

Tzav: Shareholders in Israel

Moshe Taragin

The guidelines surrounding the *Mishkan* korbanot and rituals were repeated twice. The first round of instructions parshat Vayikra, was directed to the rank and file, while a parallel list in parshat Tzav, was commanded directly to the Cohanim. Even though the general population wasn't directly involved in the *Mishkan* ceremonies they were still handed their own list of instructions. Hashem wanted every person to feel individual agency over the *Mishkan* experience, so that the *Mishkan* would not become an impersonal and heavy institution. Maintaining the dignity and sanctity of the *Mishkan* demands that only trained priests officiate in the daily ceremonies. If the *Mishkan* turns into a freeway with everyone independently ad-libbing, it loses its transcendence and gravitas. Restrictiveness is vital to the *Mishkan*, but it was still crucial that every Jew possessed agency and was personally invested in this house of Hashem, else it would become detached, bureaucratic, and irrelevant.

Similarly, everyone was invited to the inauguration of the *Mishkan*. The induction of the *Mishkan* was launched with a seven-day vigil, known as the week of milu'im, during which the Cohanim could not leave the precincts of the *Mishkan*. During this intense period, they practiced the various korbanot and rituals, so that they would become proficient once the *Mishkan* opened for business. Additionally, the seven-day vigil afforded the Cohanim time to mentally prepare for this solemn project. Though only Cohanim were directly involved in the seven-day vigil, the entire population was invited to attend its opening ceremonies.

From a purely logistical standpoint it was challenging to fit three million people into the *Mishkan*. Yet, despite the technical obstacles it was important to include everyone in the milu'im experience so that the average Jew, who wasn't a priest, would not feel sidelined by the large and rigidified *Mishkan*. By inviting everyone to the gala inauguration, everyone was given agency, and all felt personally invested in the project. We became shareholders in the *Mishkan*, not spectators.

Agency in Israel

Traditionally, Israeli citizens felt deep agency of their country. Israel was a new country, still in its embryonic stages and still forming its social, political and religious identity. Living through the early chapters of the modern state of Israel was deeply meaningful, as we were conscious about forging something new. Compulsory national service provided every Israeli with a seat at the table and an individual role in defending the country and in enriching daily life. National service provided us with a high engagement level in the affairs of our country. If Israelis were known to be vociferous and politically contentious it was because they possessed ownership and agency of their country. Sometimes too much ownership, but ownership none the less.

Shifting Away from Agency

As life in Israel shifted, our individual agency diminished. There was a pocket of about thirty years during which our country experienced spectacular and dizzying growth, as we transformed into a global economic powerhouse and a military superpower. Our fledgling little country had arrived on the grand international stage. We became fabulously successful, but the country felt less personal, and more institutional. Our heimish little country transformed from a "little engine that could" into a colossal superpower.

As Israel became large and seemingly self-powered, we started taking her for granted. We assumed that the country was stable enough and secure enough to run "on its own". As we lost personal agency in day-to-day experience, life in Israel felt more humdrum and less meaningful.

Restoring Agency

October 7th reversed this trend. Having been plunged into an existential war, we were forced to take greater agency over the future of our state. The sound of our revitalized agency echoed in the exhausted voices of soldiers who battled in Azza for months, while separated from their families and professions. Declaring their firm intention to pursue this battle to its conclusion, they defiantly announced: "If we don't protect our homes who will?". The October 7th massacre stripped away any

illusion that our country is self-powered, and that day reminded us that each Israeli citizen has a personal stake in Israel.

While national identification with government institutions runs low, patriotism and enthusiasm for our security forces runs high. This will dramatically affect the future political map of Israel, but for now, is a reflection of how empowering personal agency can be. The government is an "institution", while our security forces are everyone one of us.

During this war our entire country has served a modern "milu'im" and it hasn't been for only eight days. For five months, teachers, hi-tech executives, doctors, lawyers, shopkeepers, men, and women have kept a sacred vigil protecting our homeland from violence. And it hasn't been merely a practice session for the real show. Everyone has served side-by-side defending our country, and tragically and too often fell in battle together. If we don't defend our homeland who will? If we don't build this country who will?

Despite the immense sadness and heart-breaking tragedy of the past five months, they were filled with meaning and soulfulness. It turns out that personal agency and becoming directly involved is not just a more effective policy, but is also more meaningful. For the past five months we have been tired and anxious, but have been filled with meaning and magnitude.

International shareholders

The war has also provided agency to Jews who reside outside of Israel. They too, took the state of Israel for granted. As flights to Israel proliferated and hotels multiplied it became easier than ever to land in Israel for a few days, enjoy the people and the food, visit family and the Kotel and jet back to regular life. Fortunately, tourism became a booming industry, and traveling to Israel was no longer a pilgrimage.

Older readers still remember the crowded and suffocating old airport at Ben-Gurion. It wasn't pleasant to arrive at, but the second you landed you immediately knew you were in Israel. The heat, the smell and the cramped lines left no doubt. When the modest terminal was, thank God, replaced by the current modern and shiny airport, landing in Israel

became similar to landing anywhere else. Once pilgrims, Jewish visitors to Israel now became tourists.

Restoring Agency Abroad

Over the past few years, it has become clear that Israel is no longer something which any Jew can take for granted. The shift in mentality began during the corona pandemic when, for a few months, the doors of our homeland were closed to non-Israeli citizens due to health concerns. The unexpected and new reality, that their homeland was no longer just a few hours away was jolting for many. Of course, two years later the savage attacks of October 7th further recast the relationship between non-Israeli Jews and the state of Israel by reminding everyone of just how fragile and sometimes dangerous life in Israel still was.

During the past five months visits to Israel have been very different from the vacations of the past. Shopping and restaurants have been replaced by volunteerism and trips to charred remains of communities in the South. Jews traveling to Israel have, once again, become pilgrims rather than tourists. Tourism is a luxury while pilgrimages are personal, and provide us with agency.

The war has reminded every Jew, both Israeli and non-Israeli, that they are shareholders Israel and not external spectators. The country isn't self-powered but dependent upon us. The war has restored our agency.

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