

Media, Memory, and Covenantal Accountability

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · Jerusalem · 22 October 2026 (11 Cheshvan 5787)

In Bamidbar 20 the people are thirsty, and G-d tells Moshe to take the staff, gather the congregation and "speak to the rock before their eyes" (Bamidbar 20:8). Moshe strikes it instead, twice. Water comes out anyway. And the leader of the generation loses his entry into the Land.

Rashi explains what was lost. Had the rock given water at a word, the people would have reasoned: if a rock that neither hears nor speaks obeys the word of G-d, how much more must we (Rashi on Bamidbar 20:12). Ramban, following Rabbeinu Chananel, faults the phrasing of "shall we bring forth water," which made it sound as if the power were theirs. The Rambam, in Shemonah Perakim chapter 4, locates the failure in anger, a loss of the inner balance that a leader's speech requires. Three readings, one demand: when you hold a public trust, your words have to be precise, and they have to point beyond yourself.

That demand is my lens on the week's feeds. From 19 to 22 October 2026, my timeline was full of video clips, screenshots and charts, each insisting it was the real story. Some were primary evidence. Some were narrative wearing evidence's clothes. A Torah-shaped citizen has to learn to tell them apart, and to speak to the rock rather than strike it.

I. Warnings and the duty to speak

Every few weeks a new claim surfaces about who knew what before 7 October 2023. I am not going to retell any of them here. They are contested and they are denied, and a timeline is the wrong place to settle them.

The principle is not contested. "Do not stand by the blood of your neighbor" (Vayikra 19:16) makes passing on a life-saving warning an obligation, not a courtesy. Areivut, the mutual responsibility of Israel, means a warning that dies inside a hierarchy is everyone's loss. And Mei Merivah teaches that the people charged with protecting the camp are held to a higher standard of speech, not a lower one.

So the question I carry is structural, not personal: does our security system make it easy or hard for the person at the bottom to be heard at the top? That question can be asked without naming anyone, and it should be.

II. The arithmetic of the threshold

Israel votes on Tuesday, 27 October 2026. The legal threshold is 3.25 percent of valid votes. Here is what that means in actual ballots.

The Central Elections Committee's final register lists 7,331,981 eligible voters. The Taub Center's Prof. Alex Weinreb assumes about 99.3 percent of ballots are valid ([Taub Center figures as reported by C14, 21 October 2026](#); [Jerusalem Post, 22 October 2026](#)). Show the math:

- At 70 percent turnout: $7,331,981 \times 0.70 \times 0.993 \approx 5,096,460$ valid votes.
- Threshold: $5,096,460 \times 0.0325 \approx 165,635$ votes, Taub's figure.
- At 60 percent turnout the line is 141,973 votes; at 80 percent it is 189,297. Each point of turnout moves it by about 2,370 votes.

Now the part that matters most: what happens to votes for lists that fall short. They are not counted toward any seat. Seats are divided only among lists that pass, using the Bader-Ofer method ([Knesset, "Distribution of Knesset Seats \(Bader-Ofer Method\)"](#), read 22 October 2026). First, the valid votes of the passing lists are divided by 120 to get the price of one seat, and each list gets whole seats at that price. Then the leftover seats go one at a time to whichever list has the highest result of $\text{votes} \div (\text{seats already won} + 1)$. Two lists that signed a surplus-vote agreement are treated as one list for that leftover step, but only if each passes the threshold on its own ([Israel Democracy Institute, "Vote-Sharing Agreements"](#)).

Worked example, at 70 percent turnout:

- If every vote went to a list that passed, one seat would cost about $5,096,460 \div 120 \approx 42,470$ votes.
- If 417,400 votes were wasted, the 2022 figure, the passing lists would share about 4,679,060 votes, and a seat would cost about $4,679,060 \div 120 \approx 38,992$ votes. The wasted votes would equal about $417,400 \div 38,992 \approx 10.7$ seats that go to other lists.
- A list that just clears the line with 165,635 votes would get $165,635 \div 38,992 \approx 4.25$, so four whole seats, and possibly a fifth in the leftover round. That is why people say passing the threshold means "four seats or nothing."

The 2022 precedent is real. That year the threshold was 154,855 votes. Meretz won 150,793 votes and missed it by 4,062. Balad won 138,617 and missed it by 16,238. Across all lists below the line, about 417,400 votes, 8.76 percent of the valid total, elected nobody ([Central Elections Committee, 25th Knesset results](#); [Polimeter lost-votes table](#); [Jerusalem Post, 22 October 2026](#)).

The Torah question is not who should win. It is whether we take responsibility for our own vote. Devarim 17 limits the king so that power stays accountable to the

people under the Law. A threshold is a modern form of the same idea: a fence against splintering that can also silence real communities if they splinter anyway. Which bloc gains when hundreds of thousands of votes vanish? That depends on whose votes vanish, and every voter should do the arithmetic before 27 October 2026, not after.

A legal note: under section 16E of the Elections (Propaganda Methods) Law, new election polls may not be published from the end of Friday, 23 October 2026, until the polls close on 27 October ([Israeli Legislation, Elections \(Propaganda Methods\) Law](#); [JDN, 20 October 2026](#)). This essay cites no poll results, only the legal threshold and turnout scenarios.

III. Naming the adversary

On 20 October 2026, in an i24NEWS interview, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke about the riots in France. "They didn't prepare, and they simply gave up. They surrendered to the invasion of radical Islam," he said. He recalled what he told President Emmanuel Macron after the 7 October 2023 attack: " Hamas is ISIS, and in some ways, even worse. And if we don't eliminate them here, you'll have them in Paris." His advice to France: "Fight back, do not pursue a policy of appeasement — fight against the extremists... They will devour France, they will devour Europe" ([i24NEWS, 20 October 2026](#); [Times of Israel, 20 October 2026](#)).

Precision cuts both ways here. On the context, reporting describes unrest that began over school conditions and widened into protests over living costs and fuel, followed by looting, curfews and a troop deployment, so the crowds were mixed ([CBS News](#); [ABC News, 21 October 2026](#)). The conversation with Macron is Netanyahu's own account of a private conversation. And the target of his words is radical Islamism, not Muslims as such. That distinction is not softness. It is accuracy, and accuracy is the whole lesson of Mei Merivah.

On the substance, the Rambam counts as an obligatory war "ezrat Yisrael miyad tzar," delivering Israel from an enemy who has attacked (*Hilchot Melachim* 5:1). A movement that butchered families on 7 October 2023, and whose official Ghazi Hamad said on 24 October 2023 it would repeat the attack "a second, a third, a fourth" time ([Times of Israel, 1 November 2023](#)), is not a negotiating partner whose grievances can be bought off. So the question I would put to European readers is a real one, not a slogan: is the rising danger on your streets a policing problem, an economic problem, or an ideological movement that treats Jews first and everyone else next? If it is even partly the third, appeasement will not hold.

IV. Zakhor: the Mufti and the Luftwaffe

On 22 October 2026 (Israel time) a widely shared post on X revived a German wartime map of Mandate Palestine (its title, "Wehrwirtschaftlich wichtige Betriebe und Einrichtungen," matches the July 1943 Wehrmacht map of "important factories and installations for the military economy" that Miner cites) and the photograph of Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the former Mufti of Jerusalem, with Hitler. The history behind it is documented and worth stating exactly.

- Al-Husseini met Hitler in Berlin on 28 November 1941 and then served Nazi Germany as a propagandist and recruiter ([United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Hajj Amin al-Husayni: Wartime Propagandist"](#)).
- Historian Samuel Miner, working from captured Luftwaffe files in the U.S. National Archives (microfilm T321, roll 99), shows that al-Husseini repeatedly pressed for air raids on Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. He proposed marking the Balfour Declaration anniversary, 2 November 1943, with an attack. Göring turned the request down in July 1943 for practical reasons, not moral ones ([Samuel Miner, "Planning the Holocaust in the Middle East," Jewish Political Studies Review 27:3-4, 2016](#)).
- An October 1943 Luftwaffe intelligence assessment, quoted by Miner, judged that Jerusalem "has no great military importance," worried that a raid there would hit Arabs and Christian and Muslim holy sites, and pointed to Tel Aviv as "the citadel of Palestinian Jewry," a city populated almost entirely by Jews. An undated 1943 position paper called Tel Aviv a fitting target for retaliation against Allied bombing of Germany. Al-Husseini renewed the request for a raid on 1 April 1944. The raid never happened, because the Luftwaffe no longer had the forces (same source).
- One caution: Israeli historians Benjamin Z. Kedar and Daniel Uziel, who studied 286 Luftwaffe aerial photographs of the country, could not establish whether the reconnaissance photos of Tel Aviv were connected to the Mufti's proposals ([Qantara.de on Kedar and Uziel, Cathedra 177, January 2021; Haaretz, 8 April 2021](#)). So the proposals and the targeting logic are documented, but the claim that a particular photo or map was drawn up for the Mufti's plan is not.

"Remember what Amalek did to you" (Devarim 25:17) is not a call to hate. It is a duty to keep the record straight, so that people who planned to murder Jewish civilians are not later romanced into anti-colonial heroes. Holding to the documented version, and naming what is still uncertain, is the only memory that survives cross-examination.

V. Non-domination and the covenant

Political theory gives this a civic vocabulary. Philip Pettit's republicanism defines freedom as non-domination, meaning not living at the mercy of a power that can interfere with you at will (Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*, Oxford University Press, 1997). Daniel Elazar read the biblical covenant as the root of federal and constitutional politics: power is shared and bound by an agreement above every ruler (Elazar, *Covenant and Polity in Biblical Israel*, Transaction, 1995). Eric Nelson traced how early modern thinkers drew on the Hebrew Bible for their constitutions (Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic*, Harvard University Press, 2010).

All three line up with the week's lessons. Leaders speak precisely and in public, and the people can check them. Electoral rules fence against fragmentation, yet the citizen who wastes a vote by not doing the math has given a little of his non-domination away. Memory refuses to let eliminationist intent be rewritten. And under all of it stands the Jerusalem conviction that no human hierarchy is the final sovereign.

What to do between now and 27 October 2026

1. Before you share a clip, find the primary source and read what it actually says.
2. Do your own threshold math before Tuesday, 27 October 2026.
3. Learn one documented page of our history well enough to teach it accurately.

Speak to the rock. The water still comes.

Sources

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