

SHABBAT SHALOM

INSIGHTS INTO LIFE, PERSONAL GROWTH & TORAH



PARSHAT TERUMAH

DEDICATED WITH DEEP APPRECIATION TO
JOSEPH VITAL

GOOD MORNING! As I began to compose this week's column we were, once again, exposed to the soul-crushing confirmation of hostage deaths. For over 500 days, the entirety of Israel has been consumed by the resonating anguish and horrors of October 7th. For many, the horrific story of the Bibas family and the image of mother and children being dragged away has come to symbolize the tragedies of that day.

On Thursday, Hamas handed over four coffins containing the bodies of 85-year-old Oded Lifshitz, four-year-old Ariel Bibas, his baby brother Kfir, and their mother Shiri. True to form, for this subhuman terrorist group, it became an occasion for a festival of depravity, celebrated with crowds of Gazans, whooping with macabre delight as the tiny boxes containing Ariel and Kfir came into view.

From the outset, I have said that tragedies like October 7th are visited upon us by the Almighty to heal our intra-national infighting and fractured society. The horrors of these slaughtered, innocent, civilians has reached across all political, religious, and geographical lines. The Jews of the diaspora (those living outside of Israel) may not feel the acute pain of the deeply traumatized Israeli society, but they too are shocked and mourning the loss. My "ultra-Orthodox" publisher in Israel told me that throughout the country it was a day of public mourning. The grief for the Bibas family was being shared by all sectors of Israeli society. Perhaps this demonstrates a glimmer of hope for our people's future unity.

Upon their return to Israel, forensic experts conducted numerous examinations on the bodies, and it came as no surprise that the little boys were not killed by an IDF strike as their captors had claimed – they were executed. Perhaps they didn't want to deal with their terrified crying any longer? Perhaps they had no interest in dealing with soiled diapers? We are unlikely to ever know. No matter the reason, it speaks to more than the depravity of Hamas; it causes one to look despairingly on all of humanity and wonder how any human could perpetrate such horrid acts as murdering children.

One of the four coffins handed over was marked as being that of Shiri Bibas, featuring her photograph, name in Hebrew and Arabic, and – disgustingly – her "date of arrest": October 7, 2023. Almost unbelievably, after the forensics experts examined her remains and compared it to samples of Shiri's DNA, they found that not only did it not match her DNA, there were no matches among any of the female hostages. The identity of the remains is still unknown. Not only is Hamas subhuman and depraved – they're idiots to boot. Did they not consider that Israel would confirm the identity of the remains?

Bernard-Henri Lévy is a well-known French writer, college lecturer, and very outspoken personality who has seen, first hand, some of the greatest sufferings in modern times. He has a broad and well-informed perspective, and I have quoted him before. In an op-ed piece for the *Wall Street Journal* he writes:

“I have spent my life witnessing and reporting on the most atrocious crimes, from Bosnia to Somalia, Syria to Algeria and now Ukraine. After seeing the burned kibbutzim and gathering the testimonies of survivors – I was often asked if I had ever experienced anything similar. When I think of Kfir and Ariel Bibas and their mother, Shiri, I now answer: No, I’m not sure I have ever encountered such horror.

“In other wars, the death of a child is the ultimate shame, and some remnant of humanity – or rationality – generally prevents captors from bothering with an infant. They abandon the baby. They leave it behind or on the roadside. Someone less hardened might even leave it wrapped in a blanket outside a church, a mosque, or a home. Here, they deliberately took the time to abduct these two terrified little beings clinging to their mother.

“What went through these men’s minds as they dragged them away like animals? Did they understand the Jewish devotion to children? Did they revel, in advance, at the outpouring of ‘Jewish emotion’ that this insult to the world’s innocence would unleash? Damn those who try to drag us into the false game of moral equivalency. These two breaths cut short, this double death of innocence, is Hamas’s abomination alone – and it is unforgivable.”

There are very few alive today who personally witnessed the horrors of the Holocaust. The ongoing tragedies of October 7th are this generation’s window into the depths of depravity that humanity can sink. It can be overwhelming. Still, one of the main values of being a member of a religion that spans over 3,500 years, is that it provides both a perspective and a path forward.

This upcoming Shabbat begins the Hebrew month of Adar. The Talmud states (*Ta’anit* 29a), *“Just as we reduce our joy when the month of Av arrives (due to all of the tragedies that historically took place in that month), we increase our joy in the month of Adar.”* While it’s true that the holiday of Purim is in Adar (which celebrates when Queen Esther and the Jewish people were spared from annihilation at the hands of the evil Haman in approximately 480 BCE), other sad historical events took place in Adar as well, such as the death of Moses on the 7th of Adar. So what is the special happiness associated with Adar?

Additionally, this is the first of the Four Special Shabbatot (Hebrew plural for Shabbat) in which we append an extra Torah reading in addition to the regular Torah portion of the week. This week we add Parshat Shekalim and this always occurs around the first day of the month of Adar. What is this special added reading all about?

Beginning with the Tabernacle in the desert, God commanded that every male over the age of twenty must contribute a half shekel to the community annually. These half shekel coins were also used to take a census and count the number of men over the age of twenty within the Jewish people. This was particularly important for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was that it determined exactly how many men were eligible to serve in the army (the minimum age for going to war was twenty).

This annual census tax of a half shekel, was due on the first day of the Hebrew month

of Nissan. Therefore, one month earlier, on the first of Adar, the courts began posting reminders about this requirement. The collection began every year on the first day of the month of Adar when the “heralding of the shekalim” obligation took place, and it ended on the first day of the month of Nissan, the beginning of the new fiscal year for the Temple, when the purchase of public sacrifices was renewed.

The funds raised were primarily used to purchase cattle for the communal sacrifices. Leftover monies were used for a variety of communal purposes, including providing salaries for the judges and maintenance of the Temple, its vessels, and the city walls.

There are no “coincidences” in Judaism. According to the Talmud, Haman’s efforts to annihilate the Jewish people by gifting Achashveirosh 10,000 shekalim was averted by the merit of the mitzvah of the half shekel – *machatzit hashekel*; Reish Lakish said, “*It was known to the Almighty that in the future Haman would count out shekalim [to buy the right to exterminate the people of] Israel. Therefore, He arranged His shekalim [the obligatory half-shekel] to precede Haman’s shekalim*” (Megillah 13b). What does one have to do with the other?

This week’s Torah reading begins with the Almighty instructing Moses to solicit gifts for the Tabernacle (beginning with *machatzit hashekel*), the Torah first enumerates the various items that the Jewish people were to contribute: precious metals, fabrics, animal hides, wood, oils, and precious gems. Only then, after all the items needed for the Tabernacle have been listed, does God reveal the purpose of the collection; “*They shall make a sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell in their midst*” (Exodus 25:8).

This hardly seems to be a logical way to raise funds. In general, when a person wishes to solicit donations for a cause, he describes the purpose of his solicitation before he asks donors to contribute. Why did the Almighty first tell Moses to ask the Jewish people for donations, and only then reveal that the funds would be used for the building of the Tabernacle?

Perhaps the primary goal of collecting these gifts was not merely for the Tabernacle to be built, but rather it was for the purpose of uniting the Jewish people. Collecting materials for the Tabernacle was a secondary purpose of this campaign; the real objective was to see to it that the Jewish people could commit to working together.

This may also be the reason that the first gift solicited was the *machatzit hashekel*, which served to unite the people through a common census. This would also indicate that the real power in defeating evil – Haman in the times of Purim and Hamas in our times – lays in the Jewish people coming together as one.

Perhaps the true happiness of *Adar* lies in the ability to unite our people. By Mount Sinai the Jewish people were united as “one man with one heart” when they received the Torah, so too by Purim the entire nation was united with Queen Esther and they too merited reaffirming receiving the Torah (*Talmud Shabbat 82a*). This unity is the source of the strength of the Jewish people.

May it be the will of the Almighty that what once united us in a shared grief will one day soon unite us in joy and laughter. May we see the final redemption speedily in our days.



SHABBAT SHALOM,
Yitzchak Zweig
Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig

Torah Portion: Terumah, Exodus 25:1 - 27:19

This week's Torah reading is an architect's or interior designer's dream portion. It begins with the Almighty commanding Moses to tell the Jewish people to donate the materials necessary for the construction of the Mishkan, the portable sanctuary.

The Torah continues with the details for constructing the Ark, the Table, the Menorah, the Tabernacle (the central area of worship containing the Ark, the Menorah, the Incense Altar, and the Table), the Beams composing the walls of the Tabernacle, the Cloth Partition (separating the Holy of Holies, where the Ark rested, from the remaining Sanctuary part of the Tabernacle), the Altar, and the Enclosure for the Tabernacle (surrounding curtains forming a rectangle within which was approximately fifteen times larger than the Tabernacle).

🕯️ Shabbat Candlelighting Times: Jerusalem 5:00 | Miami 6:04 | Cape Town 7:05 | Guatemala 5:51 | Hong Kong 6:09 | Honolulu 6:17 | Johannesburg 6:21 | Los Angeles 5:30 | London 5:24 | Melbourne 7:43 | Mexico 6:23 | Moscow 5:44 | New York 5:28 | Singapore 7:01 | Toronto 5:47

**QUOTE OF
THE WEEK**

**"NO ONE HAS EVER GOTTEN POOR BY GIVING!"
— ANNE FRANK (AND A PARAPHRASE OF PROVERBS 28:27)**

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