



The Israeli sore spot

Our smartest enemies know how to exploit our divisions. But that also means redemption is around the corner.

tearing apart the country

Saleh al-Arouri, a name unfamiliar to many until just a few weeks ago, has now become a household name worldwide.

An Israeli journalist recently shared an interesting story about a 50-minute conversation he had with Arouri, one of the top leaders of Hamas, a few years back. This conversation took place some time after the Shalit prisoner exchange deal, where more than a thousand terrorists were released in exchange for one soldier. Arouri played a role in the negotiating team for Hamas that successfully closed the deal.

The journalist managed to obtain his personal number in Damascus, called him, and surprisingly, Arouri answered. The conversation unfolded in fluent Hebrew, a language Arouri learned during his time in an Israeli prison.

In the conversation, Arouri surprised the journalist by saying that, from his perspective, he would have been happier if Israel hadn't agreed to exchange Gilad Shalit for a thousand prisoners. "As an enemy, I would have preferred you not to agree to the exchange, because then it would have torn you apart from within; it would have divided Israeli society."

The journalist said that this statement made him understand just how dangerous Arouri is; he had a deep grasp of Israeli society, and knew exactly how to navigate the Israeli mindset and exploit internal divisions.

In fact, soon after the conflict erupted, Hamas leaders explicitly cited internal divisions and societal fractures in Israel as one of the reasons

for their attacks. They recognized the vulnerability it created within Israeli society, and saw it as the most opportune moment to advance their objectives.

The Original Al-Arouri?

This week's parsha has a similar story.

We just began the book of Exodus, which tells the story of our exile and exodus from Egypt.

The story of the exodus begins in Chapter 3, where the Torah recounts Moses' encounter with the Almighty at Mount Sinai. Moses, curious about the burning bush, approaches and questions, "Why isn't the bush burning?" In response, G-d calls out, "Moses, Moses..." Thus begins a lengthy dialogue between G-d and Moses.

G-d instructs Moses to approach Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Initially hesitant, Moses questions, "Who am I to go to Pharaoh?" G-d reassures him, "You won't be alone, for I'll be by your side." Moses continues to express doubts, stating that the Israelites won't believe him, and later, G-d warns him not to underestimate the difficulty of dealing with Pharaoh: "I know the king of Egypt won't let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. Only then will he release you."

After a full seven-day debate, G-d finally commands Moses to proceed. Arriving in Egypt, Moses gathers the elders of Israel and shares his mission. Surprisingly, the people believed him, prompting Moses and Aaron to lead a delegation of elders to Pharaoh. Upon reaching the palace, however, the elders somehow manage to all disappear, leaving only Moses and Aaron to enter.

They tell Pharaoh, "Let my people go!" and Pharaoh unsurprisingly dismisses them, saying, "Who is G-d that I should obey him..." He scolds Moses and Aaron, saying, "Why are you disrupting the people from their work?"

What unfolded next was a crafty move straight out of the "Saleh al-Arouri" playbook.

No More Straw

Right after their departure, Pharaoh issued a decree: "No more straw for the slaves." Up until that point, the Egyptian government had been supplying straw to the Hebrew slaves for brick-making. The meticulous daily brick quota was closely monitored. Now, they were tasked with

sourcing their own straw, all while still expected to produce the same quantity of bricks as in the “good old days” when the government provided the straw.

And the reasoning behind this? According to Pharaoh, “They’re lazy.” He accused them of procrastination and dreaming of an easier life. Their desire to go and offer sacrifices? Hindered by their heavy workload, they wouldn’t even have the time to dream.

On that very day, the decree spread throughout Egypt, prompting people to scatter in search of their own straw. This didn’t contribute to the unity of the Israelites; everyone pursuing the same material, each struggling to meet the required brick production. The Israelites couldn’t fulfill the daily brick quota on that day.

At the end of the day, falling short of the daily brick quota, the Egyptian overseers struck the Jewish overseers for incomplete work.

Who were these overseers?

Everyone is familiar with the term “kapo” from Nazi concentration camps, where Jews were appointed to oversee fellow prisoners and ensure they adhered to their assigned work quotas. The Egyptian government adopted a similar idea, appointing Jewish overseers responsible for ensuring that Hebrew slaves met their work quotas.

Unlike the kapo role in the Holocaust, these overseers genuinely looked out for their fellow Jews, protecting them from the Egyptians. At the end of the day, falling short of the daily brick quota, the Egyptian overseers struck the kapo-equivalents for incomplete work.

These Jewish overseers collectively approached Pharaoh to voice their complaints and seek understanding for this new decree. They asked Pharaoh, “Why are you doing this?” It was an impossible task he demanded. They were striving to be loyal citizens, but this new decree unjustly led to their beatings.

Pharaoh retorted, “You’re lazy, you want to go and sacrifice to G-d.”

Suddenly, they realized the cause behind this new decree was Moses and Aaron, who had demanded, “Let my people go.” Just days earlier, everyone celebrated Moses’ news of their redemption from Egypt. Everything took a sudden turn; they grasped that Moses’ message was the root of their troubles.

As the overseers left Pharaoh’s palace, they met Moses and Aaron and

immediately confronted them. "May G-d judge you, because you have made us stink in the eyes of Pharaoh and his servants, putting a sword in their hands to kill us." It was Moses and Aaron who had infuriated Pharaoh, leading to all these consequences.

Pharaoh's plan exceeded expectations. Now, Jews found themselves blaming fellow Jews for their troubles!

Between Moses and G-d

The story continues. Moses, for the first time, heard that he was the cause of the new decree, and it deeply pained him. He turned to G-d and asked, "Why have You brought trouble upon this people? Why did You send me?" His questions were so challenging that it was decreed he would not enter the land of Israel. Rashi points out that Moses lost the right to enter the land because he spoke to G-d in this manner. The Rebbe adds, that Moses knew he would be punished, but his deep love for the Jewish people caused him to cry out to G-d.

So, not only did Pharaoh's action manage to create discord between the Jewish people and Moses, but he even succeeded in seemingly causing a complaint from Moses to the Almighty.

In fact, that's precisely what's unfolding in Israeli society today. While everyone unites against Hamas, mutual accusations fly, with the right blaming the left for the conflict and vice versa, reminiscent of the situation in Egypt.

What was G-d's reassurance to Moses? Yes, the current situation has gotten worse, but there's no need to worry. "Just as darkness peaks right before dawn because the light of dawn is imminent, similarly, the profound darkness of this exile... is because an even greater light is on the horizon" (Imrei Bina 5:2).

What does that mean?

When You Hit Rock Bottom

There's a Chassidic tale of a wealthy Jew whose fortune took a nosedive, leaving him penniless. He even had to sell his house and beg from door to door. One Friday, after a trip to the mikveh to prepare for Shabbat, he returned to the dressing room only to find his clothes vanished. Someone, perhaps mistakenly, had taken his attire and disappeared.

Now, standing helpless and naked, he unexpectedly started dancing. Onlookers, thinking his troubles had driven him to the brink of

insanity, rushed to his aid. One brought a shirt, another a pair of pants, and together they rescued him from the mikveh.

Time passed, and fortune began to smile upon the same Jew. Slowly, he regained his bearings, prospered in business, and climbed back to his former status.

One day, another Jew approached him and asked a question. "I was at the mikveh that Friday and saw you dancing in the buff. At the time, I thought the depths of your despair had driven you mad. But now, seeing you completely normal and quite successful, I'm curious. Could you explain the real reason for your mikveh dance? What brought you joy?"

The Jew replied, "Listen, my friend, life is a roller coaster. When you're at the peak, you're on the verge of the downward spiral, and each time things got worse, I worried that the spiral was deeper than I had thought. However, when I emerged from the mikveh and discovered I didn't even have a pair of pants to wear, I knew I had hit rock bottom, and from there, the only way was up. That's why I danced."

That's exactly what G-d told Moses. Now that the situation has hit rock bottom, there is only one way up—redemption. Surely, after the darkness of October 7th, we will make our way up as well.