

Excavating the Tunnels of Our Lives  
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How long can you hold your breath? 10 seconds? Twenty? A whole minute? When I was a kid and we went on certain car trips, at a certain point we'd play a game of how long can you hold your breath. Here's why.

I grew up in Vancouver, B.C. If you are unfamiliar with the geography, Vancouver neighbors the United States. It takes about 45 minutes to drive from my childhood home to the U.S. border. On the way, you drive through the George Masey tunnel. Whenever we drove south, we would play the game of who could hold their breath the length of the tunnel. A game, but still reflecting reality. It is not natural for human beings to go underground. We dig basements to provide structural support but most of us fear descending into the depths, especially if they are dark. Perhaps this is why take deep breaths - if even sub-consciously - before entering a tunnel.

This summer, as Israel and Hamas descended into their bloody exchange, I found myself holding my breath more than usual. Rocket attacks we could endure. We had Iron Dome. But tunneling under my kibbutz? Under my child's nursery school? That left me with a sense of dread. If I was afraid, imagine how our brothers and sisters in Israel felt?

It is the image of what was hidden in those tunnels - in both a literal and metaphoric sense - that I want to explore with you today. The first is what these tunnels verified about Hamas and their intentions. The second is how these tunnels hid, so to speak, a virulent strain of anti-semitism that the Times decided to report on yesterday. And the third image is about us. What is hidden in the tunnel of your life? What threatens to pull you beneath the surface and how might you use these days to bring some of what is down there out, into the light? First, the war against Hamas.

During Operation Protective Edge, Israeli novelist Amos Oz, the father of Israel's peace movement, gave an interview to [Deutsche Welle](#), Germany's International broadcaster. He opened the interview in this manner:

Amoz Oz: I would like to begin the interview in a very unusual way: by presenting one or two questions to your readers and listeners. May I do that?

*Deutsche Welle: Go ahead!*

Question 1: What would you do if your neighbor across the street sits down on the balcony, puts his little boy on his lap and starts shooting machine gun fire into your nursery?

Question 2: What would you do if your neighbor across the street digs a tunnel from his nursery to your nursery in order to blow up your home or in order to kidnap your family?

With these two questions I pass the interview to you. (Read the entire interview at: <http://www.dw.de/oz-lose-lose-situation-for-israel/a-17822511>)

That's it. From one of the greatest left leaning, liberal peaceniks of our time. The legitimacy of Israel's response was black and white. In speeches translated from Arabic and broadcast on You Tube, Hamas' intentions became clear - destroy Israel and kill as many Jews as possible. Just listen their charter: "The Day of Judgment will not come about until Moslems fight the Jews and kill them. When the Jew hides behind stones and trees, the stones and trees will say O Moslems... there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him." (You can read the entire Hamas Charter

here: <http://www.thejerusalemfund.org/www.thejerusalemfund.org/carryover/documents/charter.html?chocaid=397>) Hamas is not interested in a two state solution. They do not want to live peaceably side by side with Israel. Period.

Did you hear about the greenhouses? When Israel disengaged from Gaza in 2005, it left behind 3000 operating greenhouses. If Hamas was truly interested in creating a Palestinian state, they would have turned Gaza into the Monaco of the Middle East. Instead, they destroyed the greenhouses! In effect, Hamas squandered the opportunity offered by Israel to engage in state-building because they aren't interested in state-building. They are only interested in state-destroying.

I believe that Judaism speaks to the questions of daily life. On this subject, Judaism has what to say. In Exodus we read, "If a robber is found while tunneling in and is beaten and dies, there is no bloodguilt for his death." (Exodus 22:1). Our laws of self-defense derive from this. If we know someone is coming to kill or harm us, we are permitted to stop that person, even to kill them, and to suffer what the Torah calls, "no bloodguilt."

However, since Judaism emphasizes the value of life above all else, the rabbis of the Talmud play with the second part of the verse which says, "But if daylight shines on him there IS bloodguilt." Does this mean that murder, as an act of self-defense, can only happen at night? Not exactly. The sages teach that the Torah verse is to be read as metaphor. To these rabbis, the phrase, "daylight shines," means, "if it is obvious." In other words, "if it is obvious that he has not come to kill you, you may not kill him." (Sanhedrin 72a). You can stop another with force but that force can only extend to murder if it is clear that your attacker intends to kill you. Otherwise, you may not. When it comes to Hamas, their intent is crystal clear. Those tunnels were constructed to inflict as much murderous damage as possible.

Of course, as with every battle since the Yom Kippur War, the accusation of disproportionate force and asymmetry is launched. Israel is lambasted in the media, in the court of public opinion, on social media and now, in the streets of Europe. As the anti-Israel protests heated up this summer, I wondered, where are the protests against Assad's murder of hundreds of thousands of Syrians? Where are the protests against the crucifixion and beheading of Christian Arabs and neutral journalists at the hands of ISIS? Where is the outcry against Boko Haram's kidnapping of 100 teenage girls?

How many countries drop leaflets, make phone calls and send text messages in advance of an ariel bombardment? Do we? Are we accused of committing war crimes or of committing genocide? Does Israel make mistakes? Of course it does. There is no sugarcoating that 2000 Palestinians, including 500 children tragically died in Operation Protective Edge. They didn't have to. Their deaths will require a moral accounting. I cry when I see pictures of dead or wounded Palestinian women and children. But while Hamas celebrates the death of Israeli soldiers and civilians, calling their fighters martyrs, Israel investigates the death of innocents; their strict moral code known as Tohar HaNesech, purity of arms, guides all that the IDF does. Yet, if it is clear as day that someone is tunneling in to kill you, you must do all you can to stop him.

What do I think Israel should do? They should not, as they did earlier this month, grab 1000 acres of land in the West Bank for more settlement construction. Even if it was their legal right, the optics were horrible. Ongoing settlement construction only strengthens Einstein's observation that insanity is doing the same thing and expecting a different result. As a liberal Zionist who still holds onto the dream of two states for two people, I think it is time for Netanyahu to

be bold. This is an opportunity for him to distance himself from his right wing cabinet and listen to the Israeli public and Jews throughout the world. Extend an olive branch to Mahmoud Abbas. Strive and seriously work for peace in the West Bank. Abbas wants peace because he and every moderate Palestinian are as afraid of Hamas and the larger family tree of radical Islam as we are. They want to keep the Salafists at bay. With ISIS threatening Jordan, the Palestinians might even invite an Israeli military presence in the Jordan valley. If Netanyahu wants to write his legacy into the history of the Jewish people, I ask him to stop worrying about the next election. I plead with him to take bold steps to forge a two state solution with those who want peace while at the same time defending Israel from ongoing attacks. If he doesn't, the only alternative is to be stuck in what poet Yehuda Amichai once called, "The Chad Gadya Machine," (Yehuda Amichai, "An Arab Shepherd Is Searching For His Goat On Mount Zion.") where the cycle of violence only continues and escalates. If, however, Israel and Palestine have peace, then the rest of the world will be called to confront the anti-Israel rhetoric which grows every day. And if they don't then we'll know what we are truly up against - anti-Semitism cloaked as anti-Zionism.

II. The anti-semitism buried across Europe now bubbling to the surface:

Recently a colleague crowd sourced the question, "where have there been antisemitic incidents in the last 30 days?" One person responded, "where haven't there been?"

Consider some recent occurrences: Thousands marched through the streets of Europe demonstrating against Israel's actions in Gaza. As they marched they chanted things like, "Death to the Jews," "Hitler was right," and "Reopen Auschwitz." A demonstration in Sweden against anti-Semitism had to be canceled because the organizers were physically afraid. Sweden! Land of Volvos and Ikea. And let's not forget the Paris synagogue that was targeted by a raging mob, while worshipers were inside.

In August, the Guardian newspaper - hardly a defender of Israel - published an editorial in which they wrote: "It should not need saying, but it does: people can be as angry as they like at the Israeli government, but to attack a synagogue, threaten children at a Jewish school, or throw a brick through the window of a Jewish grocery store is vile and contemptible racism. It cannot be excused by reference to Israeli military behavior. The two are and should be kept utterly distinct. This is a test for those who take a strong stance in support of the Palestinians, but in truth it is a test for all of us." (<http://www.theguardian.com/commentis-free/2014/aug/08/guardian-view-gaza-rise-antisemitism>)

What is going on here? How is it that antisemitism is bubbling up from the tunnels below? How can it be that only 70 years after the destruction of European Jewry the same continent is witnessing anti-Jewish hatred in ways it has not seen before?

In July, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon said that one must seek "the root cause" of the Israel-Hamas conflict so as to enable us to resolve it. The root cause is not a blockade of Hamas nor is it settlement construction. These are surely incitements to violence but they are not root-causes. However politically incorrect it may be to say so, the root cause of this conflict is something that IS buried underground, it is something that was also lurking in those terrorist tunnels. I am speaking of genocidal antisemitism couched in anti-Zionist rhetoric with state-orchestrated terrorism as the instrumentality to pursue these goals.

Just as the image of a Hamas terrorist popping up from a tunnel into an Israeli nursery school scares the daylight out of me, the rise of global antisemitism as a result of this conflict frightens me even more. I can count on three fingers the times I have experienced any sort of bigotry because of my religion. The first was as a grade schooler dressed in my day school uniform when three high school boys threw snow balls at me and my friend and called us "dirty

Jews." We ran. The second was in high school when I got into a shoving match with a boy twice my size. I pushed him. He punched me in the face. I went to the principal. He got suspended. The last time was in college when a dorm-mate casually said that, "he jewed someone down." I educated him. We became close friends.

But this antisemitism emerging from hidden depths across Europe is different from that I experienced as a child or the quiet country club antisemitism that once existed here in Westchester. As Deborah Lipstat, professor of Holocaust studies wrote: "Traditionally, Islam did not treat Jews this way. But in the past century a distinct strain of Muslim anti-Semitism has emerged. Built on a foundation of antipathy toward non-Muslims, it mixes Christian anti-Semitism — imported to the Middle East by European missionaries — and a more leftist, secular form of anti-Semitism. It is evident in political cartoons, editorials, television shows and newspaper articles." (NY Times Op-Ed, August 21, 2014)

The rationales — "it's just rhetoric," "it's just Muslims" — bother me almost as much as the outrages. Instead of explaining away these actions, cultural, religious and academic leaders in the countries where these events occurred should be shaken to the core, not just about the safety of their Jewish neighbors, but about the future of the seemingly liberal, enlightened societies they belong to. They should hear echo's of Pastor Niemöller's famous poem, "first they came for the Jews," ringing in their ears. As famed and controversial atheist, Sam Harris wrote in support of Israel, "This is the great story of our time. For the rest of our lives, and the lives of our children, we are going to be confronted by people who don't want to live peacefully in a secular, pluralistic world, because they are desperate to get to Paradise, and they are willing to destroy the very possibility of human happiness along the way. The truth is, we are all living in Israel. It's just that some of us haven't realized it yet." (Listen to his talk at: <https://soundcloud.com/sam-harrisorg/why-dont-i-criticize-israel> or read it at: <http://www.tabletmag.com/scroll/180808/sam-harris-why-dont-i-criticize-israel>)

An old Jewish joke is a telegram that reads, "start worrying, details to follow." When it comes to antisemitism in Europe, the telegram has arrived. Jews are worrying. David Harris of the American Jewish Committee shared an anecdote of a Jewish leader in Belgium who said they have three choices: go underground and hide their identity, leave with all the trauma that entails, or exert their Jewish identity and suffer the slings and arrows that come with it. European Jews do not currently experience the same luxuries we do. They live under constant threat.

And it is not just in Europe. While unpacking for college, a child of this congregation handed her mom her IDF t-shirt saying, "mom, I can't wear this here. Wearing a shirt that says Israel Defense Forces on campus is like wearing a Yankees shirt in Boston. It's too risky." This is very serious. At the same time, it is not the 1930s. Israel exists. Our voice in America is strong. We have unprecedented economic and political clout. My question though is this: will we, who value a open, pluralistic and tolerant society have the courage to stand up and say, "enough!"?

Towards the end of Deuteronomy there is a commandment about helping someone whose cart has fallen over on the side of the road. It ends with the words, "you shall not remain indifferent." We Jews are a people. We share a destiny. We have a collective responsibility to one another. We cannot remain indifferent. We must educate and advocate. We need to be alert, vigilant, informed. We must call upon our elected officials to stand up for Israel as they have in the past, and we should ask them to call upon their European counterparts to ensure that Jews throughout Europe feel safe and secure. We must not remain indifferent.

I have never used anti-semitism as motivation to increase Jewish identity. I think Judaism can speak for itself. However, since there are those out there who want to destroy us for who we are, then we must continue to have strong synagogues, vibrant Jewish summer camps and opportunities for our youth to learn about and experience Israel in dynamic and engaging ways. We need those with the financial means to support these endeavors. Children in Gaza and throughout the Middle East are taught to hate Israel and to fear Jews and we know who bankrolls them. Our kids on college campuses face a barrage of anti-Israel rhetoric that no one with a 13 year old Jewish education is able to disavow. We must ensure that our children know who they are, understand what Judaism comes to teach on a variety of subjects and see how Judaism can add meaning and purpose to our lives. This is what we do every day at Community Synagogue. We are only able to do so with your ongoing support and generosity.

Above all else, we must never fall into "victim mentality." The book of Job reminds us that so much is out of our control. What is in our control is how we choose to respond. It behooves us to notice that the largest pro-Israel demonstration this summer happened not in New York or Toronto but in a city without Jews – Calcutta – where thousands of Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs affirmed Israel's right to self-defense. This summer in China, social media was reportedly overwhelmingly pro-Israel. Beyond the support offered by the U.S., Canada and Australia, one of the most powerful condemnations of the link between Jew-hatred and Israel-hatred was expressed at a rally in Berlin by Germany's Chancellor, Angela Merkel. Among the protesters were thousands of Kurds, Syrian Christians and Africans. As far as those countries that have assailed Israel, think twice before you make your next overseas vacation plan or business decisions. Most of all, we need to tell Israelis that they are not alone, that we stand with them shoulder-to-shoulder, that we admire their courage and that we will advocate their cause here and around the world.

On this day where we celebrate the creation of the world, our concerns are global. At the same time, in this season of Cheshbon HaNefesh, our thoughts naturally are personal. We gather on this annual reunion to take stock of our souls.

Just as the Capital One Credit Card ads ask, "What's in your wallet?" today, we might ask a similar question, "what's hidden in your tunnel?"

For some it might be coming to terms with anger and hostility or old wounds from feeling forgotten or neglected that linger. We might blame others or God for feeling abandoned. Maybe there are feelings of envy and jealousy as we look at our neighbors and notice their achievements, failing to look at the myriad blessings that enrich our lives. Maybe in our own narcissism we have failed to act compassionately and sensitively towards others.

For some, there might be feelings associated with loss - anger towards a loved one who died or guilt that we did not do more to relieve their pain. We may have hidden addictions and other unhealthy behaviors that if we only admitted and began to deal with we know that our lives would look different. What else have you hidden in the tunnel of your soul that needs to rise to the surface, not to terrorize and hurt you but rather so you may bring it to the light as an opportunity for healing?

Rabbi Harold Kushner, author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* tells the following tale.

"One year, my Yom Kippur sermon was on the theme of forgiveness. The next day, a woman came to see me, very upset about the sermon. She told me how, 10 years earlier, her husband had left her for a younger woman and she had to raise two children by herself for the past 10 years. She asked me angrily, "And you want me to forgive him for what he did to us?"

I told her, "Yes, I want you to forgive him. Not to excuse him, not to say that what he did was acceptable, but to forgive him as a way of saying that someone who would do that has no right to live inside your head any more than he has the right to live inside your house. Why are you giving a man like that the power to turn you into a bitter, vengeful woman? He doesn't deserve that power over you."

Forgiveness is not a favor we do for the person who offended us. It is a favor we do for ourselves, cleansing our souls of thoughts and memories that lead us to see ourselves as victims and make our lives less enjoyable. When we understand we have little choice as to what other people do but we can always choose how we will respond to what they do, we can let go of those embittering memories and enter the New Year clean and fresh." (from [www.jewelsofelul.com](http://www.jewelsofelul.com)). Only by letting things come to the surface and then figuring out how to let them go can we truly begin again, can we truly live again.

Our tradition understands this. We perform Tashlich - an act of throwing breadcrumbs into flowing water to symbolize things you want to leave behind. By clearing our souls of the detritus which blocks the positive energy, we strengthen ourselves. This afternoon at 5 o'clock, we will gather at Rye Beach to perform this ritual. Join us. Let this be your first step down into the tunnel of your soul. Come. Clear out that which holds you back from becoming the whole person God wants you to be.

Of course, like any regimen, we need help along the path. Just as the wonderful 12 step programs, mental health professionals, and even modern medicines can help us achieve balance, so too can a spiritual work-out plan assist us in strengthening our souls. One cannot go to a gym once or twice a year to become fit. While these days might have been designed as a spiritual boot camp, they were intended to inspire us to enlist in a regular spiritual practice. Spiritual growth takes time. It takes patience and it takes work. Three times a day we are asked to pause, to evaluate, to make amends before moving forward. This helps stop the spiritual plaque from building up. Our tradition is aware, maybe obsessively so, that if shmutz exists in the tunnels of our souls, we cannot be as fully present as we need to be.

In a few moments we will hear the sound of the shofar. It's not entertainment. It's a spiritual wake up call. This afternoon, come to Oakland beach. And tomorrow through Yom Kippur, look to your inbox for a daily spiritual exercise to make the most of this season. Only through regular diligence can we keep our spiritual tunnels clear.

There is one last tunnel that I want to explore with you. It isn't a tunnel that threatens death nor is it a tunnel that spews hatred. It is a tunnel that nourishes and gives life. It is one of the oldest tunnels in Israel. It is one of my favorite places to visit. In 715 bce, ten years after the Assyrians had laid waste to the Northern Kingdom, Hezekiah assumed the throne in the southern kingdom of Judea. Seeing the future battle that lay ahead of him, he began an ambitious project, to bring the water that flowed from the Gihon Spring into the walls of the city. He knew that if Jerusalem was to survive, it would require cutting off the only fresh water source from any invading army. Two teams, one digging from the north and another from the south quarried into the bedrock. They met in the middle. There, they placed a plaque in tribute to their achievement. This tunnel bearing Hezekiah's name, still brings fresh water into the city of Jerusalem. With flashlights, you can walk its length, marveling at the engineering feat and cooling yourself on a hot Jerusalem day. (learn more about the tunnel here: [http://www.goisrael.com/Tourism\\_Eng/Tourist%20Information/Jewish%20Themes/Jewish\\_Sites/Pages/The%20Siloam%20Tunnel%20jew.aspx](http://www.goisrael.com/Tourism_Eng/Tourist%20Information/Jewish%20Themes/Jewish_Sites/Pages/The%20Siloam%20Tunnel%20jew.aspx))

When Sennacherib and his Assyrian army laid siege to Jerusalem in 701 bce, they found no water. The prophet Isaiah claims God wrought a miracle and sent a plague to destroy the Assyrian army. It was probably the lack of water that did them in. Yet without Hezekiah's foresight, it is likely that Jerusalem and with it Judea would have fallen. Now that is a miracle! Without Hezekiah's ingenuity, who knows where we would be today?

I believe that there is light at the end of the tunnel. Living this way gives me hope. It keeps me moving forward. In trying times such as these, it is the tunnels of Hezekiah that I look to: tunnels that nourish and save and sustain; tunnels that protect us; tunnels that move us toward the light. We need tunnels that ferry hope and opportunity. Let us, on this sacred day, seek them out and if we cannot find them, may we then have the courage to dig them anew... for us, for Israel and for the entire world. Amen.