



**The Center for the Study of  
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## PERSPECTIVES

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The Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry publishes commentary and analysis on Jewish identity and culture. You are welcome to share your thoughts on our Perspectives with us: [cst@tauex.tau.ac.il](mailto:cst@tauex.tau.ac.il). We are glad to share with you the thirty-fourth issue of Perspectives.

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### Mysterious Ways

*Tell me who intercepted the Iranian missiles, and I'll tell you what  
kind of Jew you are*

*Uriya Shavit*

My newsagent – yes, some people cannot give up on print – is an elderly Haredi man and one of the most pleasant persons I know.

The day after Iran's intercepted aggression against Israel, he told me with a beaming face that even non-religious Jews who entered his store that morning admitted Tehran's fiasco must have been the result of divine intervention.

The headlines of Haredi newspapers offered a similar take on that night's drama. They spoke of a miracle, of God's blessings and mercy. Not a word in the headlines about the IDF. Not a word about the pilots who risked their lives. Not a word about science and technology. Not a word about the UK and the USA.

More Hebrew-language Haredi daily newspapers are published today in Israel than mainstream ones. If only Ben-Yehuda were here to see.

In *Hamevaser*, which represents the small Hasidic courts, a front-page column noted that there was simply no natural way for 300 different types of missiles to be almost totally intercepted without even one Jew killed, while at the same time unintentionally killing three Jordanians along with one Bedouin girl.

Congratulations, Jacob Lustigman. You have just won the award for the most insensitive, silly, morally inexcusable, and anti-Jewish comment of the year.

Wait, there is more.

Commenting on what he described as the cheeky decision of the Supreme Court to stop funding Yeshiva students who avoid being recruited, Lustigman argued that a country that decides it does not need a spiritual Iron Dome ends up paying more for physical Iron Domes. He added that following October 7, only idiots would rely on the IDF; rather, any logical person understands that only God can save us.

I am not sure Lustigman has a good explanation for why God did not just stop the missiles before they were fired or why the miracle of bringing down the Iranian regime was not performed. I guess the answer is that God works in mysterious ways. Heads, I win. Tails, you lose.

I wonder what Haredi responses would be if someone dared explain the Meron disaster as a divine punishment for not studying math and engineering. Furious, no doubt, and rightly so.

What we have here is a one-sided relationship, where only one community is allowed to articulate the most outrageous ideas.

Prayers are personal. It is not for human beings to know if they are answered.

There is childishness and megalomania in attempting to figure out what God wants and does, especially when it serves petty sectarian interests. In my view, it borders on blasphemy.

The debate is not, as often described, between religious and secularist Jews. It is between medieval Jews and modern Jews.

Modern Jews are faithful, or not; practicing, or not. What they share is a deep historical understanding that Jews should not be passive, introverted, and ignorant. That whatever their personal beliefs are, they must embrace modernity. Empiricism. Rationality. Innovations.

That there is a world out there.

Modern Jews contributed to science and technology more than any other group in history.

Modern Jews have made Israel a military power that ensures there will not be a second Holocaust.

Modern Jews made Iran's ambitions a colossal fiasco.

If current demographic trends continue, and if Haredi society will not profoundly change – there is not one serious evidence that it is changing – then within less than two generations, the ultra-Orthodox will become the majority group in Israel.

The economy will break down because a minority, no matter how hardworking and highly educated it is, cannot provide for an ever-growing group of poorly educated people who are funded mainly by the state or work in low-paying jobs that do not require advanced skills. The military will disintegrate because the few will not forever agree to risk their lives while a growing group of dodgers degrades their sacrifice as secondary in importance.

Houston, we have a problem.

The minister of education, Yoav Kisch, must know all this. Yet this morally boneless opportunist has used his tenure to privilege Haredi education instead of forcing it to reform radically.

Putting the Haredi narratives aside, this has actually been a good week.

Many will disagree on this, but I think the first direct Iranian attack was a great Israeli – and Western, at large – strategic triumph with far-reaching implications.

It demonstrated to the entire world how dangerous and daring Iran is. Europeans are now more likely to do the math and realize the existential threat Iran poses to them. This realization will boost Israel's international standing.

It showed the limitedness of Iran's military strength compared to that of its enemies, who have not fully shown theirs, yet.

It exposed Iran, for the first time, without the shield of the proxies through which it has been menacing for years, and, in doing so, proved one more time that in the Muslim world, talk of unity and solidarity is just talk, and each regime cares only about itself.

It proved that an Israeli-Sunni alliance is workable, at least against the great Shiite devil.

It positively projected on Israel as a start-up nation, a status that has been undermined.

It manifested that in 21st-century modern warfare, being on the offense is much more difficult than being on the defense. It is a lesson fascist Russia already learned in Ukraine, and, sadly, Ukraine learned in parts of its legitimate counter-offensive. Perhaps war-mongering dictators around the world were watching.

I would like to think that the night of interceptions also reminded Israelis about the importance of their universities and schools. That their fate can only be as promising as their scientific training.

Reading Haredi newspapers, I am not so sure.

The great Herzl wrote in *Der Judenstaat*, explaining why the State of the Jews must not become a theocracy, that faith unites us, while science makes us free.

Herzl was twice wrong.

Faith does not unite us. For centuries, it has been a source of division.

And science does not make us free. Rather, freedom allows us to make good science, and good science protects our existence.

If we forget this, Heaven help us.



Prof. Uriya Shavit is Head of the Center.

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