



**"HOPE IN THE MIDST OF SORROW: A JEWISH
JOURNEY THROUGH CRISIS AND FAITH"
A JOURNEY OF FAITH AND RESILIENCE THROUGH
BLOGS ON TIMES OF ISRAEL BY BEN LAZARUS**

No charge for the eBook, but I would appreciate a donation to the PSP Awareness Fund I am running in connection with TLV Medical Center in memory of the great and my late, Neurologist Prof. Nir Giladi. Please donate at <https://www.jgive.com/new/en/ils/donation-targets/149088>

"HOPE IN THE MIDST OF SORROW: A JEWISH JOURNEY THROUGH CRISIS AND FAITH"

INTRODUCTION

Introduction: A Journey of Faith and Resilience

In the shadow of October 7, 2023, and while battling Progressive Supranuclear Palsy (PSP), a rare degenerative brain disease, I turned to writing. This book isn't a traditional novel but a curated collection of blogs I've shared in the Times of Israel, reflecting on Jewish life, loss, and laughter.

Over this time, I've written about Jewish holidays, our heroes, the power of unity, and the humor that sustains me as a religious Jew on the road. I also honor my late neurologist, Professor Nir Giladi, one of Israel's heroes, through a fund I've established with Tel Aviv Medical Center to support research for PSP—a condition that affects movement, balance, and cognition, yet receives far too little attention.

I have written broadly about my health condition, but that is for my blog, not this book, which is focused on much broader topics than me.

This book is free, but I'd be grateful for any donation to advance PSP research at [\[https://www.jgive.com/new/en/ils/donation-targets/149088\]](https://www.jgive.com/new/en/ils/donation-targets/149088). The collection centers on four themes:

- Jewish Holidays, reimagined through the lens of recent events
- Jewish Heroes who inspire us
- Jewish Unity in challenging times
- A touch of humor to lighten the journey

I pray PSP grants me the clarity to keep writing and thank my incredible wife and children for their unwavering support and the Times of Israel for giving me a forum to express my thoughts.

Ben Lazarus, Yad Binyamin, April 2025

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CHAPTER 1: JEWISH HOLIDAYS

PRE PASSOVER - THE COMING HOLIDAYS...MESSAGE OF HOPE

FEB 10, 2024, 9:54 PM



File:A Semblance of Hope.jpg - Wikimedia Commons - Common Capture License

This is the beginning of the start of the Jewish month of Adar and within the next 100 days we will celebrate and commemorate by my count 5 Jewish festivals and memorial days ... I spent some time reflecting on them this morning and after a few moments dreading them (how can we celebrate at such a time), I realized that they should give us a message of hope. I will leave it to Mark Twain to make my case, but the bottom line is that we have been in this situation before...too many times...and with hard work, faith, hope and G-d's guiding hand, we have seen off our enemies.

Mark Twain said it best, and I quote the whole of his statement because of its relevance, when he reflected in 1897:

"If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one quarter of one percent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous puff of star dust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly, the Jew ought hardly to be heard of, but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk.

His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine and abstruse learning are also very out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers. He has made a marvelous fight in this world in all ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself and be excused for it. The Egyptians, the Babylonians and the Persians rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greeks and Romans followed and made a vast noise, and they were gone; other people have sprung up and held their torch high for a time but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, and have vanished.

The Jew saw them all, survived them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert but aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jews; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?"

We start this coming period with Purim, Pesach, followed by three newer days – Yom HaShoah, Yom Ha'Zikaron and Yom Ha'atzmuot.

Each has a message of major significance for us today – certainly more than in the rest of my 48 years – and each will be poignant and perhaps very raw and difficult this year, but each is an opportunity to take hope from history and to remind ourselves that we can and will come through this extremely difficult period.

On Purim we remember what is possibly one of the two clearest stories of the danger of pure antisemitism at a period of time when we thought it was behind us and that through a combination of unity in adversity, personal bravery and G-d's guiding hand we defeated it.

On Pesach (Passover) we talk about how we were then Pesach where we say loud and clear that "We were once slaves, now we are free". I pray our captives are released tonight but I pray that our freedom all those years ago is the same for those who are today captured.

On the three newly instituted days, we chart our recent history – the terror of the holocaust of which the 7th October shows how our times are not immune from the same happening again, the sacrifice of our soldiers, security forces and victims of terror who have laid down their lives in service to the state, which of course our brave soldiers have again shown, and of course the celebration of the Independence of Israel, of whose protection we are again fighting for.

Perhaps more than the individual message of each is the combined story they tell of our history – and perhaps answer Mark Twain's question... we have been through the most terrible times where our nation is down but not out...we rebuild, regenerate and remain people of faith and hope.

PASSOVER 1 - 2024 HAGGADAH THEMES – ONE PER CUP

APR 15, 2024, 2:54 PM



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This year will be a Pesach like no other I (and probably you) have experienced for too many obvious reasons. I have had a quick dip into the Haggadah I have so often recited by rote and drawn out what for me are four messages I feel are especially relevant to this Seder.

The Seder throughout is a mix of sorrow and hope. The Matzah we eat is both a reminder of slavery “the Bread of Affliction” and also of hope as we ate it on our journey out of Egypt. This is evident across the Haggadah and serves as a very powerful backdrop to this year’s Seder – the terror of 7th October and the last six months and the miracle that was last Motsei Shabbat. The Seder is structured as a set of contradictory actions representing slavery and freedom – very much like our lives are today.

We have seen and are still experiencing unimaginable pain, shock and suffering with thousands killed and still hundreds held captive. For this there is no magic medicine, but we can reflect that this is yet another part of our collective story for which G-d in His infinite wisdom has allowed to happen for reasons unknown to us. We have also seen deliverance from attack and seen the miracle of our young and older soldiers and defense organizations literally save us from an enemy that – yet again – seeks our destruction.

The Seder really is about – at its core – educating our kids on the values of being part of the chain of history that is the Jewish People. With immense pride I see this year how our younger generation has lived up above and beyond to its role as protectors of our nation. All the talk of an entitled Gen Z has given way to stories of heroism, self-sacrifice and unbelievable service – whether in front line battle or as seen in the recent attack by Iran by those who man our air and cyber defenses as just an example. We are blessed with an amazing future generation.

This is just my attempt to put the seder into some context for me personally given the current situation. If you find it useful then great!!

Much of what is below is taken from the Haggadah available at sefaria.com and the Rabbi Sacks Commentary available on it.

Message no 1: We are there for each other!!

The first real statement of the Haggadah is strangely written not in Hebrew but in Aramaic

הָא לְחָמָא עֲנִיָא דִּי אֲכָלוּ אֲבֹהֵתָנָא בְּאַרְעָא דְּמִצְרַיִם. כָּל דְּכַפֵּין יְיָתִי וְיִיכָל, כָּל דְּצָרִיךְ יְיָתִי וְיִפְסַח. הָשְׁתָּא הָכָא, לְשָׁנָה
הַבָּאָה בְּאַרְעָא דְּיִשְׂרָאֵל. הָשְׁתָּא עֲבָדִי, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּנֵי חוּרִין

THIS IS THE BREAD OF DESTITUTION THAT OUR ANCESTORS ATE IN THE LAND OF EGYPT. ANYONE WHO IS FAMISHED SHOULD COME AND EAT, ANYONE WHO IS IN NEED SHOULD COME AND PARTAKE OF THE PESACH SACRIFICE. NOW WE ARE HERE, NEXT YEAR WE WILL BE IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL; THIS YEAR WE ARE SLAVES, NEXT YEAR WE WILL BE FREE PEOPLE.

It was deliberately written in the spoken language of the people at the time of the writing of the Haggadah so that all would understand. It is a clear statement for all of us that our primary responsibility is to make sure that anyone needy is taken care of. Taking care of the needy is not just for those who need but is the very essence of freedom.

As Rabbi Sacks says: "Sharing food is the first act through which slaves become free human beings. One who fears tomorrow does not offer his bread to others. But one who is willing to divide his food with a stranger has already shown himself capable of fellowship and faith, the two things from which hope is born. That is why we begin the seder by inviting others to join us. Bread shared is no longer the bread of oppression. Reaching out to others, giving help to the needy and companionship to those who are alone, we bring freedom into the world, and with freedom, God."

We have our major differences as a Jewish people – between secular and religious, right and left, Israel and Diaspora but we must remember that we are one family and this is evident a few pages after this quote when we talk about the four sons – four very different archetypes of people and in fact according to some a parallel to how each of us as individuals goes through these four stages of life – without all of whom the Seder is not complete.

This year, I believe we have lived up to the example set by the Haggadah in the way society has pulled together for the greater good. In the aftermath of October 7th, we pulled together as one people in an inspiring way. Long may it continue and hopefully the seder serves as a reinforcement of this.

Message no 2: We have far more questions than answers and that is ok

The whole structure of the Seder is around asking questions and the most famous part of the seder is the kids' reading out 'Mah Nishtana'. These four questions are more

important in the seder than their answers – so much so that in fact there are no specific answers given for the questions asked.

In our current situation we unfortunately have more questions than answers regarding the very basics of what is and will happen – it is an uncertain time.

The Seder at least gives assurance that this is something we have been through before many many times. The Israelites sitting in their houses on the night of Passover had only faith to rely on with no idea what comes next – that is our story.

As Rabbi Sacks says so eloquently: Religious faith has often been seen as naive, blind, accepting. That is not the Jewish way. Judaism is not the suspension of critical intelligence. To the contrary: asking a question is itself a profound expression of faith in the intelligibility of the universe and the meaningfulness of human life. To ask is to believe that somewhere there is an answer. The fact that throughout history people have devoted their lives to extending the frontiers of knowledge is a compelling testimony to the restlessness of the human spirit and its constant desire to go further, higher, deeper. Far from faith excluding questions, questions testify to faith – that history is not random, that the universe is not impervious to our understanding, that what happens to us is not blind chance. We ask not because we doubt, but because we believe.

Message no 3: We are living history on a much-travelled road. We are yet another generation who are hopefully travelling from sorrow to joy and from mourning to a festival.

Having set out the story of the Exodus – warts and all – including all the pain of slavery the Haggadah says:

לְפִיכֹה אֲנַחְנוּ חַיִּים לְהוֹדוֹת, לְהַלֵּל, לְשַׁבֵּחַ, לְפָאֵר, לְרוֹמֵם, לְהַדָּר, לְבָרֵךְ, לְעַלֶּה, וּלְקַלֵּס לְמִי שֶׁעָשָׂה לְאַבֹתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ
אֶת־כָּל־הַנִּסִּים הָאֵלֶּיךָ: הוֹצִיאָנוּ מֵעֲבָדוֹת לְחֵירוֹת, מִיָּגוֹן לְשִׂמְחָה, וּמֵאֲפֵלָה לְאוֹר גָּדוֹל, וּמִשְׁעָבוֹד
לְגִאֲלָה. וְנֹאמַר לְפָנֶיךָ שִׁירָה חֲדָשָׁה: הִלְלוּ יְיָ.

THEREFORE WE ARE OBLIGATED TO THANK, PRAISE, LAUD, GLORIFY, EXALT,
LAVISH, BLESS, RAISE HIGH, AND ACCLAIM HE WHO MADE ALL THESE MIRACLES

FOR OUR ANCESTORS AND FOR US: HE BROUGHT US OUT FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM, FROM SORROW TO JOY, FROM MOURNING TO [CELEBRATION OF] A FESTIVAL, FROM DARKNESS TO GREAT LIGHT, AND FROM SERVITUDE TO REDEMPTION. AND LET US SAY A NEW SONG BEFORE HIM, HALLELUYAH!

A number of people I have spoken to do not really want a Seder this year and I personally feel conflicted. However, it is a reality of Jewish existence that we go through peaks and troughs, from sorry to joy and I hope that with G-d's help we see good times soon.

Perhaps this year of all years in my 48 years we can live up to the strange statement of the Haggadah:

בְּכָל־דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיִּיב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת־עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם, שְׁנֵאֲמַר: וְהַגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר, בַּעֲבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם. לֹא אֶת־אַבֹּתֵינוּ בְּלִבָּד גָּאֵל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא, אֲלָא אַף אוֹתֵנוּ גָּאֵל עָמָהֶם, שְׁנֵאֲמַר: וְאוֹתֵנוּ הוֹצִיא מִשָּׁם, לְמַעַן הָבִיא אוֹתֵנוּ, לְתֶת לָנוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם.

IN EACH AND EVERY GENERATION, A PERSON IS OBLIGATED TO SEE HIMSELF AS IF HE LEFT EGYPT, AS IT IS STATED ([Exodus 13:8](#)); “AND YOU SHALL EXPLAIN TO YOUR SON ON THAT DAY: FOR THE SAKE OF THIS, DID THE LORD DO [THIS] FOR ME IN MY GOING OUT OF EGYPT.” NOT ONLY OUR ANCESTORS DID THE HOLY ONE, BLESSED BE HE, REDEEM, BUT RATHER ALSO US [TOGETHER] WITH THEM DID HE REDEEM, AS IT IS STATED ([Deuteronomy 6:23](#)); “AND HE TOOK US OUT FROM THERE, IN ORDER TO BRING US IN, TO GIVE US THE LAND WHICH HE SWORE UNTO OUR FATHERS.”

We are effectively living through the story at the moment – it is our present as we fight a clearly existential threat to our security. We should have the faith that those generations before us had – even though they also found it difficult and struggled to stay united as they were led to freedom.

I believe the Seder offers us a chance this year to really understand the meaning of freedom and the value of it as a nation and as individuals.

Message no 4: We will prevail, and I hope we will ALL be free to celebrate as soon as possible including those held captive

Next year, let us be in the built Jerusalem!

As Rabbi Sacks writes below, the concept of Jewish Sovereignty is very real this year and as we saw only a few days ago we hold onto it with resolve and the blood and sweat of our precious soldiers and others who defend us. My hope is that next year we see a revitalized nation free of war and enjoying peace.

Even more important than the above, I pray that all of us including the remaining hostages will be able to celebrate with us as soon as possible – only then will we be complete.

Rav Sacks commentary:

AS AT THE CONCLUSION OF YOM KIPPUR, SO HERE – AT THE TWO SUPREME MOMENTS OF THE JEWISH YEAR – WE PRAY LESHANA HABA'A BIYERUSHALAYIM HABENUYA, "NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM REBUILT." NOTHING IN THE IMAGINATIVE LIFE OF PEOPLES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD QUITE COMPARES TO THE JEWISH LOVE FOR, AND ATTACHMENT TO, JERUSALEM. A PSALM RECORDS, IN UNFORGETTABLE WORDS, THE FEELINGS OF THE JEWISH EXILES IN BABYLONIA TWO AND A HALF THOUSAND YEARS AGO: "BY THE RIVERS OF BABYLON WE SAT AND WEPT AS WE REMEMBERED ZION.... HOW CAN WE SING THE LORD'S SONG ON FOREIGN SOIL? IF I FORGET YOU, O JERUSALEM, MAY MY RIGHT HAND FORGET ITS SKILL. MAY MY TONGUE CLING TO THE ROOF OF MY MOUTH IF I DO NOT REMEMBER YOU, IF I DO NOT SET JERUSALEM ABOVE MY HIGHEST JOY" ([Ps. 137:1-6](#)).

WHEREVER JEWS WERE, THEY PRESERVED THE MEMORY OF JERUSALEM. THEY PRAYED TOWARD IT. THEY SPOKE OF IT CONTINUALLY. AT WEDDINGS THEY BROKE A GLASS IN ITS MEMORY. ON TISHA B'AV THEY SAT AND MOURNED ITS DESTRUCTION AS IF IT WERE A RECENT TRAGEDY. THEY LONGED FOR IT WITH AN EVERLASTING LOVE.

THE FRENCH HISTORIAN CHATEAUBRIAND, VISITING JERUSALEM IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY, WAS OVERCOME WITH EMOTION AS HE SAW FOR THE FIRST TIME THE SMALL JEWISH COMMUNITY THERE, WAITING PATIENTLY FOR THE MESSIAH. "THIS PEOPLE," HE WROTE, "HAS SEEN JERUSALEM DESTROYED SEVENTEEN TIMES, YET THERE EXISTS NOTHING IN THE WORLD WHICH CAN DISCOURAGE IT OR PREVENT IT FROM RAISING ITS EYES TO ZION. HE WHO BEHOLDS THE JEWS DISPERSED OVER THE FACE OF THE EARTH, IN KEEPING WITH THE WORD OF GOD, LINGERS AND MARVELS. BUT HE WILL BE STRUCK WITH AMAZEMENT, AS AT A MIRACLE, WHO FINDS THEM STILL IN JERUSALEM AND PERCEIVES EVEN, WHO IN LAW AND JUSTICE ARE THE MASTERS OF JUDEA, TO EXIST AS SLAVES AND STRANGERS IN THEIR OWN LAND; HOW DESPITE ALL ABUSES THEY AWAIT THE KING WHO IS TO DELIVER THEM."

NOTING HOW THIS "SMALL NATION" HAD SURVIVED WHILE THE GREAT EMPIRES WHO SOUGHT ITS DESTRUCTION HAD VANISHED, HE ADDED, "IF THERE IS ANYTHING AMONG THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD MARKED WITH THE STAMP OF THE MIRACULOUS, THIS, IN OUR OPINION, IS THAT MIRACLE."

IT IS SAID THAT NAPOLEON, PASSING A SYNAGOGUE ON TISHA B'AV, WAS STRUCK BY THE SOUNDS OF LAMENT COMING FROM THE BUILDING. "WHAT," HE ASKED ONE OF HIS OFFICERS, "ARE THE JEWS CRYING FOR?" "FOR JERUSALEM," CAME THE REPLY. "HOW LONG AGO DID THEY LOSE JERUSALEM?" "MORE THAN SEVENTEEN HUNDRED YEARS AGO." NAPOLEON WAS SILENT FOR A MOMENT AND THEN SAID, "A PEOPLE THAT CAN REMEMBER JERUSALEM FOR SO LONG WILL ONE DAY HAVE IT RESTORED TO THEM." SO, IT HAS COME TO PASS IN OUR TIME.

In summary

Perhaps more than ever, the story of Pesach resonates with our generation, and we can use the gift of the Seder to make it relevant to our time and renew our faith and hopefully unite and collectively come together as a people reflecting on hope but also the pain. It has resonated for Jews during times of pogroms and other difficult times and yet again it maybe a point of reflection for us.

May our Pesach prayers be a comfort for those tragically lost and their loved ones and may we see the return of those held captive as soon as possible.

PASSOVER 2 - SEDER WITH A RENEWED EMPATHY – FAITH AND UNITY

We are commanded to act as if we were there. Now maybe more than ever we can glimpse a small sense of the feeling

APR 1, 2025, 3:01 PM



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How did it really feel as one of the Children of Israel on the night of Seder in the heart of Egypt? They were not characters in a musical (sorry for dispelling the myth) nor cartoon characters – they were real people with lives like me and you, albeit without X or Instagram. How do I think they would have felt going through the experience?

How many times have I really thought through the injunction to imagine myself as if I was going out of Egypt ... truly? I have seen it acted out as we drink and talk, but let's really imagine what was probably going on.

You have been enslaved for your whole life, as were your parents and grandparents. Until incredibly recently, you have been under the almost total control of the Pharaoh. Now a new leader has come along, miracles reported which have shocked all, yet the Pharaoh has not given up.

You have bravely painted your doors with the blood of a sheep – the same creature worshipped by the hosts who have enslaved you for years. You have taken a huge risk and bet.

You hope, you pray, you wait.... Which way will it go? You believe with (probably) all your heart, but you are probably not certain... there is a sense of excitement, hope, and yet of fear... fear of the unknown, fear of leaving behind what you know, fear of death.... fear....

It must have been terrifying and completely intoxicating. A few months ago, we had a little taste of it when Iran attacked... yet it was a tiny taste.

We are commanded to act as if we were there. How can we do that from the comfort of our dining rooms? Now maybe more than ever we can glimpse a small sense of the feeling. And yes, there are some clear comparisons: how many Egyptian firstborns and soldiers were slain in the process? Can you imagine what the press would have reported if we had had social media in that time?

This year I have a different perspective. Having been handed a probable diagnosis of a disease that, by the statistics books, will make this one of the last Passover Seders I will have – and I am only 49 – I too am sitting in the same room.

I believe with all my fiber in God and His word in the Torah – yet I am sitting at the table knowing something is coming but not sure what it looks like nor exactly when. I am confident, but that doesn't make it all that much less scary.

Then I look around me and I realize I am not alone. We all go through this journey, just at different times and in different ways – it is all our journeys. Billions have gone through it and many more will, and many far less brave have made the journey. I will be ok! I am not alone.

The matzah is a pertinent reminder – the core center of the Seder – the matzah. It is so extremely brittle and made of such limited ingredients, yet it is so incredibly

central... it is both the bread of affliction and the bread of freedom. We are similar. Simple, brittle, yet with enormous capabilities, both the good and bad, and it is up to us to decide how to use the limited tools we have.

On the night of Seder, let's also remember another usually understated fact. The Jews of the Exodus were similar to us in that they were not, by any stretch of the imagination, unified. They represented different factions, interests, and viewpoints. There is more than enough information we can glean in the story of the Exodus about the people being driven by differences. Moshe was by no means universally accepted or loved – at least at this point, and we know at a number of other points. He was a former member of the ruling class – there must have been concerns.

Despite that, hundreds of thousands of families waited patiently and trusted in the project, laying themselves completely vulnerable by staying at the place of maximum risk – in their homes. This is an extraordinary display of unity.

A clue to this is the presence of the four sons – they were all there – the wise one who possibly had his/her concerns from an intellectual perspective, the wicked son who no doubt had faith challenges and usually didn't listen to authority, the simple son who was probably the most pliant, and the one that simply doesn't know to ask – probably a majority – those simply clinging to their faith and metaphorically speechless.

Yet – they all hung in there (others had, no doubt, and according to the sages, peeled off earlier) ... there was unity.

The Haggadah never makes an attempt to merge the four children into one common identity – it recognizes the difference. They all sat as equals at the same table. It is surely a message for all of us – we have to make unity work by respecting and tolerating our differences.

The commandment to really imagine that we were ourselves going out of Egypt is perhaps more layered and complex than I had previously given thought to. I think it adds a beautiful layer of meaning and perhaps more personal empathy to both their

struggles and the fact that we are going through a different, but in some ways similar, journey both as individuals and as a people all these years later.

The truth is that my condition doesn't make me any different to anyone else – we are all part of a chain that comes straight from those who celebrated the Seder 'live', and we all have the chance to add our flavor to the story handed down to the next generation. It is a journey not just of the Jewish People but one which influences all around. It is something truly special.

This night is different, but it still fits our narrative today.

Wishing everyone a Chag Sameach V'Kasher

PASSOVER 3 THE FIVE SENSES AT THE SEDER

APR 11, 2025, 2:47 PM

How does the expression go — you only truly appreciate something when you no longer have it. That is the way it is for me with my senses, and it has led to a real appreciation which has given me an insight into the Seder.

I said in an earlier [article](#) that one element of the Seder is to empathize with those who 3,000 years ago went through what must have been one of the most exciting and frightening experiences of all time.

Inexplicably, 3,000 years later here we are. A people who number 15 million, which sits alongside the three other big religions — Christianity, Islam and Hinduism each with more than a billion worshippers.

Talking to a cousin in rural South England...he is hosting 40 for Seder. Whilst it is probably very different to the Seder we are hosting in a religious Zionist Yishuv in Israel, it is at the same time exactly the same. We are united in our connection to the same event all those years ago.

Something is different about the night of Seder. Something keeps us coming back. What is it? Perhaps it is the multisensory nature of the evening. Think about it...

Sounds – It is not just the prayers or the text. It is the richness of the Seder – the discussion, the debate, the laughing, the kids reading (or crying because they don't want to), even the many individual discussions that take place while someone else is reading, not to mention the complaints of those who want to 'eat already'

Taste – The wine (the only night I have seen people mix white/red/grape juice), the salt water, the Matzah, the Maror, the Charoset (always the discussion depending on how good it is of whether it is dipped or heaped). It is unique as a meal and not for its gourmet status but for its variety of taste... and that is without thinking of the meal itself.

Sight – The Seder is simply awash with things we don't see elsewhere. The table is different from any other night – strange foods, plastic frogs, mocked-up scenes from Egypt, the father may be wearing a white shroud (Kittel) or simply the number of people, the Seder plate.... it is a visual feast.

Touch – The feeling of holding strange things like the Matzah as we eat strange 'sandwiches' or the vegetable dipped in salt water – we touch food like at no other meal. Then there is the impact that we get from being 'in touch' with so much of our family and friends for often the only time of the year, or sadly we feel their non-presence.

Smell – A hard one for me as I don't have it anymore but core nonetheless. It is different at each Seder but it is there – the sense that there is such a mix of different foods, people, and an atmosphere of warmth. It is, for me, the one that is like the last of the sons – a little unable to speak for itself.

And there is the effect of all of it combining. It is a tapestry that is unique. No one format could possibly work for all everywhere, yet somehow it does. It is tailored and tweaked, but it remains remarkably intact. We keep coming back 3,000 years on.

As I look towards Seder night – I am conscious I am reduced in my senses – my smell is gone, my taste vastly reduced (and wine undrinkable and acrid) and my eyes are now the latest thing to start seriously suffering in my journey with PSP. Yet, the multi-sensory

Seder still lets me participate on a number of fronts. It is for all regardless of how many senses we have.

Five

There is something deeper as well about the number five.

The Seder is known for the number four – four cups, four sons, four questions representing the four expressions by which God chose to deliver us from Egypt. “I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians and deliver you from their slavery; I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty judgment. I will take you to Me as a nation. ([Ex. 6:6-7](#))”

However, the number five although subtly hidden from view is very much there. We see it most clearly in the fifth cup – much debated in the Talmud – which as a result of that debate (ever a feature of the Jewish people – as many people do on Seder night) we compromise by giving it to Elijah the Prophet.

This is perhaps the strangest experience of the Seder – when we open the door and let in the cold air (tonight will be very cold here in Israel) and experience all five senses (actually the absence of some like the silence that descends) as we wait for the cup to metaphorically or quite literally be drunk. It is usually a moment of surprising quiet and introspection as we wait (albeit for a few seconds)...

Five is the real objective...

There are in fact actually five expressions of the redemption, not four. The fifth is “And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you as a possession – I am the Lord.” ([Ex. 6:8](#))

This was not achieved in the Exodus, so it is not celebrated but it is there, and we certainly feel elements of it in our days now... especially those privileged to live in Israel.

The Seder is therefore awash with signals that we are in between the numbers four and five. We achieved four through the Exodus but the fifth is in process and we await its final

delivery. I can't put it better than Rabbi Sacks in the following excerpt from his Haggadah, quoting the late Lubavitcher Rebbe. He says:

"WAS THERE A FIFTH CHILD? THE LATE LUBAVITCHER REBBE SUGGESTED THAT THERE IS A FIFTH CHILD ON PESACH. THE FOUR CHILDREN OF THE HAGGADAH ARE ALL PRESENT, SITTING AROUND THE TABLE. THE FIFTH CHILD IS THE ONE WHO IS NOT THERE, THE CHILD LOST THROUGH OUTMARRIAGE AND ASSIMILATION. RABBINIC TRADITION TELLS US THAT IN EGYPT, MANY JEWS ASSIMILATED AND DID NOT WANT TO LEAVE..."

CERTAINLY, THE LOSS OF JEWS THROUGH ASSIMILATION HAS BEEN AN ONGOING TRAGEDY OF JEWISH HISTORY. HOW DO WE ALLUDE TO IT ON SEDER NIGHT? BY SILENCE: THE FIFTH CHILD – THE ONE WHO IS NOT THERE.

SO BENEATH THE SURFACE OF THE HAGGADAH WE FIND NOT FOUR FOURS, BUT FIVE FIVES. IN EACH CASE THERE IS A MISSING FIFTH – A CUP, AN EXPRESSION OF DELIVERANCE, A VERSE, A QUESTION, AND A CHILD. EACH POINTS TO SOMETHING INCOMPLETE IN OUR PRESENT SITUATION. IN THE HALF-CENTURY SINCE THE HOLOCAUST, THE JEWISH PEOPLE HAS EMERGED FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT. A STATE OF ISRAEL HAS COME INTO BEING. THE HEBREW LANGUAGE HAS BEEN REBORN. JEWS HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO SAFETY FROM THE COUNTRIES WHERE THEY FACED PERSECUTION. IN THE LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES OF THE WEST, JEWS HAVE GAINED FREEDOM, AND EVEN PROMINENCE AND AFFLUENCE.

BUT ISRAEL IS NOT YET AT PEACE. IN THE DIASPORA, ASSIMILATION CONTINUES APACE. MANY JEWS ARE ESTRANGED FROM THEIR PEOPLE AND THEIR FAITH. SOMETHING IS MISSING FROM OUR CELEBRATION – THE FIFTH CUP, THE FIFTH DELIVERANCE, THE FIFTH VERSE, THE FIFTH QUESTION, AND THE FIFTH CHILD. THAT IS A MEASURE OF WHAT IS STILL TO BE ACHIEVED.

WE HAVE NOT YET REACHED OUR DESTINATION. THE MISSING FIFTHS REMIND US OF WORK STILL TO BE DONE, A JOURNEY NOT YET COMPLETE."

We know this more than ever – all over the Jewish world. The mix of pride at our children who have defended our State since October 7, those who sadly perished, those still hostage, the fear of antisemitism in our host nation, and those who are sadly not at the Seder. We haven't reached the final destination, but we are on the journey, and we are part of this chain from the time of the Exodus till now. It is still happening.

The Seder is clearly a very well-crafted model, using all senses, in which we express the complexity of freedom from slavery but at the same time we hold a little back awaiting the work left to do.

Each of the senses has its place but it is the overall combination that creates the unique event of the Seder wherever it is.

This night is different from all others but let it be an inspiration to all others, however much of the text you read. It is the experience that counts (and of course to lean when you drink and eat and make sure you eat far too much Matzah in too short of a time).

YOM HA-SHOA - THE YOM HA'SHOAH BATON PASSES TO US

APR 22, 2025, 3:12 PM



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The generations who came long after the end of the Holocaust are now going to have to step up to preserve its memory. It is our duty to make sure the world is not allowed to forget.

The magnitude and intensity of the Holocaust have touched me several times in my lifetime on a personal level. With Yom HaShoah coming up this week, I decided to look at the impact the Shoah has had on me. Even though it didn't directly take any member of my family, it ripped the heart out of my wife's.

Sadly, we are soon going to lose the testimony of those who lived through the Holocaust, and the baton will pass to those who knew those who were touched by it. Gradually, as it becomes history, we will all need to step up to remind the world of the true unbridled terror that existed not so long ago on a scale even those of us who lived through October 7 have no way of even beginning to grasp.

I have, over my almost half a century, built some personal experiences touching aspects of the Holocaust. They are <0.001% the power of those who lived it, but soon they will be what we have. I think it is an important exercise for us all. I still believe the world must remember.

Majdanek

First and foremost, Majdanek. I never went on “March of the Living”, so when I had a trip planned to Poland for a conference which started at dinner, I decided that I would fly into Warsaw in the morning, hire a car, and drive down to see it.

Wow – I never in a million years expected it to hit me so hard. It is not hidden away – it is within sight of towns and villages, and it is exactly like the movies, only completely real and still intact.

It was simply terrifying to see the engineering of death at work with such precision and in such rawness. Until people see it, it is almost impossible to believe, and I guess there was something a little heightened about viewing it by myself on a cold, windy day with very few other people around. Haunting!

Driving back to Warsaw was hard, and needless to say, I couldn't face seeing people at the dinner – I made a very brief appearance.

My Suitcase

My fiancée at the time (now my wife for almost 28 years) went on a tour to see the camps, and she went to Auschwitz/Birkenau. In an exhibition at the camp, there is a suitcase, in an exhibit of the luggage piled up by the Nazis as the Jews were taken to the gas chambers, with the name: “Benjamin Lazarus.” I received the picture, and to say it

'freaked' my wife and me out is an understatement. Someone, possibly just like me, was there, almost certainly for purely his Jewish roots. On research, it seems he was transported from Vienna to Auschwitz on 29.01.1943. Having been born in July 1891, he was actually four years older than me.

My 'Holocaust' Experiences in Germany and Holland

I have travelled to and worked a lot in Germany over the years, and it has been a very positive and rewarding experience. It is one of the countries I found the easiest and most comfortable to be a Jew, openly wearing a kippah. I have had a few discussions with German clients and colleagues about the events of the Holocaust, and all were genuinely mournful. I have walked around many cities very safely across the country.

There were, however, a few moments that stood out to me which gave me real cause for reflection.

For 4-5 months, I was staying almost every single week in a hotel in Bonn. A few months in, I was praying in the afternoon and looking out of my window at the River Rhine. I saw people standing around a monument at the edge of the hotel by the river. Having never seen it before, I went to look and was shocked to the core to see it was a memorial with a Star of David. The hotel I had slept in for months had been the synagogue and was destroyed on Kristallnacht. I can't explain what a chill it sent up my spine. This was yet another sign of the modern German population's broad acknowledgment and sense of regret at their nation's actions, but yet another chill at the real, raw actuality of the Holocaust.

During this time, I had possibly the most unexpected and strange moment regarding the Holocaust. I was running a workshop for a client – it was me (with my kippah) and about 10-15 German management members of a client in a factory in the western part of Germany. The session was in two parts, so I concluded the first session by saying: "We have now concluded the solution for the interim period, and after the break, we will discuss the ...fi..." As I went to say the word 'final,' there was a moment of suspended time... I realized what I was going to say, and I saw the eyes of everyone in the room

suddenly show fear and stare at me... after what was a fraction of a second, I said, “permanent solution,” and we moved past it.

The sensitivity to the topic, the fear that still exists attached to the connotations of the Holocaust, was in that meeting suddenly exposed for a brief moment of time.

Lastly, in Maastricht

Having been forced to spend a Shabbat in Holland due to a need to be at a client on Friday for a meeting, I ate meals with the Chabad and community Rabbi and Rebbetzin. There was an elderly gentleman at the table, and during the meal, the Rabbi asked him to tell me his story. He – clearly having done it many times before – looked a little bored and said, “I was in the same class at school as Anne Frank.” I was in disbelief. He said that, yes, he sat a few rows behind her and that there was not much to tell – she was a regular kid, nothing out of the ordinary.

That I had the merit to meet one of Anne Frank’s classmates was indeed a shock for me and made my link to the diary she wrote that much more real.

I have a few other incidents which have touched me, such as having flown to Germany on a Lufthansa flight on Yom HaShoah, but all in all, my ‘touch’ with the Holocaust is still very faint.

My closest connection is through my wife’s family, where most of her late grandmother’s family were lost, although she got out on the Kindertransport, her sister was one of those saved by Oskar Schindler, and a sister also made it to Israel. I think over 60 relatives, including her parents, didn’t. I had the privilege of knowing my wife’s grandmother and great aunt and they were truly wonderful people who somehow found the will to rebuild their families.

As I said before, we will all need to carry the message forward and I urge people to save their memories because we will need to support the retention of that knowledge.

May the memories of the souls of the 6 million be blessed.

APR 27, 2025, 5:54 AM



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For too long, I treated Yom HaZikaron with disrespect, even hostility, and I know I'm not alone. As the shock of October 7th fades, we must rethink this day and its role in the Jewish calendar.

Yom HaZikaron deserves greater reverence, equal to other major Jewish holidays. It should play a more powerful role in educating Jews worldwide, reinforcing commitment and drawing inspiration from the thousands of soldiers and victims of terror—many of them heroes—who made the ultimate sacrifice for the Jewish People.

Throughout my life, Yom HaZikaron barely registered. As a young child, it was absent. As a religious teenager with a largely non-Zionist worldview, I had the audacity to resent the day for intruding on the traditional calendar. Even after becoming a Zionist, making Aliyah, moving to a Religious Zionist Yishuv, and having a child in the army, I struggled to connect. I attended memorials and recited Tehillim, but the day felt like a prelude to Yom Ha'atzmaut—a semi-day before the main event.

Then came October 7th. My son served on the front lines, losing many colleagues. I lost a friend, and neighbors, friends, and clients mourned loved ones. The nation

grieved, and I felt our vulnerability. Yom HaZikaron took on profound importance, yet I still struggle to express its meaning fully.

One challenge is that I never served in the IDF—a choice I made by making Aliyah at 31, when service wasn't required. Without that experience or the personal loss of a loved one, I feel disconnected from official ceremonies. I attend our community Tekes, but it lacks the solemnity of other Jewish holidays.

I now see Yom HaZikaron differently and worry that as October 7th's impact wanes—as it already seems to—we'll lose sight of the sacrifices made on our behalf. How can we make Yom HaZikaron more accessible, beyond a day for those who've lost loved ones to grieve through ceremonies, which must remain unchanged?

We cannot let this day fade for two reasons. First, it disrespects those who gave their lives for Israel. Second, it's a missed opportunity to honor a generation of heroes who, from 1948 to today, have fought for a Jewish state—many while learning Torah, raising families, working the land, and building the economy. I wrote last week about one such soldier, Eliav Abitbul, as an example (see: [Who Will Our Heroes Be – A Modern Maccabee](#)).

This issue intersects with the national debate about those who refuse to serve. Those who opt out, particularly as a community, should especially honor Yom HaZikaron, as fallen soldiers bear a double burden in their stead. It's hard to accept that some refuse both service and remembrance.

Some argue Tisha B'Av is the only day for mourning. Yet, while kinnot exist for the Holocaust, pogroms, and other tragedies, there's little effort in these communities to include fallen soldiers or terror victims in Tisha B'Av prayers.

The question is: Will Yom HaZikaron remain a minor event, ignored by many, centered on physical ceremonies and secular acts like halting television? Or is it time to reimagine it as a broader, cross-communal recognition of the loss, bravery, and heroism that form our backbone?

The choice is ours.

SEFIRAT HA'OMER: WEAVING PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

APR 21, 2025, 10:30 AM



betty x1138 from NYC, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Probably due to the obvious parallel given that I am 49, am turning 50, and am dealing with life challenges, I've thought hard about Sefirat Ha'Omer, the 49-day period from Passover to Shavuot. I have – perhaps far too late in life – come to realize that though its name is modest and underwhelming, this vibrant, challenging season holds profound relevance for the Jewish People, connecting our ancient roots to our modern journey.

As a religious teenager in the UK, I found the Omer dreary. It felt marked by restrictions on music, shaving, and celebration, and endless, intricate debates over Israel's religious significance and its flag. I longed for it to end.

Here in Israel, it's a vivid, colorful tapestry, reflecting our highs and lows—ancient and modern, religious and secular. It's a journey through time, linking past, present, and future.

Passover sets the stage. It's a whirlwind of cleaning (or escaping to avoid it) at great expense, eating matzah, and braving crowds for picnics/BBQs or usually unnecessary trips to IKEA. The Seder, with its unique storytelling, unites Jews of all stripes, reminding us of our ancient story remains vital, shaping our future. For an outsider's humorous take, check Sebastian Maniscalco's first Seder clip.

Pesach ends with celebrating the Red Sea crossing, launching us into the Omer's 49-day count, which I once found so tough.

THE OMER: INTERWOVEN THEMES

The Omer is not one-dimensional. It weaves multiple themes, spanning our ancient Exodus, historical milestones, and modern realities.

- It traces our biblical journey from Egypt to Sinai, reliving the shift from physical freedom to spiritual covenant with G-d at Shavuot.
- It honors our agrarian roots, counting the barley harvest and celebrating the "Foot Festivals," a reminder of nature's miracles and our economic ties to the land.
- Since Roman times, it mourns Rabbi Akiva's students, whose disputes sparked a plague, lifted by Lag Ba'Omer's vibrant celebration, especially at Meron, explaining bans on music and weddings.
- Modern additions include Yom HaShoah, honoring Holocaust victims; Yom HaZikaron, grieving those lost defending Israel, deepened since October 7; Yom Ha'atzmaut, celebrating the Jewish State's rebirth and ongoing survival and strength; and Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Day), where the Eternal City was liberated (and I turn 50). These days show our generation vividly lives the Jewish journey, perhaps like few others since our forebears left Egypt and the fact there are still hostages shows how live it is. May they be returned to us immediately.

THE PEAK: SHAVUOT

Shavuot culminates the journey, where we embrace our spiritual covenant with G-d. This bond, rooted in the Torah and Ten Commandments, has sustained us for over 3,000 years, outlasting empires much bigger and stronger than us. It also marks the profound impact the Jewish faith has had on the world through the Abrahamic covenant.

ISRAEL, AND BEYOND

This cycle, paired with Rosh Hashanah to Simchat Torah, is unique. In Israel, its pulse is strongest—blending our collective experience spanning Egypt, Roman Judea, our exile, the Holocaust, and modern Israel. From priestly blessings at the Western Wall to Lag Ba'Omer's fervor at Meron (sometimes marred by tragedy), to intense and emotional memorial days recently made much more vivid, and the unparalleled joy of Independence Day. Where else does a nation halt highways for silent tribute three times in a week?

This is reflected in the Omer's nightly count, unbroken to bless, which mirrors our unbroken chain, counting upward to build from past to future.

Israel feels these highs and lows acutely, exposing our cultural, religious, and political fault lines. Yet, since October 7, this resonance has grown global, with renewed spirit in Diaspora communities. In Israel, this has seen Jews and non-Jews alike sharing pain and heroism on the battlefield.

UNITY'S CHALLENGE

Like the Exodus or Rabbi Akiva's time, unity eludes us. Sadly, some distance themselves from Israel's modern project—its celebration or defense—posing a profound challenge, which requires sensitive approaches. Change is complex and painful but urgently needed. I pray it unfolds respectfully, unlike history's harsher shifts.

Unity is a broader issue on many fronts, and we need to find paths to reconciliation and collaboration, which will be the test of future leadership. The Seder's four sons coexist, as did Sinai's 12 tribes. We can too. But achieving this requires building bridges with mutual respect. As I wrote in a previous article, it is more about how than the actual goals – we

need to treat each other with mutual respect and stop the Machiavellian “ends justify the means” methods we have employed in our politics.

We’re writing the Jewish story in real time and are learning to embrace its joys and cope with its sorrows. Our generation bears both the miracle—and the weighty responsibility—of living in and governing the modern Jewish State and defending against the resurgent perils of antisemitism.

On a personal note, I have to reflect my absolute pride in the Men and Women who have fought so hard on so many fronts to do their part for their defense and those who have supported them in all areas. Wishing everyone a meaningful Sefirat Ha’Omer and having just had the Seder and turning 50 on Yom Yerushalayim, may we take a leaf out of the Haggadah and next year may we celebrate in the capital city in the light of its true meaning – A City of Peace and Unity!

TISHA BA’AV 24

AUG 11, 2024, 10:12 AM



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Tisha Basava – 2024 – unlike any other I have known

Tisha Ba'av is a day of national mourning for the Jewish people on which we amalgamate all terrible tragedies into one 25-hour long day of fasting and mourning.

For many years it was a tough day – the holocaust was behind us and the prayers reminding us of temples long gone and pogroms long distant were hard to connect to. I lived in a generation when the Israel was revived, and Jews were living well in the world. Despite this Israelis – religious and secular – have always seen it as an inauspicious time – a day for example when the stock market doesn't open.

Enter 2023. The two temples that stood in Jerusalem in times long ago were the symbols of nationhood. But as each approached their 75th year of existence, each society started to disintegrate because of internal strife and infighting leading ultimately to their destruction.

This third experiment in Jewish sovereignty pre-October 7th faced its toughest period of internal strife and infighting ever and post 7th one of its toughest threats in its fight for existence after the single worst atrocity in its existence. As we go into Tisha Ba'av we even have our enemies actually threatening to take advantage of the symbolism of the day to attack us.

This must force us to reflect and regroup. Not only do we need to take on an adversary, but we must look into ourselves and resolve – each of us in our own way – to prevent the fractiousness and disunity and baseless hatred we feel for each other.

I must do too...NIMBY (not in my back yard) must not apply to me also. I need to look at those who differ from me religiously, ideologically and socially and remember that they too are family and that we must see each other as such as bring up our kids to love.

It is customary on this day to recite Kinnot – a lament – and this one written for 7th October should be amongst them. A few extracts from the lament linked below written by Rav Rimon – <https://lnkd.in/dzQueKbj>

How, in the 76th year,
There were pillars of smoke, blood and fire,
A Jew in hiding, whispering in fear,
Instead of the joy of the holy Shabbat

Waves of hate engulf Your world,
Oppressors swarm over those who sanctify Your name,
They chase Your messengers, those who carry Your flag,
May You skip over us with love.

Return the hostages, call for freedom for those in captivity,
Plant those who have been uprooted with everlasting love,
Rehabilitate the wounded, raise up the depressed,
Lead Your congregation with kindness and mercy.

We give thanks to You for our State,
And for our redemption and the salvation of our soul,
United lead us upright in our land...

I pray that we take the time to mourn our losses and more than that see it as a time to
reflect on how we will rebuild in a way which strengthens our family.

I am confident we will emerge from this a stronger people despite tragic losses...but it
will take work and prayer.

YAMIM NOARAIM - OUR FATE IS NOT DETERMINED...

AUG 23, 2024, 5:29 PM

In a few short weeks it will be Rosh Hashana – the Jewish New Year. It is quickly followed
by Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement and the end of the period is marked by the

holiday called Simchat Torah – last year coinciding with 7th October...a day of very great loss that started a new world for many of us.

This year especially as we enter this very serious period there will be many articles about topics related to forgiveness, introspection, repentance and much of this is necessary and important.

There is another point I would like to focus on and as many times this year I have turned to the late Rabbi Sacks for some much-needed inspiration.

The core principle of this period in Judaism is called in Hebrew – ‘Teshuva’. It does not translate easily but means both ‘return’ in a physical sense and ‘repentance’ in a spiritual sense. In other words, it is a chance to ‘reboot’. As Rabbi Sacks, says more profoundly:

“Teshuvah tells us that our past does not determine our future. We can change. We can act differently next time than last. If anything, our future determines our past.”

With all the pain suffered by so many on both sides at the hands of the terrorists, and its global ripple effect, it is perhaps too easy that this period of introspection turns into one of depression and/or overwhelming fatalism. In my personal – unqualified – opinion, that is not how we should see things...we need to realize that our fate is not sealed physically and spiritually and that we can reboot.

We have hostages to return, we have a war against terror to fight, we have to defend and defeat enemies both physical and spiritual who seek our destruction, we have children to raise and guide ethically, we have a fractured society to heal and a world to continue to be positive contributors to.

We should of course self-reflect because as a person of faith I can't simply look to external factors like Hamas, Iran and the ICJ for answers, and just personally I have a huge number of faults to fix, but we should focus on ‘returning’ from this reflection stronger, more united, more faithful and better prepared physically and spiritually to fight on.

We have the fight of our lives on our hands, and we have seen tremendous pain, but this next month is an opportunity to reflect, return and reboot.

I will let Rabbi Sacks have the last words:

“Faith is not certainty. It is the courage to live with uncertainty. Faith is never easy. The great heroes of the moral life, like the great artists and scientists and thinkers, like anyone who has undertaken to live a life of high ideals, know failure after failure, disappointment after disappointment. What made them great is that they refused to despair. Like Jacob wrestling with the angel, they said to fate, ‘I will not let you go until you bless me’ ([Genesis 32:26](#)). Judaism is built on that faith. Jews refused to let go of God, and God refused to let go of them. They wrestle still. So do all who have faith.”

Fate is NOT determined...

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YAMIM NOARAIM 2 - ROSH HASHANA 2024 – WHAT ARE WE PRAYING FOR?

SEP 8, 2024, 9:40 AM

I am less than professionally qualified to write articles on prayer but still here I am. I am writing this because 11 months since 7th October we are heading into the High Holydays

and a time of reflection. Many thousands from all branches of Judaism will reflect during this period and experience sadness, anger, pain, loss, grief, suffering, hopelessness for some and possibly hope for others, many other emotions and possibly all of the above. This year, more than any other in my lifetime, has been a standout one for all the wrong reasons – literally the day that marked the end of the last holiday period saw the worst tragedy for the Jewish people since the Holocaust and we are still reeling. We are at war, many captives are still being held, and many have been brutally slain, antisemitism has reared itself and we are disunited as a people.

I have lost people I know well, close relatives of friends and one of my kids has fought in some of the most sensitive places and missions on and after the 7th October as a Special Forces soldier. Everyone has their own story and experience – many far far worse than mine – but Rosh Hashana is coming to us all soon and as I prepare to lead the service there are a number of aspects which I would like to highlight – to myself more than anything – that may give us some hope or direction as we struggle to deal with the enormity of this day in our time.

I will focus on 5 specific elements, but please be aware that these are just my thoughts – the prayers are expansive and hauntingly beautiful, and everyone should seek their own thoughts. This is not a halachic guide, just my view of some highlights that speak to me.

We not I

It is a very simple point, but it has deep meaning. The prayers are about “We” and not “I” – they are about us as a people and as a world. Whether we like it or not, we are in it together. There are simply too many examples of the simple fact that we are judged as a collective.

As a Chazzan, I will be a representative of the community I lead in prayer but more than that I am praying for all of us. Our disunity is ripping us apart and people of all shades of Judaism are turning on the other.

We must find a way back from this abyss and it isn't as simple as ‘they must follow my ideas’ – we are a nation based on debate and questioning but we must do so with respect for the other.

I don't know how we do this – it seems beyond us – and this comes to my second point

God is King

For people who don't believe in God, this may not ring true for you but for people of faith – whatever your level of observance and your unresolved questions – this inability to unite and the struggles we are having as a people lead us back to the fact that we don't know all the answers and can't fix everything ourselves. We are not alone – we live in a world with a True King and Rosh Hashana more than anything is about seeing through all the noise and recognizing that.

If we can find in ourselves the faith to know that we have an ultimately benevolent King whose desire is to seek our return to Him, and to be a united people, we may be able to have meaning in our lives.

The world appears to have gone crazy, and the pain is immense. Whilst I am not, some may be angry with God for this, and I hear it but there is hope. Judaism is explicit in the fact that God takes tough decisions – In the most famous prayer of Rosh Hashana – Untaneh Tokef – Let us Voice the Power – we articulate that God will decide who will die, who before their time, who will suffer etc. God makes tough decisions for which we can't necessarily understand on a personal level and as a people why, but I have to believe it is not random – that there is a method to the apparent madness and that God has a plan.

In the same prayer it says:

“To the very day he dies, You wait for him, and if he comes back, You welcome him at once”

Rosh Hashana is about reminding ourselves and ‘coronating’ our King. There are plenty of books and articles on Why God does what He does but Rosh Hashana is about recognizing this principle.

We all need meaning in our lives – As Victor Frankl – a man who lived through the horrors of multiple concentration camps including Auschwitz wrote:

“Man, however, is able to live and even to die for the sake of his ideals and values! ... Man is never driven to moral behavior; in each instance, he decides to behave morally. ... Man does not behave morally for the sake of having a good conscience but for the sake of a cause to which he commits himself, or for a person whom he loves, or the sake of his God ”

We have a positive cause and are a positive force of good for the world and under His Kingship we will ultimately prosper and continue to do His work of improving the world we live in.

Prayer from the heart – Hannah, the Shofar and a ‘still voice’

On Rosh Hashana there is a lot of text and prayer, but it is for most of us impossible to take it all in – it is overwhelming. For me it is really important to focus finding the aspects that speak to me and that help me on my spiritual journey.

Three elements spring to mind for me which infuse the day of Rosh Hashana:

Hannah – We read about this extraordinary role model in the Haftara reading on the first day of Rosh Hashana. The way she prayed to God is the basis for much of our prayer today and was deeply emotional, intimate and passionate. It was from the heart and that is what we must strive for. If even for a moment we are able to spiritually connect with true intensity to the spiritual it is worth it.

The Shofar – despite all the prayer, the most powerful prayer for many is the haunting sound of the Shofar – it says what our mouths and prayers can’t – it calls out. Connecting to it and really speaking the things we can’t say connects us on this day.

“A Still Voice” – it is mentioned again in ‘Untaneh Tokef in the context that “A Great Shofar sounds, and a still small voice is heard”. Sometimes it is not the loud, noisy, clapping that the Divine is found, but in the stillness and quiet voice of as He connect with us.

As we deal with our current situation – we should find the time to connect – not just through the formality of prayer but through the quiet stillness, the sound of the Shofar and the passionate, and learning from the intimate prayer of Hannah.

Prayer is just one aspect

The solution for returning and reconnecting with God is stated in the Mussaf Prayer – “Repentance, Prayer and Charity avert the evil decree”.

Prayer is only one aspect of our path to reconnecting – it is a three-pronged approach

1. We must try to resolve to be better people
2. We need to pray for ‘s help and forgiveness
3. We need to build our society and engage in the practical welfare of our people and world.

Rosh Hashana is a day for the second and to really focus on putting our energy into it – but it is only part of the answer – we must improve ourselves and our society.

Something we pray for 3 times a day not just on Rosh Hashana

I say it 3 or 4 times a day but rarely focus on it. In the prayer many say every day multiple times. We ask in the 2nd blessing of the Amidah – “He supports the fallen, heals the sick, **sets the captives free**”

This is a prayer I will do my very best to focus as hard on this year. It is not just for Rosh Hashana – it is for every day – my greatest wish is that before the festival and even before this is published- will set the captives free.

I have many prayers – for peace, for health, for an end to the war but I pray that my prayers and those of all of us will unite us as a people and bring the captives home.

And lastly...the opening prayer of my Mussaf for me and the most haunting – “Here I am, empty of deeds, in turmoil, fearing the One who sits enthroned on the praises of Israel. I

have come here to stand up and plead with You for Your people who have sent me, even though I am not worthy or fitting to come”

I am not the right person to lead prayers, nor to write this article – I have my many sins and weaknesses, and I am fundamentally flawed. To some extent we all are, and we are all on a journey.

Our people are on a journey – this year it has been more than tough – but I pray that by turning to God and turning to each other we can defeat the terror that plagues us and emerge a stronger, more united, more faithful nation.

I am not here to force religion on people – many people have issues with it – and many aspects of our current implementation of the Jewish path troubles me too, and we must pray for this to improve as well. Faith is a personal matter. For anyone of faith however some of these messages may be helpful and universal.

SEP 24, 2024, 1:49 PM



Yair Aronshtam from Israel, CC BY-SA 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons

I decided to write a New Year Greeting to a number of professional friends and contacts this morning – as I do every year. Next week is the Jewish New Year and it is customary to wish people a ‘Good Year’ or a ‘Good and Sweet Year’ – the Jewish equivalent of Happy New Year....one that should be sweet and good.

I am finding it so hard!!

This year has felt so incredibly tough since 7th October for so many reasons that I don’t feel I have to list. As I say this, jets are going overhead, rockets are being fired, the court of opinion is again blaming Israel for defending itself, civilians in another country are tragically again being used by a cynical terror army as human shields, we are facing war on multiple fronts, and 101 precious souls who we are duty-bound to look after are sitting in tunnels somewhere out of reach in Gaza.

So, what do we wish each other?

I won’t get into matters of faith on LinkedIn (I give enough views that upset people already), but I do have faith and therefore hope and believe we will come through this.

Unlike optimism – hope involves work. I have quoted it before – but Rabbi Sacks once wrote: “Optimism and hope are not the same. Optimism is the belief that the world is changing for the better; hope is the belief that, together, we can make the world better. Optimism is a passive virtue, hope an active one. It needs no courage to be an optimist, but it takes a great deal of courage to hope. The Hebrew Bible is not an optimistic book. It is, however, one of the great literatures of hope.”

We must fight for our freedom – it will unfortunately not come to us through other conduits. On a broader level the world must fight for its democratic freedom, which is also under threat with a broader advancement of autocratic and extremist states.

At the height of the Nazi power over Europe in 1940, FDR, in defending his policy of supporting the British (which he described later in the same speech as “Their heroic defense will be recorded for all time. It will be perpetual proof that democracy, when put to the test, can show the stuff of which it is made.”) said: “We have always held to the hope, the belief, the conviction, that there is a better life, a better world, beyond the horizon”

We must have hope!! It is so hard to look forward whilst at war, and we are still going through grief, but we must; without it, we won't have the strength to face what comes.

Therefore, I choose to stick to the age-old greeting of “A good year” and add the extra “may it be much sweeter than this one”

Wishing my everyone (except for any terrorists or supporters of) a “a good and sweeter year”

May the hostages come home now, may terror end soon and may we eventually have a true peace.

SUKKOT - SUKKOT UNDER A CLOUD – A UNIQUE YEAR TO CONNECT



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As I write this, we are coming up to Sukkot and Simchat Torah, a day that changed everything. My son like so many others jumped to action on that day and one year later he is “offline” in war. This is no normal year and tragically we are seeing too many casualties, and we still have 101 hostages away from their homes.

How should we consider Sukkot this year and its last day (or someday a separate festival of Simchat Torah) under this cloud.

Perhaps it is this cloud that we should consider and perhaps it is a good time to reflect on four aspects of the festival for some hope and comfort.

The first theme is exactly the cloud we sit under and the vulnerability we all feel. Whether a student on a university campus, a soldier in the field or like us in a shelter a few days ago without power as 181 ballistic missiles are launched and land nearby.

The central theme of Sukkot is that we are vulnerable and need God’s protection. Whether represented by the physical Sukkah we construct and sit in to remind us of the temporary nature of our world and our dependence on the shelter we take for granted,

and/or the Clouds of Glory God provided for us in the desert, the key point which I feel more than ever is that we live under His protection and we need it more than ever.

We are blessed with the technological clouds of protection in the form of Iron Dome, Arrow and David's Sling for example but surely, we need more. This is a time to reflect on that very vulnerability and strengthen our faith. We are not alone.

A second theme is the very strange Arbat Haminim – 4 species – we wave on the holiday. I remember being a young teenager walking along in London with them being photographed by a passing tourist bus. They are strange!

But there is a unique message in them. The Sages say that it is precisely the different nature of the 4 species that makes them whole. All are needed to make a blessing, and they must all be held together. The Jewish people is made up of all shades and types. It is only through our unity and coming together that we are blessed. We must come together and respect each other and not hold ourselves as better than. It is our unique combination that makes us so strong, and you see it with the composition of the IDF. We are stronger united.

Third, Sukkot in the Temple was special in that offerings were made for all the nations of the world. It is a time to recognize that we are one of many nations and there are many out there who support and respect us. We have a key role to play in a broken world and a coalition of the good and decent and often silent majority need to come together in order to defeat an evil we face today but many will face tomorrow. Those however who demand our annihilation have no place under this holy canopy. I am learning more each day that this axis of evil under the Iranian regime's leadership is also crushing millions of others under its cosh, and I hope this year sees an ending of this and a broadening of peace between nations.

Simchat Torah however was a day designated for the Jewish people to rejoice on their own in the beauty of the Torah and its unique inheritance. This year will be almost impossible but that is where my fourth point comes in.

As we sit in Sukkah, we invite spiritual guests – something I never gave thought to at any serious level. We invite Abraham, Issac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and David to join us.

These seven guests saw everything there is to see. The three Patriarchs and their wives were there at the birth of our people and saw terrible and great wonders. Joseph was kidnapped and held as a captive for years. Moshe and Aaron led us to freedom and a David ruled the first Jewish Kingdom.

They lived and came through huge challenges and are by our side spiritually. What we are going through is terrible and I literally live in fear of news from the front but as a Jew I must double down on my faith and ask God to protect us with his Cloud of Glory and as he did with Joseph to release the captives from captivity.

May we have better times and may our children and loved ones be safe:

Chag Sameyach

PURIM 1 - AVOIDING THE NEXT PURIM

MAR 24, 2024, 7:48 AM

Enough hatred...Educating to respect difference is the first step

Today we celebrate Purim – another Jewish holiday where someone tried to kill us, and we had faith and took measures and survived. It is however another story of where an extremist element in society was allowed by the ruling elite and the silent majority to step into power and almost in this case execute their plan.

In history, Hitler, Haman (the story of Purim) and countless others who preach hatred, as well as in the modern-day ISIS, Hamas..., are allowed to gain the upper hand and promote views that at their heart put hatred of others at the top of their agenda.

It has happened time after time, not just to Jewish populations but to victims of hatred by the hands of those who don't respect different cultures, genders, faiths and beliefs of others.

As Martin Luther King said: “We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.”

The solution must start with something very basic – the way we raise our children.

As Rabbi Sacks so eloquently put it: “As To defend a land, you need an army. But to defend freedom, you need education. You need families and schools to ensure that your ideals are passed on to the next generation and never lost, or despaired of, or obscured. The citadels of liberty are houses of study. Its heroes are teachers, its passion is education and the life of the mind. Moses realized that a people achieves immortality not by building temples or mausoleums, but by engraving their values on the hearts of their children, and they on theirs, and so on until the end of time.” *Radical Then, Radical Now*, pp. 32-33

Whilst days like Purim are important to show we are able to pull through the worst of times and, as today, we can't be sheep to the slaughter and must be strong and resist terror, far more important is preventing the Purim's or Holocaust's from happening. We live in dangerous times where despite all our talk of equality, hatred is on the up. It is our job to teach the next generation more mutual respect for others and less hate.

It was rogue ideologies not nations or mainstream religions which caused the Holocaust, Purim or in modern day the 7th October, but these groups were allowed to rise to the surface because the silent majority didn't prevent them...we must teach our kids to love not to hate and be strong enough to stand up for others when they are hated.

On a very personal level, I hope I have successfully educated my kids to reject hatred of people for religion, race, creed, sexual orientation and any other personal individual freedom.

I also hope I have instilled in them a belief of the necessity and strength to defend fully their right and a just society's right to exist, from those who seek to do them harm because of hatred. It is unfortunate that this is the skill my kids are currently exercising –

it is not out of choice. I would personally far rather the 7/10's and Purim's of the future are prevented from happening.

PURIM 2 - PURIM IN THE PRESENT – WE ARE MIDWAY THROUGH

MAR 20, 2024, 2:08 PM



File:Book of Esther JHM Amsterdam 08112012 10.jpg CC license

This year I am heading into the Purim holiday feeling something completely different. This year I feel I am a participant mid-way through an unfolding and unfinished book of Jewish history's fight against virulent antisemitism that our generation is writing and which we get to influence.

When remembering and commemorating Jewish events I have tried to follow the adage of "Remember the past to build the future," to look at events from the distant and recent past like Purim and the Holocaust and try to extract messages to learn for the future. This year it is not enough...

This year more than ever, we are actors in a parallel plot and our actions and faith can and will determine the outcome. I guess we should always feel like this.

We, as 21st century Jews and as society, have made mistakes as in the past – some of us lulled ourselves into a false sense of security (both in Israel and the Diaspora), and too

much of society has again allowed pure evil to be unleashed and also become accepted narrative. As in many generations before us, we have fallen into the trap of “it can’t happen in our time.” The similarity to the first parts of the Purim story is all too clear but many of these lessons are for tomorrow.

The question for now is how we learn from the past – from the response of the Jewish people in the Purim story – to influence the outcome now. Looking into the Purim story, four things scream out to me in the events that signified our response:

Unity: The Jews stood alongside Esther and Mordechai...they fasted communally and acted in civil defense together to defeat Haman and the King’s decree.

Stand Resolute: Mordechai refused to bow down to Haman and Esther bravely approached the King. He and eventually the rest of the Jewish population stood firm against the tide and fought for survival.

Faith: G-d did not perform obvious miracles, Red Sea style, in the Purim story, but was a guiding hand and people fasted/prayed to G-d whilst also acting to save themselves physically.

Bravery: It took courage and bravery from those at the front to lead us through this dark time in the form of Mordechai and Esther and no doubt unnamed others.

We are doing many things which stand us in good stead across all fronts – the test will be to stay the journey and remain unified, standing resolute, prayer and deep faith, and continued bravery with the highest faith-based principles of our finest soldiers.

For me, we are far from the end of this story – we are mourning, fighting, we have captives to return and an enemy to defeat and there are I am sure plot twists to come which we will need dig deep for but I pray we stick to the course and double down on the points above as other ancestors did against their version of antisemitism in the form of Haman and today’s Persia in the form of Haman.

CHAPTER 2: JEWISH HEROES

DANIEL PEREZ ZTL - DANIEL – A TRUE HERO

When a terrorist army fueled by hate rampaged into Israel in a killing spree, the best of our Gen Z stepped up in defense, even when it meant giving their all

MAR 18, 2024, 6:12 AM



Family picture provided of Daniel Perez

This war that Hamas started has caused terrible pain and loss to countless people and no more so than for a beautiful family that I have the merit of living alongside in Yad Binyamin. Yesterday, a day we hoped would not come, their son, brother, grandchild, nephew, cousin, friend Captain Daniel Perez, may his soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life, was confirmed as having been killed on October 7th.

He died “Al Kiddush Hashem”/ “sanctifying God’s name.” He made the ultimate sacrifice for his people and his country. He was killed while actively defending his country against a barbaric enemy committed to nothing other than hatred and death.

His death is nothing other than a tragedy for his wonderful family, friends, and other loved ones.

For the broader world, it is perhaps a reminder of the true double-sided nature of October 7th and will serve as a reminder about who and what we are fighting for.

On the 7th of October, we saw terrible tragedy on levels not seen since the Holocaust – people brutally murdered, kidnapped, raped – by an army of terrorists fueled by sheer hatred and a desire to kill as many Jews and other innocent civilians as possible.

On the 7th of October, we also saw a group of true heroes who gave everything they had, quite literally, to save as many lives as possible and to contain what by all estimates could have been a far worse situation. Daniel was in this group and by all accounts gave every ounce of his precious life to defending our precious country. Our younger generation that we once labeled “Gen Z” has stepped up miraculously as heroes and Daniel was at the heart of this.

These last few months, sadly, I have written about Daniel many times, first as an unnamed hostage until the IDF cleared his name for publication, then on this blog as [Daniel Perez](#), the son of wonderful neighbors/friends and now as Captain Daniel Perez killed on the 7th of October, a hero in the face of brutal onslaught by the most terrible of terrorists. I truly hoped and prayed this day would never come!

At times like this, I tend to rely on the words of the late chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. He stated it poignantly when he said in reference to Israel Memorial Day: “Jews fought, and never more so than in the State of Israel, with the courage that you find only in those whose ultimate aim is not victory but peace, not triumph but life. Let us acknowledge the heroes of Medinat Yisrael (the State of Israel), the heroes not just of military battle, but also the heroes of the human spirit, who are willing to die so that we can live. They lit a flame in the Jewish heart that will never die. Let us remember them and their past and look today at the Israel they have built. A land of freedom and energy and creativity and life.”

We are not interested in death or killing or revenge over our neighbors – we don’t hate, and we want peace but as the name “Israel Defense Forces” states so literally, we are going to defend ourselves with our lives if needed to protect and preserve this special land and people.

He was a hero in whose merit our society continues to exist and act as a beacon of hope in this world. Our soldiers are doing the work of heroes, operating at the highest ethical standards and bravery against terrorists who hate so much they are sacrificing their own to feed their thirst.

Our enemies should know that far from being a weakness, our love of life, freedom and hope is a true strength. Daniel and many other precious souls made and continue to make the ultimate sacrifice, and it is, I believe, incumbent on us to honor this and each find his or her own way to make their contribution to this truly special cause. Daniel, you and your family have inspired me to step up, even if just by writing, and I know you have inspired others.

We must not let terror win physically or morally, and we must get our other captives back now.

Captain Daniel Perez — a true hero!

DANIEL PEREZ ZTL - INSPIRATION AT A TIME OF THE DEEPEST DARKNESS

MAR 19, 2024, 10:27 AM



Taken in Yad Binyamin during funeral procession - provided with permission

A SPECIAL FAMILY, COMMUNITY AND COUNTRY SHOWED WHY WE WILL PREVAIL
IN THE FACE OF TERROR DURING THE FUNERAL FOR THE LATE CAPTAIN DANIEL
PEREZ, MAY HIS NAME BE BLESSED

Yesterday was one of, if not the most, inspiring of my life and it came at what should have been one of its low points.

The background was truly horrific – a funeral of a young son and brother brutally killed whilst defending his country, presumed kidnapped for over 160 days, whose blood found at the scene was buried in a coffin whilst his body remains somewhere in Gaza, whose family has been living a nightmare beyond imagination.

Standing in the rain for two hours listening to what was said, how it was said and what was totally absent left me emotionally drained, at times in absolute tears and immensely proud of my friends, neighbors and country!

I heard a family grieving deeply and I heard most an immense outpouring of love and pride in a hero who loved his family and country and who died making the ultimate sacrifice for both of them.

From the start of the funeral – a drive through our town where residents lined the streets holding Israeli flags – to the end of the funeral where the national anthem Hatikvah “The Hope” was sung there was not a word of hatred, anger or revenge – there was just dignity!

Daniel lived his life and died sanctifying God’s name and his people, and his funeral was a sanctification of all that represents the very best of this country, people and mankind in general – love, hope, pride and dignity.

To anyone who thinks we are a genocidal or evil people bent on destruction or revenge you just had to feel the energy of this truly awe-inspiring and completely authentic funeral.

I truly wish the family comfort in memory of their hero of a son, and I also hope it reinforces a clear message that we are a truly special nation with young men and women

who are strong, proud, act with immense dignity and the best of ethics and that we will prevail.

May the other captives be returned home immediately and may this nightmare be over soon with good prevailing and an end to this bloodshed and terror wreaked on both sides by Hamas.

Captain Daniel Perez, Of Blessed Memory, A truly special man, soldier, hero from a truly special family!!

ELIAV ABITBUL ZTL. - WHO WILL OUR HEROES BE – A MODERN MACCABBE

APR 24, 2025, 7:12 PM



Pictures Courtesy of the Family

For those of us who value the Jewish tradition and Torah values, we live in a generation where we have true role models and heroes in our midst. If we were not blinded by an ever-growing wall of segregation and disunity, we'd recognize the amazing asset we possess and the incredible Kiddush Hashem that is surely self-evident.

When we were children, who were our heroes who fired our imagination? For some, it was great religious sages and great Jewish figures of history; for others, it wasn't figures

of Jewish tradition but instead music, sport and popular culture that have dominated. We all had someone. We also had our folktales, tales, and stories around which we read to our children. Most of us hope our kids are inspired by those who most embody the tradition we value.

Now, for a moment, forget which kippa or head covering you wear or that you don't wear, which community you are affiliated with, and all political opinions. Just for the sake of the exercise, focus on the pure desire of the Torah.



Provided by family

Would the following profile qualify unambiguously as one such point of inspiration, a true hero of Am Yisrael...

- A Ben-Torah who spent 5 years in a classic yeshiva, who loved Limmud Torah, who married an equally special wife with 4 beautiful young children being raised in a rich Torah environment.
- A man who, with his wife, acted as foster parents to tens of children at high risk.
- A soldier who participated in a Milchemet Mitzvah on the front line protecting the Land and People of Israel from annihilation.

- Whilst doing so, he learned, when possible, daily with each of his children.
- A brother whose 4 other brothers were doing the same, whose wives were selflessly taking care of their children's needs.
- A hero who sadly but bravely fell on the battlefield in Lebanon and who held on his body the Sefer "Shnayim Mikra V'echud Targum," which was found blood-soaked on him, with a bullet piercing it (see photos)



Sefer with Bullet Hole (Courtesy of Family)

Would it be fair to say that had his story been recorded by the Talmud, Josephus, or the Book of the Maccabees, he would be seen by all as a hero? He would be one of many, but one, nonetheless.

Sadly, due to our divisions, this might not happen! It might not happen because he happened to wear the uniform of the IDF. Unbelievably, some will even see his sacrifice as in some way 'not the right way'...

It is, however, also a huge opportunity to inspire the next generation. His passion for learning, educating his kids, and their love of Torah even when fighting in war should truly uplift us. His example of holding by his heart both the Shield of David and the Holy

Bible, and the memory of his blood-soaked Sefer, should help us stop our divisions and bring all of us together under the same Tallit.



Pictures courtesy of family

With the current non-participation of a large part of the Jewish people in the defense of the state and its politicization, we are surely losing sight of what our mission is and what G-d wants from us as Jews. We must learn Torah, keep mitzvot, and be a sanctification of G-d's name, but we must stand up and do what the Torah explicitly says is our job – to serve alongside our people in protecting our land. It is a holy task and one all of us are called upon to do.

Eliav Abitbol (ZTL) is this hero mentioned above, one of many such men and women, some on the front line and others in critical positions such as medics, intelligence, and home front. Eliav's father is a close friend who, with his wife, has raised his children with both the passion of Torah and love of his people.



Pictures courtesy of family

They are mourning the loss of their son, but they see a way whereby his service and sacrifice can serve a deeper purpose for the Jewish People.

Their son was a passionate lover of Torah and this together with his willingness to sacrifice his life, it should serve as an example to all who value the Torah and Limmud Torah. They do this in the hope that his sacrifice will lead to more unity – and inspiration – in the beautiful and diverse nation of Israel. They seek the union of our people not by eliminating our differences but by building upon our differences to serve G-d and His Torah.

He, and those like him, should unite us, fire our imagination, and inspire our nation, not divide us. We are living in truly miraculous times, and we are letting it go by. Let's bring these stories to our Shabbat Table and to the nighttime stories we tell our children and grandchildren – that way the memories of our loved ones will fuel those who follow us.

ELIAV ABITBUL ZTL. - I SAW HOPE IN A PLACE OF DARKNESS TONIGHT

OCT 28, 2024, 6:28 AM



Eliav Abitbol HYD (Photo: Courtesy)

I was privileged (and I use that word carefully) to have been at a funeral tonight which in the midst of true darkness and utter sorrow showed the hope that is the Jewish spirit. It showed everything that is the opposite of how our detractors describe us.

The funeral of an officer – Eliav Abitbol – the son of a close client/friend of 15+ years – was tragic. A loving husband leaving behind his true love, father to beautiful young kids, brother to very close siblings, commanding officer to very bereft soldiers and a son whose parents are having to do what no parent wants ever to do.

He was killed in battle in Lebanon as a hero who went above and beyond his responsibility to defend his country.

At the funeral which started after midnight on Mount Herzl and lasted for over two hours there was not a single word of anger, hate or revenge of any sort.

There was a father and mother who spoke about the critical need to honor their son by doing everything possible to stay united as a people and respect the different parts of society that make up our hole – to live his example.

There were the siblings who praised the pure soul of their brother who guided them with a message of positivity, love and commitment and how they would look after collectively his kids and loving wife so that they share the loss.

There was his commanding officer who was himself wounded crying out how his faithful deputy gave everything to the last minute for his country.

Lastly was his wife who loves him so so dearly and wishes him home with her. The sadness and pain was so strong. I don't know his wife, but I felt her love so strongly.

They all highlighted the giving nature of this hero – a kidney transplant to save someone's life, running a home with his wife for troubled kids. This is a man (and family) who gave.

This is the hope This family of kids and parents who put their country and community first, who put love over hate and who see the good in others, who seek no revenge to the enemy but fight it like heroes.

This is how we will defeat this terror and rebuild.

I feel the pain for this precious family, and I pray that they find comfort in their sadness from their hero.

I pray we honor this hero by living up to his example and building bridges in our society and going to nth degree to serve our state.

I saw hope tonight in a place of darkness.

A truly beautiful family mourning a beautiful soul.

DEC 13, 2024, 4:02 PM



Tel Aviv University - courtesy - for Fair Use

This week, a giant figure in Israel, in Parkinson's Disease, and in my recent life, passed away. It has been mentioned in the Hebrew media, but to date, it has not reached the English-speaking media and community. I feel it is important to mark his passing, not least to express my profound gratitude to him and all those like him who work tirelessly on behalf of patients with Parkinson's and other diseases.

I quietly attended his funeral yesterday in the north of Israel. It was clear from the mood, emotion, and eulogies how much of an impact he made as a doctor, teacher, researcher, friend, mensch, husband, parent, and grandparent. He will be enormously missed by so many.

To me, his impact was spread over the last five years or so, during which he was deeply involved in my treatment as one of the two incredible neurologists who have guided me. From the first day I met him, despite the hundreds or thousands of people he saw and the enormous responsibility he carried as head of neurology at one of the biggest hospitals, he was constantly present and immediate in his responses.

I had a strange diagnosis, completely atypical, with a very rapid onset and a number of irregularities, including suspected cases of autoimmune encephalitis and, at one point, a potential diagnosis of something far worse than Parkinson's called PSP. But at each juncture, he was there for me with fantastic advice and immediate responses, organizing MRIs, consultations, and treatments. In fact, after my first visit to him in the early evening, he urgently called me late that night and started an immediate protocol of steroids.

Although I only met him for short consultations and many email conversations, he nevertheless had a profound impact on me. One thing in particular stuck with me: he told me, "Make Parkinson's part of your life, not your life," and that has been my strategy ever since. He counseled me to stay positive, engage in lots of exercise, and keep working to keep the brain busy. My family and I are so grateful.

A couple of years ago, I was asked by a charity in Jerusalem (Tikva for Parkinson's) to speak at their conference in Tiberias about my patient experience and staying positive. Professor Giladi was the main speaker, and it was incredible to see the way the attendees responded to him—the line to speak to him after his talk was so long.

I wrote about him earlier this week on my [blog](#), hoping for a better outcome before the news of his passing. Sadly, he passed away in the same hospital where he had worked for so many years.

There are so many people who knew him much better than I did, but as a patient, I feel it is important to show my gratitude, as well as the gratitude of many others. I am reminded of how much one person can make a difference to so many people and how many people are involved in the lives of Parkinson's patients and those with other complex illnesses—the army of specialists, nurses, healthcare professionals, therapists, trainers, and an endless list of brilliant people dedicated to doing good for others. All of them have my thanks!

I hope the enormous contribution he made to the lives of so many, including me, serves as a comfort to his family. May his memory be blessed.

CHAPTER 3: JEWISH UNITY

UNITY 1 - UNITY IN THIS ONE MOMENT

JAN 26, 2025, 5:05 AM



Screenshot X - multiple sources - fair use

Wherever we stand on the political or religious scale, and whatever our feelings towards the current hostage plan, I believe that ALL of us are united in our instinctive reaction to this photo.

Naama Levy and her fellow hostages have been a part of my life for nearly 500 days. The footage of October 7 haunted me, the video released of her and her team being beaten and held, the ongoing prayer and tears over her fate have been with many of us.

This picture is simply worth everything: she is with her parents, she is home.

We all know the terrible consequences of dealing with Hamas and the implications for the future.

We ALL want the hostages back; we ALL want terrorists not released. We are unfortunately stuck in an impossible situation where no one has the perfect answer, and we are all creating our own ethical shopping lists and scales. Religious leaders are divided as are we all. The truth is each one could be right. But the fact that we all feel the pain of the issue and care so much for the future of the hostages, soldiers, and our people should be taken as a sign that we are all invested in the same objective.

We are one people at the end of the day, and Naama matters to us all as if she were part of our family. We wish her and all the hostages home and safe.

Maybe, hopefully, as some people found meaning and purpose in life after the hell of Auschwitz, our hostages that come home alive and the families of those who don't will somehow find meaning in theirs. I pray it is so.

I am less an optimist and more someone who has hope. As the late Rabbi Sacks eloquently put it:

“Optimism and hope are not the same. Optimism is the belief that the world is changing for the better; hope is the belief that, together, we can make the world better. Optimism is a passive virtue, hope an active one. It needs no courage to be an optimist, but it takes a great deal of courage to hope. The Hebrew Bible is not an optimistic book. It is, however, one of the great literatures of hope.”

To Heal a Fractured World, p. 166

As long as we care for each of these beautiful souls and as long as our young like these 4 girls are prepared to serve our country and protect it, we are going to survive and ultimately thrive.

JUL 9, 2024, 1:45 PM



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Unity – is it more than just a pipe dream?

I crave many things but most of all I crave Unity!

As much of the world heads to extremes and hatred and as we continue to see ourselves more through what divides us, I crave it even more.

But what is it beyond slogans and naivety????

As I sit on a 12-hour flight mulling the world I thought for hours on this topic (the film choices were not good).

Two very great people inspire me in this regard- the late Lubavitcher Rebbe and the late Chief Rabbi Sacks.

They said the following four beautiful quotes amongst others:

The Rebbe:

“It is crucial that we see ourselves as a unified people, not just in times of crisis, but in our everyday lives and actions.”

“Unity is not achieved by erasing our differences but by appreciating and celebrating them within the context of our common goal.”

Rabbi Sacks:

“The Jewish people are a family. Families can argue and disagree, but they remain bound by shared memories, collective responsibility, and mutual destiny.”

“Judaism teaches that our strength lies in our diversity, that we are each created in the image of God but uniquely so, and that it is our diversity that contributes to the wholeness of the world.”

What is unity?

We are all different, like a complex but loving family. We should never hope for a unity designed by all being the same but rather learning to respect differences and focusing on common goals.

We have common goals – irrespective of your religion or faith.

Defeat the evil of terror and fundamentalism which aims to impose a singular view on the world

Work together to raise our children in a way that appreciates and respects differences.

I am not naive truly...I have strong views on topics and disagree with many, but I can still strive to seek a common goal and strive for unity.

I will keep pushing this message and hope that even one person is influenced by this. I know so many people who feel the same.

On this the 30th anniversary of the Rebbe's passing I pray in his merit we will retain our sense of unity.

JUDAISM – MY HOPES AT THIS CRITICAL CROSSROADS

JAN 31, 2024, 7:29 AM

Only a fool would write about religion, war and politics especially when he is not a Rabbi, General or Politician. It is exactly because I am not those things, nor have the aspiration or skills to be one of them, that I write this.

When it comes to the type of values and society we want to live in and our kids to grow up with, I see this point in time as a real crossroads – we can either embrace the opportunity to reinforce the core values I see as the beauty of our Jewish identity or this could be a pivot towards a world I am deeply scared about. I feel it is important – at least to myself – to put my thoughts out there despite and perhaps because of my lack of qualifications.

To give some brief context I am someone fully committed to religious values and halacha and became religious of my own accord when I was 11/12 years old, I made Aliyah from the UK a long time ago (although my Hebrew level may indicate otherwise), I have a beautiful family and have a great community and place of work and am generally blessed, but this war has had an impact on us like all families. We have a son who serving in an elite unit was fighting in the kibbutzim on 7th October, clearing the victims with Zaka on the days after, and then in Gaza for much of the time since, have friends/neighbors with a captured son, I have lost clients and people from our office, and have had health issues due to the stress...thankfully we have suffered less than most, but it has been and still is terror.

Whilst I LOVE being a Jew and an Israeli, in the period before the war, I was growing ever more concerned with a number of aspects of our values and society – most especially the lack of unity, the disrespect across all groups for others, the lurch to extremism and ultra nationalism and the numerous cases of let's just say 'less than expected' behavior of a few in positions in religious leadership. I am sure I am not alone.

I have also seen in the broader world the face of religious fanaticism when taken to its extreme – in the faces of those who committed the terror on the 7th October and in the chants of their supporters in the streets and universities of the world. How they have distorted a religious set of ideals is everything religion shouldn't be. I am not suggesting for a second that this is our trajectory, but it is a useful reminder of what extremism unchecked looks like.

I have, however, seen some truly beautiful flickers of hope through this crisis – a greater sense of unity between and amongst people; tremendous acts of kindness, giving as a society and putting others first; a reawakening of Jewish identity across the Jewish world; a stronger connection from soldiers and others to spiritual matters. Our younger generation has really stepped up to the plate and I see in them true hope for the future.

Judaism at its core is a beautiful religion of hope, love of life, compassion, equality of all, where we are called upon to live up to these ideals.

Most of all, we need to avoid the mistakes we have made many times before – Baseless Hatred. We need to see and respect others as also G-d's creations.

As the very wise Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (ever more an inspiration to me zt'l) said "If we were all the same, we would have nothing unique to contribute, nor anything to learn from others. The more diverse we are, the richer our culture becomes, and the more expansive our horizons of possibility. But that depends on our willingness to bring our differences as gifts to the common good. It requires integration rather than segregation, and that in turn means that we must have a rich and compelling sense of the common good. Without it, we will find that difference spells discord and creates, not music, but noise".

He went on to say: "When you learn to listen to views different from your own, realizing that they are not threatening but enlarging, then you have discovered the life-changing idea of argument for the sake of Heaven"

Life is not simple...we have to stay strong stand up to terror and return our captured and right now we are in war mode but please G-D soon we will return to a steady state and our differences will again test us – will we give respect to those who have differing views, will we see the good in people, will each wing of Judaism from Orthodox and Secular and will we be able to avoid the lurch to extremism?

I think we have before us an opportunity from a point of darkness to rebuild as a more unified family, without compromising on the core halachic tenets of authentic Judaism. We can inspire the next generation. I am hopeful – but it will take a lot of work. I pray we are up to it.

LOVING KINDNESS - KINDNESS IS THE TRAIT I WOULD CHOOSE...

APR 2, 2025, 1:55 PM



How one family made such a profound difference in my life at a critical stage, serving as a reminder of the basics as we approach Passover—during a time when we have endured so much.

At a very young age—around 11 or 12—I started my religious journey in what would later be seen as typical for me: impulsiveness, stubbornness, and relentless drive and commitment. I went from 0 to 100 pretty quickly. Unfortunately, I was also a teenager

going through teenage stuff, and it morphed briefly into what I'd now call a self-centered, intolerant, and bitter mix.

One thing above all else stopped it from continuing: the influence of one family.

It happened by chance. Walking with my mother on a Shabbat afternoon in our local area—where I thought no religious Jews lived—we met a religious man. That encounter would shape me deeply.

The family—the man mentioned above, his brother, sister-in-law and family, and his sister and her family—became a second family when mine was imploding. They supported me in countless ways—building me a sukkah, teaching me by example and in practice, inviting my family for meals, and showing me the warmth of a Jewish home. Their kindness was pure and embraced not just me but my close family too.

We spent Seder with them almost every year—moments I'll never forget.

As the late Rabbi Sacks said: “Acts of kindness never die. They linger in the memory, giving life to other acts in return.”

Their ideology, observance, or dress didn't matter—they oozed kindness. Looking back on nearly 50 years, and now through a different lens given the grim medical diagnosis I face, I see how vital that was—and how I've too often failed to thank them for it. The Baal Shem Tov taught, “A soul may descend to this world and live seventy or eighty years just to do a single act of kindness for another.” Their kindness was an antidote to my toxic, fundamentalist teenage attitude, calming and shaping me.

When I think of my hopes for my children and, please G-d, one day grandchildren, it's kindness above all. How that manifests religiously, or the paths they choose, is theirs to discover with G-d's guidance. But I hope they carry the DNA of kindness, above all, with them.

That kindness isn't confined to one family or place. Israelis are known as Sabras—cactus plants, hard outside, soft inside—but in my 18 years here, I've found that same kindness in buckets. Colleagues, clients, doctors, neighbors, friends, even strangers—it's a beautiful trait so many share. As PIRKEI AVOT teaches, "The world stands on three things: Torah, service, and acts of loving-kindness." It is present across every part of the cultural and religious spectrum. Sadly, the opposite is also true.

Why write this somewhat soppy blog post. Firstly, as we head towards Passover, I hope this core DNA of kindness, tracing back to Abraham and Sarah, is a force that continues to unite us as a people. As we mourn those lost in recent months and pray for those still captive, may this compassion—this love of life and rejection of evil—strengthen us against enemies waging terror. We clearly need to remain strong and vigilant, and our sons and daughters (mine very much included) will need to continue to stand firm, but this doesn't stand in contradiction – it I believe strengthens those who fight and maintains their moral integrity and in no way lessens their passion to stand tall.

Secondly, to the family I mentioned above —whose kindness I'll never forget—thank you. You're truly one of a kind!

CHAPTER 4: AND A LITTLE HUMOR

REFLECTIONS – KOSHER CURRY WITH A SHOEHORN

APR 18, 2025, 3:35 PM



Gen AI created by author

Keeping kosher and Shabbat on the road is no small feat, but it's led me to have special moments so amusing, irreverent, and occasionally inspiring that I look back on them with deep fondness.

For anyone religious or meticulous about kashrut, Shabbat, and other pillars of Halachic Judaism, embarking on a career—especially outside Israel—it can feel daunting. It's not easy, but having done so, proudly wearing a kippa and adhering strictly across 20+ countries and half the U.S. states, I've found it to be a gift that keeps giving. It's sparked unique connections, cherished memories, and, I hope, shown others a positive side of our faith—albeit sometimes in odd ways.

Nearly 30 years later, I'm not sure how it would work today, but as a consultant based in Sheffield, London, and later Tel Aviv, it shaped my life profoundly and left a number of unused kosher microwaves spread across the globe.

Since my PSP diagnosis at 49, I've been largely housebound on doctors' orders. Many have asked if I'll write a book, and while the idea tempts me, I love the spontaneity and

immediacy of blogging and I am not sure I have the patience, time and sufficient content I'd interest for a book. It fits with the impulsiveness I have always had but that has been exasperated by the condition. I write because it is therapeutic and brings me positive memories, but I also believe these stories carry lessons for balancing Jewish life with professional demands.

Here, I share three of dozens of humorous moments, hoping they convey the wonder of keeping halacha in the strangest places. If you enjoy them, please share feedback—I've got more, including one about a trouser press turned grill! I genuinely have enough for a long book – but doubt anyone would read it.

Kosher Curry with a Shoehorn

One memorable moment came during a stint in Paris, where I spent 1-2 days weekly when my kids were young. From a kashrut perspective, it was a breeze: kosher meals on the Eurostar and countless kosher restaurants perfect for client dinners. One night, after a long day of meetings (and a separate incident where I electrocuted myself pulling a plug prong, landing me in hospital—lesson: never touch live wires!), I ordered a curry from Darjeeling, a favorite Indian spot from my honeymoon. The steaming dish arrived at my 5-star hotel in Paris's 1st district, but to my dismay, there was no cutlery. Room service couldn't help—likely baffled by the Englishman begging for a plastic spoon.

Eating with fingers wasn't an option; the curry was hot and soupy. After rummaging, I found a shoehorn in the wardrobe. Kashering a shoehorn isn't covered in any halachic text I know, and I didn't have time or means to dig it in the ground, wait 24 hours or boil it in water, but I deemed it pareve, gave it a good wash (I hope), and dug in.

The next morning, I shared the tale with colleagues and clients, who found it utterly absurd. It's now a fond memory.

Lesson learned: Always request cutlery, avoid shoehorns, and maybe keep such stories to yourself. Remember as well that you need to follow Public Health and Safety rules which I clearly breached.

Two-Star Michelin Restaurant and the Sommelier

Another unforgettable moment unfolded at a two-star Michelin restaurant in London, where a partner hosted our team for an 8-course taster menu meal in a private room. I arranged a kosher meal from a trusted London caterer. My plates, hefty and plastic-wrapped, dwarfed the delicate 8-course portions my colleagues enjoyed, making me feel slightly out of place.

The real story, though, was the sommelier—a French wine expert who described each course's pairing with poetic flair, like, "These grapes caught the first sunlight on the western ridge." I'd ordered a kosher wine, not the finest (think "selected" and boiled, for those in the know). Curious, the sommelier asked to try it. Big mistake. After a sniff and a tiny sip, he exclaimed in his charming accent, "What is this s**t?" The room stunned initially quickly turned to laughter. I doubt I did the Israeli wine industry any favors, but it's one of my funniest memories.

Lesson learned: Don't bring budget kosher wine to a Michelin-starred restaurant.

A Dinner I'll Never Forget

One of my closest work friends, a true foodie, joined me for a project in Halifax. Having lived in Sheffield, studied in Leeds and with in-laws in Manchester, I suggested dinner at a kosher restaurant in Manchester where I'd had wonderful family meals, including meeting my in-laws for the first time (and smearing chicken wings everywhere – also not recommended). I thought it was the perfect spot for dinner (and the only one for 200 miles).

We enjoyed what I thought was a great meal, but as we returned to the car, he was baffled. "How is it possible that we finished a three-course meal in 37 minutes?" he asked. To him, meals were leisurely affairs. He was also puzzled by the noisy atmosphere, people chatting between tables, the lack of wine with meals, and my order of Hot Ribena which he couldn't believe was on a menu anywhere in the world—a sweet cordial I love but he associated with sick days. Despite our similar backgrounds, our dining experiences were worlds apart. Before making aliyah, my wife and I dined with him and his wife in London, but that Manchester meal remains unforgettable.

Lesson learned: Kosher dining can be a cultural shock—embrace the differences.

Reflections

These moments, born from my commitment to kashrut, are among my richest memories. They've taught me that faith, humor, and resilience can exist in even in the most unlikely places. Living with PSP has made these stories even more precious, reminding me how staying true to my beliefs brought joy and connection, alongside a fair amount of chocolate, pot noodles and smoked salmon. It's absolutely possible to live a kosher, religious life while thriving professionally, and I hope these tales inspire others to find their own balance.

Wishing you all Shabbat Shalom. If these stories resonated, let me know—I'd love to share more!

KOSHER BURGERS FRESHLY IRONED AND PRESSED

APR 25, 2025, 1:44 PM

[Report this post.](#)



AI picture generated by author (note burger vegan so cheese is ok :-))

Last week, I shared a blog post about some of the more amusing and bizarrely inspiring moments from my career, driven by my efforts to keep strictly kosher, observe Shabbat, and follow other religious rules. I received positive feedback and decided to share more stories—this time about an ironing board/trouser press, a melon and cheese saga, a special Shabbat alarm clock moment, and a few El Al anecdotes. Surprisingly, I have many more tales—perhaps because while others were working, I was busy doing strange things.

The Shabbat in Swindon

For the last year before we made Aliyah, I worked at a client in Swindon, about 100 miles west of London. I took the train there daily, and it was a fairly uneventful client in terms of Kashrut. One Friday, torrential rain hit the UK, triggering a flood warning. Security announced over the Tannoy that the offices were closing due to flooding, so I rushed to Swindon Train Station to catch an early train back to London for Shabbat.

The train line was down. Rental car companies were flooded, and taxis were unavailable. Another religious person at the station was equally stranded. With no options left, I called a hotel in town and booked their last two rooms, realizing we were stuck for Shabbat. We had nothing with us, but Tesco was open. We bought Shabbat clothes, Kosher Yarden Wine, Kosher Kingsmill Bread, smoked salmon, Tivall Vegetarian burgers, plates, tea candles, cutlery, and aluminum foil. We had a plan.

In the hotel's business center, we printed an online Siddur (it was summer, and I'd prayed before leaving home). With Shabbat approaching, we needed to heat the burgers. Ironing them with foil didn't work—it didn't do the burgers justice. Then we discovered the trouser press, a device that presses trousers automatically. It became a fantastic burger grill. The burgers stayed warm until we ate. What happened to the next pair of trousers in the press? We didn't stick around to find out.

So, two strangers shared Shabbat in a Swindon hotel, eating hot burgers and praying with printed Siddurim. It was a very long Shabbat. Thankfully, by 9:30 pm, the roads reopened, and we got a taxi back to London.

The Melon and Cheese Saga

Early in my career, I worked in Germany in 2006 for 4-5 months, flying from London to Bonn weekly. There was no kosher food in Bonn, but I have to give gratitude to the synagogue restaurant in Cologne that delivered food weekly. The Hilton's chef agreed to reheat and store it, provided the supplier's kitchens met health and safety standards. He personally went and inspected the synagogue's kitchen, found it superbly clean, and approved.

So, to the Melon...At the project's end, I was invited at short notice to a famous castle for a client dinner. With no kosher food prepared, I worked with the chef and restaurant manager, at the last minute, to create an inspired menu:

- **First course:** Green melon
- **Main course:** Orange melon
- **Dessert:** A medley of orange and green melon

Guests thought I was either the healthiest or strangest person they'd met—perhaps both. Delicious!

This wasn't my only food-related adventure abroad involving simple ingredients. While working in Madrid for a few months during a sweltering summer, I brought kosher food from London, including cheddar cheese, since local restaurants weren't always an option. Without a fridge, I kept the cheese in a shady spot in the office. After a while, a terrible smell permeated the workplace, and colleagues started complaining. I eventually realized the culprit: I'd placed the cheese near the air conditioning intake, which was spreading the odor to every employee. I quickly removed it, apologized profusely, and learned to double-check my storage solutions. I think no one found out 😊

A Ridiculous Shabbat Morning

This is a travel story but not strictly for work. Early in our marriage, my wife and I stayed in a hotel in Northern England for Shabbat. At 7 am, the alarm clock's buzzer blared loudly. Familiar with Shabbat laws but no expert, I knew I couldn't ask a non-Jewish person to turn it off but could hint. I went to reception and said to the receptionist: "Our alarm clock is on, and Jewish laws prevent me from turning it off."

“OK.”

“I can’t ask others to do it for me.”

“OK.”

“Someone could choose to do it if they want.”

“OK... do you want me to turn it off?”

“I can’t ask, but if you want to...”

We went up together. My wife hid in the bathroom, embarrassed. He turned it off. Ten minutes later, the buzzer sounded again—he’d hit snooze. Oh no! We repeated the awkward dance, but we all saw the humor in it... I think.

El Al Anecdotes

El Al is truly unique – some love it, some less so. I love it and always have and have a very subjective perspective. Some unique things happen only on Elal. Some examples include:

- While praying discreetly at the front of the plane (I avoid gatherings because they disturb people), a stewardess prodded me. I was upset after all it was El Al. She then said in Hebrew, “Nu...There’s a minyan at the back—you’re missing it!” Only on El Al.
- On another flight, I heard money jangling. Someone unbelievably was collecting charity on the plane, en-route to London for fundraising, using the time wisely ♫. Only on El Al.
- Flying from Zurich, a stewardess sought a child for a children’s meal that was ordered – there were only businessmen. The man next to me, however, claimed it, saying, “It’s schnitzel, chips, and ketchup, delivered early—why wouldn’t you? I always order it” I admit to ordering it a few times afterward.
- At an airport coffee shop in Toronto after an early connection, miles from El Al check-in, I played chess on my iPad with a colleague. At security two hours later, the guard asked, “Who won the game?” Only on El Al.

- Years ago, in Madrid, British Airways due to late notice couldn't provide a kosher business meal. Astonishingly, on her own initiative, The BA desk manager walked to El Al's check-in, and they transferred a Mehadrin meal to BA. I ate an El Al meal on a BA flight—a kind gesture I've never seen replicated.

Being a religious traveler is never boring. Shabbat Shalom.

----- THE END -----

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