *Eretz Yisrael*, the corporate national homeland of *Klal Yisrael*, be initiated by and embody the imprimatur and enduring contribution of the *avos* and *imabos*.

As we channel all our material and spiritual resources in support of Israel in this time of crisis, it is important that we fully recognize and appreciate our national homeland's central role in all facets of Jewish life and destiny. The torrent of vicious antisemitism that has been experienced world-wide in the aftermath of an unequivocally obscene and evil massacre in *Eretz Yisrael* sadly reinforces this *halachic* principle in a very concrete way. The fate and destiny of world Jewry and Israel are inextricably intertwined in principle and practice. In the final analysis, we are fighting for the eternal *halachic* values of sanctity, dignity and spirituality, the aspirations of a maximal *avodas Hashem*. Indeed, these are the exceptional legacy of our magnificent forefathers and foremothers, whose "*achuzas kever*" necessarily initiated and encapsulated *nachalas Eretz Yisrael*. May their merit (*zechus avos*) and the merits of our own multidimensional efforts bring a *yeshuah bikarov*.

How Underlying Attitudes Affect Our Value Judgments on Israel and the Washington Rally

Rabbi Elchanan Adler

Adapted from a Shiur, Nov. 22, 2023

Rabbosai, we're living in an *eis tzarah*: an *eis tzarah* for *acheinu Bnei Yisrael* in *Eretz Yisrael*, and an *eis tzarah* for *acheinu Bnei Yisrael* throughout the world. Obviously, we have *bitachon* in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that all of this will ultimately result in something positive, and we are *metzapeh l'yeshuah—ki l'yeshuashcha kivinu kol hayom*. Generations before us have davened for *Mashiach*; *halevai* our *dor* should be *zocheh* to welcome him.

One of the tragedies of *galus* is a sense of *pirud* in *Klal Yisrael*. We are an *am k'shei oaref*: we hold strong opinions, and we're not shy about expressing those opinions. People might observe a certain reality and see it in completely different ways based on their preconceived notions. It's true in the world at large; we see it going on even in terms of how the media and people in the world are looking at what's going on in the battle in Gaza. But it's also true for us in *Klal Yisrael*.

I want to think about this in terms of the historical time that we're in. We all yearn for *Mashiach*, but there are different visions about how it is going to happen. Even in the Gemara, we find a

machlokes Tannaim if it will happen only with *teshuvah*, or if *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will bring *Mashiach* even if we don't do *teshuvah* on our own. Even the second opinion seems to say that *Mashiach's* going to come because Hashem will create *gezeiros* and *Klal Yisrael* will do *teshuvah* because it will be imposed on us. Either way, even the *Tannaim* weren't sure and had a *machlokes* as to exactly how it was going to play out.

Within *Tanach*, there are many *pesukim* that speak about *acharis hayamim*, and also about the events that will lead up to *acharis hayamim*, and to the *geulah*. There are *nevuos* that relate to *Umos Haolam* and the punishments that will be imposed on those nations, such as Bavel, Mitzrayim, Amon, Moav, and Edom, and on their lands, as retribution for having oppressed us throughout our history. There are *nevuos* that pertain to *Klal Yisrael*, to *Eretz Yisrael*, to *kibbutz galuyos*, about a spirit of *teshuvah* that will envelop us, about the land being revived. All these are *pesukim meforashim* in *Tanach*.

And then there are *pesukim* that describe a very dark period that's going to precede the coming of *Mashiach*. *Chazal* refer to this as *chevlei Mashiach*, analogous to birth pains. The Gemara in the end of *Sotah* (49b) as well as the Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (97b and much of the *perek Ed.*) talk about various *simanim* of *chevlei Mashiach*. One aspect of *chevlei Mashiach* is *milchemes Gog U'Magog*, which is described in *nevuos* in *Yechezkel* and *Zechariah* which we read in the *haftaros* of Sukkos. They describe how all the nations of the world will converge on Yerushalayim to wage war, and the outcome of that

war will be a universal recognition of “*vehaya Hashem lemelech*” (*Zechariah* 14:9), the *pasuk* we say every day in davening. In connection to *milchemes Gog U'Magog*, *Chazal* have a tradition that there will be a precursor to *Mashiach Ben Dovid*. The Gemara in *Sukkah* (52a) and various *midrashim* discuss *Mashiach Ben Yosef*. Who is *Mashiach Ben Yosef*? Someone who is going to be tragically killed in *milchemes Gog U'Magog*, about whom there will be a major *hesped*. After that will be *Mashiach Ben Dovid*. There are sources in *Chazal* and the *Zohar* that single out Yishmael as a nation that's going to wreak great havoc upon the world at the end of days, close to the coming of *Mashiach*. *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* in a few *perakim* (29, 30, and 32) speaks about wars that Yishmael will wage against the Jewish people. The *Zohar* speaks in *parshas Vayeira* about the *zechus* of Yishmael in *Eretz Yisrael*. Why does he have a *zechus*? Because Yishmael underwent *bris milah* at age 13, and Avraham Avinu begged *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* “*lu Yishmael yichyeh lefanecha*” (*Bereishis* 17:18). Therefore, he has the *zechus* of a foothold in *Eretz Yisrael*.

We also find in various Kabbalah sources—in the *Zohar*, *Tikkunei Zohar*, and in the writings of the Gra—that the challenge that Yishmael poses to *Bnei Yisrael* will be magnified through his joining with the forces of Esav who will be his allies. This is alluded to in the *pasuk* at the end of *parshas Toldos*, where Esav marries the daughter of Yishmael (*Bereishis* 28:9). This union of Esav and Yishmael is an unholy alliance that will cause us problems. Various *mekoros* in *Chazal* also speak about Paras (Persia, modern day Iran) in connection to *chevlei Mashiach*. The Maharal mentions this in his *sefer* on Chanukah (*Ner Mitzvah*), and writes that Paras has a

connection to Yishmael. There are other things in *kisvei haGra* about the *eirev rav*: parts of *Klal Yisrael* who will join forces with the *klipos* of Esav and the *klipos* of Yishmael, and they bear guilt and responsibility for the *galus* being as long as it is.

What does all this mean? It's very mysterious, very enigmatic.

The Rambam writes in *Hilchos Melachim* (12:2) that we don't know for sure exactly how these things will occur, and it will only become clear after they happen. We shouldn't pay too much attention to it. But as history unfolds before our eyes, it's tempting to begin to contemplate world events, especially as they relate to *Eretz Yisrael*, in terms of how events fit within Hashem's ultimate plan. There were *gedolim*, for example the *Meshech Chochmah*, who saw a harbinger of *geulah* in the Balfour declaration of 1917, reminiscent of what Koresh proclaimed when he told the Jews to return to *Eretz Yisrael* from Bavel and build *Bayis Sheini*. Some have suggested that the horrors of the *churban* in Europe—the *Shoah*—are part of *chevlei Mashiach* and *milchemes Gog U'Magog*.

Many viewed the settlement of *Eretz Yisrael*, going back already to the 18th century with the *aliya* of *talmidei haGra* and *talmidei haBa'al Shem Tov*, as part of a manifestation of a stage in the *geulah*. Some even suggest that *Mashiach Ben Yosef* is not a person, but a *tekufah* of resettling the land. Building off of that, many have felt that having a State of our own is considered “*reishis tzemichas geulasainu*”—*aschalta d'geulah*. This is one end of the spectrum.

On the other end of the spectrum, *mamash min hakatzeh el*

hakatzeh, we have segments of *Klal Yisrael* who view the secular state of Israel as a manifestation of the *eirev rav*, that it may actually be inhibiting the coming of *Mashiach*. Even what seems to be successful is really nothing but *maaseh Satan*, because it is a secular state, and its founders were *reshaim*, who were far from *shomrei Torah umitzvos*. This is what the Satmar Rebbe held, and he developed a whole theology to support it.

After everything is said and done, we don't have a *navi*, and we don't have the benefit of hindsight until everything has fully unfolded. We can't really know for sure how to interpret the paths of history. The Chasam Sofer says on the *pasuk* "*vera'isa es achorai ufanai lo yeirau*" (*Shemos* 33:23) that we can only understand world history retrospectively. Afterwards we understand where it was coming from, but meanwhile, we don't know for sure. We have this sense of uncertainty, and it's hard to live that way. It's hard to admit to ourselves and to others that whatever our instincts might be, there might be another side to the story.

The Torah is full of absolutes: there's *tov* there's *ra*; there's *kashe* there's *treif*; there's *mutar* there's *assur*. Where there's *safek*, there are *hanbogos* of *safek*. There are *klalim*: *safek de'oraisa lechumra*, *safek derabanan lekula*, *safek tumah b'rshus hayachid sfeiko tamei*, *b'rshus harabim sfeiko tahor*, *raglayim ledavar*, *rov vechazaka*... In *halachah* there's a *psak*; if you have a *taaroves* you plug in the *klalei hapsak*. In the world of *hashkafah*, there are a lot of variables and it's hard to pin down. Where one ends up is often dependent on where one's starting point of reference is.

With what prism should we view the modern State of Israel? How should we relate to the fact that its underpinnings were secular, and its founders were secular? On the one hand, it is a vehicle to bring masses of our fellow *yidden* to *Eretz Yisrael*, and it has instilled a sense of pride in Jews all over the world. Many Yeshivos take subsidies from the government. On the other hand, we know that its policies have often been antagonistic to Torah, and maybe associating with it is legitimizing *kefira*.

The attitude that one takes to *Medinas Yisrael* has always been a fault line that divides segments within *Klal Yisrael*. This goes back to before '48, to the rise of the secular Zionist movement: the question of whether such a movement should be praised or rejected. On one extreme, there were those who took a more positive view of the beginning of the movement, and they tried to infuse it with a more religious component. You can mention *gedolim* and find them. On the other extreme there were those who were staunchly opposed to Zionism. Seeing it and all of its trappings as *muktzah machmas mius*, it has to be fought tooth and nail; it's a threat to Torah.

On the one hand, you see Rav Kook's writings and those of his son Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook, whose ideas incorporate the spirit of secular Zionism and view it as ultimately compatible with Torah and as part of Hashem's plan for the *geulah*. In the *sefer Eim Habanim Semeicha*, Rav Yissaschar Teichtal writes that he feels that the *tzaros* of the *churban* of Europe came about because of opposition to settling *Eretz Yisrael*. That was one extreme. Yet, many *gedolim* remained suspicious of, and staunchly opposed to, Zionism. And the Satmar

Rebbe had his *shita* that was the opposite extreme: Zionism was to blame for Jewish suffering.

I think that what is often lost in all of this discussion is that between the two extreme outlooks there exists a wide spectrum, and you don't have to be completely on one end or on the other. I'll give you an example: even within the *mesorah* of this Yeshiva which is certainly very positively disposed to *Eretz Yisrael* and *Medinas Yisrael*, not everyone embraces the Messianic perspective of Rav Kook and his followers. The Rav was an eloquent spokesman for Mizrachi, but he was opposed to any attempt to tamper with *nusach hatefillah*. Whether on Yom Ha'atzmaut or even within the wording of *nacheim* on Tisha B'av, he didn't want to change anything. There are many indications that he was opposed to certain styles of celebration of Yom Ha'atzmaut.

Equally true is that the "non-Zionist" *gedolim* are not monolithic. Some were a little closer to the view of the Satmar Rebbe: maybe the Brisker Rav, to some extent the Chazon Ish, as well as Rav Aharon Kotler. Others, for either ideological reasons or pragmatic reasons, were more positively disposed toward the *Medinah*. When people would ask where to go to daven at *kivrei tzadikim*, Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach would say to go to Har Herzl to daven at the soldiers' graves. There was a sensitivity, an appreciation for what it meant to be *moser nefesh* for the country. Rav Yosef Kahanman insisted that an Israeli flag be hung on Yom Ha'atzmaut in the Ponevezh Yeshiva, and it still is. There's a *teshuvah* by Rav Moshe from 1957 (*Orach Chaim* 1:46) about a shul which had put up both

Israeli and American flags. People wanted to break away and start a new shul, because *chas v'shalom*— how could they daven in a shul that has flags? Both American and Israeli flags have nothing to do with a shul. Rav Moshe acknowledges that such flags do not belong in a shul, but *chas v'shalom* to break away over this! He goes on to discuss an American flag and an Israeli flag. Those who associated with the flag may have been *reshaim*, but the flag itself is not a religious symbol and its presence in shul is not technically *assur*.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky writes in *Emes L'Yaakov* that the State of Israel restored a sense of dignity to *Klal Yisrael* after the horrors of the Holocaust. There are many examples like this. I know that Rav Henkin, who was a big *posek* in the Lower East Side where I grew up, was very much in the camp of anti-Zionism before 1948. But then something changed; once there was a State, there was a certain association that was created in the world around us. You have to understand the reality that people now associate Jews and Israel, and if you're going to go against Israel, you're really going against Jews. Rav Henkin wrote strongly against the Neturei Karta philosophy and against Satmar; it's all there in his writings. He was not a religious Zionist, but he had very strong views about how to relate to the State of Israel. Back in 1949, Rav Ruderman invited Rav Zev Gold, the head of the Mizrachi, as the guest speaker at the 6th *Chag Hasmicha* in Ner Yisrael.

It's a fault line. Recently, there was a split between different factions in *Eretz Yisrael* about how to deal with the exemptions of *yeshiva bochurim* from the army. You have the faction in Bnei Brak,

and the faction in Yerushalayim; the more moderate faction was Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman, and you have the more extreme factions.

Again, this partly has to do with what your starting point is. If your visceral feeling about *Eretz Yisrael* as a State is the way the Satmar Rebbe felt, then your natural inclination is going to be an attitude of “in your face”. The more that you’re able to see things in a nuanced way, you can understand that there’s a more moderate approach that you can take.

Another example of this is an organization called Eretz Hakodesh that was founded recently as part of the World Zionist Organization. You had to express some kind of allegiance toward the values of Zionism, but the organization would also help *Chareidim*, and Jews in general, as opposed to having money allocated toward other things which are *mamash kefira*.

The question is: by having such a group, are you somehow betraying your own values? This became a very controversial issue, and it still is.

Why am I telling you this? I will try not to speak on a personal level, although I do have strong feelings.

This past week, we had a beautiful rally that showed tremendous solidarity with Israel. It was attended by all types of Jews: religious, non-religious, Yeshivish, and modern. It was held for a particular reason – to send a strong message to the United States government to continue to support Israel. It goes into *pikuach nefesh*.

It was to advocate for the hostages. It was to do more to fight anti-semitism. The greater the number of people that attend, the stronger the message.

Now, what happened? There's a world called the Agudah world, the Yeshivish world, and they are not Zionist. They are sort of in the middle road; a non-Zionist organization. They have a lot of people who are their constituents. They were not organizing the rally, rather it was a Jewish Federation rally.

Initially, they encouraged participation, and a letter went out saying that people should go. It said maybe not the *yeshiva bachurim*, depending on the case, but at least the *ba'alei habatim* should go. Then, at the last minute, there was a letter from several notable members of the Moetzes telling people not to go. It created a lot of confusion and controversy that continues to reverberate. I don't want to get into the politics of it— it's not relevant. I did speak to Rav Elya Brudny, and his *chesbon* is not one that I want to address right now. What I would like to do is provide a perspective to a letter that came out several days ago. I don't know how many of you saw it, but it got a lot of press. The Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Yisrael, Rav Aharon Feldman, offered a rationale for his position to stop supporting the rally. Now, I will try to separate my personal feelings, although I will not hide the fact that I was very saddened and disappointed by the letter, but I want to address some of the confusion here.

Where is it coming from? The letter goes through different reasons to oppose the rally. One issue is that due to a pastor speaking, one might become enamored with Christianity. I don't understand

exactly why anyone who is going to the rally, for the reasons they're going, would believe in that, but that was one of the points.

But then the letter gives a lot of attention to the idea that going to the rally legitimizes Zionism. There's the singing of Hatikvah, and people being exposed to this could *chas v'shalom* get caught up in the *avodah zarah* called Zionism. Now, I want to explain where this is coming from. If your starting point is that you view the State of Israel in such black and white terms, then of course– the most important issue at stake is exposure to *avodah zarah*, and even *pikuach nefesh* would not be relevant here because this is *avodah zarah*.

That's why you end up where you end up. But you don't have to be that extreme. You don't have to be in YU, you don't have to be someone who went to a *besder yeshiva*, you can be someone who went to any number of *yeshivos* not within the YU world, you can be someone who doesn't say *Hallel* on Yom Ha'atzmaut, and maybe even say *tachanun*, and yet, you don't have to view every aspect of Zionism as inherently evil. You can attend the rally and recognize the fact that it is addressing a large spectrum of people. They're going to sing Hatikvah, even if you don't join in. Even if it's not going to make your heart warmer hearing that Hatikvah, you can still attend, and understand why you're going.

There's another aspect to this. The more that you see *Klal Yisrael* in a broader sense, the more you are able to appreciate the value of Jews coming together, and see the fact that people are proud of their Jewishness as a positive thing, maybe even as a *birbur teshuvah*. The more you define *Klal Yisrael* in very limited

and narrow terms, *achicha b'mitzvos*—which has *halachic* implications—the less it bothers you that you're not part of the larger *tzibbur* of *Klal Yisrael*. Because *Klal Yisrael*, as defined by you, is more narrow.

I want to end with this. We pointed out in terms of understanding the way history plays out, and how to understand where we're headed and why it's happened: it can mean one thing or something else. You can have a view which is very extreme, but you have to honestly define it as such. It's essentially a *da'as yachid*. It's not the mainstream, and this has been proven; I've heard this time and time again. In fact, there were many *bnei Torah* and *bnei Yeshiva* who attended the rally. Rav Aharon Lopiansky took his entire yeshiva except for ten people. He kept *asara batlanim* just to be there to keep the *sedarim* of the Yeshiva, and proudly went with everyone else. I know that Rav Shalom Spitz from Shaar Hatorah was planning to go, and he encouraged *talmidim* to go. Chofetz Chaim went.

I heard a recording of Rav Moshe Brown from the Yeshiva of Far Rockaway (a towering *talmid chacham*) that back in 1967, when the State of Israel also faced an existential crisis, Rav Ruderman took the entire Ner Yisrael, Rav Elya Svei took the entire Philly Yeshiva, and all of Telz Yeshiva went to attend a rally. Again, these are not “Zionist *gedolim*”; they are within the traditional Yeshiva world. But if you have a broader perspective, and you don't make an issue like this into a litmus test, you can see a broader issue. This is where I think it's important to put things in perspective.

Decisions in life, both in this regard and regarding lots of other

things, are not always black and white. You can be right in one context, and you can see a larger perspective in a different context. One way to look at it is that joining with non-Orthodox Jews for a rally that will include speakers who might say things that clash with our sensitivities is a *shmeck* of *kefira*. On the other hand, without giving up my values or my convictions, I understand that there's another value here. I want to be part of a *pikuach nefesh* endeavor to send a message to the government even though I'm not *maskim* to everything that is going on. Even within the groups that attended there were liberal groups in the Jewish spectrum, and they came together even though they probably heard the pastor say things that hurt their ears, because they believe in trading land for peace. The point is that you attend, and you put the disagreements aside. But if you see things in very absolute terms, you can't do that. Depending on what your preconceived notions are about a given issue—in this case, the State of Israel—those counter arguments either will pass muster or won't pass muster.

Again, to come back to where we started, without a *navi*, and without hindsight, we can't know with certainty what to make of this situation or that situation. It's nice to be sure of things, or to sound like you're sure, but ultimately, we should follow our *mesorah*. Whatever your *mesorah* is along the spectrum, there's a lot in the middle. You don't have to be on one extreme or the other. What's promoted to be a *daas Torah* doesn't have to be a *daas yachid*. A *daas yachid* is a *daas yachid*, and it's good for those who want to follow that particular *daas yachid*. But don't assume that this represents more than that *daas yachid*; *Klal Yisrael* is not monolithic. It's not a breakdown between YU and the "Yeshiva world", it is a particular

point of view that is, in my eyes, quite extreme, but everyone is entitled to their opinion. The Satmar Rebbe was a *gadol*. This is an opinion, but it's not a mainstream opinion.

I want to end with a very important Tosafos. Whatever opinion you take in whatever situation, however moderate, however extreme, there's always another question to consider, which is your motives. How much *le'sheim shamayim* are you? The Gemara in *Sotah* (36b) brings an interesting *Chazal* about *krias Yam Suf*. When *Klal Yisrael* were at the *Yam Suf* the *shevatim* were arguing about who should go in first. Based on a *pasuk* in *Tehillim*, the Gemara states that *Shevet Binyamin* went in first, and *Shevet Yehuda* were stoning them. Tosafos (37a "*Vehayu*") explains this with a *midrash* which brings an interesting *mashal*. A king had two sons: one older, and one younger. He tells the younger son to wake him up at sunrise, and the older son to wake him up three hours into the day. The next morning the younger son comes at sunrise, but the older son won't let him wake up the king. The older son says, "father told me to wake him up three hours into the day", and the younger son says "no, he told me sunrise." While they're going back and forth arguing, the father wakes up. He says to the two sons: "both of you were *mechavein* for my honor, so I'm going to give you both your reward." Tosafos compares it to Yehuda and Binyamin: when Binyamin goes in and Yehuda stones them, they're both acting *le'sheim shamayim*.

Whenever you take a position, especially if it's on the extreme side of the spectrum, there's always a risk. If you're too tolerant, then you can start seeing things positively when they should really be called

for what they are. If it's evil, you can't just say everything is good. But being extreme on the other side can undermine *ahavas Yisrael*, breed feelings of negativity, and corrupt one's *middos*. Whatever position you take in any given issue in life, using this as a *marshal* to bring out other examples, you have to recognize that it's not just about being right in the abstract, it's about being right in the context of the situation and having the motives *l'sheim shamayim*.

May we get to the point that we can fully understand everything in hindsight. Meanwhile, we should follow the *mesorah* that resonates for us, that we've been *mekabeil* from our Rabbeim, and strive to act *l'sheim shamayim*, and may we all be *zocheh* to *yeshuas Hashem bikarov*.

Rallying for Israel - The *Halachic* Perspective

Rabbi Mayer Twersky

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Hashem runs the world.

The Torah guarantees that whenever we repent and cry out wholeheartedly, He answers our prayers (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 2:6).

These realities and fundamentals of faith notwithstanding, it is a sacred, categorical obligation that (in addition to prayer) we also vigorously defend ourselves by natural means. Specifically, we are obligated to defend ourselves militarily and diplomatically. The Ramban writes (*Bereishis* 32:4):

למדנו עוד שהוא לא בטח בצדקתו והשתדל בהצלה בכל יכלתו ויש
בה עוד רמז לדורות כי כל אשר אירע לאבינו עם עשו אחיו יארע לנו
תמיד עם בני עשו וראוי לנו לאחז בדרכו של צדיק שנזמין עצמנו
לשלשת הדברים שהזמין הוא את עצמו לתפלה ולדורון ולהצלה בדרך
מלחמה לברוח ולהנצל וכבר ראו רבותינו הרמז הזה מן הפרשה הזאת
כאשר אזכיר

Everyone recognizes that the support of the United States in

⁴https://www.torahweb.org/torah/special/2023/rtwe_rally.html

Israel's defensive, existential war against Hamas is crucial. America provides vital armaments and billions of dollars of financial aid; additionally, it serves as a bulwark against international pressure. Everyone also knows that it is imperative to demonstrate widespread support amongst the electorate for such support. Tuesday's rally did just that.

We are not more deserving or righteous than Yaakov; we too must exert ourselves to the maximum in pursuing avenues of rescue. Indubitably, Tuesday's rally comprised one aspect of that effort.

Without unstinting American support, there is a very real danger that the IDF will be constrained in a way that presently endangers our soldiers and, in the future, endangers the civilian population in the State of Israel. Rallying to sustain and expand such support was thus unquestionably also a fulfillment of (*Vayikra* 19:16), "*Lo sa'amod al dam re'echa*".

At the rally, religious and not yet religious Jews stood side by side. Jews who believe and those who do not yet believe stood shoulder to shoulder. The existential threat in 1967 similarly galvanized Jews from across the spectrum. (In fact, in 1967, all Yeshiva students participated in the rally.) Wonderful! If only all Jews already appreciated the gift of Torah and were believers and religious. Tragically, that is not yet the case. In the interim it is wonderful that myriads of Jews, to a degree, embraced their identity and shared destiny and overwhelmingly came to support the Jewish people, their people.

Of course, we can never act or speak in a way that legitimizes or

validates inauthentic forms of *Yahadus*, which is why in some other contexts inter-denominational activities are proscribed. Attending the political rally, however, simply expressed unwavering support for our brethren in the State of Israel in their battle for survival and security; it clearly did not affirm or validate anyone else's beliefs.

Attending the rally condemned Hamas' savage butchering, massacre, and mutilation of Jews (and some non-Jews) and called for their (Hamas') eradication; it obviously did not endorse any aspect of the program, the choice of speakers, their respective beliefs or lifestyles.

The prophetic verse (*Zechariah 4:6*), "*Lo b'chayil v'lo b'koach ki im b'ruchi amar Hashem Tzevakos*" narrowly refers to the building of the second Temple. Even as a figure of speech, it is irrelevant and inapplicable in the present context wherein our *mesorah* (tradition) demands that we exert ourselves to the maximum in pursuing all avenues of rescue.

May Hashem answer our prayer *vikol harsha'ah karega toveid, v'kol oyevei amcha mihara yikreis* (May all evil instantaneously perish and all Your nation's enemies be speedily excised) and may there be no need for any further rallies.

Jewish History and Jewish Unity

Rabbi Mordechai Willig

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Yaakov said, “if Esav comes to the one camp and strikes it, then the remaining camp will survive” (*Bereishis* 32:9). Rashi adds: He readied himself for three things: for a gift, for *tefillah* and for war. The *Midrash* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 76:3) states that these two camps existed at a later date. “The one camp that Esav/Edom/Rome attacked: these are our brothers in the south. The camp that survived: these are our brothers in exile. Even though they survived, they fasted for us, those under Roman rule, on Monday and Thursday.” The Ramban cites the *Midrash* and adds that this *parshah* alludes to future generations (see Ramban 32:4, 33:15). The Ramban writes explicitly that a *doron*, a form of *shtadlanus*, must be utilized in all future generations, in addition to *tefillah* and war, as Yaakov did in his time. Esav will never destroy us. They will kill or rob us in one land, and another ruler will have mercy and save the refugees.

The Ramban’s prescient words describe Jewish history since the time of the Ramban. Massacres, pogroms and expulsions occurred numerous times, in Europe and beyond. Each time, the survivors found refuge in a different land. The *Meshech Chochmah* (*Vayikra* 26:44) adds that the survival of our small and weak nation, despite the

⁵ https://www.torahweb.org/torah/2023/parshah/rwil_vayishlach.html

travails in the diaspora for thousands of years, is an amazing miracle. We establish ourselves in one place for a century or two, only to be destroyed mercilessly and dispersed to faraway lands. This pattern repeats itself in order to preserve the nation and the purity of Torah. When Torah thrives, the new generation is prone to try something new, and abandon its religion. They will think that Berlin is *Yerushalayim!* Then a great storm will arrive and drive them to a faraway land. There they will rebuild, and their youth will excel in Torah. They will spread it in places where it had been forgotten. This is the way of *Am Yisrael* from the time of their wanderings in *galus*. These prescient words, anticipating (reportedly in 1860, see A. Suraski, *Demuyos Hod* p. 123) the Holocaust based in Berlin, must give us pause as American Jews, particularly now that antisemitism has reared its ugly head. Sadly, it can happen here, even in this kingdom of kindness (see *Iggeros Moshe, Choshen Mishpat* 4:29), as Jewish history often repeats itself. Perhaps the words of Rav Chaim of Volozhin, uttered more than two hundred years ago, that America will be the last bastion of Torah before the coming of the *Mashiach*, (See The American Jewish Archives Journal Vol. LXXII p. 87 ff. by Zev Eleff) will spare this country from the fate of its European predecessors.

II

The Kingdom of Yishmael, father-in-law of Esav (*Bereishis* 28:9), is included in the last, longest and worst of the four kingdoms, namely Edom (Ramban, *Bamidbar* 24:20, Chavel Ed.; Artscroll *Sefer Daniel* 2:40). On *Simchas Torah*, they attacked and murdered our brothers in the south, eerily recalling the phrase of the *Midrash* (in context, it is said to refer to Beitar and its environs, see *Midrash*

Hamevuar citing *Tanna D'bei Eliyahu Rabbah* 10). All of Eretz Yisrael suffered, then and now, at the hands of Edom/Yishmael. In the relative calm of Bavel then, and America now, we fast and cry out to Hashem. In all generations, Jews in peaceful and prosperous lands help those in lands of crisis with *tefillah* and all types of assistance (*ibid*).

Jews everywhere have responded to the worst pogrom since the Holocaust and the ongoing battle against Hamas in Gaza, with heartfelt *tefillah*. The Rambam (*Hilchos Ta'anios* 1:1-3) considers this a Torah commandment. "When you wage war in your land against an enemy who oppresses you, you must cry out and blow trumpets. You will be recalled before Hashem and saved from your foes (*Bamidbar* 9:9). When a crisis besets the *tzibbur* and they cry to Hashem, all know that their misdeeds caused the punishment. This *teshuvah* will lead to the end of the crisis. But if they do not cry out, but rather attribute the crisis to happenstance, this is cruelty, and causes them to cling to their misdeeds. This worsens the crisis, as it is written (*Vayikra* 26:27, 28), "If you walk with me as if the suffering by the sword (*ibid.* v. 25) happened by chance, I will walk with you with a fury of chance." Throughout the world, *Tehillim* is recited after each *tefillah*. In our community, under the guidance of *Moreinu Harav* Herschel Schachter *sblita*, *Avinu Malkeinu* is said at *Shacharis* and *Mincha*.

The Rambam continues (1:4): by rabbinic law one must fast when a crisis besets the *tzibbur* until they are saved by Hashem's mercy. This does not apply when most of the *tzibbur* cannot do so (1:5). While the Rambam refers to consecutive fasts, today's *rabbanim* are reluctant to call for any fast, presumably for this reason. Again

following Harav Schachter *shlita*, many in our community fasted on *erev Rosh Chodesh Kislev*, a full day or at least half a day. In some shuls, such as ours, a minyan of fasters gathered for *Mincha*, with *Kriyas Hatorah*, *Haftorah*, and *Aneinu*. This accords with the *Midrash* that the camp that does not suffer the attack fasts on behalf of those who are suffering. In addition, as the *Midrash Hamevuar* notes, all types of help must come from prosperous lands. The economic needs of families of victims, and of displaced persons and communities, are staggering. Thankfully, American Jews have contributed generously. Much more is needed, and those who are able should give more. Many have gone to Israel to volunteer, helping practically in army bases and farms, and offering *chizuk*/encouragement to our beloved brothers and sisters. *Kol hakavod!*

III

Jewish unity emerged on and since *Simchas Torah* in Israel, in stark contrast to the sad disunity of the previous year. The war sparked increased interest in religion in the so-called secular population. Soldiers, especially, asked for *tzitzis* and *tefillin*. Many citizens who survived miraculously started keeping Shabbos and/or other *mitzvos*. Many *Chareidim* volunteered to serve in *Tzahal*. Others performed acts of *chessed* for and in non-religious communities. Every *tefillah* and *Perek Tehillim*, every moment of learning Torah, every act of *chessed* is a merit to help save the lives of our soldiers, who are in constant danger. Their cries, both religious and secular, of “*Shema Yisrael*” and “*ana Hashem hoshia na*”, are undoubtedly heard in *Shomayim*.

Here, the Jewish Federations of North America and the

Conference of Presidents of American Jewish Organizations called for a major rally in Washington on *Rosh Chodesh Kislev*, November 14th. Close to 300,000 Jews of all persuasions and from numerous locations converged on the National Mall to march for Israel, to free hostages and against antisemitism. The rally was endorsed by Orthodox organizations, and their constituents comprised a significant percentage of the attendees.

The support of the American government is critical to the war effort in Israel. Experts in this area, both here and in Israel, felt that a strong showing at the rally would help in gaining and maintaining that support. As such, the *halachic* obligation of *pikuach nefesh* required attending the rally for those able to do so. This is my strongly held personal view, which was shared by my colleagues at Yeshiva. Certain objections were raised to the idea of rallying or to the details of this rally. It is critical to refrain from maligning others who act *l'sheim Shomayim*, even if we strongly disagree, even in the absence of reciprocity.

May Hashem look down at all of His people, in Israel and abroad, who are all participating in the war effort by fighting, *Davening*, fasting, and rallying, each in his and her own way. We are all soldiers.

The *Yerushalmi* (*Pe'ah* 1:1) teaches that when soldiers are unified there are no casualties, even if united by *avodah zara*, as in the days of Achav. Infighting causes casualties, even in the days of Dovid Hamelech. As such, unity is a matter of *pikuach nefesh*, saving lives of soldiers and citizens in *Eretz Yisrael*.

As we pray daily to our Father and King: nullify all harsh decrees against us, the designs of those who hate us, thwart the plot of our enemies, destroy every foe and accuser, shut the mouths of our accusers and attackers. *Avinu Malkeinu, hatzmach lanu yeshuah bikarov.*

***Emunah* in Dark Times: Connecting to the Suffering of Others**

Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger

Adapted from a Sichas Mussar, Dec. 5, 2023

I was asked to discuss whether *da'agah*—worry—or *pachad*—fear, which are part of an *eis tzarah*, demonstrate *chisaron emunah*—a lack of faith, and whether those feelings should be seen as a disappointment that requires *tikun*.

The constant uneasiness with which we now live and even the genuine *tefilos* that it fosters, drive our minds constantly to the precariousness of war and the abundance of suffering that it contains. Is that frame of mind appropriate for the type of *ba'alei bitachon* that we all aspire to be?

During the routine of life, we are well practiced to be content, and feel responsible as recipients of Hashem's *hashgacha* once we have exerted the *hishtadlus* that we have been taught to extend. But do the rules change in an *eis tzarah*? Once we have done our *hishtadlus* of *teshuvah*, of *tefillah* and of Torah, of philanthropy and fundraising, of lobbying and rallying as determined by the politically well versed and the *morei hora'ah*, are we supposed to find ourselves in a place of contentment? Are the challenges, the *nisyonos* of an *eis tzarah* altogether different?

In discussing the *halachos* of an *eis tzarah* in *Hilchos Ta'anios* (1:14), the Rambam writes:

כל השרוי בתענית, בין שהיה מתענה על צרתו או על חלומו בין שהיה מתענה עם הצבור על צרתם, הרי זה לא ינהוג עידונין בעצמו ולא יקל ראשו ולא יהיה שמח וטוב לב אלא דואג ואונן כענין שנאמר מה יתאונן אדם חי גבר על חטאיו

Let us try to understand the *avodah* that the Rambam set forth for an *eis tzarah*.

Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Assi may very well address this as they *darshen* the words of Shlomo Hamelech (*Yoma* 75a):

”דאגה בלב איש ישחנה, רבי אמר ורבי אסי, חד אמר: ישחנה מדעתו, וחד אמר: ישחנה לאחרים.

Perhaps there are two forms of *da'agah*—worry. One disables; the other motivates. One overwhelms, and the other empowers. One discourages and disillusiones; the other makes one alert and aware. Anxiety that paralyzes need be pushed out of one's mind, but reasonable worry, which makes us more mindful of the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, what He wants from us, and the connection He wants with us should be shared.

This allows us to understand the wisdom of Shlomo Hamelech in *Mishlei* (28:14): *ashrei adam mifacheid tamid umakshe libo yipol bira'ah*.

That there is no *stira* between *bitachon* and *da'agah* can be seen from Yaakov Avinu's reaction to the *petira* of Rachel on the way back to *Eretz Canaan*. At this point, Yaakov Avinu displays almost

superhuman *gevurah*. He is unable to bring Rachel back to Yitzchak and Rivkah and the circle of his life that he had envisioned will never happen; *ahavas nefsho*—the love of his life—is gone.

The Torah relates that after Rachel's passing, Yaakov continued his journey and pitched his tent in Migdal Eder. The Sforno suggests that Yaakov wanted to experience *da'agah*; to embrace the *yisurin*; he wanted to properly experience the sorrow and agony of his loss.

Apparently, as we saw in the Rambam, an *eis tzarah* means the *hanbagah* of *Klal Yisrael* is different. *Nedarim* in an *eis tzarah* have a different *din*. *Tefillah* in an *eis tzarah* is an entirely different formulation and carries different *dinim* (see *Hasagos to Sefer Hamitzvos, asef 5*). There is even a different *mekor* in the Torah for such *tefillah*; according to the Ramban it is the only *tefillah de'oraisa*. Learning in an *eis tzarah* is also a different kind of *avodah*. It could be that during an *eis tzarah* to be *bida'agah* or *bipachad* is the *avodah* in itself. It's not a *chisaron* in *emunah*. It's exactly what the *Ribbono Shel Olam* wants from us.

The Lakewood Mashgiach, Harav Matisyahu Salomon *zatzal*, pointed out that the Rambam in *Sefer Hamitzvos (Asef 5)* only speaks about *tefillos*, without mentioning the *chatzotzros*, despite its centrality in the *parshah* in the Torah. Basing himself on the words of the *Chinuch* (384), he explained that the *ikar* is the *tefillah*; the *chatzotros* are simply a necessary part of being *meorer* the *tefillah*. In other words—though counter-intuitive—even in an *eis tzarah* we need to be *mis'orer* our *tefillos*. During such times, people can become *yesheirim veomdim*—standing sleepers. The *chatzotros* bring them out of their

slumber to the *kavanah* necessary for *tefillah* in such trying times. Without being properly *mis'orer*, one can skip through *Avinu Malkeinu* when it is so critical. This is why the Rambam emphasized that there is a mood to the *ta'anis*.

It is clear that in an *eis tzarah*, being *doeg ve'onein* is the *avodah* and not a *chisaron* in *emunah* at all. The *avodah* of an *eis tzarah* is to be *me'orer* ourselves; It requires that we recognize when we are *yesheinim veomdim*, and when our minds wander from the *tekufah*, we have to do the *avodah* of bringing ourselves back.

There is another aspect to the *da'agah be'eis tzarah*. Let me frame it through a *drasha* that I heard from the Rav of our Shul growing up in Toronto, Rav Nachum Rabinovitch *zatzal*, who later went on to become Rosh Yeshivat Birkat Moshe in Ma'aleh Adumim and author of *Yad Peshuta*. I remember when he came to visit Yeshiva for *Shabbos* and spoke at *seuda shelishis*. He shared an insight that I believe was *moreh derech*—a game changer—in the way we understand life after October 7th.

Following *ma'amad har sinai*, *parshas Mishpatim* says (*Shemos* 24:10–11):

ויראו את א-להי ישראל ותחת רגליו כמעשה לבנת הספיר וכעצם השמים לטהר ואל אצילי בני ישראל לא שלח ידו ויחזו את הא-להים ויאכלו וישתו

Rashi (ibid., s.v. *lo shalach yado*) states that all of the *atzilim*, including Nadav, Avihu, and the Kohanim, could have been *chayav misah* for envisioning Hashem. But Hashem did not strike them, for

they were careful not to breach the boundaries of the mountain when they approached. Instead, Rashi indicates they were endowed with the ability to envision and understand *Bnei Yisrael's* history up to that moment, to truly understand what the Torah represented. Their reaction upon achieving this understanding is striking. The *pasuk* says that after they saw *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, “*vayochlu vayishtu*”—they ate and drank. They finally understood what their suffering in Mitzrayim meant; they understood what every tear shed accomplished and where it led. Then, they chose to celebrate.

Rav Rabinovitch explained that it is acceptable to have an understanding, to be able to perceive and have unbelievable depth of insight, to be *vayechezu es ha'elokim*. However, one can never be at peace with the *yisurin* of others. Partaking of food and drink—*vayochlu vayishtu*—was seemingly inappropriate. A *manhig Yisrael* can have tremendously deep *emunah*. It is possible for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to give him such a tremendous insight as seen here. It is possible to have such deep wells of *emunah* to be *mekabel gezeiras ha'Melech*—to accept Hashem's decrees—without a sound, but never to simply accept somebody else's agony. To be *ochel veshoseh*—and thus ignore the *yisurin* of others—is impossible!

The Torah tells of a similar scenario involving Yosef Hatzadik in *parshas Vayeishev* (*Bereishis* 37:24–25):

ויקחהו וישלכו אתו הברה והבור רק אין בו מים וישבו לאכל לחם
וישאו עיניהם ויראו והנה ארחת ישמעאלים באה מגלעד וגמליהם
נשאים נכאת וצרי ולט הולכים להוריד מצרימה

Later, in *parshas Miketz* (42:21), when Shimon recalls the *cheit*

that transpired between his brothers and Yosef, he is remorseful—not about the sale per se, but the equanimity they displayed as they ignored the cries, the begging for help and the suffering of Yosef.

A *ma'amin*, even if he could achieve true *yishuv hada'as*—peace of mind—with tragedy, he can never achieve peace of mind with people on the front lines. He cannot achieve *yishuv hada'as* when there are parents and children on the front. There is no *yishuv hada'as* when there are people living in *pachad* and certainly not when there are still *shevuyim*!

Rashi says that the *avodah* of Moshe Rabbeinu was to be *misbonein* upon the Jewish people: to contemplate, to dwell upon, and bring himself to be primarily concerned for their well being. There is a *talmid chacham* named Rav Shmuel Margolin who pointed out that several times in *Parshiyos Shemos* and *Vaeira* Rashi uses parts of the phrase “*nasan eino velibo*” to both describe the attentiveness of Moshe Rabbeinu and Hashem to the suffering of the Jews. The deliberate usage of the phrase teaches us that Hashem responds in kind when leadership models for us the purposeful and empathetic mindfulness to the *yisurin* of another.

This is what the Sforno was ultimately alluding to when he said that Yaakov Avinu did not want to miss a moment of *da'agah*.

The *pasuk* described that when his children came to be *menachem avel* after Yaakov Avinu received news of Yosef's death, Yaakov Avinu could not be comforted—*vayimaein libisnacheim*. Yaakov Avinu knew that by placing himself in such a state of perpetual

mourning and sorrow he would not be allowed *hashra'as hashechinah*—Divine inspiration. But for the *tza'ar* of somebody else, especially his own son, Yaakov Avinu was willing to make this sacrifice. Yaakov Avinu shows us that there is no contradiction between someone's *emunah* and the *da'agah* resultant from the *pachad* of others.

I'll close with the words of Rav Matisyahu Salomon *zatzal* shared in an *cis tzarah* some years ago. The *pasuk* in *Tehillim* (44:4) states:

כי לא בחרבם ירשו ארץ וזרועם לא הושיעה למו כי ימינך וזרועך ואור
פניך כי רציתם:

Onkelos explains that as long as we're learning, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is *mekabel* us. Different people have different *avodos* and different *tafkidim*. Our *tafkid*, in our age, and in our *Beis Midrash*, in response to this *da'agah*, is to be *misaseik bi'oraisa*. Our *emunah* is that when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gives us a *tekufah* with *yisurin* and we are able to be *mekabel* them, to be *doeg ve'onein* and, ultimately, to be *nosei bi'ol im chaveiro*. All of this has to be *me'oreir* our *davening* and *teshuvah*, but above all it has to be *misoreir* our learning. That is our *tafkid* here. *Be'ezras Hashem*, we will be *zocheh vero'eh*: just as we are *me'oreir* ourselves to be *do'eig* in *tza'aram shel acherim*, we should be *zocheh* to sing and celebrate these *nissim*; they should happen very speedily and very soon.

Faith and Human Initiative: Rallying for Israel

Rabbi Mayer Twersky

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Did the rally of November 14 contravene the belief that *ein od Milvado*, Hashem is the only true existent, all-powerful, in control of all? Do natural (i.e., non-spiritual) initiatives such as the rally in the current existential *eis tzarah* (crisis) insinuate or reflect a heretical belief in a purely natural, geopolitical etiology? In adopting natural measures alongside spiritual ones, are we guilty of professing an idolatrous belief in *kochi ve'otzem yadi*, practical and ontological self-sufficiency?

Let us study a few sample, seminal sources, *halachic* and *meta-halachic*, which delineate some representative specifics of *halachah* and broadly depict its ethos.

First, *hashoel harei ze shofech damim* (*Yerushalmi Yoma* 8:5). One who inquires (if it is permissible to override Shabbos thereby causing a delay in rendering vital assistance when a life is in danger) is guilty of bloodshed. When a life hangs in the balance, human effort is required and potentially decisive.

Second, the Torah's presentation of the *Kohen Mashuach*

⁶https://www.torahweb.org/torah/special/2023/rtwe_rally2.html

Milchamah (Devarim 20:1-9):

כי תצא למלחמה על איבך וראית סוס ורכב עם רב ממך לא תירא מהם כי יהוה אלהיך עמך המעלך מארץ מצרים: והיה כקרבכם אל המלחמה ונגש הכהן ודבר אל העם: ואמר אלהם שמע ישראל אתם קרבים היום למלחמה על איביכם אל ירך לבבכם אל תיראו ואל תחפזו ואל תערצו מפניהם: כי יהוה אלהיכם ההלך עמכם להלחם לכם עם איביכם להושיע אתכם: ודברו השטרים אל העם לאמר מי האיש אשר בנה בית חדש ולא חנכו ילך וישב לביתו פן ימות במלחמה ואיש אחר יחנכנו: ומי האיש אשר נטע כרם ולא חללו ילך וישב לביתו פן ימות במלחמה ואיש אחר יחללנו: ומי האיש אשר ארש אשה ולא לקחה ילך וישב לביתו פן ימות במלחמה ואיש אחר יקחנה: ויספו השטרים לדבר אל העם ואמרו מי האיש הירא ורך הלבב ילך וישב לביתו ולא ימס את לבב אחיו כלבבו: והיה ככלת השטרים לדבר אל העם ופקדו שרי צבאות בראש העם:

The Torah affirms in supernatural, providential terms that Hashem wages war on our behalf and, accordingly, commands that we trust in Him and not fear. And yet the Torah also commands in natural, non-providential terms that we exempt certain classes of individuals from military service because of the dangers and uncertainties associated with war. And the Torah concludes by mandating the appointment of commanding officers, who are needed to conduct the war on a natural, non-miraculous level.

Ramban (*ad loc.*) notes these different strands, and explains how they join to form a coherent, rich tapestry:

יזהירם שלא ירך לבבם ולא ייראו מן האויבים, ויאמר שלא יבטחו בזה בגבורתם רק שישבו לבם אל השם ויבטחו בישועתו ויחשבו כי רוצה ה' את יראיו את המיחלים לחסדו. ואמר להלחם לכם עם אויביכם - כי יפילם לפניכם לחרב. ואמר להושיע אתכם - שהם ינצלו במלחמה

ולא יפקד מהם איש, כי יתכן שינצחו את אויביהם וימותו גם מהם רבים כדרך המלחמות... והנה הכהן שהוא העובד את השם יזהירם ביראתו ויבטיחם, אבל השוטרים ידברו בנוהג שבעולם פן ימות במלחמה - כי בדרך הארץ בכל המלחמות ימותו אנשים גם מכת הנוצחים

וצוה ופקדו שרי צבאות בראש העם - כי התורה תצוה בדרך הארץ, ותעשה הנסים עם יראיו בהסתר. ואין החפץ לפניו לשנות טבעו של עולם, זולתי כאשר אין שם דרך בהצלה אחרת, או להודיע שמו לצריו לעתים, כאשר היה בקריעת ים סוף וכיוצא בו

Hashem will miraculously save us from our enemies. And yet the Torah issues a split mandate - we are obligated to have complete, unwavering faith in His involvement, but also to approach war on a natural level, *b'derech ha'aretz*, without relying on miracles.

This two-tiered system, explains Ramban, whereby Providence crowns our efforts with success, allows for *nissim nistarim*, covert miracles, that do not override natural law. Hashem providentially, clandestinely operates within natural processes. In most instances, this is His preferred *modus operandi*. He wills to eschew *nissim giluyim*, overt, supernatural miracles, and perform *nissim nistarim*. Hashem, as it were, is poised to perform covert miracles on our behalf. But we are commanded, as it were, to partner with Him. His providential involvement does not diminish the need for human initiative and effort; He will crown our natural efforts with success. Hashem guarantees that He will perform *nissim nistarim* but not *nissim giluyim* when the former would suffice. A moment's reflection reveals the frightening implications of not complying with this divine providential principle and concomitant *halachic* mandate; quiescent

pietism, albeit unmistakably sincere, is extremely dangerous.

Natural initiatives such as a rally do not insinuate a belief in *kochi ve'otzem yadi*; they fulfill Hashem's will. They do not encroach upon the belief that *ein od Milvado*; instead, they implement *kabbalas ol mitzvos*, acceptance of the yoke of *mitzvos*. They do not impede divine involvement; rather they are a *sine qua non* for such involvement.

Characteristically, the Torah ordains a binary response when the Jewish people are attacked: to wage war (*vide* Rambam *Hilchos Melachim* 5:1) and to sound the trumpets (*Bamidbar* 10:9). Rambam (*Hilchos Ta'anios* 1:1-2) identifies this latter Mitzvah with prayer and repentance. Sounding the trumpets is a form of prayer which the Torah ordains to impress upon us that our sins have precipitated the danger and suffering, and we must respond to the *eis tzarah* by repenting. Nonetheless, we are obligated to simultaneously maximally exert ourselves in waging war, sparing no effort and marshaling all resources.

The Torah requires human initiative and maximum effort. Human initiative and effort make a difference, the difference. This *halachic* ethos is also embodied in the previously quoted *halachah* that one who delays in a situation of *pikuach nefesh*, danger to life, is guilty of bloodshed.

The census at the beginning of the Book of *Bamidbar*, interprets Ramban, was ordained because a nation approaching war, *b'derech hateva*, on the natural level, needs to know how many soldiers

are available to fight.

כי היה זה כדרך שהמלכות עושה בבואם למלחמה כי עתה היו מזומנים ליכנס לארץ ולבא במלחמה עם מלכי האמורי אשר בעבר הירדן ועם השאר כולם כמו שאמר (במדבר י"כ"ט) נוסעים אנחנו אל המקום אשר אמר ה' והיו משה והנשיאים צריכין לדעת מספר חלוצי צבא המלחמה וכן מספר כל שבט ושבט ומה יפקוד עליו בערבות מואב במערכות המלחמה כי התורה לא תסמוך על הנס שירדוף אחד אלף וזה טעם "כל יוצא צבא בישראל" כי המנין מפני צבא המלחמה ועוד שיחלק להם הארץ למספרם וידע כמה חבלים יפלו להם מן הארץ הנכבשת להם כי לולי דבר המרגלים היו נכנסים שם מיד

Moshe Rabbeinu also employed all relevant natural means and tactics; hence in year two he approved the request to send *miraglim*, spies, and in year forty dispatched another set.

וזו עצה הגונה בכל כובשי ארצות וכן עשה עוד משה עצמו שנאמר (במדבר כ"א:ל"ב) וישלח משה לרגל את יעזר וכן ביהושע בן נון (יהושע ב א) שנים אנשים מרגלים ועל כן היה טוב בעיני משה כי הכתוב לא יסמוך בכל מעשיו על הנס אבל יצוה בנלחמים להחליץ ולהשמר ולארוב כאשר בא הכתוב במלחמת העי (שם ח ב) שהיתה על פי השם ובמקומות רבים אז נמלך משה בשכינה ונתן לו השם רשות ואמר לו שלח לך אנשים ויתורו את ארץ כנען וידעוה ויגידו לכם ועל פיהם תתיעצו בענין הכבוש

Ramban clearly explains that naturalness characterizes all of *halachah*; it is not limited to the *mitzvah* of waging war. "*Ki hatorah tetzaveh b'derech ha'aretz*"; the semantics of *tetzaveh* ("future" tense employed as *boveh tamidi*) are that the Torah always mandates that we act within the natural realm. Ramban is quite explicit in his sweeping meta-halachic characterization of *halachah*– "*ki hakasuv lo yismoch b'kol ma'asav al hanes*." The Torah never relies on miracles.

Accordingly, any suggestion that the belief of *ein od Milvado* warrants passivity and rejects human initiative specifically contradicts discreet *halachos* and broadly distorts the ethos of all of *halachah*.

The *Sefer Hachinuch* (546) also presents and explains the two-tiered system of divine providence and human initiative.

משרשי המצוה, לפי שעם היות השם ברוך הוא משגיח בפרטי בני אדם ויודע כל מעשיהם וכל אשר יקרה להם טוב או רע בגזרתו ובמצותו לפי זכותו או חובו, וכענין שאמרו זכרונם לברכה [חולין ז' ע"ב] אין אדם נוקף אצבעו מלמטה אלא אם כן מכריזין עליו מלמעלה, אף על פי כן צריך האדם לשמור עצמו מן המקרים הנהוגים בעולם, כי האל ברא עולמו ובנאו על יסודות עמודי הטבע, וגור שיהיה האש שורפת והמים מכביין הלהבה, וכמו כן יחייב הטבע שאם תפול אבן גדולה על ראש איש שתרחץ את מוחו או אם יפול האדם מראש הגג הגבוה לארץ שימות, והוא ברוך הוא חנן גופות בני אדם ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים בעלת דעת לשמור הגוף מכל פגע ונתן שניהם הנפש וגופה בתוך גלגל היסודות והמה ינהגם ויפעלו בהם פעולות. ואחר שהאל שעבד גוף האדם לטבע, כי כן חייבה חכמתו, מצד שהוא בעל חומר, ציוהו לשמור מן המקרה, כי הטבע שהוא מסור בידו יעשה פעולתו עליו אם לא ישמר ממנו. ועל כן תצוונו התורה לשמור משכנותינו ומקומותינו לבל יקרנו מות בפשיעותינו ולא נסכן נפשותינו על סמך הנס, ואמרו זכרונם לברכה [תורת כהנים אמור פרשתא ח'] שכל הסומך על הנס אין עושין לו נס. ועל הדרך הזה תראה רוב עניני הכתובים בכל מקום, כי גם בהלחם ישראל מלחמת מצוה על פי ה' היו עורכין מלחמתן ומזיינין עצמן ועושין כל ענינים כאלו יסמכו בדרכי הטבע לגמרי, וכן ראוי לעשות לפי הענין שזכרנו, ואשר לא יחלוק על האמת מרוע לב יודה בזה.

Divine providence notwithstanding Hashem created a world which is based upon and functions according to natural law. Such is

His will. Respect for His will demands that we operate fully and effectively on a natural level. Otherwise, G-d forbid, we are being contemptuous of Hashem and His creation. Passivity and quietism are not only sacrilegious but dangerous, since one who relies upon a miracle is assured that he will not be the beneficiary of such. Hence, while we fervently believe in *hashgacha pratis* (individualized divine providence) and *nissim*, we do not rely upon them at all.

Rav Soloveitchik in *Lonely Man of Faith* (Tradition 7:2 [Summer, 1965] page 53) depicts this natural *halachic* ethos. The statement quoted in both the *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch* of *ve'im mone'a atzmo harei ze shofech damim* is a cornerstone of *halachic* thinking:

The doctrine of faith in G-d's charity, *bitachon*, is not to be equated with the folly of the mystical doctrine of quietism which in its extreme form exempts man from his duty of attending to his own needs and lets him wait in "holy" idleness and indifference for G-d's intervention. This kind of repose is wholly contrary to the repose which the *halachah* recommends: the one which follows human effort and remedial action. Man must first use his own skill and try to help himself as much as possible. Then, and only then, man may find repose and quietude in G-d and be confident that his effort and action will be crowned with success. The initiative, says the *halachah*, belongs to man, the successful realization, to G-d.

Certainly, "except the L-rd build the house, they labor in vain that build it," (*Tehillim* 127:1) but if those who labor stop building, there will be no house. The Lord wants man to

undertake the task which He, in His infinite grace, completes.

The alternative to *kochi ve'otzem yadi* is not passivity; it is the humble, G-d-fearing mindset which frames human initiative and effort. It is the recognition that while “the initiative belongs to man, the successful realization to G-d.

It is, of course, immaterial whether we label the current era as *Ikvisa d'Meshicha*, the period which will precede the coming of the Messiah; the dictates and ethos of *halachah* do not change. *Zos batorah lo sibiyei muchlefes*.

Becoming Even Closer: YU in a Time of War

President Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman

Adapted from a Hashkafa Talk, Dec. 13, 2023

It is a privilege to be speaking in the *Beis Midrash* on Chanukah. It is essential that at this moment for us to appreciate the critical importance of the *Beis Midrash*. These past couple of months have required a very public-facing type of advocacy, and it's necessary today to be out there publically and forcefully to advocate for our people and for Israel against antisemitism. I, together with our students, have been doing that work and we will continue. But the anchor of everything that we do is here in the *Beis Midrash*, because everything that we do begins in the *Beis Midrash*. Everything we do as a yeshiva, everything we do as a university, and everything we do as individuals. We understand clearly what *Chazal* has taught us (*Avos* 3:17): a tree without roots cannot be easily toppled, but a tree with deep roots can withstand the torrential winds of the times. We are only forward-focused because we are deeply rooted.

Talmud Torah and the *Beis Midrash* are our anchor, but they are more than that—they are also our source—our source, our strength, and they give us meaning. This has always been true, but it is especially true *now*.

Just before Chanukah, I was learning with my daughter a piece

from the *Nesivos Shalom* that I think expresses this point. The *Nesivos Shalom* writes that there are two *Yamim Tovim* that revolve around the number 8, and they parallel one another: Shemini Atzeres and Chanukah. Both are *bechinas shemona*, but there is a fundamental difference between them. *Shemini Atzeres* is the peak of the *Yamim Tovim/Yamim Noraim* experience. It's the finale of all our efforts and all of the closeness that we have fostered with Hashem. It comes after Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkos, and the end of the *Shalosh Regalim*. We are the height of our spiritual powers. While Chanukah is also 8 days, nevertheless it represents something quite different.

The *Nesivos Shalom* explains it with a *mashal*. Imagine a king with 2 sons. One son is extraordinarily successful— everything he touches turns to gold; he's well-liked and put together, content, social and joyful. The other son however, is broken, vulnerable, struggling. A *ben hamutzlach* versus the *ben hamushpal*. The first is a prince among people, the second struggles to participate in the daily affairs of the kingdom. Which son is more beloved by the king? Of course, he loves both equally. He is deeply proud of the *ben hamutzlach*, but it is the *ben hamushpal* that pulls at the king's heart and brings out his compassion. The king personally goes to the room of the son who struggles, to give him encouragement and strength. The king personally goes to tuck in the blanket of this son to keep him warm. It's wonderful for the *ben hamutzlach*—life coming so easily—but the parent is drawn to the child that struggles.

Shemini Atzeres is the climax of the entire *Yamim Noraim* period, it is when we are at our highest, at our most spiritual selves. It thus represents the *ben hamutzlach*. The Chanukah, however, is in the

darkness. It's when it is difficult to see the light, when we are enshrouded in this cold wintery day. It's when we are struggling and feel turmoil and suffer. The lesson of Chanukah is one that during these moments Hashem comes even closer. He places the blanket over His people on this cold night. He ensures that we are safe, and He looks over us specifically in times of darkness. When we are broken, we are at our strongest, because we become even closer.

I think this is a moment, on Chanukah, during which we can reflect on the closeness of this time, and on the parallels of the *ben hamutzlach* versus the *ben hamushpal*. Think back to before October 7th, when we started Shemini Atzeres, and compare it to where we are today. I was in Yerushalayim at the beginning of Shemini Atzeres. It was a great moment; I walked around with my sons in Yerushalayim. We were dancing in the *hakafos*... it was a magnificent end to the *chag* of Sukkos. And then, the next day, we woke up and went to shul. Suddenly, the world changed. Tragically, we were thrown from the heights, from the *ben hamutzlach* to the *ben hamushpal*.

We are all challenged. We are all mourning. Every single person in this room either knows someone or is one degree of separation from someone who was murdered, taken hostage, or killed in the line of duty, in just these past couple of months. We lean on each other for strength and support. We are closer to Israel. We have responded so powerfully and forcefully every day with our *tefillos* and our learning and with all of the activity that we do in support of *acheinu kol Beis Yisrael* and of *Medinas Yisrael*. This is a moment of our own, when we feel closer to the Jewish people as a whole and we have become closer to Hashem. Who else do we lean on? *Anachnu maaminim bnei*

maaminim! It's in our brokenness as the *ben hamushpal*, that we recognize that Hashem is by our side, placing the blanket upon us.

I want to tell our *bnei yeshiva*, that this moment in time presents us with an enormous opportunity. Jews today have their hearts open like no other time in recent Jewish history, probably since the Six Day War. The Jews today have rediscovered their Jewish identity. Jews throughout this country and the world understand that they are connected to something greater. That they feel closer right now to the source. It's not just as a response to antisemitism and hate, but rather it's about people searching for an authentic connection to their identity. Hashem is calling out to us. People feel it, and you—my dear students—are uniquely capable of leading the way.

I was recently in conversation with an alum who is now in the business world. He told me that at the beginning of Chanukah he had a business meeting in Atlanta. He was sitting in the boardroom with the CEO, and during the break, the CEO came over to him and started talking to him about Chanukah and his childhood memories. He wasn't even aware that the CEO was Jewish. But when you walk into a boardroom with the kippah on your head, you draw out other people. You're a magnet. They will come to you to connect with themselves. They will speak in Hebrew and talk to you about Chanukah. They are looking to you to lead. Not just against antisemitism, but with a positive proactive message of what Judaism stands for.

One of the great expressions of Yeshiva University and our students' leadership was the rally. I don't think people know this. It wasn't just that all of our students attended the rally, which was the

largest representation of an institution in the country—which was in addition led by our Roshei Yeshiva who not just encouraged people to go but went to the rally themselves, teaching Torah all throughout—but lesser known is the following story. When they called for this rally, they didn't know if anyone was going to come. The organizers were worried that it was going to be a *chillul Hashem*, because the worst thing to happen would be to call a rally and then only tens of thousands of people show up. And then we canceled classes. The organizers of the rally will tell you that the reason why close to 300,000 people came is because Yeshiva University came. When the organizers heard that we canceled, they cheered, and they started telling all of the other *yeshivos*, day schools, synagogues—of all denominations—that Yeshiva University canceled their classes. That is the moment that is credited as the source of the rally's success—because the country was led by our Roshei Yeshiva and our leadership, to express the importance of Israel and standing for *acheinu kol beis Yisrael*.

The world today has also seen the moral bankruptcy of higher education. A couple of days ago, I was interviewed by a journalist from Forbes, and she asked me “Rabbi, can you tell me about the core Torah values?”. I've been waiting 5 years for a journalist to ask me that question! She asked me this, because people are searching, and they see that institutions of higher education that are revered in our society are actually morally bankrupt, and they are turning to Yeshiva University to understand what it means to have an education that is inspired and fueled by core values. “What are these values, Rabbi?” They are turning to us, and Hashem is closer to us now. We have an opportunity, not just to fill the airwaves by speaking against

antisemitism, which should be so obvious, but more than that, to actually speak about what we stand for.

When I started as the president of YU, I went to a conference for new University presidents at Harvard. During one of the breaks between the sessions, the presidents were discussing one of their great challenges: when do they step in when their faculty says something that is over the line? And they told these stories about faculty saying really troubling things. They decided that they can step in when a faculty member calls for active violence against someone else. That's when they thought they could step in. And I said to them: "Let me ask you something. You're all talking about negative freedom, about what you can stop, but what about positive freedom? Why are you here? What is the purpose of your university? What are you trying to teach? What are your values?" After that comment, all throughout the conference, the presidents kept on referring back to "remember when Ari asked 'why are we here?' 'What's the goal?'" The world is seeing what happens when there is no purpose and no mission, and the value of having values that are driven by the Beis Midrash, where everything is fueled by Torah.

During this period, we become even closer. Closer to each other, closer to *Medinas Yisrael*; we are even closer to Hashem, and Hashem has drawn closer to us. And my *bracha* at this time—on Chanukah this year—for *Am Yisrael*, is not just that the Jewish people should see a speedy victory—those in Israel fighting against Hamas and those in the United States fighting against antisemitism. But even moreso, my *bracha* is that we use this time to come closer to our Source—for each of us as individual *ovdei Hashem* and for all of us as a

Yeshiva—and to use our *kochos* to illuminate the world. *Ve'ahavta es Hashem*, the Gemara says, *she'tihe'ei Hashem mis'aveiv al yadecha* (*Yoma* 86a), that the name of G-d will become more beloved through you. We are the wick, the Torah is the oil. Go and light the world, with our core values, with the Torah, with the *mitzvos*, with the loving spirit of Hashem. For when we do that, we will not just celebrate the *nissim* and the *nifla'os* and the *milchamos*, but we will all also celebrate the *geulah sheleimah*, may it come soon.

A Responsum Regarding Colleges and Universities Which Condone Support for Hamas

Rabbi Mayer Twersky

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The Question

The pivotal question of attending secular college has in the past two months been recast. Previously the question centered (primarily but not exclusively) upon the alarming rate of assimilation. Alongside that life-and-death consideration, a new factor (relevant to many but not all secular colleges) has emerged: the deplorable (in)action and (lack of) speech of university/college presidents in reacting to pro-Hamas demonstrations on their campuses and, more generally, all forms of vile antisemitism. Is it permissible for our children to seek admittance to a college or graduate school whose administration has refused to condemn student groups who justify, and even celebrate, the October 7 atrocities of Hamas? Is it permissible to teach in these institutions?

Background and Context

To be clear, the question arose before the three university presidents testified before Congress, and thus is not limited to those three schools. Their disgraceful, “contextual” response to calls for genocide against Jews was pure evil, but neither new nor revelatory. It

merely magnified their (and other presidents') initial reprehensible reaction. Hamas' avowed goal is genocide; the unspeakable atrocities of October 7 were intended to advance that murderous goal. And thus, supporting Hamas and their actions unambiguously supports genocide. Accordingly, in their refusal to condemn student groups who identified with Hamas and justified and even celebrated their atrocities, the presidents had already condoned calls for genocide. Their brazen congressional testimony merely underscored the evil. Whereas previously they spoke non-verbally ("Not to speak is to speak"), in their testimony they articulated their previous, non-verbal speech.

Invoking the First Amendment protection of free speech as a defense for allowing calls for intifada and genocide is an obvious sham. No campus would tolerate a call to lynch Blacks, or any other racial or ethnic group. And rightly so. Allowing calls for genocide and intifada has nothing to do with free speech and everything to do with monstrous evil and vicious hatred.

The university presidents, in allowing the student calls for intifada on their campuses, were guilty of an even greater evil than the students themselves. An insight provided by our Sages in the context of *lashon hara*, "evil speech", illuminates this point. *Lashon hara* can kill (*Arachin* 15b), and "One who accepts the *lashon hara* bears more responsibility than the one who spoke" (vide Rambam *Hilchos Deios* 7:3 and *Avodas Hamelech* ad loc.). One who speaks *lashon hara*, if ignored, is powerless and harmless. His evil speech would simply reflect badly upon himself. *Lashon hara* becomes toxic when validated by its audience.

Had the university presidents acted morally, and immediately, unequivocally condemned the students' words and actions, they would have helped to disarm these evil, antisemitic forces. The students would have been dismissed as ignorant, immature, impetuous rabble-rousers. Instead, by condoning the student support for genocide, the university presidents legitimized and mainstreamed their murderous words. The magnitude of their evil becomes apparent when we reflect upon one of the most chilling lessons of history: speech, which goes unchallenged, segues to action.

The Relevant Halachic Principle

Having sketched some of the background and context we (re-)turn to our query as to the *halachah* concerning colleges and universities which have condoned celebrations of the October 7 atrocities and calls for genocide.

Attending a (non-sectarian) college does not entail identifying with any ideology. It is akin to shopping in a supermarket which sells kosher and non-kosher items. Patronizing the store does not *eo ipso* endorse everything sold. So too, attending a university does not *eo ipso* endorse everything taught.

There is, however, another consideration. When a Jew denigrates himself in the public square, he is *mechallel es Hashem*, profanes the name of G-d. The Jewish people are Hashem's chosen (*Shemos* 19:5-6; *Devarim* 7:7-8, etc.), and He identifies Himself with them (*Bereishis* 17:7, *Yerushalmi Ta'anis* 2:6 [*harei ani mishatef Shimi Hagadol bahem veben chaim*]; *Beis Halevi*, *Bereishis* 46:3, et al.). Accordingly, when a Jew publicly denigrates himself, as it were, he

denigrates Hashem.

The Talmud presents this prohibition of self-denigration in the context of accepting charity. One is not allowed to do so in the public square if he has any other recourse. By gratuitously accepting alms before the eyes of the world, he denigrates himself and thereby the Jewish people. This constitutes a *chillul Hashem* (*Sanhedrin* 26b with Rashi s.v. *ochlei davar acher*. See also *Nimukei Yosef* ad loc. and *Shach, Yoreh Deah* 254:1). If, however, he has no other recourse, he is permitted to publicly accept the charity. It is not denigrating to do what is necessary for one's livelihood (This would appear to be the understanding of Rashi, Rambam, *Yad Ramah* and even *Nimukei Yosef*. Meiri dissents, but his opinion is not relevant because *ab initio* he does not follow Rashi's interpretation which is the source of the prohibition.).

Applications and Implications

The prohibition of self-denigration, while presented in the context of accepting charity, is clearly operative in other contexts, such as ours, as well.

Many colleges have condoned demonstrations justifying, and even celebrating (*sic* sick!) the Hamas atrocities of October 7. They have either implicitly or explicitly accommodated support for genocide. Our children's future livelihood or professional opportunities do not in any way depend upon their attending these undergraduate schools. Accordingly, for our children to gratuitously apply for the "privilege" of attending such schools is the height of obsequiousness. It is difficult to imagine a more egregious form of

self-denigration. We are effectively proclaiming, “You can condone and even celebrate the torture, rape, beheading and immolation of our brothers and sisters, and yet we will still seek the “privilege” of attending your school.” Such obsequiousness! Such self-denigration! And, thus, applying to and attending these schools is unquestionably a *chillul Hashem* (*a fortiori* from publicly accepting charity.). Politically motivated back-pedaling, cagey “clarifications” and hollow expressions of regret are worthless. A change of administration and direction are needed. Barring those changes, it will remain a *chillul Hashem* to attend any of these colleges.

Providing for one’s livelihood, however, is not denigrating and thus teaching in these schools is permissible, as per the Talmudic distinction above. Additionally, the professor-university relationship is bilateral, and its bilateralism dispels obsequiousness; such bilateralism, however, does not exist within the student-university relationship.

The propriety of applying to a graduate school under the aegis of these universities is more nuanced. The dispensation of pursuing one’s livelihood may be relevant. If there is no comparable program in terms of training or professional advancement in an unsullied university, it would be permissible to apply. Additionally, in some instances graduate schools have forged an identity uniquely their own, independent of their parent school. In such instances, arguably, the position of the university administration does not reflect upon the school. This angle requires careful consideration and further thought.

Appendix

The *halachic* designation of self-denigration and

obsequiousness as forms of *chillul Hashem* remarkably converges with the *halachos* of *kiddush Hashem*, sanctifying G-d's name, and *chillul Hashem* as they are expressed in martyrdom. The obligation of *kiddush Hashem* at a time of governmental persecution, according to Rambam (*Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah* 5:3), includes sacrificing one's life to fulfill a *mitzvas asei*, positive commandment, even though he may be forcibly prevented from doing so. This underscores that the obligation of *kiddush Hashem* is not the fulfillment of the *mitzvah per se* but the heroic resoluteness and steadfastness (not capitulating to persecution).

Evil's Fifth Column

Rabbi Mayer Twersky

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Western Civilization is imploding.

The lifeblood of the victims had not yet cooled. Civilized people of conscience were still reeling from shock at the savage slaughter of babies, beheading, burning people alive, kidnapping, torture, and rape gleefully perpetrated by Hamas. In that very moment the moral turpitude which is destroying Western Civilization was on full display. Various groups, notable amongst them student groups, issued vile, Faustian statements exonerating Hamas for its savagery and brazenly blaming its victim, Israel, for the carnage. Some university presidents immediately responded; reprehensibly, they generically condemned violence, careful not to single out or even reference Hamas. Others, after an initial sickening silence, prevaricated. Upon days of public pressure and contemplation, they decided that, in fact, they were opposed to beheading babies but hastened to “balance” their tepid remarks by expressing profound concern for the suffering of the innocent Palestinians in Gaza, thereby implicitly or explicitly condemning Israel’s humanitarian, self-defense response to subhuman, belligerent savagery.

Notably, these “humanitarians” do not comment on the fate of

⁷ https://www.torahweb.org/torah/special/2023/rtwe_evil.html

Arab populations outside of Israel as they languish under brutal, dictatorial regimes. Tellingly, these academic “moralists” have been silent throughout the years as Hamas has integrated its terror network into the civilian infrastructure, inter alia, shielding themselves in, behind and beneath hospitals, schools, and residential complexes. When other countries have exercised their inalienable right to self-defense (think of any just, modern war) we have not heard a chorus of voices expressing concern for civilian casualties and invoking the laws of war. And rightly so. Should Hitler or Osama bin Laden or ISIS be given carte blanche because of the grim, gruesome, tragic reality that even defensive wars inevitably involve civilian casualties? Should terrorists remain forever free to continue massacring innocents because they cruelly and cynically imbed themselves amongst the civilian population? Civilization cannot and would not survive such a hypocritical policy of “restraint”.

Every person of conscience intuitively feels that outright support for Hamas or camouflaged support in the form of moral equivocation are odious. Nonetheless, it is vital that we translate our precognitive intuition into cognitive categories as that will reveal the existential threat which Hamas’ apologists pose to civilization.

“The species of man is unique, there is no other species that resembles him in this respect, that he, of his own accord through his own understanding and contemplation, can discern good and evil and act as he wishes”, writes Maimonides, the great medieval jurist and philosopher (*Hilchos Teshuva* 5:1). Humanity is divinely endowed with a capacity for moral clarity. And, in turn, that moral clarity forms the basis for moral action. The civilized world can only combat forces of

evil such as Nazism, ISIS, al-Qaeda, and Hamas with such moral clarity. Moral clarity marshals the necessary resolve to exercise military might and vanquish evil. Without moral clarity and resolve, military firepower will never be directed to vanquish evil. The evil of explicit “moral” support for Hamas, or support camouflaged in equivocation and equivalences, is that it destroys moral clarity. Clearly, this form of evil is not academic; it reeks blood. By destroying moral clarity, it erodes moral resolve and dissipates opposition to evil. It perniciously acts as evil’s fifth column. Evil’s fifth column - the students, professors, administrators, and their co-conspiratorial ilk beyond academic circles - has and continues to provide moral cover for the atrocities of Hamas, empowering them to continue their savagery and barbarism.

Undoubtedly, rabid antisemitism animates the fifth column. In antisemitic quarters, Jewish blood is of no value and Jewish self-defense is a war crime. Nonetheless, the fifth column poses a universal threat. This is so morally because the beheading of babies, the fiery immolation of entire families, torture, and rape etc. constitute crimes against humanity. And this is so pragmatically because the Hamas beast, if allowed to torture and devour the Jews, will then turn its sadistic, predatory, murderous attention to all Westerners and “infidels”.

Hamas, along with all other “pure, unadulterated evil” terrorist organizations, needs to be militarily destroyed. But that can only happen if the hypocrisy and evil of its fifth column is peacefully exposed and defeated. Every Jew and all other people of conscience must participate in this noble, non-violent effort to restore moral clarity. Educators, philanthropists, university board members, college

bound students and their parents, heads of corporations, essayists, political pundits and activists, et al., and voters on both sides of the political aisle - each acting within their respective domains with moral clarity - must join forces. (Fortunately, some individuals and corporations have already taken initial steps in that direction.) The future of the Jewish people demands that effort. And the future of civilization depends upon it.

War and *Geulah*

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

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Rav Kook would sometimes speak about *aschalta d'geulah*. Several *Rabbanim* from Hungary would attack him in their essays in the Hebrew newspapers, arguing that this notion doesn't make sense - either you have *Geulah* or you don't have *Geulah* - why did Rav Kook invent a new concept of *aschalta d'geulah*. The truth of the matter is that the expression "*aschalta d'geulah*" appears in the Gemara. The Gemara states that *milchomos* (wars) are an *aschalta d'geulah*. The Chasam Sofer wrote in his diary that there was a period of time that the city of Pressburg was under siege in the middle of a war. The war had nothing to do with the Jews or with *Eretz Yisrael*, and nevertheless the Chasam Sofer understood the Gemara as saying that all wars in the world are *aschalta d'geulah*. He considered this idea as a *halachic* concept and said and wrote that one is not permitted to *daven* that the war should end because you are, in effect, slowing down the process of the *geulah*. One might have thought that only a *navi* or one who has *ruach hakodesh* could determine that any given situation is an *aschalta d'geulah* but the Chasam Sofer did not require such a condition.

Many years later, during World War I, a suggestion was made that the *Rabbanim* should be *gozer a ta'anis* and everyone should

⁸ https://www.torahweb.org/torah/special/2023/rsch_wargeulah.html

daven that the war should end. The *Minchas Elazar* (the Munkatcher Rebbe) dedicated a *teshuvah* to this issue and gave two reasons why he was opposed to the idea: first, it only makes sense to declare a *ta'anis tzibbur* if there is a reasonable possibility that the *tzibbur* will do *teshuvah*, and at that time that seemed highly unlikely. Second, he quoted from the Chasam Sofer's diary that all wars in the world are *aschalta d'geulah* and it is highly improper to slow down the process of *geulah*.

Rashi, in his commentary on the Gemara, does not seem to agree with the position of the Chasam Sofer. Rashi understood that a war regarding who is the *ba'al habayis* of *Eretz Yisrael* which the Jews win would be considered an *aschalta d'geulah*. In order to determine what should be considered an *aschalta d'geulah*, we have to first establish what the definition of *geulah* is. The Ramban writes in his introduction to *Sefer Shemos* that *Sefer Bereishis* is all about the three beginnings: the beginning of the world, the beginning of mankind, and the beginning of the Jewish nation. By the end of *Chumash Bereishis*, we have been introduced to the *avos* (Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov) and the twelve *shevatim*. *Sefer Shemos* then focuses on the first *galus* of the Jewish people, and the *geulah* therefrom. Then the Ramban raises an objection to this characterization: the Jewish people don't return back to *Eretz Yisrael* until after the death of Moshe Rabbeinu when they crossed over the Yarden river under the leadership of Yehoshua bin Nun; not only does the story of the Jewish people entering *Eretz Yisrael* not appear in *Sefer Shemos*, it does not appear in the *Chumash* at all! How can we describe the theme of *Sefer Shemos* by stating that it deals with the first *galus* and the *geulah* therefrom if the returning to

Eretz Yisrael only takes place in *Sefer Yehoshua*? The Ramban explains that the main tragedy in *galus Mitzrayim* was not so much that the Jews were in *chutz la'aretz* but rather that they did not have any *hashra'as hashechinah*. During the lifetime of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, the *Midrash* states that the *avos* were like the *merkava*; they had a *hashra'as hashechinah*. By the time we get to the end of *Sefer Shemos*, we have read the four *Parshiyos* of *Teruma*, *Tezaveh*, *Vayakhel* and *Pekudei* which all deal with the construction of the *Mishkan*, and the *hashra'as hashechinah* in the *Mishkan* is considered the *geulah*. It would appear that the Ramban understood that when the Gemara says that the first *geulah* took place in Nisan and the *geulah asida* will also take place in the month of Nisan, the first *geulah* being referred to is not *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, rather it is *hakamas hamishkan*. During the first twelve days in the month of Nisan, the *Nesi'im* of the twelve *shevatim* brought special *korbanos* for the purpose of *chanukas hamishkan*, and in the end of *Sefer Yechezkel* we read that when the third *Beis HaMikdash* will be built we will bring special *korbanos* for a period of six and a half months, starting from *Rosh Chodesh* Nisan and continuing until after *Sukkos*.

When *Medinas Yisrael* was established in 1948, the Chazon Ish had already moved to *Eretz Yisrael*. In the biographies of the Chazon Ish, it is quoted that he said at that time that this is the end of the *galus* but we still have not experienced the *geulah*. Many thought that this was some type of double talk. My impression is that the Chazon Ish is using the concepts that the Ramban developed: since you have a Jewish government controlling *Eretz Yisrael* all the Jews from all over the world were welcomed to come to *Eretz Yisrael* and that was considered

the end of the *galus*. But one only has a *geulah* when you have a *hashbra'as hashechinah* with a *Beis Hamikdash*.

Once we define *Geulah* as *binyan Beis Hamikdash*, then *aschalta d'geulah* would refer to some other events that are going to lead up to the building of the *Beis Hamikdash*. The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (20), quoted by the Rambam in the beginning of *Hilchos Melachim* (1:1), states that there are three *Mitzvos* that have to be fulfilled in a specific order: establishing a Jewish government controlling all of *Eretz Yisrael*, wiping out the nation of Amalek, and building a *Beis HaBechirah* (a.k.a. the *Beis Hamikdash*).

During the period of the second *Beis Hamikdash*, the *Chachamim* added on many *yamim tovim d'rabbanan* that revolved about major donations to improving the structure of the *Beis Hamikdash*, the *hakravas hakorbonos*, and the institutions of *Kebulah Gedolah* and *Sanhedrin*, both of which are connected to the *Beis Hamikdash*. All of these *Yamim Tovim* are listed off in *Megillas Ta'anis*. Rashi in his commentary on the Gemara explains that this *sefer* was known as a *megillah* because it was already written down before the Mishnah and the Gemara were permitted to be written down. The Gemara in *Rosh Hashanah* (18b) states that it is not proper to establish a Yom Tov after the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* because it does not conform to the definition of *Megillas Ta'anis*. The commentaries on the Gemara therefore raise the issue: how did *Chazal* have the right in the first place to establish the Yom Tov of Purim? According to the Gemara's tradition, the story of Purim took place towards the end of the seventy years of *Galus Bavel* when there was no *Beis Hamikdash* at

all. According to the *Pri Chadash*, establishing a Yom Tov that has nothing to do with the *Beis Hamikdash* would be a violation of *bal tosif*!

The *Nesivos* (Rabbi Yaakov Loberbam *Ed.*), in his commentary on *Megillas Esther* (*Megillas Sesarim* 9:19), suggests that the *Chachamim* in that generation felt that on the occasion of *neis Purim* this was an *aschalta d'geulah*, i.e. that this would certainly lead to the building of the second *Beis Hamikdash*. Why so? He explains that Haman is described in the Book of Esther as an Amalekite, and when Haman and his whole crew were put to death, that was *mechiyas Amalek*, which is step two of the *mitzvos* that lead to the building of the *Beis Hamikdash*. Like the Chasam Sofer, the *Nesivos* also assumed that *aschalta d'geulah* is a *halachic* concept that carries with it *halachic* consequences.

Soon after *Hakamas Hamedinah*, the German government offered reparations money to the State of Israel. At that time, many members of the Knesset felt it to be unethical to accept such money because that would imply that the slaughter of the millions of Jews will all be forgiven by this payment. At that time, Rav Soloveitchik spoke for the Mizrachi in New York and brought out two points: 1. he would tend to agree with that position that we have no right to imply that all is forgiven, and 2. he heard from his father that any nation that adopts as a policy to wipe out the entire Jewish people has the status of "Amalek" and as such it should not be permissible to take the money from the German government; just as Shmuel Hanavi instructed Shaul Hamelech that he must not take anything from Amalek, so too

throughout the generations one is not permitted to take anything from Amalek even if, for example, it is only a fraction of the money that the Nazis stole from the Jewish people. At that time, some of the relatives of Rav Soloveitchik who lived in *Eretz Yisrael* let it be known that they did not agree with Rav Soloveitchik. They pointed out that the Rambam in *Moreh Nevuchim* (3:41 s. v. *u'mima she'b'kalal osam*) seems to assume that only those that are biological descendants, *ben achar ben*, from the original Amalekites have the status of Amalek. When this position was publicized, some *Talmidei Chachamim* in America pointed out that Rav Yisrael Gustman had mentioned a conversation that he had with Rav Chaim Ozer in the middle of the Second World War. Rav Gustman asked Rav Chaim Ozer what the *halachic* status of the Nazis is, and Rav Chaim Ozer responded that he would tend to agree with the other *gedolim* in that generation that the Nazis should probably be considered like Amalek.

In *parshas Beha'aloscha*, the Torah instructs us that when there is a war in *Eretz Yisrael* we have a Mitzvah to blow *Chatzotzros*. The Rambam in the beginning of *Hilchos Ta'anios* (1:1) understands that to mean that there is a special *mitzvah lizok u'libari'a*, i.e. to offer special *tefillos* on the occasion. The Chasam Sofer in his diary wrote that during that war that he experienced in Pressburg, they recited *Avinu Malkeinu* every day. Even on Chanukah, when we don't say *Tachanun*, we still ought to recite *Avinu Malkeinu*. On Rosh Hashanah, we don't say *Tachanun* but we do say *Avinu Malkeinu*. Most probably, the correct time to say *Avinu Malkeinu* after *Shacharis* should be right after *Chazaras Hashatz* and before *Hallel*. A *talmid chacham* from Lakewood pointed out that in the *Siddur Otzar*

Hatefillos right before *Avinu Malkeinu*, appears an explanatory paragraph quoting several *Acharonim* who point out that the entire *Avinu Malkeinu* is based on the nineteen *Berachos* of the weekday *Shemoneh Esrei*. Let us all continue to offer our *Tefillos* that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* fulfill His promise that he will wipe out Amalek and that He strengthen the hands of *Tzahal* that they should be able to fulfill the *mitzvah* of wiping out Amalek and that this war should lead to the final *geulah*.

Prayer, Faith, and Initiative: The Ideal Response to Crisis

Rabbi Michael Rosensweig

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Upon encountering Pharaoh and his army as they approached the *Yam Suf* in the aftermath of their triumphant and miracle-suffused exodus from Egypt, the Torah (*Shemos* 14:10) reports that *Bnei Yisrael* panicked and burst into “*tze’akah*”:

ופרעה הקריב וישאו בני ישראל את עיניהם והנה מצרים נסע
אחריהם ויראו מאד ויצעקו בני ישראל אל ה'

Surprisingly, Moshe was advised (*ad loc.* 14:15) that this response was either inappropriate or inadequate and that a more active and pragmatic policy was demanded:

ויאמר ה' אל משה מה תצעק אלי דבר אל בני ישראל ויסעו

The apparent rejection of prayer is puzzling, particularly in a time of evident crisis. Even the Ramban (*Sefer Hamitzvos, Asei* 5), who disputes the Rambam’s codification of a daily imperative of prayer (see also *Hilchos Tefillah* 1:1-2), acknowledges the obligation in times of crisis (based on *Bamidbar* 10:9). Moreover, given the preeminence of prayer in Jewish life and thought as a critical facet of *avodas Hashem* (*Ta’anis* 2b and Rambam, Ramban *Sefer Hamitzvos op. cit.*), any

⁹ https://www.torahweb.org/torah/special/2023/rtwe_rally2.html

proposal to even curtail supplication-petition is unanticipated. Yet, the Torah evidently registers a critique of “*tze’akah*” in an acutely challenging historic moment in the development of *Am Yisrael*. What are the implications of this unanticipated reaction?

According to some *mefarshim*, there is no implied limitation of prayer in this context. Onkelos renders “*tze’akah*” as “*uzeiku*”, not a reference to prayer, but simply a cry that is an expression of fear:

ופרעה קריב וזקפו בני ישראל ית עיניהון והא מצראי נטלין בתריהון
ודחילו לחדא וזעיקן בני ישראל קדם ה'

Ibn Ezra (*ad loc.*) even understood the term as a signifying a cynical complaint, connected with “*hamibli ein kevarim b’Mitzrayim*”. The Ramban (14:10-12) posits that the term is intentionally ambiguous, reflecting a divided population (citing *Mechilta d’Rabbi Yishmael, Beshalach 3 s.v. ki asher re’isem- “arba’ kitos na’asu le’Yisrael al hayam*”), those who appropriately turned to prayer during this crisis, and those who improperly lashed out with accusations that Hashem summarily dismissed. [He develops this perspective by noting the different usages of “*Bnei Yisrael*”- those engaged in real *tefillah*, and “*Am*”- the group that were terrified and accusatory. He notes that in the aftermath of “*veyisa’u*”, the Torah (14:31) declares: “*vayiru ba’am es Hashem, vayaminu baHashem uv’Moshe avdo*”, reflecting the spiritual progress it engendered!] [See also the Sforno’s view that Hashem was critical only of one dimension of Moshe’s prayer that may have reflected criticism of *Am Yisrael*.] These views presumably further affirm the efficacy and propriety of authentic prayer, as they dismiss the more unvarnished meaning of the

Torah's words as inconceivable. The difficulty persists, however, according to the *Mechilta*, Rashi, and other *mefarshim* who identify "tze'akab" with actual prayer.

At the same time, Rashi's contribution illuminates the ideal crisis posture, refining the role of prayer. While Rashi, citing the *Mechilta* (*Mechilta d'Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai* 14:10 and *Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael*, *Beshalach* 3 s.v. *yayir'u me'od*) - "*tafsu umanus avosam*" - does identify "tze'akab" with prayer, he explains that prayer alone may occasionally be inadequate:

למדנו שהיה משה עומד ומתפלל, אמר לו הקב"ה, לא עת עתה
להאריך בתפלה, שישראל נתונים בצרה

This is true particularly when it is possible to take additional concrete steps to resolve or alleviate the calamity, or to address the spiritual challenge. In these circumstances, failure to augment *tefillah* with the appropriate *hishtadlus* (substantive effort) may constitute overindulging in prayer, possibly undercutting its authentic character and also jeopardizing the efficacy of prayer itself. *Tefillah* as a primary vehicle of *avodas Hashem* and an indispensable spiritual response and mechanism in times of crisis needs to be consistently integrated with broader *halachic* commitment and the concrete actions that reflect and facilitate it. Exclusive reliance on prayer may also project an excessive supernatural focus that detracts from the appropriate normative, philosophical, and theological facets that stand at its core. Ramban, in his introduction to *parshas Vayishlach*, discussing Yaakov's paradigmatic spiritual strategy confronting Esav, famously invokes the midrashic triple formula of *tefillah* (prayer), *milchamah* (warfare), and

doron (gifts, also akin to diplomacy-political influence). This multifaceted approach certainly did not diminish the prayer motif. Likely, it enhanced it.

The integration of “*veyisa’u*” was additional to but possibly also the ideal culmination of *Klal Yisrael’s tze’akah* of *tefillah*. In this context, it may have been a prescription to deepen their profound faith in Hashem, well beyond the sense of dependence implied by simple petition. The *Meshech Chochmah* (*Shemos* 14:15), interpreting the *Mechilta*, posits that this charge entailed that *Am Yisrael* would seize the initiative in this demonstrative act of *emunah*, that Moshe would specifically bring up the rear. Perhaps the projected “*veyisa’u*” as a way of furthering and consolidating national faith in Hashem, culminating in “*vayaminu ba’Hashem uv’Moshe avdo*” (14:31) further validated the promise of “*Hashem yilachem lachem, veatem tacharishun*” (14:14), understood by the *Mechilta* (*Mechilta d’Rabbi Yishmael* 2:6 s.v. *Hashem Yilachem*) as a broad future commitment, perhaps even when undeserved (see *Meshech Chochmah* 14:14):

ה' ילחם לכם ואתם תחרישון: לא לשעה זו בלבד ילחם אלא לעולם
ילחם, כנגדן של אויביכם.

Moreover, the ambiguity of the term “*tze’akah*” may convey not only diverse populations as Ramban proposed, but also a complex prayer posture that reflected both an appropriate mix of anxiety and dependence on Hashem’s providence, as well as a problematic expression of panic and desperation bordering on *yeiush* - helplessness. The latter may have been particularly inappropriate given the background of miracles reflected in the exodus and the specific Divine

commitment unequivocally conveyed through Moshe (as noted by Ibn Ezra and others). Rav Sa'adiah Gaon translates "*vayiza'aku*" (14:10) in a manner that suggests that the Torah intentionally utilizes this term that equally communicates a loud cry of anguish and a sober prayer for salvation. Onkelos (14:15) interpolates into his rendering of Hashem's rejection of further "*tze'akab*" the fact that their prayer had already been accepted. Confidence and faith in Hashem, alongside exclusive reliance on Divine providence and personal humility, are elemental features of *avodas Hashem*, and particularly prominent in the structure and content of "*avodah shebalev zu tefillah*" (*Ta'anis* 2b).

The need to inculcate faith and confidence was particularly challenging but also acutely vital at this stage in *Am Yisrael's* national evolution. As Ibn Ezra notes (14:13), *Am Yisrael's* panic at *Yam Suf* ensued despite their numerical superiority at this juncture and notwithstanding the explicit Divine assistance that enabled them to extricate themselves from Egypt. Yet, when they encountered Egypt and Pharaoh, they were psychologically paralyzed as they confronted their longtime masters. This despite their apparently proud departure (14:8), a temporary assertion of confidence and dignity also depicted by Ibn Ezra (14:8):

ובני ישראל יצאים ביד רמה: לא יצאו כדמות בורחים והיה עמהם כל
כלי המלחמה

The prescription of "*veyisa'u*", in conjunction with appropriate prayer, was crucial to neutralizing this posture of obeisance and cultivating a measure of national strength, dignity, faith and confidence required at this critical historical moment (albeit that

would only be fully achieved according to Ibn Ezra's analysis by the next generation that entered *Eretz Yisrael*). Thus, "*vayosha Hashem bayom habu es Yisrael miyad Mitzrayim*" (14:30). Ibn Ezra (14:30), acutely sensitive to this theme, emphasizes that the authentic salvation and redemption from Egypt that transcended the physical freedom achieved days earlier occurred only in the aftermath of "*veyisa'u*" and the miracle of *kerias Yam Suf* that it engendered. It was this profound faith experience, initiated by "*veyisa'u*" in the aftermath and as a necessary augment to prayer that fostered national confidence and dignity, true salvation:

עתה היו ישראל נושעים מיד מצרים כי עד עתה היה עליהם פחד
המלך וכתוב כי המצריים טבעו בים

We, too, are living in very challenging times, confronting dangers and disappointments that engender anxiety and uncertainty. The security situation in *Eretz Yisrael*, the tragic losses that we have endured and continue to suffer, the venom of global antisemitism, the callous attitude of presumed friendly nations, the grotesque journalistic misrepresentations of facts and contexts have left us reeling. Thankfully, we have been able to find much solace, inspiration and guidance in intensified prayer. At the same time, the need for appropriate *bishtadlus*, "*veyisa'u*" as expressed by "*lo eis atah leha'arich batefillah* (exclusively), *sheYisrael nesunim batzara*"- financial support, political activism, volunteerism- to augment intensified *tefillah* has never been more obvious. Even as we focus on these appropriate normative responses, we should be mindful of the other facet of "*veyisa'u*", the need to deepen our sense of faith in Hashem and confidence in the destiny of *Klal Yisrael*, never to descend into despair

or panic. We need to fortify ourselves by further appreciating and immersing ourselves in the principles and values that define our national core essence. In that way, we will surely be deserving of the continued Divine providence and promise, encapsulated in the aforementioned *Mechilta*:

לא לשעה זו בלבד ילחם אלא לעולם ילחם, כנגדן של אויביכם.

Doresh Tzion

“In that spirit, we turn to our generation’s *gedolim* to help us understand the current challenges we are facing and to gain *chizuk* from their lessons and their strength. We are proud and pleased to share these lessons with you at the Dor L’Dor program, which celebrates the transmission of the *mesorah* from one generation to the next.”

(From the Foreword)



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