

Free Speech:
Blessing or
Burden?

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SOLOMON JOURNAL

is a premiere outlet of young Jewish American journalism on serious, relevant topics. The journal brings together Tikvah's emphasis on lofty ideas with the impact of genuinely held beliefs, refined and articulated in a concrete way.

Solomon Journal is proudly Jewish, proudly Zionist, and proudly defends Western Civilization. We take positions on both current and perennial questions from this broad vantage point, acknowledging all the while that robust discussion and debate and not doctrinal purity are at the heart of the Jewish, Zionist, and Western traditions.

We believe that arguments matter but that they must be deployed in the service of the morally good and noble, not the deconstructive or subversive. At a time when the worlds of politics and culture are plagued by moral confusion and systemic doubt, we need to provide something more nurturing, something more bracing and clear.

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Letter from the Editors

We are excited to present the 2026 Winter Issue of the Solomon Journal! As editors-in-chief, we are honored to contribute to a student journal where ideas are explored and shared. However, the production of this journal is a collective effort. We are incredibly grateful to Mrs. Sarah Baird, Dean of the Solomon Fellowship and Director of the Solomon Journal, whose contributions and guidance were indispensable in the creation of the issue in your hands. We also want to thank our dedicated editorial team for their diligence and professionalism. Most importantly, we would like to thank our writers, who took time out of their busy high school lives to create a piece of writing and share it with the world. Thank you for letting us play a small role in showcasing your voices.



Throughout our years participating in Tikvah seminars and conferences, we were able to engage with diverse philosophies and worldviews, pushing us to deepen our thinking and challenge our assumptions. Our goal as editors-in-chief is to create a written meeting place where our peers in the Solomon Fellowship can debate new ideas while strengthening their own voices as young Jewish leaders.



As we bring this issue over the finish line, we are increasingly aware that the values Tikvah has nurtured in us—particularly the importance of free expression, the meaning of language, and the merits of debate—are all rapidly deteriorating in our American public square. Bombarded on all sides by cancel culture, anti-intellectualism, and a staggering rise in political violence, the principles that shaped both the Western and Jewish traditions are at risk. What happens when a society ceases to engage in good-faith disagreements and discards their most fundamental civic commitments? How can we, as American Jews, work to restore a culture of respectful dialogue and meaningful debate? We tasked our writers with exploring these questions in the issue's Symposium and we are excited to present several viewpoints on this topic.

In a similar vein, we present our new Debate section for the first time in this issue. Just as the Symposium asked, "What role can American Jews play in restoring civil discourse in the country?", our new section invited Solomon Fellows to debate another timely question, that of English language proficiency as a citizenship requirement. Speech and language, civic responsibility and an awareness of the changing times—these are contours of our social and political reality and navigating this landscape will not be an easy task. However, difficulty does not absolve us of action; it demands that we young Jews participate more actively in the public forum, meet disagreements with openness and curiosity, and treat the discussion of *ideas* as a civic and Jewish responsibility.

Also new to the Solomon Journal is the introduction of Hebrew poetry and articles. We believe that Hebrew enables American Jews to participate in the global Jewish conversation, both in Israel and across the diaspora. We aim to provide an intellectual forum for our peers to utilize their Hebrew language skills as a form of "Jewish citizenship."

To our readers—we hope that you enjoy contemplating the ideas our writers put forward in this issue, but more importantly, we hope that you take it as inspiration. As you read the journal, we encourage you to grapple with our writers' ideas, disagree with them, and synthesize them with your own. Then, afterwards, we hope that you go out into the world and initiate conversations, because only through dialogue, one human being conversing with another, can we attempt to restore the rich culture that our American democracy was founded upon.

Cordially,
Rachael Kopylov and Benny Marmor
Editors-in-Chief of the Solomon Journal

Symposium



Free Speech: Blessing, Burden, or Both for American Jews?

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

Is free speech, as guaranteed by the Constitution, an absolute good, or can unrestrained expression erode the safety of minority communities in the United States? How should American Jews balance their commitment to liberty with the need to defend themselves in an increasingly hostile public square? What role can American Jews play in restoring civil discourse in the country?

Upholding the First Amendment While Safeguarding Jewish Communities

By Gabriella Davis

There is no question that unrestricted free speech has placed Jews around the world in great danger, particularly since October 7th. Protests with thousands shouting, “From the River to the Sea” and “Intifada Revolution” are clear calls for the extermination of the Jewish people. Yet, as Jews, we have never shied away from vigorous debate. The liberty guaranteed by the First Amendment is not only integral to free societies, but it also allows us to practice Judaism freely. By limiting where and when protests can take place and by providing adequate security, our government can uphold the First Amendment and safeguard Jewish communities.

Our country was built on the ideal that free speech is integral to a free society; as Jews, we must preserve the right to free speech while protecting ourselves from the potential consequences of hateful rhetoric.

Recall the horrific attack in Sydney, Australia in December 2025. Two Islamist terrorists murdered fifteen attendees of a Chabad Chanukah celebration. Since October 7th, the Australian government has been increasingly hostile towards Israel and has allowed antisemitism to fester unchecked. Who can forget the chants of “Gas the Jews!” in the streets of downtown Sydney, or the screams of “dirty Jews” and “baby killers” in Melbourne? The links between such hostility and the slaughter of innocent Jews on Chanukah are not so tenuous.

As American Jews, the prospect of hateful

speech in the public square is as worrisome as it is real. The mayor of America’s largest city, Zohran Mamdani, being well-known for his thinly veiled antisemitic and anti-Israel beliefs, is cause for serious concern. But we cannot remain frozen in fear; instead, we should remind the public of our right to free assembly and self-defense.

First, as a practical matter, we must ensure that the government provides our communities with sufficient security. Reports indicate that there were only two police officers present at the Bondi Beach attack; this force was clearly inadequate. While our synagogues have armed guards and Community Security Service chapters (comprised of volunteer congregants), the state must provide personnel and equipment to meet the needs of every Jewish institution.

Second, and more importantly, demonstrations or incitement calling for the death of Jews, Israel, or the IDF should not be permitted within a defined perimeter around Jewish institutions—synagogues, schools, community centers, and so forth. Recently, Nefesh B’Nefesh held an event at Park East Synagogue in New York, and the city allowed anti-Israel agitators to protest just steps from the synagogue. The proximity of the virulent hate speech to Park East should never have happened, and we must advocate for laws that establish buffer zones around synagogues where protests are prohibited.

Third, we should encourage debate among young people. The internet enables unchecked lies to spread. We must gain a



firm understanding of Jewish history so that we can educate others about our religion and relationship to the land of Israel. One of the worst misconceptions after October 7th was that when people attacked, vilified, and slandered the State of Israel, it was not a direct attack on Jews. Israel is part and parcel of our religious identity. The fact that antisemitic attacks have spread widely throughout the world since October 7th makes it plain that there is no distinction between Zionists and Jews. We are one people.

Further, the state must enforce its laws. Protests should be required to obtain permits before congregating to prevent death threats to Jews at our synagogues and schools. If they can't produce permits, the protestors should be arrested. Moreover, we should ban protesters from wearing masks that conceal their identities. Protesters are more likely to engage in violent rhetoric and behavior if the public cannot identify them. Nassau County, New York, already has such a law, the Mask Transparency

Act, enacted in 2024, and upheld despite civil liberties concerns.

The Jewish people have benefited greatly from the rights to religion and free speech in Western nations. While we are living in challenging times, we must remember that only in a free society can we ensure our Jewish existence. Our Western ideals must be maintained, but that does not mean that we cannot fight the hateful discourse and stand up for ourselves amidst growing hatred.

Gabriella Davis lives in Teaneck, New Jersey and attends Yeshivat Frisch.

The Price of Free Speech

By Akiva Levine



I was standing in line at an airport in Amsterdam when a man behind me noticed my kippah and said, “Free Palestine.” There was no discussion. No debate. No conversation about politics or war. He was not trying to persuade. He was speaking directly to me. In that moment, my Jewish identity alone placed me inside a global political conflict that I had not chosen to enter.

I kept walking, telling myself that this was free speech. I believe in free speech. I still do. But the moment stayed with me. The principle I was defending felt incapable of defending me. I realized something that the classical liberal advocates of free speech often overlook: speech does not always function as an exchange of

ideas. Sometimes, it functions to target a person because of who they are.

Freedom of speech is one of the central promises of American democracy. It is premised on the notion that the people, not the state, are the legitimate source and judge of ideas. While this concept has limits (as Justice Robert Jackson understood, “The Constitution is not a suicide pact”), its boundaries do not guarantee citizens’ comfort. Jews do not just theorize about, but live, this principle. Our tradition treats disagreement as a way to pursue truth rather than a distraction from it; *machloket l’shem shamayim*, or “argument for the sake of heaven.”

Nations that allow open debate have done more than merely tolerate Jews; they have preserved us. During the twentieth century, American Jews relied on the First Amendment to fight discrimination. Lawyers challenged university quotas that limited Jewish enrollment. Journalists exposed antisemitic housing practices. Activists pressured the American government to respond to the Holocaust, and later, to the persecution of Soviet Jews. These efforts were not successful because Jews were popular or powerful, but because they could organize and confront authority without fear of violent retribution.

The historical contrast between the United States and Europe is significant. In Nazi Germany, antisemitism became deadly when free speech disappeared. Once the state decided which ideas were allowed, Jews lost the ability to organize, publish, or legally resist. Censorship left German Jews completely exposed, and then almost completely annihilated. History demonstrates that defending speech, even when it is reprehensible, is safer for Jews than allowing governments to regulate it. When Jews lose the right to speak freely, they also lose their ability to protect themselves.

When George Orwell wrote that “if liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear,” he was not defending the legitimacy of hatred; he was issuing a practical warning. Minority groups are the first to suffer when the government becomes the final arbiter of acceptable expression. The lesson is straightforward: free speech does not always benefit Jews, but losing it opens doors to the threat of far greater harm.

This understanding of free speech as a guard against state abuse shaped Jewish responses in 1977, when neo-Nazis wanted to march in Skokie, Illinois, a town in which many Holocaust survivors lived. Jewish lawyers at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) defended the Nazis’ right to demonstrate. They recognized the power of precedent and set aside their disgust toward the demonstrators. If the government could ban hateful speech today, it could ban Jewish speech tomorrow. The

emotional cost was severe, but the long-term danger of censorship was greater.

Today, defending the First Amendment has become more difficult as vile slander against Jews and Israel has noticeably increased. Criticizing the Israeli government is not inherently wrong, but many hold Israel as the ultimate symbol of evil on the world stage. Hannah Arendt cautioned that Israel could come to be “the Jew among nations,” judged by standards applied to no other state. Many critics today overstep policy questions and challenge Israel’s fundamental legitimacy.

As a result, free speech about Israel often affects Jews whether or not that is the speaker’s intention. In theory, the speaker is criticizing a government. In practice, Jewish listeners often hear something else: that their history is illegitimate, their peoplehood questionable, and their identity conditional. Jean-Paul Sartre observed that antisemitic language is often used “not to persuade, but to intimidate.” Today, political slogans frequently cross that line.

This dynamic is especially visible on American college campuses. The chant “From the river to the sea!” is commonly yelled in the faces of Jewish students. Libelous posters appear overnight, depicting Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu as a bloodthirsty, horned demon. Jewish studies classes are interrupted by protestors. Jewish students weigh whether wearing a kippah, walking through crowds, or participating in seminars is worth the risk of harassment. We have increasingly observed what happens when political vitriol becomes part of daily life for a generation of Jewish students.

For many Jews, free speech has now begun to feel like a cudgel antisemites use against them. While other groups may describe words as violence, Jews are often told that the same speech against “Zionists” is simply for the purpose of debate or education. This dynamic creates tension. Speech cannot be defended only when it is convenient but pretending that bigotry and slander of Israel are harmless is dishonest. Discourse shapes norms. When slogans frame Jewish political self-determination as

criminal, Jews inevitably face interpersonal and institutional exclusion.

It is understandable for Jews to want limits on speech, but the answer is not censorship. What American Jews need now is not less, but better speech. We need universities that maintain the safety of their students without appointing themselves the arbiters of acceptable thought. That requires care, clarity, and seriousness. It also requires confidence from Jews themselves.

We must speak without apology, refusing both silence and reactive outrage.

I think back to that moment in the Amsterdam airport and to the chants echoing across Columbia's campus. I still regard free speech as one of America's greatest moral achievements.

***Akiva Levine** lives in Memphis, Tennessee and attends Margolin Hebrew Academy.*

Beyond AB 715: Jewish Dignity and Free Speech

Simcha Rosenberg

Since the Founding, Americans have strived to build a system powerful enough to protect citizens from abuse without becoming one that itself abuses power. After the Revolution, many Americans were wary of tyranny. They first tried a weak national government, and it failed; the country struggled to raise money, enforce laws, and unite over common causes.

The founders then redesigned the system, strengthening the federal government while adding guardrails: separate branches meant to check each other and a written promise that certain rights would not be up for debate. That promise became the Bill of Rights and its First Amendment: a bold bet that a free society could survive even when people say ugly things. Right now, California public schools are testing that bet.

In October 2025, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed AB 715, a law aimed at preventing and responding to antisemitism in K–12 public schools. Among other measures, the law mandates the creation of a statewide Office of Civil Rights, employs an Antisemitism Prevention Coordinator, and utilizes the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism (which includes Israel-related antisemitism) to address harassment against Jewish students in California public schools.

Almost immediately, critics filed a lawsuit, arguing that the law was too vague and will

inevitably censor classroom speech, especially around Israel. This fight has become familiar in contemporary American politics: one side argues for increased accountability and enforcement against antisemitism, while the other worries about stifling meaningful and legally protected discussion.

It is tempting to treat the issue as a simple choice between free speech and safety, but the real question is deeper. Jewish students need institutional support against antisemitism. Dignity and respect are not perks; they are baseline expectations for learning in an American public school. At the same time, a strategy for protecting Jewish students that relies on fear and punishment will prevent what these students need most: a genuine sense of belonging.

With ongoing geopolitical tensions in Israel and the parallel rise in antisemitism at home, many Jewish students feel isolated and lack a sense of belonging in public schools. Many report feeling like they have been put in the spotlight amidst the constant focus on Israel in the news and on social media. In this charged environment, Jewish students have often become prime targets for bullying and harassment. Can the instigators use “freedom of speech” as an excuse to say hateful things without consequence?

It is the responsibility of a public school to protect the dignity and safety of every student. That is why a statewide response to antisemitism in public schools feels necessary at this moment. The passing of AB 715 in California is a strong



signal that antisemitism in schools is seen as a real civil rights issue and not something that can be ignored or quietly managed.

But there's another side to this debate: what does the law mean for protecting freedom of speech, and by extension, for American democracy? Many people believe that the law contradicts the deeply held American right to free speech. They perceive the law as too broad and vague, failing to give meaningful guidance on what students and teachers can and cannot say. Whether the law intends this or not, it could ultimately have a chilling effect on school learning at large. Students may opt for silence, robbing the classroom of authentic discourse. Teachers may avoid teaching the topic of Israel altogether, opting to skip this sensitive territory out of fear that it may lead to an investigation. If every discussion about Israel and what it means to be Jewish is treated like a potential legal case, students may learn to trust each other less. These are all legitimate concerns.

While the law in California was intended to protect Jewish students, it does not create the sense of belonging that Jewish students actually seek. Rules can prevent people from acting in a certain way in public, but they can't change how people feel or correct biases. Rules can discourage and punish obvious harassment, but they won't make Jewish students feel relaxed about wearing a kippah or Star of David necklace in school. A law like this might ultimately breed more resentment and suspicion towards the people it aims to protect, treating Jewish students like pawns in a global argument rather than real people.

The real work is to identify and implement a more nuanced approach, one that distinguishes harassment from debate without chilling free speech. Instead of blanket laws, faculty should be trained to identify antisemitism in stereotypes, scapegoating and blaming Jews as a group. This broader understanding would be more effective than just banning a list of words.

Teachers should support controversial debates in the classroom, but with firm guidelines: use evidence, criticize ideas without attacking people, and never hold students responsible for the actions of governments.

America was built on the delicate balance between equal protection and liberty, and we still live with this tension every day. While the First Amendment protects speech, educators in American public schools have a responsibility to teach their students how to use that freedom

without turning it into a weapon. AB 715 may seem like a necessary law to guarantee Jewish students some measure of safety, but guardrails alone cannot create belonging. The real work is building a culture where American students can debate hard issues honestly, while maintaining the dignity of all students.

Simcha Rosenberg lives in Surfside, Florida and attends Hebrew Academy (RASG).

Lessons on Free Speech from the Hebrew Bible

Orly Berenson



Although the concept of free speech did not originate in America, America's commitment to free expression is what makes this country exceptional. Jews are familiar with the power of speech; the Tanakh is full of references to it. The Hebrew Bible teaches us that God created the world through speech: "God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). Human beings, created in the Divine image, similarly possess the ability to speak, with the enormous responsibility that comes with it.

The Jewish tradition understands that speech is a unique gift that can destroy as easily as it

can create. Leviticus commands, "Do not go around as a gossip among your people, do not stand by the blood of your neighbor" (Leviticus 19:16). The Torah instructs us to use our voices for the good, and to confront injustices where and when we see them. The First Amendment similarly reflects this value when it says that we as American citizens have the right to "petition the government for a redress of grievances." According to American law, when we see something wrong in our society, we are allowed to dissent.

American law permits us to protest, and Torah law obligates us to speak out against

wrongdoing. How should we balance condemning injustice with preserving the well-being and safety of others?

The answer lies in the verse above. God simultaneously commands us to speak and not to speak; to advocate against injustice, but also to refrain from harmful smears. Jews must understand that speech is not good in and of itself. Much of the speech that the First Amendment legally protects is detrimental. The Torah offers more than a commandment; it provides a warning: do not remain silent at the plight of your fellows, but do not allow your speech to lead to harm. We must exercise the unique power we are given with care. Our words can create, but they can also destroy; the verse ends with a final reminder that God is watching.

To ultimately assess whether the First Amendment is an “absolute good,” we must recognize that although we are capable of speech, sometimes it is best to restrain ourselves in the interest of our fellow citizens. The American Jewish community is well acquainted with this tension. We publicly oppose antisemitism because, as the Tanakh indicates,

it is unacceptable to merely stand idly by their spilled blood. However, those who slander the Jewish people enjoy the same freedom to speak as we do, and their lies lead to real acts of violence. For American Jews, free speech is both a blessing and a burden: a blessing because it allows us to defend ourselves, and a burden because enemies of the Jewish people can use the same tools against us.

“Death and life are in the hands of the tongue” (Proverbs 18:21). Every individual has tremendous power. While some people choose to incite hate and violence with their speech, others, especially minority communities, can use their own freedom of speech to advocate for themselves. Although free speech can enable hate and violence, it also allows minority groups to help repair civil discourse. American Jews can engage this task by rooting our speech in both Torah and democratic ideals.

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Welcome to the Farm: All Equal, All Betrayed

By Claire Ambinder Kanner

“**S**ocialism only works in two places: Heaven, where they don’t need it, and Hell, where they already have it.” That was Ronald Reagan at his finest, using humor not as a rhetorical flourish, but as a warning about human nature, reminding us that systems built on utopian intentions fail when applied to imperfect human beings. That warning feels newly relevant in New York City.

When Mayor Zohran Mamdani speaks about the “frigidity of rugged individualism” and the “warmth of collectivism,” he is not merely being poetic. He is making a moral judgment, one that reveals a dangerous misunderstanding, not only of economics, but of human nature and of history.

Calling individualism “frigid” suggests that personal responsibility is cruel, while calling collectivism “warm” suggests that moral worth comes from belonging rather than action. This framing is appealing, but backwards. Individualism is not frigid; it is demanding. It assumes that we can make choices and live with the results. Individualism does not promise comfort or equality of outcome, but it does promise something more valuable: accountability. What Mamdani describes as “frigidity” is simply exposure to reality, to the fact that despite our efforts we don’t always succeed and that intentions do not erase consequences.

In contrast, collectivist dogma is comforting because it tells people that failure is systemic rather than personal. Your disappointment is injustice; your resentment is insight. The warmth is real, but it comes from being told



that nothing meaningful will be asked of you in this life. Those who choose collectivism are not confused; they are consciously rejecting accountability. When judgment is treated as oppression, standards cannot survive. Achievement becomes embarrassing because it implies merit. Expertise becomes suspect because it reveals that its holder has made tradeoffs. Failure becomes virtuous, because it serves as evidence that one has not benefited from a “rigged system.” In this environment, moral certainty replaces competence, and conviction replaces capability.

Mamdani appears to fully embrace this worldview. His praise of collectivist “warmth” does not ask whether collectivism works, it asks whether it feels humane. The economist Friedrich von Hayek explained why this

approach always ends badly: “Through the inevitable mismanagement of resources and goods at the disposal of the state, all forms of collectivism lead eventually to tyranny.” Not all collectivist leaders start as tyrants, but central control suppresses feedback. Force replaces adjustment when mistakes cannot be discussed or corrected. Ludwig von Mises, another free-market economist, was even more blunt: “Socialism is an alternative to capitalism as potassium cyanide is an alternative to water.” Capitalism transmits information through prices, failure and success. Collectivism cuts those signals. The result is breakdown in the name of good feelings.

America’s founding principles oppose this collectivist ideology. “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” does not mean comfort, assurances or protection from failure. Happiness is the freedom to use one’s time, talent, and resources to build a meaningful life—one that benefits family, supports community and ensures the prosperity of future generations. But this vision requires discipline and effort, the hallmarks of adulthood. Calling this moral framework “frigid” is not compassionate, rather, it demonstrates resentment toward responsibility.

Supporters of Mamdani insist that his vision is driven by empathy, not communist ideology. But the results of these policies are always the same. As Argentinian President Javier Milei has explained, “The impoverishment produced by collectivism is not a fantasy, nor is it an escapable fate.” Argentina is proof of this: decades of collectivist policy produced runaway inflation, stagnation, and decline. Venezuela tells a similar story, as did the Soviet Union, and countless other smaller experiments. The pattern never changes; in collectivist systems, reality always pushes back, and blame, rather than self-correction, ensues.

Unfortunately, there are still many people who believe that America will somehow avoid

this clear historical pattern. This attitude has particular consequences for Jewish people whose life is built around law, obligation, learning and continuity, not around state power or ideological conformity. Jewish survival has always relied on a profound sense of personal responsibility focused on formal education, family structure, community discipline and moral agency, even in the face of injustice. This makes Jewish existence inconvenient for collectivist thinking. Collectivism insists that systems determine outcome. Jewish history contradicts that claim. It shows that agency matters even when the system is hostile.

This is why collectivist movements so often drift into antisemitism. Jews, they say, are privileged and insufficiently aligned with the collectivist cause, and they are portrayed as standing in the way of moral progress with their insistence on law, boundaries, and particularity. Mamdani’s political rhetoric feeds this logic when he claims that individuality, a core Jewish value, is something that must be overridden. When “warmth” is the highest virtue, law, obligation, and particularity become tools of cruelty. History has taught Jews to recognize this pattern early, because they have paid the price for it repeatedly.

The real choice facing America is not between cold individualism and warm collectivism. It is between responsibility and excuses, between standards and sentiment, between adulthood and dependence. Mamdani chooses slogans of warmth over harder truths. Americans should understand the cost of that choice. Warmth cannot run a country. Accountability can. When nations abandon accountability, history is very clear about who suffers first: everyone except those who control the levers of power.

Claire Ambinder Kanner lives in New York City and attends *Lycee Francais de New York*.

How the Assassination of Charlie Kirk Broke the Conservative Movement in Two

By Gabriel Haron

Charlie Kirk's assassination in September 2025 sent shockwaves through the American conservative movement. Tributes poured in from all sides of the Republican political spectrum. Whether it was constitutional conservatives like Ben Shapiro or populist influencers like Tucker Carlson, everyone stopped in their tracks and briefly united in their grief. Unfortunately, this harmony was short-lived. Rather than unify the Right, Kirk's murder laid bare the tensions that had long been simmering beneath the surface of the political right wing. A growing divide emerged between those who sought moral clarity and truth in the aftermath of a public assassination of a beloved and influential activist, and a conspiratorial movement driven by increasingly charged rhetoric. Kirk, who was only thirty-one years old when he was assassinated, founded Turning Point USA (TPUSA), arguably one of the most influential political organizations in American history. Although his mission lives on, the millions Kirk inspired are at a crossroads. As his movement has now split in two, and with no guiding figure to lead the pack, the Right faces a defining question: will it anchor itself in principle and moral truth, or plunge into a storm of conspiracy that could tear it apart from within?

Just days after Charlie Kirk's passing, the commentary from well-known populist figures,

particularly Candace Owens and Tucker Carlson, revealed how wide this fracture had become. Rather than focusing on verified facts, both leaned into suspicion of government agencies, with Owens outright accusing the government and other shadowy actors of murdering Kirk. She has repeatedly stated on her show, "We don't trust the feds," while claiming that federal agencies operate at the behest of Israel. Meanwhile, at Kirk's memorial, Carlson alluded to a group of unnamed "powerful people" that murdered him, just like they killed Jesus in Jerusalem while "eating hummus." Though Owens and Carlson like to say that they are "just asking questions," both are propagating deeply misleading narratives that are grievance-driven and laden with antisemitic tropes. In doing so, they have shifted attention away from accountability and toward conspiracy, replacing clarity with insinuation when restraint and truth are most needed.

For Ben Shapiro and his constitutionalist allies on the other side of this divide, Kirk's death was not an opportunity for spectacle; he made every effort towards unity with the populists until it became clear it was time to pick a side. At AmericaFest 2025, TPUSA's marquee event, Shapiro directly criticized those who knowingly disseminated misinformation and conspiracies, declaring moral clarity and truth to be the definitive markers of the Republican



party. Though many of his detractors argued that Shapiro was trying to restrict his opponents' freedom of expression, he asserted that not all ideas are created equal, and some warrant rejection rather than engagement. Ben Shapiro's response marked a clear attempt to draw ideological boundaries within the movement, and to distinguish intellectually dishonest speculation from moral truth.

The chasm between these two sides has widened into a raging ideological battle, as conservatives struggle to confront a small but vocal minority energized by the passions and conspiracy theories promoted by figures like Owens and Carlson. However, this current landscape is not without precedent in American

history. The founders navigated this kind of factional conflict and sought to address it in the Federalist Papers, the precursor to the American Constitution.

In Federalist Number 10, James Madison offers a notably relevant framework for understanding the contemporary post-Kirk rift. He claimed that political groups driven by passion, as opposed to reason, posed a serious danger to Republican governance, no matter how small this faction might be. He stated that even ideas only adopted by a minority have ripple effects that warp public discourse.

However, it's not simply Madison's diagnosis that is interesting, it's his solutions. Madison rejected the idea that the people should attempt

to uproot factions. He believed that they are inevitably a fundamental component of human nature. Instead, Madison believed that the solution to radical factions was to control their effects by increasing checks on power, thereby impeding their spread. Without institutional or moral constraints, Madison warned, even marginal factions can distort public discourse and destabilize republican order.

When Charlie Kirk was alive, he functioned as a moderating force precisely in that Madisonian sense. He provided a bridge between populist principles and constitutional conservatism, without allowing either side to metastasize into ideological extremism. Without him, the risk is clear and rapidly materializing in our faces. A faction in which antisemitic speech goes unchallenged cannot be allowed to drag the conservative movement down with it. Those who choose to peddle conspiracies should

be curbed before America descends with them. Charlie once proved that unity without ideological compromise was possible; he was a charismatic leader who cannot be replaced. To unite once more, conservatives must decide which ideological boundaries are inviolable and find common cause with those committed to a moral direction for the movement. The namesake of Charlie Kirk's organization rings increasingly true: America is at a *turning point*, and it's up to the people to reject the path of conspiracy in favor of a path of truth and decency.

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State of the Nation: Debate



Should English proficiency be a requirement for U.S. citizenship?

*Rachael Kopylov, Solomon Burgess Eisenberg,
and Liad Geldwert weigh in.*

Citizenship and the English Language: A Pragmatic Perspective

By Rachael Kopylov



“**C**itizenship is the common thread that connects all Americans. We are a nation bound not by race or religion, but by the shared values of freedom, liberty, and equality,” declares the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). While these “shared values” are meant to unite Americans across background and country of origin, their interpretation is often mired in ideological debate. Instead, a functional immigration process should set practical standards to determine who is eligible to participate in American civic life; one of these standards must be basic English

proficiency. This is a pragmatic policy that will strengthen civic participation and serve both the nation and its newest citizens.

Section 312 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) was passed in 1952. It set the core English and civics requirements for naturalization, mandating that applicants must demonstrate the ability to read, write, and speak basic English, and possess knowledge of U.S. history and government, all tested through a naturalization exam. This exam was intended to ensure that new citizens can function

independently and meaningfully participate in society just as just as American-born citizens do.

This active participation in civic life is at the core of citizenship itself. When someone becomes a citizen, they assume the responsibility and privilege to vote, interact with the legal system, and engage in public discourse. These responsibilities depend on a citizen's ability to understand and communicate with the institutions that govern them. Ballots, jury instructions, court notices, and other governmental communications are mainly recorded in English, making proficiency a practical necessity rather than a symbolic identity marker. Without the ability to speak, understand, and read English, citizens struggle to exercise their rights and meet their civic obligations, limiting their capacity to participate in the democratic process meaningfully.

Beyond civic engagement, English skills affect economic success. According to census data, English proficiency and job market success are positively correlated. The degree to which a person can communicate in English influences their ability to find full-time employment. Even among those with full-time jobs, individuals with the highest English proficiency have the highest earnings. Immigrants who can read, write, and speak English can pursue training programs, promotions, and leadership opportunities, while those without these skills often remain in low-wage positions with limited opportunities for advancement. English fluency shapes long-term economic mobility and economic independence—a core tenet of the American Dream.

While English proficiency promotes civic and economic participation, the current naturalization requirements do not effectively assess the critical skills they were intended

to measure. Currently, USCIS officers have significant discretion when evaluating speaking and comprehension exams. That means that even if a person can read, write, and speak English well, the interviewer can still deny their application based on subjective judgment. Proficiency is not consistently measured, undermining the effectiveness of the requirement.

Moreover, the exam does not test applicants' practical skills. Instead, test-takers read and write sentences about American government and history, and verbally respond to questions about their citizenship applications. While these tasks ensure a formal assessment of English, they do not test the competencies one needs to navigate the United States as a citizen. To meet the goals of the English proficiency exam—full social and economic integration—the evaluation should prioritize functional communication skills over rote memorization of terms.

The English language is the practical means by which Americans are bound by their shared values. It is the bridge that allows new citizens to move confidently through American life. While fluency is a high bar that can take years to achieve, proficiency is foundational for meaningful societal participation, and it's an attainable goal for newcomers. By emphasizing real-world skills and a realistic timeframe for developing proficiency, the English requirement can accomplish its proper aim: to prepare individuals to not merely reside in society, but to engage, contribute, and belong fully to the American project.

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English Proficiency Is the Wrong Measure of Citizenship

By Solomon Burgess Eisenberg



Over the last year, Congress has pursued several efforts to raise the level of English proficiency required for naturalization. These efforts, coupled with changes the executive branch made to the citizenship test that toughened the English proficiency requirement, move our citizenship laws in the wrong direction. Requiring English proficiency for citizenship is fundamentally unjust, unwise, and inconsistent with the values that the United States claims to uphold. Rather than raising the English proficiency requirement for citizenship, America should eliminate it entirely.

Citizenship is not a mere legal designation or passport; it makes someone a stakeholder in American society. A citizen is afforded unique rights and protections but is expected

to contribute to our nation through hard work, civic participation, and social responsibility. Naturalization is a form of quid pro quo: citizens contribute meaningfully to society and, in return, receive various social and political privileges. Those who strengthen our economy, culture, and society should not be denied citizenship. There are countless immigrants who toil tirelessly and contribute to our shared prosperity. When we refuse citizenship to those who add substantial value to our country on the basis of language proficiency, we fail to uphold our end of the social contract, taking unfair advantage of others' work without providing the benefits that American citizenship confers.

English proficiency does not select for good citizens; it selects for those fortunate enough to have been born in an English-speaking country

or wealthy enough to afford English-language instruction. Even among immigrants from non-Anglo countries, the requirement produces stark inequalities. Germanic and Romance language-speakers benefit from shared linguistic qualities with English, whereas speakers of languages like Japanese, Mandarin, or Hindi have to adjust to an entirely new vocabulary and grammatical structure.

Moreover, linguistically proximate nations are generally far more culturally similar to the United States than those with dissimilar languages. When we bias our selection in favor of immigrants from these countries, we risk narrowing—rather than enriching—the cultural breadth of our nation’s citizenry. America’s greatness derives from the principle that no

matter your background, if you work hard, you can achieve success. In enforcing a requirement profoundly influenced by accident of birth, we betray this principle.

Recent changes to naturalization standards reveal a troubling trend of bolstering unnecessary and exclusionary barriers to citizenship. We, as citizens of a nation built on the pillars of democracy, must recognize this is fundamentally at odds with the ideals that underlie the United States.

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The Language of Exclusion

By Liad Geldwert

Language can both unite and divide, and an English-language proficiency requirement in the US citizenship process risks exclusion rather than inclusion. Requiring English for citizenship ignores important historical realities, undervalues immigrant civic contributions, and diminishes America's multilingual past.

The history of the United States shows that English language has never been the sole marker of belonging. Many regions were multilingual (and multicultural) long before English became the dominant language. European immigrants, Indigenous tribes, and slaves shaped the founding and spoke a variety of languages and dialects. In California, Texas, and the Southwest, Hispanic Spanish-speaking communities have deep roots; these regions were at the center of the Mexican-American War and were crucial to the development of the country as we know it today.

Despite America's multilingual beginnings, we must grapple with a parallel history of coercion and exclusion. In the early 19th century, the Jackson Administration forcibly removed Native Americans from their lands on the Trail of Tears, and assimilation policies sought to eliminate their native languages and culture. Similarly, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 legally barred Chinese immigrants from citizenship, which was fueled by fears of their "foreign" ethnicity and language. Many Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who arrived in the United States in the early 20th century experienced discrimination and lack of employment and felt tremendous pressure to learn English to avoid prejudice. During World War II, the federal



government infamously interned Japanese Americans out of fear that their language and culture tied them to an enemy state.

By tightening English requirements, the United States risks resurrecting a legacy of nativism that betrays America's founding ideals. Enforcing an English language requirement

would negate the significant contributions to our country made by those who did not, and do not, speak English. The expectation of English proficiency pressures families to abandon their native languages and the values, stories, and customs embedded within them. Requiring English proficiency also undervalues the civic contributions of immigrants who participate fully in American society. Many work, pay taxes, raise families, and volunteer in their communities without being fluent in English. Plumbing, landscaping, and truck driving do not require English fluency. Up to 40% of California's construction force is foreign-born. Citizenship is more than a test of vocabulary — it is an ability to uphold the Constitution, work hard to accomplish the American Dream, pledge allegiance to the flag, and live by the common beliefs God bestowed upon us. By tying citizenship to English proficiency, the policy dismisses the efforts and participation of those

who meet the responsibilities of citizenship.

English proficiency should not be a prerequisite for citizenship. America has always been a multilingual and multicultural nation, and true belonging comes from contribution and engagement, not the nativist beliefs of the past. Policies that enforce English erase culture and signal a refusal to mend past mistakes. American citizenship should celebrate hard work, civic participation, and commitment to America's ideals, not forced linguistic assimilation.

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Who Controls the Cure?

AI and the Future of Medicine

By Miriam Siroky

What if a life-saving drug could be designed in weeks instead of decades? For most of modern history, attempts to develop a single new medicine have taken over ten years and cost billions of dollars without guarantees of success. Scientists test millions of chemical compounds in laboratories, eliminating dangerous and ineffective formulas until, in rare cases, one viable candidate remains. This slow, expensive process leaves many diseases untreated because the financial risk of failure is too high. Artificial intelligence (AI) is disrupting this model.

Using advanced algorithms to identify, design, and optimize drug molecules enables researchers to compress development timelines from years to months or even weeks. AI-designed drugs are not just transforming medicine; they are influencing the economics and politics of entire nations by redefining who controls drug development, how countries respond to health crises, and what determines access to new life-saving treatments.

The traditional drug development process contains five major stages: discovery and development, preclinical research, clinical trials, regulatory review, and post-market monitoring. The first phase is usually the most expensive and least certain. Researchers identify a biological target, often a protein linked to a disease, and then search for a molecule capable of interacting with it. The protein's structure matters because shape determines function: if



scientists understand a protein's binding sites, they can design drugs to address them. Trial failure rates typically exceed 90%. Even when a drug candidate is identified, it may take years for researchers to determine whether it is safe and effective enough to be used as a treatment.

Artificial intelligence is transforming the discovery and development stage. By virtually screening millions of compounds for their ability to bind target proteins, their potential toxicity, and their metabolic clearance, AI is proving that it can eliminate weak contenders before expensive laboratory testing even begins.

Take AlphaFold, an AI developed by DeepMind (a subsidiary of Alphabet, Inc.). The AI recently mapped the three-dimensional structure

of proteins. This task, which previously took scientists years to conduct with X-ray crystallography, now requires only a few hours and a computer. AlphaFold has already predicted structures for more than 200 million proteins, providing researchers with the structural information needed to target proteins previously considered ‘undruggable’.

Beyond protein prediction, generative AI models are now being deployed to design drug molecules themselves. Companies such as Insilico Medicine and Exscientia are generating unique chemical configurations optimized for specific issues. See, for instance, Exscientia’s AI-designed drug, DSP-1181. Intended to treat obsessive-compulsive disorder, it was the first AI-generated molecule to enter clinical trials. Its design phase took less than twelve months, compared to the industry average of four to five years.

Additionally, the PandaOmics and Chemistry42 AI models identified a novel treatment for idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (a chronic, progressive lung disease) in just 46 days, marking the first time that AI both captured the protein and generated a new drug structure. The drug quickly entered Phase II clinical trials, demonstrating that this technology can move compounds from concept to human testing at unprecedented speed. Researchers reported in late 2025 that this drug has indeed been linked to improved lung function and better quality-of-life scores for cough and respiratory symptoms.

The economic implications of this shift to AI drug development are substantial. Faster discovery reduces research costs by minimizing failed experiments and lowering the financial risk of innovation. AI implementation could also reduce drug prices, particularly for rare disease treatments that were considered unprofitable to study.

AI-driven drug development also has major policy implications. Countries with advanced AI infrastructure can respond rapidly to public health emergencies. During the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers used AI to identify antiviruses and optimize vaccine design. Moderna modeled its mRNA vaccine with AI, achieving record-breaking development speed.

Nations with AI-enabled drug pipelines will gain strategic advantages in outbreak containment, public trust, and global influence.

These advancements may also deepen global inequality. As political scientist Harold Lasswell famously argued, “Politics is about who gets what, when, and how.” In the context of AI-driven drug development, wealthier nations build the necessary infrastructure to access vast datasets, cloud computing resources, and advanced algorithms. This concentration determines not only who can innovate, but who gains access to life-saving treatments.

Jewish law issues a warning against such imbalances. The Torah commands, “Justice, justice shall you pursue” (Deuteronomy 16:20), which is not only a legal principle but also a demand for fairness. Mastery of AI-designed medicine entails control over global health outcomes through pricing, licensing, and distribution; this technological revolution imparts both economic and moral imperatives.

In the Torah, healing does not defy God; rather, it is a moral responsibility. The verse “וְיִרְפָּא יְרֵפָא” — “and He shall surely heal” (Exodus 21:19) requires humans to practice medicine. AI-driven drug development is a modern application of this mandate. Furthermore, *pikuach nefesh*, the obligation to save lives, indicates that developing life-saving drugs is not just innovative but morally urgent.

AI-designed drugs represent more than a scientific breakthrough; they mark a seismic shift in medicine, economics, and politics. The technology promises faster cures, lower costs, and more precise treatments, but the question of how its benefits will be distributed remains unresolved. As AI continues to redefine drug development, the central question is no longer what AI can do, but who controls it, who regulates it, and who ultimately benefits from its cures.

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The Science Behind Shabbat

By Hodaya Harary



“And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy—because on that day He rested from all the work of creation that God had done” (Genesis 2:3).

The Day of Rest has evolved from a Jewish idea to one embraced across Western societies. Friday night and Saturday allow us to throw off the shackles of work and recover from an exhausting week. No one likes to give up a weekend; it is a sacred time for family, hobbies, and anything in between.

Jews take this idea further, sanctifying the day by refraining from *melacha*, typically defined

as creative work. *Melacha* includes not only physically demanding tasks such as sawing, cutting, and hammering, but also non-exertional work such as turning electricity on and off, checking email or social media feeds, and even typing this article.

God commanded the Jewish people to rest on Shabbat, but in addition to the spiritual requirement, are there empirical benefits to this practice?

It seems likely, according to Georgetown University psychology professor, Dr. Kostadin Kushlev. In a recent study published in *PNAS*

Nexus, Dr. Kushlev and colleagues report that refraining from screens has significant psychological benefits. The researchers instructed five hundred participants to block access to the internet and social media on their phones for two weeks. Though only a quarter successfully completed the challenge, the digital detox still proved worthwhile: participants experienced reduced anxiety, depression, and other negative markers, and increases in attention span. Even those who could only resist technology for short periods reported improvements in these areas.

If these are the results after a single technological respite, imagine the psychological benefits of a regular break built into one's week—in other words, Shabbat. The researchers found that when participants were offline, they filled their time with other, more beneficial activities—socializing, exercising, and spending time in nature—as Jews tend to do on regular Shabbat afternoons.

Just as recreational activities shape Shabbat, physical rest makes the day complete. In fact, some rabbinic commentaries relax the standard Shabbat laws for the sake of a peaceful slumber under certain conditions (*Mishna Shabbat*, 2:5). It is also customary to take additional “Shabbat naps” during the day, supplementing the conventional nighttime slumber.

The measurable benefits of sleep for the mind and body have long been established. Research shows correlations between increased sleep and improvements in metabolism, memory, and immunity, to name a few critical health areas. Nonetheless, Jewish theologians understood the value of sleep centuries before modern scientific investigation began. Maimonides wrote that the ideal quantity of sleep is eight hours per night (*Deot*, 4:4), precisely the amount the National Sleep Association recommends today. Shabbat, which begins at sunset, returns the body to a proper schedule, in alignment with nature's light cycles and its circadian rhythm. The emphasis Shabbat places on sleep allows us to feel renewed and refreshed and aligns with contemporary global health standards.

Jews believe that their religious rules are not arbitrary restrictions, but frameworks designed to elevate human life. Therefore, Shabbat is not merely an escape from the world, but a recalibration of how we live in it. Only recently have scientists articulated what Jewish tradition has maintained for millennia: intentional rest, disconnection, and sleep are necessities. Once a week, Shabbat requires us to step back—not to produce, not to optimize, not to scroll—but simply to be.

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Captives of Longing

By Adelaide Rubenstein



In one night, I became a “captive of longing” for my homeland. I walked the streets of Princeton on the night of Tisha B’Av, August 3, 2025, my arms around a friend from France and another from Israel. The sixty of us, all students on the Tikvah Scholars Program, walked together in silence, in stark contrast to the exuberance of Shabbat a day before.

As the sun sank in the sky, the air thickened as we sat somberly on the floor, singing songs of all our people had lost. Even those of us who did not know the words sang the melodies from deep within us, or simply closed our eyes and listened. Stories were told of the darkest moments in Jewish history: the destruction of the Temples in Jerusalem, the death of Rabbi Akiva, the Inquisition, and the Shoah. We were yanked back to the violent moments of Jewish history, a shell shock realization that stirred us out of our peaceful reality.

From the outside, this sight of young men and women on the brink of adulthood, yet mourning something lost centuries ago, would seem absurd. From the inside, however, Tisha B’Av symbolizes an integral part of the Jewish soul. The prayers, stories, and songs struck something deep within each of us. Memories surfaced and each young person in the room underwent their own personal Mitzraim, the Hebrew word for Egypt, which also translates to a “narrow place.”

The next morning the sun rose outside yet our prayer room was still dark as night. We heard the traditional liturgy of Lamentations and recited the Kinot, or Elegies. Below, I share my remarks from that morning, on Kina 36, the poem by Yehudah HaLevi on the beauty of Zion. They have been edited for clarity.

Last night, we were walking back to the hotel after an evening of tears and sadness but also of closeness and holding each other in our sorrow. It was a beautiful night and as we walked, I heard a single bird all alone singing in the darkness. For me, Kina 36 represents that beautiful bird song in the darkness of grief and despair.

In his commentary about this Kina, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the 20th century Jewish philosopher and rabbinic leader, speaks of two distinct aspects of Tisha B'Av. First, the poem recalls the destruction and the mourning, and the pain. But second, the poem reminds us of the beauty of Zion. To fully feel the devastation at the loss of Jerusalem, he explains, we must feel deep within our souls the beauty that Zion was "in the former days of her youth."

The time I have spent during this past year studying philosophy of beauty has given me insight into the two ways that HaLevi speaks about the beauty of Zion in this poem. One aspect of beauty is something familiar, intimate and homelike: the beauty of the place where you live, the things you love, your family and friends. These things are beautiful because they are yours. As HaLevi writes "Even more so when I stand upon the graves of my fathers." Zion is beautiful to us because it is ours: the place of our fathers, our home.

Then there is the beauty of awestruck wonder as you stand overlooking the Grand Canyon or lie under an expanse of stars. HaLevi writes of the holiness and majestic beauty of the land where God performs His miracles: "And the glory of God would be your only light." Rabbi Soloveitchik writes that "just as it is natural in the land of Israel to arise in the morning and see the sun shining or hear the rain falling, so too is it natural in the Land of Israel to arise in the morning and find the *Shekhinah* [Divine presence]." "I shall choose that my soul pour itself out in the place where the spirit of God is poured out upon your chosen ones," wrote HaLevi.

Yet, we must remember that this was Zion as it was before the destruction. HaLevi wrote these poignant verses though he himself never saw

the land he describes with such passionate love and longing.

My dear friend Leaora quoted this to me this week while I was speaking to her about this Kina: "The land of Israel can be described as a beautiful body, but, on its own, this beauty is empty. The natural beauty of the land is the outward beauty of the body without a soul. The Jewish people are that soul."

I want to speak of one line, one phrase in this poem that stuck with me, HaLevi's description of the Jewish people as "captives of longing." The verse reads: "And the greeting of a captive of longing, whose tears fall like Hermon's dew, and who yearns for them to descend upon your mountains." What does it mean to be a captive of longing? Rabbi Soloveitchik writes that "the Jewish people are prisoners of the land." No matter who we are or how far removed we are from the land, we will always feel this connection, this bond to Zion, the home of our fathers and the dwelling place of our God. This beautiful bond is like the tie between a mother and her child. When that tie is broken and mother and child are forced to separate, they both become "captives of longing" for each other and for the beautiful bond that was.

I saw this longing in each of us last night as we sang and wept together, and I learned that grief itself can be beautiful. It was beautiful the way that one person would crumble and another would be there to hold them up or just sit in sorrow with them and hold them close. I believe that we are all "captives of longing": longing for love, for knowledge, for connection, for truth, for Hashem, and, ultimately, for Zion, to "see the good of your chosen ones and to rejoice in your happiness when you return to the former days of your youth."

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Political Lessons from Tanakh

By Ozzie Hollander



George Washington once observed, “To rectify past blunders is impossible, but we might profit by the experience of them.” Frederick Douglass similarly argued that “We have to do with the past only as we can make it useful to the present and the future.” Winston Churchill later echoed this insight when he remarked, “The longer you can look back, the farther you can look forward.” Across different centuries and historical moments, many of our greatest political thinkers have returned to the same idea: the past is not merely

something to remember, but something to learn from.

If studying the words and actions of great men and women offers us any insights, we would be wise to return to the earliest sources of political thought, as they provide the deepest lessons. The Hebrew Bible is rich with instructions on political accountability, exercise of power, and responsible leadership; through the figures of Moses, Samuel, and King David, a political thinker can learn much about the principles that continue to impact modern governance.

Moses to Joshua: Effective Transition of Power

In the Book of Deuteronomy, the transition of power from Moses to Joshua provides our first essential model of true leadership. As Moses nears the end of his life, he publicly appoints Joshua as his successor, thus ensuring political stability for the Israelite nation. Moses' statement to Joshua, "חֲזַק וְאַמֵּץ"—"Be strong and be brave" (Deuteronomy 31:7), captures two key principles: first, a leader should publicly demonstrate support and confidence in their chosen successor to enable the smooth transfer of power and the successor's legitimacy in the eyes of the nation. Second, a good leader mentors and trains his potential successors to ensure their success. Moses actively instructed Joshua by giving him real leadership experience and authority while he was still alive.

In the Biblical narrative, Moses also recognizes his own limitations as an outgoing leader. He explicitly states that he is no longer capable of leading the people into the promised land when he says "לֹא-אֹכֵל עֹד לֵצֵאת"—"I can no longer go out" (Deuteronomy 31:2). Moses' public appointment solidified Joshua's authority and prepared the nation for the next phase of their journey. Moses not only knew how to train his successor but was crucially willing to recognize when his time as leader was over.

Peaceful political transitions are crucial to the flourishing of a nation. When they are poorly executed, even strong nations can stumble. Before 1963, presidential transitions in the United States were largely informal and inconsistent, leaving incoming administrations with limited time and resources to prepare. Recognizing the risks, Congress passed the Presidential Transition Act of 1963, explaining that "any disruption occasioned by the transfer of the executive power could produce results detrimental to the safety and well-being of the United States and its people." The Act established a formal framework to ensure continuity, stability, and preparedness during the transfer of power from one president to the next. Like Moses' deliberate handoff of leadership to Joshua, the Presidential Transition

Act recognized that a nation's strength depends on great leaders who facilitated well-prepared transfers when their time in power has come to an end.

Samuel the Prophet: The Dangers of Concentrated Power

While Deuteronomy illustrates the power of Moses' leadership and his effective transfer of power to Joshua, Samuel offers a different lesson in leadership: the dangers of unchecked power. When the People of Israel, now settled in the land, demanded a king "כְּכָל-הַגּוֹיִם"—"like the other nations" (I Samuel 8:11–17), Samuel responds cautiously. He explains that the people must proceed carefully; a king will draft their sons into his army, claim their daughters for his service, seize their fields and vineyards, and impose taxes on their labor. He warns them that centralized authority will come at the expense of freedom and shared governance. At the core of Samuel's message is the idea that centralized power must be approached with restraint, and that good leadership is not about satisfying popular demand but safeguarding the people's freedom and well-being.

This biblical conception of power influenced later political thinkers. In *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine famously describes government as a "necessary evil" and sharply criticizes hereditary monarchy. To strengthen his argument, he cites the above exchange between Samuel and the Israelites, reminding his readers that God punishes the People of Israel for their unrelenting desire for a king. "These portions of scripture [in I Samuel] are direct and positive. They admit of no equivocal construction. That the Almighty hath here entered his protest against monarchical government is true, or the scripture is false," Paine wrote.

Together, Samuel and Paine remind us that power, once centralized, is hard to control and easy to abuse. This biblical lesson was deeply relevant in Paine's lifetime and continues to be today.

King David: Acknowledging Mistakes

Following the death of Samuel and the first

Israelite king Saul, David enters the biblical narrative. He began as a shepherd and rose to prominence after defeating Goliath, eventually becoming one of Israel's greatest kings. His reign was marked by military success and national expansion, but also by deep personal turmoil and family conflict.

One of the most powerful lessons from David's life is the importance of acknowledging one's mistakes. When confronted by the prophet Nathan about his sin with Bathsheba, David did not deny the accusation. Instead, he admitted that "חטאתי לה" – "I have sinned to God" (II Samuel 12:13). David's heartfelt repentance in Psalm 51 remains a model of humility and accountability as he says:

לִמְנַצֵּחַ מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד: בְּבוֹא־אֱלֹהֵי נָתָן הַנְּבִיא כְּאֲשֶׁר-בָּא
אֶל-בֶּת-שֶׁבַע חֲנָנִי אֱלֹקִים כְּחֹסֶדךָ כְּרַב רַחֲמֶיךָ מִחַה פֶּשַׁעִי.

"For the leader. A psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him after he had come to Bathsheba. Have mercy upon me, O God, as befits Your faithfulness in keeping with Your abundant compassion, blot out my transgressions."

To have such an extraordinary king commit such a serious sin, going so far as to arrange a man's death, is shocking. Yet David's willingness to acknowledge his wrongdoing publicly is even more remarkable.

A parallel to this model of accountability is George Washington's Newburgh Address of 1783. At the end of the Revolutionary War, Washington faced a leadership crisis when officers of the Continental Army, frustrated by unpaid wages and broken promises, considered mutiny against Congress. He did not dismiss their suffering; instead, he humbly acknowledged their pain, declaring:

"For myself... a grateful sense of the confidence you have ever placed in me... will oblige me to declare, in this public and solemn manner, that, in the attainment of complete justice for all your toils and dangers... you may freely command my services to the utmost of my abilities."

Washington modeled humility and restraint, publicly committing himself to the welfare of his soldiers while placing the needs of the nation above personal credit or power. Although not an explicit apology, it was a moment of recognition of his tremendous responsibility and a willingness to admit shortcomings. More of our modern leaders could certainly learn from Washington's, and King David's examples of contrition.

Throughout history, societies have benefited from leaders who learned these lessons, so powerfully modeled by our biblical heroes. When these lessons were taken seriously, societies benefited. Leaders who embraced humility, accountability, restraint, and thoughtful succession strengthened their nations. Studying Tanakh can help us learn from the virtuous example of our ancestors, and the lessons they impart can continue to shape the politics of our world today.

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Undoing Reality Through Language

By Sara Lim



“If thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought.” George Orwell, *Politics and the English Language*

In the beginning, God spoke the universe into existence, establishing a foundational truth: to command language is to command reality itself. God’s divine act revealed that language can both create and destroy. For mankind, language is not a mere vehicle for communication but the architecture of thought and perception. Language serves as both a gateway and a barrier to truth; it both illuminates reality and distorts our perception of it. Language, therefore, operates simultaneously as an expression and a

reflection of our collective human conscience, capturing both moral clarity and decay. The representation of Jews in history and in our current moment demonstrates this phenomenon.

I was recently rifling through my great-grandfather’s forgotten files, and I found a document from 1938, describing how his brother, Yaakov Isaevich Levin, was “subjected to execution by shooting.” The Soviet document describing his death offers no explanation for his killing—no crime, no trial, no humanity. Just bureaucratic euphemism masking murder. What court or agency ordered his killing? What, if anything, had he done to deserve this

fate? These details are lost to history. Instead, I found words deliberately emptied of meaning, designed to conceal rather than explain.

My ancestor's example is typical of bloodthirsty regimes seeking to cover up their crimes, using coded words to mask the true nature of the horrors they inflict. In official Nazi documents, mass executions are *Sonderbehandlung* ("special treatment"), deportation is *Umsiedlung* ("resettlement"), and forced removal is *Evakuierung* ("evacuation"). These terms sever the connection between perpetrator and victim, between decision and death. Language can be used to render the unthinkable into the simply procedural.

Since its founding, the terrorist organization Hamas has exploited this principle with vile precision. While its original (and never officially repudiated) 1988 charter is violently fanatical, its "sanitized" 2017 charter is its worst rhetorical abuse. The Hamas *Document of General Principles and Policies* does not contain any explicit antisemitism; its pernicious aims are camouflaged. The document refers to the "Zionist project" as "racist, aggressive, colonial, and expansionist." By appropriating progressive terminology, an organization fundamentally antithetical to liberal principles cynically positions itself within its framework.

The same manipulation turns Jewish self-determination into oppression, employing the vocabulary of human rights to justify Hamas' genocidal aims. Where Nazi euphemisms hid atrocity through bureaucratic remoteness, Hamas inverts moral categories entirely: it makes the target "responsible" for their dehumanization. When Jews are not merely enemies but embodiments of systemic evil, their destruction is not murder but liberation. Language ceases to describe reality and begins to alter it. Violence is not only permissible but righteous.

In 1975, Hamas deception achieved institutional sanctification when the UN declared that "Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination." Though later rescinded, the resolution's reasoning endures. Applying settler-colonialist theory to Zionism erases

Jewish indigeneity to Israel while celebrating false universalism. Moreover, it establishes the elimination of Israel as the logical remedy; settler-colonialism, by definition, morally demands the removal of settlers rather than the reform of systems. Indeed, this mirrors the language used in the 2017 Hamas charter:

"There shall be no recognition of the legitimacy of the Zionist entity. Whatever has befallen the land of Palestine in terms of *occupation, settlement building, Judaization* or changes to its features or *falsification* of facts is *illegitimate*."

The "Zionist entity" is demonized; the only noble response is to pursue "liberation" through "all means necessary." This linguistic construction establishes the conditions for atrocity.

Furthermore, the weaponization of language against Jews and Israel both condemns Jewish existence and infantilizes Palestinians. Patronizing Western media outlets and academics refuse to take Palestinians' homicidal declarations or antisemitism at face value. When Hamas officials proclaim their commitment to Israel's destruction and Palestinian educational materials glorify martyrdom and demonize Jews, Western commentators perform gymnastics to interpret these statements as metaphorical, born of despair, or merely rhetorical. While every Israeli statement is scrutinized for hidden genocidal intent and subjected to the least charitable interpretations, Palestinians' calls for Zionist annihilation are dismissed as understandable frustration.

This double standard—hypervisibility of imagined Jewish malice, disregard for Palestinian eliminationism—reveals how antisemites can permanently alter discourse not just by slandering Jews, but by ignoring Palestinian discourse and behavior. This willful blindness ultimately undermines the moral clarity necessary for genuine peace.

In recent years, Western public discourse has become its own warzone. Terms like "apartheid," "genocide," and "colonialism"

permeate conversations, imparting the gravity of existential struggle to every debate. Semantics and memory are distorted by the human aversion to guilt and the desire to absolve oneself from sin. The Shoah becomes the Holocaust (etymologically derived from the Greek word *όλοκαυτεῖν*, or “burnt offering”), and the massacre of October 7th is described as “justified resistance.” This is linguistic anesthesia; dulling truth’s sting, enabling complicity, and facilitating perpetuation. Such willful distortions constitute moral failure. The pattern that began long before my great-great uncle’s murder persists in campus protests and UN resolutions, in academic journals and social media hashtags. The vocabulary evolves, but the function remains the same: using language to transform human beings into abstractions for elimination.

These are not inevitable developments but deliberate choices. Every euphemism, inversion, and redefinition represents a decision to obscure rather than confront. The words change, but their consequences do not. We must not surrender language to those who would wield it against us.

Sara Lim lives in Randolph, New Jersey and is homeschooled.

Why Hebrew Matters

By Benny Marmor

מאת בני מארמור



זאת המהדורה הראשונה של כתב העת סולומון שתכלול מאמר בעברית. קידמנו את היוזמה הזאת מתוך אמונה רבה בחשיבותה של השפה העברית לעם היהודי ואנחנו מקווים שהכללת עברית בדפינו תעורר השראה ותהווה דוגמה להוכיח לכל תלמיד יהודי שאפשר ללמוד את השפה העברית. למרות מרכזיותה ביהדות, הקהילה היהודית בארה"ב נכשלה במאמציה ללמד ולהשתמש בשפה העברית. למרות השקעה של יותר ממאה מיליון דולר בבתי ספר, רק 13% מיהודי ארה"ב ב-2013 היו מסוגלים להבין את רובו של מה שהם קוראים בעברית, לפי מרכז המחקר פיו.

This article marks the first edition of the Solomon Journal that includes a Hebrew article, accompanied by its English translation. We began this initiative with a firm belief in the importance of the Hebrew language for the Jewish people, and with the hope that the

inclusion of Hebrew in our pages will serve as an inspiration that learning Hebrew is possible for every Jewish student. Despite its centrality in Judaism, American Jewry has struggled in its effort to teach Jewish students Hebrew. Notwithstanding an investment of over one hundred million dollars in Hebrew language learning programs, only 13% of American Jews can demonstrate proficiency in reading Hebrew, according to a 2013 Pew Research Center survey.

במאמרו שפירסם לאחרונה במוזאיק, קול ארונסון טוען כי כישלון זה נובע מחוסר דחיפות. חוסר היכולת של ילדי יהדות ארה"ב לדבר בעברית אינו נובע רק מחוסר מורים או כישלון של תוכנית לימודים; אלא משום סיבה מהותית: לתלמידים אין טעם ללמוד את השפה. אבל לדידנו, הבעיה היא לא דחיפות, היא חוסר הדגש על זהות.

The writer Cole Aronson suggests in an article for *Mosaic* that this failure arises from a lack of urgency. The inability of American Jewish children to speak Hebrew is not simply a problem of adequate teachers or poor curriculum, rather, a general belief that the students do not have a pressing reason to learn the language. However, we at the Solomon Journal believe that the real problem is the lack of focus on identity in Hebrew education.

לפי ארונסון, יש סיבה אחת שיכולה לגרום ללמידת שפה על ידי הרבים: הכרחיות. הפעם היחידה שיהודים הצליחו להנחיל שפה לילדיהם הייתה או כשהם חיו בקהילות סגורות ודברו רק שפות יהודיות כמו יידיש או ערבית-יהודית בינם לבין עצמם או כאשר הצורך לעזוב את מדינתם היתה כל כך נחוץ שילדיהם לקחו על עצמם ללמוד עברית מתוך צפייה לעתיד שבו יצטרכו לעזוב את בתיהם ולעלות לארץ. בלי הכרחיות כזאת, ארונסון טוען שאי אפשר לשכנע את ילדי ארה"ב שיש יתרון ללימוד העברית.

According to Aronson, only one factor leads to language acquisition: necessity. The only times Jews have succeeded in passing their language to their children was either when they lived in cloistered communities speaking only Jewish languages (like Yiddish or Judeo-Arabic), or when the need to leave their countries was so urgent that the children took it upon themselves to learn Hebrew and made *Aliyah*. Without a similar necessity, Aronson claims it is impossible to convince the children of America that there exists utility in learning Hebrew.

ארונסון רואה את השפה העברית ככלי לעזור בתקשורת עם ישראלים או להבנת טקסט במקורו. כהוכחה לכישלון של תלמידים אמריקאים ללמוד עברית הוא כותב שתלמידים אינם יכולים להשיג מטרות מעשיות כמו להבין פסוקי התנ"ך, לקרוא עיתון, או לנהל שיחה. למרות שהדגש על השימוש בשפה הוא הגיוני, הוא כותב כאילו שפת העברית היא רק כלי. ארונסון מתעלם מהעובדה ששפה היא גם היסוד של זהות, ושזהות גם יכולה לשמש כמוטיבציה ללמידת שפה.

Aronson sees the Hebrew language as a tool to help American Jews communicate with Israelis and for understanding texts in their original form. To evidence the failure of American children to learn Hebrew, he writes

that students are unable to achieve practical goals such as understanding the Hebrew Bible, reading a Hebrew newspaper, or conducting a conversation. Although Aronson's focus on utility is logical, he speaks as if Hebrew is only a tool. Aronson ignores the fact that language is also the foundation of identity, and that identity can also serve as a motivator for language learning.

אחד העם כתב במאמרו "צורך ויכולת" שעברית היא "הלבוש הטבעי של היהדות, שבו נולדה וגדלה והאריכה ימים." אפילו בעת ניסיון ללמוד את השפה העברית התלמיד סופג אלפי שנים של זהות יהודית. כל מילה, ביטוי, ושורש מפנים למקור בתנ"ך, בשירה, בספרות, או במשנה וכוללים בתוכם את הנפש המיוחדת של העם היהודי. אוצר מילים משותף נובע משורשים משותפים.

The Zionist thinker Ahad Ha'am wrote in his piece "Need and Ability" that Hebrew is "the natural vestment of Judaism, in which Judaism was born, matured, and aged." In the effort to learn Hebrew, the student absorbs thousands of years of Jewish identity and tradition. Every word, phrase, and root of the Hebrew language, poetry, and literature references a source in the Bible, the Talmud or the Mishna, and includes within it the unique Jewish soul. When there is shared vocabulary, there are shared roots.

השורשים האלו יכולים לשמש לא רק להיזוק הקשר בין יהודי ארה"ב לארץ ישראל או הבנת טקסטים מסורתיים אלא גם כגשר של זהות משותף ליהדות שהיא יותר ויותר מפולג. ידיעה ולמידה רב בשפה העברית יכולה לתת בסיס להגן מפני ההתבוללות ולשמש כקשר לאומי לא רק בין יהודים ממדינות שונות אלא גם בין בני מסורות שונות. עברית יכולה לתת שפה משותפת לשיחות בין זרמים ביהדות שמתקשים יותר ויותר למצוא קשרים ביניהם. יהודים שמרנים יותר ויותר מתעלמים מאחיהם הפחות שמרנים, בעוד שיהודים פחות שמרנים מתקשים להיאבק בהתבוללות. שפה משותפת יכולה להתמודד עם שתי בעיות אלו, בכך שהיא תכריח שתי קבוצות אלו להכיר בקשריהם לכלל ישראל. אלו אינם רק יתרונות, אלא גם גורמי מוטיבציה; ככל שיותר אנשים ילמדו עברית, כך יגדל תחושת השייכות הנובעת משפה משותפת; וכך יגדל המוטיבציה ללמוד השפה מעבר לסיבות פרקטיים.

These roots can be used not only to strengthen the connection between the Jews of America and Israel or to understand traditional Jewish

texts, but also as a bridge of shared identity for an increasingly fragmented Jewish people. Widespread knowledge of Hebrew could provide a foundation to prevent assimilation and serve as a connecting force not only between different countries, but also between different Jewish traditions. Hebrew can provide a shared language for conversations between different denominations that have increasingly struggled to find common ground. More traditionally observant Jews are increasingly isolated from their less observant brethren, and less observant Jews are struggling to combat assimilation in their ranks. A shared commitment to the Hebrew language could force both sides to acknowledge their connection to the Jewish people. These are not only benefits, but also motivators; as more Jews learn Hebrew, the greater the feeling of belonging, providing a needed incentive for learning Hebrew beyond the practical.

אז, בין אם זה דרך דואולינגו, ספרות עברית, תנ"ך, סדרה ישראלית, או מאמר בשביל כתב העת סולומון, אני מזמין אתכם להצטרף לשרשרת של השפה העברית, ולהסתכל על עברית לא רק ככלי, אלא כבסיס לעתיד יהודי יותר מאוחד.

So, whether it is Duolingo, Hebrew literature, the Hebrew Bible, an Israeli television show, or an article for the Solomon Journal, I invite you to join in the unbroken chain of the Hebrew language, and see Hebrew not only as a tool, but as a foundation for a more united Jewish future.

Benny Marmor lives in St. Louis Park, Minneapolis and attends Breck School.



The Hero Tree

By Hannah Katz

There is a tree that stands alone atop a mountain.
A heroic tree, yet a weak one.
Once, the tree had many leaves,
But on one pitiful day,
Some of the leaves were lost.
Now, the tree looks
Bare.

But,
The roots are still strong,
Holding on with all their might
Like they have done
For thousands of years,
And will for a thousand more.
Despite those who want the tree to wither,
The tree will flourish
And new leaves will grow.

*Hannah Katz lives in New York
City and attends Ramaz.*

עץ הגיבור

מאת חנה אריאל כ"ץ

עץ בודד עומד על ראש ההר.
עץ גיבור, אך חלש.
פעם היה מלא עלים
אבל ביום מצער
כמה מהעלים נשרו.
עכשיו העץ נראה
חשוף.

אבל
השורשים עדיין חזקים
מחזיקים מעמד בכל כוחם.
כמו שהם עשו שם
במשך אלפי שנים
כך יהיו שם גם עוד אלף.
למרות אלה שרוצים שהעץ ייבש
העץ ישגשג
ועלים חדשים יגדלו.



Little Bird

By Rita Setton

Let your wings fly free
Fly, fly
Away, little bird,
You, who has never known
The cold of a cage, just
The warmth of a nest and
The love of your mother.

Little bird,
Spread your wings far,
Let them reach wide,
Let the tips of your feathers
Graze the surface of the sun as it dawns—
Do not fear its heat,
It will sting for a heartbeat, a millisecond in a million,
But then you will know its warmth,
Sure as the laugh of your sister or the arms of a lover—
And kiss the moon goodnight.

Soar, little bird.
Rise above the clouds and surface of the treetops;
Do not be afraid
Of society's boundless ocean of noise.
The waves will churn and roar, but you have wings,
My little bird,
With which you will transcend the world.

Rita Setton lives in Oakhurst, New Jersey
and attends Yeshiva of Flatbush.

ציפורה קטנה

מאת רבקה סתתון

תני לכנפיים שלך לעוף
בחופשיות
עופי, עופי
רחוק,
ציפורה קטנה

את, שמעולם לא הכרת
את הקור של הכלוב, רק
את החום של הקן
ואהבת אמא.

ציפורה קטנה,
תפרשי את הכנפיים
תשלחי אותם לכל הפינות שיש,
תני לקצות נוצותיך
לרחף על פני השמש—
אל תפחדי מהחום
יהיה כאב רק לפעימת הלב,
לא לפית השנייה מתוך מיליון,
ואז תכירי את החום בשמחה,
עם הבהירות שאת מכירה את
הצחוק של אבא,
או חיבוקי החבר—
ותנשקי את הירח "לילה טוב"

עופי, ציפורה קטנה.
מעל העצים ומעל העננים.
אל תפחדי מהים של רעש ורוע
של החברה,
כי יש לך כנפיים ולב טהור,
ואיתם את תתעלי
מעל העולם.

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