

Tefilla Notebook

18 Tevet • Vayechi

Steven Dorfman, President • Rabbi Pini Dunner, Senior Rabbi • Rabbi Aryeh Perlstein, Assistant Rabbi



Dear Members and Friends,

The Argentinian-born revolutionary, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, was assassinated in Bolivia in 1967 – but his memory endured for decades after his death, and for many he remains an iconic hero of the antiestablishment movement.

I still vividly recall the fascination with Che – bordering on obsession in certain circles – during the 1970s and 80s. The famous 1960 photograph of him taken by photographer Alberto Korda featured prominently on t-shirts and posters. John Lennon and Yoko Ono had a picture of Che in their kitchen, and the Argentinian football legend Diego Maradona had a Che tattoo on his right arm. Journalist Tom Wolfe coined the term "radical chic" to describe the promotion of radical figures such as Che by celebrities and the elite, who cheerfully used revolutionary icons as a fashion statement without any hint of irony.

Che Guevara transcended global borders as a unifying symbol of the global progressive left's commitment to antiestablishment struggles and transnational solidarity. His resolute image somehow came to represent universal egalitarian aspirations and the hope for a global socialist revolution. Progressive politics has always been riven with rivalries and hatreds, but notwithstanding the enmities, wherever someone found themselves on the map of the left, Che Guevara bridged all the many diverse movements across continents, serving as a powerful conduit for shared sentiments of resistance and revolution. Che literally embodied the perfect ideal of internationalist resistance.

In real life, however, Che Guevara was a monster. Despite Che's global reputation as a lovable revolutionary, there was a very dark side to him, marked by immoral behavior and ruthless brutality. Behind the romanticized image of the charming rebel lay a man deeply embedded in the brutal and bloody violence of armed struggle. In the mountains of Cuba, and later in Bolivia, Guevara was not merely a theorist of guerrilla warfare but an active participant. Crucially, Che was personally responsible for overseeing the wanton execution of numerous individuals – executions he saw as necessary for the cause, but which by any objective standards would be labeled as cold-hearted terrorism.

One victim of Che's brutality was Eutimio Guerra, a Cuban peasant who acted as a guide and informant for Fidel Castro's rebel army. At some point he was suspected of being the traitor providing information about the position of Che's militants to the Batista regime. According to Che, as recorded in his diaries, Guerra eventually admitted his betrayal – although, that was only after he had been sadistically tortured for days. As soon as Guerra confessed, Che pulled out his pistol and shot him dead. Similar stories are many, attesting to Che's ugly side – and yet he continued to hold the affection of many during his lifetime and afterward, and it goes on to this day.

The adulation of Che Guevara is the perfect example from history exhibiting both the stupidity and superficiality of ideologues. Once it has been decided that someone or something represents the ideals they hold dear, whether that someone or something fits the bill or not, they are put up onto the highest pedestal to be idolized as objects of veneration and celebration.

Although, you don't have to look at history to find an example: Hamas and the Palestinian cause have become the latest and most current iteration of this jarring phenomenon. Twenty-first-century radical chic is wearing a Palestinian checkered kaffiyeh as a scarf or shawl, while publicly lionizing the marauding monsters who murdered, raped and kidnapped

Jews and non-Jews in Southern Israel on October 7th. These terrorists, and their murderous leaders, such as the arch-terrorist Yahya Sinwar, are now being held up as the ultimate icons of a virtuous cause: namely, the obliteration of so-called white oppression and colonialism.

Truthfully, I fully support anyone's right to espouse whatever ridiculous cause they consider worthy. What troubles me is when people claim to want a "ceasefire", and then see no contradiction between that aspiration and the fact that they support animals who rape and butcher women, burn babies in ovens, joyfully kidnap old and young alike, and say that they would merrily do it again and again.

At what point does it become clear that pacifist progressivism is nothing more than a mirage that masks and protects, and even promotes, the same ugly violence its greatest advocates claim to despise? Those with an eye on history are clued in; they have heard of Che Guevara. But even those who are clueless about history, and embrace radical causes out of naivete, should understand that claiming you hate despots when you support something far worse than despotism requires mental gymnastics that is nothing short of Olympic gold-medal standards.

In the Torah portion of Vayechi, there is a poignant moment of moral clarity illustrating this exact point. As Jacob lies on his deathbed, he rebukes his sons Shimon and Levi for their violent retaliation after their sister Dinah was wronged by Shechem. In a murder spree against the town of Shechem, the brothers dispatched the entire male population, took the women and children into captivity, and plundered the flocks and possessions.

Jacob's critique was not of their cause, which he rightly felt was just, but rather of their brutal methods. His parting words underscore a timeless lesson: the ends cannot justify the means. As Jacob put it: "Cursed be their anger, so fierce; and their wrath, so cruel!" (Gen. 49:7). His curse is against the ferocity of their violence, not the veracity of their cause. Jacob, the great patriarch, can parse the situation: he supports the cause, but not if it employs violence as a first measure. Self-defense – even if it means using mortal force – is always justified, but premeditated murder is an inexcusable transgression, regardless of its motivation, especially if a resolution can be reached without it.

This ancient wisdom seems to elude many on the progressive left. The glamorization of violent revolutionaries like Che Guevara and Hamas overlooks the crucial distinction between fighting for justice and committing acts of terrorism. Che, much like Shimon and Levi, might have started out with what he and others perceived as noble intentions, but the path he chose was marred by indiscriminate brutality. Hamas similarly wraps itself in a cloak of righteous fervor, but in the final analysis is nothing more than a vicious terrorist group that seeks the death of Jews, and anyone associated with Jews – even if they are fellow Arabs.

The allure of radicalism often blinds its adherents to the moral cost of their actions, and they forget that, above all, what they seek must always be achieved via preserving the sanctity of life. Jacob understood the perils of falling into the trap of endorsing violence by supporting those with whom one has sympathy, but who resort to violent methods as a matter of course. Jacob's rebuke of Shimon and Levi carries within it a message for today – that supporters of the Palestinian cause must never romanticize violence and its perpetrators. It is one thing to sympathize with the plight of the oppressed, but it is quite another to be an apologist for terrorism.

ishing you a Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Pini Dunner

This week's Tefilla Notebook is sponsored by **Victor and Jacqueline Cohenca** in memory of Victor's father, **Jacobo Cohenca, Yaacov ben Shabatai z"l**, whose yahrtzeit is on the 19th of Tevet.

FRIDAY, DEC 29

4:34 PM CANDLELIGHTING
4:35 PM KABBALAT SHABBAT

SATURDAY, DEC 30

8:30 AM GEMARA SHIUR
9:15 AM SHACHARIT
4:40 PM MINCHA
5:30 PM MAARIV
5:35 PM SHABBAT ENDS

WEEKDAY DAVENING

Sun	8:00am	4:40pm
Mon	8:00am	4:40pm
Tue- Thur	7:00am	4:40pm
Fri	7:00am	4:45pm

BRING THEM HOME NOW

THANK YOU

Kiddush this week is sponsored by **Shawney & Richard Fine** in memory of Shawney's father, **Rabbi Joseph Wagner, HaRav Yosef Chaim ben Eliyahu z"l**, whose yahrtzeit is on the 22nd of Tevet.

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Yahrtzeits

Donna Michelle Gross
 Rachel Daniella bat Moshe a"h
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Jeff Gross
 Yahrtzeit - 19 Tevet

Rabbi Joseph Wagner
 HaRav Yosef Chaim ben Eliyahu z"l
 Father of
Shawney Fine
 Yahrtzeit - 22 Tevet

Jacobo Cohenca
 Yaacov ben Shabatai z"l
 Father of
Victor Cohenca
 Yahrtzeit - 19 Tevet

Bella Magenheimer
 Bayla bat Shmuel a"h
 Mother of
Maggie Bayer
 Yahrtzeit - 22 Tevet

Helen Baum
 Miriam Henia bat Yechezkel
 Yaakov HaLevi a"h
 Mother of
Anna Baum
Roberta Kimmel
Michael Baum
 Yahrtzeit - 13 Tevet

Harold Markowitz
 Benjamin Tvi ben Yitzchak z"l
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Vera Markowitz
 Yahrtzeit - 22 Tevet

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Statements have been emailed to everyone with an outstanding invoice. Please make sure to pay any open balances to the Synagogue before the end of the year. You can log-in to your account at beverlyhillssynagogue.org or call 310-276-7650

TARGET PRACTICE

January 8th, 2024 at 6pm

Location is in the San Fernando Valley and address will be given upon confirmation of RSVP.



\$100 per person includes ammunition, targets, and gun lane. Gun rentals are available for an extra charge



Only for those with prior gun experience.

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PRESENTS

SATURDAY

NIGHT

LIVE
13
JANUARY



A Magical Evening of Mitzvot!

Create special gifts and letters for soldiers & children of
displaced families in Israel.

6:30 PM

WHICH WILL BE DELIVERED
JUST A FEW DAYS LATER!!

DELICIOUS FOOD • SPECIAL ENTERTAINMENT • MUSICAL HAVDALAH • TODDLER CORNER & MORE!

SOLIDARITY TRIP TO ISRAEL



3 DAY MISSION

TUESDAY JANUARY 23- THURSDAY JANUARY 25

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

Dedication ceremony of YINBH Nahal Haredi apartment

Visit wounded IDF soldiers
in the hospital, with gifts

Visit kibbutzim affected by
the October 7th massacres

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