

# Time it was and what a time it was

It's hard not to remember the days when wars had ends. And the days when we were reasonably certain of their outcomes.

Daniel Gordis Feb 24, 2026

We were at one of the parking lots in Jerusalem's largest cemetery yesterday, not quite certain that we were in the right place. I was peering at Google Maps on my phone when two guys in their thirties came up to us.

"Are you Avi's parents?" one of them asked.

I nodded, wondering how in the world the guy knew us.

"We got a location pin saying it's over here," he said. I must have looked a bit puzzled as to how he knew who we were. "Avi was our commanding officer," he said.

We never really got to know the guys in our son's unit—security protocols didn't allow it. But at his wedding, when I saw a whole group of guys who seemed to be his friends yet didn't look in the least bit familiar, I assumed that that was them.

Later that evening, during the dancing, when those same guys grabbed Avi and me and put us on a slab of wood they'd found somewhere and held us both up there, seemingly effortlessly, for a long, long time, I was pretty sure.

Average people can't do that. Or at least don't.



Standing around the gravesite, in a heartbreakingly beautiful section of the cemetery that I'd never been to that's set aside for small children and in which tiny graves are arranged one next to the other, those two guys, and a few of the others who'd been with them in the army years ago, looked more stunned than anything. They seemed brokenhearted, yes, but mostly bewildered, almost as if they were saying to themselves, "We got through all those years in the army, then we started lives and then we went back to war and survived that, and now this?"

One of them, whose parents happen to be dear friends of ours, had lost a daughter, just a few months old, the day before, in what appears to have been a terrible accident. These weren't the same carefree, post-army, pre-life guys I'd seen at the wedding. Many of them had kids, and of this I'm sure—whenever it was that they'd last gotten together, they had not imagined that they'd next meet at the funeral of one of their infant children.

Their faces struck me as metaphors for everything here. Bewildered. A world so utterly different from what we'd imagined possible just a few years ago. A reality so disorienting that we're all still struggling to figure out how to just put one foot in front of the other.

We went out to dinner last week at Eucalyptus, an iconic Jerusalem restaurant at the base of the walls around the Old City (not far from the Jaffa Gate) that's been around for some forty years. We've been there a bunch of times, but about a decade ago, we decided to go there for our anniversary, and sitting outside in the June Jerusalem air had a really lovely evening. Since then, that's been our anniversary spot.

So when we heard that the restaurant would be closing next week, we knew we needed to go one last time. We went with friends with whom we'd gone there before—the same great food, the same enchanting setting. The chef, who always comes to everyone's table and chats them up, did so again, though this time he seemed subdued. My wife said to me afterwards, "He's not just retiring. Something else is going on—he seemed really sad."

It did, indeed, seem that he was sad. As were we.

Not because of the restaurant, per se. Restaurants come and go—it's the nature of the business, and he's definitely at retirement age. But Eucalyptus had been here forever. It was already an iconic part of Jerusalem when we moved here almost thirty years ago. It was a place that almost everyone knew. It was, in a way, the "Jerusalem of Old," the Jerusalem before Covid made us appreciate just being able to go out to dinner, Jerusalem before many spots would bring back memories of Judicial Reform protests, Jerusalem before we could remember which streets we'd stood on as military funeral processions drove by, Jerusalem before the next war.

It was part of a Jerusalem that, to be sure, was far from perfect, but it was a Jerusalem that now, in our memories, feels somehow idyllic.

It felt like we were losing more than a restaurant. We were losing one of our last holds on a world that we probably didn't appreciate enough back when we had it, a world that ended up vanishing more quickly than we'd imagined possible.

Time it was, and what a time it was, it was

A time of innocence, A time of confidences

Long ago, it must be, I have a photograph

Preserve your memories; They're all that's left you

I don't know about innocence. But maybe. Confidence? That, we definitely had. How did we not know what a gift that confidence was?

But all the bravado we've long gotten used to hearing from the Prime Minister for so many years has suddenly evaporated. I almost miss it, honestly.

Just a couple of days ago, this is what appeared on our phones on N12:

**Headline:**

Netanyahu to an American official: "Does Trump still have our back? I'm worried."

And in the **sub-headline:**

The Prime Minister left the White House with no indication of what the President plans to do.

Yes, he's clearly worried. (I pray he's not surprised; did he really think he was dealing with a person of principles?) And he's making little effort to hide that worry from rank and file Israelis.

Yesterday afternoon, the PM gave a speech in the Knesset, warning Iran that it would be a "huge mistake" to attack us.

Yes, it might be a big mistake. But how certainly are we even of that? This, after all, is the PM who also promised us "absolute victory." Remember that? Now, of course, Hamas is rapidly rebuilding just over the "yellow line." Miles of tunnels haven't been found. And Hezbollah is apparently being retrained and rearmed by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. And Iran itself ... well.

The Prime Minister's speech to the Knesset was also stunningly brief—the evening news explained that he had to leave the plenum to rush to a security briefing with the Chief of Staff and the Minister of Defense.

As the news was reporting on the mini-speech, this is what the screen showed:

**Larger header in the crawler:**

"Highest level of readiness for an American strike"

**And the sub-header:**

PM Netanyahu: "We are in complex and challenging days for the life of the State"

“Challenging days for the life of the state?” What, exactly, does that even mean? What is he trying to say? That's quite the statement from a guy who used to run on the slogan מנהיג חזק לעם חזק, “A strong leader for a strong nation.”

Time it was, and what a time it was ...

What happens when people get genuinely worried? Often, they say stupid stuff. Channel 12 couldn't help but take note, once again, in the crawler at the bottom:

**Headline:**

Highest preparedness? Some of the coalition's irresponsible comments

**Sub-header:**

MK [Nissim] Vaturi: We will use weapons that we've never used before; MK [Moshe] Saada: You should cancel all flights for this week.

What new weapons? Space lasers? Are we going nuclear? And why cancel flights? To keep people out? Or to keep people in?

Are they actually trying to get us worried?

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I suspect that they might be. Because while people here strike me as aware (virtually every email scheduling something seems to include the phrase “if there's not a war, let's meet at ...”), they don't seem scared.

And maybe that's not such a good thing.

At the end of the summer, when it seemed that things were, indeed, calming down, I took the portable generator we'd been keeping in our safe room (which is also the laundry room,

so space is at a premium) and put it back into the closet where random “stuff” just gets tossed.

Since then, the generator seems to have somehow inched its way to back of that closet, behind the folding chairs, and the high chairs and booster chairs for the grandchildren, and the bubble wrap and the Amazon boxes and all of that, back at the bottom of the closet with the long-since-expired gas masks from the Iraq war days (that we’re still not allowed to throw out, but have to return to some government office, hence their permanent residence in our home until our kids toss them after our demise), the huge roll of thick plastic sheeting we once used to seal our windows (was that the same war or a different one? I assume the same, but who knows....) and the old clothes we keep meaning to donate and all that.

I told myself a few times over the past few weeks that it’s really time to pull all that stuff out and somehow get to the generator and put it back in the safe room. A few times, I even told my wife I was going to do it. She did her share... she brought down blankets and pillows and then got water and phone cords and all that for the safe room, but I didn’t feel like undertaking the archaeological expedition that the closet would entail.

Yesterday, though, when we got back from the funeral, my wife said, quietly, “I’m reminding you about the generator.”

I got it. Our granddaughter was coming over for her weekly sleepover, and my wife was keenly aware that the chances we’d spend the night with her in the safe room were, while not high, definitely not null. And if we were responsible for her, then ...

After the horror of that harrowing section of the cemetery, well, yes, you worry. About everything.

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Ask people here what they think is going to be, and you get (at least in my experience) a pretty uniform response. A shrug, and then a face. “Who knows. But whatever it’s going to be, let’s just get it over with.”

During the funeral, an air force jet flew overhead. I hadn’t heard one in months, and a few people, like me, looked up. We couldn’t see anything behind the clouds, but then we waited to hear if others would follow. Then, maybe we’d know.

No planes followed, though. Not yet.

Is it going to happen? Who knows. But yes, it would be nice just to get it over with, whatever “it” is.

The problem is that while there were days when we used to think that wars had ends, that, too, kinds of feels like the stuff of yesteryear. What if there is no “getting it over with”? What if “over” is no longer?

This might just be ... life. Not what we would have chosen, not what we want. But if we’re determined to live here—and we are—then we don’t get to choose.

All we can do is stock up, plug in, and wait.

And in the midst of it all, we can also remember, however wistfully.

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