

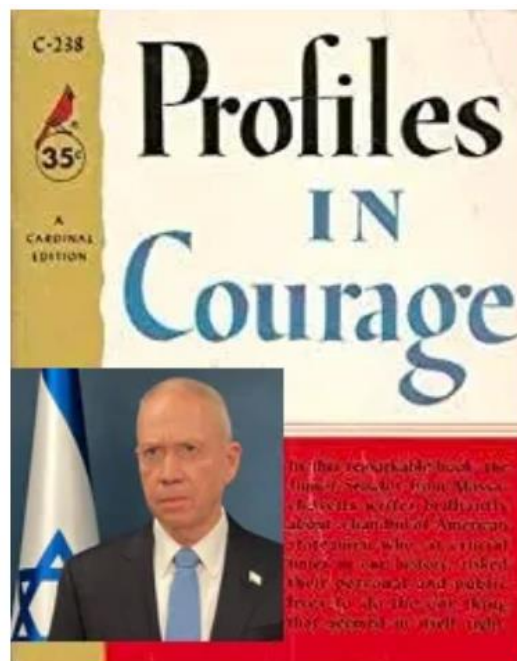


### Israel from the Inside with Daniel Gordis

## What you just witnessed was one of the greatest weeks in Israel's history

"There are those who acquire their share in the World-to-Come in one moment" (Talmud Avodah Zarah 10b)

Mar 27



This is far from over. It could be very, very far from over. And I'm about to get on a plane for fourteen hours, so that by the time I land, things might well have changed. Perhaps dramatically.

Still, I will go out on a limb, type this out very quickly with no time to proof it or to wait to see if things hold, and I will tell you what you have just seen:

*You have just witnessed one of the most extraordinary weeks in Israeli history.*

Israel's 75th Independence Day is just weeks away.

*Six months ago,*

before the most recent elections and the introduction of the “gang of thugs” into the government, had you asked anyone what the 75th anniversary would be like, they would likely have said “It’ll be a great party.” If we usually have a lot of fireworks, we’ll have a ton of fireworks. If the the national ceremony with dancers and singers and military flags is usually kind of cool, this year it’ll be very cool. If people usually booze it up a bit, this year, they’ll party away.”

But then there was an election. There was the “gang of thugs,” which led Thomas Friedman to declare in a [NYT op-ed](#), “The Israel We Knew is Gone.” No, “the Israel we knew is not gone,” [I replied](#) on this platform, and throughout, I’d hoped and prayed that I was right.

But to be honest, there were many dark days in the intervening months. If when Friedman wrote, what had us worried was Bezalel Smotrich, Itamar Ben-Gvir and Avi Maoz, they began to seem like small fry relative to the judicial overhaul / regime change (depends on whom you ask) which Yariv Levin and Simcha Rothman, Minister of Justice and Chair of the Knesset’s Constitution Committee, respectively, began to unleash.

*Six weeks ago,*

if you’d asked most Israelis what kind of Independence Day we’re going to have, they would have said, “a sh\*tty one.” The country will be depressed. We may be on the verge of becoming an illiberal democracy or a non-democracy. We’re going to be pariahs in the western world. Forget the Israeli dancing. Who needs fireworks? Who will possibly want to party? On the 75th anniversary,

we're not going to celebrate what we've created, but instead, we're going to mourn what we've destroyed.

And now?

Yes, things could change, and bad things could still happen. So I say the following with hesitation, but also with great relief and profound pride:

*I think you just witnessed one of the greatest weeks in Israeli history.*

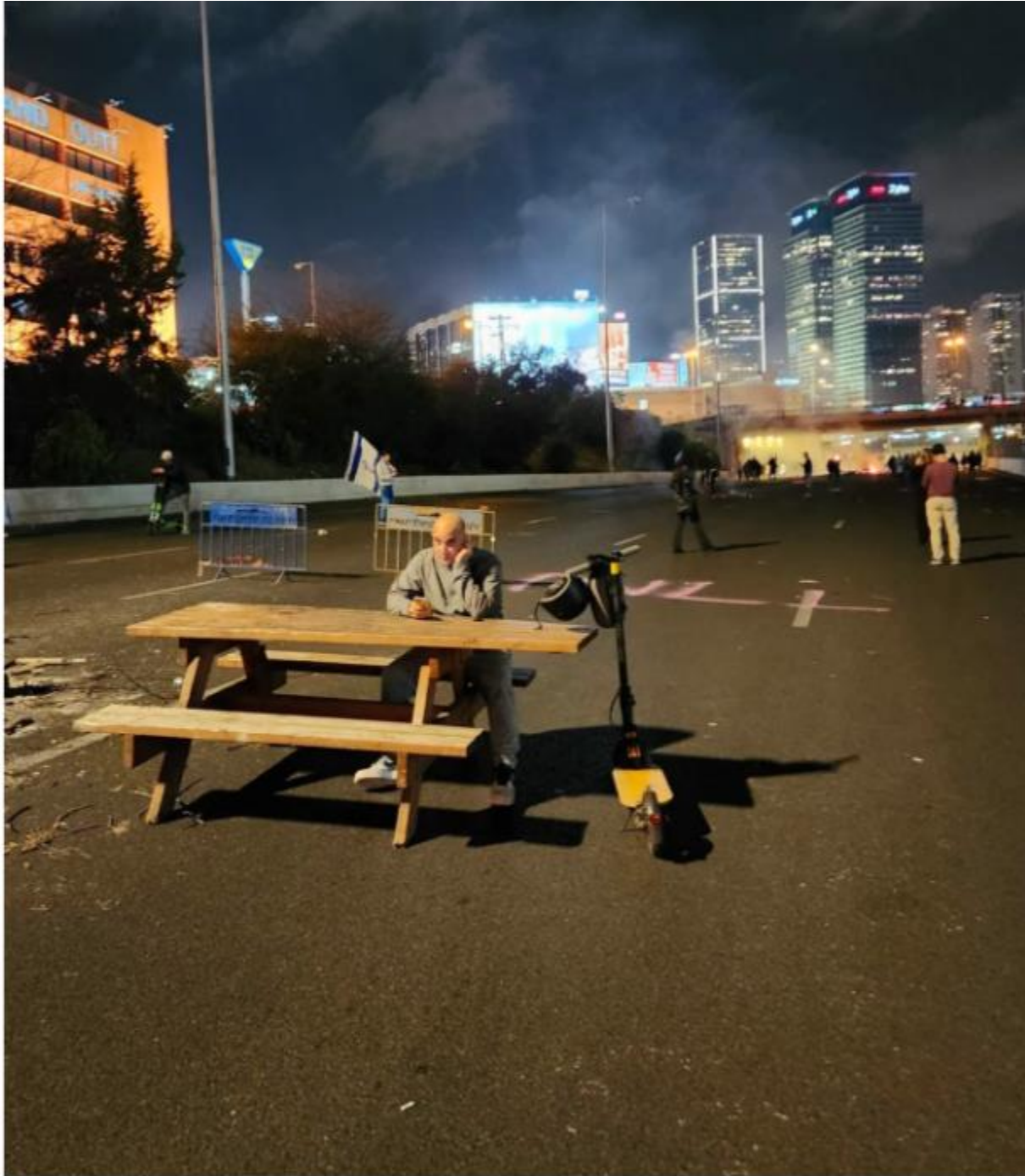


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It doesn't matter whether you were for the reforms or against them (or both, which is the position of Professor Netta Barak-Corren, whose [monumental analysis](#) of the issues I heartily urged everyone to read carefully). It doesn't matter whether you were a Bibi fan or not, a Likud sympathizer or not.

What matters is that what you have seen play out in recent weeks has been an extraordinary exhibition of love of country, of devotion to Zionism, of almost completely violence-free protests by hundreds of thousands of people for three months. What you have seen is the melding of (whatever little bit remains of) the left and the center, joined by many on the right who were so deeply worried about the split in the nation that they, too, though they favored the reforms, said it was time to stop. You saw [Orthodox rabbis come out and say](#) it was time to heed the people. (If you haven't listened to [our podcast with the extraordinary Rabbi David Stav](#), you really should.)

What you witnessed was the left-center adopting and embracing the flag, embracing and loving the country that many people thought they'd long since stopped caring about. "All they want is to code, go public, have exits," it was said. "Their Zionist-pioneers grandparents and great-grandparents must be turning in their graves," people said about them.

But no. Those Zionist-pioneer grandparents and great-grandparents must be staring down at their kids' kids with proverbial tears of pride and joy, a deep sense of satisfaction that three quarters of a century in, the young, successful, secular, "spoiled" Ashkenazi elites love this country. They took to the streets to defend it, to protect it, to preserve it. And they want to preserve it not against those who are not like them, but now, in concert with those who are not like them.

*And here's what you didn't see:*

- You saw virtually no violence. You saw no guns. You saw virtually no police violence. You saw signs dripping with anger and irony, but no one hung in effigy, no pictures of politicians being burned. You saw no gallows. You heard no "lock him up!" This was never about hate—this was about love.
- You saw no looting. None. Zero. This was not Seattle or Portland. This was not about detesting any part of this country, or even Bibi for that matter—it was about a love of the Jewish people and its nation-state.

- Yes, they burst through the barricades and blocked traffic on the highways. If they wanted to win, and they were determined to win and to save their country, they had no choice. Research shows that 100% law abiding protests get absolutely nothing done—even Martin Luther King understood that when he crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 9th, 1965. the trick was to break the law to build something better, not to break the law as a way of breaking the state.

But having burst through the barricades and having blocked the highway, the “anarchists” and “terrorists” (as the coalition called them) remained fundamentally law abiding. Watch this video, taken by someone in my family, in the wee hours of the morning between Sunday night and Monday morning this week, as an ambulance needed to get through the many thousands of “law-violating” protesters on the highway).

No one blocked the ambulance. No one said, “You’re not going anywhere.” People moved aside. Because someone was sick. Or in labor. Or needed help.

And this was about love.



*And here's what you also saw.*

You saw profiles in courage. Women and men who took stands, who showed spine, who placed love of country above their careers and their personal well-being.

There's **Attorney General Gali Baharav-Miara**, a virtual unknown when she was picked as AG just over a year ago. She stood up to the Prime Minister. She represented the law. She remained unflappable. They threatened to fire her. The police had to protect her. And she did her job, day after relentless day—and helped save this country.

You saw **Minister of Defense, Yoav Gallant**, who locked horns with Bezalel Smotrich from almost day one, warn the country that the madness had to stop. There could be reform, or there might not be. But it had to be a result of dialogue, not a coalition in heat.

So Netanyahu fired him, and thus inadvertently created a new national hero, bringing tens of thousands of people into the streets, and essentially ending any hope his government had of pressing on.

And this is a Jewish country. So after he got sacked, the press actually covered the story that [Gallant's mother called him to tell him she was proud of him](#). “You have intelligence and courage,” she told her (very adult) kid—and she made the headlines.

You saw **Asaf Zamir, Israel's Consul General in NYC**, who had already been reprimanded for critiquing the government, [resign in protest](#) after Gallant was fired. Yes, he was in New York to serve his country—but he felt he could serve the country better by refusing to serve this government.

You saw hundreds of [pilots](#), special forces soldiers, officers and non-officers alike, say that the IDF is the people's army. The people's army, they said, carries out orders, but only if they are the orders of a Jewish democratic state. And with the country looking like it might not stay democratic, they said they were out. Done. Not training. Not flying. Not reporting.

That's a very edgy, morally complicated step to take, and reasonable minds can severely critique it. But make no mistake. You saw courage, not cowardice. And you saw love.

*A few weeks from now,*

We're going to celebrate Independence Day. It will not be a carefree party. It will not be unsullied by what has happened. But it will be profound. It will be a day of thanksgiving. A day of pride. A day of hope. A day of commitment to healing the deep rifts in our society that got us where we are.

It will be a day much, much more important and memorable than anything we might have imagined just a few months ago.

What you saw throughout this week was love, and what you saw was a long-standing Jewish/biblical tradition. It was the tradition that Mordecai expressed



when he said to an Esther hesitant to approach the King because she'd not been given permission:

“Who knows? Maybe it was for his very moment that you’ve achieved your position.” ([Esther 4:14](#)).

Esther did the right thing. She helped to save the Jewish people. So, too, did these men and women. So, too, did the hundreds of thousands of young Israelis who took to the streets in anger and in fear, but not in hate. With determination to save, not to destroy. With a love of land, with a love of the Jewish people, with a love of what Israel has been, and what Israel still can be.

What you saw this week was the very, very best of Israel. What you saw this week is what got so many of us to fall in love with this country.

Let’s pray it holds.

And in the meantime, here’s the famous song by Ehud Manor, which became one of the unofficial anthems of these weeks of protest.



