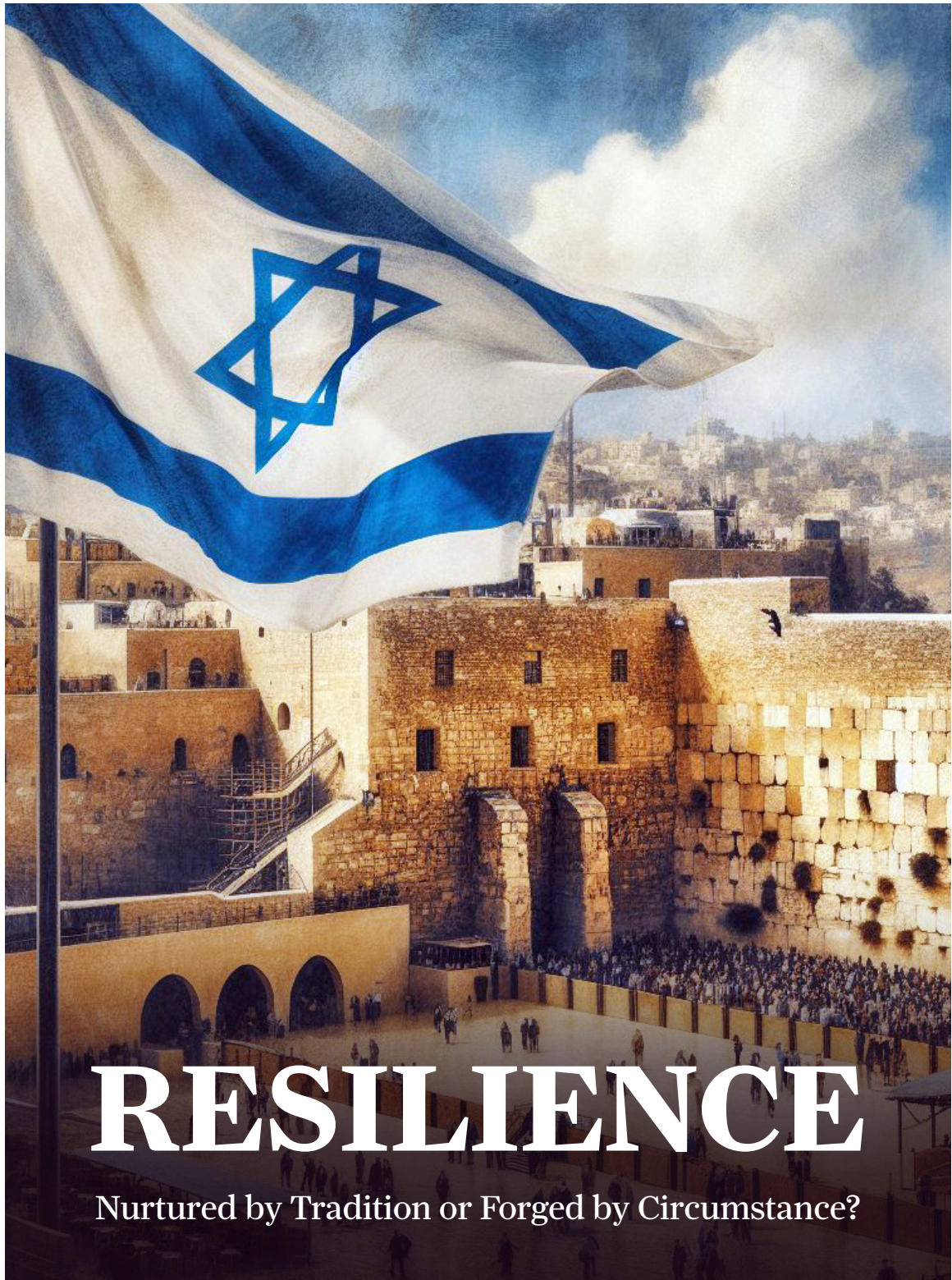


SOLOMON JOURNAL

Volume IV/Winter 2024



RESILIENCE

Nurtured by Tradition or Forged by Circumstance?



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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.

The *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 Dean

Readers of the *Solomon Journal* have come to expect original, incisive commentary and hard-hitting opinions on ideas, politics, and culture. This issue provides those features in abundance, but we cannot pretend that what you will find in these pages is Jewish journalism as it is regularly practiced, even at the highest, most sophisticated levels. This issue is different.

This issue is different because it was produced in a post-10/7 world. And, yes, Jews have suffered terribly throughout the centuries (incomparably? Can we utter that truism without crossing the self-appointed masters of DEI or perspectival “truth”? Does it-- should it-- matter?); so, what, you may ask, makes the events of 10/7 and its aftermath different? Let me suggest that it is not the staggering numbers or the sheer brutality per se that distinguishes what happened on October 7th from previous horrors our people have endured. What makes this moment different is that our dear students, our fellows, writers, and editors, experienced this abomination—and the arguably more abominable reaction of so many in the so-called civilized West—within their young lives, hard realities they have never had to encounter before. They need to reckon with this atrocity and all that it entails in ways they’ve simply never had to. With October 7th, these innocent, thoughtful young Jewish men and women have returned to the realities of Jewish history in ways they could not have imagined or foreseen. This is tragic, of course. But bracing and if one must be brutally honest, necessary, as well. For truth is always better than a convenient, perhaps even noble, lie.

In this issue, our symposiasts address a question, not subject to a simple disjunction: Is Jewish Resilience in times of crisis a conscious tradition or the result of the contingencies of history and circumstance? Not a simple either/or, especially if one is forced to unpack what a tradition means, what history can truly teach us, and what, if anything, is a function of mere circumstances in this mad—and maddening—world of ours. But I’ll let each of our contributors make their own cases for the resolved without adding any more commentary of my own. I’ll also invite you to examine the other sections of the magazine, which in our wholly unbiased estimation, packs a large and memorable punch. Let us know what you think...

Cordially,

Rabbi Mark Gottlieb
Chief Education Officer, *Tikvah*
Dean, *Solomon Fellowship*

Jewish Resilience in Times of Persecution and Prosperity

From Our Forefathers to the Present

BY JUDAH MARCUS

Resilience is a virtue that has been associated with Judaism for countless generations. Throughout Tanakh, there are a great number of stories about our ancestors demonstrating strength and resolve in times of crisis, whether external or internal crises. Although accounts of Jewish resilience have often been in response to outside pressures, particularly anti-Semitism, Jewish resilience is foremost a value and behavior interwoven within our history and religious doctrine. It is precisely this strong connection to an enshrined resilience that will enable Jews to maintain our personal strength long into the future.

In the first Jew himself, Avraham, we learn the foundation of resilience and its tight connection to our heritage through his title as an “עברי,” a “Hebrew.” The Midrash presents three interpretations of why Avraham is called an עברי. The first two are technical: Rabbi Nechemiah asserts that it was since Avraham was a sixth-generation descendent of Ever, and the Sages claim that it is because he came from “across,” which shares a root with עברי, the river into the land of Israel. Rabbi Yehudah’s opinion is profound, and almost scary. Utilizing another meaning of עבר, “other,” he explains Avraham’s title: “The entire world is on one side and he is on the other side.” Avraham’s belief in a singular God instead of many gods required an immense amount of courage and perseverance. As Avraham’s descendants, we are called by the translation of עברי, the “Hebrews,” associating our nation with resilience despite being cast as the “other” throughout history.

Avraham demonstrated this resilience during his confrontation with Mesopotamian King Nimrod, as

recorded in the Midrash. Avraham logically proved the foolishness of worshiping man-made objects to his idol-worshipping father Terach, and to no avail. Infuriated at his son’s ideological rebellion, Terach sent Avraham to King Nimrod to be punished. Nimrod, a fire worshiper, suggested Avraham worship physical phenomena that were not man-made, first offering fire, which Avraham countered by suggesting to worship its extinguisher water. Nimrod accepted worshiping the water, but then Avraham countered again, suggesting the clouds that dispense the water. After two more exchanges, with Avraham suggesting the wind that moves the clouds, or a human body which contains wind’s by-product, air, Nimrod realized Avraham’s refusal to worship anything but one Divine God.

He threw Avraham in a burning furnace and declared “let the God to whom you bow come and save you.” Avraham’s God delivered and saved Avraham’s life. By disproving the divine power of any created element, Avraham disproved the possibility of anything aside from a divine, supernatural, creator. Much like Avraham’s strong resilience against one of the most powerful kings of his time, opposition—and in effect, solitude—allows Jewish resilience to shine through. Avraham’s resilience is tested over and over again during his life, yet he never waivers in his conviction to God. Avraham’s stories exemplify a resilience characterized by internal conviction, and shown through external struggle.

Avraham’s grandson, Yaakov, is often known as the forefather who faced the hardest circumstances. Throughout his 147 years, Yaakov was forced to flee his murderous brother Esau, was deceived regarding

employment and marriage several times by his father-in-law Laban, lost his beloved wife Rachel at a young age, was separated from his favorite son Yosef for 27 years, and left the Land of Israel due to a harsh famine. While preparing for a reunion with his brother Esau, he put together a message which included the following phrases: “I have lived (גרתי) with Laban...,” and using the Gematria numerical system, Rashi equates the word for “lived” with תריג, “taryag,” a word used to numerically represent the 613 mitzvot in the Torah. Yaakov managed to maintain his mitzvah observance even while residing with his cunning uncle Laban. First, Yaakov committed to his spirituality in order to continue to build his resilience. Later, upon leaving Laban’s house, Yaakov credited his financial success and physical resilience amidst the hard working conditions to the “plight and the toil of my hands.” Similarly, our resilience in keeping the commandments has fueled our people’s success and survival throughout Jewish history.

Generations later, Moshe and Yehoshua reminded our people to tap into our heritage and “be strong and courageous” while preparing to enter the Land of Israel. The fact that these calls came before encountering potential enemies and obstacles underscore their intrinsic value to the Jewish people. These leaders preached that physical resilience in the face of enemies would only be possible if coupled with prior spiritual resilience no matter the obstacle. Only then would the people “have good success wherever [they] go.”

But who is to say that all these stories matter? Those were our ancestors, after all, and their stories of resilience could just as well be separate from ours. Just as modern Jew hatred and our modern challenges differ in source and nature from versions that existed thousands of years ago, our resilience might as well be a result of history or external influences.

The Ramban brings down a famous Judaic precept that illustrates why these stories matter to us in

our generation: “כל מה שאירע לאבות סימן לבנים.” “All that occurred to the fathers is a sign for the children.” The actions and circumstances of our ancestors are replicated, in some way, in us, and the stories of their resilience are crucial to our learning how to act. In other words, the passing of the Abrahamic tradition includes these characteristics of resilience from generation to generation.

This transmission is instilled through the teaching of Torah, which literally means “instruction.” Relaying these stories about our ancestors and leaders empowers Jewish youth to learn from and emulate their actions. Our uniqueness as a nation has engendered a large amount of animosity towards us, which has often provided backgrounds for these stories of Jewish resilience. Each challenge the Jews have faced has been driven by our people’s commitment to living a life modeled after our ancestors.

It is crucial to note the historical truth that times of trouble and distressing circumstances have often been the backdrop of Jewish resilience and made it necessary. To then think that Jewish resilience is a direct result of those circumstances might seem straightforward, but this theory requires a more limited view of history. Zooming in on specific events would perhaps cause one to reach that conclusion. However, after analyzing Jewish history through both eras of persecution and prosperity, pain and peace, one sees that Jewish resilience is characterized by a tradition-based spiritual resilience because of our place as an outsider, which then gives rise to physical resilience during times of crisis.

From exile to blood libels to pogroms, resilience—a spiritual commitment born and developed during prosperous times, and highlighted in times of trouble—is an inherent element of our Jewish identities. ☆



Abraham Makes the Enemies Flee Who Hold His Nephew. 1613, Antonio Tempesta



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The Six Elements of Resilience

BY RAANAN VANDERWALDE

There is no denying that Jews are resilient. Judaism is one of the oldest religions in the world.

For over 3,000 years, Jews have been persecuted, killed, and marginalized. Through all this, the Jewish people have not only survived but thrived, enduring thanks to our resilience. The ideas behind Jewish resilience come from our tradition going back all the way to some of the earliest events of the Torah.

Through careful thought, I have come up with six core elements that define resilience: endurance, hope, living with uncertainty, remembering the past, the ability to rebuild, and strength of belief. All six of these elements can be found in the Jewish tradition either as rabbinic teachings or in a biblical story that perfectly showcases the value.

ENDURANCE

Endurance is the ability to suffer something patiently and without giving way, even when facing difficulties or opposition. This trait can be seen as far back in the Jewish tradition as the book of Genesis, in the stories of our forefathers. In Parshat Toldot, there is a seemingly insignificant story about Isaac digging wells after he was expelled from the land of the Philistines. Isaac dug one well but the local people fought over it and took it from him. Isaac dug a second well, but still it was claimed by the local shepherds. Finally, he dug a third well that wasn't fought over, and then he praised God. Many commentaries on the Torah ask why this story merits inclusion in the Torah. The Chofetz Chaim, a respected rabbi from the nineteenth century, wrote that the purpose of the story is to teach us the value of persistence and endurance. Isaac endured, even when everyone was trying to stop him. By exhibiting endurance, we reinforce our resilience.



Victory, O Lord
John Everett Millais, 1871

HOPE

Having hope is also part of being resilient. If Jews had not been optimistic in our approach to life, then we would have been a religion lost to time. This trait of hope is found in the teachings of the rabbinic Sages. Tradition tells us that Rabbi Akiva taught the idea: "Everything that God does, He does for the best." In this concept, Rabbi Akiva is instilling optimism in us. We have to believe in God and that everything will turn out well. The Talmud

includes a story in *Masechet Berachot*, daf 60:b, about Rabbi Akiva and this principle:

"There was an incident, when Rabbi Akiva was walking along the road and came to a certain city, he inquired about lodging and they did not give him any. He said: 'Everything that God does, He does for the best.' He went and slept in a field, and he had with him a rooster, a donkey, and a candle. A gust of wind came and extinguished the candle; a cat came and ate the rooster; and a lion came and ate the donkey. He said: 'Everything that God does, He does for the best.' That night, an army came and took the city into captivity. It turned out that Rabbi Akiva alone, who was not in the city and had no lit candle, noisy rooster, or donkey to give away his location, was saved."

Despite Rabbi Akiva's hardship, he stayed optimistic. And he survived. By keeping hope alive, we are resilient.

LIVING WITH UNCERTAINTY

It is a basic concept in Judaism to live life without knowing what lies ahead of you; and living with uncertainty improves resilience. This idea of living with uncertainty comes up in our holidays, specifically Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, in which we cast our lives into the hands of God. We do

not know whether we will live or die. We say this specifically in the prayer *Unetaneh Tokef*, which says: “As a shepherd herds his flock, directing his sheep to pass under his staff, so do You pass, count, and record the souls of all living, and decree a limit to each person’s days, and inscribe their final judgment.” We live with this uncertainty that God could decide our fate at any moment. By living with this uncertainty, we display resilience.

REMEMBERING THE PAST

Throughout the generations, the Jewish people have remained resilient chiefly thanks to our emphasis on remembering the past. Looking to the past accomplishes two things. It allows us to learn from our mistakes, and more importantly, it allows us to not solely be concerned with our personal plight, but also the history of the Jewish people and our nation as a whole. Remembering the past allows us to view ourselves as a continuation of the Jewish people throughout time. We are a link in the chain. This act of remembering is clearly transmitted in the Jewish tradition. For example, we are required to remember certain events, one of those being the exodus from Egypt. The exodus was a turning point in Jewish history and marks our origins as a nation. Remembering this not only teaches us that we owe everything to God, but also that we are a continuation of those people who experienced the exodus first hand. In fact, the Passover Haggadah emphasizes the importance of not only seeing our ancestors as having gone through the experience of slavery, but also seeing *ourselves* as having been slaves in Egypt. The exodus teaches us that we have something to live for and we have something to pass down to the next generation. We also re-read the entire Torah every year, as the stories remind us of our shared history. The Jewish calendar is full of holidays and fast days that are specifically geared towards reminding us of shared elements of our past. If the Jewish people lived only in the present, we would have no chance of survival. By looking to the past, we strengthen our resilience.

ABILITY TO REBUILD

The Jewish people have been expelled from almost everywhere we have ever lived. We have lost everything and had to rebuild from scratch time and time again. We first see this rebuilding in the story of Avraham, when he re-establishes his entire life after leaving his homeland and family at God’s direction. In fact, built into Judaism, specifically in the institution of the Oral Torah, the laws passed

down through the Rabbis, is the ability to rebuild. The Oral Torah provides the basis for rabbis to debate certain topics and interpret the Torah in different ways, making Judaism flexible in ways other religions may not be. Our flexibility is an important part of being able to rebuild. An example of the Oral Torah in action is that after the destruction of the Second Temple, there was a rabbinic decision to establish daily prayers to mirror the services previously held in the Beit Hamikdash: the Temple that stood as the center of worship for the Jews for a thousand years. If the Rabbis had not taken this decision, there is no telling whether Judaism would exist today, because we would have had no way to connect to our religion in the diaspora for nearly 2,000 years. By remaining flexible and strengthening our ability to rebuild, we aid our resilience.

STRENGTH OF BELIEF

Resilience cannot exist without having strength in your beliefs. A mishnah in tractate *Rosh Hashanah* chapter 3:8 questions why Moses raising his hands caused the Israelites to win the battle against Amalek in the Book of Exodus. It explains that, rather than a miracle, Moses raising his hands made the Jewish people look up and believe in God. They had a newfound sense of belief in the Divine, which made them resilient and able to win the war. Only by possessing strength in our beliefs can we stay resilient. The necessity of holding on to our beliefs is also expressed in Deuteronomy 20:19, which says: “For man is a tree of the field.” In comparing humans to trees, the verse is telling us that we should be deeply rooted in our beliefs, just like trees’ roots go deep into the ground. We should not fall under pressure, just like a tree doesn’t fall in a storm. By being deeply rooted, we are resilient.

Jewish people are resilient, and this resilience is not simply a consequence of circumstance; rather, it is taught in our tradition. Resilience can be defined by six ideals: endurance, hope, living with uncertainty, remembering the past, the ability to rebuild, and strength of belief. All of these ideals are found in the teachings of the Torah or the Rabbis. In today’s dark and often uncertain times, we need to take these teachings and apply them to our lives. In the face of adversity and uncertainty, the Jewish people need to remember our origins, and we will be rewarded with calming, confident resilience. ✧



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The Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem, David Roberts, 1850

Jewish Resilience: Taught By Our Tradition and Tested By Our History

BY ADIN LINDEN

Jewish history has often been uneasy and tumultuous. Crisis has never been too far from the Jewish people. At times, those crises have been imposed by others, but the Jewish people have also often been plagued by internal strife, be it religious, political, or cultural. From the golden calf

to the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, Jews have sometimes seemed to be our own worst enemy. But is our reaction in these times of intense internal disagreement due to a tradition that guides us through troubling times, or a result of history and the circumstances we have found ourselves in? Is there something in the

foundation of Jewish thought that allows us to move through moments of internal strife, or is it something we have built through those moments? I believe it is a combination of both.

For the Talmudic Rabbis, it seems clear that disagreement is the foundation of the Jewish tradition. There is the rabbinic idea of *מחלוקת לשם שמים*, or disagreement for the sake of heaven. In fact, the entire Talmud, a foundational Jewish text, is a series of disagreements being retold and picked apart by various scholars. Furthermore, in key moments in the Torah, Moshe is found disagreeing with God. There are also times when this disagreement turns hostile, such as with the rabbinic figure Elisha Bar Abuya, whose views caused him to be excommunicated and his rabbinic peers to refer to him as “the other.” Our tradition establishes a precedent that we, as a community, believe in healthy disagreement. It is through our history that we learn where the line between healthy and unhealthy lies.

There are moments in our history where it becomes clear that despite our traditional welcoming of disagreement, internal dissent goes too far and becomes dangerous. In the Biblical period, it was internal strife that led to the splintering of the Davidic Kingdom into two nations. The Romans’ occupation of Judea began because the Hasmonians were in the midst of a civil war, caused by disagreements over succession of the kingship. Our Sages believe it was “baseless hatred” amongst different factions of the Jewish people that caused the destruction of the Second Temple. What started as healthy disagreements over kohanic power and rabbinic precedents, became the cause for one of our greatest historical traumas.

A history-only argument for Jewish resilience would mean that Jews adapted over time and responded to crises as they occurred, because of certain circumstances, while a tradition-only argument would mean that Jews possess a set policy for crisis response, either derived from the Torah or the Sages. When it comes to internal strife, it would seem Judaism sets a precedent with a tradition that believes in disagreement and dissent, and throughout its history adapts the boundaries of what is healthy disagreement versus dangerous

dissent. Moments such as the destruction of the Second Temple show us that there is a clear line where disagreement crosses into the “dangerous dissent” territory.

This extends to contemporary Jewish struggles as well. For example, when the Uganda Plan was proposed in 1903, the Sixth Zionist Congress voted to send an investigative commission to the land,

“Our tradition establishes a precedent that we, as a community, believe in healthy disagreement. It is through our history that we learn where the line between healthy and unhealthy lies.”

but a group of vocal dissenters protested and eventually got the Congress to give up on the Uganda Plan. Fourteen years later, the Balfour Declaration declared Britain’s support for a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine. On the other hand, the Altalena incident between competing Israeli political factions and military organizations stemmed from fundamental disagreements about the nature of the state of Israel. It resulted in bloodshed as Jews attacked other Jews. Our responses to these moments are informed by a combination of having a tradition that embraces disagreement within reason but also creates boundaries. Where disagreement becomes dangerous, or results in tragedy, we must conduct historical analysis.

Studying these moments of intense communal struggle, one can learn some staples of Jewish resilience, particularly the importance of evaluating not only the Jewish tradition’s response to strife but also the historical backdrop of the dissent. Jewish resilience cannot be reduced to simply being a part of our tradition or a result of history, it is both. And if we Jews are to survive through those incredibly difficult moments when we are our own worst enemy, then we must see our connected fate as such. Our resilience is taught by our tradition and tested by our history, and so we must learn from both. ☆



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Maintaining Jewish Unity Without Uniformity

BY ELIE DOUER

In the months before the October 7 attack, political tensions in Israel were at an unprecedented high, with intense polarization over the proposed judicial reforms. Studies show that polarization in Israel rose by 180 percent between 2009 and 2022 and, according to some estimates, Israel became more polarized than the United States during that time period. In sharp contrast, after the October 7 attack, the country has seen a degree of solidarity not witnessed in any other nation for decades. Opposing parties set aside their differences and worked as one. Those not expected or called up to fight in the military, such as the ultra-Orthodox, reported to volunteer or even ask to enlist in record numbers. Volunteers from all political and religious backgrounds continue to lead grassroots efforts to support the country in its time of need. While it is regrettable that such a strong sense of unity was achieved only through tragedy and crisis, it is nonetheless a source of hope to see Jewish people throughout Israel and the world join together, unified as one. It remains to be seen, however, whether this unity will start to falter after the war, just as the unprecedented unity in the United States after 9/11 faded into intense political polarization.

Jewish unity itself can be loosely explained by the idea of “*Kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh*”: all Jews are responsible for one another. Yet Jewish unity should not be confused with Jewish conformity. Discussion and argument are essential parts of the Jewish tradition, and they are seen as a means of arriving at truth. Therefore, Jews should not seek to avoid argument and disagreement by obstinately clinging to their version of truth without engaging in discussion. Nor should Jews get bogged down trying to generate consensus on all topics. On the contrary, stubbornness is a Jewish staple. The entire Talmud is built on arguments among Jews and being at peace with the existence of such unsettled arguments.

The purpose of this essay is not to argue for a compromise on contentious issues such as judicial reform, but rather to urge Jews to treat one another with a fun-

damental respect. Put simply, unity without uniformity. Disagreement without splitting apart. In the words of the Talmud, “*machloket l’shem shamayim*,” argument for the sake of heaven. These are the principles that all Jews should coalesce around, while simultaneously willing to maintain dialogue with those we disagree with. Unity does not mean complying with a singular belief system; it does mean maintaining respect for one another. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks once said, “On all matters that affect us as Jews regardless of our religious differences, we must work together. On all matters that touch on our religious differences, we will agree to differ but with respect.”

The Jews are one of the smallest minorities in the world, composing approximately 0.2 percent of the world’s population. Despite our many enemies, the only nation capable of threatening the existence of the Jewish people is the Jewish people ourselves. A look at history will show that when Jews are united, no power can prevail over us. Unfortunately, the inverse has been true throughout much of our history. Iran has often suggested that internal conflicts in Israel will contribute to its demise over time. The October 7 attacks are a wake-up call for Jews in Israel and the diaspora who saw ourselves on opposing teams. The essence of Israel is a unified Jewish homeland that can accommodate disagreement among Jews while still maintaining our common purpose. One nation, one body: if each leg walks in a different direction, the body will split and die. If the arms engage in a fist fight with each other, the entire body will suffer.

“On all matters that affect us as Jews regardless of our religious differences, we must work together. On all matters that touch on our religious differences, we will agree to differ but with respect.”

— Rabbi Jonathan Sacks



Jewish respect and unity are crucial in both a religious and a secular sense. It is considered a *chilul Hashem* (desecration of God's name) to publicly have discord with fellow Jews. Indeed, all 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva died a horrible death because they did not treat one another with respect. It was the deplorable *sinat chinam* (baseless hatred) that led to the welcoming of the Romans by the Jewish leadership during the Second Temple period, and ultimately to the destruction of the Second Temple and expulsion of Jews from Jerusalem. According to the Talmud, *sinat chinam* is an equivalent to idol worship,

forbidden sexual relations, and bloodshed combined.

It is paramount that Israelis and Jews around the world work to maintain the unity we are currently experiencing in this time of war, for it will determine the future not only of Israel but of the Jewish people everywhere. Fostering unity, peace, and respect should happen not only in the politics of Israel, but in our households, businesses, and social circles in the diaspora. ✧



Elie Douer is a junior at Abraham Joshua Heschel School in New York, NY.

Preserving Progress: Safeguarding Saudi-Israel Normalization From Disruption

BY ZACH LUKEMAN

Following the tragic events of October 7, a profound surge in tension between Israel and the Arab world has resurfaced. In light of the horrifying attack orchestrated by Hamas, the U.S.-designated terrorist group backed by Iran, it is understandable that the Jewish community is by and large overwhelmed by emotions. The animosity and cruelty exhibited towards the Jewish people in much of the Arab world does not help dispel Israelis' anxieties. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that despite the existing animosity from some Arab nations, Israel has made meaningful strides in recent years toward peace with several Sunni Arab countries.

The Abraham Accords, signed in 2020, marked a turning point in Israel's diplomatic history. Representing a departure from years of covert cooperation between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), marked notably by joint efforts against the COVID-19 pandemic, the Accords signaled a paradigm shift. By publicly normalizing relations, both nations made a resounding statement affirming Israel's rightful place in the region.

Central to this diplomatic breakthrough was the UAE's formal recognition of Israel and Abu Dhabi's normalization of relations with the Jewish state. Israel reciprocated by agreeing to suspend plans to annex parts of the West Bank. Bahrain, inspired by this groundbreaking agreement, joined the treaty and established normalized relations with Israel. On September 15, 2020, the Bahraini and Emirati foreign ministers joined then U.S. President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for a signing ceremony at the White House.



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman

The Abraham Accords emerged against a backdrop of shifting sentiments in the Arab world. Exhaustion with the ineffective long standing dogma of hatred towards Israel, as encapsulated in the 1967 Arab League summit resolutions following defeat in the Six-Day War, prompted a reevaluation; the policy of rejecting peace negotiations and the refusal to recognize Israel had lost traction and began to seem futile for these Gulf nations. The UAE's bold break from this unified Arab stance showed a growing willingness to accept Israel's existence within the Middle East.

The essence of the Abraham Accords is embodied in its declaration: "We believe that the best way to address challenges is through cooperation and dialogue and that developing friendly relations among States advances the interests of lasting peace in the Middle East and around the world." This lies in stark contrast with the policy suggested in the Arab League's Khartoum Resolution, released following the Six-Day War, which called for no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations with Israel. The Accords served as a catalyst, sparking broader transformation in the Middle East as both Morocco and Sudan committed to normalizing relations with Israel following the September signing.

“It is imperative that Jews not forget the positive shift in sentiment towards Israel within the Arab sphere, as we work to realize a peaceful Middle East that includes a prosperous Israel.”



President Donald J. Trump, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bahrain Dr. Abdullatif bin Rashid Al-Zayani, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Minister of Foreign Affairs for the United Arab Emirates Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan sign the Abraham Accords Sept. 15, 2020, on the South Lawn of the White House.

Prior to the attacks on October 7, Israel was actively engaged in negotiating a peace deal with Saudi Arabia, which has historic hostilities with Iran. These normalization talks were again mediated by the United States. The timing of the Iran-backed Hamas attacks on Israel was likely an attempt to disrupt these negotiations, invoke Arab unity between Riyadh and the Palestinians, and cease normalization talks. Despite the suspension of peace talks during the war, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammad bin Salman has expressed continued interest in resuming negotiations with Israel and the United States and has even called for the return of the hostages held by Hamas.

It is of the utmost importance that the Jewish people resist the impulse to project feelings about Hamas onto the entire Arab world. Such generalizations could inadvertently play into the hands of Hamas and Iran, potentially creating obstacles to Israel's pursuit of peace with its Arab neighbors. It is imperative that Jews not forget the positive shift in sentiment towards Israel within the Arab sphere, as we work to realize a peaceful Middle East that includes a prosperous Israel. ✧



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The United Nations Security Council Chamber in New York, Flickr

The UN's Impotence Goes Well Beyond Its Obsession With Israel

BY ETHAN GARCIA ROJZE

The United Nations has long been unable to enforce its own rules. And instead of addressing this failure, countries use the UN as a venue to continuously attack Israel instead of going after the nations that are blatantly ignoring and violating the humanitarian code of the UN Charter. This is not only negligence but also incompetence.

Particularly, and unfortunately, futile are the UN Peacekeeping troops. One of the UN's stated goals is to protect human rights. This, of course, includes protecting civilians. However, according to their operational code, UN Peacekeeping troops are not allowed to engage in combat unless they are being fired upon, which hinders their ability to save civilian lives. Unfortunately, they cannot use any

of their limited resources to defend civilians unless they too are being attacked. For example, if a refugee camp outside of their jurisdiction were to be slaughtered in front of their very eyes, there is nothing they could do. As such, they are extremely limited in their defensive capabilities, and can barely accomplish what they are supposed to do: create conditions for peace.

Another stated goal of the UN is to reduce conflict, and yet, the UN Security Council voted to pull out of South Sudan, which is in the middle of a brutal civil war, due to pressure from its government, which is currently committing war crimes against its own people.

Moreover, the UN Peacekeeping troops themselves are lackluster, to say the least. This is primarily due to their inability to operate independently and with initiative because of the amount of red tape around them. Given that these troops come from many different countries, they are restricted by the political motivations of their homelands, limiting where they can be deployed. They also have very limited resources and equipment, making their combat capabilities extremely limited. Now, one may argue that they are a peacekeeping group, and that combat should not be their priority. And while that is certainly true, that does not mean their military capabilities should be hampered at the possible expense of the innocents they are asked to protect.

On top of that, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is almost laughable, with countries like Somalia, where Albinos are considered unnatural and abhorrent and same-sex marriage is criminalized, having a seat. Or of course, Iran, which was recently appointed Chair of the UN Human Rights Council Social Forum despite its enforcement of Sharia law. The hypocrisy of the UNHRC is ridiculous almost to the point of satire.

Furthermore, the number of countries with blatantly corrupt governments that get voted into leadership positions at the UN should be unacceptable to any self-respecting member state. Beyond the rights-abusing states that so frequently get seats on the Human Rights Council, nations such as Russia and China have a substantial amount of power at the UN with seats on the Security Council. Even though these states do not at all represent the ideals of the UN Charter, their high-level positions enable them to influence the UN into defending dictatorships and limiting human rights, rather than

defending the rights of individuals and keeping dictatorships in check.

And then there is the UN's stance on Israel. From 2015-2022, the UN General Assembly adopted 140 resolutions against Israel, compared with 68 on every other country combined. Furthermore, the UNHRC adopted 99 resolutions against Israel from 2006-2022. For comparison, during that same period, the UNHRC adopted 13 resolutions against Iran, a theocracy whose authorities relentlessly repress and crackdown on dissent. Iran funds multiple terrorist organizations for the purpose of annihilating Israel and harassing other neighboring Middle Eastern countries.

Outrageously, the head of UN Women refused for months to talk about the mass raping and sexual violence against Israeli women by Hamas terrorists on October 7. How can a committee that stands for the rights and empowerment of women across the globe fail to condemn such a blatant violation of women's rights by Hamas?

Lastly, perhaps the most unfortunate aspect of the UN today is its rampant corruption. Throughout the years, there has been a litany of instances of corruption at the UN, whether it be the disappearance of humanitarian funds, its inability to account for its ballooning staff worldwide including in a variety of specialized agencies, or the scandal-ridden Oil-for-Food Program.

The weakness of the UN as a force for law and order on the global stage only serves to tempt authoritarians across the globe to take more aggressive actions and even act with reckless abandon, ignoring the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as they go.

If the UN fails to reform itself and continues down this course, then eventually the West will have to contend with the consequences of its actions—or in this case, failure to act sooner. Whether it comes through China making a move on Taiwan, Iran giving Hezbollah the go-ahead to launch a large-scale attack against Israel, or some other unforeseen event, nobody knows. And nobody can say when this will happen. But it is almost certain that in such a case the UN will be a hindrance rather than a decisive force for good. ☆



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Reframing the Debate Around Israel's Obligations to Gazan Civilians

BY JACOB SHAYEFAR

"Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and attacked all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God. When the Lord your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land he is giving you to possess as an inheritance, you shall blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!" (Devarim 25:17-19).

Enemies of Israel often wail that Israel is not doing enough to help Palestinian civilians. They mention movement restrictions, the shutting off of power in Gaza, the strikes on hospitals, and the Palestinian civilian death tolls. They accuse Israel of committing an apartheid, of valuing Jewish, Israeli lives over those of the darker Palestinians. They bemoan indiscriminate air strikes, raids on mosques, and settlements in the West Bank. To prove their point, they cite differences in casualty counts, UN and other international reports, and the generally atrocious conditions in Gaza. In short, they accuse the Jews of genocide.

Zionists refute these claims. They mention the necessity of movement restrictions; the trucks of humanitarian aid going into Gaza, even in times of war; the pipelines from Israel that supply water; the supply of electricity (in times of peace); and the subsequent improvement of life in Gaza that this assistance brings. Israel's defenders mention that when Israel wants to help civilians, Hamas prevents them from doing so. For example, Hamas spent sixteen years using water pipes to make missiles. They note the ample warning the IDF gives before airstrikes (the U.S. National Security Council Spokesman John Kirby recently noted he's not sure the United States would ever provide such thorough warnings) and that the mosques and hospitals the IDF targets always turn out to be terrorist hideouts. These defenders point out that Nazi Germany had more civilian casualties than the UK, that Dresden was reduced to rubble; they remind that the UN is worthless. And they're right. But it is also

where they go wrong.

When Zionists engage in this debate, they concede that Israel has a moral obligation to help the civilians of its enemy. And once they make this concession, Israel cannot win.

If Israel accepts responsibility for the Palestinian civilians, then Israel will find itself making hard decisions between safeguarding the Palestinians and helping its own people. If Israel must care for Palestinian lives the same way it cares for Israelis, Israel's legitimacy to continue the war comes into question. Anytime Israel retaliates against a Hamas attack, a Palestinian civilian might suffer. If the IDF destroys an apartment building being used to manufacture rockets, that's one less building for a civilian to live in. If they kill a terrorist, that's one fewer brother, son, or father.

Thus, Israel must pick one: either the well-being of Gazan citizens or its self-preservation.

Making Israel take responsibility for both citizenries—and care for Palestinian lives more than Hamas does—puts Jerusalem in an impossible position. It has never been the case that a nation was viewed as responsible for the well-being of its enemy. In the Classical Age, the Romans didn't care about the plight of the Goths. In more contemporary times, Roosevelt and Churchill were not

“ Making Israel take responsibility for both citizenries—and care for Palestinian lives more than Hamas does—puts Jerusalem in an impossible position.



Timon Studler/Unspalsh

expected to take responsibility for the Japanese or German citizens. It has never been the case that unending aid was expected from warring nations. France never gave money to Germany as the Nazis marched on Paris. Only Israel is expected to do such things.

All of Israel's defenders must refute this framing. We Jews, who annihilated the Moabites, drove out the Canaanites, and continue to blot out the Amalekites whenever they arise, cannot be expected to take responsibility for our enemy. We must put our self-preservation first. We must stand firm that we have no responsibility to support or enable evil.

When, according to the Arab World Research and Development (AWRAD) group, over 60 percent of Gazan civilians support the actions taken on October 7, when released terrorists are given hero's welcomes, when they chant cries to stab Jews and pay young men to do just that, there's nothing else to call it.

The IDF is a moral army. It does not, and should not, seek collective punishment. But we should not let Israel's detractors forget what we are up against. The point here isn't to hurt the Palestinian people, even those who politically support Hamas. Ishmael is, after all, not Amalek. Rather, the goal is merely the preservation of the Jewish state.

Whenever Israel lends aid to the Palestinians, it is out of an abundance of mercy. Israel has no moral obligation to aid its enemy. Thus, the fact

that Israel does provide aid, that Israel seeks to ease the hurt Hamas afflicts on Palestinian civilians, is proof of Israel's excessive goodness. And while this is acceptable, to the extent that it does not actively endanger Israelis, it cannot be used to establish the untenable standard wherein this extraordinary righteousness is viewed as expected instead of gracious.

This needs to be made clear. Zionists cannot continue to engage in an argument where the terms are biased against us. Anti-Zionists must know that it is a great privilege for the Palestinians to receive anything at all from Israel.

Zionists cannot deny reality. Israel's defenders cannot crumble under the pressure of the institutions that push false morality. They must fight for the truth, whether the untruth comes from the media, on a college campus, or from a peer, even when it will make them unpopular.

We mustn't lie, neither explicitly nor implicitly. And when we engage in the argument over Israeli aid, conceding that Israel must give aid in the first place, we tell a lie: we pretend that our values are not what they are; we deny our scripture.

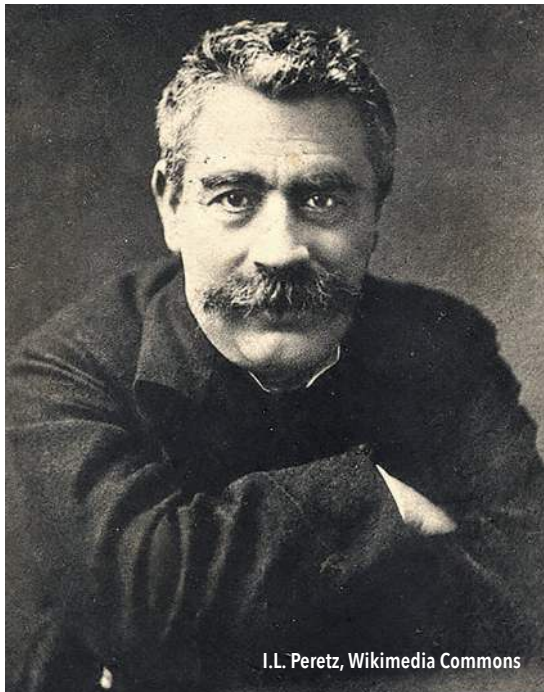
Jews cannot compromise our values. The Torah doesn't; the truth doesn't. So we mustn't either. The survival of the Jewish state depends on it. ☆



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I.L. Peretz's Legacy: Challenging Jewish Passivity

BY BENJIE KATZ



If any American has heard of the *shtetl*, the little market towns where a significant portion of Jews in Eastern Europe lived until the early twentieth century, it is almost certainly thanks to the widespread popularity of *Fiddler on the Roof*. This story portrays the lives of Jews in Eastern Europe and explores the tensions between tradition and modernity, particularly as anti-Semitic sentiment is spreading. Despite this popularity, Isaac Leib Peretz's name remains, astonishingly, relatively unknown to a large portion of Americans. Peretz, a foremost figure in the development of modern Jewish culture, dominated Jewish literary life in Warsaw practically from the moment he settled there in 1890 until his death. His influence extended far beyond the Polish capital, reaching and inspiring Jewish communities worldwide. Peretz's writing predominantly grappled with the realities of mid-nineteenth century Eastern European Jewry, and it serves as a critical lens into the early Zionist movement, which was formed

largely in response to the traditional and widespread justifications for Jewish passivity. His satirical critiques of this era are key to understanding the motivations behind the founders of the State of Israel and the responsibility of Jews around the world to uphold Peretz's ideals of Jewish unity and resistance.

Peretz's "The Shabbos Goy" tells the story of Yankele, a man who lives in the *shtetl* of Chelm and is consistently attacked by the "Shabbos Goy," whose job it is to perform certain types of work (*melakha*) that Jewish religious law (*halakha*) prohibits a Jew from doing on the Sabbath. Every time Yankele goes to his rabbi to complain about the Shabbos Goy's constant harassment, the rabbi places blame on Yankele instead. For example, when he is punched in the teeth by the abuser, the rabbi blames him for walking about the *shtetl* with such beautiful teeth. Eventually, Yankele gets kicked out of the *shtetl* for endangering the community. As the story concludes, Peretz writes, "You're laughing? Still, there's a little of the Rabbi of Chelm in each of us." The priority of the Rabbi of Chelm was not to protect the dignity of the Jew, but rather to please the neighbors and discourage them from attacking the rest of the *shtetl*.

Peretz conveys a haunting message to the reader, as he asserts that this is no mere fable; rather, it serves as a stark display of the prevalent tendency within the Jewish community to justify and thus perpetuate the cruelty of the Jews' oppressors. This form of Jewish passivity was unfortunately pervasive in the diasporic Jewish communities at the time. When pogroms were incited, the citizens of the *shtetls* toiled to quickly clean up the mess, giving the appearance of normalcy

“Peretz conveys a haunting message to the reader, as he asserts that this is no mere fable; rather, it serves as a stark display of the prevalent tendency within the Jewish community to justify and thus perpetuate the cruelty of the Jews' oppressors.”



Shtetl of Kretinga, 1914. Courtesy of The Lost Shtetl Museum

as if the violent events had never occurred. Peretz staunchly disagreed with this response and called for a change in communal mindset, urging Jews to prioritize compassion and care for one another in accordance with Jewish ideals.

Further critique of Jewish passivity can be found in Peretz's most famous story, "Bontche Shveig," or Bontche the Silent. Peretz juxtaposes protagonist Bontche's life of extreme hardship and neglect, which includes pogroms, exile, poverty, and the legal restrictions imposed on Jews, with his unrelenting stoicism and quiet acceptance of this fate. The story begins with Bontche's death, his unmarked grave symbolizing the lack of recognition he received in life. Yet in the afterlife, the heavenly court is ready to grant him entry without much debate, highlighting the exceptional nature of Bontche's passive life. The shift in the narrative occurs when Bontche is given the opportunity to request anything in heaven, and his modest wish is for a hot roll with fresh butter every day.

While this could be interpreted as a tale of incredible fortitude, Peretz offers a more bitter commentary, suggesting Bontche is symbolic of the indifference and acceptance of the unacceptable so prevalent in the *shtetls*. The Jewish persecution of the time makes it challenging to view Bontche's passivity as a virtue,

and Peretz questions Bontche's attitude. Bontche's individual story was intended to represent the collective response of Jews in the diaspora to the injustices they encountered, emphasizing the need for an assertive and active stance towards adversity. The debate surrounding Jewish indifference became particularly relevant in the aftermath of the Holocaust, and many turned to the author who had grappled with the idea that Jews were not armed or prepared for the brutality they encountered.

The works of Isaac Leib Peretz offer a profound perspective on the complex dynamics of Jewish passivity, as he skillfully employs satire and storytelling to shed light on the repercussions of silent endurance and inaction. Peretz's call to action was ultimately answered in the Zionist movement and the establishment of the Jewish state. Jews now have our own country and we are able to assert ourselves militarily in the face of unprecedented slaughter. Peretz's stories continue to serve as a poignant reminder of the power of the Jewish people when unified and self-confident, as well as the dire consequences of our division. ☆



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Petticoat Lane Market Sunday Morning, 1910, Bishopsgate Institute Archives, London



Ashkenazi Migration to London: Building a Jewish Community in the East End

BY EMILY BUNDER

When my ancestors left Ukraine during the 1905 Kyiv pogrom, my father's side fled to Brooklyn, New York and began a life there. However, my mother's side decided to emigrate to somewhere closer, a neighborhood called Stepney, in what was then known as the East End of London. Although a large portion of London's Jewish community now lives in the London Borough of Barnet and the county of Hertfordshire, Ashkenazim like my ancestors worked tirelessly to establish themselves in the industrialized, urban community of the East End, where many of them first arrived to the country in the 1880s. London has always been a city for immigrants, characterized by its diversity and beautiful interchange of culture; for the Jews of the late 19th century, this was no different. However, like many historical attempts of Jewish integration into society, not everyone welcomed us with open arms.

The area of East London has a long history of immigration, primarily due to its proximity to London's commercial docks and mainline railway stations, making it an easily accessible metropolis for individuals seeking safety from persecution.

However, when mass Jewish immigration to the area began, the Jews were seen as an unusual group of people, foreign to Anglo culture. At the time, Jews even faced accusations of committing the murders in fact committed by Jack the Ripper. This view of the community became commonly adopted by others within the city, particularly by the UK's mostly Conservative government of the day.

In 1899, cartographer George Arkell created a color-coded map depicting how many Jews lived on various streets in the East End, published in a collection of essays on the topic of "The Jew in London." Supposedly intended to limit prejudice towards Jews, as expressed by social reformer Samuel Barnett, the collection realistically did nothing of the sort. In 1905, Arthur Balfour, the man behind the Balfour Declaration, and his Conservative government passed the Aliens Act, aimed at restricting Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe. Twelve years prior to Balfour's statement declaring Britain's support for a Jewish state in what was then Ottoman Palestine, he wanted to prevent Jews from entering safe Britain, despite the terrible atrocities we were facing in Eastern Europe. It is an unsettling fact to consider.

Yet, despite the rise in anti-Semitism Jews faced

as new Londoners, the Jewish community of the East End nonetheless grew and prospered. Jewish families moved in next to non-Jewish families and shared culture, language, and food. Yiddish was spoken on every street and kosher restaurants, supermarkets, and butchers grew in number. Whitechapel Road became a haven for London Jewry, becoming a favorite location for Shabbos walks after services in nearby synagogues. Many Jewish immigrants also found jobs in factories as tailors, seamstresses, and machine operators. Despite the low pay and terrible working conditions, poverty-stricken Jewish families lived the best lives that they could. Many parents sought out good education for their children and enrolled them in the Jews' Free School (JFS), now located in North-west London—where I am educated today.

Jewish students learnt about the United Kingdom and British history. They were taught how to integrate into British society, while still upholding the values their parents brought to this country. However, as these Jewish students were taught in English, many of them did not learn Hebrew or how to read from a *siddur*, so Talmudic schools and *Cheders* were set up in the East End to supplement British education. Outside of school, young Jewish boys were able to attend youth clubs, like the Jewish Lads' Brigade, which still exists today alongside its female faction, the Jewish Girls' Brigade. The determination of immigrant families to build success in a new country is one that cannot be ignored and should be commemorated. Through difficult times for Jews, the very belief in our continued existence as a people and the love of our culture drove us to flourish and establish ourselves as a remarkable immigrant community.

Today, Jews in London are a minority amongst minorities. The Second World War and the *Blitzkrieg* drove many Jews out of the East End and into North London and beyond. As we grew in our new homes—as previously in our East London ones—new immigrant populations came to the East End, growing just as we had. As a West London Jew, I am

among a tiny community in this area, but I celebrate and share my religion and culture. I have adored growing up in the West London Borough of Ealing and sharing *sufganiyot*, *hamantaschen*, and Shabbos dinners with my Muslim and Christian neighbors and friends. Even today, our spirit to preserve our culture is undying, and can be seen in the numerous Israel marches and marches against anti-Semitism across the United Kingdom, all of which have received outstanding levels of attendance.

But some things have not changed. Recently, Conservative candidate for London mayor Susan Hall was seen by some as trying to weaponize the Jewish community against her opponents, stating that she knows “the wealth” of the community and that we are “frightened” by our current mayor, for which she has been criticized even by her own party and the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Hall's speech was poorly worded and offended many of the people she aimed to win over. But on the other side, even with the large membership the Jewish Labour Movement and Labour Friends of Israel have, the Labour Party is no stranger to anti-Semitism. Former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn had his whip suspended and currently sits as an independent in the House of Commons due to his party breaching the religious and racial sections of the Equality Act of 2010, which makes discrimination of individuals due to religion and race unlawful, mainly by failing to respond to anti-Semitism in the party appropriately.

Despite the trouble we face in politics, it is clear that anti-Semitism is not taken lightly by many in the UK. We even have an advisor to the government on anti-Semitism, Lord Mann, who, although not Jewish, vocally aspires to ensure our safety in this country, by giving policy suggestions and visiting Jewish communities across the UK to understand the experiences of British Jews. Lord Mann has made an effort to work with JFS, and in looking at the work he does and meeting him, I see the passion he holds for supporting and working with Britain's Jewish community.

So, although we may no longer be in the East End, London's Jews have not disappeared. We look back on our history with pride, and embrace our future with hope and optimism as a still thriving community. ✧

“Through difficult times for Jews, the very belief in our continued existence as a people and the love of our culture drove us to flourish and establish ourselves as a remarkable immigrant community.”



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Tal-Or Cohen Montemayor on the Surge in Online Anti-Semitism and its National Security Implications

BY ESTHER LUVISHIS



Tal-Or Cohen Montemayor

Social media is a significant part of everyone's life in the twenty-first century, especially for the young. From X, formerly Twitter, to Instagram and Facebook, there is a platform for every age group. Unfortunately, this type of influence and connectivity does not come without its liabilities. One in particular is anti-Semitism, which has risen at an alarming rate since Hamas's October 7 attacks on Israel. Jews from all over the world have been targeted with misinformation and vile slurs online. The uptick in rampant anti-Semitism not only hurts Jews and their allies from an emotional viewpoint, but it is harming American and Western societies from a national security standpoint as well.

I had the opportunity to speak with Tal-Or Cohen Montemayor, the CEO of an Israeli startup named CyberWell, launched in May 2022 for the purpose of using technology, specifically data sets, to help social media companies curb this concerning sentiment online. As she describes it, "CyberWell is the first ever open database to monitor online anti-Semitism across social media platforms, major social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and what was once known as Twitter, now X. We monitor those platforms using AI and

open source intelligence techniques and technology. We monitor for online anti-Semitism and hate in English and Arabic."

I interviewed Tal-Or in early December 2023. Here is what she had to say.

How has anti-Semitism increased since October 7?

Since October 7, we've been called on by social media partners to help out with content that isn't just online anti-Semitism, but has also been connected to these very real surges in violent Jew hatred that we're seeing online. That includes graphic content, calls that are pro-Hamas, pro-terrorist content, and misinformation and disinformation. If we look at what happened post-10/7, we have a very clear surge in online anti-Semitic content, and specifically violent anti-Semitic content, graphic content that actually celebrates the death of Jewish people and one of the largest attacks against Jews since the Holocaust. So if we look at the data that CyberWell has been monitoring, online anti-Semitism in a parallel time period versus what happened post-10/7, we see an increase of about 86 percent across the board in online anti-Semitism. That's nearly a doubling in the amount of online anti-Semitism across these major social media platforms. I would say that the baseline level of anti-Semitism on X, or Twitter, is typically higher than other platforms, which increased by 86 percent, but our highest increase in anti-Semitic content was actually on Facebook, with an increase of 193 percent of anti-Semitic data coming through CyberWell's systems from Facebook. That is almost a tripling of online anti-Semitism from what we see on a regular day on Facebook. So that is particularly alarming because CyberWell monitors in English and in Arabic, and the sharpest increases that we saw were in

violent anti-Semitic content in Arabic specifically. So calling for the harming, killing, or justifying the murder of Jews, we saw that increase from really low numbers in previous time periods to up to 61 percent of the Arabic data that CyberWell was tracking and vetting post-October 7.

What makes CyberWell unique is that we are dedicated to monitoring this issue in real time. That's what started CyberWell, because I saw that when it came to the world of online anti-Semitism, a lot of the other organizations were doing one-off reports, meaning once or twice a year at best. [They weren't] dedicating the best available technology or really a tool that was meant to monitor this issue full scale. Prior to 10/7, there was research that showed that the average user that reports online anti-Semitism has a 20 to 25 percent chance at best of getting that content removed by social media platforms. Having a report that comes out once in a while isn't going to create that critical mass or the pressure for a really tech-based solution for these platforms to actually address issues at scale...[especially since] people report spending an average of about, especially younger people under 30, an average of about 40 hours a week at least on these platforms. These specific applications that you go to bed with at night, that you wake up with in the morning, were hijacked by Hamas and literally used to incite violence against Jews and to popularize the events that happened on October 7. So it really highlighted the lack of investment on the part of the social media platforms to prevent violent anti-Semitic content from spreading, and I would say specifically in Arabic. That was a complete failure, and we really saw that the social media companies didn't have the infrastructure in place to prevent that. The reason that we want to highlight this is because it really has become an issue of national security. The social media companies, the way that Hamas leveraged social media platforms post-10/7, is something that was unprecedented, that terrorized not only Israelis for weeks after the attacks but also Jews around the world. Every Western democracy should pay attention to the way that these platforms were leveraged by a terrorist group—and other terrorist groups are paying attention to that tactic as well. Two or three weeks after the 10/7 attacks, there was a slaughtering of 800 tribesmen in Darfur by a jihadi group. Right away, the jihadi group uploaded the video to social media, because they were taking notes from

Hamas's strategy of using social media as a weapon of psychological warfare.

What is the best way to protect yourself from hate online?

As an individual who is online, I would first recommend making your profile private—for anyone who doesn't live a public life. If you are somebody who is very active in digital spaces, it's also a matter of security, and I would recommend changing your passwords often. And I also recommend that the way that you show up in digital activism should be specific to you. Everyone finds their calling in what is digital activism to them. Maybe that's being proud of your Jewish identity online, which I absolutely encourage, or you can do something that's very similar and anonymous—you can report online anti-Semitism when you see it. I would specifically recommend [reporting online anti-Semitism] in the comments section, because social media platforms are particularly bad at tracking anti-Semitism in the comments section. When you report online anti-Semitism, it's anonymized, it's not like anyone gets notified that you reported it, so that's one of the reasons I encourage it. It's a way to make sure that your digital spaces are safer, on your own behalf and your friends' behalf. And I also wanted to say that on social media, you're able to report that online anti-Semitism to CyberWell. We're opening up different channels for people to report that directly to us, including a Google Chrome extension or via our database. If you want to spend five minutes a day reporting online hate just to feel like you're making a difference, you can go to app.cyberwell.org, literally click on the content that we've already vetted as anti-Semitic, and report that content with us.

What happens when you report anti-Semitic content or misinformation or disinformation?

When you report hate speech or anti-Semitic content on a social media platform, typically speaking what happens is that there is an AI filter to recognize if something is blatant hate speech. And that is meant to deal with 80-90 percent of the content that's flagged. That often results in things like anti-Semitic speech not being removed at first stop. And then a lot of social media companies will give you the option to appeal that decision and actually get it reviewed by a human. That's why it's important when you've reported something, not to get dis-

heartened if you get an answer that you don't like, but to go ahead and push further to appeal that to the content moderation teams. The content moderation teams, the human reviewers of the social media platforms, are also training the internal algorithms for these social media platforms for decisions in the future. So it is really important to escalate your report all the way up. Instead of just reporting things on an individual basis, CyberWell's technology is meant to track these surges and changes in narratives, hashtags, and accounts online and then create very focused data sets or very focused reports that unpack these surges for these social media platforms. We give them the data points that they need in order to address them at scale, in order to go into their systems and see how far these trends have spread and potentially make the decisions to do more effective and systematic interventions.

One of the challenges with mis/disinformation in the online space in general: mis/disinformation spreads at a rapid rate, but the process to check it is rooted in fact-checking. So social media companies literally partner with fact checkers, third parties, often news agencies, in order to check if something is actually mis/disinformation. They don't make that call independently. We run into issues primarily of speed when that's the process, and when they're looking at the current war in Israel, there's a lot of issues with the statistics that are coming out of Gaza, because it's run by Hamas. And that has influenced some of the decisions with mis/disinformation coming out of the region, which has significantly impacted the optics or way the public is getting the picture of what's happening on the ground... I also think that this generation hasn't really dealt with state-sponsored propaganda or terrorist or radical ideology propaganda. But this issue of dis/misinformation is a huge challenge when people are actually getting their opinion on things. Young people are uniquely challenged, [because] for people under the age of 30, most of them are using platforms as a news source—and social media is not a news source. It's not a news source. I can't say it enough! It's really important to encourage people to get information from news sources, multiple different news sources, because social media platforms are really meant to reinforce your bias. So if the people that you were talking to engaged in content that had an anti-Israel slant, the social media platform via its algorithm is primed

to show them additional information that tells them more about that bias and reinforces them.

Are any social media companies doing anything about this?

The biggest problem that we've seen since 10/7 is that there's only readiness to act on these issues during times of crisis, when it's already too late. And that was the reason that I launched CyberWell, to drive enforcement and improvement of these policies in regular times. There is an anti-Semitism problem on social media platforms on a regular basis. What we're seeing now is this violent onslaught of anti-Jewish hatred that is also calling for violent outcomes that should be worrying to all of us. But the fact of the matter remains that there's a lot to do in non-war situations.

So what are they doing right now? Social media platforms, most of them, dedicated resources and staff to monitor the issue post-10/7 on a regular basis. I think this is very, very valuable. And there were some key policy decisions made. CyberWell has very specifically worked with TikTok in this space to make more effective decisions on monitoring online anti-Semitism and violent content at scale. But I think it's important to maintain the pressure and to not let go after this specific failure on the part of social media companies. The fact of the matter remains that this is an issue. Online anti-Semitism affects the Jewish community disproportionately, and is now causing people to hide their Jewish identity online, and even to leave online spaces. Over half of worldwide internet activity is on these social media spaces and platforms, so if we think about what that means for young Jews, Jews in general, Jewish organizations—being erased from digital spaces, it's effectively being erased from a very significant part of the world.

What is your hope for the future?

The best-case scenario coming directly out of 10/7 [is] to take the outpouring of online anti-Semitism and violent content, to learn from data sets, and actually implement them in automatic ways so that we prevent online anti-Semitism in the future. That's on the platform side. On the government side: it's high time the government realizes that the lack of enforcement of digital policies on social media platforms has become an issue of national security. Both in terms of reinforcing hate speech, but also

unfortunately like we saw on 10/7, is the pornographicization of the death of Jews. Literally. Like creating snuff videos and just projecting the horrific things that actually happened. It was leveraged as a tool of psychological warfare; the government can no longer accept this concept, that it's a free for all on social media platforms. It is an issue of national security. It is a threat for any Western democracy. So what I expect them to do, and is the best-case scenario for them to do, is to pass laws that actually require social media platforms to disclose the data. To disclose the data on hate speech, to disclose the data very directly on violent content, to disclose not only the steps that the companies took but all the reported content that was not actioned on. And they must make that information available not only to the government, but academics and organizations like CyberWell who are experts in the field. We'll generate solutions for these platforms moving forward. The U.S. is behind on this issue. The EU already passed the Digital Services Act, which is the most advanced legislation on the books that allows the EU to fine social media platforms up to six percent of global turnover if they fail to remove illegal hate speech, and that comes with a host of disclosure requirements. So I would say in the U.S., we have this unique challenge around the issue of freedom of speech and where the line is drawn, etc. I think the U.S. government needs to start thinking of social media platforms the same way they do highly regulated industries like banking and food and drug development. All of those companies are required to disclose the processes and the way that they handle data and information, and we need to have the same disclosure requirements for social media companies.

America's freedom of speech is upheld until there is an incitement to violence. And hate speech is not a general exception to First Amendment protection. What would you tell people who say that they have the right to say whatever they want online? (Not extreme incitement to violence but still blatant anti-Semitism)

In general, freedom of speech does not apply to paid speech. What I mean by paid speech: social media platforms are private companies; 90 percent of their revenue comes from advertising. Those are spaces of paid speech. So you're right to say that as

an American, you can say whatever you want to say in a public space against your government, against your friends, but that doesn't extend to a private corporation. There's a really big difference between defending Nazis marching in Skokie, Illinois that are exercising their first amendment rights versus those Nazis coming to Disneyland, which is private property filled with children, and exercising their right to march there. That doesn't extend to private property, and I think we have failed to extend that concept to these private corporations. They are not your government and they don't owe you constitutional rights. If they owed you constitutional rights, there wouldn't be digital policies to begin with. So freedom of speech doesn't equal paid speech, and when you are participating in creating paid content on a user-generated content platform, i.e. social media, you're participating in paid speech. And nobody owes you the right to promote hate speech with a commercially empowered algorithm.

Things that are very attention-grabbing reward the companies because they get more views and advertisers, so why wouldn't anti-Semitism be amplified?

100 percent. Social media platforms across the board are empowered by algorithms that are meant to grab your attention, and keep your attention. And the natural outpour of that is that the algorithm learns that the more extreme and divisive content is, the more likely it is to get other users to stay on the platform. It is therefore often rewarded, promoted, and amplified on these social media platforms. As for content, this is something that CyberWell does actively with the social media platforms, we allow them to better identify where anti-Semitic speech is violating their own digital policies. It should be best practices that content that is likely to violate the social media companies' policies is deamplified, which means it's not part of the extreme algorithmic attention-grabbing mechanism. But there is no transparency on just where they draw the line, and that is one of the biggest issues when we talk about actually improving these digital platforms so they can no longer act as reinforcement mechanisms that encourage people to hate. ☆



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One Sky, One People: The American Jewish Response to the War in Israel

BY MATEA FRIEBER



March for Israel, Nov. 14, 2023, Washington. Ted Eytan/Flickr

My great-grandfather, Chaim Frierber, arrived in New York from Krakow as a young man at the turn of the twentieth century. Recently, my mother shared with me an eight-page memoir he wrote with the help of his daughter, vividly chronicling his experiences in Krakow. Within these pages, he recounts stories about his grandfather, the cantor in the Alte shul, singing in the shul choir, and various other cherished moments with his family and the vibrant Krakow Jewish community. My mother found her aunt's copy of the memoir, on the back of which she recorded a memory with her father, my great-grandfather, from 1939.

One night in New York, as she walked alongside her father in the park in comfortable silence, he suddenly halted, gazing upwards at the stars. She realized then that he was quietly weeping, and asked him, "What's the matter?" He replied, "זיי הרגענען די אידן", which, translated from Yiddish, means, "They are killing the Jews. They are killing the Jews." In that moment, as he stood with his daughter beneath the safety of the sky in New York, he felt the pain of the Jews in Europe being exterminated under the very same stars. He passed away before the full extent of the Holocaust was known.

This story holds a profound resonance and relevance for American Jews today. Despite the vast



ocean that separates us from the suffering of our people at the hands of Hamas, our emotional proximity is palpable. According to the Pew Research Center, eight in ten American Jews across all denominations assert that their connection to Israel is an essential part of what being Jewish means to them. There are countless anecdotes of individuals, regardless of their religious levels, rekindling and elevating their Jewish identities since the horrific events of October 7. By October 18, more than 2,600 men had requested *tefillin* through one Chabad campaign set up in memory of those murdered in Israel. In addition, challah bakes are being held worldwide. In one case, more than 500 women participated in an

annual challah bake hosted by Adath Israel Congregation in Cincinnati, Ohio in honor of the hostages. And countless Jews are active members of *Tehillim* chats and spreadsheets, incorporating prayer into their daily routines in order to storm the heavens. The very term “diaspora” denotes dispersion, and yet in our separation, we have never been more unified.

Most conflicts are geographically confined, but the attacks on the Israeli people transcend anti-Zionism and have reverberated around the world as blatant anti-Semitism. Hamas’ ominous call for the complete extermination of Jews harks back to the Holocaust, and even for those not religiously observant, this threat does not feel like a mere statistic or news article; it is etched into the very fabric of Jewish identity and the Jewish soul.

Although American Jews are perhaps the most culturally diverse and geographically dispersed of the diaspora, we stand united. In a powerful demonstration of solidarity, as of October 26, the Jewish Federations of North America raised nearly \$554 million for their emergency campaign in support of Israel. On October 11, over 10,000 American Jews assembled opposite the United Nations Headquarters for a historic rally and vigil. It was the largest and most unified show of support for Israel by American Jews in decades, but not for long. An estimated 12,000 people gathered in Central Park on November 6 in support of the hostages, calling for their release. And American Jews and righteous gentiles from across the country flew into Washington, D.C. on November 14. The 290,000 people that gathered on the National Mall made this the largest pro-Israel gathering of all time.

This unity surpasses mere solidarity with our compatriots in Israel; it is a testament to the unwavering Jewish commitment to the safety and well-being of our homeland. It is an affirmation of our collective identity in the face of the ever-present specter of anti-Semitism. It is a reminder that the key to resilience lies in our ability to contribute to society without forgetting our heritage. Amid today’s prevailing culture which glorifies unrestrained individualism, the Jewish community stands out by celebrating both individuality and a profound sense of duty to something greater. ☆



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The *New York Times*: A Bias Analysis

BY ADIEL RAMIREZ

The *New York Times* is one of the most trusted news sources in the world. It is a newspaper of record in the United States. Any reputable source like the *Times* has a responsibility to bring accurate, transparent reports to its readers. So it is important to assess how this outlet has reported on the matter that is top of mind for Jews around the world, Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel and the ensuing war in Gaza, as many people take *Times* reporting as authoritative. In the months since October 7, many in my community, myself included, have criticized the newspaper for, in its effort to report objectively on the war, sympathizing with Hamas. The *Times* has published many sympathetic articles about Gazan refugees, a few suspicious ones about Israeli sources, and far too many that trust Hamas sources as the equivalent of IDF sources. This led me to believe that the reporters at the *Times* are not reporting on the war objectively. However, after further research, I found that the *New York Times*' coverage includes a wider array of perspectives than I originally thought. In this essay, I examine the bias in the *New York Times*' coverage of the War.

An October 7 *New York Times* article titled "‘We Are at War,’ Netanyahu Says After Hamas Attacks Israel," describes the events of October 7 politically and analytically. The article does not overlook the unspeakable horrors of October 7; it describes kidnappings, killings, bombings, and dead bodies strewn about Israeli cities. The article begins by listing statistics of dead and wounded Israelis and Palestinians. It calls the attack an "assault without recent precedent in its complexity and scale," describing the ways that Hamas operatives entered Israel. The article quotes Mohammed Deif, the leader of Hamas's military wing, who listed the ideological justifications and goals of the attack. The article devotes only a few short sentences to this explanation, not giving an ounce of credibility or logic to his arguments. It describes



Jakayla Toney/Unsplash

the international political responses and potential international involvements in the attack, the significance of its timing, and Israelis' criticisms of the IDF's preparedness. It recognizes that Hamas is in fact a terrorist group as designated by the United States and other nations. The article then describes the Gazan jubilation at the attacks. But, as the article states, after enduring the Israeli airstrikes, Gazans became more fearful of the situation. It notes the two-decade high of both Palestinian and Israeli deaths and recognizes that the Hamas attack was "condemned by most western countries, but praised by Israel's enemies."

In this article, the *New York Times* is fairly unbiased. Although it refers to Hamas terrorists as "militants," it recognizes Hamas as a terrorist group and devotes a similar amount of paragraphs and sympathy to both Israelis and Palestinians. It doesn't shift the focus by explaining the Israeli "occupation" of Gaza, nor does it try to make the attack seem like Israel's fault by exploring the IDF's deficit of intelligence at length. This makes journalistic sense. Israel had just suffered a horrendous terrorist attack on innocent civilians, and when this article was published, not much else was known. The *Times* is a world-renowned news source, not a sketchy website that openly spews anti-Semitic propaganda left and right. As such, on October 7, it didn't deride Israel for suffering this

attack but reported the preliminary facts.

Once Israel began to retaliate, as the war progressed and the dire state of Gaza became more front of mind than the sadistic events of October 7, the *New York Times* became more critical of the IDF and the Israeli government. If the above article from October 7 showed sympathy to a country attacked by ideologically-motivated rebels, later in the war, *Times* reports on Israel have attempted to paint a military desperately trying to clear its name to the global public. In a November 19 article titled “Israel Says Video Shows Hamas Tunnel Under Besieged Hospital,” the *Times* reporters trust Hamas intelligence and come off as suspicious of Israeli intelligence. The article is about Israel’s claims of a Hamas base located in the Al-Shifa hospital and the evidence the IDF says it found to support the claim. It describes the video footage of a fortified tunnel in the hospital complex as an effort to “bolster its allegations that Hamas has used the largest medical center in the Palestinian enclave as a base for its military operations,” writing the footage off as a political strategy that Israel employed rather than actual video proof of Hamas’ inhumane military practices. Throughout the article, the reporters use the same language to introduce Israel’s claims and Hamas’s claims about the hospital, as if Israel and Hamas share the same amount of legitimacy as democratic, trustworthy governments. The article furthermore notes that the death tolls in Gaza are provided by “health officials in the Hamas-run enclave,” almost but not really admitting that the Al-Shifa complex—and the death toll—are run by Hamas, which makes no distinction between civilian and military deaths. The article closes by noting that conclusive proof of the subterranean Hamas base has yet to be revealed due to the danger and sensitivity of investigating the hospital. In this article, the pro-Palestinian bias is understated, but still clear in the amount of suspicion the reporting casts on Israeli versus Hamas sources.

In a November 18 article titled “*Hundreds Flee Al-Shifa Hospital Days After Israeli Raid*,” the *New York Times* describes the effects of Israel’s retaliation to the October 7 attacks. The article claims that Israel raided the Al-Shifa Hospital complex, the largest hospital in Gaza. It explains that the Israeli military issued an evacuation order on the hospital and agreed to aid the safe evacu-

ation of civilians. According to one witness, the article continues, many Gazans fled on foot. In reality, the Israeli military provided humanitarian aid to the hospital overnight and allowed patients to stay with medical personnel. The Israeli military entered the hospital to find conclusive proof of the Hamas command center they had believed was hosted in the hospital. Despite video evidence of weapons and enclaves, and even footage of hostages being taken to the hospital on October 7, the *New York Times* article states that Israel has “yet to provide conclusive proof of a subterranean, military base.” Here, the article delegitimizes Israeli sources, despite U.S. officials backing the intelligence. The article ends with a description of the “raid,” noting the death tolls of both Israelis and Gazans. This article reflects the tone and wording of most *New York Times*’ coverage of the Israel-Hamas War. Although it is more or less an objective report of the facts, it undermines the authority of Israeli sources while emphasizing the sympathy-evoking state of the Gazans, thus subtly reinforcing the Gazans’ cause to the reader.

New York Times articles consistently criticize the Israeli government and military. However, they are not consistent in their biased presentation of the facts. The first article, from October 7, is decently fair, the second is understated in its bias, and the third encourages a certain perspective. With more recent articles covering the war, both reporting and opinion pieces, it is evident that the *New York Times* hosts a wide variety of writers with an assorted array of perspectives. Criticism of the Israeli military and government is widespread throughout its reporting, and the paper’s focus on Gazan suffering is poignant, but that only makes sense. Gazan civilians are, in fact, being uprooted by this war. Newspapers are bound to criticize foreign governments during a conflict. But one would hope this same criticism extends to Hamas. In conclusion, while the *New York Times*’ coverage of the Israel-Hamas War has a bias, it remains a trustworthy news source during this time of conflict and controversy. But readers would also be wise to diversify their news sources given the complexity and rapidly developing nature of the war. ☆



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A New Psychology for the American Military

BY MEIRA LUTCH

In 2024, America's military is projected to reach its smallest size since 1940. Far from a purposeful reduction in force, this contraction is cause for great concern.

How do we understand the root causes of this national defense vulnerability? A much-discussed reason for this diminution is the increasing inability of America's young people to meet the various fitness and aptitude requirements that are demanded of military recruits, such as obtaining a clean drug test, not having a criminal record, being able to pass an aptitude test, and not having visible tattoos. Currently, according to the U.S. Army Recruiting Command, a remarkable 71 percent of American youth does not meet the basic aforementioned health and cognitive standards. As a result, many branches have softened their bans on tattoos and lowered the scores needed on aptitude tests—and some branches are even considering waiving mandatory drug tests. Despite these concessions, recruiting numbers continue to drop, falling short of the military's yearly targets.

However, there is something more pernicious than dwindling ability afoot. I would like to suggest that there are deep societal currents, attitudes, and attenuation that are driving our young people away from military service. There is, I believe, a new American psyche that has taken hold in our country, and this new psyche is redefining Americans' relationship with the military. It is instilling in Americans a certain complacency and laziness, and oftentimes a deep sense of embarrassment of America's role on the world stage—for events both historic and current. This new attitude breeds a general ignorance of the global threats that abound, and this willful ignorance is, in turn, disenfranchising young Americans of the very notion of American exceptionalism.

The second and more profound aspect of the new American psyche contributing to low military recruitment is that America has become increasingly apologetic of its leadership role in the world.

The America of old viewed herself, as John Winthrop demanded and as Ronald Reagan reminded us so eloquently, as a city on a hill and as a moral light unto the nations. Freedom-seeking peoples around the world looked to America as a beacon of righteousness, justice, and godliness. But today, that self-perception seems like a distant memory. In the 21st century, many are working to rewrite America's history, twisting her past championing of freedom and goodness into a story of a country unable—and disinclined—to atone for its original sin of slavery. Who would sacrifice their blood for a country they are ashamed of? Who would encourage their sons and daughters to fight for a country of colonizers and oppressors? This corruption of the American mindset has been tainted, not only in regard to this prevalent and dangerous view of our history, but also in the structural understanding of the purpose of America's military.

Originally, the militia (America's army during its colonial and early-republic days) was a harmonized balance of give-and-take: many joined, giving of their time and safety, in order to advance a societal vision and effect the stability of their nascent state and its values. They fought for their own freedom and for that of their children. They understood very clearly the repercussions of not taking action and what could happen if they did not fight to defend their country. Today, Americans have become so used to being free that the concept of fighting for freedom is impossible to imagine, despite the many countries around the world which do not enjoy freedom, a fact of which many Americans seem to be unaware or unmoved by.

A clear understanding of what we are fighting for (life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness) has become far removed from many young Americans' reality—at our great peril. After 9/11, there was a spike in military recruits in America because people could identify the existential threat of radical Islamic terror. For better or worse, America's wars became personal to many: a significant



number of Americans either had friends or family members who volunteered to serve in the years following 9/11. Today, less than one percent of Americans currently serve in the military, and 50 percent of America's youth even admit that they actually know very little about the military and its purpose and successes, according to the U.S. Army Recruiting Command. In the year 2024, the connection that so many Americans used to have to the military has become effectively non-existent.

So what can America's leaders do to help reverse this new, pervasive, and damaging American psyche and help shore up America's military recruitment? If the U.S. government were to require military service, or some version of national service, American society would be enriched and the American military would be strengthened. (This service could include a variety of jobs to ensure that all—or at least the majority of—people could be admitted and contribute meaningfully, not just those with the right physical skill, health, and mental aptitude.) This expanded service model would bolster the national pride of American youth, which according to numerous recent polls is at an all-time low. As Rabbi E.E. Dessler writes in his *Kuntres HaChesed*, selfless giving is the surest way to effect devotion (not, surprisingly, the other way around). This would

almost certainly reverse the apathy so common in America today.

Americans are suffering from a lack of purpose, and the army is a reputable institution that instills great purpose. Military service also provides servicemen with skills that are helpful long into the future (self-defense, responsibility, teamwork, discipline, and/or practical medical or technological knowledge). Having a shared experience with so many other young Americans would also serve to unify the country, creating a sense of camaraderie to be carried with them beyond the military and into the workforce and civilian life.

It is clear that the new American psyche, and its general malaise, apologetic nature, and disconnect from America's founding ideals and institutions, is driving the critically low military recruiting numbers. Implementing required national or military service may begin the long process of reversing this decline and of rebuilding a strong America. This new national program of service would inspire America's youth through the commitment to the highest ideals of freedom, democracy, purpose, and the general good, both domestically and abroad. ☆



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Bob Dylan, Wikimedia Commons



Remembering the “Neighborhood Bully”

BY E.B. NAIDITCH

What happens in the Jewish state affects each and every Jew. As poet Yehuda Halevi famously said, “My heart is in the east, but I am at the end of the West.” American Jews contend with a much more defensive form of longing, left feeling distant and helpless in the face of tragedy. Since the October 7 massacre, the American media has been conflicted in its allyship. Some officials continue to stand strong with the state, while others hurl criticisms at Israeli actions. The Israeli government is no stranger to

such backlash. Whether it be defending itself from surrounding enemies, operating within punitive guidelines imposed by Western will, or eliminating war criminals in tunnels beneath hospitals, Israel finds itself in impossible positions. While Israel may have sympathy in its hour of mourning, it is granted no such understanding in its attempts to retaliate. This indifference weighs deeply on the heart of the Jewish nation. And this timeless double standard also brings to mind the sarcastic ode of Nobel laureate Bob Dylan to the plight of

Israel—the 1983 song “Neighborhood Bully.”

In 1981, Israel destroyed an Iraqi nuclear plant south of Baghdad. The attack, known as Operation Opera, had an undeniable effect on the nuclear atmosphere of the Middle East, pushing nuclear ambitions underground and establishing Israel’s “Begin Doctrine.” However, Israel’s actions came at an international cost, as Iraqi and French officials had previously addressed public concern with assurances that the nuclear plant had peaceful intent. Media coverage demonized Israel, with the *Los Angeles Times* calling the event “state-sponsored terrorism” and the *New York Times* deeming it “short-sighted aggression.” The United Nations General Assembly furiously reprimanded Israel’s actions, and the Jewish state was facing verbal attacks from all sides. Public opinion seemed unanimous in its criticisms of Israel—except for the dry words of one renowned pop culture icon.

Born Robert Zimmerman to Jewish parents in Duluth, Minnesota, Bob Dylan’s early public and artistic image depicted a dry midwestern Christian culture. As he broke into the music scene with his smarmy humanitarian edge and signature raspy voice, the 1960s saw Dylan release such revolutionary classics as “The Times They Are A-Changin’,” “Blowin’ In The Wind,” and “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall”—works deeply infused with themes of protest and social reform. Dylan was known to speak solemnly in support of the underdog. His albums progressively included songs decrying contemporary racial violence and injustice, coming out in staunch support of the civil rights movement. Such songs included “Hurricane,” “Oxford Town,” and “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll.”

Amid these humanitarian anthems, Dylan adapted to electric guitar, stirring controversy in the folk scene and receiving criticism for betraying classic acoustic sounds. Then, in the 1970s, Dylan converted to evangelical Christianity and released three gospel albums in quick succession. This was quite the break from the progressive, new age cultural mood of the time.

On the heels of his gospel era, in 1983 Dylan released the successful album *Infidels*, a project widely regarded as his return to secular music. From this point on, Dylan remained denominationally ambiguous, describing himself in interviews as religious, yet subscribing to no particular faith,

thus re-cementing his persona as a wandering, self-determined troubadour.

“Neighborhood Bully,” the third song on this album, seemed to exude catharsis for the crux of his journey. Fascinatingly, in this secular album, Dylan did not abandon the faith of his fathers. Instead, he addressed his Jewish roots from a spectator’s view, directly referencing Operation Opera in his lyrics. That same year, Dylan traveled for the second time to Israel, and allowed himself to be photographed at the Western Wall donning *tefillin*. In “Neighborhood Bully,” Dylan, tongue-in-cheek, describes the Jewish state as the gritty underdog amidst a sea of enemies. The song’s narrator, a beleaguered enigma, laments that he is faced with endless persecution, held to an impossible standard, and criticized constantly by the world for simply existing.

The song also highlights the necessity for Israel to act offensively, on account of being surrounded by neighbors who all want it and its people dead. In reality, this “neighborhood bully” makes major contributions in medicine and health, irrigates lifeless land, and creates a paradise. He sees his family torn apart, his holy books trampled, and the world standing by, criticizing every move he makes. After decrying centuries of oppression and expulsion, highlighting Israel’s resistance to major powers such as Rome, Egypt, and Babylonia, Dylan asks a rhetorical question: “What has he done, to wear so many scars?” Finding no satisfying answers, Dylan concludes with the neighborhood bully standing on a hill, running out of time, as history repeats itself.

“Neighborhood Bully” is written in the third person, close but yet distant in classic Dylan fashion. Many fans argue that Bob Dylan’s religious denomination is just a minor piece of the music icon. He has for many decades now avoided affiliation altogether, saying in 1997: “Here’s the thing with me and the religious thing. This is the flat-out truth: I find the religiosity and philosophy in the music.” Known for his prophetic obscurity and ambiguity, the songwriter continues to dodge definition, leaving us an immortal ballad to the Jewish state and its predicament. ☆



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The Importance of the Arts

BY RAFI UNGER

What distinguishes humans from animals is our capacity for creativity and generating new ideas. In essence, the unique creativity of humans separates us from other creatures. Unfortunately, within our current educational system, young students face limited opportunities to express and develop their distinctive and creative thoughts.

In the very early stages of education, the English curriculum revolves around the fundamental skills of reading and writing. At this early stage, students are not yet formulating novel ideas within English classes, as their attention is primarily directed towards mastering the basics—the exploration and discussion of captivating literary works is beyond their academic scope. It is thought that students

must first master these basics if they have any chance of one day comprehending the

brilliance of Shakespeare, Dickens, and Twain. Similarly, early mathematical curriculum is designed to establish a solid foundation upon which students can go on to learn algebra, geometry, and calculus. But for a young child, this method of teaching can feel very rigid, stifling, and unstimulating, and even push the child away from future curiosity in the subject. Students at this point in their education are not expected to generate original equations or hypotheses. It is evident that in early years of education and sometimes even beyond, there exists a deficiency in a core aspect of learning: fostering the development of original ideas and content.

The arts provide an invaluable outlet for young students to articulate their ideas from an early age. By participating in artistic endeavors, they can cultivate and communicate their thoughts. Where else can a young mind channel its creativity if not through the arts? Primary subjects such as English and mathematics certainly do not offer sufficient opportunities for individual expression among children. Therefore, the significance of the arts

cannot be overstated; young people need to learn how to express their boundless imaginations.

Lack of access to an arts program during early childhood may hinder their ability to think independently. If a child's introduction to producing unique material occurs only in later grades, particularly when studying literature and its underlying concepts and themes, the child may find it difficult to generate original ideas because they were never taught those tools in the first place.

It is important to define arts programs, so that one can truly understand and implement the types of programs that could develop a child's creativity from a young age. One such program could be encouraging a young student to sit down and draw for half an hour every day, for it will allow

“The arts provide an invaluable outlet for young students to articulate their ideas from an early age”

the child to express their own unique ideas. Another program could be a theater workshop, which would empower

young students to come up with their own unique ideas regarding the characters they are playing out. A final example is creative writing workshops, which would allow students to express their own ideas through words. It does not matter if the ideas themselves are unremarkable at a young age, what matters is that children start taking note of these ideas, as it will allow them to develop their creative muscle, so to speak.

Arts programs across the country often fall victim to budget constraints, leading to their reduction or even elimination. The profound impact this has on a child's creativity in later years is not always fully recognized. The arts play a vital role in providing children with a platform to channel and amplify their inherent individuality, shaping not only their growth and development but also contributing to the very creative fabric that makes us distinctly human. ✧



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Tim Arterbury/Unsplash

ARTS & CULTURE

Zakhor, or Where Is Our History?

BY MAYA TRATT

For all the talk about how Jews are the “People of the Book,” there is a chapter that seems conspicuously missing—where is Jewish history? A ubiquitous facet of modern intellectual and educational life, history as a science seems absent at best and impugned at worst by the Jewish tradition. Maimonides, taking his cue from Aristotle who understood history to be epistemologically inferior, definitively declares it a “waste of time.” Far from being an isolated case, Maimonides’ opinion is indicative of the denigration with which history was viewed for generations. This essay attempts to explore what a uniquely Jewish vision of history might look like, as well as prods the question of what has changed—and perhaps most interesting of all, asks whether we should go back.

The Tanakh and the Talmud, the two foundational Jewish texts of the past two millennia, have their own form of history. Rather than the laughable proposition of a scientific study divorced from biases (my history teacher once quipped that Josephus was the first bad historian), these two texts craft and build upon an ethic of etiology that functions as a uniquely utilitarian and Jewish version of “history”—or at least that is the tantalizing thesis of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi in the book *“Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory.”* Yerushalmi surmises that viewing Jewish history as a movement that progresses is an inherently flawed way of looking at it. Meanwhile, Tanakh routinely commands us to “zakhor!,” to remember, as an act that might create a collective memory, but does not give way to a concrete history.

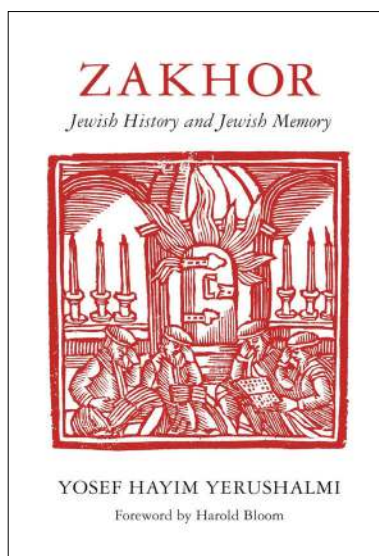
Why must Jews remember? Well, in some ways, it is a more effective way of making history into something tangibly *worthwhile*. We remember that we were slaves in Egypt so as to not

inflict oppression upon other members of society. We remember that God took us out of Egypt, so we owe Him our observance of the commandments. We remember that Abraham was promised the land of Israel, and so too were we. We remember how certain nations afflicted us, and how we bear an eternal grudge against them. The Jewish story is a circuitous one, which is partially why past generations of observant Jews didn’t see the need to chronicle their affliction—it had already been chronicled for them.

Even when Jewish history did emerge, it was usually masked with something that revealed its true lack of history in the scientific sense. For example, in post-expulsion Spain, what might have seemed like an increase in Jews chronicling their stories was really the Sabbatean movement operating as if it had finally broken out of the cycles of the Jewish tradition. Similarly, in response to devastating pogroms and violence, Jewish communities in Medieval Europe would invoke past events in Judaism to explain the situation to themselves. They ceased to be in the shaking and depleted *shtetls* in Poland and

instead found themselves sitting on the shoulders of giants that had lived through all of this before. The Jews would be persecuted, then they would be saved, and it was as predictable as it was trite to write about the specifics of such a thing.

Yet while religious Jews pored over the same books their ancestors had murmured into being, revolution was brewing. In its nascent stage, the Zionist movement’s greatest enemy was the obstinacy of a Jewish community that felt a certain complacency, and for some, a religious obligation to remain removed from history. Jewish involvement in history seemed wistful at best and a sin at worst. Jews had remembered for so long that it seemed impossible to think of another end to a





Jews Praying in the Synagogue on Yom Kippur, 1878, Maurycy Gottlieb

“The Jewish story is a circuitous one, which is partially why past generations of observant Jews didn’t see the need to chronicle their affliction—it had already been chronicled for them.

story that had already been written and acted out again and again. I do not think Zionism, and with it, Israel, could have emerged without breaking out of the encasement of the “Jewish story.” The early Zionists were convinced they could change the path of history, and so they did. The religious community saw the seeds of redemption whereas the secular saw national success, and together, we returned to our homeland.

Yet we forget what Jewish history can do for us at our peril. It is binding and draws one in emotionally in a way that no science ever could. It forms a national community that is foreboding

in its bonds. And for the past few years, maybe decades, we’ve been drawn into the collective lie of scientific history. We began to look at Jewish history in textbooks and at our fellow Jews with disdain. The tragedies of October 7 reminded us that we forget our collective memory at a high price; that our army is the element of our nation that is necessarily steeped in the chronologies of kings and wars that Maimonides dubbed frivolous, and that our social fabric, irrevocably scarred with cracks that are being slowly mended collectively, is the uniquely Jewish element of history. We infuse it with memory because nothing is simply a mechanical war; rather, it is our dear brothers and sisters who are waging battle on every front that’s been waged before, and will be waged again, and again, and again. ✡



Maya Tratt is a senior at The Frisch School in Paramus, NJ.

From the Beginning to the End

BY ARI UNGER

It doesn't always make sense
But it doesn't always have to
I guess that's the beauty
Of lasting so long
Of having little holes in your story
So it sounds like a song.

I like to look at our people
Our names and our possessions
Our traditions and stories
I know that they're as old as time
I wouldn't sell them for a million dimes

When I examine the history
Of where we came from
To where we are
I can't help but notice
That soon we'll be as many as the stars

We've been handed every obstacle
Every challenge in the book
Everything we've ever had
They always took

See, that's why I think
There's something special
About us
All our forefathers are dust
All our items are lost or covered in rust
Yet we carry on
Our beliefs continue
From me to you

How do I know that we'll always exist?
I don't
And yet I hope
With one eye on the past
Just knowing we'll always last

Because there's just something divine about us
In me
In you
In the prayers we read
And laws we try to heed

So listen when I tell you
That when the world is gone
And the ground is full of fire
And the streets are made of funeral pyres
We'll be there
Just like we were before
Of that, I'm sure



*Ari Unger is a junior at Yeshiva University
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About TIKVAH

Tikvah is a think tank and educational institution focused on the foundational ideas of Jewish civilization, the great challenges facing the Jewish people and the State of Israel, and the political, moral, and economic traditions of Western civilization and American democracy. *Tikvah* runs a wide range of programs in the United States, Israel, and around the world, including educational initiatives and fellowships, publications and websites, conferences, and policy research. Our main interest is challenging exceptional students—from middle school to high school, from gap year to college, from graduate students to emerging professionals—to become Jewish leaders and Jewish citizens. We seek to expose them to the most important ideas—in Jewish thought, Zionist history, political philosophy, economics, and strategy—and to inculcate a sense of responsibility for Jewish, Western, and American civilization. We also work closely with the alumni of our various programs, and we encourage our students to think about their time with us as the gateway to a larger *Tikvah* community. Learn more about the *Tikvah* community of ideas at www.tikvahfund.org.

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