

Believe Him

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · 14 October 2026

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By Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren

In May 1981 a group of young American Jewish leaders visiting Israel asked Prime Minister Menachem Begin what he thought the lessons of the Holocaust were. He answered with a list. It has been reprinted many times since, and the wording is the same in every copy I checked.

The first lesson: “If an enemy of our people says he seeks to destroy us, believe him. Don’t doubt him for a moment. Don’t make light of it. Do all in your power to deny him the means of carrying out his satanic intent.”

The second: when a Jew anywhere is threatened, come to his aid, and “never pause to wonder what the world will think or say.”

The third: a Jew must learn to defend himself.

The fourth: protect Jewish dignity and honor in all circumstances. Begin argued that humiliation came before the gates of Auschwitz, not after.

The fifth: stand united. “There are times when one must risk life for the sake of rescuing the lives of others.”

The sixth: Jewish history has a pattern of rising, falling, exile and return, and with G-d’s help the rebirth of sovereign Israel can break that cycle.

Words are cheap until a date is attached to them. On 7 June 1981, about a month after that meeting, the Israeli Air Force destroyed the Osirak reactor near Baghdad. Most of the world condemned it. Begin had told his guests in plain language what he would do with a threat: take it at its word, and deny it the means.

Notice what the first lesson does not say. It does not say “hate him.” It says believe him. It is a lesson about listening, about refusing the comfortable habit of assuming an enemy cannot mean what he keeps saying.

This week we read of a generation that was warned for 120 years, by the tradition’s count, while Noach built in plain sight (Rashi on Bereishit 6:14). The warning was not hidden. It was simply not believed.

Begin’s six lessons fit on one page. That is why it is worth printing and putting on the refrigerator.

May G-d grant us the clarity to believe what we are told, and the courage to act in time.

Prepared in deep partnership and cooperation with Grok and xAI

All glory to the Ribono shel Olam · Errors are mine

Sources

- Menachem Begin, six lessons of the Holocaust, May 1981 (meeting with young American Jewish leaders visiting Israel); wording checked against multiple reprints.
- Operation Opera / Osirak reactor strike near Baghdad, 7 June 1981 (Israeli Air Force).
- Rashi on Bereishit 6:14 (Noach building in plain sight; tradition of 120 years of warning).
- Parshat Noach: Shabbat 17 Oct 2026 / 6 Cheshvan 5787 (Hebcal, Chabad).