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FRIDAY, JUNE 8

Day Four: "Attack! Attack!"

By Allan Arkush

On June 1, 1967, when Prime Minister Levi Eshkol yielded to public pressure and turned over the portfolio of defense minister to former IDF chief of staff Moshe Dayan, the mood in Israel changed overnight. With the reappearance onstage of the hero of the 1956 Suez campaign, a besieged people regained its morale and the belief in its ability to win. Within days of his appointment, Dayan would preside over a victory eclipsing the one to which he had previously owed his fame.

But how much credit for the triumph of June 1967 does he really deserve?

A great deal, according to *Moshe Dayan: Israel's Controversial Hero* (Yale University Press), a new biography by Mordechai Bar-On, who served Dayan as bureau chief more than fifty years ago. Although Dayan was not, to be sure, an active participant in the June 1967 fighting, he carried with him the advantage of tested battlefield experience. As a commander in Israel's 1948 War of Independence, as Bar-On relates, he faced fire with great daring; eight years later, in Sinai, Dayan, who "had no patience with the minutiae of management," was largely to be found in the field, where he could "feel the battles from up close and, if possible, personally observe developments." And even in 1967, when for the most part he "had to stay in constant touch with the prime minister and participate in cabinet meetings," Dayan made his indelible mark behind the scenes, contributing

in significant ways to the formulation of Israel's overall strategy.

Among other things, in the early days of the war Dayan opposed action both on the Jordanian front—as long as King Hussein's armored forces remained on the eastern side of the Jordan River—and in the north "even if Syria shelled and bombed Israeli towns." To him, dealing with that nuisance wasn't worth risking the involvement of the Soviets. What mattered most was Egypt.

But by the end of June 8, 1967, the fourth day of the Six-Day War, Egypt was finished. Jordan, which had indeed attacked, had been severely punished. As for Syria, it had not yet dared to do anything more than engage in the kind of bombardment that Dayan thought it best to endure more or less in silence. Although some in the government were demanding stronger action, Dayan resisted, most notably at a meeting of cabinet ministers with citizens from eastern Galilee. "It is true that the Syrians embitter the lives of our settlements on the northern border," Dayan said, referring not only to the events of the past week but to repeated attacks over a period of years. "But if . . . the situation needs changing, it is better to move the farm buildings away from the border than to embroil Israel in a state of war with another Arab state."

Dayan won the day—but the following morning, hours after the Syrians had accepted a UN ceasefire order, he set aside estab-

lished procedure and, neglecting to contact chief of staff Yitzhak Rabin, instructed David Elazar, head of the northern command, to "Attack! Attack!" Only then did he inform his prime minister what he had done.

Bar-On's attempt to explain Dayan's conduct in this affair is very cautious. Some in Levi Eshkol's entourage accused the defense minister of blatant self-aggrandizement, of "stealing the

limelight on this front" just as he had during the battle for Jerusalem and the capture of the Western Wall earlier in the week. Without either rejecting or endorsing such insinuations, Bar-On cites Dayan's own account of this episode in his autobiography, where the general's proffered rationale for his failure to go through proper channels sounds to Bar-On "more like an excuse," attesting, at the

very least, "to a typical impatience with bureaucracy." And at the

most? Bar-On declines to say.

A question that Bar-On does not even broach is whether the notoriously erratic Dayan made the right decision in sending troops to seize the Golan Heights from Syria, to Israel's longer-term strategic benefit but at a heavy cost in casualties both in 1967 and again in 1973, when the territory had to be defended from fierce Syrian assault. Bar-On's silence might come as something of a surprise to readers who are aware that he became an activist in Peace Now in the 1980s and an admiring historian of that movement in the 1990s. In his new book, too, he allows his politics to in-



Moshe Dayan.

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trude—up to a point. As he tells us in his introduction, his political path and Dayan's eventually diverged, “and both my fascination with and my criticism of Dayan's course after the Six-Day War find expression in this book.”

Bar-On's criticism of the latter-day Dayan focuses mostly on his role as “prime architect of policy in the occupied territo-

ries.” While stipulating that Dayan's decisions could be benevolent, he faults him for having condoned Israeli settlements and thereby helped to “impede future efforts to compromise with the Palestinians.” Nor is Bar-On impressed by Dayan's formation in the late 1970s of a political party advocating unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza—for even then he re-

mained opposed to the creation of a Palestinian state.

When it comes to Dayan's conduct during the Six-Day War itself, however, Bar-On is evidently prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt—and at least some of his countrymen seem similarly disposed.

SATURDAY, JUNE 9

The Six-Day War: Day Five

Once Dayan decided against a limited attack in the Golan and opted instead to take the entire Heights, Israel's air force pounded the Syrians. The Syrians had supposed the Israelis to be tired and intimidated by their incessant shelling; unprepared for the ferocity of the barrage, their morale suffered, and some officers and soldiers deserted. But the bulk of Syria's forces remained in place, ready to give fight, while hoping for UN intervention.

Traffic jams delayed Israeli reinforcements from other fronts, retarding an assault from the south; the attack proceeded in the center, but involved exhausted Israeli tank crews climbing the rocky terrain of steep (2000 ft) hills in broad daylight, totally exposed to Syrian fire from the enemy's most formidable forces. Upon hearing of the plan, some commanders described it as “suicide.” But they proceeded unafraid.

With tank maneuverability reduced by the terrain, the Israelis found themselves at the mercy of dug-in Syrian tanks. Pressing on, the fighting was intense and confused as tanks fired at extremely close range. Maps were lost, bulldozers were destroyed as they tried to clear away barbed wire, and the threat of landmines was everywhere. The Israelis also underestimated the ability of the Syrian bunkers to withstand massive bombing.

“The Syrians fought well and bloodied us,” recalled one Israeli commander, but after a whole afternoon in battle, the IDF had made important advances. The successes were not without cost, however, in men and arms. The Syrians did manage to stop the IDF's

movement, but they too had taken a beating, and were left fearful and chaotic.

Even without reinforcements, the IDF in the south moved ahead with an attack reminiscent of the bloody battle for Ammunition Hill in Jerusalem: fighting at close quarters, often hand-to-hand. As troops advanced, the first soldiers to reach the Syrian perimeter laid down on the barbed wire, enabling the rest of the squad to vault over it. Reaching the trenches, the fighting remained intense:

“Whenever a helmet popped up, we couldn't tell if it was one of ours or not,” related an Israeli battalion commander. The seven-hour struggle left many dead.

Israeli forces managed to accomplish most objectives well ahead of schedule, but were still only eight miles into Syrian territory. The conquest of the entire Golan, Rabin estimated, would take another two days of fighting at least. Beyond its front lines, Syria's forces remained intact, though some were recalled to defend Damascus. Defense Minister Assad swore in a speech to continue to battle “Zionist imperialist aggression,” Arab ambassadors were summoned to determine what military assistance their countries could provide, and a special appeal was made to Egypt, Syria's ally by treaty.

But Egypt was reeling from Israel's *coup de grace* in the Sinai and could offer no help. The Israelis took the Suez Canal, but—whether out of overconfidence or fatigue—did not occupy its northern terminus, thus neglecting a port critical to the massive Soviet rearmament of Egypt. No new arms, however, could compensate for the impression of thousands of Egyptian soldiers limping in humiliation back to Cairo. Nasser later remarked that the IDF could have also entered the capital.

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Nasser.

The Egyptians rioted against Nasser, who took the blame. When it seemed like the people might demand a firing squad, he tendered his resignation in a live broadcast.

But then, in a bizarre turnaround, the people flocked to the streets in a display of public mourning, demanding that he stay in power. Westerners were incredulous about this course of events, but whether impromptu or planned, the demonstrations of support convinced Nasser to accept the resignations of his military commanders while remaining in office himself.

Meanwhile, the Israeli agenda at the UN was to stall, so that Israeli forces could create conditions on the ground for a real and stable ceasefire. But while demands to end the fighting waned in New York, they waxed in Washington, where the State Department was truly fearful of Soviet intervention.



The Syrian-Israeli front.

Back in Israel, Prime Minister Eshkol supported Dayan's turnaround and granted approval to continue the campaign through the night. Dayan was skeptical as to how

much farther the IDF could advance, but with the arrival of the delayed reinforcements, the commanders on the ground were preparing to move. The Syrians braced

themselves for the Israeli onslaught. "Pave the roads with the skulls of Jews," Assad ordered. "Strike them without mercy." The fight, Damascus held, was not over.

SUNDAY, JUNE 10

The Six-Day War: Day Six

After five days spent battling Arab forces, Israel now faced a new opponent: time. With the Egyptians and Jordanians out of the war on day four, and the Syrians having agreed to a ceasefire, the Security Council was becoming restless. General David Elazar's forces would have only a few hours to take the strategically important Golan Heights.

Fighting through the night, Elazar aimed to reach Quneitra junction in the north and Butmiya junction in the south. But the Syrians held their lines. By dawn, Elazar had made little progress, and thinking that a ceasefire was imminent, despaired of reaching his objectives. But then he received a telephone call from Rabin: the government had not yet committed to a ceasefire; he would have more time.

Granted this reprieve, Elazar rallied his men and redoubled the assault. But now—to his astonishment—the Syrian resistance evaporated. At the village of Mansura, they found empty tanks; at Banias, the trenches were deserted. While Quneitra remained in Syrian hands, Radio Damascus was nonetheless broadcasting its capture.

Mistrusting their Arab allies, the UN, and, most of all, the Soviets, the Syrian government had given up on a ceasefire and ordered a full scale retreat. By announcing the fall of Quneitra, they had their pretext for consolidating their troops around Damascus. Indeed, the leadership did not feel safe even there: first the general staff, then the ministers fled the capital for Aleppo.

But the Soviets had not yet given up on their Arab protégés. The Kremlin formally broke diplomatic relations with Israel and gave the White House an ultimatum: "We propose that you demand from Israel that

it unconditionally cease military action . . . We propose to warn Israel that if this is not fulfilled, necessary actions will be taken, including military." The White House issued a verbal response that the USSR should place similar pressure on Syria; but to make sure the message got through, President Johnson ordered the Sixth Fleet, sailing west of Cyprus, to turn back east to within a hundred miles of Israel's coast.

Having dealt with the Soviets, Johnson set about following their advice. At the UN, the the American Ambassador, Arthur Goldberg, met with the Israeli Ambassador,

Gideon Rafael, telling him that "the United States government does not want the war to end as the result of a Soviet ultimatum. This would be disastrous for the future not only of Israel, but

of us all. It is your responsibility to act now."

The message from Washington came back to Jerusalem and on to Elazar at the front: Eshkol and Dayan would give him until 2 p.m. to finish the job, before agreeing to a ceasefire. Quneitra, completely deserted, fell at 12:30 p.m. But the advance was still too slow; the retreating Syrian army had littered the roads with heavy equipment, hindering the Israeli offensive. Moreover, Elazar coveted Mount Hermon, with its panoramic views of Damascus.

Yet Dayan was not out of tricks yet. He had arranged ceasefire talks with the chief UN Observer, Norwegian General Odd Bull, in Tiberias; but when Bull arrived, he found that the meeting had been moved to Tel Aviv. The two finally met at 3, and set the ceasefire for 6 p.m. But Dayan issued Bull a

condition: no UN observers were allowed near the ceasefire line. Thus the war was already over when, the following morning, an Israeli helicopter crew made it to the summit of Mount Hermon and planted its flag.

The fighting was over, and the Great Powers were appeased; but between Israel and her Arab neighbors, the tension was hardly defused. Egypt, Jordan, and Syria had all lost territory, military hardware, and men—in Egypt's case, between ten and fifteen thousand. Despite her stunning victory, Israel had also suffered casualties, with some eight hundred dead, and two and a half thousand wounded. With no desire to fight again, on June 19th, Eshkol's cabinet decided—albeit by only one vote—to surrender the Sinai and the Golan in exchange for peace.

But the Arabs were hardly amenable to reconciliation. Meeting on September 1st at Khartoum, the Arab League summit issued a resolution affirming that peace with Israel was too high a price to pay:

The Arab Heads of State have agreed to unite their political efforts at the international and diplomatic level to eliminate the effects of the aggression and to ensure the withdrawal of the aggressive Israeli forces from the Arab lands which have been occupied since the aggression of June 5. This will be done within the framework of the main principles by which the Arab States abide, namely, no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it, and insistence on the rights of the Palestinian people in their own country.

The Arab League's commitment to the rights of native peoples did not extend to Jews born in Muslim lands. The World Islamic Congress, meeting in Amman later that month, declared:

Jews of Arab Countries: the Congress is convinced that Jews living in Arab countries do not appreciate the kindness and protection that Muslims have granted them over the centuries. The Congress proclaims that the Jews who live in the Arab states and who have contact with



Celebrating.

Zionist circles or the state of Israel do not deserve the protection and kindness that Islam grants to non-Muslim citizens living freely in Islamic countries. Islamic governments must treat them as enemy combatants. In the same way, Islamic peoples must individually and collectively boycott them and treat them as mortal enemies.

Pogroms followed in Tripoli, Tunis, and Baghdad; across the Islamic world, Jews abandoned their ancient communities—many fleeing to Israel. In Egypt, the persecution began during the war. A Jew in Cairo, Benjamin Melameth, recalls being arrested on the first day of the war and systematically beaten:

All this time officers were walking up and down whipping us with their branches of palm trees, and some of them ran and jumped on our shoulders. Anyone who lost their balance or who flinched received a rain of blows When the turn of the Rabbi of Alexandria arrived, they crucified him to the bars of the front door of the prison. Then they beat him until he lost consciousness.

Yet it was the plight of the Arabs of Gaza and the West Bank which captured international attention. Forty-five years on, with

the Palestinian question still unresolved, the received wisdom holds that the Six-Day War was, in hindsight, a defeat for Israel. The *Economist* called it “one of history’s Pyrrhic victories,” stating that “in the long



run, the war turned into a calamity for the Jewish state no less than for its neighbors.”

Der Spiegel was even more explicit, with a hint of guilty pleasure:

But Israel still pays the highest price today in the Palestinian territories. The state that has its roots in the bitter experiences of 2,000 years of persecution had, in fact, subjugated another people itself. An army

that had been established for the purpose of defense suddenly found itself in the role of an occupier.

But to see victory as a worse outcome for Israel than defeat is to forget that Israel fought the war just to survive; victory was the only option. As Moshe Dayan’s daughter, Yael, wrote in the *Daily Telegraph* just a year after the war:

A year ago I was in uniform with a division on the Egyptian border. We, in the front, had no doubt as to the inevitability of war. We also knew we were going to win it. We were not going to win because we were more numerous, more battle-happy, or more ambitious. We were going to win, at whatever cost, because losing meant extermination These obvious facts should be remembered, simply because we were victorious. When a David wins, he stops being David in a way, and his motives become suspect. On June 5, 1967, we risked all we had.

If Israel exchanged the sympathy of a beleaguered minority for the moral dilemmas of a majority in 1967, it is only because peace with her Arab neighbors was impossible. To quote Yael Dayan again: “If our face is changed, it is only because security and peace did not prove to be synonymous and we have chosen the first, are not offered the second, and have to live with the results.”

MONDAY, JUNE 11

The Jewish Left, between History and Revelation

By Alex Joffe

The association of Jews with leftist ideas and movements has been a fixture of Western politics for the past 150 years. But is the relationship logical and necessary, or is it historical and contingent? Do Jewish values dictate leftist values, or is this assertion merely a *post hoc* rationalization? A recent conference at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research addressed these questions and, amid the predictable cheerleading, produced some surprisingly insightful answers.

Many Jews have loved the Left, but it cannot be said that the Left has consistently re-

ciprocated. This problem, philosopher Norman Geras told the conference, goes back to Karl Marx, who employed vicious Jewish stereotypes even as he called for a “moral universalism” that would embrace and emancipate all, including Jews. But Marx’s call to emancipate the Jews also entailed emancipating the world *from* the Jews—and Jews from their own Jewish identity.

Thus, it should have been no surprise, said Jonathan Brent, YIVO’s executive director and former editor of the invaluable *Annals of Communism*, that the Marxist Soviet regime pitted Jews against each other. The Jewish Lazar Kaganovich was one of the Politburo’s most brutal enforcers. In June, 1941, Stalin told Lazar that his brother Mikhail had right-wing associations. Lazar offered no defense of his brother but merely phoned Mikhail to inform him. Mikhail

committed suicide the same day. Lazar, Brent recounted, did not blink.

Similarly, the Soviets provided early support to Israel, as a means of annoying the West. When Israel declared statehood, New York Communists staged a celebratory rally at the Polo Grounds. The event, said Ron Radosh, former professor of history at the City University of New York, followed the Soviet lead and was fundamentally anti-British. But after 1948, Soviet policy became anti-Semitic at home and abroad. The process would be repeated with other types of leftist universalism, whether Communism, socialism, or internationalism, which demanded that Jews give up their identities and, when they did not, turned on them.

Radosh noted that non-Communist left-wing support was also substantial in the years before Israel’s creation. The *Nation*

magazine and its former editor Freda Kirchway exposed the connection between the Nazis and the Mufti, Haj Amin al-Husseini, Mufti of Jerusalem; indeed, the affiliated Nation Associates served as a virtual public relations arm for the Jewish Agency. But the contrast with today's *Nation* magazine—and today's Left—is stark. "Anti-Semitic themes and ruses," Geras summarized the trend on the Left, "are once again respectable; respectable not just down there with the thugs but pervasively also within polite society, and within the perimeters of a self-flattering liberal and Left opinion."

Given Marx's premises, which shape of nearly all leftist thought about the Jews, the history of repeated divorces seems inevitable. But does the Left's inability to live with the Jews discredit leftist ideology itself? This question was not asked.

Historian Moishe Postone offered a different view: The contemporary Left, he said, has turned on the Jews largely because of the crisis of capitalism and modernity. Tracing the path from 1948 to today's global neo-capitalism, he pointed to the Left's "fetishized understanding of global capital." The short version: Capitalism won; Communism lost. The Left was angry and blamed the Jews, including Israel, and the United States.

But would it have been different had the Left triumphed? Soviet anti-Semitism suggests otherwise.

So, what is the answer to the Left's Jewish Question? Political philosopher Michael Walzer presented the puzzle in his keynote speech: There is no straight line between Jews and the Left. Indeed, certain fundamentals of Judaism militate against a relationship: a God that limits human self-determination, a particular chosen people, a fear and sometimes hatred of outsiders, a hostility to political engagement.



Michael Walzer.

Why, then, were so many Jews attracted to left-wing causes? The obvious answer is that the pent-up religious and social energy released by 19th-century Jewish emancipation was redirected into varieties of leftist political messianism. But Walzer took another, unexpected turn. While some rejection of the exilic religion was necessary, he suggested, it was wrong for Jews on the Left to reject everything. Doing so alienated them from their fellow Jews and gave them too little "cultural material" with which to survive.

For Walzer, achieving a "sustainable Jewish militancy" requires reclaiming some of the traditions that were cast off, by returning to the religious calendar, studying texts, analyzing Jewish politics. It also requires embracing the Jewish "justice tradition" and joining with Israeli Jewish leftists in a secular-religious project to make Israel a "light unto the nations."

It is tempting to pick at Walzer's idea. He

crafts a strategy for enabling the Jewish Left to survive by re-grafting it to the Jewish community and tradition; but he omits explicit discussion of God and a chosen people, as well as the all-important details of ritual and practice. Moreover, he espouses something like the religiously progressive, intellectually critical, and socially engaged stance of Conservative Judaism circa 1980, in effect proposing a reactionary return to a "vital center"; yet that center did not hold. The religious demands were too great and the values incommensurable; hence, the decline of the Conservative movement and the contemporary Jewish "other-directedness," so trenchantly described by Jack Wertheimer in *Commentary*, which puts everyone and everything ahead of community and tradition.

But Walzer has raised a real challenge. Are leftist Jews so bereft of the nourishment provided by tradition and community that return would be a spiritual salvation? Is the non-Jewish Left now so hostile to Jews and Israel that these Jews' return to tradition and community is necessary to Jewish survival? Walzer's call is a statement that Jews should survive but also that they cannot survive in the real world without the reinforcement of culture, suffused with history and a sense of belonging. Jewish liberation and revelation—singular, parochial experiences that sealed an intimate bond with God, creating an unbroken tradition—these are the phenomena to which Walzer seeks to rebind the Jewish Left. Wrestling with tradition and, ultimately, revelation lies at the heart of Judaism. Should those on the Jewish Left truly wish to rejoin that contest, they should be made welcome.

TUESDAY, JUNE 12

At the Edge of the Abyss

By Elliot Jager

Bernard Wasserstein is a non-Zionist historian sympathetic to Israel while critical of its policies. Now based at the University of Chicago, the London-born Wasserstein has focused much of his intellectual energies on matters Jewish. He does so again in *On the Eve* (Simon & Schuster), a rich and nuanced history of the 10 million Jews of Europe before the Second World War that aims to "capture the realities of life in Europe in the years leading up to 1939, when the Jews stood, as

we now know, at the edge of an abyss." The new book is a sort of prequel to his *Vanishing Diaspora: The Jews in Europe Since 1945* (Harvard), published 16 years ago.

The striking thesis of *On the Eve* is that even before Hitler came to power in 1933, the prognosis for European Jewry was bleak: "The demographic trajectory was grim and, with declining fertility, large-scale emigration, increasing outmarriage, and widespread apostasy, foreshadowed extinction. Jewish cultural links were loosening . . . many Jews wanted to escape from what they saw as the prison of their Jewishness." Millions of Jews abandoned Europe in the interwar period—perhaps 10 percent of the Jewish population;

many headed to America. Wasserstein's well-chosen epigraph is from historian Simon Dubnow whose quixotic championing of an autonomous Diaspora-based Jewish nationalism is itself a historical footnote): "The historian's essential creative act is the resurrection of the dead."

Wasserstein proves himself to be most adept at the task. He breathes life into old quarrels, both political and theological: Agudas Yisroel against the Reform; both against the Zionists; the anti-Zionist extremist Hasidim of Satmar against the anti-Zionist fanatics of Munkacz; the General Zionists versus Revisionists, and so on. Economically, most Jews made their living in commerce or in the

professions since anti-Semitic strictures essentially closed academia, government, and agriculture to them. Demographically, by the early 1930s most Jews in Germany were marrying out.

Against all this, Wasserstein's portraits of life in *heder*, *niggun*-composing Hasidic rebbes, the workings of yeshivot in Mir, Lublin, and Ponevezh, and a sketch of the Mussar movement show an Orthodoxy in decline but no means defeated. It faced minor competition from the non-Orthodox whose Budapest rabbinical school, for example, allowed its seminarians to attend (*gasp*) the cinema. In much of Europe, the real challenge to tradition came from new-found access to the outside world—while in the Soviet Union it was the jealous god Stalin.

The book is not all doom and gloom. There is a charming segment on *Luftmenshn*, those who had no visible means of support to sustain their lifestyles which ranged from poor to comfortable. The remarkable devotion of Jewish parents to their children also gets nice

treatment. Bit by bit, as the doors were closing, thousands of children were brought to safety in the 1932-33 youth aliyah, the brain-child of a little known heroine named Recha Freier; the Kindertransport later delivered 10,000 children to England.

Wasserstein's treatment of "anti-Jewish Jews" is compelling, given the abundance of ashamed Jews coming out of the woodwork in our own day. In their *Selbsthass* or self-hatred, some Jews parodied anti-Semitic tropes. Of course, as Wasserstein points out, they did not literally hate themselves so much as they despised other Jews. Some were outspokenly disdainful of the Nazis; most were fixated by Jewish issues; many ultimately renounced Judaism and assailed Jewish solidarity—but paradoxically abhorred Jewish powerlessness. (Except for his gratuitous hatchet job on Zeev Jabotinsky, Wasserstein approaches pre-war European Zionism with comparative sympathy.) There is also a sketch of earlier far-Left Jews who had quit Palestine to return to Russia after the 1917 Revolution



to create Jewish colonies in the Crimea.

No less engrossing is Wasserstein's treatment of the Jewish press. A considerable number of dailies were owned and edited by Jews, and read religiously by a mixed Jewish-Gentile audience: Budapest's liberal *Pester Lloyd*, Berlin's *Tageblatt*, and Vienna's *Neu Freie Presse*, which employed one Theodor Herzl. Mirroring our own day, "such papers did not, however, see themselves as Jewish publications." Add to this mix the scores of polemical and party newspapers of every stripe that did cater exclusively to Jews. And on the Yiddish-language and cultural fronts were the composers, artists, cantors, filmmakers, and authors, whose books all but radiated with intellectual and artistic vibrancy.

Dispensing with maudlin nostalgia, *On the Eve* is a heartrending, unabashedly compassionate portrait of doomed European Jewry. Wasserstein emphatically makes the point that they "were by no means all of a kind. Indeed, they were probably the most internally variegated people of the continent." In the absence of a sovereign Jewish state, however, they were friendless, powerless, and trapped—everything and everyone they possibly could have counted on failed them.

THURSDAY, JUNE 14

The Chained Wife

By Micah Stein

Yafa Friedman lives in a modest, two-story townhouse in Brooklyn with plastic lawn chairs on the porch and peeling white trim around the windows. This past Sunday, the shades were drawn as a group of 30 protestors marched outside the house chanting, "Yafa Friedman—stop the abuse!" After an hour, the group drove over to Merkaz HaSimcha, a Jewish wedding hall owned by Friedman's brother, Rabbi Jay Horowitz. The chanting continued: "Rabbi Horowitz—shame on you!" This went on for two hours, as the protestors—young and old, men and women, from every shade of Orthodoxy—continued to chant, hold up signs, pass out fliers, and recite psalms.

What was Friedman and Horowitz's crime? According to the protestors, they are guilty of aiding and abetting Aharon Friedman in his refusal to divorce his wife. Yafa Friedman is

his mother; Rabbi Horowitz, his uncle.

If this sounds strange—and it should—consider that the Friedman family is at the center of a religious impasse that has stymied rabbinic authorities and Jewish communities for centuries: freeing the *agunah*, the Chained Wife.

First, the facts: Tamar Epstein and Aharon Friedman were married in 2006 and had a daughter the following year. Soon after, the relationship soured. The couple separated in 2008 before divorcing in 2010, with Epstein retaining primary custody of their child. Or, rather, the couple *civilly* divorced—Friedman has continually refused to grant his ex-wife a *get*, the Jewish writ of divorce, leaving their marriage intact according to Jewish law.

For Epstein, the consequences of this refusal are intangible but severe. Without a valid divorce document, she is prohibited

from remarrying and any future children she has will be considered *mamzerim*—bastards—a designation which precludes their marrying Jews.

However, she is not without allies. The Organization for the Resolution of Agunot (ORA) has launched an aggressive campaign on Epstein's behalf, using social media and protest rallies (like the one in Brooklyn) to pressure Friedman into divorcing his estranged wife. These tactics reflect new strategies in an old war, as the problem of recalcitrant husbands dates back to the Talmud. In tractate Aharin, the rabbis discuss a situation involving a man who is legally required to divorce his wife, but refuses. What should the court do? "We beat him until he says 'I agree [to grant the *get*].'" Problem solved.

Or is it? Physical coercion can only be



used in extreme cases, typically involving a husband who has become physically intolerable to his wife (“a man who gathers dog excrement” is one of the talmudic examples); “irreconcilable differences” does not qualify as a reason. There is also the matter of beating people up being illegal. Jewish law does permit community members to exert some pressure on a recalcitrant husband, as long as the tactics do not cross over into compulsion. Historically, this has involved community sanctions or excommunication.

Today, the methods used to pressure a recalcitrant husband vary by country and community. In Israel, where religious courts handle marriage and divorce, *get* refusal can earn a stubborn spouse hefty fines or indefinite jail time. In America, the legal options are more limited. New York has a “Get Law,” which allows judges to consider “barriers to remarriage” when dividing assets in a divorce and financially penalize the recalcitrant party. A preventative option is the Halakhic Prenuptial Agreement, which in a case of *get* refusal obligates the husband to continue supporting his estranged wife to the tune of \$150 per day.

Of course, some people still prefer the talmudic method. In 2011, the FBI arrested a Jewish couple in Lakewood, New Jersey for kidnapping and assaulting a man who had refused to issue a *get*. According to the indictment, the couple beat the recalcitrant husband “for multiple hours” and threatened to bury him alive in the Poconos. Then, “the victim was asked to raise his voice and consent to the divorce over and over again. The victim was told what to say word for word in English and Hebrew.” (They also tried to extort \$100,000 from the man’s father.) Alas, such behavior qualifies as “forcing the *get*.”

In Epstein’s case, ORA has honed in on Friedman’s job as a legislative aide to Representative Dave Camp (R-MI), the Chair-

man of the House Committee on Ways and Means. In a campaign organized by ORA, Epstein supporters flooded Camp’s office and Facebook page with messages urging the congressman to pressure Friedman into giving the *get*. An online petition calling for Congressman Camp to “stop supporting abuser Aharon Friedman” garnered 5,800 signatures. As a media maneuver, the strategy was a hit—the story has been covered by Fox News, the *New York Times*, *Politico*, and the *Huffington Post*, along with major Jewish news outlets. But while the campaign has surely succeeded in embarrassing Friedman, Congressman Camp has stood by his aide, calling the allegations “gossip.” (He may have no choice in the matter.)

ORA is not deterred. I spoke with Rabbi Jeremy Stern, ORA’s executive director, at Yeshiva University, where the organization was founded in 2002. While Epstein is ORA’s most high-profile case, the organization has helped resolve over 160 cases of *get* refusal in the past ten years. Stern explained the purpose of Sunday’s rally: “We have these rallies to make a statement that you can’t support a recalcitrant husband. Period.” ORA has also protested outside Friedman’s home in Silver Spring, Maryland; this time, the target was his support system. “Aharon is dependent on their support,” Stern said. “I am certain that if Aharon were to lose that support base of his family that he would give the *get*.”

In our conversation, Stern referred to Friedman’s actions as “a distortion of halakhah [Jewish religious law].” But it is difficult to see how *get* refusal is distortive: Jewish law gives men the sole authority to dissolve a marriage; Aharon Friedman is merely exercising that right. This does not excuse his actions, which are unquestionably abusive—but it does suggest that the problem is, on some level, institutional.

On this topic, ORA is not without critics. The *Forward* faulted organizations like ORA for focusing their efforts on recalcitrant husbands, rather than stubborn rabbis. “If withholding a *get* constitutes abuse,” wrote Dvora Meyers, “then the question should be asked: How did the gun get into his hand?” At the same time, a number of right-wing blogs accuse ORA of violating Jewish law in their pursuit of *gets*, leading to adultery and illegitimate children in the community.

The Brooklyn rally captured the advantages and limitations of ORA’s methodology. For starters, the issue of *agunot* can seem strange to those unfamiliar with Jewish law. One man, who spotted the rally while walking his dog, sympathized with Epstein’s plight but had reservations about the protest. “I can think of better things to protest in this neighborhood,” he said. Such as? “That new mosque around the corner—they are always double parked on Sunday.” However, another woman who read one of ORA’s flyers quickly joined the protest.

Later, outside Horowitz’s wedding hall, the protestors lined the entranceway as a group of men arrived for afternoon prayers. On his bullhorn, Stern identified one congregant as Dov Charnowitz, another *get* refuser, and he began leading the protestors in a Hebrew chant of “woe to the wicked man and woe to his neighbor!”

Two spectators watched the scene unfold. “They should burn this place down,” one said, “You can’t let a guy get away with this.” The other man hesitated: “I don’t know, it’s not my problem.”

Was the protest successful? Neither Friedman nor Horowitz showed up, but their neighbors, friends, and customers certainly did. ORA has succeeded in making life difficult for Friedman and his supporters—if only that were enough.

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